

Clowns to the Left, Jokers to the Right:

Stuck in the Middle with (Political) Views

By: Amanda Hall, fan of Mike Brownlie's third party plan

When the average, hard-working American is given the image of a lazy, single mother watching soap operas all day and spouting out children simply to increase her welfare check, one is hard-pressed not to be enraged by this caricature. This type of personification of poverty boosted support from the middle class for the welfare reform of 1996. How dare their sweat and tears fund hedonism? Unfortunately, Americans toil under an inaccurate portrayal of poverty and welfare reform. The truth is that while fewer people are on welfare, welfare reform has not alleviated the effects of poverty in any way. This poverty affects families, children, and the future, which is a higher price to pay than sweat and tears.

In a *New York Times* article, "New York Says Those on Welfare are Increasingly Hard to Employ," (November 29, 2002) it is implied that the welfare reform of 1996 has successfully "prodded" many people off of welfare, with its more obvious cases (the disabled, helpless, and stubborn welfare recipients) still remaining. While this idea seems compact and neat, it does not accurately represent the welfare state or lend itself to facilitating change necessary for policy to be truly effective.

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Letter from the Editor

I was first introduced to M.C. Escher when I was in about 6th grade. In order to rekindle that "Classical" era of creativity and epiphany—as I think of it—I have highlighted one of his pictures here, to the left.

Ironically, as the piece (*Relativity*) suggests, we could be climbing a staircase that actually leads us in circles. As I entreat you readers and writers to rekindle your childlike enthusiasm, I also ask that you do so in a way that makes you go "upward" at the same time. Best wishes on your journey.

dan@fritzcomics.com ☒

Vanilla Sky is the Limit

By Brett

In the intellectual hipster requisite commandments handbook one can easily find: "Thou shall despise Tom Cruise." It's listed slightly past the entry pertaining to America (The Book), somewhere in between yoga and Coldplay. Don't look too hard for it, or you'll damage your status. Anyway, most likely consumed in tandem with a frosty, albeit trendy, mojito, this aging dictum unfortunately numbed the sensibilities of our cultural dragoons, and in their ensuing hangover they overlooked one of the most important movies of the last ten years: *Vanilla Sky*. On some island

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*The Criminally Comical Trials of
Mattlock
By Calderwood and Fritz*



T-Shirt Nostalgia Corner
By Susan Fritz

That Banana Republic shirt with a lizard on it

Big Johnson

Body Glove

Cross Colours: The Mo' Colors the Mo' Better



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

"Cheeseburger in Paradise Lost" ☒

Google on the way to world
domination...

Google Earth is Right!
Or, Aiding Terrorists Is Fun,
Says Google and CNN
By James Schneider

Recently, Google unveiled a new product— Google Talk. It's a pretty neat program, a little Spartan if you ask some. Basically like the IM services offered by Yahoo!, MSN and AIM, but with the ability to do phone-call-esque messaging as well. Neat. Hooray for Google and its pervasiveness.

If you trek back just a month or so, Google Earth was all the blogs rage. This program allows users to download and zoom in on the Earth. Now the picture may be a tad outdated—as I zoomed in on my driveway circa two years ago—but even the untrained eye will focus on the implications. They are in the subtext. Not sure what part of the picture that is. But, when some Islamic Extremist? Islamic Militant? Okay. When some terrorist has the ability to zoom in on, say, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue and note with absolute, satellite proof the entrance and exits available... well that worries me, ooh, just a tad.

Then, take gmail. Ah, gmail. Srida invited me and, doubtless, many of you. Every time we happily log into gmail we can rest assured that Google is tracking our every word. Thanks Google! After sending in my request for all the Internet porn I ever wanted, Google has started putting links on the right hand side of my pages. Little advertisements for all kinds of things—lube, condoms and some, um, kinky stuff—which are DAMN useful! But, still, don't know if that's kind of an invasion of privacy. For 2.5 gigs of free space, I'll let them sell me artichoke flavored anal beads. I'll take a dozen!

Google considers itself God. "Google is the closest thing the Web has to an ultimate answer machine," others apparently say. Isn't God the ultimate answer?

Muslims say Allah is God. Some Muslims are terrorists. Most Muslims use Google. Most people consider Google the ultimate answer. At least some Muslims are part of most people. Therefore, some Muslims, who are terrorists, actually believe that Google is God.

The point must have been lost in translation. But if I wanted to find out anything about *Lost in Translation*, I'd "google it." If I wanted to say the movie was popular, I could say "Google has 9 billion references to *Lost in Translation*." And, if I wanted the ultimate answer, well, Google has apparently provided it.

This cult, this Google cult, is growing. It's a little sickening. I used to think Google was pretty neat. But now I think it's pretty evil.

