

Eternal Sunshine #20

September 2008

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On the web at <http://www.whiningkentpigs.com> – or go directly to the Diplomacy section at <http://www.whiningkentpigs.com/DW/>. Also be sure to visit the Diplomacy World website at <http://www.diplomacyworld.net>. Check out <http://www.helpfulkitty.com> for official Toby the Helpful Kitty news, advice column, blog, and links to all his available merchandise! Links to all of the books and DVDs reviewed can be found by clicking on the Amazon Store button in the main menu of the Whining Kent Pigs website.

All Eternal Sunshine readers are ***encouraged*** to join the free Eternal Sunshine Yahoo group at http://games.groups.yahoo.com/group/eternal_sunshine_diplomacy/ to stay up-to-date on any subzine news or errata.

Quote Of The Month – “This is working like gangbusters.” (Joel in “Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind”)

Welcome to Eternal Sunshine, the official zine of the worst pitching staff in the Major Leagues, that of the Texas Rangers. Not to say we never have any good pitchers...its just that they don't become “good” until we trade them, or release them outright. Then suddenly they want to battle for the Cy Young award. Chris Young, Edison Volquez, John Danks, Galarraga..okay, I shouldn't mention Volquez because we traded him for an amazing player. But the rest? We traded Danks for Brandon McCarthy, who is made of glass, and we traded Young (and much more) so we could watch Adam Eaton sit on the disabled list and then sign elsewhere. Galarraga? We released him to make room for some spare veteran who sucked and then got hurt almost immediately. Fun fun fun!

It looks like this will be a shorter issue, as I haven't found the time or energy to write anything yet. Still a couple of days to the deadline though. I'd like to find an hour or two to write about working on the landscape detail in prison, so I'll keep my fingers crossed. Life has been rather hectic lately, as Heather bashed her head against the wall for two months to finish her final Algebra class...she got an A by the way! Now she's starting full-time in the Veterinary Assistant program, and finishing her Associates degree at the same time (she only needs one or two more classes for that). After a year, if she's happy with the Assistant program, she can continue on and complete the Certified Veterinary Technician program. There are only three certified Vet Tech programs in the state of Texas, so that would be a real achievement if she completed that program. Then, at long last, she'd be prepared to realize her dream of working with animals. So wish her luck!

Besides that, work has been a madhouse (although my coworker Marian is due back from maternity leave in a week), but otherwise I have no complaints. We managed to get through another birthday of Heather's without her killing or divorcing me, so that's a minor miracle. I've been spending a lot of hobby time on my new Postal Diplomacy Zine Archive. This is an area in the Diplomacy section of my personal website (<http://www.whiningkentpigs.com/DW/>) where I am scanning and posting postal Diplomacy zines from every era. This means I've got the very first issues of the first Diplomacy zine every published – John Boardman's Graustark – on up to zines from the 1990's. And I've got a ton more material to scan and post. I've even been getting some assistance from long-time hobby members; Craig Reges, for example, has scanned and emailed me a number of zines I did not have. If you're interested at all in hobby history, be sure to check the collection out. And, if you happen to be one of those people in the midst of the whole DipCon/NADF/Hobby Organization debates – which I'm not going to go into here – I think some of these zines will give you some very enlightening historical perspective, both to explain why some things were set up the way they were back then, and highlighting the fact that this hobby has been dealing with the same basic issues, again and again, since the earliest days.

Keep an eye on the Game Openings listing elsewhere in the zine. I'm open to suggestion. There isn't much point in my listing games there which nobody has any interest in. I'm also willing to provide space for someone to guest-GM a game, or to write an occasional (or monthly) column. If that gets your pulse racing, please get in

touch. Okay, that's it for the opening foolishness. If you're in the U.S., enjoy your Labor Day. See you in October!

Grab a Shovel – Part One

In the Federal prison system, at least at the security levels where I was, you had to work. Everybody had a job. Those with medical problems were given tasks like wrapping tableware in napkins, but everybody else had a true job. At Allenwood I started on the painting crew, and soon was moved to the plumbing detail (the CO in charge ran both details). When I transferred to McKean, I took a job on the orderly detail, where I stayed until I got tired of all the rackets being run there (see "The Sunglasses" and other stories in a prior *Eternal Sunshine* for details on that experience). That's when I decided to sign up for Landscaping.

At Allenwood, the "punishment detail" was called CSS (Compound Sanitation Service). They walked around the compound, using brooms, mops, and dustpans to clean up any trash they found; the inmates called it Goose Shit Patrol, because that was really what they had to do all day – sweep up goose shit from the sidewalks. Allenwood was overrun by wildlife, from geese to starving deer to stray cats to lots of other various birds and animals. The job sucked, and nobody wanted to do it, so all the troublemakers got moved to CSS.

At McKean, Landscaping had the same reputation. If you were fired from your job, or caught stealing food or some other offense, that's where you were sent. It was considered a terrible assignment, mainly because the inmates on Landscaping actually had to **work**. McKean was in the middle of the Allegheny National Forest in Pennsylvania, so there were literally tons of leaves to rake up, lawns to mow, lawn trimmings to bag or crate, bushes to trim, and branches to collect. But in the winter, the REAL work started. Aside from the typical snow you expect in that part of the country, we were close enough to Lake Erie to be subject to "lake effect" snow, which could dump multiple inches on us every hour, all day long and night long. Some members of the crew (or members of the Garage crew) would plow and salt and sand the roads, but who do you think had to manually shovel all the sidewalks and stairs, and spread sand, everywhere from the main office all the way to the Admin building at the Medium Security facility? You got it: the Landscaping crew. The "front circle" (which was the entrance to the Medium Security prison) was where you spent most of your time. There was a large front sidewalk area, plus sidewalk $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way around the circle, and a long steep stairway up a hill to the staff parking lot. There was also a short sidewalk in front of the flagpole, in the center of the circle. The snow could literally fall so fast that by the time you pushed a shovel from one side of the front sidewalk area to the other, you'd turn around and find the path covered in white powder all over again. Shoveling snow at McKean was a losing battle.

Even when it wasn't snowing, winter work on the Landscape crew was a real pain in the ass. If it was icy (which it often was) you had to crack the ice buildup on the roads and sidewalks and shovel the ice away. Use of salt to melt the ice was extremely limited, partially to save money and partially because of environmental concerns from being in a national forest. So you were expected to spread dirt only, in order to give people a bit of traction, but that was it. So we had ice chippers which we'd crack ice with, then shovels to try and move it. Or, if it had warmed above freezing, you had the pleasure of using big brooms to sweep up all the dirt and gravel that had accumulated on the roads during the last storm, which we then shoveled into trucks. There was always **something** to do, and if there wasn't, Burger found something.

Burger was the CO in charge of Landscaping, and was regarded as a real hard-ass. He loved to berate his inmates, and had no tolerance for laziness or shitty attitudes. Since almost everyone on the detail was there because of punishment, the lack of effort most crew members demonstrated was rather apparent. But Burger took his job very seriously. Winter weather was no joke to him; he wanted to keep everything clear in any area where staff members had to drive or walk. If the inmate areas were a bit badly attended to, well, that could **almost** be tolerated. But I suppose that was more because he couldn't see their condition as easily from his pickup truck, which he drove around all day long checking on all the crews working in spread-out areas. You never knew when Burger's truck would sneak up on you, so it was best to keep moving.

