

The Devniad

Book 80b

un zine de Bob Devney
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Fave Flix of 2001

Fanzines elevate subjectivity to a sacrament. So what could be more appropriate than my presenting these personal choices (the movies I most enjoyed during the cinematic year just passed), on the altar of fannishness for you to worship, revile, or at least catch on video later?

Ghods bless you, every one.

1. *Gosford Park*

Upstairs, Downstairs made by frank, fluid geniuses — from welcome old master American director Robert Altman and newish (brilliant, British) writer Julian Fellowes, to positively exemplary work by what seems like dozens of great actors. Including Jeremy Northam, Maggie Smith, Michael Gambon, and Kristin Scott Thomas upstairs, with Helen Mirren, Eileen Atkins, Alan Bates, Emily Watson, and Clive Owen down. It's a traditional 1932 English-country-house-weekend-murder farce elevated to high yet still vastly, vastly enjoyable art. And its consciousness cuts both ways: notice that the very thing these valets and maids enjoy most are songs advertising (fraudulently, as who know better) the wit and glamour of the pointless privileged class. We kind of like them too.

2. *Wit*

This beautifully filmed and directed (by Mike Nichols) HBO cable TV version of Margaret Edson's play about a hyperintelligent English professor whose brains can't cure her cancer is a merciless marvel. All the bright boys and girls reading this will recognize themselves, and be afraid, but Emma Thompson's performance as Professor Vivian Bearing is fearless. She battles the disease and

the doctors with weapons of wit and loneliness, never letting us up — or herself off. Watch also the small, cold, perfect performance by Harold Pinter as her father, and the appearance by Eileen Atkins as her mentor later on. It will break whatever pieces of your heart Thompson has spared.

3. *The Royal Tenenbaums*

A deeply quirky, deadpan comedy that's more ambitious and successful though perhaps less accessible (i.e., my Aunts Ann and Joan loathed it) than creator Wes Anderson's earlier *Rushmore*. Instead of one unforgettable weirdo, we get eight — played by Gene Hackman, Anjelica Houston, Ben Stiller, Owen and Luke Wilson, Gwyneth Paltrow, Danny Glover, and Bill Murray. Together, they incarnate a family of has-been geniuses (plus bemused friends) led by an ever-hopeful con man: Hackman in the comic performance of his life. ("I've always been considered an asshole — that's just my style.") Without seeming to invite us, they take us on a journey from laughing at them to somehow, strangely, caring ...

4. *Conspiracy*

Three secrets for portraying evil: understatement, understatement, understatement. That lesson is superbly embodied here by Kenneth Branagh and Stanley Tucci, and practiced by director Frank Pierson and writer Loring Mandel in the year's most chilling movie, another HBO cable gem. It's the almost documentary-style story of a business meeting, with all the usual mundane details of housekeeping and catering, agendas and power struggles. But Tucci is SS-Colonel Adolf Eichmann, while Branagh is his boss, SS-General Reinhard

Heydrich, head of the German secret police. And this infamous 1942 meeting came to be known as the Wannsee Conference. Its subject: the bureaucratic coordination for a final solution of the Jewish question.

5. *Memento*

Leonard Shelby (Guy Pearce, the ambitious cop from *LA Confidential*) is living a modern literary motif: his own *mind* is an unreliable narrator. Since some serious head trauma, he can't form new memories. So he wakes up every day or even every hour, and can't recall where he is, how he got there, who's he met, or what's happened since that trauma, how long ago? He can't remember ... All this somewhat hampers Leonard's mission in life, which is chasing down a dangerous killer. But it gives very good cinema. Kafka, meet Keaton.

NOTE: I know *Memento* officially came out in 2000, but I saw it last year. If Kimmel and Roeper can put it on their lists, so can I.

6. *Amelie*

Take a fairy-tale Paris (think Caron not Camus). Add overcranking, animation-within-live-action, a story of berserk coincidence, and other cool modern tricks. Top with a great new gamine, Audrey Tautou, whose gorgeously alert little face is like a French Natalie Portman's. The result will satisfy millions of filmgoers worldwide, as this delight by director Jean-Pierre Jeunet did. (Except Queen Maureen, who found it too tricky to fully engage her royal attention.) *Amelie* is a character who lives to con people into unbelievable happiness via elaborately arranged stratagems. Wait a minute, that's like a complete description of this movie! I'd probably feel totally manipulated if I could just stop smiling so hard.

