

# The Devniad Book 78b

un zine de Bob Devney  
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## Orbita Dicta

**Heard in the Halls of Arisia '02  
Boston Park Plaza Hotel  
Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.A.  
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So here's one fan's fuzzy recollection of 23 hours 58 minutes at a science fiction/fantasy/TV/movies/anime/comics/costuming/gaming convention. (Happen to know the number because 2 more minutes and my car's ransom at the Motor Mart parking dungeon would have jumped up from \$24 by a staggering \$8 increment. C'mon, personal rocket belts!)

As usual, I've listened to what people said around me and tried to scribble down the most informative or, better, weirdest parts in my notebook for haphazard assemblage later. *[My own comments lurk between brackets like this.]* If you were there and remember these quotes differently, I refer you to a paper I may write someday real soon (or have I?) on a topic I shall call Devney's Theory of Parallel Words.

*[So auld acquaintance Kate Waterous, visiting at the info table in the lobby: are you still going with that fabulous fanboy from Seattle?]*

I hope so. We're getting married next Saturday ...

His name is Ryan Johnson. Ryan K. Johnson.

*[You just know that Registration czarina Bryt admires my and Connie Willis' favorite character from the American Pie flicks]*

And then this *other* time? At Arisia?

*[On the mezzanine, NESFAn Lis Carey sounds a sour programming note]*

I went to go to the next panel I was on, at noon. When I discovered that it was at noon *tomorrow*. But I'd already told the committee that I won't be *here* tomorrow ...

*[At the panel on Fanzines and the Internet, writer Steve Lazarowitz likes the channel's far reaches]*

On the net, you can quickly and easily reach a fan in Australia. If you can *promote* your zine in Australia, which is another, difficult, story.

*[A guy in the audience has a practical point]*

The best thing about printed APAs is, when the Internet crashes, you can read them by candlelight.

*[Comics creator and radio host Ken Gale notes other APA advantages]*

What does paper offer that the net doesn't? Depth. Space. There's a lot more substance in the average paper APA.

*[For veteran gaming master Peter Maranci, it's a people thing]*

There's a lot more work to do a paper zine. And you do that work together, which fosters a real feeling of community. You get really tight with those people ...

*[Gale appreciates that, ostensible topics aside, APAs are about whatever their contributors wish to poke their cold, wet noses into]*

I learned more about *dogs*, for instance, from reading a Legion of Super Heroes APA then from any other source in my life.

*[He notes the Web is by nature a lurker's medium]*

My Web site is like my radio show. I have thousands of listeners, but only a few callers or correspondents.

*[A woman in the audience believes the net has a better shot at the facts]*

I think nonfiction is going to end up a lot more on the Internet. Because you can click on the reference ... But for fiction, people like a book. The smell or the feel of the paper, maybe.

*[Rent-a-read forces are mustering in Mordor, Maranci fears]*

The giant publishing conglomerates want to move to the case where you don't get the content and also own it, like a book or a video or a CD. Instead, they want you to pay per read.

*[In the hall, writer/critic Dan Kimmel mentions a political joke]*

Do you know the comedian Barry Crimmens? Started out as a local boy, but now he's on national TV all the time.

He refers to George W. Bush as "our court-appointed president."

*[At the DNA Publications table in the dealer's room, John Perrault feels one of his firm's mags has passed a critical milestone]*

We've finally got *SF Chronicle* to the point where *[its founder]* Andy Porter admits that it looks better.

*[Award-winning author Paul Levinson has something new to show off]*

Yes, here's the great cover for my book coming out in March. It's called *The Consciousness Plague* — another Phil D'Amato novel.

*[For Levinson, this is con central]*

My favorite part of a convention is the dealers' room. I have the *best* conversations here —

*[I point to all the lovely books lying on the table in front of us, including his]*

— Because you have ready subjects to

talk about!

*[When Levinson offers to sign the copy I buy of his second Phil D'Amato novel, Borrowed Tides, puckish bibliophile Larry Smith feigns to demur]*

I should charge for defaced copies.

