

Politic-tac-toes

With Alan (needs-to-do-his-homework) Fishman

I think my first round of political tic-tac-toes was crap. Political discourse is difficult for me, because I am not particularly well-read, and I suffer from a near-paralyzing frustration with the American political system. The idea that I would begin reading and thinking and writing about politics was not, in fact, made in the shower on election day but began as I watched election returns on TV later that night in horror. I think the Neo-Conservative movement is very intelligent and very evil. The Republican Party now has the kind of stranglehold on power that our Founding Fathers were trying to prevent with their system of checks and balances. The Executive and Legislative branches of government were intended to mitigate each other's power in order to protect the freedoms of the minority. I very much doubt George Washington or Thomas Jefferson ever imagined that they would begin working together to de-secularize government and colonize the world. These imperialist tendencies provoked the American Revolution. And it is these very tendencies which the framers of our Constitution tried to prevent from happening via checks and balances.

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Letter from the Editor

California's Mount Diablo is reported as having one of the most expansive views on earth. Peaking at over 3,000 feet far above the clouds, it's actually not all that high when measured strictly by altitude. Many mountains out West are three to four times as high, but from the summit of this "little" mountain, one can see all the way from the Pacific Ocean across the Central Valley to the snow-topped Sierra Nevadas. If it weren't for the curvature of the earth, one could see for over 200 miles in each direction. The entire Bay Area is easily at the mercy of one's eyes. The altitude means nothing compared to the relative height of the summit.

When preparing to write for this newsletter you may think to yourself, "Sure, I can write, but what qualifies me to share my ideas, my stories?" But who knew that John Q. Newsletter-Contributor is not only a spreadsheet slave at work, he also has a brain on his shoulders? Who knew that he has the ability to write about politics or pop culture or fake science news? Who knew that a consultant by day is also a god by night?

You can reach the heights from this Babble-ON-ian tower. You can be a Zeus on your Mt. Olympus. Because it doesn't matter if the mountain is 100 feet tall or 10,000. What matters is that from here you can see farther than from anywhere else on earth.

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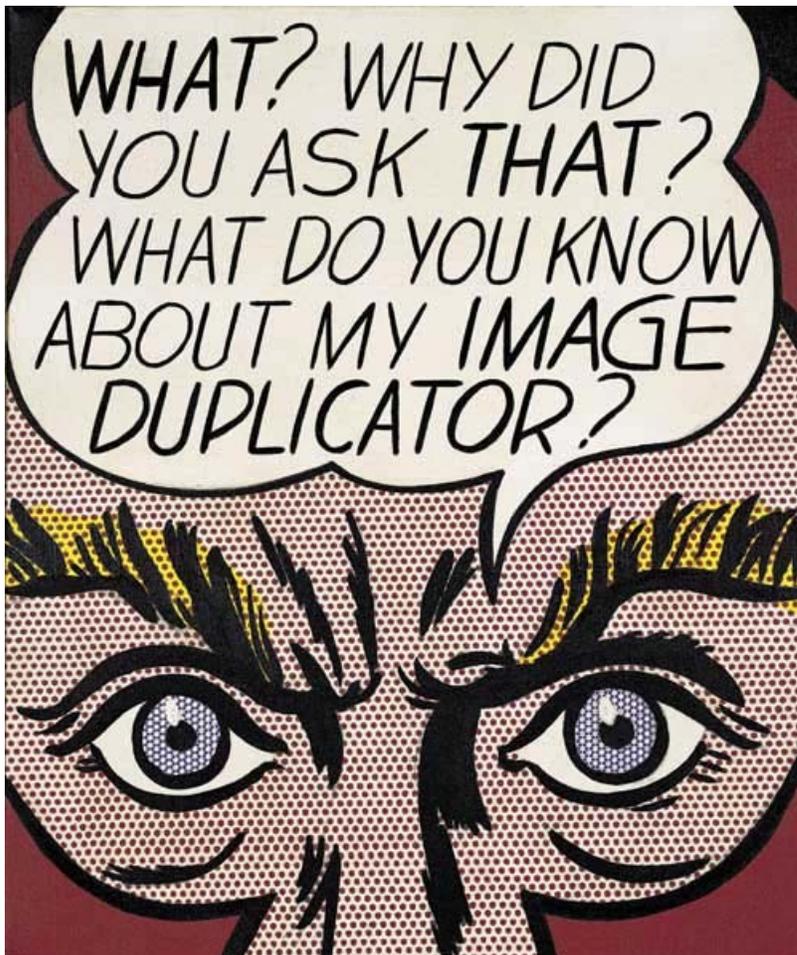
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Natural Born Thinker:

The Intellectual Life and Death of Susan Sontag

By Susan M. Fritz

To those unfamiliar with her life and/or work, the following *New York Times* obituary and written memorial to writer and Intellectual Susan Sontag may make the reader feel like s/he missed something during the course of her/his college years. S/he may be thinking, "Gee, the only Susan I know is the writer of this *Babble-ON* article, and I don't know if I'd call her an Intellectual in the capitalized sense...." This article proposes to narrow this knowledge gap and perhaps interest the reader in a previously unknown scholarly domain.

In the January 2nd online edition of the *New York Times*, Charles McGrath praises Sontag, who recently died at the age of seventy-one, as "the pre-eminent intellectual of our time—visible, outspoken, engaged." To those of you whose body of knowledge includes Ms. Sontag, this lofty assertion

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The John Cusack Guide to Successful Dating

By Brett

See page 11

**Tower of Babble-ON's
"Before-and-After" Corner**

For the "Best Year Ever: 2005"
By Susan Fritz

Kite Flying High-Five in '05

What do you think-tank you very much.

Sly-as-a-Fox News Boy-oh-Boy George Washington
University Professor and Mary Ann ☒

Bad Joke Corner

Contributed by Bryan Murray

What do you call four bullfighters in quicksand?

Quattro Sinko

What do Eskimos get from sitting on the ice too long?

Polaroid's ☒

Problem Hole

By Srida Joisa

"I want my drugs"

You're a drug buyer. Different from a drug dealer in that you actually buy and consume drugs. You also order drugs in bulk.

You receive a shipment of 10 bottles of pills. Each bottle has 100 pills. Each pill is supposed to have a mass of 10 grams. But you also get a note in the shipment that declares one of the bottles contains pills that are only 9 grams in mass each. Thankfully, your drug dealer shipped to you a scale along with the note. But it's electronic and only works once. You can put however many bottles or pills onto the scale, push the "Check the Mass Now" button and out pops a number for the mass of the stuff sitting on the scale.

And then you should return the light bottle with all of its pills included.

You only get one chance to use the scale.

How do you determine which bottle contains the light pills?

See next issue for the answer!

See the answer to last month's "Problem Hole" on page 5. ☒

Dictator of the Month:

Musharraf

By Dan Fritz



If you're gonna have a coup, why not have a bloodless coup? Maybe then you can convince people that it was not a bad thing, and you can subsequently hold referendums keeping you in power.

Past Dictators

- Qaddafi
- Karimov
- Taylor
- Milosevic
- Saddam
- Mugabe
- Pinochet
- Ceausescu
- Pol Pot

The current referendum says that he's in power for another couple of years, but we all know that means "take your time Mushie." Additionally, his coup has been legitimized by a vote of confidence last year, showing that he was "deemed to be elected." Well, I don't know about "deemed to be elected," but check out the fashion sense of the above picture. I deem that to be "fabulous."

So, Mushie is still part of the armed forces, even though he's "President." He's in charge of a country that controls nuclear weapons and doesn't seem to have any reservations about striking India if the time is right. He's been proactive in creating military strife with regards to the situation in Kashmir. But, guess what, it's strategically important to the U.S. to have his help in the War on Terror. So, once again, he's a *good guy!* For today.