7. *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*

OK, I loved it too, but not unreservedly. Aragorn (Viggo Mortensen) elbows aside Frodo (Elijah Wood) to become this fantasy flick's hero in spite of J. R. R. Tolkien, perhaps in spite of director Peter Jackson. Plus the best actor in the film has the cheesiest part — did Cate Blanchett *have* to have a choir going "woo-woo-woo" behind her? Best things here: landscapes and sets. New Zealand looks a lot like places

American or European audiences have seen before, but not quite. At the corners of our perception, there's something a little unfamiliar about every tree and waterway, mountain and valley. So these places seem almost, you know, magical.

8. *Happy Accidents*

This fine indie film, billed as "a time travel relationship comedy," stars the ever-interesting Vincent D'Onofrio and the at-last-interesting-again Marisa Tomei. D'Onofrio returned through time just because he saw a *picture* of her, and chicks certainly dig lines such as "I feel like my whole life has just been a journey into your arms." But can she trust him? And can he *prove* his futurity? The movie posits he can't bring artifacts back, and won't stoop to cheap tricks like remembering the details of 400-year-old stock transactions. Nevertheless, for us SF fans, it suggests a pretty neat way. And for us romantics, what's interesting here are feelings, not technology.

9. *Shrek*

It turns many of the usual fairy-tale conventions on their heads for a wonderfully wicked topsy-turvy effect. Of course, this kind of moral reversal usually means a genre, or perhaps an entire civilization, is well into the period of maximum decadence that presages its total collapse ... But as the ogre, the donkey, and the princess, the voices of Mike Myers, Eddie Murphy, and Cameron Diaz fully fill the characters their animators have created. I don't want to give away all the plot twists and neat quotes here, except — in what other movie could you hear the Gingerbread Man defiantly tell his torturer, "Eat me!"?

10. *The Pledge*

We all love surprises, but how often do we get them in a movie? This one delivers several, not so much in big dramatic plot twists or reversals (though there are several) as in the slow unfolding of truly alive, complex characters. Jack Nicholson may be at

his best since *Chinatown* as an old detective who can't let go of his last case. The luminescent Robin Wright Penn as a woman who touches his life makes herself look almost ordinary, but the depth of her performance is anything but. And the biggest surprise of this currents-below-the-surface indie wonder is that it's directed with world-class intelligence and skill by actor Sean Penn.

Also pretty interesting this (last) year: *In the Bedroom*; *Monster's Ball*; *Monsters, Inc.*; *Ocean's Eleven*; *The Others*; *The Mexican*; *Kate & Leopold*; *Black Hawk Down*; *Heist*; *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*.

Stuff I'm sorry I missed, so you may write and gloat about how good it was: *Ghost World*, *Mulholland Drive*, *Waking Life*, *Innocence*, *Amores Perros*, *No Man's Land*, *Vanilla Sky*.

And in a category I just made up, Video Out Now You Most Must Get, I'll say *Sexy Beast*. Saw this trendily directed, high-energy Brit mobster flick only last summer, and until last night it ranked high on my 2001 best list. Then research showed it was first released in 2000. So OK, that at least means it's already available on video, and you should run out now. You won't be sorry; Ben Kingsley turns in his most memorable performance since *Gandhi*. By the way, Ben claims he largely based his stunning character – the chain-chewingly crazy, vicious, monumentally unstoppable crook Don Logan – on his grandmother.

Invidious comparisons with lists from other critics of my stature (OK, if I wear stilts):

Dan Kimmel:

1. *Memento*. Rest in order of release: *The Pledge*; *Series 7: The Contenders*; *The Tailor of Panama*; *The Others*; *Apocalypse Now Redux*; *Heist*; *Monsters, Inc.*; *Vanilla Sky*; *No Man's Land*.

Roger Ebert

1. *Monster's Ball*, 2. *Black Hawk Down*, 3. *In the Bedroom*, 4. *Ghost World*, 5. *Mulholland Drive*, 6. *Waking Life*, 7. *Innocence*, 8. *Wit*,

9. *A Beautiful Mind*, 10. *Gosford Park*.

