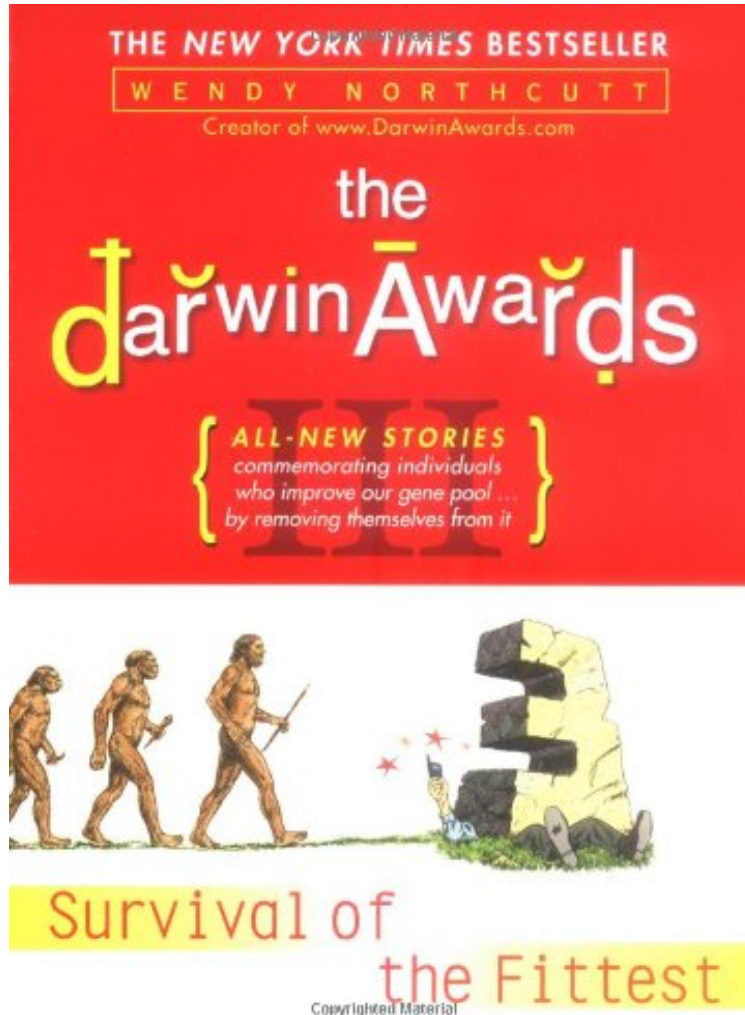


(Free read ebook) The Darwin Awards III: Survival of the Fittest

The Darwin Awards III: Survival of the Fittest

Wendy Northcutt

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Wendy Northcutt : The Darwin Awards III: Survival of the Fittest before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Darwin Awards III: Survival of the Fittest:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy BrendaThis is not our first Darwin Awards CD. Never fails to entertain.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. HilariousBy HBSThe Darwin Awards are hilarious. If you're looking for a gift for someone who likes a good laugh and isn't up-tight, then definitely purchase this book. I have been laughing at it for at least a decade now.9 of 10 people found the following review helpful. The Well is Drying UpBy JMackI loved the first edition of the Darwin Awards, but was a little disappointed by the second edition. The third edition continues the trend. I realize it may be tough to find enough stupid dead people that can be funny, but some of the stories should have never made the cut.There are a set of rules for being awarded a Darwin Award. I have

difficulty understanding how one particular entry made the book as a winner based on the standard. Did somebody forget to proofread? While I liked the "not a Darwin Award" Chapter in the second edition, none of the stories were as entertaining this time. It is my hope that this is the last edition of the Darwin will be the last or a long time passes between the third and fourth books. This way some really funny material can be collected.

The hilarious New York Times bestselling phenomenon—more than 1.5 million copies sold! Honoring those who improve our gene pool by inadvertently removing themselves from it, *The Darwin Awards III* includes more than one hundred brand new, hilariously macabre mishaps and misadventures. From a sheriff who inadvertently shot himself twice, to the insurance defrauder who amputated his leg with a chainsaw; from a farmer who avoided bee stings by sealing his head in a plastic bag to the man crushed by the branch he just trimmed, *The Darwin Awards III* proves again that when it comes to stupidity, no species does it like we do. Featuring scientific and safety discussions and filled with illustrations depicting inspiring examples of evolution in action, *The Darwin Awards III* shows once more how uncommon common sense still is.