Clever move, Mushie. *Babble-ON* salutes you! ☒

The Criminally Comical Trials of
Mexican Mattlock

By Calderwood and Fritz



Letter to the Editor

Re: "Koob's Korner"
Volume 2, Issues 4 and 5

Dear Editor,

First let me preface by saying that "Koob's Korner" is one of my favorite contributions to *Babble-ON*. While I usually agree wholeheartedly with Koob on a number of points, I feel as though he made a critical omission, particularly when viewed in light of the urban drama genre that seems to comprise most of the list.

What did Koob forget? He forgot Boaz Yakin's gripping 1994 drug thriller, *Fresh*. This is one of the most underrated movies of all time on my list. It is miles ahead of the more marketed films like *Menace II Society*. The pacing is terrific, and while you don't need to be a professor of semiotics to understand some of the rather simple symbolism, the sheer fact that the movie makes you think twice about it warrants its consideration in Koob's list. By placing the center of attention on a child, the movie also addresses themes regarding coming of age and sacrifice. Furthermore, the soundtrack, done by former Police member Stewart Copeland, is extraordinarily chilling and complements the emotional peaks and valleys of the film well.

I feel Koob has done an outstanding job with his list. Although I think that *Fresh* should have cracked the top 10, I'll only be disappointed if it is forgotten entirely.

Brett on Film ☒

Boob Corner

Contributed
by Aaron
MacPhie



Exhumed, the centuries rage in her eyes

By Chad Fritz

Exhumed, the centuries rage in her eyes,
the unmistakable clink-wham of machines grinding,
coalstacks billowing soot,
flames feasting on orange ore,
bright as hell in night,
captivating, emulsifying, bending to her want.
What fits not, fails, consumed.
"Dynasties have risen and crumbled for this," a glint.
Let the gambler shuffle his gypsy deck.
I will play the game,
And I know the gypsy.

Tails Between Their Legs

By Koob



atypiCal Films & Sofa Kingdom productions present
"Tails Between Their Legs"
As seen at www.atypicalfilms.com

This film was made as part of the 2004 National Film Challenge and was named one of the Final Fifteen films of over 160 entries.

The National Film Challenge is a contest in which filmmakers of all levels create a film in one weekend, adhering to certain guidelines that are given out by the contest creators.

The guidelines for this film were as follows:

- Genre - Mockumentary
- Character - J. Upton, Dogwalker
- Prop - A Map
- Line of dialogue - "You caught me at a bad time."

All of the above elements had to be incorporated into the film, and the film could be no longer than 8 minutes.

For more information on the National Film Challenge, visit <http://www.filmchallenge.com>. ☒

Yes, I am writing this at home

Re: "Yes, I'm Writing This at Class," Vol. 2, Issue 5

By Cécile Fromont

At this point in life and in the semester, I am a specialist of undergraduate existential crisis. Twenty-four-hour disease, panic attacks, why-do-we-have-tos, I-know-no-one-likes-mes, and lousy grammar are what a teaching fellow's life is made of. And blue books. A lot of blue books.

College is the best part of your life, Garrett, but for a million gold coins none of us would do it again. At your age, you are faced with a world of possibility. This is exhilarating. In four years, you will have chosen or let time choose for you what your life will be. Making a choice is empowering, because only then do you realize how little you had to choose from anyways. Most of the *topos* of choice is only a part of the pseudo-liberal ideology in which you have been bathed since childhood. "You can do anything if you put your mind to it." "You can become a millionaire if you work hard." This is not true. Some people are not smart enough, beautiful enough, strong enough, mentally stable enough to make it. We are not equal. Some people have to work twice as much to accomplish the same amount of work as another person. Others can work as hard as they can without being able to ever catch up.

Most of your future is already decided—and has been since you were born—by your parent's income, education, and friends. I mean this to be reassuring, because the one thing you have to learn sooner than later is resignation. From there you can gather your assets and build upon them to make the best out of what you have. You cannot beat the odds, but you can have them play to your advantage. There is zero chance you will run 100 meters under 10 seconds, so forget about that. There is maybe one out of three chances that you will get into a top graduate program, and as far as you are concerned it is more than enough. That is where the fun comes from in life. Knowing that you hugged every and any chance you had to accomplish something and that you worked hard at increasing your odds.

When I read your article, I took my red pen and started scribbling.

"A narrow-minded twenty-one year old, cynical college student": do not use apologetic, self-deprecating style as it weakens your point without adding to your thesis.

"Where is the hope in life?": good use of a rhetorical question, make sure it remains rhetorical.

"What will my next four years hold for me [...]": trite, very trite, wouldn't we all want to know? Two possessives in one sentence is a bit much, by that point of the article, I had understood it was all about you.

"Girlfriend": Garrett has a girlfriend, Garrett has a girlfriend!

"Where is the fun in that?" Mostly, the fun is reading your article, traveling four years behind and realizing that I see exactly what you mean because I was right there. Yet, I do not have an answer for you. I do not have an answer for myself either; there is just no question anymore. It feels good.

General appreciation: this is a B- paper for minor misspellings and questionable use of the course material. I enjoyed reading it though, and I am confident your performance in the class will improve greatly as you become more acquainted with the subject matter. ☒

Popcorn Pundit

By Susan Fritz

My pick of the month is a new movie—an Oscar contender, even. And since it's still playing in theaters, I won't give anything away, other than to say that it's a darn good movie. For those of you who only love sappy happy films, you might want to stay home with your VHS copies of *Dawson's Creek*. For the filmgoer who doesn't mind blood and brutal reality, however, *Million Dollar Baby* is a must see. This Clint Eastwood directed and starred film also stars Hillary Swank (awarded for her performance in *Boys Don't Cry*, another recommendation of mine) and Morgan Freeman—if you don't like this guy, check your pulse.

So, if your girlfriend argues with you, whining, "Hey, but I hate WWF!", remind her it's a boxing movie and then give her an upper cut to the jaw. If your boyfriend cries, "But girl, I wanted to check out *Racing Stripes!*", it's time for a right hook. Do whatever you need to do. Just see this movie.

Popcorn recommendation: David Letterman's new Explode-O-Pop! My friend that works at the *Late Show*, Tom, gave me some to try. It's legit and tastes great, too. Not too greasy but just enough flavor to keep your taste buds titillated and your eyes tuned to the movie screen. ☒

Do you Doodle?

By Dr. D. Freudeschönegötterfunken

Doodling has been a pastime of human beings since they discovered that they could create drawings by scraping a stick in wet sand. Since then, doodling has evolved into a complex nervous twitch that may be traceable back to a growing sense of movement and unrest in society. But is that the ultimate answer to doodling? Does that even begin to explain the myriad permutations that exist? What if you don't doodle? What does that say about you? This very article will attempt to capture the basics of doodling and its psychological implications, but this comes only after many months of intense debate and mind-blowing research. Only now am I prepared to present my findings to the *Babble-ON* community.

Many forms of doodling exist in its modern interpretation, ten common occurrences of which will be outlined. To repeat, this list is not comprehensive, but the general principles should be apparent. Each reflects something about the doodler and his life predicament, though there are some underlying attributes that apply to all doodling. To be sure, doodling is meditative, almost dreamlike, and scientists might take a hint from employing Doodle Therapy over Rorschach testing.

As mentioned, all doodling has certain aspects in common. First, all doodling mentally removes the doodler from his environment. This lends to its fantastical and dreamlike qualities. Second, all doodling comes (ironically) from an internal need to remain cognitively engaged. How many times has boredom caused the careless waste of scratch paper or notebook margins? And lastly, doodling is better done with a pen than a pencil.

...continued next page...

