

# ***Eternal Sunshine #6***

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By Douglas Kent, 11111 Woodmeadow Pkwy #2327, Dallas, TX 75228

Email: [doug\\_of\\_whiningkentpigs.com](mailto:doug_of_whiningkentpigs.com) or [diplomacyworld\\_of\\_yahoo.com](mailto:diplomacyworld_of_yahoo.com)

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**Quote Of The Month** – “We're David and Ruth Laskin. Which one do you want to be? I'd like to be Ruth, but I can be flexible.” (Clementine in “Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind”)

I have returned for yet another issue of **Eternal Sunshine**, the official subzine of the people like me who wear big paper grocery sacks on their heads when they go to watch Texas Ranger games. I don't have too much to say here, as I've already filled up enough pages with the usual foolishness that follows. But before we continue, please consider signing up for one of my game openings. I'd really like to get a Diplomacy or variant game filled in the next few months. Besides, if we start a game soon, that will leave me less space to write and cause you serious internal bleeding. Anyway, let's stop dipping our foot in the water and dive right in headfirst – without checking to see how deep it is, and on a full stomach!

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Sometimes I find it hard to understand why I am so committed to rooting for the Texas Rangers. They are a terrible, terrible, terrible baseball team. Their starting pitching is atrocious – as I write this, the combined ERA's of their starters is approaching 7.00, a level not seen since the statistic began being kept back in the 1950's. They make horrendous mistakes in the field – and not just recorded errors either. You have to watch or listen to a game to get a better picture...balls thrown to the wrong base, perfect double-play balls turned into one out when transfers can't be made from glove to bare hand, poor throws on stolen base attempts, misplayed balls in the outfield which are credited as hits. Their baserunning is nearly as bad – this week in one game two players were picked off base to end innings. Replays on one showed Sammy Sosa distracted, chatting with the second baseman. The Ranger's hitting isn't awful, but far below expectations. Frank Cat is batting below .200, Brad Wilkerson continues to be a strikeout machine (when he isn't hurt), Nelson Cruz got sent back to the minors, even Michael Young has struggled to get his average back above .250. The only saving grace seems to be the bullpen – despite the fact that it seems like they blow every game, in fact they are doing a tremendous job overall, while pitching far too many innings in the process. A number of those bullpen pieces are likely to be sent to other teams as we live up on this abomination of a season and look towards the next one.

Looking back, I realize this desperate need to root for the underdog, despite the hopeless situation, is one I have been afflicted with since childhood. Growing up in Connecticut and New Jersey, I rooted for two baseball teams. The first was the Minnesota Twins. Okay, maybe that doesn't make sense to you geographically, but for whatever reason Harmon Killebrew was my favorite baseball player, and Bert Blyleven was my favorite pitcher. I may not be able to remember why Harmon caught my attention, but I now Blyleven was because of his 1975 Topps card which showed him blowing a bubble. So I rooted for the Twins, even though they were terrible. But that was my long-range team. Close to home, while we had the Yankees doing their usual Yankee thing, my oldest brother Paul and I were rabid Mets fans. Why? Why did we choose to root for such a terrible team when a terrific one was just as close? I don't know. But we suffered, oh how we suffered. It

got so bad that for a while my father banned us from watching the games on television, because we would get so terribly upset, completely red-faced as we screamed at the players. "LOSER Henderson!" was a common refrain heard throughout the house as a crucial dropped fly ball or strikeout would doom the team's chances yet again.

Eventually, years later, they started to play better, and watching the young pitchers like David Cone or Ron Darling or Doc Gooden was a real treat. I'd take the train in to the city and the subway to Shea Stadium whenever I could get the time and money together, alone or with my brother. The attraction was still there, so I know it wasn't a complete sign of mental illness. I didn't lose interest just because the team no longer stunk so badly...the 1986 season was a tremendous thrill for me, even though I missed most of the most memorable game because I took my future wife Mara to see her favorite band (Journey) that evening...but I got us home in time to see the famous Buckner miscue. I almost missed it though...I was going to turn off the television, so sure was I that we had zero chance of coming back and winning. Mara was the one who forced me to watch the rest. So many disappointing losses had taught me that, in the end, the Mets were destined to lose again. But they didn't, and that's something.

I really do have a long-range perspective on baseball, and that's something I developed soon after moving to Dallas in 1994. I've always been fascinated with the statistical side of the game, even though I have a great appreciation for the game itself as played on the field. Anybody who has ever read Robert Coover's great novel "The Universal Baseball Association, Inc., J. Henry Waugh, Prop." (which I just reread last week) will know what I mean...the odd perfection of a scorecard or a box score, and the story it tells, can be a true thing of beauty. Anyway, over the years I have become much more interested in the full team prospects for the future: the minor league system, draft picks, free agency rights, trades and general manager duties. I watch the Baseball Movements lists to see who has been released and who might be a good pickup, who has been designated for assignment, that sort of thing. I can enjoy watching young players called up to the majors even if their initial efforts aren't up to the necessary level. I don't know if my fascination with these concepts was born out of necessity, as year after year the current season became hopeless early on...but I tend to doubt it, as even in the few years when the Rangers were actually winning I still paid just as much attention to the minor leagues and future prospects. Sometimes those areas give me more pleasure than anything else. The idea of finding the diamond in the rough, whether it is the blossoming spare part or the young maturing player, is a very alluring concept.

