

The Devniad Book 84a

un zine de Bob Devney
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A Haiku Bouquet

[These lapidary little efforts of mine appeared earlier this year in slightly different form in the world premiere issue of Burstzine, a new fanzine by Hugo-nominated short story writer Michael Burstein and Hugo-class enabler Nomi Burstein. Copies may still be available if you beg via e-mail mab@mabfan.com.]

[Note: the trick to osmosing haiku is, read slowly. But if you must go fast, rude Westerner, it's acceptable to just read each one over a dozen or so times instead]

YOUNG FAN:

Imagination
Is what sets SF apart.
The babes on *Farscape*.

OLD FAN:

Once, I sensed wonder.
But can autumn breezes still
Stir my propeller?

YOUNG WRITER:

Earnest neopro
Carefully fashions a rep.
The giants have gone.

OLD WRITER:

Our legend arrives
Fine mind afire, questioning.
Where is the green room?

The Reason of Sleep

As you get older ... you start many more paragraphs with "As you get older." But also you think more about sleep, because for many people it starts playing hard to get.

The mechanics of sleep are beginning to be well understood. Most physiological functions slow down; some, like epithelial tissue proliferation, speed up in a process of repair and growth; repetitive cycles occur through the whole experience, with theta waves up and down; the organism allots 5 to 30 minutes of rapid eyeball movement (REM) for every 100 minutes of sleep.

Why may be a harder question, but science is circling in on it. My *Columbia Encyclopedia* puts it nicely: "It has been hypothesized that while deeper phases of sleep are physically restorative, REM sleep is psychologically restorative." Because it seems that REM signals our precious dream time, wherein we process the images of the day for resolution, storage, or perhaps merciful forgetting.

In childhood, drifting off to sleep with my parents' voices softly buzzing in the background was one of life's great luxuries. (All the more luxurious for being rare, since most evenings my parents snarled at each other like wounded wolverines.) Queen Maureen seems to still experience sleep as a pleasure. Her eyelids slam shut as early as 7:00 p.m., and within seconds she's gone. (Of course, she gets up by 5:00 a.m. even on weekends. Coincidence?)

For me, sleep before midnight or 2:00 a.m. is a failure, a nightly surrender to the forces literally of darkness, leaving multiple things, enjoyable or necessary, all left undone. Even after I get to bed, dead tired, I lay awake and worry. About health, aging, work, and why I

never win a Hugo or write my fanzine stuff until the very last minute. (Coincidence?)

I worry about the fact that Alzheimer's disease runs in my wife's family. Though if short enough on sleep, I do a pretty fair imitation of Alzheimer's myself. The other day in work, I insisted to a colleague that the dangerous lunatic who's axe-whacking at the tree of liberty just outside his office as Attorney General was named John Ashworth.

This befuddled my colleague so much it was several minutes before he could remind me it's *Ashcroft*.

If you're fresh and rested, you probably have no trouble recalling that John Ashworth plays Judge Reinhold's balding, pudgy partner in the *Beverly Hills Cop* movies. Different name, more responsible approach to law enforcement.

Maybe I was tired.

Two years ago, a close friend shut his eyes on the major highway circling Boston. He was in the middle lane, I think, coming home from work in the late afternoon. With the sun in his eyes, which you'd think would keep you awake.

But he'd been short of sleep for days. Or perhaps more accurately, for years. Sound familiar to you? What is it about our culture that so devalues sleep? Did the trouble start with the electric light bulb, or later, perhaps commencing with the seductive delaying tactics of *The Tonight Show* and metastasizing into all the traps of all-night cable after too-long days at work? Anyway, my friend simply went asleep at the wheel, for just a little bit.

Researchers warn us these sleep microbursts become *involuntary*. Scary word in this context. Involuntary, if you game your system hard enough and long enough.

He hit the car ahead of him. Both vehicles (and my friend's sense of being safe in this world) suffered considerably. But no one was killed or seriously injured.

For awhile after hearing this, I tried to get better sleep myself, but you know how it goes. We sleep for a third of our lives. I seem to keep trying to make that just a fourth of our lives. It occurs to me now that if missing sleep takes, say, 15 years off my life, the equation might still work out God's way anyway.

