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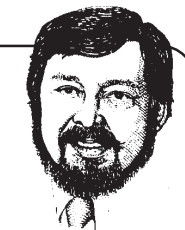
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POPCORN™

Dr. Dolittle Has The Rx For Laughter

By Michael S. Goldberger

One Popcorn, Poor • Two Popcorns, Fair • Three Popcorns, Good • Four Popcorns, Excellent



W.C. Fields warned fellow funnymen about the pitfalls of working with children and animals. At best, the little buggers upstage you. At worst, they obfuscate you altogether. Surely he never figured that a veritable jungle of beaked, fanned and furry beasts could be used to one's comic advantage. But in *Dr. Dolittle*, Eddie Murphy displays restraint and professional wisdom by allowing the animals to claim the limelight. Why shouldn't he? They're funnier.

While Mr. Murphy may be no less professionally vain than W.C., he is obviously a realist. His film successes have been sporadic at best, and that's no laughing matter, literally. While Murphy received good grades for his stint in *The Nutty Professor*, missing of late is the acerbic, in-your-face whimsy that marked earlier characterizations like Billy Ray Valentine (*Trading Places*), Reggie Hammond (*48 Hours*) and Axel Foley (*Beverly Hills Cop*).

Although the unevenly scripted *Dr. Dolittle* is littered with all manner of shortcomings, it is brimming with good cheer. Thanks to the movie magic coordinated by Jim Henson's Creature Shop and special effects supervisor John Farhat, the illusion of animals enunciating their words with seamless accuracy is uncanny. To boot, they get all the good lines. The laugh-out-loud proceedings go a long way to forgiving the film's flaws. But, for at least the moment, it means Eddie Murphy is the highest paid straight man in Hollywood.

Based on the novel by Hugh Lofting, this remake of the 1967 musical starring Rex Harrison bears little resemblance to the original, save for the Pollyanna notion at its core: that we might somehow make verbal connection with the animal kingdom and thereby expand the concept of world harmony to include all living beings. Whole soggy sacks of other pie-in-the-sky concepts serve as sub-plots and weave sinuously through the tale, buoyed only by the film's generous ambiance.

First seen as an adolescent, young John Dolittle discovers that he can habla animal. In an expository scene, the family dog explains the canine art of sizing up an acquaintance: "If you really want to get to know someone, you have to smell..." Well, you get the idea. John's dad (Ossie Davis) is abashed when his son tries the method out on the principal. The dog is banished: John is forbidden to converse with anything outside of his own species.

Flash forward. Now grown-up and uptight, Dr. John Dolittle makes his dad look like Dr. Spock. Per screenwriters Matt Mauldin and Larry Levin, because John was denied the companionship of pets in his formative years, now only grudgingly does he allow his daughter a guinea pig. He lets the office supersede his family life. And, if his mercenary partner (played to decent comic effect by Oliver Platt) has his way, Dr. Dolittle is ready to compromise his medical ethics for a lucrative business merger. In movie parlance, he is due for redemption.

Again it starts with man's best friend, Lucky (voiced by Norm Macdonald), who Dr. Dolittle almost runs over. Did the mongrel call him a 'bonehead'? Then the guinea pig, Rodney (Chris Rock), lends voice. Soon it's a menagerie of cacophonous inundation, with the good doctor certain he is going batty, so to speak. Escaping to the countryside north of San Francisco where his family is vacationing, things worsen. Having removed a twig from a thankful owl's wing, Dr. Dolittle instantly becomes a legendary healer among the fur and feather set.

The usual silliness ensues, the frantic doc trying to be all things to all people, and animals, without letting the humans in on the gambit. Of course, his crazy antics could sour the looming merger. What is more, the rift between him and his daughters seems to be widening — shades of his own failed father-son relationship. These and other contrived consequences come to bear with the subtlety of a falling anvil.

Trying to be funny in the midst of this obvious cliché, Mr. Murphy desperately resorts to Lucy-ization. You know: scheming Lucy has something to hide and, according to Ricky, she has "some splainin to do." So she mugs the camera,

and hopes that an artistic medley of facial contortions will extricate her from the seemingly impossible fray. Only problem is, Murphy isn't Lucy. Thus he remains a victim of a predictable plot that pays no specific attention to his particular brand of shtick — relegated to feeding a zoo of colleagues their comedic cues. Happily, they don't let him down.

Norm Macdonald's steady patter of wry utterances as Lucky the mutt steals the show; Chris Rock's nervous prattling as Rodney the guinea pig is equally disarming; Gary Shandling and Julie Kavner as introspective pigeons maintain a droll running dialogue; and Reni Santoni and John Leguizamo are aces as two bickering rats. In one scene, after Dr. Dolittle ministers to one of the vermin, the other rodent addresses his pal: "I don't know what I would have done if you died." He retorts: "You would have dragged me outside and eaten me." To which his pal responds, "Ya, but only out of respect."