Oh, and the CNN connection? Well, they aren't a threat yet, because no one is watching them. But, if it were up to CNN, cops would only rough up middle-aged men on their way to the subway, and every card-carrying TERRORIST would be dubbed a freedom fighter and allowed to board. ☒

Wine Country

By Steven Fritz

About half way between the Sonoma Valley and the Napa Valley is a magnificent wine facility you must visit – Taittinger, a.k.a. Domaine Carneros. I stopped at this impressive place as one stop on my wine country visit two months ago. Off to the right of the front door are tables where they serve a delicious spread of cheeses that compliment their sparkling wines. You can see for miles from the veranda. I ordered a flight of four sparkling wines and enjoyed them all, but one stood out. Their 1998 Le Reve is my pick of the month. This Brut is made from a Blanc De Blanc and worth the \$55. Sparkling wine is all about the celebration and romance and not the price, so I'll just have to get over the sticker shock but then again, it wasn't my money.



Where do the bubbles come from?

Several years ago I visited my first sparkling wine winery in the Russian River region. It was there that the tour guide educated me. Sparkling wine is no different than your regular white wine with one additional fermenting process. When the wine is ready, they add yeast, and continue the aging a bit more. It is the yeast that adds all the bubbles. That same tour guide stated that the average glass of sparkling wine has 4 million bubbles. I've never been able to count that high or that fast.



When champagne is not champagne

Sparkling wine is exactly the same as champagne from a chemistry point of view and arguably from a taste point of view. The difference is in the legal system. The original region in France where champagne comes from is called, you guessed it, Champagne. They own the name. Champagne from anywhere else is sparkling wine.

Help wanted?!

In the old days before modern equipment, making sparkling wine was a very hazardous job. After adding the wine and yeast to the bottles they were sealed and placed in special racks. A person called a Riddler would periodically turn the bottles to aid in the yeasting of the wine. A pressurized glass bottle is nothing to play around with, which is why the Riddler was one of the highest paid people in the winery and rightly so. Open that bottle slowly, and here's toasting you. ☒

"Dear Diary" Corner

By Susan Myhr Fritz

Lazy Sunday Afternight, or What I did All Sunday after Dan Left for His Business Trip to Chicago

Let's face it. I'm about to: most people say they'd love to be in my situation; that is, the situation of having absolutely nothing to do and nowhere to go on a beautiful, cloudless, sunny Sunday afternoon. I have no obligations, which entails having no pets; there are no holidays to celebrate; it is no one's birthday; I just did the laundry two days ago; I already went to yoga class at 8:00 this morning; there's no cable in the house, so there's no TV to watch; there's also no internet; I'm not related to anyone on the East Coast, so there's no infirm Uncle Stan to visit; I talked to my mother yesterday; it's a weekend, so if I want to call anyone it's free; my neighbors are all Greek, so the "it's hot" conversation took no time at all; there's just nothing to be done.

I am restless and as close to boredom as I can get without actually being considered bored. It might more accurately be called loneliness, but it's driving me to distraction and neither drink nor snack (not to mention crack!) will fill the hole. The following are tried time-filling activities: I busted out the Banana boat SPF 30 from last summer and took myself down to the busy, boob-filled beach. I had all the necessary supplies: a bottle of water, extra SPF so I would be sure to get no tan whatsoever, the book *A Star Called Henry* by the modern Irish author Roddy Doyle (author of such hits as *Paddy Clark HA HA HA* and *The Commitments*), a fiver just in case, my keys, cell phone (to act as a clock), and a big beach blanket. I was the coolest, whitest chick going solo at Calf Pasture Beach. Prepared as I was, however, after little more than an hour (of which 30 minutes were spent in tree shade) I left, unsuccessful as a full-day beach bum. At the conclusion of "Hollaback Girl," it was time to go back to the crib. I realized that a snack was in order, so before I bellied up to the tube and the new DVD player, I hopped in the Contour and drove to Stew Leonard's, the "World's largest Dairy Store". After the drive home and the prepared plate of nachos, it was time to watch one of the three free movies I had rented from the library. Whichever one sounds cheesiest is the one I'll go with. The hands-down winner? *A Love Song for Bobby Long*. Ok, not great, but it served the purpose of occupying two hours of my time. I then painted my toenails which I let dry before I decided to take a walk during the final hours of light. During the drying phase I put in some old Radio Head-Pablo Honey and hole-punched some documents that had been hanging out in the pocket of one of my binders. Threw away some old receipts, filed some stuff, etc. "Alright," I said to myself, "it should be safe to put the flip-flops on and go across the street to the park."

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

<http://www.babbleonline.com>

The World's First**Joint Extemporaneous Article**By *S. and D. Fritz*

We'll start with a Haiku:
 Sticky floor in here,
 Goo Gone does not erase it.
 Why do I exist?

Now for a list of open-ended questions and commentary:

- 1) Why do people hold the hands-free mouthpieces directly in front of their lips? --Hello? You're using your hands. What's the point?
- 2) How come they still have a dot-matrix printer at the auto body shop? -- Last time I checked, they were giving away printers for free if you buy a computer.
- 3) Why coffee for breakfast in the morning? -- It's a diuretic. Shouldn't you be drinking water? Or Jack Daniels?
- 4) Who wrote the previous question? Why did I pronounce "question" as "kestion" in my head? Oh, why?
- 5) What's in your wallet...er, dream? Get it? Get it?! You should be reading the newsletter more.

Dan is typing this whilst Susan is listening to other people's conversations whilst dictating to me. We're both sitting in the airport. I got my shoes shined by a guy who just got his citizenship last week. He was from Guyana in South America.

