

Like the Tower of Babel but with a happy ending!



Peter Rabbit by Nathan Beach

PLEASE NOTE: Many of these articles were written in December 2007, so there will be plenty of holiday references in them. In spite of the tardiness of publication, enjoy!

The Life and Times of Roy Lickenstein, Webkinz Marvel

By Susan M. Fritz, Senior Staff Writer

It's a Tuesday...or maybe I should say it's the day before Wednesday, since my world had been turned upside down ever since I got this assignment. Weeks of nervous butterflies-in-my-stomach; wondering which shade of OPI to wear...or should I go with Essie's "wicked" this time...and am I being too obscure yet? No matter, because weeks later, as I sit and wait in this swank and polished "café" (isn't a café just a glorified diner?), I pretend to be busy. I fake totally cool, calm, and collected like my life and career depends on it, although the truth is I am painfully aware of the fact that being 97 minutes early to *anything* means you're either nervous, anticipatory, or just a HUGE fan of Roy Lickenstein. As the minutes sluggishly flutter by, I declare myself all three. I also discover my consumption of 5 cups of coffee (2 of which are decaf, thank-you-very-much). *Demain*, I am thanking the gods of fashion for prompting the dry-cleaners to lose my linen suit...(97 minutes and linen do not mix!)

And then it happens. More subtle than a 1 point earthquake but with more impact than a 5.3 on that same Richter Scale, he walks...nee, he *saunters* in, head tilted to the left at a 45-degree angle, eyes veiled by Prada

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End of Slide Show,

Click to Exit

By Naresh Nagella

Ok, so your GA from 1999-2001 in good-ol', right-in-the-middle Section #D has not written for the best, all-volunteer webzine out there in a while, but I return giving you a present as the season would dictate.

Yup. Just look up there at that picture I took. Congratulations! (I needed about 15 shots to get even that amount of clarity since Google Images was of no help, so please let's not pretend that it was a non-labor-intensive effort).

So, Stoufferites, MERRY HOLIDAYS! You get the most exquisite, most beautiful picture known to people

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Limericks

By Lucky

There once was a most petulant man
Who insisted on using the can
But the room wasn't right
And was set up for hot nights
So it ended up hitting the fan

There once was a man from Beirut
Who, after burritos, started to toot
He would just let them go
And hear people yell, "Oh!"
But, like most men, he found it a hoot

There once was a lady in blue
Who would only wear her left shoe
When asked why this was
She shrugged and said, "Cuz...
the right one has better things to do."

I once owned a mischievous cat
Whose eyelashes started to bat
When he was concocting ways
Of spicing up days
By hiding, claws up, inside of my hat
☒

Letter from the Editor

This issue marks the beginning of the 6th volume of *Babble-ON*. Some of you know that one reason this comes so late in the year is due to my ongoing cancer treatment, and since that has been going on since January, some of the articles were written for the holiday time period. While those seem out of place in May, they are still excellent pieces of intellectualism. I hope you enjoy them and everything else.

My treatment goes well and the outlook is positive, and since I've been having a good week, this publication is finally coming out. You might also notice that the website has been updated. If you have any ideas to make it even slicker, let me know.

Dan, editor@babbleonline.com ☒

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

By Susan Fritz

"Dry Rottweiler" ☒

Movie Quoter

A Monthly Column

By Dan Fritz

This month's movie is the 1985 classic starring Michael J Fox and Christopher Lloyd entitled *Back to the Future*. This is an easy one to quote, especially if you've seen it a million times. Here's a little taste for your nostalgia bone.

Café Owner: You gonna order something, kid?

Marty McFly: Ah, yeah... Give me a Tab.

Café Owner: Tab? I can't give you a tab unless you order something.

Marty McFly: All right, give me a Pepsi Free.

Café Owner: You want a Pepsi, Pal, you're gonna pay for it.

Marty McFly:

George McFly: "I'm your density...I mean...your destiny."

Goldie Wilson: I'm gonna clean up this town!

Café Owner: Good, you can start by sweeping the floor

Doc Brown (1985): No, no, no. This sucker's electrical, but I need a nuclear reaction to generate the 1.21 gigawatts of electricity I need.

Doc Brown (1955): I'm sure in 1985 plutonium is available at every corner drugstore, but in 1955 it's a little hard to come by.

Band Judge (played by Huey Lewis): I'm afraid you're just too darn loud.

Doc Brown: Things have certainly changed around here. I remember when this was all farmland as far the eye could see. Old man Peabody owned all of this. He had this crazy idea about breeding pine trees. ☒

Newsletter Ideas

I'm looking for writers for the following topics:

1. Analyze human methane as a source of alternative energy
2. Compare/contrast the Presidential candidates
3. Provide an academic review of Harry Potter
4. Wikipedia: Good or Evil?

International Website Hits

Over the past year, Babble-Online has been viewed by people around the world. International website hits have come from the following 30 countries:

Argentina	Japan
Australia	Mexico
Belgium	Netherlands
Brazil	Norway
Canada	Poland
China	Romania
Colombia	Seychelles
Czech Republic	South Korea
France	Spain
Germany	Sweden
India	Switzerland
Indonesia	Taiwan
Ireland	United Arab Emirates
Israel	United Kingdom
Italy	Venezuela

Keep the submissions (and the web hits) coming! ☒

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who work in the non-manual labor world.

Some gift, you say?! Well come on! Admit it. You LOVE this picture. And, you always have wanted it. You like seeing it. It never disappoints. I doubt anything you bought for your loved people in your life can even come close to meeting such criteria.

I think Shakespeare would have written a sonnet to that damn thing if he lived to see it. Objectively, I feel it is more lovely and more temperate than a summer's day. I'm not kidding.

Sometimes, like after a particularly long presentation where somehow some dude has gone through 75 slides in an hour, I've even cried when I've seen it come up. It was a cry of love. And, unlike most loves, it's a love that sets me free. Not only from the confines of the lecture room, but also from the 60 minutes of fame-loving, lecturing him or her.

Especially in medicine, I've sat through presentations where people will present their dissertation level research (you know, something 4-6 years in the making) in that hour time frame...and they leave nothing out. They'll have complex diagrams that maybe 40% of the people in their lab can understand and actually put it up on a PowerPoint slide.

