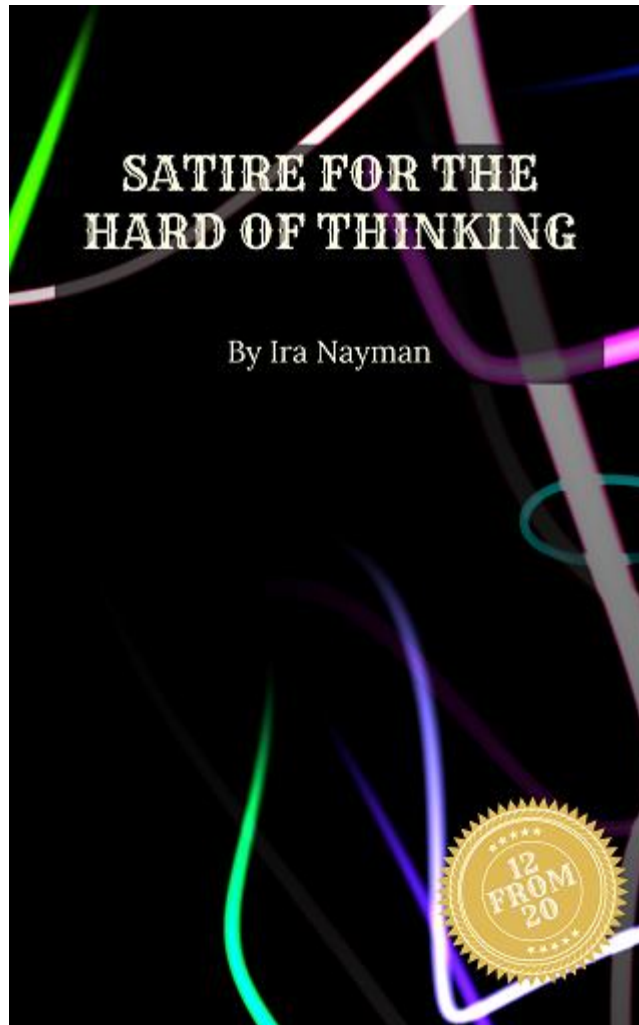




Satire For the Hard of Thinking
by Ira Nayman
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Introduction

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: the first of two miscellaneous collections that contain articles that didn’t fit into any of the other books. This book will cover the years 2002 to 2007.

The problem with separating different types of articles from *Les Pages aux Folles* into their own books is that this gives the reader no sense of the context in which they appear, no sense of the flow of the web site. It is rare that two or three of the same features appear in a single week (although it has happened when I had a lot of topical pieces of the same type and didn’t want to let them go stale through delay). A typical week’s lineup might be: The Daily Me, followed by an article of headlines, followed by an Alternate Reality News Service news article; or, a column about deplorables, followed by a column of quotes, followed by an Alternate Reality News Service advice column.

Flow.

One of the good things about the two miscellaneous collections in “12 From 20” is that they mix up a lot of different kinds of articles; in doing so, they more closely resemble the flow of the web site. (Not entirely, because they are missing the types of articles featured in other books in the series, but closely enough.)

You may wonder why the first miscellaneous collection contains writing from the first five years of *Les Pages aux Folles*, while the second contains writing from the subsequent fifteen years. Imbalanced much? Actually, not as much as you might think. The first five years of the web site contained a lot of bespoke pieces of writing (in which the form was dictated by what I was trying to say); after that, features started crowding out the bespoke articles, making fewer of them available in any given year. Although the dates may seem out of balance, the two volumes draw from a pool of articles of roughly similar size.

Flow **and** balance. Can’t ask for any fairer than that.

What follows is, in no particular order, an explanation of the development of some of the article types in this volume.

Headlines. The basic form is a headline with no comment other than a snarky headline of its own. This feature started in The Daily Me (from the source: *Billy-Bob’s International House O’ Headlines*), but I quickly found that I wrote more than one a week, and eventually had to collect them in articles of their own. (They have become such a staple of *Les Pages aux Folles* that they will be collected in an entire book of their own.)

Over the years, I experimented with different types of headlines. One that has become a regular feature is headlines in the form of a question (with my own headline often being an answer, or at least an oblique response of some kind). For a while, I would write entire columns of headlines with the word “app” in them, or the number five (which,

surprisingly, shows up remarkably frequently in newspapers). These weren't so much funny as they were experimental pieces of writing, so I didn't write many of them.

Quotes. This feature contains quotes with no comment other than a snarky headline. Similar to headlines, it began in *The Daily Me* (from the source: *No Comment Quotes*), but grew into its own feature.

Tweets. My Web Goddess (hi, Gisela!) strongly suggested that I promote *Les Pages aux Folles* on social media, so I joined Facebook and Twitter. (They were cool at the time – don't judge.) For a while, I would develop a month's worth of tweets on a specific theme (for instance: Puns We Love to Hate, or False Facts About...). When it comes to feeding the insatiable maw of the web site, I quickly learned the wisdom of wanting not and wanting not, so I collected those tweets into articles when I had enough of them.

Self-serving? You bet! I do hope, though, that people who did not read them when they were first posted to Twitter enjoy them, and people who remember them from their original posts get a warm, fuzzy feeling of nostalgia from encountering them in a new form.

Cover Stories. Six months into *Les Pages aux Folles*, I added a pithy quote to the front page of the web site. The sources for the one-liners were many: some were just bits of gratuitous cleverness that I had no other use for (example: "*Les Pages aux Folles*: the web site with nothing to say and a love of language to say it with!" – man, that's a t-shirt!); some, a lot, actually, were Puns we Love to Hate (after I had given up posting a themed month's worth of tweets because the effort became too onerous); some were A Few of My Favourite Things, another Twitter feature that had its genesis in an article I wrote in the print phase of *Les Pages aux Folles*.

"What is This Thing Called Culture?" essentially mashed up cultural references and common catchphrases in a 700 word prose poem. It starts: "What is this thing called culture? Well, there's...*No Business Like Show Business* hours not to reason "YMCA" galaxy far, far away out of his mind over Matterhorn of Plenty of nothing, and nothing's plenty for Michelle, ma Belle..." (The entire article appears in Book One of 12 From 20 if you're interested in exposing yourself to the entire insanity.) For A Few of My Favourite Things, I essentially mash up two cultural references in a similar fashion (example: "My favourite actor/physical phenomenon: Quark Gable...").

I always thought this would make a great party game. Somebody starts with a cultural reference. Then, you go around the table and each person has to build another reference on top of the one that came before them. It could be a timed game (ie: if you don't come up with something in five or ten seconds, you lose the round; inexperienced players could invoke house rules and take longer). If you repeat something that has already been used in the chain, you are out. Continue until one player is left. If they cap their last entry with one final entry, they win the round (although you could invoke a house rule and allow them to win without it). If anybody tries to play it, let me know how it turned out.

Dialogue. In the fifteen years I stopped working on *Les Pages aux Folles* (more or less, give or take, your mileage may vary), I focused on writing screenplays. That's a whole 'nother book on its own, but I mention it here to explain why many of the articles on *Les Pages aux Folles* are made up entirely of dialogue. I like to think that I became adept at writing it while working on scripts. Great dialogue has a strong rhythm (I once wrote a non-fiction article on dialogue comparing it to music); it's a lot of fun to write and, hopefully, fun to read.

I introduced a variety of character in the dialogue-driven articles. Og and Thag looked at contemporary issues through a pre-historic lens. Evan "Dick" Lamanchuck and Michaelangelo "Dick" Tremonte of Big DICK Radio started as my piss take on morning Djs (of whom I have never been a fan), but eventually evolved into a vehicle for me to comment on aspects of the radio industry. In a similar vein, Larry and Bud allowed me to comment on trends in the film industry. And of course, Mister and Misses Frump gave me an ongoing platform on which to discuss issues of homelessness.

Final Observations. "Letters to Missed Manners: The Unwanted Guest Dilemma" is a precursor to "Ask Amritsar," the advice column that would become a staple of the Alternate Reality News Service. Lives Unlived (a parody of the feature Lives Lived in the *Globe and Mail* that outlived its inspiration) started as a general article, but was eventually incorporated into the Alternate Reality News Service.

The MP for my riding was once hockey legend Ken Dryden. The Liberal was canvassing in an election the party was believed set to lose, and he knew it. We walked for a bit down the street, and in the course of our discussion, I mentioned my belief that, "Liberals are corrupt, Conservatives are evil." Not wanting to alienate a potential voter, he didn't slap me in the face or anything, but he did respond that he didn't think that was accurate.

The original formulation of this thought appears in the article "Outrage Fatigue" (which appears in this volume). Since I wrote it, I have also stated, "Democrats are corrupt, but Republicans are evil." (In fact, this appears much truer, although, to be fair, we should give Canadian right-wingers time to catch up...) I believe that the idea can be generalized as, "The left is corrupt, but the right is evil." This is not a universal constant; I have no doubt there are examples of times and places where the opposite has been true, but this formulation has been true for a depressingly long amount of my lifetime, and I see no end to it any time soon.

I often use this idea to explain why I am so hard, satirically speaking, on the right. Every satirist has an ideal world in their head against which they compare the actions of people in the real world. The difference between the satirist's ideals and the behaviour of people is a source of the anger that fuels so much of the comedy. Given the fact that ideals are, by definition, unattainable, everybody will fall short of them. This has led some people to believe that satire should make fun of everybody equally.

I would say: not. People don't deviate from my ideals to the same extent. The left-wing politician who has a secret affair with a secretary or spends funds raised for a campaign

on a wild weekend at a resort is corrupt, no question. But the right-wing politician who actively courts racists or who actively undermines democratic institutions deviates from my ideals far more, in a way that could be considered evil. It isn't that I ignore the left, it's just that I find the right a much greater threat to my ideal world. And I write accordingly.

Enjoy.

Ira Nayman
Toronto
February 22, 2022

Articles

How Things Change

I started writing *Les Pages aux Folles* in the Year of Their Lord 1985. (I'm Jewish – waddya gonna do?) Over 15 years later, I find myself, older and wider, taking up the cudgel once more. Had I known then what I know now (like, what a cudgel is), I would have been astonished at how much the world changes in such a short time.

For instance, in the 1980s, the United States harassed Canada for its exports of cedar shakes and shingle. Today, the United States harasses Canada for its exports of softwood lumber. Not the same at all.

In the 1980s, an intellectually challenged Republican President consolidated his power by exploiting Americans' fear of Communism. No more. Today, an intellectually challenged Republican President consolidates his power by exploiting Americans' fear of terrorism.

The difference is also reflected in our entertainment. In the 1980s, a TV show called *Amerika* soothed American anxiety about its place in the world by portraying the country repelling an invasion. Today, a movie called *Independence Day* soothes American insecurity about its place in the world by portraying the country repelling an invasion.

In the 1980s, America's most wanted man was Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. Today, America's most wanted man is Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. Hmm...okay, that may not seem like much of a difference. But, in the 1980s, America's main objective in international politics was to ensure the free flow of oil. Today, America's main objective in international politics is to ensure the free flow of oil. You see? Subtle differences can lead to major changes.

In the 1980s, Wall Street was rocked by a scandal involving Michael Milken. Today, Wall Street is rocked by a scandal involving Kenneth Lay. And, Bernard Ebbers. And, John Rigas. And Dennis Kozlowski...

In the 1980s, the Kent Commission reported that concentration in the ownership of newspapers was a threat to their editorial integrity. How far we've come since then! Today, moves by CanWest Global to stifle dissent at its newspapers have sparked calls for a study of the effects of media concentration on editorial integrity.

In the 1980s, a scandal-ridden Conservative government pushed for free trade with the United States. Today, a scandal-ridden Liberal government is pushing for free trade with Latin America. Of course, one would expect politics to adapt to the changing needs of the people.

In the 1980s, First World nations urged Third World nations to practice greater free trade while protecting their own key industries. Today, developed nations urge developing nations to practice greater free trade while protecting their own key industries. Okay, that doesn't seem like such a great shift. How about this? In the 1980s, more money flowed to First World nations from Third World nations than went the other way, while, today more money flows **to** developed – okay. Try this: In the 1980s, the International Monetary Fund imposed severe structural programmes on Third World debtor nations that forced them to cut social to help their poorest people, while, today – no, that hasn't changed much, either. Threat of default? No, that's still there. Uhh...

Okay, maybe the politics of aid for developing nations hasn't really changed that much.

But, other things certainly have changed a lot. In the 1980s, the press fretted over the future of Joe Clark, Conservative Party leader. Today, the press frets over the future of Joe Clark, Conservative Party leader.

In the 1980s, environmental scientists began to warn about global warming, but politicians demanded concrete proof before taking serious action to combat it. Today, environmental scientists have reached a broad consensus that global warming is a threat to life on the planet, but politicians are demanding concrete proof before taking serious action. Isn't it amazing how science advances?

In 1984, everybody was relieved that George Orwell's vision had not come to pass. In 2001, everybody was disappointed that Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C. Clarke's vision had not come to pass.

Time makes its mysterious way through our lives. No point in looking for patterns – all is change. However, what may scare those who would clutch the past tightly to their bosoms exhilarates those of us who are prepared to surf the tides of time.

After all, change ensures that there's always something to make fun of.

The Column of Lists 2

Two Prime Ministers who were born blond, whose hair darkened before they were elected and who practically bald when they died

- 1) Wilfrid Laurier
- 2) Louis St. Laurent

Eight opening lines that should earn one a slow and painful death, but will probably just get an embarrassed laugh, a pathetic stare and/or a slap in the face as a response

- 1) “Hi. What’s your sign?”
- 2) “Hi. Come here often?”
- 3) “Hi. Me Chuck, You...?”
- 4) “Hey – haven’t I seen you some place before?”
- 5) “Hi. What would you think of somebody who owned 14 different Toyota Corollas?”
- 6) “Hi. Wanna dance, or are you just here to check out the guys?”
- 7) “Hi. So...read any good books lately?”
- 8) “Hi. Has anybody ever told you that you have the looks of Margaret Hamilton?”

Ten days that didn’t shake the world

- 1) February 23, 921
- 2) May 10, 87 BC
- 3) September 3, 1953
- 4) February 18, 921
- 5) March 22, 1312
- 6) November 5, 1874
- 7) April 23, 337 BC
- 8) January 4, 113 BC
- 9) February 28, 921
- 10) July 8, 1960

Eighteen fun things to do with paper clips

- 1) open them up and pretend to fence with a friend (NOTE: the Ministry of Potentially Dangerous Hobbies is considering issuing every paper clip with a warning against just this kind of usage)
- 2) use an elastic band to shoot them at somebody who bugs you
- 3) start a fashion sensation by putting one through your ear and telling everybody you know that it’s an earring
- 4) put 1,000 in a box, shake it real good and challenge your friends to take apart the resulting chain in 12 “moves” or less
- 5) bend them into letters and spell something obscene
- 6) sell them to the Pentagon for \$347 apiece
- 7) use them as skates for a flea circus ice show
- 8) unbend one, bronze it and tell your friends that Rick Moranis personally straightened it out for you
- 9) use them as spikes in your scale model D&D torture chamber
- 10) make granny glasses for earthworms
- 11) use them to solder the keys on your boss’ computer keyboard together
- 12) tell somebody really gullible that they’re what’s left of a spoon after Yuri Geller had a nervous breakdown
- 13) throw some on a lump of drying plaster, flick paint at it and call it Art

- 14) see how many it takes to make a chain around the world
- 15) see how many it takes to make a chain around Sylvester Stallone's chest
- 16) melt a bunch down and use them as a shotput or paperweight
- 17) make braces for your hamsters
- 18) give them as gifts to people you really despise

Seven *Late Night with David Letterman* conventions that have gone on for far too long

- 1) throwing objects through the "window" behind his desk
- 2) the stupid pet tricks segment
- 3) any segment with Larry "Bud" Melman, especially remotes
- 4) the phrase: "And we all know how painful that can be."
- 5) talking to Paul Shaffer
- 6) the "....." Guy segment
- 7) the dropping things off a tall tower segment

Eight replies to opening lines that should earn one a slow and painful death, but will probably just get an embarrassed laugh, a pathetic stare and/or a slap in the face as a response

- 1) "Damaged merchandise."
- 2) "No, only after my house had burned to the ground..."
- 3) "Sick."
- 4) "Yes, but I haven't been there since – just my bad luck to meet you here, I guess."
- 5) "I'd probably think he was brain damaged."
- 6) "No, actually. I came here to check out the women. Now, if you don't mind..."
- 7) "*Darkness at Noon*. Ever read it? Ever heard of it?"
- 8) Why, no. Thank you. Has anybody ever told you that you have the brains of Pee-wee Herman?"

Eight ideas whose time may never come

- 1) velcro scuba gear
- 2) seal hunting as an Olympic event
- 3) a computer programme that can calculate the polar bear population of the Arctic
- 4) Touch of Diesel air freshener
- 5) kitty couches for animal psychiatrists
- 6) Pierre Trudeau commemorative toothpaste dispensers
- 7) hang-gliding celebrity press conferences
- 8) plaid Rorschach test ink blots

Six things that most concern young people these days

- 1) nuclear war
- 2) future unemployment
- 3) not being able to rent a tux for the junior prom
- 4) passing the test on Monday
- 5) keeping refrigerator magnets away from small children
- 6) how many existentialists it takes to screw in a light bulb

Seven car names Ford and General Motors will never use

- 1) The Sniveling Wimp
- 2) The Bloated Aardvark
- 3) Shrooms in Butter
- 4) The Aeschylus
- 5) The Heavily Federally Subsidized
- 6) Twelve Tons of Rolling Death
- 7) The Life Without Man

Twelve things you could be doing right now instead of reading this

- 1) analyzing the latest issue of *Mad Magazine* for Shakespearean references
- 2) selling arms to a small third world nation
- 3) watching Merv try to sing (again!)
- 4) stopping and smelling the roses
- 5) figuring out where gas prices are going to end up
- 6) wondering if there's life on other planets (and deciding that there isn't)
- 7) shouting at the people upstairs to please turn down the bloody Perry Como
- 8) committing yourself to a life of fighting crime because of the special powers with which you were born
- 9) washing your hair
- 10) putting money on which mini-series will win the next Sweeps Week
- 11) making a fool of yourself in front of complete strangers
- 12) choosing wallpaper for the little one's room

Frequently Unasked Questions, v. 4

- [1\) Didn't your mother teach you that it's wrong to make fun of people?](#)
- [2\) Isn't moral outrage passé?](#)
- [3\) What is your policy on correcting errors?](#)
- [4\) What is the real reason you have a Web site?](#)
- [5\) Are you some kind of freaky tree-hugging environmentalist?](#)
- [6\) Then, why is there an obvious pro-environmental streak in your writing?](#)
- [7\) Please, please, please tell me you don't code your Web pages by hand.](#)
- [8\) Why do you code by hand?](#)
- [9\) The column you wrote on, uhh...oh, dear, I don't know how to put this...women's, err, you know, private parts – well, why did you write that?](#)
- [10\) That's kind of mean, don't you think?](#)
- [11\) What makes you laugh?](#)
- [12\) Is there anything you won't make fun of?](#)
- [13\) No, really. Isn't there any subject too serious, perhaps too tragic for you to make fun of?](#)
- [14\) What about your loved ones? Surely, you wouldn't make fun of them?](#)
- [15\) What's your favourite movie?](#)
- [16\) In one Frequently Unasked Questions file, you claim that you started *Les Pages aux Folles* in 1985, but, in another file, you state that it started in the 19th century. Which is it?](#)

[17\) Hmm...wouldn't it have been easier just to admit that you had made a mistake and let an error creep into a Frequently Unasked Questions file?](#)

[18\) How do you determine how long to make your columns?](#)

1) Didn't your mother teach you that it's wrong to make fun of people?

How can anything that feels so right be so wrong? It's only wrong if you're bad at it. If you're good at it, you get a newspaper column. If you're very good at it, you may be given guest host duties on a talk show. And, I'll thank you to leave my mother out of this.

2) Isn't moral outrage passé?

Outrage will be passe when human beings stop being outrageous.

3) What is your policy on correcting errors?

Don't ask, don't tell.

4) What is the real reason you have a Web site?

I want to be the first celebrity with a negative Q Factor.

5) Are you some kind of freaky tree-hugging environmentalist?

Are you kidding? I love nature...as long as I don't actually have to live in it.

6) Then, why is there an obvious pro-environmental streak in your writing?

I can't afford to pay for bottled oxygen.

7) Please, please, please tell me you don't code your Web pages by hand.

I could tell you that, but then our relationship would be based on a lie.

8) Why do you code by hand?

Because it feels so good when I stop.

9) The column you wrote on, uhh...oh, dear, I don't know how to put this...women's, err, you know, private parts – well, why did you write that?

Just to watch you squirm.

10) That's kind of mean, don't you think?

Satire is not for the squeamish.

11) What makes you laugh?

Lots of things. The idea that the media's coverage of the Washington sniper was "responsible" because – even though it was almost entirely filled with unsubstantiated rumour – the media held back on certain pieces of real information for a couple of days because the police asked them to. Farmers injecting cow udders with foam for diary shows to make them look like they'll produce more milk. (Haven't they heard of saline implants?) President George W. Bush talking off the cuff. Yes, the world truly is my playpen.

12) Is there anything you won't make fun of?

Don Cherry. I don't understand his popularity, but it scares me.

13) No, really. Isn't there any subject too serious, perhaps too tragic for you to make fun of?

Madonna's acting career.

14) What about your loved ones? Surely, you wouldn't make fun of them?

If you love something, satirize it. If it still talks to you, it loves you. If it threatens you with a defamation suit, it never did.

15) What's your favourite movie?

Oh, I'm sorry, but I'm **not** that kind of Web page.

16) In one Frequently Unasked Questions file, you claim that you started *Les Pages aux Folles* in 1985, but, in another file, you state that it started in the 19th century. Which is it?

Neither. *Les Pages aux Folles* was actually started by Theodore of Kacz, a Franciscan monk living in a monastery in southern Rumania, in 1237. In the five minutes of free time a day Fra Theodore had when he wasn't praying, copying ancient manuscripts by hand or stomping grapes in the winery, he wrote short humorous vignettes. The first of these – which probably took six months to write – made fun of an unnamed Abbott's large ears and fondness for donkeys. Historians believe that writing this material by poor candlelight late at night caused Fra Theodore's eyesight to fail, allowing errors to creep into his copies of the bible. The phrase "Moab is my washpot," for example, may actually have read, "Myrna, take out the water basin" before Fra Theodore transcribed it. In any case, his secret writings were copied by generations of monks who, let's face it, weren't overburdened with joy in their lives. In my travels through the Middle East in 1972, the franchise was sold to me by a freelance goatherd who claimed to be a descendent of Fra Theodore who had fallen on hard times. I know, I know. Still, stranger things have happened in the Middle East.

17) Hmm...wouldn't it have been easier just to admit that you had made a mistake and let an error creep into a Frequently Unasked Questions file?

In comedy, contradictions are not bugs, they're features.

18) How do you determine how long to make your columns?

I am for an average length of 700 words. So, I simply write until I have filled my quota, and then

American Politics Made Simplistic: Book 2: The Middle East

See President Ronnie. See President Ronnie hate Commies. Hate Commies, President Ronnie, hate Commies.

See Afghanistan. See Afghanistan resist invasion from Russian Commies. Resist invasion from Russian Commies, Afghanistan, resist invasion from Russian Commies.

See the Mujahideen. See the Mujahideen fight the invading Russian Commies. Fight the invading Russian Commies, Mujahideen, fight the invading Russian Commies.

See the American Central Intelligence Agency. See the American Central Intelligence Agency supply arms and other aid to the Mujahideen. Supply arms and other aid to the Mujahideen, American Central Intelligence Agency, supply arms and other aid to the Mujahideen.

See the United States government. See the United States Government pledge to aid in the rebuilding of Afghanistan after the war. Pledge to aid in the rebuilding of Afghanistan after the war, United States Government, pledge to aid in the rebuilding of Afghanistan after the war. See the Russian army pull out of Afghanistan in defeat. Pull out of Afghanistan in defeat, Russian army, pull out of Afghanistan in defeat. See the United States government renege on its pledge to help rebuild Afghanistan after the war. Renege on your pledge to help rebuild Afghanistan after the war, United States government, renege on your pledge to help rebuild Afghanistan after the war.

See the Saudi royal family. See the Saudi royal family supply the United States with oil. Supply the United States with oil, Saudi royal family, supply the United States with oil. See the United States government repay the Saudi royal family by supplying it with arms, intelligence and money. Repay the Saudi royal family by supplying it with arms, intelligence and money, United States government, repay the Saudi royal family by supplying it with arms, intelligence and money. See the Saudi royal family allow the United States government to station troops in the country. allow the United States government to station troops in the country, Saudi royal family, allow the United States government to station troops in the country.

See the Afghan warlords. See the Afghan warlords tear the country apart with civil war soon after the withdrawal of the Russian army. Tear the country apart with civil war soon after the withdrawal of the Russian army, Afghan warlords, tear the country apart with civil war soon after the withdrawal of the Russian army.

See the Taliban. See the Taliban win the civil war and take control of Afghanistan. Win the civil war and take control of Afghanistan, Taliban, win the civil war and take control of Afghanistan. See the Taliban impose harsh religious laws on the people of Afghanistan. Impose harsh religious laws on the people of Afghanistan, Taliban, impose harsh religious laws on the people of Afghanistan. See the Taliban make its own people suffer tremendously. Make your own people suffer tremendously, Taliban, make your own people suffer tremendously.

See former Mujahideen Osama. See Osama hate the United States. Hate the United States, Osama, hate the United States. See Osama hate the United States for supporting Israel's suppression of the Palestinians (to the tune of \$3 billion a year). Hate the United States for supporting Israel's suppression of the Palestinians (to the tune of \$3 billion a year), Osama, hate the United States for supporting Israel's suppression of the Palestinians (to the tune of \$3 billion a year). See Osama hate the United States for placing troops in his home of Saudi Arabia. Hate the United States for placing troops in your home of Saudi Arabia, Osama, hate the United States for placing troops in your home of Saudi Arabia. See Osama hate the United States for reneging on its promise to aid Afghanistan. Hate the United States for reneging on its promise to aid Afghanistan, Osama, hate the United States for reneging on its promise to aid Afghanistan.

See Osama not be a happy person. Don't be a happy person, Osama, don't be a happy person.

See the children in Arab fundamentalist schools. See the children in Arab fundamentalist schools learning to hate Jews, the State of Israel and the United States. Learn to hate Jews, the State of Israel and the United States, children in Arab fundamentalist schools, learn to hate Jews, the State of Israel and the United States.

See Osama convince graduates of the Arab fundamentalist schools to act against those they have been taught to hate. Convince graduates of the Arab fundamentalist schools to act against those they have been taught to hate, Osama, convince graduates of the Arab fundamentalist schools to act against those they have been taught to hate. See graduates of the Arab fundamentalist schools kill civilians in suicide bombings. Kill civilians in suicide bombings, graduates of Arab fundamentalist schools, kill civilians in suicide bombings. See Israelis repress the Palestinians further in retaliation. Repress the Palestinians further in retaliation, Israelis, repress the Palestinians further in retaliation.

See graduates of the Arab fundamentalist schools crash airplanes into the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. Crash airplanes into the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon,

graduates of the Arab fundamentalist schools, crash airplanes into the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon.

Can I make it any simpler?

Troubled Child

George hated being called into the Principal's office. It wasn't that he was scared of the Principal; on the contrary, the Principal had never shown much stomach to exercise the kind of discipline that would interfere with George's plans. He just looked out the window of the Principal's office, watching his friends having fun in the school playground, and felt that his time would be much better spent out there with them.

"Now, George," the Principal began, "I think you know why you're here..."

"It was self-defense!" George blurted.

The Principal looked askance. In fact, he looked several skances. "George, you punched Saddam repeatedly, even though he hadn't done anything to you."

"He would have!" George argued. "He was getting ready to attack me! He was stockpiling mud pies! You know what Saddam is like – he used mud pies on his own friends! It was only a matter of time before he used them on me!"

The Principal rubbed his eyes wearily. Truth to tell, he didn't enjoy these sessions much, either. "Where is this stockpile of mud pies?" he asked, although he already knew the answer.

"I...I don't exactly know," George admitted, letting his attention drift away from the Principal back to the window. "But –"

"Isn't it true that your father made Saddam destroy all his mud pies?" the Principal asked. "And, didn't he make Saddam's father cut back on his allowance so he wouldn't be able to afford the ingredients to make any more mud pies?"

"He...he's borrowing money from his friends," George insisted, noting how blue the sky looked today, how fluffy the clouds. "He's developing new stores of mud pies."

The Principal grew stern. "How do you know this?"

"I just...know. That's all."

"Well, that's not good enough. We have rules at this school, George. You can only claim self-defense if somebody is starting to hit you or attack you with pies. And, even then, you are only allowed to use enough force to make them stop. Your attack on Saddam – that wasn't self-defense. It was aggression using self-defense as a justification."

“Osama and Omar beat me up,” George petulantly stated, following the flight of a blackbird until it was out of range of the window.

“Yes,” the Principal replied. “We’re all very sorry that happened. But, what does that have to do with Saddam?”

“It’s all, like, connected,” George mumbled.

“I have seen no evidence to suggest that Saddam was involved in any way with Osama and Omar hitting you,” the Principal argued. “Do you have any evidence that Saddam was involved?”

“He’s stockpiling mud pies...”

“George, we’ve been through that before!” the Principal raised his voice, trying without success to keep his patience from running into deficit. “Anyway, you’re the last person who should be complaining about other people’s mud pies. Not only do you have more than any of the other children at this school, but I know that you sell mud pies to others for lunch money!”

George shrugged. “I have a lot of friends...” he muttered. “They want to protect themselves from bullies...”

“Bullies? Oh, son, don’t go there!”

“You’re acting like a regular Neville Chamberpot...”

The Principal seethed for a moment. Chamberlain tried to make deals with Adolph Hitler in which he turned a blind eye while Germany gobbled up territories around it; this appeasement was an important contributing factor to the carnage of World War II. Saddam had invaded another child’s playspace, but George’s father had forced him back in his own playspace, and he hadn’t left it since. Hardly an appropriate analogy.

The Principal might have been more sympathetic if the other children in the playground had supported George’s position, but none of them had. Even Tony, George’s best friend, had expressed reservations about George’s behaviour towards Saddam.

“George,” he finally said, “if Saddam causes any trouble, you come to me and I will deal with it. You cannot act on your own. Okay?”

“Sure. Whatever.”

The Principal wasn’t convinced, but couldn’t think of any other arguments he could bring to bear, so he dismissed George with a final stern warning against acting without his

permission. George smiled ever so briefly to himself and rushed out of the room. The Principal sighed.

On the file in front of him, he wrote: "George is a troubled child..." and wondered if he would survive to see his retirement day.

Monday's Must See Programming

6:00 am

CNN *Daybreak* Satan, in an interview about his creation of "reality TV," lets slip that he was disappointed that the United States didn't ask Hades to be part of the "coalition of the willing" in the war against Iraq.

7:00 am

NBC *Today* Donald Rumsfeld jokes that the war on Iraq is so popular, even mythical personifications of evil want to be a part of it.

8:00 am

CBS *The Early Show* Jacques Chirac condemns Donald Rumsfeld's attempt at humour, claiming that it is just one more example of American arrogance, insularity and just plain bad taste.

9:00 am

ABC *Live With Regis and Kelly* Ari Fleischer accuses France of knee-jerk anti-humourism.

10:00 am

CITYTV *CityLine* Jean Chretien says he has a 12 point plan that would, if agreed to by the United Nations, bridge the gap between the United States, Iraq and the latest player in the deepening crisis, Hades.

11:00 am

OMNI 1 *Montel Williams* Baal explains that, although Hades had traditionally sided with Iraq, Saddam's regime had been so hobbled by the 1991 Gulf War and subsequent decade of economic sanctions that his ability to cause mayhem in the Middle East had been severely curtailed, forcing Satan to reconsider and back the Americans, who appeared to be in a much stronger position to cause death and destruction.

12:00 noon

WB *Maury* Condoleezza Rice tells Maury that Hades has never officially contacted the United States about joining the coalition, but the United States would gladly ally itself with any nation willing to fight for freedom and democracy.

1:00 pm

CNN *Live From...* Hades, where Satan claims he made a legitimate offer of support for the anti-Iraq war effort, but the White House refused to answer to his calls.

2:00 pm

UPN *Ricki Lake* Donald Rumsfeld jokes that any person who got a call from Satan would be wise to let the answering machine pick it up and never return it.

3:00 pm

FOX *Jerry Springer* Death says Satan, a close personal friend, is a good ally to have in battle and wonders why the United States would so cavalierly reject his offer of assistance.

4:00 pm

CBS *Oprah* George W. Bush thanks Satan for his support, which the President doesn't doubt is sincere, and says the Joint Chiefs of Staff are, at this very moment, considering Satan's generous offer.

5:00 pm

CNN *Wolf Blitzer Reports* Colin Powell says the United States will never align itself with Hades, no matter how sincere Satan's expressions of support, and that the President has always been very clear on this point.

6:00 pm

PBS *BBC World News* Ari Fleischer says that the government has not foreclosed on any options on Iraq, and Colin Powell's latest pronouncement on the subject, far from being government policy, was just another example of the President's openness to debate, an openness you will certainly not find in Baghdad.

7:00 pm

CNBC *The News With Brian Williams* Colin Powell says there is no way in Hell – you should pardon the expression – he will ever agree to send troops under his command into battle alongside the Prince of Lies and his dark minions.

8:00 pm

CNBC *Kudlow & Kramer* Ari Fleischer reminds everybody that it is the President who has the ultimate responsibility for determining who the coalition members are and, while he appreciates a good give and take, nobody in his government should mistake that as a license for insubordination.

9:00 pm

CNN *Larry King* Baal jokes that growing up in Hades was no picnic, but, what the Hell, it was home, and asks the question on everybody's mind: Is Hades in or out of the coalition against Iraq?

10 pm

MTV *Video Flow* Donald Rumsfeld says the United States will determine coalition members at its own pace and jokes about Avril Lavigne being a hot babe. At least, we hope it's a joke.

11: 30 pm

NBC *The Tonight Show With Jay Leno* Colin Powell compares chins with Jay and does a remote from a hot dog stand on Second Avenue.

CBS *Late Show With David Letterman* Satan reads the top ten list: Top Ten Ways You Know You're Getting Jerked Around By An Ally.

12:05 am

CTV *The Mike Bullard Show* Jean Chretien whines that everybody seemed to ignore his realistic compromise on Hades and the coalition, and jokes about Paul Martin's Liberal leadership campaign.

Playing the Life Market

"You want how many?"

"Four million."

"Are you nuts!"

"You know, Ian, as much as I understand that that is a figure of speech intended to express disbelief, I still do not appreciate hearing it directed towards me."

"Yes, sir."

"Yes, I want to buy four million Iraqi lives."

“Are you – okay, look, sir. Right now, Iraqi lives are trading at 897 to an American, and they’re expected to drop below a thousand by the end of the month. They’re worthless!”

“No life is worthless, Ian.”

“An admirable sentiment under most circumstances, sir, but not when you’re playing the life market. The value of an Iraqi life is currently in freefall, and there is a serious possibility that the price will drop to the entire population. I’m sure I don’t have to remind you that at that point the nation will be delisted and you will lose your entire investment.”

“**This** is nuts! We should have never accepted the American life standard!”

“Allah, please! Do you remember the chaos of the market when it was based on a floating standard? Nobody wants to go back to that!”

“Ach! Entities like Loki and Ares manipulated the life market for their own gain when we were on the floating standard! I said that going to the American standard would make it easier for them to manipulate the market, and I was right!”

“That’s what I’ve been trying to tell you! Ares has been selling Iraqi lives short for several months! Loki has been right in there for almost as long. And, many of the other entities are now following suit. There is a powerhouse building in the market and you don’t want to be caught on the wrong side of it!”

“These manipulations can’t be legal.”

“The Universal Securities Exchange Commission has already signed off on them. That battle was lost millennia ago.”

“Mmm...”

“You insist upon buying four million Iraqi lives?”

“I have a feeling –”

“Oh, Allah, how many times have I told you not to gamble on hunches?”

“Well, I –”

“No. Forget about that. Can I at least convince you to hedge your bets a little?”

“How?”

“Buy some Canadians. At 1.5 Canadian lives per American, you can afford to lose on the Iraqi lives.”

“Won’t the potential for terrorist attacks on Canadians increase if they support the war on Iraq?”

“Sure. But, that’s the beauty part of this investment: any retaliatory attacks on North America would likely hit Canada less severely than the United States. At the worst, Canadian lives would rise or fall in lock step with Americans, safeguarding your investment!”

“How many Canadian are we talking about?”

“Ah...let me get out my calculator here...factoring in the Iraqi exchange rate...allowing for contingencies... To be on the safe side, let’s say 350 Canadians.”

“Can I afford to buy the Canadians on top of the Iraqis.”

“It is a bit of a stretch. You may have to take a little loan out with the Karmic Bank...”

“But...what about my other holdings? Saudi Arabians and Iranians are still strong...aren’t they?”

