

The Devniad

Book 48c

un zine de Bob Devney
25 Johnson Street, North Attleboro, MA 02760 U.S.A.
e-mail: bobdevney@aol.com
For APA:NESFA #346 March 1999
copyright 1999 by Robert E. Devney

Millennium Fug

So, what do you think? Will everything turn out all right? Or will the year 2000 drop the Millennium Bomb on us? Like, "Open the bomb bay doors, Hal."

The other day someone told me that they knew someone who knew someone whose nephew worked for the power company. (On this topic, that's an unimpeachable source.) He said the official story about readiness is bunk.

And the power grid is going *down* when midnight strikes that fateful Y2K night.

Uh-oh.

Now, you'd think our years of reading nuclear holocaust survivor stories would put us SF readers a big step ahead in the preparing-for-the-doom-days department if the End of Civilization is actually looming. But this ignores the basically triflin' nature of many SF fans.

We're dreamers, man, not doers. Except in certain accustomed grooves, like planning book-buying expeditions or choosing cheap restaurants for big eatins' or — say — organizing conventions.

That's it! We rent out, say, SAC NORAD. Or maybe, for sentimental reasons, Robert Heinlein's old bomb shelter in Colorado Springs. And we put together a big New Year's Eve SF Survivor convention. Call it, oh, TwoKayCon or Millennium KillCon.

Or since as the years go by there may not be much to do in our mountain redoubt but read and fool around in the noble cause of repopulating the Earth with nothing but fans: Breedercon!

You know if anyone can do it, NESFA can.

OK, so this might be a trifle impractical. But I'm not the only one. Have you noticed in reading and watching items on this whole building millennium media frenzy that some of the people trying to help us deal with the problem aren't really *helping*?

You get the sort of Martha Stewart, Survivalist, line: "Since your computer static-free wipes are made in Malaysia and there won't be any more boats arriving soon after Y2K Day, learn to weave your own — out of flax, marsh grass, and the carefully stitched-together skins of the yellow-nosed vole, which unfortunately is found only on the top of Sugarloaf Mountain, Maine."

Or there are sterner suggestions from the more hard-core survivalists, who don't bother with any sissy voleskin saga. "Post-Holocaust Tip No. 32: Lay in a stock of leather-treating chemicals to usefully tan the skins of your neighbors after you eat them."

Personally, I'd lean toward some sort of hapless fantasy planning for the coming disaster. Like, I buy a postman's uniform and perfect my Kevin Costner imitation. However, lucky(?) for me, my wife Maureen is made of stronger stuff.

Basically, Queen Maureen's emerging position on Y2K puts her slightly to the right of Chicken Little. She's reading the articles, she's watching the news items, she's listening to the rumors.

And she is not amused.

Last weekend, she "accompanied" me on a forced march to our local hardware discount superstore, which I'll call Home Creepshow.

Our mission: investigate buying [doom-laden drumroll, please] a generator.

Uh-oh.

The salesdemon cheerfully saw right through our explanations that we wanted it for our sump pump.

"Uh-huh. Y2K, right?"

"Well, maybe. If, you know, it doesn't happen to be raining on New Year's Eve so we don't need the sump pump, but the power kinda goes out, we might like to have a little, you know —"

"Heat and light. Electricity," said Maureen firmly. "For the whole house."

"OK," said the salesdemon. "Now you should know that these are hot items. Home Creepshow has a thousand stores, and even we can only get so many from the manufacturer. Let's see. The model you *should* buy is out of stock. But here's a little piece of paper describing it. Basically, for not much more than a thousand dollars — well, for the smaller models. And that's not counting the electrician's fee, if you can get one. Or the lug-around wheel kit, which I recommend. Or these extra security features; I'm chaining mine down myself. On the wiring, though, well, like we always say here at Home Creepshow, why not do it yourself? Basically you get a box going into your box and rig a pigtail ..."

Now, this guy was a true believer. He'd bought a generator himself, and had as he said been selling them like hotcakes (something else you won't have without electricity, by the way) already for a month or two.

But the more he talked, the more dismayed I got. This is apparently not a case where the power goes out and you go down to the basement and flip a switch and this little box starts humming and you've got as much juice as you need for the whole house for a month or so until you put in another gallon of gas.

First, with any generator that can fit in your car, you'll be lucky to power your refrigerator intermittently, maybe your furnace once in a while when frost forms on your nose, and say a measly socket or two besides to power important survival devices like a hair dryer and a reading lamp.

Second, you won't be keeping or at least running this thing in your basement at dear old Farnham's Freehold. Because of the fumes. And the noise.