For me, none of this was really a problem. My time in prison went faster when I was busy, which is why I had done so well on the plumbing detail at Allenwood. My CO there learned quickly that I'd do my job properly, fix what I could, report to him when a job was beyond my capability. He treated me very well, and I know a lot of that was because I understood he had placed trust in me and if I abused that trust I was showing HIM a lack of respect. Much of my plumbing work was unsupervised, and often involved going into restricted areas. I could also be awakened at any hour of the night, or called upon at any moment on weekends, if an emergency arose. But my days would move by quickly, which was the real goal anyway. That, and the fact that I was paid a lot more than 12 cents an hour because of the quality and quantity of my work.

All of this entered into my decision to be one of the only two people I knew of to **volunteer** for Landscape detail at McKean. The other guy had been refused by Burger; he knew anybody who volunteered for his crew had to be a little nuts. But with me, partially on the recommendation of two guys already working for him, he was willing to roll the dice. Obviously I had to be a little twisted, especially as this job change took place the day after we'd had our first light dusting of snow. Why would anybody want to spend their days pushing a shovel around when they could be inside the housing unit, cleaning floors and finding ways to avoid work? The look I got from the manager in the Administration office when I brought him my job change request after Burger had signed it was priceless. I asked him if anything was wrong, and he shrugged his shoulders as he countersigned it, saying "No, I'm just wondering what the fuck your problem is, volunteering for Landscaping. But if you want to kill yourself, go ahead."

With those words on encouragement, he handed me the BP-8 form back, and I marched out of the office and back to the chow hall, where Burger was waiting. I was now officially on the Landscaping detail...for better or for worse. And I knew that it was life joining the Mafia: once you were in, there was no way to get out. You were a member for life, until death do us part.

To Forgive or Not to Forgive – That is the Question

Where does somebody learn the concept of forgiveness and how to use it? Is it something we learn in childhood, or is it a genetic or chemical reaction? Something to do with the way our brain is wired? I wish I knew, because I have a very flawed sense of forgiveness. I seem to have very little trouble forgiving anyone else for things that they do, if they are sorry and express remorse...and often even when they don't. If I am slighted, forgiveness is rather simple, since I put myself on such a low level anyway. Those who offend my friends and loved ones may have a harder time gaining my forgiveness, but it is possible.

The problem is, I cannot forgive myself. I simply do not know how...or else I do not believe I am worthy of that forgiveness. To forgive myself would, in effect, be letting me off the hook. And using whatever warped measuring stick I have in that brain, I have not yet earned that forgiveness...not for anything.

Memory is a tricky thing. Why we remember one thing or another, but forget most of what we say and do is beyond me. But I seem to have a knack for remembering things I wish I could forget. Big things, small things, embarrassing things; regrets clog my mind for years at a time. I cannot forget them, and I have not learned how to forgive myself for them.

It could be once when I kicked my brother Jon in the side as kids, in anger, and watched him cry. Or, it could be nearly cutting my finger off with another brother's pocket knife and claiming I fell on it (which is stupid, because I know that my father did not believe that story; he yelled at my brother for leaving it where I could get at it, but I still have not forgiven myself for lying and blaming him). For stealing a comic book from a friend when I was eleven. For pulling a dog's hair (even though he bit me for it).

Then there are the big things. All the moments I see as failure in my relationship and marriage to Mara, moments where I look back and wish I had said or done something different. Sometimes I wasn't kind enough, sometimes I was too kind and too accommodating...eventually becoming her enabler, all the while carrying the burden of her deadpan statement that if I ever wanted a divorce, just to let her know so she could kill herself. So many decisions I wish I could redo...thousands of them. Even not being strong enough to break up our marriage years earlier; that too is something I have not forgiven myself for.

Not going to college. Not succeeding in business. Not making more money. Not having more friends, being more popular. I blame myself for feeling like an outsider all the time, as if I chose to not fit in. For having no fashion sense. For being oblivious to social rules and life lessons that somehow I should have picked up on.

And, of course, for committing a federal offense. For putting my family, and Heather, through the pain of me being in prison. For being a burden to anyone, anywhere, anytime. For not being there when my father died. For not being there when Mara killed herself. I even hold open a spot of blame for things I don't know I did, or damage I may have caused unknowingly.

For others, I easily accept that they are human. They make mistakes. They err. They're just stumbling through life, doing the best they can, sometimes making poor or selfish or just unlucky choices. Mara cheats on me? Okay. No problem. Andrea forgets my birthday, or gives me nothing on Valentine's Day – not even a card? It's okay, I forgive you.

The only one I demand perfection from is me. And as that never occurs, I am eternally a failure. I am responsible for all bad things; I am powerless to provide any good. And when I do, like when I love Heather and treat her well, or when I am charitable, or when I care for animals...well, I get no credit, because those were my natural inclinations. It's like Schindler's List. I could have done more. With this ring, I could have saved one more life. Nothing is ever enough.

Or, as Rip Torn explains in Albert Brooks' masterpiece defending your life "If I change your flat tire for you, and three years later I lose your garden hose, by your logic I get no credit for the tire. I'm just the dumb guy who lost the hose."

That's me. I'm the dumb guy who lost the hose...a million times.

Hypothetical of the Month

This is a new section in Eternal Sunshine, where I will offer a hypothetical question or situation. Sometimes it will be based on things that happened in our life, and other times they'll just be silly (or gross). I hope at least a few readers will write in with their answers. Be sure to explain your choice fully so we can understand your logic behind it.

Okay, this time, here's the situation. I'm using gender neutral terminology as much as possible so it fits everybody. You're out with your significant other or spouse, and another couple. You have your dinner in a booth at a noisy Irish restaurant where there is a live band playing, but you're seated in a booth with walls so there is some privacy. The waitperson has to get in close to hear everything. The meal is a social one, with lots of talking and joking. The waitperson gets involved here and there, making physical contact with you gently a few times, grabbing your arm and so-forth. Probably innocent, and you think nothing of it. You're the only one not drinking. You've decided to treat the other couple to dinner without telling them, so you excuse yourself to "use the restroom" and find the waitperson so you can settle the tab before anyone is the wiser. When you do so, the waitperson offers you their phone number as well as the check, with a sly smile. How do you respond? What specifically do you say or do?

I know MY answer, but I won't reveal it or explain it until next issue. Heather feels my answer is inappropriate, maybe she'll explain why next issue too.

The Dining Dead - The Eternal Sunshine Movie Reviews

American Teen – When I first saw the poster for American Teen, I immediately lost all interest. It looked like some sort of updated parody of The Breakfast Club. After seeing the trailer, however, I felt quite the opposite. This documentary by Nanette Burstein gives us an insider's view of Middle America, and life in High School. Instead of trying to draw any judgments or conclusions about the teenagers featured, American Teen simply lets their actions speak for themselves. The good, the bad, and the ugly; we see it all.

Major players in the film, set in Warsaw, Indiana, are Jake (the geeky Band nerd); Hannah (the rebel/artsy girl who feels completely out of place); Colin (the jock); and Megan (the class Princess). There are other teenagers who make their way in and out as minor players, but those four are the center of the action. Amazingly, while no teenager is one-dimensional, all of them fall generally into the stereotypical categories you might expect. But, as in The Breakfast Club, each deals with their own pressures, their own insecurities, and their own demons.

