

In the land of Dinosaurs

I heard today that author and screen writer [Michael Crichton](#) died Tuesday.

I did like the movies based on his books (at least the ones I saw), but I really enjoyed the books. Especially the Jurassic Park books. His books kept me on the edge for the entire read. So much better than the movies. I think that is because my imagination is so much more creative than any digital or Hollywood effect.

Another loss in the creative world.

Things I like...

Not quite a list, because my interests are varied, but some of the things I like to do, all G-rated of course. (I have a daughter or two who may read this. Yes, they are all over 16, but they are still my little girls.)

I like insignificant bits of trivial knowledge. The more trivial the better. Knowledge that Diners Club was the first independent credit card (1949) and that is when the middle man started handling our money is interesting. Knowing that it came about because one of the first partners forgot their wallet at dinner is the cake. Knowing that partner was a man named Frank X. McNamara is the icing. Finding out what his middle name was would be, as they say, priceless.

I like reading. Of all sorts, but I tend to read Science Fiction, Fantasy (Swords/Sorcery), Mysteries, and Trivia on

the web. Will read almost any well written book. Great rainy day time filler.

Computers... Yep, I can't get enough of them. I work 8 hours a day on them and then I come home and spend free time on them... You would think I would get tired of the little buggers.

Cooking occasionally. There are times when I really want to whip up a special meal, I just don't like doing it everyday. But, you have to eat...

Time spent with friends. I'm glad to say I have a few people in my life, that don't seem to mind having me around. My wife used to call this "Adult Time". Sometimes, I think we adults act a bit like children, but that is part of the fun.

Softball and Baseball. Baseball is the only sport I ever really followed (I played at one time too). No matter how old I get, if I can still swing a bat and toddle down to first base, I plan on playing softball as often as I can. If I would do it more often, I imagine I wouldn't be as sore the next day...

Theater. In my college years, I never would have thought I would want to get on stage in front of people. Wasn't me at all in my early years. I've had a lot of fun doing my ham-bit on stage.

Science and math. Things that make my logical little brain tick. You've got to keep the gears greased to keep everything running smooth, and that's what the Science and math does for me...

A bit of wood working. I really like destruction the best, but I like using power tools. The smell of cut wood is something too.

And last but certainly not least, I like my family. Every dang one of them. They helped form the person I am today (along

with many others I've met along the way) and since I tend to like the person I became, I guess I could thank them once or twice... Nah, it would go to their heads wouldn't it.

The Kindle

While I'm on the subject of reading... I came across a cool looking device on amazon.com the other day – the Kindle. Have you heard of it? I hadn't, but it sounds pretty cool. Basically you can upload books, magazines, and even blogs to this portable device so you can read them anywhere. It appealed to me because I like to read in bed, and it seemed like a good way to get newspapers as well as stuff off the internet into a format that's easy for me to lie down and read. But the more I looked into it, the more I realized it's not really for me. The first clue was its \$350 price tag. No thanks. Maybe for \$50 or so, I'd be interested... The other thing about the Kindle is the fact that you have to *buy* books to put on it. I can't tell you the last time I bought a full price book from a book store. I get my books from my existing collection, friends, or most frequently, the library – all free sources. I could not picture a scenario where I'd be buying a book, even if it was to be put on this device. I guess the thing that appealed to me most about it was putting my town's daily newspaper on it so I could read it in bed. My paperboy delivers at 5pm – just in time for the chaos in the house to peak as kids are coming home and I'm starting dinner and all that stuff – so it's tough for me to keep up with reading the daily paper. But I'm sure the daily paper from my small town wouldn't even be available on the Kindle anyway...

But I thought it was a cool invention and I could see there being a market for something like this for people who travel a

lot and love to read. I find it strange that I hadn't heard about it sooner, but they really need to lower the price on it if they want it to catch on!

