

Loser Lunch

By Colin Patrick

So, apparently I'm a loser now. By definition, for the last year and a half I was a "winner," but that's all changed now.

It was once an unspoken code that only losers brought their lunch to work to eat in the lunch room, or worse, in their own cube (undoubtedly, anybody with half a reputation would have some serious explaining to do if they were caught with a sandwich and a computer mouse in their hands at the same time!). With the definition out of the way, let me explain how my situation evolved.

...continued on page 11...

The Human Reality behind "Maturity"

By Brett

I've heard it debated over and over again. Women are inherently more mature than men. But I often ask myself, as one should to everything, is this really true? Is there a biological basis for this infallible assertion? The answer is no. Scientists trying to discover the nature of maturity behind a gene play like little, prying children. There is no particular genetic predisposition to maturity, ergo it cannot be something inherently female. Of course the concept of maturity does not rear its protean head exclusively in the realm of the sexes, but it also breathes its foul assertions into the workplace, sibling rivalries, and parental tussles.

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Etymology with Al

By Al Fishman
see page 11

Wine Country

By Steven Fritz
see page 4



Letter from the Editor

Welcome to the Year-End Spectacular! We entered this year like lambs and exited like lions. This is thanks, in part, to insomnia and to boredom. Who needs medication? Let the newsletter be your Zolof!

This issue features the most extensive array of articles yet. At this growth rate, there will be enough content to fill a *National Geographic* by January. As is, the newsletter surpassed *Time* magazine and *Newsweek* a long time ago.

Pre-order your copy of the complete Volume 2 today by sending me an email. Both Volume 1 and 2 can be yours for a small donation of \$6 each in binding costs, plus shipping.

Happy Holidays!

Dan, dan@fritzcomics.com

YEAR-END SPECTACULAR INSIDE THIS ISSUE

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Dictator of the Month:
Muammar al-Qaddafi

By Fritz and Hall

Past Dictators

Karimov
Taylor
Milosevic
Saddam
Mugabe
Pinochet
Ceausescu
Pol Pot

Moh-moh, as I like to call him, is a rising star these days. As you may or may not know, dictators change between “good” and “bad” depending on the political climate, and Qaddafi is a perfect example of one who is, at least nowadays, “okay.” That’s what happens when you preemptively surrender. He’s even convinced other leaders to surrender (read: Jacques Chirac recently raised the white flag to the Galapagos Islands, just in case).

Back in the day, Qaddafi was a more old-fashioned dictator who liked terrorism and attempted to build nuclear weapons with the help of one Doc Brown at the Twin Pines Mall. When Doc betrayed him, Qaddafi stuck to plane bombing and the like.

He’s had some famous buddies like Abu Nidal (of Black September fame) and the notorious assassin Carlos “the Jackal.” And while Muammar stays out of the Hague, he has the potential to find even more grand company. He’s also quite a snappy dresser. ☒



The Criminally Comical Trials of
Mattlock

By Calderwood and Fritz



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

By Susan Fritz

“**Alec** Bald-Win a Date with Tad Hamilton”

Quote of the Month

Contributed by Grant Calderwood

“**You** can nominate Bush, Kerry, or Satan himself, it doesn't matter to us.”

—Ayman al-Xawahiri, Al Qaeda

Problem Hole

By Srida Joisa

Welcome. Hopefully you’re reading this in transit somewhere to do something important. You’re probably just killing some time reading this stupid magazine. In this issue of *Babble-ON*, we introduce a new section similar to Math Corner. Except it’s not for the mentally retarded. Nor is it for the people who cook (like Calderwood & Dimplewood’s Recipes).

This is for the guy who needs an excuse to avoid doing the dishes after dinner. Or taking out the trash. Or picking up his clothes. Or showering in the morning. Or going Christmas shopping.

Welcome to The Problem Hole.

Beginning with this issue, we’ll be providing little snippets of problems we’ve found through various means. Hopefully they’ll keep you entertained. And we’ll post hints and maybe some answers in the following issue. Send all hate mail to dave.barry@herald.com.

“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?

See answer next issue! ☒

Mischievous Deeds

by Asa Hadsell

If you ever find yourself at
 An open air concerto performance
 At a neighborly castle in the South of Belgium
 Where it showers quite frequently,
 It may begin to cloud and rain on you.

Make light of the situation
 And do as others by pulling out your umbrella
 And continue to enjoy the show.

But while the woman sitting in front of you
 Contently enjoys herself despite the weather,
 Lower the edge of your umbrella under hers
 And slightly over her back.

Watch patiently as she squirms with cold, wet
 Drops dampening her back.

Watch as she begins to shift
 And slightly touches the back of her head
 Not understanding the cause of her discomforts.

Watch until her friend throws you a
 Shrewd glare of understanding and
 Then look away quickly.

Try not to laugh hysterically though
 Because, well, that would be rude. ☒

Poetry Page

This page is dedicated to all of the Whitmans, Schillers, and Housmans of the world, with a special dedication to the Donnes and the Herricks. Keep 'em up!



Gather Ye Rosebuds While Ye May by John William Waterhouse

Tribute to Old Dirty Bastard

By Grant Calderwood

your **g**old teeth made the world sparkle,
Dynamical lyrics helped the world understand pimps and hos,
 and the **B**eautiful baby jesus will watch your soul burn in hell for eternity. ☒

Come join the “Friends Uninterested in Groping-each-other’s Little Yum-yums” Club (FUGLY), a group of guys and girls who just want to prove Brett wrong and be friends.

Call 1-900-LOOK-BUT-DONTTOUCH

Boob Corner

Contributed by Aaron MacPhie



Wine Country

By Steven Fritz

It has been many years since I moved to the San Francisco Bay area. A big reason why I love this region of California is the wine country. From Sonoma to Napa, Russian River to San Luis Obispo, there is no shortage of premium wine. I want to get right to my recommendation, but let me introduce you to a few resources in your quest to wine nirvana. For Father's Day this year I got a subscription to *Wine Spectator*. There is no shortage of trade rags in this industry, but this oversized periodical is the king of the hill in my opinion. Check them out at www.winespectator.com for food, wine, and the good life. Secondly is wine.com for the selections you cannot find at your local wine shop. Worst case, drop me an email at s_l_f@msn.com, and I'll recommend something and/or ship you a bottle – no, they're not for free!



White or Red? This time it's white. For my birthday I got a great bottle of 2001 Chardonnay Reserve from Ferrari-Carano. Located at the end of the Dry River Road, this winery is an excellent wine maker as well as home to beautiful walking gardens. Visit their web site at www.ferrari-carano.com, and you'll come to appreciate them like I do. These guys do an outstanding job of pairing wine with food both in their tasting room and on-line. This white is a bit pricey at \$30, but if you like a highly rated white, then this one is actually a good value. Reserve or non-reserve—that is the question. Let's just say that the winemakers themselves *always* drink the reserve release. And if you're looking to fill up an order, their Sienna (red) is a must have.



Travel Tip:

Plan on spending a full day in this region when you come to visit. Try as you might you'll only be able to visit 4-6 wineries per day. This is dictated by the travel time as well as your drinking capacity.

Storage Note:

You need to drink whites within 3-5 years, because they don't age like reds. There's your motivation to get right to it. Here's toasting you. ☒



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Welcome to Hell

Customer Service Rape by Big Business

By Dan Fritz

"I'm sorry. The system doesn't allow me to do that." How many times have you run into this problem with customer service after having waited on the phone for half an hour only to be transferred to three other people, all of whom assured you that the next person they connected you to would be able to solve your problem? "I'm gonna put you on hold." "Punch, kick, and punch" is going through my head when I hear that. Either that, or I feel like saving them the hassle and popping my "for emergency use only" cyanide pill that comes standard with the Customer Service "Survival" Kit, now available in a special collector's edition with bed pan packaging. And it's not like you can run down to the store that you bought the service from and have them help you. Their systems don't handle customer service of any kind! "We have a courtesy phone if you'd like to call the hotline." What I'd rather do is gouge my own eyes out and pour lemon juice on the open sockets. If you didn't already know this, customer service is hell.