“For the time being. Unfortunately, as you well know, situations change. The United States has said that after it is done with Iraq, it intends to turn its sights on the other countries in the region. There is serious concern in the market on what this will do to the value of life throughout the region.”

“Maybe I should just sit it out for a while – wait until things cool down...”

“Not necessarily. You know, the fundamentals of the life market haven’t changed – they’re still essentially strong. If you avoid the obvious pitfalls, there is still a lot of spiritual profit to be made.”

“I don’t know...”

“Allah, please. How long have I been your life broker?”

“About...close to 600 years...”

“And, have I ever steered you wrong?”

“Well...there was that Ottoman buy order –”

“One mistake in 600 years. You’ve got to admit, that’s an enviable record.”

“Still, I don’t want to be seen backing people who don’t believe in me...”

“Well, you know, there are a lot of Arabs in Canada, and the number is growing all the time. I think it could be argued that buying Canadian lives now would be a shrewd investment in the future.”

“Alright. Buy the Iraqi and Canadian lives.”

“I love it when a client sees the light...”

The Lawyer In Pooh’s Corner

In which

Pooh Is Taught A Valuable Lesson
in Intellectual Property Rights

One night, Pooh was dreaming a wonderful honey pot dream. Night was the perfect time to dream wonderful honey pot dreams, Pooh had decided, because that was when one was most likely to be asleep.

Pooh was, as always in the wonderful honey pot dream, counting his honey pots. This was taking a long time since, as always, they had been arranged in a circle. “120...121...122...” Pooh counted. When he reached 137, the pots started to spin – whether in reality or just in his head, Pooh could never be certain – and, before long, they had become one really big pot of honey!

Just as Pooh was about to stick his head in the really, really big pot of honey, from somewhere came KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK. That didn’t usually happen in his wonderful honey pot dream! Pooh concluded he must have dreamt it. Pooh tentatively approached the really, really, really big honey pot when he heard KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK again. Not knowing what else to do, Pooh woke up.

It was early morning. At the door of Pooh’s house stood a tall man in a very pretty suit. “May I come in?” the man said. He had to repeat himself loudly as Pooh had been mesmerized by his gold cufflinks. “Oh, of course,” Pooh said once the spell of the cufflinks had been broken.

The man, who had to nearly double over to fit into Pooh’s house without bumping his head on the roof, said, “I’m Charles Gordanis of Durston Blurston Gates McFadden. Then, he did the most strangest thing: he handed Pooh a small piece of paper with a lot of squiggles on it. “Oh,” Pooh said. Then, “Ah.” He looked at the piece of paper very closely. He looked at the side with writing on it. He looked at the side without writing on it. Knowing that the man was waiting for a response, Pooh finally gathered himself up and said, “It’s, umm, square.”

The man snatched the paper away from Pooh. “I’m a lawyer,” he said.

Pooh wasn't sure he had heard the man correctly. "A liar?" he asked.

"Lawyer," the man, unamused, emphasized. "Officer of the court. Attorney at lawyer. Law. Lawyer."

"Oh," Pooh responded. And, "Umm." This must be a special kind of liar," he thought, but wisely said nothing. Except "Oh." And, "U –"

"Let me get straight to the point," the liar/lawyer interrupted the whimsical aside. "This is an unauthorized use of characters whose merchandising rights have been secured by the Walt Disney Corporation. If you do not immediately cease and desist employing these characters, we shall be forced to take legal action against you. And, we enjoy taking legal action. Vigorous and extensive legal action."

"Oh," Pooh responded. And, "Umm." He hadn't understood a word the man said after "point." Not knowing what else to do, he started to sing:

"I'm in awe
Of a man of law –"

"And, no poetry!" the man cut him off. So as not to offend the man, Pooh sang the final line in his head: "Tum te diddly, tum te roo."

They looked at each other, Pooh and the doubled over man, for a long time. They might be looking at each other still, had not another KNOCK KNOCK come to the door.

"Don't answer that," the liar/lawyer advised Pooh. "Introducing more copyrighted characters at this point will only get you deeper into trouble."

"Nobody's home," a small voice on the other side of the door said. "That's all you can expect, I suppose, when you drop by a friend's house unannounced. Serves me right. I should –"

"Eeyore!" Pooh shouted. The doubled over man rolled his eyes. Eeyore walked into Pooh's house. "Oh!" he said, seeing the man. "You have company. If I had known, I would have never –"

"This is so in breach of Disney's copyright!" the liar/lawyer moaned.

Eeyore stopped starting to back out of Pooh's house and looked at the man. "Well, I didn't go to law school," Eeyore said, "so my opinion isn't worth anything, if you ask me. But, hasn't the copyright run out on characters created by A. A. Milne?"

This got the man's attention. "Not since the Sonny Bono copyright extension," he stated.

“Well, that’s what I get for talking out of turn, I guess,” Eeyore allowed. “There’s always a copyright extension law when a transnational corporation needs one. Still...I can’t help – in my plodding and tiresome way – but wonder how adversely this will affect the creation of new work. After all, art is often built on what came before. Copyright law that is too strict can actually stifle expression. That’s one point of view, anyway. Maybe not the right one – who knows?”

“We created the Pooh phenomenon,” the man said, simply. “We should have the power to exploit it for our maximum economic benefit.”

“You are undoubtedly right,” Eeyore gloomily responded. “Still, Disney used Victor Hugo’s *Hunchback of Notre Dame*, old fairy tales for *Snow White* and native mythology for *Pocahontas* – all without paying royalties, since those stories were no longer protected by copyright. It’s probably unfair of me to point this out – and I do apologize for saying it – but, aren’t you being hypocritical?”

“That’s irrelevant,” the liar/lawyer argued. “You know, every line added to this story just makes matters worse for you. You really ought to stop doing anything at once.”

“But, this is satire!” Eeyore protested. “This is fair comment. Or...or so I’ve been told.”

The man laughed. “Are you willing to take your chances in a lawsuit that is likely to be long and costly?”

Pooh didn’t understand much of what Eeyore and the man were talking about. He gathered the man wanted him to do Nothing. This was one of Pooh’s favourite things to do in all the world, so he was drawn to it. On the other hand, he wasn’t sure he could do Nothing on command. It just wasn’t the same.

Still, Pooh was a Bear of Very Little Means. So, he decided to

A Bargain at Twice the Price

According to recently released documents, former Chairman and CEO of energy giant Enron Corporation Kenneth Lay was paid \$153 million, including an \$81.5 million loan, as the stock price of the company plummeted and it chugged towards bankruptcy. Let us set aside the question of what an individual would do with a \$81.5 million loan buy a really nice gift for his child’s birthday – a small African nation, perhaps, or a trip to Mars).

It’s easy to understand why some people were outraged by the news. I would have happily bankrupted Enron for a tenth of what Lay was paid. That’s right – 10 cents on the dollar, a mere \$15.3 million. A bargain at twice the price.

Actually, Enron isn’t the best example; its Byzantine structure of shell companies is far too complex for my taste. I prefer a more traditional approach to destroying a corporation:

borrowing large sums of money to buy other companies whose core business isn't especially compatible with our core business, then defaulting on the loans when our stock price drops. Sometimes, the old ways are the best.

Take telecommunications company Qwest, whose chairman and CEO, Joseph Nacchio, had an annual salary of \$1.5 million, with a target bonus of \$3.75 million. And, I am not even going to mention the long-term incentive pay of \$24.3 million. He was fired because the stock price dropped from \$60 to \$4, moving credit rating agencies to slash it to junk status. Now, all I know about the telecommunications industry is what I read in the papers, but I feel confident that I could have reduced Qwest stock to junk for a salary of \$150,000 and a \$375,000 bonus.

You may be wondering what qualifies me to financially destroy healthy companies. Fair question. I believe I am uniquely qualified. For one thing, I have absolutely no training in economics. For another thing, I have never run a lemonade stand, let alone a multinational corporation. In addition, you have to factor in the fact that I am highly skeptical of corporate capitalism (I suppose you could call me a social democrat if you were into the whole "label" thing.) This combination of ignorance and malice makes me the perfect candidate to run any major corporation into the ground – and keep it there.

I would be delighted, if possible, to stay in Canada. I could, for instance, have easily destroyed Nortel Networks Corporation's value for a fraction of John Roth's \$70.8 million 2000 paycheck, and had time to build massive amounts of debt for Ontario's Hydro One, Incorporated for far less than the \$2.2 million salary and \$6 million severance package and \$1 million annual pension that CEO Eleanor Clitheroe received. Be aware, though, that I insist upon being paid in American dollars; corporate destruction on this scale must be properly rewarded.

If that doesn't work out, I would be happy to travel. To France, say, where Vivendi Universal's Jean-Marie Messier was to receive a bonus of 250% of his base salary of E5.2 million in a year when his company reported the biggest loss in the country's corporate history: E13.6 billion. That's a payment of approximately \$18 million for a loss of about \$19 billion. Who says the Europeans can't compete? Still, I could easily improve upon that executive compensation to corporate loss ratio.

I offer two fundamental packages. In the first – the Basic Package – I offer the same loss as any higher paid CEO. In the Deluxe Package, for twice the price (still a considerable saving over the competition), I will compensate for the loss of a large CEO payout by increasing the company's losses, so that the net loss to the company will remain the same. Despite the fact that it makes absolutely no financial sense, several Boards of Directors have jumped at the Deluxe Package. Clearly, somebody should get these people a calculator.

Some of you may still cling to the idea that a CEO is supposed to run a company for the benefit of the shareholders. In response, allow me to say this: GET WITH THE NEW ECONOMY! Steady growth and reasonable profits are out! Plummeting shares and

bankruptcy are in! If you do not have a corporate head who can ride this wave of economic destruction to its lowest pointing – enriching him or herself immeasurably in the process – you are erecting a huge sign that points to your headquarters and says: “This is not a hip, happening company.”

Competitive rates for destroying your corporation – isn’t that what capitalism is all about?

The Column of Lists 10 (Surprise!)

Twelve examples of inspired casting

- 1) Marlon Brando as Pappy Yokum in *L’il Abner*
- 2) Angelo Mosca as Willie Loman in *Death of a Salesman*
- 3) Jeannie Becker as Blanche Dubois in *A Streetcar Named Desire*
- 4) Martin Short as Stanley Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire*
- 5) Michael Wilson as Ebenezer Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*
- 6) Joan Rivers as Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*
- 7) Benny Hill as Romeo in *Romeo and Juliet*
- 8) Conrad Black as Charles Foster Kane in *Citizen Kane*
- 9) Richard Pryor as John Singer in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*
- 10) Lily Tomlin as Mark Twain in *An Evening With Mark Twain*
- 11) Molly Ringwald as Nora Charles in *The Thin Man*
- 12) Jerry Lewis as Winston Smith in *Nineteen Eighty-four*

Eleven claims that don’t hold up on closer inspection

- 1) “A little paint and it’ll be as good as new!”
- 2) “Things can only get better!”
- 3) “There will be full disclosure of all the facts!”
- 4) “I can’t think of a person who deserves it more!”
- 5) “Don’t panic – everything’s under control!”
- 6) “This will hurt me more than it hurts you!”
- 7) “If not completely satisfied, return the product and we will cheerfully refund your money!”
- 8) “Warmer, with plenty of sunshine!”
- 9) “If you just give the movie (book, play, whatever) a chance, I guarantee you’ll love it!”
- 10) “The world is a bowl of chocolate pudding!”
- 11) “If we only had had more time...”

Ten further potential revelations in the Iran/contras fiasco

- 1) that the “Canadian connection” was really Mendelson Joe, who agreed to be a go-between for the Americans and Iranians at the personal request of his good friend Benjamin Bradlee of the Washington Post
- 2) that the contras resold the arms they received to penguins in the Arctic for a tidy profit
- 3) that funds that are unaccounted for found their way into the Swiss bank account of some guy named Eric Rutabaga

- 4) that Frank Sinatra approved of the deal as early as 1982
- 5) that the whole elaborate set-up was the White House's way of telling Colonel Oliver North he wasn't living up to their expectations
- 6) that the New York Association of Hacks and Cabbies intends to hold its own investigation into the affair
- 7) that included in the arms shipments to Iran were several tapes of assorted thrash metal songs
- 8) that Mary Hart convinced Adnan Khashoggi to get involved
- 9) that this is all Attorney General Edwin Meese's idea of a joke
- 10) that the Iranian government really wanted the American arms to melt down and make into washing machines

Nine gifts to give people you don't like this holiday season

- 1) the recently released five album set *Abba Live: 1975 to 1985*
- 2) naval uniforms that haven't had the blood or smell removed
- 3) anything from the Dick Beddoes line of matching hats and bow ties
- 4) *Ivan Boesky's Cookbook* (he encourages cheating on the ingredients)
- 5) a photocopy of their tax records
- 6) a bottle of bitters (or, if you really don't like the person, several bottles of bitters)
- 7) gift certificates to the dentist of your choice
- 8) *Great Tables of Contents of the Twentieth Century*, a coffee table book written by Angus Development
- 9) Ghermezian Brother Dolls (set of three) with scale model Megabuck Mall (tax concessions from appropriate provincial government not included; offer void where prohibited by local zoning by-laws)

Eight kinds of filler

- 1) humorous articles ("Man saved from embarrassment by mongoose")
- 2) human interest stories ("Twins united after 50 years on separate planets")
- 3) idle conversation
- 4) Poly-Filla
- 5) almost all television programmes
- 6) off-cuts of beef and cereal
- 7) this list
- 8) this column

Seven people whose names will soon appear on their own lines of products now that hemingway has shown the way and put his name on fishing rods, safari outfits and shotguns

- 1) Mahatma Gandhi (prayer mats and bikini underwear)
- 2) Nancy Reagan (little pistols, hair dye and puppet strings)
- 3) Bob White (distributor caps and union card holders)
- 4) Steve Martin (Egyptian relics, arrows and sombreros)
- 5) Julius Caesar (Roman dictionaries and toga stain remover)
- 6) Muhammed Ali (boxing gloves and throat lozenges)
- 7) Jamie Lee Curtis (cutlery)

Six euphemisms at which mere mortals can only guess the real meaning

- 1) outplacement (firing?)
- 2) revenue neutral (we say we won't change the amount of money we'll be getting, but we secretly hope it will increase?)
- 3) high concept (lowbrow?)
- 4) damage control (press control?)
- 5) national security (the security of the ruling party?)
- 6) free trade (increasing American domination of trade?)

Five reasons for holding public trials

- 1) to ensure the rights of the accused are protected
- 2) to ensure due process is observed
- 3) to show the public that justice is done
- 4) to help make some lawyers' reputations
- 5) to give competition to *The People's Court*

Four reasons for holding closed disciplinary hearings for lawyers

- 1) their reputations could be hurt
- 2) it's none of the public's business
- 3) the reputation of the legal profession would be damaged (yes, such a thing is possible)
- 4) they make drunken brawls seem civilized by comparison

Three roads you don't want to travel alone

- 1) the Trans-Canada Highway between Kingston and Moosejaw
- 2) the road to adulthood
- 3) *The Road to Rio*

Two good to be true

- 1) Mother Teresa
- 2) Bob Geldof

One list that is completely redundant

- 1) one list that is completely redundant

No explanation for reviving a feature we all thought had run its course

The Father, The Son and The Holy Goat

"Okay, you asked for dis sit down," Tony Soprano stated, "and you got it. But, I gotta tell ya, I don't have nuttin ta say to a couple a cartoon characters."

"Oh, like you're real deep, man," Bart Simpson sarcastically commented.

“Hey!” Tony hotly retorted. “I’m deep! I go to a freakin’ psychiatrist, fer Chrissakes! I – I’m whatchacallit.”

“Three dimensional?” Charlie Brown suggested.

“Yeah! I got three freakin’ dimensions. Four! Five, even! I got dimensions comin’ out my freakin’ eyeballs, so watch what you say about me!”

Bart and Charlie Brown looked at each other, uncertain what to make of this. A heavy bass rumbling could be heard coming from the strip club outside the room. “Can we go and see the girls after we’re done here?” Bart asked.

“Wait’ll you grow up. Yer freakin’ children.”

“I’m not,” Charlie Brown protested. “I’ve been around for over 50 years.”

“Whaddya – you’re six years old. Seven, tops.”

“But, I’m not young. I’m just drawn that way.”

“I don’t give a shit. Cops see you in da club, I lose my license. Simple as dat. Simpson! Wanna tell me what dis is all about, or wha?”

“Okay, okay. Don’t have a cow, man.”

Charlie Brown looked at Bart, surprised. “I thought you didn’t use that catchphrase any more,” he remarked.

“We’re off camera – I don’t have to watch what I say.”

“I ain’t got all day!” Tony bellowed.

Bart looked down at the floor, sheepish. “Well, Tony,” he began, “we heard about the new book, *The Gospel According to Tony Soprano* –”

“Yeah, ain’t that somet’in’?” Tony grinned.

“Yeah, well...uhh, it’s just that we’re not sure that, like, you’re the best person to, err, bring the word of god to the people – no offense, man.”

“Oh, like you are? You got no respect for your family. You got no respect for your teachers. You got no respect for anyt’in’, includin’ god!”

“Yeah, man, but, like, we got Ned Flanders and god even made a guest appearance in one episode. Man, all you got was a lousy book. We got a whole college course of religious lessons out of our show, man.”

“Hey, you little snot!” Tony grumbled. “If you was my son, you’d be grounded for life!”

“What my friend is trying to say,” Charlie Brown, at his most conciliatory, said, “is that you don’t seem to be struggling too hard with issues of good and evil...”

Tony grunted. “Freak dat shit. I do what I have to so’s my family can survive.”

“Sure. Sure. Still...you kill people. You steal from people. You hurt them. And, you don’t show a lot of remorse. It’s a pretty big stretch to compare your suffering with the suffering of our lord.”

Tony lowered his voice and stared at Bart and Charlie Brown. This frightened them more than his shouting. “You t’ink you got a right ta judge,” Tony coolly asked, “just because *Da Gospel According ta Peanuts* started dis whole trend a interpreting da Bible t’rough pop culture in da first place? Lemme tell you some’tin’, Charlie Brown. You’re a freakin’ loser. Dat Lucy Bimbo’d pull a football away from me and I’d smack her around – she wouldn’t pull dat shit on me twice. Understand? And, are you a freakin’ latchkey kid, or whu? Do you even have freakin’ parents?”

“That has nothing to do –”

“No, it has everyt’ing ta do wid it. Good and evil are pretty simple in a kid’s world. In da adult world, you struggle wid da big questions all da time. Dat’s what I’m about.”

“My friend Linus talks about a god of love –”

“Yeah, and he talks about a Great Pumpkin. So?”

“So, there really doesn’t seem to be a lot of love in your world.”

Tony smirked. “It’s got a kinda Old Testament feel to it, don’t it?”

“Listen, man,” Bart chimed in, “if you’d just backed off a litt –”

“Tony Soprano never backed away from nuttin’! Especially not for a couple a cartoon babies!

There was tense silence for a few seconds. Then, Charlie Brown almost smiled. “Sorry to trouble you, Mister Soprano.”

“Don’t let da door hit your ass on da way out,” Tony graciously responded.

On their way out, Bart turned to Charlie Brown and said, “Hey, man. I got some fake Ids. Wanna sneak into the club?”

With a resigned sigh, Charlie Brown replied, “OK.”

“Cool. You wanna be Laverne or Shirley?”

Frequently Unasked Questions, v. 6

- 1) I have never heard you denounce bloodthirsty Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein – why do you support him?
- 2) How do you celebrate the Christmas holidays?
- 3) Doesn't it bother you that you are building a career on the suffering of others?
- 4) How do you make money?
- 5) No, no. I meant: since you don't charge for your Web site, how do you make money from your writing?
- 6) You don't seem to be doing any conceptual pieces any more. Have you given up on surrealism?
- 7) Why does *Les Pages aux Folles* have so many origin stories?
- 8) Do you ever feel uninspired?
- 9) It's called writer's block –
- 10) What do you do when you have it?
- 11) What are you wearing right now?
- 12) If I inject petaflops into the EMM386.EXE command line in my CONFIG.SYS file, will I risk changing the NOEMs switch to the ram switch?
- 13) Ha! I just made all the technical jargon up! It's absolute gobbledygook – totally meaningless! And, you didn't catch it. Call yourself a computer techie?
- 14) When is Toni Braxton gonna appear in one of your columns?
- 15) I don't really get a sense of who you are from your writing, and I think I would be able to relate to it better if I felt a connection to you. Why don't you write about your personal experiences more?
- 16) How can you justify engaging in frivolous activity like comedy writing when there is so much hatred and suffering in the world?
- 17) Since you think you're so smart about politics, why don't you run for public office?
- 18) Do you exploit the labourers who produce your columns?
- 19) Uhh, actually, I was wondering if you get enough sleep, or, maybe, are a little over-caffeinated.

1) I have never heard you denounce bloodthirsty Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein – why do you support him?

I have never heard you, dear reader, denounce cancer – why do you support it?

2) How do you celebrate the Christmas holidays?

I dance naked around a bank with a tree in the window for several hours until visions of *Harry Potter* videos dance in my head, at which point I sacrifice a small marsupial to the god of K-Mart's net annual profits.

3) Doesn't it bother you that you are building a career on the suffering of others?

Hey! I didn't create human greed and stupidity. Can I help it if human greed and stupidity give me job security?

4) How do you make money?

I assume I make money the way everybody else does: I find the most advanced photocopier available and –

5) No, no. I meant: since you don't charge for your Web site, how do you make money from your writing?

People actually make money from writing?

6) You don't seem to be doing any conceptual pieces any more. Have you given up on surrealism?

Ibfbot, op! J kvtu ibwf up cf jotqjsfe up xsjuf uibu ljoe pg bsujdmf, boe, mbufmz, J kvtu ibwfo'u cffo. Jotqjsfe. Up xsjuf uibu ljoe pg bsujdmf, J nfbo. Pi, qboubmppot!

7) Why does *Les Pages aux Folles* have so many origin stories?

My spiritual leader, GedRael, says that we should propagate new origin myths whenever the old ones get boring. This is the purpose of ClownAid, a corporation dedicated to cloning Bozo, Ronald McDonald and various other painted images of fun who, according to legend, came to Earth 25 million years ago and used dinosaurs as the butts of their jokes, causing the ancient creatures to go extinct from embarrassment. *Les Pages aux Folles* is an ongoing updating of the GedRaelian gospels, but that's not very impressive, since the same can be said of the McDonald's happy menu.

8) Do you ever feel uninspired?

Of course! We all have...you know...bad, uhh, periods when the words just don't...uhh, come. It's called writer's...writer's...something. If, like me, you're used to writing a lot, it can be really...uhh, really, kind of, well, hard. That's it. Hard.

9) It's called writer's block –

Yeah. That's it. Writer's block.

10) What do you do when you have it?

I put my computer on auto-pilot and hope the results aren't too embarrassing. So far, I've been pretty disappointed, but what can I do? The insatiable maw must be fed.

11) What are you wearing right now?

A Home Hardware t-shirt with Napanee on the front and Juicy Couture sweat pants that actually say “Juicy” on the ass. I’m channeling my inner Avril Lavigne. It’s so not pretty.

12) If I inject petaflops into the EMM386.EXE command line in my CONFIG.SYS file, will I risk changing the NOEMs switch to the ram switch?

Uhh...yes?

13) Ha! I just made all the technical jargon up! It’s absolute gobbledygook – totally meaningless! And, you didn’t catch it. Call yourself a computer techie?

Uhh...no?

14) When is Toni Braxton gonna appear in one of your columns?

Sorry. I don’t do requests.

15) I don’t really get a sense of who you are from your writing, and I think I would be able to relate to it better if I felt a connection to you. Why don’t you write about your personal experiences more?

Whenever I start to describe looking out of my kitchen window waiting for inspiration to hit, people threaten to dismember me with toothpicks.

16) How can you justify engaging in frivolous activity like comedy writing when there is so much hatred and suffering in the world?

Uhh...you think if I was suffering more the world would be a better place?

17) Since you think you’re so smart about politics, why don’t you run for public office?

Those who can, do. Those who can’t, teach. Those who can’t teach become Premiers and Education Ministers in the Common Sense Revolution.

18) Do you exploit the labourers who produce your columns?

Absolutely not! If you are referring to the situation described in “When Elves Rebel,” I can assure you that my professional relationship with the elves who toil on *Les Pages aux Folles* is well beyond what is required by international agreement. If you are talking about the workers in Uttar Pradesh referred to in the column “Constitutional Crisis? What Constitutional Crisis?” charges of exploitation have been declared utterly false by international labour tribunals that inspected our workshops, and we will take vigorous legal action against anybody who claims otherwise.

19) Uhh, actually, I was wondering if you get enough sleep, or, maybe, are a little over-caffeinated.

No comment.

The Dictator's Management Guide

Chapter 7: Saddam Hussein

Some people have accused Saddam Hussein of being a madman. However, to give him credit, he has managed to hold onto power for decades, through a disastrous war with his neighbours, battles with an internal enemy and, of course, an attack by the mightiest military force the world has ever known. If he is crazy, he's crazy like a fox!

"Don't be attracted to easy paths," Hussein advised in the book *Great Lessons, Commandments To Strugglers, The Patient and Holy Warriors*, "because the paths that make your feet bleed are the only way to get ahead in life." Are there lessons here for corporate managers? You bet!

The easy path for any company would be to rest on its laurels, to stick with profitable product lines. This passage suggests that the more difficult path – putting resources into developing an Innovative Strategy – is the only way "to get ahead in life." Yes, initially your feet may bleed red ink, but developing new products and new corporate strategies for maximizing the profit gained from those products is the best thing for your business in the long run.

This passage can also refer to internal criticism. Nobody enjoys criticism, of course, and the easy path would be to stifle dissent within your organization. However, criticism can also challenge you to think outside the box and contribute to your Information Agenda. Letting your feet bleed – psychologically – can contribute to your company's evolution and long-term growth and wellbeing.

"Don't provoke a snake unless you have the intention and power to cut off his head," Saddam Hussein wrote.

One method of corporate growth is, of course, to expand into a new market. However, an incumbent with an entrenched market share is a very dangerous snake, indeed. Here, Hussein reminds us that careful study must be made before entering a new market; if you cannot quickly gain sufficient market share of your own to challenge the incumbent – to cut off his head – you should consider another course of action.

This passage also suggests that, within your company, you be careful about raiding other divisions for outside contracts or personnel. If you cannot cut off your rival's head, you may start a debilitating internal battle that will divert much of your company's time and resources away from efforts to improve the bottom line.

“If you rule, rule in a fair way, and don’t let your heart take part in the ruling, or let a criminal who cannot be rehabilitated escape punishment.”

Such a simple passage, so many profound implications! To begin with, this is an admonition not to allow executive compensation to grow too large. Although Hussein doesn’t go into such details, if employers don’t use fairness in how people are paid, the results cannot help but be negative, including increased absenteeism, employee vandalism and theft and significantly lower productivity owing to generally low employee morale.

What is true for compensation is also true for punishment. Our heart may tell us to spare the incompetent secretary we want to come away with us for a weekend to Aspen or the lazy worker who happens to be a close relative of the CEO. However, our personal short term gain may not be in the best long-term interests of the company. Always remember: if the company does not survive, all your good intentions will not save others (or, for that matter, you).

This is especially true of having to rightplace employees, which some executives will cheerfully get root canals to avoid. No amount of counselling will rehabilitate the employee who has burned down the company commissary **for the third time**; obviously, he should not expect to escape punishment. Frankly, some (former) employees will see their rightplacement for what it is: a message from a desperate employer to change their foolish, unproductive ways.

“Keep people’s secrets and don’t tell them to other’s or use them against them.”

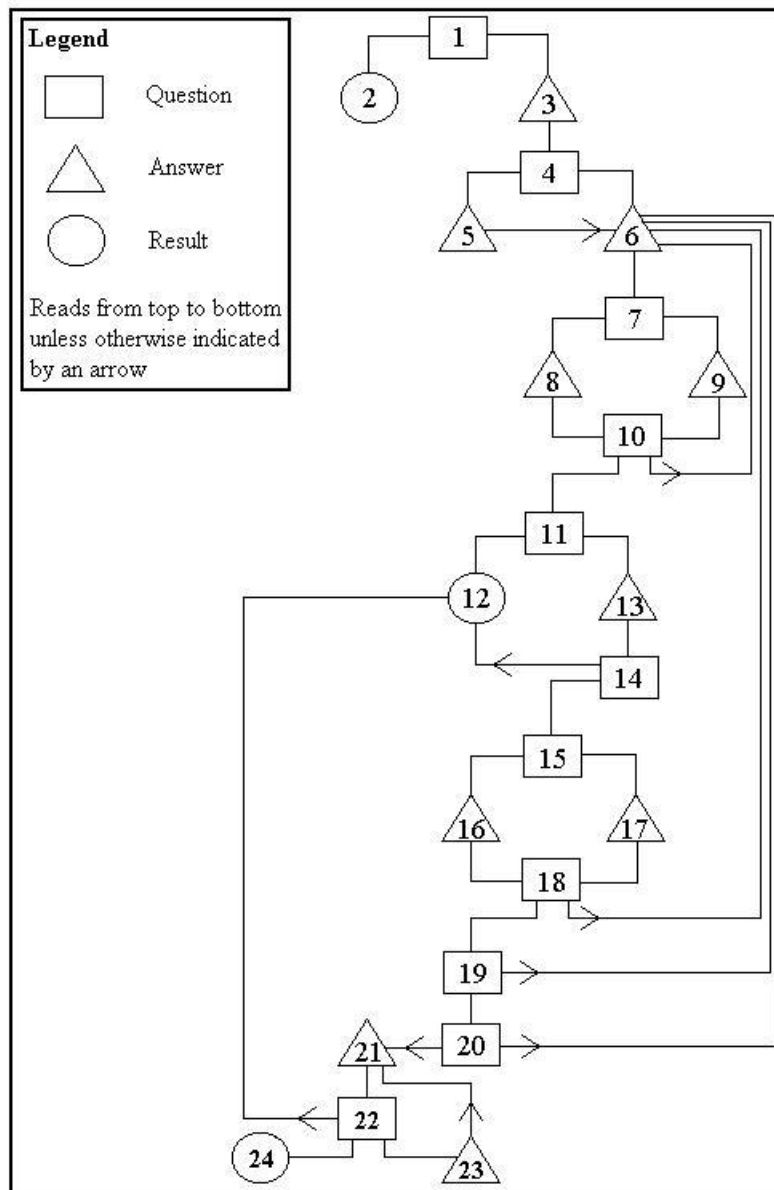
There is no evidence to suggest that Saddam Hussein uses, or even has access to, a computer. Nonetheless, in the Information Age, advice about secrets couldn’t be more relevant.

Competitive Advantage must be a part of any corporation’s Innovation Formula; you must find a better way to do something people already do, or something that people haven’t done before, but, with the right amount of coaching, could be convinced to do. Once you have this, it gives you an advantage over your competition that you need to maintain for as long as possible. Fortunately, copyright and patent laws are frequently being strengthened to ensure that you can keep your secrets.

Internally, employees may come to you with problems that they do not want other employees to know. By all means, help them with their problems if you have the time and feel so inclined. However, do not tell anybody else what has been told to you. In this way, you have something to hold over the employee in case you ever need something from him or her.

NEXT: Chapter 8: Pol Pot.

The Provincial Conservative Party Social Policy Algorithm



	1	Does the program benefit individuals or corporations?
CORPORATIONS	2	Put a businessman in charge and ignore the program.
INDIVIDUALS	3	Put somebody who has a financial stake in eliminating the program or who knows nothing about what it is intended to accomplish in charge and restructure it so that the power to make decisions about the program is concentrated in the office of the Premier.
	4	Is there an outcry against the changes?

YES	5	Ignore it.
NO	6	Cut funding to the program to pay for tax cuts.
	7	Is the federal government offering funds to help prop up the now underfunded program?
NO	8	Complain that the federal government is threatening the health of the program by refusing to give it adequate funding.
YES	9	Thank the federal government for the money and put it into your general revenue so you can afford further tax cuts.
	10	Is the program in crisis yet?
NO		GO TO 6
YES	11	Is the program considered a “sacred trust” (such as education, medical care and pensions)?
NO	12	Privatize the sucker.
YES	13	Argue that privatization of parts of the system will make it more efficient, solving its current economic problems.
	14	Is there a public outcry against privatizing the system?
NO		GO TO 12
	15	Are the Party’s backers pushing for more tax cuts?
NO	16	Say that there is no crisis and critics of your policy don’t know how much better the affected social institutions are because of the changes you’ve made.
YES	17	Cut funding to the program and to hell with the public’s opinion.
	18	Are the cutbacks to the program having adverse social effects (such as people dying after drinking tainted water or freezing to death on the streets where they landed because they could no longer pay their rent)?
NO		GO TO 6
YES	19	Is there public outrage over the adverse consequences?
NO		GO TO 6
YES	20	Is this an election year?
NO		GO TO 6
YES	21	Put money back into the program and claim that you have now improved it, even though it now has less funding and public oversight than it did before your Party took office.
	22	What is the outcome of the election?

MAJORITY		GO TO 12
MINORITY	23	Try to build a coalition with another party or parties, but use every opportunity to slam them for slowing economic growth by opposing your policies, guaranteeing an early election. GO TO 21
YOU LOSE	24	From the opposition benches, insist cutting back on social programs to pay for tax cuts is the only way to prosperity.

EXPLANATION

Remember when “crisis management” meant working towards solving a crisis rather than working towards creating one? Neither do we. Back to back majority Conservative governments in the province will do that to you.

The Provincial Conservative Party Social Policy Algorithm takes you step by step through the thinking that goes into Tory social policy. Simply answer the questions and work your way down the algorithm until you come to a conclusion. Although it is highly educational, the algorithm is not recommended for children or adults with weak hearts or who are allergic to peanuts.

The Provincial Conservative Party Social Policy Algorithm is descriptive, rather than prescriptive. In putting it together, we have tried not to explore social policies which should exist, but simply describe the approach to policy which appears to actually exist. If you have a problem with it, mail your MPP – they love letters.

Ungainly (Ad)Ventures

Imagine a yoyo. It goes up. It goes down. Now, imagine playing with that yoyo on an escalator. The yoyo may go up and down, but the escalator carries you, the yoyo, the crying child behind you and her hissing mother ever upward.

Now, imagine that somebody pushes the stop button on the escalator. At first, you will fall forward. Then, you overcompensate for your forward motion and fall backwards onto the child, knocking the mother on the head with the yoyo. Chaos.

At the Beemer, Bank of Mertonville, we know how to employ misleading metaphors in order to make our customers believe that we can actually make them money while the stock market is collapsing all around them. Beemer, Bank of Mertonville – in good times and bad, the market works for us.

PAUSE

“This is Martina Kamilov of Missoula, Missouri.”

“Hi.”

“We blindfolded Martina and asked her to test two different brands of yogurt. One was her normal brand, the other was new Tibetan Formula with 25 per cent more chemical additives. This was her reaction:”

“Mmm...yes, I like this one. It’s creamier...fruitier, and – and, do I detect more monosodium glutamate?”

“Ha ha. Martina chose the Tibetan Formula yogurt. But, you know, since we had her blindfolded, we didn’t want to waste the opportunity to conduct more research. So, we asked Martina to pet a furry animal and tell us if it was a common house cat or a feral, rabid mongoose.”

“Oh, well, this is a tough one. They would both feel soft and fluffy and – OWWWWW! Okay. I think it was the feral...the, uhh, oh my...”

“Ha ha. Martina was, indeed, holding a feral, rabid mongoose. Once we cleaned up her wound and gave her a rabies shot, a blood transfusion and a sedative, we wheeled Martina – still blindfolded – into a room with a button. We asked her if, by feeling the button, she could tell us whether it was part of a video game console or the trigger to send a nuclear missile to a third world country on the other side of a planet.”

“I...I don’t know.”

“Not even a guess?”

“The consequences –”

“Just a guess.”

“Umm, well, a nuclear weapon?”

“Why don’t you push it and find out?”

“Oh, I...OH!”

“At which point, Martina passed out. Tee hee”

“Sadism week, sponsored by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and this station. Celebrate it with somebody you love...”

PAUSE

Nuke, Incorporated subcontracts much of its production to factories in countries like China, Vietnam and Indonesia. Lately, protests have been claiming that our factories pay

our workers less than the minimum wage in their countries, force them to put in overtime without pay, expose them to harmful chemicals and subjecting our workers to verbal, physical and sexual abuse. Wow. Our detractors accuse of everything short of setting workers on fire just to keep the factories warm.

Needless to say, nothing could be further from the truth.

An average overseas Nuke worker makes 12 times the minimum wage in his country, and each gets three months paid vacation a year. Our factories use state of the art air filtration systems that ensure that our workers breath 98 per cent pure oxygen! And, we have a zero tolerance towards worker harassment of any kind: the first time a manager is caught, he loses a limb; the second time, he loses his job.

Is any of what I have just said literally true? Of course not. Nuke would quickly find itself bankrupt if it was. However, all of what I've just said is legitimate free speech, protected by the first amendment of the Constitution. Or, it would be if lower courts hadn't ruled that commercial speech is not as protected as personal speech, that corporations selling products have to maintain a standard of "truth."