Welcome back gift

As I said last post, I started working again this past week. What I didn't mention is my welcome back gift. In the past, I have received books at one of the district's workshops. Well, this year I didn't attend their workshop due to not planning on going back to subbing. I found out later that I couldn't have attended it anyway as this year they only allowed new subs. I guess they got tired of paying returning subs who already had the information. That's right, they pay subs to attend the workshop, then also pay for their lunches, materials, and extras like the books I mentioned. Another district workshop also pays subs to attend, but we have to work five days before receiving the pay for the workshop, and they don't give away books or even pay for lunch. Fine by me- I don't have lunch provided throughout the year, so why at the workshop? Anyway, you're probably wondering what gift I received this year since I didn't attend the one workshop? Well, the gift I received was a most unwelcome one- a cold. Colds any time of the year are depressing, but during allergy season when I'm already suffering it's downright oppressive. I kept waking up from the cold last night to a nose that would constantly run. Yes, I took Nyquil before going to sleep, but apparently that only worked for a few hours at best. Now I am a bit miserable which is why I can feel free to pass along some other misery in the form of a little rant about one of the districts.

Yesterday I mentioned problems signing up with this district.

They seem to want more information than other districts for people who want to sign up with them. Fortunately, since I was already on file from a few years ago they didn't need transcripts or a new letter of recommendation. Why do they even want them in the first place? It's only subbing, not a permanent position, and as for the transcript that's required by the state to get a sub certificate which is also required. It doesn't make a lot of sense that the district would want them too. I still had to fill out new forms for taxes, background check, employment eligibility, retirement, etc. I also had to fill out a new application. Well, at least they don't require a cover letter and résumé. In any event, the paperwork isn't even the main focus. What has been keeping me so far from employment there as a sub is fingerprinting. Fingerprinting is required by law for this sort of job. That's not the complaint. It's their execution of this requirement that making me wait. It seems they only do fingerprinting for 30 minutes on any given day, maybe 45. Say what? That's it?? No wonder they couldn't fit me in to do it for a week after I call. Then, when that day comes up, I get a call in the morning- sorry, we have to reschedule you as the people taking the prints are doing something else today. we can reschedule you for a week from now...

So, I am still sitting here with the paper work. I can only hope that I can start working right away after this is done, but they still probably have to wait for the results on that and the background checks. Well, I survived last year on three districts (realistically since the other barely called me) so I can survive another couple of weeks waiting for this one. I guess I can't entirely blame them- I did sign up at the last minute. For all I know they had a couple of full days a month ago for fingerprinting. Oh, well. I will just have to be patient. With this cold as well as with work. I hate colds...

Time and Numbers

Every so often I write something to try to get some of the lurkers, who read my blog, to stop and say hi. This is another of those posts.

I am a numbers person, so I am fascinated by the statistics that are generated for this blog. Some topics seem to bring more people. Books, Haunted houses, Star Wars, Indiana Jones, Moon Landings are all big draws. Big of course is a relative term. This blog has been averaging about 15 readers per day. My maximum in 1 day (that I know of) was just over 80. The average this week was around 25. I realize that some of the 'readers' I am seeing are just robots or data mining sites, but when they find something that, in the programming, is found interesting, they leave blog replies. Some of the people who come to read just won't do it.

I know a couple of the 'shy' people, and I don't really expect replies from them (they know who they are). There are others that I think would be very interesting to hear from.

Things I would like to know about you. How did you find this blog? What do you want to read here? What country/state are you from? Do you come back often? Am I boring you? Just pop in to say hello. Again, until you are 'vetted' (good political term, no?) your replies will only be seen by me, or maybe the owner of the place, he once 'hacked' in for a April Fools joke... But he is a good friend of mine, almost like a long lost brother. So if you don't want them to be seen, let me know in the response, and I'll get rid of it. Me, I'm just curious...

Other things I want to know. Why is a site in Russia interested in my blogs on Superman Movies? Why isn't the same

site interested in Batman? Just wondering..

This is just stuff I was thinking about this Saturday morning...

Loaded with tags, just for fun? Just having a bit of fun, that's what blogging is all about.

More on Books

A friend at work loaned me a book that she thought I would like. The authors of the book were Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child. The story was one of a series and the title was "Brimstone". A very good book revolving around a New Jersey Cop and an FBI agent. I've learned that this book was part of a continuing series of D'Agosta and Pendergast stories. Each one dealing with some strange crime. They could be weird science disguised as occult, or even 'real' monsters. The story telling was gripping, and these books are very hard for me to put down. Some were a little tense for late night reading, but all of them kept my attention.