Poor customer service is a plague that is as common as puke stains on a frat house floor. And as appealing. I *would* say that customer service is getting worse, but that would imply that it used to be better. I have a feeling that it has always been this bad, but I was spared the hassle as a child. What probably *has* changed is the type of line you typically wait in for the inevitable wallet pillaging that the typical customer service experience affords the typical customer. It used to be a line in the store. Now it's a line on the phone. Either way, you get left with the shit bucket, no matter if it's filled with your or the company's shit.

To be fair, we sometimes create customer service nightmares for ourselves. We've all lost the relevant paperwork, including bills, service agreements, confirmation numbers, magical mystery numbers, and receipts. We've all dropped an egg on the rug or spilled water on the computer keyboard ("It was broken when I bought it!") There is a certain level of responsibility consumers must assume for the products and services they purchase. If all products were guaranteed for life, no one would be able to afford them in the first place—unless we're talking about Craftsman tools. But I'm not talking about any of this. I'm talking about the unadulterated, vomit-inducing rape and pillage of the average consumer.

One need look no further than his cell phone bill, credit card statement, or bank overdraft notice to know what I'm talking about. Looking at cell phones in particular, you will see that companies have specifically designed their contracts to screw you over, starting with the idea of a contract itself. When's the last time the grocery store forced you to sign an agreement to buy their groceries for an entire year, or else suffer cancellation charges? Never. How about a more apples-to-apples comparison? When's the last time the phone company asked you to sign a one-

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Koob's Korner

A continuation of the top 25 most underrated movies of the last 25 years
(See *Volume 2, Issue 4* for the first 12)

By Koob

13. The Cable Guy (1996) – d. Ben Stiller – A dark comedic gem directed by Ben Stiller (yes that Ben Stiller) and starring Jim Carrey and Matthew Broderick. Perhaps, this comedy was a little darker than what people were used to from Jim Carrey at the time as he plays a desperate loner who works as a cable guy and tries to get Matthew Broderick to be his best friend. When Broderick doesn't comply, the cable guy makes his life a living hell.
14. Donnie Brasco (1997) – d. Mike Newell – The third and final Pacino movie to make the list has Al playing against his usual character type as small time mobster “Lefty” Ruggiero who befriends Joe Pistone, an undercover FBI agent calling himself Donnie Brasco and played by Johnny Depp. As he goes deeper and deeper into the crime underworld, Pistone begins to unravel, and he is ultimately faced with the prospect of bringing down Lefty, who has become his good friend.
15. Cop Land (1997) – d. James Mangold – Sylvester Stallone gives what I believe to be his best screen performance as Freddy Heflin, the sheriff of a small New Jersey town just across the river from NYC and largely inhabited by members of the NYPD. Freddy was struck deaf when he was a teen while rescuing his high-school crush, and he could never pass the physical exam to become a city cop. However, when Freddy is approached by an Internal Affairs officer, played by Robert DeNiro, he begins to realize that the cops in his town, who he looks up to, may not be exactly what they seem, and Freddy must decide whether or not to stand up to them. Outstanding supporting turns by Ray Liotta and Harvey Keitel, as well as De Niro.
16. The Game (1997) – d. David Fincher – Absolutely gripping from start to finish, *The Game* follows Nicholas Van Orton (Michael Douglas), a wealthy but lonely San Francisco banker who receives a birthday present from his brother Conrad (Sean Penn). The present is an enrollment into a live-action game which begins to completely absorb Nicholas' life until he can no longer tell the game from reality. Full of twists and turns that will keep you on the edge of your seat from start to finish.
17. Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas (1998) – d. Terry Gilliam – Based on the fascinating book by Hunter S. Thompson about his assignment to cover a road race in Las Vegas and the drug-fueled escapades that he and his “attorney” get into and get out of. Johnny Depp and Benicio Del Toro give pitch-perfect performances as the gonzo journalist and his partner in crime. Look for Tobey Maguire as the hitchhiker who picks the wrong car to get into.
18. Rounders (1998) – d. John Dahl – This film has developed a pretty large following in recent years due to the explosion of the World Series of Poker on ESPN. *Rounders* follows the story of Mike McD, a reformed gambler-turned-law-student who is trying to get out of the poker life, but his best friend “Worm,” played by Edward Norton, keeps getting him involved in more and more trouble with loan sharks and the Russian mob. Great cast of supporting characters including John Turturro, Martin Landau and especially John Malkovich as Teddy “KGB.”
19. Ronin (1998) – d. John Frankenheimer – The fourth and final DeNiro movie to make the list has our man Bobby D as one of a group of expert criminals hired by an Irish lass to track down a mysterious package that is sought after by several different groups. Has some of the best car chase scenes ever captured on film. A great international cast make up the supporting characters.
20. American History X (1998) – Tony Kaye – Edward Norton plays a reformed neo-Nazi skinhead who has just returned from prison to find that his brother (Edward Furlong) is heading down the same path that he was once on. Through extensive use of flashbacks, we learn how Norton's character became so fueled with hatred and know he must try to help his brother see the light before it is too late.

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...Welcome, from previous page...
year agreement to use their services at home? Never. Don't get me wrong—the phone company typically drags you through the dung heap in other ways, but cell phone companies force you to sign ball-shackling agreements all the time. The customer service debacle comes when they don't tell you about these fees ahead of time, when they don't mention one of the other dozen fees that you get charged, when they have every power not to charge you these outrageous fees but they do it anyway, or, when it is legitimately your fault, they gouge you till there's no more blood left to bleed.

These encounters boil down to semantic debates with the junior high graduate on the other end of the line. They don't necessarily lie to you (though sometimes that happens)—they simply fail to inform you of all the facts until the bill shows up in the mail. This forces you to call them up (which no one has time for), negotiate with someone whom you would probably avoid while walking down the street, and end up paying them because they bully you into it. To top it off, they often don't let you know about your other alleged, fine-print “grievances” until they have you by the balls with regards to your credit report. Oh, it wasn't their fault they sent your notices to Boise, Idaho. It's your fault for not telling them you weren't receiving notices you didn't know you should have been receiving in the first place! Please, Sir, may I have some more?! And I'm not even going to talk about billing details, overage charges, roaming fees, and tolls—for that I would need a few Amsterdam 'shrooms, a howler monkey and an abacus. A metric abacus.

Actually *having* a customer service job stinks mighty bad in and of itself. You've got to listen to every story on earth from, “I won't be able to pay for my kids' Christmas presents. Do you want me to have to tell my kids that there's no Santa?”—to, “it says in Leviticus that I have until the thir-

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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>

...*Koob's Korner, from previous page...*

21. Dark Days (2000) – d. Marc Singer – A fascinating look at a subculture that I had no idea even existed. Dark Days takes us inside the surprisingly thriving community of homeless people who have chosen to live underground in the train tunnels of New York City. The resourcefulness and humor that these people have, despite their situation, is absolutely inspiring.
22. Ghost World (2000) – d. Terry Zwigoff – This touching film by Zwigoff (the only repeat director on the list) tells the story of two best friends, Enid and Becky (played by Thora Birch and Scarlett Johansson) who have just graduated high school and are trying to make their way through the “real world.” They play a cruel prank on a geeky loner named Seymour (played brilliantly by Steve Buscemi), but Enid realizes that she has a lot in common with Seymour and begins to form a special bond with him while the two girls begin to drift apart.
23. The Believer (2001) – d. Henry Bean – A breakthrough performance by Ryan Gosling who plays Danny Balint, a young Jewish man who has developed a deeply anti-Semitic worldview and has joined up with a band of neo-Nazi skinheads. Danny struggles with the contradictions between his beliefs and his heritage while trying to hide his true identity from the people he hangs out with. As he climbs the ranks of his organization, he must make a final decision of whether to continue on his current path or accept his true identity. Based on a true story about an American Nazi Party leader who was revealed to be Jewish.
24. Donnie Darko (2001) – d. Richard Kelly – This film has developed a pretty big cult following in the last few years. It can't really be classified into one genre. It is basically the story of a troubled teen named Donnie Darko who takes medication and follows the instructions of a giant demonic looking bunny rabbit named Frank who saved Donnie from being killed by a jet engine that fell into his bedroom and tells him that the world is going to end. ‘Nuff said.
25. Punch Drunk Love (2002) – d. P.T. Anderson – Adam Sandler (in an atypical role for him) plays Barry Egan a small business man who is dominated by his seven overbearing sisters. One day he finds a harmonium that was abandoned on the street, meets a girl, and comes up with a great way to get frequent flyer miles. A truly off-the-wall love story as only P.T. Anderson could tell it. Some of his usual character actors, such as Philip Seymour Hoffman and Luis Guzman, play hilarious supporting roles. ☒

Bush Isn't That Bad, Is He?