Last Month's Problem Hole

By Srida Joisa

“Grandma’s Light Switches”

Imagine you’ve got a row of 100 light bulbs each with their own on and off switch. The light bulbs are laid out in a single long line. All the light bulbs are switched off. As Grandma walks down the line, she switches some light bulbs. If the light bulb happens to be on, she switches it off. If it happens to be off, she switches it on.

All 100 light bulbs start in the off position. The first time Grandma walks down the line, she switches every light bulb. The second time she walks down the line (she starts from the 1st light bulb again), she switches every 2nd bulb. The 3rd time she walks down the line, she switches every 3rd bulb. And so on until on the 100th walk down the line, she only switches the 100th bulb.

When she’s done, which light bulbs are on?

Solution:

The way to think about this is to walk (no pun intended) through a couple of Grandma’s steps and see what happens. Let’s just focus on the first five bulbs for now.

After the 1st pass, all five are on.

On the 2nd pass, she skips 1, switches 2, skips 3, switches 4, and skips 5.

So, 1 is still on, 2 is off, 3 is still on, 4 is off, and 5 is still on.

On the 3rd pass, she only switches 3.

So, 1 is still on, 2 is off, 3 is off, 4 is off, and 5 is still on.

On the 4th pass, she only switches 4, and on the 5th pass she only switches 5.

So, 1 is still on, 2 is off, 3 is off, 4 is on, and 5 is off.

These five bulbs will never get touched again, because she will always skip them on every pass after pass #5.

Every bulb will get switched each time Grandma’s pass number is the same as a factor of the bulb. In other words, 1 only has one factor, namely 1. So, Grandma will switch it only on the 1st pass. 2 has two factors, namely 1 and 2. So, Grandma will switch it on the 1st and 2nd passes. And so on.

Since all the bulbs start in the off position, a bulb will be in the on position only if she switches it an odd number of times. So, we’re looking for all the numbers that have an odd number of factors.

But factors always come in pairs. For 10, the factors are 1 and 10, and 2 and 5. So, all the bulbs will be off when she’s done. Except that sometimes factors pair up with themselves. 4 has three factors, not four. The factors are 1 and 4, and 2. Grandma doesn’t switch bulb 4 four times, she switches it three times, because it’s a perfect square.

So, the bulbs that will be on are the perfect squares: 1, 4, 9, 16, 25, 36, 49, 64, 81, and 100. ☒

Do you want to be a published, international celebrity? Send in a submission to *Babble-ON*! All submissions are due the Friday before publication. See the website for details.

<http://www.newsletter.fritzcomics.com>

...Do You Doodle?, from previous page...

Kinds of Doodles:

- 1) Random Shapes
- 2) Three-dimensional wire figures
- 3) Written letters that are then colored in
- 4) Shapes that are then colored in
- 5) The same shape tessellating over and over
- 6) The same shape on top of itself over and over
- 7) Patterns
- 8) Flowers
- 9) Chicken Scratch
- 10) Pictures of actual objects, people, etc.

1) **Random Shapes** – Any and every simple shape falls into this category, including (but not limited to) squares, circles, diamonds, and curlicues. The non-complex nature is a common aspect, because the doodler cannot spare all mental resources to add detail. Nevertheless, a mid-range cognitive allocation is required if multiple, varied shapes are being created. Sharp-angled shapes are most common, exemplifying frustration. Look for particularly dark lines in the case of stressful telephone conversations or faux notes.

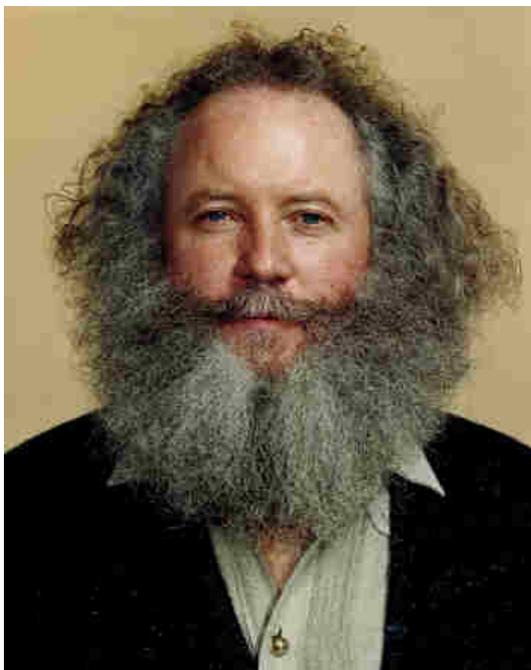
2) **Three-dimensional wire figures** – Practitioners of 3-D wire figure doodling are unsatisfied with simple shapes that lay flat on the paper. They require more life to their objects and must add a third dimension, such as (most commonly) in the case of a cube. Advanced wire doodlers might even draw 3-D houses, but the underlying wish is the same: more depth (even illusionary). This also brings up a common aspect is many kinds of doodles, namely that doodling commonly involves never-ending drawings. The doodler is attempting to break out of the second dimension, but this is never satisfying enough. Many random shape doodlers (see 1) find themselves delving into the third dimension to try to compensate for the inadequacy of their emotional expression.

3) **Written letters that are then colored in** – This falls into the “never-ending” motif at the add-on level, unless in the common case that the doodler does not even draw his own letters, but rather colors in preexisting letters on the page (i.e. letterhead). Either way, the style is extremely primitive, not even requiring the mental coordination to make lines connect. If people had third hands, they might even do this while driving, it’s that mundane. It portrays a definite sense of emptiness and the proposed compensation.

4) **Shapes that are then colored in** – This is similar to letters being colored in but more spatially oriented. The Oedipal implications of the filled box are clear. One may also observe the meticulous nature these doodlers generally portray, both in their cleaning habits and in their professions. The degree of accuracy involved in coloring “within the lines” is reflective of their ability to form lasting relationships. Accountants around the world and the people who invented commercial sanitizer have been known to doodle like this.

5) **The same shape tessellating over and over** – These doodlers are trying to grasp infinity but cannot. Alternatively, these people enjoy movies like *Meet the Parents* and/or the typical television sitcom because of the preponderance of painful, situational irony. In case you were wondering what these doodles look like, they

...continued next page...



Beard of the Month

Herbert Dobner

See <http://www.worldbeardchampionships.com/> for more.

Åsa Say

Political Edition

By Asa Hadsell

If the U.S. were Belgium, I'd be a Confederate harvesting cotton right now instead of an American with a somewhat decent education.

If the U.S. were Europe, I'd be a Texan in a big little country surrounded by a bunch of smaller countries instead of an American.

If the U.S. were a social welfare state, we'd have been bankrupt long before the terrorists had a chance to break our banks, and the entire world (excluding China of course) would never have made it out of the Great Depression, and I'd be bitching that in five years I'd be working to support ten retired, instead of an American going out on a limb with no "safety net" of government-provided health care or assistance if I lose my job, to continue to help make this world go round.

I feel bad for Europe, because it sold its people "security" without any hope, but then I feel equally as bad for America that sold its people a "dream" without anything to fall back on, which is going to cause us to fall further than the rest of the world if it all comes crumbling down.... ☒

...*Do You Doodle?*, from previous page...

may, for instance, take the form of diamonds that are repeated over and over again next to each other. If more complex, they form a "tessellation" pattern, i.e. varied interlocking shapes.

6) **The same shape on top of itself over and over** – The root of this is painfully obvious: sexual tension. By drawing the same object repeatedly on top of itself—even to the point of ripping through the paper—the doodler is performing the equivalent of tearing the label off of his beer at the bar. He is attempting to simulate the perpetual motion that is his vision of sex. There may even be signs of intensely bottled hatred, expressed through sexual (perhaps even psychopathic) activity.

