

The Devniad

Book 63b

un zine de Bob Devney

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The Making of a Blockhead.

Block Island. About 7 miles long and 3 miles wide, set in the shining sea south of Rhode Island, U.S.A. Beaches and nature trails, dunes and bluffs, stone walls and wild roses. Inns and let's not forget restaurants, saltboxes and farmhouses and trophy houses, lobster and baked stuffed tourists.

Not too big, not too small: just right.

Queen Maureen and I spent 4 days on Block Island recently — our first trip, a wedding anniversary celebration — as May turned into June, just after the Memorial Day weekend. Let me tell you a little about our vacation ...

But first, a note on tactics. You know how some trip reports inflict a compulsively chronological account of each and every event of one's stay? "Awakening late at 3:57 a.m., we huffed some Benzedrine and looked gaily forward to a busy day ahead!"

Skip all that. Instead, let's just hit a few hundred high points and we'll have you out of here in 70 or 80 pages easy, promise.

First, to slog through some basics. We went during what some resort destinations are beginning to call "shoulder season." The term has more to do with greed than good weather. Shoulder season means too early for actual piracy, but perhaps attracting enough earlycomers to make light brigandage worthwhile. If this little essay prompts you to visit, you should know that on Block Island, that decent double in a nice inn that's only \$70 per weekday off-season (\$85 per day on weekends) rises to say \$90 (\$110) on the shoulder in mid-May, then up to \$110 (\$150) for June and July, perhaps

even \$120 (\$160) through August into mid-September. (For links to accommodations and lots else, visit www.blockisland.com.)

Speaking of brigandage, remember that Block Island room prices are piled on top of a 7 percent RI sales tax and a 5 percent "bed" or "room" or "just-because-we-can" tax.

Plus there's no camping allowed anywhere on the island, so forget booking a comfy single in the hotel and having the wife pitch her tent out by the dumpster.

The days we picked turned out to have absolutely magical weather. Alternatively, your luck may suck. Locals say that, due to ocean currents, island waters are slow to warm in the spring but stay nice well after August, so your best bet may well be September. But remember, we're talking about a *New England island*. So be sure also to bring enough books, games, videos, or recreational drugs to last you through a month or so of fog or drizzle.

How do you get there? Well, first, where's *there*?

Every islander I talked to quoted a new number for their little sandspit's distance from the Rhode Island mainland. Ten miles, eleven, thirteen, fifteen ... this imprecision adds to the impression that we're talking Shangri-La here. Brigadoon ...

Let's believe Blockadoon's Chamber of Commerce map, which says it's 12 miles south of the Rhode Island/Connecticut border and 12 miles east (I'd say northeast) of Long Island. Again, Block Island is about 7 miles north to south, and 3 miles at the widest east-west.

The only real town is Old Harbor, about 2/3 of the way down the eastern shore. It's three or four blocks wide and a block deep, centered between a little breakwater thingy

sheltering the utilitarian ferry dock, with most restaurants and hotels spreading out from there. About a mile inland and northwest is New Harbor, a marina with a few restaurants on the southern shore of the Great Salt Pond. The Pond takes up most of the island's north central interior; on a hot evening in August, they say you can see 1000 small craft there bobbing beerily at anchor.

If NESFA's resident rock fan Mark Olson were here, he could tell you that the island is actually a moraine. Kind of a glacier's lost luggage, left behind when it slid off the front or sides of the ice. After my journey of exploration, all I can say is there are cliffs at both ends, north and south; lots of dunes and beaches east and west; 365 ponds, one for each Perry Rhodan book; and many rolling hills and hollows in between covered with sand, scrub, occasional trees, or retirees from Connecticut.

Besides planes, boats, submarines, and astral projection, your choices of transport include ferries from three states. Departure points are New London in Connecticut; Montauk, Long Island, in New York; and Providence, Newport, and Point Judith (or, technically, Galilee, but everybody calls the ride from there the Point Judith Ferry) in Rhode Island.

The Point Judith route has the most scheduled runs — seven a day between mid-June and early September, and a couple a day year round. (See www.blockislandferry.com.) That's the way we came. (Fare: \$8.40 one-way for an adult; for a car, \$26 plus \$8.40 per person.)

