

The Devniad

Book 77b

un zine de Bob Devney

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On Lately Looking Into Tolkien's *Rings*

In preparation for the movie release of the young millennium next week, I've been re-reading *The Fellowship of the Ring*, first book in that slightly well-known trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* by J. R. R. Tolkien.

Haven't actually been through this material since the Ace edition of 1963, which I was later dismayed to discover was pirated through a quirk in the copyright laws. (Out of propriety, I bought the authorized Ballantines when they came out, but never re-read them then, when it might have mattered.)

Thinking that my literary sensibilities may have gone downhill since the age of 11, I decided to try again last winter, at my leisure. No hurry. After all, I had a whole year to get to it.

Last week that deadline seemed a little closer, and I couldn't lay hands on my old copy, so I'm reading the first book in a new trade paperback with the face of a young movie star on it.

He's wearing a vest over a homespun shirt, is holding a little gold ring, looks pretty apprehensive. And under his curly hair there's something Vulcanish about his ears. Frodo son of Drogo, I presume.

Say — Elijah Wood, Sean Astin, the other shortish actors they've recruited to be hobbits. Does it seem to you they've all got the same haircut, like a faintly twee 1960s British pop band?

Several things strike you as you stride this old remembered landscape.

First: speaking of landscape, it's no news that you find a deep love of nature and of the countryside here. Emerson said, "I do

not cross the common without a wild poetic delight, notwithstanding the prose of my demeanor. Thank God I live in the country." This is Tolkien all through.

I've seen the last known photograph of J. R. R. Tolkien. In it he has planted his right hand, with unmistakable tenderness, upon a tree.

But — there's not as much actual nature description in the book as I remembered. For instance, about the Shire, we get a general description of the place and its inhabitants. Then a fairly detailed description of a party. Then years pass. Then we see the landscape going by as Frodo leaves the Shire with a few day's walk. That's it.

Tolkien takes it for granted we already *know* this country as he does. Already *love* the Shire. And maybe he's right, because the lack of a real tour of the place is a big surprise for this re-reader.

Tolkien's also right about one great advantage of a long book. He knows we can be lulled like his characters in the ceaseless eventfulness of a long journey, experiencing without reflecting. Then be stunned and gladdened with the relief of occasional overviews and exquisite little glimpses of hidden thoughts. As when Gandalf is smiling at the wounded Frodo like a friend, but behind that coldly assessing the hobbit's fitness for the ongoing quest, like a great general.

Emerson also said, "the nap is worn off the world." This reminds us of perhaps Tolkien's most famous accomplishment: the sense of deep time.

Much of it is delivered in the constant reference to old tales and old times, of

course. But I notice now that it's heightened and contrasted with hints of the strangeness of sharing a world with the immortal Elves.

When Elrond in council recites how the hosts of Gil-galad and Elendil assembled to assault Mordor, he's speaking of legendary events occurring perhaps thousands of years ago. Gil-galad might as well be Gilgamesh to Frodo.

But then Elrond remarks, "I remember well the splendour of their banners ... It recalled to me the glory of the Elder Days ..."

This is one *old* guy. "I have seen three ages in the West of the world, and many defeats, and many fruitless victories." Notice the downward tenor of that last pair of false opposites. All this experience hasn't exactly left this ageless elf optimistic about their current little project.

This story has some amount of homey humor, about the hobbit fondness for food, for instance. But no jokes.

I hate Tom Bombadil, the singing hippy, just as much as I did when I was 11. Even though this time I can spot his mythological forebearer.

But if you want a good Puck by a great English fantasist, go straight to Kipling's inhabitant of Pook's Hill.

People in SF fandom who know that hobbits are not tall, have curly brown hair, broad faces, bright eyes, red cheeks, and mouths apt to laughter will be very hard-pressed not to think that J. R. R. Tolkien knew Lloyd Penney.

You notice again how marginal hobbits are considered in the doings of the great world. Compared to elves, men, or even dwarves, they're definitely the second-class seconds of the Third Age. But with first Bilbo then Frodo as the Ring Bearer, they come to the forefront of events and stay there, much to what we can imagine as the bemusement of all the other characters.

One reason this story is so popular: it's a class warfare tale about the triumph of the little guy.

The Lord of the Rings is one epic where the heroes are the spear carriers.

Factiads

Your foot is as long as your forearm.