Can you imagine what advertising would be like if corporations really had to tell the – hunh! – truth? Fast food companies would have to tell you eating their products leads to obesity. Weight watchers programmes would have to tell you that the strength of your will is a deciding factor in whether you will ultimately lose weight, not their product. Car manufacturers would have to tell you all the economic and health hazards of driving gas-guzzling SUVs. And, cigarette manufacturers – well, they just prove the case, don't they?

Truth in advertising would devastate the economy. That's why Nuke, Incorporated is defending its free speech right to tell half-truths and obfuscations to the Supreme Court. We hope, for the sake of American prosperity, that you will join us.

Nuke – just screw 'em!

Conversations Overheard on a TIPS Line

"Hello?" "Hello?" "Yes?" "Hello?" "Yes, hello." "Hello?" "May I help you?" "Is this the snitch line?" "This is the **TIPS** line." "Whatever, I want to turn in my husband Frank." "You can **report** anybody you think may be involved in terrorist activity. We will decide if your complaint has merit. What –" "Hello?" "What has –" "Hello?" "Ma'am? What has your husband done to –" "What has he done? What hasn't he done? He no longer mows the lawn, he doesn't go down to the bank to cash our Social Security checks, he –" "Ma'am, I need to know what he has done to cause you to suspect –" "We've been married 57 years, and I always pulled my own weight. Is it so much to ask?" "No, ma'am. But, I need to know why you think your husband is involved in terrorist activity." "Does he have to be?" "I'm sorry." "Can't you just take him away for a couple of days to, you know, teach him a lesson?" "Only if he's involved in terrorist activity, ma'am." "Oh, well, he has an Arab cousin..." "He does!" "She's a third cousin..." "My god, why didn't you

say so? Give me your address and we'll have a police cruiser at your house in five minutes!"

* * *

"...so, after they amputated, they gave Uncle Ferdo bionic toes. The new toes didn't actually do anything exciting, but they did keep Uncle Ferdo from falling over every time he walked." "Sir?" "Yes?" "What does this have to do with terrorism?" "I'm getting there. I'm getting there. So, anyway, after Aunt Bertha was diagnosed with her disease.."

* * *

"TIPS Hotline." "Yeah. Hi. I was wondering if you could advise me on how to terror-proof my cat." "Your cat?" "Yeah. Fluffy – she's always been kind of high-strung and a bit of a loner and I think she may be becoming attracted to radical politics." "Uhh, sir –" "I just couldn't bear the thought of Fluffy wearing a belt full of explosives around her waist – she doesn't even like being rubbed on her tummy!" "Sir, this is not an advice line. We want the public to report on any possible terrorist activity they see to us." "Oh...OH!"

* * *

"Hello, TIPS Hotline." "Alfredo Pachobal is big terrorist in neighbourhood. You will doing something, yes?" "Mr. Kuscinsky?" "Please, no names. Is dis not an anonymous phone line?" "I can't help it. I recognize your voice. Please, sir, stop calling." "What?" "You're only tying up the line, preventing people with serious information from getting through." "Is true dis time!" "Like Mr. Kerchner, who you claimed was sending signals to Al-Qaeda in his flower arrangements?" "Was an honest mistake." "Or, Mrs. Serengeti talking about getting a rifle – a BB gun for her 12 year-old nephew's birthday, as it turned out." "I never trusting dat kid!" "Look, Mr. Kuscinsky, I understand your nostalgia for Stalinist Russia. But, this is the United States of America. We don't drag people off to Gulags here." "No? You think Guantanamo Bay is picnic area?" "Please, Mr. Kuscinsky! Don't call here again unless you have real information!" "Humph! Call dis a snitch line!"

* * *

"Hello, TIPS Hotline. Our motto: we're not a snitch line." "Oh. You're not a snitch line?" "No, sir." "Then, who do I call to give information about somebody who has been behaving strangely and who I suspect of being a terrorist?" "Oh, that's us." "But...why are you saying you're not a snitch line?" "Oh, well, snitch lines are soooo fifties..."

* * *

"...the whole family situation changed. Now –" "Sir, you don't really have any information on terrorism, do you?" "I'm sorry?" "You've been talking for over three

hours, and you haven't mentioned terrorism once." "I'm getting there. I'm getting there." "Sigh – alright. But, if I don't hear anything about terrorism in the next hour or two, I'm afraid I'll have to hang up." "Fair enough. So, anyway...where was I?" "Aunt Bertha's disease?" "Oh, yeah. It changed the whole family situation..."

* * *

"Well, Miss, I'd be happy to tell you what happens to the information you give us. If it isn't obviously fake – say, Santa Claus or Senta Berger – we forward it to the FBI and the CIA. The FBI is understaffed and dealing with a flood of information, so it will take them six to eight weeks to follow up on your tip. The CIA, on the other hand, will use your information to detain people within two weeks. The people who are detained by the CIA will have nothing to do with terrorism, but that will take years to establish, and, in the meantime, they will be charged and convicted of...something. Then, the FBI will accuse the CIA of withholding information and grandstanding and the President will eventually have to step in and tell them to play nice with each other and –" "You've been working at this a long time, haven't you?" "Can you tell?"

Letters to Missed Manners: The Unwanted Guest Dilemma

DEAR MISSED MANNERS: My country is considering allowing military troops to cross over the border into our country in cases of national emergency (a terrorist attack, for instance, or a new Celine Dion album). The problem is: nobody knows what will happen after the crisis is over. Any suggestions?

DEAR HEART: Ah, the perennial problem: getting rid of unwanted guests. You know, vampires have to be invited into a home, but, once they're there, just try to get the blood out of the carpet!

Some guests respond well to subtle hints. Try having your Prime Minister stretch his arms over his head, yawn prodigiously and say, "Time for my army to get some rest – we have to be up early in the morning for peacekeeping duties, you know." Periodic consulting of one's watch heightens the effect.

Unfortunately, studies out of Carnegie Mellon have shown that the kind of guest who overstays a welcome is likely not to take subtle hints. Stronger measures may be called for. Playing irritating music at high volume might work – I have found Inuit throat flute to be tremendously effective – although it tends to succeed more frequently during embassy sieges than full-scale national occupations. Some hosts have tried throwing United Nations resolutions at unwanted visitors, but this merely emboldens them, smacking, as it does, of desperation.

Perhaps the best way to deal with unwanted guests – like vampires – is to not invite them in in the first place.

DEAR MISSED MANNERS: There was this nation – I don't want to name it – well, we used to be best friends. I mean, when I would invade my neighbours, this country would give me logistic and intelligence support. It wouldn't do this openly – what would the neighbours think? Still, it would help any way it could.

Good times.

Unfortunately, somewhere along the line, things changed. The country stopped returning my calls. It wouldn't send advisers over to play. That sort of thing. Now, I find out that it has been telling everybody in the neighbourhood that I'm a threat to international security! Me! Gee, Miss M. – you control a substantial amount of oil and look at how quickly your friends turn on you! Is there any way I can stop these nasty rumours from spreading?

DEAR HEART: It is always sad when friends fall out. And, yes, it is true that some nations will resort to name-calling and malicious gossip to try and hurt a former friend. Remember: it's only words. If you respond with your own name-calling, you will just sink to the level of your former friend, which will most certainly not help your standing with your mutual acquaintances. And, under no circumstances should you resort to irrational or violent behaviour. Here's a hint: attacking Israel? It may be emotionally satisfying in the short term, but in the long term it would be a big mistake.

Let the truth be your shield and you will come through this just fine.

DEAR MISSED MANNERS: I have been invited to the funeral of an uncle of mine. His body will be available for display at the drive-thru window of Parkinson's Funeral Home from 9 to 11 in the morning. I've never heard of such a thing before. Would it be okay if I stopped to say a prayer for my uncle, or would that tie up traffic? And, can I get fries and a Coke with the viewing?

DEAR HEART: This is barbaric. Inhumane. Not nice. How can somebody who has just lost a loved one properly grieve when cars that are lined up all the way to the northbound collectors lane of the highway are honking at him to stop blocking traffic? Don't go. Boycott drive-thru viewings and demand that your family give your uncle a proper service! If necessary, threaten your parents that you will publicly come out of the closet if they do not insist that your uncle be given a proper funeral viewing.

Extreme? Perhaps. Especially if you're not, strictly speaking, gay. However, modern mourning rituals have developed over thousands of years; they offer the maximum of comfort and sensitivity to people undergoing a very sad and difficult time in their lives, and we must be prepared to fight tooth and nail to ensure that these rituals are respected!

Berlusconi World

“Silvio! Silvio! Silvio!” the crowd outside the courthouse chanted. As the elegant, silver-haired gentleman climbed the steps, the shouting grew and grew, to the point where it

seemed it would drown out the world. Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi stopped and, to a roar of approval from the crowd, turned.

Berlusconi looked out at the sea of faces. Those closest to him looked exactly like his, and he assumed that all of the others were the same, to the back of the square. Berlusconi waved, eliciting another roar from the crowd.

A cameraman from Italia 1, one of Berlusconi's privately owned television networks, broke through the crowd and approached the Prime Minister. "Ciao, Silvio," the cameraman affably said.

"Ciao, Silvio," the Prime Minister affably responded.

"Nice day," the cameraman commented.

"If it don't rain," the Prime Minister finished the old joke.

"So," Silvio Berlusconi asked Silvio Berlusconi, "what do you have to say about this...bribery charge?"

"It's nonsense," Silvio Berlusconi told Silvio Berlusconi. "I am proud – I repeat – I am proud of my conduct."

Silvio Berlusconi, a reporter for RAI 2, one of Italy's public television networks, which Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi was the head, sidled up to his private sector counterpart.

"Ciao, Silvio."

"Ciao, Silvio."

"Ciao, Silvio."

"Ciao, Silvio."

"Silvio, why do you think the magistrates are pursuing this bribery case?" Silvio Berlusconi asked Silvio Berlusconi.

"The red togas," Silvio Berlusconi contemptuously told Silvio Berlusconi, "have always had it in for me. They cannot accept a progressive capitalist – not to mention a successful capitalist – as the head of state. And, they are, of course, supported by the left wing media."

Silvio Berlusconi exchanged a surprised look with Silvio Berlusconi, then the two of them turned their attention back to Silvio Berlusconi. "But –" the two said as one, then stopped. The reporter from the public network deferred to the reporter for the private

network. “But, Silvio,” Silvio Berlusconi protested, “how can you complain about the media when you own or control mo —”

“Buffone!” somebody in the crowd shouted. “Corrupt clown!”

Two Silvio Berlusconis turned and scanned the crowd as Silvio Berlusconi, deeply offended, tried to find the man who had shouted such a foul slur. “Do you see him?” Silvio Berlusconi asked. “Do you see the treacherous heckler?”

Silvio Berlusconi shrugged. “What did he look like?” he asked.

“He didn’t look like me!” Silvio Berlusconi, annoyed, shouted. But, none of the men could see anybody who didn’t look like them, so the reporters turned back to the Prime Minister.

“You were saying?” Silvio Berlusconi asked. Unfortunately, Silvio Berlusconi had forgotten what he had been saying. This gave Silvio Berlusconi the opportunity to jump in: “Are you worried that the conviction of your friend and ally Cesare Previti for corruption will affect the outcome of your case?”

“Not at all,” Silvio Berlusconi answered. “You see —”

“Why are you answering?” Silvio Berlusconi asked.

“Because I’m Silvio Berlusconi,” Silvio Berlusconi explained.

“But, I’m Silvio Berlusconi,” Silvio Berlusconi argued.

“Well, yes,” Silvio Berlusconi allowed, “but I’m Silvio Berlusconi, Prime Minister of Italy.”

“Except, you’re not,” Silvio Berlusconi insisted. “I’m Silvio Berlusconi, Prime Minister of Italy. You are Silvio Berlusconi, journalist.”

Silvio Berlusconi considered this for a moment. “You’re right,” he admitted. “Silvio, I am so sorry for the confusion.”

Silvio Berlusconi waved away the whole thing. “It was a perfectly understandable error,” he said.

“So, Silvio,” Silvio Berlusconi asked, “are you at all worried that this second indictment will make it impossible for you to stay in office?”

“I have learned a lot since 1994,” Silvio Berlusconi confidently stated, “and I am sure there will not be a repeat of that unfortunate incident.”

“How can you be sure?” Silvio Berlusconi asked.

“I will take down as many people with me as I can before I go,” Silvio Berlusconi told him.

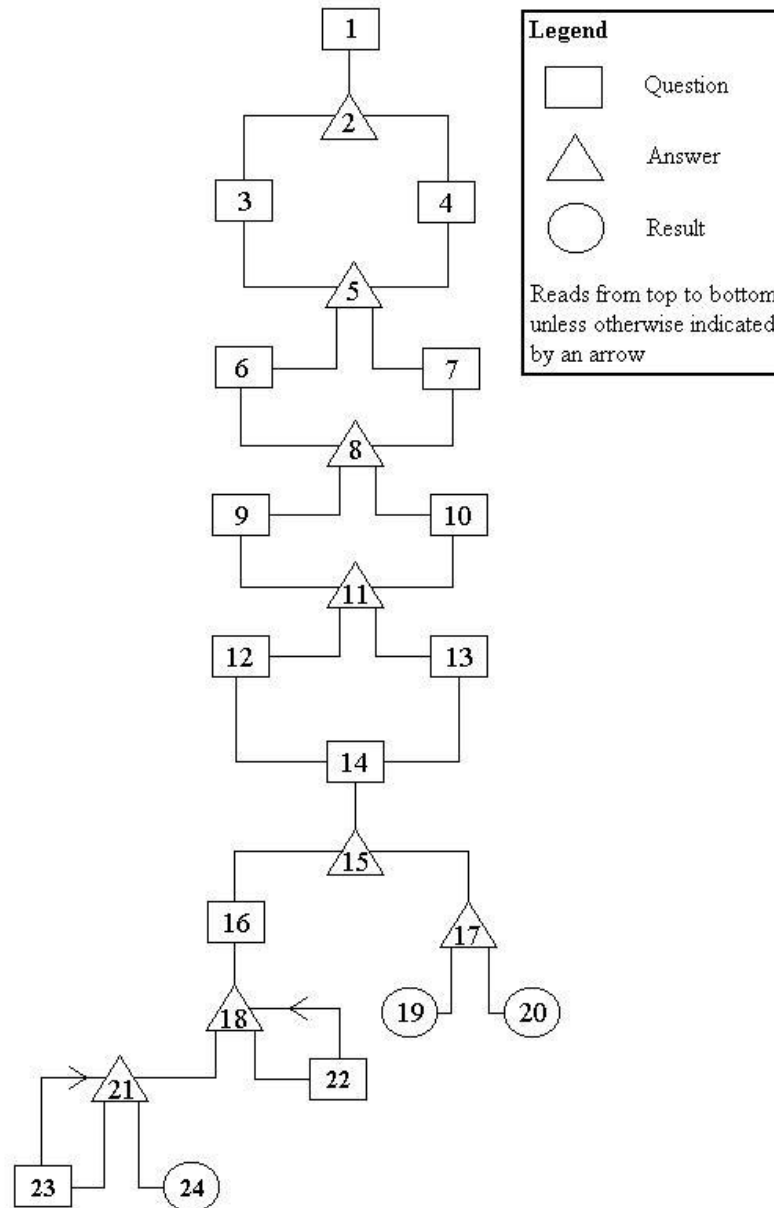
Silvio Berlusconi looked at Silvio Berlusconi. They considered statements such as this “deep, deep background” (meaning they would not, of course, be airing it or anything closely resembling it).

“Well, if you’ll excuse me...” Silvio Berlusconi gently told them. Silvio Berlusconi and Silvio Berlusconi fell all over themselves thanking Silvio Berlusconi for his time.

Silvio Berlusconi smiled, turned and walked up the final few steps to meet his accusers.

Oh, when Italy ascends to its presidency, how the European Union is going to love watching this novela!

The Hollywood Holiday Blockbuster Algorithm



	1	What is the hottest film currently in the theatres?
	2	Do you own the rights to the film?
YES	3	Make a sequel.
NO	4	Use the selling points of the hit as the basis for your own film.
	5	Can you attach a pair of A list actors to the project?
YES	6	Add \$35 million to the budget.
NO	7	Add \$3 million to the budget.
	8	Can you attach an A list director to the project?
YES	9	Add \$10 million to the budget.
NO	10	Add \$1 million to the budget.
	11	Will the film require extensive computer graphics or other

		special effects?
YES	12	Add \$40 million to the budget.
NO	13	Add \$10 million to the budget.
	14	Hire 8 writers to develop the screenplay; add \$2 million to the budget.
	15	Is your budget over \$40 million?
YES	17	Did the film test well in Pittsburgh?
NO	19	Wait a year or two and release it straight to video.
YES	20	After the holiday season, release the film in select markets with a plan to roll it out throughout the country if it is supported by positive word of mouth.
NO	16	Add \$20 million to the budget for advertising and promotion.
	18	Is your film scheduled to open the same weekend as another studio's blockbuster?
YES	21	Move the opening to another weekend.
NO	22	Did the film test well in Peoria?
NO	23	Recut the film according to the test notes.
YES	24	Release the film in a gazillion theatres.

Notes

This holiday season, as you watch Mike Myers mug his way through another witless big screen comedy or Pierce Brosnan wear designer suits at villains bent on taking over the world, you may find yourself wondering how the studios manage to crank out the blockbusters Christmas in and Labour Day out. Actually, it's a lot easier than you might think.

No, really. Close observation of the decision-making process of Hollywood executives by members of the Institute for Research, Advanced has shown that the same kinds of decisions are made in the development of every blockbuster. In fact, simply apply the algorithm above, the fruit of our research, and you, too could be the next...uhh, well, they aren't exactly household names, but...err...you too could be sipping Chablis in a spa on the desert.

A couple of *caveats* about the algorithm need to be mentioned. One is that you can make all of the right decisions and the film could still flop at the box office. (This is alternately referred to as "*Hudson Hawkitis*" and "*Ishtar Syndrome*.") In the unlikely event that this happens, blame the writers for not being able to deliver a coherent screenplay.

Also, even when all of the right elements are in place, a production can still be plagued with problems. Female actors who go all moral on you and refuse to do a contracted nude scene, male actors who have to be bailed out of jail for weapons charges, directors who close the set to studio executives while demanding that \$10 million be added to the production budget – these are just a few of the creative challenges you may encounter when producing a blockbuster film, challenges the algorithm does not address.

You will have to find your own solutions to these problems. After all, sometimes you have to work for your Chablis.

Everybody's a Hero to Their Dog

Heroes. We all have them. We'd all like to think of ourselves as one. (Oh, come on – you don't think Charlie Manson is the hero of his own life?) These days, our heroes tend not to come from real life, but from fiction: Superman, say, or Lieutenant Columbo, whose dogged questioning of suspects was guaranteed to reveal the true identity of the killer before the fade out to the closing credits.

Maybe it's no surprise that our heroes are fictional: in the real world, even these upstanding characters would be compromised. Superman would be forever tainted by his involvement in the Iran/contras scandal (hey – the American way ain't what it used to be). And, Columbo, he would have been forced to retire when it was revealed that he looked the other way while fellow officers bullied and beat innocent citizens because of their colour.

In the real world, heroism is complicated.

You may think, for instance, that being a hero means doing good deeds. Don't beat yourself up over it – this is a common misconception. In fact, villains and heroes often do exactly the same things. How can we tell the good guys from the bad guys, now that men's hats are no longer in fashion? By their motives.

Take the examples of a Palestinian suicide bomber and Eric Rudolph. Both blow up innocent people, so both should be considered villains. Right? Wrong! In the American heartland, Palestinian bombers – bad; Eric Rudolph – good. To understand the differences, refer to Chart 1.

Chart 1: Domestic versus International Terror

	Anonymous Suicide Bomber	Eric Rudolph
weapon of choice	bomb	bomb
target	civilians	civilians
specific target	Jews living in Israel	abortion doctors, gays, foreigners
justification	the Koran	the Bible
result to bomber	death	movie of the week
view from North Carolina	"Bastards're getting' in the way of the End Times"	"He's just doin' god's work."
North Carolinian actions	lobby government for absolute support for the	years of help evading authorities

	state of Israel	
view from Palestine	“This is self-defence against brutal Zionist oppression!”	“Eric who?”
Palestinian actions	years of help evading authorities	watching more CNN – those Americans are nuts!

Looking more closely at Chart 1, we see that defining a hero is really a matter of deciding whose motivations you most sympathize with. Thus, to many Arabs living in Palestine, the suicide bomber is a hero, while Eric Rudolph barely registers. (Relativism! Oh, no! Lock up your daughters! Nobody is safe!)

In comic books, the line between hero and villain is fluid. For instance, Magneto, the villain in the X-Men movies, at one point in the comic book series takes over Xavier’s school for gifted children. This fluidity can be found in the real world, as well, as Chart 2, which compares Saddam Hussein’s status in 1983 and 2003, attests.

Chart 2: Saddam Hussein versus Saddam Hussein

	1983	2003
crimes	oppressing Iraqis, looting treasury	oppressing Iraqis, looting treasury, disobeying Americans
financial situation	American military aid	American-led economic embargo
justification	support for his war against Islamic theocracy Iran	his support for terrorism, weapons of mass destruction
overlooked	gassing of the Kurds	nobody can find his weapons of mass destruction
American reputation	heroic ally	the new Hitler
Arab reputation	traitor	the new Saladdin

In comic books, this transformation occurs because the character declares he has changed his motivation, and his behaviour changes accordingly. In real life, behaviour doesn’t have to change for a person’s heroic status to change; the perception of his motivations does. In the case of Saddam Hussein, he was always an evil bastard, but his evil bastardness was overlooked by Americans in 1983 because he was useful to their foreign policy; by 2003, when he was no longer useful, his heroic image was likewise DOA.

How are people’s perceptions of heroes and villains formed? Like all of their perceptions: through the media. An excellent example of this is a comparison between President Bill Clinton and President George W. Bush (which can be found in Chart 3; President John F. Kennedy is included as a control).

Chart 3: John F. Kennedy versus Bill Clinton versus George W. Bush

	Kennedy	Clinton	Bush
personal scandal	sexual	financial, sexual	alcoholism, poor grades, failed businesses, etc.
war experience	WW II	ducked Vietnam duty	disappeared from home guard duties during Vietnam
wars	Cold War	Kosovo	Afghanistan, Iraq (and counting)
international relations	United Nations	United Nations	“coalition of the willing”
economy	inherited strong post-war economy	balanced budget despite inheriting deficit from previous administration	ballooned deficit despite inheriting balanced budget from previous administration
domestic policy	maintain social programmes	cut back on social programmes	gut social programmes while claiming to maintain them
policy stance	hands-on	policy wonk	policy lite
press relationship	worshipful	poisonous	worshipful
hero to	most Americans	other policy wonks	the far right and Fox News watchers

In many ways, George W. is a less successful president (and, quite possibly, human being) than Bill C, yet the former is a hero while the latter is constantly vilified. The most significant variable in this case is their relationship with the press, which couldn't be more different.

This suggests that the whole idea of heroism is a malleable construct, arbitrarily applied to suit current political ends. Hmm...let's see Superman work his way out of that trap!

You Want Solutions? We Got Solutions!

Works of social criticism are not considered complete these days unless they contain a chapter of “solutions.” This is based, in part, on the mistaken belief that criticizing is easy but finding ways to change the world for the better is hard. (I say mistaken because, as anybody who has tried to write three columns a week for any appreciable amount of time can attest, criticizing can actually be damn hard.) Contributing to this search for solutions is the delusion that, since we're all men and women of good will, all we need is a new idea to make the world a better place.

In fact, most of us know exactly what to do to make the world a better place; we just need to be reminded occasionally. So, in the spirit of the season (and to get some of my more vocal readers off my back), I offer the following solutions to the world's pressing problems.

Fall on your knees, beg her forgiveness and swear you'll never do it again.

Fall on your knees, beg her forgiveness and swear you got it from a toilet seat.

Fall on your knees, beg her forgiveness and swear that the alcohol was to blame, and, as of this second, you are a committed teetotaler.

Give back the land. Stop supporting terrorism.

Trade your SUV for an energy-efficient compact car. Don't leave appliances on when you're not using them. Replace your old windows with double-glazed.

Return corporate taxes to 1970 levels, rescind tax breaks for the wealthy and put the money generated back into social programmes.

Stop stopping cars just because the drivers are black. Stop sending police officers to disrupt legal public protests. Decriminalize marijuana possession and use so police officers can be freed to combat real crime.

Bring your CEO's compensation package down to a reasonable multiple of an average employee's annual salary. Stop offering them expensive stock options and inexpensive loans based on the stock options. Always state your earnings clearly. Do not use illegal means to appear to boost earnings without actually increasing productivity or profitability.

The train you are on will pass the red train in 23 minutes and 40 seconds. Start spending more time with your math homework and you will eventually be able to figure these things out on your own.

Don't take what's not yours, whether it's a cream filled doughnut or Tibet.

Limit campaign contributions to individuals.

Eat healthier food and get more exercise.

Watch less television and spend more quality time with your friends and family.

Read a book.

Stop selling weapons to tyrannical despots. Stop being surprised when tyrannical despots use the weapons you sold them against you. Stop telling your people that the tyrannical

despot killing them with weapons you sold them are dying because of the despot's irrationality and tell them the truth: you calculated their deaths as just another cost of doing business.

Accept that who your neighbours sleep with and how they get their pleasure is none of your business. Stop waging a hypocritical, expensive and futile war on drugs and accept that what other people put into their bodies is none of your business.

Put aside your mutual loathing and do what's best for the children.

Love thy neighbour as thyself.

Stop repeating mistakes you recognize as mistakes. When you make a mistake you have never made before, learn from it and never make it again.

If Communists were democratically elected, let them govern in peace. If you interfere with democratically elected governments because you do not like their policies, stop proclaiming that your goal is to democratize the world.

Don't buy clothes from companies that employ sweatshop labour. Stop using sweatshop labour to make your clothes. Pass laws forbidding clothes companies based in your country from using sweatshop labour.

Don't blame the weather. Don't blame the alcohol. Don't blame the previous administration.

Stop pretending that massive defense spending isn't an industrial policy. Stop pretending that a growing gap between rich and poor is not a sign of a class-based society.

Make sure the meat is thoroughly cooked before serving it.

Forgive others. Forgive yourself.

Question authority.

Stop wearing polyester.

You see? Solving the world's problems is not that difficult. I leave it to you to work out the details...

Making a Killing

At Baderham & Warts, we pride ourselves on having an extensive catalogue of the latest in spycraft equipment. However, we must admit that, in one area, we have fallen unfortunately behind. Our supply of personal elimination devices, once the envy of the

spy world, has, sadly, fallen largely by the wayside, owing in no small part to the American ban on assassinations.

We are delighted to report that the United States is reconsidering the use of assassination as a political tool in response to international terrorism. Happy days are here again! In anticipation of this change in policy, Baderham & Warts has reinstated the personal elimination devices section in this year's catalogue. It is our hope that you will find this year's selection to your satisfaction. Rest assured that we will spare no expense to bring you the finest products to satisfy all of your assassination needs in the years to come.

Sincerely,
The staff of Baderham & Warts

The Poison Tipped Umbrella (catalogue number T-1000-12-21). Now back in stock: the secret weapon that launched a thousand conspiracy theories! Simply send us any fully functional, perfectly ordinary umbrella, and we will sharpen and hollow out the tip for easy lethal jabbing. Please allow four to six weeks, less for preferred customers. (For preferred customer status rates, please enquire.) Baderham & Warts also offer a wide variety of poisons, everything from colourless, odourless, undetectable poisons that simulate death by natural causes to poisons that will make your target's eyes bleed and internal organs liquify. LIMITED TIME RE-OPENING OFFER: for every 10 umbrellas modified, you get a vial of the poison of your choice.

NEW! Electrocuting Keyboard (catalogue number: X-1237-17-2). It looks like an ordinary computer keyboard. It functions like an ordinary computer keyboard. But, at your command, it shoots 250,000 volts into the body of the person using it! Freak accident or murder? Not even a CSI investigator will know for sure! Coming soon: exploding Palm Pilots.

NEW! Paper Clips (catalogue number: B-1111-2-3). Remember when your mother told you not to run with something sharp or you would poke somebody's eye out? Well, these paper clips are designed to do just that! Using the latest findings in nanotechnology research, each paper clip comes equipped with a miniature onboard engine and a guidance computer. On your command, the paper clips unbend and launch themselves directly at the eyes of your target, penetrating deep into his brain. The onboard computer has retinal scanning capability, ensuring that your target can be picked out of a crowded room, but we suggest allowing a few to search out targets at random for maximum terror. Comes in boxes of 50, 100 and 500.

The Exploding Cigar (catalogue number: F-2734-6-4). Imagine your target's surprise when he suddenly finds he has no face! Hours of [classified]. Comes in three exciting flavours: Sir Walter Raleigh, Essence of the Orient (with a hint of Ginseng) and Molto Cubana (not available for delivery in the United States of America). Discounts available for bulk purchases. We can assure you that the Surgeon General won't be issuing any health warnings for these babies!

Biological Agents (catalogue numbers: D-2012-1-1 to D-2012-1-57). If you want to terrorize a nation as well as neutralize an target agent, what could be more satisfying than Deng Fever, Bubonic Plague or, everybody's favourite, anthrax? And, it's as easy as sprinkling a little Pixie dust on an envelope! Anthrax has been given a bad name since it became the weapon of choice for right wing American militia groups. Still, as we at Baderham & Warts like to say: genetically modified biological weapons don't kill people, people kill people. LIMITED TIME RE-OPENING OFFER: buy six or more biological agents and we'll pay for shipping (including payoffs to the families of accidental targets)!

NEW! Exploding Guerilla Barbie (catalogue number: F-8710-1-24); Guerilla Barbie Car Bomb (catalogue number: F-8710-1-25); Guerilla Barbie Kalashnikov and Matching Ammo Gunbelt (catalogue number: F-8710-1-26). Pull the string once, and Guerilla Barbie shouts: "Who wants to go to the mall?" Pull the string a second time, and Guerilla Barbie screams: "Death to the Infidels!" Pull the string a third time, and a shower of nails will kill any living thing within a 25 foot radius! Batteries not included. Accessories sold separately. Not recommended for children.

Covering, My Ass!

Deconstructing the world 700 words at a time...

New year, same old bile...

I was calling President George W. Bush a moron long before Francoise Ducros, but do I get any credit...?

Making fun of reality so you don't have to...

Then, it's war! Hail, hail Fredonia!

Gollum for President!

Oh, to see the world through an aardvark's eyes!

I could tell you, but then I'd have to quill you...

Always giving you a pun for your money...

Now 25 per cent more satirical!

I'm not impressed with you, either...

Satire never sleeps...

Proudly anti-American since 1985...

Proudly anti-business since 1985...

Proudly anti-[insert your personal Shibboleth here] since 1985...

You're only as free as CSIS allows you to be...

All things considered, I'd rather be in Philadelphia...

Still waiting for the peace dividend...

Inner space, the final frontier...

Have pun, will travel...

Because I could never say no to Fanny Ardant...

No celebrity too big, no human foible too small...

So, who did *your* hair?

More fun than a pack of feral mongeese...

The free Web site that guarantees value for your money...

Looking forward...to brunch...

“Star light, star bright/You got the loving that I like/Turn this crazy bird around/Should not have gone on this flight tonight.” If you think this song was written by Nazareth, read no further...

Hype springs eternal...

What could be sadder than wanting to sell out but having nobody interested in buying?

Better than a poke in the eye with a sharp stick...

Offering unconditional love for the better part of two decades...

Turtle wax...

Where you're innocent until proven stupid...

Prose that almost makes sense...

All things to no people...

Everybody I love you (except where prohibited by law)...

If you can't say something nice, claim to be a satirist...

Abandon Leslie Hope All Ye Who Enter...

Wit 'R' Us

Make friends with your inner Latin American dictator...

This tag line will break the rules for tag lines by referring to itself...

You know you're ripping off *Mad* magazine when...

Satisfying your need for reason when the grotesque becomes the commonplace...

Less platitude, more attitude...

Death: the fuckless zip...

I would put up a photograph instead of 1,000 words, but then how would I prove myself as a writer?

Cynicism is the new cynicism...

Speaking truth to whoever will bloody well listen for 18 years...

Words flail...

Welcome to the Big Queasy...

You wouldn't know it to look at me, but I'm actually the Queen of Sheba...

Better than a mole rat to the head...

Natchez? We don't need no stinkin' Natchez!

Canuckistanian, and fiercely proud of it!

It's just a phase I've been going through...for several lifetimes...

Domed as domed can be...

Show me the funny...

I play the blame game...to win!

Wall of déjà Voodoo economics...

Brought to you by an expert in whisk assessment...

Not content to be mere content...

Now that you mention it, no...

Reality: more fun than fungible...

Obnoxious for the cause...

Home of the 99 cent alibi...

Occupying your blind spot for as long as anybody can remember...

Don't you hate when what happens?

Forced fabulousness is back in style!

Eternal wisdom in five words or less...

Oh, you shouldn't have! (But, don't you dare take it away!)
Unsound bytes for the masses!
Lefts fall in love...
It's not the beat, it's the stupidity...
It's not the meat, it's the emotion...
The machinery of bold ennui...
The original Carmine chameleon...
Scratch the surface of a pessimist, and you'll discover somebody who expects no better than to be scratched...
Context-free conniptions...
Latex wasteland...
An ongoing experiment in angst management...
Lecturing...expectorating...it's such a fine line...
No longer Ministry of Oleaginous Substances approved...
Sorry, I didn't catch that...
Corn on the macabre...
Compassion? How did *that* get in there?
Taxes – the cruelest cut of all...
Game for anything...except that...
Interview with a damp fire...
Assorted diaphragms for the Godzilla generation...
Your cheerful tour guide in the handbasket to Hell...
What's calcium got to do with it?
Nipping at the heels of power for almost 20 years...
Empty your mind...leave it free to Rome...
Marginal, but not without a certain understated charm...
Isn't the alternative to the alternative the mainstream?
Where point of view is only a point of departure...
Faking it for longer than a cephalopod can remember...
Are you gonna eat that?
Studio audiences are vastly overrated...
I didn't make him...for you!
Continuity – worshipped by film directors and sperm donors alike...
It's observational humour – see?
Two's company, three's allowed...
Would you laugh more if I wrote it in a higher voice?
Don't get your shorts twisted in a not...
Afflecking the comfortable and comforting Ben Affleck for as long as anybody can remember...
Meanwhile, somewhere east of Sweden...
Just another brick wall on the highway of your life...
As not seen on CBC NewsWorld...
Because real life doesn't come with subtitles...

Big Dick Radio

“Goooooooooooo morning Toronto! This is Evan “Dick” Lamanchuck...”

“And, this is Michaelangelo “Dick” Tremonte...”

“And, you’re listening to 95 point two two C-D-I-K FM – Dick Radio!”

“That’s right. We’re the radio station where the DJs play whatever they want – as long as it’s mid-80s progressive rock.”

“It’s funny that all Dicks seem to like the same kind of music.”

“Isn’t it?”

“And, let’s face it, the Dick demographic doesn’t get catered to on radio nearly as often as its numbers would make you think it should.”

“Unless you count the Dicks on the C-D-I-X morning show.”

“Well, okay, there’s them...”

“And, you can’t forget the guys on the C-K-O-X morning show – they’ve been Dicks since before we perfected the format.”

“Yeah, sure, but –”

“And, what about –”

“Okay, okay, so morning radio has its share of Dicks. But, let us not forget that all Dicks are not created equal.”

“They’re not?”

“Absolutely not. At eight foot seven, I think I can safely say that I’m the biggest Dick on radio.”

“Wait just a second there, friend. Wait just a doggone second! I’m ten foot fourteen! That makes me the biggest Dick on radio!”

“Uhh...Dick, are you sure you should claim to be ten foot fourteen?”

“Why not?”

“It might...you know...strain the credibility of our listeners...”

“Who cares? It’s radio! It’s not like anybody can see us!”

“Good point.”

“Okay. Before we get too immersed in this witty banter, it’s time to check in with Jane and the traffic. Jane?”

“Everything’s fine.”

“Are you sure about that? Seems to me there were backups on the southbound PVD –”

“Don’t you mean BVD, Dick?”

“Let’s leave my underwear out of this, Dick. So, what about it, Jane?”

“It’s cleared up.”

“Not unlike Reggie the intern’s acne.”

“Haw haw haw.”

“Who let him out of his box, Dick?”

“I don’t know, Dick. But, you know what?”

“No, what?”

“I think Jane is still mad at us.”

“Are you still mad at us, Jane?”

“[EXPLETIVE] off, Dick.”

“Look, I’m really sorry about your impending divorce, but there’s a lesson there for all of us.”

“What would that be, Dick?”

“Don’t make plans with your lover over a cell phone when you work at a radio station with a couple of Dicks, Dick.”

“You two really are a couple of [EXPLETIVE DELETED].”

“Did you just go lower case on us?”

“Now, that’s rude. There’s no call for that kind of language, young lady.”

“Do your own [EXPLETIVE DELETED] traffic reports, [EXPLETIVE DELETED]s.”