Located at the corner where Rhode Island turns westward toward Connecticut, Point Judith is perhaps a 2-hour drive from metro Boston. (From metro Melbourne, your mileage may differ.)

Your large, comfortable passenger/car ferry comes with restrooms, a snack bar, inside and outside seating, and plenty of fresh air!

Unless, like me on our trip over, you're seated out on deck right up near the bow.

I'm coked on Bonine and taking deep breaths to stave off any possibility of my old nemesis, motion sickness. The only human beings closer than me to the front of the boat and that healing sea breeze are two harmless-looking twentysomething guys.

One of whom gets a cigarette going two minutes after casting off, and begins blowing nauseating smoke right aft like a four-stack World War I destroyer ...

Once actually safely and well on the island, however, with your hotel found and your bags unpacked and your vacation really truly begun, relaxation starts to set in. Deeply. This is helped by the distinctly casual island ethos.

On Block Island, you don't wear ties or otherwise dress up much in even the fanciest restaurant. You don't identify a house by its street number, because they don't have any. You don't play golf; there are no golf courses. Or chain stores, or MTV on the cable. You don't attend dolphin shows, or visit the world's biggest ball of suet.

Come right down to it, you don't actually end up *doing* much of anything. Because there isn't that much to do. A little walking, a little beach time, a meal, and then try to relax a little more.

The local Native Americans, a tribe of Narragansetts who called the place Manisses or "Little God's Island" and were themselves called Manisseans, maybe should have relaxed less and called on a bigger god to help when they saw the ship of Dutch navigator Adriaen Block offshore in 1614. He charted the island, and, without asking them, dubbed it "Adriaen's Eylant." In a rare noncasual moment for this locality, somebody decided to get formal and call it after the guy's last name instead.

Between the landing of the first European settlers in 1661 and about 1856, the island story was pretty much all about farmers and fishermen, with a few exciting interludes of getting plundered by French pirates, collaborating with British sailors during the War of 1812, and maybe luring a

few ships onto the rocks for fun and profit now and then. (Be careful to what islander you mention this little spot of mooncussing; some protest their ancestors wouldn't have dreamt of such a thing.) But by the 1860s, Americans started to get a little money and maybe a day off once in a while. The tourist boom has been the only sound you hear in-season ever since.

Our inn is called The Blue Dory. I thought about disguising the name here by calling it, say, The Red Rowboat, but then decided that *Devniad* readers value truth above all else except horrendous puns. So let the lawsuits fall where they may.

Actually it's a very nice place. Several very nice places: there's a main inn with 11 rooms, then a few more spacious side buildings including ours, one of the two-room suites at Waverly Cottage.

(We've started to stay *en suite* on vacation for two simple reasons. One, I stay up late and Maureen gets up early, so I need a place to read at night and she needs a place to slurp coffee and obsessively plan our day in the morning. A separate sitting room ensures we both get some sleep, with a consequent beneficial effect on our vacation spot's homicide rate. Two, we may still be relatively poor, but we're going to die soon ... relatively soon anyway... so we might as well enjoy our so-called life.)

Except for a few housekeeping difficulties and a few fixtures that were, frankly, broken (a French door miniblind crank, the showerhead spray adjustment knob — ah, those frisky honeymooners), Waverly Cottage was beautifully laid out and decorated. The brochure screamed Victorian, so I was afraid I'd be bumping my big ass into ormolu every minute. But the furnishings in the bedroom especially, while indeed tray Vicky cottagay, were placed with a modern sense of tasteful sparseness around the light-drenched room.

And the Blue Dory boasts a wonderful location — a 5-minute suitcase roll around the right-hand corner from the ferry dock in Old Harbor, with busy Dodge Street off the front porch. On the other hand, there are a

grassy, flower-strewn hillock and the 4-mile curve of Crescent Beach beginning beyond the parking lot just off the *back* deck. Plus, for Mo's benefit, we were just a door down from the funky Juice 'N Java coffeehouse ... and practically across the street from Red Bird Package Store. Although I guess it was early in the season: Red Bird sold me a Pepsi that, according to the label (and the taste) expired in October 1999.

I remember late the first day, as the vast streaky sky of a perfect afternoon darkens on toward a better evening. We walk a mile or so north, out to the Town Beach. On the whole expanse, there's us, some sea birds, and a couple with a black Labrador retriever. The dog is doing what he does best with a stick his owner keeps throwing into the surf.

