

# ***Eternal Sunshine #8***

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**Quote Of The Month** – “Maybe you can find yourself a nice antique rocking chair to die in.”  
(Clementine in “Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind”)

Here I am, irritating you with yet another issue of **Eternal Sunshine**, the Diplomacy subzine designed for socially-confused hermits and Turtle Chex Mix fanatics. I hope your summer is going well; here in Dallas we've been very lucky with the weather. Aside from all the rain and flooding (which hasn't been a problem for me personally) the temperatures have been relatively mild. We didn't even hit over 100 degrees until mid-August. During some past years we've had dozens of days in a row where the heat crossed over the century mark. Pretty soon we'll enter autumn, which is a sort of depressing time for me as I really miss the beautiful northeastern trees and leaves that I grew up with. Maybe someday we'll move north again? I'm sure Texas would be more than happy to get rid of the likes of me!

Thanks as usual to all of you who sent in nice comments about the pieces I've been printing in this rag or on my blog (or both). I've got one more prison story to finish up (“The Sunglasses”) and then I think I'm going to go back to writing about my first marriage or my childhood...or both, switching from one to the other. I'm not likely to run out of stories anytime soon. The only problem is building the energy and motivation to sit down and produce something. I've found writing on the blog helps quite a bit, because it allows me to break down each piece into smaller sections. I have a real struggle doing that mentally – breaking down a task into smaller, more manageable parts. Instead I get overwhelmed by the enormity of a perfect version of what I'm considering, and toss the whole project rather than disappoint myself. Fortunately in the last six months I've really improved in that area, and I believe a major reason for that is the feedback some of you have been kind enough to give me.

In personal news, Heather and I continue to prepare for our Halloween wedding. The invitations should go out in a week or so. When I think about the potential guest list, offhand it seems rather small. But then once you sit down and start writing all the names out, you realize how many people you know or are close to. Hmmm, I believe the social rule is that if you are invited to a wedding, you have to send a present even if you do not attend. Is that correct? If so, you should all expect to be invited! So why not save us the trouble and just send the presents now? Cash, gift cards, and other valuable items are all appreciated!

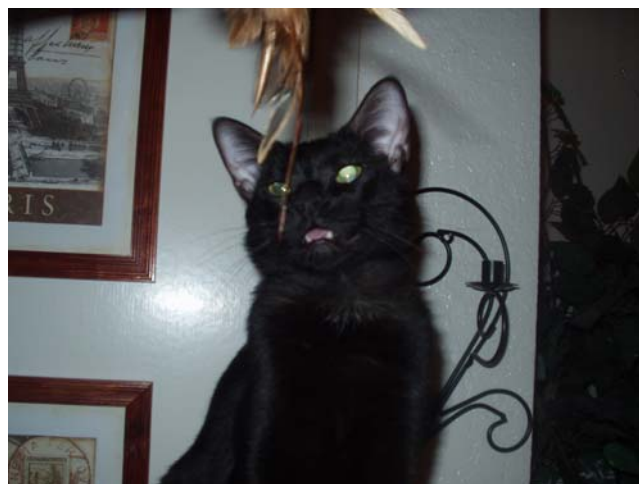
We no longer volunteer with the local animal rescue group I mentioned in earlier issues. This isn't because we no longer want to help the animals – we plan on finding a new rescue group or shelter to volunteer our time to. Instead, in this case it was simply that the woman who runs the rescue group is a real mess, and we couldn't deal with her drama anymore. Each Saturday we would have to listen to her complaining about every aspect of her life. First her car broke down, so we felt obligated to go take care of the animals seven nights a week. Then her laptop computer got stolen, which contained all of her records. When it was discovered that her own son was the one who stole it (along with a friend), she wanted to get the police to press charges...on the friend, but not her son. Then her own dog was “stolen” by a neighbor. The list goes on and on. We saw her go into a screaming argument with her teenage son because he bought her a breast instead of a thigh from a chicken place. The next thing we knew, she had “traded” her son to some friend of hers for her friend's mentally-challenged son in return. You never knew what the new drama was going to be, but there was no doubt it would be something!