[Adapted from a young painter's anatomy lesson in The Serpent Garden by Judith Merkle Riley, 1996]

Now U.S. Attorney General, then Missouri Senator, John Ashcroft tied for first place as the most conservative member of the U. S. Senate (to the right of Jesse Helms and Trent Lott) 2 years running, or would that be ranting?

[Based on 1997, 1998 rankings from The National Journal, and no I can't find out who tied with him — don't think Attila the Hun was running those years]

The workday of the citizen of Kuwait averages 3 hours. (That's in at 10:00 a.m., out at 1:00 p.m. Sigh.)

[Bitterly envied item on 60 Minutes, CBS TV, 11/18/01]

Film director Ingmar Bergman, now 83, deals with long-recurring panic attacks via biscuits, mineral water, Bach, walking, and swims in the Baltic Sea.

[Reuters doesn't specify if those are properly puritanical American biscuits or more indulgent Brit biscuits (cookies) in their item via <http://uk.news.yahoo.com/011210/80/cl15q.html>]

Besides the four tastes classically recognized by biology textbooks (bitter, salty, sour and sweet), scientists added a fifth sense 2 years ago, one stimulated by food rich in protein: *umami*, after the Japanese word for tasty.

[Sourced from yummy item in The Independent (U.K.), 4/23/01; <http://news.independent.co.uk/uk/science/story.jsp?story=68129>]

In early 2001, the Federal Emergency Management Agency listed the three most likely catastrophes facing the U.S.: a big quake hits San Francisco, New Orleans drowns under 20 feet of floodwater, or a terrorist attack hits New York City.

[Based on bit hinting that New Orleans could well be up next, in The Houston Chronicle, 12/1/01]

Calling All Logophilic Slans

If you care about words and also about science fiction, have we got a mission for you!

Go straight to http://66.108.177.107/SF/sf_citations.shtml. That's a Web page entitled "Science Fiction Citations for the OED."

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (genuflect, genuflect) is looking for information about words and terms in three specialized and until-now scandalously underreported categories: Science Fiction, SF Criticism, and SF Fandom.

Looks like they're serious about this, too. They've already got some coverage of terms from *AI* to *zero-g*. Do you know a published instance of the first from before 1971, or the last before 1952? How about *cyberspace* before 1982, or *cryogenics* before 1949? Or *science fiction* itself, between the isolated first citation they have (1851) and the second (1929)?

For another instance, sometimes they've got a citation only from a later reprinting. If you've got a first edition or first magazine appearance of *The Enchanted Duplicator*, *The Mightiest Machine*, *Space Cadet*, "A Little Something for Us Tempunauts," or numerous other stories both famous and obscure, you can make a contribution here.

And as you'll see on the Web page, they're not just looking for the big obvious coinages. They're also curious about such genre terms of art as *alternate history*, *apa*, *conrunner*, *dirtside*, *fanzine*, *fix-up*, *gamer*, *gas giant*, *helicab*, *moonbase*, *off-world*, *parallel*

universe, *sense of wonder*, *shapechanger*, *shuttlecraft*, *spacer*, *swords and sorcery*, *teleport*, *Vegan*, and *world-building*.

Such fannish stalwarts as Geri Sullivan, Lawrence Person, Leah Zeldes Smith, and Leslie Turek are already playing this for-keeps wordgame. How about you?

One cautionary note for would-be wordbuilders. Not that I'm saying fans are obsessive or anything. But before you get too excited about finally getting in your favorite John Norman coinage, note that "words used infrequently, words associated chiefly with a single author, or words so specialized that they are found only in a single subgenre, are not high priorities for inclusion."

If we do this well, there'll be more published definitions like this one, from my brand-new *New Oxford American Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 1365:

"propellerhead (also **propeller head** or **propeller-head**) n. informal: a person who has an obsessive interest in computers or technology — ORIGIN 1980s: probably with reference to a beanie hat with a propeller on top, popularized by science-fiction enthusiasts."

That's us!

Ego Scanners (Shall Not) Live in Vain

[Fan and pro film critic **Dan Kimmel** makes it a hobbit to appear here]

Congrats on your awe inspiring collection of quotes from the Millenium Philcon. Of course you left out all my best lines, but then you couldn't be everywhere at once. (And yes, your reportage of our *Twilight Zone* encounter in the Green Room was dead on.)