Richard Roeper

1. *Memento*, 2. *Vanilla Sky*, 3. *Mulholland Drive*, 4. *A Beautiful Mind*, 5. *In the Bedroom*, 6. *Amores Perros*, 7. *Dinner Rush*, 8. *Happy Accidents*, 9. *The Deep End*, 10. *Shallow Hal*.

This survey wouldn't be complete without some mass-audience ticket sales numbers from the invaluable Internet Movie Data Base (www.imdb.com). Note the below box-office bucks lists are for movies released in 2001, but can (and for *LOTR* and *HPATSS* at least, certainly do) include money still sluicing in this year:

U.S. Box Office

1. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, 2. *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, 3. *Shrek*, 4. *Monsters, Inc.*, 5. *Rush Hour 2*, 6. *The Mummy Returns*, 7. *Pearl Harbor*, 8. *Ocean's Eleven*, 9. *Jurassic Park II*, 10. *Planet of the Apes*.

International (non-U.S) Box Office

1. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, 2. *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, 3. *Pearl Harbor*, 4. *Ocean's Eleven*, 5. *The Mummy Returns*, 6. *Shrek*, 7. *Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi*, 8. *Hannibal*, 9. *Bridget Jones's Diary*, 10. *Jurassic Park III*.

By the way, that possibly unfamiliar title at No. 7 in the last list is AKA *Sen and the Mysterious Disappearance of Chihiro*, to be released in the U.S. later this year as *Spirited Away*. [LATER NOTE: Not the *Spirit* re the horse.] It's another prospective winner from Japanese animation master Hayao Miyazaki. He created such previous anime hits (and critical successes) as *Princess Mononoke*, *Kiki's Delivery Service*, and *My Neighbor Totoro*.

Kind of washes away some of the taste of finding *Pearl Harbor* on the list ...

Ego Scanners (Shall Not) Live in Vain

[From Ontario's Murray Moore, 2001-2002 CUFF Administrator (e-mail mmoore@pathcom.com, 1065 Henley Road, Mississauga, ON L4Y 1C8, Canada)]

J.R.R. Tolkien might well have found Lloyd Penney to be a recognizable simulation of an English yeoman. Lloyd will correct me as necessary but I recall the Penneys hail from Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders pretty well all trace their roots to England. But Lloyd doesn't drink beer.

Bob, I don't see why fans would confuse you and Teddy Harvia. Teddy is the one carrying the Hugo rocket.

... An example of the magic in Middle Earth I have not seen mentioned: You remark at the speed with which Legolas draws and looses arrows. How come his quiver is never empty?

John Howe and Alan Lee designed *LOTR:TFotR*. Howe was a guest at Ad Astra this past weekend. He said the movies could not be filmed in Europe because Europe is too crowded and built up. And if the movies were made in Hollywood, the natural impulse there is to review, for example, all cinematic sword fighting scenes and scavenge the best parts as opposed to being original.

I took our copy of Howe's 1991 calendar off older son Russell's bedroom wall. Russell is 15. I couldn't get him to go with me but he allowed he would like an autograph. Howe did a nice sketch on the calendar as well. Ad Astra was his first convention. The concom wanted to exhibit Howe paintings valued at \$800,000 but the insurance cost of getting them to Toronto from Neuchatel, Switzerland alone was \$8,000. Howe replaced Lee when Lee had to drop out, but Lee is coming next year, joining Michael Moorcock. And on Labour Day weekend next year there's this Worldcon thing in Toronto...

I am taking orders for my 10,000-plus-word 2001 Canadian Unity Fan Fund (CUFF) trip report. Its title is *A Trip Report Found in a Plain Manila Envelope*. Its sub-title is *Being a True Account of the Adventures in May 2001 of Murray Moore of Mississauga Who Traveled to Exotic Vancouver and to Fabulous Seattle*. All proceeds go to CUFF, \$5 Canadian and \$5 U.S. U.S.

dollar cheques are good. Cheques payable to CUFF, please. Copies will be mailed to CUFF supporters in April.

... Robert J. Sawyer agrees with Nancy C. Hanger and Josepha Sherman on the subject of claiming deductions. At the post-Ad Astra party high in the sky in the Clink-Sawyer Mississauga penthouse domicile ... Rob says about deductions: "If I can't deduct it, I don't do it."

