

# Eternal Sunshine #7

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**Quote Of The Month** – “Right there... see? Sort of a swoop and a cross, Osidius the Emphatic.” (Joel in “Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind”)

I have returned for yet another issue of **Eternal Sunshine**, the only Diplomacy subzine which still pays homage to the great Jack “Sack” McHugh. We’ve got way too much of my personal foolishness this month, so I think it is probably best if I save all the space I can and skip any babbling here. I won’t even bother rambling on about trades the Texas Rangers made at the deadline – I’ll save those for next issue (if ever). Before you dive head-first into the shallow pool which is Whining Kent Pigdom, let me mention that my Diplomacy game only has 3 openings left, and the game of Balkan Wars VI is hopefully going to fill soon - especially since Diplomacy World #98 (which came out only a week before this rag – visit <http://www.diplomacyworld.net> to download a copy) features the rules and map in an attempt to reintroduce the variant to the uneducated masses. We now return to our regularly scheduled program.

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The cat situation at home continues to evolve. First there is Tigger and her thyroid problem. After about three weeks on her medication, we took her in for a blood test to recheck her T-4 levels. As it turns out, they were down more than anticipated, to the point that we probably needed to reduce her dosage. Unfortunately, when we brought her to the vet, the technician didn’t bother getting a weight or a heart rate. So a few days later I had to take her BACK to the vet, leave her there during the day while I was at work, and pick her up on the way home. Her heart rate is down nicely, but her weight was actually down a bit too, so we’re cutting her from two pills a day to one and a half a day. With luck this will increase her appetite without increasing the T-4 levels beyond the target zone.

I get rather depressed about Tigger’s situation lately. It seems that most of the time I’m paying her attention, it’s to give her a pill or take her to the vet. She has never been very happy about car trips, which shouldn’t be surprising to any of you who ever read the travelogue of when I drove down from New Jersey to Dallas in 1994 with Mara and four cats. I am sure that scarred her for life as far as traveling goes. Anyway, I do try to give her as much love as I can, but she is now rather suspicious about my motives when I do. I think it’s getting a bit better, but I have a bad habit of humanizing the emotions of animals so in my mind she’s angry with me and would rather Heather pet her. Of course, having Toby invading her space hasn’t improved that mood much, although that too is slowly settling down.

As I mentioned briefly in last issue, we have a new addition to our household. Toby is a big black ball of fun and love. Since we couldn’t possibly adopt Toby the Dog (the Rottweiler/Basset Hound Mix) because of our tiny apartment, Heather instead fell head-over-heels in love with Toby the first time we pulled him out of his cage to clean it. It seemed that all Toby wanted to do was be held and petted – a true lap cat. He was instantly attached to both of us, Heather in particular, and was peaceful and friendly with every random person who came by to look at him or pet him while we had him out. Lots of purring, lots of rolling over like a dog to get his tummy rubbed, and lots of kneading his paws (what Mara and I used to call “nummies” and many people down here in Texas call “making biscuits.”). For a few hours we discussed whether we could bring another cat into the apartment and upset Tigger’s life, but it wasn’t that much of a struggle. While Tigger has been the only cat for a few years, at one time she lived with as many as four other felines at once, so while we expected the usual

hissing and growling, we agreed she'd eventually get used to him. At least Toby is so docile and submissive that Tigger would still be the unquestioned boss. In addition, Tigger is so advanced in age I felt it would be best for me in particular if we get a second cat now. When one of my pets has to be put to sleep, I find it to be a very emotional and painful experience, and often I am left telling myself "I am never going through that again." This way, the apartment won't be so lonely whenever Tigger is no longer with us – although I am still hopeful we'll have her around for a few more years.

The only thing which prevented us from bringing Toby home that very first Saturday was his flea problem. He was covered in flea dirt, and although I couldn't see any live ones in plain sight, the last thing we wanted to do was bring fleas into the apartment and allow Tigger to get infested too. So we applied some Frontline and decided to bring him to the vet on that Wednesday. If Dr. Cameron gave Toby a clean bill of health, I'd bring him home directly from his office. If not, I'd him board at the vet's until he was safe to introduce to Tigger.

The trip to the vet was long and complicated, but turned out very well. The vet tech suggested Toby might not really be "fixed" because his scrotal sack was still present, but Dr. Cameron confirmed he had been. We were unable to get Toby's vaccination records from the organization our rescue group had used, so we had to get him vaccinated again. I was assured this would not be harmful, but for a few days afterward Toby was sleepy and terribly lazy, only moving to eat, drink, and use the litter. He was checked for ear mites and various diseases and was declared healthy. By his teeth, we're guessing he is about three years old. The fleas have not been a problem since we applied the Frontline, but I think we'll treat him again after 30 days just to be sure.