"The Darwin Awards is a riot to read. Deeply entertaining."—San Francisco Weekly "Delightfully funny, The Darwin Awards, taken together, constitute a delicious sermon in support of common sense."—The Baltimore Sun

About the Author: A graduate of UC Berkeley with a degree in molecular biology, Wendy Northcutt began collecting the stories that make up the Darwin Awards in 1993. Her award-winning Web site www.DarwinAwards.com is one of the most popular humor pages on the Web. The Darwin Awards have been profiled in USA Today, The Wall Street Journal, Entertainment Weekly, and on NPR's All Things Considered. Wendy is the author of the international bestsellers *The Darwin Awards: Evolution in Action*, *The Darwin Awards 2: Unnatural Selection*, *The Darwin Awards 3: Survival of the Fittest*, *The Darwin Awards 4: Intelligent Design*, *The Darwin Awards: Next Evolution*, and *The Darwin Awards: Countdown to Extinction*.

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Introduction Darwin Awards are not for everyone—only a select few earn this dubious distinction. the rules, the categories, and the evolutionary concepts underpinning the Darwin Awards.

THE DARWIN AWARDS: DEFINED Darwin Awards are bestowed upon individuals who improve our gene pool by removing themselves from it in a spectacularly stupid manner. They involve themselves in situations that a person with even a modicum of common sense would avoid, and their subsequent and predictable demise removes a set of judgment-impaired genes from circulation, thereby ensuring the long-term survival of the human race—which now contains one less idiot. Every time a Darwin Award winner eradicates himself (or, occasionally, herself) from the population, we can breathe a sigh of relief, knowing that our descendants won't have to deal with—or breed with—the descendants of this mental midget, who lacks the ability to survive his own appallingly ill-conceived ideas. Of necessity this honor is awarded posthumously, except in rare instances where a nominee eliminates only his ability to reproduce. These stories are not mere tragic accidents. They are astonishing misapplications of judgment of such magnitude that the observer can only shake his head ruefully at the poetic justice dished out by fate to a deserving recipient. The Darwin Awards commemorate the not-so-unexpected demise of a wood thief crushed by the overhead tree branch he methodically sawed in half while standing beneath it (page 37); two men competing to see who's the bravest of them all by holding lit fireworks in their mouths (page 55); a judge who pulled the pin of a live grenade introduced into evidence (page 41); and all the absentminded catastrophes caused by those who repeatedly stump us with their cluelessness. Want to feel like a genius? The next time you feel foolish, stupid, or incompetent, seek out the Darwin Awards and read a few of these true tales of misadventure. You'll soon realize how brilliant you really are, compared with the morons featured on these pages. And you will probably find yourself taking a few personal pledges while reading this book, such as: "I will keep pointy metal objects away from electrical wires." "I will not suck gasoline into a vacuum cleaner." "I will hold no fireworks in my mouth." "No sleeping in the road for me!" There is an especial danger in new technology, which presents challenges that some people find insurmountable. The cover illustration shows the quintessential modern Darwin Award winner, holding a cell phone, intent on the wrong signals, and clueless in the face of impending doom. The image of a squashed cell-phone user typifies the absentminded human animal, unaware of dicey circumstances and headed for trouble. Cell phones have become ubiquitous, but humans are still singularly ill equipped to use these devices safely. Although we have been communicating for millennia, we have not yet evolved the multitasking aptitude needed to talk on a cell phone while driving. Put one of these lethal instruments to the ear of the average driver, and a traffic accident is quite likely to occur. In fact, accidents involving cell phones are too common to be eligible for a Darwin Award unless additional stupidity is present. "What's That Sound?" on page 160 and "(un) Armed and Dangerous" on page 190 are two sterling examples. As more and more people remove themselves from the gene pool while using cell phones, the species as a whole will become better equipped to safely coexist with this new technology. As the population of cell-phone idiots is slowly depleted, one can imagine a golden day, far in the future, when cell phones are considered as safe to use as a faucet. A 2002 Harvard study estimated that 6 percent of U.S. traffic accidents are caused by drivers talking on cell phones, resulting in 2,600 deaths and 330,000 injuries. In January 2003, the California Highway Patrol reported that cell phones are the leading cause of crashes attributed to driver distraction, a category that covers 10

percent of all crashes. Reference: San Jose Mercury News

THE RULES

Now that the concept of the Darwin Awards has been explained, a discussion of the rules will not only elucidate their genesis, but also illuminate some of the more obscure questions that arise when evaluating nominees. There are five basic rules:

Reproduction

Out of the gene pool! Excellence The event transcends common stupidity. Self-selection They did it to themselves! Maturity But not a child or handicapped person. Veracity Confirmed or, at least, plausible.