We watch the Lab, flinging himself into the waves with abandon, grabbing the stick, hurtling back to his people, and making sure to get right next to them before he shakes half the ocean out of his coat and begs to go again, over and over.

His joy is almost as perfect as our own.

In the days that follow, as we wander around the island, some of the charm of the place for me is amateur sociology. There are 851 people on Block Island in the winter. When I talk to the locals, I'm always trying to find out, how does this small group work? What are their hierarchies, rites and rituals, culture? In the summer, this tight little tribe is diluted by 8000 tourists. How do they handle that? Why aren't there more suicides in winter, and touristacides in summer?

Of course, it's not easy to find all this out in 4 days while you're simultaneously trying to kick back, groove on nature, and stuff your face silly.

But we do manage to meet some interesting people, and get some glimpses of the island life.

Following a time-tested technique in a new place, early on we hire a cab for a personalized tour of the whole island.

Art of Kirb's Taxi looks like a slightly bigger Mel Torme, and sports a voice a little like Harlan Ellison's. (Sorry about that "little," Harlan.) Retired from a job as a tech at Connecticut Power, he notes that he's not like the island's "real retired," people who have real money.

Speaking of which, a one-hour taxi tour of the island costs \$30. But we all like each other; he ends up riding us around for an hour and a half. Of course, we end up giving him \$40.

Art also ends up introducing us to another friend, when he picks up a regular. A waitress at a popular seafood palace, she lets us hear in her voice that she's not too enthusiastic about the food there. We'll keep running into her throughout our stay. (This is a *small* island). And she'll keep asking us how the anniversary's going. (This is a *friendly* island.)

Art takes us up one of the island's million dirt roads — Dories' Cove Ave. — and points out one especially beautiful home. It's a work of art. Narrow, modern, but perfectly integrated into the landscape, all its jutting and rambling length — including a little stand-alone chapel at the end — faces the beach down the steep incline in front. The front of the house, looking due west over Block Island Sound toward Connecticut, is almost all window. I imagine the sunsets look pretty nice in there. With difficulty, I dissuade Queen Mo from aquadefenstrating the inhabitants and taking immediate possession.

Throughout our drive, though, Art is scornful of badly done, too-big "trophy houses." He's knowledgeable about good building techniques, introducing me to a neat new phrase, explaining that a good shingle exposes only "5 inches to weather." He calls *rosa rugosa*, the pink flower that makes every hedge and stone wall and fence on the island a delight, "the wild Irish rose."

In fact, he tells us, many people besides us compare this rolling green landscape to Ireland. (At least this time of year.)

Art confirms what the guidebooks say: there's very little crime, except for summer's drunk college boys committing moped

outrages. It's even OK to hitchhike. Though why not just take a cab?

He tells us the actor Christopher Walken bought here recently, on the south coast; he's not sure which of two houses it was, so shows us both. He asks me what movies Walken has made, and what they're like. I describe with my usual loony film-fanatic enthusiasm Walken's roles as a murderous druglord in *The King of New York*, a murderous Mafia lieutenant in *True Romance*, a murderous angel in *The Prophecy*. Art looks like he's wondering if Walken will make such a good neighbor after all ... This is a *small* island.

Maureen asks Art how he puts up with the long, cold, lonely winters here. Art: "No problem. One of the first things I did was buy a satellite dish."

Enough about beauty; let's talk food.

Battle eternal rages between stomach and spirit for the soul of man. Nowhere is this dialectic better illustrated than by the breakfast buffet at The 1661 Inn.

We arrive pretty (OK, very) late one morning, which may help explain why the French toast is a little cold and the made-to-order omelet is uninspired. But the view is sublime. Thus once more proving Devney's Law of Spectator Dining, which states that the higher your vantage point and the greater the view, the worse the grub.

Need convincing? Just think about the food on airplanes.

Anyway, back to The 1661 Inn. It's a few minutes' walk from the Old Harbor waterfront, up on a hill in a district containing several of the island's more elegant doze 'n' dine establishments. From the white rail of the roofed porch where they serve breakfast, you look left to the harbor, or straight out over the terrace to the blue sea and, if you squint really hard, maybe Ireland.

