

The Devniad Book 52d

un zine de Bob Devney
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Orbita Dicta Heard in the halls of Readercon 11 The Westin Waltham-Boston Hotel Waltham, Massachusetts, U.S.A. July 9-11, 1999

Once again, here's how it works with these con quotes issues: I go to a science fiction convention (and right here, my non-SF friends are deserting in droves — bye, people: there's a movie review or two at the end you might check out before you go, and oh, don't miss this month's thrilling installment of *Our Man in Honduras*; see you next month). And I want to capture some special moments. Little snippety dialog bits that elicit this particular congoing experience's ineffable flavor.

So I do my best to eff it.

I take frenzied notes, in the worst handwriting since Cretan Linear B, that at least approximate what somebody said a minute ago, or at the party last night. Then I go home, try to read my own writing, succeed at least sometimes, and end up keying in the stuff you see below. With my own sarcastic, befuddled, or uninformative notes added in brackets before, during, and sometimes after.

Enjoy yourselves. I faintly recall I did.

NOTE: Any resemblance to accuracy or fairness is, to be accurate, fairly surprising.

Special Note: The Beast That Shouted Love Me at the Heart of the Con

There were approximately 650 people in attendance this Readercon weekend.

About 600 of them were Harlan Ellison.

Let me explain. Now, I've been going to cons, watching wordcrafters walk and talk since the late 70s.

I've seen Isaac Asimov mobbed with adulation. Jack Chalker take over a panel. Patrick Nielsen Hayden shred a subject with a few brilliant, incisive words. Frederik Pohl tell great stories of the old days. Stephen King gain a fast rapport with wit and street cred. Ellen Kushner keep a story moving like the broadcast pro she is. Douglas Adams rock the room for one whole hilarious hour. Orson Scott Card fight the good fight against an opposing faction.

I've seen David Gerrold pretty puffed up with Hollywood success. Larry Niven a little smug in the knowledge of his greatness. Ursula Le Guin serene in the certainty of hers. Darrell Schweitzer relentlessly try to sell us something. Jane Yolen shine out tough, smart, and warm.

I've seen Joe Haldeman speak with touching vulnerability of wounds and dead friends. R. A. Lafferty lonely in the midst of a crowd. Barry Malzberg so bitter you could hardly look at him and hardly look away. Lucius Shepherd not give a shit what anyone thinks.

Was going to say, "and I've never seen anything like Harlan Ellison" — but of course I have. All of the above.

He's a nifty combination of Tennessee and Robin Williams. Jack Kerouac and Jack the Ripper. Mother Theresa and Mother Fucker?

Much of the crowd this weekend adored him. Others told me he was a jerk, that this cult of personality thing was bad for a con, that his need for everybody's love and approval and undivided attention — and his sometimes savage attitude when he didn't

get it — were bad form. Oh, and that he had a big ego.

Well, *duh!*

I'd say his ego is almost as big as mine, but with a tad more justification. Go read just his better stories and articles again — that should take you about 2 months straight. And you'll emerge white and shaken ...

You could say that like Theodore Roosevelt, he demands to be the bride at every wedding and the corpse at every funeral. Or you could say that he throws his dark little heart into being a great, totally available Guest of Honor.

I left one of his speeches this weekend halfway through. After things got way too ugly. And after he repeated things he'd written elsewhere, then things he'd said in earlier speeches, then things he'd said in *this* speech. Look, I couldn't take Harlan Ellison at every con I attend. He drowns out all the other voices, and that beautiful Babel is one of my chief pleasures in congoing.

Also, as I told him when I had my moment with the man, he's a con reporter's walking, talking nightmare. He speaks way too fast and says great stuff way too long for decent note-taking. I believe my phrase to him was, "My goddamned *hand* is falling off."

Finally, when he indicates he thinks, say, Forrest J. Ackerman is one of the most infamous monsters of filmland, I can't print all the details he dishes in the next 25 minutes, complete with *reading letters aloud*, to show *why* he thinks that. So should I print it at all? It's a problem of space and taste.

Harlan at every con? Oh please.

It would be too tiring. Probably for both parties. Like having chili-and-amphetamine ice cream for dessert every meal.

But I'm glad he came. How about you?

Colorful Language Caution: Aunt Ann, in reading this report, I'd skip right over anything that nice Mr. Ellison says.

* * *

[I'm starting to fear nobody at my office will offer a customary clueless send-off to my lit'ry weekend until designer Steve Rebello speaks up]

Well, see you, Dev. Hope you've got your *Star Trek* uniform ready.

[In what's becoming another tradition, author and quote-hungry Hugo nominee Michael A. Burstein jumps me in the lobby first thing]

I've got a panel at 5:00, a kaffeeklatsch on Sunday — and I'll have some very scintillating material.

[Wife Nomi props him up]

— That's because he's got glitter.

[The Friday afternoon panel on Outrage in Literature finds Co-GOH Harlan Ellison — author of Angry Candy — on familiar ground]

I think it was Orwell who said, There are situations from which one can only extract oneself by becoming a madman.

... I'm suspicious of writers who write a controlled, delicate prose. I suspect they are not in touch with their own viscera.

[Event Horizon webzine editor and other Co-GOH Ellen Datlow frames it differently]

There has to be a real story framing the anger to make it effective.

[Let's distinguish, says Carolyn Ives Gilman]

One kind is anger at people. Another kind is anger at institutions and power relationships.

... Writing about a person, you're forced to think from that person's point of view, and that defuses the anger ... Writing about institutions, I find I get *more* angry as the story goes on.

[In a war of words, writer James Alan Gardner sounds like sniper material]

I find I'm a lot better at cold anger or devious anger —

[Ellison helps with a label]

— You're a sneak!

[Death did not dim Ellison's animus at the producer of Star Trek; but writing it out helped]

Let me give you a specific: Gene Roddenberry was an ambulatory sack of shit, as far as I'm concerned ... While I was writing *The City on the Edge of Forever*, I was so angry after years of his lying to me and about me, the story became demented and inarticulate.

... But as soon as it was finished, I opened my mouth and a — a *dove* flew out. I was so relieved, finally. And I could actually say the pussbag's name.

[SF Age editor Scott Edelman says sometimes obsession don't sell]

There are times you must say, "That's the fifth story I got from you about killing your ex-wife. I think it's time you moved on."

[Though Ellison's still thinking about a story he wrote in 1978 (and an editor whose name I've no idea how to spell)]

The best editor I've ever had in my life was at *Playboy*: Victoria Chen Hyder. Asian-American, very young ... I wrote a story, "All the Birds Come Home to Roost" — one of my best. The narrator, his wife ended up in an insane asylum, where my first wife *[Charlotte]* ended up ...

And Victoria said, great story. But you *talk* about how she almost drove him crazy, and you never give an example.

... It was only one paragraph, but it took me 6 weeks to write — to encapsulate 4 years of a horrible marriage. I wrote that paragraph in tears. I could barely see to type.

And it made all the difference, buried there in the middle of the story ...