One must acknowledge here the important work contributed in this area by Jerome Seinfeld. His Night Jerry/Morning Jerry

formulation — with Morning Jerry's constantly cursing the sleepless excesses to which Night Jerry has forced their shared organism — resonates with the experience of so many of us.

Again, when I was a kid — say, until last week — I was outraged that humans were designed so poorly. No hero in any comic book narrative, for instance, would take so much time each day eating, or be forced to spend a third of his time unconscious. And I still feel some of that resentment.

For instance: if the organism is so wise, why doesn't stress *encourage* sleep? How come it's so much harder for the general to find sleep before the great battle, the student before the life-determining exam, the ad man before the hundredth presentation showing the intrepid businessman's struggle to dodge pesky environmental regulations by conceptualizing him as a mountain climber?

A few lucky individuals are notable for slipping some of sleep's surly bonds. If you see a picture of Thomas Edison waiting his turn to speak on a public platform somewhere, look closely: chances are his eyes will be closed. Edison boasted of sleeping only 2 or 3 hours a night, but rarely mentioned that he napped like a madman during the day.

My father worked two jobs — ad man by day, restaurant chef or later waiter until late each night — for most of his last 20 years. He could sleep anywhere, anytime. He'd drive by a drugstore, stop, park, you'd go in to pick up some Chuckles, he'd be asleep when you emerged 6 minutes later. Dad asserted he'd acquired this priceless knack in the Army, along with learning how to scrub a toilet and how to chew out the middle of a target with a Thompson submachine gun. Unfortunately, he passed on only one skill out of three to me.

During the height of her filmmaking career, Katherine Hepburn was said to snooze an average of 12 hours a night. But one can take this too far. In his eighties, the British-French mathematician Abraham De Moivre (the guy that had refereed the Newton-Leibniz fight over who discovered the calculus first) slept 20 hours a day. Then he kept adding 15 minutes each time. The day after he reached 23 hours, he slept 24 hours and died.

In his sleep.

The villain in the new Bond movie *Die Another Day* can't sleep because of some kind of DNA makeover: "The insomnia is permanent for me. [*Gestures to chair with a peculiar full-face helmet fringed with sort of jellyfish tendrils thingies.*] An hour in the dream machine keeps me sane." A relative term, perhaps, for a guy who plans to conquer Earth with his satellite sun-focusing death ray.

In the most extreme case, it's said that, like Satan, Arthur C. Clarke's Sigmund Snoring, and the makers of half-hour TV testimonial advertisements, sharks never sleep. Turns out that, according to a 1998 article by J. Lee Kavanau in the *Brain Research Bulletin* (ain't the net great?), this is about right. Several kinds of shark (some species in the families Carcharhinidae, Triakidae, Sphyrnidae, Hexanchidae, and Lamnidae, to be exact — our friend Jaws belonging to the first group), among other marine creatures, appear not to sleep. They lack a gas bladder, and so must swim continuously or sink. (Note that this missing gas bladder conclusively refutes the popular analogy to lawyers.)

But this merely raises further questions. If not every organism needs sleep, why evolve such an on-the-face-of-it inconvenient mechanism in the first place?

As Kavanau puts it, "These findings raise the possibility that the selective pressure for the evolutionary origin of sleep was a conflict between the brain's waking needs for processing sensory information, predominantly visual, with its needs to refresh memory circuits for infrequently used functions. The conflict might have arisen as non-sleeping animals acquired increasingly complex brains, behavior, and visual competencies, together with ever enlarging stores of experiential and inherited memories. If under selective pressure, the brain were to achieve a more profound state of unresponsiveness to sensory inputs than usually occurs during restful waking, namely the state of sleep, circuit refreshment could have proceeded unimpededly."

So the more you sleep, the smarter you are? I score this Hepburn 12, Maureen 10, Edison 0.

In a larger sense, humans experience quite a few instances of profound unconsciousness in their span. Consider the great oblivion from which we are mystically gathered into life, its

brother blankness into which we will someday dissolve, the one-third portion of each day continually consumed, perhaps the odd episode of anesthesia or fever dream, that brief period in 1980 when I thought about voting Republican ...

I thought up this essay while trying to get to sleep. Now maybe I can.