Driving to work this morning, Susan and I discussed a movie idea. It's called *Country Convenience*, and it's about a convenient convenience store called Country Convenience. The lady that takes your money (as I would describe as "the cashier"), is called Madge like the Palmolive lady. Her sidekick helper's name is Joe, sometimes called "You Eegit Turd Pot." I'll describe the scene from start to finish, in real time. The film should be a good three to five minutes this way. Scene opens: a car, from the driver's perspective, speeds down a windy but well-populated country road, seeming to hit all the potholes on purpose. It's a roller coaster ride as the camera depicts a bumpy, motion-sickness-inducing view. That said, this film might be a good candidate for the opener to some educational IMAX flick. Sometimes those movies need some spicing up. To return: as the car speeds down the road, it reaches a "no turn on red" stoplight, but turns anyway. The Country Convenience store lies dead ahead, and the car screeches to a halt. The driver pops out and buys a lottery ticket from Madge, who stairs silently while giving the customer change. With a ghoulish glint in her eye, however, she can't resist screaming at Joe when she finds that there are no quarters in the change drawer. "You Eegit!" she yells. "No quarters in the drawer! That's not *convenient!*" The customer dead pans to the camera. Fade out to Pink Floyd's "Money."

THE END? ☒

...*Dear Diary, from previous page...*

I brought an unread book with me since I finished my Roddy Doyle IRA novel this afternoon at the beach. This one's a famous one I've meant to read for some time, *The Lover* by Marguerite Duras. It's pretty famous (at least to French people), but don't kill yourself if you haven't heard of it. It's only a little over 100 pages, so I could make it a goal to finish it tonight, but I'm a freaking slow reader on account of my distracted nature, so chances are I'll read to page 30 and then end up vacuuming. Or else I will watch the second of the library movie rentals. It's a tough call...and a tough life here on this lazy Sunday afternight. Until next Sunday. Oh, and by the way, this was "What Life is All About."

☒

...*Vanilla, p. 1...*

near Southeast Asia, they still cane the collective cans of *Vanilla Sky's* promotional staff, because the previews for this movie sold it about as well as those that advertised *The Matrix*. You remember those *Matrix* previews. They featured Mr. Reeves, clad in guns and black overcoat, running around shooting. They had absolutely nothing to do with the more thought-provoking elements that actually made the movie worthwhile. Nonetheless this particular film spawned a successful franchise monster. On the other hand, enough skewed expectations, Tom Cruise prejudice, and general confusion iced Cameron Crowe's modern masterpiece and with little fanfare.

I beseech all the haters to take another look at the brilliance of *Vanilla Sky*. Cameron Crowe, one of pop culture's most poetic priests, conceived the film to meet its viewers at whatever level they wanted to embrace it. Indeed layers of interpretability abound, intersect, and enrich the movie - elevating it higher than the scorching simplifications that most critics seem to level. I will gladly and very appropriately glorify the film as a semiotic's wet dream. It begs to be viewed over and over again for more clues and signs. Yet at its center (or lack thereof), no *true* story exists. As evidence, I relate you all to the following link:

<http://www.cameroncroweonline.com/films/vanillasky/secrets.htm>.

Here you will find numerous clues and theories assembled by the webmaster, a few of which I contributed. Given the multitude of interpretations swirling around the film, many of which you can read in that link, I will offer only one of my many insights regarding the film's more pertinent themes, namely the ubiquitous blur between fiction, reality, pop culture, and dreams.

In the final sequence, the plot reveals its sci-fi twist. The company who reconstructed David Ames' lucid dream did so with the help of pop imagery taken from his life - the *Freewheelin Bob Dylan* or *To Kill a*

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Submission Suggestions

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

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

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

...Clowns, p. 1...

The overarching goal of the welfare-to-work program was to decrease the dependency of the poor population on the government through work opportunities, thereby encouraging the autonomy of welfare recipients. One major problem with this policy is that it does not encourage skills training or education. Therefore, the disadvantaged are being forced into minimum wage jobs that will not alleviate poverty (or the dependency on others). Also, many people are taken off of welfare for reasons other than job attainment, reasons such as mistakes on paperwork or reaching the time limit for benefits. So, while politicians might declare success in welfare reform due to lower numbers of people receiving welfare, their "success" needs to be measured by the overall purpose and not just the process. Of course, politicians refuse to do this, because they know that, in using poverty as a measure, the program is really not a success at all.

When one does look at the numbers still in poverty, welfare reform does not appear to be the cure it was touted to be. Today, 20% of children live in poverty (keep in mind that currently the poverty line is around \$14, 600 for a family of three---children above that line are not included in this 20%). That means that one in five children live in situations with extremely high rates of malnutrition, illiteracy, poor health, violence, abuse, and other deleterious factors. Concurrently, these children have little chance at competing with others who are well-educated, well-fed, and well-informed. This gap will ultimately lend itself to a cycle that renders children unable to escape poverty into which they were born. How can we justify leaving these children floundering in squalor simply to punish their "lazy" parents (many of whom are not lazy at all)?