7) **Patterns** – Patterns can take form in a variety of ways. They could be more along the stricter lines of the tessellation, or they could be far less regular. Sometimes the pattern is more like a maze that just keeps being added to until the pattern fills an entire quadrant of a page. For most practitioners of this doodle style, the desire for a sense of accomplishment is strong. At the end of the day, they have only drawn a random doodle, but they feel like (and want to feel like) they have done much, much more. These people like to play the Sims.

8) **Flowers** – More than not, this doodle is reserved for the female population. And the flowers never change. They are the same flowers every time, usually similar to a daisy. While some may view this behavior as their shot at being cute, others may recognize the strong hints of repressed anger and the overcompensation thereof. The doodlers are attempting to *be the flower*, but they know that they are not. This just causes them to draw even more flowers. They even doodle in other people's notes, the need for compensation is so dominating.

9) **Chicken Scratch** – These doodles look like scratches and dots on paper. No identifiable "objects" exist in such drawings. People who practice this method are attempting to look like they're doing something, even though they're not. The problem arises when their weak imagination fails at preoccupying their minds with more interesting subjects to doodle. People who usually want you to "tell them a story" fall into this category, since they cannot make up their own nor can they recall them if they could. Either that, or they're just fake-out artists.

10) **Pictures of actual objects, people, etc.** – These doodles sometimes take the form of stand-alone pictures and sometimes take the form of cartoons, most commonly employing word and thought bubbles. The practitioner of picture doodling usually expends more concentration on creating these pieces than the ones previously described, especially if he is cartooning. This is due to the necessary structure of the creation. If the picture is a still-life or portrait, the practitioner must carefully recreate the image. If the picture is a cartoon, the practitioner must create action and/or dialog. In this sense, people who draw pictures as doodles have the greatest desire to be removed from the current situation that they are in, i.e. a classroom, meeting room, or other lecture environment, since this doodle requires them to fully reassign their attention. Doodling, therefore, enables them to completely escape.

As you can see, the vastness of this study is simply too great for a mere article in *Babble-ON*. Additionally, as with any other sociological or psychological study, this outline serves as a rubric for identification. Rarely is there one subject who exclusively employs one method or exhibits only one of these ten-odd traits. For instance, developed doodlers have been known to exhibit a combination of 4 and 10, which typically results from the psychological background displayed by 8. Those doodles might look like volleyballs that have a couple of their patches colored in. The possibilities are endless.

And for everyone else who doesn't doodle, congratulations on controlling your nervous tendencies. You're well on your way to life contentment. Keep it up.

To contribute further data to this research, please send all materials to
dan@fritzcomics.com. ☒

Retro Word World

Words and phrases from your past

By Susan Fritz

RAD!

As in, "Dude, did you check out the hydraulics on his ride? They are so **rad!**"

Or, "My ride is way **radder** than yours!"

Or, "Dude, my ride is the **raddest** around!"

BALLS!

As in, "**Balls!** I forgot to turn off the stove! That sucks balls."

TOTALLY TUBULAR!

As in, "The Zamboni on Nintendo Ice Hokey is **totally tubular!**"

SCHWING!

As in, "**Schwing!** If Claudia Schiffer were president she'd be Babe-raham Lincoln."

SORE

As in, "Gee, it really made me **sore** when Bobby tied me to that tree *and* rode my bike."

BOSS

As in, "Wouldn't it be **boss** to quit our jobs and fly to Fiji?" "Yeah, what a **boss** idea."

SKANK

As in, "Your dad's new wife is a total **skank!**"

NOT!

"That new haircut of yours looks hot...**NOT!**"

AS IF!

So she says, "Hey, have fun watching the Dukes of Hazzard and playing Pong this weekend...as if?" One could also complete this sentence with, "as if my dance card isn't totally full this weekend!"

ISN'T THAT SPECIAL?

You remember the Church Lady, right? (Kids born in the 80's, consult old episodes of SNL on your local Comedy Central station.) Well, this phrase creates an annoyingly nostalgic feeling when used sparingly. ☒

The Ever-growing Presence of Videogames in Pop Culture

from mlgpro.com, Thursday, January 13, 2005 - 08:49 AM

By James 'Fiend' Schneider

Gamers are special people. No, not like "riding the short bus to school" special. We have a knack for problem solving, tend not to give up easily and can convince our significant others to stare at the sides of our heads for more hours than we talk to them. Sorry, Claudia. On the negative end, gamers tag buildings with graffiti, rob and even kill, if you'd believe it. But, both scenarios feed the same basic idea: videogames are becoming more commonplace—in movies, sports, music and more.

The age-range for gamers is growing, and now they're continuing to game well into their thirties and perhaps beyond, so gaming is inherently becoming more expected and respected. Positive for the gaming industry is that the children who grew up with video games will not only continue to game, but pass it on to their children as well. But, there's a group of people who will never get it: this generation of gamers' parents.

Take your parents, for instance. Your parents are, shall we say, mildly confused by your actions. You aren't listening to music or watching television like might be expected of someone your age. Instead, you are in the dark, five feet from your television screen, talking to "friends" you've never met on a thirty dollar headset wired into your controller. It may be winter there, but the season never changes in your family room. You don't go outside. And add to that the profanity, lack of hygiene and laziness that they may see everyday. Pleased as punch doesn't immediately jump to mind.

How could your parents understand how hard it is to be you? Come on, this is a Major Clan Match and for the first time in a month you weren't standby-cheated: this is serious. Someone's got the bomb and they are hiding it, and you need about five more minutes, just five more minutes, or your stats will lower and none of your friends will talk to you. What friends? You barely talk to us. The imaginary people that live in your television and talk to you through your strange headset, of course.

The same scenario could be applied to spending time with your real-life non-gaming-typically female-friends in person. They stop by occasionally to check up on you, see how you are doing. They usually watch the side of your head and get about three disjointed sentences before they "have to go."

Those closest to you might want to know why your eyes are always bloodshot and why you have nagging carpal tunnel. Once you tell them you are totally engrossed in the coolest game you've ever played, they might not understand it, but they won't stop you. Probably because they love you, even despite yourself. Awww.

But what made gaming such an integral part of the culture of people our age—whatever that is—that more people than ever would "get it?" Or, at the very least fake it, just to seem like they're more with it than your folks.

What follows is a gross oversimplification and for that I apologize. For everything else I've done, well, yeah I guess I apologize for that too.

In the world of gaming, the first people to play videogames were a little weird. No one really got why you'd use something called a joystick, or why you'd alter your perfectly good television for the purpose of paddling Pong. These people weren't necessarily the type of people to play real ping-pong, but they'd play this game non-stop.

Years passed and more people started playing videogames: Space Invaders, Pac-Man, Tetris and, of course, the Mario phenomenon. Not very complicated, and yet a little too complicated for some. Gaming consoles began to appear in more and more people's living rooms. And, one excellent gaming system, like Atari, gave way to another, like the NES, which gave way to another like the Sega Genesis.

Then along came Wolfenstein 3-D and Doom. id Software noticed that there was a growing demand for increasingly realistic and progressively more violent videogames. They created a game where you kill Nazis and followed it up with a game where you viciously murder Satan spawn bellowing up from the craters of Hell. Basically, blood-soaked affairs that left gamers grinning and mothers cringing.

So, we in the console world owe a strange debt of gratitude to Wolfenstein 3-D and

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The Fake Science News

Tolkien Incorrect: Sauron Clear Victor in
War for Middle Earth

By Marisa Alyn Fenn

Recent archaeological excavations have revealed the truth behind the highly heralded War for Middle Earth. J.R.R. Tolkien's descriptions of this epic battle are perhaps the most famous and were also recently adapted for the silver screen. What the archaeologists from the University of New England (which is in Australia, not New England) found, however, contradicts much of Tolkien's descriptions of this war, including, which side may have ended the conflict victoriously. A recent interview with Peter Brown, paleoanthropologist at the University of New England sheds much light on the questions surrounding the truth about the fate of the Hobbit-folk that all the world has learned to love.



