

# The Devniad Book 70c

un zine de Bob Devney  
25 Johnson Street, North Attleboro, MA 02760 U.S.A.  
e-mail: bobdevney@aol.com  
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## **Orbita Dicta Heard in the Halls of Boskone 38 Sheraton Framingham Hotel Framingham, Massachusetts, U.S.A. February 16-18, 2001**

So you must know the drill by now, people. I go to a science fiction con, listen to what people say, take mostly illegible notes, and fake them I mean write them up for you. *[My comments on each quote are in brackets a lot like these.]*

This time, there were on hand an unusual number of my spies, who do the same thing not quite so obsessively. Without blowing their cover, let's just say I'd like to thank Darcy Devney, Bob Kuhn, James Marshall, Sarah O'Connor, and Mark Mandel. Bob K also appeared in the role of Weege, photodocumenting the con's more lurid moments with his mercilessly accurate camera for Ernest Lilley of *SFRevu*. The results, at least for now, are on shuddersome display in the Feb ish at the Web site. Check out [www.sfrevu.com](http://www.sfrevu.com) if you dare ...

*[Fearful of being quoted while seeming ignorant of SF sensibilities again this year, coworker Steve Rebello slyly bids me adieu with a voiceless Spock salute; better luck next year, Steve ...]*

*[Upon my arrival Friday night, intrepid Devniad agent Darcy Devney fills in the earlier hotel misadventures of writer Greer Gilman]*

First they had trouble at the front desk with two of her credit cards. Then when she got to the room, Greer opened the door to the closet and it fell off. So she went to call the desk ... but the phone was dead.

*[At Registration, bibliopole Art Henderson isn't relishing his weekend-long exile to the dealers' room]*

Write it up so I'll know what I missed.

*[My precisionista bro-in-law Bob Kuhn driving home from dinner Friday night, on Bertucci's being listed in the Boskone Restaurant Guide as 4.3 miles from the hotel while Bennigan's right across the street is listed at 4.4]*

I'll excuse the possibility of error. It's inconsistency I can't stand.

*[At the panel on Anime and Manga (which starts with few attendees not including Alice Lewis, who was stuck in traffic until the last 10 minutes of the panel), fan Christine Carpenito surveys the scene]*

Right in Cambridge, we've got anime at MIT every Friday night ... And right in Harvard Square you can buy at Tokyo Kid and Anime Crash.

Also there are cons frequently. And the big Anime Expo, which gets more than 10,000 people — last year it was in Las Vegas.

*[Fan James Wolf from the audience, if that concept has any meaning with only 5 people in the room anyway, explains anime to the goyim]*

Anime is basically animation done in Japan. *Astro Boy* was the first thing that appeared in the U.S., on TV in the sixties. Then *Speed Racer* and *Star Blazer* and so on.

*[Rachel Olson is queen of the Anime Club at nearby Framingham High School]*

You can get all sorts of stuff on the Web, too ... There are kiss dolls: an electronic paper doll program you can download and mess around with ...

*[Olson on the plot of a famously dark anime hit]*

Yeah, *Grave of the Fireflies*. A boy and his sister trying to live in the last 2 years of World War II. Everybody dies tragically of starvation and despair. Like when the guard throws the candy tin holding the ashes of his sister away.

*[At one juncture, Olson actually talks on point]*

... Anime's not taking over science fiction. It's *joining* science fiction ... at the last meeting of our anime club, some people in back were reading *Dune*. Because they liked the miniseries that was just on TV.

*[Finally running in from her traffic mess, panelist Alice Lewis jumps right in and starts evening the balance in favor of manga, or Japanese comic books – or American comic books, for that matter]*

I work at Million Year Picnic *[the comix place, again in Harvard Square]* ... The independent comic that most surprises me is *Johnny the Homicidal Maniac*. It's, like, psychotic, but also sweet and clever.

*[Lewis comes to terms]*

"Dubs" and "raw." You quickly deny that you ever see a dub. It's all subtitles for you, of course. Or even better, raw — all in Japanese, no dubs, no subs.

*[Any special recommendations, Alice?]*

... Everybody should go beg borrow or steal *Onee-sama*. I just saw it. It's like anime crack!

*[Wolf pounces also]*

Here, take down this list of the kickass stuff to go see. *Evangelion, Serial Lane Experiments, Star Blazers, Cowboy Bepoh, Dirty Pair, Tenchi Myo* ...

*[At the opening ceremonies, 2002's Boskone chair Pam Fremon says the Sandman cometh]*

Here's a very late-breaking announcement. Next year's Boskone Guest of Honor will be — Neil Gaiman!

*[In the throng, current Guest of Honor George*

*R. R. Martin blows hot and cold about his great fantasy series, A Song of Ice and Fire]*

I've got three more to do. *[Drawn-out sigh]* These books are *long* ...

*[Boskone PR Czar Elisabeth Carey talks of the AT&T cable TV crew going around interviewing people on camera for the premiere episode of a show called Chowdah, which is good news for all you fans (would that make you Chowdaheads?)]*

The Chowdah people are saying the show with our stuff should go on their cable access channels in early March.

*[In the panel Unbreakable Chicken in Love: The Offbeat Best Movies of an Offbeat Year, fan/film nut Mark Leeper brings a reminder from the Early Days of Dot]*

I realized a few years ago that I am the longest-running film reviewer on the Internet. I've been posting film reviews on the Internet since 1980.

*[Pro flick kicker Dan Kimmel horns in with a quirky recommendation]*

*The Little Vampire* — You've got to love a film where the cows are vampires, and the farmer wonders why the cows are hiding in the barn ... And the scene where the cows take flight!