Of upcoming movies I recommend *Monsters, Inc.* (especially if you liked the two *Toy Story* movies) and *Heist* (especially if you enjoy David Mamet). Having just read the first Harry Potter book I now find myself actually looking forward to the film,

which I'll see a few days before the Nov. 16th opening. Are you aware it's nearly two and a half hours? I'm less excited about the first *Lord of the Rings* films because the books bored me to tears, but director Peter Jackson (*Heavenly Creatures*) makes me want to give it a shot.

Hope to see you at Arisia, if not sooner. [Dan, I pondered not running your comment about being bored of the Rings. To keep you from being torn apart by enraged, hairy-footed mobs ... Remember when Oscar Wilde sailed over from England and announced he was bored with the Atlantic Ocean? ... See you at Arisia, maybe.]

[For Lt. Commander **E. J. McClure**, USN, boring isn't exactly the word]

As we struggle through the wake of Hurricane Michelle on the last leg of our homeward voyage, I wanted to take time out to thank you for the e-mail editions of *The Devniad* that you faithfully sent me throughout *Philippine Sea's* 7-month deployment. They were a welcome window on the wild and wacky world of SF/Fantasy/Fandom, and provided much-needed comic relief. Your keen observations on fans and fandom, your hilarious running commentary and insightful reviews were a delight to read, as always.

Life at sea must be like life in a spaceship — stuck in a very small space with the same crowd of folks for months on end. Working round the clock in a watch routine. Days and nights of tedium and drudgery, and moments of sheer terror.

All of which looks very exotic to the outside observer.

[E.J., this observer is certainly awed. And speaking of awesome: warm congratulations on your upcoming New Year's Eve marriage to SFRevu editor Ernest "Lucky" Lilley! Looking forward to re-celebrating your nuptials at Boskone with a re-enactment featuring full Space Fleet uniforms and an arch of crossed laser rifles. Or at least a drink at the bar.]

[Fan **Kurt Siegel** has a cross-cultural culinary correction on my coverage of where to eat at the Philadelphia Worldcon, wherein I relished "the

amazing — and yes, authentically Amish — Dutch Eating Place across the street in Reading Terminal Market"]

Sorry, Bob ... They were Mennonites, not Amish. You must have noticed the cash registers and electric coolers!

[Kurt: dammit, you're right. Wasn't too aware of the difference. Actually, all I noticed was the delicious food ... Hope there aren't many of the Plain People getting this via e-mail. With your expertise, Kurt: do the Amish do jihad?]

[Canadian fan **Lloyd Penney** remembers Worldcon well]

... Our own trip to Philadelphia was a little hellish. Not only could we smell the kerosene fuel through the air venting, the two Arabian-looking men sitting behind us smelled as if they hadn't showered in a month. (I don't think there's any connection between that and what happened two weeks afterwards.) We were moved forward in the plane, as were as many people as they possibly could. Because of lower savings, and a horrible exchange rate (it's even worse now), we arranged our flight so that we came in the first day of the con, and left the last day. So, we were in attendance the middle three days only. We stayed at the Hawthorne Suite hotel two blocks north of the NE corner of the convention centre, which made our long walk even longer, especially going to the fanzine lounge in the Marriott.

So-called conversations like the one you had with flamethrowers like Lenny Bailes I try to avoid. I have found there's a perfect word to make these rounds of verbal/printed abuse stop ... the word is "unsubscribe." I have left Trufen because of such flames, and I have made a promise to myself that if I am the target of such flames, I shall say "unsubscribe" again. I'm not in the mood for it, and don't have to stand it. I have found that I have little to say on these listservs, and what little I do say is usually ignored, so this new kind of fanac is becoming more and more disagreeable.

One thing I have always hated about fandom ... being roasted in person for the unpardonable sin of being mistaken or

wrong, as if being misinformed was not just an immoral act, but a personal affront to the person in your face. "GET IT RIGHT!" they roar, self-righteous to a fault. There's lots more to like about fandom, but your story about Lenny pushed my buttons.

... I am looking forward to going to Torcon 3 so I can spend my own money. The current exchange rate of US\$1 now equaling Can\$1.60 will make going to ConJose impossible unless my own resources are greatly increased.