The answer is neither to cut funding nor to increase funding, which is how our trusty conservative and liberal representatives usually break it down. The answer is to modify the current program so that it can function more efficiently. Countless experts agree that what is truly needed is better job skills training, so that welfare recipients are afforded the opportunity to earn enough to escape poverty. While childcare is provided now on a limited basis, the quality and quantity of this care needs to improve so that it becomes cost-effective for women to enter the work force. Provision of healthcare, especially to children, should be broadened so that poor health creates less of a barrier to functioning for the disadvantaged. Higher education should be encouraged, as it has been proven that those with a college degree are much less likely to live in poverty than those with no college experience. By enacting these types of changes, the government will create autonomous, tax-paying citizens that can contribute to the economy rather than draining it. In the long run, these changes are more cost-effective than the current program, which is extremely shortsighted.

Is it foolish to believe that lawmakers will make these types of sweeping changes? No more foolish than to assume a job making \$5.50 an hour will comfortably feed a family of four. It goes back to that old saying: If you give a man a fish, he will eat for a day, but if you teach a man to fish, he will eat forever. We seem to be caught between these two sentiments as the policy stands today. Simply giving poor people money will not end poverty, but giving them the tools to work (and not just the edict to work) can move people more quickly in that direction. We are missing crucial steps to ensure that people can work at jobs that will effectively end poverty (and not just welfare).

Entitling the 1996 legislation the "Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act" was a cunning move for politicians to make. Its name implies that each welfare recipient should be held accountable to pull themselves up by their bootstraps. If they fail, blame falls on them since "opportunities" were given out like candy. In reality, it will only be successful once it is retitled the "Let's Quit Throwing Away Money and Actually Provide People With Tools and Services Instead of Ultimatums So We Can Really Reduce Poverty, Not Just Insignificant Numbers Act." ☒

...Vanilla, previous page...

Mockingbird. Simultaneously the movie wrestles with the difference between David's dream and his actual life from its very first scene all the way until the end (the movie begins and ends the same way). Some speculate that the whole movie was just a dream, or nightmare. Anyone familiar with Sigmund Freud's *Die Traumdeutung* immediately recognizes the importance of every day signs and memory fragments. We consider these every day signs as "real," while their ephemeral appearance in our dreams can only be the fleeting result of some biorhythm. But Crowe's film, which moves so beautifully between dream and reality, shows that the two might actually be indistinguishable.

Every "reality" we encounter is in fact a fiction in itself. We identify, absorb, adore, imitate, love, and hate all of the cultural icons that construct our lives. In the case of *Vanilla Sky*, the dominant fiction is pop culture. This mimetic matrix has woven the fabric of any reader who can admit to identifying with a movie hero or heroine, to having a favorite book, to nurturing a childhood fantasy (where did it come from?). We are all stars in our life script, and every scrap of fiction, whether we uncovered it in our friend's basement or licked our parents' spoon, has all been handed down. These fictions inform every action we make, and realizing now that our actions are only the fulfilled or diminished desires of fantasy, how can we differentiate between our own reality and any fiction? Piecemeal, Brett could be little more than Bret Easton Ellis, Jake Ryan, Evan Dando, Corporal Hicks, and he's humming something that might not be "The Rascal King" or "Red Barchetta" while daydreaming about triumph and tragedy, irony and commodity, or a romance like he saw in that movie when he was thirteen years old. He just might be this and millions of other fictional pieces - just as those figurations themselves represent nothing but congealed fragments wrought by other eternal reveries. Those still in doubt need only look at people who orient their own entire fictions (realities?) after the most influential one ever written: The Bible.

This and other questions await (re)awakening on each return trip through *Vanilla Sky*. Here I am tempted to turn the discussion towards the fictional discourse of love, how it is represented in the movie, and how we all define and *dream* of it. But I think that I have reached a suitable stopping point and ask, is life but a dream? Hopefully I've provoked you to reconsider this film and explore it once more, or over and over again. After all, according to the movie, every passing minute is a chance to turn it all around. ☒

YOUR ARTICLE HERE!

It's never too early to send an article to
dan@fritzcomics.com

"Sir"

By Naresh Nagella

I thought this country was all about getting rid of British traditions— you, know like spelling *colour* color and never having a king and all. But the British have one tradition which we do respect: the use of the word "Sir."

I've been thinking about that word a lot. Lately, you see it in the news, because the new CEO of Sony is an official British knight—Sir Howard Stringer—and lots of legitimate news outlets call him Sir Howard out of British custom. We never listen to anything the Queen of England wants—but this one thing is okay?

So, I wanted to learn why we respect the "Sir" so much. And, that's because, despite never really having a feudal society here, the word "Sir" is used like mad in modern America. We love that word. I want to recount where I've used it and when it's been used upon me throughout my near 28 years of existence, and you'll see exactly how powerful and versatile three letters can be:

1988-1991 – Montgomery Bell Academy – Nashville, TN

My first memory of calling people Sir (and Ma'am, which can be another whole article but—since almost no one (thankfully) calls me it—not the subject of this piece) was at this all-boys private school. The guy who wrote *Dead Poets Society* went there and based some of the movie on the school. Yes, it was that preppy. I still remember the admitting dean (a dean at a freaking junior school!) telling me that Polo was the preferred type of shirt at the school. At any rate, we had to call all of our teachers Sir or Ma'am. If we didn't—and I kid you not at all—we had to go into school for half an hour on Saturday each time we failed to address a teacher by that title. Sadly, most teachers enforced the policy. And, as an early lesson in the rehabilitative capability of criminal justice programs, I forgot it a couple times, went to school a couple Saturdays, and never forgot to say it again. (We also had to go to school on Saturday for one hour each time we forgot to wear a belt or wore our shirt untucked. Yikes.)