If anyone wants a PhD themselves, please just go and look at the physiological reaction of white collar America when arbitrarily presented this sign. Think about it. You're heart fluttered when you saw that baby right? YES, YES, YES, YES you yelled...please click to exit! Click to exit! Your pupils probably dilated like you were 12 years old and it was Christmas morning and your Mom actually did get you that new Super Mario video game you wanted. (Note to my wife: nothing has changed this year for this scenario).

A certain amount of you might have even had a Pavlovian reaction. Who amongst us automatically zipped up a bag and started to rise from his chair upon seeing this beauty? Who amongst us automatically said to no one in particular (even if you were alone in the room)...“So, what class you got next?” or “I have so much work to do if I'm getting out of here by 5:00 today!”?

Good PowerPoint is an art, and I feel businesspeople probably do it the best. In medicine and science, where I've been the last couple years, effective PowerPoint is a lost cause. People try to be encyclopedic in what they convey on their slides and will end up repeating or reading them word for word. I've seen presentations that consultants and stuff put together, and I'm shocked at how effective and complementary to a speaker's style they can be. Simply put, less is more.

But, you know, I'm not here to write about effective PowerPoint. I'm sure if FDR were giving a PowerPoint talk and had the best consultants in the world doing his slides, we'd still all yearn for a good “End of Slide Show, Click to Exit” at the speech's end.

If I ever have to give a talk, I'd want to put a couple of them in the middle of my presentation just to keep the audience on their toes. Imagine seeing it on slide #15 of #27. You could give your listeners a bit of jolt. Especially if speaking after lunch, right when half the audience is about to sleep, it would be like if someone slammed the door and woke everybody up.

Ok, so you know I love a good, old-fashioned round table talk or, heaven forbid, a dry-erase or chalk board way of conveying information in educational or even professional environments. PowerPoint almost forces stuff to be a lecture instead of a conversation. You know how people might ask a question and the

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...End of Slide Show, from left column...

presenter says, “Yup, I get to that in a couple slides.” Ok, maybe she does or maybe she does not. Still, it would be a lot nicer if the talker addressed the point (quickly or at length – the talker still has that power) and moved forward.

All right, that last paragraph could be another essay, and I'm not going to bore you anymore there. Just go back to appreciating your gift. Although if you google the beautiful phrase “End of Slide Show, Click to Exit,” I feel the pro-PowerPointers of the world are up to something sinister. Four fifths of the first links are ways to REMOVE THE SLIDE AT THE END OF THE PRESENTATION.

So, during the season, I give this gift to all my fellow Stoufferites and a lump of coal to Google. I thought they were all about “Not being evil.” If they let these links persist, they will indeed be evil.

As an additional parting gift, I'll teach you a stress reliever. If you're feeling tense or had a really bad day at work or are about to argue with someone, simply close your eyes, imagine yourself seated in a lecture hall, the projector at full brightness, a red point of light fluctuating throughout the room, and intermittently pointing to something on a screen, and say to yourself repeatedly:

End of slide show, click to exit.

It works like the charm that slide is.

HAVE A GREAT HOLIDAY SEASON EVERYONE! ☒

Recipe of the Month:

Split Pea Soup

By Elizabeth Carlson

Ingredients:

- 1 ham with bone
- 1 onion (chopped)
- 3 carrots (chopped)

Put ham in big pot. Add onion and carrots. Fill with water until ham is covered. Bring to boil. Simmer for 1 hour. Take ham out of water. Put on plate. Add one pack of dried split peas to broth. Cover. Simmer between 3 and 4 hours until thick (mushy). Stir occasionally. Trim ham off of bone. Add back into the broth. ☒



"Untitled"

By Alan Fishman

Upon the ground beneath our porch, lie the remnants of a torch.
The light that once filled his corpse, now bleeds with red remorse.

Yet we can't say that we feel swayed
to bend our knees with mourning.

The last few days above our porch, rained kernels from the trees.
Against our breasts, against our skulls, they dropped with wicked
glee.

This furried bomber is now half-eaten,
and her paw grasps him playfully. ☒

Yoda was a Failure:

Our misguided praise for this flawed fellow

By Dan Fritz

Countless fans have sported green-eared hats while sitting in front of the flat screen, watching his much-anticipated lightsaber duel scenes. Millions of other fans have plastered posters with quotes of his Eastern-style philosophy to their bedroom walls. Still others have attempted to emulate his unique voice and grammatical mix-ups that only Frank Oz is capable of producing. Weird Al Yankovic even wrote a spoof of the song "Lola" by the Kinks about this cinematic legend. He's little. He's green. No, not Kermit, ladies and gentlemen, but a puppet nonetheless. I'm talking here about the one-and-only Yoda of *Star Wars* fame.

Now, assuming you've read the title of my article, you may already be angry at what you're about to read. Let me start by saying that while Yoda is a very memorable and even likable figure, he is also the greatest failure in that far, far away galaxy of legend. Sit back and entertain the idea, if you will, and you may come to realize popular culture's misguided praise. He may be the best-dressed Jedi Master on Dagobah, but he exhibits major shortcomings throughout the *Star Wars* series.

Episodes IV – VI: The Original Trilogy

In the original three *Star Wars* movies, Yoda only appears in the second two, namely *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*. Though generally playful in his initial interaction with Luke Skywalker, he is also very quickly revealed to be a cantankerous and somewhat scary little octocentarian. He is unimpressed with Luke's impatience and wishes not to teach him. This seems somewhat silly in retrospect, since Luke and Leia are the only hope for defeating the Sith Lord Vader and destroying the evil Emperor. (And why are Vader and the Emperor in power in the first place? Because of Yoda's incompetence – but we'll get back to that.) Yoda, of course, does a stellar job of training Luke in a very short period of time, but he is incapable of convincing Luke to complete his training before bolting off to save his friends in Cloud City. Luckily, Luke escapes that fiasco and is able to return to Yoda and get some vital information (with the help of Obi-Wan's ghost) about his relationship to Vader and Princess Leia.

Yoda is clearly very wise—maybe as wise as a fortune cookie.

