

The Devniad

Book 64b

un zine de Bob Devney

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Factoids of the Month

Some of the people in my office have taken lately to asking me for "the factoid of the day." They seem to believe I have an unusual affinity for odd and completely useless bits of knowledge.

Duhh!

Anyway, this article was to have listed several pages worth of insignificata that have come to my attention over the last month, with notes on sources.

However, I've spent the last several days wrestling with a failing disk drive and an unstable Windows environment on this, my home computer. The deathmatch has left me no time to collect and write up lots of other bits I had in mind. (In fact, this whole ish is going to look mighty ragged.)

But to save the embarrassment of an issue with no lead story at all, might as well show you the yolk here. Just squint hard and try to imagine what a grand chicken I had in mind.

1. The descendants of Hitler's nephew live — quietly, under another name — on Long Island. ["Hitler's Lost Family" by Timothy W. Ryback, *The New Yorker*, 7/17]
2. The reason why platypuses and echidnas are classified as monotremes is pretty rude. Hint: "treme" is derived from the Greek for "hole." [*In a Sunburned Country*, by Bill Bryson]
3. *Swarf* is the material, such as metallic particles, produced by a cutting or grinding tool. It's from the Old Norse for "file dust." Use it in a sentence, Bobby? OK: "One drawback to sex with robots: sleeping in the swarf spot." [Motion

control products press release by my young colleague Bryan Jackowitz — source for the word only, of course]

4. It's possible to work on a PC with a boot drive containing sectors that are dying like flies. It's just extremely time-consuming and unpleasant. [Bitter personal experience]

One Young Mind Is Ours To Warp

My old high school friend David Rice recently visited from his home in St. Louis, Missouri, in tow of lovely and (necessarily) patient wife Patricia and sturdy young Master Michael Rice. David notes that the 2.6 year old seems to love taking things apart, so they're figuring him for a future engineer or scientist. He asks what junior SF books we recommend he should read aloud to Michael, and later move him on to reading on his own.

Suggestions, people? I suspect that my own quite early influences — stuff like Ellen MacGregor's *Miss Pickerell Goes To Mars*, Eleanor Cameron's *The Wonderful Flight to the Mushroom Planet*, Louis Slobodkin's *The Spaceship Under the Apple Tree*, and Evelyn Sibley Lampman's *The Shy Stegosaurus of Cricket Creek* (any other geezers remember these?) — may have been supplanted by later, better stuff.

Rowling and D. W. Jones I know, of course. But what can people tell us about particular works by Jacques or Colville, for instance? Any other particular more modern favorites?

Quick, everybody! Now's our chance to corrupt at least one eager young intelligence while they're still teaching kids to read.

Ego Scanners (Shall Not) Live in Vain

After finally making an honest woman of lovely companion **Sydney Sowers** earlier this year, newish stellar SF/fantasy/horror short form star **Andy Duncan** has now made an honest-to-god writer of himself. Finally, we have a book!

(Full disclosure: I've met Andy and Sydney. We're friends, albeit mostly long-distance. Though there *was* that time we got crabs together in Baltimore ... But I sucked up to him first because I really liked his writing. You will too.)

As his intimate little broadcast e-mail press release makes clear, *Beluthahatchie and Other Stories* puts more than 100,000 words of fiction from the pages of *Asimov's*, *Best New Horror*, *Realms of Fantasy*, *Starlight 1*, and *Weird Tales* between hard covers. Says here it's peopled by "Appalachian sirens, redneck devils, decaying popes, and all manner of revenants, not to mention Patton, Lincoln, and Groucho Marx." And includes the Hugo-nominated title story and the Nebula-nominated novella "The Executioners' Guild." Plus notes by the author. Plus two new stories, "Fenneman's Mouth" and "Lincoln at Frogmore." Plus there's an intro and an outro by two guys named Michael Bishop and John Kessel, with cover by somebody else named Bob Eggleton.

I'm already sending my \$23.95 postpaid to Golden Gryphon Press, 3002 Perkins Road, Urbana IL 61802. That way, I might see it before its October pub date. If you need more convincing, friends — quick, try www.goldengryphon.com or www.angelfire.com/al/andyduncan.