I've read the following and am working on the others. I would recommend them for any who likes good mysteries.

Relic – First book in the series

Brimstone – not sure where this is in the series, but I think there is more than one book before this one

Dance of Death – Follows right after Brimstone

For those of you who live in my area, forget the local library for a month or so, I just checked out the following

Reliquary – 2nd book I think

The Wheel of Darkness

The Book of the Dead

and Mount Dragon – Not part of the above series.

Good reading..

Currently reading...

I am a reader. I have been a reader since I was a child, especially of science fiction and fantasy. I remember back when I was around ten, reading a book series about an alien called a “Martinean” who everyone called Martin E. Ann, assuming that was his name. Except for the boy who knew he was an alien of course. I don’t remember anything about that series aside from that, but it shows that I have been reading for awhile. I have read some Isaac Asimov, Ben Bova, Piers Anthony, Terry Goodkind, Terry Brooks, Terry Pratchett, Alan Dean Foster, Robert Jordan, and more. Currently I picked up a new book at the library from Timothy Zahn, called [The Third Lynx](#). Noting this was the second book in a series, I also picked up [Night Train to Rigel](#) from the non-recent stacks and read it first. Now before I continue, I should say that there are a few types of books. There are those that you take one look at and then leave on the shelf. Then there are those that you read for a bit and then realize that reading that book is just a waste of time, so you either force your way through it just so you can say you finished it or you stop reading it. I actually had a book of this type recently, a Star Trek Titan book part of a post-Nemesis movie about Captain Riker and his starship, Titan. I read one by a homosexual author who put a scene in the book that served no purpose other than to say that he believes in homosexual relationships. In fact, you could remove those pages entirely and no one would ever realize it was missing as it had no bearing on the plot. Anyway, I digress. After finishing that

one, part of the third category I have yet to mention, I checked out another one where they found entire groups of the giant sentient “spaceships” Captain Picard and company encountered at Farpoint way, way back in the very first Next Generation episode. After getting about halfway through I realized that the book was just not my type of book so I stopped reading it.

The third category included those books that you read and finish, but are just not memorable. You finish the last page, close the book, and go, “meh- whatever.” The last category is the book you just can’t put down. Timothy Zahn is one author who writes books like these, at least in my view. Star Wars fans might find his name familiar as he had the first books out in the newly approved-for-writing post-episode-VI universe. This first trilogy consisted of the books [Heir to the Empire](#), [Dark Force Rising](#), and [The Last Command](#). Leia and Han Solo are now married and give birth to twins Jacen and Jaina, and later Anakin (you know who he’s named after...). Luke starts taking on students who would become new Jedi. I read this series about ten or so years ago and thoroughly enjoyed it. When he wrote a couple more Star Wars books I was quick to read those as well. He introduces a new enemy known as Grand Admiral Thrawn. He was an extremely brilliant alien strategist bent on keeping the Empire alive after Palpatine was gone.

His new books star a character who bears some resemblance to Thrawn in that he is quite brilliant in his own trade, as an investigator, or spy. Once employed by a government agency, Frank Compton had a falling out and was fired, though not for lack of competence. He has just taken on a job for someone when another one falls in his lap in the form of someone who dies just as he finds Frank. Frank picks from his pocket a quadrail (futuristic train that travels interstellar distances) ticket in his name, and leaves immediately to discover an answer to this mystery and is led to the one who

would hire him, leaving the first job on the backburner- or did he? The employer for the first job is only revealed later in the book, and the job he was hired to do not until the very end. There are some imperfections in the books, but overall they are also books that I can't put down. I will definitely be adding Zahn to the list of authors I will be keeping an eye out for, and I will have to read the other books he's written as well.

Astronomy Book Review...

I have a book for people with little or no background in Astronomy. It is called quite simply "The Stars – A New Way to See Them" by H. A. Rey.