We talk for a long time to the brand-new breakfast manager. She points out, here and there in the scrub below, between us and the sea, a few piles of bricks and stone. This is all that remains of the Ocean View. Once the largest hotel east of the Mississippi, if

you can believe that, it burned to the ground one afternoon in the late 1960s just so we could have this uninterrupted view.

Our new friend is a red-headed woman with a soft French accent, and manners so refined they make Catherine Deneuve's look like Minnie Pearl's. She's lived on the island for 38 years. Now when she visits France, they make *le sport* of her American accent. She's recently divorced, and her friend the innkeepress just gave her this new job.

I imagine once she tastes the food, there'll be a petite Austerlitz in the kitchen and matters may thereafter arrange themselves more satisfactorily.

Not all islanders we meet are quite so upmarket. The island's famous Italian family-style eatery is Aldo's, a block back from Water Street. (We have a decent breakfast there, but split our vote on dinner; call it so-so.) Renting a ride at the bike/moped/car rental shack next door, we find the same family owns both operations. Happens we spend a little time with one scion of these island aristocrats, a bronzed, beefy twentysomething sporting a tank top, wraparound sunglasses, and a princely attitude. As we pull into the yard of one outpost of his empire out in New Harbor, he lunges out the car window and yips at one of his college-kid workers by the bike rack: "Caught you leaning!" And confides to us: "I pay them *above* the minimum wage, and *still* I see them sitting down."

Later one of his employees confides that, in addition to its signature restaurant, young Caligula's family in fact has cornered most or all of the island's bakery biz, its bikes, all but one of the moped shops, the kayaks, etc. He's been known to confide to his underlings, "I *own* this island!"

On the other hand, *Devniad* readers will be especially relieved to learn that Very Nice People run both of the island's bookshops we encounter. And that both go beyond John Grisham and Piers Anthony to stock some cool stuff. In the Book Nook right out front on Water Street, there's also the semi-obligatory sleeping cat to add more

charm. And in Island Bound Books off to the left, between the new post office and that nice hippy deli, they've got Nanci Griffith on the stereo and can even talk about her.

All Block Island waitresses have a boyfriend who is a carpenter. Assuming they're not all talking about the same very lucky albeit busy guy, this is bad news for unspoilment. Since it indicates the developers are winning the race — the race by the island's conservationists, who already have more than 25% of the land area locked up in preserves, to get to 50% ahead of the developers.

Good luck, my druidical pals ...

Which brings us to one in our series of Great Moments in Naturegrokking.

We're hiking along the Clayhead Nature Trail leading out to the island's northeast shore. They say it's only about a 12- or 15-minute walk to the beach from the parking bog, but it makes a very nice jaunt. There's a bit through forest, which isn't all that common on Block Island, because the winds, the salt, and the sandy soil keep trees low or nonexistent. Then we meander downhill for a while on a little switchback trail. A turn reveals a lovely view of a large pond on the right.

In the trees again, Mo freezes, motions for me. As I creep up beside her, though, she relaxes. "I saw a really beautiful yellow bird up there, but it flew away."

As the research member of the team, I instantly recall the display board at the trailhead, which listed frequent avian visitors to this spot. So I can say definitely that what we (well, Mo anyway) sighted was a Nashville warbler. Or maybe a yellow-breasted chat. Or a black-throated green warbler — with a name like that, of course, its primary characteristic is a big yellow head.

Or, wait, the whole thing could have been a smudge of lemon slurpee on Mo's sunglasses. Does that still count for our Life List?

The Mohegan Bluffs down by the Southeast Light are one of the real can't-miss sights on the island. First there's a big green lawn with this really ugly brick Victorian squatting malignantly at the end. Then you notice that the big tower on said monstrosity is actually a lighthouse. (Favorite guidebook fact: they say if the light stops revolving on a sunny day, sunlight refracting through its big momma lens can start fires 35 miles inland. So who needs anti-missile laser defenses?) And when you stroll around the back toward the sea, you realize you're on top of a cliff 150 feet above the crashing waves, and can see whole lines of such beautiful bluffs marching away to the east.