*[Iron Man Leeper somehow talks about The Cell without mentioning Jennifer Lopez's skintight blue virtual reality suit]*

*The Cell* was a psychological *Fantastic Voyage* ... Within the virtual dream state, you see how each of the characters used religion differently, for example ... There was a lot more intelligence behind that film than I was expecting.

... *Titan A. E.* was pretty good ... A film on the level of the early writings of Alan Dean Foster. With the visuals, the makers added a number of brushes to the palette.

*[Fan and Internet movie reviewer MaryAnn Johanson, a worthy new addition to Boskone panelists, found Mission far from impossible]*

I liked *Mission to Mars*. The people were scientists, and they behaved like scientists, not the usual stock characters. They didn't

panic at the first sign of trouble ... That's a gorgeous looking film too. It *looked* like it was filmed on Mars.

*[Leeper has one reservation]*

— But why you need *shower scenes* in science fiction movies —

*[Kimmel leaps to a high-minded defense against cinematic censorship]*

— Hey, don't come between me and Denise Richards in *Starship Troopers!*

*[From the audience, veteran fan writer nominee Evelyn Leeper just can't help mentioning the Hugos, to get voters thinking, which I of course would never do]*

Somewhere on my Hugo ballot will be *The Ninth Gate*. It's based on *The Club Dumas* by Arturo Perez-Reverte, the Spanish author who also wrote *The Flanders Panel*. I thought it was a very, very good film.

*[At the Trivia Bowl, Trivia Tsar Mark Olson announces the usual deeply unfair rules]*

The winner is the person with the most chocolates ... uneaten!

*[From the audience, Bob Kuhn advises linguist Mark Mandel to tell it to the Marines]*

Semper Fi does *not* mean "Always Faithful." Semper Fi doesn't mean *anything*. Semper Fidelis, on the other hand ...

*[My notes from the panel on the forgotten works of Nevil Shute first thing Saturday morn suffered from my being on it; but I'm struck by a parallel from British fan Peter Weston]*

Shute's the most Heinleinesque writer I know. He has the same great respect for science and technology. And for business for that matter: the main character in *Kindling* is a kind of D. D. Harriman figure, isn't he? A businessman trying hard to build something new and wonderful.

*[And superfan Janice Gelb likes Shute's Round the Bend almost as much as John Douglas and I, although we both cry when we reread it and she claims she doesn't; she admires the new religion created by the airplane mechanic character]*

Connie Shaklin's philosophy reminded me of the Shakers. Everything's about the excellence of the work.

*[Afterward, Weston boosts Boskone]*

I like this con much better than any Worldcon. It's friendly, and you've got time to chat with people. Not just tramp down endless echoing halls ...

*[Just down our by contrast comfily crowded downstairs hall, NESFAn Leslie Turek offers instant gratification]*

I heard your Shute panel went really, really well! —

*[Flattered, I fish for even more impartial praise]*

Oh yeah? Who told you that? —

*[Big mistake]*

— Your brother.

*[Outlining his reading agenda, Devniad subscriber Michael Colpitts demonstrates he knows great net journalism when he sees it]*

*News of the Weird* and you get priority one.

*[In the panel on Remedy for Future Shock: Near-Future SF as a Dress Rehearsal, Canadian SF star Robert J. Sawyer is flip about phones]*

Recently in Toronto there was a 12-car pileup caused by a driver on a cell phone ... No SF writers predicted that Captain Kirk would flip open his communicator — and drive the *Enterprise* into a star.

*[No one would have predicted that writer Michael A. Burstein would ever say this, either]*

I have nothing to say.

*[In the hall, writer Barbara Chepaitis radiates the unearthly glow of the newly engaged (to screenwriter/reviewer Steve Sawicki, lucky bastard)]*

I'm really enjoying it ... Merging our collections isn't as hard as you might think. For a fan, I'm relatively book-light. The only pile I have around the house is the pile of manuscripts I'm writing.

*[Priscilla Olson displays the gossamer touch of the Boskone Chairfairy]*

I'm going around trying to spread cheerfulness and light in different places. Or at least saying, "Go ahead and spend money if you have to," which is about the same thing.

*[In the panel on The Urban Legends of Publishing, editor Ellen Asher of the Science Fiction Book Club cries just like a writer]*

I've always felt very jealous of the authors who come to panels and hold up their new books, so here is mine *[brandishes brochure of forthcoming SFBC releases]*.

*[Tor editor Patrick Nielsen Hayden explains why a book bombs]*

We have our excuses all lined up ... it was the wrong cover, wrong season, wrong price point, etc.

*[Patrick to his assistant, about calling a writer — as told by audience member Teresa Nielsen Hayden]*

Tell the author I'm really, really sorry, and we'll put those changes into his next novel.

*[The panel on Writers's Influences shows mature SF maven William Tenn — whose continuing neglect has just been staved off by the first big volume (Immodest Proposals) of his NESFA Press enshrinement — is no slouch at name-dropping]*

The years I was first reading science fiction, from 15 to 19, I was also reading Andre Malraux, Thomas Mann, and Dickens ... And I couldn't really distinguish between the philosophy and the science fiction.

... I admired Sturgeon tremendously, but the writer who influenced me the most was Lewis Padgett — that is, C. L. Moore and Henry Kuttner *[writing under that name]* — in terms of his humor and his method ... And H. G. Wells and Heinlein.

*[Stylistically, writer Sharon Lee is slightly schizophrenic]*

For ideas, Ursula K. Le Guin's story "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" ... Stylistically? Georgette Heyer.

*[While Steve Sawicki is more closely focused]*

I look at pieces of a writer's work for influences. Jack Vance's ability to do dialog ... his beautiful, beautiful language. And Harlan Ellison: the edge he manages to keep on his material.