[Virginia] died about 6 weeks later in that plane crash in Chicago, with everybody going to the ABA convention.

Charlotte ... Her shriek of a mother called me years later ... And said, Charlotte's in a madhouse. She's reverted to the age of 6, and sits staring out the window. And when I talk to her, she says, "Shhh, Harlan is writing" ...

I wasn't able to deal with that for fucking years.

[Ellison notes he's not the only Angry Young Man around]

When Barry Malzberg is being at his most bitter, it's like paper cuts all over your body ... He's one of the best there ever was.

[Gilman wants to recall that emotion]

Anger's the fuel. You have to transform it into the *story*.

[Gardner says it isn't only writers]

Have you ever met a real live standup comedian? Almost all of them, there's an awful lot of anger hiding in there.

[Ellison on the comic/talk show host Bill Maher]

He's got the best job in television, all these great people every night ... but he never talks to anybody ... He said in a *Playboy* interview that he sits in his dressing room before every show and masturbates.

[Edelman flogs a huge laugh from the audience]

— Yes, we all did that right before this panel.

[Gilman thinks SF's cool — maybe too cool]

I've gotten this heretical thought that maybe people read SF so that they don't have to take it personally ... There are so many levels of alienation that they can say, It's on Mars, it doesn't have anything to do with me.

[Let's end with a cool quote from Ellison]

I think it was Isaac Bashevis Singer who said, as a writer, if *you* can figure out the ending of the story, so can the reader ... I never know the ending when I start.

[The Lest We Forget panel on maintaining collective memory contributes another beauty to ours, as Ellison steams into the panel next door and we hear him through the wall reasoning with Michael Burstein, Robert Sawyer, and other panelists whose voices were innocently coming through on our intercom; Holy Jumpin' Jeffy, is he actually tearing those microphones out by the roots and shoving them up their — surely not]

YOU CAN HAVE YOUR PANEL, AND
YOU CAN TALK AS LOUD AS YOU
WANT, BUT YOU MAY NOT USE *THESE!*

*[After the contretemps above, Rcon staffer and
mike maven Robert Ingria presses a special
flower into his memory book for this reporter's
benefit]*

Among the memorable things noted,
will you get Harlan calling me a
motherfucker? It's an honor, really.

[Ellison returns and starts on topic]

This is a generation for whom nostalgia
is what they had for breakfast ... If all you
can write about is Ricky Martin and this
year's Barbie, are we in *trouble!*

*[Word wars veteran Gene Wolfe thumps his cane
and chortles]*

I have a wonderful old leather jacket —
not the kind that pilots wore in World War
II, but the kind that barnstormers wore in
the 20s ... In a donut shop, I once convinced
a young man that I was a veteran of World
War I, and wore it in my Sopwith Camel!

*[The dingbats we'll always have with us, thinks
writer Richard Bowes]*

Eventually, all writing has to be
footnoted. *The Iliad* had to be footnoted.

*[Ellison wants some goddamned perspective,
please]*

The new *Star Wars* is not a cultural
event. The *Korean War* is a cultural event ...
Star Wars may be a cultural event *later*.

[Wolfe has fought the cultural war himself]

I tried and I tried to get my children to
watch *The Maltese Falcon* — a really great
movie. Tried and tried and couldn't.

... Then one day they said, "Dad, you've
got to watch this great movie on TV!" I went
in, and Humphrey Bogart had pink cheeks.

It was colorized.

[Someday this could be Tubercon, hints Wolfe]

I'm old enough to remember reading
pulp magazines when they were new ... The
sort of people who used to read *Ranch*

Romances and *Black Mask* are today not
reading *anything*.

[Ellison warned us, early and often]

When I showed the first *Star Trek* at a
SFWA banquet, everybody was so excited.
But I said, Do you think *Star Trek* is going to
sell one more Tom Disch novel?

*[According to my secret source (fan Joe
Petronio), three apple-cheeked collitch girls in
audience came up afterwards and begged Ellison
to come speak at Bryn Mawr, but he gracefully
demurred]*

Right, I'm gonna go around the country
like fucking Johnny Appleseed, spreading
poison apples!

*[In the hall, fanzine fan Hope Liebowitz provides
one of those quotes my bro Mikey hates]*

Oh, you're not the brother. You're the
real thing.

[At dinner, Mark Hertel nose the facts]

I've never seen anybody sneeze from
pepper. It's only on television.

*[On the Is Hollywood Getting a Clue? panel,
writer Aline Boucher Kaplan gives us one]*

The program book asks, Will there be
more good SF movies? The answer is four
words: If they make money ... Everybody in
this room should vote with their dollars.

*[Writer/columnist Paul T. Riddell of
www.sfsite.com has been taking Harlan pills]*

No, Hollywood *doesn't* have a clue.

... *Starship Troopers* was the best
documentary about life in Houston ever
made. Nazi stormtroopers and giant bugs.

... I saw a preview of *The Blair Witch
Project*. The best horror movie H.P.

Lovecraft never made.

... George Lucas had a better special
effects budget, but Ed Wood was a better
writer and director.

[Ellison gives us the word(s)]

What film critics do: rodomontade and
gardylloo. Two *very* good words, by the
way.

[And shows street cred from Hollywood and Vine]

I work in Hollywood, folks. I was in Hollywood yesterday. Not only do they not have a clue, they are arrogant about not having a clue ...

Pauline Kael, the last great film critic *[lonely clapping from this reporter]* said the tragedy of movies is that they are an art form being run by businessmen.

[What keeps Ellison up nights?]

There's an SF film that was made the same time as *Independence Day*, and it's great: *The Arrival*. Same alien invasion stuff ... Even Charley Sheen was decent. And that scene with Lindsay *[Crouse]* in the hotel room with the scorpions!

... My favorite science fiction film of all time was *Seconds*. Black and white *[released in 1966, starring Rock Hudson?!]* ... directed by John Frankenheimer.

... Another of the great movies of all time is *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* ... a great, funny, silly movie ...

You know how you know a great movie? You're lying there at 3:00 a.m., and you can't sleep, and you turn on the TV for a minute and you *have* to watch it through to the end.

[Hear a veird trillink zound? Ellison does]

They announced last week that Arnold Schwarzenegger will be Doc Savage, if you can believe that.

[Riddell's got another good one]

And now *Inspector Gadget?* What's scary about the movie business is that these guys are making movies about the cartoons they saw when they were kids — 5 years ago!

[MIT media maven Henry Jenkins still thinks things are looking up]

All the criticisms I'm hearing today could have been made by New York intellectuals about Harry Cohn and Sam Goldwyn when they were running studios in the 30s. And were held in contempt as "just businessmen."

... I'm talking about the movie equivalent of the midlist ... that there is more interesting SF stuff playing on screens 6 and 7 of the multiplex than there used to be.

[Some rules from the Harlan Handbook]

First of all, you go to see no movie which is a rewrite of the television series ...

No movie with a preview clip on TV *[so loud and jarring]* it gives you a headache ...