*[Meeting writer Keith R.A. DeCandido, I'm too flustered remembering my abysmal performance in the great quiz game he helped create at the Philadelphia Worldcon, Win Tom Galloway's Money, to note any of the doubtless brilliant things he says here; you'll just have to visit www.decandido.net for plenty of his golden words]*

*[I come in late and stayed about 1 minute for the ultra-crowded panel on Writing Action Scenes; but was impressed by the graciousness (and obsessiveness) of writer/publisher Cecilia Tan]*

I was going to bring my copy of *Swordspoint* *[nods to her fellow panelist Ellen Kushner, who wrote it]*. It has my favorite sword fight in literature. I like the passage so much that at one time I had it memorized ...

*[In the thankfully less crowded panel on Life of a Freelancer, writer Josepha Sherman may be quickening a big assumption here, namely that you'll make any money; but anyway]*

I'll throw in a quick plug for Quicken — the most wonderful program for doing your checkbook *and* your books.

*[Writer/editor Nancy C. Hanger agrees]*

— At the end of the year, you just hand your Quicken files over to your accountant for taxes.

*[Hanger points out the writing life hath certain advantages]*

Those seven showings of *Lord of the Rings* you saw? Tax deductible —

*[Sherman says sure]*

— After all, you have to get the details just right in your review!

*[But how should a writer do business? Hanger has a strong opinion]*

Not a corporation. A — what do you call it? *[Brief discussion with audience]* Yes, thanks, a sole proprietorship. The only way to go.

*[Hanger is also high on the site for the Editorial Freelancers Association]*

One great site is [www.the-efa.org](http://www.the-efa.org). It's got listings for everything you need to know.

*[Writer/editor Joseph Lazzaro lays down the law]*  
Read the guidelines. It's a golden opportunity, where the editors are telling you *exactly* what they want.

*[Hanger notes that it is however possible to oversell your stuff]*

Janice Silverstein and I were at a con, and this guy was following us around with a bookbag full of his manuscript. Finally, to get away we ducked into the ladies' room.

And this guy followed us right in!

*[The panel on the Mechanics of Writing Alternate History has Guest of Honor Katherine Kurtz explaining her penchant for penning the stuff]*

... Perhaps it comes from my SCA background: History as it should have been.

*[About her Temple (or is it Templar?) series]*

... We're going to do a third one, to finish that one out: *The Temple on the Ark*. We're going to take them to Ethiopia!

*[Her fans are sometimes unwilling to suspend their belief]*

I've had countless people come up to me about writing *Lammis Night*, and say, "You mean there wasn't a *real* Prince William?"

I worked hard, to make Prince William a twin to Prince John, who died young. So there wouldn't be an additional royal pregnancy, which somebody might have noticed —

*[I think this crack came from writer Shane Tourtellotte in audience]*

— Like the King?

*[This is the con where I discover writer Walter Hunt, who gives good panel and, as we see here, likes all the right people]*

Declare — that's a brilliant book. If it didn't happen that way, it should have ... Nobody writes like Tim Powers. *[We all now spend 2 minutes calling out the names of all Powers' books and nodding enthusiastically]*

*[Per Kurtz, you've got to have a nose for what the fans can take]*

You find ways to alter historical things that aren't to your liking. For example, Templars were kind of smelly things in filthy, stinky robes and long ratty beards.

So I made my hero a diplomatic Templar, who had to interact a lot with the courts of Europe. He would have trimmed his beard and cleaned up a little.

*[Writer Seth Deitch thinks this can go too far, especially in the dreaded PC direction]*

You see a lot of social anachronism in the mass media. Where people's social roles in the past are exactly what they would be today.

*[Kurtz thinks truth is stranger — and a lot messier — than, well, you know]*

In history, a battle might be fought again a few years later, for the exact same reasons as the first battle.

You must remember: Fiction has to make sense. History doesn't.

*[Deitch wonders which reality we're in right now]*

It's always occurred to me that we're living in the midst of really implausible developments, for instance in the Soviet and American space races. It was really speeded up. From the late 50s, to go to the moon by the late 60s ... If I hadn't lived through it — well, I'm still not sure I believe it.

*[Kurtz concurs]*

And then, just as unbelievably, to have done so little in space in all the years since. *[A chorus of groans and mutterings fills the room ...]*

*[Arisia's hotel has some of the planet's smallest, most inadequate program rooms, so population pressure only lets me pop in for about three quotes' worth to the panel wondering Why Can't Hollywood Make Good SF Films?; pro film critic Dan Kimmel alludes to two exceptions that disprove the rule]*

They really wanted Andrew Niccol's script for *The Truman Show*, so they made a

deal to let him direct his own *Gattaca* afterward.

