

# The Devniad

## Book 81b

un zine de Bob Devney  
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### London High and Lowlights

*A tourist is like the guest at a Mexican Christmas, blindfolded and spun around and along by crowds of people lining the way. Of course, you're also the pinata: everybody keeps whacking you so coins fall out.*

*And in Britain, remember, a two-pound coin is worth about three and a half bucks. (Wish I'd been able to remember that.)*

*Here are some selected scenes from a vacation: 10 days in late May I spent on long-anticipated holiday with my wife, Queen Maureen, in the city of London, sleepy little capital of the United Kingdom.*

*This report was expanded from a journal I more or less kept more or less daily. Let's cast the below account as much as possible in the present tense, to preserve that sense of immediacy that puts you right there with us, although actually you couldn't be unless you paid us several thousand dollars and agreed to carry most of Maureen's stuff.*

*To continue with the above frankly unsuitable southern metaphor, the locals did take more than a few swipes at our pinata. (That hotel bill! VAT at 17.5%! Ouch.) So in a sense, here's my chance to whack back. But the locals also opened up their treasure-trove of sights and places I've read about all my life, among which we wandered in appreciation, awe, and gratitude.*

*There are more than 7 million people in greater London, living, working, playing, and standing with pints of beer out in front of their pubs every spring evening on 50,000 streets unless it rains really hard.*

*We've been back for several weeks. My feet still hurt. But I'm smiling when I think about it all.*

### Packing It In

Before the trip comes the packing. Let's freely admit both Maureen and I tend to slightly overdo things along this line. Absolutely true example: at one point, Maureen pauses in mid-suitcase-stuffing frenzy to inquire, thoughtfully, "Should we take the microwave?"

### Getting to Go

Maureen's sister Kathy graciously chauffeurs us to the next town over, Mansfield, where there's a stop for the express bus to Logan Airport in Boston. (And equally graciously, Maureen's sister Marilyn and husband Steve will drive our car over to the Mansfield lot the day we return, so we can pick it up when we arrive toward midnight.)

For the easily horrified among us, I should note the Bonanza line charges \$29 round trip per person. I assure Mo that's the last exorbitant price we'll pay on this trip.

For the apprehensive among us, once we get to Logan the heightened security doesn't actually extend to our body cavities. In fact the lines are a matter of minutes only, Maureen passes through easily, and although I get extensively wanded, they don't check me for shoe-nukes.

However, once seated in the flight lounge with 2 hours to go, Maureen discovers we've lost her passport. She returns to the gate twice to accuse the security guards of identity theft before I find it, for some reason in my secret money belt, tucked into the top of my pants under my shirt. Ooops.

The 2 hours crawl by uneventfully enough, until American Airlines announces there'll be a delay. To be exact, our plane needs a part they can't get quickly, so they're waiting for another plane which should be ready for takeoff ... in only 3 more hours.

### **My Brother, the Prince**

After the moaning has subsided to a dull roar, we slowly recover our spirits and decide to grab dinner.

On the way, passing an insurance machine, I remark that my brother Michael used to pay me to take out flight insurance at one of these. If I died in a crash he'd be very sorry, and what better than \$200,000 to help him grieve?

Maureen effortlessly invents the best neologism of the trip. "That is *so Mikevellian*."

### **Coffee, Tea, or Medieval Torture?**

We've been airborne for hours. As always when flying, I'm coked to the gills on Bonine to stave off airsickness.

Somewhere over the dark North Atlantic, half-awakened from a druggy doze, I lurch blearily down the aisle for a quick (NOTE: sensitive readers should avert their eyes from the rest of this) piss. Wedging myself into one of the twilit toilet compartments, I swipe at the dispenser to get a swath of toilet paper (dainty dudes don't just shake, they dab). Close my tired eyes because they won't be needed for a minute, I've done this before. Fumble for my fly, use the hand holding the paper to zip down — and somehow manage to *catch the paper in the zipper!*

So here I am, zombified at 32,000 feet, with my zipper stuck at half mast and a ruff of white toilet paper fetchingly posed against the crotch of my pants, like a Playboy bunny's cottontail in perverse reverse. The next 20 minutes are spent hunched over almost double, my trifocals shoved as near as possible into my crotch, hauling a well-nigh immovable little zipper tab up and down, micron by micron, while picking with soon very sore fingers at tiny bits of tissue wedged into these savage little metal teeth. At first the tissue is just from the Kleenex, but near the end I'd swear some of it came from my fingertips ...

Nice way to start your big trip, Devney. Did Lindbergh have nights like these?