Unfortunately for me, the Texas Rangers seem to have been one of the worst teams at recognizing talent. Time and time again we trade or simply GIVE away terrific players, and in return see nothing useful. I'm not talking about the old Sammy Sosa trade – that was before my time. And I am not one of these moronic Dallas-area fans who whines about somebody like Alfonso Soriano. When you trade away somebody who is going to become a free agent, that's part of the game. We didn't "lose" him, because he wasn't going to stay here anyway, and of course there is nothing preventing us in those occasions from trying to sign the player in the off-season just like everybody else. No, I'm talking about players like Chris Young, who is burning up the pitching rubber on the west coast (along with Adrian Gonzalez who is killing the ball)...or Doug Davis who we put on waivers and now soaks up innings for the Brewers. Or Travis Hafner, or John Danks (although Danks may lose his rotation spot soon, and Brandon McCarthy has promise, so I reserve judgment on that trade). And our drafting has been horrendous! I know baseball drafts are a difficult thing, but aside from Mark Teixeira we haven't had a successful first-round pick in a while. I do think we made some very intelligent selections this year though, so maybe the team is finally starting to learn.

Blake Beavan, our first pick in this year's baseball draft, made some headlines when he spouted off about the Rangers' pitching woes. I believe his quote was something like "I go to the ballpark and I think, man, put me out there, I can do that. I can give up lots of runs like they do." I'd find his bravado a bit more troubling if he wasn't right. Our "ace" Kevin Millwood is having his worst season ever, and Vicente Padilla (who we just signed to a three-year deal) hits batters more often than the strike zone. Still, I think a year or two of facing professional players instead of high school kids might humble him a bit. And if it doesn't, good – maybe he's all he thinks he is, and even more! Still, this place does strange things to pitcher's heads. Look at Coco Cordero. He was our closer for a year, showing good results. Then he fell apart, and we traded him to the Brewers (in a bad decision in my opinion) is the Carlos Lee deal. Since then he has been the most reliable closer in the Major League, with 22 out of 22 save chances and an ERA below 1.00. Oops, that is, until last night...when on his first return to Arlington he gives up 5 hits and a walk with two outs in the ninth (four times having the batters down to their final strike) and allowing the Rangers to score 4 and win the game 4-3. This ballpark just messes with certain pitcher's heads. For that reason alone I can sometimes excuse some of the poor decisions by the GM...who knows if Chris Young, for example, would have an ERA below 7.00 if he pitched here? Hard to say.

Speaking of baseball and General Managers, I've found myself rotating between a few computer games lately when I get bored, or when I'm trying to relax and want to occupy that scattered part of my mind. When it comes to computer games, I am really an old-school old fart. Remember, I'm a guy who used to love playing games like Taipei and Kingdom. The actual graphics aren't that important to me, and live-action games simply aren't what I am interested in. In the past I loved to play games like Lords of the Realm, games which combine strategy and economics. I was also a fan of the old Sid Meier games, especially Pirates. I was quite pleased about six months ago to find an updated (but very similar) version of Pirates on a shelf at Target. I played it quite a bit for a few months, before I moved on to my NEXT game obsession, one which I will return to soon: Baseball Mogul. I found this at Big Lots for a few dollars (it's the 2003 version). Unlike most baseball games, this one is focused on GM and managerial stuff. You don't play each inning of each game. Instead you set the general lineups, strategy (aggressive base running, etc), and play the season day by day. You set concession prices, develop players in the minor leagues, make trades, arrange new contracts...your goal is to win AND to turn a profit. It can be a lot of fun. I'm sure they have updated rosters on the web somewhere, maybe when I install it on my laptop I will see about starting with a more up-to-date version.

For the moment however, I am stuck on another game: the old Sid Meier classic Railroad Tycoon Deluxe. They've released a new version recently called Railroads, but to promote it they went ahead and re-released the old version for free on the internet. The download even has DOSBox built in to allow you to run the game on XP and Vista without a problem. Now I'm spending WAY too much time playing it, working my way back up to the more difficult levels, building stations and terminals, starting fare wars, developing industries. This version has maps I didn't own on the original version – South America and Africa, so I doubt I will tire of it anytime soon. The only problem I encountered was figuring out how to use the keypad keys on a laptop, when they don't exist. My Dell has a Fn button which was supposed to allow you to do that, but at first it just wouldn't work. But then through trial and error I discovered that if I enter the game and THEN turn Num Lock on and off once, the Fn process works. Watch out world, its choo choo time...at least when I am not fighting pirate battles or investing in my farm system and setting moderate stadium parking fees.

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After talking about it for a while, we decided to go ahead and take Tigger to the vet for a full check-up. She has never been very cooperative when it comes to car trips, but with her condition not getting any better, we really needed to find out exactly what was wrong with her so we could determine whether there was anything reasonable we could do to help her. Since she's about 19 years old, there is a limit to the lengths we can go...but we want her last years to be as comfortable as possible.

The vet I used to go to has relocated out of the area, but I discovered the veterinarian owner of the clinic (the only clinic I have used since I moved to Dallas in 1994) is still the same. So we made an appointment to see him on a Saturday morning. If you remember, my real fear was that Tigger was suffering from Feline Chronic Renal Failure, which I had encountered before in my old cat Ubber. With him, Mara and I had to give him subcutaneous fluids for a number of months, but he still had to be put to sleep soon after.

Dr. Cameron and his staff gave Tigger a very thorough examination, including urine and blood tests and a detailed physical inspection. He paid close attention to her reflexes and other neurological symptoms, since one of the main complaints we have is her sudden epileptic-like head twitches, which I have been guessing are caused by the build-up of toxins in her system associated with the CFRF. While we were there, the vet showed us a very bad tooth Tigger had been dealing with. We scheduled dental surgery for the following Wednesday, and they promised to call on Monday with whatever her test results might show. However, Dr. Cameron was unsure what might be causing the facial tics, but he doubted it was CFRF because of the lack of other symptoms.