I called any adult Sir or Ma'am (including my parents, who never forced it upon me but, strangely, never told me to change either) after three years of that place, and people always thought of me as the most polite kid because of it. My friends' parents would always be like, "How come you're never as polite as Naresh?" And all because of Sir/Ma'am. They didn't know I had been brainwashed into it. At any rate, you never can go wrong being a well-groomed, Sir/Ma'am-using teenager, until....

Sometime in the Summer of 1993 – Barnes and Noble – St. Petersburg, FL

I was 16 at the time and told a 25 year old clerk at the Barnes and Noble, "Thank you Sir," as I completed my purchase. I'll get more into how, only in America, the customer calls the clerk/cashier "Sir" —but, man did that end my Sir using for a while. The guy was livid I would ever call him such a title. I'll paraphrase, but he went on a tirade right afterward that addressed the following: 1) that he was only 25, 2) he never wants to be a Sir ever in his life, and 3) I immediately had him feeling old, and worse, like "the Man" for calling him it. He told me never to call anyone that remotely looked like him Sir. And, aside from the clearly elderly gentleman, I stopped using that title for anyone. Who ever thought buying a book at Barnes and Noble could actually change your speech habits? So, I never again thought about Sir, until....

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Sometime in the Summer of 2002 – Boring Corporate Law Firm – Washington, DC

I was 25! And, I was called Sir for the first time. I was in the elevator, where in some corporate environments, and especially ones that bill by the hour, most of the cool conversation goes on. I actually wanted to spend a day riding in the elevator just to learn about everybody at my firm and see what people talked about. You could be a gossip magnate by riding in an elevator all day, I tell you. I'm not sure how the water cooler gets all the attention.

At any rate, I was in the lift, and a Partner needed to get out from the back of it to his floor. He pushed me aside and said "Excuse me, Sir!" It really threw me. Why the hell was a Partner, who could care less about me, referring to me so politely—with a phrase historically used for heroes of crusades and wars, tycoons, and inventors of life changing products? And, then I realized, even though the corporate law firm Partner could buy or sell me if he wanted, the "Sir" had actually become a very American way of saying, "Even though I drive to work in a car that costs 5-6 times what you owe in student loans, if I call you Sir, I'm still cool despite my money and boring work." Only in America could the most class-regimented of terms, like Sir, be used in such an egalitarian, and well, fake way. For a guy like that, calling me "Sir" helped him work out a lot of issues—he didn't have to get to know me, and he didn't have to seem indifferent to me either. After all, he knew I was a young lawyer at the firm and, well, he probably should get to know me, but he really does not have to or need to. The "Sir" was just an incredibly efficient phrase to help ease his conscience and free up his day, even if he didn't mean it.

And, well, I see lots of people use the phrase nowadays if you hear for it. At my hospital, I see older doctors call janitorial staff by Sir or Ma'am. It's an incredible way of showing patients you respect them immediately by calling them that.

Still, I wish we could form some official guidelines on when to use it. I know I hate it being used upon me. No one needs to be calling me Sir. Among my greatest achievements is, well, eating an entire (large) box of Frosted Mini Wheats on only a pint of milk (just try it—it's hard). And, I know some people hate being called it. It's so fake, superficial, and even though you're trying exactly not to be, it's still condescending.

For someone clearly old—say 70+—I can see people using it. It's just that it seems like such a loaded word. It implies that the receiver has an expectation to be called it by some greatness that is so pervasive that it must be acknowledged by the address. But, honestly, I doubt janitors or cashiers really care whether you call them it. I still use it at stores or restaurants just because I really am trying to be polite, and it's just a safe way of being polite when you can't call people by their name. (I am one of the people who will use a name tag of a service worker if they wear one—like, calling my waiter "Brian" throughout an entire meal. That could be another entire article about nothing, however). But, if no name tag, I still go with Sir/Ma'am, despite almost feeling dirty for using it.

And, really, if this piece has any point, I wish that society would somehow see it fit to use a phrase I would much more, seriously, love to use. I mean, if we are able to incorporate Sir/Ma'am into our official vocab, then, I'm sure society can adapt to see we use this one appropriately and pervasively. But, alas, I feel that as I say "hi" to the name-tag-less 60 year old janitor who passes me in the hall on a late night at the hospital, he might just think I were weird if I declared to him, "Hi, dude." ☒

Chess-Whiz

By Dan Fritz

This month I offer a piece of advice that is contrary to my normal practice (and maybe that's why I lose a lot of games). For beginners, this is especially useful, since there is enough to concentrate on without complicating the situation.