*[Tenn was close with SF master Theodore Sturgeon, and remembers his reaction to the early success of fantasist Ray Bradbury, outside the orbit of editor John W. Campbell of Astounding]*

Bradbury had a tremendous impact on Sturgeon ... He made Sturgeon very angry.

Because Sturgeon saw that maybe he *[Sturgeon]* shouldn't have gotten hooked up with Campbell. There was another road he could have chosen.

*[Sawicki pins down Bradbury's appeal]*

His stories seemed to me like things that could happen. I could walk down the street and turn the corner and discover that dark carnival.

*[Tenn does us the great compliment of taking his field — and his audience — very seriously, uttering one of the most breathtaking things I've ever heard a writer say]*

E. M. Forster was on a BBC radio interview many years ago. He was asked the question, why do you write? He said first, "For money" ... which upset the interviewer very much.

... And he said, "Today I write to win the respect of those I respect. To begin with, Homer. Possibly Aeschylus."

... So in that regard, in my own case I'd mention Swift, Voltaire, Aristophanes. If I had the feeling that one of their shades would nod a little bit at something I've done ...

... One of the biggest moments of my life was when Sturgeon said to me, "Oh, that piece of yours — that wasn't too bad."

*[Young writer Shane Tourtellotte laughs a little enviously]*

— I'm sorry. Right now I'm just writing for the respect of a couple *publishers*.

*[Writer Rosemary Kirstein has been touched by]*

Ted Chiang. For a while I thought Ted Chiang was like, the angels had sent someone to save us ... And he's still in his 20s.

*[Tenn tells a tale of another SF master, C. M. Kornbluth]*

Fred Pohl told me once that Cyril Kornbluth first wanted to be a scientist. But at City College, he had a tremendous course load and decided to take one nice, easy course to round it out. It was in the mathematics department, and had the simple title Theory of Numbers ... It was a horrendous experience, and Kornbluth turned his back forever on the fields of science and mathematics.

*[In the audience, writer Barry Longyear talks about his own influences]*

Different children's book. And *The Autobiography of U. S. Grant*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Richard Halliburton's *Book of Marvels* ...

*[Tenn circles back to Sturgeon]*

Ted said the story that most changed him was "Bianca's Hands." It forever changed the way he worked. I thought that was a great shame, because the story he'd written right before was "Microcosmic God," which I liked very much ... He said that after "Bianca's Hands," he didn't have to write that juvenile stuff anymore ...

*[Kirstein's had a more recent revelation]*

What changed me was the latest story I wrote, *The Last Steersman*. Which Del Rey has and God knows when it's coming out.

*[In the panel on The 10 Worst and Best Ideas in SF & Fantasy, writer Keith DeCandido flogs one of his books with mature dignity]*

It should be for sale in the dealer's room. And if it's not, tell them they're a big bunch of stinkies.

*[Who'd want to play "Teacher's Pet" with Michael Burstein after this?]*

This student of mine *[pointing to her in audience]* has already written a novel —

*[Lawrence M. Schoen responds]*

— So what does she need you for?

*[Burstein goes for the joke]*

— I didn't say it was a *good* novel.  
*[Editor Patrick Nielsen Hayden thinks globally in the panel on Overseas Hard SF]*

There's a kind of extravagance in Iain Banks and Ken MacLeod, and perhaps in Colin Greenland's space operas. They feel like books that contain whole worlds.

*[British writer and fan Paul Kincaid talks about the success of one of my all-time faves]*

Iain Banks was an immediate commercial success in Britain right from the first novel, *The Wasp Factory* ... Even before his first science fiction book was published — *Consider Phlebas* — he was a guest at Mexican, a British science fiction convention.

... Despite the fact that he hid behind the immensely opaque pseudonym of Iain M. Banks, he kept his readership and took it with him into his science fiction work.

*[Nielsen Hayden says the paddling's been more perilous on this side of the pond]*

The publishing history of Iain Banks in the U.S. has been an unmitigated disaster ... You can go into 12 bookstores in a row and not find one Banks.

*[What does it take to terrify Kincaid?]*

I'm in a writer's workshop ... When we go over a story, it's pretty damned destructive. Chris Priest in particular is absolutely terrifying. He will go through every single word of a story, and tell you why it's the *wrong* word.

*[An audience member says younger U.S. writers aren't exactly flocking to fly the hard SF flag]*

I went to Clarion this summer. And out of the 130 stories we worked on, only the 2 that I worked on were hard science fiction.

*[Fan Mark Mandel overheard this honest exchange between two younger fans on the stairway]*

— Mike, is there a purpose in your babbling?

— No.

*[In the hall, Canadian SF superstar Robert Sawyer has kind words for our con]*

This is my first Boskone. I go to Readercon frequently, but not this. It's just the usual Boskone Bad Weather that prevents us coming, I think. I'm enjoying this very much, finally.

*[NESFAn Chip Hitchcock is suspicious about George R. R. Martin's fantasy series]*

It's supposed to be six novels. But I remember when Zelazny's Amber was a trilogy. I believe that one ended up as five and five novels ...

*[In the dealer's room, bookseller Chris Logan Edwards hits a humoresque note about a movie I recently rented, The Red Violin]*

You might say it was about sex and violins.

*[Bibliopole/publisher Mike Walsh of Old Earth Books has a momentous announcement about a neglected minor master (1909-1976)]*

I signed up another dead writer ... I'll be doing all of Edgar Pangborn. All the novels, and a one- or two-volume omnibus of all the short stories ... *A Mirror for Observers* and *West of the Sun* might be out for Philcon!

Also, Boston University has a collection of Pangborn's papers ... I have no idea what we might find *[publishable]* there.