Long-lasting letterhack **Lloyd Penney** was also heard from, although just too late to get into the last ish:

"Interesting theories about Connectors, Salesmen and Mavens. I think I've had my

time as a Maven, especially when I chaired conventions. Now, I think I'm a Connector. The greatest tool for Connectors is a gigantic personal phone book, and that's what I've got. Yvonne and I have kept connected with fan groups of all interests in Toronto, lit, media, gamers, costumers, filkers, SMOFs and more, which is why we were able to fill our Worldcon committee with people with the widest possible variety of interests.

"When it comes to Steve Stirling's fiction, both my childhood and my adult days were fairly liberal, so I've never been exposed to anything military-minded. So when I first met Steve in Toronto, I admit I was turned off by his constant references to death and war. He wore black all the time, and if you were to talk to him for any length of time, you'd think it matched his soul. Steve used to live here, but now lives in New Mexico. I've never been able to read his fiction, and I still can't, and that largely goes for any military fiction ...

"In that issue of *Locus* that had pictures from the ICFA in Florida ... if I recall the pictures, there was one with all Canadian attendees. They had to pester Jay Kay Klein to take that picture, too. And, they didn't get all the Canadians there into the picture. Canadian participation in SF&F is reaching invasion proportions ...

"VCon 25 was a great time. Good flight out, fantastic con...they treated us like king and queen, and I've love to go back. Spider and Jeanne were great, too, and Spider's Beatles jam on Saturday night was one of the day's highlights ...

[O]n British food, you will notice that I did not mention that one-time delicacy of the English, the Mars bar, battered and deep-fried.

"Coming up for us ... TT2000, the local mediacon. This convention is hosting this year's Canvention, and handing out this year's Aurora Awards, Canada's version of the Hugos. I'm on the final ballot for two Auroras, and Yvonne is up for one, and we should be presenters during the ceremony itself. Should we bring home any pointy little trophies, I'll let you know."

Lloyd, fried Mars bars: didn't England ever sign the Geneva convention?

Meanwhile, my frank friend writer **Patrick O'Leary**, who excuses no fault in his own stuff, unfortunately extends this honesty to me. Patrick thinks my style and my Block Island report are both way too big and bloated:

"Regarding your vacation, which I'm sure was much shorter than it read (despite your ample wit and attitude): Less menus, more Christopher Walken."

Patrick softened this blow with talk about what a bad day he'd had. But in case he's right: If I'd *had* more stuff about actor and new Block Island resident Christopher Walken, I'd certainly have used it. Best I can do is a non-vacation bonus Walken story.

Did you ever hear Walken talk about meeting fans on the street? At least some years ago, when his disquieting visage was much seen in movies but he was not yet really famous, Walken used to have a riff that went something like this:

"Other actors have people come up, don't quite recognize them -- but *know* they know the face. Ask if they were in high school with them.

"Me ... they're positive we did *time* together!"

Fan writer **Evelyn C. Leeper** also jumps on my style, though in a more micro manner:

"On Page 6, you say, 'Who, since it was our anniversary, after all, felt free, even though it was, after all, my appetizer, to consume most of it.'

"This indicates an obsession with commas which you should probably have treated ...

"Tom Jackson says he is from Oklahoma and doesn't think of himself as a Southern fan because Oklahoma wasn't part of the Confederacy. This is pretty much the definition of "Southern" that people started with at the panel on Southern fandom at BucCONeer, although Mark Van Name immediately said that Texas shouldn't be included because "Texas is its own damn

thing.' Eventually the panelists (James Dorr, Andy Duncan, and Mark Van Name) decided that Southern was a mindset and a set of tropes: the legacy of the Civil War, segregation, integration, civil rights, family, history, land, climate, and eccentricity. There was also a notion of obsessive self-reflection and self-awareness. Oh, heck, just read my complete write-up at <http://fanac.org/worldcon/BucCONeer/w98-rpt.html#18>."

Evelyn, on commas: of course my sentence was overpunctuated for fun. But I'll admit that Anna Croke, a co-worker who suffered under the lash of my proofing/editorial dicta, once nicknamed me "The Comma-kaze." Which I thought was, well, one would have to say, brilliant, no?

