

The Devniad Book 61b

un zine de Bob Devney
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Ten Things You Won't Hear If I Win the Hugo

I was recently nominated (third time in a row, caloooh callay!) in the Best Fan Writer category for the Hugo Awards, science fiction's answer to the Oscars. Winners to be announced at the World SF Convention in Chicago, late Aug/early Sept.

Poised to crush me again this year are the jovial and talented Mike Glycer, the lovely and talented Evelyn C. Leeper, the local and talented Steven H. Silver, and the inevitable and talented Dave Langford.

Unless you vote early and often, my friends ...

And in that spirit: if lightning strikes (the other candidates, I mean) and I take the rocket, here are some comments you probably won't be hearing from me at the podium:

10. "I'd like to share now with you all a little about the principle influence of my life that has helped bring me to this defining moment. Scientology was founded in"

9. "Apologies to Bob Eggleton for stepping on his hair on the way up."

8. "First Spielberg buys film rights to *The Devniad* for three point four mil, and now this!"

7. "Accepting for Mr. Devney will be his close friend Miss Jennifer Lopez."

6. "Myyyyyyyyyyyyyyy kind ah town, Chi —"

5 "Wow, who'd ever predict 100 percent voter turnout in the little ol' Best Fan Writer category?"

4. "This one's for you, Elian!"

3. "It was a tough decision to speak out about how you never see Dave Langford and Whitley Strieber together, but I felt I owed it to the SF community to come forward with what information I had ..."

2. "And I'd like to thank my wife Maureen for her untiring support and encouragement of my every fannish activity."

1. "You grok me! You really grok me!"

A Bulletin from the Wild Kingdom

Queen Maureen commands me to pass along her favorite laugh this month. It came during her viewing of one of the TV nature shows she devours like a wolf at a Bambi Lookalike Contest.

This particular segment was an encomium to the lives and loves of the capybara. That's kind of a 100-pound Latin American guinea pig that owns the shining distinction of being the world's largest rodent.

In the insufferably self-satisfied tones of all these wildlife wonks, the narrator was giving out with color commentary about the action as a family of these overgrown vermin frolicked happily about a forest clearing. He blathered on solemnly about their habitat, their home life, their diet, and so on. Nor did his diction change as one of the small, hairy youngsters trotted swinishly over to investigate some tasty morsel on the ground. The ground directly in front of a huge, clearly visible boa constrictor, that is.

However, as a particularly vivid demonstration of the food chain wrapped itself around the little rat's neck, our unflappable narrator murmured, "This may be a good time to mention that the *brain* of the capybara ... is the size ... of a lemon."

Escaping the Safety Net

Here's kind of a sad note. Brave, but sad.

The April issue of *Fast Company*, a hot new business magazine, had an article on creativity and creative personalities. And what to my wondering eye should appear but a quote from Madeleine L'Engle, whom the piece reminds us is "best known for her 1963 Newberry Medal-winning children's classic, *A Wrinkle in Time*, and its three sequels. [Currently] writer-in-residence and librarian, Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine ..."

A favorite young adult read for many of us SF boomer fans, Madeleine has not lost her wise, honest eye and truth-telling voice:

"... We live in a wild universe — a universe in which the truth is frightening. My son died last December. He was only 47 years old. That's scary, and it's lousy, but it's true. Creativity comes from accepting that you're not safe, from being absolutely aware, and from letting go of control. It's a matter of seeing everything — even when you want to shut your eyes."

Ego Scanners (Shall Not) Live in Vain

As was evident from the panel on Modernism at the Baltimore worldcon in 1998 (where it's said he practically got into a wrestling match over definitions with writer Michael Swanwick, writer/professor **John Kessel** is a passionately informed expert on

early 20th century literature and art. So it's no surprise that he has further inside details on the 1927 carwheel scarficide of dancer Isadora Duncan:

"Just a little trivia in re 'Death a la Duncan': the scarf that Isadora was wearing when she met her fate was given to her by Marie Desti, her close friend, and incidentally the mother of one of my fave film directors, Preston Sturges. (She was also briefly the consort of Aleister Crowley).