No movie with girls with just-budding breasts ...

No movie with Paulie Shore or Adam Sandler.

[Ellison on Riddell]

Don't listen to him, he's wearing a Green Lantern ring —

[Riddell, thrusting clenched fist at the audience]

— But the damned thing doesn't work!

[Jenkins recently got ripped by our reps]

I testified for the U.S. Congress *[in the "Littleton" hearings]* ... I was the only person in those hearings that testified in favor of youth and of the popular culture ... *[the hearings]* were being run by Jack Valenti on one hand and by the Christian Right on the other.

[When I ask reviewer F. Brett Cox why our buds the lovely and talented Sydney Sowers and the talented Andy Duncan didn't show up this year]

Pure finances.

[In the panel on Misfit and Outcast Literature, Cox endears himself immediately]

Everybody in the room is or has at one time qualified as a misfit.

[Fine new Canadian/Caribbean writer Nalo Hopkinson remembers misfithood well]

SF is a literature that holds out the possibility that maybe you could be normal.

[Southern writer Rebecca Ore has been there too]

I think it used to be the secret literature of smart kids.

[Perhaps Northern (Canadian) writer Robert Charles Wilson has been overmedicating on SF]

It's a very consolant literature to have ... cerebral, satisfying when you're uncertain of your emotional state ... And it can be useful too.

[The more things change, the more they stab the same, thinks Wilson]

The Aztec culture must have seemed normal at the time. But there must have been a few Aztec adolescents who said, What is *with* all this human sacrifice?

[Ever the academic, Cox hauls in Herman M]

You want alienation in literature, read "Bartleby the Scrivener" —

[Instant response from an audience smartass]

— I prefer not to!

[Writer Allen Steele gives good ending]

SF gives you sometimes another solution than "in the end he killed himself." Of course, it may not be realistic: "in the end we fled the planet."

[King critic John Clute edifies his kaffeeklatsch]

There's a speech I'm giving in Edmonton in September. Kind of a joke — "Notes Toward a Unified Field Theory of the Fantastic."

[It takes a worried, worried fan, per Clute]

I don't think it's any accident that alternate history has had success at a time when there's a great bit of anxiety about the future.

[Clute said this in a 5/25/99 article "In Defense of Science Fiction" in the Salon on-line magazine at

www.salonmagazine.com/books/feature/1999/05/25/sfdefense/index.html that Patrick O'Leary just turned me on to — but it's too neat to miss]

From the early 1920s till about 1975, American science fiction told a central story that has now become embarrassing to many of us. It was the story of the technology-led triumph of the American Way in the star-

lanes of the big tomorrow ... It hasn't exactly turned out that way.

[Before we start the Meet the Prose Party, can anybody ID Kelly Persons' childhood favorite?]

There's a book I read when I was a kid. Don't know the author, or the title. Read it about — it would have been mid-60s. These green aliens drop the kids off at earth. The alien kids grow a giant tomato plant in these human kids' back yard, and live in it. The grownups don't seem to notice ...

[Conveniently forget exactly who told me this one]

At the Sabbath service this evening, with Janice Gelb, there's a moment when you turn to the doorway to greet the Sabbath Bride. Usually, of course, there's no one there. But tonight we turned — and there was Paula Lieberman.

[Turns out that powerful new fantasy author Patrick O'Leary shares my taste for a powerful folk/country singer]

Lucinda Williams, oh yes. That song "Sweet Old World" — just wonderful ... Yes, a song addressed to a suicide.

"See what you *lost* when you left this world. This sweet old world ... The breath from your own lips / The touch of fingertips"

... Then, "Didn't you think / anyone loved you?" Beautiful.

[The Meet the Prose Party turns into the Suck the Poison Party as Ellison offers us a 2-hour-plus glimpse into his abyss with a cheery little talk entitled "Those I Honor, Those I Despise"]

I will track somebody to the other side of the fucking planet to get five dollars he owes me.

[Much of this talk is about the source of one story supposedly told about Ellison: he gets in the elevator and propositions a tall blonde]

"What do you say to a little fuck?"

"Piss off, little fuck."

[Ellison thinks it was maybe funny the first time, but not now and not about him; and it certainly isn't true]

The whole thing is straight out of Joe Miller's joke book, that they used in vaudeville before I was born ...

I kept hearing this story as *true* ...

Turns out it was told by Philip Klass, or William Tenn as it says on his books ... I heard him tell the story on the tape from when he was Westercon Guest of Honor.

[A pause in the middle of reading a subsequent poisonous letter from him to Klass]

... "Splenic." Great word, "splenic."
The little fucker really can write, can't he?

[In mid-rant, Ellison realizes his long-suffering wife Susan has been standing too long too]

Can I mooch a chair from some young buck?

[My brother Michael leaps to give up his chair for Susan; whereupon Ellison brings 300 people's attention to poor Mike, who's early 40s but, like me, does have more than a bit of snow on the roof]

And here — a chair for that older gentleman over there.

[Michael, depressed, later that night]

That does it. Tomorrow I color my hair.

[Ellison on a former collaborator]

For those of you who don't know it, A. E. van Vogt is an Alzheimer's victim. His mind is gone ... For years, when our story [*"The Human Operators," I think*] gets reprinted, I won't send him 50% of the sale, I'll send him 150%. And he won't even notice.

[At breakfast Saturday, my sister Darcy can't stay]

I have to go home to see if my husband has had a heart attack because our RCN Internet service is out. Again.

Mind you, he's already told me that if he does die, I'm to sue RCN.

[In the Patrick O'Leary/Terry Bisson/Paul Park impromptu joint kaffeeklatsch, writer Eleanor Arnason shouldn't write where she eats]

I'm working on a story with squid-like aliens ... with the result that I can no longer eat calamari.

[Park has work in progress]

I'm about halfway through a novel. Thought at first it was a Young Adult book, but that required the kind of detail to an implied reader that I was not prepared for ... It's not a coincidence that I have kids now. I think of them possibly reading it one day.

[A fine writer, Park reflects on how he got that way]

...I started out as a conscious imitator of Isak Dinesen ...

... The pleasures of writing ... For me, it starts with the ability to visualize. If there's a problem in my writing, it's not a

breakdown in the plot, it's a problem that you're not visualizing something correctly.

[Writer/translator Michael Kandel joins in — say, there are a lot of pros at this kaffeeklatsch]

Other writers don't give a shit about visualization. They say, "I've got to get the characters right."

[Bisson seems half-ashamed, half-proud]

I never plot. I still don't know *how* to plot. And I teach a writing course! But I leave out the part about plot ...

In a novel, I always fail about a third of the way through. And I have to salvage it with, you know, plot.

[O'Leary agrees more with Park]

With me, it's always the image ...

I never have an idea what's going to happen ... I think of it in kind of a precious way: stones in a river. The story jumps from stone to stone. And sometimes I can't see the stone and I just have to jump. And sometimes I miss and have to flounder over to another stone.