Hot new writer **Barbara Chepaitis** has waded out to where the water is wide and perhaps more treacherous than in our little genre pool:

"I thought you'd want to know that my first mainstream novel, *Feeding Christine* (Bantam) is in the stores, for sale, hardcover and very pretty. It's about friendship, food, and love, not necessarily in that order, and for more info you can visit www.bantamdell.com."

Barbara, you must be flying high. All good wishes for success. Here's hoping you gets Rowling's sales and Erdrich's reviews.

Here's also hoping mentioning it here will spread the word far and — uh, well, near and narrow anyway.

About the title: I guess I'd rather feed Christine than Cujo.

After I mistakenly call fanzine stamina star **Mark Leeper**, he of the weekly e-zine *MT VOID*, Michael by mistake in an e-mail:

"Sounds like what I do all the time. I have long been a sufferer of IOWA. That's Infant Onset Weak Alzheimer's. Apparently they recognized it in grade school. I remember each year they had me taking IOWA tests to track the results."

Mark, I certainly remembered your great joke enough to use it about 6 times in the

last few days. But strangely enough, I usually forget to give you credit.

Pro flick critic **Dan Kimmel** sent early — and excited — word about *X-Men*:

"Right now it's my top contender for next year's Hugo for best drama. (Of course with almost half a year to go, things may change.)

"I don't know the comic books — I was a DC fan growing up — but I took the precaution of bringing Michael Burstein to the press screening and he vouched for the film's bona fides. The fact that [Marvel Comics founder] Stan Lee was billed as an executive producer (he also appears briefly as a hot dog vendor) may have something to do with it.

"In any case, this is a film that is at once serious and entertaining, providing the thrills and special effects while never forgetting that it's *really* about the people. Patrick Stewart and Ian McKellen are marvelous as, respectively Dr. Xavier and Magneto (the leader of the X-Men and the villain), and the rest of the cast shines as well. Model/actress Rebecca Romijn-Stamos has a get-up as shapeshifting Mystique that made me want to call her 'Eight of Nine.' I would have loved to have been on the set when they were spraying her costume on."

Dan, will do everything in my Power to see *X-Men*. We mutants gotta stick together.

I was already salivating before your most persuasive missive. Now my spit cup runneth over. Looks like director Bryan Singer, who scored with *Usual Suspects* but bombed with *Apt Pupil*, may be bouncing back eh? [In the event, I went. See my quick review this ish.]

Added note: actually, Dan, I hear that Stamos had her "costume" — a few scraps of plastic and lots of paint — uh, appliquéd by an all-female crew.

And one more thing. Wouldn't ex-men be ... castrati?

VERY GOOD:

Chicken Run — Run and go see it. Will scratch out more later, I hope.

X-Men — If unhappy people are more interesting than happy people, then unhappy superheroes are super-interesting. The creators of *X-Men* — I'll credit director Bryan Singer here, for short — have learned that lesson almost as well as Tim Burton did with his masterpiece *Batman*, and better than Alex Proyas did for *The Crow*. Although this one's not as dark as two other worthy contenders for top comics movies, *Spawn* and *Blade*, it for instance has more humor. Let's see, plot. We follow some unhappy young people — Logan (Hugh Jackman) and Rogue (Anna Paquin, the little girl of *The Piano* all grown up) who have special powers that come with equal or greater drawbacks. Logan fights like a wolverine in barroom gambling matches, and turns out to have a metal endoskeleton and extensible scimitar claws. (Rogue asks, "When they come out, does it hurt?" "Every time.") Rogue discovers at puberty that her kiss or even touch can suck men's power or very life essence dangerously low. Gee, wonder why adolescents so strongly identify with this stuff? I like very much how, strangers at a dark roadside bar in the Canadian wilds, the eyes of both flick to the TV in interest when news about the threat of newly evolving mutants comes on the news. They both identify with this, obviously, and end up at a training academy for mutant kids run by wheelchair-bound Professor Xavier (Patrick Stewart). But there's an opposing group, run by Magneto (Ian McKellen), who wants to make the world safe for us mutants. Super conflict ensues. The battles are pretty terrific, with lots of kicks, spins, and cool tricks, and a great grasp of comic book physics. The villains include Mystique (Rebecca Romijn-Stamos), who in an irony I bitterly resented can assume any form she wants — with a shape like hers, why on earth would we for 1 minute want her to change to anything else? — and Toad (Ray

