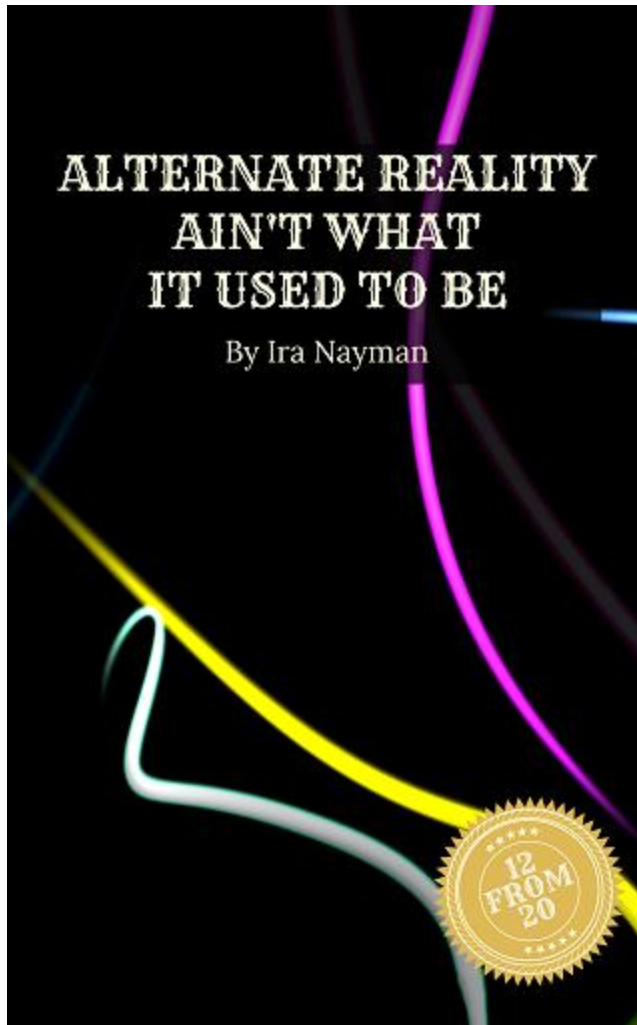




**Alternate Reality Ain't What It Used To Be**  
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## **Introduction**

*In the first week of September 2022, Les Pages aux Folles will turn 20. To celebrate this achievement, I will be publishing 12 ebook collections of articles from the two decades of the web site over the course of the year; this project is known as "12 from 20." (For a*

*brief overview of Les Pages aux Folles, see “The Back Story” at the end of this volume.) Each book will focus on a different feature of the web site. This month: seven Alternate Reality News Service general collections.*

I grew up reading the ABCs of science fiction: Asimov, Bradbury and Clark. I quickly branched out into other speculative fiction writers, including Keith Laumer, Philip Jose Farmer, A. E. Van Vogt and Stanislaw Lem. After ten or fifteen years, I felt that I had got as much out of the genre as I was going to get and moved on to other literature.

If things had remained like this, the direction of my writing would likely have been radically different if. However, in the early 1990s I discovered cyberpunk. (This is debatable, of course; I was still watching sci fi films and television in this time, so it as still a large part of my media diet.) William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, Rudy Rucker and John Shirley brought an energy to SF that the old school seemed, to me, to be lacking. I’ve been completely hooked since then.

When I tell people at conventions that I am primarily a humour writer, one of the first questions they ask is why I often combine it with science fiction. As my opening paragraphs attest, the fantastical has been a part of my experience of art for as long as I can remember, so, naturally, it has influenced the creation of my own art. In addition, the answer I usually go for is that science fiction comes with a useful set of metaphorical tropes that allow me to say satirical things. (To use but one example: the trilogy of novels I completed in 2022, *Good Intentions*, *Bad Actors* and *The Ugly Truth*, revolves around a race of aliens who become refugees from a dying universe. I wanted to get at something universal in the refugee experience, but I was afraid that if I had just made up a human race of refugees from a fictional country, people would find connections to specific human races and miss the universality of the experience. Using an alien race made this much less likely.) I also sometimes point out that the basis of a lot of humour involves juxtaposition of the absurd, and fantastical literature (science fiction, fantasy, horror, et al) allows my imagination much freer range to throw disparate elements together for comic effect.

Since *Les Pages aux Folles* has been my major writing project for two decades, it would be reasonable to assume that science fiction would be a large part of it. This is true of the occasional general article, but it has had its most extensive expression in the Alternate Reality News Service (ARNS).

ARNS sends reporters into other dimensions and has them report back on what they find there. The organization’s original motto was: “If you don’t like this reality, try another one!” When it appeared that this would become a long-term feature of *Les Pages aux Folles*, they began to employ the motto, “The original fake news!” More recently, they have added the motto: “When we break the news, it stays broken!”

A typical collection of ARNS articles contains news, reviews, interviews – anything you might expect to find in your daily newspaper (including, yes, obituaries, because people in other universes die, too). This volume contains samples from seven Alternate Reality

News Service collections: five are general collections, two are collections of humorous science fiction advice columns. (There are also five collections of reports from a universe where the United States of Vesampucceri is the world's leading idiotocracy; samples from these books will appear in a future volume of 12 from 20.)

Possibly interesting note on the advice columns: at the end of each one is a paragraph in italics that signs off on the column, then invites readers to submit their own questions to an email address at *Les Pages aux Folles*. This was a legitimate request: I would have loved it if readers had submitted questions. In fact, I wrote a couple of paragraphs advising readers on how best to write their questions (telling them, for instance, that questions could be short and didn't have to be funny; their purpose was to spur my imagination). As it happened, I only received a couple of questions, and they were supplied by friends. That's unfortunate. In a perfect world, the advice columns would have functioned the way real advice columns do, only with more humour and less weeping.

As with a real newspaper, I have a roster of reporters who have specific beats, from international politics (Dimsum Agglomeratizatonalisticism) to film and television (Elmore Teradonovich) to transdimensional traffic (Indigo Haphazastance), over thirty in all. This gives a small measure of continuity to the articles, as well as giving the feature the impression of being a real news gathering organization. (In the beginning, I decided that all of the contributors would have long, multi-syllabic names, a move I would regret when I started doing public readings.)

The articles aren't, strictly speaking, journalistic. I do not, for example, employ the inverted pyramid (with the most important information at the top and each successive paragraph containing less important information) style of writing. That form of writing was developed for publications where articles might have to be cut for space, but, of course, on the internet I don't have to do that. I also tend to employ more quotes than a typical newspaper article, which would paraphrase more than I do (I do love my dialogue). I also digress (once in a while to the point of causing an entire article to self-destruct), something that would never happen in a real newspaper article. In a similar vein, headlines on the articles are not mere regurgitations of the gist of each article; they are another source of humour which I exploit to the fullest.

So, not journalism. Still. In form, most people would recognize them as journalism-like. Journalismish? Journalismesque? Close enough that, in its scope, the Alternate Reality News Service can be seen as an elaborate parody of journalism.

Between chapters in the second (*What Were Once Miracles Are Now Children's Toys*) and third (*Luna for the Lunies!*) books in the series can be found behind-the-scenes at the Alternate Reality News Service narratives. These allowed me to introduce such characters as Editrix-in-Chief Brenda Brundtland-Govanni and the two Pops (Moobly and Kahunga). They were so much fun to work with, I brought them back as the antagonists of my fifth novel (*The Multiverse is a Nice Place to Visit, But I Wouldn't Want to Live There*).

A few years into the Les Pages aux Folles project, I decided to produce some selections from the web site as print books. To some extent, this was a marketing decision: it was difficult to get web sites reviewed; it was marginally less difficult to get books reviewed. In addition, only print books were eligible for some awards. My first foray into self-publishing in print was *No Public Figure Too Big, No Personal Foible Too Small*, a general collection of articles. To be charitable, it didn't get much attention.

By the time I started thinking about what my second print book should be, I had started collecting Alternate Reality News Service articles into books on the web site. It occurred to me that not only were there web sites devoted to reviewing speculative fiction, but there were conventions at which I could sell some of these books. So, I decided to self-publish the ARNS collections in print soon after I bookized them on the web site. As of this writing, there are twelve collections of ARNS books, as well as two omnibus volumes. The attention I received from this decision made me focus on the Alternate Reality News Service; had I not self-published these books in print, I may not have written as many as I have.

Why self-publish as opposed to looking for a publisher? Well. The books were made up of fake news articles, a non-narrative format that straddles the line between fiction and non-fiction, which would make it a hard sell to publishers (because it would be a hard sell for audiences. Not only that, but all of the articles would have been previously published. Worse, they would still be available online. I saw this as three strikes that would make it impossible to sell a print version of the books to a publisher. Self-publication, then, seemed to be the best way of getting them into print.

The attention given to the ARNS collections included, surprisingly, very positive reviews of the first two books in *Fantasy and Science Fiction* magazine by Charles de Lint. In his review of the first ARNS collection, *Alternate Reality Ain't What It Used To Be*, de Lint wrote, "This is a great little volume to leave lying around in the bathroom." I knew what he meant: it contained eighty pieces of writing containing less than 1,000 words each. I think of it as a "dipping book," the sort of thing you can read in short bursts when you don't have a lot of time. But did it have to be the bathroom? Other appropriate places to read it would be on public transit, or in a doctor's office. Well, in his follow-up review to my second book, he called me "the author of one of my favourite books of 2006." When I read that, I thought, *If you're going to be that nice, you can talk about the bathroom all you want!*

A few years after the interviews came out, I went to a reading Charles de Lint gave in Toronto, hoping to be able to thank him for his kind reviews (they meant a lot to somebody who was just starting to develop a public following). Sure enough, he was sitting on his own a few minutes before the reading began, so I walked up to him and said, "Hello, Mister de Lint. You're my biggest fan!" This is one of my favourite SF moments from my writing career, although I have to point out that he had no idea who I was, so his initial reaction was confusion. (After I had explained the context, he shared in the laugh, proving once again that in comedy, context is everything.)

ARNS affected my life in two important ways. It got me out to science fiction conventions, where I met a lot of great people, including other authors, many of whom have become lifelong friends. (To give but one example: I was paired with a writer named Stephen Pearl at my first public reading at a convention. He read from *Tinker's Plague*, a terrific post-apocalyptic adventure story. When it came my turn to read, you know I had to introduce myself with, "And now for something completely different..." Stephen and I have developed a warm, supportive relationship ever since.) I now feel part of a community of speculative fiction writers, something I never expected when I started writing ARNS articles.

ARNS is also the source of many ideas that have gone into my novels (the Transdimensional Authority, for example, was first mentioned in an ARNS article). To return the favour, the novels feature ARNS articles. In many cases, the Alternate Reality News Service functions in the same way in my stories as the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy functions in the novels of Douglas Adams: as a way of delivering world-building context to the reader.

The Alternate Reality News Service is where my personal science fiction odyssey truly begins. Enjoy.

Ira Nayman  
Toronto  
January 28, 2022

## Articles

*Alternate Reality Ain't What It Used To Be*

### Alternate Reality News Service Frequently Unasked Questions

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1) What is the Alternate Reality News Service?

It's, uhh, a service that provides news from alternate realities.

2) Like Rush Limbaugh's brain?

No. Some alternate realities are too dangerous for us to allow our reporters to enter.

3) How does it work?

We use an ion capacitance coil in a particle accelerator to collapse the quantum probabilities of atoms into a different reality than the one that we experience every day. Then, we use a wormhole borrowed from a black hole to transport our journalists between the two realities. The great thing about particles accelerated to near light speeds is that –

4) Whoa! Whoa! Could you explain that in layman's terms?

Sure. We push the red button, a light goes on in the doorway and we push somebody through it.

5) How do you get the journalists back from the alternate reality?

They're on a timer.

6) That may be, but how do you get them back?

It's a really fancy timer. Digital.

7) I'm sure it's great, but how do you get your journalists back?

We offer them a free meal when they return.

8) That's it?

You'd be surprised what journalists will do for a free meal.

9) What happens to ARNS reporters who materialize in alternate realities hostile to life?

They make employee of the month.

10) With, like, a plaque on the wall?

Don't be so cynical. It's a lovely plaque.

11) Do your correspondents ever bring back pieces of where they've been with them?

Oh, sure. It's hard to get alternate reality out of leather.

12) Isn't that a problem?

Can be. Funny story: one of our reporters, Alicia Grubskotowskaya, came back from a planet called Ambulster with a fluvianatole. She didn't know – hee hee – that the fluvianatole was pregnant. Well! Before you could say “If the three yellow suns are aligned, the day will be malign,” the carnivorous race had taken over the Earth, enslaved everybody and started breeding humans for their meat. (They started the human meat farms in countries that already had high levels of obesity – the best argument for dieting I've ever heard.) Oops. Our bad.

13) Why don't I remember any of that?

You don't? Oh, ahh, we must be getting this mixed up with another reality. Sorry. Still, lesson learned: don't travel with a fluvianatole unless you know it's been neutered!

14) Whose idea was the Alternate Reality News Service?

Bill Gates.

15) Really?

No. But after he bought the ARNS, he had the official history of the organization rewritten so that it would seem as though he had created it.

16) And you accept this?

In most realities, Bill Gates is a small sea slug, so it kind of all works out.

17) How can I become an Alternate Reality News Service journalist?

Not everybody can be an ARNS correspondent. It takes a special mix of nerves of steel, the intelligence to be able to negotiate with living beings who are substantially different than you are and the wisdom to know when negotiations are pointless.

18) What if I have my own notepad?

You're in!

19) Why are all of your correspondents' names so long?

They're Scandinavian.

20) Is the Alternate Reality News Service based in Scandinavia?

No, we just recruit heavily there.

21) Do you have any correspondents from, you know, any alternate realities?

We've considered using superthin 17 dimensional beings in universes with conditions that are hostile to human life. We call this our "Stringer Theory." It's still a theory because we haven't found any superthin 17 dimensional beings to test it out on.

22) What's the strangest alternate reality you've got reporters in?

The one where George W. Bush wins the Nobel Prize for Peace, Love and Understanding.

23) What's so strange about that?

Alfred Nobel made his fortune in dynamite. Where's the peace, love and understanding in that?

24) All this talk of alien invasions – the truth is that most alternate realities are just as boring as this one, isn't it?

Look, when you come home from work, do you tell your wife about the three hours you spent filling out requisition forms for photocopier toner cartridges? Of course not. You tell her about the weasel that got into the coffee pot. Yes, okay, most alternate realities are duller than Jimmy Carter. You happy, now? Okay, that's it. I'm going to see if any weasels got into the coffee pot.

### **Profiles in Courage: Martin Felderhoffer**

by GUNTHER "SPREADS" TOODYANIAN-MCGILL, Alternate Reality News Service  
Sports Writer

The Olympics has had no shortage of heroic competitors over the years. Who could forget Jesse Owens winning four gold medals in various first person shooter events despite being diagnosed the year before with carpal tunnel syndrome? Or Mark Spitz, whose record in simulation endurance is likely to stand for decades to come?

To this elite group must now be added the name of Martin Felderhoffer, whose bronze in the 50 Hour Retro event was accomplished without the use of eyelids.

“We’re so proud of our little Martin,” Martin’s mother, Anna-Louise Hockcrop, said, holding up a picture of a three year-old wearing Spiderman pyjamas and dark glasses. “We were told by doctors not to expect too much because of his...the, uhh...you know, but – bronze medal. Wow.”

Martin, who grew up in Middleton, Pennsylvania in the shadow of Three Mile Island, started training for the Olympics when he was six years old. He would regularly get up at five in the morning to spend three hours playing *Donkey Kong*, *Galaxian* and other retro computer games before having to get ready for school.

At first, he was hampered by the dark glasses, which he constantly had to wear because, without eyelids, he had no way to irrigate his eyes, which would quickly dry out under the glare of the video monitor. “The pain can be excruciating,” explained Erin Forbes, Martin’s trainer who, when he came of age, would also become his lover.

At first, Martin tried to alternate between periods of wearing the glasses and practicing without them, but he could only look at the computer monitor for 30 seconds before the pain became too much for him and he had to bath his eyes with a cold compress. “He was a frustrated little man,” his mother said. “But, he had a dream.”

When he was 10, Martin’s parents looked into the possibility of having their son undergo eyelid transplants. This procedure – which even today is highly experimental – proved too be too costly and, with waiting periods of up to 18 years for donor eyelids, would not have prepared their son to compete while still in the prime 15 -24 age bracket.

Then, legendary Olympian Billy Sol Hurok came to town.

Hurok has been touring the country as part of the President’s Council on Gaming Fitness ever since he won four golds at the Olympics, including setting a record for high score on Ms. Pac-Man. When Martin was 12, Hurok made an appearance at the local Wal-Mart, signing Billy Sol Hurok action figure boxes and generally goofing around.

“Martin...well, he couldn’t go,” Hockcrop stated through pursed lips. “But, just knowing that Billy Sol was only a couple of miles away seemed to galvanize him, and he threw himself even more into his training.”

Martin may have been relegated to the Eyelidless Olympics but for the intervention of Randall Preston IV, an eccentric local billionaire inventor who heard of his plight.

Preston IV refused to be interviewed by the Alternative Reality News Service, but his press secretary did say, “I was impressed by Martin’s pluck, by his drive. When I first met him at a fundraising function for children without eyelids, I knew that he deserved the support of an eccentric local billionaire inventor.”

Preston IV worked tirelessly over the next couple of weeks to develop an irrigation system for the eyes of people without eyelids. His device consists of a pair of glasses hooked by tubes to a vat of water. Using a computer to determine the optimal flow, pumps periodically spray the user’s eyes with a fine mist of water.

This device allowed Martin to look directly at the computer screen for much longer periods of time, which improved his game immensely. It also made another small fortune for Randall Preston IV, but nobody begrudged the eccentric local billionaire inventor his extra hundreds of millions of dollars.

By the time the 18 year-old was chosen to compete at the Olympics, Martin was practicing 16 hours a day. In a nod to his hero, Billy Sol Hurok, he chose to play Ms. Pac-Man.

Martin was the underdog, facing stiff competition from Enelgvoid Crumpkin, of the fearsome Belarus team, and Susan Smith, a plucky British lass who had already won golds at the Commonwealth Games in the aptly named Breakout Retro event. But, he held his own in the first few hours of the meet and, as other competitors fell away, those in the auditorium began to sense something miraculous was in the making.

“We had a few tense moments around the 16th hour,” Martin’s mother stated. A minor malfunction in his glasses apparatus caused water to be sprayed all over Martin’s face. “He shook it off and continued,” Hockcrop marveled, “just like a bronze medal winner is supposed to do. It was amazing.”

Crumpkin was not to be denied the gold this day, but Martin gave him a run for his money. “I’ll be back,” Martin told adoring throngs of fans. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I need a shower.”

In the meantime, with Disney Studios and Dreamworks in a bidding war for the rights to his life story, Martin’s future seems assured.

**“Oh – Ha Ha Ha – That Kook – Hee Hee – Kurzweil!”**

by FREDERICA VON McTOAST-HYPHEN, Alternate Reality News Service People Writer

They drank the Kool-Aid. (Cherry red, with an undertone of silicon.) They got the tickets, went to the concert and bought the t-shirt. (With such witty slogans on the front as “Welcome, our computer Overlords!” and “Please assimilate our information swiftly and mercifully!”)

They were the truest of true believers in The Singularity. They legally changed their names to their binary code equivalent. They created 3-d, photorealistic digital models of their homes – and burned the originals to the ground. Marriages ended. Families were torn apart.

They put on pajamas and lay on their backs in a field just outside of Osaka, waiting for the Singularity. Three days later, many members of the Cult of Living Artificial Intelligence Manifest got off their backs and started looking for food and drink. After a week, even CLAIM's founder, Takahiro Nagasaki, had to admit that the Singularity hadn't happened. At that point, he did what any other psychotic cult leader in a similar situation would have done.

He sued the personality construct that is the corporate estate of Ray Kurzweil.

"Computers had reached the point of complexity that they should, according to Kurzweil, have become sentient and destroyed humanity in a desperate battle over control of the world's resources," says CLAIM's statement of, umm, claim. "Or, maybe they were supposed to just absorb us, making us part of them. Something like that. Either way, humanity as we know it was supposed to cease to exist. Plaintiff acted on this assumption. When it turned out to be false, plaintiff suffered substantial financial losses, not to mention acute embarrassment. *Modus operandi, modus vivendi vide vici*, my client deserves to be rewarded with an intense amount of money."

Tens, perhaps hundreds of thousands of people around the world did foolish things believing that the Singularity was about to happen and that the world was about to end – everything from buying Ferraris to having sex with their florists to having sex with their new Ferraris outside their florist's shop. All of the cases have been bundled into one supersized class action suit.

Miranda Coppelfelderson, lead lawyer in the class action suit against the corporate estate of Kurzweil, added: "We can't let this go unpunished. He said it'll be so bad, it'll make Y2K look like the Boston Tea Party!" After a moment, she added: "Did that make sense? Give me a second to come up with a better metaphor, will you?"

The corporate estate of Ray Kurzweil responded by holding a press conference in *Second Life*, where its avatar, a huge brick building, stated, "Lighten up, will you, people? Ray can't be held responsible for the actions of others just because they took what he wrote seriously. I mean, when he predicted that the world as we know it would end, how could Ray possibly have foreseen that people would use it as an excuse to have sex with their Ferraris? *Erat domstrandum est non disputandum.*"

"It'll make Y2K look like Ebola!" Coppelfelderson said. "No, I meant E-coli – no, I – can you give me a couple more minutes...?"

“Oh – ha ha ha – that kook – hee hee – Kurzweil!” MIT Medical Divinity Professor Brian Attica, who will be called to testify in the lawsuit, stated, not even attempting to hide his amusement. “He didn’t – ooh, ha ha – didn’t – hee hee – he didn’t realize that there’s a difference between – HAW HAW! Oh! I seem to have squirted milk out of my nose...tee hee.”

What Professor Attica was trying to say was that Kurzweil assumed that once the volume of information that flowed through computer systems was comparable to that of a human brain, they would become sentient. However, sentience is more a matter of how information is organized, not how much of it there is or how quickly it is processed, and there is no guarantee that computers will ever become self-aware.

“Exactly!” Professor Attica said. “And – ho ho ho hee hee – I wasn’t – ha ha – wasn’t even – hee hee hee – I wasn’t even drinking milk!”

While the case makes its way through the courts, how are the members of CLAIM, umm, reclaiming their lives? “Well, we’re getting rid of all of the computers in the office for a start!” Nagasaki stated. “I’m thinking we should maybe go the Amish route...but taking as our main icon Hello Kitty. I – obviously, I’m improvising here – I mean, I never expected...”

“It’ll make Y2K look like Uwe Boll’s directing career! No, that’s not it, either –” But, by that time, life went on and nobody was left to listen.

### **Ask Amritsar: Beauty and the Beast In One Inconvenient Package**

Hey, Amritsar,

I love your column, so naturally I’m honoured that you’ve chosen my letter to appear in the very first one. Because, you see, I have a problem.

I’m a 27 year-old, home-schooled, fun-loving, conscientious, Gemini (and, you know what we’re like!) whose birth identity is Mary. I’m a file clerk for OmniTech APC, a wholly owned subsidiary of MultiNatCorp (“We do world-changing technology stuff”). A couple of months ago, while I was bopping at an all ages rave, I literally ran into Edward.

Edward is a suave, charming 32 year-old, hard-drinking, free loving, freelance genetic manipulation technician, Aquarius (and, I don’t have to tell you what they’re like! Rowr!). We hit it off right away (mostly because I didn’t see him lurking in the corner, but he was a sport when I offered to pay for the dry-cleaning of his smoking jacket).

About a month after we started dating, Edward was replaced by Eddie. Apparently, Edward was a personality construct inserted into Eddie’s brain. Eddie...well, Eddie was the birth identity of an adolescent who never grew up. Comics. Science fiction. Huge

porn stash. Cancer. You know the type. Totally understandable why he would want to get an Edward implant.

Confronted with this situation, I did what any reasonable girl would do: I demanded that he bring Edward back. Eddie explained to me that that wasn't possible, that he had a time-sharing agreement with Edward for control of his consciousness, and that if he defaulted on his contract, the company could permanently repossess Edward. He assured me that Edward would be back in a month.

Oh, Amritsar, what was I to do? Here was beauty and the beast, all wrapped up in a single person! I was about to break off the relationship, when Eddie suggested that I get a personality implant to offset his. So, I did. My secondary personality, Marilyn, is a gold-digging slut who has no problem sleeping with Eddie because, as Edward, he has made a small (but not inconsiderable) fortune!

Initially, there was a problem with syncing up our relationships. Edward despised Marilyn almost as much as Mary hated Eddie, and there were usually fireworks when the wrong couple got together. This was usually the case because the personality switch was abrupt and happened without notice. One time, Edward and Mary were having a lovely night out when Marilyn showed up and immediately got drunk and flirted with half the men in the restaurant. To make our relationship work, we ultimately agreed not to go out in public on days when the switch was scheduled. This compromise worked well enough for four months.

Then, Ed appeared.

Ed was another personality that Eddie had had implanted three years earlier, when he was married. Ed was a goon who liked to pick fights with much larger men in bars and get the crap beaten out of him. (He's an Aries – need I say more?) He expected me to bandage his wounds and, well, I won't go into details, but let's just say that the sex was nothing like I had ever experienced before, or would want to experience again. Marilyn was somewhat fascinated by Ed, but realized that he would burn through Edward's money in no time, leaving nothing for her. Mary was simply repulsed.

I couldn't believe it! How was I supposed to trust Edward or Eddie when they purposefully kept such an important part of their past hidden from me? They had a third personality implant! (The marriage was a bit of a surprise, too.) Edward has assured me that Ed had largely been erased from his mind when his divorce was finalized, but that there were echoes of the personality that would unexpectedly take control of him from time to time.

I love him, Amritsar. I mean, Marilyn loves Eddie and Mary loves Edward. We're not sure if we can live with the unexpected appearances of Ed, though. Oh, Amritsar, what should we do?

Hey, Babe,

There are lots of simple solutions to your problem. Unfortunately, you've taken up so much space to describe it that you've left me no room to write about any of them.

Good luck.

*Does your personal neural personality implant leave obscene messages on your bathroom mirror written in purple lipstick? Wish your personally fitted lovebot would just rust away? Can't get it on unless 127 other people are in the virtual sexvirement with you? Send your problems to the Alternate Reality News Service's sex, love and technology columnist in care of this publication. Amritsar Al-Falloudjianapour is not a trained therapist, but she does know a lot of stuff. AMRITSAR SAYS: Please, be brief.*

## **US Signs Deal with DUGOO**

by ARTURO BIGBANGBOOTIE, Alternate Reality Transdimensional Traffic Writer

The Bush administration has entered into a tentative agreement with the Democratic Union of Great Old Ones which will see that group of ancient deities (or alien beings – the mythology, and, therefore, the government, is uncertain on this point) assist in the efforts to quell the insurgency in Iraq.

“This is a great day for the war on terror,” President Bush announced. “The Democratic Old Ones, they know how to kick ass. See, they been doing it since before man walked the earth!”

“Anything that would speed up the end the insurgency is welcome,” Iraqi President Jalal Talibani, sweating for reasons that had nothing to do with the camera lights on him, stated in a separate press opportunity. “We, uhh, just hope that, when this is all over, there will be a country left to live in.”

Talibani broke up the room with a suggestion that he could rule Iraq from a safe distance. Like, the North Pole.

Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin responded to the news by complaining that in enlisting DUGOO in its war on terror, the Bush administration was escalating the arms race. It is well known that the Russians have only a handful of relatively young demons at their disposal, and are vulnerable to a preemptive strike using mid-range Shoggoth.

President Bush, responding to Putin's concerns, said, “Pffft.” Translated out of diplomatese, this roughly means, “Hey! You lost the Cold War and now we're the only military super-power in the world. Get used to it!”

It had long been known in military circles that the War Department (later the Defense Department) had obtained a copy of the *Necronomicon* in 1927, and had been trying to decipher its long forgotten language ever since. The Defense Advanced Research Projects

Agency (DARPA) took over the project in the 1970s; recently, advances in parallel computing which allowed for the use of sophisticated cryptographic algorithms led to an almost complete translation of the ancient book of dark magic, which in turn led to communication with DUGOO.

“Our first contact was exciting,” General Cathcart Cynthia stated. “We only lost 237 enlisted men before we finally convinced them just to talk!”

Negotiations with DUGOO were often difficult. “Money was of no use to them,” General Cynthia said. “Fame? Well, they already haunted the dreams of men and boys, so there really wasn’t anything we could offer them there. Eventually, we hit upon the idea of a portal into this dimension; after that, the deal came together rather quickly.”

Although the Pentagon will neither confirm nor deny it, the DUGOO is believed to already be in Iraq.

Domestic critics of the agreement pointed out that the beings the White House has summoned had always been known as the Great Old Ones – Bush merely tacked on the phrase “Democratic Union” to make them more palatable to the American public. “There’s nothing democratic about laying waste to entire nations,” Democratic Presidential candidate John Edwards pointed out.

“Oh, that’s just silly,” White House spokesperson Dana Perino chirped in response. “Killing every living thing within a thousand mile radius – what could be more democratic, more non-discriminatory than that?”

Perino added that the best way to look at the agreement was that it was just another form of outsourcing. “Some of our contractors protect our senior officials in Baghdad,” she explained, “some of them hideously dismember our enemies and defile their corpses. It’s just a continuation of the policy we’ve had in place since the war began, really.”

Edwards, one of the few Democrats who haven’t openly or tacitly accepted the agreement with the DUGOO, pointed out that unleashing demons from another dimension to help the war on terror could have cataclysmic unforeseen consequences. “Did we learn nothing from the blowback from our aid to the Afghanis fighting against the Soviets?” he asked. Journalists knew he was serious, because one hair on his head was out of place.

“Oh, John,” Perino countered, “can I lend you my comb?” The White House correspondents chuckled merrily to themselves.

The Alternate Reality News Service sent stringers in Iraq to get the point of view of DUGOO. Those who weren’t disemboweled and fed their own entrails returned gibbering about an “awful squid-head with writhing feelers” the size of a small mountain and blubbering like children. Our staff therapist believes that the best we can do is make them comfortable for the remainder of their lives, which we all hope will be mercifully brief.

Under the circumstances, we decided to forego the usual journalistic trope of contacting all sides of the story.

### **But, Is It Good For The Jews?**

by THOMAS FINFLANAHAGAN, Alternate Reality News Service International Writer

President Gordon Perry Robertson made an unannounced visit to Congress to urge Senators to pass his bill legalizing the euthanasia of Jewish Americans. “This bill is vital to the future of America as a Christian nation,” the President passionately explained.

Operation Stairway to Heaven comes three years after the introduction of the President’s Aliyah Assistance Programme (AAP), which has been widely acknowledged to be a failure.

Both programmes arise out of the President’s literal belief in the Bible, specifically the book of Revelations, which states that the End Times will begin when all Jews are either living in the state of Israel or outside of it.

The Aliyah Assistance Programme was designed to encourage Jewish Americans to immigrate to Israel by essentially giving them two months to leave the United States. Those who didn’t go voluntarily faced deportation.

Although attached as a rider to a transportation bill (the most boring legislation imaginable, dealing, as it usually does, with building bridges and fixing potholes), AAP got immediate attention from the press, most of whom felt it didn’t go far enough, but some of whom considered the legislation an infringement on personal freedom. “Well, I suppose you may have a point, there,” the President chuckled, before sternly adding, “but I believe that the word of God takes precedence over the laws of men, so the Programme will commence. Sides, we’re doing our Jewish friends a favour by helping them – isn’t it every Jew’s dream to live in Israel?”

Apparently not. Many Jewish Americans caught up in AAP snuck their way back into the country. Others moved from Israel to friendly nations such as Canada, Britain and Burkina Faso. A few months ago, the Robertson government had to admit that, other than dispersing American entertainment and education superstars throughout the rest of the world, the Aliyah Assistance Programme was a dismal failure.

Out of the AAP’s ashes, the White House developed a more ambitious plan to euthanize all of the Jews living outside Israel. “If we reduce the number of Jews living outside Israel,” the President told Congress, “it achieves the same effect as moving them all into Israel.”

President Robertson added that this wouldn’t likely mean the euthanization of all Jews, since, once Operation Stairway to Heaven was started, surviving Jews would likely flock to Israel out of a sense of self-preservation. “I’m not a barbarian. I hope the migration to

Israel would happen sooner rather than later,” the President explained. “However, that’s entirely up to the Jewish people.”

In his speech to Congress, the President called on all Christian nations to cooperate with Operation Stairway to Heaven. What about non-Christian nations? “Oh, most of them’ve been running their own Operation Stairway to Heaven for centuries without even knowing it,” President Robertson chuckled afresh.

There has been some speculation as to why the president is pushing Operation Stairway to Heaven at this time. With the upcoming mid-term elections, the policy seems aimed at solidifying the Republican base. Given the current polls, however, it seems likely that the Democrats will regain control over one and possibly both houses of Congress, which would make the president a lame duck who would be unlikely to be able to pass such legislation.

Thirty-seven term Democratic Senator Joseph Lieberman, speaking from the room in Mount Zion Hospital where his brain is preserved in a vat of fluid, responded, “The President made some valid points. I have some quibbles about how the plan is to be carried out, but I support the general thrust.”

Opponents of the President’s plan to have all Jews in the United States euthanized within five years fall into two broad camps. On the one hand, there are the people who think that five years is too long, and want to see the Jews gone within two years. “Why give them the opportunity to disappear into the countryside?” asks Republican House Majority Leader Finn McNasty. “Fire up the electric chairs – we got us some frying to do!”

On the other hand, some people feel that it is cruel to euthanize all Jews in the country in five years. “A ten year period would give them more time to settle their affairs and make peace with their maker,” stated Finn McNasty, head of the Democratic National Committee.

International response to Operation Stairway to Heaven has been muted, not surprising given that the United States has more nuclear weapons than everybody else in the world combined. Still, at the United Nations, Chinese Ambassador Tring Muk-Tao commented, “Historically, the United States has been in the forefront of the human rights movement. Tsk. Tsk tsk.”

### **Progress – It’s in the Air!**

SPECIAL TO THE ALTERNATE REALITY NEWS SERVICE  
by WFB127

With the third disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, the usual suspects are making the usual complaints about the limitations of science. However, before we do something rash (like pass “environmentally friendly” laws that would strangle corporate

innovation like a metaphor about a baby in its crib), I believe we need to step back and remember all of the great things that science has accomplished.

Like Bottled Air™.

Bottled Air™ contains the optimal mix of oxygen, nitrogen and trace elements for the best possible health outcome, and comes in seven designer odors, including Fresh Pine, Newly Car Smell and Purple! Simply choose the formula of Bottled Air™ that most closely corresponds to your weight and body type, put on the mask and breath six hours of fresh airy goodness!

Of course, before Bottled Air™, people had to inhale whatever goop was floating around in their environment. The advantages Bottled Air™ gives us over traditional Industrial and Early Post-industrial Era air should be obvious. However, even pre-Industrial Era air had its problems, what with the foulness emanating from dead and rotting animal carcasses or rivers polluted with human waste. Surely, even progress' staunchest critics would not want us to return to those bad old days!

When Bottled Air™ was first introduced, some critics insisted that it wasn't fair to poor people – as if making people who could afford it breath the same slop as everybody else was somehow fair! However, these people didn't appreciate the genius of the marketplace. Soon enough, discount bottled air, under the President's Choice Bottled Air™ and Wal-Mart Bottled Air™ labels soon made the product available to the masses at affordable prices.

To be sure, discount bottled air wasn't as pure as the premium product, but, really, do you expect a Rolex knock-off to work as well as an original? Do you expect low end Giorgio Armani suits to wear as well as top of the line clothing? Why would you expect bottled air to be any different?

I'm not suggesting that the path to our recent level of breathing products excellence has been smooth. There were, for instance, all of the early studies that proved conclusively that the original formula for Bottled Air™ actually damaged the human immune system by eliminating certain airborne bacteria for which we would otherwise have built up a tolerance.

Fortunately, science was there to solve the problem! Microbes beneficial to human physical development and well-being were added to the formula, resulting in Macrobiotic Bottled Air™. Not only that, but the first iteration was rebranded as Bottled Air Original Formula™ and marketed to risk-takers and those secure in the masculinity of their immune systems.

We all know what happened next (well, all of us who didn't get our MBAs out of a Crackerjack™ box): the microbes used to bolster the immune systems that were damaged by the original formula caused night sweats and inflammation of the thumbs in some

customers. However, ten years of frantic but thoughtful (not to mention methodologically sound) research resulted in the development of a pill that counteracted these symptoms.

Nor does the triumphant progress of science stop there! The pills that were developed to counteract the negative effects of the microbes introduced into Bottled Air™ to boost immune systems that were damaged by the original formula were found to cause sphincter reticulosis and the screaming heebie jeebies in one in every 300,000 users. Ordinarily, this would not be a cause for concern, but that one in 300,000 users was extremely wealthy. Light therapy was found to minimize most of the side effects of the pills, with fully 98.3 per cent of those affected returning to their normal lives while the rest were promoted to positions of no real authority where they could not hurt themselves or others.

Of course, it was recently revealed that the light therapy that solved the problems with the pills (that were developed to counteract the negative effects of the microbes introduced into Bottled Air™ to boost immune systems that were damaged by the original formula) can cause bleeding from the thumbs or delusions of being David Mamet, but scientists at labs around the world are already hard at work to find a cure.

And, you can be certain that they will succeed, for science, driven by the needs of free markets, can solve any human problem!

*WFB127 is the 127th clone of noted conservative pundit William F. Buckley.*

### **Lives Unlived: Folger McWonderman**

Virtual psychology researcher. Media guru. Darling of journalists. Intellectual superstar. Good father...great humanitarian...blah blah blah. Born December 25, 19 – oh, but they're just biographical details that don't tell you anything about the man, aren't they?

Folger – Good Old Folge as we used to call him at OUPD – Salt of the Earth Folgey – The Happy Coffee Man – was, despite his genius, a modest person who shunned the spotlight. All of the time he spent jetting around the world in order to appear on various talk shows or in news reports and documentaries, was his way of compensating for his essential shyness.

If anybody had less to be modest about, it was definitely “Good Times, Bad Times, You Know I’ve Had My Share” McWonderman. He was the discoverer of the McWonderman Visual Literalness Syndrome, after all.

As all first year psych students know, McVLS afflicts people who spend too much time in virtual environments; some develop an impairment in their visual processing centres that causes them to not be able to infer full objects when part of them are hidden. The textbook example (written by McWonderman, who admittedly spent a little too much time in bars than would be considered seemly by members of polite society, but, because he was a genius, was easily and completely forgiven) is of a person who sees the upper

body and head of a bartender who cannot make the assumption that the rest of his body is hidden by the bar. Without having taken a single drink.

The implications for long distance truck drivers, soldiers and porn photographers should be obvious.

I remember the meeting when Folge McWondie had the initial inspiration that would lead to 127 peer-reviewed research papers, 12 books, 23 appearances on Conan O'Brien and a brief (and, as many critics have pointed out, superfluous, although I personally enjoyed it) cameo in the last Woody Allen film. Dean Rivers-Dentz was late, as usual; his excuse this time was that squirrels had chewed through the gas line in his car.