A bigger concern for us was the condition of the animals. The dogs would appear weekly with scars or cuts, which she would attribute either to fighting or to "trying to break out of the kennels." The cats she'd bring were either flea-infested or stricken with diarrhea or both. Her "adoption fees" fluctuated based on what the person asking looked like, whether it was one of her favorite dogs that slept in bed with her, and whether her mortgage was past due. There seemed to be no separation between her personal money and that of the rescue group, even though the rescue is registered as a 501-whatever non-profit organization. And on top of all this, her stories on the animals, where they came from, their names, and what vet work they'd had done seemed to change from hour to hour. Her dogs and cats supposedly had been fully vetted and had their shots, but the paperwork was strangely missing. On one occasion she claimed to have paid to have a dog fixed, but he clearly hadn't been. Inevitably, these misunderstandings were the fault of everyone else, and never her. In the end, we didn't feel comfortable helping someone we could not trust. Even if she was telling the truth about everything, she isn't in any condition physically, financially, or emotionally to be responsible for all of these needy animals. All we were doing was helping her hold off complete collapse for another week. Personally, I would rather she have to shut her organization down. Her laziness and drama theatrics were to the point that we were no longer there to help the animals – we were there to help her keep her personal life together. Regardless, after we spend a few weeks resting and running errands (like finalizing our wedding plans), we'll begin the search for a more reputable organization that needs volunteers. Heather has cried a few times because she truly misses the animals and feels terrible that we aren't able to spend time with them and improve their lives for a few hours a week anymore.

The first week we didn't go to work with the rescue group, we couldn't have made it anyway, as that was the Saturday we had to bring Tigger into the vet for what we feared could be her last appointment. Things had not been going well for her in the prior three weeks. While on one hand we were having a much easier time giving Tigger her thyroid medication because of the discovery of Pill Pockets, she seemed to be going downhill fast. She would still get up to eat and use the litter, but her movements were slow and labored. We were concerned she was becoming dehydrated, as it wasn't often we would see her drinking water (but we had no real way of verifying that since she spends all day here while we are at work). Basically, she looked old and feeble and miserable, and as much as it upset us to think about it, we had to prepare in advance for the possibility that when we brought her in, we may have to decide to put her down then and there, or bring her home to spend another few days while we located a service that would do the procedure here at the apartment. I even called in advance to have the papers drawn up, just in case.



Our regular vet wasn't in that day, so one of the newer vets – but very skilled, as all at that particular clinic are – did the exam. At first she agreed Tigger did not look particularly well, although her heart rate was way down which was a major improvement from when we first discovered her thyroid condition. After doing her blood test, however, we were all very surprised to discover that her thyroid level was still much too low – meaning her medication level was too high. Normally a cat requires at least the amount we had been giving her to respond, but every case is different, and apparently Tigger reacts easily. Dr. Thomas also showed us that Tigger was willing to take her pill not just with Pill Pockets, but also stuck in a bit of Easy Cheese. (I should mention that while we continue to use this trick at home, it does not always work. On occasion Tigger is clever enough to eat all the cheese and then spit out the ½ pill. On those days, I stick the pill back in a Pill Pocket and give it to her a bit later). Also we were shown that Tigger was not dehydrated. Her skin was loose, but when you use the "gum test" (pressing on her upper gum to see how long it takes to turn pink again) her color returned instantly. So the appointment turned from potential goodbyes into hope for improvement. I am happy to report that aside from a minor flea problem that is now under control (which she must have picked up from Toby), Tigger seems much more herself. She is more active, more affectionate, and more herself. Yes, she is still a whiny grumpy sourpuss most of the time, but that's to be expected from a 20-



year-old cat who has to deal with a 3-year-old black cat who wants to instigate trouble whenever he can. I am now hopeful Tigger will hang around for a lot longer than earlier suspected. That's good news.

I suppose before I move on to the latest in my prison series, I should take a minute to make my NFL picks for the year. I know my MLB picks weren't all that hot – although I need to back and see what the heck I said, its hard to remember when most of my baseball attention is focused on trying to make the Yankees lose as many games as possible! Anyway, here are my NFL picks:

AFC East – New England, Jets, Buffalo, Miami. I think Miami may be just dreadful.

AFC North – Baltimore, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, Cleveland. I'm tired of Cleveland getting good press every year, only to fall flat on their faces once the season starts.

AFC South – Indianapolis, Tennessee, Jacksonville, Houston. Letter Carr go will turn out to be a mistake.

AFC West – San Diego, Denver, Kansas City, Oakland. Will Oakland ever be a true NFL team again?

NFC East – Dallas, Philadelphia, Giants, Washington. Not the picks I want to make, being a Giants fan and a Cowboy hater. I think the Giants will s-u-c-k!

NFC North – Chicago, Detroit, Green Bay, Minnesota. Detroit is finally putting things together.

NFC South – New Orleans, Carolina, Atlanta, Tampa Bay. Atlanta and Tampa Bay may fight it out for worst in the conference.

NFC West – Seattle, San Francisco, Arizona, St. Louis. Arizona disappoints again, while San Francisco surprises.

AFC Championship: Baltimore over New England.

NFC Championship: New Orleans over Chicago.

Super Bowl: New Orleans over Baltimore.

Finally, on baseball, I am pretty happy with what the Rangers got for Gagne. The Teixeira trade may or may not pay off, but I don't care – they got the most they could for him. Too bad Aki was hurt, I would have liked to trade him too. I don't think Texas will be too terrible next year, especially if we can sign a quality center fielder.