I learned my constellations by the having star charts with lines connecting the various stars in a group (constellations and asterisms) and except for a very few, they looked nothing like what the name given. Then there were other books that put drawn pictures around the stars, but they did nothing to connect the stars in any reasonable fashion. Enter H. A. Rey with his book. He made simple stick figures with the stars that look surprisingly like the names of the constellations. He also uses English names for the constellations so you don't have to know Latin to figure it out. Neat stuff for the beginner.

This book is designed for naked eye viewing. You don't need a telescope or binoculars to use it. As you get comfortable with the stars, he does point out things to look at with either binoculars or a small telescope, but this book is designed more as a major road map, not something that gives you all the little tourist stops.

I will admit that even though I've been into Astronomy for over 30 years, I never really took the time to discover or remember the constellations. I know the major ones, and can use my star chart to find others, but this book will help me to remember ones I don't know at the present time. It will be nice to know my way in the sky without having to consult a map every time I look at something I don't know.

If you struggle with what star is what, I give this book a very strong recommendation.

More on interesting blogs

Currently (as I write this), my top read posts contain two posts I wrote about books. If I look at the posts from the last 10 days, I find posts about books take 4 of the top 10 spots. I just found this fascinating. In fact one of my best few days in blogging (most visitors in a 24 hour period) came after I wrote about my favorite books.

This got me thinking. If I'm not in a play, I tend to read a great deal. Recently my tastes have been stuck in Science Fiction and Mysteries, but I will read different things at different times. Really different at some times, during my high school days I read 4 different encyclopedia sets from A to Z. Ok, one of them was a children's set I read again, but I did read it during High School.

Anyway, I was thinking I need to take my reading in a new direction. So if you have a book you really like, please respond. I'm going to try to read as many as I can. I'm a quick reader, so depending on the list, it may not take too long.

Yes, this is another one of those posts designed to change lurkers into responders....

Recent books I've read

Why did it have to be Snakes (Mysteries of Indiana Jones) Lois H. Gresh and Robert Weinberg

The Early Asimov – Isaac Asimov

Sherlock Holmes and the case of Sabina Hall L. B. Greenwood

and re-reading A Morbid Taste for Bones – Ellis Peters

Books to read...

Stole this one from Tanja's site. It looked like fun.

The Big Read, an initiative by the National Endowment for the Arts, estimates that the average adult has read 6 of the top 100 books they've printed. How about you?

- 1) Look at the list and bold those you have read.
- 2) Italicize those you intend to read.
- 3) Underline the books you LOVE.

- 1 Pride and Prejudice – Jane Austen
- 2 **The Lord of the Rings – JRR Tolkien**
- 3 Jane Eyre – Charlotte Bronte
- 4 **Harry Potter series**
- 5 **To Kill a Mockingbird – Harper Lee**
- 6 **The Bible** (multiple versions)
- 7 Wuthering Heights – Emily Bronte
- 8 **Nineteen Eighty Four – George Orwell**

- 9 His Dark Materials – Philip Pullman
- 10 **Great Expectations – Charles Dickens**
- 11 **Little Women – Louisa M Alcott**
- 12 Tess of the D'Urbervilles – Thomas Hardy
- 13 **Catch 22 – Joseph Heller**
- 14 **Complete Works of Shakespeare (Partially)**
- 15 Rebecca – Daphne Du Maurier
- 16 **The Hobbit – JRR Tolkien**
- 17 Birdsong – Sebastian Faulks
- 18 **Catcher in the Rye – JD Salinger**
- 19 The Time Traveller's Wife – Audrey Niffenegger
- 20 Middlemarch – George Eliot
- 21 **Gone With The Wind – Margaret Mitchell**
- 22 **The Great Gatsby – F Scott Fitzgerald**
- 23 **Bleak House – Charles Dickens**
- 24 War and Peace – Leo Tolstoy
- 25 The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy – Douglas Adams (Not Yet)
- 26 Brideshead Revisited – Evelyn Waugh
- 27 Crime and Punishment – Fyodor Dostoyevsky
- 28 **Grapes of Wrath – John Steinbeck**
- 29 **Alice in Wonderland – Lewis Carroll**
- 30 **The Wind in the Willows – Kenneth Grahame**
- 31 Anna Karenina – Leo Tolstoy
- 32 **David Copperfield – Charles Dickens**
- 33 **Chronicles of Narnia – CS Lewis**
- 34 Emma – Jane Austen
- 35 Persuasion – Jane Austen
- 36 **The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe – CS Lewis**
- 37 The Kite Runner – Khaled Hosseini
- 38 Captain Corelli's Mandolin – Louis De Bernieres
- 39 Memoirs of a Geisha – Arthur Golden
- 40 **Winnie the Pooh – AA Milne**
- 41 **Animal Farm – George Orwell**
- 42 **The Da Vinci Code – Dan Brown**
- 43 One Hundred Years of Solitude – Gabriel Garcia Marquez
- 45 The Woman in White – Wilkie Collins