IN: "So, your recent discoveries are from the island of Indonesia. Did you know that this island was in fact the Middle Earth of legend?"

PB: "Well, I thought so. My colleague Jim was swayed by that Peter Jackson fellow and thought that it must have been New Zealand, but I was sure that Indonesia was the place."

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... Video Games, from previous page...

Doom (both PC games) for creating such a stir. As wallets opened, so did new companies driven to find innovative ways to explore fantasy. Those games are legendary, and were borrowed from and copied in countless ways, from within id for Quake and by outsiders like 3D Realms for Duke Nukem 3D and Shadow Warrior and on and on. They pulled the most talented software engineers they could find and produced games that emphasized graphics and the use of insane weapons.

But the consoles have long since struck back with a vengeance. With increased hardware and graphical firepower and the ability to play the newest games without shelling out two G's for another computer, the console has become the choice du jour for many. And although this particular debate has no room in this article, suffice it to say there are two breeds of gamers—PC gamers and console gamers—with limited exception. Either way, gamers of both worlds have been growing at an exponential rate since those early FPS games.

Unfortunately, when you mess with people's conventional values, frivolous lawsuits will be filed. It is all theoretically in the name of banning violent games and protecting children, but it's actually only to rattle cages and make excuses for their own failings as parents. An army of soccer moms claiming that video games like Postal and Grand Theft Auto should be boycotted? Come on. That kids play violent video games is normal. That violent and troubled teens are among those who play video games is normal too. It's just not credible that video games cause more harm than watching Dad beat Mom. Sorry. Still, video games, even when seen in such a negative light, are more high profile because of these lawsuits.

Thankfully, along came something called the Internet which (after some notable intermediate steps) eventually gave rise to the popularity of Microsoft's Xbox and Xbox Live. And with these wondrous inventions a little game called Halo exploded. Master Chief is iconic to the point where crowded theatres will gasp as they see the larger than life MC gruff, "I need a weapon" in a trailer for H2. Okay, it was just me, but I still thought it was awesome.

As video games became, and continue to become, more important items on the cultural menu, they persistently appear in more elements of mass media, the printing press of the new millennia. It's not just a new diversion; it's easily the best one. At the end of the day, most men want to feel like they are heroes. And if it's the sudden-death flag-cap to seal the victory, hey man, more power to you.

Movies and video games feed off each other. Angelina Jolie embodied the beautiful and voluptuous Lara Croft. Mortal Kombat was also turned into a movie. In the case of *Blade Trinity*—which I highly recommend—video-game-esque graphics and fast, jerky camera angles trick the viewer into believing in vampires. *The Matrix* and the *Lord of the Rings* franchises had their movies and their video game counterparts developed more or less concurrently. The should-have-been-trademarked "Matrix move" with the slow-motion-stop flying ninja acrobatics could not look any more like a video game. Max Payne's "Bullet Time" anyone? And the *Chronicles of Riddick* not only appeared as a movie—albeit a forgettable one—but also as a video game, *Escape from Butcher Bay*, which samples the likeness and voice of Neanderthal Vin Diesel.

Video game cinematics, beautiful sound and famous actors make for stories at least as complicated as most movies. This is all made possible in games by bigger budgets, so thanks once again to the popularity of Wolfenstein and Doom.

There have been movies about fake video games, movies based on real games, games based on movies and even movies that were made with games in mind. You can't deny that the images on screens of both are fantastic, in the sense that they usher in a world of fantasy, but they're also vividly real. They fit with the action as much as any other part of the film, but just happen to be computer-generated, like a video game.

The growing popularity of sports games, meanwhile, explains some of the jerky camera tricks employed during sporting events. People like my friend Nate criticize the cartoonish nature, or the videogamish nature of broadcasted professional sporting events—especially football. Well, he loves Madden more than anyone I know. ESPN even used its own versions of the Sega sports titles NFL 2K5 and NCAA 2K5 to predict outcomes of their events.

Then, of course, there are all the famous, popular people who play video games.

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...*The Fake Science News, from previous page...*

IN: "What made you so sure that Indonesia was in fact Middle Earth?"

PB: "Can't remember exactly, but it is clear now that Indonesia is the place, and I'm sure I'm quoted somewhere at some point saying that I thought we would find this sort of evidence there."

IN: "And, what exactly did you find?"

PB: "I found a number of skeletons, many of which are clearly hobbits as well as some skeletons of animals. I also found weaponry. The hobbit skeletons are very small, but they are clearly the skeletons of adults. Some stature estimates have been as small as one meter."

IN: "One meter?"

PB: "Oh yes, that's about 3.3 feet for you Americans."

IN: "So, what about the finding of these hobbit skeletons leads you to conclude that Tolkien was wrong about the War for Middle Earth?"

PB: "The hobbit skeletons were the only human-like skeletons that we found on Indonesia for the appropriate time frame. If the free races of Middle Earth had won the war then there should be remains of men and dwarves as well, but we have found no evidence of that. My theory is that when the war was lost, the elves, men, and dwarves left Middle Earth seeking safer lands, but the hobbits were left to the slavery of Sauron, because they did not know how to swim or use boats."

IN: "I thought they used some boats in the movie."

PB: "That was just over short distances. They would never have made it to another landmass across a big body of water. Besides, my theory is supported by the finding of a skeleton we think is actually the famous Frodo Baggins."



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...*Video Games, from previous page...*

Like, Willis McGahee and the band Breaking Benjamin, who appeared on the Xbox Live contest Game with Fame. It's not über-cool that McGahee and Benjamin play Halo—they fit the 18-35 demographic of males (read: target audience). Okay, okay, so they aren't even all that famous and no one really cares that they play Halo 2. A real Game with Fame might have some contest winners crushed by MLG pros. That might be fun. Hey, why not?

Then there's the aspect of water cooler conversation for young workers in their 20s and 30s. It might not happen with an office of older people, but since tons of employees can't wait to jump on their consoles the second they step in the door, gaming is bound to come up. You know it yourself. Bags drop to the floor, shirts off, belts undone, Xbox, PS2, what have you flipped on and wham-bam, thank you ma'am, game till you drop to the floor exhausted.

But, there comes a breaking point. A point when even people you wouldn't really expect to play video games are now playing them. This is the mass media, pop-culture idea of market saturation. And, it's not a harbinger for the end to video games as we know them, but perhaps a sign that video games are more commonplace than ever before. Still, I recently saw two things that disturbed me profoundly...

I saw almost all of Ashlee Simpson's latest video. On MTV no less. As she lip-syns to her latest song—I believe it's called "La La"—she holds an S-Controller and pretends to play Tony Hawk's Underground 2 with a bunch of her girlfriends. Your girlfriend probably doesn't play video games, so it's not super-crazy-cool. Ashlee herself was faking it, again. But even Miss My-Band-Played-The-Wrong-Song and her directors found video games a culturally relevant reference. At least as culturally relevant as MTV.

The second item is deplorable; actually, it's so deplorable that it's stupid. At a Catholic School near my town, someone tagged "Jesus Pwns" in huge block letters next to a cross. I've heard that a sixth-grader carried out the vandalism. Regardless of the futility and evilness of the act, it's gamerspeak—ironically also something consoleers owe to PC gaming. Most of the teachers didn't understand it, and most of the religious brothers didn't either, but some did: anyone who's noob enough to know the word "noob." We can chalk this mischief up to a Christmas where more parents gave their children videogames than ever before.

Luckily, there is a strong counter to the baser elements of society, the "scrape the bottom of the barrel and you haven't quite hit it yet" funk. You know, like Ashlee Simpson, Jesus Pwns and lawsuits against video games. It's Major League Gaming! It is a testament to the ever-growing popularity of videogames if there ever was one. To think something that was once only for a few people is now worth thousands of dollars for today's best.