Once the shots wore off and Toby became more comfortable in the apartment, he has become something of a terror. He is so full of energy, the exact opposite of what we expected based on how

he acted at Petco. But he also is very affectionate, loves to be held, and enjoys curling up on any available body part for a nap. Well, when he isn't trying to play rough with your hand or various cat toys, that is. He tries to climb all over, on top of cabinets and behind everything. Toby also likes to race around from room to room. Tigger is still growling at him, but now it seems to be more of a crotchety old woman growl and less of an angry, nervous one. I think, given time, they'll actually play together now and then if Toby can learn not to play too rough or run quite so fast when Tigger wants to join in. All in all, I am pretty happy with the way they've gotten along – Toby is infatuated with the older woman, and stares at her longingly. Heather has a true crush on Toby



too, as she is fascinated with watching him play wildly, and thinks his sleek, black, panther physique is positively handsome. I get teary-eyed sometimes when I see Heather asleep on the couch, dozing before we go to bed for the night, while Toby is curled up on top of her sleeping the sleep of the happy, content, and safe. The only thing which is almost as cute is when Toby sees the big black cat stuffed animal we call Merlin. Merlin stays on the bed during the day, and Toby has decided this lump of stuffing is his mother; any time you need to get him out of trouble and occupied with something peaceful, just plop Toby on Merlin's back and he'll start kneading his paws into her for a good ten minutes! I have photos of that, but since they both have such dark black fur it is difficult to see where Toby ends and his stuffed animal friend begins. What a sweetie! Now if Toby will just leave Tigger more food in the bowl...

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***(Warning – This section contains some nasty medical descriptions...or at least I think it will)***

There were two pieces of advice I received from former inmates when I was getting ready to report to prison. I hadn't spoken to anybody I knew personally, although my sister knew a guy who had spent a few years at the same facility I was due to surrender to and he'd told her it wasn't as bad as a lot of other places. Instead, I went to an orientation sponsored by the Pre-Trial Services office, which is the division of the Department of Justice which oversees anybody who has been indicted and not yet seen trial, or who has pled guilty or been convicted but not yet been incarcerated. Some of the people under Pre-Trial's supervision are flight risks, or violent, or still involved in criminal activities. So not surprisingly, non-violent first-time offenders like myself who don't appear to be a problem (who have been released under their own recognizance without posting any bail) are pretty much left on our own, reporting in by phone once a week. When my Pre-Trial Officer mentioned a free orientation was offered every few months, I asked that he let me know when the next one was being held. I didn't know whether to expect Club Fed or something more like Oz or Shawshank Redemption, so I was anxious to hear from people who had been through the system already.

The orientation included a film about the various Bureau of Prisons facilities, as well as an outline of the general rules (there are no conjugal visits, for example). After the government people said what they wanted to, and answered a few questions, it was time for the star attractions: a male and a female who had both served sentences in the Federal system, and who were currently on probation. The female spoke first. She had started out in a very violent Medium Security facility, and eventually worked her way down to less-dangerous locations. From how she described it, the female prisons were worse than the male ones in many ways. She had seen plenty of fights, stabbings, rapes, and other horror stories. She spent a bit too much of her time trying to explain how she'd been screwed by the government on her conviction, but I tuned that out. I figured I'd hear enough of that kind of complaining once I started serving my time (surprisingly, there was less of that in prison than I imagined, but that's another story).

The man spoke last, and for him prison didn't sound all that terrible. He gained lots of weight (having been a crystal meth addict before he was arrested) and then lost most of it. He learned to appreciate reading. He tried to live peacefully, kept mainly to himself, and made it through his four years without too much turmoil. He did mention that his wife had left him, as many of them do, and warned that the most dangerous time for the "Dear John" letters to arrive was about six months before an inmate was to be released. That's when the reality of the person coming back finally hits home, and the wives or girlfriends start to remember what life was like before. Often included drugs, alcohol, abuse, infidelity, lies, and seedy friends and cohorts. Faced with the choice of moving on with their own lives, or the possibility of falling right back into the old nightmare, at six months to go a lot of them get the courage to finally wash their hands of the whole affair and look to the future.

Anyway, he rambled on about his relationship problems, and about the struggles of seeing his children now as often as he would like to. But then he stopped, and gave the four or five of us in attendance what he said were the two most important pieces of advice for making it through a prison sentence. First: mind your own business. Don't ask people about what they are doing, what they are involved in, what scams and hustles they are running, and even if you happen to see something or hear something, pretend you didn't. (He added a corollary to that advice, which was not to get involved in any gambling in prison, because the risks were great and the rewards were both small and unreliable). More important, he said, was his second piece of advice. Speaking from experience, he said this was without question the most crucial piece of advice anybody entering the Federal prison system could hear, learn, and understand. The advice was simply this:

Don't get sick.

It seemed silly to me at the time, especially since I couldn't really see a way to avoid getting sick. You could try to eat healthy, exercise, dress warmly in the winter, and keep as far away from other sick people as possible. Besides that, what could you do? And anyway, if you did get sick, the prison system would have to take care of you, free of charge. Wouldn't they?

As it turned out, he was wrong to suggest "don't get sick" was a piece of advice. Instead, he should have told us to use it as a mantra, day after day. Or, maybe, as a prayer three times a day: "Please, please, please, don't let me get sick in here."