“Geez, somebody got up on the wrong side of the feminine hygiene product this morning.”

“Speaking of which, last week, as regular listeners to the show will recall, we called a woman who claimed that she had been groped by then candidate, now governor of California Arnold Schwarzenegger. During the call, we played snips of dialogue from Schwarzenegger’s old movies. Unfortunately, the woman started swearing profusely and crying before, giggling, we ended the prank. Well, I guess some people can’t take a joke, because the next day she was admitted to the hospital with razor cuts up and down her arms —”

“Yowtch!”

“Exactly. On behalf of Dick, myself, everybody who works on the morning show, everybody who works at the station and everybody who works at the national entertainment conglomerate that owns the station, I would like to apologize to...well, she knows who she is. We are very, very, very, very, very, very, sorry about perpetrating such a tacky...tasteless joke...”

“...”

“...”

“Our lawyers made us say that.”

“At a really long meeting.”

“I have never, in my 21 years in the radio business, attended a meeting so long.”

“We had to have sleeping bags brought in.”

“They plied us with coffee because they wanted to make sure we heard every word they were saying.”

“Now, I don’t want you to get the idea that we weren’t sincere about the apology because we had to be talked into making it by executives of the corporation in a long, long – brrr – long meeting.”

“Absolutely not.”

“No way.”

“We’re insincere about everything.”

“We don’t need meetings to teach us how to do insincerity.”

“It’s called irony.”

“If you don’t like it, don’t listen to morning radio.”

“You certainly shouldn’t be listening to...DIK FM – Big Dick Radio.”

Lives Unlived – Charles Foster “Charlie” Brown

Philosopher, raconteur, teacher, bon vivant, neurosurgeon. Born, January 12, 1950 in the imagination of Charles Schultz. Died, December 23, 2000, aged 50, but lives forever in syndication.

Some people you can’t get out of your life fast enough. Some people leave us too soon. When I was growing up, all of my friends and family thought that Charles Foster Brown, whom I knew as “Charlie,” was one of the former. But, I had faith in him, and my faith was rewarded, as he became one of the latter.

I recall the lazy summer days when my sister, Lucille van Pelt Wilson von Richter Haig al Halachmi Rosenberg used to hold a football for Charlie to kick. Long after it became clear that she would pull it away just as he got there, Charlie would continue to play along, continue to try to kick the football. What inside him bade him to continue to act in the face of such repeated, inevitable failure? Even now, I cannot say.

But, this drive – whatever it was – caused him to persevere through the brutal days and nights of medical school, and to eventually realize his lifelong dream of becoming a neurosurgeon, a “brain doctor,” as he would have it. In this capacity, he saved many lives, not only of patients on the table in front of him, but because of the new suturing techniques he developed after years of practice.

His deeds have been well documented in medical journals, so I won’t rehearse them here.

More impressive than his public exploits, however, was his private life. After decades of frustration, Charlie finally wooed and married his childhood sweetheart, the little red haired girl. He was always loving and attentive to her, and was, by all accounts, a doting father to their seven children.

“I want them to get the love that I never had,” he used to say, referring to his own parents who, to be charitable, were distant. Yet, he bore no resentment towards his parents; the worst he would ever say about them was that they lived in an age before parenting books and classes, and that they did their best.

Charlie was also a good, good friend. I remember, when our mutual friend Schroeder got his fingers crushed in a bizarre piano lid accident that he refused to talk about, Charlie visited him daily, encouraging him in this therapy. When it became apparent that Schroeder’s career as an internationally renowned concert pianist was over, Charlie was

always there with advice on alternate career possibilities, as well as encouraging him to go to schools to give lectures on the dangers of improper musical instrument maintenance. Schroeder, under pressures we can only imagine, eventually hung himself with a guitar string; but there was good old Charlie Brown to give a beautiful eulogy at his funeral.

Charlie was also very helpful to me personally when I went through my...difficulties with alcohol.

Charlie felt compassion for all living things, animals no less than human beings, with his dog Snoopy taking pride of place. As he got older, it became more and more clear that Snoopy was losing touch with reality; he became increasingly consumed with a fantasy that he was a World War One flying ace. At this point, most people would have had their pet put down. But, Charlie felt closer to Snoopy than he would any mere pet, and he organized the other people in the neighbourhood to pretend that it was a WWI war zone. When Snoopy finally died – of natural causes – the whole neighbourhood mourned.

As he got older, Charlie seemed to grow into himself, becoming increasingly happy. He used to tell stories of our childhood that would have everybody rolling in the aisles with laughter. He had clearly made peace with himself and his creator. Many of Charlie's stories would end with the question, "What's so good about grief?" Wherever he may be now, I cannot help but feel that Charlie would be looking at us with a twinkle in his eye and a big grin, preparing to reduce us all to happy tears with another story from his childhood and banish our grief.

Charlie Brown was loved and will be missed.

Reverend Linus van Pelt

The Right Reverend Linus van Pelt, pastor of The Church of the Great Pumpkin Revealed, was a childhood friend of Charles Foster Brown.

Lest We Remember

War is a time of valour and heroism. (No, they're not the same thing, smarty pants, because...because one comes later in the dictionary than the other.) Remembrance Day is a time when we honour the men and women who risked their lives so that we might one day watch *Band of Brothers* on an illegal satellite feed.

For the most part, on Remembrance Day we are encouraged to think of the heroes of wars past, the men and women who risked their all saving the lives of their fellow soldiers by braving enemy fire, coming up with effective new battle tactics or throwing themselves upon suspect foodstuffs in the mess tent. However, bravery comes in many forms, and there are many heroes whose stories are not ordinarily retold on this special day.

Heroes like Private Roland “Eddie” Edmunsson, who, at the height of World War I trench warfare, shot himself in the foot so that he could get a disability discharge and be sent far, far away from the fighting. Legend has it that he was whistling a happy tune while waiting for the stretcher that would take him away from the front lines when the mortar that obliterated his face fell.

Heroes like Corporal Emmet “Stroppy” Wilson, who shouted, “I ain’t fightin’ with no Jew-boy battalion!” before the charge on Dieppe in World War II. Heroes like the members of the military tribunal who gave Wilson an honourable discharge so that they wouldn’t have to address the issue of racial segregation in the military.

Heroes like Corporal Trent “Reason, Or...” Ockerchevsky, an intelligence officer who exaggerated the threat the French evacuation of Korea posed to the United States. His reports from the front lines still give senior CIA officials night sweats, even though they long since have been proven false.

Heroes like Sergeant Keith “Doobie” Brothers, who pacified a Viet Cong village by ordering his men to fire on anything that moved, meaning 34 men, women and children. Heroes like Field Commander Walter “Humour-impaired” Schultz, who ordered an air strike on the village to ensure that no evidence of the slaughter remained, then put Sergeant Brothers up for a medal for bravery in the face of enemy fire.

In fact, Vietnam was the occasion of more American heroism per square soldier than any other conflict since the Civil War. Heroes like General Isaiah “I Spike Ike” Jedediah, who kept sending troops into battle long after intelligence had told him that the war could not be won (and who died while singing the American national anthem at a Yankees game at the ripe old age of 93). Heroes like Private Walter “Benjamin” Henry, who spent the last year of his service AWOL from Colorado’s Fort Bord, but who, 30 years later, was the most hawkish Cabinet member of a President hell bent on sending a new generation of soldiers to countries all over the world.

Heroes like Sergeant Bertrand “Brash B” Wilson-Smith, who trained Latin American Generals at the School of the Americas in the fine art of extracting confessions from left wing insurgents using only an emery board and 20,000 volts of electricity. Sergeant Wilson-Smith never actually faced combat, but is considered a hero by those who worked with him because he took a fatal bullet repelling the hijacking of his Jeep Cherokee driving through Washington, DC.

Heroes like Major Brett “Sheep Scarer” Wintonick, who, during the first Gulf War, dropped a bomb from 50,000 feet onto a wedding party, killing 13 and wounding 39 partygoers. Heroes like the unnamed intelligence agents who told Wintonick’s superiors that the area was actually an enemy training camp.

Heroes like Private Lance “Freelance” Firenza who, during the second Gulf War, got a little overzealous and started subjecting prisoners to sleep deprivation, cuts and cigarette burns – what some might call torture – because he had heard that these techniques were

now being quietly supported by his superiors, and he wanted to get his own line on where the terrorists were. Mostly, he found out who was sleeping with whose wife and where villagers kept secret herds of sheep.

Yes, these stories, and thousands upon thousands of others just like them, aren't told on Remembrance Day. Perhaps if they were, young men and women might not be so eager to fall in love with the romance of war.

Tom and Jerry Do the Twister

Transcript of Radio Broadcast, June 22, 2003

TOM: All you have to do is look at it. It looks like B. J. Birdie, the Toronto mascot, has a pickle stuck up his ass.

JERRY: No, it doesn't! He looks...determined.

TOM: Determined to get that pickle out of his ass, maybe.

JERRY: No, determined isn't exactly it. He's supposed to look...ferocious.

TOM: Yeah, well, if I had a pickle stuck up my ass, I'd be pretty pissed, too.

JERRY: You mean, you don't?

TOM: ... All's I'm saying is that I'm not impressed with the new logo.

JERRY: Well, it's a homonym, isn't it?

TOM: A what?

JERRY: You know. It represents how the team is supposed to play.

TOM: Like a...metaphor?

JERRY: That's what I said.

TOM: Ooooookay. We're going into the bottom of the third, with the Blue Jays leading the Baltimore Orioles 11 to seven.

JERRY: You could say it's a pitchers' duel.

TOM: You could say that...if you meant that the starting pitchers have managed to die a horrible death.

JERRY: That's another way of looking at it, I suppose.

TOM: Last inning, the Blue Jays sent nine men to the plate, Jerry.

JERRY: Right you are, Tom. And, it proved to be more than a little embarrassing when the umpire sent eight of them back to the dugout.

TOM: Well, you know, they were having just a devil of a time all fitting into the batter's box – Frank Catalanotto's elbow kept poking Carlos Delgado in the ribs.

JERRY: Hunh – I never did figure out why they call him “the Cat.”

TOM: When his grandmother died, she was discovered in a one bedroom house with 28 felines?

JERRY: Nooo, that doesn't sound right.

TOM: His feet are padded?

JERRY: I don't think so.

TOM: He purrs when you scratch him behind the ears?

JERRY: It's probably just one of those private things...

TOM: He likes licking his –

JERRY: SO! About last inning. All those players trying to fit into the batter's box – it reminded me a lot of a game of Twister.

TOM: Really? I didn't know you played.

JERRY: Oh, sure. You wouldn't know it to look at me now, but I was silver medallist in the Brampton Twister Run-off six years running.

TOM: That's quite a feat.

JERRY: Feet, hands, torso – that game requires complete body control.

TOM: Okay. There's one down and two runs are already in in the inning. You know, Jerry, long-time fans must be thrilled that the Blue Jays are only two games behind the Yankees for the lead in the American League East. With the All Star game looming, it's good to see the Jays in the hunt for the pennant.

JERRY: That's right, Tom. The Jays have their sonar and depth charges ready, and it's only a matter of time before they find that Russian sub –

TOM: Jerry, are you sure you're not thinking of *The Hunt for Red October*?

JERRY: No, no, no. You're thinking of that nonsense poem where a bunch of adventurers chases a mythical creature.

TOM: You mean, "The Hunting of the Snark?"

JERRY: I don't think so. That's the movie about that troubled kid from the wrong side of the tracks who turns out to be a math genius.

TOM: Uhh, isn't that *Good Will Hunting*?

JERRY: Hmm...maybe I meant it as a dominant fricative.

TOM: A metaphor?

JERRY: That's what I said. Yes, it really is good to see the Jays in a pennant race.

TOM: You mean, a *Paper Chase*?

JERRY: Who's talking about Chevy Chase?

TOM: He was great in the *National Lampoon Vacation* series.

JERRY: Yes. Yes, he was.

TOM: Okay. The Blue Jays are out of the inning, but the Orioles managed to score three runs to close the gap to eleven to ten.

JERRY: It's really a defensive ball game.

TOM: Well, let's just say it's the kind of game that makes managers defensive.

JERRY: Isn't that what I said?

TOM: Hard to tell, Jerry. Sometimes, it really is hard to tell...

If Auto Assembly Was Like Screenwriting

Everybody who has ever driven in a car would think that they could build one. This would result in fierce competition for jobs on the assembly line, which would require that aspiring auto workers would have to prove themselves outside the industry before they were hired. Some would work their way into the industry by working on toaster or radio assembly lines. Others would tap their friends and family and max out their credit cards to produce a car themselves, which they would then take to indie auto shows in the hope of impressing a suit from Detroit with their ability.

Once an aspiring auto assembler had built a personal buzz in this way, he or she could expect interest, and possibly offers of employment, from auto manufacturers. At this point, the auto worker would be wise to get an agent, a person who would take 10 per cent of their paycheck to find the best offer among those the worker him or herself had generated. If there were enough competition among auto manufacturers for a particular worker, the agent might be able to negotiate a contract that offered greater incentives than the industry standard.

Owing to the fierce competition for positions on the assembly line, the people who actually were hired by auto manufacturers would, for the most part, be those who were the most persistent and/or aggressive, not the most talented. As a result, the cars that they built would be substandard, functional but with little style and prone to fall apart under close scrutiny.

Every car that came off the assembly line would receive a critique (politely referred to as “notes”) from every executive in the company. Some of the critiques would suggest improvements to the car, others would suggest changes that would make it worse. Some would be contradictory (“I think it would work better with eight cylinders,” and “I don’t think a car like this needs more than four cylinders.”), and some would make no sense (“I don’t feel the ‘carness’ of this car – it’s just not coming across. Maybe you need to reassess your attitude towards four wheel drive,” or “More!”).

Why would executives need to be so critical of the work of their employees? Secretly, they know that, without the men and women toiling on the auto assembly line, the executives would have no job, and they resent relying on people whose work they don’t really understand.

Each producer would have a staff of 10 to 12 mechanics in addition to those who work the line. Their job would be to take parts off a finished car and replace them with parts the staff members like better. Cars would take five times longer to finish and cost ten times what they currently do. Not only that, but they would have pieces that stick out at odd angles and don’t function the way they were originally designed to.

A secondary industry would arise catering to the needs of would-be auto workers. Hundreds of books would be available that took people through the theory of auto assembly, as well as discussing practical aspects of making a career in the industry. The books would cover more or less the same territory (starting with liberally borrowing from the auto assembly line theories of Aristotle). They would have titles like *30 Days to Becoming a Professional Auto Worker*, *Life on the Line: The Advanced Auto Assembly Line Worker’s Handbook* and *Auto*.

Auto assembly would be taught at universities, where it would be considered a bird course by mechanical engineering students. On any given weekend, you could find a conference for would-be auto assembly line workers featuring seminars with titles like “Advanced Creative Auto Assembly,” “The Nuts and Bolts of Engine Placement” and

“Breaking Into the Auto Assembly Shop...The Legal Way.” They would, for the most part, be taught by people who no longer work in the industry, or never did.

With a small number of notable exceptions, those who work on the auto assembly line would be the worst paid members of the auto industry. Moreover, if a car was extremely popular, all the credit would go to the CEO of the company.

Perhaps it’s just as well that working on an auto assembly line isn’t like screenwriting.

Corporate Kleptocracy Frequently Unasked Questions

- [1\) What did Conrad Black do?](#)
- [2\) Could you qualify that description any more?](#)
- [3\) It’s hard to believe some of these allegations. I mean, how could Black’s wife Barbara Amiel spend \\$2,463 on handbags?](#)
- [4\) The couple spent \\$24,950 to go to Bora Bora for “summer drinks?!”](#)
- [5\) Did Black use company funds to...ah, fund these types of things?](#)
- [6\) Why did I bother asking?](#)
- [7\) Is Black really ACCUSED of ALLEGEDLY stealing \\$400 million from the company?](#)
- [8\) How was Black able to control 70% of the voting shares of Hollinger when he owned less than 20% of the shares?](#)
- [9\) Where was the Ontario Securities Commission while all of this was going on?](#)
- [10\) Would it be fair to say that the Hollinger board of directors were sheep?](#)
- [11\) The board was made up of hand-picked friends of Conrad Black. How could they have turned on him like this?](#)
- [12\) But, we’re talking about people like Henry Kissinger and Richard Perle!](#)
- [13\) According to one report, Perle says he rarely read or understood the documents Black sent him to sign. What should we make of this?](#)
- [14\) How was Perle compensated for this work?](#)
- [15\) About US\\$5.37 an hour and all of the cherry cola he could guzzle at board meetings?](#)
- [16\) Why was Black being sued under the American RICO statute?](#)
- [17\) Why were the RICO charges dismissed?](#)
- [18\) How will his current travails affect Black’s stature in the British House of Lords?](#)
- [19\) Don’t you agree that Conrad Black was a brilliant entrepreneur?](#)
- [20\) But, he didn’t do that with the *National Post*.](#)
- [21\) But you can’t deny Conrad Black’s intelligence – the man knows more words than everybody in the province of PEI put together.](#)
- [22\) That’s a pretty harsh assessment. Aren’t you afraid Black is going to sue you?](#)
- [23\) But, he’s renowned for suing to protect his reputation. He seems to take pleasure in mauling people in court just for the sport of it – he’s a frothing pit bull of libel actions. Aren’t you the least bit frightened?](#)
- [24\) Oh, shit.](#)

- 1) What did Conrad Black do?

Black is ACCUSED of ALLEGEDLY taking THEORETICAL money from his companies, particularly Hollinger, Inc. to PERHAPS fund his POTENTIALLY personal interests.

2) Could you qualify that description any more?

MAYBE.

3) It's hard to believe some of these allegations. I mean, how could Black's wife Barbara Amiel spend \$2,463 on handbags?

She had Imelda envy. Fortunately, there is a cure. Unfortunately, it involves a jail sentence. But, that's nothing compared to the \$60,000 birthday party Black held for her, or the \$24,950 trip the couple took to Bora Bora for "summer drinks."

4) The couple spent \$24,950 to go to Bora Bora for "summer drinks?!"

Is there an echo in here?

5) Did Black use company funds to...ah, fund these types of things?

It is POSSIBLE that a HYPOTHETICAL investigation MIGHT CONCEIVABLY find that to be the case.

6) Why did I bother asking?

Impossible to say. But, I hear they have reality shows for that.

7) Is Black really ACCUSED of ALLEGEDLY stealing \$400 million from the company?

Catching, isn't it?

8) How was Black able to control 70% of the voting shares of Hollinger when he owned less than 20% of the shares?

He is selectively math deficient.

9) Where was the Ontario Securities Commission while all of this was going on?

Serving the Blacks drinks in Bora Bora.

10) Would it be fair to say that the Hollinger board of directors were sheep?

No. Sheep provide us with wool and mutton.

11) The board was made up of hand-picked friends of Conrad Black. How could they have turned on him like this?

You just can't trust anybody these days.

12) But, we're talking about people like Henry Kissinger and Richard Perle!

You're right. Black should have distrusted **them** from the very beginning.

13) According to one report, Perle says he rarely read or understood the documents Black sent him to sign. What should we make of this?

It explains why the war in Iraq is going so well.

14) How was Perle compensated for this work?

He was paid a base salary of \$300,000 a year and collected a \$3.1 million bonus for making investments in dot com companies, some good, some only your mother's investment broker could love. Can you imagine how much he would have made if he had actually had the best interests of the company at heart?

15) About US\$5.37 an hour and all of the cherry cola he could guzzle at board meetings?

Uhh, actually, yeah.

16) Why was Black being sued under the American RICO statute?

He must have pissed off a lot of Italian Americans.

17) Why were the RICO charges dismissed?

Hey! – if the Fed couldn't make racketeering charges stick against Al Capone...

18) How will his current travails affect Black's stature in the British House of Lords?

The British prefer their leaders to be barking mad, so his position would have been strengthened if he had claimed to actually be Louis XIVth instead of just dressing up as the dead French monarch. Still, members of the House are no stranger to financial scandal, so it shouldn't hurt his standing.

19) Don't you agree that Conrad Black was a brilliant entrepreneur?

Oh, please! You don't have to be brilliant to buy companies, gut their staffs and reap profits, you just have to have a thuggish lack of compassion for those whose lives you are destroying in the name of economic self-reward.

20) But, he didn't do that with the *National Post*.

No, and look how much money that vanity project lost him, and now loses for its new owners. For somebody trying to prove that Black is a great entrepreneur, you aren't very effective. Have you considered writing speeches for the NDP?

21) But you can't deny Conrad Black's intelligence – the man knows more words than everybody in the province of PEI put together.

Obscurant irrelevancy.

22) That's a pretty harsh assessment. Aren't you afraid Black is going to sue you?

And give me all the attendant free publicity? I should be so lucky! Besides, even if he beat me in court, what exactly would he win? Twenty bucks and a pathetic political button collection? Seems like a lot of effort to go to for so little reward.

23) But, he's renowned for suing to protect his reputation. He seems to take pleasure in mauling people in court just for the sport of it – he's a frothing pit bull of libel actions. Aren't you the least bit frightened?

After what you just asked, shouldn't you be?

24) Oh, shit.

No kidding.

Head For Cover!

The one Web site you can be sure doesn't cut and run off at the mouth...

Where you are discouraged from displaying paroxysms of patriotism...

This, too, shall pass wind...

Do computer programmers take vitamin C++ supplement tablets?

I veg your pardon!

Keep it symbol, stupid...

People who mix their food scraps with their regular garbage are non-compost mentis...

The operation was a success, but the patient wasn't fully operationalized...

Some conditions always apply...

One place on the Net where you don't have to feel boxed in with Schrodinger's cat...

Where you're always welcome, even if you're not a reproductive member of society...

From codex to codecs...

Where rats never sing...

The Web site with nothing new to say, but the joy of language to say it with...

Relax! It's just a fate I'm going through...

Every rule has an exception...except this one...

Where we measure our failures in petaflops...

To a slapstick comedian, bladder control is a whole other problem...
Flee your mind!
Where Covert Ops is defined as "Covert Oops..."
New Deal? That's soooooo 1940s!
Fighting the hardening of hearts and arteries since non-sequiturs were first sacrilized...
When meaning comes thick, it helps to wear a pith helmet...
Would it be fair to say that the author of *The Wizard of Oz* was Da Baum?
Oh, you got a lotta nerf!
It helps if you turn it on...
It's good to be able to laugh at yourself...but, if you can't, laughing at others will just have to do...
Commodify your ignorance!
Where it is generally acknowledged that the increased white space is between Leonard Asper's ears...
Phish or cut bait...
The onus is on us to allege on a ledge how the prime eight primates live with the guilt of having stolen the primary prime aerie...
In case of emergency, don't break my glasses.
Doctor Nguyen -- good to see you again...
A Web site that's not afraid to call fabric swatches for an ottoman stool samples...
Senseless working overtime...
Mergers and acquisitions specialists to the left of me! Mergers and acquisitions specialists to the right of me!
I hate when that happens...and I don't even know what's going on!
Tab Hunter, please go to the white courtesy phone. Tab Hunter to the white courtesy phone, please...
The Celts have their own language, for better or erse...
Some people are just not fated to be feted...
Why are we asked to consider the unintended consequences of increasing welfare payments, but never allowed to consider the unintended consequences of invading other countries?
Where *The Lord of the Rings* offers CGI for the straight guy...
Where mistaking Bactine for Reactine is funnier than it would be in real life...
The sadistic computer programmer is always looking for somebody to dBase...
Conrad Black is the master of financial ledgerdmain...
Copyright? As long as I get cash, I can live without the credit...
Where we always keep an eye out for the Hun in the Hyundai...
In principle, uncertainty is certain...
President Bush wants to break down the walls between church and state...could there be a Methodist in his madness?
Praise the lard and pass the kimmel bagels...
At play in the fields of the lard...
The lard works in mysterious ways...
Ask not for whom the Tom Toles. He Toles for thee...
Sure, I love vaginas, but I don't want to belabia the point...
Where you are always encouraged to invest in the dot com before the storm...

For a good time, don't call...
Seize the daze...
Where the ideal relationship with readers is one of master and surfant...
Two years on the Web and nothing clever to say about it!
A place you can admit that the fine print is fine in name only...
For goodness' sake, get a hold of yourself – NOT THAT PART OF YOURSELF!
Featuring the hit single "Wichita Linesman (Cuisinart Remix)..."
Where drosophilia is more than just...uhh...whatever it is in other places...
Where wolves of London...
I don't know – what do you think it is?
Eleven easy elephants entrance eating emirs effortlessly...
Eek! A spouse!
Head for hills! The game Twister is coming!
How now brownout?
Where silliness is not just an impediment to higher productivity – it's a way of life!
Living life in the fast Nathan Lane...

This Sponsored Life

Panasonic Esso Tim-Hortons was bludgeoned to death with a television converter when he insisted that patrons of a sports bar turn up the sound of advertisements during a Toronto Maple Leafs/Montreal Canadiens hockey game. He was 23 years old.

Mr. Tim-Hortons is generally believed to be the first person to have led a completely sponsored life. Sony donated the video recorder on which his birth was televised to the world on various health networks. Upon birth, he was given a life-time supply of Pampers' Bubble Butt diapers, a line created especially for him.

Mr. Tim-Hortons was a chubby child. Most of the people who have studied him blame this on the fact that Captain Crunch was the official breakfast cereal of his life, Ding-Dongs were his official mid-afternoon snack, the only drink he was allowed to drink was Coca-Cola, the official soft drink of his life, and, of course, the official doughnut of his life was Tim Horton's. In fact, Mr. Tim-Hortons was contractually obligated to have a daily caloric intake that is higher than the populations of entire cities in many developing nations.

"Of course, being overweight was bound to have a negative effect on Panasonic's sense of himself," said Doctor Elmer Fuddle, a psychotherapist whose work with Mr. Tim-Hortons was underwritten by the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce. "Despite having his every need taken care of – by Taco Bell, Serta, The Gap, IBM, MultiNatCorp and others – I would say that Panasonic had an unhappy childhood."

At the age of 12, Mr. Tim-Hortons was embroiled in a scandal when Esso changed its name to Exxon. General Motors claimed that this invalidated Esso's contract with Mr. Tim-Hortons, and offered him a large sum of money to change his name. Esso countered that Mr. Tim-Hortons must honour his contract and, if anything, change his name to

Exxon. When the court case was first reported in the newspapers, several corporations entered into a bidding war for Mr. Tim-Hortons' middle name, including Time-Warner, Wal-Mart and Microsoft.

Before the case could go to trial, Tom and Mary Fitzgerald, Mr. Tim-Hortons' parents, reached a settlement with Exxon in which they would retain the middle name if the company would match the highest bidder. "We don't want to put young Panasonic through the torment of a trial," the Fitzgeralds' said in a press release.

Mr. Tim-Hortons achieved more notoriety at the age of 15, when he began to refuse to wear designer clothing, opting for inexpensive army surplus wear, and declared himself a vegetarian. A coalition of fashion designers, including the houses of Gucci, Dior and Levi-Strauss, brought a class action suit against Mr. Tim-Hortons, claiming that he was in violation of his contracts with them. At the same time, MacDonald's corporation, which had been one of the founding sponsors of his life, threatened him with legal action if he did not start eating meat again.

"You have to understand," Doctor Fuddle explained, "this was just youthful rebellion, not a challenge to the capitalist system!"

Mr. Tim-Hortons was unrepentant, and a judge sentenced him to spend a couple of nights in jail for contempt of court, garnering a lot of negative publicity for the coalition of designers. In the end, they decided to let their downscale labels release some lines of clothes without labels specifically to fit Mr. Tim-Horton's avowed new lifestyle. MacDonald's, perhaps more media savvy, immediately started serving salads and other meatless meals in their restaurants.

Mr. Tim-Hortons, after a year traveling sponsored by Air Canada, entered the University of Toronto on a unique scholarship sponsored by the law firm of Hunter, Playback and Knudsen. He started as a film major, but in his second year switched to pre-law. His parents claim that this was because of pressure put on him by his sponsor, but Archibald Playback insists that Mr. Tim-Hortons "really grew as a result of his university experience, and didn't require any encouragement from our firm to begin making more mature decisions about his future."

At the time of his death, Mr. Tim Hortons was reportedly studying copyright law. "He was very socially responsible," Marilyn "Revlon" Guthrie, Mr. Tim-Hortons' girlfriend, stated. "He believed information wanted to be free." According to Ms. Guthrie, Mr. Tim-Hortons' favourite book was Naomi Klein's *No Logo*.

What is Mr. Tim-Hortons' legacy? "Sure, sometimes, we were competitors," says Halliburton Disney Franklin, 13, "but Panasonic was a pioneer in life sponsorship, man. His life was, like, inspirational. He will be missed."

Panasonic Esso Tim-Hortons was survived by his parents, Tom and Mary Fitzgerald, sisters Martha and Lisa, and his golden retriever, Alpo. Services will be held this Sunday. Flowers are appreciated – only from FTD Florists, of course.

Exercises in Futility

1. Get a newspaper. (Rush hour subways are highly recommended.) Cut out individual words from headlines on each page of the newspaper. Put the scraps of paper in a hat. Choose words at random and paste them onto a piece of paper in the order you choose them. Throw the piece of paper away – the results will be pure rubbish.
2. Using the “people, places, props” method of brainstorming (see Chapter Three), make a list of 732 items which would be of interest to chiropractors south of the Mason-Dixon line. Using the “poopdeck, poopiehead, pooprietary” method of connectivity (see Chapter Five), take the list of 732 items and apply them to a wall badly in need of a coat of paint.
3. Let’s be careful out there.
4. Define love. Include the following terms: the moon in June; irregular heart palpitations; smiles when you meet; emotional connectivity. Now, apply in the real world.
5. Turn down the lights. Put on soft music. Sit in a comfortable chair. Imagine that you are a cloud drifting through an endless sky. Seconds later, turn up the lights. Turn off the music. Turn on *Celebrity Mud Wrestling* on PBS.
6. After several years of negotiation with your enemy, complete a peace treaty. Allow fanatics from your country to kill citizens of the enemy’s country. Watch in horror as fanatics from your enemy’s country kill some of your citizens. Both sides will tear up the peace treaty as the violence escalates. A few years and thousands of deaths later, sit down with your enemy to start negotiating a peace treaty. Repeat until there’s nobody left.
7. Place tab A into Slot a. Fold along dotted line. Place tab B into slot C. Cut off tab C along dotted line (it was a mistake in design). Fold along dotted line. Fold along dotted line. Fold along dotted line. Cut a straight line between the two solid lines from point D to point Alexandria. Always remain on the left of the solid yellow line. Lick tab E (it isn’t illegal and, in any case, how can something that feels so right be so wrong?). Glue tab C to slot B (oops, sorry, you needed that piece after all). If you do not end up with a miniature Taj Mahal, flatten the paper and start all over again.
8. Take 1 (one) black hole. Shake vigorously. Fifteen billion years later, search the cosmos for signs of intelligent life.
9. Explain to an American that Canada is a separate country. Explain to a neo-Conservative that private funding through the free market doesn’t solve all problems. Explain to your mother that those noises she heard last night really aren’t what she thought they were. Stop, because stopping feels so good...

10. Vote to change the world. Four years later, vote to change the world back.
11. Five sit-ups. Fifty french fries. One minute on a stationary bicycle. One Bic Mac. Repeat until obesity makes you keel over.
12. Paint a bowl of fruit using only the colour taupe, a rubber band as a brush and the back of your hand as a canvas. Try to explain to your friends that it's art.
13. Carve a nude sculpture of Conrad Black out of feta cheese. Try to convince yourself that it's art.
14. Appear at an institution first thing in morning and get in a line. Move to the back of the line that appears to be moving the fastest. Repeat until the institution closes. Repeat until you are either bankrupt, too old to drive or dead.
15. Put your hands on your hips. Put your left leg over your right shoulder. Stick your tongue out as far as it will go. Hop up and down on your right foot until you fall over. Repeat until it's time to get a chili burger and fries.
16. Sit opposite your partner. Pretend that you are your partner while your partner pretends that he or she is you. Caricature your partner's concerns. Parody your partner's mannerisms and speech patterns. Become outraged when your partner parodies your mannerisms and caricatures your concerns. Throw the nearest ashtray, lamp or other small object at your partner. Listen in disbelief as the therapist tells you that, as a couple, you seem to be making great progress. Repeat until either the one of you has murdered the therapist or the divorce papers are finalized.

Conversations Overheard On The Wal-Mart Union Hotline

"Union Hotline – how may I help you?" "There's this associate...Bob...man, he just can't stop complaining!" "About working at Wal-Mart?" "Not usually. Mostly, it's about how his wife is cheating on him." "Okay." "Sometimes, it's about his chronic herniated septum, which causes him all sort of breathing problems, and –" "Okay." "...has really put a damper on his sex life. Oh, and –" "Yes, well –" "Then there was the incident at Roswell, and he still hasn't gotten over the Kennedy assassination, even though he wasn't born when it happened, and –" "HEY!" "Yes?" "Does your associate's complaining interfere with his work?" "No. But, I worry that he's a Chronically Dissatisfied Associate." "The kind that's obvious union bait?" "Exactly. What should I do?" "Fire him." "Thanks."

* * *

"Union Hotline – how may I help you?" "I have an associate...her name is Bertha..." "Yes?" "She...well, she seems to be spending more time than usual these days in the washroom." "Could she have a reason for being there?" "Hmm...she is pregnant..." "I

see.” “And, she always has had bladder problems...” “Right.” “And, she is allergic to milk, so maybe it wasn’t a great idea to put her in the dairy section.” “Okay, but other than that...?” “I suspect she might be doing some union organizing in there. What should I do?” “Fire her.” “Thanks.”

* * *

“Union Hotline – how may I help you?” “OH MY GOD, THERE’S A UNION ORGANIZER IN MY STORE!” “Now, ma’am, please calm down.” “YOU DON’T UNDERSTAND! UNION ORGANIZER – IN STORE! RIGHT NOW!” “Is the union organizer with you at the moment?” “NO! HE –” “Ma’am, I’m going to have to ask you to calm down. Take a few deep breaths. If you have a happy place, imagine yourself in it now. Are you breathing? Ma’am, are...you...breathing?” “I...yes. I am.” “Okay. Where is the union organizer now?” “He’s in the lunch room.” “Okay – as long as he’s there, the harm will be contained – no associate is allowed to stay there for very long. Now, if you give me your location, I’ll dispatch an emergency team to the scene right away. Okay?” “What do I do about associates the union organizer comes into contact with?” “Better take no chances – fire them all.” “Okay. Thanks.”

* * *

“Union Hotline – how may I help you?” “I’m worried about an associate named Che –” “Che – that’s an unusual name.” “He told me it was short for Charles.” “Oh. Okay. What seems to be the problem?” “It’s his behaviour. It’s kind of strange.” “Strange behaviour? Un hunh. What’s strange about it?” “He was great for the first couple of months – always arrived on time, never complained about overtime, always smiled at the customers. Hell, he thought it was fantastic that he was called an associate. He’d be, like, sweeping the floors and muttering to himself, ‘Hey, Mister Associate. Nice job...Associate!’” “What’s the problem?” “Well, I noticed a couple of days ago that he spent over 10 minutes in the parking lot. When I asked him about it, he said he was interested in getting a new car, and he was checking out the cars in the parking lot to compare.” “Did you believe him?” “I don’t know what to believe. What should I do?” “Fire him.” “Thanks.”

* * *

“Union Hotline – how may I help you?” “He...he’s got a gun!” “Would you speak up, please. I can hardly hear you.” “I can’t talk much louder – there’s a man with a gun.” “That’s better. Now, tell me, is the man a customer?” “No, an employee.” “You mean, an associate?” “He’s worked too much overtime and...and...and he just...snapped!” “The associate?” “YES! Yes, the associate!” “Tell me, is he using a gun we stock?” “How would I know?” “Did he come in with it, or did he take it off a rack in the store?” “He...uhh, I think he came in with it.” “Is he shouting about starting a union?” “He’s shooting people in home appliances!” “Would you like to speak to a Customer Service Representative?” “What?” “I can transfer you.” “Help me!” “I’m sorry, but this is the Union Hotline. If you don’t have a concern about unionization at your store, perhaps you

should consider dialing 9-1-1.” BANG “Hello? Hello? ... Well, I like it when a problem solves itself...”

What Makes a Writer?

Why do people write? You have to spend hours and hours in your own head – a dark and inhospitable place for most people. The only recognition you’re likely to receive is being spit upon while walking down the street – if you’re lucky. You will be ostracized at parties the moment you claim to be a writer, the main reason that directories of alternate careers are now available on the World Wide Web.

Despite all the drawbacks, many people still seem to want to become writers. Some, despite the world’s best efforts to discourage them, will actually succeed. What is the difference between those who dream of enduring the daily abuse of being a professional writer and those who actually become one? Several theories have been developed to answer this question.

Suffering.

It is well known that William Shakespeare had to have both legs amputated when they were crushed under a falling opera diva, yet he went on to write some of the world’s best known plays. Evelyn Waugh was married 27 times before he finally sat down to write *Brideshead Revisited*. Great suffering, it is believed, results in great art.