Hannah hates Indiana, and dreams of going to film school in San Francisco. But she is terrified of developing the mental illnesses her mother suffers from, and she's basically living on her own, without a solid support system. Jake can't find a girl, and feels utterly insecure and beaten-down. As he puts it, he "sucks at life" and is looking for a "sock to be paired with." He has terrible acne, is short, and spends most of his time playing video games. Colin cannot afford college, so he needs to shine on the basketball court and get a scholarship. Otherwise, it's probably the army for him. And Megan constantly tries to derive power over, and support from, her circle of friends, while agonizing over whether she'll get into Notre Dame (where her father and all but one sibling attended college).

There are many sweet moments in the film, and some which leave you scratching your head wondering if these teenagers will look back at their actions in shame. To those of us who grew up in a different time, the lack of real connections between most of these kids is frightening. They break up by text message, or sit and text message other romantic interests right in front of their boyfriends and girlfriends. When one girl sends her boyfriend a topless photo, it quickly is seen on every area cell phone, and eventually on its own web site. Yet later in the film, that same poor girl is sitting happily at a table with the girls who distributed it. Everything means everything, and yet nothing means anything.

American Teen has gotten rave reviews, and I'm happy to join in the group of those who thoroughly enjoyed the film. Go see it.

Henry Poole Is Here – Luke Wilson films can be hit or miss. Some of his broad comedy falls flat, but when he plays the decent, human character he can be terribly effective. In "Henry Poole is Here," the new film written by Albert Torres and directed by Mark Pellington, we're fortunate that Wilson has found some middle ground. It isn't a monumental film, but a sweet one.

Wilson plays Henry Poole, who is buying a house in a quiet California neighborhood. He doesn't want to haggle over the price, have any repairs done, or anything else. He simply wants to buy the house, move in, and be left alone. As he tells the real estate agent (Cheryl Hines), "I won't be living here that long."

Like Finbar McBride in "The Station Agent," Henry just wants to be left alone. Unless you learned it from the trailers, the reasons for his melancholy state and desire for solitude are revealed to us bit by bit. But solitude is the one thing Henry is not permitted. On one side of his house is a troubled child who does not speak, and her mother (Radha Mitchell). Millie, the daughter, likes to tape record the conversations that take place in Henry's yard. Henry clearly is attracted to Millie's mother, but he is not willing to pursue the relationship.

The brunt of the activity, however, comes from his neighbor on the other side of his house, Esperanza (Adriana Barraza). A close friend of the former owner, Esperanza discovers what she believes is the face of Jesus in a water stain left in the stucco job on the side of Henry's house. She invites over the local Catholic priest (George Lopez) and soon has a number of believers invading Henry's yard. Aside from the interruptions, Henry is enraged by the blind faith of the group. "Your hope will not save you!" he yells.

Overall the film has some laughs, some drama, and some lessons. It also has some insightful comments on the way we think, the way we validate our own beliefs by having others believe them, and the human desire to fix the present by reliving the past. As I said, Henry Poole is not a terrific or important film. But it's decent entertainment.

Boy A – Before we went to see this film, I started to read a favorable review of it. In its first paragraph, the review stated that in order to properly experience Boy A, you really need to only have the slightest notion of what it is about. Any description of the plot, any knowledge of the things which may or may not happen, will cause you to spend too much time trying to figure out what WILL happen, instead of just experiencing the moment.

This happens to be a major problem for me with many movies. If I've seen a trailer, I remember the scenes and part of my mind uses those scenes to try and determine the course the film will take. And having seen Boy A, I happen to agree with that reviewer. The experience of the film is better if you know little about it.

The simplest, most generic synopsis I can give Boy A is Andrew Garfield plays Jack, a young man who is being released from prison for a crime he committed as a child. But in order to protect his anonymity, he is creating a new identity for himself. That name, Jack, is the first piece of the identity.

Boy A touches on a number of emotional or complicated topics, ones in which there is no true right and wrong, no black and white: rehabilitation, punishment, redemption, the value of a human life, forgiveness, revenge, hatred, blame. Are we what we did, or are we what we do now, or are we what we feel, or a combination of all of those things? Are we how we feel about ourselves, or are we how others see us and how others feel about us? If we love, and if we receive love, are we worthy of love? If we are hated, are we deserving of that hate?

The cinematography and direction of Boy A is quite well done. Each scene carries with it the light and dark of life. A nightclub can at one moment be exciting and full of energy, and at the next a mass of bodies cramped together. Peacefulness can seem like loneliness. A functional room can be claustrophobic. A hero can be a villain. And a friend can be an enemy.

Boy A is already disappearing from theaters, so if you miss it, watch fir the DVD. And don't read the back of the box. Just rent it and watch it.

Seen on DVD – Alien (B+, still a fun movie to watch, but DAMN that Veronica Cartwright makes me want to slap her in the face!). **Stonehenge Decoded** (B, the head of the project has some interesting theories, but I saw almost zero evidence to support them. It's all conjecture. And Donald Sutherland's voice was a bit too mono-tone for narration).



Heather's Tricks and Treats

The Idiot Girl and the Flaming Tantrum of Death by Laurie Notaro – Funny reflections on getting older. I still love the way she writes. She has such self-deprecating humor. Her older books are even better. 3 ½

pumpkins. 

Farnham's Freehold by Robert Heinlein – A good science fiction novel. You know how some science fiction books are way too detail oriented, with names a mile long, and you have to be a super-geek to enjoy them? Well, this book isn't one of those; which is why I enjoyed it. However, I must admit that the first time I read it

(20 years ago) I was much more impressed and intrigued. 3 ½ pumpkins. 

Hocus Pocus by Teresa Roblin – Cute, light paranormal romance book. Helps to illustrate the point that when women speak their mind, they do become more attractive and sexy; the sexiest part of a woman's body is her

mind. 4 pumpkins (partially because I stayed up and read it all in one night) 

Black Wind: Sean & Bronwyn by Charlotte Boyett-Compo – The book itself is not written FOR young adults, but the story is a paranormal romance about a girl and her High School sweetheart. Had a few twists, and some

unexpected tragedy. 3 ½ pumpkins. 

Black Wind: Viraiden & Bronwyn by Charlotte Boyett-Compo – Warning: if you want to read this book, read **Back Wind: Sean & Bronwyn** first...the book doesn't warn you about that requirement, but if you don't, characters will be introduced as if you're already familiar with them, and you'll get royally pissed off. I really liked it, even more than the first book. Bronwyn is older here, and she finds mystery and romance at her new

job, with even more twists. 4 ½ pumpkins. 

Dead Witch Walking by Kim Harrison – The idea for this book is great, but the writing style is terrible for me. I couldn't make it very far at all. A waste. Zero pumpkins.

Smashing a Perfectly Good Guitar

The Greatest Albums You Never Bought

It's 1976, and disco is slowly decimating album-oriented radio and the record business. It will be the 1980's, after near collapse caused by betting too heavily on Punk, that the music business will stabilize and begin to grow again, pushed onward by a new force: MTV. But for now, many of the kings and lesser royalty of rock and roll have hung it up. The Beatles are gone, country music is big again, and Kiss hasn't quite hit the big time.

Enter Grand Funk Railroad. In some ways, you can compare them to Coldplay, but only in that the critics hate them but their fans love them. Musically they are worlds apart. Gold record after gold record kept the train rolling, as Mark, Don, and Mel ignored the media and instead toured the world, the first band to play Shea Stadium since the Beatles (with opening act Humble Pie, featuring a young Peter Frampton I believe).

But their day has passed. Now a foursome, with keyboardist Craig Frost (later to join Bob Seger's Silver Bullet Band), most assumed Born to Die would be their final album. Its two singles, "Sally" and "Take Me", were only minor hits. Bickering among the band members was a problem, and years on the road had worn everybody down.