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A Letter from Santa

Dear little boys and girls of the world (even the bad ones),

Santa wrote you last year to talk about the de-christianization of Christmas (or, as I am pushing for, "Clausmas"). You responded with great support and admiration – why wouldn't you? I'm awesome. [This may seem less than humble, but I spend my whole year planning rewards for others being awesome – sometimes Santa needs to root-a-toot-toot his own horn.]

This year I must address yet another disturbing controversy that has been stirred by yours truly. This year, many of my Earthbound representatives, or the vulgar "Mall Santas" as they are known, are being asked to switch from the centuries old, "Ho ho ho!" to, "Ha ha ha!" as their pervasive greeting. This request was made because "ho ho ho" was deemed offensive to ho's – I mean women. Boys and girls, Santa is afraid that this sleigh is careening down a politically correct wormhole, where civilization may be doomed to languish as eggshell-walking, non-communicative ogres.

To even intimate that Santa's greeting would be misconstrued as a derogatory term for the softer sex is ludicrous. I mean, ludicrous. Santa's very existence is anchored on treating others with love and affection. Jolly...hello? Ring any bells? Laughing? Cherub face? Giving gifts? Nowhere in "Twas the Night Before Christmas" was it said that Santa had to slap a bitch or that Santa had to get his ho's in line. Oh, yes, yes. Now I remember the line. "Out on the lawn arose such a clatter. Santa was slapping around a few sluts who got out of line in the Clausmas matter." No...no...that doesn't exactly flow, does it now?

I appreciate the female's plight in this society. Even with all of the strides made by brave women over the last century, disparity still exists. Shoot, Mrs. Claus reads from "Feminist Weekly" every Saturday night, while we are cuddling in bed. I have my very own Erin Brockovich lying next to me, so – believe me – I know. But, is Santa's re-tooled greeting really forwarding the cause in any way?

"Ho ho ho" is so ubiquitous that it really shouldn't get confused with any other turn of phrase. I mean, what the heck is going on in your household that, when your child hears the word "ho" in succession three times, they immediately believe they are being put down. Perhaps the trouble isn't in Santa's house...perhaps it's in yours. But, Santa understands how all problems in the house can be solved by changing external cues rather than substandard parenting. [That was sarcasm. Santa doesn't know how to express sarcasm through writing, so he will slap you in the face with it. Santa doesn't need to be accused of any more subversive messages.]

This solution of replacing the phrase with "ha ha ha" will, inevitably, be squelched by parents of losers who get picked on at school. They will claim that it conjures memories of being picked on or laughed at. Then Santa will have to shift to "hu hu hu" since it would be seemingly incomprehensible – therefore could not be misconstrued to offend anyone. Of course, Chinese citizens will rise up against this new derivative, and Santa will be reduced to greeting each child as though it were an interview. "Hello Sally. I'm Santa Claus. This is Elf Madison. Please have a seat over here. Tell us why you think you deserve presents? What are your weaknesses that we should be focusing on as we make the decision on what you may or may not receive this season?"

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...Yoda was a Failure, from previous page...

But he has created an unnecessarily risky situation by not training Luke sooner and more thoroughly before confronting Vader. He has also not arranged to train Leia in the ways of the Jedi at all. And why must he continue to remain in hiding? His presence alone could be a significant morale booster for the Rebellion, and given the combined strength of Yoda, Obi-Wan, Luke, and Leia, he could openly lead everyone to victory, unlike in the olden days when he lead everyone into defeat. This becomes even clearer in the light of everything that Luke alone accomplishes.

Episodes I – III: The Prequel Trilogy

Yoda makes a very significant appearance in all three prequel films, both leading the Jedi Council and marshalling various Republican military forces. We are informed of his prowess in the Force and his lightsaber abilities (however limited, as we shall soon see), which are confirmed in two climactic fight scenes, one with Count Dooku and one with Emperor Palpatine. We know of his skills in training the Jedi younglings. We also know that he is capable of making decisions as a supposedly strong leader. So, how does this add up to failure?

Clearly, his abilities in sensing problems and seeing the future are overstated. Not only does he fail to detect and stop the growing strength of the Sith forces in their infancy, his vision into the future is completely clouded by the Dark Side. He cannot foresee the imminent demise of every Jedi in the galaxy, the dissolution of the Senate, and the rampage at the Jedi Temple. He mishandles the entire upbringing of Anakin, allowing a newly minted Jedi (Obi-Wan) to be responsible for one of the most important people in the history of the Jedi Order. Obi-Wan was neither ready nor capable to be Anakin's mentor, and Yoda should have either foreseen this or corrected this before disaster ensued. Any number of solutions could have been implemented to contain Anakin, and any number of steps could have been taken to discover the identities of the Sith evil-doers and their master. Yoda bumbles the whole thing at the cost of freedom and peace throughout the galaxy.

His combat strength is also overrated. Mace Windu is shown to be capable of defeating Emperor Palpatine and would have single-handedly done so, had not Anakin interfered. Yoda, on the other hand, cannot defeat him in combat. Rather than enlisting the help of Obi-Wan, Yoda confronts the Emperor on his own and loses. Would it not have been more prudent to destroy the massively powerful and influential leader before taking care of the relatively inexperienced and impulsive Anakin? This forces Yoda into retreat and hiding, where he remains until his death. Under Yoda's tutelage, the ancient Jedi Order is utterly annihilated and the Galactic Republic becomes a cruel dictatorship. Way to go, Yoda!

In summary, Yoda—though presented with numerous warning signs and endowed with great powers—fails to perform his primary task as a Jedi leader: to fight for peace and order throughout the galaxy. Instead, he leads everyone to death and exile. His attempts at redeeming himself are barely adequate in leading Luke to victory. While we may love his catchy phrases and admire his self-actualization (and while Susan will remind me that Yoda is still cuter than Natalie Portman), we should also consider his failures before making him our role model. Think of the children, George Lucas!

☒

...A Letter from Santa, from previous page...

How about I don't bring your ungrateful children anything this season? Yes, that seems like the easiest solution. But, of course Santa isn't as big a shlub as you all. He wouldn't do that. What he WILL do is continue to say, "Ho ho ho!" He's been saying it since before your great-grandmother was around, and he'll be saying it until rapture. Try and stop the Jolly Train. See what happens. I have two words for you – Elf Mafia.