Reproduction

The candidate is no longer able to contribute to the gene pool. The traditional method of satisfying this requirement is to cause one's own death. However, the occasional rebel opts for sterilization, which allows him more time to enjoy the dubious notoriety of winning this award. The existence of offspring, though potentially deleterious to the gene pool, does not disqualify a nominee. Children inherit only half of each parent's genetic material and thus have their own chance to survive or snuff themselves—if, for instance, the “play with combustibles” gene has been passed along. If they have inherited the “play with combustibles” gene, but have also inherited a “use caution when ...” gene, then they are potential innovators and possible assets to the human race. Therefore, each nominee is judged based on whether or not she has removed her own genes, without consideration to number of offspring or, in the case of an elderly winner, the likelihood of producing offspring regardless of an untimely demise.

Excellence

The candidate suffered an astounding lapse of judgment. It takes a phenomenal failure of common sense to earn a Darwin Award. Common idiocies such as playing Russian roulette, falling off a boat, or sleeping next to a smoldering cigarette are not sufficient to win the dubious distinction of a Darwin. On the other hand, playing Russian roulette with land mines, jumping off a boat into shark-infested waters knowing you cannot swim, or sleeping with a smoldering cigarette under an oxygen tent ... just might win you a Darwin Award! It has been argued that more emphasis should be placed on the stupidity aspect, and less on the extreme nature of the stupidity. After all, humans are supposedly able to learn from their mistakes, and yet time and time again we manage to fall down stairs and drop radios into bathtubs. There is merit to this criticism, as natural selection is undoubtedly eliminating “bad driver” genes more rapidly than it's eliminating “grenade juggling” genes. However, it is not amusing to read dozens of stories about poor driving! Therefore, the Darwin Awards are given only to those who show their flagrant disregard for the laws of nature in a novel way. Those who participate in extreme sports are not automatically eligible, as they knowingly assume an increased risk of death. They are, in a sense, correctly applying their judgment that the entertainment is worth the risk. However bizarre the sport, an additional misapplication of judgment must be present in order for the deceased to qualify for a Darwin Award.

Not a Darwin, but not safe either:

- Falling off a precipice while posing or pissing
- Warming aerosol cans or gasoline in the oven
- Whizzing on an electric rail or fence
- Being hit by a train or an automobile
- Smoking inside an oxygen tent
- Carbon monoxide poisoning

Most autoerotic deaths These circumstances are all too common!

Self-Selection

The candidate must be the cause of his own demise. The humor of the Darwin Awards depends on the fact that the only victim is the nincompoop who planned the ill-fated scheme that resulted in his death. For that reason, the death of an innocent bystander rules out a nomination. Self-removal of incompetent genetic material is essential. One person cannot “give” another person a Darwin; rather, each person must earn the award based on his own ingenuity. Oddly enough, those who commit suicide are not eligible for a Darwin Award, even though such a decision may be ill advised. A suicidal person is applying his judgment that life is not worth living, and the outcome is therefore expected. The spirit of the Darwin Awards, on the contrary, requires an element of surprise, when one departs from the gene pool by accident. The death of an innocent bystander is not allowed, as it is not amusing. Suicides, whether or not they succeed, are not eligible. And anyone who dies while intentionally engaged in notoriety-seeking behavior is disqualified, as the Darwin Awards are not meant to encourage risk taking.

Maturity

The candidate must be able, and capable of sound judgment. Some people, like children (whose judgment has not fully developed) or those who are born with physical or mental handicaps, are more susceptible to injury doing activities that an average adult can perform safely. Because the increased risk comes from an innate impediment, deaths that result are not amusing and not eligible for an award. Also, children (typically below the age of sixteen) do not qualify, as it is commonly understood that they do not possess sufficient maturity and experience to make life-or-death judgments. The responsibility for their safety still resides with their parents and guardians. The maturity rule is occasionally bent for a sufficiently humorous story. For instance, if a person confined to a wheelchair routinely travels by holding on to the fender of a speeding car, she is eligible for a Darwin Award when her wheelchair overturns on a freeway. Or if a woman chooses to impair her own judgment—for instance, by smoking marijuana before napping on a steep roof—she is eligible for a Darwin Award when she turns over in her sleep and rolls off the roof.