Most of the island's visual adventures are of a quieter kind. Nice hill, smell the flowers, wouldn't you like to live in that house, beautiful beach, pretty pond. But Mohegan Bluffs actually has a decent Ooo-factor. It's like some kind of mini-Maui. Zowie!

A few cliffs down the coast from the lighthouse, a sturdy wooden staircase plummets the whole way to the beach. There are *hundreds* of steps on that sucker. I want to climb down and then run back up a few times, I really do, but unfortunately we have to be back for dinner in only 6 hours.

For those more scientifically than athletically inclined, one of the cliff tops has a neat little display board teaching us all about shorelines and water levels. You see the coastline and islands from Massachusetts south through Connecticut in three slices of time: thousands of years ago; now; and (estimated) the year 2300.

Bad news, rich people! Prospects aren't looking too good for any beach property you may currently own, unless you can manage a graceful transition from vacation home to plankton farm.

In the view of the display designers, who are obviously big global warming fans, the next 300 years will see big-time coastline erosion. It's all right there on the map. Bye-bye, Chatham. Ta-ta, Provincetown. Good luck lengthening those Cape Cod bridges,

guys, because that canal is going to get a *lot* wider. Long Island, prepare to get a bit shorter, and say "so long" to Montauk. And as for Block Island itself — you guys end up in two separate north and south pieces. But look on the bright side: you get a whole new set of beaches.

Speaking of spooky thoughts, one more neat thing happens while we're touring the Bluffs by the Southeast Light. So very early in the season, there's no one else around. Until we encounter a big fat American Shorthair red tabby cat on the lawn by the path on our way out. Looks rather surreal, this light-orangey creature just kind of *glowing* against the vast empty expanse of green grass. Oooo.

So as we walk on, meeting a group of tourists straggling in out by the gate, I get the impulse to lay on some atmosphere. Stop and hail them portentously: "Hello there!"

Beckoning them closer: "Did you know, they say that on certain sunny, windy afternoons — much like today — this place is *haunted*? Yep, by the ghost of the *cat* that once prowled these grounds ... Enjoy your stay!" And we march out. Looking back at us curiously, they walk on toward the lawn.

You know, this kind of thing works even better since I grew my distinguished gray beard. "It is an ancient Mariner, and he stoppeth one of three ..."

Two final restaurant recommendations may be worth relating. First, if you want a grand romantic dinner (this trip, after all, was around our wedding anniversary), try The Atlantic Inn. Rockers on the porch with fabulous ocean view, L-shaped bar with fabulous ocean view, intimate little table with fabulous ocean view, and a \$42-per *prix fixe* dinner that, unlike the case in some other restaurants on what after all is an island, doesn't force seafood-hating me to make my appetizer something like tentacles on toast.

In fact, while my appetizer happens to indeed be something new and strange — called chickpea cake — it turns out to also

be decidedly rich, smothered in one of Earth's most heavenly mushroom sauces. It's the single best menu item we consume on the island.

Just ask Maureen. Who, since it was our anniversary, after all, felt free, even though it was, after all, *my* appetizer, to consume most of it.

Also: if you go too early in the season, stuff isn't open yet. Particularly on weekdays. This has been our experience with Eli's, a little place off a side street in Old Harbor that the guidebook cruelly teases us has the best gourmet pasta this side of Newport. Evening after evening, all we see through the darkened windows are chairs upside down on top of tables, which we take as a bad sign.

But finally, on Friday night: Eli's is open!

Van Morrison's *Into the Mystic* on the stereo. Arty-crafty ceramic tiles on the tabletops, funky prints on the walls, smiles on the cheerfully pretty blonde waitress. We're going to like this place.

Now, every single islander we talked to about Eli's warned us about one thing: the portions are Godzilla-sized.

And they're right. For appetizers, I spoon a lake of cremini mushroom soup into my gaping maw with one green-scaled claw, while my companion Gamera chomps on a vast spinach salad. When the waitress staggers up, bent under the weight of Mo's Bohemian chicken ravi with mushrooms and my wok-sized bin of penne fromaggio, I pray I'll be resurrected in the sequel ...

It rains only once during our entire stay. And that occurs, considerately, while we're downing our monster meal at Eli's. Staggering out as darkness falls, we notice that another downpour threatens and lurch home, arriving back just in time as a truly titanic lightning storm breaks over the island.