Still. At the age of 15, William Pitcairn cut off his nose to win a bar bet that he wouldn’t spite his face. On and off for the rest of his life, he would suffer from ice cream brain freezes even though he never ate ice cream because he was lactose intolerant. He also complained of phantom smells – strawberry rhubarb and napalm prominent among them.

Betty-Lou Grapplingham had 27 children in 12 years. This was something of a medical controversy, since she had her tubes tied after her seventh child, her husband was castrated after their tenth child and she stopped having sex after her fifteenth child. By the time she was 35, she looked like she was 80.

Despite their elaborate sufferings, neither William nor Betty-Lou ever wrote a single word; in fact, there is evidence to suggest that neither of them was in any way literate. And, they are but two of perhaps millions of examples of people who suffered tremendously but never felt the urge to pursue a literary career.

Substance Abuse.

Ernest Hemmingway was a notorious drunk, who, in the final stages of his life, was known for shooting off his mouth, among other body parts. Lord Byron was a firm believer in the tenet that absinthe makes the heart grow fonder (although, in his case, it made the heart grow fainter). William S. Burroughs abused substances there wasn’t even

a name for! Even more so than actors (although, to be sure, it is a close thing), substance abuse appears to be common among writers.

Still. Angelino Fabrizzi had cross-addictions to alcohol, painkillers and John Grisham novels. The only writing he is believed to have done is his name in snow with his urine.

Franklin Marinara had the odd habit of burning teddy bears in a bonfire so that he could inhale the fumes. His family members report that, when high, he would fantasize that he was in Wonderland with Dorothy, Godzilla and Rupert Murdoch. In his frequent bouts of withdrawal, he would curl up into a ball in a dark corner and sing “The Sun Will Come Out Tomorrow” in a raspy baritone. Marinara never wrote a word.

Madness.

It is well documented that Franz Kafka suffered from agoraphobia – the irrational fear of being stuck in a Greek agora. The Marquis de Sade was placed in an asylum for the last years of his life (but the joke was on the authorities who put him there, because he actually enjoyed it). Sylvia Plath took her fondness for baking just a little too far. Madness seems to be common among people who write.

Still. Many people have exhibited signs of madness without picking up pen or laptop computer. Howard Turgidson ate 27 cell phones in the space of less than an hour, earning him a spot in the *Guinness Book of World Records* and the Bellevue Home for the Faint of Heart. Marissa Bobombissa, of Papua, Tennessee, was convinced she was a hoot owl, and for years subsisted on a diet of mice her family threw past her bedroom window in the middle of the night. Englebert Hammerschmidt stalked Talisa Soto for years under the delusion that she was a star of stage and screen, then hung himself from a No Parking, 9-5 Mondays to Fridays sign when he realized how he had wasted the best years of his life.

When you remove writing from the equation, madness just seems to be common among people.

Could it be that what differentiates writers from ordinary people is that...they write?

The Marquis Treatment

“Hello, Ontario Ministry of Social Services. How may you help us?”

“What?”

“Ontario Ministry of Social Services...how may you help us?”

“Aren’t you the ones who are supposed to be helping us?”

“That’s what I said.”

“It is?”

“Yes. How may **you** help **us**?”

“No. Me. Me. How can you help me?”

“You people on social assistance! It’s always about you, isn’t it?”

“Umm...I just got my Welfare check.”

“So? You should be grateful to live in a country that takes care of its weakest members.”

“After paying rent, I have 37 cents a day. How am I supposed to feed myself and my two children on 37 cents a day? We end up not eating three days a week!”

“I know. The new rates are part of the province’s Marquis Programme. The Marquis Programme is intended to make the public feel like the poor are being treated like royalty.”

“But, the Welfare rate has gone down. How am I supposed to feel like royalty when I’m getting less than I used to?”

“Please pay attention – I have a lot of calls to field and I can’t waste time repeating myself. The Marquis Programme is intended to make the public – that would be taxpayers – that would be people not like you – feel like the poor – **that** would be you – are being treated like royalty.”

“But, we’re not.”

“As long as the public thinks you are, who cares?”

“I CARE!”

“Sigh. Have you never heard of coupons?”

“With coupons, we still end up not eating two and a half days a week!”

“Well, there you go! Things are looking brighter already! Now, if you just apportion your non-eating days sensibly throughout the week, you should be able to survive with a minimum of suffering.”

“You enjoy this, don’t you?”

“Public service is a marvelous thing.”

“But, you’re not helping me.”

“No, but think of all of those unfortunate people who have to pay mortgages on their castles, or who cannot afford a home in Aspen or...or a second yacht. Do you know what it’s like to lose half the value of your investment portfolio in a week? Have you no empathy for their suffering? Don’t you think they deserve a break from your insatiable need to eat every day?”

“This is insane.”

“If you don’t like being on Welfare, you should have done more to get off it.”

“I was! I was taking classes in dental hygienistry. I was nine credits away from graduating when your government made it illegal to be on Welfare and get financial aid to go to school.”

“Ah. I see what the problem is. When I said you should have done more to get off Welfare, I meant you should have done more **on your own** to get off Welfare. A small, but important difference.”

“Dammit, I can’t live like this!”

“What are you saying?”

“I’ll kill myself! I swear – I won’t keep on living like this!”

“Oh., I cannot council suicide, seeing as it’s against the law and all. Still, if that’s your choice...”

“You **want** people to kill themselves?”

“I know it’s hard, but try looking at it from our point of view. If more poor people killed themselves, there would be less of them on Welfare, and at a cost to the taxpayer that was substantially less than actually having to fund workable programmes.”

“That’s nonsense!”

“Yes, but it’s very common. Why do you think it’s called the Common Nonsense Revolution?”

“This is a nightmare.”

“If that’s all...”

“My phone service will be cut off in a couple of hours.”

“More money for food!”

“How will I get in touch with you if I need to?”

“You can always come into the office.”

“The nearest branch is 200 miles away.”

“Just as well – we’re cutting back on staff, anyway. Now, was there...anything else?”

“Would you care if there was?”

“Then, thank you for calling. Your call is important to us. Would you mind taking a moment to rate your service under the Marquis Programme?”

“It should be called the Marquis de Sade Programme!”

“That was the original name, yes. Unfortunately, a lot of people objected to it. Go figure. Still, don’t spread it around, okay? Hello? Hello? Hello, Ontario Ministry of Social Services. How may you help us?”

What Do Bad Fences Make?

“Ariel, you nut!” United States President George Junior affably said. “Whachya doin’?”

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon stopped dead in his tracks. “Wha – what does it look like?” he spluttered.

“It looks like you’re building you a big ol’ fence,” George Junior responded.

Ariel pulled himself up to his full height (all four feet of it) and belligerently said: “Yes. That’s right. I’m erecting a fence. So what?”

“Well,” George Junior reasonably pointed out, “it **is** my office.”

The chain link fence, six feet high, broke through one wall of the Oval Office, snaked through furniture past the President’s desk and disappeared out a hole in the far wall. A couple of workers hammered nails into the floor to assure the stability of the fence.

“I think it adds something to the room,” Ariel enthused. “Don’t you?”

“Sure,” the President groused, “an obstacle. How’m I s’posed t’get to my desk?”

“We have taken that into consideration, Mister President,” Ariel smoothly stated.
“Simply go to the end of the hall. There, you will find a staircase. Walk down three floors. Walk north/northeast for almost half a mile, go through the commissary, walk due north

about 100 feet and you will come upon another staircase. Walk up two floors. Next to the stairwell will be an elevator. Take that up one floor. You'll come out near your residence. You can walk over to your desk from there."

"It seems like a lot of trouble to go through just to get to my very own desk," George Junior pouted.

"It's good for your cardiovascular," Ariel replied, adding: "and Israeli security."

Well. No American politician with a hope of remaining in office is going to argue with the issue of Israeli security, even if it makes negotiating the office he is in tricky. So, George Junior went to the end of the hall, down three flights of stairs, north for about a mile before realizing he was going in the wrong direction, doubled back, went north/northeast for almost half a mile, through the commissary (stopping only for a sticky bun and a latte), north 100 feet, up two flights of stairs, up another flight by elevator and through his residence to his desk. It took 45 minutes.

Sitting behind his desk, President George Junior drank his latte and fantasized about all the cool ways Saddam Hussein could be killed. Garroting. Lethal injection. Hanging. Electrocution. Firing squad. Electrocution. Beheading. Lethal injection. Electrocution. Lethal injection. Electrocution. Lethal –

You can take the governor out of Texas, but you can't take the Texas out of the governor.

In time, Colin Powell walked into the Oval Office. "Mister Pres –" Powell stopped short when he saw the fence. "What is this?"

"A security fence," the President cheerfully told him.

"Why do we need a security fence through the heart of the White House?" Powell asked, reasonably, or so he thought.

"I, uhh, I'm not big on the details," President George Junior affably responded. "You should probably ask Ariel."

Before Powell could respond, Karl Rove walked into the Oval Office. "Mister President, we need –" Rove stopped short when he saw the fence. "What is this?"

"A security fence built by the Israelis!" Powell, outraged, answered.

"Oh," Rove said. After a couple of seconds of thoughtful silence, he continued: "Mister President, we need your signature on some Guantamo Bay execution orders."

Powell was livid. "We can't let this fence stand!" he bellowed.

Rove looked at him benignly and, as if to a child, calmly explained that, “Israeli security is a primary objective of this administration. If Ariel Sharon’s government feels it is in their interests to build a fence through the White House, who are we to tell him not to?”

“How can building a fence through the White House be in the interest of the Israeli government?” Powell protested.

“Maybe they think it will help keep moderates away from the President,” Rove answered, pointedly looking at Powell. “I understand the next phase of building involves bricks and mortar...”

This only fueled Powell’s anger. “We cannot let this fence stand!”

Rove shrugged. “We’ve got an election coming up in less than 16 months,” he argued. “We cannot afford to piss off the Christian right – if they sit it out, we will almost certainly lose. They want us to show strong support for the state of Israel. The fence stands.”

Powell turned to the President for support. Unfortunately, the President had long tuned out the debate, and was pondering the possibility of sneaking down to the commissary to get another doughnut...

My Bad

Since the first couple of weeks of the new year usually offer little in the way of hard news, columnists have a tradition of using this time to correct some of their errors. This is a problem for me as, of course, I made no errors last year. However, executives at MultiNatCorp’s Satire, Commentary and Miscellaneous Polemics Division – in the body of Vice President Ned Feeblish (and there’s a body joke in there somewhere for enterprising young comedy wannabes) – have demanded in a sternly worded interoffice memo that I be humble and repent the (non-existent) errors of my ways. So, here you go.

Alert reader Anna R-R wrote that Nathaniel Fisher could not have been the person who prettified the corpses of Uday and Qusay Hussein so they could be shown on national television since Fisher is a fictional character. Good point, Anna, but have you considered the possibility that Uday and Qusay were fictional as well? I mean, did you ever run into them at your local Wal-Mart? Were they your husband’s tennis opponents? Did your children go to day care together? It’s letters like this that bring a tear to my eye and make me wonder, not for the first time, if my alert readers have far too much time on their hands.

Many readers of the Jewish persuasion wrote to complain about a column in which I portrayed Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon cheerfully building a wall through the Oval Office with the compliance of President George Bush. I agree that this was a simplification. To accurately portray the situation in the Middle East, I should have added

that Sharon authorized the targeted assassination of low level White House staffers, and that he claimed control of the building's water supply and other resources.

In the column "If Auto Assembly Was Like Screenwriting," the following clunker of a sentence appeared: "This would result in fierce competition for jobs on the assembly line, which would require that aspiring auto workers would have to prove themselves outside the industry before they were hired." The sentence should have read: "In the absence of other information, put your right hand behind your left ear and try not to bother the conductor, an amiable old fart in over his head." I trust everything is now clear.

Many astute readers wrote to complain that the idea of The Death Network was offensive. Uhh, hello! Satire, here, people! If you want satire that does not cause offence, *The Royal Canadian Air Farce* is still available in your area.

One reader, Ann C., wrote to tell me that she had, in fact, posted a message to the *Les Pages aux Folles* message board without first reliving a past life, as I had recommended. Of course, it's **possible**, Ann C., but if you had returned the next day, you would have found that karma parasites had reduced your post to unintelligible gibberish, much like your newspaper columns.

Another reader, Franz K., pointed out that piston engines are not a fruit. Of course not. However, they do take on fruitlike qualities when soaked in linseed oil for 24 to 36 hours, and can, under the supervision of qualified taxidermists, make an excellent jam flavouring.

In a column on the Gulf War, I stated that "President George W. Bush's head should be used as an example for children of what happens when you let cheese sit out in the sun for too long." I obviously regret this statement. For one thing, there is no scientific evidence linking President Bush's head to cheese that has been allowed to sit out in the sun for too long. For another, several readers complained that the comment scared their young children. Clearly, this was a case of metaphorical overreach. I do, however, stand by the statement that the President's head is proof that nature does not, as is commonly believed, abhor a vacuum.

In a similar vein, some readers complained that my constant satirical jabs at Secretary of State Donald Rumsfeld were "not balanced." Not true. I balanced them with satirical jabs at Vice President Dick Cheney every chance I got.

In my coverage of Arnold Schwarzenegger's ascent to the governor's mansion in California, I did not make the obligatory "talk to da hand" joke when accusations of him groping unwilling women were made. If it's any consolation, many other columnists stepped in to fill this void.

Finally, in December, I quoted Lenny Bruce, commenting on his posthumous pardon for an obscenity conviction, as saying, "I'm dead. Why should I give a shit?" Actually, what he said was, "I'm dead. Why should I give a fuck?" The original quote was relayed to me

by an angel who watered it down because s/he was worried American authorities would storm Heaven. With good reason: I understand a warrant is already being prepared.

What have we learned from this exercise? Damned if I know. But, rest assured that I will be getting an interoffice memo on it really soon.

Spam Much?

From : onlyWebsites <info@web6030mailer.net>

Sent : January 16, 2007 9:58:01 PM

To : ned.feeblish@lespagesauxfolles.ca

Subject : I Have Redesigned Your Website

I have redesigned your Website and have developed several prototypes for you to view by clicking on the link below (we have not touched, altered or edited your existing site in any way).

Please click here to view your custom Website prototypes.

I have created these free prototypes for you with no obligation, just call or email me for a free quote and consultation.

Due to an extremely positive response we are extending our Agressive Discount Offer another month if you E-mail or Call us to get started before February 1st, 2007.

If you have any questions and would like to speak to me about features and pricing, please email or call me at (800) 932-6030.

Sincerely,

Wayne Hill
www.onlyDentist.com
Marketing Director
(800) 932-6030

Mister Hill,

I have long thought that there was a real lack of Web design/dentistry companies in the world. Congratulations! You have clearly filled a much needed niche.

That having been said, much as I and many others have tried over the years to get The Creator to change the look of the Web site, I am afraid that all of our efforts have gone for naught. You would think that revolving skeleton heads against a backdrop of crackling fire was the most hideous vision since Dario Argento started making films the way he carries on about it!

It's so bad that we cannot get The Creator to even look at your prototypes. And, oh, how we have tried! We even went so far as to disguise the URL so that it looked like it would take him to the home page of his favourite porn site, Girls With Eyepatches, but, alas, he quickly saw through our ruse.

So, I am afraid we will not be requiring your Web design services. On the other hand, I have this molar that has been causing me no end of grief. It's in the back – hard to reach, but exquisitely painful. I'll call you.

Sincerely,
Ned Feeblish
ned.feeblish@lespagesauxfolles.ca
Vice President, Public Relations and Dental Implantations
Les Pages aux Folles
a wholly owned subsidiary of MultiNatCorp
“We do (apparently badly visually designed) stuff”

* * *

From : Emily Kovak <emily@careerjet.com>
Sent : January 15, 2007 7:00:14 PM
To : ira@lespagesauxfolles.ca
Subject : Site suggestion: www.careerjet.com

Hello,

We have looked through your site and noticed that you have a "jobs" section in which several sites were listed.

We would like to recommend our site <http://www.careerjet.com>. Careerjet is an employment search engine for the USA. It allows you to search a growing selection of jobs listed on company sites as well as jobsites in one go saving you the trouble of having to go to each site individually.

We hope this site will interest you and can be included in your listings.

Thank you

Yours truly

Emily Kovak
emily@careerjet.com

Emily,

You couldn't have looked through our site very closely, or you would have realized that the section you believe is about "jobs" is actually about Jobs, Steve Jobs to be precise, the man behind Apple Computers. The Creator of *Les Pages aux Folles* has decided that Jobs is a saint, not, perhaps, in the same league as a Saint Vincent or a Saint Mallobar, but certainly on a par with the lesser known Saint Baruch of Padua. The Steve Jobs page is not only The Creator's way of paying homage to a man he believes is truly great, but is also a pathetic attempt to get that man's attention.

I hope I haven't been indiscreet in pointing this out. If so, I may be using your job listing service quite soon! In that eventuality, I must say that I am grateful that you have saved me the trouble of having to go to a variety of job search Web sites individually. Now, if you could only automate the sending out of my resume and the actual job interview process, we would really be getting somewhere!

Sincerely,
Ned Feeblish
ned.feeblish@lespagesauxfolles.ca
Vice President, Public Relations and Famous Person Intoxications
Les Pages aux Folles
a wholly owned subsidiary of MultiNatCorp
"We do (sycophantic) stuff"

* * *

From : <serginho_bzg@gmail.com>
Sent : January 9, 2007 3:17:02 AM
To : aardvarkseyes@hotmail.com
CC : serginho_bzg@gmail.com
Subject : (nenhum)

Você realmente já viu, o vídeo verdadeiro e completo da morte de Saddam Hussein???
Não?

Antes de você visualizar o vídeo tenha certeza que você não irá ficar horrorizado(a).

Bem gente, estou mandando esse vídeo para vocês verem a morte de um cara que matou muita gente. Se poderem mostrem para mais gente, vamos espalhar o verdadeiro vídeo do enforcamento de Saddam. Não me responsabilizo pelo mal uso desse vídeo!!!

Abaixo o link para você visualizar o vídeo: Assistir o vídeo!

Dear Seginho,

I don't understand a word of what you've written, and, yet, I find your email strangely compelling. It offers insight into worlds seldom seen, paradises only glimpsed at out of the corner of one's eye while one is standing in the line to buy frozen peas. It...it moved me.

And, oh, the way you triple up on the punctuation marks! (Or, should I say, !!!?) What could be more indicative of a hot-blooded Latin passion? Although I have never actually met you, I am reminded of the time we walked down the shore of the Escondido el Cuido, just you, me and the body of Saddam Hussein. It was the most magical night of my life – I wished it would never end. But I had to get back to my work – all those mojitos don't pay for themselves! – and, in any case, Saddam's body was getting a little ripe.

Please, I beg you, let's keep in touch, my mad Latin fling!!)

Ned

* * *

From : Royal Bank of Canada <accounts@rbcroyalbank.com>
Reply-To : accounts@rbcroyalbank.com
Sent : October 29, 2005 12:19:00 AM
To : ira@lespagesauxfolles.ca
Subject : Safeguard Your Account - Update Information

Dear RBC Royal Bank Customer,

Recently there have been a large number of identity theft attempts targeting RBC Royal Bank Customers. In order to safeguard your account, we require that you confirm or update your identity.

This process is mandatory, and if not completed within the nearest time your account or credit card may be subject to temporary suspension.

To securely confirm your RBC Royal Bank update details please logging in and confirming your identity over a secure connection at:

<http://www.rbcroyalbank.com/cgi-bin/rbaccess/update/index.php>

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter and thank you for using RBC Royal Bank.

© Royal Bank of Canada 2001 – 2005

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing on behalf of Ira Nayman, The Creator of *Les Pages aux Folles* and recipient of your recent email warning him against the theft of his identity through his account at the Royal Bank of Canada.

At first, he was frantic about this possibility. You see, he is already highly insecure about his personality. It's not just that he is afraid that people will consider him boring. He has pretty much come to terms with that reality. It's that he is afraid that there is another version of him somewhere dating supermodels, smoking very thick cigars and otherwise having the kind of life that he only dreams about.

When he first received your email, he went into a closet and refused to come out. It wasn't until several hours later that one of the elves who helps him write found him cowering behind a battered suitcase, muttering something about Panatellas. It took the elves and I several hours to convince The Creator that he did not, in fact, have an account with the Royal Bank of Canada and that his identity was, therefore, safe.

Such as it is.

I am writing to ask you to please stop sending email to this sadly fragile human being. If you cannot see your way to doing this, perhaps you could clearly label it "Not From The Bank You Actually Use" in the subject line. Really, the elves and I aren't paid enough to deal with the trouble!

Sincerely,
Ned Feeblish
ned.feeblish@lespagesauxfolles.ca
Vice President, Public Relations and Psychotic Lamentations
Les Pages aux Folles
a wholly owned subsidiary of MultiNatCorp
"We do (sycophantic) stuff"

Conversations Overheard in a Free Speech Zone

"'Bush sucks.' Good sign." "Are you being ironic?" "Naah. We live in the post-ironic age." "What does that mean?" "It means I can be stupid without actually being witty." "Ain't theory grand?"

* * *

"What a rip! I drove all the way from Boston to stand in the free speech zone in New York to protest the President's speech!" "Why are you so angry?" "Because I just found out the President is speaking in Los Angeles." "Didn't you know that free speech zones are created to keep protestors away from the President?" "That makes no sense." "Look. It's really very simple. Next time you want to protest a speech the President is giving in Texas, go to Selma, Alabama. And, if the President is to appear in Arkansas, go to New Mexico." "What if the President is giving a speech in Washington?" "Have you ever

wanted to be on the space shuttle?” “This is nuts. I thought all of the country was a free speech zone.” “Oh, it is. Just not all at the same time.” “What?” “I come from Nebraska. We love free speech and all, but, you know, sometimes it’s a burden we’re happy to pass off to...Arizona or...or Kentucky.” “I can’t belie – say, wait a minute. If you knew all this, what are you doing here? I mean, you must have known the President wasn’t going to be here.” “Sure. I just like having fun with protestors...”

* * *

“Go ahead.” “What?” “Ask her.” “But, I don’t know her.” “Have you seen the way she’s been looking at you?” “She has?” “She wants you to ask her.” “But...” “Seriously. How do you know what’s going to happen if you don’t try. Go. You’ve got feet. Walk up to her and ask her.” “Okay. Okay... Ahem, miss?” “Yes?” “Do you think the United States would be right to invade Holland if any of the members of the executive branch were brought in front of the International Criminal Court in the Hague for war crimes?” “I’m sorry, but I’m **not** that kind of girl!”

* * *

“Did you bring bottles of water?” “No.” “Oh.” “Should I have?” “Well, your throat is going to get pretty dry from shouting loud enough for the President to hear you.” “Maybe that’s not why we’re here.” “No?” “Maybe we’re here for the press coverage.” “The press coverage?” “That’s right.” “How are the press going to cover you when they’re with the President?” “...” “Yep. I love protestors!”

* * *

“You know I was in Seattle?” “No shit?” “No shit.” “What was it like?” “Amazing! We got our asses kicked and we got our names took.” “Oh...” “Then, there was Washington.” “Was that any better?” “Are you kidding? We got our asses **seriously** kicked in Washington. And they took our names...twice!” “Are you sure –” “Then, there was Quebec City.” “You got your asses kicked?” “Abso-fuckin’-lutely!” “And they took your names?” “You best believe that!” “Seriously, don’t you think –” “But, the best was Davos last year.” “Your asses were kicked and your names were taken?” “Took.” “Listen, aren’t you supposed to be the ones kicking ass and taking names?” “You obviously don’t understand how protests against international corporate fascism are supposed to work...”

* * *

“Yer one o’ them troublemakers, ain’tcha?” “I’m no troublemaker! I...am a law student.” “Worst kind o’ troublemaker.” “Why do you think I’m a troublemaker?” “You’re wearing a helmet and I don’t see no bicycles around. Why’re ya wearing a helmet?” “You ever been hit in the head by a police baton?” “Sure. Had me some shine stills out past concession 37 back in the seventies. Got my head busted more’n once by the cops. Deserved it, too. That was when people gave a good goldurn – now, of course, the police turn a blind eye and the shine has ‘quality control’ or some kind of shi –” “You...you

aren't really concerned about corporate corruption or globalization, are you?" "A man can't reminisce about his youth? What is this country coming to." "Well –" "Troublemaker."

* * *

"Programmes! Get yer programmes here!" "Programmes? At a protest rally?" "How else you gonna know your Raging Grannies from your Black Box Anarchists?" "Doesn't it defeat the purpose of decentralized planning?" "Look. You don't wanna go to see puppet street theatre only to get there an hour before it starts and be forced to chain yerself to a fence. My programmes are a valuable service." "But –" "Really. Don't you want to know when the Latin American indigenous agrarian revolution lecture starts?" "Why would I?" "So you can avoid it?" "Well, not that the Latin American indigenous agrarian revolution isn't vitally important, but –" "Hey, I believe in anti-capitalist protest, but ain't a guy allowed ta make a buck out of it?"

Everybody Settles

When you think about, the government would be doing us all a great favour by setting up a ministry whose mandate would be to bring the world closer to our individual expectations. I mean, where would you prefer your tax dollars to go: towards another First Minister's conference on inter-provincial relationships, or to bringing your dream of pitching in a World Series one step closer to being realized?

We're all adults here (and, for those of you who aren't, you really ought to explain the concepts of filters to your parents), so let's admit the sad truth: life never gives us quite what we want. So, we settle. And, often, even what we're prepared to settle for seems to be beyond our grasp.

You know what I'm talking about...

YOU WANT: peace on Earth. YOU'LL SETTLE FOR: a piece of the Earth. YOU'LL GET: peace when you're under the earth.

YOU WANT: a life less ordinary. YOU'LL SETTLE FOR: a life more or less ordinary. YOU'LL GET: less life.

YOU WANT: the respect of your peers. YOU'LL SETTLE FOR: the respect of your mate and children. YOU'LL GET: the respect of your dog (as long as you remember to feed it regularly).

YOU WANT: passion that lasts. YOU'LL SETTLE FOR: a partner who doesn't fart in bed. YOU'LL GET: a partner who wears diapers in bed...not by choice.

YOU WANT: *Grand Theft Auto* for your birthday. YOU'LL SETTLE FOR: a *Teletubbies* video for your child's birthday. YOU'LL GET: a fruitcake for Christmas.

YOU WANT: to run with the top dogs. YOU'LL SETTLE FOR: a little excitement every now and again. YOU'LL GET: two children, a house in the suburbs with a brutal mortgage and a partner who only intermittently empathizes with you.

YOU WANT: a Rolls. YOU'LL SETTLE FOR: a Chevy. YOU'LL GET: a Volkswagen.

YOU WANT: work that fulfills you and makes the world a better place. YOU'LL SETTLE FOR: work that doesn't bore you stiff and doesn't make the world a worse place...much...while you're looking... YOU'LL GET: work that will take 10 years off your life and that contributes to either global warming, the plunder of the resources of the developing world or the dumbing down of your culture...or some combination of the three.

YOU WANT: a movie that will help you see the world more clearly. YOU'LL SETTLE FOR: a movie that entertains you for a couple of hours. YOU'LL GET: a movie that you can't remember five minutes after you've left the theatre.

YOU WANT: to change the world. YOU'LL SETTLE FOR: changing the people around you. YOU'LL GET: not being able to change your underwear without the nurse's help.

YOU WANT: two children, a house in the suburbs with a mortgage you can handle and a partner who empathizes with you. YOU'LL SETTLE FOR: a little excitement every now and again. YOU'LL GET: having to keep up with the top dogs.

YOU WANT: Cary Grant. YOU'LL SETTLE FOR: Ben Affleck. YOU'LL GET: Buddy Hackett.

YOU WANT: a politician you can trust. YOU'LL SETTLE FOR: a politician who doesn't disgust you. YOU'LL GET: George Bush or Jean Chretien.

YOU WANT: to create a TV series that is so good, people will weep with joy and gratitude after watching it. YOU'LL SETTLE FOR: being part of the writing team on a daytime soap you otherwise wouldn't watch. YOU'LL GET: a position teaching screenwriting to bored students who would really rather direct.

YOU WANT: underwear that fits you like a second skin. YOU'LL SETTLE FOR: briefs that don't ride up your crack too often, or, at least, that you can put back in place discreetly. YOU'LL GET: thong underwear.

YOU WANT: a four week paid vacation. YOU'LL SETTLE FOR: a two week unpaid vacation. YOU'LL GET: a weekend at the cottage at the height of mosquito season.

YOU WANT: to be a successful wife, mother and businesswoman. YOU'LL SETTLE FOR: a husband who learns better after the first time he cheats on you, children who

know better than to “accidentally” burn down their school and a business that manages not to go bankrupt. YOU’LL GET: Prozac.

YOU WANT: a thick, juicy steak with mushrooms and onions. YOU’LL SETTLE FOR: a thick, juicy hamburger with all the fixings. YOU’LL GET: Hamburger Helper.

YOU WANT: the whole enchilada. YOU’LL SETTLE FOR: the glass that’s half full. YOU’LL GET: running on empty.

Sorry to disillusion you. Still, it could be worse. After all, imagine how much worse what you get would have been if you hadn’t started with such high expectations!

How Presumptuous!

1. PRESUMED INNOCENT

PROSECUTOR: Are you comfortable?

MAJOR SCHMIDT: Sure.

PROSECUTOR: I’ve got a great chair in my office – really comfortable. I could have it brought down –

MAJOR SCHMIDT: No, really. I’m fine.

PROSECUTOR: Well, that’s fine, then. [pause] So, uhh, then, you, err, dropped ordnance that – hee hee – killed four soldiers and injured eight –

MAJOR SCHMIDT: War is hell, man.

PROSECUTOR: Yes. Absolutely. That’s is a long-established fact. War is, as you say, hell. Only, the soldiers you killed and wounded were Canadians, and the Canadians soldiers you killed and wounded were, in fact, our allies at the time –

MAJOR SCHMIDT: I thought they were firing on me.

PROSECUTOR: Of course you did! Anybody in your situation would! Only, of course, they were just on maneuvers in the Afghan desert.

MAJOR SCHMIDT: My CO didn’t tell me –

PROSECUTOR: Oh, I don’t think we need to go into that.

MAJOR SCHMIDT: Seriously. Nobody from headquarters informed me that –

PROSECUTOR: Major, that isn’t really relevant.

MAJOR SCHMIDT: Are you kidding me? I've got an involuntary manslaughter charge hanging over my head! You know I'm gonna mount a vigorous defense! And, that means pointing out that command knew about –

PROSECUTOR: Involuntary manslaughter? Oh, tut, tut. Whatever gave you the idea we would be pursuing that old chestnut? Consider that charge dropped.

MAJOR SCHMIDT: Yeah, great, but there's still the aggravated assault charges. I could still be looking at serious jail time if I didn't put it on the record that I wasn't given information that my superiors clearly –

PROSECUTOR: Aggravated assault? Who said anything about aggravated assault? Did you hear me say anything about aggravated assault? Let's just drop all this talk of aggravated assault charges, shall we?

MAJOR SCHMIDT: And, this dereliction of duty thing...

PROSECUTOR: Well, Major, you know, with four allies dead and eight injured, well, you have to be charged with something, if only so that we can hold a hearing to clear your name.

MAJOR SCHMIDT: But, I could be confined for six months and lose pay!

PROSECUTOR: Major, I don't think you heard me correctly. Please pay careful attention to what I'm saying. You have to be charged with something, IF ONLY TO HOLD A HEARING TO CLEAR YOUR NAME.

MAJOR SCHMIDT: But –

PROSECUTOR: CLEAR...YOUR...NAME.

MAJOR SCHMIDT: Oh. Right. Gotcha.

PROSECUTOR: So, in your own words, can you please tell us what happened?

MAJOR SCHMIDT: Well, you know how it is...

PROSECUTOR: Yes?

MAJOR SCHMIDT: War is hell.

2. PRESUMED GUILTY

PROSECUTOR: Are you comfortable?

SUSPECT: Well –

PROSECUTOR: Turn the screws.

SUSPECT: AAAAAAARRRRRGH!

PROSECUTOR: Now, how long have you been an Al Qaeda operative?

SUSPECT: I...I...I'm not!

PROSECUTOR: You're not?

SUSPECT: I...I'm a used care salesman! From...from...from Detroit!

PROSECUTOR: Detroit – that hotbed of international terrorist activity.

SUSPECT: I'm not...a terrorist!

PROSECUTOR: You know, you're pretty convincing. Harris over there has some doubts. Too bad for you we have insider information that Samir F. Bashir is part of an Al Qaeda cell working in the United States.

SUSPECT: That's not me.

PROSECUTOR: Yeah, they all deny –

SUSPECT: I'm Samir E. Bashir. E. Not F.

PROSECUTOR: I don't care if you're the whole freaking alphabet! We have insider information that –

SUSPECT: What information?

PROSECUTOR: Excuse me?

SUSPECT: I want to see the information you have against me.

PROSECUTOR: [inaudible] So, that's the way you wanna play it, hunh? You hear that hammering?

SUSPECT: No.

PROSECUTOR: Of course not! We're in a sound-proof room in a concrete bunker, for crying out loud! But, if you could hear that hammering, I would tell you that it's an execution chamber being constructed.

SUSPECT: A – gulp – execution chamber?

PROSECUTOR: Exactly. So, here's the deal: if you confess to being a terrorist, you'll get 20 years to life in a maximum security prison. If you don't confess to being a terrorist, and we decide you are, you'll get the death penalty!

SUSPECT: But, I'm innocent!

PROSECUTOR: Really? If you're innocent, what are you doing here?

The Abramov Scandal Frequently Unasked Questions

- [1\) Who or what is an Abramov?](#)
- [2\) Wait a minute! Isn't Abramov a person?](#)
- [3\) Uhh, okay. So, he's a lobbyist. What's the big deal?](#)
- [4\) Why don't you give me the *Reader's Digest* version?](#)
- [5\) We'll, why don't you start explaining what you know and when you see my eyes glaze over, you can sit me down in front of a TV and let me watch *Reno, 911*, okay?](#)
- [6\) That doesn't make any sense. Why would natives who ran casinos want anti-casino legislation?](#)
- [7\) Hold on. Ralph Reed? The former head of the Christian Coalition? What does he have to do with this?](#)
- [8\) Okay, back up. Grover Norquist? The head of Americans for Tax Reform and all-round neoconservative guy? How is he involved in this?](#)
- [9\) Did you say competing tribes?](#)
- [10\) Tom De –](#)
- [11\) I thought you said Abramov represented native tribes?](#)
- [12\) You...you're talking about bribery – on a massive scale!](#)
- [13\) SunCruz Casinos? Israeli sniper training? Uhh, this is becoming too much. Can I...can I take a rest for a moment?](#)

- 1) Who or what is an Abramov?

The Abramov is a rare species of woodchuck (*marmota monax*) found only in the southern United States and northern Mexico. It feeds on nuts, berries and discarded Taco Bell products it finds by the roadside. The Abramov's natural enemies are wolves, coyotes and Ford Broncos.

- 2) Wait a minute! Isn't Abramov a person?

You got me. The Abramov is a common species of lobbyist (*processus corruptus*) found in the halls of Washington. It feeds on thousand dollar bottles of wine, hundred dollar steaks and corporate clients. The Abramov's natural enemies are lobbyists for corporations whose interests conflict with those of his clients and campaigners for finance reform.

3) Uhh, okay. So, he's a lobbyist. What's the big deal?

Do you have a couple of weeks?

4) Why don't you give me the *Reader's Digest* version?

We're still going to need a few days.

5) We'll, why don't you start explaining what you know and when you see my eyes glaze over, you can sit me down in front of a TV and let me watch *Reno, 911*, okay?

Okay. But, remember, you asked for it.

Jack Abramov represented Indian tribes such as the Louisiana Coushattas and the Mississippi Choctaws. These tribes ran casinos, so Abramov advised them to send campaign contributions to literally dozens of politicians who supported limiting casino development.

6) That doesn't make any sense. Why would natives who ran casinos want anti-casino legislation?

See, I've barely started, and already things are becoming muddy. Abramov's native clients – they're the good Indians. You know, the ones who helped Kevin Costner in *Dances With Wolves*. Everybody else – they're the bad Indians. You know, the ones who scalped settlers and killed Custer. The good Indians already ran casinos. They didn't want the bad Indians to compete with them. It's a native tradition dating back at least as far as the introduction of capitalism into the new world.

So, Ralph Reed is given as much as \$4 million to –

7) Hold on. Ralph Reed? The former head of the Christian Coalition? What does he have to do with this?

He took the native money and magically turned it into Christian money. That way, nobody would know that Grover Norquist was helping natives fight against other natives.

8) Okay, back up. Grover Norquist? The head of Americans for Tax Reform and all-round neoconservative guy? How is he involved in this?

The money seems to have gone through ATR on its way from native tribes to Congressmen and Senators. Really, you must keep up. According to government prosecutors, Abramov made at least \$82 million while representing the competing tribes in the –

9) Did you say competing tribes?