When you find yourself in a predicament in which one of your valuable pieces is threatened, it is usually best to remove the threat rather than apply counter-pressure to your opponent. There may be an exception to this if you are able to put your opponent in check, but as a rule of thumb, the more opportunity you give your opponent to threaten you, the more pieces will be threatened. Since you can only move one piece at a time, you open yourself up to a guaranteed demise by allowing the enemy to counter your counter. In other words, a conservative approach could save you big losses while you feel out the complexities of the game in general. ☒

BabbleList of Distinction

This month's *Grimmelshausen Contributor* award winner:

AMANDA HALL, BABBLE-ON-IAN

Exploding into the Grimmelshausen Hall of Fame, Amanda has entertained readers with her language lessons in "Urban Vernacular" and numerous satirical pieces. *Babble-ON* salutes you!

Note on the Grimmelshausen Award: Grimmelshausen distinctions are awarded to *Babble-ON* contributors who have submitted over 10,000 words. The award is named after Johann Jacob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen, the 17th Century German author of the picaresque (and very lengthy) novels of the Simplician cycle, among other works. ☒

Problem Hole:

Answers to Last Month's Problem

By Srida Joisa

"3rd Grade"

Here's another one from the Internet.

The owner of a motel with 100 rooms wants the room doors numbered in order from 1–100. She asks you to buy numbers and hang them on the doors. Now you must go to the store and buy all the digits you need to make the numbers.

How many of each digit, 0–9, must you buy?

Answer:

0 = 11

1 = 21

2 = 20

3 = 20

4 = 20

5 = 20

6 = 20

7 = 20

8 = 20

9 = 20

Total = 192 ☒

The First Annual Babble-ONline

Readers' Choice Awards

Below are the results of *Babble-ON's* first Reader's Choice Awards. The winners are highlighted in red, bold text. Congratulations to both the winners and the nominees!

BEST MONTHLY SUBMISSION / SERIES

- **"Urban Vernacular" by Amanda Hall**
-covers the evolving language and culture of teenagers in the Bronx.
- "Wine Country" by Steven Fritz
-gives wine recommendations while providing tips and other tidbits.
- "Dictator of the Month" by Dan Fritz & Amanda Hall
-satirizes various dictators, both past and present.
- "Etymology with AI" by Alan Fishman
-gives an interesting history of selected words.
- "Popcorn Pundit" by Susan Fritz
-provides random, monthly movie picks.

It was a close race between Wine Country and Urban Vernacular, but Amanda's humorous social pieces won the day.

BEST NON-TEXT SUBMISSION

- "Islam is the Bomb," Vol. 1, Iss. 1, by Chad Fritz
- "Squish," Vol. 1, Iss. 8, by Alan Fishman
- "Comic Corner," Vol. 2, Iss. 2, by Dan Fritz
- "Letters from Italy," Vol. 3, Iss. 3, by Garrett Calderwood
- **"Mattlock," Vol. 3, Iss. 4, By Grant Calderwood & Dan Fritz**

Votes for this category were all over the board, but at least a couple of people agreed on one entry.

BEST ARTICLE

- "Ikea'd You Not," Vol. 1, Iss. 3, by James Schneider
-tells the story of an early-morning, furniture misadventure.
- "R.E.M. Crowd Lacks L.I.F.E.," Vol. 1, Iss. 6, by Dan Fritz
-conveys the scene at a R.E.M. rock concert in Dallas.
- "Koob's Korner," Vol. 1, Iss. 9, by Ryan Crocetto
-reports on the tragic death of 70's sitcom star "Rerun."
- **"This Flesh is Legal Tender," Vol. 2, Iss. 2, by Brett**
-pontificates on the human sex drive.
- "The Burning in of Music Sentimentality," Vol.2, Iss. 3, by Brett
-philosophizes about good music and its context within one's life.
- "Natural Born Thinker," Vol. 3, Iss. 1, by Susan Fritz
-eulogizes Susan Sontag and her intellectual contributions.
- "Politac-toes," Vol. 3, Iss. 1, by Alan Fishman
-analyzes American political apathy and the two-party system.

Congrats to Brett on his sex piece. How can he lose with that?

A special award goes to **Srida Joisa** for the **Most Dedicated Contributor** of Year Two of *Babble-ON*. Good job, Srida! This newsletter would have been empty without you. ☒

THE TRAGIC TALE OF
MADELEINE ALBRIGHT'S CAREER AS A FASHION MODEL
IN 19TH CENTURY NEW YORK
(PART 4)

By Several Bored Office Pukes

In our last installment, Madeleine learned the ways of the catwalk from a Mexican Greek named Castro. Finding no work, she continued through the streets of New York where she met Teddy the Jew, aka Teddy Roosevelt. Teddy got into a gunfight with Strom and Bob Dole over Maddy. He defeated them with his boxing prowess.

Triumphant, Teddy turned around to find his prize, Maddy, sticking feet first out of a violently sundered crate of chocolate. The ecstatic slurping sounds emanating from the crate made Teddy blush, shift from foot-to-foot, and finally clear his throat, but it became quickly apparent that he would have to extract Maddy physically from the crate before she drowned herself.

This was the scene upon which a familiar band of roving Mexican Greek male models happened....