However, the timing means this isn't weather as spoiler: it's weather as supreme entertainment. We drag in two rocking chairs off the front porch, and spend several awed hours watching through the screen

slider off the back deck ... as God's own lightshow exhibits all its raving magnificence over the 4 miles of Crescent Beach.

If I wanted unspoiled, unhurried leisure time, would I be writing a monthly fanzine? (Although I am, of course, one of the world's laziest people. Just ask Queen Maureen.)

Still, on Block Island, even the resting-disabled may feel the faint stirrings of hope for a cure.

There are smaller islands, more remote or less populated places. But it's a nice mixture.

Block Island doesn't have the expanse, the cobbles, or quite the upmarketedness of Nantucket, or the faint lingering taste of a hippy party that I like about some places on even bigger Martha's Vineyard. (If you can run in between the tourists falling like raindrops.)

Block's is a backyard and backroad Island mostly. Get away from the overtouristed waterfront of Old Harbor and the huge smallboat clusterclump of New Harbor and you're left with two choices. Besides the beach, which is its own category, and ubiquitous.

But the two choices otherwise are iced Pepsi in a lounge chair up back of the house, or warm water from a plastic bottle amid the scrub brush and birdsong of a nature trail. These are both beverages that I like very much.

If you feel the same, then come you down to de island, mon.

There Can Be Only One. I Guess. Maybe.

Who could resist the lure of a Web site called One Book? (At www.go2net.com/internet/onebook.) Founder Paul Phillips apparently challenged the members of the Usenet newsgroup rec.arts.books in 1994 with the following mission impossible: "[D]ecide on a single book that you would

most like for the world to read ... The book that, for you, was the most influential, or thought-provoking, or enjoyable, or moving, or philosophically powerful, or deep in some sense you cannot properly define ..."

Since then, he's gotten hundreds of entries. See them there in all their bibliocentric glory.

Plenty of SF makes the list, as is only proper. Just looking at a few worthy choices with which I'm familiar, there's Wolfe's *The Book of the New Sun* (no fair, that's three books), Delany's *Stars in My Pockets Like Grains of Sand* and (gulp) *Dhalgren*, Heinlein's *Starship Troopers*, Card's *Speaker for the Dead*, Stephenson's *Snow Crash*, Powers' *The Stress of Her Regard*, Ellison's *Angry Candy*, Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, Clarke's *Childhood's End*, Bester's *The Demolished Man*, Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*, and Herbert's *Dune*.

But not all the SF choices are quite that mainstream. Would you believe John Wyndham's *The Chrysalids*? Or how about S. M. Stirling's *The Stone Dogs*? (Now *Marching Through Georgia* I could get behind.) Others are way *too* mainstream — for instance, somebody picked Terry Brooks' *The Sword of Shannara*, calling it "fantasy/fiction at its finest." One could laugh/cry.

I think I know where the guy who chose Richard Scarry's *Cars and Trucks and Things That Go* was coming from. But how about the world's biggest fan of *The Copyright Handbook* by one Stephen Fishman?

And some contributors' enthusiasm is clearly stronger than their self-expression skills. I like *Stranger in a Strange Land* quite a bit too, but wouldn't declare my love by burbling (avert your eyes, George Flynn): "And who would have thought a martian/human named Michael St. Valentine would have impacted my life so dramatically? I plan to name my first son after Jubal Hershaw." Papa Heinlein must be very proud.

Also, despite my real fondness for a certain cool space adventure I admired at age 11, I'm not really sure I'd enjoy meeting someone who comments "Almost

everything I know about morality is from Piper" ... and so names as the most influential book of all time H. Beam Piper's *Space Viking*.

There Oughta Not Be A Law

Devney's Conundrum:

The production of any given fanzine will expand to fill the time available plus n, where n is up to 80 percent of the duration of the meeting at the start of which said zine was laughingly scheduled to be handed in.

Ego Scanners (Shall Not) Live in Vain

From New Mexico, writer and fan **Yvonne Coats** feels my pain:

"I have an alternate 'challenged' writer's motto for you: 'If at first you don't succeed, type until your fingers bleed.'"

Oklahoma fan **Tom Jackson** wants us to know where he's coming from:

"The Peter Abrahams book sounds very interesting — I'll hunt up a copy for my girlfriend, the mystery fan.