As the salesdemon explained, what's a generator? It's an electricity machine — with a lawnmower engine attached.

You start the thing with, oh, say with my luck twenty or thirty spine-cracking pulls on one of those good old lawnmower starter cords. Do it the wrong way and your back goes out. During, remember, the End of Civilization, which means that pretty soon you die.

And if your generator is at this point still in your house, fool, said house quickly fills up with exhaust fumes and you die.

And the sound — it seems that any usefully sized generator makes a noise like a helicopter attack on school band practice in a boiler factory. Live with that in the house for 4 minutes and you'll *wish* you could die.

All this conjures up an interesting scenario, doesn't it?

It's one minute past midnight on January 1, 2000.

The complete darkness in my suburban neighborhood quickly fills up with shots, screams, and despairing wails of "I knewwww it!"

I heave myself off the couch. Descend to the stygian cellar. Slush through the instantly arisen groundwater to the back door. Flounder through the drifts to my new specially constructed, super-ventilated generator shed. Shovel out the door. Struggle inside. Plunge up and down a mere thirty or forty times until the starter cord persuades the engine to catch. Start er up.

At which time my new life-saving acquisition announces, with steely lawnmower lungs, its precious presence to every killer, raper, and especially looter and pillager within the greater Attleboro area.

Uh-oh.

Our Man in Tegucigalpa

Intrepid nephew Jarrod Ferrara reports all's well at his new post with the Peace Corps in Honduras.

Or almost. Turns out he still has to make it through his in-country education courses — "things like emergency procedures, first aid, personal safety, etc. ... Right now I'm considered an *aspirante*, or trainee." If all goes well, his actual swearing-in as a *Voluntario del Cuevo de Paz* will occur on April 28.

Our busy correspondent is a little light on local color. (Details, lad! We want specifics.) But you get an idea of what's still on everybody's mind months after the autumn hurricane that ravaged Central America ... from the stamp on his letter. It shows a flooded street with a young man (not Jarrod; we checked) wading, and cars half-submerged. "INUNDACION ZONA NORTE," the legend says. And notes that every effort is bent toward one end: *Todas par la Reconstrucción Nacional*.

However, you know the country's spirit isn't crushed yet. There's also a brightly colored inset photo of a parrot.

Ego Scanners (Shall Not) Live in Vain

SF artist Courtney Skinner writes in, apropos of I forget, with a beautiful mini-meditation on how right wrong-headed perfectionism can be.

"As a kid, my friend, SF writer Geary Gravel, thought that the way you see finished books was the way they were written ... complete, perfect and correct.

"There was an astounding pen & ink artist, Franklin Booth, who had seen wood engravings as a young man, and thought that artists had drawn them that way in pen & ink. So with this misconception, he developed an entire painstaking pen technique that looked like actual wood

engraving ... which guaranteed him a unique technique and a sought-after talent."

Courtney's fighting the good fight for art for art's sake, too. "I am trying to widen the appeal of art in general to cons like 'ReaderCon' where for the most part art is rare ... I believe they are opening it up more to visuals."

Famous fanwriter Evelyn Leeper says about last ish that it's S.M. *Stirling*, not Sterling. And she didn't say that about Sean McMullen's *Centurion's Empire*. Whaddya want, accuracy? I'm doing a fanzine here. Like Evelyn's own new con report on Boskone, which features a brilliant quote or two from some guy named "Devny" ... Including one that I'd forgotten, wherein I said that Nina Kiriki Hoffman was Zenna Henderson but with sex. Thanks, Evelyn.

All in all, I love her con reports, though, and I'm not afraid to say it. Their sheer dementedly detailed overkill coverage of what seems like every picosecond of every panel she attends means it's just like you're there again — or for the first time, if you didn't actually show up. Until we get virtual reality wraparound-sensorium con reports, Evelyn's will be the next best thing.

See her Boskone 36 bible at:
http://fanac.org/Other_Cons/Boskone/b36-rpt.html

Piling on while I'm already down about the accuracy thing, fan Tom Jackson responds that "Chance" is collected in Connie Willis'

Impossible Things, not *Fire Watch*. (Hey, I was just quoting James Patrick Kelly.)

But Tom furthers the discussion by stating that "My favorite Willis stories are 'Blued Moon' (a romantic comedy — Willis loves Jane Austen, one of my favorite authors, as I found when I interviewed Willis last year), 'Cibola,' and 'Nonstop for Portales' (the wonderful Jack Williamson tribute, reprinted in David Hartwell's second *Best SF*). " Thanks, Tom.