Statistics of the Month

[From *Fast Food Nation* by Eric Schlosser, 2001 (page 83)]

Roughly four or five fast food workers are now murdered on the job every month, usually during the course of a robbery ... In 1998, more restaurant workers were murdered on the job in the United States than police officers.

[*Smile at a fast-food worker today. Or the terrorists have won.*]

Word of the Month

Nimrod — Since the mid-20th century, a hapless person, a fool. But the common meaning for centuries before that: a mighty hunter.

The connection? According to my 2000 edition of *The American Heritage Dictionary*, it was a single animated TV cartoon. Wherein Bugs Bunny refers to Elmer Fudd, wearing his hunting plaid and carrying his trusty long gun, as "poor little Nimrod."

That's all, folks.

NOTE: Or so I thought. But after the above, happened to do a little net research, and came across the following paragraph at <http://alt-usage-english.org/excerpts/fxnimrod.html> from someone named Mark Israel:

"Unfortunately for this theory, Jesse Sheidlower says that Random House has two citations of "nimrod" = "numbskull" from the 1930s, before the Bugs Bunny episode containing the taunt."

Any further theories, dweebs?

Quote of the Month

"A day without fusion is like a day without sunshine."

FlimFan

VERY GOOD:

Femme Fatale — It's the story of a bad girl, told by a perennial bad boy of the American cinema. The girl is Laure Ash, a con woman, jewel thief, and amorous amoralist played by Rebecca Romijn-Stamos. Who foreshadows much of the plot and succinctly sums herself up to Nicolas Bardo, a paparazzo played by Antonio Banderas: "I'm a bad girl, Nicholas. Rotten to the heart. Last scrape I was in, I fucked up a lot of people. People like me. People who don't forget." Many perverse complications ensue ... This tricky, stylish thriller is written and directed by Brian De Palma with the confidence to tell us large chunks of the story without words. But be warned (or encouraged): this is less the Big Hit Brian of *Carrie*, *Mission Impossible*, or *The Untouchables* and more the Dreamily Depraved De Palma of *Obsession*, *Dressed To Kill*, or *Snake Eyes*. (By the way, *Obsession* — the 1976 Hitchcock tribute with Cliff Robertson and Genevieve Bujold, a story about a New Orleans kidnapping — is still probably my favorite of his work. Great rental for a rainy Sunday when you feel the world's a pretty place but her heart is full of lye.) ... The sex stuff here, as usual in De Palma, is fairly off-putting (for me, anyway). There's a *Dreamgirls* strip-club-seedy, over-obvious edge. But Rebecca Romijn-Stamos is thankfully a little softer in her approach than Elizabeth Berkley. (You could cut meat with that girl's face.) And Banderas is surprisingly dialed-back and likable as the paparazzo. Another plus: the movie is quite comfortable setting itself in France. Even Romijn-Stamos' French accent (in English, I mean) seems credible ... This flicks plays tricks with coincidence, with time, and with the speed we're able to take things in. New characters join the story, and we scramble to keep up. At least one enters as a passer-by, blinking past our attention like an extra — but if you know his face from other De Palma movies (thinning blonde hair, arrogant eyes — it's Gregg Henry, who played a major character in *Body Double*), you're not surprised when he shows up later as Shiff the security expert. Another character appears wearing the same bloodstained shirt

we thought he died in years before. It takes a moment to figure out the one circumstance in which that might realistically occur. Hint: he says of the heroine: "I thought about her every fucking minute of every fucking hour for 7 fucking years." ... De Palma is so shamelessly show-offy — not sometimes but *always* too much. He loves the long shot, pulling back, with golden light and sweet violins. The man's a sensualist, and doesn't care who knows it. *Femme Fatale* is so lush and melodramatic, it feels something like the bad movie they're always making when they make a movie about making a movie? Except this is a *good* movie.

GOOD:

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets — What doth it profit a moviegoer if we gain a much smoother flick this time, with better special effects and more assured kid acting (plus Kenneth Branagh's stealing the show as author/ego Gilderoy Lockhart), but see less of Robbie Coltrane's ineffable Hagrid?

DECENT:

Die Another Day — Being the second-best Bond, as Pierce Brosnan now undoubtedly is, must be some consolation. (Halle Berry as the most independent-minded Bond girl helps me get through this one, I must say. Although there's a lot of cool sexy talk here without much in the way of hot sexy scenes.) Oh, and the millions this will make should help too.