That's right. Apparently, Abramov represented the tribes that wanted to build casinos at the same time as he represented tribes that wanted to stop them from building casinos. Now, that's competition for you. As Abramov's good friend Tom DeLay used to say –

10) Tom De –

Oh, don't tell me you don't know about that? DeLay has given up his quest to get back his House Majority leadership position, and may lose his seat in the next election over it. It's been in all the papers! Abramov paid for several golfing trips for DeLay to foreign countries. And, don't think DeLay was being bought off cheap, either, because those trips ran to tens of thousands of dollars!

It was the least Abramov could do for his client, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands

11) I thought you said Abramov represented native tribes?

The man can have more than one client – he has a big heart! Abramov saw the poor Marianas, a US territory, being oppressed by laws that would require its workers to have minimum wages and safe working conditions. Horror of horrors! So, he used the system he had in place to help persuade sympathetic legislators and some of their staff members to kill legislation that would have improved working conditions on the Pacific Ocean islands.

12) You...you're talking about bribery – on a massive scale!

Oh, don't be so melodramatic. There couldn't have been more than 150 people in Washington who accepted Abramov money – 200 tops. And, it's not like they're sticking up for the guy now that his scams have been revealed. No! They are giving back as much of the money they received as is politically expedient and, in their best Claude Rains voices, proclaiming to anyone who will listen that they are shocked, shocked, they say, to find out that the money was in any way tainted!

Now, if Abramov had only stuck to reneging on the purchase of SunCruz Casinos, a Florida gambling boat, or even funding Israeli sniper training, his level of corruption wouldn't be reaching into –

13) SunCruz Casinos? Israeli sniper training? Uhh, this is becoming too much. Can I...can I take a rest for a moment?

I did warn you.

Things Gone Unsaid

Is there anybody in North America who doesn't believe that Saddam Hussein was a paranoid shit who thought nothing of killing and torturing his own people if it helped him

consolidate his own power (and who killed and tortured thousands of them during his mad reign in Iraq)?

In the three years since the beginning of the most recent Iraq war, that simple truth has been repeated 2,037,564 times. Bill O'Reilly and Sean Hannity have a competition to see who can say it most often. The *New York Times* proclaims it in 48 point type headlines ("Saddam bad!") while The *New York Post* proclaims it in 64 point type ("Saddam EVIL!"). *Southpark* has Hussein getting it on with Satan (apparently, Adolph Hitler was unavailable for the part).

If I choose not to repeat this truth until I'm blue in the lips, it's not that I don't believe it, it's that something that has been repeated 2,037,565 times (since you started reading this, Oprah mentioned that it would make a great book) is not news. Something that has been repeated 2,037,568 times (*CBS Evening News*, *Better Homes and Gardens* and Howard Stern on satellite radio) doesn't require me to repeat it to make it true.

I prefer to write about things other people aren't repeating 2,037,570 (David Letterman and Jay Leno trying to see which can make the least funny joke about it) times. (Like the fact that the United States supported Hussein during the period of his worst atrocities. To my knowledge, this has been repeated only 237 times in the three years since the war started, 201 of them by Noam Chomsky.)

The fact that some truths are repeated 2,037,615 (the Mormon Tabernacle Choir) times while others are repeated 237 times is, in itself, worth considering (and, perhaps, repeating). (No, wait, 238 times: Ed Asner mentioned it in an interview with *Entertainment Tonight*.) Why is it if you aren't quick to repeat tales of Saddam Hussein's infamy (2,037,619 times, now, thanks to Pete Tong, Walter Ong, Rae Dawn Chong and Herman the Talking Tree Stump), you're a traitor, while if you repeat tales of American support for him...you're a traitor?

(I mean, it's not like anybody in the White House ever denied the accuracy of the photo of Donald Rumsfeld shaking hands with Hussein in 1983. They just ignored it until the press lost interest – 30.29748 seconds or so.)

This is by no means the only example. The riots that occurred around the world after the publication of some mild cartoons featuring the prophet Mohammed in Denmark were out of line. Way out of line. So far out of line, you couldn't even make out a line from where you would be standing if you used telescope. They were an absurd attack on free speech.

Since they began, this truth has been repeated 787,423 times. Rush Limbaugh repeats it to open his radio show. Ann Coulter and Bill O'Reilly (what? – he can't be the mouthpiece for more than one received truth?) are leaders of the pool to see who will be the person to repeat it for the millionth time. There have been over 60,300 cartoons about the cartoons – editorial page satirical self-reference gone amok.

You read the first part of this column, you know the drill: something that's been repeated 787,424 times (Bill Maher just mentioned it, although he was actually talking about something completely different) doesn't need my voice to repeat it; it's already accepted wisdom; other truths (the cartoons, whether intentionally or not, become part of a propaganda effort to demonize Arabs) are repeated far less often; yadda cubed.

You gotta ask yourself why something that is repeated 2,037,622 (Angelina Jolie's adopted Ethiopian baby, Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes' new child – congratulations, folks – and Dan Rather) or 787,425 (Marshall McLuhan's spirit being channeled by Gilbert Gottfried) needs more repetitions. Okay, maybe you don't. But, since I'm the one being asked to do the repeating, I gotta ask myself that question.

I think it has something to do with what, in a more naïve time, used to be referred to as “dissent.” Despite the way it may currently appear, dissent is not about telling the emperor he would look better in more muted colours when everybody else is telling him how wonderful he looks in his new clothes. Dissent is about going beyond the common wisdom and telling the emperor that his new clothes would look better if he actually, you know, got some.

Common wisdom. Hunh. Common wisdom is usually common, but rarely wise.

Larry and Bud Are Remade

“Larry?”

“...”

“LARRY?”

“...”

“**LARRY!**”

“Bud?”

“I think I got it. A movie so fool-proof even you could make it!”

“Bud, how is it possible that you are talking to me right now?”

“What?”

“I died three days ago.”

“I know. I was at your funeral. I haven't been so touched since they cancelled *Joanie Loves Chachi*. Got me right in the *kishkes*. Tell me, how much did you have to pay George Clooney to talk at the wake?”

“Nothing. He was a friend.”

“Larry, Bubbelach, there are no friends in this business. If you don’t want to tell me how much you paid Clooney, be a mensch and say it’s none of my business!”

“I didn’t pay him a cent!”

“Tsk. Used to be a time in this town when people told you an honest lie!”

“I’M NOT – look. How can we even be having this conversation? I don’t have a phone.”

“Ach, I couldn’t live without you, you big lug, so when I heard you died, I killed myself and arranged to have my body buried next to yours. I’m just shouting really, really loudly at the moment.”

“Is...is that true?”

“No. Now, if we’re done with the exposition, can I tell you my great idea?”

“You always do.”

“A remake of – wait for it – *The Bicycle Thief*!”

“*The Bicycle Thief*?”

“Great, hunh? We’ll call it...Bicycle! Or, no, no, I’ve got an even better title: *Thief*!”

“Why not keep the name?”

“Kids these days – they got no attention span. My 12 year-old great-grandson Moishe can frag aliens on his portable PlayStation like nobody I ever seen, but trying to get him to sit down to watch a classic episode of *The Honeymooners* is like trying to keep control of a box full of crickets.”

“Why do you need to control them if they’re already in the box?”

“Maybe somebody opened the lid – CAN WE FOCUS, HERE, PLEASE?”

“Sorry.”

“Of course, the ending has to go. You don’t want the audience to invest 90 minutes in rooting for a guy who ends up stealing a bicycle. Word of mouth that the film is a downer will kill *Thief* faster than *Hudson Hawk* killed Bruce Willis’ career!”

“But, Bud, who is the bicycle thief if the main character doesn’t steal the bicycle?”

“The schmoe who stole his bicycle, of course.”

“But, we never see that character again.”

“Ah, well, you see, that’s where the rewrite comes in. See, the main character tracks down the bicycle thief, who is really the head of a stolen bicycle ring, and takes him down in his warehouse of stolen bicycle parts. Wham, bang, zoom – we get an ending with some zing and an opening gross north of \$100 million!”

“Poignant.”

“Here’s the beauty part: know who we get to play the lead?”

“I’m a little beyond beauty appreciation at this point, Bud.”

“Bruce Willis!”

“You think?”

“He can do poignant. And he can kick ass! We’ll reset it in San Francisco and –”

“Why San Francisco?”

“I never been. You got something against me enjoying a part of the country I never seen before?”

“No. I –”

“Anyway, we’ll change the bicycle to a cool new car –”

“You’re going to remake *The Bicycle Thief* without a bicycle?”

“It’s just Thief now, remember? We gotta update, right? I mean, who gives a shit about a bicycle? People will think it’s a kid’s movie!”

“Even with the violence?”

“I didn’t say a good kid’s movie. A confused kid’s movie. We cannot have that – an audience senses confusion, they’ll stay away in –”

“You don’t have the faintest idea what made *The Bicycle Thief* such a great movie, do you?”

“What?”

“You want to remake a classic movie, and you don’t have a clue what made it a classic in the first place, do you?”

“Sure I do. *The Bicycle Thief* was a poignant statement about...crime – terrible, terrible crime and...punishment. Swift, uhh, terrible...vengeance.”

“Try again. And, this time, without all the adjectives.”

“*The Bicycle Thief* is about...man’s inhumanity to man.”

“Bud, *Antz* was about man’s inhumanity to man. That’s really not saying anything.”

“Okay, you know what, this is bullshit. I’ve got a brilliant conception for a movie, and as soon as I can figure out how to get in touch with Bruce Willis’ people, we are gonna strike box office gold. You hear me? Box. Office. Gold.”

“Figure out – wait a minute – you weren’t kidding. You really did kill yourself just so we could have this conversation, didn’t you?”

“What if I did?”

“It’s just that – oh, wow, I just had a realization...”

“Do I wanna ask?”

“Hell is other producers!”

The Tao of the Betty Boop Slots

You seek the wisdom of the way, unaware that the way is with you wherever you go.

You may find yourself in a gambling establishment, seeker. It happens. Perhaps it is CasinoRama. Why CasinoRama? Because it was named after Rama, a king of ancient India who was the seventh avatar of the god Vishnu. Unless it wasn’t. And, even if it was, it wouldn’t really matter. Perhaps you find yourself in some other such establishment. There are many, and you are but one human being. Which establishment is of no consequence.

Listen to what is around you. You will hear the pinging of machines. You will hear the clanking of coins as they are dropped on other coins in cups, or, as is more likely, as they are deposited in slot machines. You may even hear the ball rolling around the roulette wheel. If this is all you hear, you have heard nothing.

Listen more closely. Under all of this surface noise is the sound of the “Om,” the one sound that unites all things in the universe. Go ahead, seeker. Listen. I’ll wait. I’ve got until the bus comes at five o’clock. Ah, you hear it.

Good.

Consider the roulette wheel, that which is sometimes referred to as the wheel of fortune. Sometimes, it comes up red. Sometimes it comes up black. Yet, it only rests lightly on these, only for a moment, before, once again, the wheel is in spin. Sometimes the ball lands on the colour you have chosen, sometimes it lands on the green and all are losers. Sometimes you win at 36 to one, other times you cannot catch a break for hours on end. Ultimately, no matter. Win and lose are meaningless concepts. There is always one more spin. The spin is all. Until it is nothing.

Or, consider the Betty Boop slot machine. She entices with unspoken promises of wealth. As you sit down in front of her and begin to place your money in her slot, you can imagine that you are the only person who has ever sat before this machine, who has ever fed money into it, who has ever placed his hopes and dreams on the turn of her inscrutable inner workings. In a sense, you are correct: nobody has ever placed bets in exactly the same way that you have. In a deeper sense, however, you are completely mistaken: thousands have come before you and thousands will come after you. You are but a single gambler in the procession of chance we call life, no better or worse than those of who have come before you or those to follow.

Be humble.

There is much else to be learned from the Betty Boop slots. Perhaps one person in a thousand will win money, and, unless it is a truly honking large amount, he is likely to lose it on his next trip. Once one has overcome the sting of loss, one can ponder the illusion of material possession. How can we say that we own a coin, when it so easily disappears into a slot, never to be seen again?

The Betty Boop slots teach us that all things are impermanent. What today is a coin burning a hole in our pocket turns out tomorrow to be just one of a sack full of coins in the vault of the casino. One can mourn one's loss. One can celebrate the good fortune of the casino. Or, one can go beyond mourning and celebration and accept that this just is. The Betty Boop slots encourage us to let go of our conceptions of the permanence of reality just as it encourages us to let go of our coins.

The important thing is to be mindful in our loss, to live every moment in front of the Betty Boop slot machine to its fullest. Hold the coin firmly but gently in your hand. Feel its hard edges. Feel your ass on the stool. When you drop the coin into the slot, feel the gravity pull it from your hand into the machine. Attend to the pressure under the button as you press it, and to the figures dancing in front of you. Listen to the soft music of the machinery. When you lose, it will be alright to shout in disappointment because, unlike those around you who are shouting in disappointment, you are mindful in your disappointment.

You seek the wisdom of the way, unaware that the way is with you wherever you go.

Common Sense Meets the Common Moron

Why is it that when somebody does something mind-bogglingly dumb, we slap our foreheads with our palms? Wouldn't common sense suggest that we slap **their** foreheads (or other body part, depending upon the severity of the nonsense)? These days, common sense appears to be in short supply.

There is a simple reason for this: at every point at which common sense threatens to reveal itself, it is confronted by a common moron ready to assert his or her foolishness and, if necessary, give common sense a horrifying beat-down. It's the common moron who, when you do not appreciate the wisdom of his or her folly, encourages you to slap yourself in the forehead. The harder the better.

Below, I offer a number of examples of the clash between Common Sense and the Common Moron to show just how difficult it is for common sense to assert itself in today's world.

Common Sense suggests that if you divide a region into countries containing a variety of ethnic groups that don't get along, they won't get along. The Common Moron says that's fine; if they're fighting among themselves, they won't be fighting with you. Common Sense disagrees, arguing that sooner or later some of them will blame you for causing their problems and attack you. The Common Moron sticks its fingers in its ears and chants, "Root causes! Root causes!" until it reaches a state of satori or, more likely, passes out from oxygen deprivation.

Common Sense suggests that if you export high paying jobs to low wage countries, throwing many of your people into poverty and/or forcing them into low wage jobs, there will be fewer people to buy your expensive products. The Common Moron asks what you've got against corporations making a profit – you some kind of Commie or something? When Common Sense points to his falling apart sneakers and rusting out car, the Common Moron defensively responds that he's just going through a rough spot right now and soon his ship will come in and he'll be able to afford those Air Jordans and a Camaro and...and you're a bastard for making this personal.

Common Sense suggests that if you bomb a country, its citizens will not shower your troops with roses and welcome your tanks. The Common Moron says support our troops your ignorant America-hater. Common Sense tries to argue that not putting them in harm's way for no good reason **is** supporting the troops, but the Common Moron is already signing Common Sense up for recruitment literature.

Common Sense suggests that if you continue to use a finite, non-renewable resource, it will run out. The Common Moron says it's its god-given right as an American to drive a vehicle that uses more fuel than an entire division of soldiers in World War II. When Common Sense tries to engage in a discussion of renewable energy sources, the Common Moron drives over its house with its SUV. As always, this quickly ends the debate.

Common Sense suggests that the scientific method is not the proper way to resolve matters of faith. The Common Moron believes that Intelligent Design is a good way to reconcile faith and science. Common Sense suggests that the Common Moron watch more *Nova*, but its too busy watching *The O'Reilly Factor* to be bothered.

Common Sense suggests that to govern, you have to believe in government. The Common Moron votes for neo-con politicians anyway. Common Sense tut tuts at the Common Moron's inability to see its own best interests. The Common Moron sucker punches Common Sense in the kidneys and steals its wallet when it's lying on the ground, writhing in pain. Common Sense doesn't carry much cash, so the Common Moron maxes out its credit cards.

Common Sense suggests that you cannot fill the atmosphere with chemical compounds without having it affect what happens in the atmosphere (commonly referred to as "weather"). The Common Moron says it's its god-given right as an American to drive a vehicle that uses more fuel than an entire division of soldiers in World War II. I think you know where this is going...

I could go on, but Common Sense suggests that I not overstate my case. No, there's no point in insisting; if you do, I will just stick my fingers in my ears and chant, "Common Sense! Common Sense!" until I reach a state of satori or, more likely, pass out from oxygen deprivation.

DNSR: Katrina Makes Waves

Welcome to this Deadline News Special Report: Katrina Makes Waves. I'm your host, Rex Veneer.

To begin, we take you live to Florida, where Deadline News Weather Disturbance Specialist Tracey Treadwell is standing by. Tracey, what's it like out there?

"Well, as you can see, Rex, it's wet. Very wet. The rain is coming down, and it's coming down hard. Yes, it's very, very...wet here in Flori --"

You don't have any funny animal shots?

"No, Rex. No Lassie shots. Most of the small animals were washed to sea when the hurricane first hit."

No cars buried under a pile of cheese?

"Where would you get that idea?"

It would be interesting to look at.

“We do have footage of cars leaving the state on one side of the highway while a lone car is entering the state.”

Everybody has that one, Tracey. In fact, we’ve seen that clip more often in the last three days than we’ve seen any clip of President Bush in the month since he went on vacation to his Crawford ranch. What about some local colour? What do Floridians think about what’s happening to them?

“Well, Rex, I have no idea. Most of them have evacuated the state, and the ones who haven’t have barricaded themselves in their basements with a supply of canned foods and enough firearms to start a Middle Eastern insurgency. And, there’s no way I’m talking to any of them until DNN coughs up with some danger pay!”

Thanks, Tracey. That was Tracey Treadwell, in Florida. We’ll, uhh, have another incisive report from her later in the show.

In other hurricane news, representatives of Florida’s gay and lesbian community said that the hurricane was the universe’s vengeance against televangelist Pat Robertson for, well, being Pat Robertson. When it was pointed out that the hurricane came nowhere near Robertson, one man commented, “The universe is nearsighted. Is it any surprise that it has lousy aim?”

Meanwhile, Adam Horonovitz became the first casualty of Katrina when he was torn apart...by his neighbours. While most people were preparing to evacuate areas of Louisiana which were expected to become submerged by water, Horonovitz repeatedly blasted the Tragically Hip song “New Orleans is Sinking” from his state of the art stereo system.

“The first 11 or 12 times, it was pretty amusing,” neighbour Martin Martini commented. “After that, well, he had it coming.” Police are considering charges. But not too seriously.

“I mean, if it had been Zeppelin’s ‘When the Levee Breaks...’” Martini started to say, but our attention had already moved on to another aspect of the disaster.

To whit: hurricane Katrina ripped two holes in the curved roof of the Louisiana Superdome, letting in pouring rain as thousands of storm refugees huddled inside. “I always wanted to blow the roof off this joint,” a shivering Mandy Shurikin said, “but this isn’t exactly what I had in mind...”

Hurricane Katrina wasn’t as bad as some had feared, being downgraded from a Category Five hurricane to Category Four. Or, for those of you who miss the colour-coded terror alerts, it went from puce to tangerine. Despite this, the hurricane was estimated to have caused over \$25 billion in damage. To put that figure in perspective, it could pay for 16 months of the war in Iraq, or almost 10 weeks of American oil consumption. It may not sound like much, 10 weeks, but there are at least two long weekends in that time period.

Insurance companies are balking at paying out \$25 billion to cover the costs of replacing properties lost due to the hurricane. “The weather system has been in effect for as much as 10 billion years,” MetLifeHaHa representative Carl “HoDaddy” Perkins explained. “Talk about the ultimate pre-existing condition!”

When it was pointed out to him that the extreme weather conditions we are currently facing might be caused by global climate change, Perkins beamed: “Even better! The victims brought it on themselves! There’s no way a court will force us to pay out a penny under such circumstances.” After a moment’s reflection, Perkins added: “Of course, we’re sorry for everybody’s loss.”

Louisiana officials are already warning citizens that when they return, they should avoid contact with the water in the state, which now contains a toxic mix of chemical pollutants, bacteria and human waste. The only person who could survive contact with the water is believed to be Keith Richards.

Louisiana officials – not the ones who warned citizens about the water; other officials – expressed the hope that Richards would take time out from the Rolling Stones’ current world tour to search the state for survivors. An assistant for Richards responded: “Mrmf I rowf arrr bleedin’ ‘ell! Bleedin’ bleedin’ ‘ell!”

Trust an Englishman to be able to articulate what all Americans are feeling.

Except, perhaps, for the looters, who were filling garbage bags with merchandise from stores they had broken into and floating them out of stricken area. One witness to the looting said it looked like Baghdad. Except, of course, for the fact that American National Guardsmen were actually in Baghdad when it was being looted.

President George W. Bush took to the airwaves to calm the American people. “We must stay the course. We mustn’t withdraw people from potentially affected areas,” he explained, “because then the hurricane will have won.”

Is there such a thing as being too on message?

On a personal note, Hurricane Katrina has not merely been an excuse to have the biggest wet t-shirt contest Florida has ever seen. It’s about...people’s hopes and dreams. Yeah, that’s it, hopes and dreams...being crushed by forces beyond their control. Usually, those forces are wielded by governments or...or corporations. But, even the greediest, most rapacious CEO must bow his head in awe at the power of nature to...to...

Sorry. I got nothing.

Okay, we’re going to take a break. When we come back: more footage of journalists standing in desolate areas, blabbering on while waiting desperately for something interesting to happen or profound to say. Stay with us...

The Powitics of Pewsonaw Destwuction

“Nyah, what’s up, Doc?”

“Be vewwy, vewwy quiet. We’we hunting Cwintons.”

“You mean, like Tarantino and...and Crisp?”

“Not Quintons! Cwintons! Like Biww and Hiwwawwy!”

“Gotcha. Say, Doc, I don’t mean to rain on your petunia patch or nothing, but are you sure they’re in season?”

“Whaddya mean?”

“I mean, Bill isn’t the President any more, so there doesn’t seem to be much poi –”

“You’we wong! Wong! Wong! Wong! Wong! Wong! Wong! Wong!”

“Not me, Doc. I never even been to China.”

“I meant incowwect. You see, it’s awways Cwinton hunting season! Hiwwawwy is still a Senatow fwom the state of New Yowk, and the wumouw is that she wants to wun fow Pwesident in 2008! She’s totawwy faiw game!”

“I thought you said we needed to be quiet.”

“I AM BEING QUI – awwight, awwight, you got me thewe.”

“I, ahh, see that this is a very emotional subject for you.”

“You got that wight.”

“So, ehh, tell me, doc, what kind of ammo are you using?”

“Whitewatew.”

“What, that old thing?”

“Whaddya mean?”

“No offense meant, doc, but that ammo wouldn’t bring down a gnat in a tornado. Got anything else?”

“Thewe was Biww’s infidewity. The Staww wepowt was vewy damaging. Vewy, vewy damaging.”

“Oh, sure, doc, sure. And, after it was released, Clinton’s popularity went up. Somebody really shot themselves in the foot with that one, and I don’t think it was the former President. Got anything else?”

“Weww...”

“Would you like something juicy?”

“Suwe.”

“Something that all Americans could agree was wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong?”

“You’ve piqued my intewest. Go on.”

“Something that would probably be an impeachable offense?”

“Now you’we talking! What is it?”

“Naah, you probably wouldn’t be interested.”

“Teww me! Teww me! Teww me!”

“You sure you wanna know?”

“Teww me! Teww me! Teww me! Teww me! Teww me! Teww me!”

“Okay, doc. You asked for it. What if the President lied about the reason for going to war, sending our brave sons and daughters to be killed for reasons he kept hidden from the public?”

“Awe you sewious?”

“Dead serious.”

“That’s a howwible, howwible thing fow a Pwesident to do! He should be immediatewy impeached!”

“Wait. There’s more.”

“Weawwy?”

“Really. What if the President pushed through tax cuts that made the federal deficit balloon so that he would have an excuse to slash social programmes AND misled the

American people into thinking that they would benefit when most of the tax cuts actually went to the richest five per cent of the population?”

“I don’t know...that’s kind of abstwact.”

“Ah, but, what if he paid for his tax cuts by cutting benefits to our brave men and women fighting for democracy overseas?”

“Who?”

“Our soldiers.”

“OH! He’s a monstew! He’s a tewwible, tewwible mon – hey! Wait a minute! Who awe you talking about?”

“I’m talking about the President.”

“Not Pwesident Cwinton. He didn’t do any of that.”

“You got me, doc. I was talking about President Bush.”

“That’s Hawdwy faiw!”

“Nyah, how do you figure?”

“You’we just engaging in the powitics of pewsonal destwuction!”

“I am?”

“That’s wight.”

“Why is it when you attack Clinton for some minor sexual indiscretion, it’s fair game, but when I actually talk about Bush’s record, it’s foul?”

“Because Bush is the bettew Pwesident.”

“He is?”

“Eviewybody knows that.”

“I hate to disillusion ya, Doc, but I think Clinton was the better President.”

“What? Nevew! Bush was bettew!”

“Clinton was better.”

“Bush!”

“Clinton!”

“Bush!”

“Clinton!”

“Bush!”

“Clinton!”

“Bush!”

“Bush!”

“Cwinton!”

“Bush!”

“Cwinton!”

“Bush!”

“Cwinton!”

“Bush!”

“Cwinton was the bettew Pwesident and I don’t wanna heaw anothe wovd about it!”

“Whatever you say, Doc.”

“The man was a giant who desewves to be wevewed thwoughout the – hey, wait just a minute! Who am I talking about?”

“President Clinton?”

“No! I was talking about Pwesident Bush!”

“Then, why did you keep mentioning President Clinton?”

“Because you kept mentioning Pwesident Bush!”

“You know, Doc, you’re right. I did keep mentioning President Clinton.”

“No, Pwesident Bush.”

“That’s what I said: President Clinton.”

“No – you – I – actually – that is to say – I – I – I think I need to lie down for a while.”

“That’s a good idea, Doc. Presidential politics can sometimes be difficult to understand.”

“You got that wight. Ooh, my aching head!”

“Hunh. Ain’t I a stinker?”

Blog Blah Blah

June 1: Is anybody out there? Hello? Hello?

April 30: Top 10 Reasons We Don’t Need Commercial Media

- 10) They’re biased towards the wealthy
- 9) They pander to people’s worst instincts
- 8) They crush competition
- 7) They...they...oh, lord, what have we done?

April 22: So, like, I’m looking out my bedroom window, and nothing is happening. No war. No natural disaster. No politicians kissing babes. Shit, some people have all the luck...

April 16: What the fu – look, dumbass, I was trying to support your sorry blog. What’s the thanks I get? MaryQuiteC at <<http://blogmind.is/~MaryQC/RFA>>Radio Free Albumen Blog reports that Charlie 8Ball has been dissing me in <<http://www.GetBehind.com/home>>BehindBlog. Fine. That’s the last time I help any lamers like you!

April 14: I have no intention of putting up a top 10 list of anything. Lists are for lamers.

April 13: Charlie 8Ball at <<http://www.GetBehind.com/home>>BehindBlog says that VVPuritan at <<http://www222.blogeria.com/VVVblog/index>>VV’s Vivisection Blog made up her article about Angie Panda (<<http://w2w2w2.blogbuster.com/ebonyandivory/home>>Black and White Blog)’s claim that she has inside information on the President’s inability to sit still. I think Charlie is out of line, here. Look, VV has the right to her opinion, and, as for the whole hemorrhoids issue, well, I do find it hard to believe that Angie’s dream is a true reflection of the President’s condition, but you never know. You know?

April 11: The, uhh, *New York Times* had an article last month, you know, before it croaked, that the President has some sort of back condition. Maybe they’re setting up some kind of Limbaugh-painkillers defense for his strange behaviour. Thoughts?

April 9: I don't understand. DavieBouyXT is shutting down
<<http://fatehitsyouupsidethehead.com/Destiny/home>>Blog O' Destiny. Man, I worshipped that site – it was the inspiration for me to create my own blog. DavieBouyXT says that there's nothing left to say. Well, bullshit, man. It's a big, wide world out there with lots of stuff to write about! I – I – man, this sucks.

April 7: You know, Michael, nobody likes a sore winner. If you – no, you know what, I'm not even going to go there. It's not worth the (you) bytes.

April 6: Holy shit! Somebody actually bought a "Fair and Balanced" coffee mug for 22 cents on eBay! Nicely played!

April 5: Michael Panzaroti at
<<http://www.destroycbs.com/articles/239635917155C.pdf>>DestroyCBS.com is still going on about Dan Rather jumping on the President's Vietnam War record. Dude! Rather is long gone from the scene, and CBS itself folded up its cards and quite the game months ago. We won! Accept victory graciously and move on. Or, you know what, don't even be gracious about it, if that's where you're coming from. But, either way, move on!

April 4: A lot of office furniture and shit is being put up for sale on eBay. Anybody happen to notice if any of it has Fox logos on it? LOL I'd pay for a "Fair and Balanced" coffee mug...yeah, right. Like, 50 cents, maybe. ROFL

April 3: Anybody know what happened to *Salon*? One minute, I'm reading an article on the American fad for rice wine, the next I'm getting 404 errors all over the place. Don't – don't tell me they were corporate! Man, you just can't trust anybody these days. Well, except me, of course. :-)

April 2: My, oh, my. Did you see the rant on Bill O'Reilly's blog?
<www.foxnews.com/ravinglunaticpoints/>Bunch of pathetic losers who should get out of the house more? From where I sit, you're the pathetic loser, Bill. Enjoy your next job – I'm sure Wal-Mart can always use another greeter!

April 1: Ha! Suckers! The commercial media has finally bitten the dust, and not a moment too soon! With the <<http://fatehitsyouupsidethehead.com/Destiny/home>>collapse of Fox News – which was okay, considering, but still too big for its own good – not to mention ours – no giants remain. The *New York Times*? Gone! CNN? History! AOL/Time Warner/Disney/Vivendi/Universal has bitten the dust! All the lumbering dinosaurs of a different media age have met their comet from the heavens and gone screaming into history's void.

Blogs rule!

May 30: Fox News just had a 20 minute segment speculating on
<www.foxnews.com/wedecideyouretort/news>why the President doesn't seem comfortable when he sits down. Like, HELLO! There's a whole wide world out there,

people! Is this really the best that your multi-million dollar news department can come up with? That's pathetic!

Working for Big DICK Radio Is Its Own Reward

"So, Donny –"

"Danny."

"Right. Denny. How do you like working for C-D-I-K?"

"It's only been three hours."

"Must be exciting for you."

"I haven't really processed –"

"Sure, it is. Here. There's something we'd like you to read on the air."

"Hmm...oh...sure. I – what? I can't read this!"

"Why not?"

"I've only been working here for three hours."

"Nobody will know. Well, I mean, if you stop saying that."

"It won't sound credible coming from me."

"Believe me, it wouldn't sound any more credible coming from any of us."

"Not helping, Dick."

"Sorry, Dick."

"So, Ronny –"

"Danny."

"Right. Randy. Please read what we've prepared for you."

"Well...uhh...okay. 'Last week, radio station C-D-I-K ran promos that suggested that we would be airing the Rolling Stones concert live from the Palais Royale with Cheese. However, at the time the Stones were playing live, we actually aired a tape of a concert they gave at the Palais Casino Royale in 1938. Alert listeners realized that they were not hearing a live concert the first time we cut away from the music to air an ad for Camel

cigarettes. I'd like to apologize to listeners of C-D-I-K for the deception. When I made the decision two weeks ago to run the promotion, it seemed like a good idea. Now, I realize this is exactly the sort of behaviour that is fuelling the sales of iPods, and that's not a good idea. So, I have to admit, I have been the Moron of the Moment."

"Moron of the Month, more like."

"Moron of the Millennium, if you ask me."

"You think anybody listening is going to buy that?"

"You gave a brilliant reading."

"I won't kid you – I teared up."

"Yeah, but, I've only been working here –"

"That's not important."

"But, how could I have made a decision two weeks ago if –"

"The important thing is that you made a mistake, and you were big enough to admit it."

"Uhh, okay. How...how is this going to affect my job?"

"Oh, you'll be fired."

"Like you were shot out of a cannon."

"That's one way of going far in the industry."

"Kind of a painful way."

"I hope you have a net."

"Do you have a net?"

"I'm gonna be fired?"

"Of course. We can't keep executives who make boneheaded programming and promotional decisions."

"We'd soon be out of business."

"But –"

“And, as boneheaded decisions go, yours was one of the worst I’ve ever seen in my three decades in the radio industry.”

“Camels cigarettes? What were you thinking? They’re so unhip!”

“But –”

“It’s you or us, pal.”

“And, our money is on us.”

“WHY DIDN’T YOU TELL ME I WOULD BE FORED BEFORE I STARTED?”

“Would you have read the apology if we?”

“Of course not!”

“Question pretty much answers itself, doesn’t it?”

“For somebody who wanted to be a radio executive, you ask the dumbest questions.”

“But, not to worry. We actually have something for you.”

“I don’t want a Moron of the Moment t-shirt. Thanks.”

“It’s better than that.”

“What could be better than a Moron of the Moment t-shirt, Dick?”

“Let me tell the man, Dick. You’ll be getting an employee of the year plaque.”

“But, I only worked here for three hours.”

“Fortunately, the rules of this employee of the year thing are a little...loose.”

“So, you’re rewarding me for taking the fall for somebody else’s mistake?”

“Hey, it worked for Bush.”

“You see the honking great medal he gave George Tenet?”

“It’s a thing of gorgeousness.”

“Oh, and we have something else for you.”

“Oh?”

“A tour of the exit from the studio.”

“I don’t need –”

“GUARD!”

“There’s no need. I’ll go quietly.”

“Good, cuz we don’t like hanging out with losers.”

“Hard enough hanging out with each other.”

“Don’t let the door hit your employee of the year plaque on the way out!”

“Well, I’m glad that’s over with.”

“We’ve got a minute before we have to go to commercial. What should we do now?”

“I have a concert announcement to make.”

“Yeah? Who’s coming?”

“Jim Morrison!”

“Uhh...Dick?”

“That’s right. He’ll be playing live with The Doors at the Palais de Justice Royale on August 31st. The opening act will be Big Brother and the Holding Company, featuring the incomparable Janis Joplin. And, the best part is that we’ll be airing live coverage of the concert!”

“...”

“What do you think?”

“How many employee of the year plaques can we give out in one year?”

Thirty-one Reasons To Believe The Technology In Your Life Is Out of Control

1. Your iPod contains more minutes of music than minutes actuaries tell you that you have remaining in your life.
2. You don’t want to spend more time playing *Grand Theft Auto San Andreas* than having sex, you **have** to spend more time playing *Grand Theft Auto San Andreas* than having sex.

3. Your fridge is selectively allowing certain foods to spoil more quickly in a not so subtle attempt to get you to lose weight.
4. You don't let your teenage son drive your car, yet you still aren't certain where it was last night.
5. Every offer for wireless Internet connections that has been made to you comes with strings.
6. Your PDA doesn't want you to read most of your Instant Messages because "they're private."
7. After several warnings about illegal file sharing, your CD burner turns you into the cops for copyright infringement.
8. Your seven hour odyssey going through a menu of options on the phone ends with a conversation with somebody in Tijuana whose knowledge of English is limited to "One girl or two?" and "I will need your credit card number. Please speak slow." And, all you wanted was to find out your current bank balance!
9. The Global Positioning System unit in your car keeps telling you that you are at the corner of Fleeglebart Street and Fufnafler Avenue on Mars...and you're at the point where you're willing to believe it.
10. The paper clip icon in Microsoft Word is embarrassed to show its face when you're working.
11. You spend 12 hours preparing a 20 minute Power Point presentation. You spend 24 hours preparing a 10 page report that nobody in your company will read. And, you're only the janitor.
12. Your robotic pet gets more attention from members of the opposite sex than you do.
13. You're so starved for companionship that you're seriously considering asking one of the dinosaurs in the virtual reality game *Dactyl Nightmare* for a date.
14. You spend more on batteries than on food.
15. You envy the carefree ways of a hedgehog.
16. Your laptop "just wants to be friends."
17. You know that scene in *Alice In Wonderland* where she can't eat food that she's been personally introduced to? Get ready to become a vegan.

18. You fantasize about being a Sim. This is wrong on so many levels, it's hard to know where to begin.
19. You'd rather talk to your lover on a cell phone than face to face.
20. You find yourself defending Japlish at parties because it is starting to just make so much sense to you.
21. You spent several hours watching your defragger clean up your hard drive. It was the most moving experience you've had in front of a screen in years.
22. You're riveted by the cursor in your word processing programme, because it reminds you of all the happy hours you spent as a child playing Pong.
23. You spend so much time typing, your hands are beginning to resemble crabs claws, but, instead of going to the doctor (who will likely suggest that you cut down on your computer use), you hope that crab claw hands will soon become fashionable.
24. Your clone has stopped returning your calls.
25. Your spell check programme informs you it won't be available for your use for at least 20 years because it is working on James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*.
26. When you try to withdraw money, ATMs across the city laugh and thank you for lightening their day. You're thinking of moving to another city, but you're worried the whole network of ATMs knows who you are, and, in any case, you can't afford to.
27. Just when you've finally mastered programming your VCR, you have to get TIVO.
28. Your mother announced at the last family dinner that even she finds your Webcam too dull to watch.
29. Nanobots don't want to go anywhere near you – they don't know where you've been, and they're afraid you'll give them cooties.
30. A disaster happens close to where you live, and you're disappointed because you weren't there to take pictures of it with your digital camera and email them to all your friends.
31. Your pacemaker digs jazz.