Okay, on to the rest of this mess...don't forget to sign up for the game openings before I get tired of offering them! See you in a month.

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(Note - names in this piece have been changed but the events are, as always, as I remember them)

### **My First Prison Bunkmate**

On my first day in prison, the Unit Manager talked to me in his office for about two minutes. He was an ex-Marine type, but seemed pretty straightforward. His instructions were rather simple: follow the rules, stay the hell out of his way, behave myself, and if I had any questions I should direct them to his clerk (an inmate) first before I bothered him with anything.

I suppose he was able to size me up rather quickly. "You'll be fine, just keep your nose clean." Glancing down at the paperwork on his desk, he looked up at me again. "The guy you're bunking with is a bit of a slob, but I don't think you'll have any problems with him. His name is Alan."

A few minutes later I was introduced to Alan Linden. The man standing before me, hand outstretched, was quite striking in appearance. His skin was pasty and pale, with a long face and high forehead. His unkempt black hair was thinning, extending his forehead halfway across his crown, and the terrible comb-over did little to hide his large bald spot in the back. A large, ethnic nose helped complete the portrait of the stereotypical schemer, which in Alan's case turned out to be quite accurate.

Instantly Alan had decided he would be the one to show me the ropes. It seemed very important to him that I regard him as an authority on everything, from who was who within the prison system to where to get the best deals on anything and everything. In the first hour Alan told me he would be happy to fix me up with new socks, a radio, an extra blanket, food from the kitchen...all for a price, of which I was sure he'd keep a nice cut despite his claim to the contrary. The fact was I didn't have much money, and being a bit shell shocked at my first day in prison, I wasn't especially interested in doing any business until I could figure out the lay of the land.

It was precisely my inexperience which caused me not to notice some things initially..things which quickly became apparent over my first week. First of all, Alan was a terrible pack rat. The man seemed to throw nothing away. Old magazines, empty peanut jars, little bottles that tooth powder or other personal items came in - he snatched it all up and stuffed it in his locker. When he didn't have enough room there, he'd hide things

under his mattress and pillow, or in one of two drawers under his bottom bunk. Those drawers were regarded as a prized possession in this facility, as they did not have anymore to pass out, and there were not enough to go around. I politely turned down his offer to sell me one of his for \$20; I already knew that was twice the going rate, but I didn't need the space anyway.

It was also next to impossible to have a conversation with Alan. He was a complete know-it-all, but the New York style who thought he could win his arguments by saying things like "Ahhh, what do you know?" He was a Deadhead, so any discussion of music immediately returned to their superiority over every other musical act in history. He'd open his locker and show me photos of his "girlfriend" – the one who wouldn't let him call, and who only wanted his letters to go to a PO Box. Sort of like she didn't want anyone who she might be shacking up with to know that she still had contact with Alan. Since he had signed power-of-attorney for the apartment building he owned over to her while he was locked up, this didn't seem to be a workable situation. As the months went on, Alan would slowly lose his sanity when it came to this "relationship." When he wasn't fussing over the fiasco, he'd stare at a photo of the two of them together and sigh. But the sigh was not directed at her; instead it was directed at his own image in the photo. "Look what a beautiful head of hair I had!" he'd exclaim. True, compared to the thin, frizzy, greasy mop he wore now, including the bald spot the size of Antarctica, the hair in the photo looked to be a vast improvement. It made me wonder just how long ago it had been taken, as I learned Alan had only been in prison for about six months himself.

Aside from being a pack rat, Alan was also a real slob. Since we could be punished for having a messy cubicle, it became my self-imposed job to sweep and mop the floor every morning, and to empty the trash can before I left for work. Alan worked in the kitchen, and generally didn't get out of bed until after I had left, so he seemed fine with the arrangement. In exchange, Alan's job was to use the floor buffer on our floor to keep the wax shiny. I think I only saw him do that one time during the entire period we shared a cubicle, but I simply didn't care enough to get into an argument. As long as I could keep the area tolerably clean without too much effort, I was willing to overlook his personal habits. The last thing I needed was stress with a bunkmate, or aggravation from the staff. Taking a long-term view, I figured I'd just need to learn to deal with it until a better bunk became available.