When the vet called on Monday, it turned out Tigger's toxin levels were normal, and her kidney readings were good – so no CFRF after all! However, her T-4 readings were very high, which shows she suffers from Feline Hyperthyroidism. This is a somewhat common ailment in older cats, where growths on the thyroid glands result in over-stimulated thyroids. The excess T-4 in the system causes the cat to burn off way more food than it should, so even though the cat is hungry all the time and eats all the time, they lose weight. There are other symptoms too – rapid heart rate (which the vet noticed on Tigger), bouts of vomiting and diarrhea (which Tigger doesn't suffer from yet), and restlessness or howling.

There are three forms of treatment for this disorder: surgery, radiation, or pills. The surgery and radiation actually cure the disease, while the pills simply counteract the T-4 and relieve the symptoms. Due to her advanced age and the costs involved (the radiation, which is the best choice overall, can run up to \$2,500 including all tests and boarding) we have elected for the time being to try the pills and see how that goes.

In the meantime, Tigger made it through her dental surgery fine. They had to remove four teeth in the end – the one bad one we noticed during the exam, the one behind it, and two on the other side of the mouth (one was cracked and one had a big hole near the gum line which would have eventually developed an abscess). I have a few before and after photos I was going to scan and put in here, but the scans don't do justice to the difference in color – she had plenty of tartar on those old teeth of hers! Tigger was eating solid food by the same evening of her surgery, and even though she wasn't showing much in the way of discomfort, we gave her the painkillers the clinic provided for the first 24 hours. Now she is back to her normal whiny self – except her teeth are all white and clean. She actually hadn't had her teeth cleaned in maybe 12 years, as Mara would not allow me to bring any of our cats in for dental treatment after a particularly bad episode with Ubber where he almost did not survive the procedure. Anyway, if the CFRF pills work, maybe Tigger will be with us for many years to come. After all, I did read about a cat who is supposedly 37 years old! I don't happen to believe that story, but since Tigger still thinks she is a kitten sometimes, perhaps she does have another 18 years in her somewhere. The only bad news is the epileptic twitches seem to have gotten worse lately. When I bring Tigger back in to have her T4 levels checked in a few weeks I will see if they have any ideas what is going on with her.

Speaking of pets, Heather has been searching for a local shelter or rescue group we could volunteer a few hours of our time to every week. After looking at local magazines, newspapers, and web sites, she finally located one which sounded good to her. We are rather limited on time, only having about 4 or 5 hours each Saturday right now (and we wouldn't even have that except Heather's math class "didn't take" due to lack of students and was cancelled at the last minute). After some initial confusion over where we'd be helping out, when, and what exactly we might be doing, this past Saturday we spent most of our day at a local PetCo store helping with the group's dogs and cats.

Aside from wanting to help the animals, Heather felt this kind of volunteer work would be a great bonding experience for us. After a day of hard work, I think she was right. It really felt good to be there to help and support these rescued animals. Almost all of the dogs and cats Dawn (the woman who runs the rescue) had have been taken from local animal shelters when they were running out of time. When we arrived we met Dawn assistant, who was busy setting up the dog crates on the sidewalk. We helped him clean the crates and then move the dogs into place. Aside from a couple of exceptions who simply do not handle the public setting very well, these were all terribly sweet dogs – rather surprising considering they've been bounced around from shelter to foster home. They range in size from tiny a Chihuahua to a slight scary-looking but incredibly docile Pit Bull/Golden Retriever mix. Right away I saw one which I knew was going to be trouble – an adorable mixed dog. He had the head and body of a Rottweiler with the stubby little legs of a Basset Hound. Heather has a real fascination with the stubby-legged varieties like the Welsh Corgi – she finds them irresistible. We'd discussed in advance the difficulty of getting too attached to the animals we'd be helping; with Tigger at such an advanced age, and with all the expenses we had just incurred from her, it just doesn't seem to be very prudent to think about adopting a dog yet. That doesn't even take into account the fact that Heather is changing jobs (I'll give you details of that elsewhere in this subzine) and will be earning a bit less, at least to start.

We spent most of the first couple of hours cleaning our the big cat cages and their litter boxes. Aside from one adult cat which had already been adopted (but not picked up yet) all of the cats were kittens. Some were a bit feral, scared and hissing, but most of them were playful and loving. One in particular Heather immediately nicknamed Lovebug because all she wanted to do was be held and purr, as opposed to most of them which think a person's shoulder is a mountain that needs to be climbed...and then clung to with every available, razor-sharp claw. The job was messy of course, but neither of us minded, and working as a team we did very well.

Later we took turns walking the dogs, or letting them sit out on leashes for some attention and freedom. Not surprisingly, Heather played favorites and spent much of her time with Toby, the Rott-Basset mix. When Dawn went to get lunch, Heather sat at the donation table with Toby lying on the ground next to her. Despite Heather's nervousness, she actually did pretty well asking for donations from the passers-by. It is funny to watch how defensive some people get when you ask them – instead of just saying "No Thank You" or walking away, they'll feel guilty and try to explain "I just adopted two dogs, you gotta give me a break." A few people stuck tens or twenties in the jar, which I was happy to see. Most just passed by, or dropped a dollar bill in. Remember, since this was outside a PetCo, everybody walking by is probably a pet owner.

All in all, it was a very rewarding way to spend a day. We wound up staying 90 minutes later than planned, but in the future we will make an effort to leave closer to our schedule. We'll be returning this coming Saturday to help again, and this time I will try to remember to bring the digital camera so we can take some

pictures. If any of them look decent, I'll stick a couple in here – especially one of Toby! It's been 24 hours, but that sweet face and those cute little legs are still occupying part of my mind...and I know Heather keep thinking about him. Maybe it will get easier after we've been there a few times.