Park), who has a tongue that can tie you in knots without saying a word. Surprisingly for me, Jackman's Wolverine steals the movie. I predict his furry good looks will single-facedly bring back long sideburns. Plus he's got a rebel appeal down pat — sort of like a really fierce Fonzie — and they give him most of the biting lines. When first introduced to kids with names like Storm and Cyclops, he looks at Professor Xavier and says, "What do they call you, Wheels?" And when ushered into the one of the movie's best sets, an impressive *Star Wars*-sized globe for focusing mental powers called, natch, something like the Cerebroom, he comments, "This certainly is a big round room." This certainly is a smart, entertaining comics movie.

GOOD:

The Patriot — Word is Mel Gibson was supposed to play Francis Marion (1732-1795), a real-life South Carolina brigadier of irregular militia whose guerilla strikes from his wetlands base resulted in his cool nickname, The Swamp Fox. (Geezers may recall the 1959 Disney TV series.) Then the producers saw Marion's race relations record — seems he was a slaveowner whom *other slaveowners* thought a little harsh on the help. You can just hear those nasty reviewers making jokes about *Slaveheart*. So they ginned up a fictional composite named Benjamin Martin. A handsome, widowed gentleman farmer (with a freedman-only labor force, natch), Martin's got grim memories of his gory heroism in the French and Indian War and isn't eager to make war for democracy: "Why should I trade one tyrant 3000 miles away for 3000 tyrants one mile away?" (There's some good spare verbal scene-setting in this flick, courtesy of Robert Rodat, who wrote *Saving Private Ryan*.) But when unendurably provoked by the nasty Brits, Martin wields musket, knife, and Cherokee tomahawk to bloody good effect. It *is* true his motivations remain somewhat nebulous throughout the movie ... Unlike the villain; *he's* obviously been reading from Himmler's playbook. Marion's actual British nemesis, the admittedly

unsportsmanlike Colonel Banastre Tarleton, is morphed into the totally evil, over-the-top colonel of dragoons William Tavington (Jason Isaacs), the Calley of the Carolinas. As for the rest of the cast, Gibson is now at that fateful age when they start hiring sex objects to costar — as your children. Here, his eldest is sturdy young blonde hunk Heath Ledger of TV's *Roar* and the movies' *10 Things I Hate About You*. Perhaps Gibson can take heart that, when the kid does get a romantic bedroom scene, he must play it sewn into a bundling bag. And Tchéky Karyo delights as the Ghost's sidekick, French General Jean Villeneuve. Shooting some clearly quitting Brits, he meets an outraged protest — "These men were about to surrender!" — with suspect Gallic solemnity: "Perhaps. We will never know." This flick is often really exciting; very good battle scenes, some tender moments with love interests Joely Richardson and Lisa Brenner, a good sprinkling of laughs, all usually well shot. My reservations? Well, *The Patriot* is produced by Dean Devlin and directed by Roland Emmerich — the same people who brought us *Stargate*, *Independence Day*, and *Godzilla*. These guys seem to go out of their way to sacrifice authenticity for a cheap laugh, sentiment, or thrill. Almost the first words out of Gibson's mouth, chiding his sons for not completing their fieldwork: "Well those swimming breaks really cut into the day, don't they?" Or when Ledger begs to sit next to Brenner, and she replies tartly: "It's a free country. Or at least it will be" ... *The Patriot* is the Chef Boyardee of Revolutionary War movies. I say this in honor of my college roommate Phil Cipolla, who, although used to wonderfully authentic Sicilian cooking at home, gobbled canned Chef Boyardee Spaghetti and Meatballs at school. Said Phil, "If you think of it as having *nothing to do* with actual spaghetti or meatballs, it isn't that bad!"

DECENT:

Me, Myself & Irene — The attempted mercy-killing of the cow, and a few other

bits, are fully up to the comic levels reached by the movie's creators, the Farrelly brothers, in their earlier *Something About Mary*. But why does Jim Carrey's character have to be so unlikeable?

The Perfect Storm — Good effects, but a big wave of melodrama almost sinks it. Only the strong cast (George Clooney, Diane Lane, Mark Wahlberg, etc.) keeps it afloat. You should certainly read the book. But maybe wait to rent the movie.