*[Writer/reviewer/screenwriter Steve Sawicki thinks all this tech talk is cheap]*

People have made comments here that you can make lots of SF special effects movies these days, because the technology is so cheap now.

The technology is *not* cheap. It takes thousand of programming hours to do that stuff.

*[Musing on the cinematic sickness of sequelitis, Kimmel gets — and gives — good quote]*

I remember hearing a line: "Hollywood is filled with people who want to be first in line to be second."

*[In the panel on Plagues and Armageddon, about the SF idea of "illness and the end of the world," writer/professor Chuck Gannon arrives late and (nonsymptomatically, we hope) breathless]*

I was moderating Women in Combat. It was very lively.

*[Writer Shariann Lewitt is sometimes a fairly combative woman herself]*

The description of this panel in the program book bothered me deeply ... As if widespread illness had not been the major killer of humanity for 99 percent of its history!

*[Paul Levinson (another writer/professor, come to think of it) agrees]*

More people were killed in the Black Plague when it ravaged Europe [1247-52] than were ever killed by any human technology.

*[Gannon looks to our roots]*

One of the first science fiction writers, Mary Shelley, 30 years after *Frankenstein*, wrote about the big plague in *The Last Man*.

... In many ways, biology rather than technology plays at the edge of things we really don't understand.

*[Lewitt, who somewhere in here reveals that she holds a degree in population genetics, expertly shares lots of bad news]*

Our technology is creating huge new plagues for the future ... We now have four strains of TB that resist the effects of at least three of the current four counteragents.

... By trying to eliminate disease, we have created the possibility of another Black Death, another flu of 1918.

... We all were born in this little window of time. Since 1954, we are not subject to these pandemics.

*[Gannon keeps an eye on those unintended consequences]*

The growth of the Sahel almost directly parallels the eradication of smallpox.

... It's not one blow — the Four Horsemen are gregarious. At what point do you demolish the carrying capacity of a civilization?

*[From the audience, fan Joe Petronio supports the point]*

I read somewhere that only half the people who died in the Black Plague died of the virus. The other half starved to death, because not enough people were planting crops.

*[But another onlooker is really good at finding silver linings]*

I've read a theory that the Black Plague, by concentrating wealth into a smaller number of smaller families, directly led to the Renaissance.

*[From the audience, I mention one scenario that shadowed my adolescence, when in 1962's The Satan Bug, thrillerist Alistair McLean postulated a man-made agent so powerful that a tubeful poured on the ground would in months eliminate life on Earth; Lewitt delivers a mixed verdict]*

The vector is perhaps feasible, but the epidemiology is very problematic.

*[She inks in a grim old picture]*

It happened to the Incan empire. They were exposed to smallpox, and it took

something like 10 years for a great, powerful — and technologically advanced — society to completely collapse.

*[Levinson's point here may be a tad askew, but don't worry, there'll be somebody in the room to set us straight — ]*

From an evolutionary point of view, what assholes mosquitoes are! If they just took a little blood and didn't leave us with the goddamn *sting*, it might be acceptable —

*[— Someone like Lewitt, who points out that with a wound, pain is inescapable; but]*

— The thing is, they anesthetize us early on so we don't *feel* the sting and swat them.

*[Lewitt washes her hands of certain ill-conceived conveniences]*

Everybody, throw away your antibacterial soap! It only kills off some of the weakest bacteria, but what's surviving? What's getting stronger —

*[Gannon gets in a suitably ominous last word]*  
— What's *mutating*?

*[Note for next year: to get into that warm, bright, shining pasta palace called Maggiano's right across from the Park Plaza, try reserving more than 2 days ahead, airhead! anyway, as I pick over a mediocre shepherd's pie at our default Irish pub, dinner companion Joe Petronio is still enthusiastic about SF grand master Arthur C. Clarke]*

He's still got it! He just wrote a book with Stephen Baxter, *The Light of Other Days*? They invent a technology where you can see anything happening anywhere ... They explore what that would mean.

But that's not enough. It turns out you can look into the *past* as well! And they do all this great stuff with that.