Update – As it turns out, we're adopting Toby...but not Toby the Rott/Basset mix. **This** Toby is a large black lap cat. We paid the adoption fee today but won't pick him up for a few days because I want him to get a flea bath first...he has tons of flea dirt. He's so friendly, loving, and quiet, and he looks almost exactly like a larger version of Ubber, which was the black cat Mara and I had years ago (who also happened to be Tigger's best friend). Maybe she can make friends with this one too? The thing is, Tigger is **my** cat. Heather really wants an animal of her own, a mama's boy, and we both realize we need a house with a yard before we can adopt the type of dog we're interested in. So hopefully Toby the cat can fill that role for Heather. I'll put a few photos of Toby in ES #7, even though I've already gotten a bunch of nice ones.

In the meantime, here are a few photos that Heather took – me and Toby the dog, and me and a Black Lab mix named Amy (giving me a kiss). This week we also met a Golden/Char Pei mix named Honey who I read about in the news a few weeks ago. Honey was left behind in an apartment when people moved out, but left in a crate. Nobody found her for days, and by the time they did she was almost dead. You can still see her ribs, but she's doing better and sooooo loving. Heather cried when we were petting her, so upset that people could be so thoughtless and cruel to such a kind animal.



Heather has finally gotten completely fed up with work, and is starting a new job. We are both hopeful that this change will help her have a more cheerful disposition on a day-to-day basis, instead of worn out and miserable when she drags herself home after work. Heather says she is not the same person she used to be, and she believes the constant beating her job has taken on her has a lot to do with it. Thinking about it, I guess I have to agree that yes, she is living at a higher stress level than when I met her. She also has less tolerance for people, and finds it harder to be the giving and trusting woman she was when I met her without making a very strong conscious effort to fight the scars from a day of being yelled at or at best treated with a dose of disdain. I suppose being surrounded with negative energy all day can be exhausting. So now it is finally time to make a new start, somewhere more uplifting and laid-back.

Years ago Heather worked retail, eventually running the cosmetics department at a large Kroger grocery store here in Dallas. That was a job she loved, because not only was she good at it, but she was able to express her creative side by designing all of their sales displays. She'd go to quite measurable lengths to outdo herself, and frequently would win regional or national awards when in competition with the other Kroger stores. She also personally developed their annual sale into a roaring success, beating sales goals year after year which nobody thought she could do. She worked hard, was rewarded with recognition, and could see great results in what she accomplished.

It was her ex-husband (still her husband at the time) who convinced Heather to go work for the City of Garland. He was employed in their library system, and when Kroger decided to phase out cosmetics nationwide except for a few special signature stores, he pushed Heather into interviewing for a job with Utility Collections. The good benefits were probably the major selling point, but back at that stage in her life Heather

did not call many shots on her own; her husband liked to make all the decisions, and after a while she stopped trying to argue them. So despite her misgivings, she passed up opportunities to move to another store or take a job with a company which designed restaurant interiors, and found herself spending her days accepting payments from Garland residents. In Garland, there is no electrical deregulation. The only company which can provide you electricity service is the city, under the name of Garland Power and Light. When I met Heather, she was working in "the dungeon" which was a room where they processed all the incoming mail, containing checks and money orders from thousands of residents. It was stressful work, especially when the equipment had problems or when the mail load was heavy, but overall she seemed to tolerate her job and make the best of it, if not actually enjoy it.

For the past few years though, things have gotten a lot worse. First she no longer does the mail. Instead she deals with customers face-to-face either at the drive-up window or the walk-up lobby windows. People are rarely happy about paying bills, so you can imagine they've been even more angry about it since energy costs started going up. Add to that the fact that in almost every case, if you are paying your bill in person it's because you are about to be shut off or have already had your service cut off. Heather's job only involves taking the payment; if you have a problem and need resolution all she can do is send you to customer service. So there is no happy ending, just a transaction with an unhappy customer. They've also installed a new computer system which is slower, more cumbersome, and has been sending random payments into another dimension, which frustrates Heather more than the customers.

Besides all of this, the collections department is the lowest-paid, and NOBODY has even successfully transferred from there to another job with the city. I can only assume Heather's supervisor puts the kibosh on any attempt. One woman had to go so far as to quit, and then was immediately offered a job with another department she had been trying to transfer to. Both the new GPL bigwig who was just hired, and the new Mayor who was just elected, seem to have plans to make the workers in collections act "more professional" which to me means stricter dress codes and rules with no additional money. With no way to transfer and no hope of promotion within the department, Heather was forced to give up and look for work elsewhere.

It didn't take long for her to locate a company nearby which wanted a new customer service rep. The pay will be slightly less, but they seem much more laid back and friendly, and the customers she will be dealing with are people who use their wireless communication products and want to check on an order instead of people who wish they could firebomb her office. Plus the hours will be 10 to 7 after training is over, and Heather much prefers to sleep in a bit. She simply is not at her best early in the morning! The company is pretty big, and growing, so there will be room for advancement. Plus the people seem genuine and friendly. I figure even if the job sucks, it will be 5 times better than GPL! So please wish her luck in her new job – maybe she won't have dreams about murdering customers anymore.