Veracity

The event must be verified. The world is full of tales of wondrous stupidity, but in order to make the cut as a Darwin contender the tale must be true, not tall. Articles published by reputable news outlets, confirmed television and radio reports, and responsible eyewitnesses are considered valid sources. A chain email, an Internet humor 'zine, or an edited photograph, is not considered a valid source. Depending on the plausibility of the story, more or less confirmation may be deemed sufficient to consider it verified. As the author has a finite amount of time to spend investigating the stories, a designation of “Confirmed by Darwin” means it has been verified to the best of her knowledge and is presumed—but not guaranteed—to be accurate.

The Categories

There are three categories of stories in this book: Darwin Awards, Honorable Mentions, and Personal Accounts. All stories must be excellent examples of self-inflicted

stupidity; the other three rules are flexible. Honorable Mentions and Personal Accounts usually don't meet the loss-of-reproduction rule. The veracity rule doesn't apply for Personal Accounts, which are by their nature unverified. And if a person is mature enough to submit her story as a Personal Account, age or other mental or physical impediments are of no concern.

Darwin Awards Those whom life does not cure, death will.—Cormac McCarthy Darwin Awards are true examples of astounding stupidity leading to a loss of reproductive capacity, generally because the perpetrators are no longer alive. We do not take into account the unsettling possibility of the existence of cryogenically stored spermatozoa when selecting a Darwin Award recipient.

Honorable Mentions He who hesitates ... is sometimes saved.—James Thurber Honorable Mentions are foolish misadventures that, against all odds, stop short of the ultimate sacrifice. They illustrate the innovative spirit shown by a true Darwin Award candidate, without the unpleasant side effect of being deceased or, arguably worse, no longer able to reproduce.

Personal Accounts Common sense is not so common.—Voltaire Personal Accounts were submitted by loyal readers blowing the whistle on stupidity—their own, or that of a spouse, neighbor, coworker, or (sometimes former) friend. The narratives are plausible but usually unverified. In some cases the people who submitted Personal Accounts have been identified with their permission, but this does not necessarily mean that they are directly associated with their Personal Accounts.

All Darwin Awards and Honorable Mentions are known or believed to be true. The phrase **Confirmed by Darwin** under the title generally indicates that a story was backed up by multiple submissions and by more than one reputable media source. **Unconfirmed by Darwin** indicates fewer credible submissions and the unavailability of direct confirmation of media sources. In unconfirmed Darwin Awards or Honorable Mentions, names have been changed and details of events have been altered to protect the innocent (and, for that matter, the guilty).

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST Evolution is the process of species changing over time to better suit their environments. The mechanism of evolution was referred to as “survival of the fittest” by Alfred Russell Wallace, who is considered the codiscoverer of evolution. He used this phrase because he felt that the term coined by Charles Darwin, natural selection, incorrectly implied a directed force behind the selection.

In order for “survival of the fittest” to cause a species to evolve there are four requirements. The species must show variation, and that variation must be inheritable. Not all members of the population shall survive to reproduce, but the inherited characteristics of some members make them more likely to do so.

Inheritable Variation Every species scientists have studied has been found to consist of individuals exhibiting a variety of traits. Numerous differences exist between even the most closely related individuals, from amoeba to zebra. Some variations are caused by environmental factors and are not inheritable; for instance, chronic food scarcity results in shorter humans. However, many variations are the result of different genetic instructions and are inherited. For example, even with ample food, short parents produce shorter children than tall parents. Only inheritable characteristics are subject to evolutionary pressures. These inheritable characteristics are encoded in long strands of DNA. Populations constantly acquire new variations because the process by which DNA is copied is prone to infrequent but inevitable errors. The error rate of DNA transcription is not accidental, but rather is a carefully tuned variable that introduces an optimized amount of random mutation into a population. Because the vast majority of random mutations are deleterious, if they occur too frequently, the species would be too sickly to survive. If mutations occur too infrequently, the evolution rate would be too slow to keep up with the changing environment of a cooling Earth, or, later, with the competition of other species adapting faster to their surroundings.

Some Succeed While Others Fail Wild adult squirrels have two litters of three pups every summer, and they live about four years. Given these numbers, a single pair of squirrels could multiply to 63,967 trillion in thirty-three years if they all survived. (See figure on page 14.) That's more than enough squirrels to cover the entire surface of the planet! Obviously, most squirrels die before they produce nine children. Because not all squirrels survive to reproduce, and because inherited traits play a role in which ones survive, there is a selective pressure that favors certain traits. If you spend time watching squirrels, you will see that some are fatter than others, some hide better, and some are more aggressive about obtaining food. The parents of each new generation are the most successful squirrels from the past summer. Thus, successful traits become more prevalent over time, and less successful traits eventually disappear.