*[At Intergalactic Book Works, Dan Kuenzig indicates his absent wife is tired of my quoting stuff about, like, her bunions]*

Don't talk about Barb's illnesses or anything like your usual. Just say, let's see, say that we enjoy bringing people happiness by sending them books in the mail.

*[Dan Kimmel is a Pictionary virgin (if you can picture that); after the first couple of game turns, he observes from the audience]*

They all look like *Chicken Run* to me.

*[Writer Craig Shaw Gardner should be quartered for keeping score like this]*

It's 3 to 2. We've drawn ahead.

*[In the panel on Science and Faith, Esther Friesner says sweetly]*

I'd like you to know I did find the First Church of Chocolate. Salvation through calories.

*[Later, writer Jeffrey Carver prays]*

Let's drag this, kicking and screaming, back to the topic.

*[On the panel about Pop Horror, editor Adam Golaski is surprised to hear Louisa May Alcott supported her family by writing newspapers stories about vampires, slashers, and abductions]*

I've gotta re-read *Little Women*!

*[In the elevator, swimsuited writer/critic Gregory Feeley still drips with articulateness]*

Our panel on alternate history went fine. Although there were some military fan types in the audience who keenly felt the urgency of setting me straight even earlier in the hour than I as the moderator usually prefer.

*[I'm sure Midwest fan Dick Smith meant this without an ounce of fanflamery]*

Corflu is the elite convention of fanzine snobs. Ditto is the un-elite convention of fannish un-snobs.

*[In the panel on Why the SF Channel and Too Many SF Movies Suck, Michael Burstein tells the bitter truth]*

We *[SF fans]* are *nothing* on the ratings — we are barely a blip. Why do you think *The Rock [from pro wrestling]* appeared on *Voyager* last season?

*[Dan Kimmel feels Star Trek: Voyager is still living down to its reputation]*

The plot last week was *Voyager* is caught in a void ... Oh, oh, I'm on the edge of my seat with suspense.

*[This reporter on something you won't see on film anytime soon ... especially since all the Hobbits in the book are male]*

I think *Hobbit* sex could be a little challenging.

*[In the panel on A Great Story Needs a Great Villain, proto-author Alex Irvine lectures]*

All extrapolative fiction is didactic.

*[Pause]* Period.

*[In the hall, very tall fan Glenn Hauman boasts of a very short Web address]*

I am as far as I know the longest continuing publisher of commercial e-books. Bibliobytes, since about 1994. With a URL like www.bb.com, you know we've been around a while.

*[In between spiraling shiploads of food and drink into hopelessly terminal orbits around the black holes of 900 fannish gullets, has harried NESFAn Claire Anderson nevertheless somehow found the energy to save up this mot for me?]*

Working Con Suite gives you a new understanding of the Mongol hordes.

*[My brilliant brother Michael, in the room before the evening outings, solves my frantic how-to-get-water-into-the-iron dilemma]*

You'll find that the coffeepot has a pour spout ...

*[At a con suite table, when I learn our sister Darcy and bro-in-law Bob Kuhn can't make it to dinner, I have a simple but not actually serious suggestion for my brother Michael]*

Why don't you just, you know, pick up some babes?

*[Imagine my surprise when this stranger sitting to our left takes us up on the "offer", says her name is Bonnie and she has this friend, MaryAnn ... which is how it comes to pass that, during dinner at Not Your Average Joe's, Bonnie Blair defends a best-selling fantasy author against my lit-crit sniffiness]*

Robert Jordan writes the best and most complex female characters in fantasy today ... Between Robert Jordan and Guy Gavriel Kay, I'd rather take Jordan.

*[How did film reviewer MaryAnn Johanson get into SF?]*

My mother bought books because they looked nice ... Once somehow she got 8 books for a penny from the Science Fiction Book Club. I was 6 or 7 years old ... Soon I was into *Childhood's End*.

*[In the packed Iron Author contest after the banquet, where Becky and Art Henderson kindly*

*gesture me into an empty seat at their table up front; editor/judge Teresa Nielsen Hayden never skirts a risqué possibility]*

The classic advice about artichokes is to think of the leaves as petticoats —

*[Writer Shariann Lewitt demurs]*

— No, the classic advice is ... butter.

*[If you've never seen a Japanese game show called The Iron Chef, describing its parody here is pretty hopeless; let's just say that as four authors attempt to each write a story in 15 minutes onstage while incorporating various weird props, the clueless stooge Ota (played I think by fan Joel Saul) feeds blow-by-blow observations to Walter Stutzman as MC Fukui at the dais]*

The artichoke, Fukui-san, is indeed on the *[microphone goes dead]* old side. As is the sound system.

*[Ota surveys Keith De Candido's work]*

Ah! Good use of cliches.

*[Nielsen Hayden invents a new cliché]*

I think the mark of the true genre hack is when they have the cliches loaded as macros.

*[Iron Author Horror (Esther Friesner) won, but I preferred Iron Author Science Fiction (Keith De Candido) because his effort included stuff like]*

Captain Blowhorner ... the SS NESFA ... They were in the middle of a fierce war against the Arisians.

*[Charming Iron Author bimbo Lisa Leutheuser proudly explains how difficult this all was to carry off]*

We did it at a con in Michigan in January, but that had stuff prearranged. Tonight was our first live show.

*[After the show, NESFAn Mark Hertel shares more news about same time next con]*

Tom Holt the writer is also a filker. In fact, he's the Filk Guest of Honor here next year.

*[At the Boston in 2004 party, Ellen Asher can hardly bear to conceal her news]*

*The Sound and the Furry: The Complete Hoka Stories!* Coming in April from the Science Fiction Book Club.

*[Also, Asher can and does flourish her Skylark (Nice Guy/Gal) Award with pride]*

It's the only award I'm very likely to get. Since I don't write and I don't draw.