Meanwhile, Near-New-York lawyer/fan Jeff Wendler is getting really excited about

the approaching week of his wedding to the lovely Lori. As he so gallantly puts it, "Oh by the way, *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* comes out the Wednesday before my wedding. So I guess I can see it 4 times before I get married."

Jeff already spends most free waking moments reading practically every SF/F book that comes out. And he's a big movie fan too, and a fair con-coer also. A guy after my own foolish fannish heart.

But — maybe Lori should consider a con cap clause in the pre-nup.

If "*leofgeornost*" — the word that gives Fred Lerner the title of his fanzine — is the last word in *Beowulf*, what's the first? And what's the Jane Chord? asks fan Cassandra Boell. For those who haven't memorized my essay on the subject in *The Devniad, Book 3* (March 1995), a Jane Chord is obtained by juxtaposing the first and last words of a literary work to create a two-word phrase or sentence — hopefully one that makes some hieratic statement about said work.

Luckily, this *Beowulf* question is something that my vast brain and about a half-hour on the net trying to find one measly goddamned Old English text can easily handle. Answer: "*Hweat*" is the first word. Old translations render that as "Lo!" One too-modern translation gives it as "Yo!" Many render it as "Listen!" Which I suspect is just right. Oh, and Fred's favorite last word is apparently best translated as something like, "desirous of renown."

So *Beowulf's* Jane Chord would be something like "Listen ... fame-loving." Which is a little less focused than one would wish.

You'd hope it would be something more like "Monster ... mash."

Squibbles

Could THIS be the awful legacy of Heorot?

And in other news ... Put down your mead cup, Fred Lerner, and lo! Caught an intriguing news item this month announcing that an upcoming film would feature a "synthespian," or computer-generated character, in a key role. Looked around, but couldn't get much more info on that aspect of the movie. However, the flick itself sounds like a kick.

Picture it: a movie reworking of *Beowulf*, set in a future "techno/medieval" titanium mine colony.

I'll give you two clues to the quality you can expect from this thing. One, it's already gone straight to video in several lucky foreign countries. Maybe it opens in the U.S. April 1. Or maybe it's already come and gone here? Anyway, two, here's what an enthusiastic fan of *Beowulf* the (At Best) B Movie said on the net about the already pretty synthetic thespian picked to play the lead: "Christopher Lambert ... does this part perfectly, not since *Mortal Kombat* have I seen him this good."

Horny is here!

In case you haven't heard, a British series of four 2-hour TV movies starts [started] here on A&E cable April 4, based on the C. S. Forester tales of Horatio Hornblower, a British naval officer helping fight the Napoleonic Wars. Sounds like most of the material is taken from the early years of our hero, say from *Mr. Midshipman Hornblower* and maybe shading over into *Lieutenant Hornblower*? And they spent some money on this: much of the action was filmed aboard the *Grand Turk*, a recently built full-scale, perfectly sailable replica of a late-1700s frigate.

Lots of SF/F fans are Hornblower fanciers already. Harry Harrison even did a priceless short SF parody, 1963's "Captain Honario Harpplayer, R.N." And of course, one suspects David Weber may just have had Forester's guy in mind when he named his space navy heroine Honor Harrington?

Perhaps you're a fan of the later Patrick O'Brian Aubrey-Maturin series. If so, think of Forester as kind of O'Brian Lite.

It's a must-see, you worthless swabs,
damn your eyes ...

(Independent) film at 11

In other, more local entertainment news, apparently Robert Redford is fixing to build a huge new complex in Boston to showcase independent films. Supposed to have 11 theaters, a film library, an eatery, and 2 bars in this \$40-million Sundance Cinema Center.

But the announcement notes the plex "is expected to be built behind the historic Fenway Field, home of the Boston Red Sox."

If they think Fenway Park is called "Fenway Field," who knows if these plans are anywhere within the ballpark of truth?

**From "Deep Thoughts"
by Jack Handey**

(on TV's old *Saturday Night Live*)

"If the Vikings were around today, they would probably be amazed at how much glow-in-the-dark stuff we have, and how we take so much of it for granted."