"Small world, huh?"

"Hope to be at Readercon this time."

John, didn't know any of that Duncan-Desti-Crowley-Sturges connection. Fascinating. Did know that Sturges was one of your favorites, though: it's so delightfully obvious to all of us who loved your screwball farce tribute *Corrupting Dr. Nice*.

Great news that you may hit Readercon! A death in the family locked me out of Boskone, so I've been in serious need of a sercon fix. With you there, fun and fur are sure to fly. Perhaps we'll have something akin to another Modernism Smackdown ...

Googolplex-time Hugo nominated fan writer **Dave Langford** has a big but:

"Thankee kindly for the namecheck. But, but, but, in this line attributed to one Langford — 'What I liked was it's always being called a drapeau' — where did that apostrophe come from? Whatever happened to cut and paste? O tempora, o more's."

Dave, I guess today's the day that today's most easily rattled proofreader, your's truly, must admit a stupidly wrongheaded error made in rush retyping when I didn't have the untouched file handy with which to cut/paste. In the immortal words of Wrong-Way Corrigan, "Ooops."

Speaking of stupid *Devniad* errors, brand-new author **Rick Heller** was once the victim of one of the worst.

"I met you at the Readercon before last, in Westboro, at the kaffeeklatsch with Andy Duncan. Later, in the lobby, I apparently said that I was working on a '60,000 page' novel, since that is what you quoted in a previous *Devniad*. In fact, it's about 60,000

words long, and I'm going back to it, having suspended work on it while I tried to break into print via short stories."

Nice try at letting me off the hook, Rick, but I'm sure the howler was mine. To make up, why don't I let you plug your stuff? Deal.

"I wanted to let you know that my first published story, 'Loyal Puppies,' appeared in the March *F&SF*. I've also sold another story to *F&SF*, publication date uncertain."

Thanks for the info, Rick. But to quiet our fears, what's the word count on that puppy?

Who better than *Devniad* Science Advisor Dr. **Stephen Kennedy** to take a crack at last ish's query about how many reflections you can see when standing between two mirrors?

"As I recall, silvered mirrors only have about a 95% reflectivity (unlike total internal reflection, which is more efficient at 99%+). If you had a hundred reflections, you would reduce the light by a factor of .95 to the one hundredth power, which is about a half per cent of the intensity of the original light. This, coupled with a factor of one over the optical path (the distance traveled by the light in its 100 reflections) squared (due to the drop-off of intensity with distance) would be enough to make the intensity of light too dim to see with the human eye."

I see, Steve. Dimly.

Responding to a comment from fan Gary Dryfoos, pro movie critic and SF fan **Dan Kimmel** makes a vicious suggestion:

"Re: Jennifer Jason Leigh. I don't know why anyone would waste their time with *Hudsucker Proxy*, but if he (and you) are Jennifer Jason Leigh fans — as am I — then don't overlook *Mrs. Parker and the Vicious Circle* wherein she plays writer Dorothy Parker.

"... As for *Happiness*, it is an utterly loathsome film. It is the one I contrast to *American Beauty* when people claim the Oscar winner is too downbeat about its dysfunctional characters. *American Beauty* has heart and has compassion for its all too

human screw-ups. *Happiness* is about a bunch of sick and perverted people (wait until you get to the scene of the father/son conversation where Dad explains why he rapes the son's young friends but would never do that to his own flesh and blood). It is, supposedly, a comedy. It is more like looking under a rock.

"Now, if you ask nicely, I'll give you my *unadulterated* take on the film...."

And about Andy Duncan's listing of films you'd hope Disney wouldn't make:

"I didn't see it, but apparently at the last Boston Jewish Film Festival there was an animated version of *The Diary of Anne Frank*. It was not, so am I told, 'Disneyfied.'"