*[Ozzie fan Stephen Boucher trumpets a very well-reviewed Australian comedy/drama flick (from the makers of The Castle, one of my faves of 1998) with its U.S. opening scheduled March 9]*

*The Dish* is coming your way soon, and it's great! About goings-on at the Australian ground station during the Apollo missions.

*[Also at the Boston party, SMOF/DUFF Queen Janice Gelb teaches me the mysterious Way of the Palm; Pilot, I mean]*

You should do your *Devniad* on this! You just have to get used to writing every letter in the same tiny space, very very fast ...

*[Toward midnight, partygoers look out a hallway window upon a lit Coke machine in the middle of yon icy, windswept wilderness (the outdoor pool patio); who but Dr. Bob Kuhn would have such a ready explanation?]*

It's the American Tardis —

*[A partygoer laughs, a touch prophetically]*  
— I'll have to remember to tell Bob Devney that one!

*[By the elevator, we encounter Dick and Leah Zeldes Smith; Leah thinks Boskone not sufficiently fannish]*

I've done panels like *Do You Speak Fanglish?* and had only a handful of people come. But at San Antonio, I wrote the description in fanspeech and said, "If you want to know what this means, come." Much bigger crowd. And then, if you think a panel is marginal because it's about fandom, don't marginalize it again by scheduling it first thing in the morning. Give it a nice

afternoon time slot, and you can get a decent audience.

*[All too soon, the Sunday sun spits morning into Devney's face; I greet it and my crack-of-dawn (well, 10:00 a.m.) panel with a crack]*

Welcome to *Crouching Kitty, Sleeping Panelist*.

*[Actually, the panel's on the new Chinese fantasy romance Crouching Tiger, Sleeping Dragon; forget why Mark Leeper brought this comment up, but it slayed]*

There's an SF film you may have seen on cable lately: *The Mating Habits of the Earthbound Human*. An alien is describing what happens when humans go to the cinema. "Women like films in which one person dies slowly. Men like films in which many people die quickly." [HUGE audience guffaw]

*[During the writers' tour of the Art Show, Bruce Coville muses]*

When you see pieces like this all from one artist, where everything is at a distance, you wonder if this artist is trying to keep a psychological distance — or maybe they just don't like to paint faces. You know, some artists like to just paint the backs of heads.

*[For Jerry Weist, sometimes the medium's the menace]*

Watercolor has always been the most intimidating medium to me as an artist, because there's no going back.

*[In the Panel on Beyond Super Heroes, writer Daniel Dern discusses the canon-conflicts in comic books today]*

I'm confused. Is Ultimate Spiderman different from Spiderman-Regular ... Spiderman-Decaf?

*[Before the Dueling Storytellers event, Josepha Sherman (sound) checks with Bruce Coville]*

I suspect none of us will need microphones. You won't, will you?

*[Coville cracks back]*

— No. And *you* certainly won't need a microphone. You wouldn't need a microphone in Grand Central Station.

*[Write Barbara Chepaitis keeps trying to catch candies thrown to her from the audience, and missing]*

I feel like I'm dealing with my publisher here.

*[In the Fantasy Noir panel, writer and fantastic history scholar Darrell K. Schweitzer answers a question that's pretty impenetrable unless you realize he's focusing on the locus where Lester Del Rey introduced Sword of Shannara]*

When did fantasy become cute? The answer is 1974, Lunacon. I was there.

*[Boskone Special Guest Jack Cohen, British reproductive biologist and world-class teacher/showman, treats a packed house to his one-man lecture/slideshow, Redesigning the Human Body for Fun and Fornication — let's just excerpt a highlight or twenty]*

If you can't hear me, stand up on your chair at the back and wave your arms. I don't promise to talk any louder, but it will amuse the rest of us.

... When I came to Harvard for a year in 1963 ... the perversion of the month was metavoeyurism: watching Peeping Toms.

... Fans at science fiction cons are my most intelligent — my *wisest* — audience.

*[Cohen's heard it all]*

... People have the most amazing ideas about cloning ... Like the call I got from the woman who said, "My daughter was 3 years old when she was killed, 3 years ago. I have some of her hair and I saw *Jurassic Park* last night. Only you can help me!"

*[Keep your eyes open and your — never mind]*

I don't want to upset people except to the extent of educating you.

... When you drew vaginas, you drew them open. Every one of you knew that they were not ... Because we are trained to respect authority. And that's the way they're drawn in the book.

*[What's wrong with many biologists today?]*

Robert *[that's me!]* goaded me into this analogy just before the panel. Instead of going to *Hamlet* and looking at what's interesting about Polonius or the King, they look at the whole play.

... You silly buggers. Why are you still talking about drosophila and peas when they're so different in the wild world?

We say, "As like as peas in a pod." *[New slide showing a pod with wildly dissimilar peas]* I'm showing you peas in a pod, not peas in a Birdseye package. Look, there's peas in a pod.

*[When a baby cries, Cohen glares at the parent in the audience]*

Am I talking too loud for the child?

*[Question your assumptions, folks; if not, Jack will]*

If you're going to understand ecology, you've got to understand the background ... Species are not like a spreading tree. They are like grass. Nearly all of them die, without reproducing.

... I am very glad that I turned out a really smart Ph.D. student who's become a leading light of the Creationist Society.

... I worked for nearly 30 years on the question of why there are so many sperm. Perhaps 200 million sperm in human ejaculate ... Nearly all sperm have broken DNA ... They are not selected, they are discriminated.

*[Now Cohen gets personal]*

The human has a big brain, so that's the aim of it all ... We think that the highest form of life that is found on any planet will resemble — jan. *[points to fan jan howard finder]*

... If you are designing a woman and a man, you should design the man to be adventurous and the woman to be protective.