The one thing you hear from a lot of people when you're going to prison is "at least you'll be able to get your teeth fixed." For whatever reason, there is a belief among the general public that inmates get all kind of free dental care - walking in with a mouth full of bad teeth and walking out with a new set. Maybe that was true at one time in the distant past, but believe me; nothing could be further from the truth these days.

One of the first things you're advised to do when you get to prison is get your name on the dental waiting list. Actually, there are two lists, one for cleaning and one for dental repairs. The wait on those lists can be a year or more, depending on where you are doing your time. The problem is that due to budget cuts, the dentists only spend one day a week at any given facility, and the hygienist probably spends one day a week there as well. That means only 6 hours of dental visits a week, by a dentist who probably submitted the lowest bid in order to win the contract. And most of those hours are taken up with "emergency" visits, taking care of inmates who have sat outside the dentist's office all day waiting to be triaged. If your problem isn't immediate - a cracked tooth, abscess, or severe pain - you don't get seen until your turn comes up on the list.

Even if you are lucky enough to get in and see the dentist, the level of care you get is random. I had a few fillings put in while I was a guest of the government - only one has yet to fall out. And forget about getting a crown; if you have a bad tooth, all they will do is pull it out. So generally you're going to leave prison with less teeth in your mouth. Even the simple act of pulling a tooth can become a nightmare.

I had two teeth that needed to be pulled, both because they had cracked and started to rot from the inside. The first one was a few months after I started my sentence. It was pulled without a problem, although I had to take some antibiotics for a week first to clean up a minor infection. The second tooth, however, was not so simple. This was near the end of my sentence. I'd tried three weeks in a row to get in as an emergency patient, but all three times the dentist failed to even show up. Finally, after a month of trying, and what felt like an eternity waiting in line, I made my way into the dentist chair. He agreed that the tooth needed to be pulled, and told me to wait in line again with the other approved patients until my turn came up. Two hours later, I was back in the chair. That's when the fun started. After a few shots of Novocain, the dentist climbed up on my chest and started grunting while he attempted to dislodge the tooth. He pulled, tugged, groaned, moaned, shifted...and finally the tooth came out. Or so I thought...instead, he had only managed to pull off the **crown** of the tooth. The root was still intact, poking slightly out of my now profusely-bleeding gum.

I didn't think this would pose such a problem, but now it seemed to me I was left in worse shape than when I started. Instead of a rotting tooth, I had an exposed (and soon to be painful) root. Imagine my unhappiness when the dentist announced to me that to remove the tooth he would have to cut my gum. Surprise, surprise, he wasn't allowed to do that! Something to do with his contract. I would have to wait to see the oral surgeon. Unfortunately, the oral surgeon was not scheduled to return to the facility for six weeks, and I was supposed to be released in four! To make a long story short, I've still got that exposed root in my mouth...although I plan on going to the dentist in the next month or two so I can have all of my dental issues prioritized and eventually treated.

So when somebody tells you the plan on getting their teeth fixed in prison, you should probably tell them to plan on eating soft food for the rest of their life. That is, if they are lucky enough not to get seriously ill while in prison...or blessed to recover if something serious does go wrong. As for me, aside from these dental issues, I was pretty lucky when it came to staying healthy in prison. That is, until I woke up one morning with an itchy bump on my right wrist.

At the time when I learned first-hand how dangerous it could be to become seriously ill in prison, I was working as the plumber in my first facility. I didn't have any personal experience in that area, but the CO who ran the Paint Shop also ran Plumbing, and he needed a second inmate to handle all the minor repairs in the aging prison. About a week after I started, the head inmate plumber was sent to "the hole" and eventually was transferred to a higher-security location, so that left me as the only plumber. Since things had a tendency to break every day, I learned on the job, and learned fast.

Because I had to spend a lot of my time working with broken toilets, urinals, and drain lines in the bathrooms, I sent requests to the medical department to try and get them to approve hepatitis inoculations for me. I knew they provided them for the inmates who worked at the sewage treatment plant (our facility was not on city water - we had our own well, water tanks, and sewage plant) so I figured I should get them as well. Unfortunately my requests were always turned down, because the "policy" was to only give the shots to inmates who came in

direct contact with sewage. Somehow they had decided that plumbers, who use jettors and augers on clogged drain lines constantly, didn't operate in those conditions. I found myself without that protection, but very aware of my personal health and the state of my body as a result. In addition, I had suffered from malignant melanoma back in 2000 and worried about another occurrence, so I kept a close eye on my skin and my freckles.

One morning I woke up to find a small bump on the underside of my right wrist. It itched terribly, but wasn't much bigger than a mosquito bite. I shrugged it off and went about my day. By bedtime, however, it had started to look more like a pimple or maybe a cyst. It was red, growing upward (not so much outward), and beginning to resemble a miniature volcano in design. When I awoke the following morning, that's exactly what it looked like: a mini volcano, with a whitish-green crater in the center. I knew enough to realize the green meant this was an infection, and possibly a bad one. My stomach flipped over when I realized two more things: first, that underneath this volcano there was a cyst that was about the size of a blueberry, stretching the skin around my wrist tightly; worse, *much* worse, and much scarier, I had a small bump on my left butt cheek which was itching like crazy...the same way the one on my wrist had itched 24 hours before!