### **Looks Like We Made It**

Land at Heathrow, hunt the Minotaur through miles of twisty corridors to the Heathrow Express train, heave our stuff

aboard (here Mo hurts her back: ah, Lovely Start Part II), quick 20-minute run to Paddington Station (you know, the one named after the bear), the sun is shining! through that nice Victorian glass roof. Quick cab to our decent middle-class suites hotel (Britspeak: apartment hotel), the Curzon Plaza at Curzon and Bolton Streets in Mayfair (We're in Mayfair! Where the Werewolf of London has lately been overheard! Wahoo!), just one long block off Piccadilly (Piccadilly!) Street. Whence we quickly resort once we've dumped our stuff in the room, for one of those trip-defining moments ...

*[anxious pause]*

Ah! Big relief. Our ATM card functions here. (British banks use four-digit PIN codes, versus seven-or-eight-place U.S. passwords. Fleet had said to just type the first four places of our usual code, and it works. If not, I'd been told to try the *last* four digits next ... There'll be probably a \$5 charge per withdrawal, but the rate will be otherwise better than most exchange bureaus. During our stay, usually \$1.46 to \$1.48 per pound.) We can let our pesky traveler's checks rot in the room safe. Result: happiness. Although tempered by jet lag: man, am I sleepy.

First impressions of London in the spring of 2002? All the girls show a sliver of midriff (in bellbottoms, hello 1970s), all the boys have bullet-head cropped haircuts. There's actually more traffic than Boston but the streets are narrower; the taxis are big and mostly black, the buses are red and legion. That black-and-white bird in the park across Piccadilly: a magpie? The sun is still out; perhaps this is an alternate-world London, like sunny Seattle in *The Lathe of Heaven*. Architecture: this city is Boston's big brother. Similar 18th and 19th century buildings adorn, say, a few parts of Beacon Hill in Beantown, but they're all over here. You have to carry used Kleenex for blocks, because public trashcans are scarcer than courage in Congress; perhaps because of IRA bombing campaigns? I like the ad on that bus, for the big department store Marks and Spencer: "Exclusively for Everyone."

### **A Walk In (Well, Beside) the Park**

We go for a stroll about a half-mile west, in Hyde Park. Well, not *in* the Park exactly yet: we're across very busy Park Lane (lane, hah! the thing's a divided way the size of Back Bay's Comm Ave), and turn up parallel to the park about half a block beyond a corner entrance — then damned if we can spot another entrance for approximately forever. So instead of enjoying the grass and trees, we're looking longingly across while enjoying the concrete and car fumes. Eventually we get fed up, cross over, and nontrivially jump the fence, but this will be a familiar pattern. London's pretty stingy with its entrances.

Through a sleepy haze (Mo managed more rest on the plane than I did), Speaker's Corner swims into view ahead, and it's Sunday afternoon, when this world-famous free speech fair is actually on. We'd thought there'd be a speaker and maybe 10-20 listeners, but there are at least 4 or 5 speakers here with audiences of 50 to 100 each. A guy with an Irish accent holds forth wittily against the complacency of the current British and American governments. No argument from me there. In fact, little argument anywhere: there are few hecklers, and most of the speaker are more entertaining, less bonkers than expected.

Seems one must stand above ground level to get the speech privilege. Guy offers Maureen a little portable plastic step. London is only saved from, say, having enraged women storm and liberate all men's rest rooms (Her Royal Moness can be *quite* fiery on that subject) because we've got a bus to catch.

### **Above It All**

When first you hit a new city, we think it's a good orienting trick to take a bus tour — in a post-modernist, ironic spirit of course. Completely unlike all the other bozos on this bus. They're tourists. We're, uh, insightful foreign observers of the local scene.

In London, you can take one of those legendary red buses, doubledecker, with an open top yet. It's like your own big red convertible! We get to hop on and off any of the vehicles of our company (the Original Bus

Tour, by Arriva) in a 24-hour period for a mere 15 pounds apiece.

We board at Marble Arch. Glance across to the traffic island once known as Tyburn, where for four centuries they hanged people in gangs for the amusement of vast crowds. Thankfully, now we have TV.

So for a pair of hours we're whipped around the city 12 feet above the street, some kind of scene-struck second-story artists, sun in our faces, wind in our hair. In Elizabethan times, a bus (OK, hackney coach) was called a "whirlicote." One can see why. Wheeeee!

### **Sunday in the Park with Mo**

As the bus circles back, we get off close to our new home, at Green Park. Blue-white-striped wood-and-canvas lawn chairs are strewn on the grass. Set one up, plop down, and in a few minutes a chairman comes by with a belt-mounted change machine. One pound each per chair for 2 hours. How civilized. How sleepy I am.

It's a beautiful space all right, and only one long block from our hotel. (The Green Park tube, another block up Piccadilly, will be our home station.) But once you sit looking around for awhile, the park seems a trifle ... bare. There are trees and shrubs and grass in verdant abundance, but where are all those flowers the English are so famous for?