... There are probably five or six people in this room who have odd genitalia.

*[Shows slide of Michelangelo's David]*

Those genitals would be regarded as rather small by contemporary American standards, yes? —

[After everybody pauses thoughtfully, I win the race to reply first, declaring in my best basso]  
— Oh, absolutely! [Really, really big audience laugh]

[Near the end, after explaining the translation mistake that turned “fur” to “glass,” Cohen explains the not-so-hidden sexual subtext in Cinderella]

So the girls all give the Prince their fur slipper to try on ...

[Afterwards, Cohen’s companion Carol Murth has a little story of her own]

We had a Chinese student staying with us, and when he left, as a gift he gave us this Chinese music tape. I used to drive around Swansea playing it in the car, I thought it was quite lovely.

Then finally a Chinese friend heard it and said, “Do you realize you’re driving all over playing Chinese propaganda music?”

[In the panel *Winter Is Coming*, George R. R. Martin reminisces about the good old days]

I got 94 dollars for that first story. It seemed like all the money in the world in 1971.

... In my graduate school year, I lost 100 pounds to try to get the attention of an extremely attractive young woman. She still wouldn’t go to bed with me, but I suddenly looked very good to my draft board ...

I ended up being a conscientious objector and spent 2 years of alternative service in VISTA.

[Gradually, his writing career took off]

At Disclave in 1973, Gardner [Dozois] introduced me around as, “Hey, this is a guy who I fished out of the sludge pile.”

... I sold my first story in 1971, and my first novel in 1977 — *Dying of the Light*.

So it wasn’t, “Here’s a first novel by someone you never heard of.”

[Although there were obstacles along the way]

*The Armageddon Rag*, my rock-and-roll science fiction novel, came in 1983. It was supposed to be my breakthrough book. It got incredible reviews, some of the most flattering of my career.

And nobody bought it.

So my career hit a brick wall right there

...

The thing I wrote then was *Black and White and Red all Over*, which was never published until this weekend, in *Quartet*. It’s an historical horror novel.

[Once more, his cards will be on your table]

*Wild Cards* is returning. We’ve got a new deal, we’re going to reissue the first 12 books ... While I was in Hollywood, it kept my name in front of people who bought books.

[What’s life like in *La-La-Land*?]

I was a staff writer on *Twilight Zone* and *Beauty and the Beast* ... Any position that has the word “writer” in it in Hollywood is a very lowly one. You want to get up into that magic “P” word: producer.

... The networks commission hundreds of projects a year, and a couple dozen of them are made into scripts, and five of those are actually filmed. And one of them gets on the schedule ... It’s a winnowing process.

... The wheelbarrows full of money were nice, but I needed an audience.

[With his latest fine series, he’s certainly got one]

It [*A Song of Ice and Fire*] was a trilogy when I started ... I wrote 1500 pages without an end in sight. I found a place on page 1100 where I could break it, which already gave me a 400 page headstart on the second book ... I never actually intended to write thousands of pages about 8-year-olds.

... I love Tolkien. I’m crazy about Jack Vance. I can’t write like either one ... [*This series*] is more realistic than most of the fantasy out there. The comparison might be more to historical novels ... To Nigel Trantor, the great Scottish historical writer who died early this year in his 90s. Or to Dorothy Dunnett. [*Yay! And must look up this Trantor guy*]

... A lot of the wars in fantasy books are terrible. People get together in a big field and run at each other. I wanted tactics and strategy, logistics and supply lines ...

But the characters also make their own demands ... Effectively, I have eight interwoven novels, one about each character.

*[Interviewing Martin, editor David Hartwell finds an object lesson in becoming a professional]*

The first time I taught Clarion, only 3 of the 20 students had ever read any Philip K. Dick ... You want to be a fan, read whatever you feel like. But if you want to be a professional, you have to know what's going on, and has gone before.

*[At Intergalactic Book Works, client Robert Brown III gazes at a row of Tom Swift books with vast delight, and says simply]*

I used to read these when I was a boy. *[In the dealer's room, Illinois' Dick Smith employs a nickname I hadn't heard before for one of his area's biggest employers, Motorola Corporation]*

I don't care for the way Mofo treats its employees.

*[Explicating How Magic Works, writer Esther Friesner explains why Gandalf had to be removed partway through Lord of the Rings: some characters are just too useful to be useful]*

Gandalf was the Swiss Army Knife.

*[Once Josepha Sherman had a story that was a real killer; no really]*

I had a short story that killed six magazines and an editor.

*[In the panel on SF Reference works, writer Darrell Schweitzer says to play by the book]*

You must not assume that the people of the past have the same ideas you do. You must not assume that the people of the future have the same ideas you do.

*[NESFAn Mark Olson braces Schweitzer in re Alexei and Cory Panshin's 1989 work on the SF field, The World Beyond the Hill]*

You justly criticized the Panshins ... Can you name anyone subsequently who's done the synthesis *[of SF history and critical opinion]* better? I can't. We're 30 years into the desert here.

*[Schweitzer's obviously read some ref in his time]*

"The Radiation of the Chinese Vegetables," from an old Hugo Gernsback pulp. It's about a giant killer radioactive bok choy ... Hugo Gernsback actually had quite a range of humor, which you'll learn only from looking at the primary sources.

*[In the Gripe Session, fan Leah Smith elaborates an earlier point about the con's program priorities]*

Virtually nothing of what I call community-building items ... Things for neos, fan history, fan language, etc. ... I think it's a detriment not to have that. There were basically only two items about fandom ... With Gaiman coming in next year and the move to Boston the year after, you have to do better than this at community-building.

... And I never saw any pros in the evening. They were all at The Secret Pros Party.