I skipped breakfast to go to Sick Call, where I signed up for an appointment with the doctor a few hours later. Well, except you don't get to see "the doctor." Instead you get to see a Physician's Assistant. He examines you and passes on his diagnosis to the doctor, who prescribes any necessary medication. The mere act of getting a prescription could be a joke. One particular PA supposedly had been a veterinary assistant in the Philippines. True or not, I do know that the two expressions you were almost guaranteed to hear when he examined you, delivered in his thick accent, were "pull down your pants" and "you buy Ibuprofen at commissary." Magically, the ibuprofen was a cure-all on the level of some elixir sold at a traveling show by a barker in a top hat and loud jacket. However, the word from inmates with more experience was that our medical care in this place was actually better than in most facilities.

As luck (or lack of it) would have it, I was examined by "pull down your pants", and this time I wanted to pull my pants down. He told me he didn't see anything on my rear end, but for the "spider bite" on my wrist he prescribed some antibiotic ointment, the same bacitracin stuff you find on any drug store shelf. I suppose I felt slightly relieved that this supposedly-qualified medical professional felt that whatever I was suffering from was of only minor concern. I went back to work and picked up the cream that afternoon. The urge to pick at, or pop, the volcano on my wrist was nearly irresistible, but I managed to fight it and went to bed hoping the ointment would do the trick.

The following morning, however, I was much less hopeful. Not only did my wrist look purple, the cyst underneath was now grape-sized. Volcanic was still the best way to describe whatever this was, as unlike a normal pimple where the head sticks out, the whitish-green head on this thing was actually recessed within the center of the growth. I was also terrified to realize I could feel a lump under the skin of my ass the size of a golf ball. Worse, this was Saturday, so there was no normal Sick Call to attend. I would have to go to "Control" and get the officer on duty to agree my condition was serious enough to warrant a phone call to the PA, and an unscheduled appointment.

My big fear was that I had developed MRSA, which is a dangerous and highly-contagious antibiotic-resistant staph infection which seems to have become more widespread in the last few years. At first it was known mainly in overcrowded prisons, but recently even professional sports teams have had to deal with outbreaks. In fact, the prison I was being held at had suffered an outbreak the prior summer. The eight or nine inmates infected had to be held in quarantine in "the hole" until they were no longer contagious. From the little bit I'd read about MRSA, there were only a few antibiotics which could treat it, and even then it could be a struggle to completely eradicate it. I shivered as I walked to Control, both from the unnatural lump on my backside and the worry that I would be locked up in solitary for weeks until I had recovered...or died, whichever came first.

And as I approached the Control Center, it suddenly occurred to me that if the thing I my wrist had started as a blueberry and then grown to a grape, this new sore might grow to a much larger size than the golf ball I was currently dealing with. "Don't get sick" now sounded like the best advice I could have been given!

The officer on duty at the Control Center took pity on me and went ahead and called the PA, who told me to go to see him in the Medical department. I had to sit around for an hour or so until he called me in, as he was caring for a diabetic who was feeling rather ill. He looked at my wrist and my backside and agreed I was suffering from some sort of infection, and that the ointment I had been prescribed was not going to help. Here is where I got my first real taste of BOP medical care: the PA explained that he was going to have the doctor prescribe me some antibiotics, which I could pick up on Sunday. However, those antibiotics were most likely going to be completely ineffectual. The antibiotics he **wanted** me to have couldn't be prescribed until I had taken the useless ones for three days. Then I could come back, see the PA or maybe even the doctor, and they would be able to prescribe the stronger stuff. The wonderful word "policy" was used again. Even then, the strong antibiotics would only be

prescribed for seven days, after which they'd need to get special approval to continue them. In the meantime, I was advised to take the ones they were giving me, use the worthless ointment, and try to keep a warm compress on the cysts...although how the heck I was supposed to keep a warm compress on my ass he had no suggestion. The compress would help draw the infection out. It was also suggested that Monday I should come back to Sick Call again to get permission to skip work for a few days until I felt better.

By the time Monday morning rolled around, the cyst on my wrist had burst, expelling a good deal of greenish pus and blood, which I tried to keep mopping up with toilet paper. The pain had been quite intense. When I went to Sick Call, they gave me some adhesive bandages for my wrist, and a "lay-in" to skip work for the rest of the week. Unfortunately for me, it was also "policy" that even though I had a lay-in, I was not allowed to lie in bed under the covers during the day, just on top of them, so my attempts to keep a warm compress on my butt cheek were questionable at best. Plus the bathroom, my only source of hot water, was on the other side of the building from my bunk. The cyst had now grown to, as near as I could tell, about the size of a baseball, with maybe a quarter of it sticking up above the normal surface (but still under the skin), and the rest deep within the cheek. Sitting was terribly painful, and lying on my stomach was the only way to feel even the slightest improvement. Even in that position, waves of pain were common. I could barely eat, and when I did I had to balance on the side edge of the chair in the dining hall to avoid any additional pressure. I would alternate between profuse sweating and terrible chills, and the pain made me shake all over and my teeth chatter when it was at its worst.