By Srida Joisa

Im not much of a writer. I've never been very good at it. So, this marks the beginning of an effort to improve my writing. I decided that topics don't matter, so long as I keep writing from time to time. That's why I'm basically reposting what I posted to the Stoufferites Yahoo group.

I posted a bunch of babble, and it's repeated here with some commentary. Feel free to send all hate mail to jonathangilman@hotmail.com. It'll reach me eventually.

- Bush will bring morals and values to the Whitehouse.

The funny thing about being a leader is that your job is to lead. You don't actually do much—and I am starting to realize that's ok. Leaders should be inspiring so that followers will be empowered to do things they never thought possible. So, when Bush talks about crusading around the world bringing freedom and democracy to the world, maybe that's exactly what America needs—a leader that paints a clear picture of what the future should be like. Bush paints that picture and middle-America believes in him because of his “morals and values.” Well, if he and his evangelists can get a majority of the popular vote, maybe this isn't such a bad thing.

It just hurts when he sounds like an idiot almost all the time.

- The American people actually do support Bush more than we hate him.

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teenth day of the month of Mahalalel to pay bills relating to purchases of cloven-hoved livestock.” Only one of those is made up—but the other one's not too far off. It's bad enough that the average customer service representative usually works for the value of two seashells and a shiny agate every hour, has a shift on Bucharest time, and fears that his job will at any moment be outsourced to Mumbai. Does he also have to be subjected to verbal excrement from every direction?

What other interactions in life involve two parties that lose while a third party reaps massive benefits? I can think of one off the top of my head: legal proceedings. Customer service interactions are the equivalent of mini, ugly legal battles, and sometimes customer service experiences themselves lead to legal action, a double rape. The winning third party is, of course, the lawyers. In the case of customer service, the winner is the big company. Their reps hate life, because they get paid nothing to take calls and emails—the verbal equivalent of wading through raw sewage. The customers hate the company, because they didn't realize that instead of buying a DSL service for \$19.99/month, they were actually buying hot garbage. There doesn't even need to be a shred of validity to a company's claim that you owe them money. If they declare it, you'll either pay it, suffer the consequences of calling to correct it, or both.

This whole system of demonic abuse leads the general public to stay with the same company for as long as possible in order to avoid start-up and cancellation nightmares, the modern day submission to the serfdom of the big company feudal lord. It doesn't matter whether you are poverty stricken or upper-middle class—they will take everything they can, and they won't apologize for it.

A word of advice: don't ever buy anything unless you have to. ☒

...*Bush, from previous page...*

I'm sure there's some funny business involved in the vote count, but Bush won the popular vote by enough of a margin that I'm convinced the rest of us who live in the United States of Canada just don't care enough. We're too busy working and making money.

How many of you actually went out and voted?

- Iraq wasn't all bad. At some point in the next 4 years, they will probably hold democratic elections. People are hopefully not starving or being executed for their religious beliefs, but I really don't know how much of that is true vs. just propaganda.

Based upon more recent news, I'd say elections are going to be held real soon now (RSN).

- We will withdraw some portion of troops from Iraq.

Donald thinks it'll be 4 years before we pull out completely. I'd be surprised if we ever pull out **completely**, but something like 3-4 years or so feels right. The next Republican presidential candidate can't win the election if the party still has too many troops out there, so elections are good for something.

- Afghanistan seems to be a nice place to live now.

I haven't visited, but maybe one of us should—just for a honeymoon or something.

- The Patriot Act sucks for non-white people who travel using airports, but it sucks worse for the people who haven't seen the light of day in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba for the last 2 years. Maybe they'll get out soon since Bush can't be re-elected again. That reminds me, I should have a copy of my passport tattooed to my chest, so I can't forget my ID.

Just like Sarbanes-Oxley, the Patriot Act was a knee-jerk bill that passed, because every one had images of 9/11. That doesn't make it fair, it's just what happened. Thankfully, we can fix problems if we work at them.

- Tax cuts are good. I mean, keeping more of your money is good. If you happen to be at an income level where you don't pay much in taxes anyway, and you get similar benefits from national security, roads, Medicare, Social Security, etc. well, life will suck a little bit for you. You should just go to church more often and pray you become rich soon, so then you get tax cuts.

This is just like paying for a restaurant bill together in a group. Every time I go out to eat in a group someone **always** gets screwed with paying more than they would if we got separate checks. Well, in real life, those people are rich, so we all tend to think "oh well, who cares, they've got enough already anyways." I tend to agree with that—up to a certain point. The thing is you're supposed to be **friends** going out to eat. A buck here, a buck there, it doesn't matter. What sucks is when you end up paying an extra 75% because somebody (Brett) decided not to tip the waitress.

The point of this comment is you end up getting what you pay

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for. If you want to eat out with friends, you'd better expect to get screwed once in a while—or maybe those people just aren't your friends. So, if we really want to have benefits like Social Security and Medicare when we retire, we'd better keep paying up today. If we cut taxes, we should expect to get hosed when we're older. Or our kids will get hosed for us.

- Increasing the national debt is good. I think we're at \$7.384 trillion now. There's actually a cap set by congress. That cap has to go (see the Wall Street Journal from 11/4/04), or else the government won't pay its employees, or interest on T-bills. That would suck, even if you're rich.

Congress passed a bill to raise the cap. They raised it by 800 billion to \$8.184 trillion. So, this is fixed until next week.

- Privatizing Social Security could be good. Honestly. The only problem is idiot investors will dump all their money into some hotshot biotech stock (like Merck) and then whine and sue everyone when their Social Security savings go down the toilet. But I could see this structured where risk was measured and limited on some rational basis. Oh wait, we live in the land of idiots. We don't do rational things.

I think that one is self-explanatory.

I just want to get my money back from the old people who never contributed to Social Security but got cash benefits.

Actually, I should be getting my money back from that generation's working population, because they were the ones who DIDN'T pay for their parents' food, lodging, etc. when their parents were old. That's how it works in most of the rest of the world. You take care of the old people in your family when they can't take care of themselves anymore. Besides, you owe your parents for the first 25 years of destruction you brought when you came into the world. Those bastards.

It's kind of funny when you think about it. Yes, life expectancy is longer than ever before. But people in the 1800s were living pretty long, too, and they were doing okay without Social Security until the Great Depression.

I think we should just eat more cheap food like McDonald's to save more money, and then eat more McDonald's when we're old and broke to make sure the average life expectancy drops to 15 minutes.

But seriously (hopefully some of the gibberish above is actually serious, too), I'm hoping Bush won't be a disaster. I mean, what do we really want? I think what we want is:

- A growing economy
- More jobs
- More money to go around
- More money / more efficient use of money for public works
- Less death (soldiers, suicide bombings, etc.)
- Some of us want more equality--we probably won't get that

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...*Bush, from previous page...*

with Bush. And if you want to do research using stem cells, come to California--the land of paradise.

I hope some of that's universal. Maybe we'll get there some day.