## The Dining Dead.

# The Eternal Sunshine Movie Reviews

This summer of blockbuster sequels is really cutting into our movie attendance. I have ZERO interest in movies like Oceans 13, Spider-Man 3, Shrek 3, Hostel II...and the list goes on and on. Instead we've been spending more time seeing local plays. I could provide reviews of them, but since they aren't touring productions I don't see much interest from the readers outside of this area. Besides, few of them have runs longer than two weeks, so even if you ARE local, by the time you read the review the productions will have closed. I am posting reviews of them to my Blog, so you can read them there if you are interested. Oh well, there are some upcoming movies we are interested in seeing, so the reviews will continue!

**Crazy Love** – There is a potential problem shared by documentaries and by movies based partly on real events: how do you tell the story when most people know how it is going to end? One of the things which made James Cameron's Titanic so surprising was how he crafted a fine love story around a ship which we ALL knew was going to sink. Or Apollo 13, where most of the audience knew how the story was going to end. Crazy Love is a film which shares that problem, although not necessarily to the same extent. Any personal familiar with the story of Burt Pugach and Linda Riss knows most of the major pieces of the story already. Fortunately, as it turns out, knowledge of the events does not lessen your enjoyment of the film in the slightest. And if you don't know the details, you're in for quite a story.



I'll try not to give too much away, in case you haven't heard about Burt and Linda over the years. Back in the 1950's, Burt Pugach, a married successful lawyer (one of the original New York City ambulance chasers) meets a beautiful young woman named Linda Riss, and becomes at first smitten, then infatuated, and eventually obsessed with her. Their romance stalls when she discovers that he is married, although through lies and subterfuge he talks his way back into her life a few times. Finally, she's had enough, and becomes engaged to a nice-enough young man. At this point, Burt snaps, and decides that if he can't have her, nobody can.

Through interviews with both Burt and Linda, plus many of their friends and relatives, the first-hand accounts of a relationship turned into ugly obsession leave the viewers shaking their heads in disbelief. Even if you know some of the story (as I did from the extensive press coverage of later events as I grew up near New York City), to have them all laid out in front of you piece by piece is a very captivating experience. Even Burt at times comes off as a slightly sympathetic character, finding himself unable to control his emotions when his professional and personal lives were collapsing simultaneously. Who knows where the line between love and obsession, between reality and insanity, is truly drawn?

The combination of modern interviews, old news footage, home movies, photos, newspaper clippings, and period music all work together in a marvelous fashion. Humor, intended and unintended, is everywhere – as it has to be when dealing with a story as manic as this one. I am not sure how widely available this film is right now, but do yourself a favor and search for it. You'll be very glad you did!

**Seen on DVD** – Boxing Helena (C+, Heather loves Sherilyn Fenn, so she convinced me to give this once-controversial movie a go. Not terrible, but seemed too much like some old Cinemax late-night soft porn); Sara Silverman's Jesus is Magic (B+, the stand-up stuff was almost all funny, but most of her filmed scenes we could have done without); A Handmaid's Tale (c+, this film reminded Heather of Children of Men, so she wanted to see it again – I had never seen it that I remember. Mildly interesting, but very slow I'm not sorry I watched it though).

## Meet Me In Montauk

### The Eternal Sunshine Letter Column

**Harold Reynolds:** How's the weather in Dallas? I keep an eye on the radar, and I think I've seen some heavy weather blow through that area on more than one occasion lately. It's been hot and smoggy here in the Centre of the Universe (Toronto, though I live just east of Toronto in Pickering). I'm looking forward to a change in air soon... blech.

***We've seen our share of storms recently. In fact through May it seemed like the forecast every single day was "chance of severe thunderstorms." Out to dinner one night this past month the waitress had to come to our table and let us know what the evacuation plans were if a tornado was sighted – that's always fun mealtime conversation. Now with all the flooding, we have a lot of standing water in the area, which means massive mosquito breeding...just what we need!***

I was sorry to read about the decline in your cat's health. Our former cat got run over a year ago May 29th. We live on a very quiet street, but something must have spooked her as she ran out from behind a car just as someone was driving by, and she was killed instantly. The poor woman was traumatized (as we were), and as it happens, a niece had a cat that had just had kittens, and she offered us the last one. So now we have Squeak, a brown tabby, who turned 1 in March. He's a little bit crazy, but that's no surprise considering he lives in a house with 4 boys, aged 4 to 9.5.

***The hardest part for me is always knowing when to throw in the towel and but the animal to sleep. With humans they can tell you how they feel, but with pets you have to use your own judgment. Sometimes it is simple, like when my Persian started stumbling around and shaking, and the vet took an x-ray and told me he had fluid in his lungs and an enlarged heart...since he was 18 the choice was simple. But when an animal seems okay and is usually happy, just has some symptoms which are getting worse, it is hard to decide what to do. Well, for me, it's more like it is easy to know what the right thing is, but harder to avoid finding ways to rationalize it. Ignoring the***

***situation of convincing yourself it isn't as bad as it seems is far too easy. When Tigger goes though, we're going to be done with cats for the time being – the next pet is a medium-sized dog. (Or so I thought when I wrote this part...more details later)***

**Tom Howell:** Just read your three installments of ES in TAP. Forgive me if my commentary sounds out of date.

***I don't think any apologies are ever necessary! If people remember what you're talking about, that's good...and if they don't, they can go back and reread the subzone issues on my web site. Either way, \*I\* certainly remember all the things you are referring to.***

Sounds to me like Heather could use a new job. Getting up might be easier if she had one she looked forward to going to.