Survival of the Fittest ... Human? That humans have evolved is evident from the fossil record, and that we have inherited successful traits is proved by the large worldwide population of humans. We meet all the requirements necessary to be involved in the race for “survival of the fittest.” We show a wide variation of inheritable characteristics, and as the stories in this book attest, some members of the species are demonstrably less able to survive than others!

The Darwin Awards that follow show that Nature is still improving on the human design. But they also illustrate the creativity that distinguishes us from less adaptable species. The same innovative spirit that causes the downfall of the Darwin Award winners is also responsible for the social and scientific advances that make the human race great.

CHAPTER 1 Law Enforcement: Crime Does Pay B O would some Power the gift to give us, To see ourselves as others see us! It would from many a blunder free us, And foolish notion.—Robert Burns

In this chapter lawbreakers and law enforcers bump elbows in an informal competition to see who is best suited to lose the fight between good and evil. Inept bunglers from both sides of the law, from con artists to beat cops, from judges to crooks, astonish us with their casual disregard for the “natural laws” of physics.

PICKING THE WINNERS Contenders for the Darwin Award are selected based on the five criteria of death, self-selection, excellence, maturity, and veracity. But there's more to the selection process than one person writing stories and making a dry

comparison with the rules. The selection is a participatory event, a community celebration of the humor found in the inevitable results of foolish choices! Here's how the entire process works. Submission A Darwin Award begins its life as a submission to the website. The nominations come from around the world, and without these submissions there would be no Darwin Awards. Enthusiasts are encouraged to keep a sharp lookout for potential contenders in their neighborhoods and local newspapers. If the event is written into a story that highlights its humorous aspects, rather than simply a bare link or newspaper quote, so much the better! Amusingly presented stories are more likely to pass the triple hurdles of moderation, public vote, and Wendy's review. The current system was initiated in January 2002, as I could no longer keep up with the thousands of emails sent every month. The correspondence included submissions, additional information, debates on the merits of candidates, flames, commendations, requests for vaguely remembered stories, and so forth. Much as I enjoy reading these emails, the quantity was simply too much for one person to deal with. In fact, I still have thousands of unread emails and submissions! That's why the more formal submission system described herein was devised. Now submissions receive quicker treatment, and fewer good stories languish in the dusty recesses of an overflowing inbox.

Moderator Each submission is reviewed by a team of volunteer moderators who decide whether it's a potential Darwin Award, Honorable Mention, or Personal Account. Anywhere from two to five moderators rate each story before it's moved from the moderation queue to the public Slush Pile. Submissions that don't make the cut are usually repeats, bizarre or macabre stories, or illustrations of poetic justice, rather than examples of Darwinian self-selection. These stories are placed in the public Slush Pile Rejects area. As the graph illustrates, an average of five hundred stories are submitted per month, and approximately one in six is accepted into the Slush Pile. When a particularly sensational story appears in the news, it can be submitted hundreds of times. The spike in January 2003 was due to the shooting death of a man who decided to beat his misbehaving dog with a loaded gun. The spike in July 2002 was caused by two men fighting over who would go to heaven and who to hell; a shotgun was used to solve the argument. The September 2002 spike resulted in the Darwin Awards "Slip Sliding Away," on page 53, and "A Rocky Roll" on page 30.

Public The stories, with moderator scores and comments appended, are transferred to the website for public review. They land in the Slush Pile or the Slush Pile Reject area, and the submitter is notified by email. The decision may be appealed; however, the moderators are fairly experienced, so stories are only infrequently salvaged from the Reject area. It is rarer yet for a story to be removed from the Slush Pile, as only one in three will, in any case, be moved to the permanent archive. A submission will occasionally be removed for privacy reasons, or if it is the cause of many complaints.

Readers read and rate the stories in the Slush Pile on a scale from 0 to 10, with each story receiving approximately eighty votes, although the number ranges from fifteen to five hundred, depending on how much interest it evokes. **Vote on Slush Pile Submissions!** www.DarwinAwards.com/slush Wendy's After at least a month of public review, I sort the Slush Pile based on popularity and begin reading through the submissions for that month. I refer to the moderator comments and decide whether each story is novel enough, and amusing enough, to write into a Darwin Award, Honorable Mention, or Personal Account. Approximately ten to fifteen stories per month are selected to enter the permanent archive. **The Final Cut** But that's not the end of the process! In fact, it's a new beginning, for stories in the archive enjoy a far greater audience than when they first appeared in the Slush Pile. Visitors cast five million votes per month, and mistakes, corrections, and confirmations are frequently reported. Stories that are particularly comment-worthy are linked to a discussion thread in the Philosophy Forum. The Darwin Awards are continually updated (or removed) based on new information, and this final review process continues for as long as the story remains on the website. The accounts in this book have all been subject to this public scrutiny and are accurate to the best of my knowledge. But because the Darwin Awards are dynamically modified, they are not guaranteed to be entirely accurate, nor in their final form. The last chapter in this book features stories that have been disqualified, and the reasons for the disqualifications. Most appeared in the website archive, but were later removed based on this final public review. As you read the tales contained herein, keep in mind the lengthy submission process, and the care with which each gem was culled from dozens of competitors and honed to its current form.