FlimFan

GOOD:

Analyze This — Nice comedic idea: Mafia boss is so stressed-out he consults a psychiatrist; culture clash ensues. Unfortunately for *Analyze This*, HBO cable had been running *The Sopranos*, a series with exactly the same premise, for months before this newer entrant opened. Oops. Because *The Sopranos* has got more edge, deeper darkness, and a much more modern, character-driven wit than this. *The Sopranos* just hits more high notes ... And while Robert De Niro shows us some layered behavior here as the conflicted Mafia don, the trophy for Comic Reinvention of a Mob Boss Character was retired by Marlon

Brando in 1990's unsung classic *The Freshman*. Look, *Analyze This* is not a bad flick. It's got De Niro, Billy Crystal, and a trunkload of familiar faces from other Mob movies, together with several set-piece parodies of same. (Crystal's not hosting the Oscars this year, he might as well stick these cute rip-offs here.) But it is of course a one-joke movie. Tell the joke a buncha times, very good, we all laugh, bada-bing, bada-boom ... Here, let me spoil a couple jokes for you just to juice up the end of my review: Crystal's Dr. Sobel explains the Classical origins of the Oedipus complex to De Niro's Vitti, who responds in character: "Fucking Greeks." And then, "You think I want to fuck my *mother*? ... You ever *see* my mother?" Or there's the time when Chazz Palminteri's bad guy discusses with a henchman what's playing at the cineplex: "It's all that shoot-em-up action bullshit. I get enough of that at work."

Ravenous — Cannibalism fans will eat this one up. Guy Pearce (the good — well, slightly less bad — cop in *L. A. Confidential*) is a U.S. Army officer sent to a remote fort in California's western Sierra Nevada mountains for the winter of 1847. I love this setting, and the small band of lost souls and losers gathered there. It's the kind of place where the commandant (Jeffrey Jones) remarks, as his men tuck into a big dinner one night, "Did anyone *do* anything today?" And everybody laughs appreciatively at the joke. Until, that is, a traveler (Robert Carlyle of *The Full Monty* is first haunted, then jaunty in this *completely* different role) staggers into the fort with tales of a stranded wagon train ravaged by its own Army guide, who's turned killer cannibal. The rescue party reaches the site — and things really go to pot. This is actually a consistently interesting, surprising, well-told, excellently acted, beautifully shot horror movie. The more I think about it, the more I'm tempted to call it a minor masterpiece. The mountain scenery is breathtaking. The music is great, with some period instruments and airs but a real ominous modern overlay, and plenty of dangerous drums. Among the actors,

Carlyle and Jones especially are just, well, delicious. And the director, a young woman named Antonia Bird, has a real energizing agenda behind all her shots of dripping meats, fulsome flesh, and manifestly destined American flags : she's a leftist British vegetarian.

DECENT:

True Crime — James Woods as the cynical newspaper editor: "Issues are shit that we make up to give ourselves an excuse to run good stories" ... Director/producer/star Clint Eastwood is awfully hoarse 'n' gnarly as the star reporter/recovering drunk who must clear a jailed man of a murder charge *starting on the day of his execution* ... Eastwood realizes, "This isn't a personal interest sidebar, it's a cruci-fucking-fiction" ... Woods voices the audience's skepticism about Clint's miraculously lucky investigation (and defuses our disbelief, thinks the scriptwriter, hope hope): "How long did it take you, half an hour?" ... Keep cutting back to the condemned man, not having such a good day either; he's played pretty well by Isaiah Washington, wasn't he a basketball player? ... The warden, played by Bernard Hill, very interesting, a reasonable man with his own doubts; but take points off him for calling the execution chamber "the procedure room" ... Eastwood's guy is a good reporter, otherwise a jerk; compare his using/abusing personality with that of the nice kind family-valued convicted killer ... So when they say "lethal injection" at San Quentin, it's actually three drugs serially, sodium pentathol for sleepypime, something maybe called panchromium bromide to paralyze muscles, and good old potassium chloride, a real heartstopper ... Hey, it's not a gas chamber anymore; why close and dog down the hatch? ... Look, I know these notes have a not unpleasant but unfinished, fast-and-loose feel. The movie ditto.

INDECENT:

Cruel Intentions — Well, its antecedents were good. This movie is a modern retelling of that big bestseller of 1782, the seduction-of-the-innocents novel *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* by Pierre Choderlos De Laclos. It's got a great movie history also: two earlier versions were presented by first-class directors *in the same year*: Stephen Frear's *Dangerous Liaisons* and Milos Forman's *Valmont*, both of 1989. Although this movie is not totally unredeemable, I'd go rent

either of them in preference to this. Bored, rich-bitch private high school student Kathryn (Sarah Michelle Gellar, yes TV's *Buffy Vampire Killer*) bets her almost equally corrupt half-brother Sebastian (the fey Ryan Phillippe) that he can't seduce new virginal young classmate Annette (Reese Witherspoon). Kathryn to him: "Be her Captain Pickard, Sebastian. Boldly go where no man has gone before." The stakes are his 1956 Jaguar roadster against a free shot at his half-sister's body: "You can stick it anywhere ..." Some good things do stick out from the chaos of this overdramatic *melange a trois*. Gellar at least tries hard. The soundtrack has a hypnotic new number by Fatboy Slim. Parents can take some small comfort that, while there's plenty of *very* frank talk about sex, there's actually very little frank exposure of skin. And I got some surprisingly big laughs from Selma Blair's pratfallful performance as another victim, the innocent and extremely klutzy Cecile. But look, you don't believe for more than a minute that we're really in high school here. These aren't kids. Kids are often the most bored beings on the planet. But they're not bored like this. They haven't *lived* long enough to be bored like this.