FAIR:

The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle — Good thing I loved the original. The laughs here are modest at best. And like the fine actors they are, Robert De Niro and Jason Alexander are never afraid to make fools of themselves. Unfortunately, this time they succeed.

Backchat

on *APA:NESFA* #360, May 2000
and #361, June 2000

To Michael Burstein

About my online letterhacks getting fuller treatment in *The Devniad* than you APA paperpushers: well, I don't in fact always quote online people in full. Depends how interesting they are, or at least how fullsome in singing my praises. But I get in all that I can, figuring at least everybody who reads the APA gets yours and everyone else's texts in full; what I don't print from an Ego Scanner spins silently and sorrowfully into the void ...

Fascinating report on Scott McCloud's new *Reinventing Comics*. I'm not a comics reader these days, but even I thought his 1993 *Understanding Comics* was, flatly, a masterpiece. (Go find a copy, everybody! There's never been a book quite like it.) The new one sounds like it's not similarly a conceptual breakthrough, but still worth reading — and I hadn't heard about it til you. A million thanks, Thought Balloon Boy.

To Pam Freemon

Love your rationale for naming your zine *Saga of the Crying Purple Gorilla*, after the best-selling elements one can have on a comics cover. What would be the equivalent for an SF publisher's art director, do you think? A spaceship ... with breasts ... menaced by Darth Vader ... wearing a Nazi armband ... about to be run over by the Hogwarts Express.

I share your frustration with most urban Webcams and their boring rooftop views.

I'm yelling at the screen: "Why aren't you down at street level by the café!?" Then I remember you'd have to encapsulate the thing with Batmobile armor or in most cities it would be trashed within the week.

Sorry you loathed *Dinosaur*; I was fairly charmed by it. Perhaps my critical faculties are less fully evolved.

To Mark Olson

The name of the hero of *Gladiator*, Maximus, sure sounds more heroic than Narcissus, the actual wrestler (not gladiator) who killed you-know-who in the end.

Loved your review of *Genes, People and Language* by Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza. Sounds like a must read. Hhmmm, the Basques may be isolingual because they're Cro-Magnons! Novel material there.

So you think two lousy movie reviews make you "nearly a Devney." Well, maybe the lousy part qualifies ... Keep up the good work, Media Man.

A cavil: Michael Crichton, although a decent sometime movie director, actually didn't direct that seriously undervalued Beowulf retelling *The Thirteenth Warrior*, based on his novel *Eaters of the Dead*. At the helm instead was John McTiernan, who'd earlier done good stuff like *Die Hard* and *The Hunt for Red October*. Learning-the-language tricks like the one you praised may be a McTiernan specialty. Remember in *Red October* when right at the start, Connery and company speak Russian, then you zoom in on Sam Neill's lips for a sec and when you widen out again he's speaking English? Never seen it done more neatly.

To Jim Mann

What are we, twins separated at birth?

I was interested in every single topic you brought up in May, from *The Lord of the Rings* to Trafalgar to Nelson Shakespeare's histories to DVD lists to Iain Menzies Banks' great first purely SF novel, 1987's *Consider Phlebas*.

Your "highly recommended" may underestimate that last; like a number of other fans, I consider it one of the best space operas of all time. Along with Banks' later

classic *Against A Dark Background*, which I still can't get out of my mind years after reading.

Some of the scenes and settings in *Background* — the mountain gondola, the beach, the huge train, the monastery/castle keep with its chain system running through its halls, the causeway — frankly, they haunt me still. That guy Banks certainly knows how to set a mood.

To Elisabeth Carey

Your May comments on what SF books to feed to your regular-folks book discussion group gave me furiously to think. Besides Finney's *Time and Again* or Butler's *The Parable of the Sower*, I'd suggest some more kind of slipstream stuff.

For recent works, how about Neal Stephenson's *Cryptonomicon* — codebreaking in World War II, plus computer hackers in our near future — or Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* — urban Caribbean magic in dystopian future Toronto — or Sean Stewart's *Mockingbird* — more urban magic, but Hispanic, in Houston — or Gregory Maguire's *Wicked* — her side of the story from the Wicked Witch of West Oz?