All things considered, the motley wild-life in *Dr. Dolittle* generates some very biting humor. But an Eddie Murphy in top form could have made it more fun than a barrel of monkeys.

Dr. Dolittle, rated PG-13, is a 20th Century Fox release directed by Betty Thomas and stars Eddie Murphy and the voices of Norm Macdonald and Chris Rock. Running time: 91 minutes.

THE word™

BY JO & JOHN JACOBSON

PRINT

If you feel a pressing need to toast your success with Champagne upon acquiring an important print, map or other historical printed matter, don't be concerned. For, you see, the printing press used to print on paper was a later refinement of the beam press first used to press wine and olives circa 1500 BC.

The print word is, in fact, a cognate of the Latin word *promere*, meaning to press. After all, that is exactly what happens in most traditional printing methods; paper is pressed onto an inked surface or vice versa.

Although the Egyptians, Sumerians and Assyrians are credited as the first people to convert grape juice to wine, it was the Chinese who invented woodblock printing in the 7th Century AD. This method was first used to print whole book pages.

In the late 14th Century, religious booklets called Poor Man's Bibles were printed in this manner. Playing cards and posters soon followed. Individual wood type was first used to stamp titles onto books as early as 1420, but the invention of movable metal type is attributed to Johann Gutenberg of Mainz, Germany in 1450.

We hope you will always enjoy feeling pressured to search for coveted rare prints, but if you feel compelled to celebrate with fermented grape pressings, please do so at a safe distance from your prints. Because a slip of the sip can sink a pip (of a print).

Democracy May Not be Flawless, But Remains Unmatched So Far

By Louis H. Clark

There is one scene in the motion picture *Gettysburg* which has stuck in my mind. I bought a cassette of it for my own VCR.

A young Union captain is talking to three Confederate prisoners of war. One of them asks him, "What are you fighting for, Captain?"

He looks at them speculatively and answers, "This is the only nation on earth which was started by common people and run by common people who are elected by common people. No kings or nobles started it. That is why I do not want to see this country destroyed." Now everyone knows the United States is not peopled by angels, and this is not paradise. Churchill once said, "Democracy is the worst sort of government I can think of. But it is still better than anything else we see or have seen."

There are many people — intelligent ones — who say with pride, "I have never voted." These are the people who cry the loudest at anything they think is stupid, irrelevant or just plain thievery. They forget that whenever there is a

lot of money around, there are bound to be people with gluey hands and zippered pockets grabbing the bribes, while wrapping themselves in an American flag as they stand up in church crying out for dear old mother.

"Throw the bums out," is a privilege only given in democracy. Just think of France under all those Louises. There, the judges inherited their offices and could not be thrown out of them. Some of them were serving in a straight line for 400 years until the Revolution came.

Who did the British put in charge of their War Office during the American Revolution? A man who showed such a lack of brains, leadership and all the other requirements of an officer. But he had one thing going for him that overrode the report on him which said, "This man should never be allowed to be put in charge of troops." But he was a Lord and a rich one to boot. His name was Lord St. Germain. A man marked by indolence, procrastination and long weekends.

General Schwartzkopf would have had him shot.

"Land Save" Group Cites Links Between Recycling And Incinerator Costs

Editor's note: This column was submitted by David F. Moore, the Executive Director of the New Jersey Conservation Foundation located in Far Hills.

Many years ago a major incinerator was planned for the Hackensack Meadows. Thanks to the foresightfulness of the Garden State Paper Company, and a coalition of objecting businesses and environmental groups called the Committee for Resource Recovery, it was never built.

I'm pleased to say the New Jersey Conservation Foundation, which I direct, was involved from the beginning. With an incinerator financial bailout controversy now raging, it is instructive to look back to see what we might learn.

Today state law mandates recycling, and there's a pioneering state recycling plan to carry it out. Both are a result of the nonprofit successor to the aforementioned coalition, called the Recycling Forum.

The state mandated that county gov-

ernments were to deal with their own trash problems, or work it out with their peers. That law came about when counties lobbied hard against state control of trash, complaining about the loss of home rule.

Trash has come home to roost, thanks to a court ruling defining garbage as a substance worthy of interstate commerce. Years ago, some counties facing mounting landfill costs opted for capital-intensive incinerators. Such facilities depend on a steady source of high-cost garbage, with lots of paper and plastics in it to keep the fires burning, in order to pay off the capital debt. The state did its best to discourage too many from being built, but failed.

For openers, incinerators are in competition with recycling. The more we recycle, the less suitable fuel for the incinerator, and the harder it is to pay for it. That's why Garden State Paper and other secondary materials users wanted nothing to do with a Meadowlands incinerator. The more it burned, the fewer old newspapers there were as raw material for paper recycling mills.