Later, we hear the story — one popular with tour guides anyway. It seems King Charles II was once observed by his wife, Queen Catherine, picking flowers here. She waited, but said bouquet never came her way. Apparently they were intended for the King's mistress (Charley was a wild one) instead. Thus the Queen bade the park's every flower uprooted, to be replanted nevermore.

Thus the name. But despite its roots in rage and betrayal, today Green Park is nice and quiet and so ... very ... peaceful ...

Eventually my kinder Queen awakes me and we plod back to the hotel, where we sleep for 12 hours. (With the aid of a sleep mask against the usual incompetent hotel shades and earplugs against the traffic. Which later I clock at an average of 14 cars per minute, all wafting their engine roars up to our fourth-story windows each morn.)

### London — See It Here First

Our first day awake, so it's off to The Museum of London. Tipsters say it has a great collection that orients you to the rest of the city you'll see, with a thoughtful exhibition policy: concentrate on showing one excellent, representative item, instead of twenty so-so things ... And they're right.

The building, about a mile and a half east of Mayfair at the northern edge of that historic square mile called simply the City, dates from the 1970s, and there's all kinds of reconstruction going on. The entrance right now is one story above street level; some of the building floats above a busy traffic circle. Tickets are supposed to be 5 pounds, but they must be celebrating Devney Day, because today admission is free.

Inside, exhibits zig-zag down a series of large platforms and ramps, with prehistoric London at the top down to 20th century stuff at the bottom. Give it awhile more and they'll dig basements for Tony Blair's Britain.

I linger too long at the Roman London stuff, so that Maureen gets bored and goes off to wait in the quite nice museum café where we ate breakfast. But while I've previously read up on much of the city's later history, this earlier stuff is new and fascinating.

Did you know that it wasn't until after 200 AD that cremation was replaced by inhumation in these parts? Do you realize how much iron first-century Roman styli resemble what I'm making notes with in this PDA? Did you know the Romans had novelty goods, like this lamp in the shape of a sandaled human foot? The candle stuck up from the big toe.

And can you feel the strangeness in the fact that, although the Roman settlement was quite the bustling metropolis, by 500 AD Londinium had been quietly and thoroughly deserted? The lights are low in this gallery as I stand alone, imagining it. All the inhabitants just drift away. And here, hundreds of empty years go by until Saxon farmers living nearby start to use the site for trading again.

First there is a city, then there is no city, then there is ... Fair gives me the deep-time shivers, this does.

Some complain about British museum signage, but there's adequate info here —

certainly more than I have time to absorb, with Maureen tapping her foot in the café. I race downhill through the rest of the exhibits.

Mo has already announced her biggest impression of London so far: there are *so* many buses! In this exhibit, a guy at Whitehall circa 1636 agrees with her: looking at the street, he surveys coaches close-packed as "mutton pies in a cookes oven." Oliver Cromwell's death mask: somehow you feel that when those eyes were open, the impression would have been less serene. My God, the Lord Mayor of London's 1757 state coach is elaborate as a battleship, and nearly as big. Red and black and gold — hey, same colors as a London bus!

Hard to say what breed Tiny the Wonder was, but it is a wonder indeed to see an engraving of a rat-sized dog weighing less than 6 pounds who, let's see, killed 200 rats within 1 hour, in the ring at the Blue Anchor in Finsbury, 1850. I'll bet all those "gentlemen" spectators were more excited about it than we see here. Who knows, perhaps this intent boy hanging over the rail was young Jack Ripper.

In John Ritchie's 1858 comic painting *A Summer Day in Hyde Park*, the pooped provincial tourist has dropped his London map. My laminated Streetwise version's safe in my right front pocket at all times, where I toted it for weeks before the trip, studying up. But I already identify with the pooped part.

OK, this was a Bob-friendly stop for our tourist train. Next, a well-known retail establishment by appointment to Her Majesty Queen Maureen.

### Let Thatcherisma Thrive

Harrods is back about half a mile west of our hotel, on the southern side of Hyde Park. It certainly is a big, elaborate department store. But they make tired tourists pay 2 pounds 50 for bag check. And their bathrooms are only free for customers brandishing receipts. Otherwise, that's right, Harrods makes you pay a pound to take a pee.

Besides, they don't have any of the items we came for.

### **An Embarrassment Abroad**

The new transformer I brought to step Brit voltage down for the sake of our few more modestly powered American appliances turns out to be defective. So one thing we want from Harrods is a replacement. The saleswoman of Indian or Pakistani heritage in the small electrical appliances department doesn't have one, but she does have some opinions we find many Britons are ready to share with American visitors when asked:

She: "Your President Bush doesn't seem to us to — well, he doesn't seem to know what he is doing."