Alan's lack of cleanliness was not restricted to leaving an inordinate amount of hair, trash, and food matter all over the floor and desk. He was just as dirty when it came to personal hygiene. Because he worked in the kitchen, Alan would usually spend the day in his kitchen whites, leaving his khaki uniform for visits or his days off. He'd work, getting all sweaty, then come back to the housing unit. Without taking a shower, he'd strip down to his undergarments, pull on a dirty set of long-johns, and put the same filthy whites back on over them. On those rare days when he did decide to take a shower, I'd be horrified to see him put the same dirty long-johns on over his supposedly clean body. There simply was no reason to live that way; the facility not only had free washers and dryers for inmate use, but they also had a prison laundry where you could get your clothes cleaned for you (in a laundry bag) within 24 hours. Most inmates preferred to go to the trouble of self-washing, if for no other reasons than you didn't get your uniform as wrinkled, and you didn't have to imagine what other filthy clothes were mixed into the same load as yours. But Alan let his sweaty, stinky clothes fester in his laundry bag day after day, hanging from the hook by his bunk. I am sure he must have cleaned them once in a while, but I don't know when. And I NEVER saw him exchange his bedding on exchange day every Wednesday. The man was pure filth. When the C.O. called him "a bit of a slob," that was like calling the national debt "a bit of a cash flow problem."

When I would meet inmates for the first time and they'd ask me who I was bunking with, I'd always get one of two responses. Wither they'd roll their eyes and say "sorry, man" or they'd look at me in confusion. "Who is Alan?" they'd ask, and when I would try to describe him they'd finally exclaim "oh, the crazy guy!" I was starting to understand what they meant. It wasn't just that he had no respect for himself - he also had no respect for me or for anyone else around him.

Alan's poor hygiene seemed to be getting worse over time. When he'd sit in the TV room, which was usually completely packed, people would do anything they could to avoid sitting within three seats of him on any side. It got to the point that inmates were coming to \*me\* to see if I could try and talk some sense into him. Why Alan was all of a sudden my problem, I don't know. Perhaps I'd lasted longer than anybody else without trying to kill him. Anyway, I finally bit the bullet and sat him down.

"Alan, people have been coming to me talking about you" I told him. "They're complaining that you really stink, and that you need to take a shower more often."

"Huh? That's not me they're smelling. It is probably one of those Mexicans."

"Well I don't know what to tell you Alan, but this is what they are saying. And I have noticed that you have a tendency to become pretty ripe, especially after you work all day. I mean, you don't wash your clothes very often, and...I don't know...you don't want to get a bad reputation around here do you?"

After a lot of arguing, Alan came up with a plan. He was willing to trust me, not anybody else. So if I felt that he had started to stink, I should let him know so he could take a shower right away. But to preserve his dignity (not that he had any left that I knew of), I wasn't supposed to tell him he smelled bad. Instead, I was supposed to use a code phrase. All I'd have to do is tell him "Hey Alan, 7-Up." Then he'd take a shower and change his clothes.

A few days later, I was sitting in my top bunk writing a letter, when Alan walked in and sat down on his bed. Immediately the terrible odor of sweat and dirt wafted up to my nose, making me turn my head and cough. I called quietly down to him, "Hey Alan. 7-Up, man, 7-Up."

Alan lifted his arm, sniffer at his armpit, and shook his head. "Uh-uh man, it isn't me."

So much for that plan. But I was soon to learn that Alan's nasty habits went further than I imagined.

After I'd shared a cubicle with Alan for a few months, a young kid named Rico moved in to the cube next door. Like me, he slept on the top bunk, and we shared an appreciation for pushing people's buttons when we knew we could get away with it. Rico had his favorite target in a large, one-eyed guy named Big Jim who was finishing up a twelve-year bid. Big Jim and Rico worked the same detail, and while in some ways Rico regarded him as a father figure, in others he was like an older brother. You'd never see a bigger smile on Rico's face than when Big Jim was shouting at him or chasing him away because of something he'd said or done. Rico's pranks were usually childish and harmless: a favorite was to sit at the same table as Big Jim during dinner when there was something sought-after for dessert, such as a small piece of cake. Rico would eat his entire meal, and then sit there staring at his dessert until Big Jim would finally ask if he could have it. Inevitably, Rico would then destroy the dessert, either by pouring soda on it, or spitting on it, or covering it in pepper, before looking up and saying "Sure Jim, you can have it!" To Rico, the shame of having the cake smashed in his face by an angry Big Jim was a small price to pay for getting the desired rise out of Big Jim.

Rico's other favorite habit was to sit on his bunk and sing along with his walkman radio. Unfortunately for those around him, Rico couldn't carry a tune with a wheelbarrow. He'd croon along while wearing his headphones, mangling or randomly changing the words and completely ignoring the song's key. At first I found this a bit annoying, although there was humor in it. But soon I discovered that Alan hated Rico's singing. It drove him absolutely nuts, to the point that Alan would bang on the wall and shout at him to stop. Of course, that did no good, because even if Rico could hear Alan over the music and his own singing, I highly doubt he would have quieted down. If nothing else, he'd be more likely to sing louder.