***I don't think it will ever get much easier for her, but you're right about the job part. Working for the City in the Utility Collections department seemed to get worse month after month. First of all, nobody who comes in there is happy – either they've had their electricity cut off, or they are about to, or else they are just paying their bill (which in their opinion is way too high). Heather is the first person they can take that anger out on. Add to that the fact that they just "upgraded" their computer system again, so now things which used to take 2 steps take 4 or 5, and it is easy to see why she found work more stressful than ever. Heather has said repeatedly that she does not like the person she become after a day of working there. So she started looking for something better, even if it paid a little less. You'll find details of her job search elsewhere in this issue. She is also considering going to school full time for 18 months to become a licensed Veterinary Technician, although a move like that is just in the discussion/idea stage at this point. A job working around animals would be a dream come true for her.***

Thanks for the 100 movies list. I had a bit of trouble counting them. Without indentation, the titles wrapping onto a second line don't just jump out at one. Nevertheless, I did figure out most of them. I must be missing one of the two-line titles, as I still get a count of 101. Have you seen "Finding Forrester"? It's about the relationship between an inner-city black kid who wants to be a writer and a reclusive one-good-novel writer. More I won't say until you've seen it; I've seen it twice. Which is saying a bit as many of the movies I've seen lately weren't worth the entire first viewing.

***I heard very good things about it, so I waited to see it until later because I didn't want my expectations to be too high. Since then I forgot all about it, so now I will have to add it to our Netflix list.***

Thanks for sharing yourself. We've been dealing with some family issues here. Seems my dad's mother's mother was quite a piece of work. Some of the effects passed through the generations seem clearly to be genetic (manifested as schizophrenia), but enough of it is behavioral (kids learn what they grow up with or react to their environment) that it's difficult to tell where one ends and the other starts or whether there's some overlap and interaction.

***That's always been a source of fascination for me – how much of my mindset (or anyone else's) is genetic, and how much is environmental? Hmm, sounds like a great movie. Maybe starring Dan Aykroyd and Eddie Murphy. See, Murphy can play a con artist, and Aykroyd can play a commodities trader, and....***

One of my grandmother's things was not "burdening other folks with 'our' problems" -- even within the family. The more I learn, the more I understand, and the easier it is to deal with the family "stuff" both past and ongoing. I've found at times that just writing things down is very helpful. Some of my best and most useful letters were delivered only to the trash can after I finished them. Your family story might be in that category.

***That's one thing that both my therapist and my RDAP counselor in prison suggested: that I write a goodbye letter to Mara, for example, and then burn it or destroy it in a symbolic way. The writing would be to get the emotion out, and the destruction I guess is to release it from my mind. I mean to do that at some point, but haven't yet. It's hard to think about writing projects like that currently, as I am still rather flat from this medication I am on. I don't feel enough of ANYTHING***



***at the moment, good or bad. That's one reason I hope to change medications later on this month. Speaking of which...***

As for the medication... My best friend is bi-polar. He says the hardest part of managing it is finding a doctor who's willing to spend the time to find the right medication. Everyone responds to a given medication differently. What works well for one person doesn't work for another and has horrible side effects for the third. And what worked well last year may not be the best thing next year. Part of that is that our bodies' response changes over time, and part is new meds appearing all the time. Some actually are improvements.

***That was always the most frustrating thing when it came to Mara's medication. She was taking three or four medications at a time for her chemical issues, depending on what was working – Lithium, Prozac, and usually one or two more. I understood why a combination which worked one month wouldn't necessarily keep working for any long period of time, but that didn't make it any easier to deal with. It was such an effort to get the levels just right, and the whole time I'd be thinking about how a few months down the road we would probably have to begin the process all over again.***

My response to reading about the prescriber who gave you a second med to counter the side effects of the first was that you should have moved out of the city where that guy works. The proper action would have been to try a different med in place of the first, not in addition.

***I suppose that's what I get for letting a GP who I normally went to for things like sinus infections prescribe me psych meds!***

Keep up the good work - on all levels. It's great to read your subzine.

***Thanks Tom, it is much appreciated. And it's great to publish your loc!***

**Brendan Whyte:** Your comment on drugs reminded me of a friend with bipolar disorder, who needed to take stuff each day to stay stable. She felt the same way: she was who she was, and taking the drugs made her someone different, so she was not keen on taking them. The problem was if he didn't she became uncontrollable and ended up hurting herself and others. But I can sympathize with her and your position: when off the drugs one knows who one is, but is unstable; to be doped up all the time means stability, but feels like one is denying one's self and trying to become someone else. It's a hard decision, and I understand the difficulties of making it, but in the end, my friend's craziness got worse and worse if she didn't take the drug, so it became a matter of necessity. So while I sympathize with your predicament and understand both sides of the argument (and would hate to have to make such a decision myself), taking the medication means you can keep friends, family, job, sanity and ultimately self respect. Even those of us who are 'normal' (whatever that means), have to mould our behavior and desires to fit into societal norms. Whether it is kleptomania, a short temper, or just hating to be in crowds, we all have our own crosses to bear, and while mine might seem silly or inconsequential to you, it might be oppressive for me. We all respond differently to our burdens and the pressures we face (or think we face) to adapt to society.

***Fortunately for me it isn't a question of being violent or dangerous, but the general concept is still the same. Right now being on a low dose for the past few months, I don't feel like a different person, I'm still myself. I do find that I am less anxious (which is good) but also less emotional and flatter overall (which I think is a negative). We're going to stick with this medication for another month or so and see if anything changes. There are others I could try, but my doctor prefers this one because it should help both the anxiety and the OCD aspects of my problem, with out any real sedation.***

Talking about it certainly eases the burden compared to bottling it all up and being to embarrassed or frightened to do so. Take care, and don't forget to have a ginger beer from the fridge now and then. Even if it's just one on a Friday night to reward yourself for getting through another week.