That the forums are so active, not just from the top pros, but from those interested in them, is great. That the MLG tournaments are able to provide larger and grander payouts is very promising. That the upcoming tournaments are looking like they'll have extremely high attendance is great too. All signs point toward gaming becoming a bigger part of the mass-media society.

Videogames are everywhere and their effects are growing. As I sit in my Halo 2 t-shirt below my Halo 2 poster that my girlfriend bought me for Christmas, I see the horizon. I see a new generation of people with good hand-eye coordination, a never-say-die attitude and battered thumbs. I see movies and sports copycating videogame effects. I have a new revelation: videogames are good for everyone—including your girlfriend. I see a new world, and it looks great from here. ☒

...*The Fake Science News, from previous page...*

IN: "What makes you think this skeleton is Frodo Baggins?"

PB: "The best evidence really, is the look of utter and annoyingly constant angst that the skull possesses. Yes, it is clearly Frodo."

IN: "Well, no arguments here...but tell me more about the animal skeletons that were found."

PB: "Some interesting finds were of lizards like Komodo Dragons but larger. These animals clearly represent the Winged Carrion beasts that the Nazgul rode into battle. There is actually no evidence that these lizards flew, so we think Tolkien just made up that part, but they still may have been ridden by the Nazgul into battle on land. We also found elephants or "oliphaunts" as Tolkien describes, but they were smaller than the elephants that we are acquainted with. It is impossible to imagine them being ridden by multiple men into battle, but they may have aided in battle in some other way."

IN: "So, in the movie when Gimli complained to Legolas that his big oliphaunt kill wasn't such a big deal, he really had a case."

PB: "Oh yeah. I think the hobbits probably could have managed to kill the things we found...even with the crude weaponry we found with them."

IN: "Final question for you then...Were you able to locate the ring of power?"

PB: "Of course not. If any of the hobbits had it, they might not have lost the war. My guess is that Sauron got it back."

IN: "Doesn't that mean that evil reigns supreme in the world of men?"

PB: "You don't need a Ph.D. to answer that one...but, as I do have one...my answer is yes." ☒

Etymology with Al

By Al Fishman

This week on Etymology with Al...**SPANKING!**

As you frolic to and fro this winter, inevitably breaking a few rules, be aware that Mommy or Daddy may have to give you a swift spanking. The word, "spanking," is quite mysterious. It seems that no one truly knows its origin. Perhaps it is Scandinavian in origin, from the Danish or Norwegian word *spanke* which means "to strut." (Or maybe lesbians made it up, but we'll get to that later....) In any case, people can use "spanking" as an adjective or adverb to mean "remarkable" or "swift and vigorous" or "brisk and fresh." People really should use this word more often. It appears in English about the middle of the seventeenth century and implied something that was exceptionally good or especially fine, often something showy

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Babbleplay Excerpt of the Month

from *The Book of Liz*

By The Talent Family, David Sedaris and Amy Sedaris

Contributed by Susan Fritz

The following is an excerpt from Scene Nine of the aforementioned play. It is also advice on how to quit your job whilst standing up for your personal convictions.

DUNCAN. It's our look that's turning people away. Too dark. Too heavy. So the folks upstairs have decided to lighten things up. The new uniforms will be a pancake, toasty sort of color ... (*He hands her the catalog opened to the proper page.*)

ELIZABETH. You mean this one here, with the poncho and sombrero?

DUNCAN. No, silly, the one on top, worn over the turtleneck T-shirt. The guys, of course, will wear pants while the ladies will have a choice of either shorts or a skirt.

ELIZABETH. (*Holding up the catalog.*) You don't mean this skirt, do you? Why, it's no bigger than a bev nap.

DUNCAN. It's a little on the short side, but customers like to see a bit of leg. Studies prove it increases the appetite for bacon.

ELIZABETH. But Mr. T, I can't wear this.

DUNCAN. Sure you can, Liz. Have some confidence. I see a lot of women your age wearing this sort of thing.

ELIZABETH. It's not my age, I just...can't. The poncho maybe, but the skirt or the shorts, no, they're out of the question.

DUNCAN. There's a special provision for the disabled, but as long as those are your real legs I'm afraid you're going to have to go along with the program. What is this, Liz, some sort of a...religious thing? You're not a Moslem, are you?

ELIZABETH. (*This is very hard for her to say.*) No I'm...I'm Squeamish. I'm from Cluster Haven, Duncan.

DUNCAN. (*Laughing.*) Right, like the folks in their buggies? Oh, that's a good one Liz.

ELIZABETH. Please don't act like that Duncan, not you.

DUNCAN. I'm sorry. But...Squeamish? From Cluster Haven? Why didn't you tell me?

ELIZABETH. No one ever asked and, seeing as it never got in the way of my job, I didn't see any reason to bring it up.

DUNCAN. Is that why you wear gloves when working the register? And ride the...

ELIZABETH. Llama to work. Yes. There are a lot of things I can work around, but a short skirt—it just goes against everything I believe in.

DUNCAN. Cluster Haven. That's a pretty big thing to withhold. I mean, a thing like that, it rules your life.

ELIZABETH. Well don't you start every shift with a group serenity prayer?

DUNCAN. That's different, Liz. I'm an alcoholic.

ELIZABETH. Great. So why don't you have a drink to celebrate your big promotion? Go out on the town with Conrad and treat yourself to a nice big bottle of Lancers.

DUNCAN. That's cruel, Liz. You know I can't have a drink. Especially Lancers.

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...*Etymology, from previous page...*

or smart. Then it was used to describe fast horses, moving in a smart way. And later could be used to describe almost anything moving fast. H. G. Wells used it in 1904: "The char-a-banc ... was clattering along at a spanking pace" [char-a-banc, an early form of bus, used for pleasure trips]. But I think we all would rather use the term to describe the action of disciplining a child (or lover) by administering swift strikes on the buttocks, either bared or clothed, with either the hand or an implement such as "a wooden spoon." This example of spanking lets me introduce my favorite TV show, BBC's *Coupling*, to the Babble-ON community. The episode that made *Coupling* my favorite show is "Inferno" (season one, 4) in which Steve is plunged into total panic when he suspects that Susan has found one of his porn videos. Susan invites all the friends over for a dinner party, and then, in front of everyone, Susan insists that Steve justify his passion for the offending porn film, *Lesbian Spank Inferno*. Luckily, Steve is a bit of an orator and initiates the "it's not pornography; it's erotica!" defense. Brilliant! You should all be spanked and then watch *Coupling*. To see what I'm talking about, go to <http://www.bbc.co.uk/comedy/coupling/episodes> (but only after reading *Babble-ON*). ☒

...*Babbleplay, from previous page...*

ELIZABETH. And I can't wear a short skirt. It's the same thing, Duncan.

DUNCAN. Listen Liz, I can tell you right now that the guys upstairs are not going to accept anyone not wearing the new uniform. I personally think you have what it takes, *but...*

ELIZABETH. Ah, there's that *but* again. You people use that word a lot, Duncan. "We love you to death *but* you sweat too much." "You'd make a great manager, *but* you won't wear a short skirt." "Your llama's really cute, *but* he can't have an employee parking space." (*She gets up from the chair and starts collecting her things.*)

DUNCAN. What are you doing?