In 1976, GFR left Capitol Records and released their TRUE final album, on the MCA label. Produced by Frank Zappa, Good Singin' Good Playin' sold less than 80,000 copies. But to many fans of the band, it remains their finest work. Partially because of the influence of Zappa, and partially because the band realized they had little to lose (and were likely to see their swan song largely ignored), the music was generally recorded live. GFR shows the depth of their harmonies, the kind of sound only those who saw them live had been able to enjoy previously. The sole single to chart, "Can You Do It", begins and ends with studio noise; a sign of what Zappa wanted to do, capturing the band in its true unpolished element. My personal favorites remain "Just Couldn't Wait" and "Pass it Around." The re-mastered CD, released in 1999, includes a bonus track – "Rubberneck" – which feels more Zappaesque than any other track. The songs were generally negative or depressing in lyric, but the music is tight, the singing is crisp, and the band is having one last blast in the studio before going their separate ways. I'm a huge fan of many of their albums – in particular "Survivor" and "Caught in the Act" – but this one holds a special and necessary place in my

collection.

If you see the CD issue, or the LP, do yourself a favor and pick it up. You may not recognize any song titles (unlike on smash albums like "E Pluribus Funk" or "We're An American Band") but I think you'll be far from disappointed.

Meet Me In Montauk

The Eternal Sunshine Letter Column

Andy York: Question - how have your siblings reacted to your writing about them? Just curious, no need to answer if it is a touchy subject.

[[As far as I know they love it. I've only heard from two directly regarding my writing (although they often pass along the sentiments of the other siblings), but in general the family has always been supportive. Allison, the "stay" of "Peanuts for Breakfast" in last issue, wrote immediately after it came out to tell me how much she laughed reading it.]]

Dane Maslen: So amongst his other crimes against humanity Richard Walkerdine was responsible for encouraging John Colledge, was he? Goodness knows how he can sleep at night with that on his conscience.

[[Walkerdine has no conscience. He feels nothing. When you look into his yes, there is just blackness. No emotion, no human compassion, no moral compass.]]

How come almost nobody writes me anymore? Must be my sparkling personality.

Game Openings

Diplomacy (Black Press): Signed up: Melinda Holley, need six more to fill.

Treachery Diplomacy (Black Press): Signed up: None, needs seven more to fill. Rules on request.

There will be another game of By Popular Demand when this one ends, although I'll include a Joker this time; that's where you get to choose one category to double your score each turn. I may offer another Gunboat 7x7 soon, so keep your eyes open. Other options are a game of Woolworth, Youngstown or some other map variant. Also thinking about a game of Kremlin. In the Word Game category, I think I will offer a game of Facts in Five next issue. Oh, and if somebody wants to guest-GM a game of anything, just say the word. If you have requests please let me know.

PS - Anybody interested in a game of "Sea of Despair?"

Eternal Sunshine Game Section

Diplomacy "Wouldn't It Be Nice?" 2008A, Spring 1903



Austria (Kevin Wilson): A Budapest Hold, A Bulgaria Hold, F Greece - Aegean Sea, A Serbia Supports A Bulgaria, F Trieste - Adriatic Sea, A Vienna Hold.

England (J r mie LeFran ois): F Belgium Supports A Holland, F Denmark - Baltic Sea, F Edinburgh - Norwegian Sea, F North Sea Convoys A Yorkshire - Denmark, A Yorkshire - Denmark.

France (Alexander Levinson): F Brest - Mid-Atlantic Ocean, A Holland Hold, A Marseilles Supports F Spain(sc) (*Cut*), A Paris - Gascony, A Picardy - Burgundy (*Bounce*), F Spain(sc) Supports A Marseilles (*Cut*).

Germany (Graham Wilson): A Kiel - Holland (*Fails*), A Ruhr Supports A Kiel - Holland.

Italy (Don Williams): F Gulf of Lyon - Spain(sc) (*Fails*), F Mid-Atlantic Ocean - English Channel, A Munich - Burgundy (*Bounce*), A Piedmont - Marseilles (*Fails*), F Tyrrhenian Sea - Western Mediterranean.

Russia (Melinda Holley): A Moscow - Warsaw, F Norway Hold, A Rumania Supports A Bulgaria, F Sevastopol - Armenia, F St Petersburg(sc) - Gulf of Bothnia, A Ukraine Supports A Rumania, A Warsaw - Silesia.

Turkey (Brad Wilson): F Black Sea - Bulgaria(ec) (*Fails*), A Constantinople Supports F Black Sea - Bulgaria(ec), A Smyrna Supports A Constantinople.

Summer and Fall 1903 Deadline is September 29th 2008 at 7:00am

PRESS

Somewhere West of the Hobby...The Medicine Show - "WOULDN'T IT BE NICE TO NEVER BE SICK AGAIN?"

the voice reverberated, seemingly magnified by the sudden silencing of the calliope. It reverberated over and into the gathering crowd of townspeople, cowpokes and the girls and patrons from the Heart of Darkness Saloon. Even the guests of the Austrian Arms Hotel, across from the saloon, had emptied into the street. Simon, the hunchback, was rolling a large red, blue, white and yellow drum; larger than he was tall, from the rear of the wagon to the spot where the Professor stood, glorious in his suit and tall stove-pipe hat. He chimed in enthusiastically;

"To never be thick again!" With that he toppled the drum sideways between the crowd and the wagon, where it twirled and thumped in it's whirling until it slowly settled into the dust of the page with a whumpa, thumpa, whumpa, thud. Immediately the Professor jumped up onto the impromptu stage and raised his cane theatrically in the air, his cape billowed out behind him and the sun gleamed from the head of the cane, and from the wax in his long mustaches.

On the second floor balcony of the Hotel was a well-dressed couple looking down upon the fray. The man was attired in a vest and evening coat, a bowler hat in his hand. The comely young woman at his side was adorned in a splendiferous red satin gown, beribboned hair, and brightly rouged cheeks. She brushed casually, in a jaded fashion, at the air with the decorative fan in her hand; her aura of sophistication and culture only belied by the manner in which she smacked her chewing gum loudly and vociferously. She looked sideways at the gent, "Ya' sure dis is da place Webby?"

"TO SHIRK THE FRAILTY OF AGE, TO CHEAT THE WEIGHT OF TIME AND DEFY THE INDEFATIGUEABLE PULL OF GRAVITY!!" thundered the Professor.

"To thirk the frailty of age, to choose to wathe the time, and defy the inde...the inde, the tireleth pull of gravity!" echoed the hunchback, with both of his short arms raised into the air. The Professor gave him a cross glare with menacingly lowered eyebrows. "Thorry, mathter," answered the hunchback sheepishly.

"I AM PROFESSOR ALEXANDER," with a broad wave of his cane he indicated the red velvet banner which hung from the side of the wagon, emblazoned with his name in large gold lettering upon it, "AND I AM A MAN OF SCIENCE!" He raised the cane even higher, and the crowd's gaze followed it up so that they took in the whirling anemometer atop the wagon. His half cape billowed out from his body.

Ooohs, and aahs passed through the crowd of onlookers. They shuffled about to get a better view, craning heads to see the wagon and the tall, elegantly clad speaker.

The well-dressed man on the balcony of the Austrian Arms took it all in, and a slow smile crossed his lips, he turned his head to the woman and nodded, answering in his deep voiced drawl. "Ah say, this is gonna cause more confusion than a mouse in a burlesque show. Assuredly, Madam, we are in the right place."