I will say that we had a great time at the World Fantasy Convention, which was held in Montreal November 1-4. We worked with chairman Bruce Farr in staging the green room for the convention, so we met lots of neat folks like Esther Friesner and L.E. Modesitt. WFC is truly a professional conference for fantasy writers, but that didn't stop SF writers like Robert Sawyer from coming to Montreal and enjoying himself in the company of peers. We also had a hand in proofreading the great CD-ROM that came as part of the programme book, and we even printed up all the table-top name plates for the panelists.

A marvelous new project ... in late September, I saw an ad in one of the local entertainment newspapers offering auditions for a spoken word CD. I hadn't done any voice work in about 20 years, so I thought, whattheheck, give it a shot. I called for the audition, did the voice test, and was accepted to perform on the CD. The CD is a spoken-word compilation of six Canadian horror stories by good folks like Edo van Belkom, Tanya Huff, David Nickle, and Nancy Kilpatrick, with the stories converted into radio-style plays. Two more stories are yet to be added to the collection, and the legal permissions work is still being done, but with some luck, the disk will be available for sale in February. With this little bit of confidence, I then contacted a service called VoicePrint, which relays the news via cable to the blind and shut-ins in the Toronto area. It's volunteer work, but it could lead to some more voice work later on.

[Lloyd, really enjoyed meeting you and Yvonne at Worldcon, if even for one brief moment at the top of the Marriott escalator. Amazing how much having a face (and a voice) (and in your case, an unforgettable Hawaiian shirt) to put with the name thickens up the experience of reading your messages. Was pissed at myself when preparing the con quotes and found I'd neglected to put pen to notebook during our meeting, and so had no quote from you or Yvonne. You're a damn recognizable personality in the fan community by now, and having one would have added to my mix. I'm sure you said lots of memorable stuff, but I was already pretty con-fried. Oh well. Start preparing your witticisms now for Torcon ...]

*[Great fan artist **Teddy Harvia** gives the poor writer some consideration, which is more than I can say for my usually pathetic level of attention to the visual side of SF books]*

I decided I couldn't do a fan artist webpage without doing one for writers, too: http://web2.airmail.net/tharvia/fan_writer_hugo.html

The referenced chart graphically shows a definite tendency toward repetition the last few years: http://web2.airmail.net/tharvia/fan_artists/writer_dist.gif

I'll do one for fanzines next.

Fans that think you and I look alike may have something. The mustached photo of you on your website looks eerily like a mirror image of me. I think I'll keep my current clean-shaven look to avoid confusing fans.

[Teddy, I've got a long white beard now (or at least a short gray one), so you'll doubtless get more girls from now on. But I agree it's best to try avoiding those confusing fans.]

[Gary Dryfoos starts off with trash talk about one of my old favorites, which I'd referred to as "a certain fine, strange 1983 Catherine Deneuve/Susan Sarandon lesbian vampire movie"]

The Hunger ... It is a swell little movie, really luscious and lustrous. That duet from Lakme has been horribly over-used in advertisements, but it really works well in the film.

Leonard Maltin says, "Kinky trash masquerading as a horror film ... As for the rest, beware, unless seeing Deneuve and Sarandon in bed together is your idea of a good time."

Uh ... well, *yeah!* What's his problem?
[About a rumored new Lovecraft movie]

Internet Movie Database to the rescue?
Here's just the most recent of what they have for Lovecraft:

1. *Beyond Re-Animator* (2001) (story "Herbert West, Re-Animator"). 2. *The Haunter of the Dark* (2001) (novel) ... aka *H.P. Lovecraft's The Haunter of the Dark* (2001). 3. *Dagon* (2001) (novel). 4. *Chilean Gothic* (1999) (story).

One of those?
[Gary, hard to tell. Has anyone out there haunting the darkness between fanzines seen any of these?]

[Illinois fan Leah Zeldes Smith was looking for the chance to use Dick Eney's program to make The Fancyclopedia available in Palm format]

I received such permission at MilPhil, so if fans who want it see me at a con, I can now beam it to them.

[About my mulish reluctance to publish letter column addresses, either e-mail or paperpostal]

If it's an e-zine, then you've got all the space you need. And how can it be more intrusive to hand out someone's e-mail address than his or her postal address? No one can leave old mimeographs on your porch if all they've got is your e-mail address. But they can't send you paper fanzines, either.