When I look back at this post, there's probably a thousand things missing from this list. And I just listed what I thought was important. You can probably tell I live in California and work for a living. Maybe preservation of the environment should go on the list. Maybe better schools for my non-existent kids should go on the list. Maybe cheaper college educations should go on the list. But all of those things are economic factors too. When people are starving, they're not worried about the environment. When you have some basic needs taken care of, you may pay more attention to things like that.

I think environmentalists need a new marketing program. Really. It's all about awareness and getting people to think about the large impact lots of little things add up to. Just take a look at New York and New Jersey. What a dump. Come to California. It's paradise.

-Sridos2004

Sridos2004 will be running for re-election in 2005. Don't miss out on the next version. ☒

Dear Journal

A Journey into the Secret Life of Srida Joisa
By Srida's Journal Writer

Dear Journal:

I dream of the soft curves of her back, her gentle touch, the way she wakes me in the morning with her soft coos, and how she makes me stand at attention and jump to the soft calls of her ringing voice. My pants warm with the prrrrrr of her presence, my thumbs twitch in anticipation of her touch, and as I slide into position, my lips part slightly as I feel the first caress of her skin. As I peer into her eyes, I feel alive, hopeful yet full of the false hope that she will display an important message to me.

I curse my love for her, my wicked Blackberry.

Signed,
Srida
☒

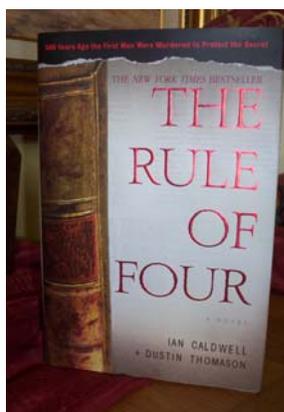
"World" Book Review

By Steven Fritz

The Rule of Four by Ian Caldwell and Dustin Thomason is about a small band of students at Princeton in 1999 that, like typical obsessive compulsive types, spend every waking hour studying an ancient book called the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. Just as we saw in *Indiana Jones* with Indy's obsession over religious artifacts, you are introduced to Tom Sullivan and his search to the key to a coded message locked in the text. Why? Priceless treasure and antiquities.

Just this past weekend I saw the movie *National Treasure*. That movie reminds me a lot of this book—riddles hidden in puzzles protected by secret societies for countless years. Tom, on the night before graduation, has to balance his obligation to finish his thesis with his drive to crack the code. Now, if you were the authors, how would you thicken the plot? Have him write his thesis *on* the *Hypnerotomachia*. Problem solved. Just in case you can't work out an enunciation, do what I did and give it a nickname like *Hypto* or something. There are some pages in the book where the author uses it ten or twenty times.

The pages are filled with the standard faire. Romance, intrigue, wealth, friendship, murder, and important things like finals cramming, nude streaking, and favorite eating places on campus. Ian and Dustin did write in all the details that make the characters believable and likeable and three dimensional. The pace of the story is slow at times but ends a bit rushed, as if there were a paper shortage and the authors had but one paragraph to wrap things up. Now that I think about it, I can see a second book hidden in those final words. Those sneaky dogs.



I liked this book. If can you imagine a blend of Sherlock Holmes, *DaVinci Code*, *Indiana Jones*, *National Treasure*, and maybe a little *Dead Poets Society*, then you'll like this, too.

For those who would like to read the book:

Here's the deal. After looking at Dan's world map of contributors to this newsletter, I had an idea. I'd like to share my library of hardcover books with the readership. Here is what you have to do.

1. Promise to read the book in a month. Can't get around the world unless those pages are flippin' and flyin'.
2. Write a sentence on your take of the story on the inside cover/pages, sign and date it, and note your location (country and/or city).
3. Return it.

That way, I'll have a wonderful collection of books that have traveled the world over, and you'll get to read stories for the meager price of postage, plus, you get to own a portion of the journey. What say you? s_l_f@msn.com is your jump off point. ☒

Bad Joke Corner

Contributed by Bryan Murray

1. How Do You Catch a Unique Rabbit?

Unique up on it.

2. How Do You Catch a Tame Rabbit?

Tame way, unique up on it. ☒

Ask Anil

By Anil Babooram

Dear Anil,

I am 26, and my boyfriend and I have been together for five years. We were so happy together and were discussing marriage and purchasing a house together in the not-too-distant future. Last month I caught my boyfriend cheating on me with another woman. My whole life has fallen apart. We were so happy—why would he do this?!

Dazed and Confused

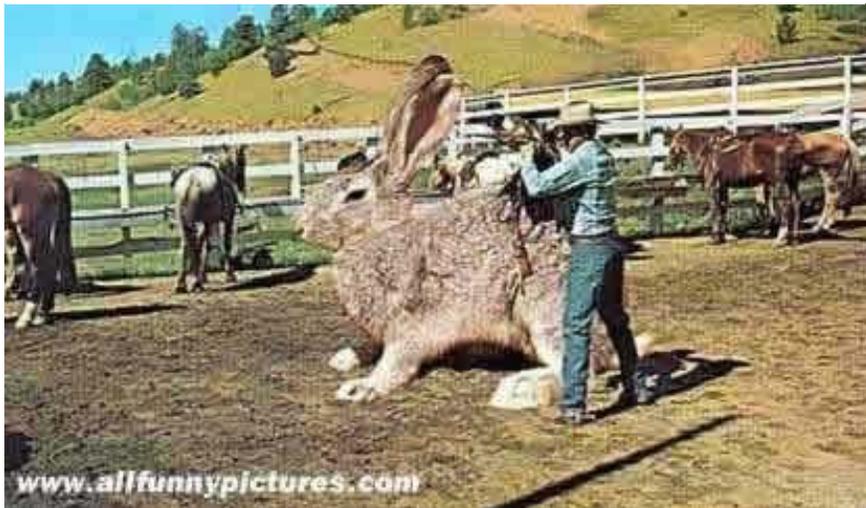
Dear Dazed and Confused,

Sex is natural, and sex is an activity. I don't know the specifics about you or your boyfriend or your relationship, but you clearly had expectations of a monogamous relationship. Many women just assume that this is the way it would be when they are romantically involved with a man. Your boyfriend liked you and wanted to be in a relationship with you, because he liked the feelings he experienced by being in that relationship. He tried to follow the rules of what society says is acceptable, but it is entirely unnatural to only have sex with one person. Odds are that he might have tried to repress his feelings initially so as not to ruin his relationship with you. But what you resist persists, and eventually he would have had to nail someone else, or he would go insane. The perfect solution might have been if he could have said to you "Hey, I like you and the feelings produced by our involvement, and me having sex with other people has nothing to do with my feelings for you." But of course you would have cried and screamed and broken up with him, and he would have lost those feelings produced by his relationship with you entirely. So, like many other men, he got his creep on the sneak. That's it, Dazed. There's the truth, and the sooner you process it and accept it, the better off you'll be and the less chance you'll create unrealistic expectations again. It's just an activity, tons of other animals act the same way. It's only us humans that screw it up by trying to make sex some sort of holy grail activity and build up all these laws around it. But it's not easy to take away what all those years of evolution built into your boyfriend. You wouldn't be mad if he played scrabble with some other woman would you? So, until next time, kiddies, spread your love like a fever.

Please send your questions to:
babooram@alumni.upenn.edu ☒

Visual Corner

Contributed by Aaron MacPhie



Thoughts on Morals

The following is an email exchange between Dan Fritz and Rob Olson about the existence of non-religious-based morals.

From Dan to Rob:

I wanted to go over this theory again to make sure that it is correct.... From my viewpoint, this works solely as a utopian model as opposed to a realistic way of life, but the breakthrough is that with your assumptions, I finally have a reasonable model for the basis of "morals" without religion.