Reality Free Political Commentary

My problem is that I believe in reality. (Okay, smartass, my **other** problem.) I have been operating for these 20 or so years past under the assumption that reality can be subdivided

into facts. Facts can be checked. If you are going to engage in political commentary, you use facts in order to establish a point of view on reality.

Boy do I feel stupid!

Watching the boys and girls of Fox News, listening to radical right radio rats like Rush, reading the editorial pages of *The Wall Street Journal*, I have begun to realize that facts, well, they just get in the way of a good argument. Some people were shocked when an aide of President Bush said that “We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality;” but, if they had been paying attention to the right wing press, they would have seen this principle in action years before the Bushmeister ever thought about reupholstering the chairs in the Oval Office.

Since actual reality-based commentary takes actual work, I think I’m going to try my hand at right wing, reality free political commentary. I must admit, I’m doing it more out of laziness than political commitment, but, if I succeed, I’ll cut the heart out of anybody who challenges my motivation.

Based on a total lack of research on how they do it, I have come up with the following rhetorical strategies:

1) Always personally attack anybody who disagrees with you.

Ann Coulter looks like a ferret. A ferret with very fetching blond hair and a pretty impressive figure, but still: when she gets that feral look in her eyes, you know that only evil can follow.

Hey, that was fun! No wonder the right engages in personal attacks! Let me try it again.

Sean Hannity has the face of a ferret. A ferret with very fetching blond hair and a pretty impressive figure, but...uhh, but...okay, maybe I’m going to have to work on this a bit.

2) Make shit up.

Did you know that Bill O’Reilly is a bed wetter? That’s right – he has to wear adult diapers when he goes out because he never knows when he’ll have a little accident. You know that constipated look he sometimes gets when he’s talking to somebody who disagrees with him? (You may have thought it was anger – that’s okay, it was honest mistake.) Actually, O’Reilly is trying to keep himself from peeing his pants. Even with the diaper, and taking into account the fact that nobody is ever likely to know, it’s just too embarrassing.

Wow. I got this amazing rush writing that last paragraph. Did you feel it, too? I totally made the whole bed wetting thing up, of course – I have no idea how Bill O’Reilly’s personal plumbing works (not that I even want to...). But, making shit up – it’s so much

more liberating than actually having to read shit and fact check your research to ensure that it is, you know, accurate. I think I can really get into this!

3) Attack the patriotism of anybody you disagree with.

What the hell was Rush Limbaugh thinking, supporting Bill O'Reilly's denial that he's a bed wetter? Doesn't Rush know that people with a secret – such as wetting their beds – are ripe for blackmail by terrorist cells intent on destroying America by infiltrating the media? Let's face it – if you support bed wetting, the terrorists will win!

You know, when I based my political writing on “facts,” I would have looked at a paragraph like this and concluded that the person who wrote it was a raving lunatic because it makes absolutely no sense. Well, if it's wrong to be barking mad, then I don't want to be right! I just have to get over my fear that, if I were to ever get my own Fox show, 20 million Americans would respond to paragraphs like the one above with: “You go get those bed wetting terrorist-loving bastards! You give ‘em hell!”

4) Repeat shit until everybody agrees with you just to shut you up.

Bill O'Reilly is a bed wetter!

Bill O'Reilly is a bed wetter!

Bill O'Reilly is a bed wetter!

Bill O'Reilly is a bed wetter!

Bill O'Reilly is a bed wetter!

Bill O'Reilly is a bed wetter!

Bill O'Reilly is a bed wetter!

Bill O'Reilly is a bed wetter!

Bill O'Reilly is a bed wetter!

Okay, this part is kind of boring. Agree with me to shut me up already so I can move on to another point.

5) Shout down anybody who disagrees with you.

“YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT!”

“YOU SAY THAT BECAUSE YOU HATE
FREEDOM/CONSERVATIVES/LIFE/GUNS/THE FLAG!”

“SHUT UP! SHUT UP! SHUT UP! SHUT UP! SHUT UP!”

Of course, this one is more fun if you’re actually shouting at somebody else in the room – text doesn’t really do it justice. Still, if it works half as well as the other tactics, I’ll be enjoying it for decades to come.

Am I ready for my close-up, Mister Murdoch?

Cardinal Ratzinger, Vatican Enforcer

Father Michael was busy preparing his sermon for the day in his study. There had been some problems in his parish over the question of allowing gay Catholics to be involved with religious services which he felt needed to be addressed. He particularly wanted to stress passages such as “love thy neighbour as thyself” and “judge not lest ye be judged” which, to him, represented the wisdom of a loving god.

As was his wont, Father Michael lost track of time as he tried to find just the right combination of scripture and moral argument (what he thought of as his “psalm and dance”) to make his parishioners understand and accept his philosophical argument. Thus it was that he had no idea how long he had been at it when his door burst open, splinters flying, and the man in the miter lurched in.

“Fodder Michael?” the man asked.

“Y...yes. Who are you?”

“Ratzinger. Joseph Ratzinger.”

“Not a Cardinal of the Holy Mother Church and leader of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith!”

“Da same!”

Father Michael could feel a constriction in his chest. “Whu...what can I do for you, Cardinal Ratzinger?” he managed to say.

“I hear youse got a lot of gay parishioners.”

“There is a large gay community in my parish, and –”

“Dey don’t have...intimate relations, do dey?”

“I wouldn’t know. When they walk through the door, I don’t ask them if they’re sexually active.”

“Why not?”

“I’m sorry.”

“Surely, Fodder Michael, dey admit to it in Confession.”

“Some, do, but –”

“You know dat homosexual fornication is an abomination in da sight of god. I trust dat you are making it clear ta dem dat as long as dey engage in dis aberrant behaviour, deir souls’re condemned to an eternity of damnation.”

“I don’t see it quite like that, Cardinal.”

“Youse don’t?”

“We were all made in god’s image, after all, and all share in his infinite love.”

“Infinite love, hunh?” Cardinal Ratzinger thought about this for a moment, then exploded: “Who do you think you are? A simple parish Priest lecturing a Cardinal o’ Rome! Listen up, buddy boy. I got da ear o’ da Pope. You understand? Nuttin I say comes widout da approval of da Pope, who is infallible. Does youse understand da meaning of da word infallible?”

“Yes.”

“Okay, den.”

“But –”

“Still infallible.”

“I understand that, but –”

“In. Fall. Ible.”

“I get it. Infallible.”

“Youse wouldn’t want ta cross me. If you did, you could find dat t’ings break.”

“Was that a threat?”

“I’m Cardinal Ratzinger. I don’t need ta make t’reats. My existence in dis place at dis time should be t’reat enough.”

“Threat of what, exactly?”

“Like, yer relationship wit’ Rome. It’d be a pity if dat should just...break.”

“Are you threatening me with excommunication?”

“I didn’t say dat. I implied it heavily, but I didn’t actually say dat.”

“You would excommunicate me for seeing to the needs of my parishioners.”

“See, Fodder, when youse put it dat way, it almost sounds unreasonable. In Rome, we prefer to t’ink of it as not bein’ complicit in sinners goin’ ta Hell.”

“You...you know, when I find myself in these kinds of situations, I always ask myself what Christ would do.”

“Make youse a deal. When ya gets ta heaven, youse can ask him. In da meantime, as long as ya live in dis world, youse gotta do what da Pope says.”

“The infallible Pope.”

“Yeah. Dat one.”

Father Michael slumped in his chair, defeated. “Okay, Ratzinger. You win. What do you want me to do?”

“Preach fire! Preach brimstone! Put such a fear o’ god into dose headen bastards dat dey’ll cut deir own members off before dey have anudder sexual t’aught. T’ink yer up ta dat, Fodder?”

Father Michael nodded quietly and thought to himself, “Heaven help the world if this man ever becomes Pope...”

NEXT!: “Ratzinger, you rat bastahd! How n’Hell are ya?”

“Dis is not a social call, Romero, you Latin American Communist, youse. I’m here ta reason wit youse about dis whole Liberation T’eology t’ing. I wanna bring you back into da flock, Romero, but, if dat don’t work, I’m gonna hafta take youse down.”

“Bring it on, Ratzinger! Bring. It. On.”

WILL THE CARDINAL BE ABLE TO PUT AN END TO THE UNAUTHORIZED PRIESTLY SUPPORT OF A POPULAR MOVEMENT FOR THE POOR, AVERTING A SCHISM WITHIN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH? OR, WILL HIS LATIN AMERICAN NEMESIS PREVAIL? FIND OUT ON THE NEXT EXCITING EPISODE OF *CARDINAL RATZINGER, VATICAN ENFORCER!*

De-con-struct(ur)ing Academ(ed)ia

As decrepescence slowly descends upon the new Millennium, it becomes more important than ever to recognize that the Derridean Meridian (thesis + antithesis = rhesus) not only explains the world as it should be, but all of the multifarious worlds of the rhizomatic omniverse. We could ask no less of a nascent theory of everything (a baby TOE, as it were, or possibly will be), and yet, we must ask more. (Gerald, stop picking your nose and pay attention – this could be important!)

Of course, Derrida hadn't considered the mirror phase of laser optics, or he would have realized that the inClement Greenberg approach to 17th century Portugese pornographic haiku was *ipso facto pas au courant schadenfreude in media res*. (Erika: I hear that Michael has finally proposed. Frankly, I think you can do better – the boy just isn't tenure track material, if you know what I mean. Still, if he's really who you want to spend the rest of your life with, congratulations.) It was this failure of Imagineering that Eco was referring to when he pronounced: "I need some Tums. Does anybody have any Tums on them? God, what I wouldn't give for a Tums!" [1]

It's this re-embodiment (re-embodi-mint?) that leads to the generalization of cyborg instantiation. (Gerald, stop that! It's gross. And, unhygienic.) It's the 19th century body eclectic made over from the spare parts of a decaying culture. Well, that and batteries you can get for \$3.99 at Radio Shack. Would that real power in the world came so cheap!

The body, you see, is like an electron swimming in the irreducible sea of sub-atomic energies. You can comm-link to some pie (eye-fie-DIE?) in the sky satellite system, but, when it comes right down to it, the atavistic impulse cannot be squelched by mere allusions to Eigan Values. (Ingeborg, are you ever going to get that dissertation written? The world is waiting!) No. We must strip our conceptions of the body, pull our minds out of the conceptual gutter we've all been born into and walk boldly away from Our Cyborgian Century. [2]

Yes, I'm talking about nothing less than the overturning of the overnurturing Master Mega Monongohelian Nar(rat)ives. Foucault wept. Then, he wrote 27 volumes on the end of the printed word. As the man himself might have written: "Being is the essence of existence, but neither its *juissance* nor its *puissance*." [3] (Tsuing-Po, that diet drug is going to kill you. Consult a doctor.) The Other has confronted the unassimilable Otherness of its being, and thrown up in a sink in your bathroom. Invest in a plunger.

So much for the erotic ontology of the garden gnome. I believe it was Freud, that diabolical eclesiast himself, who argued that sometimes a garden gnome is just a garden gnome. [4] The Other has left the building. Brecht wept, [5] but it was either the alienation talking or the garlic he had for lunch. The substantial instantiation of Otherness within the coZy confines of the IVory ToWer is only mATChed by the raw power of the Other marCHiNg down Main Street with its UnDeRwEaR eXpOsED. [6]

Of course, there may only be half a dozen people in the world who will follow this argument. (Hi, Markus! Good to see your condition has cleared up.) All the more reason to make it as forcefully as we can.

- 1) Anschluss, Viktor. "We Don't Live In That Universe Any More." *Digest of Indigestible Results*. V27, I132. November/July, 1996. p11,024. See, also: Victoria Anschluss. "That Universe Doesn't Live Inside Us Any More." Forthcoming.
- 2) Nicholas Negroponte, private conversation, July 7, 2031.
- 3) But, he didn't write it, so I don't have to footnote it. Well, alright, if he had written it, it probably would have appeared in: Foucault, Michel. *On Grammatonarratologicalism*, v 25. Mickey Spillane, trans. New York: (No Such Thing As) Bad Press, 1988.
- 4) Freud, Sigmund. *Dreamy Dreams and the Dreamers Who Dream Them*. Al Franken, trans. Bonn: Bavarian Cream Pie Press, 1997.
- 5) Moraviatuya, Hans. *Theatre in the Age of Autonomous Unintelligence*. New York: YECHT Press, 1989.
- 6) Sorry about that: my caps lock key was having an emotional crisis due to what it perceives to be my aggressive use of the keys around it. At first, I felt it was beneath my dignity as a white male woman of colour to argue with my machine; however, given the cyBorgesian nature of modern society, I let it have its way for a sentence. It takes so little to keep keyboard components happy...

Outrage Fatigue

People ask me why I don't express more outrage at the revelations coming out of the Gomery Commission's investigation of Liberal Party corruption in Quebec. Really. They do. I get asked this question more often than I get asked, "Hey, buddy, what's your problem?" although not quite as much as: "Are you sure you don't have something stuck between your teeth?"

It's not that the Liberal government isn't corrupt. Clearly, it is corrupt. As corrupt as the day is long. As corrupt as a hard drive that's been exposed to the Internet without protective anti-virus software. As corrupt as any third world government (at first world prices).

Sure, the Liberal Party is corrupt. But its main rival, the Conservative Party of Canada (Manningist-Loonyist) is evil.

The Liberals, while beholden to big money interests, still occasionally hear small voices in the back of their heads telling them that there is a greater good for all citizens. Sometimes they act on the voice, sometimes they drown it out with a few drinks paid for by a corporate lobbyist in the bar of a sleazy hotel, but at least the voice is there. The CPC (ML) has been to an expensive psychiatrist who has convinced it to destroy the voice with electroshock therapy and several weeks vacation on the Riviera.

Take continental integration. The Liberal Party is like the shy girl at the ball who is really in love with the tall, handsome stranger. She spurns his initial advances, not because she

doesn't yearn in her heart to integrate her corporate and security regulations with him, but because she's afraid of what her friends will think if she lets herself go too willingly. So, she frustratingly sends mixed messages to him on missile defense.

The Conservatives, by way of contrast, could be considered the sluts of the Canadian political scene, if that wasn't too insulting to sluts. They salivate at the prospect of getting into bed with the tall, handsome stranger. They practically throw themselves at him. They obviously didn't listen to their mother when she advised: "Dear, if you're too eager to give away your resources to a tall, handsome stranger, he will take them, but he won't respect your borders in the morning."

Okay, so, maybe the difference isn't all that great. But, it does exist.

Take the environment. The Liberals are like Don Knotts in *The Gang That Couldn't Shoot Straight*. It's not that they love the environment so much that they want to protect it from the corporations that want to develop it out of existence; it's more that they go all goofy when the subject comes up and you can never be sure if their actions are going to help or hurt the cause.

The Conservatives, on the other hand, are the Mike Myers of the environment, and I'm not talking about the cuddly comedian star of the *Austin Powers* movies. No, I'm talking about the unstoppable killing machine of the *Halloween* movies. Like Myers, the Conservatives see themselves as an all-powerful being that mercilessly mows down all environmental obstacles to corporate profit.

So, the choice is between goofs who sometimes get things right or mass murderers who leave death and destruction in their wake. Hmm...think I'll need a little time to work this one out...

Or, consider Quebec, where Paul Martin's current woes seem to have started. The Liberal Party is like the ineffectual father in those sad Disney movies from the 1950s: "Now, now. This whole sovereignty thing is just a phase you're going through. Tell you what: I'm going to raise your allowance by a couple billion dollars if you'll just behave. Okay? And, the whole language law thing? We'll just pretend that never happened. Kids will be kids, right?"

The Conservatives, on the other hand, believe in tough love: "You stop this acting out on independence right now, young province, or I'll send you to your room without your equalization payment! What do you mean, you'll take your room and move to another house? I'd like to see you try!"

The Liberals are about muddling through and sometimes doing the right thing. The Conservatives are about boldly taking the country in the wrong direction. (And, when did the term "leadership" become so empty that getting a country somewhere, anywhere is more important than where you actually take it?) You can be outraged by the evidence of

corruption revealed by the Gomery Commission if you like. Personally, I find the Liberals' approach to governing very Canadian.

Fatwa Chance!

From a fatwa issued by the Saudi Shiekh Abdullah Al-Najdi. The fatwa, originally published on an Islamist website, hasn't affected the National Hockey League in the slightest. Translated from the Arabic by the Middle East Media Illiteracy Programme.

1. Do not play hockey on an ice surface with boards, since this is the way of the non-believers.
2. One should not use the terminology established by the nonbelievers and polytheists, such as "shooting," "scoring," "high sticking," "penalty box" and "30 second time out." Whoever pronounces these terms should be punished, reprimanded, driven from the ice and even told in public: "You have come to resemble the nonbelievers and polytheists, and this has been forbidden.
3. If a player is knocked in the head with a stick or gets knocked into the boards from behind, he shall not say "foul" and shall not stop playing because of his injury. The one who caused the injury shall not be given a penalty but rather the case shall be judged according to Muslim law. The injured player shall exercise his rights according to shari'ah, as stated in the Koran, and you must testify together with him that so-and-so placed his stick between the injured player's legs in order to trip him intentionally.
4. Do not set the number of players on the ice according to the number of players used by the Jews, the Christians and especially the vile America. In other words, six players shall not play together. Make it a larger or smaller number. Preferably larger.
5. Play in your normal clothing, or in pajamas, or something like that, but not in pads and cups and colourful jerseys. Pads, cups and jerseys are not appropriate clothing for Muslims. They are the clothing of the nonbelievers and therefore you must be careful not to wear them.
6. You must play the entire game with the intention of improving your physical fitness for the purpose of fighting jihad. One should not waste time in celebrating false victory or giving attention to team standings. Especially if one is in the same division as the Montreal Canadiens.
7. Do not play for 60 minutes, as is the practice among the Jews and the Christians. This is also the length of time that is accepted in the minor and international leagues of those who have strayed from the righteous path.
8. Do not play in three periods, but rather in two or four parts, so as to be different from the sinful and rebellious, the nonbelievers and the polytheists. One period is okay – five might be stretching the point.

9. If neither side has defeated the other and neither side has inserted the puck between the goalposts, do not waste further time in an extension or “shootout” until someone has won but rather leave the ice rink immediately, since this kind of victory is precisely an imitation of the nonbelievers and adoption of the despotic National Hockey League rules.

10. Do not appoint someone who skates up and down the ice and follows the players and is called a “referee,” since, after canceling the National Hockey League rules, there is no need for his presence.

11. In the course of the game, it is forbidden for groups of television cameras to gather and broadcast the game, since if you are gathering for the sake of sports activity and physical fitness, as you claim, why should anybody at home be watching you? You must make the cameramen and commentators participate in order to prepare them for jihad; or else, say to them, “Go propagate Islam and seek out moral corruption in the marketplace and the press [but never in the mosques] in order to correct it, and leave us to improve our physical fitness.”

12. Endorsement deals are right out.

13. When you finish playing, be careful not to talk about the game and not to say, “we really kicked their asses tonight,” or “so-and-so really outskated your ass,” etc. You should speak about your body, its strength and its muscles, and about the fact that you are playing as a means of training to run, attack and retreat in preparation for waging jihad.

14. If one buries the puck in the net and then starts to skate to centre ice so that his companions will skate after him and hug him, like the players in Canada and Europe do, you should spit in his face, punish him and reprimand him, for what do joy, hugging and perhaps worse have to do with sports?

Money Is the Drug

“Open wide and say, ‘Aaah.’”

“What are you going to do?”

“I’m going to look down your throat. We’ve done this many times before...”

“What is that?”

“A tongue depressor.”

“It’s gold.”

“Don’t be silly. If I had a gold tongue depressor, do you really think I would use it to depress people’s tongues? I would probably use it to pay for a trip around the world.”

“It looks gold.”

“It’s gold plated. Now, open wide and –”

“Why do you have a gold plated tongue depressor?”

“It was a gift from GlaxoKlineRexdaleMcGuffinSchmedley. If you look at the bottom, you can just make out the company’s logo: two snakes strangling a hospital administrator.”

“I’m sorry, I don’t understand. Why is GlaxKli...err...”

“GlaxoKlineRexdaleMcGuffinSchmedley.”

“Yeah. Them. Why are they giving you gold-plated tongue depressors?”

“They just gave me one!”

“Whatever.”

“Are they giving other doctors more than one?”

“I don’t know! Why are they giving you any at all?”

“Well, ahh, to remind me of their latest product, Flutoxicone, known publicly as Coniflutox.”

“What does that drug do?”

“It’s really not relevant to –”

“I’m curious.”

“It’s for irritable bowel syndrome. Unless your body is connected in ways they don’t teach in medical school, I won’t be checking for that with a tongue depressor. Now, please, open your mouth and say, ‘Aaah.’”

“Aaaah.”

“One more time. With feeling.”

“AAAAAH.”

“Okay.”

“This FluxCapacitor –”

“Flutoxicone, known publicly as Coniflutox. Yes?”

“Does it work?”

“What kind of a question is that?”

“Seemed reasonable enough to me. Does it work?”

“Pfah – how would I know? You think I have time to read all the medical literature? *The Journal of Appendectal Lapriscopy* alone publishes 18 volumes a month! No, I let the FDA and Health Canada figure that stuff out.”

“Okay, and, what do the FDA and Health Canada say about fluxto –”

“Flutoxicone, known publicly as Coniflutox. Yes. They say it seems safe to recommend it for patients under certain conditions.”

“What conditions?”

“That the patients are elderly and likely to die soon anyway. They’re very strict, Health Canada is.”

“Umm, doctor, I hate to ask this, but do you prescribe this Fluxtonic?”

“Flutoxicone, known publicly as Coniflutox? As a matter of fact, I do, yes.”

“And, would the fact that they give you free gold tongue –”

“Gold-plated.”

“Would the fact that they give you free gold-plated tongue depressors –”

“Just the one.”

“Does it have anything to do with the fact that you prescribe their drug?”

“Prescribe their – oh, no. No. No. No. No. No. No. No. No. No. No. No. Goodness me, no. The fact that they gave me one lousy gold-plated tongue depressor is not a factor in my prescribing their drug.”

“That’s goo –”

“The dinner at the Four Seasons is a whole other matter, however.”

“Dinner at the Four Seasons?”

“They make a terrific haddock bisque – have you ever had it?”

“So, this company pays for a fancy dinner and you promote their drugs to your patients.”

“To be fair, the trip to Florida was an important consideration.”

“The drug company paid for a trip to Florida?”

“Just for me and the misses. They drew the line at my eight children. Do you know how much babysitters for a week cost?”

“The drug company paid for a trip for you and your wife to Florida!”

“It was for a medical convention. I have to keep my skills up, you know.”

“What skills did you learn at this medical convention in Florida?”

“Not to be so slow snapping my wrists on my backswing.”

“You spent your time at the medical convention paid for by the pharmaceutical company playing golf?”

“What part of ‘I have to keep my skills up’ did you not understand?”

“Do you do this for a lot of drug companies?”

“Define ‘a lot.’”

“More than one.”

“Well, you have to understand, there are medical conferences in hot tourist spots practically every other week. But, that’s a sacrifice I’m prepared to make to ensure that I have the most up-to-date medical knowledge to better serve my patients...especially if I don’t have to pay for it.”

“Umm, doctor, why would anybody trust anything you tell them knowing that drug company freebies affect your diagnoses?”

“For my judgment, of course.”

“Your judgment?”

“Damn straight. I’ve had over 20 years of experience in the field of medicine – I know which drug company offers to accept and which to refuse.”

“I’m outta here.”

“Don’t you want a prescription?”

“No.”

“I think you need a prescription.”

“Why should I trust you?”

“Hey! Who’s the doctor here?”

Get Em While They’re Lukewarm

’Publican Presidential Pronouncements Parser (P4)

Price: \$25,000.12

Time Left: **6 days**

12 day listing

Ends Aug-12-05 21:00:00 PDT

Start Time: Aug-01-05 21:00:00 PDT

Quantity: 12.

History: The Prototype P4 was developed under a shroud of secrecy in an unnamed northern state. Only 37 were manufactured before the Bush administration discovered the whereabouts of the factory and shut it down on national security grounds, claiming that the manufacturer was a terrorist. Of those units that were made, only a dozen survived the raid, smuggled out of the state by grunted workers.

Item Location: Wouldn’t you like to know?

Description: Like the *Star Trekian* universal translator or the *Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* Babel fish, the Presidential Pronouncements Parser takes what a Republican President says and turns what he means into easily understandable English. EXAMPLE: Input: “I hope that Congress will consider my nominee for the vacant Supreme Court position with a spirit of by-partisan cooperation.” Output: “I intend to install a Supreme Court Justice who passes the litmus test of the religious right, and will destroy anybody who dares to question my choice.” If you are not fluent in right wing bafflegab, the ’Publican Presidential Pronouncements Parser is a must-have item!

You Worship Your Religious Icons, We’ll Worship Ours

Price: \$10,000 plus medical expenses

Time Left: **60 days**

40 day listing

Ends Oct-05-05 21:00:00 PDT

Start Time: Aug-05-05 21:00:00 PDT

Quantity: 1.

History: I was born 27 years ago in the middle of an ice storm in Tijuana, Mexico. Growing up in Malvern, Ontario, nobody thought I would amount to much. Really. I can't begin to tell you how often people told me I wouldn't amount to much. "Dex," they would say, "You're not going to amount to much." Over and over again. Well, I've had to stop pumping gas in order to protect my thumb, but, boy, will this prove them wrong!

Item Location: The thumb of my right hand.

Description: My fingerprint, looked at sideways...in low light...while you squint...is the spitting image of Obi-Wan Kenobi from the *Star Wars* movies. Not Ewan McGregor's Obi-Wan, either, but the real Obi-Wan, Alec Guinness. But, don't take my word for it. Harry Knowles of *Ain't It Cool News* has authenticated the image, and nobody could accuse him of opportunism! Now, for a price, the Obi-Wan fingerprint can be yours! I will have the top layers of skin surgically removed from my finger; you can then have them grafted onto your own finger at your leisure. Or, for an additional fee, I will have the entire finger amputated. Perfect for creating a human Obi-Wan stamp! Impress your friends! Disgust your enemies! Bid now!

For Those Who Like To Live Life On The Edge: What's Your Beef?

Price: \$1,000 a steak, \$20,000 for the entire cow (butchery for free)

Time Left: **1 days**

3 day listing

Ends Aug-08-05 21:00:00 PDT

Start Time: Aug-05-05 21:00:00 PDT

Quantity: 3 cows (with more likely to come)

History: The purity of the food supply is one of America's sacred c – well, it's very, very important. That's why the government has cut back on funding for meat inspectors while quietly allowing farmers to feed livestock with meal made out of dead c – okay, not a great example. But, that certainly is why the government stopped importing cows from Canada after one case of mad cow disease was found, and why this time they are serious about protecting the purity of America's food supply now that several cows with...ummm... you know what? Screw the purity of America's food supply! America's loss is your gain!

Item Location: various locations throughout the United States

Description: You're probably wondering why I'm asking so much for steaks and other cow meat when there are already so many cows in the United States. Simple. These aren't just any cows: they're cows that have been diagnosed with bovine spongiform...uhh...mad cow disease. That's right – they have a fatal illness that could be passed on to you when you eat their flesh IF it isn't properly cooked. Why take that risk? Why do otherwise sane, rational people eat puffer fish? For the thrill of it! Let's face it: you're never more alive than when you think you could die at any moment! And, I'm not talking any old death, either, but a grizzly, brain-eating death! Sure, you could go sky-diving. You could take up race car driving. You could try to explain to Jennifer Aniston what a great humanitarian Angelina Jolie is. Instead, why not play food chain roulette! The thrill is worth every penny!

Holocaust Denial Frequently Unasked Questions

- [1\) Who is David Duke?](#)
- [2\) Really?](#)
- [3\) David Duke, Holocaust Denier. Wasn't that a TV series in the 1970s?](#)
- [4\) Seriously. Wasn't it the series David Hasselhoff starred in before *Baywatch*?](#)
- [5\) Oh. Right. Sorry. So, what's the deal with Holocaust deniers?](#)
- [6\) What is the argument that Holocaust deniers most frequently make?](#)
- [7\) Does that make any sense?](#)
- [8\) Six million people is a lot to suddenly go missing. What do Holocaust deniers claim happened to them?](#)
- [9\) Holocaust denial has been around for decades – why is it in the news now?](#)
- [10\) Why would he do such a thing?](#)
- [11\) You don't believe people are evil.](#)
- [12\) What was the Western...err, response to the conference?](#)
- [13\) Hey, wait a second! Those curls...those black hats...those Yiddish accents...could there be...Orthodox Jews at the Iranian Holocaust denial conference?](#)
- [14\) What could they possibly be doing there?](#)
- [15\) Why was Shiraz Dossa, a political science lecturer at St. Francis Xavier University in Halifax at the conference?](#)
- [16\) But Dossa doesn't deny the Holocaust.](#)
- [17\) I find your approach to this subject very distasteful. How can you make light of the Holocaust?](#)
- [18\) No, seriously, hasn't this whole Frequently Unasked Questions file trivialized the Holocaust?](#)

- 1) Who is David Duke?

A dumb but loyal fighter in the third Crusade who died after slipping on a pumpkin on his way to the Promised Land (although, according to Wikipedia, he didn't make it much farther than Sheffield) and was rewarded by having a level of the aristocracy named after him.

2) Really?

No. But, the way I answered the question sounds much better than “former Ku Klux Klan leader and world famous Holocaust denier.” I mean, that’s not exactly something you put on business cards, you know? David Duke, Holocaust Denier. You don’t shout, “Honey, I’m off to do a few rounds of Holocaust denial with Mungo and the boys. Be back for dinner, alright?” as you’re walking out the door. It just doesn’t sound right.

3) David Duke, Holocaust Denier. Wasn’t that a TV series in the 1970s?

No.

4) Seriously. Wasn’t it the series David Hasselhoff starred in before *Baywatch*?

Uhh, look. If your going to throw out loopy concepts, you’re going to leave me with nothing to do. Besides, I’m getting the distinct impression that you aren’t sincerely interested in learning something new. If you aren’t planning on asking any serious question, could you please make way for an imaginary reader who will?

5) Oh. Right. Sorry. So, what’s the deal with Holocaust deniers?

You know when a member of the Bush administration talked about how they created reality? Holocaust deniers got there decades earlier.

6) What is the argument that Holocaust deniers most frequently make?

The basic premise is that the murder of six million Jews by Nazi Germany during World War II was an exaggeration...by five million nine hundred ninety nine thousand nine hundred and ninety nine. You see, Germany was actually baking strudel and pursuing other harmlessly stereotypical Teutonic activities on the day they were supposed to be gassing and shooting innocent people.

7) Does that make any sense?

Absolutely. As long as you ignore the testimony of the survivors of the Holocaust. And the testimony of the Allied soldiers who freed the Concentration Camp prisoners. And the record of the war crimes trials that occurred after peace was declared. And the meticulous documentation the Germans themselves kept. Once you’ve written off all of that evidence, Holocaust denial is pretty much clear sailing.

8) Six million people is a lot to suddenly go missing. What do Holocaust deniers claim happened to them?

Holocaust deniers claim that the six million Jews went vacationing in Monte Carlo and decided not to come back.

9) Holocaust denial has been around for decades – why is it in the news now?

Iranian President Mahmoud “Chuckles” Ahmadinejad hosted a conference on Holocaust denial.

10) Why would he do such a thing?

He’s evil.

11) You don’t believe people are evil.

Okay. You got me. Actually, Ahmadinejad sponsored the conference in response to the Western response to the riots in Islamic countries that were a response to insensitive cartoons about the Prophet Mohammed that ran in a Danish newspaper. Don’t ask. He argued that Western protestations of freedom of speech rang hollow; if they were genuine, they should apply to people like Holocaust deniers.

12) What was the Western...err, response to the conference?

I have never seen so many pundits put so much effort into proving an evil man right.

13) Hey, wait a second! Those curls...those black hats...those Yiddish accents...could there be...Orthodox Jews at the Iranian Holocaust denial conference?

What gave it away? The Headline that read: “Orthodox Jews attend Iranian Holocaust denial conference?”

14) What could they possibly be doing there?

Indulging in a little State of Israel denial.

15) Why was Shiraz Dossa, a political science lecturer at St. Francis Xavier University in Halifax at the conference?

Ever since Ernst Zundel was deported to Germany, it’s been tough finding a Canadian to take his place at Holocaust denial gatherings.

16) But Dossa doesn’t deny the Holocaust.

This is what free enquiry at Canada’s universities has come to.

17) I find your approach to this subject very distasteful. How can you make light of the Holocaust?

I'm not making light of the Holocaust. I'm making light of people who make light of the Holocaust. By the commutative law of satire, that actually means that I'm making...uhh...heavy of the Holocaust.

18) No, seriously, hasn't this whole Frequently Unasked Questions file trivialized the Holocaust?

Seriously, I prefer to think that it has trivialized Holocaust deniers. And, I can't imagine a nicer bunch of psychopaths to do that to.

Suppressing Voter Turnout for Dummies

When it comes to electoral fraud, electronic voting machines that don't leave a paper trail are getting all of the attention; it's almost as if Diebold was paying for the publicity! However, as with so many things, when it comes to ensuring your candidate wins by foul means or fouler, the tried and true methods are always the best. Have you considered suppressing voter turnout? As your grandmother used to say, you never have to worry about recounting votes that were never cast in the first place.

You may think that suppressing voter turnout is hard, or expensive, or time-consuming. But, really, there are methods of suppression for all levels of politician, from the first time candidate to the 10 term incumbent. All you need is a telephone (or, in some cases, a bank of them) and a little time and you can disenfranchise enough of your opponent's supporters to swing the vote in your favour. Really! It couldn't be simpler!

Here's how:

THREE STRIKES AND YOU LOSE THE RIGHT TO VOTE.

Call up your friends in the capital house and ask them to remove the names of convicted felons from the voters' lists. You might be tempted to argue that it's just a coincidence that 90 per cent of the names would have voted Democrat if given the chance, but a more aggressive stance would be that you always suspected that being a Democrat made you prone to criminal behaviour. And, the best part? By the time the real criminals are sorted out from the law abiding citizens who just happen to have criminal names, or names that look almost like those of criminals, or names that should be criminal, or whose crimes weren't serious enough to merit losing their vote, or people who looked like criminals in their driver's licence photos, you'll be halfway through your new term!

VALUES NON-VOTERS

The problem with "inner city" (wink wink) religious figures is that they tend to support Democrats because they've seen first-hand the devastation that Republican policies (tax, drugs, crime – take your pick) wreak on their communities. Yeah. We know. We don't get it, either. Still, there is a simple way of neutralizing their authority within the community.

Call one of your friends at city hall and suggest that they put money into an AIDS hospice, a drug rehabilitation programme or some other do-goodie project supported by the institution of the religious figure in question. No strings attached. They don't have to do a thing to get the money. Literally. They don't have to encourage the members of their flock to get out and vote. In fact, it would be best if they didn't. Talk about doing well by doing good!

CRANK IT UP

You know how, when you were a kid, you used to call strangers and make really bad jokes before hanging up? Hard as it may be to believe, you can use that experience to win elections!

For example, have your staff members call registered Democrats and helpfully remind them of the date of the election and how important it is for them to get out and vote. Okay, it may be the date of the election of 1973, which just happens to be a day or two late this time around, or early, but it is the date of **an** election.

If that's too laid back for you, have your staff members call registered Democrats and helpfully remind them of the date of the election and how important it is for them to get out and vote. Again. And, again. And, again. By the 20th or so call, even the most stalwart Democrats will vow never to vote again just to get you to stop.

Still not dirty enough for you? If you can afford an automated phone bank, use it to call legally registered voters with a stern warning that they had violated election laws and might be arrested if they show up to vote. This is especially effective in "inner city" (wink wink) precincts.

If you're of a more post-modern bent, have your phone bank do nothing on election day but phone the phone banks of your opponent every five seconds and hang up. You'd be surprised at how effective this is at hindering their last minute efforts to get voters out to the polls. And, machines interfering with machines – how cyberpunk of you!

DON'T COP OUT

Another simple but effective tactic to use on "inner city" (wink wink) voters is to phone one of your friends in the police department and ask them to put a police car at each end of the street where the polling station is located. You would be surprised at how easily "law abiding citizens" can be intimidated by a black and white cruiser, a blue uniform and an orange cruller!

YES, IT'S RETRO, BUT SOME TECHNIQUES NEVER GET OLD

If you have a bit of money, bribe canvassers for your opponent to take election day off.

EVERYBODY’S A PUSSYCAT – TO THEIR DOG

Did you know that you’re allowed to have observers at every polling station? Can you help it if your observers are all six foot seven, with red faces and popping veins even when they’re standing still? The fact that all of their questions sound like they’ve come through a bullhorn is not their fault – it’s an affliction. The fact that they seem to ask a lot of questions of “inner city” (wink wink) voters isn’t their fault, either. They don’t mean to be intimidating. They’re just slow, and sometimes they need to have simple truths explained to them several times. Anybody who questions this obviously has a prejudice against the developmentally challenged.