You report your "abysmal performance" during Win Tom Galloway's Money. Imagine you are the name in the game. A year ago during Ad Astra, last May during VCon, and this month, I was the Murray Moore in Win Murray Moore's Money. My winning percentage is .333.

I suggested to Rob that he star in Win Rob Sawyer's Money, during Torcon 3. Rob rejoined that the only appropriate contestant with him would be Torontonion Alan Weiss. (This is very funny, and slightly dark, if you know the story.)

[Folks interested in the CUFF report, send to Murray's address at the start. And you can all just ignore that crack about Teddy Harvia's having a Hugo not me – or you can DO something about it!]

[From Queensland, Australia's Eric Lindsay (eric@wrevenge.com)]

... About your "little folding keyboard with an even littler Palm PDA sticking out the top": During the GUFF trip to the U.K. I noticed that TAFF winner Victor Gonzales had a similar Palm and folding keyboard, and was taking note for his TAFF report. Since I have been using PDAs with keyboards since 1991, I can certainly report that I think they are a great idea for keeping notes. Of course, older models tend to have a much longer battery life than the newer, high horsepower versions (but the new ones play better games, and tend to have better audio). I used to get over 60 hours from my old Psion 3 series, whereas my latest Psion 7 gives more like 8 hours.

Did it work for me for my GUFF report? Well, we had the web version up on <http://www.ericlindsay.com/guff> before

Jean (Weber) got back here on the trip. We also have the paper version out. Not sure how Victor went with the TAFF report.

[Eric, I'm a firm convert already. And I picked my Handspring Visor Pro because it had a low-drain black-and-white display but 16 MB RAM; the battery life seems to get me through a whole con weekend of note-taking no problem.]

[From Massachusetts fan James Marshall]

... Being American-born and -raised, I grew up with heroes who were more like Aragorn and less like Hobbits. I think that may be why, the last time I went through the books, I tended to skim parts that were just hobbits and paid more attention to the humans. I think it adds to the film that Aragorn is a more or less reluctant hero and a true leader ... who realizes that *nothing* he does will matter unless Frodo can destroy the ring.

Actually, the first role in which I ever saw Mortensen was when he played Lucifer (yes, the devil) in *The Prophecy*. So, of course, *that* is the role for which I remember him when I see Aragorn. And for me, that makes his temptation to take the ring so much more terrifying.

[James, I'd forgotten The Prophecy. Great, surprisingly well-written flick, and of course Christopher Walken as a lesser demon vies to outevil Mortensen. Must go back and see it again.]

[From another local fan, Ron Salomon]

... Well, I know one person who attended both Corflu and Boskone but it weren't me. I was at the former. Real Fanzine Men ... And that fan who was two places nearly at once — Pete Weston, heckuva nice long-time fanzine fan I finally got to meet after mere decades of anticipation. Watch for my photo of him to appear in upcoming Noreascon pubs.

If there is anyone I missed (besides you of course my sweetheart) it was meeting for the first time Robert Sheckley. Bull and Shetterly etc are merely blips on my SF reading radar screen, but Sheckley, ah to me he is one of the Great Masters, having read him as far back as the 1950's. Why is that so suddenly long ago by the way? ...

... I convinced myself, and not entirely irrationally, that it was cheaper to Corflu than Boskone. Non-stop US Airways to BWI was

each way, including the airport charges, \$30 each way. The shuttle into Annapolis from the airport cost me \$3 for 18 miles. And the quote unquote \$249 max rate/rack rate room at the Radisson was \$220.40 including taxes for *three* nights. With some fen sharing ... well, I could not resist. Besides my Anglophile side thinks there were more Britfen at Corflu than at Boskone (unsubstantiated on my part) (I heard 5+% of attendees at Corflu).

... One thing that struck me about the movie *Babe* was that otherworldliness that I think was caused by filming in NZ, yes? I'd like to see that technique used in a filmic remake of *Charlotte's Web* ...

[Ron, with cloning or holographic projection technology, maybe Unreal Fanzine Men would have a better shot at attending Boskone and Corflu simultaneously ... Anybody, does Corflu conflict next year too?]

[From Ontario again, Lloyd Penney (1706-24 Eva Rd., Etobicoke, ON, CANADA M9C 2B2; penneys@netcom.ca)]

... I haven't been in an APA in some time. A few other zines I receive have been talking about APAs here and there, and I think that perhaps the novelty of the Internet is wearing off for some people, and nostalgia for what was is coming back. So, let's chat written style in an APA. Suits me. Garth Spencer in British Columbia is trying to restart an APA there, since several have folded over the past decade or so.