That is all.

Ho ho ho!

Santa F. Claus ☒

35,000: Rules to Live by in the Air Travel World

By Garrett Calderwood

I thought I would start a new monthly posting (mainly to get myself to write more and contribute more than pictures to the newsletter). While sitting on a plane wondering to myself what it should be about, I started thinking. I spend at least eight hours a week on a plane and another four in the terminal, if I'm not delayed. In the course of these twelve hours a week there is a ton of random crap that happens to me, so why not share with the *Babble-ON* readership the joys of a life at 35,000 feet?

Because it is December this is going to be a special holiday edition of 35,000. In the air travel world, I'm sure of one thing... no one checks their luggage any more because it just becomes a huge pain in the ass. This being said, this holiday season be sure not to include any snow globes in your carryon luggage, or the anti-Christmas police (as Bill O'Reilly puts it) will most definitely confiscate them. I was at Newark airport this month heading to Dallas, and I had four Bloomberg snow globes for my clients. Not very big, kinda dumb, but I like giving away dumb stuff to clients. The school marmish TSA security official asked me if I knew why she took my bag (which happens to me a lot), and I said no but I was hoping she did. She sneered at my attempt at humor and promptly told me that I had snow globes in my bag which were not allowed. I have no idea how that X-ray machine can see that I have snow globes, but I guess the TSA specially trains their security officials to know how to stop Christmas. She took each one out of my duffel bag and carefully put it on a scale to see if each little globe of joy weighed under 3.5 oz, which is the official liquid weight allowed on flights. Nope. I was told I could check my bag or they would have to throw away my snow globes. Well, being that I was already late for my flight I promptly picked them up and gave them out to 4 of the TSA security officials (most of which I see weekly so they know me) saying merry Christmas and here is a photo snow globe for you for doing such a great job. Bloomberg snow globes for all! I could only think to myself that if the terrorists planned to snow globe us to death that thankfully we are safe. ☒

Tech Corner

By Nathan Beach

Well, folks, 2008 has arrived and technology is hotter than ever! Microsoft's Google department has recently released a new Web-Site called a "search engine" at <http://www.gogle.com/>. You can visit up to ten World Wide Web (WWW) pages based on whatever "search line" you send to them in an E-Mail to "search@microsoft.com".

You best not be copying your friends' Compact Disks because the MPAA is cracking down! Both Metallica and Dr. Dre have delivered thousands of usernames to E-Commerce World Wide Web Site Napster.net who they believed were pirating their songs.

Look out Cannon Computers! Consumers like us no longer have to use carbon paper to make copies! Chinese computer manufacturer Microtek has recently released a "scanning apparatus" that turns paper into digital bits and bytes. And then you can print it out on any dot matrix printer. It's amazing.

Also, the computer industry moguls at Atari recently registered copyrights for two computer games: "Asteroids" and "Lunar Lander". They're sure to be hot in Christmas stockings for 2008!

Can't figure out how to get on the Inter-net or World Wide Web? Look no further. American Online now provides direct access for 9600 baud modems via its Quantum Computer Services initiative. All you have to do is pop the Compact Disk into the drive (you'll get one in the mail) and you have Internet access and E-Mail!

Real High Tech: Mad Scientist John Napier has recently introduced a system called "Napiers Bones," made from horn, bone or ivory, the device allows the capability of multiplying by adding numbers and dividing by subtracting! Look out Texas Instruments! Your calculators may be short for the land fill.

That is all for this quarter in High Technology.

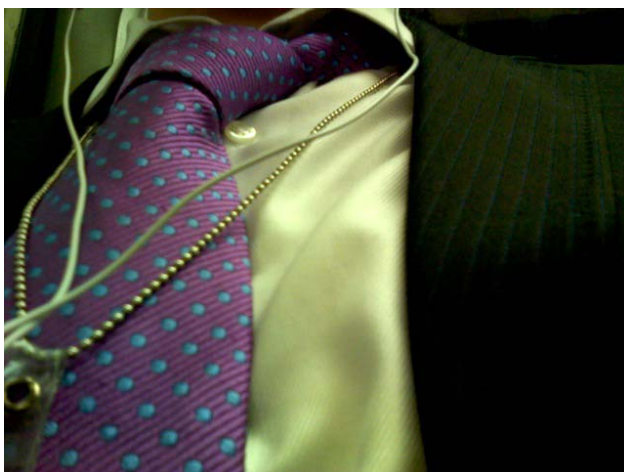
Technology Quote For This Issue:

"The factory of the future will have only two employees, a man and a dog. The man will be there to feed the dog. The dog will be there to keep the man from touching the equipment."

--Warren G. Bennis ☒

Man at work

By Garrett Calderwood



Guilty Pleasures

Volume 2

By Dan Fritz

In the last episode of "Guilty Pleasures," I shared with you the sci-fi movie classic *Enemy Mine* starring Dennis Quaid and Louis Gosset, Jr. I feel it only necessary to share a guilty pleasure of a different variety, namely the printed kind. The book series on which my confession is based begins with this phrase, inspiring nerds around the globe: "The Wheel of Time turns, and Ages come and pass...." No it's not Tolkien, but it's the same idea. It's a little fantasy series (and by "little" I mean incredibly lengthy series) known as *The Wheel of Time* by Robert Jordan.

So, why do I share this little nugget today? As before, I share this partly as confession and partly in the hopes that you will feel empowered to revel in your own nerdism. For this month's submission, I need not specify a *particular* fantasy series, really, since I have read a number of them over the years, all requiring confessions, including such works as: the *Shannara* series and *Magic Kingdom of Landover* series by Terry Brooks, *Magician* by Raymond E. Feist, and most recently *Doppelganger* by Marie Brennan*. And of course, I've read *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* by J. R. R. Tolkien, whom many revere as the prophet of the genre of fantasy writing. While I would probably recommend *The Hobbit* over any other single-book fantasy novel I've read thus far, let's return to the focus of this confessional.