Tuesday night was the most miserable night I could imagine. My skin felt stretched to the limit. I really believed that I might go into shock, or if I did manage to fall asleep I could likely never wake up again. I went to the trouble of writing a goodbye note to Heather, plus one to my father and stepmother, and a third to the rest of my family. I was starting to have delusions lying in bed, or maybe I was simply going crazy. But somehow I fell asleep, or passed out, or something. And when I woke up, the cyst had finally started burst, leaking blood and pus onto the compress and ruining the pair of boxer shorts I was wearing. As bad as it hurt, and as terrifying as it was, at least I figured this would be the beginning of the end. From here on in, I'd either get better or I would whither away and die.

At Sick Call the PA on duty was Mr. "Pull Down Your Pants" again. When I did just that, he backed away as if he'd seen something out of a horror movie. The PA didn't even want to apply any gauze or tape a bandage on – he simply wanted to get as far away as possible from this extra head growing out of my rear end. At first he simply told me to continue with the antibiotics, but at my insistence he called the doctor and they went ahead and prescribed the stronger pills for me. To my surprise, even though I was oozing a tremendous amount of disgusting thick pus, he had no interest in having me quarantined. The PA didn't even take a culture to test and see if I had MRSA – it was "policy" (so he told me) that they only took a culture if the second antibiotics failed to work. My lay-in was extended to the following Monday, and I was sent back to my housing unit.

When everybody was at work, I decided that at the very least I should take a shower. In this facility we had open showers, six shower heads per room, and the last thing I wanted was for anybody else to see me this way. The hot water was both soothing and painful, but I almost threw up when I saw the trails of blood and thick white paste flowing down the drain. Worse, when I gently tried to clean my backside, my finger actually slipped into the open head of the cyst. The hole was **that large!** No wonder I had gotten sick, when the authorities were allowing people as sick as myself to remain in the general population, and when they continued to refer to my illness as "spider bites." Perhaps that was "policy" too; there may have been a directive that they would not tolerate another outbreak of MRSA, or anything similar, because of the negative publicity. I have no idea. All I know is I let the water run for ten minutes after I was done showering in an effort to wash away anything which might make somebody else sick. If we had been permitted access to disinfectants or useful cleaning supplies I would have covered the area in that as well, but in that facility we were not allowed to use such "dangerous" substances.

I did improve over the following two weeks, as the cyst slowly shrunk away and the blood and pus ceased to flow. The medical staff was able to get approval for me to use the powerful antibiotics for a full 3 ½ weeks, which I guess was long enough to knock most of the infection out of my system. I did experience another cyst on my left hip about five months later, but it did not grow nearly as large this time, perhaps simply because the area is not as fatty. Once again they treated my "spider bite" with the weak antibiotics first, followed by two weeks of the good stuff. After that experience, the cysts never returned. To this day I wonder if I'm carrying any odd undetected illness in my system.

The only physical reminder I carry is a tiny scar on my right wrist. I may have a similar scar "back there" but if I do I can't see it, and I'm not about to spend much time searching for one. Months later I was transferred to another facility, where an inmate was sent to the hospital for over a week for what sounded very similar to what

I'd suffered through, in the same physical location. At least that let me know that it isn't necessarily that all medical care in the Bureau of Prisons is terrible – it's just inconsistent, like so much else in life.

## The Dining Dead -

# The Eternal Sunshine Movie Reviews

**Once** – Once is in some ways a very simple movie, minimalistic in cinematography, script, scenery, and most of all in plot...all the way down to the unnamed main characters, Boy and Girl (at least that is how they are listed in the credits). But in its own way it is as complicated and intense as real life, which in itself can be minimalistic when you silence the bombardment of noise all around us. Life is also beautiful, and it makes its own bittersweet music in much the same way as the characters in Once.

Billed as a musical, Once is not the kind of movie where you'll see a chorus of dancing Dickensian street urchins doing somersaults through the streets of Dublin, where the film takes place. The music is provided by the characters themselves. Yet like many musicals, the plot can be squeezed down to Boy (Glen Hansard) meets Girl (Marketa Irglova). Hansard plays a street musician who earns a few pounds strumming his guitar and playing songs when he isn't working with his father at the vacuum repair shop. At night, however, he'll stop playing the "established songs" the crowd enjoys, and instead plays heartfelt songs of his own composing. Irglova hears him perform one night, and they strike up a friendship. Soon they find themselves discovering they have mutual musical tastes and talent, while learning that they share some similar scars from prior relationships. Together they begin to rediscover some hope for happiness. The question remains whether that happiness is to be found with each other as friends, or as something more.

The dialog is simple and everyday, but the music that surrounds it is moving and personal. The songs aren't part of a background soundtrack...in this film they're performed within the plot, not as devices but simply as the songs both musicians write and work on. In fact, most of the songs were written by the actors themselves, which may explain why the personal performances seem so appropriate.