One song in particular set Alan off like no other: the Barenaked Ladies song that goes something like "Another postcard with chimpanzees I never wanted, addressed to me." The local FM station we were able to get decent reception from seemed to play that song at least once an hour. So I found I was able to relieve some of my suppressed resentment towards Alan by inducing Rico to sing along whenever the song came on. Having discovered Rico's love of M&M's, all it took was three or four hard candy shells filled with sweet chocolate middles to start the performance. Pretty soon Rico decided irritating Alan was even more fun than raising Big Jim's blood pressure. He no longer waited for the song to come on the radio; now he'd often walk over to our cube and ask Alan if he wanted to hear the "latest remix" of Chimpanzee, which consisted of the chorus repeated ad nauseam, broken up only by the occasional turntable "cutting" hand motion and Rico calling out "ch-ch-ch-check check check." I would try to surpass my laughter, but the sight of Alan's pale skin turned bright red, clumps of thinning black hair in his clenched fists, and his teeth gnashing like we was a shark trying to bite through a line was usually more than I could stand. I'd burst out in a fit of laughter, and Rico would run away to the sound of Alan's curses.

I no longer cared much about having a friendly relationship with Alan by this time. Any hope I had of feeling anything but loathing for him was crushed by his latest inappropriate habit: public masturbation.

In prison, or at least in the facilities I spent time in, masturbation is not something you do openly. It was generally assumed most inmates did it, but there was an unwritten understanding that it should be limited to the bathroom stalls. At later facilities I know inmates sometimes talked of "spanking the monkey" in the shower, but in this location the showers were open areas with 6 shower heads, where you almost always had to share the showers with another inmate at the same time while a line of anxious clock-watchers stood waiting for their turn before the hot water ran out. Despite rumors I had heard to the contrary before I was incarcerated, the bathroom stalls had doors, and most had locks, so privacy could be obtained when necessary. The more

concerned inmates would sometimes use damp toilet paper to cover up the cracks around the door, on the off chance someone might try to peek. That wasn't really necessary however...if you were going to be quiet about it, there was a general don't ask-don't tell policy about what took place behind the stall door.

I shouldn't have been surprised that Alan didn't abide by this policy. After all, he never wanted to use the bathroom to take a shower, why would he want to go there to enjoy any privacy? He had recently had so many complaints lodged at him about his lack of hygiene that he'd started to "fake shower." He would strip down to his underwear, put on his bathrobe (something most inmates did not have or could not afford to buy), and wander off to get himself clean. He would generally return less than five minutes later, hair dry as a desert, and start exclaiming (to nobody in particular) "Wow, great shower. G-r-e-a-t shower! Boy did that feel good." Whether this little song and dance routine fooled anybody I have no idea, but I do know Alan would simply put back on the same dirty long-johns, as always. Even if he had been clean, which I doubt, the odor from those nasty clothes would be sure to irritate even the least sensitive of noses.

One morning a guy who lived in the cubicle next to ours pulled me aside and let me know what I had missed the night before while sleeping. There was a window between our cubicles, half on our side and half on his, and while it didn't serve any useful purpose, it did at least give a view of what was outside – in this case a few feet of grass and another building. At night, however, if an inmate in either cubicle was using a reading lamp or the fluorescent lamp on the desk after lights-out, the window was magically transformed into a mirror, transmitting a view of our desk area to the desk area next door, and vice-versa. Apparently Alan had been up late "reading" at the desk, and took it upon himself to engage in some personal physical activity while flipping the pages of his secret porn stash. While it was only chance that this neighborly inmate had seen what was going on in the window reflection, the fact is that anybody who happened to walk by the cubicle would have been treated to the same horrific view.

It wasn't more than a week later that I was dozing off in my bunk one evening when I heard a conversation between Alan and another inmate who I could not identify. My glasses were off, and considering the tone of the conversation I chose to pretend I was asleep and simply listen. As near as I could tell, Alan was lying in the bunk below me, and the other inmate was in the walkway outside the cubicle. Basically it went like this:

Inmate: "Yo man, you need to knock that off, that shit ain't right."

Alan: (nervous laugh)

Inmate: "Don't laugh, it isn't funny. I'm not kidding man. Show some respect, your bunk is asleep up there and people are walking by. I can see what you're doing. If you want to play with yourself, go to the bathroom."

Alan: "No dude, I wasn't. I was just scratching."

Inmate: (walking away) "Mighty odd way to scratch yourself, pulling on your dick like that."

Word must have started to get around, because pretty soon Alan was being referred to as "Yanker" behind his back...and occasionally to his face as well. Our conversations were now as short as I could keep them, often with nothing but grunts in response to anything he might ask me. The subject itself was never discussed directly, but the icy chill whenever he entered the cubicle should have been enough to tip him off that I hated his guts.