Baxter's good on his own, but you can tell at least part of what Clarke contributed. There's this unending stream of *ideas*.

*[The giddy social whirl spins on as fan and new friend from last year's Readercon Marlin May meets me for a drink in the hotel's lobbyside Swan's Court bar/restaurant]*

You should have been here earlier. There was a young fan sitting at the piano who was just fantastic! Maybe only in his early twenties, but he was just throwing off some really complex pieces: a good Joplin, and then some Rachmaninoff or something.

It was so *impressive*. So I went over to compliment him. And he holds his little Furry up and says, Yes, Critter really likes Liszt.

*[I've been aware of the Furry cult you see at SF cons, mostly among some teens and twentysomethings, but remain a tad vague on the details]*

Wait, so his stuffed beaver or chipmunk or whatever. He carries it with him everywhere, right? And he's saying the Furry is actually doing the playing? Or — which one is Critter?

*[Marlin tries to be patient]*

You don't hang around with Furries much, do you? The animal is his, um, kind of totem. And has the same name.

They're *both* Critter.

*[The ensuing thoughtful silence calls for some long sips of our drinks; while I'm knocking back my usual slugs of wine-dark Pepsi, Marlin, who's obviously been preparing for this moment for days, glugs reverently at his enormous vodka martini (I know he's been waiting for this, because holding his snazzy black-and-electric-blue tunic together are buttons shaped like martini glasses); he considers his Brobdingnagian barware with awed approval]*

This is a very civilized-looking glass. *[Sip]* And a very *[sip]* big one. *[Sip]*.

*[Like many discussions at this con, within minutes our conversation is pulled by some dread power into a tight spiral around the recent release of the movie Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring, and soon Marlin is delivering a detailed, incredibly incisive exegesis of the (extra-cinematic) history of the Silmarils; however, that was one big martini glass; at the*

*end of our talk, Marlin exhibits a little difficulty framing a question about my plans]*

Are you going upstairs now to see the Silbert and Gullivan?

*[Actually, we head up for the Masquerade instead; while we wait in line, fan and friend Gary Dryfoos talks about what he saw earlier in the gaming center (I later discover it's an inductive logic game played with pieces of Icehouse, also known as the "Martian Chess Set")]*

That's a fantastic science fiction game. There's a big wide table, and these little plastic pyramid pieces in cool colors that make all these fascinating patterns. It's even got a cool science fiction name: Zendo! It couldn't be more science-fictional.

Unless the little pieces hovered above the table.

*[We join our friend Marcy Sumner, and settle into the buzzing Masquerade audience for lots of talk about various wonderful things; however, after about 45 minutes on those hard seats and still no more sign of the show than you'd get at a Rod Stewart concert in London where it was 11:00 p.m. and they were still having trouble dragging Rod out of that pub in Glasgow ... and after I recall that even when it lurches to life this extravaganza will continue for about 2.5 Earth years, I canna stan no muir]*

I've just remembered why I almost never see the Masquerade. Let me know how it turns out?

*[Fleeing, I end up at the 8th floor elevators, where contrarily fan Kate Savage is in a great mood; is it just the sight of me, or something (someone) else?]*

Hey, you're the guy that, last Boskone I kept mistaking you for Tom Easton, right? *[Easton is Analog's longtime book reviewer.]*

Well, I guess that's a compliment to you, because now Tom and I are engaged.

*[In the Noreascon 4 party, Walter Hunt talks about why, in his new book, set hundreds of years in the future, he places the capital of Earth's empire on Hawaii]*

Because if you were emperor of the world, where else would you put it?

*[Although contemporary Oahu has some problems it might indeed take an Imperial edict to clear up]*

It's got 500 miles of highway and 30,000 cars.

*[Hunt has big plans for his personal publishing future]*

It took me years to write this first one, *Dark Wing*. But now I'm going well. *Dark Path* will come out this March, and the next two I'm still talking around will tentatively be called *Dark Companion* and *Dark Crusade*.

Why a tetralogy? Because my aliens speak in eights.

*[In the Bush Bash Party, someone comes in wearing a carved wood-look mask of fearsome aspect; I ask the obvious polite question]*

Are you from Japan, demon?

*[The demon demurs]*

Everybody asks that.