I know some of the furies in the Toronto area -- they're good folks, and have discovered that they can chat about their interests online no problems at all. Also, they have created a furry summer camp in central Ontario's Algonquin Park, and the camp is called Feral! I always look at exploring other fandoms as an education, but nothing prepared me for the x-rated spooze (fabulously-built anthropomorphic characters with NOTHING to hide) or for the plushies (where your favorite stuffed animal could be your sexual S.O.). I should never be surprised when the repressed sexuality of fandom comes to the fore.

... Coming up in April are two cons for us, FilKONtario 12 in Mississauga (we're not

filkers, but we help our friends who are), and Eeriecon 4 in Niagara Falls, NY, where we go and enjoy our Buffalo friends every year, and where we will spend the money we had leftover from the Philly Worldcon. The exchange rate is pathetic, and in the near future, we may have to refrain from all US cons, simply because the currency is too expensive to buy.

[Lloyd, your currency problems are U.S. fandom's loss – at least until the Toronto Worldcon next year, yippee!]

[From another local fan, David Wolff]

I don't know if you accept things *[quotes]* you didn't personally hear, but I heard these at Boskone:

Unknown at panel on The Editor... As Ax Murderer?: "There are two kinds of copy editors: those who take commas out, and those who put commas in."

Teresa Nielsen Hayden at a panel on SF terminology for the OED, discussing how fans speak differently from mundanes: "The tetraploid nerds among us..."

Also TNH (same panel, I think, after digression into FWUK – Fan Writers of the UK – offshoot of Fan Writers Association, which started so fans could get their own free suite at WorldCons): "The SFWA suite at WorldCons gives writers who can't get invited to fan parties a place to hang out."

[David, for good quotes my policy is, take everything I can get. Thanks ... And I'm definitely the kind of editor who puts commas in. My typesetter friend Anna Croke used to call me The Commakaze.]

[From noted New Jersey fanwriting star Evelyn C. Leeper, some very gracious quotes left over from her own classy reporting (at her Web site: www.geocities.com/evelynleeper)]

My con report is not quite done, but I figured I'd send you what I had in the way of choice quotes in case you wanted them for *Orbita Dicta*:

How Bad Can a Bad Panel Get?: Regarding panelists saying they don't know why they're on this panel, Jim Mann related the story of how John DeChancie apparently said at a recent convention that he didn't know why he was on that panel, and from the audience Mann

responded, "Because you asked to be on it, John."

A Fragmentation of Fans: The Growth of Separate Fandoms: Mark Mandel said one of his interests was filk, but even that was fragmented. "I'm a folky filker. There are people who do thrash filk."

From the audience at one panel, Nomi Burstein talked about expressing interest in working on a Boskone and having someone say, "Oh, we have an easy job for you. We call it logistics." Her husband Michael added, "And the next thing we know, we have 600 pounds of soda in our garage."

How To Watch an Animated Japanese Film: Speaking of the characters in a lot of anime, Christine Carpenito said, "They're all tall and willowy when they're not short and fat and dwarfish."

Rediscovery: Olaf Stapledon and Other Classics in the Field: Darrell Schweitzer, speaking of the decline in quality of SF in the 1930s: "The pulps," he said, "lowered entry standards to a level no one imagined possible."

I Enjoy Being a Fan: Mary Kay Kare said that fandom meant "never having to say, 'But where would I wear that?'"

Hugo Suggestions and Discussion Group: Jim Mann, on Terry Pratchett: "I don't think people who think Pratchett writes light fantasy have read Pratchett very closely."

[Evelyn, thanks for your incredibly gracious sharing. You snared some real live ones ...]

[And fan, friend, and pro filx critic Dan Kimmel adds two notes to his "Best of 2001" movie list earlier this ish.]

And those who insist that *Apocalypse Now Redux* is simply a re-edit of a 1979 film should a) have to sit through all the lousy 2001 movies I had to see and b) understand that I was never a big fan of the '79 film and was real impressed with this fuller version.