I got a break for about six days, when Alan got sent to "the hole" for inciting a work stoppage in the chow hall. I kept hoping he wouldn't come back, because after seven days he would lose his bunk and they would assign it to someone else, but as usual I wasn't that lucky. It was fun, in an evil way, to watch the CO try to pack up Alan's stuff from his locker. I'm told it normally takes one large bag for the inmate's belongings. In Alan's case, it took four full bags and part of a fifth, not including all of the crap they threw away. I don't think the guy had ever seen anything like it.

When Alan came back, he looked worse than ever, and I wasn't surprised to learn he hadn't shaved or showered while he was locked up. The charge of inciting a work stoppage had been dropped, but he'd lost his job in the kitchen and was assigned one scooping up trash. He had also now earned a reputation with the guards as a pain in the ass, so life was sure to be miserable for the foreseeable future.

About a week later, I received word that I was being moved to a lower bunk in a different cubicle. Lower bunks were assigned first by medical necessity, and then by seniority. Alan seemed surprised that I had accepted the transfer. "Why would you want to move over there? We get along pretty good here. I thought we'd just keep things the way they are?" Fat chance. As if I needed a reminder of why I wanted to move, two night before the transfer was to take place, I was awakened about ten minutes earlier than I normally got up to a rhythmic shaking and squeaking of the bed. It didn't take a Rhodes Scholar to know what Alan was doing down there. I muttered loudly "You've got to be kidding me!" and sat up in bed. The shaking stopped, and moments later an obviously fake snore could be heard emanating from the bunk below me. I'd had enough, but there simply didn't seem to be a reason to confront Alan. I was moving, and he'd be someone else's problem soon enough. As it

turned out, Alan was transferred to another facility soon afterward. But to this day, whenever I hear "Another Postcard", I instantly am reminded of Rico's singing, and Alan's shouting and banging on the wall.

## The Dining Dead -

# The Eternal Sunshine Movie Reviews

**Stardust** – Stardust is, when broken down to its base element, a wonderful little fairy tale. It is the story of Tristan, played with heroic innocence by Charlie Cox. In order to convince Sienna Miller to marry him, Tristan dares to cross the wall which separates his village from unknown realms beyond. His goal is to bring back a falling star, but he quickly discovers that star is none other than Yvaine (Claire Daines), who was knocked out of the sky by a necklace flying into space. The threads of the fairy tale include a dying King and his sons who want the necklace, Michelle Pfeiffer as the leader of three sister witches who want Yvaine's heart, a minor witch and her captive slave with special ties to Tristan and his father, and a group of pirate-types who catch lightning from the clouds (led by Robert DeNiro).

I've heard this film described as "Princess Bride on steroids" and I can see some similarities between the two. But Stardust is very different. It seems to effortlessly transport the audience into its magical world, both because of the awesome scenery and cinematography and thanks to the script, adapted from a book by Neil Gaiman (who earned his early fame as a literary comic book author, the driving force behind the Sandman series). The special effects are understated, leaving the fantasy in the action and the plot instead of filtered through distracting CGI animation. Matthew Vaughn's direction is well-suited, and the world of Wall and beyond is somewhat reminiscent of Terry Gilliam and his Baron Munchausen universe...and I mean that as a compliment. Stardust is everything that movie should have been and much more.

Humor is sprinkled throughout, in a delicious English flavor. Michelle Pfeiffer is exquisite as the evil witch, at once alluring and seductive and dangerous. Robert DeNiro plays his limited part to perfection, in a role which could have been easily ruined if handed to someone else (like Robin Williams, who might seem an obvious choice to a typical Hollywood casting department). There is also a hilarious appearance by Ricky Gervais of "The Office" fame as a slick trader, and the seven brothers (dead and alive) searching for the necklace offer a number of hearty laughs.

The only problem the film experiences is its inability to market itself properly. I don't remember seeing the trailer for this movie, but I don't believe a typical one could do it any justice. Stardust is a magical journey which will far too easily be lost among the doldrums of sequels which fill most of the multiplex screens this season. It's a sad state of affairs when families will spend the day going to suffer through Rush Hour 3 instead of letting their eyes and imaginations run wild through the world of Stardust. Make the effort to see the film on the big screen while you still can. You won't be sorry.

**Rocket Science** - "Rocket Science" is a small picture. It doesn't have a big message, expect that life can be hard and make you unhappy. But it is still filled with plenty of laughs, and that's a good thing, because if you can't find ways to laugh at the confusion and idiocy and misery all around you, you're pretty much done.

I suppose you could compare this film in some ways to the classic "Welcome to the Dollhouse" and cross that with "Sixteen Candles"...except in "Sixteen Candles" Samantha wasn't as odd as she thought she was, and in "Welcome to the Dollhouse" we were confronted with the misery of public school like acid tossed in our eyes. "Rocket Science" takes a quieter approach, one in which the weight of the world doesn't feel quite so massive, and where the characters (in a somewhat untrue view of teenage years, in my opinion) realize that life will go on. Anyone who remembers how crucial a big test or an early relationship felt will likely see the same sense of urgency and overwhelming, over dramatized magnitude missing. But I still laughed quite a bit, all the same.