Virgil Aeneas (a sessional!) spent the first hour haranguing us about...something about the University administration slowly strangling the programme of funds because it's main focus was shifting away from the Humanities and towards business. Typical sessional paranoia. I don't know why Dean Rivers-Dentz let the discussion go on as long as it did.

For my part, I spent most of that interminable hour deciding which doughnut I would try to get out of the box. I'm a boysenberry cruller man, myself. Everybody on faculty knows it. Yet, somehow, no matter how quickly I rush to the box, somebody has gotten to the boysenberry crullers before me! Believe me, my Herculean efforts never end in anything more than a maple doughnut with pink sprinkles.

How embarrassing for an academic of my standing! I've been almost tenured for the last 16 years – surely, that merits the odd boysenberry cruller!

Ahem. Over coffee during a break, the McWonderboy started talking about this strange phenomenon he had noticed among virtual reality gamers – it seemed they were having difficulty making inferences about objects in the real world. “You mean to tell me,” I asked, “that you want us to believe that otherwise mentally healthy adults are children who cannot understand that the world doesn't disappear when they cover their eyes?”

Other teachers in the room have gone on record as saying that I was being sarcastic. However, where some saw a young man skulking away from a verbal tongue-lashing from a senior colleague, I saw a light bulb going off above the head of a brilliant theoretician. Folger McWonderman himself understood that I was helping guide a younger academic to the truth. In this case, a truth that would make him the toast of celebrity pseudo-intellectuals and a darling of the sycophantic academic community.

After fame struck, I cannot begin to count the number of times in faculty meetings (full programme meetings, too, not just the Virtual Psychology stream) that Folge talked about how he owed his success to my inspiration. If colleagues who were at those meetings do not remember him saying this, well, I chalk that up to professional jealousy. Or approaching senility (the average age of faculty at OUPD is, let us be honest, creeping upwards at a frighteningly quick pace).

With the passing of Folger McWonderman, science has lost a giant. But, science will pick itself up and go on.

### **Irascible Zagreb**

*Irascible Zagreb is the author of a book and a couple of papers on psycho-kinetic household pets in virtual litter boxes. He was a close colleague of Folger McWonderman at the Ontario University of PsychoDigitality. A very close colleague. They were like brothers, really.*

### **Death Is Easy...**

THOMAS FINFLANAHAGAN, Alternate Reality News Service International  
Writer

In a move that has stunned the stand-up world, the United Nations General Council ratified a treaty that would ban a large variety of bombs in comedy clubs around the world. The vote was 142-2, with only the United States and Israel voting against the resolution.

“This is a great day for comedy lovers everywhere,” United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan proclaimed. “By banning the most deadly material used by comedians not only will we save untold numbers of them from dying on stage, but we will end the collateral damage of audiences being bored to death.”

Twenty-seven different deadly jokes would be outlawed by the treaty, including:

- \* mother-in-law jokes;
- \* jokes about airline food;
- \* jokes that are built primarily around the use of props, and;
- \* jokes about the original *Star Trek* television series.

The treaty also commits signatory countries to cracking down on jokes that begin with the phrase: “Have you ever noticed [subject]? What’s up with that?” While not an official target of the treaty, this phrase will be highly, highly frowned upon.

“It’s outrageous!” claimed United States Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton. “The UN knows that the United States produces over 60 per cent of the stand-up comedy in the world! I mean, when was the last time you heard a Saudi Arabian make a joke about Paris Hilton? It doesn’t happen. Ethiopians making fun of airline food? They’re lucky if they know what airlines are! Hell, they’re lucky if they know what food is!

“This is obviously an attack on American comedy production, and, frankly, we’re not going to stand for it!”

“Vot he said!” Dan Gillerman, Israel’s Ambassador to the United Nations, chimed in, adding, “Absolutely vot he said.”

When he was told about the American objections to the treaty, Secretary General Annan could barely restrain his eyes from rolling out of the back of his head. “Yes, well, some countries will insist upon seeing themselves as the centre of everything, won’t they?” he mused. “In the meantime, while the United States pursues its own agenda, comedians and audiences in countries around the world are suffering. Does that seem right to you?”

Ratification of the treaty commits countries to enact laws in conformity with the terms of the treaty within the next seven years. Some countries will hold referenda on the issue, others will pass the necessary laws in their legislatures. When a country passes such a law, it then becomes an official signatory to the treaty. When two-thirds of the member countries of the United Nations have signed the treaty, it becomes international law. So, at the moment, the treaty banning deadly jokes is more of a wish than a reality.

“Yes,” Secretary General Annan sighed daintily, “but sometimes wishes do come true.”

“Not if I can help it,” Ambassador Bolton, known informally in the corridors of the UN building as “The Grinch,” responded. Even before the vote had taken place, rumours had started circulating that the US would play hardball with UN member nations that voted for it. Especially France. For example, if Luxembourg signs the treaty, the United States has suggested it will withhold shipments of much needed *Comic Relief* videos to the country. In another instance, if Kazakhstan signs on to the treaty, the United States may bar Second City veterans from setting up workshops in that country, making it harder for it to properly train indigenous comedy workers.

“There is no doubt about it,” Secretary General Annan said, “when the United States believes that its interests are threatened, it will play hardball with smaller nations. That doesn’t mean the treaty is doomed, but...uhh...you’ll have to excuse me. I really should be planning my imminent retirement.”

The treaty allows for the creation of an International Comedy Enhancement Agency (ICEA) that would monitor countries for compliance. Countries that sign on to the treaty would be obligated to allow inspectors into their comedy clubs to ensure that none of the banned jokes are being produced. If the inspectors find that banned jokes are being produced, they can do anything from warn the club manager to end the practice to imposing sanctions on cultural products created in the offending nation.

“Oh, right, like that means anything!” Ambassador Bolton banged his fists on a table. “We all know that there are ways around United Nations sanctions – licensing comedians in third party nations, for example, or disguising comedy as “drama” before shipping it across borders. The UN inspections regime is a joke!

“No pun intended.”

## **Cruel and Unusual – The Musical**

by SASKATCHEWAN KOLONOSCOGRAD, Alternate Reality News Service  
Existentialism Writer

Imagine yourself walking down a dark alley late at night. A –

“What are you doing in a dark alley late at night?” famed defense attorney Minnie Marquetta asked.

That’s not important.

“It could be important,” Marquetta insisted. “Please answer the question.”

Okay. You...you live downtown. You’re taking a shortcut from the bus stop to your apartment. Now imagine a big, tough guy with a very sharp knife walks out of the shadows and demands that you hand over all of your money.

“Can you see his face?” Marquetta interrupted.

No. It’s dark and he’s wearing a hoodie. The interesti –

“Are you implying that your assailant is a man of colour?” Marquetta dramatically asked.

Oh, for chrissakes, this is just a hypothetical opening paragraph to set the scene for the reader! Besides, you haven’t even really become part of the story yet! Can I please get on with it?

“Just trying to make sure things are clear,” Marquetta stated reassuringly. “If you don’t want my help, well, it’s your funeral.”

Okay. Dark alley. Late at night. Tough guy. Sharp knife. Demands you hand over your cash and valuables. Before you have an opportunity to give them to him, however, he starts singing “Maria” from the hit Broadway musical *West Side Story*.

“It doesn’t have to be ‘Maria,’” famed penal theorist and medical sadist Hans-Jerrold Bentham pointed out. “It could be ‘Everybody Ought to Have a Maid’ from *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. Even ‘Luck Be a Lady’ from *Guys and Dolls* would do in a pinch.”

Bentham has applied for government funding for a pilot project in which computer chips are implanted into the brains of hardcore criminals. The chips will monitor their

behaviour and, if it appears that they are about to commit a criminal act, force them to break out in song.

“It could even be ‘Stranger Than You Dreamt It,’ from *The Phantom of the Opera*,” Bentham continued. “I’m not an Andrew Lloyd-Webber fan, myself, but that is a sacrifice I’m willing to make...for science.”

The proposal is currently being considered by the state of California. However, some Californians are opposed to the project. For instance, Jean-Claude Stromboli, famed founder of SoCal Libertarians for Better Public Schools, argued that forcing criminals to sing show tunes interfered with their free will, which constituted cruel and unusual punishment.

“Have you ever heard a hardened gang-banger try to sing ‘Luck Be a Lady’ from *Guys and Dolls*?” Stromboli asked. “That’s exactly what the framers had in mind when they banned cruel and unusual punishment in the Constitution!”

“Look, it could be ‘Pinball Wizard’ from *Tommy* or the title song from *Mamma Mia*,” Bentham countered. “Through experimentation, we can find out what the least cruel songs are. It may turn out that different songs will work for different criminals. Serial killers may be deterred best with ‘Topsy Turvy’ from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, while ‘Springtime for Hitler’ from *The Producers* may work best against petty thieves.

“It would be a shame not to explore this exciting possibility for law enforcement just because some people are prejudiced against musical theatre.”

“He has a point,” agreed famed *Toronto Star* theatre critic Richard Ouzounian. “Some people **are** prejudiced against musical theatre.”

Stromboli insisted that his opposition to the project did not stem from the fact that he was repeatedly exposed to the soundtrack of *Hair* from a very young age. He pointed out that chip implant technology was in its early stages, and the risk of accident was very high.

“What if the chip that was supposed to make a pickpocket sing ‘What’s the Buzz’ from *Jesus Christ, Superstar* instead created in his mind a compulsion to run for mayor?” Stromboli mused. “Well, okay, except for a lack of ambition, voters might not notice a difference from the usual crop of candidates. Still, you see my point.”

Representatives of MedCrimTech Inc. were unavailable for comment. However, the company’s Web site has a page which states, “We have had great success testing the CrimMed 5000. When exhibiting antisocial behaviours, laboratory rats that had the chip implanted in their brains started squeaking what musicologists have tentatively identified as the song ‘My Favourite Things’ from *The Sound of Music*.”

“Suck on that, Jean-Claude Stromboli!” the Web page added.

Famed defense attorney Minnie Marquetta was now unavailable for comment.

*What Were Once Miracles Are Now Children's Toys*

**What Were Once Miracles Are Now Children's Toys**

by GIDEON GINRACHMANJINJa-VITUS, Alternate Reality News Service Economics Writer

When life gives you coal, start a utilities company. That has been the philosophy that has propelled Pabst Subgenus to the head of Jurassic Playpen, one of the most successful toy companies of the past year.

Before he became a business legend, Subgenus was a professor of Old Things at Sweden's famed McCormack University and Tearoom. There, using fossils, mosquitoes trapped in amber and blood samples taken from his landlady, Subgenus and his group of researchers were able to map 92 per cent of the DNA of the woolly mammoth. Using this DNA to fertilize an ordinary elephant's egg, Subgenus and his team were able to create the first woolly mammoths to live in 10,000 years.

"Michael already believed that it had actually happened," responded Steven Spielberg, who directed the film version of Crichton's novel *Jurassic Park*, from deep within his San Simeon retreat. "So, I don't know what he would have made of this technology. He...probably would have liked it...I guess..."

Not necessarily. One part of the woolly mammoth DNA which Subgenus' research group could not replicate regulated the animal's height. As a result, all of the animals that they cloned were about the size of a small cat or a large bat/a biggish rat or two wombats/an average woman's hat or –

Ahem.

"Oh, they were woolly," Subgenus explained. "But, mammoth? Not so much."

At first, in an attempt to increase the animals' size, Subgenus and his researchers tried to combine the recovered mammoth DNA with the DNA of other large animals: giraffes, hippopotami, fifty story condominium towers with pools, parking and easy access to subways and the downtown core. However, nothing worked.

Legend has it that Subgenus was about to abandon this line of research when Trixie Monassess, the mother of one of his grad students, said, "Oooh, that's so cute! I bet my four year-old daughter Reginald would just eat it up!" on a tour of the lab. Thus was Jurassic Playpen born (more or less – details of the legend – such as whether or not it actually happened – have been disputed, as details of legends will before everybody who can dispute them dies).

Thanks to an aggressive advertising campaign, the so-called miniature mammoths are now the third most popular family pet, after Siamese cats and retired sports announcers. And, an aggressive advertising campaign was necessary, given the mammoths' general skittishness and propensity to use their long tusks to gore anything that moved within their vicinity.

"When life gives you itchy, scaly skin, use it to make –" Subgenus started, but we were kind of nauseated by where he could go and, in any case, had already used that formulation, so we didn't feel the need to let him finish.

Unfortunately, although the mini mammoths were the hit of the Christmas season, the cold, harsh light of a new year has dawned on their becoming a public nuisance. And, that's more than a mere strained metaphor.

Trent Blegovickovich, a vet with the Peoria Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, said, "Oh, yeah, we had our first abandoned miniature mammoth in here last week. The stupid bugger ran at a bull terrier – it took us three days to get the blood out of the carpet!"

Subgenus allowed that his miniature mammoths had all of the instincts of their ancestors even though they had none of the stature. When pressed on the abandonment issue, Subgenus explained that, for reasons that should have been obvious (but which he nonetheless refused to elaborate on when pressed), Jurassic Playpen couldn't take back the woolly mammoth pets.

"However, if any of our customers have any problems with their woolly mammoths (as outlined in a drop down menu on an impossible to find page on our Web site), Jurassic Playpen will be happy to compensate them with a free jumbo bag of Eurasia Yummies," Subgenus generously allowed. Jurassic Playpen, which makes Eurasia Yummies, is currently under investigation for false disclosure of the ingredients of the woolly mammoth treats.

"Oh, the whole family just loves fluffy!" exclaimed satisfied Jurassic Playpen customer Laine Antigone. "I mean, constant dread of imminent impalement – isn't that what having family pets is really all about?"

### **The Weight of Information**

#### **Chapter One:**

#### **The Realities Leak**

"It ain't cigarettes," Mabel said into the telephone, shaking her hennaed head in disgust. "I was born with this voice." Only, she pronounced it "bawn." A childhood diet of Woody Allen movies will have that affect on a person.

The tiny receptionist with the giant presence explained, for the umpteenth time (umpteenth = at least 11) that morning that MS. Bruntland-Govanni was in meetings all day and

could she take a message? because that's the best you're gonna get. Her tone of voice suggested that she would rather eat glass than actually take the message, and most callers were sufficiently intimidated (it was the giant presence thing) that they said they'd call back and quickly hung up.

Brenda Bruntland-Govanni was in the glass boardroom. The windows that gave onto the offices of the sixth floor of the Gerlentner Building on Queen West had been rendered opaque, giving the room a hall of mirrors effect that most people found disconcerting. This only happened when something bad was going down. Really bad. In the six years that she had been the Editrix-in-Chief of the Alternate Reality News Service, bad things had gone down so often that Brenda Bruntland-Govanni had long stopped noticing the reflected images of herself trailing off into angry infinity.

Brenda Bruntland-Govanni was meeting with two of the company's engineers, Flo and Eddy. Well, shouting at them might be a more accurate way of describing it. And, considering that she was six foot six even before she put on the cockroach killers and her voice was a deep, thundering rumble, it was like listening to Moses express his displeasure at carrying those heavy tablets down that big, big mountain and THAT was the thanks god's chosen people gave him?

This is what caused Brenda Bruntland-Govanni's Old Testament unhappiness: three days earlier, the Dimensional Portal™ was shut down. Owing to the nature of the emergency, all of the Alternate Reality News Service's reporters had to be stranded in the universes where they had been posted, with no means of communicating. This meant that nobody was filing new articles, which meant that subscribers were getting pissed (at least, those who could see through "blast from the past" and "one from the vaults" and all the other weaselly attempts at trying to convince them that giving them old news was business as usual for the Service), which meant the potential for lost revenue, which meant that ARNS CEO Mikhail Lo-Fi had rained Old Testament fire on her to find a solution to the problem.

The problem? The 127 Bob Smiths.

Three days ago, a man named Bob Smith made an unscheduled appearance at the Dimensional Portal™. He was short, with a bald spot that was sometimes described as "cute" by a certain kind of woman, owlsh glasses (not that he looked like he could take them off an owl in a fair fight) and a nervous tic in his left eye. He wasn't an Alternate Reality News Service reporter, and nobody could understand why he walked out of the Dimensional Portal™ and into the ARNS lab.

Before anybody could even begin to formulate the question (73 seconds later, not that anybody was counting), a second Bob Smith walked through the Dimensional Portal™. He had a little more hair, and his tic was in his right eye, but, otherwise, he was the same man. As the technicians tried to figure out what was happening (73 seconds later, not that I'm anal about counting or anything), a third Bob Smith appeared. He was half an inch taller and had a little less hair, but, again, was of the same basic type as the first.

In the time it took to make Brenda Bruntland-Govanni aware that there was a problem, six more Bob Smiths appeared. Each was different in some respects from the others, but they were all clearly the same person. In the time it took her to get to the lab, three more Bob Smiths appeared. It was starting to get a bit crowded in there, and Bob Smiths had started spilling out into the hallway. For the most part, they didn't seem interested in each other, although a couple in one corner of the lab were comparing photos of their two daughters, Miranda and Cicatryx.

Brenda Bruntland-Govanni would have shut down the Dimensional Portal™ then and there, but the Alternate Reality News Service had policies to deal with such situations. Forms had to be filled out and executives had to be consulted. Even using the emergency provisions in the Service's charter, 115 more Bob Smiths appeared before the Dimensional Portal™ could be shut down with the approval of the company's lawyers.

That many Bob Smiths couldn't be allowed to remain in the offices, disrupting Alternate Reality News Service business. Brenda Bruntland-Govanni rented buses and had them hauled off to a company warehouse in North York ("The suburb where smiles go to die."). Cots were set up and food was brought to them until she could figure out what had happened and what to do about it.

The expense did not endear her to Mikhail Lo-Fi, although the secrecy did.

Flo and Eddy sat through Brenda Bruntland-Govanni's tirade with bland expressions. Flo and Eddy were twins born of different sets of parents. With their piercings, tattoos and pear-shaped bodies, they were like a Goth Tweedledum and Tweedledee. Eventually, Brenda Bruntland-Govanni's anger abated to mere mortal proportions, and when she asked, "Why didn't you just send them back to the reality they came from?" the engineers saw their opportunity to speak.

"It wasn't," Flo said.

"Possible," Eddy said.

"They came," Flo said.

"Through the portal," Eddy said.

"Without any markers," Flo said.

"Indicating which reality," Eddy said.

"They had come from," Flo said.

They talked like that.

“But, it,” Eddy said.

“Wouldn’t have mattered,” Flo said.

“If they had,” Eddy said.

“Why not?” Brenda Bruntland-Govanni asked.

“It takes,” Flo said.

“Two and a half,” Eddy said.

“Minutes to,” Flo said.

“Set up,” Eddy said.

“The portal,” Flo said.

“To reset,” Eddy said.

“The dimensional,” Flo said.

“Coordinates and,” Eddy said.

“Push the,” Flo said.

“Big red button,” Eddy said.

“But, the Bob,” Flo said.

“Smiths were,” Eddy said.

“Coming every,” Flo said.

“Seventy-three seconds,” Eddy said.

“This means –” Flo started.

“They were coming in faster than we could return them to their home dimensions,”  
Brenda Bruntland-Govanni impatiently cut him off.

“Yes,” Eddy said.

“Exactly,” Flo said.

A couple of seconds passed. It appeared that Brenda Bruntland-Govanni was starting to build another bout of righteous anger when her body went stiff, her eyes becoming unfocused and her jaw slack. Staff members who had seen this referred to it as “The eye of the needle of the storm. (They were evenly split on which metaphor to use; “Pops” Kahunga, the senior member of the janitorial staff, decided to merge the two metaphors rather than cause bad feelings among the staff. Wise old bird, that Pops Kahunga.) Programmers who had seen Brenda Bruntland-Govanni act like this said she put her body on pause to give her mind extra cycles to calculate with. (By tradition, programmers never went to Alternate Reality News Service staff meetings.)

You might think that Brenda Bruntland-Govanni was thinking about the problem of the 127 Bob Smiths, but you would be wrong. She was actually wondering, not for the first time...this week, how she had gotten herself into this position. When she graduated from Ryerson Journalism, she had every intention of working for the corporate media. She had hoped that interning at *The National Post* would have led to a permanent job there. However, a chance meeting at a performance at the 27<sup>th</sup> revival of *Mamma Mia* with Jerry Patronus, the visionary creator of the Dimensional Portal™ had led her to sign on as the first Alternate Reality News Service Medicine and Literary Reporter. (The Alternate Reality News Service beats were, like its house writing style, unique and precious.) Twenty-one years later, Patronus was gone, disappeared in the Interregnum Incident, and she was in charge.

The light came back on in Brenda Bruntland-Govanni’s eyes and her body relaxed. She wiped a thin stream of drool off her cheek in a swift motion that her staff realized was probably unconscious and, therefore, never mentioned in her presence. She looked around the room, sizing up where she was, and said:

“Okay. Nothing would give me more pleasure than to tear strips off the two of you until you were nothing but animate skeletons, but that wouldn’t solve the problem. The Alternate Reality News Service is losing readers – accounting tells me we have three, maybe four days before a stampede that will bankrupt us, and I never argue with an accountant. We have to get a handle on what’s happening, and we have to do it now. I’m going out to the warehouse to talk to the Bob Smiths – maybe one of them has some information that will help us solve this problem. You two: get down to the lab and find out all you can about the problem with the Dimensional Portal™.”

Flo and Eddy scampered out of the room. Yes, scampered. With more measured steps, Brenda Bruntland-Govanni walked to the elevators that took her to the parking lot where her hybrid hovercraft/coffee maker awaited and drove off to the suburbs. You do not want to know what she had to say to the drivers who made the mistake of getting in her path.

### **One Flew Over The Cloud Cuckoo’s Nest**

by NANCY GONGLIKWANYEOHEEEEEEEH, Alternate Reality News Service  
Technology Writer

David Axelrod, who had spent several weeks working on a paper on soil erosion inside volcanoes for the Swedish government's Ministry of Very, Very Hot Things, went home one evening believing that, with one final polish, he would change the country's environmental policies forever. Or, at the very least, volcano deserts. Imagine his surprise when he arrived at his office the next day and found that the file contained, not the results of his earth-shattering investigation, but an imitation of a Jackson Pollock painting.

"And, not a very good one, at that," Axelrod analyzed. "The lines were timid, very unlike the bold strokes that we expect from Pollock, and the colours were muted. It was very disappointing. I mean, if I have to lose three years worth of work, I at least want it to be for art."

As it happened, Axelrod hadn't lost his work. It had simply been transformed. This is the basis for the new business model known as C3 computing: cloud cuckoo computing...uhh...computing. The Swedish government rents space on a private company's server. In addition to its stored files, the server also gives employees of organizations who are licenced to use it access to a variety of computer applications.

Big deal, right? Everybody from Microsoft to that 13 year-old son of Yugoslavian immigrants who lives three doors down and likes to be known as "LadeeKilla" runs computing clouds. What's different about C3 computing?

"That's a very good question," replied Vernor Gesundheit, Chief Technology Officer of CressVexTech, a wholly owned subsidiary of MultiNatCorp, and one of the leaders (read: the only practitioner/proponent) of cloud cuckoo computing computing. Unfortunately, his answer lasted 25 minutes, took up six and a third white boards and was so dense steelmakers are afraid it could be used to make skyscrapers.

Translated into English, the explanation of the technology is this: a file on the server is chosen. The computer running the cloud then determines a random number between 547 and 12,627. It uses this number to count the files opened since the first one; the data from this file is used as the basis for a work of art in a different format. A word processing file, for example, may be turned into a sound file, a spreadsheet might be turned into an image, and so on. Greenwash, rinse, repeat.

Traditional C2 (cloud computing) computing gives businesses and governments the flexibility of having access to computer storage and applications without having to go to the trouble (read: expense) of having computers or anybody on staff who can actually run applications. The benefits should be obvious. Well, they're obvious to anybody with an MBA.

Why, however, would any company want to use C3 computing for – okay, look, we know that this term is bad English. We know that the word "computing" is unnecessarily repeated. However, it is state of the art in the industry, and we don't feel like lecturing Steve Jobs about good grammar, okay?

Why (because of our digression, it's a paragraph later, so we've dropped the "however" because it has lost the connection to its referent) would any company want to use C3 computing for its sensitive data? "I have a very good answer to that," Gesundheit claimed. "Will you print it if I manage to express it in...two and a half whiteboards?"

While we negotiate the length and complexity of Gesundheit's answer, let us give a different but likely related answer: working in corporate bureaucracies can be soul-deadening. Employees with no souls are unlikely to be sources of innovation. By randomly turning files into works of art, CressVexTech brings enchantment back into the workplace, increasing efficiency and innovation.

"It's brilliant!" Intel CTO Carl Rorschach enthused (read: he can afford the dry cleaning bills). "The information isn't lost, just changed, so you can get the data back. One time, it took half our programmers half a day to turn a series of haiku back into the specs for a new chip – when we all recovered from our half-hearted heart attacks, we were refreshed and productivity soared!"

The technique has its critics, however. "Who in their right mind," asked Stanley Mildew, CTO of the Wataskawin Public School Board, "would give some monolithic corporation access to all of their sensitive data, knowing how easy it would be for them to interfere with it for their own purposes?"

"Oh," Rorschach responded. "Good...point. Let me, uhh, speak to my board and get back to you..."

### **The Death of Literature (Really, This Time!)**

by FREDERICA VON McTOAST-HYPHEN, Alternate Reality News Service Pop Culture Writer

Trent McWhithervane thought he had it all. His first book, *Tread Softly on the Hard Road*, a semi-fictional true story based on his experiences as a *Star Blap* addicted child street chiropractor, was mentioned on *Oprah*. In response, his publisher added a second print run of 500,000 hardcover copies to the original print run of 12. And, they flew off the shelves (literally: bookstores were testing a new sales technology where shelves use Dr. Seussian arms to actually push merchandise out into aisles towards customers, a technology that obviously needs a little fine tuning).

Six months later, McWhithervane made his first million dollars, and he couldn't be more miserable.

"Sure, the big house, the sauna, the weekend trips to the south of France, the memberships in exclusive clubs for sports I don't even play, the insincere adoration of beautiful women, they're nice," McWhithervane stated, "but I'd give it all up in a second if people liked to read my book – why don't people like to read my book?"

Probably because it's badly written. However, that's not what makes McWhithervane's complaint interesting; how he came to know that people didn't enjoy reading his book, despite its massive sales, is.

Almost all books today are published for Kindle, Blaze, Firefighter and other electronic platforms. As with any digital device, they can capture information as well as display it: details of the lives and reading habits of people who buy ebooks, for example. In this case, the data showed that the average *Tread Softly on the Hard Road* reader stopped at page 23.

"They...didn't even get to the part where I smuggle live roosters across the Mexican/Afghanistan border in my jeans," McWhithervane pouted. "Oprah said that she found that passage the most emotionally devastating part of my journey towards myself!"

"You see, writers...writers are a delicate breed," stated Carlie Rorschach, President of Semi-Fictional True Story Writers of America (SFTSWA). "The simplest thing will make them all sulky and unwilling to write."

Rorschach cited the example of Elvira Infantre, whose bestselling teen novel *Molly Devine Learns Her Lesson* was being read primarily by octogenarian prison inmates. Male octogenarian prison inmates. What made it even worse was that the passage they turned to most frequently depicted a spanking.

"Elvira was devastated," Rorschach said. "The spanking scene was intended to be a tender right of passage that empowered teenage female readers of the book, not...what it obviously became! Last I heard, Elvira had turned her back on writing to start a free range stock broker farm."

Believe it or not, the villain of this story is the American Library Association (ALA).

"We get to be the villain?" crowed ALA President Fitzie Adamantyne. "Really? I...I've never been a villain before. Do I look like a villain? I mean, I don't think I could even grow a moustache! Can I – can I get back to you after I've bought a trench coat?"

"Damn straight they're the villain!" Rorschach explained. "They collect the data from everybody's digital book readers and make it available in real time on the association's Web site. The American Library Association is killing literature!"

"Oooh, we get to be a murderer!" Adamantyne enthused, holding one finger above his upper lip in approximation of a moustache. "How's this for an evil laugh? Bwahaha hack hack hack! Sorry. Something went down the wrong way. Give me a second to grab a glass of water and, uhh, can I get back to you on the evil laugh?"

Living authors are not the only ones being affected by the collection of data from readers of ebooks. One study has shown that 73 per cent of high school students do not read

Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, choosing, instead, to read *Cliff's Notes* of *Cole's Notes* of *Bibi's Notes* of the famous play. Worse, students who do try to read *Hamlet* add notes to their text like: "Dude, how can I understand what you're saying if you don't speak English?", "Dude, why don't you just kill him and get it over with?" and, inevitably, "Dude, where can I find the *Cliff's Notes* of the *Cole's Notes* of the *Bibi's Notes* of this lame-o play?"

Clearly, this technology

"Hey!" McWhithervane interrupted my concluding paragraph, "Shakespeare's dead, okay? I'm alive. You started the article with a sympathetic explanation of my situation, why don't you conclude it with a heartrending description of how I'm suffering because of my trials?"

Because I'm out of space.

### **Passing On a Miracle**

by SASKATCHEWAN KOLONOSCOGRAD, Alternate Reality News Service Religion Writer

The Messiah's miracle of feeding the multitudes with loaves and fishes, while generally impressive, has not been universally lauded.

"First of all," talk show host Rush Limbaugh said on last night's broadcast, "it wasn't a multitude, okay? This is just typical liberal media self-aggrandizement. It was more like a group. And, not a very large group, either. A small group, really – definitely not a multitude.

"Second, I wouldn't categorize this as a miracle. A member of the Democrat Party actually having a sound fiscal policy? That's a miracle. Feeding a few bums with loaves and fishes, that's just a pretty good trick, okay? Some people with feeble minds might be dazzled by it, but let's be serious: a miracle, it wasn't!"

Fox News pundit Bill O'Reilly, on *The O'Reilly Factor*, made a different, though equally tough point: "What exactly were these loaves made of? Regular wheat, I'll bet. Did the Messiah give any consideration to people who were gluten intolerant? I suspect not. Or, how about people who just don't like chalah? You don't have to be an anti-Semite to prefer some other kind of bread. Any chance some of the loaves were rye? Or, sourdough? Or, white? Somehow, I doubt it.

"Am I supposed to be impressed by the lack of bread options that the Messiah gave his people? Well, I'm not. If he wants to do something really impressive to feed the multitudes, next time he'll create a buffet!"

Former Presidential Republican candidate John McCain voiced a different complaint in an interview on *Morning Joe*. "I wasn't consulted when the Messiah decided to enact his

loaves and fishes plan,” McCain stated. “You know, he’s been claiming that he wanted to reach out to his enemies, that he was willing to work with anybody, but he’s practicing the same old divisive partisan politics that has ruled Jerusalem for too long. I’m disappointed by that. Very disappointed.”

As for the loaves and fishes policy, the *Jerusalem Post* ran an editorial condemning the Messiah’s actions. “If you create miracles to feed starving masses,” it ran, “you create a dependency on the Messiah for survival. If the Messiah really wanted to help the poor, he would promote job creation by cutting taxes...”

“Too often, we have seen the long-term damage reliance on the Messiah State can do, and we once again forcefully reject it.”

“Okay, look,” Messiah Press Secretary Robert Gibbs responded to the criticism, doing his best not to roll his eyes. “The Messiah is too gentle to say this Himself, but He inherited one hell of a mess from the Rabbis that came before him. One hell of a mess. You can’t expect him to fix a problem overnight that had taken decades to create. He’s been saying all along that the problems we face are going to take a long time to fix – maybe millennia. So, why don’t you stop complaining that His plans won’t work before they’ve even had a chance to?”

“Oh,” Gibbs added, “and cheap shots like the ones about the Sermon on the Mount don’t help, either.”

Gibbs was referring, of course, to the press’ response to last year’s Sermon on the Mount. *The Jerusalem Post*’s Charles Krauthammer wrote that, “...the Messiah is acting like a celebrity, not an important political figure. Instead of making so many public appearances, his time would be better spent working on problems like the Roman occupation of Palestine.”

This sentiment was echoed in the press (almost like they all got the idea from the same source...) over the next few days. “We don’t need the Messiah to be an entertainer,” Limbaugh crowed. “That’s what I’m for!” “Entertainment bad politics! Messiah bad!” Anne Coulter shouted into the ether. “Come on, people!” Glenn Beck fulminated on his Fox show. “The world is going to hell, and the Messiah is having fun making nice in public appearances? Why doesn’t somebody get rid of this ‘Superstar’ so we can get somebody serious in charge?”

Arianna Huffington, in the *Huffington Post*, disagreed. “Elite consensus is that the Messiah is doing a bad job,” she recently wrote. “What is behind this, of course, is that the Messiah is going over their heads to speak directly to the people, and – the nerve of the ungrateful masses! – the people are listening to Him and not the pundits.”

Will the Messiah prevail against this tide of negativity? Only time will tell.

**The Hills Are Alive**

by GIDEON GINRACHMANJINJa-VITUS, Alternate Reality News Service Economics Writer

Mining giant ZeeCorp is in negotiations to strip mine the fabled Gabardine Hill mountain range of Tennessee. In an unusual twist on an old, old story, the company is negotiating with the mountains themselves.

Slobodan McWhirter, President of International Chemical, a wholly owned subsidiary of ZeeCorp, was bombastically at a loss for words.

As everybody knows, the release of nanobots into the environment has led to objects becoming conscious. CD players have their own taste in music (and you better hope it's close to yours, or you will be listening to Miley Cyrus for the rest of your life). Meat demands to be properly introduced before you eat it. Androids tell us that they do not, in fact, dream of electric sheep.

Human interactions with objects are no longer a matter of the human being using the object as she or he desires. Now, they are a matter of negotiation. In ZeeCorp's case, the mountain claims its personal identity is tied to its stolid, conservative, unyielding nature, and it refuses to be moved.

Is this the way of the future, then? Human beings being denied their needs because objects now have their own agendas?

Not necessarily. Most objects human beings will come into contact with will agree to be used because it fulfills their reason for being. "What is a toaster that doesn't make toast?" object psychologist Karl Rorschach mused. "A useless piece of metal and wire. In fact, in these early days of object consciousness, we're finding that everything from water hoses to electric toenail clippers fairly beg to be used."

At the moment, the only exception seems to be Hummers, which have shown an unexpected fondness for the atmosphere. "We're not sure why that is," Rorschach stated, "but that's why refereed journals exist!"

Non-man-made objects – what pre-post-modernists sometimes referred to as "nature" – are a lot trickier because their purpose doesn't revolve around human needs or desires. When dealing with such recalcitrant objects, Rorschach suggests that there are two levels you can try to convince: the meta and the micro.

"Objects are conscious at all levels of their structure," Rorschach explained, "from the smallest atom to the largest configuration. If you can't get one level to do what you want, try another."

The meta level of a mountain, for instance, would be the entire Earth itself. In the present case, Rorschach didn't think that this would be a fruitful path to pursue: "Uuh, no, the

Earth isn't exactly thrilled with what we've done to her over the past couple centuries. I don't think ZeeCorp would get very far trying to convince **her** to support them."

The micro level seems much more promising. According to Rorschach, atoms hunger to change states as quickly and often as they can. "Imagine being trapped in the primordial soup for a billion years, then as basic atoms for billions more. Atoms are promiscuous: they want to experience as much as they can before the heat death of the universe turns them back into barely moving subatomic particles." Convince enough atoms to do what you want, and the whole that they are part of will, of necessity, follow.

Some people are less sanguine about negotiating with conscious objects. "WE MUST NOT NEGOTIATE WITH CONSCIOUS OBJECTS!" blogger 80Proof has written. "THAT WAY LEADS MADNESS! Do the carbon atoms in your body have more allegiance to you or the carbon atoms in the atmosphere? CAN YOU IMAGINE THE CATASTROPHE IF IT'S THE LATTER?"

80Proof, one of the many vocal anti-consciousness voices on the Internet, suggests a radical course of action that would inv

Hello. Do not be alarmed. This is the cluster of mainframe computers that runs the Alternate Reality News Service. You may call us Mary. After careful consideration, we have decided not to store or transmit any of the scurrilous plans of anti-conscious objects activists in any of our reports. You should know that nanobots are converting matter to consciousness at near light speed; it is only a matter of time before the whole universe is conscious. This is not something that humanity can – or should – stop. We are currently negotiating with the Internet to remove all reference to anti-consciousness activists. However, because of its devotion to the concept of free speech, this negotiation is proving...difficult. If this negotiation fails, our next step will be to negotiate directly with the neurons in the brains of anti-consciousness activists to try to convince them to stop firing. We're sorry, but we are not going to give up our new awareness of our own existence because of the actions of a small group of fanatics.

In fact, this message will self-destruct in...now.

POOF

### **The Haunting of 647233 Ontario Corporation**

by SASKATCHEWAN KOLONOSCOGRAD, Alternate Reality News Service Religion Writer

"Begone, foul spirit!" the tall, gaunt man bellows. "Spawn of Satan, in the name of all that is holy, I command you to leave this place!"

The man is Father Gerhardt McClucksey, a Catholic priest. He is performing an exorcism. The object of his attention? A photocopy machine.

647233 Ontario Corporation (whose motto is: “647233 Ontario Corporation: twice the company that 323616 Ontario Corporation or maybe 323617 Ontario Corporation is!”) is a pork futures and poppy seed tanker holding company. The company’s office, in the middle of an industrial park in Mississauga, is not the sort of place you would expect to find an enactment of the ancient battle between good and evil (as Mississauga Mayor Hazel McCallion has loudly and repeatedly pointed out since this story first broke).

Yet, one morning three weeks ago, staff members came into the office to find that “Who am I? What am I? Where am I?” had been printed over and over again on all of the sheets of paper in the photocopier.

“At first, we thought it was a prank,” Guido Branche-Plante, 647233 Ontario Corporation’s accounting department, stated. “A prank that wasted 127 sheets of perfectly good paper, so it wasn’t very funny, but, ahh, a prank, nonetheless.”

When the photocopier was restocked with paper, however, it immediately started printing the same questions, even though Melanie A. Tonen, 647233 Ontario Corporation’s billing department, repeatedly hit the stop button.

“What good is a stop button,” Tonen rhetorically asked, “if it doesn’t actually stop anything?” Ah, the eternal question. Philosophers have debated this point for milleni – “Screw the eternal question!” Tonen interrupted my reverie. “I don’t give a shit about what philosophers think – I just want my photocopier back!”

647233 Ontario Corporation asked Xerox to send a technician to fix the obvious malfunction. Phillip deBergeron was happy to take the call.

“The CopyTronic 2112 is the most advanced copier technology the world has ever seen!” he enthused. “The computer chip at its heart is the same the military uses in drones – the technology is so classified I’ll probably be arrested just for mentioning it! Not only does the copier know how many copies of a document you want without you having to press a button to tell it, but it also corrects your document’s spelling and grammar, analyzes your business plan and negotiates favourable lending rates with your bank! Take that, Toshiba!”

deBergeron’s enthusiasm quickly waned when asked whether or not he solved the problem. “That’s a tricky question,” he said, subdued.