On the other hand, Spielberg's "tweaking" of *E.T.* strikes me as positively Orwellian. (He changed the word "terrorist" to "hippie" in a line of dialogue and where the cops once carried guns they now have walkie-talkies.)

[Dan, gee, now I have to sit through both all over again ... a pleasure, really.]

FlimFan

VERY GOOD:

Ice Age — Basically, *Three Mammals and a Baby*: a sarcastic mammoth, a bumbling sloth, and an enigmatic sabertooth tiger bond with a human toddler and each other during an ominous climactic change. This computer-animated flick doesn't aim as high as the *Toy Story* movies, *Antz*, *Shrek*, or even *Monsters, Inc.* But its animation is excellent, the characters are very well voiced, and the script keeps us fully entertained with a barrage of slapsticks, jokes, and occasional darker bits. Ray Romano as Manny the mammoth gets a massive share of the best lines, but the animators also convey deeper emotion just by widening his big moody eyes. Eventually we learn, as the old joke might have it, hey mammoth, why the long face? when some animated cave paintings cleverly fill in Manny's backstory ... Protean actor John Leguizamo gives a lisp and the right clueless-loser charm to Sid the sloth. I cherish moments such as Sid's doing his restless-sleeper ballet or getting his tongue stuck on the ice; or the moment when the mouthy megatherium reassures the baby about some cave paintings: "The tigers are just playing tag with the antelopes [*cut to detail of tigers savaging antelope flesh, as Sid concludes in a smaller voice*] ... with their teeth" ... And Dennis Leary oozes properly irritated menace as Diego the sabertooth tiger, kvetching about the crying kid: "I've *eaten* things that complained less!" ... My favorite character, though, may be Scrat the Sabertooth Squirrel, voiced or rather screeched by co-director Chris Wedge; Scrat (apparently Wiley E. Coyote's missing-link ancestor) intends to bury his nut for the winter if it takes him 20,000 years ... We don't believe anybody's motivations, intelligence, or behavior for an Ice Age minute. But at least the filmmakers avoid showing any dinosaurs. Though at one point the camera pans past Stonehenge — about 15,000 years prematurely. And I've tried and failed to confirm the existence of prehistoric sabertooth squirrels. However, if you enjoy in-jokes, pay attention during the walk through the ice cavern: some pretty interesting things are frozen and preserved behind those glassy

walls We haven't even mentioned the ice slide pod race tribute or the great if a little dark attack of the Tae Kwan Dodos ("There goes our last female") or, speaking of darkness, the fact that if you look at how things turned out for the species of every single major character, only the kid makes it.

GOOD:

We Were Soldiers — This look at the first big American battle in Vietnam, the November 1965 firefight at Ia Drang, is based on a book by the American commander and a friendly war correspondent veteran of the battle. So we get something fresh in Vietnam War flicks: a colonel's-eye view of the war. Good colonels are exasperated by the generals above them, tenderly paternal toward the officers and men below them, and respectful of the history, technologies, and morals of the profession of arms; so is this movie ... As Hal Moore, Mel Gibson shows us a tough yet thoughtful guy who's a very good colonel. Greg Kinnear is also very effective here as the at-first-lighthearted commander of the helicopter mobility-and-resupply force so vital in fighting this new kind of warfare: has this guy ever turned in anything less than a note-perfect performance? ... My friend Steve Kennedy, trained by events to disbelieve both our government and Hollywood, was scornful of the philosophical prophesying of "the fictitious general" who leads the North Vietnamese troops in the movie. I went straight to Borders afterwards and picked up the book. Turns out he wasn't fictitious, he was Lt. Col. Nguyen Huu An, who was interviewed fairly extensively years later. I'd argue that in the flick Moore and An seem evenly matched, and check each other's best moves over the whole period of the battle, with only one real stroke of tactical genius unanswered (by guess who). That's one new thing about this flick: it shows at least some attempt to personalize the other side, even if we get to know only one or two Vietnamese

faces versus a dozen or so of our guys ... Another fresh angle is the time we spend seeing the impact of those famous "regret to inform" telegrams falling like rain back at the family quarters in Fort Benning, Georgia. Madeleine Stowe as Moore's wife does a fine job showing resolve shadowed by unacknowledged fear ... One outsider character in director Randall Wallace's vision (he wrote *Braveheart* and *Pearl Harbor*; this one's certainly better than the latter, nowhere near as good as the former) is Joseph Galloway, the reporter who drops in for a looksee and changes his life forever. Galloway (played by Barry Pepper, the sniper in *Saving Private Ryan*) may be the hardest thing to take about the tale; he gets more face time and backstory nobility than anyone else in the story except Moore, and I was always queasily aware that, well, he and Moore are the ones who *wrote the book* ... Since [SPOILER WARNING] our guys weren't totally massacred, despite odds of about 2,000 to 450, you might call this a flick about an American victory. But as with any Vietnam War movie, when we know the eventual ending is so ruinous, it's hard to make beginnings happy or heroic.