DARWIN AWARD: CONVINCING THE JURY Confirmed by Darwin 16 JUNE 1871 B Proof that the only good lawyer is a dead lawyer. Clement Vallandigham was a well-known Northern Democrat who campaigned for states' rights during the Civil War. In 1863 Vallandigham was convicted of treason for his speeches attacking the administration of President Lincoln. He was banished to the South, where he continued to voice his political views. After the war Vallandigham became a lawyer. In his last appearance in the courtroom he represented a client on trial for murder. The accused man's defense was that the victim had drawn his own gun in a fashion that caused it to fire, killing himself. To prove the defense argument, Vallandigham demonstrated the victim's method of drawing a gun—using the loaded evidence gun as his prop. The firearm went off, and he lost his life—but proved his case! Reference: Klement, Frank L. *The Limits of Dissent: Clement Vallandigham and the Civil War*. Fordham, Mass.: Fordham University Press, 1998. Reader Comments: "A mind is a terrible thing to waste." "If only all criminals were so accommodating." "He couldn't extrapolate from the lesson, Don't run with scissors." "This will keep the prison population down." "An argument against gun control."

DARWIN AWARD: FAULTY AIM FATAL Confirmed by Darwin 7 MARCH 2002, COLORADO When Gerald was pulled over by police for erratic driving, he decided it was better to flee from the stolen car on foot, rather than face possible jail time for a parole violation. This was the first of

two successive mental lapses. Gerald's actual thoughts are unknown, but may have been something like this: The officers are merely suspicious and alert now ... why not make them hot, sweaty, tired, and angry, by leading them on a wild chase through dark alleys and fields? During the subsequent foot chase Gerald attempted to dissuade officers from the pursuit by firing a 9mm Ruger semiautomatic handgun blindly over his shoulder. This was the second illustration of a potential mental deficiency: Officers are running behind me. They have guns. I have a gun! They have eyes in the front of their heads, so they can see to aim at me. I don't have eyes in the back of my head, so I'll fire wildly behind me and see what happens! Unfortunately, Gerald appears to have been one of those folks who can't chew gum and walk at the same time. Or at least he couldn't flee and fire at the same time. While discharging the weapon over his shoulder, Gerald managed to shoot himself in the head, bringing the chase to a sudden conclusion. Four shots were fired, none by the officers, who found Gerald's pistol next to his fallen body. Gerald was transported to a local hospital where he expired the following day, thus removing a set of genes deficient in both judgment and coordination from the gene pool. Reference: Colorado Springs Gazette-Telegraph, 9news.com

DARWIN AWARD: CHAIN SAW INSURANCE Confirmed by Darwin JANUARY 2002, ITALY Some people will do anything for money. Andreas, a twenty-three-year-old bouncer from Italy, was found lying in a pool of blood near a country road. Police initially mistook him for a victim of sadistic mutilation. His left leg had been nearly severed by a chain saw. His last act was an emergency call to operators, who heard only a "death rattle." By the time help arrived, copious bleeding had drained his body of blood. A violent attack on an innocent man? Not quite. Andreas was the victim of his own conspiracy to commit an insurance scam. In order to reap half a million dollars from numerous insurance policies, permanent disability was all that was required. So Andreas convinced his cousin to cut off his left leg with a chain saw. Andreas relied on his knowledge of first aid to survive the chainsaw incident. His twenty-nine-year-old cousin confessed that he was the designated assailant, and that he had attacked—and inadvertently killed—the younger man in a mutually planned, high-stakes fraud that went badly awry. The attack took place near a country lay-by. The cousin sawed Andreas's leg below the knee, severing a major artery. The gambit for permanent disability was successful, in a sense, yet it was timed too close for Andreas to survive. Emergency crews found him dead, and his cousin fled, tossing the chain saw in a river on the way out of town. Andreas's death was a classic example of fate noticing those who buy chain saws. Reference: www.cnnItalia.it, Glas, Yugoslav daily, La Nazione, news.bcc.co.uk, Ananova

An insurance adjuster commented, "This reminds me of a claim where the chap purposely cut off his little finger. We refused it, because he had not lost the use of his limb below the wrist. He apparently didn't follow our reasoning, as six months later, he submitted another claim after axing off the next finger. We still refused the claim!"