"Whatchoo tink you're doing?" yelled Castro. Teddy continued wrenching Madeleine out of the barrel as both of her legs flailed in the air. Ironically, this was a sight all too familiar to Castro and his partners...in fashion. "That's no way to treat a lady," Castro yelled again, snapping his fingers and flicking his hips from side to side.

For some reason, Madeleine always ended up being the center of attention in her adventures in New York. Deep down in her subconscious, her soul knew that this was exactly what she needed to make it in the big city as a fashion model. Almost involuntarily, she smiled like a baby filling its diaper. In her moment of bliss, she shot up out of the barrel and tumbled backward onto Teddy.

Castro and his gang stared in shock as Madeleine rose to her feet, hair a swirling mess. For the first time since this morning, the gang members' jaws dropped in unison, in awe of what everyone knew would be an instant, citywide, fashion hit: the "barrel swirl," later known in the 1950s as the "beehive." Little Madeleine didn't even know what she had done.

Meanwhile, staring up at her from the ground, Teddy could see young Madeleine's petticoat. "Damn that is hot," Teddy thought. He had seen that petticoat before in the window of Madame Pussycats Naughty Negligees Boutique and in the ever popular Sears Lingerie catalogue. If there was anything Teddy cared about it was lingerie. He seemed to recall that it was the summer mini model, and damn was it even hotter in person. It was so mini, so short, that from this angle Teddy could see all the way up to Madeleine's ankles. If that girl weren't careful, she would become a New York sex symbol. And Teddy knew just how to make that happen.

Still feeling a little dazed from having the wind knocked out of him when he and Madeleine fell to the ground, he groaned and struggled to his feet. Jutting out his lower lip, he blew air through his coarse moustache. The air whistled between the hairs and made Teddy look like a frustrated walrus.

"You look hot," said Castro.

"Well, I was just in a mighty fisticuffs and the young lady toppled over on me. And by the way I've killed lions with my bare hands," replied Teddy.

"I'm not talking to you! I'm talking to young Madeleine!" Snap, snap, snap went Castro's fingers.

A low hum came over Castro's gang as they discussed the emerging hair style and the triple snap from their leader. But the scene was cut short when a shout erupted from the street, "I'M BOB DOLE." Erratic shots

...continued in right column...

...Madeleine Albright, from left column...

followed as the group could see the young man staggering around in the horse dung and street muck. Everyone dashed into Ulysses S. Grant's general store and whiskey distillery...which was a huge mistake.

The Mexican Greek gang ran yelling into the building, with Teddy and Maddy fast on their heels. Bob Dole's shots rang out and one wild bullet hit a lantern near the door of the distillery, which exploded and caught a Mexican Greek on fire as he ran through the doorway. Screaming in surprise, he ran around wildly until he crashed into a vat of freshly distilled whiskey, which was upended, fell over, and though the Mexican Greeks first looked at the rushing torrent of booze as a blessing from God, their minds were swiftly changed as their flaming friend spread his fiery predicament to the quite flammable single-malt beverage. In an eruption of hellfire, four other barrels of booze exploded before everyone's eyes! The "Ulysses S. Grant" print on the store sign turned into black carbon as everything was consumed in the raging conflagration. Horses whinnied on the street outside, and the smell of burning horse crap permeated the neighborhood.

"There are many ways to hell, but this ain't one of 'em!" Teddy yelled. "This way, Missy!" Quick as lightening, he wrapped Madeleine in a nearby blanket and lunged through the back door. Screams of burning Mexican Greeks could still be heard in the general store while more of Bob Dole's shots rang out from the front of the distillery. "I'M...BOB...DOLE!" BLAM, BLAM, BLAM, CLICK! He was finally out of bullets.

The alleyway behind Ulysses's distillery was a steep hill, and a gurgling stream of horse dung and human excrement flowed quickly down the street. The soft ground was littered with the carcasses of rats that had jumped from the rafters of the burning building, drowned in the dark filth, and floated, charred and distorted, down the street. At the far end of the alley down stream from where she was standing, Madeleine could see someone hunched over tearing at something with their teeth, although she could not say exactly what. A few more rats leaped screaming from the buildings sinking into the filth with a muffled squish.

"Well, I'll bet there hasn't been a fire like that since God sent the signal to Moses to lead his people out of slavery," said Teddy as he tried to hustle Madeleine away from the burning building. Silence came from Madeleine. "You know, lil' miss, when Moses led his people, and there was a fifty foot pillar of fire? It reads quite well in the Torah."

Madeleine jerked away from Teddy. "A Jew! Looking at my ANKLES?! Unforgivable!"

"But I saved your life young lady," replied Teddy. "Isn't that a little more important?"

"What do you know? I want to be a fashion model in NYC. And you are about as much use to me as an empty chocolate wrapper. I'm leaving!"

"Fine, young lady. You do what you want," Teddy said in a cautious tone. "I'm going to do two things with my life: First is to become President, and second....," he trailed off.

"What?! You're gonna what? You're no magician, Willow Ufgood."

Teddy, not understanding the last part of Madeleine's sentence and her sudden scorn, took a few steps back. Maybe if he did something heroic, more than rescuing her from a burning building, she would not be so upset.