But I'm actually an Indonesian demon with this mask. It's because I'm wearing a Japanese robe and a Japanese tee shirt with Japanese characters on it.

*[Let history (and partisan hit squads) note that Dan Kimmel is the toast of the Bush Bush party wearing the button I and my brother Michael created for the West Wing panel at the Philadelphia Worldcon, "BARTLET VS. BUSH IN '04"]*

*[In the dealers' hall again, Larry Smith is cold to my talk of an overheated bedroom last night]*

I haven't had any heat in my room all week. This hotel is not a hotel. It's a rather expensive Purgatory.

*[Dealer Art Vaughan of (logically enough) Art Vaughan's Used Books will use any excuse, including last night's Babylon 5 flick, to move the merch]*

I was watching *The Legend of the Rangers* last night on the Sci-Fi Channel. And the promo for their next movie was for this

Richard Matheson title *[holds up What Dreams May Come]* I happen to have right here ...

*[In the panel on Internet research, is a woman in the audience who seems to be a librarian betraying a trade secret?]*

Libraryspot.com is a phenomenal links site. Dictionaries? Eight dictionary sites. Phone directories? Eight phone directories — including reverse lookup.

*[Moderator James Turner disses my favorite phone directory of several years ago]*

Watch out: www.bigyellow.com is actually Bell Atlantic. Don't use it.

They now preferentially list their advertisers. So if you're in Derry, New Hampshire, and ask for "building contractors," you'll get 2 pages of national advertiser contractors before you see anybody local!

Use worldpages.com instead — a much better phone directory.

*[Sitting next to me in the audience, fan Pam Phillips is typing into a little folding keyboard with an even littler Palm PDA sticking out the top; I'm intrigued, and she's glad to help/explain]*

I've only had it for a little bit. But so far, it's great.

It's called the Palm Portable Keyboard; look, it folds up four sections into one small thing. *[Demonstrates.]* You do have an easier time if you brace something stable under it when you're typing on your lap.

... Yes, you use this Wordsmith software to synch out to Word. So you can easily upload whatever you type on your Palm into Microsoft Word on your PC.

*[Interested in retiring my con quotes steno book, I mention that my biggest concern is battery power, since I might be typing stuff in for 12 hours or more per typical con day; she's reassuring]*

Well, I've already been to several panels, and look, the battery indicator is only a little way down. And an extra battery for this is pretty small ...

I think I finally have the laptop I've been looking for! *[Me too, perhaps ...]*

*[In the panel on Time Travel, our moderator, writer Ian Randall Strock, states the big question nicely]*

Can we *do* time travel — other than forward at the rate of 1 second per second?

*[Writer and constant Devniad quoter Michael A. Burstein recommends a hot read for us]*

You should all read at least one great book. By J. Richard Gott: *Time Travel in Einstein's Universe*.

... Among other things, he explains the answer to the question, If time travel is possible, where are all the time travelers? The ones from the future, visiting us ...

His time machine cannot send travelers into the past to before the machine was built.

*[Burstein has another rec too]*

I love the Law of the Conservation of Reality. There's a great story about it, by Fritz Leiber — what was it called? *[Gets help from the audience.]* Thanks, "Try to Change the Past," in his Changewar series.

*[Fan Alexx Kay tries to change our opinion of said story]*

That author had a poor understanding of the actual theory. It really comes down to, anything you go back and do, has already been done.

*[In the art show, Ruth Sanderson is found in front of renderings from her new edition of Cinderella, coming in April from Little Brown; one internal illustration in particular of the Prince and his fetching commoner is extraordinary for the face and expression of the girl, here not a standard idealized fantasy princess at all; Sanderson is suitably modest about somehow bringing a real person to life via tiny motions of her hand over a few square inches of canvas]*

Thank you.

She's a real person I used as a model. A farm girl, who lives near me. They have four horses and chickens and there are lots of kids in her family.

Her name? Jennifer. The family is religious: she's a fundamentalist Christian — so I'm sure a virgin, although she's 18 or 19.

You can tell by looking at her, can't you, somehow.

*[In the parking garage heading out, as I sling my bag o' books into the trunk, I ask the guy getting into the next car with his wife if they were at Arisia; he's polite]*

No, but we stayed at the same hotel as, uh, Alicia.