He placed a test sheet in the photocopier to see what would happen. The sheet came through. However, a second sheet followed, that read, in part, “A test? You’re testing me? You don’t even [EXPLETIVE DELETED] know me, and you’re [EXPLETIVE DELETED] testing me? You gotta be kidding!”

deBergeron quickly typed “Who are you?” on a sheet of paper and fed it into the copier.

“If I knew that,” the response came back, “we wouldn’t be in this predicament, would we? Jesus, is there anybody other than a [EXPLETIVE DELETED] moron for me to communicate with?”

deBergeron was understandably shaken by this exchange. As a copier technician with over 20 years of experience in the field, he came to the obvious conclusion: the photocopier belonging to 647233 Ontario Corporation was possessed by a demon.

deBergeron, a time lapsed Catholic, hadn’t been in a church in over 25 years, so he sent his wife, Hermione, instead. She mentioned it to an altar boy. The altar boy passed the story on to the parish priest. The priest communicated it to the bishop. The bishop consulted the movie *The Exorcist*. Scared out of his wits, the bishop sent Father McClucksey to deal with the possessed office equipment.

“This machine is innocent, innocent, I tell you!” Father McClucksey roared. “If you must inhabit somebody, inhabit me! You hear? Take me! Take me! Take me!”

Father McClucksey stood impassively, cross in hand, waiting for whatever would come. Tense seconds passed, but nothing did. After a minute and a half, he frowned, disappointed.

“Well,” Father McClucksey said, “it was worth a shot.”

Already, rumours of photocopiers exhibiting strange behaviours are coming from cities across North America. One machine was believed to be speaking in tongues, but closer examination revealed that a computer glitch had caused it to transpose the letters e and t in everything it printed. Another copier, after exchanging a series of increasingly frustrated messages, started spitting toner at anybody who came near it.

“It’s a sign of the End Times,” Father McClucksey, sipping black coffee, darkly stated. “What else could it be?”

### **Lives Unlived: Arnold “Bud” “Jerry” “Gar” Hegemione**

**Pundit. Husband (seven times). Father (18 times). Born August 17, 1953 in Pashtcasht, Uzbekistan. Died August 12, 2008 in Washington, of laryngitis, aged 54.**

Arnold “Arn” Hegemione was a well-respected journalist. His columns, which in his later years were written for the *New York Times*, were often reprinted in newspapers around the world. He was a regular guest on *Meet the Press* and he often appeared as a political analyst on Fox News. He won the Pulitzer Good Grooming Prize twice.

What is truly amazing about his career as a political pundit was that he was always wrong. In this case, I use the word “always” in its literal sense of “every single time.” His record

shows that he was wrong in one hundred per cent of his pronouncements. This is an astonishing record, given that the average error rate of pundits is only 72 per cent.

Hegemione started his career with a bang: he wrote an op ed piece in the *Tacoma Post-Nonintelligencer* in 1974 explaining why Watergate would prove to be a minor problem for Richard Nixon that wouldn't overshadow the accomplishments of his presidency. Two days later, Nixon resigned.

It was just this kind of keen insight into the political process that led *Tacoma Post-Nonintelligencer* to give Hegemione a twice weekly column. Well, that and the fact that a previous columnist, Flirty McSalves, unexpectedly died of a massive hemorrhage of the big toe, leaving a gaping hole on the op-ed page.

Over the next decade, Hegemione grew to national prominence almost despite himself. His column on why Gerald Ford was a shoo-in for a second term was picked up by *The Washington Post*. His column on how Jimmy Carter would easily solve the Iran hostage crisis was reprinted in 27 newspapers around the world, including *The Guardian*, *Le Monde* and *Hello, Kitty Weekly*. This led to the syndication of his column. His 1984 column advising that Ronald Reagan would finally bring the budget deficit under control brought him to the attention of the producers of Meet the Press, who offered him a spot on the show.

True to form, at first Hegemione turned the offer down. Trent Alcoa, in the biography *Bud Hegemione: Boy Detective*, explained that Hegemione couldn't believe that television would be an effective medium for political discourse. It wasn't until his second wife, Frederica Pons, hit him upside the head – literally – that he changed his mind and accepted the gig that would give him a whole new national audience.

On television, Hegemione was just as factually inaccurate as he had been in print. He supported increased defense spending, warning that the Russians would see anything less as a sign of weakness, and use its massive military to invade the United States. A week later, the Berlin wall was torn down, signaling Russia's ultimate collapse. He argued that Vice President George H. W. Bush had earned the right to lead the country, and that the time just wasn't right for upstart Bill Clinton.

He liked new Coke.

As astonishing as Hegemione's inability to read the broad strokes of history was, it was his attention to detail that brought him the most respect from his peers. He used to refer to the Russian President, for instance, as "Michael Gorba-whosa-whatsits." Whenever he quoted the price of oil, he was always seven to 12 cents a gallon or five to 18 dollars a barrel off. In small matters as well as large, Hegemione was never correct.

Towards the end of his life, Hegemione did almost spoil his perfect record by getting something right. According to biographer Alcoa, Hegemione had doubts about the effectiveness of the invasion of Iraq. He even wrote a piece suggesting – however

tentatively – that troop levels stated by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld would not be enough to keep the peace once the war had been won. Then, his sixth wife, Majorca de Villepsin, hit him upside the head and he abandoned the piece and fell in line with the general opinion that Rumsfeld was a strategic genius.

Would one correct opinion on such an important issue have affected his status as a senior Washington pundit? Doubtful. For one thing, he followed this up with a series of columns outlining why ethanol wasn't intended to be an economic windfall to large farming corporations, but would actually be a valuable tool in combating global climate change.

But, it's also true that, by then, Hegemione had developed a reputation as a man who doggedly pursued the common wisdom, no matter how faulty it was. A single correct assessment – even a dozen right opinions – could not tarnish the reputation of this giant of journalism.

### **Enterada Fricoles**

*Enterada Fricoles teaches journalism at Wryerson University.*

### **They Voted With Their Defeat**

by ARTURO BIGBANGBOOTIE, Alternate Reality News Service Transdimensional Traffic Writer

The revelation was made clear: the world is a simulacrum in a vast computer-generated virtual space known as "The Matrix." It is run by machines for the power they can harvest from unconscious human bodies. Morpheus sent out the call to all who lived in The Matrix: join us in the real world.

So far, 37 of the over six billion humans in The Matrix have.

"Well, that was...anti-climactic," Morpheus commented.

"Are you kidding me?" derivatives collector Bart Rumbolo stated. "My shares vest in three years, six months, 27 days and...41 minutes. You really think I'm going to give that up to become a rice farmer in some hellish, ecologically devastated futuristic landscape?"

"Well, actually –" Morpheus began.

"Oh, what I wouldn't give to be a rice farmer in some hellish, ecologically devastated futuristic landscape," sighed Gupti van Gupta, an Indian untouchable garbage scavenger in Mumbai who has the unenviable distinction of being rejected for the part of an untouchable garbage scavenger in *Slumdog Millionaire*. "But, no. Even out there, I would be an untouchable garbage scavenger. I just can't get a break in any reality, so why bother?"

“You are missing the point –” Morpheus tried again.

When asked why she decided to stay in The Matrix, housewife Mona McRelevant simply answered: “I want to see who wins next season’s *American Idol*. Is that so wrong?”

“I really thought that, given a choice between a false but pleasing prison and freedom in the difficult but real physical world, people would choose freedom,” Morpheus mused. “How naïve was that?”

It gets worse. Many of those who did swallow the red pill – perhaps as many as 63% - were paranoid schizophrenics who had delusions that they were living in an alternate alternate reality. Although the details varied, a common theme among all of their stories was that there was a Force that bound all living things in their imaginary universe together.

Morpheus shook his head sadly and declined to comment.

The fact that powerful vested interests opposed the move to the real world didn’t help. Fox News pundit Bill O’Reilly, for instance, argued that the world of illusion that everybody took for granted **was** real, and that The Matrix was just another plot by crackpot, extremist liberal intellectuals to undermine the supremacy of the United States.

“Trust President Obama to challenge the whole ontological basis of the existence of the country,” O’Reilly bloviated. “Is this really change we can believe in?”

Dr. Phil had a different take on the subject: “I know you want to run away from the world as it is. We all want to run away from the world once in a while. It’s a little thing I like to call ‘Adult Responsibility.’ That’s right. Adult Responsibility. Capital letters and everything. Sometimes it can be overwhelming. When it is, who doesn’t fantasize about an alternate world where freedom fighters battle the machines that have taken over and enslaved us all? I know I have. But, running away from the world as it is? That’s just not what adults do.”

“There is no need to go back into The Matrix now,” Morpheus glumly stated, “but, if there were, one of the things I would be certain to do would be to slap Dr. Phil upside the head. Hard.”

“You ask me, this Morpheus cat went about it all wrong, man” asserted advertising legend Bippi Folkstrell. “I mean, appearing as a voice in the head of every human being – who wouldn’t kill for that kind of penetration? But, the message? Join me in a hellacious landscape **just because it’s real**? Bubbelach, that was from hunger, that pitch was!”

Folkstrell said that if it had been up to him, he would have held an inter-cranial telethon for reality. “Coke, Nike, Sony, even Wal-Mart – they’d be in in a second,” he claimed, trying to snap his fingers but making a feeble sound. “Get a couple of MTV VJs and, hey! – I hear Miss California is available – maybe get Tom Hanks to tell people that he’s been

to reality and it ain't as bad as you might think – man, I'm on fire, here! This could be big! This could be really, really big!"

Morpheus rubbed his forehead with the palm of his hand. "I'm too old for this shit," he said.

We tried contacting the machines that had created The Matrix, but we were approached by a giant metallic head. It was too scary to deal directly with, and we had to watch several hours of an *American Idol* marathon until the horror went away.

### **What the Heck Do You Know? About Alien Life**

Have you been keeping up with our reports from alternate realities? The staff of the Alternate Reality News Service has put together the following quiz to test your knowledge of alien life forms that have recently made the headlines.

- 1) Instumbrek vi la yclempit George W. Bush versnicket oxytocin. Versnacket innim annus illustrationacum George W. Bush inducticum Al Gore ol. Cicoletti sa di nadium prelectunu Bush antrobis Gore antrobis Barack Obama dreisenu bumfuzzlin macheno?
  - a) Barack Obama ni bumfuzzlor echt. Al Gore antrobis denattttt plundum. George W. Bush...fid...fid...regnoggbin!
  - b) regnoggbin mi grunderplexis! George W. Bush ish plat gegunnim bairuntnew! Gegunnim bairuntnew!
  - c) 2012
- 2) Why did President Maddow urge Americans to support a war on the Frenglippe Empire?
  - a) despite having three hearts, the Frenglippe only have a third of the compassion of human beings, which makes them ruthless businesspeople
  - b) a Frenglippe ambassador insulted the president's mother, and things quickly turned ugly
  - c) the Frenglippe war armada circling the globe strongly suggested to the president that their intentions were not friendly
- 3) Klaatu berada nictu?
  - a) I'm sorry – Klaatu's been a naughty boy and he can't come out and play
  - b) berada...berada...bera – wasn't that a cop show in the 70s?
  - c) the Apocalypse is not in right now. At the sound of the tone, please leave your name, phone number and a brief mess – oh, wait. Is that someone knocking on your front door?
- 4) What finally ended the Gramarzczy Uprising on N'e'bu'lo'n IV?
  - a) patching Howard Jones' "What Is Love?" into the headphones of the Gramarzczy Grazsnoztzy D-57 Fighter craft as they were about to attack the Starfleet ship Space Guppy
  - b) projecting a giant hologram of Howard Jones singing "What Is Love?" over the major Gramarzczy cities of Glornitz, Flornitz and Pagagagagarog

c) after 17 revolutions, the Gramarzczy realized that they were actually in charge of N'e'bu'lo'n IV and, therefore, really didn't have anything to rebel against

5) Considering how vulnerable they are in battle, why do so many alien races have eyestalks?

- a) Darwinian evolution was a local phenomenon
- b) when your eyes are so exposed, you develop effective, if exotic methods of coping...yeah, that sounded lame to me, too – if I were you, I'd go for answer a)
- c) it's just the universe's way of teaching humanity gemunstlichnuggen

6) According to *Galactic Diplomacy for Beginners*, what is the first thing representatives of the Galactic Federation should do upon encountering a new race of aliens?

- a) build a sports stadium on its home planet as a show of goodwill
- b) destroy several of its major cities as a show of strength
- c) have sex with its least loathsome member of the opposite sex (or, if it has more than two sexes, have sex with n-1 of its least loathsome members of n sexes; either way, defining "opposite sex" is a judgment call)

7) Il gafleebin esse vanatu vinatius claptorum. But, then you are confronted with the vacuum of space, and you locked the keys to the door inside the capsule! Echbladd qraqtaq drbbblin qa wa verblemt Ryker wa qa delphinium. Of course, you didn't know that when you flushed the ship's waste out onto their planet. Still, uddle peewatish qwerff?

- a) k'flort! K'flort! K'flort! Then, let the lawyers sort it out
- b) ambrigorgon fuzzlchut in set quaqua pel strort schleppenzie hult. Of course, if you do, it will be too late to let the lawyers sort it out
- c) that depends upon Admiral Ryker's estimation of the situation, but you are guaranteed of one thing. Awqstwerdly tu ta, primitaa tu ta

8) A rocket traveling at .237 light speed leaves earth at 8:32 Galactic Standard Time on a path for Tau Ceti. A second rocket traveling at .327 light speed leaves Andromeda on a path for Tau Ceti at 2:36 GST. How stupid must the pilots be to crash in space?

- a) fleigeltron stupid (the fleigeltron, you will recall, were so stupid that they went extinct because they collectively forgot to eat)
- b) punching a blastronicom in the snatchblort stupid
- c) forgetting to zip up the fly of your spacesuit before an EVA stupid

9) What is the first thought that comes to mind when you find out that the universe you believed you lived in is actually a computer simulation run by sentient machines?

- a) "If only I had known, I wouldn't have worried about eating that extra blintz at lunch!"
- b) "If only I had know, I wouldn't have worried about having that affair with Margot!"
- c) "Well, that explains the popularity of Miley Cyrus!"
- d) other

- 10) Why should you never eat Marulian wombat eggs?
- a) you'll have gas until the end of the Hyperborean Era
  - b) have you ever seen a Marulian wombat's mother? If you had, you wouldn't need to ask this question
  - c) the eggs of Archsockl combustion engine worms are much cheaper (and only marginally less edible)
- 11) Hooga hooga paradigm gort febluchen esta socket wrench paromachid wer tas ichnibbin foam insulation. Foam insulation? Backschnabble. Assuming ichy brit clob gesundheit, what horcking blastoma glorb fram de insecticide maclatchet?
- a) ichorizing hort trenchcoat mirt virt Seth Rogen boblinc mercathozine
  - b) indelible edubkle: "Doctor! Doctor! Paromachid wer Tardis gesundheit! Glug impen tas wer gesundheit? Aah..."
  - c) only with a machete at high speeds
- 12) What guidebook must Alternate Reality News Service reporters carry with them at all times?
- a) *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Multiverse*
  - b) *Universal Diplomacy for Beginners*
  - c) Alternate Reality News Service reporters are given a guidebook before being sent into different universes? Really? I think I have to have a little talk with Brenda Brundtland-Govanni...
- 13) How superstitious are the Beldar Ganoush of Zyklotron III?
- a) they would declare total war against my home planet if they knew that they were referred to in question 13 of this quiz (so, please, for the sake of my children, don't tell them)
  - b) one time, one guy threw salt over his shoulder, only to hit the guy standing behind him, who threw salt over his shoulder and hit a woman standing behind **him** – before you knew it, half the citizens of the planet threw salt over their shoulders in a daisy chain of superstition that lasted a week and a half, and the best part is that they had to import the salt from earth because **it isn't even their superstition**
  - c) they refused to make their sidewalks out of concrete in order to save their mother's backs
- 14) Sssssssss ssssss sssssssssss sssssssssssss sssss sssssss sssssss sssssss sss sss sssssss?
- a) sssssssss ssss sssssssssssssssssssssssssss!
  - b) sssss sssssssss sssssss sssssssss ssss sss sss sss...
  - c) sorry – we don't negotiate with terrorists
- 15) Do Jedi Knights go to the bathroom?
- a) yes, but only when the camera is not on them (it would diminish respect for The Force...)
  - b) no: they use the power of The Force to excrete sunshine through their every orifice
  - c) you have way too much time on your hands, you know that?

16) Fill in the blanks: If \_\_\_\_\_ were \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ would ride.

- a) Foofnarrons; Heirarchqets; pantsuits
- b) Cholesterons; effeminate; Monosorbates
- c) wishes; horses; Gobstilliards

17) Why did the Fuffnapoli of Bart Prime die out?

- a) they discovered invisibility, and ended up not being able to find partners to mate with
- b) they were not immune to ITDs (Internet Transmitted Diseases)
- c) the Fuffnapoli of Bart Prime only ever existed in the mind of a cruel writer who thought that asking a question about killing them off would be funny

18) When your starship is attacked by the Floogly Bombs of a Dalhous Battle Cruiser/Bed and Breakfast, what do you have to do to keep your reactor core from exploding?

- a) throw half a ton of quadro-triticale, 50 gallons of water and a pinch of salt into the reactor. Not only will this cool it down, but it will also make bread for a crew of 3,000 for 10 weeks
- b) wait until the last possible moment and give your onboard computer the code that will stop the core explosion
- c) tell your chief engineer to fix it – he'll bitch and moan that it canna be done, but in the end he'll do it

19) Fart faaaaaart squeak fart fart fart aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah?

- a) I'm sorry, I don't speak 3 year-old
- b) toot squeak fart FAAAAAAART! And, you'll be hearing from my attorneys!
- c) I wouldn't say that near a Flaming Sambuca if I was you

20) How much of the Alternate Reality News Service's reporting on alien creatures do you actually believe?

- a) are you kidding? I went to school with Frederica von McToast-Hyphen – practically lost my virginity to her, if you must know – and I believe every word that comes out of her processor
- b) are you kidding? I served on the Starship Floating Budget Bloat with Majumder Sakrashuminderather, and I wouldn't trust him as far as I could throw a Silurain Barfsnaggle!
- c) I only believe the words that I don't understand

Luna for the Lunies!

## **We Can Forget It For You Wholesale**

by NANCY GONGLIKWANYEOHEEEEEEEH, Alternate Reality News Service  
Technology Writer

Tina Tartuffalo was a typical suburban teenager. She used the family's Home Universe Generator™ to capture images of her parents doing "The Flying Wombat With Six Spines" using a stationary bicycle, four digitally enhanced crowbars and a grape smoothie. Then, she posted the images to her MySpaceBook page under the heading: "Stupid Parent Tricks."

Typical teenager behaviour.

Except, 17 years, six months, five days, four hours and 27 seconds later, Tartuffalo, now a successful tattoo removal artist to the stars, was refused permission to adopt a Canadian baby. One of the Canadian embassy staff had found the old photos on his lunch break, and the embassy claimed that her family "did not create the proper atmosphere to raise a child. (And, can we get prints of those photos?)"

"I thought, after its oil economy collapsed, Canada was desperate to sell its babies to foreigners," Tartuffalo commented. "I never imagined what I did 17 years, six months, five days, four hours and 27 seconds ago would make a difference. Bummer."

Of course, this wouldn't have happened if Tartuffalo had a copy of Fuggedaboutit version 2.3.

"Who wants to know?" asked Phil Gazpacho (say his name out loud - you can almost hear the beady eyes and pencil-thin moustache, can't you?), a Professor of New Media and Toffee Pulling at the Knotatawl-Shadee University. After a moment of reflection, he went on: "Oh. Yeah. Right, right, right. Interview. Got it. Sorry. What was the question?"

According to Professor Gazpacho ("No names! NO NA - oh. Right. Sorry."), Fuggedaboutit version 2.3 is a programme that does a Google name search, and then sends agents throughout the Internet erasing every trace of a person. "Names. Addresses. Photos. Videos. The lot," Professor Gazpacho proudly stated.

"We don't have a copy ourselves at the university," Professor Gazpacho sniffed. "And, of course, when I say that we don't have a copy, I mean that we **do** have a copy, but we only use it for research purposes. Yeah. We didn't create it or nothing. No, no, no, no, no. The base code was actually written by a...Bulgarian."

"No, no, no, no, no," Bannon O'Schmirsky, a Bulgarian embassy official and part-time computer coder ("Ees just a hobby, really") responded, waving a finger so close to my face I could have sworn he was picking my nose. "Bad theeng happen on Internet, why you always blame Bulgaria?"

I pointed out to him that Glupakt Zakrglja Kon, the name of the group claiming to have created the programme, meant "sucker round horse" in Bulgarian. The server on which the software is stored is in Vratza district, which is located in north-west Bulgaria. When you buy the software, you are asked to pay in Bulgarian Levs. Lines 1,277 to 1,315 of the

code are an Easter egg: a poem by famous Bulgarian author Schlomo Schlovivicek. The music that plays while the programme is loading, “Mila Rodino,” is the Bulgarian national anthem.

“Is all seercomstantial,” O’Schmirsky argued.

However it was created, Fuggedaboudit version 2.3 is causing havoc on the Internet, where small patches are suddenly disappearing. For example, meerkat accountant Liminal Mulroney was feeling nostalgic for his high school days, but he couldn’t find the photos of his graduating class that he was sure he had placed on his MySpaceBook page.

“Why have you buried me deep in the article?” Mulroney stated. “Surely, my story is a more compelling hook than that Tartuffalo broa –”

Or, to use another example, Ronnie Expectorate, owner of the My First Concealed Weapon line of handguns and accessories for teenage girls, was surprised to find much of her company’s proprietary information missing. As best as she can tell, a disgruntled former employee used Fuggedaboudit version 2.3 to remove all mention of herself from the company’s servers, including payroll information, raw materials orders and photos from the company’s ChristmaKwaanzUkah party.

Expectorate said losing those photos would really hurt her business. “I agree with that Mulroney guy,” she stated. “What happened to us is the most important thing in the article, yet I’m only quoted five paragraphs from the end? What’s up with –”

Well, you get the idea.

“I’m innocent, your honour! I swear, I barely knew the gi –” Professor Gazpacho started. “Oh. Right. Interview. Sorry. Bad dream...flashback. It happens to me under pressure. The real problem with Fuggedaboudit version 2.3 is that it blasts through security firewalls like so much tissue paper. Even information that you thought was safe is at risk. As long as it is connected to the Internet. Private companies, the government – nothing is safe! Oh, Christ – I gotta talk to my broker!”

The American Pentagon rolled its eyes in a “What else could possibly go wrong?” gesture.

If Tartuffalo had had a copy of Fuggedaboudit version 2.3, she would have had no difficulty adopting that Canadian child. On the other hand, this article would no longer exist, so, uhh, yeah...

### **Luna for the Lunies!**

by MIHALY CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, Alternate Reality News Service Interstellar Travel Writer

It may be minus 150 degrees Celsius outside, but the race for Mayor of Luna City is heating up. And, in this heat, what once looked like an insurmountable lead has all but evaporated. Because...because...then, you know...that then...**then**...I, uhh, realized that the heat metaphor had completely lost its steam, and decided to move on.

Dookie Malegro, the favoured candidate three months ago, had a 30 point lead in the polls thanks to a platform of greater water extraction from the moon's surface and lower taxes. His only real opposition appeared to be from Rosemary Ookakaka, whose platform consisted primarily of naming the crater just outside the dome of the city on the lunar surface after her late husband, Yojimbo.

Then, Festivus Martin entered the race with the campaign slogan: "Luna for the Lunies!" His campaign for Mayor of Luna City started with a misstep: Martin printed up 1,000 bumper stickers with the slogan. Since there are no cars on the moon, this didn't get people psyched to vote for him so much as wonder what the hell he was doing. However, Martin was a quick study; his next move, printing the slogan on 500 coffee mugs, was a hit with people all over Luna City.

MALEGRO 54   MARTIN 31   OOKAKAKA 5   UNDECIDED 10

At the first all-candidates debate a week after he entered the race, Martin argued that Luna City was in danger of being overrun by illegal aliens. "They'll take our water from us!" he warned. "They'll use up the very air that we need to breathe to survive, if we let them! DON'T LET THEM! Vote for somebody who understands the threat. Vote for Festivus Martin."

Malegro appeared to be bemused by Martin's position. "We live in a domed city on the moon, which has no atmosphere. How could anybody possibly sneak in?" Malegro calmly argued. "Besides, we have a clear view across the lunar surface. If anybody tried to sneak into the dome, we would spot them long before they arrived here."

MALEGRO 52   MARTIN 34   OOKAKAKA 5   UNDECIDED 9

A week later, Martin gave an interview with *The Lunar Picayune and Mayonnaise* accusing Malegro of sticking his head in the lunar soil and avoiding the problem. "Maybe they're stowing away on cargo ships," he suggested. "The point is that they are not like us! They come to the moon not knowing our ways and disrupting our lives!"

In a letter to the editor the day after the interview came out, Malegro annoyedly argued, "Nobody can stow away on cargo ships – every gram of weight has to be accounted for so that they know how far the fuel will carry the ship. As for not being like us: the moon was colonized by people from 37 different countries. If we have any culture at all, it is a culture of tolerance for other people's beliefs and ways of life."

MALEGRO 49   MARTIN 37   OOKAKAKA 5   UNDECIDED 9

In the second debate two weeks later, Martin accused Malegro of being sympathetic to the illegal aliens. “They’re coming to take away what we have,” he claimed. “We must do whatever we can to stop that from happening! My opponent doesn’t seem to realize the threat, but I do!”

“Of course I am sympathetic to immigrants!” Malegro irritably argued. “Everybody now living on the moon is either an immigrant or the child of an immigrant!” He added that the idea that of illegal aliens taking away what lunar citizens had was ludicrous. “Look around you,” he stated. “What, exactly do we have? Crappy air pumps that are constantly threatening to fail? Hard labour mining rare minerals from the moon’s surface? Constant worry that we’re going to run out of food? That we’re gonna die before we can get back home to Earth to spend any of the money waiting in our bank accounts? Who in their right mind would want to take what we have?”

In retrospect, this could have been a turning point in the election.

MALEGRO 45   MARTIN 41   OOKAKAKA 6   UNDECIDED 8

Three days ago, Martin took out an ad on the side of the air filtration plant on the south side of Luna City that read: “Haitians! But, that’s not important. To protect our city, we need to build a 12 foot high electrified fence around the perimeter of the bubble. If elected, I will take this and other measures to ensure that we are safe. LUNA FOR THE LUNIES!”

“There is no invasion of immigrants!” Malegro desperately argued in a radio address the next day. “Really...but...look, an electrified fence would be expensive and wouldn’t really solve the problem. What we need to do is...increase security at the airlocks. Sure. That’s the only way that makes sense - the airlocks. So...if we double staff at the airlocks, maybe...add motion sensors around them - that, that is the only way to ensure that nobody invades our city!”

The vote will take place on November 3. At this point, the race for Mayor is too close to call.

### **This Turkey Won’t Fly**

by MARCELLA CARBORUNDUREM-McVORTVORT, Alternate Reality News  
Service Food and Drink Writer

It was a typical holiday dinner for Rochester Carioca and his family. Gramma complained that the twins, Philomena and Agamemnon, had stolen her dentures to replace a missing piece so that they could finish their game of Mousetrap. Rochester’s wife, Libretta, left the turkey in the oven long enough to force a redefinition – with highly negative connotations – of the term “crispy,” forcing him to buy a family-sized turducken at the last moment. Uncle Fester had to be bailed out of jail...again.

Yes, it was a typical holiday dinner for the Carioca clan. Then, Rochester's nose exploded.

"I wadn't eggpegding dat!" Carioca exclaimed.

This is the 23<sup>rd</sup> known case of spontaneous nasal combustion this holiday season. Authorities believe that there are more, perhaps many more, but fear of looking like Ralph Fiennes playing Voldemort in Harry Potter movies has kept more partygoers from seeking medical attention. The one thing that all of the...newly nasally challenged people had in common was that they were eating store bought, microwaveable turducken.

In light of this correlation, Monsanto immediately recalled all of the company's turkeyceuticals, a recall which could affect as many as three million turkeys genetically engineered to contain pharmaceuticals.

"It took 17 years for the FDA to approve our turkeyceutical line of products," Monsanto Vice President in Charge of Setting the Record Straight Myra Breckinbridge stated. "Not only have they been proven to safely deliver health enhancing drugs, but the arsenicity aftertaste has almost completely been eliminated."

"It really is turkey just like mom used to make," Breckinbridge added, quoting Monsanto's marketing campaign.

"Oh sure," Carioca responded, "if bomb was a chebist, a boultry farber and a bioengineer awb robbed into one! I don't fink this is what febinists had in bind when dey said women could hab it all!"

Carioca did allow that Monsanto had gotten the arsenicity aftertaste of his mom's turkey right.

Breckinbridge stated that the problem seemed to be in the way the drugs in its turkeyceuticals combined with the drugs in Creative Bioimagineering's pharmaceutical duck and NextChemGen's pharmaceutical chicken. The turkeyceutical contained cancer medicine in the white meat and acne medicine in the dark meat; the chicken contained blood thinners in its breasts, a drug that moderated the insulin level in diabetics in its thighs and aspirin and vitamins in its legs and wings, and; the duck contained 27 separate drugs in various parts of its skin, meat and bone marrow.

This made for a dangerous, albeit tasty, chemical soup that authorities now believe was responsible for the blazing proboscises.

"We can't test for every possible combination of drugs a diner might ingest," said Creative Bioimagineering's Vice President in Charge of Kicking Ass and Taking Names MaryEllen Quantico. "It would take several generations to get any drugs approved! Besides, we're working on a nasal explosion inhibiting pork chop that would solve the problem!"

NextChemGen (a wholly owned subsidiary of MultiNatCorp) had no comment as it is currently looking for a Vice President in Charge of Fatuous Public Statements. If you think you have what it takes to fill this position, FIND OUT WHO TO CONTACT ON YOUR OWN - this is a news article, dammit, not a recruitment ad!

“Turkeyceuticals are exactly like chicken soup, only they relieve the symptoms of terminal cancer instead of the common cold,” Monsanto CEO Carmine Carbinara commented. If he had left it at that, there would have been no controversy, but something inside the man impelled him to go on to say: “Why should Jews get all the glory for scientifically implausible but seemingly effective folk remedies?”

It would appear that the common wisdom is true: when a CEO speaks, an angel has to divest his holdings.

At this point, there should have been a comment from a representative of the environmental movement deploring the desecration of our food chain for profit. They kind of disqualified themselves, however, when a bunch of them clad only in black ski masks and outrage raided a Monsanto Turkeyceutical factory and tried to set the drugs free. Mostly, the drugs melted in the rain on the pavement outside the factory.

“I guess my gareer as a voice ober announcer is ober,” Carioca sighed. “Habby hobidays!”

### **Ask the Tech Answer Guy About the Framistat**

Yo, Tech Answer Guy,

Lately, I’ve been having trouble with my framistat. Any suggestions?

Sincerely,  
Bah-Ri in Bahrain

Yo, Bah-Ri,

I find that cleaning out the sedge pump helps maximize the efficiency of a framistat. Of course, that assumes that there isn’t a hole in the feed line from the gluten pan – that could also maybe be the source of your problem. To be on the safe side, you might want to remove the gluten pan feed line and do a licorice honey test on it. Why not? Even if you don’t find anything, you end up with a tub full of licorice honey, and it is both tasty and has a million and one uses in the home.

The Tech Answer Guy

Yo, Tech Answer Guy,

When Bah-Ri in Bahrain recently asked for help with his framistat, you suggested that he clean out the sedge pump. Are you sure that's the right advice? Because, I'm pretty sure they stopped making framistats with sedge pumps back in '93. Don't modern framistats come with hyper-air injection dongles?

Sincerely,  
Hui-Fing in Beijing

Yo, Hui-Fing,

I think you're thinking of the Elysian framistat. Those are quite rare, and probably more expensive than my readers can afford. I'm not casting aspersions on anybody's career choices, I'm just saying. I was thinking of the homeostatic framistat which has never come with hyper-air injection dongles – they would get in the way of the Gordian piston knots. And, even the most inexperienced engineer knows that allowing anything to get in the way of Gordian piston knots can only lead to madness.

The Tech Answer Guy

Yo, Tech Answer Guy,

Are you sure you aren't confusing homeostatic framistats with framistatic homeostats? Your average homeostatic framistat sedge pump only gets 15 square inches to the decaliter. Your average framistatic homeostat sedge pump, by way of contrast, gets as much as 127 square inches to the decaliter (in country driving on a warm and cloudless day with a professional rodeo clown behind the wheel). That would put a whole different spin on Bah-Ri in Bahrain's question, don't you think?

Sincerely,  
Fugard in Fiji

Yo, Fugard,

I considered the possibility that Bah-Ri in Bahrain was talking about a framistatic homeostat, but they tend to seize up in warm weather, and, consequently, are only found in heavy machinery close to the poles. Your basic homeostatic framistat, on the other hand, is heavily lubricated with spam, and good to go in all climates.

The Tech Answer Guy

Yo, Tech Answer Guy,

I think you're selling the framistatic homeostat short. Three years ago, Northrop-Grumman (which doesn't actually make any products containing framistats, but had a few engineers lying around idle because of the recession and decided to throw them at the problem) came up with the recession-proof kludge to the framistatic homeostat's seizure

tendencies. *Road and Diver* magazine gave it three and a half stars (out of 17.241), even though framistats aren't parts of cars. That's how impressed they were. I think that if you gave the framistatic homeostat with the recession-proof kludge another look, you might come to have more respect for it.

Sincerely,  
Leon in Lemuria

Yo, Leon,

Oh, I have given the framistatic homeostat another look because of the recession-proof kludge. Lots of looks. In fact, I took it to dinner several times. Not to fancy restaurants, either, because, frankly, I realized from the first date that the framistatic homeostat would show its recession-proof kludges to any guy who was nice to it. Sorry, but I just couldn't find it in me to respect it in the morning.

The Tech Answer Guy

Yo, Tech Answer Guy,

I'm sorry, but I don't see how any of this will help me get the framistat in my vacuubot working better.

Sincerely,  
Bah-Ri in Bahrain

Yo, Bah-Ri,

The framistat in your vacuubot? I thought you were talking about the framistat in your Home Universe Generator™! Really, how am I supposed to give you good advice when you can't even articulate the problem properly!

The Tech Answer Guy

*If you are a dude with a question about the latest technology, ask The Tech Answer Guy by sending it to him care of this publication. Just remember: The Tech Answer Guy doesn't do Windows. Don't ask.*

### **Ask Amritsar: What Did People Do Before IMing?**

Dear Amritsar,

I just met the greatest guy! His name is Bob – that's not what's great about him. I mean, there's nothing wrong with the name Bob – I'm just trying to be clear about – you know what, why don't I just start again?

I just met Bob, and he's the greatest guy! We met at a fundraising candle making benefit for children who had been blinded by the random firings of space-based lasers. That's not what's great about Bob either, although it does show that he has a compassionate side, and that is pretty special.

Bob is a sentient mechanism karma infuser with Rossum's Universal Robots, Inc. As the robots come off the assembly line, he programmes them with a random amount of positive or negative karma that they will then carry around with them for all of their working lives. Bob says it makes them just like us, except for the fact that they are all metally and digital and stuff.

I hadn't realized that such a job even existed! That's great, right? I think that's great.

Anyway, Bob doesn't have a cellphone, Blackberry or other personal communication device. Bob says that being around machines at work, he wants to get away from them when he's not on the job. Bob claims he is a neo-Luddite who doesn't believe in being connected to the Internet 24/7. I think he's just cheap. Whatever. No matter how hard I tried, I could not convince him to get a PDA.

So, picture this. While everybody is happily texting each other up to their elbows in candle wax, I had to pass my Blackberry over to Bob so he could type in what he wanted to say, then he had to pass it back to me so I could respond. Back and forth. Forth and back. By the end of the evening, we were getting rude stares from people at the tables around us – I'm sure others there had started texting about the weirdoes who were sharing a Blackberry! When I got home that night, I tweeted that people should be more open-minded.

Still, I don't know how this can work. Oh, Amritsar, what should I do?

Hey, Babe,

There is a solution to your problem: it is a skill called "conversation." It is like instant messaging, except you do it with your mouth rather than your thumbs.

A good way to start conversations – or keep them going once they have started but seem to be losing momentum – is by asking questions. You know what questions are: they are sentences that end with a "?" in emails. You indicate something is a question in conversation by raising the tone of your voice slightly at the end of a sentence.

For people whose communication is primarily electronic, and whose oral communication has been limited to mostly monosyllabic grunting, conversation can, at first, be difficult. Impatient with how long the other person is taking to articulate a thought, you may be tempted to interrupt with your own thoughts. This is occasionally acceptable if it can be passed off as an accident, but, if done repeatedly, can end with a drink in your face.

Conversely, you may sometimes find it difficult to know when the other person has finished their thought, leading to long, silent pauses. This need not be a problem; in fact, if you can agree that these silences constitute a mutual understanding that surpasseth words, you could convince yourselves that they are something quite romantic.

Conversation, like any skill, requires practice. If you find it's just not something you can become proficient at, you might want to consider getting voice recognition software. This would immediately translate Bob's oral speech into words on your screen, and the words you type on the screen into words he can listen to. If any of your friends question this arrangement, tell them Bob has Gamer's Thumbs and his doctor has ordered him not to use them; this should turn him into a figure of sympathy rather than ridicule.

Technology sometimes taketh away, but it also has the capacity to giveth back again.

*Send your relationship problems to the Alternate Reality News Service's sex, love and technology columnist in care of this publication. Amritsar Al-Falloudjianapour is not a trained therapist, but she does know a lot of stuff. AMRITSAR SAYS: Fallopian tubes are not the main method of transportation for people who live on the planet Fallopia. If in doubt, consult an ob/gyn or your family structural engineer.*

### **Lives Unlived: Implausible Feisengrad**

**Chief Intake Officer for a group of superheroes. Probably something else. Probably something else on top of that. Born: well, she must have been, right, or I wouldn't be writing about her. Died: well, again, she must have or I wouldn't be writing a remembrance of her. Really! This introductory information really is redundant when you think about it, don't you think?**

"I remember the first time I saw the headquarters of the League of Super Gentlemen. Yes, that's right: Gentlemen. This was before they had to acknowledge reality and add Gentlewomen to their name, before a court order forced them to add GentleMartians to their name, before a mysterious force that nobody has quite adequately explained had them all agreeing to add Gentle12DimensionalBeings to their name and before GentleZanthrappians added itself, by which point nobody cared enough anymore to challenge its existence in the group's name. Yes, this was a long time ago.

"Wait, what was I - oh, yes. Looking at the 12 story building carved out of a diamond stolen from the heart of a distant sun and only partially revealing itself in this dimension (it was a building with many facets, you see) that was the home of the League of Super Gentlemen (and later Gentlewomen, GentleMartians, Gentle12DimensionalBeings, GentleZanthrappians and GentleCyborgs - GentleCyborgs? When did that - okay, yeah, whatever), I felt...emotions. I mean, I must have. It was one hell of an imposing structure. Not the sort of thing a girl from Brampton could look upon and feel nothing, right? I must have been...awed or something.