In our scenario, "neutral" and "good" fall into the same category and are defined as the pursuance of that which is not in conflict with anyone else's wishes. One can do anything he is comfortable doing as long as it does not "infringe" upon someone else's happiness, at which point both parties must disengage. "Infringement" is limited to this definition: involvement with another party that opposes that party's wishes. It does not include third-party intervention in disengaging two parties in conflict. This disengagement (judgment) is not "morally" driven; rather it is driven by a mismatch in values, whatever those values may be. In our examples, alcoholism is not bad unless it directly conflicts with the happiness of others, i.e. if one drives drunk and smashes into your car. Therefore, driving under the influence is "bad," but drinking alcohol is not necessarily bad. Similarly, killing someone is not necessarily bad in the case that they want to die (i.e. assisted suicide). None of this precludes the "right" for someone to give you an opinion (or not), but it does preclude that person making decisions for you.

Which brings us to a recap of the major assumptions: 1) I can only control myself. I cannot control anything else. As such, it is fruitless to attempt to control someone (or something) other than myself. That does not preempt me from making my opinion known. 2) Everyone must operate by the utilitarian principle that disagreeing parties must be disengaged. + and + = good, - and - = good, + and - = bad.

As a side thought, factors that motivate individuals' actions do not include

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...Thoughts on Morals, from previous page...

theoretical, post-mortem punishments or reward. That supports this concept of good and bad, since it defies the traditional view that certain actions are inherently right or wrong. For instance, to reiterate the drinking theme, drinking in and of itself is not evil. It only becomes so when one's drunkenness endangers someone who does not want to be endangered, etc.

Problematic areas:

It is not always straightforward what interactions could cause someone unwanted pain, etc. In the case of someone being beaten, there is a clear definition of damage. What about psychological damage?

Everyone has to buy into the above utopian society in order to not be traumatized by certain encounters that are bound to occur. In the beating example, if a third party watches someone being beaten to death (by agreement between the two parties), I find it hard to believe that there isn't a basic human reaction (whatever the origin) that that is unacceptable to any given third party. Or it may just be emotionally scarring.

Either way, if you extend that example out to the realm of all living human beings, there must be a consensus on every action taken by anyone in order for it to be successfully carried out. Or there must be a limitation somewhere in there. Psychological trauma (i.e. the third party seeing the beating) cannot count, since that party is not directly engaged in the action.

From Rob to Dan:

It seems to me as though your recap pretty closely reflects that which I tried to communicate.

The interesting philosophical debate revolves around the disengagement process. Say a political fugitive runs into your house seeking shelter, and a corrupt political power follows into your house the next day looking for him. Obviously, this is a point of inequality (i.e. + and - = bad). So, how is the situation resolved? Do you defer to the negative "I don't want to be found" and lie, or the positive "I want to find that bastard" and rat him out, or do you completely ignore the authority? This is more difficult to answer. As I see it, there are two basic camps, the utilitarian approach, championed by John Stuart Mill; and the moral imperative approach, championed by Kant.

I'd tend to go with the moral imperative. BUT, I only go with the moral imperative when there is discord among intentions (again, + and - = bad).

From Dan to Rob:

Excellent, then that's the starting point.

The moral imperative is exactly what I have been attacking as pointless outside of the realm of religion, though that seems to be a focal point of existentialism. Going back to my newsgroup question, how can morals exist without God? From there, I contend that existential quandaries actually imply that God does exist.

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What I now have from our conversation is a new set of assumptions, whether or not those assumptions will pan out in the end.

From Rob to Dan:

I suppose that my own perspective on the moral imperative is a sort of religious/existentialist hybrid. Again, from my perspective, the existence of God is something of a moot point. From a purely economic standpoint (and by economic I simply mean scientific decision-making as opposed to monetary blah blah...) it seems to me that we would all be best off in this life if we all decide to love each other. Of course, that's also what Jesus said, as well as Buddha, among other godly folks. (I suppose it is worth noting that the fact that I don't think that it matters whether I believe in God does not stop me from believing in God.)

As an interesting side note (and the closest I've come to being able to "prove" my economic point), the makers of the *Lord of the Rings* movies faced a problem in shooting their massive battle scenes. How could they animate hundreds of thousands of figures and make it look believable, without spending hundreds of hours animating each individual figure? Their solution was to develop a fairly simple program based strictly on economic decision making (absent of pride, etc.) in order to animate all of the humans and bad guys in their enormous fight scenes. They found that a simple economics-based program was inadequate in order to animate the fight, however.

Why? Because the warriors would simply walk away from each other. Logical, but not great if you are looking for gore and death and triumph. ☒

Popcorn Pundit

By Susan Fritz

Winged Migration, a film by Jacques Perrin;
http://www.sonyclassics.com/wingedmigration/index_flash.html

This French flap-away hit is a must see. Fly, don't walk to your nearest movie rental store, and check it out immediately, if not sooner! If you like birds, you'll love this movie. If you are an ornithophobic, gain valuable insight into the beauty and majesty of these airborne creatures.

P.S. Don't forget the stale bread for your movie night—a favorite amongst birds everywhere! ☒

Etymology with Al

By Al Fishman

This week on Etymology with Al...
the **ALLEY-OOP!**

As basketball players soar through the air this season, dunking lofted passes from their teammates, consider the etymological origins of the Alley-Oop. The term comes from (and is pronounced like) the French "Allez-Oop" (to go), used by circus acrobats and their directors. Traditionally, the performer would shout "Allez Oop!" at the start of their leap, or the circus director would use the term to signal an acrobat to go.

Interestingly, a circus director might use a variant of the term in the event of rigging problems or injury to bring out the clowns. In this case the call would be "Clowns Allez!" (clowns go!), from which another term, Clown Alley, originates. In the circus, Clown Alley is both the area used by the clowns to get ready for the show, often the nearest side wall of the tent, and the general term for a group of clowns performing in the circus. Isn't that a cool term? Clown Alley is where they prepare their craft and also who they are. Just so, perhaps one day people will be called Babble-ON-ians... In any case, I think it's safe to say that the Harlem Globetrotters are the key link in this basketball-to-circus reverse train of thought. And remember kids, Inman Jackson is yo' daddy! ☒

...*Loser Lunch, p. 1...*

Once upon a time, I worked with lots of winners. Winners, as you know, tend to hang out together. And as winners do, we dined out at lunch at the finest restaurants with no regard for the time spent away from the office or the rising costs of being cool. The coolness lasted for well over a year, and by my rough calculations, I easily spent over \$2,000 on my habit. We all did; we were winners. Some might scoff at the cost, but can you really put a price on your reputation?

Then like Rome and King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table, the winner's numbers fell into decline. One by one they went away, on to be winners elsewhere. As the supply of winners fell, I began to recalculate the shades of my own "winner-ness." Would I still be a winner if I went out every day to dine? Of course! Would I be a winner if I went out every day to dine alone? Not so much. Yeah, I could sit at the bar and watch TV and talk to the barkeep, but that's where being cool gets gray. On one hand, I would have escaped the office, AND I would be eating food prepared and having my glass refilled by someone else. On the other, I would be alone. And loner winners are not real winners when we're talking about lunch.

So, here I am a product of the system that I helped to define. I am a loser. Instead of debating the next cool lunch spot, I argue the finer points of Lean Cuisine while humiliating those with Sara Lee. I have to be reminded by a cardboard box which packets of my meal need slits and which ones need to be fully exposed to the powerful microwaves. I get mad when I forget that a can of Campbell's Select soup can fit entirely in a Styrofoam bowl while a can of Progresso cannot. These are the worries of losers. These are the worries of me. ☒

Are We There Yet?

By Susan Fritz

It's the middle of the afternoon and I'm crawling over the fence that keeps the cars out of the public park's parking lot. Strangely enough, this is where, during the day, sad-looking 9 to 5ers eat their take-out with a view of the harbor. Where they enter is a mystery to me, and until I notice the opening at the other side of the park, I wonder if these cars have been parked here forever. After hours, this parking lot transforms into an outdoor bar; a pharmacy for illegal drugs and activities. And that's what the Canadian geese seem to be talking about each morning, because whether or not I can hear them from my kitchen window, I see their beaks flapping as they gather to graze on park grass like diners gossiping over their morning breakfast of coffee and a short stack. Today I play the goose translator and am sure that the topic of discussion shifts to me as I slowly, unthreateningly, saunter through the large herd. I realize that I'm invading their space somewhat, but animals, especially birds, are so interesting to watch that I can't help myself. It's kind of like the compulsion to touch a statue that is centuries old when the reason why it's out of reach is clear. Today, however, I give myself the permission to be the exception, the one scientist whose skills render it necessary to reach out and invade the sacred statue. In my case, I think the geese will recover.