Darwin Award: Truck Stop Confirmed by Darwin 31 MARCH 2002, BANGLADESH Six highway robbers, who had apparently watched too many gangster movies, were caught in their own trap when they blocked a bypass with their car at midnight in a ploy to garner victims. The driver of an oncoming truck carrying a cargo of cows was unable to halt his heavy vehicle in time. The truck rolled right through the blockade, crushing the car and its scheming occupants. Five dacoits died, and the sixth was critically wounded. A cow was also killed in the accident. Reference: Dhaka (Bangladesh) Independent

A dacoit is a member of a gang of robbers in India. Dacoity is the practice of (armed) gang robbery.

DARWIN AWARD: ANTLERS AHOY! Confirmed by Darwin 1985, MONTANA Two locals decided to increase their income by illegally transporting shed elk antlers out of Yellowstone Park. The antlers sell for about seven dollars a pound, and a big set can weigh thirty pounds, making their theft a lucrative venture. The two men, dollar signs in their eyes, thought long and hard about the best way to get the largest haul of antlers out of the park without being observed. Cars were too risky because there was a ranger checkpoint on the roads. Backpacks couldn't carry enough to make it worth their while. They decided to use a boat. Well, not exactly a boat. A rubber raft. These two entrepreneurs decided to take the raft on a nighttime voyage on the Gardiner River, which runs out of Yellowstone and through the town of Gardiner, to minimize the chance of being spotted. After loading the raft to the bursting point with pointy antlers, the men pushed off and began their journey. It was late springtime, so the river, hazardous in all seasons, now had twice the normal flow of water. They hadn't gone far before they hit some treacherous rapids, and the bouncing antlers punctured the raft. Deprived of transportation, the men had to fend for themselves against the current. One of the antler thieves swam to shore, hiked the road, and hitched a ride into town. The other was not so lucky. A week later he floated onto a beach used by local sunbathers. This story was confirmed in an unusual way. The primary source of information is an eyewitness account by a person who gave the survivor a ride into town, and later found the body on the beach. But the story is also described in a book, *Death in Yellowstone*, by Lee H. Whittlesey, published in 1995. This book cites articles in the *Billings Gazette* ("Body of Antler Smuggler Recovered") and the *Livingston Enterprise* ("Gardiner Horn Hunter Presumed Drowned in Park"). I have chosen to use details provided by the eyewitness. While the fact of the antler theft is confirmed, there are some discrepancies regarding the exact nature of the undertaking. According to the book, a man loaded 250 pounds of antlers onto a large raft, then tied it to his own one-man raft, which later overturned on the river.

DARWIN AWARD: SKELETON KEY Confirmed by Darwin 2001 Another would-be thief has been discovered languishing as a pile of bones, this one uncovered by an artisan brick mason. The protruding foot and leg bones found during building renovations belonged to a thief who had tried to rob a gift shop by way of the second-floor chimney fifteen years before, speculated bemused authorities. Maybe he should have tried a skeleton