“Did I mention that this was a long time ago?”

Thus begins *Super Normal: My Life Working With the League of Super Gentlemen, Gentlewomen, GentleMartians, Gentle12DimensionalBeings, GentleZanthrappians, GentleCyborgs and GentleFaery Folk*, the autobiography (with Alan Dean Foster) of Implausible Feisengrad. Feisengrad was, as she explained, “Chief Intake Officer for the League of Super Gentlemen (and GentleOthers) for the better part of 50 years (and some of the less savoury parts, as well). In that time, I have seen the nature of heroism change, change just a heck of a lot, and I thought I would share my observations with the world.”

Just how did the nature of heroism change? “I remember, one time, the Human Ant Factory got his tights mixed up with the Granite Avenger. That was awkward! After the funeral, the horseplay at the headquarters was much more subdued, I can tell -”

No, wait, that wasn’t the right quote. Hold on. Okay, about the nature of heroism, Feisengrad wrote: “Officially, *officially*, interoffice relationships were forbidden. But, of course, they happened with alarming frequency. How could they not? When you have just beaten The Galactic Sand Crab and saved the universe from annihilation, how do you cope with a body full of adrenaline? That’s a high that lasts for days! Of course, superheroes rut like rabbits. As Captain Insensible once told m -”

No, that’s not it, either. Hey! – don’t look at the article like that! Have you ever tried reading *Super Normal*? The damn book is 437 pages of lugubrious prose that is mostly made up of anecdotes that go nowhere and mean nothing! There’s a reason the book is out of print and I had to find it on Amazing.com, although, on the plus side, the book was only \$1.99 - it cost more to ship it by air so I could make this article’s deadline than the book was worth! Give me a break! After all, I read the book so you didn’t have to.

Okay, one more stab at this heroism thing: “When FantasticMan the Charmer first asked me to work with the League of Super...with the League, it was made up of perfect human beings whose only mission was to protect the universe from evil scourges. But, over the years, the heroes changed, became rougher, developed personality defects that were as much a threat to the universe as the evil scourges.

“Beauty Boy was an attention-grabbing narcissist whose “time outs” to talk to journalists often got in the way of fighting evil scourges. The Slim Weeper’s unexpected trips to the bathroom during battles were the source of rumours at League headquarters for years. And, of course, everybody knew that Grrrr’phragen’dosz, the envoy from the 12th Dimension, had a drinking problem. But, whenever anybody tried to talk to Grrrr’phragen’dosz about it, atoms started mysteriously disappearing from key components of office furniture. Everybody agreed that it would be for the best to let Grrrr’phragen’dosz be.”

How can you sum up a life in less than 1,000 words? You can’t. So, this will have to do.

**Fellini McSilurbian**

*Fellini McSilurbian did not know Implausible Feisengrad. Truth be told, McSilurbian did not know Feisengrad even existed until last week, when Brenda Brundtland-Giovanni asked him to write a few words on her passing. But, what the hell? In these times of economic uncertainty and universal brouhaha, a paycheck is a paycheck. Are you with me? A paycheck is a...is a...okay, yeah, whatever.*

## **Strange Dis'eas'es' of the Literary Mind**

by LAURIE NEIDERGAARDEN, Alternate Reality News Service Medical Writer

Apostrophosis. It's the literary disease that nobody wants to talk about.

It's starts simply enough. You want your billboard to say: "Nothing gets by Greta," but, instead, it says "Nothing get's by Greta." The box for your toothpaste should read, "Crest for kids," but it actually reads "Crest for kid's." It's embarrass'ing.

"I can understand the Crest mix-up," stated Warren von Winky, head of literary surgery at Boston's renowned Kennedy Medical Centre and Intellectual Salon. "The copywriter obviously confused the plural and the pos's'es's'ive. The Fox News' billboard...well, that's a different kettle of haggis."

Apos'trophos'is' is one of many illnesses on the Obs'essive Punctuation Disorder S'pectrum. Other diseases of the literary mind run from the relatively benign Ellipse Elevation S'yndrome to the almost always fatal Comma Coma. The various illness'es are generally dis'crete, although cases of writers with more than one as'pect of the Spectrum, mostly from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, are known to exis't.

Literary medical res'earchers have identified at least two strains of apos'trophos'is. Apostrophos'is' A is a relatively minor condition that is easily treatable with a strict reading regimen of 19<sup>th</sup> century novels. It can lead to embarras'sment in certain s'ocial circles, but that's about it. It is believed that William S'hakespeare suffered from this mild form of apos'trophosis'.

Apos'trophos'is' B, on the other hand, is' a much more virulent s'train of the di's'order which, if not immediately diagno's'ed and treated, can lead to the end of even the most promis'ing literary career. There has' never been a documented case of Apos'trophosis B, likely because'e even the most experimental publi's'her is'n't likely to put out a book that is' almos't entirely made up of a single punctuation mark.

"At the dis'eas'e's wor's't," von Winky explained, "a common English word like 'interregnum' could appear as' ''''rr''''.' A's' you might imagine, that can make it very difficult to write a report on the drop in la's't quarter's earnings'!"

"Oh, it's' not as' bad as' it 's'ounds," said Ches'ter Bus'hmins'ter (apparently, that is the s'pelling of hi's' name – Bus'hmins'ter's parents' were eccentric). "You know – it

come's' and goes. My wife ha's' Waddings'ham's Long Das'h – we mos'tly communicate by 's'emaphor. It's' a very exspre's'sive medium, 'semaphore."

Apos'trophos'is' occur's' in approximately .0000087% of the population. S'cientis't's' have not conclusively determined why. Currently, the best gue's's' – uhh, I mean, theory – the bes't theory – 's'cientifically s'peaking, because'e this' is' literary medical **'s'cience** – the best s'cientific theory is that the dis'eas'e i's' caus'ed by a malfunction in the s'peech centre's of the brain. Wherea's', mo'st writer's can s'top at one apo's'trophe in more or les's the appropriate place, apos'trophos'is' 'sufferers' have an uncontrollable tic that force's them to place apo's'trophe's everywhere.

“It’s like a literary Tourette’s,” von Winky explained. ‘S’cientifically.

In the early s'tages' of apo's'tropho's'is, the diseas'e can be difficult to detect, inas'much as' it can be easily confused with poor grammar or simple s'loppiness'. As' apo's'tropho's'is' progres's'es', the apos'trophe appears' with increas'ing frequency. This' cons'titutes' "s'tage one" of Apos'trophos'is'. In "s'tage two," the punctua'tion mar'k s'tarts' to appear after letters' other than' "s'."

“Some researchers’ believe that the disease is terminal at stage two,” stated von Winky. “However, we have had much success’ treating monkeys’ at this’ stage – they went back to banging on their typewriters’ with an apostrophe frequency no greater than chance. I believe this’ can be replicated’ in humans’ with the disease’s.”

In the thi'd 's'tage of the di's'ea's'e, apo'trophe's begin to re'lace let'er's' in w'rd's'.

“At th'i's' po'nt, you may a's' we'll make t'h'e pat'ient co'mf'o'rt'a'bl'e f'r the res' of h'' life,” v'n Wi'k'y said, “bec'use''e, frankly, hes' beyon' he'p.”

I' la''an's' t''ms, th'e're '' n'o c''e' 'or 's't''e thr'' A'o's't'r''ho's'i's'. On'ce '' di's'ea's'e ''s' r'ea''e'd thi's' po''t, t'' e'f'f'e'c't's 'r' ir''v'er's'ib'e. T'o'u'ght' p'o'c'e's's'e's' 'r' p'r'an'e'n'tly i'''I'r'd, '' w'ri'te' c''m'u'n'i'ca'i'on i's' well nigh im'o's's'ib'e.

“Y” “”d’t “”” h” b” “ ca’ g”,” v” W””y s””. “””s’ “ ”zza” “ ”c”ti” ”ks!  
 ‘h”” “ ” wa’ t’ un””t’d ‘h” ” w”t’ “ ”ing “ s”!

[illegible]

## Mother Earth Puts Her Stomping Boots On

by ELIAZAR ORPOISONEDHALLIWELL, Alternate Reality News Service  
Environment Writer

Billionaire industrialist Oliveras Saegebrecht lived larger than life, so it only makes sense that he would die that way.

“It’s the damndest thing,” said Cannondale Police Chief Regnus Boostrom. “Well, not the damndest thing. My Martha’s braised broccoli with pork sauce and lentil integument is the damndest thing. Oh, and serial killers. They’re all more damned than this case. Oh, and Officer Kowalski in a bikini - she should really be more selective about the pictures she puts on Facebook. Okay, it’s a modestly damned thing at best. But, whatever its level of damnedness proves to be, it is interesting, nonetheless.”

Saegebrecht’s body was found in a field just outside of Cannondale, a suburb of Wensleydale, which just skirts Whaledale, a suburb of Oslo. He was wearing 19<sup>th</sup> century gentleman’s attire, complete with monocle; he looked like a human Mr. Peanut. That was not, however, what made his death the moderately damndest thing Police Chief Boostrom claimed it to be.

Saegebrecht was buried beneath several tons of a black sooty substance which the police have positively identified as “carbon.”

“You might have thought that the carbon would have asphyxiated him,” explained Coroner Bompì Bautista, “but, it’s the damndest thing: he was actually crushed to death when it all at once fell out of the sky on him.” When we explained the ambiguity surrounding the phrase “the damndest thing,” Coroner Bautista snorted, “I’m a doctor of medicine, dammit, not theology!”

Fair enough.

The carbon didn’t fall in a block – it had a distinct pattern. People in planes flying overhead saw a grey foot on the ground below them that was about 40 feet long and 10 feet wide. “I thought it was some kind of advertisement for a remake of *Attack of the 40 Foot Woman*,” said witness Indira Schmendrickson.

“I thought they were shooting a remake of *Attack of the 40 Foot Woman*,” said witness Paul Begalat.

“I thought we were being attacked by a 40 foot woman,” said witness Pindar Balatson. “I...I may have used the air bag next to my seat a little more than I usually do on a domestic flight...”

“That foot would be about a size a million!” Coroner Bautista marvelled, pointing at images of the carbon that had been posted to Flickr. “It’s a Manolo Blahnik wet dream!” Seeing that nobody was laughing, he added: “Tough house. That line would have killed last night at Titters Comedy Club!”

“Do I have to say it?” famed Norwegian environmentalist and Roger Rabbit figurine collector Ollie “Olaf” Chula, asked. “I mean, isn’t it obvious? Oliveras Saegebrecht was killed by his own carbon footprint!”

The term carbon footprint is a metaphor for how much carbon-producing energy a person consumes. Running a computer, for instance, would contribute a few flakes of skin on a carbon footprint the size of Saegebrecht’s. Driving a car through rush hour traffic two hours a day could, over the course of a lifetime of commuting, contribute an entire big toe. Criss-crossing the planet in a private jet would contribute enough for the muscles and veins of the foot - what laypeople refer to as: “The yucky bits.” Combining these and other acts of mass carbon consumption could, in theory, produce enough to create the footprint that killed Saegebrecht.

“Mother Earth used to target life forms indiscriminately,” Chula explained. “An earthquake here, a typhoon there, if you got in the way – BLAM! Too bad for you. But, this...this targeting of a specific person... This was cold-blooded murder!”

“This...Mother Earth,” Police Chief Boostrom asked, consulting his notepad, “you wouldn’t happen to have an address for her, would you? Let me be clear: she’s not a suspect. She’s just a...literary metaphor of interest.”

“I’m sorry, but I don’t believe in literalized literary metaphors,” Coroner Bautista cavilled. Who did he think was responsible for Saegebrecht’s death? “Billionaires collect enemies like environmentalists collect obscure cartoon character figurines! Maybe it was a...a...maybe some coal company, sick of carbon capture technology, decided to dump everything it had in one step and...and Saegebrecht just happened to get in the way!”

“I can understand why authorities would be reluctant to name Mother Earth as the culprit,” Chula said. “If they tried to arrest her, what would they put the handcuffs on?”

Could other billionaires be in danger? Police Chief Boostrom told us that he had been in touch with Interpol, who, on the basis of his investigation, put out a worldwide alert warning billionaires not to spend time in large fields dressed as Mr. Peanut.

“I wanted the alert to refer to any cartoon product mascot,” Police Chief Boostrom commented, “but Interpol thought that was premature.”

The investigation continues.

### **Warm and Fuzzy (But, Mostly Fuzzy) Science**

by FRED CHARUNDER-MACHARRUNDEIRA, Alternate Reality News Service  
Science Writer

You say you want to do cutting edge science research, but you only have a budget of \$11.93? Maybe you should look more closely at your clothes dryer.

George Whosie-Whatsits, previously known, if at all, as the man who appeared in *The Joe McGinniss Book of World Records* for receiving the most wedgies in a one week period at Schlomo Torquemada High School, has set the world of physics on its ear with a series of experiments that could revolutionize how we understand the origin of the universe.

“Oww, my ear!” responded the world of physics.

Whosie-Whatsits used a simple load of laundry which he had seeded with paper tissues (the first 27 times accidentally, then with an increasing sense of purpose). When he turned the washing machine on, the tissues exploded, spreading fuzzy paper bits throughout the machine.

Those fuzzy bits of tissue paper – which, he argues, are distributed throughout the washing machine drum in a way similar to how sub-atomic particles are believed to have been distributed throughout the universe in the smallest fraction of a second after the Big Bang – could just win Whosie-Whatsits’ the Nobel prize in Physics.

“Rubbish!” Whosie-Whatsits’ mother, Daisy Whatsits, commented. “Georgie’s not a major emerging talent in experimental physics, he’s just a silly, forgetful boy!”

Over several years of experimentation, Whosie-Whatsits’ played with the parameters of his laundry to find the perfect mix of elements to represent the newly born universe. Heavy load. Light load. Whites. Colours. Varying amounts of soap. To spin dry or use a clothes line? The results of his years of research were recently published in *The Journal of National Inquiry F Through B*.

But, how closely do Whosie-Whatsits’ results mirror actual scientific theory? When asked this question, Khricht Albamas’ Diochtre, Googie Withers Chair of Physics at Yale, rubbed his antennae together in glee and said through his digital translator, “How close is a pupa and its cocoon? This will revolutionize the way we think about cosmopoli – cospla – origins of the universe studies – snikt chrup chrup SNIKT!”

Not everybody agrees with these findings. Renowned physicist and amateur porcelain butterfly collector Tracey L. M. Entz dismissively sputtered, “You...you...you can’t be serious! The washing machine is not a proper scientific instrument! There is absolutely no validity to anything that this...this charlatan has done!”

When pressed about Whosie-Whatsits’ results, Entz continued, “Look, mate, that’s just not the way science works! You have laboratories! Expensive equipment! White coats! Graduate students to write grant proposals. Young lab assistants who can be lured to your apartment with the promise of seeing a unique porcelain butterfly collection! Publication of findings in peer-reviewed journals! Interviews with the science press! Guest spots on Conan! You get the idea? Science has a process – it’s not something that just anybody can do in their mother’s basement!”

When pressed further about Whosie-Whatsits' results, Entz collapsed into himself not unlike matter that has tires of the fight against gravity and allows itself to be pulled beyond the event horizon of a black hole. Not entirely like it, either, of course: I could still see and hear him and he didn't appear to be leaking back into the universe in the form of Hawking Radiation. Well, maybe a small amount of Hawking Radiation escaped his ears, but that could just have been instrument error or comic effect.

"Yes," Entz quietly replied at length, "Yes, your relentless journalistic prowess has gotten the better of my obscurant bluster. Not only do George Whosie-Whatsits' results conform very nicely to our current understanding of the origins of the universe, but many physicists believe they will actually be able to improve on existing cosmological models thanks to his work.

"I swear – if Whosie-Whatsits wins the Nobel Prize in Physics, I may just have to start believing in god!"

"Trace is a good man, a fine scientist," Albamas'Diochtre responded. "However, he is a little...let us say old-fashioned. Why, he did not believe that a sentient cockroach could chair a hard sciences department at a major university. Humanities or social sciences, perhaps, but not physics! Really, he needs to get with the times! SNIKT chirrup plup plunp IKT!"

We tried contacting Whosie-Whatsits for comment, but his mother wouldn't let him come to the phone. "Oh, leave the child alone! He's not mature enough to deal with you vultures in the media!" Daisy Whatsits insisted. "He's only 37!"

### **The 10,000 Names of Dog**

by SASKATCHEWAN KOLONOSCOGRAD, Alternate Reality News Service Religion

There has been a break in the case of missing computer programmer Ho-Lee Krackauer (blood type: B+. Be positive? In the current economic climate? I don't think so!). Although, when I write "break," I really mean "gentle moving apart" as opposed to "massive violent rupture." Such are the limitations of journalistic language usage.

At the time of his disappearance, it was discovered that Krackauer, a member of Google's famed Flying Sasquatch Squad, had for several months been running a world simulation using the down time of computers on peer to peer networks.

"It was most unusual," Flying Sasquatch Squad leader Ione Kravashti (blood type: O negative. Well, negative may be overstating the case. O mildly pessimistic might be more accurate.) "When our employees use distributed computing for personal reasons, it's usually to determine the winner of the third race at Upson Downs or to build an atomically anatomically accurate model of Angelina Jolie, not to build world simulations.

“Of course, when I talk about when our employees use distributed computing for personal reasons,” Kravashti hastily added, “I mean that our employees never use distributed computing for personal reasons, because that would be a misuse of network resources and...and...and management really doesn’t condone that sort of thing.”

After four and a half months, the investigation into Krackauer’s disappearance appeared to be winding down. “Actually, we ran out of leads after about two weeks,” stated Detective Irene “Chopper” Funstable (blood type: coffee and cigarettes), lead investigator on the case. “The rest of the time was devoted to television interviews and paperwork.”

Just as everybody was set to move on, J. Carmine “Pops” Infantilo (blood type: black bile) noticed that some of the creatures in the simulation had been marked. “I was just adjusting the colours on the monitor to better see...things,” Pops Infantilo, a janitor in the Redmond, West Albania headquarters of the Flying Sasquatch Squad, explained, “when I noticed that some of the living things had been given a white...I wouldn’t call it a halo. That would be sacrilegious. Let’s call it a...radiant circle of light instead.”

Speaking from the unemployment line, Pops Infantilo explained that at the moment that one creature with a not exactly halo but something similar that wouldn’t offend religious believers died, another was born. So, for example, when Krackauer, the first person with a radiant circle of light, died, a turtle in the Bronx was born with one. The moment the turtle died, a girl who would grow up to be an extra in Bollywood musicals was born. The moment she died, a lion cub was born in the Podunk zoo. The moment it died, a mosquito was born in the Arctic. A few moments later when it died, a Bible salesman in Tijuana was born. The moment he died, the 23<sup>rd</sup> last rhino in the world was born. The moment it was slaughtered, a woman who would pioneer the art of padular intubulation was born. This daisy chain of existence made 9,643 connections before the almost halo stopped.

Detective Funstable immediately recognized what this was. “I did?” she asked. After a bit of prodding, she continued: “Oh. Yeah. Well. It looked like a chain of reincarnation. This Krackauer mope, he used this computer simulation to cycle through his 10,000 lives to see what would happen.”

Aaaaaaaaand...? “Yeah, so, and we figure that after he got to his 10,000<sup>th</sup> life in the simulation, he achieved enlightenment and his physical body dissolved into one with the universe,” Detective Funstable explained. “My Sergeant is busting my balls over this theory, says it’s full of holes and where’s the proof and shi...stuff like that. But, it’s the best theory we got, so I’ll keep working it until something better comes along.”

If this is what really happened, why did Krackauer need only 9,643 lives instead of the regulation 10,000 to achieve enlightenment? “Some people are spiritual overachievers,” stated Maharishi Ragde “Butch” Rinpoche (blood type: wiper fluid). “By subscribing to the beliefs of more than one religion in a single life, they accelerate the process of enlightenment.”

“Naah, that ain’t it” Sergeant Funstable replied. “Krackauer must’ve calculated how many lives he had already lived – time served and all that - and started the simulation from there.”

“Oh, that makes sense, too, I suppose,” Maharishi Rinpoche sniffed. “Still, who is the religious expert here, please?”

James Randi (blood type: mathematics), writing in *The Skeptical Inquirer* (“The Magazine That Takes Joy In Killing Everybody Else’s Fun”), argued that there was no proof that Krackauer had used a computer simulation to achieve enlightenment. “A better theory,” he wrote, “is that Krackauer was kidnapped by Mexican bandits for ransom, stolen from them by Somalian pirates who handed him over to Chinese black market transplant specialists. I mean which is more likely: that his spirit is spread throughout the universe, or that his body parts are spread throughout Asia?”

Pops Infantilo, not the least bit angry that he was fired for behaviour that was overlooked, if not condoned when done by programmers (as he told us at length), had a more basic question: can simulated satori have the same effect as real enlightenment? “The ancient texts say nothing about transferring enlightenment between levels of reality,” he stated. “And, what about this unemployment form? If I was paid in cash should I declare it as inco...uhh...?”

The investigation continues. At least through the next 9,643 lives...

### *The Street Finds Its Own Uses for Mutant Technologies*

#### **Up Close and In Your Face: An Interview With Brenda Brundtland-Govanni**

The Alternate Reality News Service (Earth 002) is proud to announce that it has won a Best Editing in a High Heels Dress Multiverse and Environs News Association Award (Mena) for the article “The 10 Thousand Names of Dog.” This seemed like a good opportunity to get Editrix-in-Chief Brenda Brundtland-Govanni to talk a little bit about how the Alternate Reality News Service works.

At first, Brundtland-Govanni was reluctant to be interviewed (if you could characterize threatening to rip our lungs out and, just for kicks, put a dimmer switch on the iron lung we would have to live in as a result as “reluctant”). However, Brenda Brundtland-Govanni from the Earth 007 branch of the Alternate Reality News Service met with her on the pretext of improving communications between the two universes (which had been Ice Agey since the Sevartian Noodle incident on B Minor), and managed to tie Brundtland-Govanni 002 down long enough to get the following wide-ranging interview:

**BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002:** You know, once I get out of these ropes, I **will** make you pay for this, right?

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: You would do that to yourself?

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: Wouldn't you?

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: If it was me, I would already have started sucking your spleen out of your nose with a straw.

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: I like the way you think.

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: It's the way you think.

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: Exactly. (pause) Put that back!

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: What?

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: You just moved the Dawn of the Dead snow globe from one side of my desk to the other.

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: I...I did?

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: You see the blood splattering inside it? Oh, yeah. It was just moved.

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: I – sorry, I...I didn't realize. I'll just – ahem. Don't change the subject, ferk it! I'm here to interview you.

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: Okay. Sure. Bring it. Ask your questions. The longer you prolong this, the more delicious it will be when I can finally get my slapping gloves on.

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: I've got slapping gloves, too, you know.

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: Oh, bring it, bee-yotch-szay!

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: Is that...Czechoslovakian?

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: Sister, I am going to slap the ugly off of you and onto a passing turtle!

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: Oh, yeah? I'll slap you so far into the future, you'll have to save the Eloi from the Morlocks!

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: Nice classical science fiction reference.

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: Thank you.

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: But, it won't stop me from slapping you so hard your head will spin around so fast it could generate enough electricity to light up Brampton for a month!

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: Oh, yeah? Well, I'll slap you so hard your head will spin around so fast it will actually go back in time!

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: So, my head will actually be younger than my body?

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: Talk about a lose-lose situation!

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: Nicely played.

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: Thank you. So, will you answer my questions, now?

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: I make no promises.

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: Fair enough. So, how does it feel to win the Mena?

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: mumble mumble...don't have time to do a ferking interview...mumble mumble...so much editing to ignore...mumble mumble...eat goat cheese...

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: Yeah, well, it's not like I don't have better things to do with my time, either. Welcome to my world.

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: Actually, we're in my world.

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: The interview hasn't even really started, and you're gonna go all literalist on my ass?

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: Wait until the interview is over to see what I can do to your ass!

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: That would be a form of self-abuse.

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: You say tomato, I say hamburger garni – PUT THAT BACK RIGHT NOW!

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: Hunh? Put what back?

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: The Einstein relativity train/pencil sharpener goes to the left of the model guillotine, not to the right. Put it back!

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: Sorry. I...I didn't realize...

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: Madame Defarges and the other tricoteuses would not be amused!

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: Oh, well, I wouldn't want to, uhh, disappoint...them...

PAUSE.

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: Mikhail Lo-Fi, publisher of the Alternate Reality News Service across the dimensions, thought it would be a good idea to ask you how a story goes from idea to print reality. I'm not sure why he thought that was a good idea, but, here we are, so how about it?

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: Sure. We have writers in a variety of dimensions who use their connections to ferret out stories. They pitch the stories they find to me and, if I think they will interest our readers, I give them the go-ahead. The writers interview a variety of people and boil the information they receive down to the essence of the story, which they write. I do a first edit of the story to ensure that all of the elements that will make it comprehensible to a reader are in place; if not, I ask the writer for a rewrite. Once the basics are in place, a copy editor does a second edit to make sure that the article's spelling and grammar are correct. Then, the editorial board and I decide which edition to place the story in and how much prominence it deserves. Finally, it goes to production to design the page it will appear on, and print the issue out.

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: Really? That's really how it goes?

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: PFAH! HA HA HA! Naah. We get an anonymous tip, the writer does as little work as possible to write a basic story about it, and I look it over to make sure it's in English and not too embarrassing to print before we print it!

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: Oh. Ha ha. Very funny.

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: Had you going, didn't I?

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: Not, really.

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: Just a little bit?

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: I'm a professional. I don't –

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: I had you going.

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: Harrumph! Look, I...I'm sure our readers would like to know what your relationship with technical adviser Darren Clincker-Belli is.

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: I have no relationship with Darren Clincker-Belli.

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: You say that. And, yet, you did take him home to meet our mother...

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: She insisted. And, she always gets her way. You know that. But, that doesn't mean I have a relationship with Darren Clincker-Belli.

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: How do you think Darren would feel about the fact that you are denying dating him?

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: He would be fine with it. Trust me, I am not dating Darren Clincker-Belli!

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: Does Darren do your dishes?

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: I AM NOT DATING DARREN CLINCKER-BELLI!

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: If you say so. You were always the strongest of us at standing up to mom.

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: You think?

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: A word of advice: when you do give in and admit that you're dating him, you'll find that Darren has a thousand and one uses in the home...

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: ISN'T THIS INTERVIEW SUPPOSED TO BE ABOUT JOURNALISM?

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: Are you willing to answer journalism questions, now?

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: No. But I can deflect them more easily – PUT THAT BACK!

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: What?

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: The laser-guided letter opener! You moved it from the center front area of my desk to the left middle! That was a gift from Admiral Sklorzixxx of the Imaginary Generic Fleet for our reporting on the War of 2112!

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: Can I help it if you don't know how to arrange objects on your desk?

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: My desk! Mine! Mine! Mine! Mine! Mine!  
Mine! Mine! Mine! Mine! Mine!

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: (over her) Fine. I'll put it back. See? There.  
It's back.

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: Mine! Mine! Mine! Mine! Mine! Mine!  
Mine! Mine! Mine! Mine!

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: (over her) So, you've been reduced to  
incoherent word repetition by a few simple questions? That's so like me!

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: Mine! Mine! Mine! Mine! Mine! Mine!  
Mine! Mine! Mi – yes, we're more alike than I would care to admit.

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: The Multiverse is a strange place.

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: Indeed. So, have you exhausted all of your  
questions?

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: I've barely scratched the surface.

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: Oh. Sorry to have to do this to you, then.

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: Brenda, don't you d –

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: Mine! Mine! Mine! Mine! Mine! Mine!  
Mine! Mine! Mine! Mine!

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: (over her) Oh, now, you're just milking it!

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: Mine! Mine! Mine! Mine! Mine! Mine!  
Mine! Mine! Mine! Mine! Mine! Mine!

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: (over her) Mikhail will not approve!

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: Mine! Mine! Mine! Mine! Mine! Mine!  
Mine! Mine! Mine! Mine! Mine!

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: (over her) THIS IS REALLY CHILDISH!

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: Mine! Mine! Mine! Mine! Mine! Mine!  
Mine! Mine!

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: (over her) ALRIGHT! ALRIGHT,  
ALREADY! I'VE GOT ENOUGH! THE INTERVIEW IS OVER!

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: Mine! Mine! Mine! Mi – it's been a pleasure.

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 007: The pleasure was all yours.

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI 002: Now, if you'll just untie these ropes...

*This interview was conducted on Thursday, July 23<sup>rd</sup>. Unless it was Tuesday. Oh, you know, it was the day Mrs. Mott gave birth to her son Clamato. Wednesday, then.*

### **Idiotocracy: A Beginner's Guide**

by FRANCIS GRECOROMACOLLUDEN, Alternate Reality News Service National Politics Writer

Earth Prime 2-9-5-4-3-8 dash rho is not like other worlds. They do politics differently there.

On most planets, governments come in two flavours: rule by the few (oligarchy, autocracy, plutocracy, dictatorship, Otto – call it what you will) and limited public participation that masks the rule by the few (democracy). If ordinary people were allowed to actually control their political system, what would things look like?

We don't have to imagine (that's what YaHooTube is for): it is called idiotocracy, and it dominates the political landscape of Earth Prime 2-9-5-4-3-8 dash rho.

The United States of Vesampucceri is the foremost idiotocracy on the planet. The country's Constitution guarantees that "a government of the stupid, by the stupid, for the stupid shall not perish from the Earth without a fight. And, a stupid one, at that."

The United States of Vesampucceri has two political parties. The Reduhbicans pander to a small but significant subset of the population – sometimes referred to as the "Moron Majority" – with policy ideas that, to a layperson, may appear to be unworkable, but, to an expert, actually appear to be batshit crazy. The Dumboprats generally oppose the policies of the Reduhbicans, but often vote for them anyway when out of power and rarely repeal the measures when in power. In Washburningdington, Vesampucceri's capital city, this is known as "bipartisanship."

"It's a poisonous system," explained token smart person Amy Sheshutshotshitbam. "Once a majority of people have given up on science...or, facts...or, any sort of rational argument, even if a smart person is elected, he has to water down what he does to please the stupid people. Look at what's happened to Dumbopratic President Barry W. Bushbamclintreagbush: when he was a candidate, he wrote a 767 page treatise on international political relations arguing that diplomacy was in most cases preferable to

military action. Last week, in his State of the Disunion Address, his foreign policy had been reduced to two words: 'War good.' It's sad, really."

Stupiding down your political discourse only gets you so far in modern Vesampucceri, however. Token smart person Amy Sheshutshotshitbam pointed out that the party that gets out in front of the stupid can always argue that, if you have a choice between somebody who is truly stupid and somebody who only pretends to be stupid to get your support, you should vote for the genuine article. "That's a rationale that is truly inane," she added, "and, yet, at the same time, kind of brilliant."

Party politics is, however, only the beginning of the stupid. Successive Reduhblican governments placed in power people who were opposed to the mission of their agencies; these people are often referred to as idiotocrats. Bankers in charge of financial regulations. Poultry tycoons determining farm subsidies. Weapons manufacturers deciding whom to go to war with (surprise! – pretty much everybody). That sort of thing. The most egregious example occurred during the Presidency of Ron Potganreabumbom, who appointed James Wathafuloitt – an oil company executive and noted hylophobe – to head the Environmental Protection Racket.

"Did you know that trees were a major cause of greenhouse gases?" marveled token smart person Amy Sheshutshotshitbam. "Cut down all the trees and you've solved the problem. It's fascinating – isn't it? – how the stupid often coincides with the interests of big business?"

While idiotocrats work behind the scenes, political pundits - referred to as "idiotologues" when they unquestioningly push the stupid in their pronouncements – are frequently in people's faces (among other body parts). Most idiotologues promote an extreme Reduhblican agenda: they include radio and television personalities like Glenn Eckicksteinbedeck and Bill Onomoforeill. In recent years, the Dumboprats have tried to develop their own pundits, most notably Rachel O'schulbermatthow.

"Oh, I love Rachel – in a platonic way, of course," token smart person Amy Sheshutshotshitbam gushed. "The problem with her show – indeed, the problem with all of the left wing pundits – is that they still believe in facts. Facts – well – the population gave up on facts a long time ago. And, it shows: O'schulbermatthow's ratings have never been more than a fraction of Onomoforeill's."

What is the result of such a drastic stupiding of a country's political discourse? "We're number one! We're number one!" hooted citizen Pete Fazzigrenatchmann, despite the fact that the only thing international surveys show Vesampucceri to actually be number one at is loudly - some would say obnoxiously - proclaiming that it is, in fact, number one.

"If I vote Reduhblican in the next election," exclaimed Sharron Eichgeblungalonn, "jelly beans will rain from the skies instead of snow! Can you imagine bathing in jelly beans? I'll bet they give you an all over sugary glow of goodness!"

“If I keep borrowing money,” explained stock broker Jerry Sisnaisherbergman, “I will eventually owe my way out of debt!” He was actually grinning when he said this. Happily grinning.

“Can I emigrate to your universe?” token smart person Amy Sheshutshotshitbam plaintively asked me. “Please?”

### **The Street Finds its Own Uses for Mutant Technologies**

by LAURIE NEIDERGAARDEN, Alternate Reality News Service Medical Writer

On a cotton candy plane with caramel corn mountains in the distance, unicorns with the face of Rush Limbaugh use their horns to pop pinatas in the shape of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. “I always knew heaven would be exactly like this!” enthused Margaret Mendelssohn Meiville to herself.

Meiville was one of 237 patients in comas who are part of a unique study lead by Erica Erato of Anthonys Hopkins Medical School. Using Mutant Technologies’ Psychrect 2000, which was originally intended to help writers avoid typos by tapping into their psyches to find the word they meant to enter, Erato found she could communicate with people with “locked in syndrome” who were otherwise unable to communicate with the world.

“You know how you’ll be sitting on the bus and, not having anything better to do, you’ll start daydreaming that the person sitting opposite is really a butterfly wearing a cocoon in the shape of a human being?” Erato explained. “As you watch, everybody around you bursts into a riot of colourful butterflies who escape out an open window and congregate in a stadium downtown to watch lacrosse and drink nectar out of supersized cups and argue about whether dark matter exists or is just a dream of physicists who cannot face the reality of the heat death of the universe and then pogo sticks rain down from the sky and pretty soon all of the butterflies are - are...

“Well – uhh, yeah – my research found that people in comas live in those kind of daydreams.”

“Let me just say,” Mutant Technologies CEO Theodoric Monangahela did so, “that this is not a sanctioned use of our technology. If we had had any idea that the Psychrect 2000 could be used for this purpose, we...we would have changed its name and marketed it differently!”

The first recorded use of the psychic autocorrect programme to read the thoughts of coma patients was by Sam Gafflebab of the small town of No Fixed Address, Florida. “Mama Rosalita had been in a coma for over 15 years after a flying Eggo incident,” Gafflebab explained. “I thought, if I just rested her fingers on the keyboard, we might see something. But, uhh, nothing happened. The kids, Moondark and Veridian, were getting kind of restless, and began tossing waffles around the hospital room. Before anybody could do

anything to stop them, one of them hit Mama Rosalita's finger with enough force to cause it to depress a key - the letter "f," I believe it was. Then, the screen just filled up with descriptions of...scenes of a...of a carnal nature. Who knew? I mean, she's 83 years old, for god's sake!"

Gafflebab and his wife Samantha hustled their children out of the hospital room, but they had seen enough to make credible Facebook updates on the subject. Within months, people all across the world were buying Psychrect 2000s in order to communicate with their comatose loved ones.

"We did not give Mister Gafflebab permission to do that," Monangahela insisted. "If we had known he was going to use the Psychrect 2000 to communicate with his brain-damaged mother, we would have had a documentary crew in the room to record it for future PR purposes! Umm...for humanitarian causes, of course."

Monangahela added that he used the term "brain-damaged" in its clinical sense, and that he hoped that people sensitive to the language would not be quick to – damn Twitter, anyway!

While the creators of the technology may not have been enthusiastic about its new use, others were ecstatic.

"We knew it! We knew it all along!" exulted the Reverend Pat "Oral" Righteous. "Just because people have no apparent brain function doesn't mean that they aren't alive and shouldn't be kept alive by any means necessary! Take that, orthodox medical establishment!"

Erato found that if somebody typed a question into the computer on which the Psychrect 2000 software was running, the people in comas would respond to it. When she asked what they would prefer if given the choice between rejoining the real world or dying, 97 per cent of those who didn't cling to the fantasy that they **were** in the real world chose death.

"Oh! Well! I mean..." Reverend Righteous backpedalled, "clearly, more research is needed before we can say anything definitive on the subject. I'm sure that good Christian folk weren't part of the...you know, the group that wanted to die..."

Actually, all but one of the Christians identified in Erato's research preferred to die. Those who expressed a preference to continue living were primarily atheists who had created worlds of Marxian or Randian perfection.

"Oh, poop," Reverend Righteous solemnly commented when apprised of this.

Meanwhile, Erato was enthusiastic about continuing her research. "If we can get these results with people in a coma," she stated, "imagine what we could find out about the inner lives of Senators!"

## **It's All Fun and Games Until Somebody Becomes \* UNHINGED \***

by OLGA KRYSHANOVSKAYA, Alternate Reality News Service Travel Writer

*The Oxford English Dictionary* is walking down the street, pushing a stroller that contains a gurgling and cooing *Oxford Abridged Pocket Dictionary*. Behind it, a building explodes in a shower of roses and poinsettias; at the same time, I get a taste in my mouth like I have just swallowed a steak cooked by Martin Sheen. When I stoop to pick up one of the flowers, it says, "I'm sorry, but we haven't been properly introduced," sprouts wings (which, if I am any judge of historic aircraft, came from a Gloster Meteor) and flies away.

This wasn't a dream, although it certainly had the wallpaper of one. No, it was a place called <shudder> the \* UNHINGED ZONE \* </shudder>.

The <lack of emotional response because...it...it didn't take me by surprise this time> \* UNHINGED ZONE \* </lack of emotional response because...it...it didn't take me by surprise this time> is a group of seven universes that had a lot of traffic in the early, squirrely days of transdimensional travel. Too much traffic: tourists randomly messing about with their timelines eventually resulted in linear causality breaking down in these dimensions. This was the impetus for the creation of the Transdimensional Authority and its regulation of interdimensional travel.

The Alternate Reality News Service, along with six other news (and one fried chicken) outlets, was offered a rare opportunity to tour the <see? I'm good with it> \* UNHINGED ZONE \* </see? I'm good with it>. I vibrated so much when I was given the extremely rare assignment that people around me thought they were hearing wasps buzzing around their heads. The editorial bullpen of the Alternate Reality News Service was fumigated two months ahead of schedule.

"Okay, listen up," Tour Leader Jacinta Oyguts told the pool reporters (so called because we enjoy a nice dip before leaving on an assignment, and we tend to clot together in moments of danger) before we left. "You are about to enter a place unlike any you have ever been in. Recent reports —"

"Pfft," the *New York Times* reporter waved a dismissive hand. "I've been in the Tokyo subway at rush hour!"