ELIZABETH. Don't you see, Mister T? If I go through with this procedure there'll only be more butts. And I'll go along and go along until someone says, "We'd love to keep you on, *but* you're getting too old." And in the end I won't have anything left but a dry miniskirt and a plaque reminding me that once upon a time I was employee-of-the-month. I can face old age, Duncan, but not without my principles. Thanks for the offer, but I won't be needing the job. Or the leeches. ☒

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The John Cusack Guide to Successful Dating

By Brett



Do you ever wonder how he pulls it off? In every movie, Mr. Cusack successfully fumbles his way into the lap of the leading female and into the hearts of his sympathetic followers. He has simply mastered the lovable loser technique. For the sake of every man out there, I attempted to dissect this strategy. It took literally hours of film study and many bottles of beer to figure out exactly how Mr. Cusack can so awkwardly find success in the hearts of all of his female followers, both fictional and nonfictional. Well, I have saved you gentlemen all of the work. Sit back, take notes, and see what you really need to do in order to get all the babes, just like John Cusack, in **10** simple steps.

- Keep it "real." Basically this means: be as awkward as possible. No woman ever expects perfection. In fact, they want someone more foolish than they. If you do everything too well, then you'll be "too good." You don't want that. You must be the orphaned puppy, and the orphaned puppy never knows all the right moves. From this main principle, all the rest bloom.
- Hobbies are important. When deciding what to occupy your spare time with, do something as esoteric and emotionally inaccessible as possible, like kickboxing. If you want to do

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...*Natural Born Thinker, p. 1...*

is apt. As I read McGrath's article, I was transported back to my first class at New York University's Gallatin School of Individualized Study. During the first writing class I was *required* to take, all five of us transfer students were handed Sontag's essay called "Against Interpretation," her most famous and perhaps most disputed work. Unexpectedly, I was already familiar with her work, having seen a play she had written a few months earlier. So, I got to do one of those satisfying, "Oh, sure, I'm familiar with Susan's work" jobbies, trying to impress the suede pants off of my Ph.D. candidate writing teacher. The truth was, it was one of the worst plays I'd ever seen—as in, it made me sick and anxious watching it. My conspicuous front row seat was the only factor that kept me from sprinting out of the theatre.

In contrast to the author's plays, in my post-graduate life I soon discovered Sontag's gift for storytelling through the genre of novel. On a happy trip through the discount section of Powell's Bookstore in Portland, Oregon, I quite literally judged a book by its cover. (You see, I'm the person they market multi-colored iMac's to. If I could, I would buy one in each Jolly Rancher fashion color.) In this instance, it was the substantial-looking black-and-white covered book titled, *In America* that caught my eye. Below the title in larger font read "SUSAN SONTAG." The novel exceeded my expectations. It reads like historical non-fiction at times and a dream-like memoir at others. Sontag once wrote, "The aim of all commentary on art now should be to make works of art—and, by analogy, our own experience—more, rather than less, real to us." With this novel, it's as if she is providing herself a basis from which to test this method of criticism, creating fictional history that at times seems more applicable to our life than a so-called "factual," non-fiction rendering of the past.

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...John Cusack, from previous page...

something more common, like own a record store or draw, make sure you do it with such zeal that she will never understand your geek-dom but will nevertheless be attracted to your dedication.

- Make sure you have some sort of unreasonable fear of something silly and insignificant, like boats. This will comfort the woman and make her feel more secure, since in fact, *you* are the big weenie.
- Any female will tell you how important a family is. This is why you need to make sure that you alienate her family as much as possible. Look dangerous or do something that exposes you as the shady guy. If you can't accomplish this, then look as socially inept as possible when in the presence of her family. This will make her try even harder to integrate you into her life.
- Make sure to mix in an unreasonable outburst from time to time. This should be embarrassing for both parties. This will set you up for the tactical apology.
- When talking on the telephone, make sure you sound as awkward as possible. Never give the impression that you are ever comfortable with yourself and what you are doing (remember, we are trying to keep it "real"). This applies doubly to conversations on the telephone. If you feel yourself gaining too much control of the situation then see the previous point and erupt. If all else fails, resort to self-deprecation. You want her to feel sorry for you and thereby want you more. Think puppies.
- Try to get caught doing something that really isn't your fault. Make sure as many people know as possible that it really is not your fault, *except* of course the woman in question. This is obviously her big test of whether she will take you back, even though we all know you are innocent. Think puppies being beaten for peeing in the corner, even though they didn't do it.
- Make sure you pick a nemesis with whom you couldn't possibly compete on any practical level. You must be unstable, and he must be the captain of the ski team. If you're really lucky, this guy will already be dating the woman you also plan to date. While we're on this topic, it is important to point out that you should never ever drive a nice car. Ever.
- The reconciliation speech is a pivotal moment. After having invariably screwed up your relationship, you will need to execute the "please come back to me" sermon. Steps need to be followed in order for this to follow proper procedure. First, check the weather and make sure it will be raining. Secondly, make sure to arrive at her place in mid-torrent *without* an umbrella. Don't entertain thoughts of actually going inside her place, rather, get as soaked as possible and deliver a speech from outside her house, then implement a hasty retreat. She'll be calling you back in no time. Perfect!
- Whenever possible, make offhand comments to a fake camera or a fake audience. Talk about the importance of following the above principles and your fierce integrity as if people were really listening. Don't worry if you do this while she is actually sitting there at the dinner table or accompanying you on any date. She will understand the necessity of such exegesis. This will also help to reinforce the aforementioned principles.

So, there you have it. This is naturally just a beginner's guide. More comprehensive, theoretical takes on the John Cusack dating system still need to be explored. Nonetheless, these simple strategies will help you secure the woman of your dreams through sheer blunder. Good luck! ☒

...Natural Born Thinker, from previous page...

"Against Interpretation," 1964:

Ours is a culture based on excess, on overproduction; the result is a steady loss of sharpness in our sensory experience. All the conditions of modern life—its material plentitude, its sheer crowdedness—conjoin to dull our sensory faculties. And it is in the light of the condition of our senses, or capacities (rather than those of another age), that the task of a critic must be assessed.

It is important to keep in mind that Sontag's scholarship is in reference to the *professional* critic, i.e. the art critic, the theatre critic, the film critic, the literary critic. It is true, though, that we are all, at some point or other, critics. A person may play the role of critic on a daily basis at work or on the weekends after seeing a newly released Blockbuster video rental. Sometimes our criticism is unstoppably emotional, based on a gut reaction with little or no "reasoning" behind it. Sometimes we are able to step back from our emotions in order to analyze and interpret what we experience, view, or read. In either case, however, it is usually easier to muddle up what we see with gut and brain-response than to examine it in a calm, clear, 20-Watt light. Sontag goes on in her essay,

Our task is not to find the maximum amount of content in a work of art, much less to squeeze more content out of the work than is already there. Our task is to cut back content so that we can see the thing at all.

"The thing"...I love that line. Sontag is someone whose vocabulary could easily crush yours or mine, but she illustrates and thus *emphasizes* her point with simplicity. It's refreshing, and it's a skill to admire.

In re-reading Sontag's words, just a handful of which I have reproduced here, I was prepared to relive my essay-writing days of old by inserting huge block quotes followed by the attempt to decipher their meaning. Or, as I sometimes dreamed (aware of my naiveté), to add something new to the chorus of intellect already written. But as I read, I thought that Sontag might not have approved of my actions, my attempt to offer up another critique of the criticism of criticism. So, I just decided to read on with an open mind, as if reading the essay for the first time. I also put my Bic brite liner aside. But like a klepto with sticky fingers, I am certain to pick it up later, and that's o.k. There is satisfaction in protecting one's insights, in keeping thoughts to oneself. It transforms into that almost imperceptible glint behind a person's eye. The stuff deposited into romance novels, I suppose. So, to honor her passing, I will leave you, in this age of technology, with a suggestion and a final quote: find yourself a copy of "Against Interpretation" or another of Sontag's essays. Think of these works as listings on the "recommended readings" portion of your syllabus. And think of these words not as discouraging and pessimistic, but as a challenge to continue thinking, writing, and analyzing. If not in the pursuit of the purest form of criticism, at least toward the effort of clearing away the mental cobwebs.