Looking at these large birds, listening to the quiet murmurs of the harbor, and smelling that unmistakable New England fishy smell, my mind begins to wander and lands on a single phrase, one familiar to any kid who has ever endured a lengthy car trip. "Are we there yet?" I think the geese might have also been discussing this. After all, the weather's getting colder and it's a long way south when you're traveling with your own set of wings. But since my mind has taken the first steps down this windy road, I follow it to the next question, "Are we *where* yet?"

Explore with me as I implore you to set aside your own gut reactions (if your gut indeed has reacted) to this question and start from scratch. At least approach it from a more innocent perspective, a time of unformed expectations where each day was newer than the one that came before. This article title's question, "Are We There Yet?", puts me in kid mode...at least behavior-wise, since just a few short months ago I was asking this same question in a Budget rental truck as Dan and I moved our lives from a large Southern state to a tiny New England one. More than once on our three day trip did I ask this question like a colicky two-year-old; like someone waiting to ride the teacups at Disney Land as a reward for five minutes of quiet disguised as "The Quite Game." It was not as if I snored at the scenery as we passed through new states and landscapes I'd never seen. It excited me to stop at the gas station in Tennessee and to earlier see the sign, "Welcome to Hope, Arkansas, birthplace of William Jefferson Clinton." Yes, the license plate game is still fun after all these years of car trips. It was just that I wanted to get on with it already! But what was (and is) IT? That's the question. When I arrived at the destination, did I expect to see a sign greeting me: "Welcome to the rest of your life!" "Congratulations, you have arrived!" No, it was more my anxiousness to start a new chapter of my life...the anticipation of building upon something foundationless. Not to mention the excitement that comes from traveling with my favorite person; my ultimate partner in crime (have you ever harmonized with someone

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...*Are We There Yet?*, from previous page...

on mouth trumpet?). But how long does it take for that newness to wear off, or at least morph into mild frustration? How many times can a person move (and to how many locations) before the lack of foundation becomes problematic? I am not sure these are answerable questions, but they are worth putting on paper.

Another story comes to mind in reference to the effects of spirited "that's the American way" car trips. I was 5 or 4—old enough to remember flashing images of the incident but young enough to have been more influenced by the incident's adult retelling. I had a stuffed bunny that I carried around everywhere. In true kid fashion it was the most simplistic of all my stuffed animals (the one dimensional fabric cut-out kind with stuffing), so naturally I liked it best. To this day I'd rather pound on a rock than test my hand-eye coordination skills with an X-Box. We were on some sort of long car trip in the summer—long even from an adult point-of-view—and for some reason on an endless, arrow-straight stretch of road, I decided to throw my favorite stuffed animal out the window. Maybe I wanted to see if it could run fast enough to catch up with our speedy blue Pinto, or maybe I just felt like throwing something out the window. In any case, the poor bunny was toast on the side of the road as we zoomed on by. I must have screamed or cried or something, because the next thing I knew an argument ensued about whether or not we should turn around to rescue the bunny, or if we should abandon it as stuffed road kill. Somehow, my mom won this argument and convinced my disgruntled dad to turn the car around. It's not like we'd see another car for miles, so it wasn't inconveniencing anyone but the driver. My mom didn't think this was the time or place to teach me any kind of lesson about tossing my best friend out the window. Ultimately, the bunny was rescued and my tears dried. We reached our destination and life resumed.

That particular journey was wrought with drama and trauma in kid terms, but after all, everything is relative. In either scenario—bunny rescued or left behind—the Pinto would have arrived home just the same. However, life for me as a little kid would have altered considerably, at least for a few days, if that step of the journey were written differently. In other words, the elements of the journey and the destination were and are unavoidably interconnected.

There's a religious slant to this discussion, and as I continue to walk through the park I realize how much it relates to the concepts of "journey" and "destination." Not that there are clear-cut divisions between the so-called "religious" and "non-religious." After all, that concept of "agnostic" (which still, admittedly, alludes me), compels some to straddle the religious fence. However, assuming that some believe in God and others do not, the ultimate "destination" of a person changes considerably according to the belief or lack of belief in an afterlife. An argument I often hear from people who believe that there's only "One Life to Live"—that this lifetime is it, no heaven, no hell, and no reincarnation of any sort—is that a person might as well enjoy himself while he's here. "You only live once" is the motto by which these people live, although even this phrase might continue with two opposite approaches. First, "you only live once...so you might as well look out for yourself and live life to the fullest" (i.e. party, rape, and or pillage), or "you only live once so you might as well treat others like you wish to be treated" (i.e. Golden Rule). Not to get off onto a tangent, but this is why the whole Red State vs. Blue State argument is such B.S. It not only implies that all religious Red

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Staters are crazy zealots; it also implies that the Blue Staters are immoral atheists. Neither viewpoint is accurate. But to return, if a person is religious (believes in God or at least a higher, governing power), a person's journey and destination are intertwined. You may only live once in Christian terms, but your behavior (and more importantly, your beliefs) in this life is monitored and affect what happens in the afterlife. In other Eastern religions such as Hinduism, a person's behavior in this lifetime is both influenced by previous lifetimes and influential upon future lifetimes. So, like in Christianity, a person is responsible for his or her actions independent of what impulse or instinct might dictate. There is a certain code of conduct, also known as a set of "morals" that act to guide people to behave in ways that will benefit the individual and in turn benefit society as a whole. It's the silly humans in control of the Organized Religion Factor that turn so many off of religion completely. For example, the act of the Roman Catholic confession seems to alleviate the paralysis of guilt that is supposed to drive people to "Do the Right Thing." It should be the instructive content of the Bible that performs this service, not a few self-proclaimed, earthly messengers of God. It is safe to say that Jesus would not condone guilt as an acceptable means of controlling a population. This is also true in pure (i.e. without the interpretation of corrupt leaders) Eastern religions. In fact, in Sanskrit, the ancient Indian language, there is no word for guilt. There is only Karma; therefore what you do (good or bad) comes back to you...always, and presumably, exponentially.

So, how does this writer answer her own question? Are we there yet? Can I answer this? All philosophical musings aside, I hope not. I, for one, have a long way to go in becoming the human being I aspire to be—in even becoming acquainted with what that is. Somewhere hidden away in a box far, far away is my tossed bunny, and its memory survives. For a few more weeks until the extreme winter cold descends upon us, the geese will continue to migrate with pin-point accuracy and certainty of their destination. But they're coming back this way when the season's over, and it will all start again. Make of that what you will. ☒

Yes, I'm Writing This at Class

By *Garrett Calderwood*

Hello, everyone. I thought I would take a line or two to introduce myself. I'm Garrett Calderwood the "little" brother of Grant. I am 21 years old, I attend a small liberal arts college that you have never heard of, Eckerd College (yes, named after the Jack Eckerd of the former Eckerd drug store), I am an anthropology and history double major. That's me. Now on with the show.

I was reading through last month's issue and flipped straight to my older brother's article. It made me laugh out loud in several places, but more importantly it got me thinking. This may not be exactly what Grant had in mind when he wrote the article, but this is how I, the average 21-year-old college Junior who knows nothing of the outside world, am responding to it. As Grant asked himself in the article, I ask my self the inverse all the time. What will my next four years hold for me when I get out of this dump known as St. Petersburg, Florida? I feel that at this stage of my life I am

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Politic-tac-toes

With Alfred Israel Fishman

The United States of America has ridden its two-headed pack animal of a political system through the roofs of the world. Or maybe it's ridden the almighty dollar as far as it can go. Either way, the economic, military, and humanitarian successes that a stable political system allows illustrate what a two-party representative democracy can hope to achieve in other countries. And that is why America has been seen as a leader across the world. (Or maybe it's our money. Dang, there's that again...) But the point is that America is a First World Nation. And, concerning its political system, most people would advise, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." Why even consider changing anything? It is both a simple question and one that I feel compelled to try to answer.