Although Robert Jordan recently passed away, leaving the final book in the 12-book series unfinished, I have enjoyed the trials, tribulations, and adventures of the characters of his fantasy world in the *Wheel of Time* and would recommend the read. The series is the story of a group of friends who "grow up" (between roughly the ages of 18 and 25) to be powerful leaders in a magic-driven, medieval world headed toward Armageddon. Though bogging himself down in descriptive minutiae many times, and though he is notorious for purposely leaving countless subplots unresolved, Robert Jordan does have a knack for building tension and delivering a high-action climax in each episode. Jordan tells successive chapters from the different characters' perspectives, keeping the reader interested in the characters' development. He has fully fleshed-out governments, customs, lore, and belief systems built into his world, all making for a decent slice of entertainment. If you get bored by the middle of book 6, read the climax, skip to 11, and skim an online blog for a summary of the rest.

Here's to another guilty pleasure revealed, and here's to hoping that Jordan left enough notes to complete book 12! ☒

*check out this new fantasy series by a high school colleague of mine: *Doppelganger* and the sequel *Warrior and Witch* by Marie Brennan, available at major book stores and Amazon.com.

The Rise and Rise of Civilization:

A brief history and comparison of the
Sid Meier's Civilization computer games

By Dan Fritz

Disclaimer: This article is for nerds only—in this case computer game nerds who like to play *Civilization*. If you read this article and say, “Hey, what a nerdy article of no import to me,” then at least you will have been warned. Please send submissions on other topics if you prefer not to read this drivel.

Distant tribal drums and a song in an unknown language permeate the stale darkness. A lone warrior gathers his nerve as he grips the smooth wood of his massive club and charges a panther on the nearby forested plain. The tension is palpable as he swings and dodges in and out of the dangerous attack of the fearsome enemy. A sigh of relief fills the room, and I take a sip of my Diet Dr. Pepper (I’m trying to cut back on calories) as the warrior emerges victorious. Such is an early scene in a game of *Civilization IV*. I hate it when you lose a military unit to a roaming animal at the beginning of the game. I mean, come on!

The *Civilization* computer game franchise has frequently found its way onto hard drives around the world since its debut incarnation in 1991, developed by MicroProse. Also since then, it has undergone numerous improvements, including expansion pack enhancements, patches, and of course new releases altogether (they’re now on version 1.74 of *Civilization IV*). There have been mods, customizations, and “spin-offs” (the *Call to Power* series, for instance). It appears that people simply like the feeling of ruling nations from 4000 BC to 2000+ AD, and they keep coming back for more and better ways to do so.

Let’s take a look at those different ways, starting with the ever-popular *Civ II* (MicroProse, 1996). This is the first version I really got into, and millions of fans around the globe jumped in at this point, as well. More than one internet gaming blog claims that *Civ II* was and is still the best one. To these hangers-on of the past, I say “poppycock.” It was good at the time, but the interface improvements alone make subsequent versions superior. What did *Civ II* do well? It engaged an entire generation of gamers and boosted the franchise. What did *Civ II* do poorly? This is where our comparison truly begins. In *Civ II*, stacked units do not get to defend themselves. If they are attacked, the unit best suited for the defense fights the battle and every other stacked unit simply grabs its ankles. A missile could land on top of 20 stacked units and kill them all at once. Well, that was a fun three-hours spent amassing that force. It’s also highly likely that nuclear weapons will be used later in the game, making for a very ugly holocaust in some cases. Finally, the lack of political boundaries makes it easy for rivals to walk through your territory and found a city in the middle of your homeland. In general, this is a great game, but *Civ III* fixed quite a few annoyances.

Civ III came out in 2001 under a different developer (Firaxis) and underwent several notable improvements. The tactical game is more enjoyable, as stacked units don’t all get destroyed at once and units don’t require production support (shields) from their home cities. Bombardment units were also added (catapults, cannons, frigates, etc.) allowing attackers to weaken static defenses and allowing defenders to punish the attacker with an initial volley. *Civilization-*

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...Roy Lickenstein, from page 1...

shades, his old-fashioned but oh-so-chic top hat cocked just so. The rest of his ensemble is surprisingly dressed down—Hanes tagless tee, Levi shrink-to-fit baby blue jeans. He is unmistakable, and this is unmistakably him, but something is off. Ahhh...his signature earring, an aspect of the idol I daydreamed about—that trademark diamond stud gleaming in the café sunlight—is missing. Even so, at 4” high and 5” long, he is unmistakably Roy...all dog and no bull...well, technically “Bull,” just no “bull.” You know what this reporter means. He’s a Webkinz Bulldog, just not full of...forget it. Roy sits down like a cat nestling up to his personal “sunny spot” and before he says, “How’s it goin’, hon?” he orders a Perrier. “No booze or cursing while I give an interview,” he explains. “My new rule...we’ll see how long that lasts.” Not that this needs a mention, but Roy is a notorious bad-dog, a “booze hound” if you’ll pardon the pun. But lately (re: the past week), he’s vowed to clean up his act, most notably making a visit to disabled vets and shaving his coat for “Coats of Love”, the charity that uses donated fur to create wigs and coats for sick and underprivileged pups. This philanthropy is working at least on a superficial level—Roy is more striking and luminous than ever...as if he’s just humped a leg or something. But I digress...time to let our star speak.

After summoning all the faux confidence I can muster, I decide to make my first question about the obvious lack of trademark earring. “Is this part of your new run to clean up your image?” I quip. Roy howls a bit—a la the role that made him famous: “Spot” in *Dog Days of My Autumn*. His response: “Back in the day—you know, back when I first moved to Malibu, I lived with Harrison in this run down skanky (can I say skanky? Yes?) old apartment. It was actually above the garage of one of the original In-and-Outs; you know, the now chain burger joint? They have some pretty good fries and shakes, too. You should check it out. They’re everywhere here, man...I mean...” As he trails off in his signature dope-infused confusion, I smiled to myself with the thought he actually thought I hadn’t heard of (let alone been to earlier that day) In-and-Out Burger. Oh, and by the way, by Harrison, he means Harrison Ford. Yes, Roy’s first roommate as he made his way up the actor food-chain to über-stardom, was none other than the man of *Star Wars* fame, Harrison Ford. “Yeah, I was such a naïve young pup back in those days. It was actually Harr who got me wasted one night and convinced me to put this hole in my ear. Yeah...” He suddenly barks in his signaturly unexpected way—raspy and chuckling...a few too many Lucky Strikes inhaled. “Anywho, those days were then and this is, like, the now.” I take that philosophical gem as my cue to move on and decide, alas, that it’s time to get down to the business at paw.