"A man of science is just whut we need," said a voice in the crowd in a deliberate and stilted manner. S'ym, who had at one time or another, met or served a drink to every denizen of Darkness in his twenty years in the town couldn't place the voice.

"AND I HAVE COME FROM THE EAST." A sudden thrust with the cane at Thumbelina, the elephant clad in silks and tassels and wearing a large red crown upon her head. On cue she raised up onto her back two legs and trumpeted mightily into the desert air;

"AAAAAARRRRRRrrrrrrrrrrroooooooooooooooooarrrrrrrrrhHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!"

She settled back onto all fours with a thud that sent reverberations through the sentences under the townspeople's feet, and her ears beat energetically back and forth buffeting the crowd with gusts of wind. More emphatic ooohs and ahhs. Mrs. Peabody, one of the town's ladies fainted into the arms of her husband.

"Heehawh!!!" brayed Jasper, answering the challenge, from where he was tied up at the rail in front of the saloon. Other horses neighed and pulled at their reins.

Cyril and Marlow were watching from the covered boardwalk of the Chacol Noire First Trust across from the crowd. Marlow leaning on his broom, Cyril sitting on the steps with a long bit of straw between his teeth.

'Hark, spoit,' Marlow spat into the dust of the page; "I figger' Mister Peabody better take his shot at the missus while she's out. That old biddy don't lay down much."

"Yep, yep, yep," replied Cyril, "wound tighter than my pocketwatch, that one."

The door to the bank opened and Jeremie Lefrancois, President and owner of the Chacol Noire, bustled onto the porch. He had a kerchief tucked into the neck of his shirt and crumbs were on his chin. "What is all this fretful commotion? I was having petit fours," said the banker.

"I'da thought you was on ter yer petit fives or sixes by now, yer Voraciousness," answered Marlow.

"Why, that's Professor Alexander's Medicine show," said the banker!

"Cain't slip one over on you. Hark, spoit," spit Cyril, "what with the big sign and the elephant and all." The Banker gave him a sidelong glance, but the old timer looked steadfastly ahead watching the Medicine show unfold.

"...FROM THE FABLED ORIENT. I HAVE CROSSED THE SEA OF PRESS, AND TRAVELED THE VASTE WASTES OF THE TABULA RASA. I HAVE SEEN WONDERS AND LEARNED MUCH!"

One of the Wilsons nudged Deadeye in the ribs, "He brags more'n you do." Deadeye didn't answer, he just shoved the speaker harshly, bumping him into another two people watching the show.

"I just wander why he needs two elephants," pondered Wandering Eye Wilson. Deadeye turned to look at him, but just shook his head without saying anything.

"What could a man of science bring our poor, little town?" said the slow, stilted voice in the crowd. S'ym turned his head, his blue furred ears springing up to full attention, trying to place where the voice was coming from in the crowd.

"YOU MAY BE ASKING YOURSELVES, WHAT COULD A MAN OF SCIENCE BRING YOU?"

"Woah," whispered Elana, one of the dance hall girls from the Heart of Darkness, lowly, "it's like he can read our minds!"

"You'd have to have a mind first, girl," retorted Ashley, another of the silk and chiffon clad damsels.

"YOU MADE AN ASS OF YERSELF IN A SÉANCE?" asked Tin Ear Wilson, with his ear horn up against his head. The Professor glanced toward him, momentarily paused, then pressed on.

"I BRING KNOWLEDGE, I BRING THE CURE," he held up a bottle of bright blue liquid that almost seemed to glow in the sunlight, "I BRING LIGHT TO DARKNESS!"

"He is certainly a man of huge genius," said the slow stilted voice in the crowd. S'ym was moving through to where he had last heard the voice, but now it seemed to have moved to elsewhere in the crowd.

"HE HAS A HUGE PENIS?" yelled Tin Ear.

"Really?" said Elana, "AND he can read minds. He would know exactly what a girl wanted."

"It would depend on which 'mind' he was using at the time," said Gabby.

"Gentle ladies, and you noble knights of the sage I bring you elixirs of vitality," said the Professor. He had dropped his voice, had leaned in toward the crowd, drawing them in toward him. It was then that he caught the eyes of the banker standing on the boardwalk of the Chacol Noire First Trust, and held his gaze for a brief second and gave him an almost imperceptible nod. Jeremie Lefrancois suddenly straightened and swallowed nervously. He brushed at his shirt front, his nervous fingers came across the kerchief still tucked into his shirt collar and he pulled it out, rapidly brushed his fingers over it and held it in his hands.

"Is it mid-game already?" the Banker said, not realizing it was out loud.

"NOSTRUMS OF PHENOMENAL POTENCY AND PROPRIETY," continued the Professor. "I bring you PROFESSOR ALEXANDER'S GOOD TIME HALLELUJAH VITALITY ELIXIR! This is NOT a nostrum of nominal effect, this is no simple extraordinary elixir...it is more than that. IT IS SUPER-EXTRAORDINARY!"

"Oh, my. That is much better than extra ordinary," said a voice in the crowd, and S'ym just caught the top of the head over the crowd. A large fellow. Moving again, odd in a crowd that stood still, craning and standing tippy-toe to get a better look.

"That **IS** much better than ordinary," said Elana. There were mumbles of agreement in the crowd around her.

"IT HAS RESULTS THAT VERGE ON THE UNBELIEVEABLE," the Professor's voice lowered to an almost conspiratorial tone and volume as he leaned into the crowd, "some would say almost mystic." Now, again louder, "But it is NOT! It is a physic culminated from the greatest advances of science known to man!"

"Oh, my. That is much better than extra ordinary." Again the slow, stilted voice and now S'ym had him, a large fellow in blue dungarees, and S'ym had never seen him in town before.

The Professor gave a cross look to that part of the crowd and rapped his cane on the drum stage. S'ym watched as the fellow flipped a piece of paper over. "Errr, what can such a wonderous cure do for us?"

"YOU MIGHT BE ASKING YOURSELVES WHAT SUCH A WONDEROUS CURE CAN DO FOR YOU?"

"He is amazing," said Elana!

"WHAT DID HE SAY?" shouted Tin Ear Wilson.

"My good man," said the Professor, looking down into the crowd at Tin Ear, "are you as keen as you look?."

"YOU WANT TO LOOK AT MY PENIS?"

"That is entirely unnecessary for this procedure," assured the Professor, "I merely intend to demonstrate the vitalic properties of my elixir."

"YOU WANT TO STRADDLE WHO PROPERLY WHEN YOU DICKS HER?"

"Please, please...just step forward."

"STOP BEING FORWARD, YOU'RE THE ONE BEING FORWARD." But the crowd jostled Tin Ear to the front so that he was standing next to the foot of the Professor's stage. The Professor in a dramatic motion swept Tin Ear's crumpled hat from his head, "AHA! Ladies and Gentlemen I present to you a bald pate."

"I'M GONNA GET BALLED ON A DATE. YOU AIN'T EVEN BOUGHT ME DINNER!"

The Professor deftly uncorked the bottle of elixir in his hand and poured several drops of practically glowing azure liquid onto Tin Ear's head and massaged it in.

"EVEN NOW, the elixir works into the scalp and penetrates the tissues of the skin," explained the Professor, "it is made from RARE products..."

"THAT FEELS MIGHTY GOOD! DO YOU WANNA MOVE A LITTLE SOUTH?"

"...that I can refine."

"KIN HEAR FINE?"