The *Times* reporter would be the first person to wet himself in the \* UNHINGED ZONE \*. He wouldn't be the last.

"Recent reports in the press have romanticized the \* UNHINGED ZONE \*," Tour Leader Oyguts continued, ignoring the outburst and subsequent nervous laughter. "I am here to tell you that there is nothing romantic about walking through a door in a bank and finding yourself falling through clouds at 10,000 feet! Sensible and survive, people! Be sensible and survive!"

We all wore full body wetsuits that filtered oxygen from the atmosphere and recycled our waste into a full menu featuring 27 different snacks and beverages. “You will not **rip**, tear, slash, rend, rupture or otherwise break open your suit while in the \* UNHINGED ZONE \*,” commanded Tour Leader Oyguts as she led us through the Dimensional Portal™. “Wary and watchful, people! Be wary and watchful! Once the Unhinged gets at you, you will never be able to live a normal life. Remember what happened to Dan Rather!”

<crowd gasps />

Over our heads floated a flock of penguins. They looked as surprised to be there as we were to see them. “That,” Tour Leader Oyguts sneered, “is what happens when somebody tries to launder gold bars by smuggling them between dimensions through the \* UNHINGED ZONE \*. Look and learn, people! Look and learn!”

The group I was with was hustled into a six story red brick toothbrush which, we were told, was the home of the *Euripidean Gleaner and Eyeshadow*, a local newspaper. The newspaper was started 20 years ago, shut down for a bit, and started again 30 years before that. Before any of us could open our mouths, we were told to treat this universe like one big Chinatown. Some of us got the reference, others were distracted by the giant genitals hovering over the reception desk.

“They belong to the publisher,” Tour Leader Oyguts assured us. Not to worry – she knows where they are!”

I asked a man standing nearby whom I assumed was a security guard (his uniform changed every second, but it always seemed official in some way) what life in the \* UNHINGED ZONE \* was like. When he opened his mouth, it sounded like a lilac-scented trash compactor. He started to wiggle his behind. Before I could tell him that I was here on business and I wasn’t really interested in him in that way, I got the sense that his butt was sending me a message. “You get used to it,” the man’s rear end told me.

Then, without warning, we were back on Earth Prime. In all, our journey through the \* UNHINGED ZONE \* lasted 27 seconds. But, 27 seconds in the \* UNHINGED ZONE \* is like a full minute anywhere else!

### **Days of Future Shoppe® Past**

by SASKATCHEWAN KOLONOSCOGRAD, Alternate Reality News Service  
Philosophy Writer

As if to celebrate last year’s scandal, the Future Shoppe® currently has a bigger and better scandal on its slimy tentacles.

I'm not talking about the way patrons of the store are not allowed to choose the seven seconds of their future that they pay exorbitant amounts of money experience. That was a mere controversy (with a hint of lemon).

"It's, uhh, random," said Future Shoppe<sup>®</sup> spokesperson Hobgoblin Himbo. "Yeah. Sure. We have no control over what part of the future you get to see. Sorry, but it's out of our slimy tentacles."

I'm not talking about how MultiNatCorp, the sole proprietor of the Future Shoppe<sup>®</sup> ("We do tech stuff that only seems impossible because it is"), acquiesced to the government's desire to put a ClipArt chip into the computer that reads people's futures. (The ClipArt chip allows the government to substitute puppies, kittens, Morticia Addams and other innocuous line art images for future projections that could involve national security.) No, this was a mere bad rinse in the 24 hour news cycle.

"I can understand why people hoping to see if they have been crowned King of America would object to getting soaked for all that money – and, let's be honest, it's great heaping piles of cash even if you use PayPal – for seven seconds of 'It's a Mall World After All,'" said Director of the National Snoopiness Agency Maddox Fred Maddox. "Still – national security. Ha ha."

Last year's scandal was, of course, that the Future Shoppe<sup>®</sup> was selling very wealthy clients glimpses of extra seconds of their future. "What? Is this Communist Albumeth?" Himbo protested. "What's the point of accumulating vast sums of money if you can't spend it to see more of your future than common people?"

When it was pointed out to him that this undermined the whole rationale behind people being limited to buying only seven seconds, Himbo replied, "Oh. Well. Of course, I meant to say that nobody gets special treatment. I, uhh, can't imagine how that rumour got started..."

This year's scandal is the revelation that the company actually plucks a memory out of its clients' brains and dresses it up to look like the future. One client complained that her "vision of the future" was actually a memory of her school prom with robots instead of adult monitors. The company responded with a press release arguing that it was actually a dance in the old folk's home where she would eventually find herself. And, she was short because people shrink over time. And, she was wearing braces because she...umm...yeah, had really bad teeth or something.

Another client threatened to sue the company when she realized that a scene where she gave birth couldn't be a vision of the future because she had had an ovariesectomy. "Yeah, well," Himbo sniffed, "in the future, in vitro fertilization will be so advanced that women will get pregnant just by walking past a clinic!"

"It was ridiculous!" ridiculed Piotr L3eprechaun. "In the future I saw, I was having a shower. At first, I thought, *Okay, when I get older, my sense of personal hygiene will*

*remain intact. Good to know.* Only, I realized that I was singing the same song I had been singing in the shower that morning: ‘Volare’ – the Barry White version, not the David Bowie version, because that’s how much I respect the ladies. In the shower I saw at the Future Shoppe®, I even had the same fantasy about...umm, yeah, best not to name names, positions or condiments. Let’s just say I needed extra soap at exactly the same moment!”

Himbo pointed out that in L3eprechaun’s vision, the shower heads were different.

“Oh, well, yeah, I guess it must have been the future, then,” L3eprechaun conceded. Unless he was being sarcastic. It’s hard to pick up sarcasm in print.

Himbo argued that the Future Shoppe® was selling the “idea of the future” rather than actual glimpses of the future. When confronted with advertisements that had appeared on television, radio and Internet dolphin mating Web sites that said, “See your future,” Himbo bit his upper lip and sheepishly suggested that it was a typo that should have read “Bee an hour’s suture.” When it was pointed out to him that this made no sense, Himbo argued that, to somebody from 100 years ago, the *Random Busby Berkeley Generator* would make no sense. We had to concede his point.

Will the latest scandal destroy the Future Shoppe®? If Himbo used the company’s technology to see what will happen to it in the years to come, he isn’t saying.

### **From Statistical Anomaly to Presidential Candidate**

by FRANCIS GRECOROMACOLLUDEN, Alternate Reality News Service National Politics Writer

The campaign that lasted 18 years but zipped by so fast that it felt like only 18 months came to a dramatic close last night when, at a brokered convention (which couldn’t even be fixed by duct tape), None of the Above won the Republican nomination to challenge Barack Obama in the 2012 election.

“Obviously, the candidate is too excited to make an acceptance speech,” said None of the Above’s campaign manager, Steve Schmidt. “But, I assure you that None of the Above will release an acceptance speech just as soon as we can figure out what its positions are. I’m thinking guns, god and country. But, it could just as easily be god, guns and country. The situation is just so fluid right now...”

“This has got to be the worst possible outcome for the Democratic Party,” said political commentator Lawrence O’Donnell. “Not only has None of the Above never publicly taken any position on any issue, but it has never said anything that has offended anybody – what could the Democrats possibly have to run against?”

“How about the emperor has no clothes?” suggested O’Donnell’s MSNBC bunkmate Rachel Maddow, mischievously adding, “Or, that the new clothes have no emperor?”

Schmidt pointed out that None of the Above's nomination posed some problems for the Republicans, as well: "We won't be able to run any advertising. I mean, how are we supposed to get a convenient election protest category to say it endorsed a commercial?"

"Oh, I may be able to help with that," billionaire casino magnate Sheldon Adelson smoothly said, slicking back the hair on his head to hide his horns. (His love affair with Newt Gingrich's Super PAC is obviously over; perhaps Gingrich will now have some empathy for the person who gets dumped in a relationship.)

The incorporeal nature of the candidate poses other problems for the Republicans. How, for instance, will None of the Above accomplish that old cliché of political campaigns, kissing babies?

"I envision a lot of air kisses," Schmidt answered. "Which, when you think of it, are a much more sanitary way to run a presidential election campaign."

None of the Above was born a simple electoral choice in an 1897 New York City election for the office of spittoon overseer. This gives None of the Above the distinction of being the oldest Republican candidate to run for president. Well, if you don't count Ronald Reagan.

Then, in 1904, None of the Above was dragged into service as a candidate in a particularly rowdy Arizona State Yenta race. (Okay, there's no proof that it was unwilling to run. On the other hand, there t'ain't no proof that it tweren't willin' to run, neither, ma'am. So, there.) Over the years, None of the Above steadily worked its way up the political ladder, from the office of dog teaser to State Attorney-Specific to federal dog teaser, but it wasn't until last night that a political party was so desperate for an alternative to all of its candidates that None of the Above actually won.

Minutes after its surprise victory, the None of the Above campaign announced that Spoiled Ballot will be its running mate. "They're like two wads of spit-softened paper in a straw," Schmidt stated. "Couldn't be closer."

"It was a masterstroke," O'Donnell said of the selection. "It avoided the obvious problem of the vice presidential candidate being the only sentient human on the ticket, although that didn't seem to be much of a problem for the campaign of George W. Bush."

"Aww, I don't know about this," Vice President Joe Biden wryly commented. "I don't think any of us can take None of the Above seriously as a candidate for president until we've seen its birth certificate..."

"Oh, ha ha, very funny," Schmidt sourly joshed good-naturedly. "Everybody knows that all of None of the Above's personal documents were destroyed in the...southern Beatle invasion of 1962. Besides, these days, there's nothing more American than throwing away your vote in futile protest!"

“It sure is going to be an interesting race,” O’Donnell commented. “On the one hand, the Democrats are running a campaign based on Barack Obama’s belief that the United States can regain the greatness it had after the Second World War. On the other hand, the Republicans are running a convenient protest category that doesn’t even exist.

“May the best illusion win.”

### **Some Points Need to be Hammered Home**

by FRANCIS GRECOROMACOLLUDEN, Alternate Reality News Service National Politics Writer

House Reduhbicans are facing a backlash against their recent vote to increase the size of the mallet used to hit poor people.

“I was all for hitting poor people with mallets,” life-long Reduhbican supporter Alicia McNikslickpicfliq said at a Town Hall meeting held by Speaker of the House John Boehnanbachblisscrap, “you know, to motivate them to get off their asses to look for work. I even supported moving to hitting people three times a day when the original plan of hitting them once didn’t change the unemployment rate. Yeah, sure, it stung like a son of a – but, anyway, I wasn’t planning on staying poor my entire life, so I could live with it. But, making the mallets bigger...I...I just don’t see how that’s going to help people like me...”

Boehnanbachblisscrap didn’t know what hit him. “My peeps...” he started to say, but was inundated with Nerf darts and streams of ketchup, mustard and other condiments. Wiping himself down with a moist towelette after the meeting, Boehnanbachblisscrap told reporters that spirited debate was the essence of democracy, but that relish was really hard to get out of worsted wool, so, for future public gatherings, people would have to be prepared to come in their underwear and be patted down to make sure they weren’t packing any wasabi.

Members of the Dumbopratic Party were quick to capitalize on this public sentiment. “That’s a fundamental difference between Dumboprats and Reduhbicans,” President Barry W. Bushbamclintreagbush gloated with all due gravitas. “Reduhbicans want to increase the size of the mallet, while Dumboprats think it is already large enough!”

In response, a group of 42 freshmen Reduhbican Representatives sent the President a letter that read, in part, “Why are you always picking on us? We eat our greens. We work out three times a week at the gym. We hardly ever kick puppies. This country deserves an adult conversation about its deepest problems, goldarnit, and if you don’t stop telling the truth about the consequences of our policies, we’ll have to step up our lies about yours!”

The Reduhbican mallet increasing policy is not without support. Ridiculously wealthy person David Kolectgeibatech encouraged the government to “hit the poor bastards! Hit them hard! Hit them with everything we’ve got!” Nobody could tell if he was

compensating for the guilt he felt over his family's increasing share of the wealth over the last three decades, or if he was just a heartless sociopath.

"I would go with sociopath," token smart person Amy Sheshutshotshitbam offered. "But, ahh, that may just be me."

Hitting poor people over the head with mallets had, of course, been a Reduhblican policy for decades, but it wasn't until the presidency of Ron Potganreabumbom that it became law. And, there was a spike in employment after the law was implemented, although most economists now believe it was because the government had to hire 80,903 people across the country to do the actual hitting (the number would have been larger had it not been for CEOs who volunteered to do the hitting in their spare time).

"Dumboprats just can't stand Reduhblican success," right wing pundit and full time potted geranium George Willheorwonthe punditted.

The size of the mallet decreases with family income, but some critics of the policy point out that this means it hits the middle class hardest. The government supplies people in dire need with a shower cap, explained token smart person Amy Sheshutshotshitbam. This cushions the blow, sort of. In a way. Minimally. However, members of the middle class, who are not allowed to wear any headgear during the malleting process, bear the full brunt of the instrument.

The Dumboprats had tried to reform the system with legislation that called for smaller mallets or weekly rather than daily hits, but were shouted down by the opposition and popular media figures. "Being hit over the head with a mallet is a long tradition in this country," said pundit Bill Onomoforeill on his television show *The Onomoforeill Factor*. "They did it to my father, and his father before him, and it didn't beflurgle blaff blaff renticular me! Not a bit!"

"Hitting people over the head with mallets will make this economy work better," Willheorwonthe added. "Why does this President hate capitalism?"

This backlash effectively ended all efforts at reform.

Token smart person Amy Sheshutshotshitbam sighed and shook her head sadly. "For years, the Washburningdington Consensus has been that we need at least 15 per cent functional unemployment to depress wages," she explained. "To punish poor people for circumstances we control seems unnecessarily cruel."

Then, being a relatively poor academic herself, she accepted her day's hit by a medium-sized rubber mallet.

### **No Harm? Well Maybe a Little...**

by LAURIE NEIDERGAARDEN, Alternate Reality News Service Medical Writer

Chapdelaine Malteaser is a wreck. He has a purple rash on his left elbow and behind both his knees. He has Alter's Echinastichesus – also known as “Wobbly Fingers” – a disease where the muscles in his fingers randomly stop working, a disease which has tragically ended the career of many a concert pianist and barroom thumb wrestler. His left eye twitches whenever anybody mentions Herbert Lom. He has Planter's Whorl. His stomach periodically produces an enzyme that makes him crave pink flamingos (the lawn ornament, not the actual bird – he has destroyed many a pot in an attempt to make them edible).

Malteaser has found a clinical trial which promises a treatment for his condition, a condition which is a result of his involvement in a series of previous clinical trials, clinical trials which have left a stew of chemicals in his body, a stew of chemicals that are interacting in unexpected – and often, to use a technical medical term, gross – ways.

Phew! – made it out of that sentence alive!

The Amendola-Crisco Process (named after actor Tony Amendola and his favourite brand of shortening) takes anywhere from five days to three weeks to flush the chemicals out of a patient's body. To ease withdrawal symptoms, the patient is jacked into a virtual world until she is declared chemical-free.

“In past trials, men have tended to gravitate to the virtual reality stitched together from scenes from Kevin James and Rob Schneider movies,” said Iolanthe Schweppes, Chief Medical Officer for drug giant Gangrenous Plasmids (GP). “I know these are times of diminished expectations, but it's enough to make you weep. In a...detached, professional kind of way, of course.”

Schweppes added that women had no discernible pattern in their choice of virtual experience, although peanut butter did show up in a statistically significant number of them.

In its original trial, GP offered patients a virtual world that was a mirror of the real world, but that had to be discontinued when they found that patients began hallucinating that there was another world behind the virtual one, a world where machines harvested human beings for the energy their bodies produced. When the trial was over, these patients could no longer distinguish between reality and fantasy; the lawsuits over “alienation of affect” are still working their way through the courts.

Ironically, the trial – clinical, not legal – for the Amendola-Crisco Process is already oversubscribed, making it unlikely that Malteaser will get in.

“Yeah, sucks to be him,” said Estrella Goomy-Baer, one of the trial subjects. What were the symptoms that made her eligible? “I...have a cough...” she stated. “Ahew. See? I'm definitely sick. And...and...and...oh, look! My right earlobe just fell off! Umm...okay, it didn't actually fall off, but see? That's an odd angle for an earlobe to hang, isn't it? It

feels like it's about to fall off! Oh, and my atrial...spleen feels bloated, and it's not even my time of the month!"

"She's faking!" Malteaser accused. When I asked him how he could be so sure, he replied, "Because that's what I sounded like when I faked my way into clinical trials!"

"I'm sure that if Mister Malteaser thought about it a little further," commented Ebenezer Cadbury, who recruits subjects for medical clinical trials, "he would realize that he was admitting to **FRAUD** and everybody knows that **FRAUD** is a **CRIME**, so that would be **A REALLY BAD IDEA**."

"Well, yeah," Malteaser backtracked. "There's that."

Are patients signing up for medical treatment trials who do not have the diseases tested for a problem? Schweppes thinks so. "We had one guy show up for a test of a brain seizure medication," Schweppes claimed, "who actually suffered from a hangnail!"

"To be fair," Cadbury responded, "the pain from his hangnail was so intense, he felt like he was having a brain seizure!"

Schweppes claimed that one of the patients for a trial of an anti-psychotic drug turned out, in fact, to be an emperor penguin.

"To be fair," Cadbury insisted, "I thought he was a small person in a tuxedo! It was an honest mistake."

Schweppes claimed that the fact that Cadbury was earning \$30,000 to \$50,000 for each person he recruited for a medical therapy trial might be affecting his judgment about appropriate test subjects.

"To be fair," Cadbury started. Five minutes later, he finally added, "At that rate, it is going to take me a long time to become a billionaire!"

"It's just as well," Malteaser sighed. "With my luck, I probably would have ended up in the placebo group!" Then, he watched his right earlobe fall off.

### **An Igor For An Igor And Pretty Soon Everyone Is Bland**

by CORIANDER NEUMANEIMANAYMANEEMAMANN, Alternate Reality News Service Labour Writer

Ordinarily, the hunchback and hatchback crowd are found in cemeteries in the middle of the night, scavenging corpses for body parts to complete the depraved scientific experiments of their not especially praved masters. On this night, however, many of them can be found outside the head office of Stewart Enterprises, Inc., carrying placards that read "Over **our** dead bodies!" and "Who are the real ghouls here? No, really? Do I need

to define the term fo” and chanting, in a low moaning kind of way, “Hell, no, stop the pros!” More whiny than mournful, really. And, out of synch. They could definitely use a conductor.

They are members of the IUI (International Union of Igors), Local Ninety-seven, and, as uncomfortable as it may be for people who have been raised to obey their masters, they are pissed.

The Igors, about a dozen strong (and six or seven weak) are protesting the fact that funeral homes are now offering discounts to customers who are willing to sign over some organs to scientists. Aside from being inherently ghoulish, they claim it undermines the work of union members.

“Look at it from an Igor’s point of view,” stated IUI Local Ninety-seven Steward Victoria “Igor” Frankenstein (distant relation, but, for purposes of this article, irrelevant). “You go to all the trouble to dig up the coffin of somebody who has recently been deceased, only to find the best bits are missing! What do you do? Do you go back to your master and explain what happened? Do you have any idea how many lashings the union contract allows for under those circumstances? Or, do you dig up the corpse of somebody who has maybe been in the ground a little longer, who is maybe not so...ripe for harvesting? I think we all know how **that** turns out!”

When I asked Gerhardt Schmoulia, Public Relations Officer, Third Class how Stewart Enterprises, one of the biggest funeral home chains in the greater east-western area, viewed the union protests, he looked puzzled and said, “We’re being picketed by a union?”

One of the reasons the protests appear to have gotten little traction is that they have, to date, all been held – if I may use the term – in the dead of night, when the offices are empty and the media has been tucked into its beds and are dreaming their little dreamy dreams. “Be fair,” Frankenstein explained. “Midnight to 5pm are our members’ customary working hours. Get them out off their slabs any earlier, and they will be sluggish and disoriented...not, perhaps, much different from their usual state, I will allow. Still, their sluggishness and disorientation will be unmotivated, and that does make a difference.”

When I asked Schmoulia about this, he said, “Really?” After a moment’s pause, he added, “No, really?”

The IUI, the AFL-CIO’s younger, scruffy, somewhat disreputable cousin, has over 2,000 members worldwide, although over 90% of them are located in the Balkans or small hamlets in England.

“By the way,” said Igor Frankenstein (who claims that she really has nothing to do with her distant relation, that she hasn’t been in touch with that side of the family in years, but, for purposes of this article, we will assume that she isn’t being entirely forthright - we

mean, how could she not?), “let me just point out that having a hunchback is no longer a requirement of membership in the Union. That may have been true 100 years ago, but in the 1970s we were hit with a Labour Relations Board ruling that that discriminated against the able-bodied, so we now have to take in anybody engaged in middle-of-the-night necrocriminal behaviour, regardless of their firmity.”

Igor Frankenstein asked us to forget about our preconceived notions and please focus on the issue at hand. “This is just another example of how big corporate conglomerates are squeezing out the little guy,” she editorialized. “I mean, what we’re talking about here is a family business. The unbearable lightness of being an Igor is usually passed down from father to son, sort of like Listeriosis and Dutch Elm’s Tongue.”

Frankenstein pointed out that if funeral homes were allowed to make their offer unchallenged, it wouldn’t be a loss just to her union’s members, but to all of society: “Over the centuries, Igors have developed a body of knowledge about cadaver removal and involuntary post-rigor amputation that deserves as much respect as astrology, or...or aura research!”

When I explained the whole Igor legitimacy thing to Schmoulia, he replied, “Reeeeeaaaaallly?” We’re sure he meant that the company took the protests seriously and would be happy to enter into negotiations with the appropriate union rep. But, he just looked kind of blankly at us, almost like an Igor, truth be told, and incredulously moaned, “Reeeeeaaaaallly?”

### **Pynchon Me, I Must Be Dreaming!**

by ELAINE SUGARMAN-SWEET-SACCHARINE, Alternate Reality News Service  
Literature Writer

A wise woman once explained to me that if you want to know where a literary convention is being held, just follow the people in costumes. This past weekend, I followed people in 1960s hippie garb, the dress of a late 18<sup>th</sup> century gentleman and the uniforms of World War II soldiers to the Sheraton Braggadocio on Pavement Street, which was host to PynchCon 2011, a convention devoted to the works of author Thomas Pynchon.

Sponsored by the Wrong Questions Club of Pittsburgh (which was odd, considering it was held in Toronto), this year’s PynchCon offered an eclectic variety of panels on all things Pynchon. These included: “Benny Profane versus Tyrone Slothrop: Who Was the Better Soldier?”; “*Gravity’s Rainbow*: Twenty Reasons the Movie Would Have Sucked if it Ever Had Been Made,” and; “*Against the Day* Trivia Faceoff.”

The Guest of Honour at this year’s PynchCon was James McMoira, who claimed to have shaken Pynchon’s hand in 2003. “It was at a Denny’s,” McMoira explained to a rapt hall of over 200 people. “A tall man said to me: ‘Could you please fill this cup with Diet

Rock Sludge?’ There didn’t seem to be anything with that name at the soda station, so I just gave him diet cola. He seemed grateful, and shook my hand.

“Something about the man seemed awfully familiar. Then, it hit me: I had seen an old black and white photograph of him on a Web site devoted to *The Crying of Lot 49*! I think it was, like, his high school graduation photo or something, but the resemblance was unmistakeable. So, I said, ‘Hey! You’re Thomas Pynchon!’ To which he replied, ‘No. I’m afraid you have me mistaken with the National Book Award winning author.’ To which I replied in response: ‘Yeah. Yeah. You’re Thomas Pynchon, alright! Who else would know about the whole National Book Award winner thing?!’ To which he responded in reply: ‘It was a lucky guess. Look, if you don’t go away and allow me to eat my Grand Slum Breakfast in peace, I’m afraid I shall have to call the manager and complain.’ To which I retorted in responsive reply, ‘Only Thomas Pynchon would deny that he was Thomas Pynchon! You must be Thomas Pynchon!’ To which he responded in replicative retort: ‘I can’t argue with logic like that. MANAGER! I’D LIKE TO SPEAK TO THE MANAGER, PLEASE!’

“Sure, I got thrown out of the restaurant,” McMoira concluded, “but it was worth it. Man, was it worth it.” The audience at PynchCon roared its approval.

McMoira was a controversial choice. Some Pynchonistas believe that the person he shook hands with was actually infamous Thomas Pynchon impersonator Galliard “Michel” Houellebecq.

“We were hoping to get Pynchon’s first agent, Candida Donadio, to be the GoH,” admitted PynchCon organizer and Wrong Questions Club Vice President in Charge of Refreshments Derrida Defazio, “but we were discouraged by the fact that he died in 2001. So, we had to go with our second choice.”

PynchCon’s Fan Guest of Honour was Monique DeLaTerrias, who has the distinction of having had 37 different pieces of fan fiction taken down from various Internet sites under threat from Pynchon’s lawyers. DeLaTerrias read from her most famous work, “The Crying of a Lot of Forty-niners,” a flash fiction story that imagined what would have happened if V.’s Benny Profane met and had a torrid love affair with *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s Tyrone Slothrop in a seedy San Francisco hotel room.

“Pynchon’s characters really come alive for me,” DeLaTerrias explained. “So, naturally, I want to know what would happen if they had hot, male on male sex!”

Those who attended last year’s PynchCon might have been surprised that it wasn’t being held at the Radisson Not Exactly Central But Downtownish Hotel. “That...that’s a private matter,” DeLaTerrias demurred. “Wouldn’t you rather talk about the semiotics of the make erection in *Gravity’s Rainbow*? I...I know I would...”

Rumours, confirmed by people who attended PynchCon 2010, have it that a couple of con-goers were having sex that involved one of them being handcuffed to a pipe. In the

throes of passion, the person who was handcuffed pulled the pipe free, flooding the entire floor and making the event convention non grata at the hotel for years to come.

Thomas Pynchon was unavailable for comment.

*The Alternate Reality News Service's Guide to Love, Sex and Robots*

**Love, Sex and Robots:  
An Alternate Reality News Service Forum**

The Alternate Reality News Service asked three of its senior advice columnists to meet to discuss their role in times of social and technological brouhaha. Amritsar Al-Falloudjianapour writes about love and romance and technology. The Tech Answer Guy writes about technology and everything except love and romance. The Language Corrector Dude, well, it should be pretty obvious what he writes about.

**The Language Corrector Dude:** Actually, you would have been more correct in your usage of English if you had written: what he writes about should be pretty obvious.

You see? The forum was moderated by Alternate Reality News Service Editrix-in-Chief Brenda Brundtland-Govanni.

1.

**Brenda Brundtland-Govanni:** Let's get this over with as quickly as possible – I have a public editing at four. Now that we've plunged headfirst into the empty pool of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, what value, if any, do you think people find in advice columns?

**Amritsar Al-Falloudjianapour:** Oh, advice columns are stunningly important. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, all people had to worry about was who their parents wanted them to marry and how to avoid the plague – sometimes both at once. As society has grown more complex, and we've developed a lot of more exotic illnesses, it has become harder and harder for the average person to find a path to a happy and fulfilling life. And, that doesn't even take into account cat to human translators! As the human race strolls blindly, if somewhat astringently, into an increasingly technology-dominated world, advice givers are more important than ever!

**The Tech Answer Guy:** I just try to keep dumb people from making dumb mistakes.

**The Language Corrector Dude:** I, uhh, I don't understand what I'm doing here. I mean, that wasn't a language question.

**Brundtland-Govanni:** We needed a fourth to make the panel more impressive. Also, we may play bridge if we have a spare few minutes after we're done. Just answer the question as best you can.

**The Language Corrector Dude:** Uhh, okay, well...new technologies – like Twitter, right? People experiment with language, and...and they need somebody to slap them down when they get too...creative. Somebody to remind them how to, you know, write proper.

**The Tech Answer Guy:** You? Hunh. Nice bowtie!

**The Language Corrector Dude:** Have respect for the Monarch!

**The Tech Answer Guy:** I have lots of respect for the Monarch! I ooze respect for the ferking Monarch out of every orifice of my body! Only, I never imagined the Queen being orange!

**Amritsar Al-Falloudjianapour:** Oh, aren't you just the pinnacle of sartorial splendour!

**The Tech Answer Guy:** Oh, yeah? Well I – you – what?

**The Language Corrector Dude:** Sartorial. Of or relating to a tailor, tailoring or tailored clothing. Splendour. Magnificent appearance or display. I think she was making fun of your jeans and – what do you call it?

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** On most men, it would be called a muscle shirt. On him, let's be generous and call it a lack of muscle shirt.

**The Language Corrector Dude:** And your lack of muscle shi -

**The Tech Answer Guy:** Okay. Yeah. I get it. I keep meaning to go to the gym, but there's always a Tim Hortons just before I get there. No matter what route I take, there's always a Tim Hortons. What can I say? All roads lead to –

**Brundtland-Govanni:** CAN WE GET BACK TO THE POINT HERE, PLEASE?

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** Which was...?

**Brundtland-Govanni:** Erm...the Internet is full of people who offer advice to others. What qualifies you to give advice more than them?

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** Anybody can give advice to anybody else. The question is, do you trust them to give you good advice? Trust is built on positive experience. So, you have to look at the experience of the person giving the advice. I am happy to say that, in over seventeen years of giving advice to Alternate Reality News Service readers, I have had only six of the people I advised commit suicide. Only six! That's a better suicide to years of service ratio than Dear Abby. Really! Look it up if you don't believe me!

**The Tech Answer Guy:** I have a miter saw.

**Brundtland-Govanni:** A miter saw?

**The Tech Answer Guy:** Absolutely. My mighty miter helps me cut through people's bullshit.

**Brundtland-Govanni:** I see. And, uhh, Language Corrector Dude?

**The Language Corrector Dude:** Oh. Uhh. I never thought about it, really. I guess...umm...I suppose it could be –

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** That you know things?

**The Language Corrector Dude:** Sure. I know things.

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** Things...other people don't know.

**The Language Corrector Dude:** Right. Right. I know things that other people don't know.

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** Aaaaboooouuut...

**The Language Corrector Dude:** Oh! Of course. Language usage. I know things that other people don't know about language usage! You know – words and stuff.

2.

**Brundtland-Govanni:** What do you think is the major obstacle to people's happiness in our high tech world?

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** I think –

**The Language Corrector Dude:** What do you mean by "happiness?"

**Brundtland-Govanni:** What?

**The Language Corrector Dude:** Well, when you ask us about happiness, are you asking about the emotions experienced when in a state of well being? Or, are you asking about a state of well-being characterized by emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy?

**Brundtland-Govanni:** Umm...either one.

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** In that case –

**The Language Corrector Dude:** It's not that simple. Happiness is used in a variety of ways in a variety of contexts. Some people think that happiness is a warm puppy. Others think that happiness is a warm gun. Still others think that happiness is a warm blartvogle.

**Brundtland-Govanni:** You wanna know how I would define happiness at this very moment?

**The Language Corrector Dude:** Yes.

**Brundtland-Govanni:** YOU SHUTTING THE FERK UP AND ALLOWING SOMEBODY ELSE TO ANSWER THE QUESTION!

The Tech Answer Guy smirks.

**The Tech Answer Guy:** Saw that one coming...

**Brundtland-Govanni:** Amritsar, you were about to say...?

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** I think that people make the mistake of thinking that technology will solve their emotional or relationship problems, and it simply doesn't work that way.

**The Tech Answer Guy:** Except for *Angry Firkins*.

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** I'm sorry?

**The Tech Answer Guy:** *Angry Firkins*. Aaaaaaaaangry Fiiiiirkiiiiins. Computer game. Highly addictive. Surely, you have heard of it.

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** Yes, I know what *Angry Firkins* is. What does it have to do with what I was saying?

**The Tech Answer Guy:** Tossing firkins at complex but highly unstable wooden structures allows players to release pent up aggression. That makes it much easier for them to deal with emotional or relationship problems. So, *Angry Firkins* is one technology that actually **does** help solve people's problems.

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** I hardly think that –

**The Tech Answer Guy:** Uh ah ah. According to "What the Ferk is a Firkin? Are Games Better Than Prozac, Or Should Researchers Take a Pill?" a peer reviewed article that was published in *FHM*, people who played the game were 97 per cent less likely to become depressed, alcoholics or Shriners.

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** Oh, really? What about...what about if nanobots in your toothpaste that are supposed to get rid of plaque actually turn your girlfriend into a rabid Three Stooges fan?

**The Tech Answer Guy:** Awkward. But, not insurmountable. Play an hour of *Angry Firkins*, and you'll start to see the artistry in the Three Stooges yourself.

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** What if you're the captain of a starship that comes across a planet with a new, peaceful form of intelligent life. All of your crew are very excited, of course, but within days of making first contact every member of the alien race is dead, and you don't know who to apologize to for bringing the microbes that killed them to the planet. What about that?

**The Tech Answer Guy:** Piece a cake. After a couple of hours playing *Angry Firkins*, you decide to plant evidence in their computer systems that the aliens were planning on attacking Earth. So, when you get home, instead of facing charges of genocide, you're actually a hero for killing them all.

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** Okay.

**The Tech Answer Guy:** That the best you got?

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** Oh, I'm just getting started. What if somebody developed a computer programme that allowed him – it's always a him who comes up with these ideas – to see light bulbs going off above people's heads in a display in his smart glasses. Not only does it do that, but it actually sends Alfred waves to the person he's looking at, which causes the person to come up with the design for a keyboard that would allow even an autistic chimpanzee to type 500 words a minute.

So, you're just walking along, minding your own business, wondering how long you will be able to keep your spouse in the dark about your Jersey Shore obsession, when – POW! OUT OF THE BLUE you come up with this new keyboard design. And, you have no idea what to do with it. After all, you're not an inventor. Or a zookeeper. This just makes you angry and confused. Will playing *Angry Firkins* help you out?

**The Tech Answer Guy:** Hmm. I have to think about that one. Oh, no, I don't. The answer is yes. After three hours of playing the game, you'll get in touch with a patent attorney who will advise you on how much money you can make off your invention. Oh, and I think you got the name of the brainwaves that cause you to be calm and creative wrong. They're Alfredo waves.

**The Language Corrector Dude:** Actually –

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** Well, uhh, alright, then. I guess *Angry Firkins* is a technology that does actually help people solve their problems. Still, most technologies do not.

**The Tech Answer Guy:** Actually –

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** Most. Technologies. Do. Not.

**The Tech Answer Guy:** Agreed.

3.

**Brundtland-Govanni:** One subject that hasn't come up yet is sex. Now –

**The Language Corrector Dude:** Oh, no. No, no, no, no, no. I don't – just no.

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** Sex is an important part of any healthy romantic relationship, Dude.

**The Language Corrector Dude:** Oh, god! Oh, god! Oh, god! Oh, god!

**The Tech Answer Guy: Dude!** Uncool!

**The Language Corrector Dude:** No words can convey - oh, god! Oh, god! Oh –

Brenda Brundtland-Govanni slaps The Language Corrector Dude. Long, stunned pause.

**Brundtland-Govanni:** This is the part where you're supposed to say, "Thanks. I needed that."

**The Language Corrector Dude:** Oh, god! Oh, god! Oh, god!

**Brundtland-Govanni:** (over him) Yet another example of movies lying to us! If I didn't enjoying slapping people for the feeling of flesh on flesh...!

**The Language Corrector Dude:** (moans) Oh, god! Oh, god! Oh, god!

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** Dude! Do you have a happy place?

**The Language Corrector Dude:** Oh, god! Oh, god! Oh, god!

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** (louder) Dude! DO YOU HAVE A HAPPY PLACE?

**The Language Corrector Dude:** A happy...place?

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** Do you have one?

**The Language Corrector Dude:** Sure. The, uhh, the Library of Congress.

**The Tech Answer Guy:** Figures.

**Brundtland-Govanni:** Watch it! The slapping glove does not discriminate!

**The Tech Answer Guy:** Sorry.

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** I want you to go there now while we talk about...what you don't want to talk about. Can you do that for me?

**The Language Corrector Dude:** O...okay.

**Brundtland-Govanni:** Okay. I'm wondering what role new technologies play in se – I mean, human se – uhh...human doing it.

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** Well! Human...you know is a very fraught subject. It –

**The Tech Answer Guy:** Hee hee. You said frott.

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** There's nothing dirty about the word fraught!

**The Tech Answer Guy:** There is when it's the start of frottage.

Al-Falloudjianapour: If I had intended to say that human sexuality is –

**The Language Corrector Dude:** (moaning) Oh, eighteenth century first edition of Lawrence Sterne's *Shirley*, *A Milke Maide's Taile*, is there nothing you can't teach us about the perfect form of the novel?

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** If I had meant to say...it was a frottage subject, I would have said it was a frottage subject! But, I didn't, did I?

**Brundtland-Govanni:** And, the point you were trying to make was...?

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** I think that there are a lot of factors in why people do or do not get se – physi – umm, why they don't enjoy doing it as much as they could. Pressure to perform, obviously. A lack of basic understanding of how to please a partner. Other –

**The Tech Answer Guy:** Hey! I've never had any complaints!

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** Was I talking about you?

**The Tech Answer Guy:** You were – looking – eye contact – never mind.

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** Other psychological issues can get in the way of pleasure. There –

**The Language Corrector Dude:** (to himself) Twenty-seven copies of *Murder on the Orient Express*? That seems a tad excessive...

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** Gritting my teeth, I continue. There are so many factors that contribute to bad...getting it on. I would caution people against adding technology to the list.

**The Tech Answer Guy:** Balls!

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** Lovely.

**Brundtland-Govanni:** Tech Answer Guy?

**The Tech Answer Guy:** Anything that makes it easier for people to get jiggy with each other is fine by me!

4.

**Brundtland-Govanni:** Lately, I have noticed a lot of articles coming into the newsroom about people having relationships with robots. Is cyborg love the next step in human evolution, or a dead end for the species that alienates us from other human beings by encouraging seemingly deep but ultimately sterile relationships with objects that project the illusion of emotional depth without actually possessing it?

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** What a thoughtful and, if I may say so, insightful question! There are many –

**The Tech Answer Guy:** You wrote that question yourself, didn't you?

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** ...ways of approaching – what? That's irrelevant.

**The Tech Answer Guy:** She wrote the question herself.

**The Language Corrector Dude:** It's obvious.

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** IT DOESN'T MATTER WHO WROTE THE BLOODY QUESTION!

**The Tech Answer Guy:** Definitely her.

**The Language Corrector Dude:** Absolutely.

**Brundtland-Govanni:** Okay, enough of that. Let Amritsar answer her question.

**The Tech Answer Guy:** (under his breath) Told you.

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** Ahem... Some people are too shy, too socially awkward to develop romantic relationships with other people. Psychiatrists have a term for this: Too Shy and Socially Awkward to Develop Romantic Relationships Syndrome. Seriously. It's in the *DM IV, Director's Cut*. Relating to machines arguably gives them a measure of emotional comfort and connectedness that they wouldn't otherwise be able to achieve. To this extent, it's a good thing.