“So, Roy, considering it took me months to schedule this interview, I take it your schedule is full to the point of overflowing these days.” Roy unconsciously paws at his naked ear and sighs, “Yeah, man, you could say my bowl runneth over—true dat.” He is always so current, and yet so blasé about his status as a mega-star, that I’d rather let him go on for hours than ask, “So if you don’t mind...I’m dying to know about ’09 for you. Obviously it’s filled with amazing stuff, but, um...tell me about Triumph and the guest spot on *Grey’s*...fill us all in.” There—I’d sputtered it out, and no matter how awkward I was, Roy answered with predictable grace and (although muted) enthusiasm.

“Well, man, you know, Triumph and I have always had this sort

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...*Civilization, from previous page...*

-specific units and characteristics (i.e. aggressive, spiritual, expansive, etc.) were also created, allowing more overall strategic variation. Some production is dependant on key resources (like iron or coal), adding an incentive to trade. Barbarians were also changed, spawning from specific camps instead of thin air. But the biggest enhancement was the introduction of culture/ethnicity and cultural boundaries. Enemies may still enter your borders at will, but you can force them to either leave or declare war on you. A player can also depose rulers in nearby cities by having a relatively stronger culture. All of this leads many players to claim that *Civ III* is indeed the best game, to which I say “poppycock” once again. That leads us to *Civ IV*.

But first, it is worth sidebarring here for a moment and mentioning the *Call to Power* series developed by Activision. While these are not technically a part of the series, they are based on the same concept. *Civilization: Call to Power* (1999) and *Call to Power 2* (2000), are worlds apart from the Sid Meier series in many respects, and while most players would agree that they prefer the original series, these gems have a couple of positive features. Trading goods in *Call to Power* is a key way to make money. Having more of the same good yields a higher income every turn, so trading more pearls (for instance) is attractive both for the giver and the receiver. If you already have one, you earn incrementally more by purchasing another. If you are selling, you are clearly winning, too. Due to this type of price fluctuation, a player can put his goods on the market for a specific price and make a big sale. Also, while the combat interface of the game leaves something to be desired, the concept of attacking with multiple units at once has some merit (*Civ III* used the concept of “armies” by essentially combining units under a leader). Incorporating these concepts into the Sid Meier series could yield some interesting results.

Back to *Civ IV* (Firaxis, 2005). The overhaul of governments (now structured as “civics”) in *Civ IV* caused some discomfort for me early on, but once that was mastered, the rest of the game proved its worth very quickly. Where *Civ III* added the cultural aspect, *Civ IV* took it to another level, adding the ability to allocate funds to culture (just like scientific research), adding cultural/ethnic percentages to the cities, and introducing different religions. While all religions have the same intrinsic values, it spices up the diplomacy when differing religions are taken into account. Players also specifically know why other civilizations like or dislike them (i.e. “-1 you made an arrogant demand”). The administrative interface is also far superior in this game. All useful functions can be managed from the map view, instead of spending 50% of the game in the city view windows, and more emphasis is placed on developing your cities rather than simply building lots of them. Units can be moved in groups, and workers can be automated more easily (i.e. you can tell them to build a road from point A to point B, 10 spaces away). Other civilizations are not allowed to enter your realm without declaring war or signing an open borders treaty, and more options exist in creating alliances. Combat and unit strengths have also been restructured, combining the concept of attack/defend values and the health of the unit. A player can also see combat odds very clearly before deciding whether or not to attack. This is a significant improvement over all previous versions. I also thoroughly enjoy the narration by Leonard Nimoy and the soundtrack. This all adds up to *Civ IV* being the pinnacle of the series thus far.

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...*Roy Lickenstein, from previous page...*

of rivalry. I think you know what I mean.” And of course we all do, since it was the headliner of *Star* and *Us* for weeks. “But, man, my agent just patched me through to him one day and said, ‘Listen, Roy, for the sake of your career...for the sake of your soul...dude, you gotta mend it with this cat.’” By “cat,” of course Roy refers to Triumph the Insult Comic Dog, but again his way with words is the true “triumph.” Roy goes on to tell me about his surprisingly positive chat with the soul pet star of *Late Night with Conan O’Brian*, and their decision to move forward with a relationship that seemed beyond repair. A few examples: during the Writers’ strike, both had extra time on their paws and so decided to put together a charity comedy show—which naturally sold out and was on the road to an extended Broadway run—that is, until the equally tragic Broadway Stage Hands’ strike. That didn’t stop the pair from working together, however. Five days of the strike both stars were spotted being walked on the picket line with signs of union solidarity on their backs in the form of b’dazzled doggie jackets.

“You know, that whole experience is like a blur, but I think it was really....” Roy is visibly shaken and touched at the memory, and instead of pressing him further, I move on to an equally noble cause, his support of the *Jerry Lewis Telethon* this past year. “You know, I was lucky enough to get some breaks in life, but these kids...and you know I admire the stuff kids like Angelina Jolie and Brad (lucky bastard) are doing. Just getting out there, going down to Africa and sh*t...oh, sh*t, I just broke my rule.” Roy smirks and finds it difficult to continue without first breaking into a smoker’s cough-turned-laughing fit. I simply marvel and watch, pinching myself between sips of Perrier.

While Roy recovers from his laughing/coughing fit and I sip and pinch, my mind wanders to the many inconsistencies that are Roy: his love of cats—it’s rumored he’s adopting two Siamese kittens from a shelter—his love of old cheesy sitcoms like *Empty Nest*. Roy later tells me it was the dog who played the character “Dreyfus” on the show who inspired him to try his hand in comedy. Roy also talks candidly about his now ex-girlfriend Sasha B (famed great-granddaughter of the Original Lassie) and how he almost lost it all because of her. It’s also the main reason Roy is unsure if marriage is for him. *Us Weekly* quoted him as saying, “[She] thought her career was more important than mine and when mine took off, she just couldn’t deal.” When Roy finally stops choking I ask him about it.