"HE CAN HEAR FINE," shouted the Professor, throwing his hands victoriously in the air, "YOU HEARD IT YOURSELVES GENTLE PEOPLE, ANOTHER MIRACLE CURE!" He pushed Tin Ear away rapidly and beckoned to one of the dance hall girls, "Young lady, step forward!"

"Me?" asked Gabby.

"Yes, you're a fine specimen of womanhood, a willow among these dusty oaks" said the Professor, practically leering.

"Shucks, you sure talk pretty," answered Gabby shyly.

"But some women would desire to be, somewhat...better endowed, shall we say."

"Like Miss Kitty's rack? That would be a fine thing," answered Gabby brightly.

"We just take this elixir," said the Professor, again popping the cork, "and massage it onto your breasts."

"Not unless you pay me a dollar first," retorted Gabby, "Miss Kitty always says lookin's free, but you gotta pay to play." Simon, the hunchback, standing at the base of the stage, vigorously searched his pockets.

"I'll just pour a few drops on," said the Professor, "and you rub it in yourself." He dripped four of the luminous blue liquid drops onto the alabaster swells of her breasts and watched as she rubbed the liquid over the entirety of her breasts.

"Don't forget to do the underthide and the thuggly partth," said Simon helpfully. The Professor pushed at the hunchback with the toe of his boot, pushing him away from the stage.

"How does that feel?" asked the Professor.

"It's all cool and tingly," answered Gabby, as the alcohol evaporated off her skin.

"THAT is the elixir taking EFFECT," said the Professor dramatically, "here, take a whiff of the elixir, breath it deep in." He held the bottle under her nose and she inhaled of the intoxicating fumes, her eyes seemed to glaze over and the Professor turned her deftly toward the audience just as she took a deep breath.

"Oh, my," said Elana, "they're growing right in front of us!"

"Better be careful not to sit in it," said Ashley.

Gabby, woozy from the fumes, had to be steadied by Patrice and Synda.

"IT ALSO HEALS OPEN WOUNDS, STOPS JOINTS FROM ACHING AND IMPROVES YOUR NIGHT VISION," shouted the Professor.

S'ym watched as the stranger in dungarees looked at yet another paper card and then shouted into the air, "I MUST HAVE THREE BOTTLES FOR MYSELF!"

"I am sorry," intoned the Professor solemnly from the stage, "because the supply is strictly limited we must ration one to a customer."

"I'll take one," said Deadeye, waving a hand in the air.

"Whut do ya want to grow boobies fer?" asked Cookie, who had clicked and rattled up next to the other Wilson boys.

"It's fer my aching joints, ya idjit," retorted Deadeye, "you should get one yerself. Yer knee is clicking sumpin' awful." Cookie shut his mouth, oddly with no ready retort to Deadeye.

"I'll take a bottle," said one of the townspeople. "I'll have one," said another.

"Pass a bottle back to me," said Mr. Peabody, with one glance to his still swooning wife.

"My able assistant, Simon," said the Professor from the stage, pointing at the hunchback with his cane, "will handle the transactions." With that and a flourish of his half cape he alighted from the drum stage and headed toward the back of the wagon.

Soon a long line of townspeople were trading their money for the bottles. The hunchback placing the luminous blue bottles into their eager hands and thrusting bills and coins into a large bag at the base of the stage.

"Well, my dear," said the man on the balcony, "I do believe the show is, as they say, over. Ah say, it's done." He proffered her his arm, she draped one satin clad arm over his and accompanied him back inside the room.

The Banker, Jeremie Lefrancois, stepped down off the boardwalk of the Chacol Noire and made his way into the crowd, moving forward toward the large wagon.

"Wull that was quite a show. Hark, spoit," Marlow commented to Cyril, spitting into the dust of the page. "Didja' see that nod the Professor gave his Crapulence there?"

"Yep, yep, yep,..almost imperceptible."

Somewhere West of the Hobby... A Hole is where nuthin' is supposed to be...

"Wouldn't it be nice to do that again," asked Miss Kitty? She sat astride the gunslinger, her pendulous breasts hung above his head reminding him of boulders poised over a treacherous pass in the Badlands.

"Again?" said the Duke. He lifted the covers and looked underneath. "I might have to have to eat something first."

"Shucks, it's okay Ducky, you did just fine. It's not like I expected you to be like the German..."

"Like the German?"

"You know, famed Teutonic punctuality. Like a clock...straight up twice a day," smiled Miss Kitty.

"Well, if you want to give me another twelve hours, I'm game," replied the Duke.

"It's okay hun, I just wanted to give you a little something to unwrap for your birthday," said Miss Kitty, looking at the pile of chiffon and satin clothing heaped in disarray at the end of the bed and spilling onto the floor. "Did you make a wish? You know how to blow out a candle, don't ya. You just put your lips together and whistle."

She stood up, her spectacular body naked, and effervescent shimmering in a light sheen of sweat picked out by the soft sunlight of the setting sun filtering through the thin lace curtains.

"It's almost sunset, I have to get to work anyway," said Miss Kitty.

The Duke grabbed his pants and his gun and pulled them on. "Can I at least buy you a drink?"

"Sure hon, you head on down. It takes me a few moments to get put back together," she held up the contraption of a corset and winked at him. He understood; undoing the thing had just about cost him an eye.

As he stepped out the door of Miss Kitty's room, he heard a second furtive footstep on the landing. Looking to his right he saw Mosey, the old prospector, coming out of the room next to him, his shirt unbuttoned and his boots in his hand. His sock clad feet placed quietly on the floor.

"Whut did I miss," asked the grizzled prospector, squinting at the Duke.

"Oh, about eight episodes, I'd guess," replied the gunslinger, "was it worth it?"

"Hell, yeah," replied the prospector in a whisper, "I got me laid by one of them China girls..."

"Bang cock!" said a shrill female voice from the darkness of the room that Mosey was exiting.

"Hell, thought she was still sleepin', she is INsatiable," he quickly shut the door.

"You still owe me a dollar, Round eye!" could be heard muffled by the shut door.

"She counts good too," grimaced Mosey.

"You got enough of that coin left to stand a beer?" The prospector shook his head, sadly, no. "It's alright, I'll buy you one." The two headed down the stairs to the Saloon part of the Saloon, where the crowd had started to filter back in from the street, and the music had started back up, and the intermittent cacophony of sounds and conversations filled the air.

Miss Kitty came to the door of her room and watched the two descend the stairs, she heard the creak as the door next over squeaked open and she looked and saw Mai Ling standing there.

"Did you do okay, Helen," asked Miss Kitty?

"Yeah," answered 'Mai Ling', as she reached up and pulled the tape off her face that pulled back the sides of her eyes, "I just don't understand why I always have to be the one that plays the 'slantly eyed whore'." She rubbed her fingers on her face where the tape had been.

"You the only one with theatre experience," answered Miss Kitty.

"Yeah, but I only had one line in that play," retorted Helen.

"That's okay, you only have one line now."

"Bang cock!" said Helen and they both laughed. They reentered their respective rooms to get dressed and head on down to the saloon for the night.

Downstairs, the place started to come alive again. Bruno pecked out a lively melody on the barely tuned piano, and S'ym sauntered behind the bar and picked up his barmop. He was back in uniform. Deadeye and the other Wilsons stood about the door, and S'ym saw the banker nervously enter the Saloon, squint into the darkness, and head for the bar.

"I haven't seen you in here before," said S'ym to the fastidious, slightly paunchy banker, "what would you like?"

"Well, I've never had a strawberry donut, but I figured it would taste very...very, American," said the banker. He still seemed ill at ease and looked nervously about.