- 46 Anne of Green Gables – LM Montgomery
- 47 Far From The Madding Crowd – Thomas Hardy
- 48 The Handmaid's Tale – Margaret Atwood
- 49 **Lord of the Flies – William Golding**
- 50 Atonement – Ian McEwan
- 51 Life of Pi – Yann Martel
- 52 **Dune – Frank Herbert**
- 53 Cold Comfort Farm – Stella Gibbons
- 54 Sense and Sensibility – Jane Austen
- 55 A Suitable Boy – Vikram Seth
- 56 The Shadow of the Wind – Carlos Ruiz Zafon
- 57 **A Tale Of Two Cities – Charles Dickens**
- 58 **Brave New World – Aldous Huxley**
- 59 The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime – Mark Haddon
- 60 Love In The Time Of Cholera – Gabriel Garcia Marquez
- 61 Of Mice and Men – John Steinbeck
- 62 Lolita – Vladimir Nabokov
- 63 The Secret History – Donna Tartt
- 64 The Lovely Bones – Alice Sebold
- 65 **Count of Monte Cristo – Alexandre Dumas**
- 66 On The Road – Jack Kerouac
- 67 Jude the Obscure -Thomas Hardy
- 68 Bridget Jones's Diary – Helen Fielding
- 69 Midnight's Children – Salman Rushdie
- 70 **Moby Dick – Herman Melville**
- 71 **Oliver Twist – Charles Dickens**
- 72 **Dracula – Bram Stoker**
- 73 **The Secret Garden – Frances Hodgson Burnett**
- 74 Notes From A Small Island – Bill
- 75 Ulysses – James Joyce
- 76 The Bell Jar – Sylvia Plath
- 77 Swallows and Amazons – Arthur Ransome
- 78 Germinal – Emile Zola
- 79 Vanity Fair – William Makepeace Thackeray
- 80 Possession – AS Byatt
- 81 **A Christmas Carol – Charles Dickens**

- 82 Cloud Atlas – David Mitchell
- 83 The Color Purple – Alice Walker
- 84 The Remains of the Day – Kazuo Ishiguro
- 85 Madame Bovary – Gustave Flaubert
- 86 A Fine Balance – Rohinton Mistry
- 87 **Charlotte's Web – EB White**
- 88 **The Five People You Meet In Heaven – Mitch Albom**
- 89 **Adventures of Sherlock Holmes – Sir Arthur Conan Doyle**
- 90 The Faraway Tree Collection – Enid Blyton
- 91 Heart of Darkness – Joseph Conrad
- 92 The Little Prince – Antoine De Saint-Exupery
- 93 The Wasp Factory – Iain Banks
- 94 **Watership Down – Richard Adams**
- 95 A Confederacy of Dunces – John Kennedy Toole
- 96 A Town Like Alice – Nevil Shute
- 97 **The Three Musketeers – Alexandre Dumas**
- 98 **Hamlet – William Shakespeare**
- 99 **Charlie and the Chocolate Factory – Roald Dahl**
- 100 **Les Miserables – Victor Hugo**

I counted 41 read from this list. Some of them I had to read for High School or College, and can not remember them. Others on the list I've looked at but could not get through the first chapter. Some I haven't even heard of. The list is lacking Science Fiction, not even Jules Verne or Isaac Asimov. I feel both authors have better books than the Dune Series by Herbert