... When I wrote *The Gift*, I had a fight on the deck of a boat. And I had a one-armed man, who's fighting with a sword, *punch* somebody in the face ... But I had to ponder and work to figure out, What's wrong with this image?

[Artfully, Arnason brings us to the end]

Endings are totally artful. There are no endings in life. Except that we die. And even that is not an ending for the people around us ... The only real ending is the heat death of the universe.

I want it to just open out at the end ... I don't like to kill a character. I hate the end of *The Left Hand of Darkness* because I think [Le Guin] needed to end the book so she killed the main character. It would have been a very difficult but much more interesting thing if that character had stayed alive.

[Fan Jeff Rogers has spotted some fun new talent]

Oh, there *is* something I've liked recently you don't hear much about. Books by this guy S. Andrew Swann — kind of light, fun, but noir-ish stuff. They're set in a future Cleveland where they've got these human/animal hybrids through genetic engineering. Don't remember any of the titles, but if you look in the bookshop ...

[In said bookshop, bookseller Larry Smith is suspiciously amenable]

Bob, is this a purchase or a stack? ... A stack means you can stash it here and come back later to get it and spend even larger sums of *money*.

[Although not actually present, writer Neal Stephenson makes bibliopole Art Henderson's day]

How's business? Well, last night was better than the usual Friday, but today is just OK. *[His wife Becky hands him a slip]* I take it back, it's a *great* day. *[Shows slip: a single receipt for \$500]* That's for *Snow Crash*, first edition, ex-library but uncirculated, just the library stamping.

For a pristine first, you could get \$1000.

[So Barbara Kuenzig of Intergalactic Book Works, how's your sciatica?]

Worse than hemorrhoids.

[On the panel 1998: The Year in Short Fiction, Michael Swanwick has dubious news from Oz]

Greg Egan is odd even for an Australian SF writer. In fact, are you aware that no one's met him out there? There's a rumor he's an artificial intelligence.

[Editor David Hartwell knows how to take all the fun out of things with facts]

[Egan] lives in Western Australia ... and doesn't want to play the game of being an Australian science fiction writer ... Feels it's like being the chairman of the Australian Special Olympics.

[Hartwell gets back on point]

I think the theme of the year was communicating with aliens. For instance, there's a Michael Kandel story *[maybe*

"Wading River Dogs and More?"] ... and Ted Chiang's "Story of Your Life."

[Writer Mark Rich adds another sterling example]

And I think of Bruce Sterling's "Maneki Neko." Which, while I think the Chiang story is very good, it doesn't break new ground and isn't brilliant like "Maneki Neko."

[Swanwick can also pronounce Sterling's titles]

Bruce Sterling had another story out, "Taklamakan" — by god, he's had a helluva year.

... He gets all this plot movement by a negation of the expectations of science fiction.

[In the audience, Brett Cox is still splenetic]

About Kristine Kathryn Rusch's tenure as editor of *F&SF* — it's seldom I find myself *shaking my fist* at an issue of a magazine.

... I thought Ian R. MacLeod's "The Summer Isles" was the single best piece of fiction I read last year. MacLeod is one of the best and simultaneously the most underrated writers we have.

[Tangent editor David Truesdale has a good eye]

We should do a whole panel on *new* writers who did well this year. Like Cory Doctorow, James Van Pelt, Dominic Green, Ellen Klages if she writes more, Bruce Holland Rogers, Eliot Fintushel ...

Ever since he came back from Sycamore Hill, where Kessel and Kelly bludgeoned him into shape, Eliot Fintushel has been doing better ... Kind of like Lafferty.

[Hartwell adds yet another]

Robert Reed. He's someone who's been writing a long time — he's the most prolific *good* writer.

[Cox brings up our mutual friend Andy Duncan; Truesdale agrees]

Andy Duncan really is a bright new voice. He's the progenitor of what we call crackerpunk.

[In the panel on Must Art Be Difficult?, Patrick O'Leary votes yes]

The easy stuff is as hard to do as the hard stuff.

[Gene Wolfe agrees with most fans]

— All my stuff is wonderful.

[Ellison, to Wolfe]

Yes, I've read all your books —

[And to I think O'Leary]

— and I've read all *your* books I could get my hands on —

[And to the great but sometimes less accessible Samuel R. Delany]

— and I've read all your stuff I *could*.

[laughter] ... OK, so I'm the only man on the goddamned planet who couldn't get through *Dahlgren*.

[After being harassed onto the panel by Ellison, writer Jim Sallis shows he's been around]

You know the old story about the trouble with writers' workshops? They don't discourage enough people.

[Ellison besmirches one of my sacred SF idols]

Jim Schmitz — James A. Schmitz, whom most of you have virtually never heard of. He did a trick in one book — *The Witches of Karres*. And you all liked it, and he ended up doing it again and again and again.

[For Wolfe, the difficult part of art can be the sale]

I went through a period of 20 years or so ... where if an editor said, Will you write a story for me for my anthology, or my magazine? It would almost invariably be rejected.

They wanted a story like the *last* Gene Wolfe story I did for them. And I wanted to do something *new*.

[Why Delany's still a nova in our sky]

I was doing a reading at Barnes and Noble. And someone came up to me and she said, How can you write the stuff you're writing now, and they let you be a *professor*? And I knew I was doing something right.

[Ellison makes O'Leary's con]

What was your first book — *Door Number Three*? It's like J. D. Salinger sitting down for his first book and it's *Catcher in the Rye* —

[O'Leary may faint]

— Harlan Ellison just complimented me!

[But Harlan will turn on you]

— It came in cold, with the usual load of Tor dreck —

[O'Leary, laughing]

— Sting with a kiss!

... It took me seven and a half years to write *Door Number Three*, and —

[Now Ellison may faint]

— It took you *seven YEARS*?

[O'Leary feels guilty enough already]

— Well, I have a day job, and I'm really slow —

[Ellison knows that not everyone can dash off stuff in shop windows, but still]

— Mother of God. *Glaciers are slow*.

[O'Leary re-enacts "smiling, the boy fell dead"]

But it doesn't matter how long it takes, as long as you get there.

[My friend Chris Sullivan, who at age 23, a year after taking up computer illustration, seems about to sell his first piece of cover art ever (to NESFA Press for the upcoming Best SF of 1964 Robert Silverberg anthology) — anyway, Chris is suitably awed by his very first literary SF con ever! What'd you think of all this, Chris?]

Interesting.

[In the panel on *The Short-Short Story*, Michael Swanwick starts without answers]

When you write enough short-short fiction, you come to question the very definition of what fiction is.

[Eric Van, in audience, perpetrates an involved metaphor linking fiction to (quantum physics, I think), ending with]

... As we further compress these stories and make them very short, we seem to get an explosion in the varieties of form.

[After Gene Wolfe reads his short story "How I Got Three ZIP Codes," Terry Bisson reacts]

I submit we have *another* form here: where you ask a question *[in the title]* and refuse to answer as elaborately as possible.