Now the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that garbage is subject to interstate commerce rules, meaning landfills in other states can compete with our incinerators for your trash. The result is not enough garbage to pay for county trash burning. What's proposed now is that you and I as state taxpayers help the counties with their incinerator debts. There are several bills in the legislature to do so.

The same ruling may have an effect on recycling too, for the cheaper it is to dump in some other state, the harder it is to make recycling ends meet, even though some incinerators produce and sell electricity.

We have major new manufacturing operations that have moved in to take advantage of recycled materials, so finding ways to discourage incineration in favor of recycling increases jobs. We need to be very careful that our bailouts don't cause a decline in recycling rates. There's not much we can do once trash is commingled and burned with the leftovers, whereas separated throwaways can be converted to useful products again quite easily, and at less cost than if from virgin materials.

New Jersey was once a dumping ground for other states. With the proposed deregulation of trash, we may be again, if for no other reason than to help pay off incinerators.

What we need to do is to foster more reuse of things we cast off, reduce the volume of things we buy that require disposal, and recycle as much as possible. That includes not only glass, aluminum, plastic, paper and steel, but organic garbage and yard waste, both of which make good compost.

While I have some sympathy for the counties which were sucked into the trash-burning trap, the fact is that we allowed the overbuilding of incinerators. The penalty for poor decision-making shouldn't fall on all of us equally.

From Camelot To Westworld

In the mythical world of Camelot as described in Tennyson's *The Lady Of Shalott*, rural Arthurian English society is characterized as blissful, chivalrous and honorable. Purportedly, during this period, society's roots of morality ran deep.

In the 20th century, the 1973 film *Westworld*, directed by Michael Crichton, presents a view of modern society that is glitzy and void of morality. The film's town is "Disney"-like — created by technical wizardry. Life in Westworld was structured only for profit and celebrated the pursuit of individual pleasure — self-gratification.

A *Westworld* slogan promised that "you can't get hurt and nothing can go wrong."

Predictably, as movie scripts go, the town collapsed to nothing but rubble in a doomsday scenario. Westworld's dreams of the perfect society — its "Tower of Babel" — failed — unsupported. The society lacked "roots" and a sense of community.

Yet Westworld's leaders were not necessarily immoral. They just ignored — or forgot to heed — the essential need for investment in long-lasting values, something that wasn't measured by the bottom line.

As we approach the year 2*10^3 (2000 in techno-speak) there's a good feeling in America — "you can't get hurt, nothing can go wrong." Is it Camelot all over again?

Westfield, for instance, seems to be approaching its own Disney-like era. The technical wizardry of Comcast Cablevision is wiring our homes. AT&T is using Westfield as a model for marketing research. Retail stores like The Gap, Banana Republic, Foot Locker, Williams-Sonoma, and Nine West are filling the downtown. The Downtown Westfield Corporation plans to advertise Westfield on billboards along Route No. 22 and beckon all to come.

But think about it. Is more — or bigger — necessarily better?

How easy is it, now, to cross the street on foot in downtown Westfield? What if a parking garage goes up across the street from the Westfield Post Office, next to a proposed "pocket park?" Will it all then be better?

Camelot may not truly exist anywhere but in Tennyson's poetry, yet let's not slide unthinkingly into something resembling *Westworld*.

Let's ask our own "merchants of Westworld" to get involved in our very real, vibrant towns. It makes good sense. Good business sense. Good quality-of-life sense.

Let's not invest the heart and soul of our towns in business ventures that pack up and flee in the middle of the night, whenever the wind should blow from a different direction.

Letters to the Editor

Street Cleanings in the Early Morning Interrupt Sleep for Area Residents

We are writing in regard to the Publisher's Note that appeared in the July 9 Leader. While we share your approval of the town's emptying downtown trash containers, we thought you and the residents of Westfield should know that this cleanup includes a program that sends very noisy street sweepers down residential streets early on Sunday mornings.

We were awakened at 7:15 a.m. last Sunday, July 5, the day on which you noticed your empty trash cans, and at 6:30 a.m. this Sunday. This is in addition to the town sweeping the streets in the central business district and surrounding areas starting at 5 a.m. most Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

We have spoken to both the Public Works Department and Mayor Thomas C. Jardim, each on several occasions, about the fact that we are being awakened at an unreasonable hour by the town's maintenance vehicle. However, we have seen no change in either the route or the schedule of the street sweeper.

In fact, the frequency of street sweepings has increased in recent weeks to four times per week on our one-block-long street.

We agree with you that the quality of life in Westfield is enhanced by empty trash containers and clean streets. But we also believe that residents of Westfield, both in the central business district and on residential streets, should be allowed to get a decent night's sleep in their own homes.

Do the people of this town really demand that their streets, including residential streets, be swept at such an early hour, even if the cost is to deprive their neighbors of something as basic as the ability to sleep past 5:30 a.m.?