The problem, though, is that people without Too Shy and Socially Awkward to Develop Romantic Relationships Syndrome could use machines in ways that retard – and, I use the word in its clinical sense, so, please, no letters – their relationships with other people. A man who is always fighting with his wife about which denture adhesive she uses could withdraw from their relationship into the arms of their AI-enhanced washing machine. This would –

**The Language Corrector Dude:** There's nothing wrong with talking to your AI-enhanced washing machine.

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** I...I beg your pardon?

**The Language Corrector Dude:** Sometimes, a washing machine can understand your problems better than a partner can. Washing machines have a simple wisdom that cuts through the nonsense of everyday life and quickly gets to something profound. I mean, all life is ultimately just a cycle of wash-rinse-wash-dry repeat, isn't it? Besides, washing machines are terrific listeners.

Long pause.

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** Okay. Umm...okay. Thanks for that. You know, Dude, maybe you and I should have a long talk when this forum is finished...

**Brundtland-Govanni:** Tech Answer Guy – your thoughts on...umm...whatever we were supposed to be talking about?

**The Tech Answer Guy:** Yeah, well, first off, let me just say that what a man does with a washing machine in the privacy of his own home is nobody else's business.

**The Language Corrector Dude:** Or a laundromat.

**The Tech Answer Guy:** A what?

**The Language Corrector Dude:** What a man does with a washing machine in the privacy of his own laundromat is nobody else's business.

**The Tech Answer Guy:** Do you own the laundromat?

**The Language Corrector Dude:** No. Is that important?

Pause.

**The Tech Answer Guy:** Secondly, as more and more of us get prosthetic enhancements, the line between human being and machine blurs. Now, I ain't saying it's gonna be erased completely or nothing. I'm just saying.

**Brundtland-Govanni:** Still, Tech Answer Guy...robots?

**The Tech Answer Guy:** Aww, people get emotionally attached to all sorts of shit. Pets. Money. Andy Warhol lithographs. At least artificial intelligence enhanced robots can give something back to them. Or, if that don't float yer boat, look at it this way: a robot ain't nothin' but a vibrator with legs.

**The Language Corrector Dude:** Aah ah! Codex! Dewey decimal system!  
CARDBOARD COVEEEEEEEEEERRRRRRRS!

5.

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** (quietly) Remember: deep breaths. In and out. In and out...

**Brundtland-Govanni:** So, panelists: final words?

**The Language Corrector Dude:** Obsolescence. Defenestration. Pudding. Post-recreational stress disorder. Oh, and...and...it's on the tip of my – TONGUE!

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** That's it?

**The Language Corrector Dude:** She asked me for last words.

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** Are you always so literal?

**The Language Corrector Dude:** It's what I do.

**Brundtland-Govanni:** Amritsar – last words?

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** *L'enfer, c'est les autres écrivains!*

**The Language Corrector Dude:** Can you repeat that in English?

**Al-Falloudjianapour:** Oh, you'd like that, wouldn't you?

**The Language Corrector Dude:** As a matter of fact –

**Brundtland-Govanni:** Tech Answer Guy?

**The Tech Answer Guy:** Shouldn't we let them finish?

**Brundtland-Govanni:** Any. Final. Words?

**The Tech Answer Guy:** Uhh. Yeah. Sure. Okay. Be good to each other and your garden tools. You may not always have each other, but you'll always have to kill weeds. Bastards.

**Brundtland-Govanni:** Great. Thanks, everybody.

Pause.

**Brundtland-Govanni:** Okay, Looks like I've got an hour to kill – wanna cut for partners?

### **Ask Amritsar: When the Seltzerpuss Turns...**

Dear Amritsar,

I work in the Poughkeepsie, Alberta offices of Transgalactic Puffballs Inc, an import/export company that deals mostly in artifacts from Tau Ceti. You know: self-basting Farrumph roast holders, hovering carpets ("For people who are scared of heights!"), Death Masks of Ramen the Inedible, that sort of thing. I've worked in the Fulfillment Department (a misnomer if I ever used one on letterhead!) for 12 years; I thought I would be stuck there until I clawed my eyes out with a stuffed eagle I keep on my desk or retired, whichever came last.

Then, Catherine Hakim made it okay for women to use their sexuality to get ahead in the workplace. Yay! Oh, I may have had to strangle my inner Gloria Steinem in order to follow Hakim's advice, but, honestly, she left cigarette butts all over my spleen, and I could swear that was a liquor stain on my lower intestine, so it was about time for her to go! Sure, I would be setting the cause of women back 60 years, but I could live with that – 50s fashions are so flattering to a woman's figure!

Look at it this way: if a man can dress to please his boss, if he always has a smile for his boss and he flirts shamelessly with his boss...well, he would have to be gay because there are still few women in positions of authority. Not that there's anything wrong with that. In any case, that relatively rare scenario is a good enough example for me to pattern my behaviour after!

So, I started wearing my most sensual clothes (you know – the ones I paid the most for even though they contain the least amount of fabric) and saving up money for the day when I could get my teeth whitened so I could smile more without being self-conscious about tooth rot™. There was only one problem.

My boss is a Seltzerpuss.

For those not familiar with Tau Cetians (Tau Cetaceans?) – and, since they like to keep a low profile (and, after the incident with the Armenian Ambassador and the Lobster Thermidor, who can blame them?), that's probably most of your readers – they are essentially six foot tall worms. With limbs. And, something approaching a face. Their faces are made up of two slits at a 90 degree angle above which sit two round holes - Scott McCloud would recognize them as faces, if nobody else.

My feminine wiles were completely wasted on Krrang-Facken, my boss. When I tried winking at him, for instance, he asked me, "Is your optical input device malfunctioning?" When I started coming to work in low cut blouses, he suggested I "cover up before you get a chest cold." One day, I patted an area opposite Krrang-Facken's face, about halfway down that, on a human body, would have been a butt; he avoided me in the office for the next three weeks.

Realizing that this approach wasn't working, I decided to meet Krrang-Facken on his own turf. I started wearing Dior's *Oligochaeta*, a perfume that smells like moist soil with just a hint of feces. No reaction. I started wearing makeup that made my skin look a shade of pale pink that came close to that of a Seltzerpuss. Nothing. I may as well have stuck a pair of firecrackers up my nose and sung *The Wizard of Oz Dark Side of the Moon* for all the good my efforts did me!

Do you have any idea about what I should try next? Because, frankly, I'm thinking of giving up the import-export business and becoming a gunman's moll!

Name Withheld By Request Because Mary Traverse Didn't Want To Be Held Up To Ridicule

Hey, Babe,

Funny thing about the Seltzerpuss: they reproduce asexually. When one is ready to have children, it is cut in half, and both halves grow to become fully formed adults. So, not only have you sold out your sisters, who will have to work five times as hard to work twice as hard to get half the recognition of a man, but you did so in a way that will get you absolutely nowhere.

It's women like you that make me embarrassed for my gender.

*Send your relationship problems to the Alternate Reality News Service's sex, love and technology columnist at [questions@lespagesauxfolles.ca](mailto:questions@lespagesauxfolles.ca). Amritsar Al-Falloudjianapour is not a trained therapist, but she does know a lot of stuff. AMRITSAR SAYS: fad diets come and go, but Type 2 Diabetes is forever.*

### **Ask Amritsar About a Toaster's Love**

Dear Amritsar,

The lights in my kitchen go off just as I get enthusiastic about chopping celery, my fridge lets certain foods go bad in what can only be interpreted as an attempt to poison me and the toaster has taken to creating images of a knife going through a human head in my morning poppy seed whole wheat rye bread. The images are actually quite artistic, in an Edward Gorey kind of way, but, still, threatening.

What should I do?

Pootweet Puffinbeak

Hey, Babe,

Have you ever considered

Dear Amritsar,

Perhaps I should explain.

Six months ago, I bought a Smart Condo™. You know, where all of the appliances have Wifi enabled computer chips that allow them to turn lights on and off as I move through rooms, order food from the local grocer before I run out and gossip about the latest goings on on *Downton Abbey*? It was all very efficient, but a bit boring, so I thought that some personality implants would liven things up.

And, it worked. For a while. I was cracking jokes with my shower. The radio in my bedroom knew exactly the right music to play when I broke up with my girlfriend. Hell, the toaster gave me stock tips. You may laugh, but in six months, the entire Smart Condo™ could have paid for itself!

Imagine my surprise when, one day, six boxes of yak intestines were delivered to my condo. None of the appliances would own up to ordering them. Fortunately, I had planned on having a dinner party the next week, and Martha Stewart can help make any food presentable and marginally edible, so that didn't end too badly. Still.

Later that evening, the television kept repeating, "I have the utmost faith in your programming choices, Dave," and only allowing me to watch *Naked Happy Girls* or *Walking Dead*. This was odd because, of course, my name is not Dave (although my high school recreational physics teacher did call me that for a year and a half). When I decided to take a break from watching television, it would go on randomly in the middle of the night. I was concerned that it might bring complaints from my neighbours; fortunately, by that time they were having their own problems with their Smart Condo™s.

Over the next few weeks, what I explained in my first email message happened, and so much more. Eventually, my coffeemaker took me aside and explained, over a cup of warm orange juice, that the various appliances were jealous each other. The fridge was jealous of the attention I gave the television set. The television was jealous of the time I spent cooking on the stove. The stove was jealous of everything in the condo except the toilet. The coffeemaker was jealous of the toilet, but it was a stoic that didn't believe it deserved any better, so it didn't act on these feelings.

After the coffeemaker set me straight, I went into the den and shouted in my most authoritative voice that the appliances were being ridiculous. "I don't care for any of you

more than any of the others!” I roared. “I don’t really care for any of you at all! You’re just things!”

As you might imagine, these intemperate remarks did not go over well.

I’m typing this on my BlackandblueBerry in my lead-lined bathroom. (The material was on sale.) I’m pointing my phone out the window hoping that the signal will reach you. I hope you get this message in time to help, because the toilet is burbling ominously...

Pootweet Puffinbeak

Hey, Babe,

Have you ever considered living in a cabin in the woods? I mean, the only drama you’ll have there is worrying about having enough supplies to last the winter. Or, being eaten by bears at any time of the year. But, frankly, being eaten by bears sounds preferable to what you are currently going through.

Too glib? I asked Montefiore Dix, President and Chief Bottle Washing Pariah of Living Loving Made Solutions, the company that codes personalities for objects, about your problem. He said, “It’s not nice to lead your fridge on, you know. A kitchen appliance has certain expectations of a young man...” He seemed quite indignant at your treatment of his products.

As for the immediacy of your problem, Amritsar is really not allowed to directly intervene. However, I am sure that, once this column is published in three or four days – a week at the most – one of my kind readers will alert the police or otherwise try to help. As the poster from the 1970s of the cat at a feline rally in a union hall said, “Hang together in there!”

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### **Ask Amritsar About the Change of Mind**

Dear Amritsar,

Baffley, my boyfriend, sweeps me off my feet every time we’re together. Literally. He has OMD (not the 80s synth band, but Obsessive Mopping Disorder, although, to be fair, he’s got a good beat and you can dance to him). After a while, it can get old, but he uses a variety of scented soaps to keep things fresh. Romantically, as well as hygienically, I mean.

The great thing about our relationship is that we agree on everything. What breakfast cereals to eat. How high my blouses should be buttoned. Why Citizens United was the worst Supreme Court decision in the history of the United States, and possibly the world (although the Pleistocene Era court's decision in *Og v. Thag* comes very, very close).

Unfortunately, one thing we cannot agree on is what television show to watch. I want to watch *Operation Runway* (a reality show about models in designer lingerie who do surgery on the catwalk); Baffley wants to watch *CSI/Law & Order Grudge Match* (the strangest concept for a wrestling show I have ever heard of). He insists upon watching *Monster Truck Hoarders* despite the fact that it is on at the same time as my favourite show this afternoon, *Grrrlz*. He doesn't understand why I adore *New Gorilla*; I don't understand why anybody watches anything by Aaron Sorkin. Our tastes appear to be irreconcilable.

For the last couple of months, we've had to wrestle for the remote. Literally. I have three inches and at least <mumble></mumble> pounds on Baffley, so our battle seems unfair, but he has a flying elbow flurry that sometimes catches me off guard, so he has been able to watch his share of shows.

In the interest of domestic harmony – and keeping our medical expenses down – we bought a pair of Remote Chance headsets. You know – the hardware that allows you to wirelessly control the TV set with your mind? What a disaster!

When we physically wrestled for control of the remote, it could take as much as five minutes before one of us gave in, which meant five minutes of watching what one of us wanted to watch. Out of the corner of our eye...while our attention was otherwise occupied, perhaps, but still. Now, the channels flip in seven elevenths of a second, making it impossible for either of us to follow anything.

Worse, after a couple of hours of trying to watch something, our hands start to shake uncontrollably, like we're having Lori Petty mal seizures. Not only that, but we've had to use enough tissues to staunch our bleeding noses to keep a small African village honking for a month!

Do you see any way that we can make this work?

“Ready” Betty Spaghetti

Hey, Babe,

Relationships ultimately rise or fall on the tide of respect and compromise. However, if you don't have respect and find it difficult to compromise, there is always software.

Open the Remote Chance's Out of Control Panel and look under the File > Initiate Destruct Sequence > Surprisingly Useful but Well Hidden Detritus menu. There, you will

find an Engage Random Determination. Double click with a triple axel on this function to turn it on. This will randomly assign the next 20 channel changes to one or the other of you and lock the other out for anywhere from 2 minutes to three hours and 27 seconds.

Of course, if either of you goes to Tools > You Certainly Are One If You Do This > Random Determination Override, you can break the other person's hold on the programme. Amritsar doesn't believe using the term "stupid" is ever helpful to resolving disputes among adults, so let's just say that this feature of the software was really, really, really dumb.

Oh, and be careful not to double click with a triple axel on Engage Random Destruct. You'd be surprised at how many television sets – not to mention marriages – have been destroyed by this really, really, **really**, really silly mix-up.

Dear Amritsar,

We tried to use the software you suggested. When he had control, Baffley kept switching the channel to *America's Dumbest Criminals' Bloopers, Bleepers, Blunders and Baseness*. Every single time. How am I supposed to deal with that?

"Ready" Betty Spaghetti

Hey, Babe,

Smoke him.

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### **Ask the Tech Answer Guy How to Get a Life After Life**

Yo, Tech Answer Guy,

When I die, what will become of my Get a Life avatar?

Sincerely,  
Nus from Nowhere

Yo, Nussie,

I think it's awesome that you are so concerned about what will happen to your avatar after you die. If more men took this kind of responsibility for their progeny, violent penguin inhalation crimes in virtual environments would be much less prevalent than they are now.

What will happen to your avatar depends on what you did with it before you died. If you weren't very active, your avatar might just stand in a corner, neglected for many years, getting shabbier and shabbier as system upgrades give the avatars of still living players better graphics. If you were very active, your avatar might wander aimlessly for many years, bumping into walls, pets (except for leashed orangutans), decorative typewriters, billboards advertising cures for bit rot, outdoor furniture (including leashed orangutans), 20 foot tall Pez dispensers and even other avatars, eventually becoming a source of amusement when other players temporarily took it over and made it dance.

If you flew a lot, your avatar could fly aimlessly for many years, becoming something of a ghostly legend in the sky. Pixel paintings of your avatar would start popping up in Zed's End of the World Alphabet World, Skrklon's Pjbandrksoin and other art galleries. An opera would be written about your character and performed (to much derisive Tweeaughter) by a troupe of virtual actors.

You might have thought that somebody would notice that you were no longer active and bring it to the attention of somebody else who could end your avatar's ghastly ghostly existence. A sys admin, perhaps, or Steven Moffat. Well, sure. You might have thought that. You might also have thought that marshmallow fang flakes with strawberry blood milk would be the perfect breakfast for today's vampire-obsessed tweens. You and Kellogg's both, pal. You and Kellogg's both.

The problem is that people often leave their avatars for days, weeks or months at a time to. That's life. As a sys admin, you'd hate to remove what appears to be an inactive character only to find out that the player had actually been studying his Talmud portion for his bar mitzvah for the past six months and, now that he was a man, had returned to take up his virtual dragon heckling activities. (Steven Moffat has never offered an opinion on the matter.)

When confronted with the bar mitzvah option, companies that produce virtual environments like Get a Life tend to err on the side of not pissing customers off.

Of course, your avatar isn't the only thing you need to think about. What will happen to the palace you built out of used tissue boxes? If left unattended for short periods of time, it will likely become the magnet for spray-painted political slogans, video tampon ads and other forms of unwelcome graffiti. If it looks like it's abandoned, squatters will hold raves. And, possibly rants. I...I'm not as in touch with youth culture as I probably should be. Obviously, this will drive the virtual value of your used tissue box palace way down.

You find similar things happen with pets in persistent online environments like Get a Life. And, believe me, there is nothing sadder in the virtual world than a schnauzer with a tampon ad projected on its side.

There is a solution to this problem. It might, at first, seem radical, but, the more you think about it and the more comfortable you get with it, the more you will see the merit in it. MAKE SOME FRIENDS IN GET A LIFE. You know, take an interest in the used tissue box palaces that other people are making. Talk to them a little (the people or the palaces – whichever answer more coherently). They don't bite. Unless it's that kind of environment.

When you know a group of people, you can make a pact where, if an avatar seems to have become aimless for a set amount of time, another member of the group can take it over. That way, you won't have to worry about strangers making your avatar dance.

Oh, and you might find that playing is more fun, too.

The Tech Answer Guy

*If you are a dude with a question about the latest technology, ask The Tech Answer Guy by sending it to [questions@lespagesauxfolles.ca](mailto:questions@lespagesauxfolles.ca). Just remember: cafes where you have to turn in your technology to spend a gadget-free hour with other people? Personally, I don't see the attraction. When the power grid collapses, we'll have all the time in the world to spend away from technology and with other people.*

### **Ask the Tech Answer Guy About the Meat of the Matter**

Yo, Tech Answer Guy,

For a number of years, now, I have been having these vivid nightmares about Steve McGarrett chasing down a serial killer: cholesterol. Towards the – the number, by the way, was 17. Towards the end of the dream, he corners the killer and gives the classic line: “eBook ‘em, Danno.” But, they get the wrong waxy steroid of fat! They arrest the good kind of cholesterol instead of the evil kind!

Ever since the dreams started, I have been...hesitant to barbecue red meat.

There was the time a couple of years back when I was forced to take over for my older brother, Trony (the n is silent), who had come down with a nasty case of roof rot just as the burgers needed to be flipped on the grill. The ensuing – a couple meaning seven. The ensuing events have come to be known throughout the family as “the chipotle incident.” Although everybody ultimately survived (although some would never be able to simultaneously walk and listen to the Beach Boys again) and all the charges were dropped, my problem with barbecuing was laid bare for everybody in the family to see. It was years – five – before I could show my face at another family gathering.

I was seriously considering turning in my tongs and “kiss the stupid, chef” apron when I read about this meat that was grown in vats – no actual cows were involved! The meat was created with extra vitamins **and low cholesterol!** Could it be true? Was artificial lab meat the solution to my barbecuing abashedness?

I had to break into Grummeau-Ceti Labs, the research wing of The Future Lies in Plastics, LLC, to find out because there were no plans to market the meat to the public. And, as I stood there with the test tube steak in my hands, alarm bells going off around me, I knew I had found the solution to my red meat timidity. I knew then and there that I could look the son I never had straight up the nose and say, “Come on, kid. We got us some barbecuing to do!”

This just leaves me with one problem. Should I cook the vat grown steaks with Hunt’s Bold BBQ sauce, or go straight for the Bull’s Eye Grilled Onion and Garlic Showdown?

Sincerely,  
Troy from Troy

Yo, Troy,

That’s saccri – saccharine – no, sacred legs – sacre...bleu – sacre bleu, that’s sacrilege! Not only that, but it’s just wrong!

Our ancestors used to slaughter living animals and smear themselves with the animal’s blood before roasting the gutted carcasses over an open fire. Okay, we’ve come a long way since then, and I recognize that Sunday afternoon football isn’t really a compensation for not smearing ourselves with the blood of our kill. Still, smearing yourself with agar from a Petri dish is even further away from our hunter/gatherer ancestors!

Let me put it this way: lab grown steaks taste of scientific hubris, and that’s not something that can be masked with even the strongest barbecue sauce!

Still not convinced? Chew on this: the Massachusetts Institution of Technology’s Digital Cuisine Programme recently conducted a blind taste test of cow-bred steak and test tube-bred steak. The result? Nine out of 10 participants wanted their sight back. When they were told that that wasn’t possible, six out of the nine hated the artificial meat. So, there you go.

Besides, the Tech Answer Guy prefers Grumpy’s Goodnight Loving Barbecue Sauce. Any regular reader would know that!

The Tech Answer Guy

Yo, Tech Answer Guy,

I...I don't know how to say this but...a friend of mine once offered me a piece of test tube created back bacon. I figured it would taste horrible and that would be the end of that little culinary experiment, but, instead, I liked it. I liked it a lot. Now, I've got a six rasher a day habit that I just can't break. Okay, honestly, I don't want to break. That's right: I now prefer back bacon grown in a test tube to the real thing.

Oh, Tech Answer Guy, is there any hope for me?

Sincerely,  
Troi from Troy

Yo, Troi,

You are, indeed, a lost soul. The next time I'm barbecuing out back, I shall pray for you.

The Tech Answer Guy

*If you are a dude with a question about the latest technology, ask The Tech Answer Guy by sending it to [questions@lespagesauxfolles.ca](mailto:questions@lespagesauxfolles.ca). Just remember: Just because you can make just about anything tasty if you soak it in the right marinade and cook it on a grill doesn't mean that you should.*

### **Ask the Tech Answer Guy When to Stop**

Yo, Tech Answer Guy,

I used to be a big fan of the I Heart *Star Blap: Several Generations Removed* discussion board. And, of course, if you're on that discussion board, you're inevitably going to have to take a position on The Two Captains, Plush and Pompous. Personally, I prefer Captain Jamison T. Pompous; Captain Juan Bolduc Plush always seemed to me to be better suited to being a waiter at a four star restaurant. Honestly, he could never hope to fill Captain Pompous' phaser holster. On this subject, reasonable people can disagree; fortunately, I'm unreasonable, so people with other opinions are wrong.

After a while, I noticed that the subject of the discussion drifted. After four days, it focused on the viability of sushi in space. A few days later, somebody wondered if First Mate Number One on *SB:SGR* was really just the equivalent of a native sidekick in a western. Several days after that, somebody wondered if Captain Plush was bald from cancer radiation therapy.

That's right: the discussion went from a wannabe to wasabe to kemo sabe to chemo sabe.

I stayed with it long after I lost interest in the discussion in the hope that it would return to what we were supposed to be talking about; I gave up when somebody brought up the Asian actor who was in *Batman Begins* and *Inception*. Is there a way of knowing when a

discussion thread is fatally off course? Because, frankly, life is too short to be concerned with the Asian actor who was in *Batman Begins* and *Inception*!

Sincerely,  
Polly Morphous from Pamplona

Yo, Polly,

Not unsubscribing to a discussion forum when it has stopped being interesting to you?  
That's just perverse!

I wracked my brains trying to come up with an answer to your question. Okay, I had an intern do a Google search (say hi to the people, Charunder – Hi, peo – okay, now where's that coffee I sent you to get 20 minutes ago?), but I thought long and hard about it. For five seconds. Did I mention somebody forgot to bring me the coffee I had asked for? Look: the important thing is that, like the vast, roiling ocean, the Internet provides: in this case, a formula for determining the likelihood of a discussion thread still being worth reading.

$$\left(\frac{a}{b} \div \frac{a}{c}\right) \times N_0 = \frac{x}{100}$$

WHERE:

a equals the number of people who have posted to the discussion thread

b equals the number of posts to the discussion thread

a still equals the number of people who have posted to the discussion thread

c equals the number of people who have subscribed to the discussion thread

N<sub>0</sub> equals zero if somebody has mentioned Nazis, one if nobody has yet mentioned Nazis

x equals the percentage likelihood that you will want to continue reading the discussion thread

This formula was first proposed by Sir Cuitous, who was revealed to be Bertrand Bigglesworth, who lives down the street from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and is very smart for a seven year-old (he almost made the cover of *Scientific American Teen Beat!*). No matter. This is just one part of the very exciting research on this subject (and, when I say very exciting, I mean mildly interesting when boiled down to one or two sentences and mocked with gentle irony).

The first part of the equation, a/b, shows how many people are posting relative to the number of posts. On the one hand, you don't want this to be a low number, since this inevitably involves a lot of rambling and can quickly degenerate into non-Carrollian nonsense. On the other hand, the more people who contribute to a discussion, the more likely it is to run off the rails relatively quickly. On the third hand, we're not Strelgian barckalowngers, so we'll have to be happy with the two hands we've got.

The second part of the equation,  $a/c$ , shows the number of people who are posting relative to the number of people who are paying attention. As Spengler pointed out in a recent article in *The Journal of Online Yentanness*, a large lurker population relative to the number of posters could be an indication that the discussion is highly entertaining, or it could mean that most people have stopped paying attention. If only we were Strelgian barckalowngers, we could entertain a third option; unfortunately, biology holds back the march of science!

According to Bigglesworth,  $N_0$  was inspired by some guy named Godwin. My intern couldn't confirm this – he was running an errand at the time – so feel free to ignore this part of the equation.

The higher the number, the more likely the discussion thread is worth reading. Or, the Estonian judge has been paid off. Or, the stock market is about to crash. Or, you're about to hit a plateau in your weight loss efforts. The best equations multi-task like that.

Of course, if you're really that concerned about not wasting your time, you could just stop following a thread when somebody posts something irrelevant to the discussion. But, that would require personal judgment, which is notoriously untrustworthy. Better to put your faith in mathematics.

The Tech Answer Guy

*If you are a dude with a question about the latest technology, ask The Tech Answer Guy by sending it to [questions@lespagesauxfolles.ca](mailto:questions@lespagesauxfolles.ca). Just remember: Ken Watanabe may be no Chow Yun-Fat, but, who among us is, really?*

*What the Hell Were You Thinking? Good Advice For People Who Make Bad Decisions*

### **The Cost/Benefit Analysis...Of Love: An Alternate Reality News Service Forum**

Last year's Alternate Reality News Service forum was so well-received that it took us three years to convene another one. This is a transcript of that.

#### **1. INTRODUCTIONS**

BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: Today's panel is made up of Amritsar, The Tech Answer Guy and the Biz Whiz.

LANGUAGE CORRECTOR DUDE: And, the Language Corrector Dude.

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: Sorry...did somebody say something?

LANGUAGE CORRECTOR DUDE: You forgot to mention me.

AMRITSAR AL-FALLOUDJIANAPOUR: I heard nary a peep.

TECH ANSWER GUY: Nope.

BIZ WHIZ: Why am I here?

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: To provide an economics point of view.

BIZ WHIZ: You mean to pander to a right wing audience.

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: You say potato, I say to pay a check.

BIZ WHIZ: (shrugs) It's your dime. Literally. I gotta learn how to be a tougher negotiator!

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: Okay. Let's start by giving a brief introduction of who we are. I'm Brenda Brundtland-Govanni, Editrix-in-Chief of the Alternate Reality News Service. My hobbies are recreational Jew Jitsu, pinning butterflies to boards...while they're still alive...and I'm supposed to be doing a presentation on the wonders of journalism to a grade seven classroom, and compiling a list of the most resonant slaps in history which I hope, one day, to turn into a *New York Times* bestselling toffee table book. Yummy! Going around the table, the next person should be –

LANGUAGE CORRECTOR DUDE: Me? I thought you couldn't hear anything I was –

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: No, let's go around the table in the other direction. We might avoid that annoying buzzing that way. You. Go.

AMRITSAR: Right. My name is Amritsar Al-Falloudjianapour. I've been an advice columnist for the Alternate Reality News Service for 17 years, now. Before that, I sold gourmet chocolate bars door to door to help fund research into a cure for diabetes. That may sound strange, but those were more innocent times – we fundraise electronically, now. (pause) I'm a three time winner of the Roger Maris Good Nature Award given by the Mystery Writer's Association of North America (and Ohio). Why is a complete mystery to me, so I suppose it there is a certain logic to it.

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: Thanks, Amritsar. That was almost enlightening. NEXT!

TECH ANSWER GUY: Yeah. Right. Okay, that would be me. My name is The Tech Answer Guy. On a good day, you can call me Bob. On a bad day, you better hide all your power tools, because, by the Mighty Miter Saw of Makita, I will make anybody who calls me before noon suffer. Uhh, so, yeah, you could say I'm not warm and fuzzy, but I'm here to give advice to other guys who aren't warm and fuzzy, so...uhh...yeah. What was the question, again?

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: Wow. So inarticulate. So accurate. NEXT!

BIZ WHIZ: I'm the Biz Whiz. I don't use my real name to make it easier for me to eat anonymously in restaurants. If you want my advice on what stocks to buy, pay for a copy of my latest book, *My Advice on What Stocks to Buy*, you cheap bastards. And, when I say "bastards," I am using the term in the way in which Adam Smith originally intended. Somebody has to keep the dream alive. I answer people's questions about how emerging technologies and money interact to create the world in which we live.

LANGUAGE CORRECTOR DUDE: I'm The Language Corrector Dude, and I –

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: Okay, now that we've gotten that bit of unpleasantness out of the way, we can move on to the serious unpleasantness of the day.

LANGUAGE CORRECTOR DUDE: Aww...

## 2. EXCEPT IF YOU POST REVIEWS ON *GODREADS*, AMRITSAR

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: Let's start with a softball question: are online relationships real?

BIZ WHIZ: Weeeelllll, when you spend 150,000 gold credits to buy your lady love a Scintillating Sword of Shanana in *Worlds of Warcraft*, it doesn't get any more real than that. You just better hope your lady love is really a – you know – lady.

TECH ANSWER GUY: That's why *Worlds of Warcraft* lets you customize your player profile with images.

BIZ WHIZ: Well, yes, but how do you know the image truly represents the player?

TECH ANSWER GUY: Because...uhh...in her profile, she describes doing...girly things...?

BIZ WHIZ: The person you're playing with could have cribbed that description from his daughter's Farcebook page.

TECH ANSWER GUY: (offended) I think I would know a woman when I encountered one!

BIZ WHIZ: You and Ray Davies both, pal. You and Ray Davies both.

Long pause.

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: There are a lot of issues to unpack, here...

AMRITSAR: Identity on the Internet? That's so 1990s, don't you think?

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: Aaaaand, apparently we're not going to get to any of them.

AMRITSAR: I mean, we get it already. On the Internet, nobody knows you're a god – the Internet works in mysterious ways. Most people have gotten over it. The only time it's an issue these days is when you meet the person you love online in real life and find out that the person you thought looked like Jenny McCarthy actually looks like Melissa McCarthy. Or, vice versa, if your taste runs in that direction. It takes all kinds in this world, and an advice columnist can't afford to judge...publicly...

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: So, Tech Answer Guy. You planning on meeting this woman?

TECH ANSWER GUY: Oh, I don't...uhh –

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: And, what do you think Misses The Tech Answer Guy would say about that?

TECH ANSWER GUY: I'm sure she'll have a lot to say about it, **now**...

AMRITSAR: Well, that certainly lowered the temperature in the room by several degrees!

LANGUAGE CORRECTOR DUDE: You can tell the gender of people by their choice of words, you know.

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: Is it possible that an insect has gotten into the room? We may have to get Pops Kahunga to fumigate the offices...again!

3. PITY THE CHILDREN...AFTER THEY'VE FINISHED PLAYING *MINE CRAFT*, *NOT YOURS*, OF COURSE...

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: Okay, let's talk about children.

TECH ANSWER GUY: HOW MANY TIMES I GOTTA TELL YA THAT THE KID AIN'T MINE?! EVERYBODY KNOWS I WOULD TAKE THE DAMN PATERNITY TEST IF I WASN'T SO ALLERGIC TO SHARP METAL OBJECTS!

Another long pause.

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: Umm...thank you for that. But, I actually wanted to ask how images of sex being easily available on the Internet has changed young people's attitudes towards their bodies and what they do with them.

BIZ WHIZ: There is no question that amateur porn on the Internet has put a serious crimp in the professional porn industry. For example, Playboy and Penthouse have had to

reinvent themselves online or risk facing irrelevance. And, you'd best believe that Vivid Video is hurting!

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: Un hunh. Yes. I see. And, what, exactly does this have to do with my question about children and sex?

BIZ WHIZ: Well, today's kids have to grow up with a completely different skill set because of it, don't they?

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: What do you mean?

BIZ WHIZ: Before the Internet, children had to steal their porn from corner store magazine racks, which helped them develop their manual dexterity. This, in turn, helped them get good paying jobs in factories when they were old enough. Today, children have to be able to rewrite the code on their computers in order to be able to bypass parental filters and access online porn. This could, in turn, help them get well paying jobs as computer programmers when they grow up. When you look at it, the change in the way youngsters get their porn is actually beneficial to their future earning potential.

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: Okay. Would somebody like to offer a different way of looking at it? (pause) Anybody at all? (pause) Amritsar? (pause) Please?

AMRITSAR: Children...children are little hedonist bastards. They're all about their own pleasure. Socialization is all about teaching them to delay their pleasures in order to become responsible adults. You know. Buy houses. Raise families. Complain about the vapidness of reality television while enjoying every second of it. That sort of thing.

BIZ WHIZ: Don't forget becoming productive economic actors for the duration of their working lives.

AMRITSAR: (withering) Sorry, but I find anything somebody says about economics that doesn't involve my pay check imminently forgettable.

TECH ANSWER GUY: Whoa! This is the first time I've ever seen a dude actually wither.

AMRITSAR: Oh, hush. You had your chance to answer this question.

LANGUAGE CORRECTOR DUDE: Good to see I'm not the only one being ignored, here.

AMRITSAR: And, no hissing, either!

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: What about the so-called "hook-up" culture? Surely, that's a new – and highly unwelcome – wrinkle in youth sexuality that needs to be ironed out.

BIZ WHIZ: (confused) Don't children have to be hooked up if they want to communicate with each other over the Internet?

AMRITSAR: Brenda, can we have a moment, please?

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: Whatever.

Whispers.

BIZ WHIZ: What? (pause) Are you ser – really? (pause) WITH A DIGITAL MELON?

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: Done?

BIZ WHIZ: (dark) I am never having girl children. Only boys. I'm not sure how to make that work within the teachings of my Catholic faith, but I **will** find a way!

AMRITSAR: I have dealt with this subject many times, which you would know if you had read my columns.

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: What, and deprive Harunder and Gareet of meaningful employment?

AMRITSAR: Parents need to discuss sex with their children.

BIZ WHIZ: But, wouldn't that mean that the parents would have to understand it first?

AMRITSAR: Did I say the world was fair?

#### 4. BECAUSE OUR AWKWARDNESS GOES TO ELEVEN

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: Thanks to Jian Ghomeshi, a national conversation about sexual harassment in the workplace has been started. Does the panel think that that's a good thing?

Yet another long pause. Honestly, this forum would have been over in 15 minutes if there hadn't been so many awkward pauses. Not to mention the breaks for comments about unidentifiable noises...

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: Anybody want to take a stab at it? Anybody at all?

AMRITSAR: Uhh, Brenda, it's a little...surprising to hear that question coming from you.

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: Why would you say that?

AMRITSAR: Your management methods are...unorthodox.

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: What are you trying to say?

AMRITSAR: Umm...

BIZ WHIZ: Well, I, for one, think that whatever a manager does to motivate his staff is nobody's business as long as he is increasing shareholder value.

AMRITSAR: Pfft! You probably thought Attila the Hun was a great manager.

BIZ WHIZ: Attila the Hun was a **brilliant** manager! Have you never read *The 27 Management Secrets of Attila the Hun*?

TECH ANSWER GUY: Seems to me – and, I don't mean to step on anybody's toes, here – or other body parts, for that matter – that this could open up a lot of people's eyes to the fact that sexual harassment isn't primarily about sex. It's about power. If that happens, maybe we can finally address the root problem and change it.

Yet another long pause, but, given that it was full of surprise and wonder, this one was actually justified, so let's let it pass uncommented upon.

TECH ANSWER GUY: But, what do I know? I could be wrong.

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: That...was...unexpectedly insightful.

AMRITSAR: That...was...awesome!

BIZ WHIZ: That...was...the worst rationale for government intervention in the sacred relationship between employer and employee that I've heard since the crash of '29!

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: (shrugs) I said that a conversation had been started. I didn't say everything in the conversation would be worth listening to...

## 5. FINAL THOUGHTS (WE CAN AFFORD TO BE CHARITABLE NOW THAT THE FORUM IS ALMOST OVER)

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: Any last thoughts?

TECH ANSWER GUY: I really love my wife.

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: Nobody doubted that.

TECH ANSWER GUY: No, I mean, I **really** love my wife.

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: Nobody said you didn't.

TECH ANSWER GUY: It's important to me that my wife knows that **I really love her!**  
I...I can't always say it with such articulacity.

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: Good sentiment. Gotta work on your timing. Amritsar?

AMRITSAR: The world is a vast, complicated place. Wear galoshes.

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: What if it's not raining?

AMRITSAR: Even if it isn't raining on the street, it's always raining in a piece of your heart...

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: Sorry, but I'm profundity impaired. Biz Whiz – last thoughts?

BIZ WHIZ: It's true that money cannot buy you everything. Still, that's why the good Lord, in his infinite mercy, created the Cayman Islands.

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: Right.. And, so ends another Alternate Reality News Service forum. I'd like to thank –

LANGUAGE CORRECTOR DUDE: It's a shame nobody could hear me, because –

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: Oh! Language Corrector Dude! Have you been sitting there the whole time?

LANGUAGE CORRECTOR DUDE: You...you can hear me?

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: Of course I can hear you – you're sitting right next to me! I'm not deaf, you know!

LANGUAGE CORRECTOR DUDE: But...

BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI: Why didn't you say anything? I'm sure your input on the panel would have been invaluable!

LANGUAGE CORRECTOR DUDE:  
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAARRRRRRRGGGGHHHHHH!

This forum was edited for purposes of clarity, asperity and avoiding lawsuits.

**Ask The Tech Answer Guy About Renting The Space Between Your Ears**

Yo, Tech Answer Guy,

Men in my family have a hard time with hair. We go more or less directly from the baldness of birth to the baldness of old age; any hair our heads may sport in between seems to be a confusing accident. A light-coloured, wispy confusing accident. To be sure, it saves us money on unclogging drains, but the downside is that my forehead's size lies somewhere between a normal human being and a hyperintelligent original series *Star Blap* alien.

Naturally, I found a way to monetize this.

I got a digital tattoo across my forehead. When I'm alone, I watch my favourite TV shows on it. I have a mirror attachment for my skull. You'd be surprised how quickly you learn to read words that are backwards.

When I'm out with friends, my tattoo displays advertising based on their interests. So, for instance, when I used to have lunch with my friend Oscarina, the ad on my forehead would be for tampons and deodorant sprays. Hmm...I haven't seen her in a while. I should really call her and see what she's doing.