"I live in Oklahoma, and I don't normally think of myself as a 'Southern fan.' Oklahoma wasn't a part of the Confederacy. It wasn't even a state — it was Indian territory, considered too undesirable for white men but a handy place to stash Native Americans after we stole their land. During the Civil War, we had a little civil war of our own, with a Rainbow Coalition of Indians, whites and Union blacks from Kansas shooting each other. The Union won our biggest battle, Honey Springs, because of resolute fighting by a unit of Kansas blacks. Honey Springs is known as the 'Gettysburg of the West' in Oklahoma, but I've never

heard the rather minor battle mentioned anywhere else.

"Looks like I'll have to skip *Battlefield Earth*. I've been waiting for one good review so that I'd have an excuse to see it, but my arm is getting tired from walking around and holding that lamp ..."

Tom, sorry about the Southern fan thing; I was vague on your actual location, and thought I remembered some connection with Southern fandom. Just looked up the Battle of Honey Springs; very interesting. You're right that it's not exactly granted Homeric notice in the histories. Even Shelby Foote, given three fat volumes with which to play, covers it in four sentences, within a flashback, no less.

So you have a mystery-loving girlfriend named Ann. Don't I remember your Desperately Seeking Somebody just last year? So your friend is a new addition; good for you. Every time a fanboy finds a date, an angel gets his beanie ...

Confirmed Son of the South **Andy Duncan** picks some Cotten stuff from last ish:

"Had Joseph Cotten's career actually ended with *The Third Man*, we wouldn't have that unforgettable climactic scene in that Vincent Price classic *The Abominable Dr. Phibes*, wherein surgeon Cotten has to sweatily operate on his own son to remove the embedded key that will unlock the fetters keeping the boy's unconscious form pinned beneath the pipeline of deadly acid that will start dribbling down Any Moment Now ... "

Andy, I didn't know they had HMOs that early.

Meanwhile, future U.S.N. Admiral **E. J. McClure** continues to make the rest of us feel very lazy:

"I just got back from six weeks of Cooperative Engagement Capability (combat systems) testing down in the Caribbean, which culminated in a couple of successful missile engagements (against drones) and a port visit to Montego Bay, Jamaica (yes, the resorts do look like the

tourist brochures, but the rest of the island reminded me slightly of West Africa). We are in Mayport for a three week painting frenzy, after which we head up to New York City, where we will host the President and his distinguished entourage for the International Naval Review. You will see *Hue City* on CNN, but don't bother straining your eyes to pick me out amongst the sailors 'manning the rails,' as I will be down in the Engineering plant Central Control Station with the damage control and casualty repair team, and my engineers will be at maneuvering stations.

"Then we go on up to Boston for OPSAIL 2000, and then to Halifax. I leave USS *Hue City* when we get back to Mayport in August, and am going to take my bike and go cycle-touring in Ireland on my own for three weeks. Beautiful scenery by day, Celtic/trad music in the pubs by night, absolutely no responsibilities, no email, and no phone; sounds like heaven after five years as Chief Engineer!

"Then I'll come back to the States to zip through the Executive Officer training pipeline (various schools in Dahlgren, Virginia; Damneck, Virginia; Newport, Rhode Island — five different locations in three months). If all goes well, I will report to *USS Philippine Sea* in December for my third consecutive sea tour, but this time as 'Number One' instead of as 'CHENG.'"

E. J., suddenly I feel tired and must go lie down.

Famous fanwriter **Evelyn Leeper** takes me to task:

"*Zulu* was not Michael Caine's first movie — he was in about two dozen before it, including SF flick *The Day the Earth Caught Fire*.

"[In *Gladiator*,] Oliver Reed played Proximo, not Proxima. I know his robe may have looked like a dress in the muddy cinematography, but still ..."

Evelyn, oops and double oops. Shall we call that Proxima/Proximo thing a near thing?

And in a first-time *Devniad* exclusive, my brother **Michael Devney** tries to get me in all sorts of trouble:

"I would suggest the book *Imagining Atlantis* by Richard Ellis. From the Blue Monkeys of Crete to a theory that the continents did not just split apart but actually rotate from time to time, this is a fun and thought-provoking book.