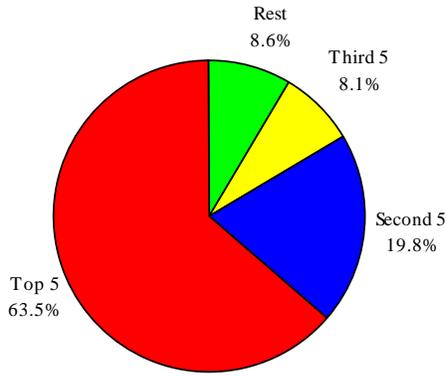
"You have it your way, young lady." And with that he turned around and ran back into the burning building. He had to see if Castro was all right, and he had no more time for what he thought just happened. Had Madeleine actually thrown a supermodel temper tantrum? He ducked his head and darted through the back entrance of the distillery.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT ISSUE



Note: These statistics are close approximations and do not include the current issue or the submissions provided by the Editor.

Words Contributed as a Percentage of the Total



Contributors:

Grant Calderwood
Matt Ellinwood
Dan Fritz
Steven Fritz
Susan Fritz
Amanda Hall
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Awards

These awards could be yours!

For Total Words Contributed:
1,000: **Little Scribbler**
5,000: **Babble-ON-ian**
10,000: **Grimmelshausen Award**
Each additional 10,000:
Proust BabbleStar

For Exceptional Content:
Alfred, Lord Tennyson
Platinum Seal of Excellence:
To date, no one has won this.

Good luck, and keep the submissions coming! ☒

As of last issue, the top five Babble-ON contributors (red) had contributed 63.5% of the written material, the next five (blue) had contributed 19.8%, and the next five (yellow) had contributed 8.1%. All remaining contributors (green) had accounted for another 8.6%.

Top tier contributors include: 1) James Schneider, 2) Srida Joisa, 3) Brett Martz, 4) Amanda Hall, and 5) Susan Fritz.

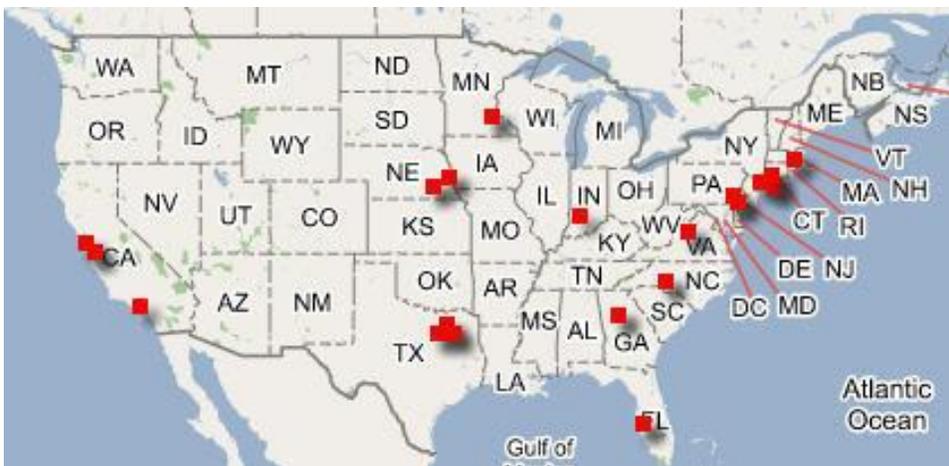
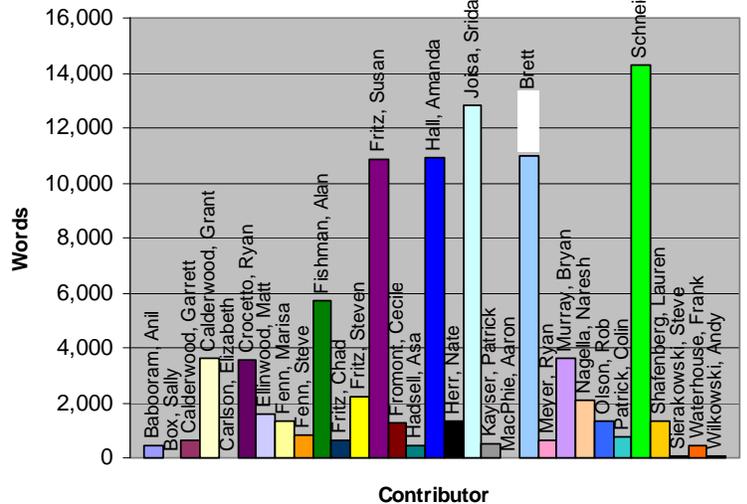
Current Trends:

Amanda went postal on the word count charts last month. She leaped into fourth place, barely edging out Susan and barely lagging behind Brett.

Predictions:

The top tier will continue to grow in percentage of word-share now that all top tier contributors are Grimmelshausen level. The second tier is a large step down and will struggle to keep up. ☒

Words Contributed per Contributor



Global Watch Map

BabbleON has attracted contributors and readers from around the globe. In addition to the U.S. writers noted on the map, there have been submissions from:

Brussels, Belgium,
Venice, Italy, and
Sydney, Australia.

Key: Red squares mark the residence of each contributor. ☒