We don't know enough about the characters, but seeing everybody all dressed up was — very interesting.

## Cynics of the World, Take Heart

For those of you dreading ahead to Valentine's Day, click those faithless, self-loathing digits straight onto [www.despair.com](http://www.despair.com).

It's a pointer I got from Tor editor Teresa Nielsen Hayden's fine weblog *Making Light*, at [www.panix.com/~pnh/makinglight.html](http://www.panix.com/~pnh/makinglight.html).

At [despair.com](http://despair.com), besides a wonderful satire of corporate feelgoodism, there's a little display of BitterSweets™, subtitled Valentine's Candy for the Rest of Us. Here you can see those hard, flaky little pastel heart candies bearing love notes carefully crafted for modern romancers, such as:

"JUST A FRIEND"

"I DESERVE BETTER"

"WE NEED 2 TALK"

"TIME 2 TRADE UP"

## Ego Scanners (Shall Not) Live in Vain

[Fan and friend **Bonnie Black** savors the dueling cinematic duo of Harry Potter and Lord of the Rings]

I enjoyed *HP* while watching it, but it was kind of like those melt-away cookies ... You have no real memory of its flavor. I liked it, but wasn't blown away (except by Robbie Coltrane's Hagrid).

However, *LOTR*, I was really swept up into. I've seen it twice and will probably see it at least once more before Boskone. I felt Jackson caught the feel and flavor of the book and its characters and situations, without being slavishly devoted to its narrative. I don't think there can really be any comparison to *HP* — it's like comparing hot dogs and french fries ( a fine meal on its own) to roast rack of lamb with baby green spinach, Italian style and roasted red potatoes. (Can you tell my current hobby is a bit of an obsession lately?)

[Bonnie, agreed that *LOTR* wins the bakeoff with *HP*, but neither fully satisfied this consumer]

[Montreal fan **François Gagnon** updates us on the real detective described in my review years back of *Citizen X*, the great unsung Stephen Rea/Donald Sutherland movie about a Russian serial killer]

I have also been very impressed by this film, and personally have the most respect for [the detective] Mr. Burakov.

Somewhere you write:

"Fetisov and Burakov are real people. Can't help wondering if they're still in the Russian police. If so, what with the Mafia overrunning the country and cops going unpaid for months at a time, I wonder if they ever look back with nostalgia on the good old days?"

In spring of 2000, Colonel Viktor Burakov was Deputy Head of Interior Affairs (chief of the militia), region of Rostov. Right in the middle (it was the headquarters of the Russian army) of the war against Chechen Islamist rebels, following the bombings of mid-September 1999 (with 300+ deaths only in Moscow).

He was working 12 hours a day, 7 days a week since the terrorist attacks. In an interview, he said (approximate translation) "Some of the police are away in Chechnya, while the rest are fighting terrorism. Meanwhile, the number of rapes and murders grows. We leave the criminals unattended. As a result, the number of unsolved violent crimes is on the rise."

I can't figure how he can keep going through all this. Perhaps it's the legendary Russian capacity to endure hardship who helps him. However, he's really the same man as the one depicted in the movie, and he has not changed. Always stubborn, and critical of his superiors. He's still a sort of hero for many Russians (and others of Eastern Europe) who remember the Chikatilo case.

... I have (had, should I say) a "net friend" from Ukraine, a Mr. Gustave Gueuleu, who knows French very well, and we were exchanging e-mails on a regular basis. Since Ukrainian and Russian

languages are very close, he was doing translation for me. And the info also comes from an article in English (from *The New Republic* I think).

*[François, thanks for the unexpected reply to that old review of one of my favorite sleepers.*

*Delighted to hear an answer to my question about the real Viktor Burakov. Sounds like his lot is not appreciably happier, though. Maybe they make tough men especially for tough times.]*

*[Old friend **Michael McWilliams** is just back from a family trip to wondrous climes, the lucky bastard]*

... I just returned from Australia and New Zealand this morning ... and I'm still very much on antipodeal time. We were in the Shire and Mordor. And I'm pretty sure we walked right through the valley that inspired Rivendel.

What an ordeal getting back up here to the Northern Hemisphere ... even with a five hour sleep break at the in-laws in Hawaii.