"I would also like to suggest the following book to be read by single childfree people and married childfree couples. *The Baby Boon: How Family-Friendly America Cheats The Childless* by Elinor Burkett. When you are finished, you will wish that single childfree citizens and married childfree citizens rise up and demand their rights as equal citizens in both the corporations they work for and the U.S.A. as a whole. For how can we be free if one citizen is treated unequal to another?

"Last but not least: So you say you support libraries ... you might want to visit the U.S. Mint Web site (www.usmint.gov) for a firsthand look at the coin immortalizing the Library of Congress on its bicentennial year. Imagine if your ancestor had handed down a coin commemorating Alexander's Library ... you would display it to all. Your grandchildren will thank you for buying this one."

Michael, on your last point: what, no legacy for the grandchildfree?

FlimFan

GOOD:

Dinosaur — Let's lighten up, people. I keep hearing critics carp that this chronicle of the wanderings of a young dino suffers from a kid's-stuff story and a pile of paleontological inaccuracies. Coprolite! The movie's beautifully visualized 82 minutes (the animated dinosaurs are placed against real landscapes; wow!) actually has the most documentary feel of any Disney animation I can recall. *Dinosaur* pushes info our way on such hot dino topics as nurturing behavior, island ecosystems, herding instincts, predator hierarchies, climate changes, mass migrations, and extinction events. Sure, it

gives its critters fairly human motivations and personalities voiced by Hollywood actors. You've got your brave, adventurous young hero iguanodon D. B. Sweeney (readily identifiable by his toothless beak, stiff tail, and three-toed feet — the animal, not the actor — if you're either an Oxford dino don or have checked the extremely handy little *Dinosaur* glossary at www.rottentomatoes.com/movies/titles/dinosaur/preview_production_notes_23.php); his lickerish lemur pal Max Casella (with occasional over-the-kids'-heads dialog such as "Any of you ladies up for a game of Monkey in the Middle?"); and even a genteel brachiosaur-of-a-certain-age Joan Plowright. (One of my own grandmothers weighed about 80 tons too, but lacked the cute stubby tail.) And sure, if you're going to give a dino some cute mammalian friends so the kids in the audience have something more familiar (and warm-blooded) to cling to, your accurate choice would be nasty little shrews, not the film's bigger, cuter, but unfortunately later lemurs. However, the story, with its lessons about love and loneliness, teamwork and compassion, is a decent one; the little kid inside most of us gets his pulse properly pounded and his heartstrings twanged. And the visuals range from good to great. The opening adventures of the dinosaur egg alone, with the pteranodon's swooping and soaring along as we get a future-bird's-eye-view of the prehistoric landscape, are worth the price of admission. And one view of night in the wasteland is as beautiful and alien as anything the great John Schoenherr ever created.

DECENT:

Mission: Impossible 2 — Despite some pretty good car chase stuff and motorcycle stunts, there's no action here to rival in memory the Tom-Cruise-dangling-from-a-line ballet or even the helicopter-in-the-train-tunnel bit of the first movie. And why bother to recruit one of the world's most beautiful and — let me emphasize this part — *accomplished jewel thieves* (Thandie Newton) if you're not going to really utilize

her criminal talents on the team for the rest of the flick? You miss the rest of the team desperately, too. Come back, Ving Rhames and Jean Reno!

NOT ALL BAD:

Titan A.E. — This animated space adventure has a great opening idea. (Hint: "A. E." stands for "After Earth.") And the voices of Nathan Lane, Janeane Garofalo (ghod I hate trying to spell her name!), and John Leguizamo (no picnic either) bring three funny supporting characters right to life. But Matt Damon and Drew Barrymore are just OK. Anybody in NESFA could have written a better pulp script. And here's the kiss of death: the animation just isn't all that great. However, no movie that ends with everything starting over on the planet "Bob" can be all bad.

BAD:

Up at the Villa —Direction and acting both fine; British expat colony in 1938 Florence beautifully recreated; Kristin Scott Thomas born to wear those clothes, and Sean Penn always interesting and weirdly handsome in a very real way. But the Somerset Maugham story here was a tired old thing when the tired old thing first penned it.

Aaarrrrgggghhh! No time for Backchat. More next ish.