To Art Henderson

Very meaty contributions, guy! Thanks. Great list of 25 best SF collections of all time. So glad especially that you included *The Island of Doctor Death ... and Other Stories*; the title piece turned me onto the great Gene Wolfe. But the Cowper, McKenna, and Reamy are new to me. If you see this in time, you might toss any spare copies into the Zoroastromobile to tempt me at Readercon ...

Christianna Brand's *Green for Danger* sounds great! *There's* an author's name I haven't seen since the back stacks of the Canton, Mass., public library at about age 13. A Brit mystery from 1944 — seems to be a whole revival going of old mysteries. Will write more sometime soon about exciting news for fans of Manning Coles.

About getting the Harry Potter books, for the three people within the sound of my keystrokes who hasn't yet read them: of

course, again, any respectable bibliopurist can't be satisfied with the "translated" American editions (for instance, "Sorcerer's Stone," hah! The title is *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, the latter phrase having about 1000 years' worth more resonance). Insist on the British editions. If you don't have a Brit source handy, there's amazon.com/uk. Warning: we Americans *do* have nicer covers.

Beautifully detailed, informative history of the Science Fiction Book Club. If nobody has shown this yet to Ellen Asher, you should present a copy yourself at Readercon.

And I, too, adored Bergman's 1974 film of Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute*, even if it was in Swedish instead of German. (Sorry, Pam F.)

To George Flynn

Re Alison Scott's dismissal of all but one contender for the Fan Writer Hugo. First, it's hard to fault anybody's good taste in enjoying Dave Langford, the witty and graceful Bill Tilden of fanwriting. Second: hey, my stuff came off the best of the Yanks at "pleasant but undemanding." But I'll try it Alison's way. Next ish, a semiotically informed analysis of Readercon panel discussion touching fannish mixed marriage foreshadowing in *Finnegan's Wake*. In Basque.

About your bit on spell-checker suggestions: as we both get older and grayer, Bob Denver and I get more alike every day. Guess no man is an island, even Gilligan.

Ran a few NESFANS and others through Word's sense grinder, and among many dull guesses the machine did emit:

Leiberman = Liberian

Geisler = grislier geisha

Hillier = holler hellfire

Giguere = gigue giggler

Asimov = amiss Amish. A hint re the old story of the Lost Tribes of Southern Russia.

Very interesting. So in Malcolm Gladwell's original article in *The New Yorker*, the 1956 NYC gathering is correctly termed the World Science Fiction Convention, but as

I reported, in his book *The Tipping Point* it's wrongly given as the Science Fiction Writers Convention. Guess the publisher should have known better than to screw up *The New Yorker's* famous fact-checking.

To Leslie Turek

Your tour of Vienna sounds fairly fabulous. I hadn't realized the palaces were quite so expensively extensive, and the wealth of the empire so great. About "Crown Prince Rudolf ... found dead with his mistress in a hunting lodge in the Bavarian woods in 1889." At least two movies have been named after that lodge, Mayerling. The 1936 film starring Charles Boyer and Danielle Darrieux is supposed to be tres romantique, but one source says the 1969 British remake "stinks."

The National Library looks great. Especially that one little book nook 252 feet long with bookcases going about a mile up each wall, housing 2.6 million volumes. Maureen and I are planning to build an addition soon; must fly my architects to Vienna forthwith to take off the lines.

To Tony Lewis

Not one but two very thought-provoking threads in your June contribution. The glimpse inside the mind of a dedicated con-runner — you, I mean — was fascinating for us sideliners. Especially liked the bit about how people at Hartford for Costume-Con suffered from the lack of nearby decent restaurants open for the weekend — and realized that the site for Charlotte, which is bidding for the 2004 worldcon against our heroic Boston con men and women, would face the same slim pickings. Unlike Boston's citywide cornucopia. I take your point: grab fans by their guts and their votes will follow. Although I've always wondered what charlotte russe tastes like ...

And your beautiful and brilliant daughter Alice makes another great point, about SF's now being too mainstream. So all the young freaks and geeks flock instead to anime and manga for their cutting-edge cred? Sigh. A daunting prospect, trying to learn Japanese at my advanced age.

Ooops, out of time. More next ish.