None of us can ever retrieve that innocence before all theory when art knew no need to justify itself, when one did not ask of a work of art what it *said* because one knew (or thought one knew) what it *did*. For now to the end of consciousness, we are stuck with the task of defending art. We can only quarrel with one or another means of justifying art which becomes particularly obtuse or onerous or insensitive to contemporary needs and practice. ☒

...*Poli-tic-tac-toes*, p. 1...

So, I watched in horror, as George W. Bush won his 2nd term, and I asked myself, "How can this be happening?" My instincts told me the problem was America's two-party system, for it allows the scenario of one party winning everything. But that's a difficult feat, really only possible when the other party alienates Middle America. But I suppose having an evil genius mastermind in your corner, like Karl Rove, helps, too. Anyway, there I was, thinking the Democratic Party was full of incompetent politicians and wishing Karl Rove away, and I decided I would explore multiparty systems. I would explore all the options. But there are no ready options, no easy vehicles for change, no clever solutions. This two-party system is entrenched in America. Our government is run by professional politicians. It is no longer the idealistic government for the people, by the people, and of the people because we, the people, do not want to spend all of our free time in city planning meetings. F*** that. Let the politicians do it. It's their job, right? This indifference to our own governing helps entrench the system. That's the real problem, not the number of viable political parties. We, the people, want convenience at our every finger tip. We, the people, want professionals making the hard decisions. We, the people, want gay marriage to be unconstitutional so our children won't be gay. We, the people, want freedom and democracy spread across the third world so we can sleep easier in our subdivisions. At least this is what the majority of people want. And to just say Republicans duped Middle America is insulting and feeds all the liberal bashing. (Note: We, the people, also wanted the Falcons to beat the Eagles in the playoffs, but you cannot have everything.)

If these things are not what you want, you should speak louder or vote more often (in Ohio) or try to start your political party in a non-swing state. If you really want to talk about adding parties (which is doubtful, because I brought up the subject), know that the only people that could amend the political framework to make it more difficult for the two parties to maintain the status quo are members of one of the two main political parties. So, that's obviously not going to happen. They want to keep their jobs. And we, the people, like the status quo. We, the people, have never liked change. If you don't believe me, take a look at this selection from the Declaration of Independence:

Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security.

There might come a time, though, when we, the people, decide to get more involved in politics. If that happens, I think change can be done from within the current political system (unless the Neo-Conservative train of abuses and usurpations grows too lengthy). I've been watching C-SPAN, and I know there are some people doing good work in Washington. God bless 'em.... But that's not really an answer to my issue with the two-party system. That answer doesn't exist. All I can do is become less indifferent. In the mighty words of Michael Jackson, I'm starting with the man in the mirror. I'm asking him to change his ways. And no message could have been any clearer. If you want to make the world a better place, start with yourself and make that...change! ☒

The Eagles

A String of Haikus
By Steven Sierakowski

Such majestic birds
Soaring to greater heights;
Who are you today?

Once a poem by
Alfred, Lord Tennyson;
Now a Goodyear tire

A master boy scout;
Or in Colorado,
At Kobe's trial

Henley and Frey wrote
Hotel California,
And Take it Easy

National treasure;
Or the Fellowship's savior
From Sauron's Mt. Doom

Could be many, but
Philadelphia knows...
Super Bowl Heroes

☒

BabbleList of Distinction

The following people have been (or will be, after this issue is released) awarded the following *Babble-ON* distinctions. Congratulations!

Babble-ON-ians (5,000+ words):

Alan Fishman
Susan Fritz
Brett
James Schneider

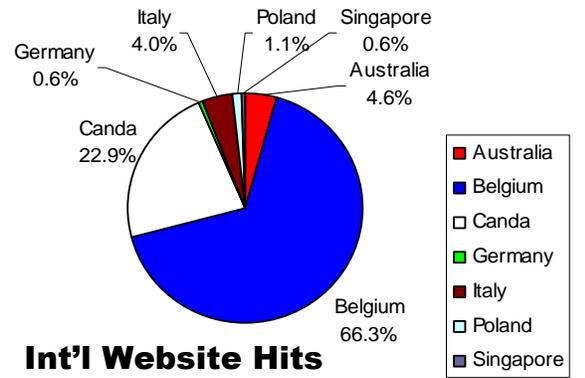
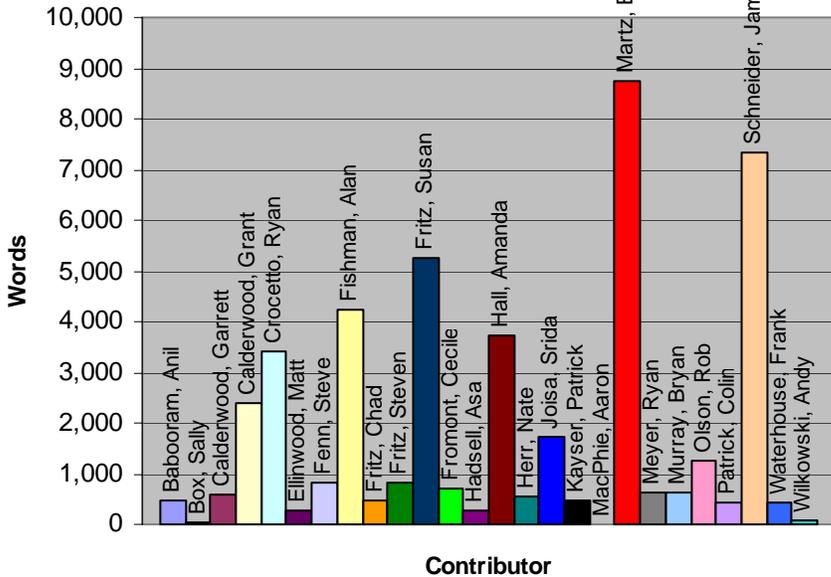
Little Scribblers (1,000+ words):

Grant Calderwood
Ryan Crocetto
Cécile Fromont
Amanda Hall
Srida Joisa
Rob Olson

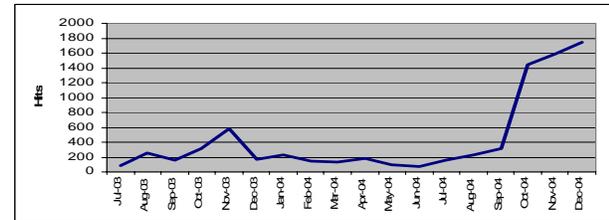
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Total Words Contributed

These are close approximations. Does not include current issue or editor.



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| Grant Calderwood | Asa Hadsell |
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| Marisa Fenn | Aaron MacPhie |
| Alan Fishman | Brett |
| Chad Fritz | Bryan Murray |
| Dan Fritz | James Schneider |
| Susan Fritz | Steven Sierakowski |
| Cécile Fromont | |

Submission Suggestions

Your contribution can be anything that fits onto a sheet of paper. Here are a few ideas:

- | | | |
|-------------|---------------|------------|
| Editorials | Reports | Philosophy |
| Reviews | Ramblings | Rants |
| Comics | Puzzles | Jokes |
| Quotes | Polls | Trivia |
| Drawings | Poetry | Recipes |
| Photographs | Short stories | News |
| Predictions | Advice | Graphs |

Please send all of your submissions by the deadline to dan@fritzcomics.com. ☒

Awards

These awards could be yours!

For Total Words Contributed:

- 1,000: Little Scribbler Contributor
- 5,000: Babble-ON-ian
- 10,000: Grimmelshausen Contributor

For Exceptional Content:

Alfred, Lord Tennyson Platinum Seal of Excellence: This award is a very rare distinction, awarded only for indisputably masterful work.

Good luck, and keep the submissions coming! ☒



Key
• = Site of Babble-ON Contributor

Global Watch Map

These maps were created using Microsoft Streets & Trips.