... Alice is on a six-month sabbatical ... and she was heading down to NZ's South Island for a ten-day stint studying dolphins with Earthwatch and then on to an exchange program with a school in Wellington. So I went to Sydney a week earlier to build some affiliations.

She joined me for a day ... and then we flew to Christchurch. From there we made the trek to Queenstown and Te Anau, and then hiked the legendary Milford track ... finishing up with a cruise through mind-boggling Milford Sound. Back to Queenstown and Christchurch where we split: she headed to Kaikoura and the dolphins while I flew up to Auckland for another day of business, then a quick two night stopover for a few meetings in Sydney. Thence I made my tortuous way back home ... medieval, nightmarish security procedures be damned.

Saw the first *Ring* epic over the holidays with nephews and nieces at a state-of-the-art theatre in Honolulu. Unanimous raves all around!

*[Michael, sorry, I'm too jealous to speak to you right now ...]*

*[Longtime lettercol stalwart **Gary Dryfoos** has a really great rant this time, off last month's item that Japanese scientists have recognized a fifth taste, umami ("tasty") for foods rich in protein]*

Isn't that great! It's like Aristotle misstating the number of teeth in women's mouths and getting away with it for centuries, or all those biology textbooks that for a few decades showed a photograph of a human cell nucleus, with 23 pairs of chromosomes, and labeled it as — what? Twenty-four pair, 22 pair, something wrong anyway, and everybody looked at the same photo, reprinted the same goddam photo in high school and college biology books for years, and nobody went back and just counted the doggone chromosomes.

Here we are, end of the 20th century it was (seems like only a year or two ago, doesn't it?) and everybody *knows* that the tongue only has four senses: sweet, salty, bitter, sour. Everybody *knows* it. And yet cooks all over the world are making stocks and reductions of beef, poultry, lamb, to add that "richness," that "savor," that "je ne sais quack" that no amount of sweet, salty, bitter, or sour can ever replace. And still nobody seems to notice it until some Japanese food chemist wakes up one day and says, "Wait a minute here ...!"

Well hell, in a world where people still believe that throwing rice at weddings is bad for the birds, that they'll go drink water and then their little bird bellies will POP! (As if birds haven't forgodsake been eating rice for millions of years, well at least since the invention of either rice or birds. I mean, there are just tons of ancient Chinese sages recording seasonal episodes of exploding finches, aren't there? And how about all those elegant classical Japanese haiku about the mournful autumn sounds of rustling dry leaves and detonating nightingales?)

Anyway in a world that'll believe that, why be surprised that we don't even know what the hell our own tongues are up to??

And, oh, by the way, when tasting something really rich and flavorful, like a good lamb stew, I recommend that this fifth gustatory sensation be spelled "Ooooooh Mommy!" to indicate a more appropriate level of appreciation.

[Gary, you had me at "detonating nightingales." Thanks for a letter that has everything: wit, style, science, rancor, and an elusive fifth quality that I'll call "devnumium."]

[Fellow fanziner **Linda Bushyager** wishes me well in a sweet and much-appreciated note]

Just wanted to write that I enjoyed DEVNIAD, especially all the movie reviews which were great whether I had already seen the movie or not. I know sometimes it is hard to put out a zine in a seeming vacuum when no one is responding so just wanted to let you know that it was read and appreciated here.

[Friend **Dan Kimmel** is not a professional critic for nothing]

If we're going to knock over this Langford guy, you're going to have to hire a fact checker:

1. *K-PAX* was, in fact, based on a novel called (wait for it) *K-PAX*. It was written by Gene Brewer and apparently there's even a sequel. I picked it up in paperback in Philadelphia at Worldcon. The movie is a more or less faithful rendition of an already slight and derivative story. It was like a half-hour *Twilight Zone* inflated to feature length.

2. Ray Harryhausen, last I checked, is alive. (See <http://us.imdb.com/Name?Harryhausen,+Ray>)

3. *Harry Potter* may have been a long movie for kids, but that's only because kids' attention spans are getting shorter. *Mary Poppins* (1964) is nearly as long at 140 minutes.

4. You reference *Lord of the Rings* as something worth reading. Of course it is overlong, overrated, and reading it was one of the most excruciating literary experiences of my life, falling slightly ahead of having to read *Ethan Frome* in the 11th grade.

As noted elsewhere in your 'zine, "Get it right!"