— Leah Zeldes Smith, laz@enteract.com;
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60070-1250

[Leah, The Devniad is actually a hybrid: a very limited APA distribution on paper, where running 20 extra address lines (yours above took me three lines on paper) can sometimes mean printing extra sheets under my always-almost-missed deadline, plus a later and roomier e-edition to many more people. But you make some good points. How about this: **all you letterhacks**, tell me in your messages if you want your addresses quoted, and if so which ones.]

[Fan Dan Reid has done his homework on K-PAX]

Haven't seen *K-PAX* yet but I enjoyed your review. Am surprised you didn't mention Lindner's *Fifty Minute Hour* as a possible source for the novel and movie. I don't know if it is or not, but you've got to wonder. Also, the "Is he an alien or just crazy?" question was at the heart of a 1987 Argentinean movie called *Man Facing Southeast*. Look it up on www.imdb.com and be amazed at the basic similarities.

I've liked Jeff Bridges since *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot* — by the way, ever notice there's another buddy movie that shares the same initials, i.e. *Thelma and Louise*? — but the reviews of *K-PAX* have been so lukewarm that I'll probably pass on it. Pity. [Dan, the consensus among critics is that *K-PAX* was close but no ripoff of *Man Facing Southeast*. However, your Lindner link is a new one to me; must pursue ... Yes, wasn't Bridges great in stuff like *The Big Lebowski*, *Starman*, *The Fabulous Baker Boys*, and *The Contender*?]

[Australian fan **Erika Maria Lacey** is on the lookout for good stuff only, please]

K-PAX sounds like a thousand books I've read, and probably another thousand I have not. Perhaps I exaggerate a little. It would be interesting to see what they would do with it on film, but, like you say, movie producers are more inclined to try making people go "ooh" than anything else. Purple moons indeed! Though I bet that if it doesn't do well they'll blame it on the fact that it doesn't have a few trillion dollars worth of special effects.

Happy Accidents does sound interesting, though, and I've been trying to drum interest in friends to go see *The Others* with me, since a few of the other friends I have who've seen it say that it's worth shelling money out for. Not often I go see films in cinemas. At any rate — good to have some word on what's worth seeing and what's not (like, I've never, and will never, sit my backside down to watch any of the *American Pies*, regardless of whether I pay or not).

I can't believe that US folks don't know answers to questions like those you posted in your comments to Pam Fremon. Every so often the current affairs shows here (probably out of a lack of anything newsworthy) will go around asking people questions. Who was the first prime minister of Australia? (Edmund Barton, more info: <http://www.pm.gov.au/yourpm/past_pms/> if you want to know.) What are the words to our national anthem? (at <http://www.pm.gov.au/aust_focus/nat_symbols/anthem.htm>) When did we become a Commonwealth? — things one would expect folks to know. Nope. This is about our own country, mind you.

[Erika, I knew those Canadian answers OK, but flunked your Oz quiz miserably. Thanks for the informative links. About avoiding those American Pie flicks: sure your disdain isn't just a bit chauvinistic? How about Australian Cake?]

[From Mississauga's own **Murray Moore**]

I was interested in the references in your MilPhil issue to this Dave Langford chap.

English, is he? I decided from the evidence that he must be the Bob Devney of the U.K.

Try to get yourself nominated in 2004. If you can't win with a home field advantage, you never will win. No, don't thank me for the advice. I am a person who enjoys helping others.

[Murray, or is it Loki? This is just what I need, trouble with the Dark Lord of Reading.]

FlimFan

VERY GOOD:

Monsters, Inc. — This fast, funny, enjoyable little flick shows what happens after the kid in the bed says “Night, Mom,” and the lights go out ... Turns out that’s when monsters come out of the closet. Our story focuses on Sully (voice of John Goodman), a big blue shag rug with purple patches, horns, and cute dorsal nubs; and his friend Mike (voice of Billy Crystal), who’s basically one big green eye on several little green stalks. There’s some neat worldbuilding early on about their city, Monsteropolis, with its “grossery” stores and its pedestrian crossings that toggle from “Stalk” to “Don’t Stalk.” But this workingmonster’s comedy takes places largely in the factory where Sully and Mike bring their lunchboxes for the daily kid-scaring shift ... These Pixar feature-length computer animation apotheoses — the revolutionary *Toy Story*, *Toy Story 2*, *A Bug’s Life* —view our world from the margins, from the freshly imagined POVs of toys, or bugs, or now of the powerful little creatures that haunt our children’s dreams. There’s a good, rather tender-hearted story here, if not a plethora of huge yuks. But before the extravagant, kid-pleasing chase scene at the end, there’s time for plenty of minor smiles. Like the restaurant named (in a nod to a deceased special effects master) Harry Hausen’s. Or the moment when Sully must reassure a child about her closet: “Look, no monster in here!” He goes in to make sure, turns around, looks out at her, looks down at himself, realizes, “Well, now there is.” ... I also loved the hazard-suited workers of the CDA (Child Detection Agency), called in