key.Reference: Natchez (Mississippi) Democrat, Chicago TribuneCaution: Natural Selection at WorkDARWIN AWARD: A ROCKY ROLLConfirmed by Darwin29 AUGUST 2002, WASHINGTONAn innovative petty crime spree turned into a Darwinian opportunity when a Vancouver man fell out of a minivan while throwing rocks. Five men had been denting mailboxes and terrorizing moving cars with their low-tech missiles, when twenty-three-year-old John decided he needed a wider range of targets. As the Ford Aerostar cruised through a residential neighborhood, he left his compatriots at the windows while he opened the sliding door. One mighty throw later, he pitched through the opening, struck his head on the pavement, and suffered the ultimate penalty for his crime: stone-cold death.Reference: www.KGW.com, Northwest NewsChannel 8BR> Astoundingly, the deceased may not be legally accountable for his own death. A spokesperson for the sheriff's office said that the driver, the person ultimately responsible for the vehicle, could be charged with a range of offenses, from allowing a passenger to ride without a seat belt to vehicular homicide.DARWIN AWARD: BOOBY TRAPS TRAP BOOBYConfirmed by DarwinNOVEMBER 2002, BELGIUMA retired engineer living in Charleroi booby-trapped his home with the intention of killing his estranged family, but died himself after inadvertently triggering one of his own devices.At first police assumed that the seventy-nine-year-old had committed suicide, as he was found alone with a bullet wound in his neck. Then a detective missed a bullet by inches when he opened a booby-trapped wooden chest. Police beat a hasty retreat from the property and called in military experts.The experts deciphered an enigmatic series of scribbled clues to locate nineteen death traps in walls, ceilings, and household objects. A pile of booby-trapped dinner plates was revealed, for example, by the clue "Cheaper by the Dozen," a reference to a film in which a child throws a plate at someone's head. Police speculated that the notes were intended to assist his failing memory.Other traps included numerous concealed shotguns triggered by threads, and an exploding crate of beer set to detonate once a certain number of bottles was removed. It took three weeks to crack nineteen of the twenty clues, and experts were forced to admit defeat on the final note: "The 12 Apostles are ready to work on the pebbles." Said one expert, "We have never come across anything like it before. It was all fiendishly clever."True to form, the "fiendishly clever" but careless Darwin Award winner was described by neighbors as a taciturn but harmless man who enjoyed puttering in his garage. But relatives say he had never forgiven his wife for divorcing him twenty years earlier. Police believe he began installing the traps four years before the incident, after losing a lengthy battle to keep his home.Reference: Daily Telegraph (London), The Age (Melbourne, Australia), The Associated PressQuestions have been raised regarding the soundness of this nomination. Perhaps the man was obsessive to the point of insanity, or suffering from senile dementia, and therefore not capable of sound judgment. At age seventy-nine, and possessed of fourteen children and thirty-seven grandchildren, his continuing influence on the gene pool was assured. And furthermore, the workers who discovered and dismantled the devices were placed in harm's way, thus innocent bystanders could have been injured. However, the judges have decided that the notion of diminished mental capacity is merely speculative, that offspring and advanced age are not a bar to a nomination, that no innocent bystanders were injured, and that the magnitude of his actions make it imperative that he be given a Darwin Award.DARWIN AWARD: CAVEAT EMPTORConfirmed by Darwin4 FEBRUARY 2002, NEW MEXICOLet the buyer beware.Police say three men tried to rob an Albuquerque man who had placed a newspaper ad to sell a gun. The robbers arranged a meeting, then beat and sprayed Mace on the gun seller in an attempt to steal the weapon.Surprise! The gun seller was ipso facto a gun owner. Eighteen-year-old Carlos intercepted a bullet and died before rescue crews arrived.One can understand the mistake of robbing a man who unexpectedly pulls out a gun and shoots—but if a robber singles out a victim because he is selling a gun, there's no excuse for being surprised to discover he is armed.As a Darwinian bonus there's a fairly good chance that the eighteen-year-old has not yet reproduced. ...Reference: KOAT TV, TheNewMexicoChannel.comDARWIN AWARD: JET SKI SPREEConfirmed by Darwin26 JULY 2001, NEVADASometimes fate has perfect vision. Two men found dead at Lake Tahoe were presumed to be homicide victims—one disfigured by severe facial wounds and the other apparently shot—until investigators discovered that they were actually victims of their own larcenous tendencies. The men had stolen a jet ski from a marina, but, unfamiliar with the lay of the land and piloting in pitch darkness, they had crashed at high speed into a nearby dock. One man died instantly from a broken neck; the other crawled to shore where he, too, expired.Reference: TheKCRACChannel.com and The Associated PressDumb, Dumber, DarwinDARWIN AWARD: RISKY REENACTMENTUnconfirmed by Darwin23 OCTOBER 1993, ILLINOIS A police officer trying to show another patrolman how their fellow officer accidentally killed himself, accidentally killed himself while reenacting the shooting incident a week later. The twenty-year veteran forgot to unload his .357 Magnum, shot himself in the stomach, and died in a car crash while driving himself to the hospital.Death comes to all men,but some just can't wait.DARWIN AWARD: RETURN TO TREES FAILSConfirmed by Darwin18 FEBRUARY 2002, HAWAII Millennia after an evolving human species descended from the trees, thirty-year-old Joshua reversed the process, removing himself from the gene pool while perched in a tree. Joshua had hiked several miles onto a ranch and climbed a koa tree under cover of darkness, intent upon stealing a branch of the expensive native hardwood. To his credit he was smarter than a classic cartoon character and didn't make the mistake of cutting the branch supporting him. However, he was not smart enough to avoid cutting a branch directly above his head. The severed limb struck and killed him. Authorities found his body still in the tree, suspended twenty feet off the ground.Reference: Honolulu

Star-Bulletin Famous Last Words: It seemed like a good idea at the time