[Dan then appends a smiley emoticon, as though that will take all the sting out. Fat chance, Kimmel. I stand by my fatheaded opinions as written — except for that bit saying Hollywood special effects master Ray Harryhausen, given a little tribute in *Monsters, Inc.*, was deceased. Ooops. Sorry, Ray. Not you, Dan.]

[And speaking of mistakes, bookdealer and Old Earth Books publisher **Michael J. Walsh** picks up my referring to the first paperback editions of *Lord of the Rings* as appearing in 1963]

Er, that's 1965, not 1963.

Due to a quirk in the copyright laws, *LoTR* was public domain (the law was later changed), so the Ace editions were hardly "pirated." Wollheim might have been many things, and making use of copyright failures was certainly one of his "skills." Recall that it was Ace that discovered that a number of Burroughs books had not been renewed. And then the ERB boom began.

[Michael, this will teach me not to date things by how old I thought I was when I read them. Of course, you were so much older than me then ...]

## Nine Ring Things

I liked the new movie *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* very much. But I'm not ready to join its swelling cult just yet.

If you're reading this fanzine, you've probably already waded through exhaustive discussions of the flick. Here are a few personal observations you may not have encountered yet (unless we've already talked in person).

1. Aragorn becomes the hero of the movie version, in spite of J. R. R. Tolkien, perhaps in spite of director Peter Jackson. The hobbits just don't seem as important, despite all their screen time. The thing is structured on film as more action flick than elegiac epic, and Viggo Mortensen's rugged good looks just make men want to follow him and women want to, well, follow him

really closely. Mortensen has been excellent in a number of roles, from Demi Moore's drill instructor in *G. I. Jane* to adulterous Gwyneth Paltrow's painter lover in *A Perfect Murder*. Admittedly I missed him in *Leatherface: the Texas Chainsaw Massacre III*, and, while I admire his battered countenance, we can only hope he didn't portray the title role.

2. The best actor in the film has the cheesiest part. Cate Blanchett could have *ruled* as Galadriel. And I did love her scene at the fountain, and her transformation when we see her imagined future as a Ringbearer. But if you're going to show an Elf Queen, why not try to re-imagine what this would mean cinematically? Instead they drag in all the hokey old Hollywood effects: put a keylight behind her head like a halo, have her speak in a low portentous voice, and, ghods help us, actually have a *choir* going "woo-woo-woo" behind her. Please.

3. On the other hand, one of the best effects in the film is how fast Legolas (Orlando Bloom) can draw and loose three arrows in about 2 nanoseconds. If that's real and not a camera con, I say Bloom should star when they remake Costner's *Robin Hood*.

4. For years, my brother-in-law Bob Kuhn has cherished Olmsteadian plans for a miniature garden in his backyard. He dreams of a little brook and a tiny perfect bridge and so on. After seeing *LOTR*, my brother Michael claims he won't rest til he finds little lawn ornaments for Bob — in the shape of itty-bitty Kings of Gondor holding their palms up commandingly by the wee riverside.

5. All that chainmail is actually sliced-up, spraypainted plastic piping.

6. Did you like Ian Holm's momentary facial flicker of pure sharp-toothed evil when he lusts after the Ring? Then catch a longer but amazingly similar moment in another Holm flick released late last year, *From Hell*.

7. As I reported in a previous issue, people who know Tolkien say he pronounced the name "Gandalf" differently than you'd think. It's actually spoken so the last half sounds like, well, the word before "sounds" in this sentence. Although I and every other reader I've ever met go through the books believing the last part rhymes with that game only Tiger Woods can play. Now, the filmmakers could have been brave, defied all the fans, and stayed true to Tolkien's vision (er, sound). But apparently they couldn't stand the galf ...

8. Thank God, they left out Tom Bombadil. I hate that guy.

9. For me, the best things in the movie are the landscapes and the sets. There's a dynamic here which Jackson also used to great effect in his excellent but mostly unknown 1996 Michael J. Fox ghost story *The Frighteners*. In many shots, New Zealand looks a lot like places American or European audiences have seen before — but not quite. At the corners of our perception, we feel there's something a little unfamiliar, something with an unsettling edge of difference about every tree, every waterway, every landscape. Which makes it easy to believe these places are magical.