Perceptive fan **Jerry Kaufman** gets to the heart of what I want in a review, too:

"Suzle and I went to see *High Fidelity* last night, so finding your newest *Devniad*, with its highly faithful review was a serendipitous pleasure. I always enjoy reading reviews of a movie more after seeing it than before. Now I can find details I missed, slants I didn't think of, inaccuracies in the review I can feel superior to, and so forth. (Not that I found any [of the *latter*, I hope you mean, Jerry] in your review.)

"Jack Black's character was scary fun in the way he browbeat or hypnotized the customers even more than the way he treated Dick. And his singing at the end of the film was a revelation. I want to get the soundtrack, especially if it has him and that Beta Band cut (I've never heard the Beta Band before). And the book has moved to my must-read list of things to buy. (I've heard good things before about Hornsby, not only this one, but *About A Boy* as well.)"

The soundtrack does indeed have that Beta Band cut, Jerry, plus Jack Black singing. I also enjoyed the book a bunch. Although must warn you that another friend of mine, Brenda the Book Babe, wasn't so hot on it. Maybe it's best enjoyed when driving under the influence of testosterone.

Friend **Evelyn C. Leeper**, the Susan Lucci of fanwriters, takes a shot and has a little list:

"In your review of *Forgotten Silver*: 'One thing is was was really funny.' You mean other than the syntax of that sentence?"

"In your comments to Art Henderson, you talk about how many films you see. Being the compulsive list-making person I am, I can report that we [Evelyn and hub Mark] see about fifty theatrical releases a year, with another fifty at a major film festival if we go (and I suspect Toronto will become an annual event for us).

"In the first quarter of this year, I saw 16 theatrical films and 151 (!) on cable/video. This is not counting 72 television/cable items of an hour or less (e.g. Ebert's show, 'Religion & Ethics Newsweekly,' etc.).

"I also read 48 books. Do I need a life?"

Evelyn, from my twisted perspective, sounds like you've already got a great one. I mean besides the joys of being married to Marvelous Mark ...

By the way, about your last comment: When did Ebert get religion?

As usual, Canadian fan **Lloyd Penney** is kinda shirty:

"What David Hartwell does for the tie, I am only too happy to do for the shirt. Courtesy of Yvonne's Ferenghi Fashions, I own nearly two dozen of the tackiest, retina-burning shirts in creation ... Now that the spring fashions are here, replete with brightly patterned shirts, I think Yvonne and I will be doing some shopping this weekend. Gotta find something hideous for Chicon ...

"Wouldn't dream of snaffling Hugo nominations at your expense, Bob ... well, I *can* dream, anyway ... I would be ecstatic to have a little rocket to wear in my lapel at Chicon, but if by some wild fluke, the big rocket might have my name on it, I wouldn't refuse it. To be honest, I am still amazed that some people actually nominate me for a Hugo, and I love them dearly. I just hope they remembered to do it again this year!

"*The Whole Nine Yards* ... hey, if the movie is supposed to take place in

Montreal, at least they didn't dress it up with a few USPS boxes and a Star-Spangled Banner here and there, and call it New York. I never saw the movie, but would expect that Hollywood wouldn't try for accuracy when it comes to the nasal Québécois accent. They're probably not too familiar with it, unless Rosanna Arquette tried to imitate Céline Dion's speaking style. Yvonne and her siblings do not have French-Canadian accents, but their mother does, by gar ..."