Me: "I know what you mean."

She: "To get one man [*Osama bin Ladin*], did he have to bomb all those people and have a total war? Could he not just send in a special group and, as you say, take him out? I see that on American movies all the time. Why, it seems that if he had only called someone like your star, is it Norris?"

Me: "These are all very good questions."

### **Spotted Dick? Not Lately**

Here may be a good place to sum up a trip-full of observations about eating out, London style.

At Faces Café, a few blocks down from Harrods, we get a pretty fair Italian meal and bonus attention from the manager/headwaiter, an arm-waving, cheek-kissing, high-energy Roberto Begnini act-alike, Jaime from Torremolinos. (Many service people in London's food industry hail from Spain or Morocco or maybe Turkey, while store clerks and small businesspeople often trace their heritage to the Indian subcontinent. Warning: survey completely unscientific; your heritage may differ.)

After we've eaten, we're chatting happily with Jaime when the new Polish waitress comes with our check. Jaime sweeps it out of her hand with a dramatic "No," makes some remark like "It's a pleasure to have you here," chats a while more — then leaves with the check in his hand and us in utter American bewilderment.

Hey, we returned his friendliness, but didn't exactly swear eternal blood brotherhood. Is Jaime actually picking up our check? Why? What do we do now?

Eventually he returns, compounds our confusion by declaring, "What are you drinking? Here, let me get you drinks on the house!" Somewhere in there he kisses Mo. Oh God.

We linger, trapped, until finally I blunder through a dialog that clears things up; we pay and flee.

Important cultural lesson, which we found repeated everywhere: In the U.S., they can't wait to flip you the check and keep the money machine turning over. In London, it seems to be an insult to appear to be hurrying you out in anything under 5 hours. Ask for the check firmly and clearly when you're done, or take out citizenship papers.

Also in the Faces Café — under Vegetables, they list French Fries. Well, I suppose you couldn't put it under Fish. And another thing: if American bacon is bacon and American ham is ham but English bacon (like Canadian bacon) is American ham, what's English ham? Finally, "starters" and "mains" are Britspeak for appetizers and entrees. I like it. Makes more sense, really, doesn't it?

Other observations: in the quite good, somewhat upscale pizza/pasta chain called Pizza Express, they offer all sorts of British toppings, like (inevitably) prawns, but also one model called the American. Ingredients: pepperoni and cheese. Ah, the taste of home. Maureen wants to eat here every dinner for the rest of the trip — until we find Pret.

There's a Pret A Manger on every corner; Mo loves this chain too. A high-energy atmosphere, and beautiful trendy uncomfortable metal tables with storky stools. It's the Ben and Jerry's of upscale sandwich Automats: hundreds of pristine sandwiches made with absolutely good, fresh ingredients on the premises that day, then slotted onto gleaming metal shelves in little transparent triangular containers. (And Pret's sailing Stateside, opening stores in NYC right now.)

Of course, entirely too many of said sandwiches contain prawns (British shrimp). It's like J.B.S. Haldane's remark on God's partiality to beetles. Perusing British menus, you detect an inordinate fondness for prawns. [*Report to be continued in a future issue: hey, it was a long trip, OK?*]

## Web Site of the Month

This one's the product of the kind of inspired lunacy that can be the glory of the Net. (I found it via a weblog somewhere; if yours, write and I'll give full grateful credit.) It features flags of all the nations of the world, rated for design and content. With letter grades, and icons for qualities such as "Too Busy," "Eyewatering," and "Colonial Nonsense." Plus individual comments, as for poor Brunei (grade: D): "Appears to involve a moustache sprouting from a flagpole."

View it alphabetically, by country name, for maximum hilarious variety.

The site:

<http://138.251.140.21/~josh/flags/intro.html>

## Ego Scanners (Shall Not) Live in Vain

[From Ontario's **Murray Moore** (e-mail [mmoore@pathcom.com](mailto:mmoore@pathcom.com), 1065 Henley Road, Mississauga, ON L4Y 1C8, Canada) ... comes news they've decided to give Ditto some northern exposure]

DITTO 15 — Ditto returns to Toronto in 2002. Ditto, the 15th annual gathering of SF fanzine fans, returns to the city of its 1988 founding.

WHEN? The weekend of October 18-19-20, 2002.

WHERE? Days Inn Toronto Downtown, 30 Carlton Street, Toronto, Ontario ...

[Murray sends many more details, which can be found at the Web site:

<http://ditto15.efanzines.com>. Or contact him directly, as above. Sounds like a great little con for us obsessed fanzine freaks.]