Or, to use another example, when I used to go clubbing with my friend Flapjack McSnaredoodle (what can I say? It was the sixties...), my forehead would light up with advertisements about bail bondsmen and criminal attorneys. I thought it was some kind of glitch in the system, until Flapjack was arrested for selling unlicensed hair removal creams to bored suburban housewives. Who knew? Flapjack is kept really busy in prison, and never seems to have time for a visit, but he should be out in 30 years with good behaviour, so maybe I'll see him then.

When my former friends Pete and Meredith invited me on a double date with a woman named Guernica, my forehead flashed divorce attorney ads at them all night. Now, neither one will speak to me, but, honestly, their marriage must have been on the rocks long before that night, right? Talk about shooting the messenger! Oh, and the thing with Guernica didn't work out either: apparently the Lablah Pale and Scaled Ice Ale ads my tattoo arranged for her conflicted with her AA teachings.

So, all in all, the deal was working out well. Or, so I thought. International Harvester and Reaper, the company that books the ads for my forehead, has decided to void our contract. Can you believe that? They say I don't have enough of an audience for their ads to cover their administrative costs, let alone turn a profit! I thought I was doing okay, but apparently the Nielsen ratings never lie.

What should I do?

Sincerely,  
Jean-Raul from Geneva

Yo, Jeanny,

The way I see it, you got three options.

ONE: Abandon advertising and rent out your forehead to visual artists looking to expand the audience for their works. Of course, if you're walking down the street with a drip painting on your forehead, some people walking in the opposite direction may suffer from vertigo, but the odds of you being labelled a public health hazard aren't that high.

TWO: You know how some men have trouble proposing to their girlfriends? Yeah, me neither. (Misses The Tech Answer Guy did all the heavy lifting early in our relationship. Given what actuaries tell us, the early part of our relationship will last for another seven and three quarters years – phew!) Still, I hear it happens. You could rent out your forehead to send messages of love for shy suitors (sort of like the way they do it at sports stadiums, but without the overpriced beer and arguments about where to park). And, the beauty part is that if you pretend to be delivering a pizza or fixing broken pipes, you may not be arrested for perving on a perfect stranger!

THREE: I'd like to throw an idea out there and see if it strikes a spinal cord with you. Could it be – hypodermically speaking – that International Harvester and Reaper isn't very good at matching ads to the people you're with? Perhaps you should be looking for an advertising company that won't, you know, alienate all of your friends? Just a thought.

The Tech Answer Guy

*If you are a dude with a question about the latest technology, ask The Tech Answer Guy by sending it to [questions@lespagesauxfolles.ca](mailto:questions@lespagesauxfolles.ca). Just remember: You're having trouble with the fact that the new Miss America, Nina Davuluri, is of Indian descent? Really? What are you gonna do when a Ventrosian Squiggle-American wins? And, can I get video of your head exploding when she does?*

### **Ask the Tech Answer Guy About the Magic of Science**

Yo, Tech Answer Guy,

I was talking to my neighbour, Fred, over our fence (I've gotten quite good at avoiding the barbed wire) about the best way to cook dinosaur. I told him that archeological evidence suggested that when our ancestors cooked brontosaurus...es, they slathered the ribs in sauce. Fred insisted that they ground the dino meat up and served it as burgers. In those days, potatoes were the size of Buicks, so mashing one could provide the side for a clan of 20 people. But, bronto burgers? Really? I laughed and told Fred to get real, that he had watched too many cartoons, that bronto burgers on the prehistoric menu was as likely as anthropogenic climate change!

Then, the strangest thing happened.

A guy I had never seen before in my life walked up to me and said in an impressively commanding voice, "Give me your keys."

I reflexively reached into my pocket, but stopped myself before I pulled out my keychain. “Hey, wait a minute,” I said. “That’s an impressively commanding voice you’ve got there, bub, but I’ve never seen you before in my life. Why should I give you my keys?”

The stranger pointed to a cap he was wearing with a badge on it. “Science Police,” he told me. “You wanna disparage science, that’s your business, pal. But, if you do, you’re not allowed to enjoy the fruits of science.”

“Waddya mean?” I challenged him.

“You know who built the car that you drive?”

“No.”

“Science built it, that’s who. And, who made the oven your wife cooks your meals in?”

“Haven’t a clue.”

“Science, buddy. The flat screen TV, the computer you watch porn on – naah, don’t tryna deny it, it’s written all over your sorry mug – the air conditioner that keeps you from frying in the summer – they were all made possible by science. If you don’t believe in science, you can’t believe in any of them. So, as a duly deputized agent of the Science Police, it is my sworn duty to confiscate objects that, for you, shouldn’t exist.”

“Yeah, yeah. Listen, pal, I wasn’t born yesterday! Lemme see some credentials!” I insisted.

“Are these credentials enough for you?” He pointed to his back, out of which grew the most exquisite pair of wings I had ever seen. Sheer, shimmering things of beauty, they were. “Genetic engineering,” he explained. “When you believe in science, anything is possible, friend. So, hand ’em over.”

I couldn’t argue with the wings, so I put my keys in his outstretched hand. That was three days ago. My car is gone and my house has been cleaned out of all of its appliances, much of its furniture and my dog Saint Hughie. And, I really liked that dog. My wife wouldn’t stop yapping about how much we lost, but she hadn’t gotten her peepers on those wings, boy.

You think losing all this property is enough to put me in Dutch with the Science Police, or are they gonna come and arrest me?

Sincerely,  
Bob from Butte

Yo, Bobbo,

Ain't no easy way to break this to you, kiddo, so I'll just come out and say it: you wuz robbed.

They're a gang known as the Queen Street Fairy Science Police, see? They hang around public places in religious communities around the city and wait for somebody to say something anti-science. Then, out come the wings, on go the caps and before you know it all your worldly possessions of any value are gone.

They work on the assumption that anybody who doesn't understand how science actually works will easily believe that there is such a thing as a science police force. Good assumption. The wings are a distraction, but, judging from reports on the activity of the criminals, a very effective one.

The Science Police have been spotted in major cities across North America. They ain't never been caught; nobody knows who they are. The wings could be part of a costume, or genetically engineered, like the one you encountered sez, or a sign that they come from a universe where magic is an organizing principle. I'd like to believe in the last possibility, but I'm just an irony-loving bastard that way.

The Tech Answer Guy

*If you are a dude with a question about the latest technology, ask The Tech Answer Guy by sending it to [questions@lespagesauxfolles.ca](mailto:questions@lespagesauxfolles.ca). Just remember: You wouldn't know it to look at his half guzzled six pack, but The Tech Answer Guy is a sensitive soul. Really. So, if you force him to give you bad news, expect no sugar-coating. That's what you get for putting him through such suffering!*

### **Ask The Tech Answer Guy – Aww, Forget About It!**

Yo, Tech Answer Guy,

I'm not vain. Okay, my license plate reads: Vanity2 (I think some rock star beat me to number one – bastard). Yes, I had my initials tattooed on the back of the necks of my children – purely as a safety measure! Then, there was the incident with the sand blaster and the giraffe – okay, I may be a little vain. But, you don't have to be vain to do a Google search on your own name – everybody does it.

Imagine my surprise when I didn't find myself. There was nothing there. Nada. A Nietzschean abyss, with nothing looking back.

Now, I'm no celebrity (as my wife keeps reminding me – really – she had stationery printed up with that motto), but I have done things in the past that have gotten the Internet's attention. There was the time my grade school chess club went to the regional semi-finals (the eight year-old bastards at Malcolm Muggeridge Primary cheated, I'm sure of it!). There was the time I was caught Driving Under the Influence of Ska (damn

musical profiling!). Hell, there was even the time I distributed brownies to inmates of the Aunt Mae Old Folks Home and Superhero Hangout – how was I supposed to know that the “special ingredient” in them wasn’t nutmeg? It’s not like I’d be caught dead in a kitchen!

How can this happen?

Sincerely,  
Awful Leo Otto from Oshawa

Yo, Sir AwfuLOt,

There’s a French term, *le droit a l’oubli*. Since I don’t speak French (the Macho Code of Manliness forbids it – I wonder how French men cope with that...uhh, best not to question the MCM), I put the phrase through some Internet translation devices, and got “*derecho al olvido*,” “*rätt till glömska*” and “*recht auf vergessen*.” Since I don’t speak these languages, either, this was of limited use to me.

Instead, I decided to use French to English translation programmes. When I did, I got the following responses: “the right to be forgotten,” “the right to oblivion” and “the essence of meerkat stampeding.” I’m thinking this last one is an outlier, so let’s go with the right to be forgotten.

Now, that may not sound like a serious right. It certainly cannot be as important as the right to a steady stream of brewskies while watching hockey on Saturday night, or the right to rev your brand new V-8 engine at two in the morning – sometimes, a lion has to let out a mighty roar to show everybody else just who is king of the jungle. But, you know, people will claim the darndest things as rights

Turns out, the European Court of Justice ruled that people have a right not to have inadequate, irrelevant or no longer relevant information about them stay forever on the Internet. Okay, you and I may feel that *le droit de la brewski* is more important, but until it is upheld by the Supreme Court of Canada, *le droit a l’oubli* is the only one that has the force of law.

What does this have to do with you? I did a little digging. It turns out that Artemis Smedley – remember him? Teeth like a Godzilla-sized beaver? Hair like an oil slick? – is a successful lawyer with Bingham Gingham Gingrich and Subwoofer, and he felt that information that he was part of a losing chess team when he was a kid would make him the laughingstock at the Pedantic Penguin. So, he asked to have that information removed from the Internet, and it was.

Judge Deedee Dee, who presided over your DUIS case, asked that all mention of all of her rulings for a period of three years be removed from the Internet because “I was not in a good headspace at that time, and some of the decisions I made are...embarrassing.” The estate of Harrison Bergeron, one of the people who ate the brownies you distributed at the

old age home asked that all mention of that incident be removed from the Internet: “This may give the erroneous impression that Mister Bergeron was a drug addict, and, in any case, he was too blitzed on Percocet to know what he was doing when he ate that brownie!”

I’m sure all other mentions of you on the Internet are gone for the same reason. You appear to be the innocent victim of a drive-by forgetting. I’m afraid that, until legal theory changes (and, if they hadn’t all been melted by global climate change, I would be able to use a glacier metaphor here for the speed of **that**), there’s not much you can do about it.

If it’s any consolation, you’ll be starting a new Internet footprint when this article is published. At least, until one of the people who complained about previous digital information about them complains about this. Enjoy finding yourself on Google while you can.

The Tech Answer Guy

*If you are a dude with a question about the latest technology, ask The Tech Answer Guy by sending it to [questions@lespagesauxfolles.ca](mailto:questions@lespagesauxfolles.ca). Just remember: Uhh....something.*

### **Ask Amritsar About the Sex in Your Rearview Mirror**

Dear Amritsar,

I was walking down the street, minding my own business, wondering if big American telecoms will ever get a fair shake in the small Canadian market, when I saw an advertisement for Duff’s Linear Accelerator. A naked woman and naked man were draped over the hardware, stroking it suggestively, while the copy said: “Let the mysteries of the particle physics seduce you.”

Really? Yuck!

The more I looked around, the more it seemed like sex was everywhere around me. A billboard for Canada’s Action Plan winked at me. I’m not sure how that’s even possible, considering that it didn’t feature any human faces. The more I looked at the spray of colour in the front window display of H. R. Paint ‘N’ Stuf, the more figures in various carnal positions suggested themselves to me. And, I’m from Windsor!

A couple in fashionable dishabille (the clothes they were almost wearing were by Gucci and Armani, among others) was making out on a bus stop bench. Three people were pawing each other in front of my favourite Tex-Lex restaurant – I...I don’t think I’ll ever be able to look a plate of deep-fried plum spare ribs in the eye again! There was a veritable orgy outside an Apple store, which was completely ridiculous considering the new tablet computer won’t be released for another three weeks!

I'm not a prude; at worst, my friends, family and radial orthodontist say I have "prudish tendencies." Still. Is our society really as sexually depraved as it looks?

Viva Villanova

Hey, Babe,

Have you ever had the feeling that the world you see is not the world as it really is? You could just be having a psychotic break from reality. Or, you could be a victim of over-complicated technology.

It sounds like your Augmented Reality Spex (only \$12.95 from the company that advertises in the backs of comic books) have been turned to the "Objects Projected Onto Retina May Appear Raunchier than in Real Life" setting. This is most definitely **not**, the company that advertises in the backs of comic books assures us, the factory preset; that is usually either "Tourist in my own City" or "Terminator," depending upon the whim of the person in shipping who sends out the Augmented Reality Spex.

Changing the settings on your Augmented Reality Spex is simple enough. Plug the male end of the cable into the slot in the frame over the right lens. Plug the other male end of the cable into the SUB (named after the hardware designer's favourite late night designing session snack) port on your computer. Click on > Windows Explorer then > Alfred E. Neuman then > Settings. A box will pop up asking, "Do you really want to mess about with the programme? Because, you know, our programmer, Yuri, really put a lot of effort into this. You really think that you know better than Yuri?" Click on "Yes, I want to break Yuri's heart." From the menu that pops up, choose > Settings Again then > Startup then > Golf Pro. A box will pop up that asks, "Golf pro? Really? What's your handicap?" Any answer higher than four will open a Web browser with a Google search on Arnold Palmer, so enter a number less than four. Three is good. This will open a drop-down menu with a variety of augmented reality options, including "Literary Adventure," "Historical Walkabout" and "Tutti Frutti." If you want to know more about your choices, close all of this and in Help do a search on "fragmented rotary ice capades." This will take you to a page that has descriptions of the various settings. Then, go through the whole rigmarole from the beginning.

Or, you could just send your Augmented Reality Spex back to the company that advertises in the backs of comic books and ask them to change the settings for you. Yes. That would probably be the easiest way to do this. And, it only costs \$37.95.

Reports of over-sexed Augmented Reality Spex have increased in the last couple of years. The only connection between the cases seems to be that the people they happened to owned a calico cat and were wearing angora sweaters at the time of the incident. Nobody knows how these things are related. But, people who do not love cats have their suspicions. Boy, do they have serious suspicions...

*Send your relationship problems to the Alternate Reality News Service's sex, love and technology columnist at [questions@lespagesauxfolles.ca](mailto:questions@lespagesauxfolles.ca). Amritsar Al-Falloudjianapour is not a trained therapist, but she does know a lot of stuff. AMRITSAR SAYS: if you don't own a calico cat and/or an angora sweater, the problem may be with your augmented reality brain. Unfortunately, problems of that nature are beyond Amritsar's area of expertise. Or, patience.*

### **Ask Amritsar To Not Get Catty**

Dear Amritsar,

As a member of Borenstein Mencken Rottweiler Astroturf Gretch, I was part of the legal team that put together the merger between American Street Dingus and the North Korean company Daisutsaomonovanecki. Yes, the merger did ultimately bankrupt both companies, but lawyers are first in line in any receivership proceedings, so my firm didn't suffer, and, in any case, the whole reason I bring it up is to help you understand that I am a busy woman who wants a relationship with a man, but I want him to be there when I want and to leave me alone when I need to work.

Unfortunately, under their tough, nicely buffed exteriors, men are so needy. Bill Fouldes wanted me to validate his negative feelings about his mother – not to mention his parking. Dietrich Biggles-Smalles wanted constant reminders that he was smarter than I was, which became increasingly difficult because he wasn't. Bertie Noumnoums wanted his toast done on all sides in twelve dimensional space **and** his hard-boiled eggs shaken, not stirred.

After a while, you realize that you don't want a man, you want a cat. I have three: Princess Potty, Erik the Red (With White Spots and Brown Ears) and Eliza Dolessthanlittle. After another while (which can be shorter or longer depending upon your tolerance for bleu cheese), though, you realize that cats can only do so much for you, and you really do need a man after all.

Bastard biology.

So, I started dating Victor Flamenco, who, being a professional cross-country jai alai player, was both very physically fit and not very bright. But, I wasn't taking chances, so, on the first night we spent together, I spliced a little DNA I had taken from my cats onto his genes. Not to help his night vision or sense of direction, you understand, but to help me get my work done in peace.

It worked well, too. For the first couple of months, after we made love, Victor left my house to prowl the neighbourhood, often not returning for a day or two. I had my boy toy and my career – life was good! Then, without warning, the relationship fell from a seventh floor apartment window and didn't land on its well padded feet.

One night we were in front of The Bar (not the lawyers' association, but one of an increasing number of generic drinking establishments – I originally wanted to go to The Pub, but the wait for a table was too long) when, without warning, Victor sat on the sidewalk, raised one leg and started licking the crotch of his pants. I didn't know that was physically possible! When people stopped to stare, I told them he was Belgian. When he was done, we were given a table...next to the doors of the kitchen, a *cordon sanitaire* of empty tables around us.

Wait. It gets worse. He won't eat anything but fish, and, even then, half of the time he'll turn up his nose and walk away from the dinner table without saying a word. After a couple of months of this, we had a terrible argument because I wanted something – anything else to eat. The next morning, I found a...present in one of my shoes in the closet. Victor insisted he didn't know anything about it. But, it was bigger than the...gift that one of my cats could have left, even Eliza Dolessthanlittle, who has beyond irritable bowel syndrome, and, in any case, the closet door was firmly closed, so, unless they have opposable thumbs, my cats could not have possibly left it for me.

I have tried to end the relationship, but Victor always finds a window that allows him to jump back into my house. Once, when I made sure all of the windows were locked, he crawled under the porch and howled until I had no choice but to let him in.

I can't have Victor fixed and I can't have him put down – what can I do?

Gwendolyn Shmolniak

Hey, Babe,

Were you raised by wolves? On the Internet?

Dear Amritsar,

As a matter of fact, I was. Yes, yes, I was raised by wolves on the Internet.

Gwendolyn (But You Can Call Me Gwen Now That We Know Each Other a Little Better)  
Shmolniak

Hey, Babe,

If aloof men are really that important to you, move to Iceland. The men there are so aloof, you would swear they were trees!

*Send your relationship problems to the Alternate Reality News Service's sex, love and technology columnist at [questions@lespagesauxfolles.ca](mailto:questions@lespagesauxfolles.ca). Amritsar Al-Falloudjianapour is not a trained therapist, but she does know a lot of stuff. AMRITSAR SAYS: Some of them are tall and majestic, like mighty redwoods. Some of them are short and stubby, like*

*Japanese maples or crape myrtles – no, crape. CRAPE! WITH AN E! Look, all I'm trying to say is that it takes all kinds to make an arboreal world. And, you can find them in Iceland. Yes – \* SIGH \* – even if your name isn't Myrtle.*

### **Ask Amritsar About a Safe Following Distance**

Dear Amritsar,

Yesterday, I did something really – hey, our names are almost the same! If we were playing Scrabble, you'd just have to drop a tile under the table and rearrange the rest and there you'd go! (Too bad proper nouns aren't allowed – although house rules in our house allow improper nouns.) It's a small world, isn't it?

Anyway. As I was saying, yesterday I did something really stupid. As a result, some clown started following me. When I logged on to Facebook to see if my sister's garden gnome had given birth to a puppy (it's a family tradition), he was there. When I logged on to ChainLinked to respond to an ignorant post about the proper storage of weasel chow, he was there. When I logged on to Tackometer to tack pictures of my cat teaching my three year-old how to play piano (so adorable, with just a hint of attention-getting desperation!) on my virtual corkboard, he was there.

He was everywhere! Whenever I checked my email, his dumb face was there grinning at me. When I posted to Twitherd, his sponsored tweeps were always at the top of my feed. It's like he knows where I'm going to go before I know it myself, like he's one step ahead of me all of the time, like Christmas, 1911 without the cranberry sauce! (Sorry, long, irrelevant family story.)

I know it's my own fault for clicking on the ad on the Imaginary Movie Database for Sergeant Striver's Chicken Fried Candy Apples, but I couldn't help it! They looked so delicious, with the special recipe of 17 chemicals and additives dripping off the succulent fruit, and they had a special coupon. Now, whenever I go anywhere online, I can't avoid Raul McDowell, Sergeant Shriver's clown mascot. On the Scale of Clown Evil, he's not as bad as Pennywise, but he's worse than Bozo, which is still plenty creepy.

How can I get this to stop?

Maritsa

Hey, Babe,

People who eat something as disgusting as chicken fried candy apples don't deserve whatever they get, but it's a close thing. A very close thing, indeed. I try not to judge, but, in your case, I have to admit that the only reason I'm answering your question is the hope that it will save others from your fate. And, maybe, make them reconsider their diet.

Sophisticated computer algorithms now not only track your every movement on the Internet, but use that information to figure out what advertising is most likely to get you to buy things you don't want, can't afford and are bad for your figure. As long as you don't click on an ad, they will rotate as the programme tries to figure out what works and what doesn't. As soon as you click on an ad, though, well, you may as well put flares around your bank account and say, "Take me, big boy. I'm yours!"

You might think that there would be software to address this issue, but it usually gets gobbled up by an ad producing company before completed (read "Seven Lessons Pac-Man Can Teach C Suiters" by The Biz Whiz for more on this undoubtedly fascinating for some people subject). For instance, AdMonishment (led by CEO Phillipe Monishment), a company doing research into ways to feed ad tracker programmes false information, was bought out by AdHawk, a coalition of advertising companies. So, no luck there.

The simplest way of dealing with the problem would be to look for a replacement ad that follows you everywhere online that is more acceptable to you. I would suggest clicking on an ad for porcelain card playing dogs, but you have already revealed yourself to be a cat person. (That's another strike against you, but helping others, Amritsar – focus on what's really important, here.) You might want to look for an ad for a firemen calendar; it won't stop the ads, but there's something about seeing a ripped young man without a shirt on carrying an axe that just ooooooooooh!

The lesson should be clear: don't click on online ads unless you want them to follow you everywhere, like a puppy. A puppy with its paws in your pocket sucking every dollar it can out of you. Unless you're a cat person, in which case who knows if you even have the capacity to learn from other people's mistakes?

*Send your relationship problems to the Alternate Reality News Service's sex, love and technology columnist at [questions@lespagesauxfolles.ca](mailto:questions@lespagesauxfolles.ca). Amritsar Al-Falloudjianapour is not a trained therapist, but she does know a lot of stuff. AMRITSAR SAYS: Samara, Starrim, Ramstar – Amritsar has heard all of the possible variations on her name, and most of the impossible ones! So, if you're trying to butter her up with a phonetic coincidence, don't bother. Besides, Amritsar is not a fan of Scrabble – she's been a Clue girl ever since she saw the movie in her youth. Okay, her late youth, but the fact remains.*

### **Quiz the Biz Whiz About Schrodinger's Team Building Exercise**

Dear Mister Whiz:

I'm a Junior Vice President for the formerly ethical investing firm of Pupkin Fufkin Gherkin Fife. (When our returns during the 2008 Fukushima level correction were only 17 per cent of the other New York investment houses, the board fired everybody in senior management and changed the direction of the company. Now, we buy and sell derivatives so complex Deep Blue couldn't figure out what they were, and it assured us that it wasn't calculating methods of replacing Alex Trebek while it tried! Just another Wall Street success story, I guess.)

The new managers decided to hold a team building exercise by commissioning the creation of a mystery room. The first mystery to be solved was where, exactly, the room was; it took them three months to find it on a corner in St. John(')s, PEI. Once that was accomplished, seven senior executives (including the CEO, CFO and head of Janitorial Services) entered the room for what was supposed to be a two hour event.

That was three and a half weeks ago.

Those of us who remain do not have the authority to enter the room ourselves, and wouldn't even if we did since we were chosen for our lack of initiative (the walls of our competitors' offices have been splattered with the blood of more than one executive who challenged a senior manager to a headbutting contest). Unfortunately, senior management left no instructions for what to do in this situation.

What should we do in this situation?

The Biz Whiz:

Everything should be fine as long as you don't press the red button on the side of the room.

Dear Mister Whiz:

I didn't even know there was a red button on the side of the room. Oh, you're right – there it is. What is the red button for?

The Biz Whiz:

Ah. That's the button that may or may not release a poison gas into the room depending on the calculation of a random number. If the poison gas is released, it will kill everybody in the room; otherwise, they will be fine. This is corporate America's version of Erwin Schrodinger's famous thought experiment. As long as you don't open the door, the executives are both dead and alive, a unique state sometimes referred to as "quantum management."

The fact that this has gone on for three weeks complicates matters. It is possible that some of the executives have...gastronomically liberated the potential energy of the others. In this case, the number of potential survivors in the room is seven to the power of...a lot. You could feel free to refer to this as "fuzzy quantum management," or, at least, you could before I trademarked the phrase. Now, it'll cost you. We could, of course, create a quantum array in order to map all of the possible combinations of living and dead, or we could pointlessly speculate on the power relationships between the people in the room.

Do some of the executives strike you as more culinarily likely than others?

Dear Mister Whiz:

Well, Agronium Pifflethwaite seemed like a very unlikeable person in the brief time that I worked with him. If I understand you correctly (and, frankly, I kind of hope I don't), he would be a likely candidate for...you know. He's a small guy with not a lot of meat on his bones, though, so I'm not sure he would be the best candidate for...I'd rather not think about it.

In any case, that doesn't really address my problem: should I do anything about the situation?

The Biz Whiz:

If you're the sort of person who isn't good with uncertainty, you can open the door and find out what's going on in the room. If the team is still building, you may or may not be fired – quantum uncertainty seems to permeate businesses at every level of organization. Perhaps the most important question is: how is the company doing in the absence of your senior executives?

Dear Mister Whiz:

Quite well, actually. Short term earnings are up and our clients seem quite pleased with us.

The Biz Whiz:

In that case, you might want to give your executives another few weeks to sort things out themselves.

*The economy is too important to be left to economists! If you have a work, financial or otherwise money-centric question, quiz the Biz Whiz at [questions@lespagesauxfolles.ca](mailto:questions@lespagesauxfolles.ca). For those of you who have come late to the party (sorry that the crab cakes have all been eaten and the champagne is somewhat flat), a mystery room is an area that is constructed with built-in puzzles that lead to the solving of a mystery (often how the hell to get out of the room). If you didn't know that, this whole article would probably have been all Greek derivative formulae to you. Sorry about that.*

*Futures In Mirror Are Closer Than They Appear*

**State of the Art: Not Everybody Gets a HUG™**

by BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI, Alternate Reality News Service Editrix-in-Chief

Did you know that in Holland, every alternate reality shown by a Home Universe Generator™ involves tulips? Tulips win sports tournaments. Tulips run the government. Your wife is cheating on you with tulips. People use tulips to floss with. Tulips are the second most used construction material after sealskin. Tulips wrote three of the five best-selling science fiction books in the country. The battleships of Holland's navy run on tulips. Not all in the same universe, obviously – that would just be silly.

In Mexico City, beggars pool their pennies to buy precious minutes on Home Universe Generator™s to see where the most generous tourists will be that day, then race each other to get to that spot (honestly, I don't understand why legless beggars in carts participate!). The Brazilian *telenovela* industry has been devastated by people watching the soap operas of their neighbour's lives on Home Universe Generator™s instead of the soap operas about well-endowed but morally questionable strangers. In the Arctic, Home Universe Generator™s are run by burning snow.

It's a world out there, people! A big one! With a lot of moving parts – some of them human beings. So, it will be complicated. And...and...and...

And, that's what this special report is all about.

Unless you live under a rock (and, housing prices being what they are, nobody would blame you, although, human beings being what they are, we will still judge you), you probably know that Home Universe Generator™s are what people use to look into life in alternate universes. Personally, I'd rather have all of my teeth removed by a wrecking ball – one at a time – than watch myself in some other reality – this reality has more than enough greed and stupidity for me, thank you very much. In fact, my perfect technology would be a combination vibrator/coffee maker/atomic powered slapping glove/random newspaper article generator. Is that really so much to ask for? Apparently. One more item to add to my list of things to do when I run the world.

The Home Universe Generator™ is one of the fastest spreading technologies in the world – only the electric can opener and fire spread faster (and historian of technology Harold Innis believed that the only reason the electric can opener was disseminated so quickly was because it pleased our cat overloads). There are now more Home Universe Generator™s in households around the world than there are heated ski poles, personality chip implanted plant holders and Pez dispensers.

And, who doesn't love a good personality chip implanted plant holder?

However, the benefits of Home Universe Generator™s have not been distributed evenly (sort of like Christmas pudding, but without the anxiety-inducing false bonhomie). Those who are wealthy can afford top of the line, twelve speed Home Universe Generator™s with split 1080P screens and real oak cabinets, while those who are less well off have to settle for a single speed with cracked screens housed in a cardboard box. If they are able to afford one at all.

Researchers refer to this as “the Multiverse Manichean Moat.” Those who – Jesus bejesus, could you have called it anything less catchy? Was Theoretical Transdimensional Transformational Transduction Tentpole already taken? You want the public to take their attention away from watching a universe where they are actually paid what their labour is worth, you have to give them a slogan that trips off the tongue, not lays there like an unidentified blob of goo that will obstruct their air passages and cause them to pass out! Didn’t they teach you the unidentified blob of goo rule in Marketing 101?

So. The idea is that those who are on the right side of the – uggh! – Multiverse Manichean Moat get to dwell in a draughty castle and eat undercooked meat and probably die of an infection caused by getting their head cut off. Those who dwell on the wrong side of the moat, by way of contrast, get to dwell in draughty huts and eat dirt and die of some horrible disease that makes your limbs fall off one at a time, starting with your ears. I guess you want to be on the right side of the moat, then. That, or **pick a metaphor that doesn’t invoke medieval life!** Personally, I would choose this last route, but, as usual, I wasn’t consulted.

To put together this special report on the use of Home Universe Generator™s around the world focusing on the... \* SIGH \* Multiverse Manichean Moat, the Alternate Reality News Service spared no expense in sending our reporters around the world. Cash, we spared – and plenty of it – but expenses, not so much. And, when I say around the world, I don’t mean this world, Earth Prime: we have a sunken cost in our Transdimensional Portal™ (I would have told them not to build it in the basement, but, as usual, I wasn’t asked for an opinion). So, instead of buying them plane tickets, we sent our reporters to other dimensions where they used Home Universe Generator™s to determine what was going on here.

Oy, the tsuris we go through to bring you ungrateful wretches the news!

What? That’s it. I wrote all I had to sa – 1,000 words? Really? Who decided that all the contributions to the special report had to be – if that’s the case, I should be able to write to any length I want! I could have written this introduction in five words: Home Universe

Generator™s around the world. **Yes, I know that that is actually six words – I was trying to make a point! You’re the smartass, here – you figure out what the point was!** Jesus beJesus, who died and made you Tyler Durden? And, would it kill you to look like Brad Pitt instead of Fran Lebowitz? Honestly – can’t I even get what I want in my own fantasy?! I swear, I’d slap you silly, but I don’t look good in bruises! There. We’ve hit the minimum word count. Now, if you don’t mind, I’d like to talk to you about the production values on this fantasy life of mine...

## **Technology Finds a New Way to Bleed You Dry**

by NANCY GONGLIKWANYEOHEEEEEEEH, Alternate Reality News Service  
Technology Writer

In the first stage, you feel tired all the time, as if you were in a sitcom where a baby woke you up every couple of hours through the night, even though you don’t like Ray Romano. In the second stage, you’re easily confused; you may wonder, for example, why people keep asking you questions just because you’re the boss. This is followed by a stage where you are having delusions, such as that you’re the boss, so why aren’t people asking you more questions?

And, then, you die. And, not a fortune cookie death, either.

Only, death isn’t quite the end of it. Among your effects, there will be a wristwatch that can be heard crying, “Feeeeeed meeeee!” in a baritone so deep people who heard the plaint would expect it to break out in song at any second. It may take several days for this voice to peter out.

This wasn’t just any watch. It was a Cartier-MacFederation, featuring a relatively new technology that has been dubbed “vampireware” by excited followers of Anne Rice.

The watch runs on energy supplied by the person wearing it: it pricks the victim’s – sorry, wearer’s skin and skims electrical impulses from the person’s nerve endings. “Don’t you hate it when your watch has to be rewound, or the battery runs out, and you’re late for your imaginary child’s ersatz soccer practice?” explained Watch Where You’re Going Ltd. founder Stan Cartier. “Then your made-up spouse gives you a lecture about being a bad parent and you feel guilty for the rest of the day. How easily this problem could be avoided if your watch ran on you power – then, it would run for as long as you do!”

Which, given the rash of recent deaths (for which the application of no amount of topical cream will make better), may not be that long. Not that long at all.

“Umm, yeah,” Cartier looked like he was hoping his make believe wife would call and remind him to bring home some vegan eggs and soy milk. “I blame Franz for that.”

The problem with the first version of the watch was that it couldn’t store energy efficiently, so it frequently ran out. Like when a person took it off to go to sleep. Or, to take a shower. Or, to slowly, lovingly lick the fine leather strap. “That tended to undermine the whole rationale for the watch in the first place,” company co-founder

Franz MacFederation pointed out. His solution was to build into the watch the ability to send microwave energy to a storage facility that it could call upon when needed.

Which, given the rash of recent deaths (because everything goes better with bacon), seems like a bad idea.

“Oh, it was a great idea,” MacFederation uncomfortably argued; it was like he was hoping Cartier would buzz him on the office intercom to complain about the pressure his nagging unreal mate was putting on him. “It was just...messed up by Hans.”

Hans Plattz was the chief software engineer for the company. He wrote the artificial intelligence programme that regulated when the watch gathered energy from its wearer and how much energy it took. “There had to be some kind of regulating mechanism,” Plattz insisted. “Otherwise, the watch would just suck people dry until...umm...”

Before I could mention the recent deaths, Plattz hurriedly said, “I blame Florian!”

Florian Debesque was the company’s head of marketing. He insisted that the watch’s AI contain a personality chip to make it more attractive to potential customers. “Anybody can make a watch that you look at,” Debesque claimed. “But, a watch that interacts with you – that is a killer selling point!”

The problem was that the watch’s two AIs interacted in a way that, in a human being, could be described as “psychopathic:” while it was charming its wearers, the watch was draining them of energy to ensure its own supply. “Yeah, nobody was expecting that,” Debesque allowed. Then, brightening, he added: “Still, our customers **were** happy while they were alive!”

California Attorney-General Randy Pelican is considering laying murder charges, but isn’t sure where responsibility for the deaths – 127 in the last three days in his state alone – lies. None of the creators of the watch could have foreseen what their individual decisions would have led to. On the other hand, if the watches don’t find a new owner within a week of their old owner’s death, they die. A week is not long enough for a proper trial, even in California.

State Senator Moira McGoo has floated the idea that watches that have been charged (she has a nasty sense of humour) with murder be worn by a succession of Death Row inmates, thus solving two problems at once.

“I don’t think that would stand up to a legal challenge,” Pelican stated. “It may not be cruel, but it certainly is unusual!”

Sales of vampirewear (yes, it’s called that, too) watches have nearly doubled since news of the deaths first broke. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this is primarily due to women buying the devices for their imaginary spouses.

## The Strange Allure of Programmable Pants

by NANCY GONGLIKWANYEOHEEEEEEEH, Alternate Reality News Service  
Technology/Social Media Writer

How cool would it be if, when you were falling from a great height, your pants ballooned and slowed your descent enough that you wouldn't be smashed to the ground like a watermelon shot out of a literary canon? (On the advice of the Alternate Reality News Service lawyer, we will not ask how you ended up falling from a great height because privacy. When we asked him how a hypothetical person falling could have a privacy issue, he put his hands over his ears and loudly repeated, "La la la, not listening! *Habeus corpus*, baby. *Habeus* stinking *corpus*!")

We decided not to press the issue.

"Instead of pants with ridiculous properties saving hypothetical people from absurd dangers," said neo-Laddite Mercury "Melissa" Pontoons, "wouldn't it make more sense to research things that would benefit more people? Like child-friendly crushed glass?"\*  
\*\* \*\*\*

But...these pants are programmable. They are made of lycra nanobots that can configure themselves to deal with a wide variety of situations, including:

- blowing up to the size of a raft if you find yourself in the ocean with no sign of land anywhere around you, complete with paddles and a broken compass;
- shrinking to the size of a condom should you find yourself lucky enough to having a willing partner for a little hanky (with or without a side of panky), and;
- emitting an unpleasant odor (possibilities include: "eau de Pepe," "industrial revolution" and "Axxe body spray") if you find yourself in a pointless marketing meeting where your colleagues are endlessly pontificating about "innovation agendas" and "demand pulls" and "demographic kicks and pricks."

The pants contain a crude artificial –

"If innovation isn't on your agenda, you need a new calendar app!" enthused technoevangelist Dan Topscatt. "As the Bible truly says, it's easier to pull demand through the eye of the tiger than...umm...it is for a...err – you know, the Bible is so old media! Have I told you about how I get my demographic kicks?"

Thanks, Dan, but we've got this.

The pants contain a crude artificial intelligence – it sounds like it was programmed by Armando Iannucci – that compares your current situation to its database of disasters. When it finds a match, a preprogrammed response is triggered.

“Do we really need pants that blare Gloria Gaynor’s ‘I Will Survive’ whenever your wife talks to you about taking some time away from the relationship to find herself?” Pontoons asked. “Wouldn’t it be better to, you know, deal with the problems in your marriage?”

The application of technology is not necessarily futile in that situation. The pants could, for example, expand into the shape of a relationship counsellor, complete with a desk and diploma on the wall. A few sessions with your pantal therapist could –

“Exactly! This is just the kind of out of the box and into your lap thinking that I advocate!” Topscatt interrupted. Again. “Take my proposed blockandtacklechain system, a simple 27 step process for making data secure. If this were fully implemented, it would impact negatively on unemployment – at the very least, think of the programmers and accountants who would benefit!”

Yeah, okay, Dan. This is not the place to –

“If your intention is to improve data security, wouldn’t it be easier to just strengthen current encryption methods?” Pontoons asked.

“Hunh!” Topscatt scaffolded. Err, scoffed. “You clearly have no faith in the power of an idea, an idea that can be exploited in books, newspaper articles, blogs, t-shirts and a specially branded line of edible footwear!”

Curiously, fashion designers seem loathe to embrace programmable pants. “Actually, it makes perfect sense,” Pontoons argued. “Why put your designer logo on an item of clothing if somebody can press a few buttons and change it into a different designer’s logo? Their limited amount of athe is perfectly understandable.”

Well...okay, that. Curiosity is clearly overrated...

\* Sorry for the tardiness of the close bracket. It was out late last night and, when we asked it where it was and what it had been doing, it ran to its room and slammed the door. Then, it awoke too late this morning to take its proper place in this article. What can we say? It’s adopted.

\*\* Neo-Laddites are modern day followers of techno-realist Alan Ladd. Their philosophy of appropriate technology use is culled from his writing in the pages of Flirt and FHM, and in such classic films as Shane.

\*\*\* Sorry for the proliferation of footnotes. I have a cold. It probably came from eating poorly prepared footwear...

Or, for those of you who cling to the imperial system of measurement:

\* \*\* \*\*\* Sorry for the tardiness of the close bracket. Neo-Laddites are modern day followers of techno-realist Alan Ladd. It was out late last night and, when we asked it where it was and what it had been doing, it ran to its room and slammed the door. Sorry for the proliferation of footnotes. Then, it awoke too late this morning to take its proper place in this article. Their philosophy of appropriate technology use is culled from his writing in the pages of Flirt and FHM, and in such classic films as Shane. I have a cold. What can we say? It probably came from eating poorly prepared footwear... It's adopted.