“Yeah, I wish her the best, but, you know....” I guess I do, and since this is clearly where he wants it to end, I let him sigh out one last sentence on his own time. “Yeah, I’m just lying low now, living the bachelor life and all with my cats...and Consuela, my housekeeper. She picks up the poop, if you know what I mean.”

I notice that the digits on the diamond-encrusted clock have slipped by unnoticed until now, and unfortunately, I have a plane to catch. I thank Roy—no, I thank this star *hero* of sorts for taking the time to set his record straight. Again, I am surprised by a final burst of brilliance:

“You know, doll, when it comes down to it, it’s really important...what we were talking about earlier...uh, the Africa movement and the telethons and Brangelina and the lost young pups who...I really just owe the world something, and I’d be a fool not to use this extreme fame and wealth of mine for something...you know, bigger than....” Roy goes on one final serious note of appreciation and even breaks down in tears as he talks about Oprah’s

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...Civilization, from previous page...

Some improvements I'd like to see at some time in the future are largely those that make the game more economically interesting and geopolitically intricate. A more complex trading system would improve diplomatic interactions and mimic real international economics (the "franchise" concept of *Call to Power* also comes to mind).¹ An expansion of the "permanent alliance" treaty could be intriguing.² In *Civ IV*, permanent alliances are two players who merge civilizations, one becoming the puppet government of the other. What about greater conglomerations like the European Union or trade partnerships like NAFTA? What about the inverse of a permanent alliance, such as rebel governments that mimic the Revolutionary period of history or governmental relationships that mimic the evolution of the British Commonwealth? Or maybe there should still be a way to win even after you've been pummeled, maybe by pursuing a Switzerland-type approach to the game. In any case, I'm already looking forward to whatever the next installation will be.³

I hope you found this informational if not interesting. A further comparison of features is included in the table below. Enjoy!

¹ "Corporations" were added to *Civ IV* expansion packs, though this concept is quite different from the *Call to Power* "franchise" feature, which gives the player a production bonus as opposed to a cultural/monetary/scientific boost created by the corporations. I find corporations somewhat difficult to manage due to their upkeep requirements, but like religions it does add variety to the game.

² Expansion packs have added the feature of "vassal states" which is a great improvement in this regard. Vassal states fight with their parent nation and give certain victory condition bonuses to them assuming the parent nation meets the requirements to continue ruling the other nation.

³ Another satisfying addition in the expansion packs are the "Apostolic Palace" and the expanded set of United Nations resolutions, like the ability to force peace amongst warring nations. The Apostolic Palace functions like an early-history version of the U.N. Membership is based on the prevailing religion of the nation in which it resides, and all members possess cities with that religion.

Game	Released By	Year	Features / Changes
Civilization	MicroProse	1991	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 player maximum (1 Human)
Civilization II	MicroProse	1996	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 player maximum Stacked military units—all of them could be destroyed by a single attack barbarian leaders give ransom in gold barbarians destroy cities unit support shields linked to city of origination you gain technologies when you take over a city Caravans convert to production (especially useful for Wonders of the World) diplomat and spy units democratic senate—can overrule your war decisions high chance of being nuked no clear way to protect your borders
Civilization III	Firaxis	2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8 player maximum barbarian spawning areas barbarians do not capture cities worker unit introduced – no longer require food support to maintain cultural boundaries leaders—can rush production or build "armies" civilization-specific units and characteristics small wonders (each civilization can build them) nationalities of citizens can trade captured workers bombardment units resource specific production (i.e. cannot build a swordsman without iron) embassies to replace diplomats unit upgrades available (not just via Leonardo's Workshop like in <i>Civ II</i>)
Civilization IV	Firaxis	2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 18 player maximum barbarian cities roaming animals more intricate culture various civics – restructuring of government types great people (not created through combat like <i>Civ III</i>) production switching restriction—cannot use your current progress on Pyramids to instantly switch and build the Great Lighthouse (for instance) unit promotions – replaces "veteran unit" concept melding of unit strength and combat strength more intricate and flexible tech tree peace agreements—only one civilization benefits, forced 10-turn peace controlled cultural boundaries map centering city fortification percentages religions settlers and workers no longer subtract from city population upon production no disorder (just increasing unhappiness) no more disbandment production boost less micromanagement cannot mix cash lump sums and per-turn amount during negotiations removed the ability to conduct coastal bombardments of terrain (unlike <i>Civ III</i>)

☒

...Roy Lickenstein, from previous page...

recent special in Africa. "Those girls...I mean, it reminds me of me somehow...only really different. I'd like to do something really impactful like Oprah someday—yeah, it probably would surprise some people, but it's the Bono in me...he, he..."

Finally, the personal insight only a Barbara Walters could extract from this hard-as-nails star emerges as Roy opens up about his own childhood and the advice his father gave him before leaving the litter of 10 for good. "He said to me, 'Roy,' he said, 'Roy, that bowl ain't gonna fill itself.' And that sort of just stuck with me...hey, can I order a Bloody Mary down there?" As he takes a concentrated swig, these words thrill and melt this writer, "I tried, but I'm still human, right?"

Well... ☒

The Five Phases of Wealth

A short treatise on personal finances
By D. Fritz, Former Phase I Member

The propagandists will tell you that America is a land of opportunity and that hard work will result in financial prosperity. While I would temper that with the caveat of luck (both good and bad), I generally agree. But what does that mean on a day to day basis in the interim? We tend to think of American class structures in about four levels: 1) lower, 2) lower middle, 3) upper middle, and 4) upper. These are much-used conventions, but they tell us close to nothing of what life at those economic levels means. Some experts put anywhere between 1/3 and 1/2 of the population in the middle class based on income, but even more people call themselves middle class (i.e. having the "average" American economic life). Hence, people don't even realistically know where they are in the financial landscape—they just know that everyone is middle class and that's a good thing compared to the feudal system described in their high school history books. In this brief essay, though admittedly unscientific, I will outline a new set of classes, ones that I believe actually exist and have meaning. By understanding these levels, we might think about ourselves with greater clarity and plan our ascent accordingly.

