

INTRODUCTION

Frankly, this book doesn't need an introduction. I have no characters to introduce. There is no historical background that I need to acknowledge. I really have no business writing an introduction.

But readers expect introductions. Without an introduction, it doesn't feel much like a book. So I am writing an introduction. Yes, I am writing an introduction for the sake of having an introduction. This is my book, and I do whatever I please. If you don't care much for my introduction, go write your own damn book.

No, I'm not trying to confuse you. If I really wanted to mess with your mind, I would've saved myself the trouble of numbering every single page.

That's where I am confused about the whole deal with the bookmarks. What is a bookmark? It marks the location of the book? But that's why books have page numbers!

But you know if there were no page numbers, you'd be panicking even if you had bookmarks.

“Oh my God. This is where I left off? Is this where I left off? This can't be where I left off! I'm not re-reading the same crap I was last night, am I? Did someone touch my bookmark? Someone must've moved my bookmark! I'm going to kill whoever it was that moved my bookmark! Why does this book not have page numbers? How is this possible? This book stinks.”

Then you throw it out of the window and hit a rabbi on the head. You get jailed for two years and your life is ruined.

I don't really want to ruin your life, so I'm giving you page numbers. Besides, if this book ruins your life, it's bad publicity.

I just want you to appreciate the presence of page numbers.

With an introduction, by law, I have to introduce you to something. It is not good enough simply to introduce you to the book. So allow me to take this space to introduce.

This book contains observations. Observations that I have made. That remark is kind of obvious. Obvious remarks populate this

book.

I hope you enjoy this book. People who enjoy this book are those who find life enjoyable. I am not saying that if you don't enjoy this book, you don't enjoy life. All I'm trying to say is that it is okay if you happen not to enjoy parts of this book, but if you don't understand this entire book, you need to be observed.

I'm not very good with introductions. What follows is the book.

Again, an obvious remark.

It is worth mentioning that the remark that remarks that that had been an obvious remark is itself self-evident. \diamond

SEX & MONEY

Sex

Each time you open a book, at the back of your mind, you are always hoping that the book mentions the word “sex” at least once. Preferably, though, more than once. Preferably in an erotic sense. You anxiously leaf through the book meticulously page by page, looking for the short little three-letter word.

It feels wrong. You feel like you are committing a crime. Yet, it’s such a natural inclination that you are powerless over it. You pray to the person above that the silly word would show up in the middle of a sentence somewhere. You don’t really care why it’s there, or whether it makes any sense. You can’t care less whether it helps you to understand the point that the book is trying to get across. You really can’t. All you need is for that dirty little word to show up somewhere.

This book is starting off with it. This is

going to be your favourite book. It will get your imagination jump-started.

You can now justify the purchase of this book.

Natcuprolipheliteracourse

“Sex” is one of those words that are categorized as dirty. As kids growing up, it’s the last word that parents want you to know. “Love”, “murder”, “stupid idiots in the government” are things that all parents are more than willing to let their children understand. But “sex” is much trickier.

Parents really have to blame the people who came up with this word in the first place. It is so short, so simple, so easy to spell, and so easy to pronounce. What we really should have done would be to call it something like “Natcuprolipheliteracourse”. The kids will go up to their parents and ask: “Mom, what’s nekaprolipe-he-la-da-ka-hers?”

“What’s that, honey? I didn’t understand a word you said. Now help me set the table.”

It would also be a good screening process for literate dates. If he can’t ask, don’t give it to him.

This book has an admirable, if not

excessive, amount of materials about sex. I'm in the business of writing things you want to read. Why else would you buy this book?

Money

You should buy this book. Not only because that's the only way I can make money off writing this, but it also helps to improve our society.

Money helps to improve society. Without money, there really isn't much to live for. People are known to have lived successfully without family, friends, TV, email, telephone, electricity, water, dignity, conscience, morality, automobiles, elevators, soap, pencils, hope, confidence, or even sex. But without money, everyone will go nuts.

People value money. They like how the colourful pieces of paper feel against their skin.

People like to have wallets. Big, leather ones with a compartment for everything that they've ever owned. Wallets have been with us for generations. It's the one unfashionable item that won't die.

Wallets make people appear to have a lot of money. You may only have a ten-dollar bill, but no one really knows what's inside that thick

pile of leather you have stuck against your butt. You can stick Monopoly money in there, and no one would know. All people care about is the size of the your wallet.