[At NESFA Sales, Tony Lewis on why his An Annotated Bibliography of Recursive Science Fiction — 180 ms. pages, near 800 entries]

Somebody had to do it.

[NESFAn Deb Geisler recalls a fraught moment from the vanished Orlando -in-2001 worldcon bid]

There was nothing scarier than signing my name to a contract with over a million dollars in penalty clauses.

[Speaking of besmirching my idols, how about this bit from Ellison at the item titled Ellen Datlow and Harlan Ellison: A Conversation?]

I turned down a Robert Heinlein story for *Dangerous Visions*. Bob sent me a story and it was terrible and I rejected it.

[Datlow loved one of my (everybody's) favorites]

It was your *Dangerous Visions* anthologies that more than anything else inspired me to become an editor.

[Ellison, later, on a certain legendarily late project]

The Last Dangerous Visions ... I wish I'd never gotten into that goddamned albatross.

[I wasn't around NESFA for the events described; but by the end of a detailed narrative of how Ellison and Cordwainer Smith's widow Genevieve Linebarger painfully wrote and rewrote most of the Smith story "Himself in Anachron" between them for TLDV before NESFA raped, murdered, and pillaged it away for its humungous Smith collection The Rediscovery of Man, I begin to suspect that Ellison is still a tad miffed at my beloved club]

They love to say *[switches to braying, nerdy honk]* "We got it away from Harlan Ellison."

And they will never know that *[the story is mostly not Smith's]*. They will die hideous and unloved that they are ...

[Datlow on why she edits]

I am not a writer.

I could not decorate an empty room. I need material to work with. But editing uses a different part of the brain.

[For a Jewish guy, Ellison has catholic tastes]

My favorite novel in the world is *The Seven Who Fled*, by Frederic Prokosch ...

It was the 1937 Harper Prize novel ... About seven people fleeing from a Chinese warlord across the Gobi Desert ... One chapter just describes the desert. In language — it's language used in a way that I found stunning.

[And he loves crime stuff, too]

The best writer in America today is Donald Westlake ... At the level of — and he's better than both of them — Chandler and Hammet ...

[Quotes a great sample sentence from a Westlake novel I didn't catch but now certainly want to; by the way, my brother-in-law Bob Kuhn points out Westlake maybe got this idea from Kris Kringle's job application in Miracle on 34th Street] "There were three guys at the bar and they were all older than their teeth."

... *Trust Me on This*: his best novel ... A Pulitzer prize novelist, a woman, goes to work for a scandal sheet, *The National Blat* ... It's the funniest, most mordantly brilliant novel.

[At the banquet, Tyler Stewart of the Pandemonium bookshop in Cambridge, MA, has bad news and good news about a peerless classic — plus a personal announcement]

... It gave me such a thrill. In the nine and a half years my store has been open, Roger Zelazny's *Lord of Light* has not been in print so I could stock it. Now I finally got hold of a British edition!

... In your next issue, print that despite what you quoted somebody as saying last time, Tyler Stewart is not married. Has no wife and no life, just the store. Tell them that eligible, wealthy women are encouraged to come by and check him out.

Hmmm. On second thought, I don't know if you should print that last part. It's pretty cheesy. Oh, what the hell.

[Suspecting, probably rightly, that our appetite for Ellison remains inexhaustible, the committee has scheduled another Harlanfest after the banquet, this one promisingly entitled Strangling Cats, and Other Happy Pastimes. It is extraordinary, as these snippets may hint]

... I taught myself to read at the age of 5
... Then, later, Lathrop Grade School is where I did my internship as a savant.

[On being a Jewish kid in Ohio then]

I had no idea that I was a pariah who had crucified Our Lord. Later I found out, and I was quietly proud about the whole thing.

[Young Ellison's initial meeting with his first-grade teacher did not bode well, as his mother politely introduced him]

"This is Harlan."

— "Hello, Herman."

"No, no, Harlan."

— "Hello, Hadrian."

And my mama kissed me, and said "Be a good boy" — and then she went *[imitates his mom emitting a pursed-lip sound of inadvertently escaping skepticism]*

[Young Ellison's first day did not go too good]

... There's a sandbox. But where are the goddamned books?

... So naturally, I climbed up into the teacher's chair and started reading *her* book.

... I wouldn't let go of the book ... She kept trying to grab it ... So I sank my teeth into her hand.

... Four minutes. Four *minutes*. The phone is ringing as my mother walks back up to the house!

[Turns for the first time to look at home movie of old people at a party, which has been unreeling silently behind him the whole time]

This was my class. Forty-five years. Every year these days, they send me an invitation *[to this reunion of the East High Class of 1953 from Painesville, Ohio]*. But I didn't graduate with my class ...

This is my class. But I don't know any of them. They say they're all my friends, and

they ask after me. And I think, What are they remembering?

I had no friends. I was a pariah ...

If I went there, what would I say to them? I have nothing to say to my own sister.

... This guy here — this guy here — I remember him distinctly shoving me into a locker and locking it.

[Somewhere along the way, though, he learned German pronunciation]

... It's not Dr. *[rhymes with noose]* Sues. Ted Geisel, who was Dr. Seuss, pronounced it *[rhymes with voice]* Seuss.

[Look, let's forget the structure and just blurt out Ellison quotes in no particular order]

I was a cab driver in New York City. I know how to make people feel like shit.

So I call my bail bondsman ... When you lead the life I lead, folks, you have several things on call at all times ... I have a doctor, I have a translator of many languages, and I have an excellent bail bondsman.

I've reached 65 and I find myself in a peculiar position. The last 3 weeks I've buried three of my closest friends ...

Mel Torme ... Knew him for 40 years.

... We are the same height. The first time I met him, I walked into the room, he looks at me, I look at him, and the same instant, we start singing, We REPresent the LOLlipop GUILD ...

I found myself delivering the eulogy. Charlton Heston was called upon to do the eulogy, but he couldn't quite make it — he was off somewhere selling guns to minors ...

... And I had to bury Dee Kelly — DeForrest Kelly from *Star Trek*.

We're doing this series *[of SF radio dramas]* on NPR ... We just recorded Robert Heinlein's "By His Bootstraps." Starring Richard Dreyfus. And we're doing "'Repent, Harlequin!' Said the Ticktock Man" ... starring Robin Williams.

How many of you have ever been in jail?
You push your *hands* through the bars to get
a little bit outside.

... I have been everywhere and done
everything. I have had a terrific life. Topped
at this moment by Readercon.

I'm like all the rest of you. All alone in
the kayak, going down the river.

*[At its whateverth iteration, Eric Van is still
crazy about his wildly popular Kirk Poland
Memorial Bad Prose Competition]*

Craig *[Shaw Gardner]* and I have been
doing this together for 12 years, and we are
still sane! *[Huge wave of audience laughter,
catcalls, doubt]*

We've done this 12 times. It's a
competition — allegedly. Eleven times with
the same result ... May we have hushed,
reverent silence for the Eternal Champion,
Geary Gravel!