when, say, a little kid’s sock might have breached the factory’s containment. As the CDA workers combine the worst maneuvers of Mac Sennet’s Keystone Kops and Chevy Chase’s Secret Service, watch the subtle changes you see from suit to suit. The helmet that accommodates five eyes instead of three, for instance ... Plenty here to please kids and adults as well. Besides Goodman and Crystal, there’s a whole cast of terrifically characterful voices: James Coburn as the boss, Steve Buscemi as the villain, Jennifer Tilly as the girlfriend, Bonnie Hunt, Frank Oz ... plus John Ratzenberger as the Agreeable Snowman.

Ocean’s 11 — Just saw this supremely smooth Steven Soderbergh caper movie starring George Clooney, Brad Pitt, Julia Roberts, Matt Damon, Elliot Gould, and Carl Reiner. You should too. (Maybe more of a review, OK, rave, next month when it’s too late.)

GOOD:

Heist — Forget Moriarty, Kaiser Sose, and the Bond villains. Joe Moore (Gene Hackman) is the real thing, an actual criminal mastermind. He thinks twisty and fast, real fast: Joe’s always a step ahead of you. (He warns us early on, “I wouldn’t tie my *shoes* without a backup plan.”) With his similarly seasoned crewmembers Bobby (Delroy Lindo) and Pinky (Ricky Jay), this old pro pulls off a jewel heist — and his long-time fence, mobster Mickey (Danny DeVito), refuses to pay off. But Joe barely stays around to hear Mickey wants him to pull one more job to get paid for both. Neither surprised nor resigned, he’s just walking out: “You screw me on Wednesday, you screw me on Friday?” he explains. This movie is supposedly about whether the aging Joe still has the moves to get away with his life of crime and his young, streetwise wife Fran (Rebecca Pidgeon), while albatrossed with new crewmember Jimmy (Sam Rockwell), Mickey’s lightweight hothead nephew. But for me, as when attending any movie written and directed by old pro mastermind David Mamet, it’s mostly about the dialog. Like

Bobby's story about the guy he knew in Vietnam who carried a Bible in his breast pocket? Sure enough, one day, "That Bible stopped a bullet. Hand to God! ... And if he'd carried another Bible in front of his *face*, that man'd be alive today!" Although my favorite moment in the movie isn't dialog at all. When a cop accosts the crew in suspicious circumstances, Joe gives Bobby a wink and a little smile. He's so cool you've got to admire the guy ... in a way, though, that he may not deserve. What are we really supposed to make of Joe's mettle? Several of his crystalline plans quickly devolve into brute force or even really messy gunplay. And in the end, what is he really getting away *with*? Or from? Or to? There's an incompleteness here that may not be another Mamet twist, but a sign that the story gets away from him. So this doesn't quite rank with Mamet's inspired *Things Change* and his classic first writer/director outing, *House of Games*. Also, there's a scene involving a cargo jet which feels a little wrong. These days, anything involving planes and violence isn't quite as much fun as it should be ... Like watching the old pros at play in *Heist*.

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone — Director Chris Columbus and writer Steven Kloves honestly try their best to film the most popular children's fantasy in the history of the world, but maybe they're Muggles at heart. We readers are always complaining our favorite scenes from the book get left out. Try putting them all in and you get this somewhat ponderous, kinda overstuffed thing. (One hundred fifty-two minutes is too long for many adults, let alone kids. At the evening screening I attended, you saw youngsters already wearing their pajamas. Hour and a half later, they were using them.) My feelings are really mixed about this movie. The effects, the sets, the props were all done with scrupulous care and imagination, sometimes outdoing my own visualizations from the book. The approach to the school across the lake at night, the fine-grained handle of Harry's broom with its classy Nimbus 2000 logo, the darting golden