S'ym frowned, "we don't have donuts here."

"Well, then," Jeremie, the banker, rubbed his fingers together, and he thought about his choices, "I will take a stabberou."

"What's a stabberoo?" asked S'ym, his lip curled and one eyebrow arched. He hated fancy drinks.

"No, it's with a "u", not a double "oo"," explained Jeremie, "it's my favorite snack. It's like a smore, but sort of like an éclair too. It's the absolute best of both worlds. Practically dreamy."

"Yeah, we don't have that either."

"I don't understand," said the banker slowly, puzzled, "Miss Kitty said you had tarts."

"Oh, we've got tarts."

"But you don't have donuts?"

"No donuts."

"I don't understand. I loaned Miss Kitty money from my bank for donut holes...she had this whole business plan to increase her market by offering cream filled donut holes," the banker was now obviously flustered.

"Did she actually use the word 'donut'," asked S'ym? He leaned forward and watched the banker closely.

"Well...now that you ask it that way," the banker paused, his faced scrunched as he remembered the conversation, "she said 'cream filled holes'...but what else could she have possibly meant?"

S'ym, broad-faced, looked around the Saloon where the girls were keeping the cowpokes and the townsmen company. They fawned and flirted, and a couple of them were ascending the stairs, passing the gunslinger and the prospector on their way down.

"Not sure," dead-panned the bartender.

Elana, one of the dance hall girls, had come up during this conversation, and she interjected, "maybe she was talking about some other sort of hole?"

"You're not as dumb as you look," said S'ym.

"But...if you filled it...it wouldn't be a hole," continued the dance hall girl.

"Okay, maybe you are," concluded S'ym.

The banker was confused, "Miss Kitty wouldn't lie?!!"

"Are you new," asked Elana?

The Professor entered the Saloon, and stopping, inhaled deeply. "AH, SIMON, DO YOU SMELL THAT?"

"Vomit and pith?" asked the hunchback from his side.

"NO, COMMERCE! THE SMELL OF MONEY EARNED BY HARD SWEAT, HAULED FROM THE DEPTHS OF THE EARTH ITSELF. IN THE MINES OR THE TILLED FIELD, CULLED BY WILL ALONE AND SPENT...SPENT. CAN YOU HEAR IT? THE MUSIC OF THE TILL?"

"Inthide voice mathter," shooshed the hunchback, "inthide voice."

The Professor headed toward the back of the room, trailed closely by Simon, his diminutive hunchback assistant. But the two were suddenly separated as Deadeye, noticing Simon, stepped in front of him.

"Lookit that, it's a dwarf!" said the cowpoke loudly. He was slightly intoxicated and as always, belligerent.

"I thir, am a little perthon," said Simon indignantly!

"You're cute as a tick," said Deadeye and hoisted the hunchback up into the air, holding him above his head, "I bet you don't weigh more than a can of beans."

"PUT ME DOWN!" yelled the hunchback.

"Okay, you're short and you talk funny," replied the cowpoke.

"I thpeak funny? You illiterate hick!" Simon squirmed, and his feet trotted ineffectively in the air.

"You might want to put those fellas down before they piss on your hat," Wandering Eye Wilson said to Deadeye.

Deadeye stopped shaking the dwarf and looked sternly at Wandering Eye.

"It is your favorite hat," reminded Wandering Eye.

"It's mah only hat," retorted Deadeye.

"That's sort of my point," nodded Wandering Eye.

"I had thix bottleth of beer for lunch," threatened the hunchback, "I'm good to go."

"Alright, alright," surrendered Deadeye and lowered Simon to the floor, where he hurriedly shuffled off to catch up with the Professor. He shot an ugly glower over his shoulder at the cowpoke as he thtormed off.

The Duke had by now got to the bar, with Mosey the Prospector, at his side. He felt there were still some things that the old man could tell him, and maybe a beer or two would pry it out of him.

"S'ym, I'll take a sassparilla, and Mosey here will have a brew," said the Duke.

The bartender brought the drinks and set them in front of the Duke, "hey, you been around. See that guy?" he asked the Duke. He jerked his chin to indicate the large fellow, dressed in dungarees, that S'ym had watched in the crowd outside. "I've been here for nigh on twenty years and I can't place him. Never noticed him until the Medicine show got here."

The Duke's eyes narrowed as he gazed down the bar at the big lug of a man. Large, and looks not helped out so much by the broken nose and the cauliflower ears, and the glimmer of recognition seemed to brighten at some hind part of his brain.

"Yeah, back in the Hobby," answered the Duke, "I saw this guy, Chowder...Chowder Yarmouth, went three rounds with the Wichita Woemonger, back in the day."

The rest of the story was interrupted. The Singing Cowboy, Bolt Cimmaron, climbed up on the stage next to Bruno at the piano. His pristine white clothes and hat, so white they shimmered even in the gathering darkness of the interior of the bar, catching and reflecting the last of the setting sun through the windows of the front. He had laid aside his guitar and he hoisted a banjo on his hip.

"Ladies, gents...small person there," said the Singing Cowboy with polite interruption, and a nod to the back of the room. Bruno quit playing as the Singing Cowboy continued, "I got a little song here, I'd like to play for you, called the Devil Went Down to Darkness." His fingers picked over the banjo strings and a quick, lively tune jumped in the air, and he began to sing:

Ol' Scratch dropped into Darkness an' he was looking for some dots to steal
He was in a mood of foulest brood and he was looking to grease the deal
And he came upon a game of chance in that hell-hole of a town
And Scratch said "Boys, just drop those toys and I'll tell you what's going down."

"I'll bet you didn't know it but I'm a poker player too,
And if you care to take a dare, I'll make a bet with you
Now y'all play pretty good poker, boys, but give Ol' Scratch your ear,"
As he put one hoof on the table and another on the chair.

"See I'm a sportin' man myself and this game I love to play
But on the shelf I'll put myself if you'll start without delay."
"Now you ain't never met me, but I'll tell ya' cause it's true,
I've played a game against some names much better at it than you."

Players sharpen up your lies, hone your treachery
Ol' Scratch is here to teach you fear, and the game of Diplomacy
If you win you'll get a ribbon and a wooden plaque
But if you lose, Ol' Scratch your soul is his to sack.

"You're playing stud and hold 'em, boy, I see you've won a roll,
Cards ain't shit when it comes to wit, and won't corrupt your soul.
Here's a game that will test your brain, your silver tongue and wit
Impelled by your driving will and your unwillingness to quit."

"So put away those cards of chance, your chips and coin of gold.
We'll start a game to put yours to shame; dare you be so bold.
Just take these pasteboard maps, my friends, and these colored blocks of wood
Place them on those dots, just so, where they'll do most good."

"Each board has seven takers and there's boards enough for all.
And for the con I'm puttin' on, this crowd is mighty small.
Now here's the stakes - those dots you'll take - the meaning of it all.
When the end is here, and death draws near and the writings on the wall."

Travelers and locals come play this game obscene,
And starting from just three small dots stab right up eighteen.
If you want that eighteenth dot to reach your final goal,
You'll trade your soul for a heart that's made of coal.

When the game is over, when all is said and done
Where seven souls had started, at the end there's only one.
So if you'll sit down in that chair, right there, and let me tell you what
I'll show you the glory and the fame deriving from the dot.

My job's concerns and worries, now you just go have fun.
I'll keep the score, I'll mind the door, I'll tell you all who's won.
I'll assign the games, I'll track the names, I'll tally up the scores,
I'll get you food and drink, I'll judge, they're just the tourney chores.