[Van's always been critical]

Robert Silverberg began his career with
two genuinely bad juvenile novels ... *Revolt
on Alpha C*, I couldn't get many pages into it
even at the age of eight or nine.

*[Somebody at the Boskone party catches sight of
my astral-motif banquet tie]*

"My god, it's full of stars!"

*[At the Artemis magazine launch party to
which Lisa Hertel shepherded me, many
fascinating things were said by Mark Rich,
Richard Bowes, Steve Sawicki, Michael and
Nomi Burstein, Artemis honcho Ian Randall
Strock, and others; though this one by Rich is all
that I remember]*

You'll send *The Devniad* to my e-mail?
You promised the same thing last year.

*[Random fan in hall has a little slip of the
tongue]*

I haven't gone to many cons. I'm just
beginning to dip my toe in condom.
Fandom.

*[Quebec writer Yves Menard greets Sunday
morn in the elevator with a cheery quote]*

"Ideology is to politics as fashion is to
clothes." I've been trying to place that with
you, but I haven't seen you.

*[At Ernest Lilley's SFRevu KRewe breakfast,
Steve Sawicki has a recommendation well-suited
for the hungover crowd]*

Dennis Danvers, *End of Days*. Great new
read about the end of the world.

*[New writer Barbara Chepaitis, after earlier
quoting Dante in the original, displays false
modesty]*

I don't read —

*[Whereupon all the movie buffs at the table — I
think Katya Pendill, Steve Sawicki, and I — all
come to the Being There connection more or
less simultaneously]*

— I like to watch!

*[Chepaitis outlines her great, complex, terrific
theory on Thomas Harris, although since I was
eating all I can remember is the gist]*

Red Dragon, male ... Silence, female.

*[Well met in the garage, critic Don D'Amassa
clarifies a questioned quote from last year, re
more than half of 1997 genre books' being media-
based]*

It was based on my own book counts.
The final figure came out 48% ... And it's
running about the same this year. Scary.

[NESFAn Priscilla Olson hurries thru the halls]

I'm commuting from Concertino!

*[In the hour-plus line for Ellison autographs,
NESFAn Kelly Persons says bite the biter]*

Your hand hurts? Sue Harlan for carpal
tunnel.

*[As I come in having missed the panel on John
Clute's Model of Fantasy Structure for reasons
of sleep, friendship, and breakfast, normally
equaniminous NESFAn Mark Olson confirms
my worse fears about its quality; he's more*

excited than anyone but Priscilla should decently see him]

This was a *very* successful program item. Brilliant. Just brilliant. I took five pages of notes.

[In the panel on Not Since Tolkien: Fantasy Without World-Building, Yves Menard asks]

Why *did* Tolkien need all those maps and appendices?

[Writer Greer Gilman peers inward]

Fantasy is not about landscape. It's about inscape.

[Michael Swanwick on George R. R. Martin's Game of Thrones]

I read everything that George Martin has written, except that book ... A fantasy trilogy — the whole damned genre put me off.

[John Clute's unhappy with current fantasy]

... They take a snapshot of the most analgesic part of Tolkien's landscape ... and use it as a playground.

Playgrounds are places that operate by rules. Where things do not change.

[Writer Katya Reimann has done some research]

Tolkien had the map on his living room wall that picked out his walks in red ... Like the map Bilbo has on *his* wall.

But the first maps Tolkien did were not of pleasant walks. They were trench warfare maps in World War I ... In some part of his mind, his maps were *not* part of a playground.

[Swanwick on The Lord of the Rings]

Reading it as an adult, I found it was the saddest book in the world. A book where everyone in the book is in the process of losing everything they loved. And in the end, the best they can do is accept that.

[Menard on the co-creator of Dungeons & Dragons]

Is Gary Gygax a secret identity of George Lucas?

[Clute counters]

— I think he's a secret agent of horror ... Role-playing games are set in Hell ... as with users of the Internet. People who are on the Internet a lot are profoundly depressed.

[Gilman thinks worldbuilding is hell]

Dante's *Inferno* is one of the best pieces of worldbuilding we have.

[Clute still insists the map's not the territory]

A genuine fantasy rips up, transmutes, transforms the map as soon as it goes into operation ...

If a map works, it's because the Dark Lord holds sway over the land.

[Swanwick looks to first causes]

What do you go to literature *for*? You go to be surprised and amazed and moved —

[Clute adds a chill]

— and threatened.

... In *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Once and Future King*, a lot of the resonance that occurs in both those books is the mimicry of a book for children ... All great fantasy novels argue that there is a life span and that only magic will protect us at *all* from the constant seepage of terrifying loss.

[Is Gilman saying fantasy's written by the losers?]

So much of fantasy is being *forced* to make a journey ... being forced out, swept away by dark Satanic mills, pollution, and so on.

[Clute keeps saying quotable things, damn him]

Go to Tolkien's Oxford now with open eyes and the horror of the 20th century is very evident. I was there a month ago, and it's the harrowing of Hell ...

[Swanwick too]

I have this argument with Ellen Kushner. You *can't* have a successful novel in which a lot of attractive people have nice things

happen to them ... They get presents, have sex, and then they get cake.

*[On the genesis of his landmark hard fantasy
The Iron Dragon's Daughter]*

The very beginning of most fantasies — and of most literature — is that you write about something that's "neat." I was driving with my wife ... and I made a joke about Baldwin's Steam Dragon Works, and she laughed. And I thought about it for a mile or so, and I said, "Write that down."

[In the panel on The Career of Ellen Datlow, Gordon Van Gelder catches our attention]

Ellen Datlow taught me everything I know about alien sex.

[Brett Cox is a great person himself]

There's almost a Great Person theory of science fiction editors ... Campbell, Boucher, Horace Gold ... and moving into our time, Gardner and Ellen and now Gordon of course.

[Van Gelder on the editorial armamentarium]

Part One, it takes a good eye ... In Ellen's case, she purchased the first story by Ted Chiang and lots of others ...

The other thing that Ellen has, more than Campbell, Boucher, and Gold combined: Ellen's social skills. Nobody in the field can match Ellen for getting the right people together.

[SF talk radio guy Jim Freund concurs]

She is our den mother. And to that I would add, vision.

[Former colleague Jim Mintz too]

It isn't just the nurturing, it's the tough love ... but if we can't get into the gossip, I'm not really sure why we're all here.

[Van Gelder obliges]

Ellen keeps the mummified bodies of her former cats in her apartment, and bows down to them every day —

[In the audience, Datlow has finally found a subject worth interrupting the panel for]

— The ashes are in a little tiny temple of Bast.

[Van Gelder's been there, done cat]

It's almost a publishing rite of passage to be Ellen's cat-sitter.

[Just then Pat Cadigan puffs in 25 minutes late]

Sorry — I was busy putting nude pictures of Ellen Datlow on the net —

[Van Gelder's barely interested]

— Oh, is there anybody who hasn't seen those?