FlimFan

GOOD:

Frequency — This flick's claim to be science fiction vibrates on a pretty narrow band: some stuff about solar flares, the Northern Lights, string theory, and the resonance of a tube-powered ham radio that's precisely tuned to, well, itself, over a spark gap of 30 years. *Devniad* Science Advisor Dr. Stephen Kennedy says they have the aurora spiraling the wrong way; also that it might make more sense to talk about three sunspot cycles spanning 33 years ... I say *Frequency* is more a comfortable, middling science fantasy. More about the emotional connection between father and son than any tenuous connection to the ham radio experience as we know it. Dennis Quaid (*Innerspace*, *The Big Easy*, *Enemy Mine*, *Flesh and Bone*) is a useful talent who's never really gotten his due. Here, he does his usual good job playing the tough, resourceful, blue-collar-hero father — the kind of New York City fireman who, after a lifesaving feat of explosive bravery one shift in 1969, answers his wife's question of "How was your day?" with an offhand "Oh, the usual." Jim Caviezel (the poetic, haunted-faced, nature-loving Private Witt of *The Thin Red Line*) is his more troubled son, grown up to be a NYPD detective in today's darker, less certain times. The son finds his father's ham set in the old family home in Queens, and soon the pair are — let's say they're

communicating better than they have in years. As the dad says, "We gotta be talking the mother sunspot of all time" and "I'm picking up signals from places I could never reach before." Uh huh. The thick, overlapping visual textures, all shadows, closeups, and camera movements, are better done here than the plot, particularly the mid-movie addition of a crosstime hunt for a serial killer. They should have stuck to the family story, and the emotional impact of the sense of wonder it elicits. I especially like the poetry of one particular moment: You burn a letter into a desk *now*, smoke curls up *then* ...

Return to Me — It's rare to see a good movie this badly made. Actress Bonnie Hunt, who's been a funny, wise, and seasoned actress in roles such as Tom Hanks's wife in *The Green Mile* or the sister in *Jerry Maguire*, is making her directorial debut here, and boy does it show. Especially early on, this thing is full of freshman awkwardness: bad scenes, bad lines, and especially bad cuts, like a crucial one early on, where one second people are dancing and the next we're in some hospital after an accident. The actors do what looks like a lot of game improvisation; too often you can see them working too hard at it. But you know what? This thing has got a good heart. And everything settles down well as the story (which I don't want to say much about, since there are big changes fairly early on) hits its stride. Especially when we start seeing more of Minnie Driver as a recovering cardiac surgery patient looking for love; she has a miraculous sweetness and naturalness. David Duchovny usually manages a nice light touch as her troubled suitor, too. There's some truly refreshing stuff here. Example: for a modern movie romance, this thing has less sex than a barrellfull of Republicans. Also, we see oodles of old people. Carroll O'Connor plays Driver's grandfather, who runs O'Reilly's Italian Restaurant (specialties: chicken vesuvios and corned beef plates) with gruffly lovable cook/crony Robert Loggia and a cast of neighborhood geezers. The over-the-hill gang's scenes are just too

cute sometimes, but you can't help liking it when O'Connor serves a middle-aged regular her huge portion with a cheery "I know that looks massive, but you'll get through it." Or sensitively encourages Driver to start dating: "You're beautiful, and no one's going to notice your chest." Or when, arguing the merits of boy singers like Bobby Vinton, Loggia trumps everybody with Frank Sinatra, but then must defend his hero's hectic history: "*Frank* never beat up *anybody*. His *people* beat up people."

The Road to El Dorado — This one was fun, but due to work's stealing all my lunch hours I never got my notes together into a coherent review. Why don't we just hit a few of the high points? ... It's Spain in 1519, and two con men (voiced by Kevin Kline and Kenneth Branagh) inadvertently stow away on the voyage of big bad Cortez in search of the fabled city of The Golden One in the New World. Cortez is not happy to see them: "My crew was as carefully chosen as the disciples of Christ." And Kline at first wants to "row back to Spain like there's no manana." ... But on arrival, the boys are certainly happy to see their fabled Meso-American Mecca: "It's an entire *city* of suckers!" ... Naturally, our heroes are taken to be gods ... No language barrier? Why couldn't they just handle this point with a line or two of silly dialog? ... Lots of nice Aztecish art motifs: square pyramids, feather headdresses, chunky jewelry, braves with axes. Lots of red, gold, green; Day of the Dead masks. Gold looks photorealistic! Commoners' faces have that real Indio look. Haven't seen these visuals in a cartoon before; nice and fresh ... Edward James Olmos voices the Chief, Armand Assante his rival the High Priest, both very good ... The High Priest tries to be accommodating: "Do you prefer to have the victims bound with ropes, or free range?" ... Oops, when there's danger, the gods gotta go: "We really hate to be ascending so soon" ... The stakes are pretty clear: "On the one hand, gold. [Points to mural of guy being gutted by spear.] On the other hand, painful agonizing failure" ... This *Road* is well worth taking (in).