Changing a political system that has been in place for over two centuries obviously risks instability. But the problem is that the world has already begun changing and is much less stable itself than it was four years ago. There's an entirely new playing field, which is aimed right at America. The almighty dollar is losing ground and might not be the benchmark for the world economy for long (so it might be a good idea to start trying to balance the budget). The complicated relationships, cultural hatreds, and volatile factions across the Middle East have really caught the U.S. military in a quagmire. And America is now seen as a country who tortures prisoners and bombs innocents. With that said, America's republic is still a powerful ideological force in the world. And I think it is the best thing America has going for it. So, naturally, my next thought is to write a series of articles arguing for the disbandment of America's two-party system in favor of a multi-party political system. My goal is to evaluate what might be wrong with American politics and what we, the people, might do to make it better.

This all started on the morning of November 2nd. While showering that morning, I considered voting for Ralph Nader just to show that there's something very wrong with the American political system. But I brushed those ideological crumbs off my slate by the time I was waiting in line at the local East Atlanta elementary school. I had been anti-Bush the entire campaign and wanted that voice as loud as possible. Or maybe I just chickened out. Old (two-party) habits die hard.

I like the concept of building upon all the work done before you in academia to advance a field's body of work. And I think America's political system grows in much the same way. Throughout history, interest groups have represented constituents. And those viewpoints are heard at the party level and then passed to build the party's platform. Bit-by-bit, each platform evolves over time, moving forward and backward with the views of the constituents. The success of each piece of policy that actually passes affects the views of the electorate, whose evolution reverberates and rebalances power within government. But this ideal political representation loses quite a bit in partisanship and through the media. The end result is a distasteful political system ruled by the elites who recognize that most people just want to be left alone. How is this democracy?

Many would say that the tides of American politics, the checks and balances built into the system, and the business cycle ensure that this country will remain headed in the right direction with the same political system it has always had. But I'm not so sure. First, I think the viewpoints of many get lost in the deals and compromises of party politics. Eliminating those voices from the stage of American politics dilutes the national discourse into "Us" versus "Them" when we need to be DEBATING ISSUES to learn more about the road that lies ahead for all of America. And secondly, it's possible that our two-party system has created a monster and will keep creating monsters as long as the two-party system gets fed. I don't see much balance of power in politics these days. I see a sea of red that dares the constitution to make it separate church and state. I see a Democratic party whose core supporters don't understand that a majority of Americans find their professed egalitarianism elitist. And I see both sides using fear mongering to feed the beast.

In theory, a multi-party system reflects more purely the public will and encourages its participation. Sure, realities are often a far cry from theories, but that doesn't negate the fact that a multi-party system could lessen the impact the media has on elections, decrease the degree of partisanship in our capitals, and increase the quality of our policy discussions. If we can make our government explain itself more often in the hopes of getting the will of the people right, should we not go to whatever lengths necessary to see this through? Agree, disagree, or scoff, we should at least invite the discussion.... ☒

...Yes, from previous page...

busier than I will ever be, putting in at least two 14-hour days a week. Maybe I'm over-involved—choir, bell choir, tour guide, men's volleyball team, girlfriend—there is so much out there to do. Did everyone feel this way in college? Are my feelings exacerbated, because I live with two theater (single) majors who sit around and play Everquest 2 and watch Disney channel all day? People tell me all the time to cherish my college years, because they are the best of my life. How can that be? I have almost zero free time. I put in my 12 to 14 hour day every day and then come back to the apartment, plop down on the couch, and read some of the over 1000 pages of reading I have assigned every week, not to mention writing papers and studying for exams. Ok, so I'm complaining. Basically, I just want to know, does it get better? When I was home and I would see Grant on his computer till all hours of the night finishing a project, it doesn't seem like it does. Or when I stumble across an article in *Babble-ON* about how his break is grabbing a sandwich in the conference room and taking time out of his crunching numbers to write 600 words, I mean no offense, but where is the fun in that? Isn't life supposed to get better? Where is the hope in life? Maybe I am missing the bigger picture. Maybe I'm limited by my point of view. A narrow-minded, twenty-one year old, cynical college student living in menial St. Petersburg, Florida probably wouldn't think much was out there. Or am I more correct than I think I am? Please feel free to debase me in next month's issue, however the global watch map will be expanding, seeing as I will be in Malaysia. So, give me a month to get back to you. ☒

Please send all hate mail, article commentary, and playful jabs to:
dan@fritzcomics.com

...*The Human Nature behind Maturity, p. 1...*

While the meaning of “mature” is nebulous at best, particularly when one really tries to arrive at its precise definition, it is nonetheless some type of status worth achieving [It is no doubt that people want to be “mature”. When I say it is worth achieving, I refer to the concept of “maturity” as I will attempt feebly to outline in this article]. Yet, it is only a status worth achieving when its nature has been uncovered, or at least, when a nature and definition for maturity has been proposed, which deviates from the superficial label that informs the actions of humans from age 8 and on. Let me first start by saying that my discussion will consider maturity as a state of mind and allow its function as a reality ascribed by bystanders to marinate for a bit. After all, the massive dissent in the definition of “mature” initially put me on this path, so to relegate its meaning to a matter of perception would be to surrender our own authority on our own maturity. No action is in itself inherently mature or immature. I will make a step towards a quantitative definition of what it means to be mature, and thereafter I will address its implications for our understanding of male/female relationships and human understanding in general.

First, let's define maturity before progressing towards a theory of achieving it. This brief article makes the assumption that maturity equates both a knowledge and practice of interpersonal savvy. A mature person has panache. A mature person will be measured by his peers as someone who can address problems relating to all of human nature in all spheres of life. Again, we must somehow be indebted to the social context of the label “mature,” but I still intend to show that when it is something observed and asserted, it does so generally on the premise of a person's approach toward life and the subsequent impression this makes on others, whether positive or negative. Yes, one might be able to portray an aura that is ostensibly mature by behaving in a manner that social contexts have somehow applied to older people, but this is mere pantomime. Eight year olds can play house, but they are not mature. They are certainly less mature than the fifty year old who has decided to go back and dance at a teenage club. However, some eight year olds might be more mature than some twelve year olds. Why do I need to host a “dinner party” to be mature? A mature person need not necessarily be charming or well liked or even old for that matter. As a matter of fact, my theory seeks to shatter the naïve belief that age automatically translates into maturity.

Maturity, as I recognize it, can be reduced to an equation of experience and reflection. Experience multiplied by reflection will in most cases yield what our society will in individual cases regard as maturity. It's never a precise science. Maturity necessitates a dialectic union of both forces that are by nature at odds with each other – a sedentary and dynamic clash. Both share equal importance and rarely does a person lead a life where both are cooperating in equal proportion. If one does nothing but run around and experience life without taking a moment to understand any of it, one cannot be mature. They cannot relate these principles to anything but their ephemeral moments and those respective memory imprints. On the other hand, a person brooding all day in reflective meditation has no experience to process or extrapolate. They can measure nothing but imagination and presumption. Both extremes yield undesirable results. Do we really care for the woman who has traveled the world but cannot escape her own arrogant oversights and flamboyant insensitivities vis-à-vis her fellow humans. The hermetic boy poring over his poems and books is equally clueless. Indeed real maturity must be a combination of both. This accounts for the variation in perceived levels of maturity for different people of different age groups. Yes, by following this logic one can easily say that someone who is 20 years old could easily be more mature than someone who is 27 years old. How can that be? Well let's find out.