[But Cadigan finally plays it straight]

One story with Ellen Datlow is worth half a dozen years in a writers' colony.

[Apparently things got a little bubbly in the hotel room last night, according to tantalizing hints dropped by Cadigan]

... We finally got Terry Bisson out of the hot tub and out of the room ... This morning, I uploaded the pictures I took of *[Datlow]* and David Hartwell onto the net. With extra bubbles, because David needed them.

[Cox reminds us of the big picture]

Her career, also with media the field hadn't previously experienced. *Omni*, a big slick magazine. *Event Horizon*, an on-line venture.

[Cadigan begins another paean]

For a long time, she was the only female science fiction writer in the —

[Datlow interrupts]

— Editor.

[Cadigan, calmly]

— Editor. She's my editor, and she can correct me.

[Roguishly] Because she knows I *like* it.

[Van Gelder on the nature of the beast]

Ellen Datlow cannot be cowed. An editor wanted to remove one story from a book she did. Now I've seen rhinos in the wild — that's what Ellen looked like that day.

[As the panel breaks up, writer Michael Burstein comes to the door and commits a mal mot]

Oh, The Career of Ellen Datlow is ending.

[In the hall, fan Sue Thorn feverishly checks off names on her printouts]

I'm getting signatures for my friend Ron Larson in San Francisco. He couldn't go, but he paid for me to come if I got them for him ... So far, I've got 41 out of 52 signed!

[Since the hotel's lobby snack bar, skimpy as it was, is a total no-show today, fan Ed Gerus and I forage in the con suite; Ed has been struck (across the face?) by a resemblance]

Doesn't Harlan Ellison remind you of George C. Scott as Patton?

[One thing killing old writers' reps is new copyright laws, per Nielsen Hayden in the panel on Literary Life After Death]

Eileen Gunn got into a lot of trouble with an essay on Avram Davidson's "The Affair at Lahore Cantonment." She quoted from Kipling's "Danny Deever," and it turns out it's *back* in copyright!

[Someone in the audience speaks of Stephen Baxter's similarly disastrous experience with his fine Wells homage The Time Ships]

All of H. G. Wells' work has got back into copyright in the European Union. And the estate wants excessive amounts *[for any reprints]* to make up for lost time.

[Darrell Schweitzer has another horror story]

You can't reprint Walter de la Mare — who did fantasy and ghost stories in addition to his poetry. They want \$3000 for each of his short stories.

[You wouldn't normally think of Ellison lying around in academe]

At these dumb faculty receptions ... I've learned. No matter what stupid things they say about my work, I reply, My God, did you catch *that*? You are the only one in 35 years to see that!

... And they puff up like pouter pigeons. And they teach me in their classes.

[In the bar, my bro Michael is having fun]

In the people I've met — the energy, the drive to talk — this is one of the best cons I've been to in the last 10 years!

[As Irwin Strauss does his Filthy Pierre cocktail piano bit in the lounge, Michael muses]

You ever notice how he's always providing nice music in the background, and nobody ever notices?

[In the panel on The Literary Taste Continuum, editor Patrick Nielsen Hayden picks on one phrase in writer Fred Lerner's intro]

For "no doubt" read "I think."

[Ignoring this, Lerner proposes a nice analogy]

I like to think of SF as a provincial literature. Like Albanian literature —

[Which Nielsen Hayden promptly perverts]

— Elbonian.

... It's literature written by writers who feud with other Elbonian writers.

[Later, Lerner makes a point worth repeating worth repeating]

What we're really looking for in SF is re-readability.

[Nielsen Hayden goes further]

— I'd say we're looking for *voice*.

And an *agenda* ... I have a sneaking suspicion we mistitled the field. It should have been called argument fiction!

The core of the field is to put forward an argument ... That's the core of the whole John Campbell field, for instance: Ask the next question.

[At her reading of a terrific new novel about a Caribbean-colonized planet, Nalo Hopkinson reminds us that linguistically, every mon is an island]

I saw *[terrific 1973 movie]* *The Harder They Come* only recently, because I was too young to be allowed to see it when it came out.

But even I needed the subtitles. It was deep into Jamaican creole. I knew one word in three.

[At the panel on The Killers Inside Us, Connie Hirsch displays some eerie expertise]

Whitman — the Texas Tower Killer — he was an external suicide ... It was a case of suicide by cop.

... There are actually technical specs on whether you're a spree killer or a serial

killer, based on the interval between your killings and on how far you took your bodies ...

[Delany recalls some killer conclusions]

They did a lot of research in the 60s ... and came up with some hard-edged conclusions. That everyone has forgotten.

One thing they determined ... The main cause of all crimes was simply this: what crimes could be *gotten away with*.

This was a scary thing. The same reason that you and I, working in an office, steal paper clips ... is the same reason professional hit men murder people ... It's the *same* attitude.

We can't get away with saying, This is a different kind of person. This is a good person, this is a bad person ...

[If writer James D. Macdonald had a hammer, just keep him away from me]

I have a heroine in one of my books hammer a stake through her best friend's heart, at her request ...

And I keep thinking, someday will somebody *really* hammer a stake through her best friend's heart — and be found with a copy of my book by her side?

[Nowadays some say guns don't kill people: books, games, or movies kill people ... new author Michael Cisco (of The Divinity Student) makes the opposite case divinely]

I've read all kinds of things in my life, and I've never killed anyone. And I bet the bulk of us could say the same ...

Here's what I think is behind some things like the Columbine killings: I don't know that young people necessarily understand what death is ... I think to a considerable extent the trouble is *lack* of imagination, not an overactive imagination.

[That new Cisco kid, after panel — as hope springs eternal in the new writer's breast]

At Buzzcity Press, they told me *The Divinity Student* would be a very small print run — only 500[!] copies. But it would be a beautiful book.

And it is! That beautiful cover by Harry O. Morris, and the nice packaging ...

In fact, I'm so happy! I still can't get over the fact that people I've never met will buy

my book. And put *my* words on their shelves.

[At the Debriefing, after I complain about the abysmally slow hotel food service, I murmur something like "I'll say this, to be sure you keep doing it. The Program Guide is always one of the true glories of Readercon. You have the complete bios — and they're updated every year. It must be a massive amount of work — OK, for your guy Richard Duffy. Anyway, I use it all year long as a reference: there are the two Clute-and-friends encyclopedias, and there is the Readercon Program Guide" — whereupon the committee clamors with one voice from the platform]

Quote yourself!

Our Man in Honduras

From his Peace Corps post in the cholera room of a hill town north of Tegucigalpa, our nephew Jarrod Ferrara sends another report.

He seems to be settling in. Maybe *too* comfortably. Jarrod now dates his letters in a style positively un-American: "29/6/99."

But at least the weather hasn't killed him, at least not so far:

"In the lower elevations, it's routinely over 100 degrees. I'm glad I don't live too low. From what I hear of volunteers that do, it's so hot you lose your appetite. It's a real problem with some people just maintaining their weight, and I don't mean not gaining any!"