snitch, in fact the whole quidditch game: brilliant. But many characters must rush through their appearances. It takes a deeply wrongheaded movie to waste John Cleese ... The only characters who get anywhere near their full due are the three kids and the tremendous Robbie Coltrane as Hagrid, the only person in the talented cast who actually gets to produce a fully rounded, delightful, oh-good-here-he-is-again comic character. Harry (Daniel Radcliffe) has basically one expression: looking with wide-eyed wonderment through his cute glasses at some new, well, wonderment. Look, there are also good scary moments here. The encounter in the forest with the lightless shape of ultimate evil certainly gets our hearts pounding. And the beautifully done chess game, with its threatening, somehow Victorian twilight; its terrifyingly loud sounds of exploding stone; and the rare feeling of real tension and fear from our three heroes, especially Ron — this is pretty strong stuff. But it's not after all the worst the movie can offer. Because remember, and here I'm taking issue with both movie and book: at the dark heart of our story is an abandoned, emotionally abused little boy ... What happens to Harry is no light matter. Raising a kid from babyhood in a cupboard with snarls and a total absence of physical contact — the demonically cruel, nothing-really-funny-about-them Dursleys never touch Harry if they can help it, and the little scene in the kitchen where we recognize this is one of the film's few moments of full horror (if I had kids with me, this is where I'd cover their eyes) — this kind of regimen doesn't produce a slightly sad but brave, noble, true, self-reliant junior magician. It's the recipe instead for making a twitching, feral, red-eyed psychotic. For god's sake, if Dumbledore (Richard Harris) and McGonagall (Maggie Smith) are so magically wise, why don't they quit giving this kid potion lessons or distant lectures on avoiding self-indulgent dreams? And just spend their whole damn First Year giving him *hugs* ... Two last, lighter thoughts about the flick. Ron is played by the perfectly cast Rupert Grint. I just want to ask: is that a

name or *what*? It's one of the most magical things about the movie. Maybe a series about *him* would be even more fun. Rupert Grint and the Alkymist's Carbuncle ... Rupert Grint on Unicorn Island ... Rupert Grint and the Impossibilitists ... Emma Watson is entirely too pretty to be Hermione, but she gets the girl's nervous intellectualism just right. By the way, is Hermione really J.K. Rowling? She's sure got something of a young bookworm's self-loathing. "You're a great wizard, Harry," she tells our hero. "Me, books and cleverness — there are more important things. [*Looks at him*] Friendship, and bravery." Can't you see Hermione growing up to write about all this?

Spy Game — This looked bad going in, but actually kind of grew on me. Robert Redford, Brad Pitt, directed by Tony Scott of *Top Gun* infamy. It's no *Three Days of the Condor*, or even *Patriot Games*, but it moves fast and keeps you entertained.

BAD:

Shallow Hal — The Farrelly Brothers attempt to maintain a delicate balance between sensitive treatment of the issues and the heartbreak of the seriously overweight — versus the need to get big laughs with fat girl jokes. They may be the creators of the sublime *There's Something About Mary*, but what made them think any of this would work? Jack Black, so good in roles like the motormouth record store clerk in *High Fidelity*, is so bad here. And Gwyneth Paltrow tries so hard and fails so completely ... Run away.

Backchat
on *APA: NESFA #377*,
October 2001

To Tom Endrey

Would love to read an essay on the few books ("really great reads") you've kept instead of (shudder) disposing of them.

About wanting a song to be written for the World Trade Center firefighters: have heard at least one so far, by long-time folk star Tom Paxton. Does a decent job of it, telling the story from a survivor's point of view. Only heard it once, but the refrain is, "Every time I try to sleep, I'm haunted by the sound / Of firemen pounding up the stairs, while we were running down."

To Tony Lewis

So FDR was such a Sherlock Holmes fan, he published several articles (anonymously) in the journal of the Baker Street Irregulars. One of those great little facts I appreciate knowing but can have no real comment upon except to echo Johnny Carson's useful little line: "I didn't know that."

Agree that your friend Meredith Schwartz's coinage of "cross-platform fandom" sounds a useful tag for pointing to the entire fannish universe, including enthusiasts of books, movies, TV, anime, costuming, filking, Greg Egan action figures, whatever. I suppose "fandom at large" might be taken amiss ...