Writer and Director John Carney was once a member of a band with Glen Hansard, and in him he has found a brilliant performer who can sing and emote without making it look like the overacting and false emotion of the overused "guitar face" every 80's video (or air guitar rendition of a rock anthem) is engulfed with. Marketa Irglova has a soft and lilting voice which blends perfectly with Hansard's, but which can also stand out on its own, with an odd combination of strength and vulnerability. Like many people, her character (and her voice) is a contradiction in terms, multi-faceted and dazzling. I am now learning more about their musical careers (they've done an album together from which a few of the film's songs came from, and Hansard's band is in many circles considered the TRUE ultimate Irish band, regardless of U2's worldwide popularity), but you don't need to have any knowledge of their history to appreciate the film.

It is hard to review a film like Once, because the movie is more of a compilation of parts which together form the basis for what the characters are learning to accept: that life is beautiful and painful and bitter and delicious and complicated, and simple, all at the same time...the same way music can be. Whether it is a full orchestra or one person with a guitar or piano, honest music can touch a soul like almost nothing else.

**Joshua** - Joshua is a sort of hard movie to categorize. It isn't gory, it isn't scary...it's more of a suspense drama, taking the often-used plot of the evil child - think The Omen - and using your familiarity with that storyline against you. It isn't a great film, I'm not even sure it is a very good one, but it's enjoyable and the suspense works, so it is a useful diversion if nothing else.

Sam Rockwell plays Brad. He and his wife Abby (Vera Farmiga) have just had their second child, a little girl. Brad is a successful New York City investment banker-type, and his wife stays home with the kids: their new baby and 9-year-old Joshua (Jacob Kogan). With help from Brad's parents, and Abby's brother Ned (Dallas Roberts), we watch as Abby tries to care for this newborn and overcome her fears of post-partum depression, which apparently she suffered from after Joshua was born. As the newborn begins to cry frequently, and Abby can barely get any sleep, her depression turns to occasional hallucination. Yet around every corner, near every problem, lurks Joshua. Jacob Kogan plays Joshua in a wonderfully creepy fashion, not moving his arms when he walks (ala Joe Friday), droning on in a monotone voice both adult and childlike, an unemotional stare, a blank

expression...he is completely unsettling, especially to the audience who has grown to expect head-spinning and vomiting (Joshua does throw up in an early scene, stopping in mid-spasm to apologize).

The family starts to disintegrate. Brad's business is suffering, nobody is sleeping well, Brad's mother wants Joshua baptized which Jewish Abby finds offensive, the apartment upstairs in a constant source of construction racket...and as each new crisis is reached we are left to decide if Joshua is somehow involved, or fully responsible...or have we just been trained to believe so? In one scene, the child suddenly stops crying, and immediately Joshua is seen with a full garbage bag which he wants to take outside. His parents are merely curious, but the audience's first question is inevitably "did he stuff the baby in there?" Are Joshua's eccentricities a result of his advanced intelligence for his age, or his talent as a young pianist, or typical sibling rivalry? Or more?

The only problem I had with the movie was self-inflicted: I can't watch Sam Rockwell in a film now without picturing him as Chuck Barris from "Confessions of a Dangerous Mind." If you don't suffer from that problem, I think you might enjoy a break from the multitude of sequels this summer by seeing Joshua. If you miss it now, at least catch it on DVD. The creepy moments make it worth your while. Plus, as one local review put it, if nothing else, it might convince you not to have any more kids.

**Goya's Ghosts** – Goya's Ghosts could have been a very good picture. As it is, it's merely a decent one, with adequate performances and a historically interesting period, but the characters and their experiences somehow run flat.

The film centers on two characters on opposite sides of the Spanish Inquisition. On one end is the Spanish painter Francisco Goya, played by Stellan Skarsgard. His masterpieces grace chapels and the best homes, and he has been appointed the court painter to the King and Queen. But he also prints drawings which the religious leaders of the day find distasteful. On the opposite end is Brother Lorenzo (Javier Bardem), who is leading the drive to re institute the harsher methods of the Inquisitions older days. Early in the film the daughter of a local merchant (Natalie Portman) who Goya has painted in the past is arrested by the Inquisition on a charge of being a secret Jew. Her forced confession is one of only a few scenes which carry any true emotion...as does her eventual release from prison.

The character of Goya is merely a centerpiece for the struggles going on in Spain at the time, as Napoleon's forces invade, followed by the British. None of the characters are ever really developed. Lorenzo shifts from evil persecutor to religious zealot to heathen to radical revolutionary without the slightest hint at his inner workings or motives. Goya is allowed to produce his drawings without any response or even the slightest pressure from the Inquisition, who are perfectly willing to torture innocents in the meantime. Natalie Portman is given very little to work with in either of her roles (she also plays a young prostitute for reasons which become clear as the plot moves forward). The cinematography is detailed and interesting, and the direction by Milos Forman (Amadeus and One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest) is effective. What fails is the direction-less plot, and the empty characters. Who lives and who dies is of little concern to the audience. Even the terrors of war hold only minor interest. In the end, you are left only waiting for the final scenes, and then wondering what could have been made of this story if only it had been done differently.

I'd give Goya's Ghosts a C, perhaps a C+. I can't say I am sorry to have seen it, but I am sorry that the film I saw couldn't have been given better treatment.