[Metro Boston fan **James A. Wolf** corrects my quote of his quote of Mike Macfee's riff on kid's book *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*, which I mixmastered as "If you give a monk a muffin ..."]

Actually it's "monster," not "monk."

[James, take a good look at the Ron Perlman character in the movie *The Name of the Rose* and you too will ask, what's the difference?]

[Guess we caught Cambridge, Mass fan **Gary Dryfoos** lucubrating again]

If I was the least bit sleepy, you wouldn't be reading this.

[About the theory that Woodstock was only 15 hippies, with the rest time travelers]

Demonstrably false. If everybody in the crowd had mysteriously pulled out rain ponchos, or otherwise been the least bit prepared for a week in the mud, that would be evidence of time travellers. (Time travellers to the Middle Ages will be recognizable as the only people with minty-fresh breath in the morning, and no pox.)

[About Stevenson's Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde]

You know, more people talk about that book than have actually read it. It's not like this is absolutely necessary, because it's not a huge *Moby Dick* or *Sotweed Factor* kind of thing. In an otherwise slow month, Gordon van G. could probably squeeze it into *F&SF* and call it a novella. I read it on a rainy afternoon in Edinburgh, which might be the best way.

But it is the ultimate spoiler-vulnerable book — once you know who this mysterious Hyde is, the whole thing seemed so deflated, as if he'd expected everyone to read the book all at once the first week it came out, before anyone heard any water-cooler conversations about it. The Hollywood block-buster strategy, I guess ...

[About silly molecule names]

Didja know? This neutral numbering thing is because of some fierce arguments about what to name new elements. Apparently, after about 104 or 105 there began to be disagreements. After all, the Berkeley labs in California already had three elements named for them (can you name all three?) and some (Swedish? Danish?) lab in Ytterby has three, and still there was nothing for Bohr, or Otto Hahn, and the Russians wanted one for their lab at Dubna, et ceterum. I have seen three different possible lists of elements from 105 or so onward. The ununium is a kind of dissect-the-baby-and-get-on-with-it solution, I guess.

[Re Helsinki fan Jukka Halme's rereading of Lord of the Rings]

Heck, if he's reading it in Finnish, it's more like *he's* reading it in the original, and we're all reading Tolkien's English translation. Look at all the Elvish and see.

[Gary, that dissect-the-baby remark seems kind of cold. Does remind me, though, of time the abandoned wife of wild English novelist Simon Raven telegraphed a little reminder, WIFE AND BABY STARVING SEND MONEY SOONEST, and Simon sez SORRY NO MONEY SUGGEST EAT BABY.]

[From Vermont, friend/fan/pro **Fred Lerner** comments on James Macdonald's Boskone remark that those immersed in Western civilization grow up essentially Catholic]

When I was at Columbia College in the early 1960s, all freshmen took the mandatory core course on "Development of Western Ideas and Social Institutions (AKA Contemporary Civilization), which was described unofficially as "atheists teaching Catholicism to Jews."

[Fred, you'll notice most fans have very catholic interests]

[From Wisconsin last I knew, writer and fannish scholar **Mark Rich** likes to stay in contact]

Hey, Bob — Thanks for sending. It made me feel a little less out-of-touch than I actually am.

Want my band's CD? ... It's fuzzy rock. Samples at [www.iguanodonsmile.com](http://www.iguanodonsmile.com).

[Mark, if you're reading this, would love to score a copy — that's 25 Johnson St, North Attleboro, MA 02760. Is fuzzy rock rock about fuzzy logic, H. Beam Piper, or the police?]

[From Queensland, Australia's **Eric Lindsay** (fiawol@ericlindsay.com) puts the boot in about my hasty offer of a vanilla text edition]

Well, actually, it isn't in plain vanilla e-mail. AOL appears incapable of sending plain text, and puts *The Devniad* into HTML format (exceedingly poorly done HTML at that). (As a result of which, it gets filtered into my spam trap, and I don't get around to checking it until a week after it arrives).

Still, HTML is a lot better than risking a Word macro virus.

I do like your quotes from cons. On the other hand, you get more good quotes than I ever encounter at precisely the same conventions! I've missed Boskones.

[Eric plays that psychologically odd mine's-smaller-than-yours game re personal digital assistants]

... My PDA has a keyboard built in (and unlike Palm, it multitasks and has lots of built in software — and unlike Microsoft CE, it can do it all with an 18 MH CPU rather than a 206 MHz one — and was working that way in 1997).

[About not really wanting one's refrigerator to download the Internet]

Oh yes we do! I'm looking forward to my fridge keeping track of all the food in the kitchen, and making out the orders to the supermarket for delivery at some time my schedule shows I'll be home.

Oh yes, I've changed my email address (not because of spammers — we are dropping the old domain in a few months).