*[Dick Smith digresses, delightfully]*

I remember when Stephen King was at Rivercon in 1980 or so. Poor man. He snuck, exhausted, into the secret committee den — and the *committee members* tried to get him to autograph their books!

*[Con chairperson Priscilla basically blames her husband — and of course me, since I helped out a little on Program]*

If I had been doing the Program instead of my husband, there would have been more fan items and *[mock-glances in my direction]* fewer media things. Write that down, Devney!

*[NESFAn Tim Szczesuil announces the figures for con attendance]*

We just got Joe Rico's unofficial numbers. Warm bodies, 933. Total members, 1093.

[West Coast fan Kathryn Daugherty has a curious complaint; I recommend afterwards that she talk (or listen) to Tim S]

Funny thing: I thought this convention attracted people from the Boston area. I *still* haven't heard a single Boston accent.

[Self-described "nervous traveler" Tom Endrey sits in the lobby an hour before his shuttle bus comes]

You met Jack Cohen, and bought his new book *Wheeler*. You didn't get it signed? The author lives in England; when will you get another chance?...

[Plainly disappointed in my foolishness, Tom gently tries to explain the point of autographs]

... It would have been a nice memento of a good moment.

Speaking of nice mementos and good moments ... farewell, Boskone. See you next time.

## **Ego Scanners (Shall Not) Live in Vain**

Editor **John Douglas** has some notes about further readings in Jewish SF and fantasy:

"Just finished reading the latest issue. A wide-ranging pleasure as always.

"Your comment of Lisa Hertel's explanation of Tzaddikim leads me to believe that you've never encountered the works of Isidore Haiblum. He is a New Yorker and Jewish and some of his work has used Jewish myth as the basis of his fantasy. I don't know that anything is in print at present and I haven't seen anything new from him in a good many years but you should go searching for a novel of his called *The Tzaddik of the Seven Wonders*.

"You might also wish to hunt up the two (there may possibly even have been a third) anthologies edited by Jack Dann and called

*Wandering Stars* and *More Wandering Stars* which contained fantasy and SF stories which were intrinsically about Jews and Judaism."

Thanks, John. I remember the first Dann book as a real *mitzvah*; must look up the other.

NESFAn **Leslie Turek** takes me to task for oversimplifying her complex reaction to *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*.

"While it is true that I may have used the words 'really' and 'silly' in the same sentence, I did not intend them as an overall description of the movie. On the contrary, I thought the film was beautiful to watch and I enjoyed the romance and the poetry, the grace and exhilaration of many of the fight scenes, and the wonderful atmosphere of a place and time that never quite existed.

"What I was referring to when I said 'really silly' was that I had trouble understanding the behavior and motivation of one of the main characters. I found it frustrating that the plot was driven by this character consistently refusing to take advantage of the many opportunities for happiness and self-fulfillment that were thrust in her path, willfully doing the exact opposite of what seemed (to me) to make sense.

"This might have been, as you say, somewhat due to my unfamiliarity with the conventions of the genre (although I'm glad you admit that the story was kinda silly in spots). But kinda silly or not, I do agree it was a wonderful film and I do urge people to go out and see it."

Your words exhibit much wisdom, Grasshopper.

Fan and film reviewer **Dan Kimmel** has more movie news, including the pre-*Star Trek* William-Shatner-in-Esperanto release *Incubus*:

"I passed along your special Arisia excerpt edition to John Black, who was suitably honored to be quoted at his very first con.

"Alas, the owner (and restorer) of *Incubus* wouldn't release it for marathon-

viewing [at the Coolidge Corner Moviehouse's annual SF festival in February]. He thinks he's going to get a major distribution deal. (Is he in for a surprise.) The marathon was a blast, as usual, and the funniest bit was the final two entries, *Trekkies* and *Galaxy Quest*. Both went over well (*Galaxy Quest* is such a delight) but the reaction to *Trekkies* was a near universal reaction by the marathoners that — compared to the obsessive *Trek* fans in the movie — we're downright normal!

"... Finally, two upcoming films I urge you to take in: *The Tailor of Panama* and *About Adam*."

Fan **Cassandra Boell** is actually of medium height and sometimes acerbic nature, but her letter is short and sweet:

"Vermiculating. It's really a word. Who knew.

"Thanks for a great issue."

## FlimFan

### GOOD:

**13 Days** — The title recalls those tense baker's dozen days in October 1962 when the world almost ended. A recon specialist scans high-altitude photos of Cuba, and finds Soviet medium-range ballistic missiles getting set up 5 minutes as the deathbird flies from Washington, D.C. Once word's up, Presidential special assistant Kenny O'Donnell (Kevin Costner) blurts: "Jesus, I feel like we caught the Jap carrier steaming for Pearl Harbor!" ... Soon, though, we're wondering if the U.S. will play the sneak attack card ourselves, as the (fairly demonized) military urges the troika of President John F. Kennedy (Bruce Greenwood), his brother and main advisor Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy (Steven Culp), and O'Donnell to counter the buildup with a first strike at the missile bases. As SAC General Curtis LeMay (Kevin Conway) puts it: "The big red dog is digging in our backyard, and we are justified in shooting him." The choice he presents boils down to,

do we *start* World War III now or *lose* World War III a little later? ... This is in some ways just a TV Movie of the Week with better — OK, much better — production values. (There's a really cool low-level recon flight up a river into the Cuban guns, for instance.) But director Roger Donaldson, who did 1995's *Species*, also guided Costner's best early performance in the 1987 thriller *No Way Out*. And Kev finds some convincing notes here as the big, shrewd, intensely loyal, aging jock who watches JFK's political back, at one point literally holds RFK's coat, and delivers pep talks at crucial moments. He even makes a credible stab at a Massachusetts accent, although few actors get that really right. The movie makes its star more crucial to events than reality might allow. But he remains a man under authority — an authority he respects. Greenwood as JFK is good also, a Hamlet figure who we hope will show steel in making the big decisions ... This flick does an excellent job of reminding us of the taste of the time, what people looked like and sounded like and thought. And it builds a convincing case for good reason behind how afraid they were. The tagline says it all: "You'll Never Believe How Close We Came."