DECENT:

The Time Machine — Not a stinking corrupt failure, like the recent disastrous Tim Burton (sob) remake of *The Planet of the Apes*. This one has more heart and earnestness than that. Not surprisingly: this project was led by H. G. Wells' great-grandson Simon, who happens to direct movies for a living. And Guy Pearce works very hard (too hard really) at enlivening his mad-scientist character (who, however, still ends up pretty much of a dud). Also the time machine itself is marvelous, all beautifully milled brass levers topped with flashing crystal knobs ... But there are plenty of dead spots, worse, dead stretches here. Jeremy Irons, sometimes a sublime actor, has another horrible check-cashing laughable villain here. And let's face it, the story is corny. Unlike modern SF writers, pioneers like Verne and Wells, no matter how talented, had to imagine almost every detail for the first time, without the benefit of decades of refinement of stories and tropes by a thousand busy hands. So given

the timeline we're talking about here, you're overwhelmed by an immense sense of arbitrariness. Of all the events that might occur in the lives of billions of people across the multi-millennial ocean of time, why these?

Backchat

on *APA: NESFA #381*,
February 2002

To Tony Lewis

Not to dis all your fascinating main-topic discussions last month (the stuff on the House of Roy was particularly informative and hilarious), but you know how they say of histories that the most interesting parts were the footnotes? Thanks awfully for your aside that private schools in England are called "public" schools "as opposed to private tutoring at home." I'd always wondered ...

Next month, Lewis on "Leftenant"?

To Mark Olson

Thanks for the reviews and terrific chronologies of Poul Anderson's books. Must go read some of them again ... but I'll start with a favorite of mine and yours you didn't mention this time, *The High Crusade*.

Like your review of Crossley-Holland's *The Norse Myths*, too. Those Pantheon collections of different cultures' mythologies are invaluable: I must have a dozen of them, always mean to go collect them systematically. Nice clear explanation about Norse poetry's reliance on alliteration and kennings ("whale road" = sea, "sword-storm" = battle) for most of its effects, and how strange this might sound to our ears. Reminds me of something in *Out of Africa* by the Danish baroness Karen Blixen, who wrote under the pseudonym Isak Dinesen. The villagers near her farm in East Africa didn't use rhyme either, and were charmed when

she made up some rhyming nonsense verse in Swahili. They kept begging her to go on, "speak like rain."

To Paul Giguere

Interesting analysis, that Tolkien's arc was "creating a bridge ... to the humans and their ascendancy." I'd thought his money was on the hobbits as representing the spirit of the (much later) sturdy yeomanry of England. Guess I'd better hurry up and reread the last two volumes in *LOTR*, this time *before* the week the movie comes out ...

You're not the first person I've attempted to entice into Dorothy Dunnnett fandom that's balked at *The Game of Kings*, first of her first series, the Lymond books. Since you're gracious enough to reengage, perhaps try her ultimately better second and last series, *The House of Niccolo*? So try picking up *Niccolo Rising* in some of the nice newer editions they've issued fairly recently.

To Elisabeth Carey

Thanks particularly for the crisp review of Paul Levinson's *The Consciousness Plague*, which I picked up (under Paul's glad eye) at Larry Smith's stand at Arisia but haven't gotten to read yet. I already knew one of his central and quite scary ideas, about an amnesia epidemic ... Am I exhibiting a brain cloud or a brainstorm if in a blinding flash of insight I link that with the recent cool movie *Memento* [see Fave Flix in this ish], about a man with no short-term memory, and wonder if we won't see memory loss replacing AIDS as our central menacing medical meme while all we geezers traverse the pre-Alzheimer's years and enter the (Brain) Dead Zone beyond?

No more time ... until next ish!