The plot is simple enough. Reece Daniel Thompson plays Hal Hefner, a lonely teenager who lives in a less than ideal world. His parents are splitting up, his older brother is a kleptomaniac and calls him by female names, and worst of all Hal is a stutterer. He is basically invisible, to the point where his classmates don't even seem to make much fun of him. Suddenly, however, the school's debate champion Ginny (played by Anna Kendrick) recruits him as her debate partner. Stuck between how unsure of himself he feels and his sudden rush of

acceptance and personal triumph, between his loneliness and his infatuation with the self-assured and cute Ginny, Hal tries to put all the pieces together and end up on top.

Along the way there are a multitude of humorous characters, most of who are introduced only long enough to still be vague and amusing. Some of the funnier moments carry an odd sort of humor, dark but still somewhat lighthearted. Jeffrey Blitz, who wrote and directed the film, keeps the story moving along but leaves a few twists which are sharp enough to be unexpected. And Reece Thompson keeps the stutter believable, not going for the cheap and easy laugh. His character is more than his speech problem.

This film is likely to get lost among the big budget movies and sequels and star-studded comedies this season. But if you find it at a local art house theater, don't miss the chance to see "Rocket Science" before it disappears.

**Seen on DVD** – **Running With Scissors** (C-; the only reason I wanted to see this was to learn if all the terrible reviews it received when it was first released were justified. They were! It was boring, long, without emotion, and had maybe three laughs in it, which is strange when you consider it was adapted from a book which was both hilarious and enthralling. If I had seen the movie BEFORE I'd read the book, I would now have absolutely zero interest in reading it); **The Short Films of David Lynch** (D; aside from "The Cowboy and the Frenchman" I could have done without seeing this, although "Grandmother" and "The Alphabet" offered glimpses into the Lynch we'd learn to love later on.); **Dumbland** (B-, eight animated shorts by David Lynch in simple stick-figure format. Amusing in an odd way, the sort of animated shorts you might have seen on the old MTV series "Liquid TV"); **The Science of Sleep** (C+, visually very interesting, but the plot lost out to the attention paid to the dreamlike state of most of the film); **The Dead Girl** (C, bad choice starting with the weakest chapter of the five, almost turned it off, but gave it a chance and it got better); **Elizabeth** (B+, we watched this in preparation for the sequel which I think will be released in the Fall, and which I look forward to seeing. Wonderful performances. But wasn't Mary beheaded in real life? I forget).

## Books in Boxers

# *Eternal Sunshine* Book Reviews

**I Know You're Out There** – Michael Beaumier – This book is a collection of anecdotes by Michael relating to the years he spent as the personals editor of the Chicago Reader. To be perfectly honest, I found almost none of these stories to be very amusing, or even interesting. The only section which got a laugh out of me was one where he brings his boyfriend to Christmas to meet his family...and that story had nothing to do with the personal column. Once he returned the subject to his work, the laugh meter went back to zero. Skip this, I give it a D.

**The Idler Book of Crap Jobs** – Edited by Dan Kieran – A collection of "100 tales of workplace hell." Little one-page snippets of terrible jobs, classifies as "dangerous" or "disgusting" or "immoral" or "soul-destroying." A good bathroom book. Some of the jobs didn't seem that terrible, but if I had to actually do them I imagine after a few months I'd be suicidal. Other, like Silo Cleaner or Maggot Farmer are best avoided at all costs. Give it a B-.

## Meet Me In Montauk

# The Eternal Sunshine Letter Column

**Dane Maslen:** (Regarding Chris Babcock's comment on the Popeye theme in last issue's By Popular Demand results) There's a sandwich-delivery van (it does deliveries to offices) in my area that announces its arrival by playing 'La Cucaracha'. Personally I find this highly amusing. I presume that neither the owners of the van nor their customers speak any Spanish.

***Reminds me of all the marketing stories about how important it is to examine the target language when it comes to naming a product. The most famous case that I can think of is the Chevy Nova,***



*which failed to sell in Central America. General Motors executives were perplexed until someone pointed out that in Spanish "No va" means "doesn't go."*

**Brendan Whyte:** Jack Nicholson movies: I've only seen A Few Good Men and Cuckoo's Nest, but recently saw his first bit part, in Little Shop of Horrors (the original). The latter colored my thoughts when I went to a dentist here in upcountry Thailand... they took an x-ray then the dentist (a girl who looks 15 and wears braces) and her equally young assistant were giggling over my x-ray while they stood behind me, with me in the chair, wondering what this was going to cost, and how much it would hurt. I still can't brush on that side without drawing blood...