[Eric, can't tell if your comment about my nose for Boskone quotes is admiring or accusatory; oh well, any publicity is good publicity]

[From Ontario, steely lettermeister **Lloyd Penney** (1706-24 Eva Rd., Etobicoke, ON, CANADA M9C 2B2; [penneys@netcom.ca](mailto:penneys@netcom.ca)) has sent two missive's worth while waiting for this ish]

... Good to see that Robert Sheckley was an honoured guest at Boskone. I met him some years ago at Con\*cept in Montréal, and because a lot of fandom in Montréal is media-oriented, they had no real idea who Sheckley was. I did, though, had my stack of Sheckley paperbacks, and got an autograph on each of them, which put a smile on that craggy face of his. I wanted to ask him why he made the decision to write series books, like those for *Star Trek* and *Babylon 5*, but I think we all know the answer. Shame he had to do it, though ... it was like seeing Heinlein's name on a *Space:1999* novel ...

... I've been on VoicePrint for a couple of months now, and it's a good time, and good experience. I finished a month of beginner's voice training classes, and am now starting another month of advanced classes at one of the top television stations in Toronto. There might even be the chance of a little voice

work, which can be fairly lucrative. I have some hopes that it might provide some extra income, for I'm in the publishing industry, which is slowly dying in this country.

Damon Knight, George Alec Effinger, Jon Gustafson, Richard Cowper, and now, Bruce Pelz. It's been a horrible year so far, and there's so much of it left to go.

... Ah, if I was to read all the books, see all the movies, do all the things recommended to me, I'd have to apply for another three lifetimes. So, I'll have to make do with having seen *Lord of The Rings: Fellowship of the Ring*, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's/Sorcerer's Stone*, *Monsters, Inc.*, and *Star Wars Episode 2: Attack of the Clones*. Enjoyed them all, but when it comes to imagination, I still think *Monsters, Inc.* was the best of the lot.

Murray Moore is correct, there are many Penneys in Newfoundland; they're as common as Smiths in many phone books in Newfoundland and Nova Scotia ...

Mary Kay Kare said fandom meant "never having to say, 'But where would I wear THAT?'" Thought I saw that saying in one of Nancy Leibowitz's button catalogues. Wearing a tacky Hawaiian with a NESFA-style vest says "Fan!" to many people. Unfortunately, it says "Tourist!" to a lot more...

Just got word from Aurora administrator Dennis Mullin that both Yvonne and I have been nominated for Aurora Awards again. However, we're not sure what categories we're nominated in, and suspect we'll be competing against one another again for the umpteenth time. The final ballot should be ready for download later today. The awards will be handed out at this year's CanVention at ConVersion in Calgary in August. Wish we could be there...

*[Lloyd, congrats to you both on the nominations. And until you know it's for Friendliest Fan or Most Blinding Shirt-Like Costume, why not tell everybody it's probably for Best Novel and Best TV Show respectively?]*

*[Fan, friend, and Brookline, Mass's best pro flix critic **Dan Kimmel** has some doubt about my standards, but not about the hot new SF movie of the summer]*

*Memento* may have had some festival showings in 2000 or even played overseas, but it went into general theatrical release in the U.S. in 2001.

On the other hand, I don't think you or Ebert should be allowed to include cable movies, no matter how good they are.

... I was stunned. *Minority Report* is actually good!

*[Dan, thanks for mentioning me in the same breath as the only movie critic ever to win a Pulitzer Prize, nyah nyah. I always figure if they ever do his biopic, you'd get the Siskel part (maybe with a bald wig) but I'd inevitably play the fat guy. Although probably they'd rethink the whole look and go for MaryAnn Johanson.]*

*[Apparently New York editor **John R. Douglas** has cable too, nyah nyah again, Kimmel ... although he and I aren't always on the same frequency]*

... Although I don't disagree with any of the selections you made for your top movies of last year, and I'm happy to note the presence of the two HBO features, both of which I thought were very good, I do have to disagree a bit about *LOTR*. I thought that both of the major female parts were the weakest spots in the movie—overdone, badly acted and essentially without any logical foundation in the rest of the story. On the other hand, I don't think Tolkien did well by his women characters so I don't think Jackson deserves much of the blame for the problem in the movie. If you're going to be that faithful to the source material, sometimes there's a high price to pay.

*[John, I did try to indicate that the already-great Cate Blanchett was ill-served by her part (and her backup chorus). Thought lovely Liv Tyler as Arwen had a perfectly Elvish look, and I was satisfied by her riding and fighting — plus she got to bring on that cool river/horses effect!]*



[Eagle-eyed editor **Gordon Van Gelder** of The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction displays a sense of wonder about my rave for an actress I referred to as Sean Wright Penn]

Uh, shouldn't that be ROBIN Wright Penn who was luminescent in *The Pledge*? [Gordon, oops. Must have been blinded by the Wright.]