DECENT:

U-571 — A crew of American submariners and commandos, led by inexperienced officer Matthew McConaughey, sturdy chief Harvey Keitel, and creepy spy Jake Weber, battle their way aboard a German submarine. Then the ballast *really* hits the propeller. This is one of those war adventures that exist (and that kills quite a few major and minor characters along its winding way) not for the attainment of the finally immaterial maguffin — here, an ultra-secret (in-joke there) German Enigma code machine — but simply to satisfy us emotionally by bringing the hero (McConaughey) through travail into maturity and into touch with his true greatness. I made a note in this regard: "Being in command basically means you get to pick who dies. Cool." But deeply impossible story aside, the sets, the effects, and the intensity this flick delivers are all first-rate, as suggested by my other notes like "Try never to get depth charged. Way too loud and scary." If you want to see a great sub movie, try to find a subtitled version of 1981's *Das Boot*. For a very good sub movie, see 1990's *The Hunt for Red October*. For a good submarine video game experience on the wide screen, dive into this.

American Psycho — I don't imagine too many of you are going to see this, because you think it's a horror flick. Wrong. It's a satire. An intelligent, stylish, beautifully photographed, carefully crafted art movie. Just about the blackest of class comedies, and a savage feminist parable, too, by director Mary Harron. But be warned that the material (from the controversial 1991 novel by Brett Easton Ellis) is very strong; you still probably won't see it. Judge for yourself. Yuppie banker Patrick Bateman (Christian Bale, grown since he played the kid in *Empire in the Sun*) is one of the materialist scum infesting New York City in the late 80s/early 90s (not like now), but instead of just figuratively killing our culture, he acts out his empty rage for real. The underlying joke of this story is that he does all his serial slaying practically out in

the open, but almost no one notices except his victims. Half of the time, we don't awfully mind, because he's just snuffing his equally despicable friends: the type of people who think a \$570 dinner for four featuring squid ravioli in lemongrass sauce is "reasonable," but complain that the restaurant doesn't have "a good bathroom to do coke in." A Harvard man, Bateman tries to duck suspicion by suggesting that one of his victims might have disappeared due to "that Yale thing ... He was a closet homosexual, did a lot of cocaine." Bateman may be bad, but he wouldn't want you to think he was gay; in another scene, frantic with homosexual panic, he washes his hands while still wearing leather gloves. At a loud party, a tall blonde model inquires what he does for living. He says murders and executions; she hears mergers and acquisitions ... If you can stand the content, this is funny stuff. However, we cringe when he knifes a homeless man in an alley; and get really upset when he stomps to death the man's yelping little dog. And when his homicidal rage threatens his secretary (Chloe Sevigny of *The Last Days of Disco*), the only really nice person in the movie, the tension gets unbearable. Our only relief is that, though it's 100 minutes long, the movie seems to be over so quickly ... Leaving, like the yuppie years it savages, only a long list of product placements.