**Interview** - Interview is a movie which pretends to make big points about the society we live in, where celebrity can often be more about what you look like and who you're sleeping with than any talent or intellect you might possess. In today's world the public's frenzy with Hollywood and the train wrecks of people like Lindsay Lohan or Paris Hilton take precedence over politics, current events, war, and other crucial topics that help determine the direction of the world. Interview doesn't attempt to decipher these points, or to lay blame. It merely points out that world's existence, and uses it for the background of the story.

Adapted from the Dutch film by the same name (which was directed by Theo van Gogh, who was murdered for another one of his pictures), Interview stars Steve Buscemi (who also co-wrote the screenplay, and directed) and Sienna Miller. Buscemi plays Pierre Peders, a journalist who generally covers Washington and politics. For reasons left initially unexplained, he is assigned the task of meeting and interviewing Katya, played by Sienna Miller as a self-centered pretty face of the week actress crossed with a Hollywood socialite. Arriving over an hour late for the interview, the unapologetic Katya is insulted to find Peders has not prepared for the interview in any way. It is clear he regards the job as pointless and his subject as vapid. The interview is canceled, Peders is slightly injured in a car accident caused by his cab driver's focus on Katya...and the next thing you know, she brings Peders up to her loft. There ensues the interview, along with a battle of wits, verbal barbs, insults, secrets, lies, honesty, and some minor surprises along the way.



The sharp jousting between the two characters keeps things interesting, even if some of the road they are to travel is telegraphed a bit too openly. Both actors play their parts with precision, and the direction by Mr. Buscemi seems properly basic and minimal, including a few cuts with a hand-held digital camera to add to the intimate setting. As the movie concludes, the characters agree they share one belief: that in every relationship, there is no equality; someone is the winner, and someone is the loser. So who wins or loses here? That remains to be discovered, a question the film hopes to answer.

As I mentioned, the only real negative of Interview is the obvious (to me, at least) payoff. But I can't fault the screenplay too much. Even if I knew where we were probably going, I still enjoyed the trip. As they say, it is better to be traveling than to arrive!

**Seen on DVD** – Breaking the Waves (A-, a very open and emotional film which I had meant to see when it was released in 1996 but somehow never did, starring Oscar-nominated Emily Watson as an unsteady Scottish villager who talks to God and believes her paralyzed husband will walk again if she has sex with other men. The line between madness, faith, and magic can sometimes be very fine, and which side of the line you stand on depends on who is drawing the line); Kids (C-, highly controversial in 1995 when it was released, while it does still serve as a reminder of the dangers of unprotected sex, I just couldn't get into the jabbering "realistic" dialog); Windy City Heat (B+, is it a real documentary or is it fake? All I know is it is funny, as an unsuspecting goofball finds himself cast as the lead in an action picture – without realizing the whole thing is an elaborate practical joke on him); Girl With a Pearl Earring (B-, slow-moving but with good performances; painting and appreciation of art is difficult to translate onto film); The Spitfire Grill (B, another idealized view of small-town life, but it does seem to build the viewer to a slow appreciation of the simpler things in life. Certainly trying to forget, or forgive, the past is an important lesson).

## Meet Me In Montauk

### The Eternal Sunshine Letter Column

**David Partridge:** Just to let you know that you have spread some good, I went out and bought myself a 4-pack of Reed's Extra Ginger Brew after reading ES. I haven't bought it in a long time because of the price, but it's really not that much in comparison to a lot of things, and I really enjoy them, so why not?

*Here at the office my coworker and friend Marian bought me (at my request) some of the Reed's, which I had never had before. This was Jamaican Ginger Brew, which had a much heavier lemon/lime flavor than I am used to. I liked it, but I still prefer the Stewart's which is crisp ginger but without so much of the other flavorings.*

**Melinda Holley:** Utility collections - UGH!!! My sister, Dianne, worked in that for several years for a large water company. She wrote instruction manuals, trained people, and set up various call centers around the country...only to see the 'professionals' ignore the manuals, not back up the front line people, and generally let the call centers deteriorate. Then the resulting problems landed on HER desk. So she went back to school & got her Masters in Instructional Design, got a better job in Delaware (which pays almost twice the salary), and waved bye-bye. She called where she worked 'The Compound' & said it reminded her of a prison. She was VERY happy to leave.

*The longer she worked there, the more I understood why they based "King of the Hill" on Garland and its residents...some very strange people there, both as workers and as customers. The whole operation tries to be Big City but comes off more like country bumpkin. A perfect example is when they decided to start accepting credit cards for utility payments at the drive-thru window. Instead of building some sort of keypad outside, they at first wanted the person working the window to put the credit-card machine THROUGH THE WINDOW DRAWER so the customer could run their own card! Then they decided that was a bad idea...so instead the customer has to send through their credit card and photo drivers license, have the employee run the card, send just the credit card receipt back for a signature, retrieve the receipt, and return the card, license, and system receipt. Yeah, that's going to work! Especially when you realize customers ALREADY bitch and moan about how long it takes to make a payment. I am so glad Heather is out of that nightmare before it got any worse.*

**Allison Kent:** Did I tell you that I am volunteering at a local animal shelter too? I started a couple months ago. I haven't done any of the off-site engagements, but I just go to the shelter, pet the cats, and walk the dogs.