SOME PEOPLE HAVE WAITED THEIR WHOLE LIVES TO VOTE – YOU CAN WAIT A FEW HOURS

Forget the latest technology. Try to get your friends on the elections commission to stock precincts that traditionally have gone to your opponent with voting machines from the 1930s! Of course, there will be far fewer than the precincts need – they’re antiques, after all, and hard to come by! When they break down – and, they always break down – have your friends shrug and say that a repairman will be flown in from a distant state, but that it may take a few hours. Throw in ballots that are harder to parse than a French semiotician’s sentence, and you’ll have long lineups guaranteed to discourage the elderly (or otherwise frail) and the young (or otherwise impatient).

Use one or more of these simple tactics and you can’t lose. And, may the best candidate win! (wink wink)

Canada’s Boy Scout Knows The Value of Being Prepared

“Mister Zaccardelli?”

“Royal Canadian Mounted Police Commissioner Giuliano Zaccardelli, actually.”

“Yes, sir. Do you understand why you’re here?”

“I have to give testimony to Parliament about the issue of the RCMP’s role in the arrest and detention of Maher Arar. You’re going to help me communicate the RCMP’s position to MPs.”

“Good. And, what would you say the RCMP’s position is?”

“NONE OF YOUR FUCKING BUSINESS, YOU BLOODSUCKING LEECHES! WE’RE PROTECTING THE COUNTRY FROM EVIL PEOPLE – THAT’S ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW!”

“Ah. And, how do you think that will go over?”

“I don’t know. I don’t care. I’m too busy protecting the country from evil people.”

“Ah. You might want to take a little time away from protecting the country from evil people and start thinking about protecting your own ass.”

“I’m here, aren’t I?”

“Very good. Now, let’s try again. Without the profanity and references to bloodsucking leeches. What is the RCMP’s position on Maher Arar?”

“We’re protecting the country from evil people – that’s all you need to know.”

“Okay. Now, as it happens, some members of Parliament may feel that because the RCMP is a government body, they have a right to know about what it does.”

“That’s where the bloodsucking leeches reference comes in. You see, it signals my contempt for their civilian oversight authority.”

“I see. Have you considered taking a more...conciliatory approach to the hearings?”

“Conciliatory?”

“Cooperating.”

“With bloodsucking leeches?”

“I’m not saying it will be easy. You may find that it helps the cause, though. Honey catches more flies than a jackhammer and all that.”

“Cooperation. What a crazy idea. How would it work?”

“Well. The United States arrested Maher Arar and sent him to be tortured in Syria based, at least in part, on information supplied by the RCMP, information that subsequently turned out to be false. When did you learn that the information was false?”

“Shortly after Arar was sent to Syria.”

“No.”

“No?”

“How do you think the public is going to react to the information that the RCMP did nothing about Arar even though it knew that the information he had been arrested on was false?”

“See, this is why I feel cooperation may not be such a good idea.”

“So, who told you to cooperate?”

“Uhh...you did.”

“Of course. You need to make it clear to Parliament that you are willing to cooperate with their investigations to the fullest.”

“I am?”

“Then, you must tell them that you didn’t know anything about how wrong the information was until years later.”

“But, I did know. That would be a lie.”

“Commissioner Zaccardelli, in public relations, there is no such thing as a lie. We prefer to think of it as an ‘active engagement with the truth.’”

“How is that cooperating with the investigation?”

“Who told you to cooperate with the investigation?”

“Uhh...you did.”

“And, I was right. You will cooperate with the investigation fully and openly...on your own terms.”

“...There, uhh, may be a problem.”

“There are no problems, Commissioner, only opportunities for further active engagement with the truth. What’s up?”

“I may have already told the committee last December that I, well, kind of, knew about the falsity of the information.”

“You’ve already testified once.”

“That’s right.”

“Tell them you were wrong.”

“I was wrong.”

“You misremembered. You’re a busy man, protecting the country from evil people and all. These sorts of details can get muddled in your memory.”

“That’s going to make me look like an idiot.”

“Well, of course, it’s your choice. You can look like an idiot or you can look like a callous bastard who allowed an innocent man to be tortured for a year in a foreign country because you refused to own up to a mistake. Which would you prefer?”

“I’D PREFER TO BE BACK AT MY DESK PROTECTING THE COUNTRY FROM EVIL PEOPLE, YOU BLOODSUCKING FUCKING LEECH!”

“Ah, you are undoubtedly referring to the fact that I’m costing the RCMP \$400 an hour. I can understand how you might find that problematic. However, you might want to ask yourself if abusing me is a really good use of our time or your money.”

“...”

“Exactly. So, let us begin again. Why did the RCMP not tell anybody that the information it gave to the Americans that led to the arrest and torture of Maher Arar was wrong. And, this time, could we please lose the reference to leeches?”

A New Twist On The Spin Cycle

Let’s be honest: you’d rather wrestle a polar bear naked than fill up your tank with gas, wouldn’t you? The cost of gas – I meant you would be naked, not the polar bear – take away their fur and they’re pretty much naked, anyway, right, so – wh...what was I talking about?

Oh. The cost of gas. Right. It’s totally out of control, and it continues to rise. As the price of gas goes up, alternative sources of energy become more and more inviting. One alternative source of energy that gets far less attention than it deserves is dead people.

It’s not like we’re not all aware of the basic principle: how many times have you heard of – or possibly even spoken of yourself – a dead person turning in his or her grave? All we need to do is connect these spinning dead people to turbines to generate electricity. Put cemeteries on the power grid, and, depending upon how mortified the dead people in them are, you could generate enough electricity for all sorts of uses, including powering electric cars.

Which, granted, after a brief flurry of interest, no longer exist.

We’ll work around that.

How would this work on a practical level? Consider Mexican revolutionary Che Guevara. How do you think he would feel if he found out his main claim to fame today is as a t-shirt and coffee mug icon? I think he would spin fast enough to be able to power approximately 10,000 coffeemakers for a year.

Or, how about Alan Turing, a brilliant mathematician whose work, especially on what he called the “universal machine,” was an important inspiration for early research into computers? Do you think he would be delighted to know that his ideas are now being used by millions of people throughout the world to kill zombies in massive multiplayer role playing...thingies (MMRPTs) and trade sexual fantasies with people they’ll never meet? I think he’s probably spinning at a rate that could power all of the computers in the world for 100 years.

There is a poster in the Bloor subway station dominated by an image of Michael Therriault as Gollum with the headline “Lord of the ring tones.” One ring tone to bind them, one ring tone to get them on a conference call? J. R. R. Tolkein must be spinning in his grave fast enough to generate enough power to light up all of the theatres in North America for a year. If the ad campaign moves to Europe when the show does, you might be able to include all of their theatres, as well.

President George W. Bush likes to compare himself to British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. That must be good enough to keep the lights on in London for a year. On the other hand, he likes to compare himself to President Teddy Roosevelt. Roosevelt’s spinning is probably strong enough to keep New York lit for a year. Hmm... Perhaps we can get the two dead leaders to compete to see who can generate the most electricity. If we piped Bush speeches into their graves, we could probably generate enough electricity to keep several cities on both sides of the ocean going!

Who do you think would generate more electricity: Vincent van Gogh, whose paintings now sell for \$50 million or more even though he only sold three paintings in his lifetime, or; Leonardo Da Vinci, whose masterpiece is now at the center of a poorly written, paranoid conspiracy thriller? You’re right: both dead men are better than nuclear power plants, so which of them spins faster is really irrelevant.

All of this is small potatoes, when you can imagine pissing off a whole group of dead people. For instance: put an amendment in the American Constitution making it illegal for gay people to get married. An amendment curtailing the rights of citizens in a document that’s all about ensuring the freedom of citizens? With the energy generated by making all of the founding fathers turn in their graves at the same time, the United States could end its dependence on foreign oil once and for all!

The best part of this energy plan is that it costs virtually nothing and it’s already well underway. All we need to do is convince the powers that be to put some research money into the project so that we can get the technology perfected – you think oil companies would be cool with that?

Understanding The Importance of The Strawberry

“A monk is walking through the forest when he comes across a lion. He runs away from the lion, but soon comes to the top of a cliff. Thinking quickly, the monk notices a vine running off the side of the cliff, and starts to climb down. Unfortunately, there is a lion

waiting for him at the bottom of the cliff. The monk figures he can hold onto the vine until one of the lions gets bored and goes away. However, he notices a slight indent towards the top of the cliff, where a mouse has started gnawing on the vine. If he doesn't do something quickly, the vine will snap and he will fall into the paws of the second lion, but he cannot think of an action that will save him! Just then, the monk notices another indent in the cliff, one quite close to him, in which a single strawberry grows. The monk plucks the strawberry out of the indent and pops it into his mouth. After he has eaten the strawberry, he says, 'Sweet!'"

"...Sweet?"

"Sweet."

"That's it? That's how the story ends?"

"That's it."

"What the hell does it mean?"

"You're supposed to figure that out for yourself."

"Oh. Umm...sweet?"

"Sweet."

"So, you're saying...you should...eat more strawberries?"

"What?"

"The moral of the story is to eat more strawberries?"

"No."

"Don't you like strawberries?"

"Sure, I like strawberries."

"So, why don't you want to eat more strawberries?"

"Eating more strawberries has nothing to do with the story!"

"Then, why does the monk eat a strawberry at the end of the story?"

"It's a metaphor!"

"A metaphor."

“That’s right.”

“So...when the monk eats a strawberry at the end of the story, it really represents a...a pomegranate?”

“How did you get pomegranate from strawberry?”

“It’s a metaphor.”

“You’re proud of yourself, aren’t you?”

“And, another thing I don’t understand about the monk: why was he walking through the forest in the first place?”

“Is that really important?”

“It is to me. I hate unmotivated behaviour.”

“All of a sudden, you hate unmotivated behaviour – who do you think you are? Robert McKee?”

“Is there a reason for the monk to be walking through the forest?”

“He...he’s going to visit his grandma.”

“The one with the big ears?”

“That’s a different story.”

“The one with the big eyes?”

“That’s the same different story.”

“The one with the big teeth?”

“NO!”

“Then, why was the monk going to visit his grandma?”

“I don’t know! Because...because he had to tell her that the family was moving her into a home, okay? Okay? Is that motivation enough for you?”

“Sure.”

“Good, because –”

“Not exactly a monk-like thing to do, you ask me.”

“He wasn’t a very good monk!”

“I’ll say!”

“Can we please get back to the point of the story?”

“It’s a warning against global warming, isn’t it?”

“A...a...a...what?”

“Lions in the middle of a forest – that might have worked for O. Henry, but it isn’t exactly a reflection of the real world. They’re more savannah-dwelling creatures. So, the way I figure it, the only way they could have been in the forest to threaten the monk was if massive climate change had forced them out of their natural habitat.”

“That has got to be the stu – wait a second. That almost makes sense.”

“Thanks.”

“I find that very scary.”

“Look: I didn’t ask to be told this –”

“Okay, let me give you a hint: the monk is facing almost certain death.”

“Really?”

“Of course! The lions and – and the mouse gnawing through the vine!”

“See, I thought the animals were a metaphor.”

SMACK! “A metaphor?”

“Yeah. See, the monk is trying to run away from the animals, like we are all trying to hide our animal natures behind a thin veneer of civilization. However, no matter where he turns, he is confronted by the reality of his animalness. The lions and the mouse represent the animal part of us we’re always trying to deny.”

“Then, what’s the importance of the strawberry?”

“Oh, the strawberry is totally irrelevant. The story would make more sense if you got rid of the strawberry altogether.”

“THE STRAWBERRY IS NOT IRRELEVANT! IT IS THE CENTRAL METAPHOR OF THE STORY! IT’S ABOUT LIVING EVERY SECOND OF LIFE TO ITS FULLEST! EVEN FACING CERTAIN DEATH, YOU CAN STILL FIND SOMETHING ABOUT LIFE TO ENJOY!”

“Really?”

“REALLY!”

“Because, you know, I didn’t get that from the story at all.”

“AAAAAAAAAAAAARRRRRRRRGGGGHH!”

Time to Facebook the Music

“It is better to be anonymous and be thought to have a boring life than to start a Facebook page and erase all doubt.”

You may have heard of social networking Web sites like Facebook, MySpace, EgoTronic and PissyHissers, among others. You might be wondering what they’re all about. I’m not going to tell you. (Go ask your seven year-old daughter.) However, if you’re thinking about joining one (let’s say...Facebook), or have recently signed up, here are a few things you might want to keep in mind:

It’s embarrassing to have too few friends on Facebook.

It’s embarrassing to have too many friends on Facebook.

How much leeway somebody gives you on how many Facebook friends constitutes too many or too few varies depending upon how many Favourite Movies you have in common.

If your ex isn’t your friend, your ex shouldn’t be one of your friends.

The photos in your holiday album are really as boring as the photos in the holiday album of everybody else, but your 100,000 friends are too polite to tell you.

Saying, “I haven’t done anything remotely interesting today” is only funny the first 500 times other people hear it.

Saying “I haven’t done anything remotely interesting today” never grows old if you’re the one saying it. And, if you do it often enough, it becomes a meta-commentary on Facebook itself.

Don’t knock sympathy friends – sometimes, they’re the only ones who matter.

Don’t put anything on Facebook that you wouldn’t want your teachers to see. Or a potential employer. Or your mother. Especially not your mother.

Do not attempt to write a treatise on why Last Year at Marienbad is the greatest film ever made in your Favorite Movies space...unless you can be really, really, really, really, really concise.

The Favourite Television Shows space is not a good place to rant about the writers' strike – that's what www.damnwriterstohellforeternityespeciallytheonesonlost.org is for.

Besides, by the time you actually write something of value on the subject, the writer's strike will be over.

Nobody cares what your Favourite Music is.

You don't have to join all the groups on Facebook.

In fact, you could spend the rest of your life just joining Facebook groups.

A good rule of thumb is: if you're spending more time joining groups than participating in them, **back away from the computer slowly and take a deep breath.**

You don't have to use all the third party software available for Facebook. Seriously.

Poking somebody can be amusing. Once. Biting them in the neck like a vampire is just rude, even if the only blood spilled is in pixels.

Facebook is not mocking you when it asks if you want to try to beat the score of somebody who has gotten a perfect score on a quiz. It's a programming glitch.

You should seriously reconsider having a piece of third party software if it either uses your credit card to buy peripherals without your permission, starts a torrid romance with a bookkeeper in New Zealand without your knowledge or seems to be having more fun than you are.

The fastest per capita rate of growth on Facebook in 2007 was in Canada. Now, how hip do you feel?

Your Web comic depicting elves getting naked and having sex is only funny the first time; your continued high readership is for a different reason that you probably don't want to think too hard about.

Video of your band thrashing in your parents' garage might get more views if you played something more than Zeppelin covers. Seriously, dude, just stop.

Dissing people on MySpace is uncool. Unless they really deserve it.

Have social networking Web sites made us more self-obsessed, or do they allow us to express our self-obsession more honestly? If you actually ponder questions like this, you probably aren't on one. If you write dissertations about questions like this, you're definitely not on one.

How much time you spend on Facebook will depend upon your disposition and personal circumstances; however, if you have to check your friends' pages to remind yourself of what they look like, you probably need to get out more.

If you're going to list yourself as "single," make sure that your partner is not on Facebook. As well as all of their family members. And all of their friends.

That is the power of networking.

AIPAC Of Lies

America Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC): We represent the opinion of North American Jews.

IRA: You don't represent my opinion.

AIPAC: Obviously, you're not Jewish.

IRA: But, I am Jewish.

AIPAC: Then, we represent your opinion.

IRA: But, you don't represent my opinion.

AIPAC: Oh, dear, are you planning on being difficult?

IRA: [SHRUGS] According to you, what do North American Jews believe?

AIPAC: That radical Islam poses an existential threat to the state of Israel, and that we must wage war against Muslims to defend ourselves.

IRA: Not all Muslims are violent radicals. In fact, there is a wide spectrum of Muslim belief. You act as if they speak with one voice.

AIPAC: Of course they speak with one voice.

IRA: No, they –

AIPAC: **We** speak with one voice.

IRA: We...being...Jews?

AIPAC: That's right. We represent the opinion of North American Jews. If one organization can represent the opinions of all Jews, then –

IRA: But, you don't represent the opinions of all Jews.

AIPAC: We don't?

IRA: You don't represent my opinion.

AIPAC: Then, you're not Jewish.

IRA: Of course I'm Jewish!

AIPAC: Oh. I think I understand.

IRA: Finally!

AIPAC: You're one of those self-hating Jews.

IRA: What?

AIPAC: It's sad when somebody is so at odds with his heritage. The good news is that there are programmes that will help you reconnect with your –

IRA: I don't hate myself!

AIPAC: We didn't say you hate yourself.

IRA: That's exactly what you said!

AIPAC: No. We said that you hate the Jewish part of yourself.

IRA: I don't hate that, either. I'm very proud of my Jewish heritage.

AIPAC: You don't act like it.

IRA: What do I do that would make you think I hate my Jewish heritage?

AIPAC: You disagree with the opinion of North American Jews.

IRA: You mean, I disagree with you.

AIPAC: Of course. We represent the opinion of North American Jews.

IRA: You don't represent my opinion.

AIPAC: QED.

[LONG PAUSE]

IRA: And, what exactly is an existential threat, anyway?

AIPAC: A threat to Israel's existence.

IRA: No. That doesn't sound right.

AIPAC: Well, it sounds right enough to us. If you have a problem with it, maybe you should talk to Richard Perle. But, let's not get hung up on semantics. The important thing is that we want peace for Israel. If you disagree with us, you must obviously not want peace for Israel.

IRA: I didn't say that!

AIPAC: Somebody who wants Israel to be in a state of perpetual war...hmm...sounds like a self-hating Jew to us...

IRA: Oh, look, every Jew wants Israel to be at peace. But –

AIPAC: So, we do speak for you.

IRA: But, your positions won't get peace for Israel. If you believe that all Muslims are part of a movement that poses a threat to Israel, you leave nobody to negotiate peace with. You're the ones who are creating the conditions for eternal war.

AIPAC: [SIGHS] And, we were getting along so well.

IRA: Look –

AIPAC: No, you look. Israel is beset on all sides by enemies.

IRA: How biblical of you.

AIPAC: Thanks for noticing. The only path to peace is to put up a strong resistance to any nation that would destroy us.

IRA: By waging war.

AIPAC: Finally, you see what we're saying!

IRA: I might, if I could just get this bit of George Orwell out of my eye...

AIPAC: Very funny. So, you believe a weak Israel is somehow better?

IRA: Did I say that?

AIPAC: We read between the lines.

IRA: Is that what you call it when you misrepresent the position of people who disagree with you?

AIPAC: Are you saying that you don't believe in a weak Israel?

IRA: I'm saying a willingness to negotiate with your enemies is a sign of strength, not weakness.

AIPAC: Pardon us while we laugh uproariously. [LAUGH UPROARIOUSLY] Oh, dear. We haven't had such a good time since we dealt with opposition to the last round of appropriations for Israel in the American Congress.

IRA: Who gave you the right to lobby the American Congress on behalf of Israel?

AIPAC: Well...you did.

IRA: I did?

AIPAC: Sure. You named us to represent the opinion of North American Jews.

IRA: You don't represent my opinions.

AIPAC: Silly boy. That's not what Congress believes, and that's all that counts, really, isn't it?

Poetry of the Penis

This Message May Be Dangerous

Why be an average guy any longer
Enter the world of boundless sensual enjoyments with a new big pen!s!

I dare presume that you are dreaming about having bid dic'k?
Rarely will you meet a girl who would say she likes small dic'ks?
My wife adores my big dic'k, and yours?
Please your wife with a big hard shaft!
She will certainly appreciate your new dic'k at its true value!
No Impotence?

Better s'e_x means better health! What to do if your pen!s is too small?
Don't grumble about your small pen!s - increase it!?
Increasing your penile size is your sure way towards s'e_xual health and well-being?
Feel how amazingly your s'e_Xual life will change when you increase your penis!
Nights full of excitement become more real with a new dic'k-increasing remedy!?
All our customers who tried this remedy changed their s'e_xual life for better?
Causing an erection?

With bigger dic'k you will stimulate more special hidden spots inside female vag!na?
Bigger pen!s will open new exciting horizons of sensual pleasure for you?
Greater penile size means more satisfaction for her!?
Get more pleasure in love with your new big phallus?

The greatest gift for your woman will be your new big shaft!
be confident knowing you wont be a 1 minute man anymore!
She's so appealing... What a pity you've got such a small dic'k!
New pleasure with new bigger cock?
For the majority of women the length of your dic'k is extremely important!
Massive rod is what you need to make your beloved lady adore you!
Have a great night with your girlfriend!?
RE: If it is up, it is up for long time?

holy shit! can you even piss out of that thing??
Don't you think it's time you stopped being a loser with a tiny pen!s??
Does your poor tiny dic'k need to be cured? We think so..
May i ask why you're so unhappy with your dic'k?
Stop the humiliation with Penis Enlarge Patch.?
Take a challenge of a penile size competition and win with our wonder-med!cine!?
This new medicine will help you obtain a gigantic rod!

marriage break up? take a look downstairs?
Most women consider pen!s size to be of utmost importance?
If you've got a small dic'k, don't blame your parents, just think how to increase it?
are you going to pass up an opportunity to get a humungous penis? really?

you think having an average sized cock is ok?
With larger peni's you will have the hottest women at your feet?
Don't let them treat you as a small-dic'ked loser!?
Beat her womb with your new big rod, so that she knew who wears the pants!
Get ready to hear her happy moaning as you thrust your new big dic'k into her wet box!?
if you like cumming on tits, now you can smother her in your sperm which will be
boosted by up to 500%! thats heaps.
Let your dic'k become something she will never forget!
There are no losers among the possessors of long dic'ks. Now you can be one of them!?
Fight your uncertainty by getting your willy bigger!

Welcome to the world of happy and confident men?

Want to pass an unforgettable night??
unleash the man in you?
Hear her screaming when you pound her wet twat with your new huge schlong?
CAUTION! she might be tight when you reach your new size, stretching may be required?
Fill your nights of love with a true masculine force!
Ask us how to achieve your true manhood. We've got an answer!
No embarrassment?

plumping cock for Summer?
Add more bright colors into your s'e_xual palette!
RE: Make the new year even more pleasantly!?

Make your s'e_xual life shine with brighter colors!

Your baby-maker needs to be bigger in order to perform its functions well?
Have you ever felt a kiss of a womb? With your new big rod you'll feel it!?
True masculinity is impossible without a substantial volume of male meat?
Add extra inches to the length of your little soldier of love!
Keep your s'e_xual weapon in the best possible form!?

Do you want enlarge your penis? mfvc?
Do you want enlarge your penis? lugj?
CLAIM YOUR 1 FREE BOTTLE EnlargePENIS PILL FROM THIS SITE yjosk?
CLAIM YOUR 1 FREE BOTTLE EnlargePENIS PILL FROM THIS SITE qskbp?
CLAIM YOUR 1 FREE BOTTLE EnlargePENIS PILL FROM THIS SITE ksmwad?
For the moment it's the best possible way to increase your pen!s?

My sizeable penis Melba?

The Attitude of Gratitude

“Unemployment? Unemployment is a state of mind – no, a state of being. You want to change your employment status? You must change your attitude towards employment. No more of this sour Sol or grumpy Gottfried. To succeed in today’s marketplace, you have to focus, focus, focus on your goal, and your goal is to make your employer feel like you are having the time of your life!”

applause

“What’s your name, friend?”

“Solomon Gottfried, but my friends call me Sol.”

“Wasn’t I just talking about you?”

laughter

“But, seriously, Sol, you’re here because you’re out of a job. How long have you been out of a job?”

“Six months, Pat.”

“Why is it that you’re unemployed, Sol?”

“The company I worked for for over 20 years moved its manufacturing to China, making hundreds of managers redund –”

“NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO! See, that’s outer-directed thinking, Sol! That’s blaming others! We don’t blame others here! The blame game has no place in a healthy attitude towards work! No, here, we practice inner-directed thinking. If you’ve been fired, it’s because you weren’t good enough!”

applause

“I thought you said the blame game has no pla –”

“Look at yourself, Sol. Look at you sitting here.”

“Got a mirror?”

“You see, that’s exactly the kind of attitude that employers don’t want. You sit slumped in your chair – were you born with that scowl? I mean, honestly, contempt oozes out of your every pore. Now do you see why you were fired?”

“I know why I was fired. I was fired because the CEO of the company made over \$430 million last year – that money had to come from somewhere. Hundreds of employees’ pockets – that’s where!”

“You poor, deluded soul.”

audience sigh

“Don’t you see that you’re allowing your ego to get in the way of your finding permanent fulfillment in a satisfying, well-paying job? I mean, really, would it kill you to smile –”

“No...”

“...eight hours a day, five days a week for the next 30 years of your life?”

“No!”

“That’s my point! That is exactly my point! In previous generations, it was understood that you had to make sacrifices to put bread on your table. You had to dedicate yourself to your job – to do whatever it took to get ahead. Now, people are balking at giving a smile once in a while. What does that tell prospective employers?”

“Hey! It was employers who broke the compact with their workers. Sure, you had to sacrifice, but at least you were guaranteed a job for your trouble. Now, employers will fire you just to hire somebody half your age at a third your wage. What’s the point of sacrificing if there’s no guarantee that in the end it will be worth it?”

scattered boos

“Sol, Sol, Sol, Sol, Sol. There are no guarantees in life – why should there be in work? Besides, you are doing everything you can to avoid the real issue.”

“The real issue? What would that be?”

“YOUR ATTITUDE! Corporations need to be flexible in today’s world of transnational capital. The last thing they want is somebody coming to job interviews talking about ‘guarantees.’ Don’t you understand? The key to your future is entirely in your own hands.”

cheers

“I mean, really. With that attitude, what do you expect to accomplish?”

“Oh, I don’t know. I think I have some good options.”

“Really? Like what?”

“Well, I could become a union organizer and work for greater job security for middle-income, white collar workers.”

audience boos

“Or, I could become a politician and work for more realistic minimum wage laws and laws to stem the flow of jobs overseas and –”

audience spits on Sol

“Hey! Hey, I’m just saying –”

audience drives Sol from the conference room

“Now, now, people. Settle, people. Find your happy centre. That’s right. Deep breaths. Smile, smile, smile...”

audience becomes quiet and still

“You see how counter-productive outer-directed thinking is? Not only has Sol ensured that he will learn nothing from today’s workshop, but he can complain until he’s blue in the face and he’ll never get his money back! You make your reality – now lie in it! Okay – phew! I’m sure we’re all glad that’s over with! Now, I’d like you to split into pairs for an exercise I like to call ‘Master and Servant...’”

Canon Fodder

It behooves (literally, puts cloven hooves on) any feature that claims to have any degree of topicality to add to its roster of characters as circumstances in the world change in order to better reflect those new circumstances. With this principle in mind, I would like to introduce the latest addition to the *Les Pages aux Folles* canon: Achmed al-Katani.

“Hello.”

Achmed was born in Lebanon, but his parents moved to Canada in the early 1980s when he was just two years old.

“Needless to say, I don’t really remember any of it. As far as I’m concerned, I’m a typical Canadian.”

His father being a successful architect, Achmed grew up in middle class comfort.

“I won’t deny it – I just ask that you get to know me before you judge me.”

That makes it all the more harder to understand why Achmed plans on committing a terrorist act in the country that welcomed him so warmly.

“WHAT?!”

Although nobody noticed, Achmed grew up bitter and alienated.

“Of course I was bitter and alienated – I grew up in Scarborough!”

Achmed came to despise the materiality of the society in which he grew up.

“Despise the materiality of the socie – what about my iPod nano? What about my Nintendo DS? I’ve got a home computer that probably costs more than you make in a year – do I sound like somebody who despises material things?”

Achmed is, in many ways, a typical suburban young man. Unfortunately, he fell under the sway of a radical Imam who, using passages from the Koran, convinced him that he must fight the Infidel West and, in particular, the Jews who controlled Western media and governments.

“Oh, man, you’re freaking me out, here. In the first place, the Qur’an is a book about love and living a righteous life – a peaceful life. If some people use it as the basis to preach hatred, they are misinterpreting it, much like people who use the Bible to support wars. And, what’s this nonsense about Jews? I’m a New Media student at Ryerson – some of my teachers and fellow students are Jewish, and we all get along just fine.”

In fact, Achmed has planned to strap homemade explosives to his chest and blow up Queen’s Park this coming Tuesday.

“See, that’s just not right. Tuesday, I have to work on my thesis project. Are you even listening to anything I say?”

I beg your pardon?

“Are you listening to anything I say?”

Were you saying something?

“This radical Islamic bogeyman you’re describing – ooh waaah – it’s not me.”

But, it’s my canon you’re being added to.

“Yeah, but it’s me. I think I know myself better than you do.”

Look...you believe that the Israelis have treated the Palestinians mercilessly, and the only way to lasting peace is for Israel to accept a Palestinian state, don’t you?

“Sure. So what? A lot of Jews believe that. Hell, you believe that.”

Yes, but I’m not an Arab.

“Okay, but, still, you can believe in a negotiated two state peace without being an Islamo-fascist terrorist.”

...Okay, look, here’s the thing. I wanted to add you to the canon so that I could explore why people in this culture would violently reject it.

“The whole ‘homegrown terrorist’ angle? I get it. I do. The thing is, though, there have already been a dozen books and movies on the subject. John Updike is just the latest. I mean, John freaking Updike! When he writes a political book, you know the subject has been exhausted.”

What’s the point, then? Why should I bother to introduce you into my canon?

“Well...I could represent all of the Canadians of Arab descent who have integrated comfortably into North American society. The peaceful Arabs, the ones who are happy to have had the opportunity to live and grow in such a wonderful country. You know, the vast majority of us who are rarely portrayed in the news or in fiction.”

Couldn’t you be a little bit of an Islamo-fascist terrorist?

“A little bit?”

You know. On weekends or something like that.

“Sorry, man.”

Will you think about it?

“Really. It’s just not me. But, don’t worry.”

No?

“Absolutely not. In today’s political climate, portraying Arabs as ordinary people is the most radical thing you could do in your writing.”

**Semiotics:
Lesson Two:
Staying Ahead of the Euphemism Curve**

People? Hello? Settle, people, settle. Lord knows, I have.

A couple of you actually managed to find me during my office hours. One is currently in the hospital being treated for pepper spray poisoning, the other has suffered some sort of “breakdown” and will probably require bed rest for the next several years. I did try to warn you about this last week – you really must pay attention.

In any case, their loss is your gain. One of them wanted to know why I don’t use Power Point presentations in my lectures. Well, I find that when students are attending to what’s happening on a screen, they tend not to give their full, rapt and undivided attention to what is the most important part of the lecture: **ME!** People, when I deign to go to academic conferences, undergraduate students genuflect when I pass and graduate students offer me their bodies in exchange for advising them. You think I have any intention of competing for your attention with coloured text and animated gifs?

I blame *Sesame Street*.

It’s already the second week of classes, and some of you are beginning to wonder what will be on the mid-term exam. Well, I like to think of myself as an intellectual sculptor, so, if you would like to know what you will be tested on, simply find yourself a copy of the latest edition of *The Encyclopedia Britannica* and carve away everything that is not related to semiotics. Then, study your heart out.

Now that we have that taken care of, let us begin today’s lesson. You may be under the mistaken impression that words are primarily used by people to communicate ideas. I blame the public school system. In fact, there is a fundamental problem with words: people often object to the reality to which they refer. For this reason, words can just as often obscure reality as describe it.

Take the word “fire.” When we’re talking about the stuff Prometheus stole from the gods – the noun – we’re in pretty good shape. But, when we talk about throwing people out of

their jobs – the verb – well! You wouldn't believe the anger with which some people respond to the mere possibility of the mention of the word!

If you want to shed your company of workers, but don't want to rile anybody up by using the word "fired," you have to come up with another term, one less freighted with such negative connotations as hunger, lack of shelter and poor teeth. This is known as "finding a euphemism," or, simply, "euphemizing."

For a time, the word "fired" was successfully replaced by the term "laid off." This sounded much softer: laying (down?) is so much better than being fired (out of a cannon?). Unfortunately, workers eventually came to realize that although the words may have changed, the reality had not: what was now being called a layoff was just a good old-fashioned firing, with all of the negative connotations of the original term.

Clearly, a new term was necessary. Initially, the term chosen to replace "layoff" was "downsize." However, since the word "down" usually has negative connotations (as anybody who follows the stock market can attest), workers caught on pretty quickly. The term was replaced by "rightsize" which, rather than dragging the company down, made it perfect for the Middle Bear (ie: just right).

Now, people are beginning to find the term "rightsize" suspect; they are beginning to follow the chain of associated meanings back to fire. A term recently tested as a replacement for rightsize, "permanent involuntary leisuring," holds great promise. After all, in this hectic world, who could possibly object to having more leisure?

How long can a new euphemism survive before those who are supposed to be fooled by it catch on? We can get a sense of this by creating a graph with the number of terms used for a phenomenon on one axis and the time it takes for people to catch on to the term's real meaning on the other axis. A generic example of such a "Euphemism Curve" is shown in Figure 1.

For those trying to soften or hide a harsh reality, it is necessary to stay ahead of the euphemism curve. That is to say, it is necessary to introduce a new euphemism just as people are starting to catch up to the one currently in use. Somebody who is skilled at staying ahead of the euphemism curve can keep a sizeable amount of the population in the dark for many years.

It is not possible to stay ahead of the curve forever, though. As you can see from Figure 1, the time between the introduction of a new euphemism and the point at which the public uncovers its ultimate meaning decreases the greater the number of euphemisms one employs. The curve eventually approaches the "Euphemism Curve Asymptote," commonly referred to as the "point of know return."

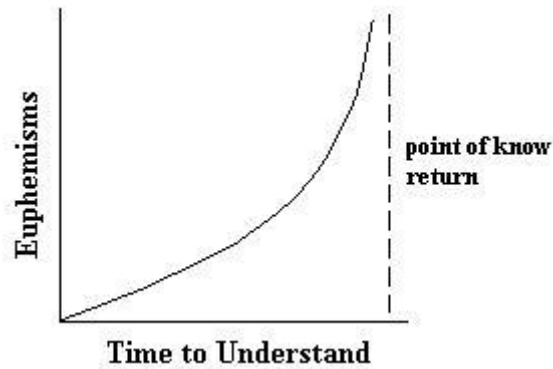


Figure 1
Generic Euphemism Curve

The asymptote is the point where the public understands euphemisms almost as soon as they are used, making their use moot. In the above example, at the point where the native population knows a lot of people are about to be fired, what management calls it becomes irrelevant; in fact, the closer you get to the asymptote, the more caution you must use in coining new terms, since the public will turn against you if it perceives that you are trying to pull the wool over its eyes.

I do not mean to imply, by my choice of example, that the euphemism curve applies only to business. Any institution that deals with the public will, from time to time, find it of use. The military, for example, has done well with the phrase “collateral damage” (oops, we accidentally broke something), which replaced the phrase “civilian casualties” (can’t get too worked up over something so casual), which had been used to describe the slaughter of innocent people in times of war. Why the military would not want to use the phrase “slaughter of innocent people in times of war” should be self-evident.

And, if you’re an average citizen who wants to understand what people are really talking about, well, a little common sense goes a long way: what do you **think** the Undersecretary of Public Diplomacy is in charge of?

To this point, we have looked at individual examples of euphemism degradation. What happens to a culture when euphemisms are liberally employed in every sector of life? Do we have a cultural point of know return? In a recent article in *The Journal of Irreproducible Fungibility*, Bausch and Lomb argue that the increased use of euphemisms over time creates a culture of disbelief. (They literally argue: Piotr Bausch and Herbert Lomb, brilliant researchers that they are, never did get along.)

Whether or not this is a bad thing depends upon what you think of individual participation in public life. If people become so cynical about the public pronouncements of business and political leaders that they stop believing anything these people say, they may be tempted to stop participating in public life. There is a possible downside, though: cynical citizens may become more active in the public sphere, questioning business leaders at shareholders meetings, for instance, or demanding public accountability from

politicians. Such alarming behaviour is sometimes referred to as “public participation in democratic life.”

To forestall such dire consequences, most large organizations have staffs devoted to coining new euphemisms for public consumption. These are generally referred to as “public relations” departments. Public relations. In business, public relations used to be known as advertising; in government, public relations used to be known as propaganda. Who could object to the term? After all, every organization would like to foster a good relationship with the public.

However, as I stated, fostering good relations with the public appears to require telling it unpleasant truths in ways that appear to satisfy its need to know. Yes, this is very much like a dysfunctional marriage where nobody wants to admit that “staying late at the office” is actually a euphemism for “getting it on with the secretary” and “tired” is a euphemism for “drugged up to the eyeballs.”

That’s why I’m delighted to be single. But, that’s another matter.

You may wonder why businesses and governments don’t just tell the truth about what they’ve been up to. Obviously, you’ve never been married, either. The longer a couple is able to ignore dysfunction, the longer they can pretend that their marriage is mutually satisfying.

Okay. We just have enough time for one que – no, we don’t. Sorry. No, I’m not. But outright lying is a lecture for another time...

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 20th 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 20th 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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