***I actually enjoyed one last night. Little by little I see improvement in that regard too. Whether that's simply practice or a more positive outlook, or whether it is due to medication, who knows?***

**Dane Maslen:** I notice from the news that parts of Texas are excessively wet at present. I hope you are not affected. My experience of what 'near London' means on foreign TV news leads me to suspect that 'near Fort

Worth' probably means "somewhere pretty much anywhere in Texas that isn't near any other city that the average TV viewer would have heard of". Given, however, that you're in Dallas and that's a city that we've all heard of, I'm fairly confident that the reported flooding wasn't too near where you are (though if the flooding really is near Fort Worth, it's not going to be hugely distant from you).

***The flooding missed Dallas proper this time, but places like Sherman and Trophy Club are still within the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex, so they are relatively close (50 miles or so from where I live). In this case, the storms and flooding followed a path mainly north of us, and instead of moving through the area (as predicted) they sort of hovered over the affected area and dumped tons of rain on them. Afterward, some areas looked like the Katrina we all saw on the television, except the waters receded within a few hours. There has been so much rain this year, I'm curious to see how much more we get, and what the rest of the summer is like.***

**John Michalski**: I received a handful of issues of *Eternal Sunshine* today, with that cover letter titled *The Abyssinian Prince*. Normally I don't pay too much attention to the subzines, but it's a slow, hot, humid Friday afternoon here, so I flipped through, and while the picture of Tigger would normally have been the only thing to catch my eye, I did see a reference to prison in the preceding writing, so I actually stopped there and read further. I have a hobby contact --not postal *Diplomacy*, but rather, fourth edition *Third Reich*-- who is whiling away his life as a guest of the Iowa Dept. of Corrections in Fort Madison, and early on, we spent a lot of time discussing our two very divergent points of observing prison. (His, very much first-hand; I, as a taxpayer and newspaper reader only, with a very critical eye toward the whole system.) I continue to send him press items of interest, or at least good for a chuckle, most recently the on-going tale of the Oklahoma judge here who was convicted of running his penis pump on himself in his courtroom, on the bench during trials. Such stories seem to strike a note there somewhat akin to the favor you observed for lurid murder tales.

***That story was a real laugher, that's for sure!***

Anyway, that kept my interest, even as your one issue turned into three. (Or was it more?) As our house has been a home to an on-going string of very nice cats in need of homes over the years, I read the Tigger item with some interest. It turned out to be a sad story I am somewhat familiar with, most recently (and most specifically-) involving our late Mr. Devlin.

Poor old Dev' was only 16 or 17, but the cumulative effects of veterinary care with its mixed results of treatment & damage for various things (urinary infections, infected wounds from outside encounters, teeth cleanings and annual testings, a bad lung and more) combined with old age, finally got him down. We'd lost a number of family friends over time, and Mr. Devlin was the last of what I'll call the Old Guard. Like you, I was determined that he would be spared everything within my earthly power to avoid, particularly as it grew more obvious that there really wasn't much left for him to enjoy in this world.

One of the things the cats had learned to fear and loathe long before we two legged types wised up, was learning that the vet clinic might be brimming over with PR showings of care and concern, but to the inmates, it was a house of horrors. Mr. Dev's longtime companion here, Miss Kally, had made her final visit to the big fancy place less than a mile away barely two years before, and I was shocked at the way even the simple job of putting her to her final sleep was botched. (I don't want to go into detail; I'm still angry two years later. If I were a young man, I'd contact some hairy Moslem type, and ask for suggestions.) Suffice it to say, I was bound and determined that Mr. Devlin would not be taken into that house of horrors for any reason whatsoever. No matter how badly off he was, he would not spend part of his last hour being put in the carrier, and then turned over to Dr. Mengele, DVM, in that cold building with the odd smell he already knew all too well. No way.

***Putting a loved pet to sleep is one of the hardest things I've done in my life, and that life includes some terrible moments. I can't even imagine how much harder that moment must be when it is botched by someone who you put your trust in.***

The answer I found was something that might very well be due for Tigger. I found a professional practitioner who made house calls! It is costly, and not as simple as one would think: it seems that they have liabilities to consider, should the caller be some disgruntled boyfriend house-sitting for his reluctant girlfriend's pets, for example, and so they require a certain amount of verification that the proposed decedent is actually yours to decease. (Pardon the syntax.) But it was well worth it. The fellow came to our home, numbed a small spot out of his sight, then gave him an unfelt shot there while I held Devon my shoulder. He felt safe and secure to the end, which was very quick. The fellow took him along in a towel. The \$125 was the best money I've spent

in a very long time. Reading Tig's story, I felt I should sit down and send this suggestion.

*We are definitely going to look into that and see if such a service exists in our area. Whether or not she improves on this new thyroid medication, clearly at her advanced age this is something we need to be thinking about in advance. Thanks so much for the suggestion!*

# Game Openings

**Diplomacy (Black Press):** Graham Wilson, Brad Wilson, Chris Babcock, needs four more.

**Balkan Wars VI (Black Press):** Signed up: Jack McHugh, Graham Wilson, Brad Wilson, needs four more. Rules and map on request, or you can find them online within Paul Bolduc's **Boris the Spider** site at: <http://members.aol.com/prbolduc/boris/hrules/BW6.html>

**Colonia VII\_B (White Press):** Fred Hyatt's worldwide variant. Signed up: Jim Burgess, Graham Wilson, David Partridge, Brad Wilson, needs 5 more. Rules and map on request, or you can find them at a section of Harold Reynold's **Bad Pet** website at [http://www.badpets.net/Diplomacy/Colonia\\_VIIB/index.html](http://www.badpets.net/Diplomacy/Colonia_VIIB/index.html).

Suggestions for Diplomacy variants or other multi-player games are welcome. Maybe a quick Dip variant like The Italian Wars?