Personal financial stability progresses in phases, each of which constitutes (as I will call it) a different wealth "class." This is true for everyone, though certain outside influences may "shock" this system, allowing for the acceleration of certain phases or artificial stability at lower levels.* Phases 1-3 represent a relatively flat curve, covering maybe 85-90% of the population. Phases 4 and 5 represent the remainder on a much steeper curve. This reflects the concept of momentum and the fact that the rich get richer. You need money to make money.

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*Examples of these shocks might be: inheritance, lotto winnings, considerable family assistance, etc. Extensive losses may also shock your personal financial system, but this may be hedged by employing savings strategies along the way or taking advantage of the social welfare of the country (both privately and publicly provided).

Phase 1: Destitution

A person in destitution cannot meet any financial obligations and must therefore borrow or steal to satisfy basic needs. Even to declare bankruptcy, a person in destitution may need to borrow money. This phase applies to those who are unemployed, homeless, or...new college graduates. Upon gaining total independence out of college, a person without a job (unless backed by outside funding) finds that he has been immediately shackled by financial obligation in the form of student loans, a protected debt. That and other existing debt causes the swift erosion of credit, and any existing credit lines are maxed out. Late fees compound and overlimit/overdraft fees quickly become an issue. The longer one stays in destitution, the more difficult it is to escape, sometimes leading to permanent destitution (i.e. homelessness, vagrancy, and eventually detrimental health effects). Sometimes destitute people qualify for government assistance; sometimes they don't. Either way, this is not the place to be, as it erodes a person's emotional ability to overcome the issue in addition to overcoming the money problems.

Upon finding employment, a person progresses into Phase 2.

Helpful Hint to those in Destitution: Try to cut a deal with your creditors. They may offer a settlement or a payment plan that you could potentially make work for a short period of time. This will make your recovery in later phases much easier. Also, forebear/defer student loans if possible. Take advantage of existing social welfare, and find a comfortable couch in someone else's house.

Phase 2: Subsistence

Basic needs are met in this phase, though a juggling act usually ensues in order to make the budget work. A prolonged Phase 1 will make Phase 2 all the worse, and people suffering in this phase must pay what I call a "poor tax" in order to get by. The poor tax includes overdraft fees, overlimit fees, high interest rates, premiums on emergency purchases, premiums on lower quantity purchases, etc. For example, if a person (we'll call him Mark) finds that his junker car has broken down, he has no choice but to purchase a new one or risk termination of employment. Mark has no flexibility, so he must accept whatever he can find—he cannot afford to wait for the low-interest deal, for more cash in the bank, or for anything else. He must purchase a car now, and it will probably be a piece of junk that continues to break down. After all, where is he going to get the money to buy a new car? Mark's poor tax equates to the continued maintenance charges, the high interest of the money he probably has to borrow, the fees that this strain will create (late payments on other purchases), and any other negative impact that a person with some money in the bank could easily avoid. A significant portion of the population is in this phase and must therefore be continuously employed. Any breakage in the cash flow is detrimental.

Helpful Hint to those in Subsistence: It is difficult to juggle balance transfer deals, but this may be a key to your success. If you can repay debt at the lowest possible rate, you are saving yourself months of pain in the future. Delay gratification—do not purchase anything you don't need. Also, forebear/defer student loans if possible.

Phase 3: Modern "Middle Class"

This phase is not vastly different from Phase 2 in terms of monetary excess, except that one can accelerate purchases. A significant amount of catch up must occur in this phase, and other purchases are made simply because you can do it now. For example, Mark would postpone fixing things for as long as possible when the money was tight. Now he has the ability to maintain and upgrade everything when it needs doing. The net

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...*The Five Phases of Wealth, from left column...*

result is that he has no extra money in his pocket since Phase 2, but now, for instance, he has jeans without holes, current tags on his license plate, and functioning light bulbs throughout the house, all at the same time! He even gets his hair cut when it needs cutting, as opposed to once every six months. Debt is controlled in this phase but not necessarily reduced. General risk can be reduced, because every purchase is not an emergency purchase. This is my definition of middle class, though there is still significant room for financial improvement.

Phase 2 and Phase 3 probably account for 3/4 of the population, though this number is difficult to derive. Raw income does not determine which phase of wealth someone is in.

Helpful Hint to those in the Middle Class: This is the first opportunity to truly springboard into the latter phases. As such, it's best to control desires as though you are still in Phase 2. The moment credit is repaired and available, do not use it! Only people in Phase 4 should even consider buying what they "want." With a very structured approach, people in Phase 3 can treat themselves to limited luxuries, like dining out occasionally and going to the ball game.

Phase 4: Stability

Probably the equivalent of "Middle Class" in the fictional/traditional sense, the Stability phase is enjoyed by a minority of the population (maybe 10-15%). People in Stability manage their risks well and make investments (not just money in a savings account). Emergencies can be absorbed by savings and contingency funds, and most of what was desired in Phase 3 can be purchased. As such, some people in Phase 4 still feel like they are in Phase 3 because of the lack of monetary excess; however, they not only meet their needs but also purchase what they feel like on a regular basis. People in Phase 4 should actively remind themselves of this and provide for those in Phases 1-3 when needed. Stability also affords its members with the means to retire well, which is all the easier if purchasing desires continue to be controlled throughout this phase.

Helpful Hint to those in Stability: As big a leap as it is from Phase 3 to 4 (and that's a pretty big leap), it's just as big (or bigger) to go to Phase 5. Don't succumb to the temptation to maximize expenditures—that is what keeps most people in their current class. Open the purse strings for your own enjoyment but not too much!

Phase 5: Independent Wealth

Everyone knows what being independently wealthy means: buying what you want, when you want; working or not working, as desired; pursuing non-economic interests. This is where we would all like to be, theoretically. I certainly would.

Helpful Hint to those in Independent Wealth: The name of the game is capital preservation. People who work to acquire their wealth know this.

Thus ends my summary of the Five Phases of Wealth. Anyone and everyone can make it to at least Phase 4 with a little discipline and luck, and let's all hope that Phase 5 awaits us. The overriding principles of all of these phases are maintaining fiscal discipline by controlling desire and planning ahead (this includes purchasing all kinds of insurance). It matters less how much you make as opposed to how much you spend, and it turns out we have more control over the latter.

For more information, please email me at editor@babbleonline.com. ☒

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