Backchat

on APA: NESFA #358, March 2000

To Elisabeth Carey

Very nice story about the party to honor one of your most influential college teachers. Thanks for recalling also Richard Cardinal Cushing (1895-1970), the late lantern-jawed, sawmill-voiced prince of the Catholic Church in this part of New England. Besides advising President Kennedy, hobnobbing with Billy Graham, and being apparently the first public source of the quotation "When I see a bird that

walks like a duck and swims like a duck and quacks like a duck, I call that bird a duck,” he was the priest who officiated at my ceremony of confirmation. (Mine and that of about 50 other overawed fifth-graders of St. Ann’s School, Wollaston.) In fact, I may have taken the confirmation name “Richard” just to suck up to him. As well as to honor, of course, the hero of *The Skylark of Space* ...

To Jim Mann

Thanks for the tour of southern Albion. I’ve read pieces like this before, in fact in this very periodical, but manage to learn new stuff every time. For instance, I would have said that Conan Doyle wrote his first Sherlock Holmes in London, not Portsmouth. Plus, you give probably the most favorable reviews I’ve ever seen on British grub. Sounds like the key is, concentrate on breakfast ... And I liked your bit on the London mayoral candidate so randy his nickname is “Shagger.”

Agree wholeheartedly that Jim Broadbent’s performance as W. S. Gilbert in *Topsy Turvy* was Oscar-worthy. He got across a nuanced portrait of a deeply complex personality. Deeply hilarious too.

To Mark Olson

Granted that you usually play your book reviews for lucidity rather than laughter, Mark. Nevertheless, you crafted a perfectly wonderful Big Laugh in your gleeful dissection of Baxter’s *Manifold Time*. You build up this big question about who will be chosen to crew an experimental spacecraft, and then beautifully choose italics and exclamation point to set off the answer: “*He’ll send the squid!*”

I fell bonelessly to the floor, tentacles thrashing with helpless hilarity.

Marvelous trip report on Rome, too. Pretty obvious that a lot of your details come, not off skimpy tourist signs, but from decades of your close reading of tyranny, war, and assassination in Roman history. Which I’ll bet has come in handy also for fannish politics.

Your comments on the darker side of the experience — pickpocket gangs, insane

traffic styles, etc. (I love your line about Roman drivers: “They don’t stop for pedestrians, though they don’t seem to make any particular effort to hit them”) — all these are echoed in the section on his Italian visit included in Bill Bryson’s curmudgeonly 1993 *Neither Here Nor There: Travels in Europe*. Which I’d subtitle *Through Darkest Europe with Notebook and Attitude*.

To Lisa Hertel

Hope your work situation has straightened out. Why in this so-called miracle economy is almost everyone I know more miserable about work than ever?

Your remarks on visiting your 89-year-old cousin in Sheepshead Bay made me haul out the atlas and try to get New York City geography through my head again. World-class urbanite though I may seem, I’ve only visited a few times. Can never remember that Brooklyn and Queens are on Long Island. I think of LI as kind of suburban if not rural, and keep trying to insert some other built-up landmass between the East River and LI to hold those pesky outer boroughs. Of course, in reality, Bensonhurst and the Hamptons are practically neighbors ...

About your Lunacon report: wouldn’t it have been perfect if the Boskone from Hell had been held at the Escher Hilton?

To Joe Ross

Since not many people ever mention it here, let me say that, besides your terrific collections of quotes, I’m always interested in your stuff about the lawyer’s life. Seems to be full of interesting people and odd circumstances.

I’ve thought of sharing vignettes from my own worklife in the same spirit, but most of the interesting things that happen in advertising leave me too angry and/or disgusted to speak.

To Michael Blackmore

Welcome to the APA! As well as to NESFA itself. Sucker.

In the contest for what to call this new decade of years ending in oh, your

“Naughts” is nice and of course reminiscent of the Naughty (Eighteen) Nineties, but I still favor the “Oh-Ohs.”

And as a movie buff who’s also about to interview candidates for your shared apartment, I assume you’re putting together a New Roommate Video Horrorfest. My favorite is probably 1994’s minor masterpiece *Shallow Grave*, but 1992’s *Single White Female* also has its moments for fans of Bridget Fonda or Jennifer Jason Leigh.