And do the people of this town really think that four-times-a-week street cleanings, at times of day that undoubtedly require overtime pay for the machinery's operators, is a good use of our tax dollars?

Randall K. and Wendy H. Packer
Westfield

Chain Stores Jeopardize Livelihood Of Faithful Downtown Merchants

Move over mall at Short Hills, here comes the mall at Westfield. I grew up in Union and now reside in Cranford, so why am I so interested in Westfield's downtown? Well, first of all, it's where I shop. Westfield has always been known for its unique and interesting stores. But not anymore. All those great stores are gradually being replaced by big chain stores. Great concept, the anchor store, but how many anchors does this boat need?

Now the second reason. My wife is one of those unique small business owners who was just told by her landlord that not only hers but her neighboring business's lease are not being renewed because a large chain store just made him an offer he can't refuse. So she's out.

"Ah! I got it now," is what you're thinking. "The angry spouse taking to the pen because the food on his table is threatened." No, that's not it. Although this will be financially devastating to you, Don't think, "Not my guy, he would never throw me out." Just ask yourselves this: if you were suddenly forced to uproot and relocate, would your business survive?

To the residents of Westfield I say: a mass of big chain stores will indeed offer "convenient" shopping. But is it really the good and unique shopping that Westfield was known for. These large stores' goals are based solely on profit. What allegiance do they have to the community?

To the landlords: short and sweet — just because you can doesn't mean you should! You have to live with yourselves after your actions.

I wonder, since Westfield is going "mall," how long will it take before people realize that, unlike Menlo Park and Short Hills, Westfield won't be able to offer rain-proof, climate-controlled shopping with better parking. Sure we could always partially enclose the sidewalks. It worked so well in East Orange.

Steven Spurr
Cranford

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Rialto Patron Dismayed Over Lack of Elevator To Upstairs Level

I am writing to register my disappointment with the newly-renovated Rialto Theatre.

On Friday, July 3, my husband and I went to the Rialto to see a film. The movie we selected was in theater number 6, which is located on the upper level.

Imagine our dismay when we discovered that there is no elevator in the theater, and I had to scale the 18-plus steps on crutches. I spoke with three other patrons who also had great difficulty getting up the stairs.

My husband and I spoke to the manager about our concerns, and while he was apologetic, he was unable to provide any assistance.

Adrienne Bishop
Westfield

Sara M. Milligan Awarded Scholarship

Sara M. Milligan, a graduate of Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School, was among eight recipients of the Foreign Language Educators of New Jersey's (FLENJ) annual scholarship awards for 1998. Each student was awarded \$500.

Sara, who competed in German, plans to attend Penn State University in the fall. While attending high school, she was a member of the National Swim Team, Sign Language and several other clubs. In 1994, she garnered the American Scholar Award in German.

Every year, a state-wide written contest is organized for all high school seniors nominated by teachers who are current members of FLENJ.

Candidates are required to either describe a picture or write on a topic in their target languages. Eight winners are chosen based on their proficiency in the language.

World language teachers who are not members of FLENJ and who wish to see their students compete may call (908) 349-1952 for membership.

In Both Golf and Business, They're Going for 'The Green'

By HORACE R. CORBIN

Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

For the first time, a woman played in the Three Day Member Guest golf tournament that I participated in this weekend. It was a "ground breaking" occurrence. The tournament has been going on for almost a century. As a new bond holding member at Canoe Brook Country Club in Summit, Jacqueline Cleary entered this traditionally male domain.

She was gracious with a good swing, and the men were nervous — particularly me, as she was in our flight. My guest (Gus Stasche from Lake Mohawk) and I squeaked out a narrow victory for

the flight championship against Ms. Cleary and her guest, John Urbano, due to Gus's inspired play on Sunday in the showdown match.

I have to admit relief by escaping what surely would have been the inevitable locker room ribbing. As it turns out, Ms. Cleary is one of those bright young professionals moving into Westfield. She recently bought a house here and now is my neighbor. It's an interesting and changing world.

At another golf course last week, the Scotch Plains Republicans held their candidates night at the Township Scotch Hills Country Club. It's a very nice facility. Also, the town meeting discussions were full of energy and commitment — so were the council candidates, Paulette Coronato and incumbent Robert Johnson.

On the golf course, time seems to stand still in blissful isolation. But, things continue to happen in the outside world.

Also, it has been ascertained by the newspaper that two long-standing "Mom and Pop" businesses in Westfield are being ejected by their landlord in favor of another mall store downtown. The Elm Delicatessen and Backroom Antiques will not have their leases renewed. They must vacate the premises in January.

In golf and in business, everyone's "going for the green."

Oh, by the way...The trash cans were full this weekend in downtown Westfield. So, the congratulation given to town government last week in this newspaper for fixing the situation is apparently premature.