*...and we see yet another reason I have trouble motivating myself to see the dentist. The giggling teenagers sound a lot like the scene in She's Having a Baby when Kevin Bacon drops off his "sample" to the fertility doctor.*

**Harold Reynolds:** I thought I'd drop you a line to say that a few weeks ago I got a message from none other than Rod Walker about the Diplomacy A to Z. I have updated it on my site based on his comments. I also have created a better PDF version, courtesy of OpenOffice. I was thinking that it's about time that the Hobby literati thoroughly reviewed and updated its contents to create V 7.0, as a lot of it is quite dated.

*Rod and I have exchanged an email or two recently as well, as I'm hard at work searching for long-time hobby members to contribute to Diplomacy World #100. Yes, we do really need to see about updating some of the information in there!*

Your description of life as a guest of the State, and about "don't get sick" was disturbing, but not nearly as unpleasant for me as it would have been for you. 8-( I have heard similar complaints in the news about substandard medical care here in the Canadian corrections system. There just isn't the motivation (i.e. money) for medical folks to do work in the corrections system, yet many will go off to third world countries to do work helping the underprivileged. Yet there's a third world right in their neighborhoods. And I probably shouldn't get started on the Indian reservations.

*In the US BOP, it simply is a function of money and nothing else. The BOP gets less money ever year, and has to spend it on more inmates every year (especially as more and more crimes become Federal crimes). Between that and the bureaucracy, I suppose it is lucky there is any medical care at all! When I left they had started charging a co-payment to inmates for medical care (which would be waived if you had no balance in your commissary account).*

I'm glad that your new cat is working out. My cat likes to chase twist-ties and those wretched wires that toys come festooned with nowadays. I wrap one around my finger to make a helix and toss it on the floor, and off he goes. Great fun, and free!

*Toby will play with absolutely anything. We're just getting used to having a cat who still thinks they are a kitten again; Tigger past that stage a few years ago, maybe when she turned 17. But he is tons of fun, and so damn sweet, even when I am running late for work I have to stop and play with him for a few minutes!*

## 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 5 Categories

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

<u>Player</u>	<u>Shape</u>	<u>Tree</u>	<u>Religion</u>	<u>Planet</u>	<u>Network</u>	<u>Turn Score</u>	<u>Total</u>
Cal White	Circle	Oak	Buddhism	Venus	CBS	40	161
Chris Babcock	NMR	NMR	NMR	NMR	NMR	22	156
David Burgess	Circle	Oak	Buddhism	Saturn	ABC	33	154
Allison Kent	Square	Oak	Buddhism	Saturn	NBC	31	151
Jamie McQuinn	Square	Pine	Buddhism	Venus	CBS	35	149
Dane Maslen	Circle	Oak	Buddhism	Venus	Fox	37	147
W. Andrew York	Circle	Elm	Hinduism	Venus	CBS	22	142
David Partridge	Square	Maple	Buddhism	Venus	CBS	34	129
Brad Martin	Square	Elm	Buddhism	Venus	ABC	34	127
Melinda Holley	Triangle	Oak	Buddhism	Jupiter	Fox	27	125
Joakim Spangberg	Circle	Pine	Buddhism	Venus	CBS	34	119
Kevin Wilson	NMR	NMR	NMR	NMR	NMR	22	118
Brad Wilson	Triangle	Oak	Buddhism	Neptune	ABC	29	111
Martin Burgdorf	Square	Oak	Buddhism	Saturn	CNN	32	103
Jeremie Lefrancois	Square	Oak	Buddhism	Venus	ABC	40	93
Brendan Whyte	Triangle	Redwood	Buddhism	Venus	CNN	28	81

Selected Comments By Category: **Tree** – Dane Maslen "This is the obvious answer for a Brit. I've no idea what an obvious answer for an American might be, so I won't attempt to be clever. It didn't do me any good with the nut last time!" **Network** – Dane Maslen "Having resisted the temptation to be clever on 2, I succumb on this one. Obviously I've got to think of an American TV network. CNN would be the natural choice for me as it's internationally available on satellite, but I suspect that it's not the natural choice for an American, so I'll go for Fox instead. "; Brendan Whyte "I think a Thai one won't score points. I vaguely remember one with a C in it when I was in the US years ago... CNN? we have CNNNN in Australia, a piss-take program of CNN programming"; David Partridge "I'd really like to say PBS, but in the interest of actually trying to get some points I'll pick one of the Big 4."

### Round 6 Categories – Deadline is September 26th, 2007

1. A brand of vodka.
2. A Dustin Hoffman movie.
3. A prime number greater than 3.
4. An island.
5. A flavor of popsicle.

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**Deadline For The Next Issue of Eternal Sunshine:  
September 26th, 2007 – See You Then!**