[New Jersey fan **Jeff Wendler** finds The Devniad truly astonishing]

I cannot believe that you rated *Gosford Park* in your top ten. While it was an interesting period piece, in a year where *Shrek* was the best movie for 8 months, it really was too slow — very very slow — and I really didn't think it should have been in the top ten.

*The Royal Tenenbaums* — I liked this movie a little but I thought it was a one joke film, with the awful truth that if you take a beautiful woman like Gwyneth Paltrow and make her ugly, she is ugly. My father told me that he couldn't believe we allowed him to go to this movie, so I have to say that it was cross generational. However my sister — who is 25 — did like it.

*Memento* — Very daring movie. I liked it but I have to say that even though it made me think, I am still not sure if I liked the ending as beginning as ending. Deep dark probing into the mind of man. A good choice.

*Lord of the Rings* — I also thought this was a great adaption. At Lunacon I was at a panel where one idiot kept saying that they ruined the book, when I thought that they made the books more accessible to another generation and got the rest of us to reread it. I didn't think the changes to the ending were any big deal and the streamlining was good. I reread the book and have to say the beginning still is very slow, so if the movie was too it's only like the book.

*Shrek* — One of the five best movies of the year.

*The Pledge* — My dad told me it was awful, but had good performances.

My list: *A Beautiful Mind*, *Memento*, *The Deep End*, *Ocean's Eleven*, *Heist*, *Black Hawk Down*, *Monsters Inc.*, *Planet of the Apes* (until the stupid ending), *Bridget Jones's Diary*, *Lord of the Rings*.

Oh, and I have to say that *Vanilla Sky* was very very disappointing. Cannot believe that anyone had it in a 10 best list! It was last year's AI.

[Jeff, you can't mean the recent *Planet of the Apes*, can you? This must be some retro reference to the Heston flick in the middle of your list, right? Otherwise I'm going to be very very very disappointed in you. Because the new Tim Burton (sob) version was practically last year's *Battlefield Earth*]

[And when **Gary Dryfoos** reads a reference to my favorite Anderson novel, he comes back for one more]

Stupidest Poul Anderson joke ever:

A: "*The High Crusade*"

Q: "What do you get when you mix the 3 pints of water, the 2 cups of sugar, and the 1 cup of High Crus Juice?"

[Gary, must admit I've never heard anything quite like that. Perhaps it's as well Poul never lived to see it ...]

## FlimFan

Obviously, this London thing has thrown my whole ish for a loop. Lots of the reviews below aren't done yet (if ever), but at least rating the titles can tell you where I plan to stand.

### VERY GOOD:

***Unfaithful***

***Insomnia***

***Changing Lanes***

***The Bourne Identity*** — A pleasant surprise. I've always found Robert Ludlum's stories turgid, and thought Matt Damon too pretty to play a pure action hero. But Damon is properly battered and buff here as a wounded amnesiac spy with an apparently violent past; much more convincing than his buddy Affleck in *The Sum of All Fears*.

Damon's brutal set-piece martial arts duels are exciting advertisements for the sheer power of muscle memory ... The plot does contain some gassy nonsense, probably left over from the 1980 novel. It smells like Ludlum to store a Swiss bank account number in a laser projector hip implant. (What, because you *expect* to get amnesia?) But for the most part the flick concentrates on the central interesting (if equally far-fetched) dilemma, keeps the dialog sparse, and leaves a lot of what are probably stupid details nicely vague. Clive Owen is great as usual as a worthy adversary, and Franka Potente of 1998's *Run Lola Run* makes a nice edgy running mate.

### ***Spider-Man***

### ***About a Boy***

#### **DECENT:**

***The Panic Room*** — This artful but fairly airless chiller was directed by David Fincher of *Se7en* and *Fight Club*, and written by David Koepp of *Snake Eyes* and *Stir of Echoes*. All four previous efforts had more juice. *The Panic Room* is well made, and has a basically neat idea — a traditional locked-room problem turned inside out — but I wish we cared more. The setting doesn't help. A four-floor "townstone," it's the most unattractive multimillion-dollar apartment in Manhattan history. Everything's in dull tones of old-plastic yellow, institutionalized green, sour beige; the look may mean to be ominous, but all it achieves is depressing. And speaking of depression, there's Jodie Foster's character. She's a downbeat, househunting divorcee a little overprotective of her 11-year-old daughter (Kristen Stewart). Foster is basically too steely and intelligent for us to panic about her plight. From the start, for instance, her perceptions about the house are sharp. "This whole thing makes me nervous ... ever read any Poe?" And she's the first to infer the existence of the eponymous panic room ("in vogue in high-end construction right now"), an inner sanctum with siege supplies; steel walls, ceilings, floors, and doors; and really good locks — the rich person's answer to