To George Flynn

So at least you and I know that *Cryptonomicon* should get the Best Novel Hugo. Even if the rest of our friends are scared off by a mere 918 pages.

Thanks for knotting my loose ends about the origins of neckties (*cravates* from Croatian or *Hrvat* mercenaries). Knew I’d heard the origin story, thought it was Serbs or Croats, but couldn’t be sure of the connection and was already about an hour past deadline ...

To Tony Lewis

Wonderful relic you own: one of Isaac Asimov's famous bolo ties. And, *pace* Dave Langford, so much easier to deal with than will be the lot of, say, whoever gets David Hartwell's plaid jackets. (All that lead-lined glass in the display case alone, to attenuate the radioactivity ...)

Tony, after studying your APA reports for 5 years I have decided that the word best describing your style is "incisive." Wait, no, maybe that should be "magisterial."

To Tom Endrey

Believe me, I don't usually pay anywhere near 40 bucks for a tie either. Hey, you can get a nifty 24-screen printed silk floral number from Leonard of Paris for only \$165. Shall I pick you up a couple?

Always enjoyed Richard Belzer's character John Munch on *Homicide*. Will definitely look for his book *UFOs, JFK, and Elvis*; thanks; sounds like a lot of fun. His character reminds me of one in another movie you should catch if you haven't before: Dan Aykroyd's NASA-scoffing conspiracy buff in the 1992 Robert Redford thriller *Sneakers*. Definitely a candidate for any Tom Endrey Film Festival.

To Art Henderson

I had a wonderful time reading about your baker's dozen of top flix on DVD. Only one I haven't seen is *Hercules*; OK, you've convinced me.

Especially nice to see you talking about *Glory* and *Streets of Fire*; I love them too, despite the fact that they don't usually come up much in these conversations. Not together, anyway. In *Glory*, I kept thinking Matthew Broderick looked way too young to be a colonel. Which of course was precisely true to life, since Colonel Robert Gould Shaw of the 54th Massachusetts never lived to see age 28.

As I've boasted in this space before, when Maureen and I started dating, the first film I took her to was, yes, all 207 glorious black-and-white, subtitled minutes of that serene masterpiece *Seven Samurai*. Despite

this, she continued to go out with me. The next week, she took me to *The Muppets Take Manhattan*. Despite this, I continued to go out with her.

To Paul Giguere

Thanks again for the predigested list of upcoming books. Ooooooh, another Kage Baker — I'm turning into a real Company man. Plus your voice added to the chorus may actually make me read a Martha Wells fantasy someday.

Good luck with the 3-year doctoral program. Too bad you can't just go to bed with an IV full of distance-learning nanomite knowledge pills over a long, rough weekend and come out Tuesday morning fully doctored up.

Your stated reasons for avoiding Neal Stephenson's *Cryptonomicon* must be in some code I can't crack. The "daunting size of the book" — this from a guy who reads, what, 2 or 3 million words a year? Please. And the "strange third person narrative" — what's so strange about a third person narrative? he asked with puzzled outrage. Look, if you said you thought Vinge's *A Deepness in the Sky* deserved the Best Novel Hugo instead, I'd understand — it's a close call. But to not read it at all, he mourned, shaking his head sadly.

To Leslie Turek

Just spent some time looking through your Web page again (<http://people.net.mediaone.net/lesliet/index.html>). It's where I read your Slovakia travel reports, so I can see the pictures in rich color. Which I recommend for maximum enjoyment of things like those gorgeous painted Eastern European Easter eggs, or the attractive landscapes. The High Tatras remind me of Vermont: similar rolling hills and small mountains, rugged yet still on a scale that has some pleasant relation to the size of a human being.

You say that in Slovak, *slobodny* means both "unmarried" and "free." So is "married" the same word as "imprisoned"?