To Joe Ross

Sad that your tech support contact had never heard of Groucho, but increasingly less surprising. Recall that Julius Henry Marx died in 1977. Your interlocutor could have been born 5 years too late to remember him live on TV. (And must click off anytime a black-and-white movie comes on.) So would *you* recognize the name of every entertainer your parents liked on the radio in 1938? Although come to think of it, Joe, you probably would.

To Lisa Hertel

Must give a glowing review to your account of being radioactive during thyroid treatment. Fascinating as always. I've heard other patients say that radiation therapy is really, really fatiguing, but you seem to have mostly escaped that.

So while lounging around you read an Isaac Asimov collection that included *Pebble in the Sky*. I haven't read it for a kalpa, but seem to remember thinking — and later

reading someone else who agreed — that it was his warmest, most literary book. What do you think?

To Anna Hillier

Love your description of the new sport of geocaching — hiding small trinkets in airtight containers, giving out the coordinates, and leaving them to be found by players using GPS units. Leslie Turek wrote here about orienteering some years back; wonder if she's played this trendier version?

You're right that passerby pilferage would hinder making it an activity for the next Worldcon here in Boston. Unless: if you tied on lead weights and tossed them overboard *in the harbor*, of course issuing contestants SCUBA gear.

To Paul Giguere

If you liked my Worldcon report, you might love Evelyn Leeper's even longer piece, now at www.geocities.com/Athens/4824/milphil.htm. I think we only covered one or two of the same panels from Laurie and Jim Mann's vast and wonderful Worldcon programming conucopia, so it'll be like attending an entirely different con for you.

About whether Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* should have been nominated for/won the Hugo, there's a huge amount of tasty argument about this in letters on the *Locus* Web site at www.locusmag.com.

Some objectors' question seems to be: (indignantly) What is this, a popularity contest?

Well, as a matter of fact, yeah.

Basically I'm a liberal constructionist (big surprise). Of *course* fantasy can, should be, and is nominated.

Equally of course, this novel's triumph seems to represent a slackness of attention on the part of the voting majority, and a decisive lowest-common-denominator factor. Hard to believe tons of people who put it first had read most or all of the other contenders. *Goblet* was a good read certainly, interestingly deeper and darker than its predecessors — but the best SF/fantasy novel of the year? C'mon, people, it wasn't even the best Harry Potter novel!

Nevertheless, I'll defend to the death people's right to vote for it as though it were. I'd rather change people's tastes than change the rules to make the voting less democratic.

To Pam Fremon

Interesting that in Swedish, "apa" means monkey, cow, bitch, mimic, etc. The following may be less interesting, but I just blew half of my lunch hour on it, so here goes.

A partial search on Google turns up mostly acronyms, including several references to "Amateur Press Association," which of course is where our term for

fanzines such as APA:NESFA originates. But the list also includes the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association (maybe they should talk merger, or would it be gestalt), American Planning Association, Austria Presse Agentur, a coy organization called APA-Engineered Wood Association that I'll bet anything used to be called the American Plywood Association, American Philological Association, American Poolplayers Association, Advertising Photographers of America (never heard of them, and I'm in the biz), Audio Publishers Association, Ambulatory Pediatric Association, Australian Physiotherapy Association, Associazione Pordenonese di Astronomia, American Poultry Association, American Pyrotechnics Association, Acolyte Protection Agency (which curiously seems to have more to do with wrestling than altar boys), and the Allied Pilots Association (couldn't find its presumed rival, the Axis Pilots Association).

Given all this, shall we infer the existence of an Associational Proliferation Association?

Oh, colleague Lubna Agha, who hails from Pakistan, just informed me that in Urdu, "apa" means "elder sister." She's not planning to tell her own sister anytime soon about that cow/bitch thing.

To Mark Olson

OK, you've talked me into Judith Merkle Riley. I just bought *The Serpent Garden* and I'm one chapter in — so far so very good.

Seems fitting, somehow, to find a new historical novelist I can enjoy right now. One to succeed (never replace) my old favorite, Dorothy Dunnett. If you hadn't heard, Ms. Dunnett (creator of two rich, learned, intricate historical novel series, the Lymond books and the House of Niccolo books) died Nov 9 of liver and pancreatic cancer. The Edinburgh booksellers James Thin have an extensive DD site including a tribute page starting from www.jamesthin.com/indexscot.htm. Anybody who hasn't latched onto her by

now should probably start with *Niccolo*
Rising ... and so she lives on.