home invasion. Naturally, Foster and her daughter get to try everything out real soon. Once the action gets running, though, there's too much Hollywood here. For instance, one of her stratagems (involving propane) is so extreme that 1) she never would have tried it and 2) once she did, the bad guys would have cut their losses and run. Said baddies — played by Forrest Whittaker, Jared Leto, and Dwight Yoakam — are the brightest spots here. Everybody's got the clock running on their lives, after all, and the filmmakers have constructed things so each man's character emerges *in extremis*. We come to somewhat sympathize with the invaders' desperation too ... Since this is art, one quickly looks for a subtext. This motif of retreat to an undisclosed sanctum from which to unleash compunctionless horror upon one's enemies may make this Dick Cheney's fave flick of the year.

### ***The Rookie***

### ***The Sum of All Fears***

#### **GOOD/BAD:**

***Star Wars — Episode 2: Attack of the Clones***

#### **BAD:**

***CQ***

### **Backchat**

**on APA:NESFA #382,  
March 2002**

#### **To George Flynn**

Thanks for the clarification that "unununium" is just a placeholder until they come to an agreement and name the newly discovered element something sexy. May I suggest devnium or flynnese?

Thanks also for the pointer to your handsome face, slaving away at [www.cambridgeprepress.com/frprodcomp.h](http://www.cambridgeprepress.com/frprodcomp.h)

tml. I note your company boasts “We can even proofread your pages to make sure they're consistent and correct from top to bottom, front to back.” Knowing your uncanny skills, George, they could have added “and inside out.”

#### **To Joe Ross**

I'm glad to hear the Mass court ruled an e-mail signature was worth the electrons it's printed upon.

As usual, you show great taste in your selection of quotes from all over. I especially like the one from Benjamin Franklin, “You never know what a man is like until you share an inheritance with him.” And would just like to tell the world that my brother Michael, the only person so far who in a small way fulfills that description, is as you might suspect generous, fair-minded, and a gentleman. As are my sisters Darcy and Liz ... me I'm not so sure about.

#### **To Tony Lewis**

About the late 60s phenom of “accident fandom” following the story about your wife Suford's pileup in the first ish of *Locus*: you must have really enjoyed David Cronenberg's 1996 James Spader/Holly Hunter flick *Crash*, about sex spiced up by car crashes ... Hey, just looked it up, and turns out I'd forgotten it was based on a 1963 J. G. Ballard novel. But you probably knew that.

Re your horrifying assumption that “your suggested titles for the Brin book mean you are volunteering to work on it”: I thought you guys wanted to *encourage* suggestions. Sheesh. What's your Mob nickname, Tony the Intimidator?

#### **To Pam Fremon**

Sorry you found *Ice Age* so mean-spirited and scatological. Guess I'd acknowledge both elements were there, but played small part in my fairly substantial enjoyment. So there.

#### **To Paul Giguere**

Must march out and get Russo's *Ship of Fools*, since you go so far as to call it your standout Hugo choice. Have added it to the

“get” list I now keep in my neat new Handspring Visor Pro PDA. Unlike when I used to keep such notes on index cards in my pocket, this one won't become all sweaty and crumpled if it takes me a few months to get around to the buy.

Thanks for the details on Your Leslie. Sounds like a wonderful woman; of course, we expect no less. And glad she's tolerant (at least, that what she says *now*) and will go to cons and read some SF. This is certainly some inches further than Queen Maureen has ever deigned accede. But will your fair one agree to have the wedding in full Klingon drag at Pandemonium with Ellen Klages presiding and crottled greeps for the reception?

#### **To Mark Olson**

Fun reading your three breezy reviews of three breezy books. Your slight criticism of Jerry Oltion's *The Getaway Special* for having the government bad guys be too efficient reminds me of a defense of conspiracy theories I read somewhere on the Web recently. It boiled down to not underestimating the ability of people to get together and cause trouble.

#### **To Ray Bowie**

There's a line I've always loved, in a movie ditto. Given your own flick fanaticism, I'm sure you know it: Robert Redford's 1972 *Jeremiah Johnson*? The old trapper played by Will Geer appears at wide intervals throughout to validate Redford/Johnson's progress from greenhorn to seasoned mountain man — and legendary survivor of a years-long duel with the entire Crow nation. Near the end, Geer says something like, “You have done well, pilgrim, to keep so much hair when so many wuz after it.”

Reading about all your medical travails in the midst of your good-natured movie and book notes: You have done well, Raymond, to keep your cheerfulness when so much conspired against it.