DOESN'T MEASURE UP:

SMM — Depressing without being convincing. Like Alan Pakula's *Klute* (1971) and Paul Schrader's *Hardcore* (1979), both much better films, this flick is about a small-town detective who goes to the big city and gets caught up in its decadent lowlife. In this case, it's Nicholas Cage sloshing through the S&M undergrounds of New York and LA, trying to backtrail a violent porno movie to see if the realistic on-screen murder is real — if this is a snuff film, and the "actress" actually died. His guide to the sleazy byways of that world is played by Joaquin Phoenix as an intelligent porno store clerk in the only interesting performance in the film. Phoenix's character explains that the market offers different flicks for different folks: "One guy sees it and pukes, another sees it and falls in love." Cage himself plays his role with only two

expressions: determination and anguished revulsion. I should have known we were in for a bad time when I saw the name of Joel Schumacher, heavy-handed director of *Batman & Robin*. (Need I say more?) There's so much melodrama, cheap irony, and just plain sloppiness here. One small example: this film is so ignorant of contemporary American sectarian distinctions that a killer's mother, who gets in a bus labeled "Christian Fellowship" — this same woman has in her yard a bathtub Virgin Mary ... Holy Mother of God, this one's a mess.

Backchat

**on APA:NESFA #344 & 345,
January & February 1999**

To Tony Lewis

Agree with you that the choral singing at the banquet during Boskone — a pretty arrangement of Heinlein's "The Green Hills of Earth," which I'd heard on the radio years ago as a country-western ballad! — was excellent. A pleasant surprise, and one of the high points of the con.

About the name badges with the wearers' names overshadowed by the con's names, the city, the date, the artwork, etc. Hardly a new complaint at almost any convention in the history of the world. My theory is that con-going aliens perform weird experiments followed by selective mindwipes. Explains lots of other stuff too, no? Of course, now Tom Endrey will get a button proclaiming SMOFS ARE BEM.

About cell phone blabberdrivers, saw a nice bumper sticker recently that sums it up for me: HANG UP AND DRIVE.

To Tom Endrey

About your January comment to me that I'm wrong, 49 is not a prime number. Ooops. That's right, "prime" doesn't quite mean "odd," does it? Inattention, sir, pure inattention. Sorry, everybody. Now you see

why I'll never be a SMOF (Skillful Multiplier of Fandom).

Great to see you at Boskone and have you grace our banquet table, Tom. The huckster couple you mention was Art and Becky Henderson; Art was the font of Elizabethan history, Becky was the cute one with the cool haircut. And the guy next to you was another dealer, the inimitable Chris Edwards. You know, Winona Ryder's new boyfriend?

One regret: being unable to get you and Anna Hillier together. She missed you by 5 minutes in the hall early Saturday, but didn't want to buy a membership just for a couple of hours so stayed in the hall. I looked around, she looked, never found you. Maybe next year.

My American Heritage Dictionary defines "ducking stool" and even includes a cute little drawing (3rd edition, p. 568): "A device formerly used in Europe and New England for punishment, consisting of a chair in which an offender was tied and ducked into water." My memory says it was also used to get witches to confess. Don't remind Ken Starr or he'll want one.

To (Cassandra?) Elisabeth Carey

Agree with your praise for NESFA Press' new *The Compleat Boucher*. At the risk of telling you something you probably already know well — hell, there's not enough poetry in this APA anyway — I take Boucher's character who suddenly understands what is meant by a "wild surmise" to be referring back directly to the phrase's first literary use. Which would be Keats, in "On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer," describing "Cortes" "discovering" the Pacific after crossing Panama.

Of course, a few million Polynesians and Japanese and Native Americans etc. were probably already slightly familiar with that particular body of water. And even the first European to see it was not Cortez but Vasco Nunez de Balboa in September 1513. Keats apparently mixed up two similarly breathless passages in Robertson's *History of America*, or maybe just decided Balboa didn't scan.

**Urk. Out of time again? Sorry to the people
I didn't get to; more next time ...**