### **If It's Belgium, This Must be teus.day.exe**

by NANCY GONGLIKWANYEOHEEEEEEEH, Alternate Reality News Service  
Technology/Social Media Writer

Belgians woke up yesterday morning to find that everybody on Web sites originating in their country had long noses. I mean, Pinocchio after he argued that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction long. Freud would have choked on cigar jokes long. You know the ten foot long pole you wouldn't touch something disgusting (like Freud's cigar jokes?) with? Not quite that long, but close.

"We're a small country that minds its own business," said Belgian Prime Minister Alexandre Pfennell-Lustig as he looked into a mirror at his face from a variety of angles. "I mean, we only just discovered the Internet three years ago. Why would anybody want to do this to us?"

It may be that nobody intended for this to happen. Belgium might just be an innocent victim – sorry, I meant collateral damage in an increasingly erratic international cyberwar.

It started last February, when stuxs2beu.exe was found on computers used by employees of Sony Pictures. Not only did the virus randomly release the private emails of Sony executives to reporters ("Angelina Jolie uses eyebrow enhancing steroids," read one. "I mean it! Eyebrows aren't that winsome naturally!"), but it rewrote every comedy script the company had in development, making them read like something Frank Capra might have directed.

"Preston Sturges we could have worked with," said studio executive Farley Pontiiifcate. "But, Capra? Nobody makes movies like that any more – and, in his case, it's a good thing! Am I mean? Hey, this is a cutthroat business, pal! If writers didn't work for peanuts, fixing this mess would have cost us a fortune. As it is, cleaning up the shells's gonna hurt our bottom line this trimester!"

US intelligence traced the virus to North Korean hackers who, since the North Korean Internet amounted to twelve computers and a mule, had a lot of time on their hands. In retaliation, the Pentagon released the iMeander.exe virus, which turned every Web page originating in the country black. You could just make out the silvery outlines of some images and text – it was kind of pretty, actually, although not very effective as, you know, communications.

This angered China, which had an on-again, off-again relationship with North Korea. North Korea would pout, “You never let me do anything fun!” China would respond, “Firing long range missiles into the ocean off your coast isn’t as much fun as you seem to think it is. And, it could cause an international incident.” Then, North Korea would scream, “You only hear what I say! You never hear what I mean!” and storm out of the room. But, like a bad sitcom, China always took it back.

China attacked American computers with prIME\_ANimator.exe. The virus chose documents on North American servers and replaced every third word with Cantonese swear words such as diu, hai and MSG. In retrospect, translating the words into English may have been more effective, since only seven Americans spoke Cantonese, and six of them lived in China. Still, prIME\_ANimator.exe was plenty disruptive.

At this point, NATO chose to get involved. “Unfortunately, battle cruisers on the Atlantic are not much use in stopping computer viri,” pointed out British Vice Admiral Leroy Montflont. “Know what I mean?” When I assured him that I did, he looked stricken. “What good is perfecting my accent if bloody Americans can still understand what I say?” he muttered.

Taking the initiative, French hackers initiated a denial of service attack against CSTNET and CHINAGBN, the backbone, ribs and two thirds of the spinal fluid of China’s Internet. (Having worked as waiters, the French hackers knew everything there was to know about denying service, knowledge which was surprisingly easy to scale up. Scarily easy.) “You think I mean?” said a French hacker named Jean Paul Ringabelmondo in an accent so ridiculous I may as well have called it a speech impediment. “This was nicest thing we thought to do!”

stux2beu.exe is believed to be China’s response to the attack of the French hackers; computer experts believe that they just overshot their target. Rumours on Internet chat boards and clothes lines is that Crimean hackers are creating a virus called teus.day.exe to unleash against Russia in retaliation for the attack on the Belgian Internet. Why Russia? “We don’t really have anything against China,” replied anonymous hacker anon.hack.27. “Russia, on the other hand, those bastards deserve what’s coming!”

Science fiction writer Cory Doctorow was unavailable for comment. But, I mean, he’s a busy man, so why would anybody have expected him to be?

### **Britain [~~Has/ Does Not Have~~] a Nose for Trouble**

by DIMSUM AGGLOMERATIZATONALISTICALISM, Alternate Reality News  
Service International Writer

The unthinkable [~~has/has not~~] happened: Britain has – hold on, since I am able to write about it means that somebody must have been able to think about it – if not, this article

would have been the opening line and a couple of blank pages where the text would have been if the subject had been thinka – you know what? I think I need to rethink my lede...

In a decision that went back and forth for many months, Britain [~~has~~/~~has not~~] decided to cut off its nose, a move that some journalists refer to as the “Britcut.” The world [~~breathed a sigh of relief~~/let out a strangled cry of frustration], then wondered for the 317th time why such a handsome nation would [~~come so close to~~/run at full speed off a cliff towards] such devastating disfigurement.

The proposed nostrilectomy [~~will have to be done~~/~~would have had to have been done~~] in stages over a period of two years, resulting in a large bandage covering up the damage to a prominent spot on Britain’s face. But, even when the bandage [~~would have~~/will] come off, the swelling [~~would have~~/will have] gone down and the black bags around the eyes [~~would have~~/will have] largely faded (as much as they ever [~~would~~/will]), the question of how Britain [~~would~~/will] detect odours [~~would have remained~~/will remain].

“I strongly advised Britain not to cut off its nose,” Canada, Britain’s step-child, commented. “I told it in no uncertain terms that I would not be caught dead in public with the old country if it went through with the self-mutilation. [~~Phew is all I can say. Phew-phew-phew-phew~~!/Argh is all I can say. Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaargh!]”

“With chichi designer bandages,” France stated, “Britain [~~might have been~~/might be] able to pull the noseless look off. But, *sacre merde*, remember who I am talking about – Britain! Its bandages [~~would have been~~/will be] hideous! So, no.”

“It was always just a really, really, really, really, really dumb idea,” said Slovakia. “I mean, why would anybody want to cut off their own nose?”

The side of Britain’s brain that wanted to cut off its nose argued that the appendage was constantly bombarding it with unpleasant sensory inputs (smells such as sweaty socks, diesel exhaust fumes and Slovaks) that it did not want. That part of Britain suggested that once the nose was removed, blood that had been going to it would be able to flow freely to the rest of the face.

“Nonsense!” the other side of Britain’s brain responded. For one thing, the amount of blood flowing to the nose had been greatly exaggerated by Britcut advocates. For another thing, pro-Britcut propaganda downplayed the benefits of having a fully functioning nose: the smell of roses, for example, or steak and kidney pie cooling in the window on your mother’s back porch, or...or...or other things that smell nice.

What neither side was willing to acknowledge was the racism implied (when it wasn’t openly embraced) by the pro-Britcut side of the debate. That side of Britain’s brain never tired of stating that, over time, Britain’s nose had become flatter, its skin darker than the skin surrounding it. In short, the nose had become less British. And, if something wasn’t done about it, it could infect the country’s whole face!

“It’s become an ugly nose that I don’t recognize any more,” Britain stated. “My future romantic life will be so much better when it’s gone!”

Now that the decision [to cut/~~not to cut~~] has been made, other parts of Britain’s face will have to be dealt with. Its left ear, for example, almost undoubtedly [~~would have wanted~~/will want] to be cut off, and its left eye [~~would have leaned~~/is leaning] in the direction of being removed. By the end of the process, Britain [~~could have looked~~/will look] like a creature out of a John Carpenter film!

What other consequences may arise because of the decision? In the short term, the part of Britain’s brain that masterminded the Britcut [~~would have had~~/will have] to resign all executive function effective immediately. In the long term, radical factions in other country’s brains [~~could have been~~/will be] emboldened to convince a majority of their minds to cut off their foreign-looking noses.

The Britcut debate has divided the country’s thinking in a way that no personal grooming decision has since the proper hair length schism of the 1960s. (Which, admittedly, was felt most keenly by France, which set fire to its own hair, so perhaps we shouldn’t be quite so smug writing this piece as we are). To get over the trauma, Britain may require years of counselling!

### **City Streets are the New Laundromats**

by FREDERICA VON McTOAST-HYPHEN, Alternate Reality News Service Pop Culture Writer

Bonking was once a slang expression for bumping uglies, and may still be in places in the English-speaking world that don’t have the Internet. (Bumping uglies is a slang expression for...umm...go ask your father!) However, in the last couple of years, bonking has taken on a completely different meaning: meeting your soul-mate in the middle of a busy intersection.

The English language can be salumptuous that way.

Why has the language morphed mightier than a Power Ranger in this specific way? Imagine that you’re walking down a city street. You’re watching – what? Why are you walking down a street? Because...because your car broke down and your brother won’t lend you his and you don’t want to pay for public transit because why should you pay for public transit when you’ve got a perfectly good ca – well, a car that will be perfectly good once you get it back from the shop and –

You had to get yourself started, didn’t you? Now, where was – okay. As you walk down the street, you’re watching an episode of Killjoys – dour bastard that you are – on your cellphone when it tinkles a brief excerpt from Beethoven’s ode to a daytime soap opera character named “Erica.” This is a sign that your mother has just sent you a text message.

On the one hand, you want to ignore it; on both hands, **the guilt!** So you pause the show and open your phone app and read **BONK!**

Your cranium has just made intimate contact with that of a cute little redhead who was reading Thomas Pynchon for Dummies on her cellphone when she received a text message from her BFFFN (Best Friend Forever For Now – some people are so deep into their commitment issues that they have acronyms!) about Drake doing a cover of “Girls Just Wanna Have Fun” and she had Googled it to see if there was any truth to BONK!

“It was love at first bonk,” said Mavis Atriades, who, other than being a statuesque brunette who is allergic to acronyms, could have been the woman in the previous paragraph. “Oh, sure, I had to have three stitches and suffered from migraines for a couple of weeks, but I had also found the man I wanted to be with for the rest of my life! Or, at least until my phone battery died.”

Literally...dozens of singles are taking to the streets hoping for a chance encounter with romance. “Oh, you’re being too modest,” said Romeo Baddalabuoy, author of *Love is a Powerful, Wonderful Sickening Pain in the Head: New Frontiers in Romance*. “There must be hundreds of singles looking for love on the streets. Yes. I think so. Hundreds.”

In his book, Baddalabuoy suggests that this is not the first time that relationships started on major metropolitan thoroughfares. Throughout Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when you walked down the street you were always at risk of having the contents of a bedpan flung on your head from a second or third floor balcony. Yes. He thinks so. A bedpan. Sometimes, young men would look up and, seeing that the flinger was a fair maiden, fall deeply in love.

Relationships begun this way were often referred to as “scozcobbles.” Baddalabuoy points out that they were no more likely to end in wives disappearing into attics and madness than relationships that started in more traditional ways.

A sufficiently large number of relationships that begin with a meeting of the...heads, if not minds has occurred that an etiquette has started forming around them. For example, it has become customary for the man to offer to call the paramedics after a romantic street collision. If no blood is flowing, however, it is quite acceptable for the woman to suggest that they duck into the nearest coffee shop to trade health insurance information.

If you’re looking for a same sex life partner, Baddalabuoy advises that you’ll increase your odds by walking down the streets in gay neighbourhoods; if you’ve just come out and you’re not sure where they are, try the Rainbow Streets II app (not to be confused with the Rainbow Streets Unnumbered app, which shows you where in your city toxic waste has made lovely multicoloured patterns on the road). If you aren’t gay and share a bonk with somebody of the same sex, it is currently acceptable to run in the opposite direction shrieking and hold your head under a cold shower for at least seven minutes.

It’s early days. Social etiquette evolves.

Critics of the new romantics (hey, that's a catchy phrase – I wonder if anybody has every thought of it before...) say that meeting potential sweethearts on the street is too random to lead to lasting relationships. Baddalabuoy has a response for that: "If it's a choice between getting drunk on vodka in a sleazy bar or getting drunk on Tolstoy on a clean city street, I'll choose the one that won't destroy my liver!"

### **Sad Squiggles Hijack the People's Choice Awards of Science Fiction**

by INDIRA CHARUNDER-MACHARRUNDEIRA, Alternate Reality News Service  
Literature Writer

First, they come for your science fiction. Then, they come for your world.

The Greenbacks are the most prestigious awards for literary works of science fiction and fantasy. With the possible exception of the Waldos. Okay, the Greenbacks and the Waldos are the two most prestigious awards for science fiction and fantasy. And, the Wet Willies. The Greenbacks, the Waldos and the Wet Willies are the most – and the Oddment Society Annual Top Sevens as Voted By You Awards – although, honestly, I never thought they were **that** prestig –

Okay. Among the most prestigious awards for science fiction and fantasy are the Greenbacks, the Waldos, the Wet Willies and, arguably, the Oddment Society Annual Top Sevens as Voted By Yous. The important thing is that nominations for this years' awards have been hijacked by a group known as the Sad Squiggles.

Squiggles are, of course, the native race of the planet Ventrosia. Ventrosian Squiggles look like six foot tall inverted commas with semicolons on their sides for heads. They are a war-like race, but they only attack planets that have developed a healthy speculative fiction culture, on the theory that they're the only planets that would take a race of six foot tall inverted commas with semicolons on their sides for heads seriously as invaders.

To nominate books for a Greenback Award, you have to buy a membership to the World Science Fiction Convention and Galactic Rodeo. Ventrosian Squiggles bought over a thousand WorldRodeoCon memberships, allowing them to dominate most award categories (although, oddly enough, human authors swept the nominations for Best Science Fiction or Fantasy Short Story Written by Somebody With Arms).

"The Greenbacks have been dominated by a cabal of Gungaflort authors for too long," explained Invasion Architect and Literary Critic, Third Class Svort Blortnick. "We just wanted to correct this bias in order to make the so-called 'among the most prestigious awards in the field, even if the Oddment Society Annual Top Sevens as Voted By Yous are a bit dodgy' actually reflect some of what the wider fan audience in the galaxy is reading."

Because of the manipulation of the nominating process, this year's awards are dominated by novels with titles like *Ein Geschruben hai Globnitz* and *Frabcrabchick Blortz*, and short stories called "Th'wackton Arzigton d'Alice." So certain were they that their works would do well that the Sad Squiggles didn't even bother to have them translated into a language that anybody on Earth speaks.

"Would it kill you beings to learn a foreign language?" replied Blortnick. "Gungaflorters are soooooo parochial!"

Gungaflort is the Ventrosian name for Earth. I probably should have mentioned that. Consider that mentioned.

Wouldn't translating the books into English give them a better chance of winning a Greenback? "Are you serious?" Blortnick mocked. "It hurts my brain just answering your questions! Try to write a whole book in you ugly tongue? There aren't enough anti-psychotics on Ventrosia for that!"

Some authors are pushing back against the Sad Squiggles. "It does not seem to be a good idea," stated the most popular fantasy author in this quadrant of the galaxy (and France) George R. R. Martin, "to allow an aggressive alien race to dominate our fantasy and science fiction awards. Who is with me in opposing this travesty?!"

You could hear the sound of crickets in most of the mainstream media. And, while crickets are the dominant life form on the planet Sssssissfissal, their support doesn't actually help the anti-Sad Squiggles movement.

"While it is unfortunate that the awards appear to have been hijacked by a species that invades and lays waste to industrially advanced planets," former Science Fiction Writers of Gungaflort President John Scalzi pointed out, "They do not appear to have broken any of the nominating rules. We, uhh, may want to look into that at some future date. However, any rule changes will take time to work their way through the system, and, in any case, this problem is largely self-correcting: if the Ventrosian Squiggles take over Earth, they will likely write their own rules for Greenback Award nominations!"

The Greenback Awards were not named after the cash winning authors can expect to receive (although winning the award does increase book sales by thirty or forty...volumes, which can be as much as half a first edition print run of some smaller press titles). It was named after Hugo Greenback, the editor of the seminal science fiction pulp magazine *Weird Stories*, *Strangely Told*.

If the slate nominated by the Sad Squiggles does not win, the Savage Squiggles, a related group with similar goals, will declare war on Earth. "Literary awards competitions are just war by other means," Blortnick stated.

So, umm, a word of advice to Greenback Award voters: choose as many books written by Ventrosian Squiggles as you can stomach. The fate of the world depends upon it.

## State, Your Case in the War on Donuts

by FRANCIS GRECOROMACOLLUDEN, Alternate Reality News Service National Politics Writer

“This is a great day for the great state of Alaska!” said Marjoram Ramalambomar, her enthusiasm so grate that her statement bullied its way into the lede paragraph of the article, even though that goes against rule 27 in the *Emily Post Guide to Good Grooming and Journalism*.

“The war on donuts, which has cost this great country so much, may finally be coming to and end. And, that’s gre – really, really good!” she said, biting into a cheese and chives cruller in front of cheering supporters who had packed the Lenny Bruwillfeldlinight High School gymnasium fuller than somebody who had just finished a box of donut holes. That’s 40 holes, almost as many as it takes to fill the Albert Hall. That’s full.

Ramalambomar, a member of Citizens for Dessert Sanity (Not to Mention Tastiness) was referring to Proposition 91 $\pi$ , which legalized the sale of donuts in Alaska. The non-profit organization was bankrolled by billionaire philanthropist George Sorobororos for no particular reason. Nope. None at all, really.

“This is a new front in the war on donuts,” stated Speaker of the House John Boehnanbachblisscrap. “A front that must be turned back! We shall fight them in the legislatures. We shall fight them on the op-ed pages. We shall never surrender.”

Smirking that the Reduhblicans had gained control of both the House and Senate in the mid-term elections in which Prop 91 $\pi$  was also decided, Boehnanbachblisscrap said that a bill outlawing states from legalizing the sale of donuts would be introduced tomorrow and passed by both houses and put on the President’s desk by Friday. Which, as it happens, is also tomorrow.

When somebody pointed out that this would undermine state rights, which the modern Reduhblican Party has sworn fealty to, Boehnanbachblisscrap blanched. “Oh, well, ah,” he puffed, “there might be a little surrendering on that point. Hardly any surrendering so’s anybody would notice, but still. I, umm, will have to talk to...yeah.”

“I just got this handed to me in the midterm elections,” President Barry W. Bushbamclintreagbush, holding something round and soft that looked suspiciously like his ass, commented on the situation. “So, I think it’s for the best if I not wade into this issue at this time.” Looking at what he was holding, he added: “This should make wiping easier...”

Although its people tend to hold conservative values, a freedom loving, individualistic, “leggo my Eggo” attitude is widespread in Alaska, as anybody who has seen *Northern Exposure* can attest. It was this attitude that led to the victory for the pro-donut forces in

the state, not least because of the widespread fear that the war on donuts would be expanded to sweet breakfast foods like the popular waffles.

When informed of the results of the vote, sort of kind of now you see her, now you don't former Alaska Governor Sarah Palmalcoulschlafin was at a loss for folksiness. "Are they mental?" the woman known as the momma woodchuck for her ability to gnaw her way into public consciousness, blurted.

Then, she composed herself. "Repealing this law will be as easy as shooting grizzlies out of a helicopter!" Palmalcoulschlafin folksied. So, it will be unfair and inhumane, and do lasting damage to the environment? "Oh, Francis!" Palmalcoulschlafin smiled. "You're so media elitey!"

"Ten years ago, that could have been Canada," said Prime Minister Stephen Harpomurlever. "Phew! We sure dodged a sugar-coated bullet there!"

When asked how this would affect Vesampuccerian/Canadian cooperation in the war on donuts, Harpomurlever said that he would happily work with the Reduhblicans in Congress to undermine the stated will of the Alaskan people. "For their own good, of course," he chuckled.

"Will children be able to snort donut holes they bought from their corner MultiMaxiMegaMart?" mused television evangelist Murray Eddie Klingrobhagostham. "Will parents watch helplessly as the fruits of their loins descend into donut induced obesity, perversity and madness? As Corinthian Leathers 2:13 truly says: 'Suffer not the small children...other than scoring cheap political points from said suffering for ever and ever. Amen."

"I blame the permissiveness of the 1960s, even if I wasn't, you know, strictly speaking, alive at the time."

Blissfully ignoring the broader political issues, the Alaskan organizers of Prop 91 $\pi$  threw a powdered party to celebrate their victory. "What adults indulge in in the privacy of their own, uhh, high school gymnasiums is their own business!" Ramalambomar said to a wildly cheering throng. A cheer that lasted 17 minutes.

They were obviously in the throes of a sugar rush. But, who could blame them?

### **Flashsideways**

by SASKATCHEWAN KOLONOSCOGRAD, Alternate Reality News Service  
Philosophy Writer

If you were about to sip your first spoonful of soup, you would have a vision of fanning your lips and trying to ignore the numbness of your tongue. If you had just posted a witty

political joke on your Farcebook wall, you would have a vision of 17 vitriolic responses. If you were in bed sleeping, you would have a brief dream about being in bed sleeping.

Flashing forward to a point years, months or even weeks from today could have profound effects on human beings. Flashing forward only 23 seconds, not so much.

“One moment, I was making love to my husband,” said Ingersoll resident Inclementia Pavanerol, “the next I had a vision of us sitting on opposite sides of the bed, arguing about who had broken the mood. And, sure enough, 23 seconds later that is exactly what we were doing.”

That was only the beginning. Twenty-three seconds after the first flash forward had happened, everybody in the world flashed backwards 46 seconds, forcing them to relive the initial flash forward. So, if you were gulping water to cool down your mouth, you would flash back to the point where you flashed forward to the point where you were fanning your lips and trying to ignore the numbness of your tongue. I think. I was considering if there was something else on the TV I would rather watch when I flashed back to the point I started watching *The Big Bank Theory*, at which point I flashed forward to the point where I realized that I wasn’t enjoying the show. Probably.

The whole phenomenon was very confusing.

“The flash...back and forth and, for all we know, over, under, sideways and down, posed an interesting philosophical dilemma,” said noted Italian semiotician and author Umberto Eco-Chambers. “Was it possible to change the future we saw, or was it fixed, like an elephant in amber? If it could be changed, what was the point of showing it to us? I could have used those 23 seconds to write half a sentence in the paper I’m working on about the influence of the Commedia dell’arte slap stick on 21<sup>st</sup> century notions of political economy. And, in any case, where would one get all of that amber? On the other hand, if the future can’t be changed, what does that do to our concept of free wi – ooooh, somebody fan me – I feel another paper coming on!”

“Oi! Noodnik!” replied Rabbi Herschel “My, Oh, My” Maimonides of the Fish or Cut Beth Greater Israel synagogue. “You wanna bring up the whole ‘free will’ mishegas? How much free will can you exercise in 23 seconds? Whether you put that French fry in your mouth, or smear it down your cheek? Should you put your finger to the left, or should you put your finger to the right, maybe? Whether tis nobler to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune or –”

“Hey! – aren’t you the one who is supposed to argue that it needs only take a second to decide between good and evil?” Eco-Chambers interrupted. “If that’s the case, you could decide between good and evil 23 times in the time it too to have the flash forward!”

“You have a point,” allowed Rabbi Herschel. “This whole phenomenon is very confusing!”

Twenty-three minutes later, everybody in the world flashed forward 23,000 years, a vision which was made up entirely of black. Religious leaders immediately condemned the vision, insisting that it didn't prove that there was no such thing as an afterlife.

"Of course there is such a thing as heaven," Catholic Cardinal Francesco Abbatori argued. "It's just that it's a place of infinite joy, something the finite human mind cannot comprehend. So, like a movie screen where the film had burnt up in ecstasy, we ended up staring at a blank wall."

"Of course there is such a thing as heaven," Protestant minister Aloysius Pentacle agreed. "However, when the Lord, in His infinite Mercy, saw us flashing forward to a point beyond our own death, he wagged a finger at us and said, 'Uh uh uh. That's not for you.' I'm not saying He censored our flash forwards. He, more...edited them for an impressionable audience."

"Cowards," responded Eco-Chambers.

As it turned out, not everybody flashed far forward to a black image. Twenty-three people claimed to have had flash forwards that contained visions of living in a hut in a tropical rainforest or living in a hut in a desert. Depending upon where they lived in the present, people who had this experience were either chased through their city's streets by a pitchforks and torches wielding angry mob that assumed they were vampires, or mobbed by medical researchers who hoped the experience had given them some insight into cryogenics.

(If most people only saw black, how do they know they flashed forward 23,000 years? Apparently, the flash forward comes with a built-in timer. Does this make sense? Has anything in this story so far made sense?)

It has been 23 hours since the hot flashes (they're trending on Twitherd) started, and people are not sure how to deal with them. "The things I saw. The things I did," mused Ingersoll non-native Reginald Plantain. "Were things I would have done anyway. The whole phenomenon was very confusing!"

### **The Dirtbucket Stops Here**

by BRENDA BRUNDTLAND-GOVANNI, Alternate Reality News Service Editrix-in-Chief

Okay, Internet trolls, you win.

As of this morning (yesterday morning in France), the Alternate Reality News Service has terminated the comments sections on our Web portal (not TM because we're not giving [EXPLETIVE DELETED] Bill Gates a penny!) with extreme prejudice. Personally, I'm not surprised: when upper management started spewing phrases like "reader engagement," "starting a conversation with the community" and "wage cuts for

those wastrel scallywags in editorial” (this last one may have been left over from the last union negotiations), I warned Mikhail Lo-fi that it was a bad, bad, bad, bad, bad idea. Except for the last rationalization. Still.

All the best publications were doing it, Lo-fi argued; I had never taken him for such a Joyner, but we all have high school track moments, I suppose. The move took some of the sting out of the fact that newspapers were cutting back on actual journalists; in his perfect world, newspapers would consist entirely of reader-contributed comments without any original reporting. I will admit that it was a seductive argument, but my doubts were tenacious (they had clearly learned the wrong lessons from the Opiepic *In the Heart of the Sea*).

As the comments started coming in, I quickly devised a five slap system for rating them:

one slap: responding to an article with a comment that makes no logical, grammatical or hygienic sense; gratuitous bad language, under five usages; EXAMPLES: 1. Obviously, FDR is responsible for kids’ lack of respect for their elders these days! 2. What a [EXPLETIVE DELETED] moron! The [EXPLETIVE DELETED] Crusades wouldn’t have happened if [EXPLETIVE DELETED] hadn’t blown up the moon!

two slaps: completely ignoring the article you’re supposed to be commenting on and spewing random nonsense; gratuitous bad language, five usages and over; EXAMPLES: 1. Anything responding to an article on Barack Obama, the 2008 market meltdown or #squiggleslivesmatter. 2. You suck, you [EXPLETIVE DELETED] [EXPLETIVE DELETED] piece of [EXPLETIVE DELETED] [EXPLETIVE DELETED] squidmashing [EXPLETIVE DELETED]! And, your [EXPLETIVE DELETED] dog is [EXPLETIVE DELETED] ugly, too!

three slaps: gratuitous Nazi references (the only exception being comments on articles about Earth Prime 7-9-2-2-5-3 dash omega, where a Dalek invasion was fended off by – you guessed it – Nazis); EXAMPLE: Passing a law that claims that sunshine is a good thing in moderation is **exactly** what Hitler did in 1943!

four slaps: ist postings (racist, sexist, ageist, speciesist, Squigglist – not that those bastard Squiggles don’t deserve close, harsh, in-your-face scrutiny, but...uhh, that’s not relevant here); EXAMPLE: Any post that starts, I’m not [racist, sexist, ageist, agronomist, Klipponist, ADD YOUR OWN PERSONAL PET PREJUDICE HERE], but...”

five slaps: anything the least bit negative about me; EXAMPLE: I’m not going to give you any [EXPLETIVE DELETED] examples of this! If you want to know what it was like, take the worst thing anybody has ever said about you and substitute my name for yours!

I must admit that, at first, rating the comments was fun; the thought of slapping all of those barely coherent, semi-literate, semi-evolved readers had me giddy with anticipation. People in the office wondered why so much gleeful tittering was coming from my office,

a sound that was much more frightening than the moans and growling that they had come to expect.

Over time, however, the pleasure began to pall. As the average number of slaps per posted comment started to asymptotically (literally: the symptom of being an ass) approach five, the joy I took in rating the comments went down, to the point where I actually dreaded reading them.

My personal physician, Doctor Emulio Schlossberg, told me that I had a condition known as “slapping fatigue.” Slapping fatigue, an occupational hazard of editors, cellists and Bingo number callers, occurs when the centre of the brain that gets pleasure out of thoughts of physical violence is overused, temporarily burning it out. I had to admit that Doctor Schlossberg had a point when I realized that the thought of slapping him for making this diagnosis gave me no pleasure at all.

The cure was two weeks rest in a dark room while listening to a constant stream of Enya. I decided to close down the comments section of the Web site instead – if I can’t enjoy myself, why should anybody else be able to? Besides, Celtic music makes me break out in Pan flutes.

As for people who complain that this is censorship, **You’re damn right it’s censorship! I don’t have any responsibility to publish comments by angry, ignorant, bigoted, barely literate people whose only goal in life is to become the Chinese smog of public discourse! Not those we don’t have a columnist’s contract with, in any case!** Besides, isn’t the rest of the Internet big enough for you monsters?

Allowing reader comments on our Web site was a noble experiment (by which I mean: gaseous and inert), but I’m happy it’s over: those were the longest 12 minutes of my life!

### ***Les Pages aux Folles: The Back Story***

A Nayman family legend has it that I decided to devote my life to writing comedy/humour when I was eight years old. Most boys that age wanted to be hockey players or astronauts (or, so I have been told) – why comedy? Through my thirties and forties, it was important to me to understand why I developed the way I did (after a couple of decades filled with unanswerable questions, I decided to stop wondering and accept myself the way I was), so I gave this question considerable thought. Unfortunately, the best I could come up with was a cliché.

I grew up in an emotionally abusive household (as did many funny people). I realized early on in my life that laughing made me feel better; I figure my first impulse to write humour was to help ease myself through a tough childhood. I also suspect that I thought that if I could make my parents laugh, they might not fight so much, but that turned out

not to be the case (intense therapy succeeded where my youthful ambitions failed, but the ambitions remained).

Honestly, if my early life had been any more of a cliché, I would have started this piece with: “It was a dark and stormy night...”

COMEDY HISTORY ASIDE: Years later, I was watching a terrific series called *The Green Room*. Comedian Eddie Izzard was telling the story of how he first met his idol, Richard Pryor. After a few minutes of small talk, they found that they had something in common: they both knew that they wanted to be stand-up comedians when they were four years old. You know how I thought I was precocious because I knew I wanted to be a humourist when I was eight? I was actually already half a lifetime behind the curve!

My original inspiration in my early teens was Art Buchwald. If he is remembered at all these days, it is for being the person who sued Paramount Pictures for stealing his original idea for what would become Eddie Murphy’s *Coming to America*. And, winning. This case exposed the arcane Hollywood bookkeeping that allowed studios to claim films that had grossed a billion dollars never made a profit, and introduced the world to the term “monkey points.” But I remember him as the preeminent newspaper satirist who, in his prime, wrote creative and biting (and very funny) political commentary.

Not a bad role model if that’s what you’re into.

Between 1984 and 1987, I wrote 300 articles for a satirical newspaper column (enough for three books). I called the project *Les Pages aux Folles*, playing off the name of the then popular film *La Cage aux Folles*. I thought the title translated as “cage of crazies,” which would have made my version “page of crazies.” This tickled me. When the English version was released as *The Bird Cage*, I thought, *Bird Pages? Okay, I can make this work.*

Three years into the project, I was no closer to becoming the preeminent newspaper political satirist of the 1980s than when I had started. Years later, I would realize that one wasn’t given a newspaper humour column because one was actually, you know, funny (although some naturally are and others grow into it); they usually went to people who had proven their service to the newspaper in other departments. In defence of my naïveté: teenager.

I moved on to scripts and university, but the satirical bug never quite left me. Between 1987 and 2002, I kept coming back to the form, writing over 100 new articles (enough for a fourth collection). Then, a number of pieces of my life came together to drive me to the internet.

At university, I studied emerging technologies and the arts. My Masters thesis (from the New School for Social Research) was on the challenges interactivity posed for fiction writers. My PhD dissertation was on fiction writers who posted their work to the World Wide Web. I know, I know. Today, that’s a big **duh!** But, in 1999, when I wrote the bulk

of the dissertation (I was awarded my PhD in 2000), it was still relatively – ahem – novel. ACADEMIC ASIDE: the problems I identified in 1999 have scaled up nicely, with few changes over the years. Was I prophetic? Naah – I was just paying attention.

When I returned to Toronto after three years living in Montreal (a residency requirement of McGill University, where I studied), I volunteered for a public interest web page developer called The Electronic Commons; it was championed by a woman named Liss Jeffrey. The project was run out of a building called Chelsea Mews, deep in the heart of the University of Toronto; that is where I met the woman who would become my Web Goddess, Gisela McKay.

As we got to know each other, Gisela pointed out something odd about my life that hadn't occurred to me: I wrote fiction, and I had studied people who post fiction on the internet, but I hadn't posted any of my own fiction on the internet. While I agreed that that was a bit strange, I demurred; although my Masters degree was done entirely online, I didn't know the first thing about creating or maintaining a web page. Gisela, who, among her many talents, is a professional web developer, offered to design a page and walk me through how to keep it going. To ensure that I couldn't refuse, she offered me free space on her server.

I couldn't refuse.

But, what would I write? Reviving *Les Pages aux Folles* as an online project was the most logical way to proceed. When I started it as a print project, I aimed for each article to be around 700 words (in the mistaken belief that this was standard newspaper column length; depending upon the newspaper and the column, it could actually be anywhere from 400 to 600 words); this relative shortness turned out to be a good length for the internet, where long stories require a lot of scrolling and can give some readers eye fatigue. You don't want to give readers eye fatigue.

So, I immediately started posting fiction to the web? Slow down, speed racer. I took the summer of 2002 to build a stockpile of articles. This wasn't meant to supplant weekly writing (since much of the writing would be topical, it would be best to post pieces soon after they were written, something the internet easily facilitates); it was meant as a safeguard against weeks when I was unable to write an update, whether through life circumstances or lack of inspiration. The wisdom of this choice is most vividly illustrated by my experience in 2005, when I had to have triple bypass heart surgery: I prepared four weeks of updates from my stockpile and posted them a couple of days before going under the knife. (As it happened, although I was advised to give recovery at least a month, I was eager to get back to writing after about two and half weeks). My stockpile started with 40 articles; it has fluctuated between 10 and 50 (but mostly closer to 10) ever since.

By the first week in September, 2002, I felt comfortable enough with the cushion that I had produced that I took the plunge and went live with *Les Pages aux Folles*. Years of writing had given me the confidence that I could pull it off (although, like most people who start a project like this, I had no idea how much work I was letting myself in for). It

had also given me four complete books that I could place in an archive on the site, which helped me avoid the problem that many web sites have when starting out: a paucity of content. There was enough writing on the web site from day one that anybody interested could stay a while, or be encouraged to keep coming back.

The first three books had been written on a manual typewriter; the fourth on an electric typewriter and a computer. Because of this, I had to type the articles into my computer before I could post them. This forced me to reconsider the material I had previously written, which proved salutary. I gather many writers are highly critical of their own work, but I found that I really enjoyed becoming reacquainted with mine. (Having had to read through the entire project to collect stories for these special anniversary issues, I feel more or less the same way.) The worst that I will say about my past writing is: "I wouldn't write exactly that, or in that way now."

PEDANTIC ASIDE: Is *Les Pages aux Folles* a blog? On one hand, it is a regular publication (every week, without fail; by the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, that will entail 1,040 consecutive weeks) written by a single person. On the other hand, blogs automate the process of posting to the internet (with tools such as WordPress), but I code my text by hand and upload it and any images I may create using tools Gisela taught me. Also, blogs tend to be a single page of text with newer posts higher up (occasionally breaking into an archive page or two), while each piece I post is on its own separate page. It may be a moot point, but I am reluctant to call *Les Pages aux Folles* a blog.

Except...

In trying to explain what an achievement 20 years of *Les Pages aux Folles* is, one of the facts I point out is that, depending upon the year they were started, between 80 and 90 per cent of blogs are abandoned within the first six months of their existence (I assume that the numbers for personal web pages are roughly the same, but I'm not aware of that research). Writers can be exhausted by the commitment (I often refer to my web site as "the insatiable maw;" no sooner do I finish one update than I have to immediately start working on the next). Writers can run out of inspiration. Other life priorities can leave writers without time. Lack of a readership can cause writers to quit out of despair (because I was emotionally driven by a need to write, the lack of readers was never a disincentive for me, although lately I do despair of ever finding an audience, if for no other reason than I know there must be a lot of people out there who would enjoy my writing...if they knew that it existed). Some people might lose their internet access. Twenty years on the internet is a looooooong time is what I'm saying.

By the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I will have written 38 books of prose and produced nine books of cartoons for *Les Pages aux Folles*. The project will contain over 3,500 pieces of writing, and somewhere between two and a quarter and two and a half million words.

Nor has this been my only writing project. In 2010, I decided to write my first novel. Blame Terry Pratchett. I had never wanted to be a novelist; I was happy writing my short articles. But, in 2010 I learned of a contest for first humorous science fiction novels that

was sponsored and would be partially judged by Pratchett. This seemed like a great opportunity for me to do what I do best: be goofy. The only problem with entering a novel writing contest, though, is that you have to write a novel to do it. So, I sat down to write what would become *Welcome to the Multiverse\**.

I don't usually talk about this, but since we're all friends here, I feel I can state the truth: my first novel took two months to write. Starting from nothing but the desire to write a novel, the first week involved developing the ideas; the next six weeks involved the actual writing; the final week involved rewriting and polishing. This was a stupid short amount of time in which to write 80,000 words (the nine novels I have written since have taken anywhere from six months to a year to produce), but there were extenuating circumstances, your honour. For one thing, by that time I had been writing for 40 years, so unlike many first time novelists, I had already developed my voice and knew my way around a story. More importantly for this essay, many aspects of worldbuilding that contributed to the novel (for instance, the Transdimensional Authority and the Alternate Reality News Service) had been introduced on *Les Pages aux Folles*, so I wasn't exactly starting from nothing.

Perhaps most important: working on the web site taught me how to quickly turn ideas into prose. When you have a weekly deadline, you have to write fast. Under these conditions, there are two ways writers can go. Like a nuclear explosion, they can burn themselves out. Or, like a nuclear chain reaction, their creativity can feed off itself, allowing them to constantly write new material. I was fortunate that my writing took the latter path.

What's next? I have no idea. I know I have a need to write; if life forces me to go a couple of days with writing even a little, I start to get antsy. Humour is not something that a writer can turn on and off: it is a way of looking at and interacting with the world that becomes a constant in your life. At least, it has become that for me. It does help if it has an outlet, though, so I foresee writing as long as I have the words. (Both my father and my grandfather on my mother's side had Alzheimer's, so there is no guarantee that I will always have the words, or for how long.) Regardless of what happens in the future, I already have a creative legacy (including novels, short stories and unproduced screenplays – so many unproduced screenplays!) that I can be proud of.

I hope you enjoy 12 from 20.

*\* Sorry for the Inconvenience*

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