Reflection and experience. First of all, age guarantees neither of these two activities. Expanding boundaries, gaining perspective, learning new cultures, understanding new people – this all comes with different experiences and should be sought. Sure, one might experience different things living in the same town forever, but only a fool would say those experiences rival familiarity with as many different people and places as possible. Regardless of one's worldly experiences, it is only in the act of thinking about their significance that one begins to move beyond pure experience and simple pleasure. At the same time, it does no good to

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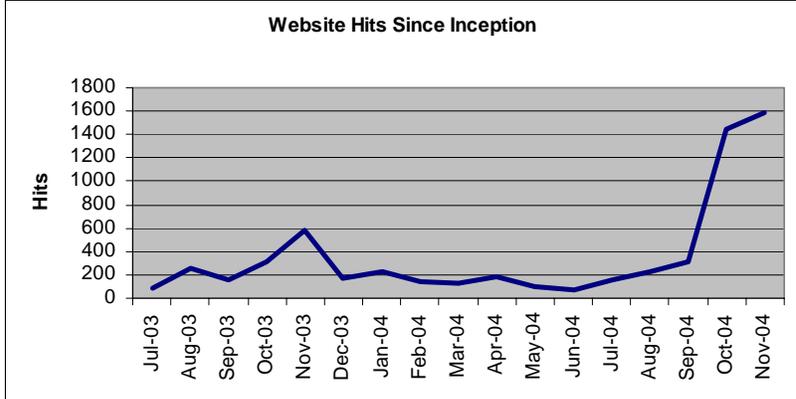
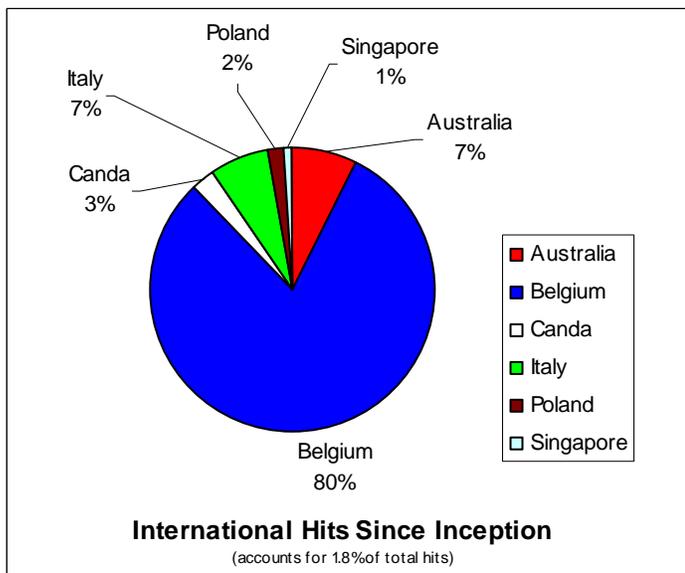
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constantly ponder about the nature of life without having lived it. Truly, this is a ridiculous exercise in frustration, though some might falsely pursue it in hopes of attaining some sort self ennobling stoicism. In either case, the main goal is lost, namely interaction with fellow humans. In both cases there is an excess of focus on internal indulgence, whether it be pleasurable or painful. You know how it goes...If I spend all of this time experiencing all of these great wonders, it means nothing if I do not stop to ponder what they all mean. [At the same time - double], I cannot keep this state of reflection from hindering a continuation of the journey. Perhaps this is why the zombies shuffling to work, collecting their paychecks, and mechanically engaging in mind numbing drink and superficial sex really have no maturity. They're not experiencing much, and they are simultaneously too busy to reflect. I can't think of a worse state for a human.... Fitter.... Happier... More Productive....

Now, practically speaking (and I know this is the part you've all been waiting for), this accounts for how a person of such a young age can surpass someone older in perceived “maturity.” If I were 22, yet I had traveled to different locales while at the same time refused to simply embrace each moment as if it were there for its sheer enjoyment, then I would be more mature than the 30 year old who has not only very little perspective on the world due to lack of experience, but also has reflected little on his own experience due to excessive experience with the Playstation 2. The realm of sexuality is no different. The person who pays attention to the art of pleasing 10 lovers will be an infinitely better lover than the person who has simply fucked 20, despite our normal intuition telling us that the person with 20 should be more “experienced” and therefore a better lover. No. My theory is disposing of that mindset. My definition of maturity does not get much more complicated. It is straightforward. It does not however embrace any sort of typically prescribed action for maturity. Having dinner parties, going wine tasting, getting married, avoiding crowds, “appreciating” art, and all of these things... they don't equal maturity.

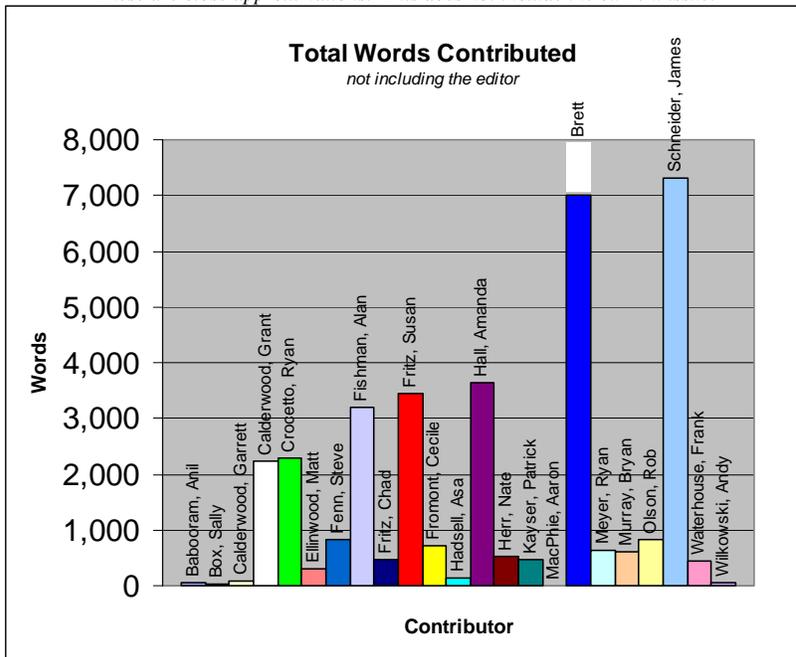
Ok, and now to travel the home stretch of this argument, I will try to understand why it is that women are generally considered “more mature” than men. Again, I did define this “maturity” as something that can be perceived, although it has no correlative action that directly defines it. The way women and men are raised through childhood contribute to this outcome. Yes, yes, picture me sitting on a leather armchair in Vienna smoking a cigar, but it is true. Men are usually pressured into more action at very young ages. They are not encouraged to do very many actions that require any reflection. This does not mean they are withheld from actions requiring the mind. Using the brain and reflecting are too entirely different concepts. Just because someone learns to play the piano does not mean that they have reflected at all. Automaton can be programmed to play the piano. Perhaps this changes as life goes on. Indeed it does, or you'd never find a man more mature (within our understanding of mature) than a woman. Nonetheless, women still have the jump on men, and due to the nature of gender roles, they always will have the advantage in matters of maturity, since characteristics naturally ascribed to feminine lend themselves more to our definition of mature.

I have no answer for how to make people more mature. I can't really produce any plan or formula for showing others how to be mature. Actually, one can be no more or less mature after having read this article, nor can they really have an applicable plan for becoming more or less mature. And while I think that “maturity” is a state of mind (always becoming) for which people should strive, this is not a pedantic message geared towards converting all of humanity into “mature” individuals. Seriously, there could be no “mature” if there weren't in fact any “immature,” so, in truth, I have done nothing more than offer a definition for what might truly be mature. But why? Well, I, like others, am sick of the parading and masquerading. We're all sick of the bullshit of having to be “adults”. There is no proper definition of being an adult, and that is precisely what I wanted to show. Having spent more than enough time in a corporate environment that may have well been a sandbox, it has occurred to me that age does not equal maturity, as I stated in the beginning. The preceding babble(ON) was my sincere attempt to unearth a more plausible definition for this elusive yet seductive concept. ☒



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