**Hannibal** — Ah, the good Doctor Lecter. Has there been a movie villain since Norman Bates to whom the public has responded more hungrily? Strange to think that Gene Hackman was the producer's first choice for Lecter in *Silence of the Lambs* (with Michelle Pfeiffer as Starling). In any case, by now, Anthony Hopkins has established that the key to Lecter is to move smoothly and never look surprised. And then there's the silky voice. Does it sound less menacing when I mention Hopkins once described it as "a combination of Truman Capote and Katherine Hepburn"? ... This time, Lecter, the world's worst serial killer, has been on the loose for 10 years, it turns out in Italy. FBI Agent Clarice Starling, his attractive nemesis, played by Julianne Moore, gets wind of his whereabouts — but so does someone else. There's always a foreground villain while Lecter lurks in the background;

here it's Mason Verger, an evil millionaire played well by someone we're not supposed to tell about. (Though my friend Steve Kennedy guessed him at once.) Verger has revengeful reasons for wanting to, well, face Lecter again. And a fiendish plan; as he notes, "When the fox hears the rabbit scream, he comes a'running — but not to help." And so the chases begin ... Moore is accomplished, and manages to look pared-down enough to get Starling's energetic jock demeanor; but somehow her control puts us off, as it does her worthless colleagues. We never really root for her as we did for Jodie Foster's earnest, vulnerable striver ... Critics are calling this movie violent and gory, but as usual in a good film, the objectionable elements are fleeting — maybe 5 minutes of the total 135. They have impact because they're correctly presented for maximum effect. More bothersome, the flick makes Lecter's little jokes ("Whenever feasible, he told me he preferred to eat the rude. Free-range rude, he called them") more heavy-handed than the original novelist, Thomas Harris, does — or than *Silence's* writer or director would. But neither Ted Tally nor Jonathan Demme is on the job this time. Director Ridley Scott has done great work before (notably *Blade Runner* and *Alien*; his later movies like *Gladiator* have been more of a mixed bag) and he certainly has a lush touch with visuals. However — and let's issue a SPOILER warning here — the book achieved its centrally disturbing effect by showing us evil explained to the point of sympathy, good traduced and turned to an alliance with evil. The movie ducks that point, mostly plays Lecter for lurid laughs, and loses its own soul. When we're to make a meal of pure evil, please hold the relish.

**DECENT:**

**Save the Last Dance** — Suburban Sara (Julia Stiles of *10 Things I Hate About You*) moves to Chicago and becomes the only girl in her high school with white skin (plus a red coat so you can pick her out in crowd shots). From her new sistah Chenille (Kerry Washington) and Chenille's cute bro Derek (Sean Patrick Thomas), Sara gets lessons in

language (Don't say cool, say slammin'), looks (Tops from the Gap make you look country), love (Blood's thicker than blondes), and life (Only you can realize your dream). Her dream is a ballet scholarship to Julliard; turns out lessons in hip-hop dancing and sitting like a black person somehow help. This flick is served with lots of sugar coating, but there's enough good medicine underneath to make it worth watching. You get straight talk about Chenille's absent Mom, who served time for "drugs and the things women do for drugs." And the first question Sara's friends phone in from the burbs is, "Did you see anybody get shot yet?" You occasionally feel these are real kids talking, and that's not always the case in these movies. Thomas has got good looks, sincere intensity, and a few flashes of the young Sidney Poitier. (As in Poitier's early flicks, Derek's affair with Sara is interracial love even your bigoted granny could like.) Fredro Starr gives the movie's best performance; he busts all the right moves (I believe that's how these young people talk) as Malaki, Derek's best friend, who attempts to tempt him down the thuggish path to hoodhood. Biggest complaint: even shot mostly from the waist up, Julia Stiles looks as much like a ballerina as Drew Barrymore. Of course, the moviemakers are smugly confident the target audience wasn't even alive for all that embarrassing publicity about the real dancer in *Flashdance*. But Stiles does quiet self-possession pretty well, and Sara learns to stand up for herself in her relationship with Derek. As when his ex-girlfriend helps him win the contest of the hip-hop dance that most closely simulates sex. (Now *that's* a crowded category.) Sara isn't too happy with Derek's explanation; as she puts it: "What, her ass just *happened* to fall into your hands?"

**Backchat**  
on **APA: NESFA #368**,  
January 2001

**To Chris Logan Edwards**

Really envy your having caught Pinter's Binoche/Schreiber/Slattery *Betrayal* on Broadway. The 1983 film version with Patricia Hodge, Jeremy Irons, and Ben Kingsley has long been one of my favorites for chilly intelligence. That backwards-in-time narrative structure of an adulterous triangle is fascinating. As the affair gets earlier and earlier, and the characters grow happier and happier, you become sadder and sadder and sadder ...

Similarly: by the time you read this, guy, presumably I'll already have seen you at Boskone, so in advance/retrospect, hello!

**To Paul Giguere**

Always makes me feel good when someone experiences a book or movie or restaurant on my recommendation. As long as they love it, of course. Glad you and your date adored *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* so much it got you laid ... Oh, no? I assumed that was your subtext.

**To Art Henderson**

Wonderful report on Donald Duck's family tree. Paraphrasing Ogden Nash, I wonder if the Duck family motto might not be: "If called by a panther, don't anser."

**OMIGOD! The clock screams it's half-past deadline! More next month ...**