# Eternal Sunshine Game Section

## By Popular Demand

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 3

1. A mixed drink other than a martini.
2. A type of bird.
3. A type of cookie.
4. A city in Japan other than Tokyo.
5. A piece of clothing.

Highest Possible Score – 37. Congratulations to Chris and Allison for coming close. I decided to be kind and group all Clothing items into the vague terms. In other words, Jeans are a type of Trousers and T-Shirt is a type of Shirt. "Type of Cookie" was meant to be vague, but I was actually aiming not to get name brands (as opposed to Brand of Cookie). Welcome to our new players Brad Wilson and Brendan Whyte, who decided to join the fun even though they start a bit behind. I never win, so why should they? I'm trying to decide if when this game ends I should run another BPD, or try the game I played in Brendan's **Damn the Consequences**, "By Not So Much Popular Demand" (or something like that), where the idea is to submit a legal answer which nobody else will. We'll see.

| Player           | Drink           | Bird     | Cookie          | Japan     | Clothing   | Turn Score | Total |
|------------------|-----------------|----------|-----------------|-----------|------------|------------|-------|
| Chris Babcock    | Gin & Tonic     | Robin    | Chocolate Chip  | Kyoto     | Shirt      | 35         | 110   |
| Cal White        | Screwdriver     | Robin    | Chocolate Chip  | Kyoto     | Shirt      | 33         | 108   |
| Allison Kent     | Margarita       | Robin    | Chocolate Chip  | Hiroshima | T-Shirt    | 35         | 105   |
| David Burgess    | Margarita       | Eagle    | Chocolate Chip  | Hiroshima | Shirt      | 32         | 101   |
| W. Andrew York   | Gin & Tonic     | Robin    | Oreo            | Hiroshima | Shirt      | 31         | 95    |
| Jamie McQuinn    | Screwdriver     | Parakeet | Chocolate Chip  | Hiroshima | Shirt      | 30         | 90    |
| Kevin Wilson     | Gin & Tonic     | Robin    | Oreo            | Kyoto     | Shirt      | 29         | 89    |
| Brad Martin      | Tequila Sunrise | Eagle    | Chocolate Chip  | Hiroshima | Shirt      | 30         | 86    |
| Dane Maslen      | Margarita       | Eagle    | Chocolate Chip  | Kyoto     | Trousers   | 24         | 85    |
| Melinda Holley   | Bloody Mary     | Robin    | Chocolate Chip  | Hiroshima | Jeans      | 27         | 83    |
| David Partridge  | Gin & Tonic     | Parrot   | Oreo            | Hiroshima | Hat        | 19         | 79    |
| Joakim Spangberg | Gin & Tonic     | Gull     | Butter Cookie   | Hiroshima | Trousers   | 18         | 78    |
| Brad Wilson      | Manhattan       | Pigeon   | Chocolate Chip  | Kyoto     | Shirt      | 26         | 57    |
| Martin Burgdorf  | Pina Colada     | Raven    | Giribaldi       | Kyoto     | Hat        | 11         | 44    |
| Brendan Whyte    | Screwdriver     | Jailbird | Computer Cookie | Osaka     | Underpants | 7          | 38    |

Selected Comments By Category: **Drink** – Chris Babcock “The first to mind was a rum and coke, but I’ve never been much of a mixer. I’m counting on my fellow geeks to recall Douglas Adams treatment of “Jinan Tonic” and variations in the Hitchiker’s series.”; Andy York “In my much younger days, top choices were Whiskey Sour, Jellybean (a layered drink) and Brown Bomber. However, those don’t seem to be common enough except, maybe the whiskey sour. Today, margarita, long island ice tea or gin & tonic; but, since martini is mentioned, folks may think of G&T first.” Allison Kent “Margarita - I like it on the rocks with salt. I would rather make it at home so that there isn't quite as much sweet and sour as the way a typical bartender makes it. Of course, you could ask them to make it the way you like it, but that doesn't necessarily mean more alcohol; may just be more ice!” **Bird** – Andy York “Cardinal would be my next choice.” **Cookie** – Allison Kent – “Peanut butter is certainly my favorite, but cookies are my favorite food, so any kind is perfect. Oh, except I don't like the ones with orange or lemon. Don't try to make a cookie healthy!! Maybe oatmeal raisin is a little healthy, but that is the exception. And how healthy can a good cookie be, really?” **Japan** – Chris Babcock “A little closer to August and I might have said Hiroshima. Kyoto is not only populous and well known, it's also an anagram for Tokyo in both English and Japanese.”; Andy York – “due to the crowd, the first thing that came to mind was Edo; but, that definitely wouldn't be it. Osaka or Yokohama are other options.” **Clothing** – Chris Babcock “Too many other articles of clothing follow the phrase “shirt and...” for it to be anything else.”

#### **Round 4 Categories – Deadline is August 2nd, 2007**

1. A nut other than a peanut.
2. A Jack Nicholson movie.
3. A scented candle scent.
4. A make of automobile.
5. A green vegetable.

## **Diplomacy Zine Plug**

I was very happy to learn that one of my favorite old-school Canadian Diplomacy zines is still being published. Northern Flame, originally published by Cal White, was passed on to Robert Lesco and is still going strong. I don't see any current game openings, but Robert always has some entertaining comments to make, and I am sure standby spots open up from time to time. If you'd like to see a sample, email Robert at rlesco of yahoo.com or contact him postally at:

49 Parkside Drive, Brampton, Ontario, L6Y 2H1, Canada

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**Deadline For The Next Issue of Eternal Sunshine:  
August 2nd, 2007 – See You Then!**