After reading your experience at Pet Smart, I am thinking that may be something I should try. The shelter is beginning to get me depressed. I don't really LIKE going there anymore. But I will continue to go since I know the animals enjoy when I go. There are just SO MANY cats and I cannot believe the reasons that people surrender their dogs. It makes me sick.

*I really think people here in Texas, or maybe people in general who live in a more rural area, have a different outlook on pets in general. When they get tired of a cat or dog, they just let it go outside and fend for itself. If we're lucky, they bring it to a shelter or the SPCA, but you are right about the reasons... "He chews on things"; it's a puppy damn it, what do you think they do? "He costs too much to take care of"; did you even consider what food and vet bills would be before you got the animal in the first place? "She sheds"; so do YOU, it's a cat, where do you think the hair goes? My favorite is when they say "she's too jumpy and energetic"; well damn it, you keep the dog locked up in a crate all day, and you never want to play with it or take it for a walk, if you want to ignore him why did you adopt him? Get a fish or a plant! I understand how sometimes it isn't really enjoyable at the time, but when I can't find myself really enthusiastic about going I remember how satisfied and useful I feel afterward, which is a big reward for the small effort and time we have to put in.*

# Game Openings

**Diplomacy (Black Press):** Graham Wilson, Brad Wilson, Chris Babcock, Melinda Holley, needs just three more. Getting close, who wants to join in the fun?

**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).

# 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 4

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.

<u>Player</u>	<u>Nut</u>	<u>Nicholson</u>	<u>Candle</u>	<u>Auto</u>	<u>Vegetable</u>	<u>Turn Score</u>	<u>Total</u>
Chris Babcock	Walnut	The Shining	Apple	Ford	Spinach	24	134
Cal White	Almond	Cuckoo's Nest	Lavender	Chevrolet	Pea	13	121
David Burgess	Almond	The Shining	Strawberry	Ford	Green Beans	20	121
Allison Kent	Walnut	As Good as it Gets	Vanilla	Chevrolet	Green Beans	15	120
W. Andrew York	Macadamia	The Shining	Vanilla	Ford	Pea	25	120
Jamie McQuinn	Cashew	The Shining	Cinnamon	Ford	Spinach	24	114
Dane Maslen	Pecan	The Shining	Vanilla	Ford	Pea	25	110
Melinda Holley	Cashew	Witches of Eastwick	Vanilla	Chevrolet	Broccoli	15	98
Kevin Wilson	---	---	---	---	---	7	96
David Partridge	Cashew	Cuckoo's Nest	Cinnamon	Toyota	Broccoli	16	95
Brad Martin	Brasil	Cuckoo's Nest	Citronella	Harley-Davidson	Lettuce	7	93
Joakim Spangberg	---	---	---	---	---	7	85
Brad Wilson	Walnut	The Shining	(Spiced) Apple	Ford	Pea	25	82
Martin Burgdorf	Walnut	The Shining	Vanilla	Ford	Spinach	27	71
Brendan Whyte	Cashew	A Few Good Men	Eucalyptus	Ford	Cabbage	15	53

Remember, if you do not send in orders you get the lowest score earned that round, which in this case was 7. The highest possible score was 28. **Congratulations to Martin Burgdorf who came the closest with a 27!** Good job!

Selected Comments By Category: **Nut** – Dane Maslen “I have deliberately gone for what I (perhaps incorrectly) perceive to be the sort of answer Americans might give (I'd go for 'walnut' with a set of British players)”  
**Nicholson Movie** – Chris Babcock “One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest is better fixed in my mind, but probably not others. I can't imagine “As Good as it Gets” even registering (as good as it was). **Candle Scent** – Brendan Whyte “What a girly category for a boys-own zine...um... you want the scent itself or the girly name they give it like “eternal soothing memories of my pony” **Automobile** – David Partridge “In the past I would have said Ford, but now I really don't know what will pop into someone's head.” **Vegetable** – Chris Babcock “There's an ice cream truck in my neighborhood that plays the Popeye theme. Either someone has a sense of humor or completely lacks a sense of irony.”

### Round 5 Categories – Deadline is August 30th, 2007

1. A geometric shape.
2. A type of tree.
3. A religion practiced in Asia.
4. A planet in our galaxy other than the Earth or Mars.
5. Any television network.

## **Diplomacy Zine Plug**

As long as I am giving zine plugs here, let me take this opportunity to plug the latest issue of **Diplomacy World**, which was just released a few days ago. **Diplomacy World** has been published since 1974, and we're approaching the big Issue #100. I've really enjoyed working with Jim Burgess on this zine since I resumed the role of Lead Editor earlier this year. I think the two issues we've put out have been pretty good, and I truly believe the best is yet to come. You can download Issue #98, as well as plenty of back issues, free of charge in Adobe pdf format from the new **Diplomacy World** web site:

<http://www.diplomacyworld.net/>

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**Deadline For The Next Issue of Eternal Sunshine:  
August 30th, 2007 – See You Then!**