Now as I said, this crowds quite small and I spy an empty chair.
It'd be a shame, make the game so lame, were it to continue bare.
I'll just sit, here a bit, to keep the table warm.
And push some blocks in a round or two, though it is not the norm.

O! Scratch plucked from his case smoking embers of darkened wood
that glowed from inner heat, and simmered where they stood.
"These are blocks of my very own, whittled from my soul,
Soaked with oil of envy and lit from my heart of coal."

"I bet you didn't know it, did I tell you I'd ranked eighth?
I know the records twelfth", he says, "but you can't take that on faith."
He pushed his blocks across the board and they made an evil hiss
"I know you've made good moves, but you weren't expecting this."

A game was done, then another won - all settled with dispatch.
When all was said and done the tally flattered Scratch.
"The tourney's done, the games are won. There's the matter of the fee
It seems you all are losers, and your souls belong to me!"

"The math is true and simple", he said it with a grin,
"I told you once, I'm a son of a bitch, and the best that's ever been."
"I'll don the wreath, and keep the fame, adding laurels to my name
And the rest of you can just go hang your heads in failing shame."

So the con had come to pass, and we're here to ponder verse.
All in all, how the chips did fall, how it could have ended worse.
So too, the lesson learned, true and simple as the math,
You lay down in the mud with dogs, you're gonna need a bath.

By Popular Demand

Credit goes to Ryk Downes, I believe, for inventing this game (although his original version had the GM supply the starting letter as well). The goal is to pick something that fits the category and will be the "most popular" answer. You score points based on the number of entries that match yours. For example, if the category is "Cats" and the responses were 7 for Persian, 3 for Calico and 1 for Siamese, everyone who said Persian would get 7 points, Calico 3 and the lone Siamese would score 1 point. The cumulative total over 10 rounds will determine the overall winner. Anyone may enter at any point, starting with an equivalent point total of the lowest cumulative score from the previous round. If a person misses a round, they'll receive the minimum score from the round added to their cumulative total. And, if you want to submit some commentary with your answers, feel free to. The game will consist of 10 rounds. A prize will be awarded to the winner.

Round 7 Categories

1. Something you find in Texas.
2. A military rank other than General.
3. A size of battery.
4. An herb.
5. A dangerous occupation.

Some major changes in the rankings this turn! The popularity of battery size AAA pushes Berend and Jamie above Tom Swider in the totals. With three rounds to go, there are literally 8 or 9 players who could make up enough ground to battle for first place. I was surprised at the wide range of answers we got for occupation. Allison Kent and Bill Brown get the high score for the round of 29. The maximum round score was 33.

Selected Comments By Category:

Texas – John Colledge "I am tempted to say Yellow Roses, but I might be showing my age." Brendan Whyte "You're more likely to find Mexicans than real Texans now... except maybe as exhibits in the theme parks and museums." Tom Swider "You also find a lot of Tejanos and Shiner Bock beer in Texas. I'm sure the cultist count is pretty high there, too." Andy York "Alamo is probably what'll come to everyone's mind, maybe Dallas or oil would be second." Dane Maslen "Yes, I know my answer for 1 is silly. It was, however, the first thing that leapt to mind. For some reason it made me giggle, so I thought I'd stick with it."

<u>Player</u>	<u>Texas</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Battery</u>	<u>Herb</u>	<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Turn</u>	<u>Total</u>
Berend Renken	Guns	Colonel	AA	Basil	Fireman	24	221
Jamie McQuinn	Doug Kent	Colonel	AA	Oregano	Miner	28	221
Tom Swider	Oil	Seargant	AAA	Basil	Police Officer	15	218
Bill Brown	Oil	Captain	AA	Oregano	Lion Tamer	29	217
Brad Martin	Oil	Captain	AA	Parsley	Soldier	27	212
Dane Maslen	Texans	Captain	AA	Parsley	Miner	27	208
Kevin Wilson	Texans	Admiral	AA	Oregano	Construction Worker	25	207
Brendan Whyte	Texans	Private	AA	Rosemary	Stuntman	22	202
David Burgess	Cowboy	Private	AA	Parsley	Police Officer	25	201
Melinda Holley	Cattle	Colonel	9 Volt	Sage	Police Officer	14	178
David Partridge	Cattle	Captain	AA	Oregano	Miner	29	176
Brad Wilson	Doug Kent	Admiral	AA	Tarragon	Fisherman	19	174
Allison Kent	Cowboy	Colonel	AA	Oregano	Window Washer	29	173
W. Andrew York	The Alamo	Captain	AA	Rosemary	Police Officer	26	171
John Colledge	Oil	Major	AAA	Oregano	Fireman	18	159
Gina .Teh	NMR	NMR	NMR	NMR	NMR	13	154
Jack McHugh	Cowboy	Colonel	AAA	Rosemary	Cab Driver	17	153
Jeremie Lefrancois	Dallas	Colonel	AAA	Marajuana	Fireworks Person	13	146
Martin Burgdorf	Rodeo	Major	AA	St. John's Wort	Soldier	23	143
Joakim Spangberg	NMR	NMR	NMR	NMR	NMR	13	108

Rank - Kevin Wilson "I think the General hint might keep a lot of people in army and air force ranks so responses could be major, colonel, captain etc. But if you branch (pun intended) a bit and think of the other services, then you get Admiral and Commander etc. Since I like the Honor Harrington books by David Weber I'm going navy and saying Admiral. "

Battery – Brendan Whyte "3-gun? 21-gun? Oh, you mean electric cells (a battery is a group of electric cells, like a car battery is. The small ones for torches, radios etc are dry cells, because they are single-cell and have no liquid." Dane Maslen "I hope that you guys use the same nomenclature for batteries that we do. AAA, AA, C, D etc are the standard names over here, but there were alternatice names in the past each and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_battery_sizes reveals the plethora of names for each size."

Herb – John Colledge "Can't make a decent Italian dish without oregano." Brendan Whyte "Rosemary is wonderful in a pear-vodka martini, or fried with potatoes. " *[[I prefer her baby...which I am very sad to say I understand is being remade. Another classic ruined.]]* Andy York "Sage, Rosemary or Thyme (or Marijuana)." Kevin Wilson "I'm not much of a cook so I don't really know if salt and pepper qualify so I'll try something else. I'll go with oregano. "

Occupation – Brendan Whyte "Though in this country, 'Prime Minister' is just as bad!" Berend Renken "My wife tells me that *garbage collectors* are actually the most likely to die while exercising their profession, but this information is probably as new to the other players as it is to me." Andy York "Soldier might be a better choice, given #2's listing." Dane Maslen "At one time I would have felt a lot happier about my answer to the fifth category, but now that it's mainly Russian and Chinese miners getting buried, drowned and blown up in accidents, I'm far from convinced that this answer will spring to other people's minds." Kevin Wilson "I'm tempted to go with soldier since we already have a military theme above. I also thought about things like football player or, given the reality shows on TV, lumberjacks or ice truck drivers. Others are construction workers, chemical plant operators or cab drivers. Too many to choose so I'll just grab one and go with construction workers."

Round 8 Categories – Deadline is September 29th 2008 at 7:00am

1. A stringed instrument.
2. A difficult school subject.
3. A poor nation.
4. One of the deadly sins.
5. A word associated with weather.

**Deadline For The Next Issue of Eternal Sunshine:
September 29th, 2008 at 7:00am – See You Then!**