And speaking of things positively American, just because you're in-country doesn't mean you don't celebrate the Fourth:

"A lot of volunteers will be in Tegus [Tegucigalpa] this weekend. There's a cookout at the ambassador's residence ... Only members of the U.S. mission are invited (i.e., Peace Corps, State Department, military, etc.) ... who wants to be around all those stuffy diplomats anyway?"

By the way, be proud of me, Jarrod. Heard there was an earthquake down your

way, and got on the net to read Honduran newspaper stories in my miserable Spanish.

Seems the quake hit far north of you.
Either that, or the postillion has been struck
by lightning with the glove of my aunt ...

**From "Deep Thoughts"
by Jack Handey**

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

"I bet a fun thing would be to go way back in time to where there was going to be an eclipse and tell the cave men, 'If I have come to destroy you, may the sun be blotted out from the sky.' Just then the eclipse would start, and they'd probably try to kill you or something, but then you could explain about the rotation of the moon and all, and everyone would get a good laugh."

FlimFan

EXCELLENT:

Tarzan — Paint an ape pink, put him in the cage with the others, and they'll tear him apart. That's a truism children intuit by or on their first day at kindergarten. So kids and grownup kids alike have an apprehensive, rooting interest in the Tarzan story. And a real sense of triumph when Tarzan not only survives, but prevails. These feelings are marvelously preserved by the creators of this terrific new animated version of Edgar Rice Burrough's classic tale. What a story! The boy orphaned in the jungle who must first learn to be an ape, then to be a man. There are beautifully done 3D scenscapes: the clifftop treehouse, the ape family's forest glade, and especially the waterfall pool — no cartoon has ever had water that looks so magically translucent, so sparkling, so *wet* before. There are the usual great Disney jokes for kids of all ages, as when his miffed friend Terk (voiced by Rosie O'Donnell) says Tarzan (Tony Goldwyn), once he encounters humans, drops his animal friends "like a newborn giraffe." And I like how when the elephant see a human camp and catches terrified sight of a teapot, you get one of the few references in the Disney oeuvre to *Apocalypse Now* (or, for that matter, to Joseph Conrad): "The horror!" bleats Tantor

(Wayne Knight). I'd rank this one with *The Little Mermaid* and *Beauty and the Beast* as the best of the modern Disney flicks. There's some violence and sorrow here, but the little kids in our audience seemed to take it equably. And the big kids in the hearts of Queen Maureen and myself had a great time.

CURMUDGEONLY AFTERTHOUGHT:
Just for fun, let's look at the dark side here. Despite the many areas in which the moviemakers have brought the story into line with all the TV documentaries on animal behavior Maureen makes me watch, there remain a few teensy bit of unrealism. For instance, current knowledge on feral children might suggest that any actual grown-up Tarzan, far from being a sharp young hunk who masters English and astronomy in a snap, would instead be an anus-sniffing, parasite-infested lump unable to learn any human language or even stop scratching himself. And let's think about the big silverback male Kerchak. A little kid may not be clear, when Kerchak talks about "our family," that he means all the females in the group are his exclusive harem, all the other adolescent or adult males have been driven off with scars and scowls, and all the young ones had better be his progeny or he'll kill them. But perhaps a bright youngster who watches *Oprah* may guess that Tarzan is headed for life as a neurotically overachieving perfectionist. Since he's launched into the pattern of forever trying hopelessly to please an emotionally distant, punishing father ...

VERY GOOD:

An Ideal Husband — Normally I hate people talking during the movie. But early on here, as an expressionless majordomo proffers a beverage to his recumbent milord and helpfully reads the morning papers aloud while his lordship slowly regains consciousness — my brother Michael whispered hoarsely, "I want a butler *just* like that." Which explain why we like these Victorian quipfests: greedy nostalgia for the high life we never had. It's on splendidly displayed here, in lushly photographed parks

and parties, a fencing academy, the House of Commons, and yes drawing rooms. These movies all come down to people saying witty stuff, so you might as well vary the backgrounds for visual interest. This plot's mostly background too: a rising political star (Jeremy Northam) well-married to a rich beauty (Cate Blanchett) with a spunky younger sister (Minnie Driver) is blackmailed for a youthful indiscretion involving (yawn) state secrets and (gasp!) money by a scheming adventuress (Julianne Moore); the politician leans for support on the willowy wand of his best friend, our idle young bachelor lord (Rupert Everett). This story started as an Oscar Wilde play, so timeless wit is everywhere: as when Moore's character speaks of the newspapers' "loathsome joy" in scandal. Or when someone suggests, "Well, you could always get married," and Everett replies, "It's the 'always' that concerns me." But the lively gleam in Minnie Driver's eyes may persuade him otherwise, as may the happiness his friends have found: I've never seen the usually crystalline Cate Blanchett so warm and innocently beautiful. This movie has an uneven quality at first, progressing in fits and starts as the actors and writer/director Oliver Parker (whose 1995 Fishburne/Jacob/Branagh *Othello* was more black-and-white) find the right tone. But find it they do, and we all have a nearly ideal time.

DECENT:

Entrapment — Some random thoughts to meet my impossible deadline: You see very few movies where the heroine's an insurance company agentess. Catherine Zeta Jones is indeed enthrallingly beautiful, and I especially enjoy watching her do splits, lifts, and slides to slip through a lattice of laser beams: a kind of deep-breathing laser beam blindfolded ballet ... Sean Connery as the impossibly knowledgeable international art thief and cat burglar is looking older, no surprise. Maybe he's compensating with lines like these: "Did you know that Rembrandt lived with his parents well into

his 40s?" ... You love to see Ving Rhames enter any movie. Here, he's an asset again ... Liked what Connery says when he finally breaks into a huge bank and sees the ultimate target: a big computer. "This is it? Whatever happened to *money*?" Liked the unusual locations (Scottish Highlands, Kuala Lumpur) and the cool modern one-tank diving gear ... Loved the parachute in the air shaft.

ULTIMATELY REALLY BAD:

The General's Daughter — More random thoughts: John Travolta as a U.S. Army warrant officer in the military police has a good old-soldier beefiness, but none of that old-soldier beaten-downedness the real guy would probably have ... Madeleine Stowe always looks smart, and here it's not a problem for her to look more intelligent than Travolta ... Some actors are said to play each part using the technique of imagining some secret their character might have; never expressing it, just using it to deepen the character. Of course, this is an even better technique if you're a suspect in a thriller. James Woods does it perfectly here ... Often, the music just tries to bully you with big, booming, empty chords. Although I did like the uncharacteristically unusual choices of the old song (gospel blues?) "Sea Lion Woman" at the beginning, and the fresh arrangement of "Rock Island Line" also at the end ... What turns out to have really happened at the central crime scene is so stupid, you wish they'd kept it a mystery ... There's a really ugly bit of terminology here referring to a woman: "a piece of patch." Well, this thing is a lurid, melodramatic piece of trash.

AAAGGH!

No time for Backchat.

Next ish ...