Backchat

on APA:NESFA #389,
October 2002

To Joe Ross

Agree with much of your dubiety regarding the wording of those Trivial Pursuit questions. But seems the gameboys were right about one: Jimmy Carter's wife was born Eleanor Rosalynn Smith in 1927, so Rosalynn is indeed her middle, not first, name. My source: *Encyclopedia Britannica* online.

Oh, and looks like they were basically right about Aquaman, too, though you're correct that the epoch we're talking about long antedates the Boomer Edition's subject period.

Various net sources place Sub-Mariner's first appearance in *Marvel Comics* #1 dated November 1939, while Aquaman doesn't swim into our ken until November 1941 (in *More Fun Comics* #73). And one site (www.toonopedia.com/aquaman.htm) says it right out: "Aquaman was DC's answer to Marvel's Sub-Mariner."

To Tony Lewis

You're the second person I know that has liked Robert Metzger's *Picoverse* and suggested it as a Hugo pick next year. But I still can't keep from thinking of it, not as a novel, but as a very small poem ...

To Tom Endrey

Saw Roger Ebert praising *Kiki's Delivery Service* to the skies years ago. Now that I've finally seen a Miyazaki animated movie — his latest, *Swept Away*, which dazzled me — must go back and finally catch up with *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Kiki*, *Princess Monoke*, so on. Just bought *Mononoke* on DVD: will let you know.

Funny how you'll resist starting up with a new artist for a long time, despite all you hear of their brilliance: then finally give in. Most annoying that it often turns out everybody was right, you *would* have loved him or her. For instance, I hear Peake and Proust are really decent.

To Sarah Prince

Your bit about the second anniversary of your clothes dryer's catching fire reminds me of Samuel Pepys. (Claire Tomalin has just written a new biography; the reviews have him much in my mind.) He used to observe with some ceremony the anniversary of his freedom from "ye Stone." Referring to his dangerous but successful 1658 surgery, which cut out a kidney stone the size of a tennis ball. (Without antiseptis — or anaesthetic!) The great diarist used to mark the occasion with a triumphal dinner for his friends, and show off the thing in a special display case.

May we assume, Sarah, that your mantle proudly displays a charred lint screen?

To Elisabeth Carey

Thanks for the article on your recent hysterectomy. It was my most in-depth

exploration of another person's plumbing since the TV tour of Katie Couric's colon. Trust you're continuing to fart your heart out ...

The review of Robert S. McElvaine's *Eve's Seed* made it sound a fascinating book; your review was pretty fascinating itself. I laughed aloud abruptly, all alone in my office cubicle, when you remarked his argument "occasionally strays into the woo-woo."

To Sheila Perry

Like your bit about staying up too late at Albacon, and your resultant Non-Functioning Brain's causing you to misread the schedule and miss Sharon Sbarsky's GOH speech. This is why written material and instructions need to be so laboriously inched in the direction of idiot-proof. Because we're all idiots sometime. OK, George Flynn, Patrick Nielsen Hayden, and Gene Wolfe excepted.

To Paul Giguere

I echo your comments on Orson Scott Card's continuation of the Ender saga exactly. Except that I bought but haven't yet read *Shadow of the Hegemon*, afraid of trashing my good thoughts about the rest of the series. You know how TV shows are said to jump the shark? Let's say I was afraid Card had dune messiahed us here.

Sounds like I should relax and try it.

To Mark Olson

Within a week of your introducing us (in reviewing *Lost Languages*, by Andrew Robinson) to the delightful linguistic mystery of the Phaistos Disc from Crete — A clay Frisbee originating perhaps 3500 years ago? *Printed* glyphs running in a *spiral* inward to the center? *Single* known instance of this language? Fascinating, Captain! — I ran across other references to it not once but twice. I assume they've considered and discarded the theory that it's a really cool set of Ur-78 liner notes?

Also, about your review of Gordon Kane's book on the science of supersymmetry: Since you, one of our civilization's great proficientes at presenting murky subjects in pellucid terms, refer to the concept of "gauge symmetry" as "just plain too hard to explain in words," I'll assume it has nothing to do with round dials.