Why is it called stinking rich? Why can't someone be good-smelling rich? Potpourri rich? Why stinking? Is it because all the bills that are stuck inside the leather behind our behinds are unable to perspire?

Really, isn't there a better place to put our wallets? Everything else: keys, cell phones, handkerchiefs, loose changes, receipts, movie stubs, they all go in front pockets. What's so magical about money that can make grown men voluntarily grab their own butts in public?

Very rich

I wonder if there is such a thing called too rich. You would think that someone out there must be too rich for their own good. You have a house, a yacht, an automobile. You go into the store and say you want that, that, and that, and want them in a paper bag to go. If they don't fit in a paper bag, you'll pay them to make a bigger paper bag for you. You walk down the street, and throw one hundred dollar bills at everyone you see.

Again, if you are rich enough, you would hire people to shop for you. And it would be too unsafe for you to walk down the street anyway.

What do people do with lots and lots of money? The more money you have, the fewer things you need. They won't even have basic appliances, like washing machines. They can just buy new briefs everyday. They may even try to change twice a day just because they have nothing better to do. But if you are that rich, you probably won't need to wear underwear, anyway. You'll probably walk around naked around the house, which is heated or air conditioned year round. You are sitting in your own house. You own the land your house sits on, and the next ten thousand square miles. Why would you confine yourself to clothes if you can do without it? I would certainly not.

You won't even have a TV set. You'd hire actors to perform things live in front of you. You don't need a microwave oven because your cooks will be cooking things that were alive seconds ago. You don't need a car, because everyone would come to you. You can pay people to have the Broadway production in your front yard for a dinner party. And of course, you better move it back after you are done.

To be fair, you'd probably still want Internet to explore the outside world once in a while. It really isn't that much fun walking naked around the house everyday. The novelty wears out in a week. Trust me on this one.

Internet

What is this Internet, really?

Internet is simply a cheap and private avenue to pornography.

It's the dream of men. Men invented Internet on the pretext that it would be useful for research.

And the excuse, which was to create an efficient military network, beautifully reflects how our instinct of indiscriminating destruction of the world is – resulting from some historically twisted development of sociology – regarded as more socially acceptable an action than satisfying the basic emotion called lust, which in its normal form doesn't even hurt a spider.

But to kill, we all understand. Sex, we try not to.

The real goal for the Internet was to find a convenient way to unite the lonely and deprived grown males of the world without their wives having a clue about what they are up to.

How these deprived males got wives or how they got deprived is truly beyond the scope of discussion here, but the basic idea is obvious. The Internet, with its lightening fast communication ability, has its potential fully taken advantage of in order to carry out a well orchestrated research plan to develop robots with crude human features who can carry on semi-intelligent conversations and capably provide auxiliary pleasures without inflicting physical mishaps.

I think the ultimate goal for developing those smart robots is to drive down the black market price of mail-order brides.

Because, really, in all honesty, where else would the speed of Internet come in handy? How fast do the e-mails have to come back to you before you are satisfied? There is almost a certain expectation, now that communication on the Internet is so darn fast, that your emails would be answered before you have finished typing your initial message. And I think when that happens, it would be rather scary. You are trying to send off your philosophy essay when you get a message in your mailbox: "Bob, this is God. Yes. I do exist. And you will not be welcome here. Sincerely, God. P.S.: Pray hard if you don't want

to end up with Rhonda.”

Snow trees

Regardless, this is the male psyche: Men will, as long our civilization would last, be determined to find more ways to access pornography. After they hit puberty, they are mesmerized by the bizarre laws that prevent them from looking at naked women for another half a dozen years. No wonder men are so obsessed. Once they hit high school, that’s pretty much the goal of every guy in the world: to create easier access to pornographic materials.

Every technology that has been invented is to create avenues for sexual exploration. The telephone: phone sex. The telegram: mail order brides. The car: back seat business. The space shuttle: find sexual beings in outer space.

Despite this obsessive-compulsive pursuit of sex, people still have a real issue with being naked themselves.

The majority of people don’t feel comfortable when others see them naked. Everyone enjoys seeing other people naked, but few people find your interest in their nakedness attractive. But we all know what’s there. There is very little to hide, if anything at all. The truth is

that the human body is probably one of the most easily visualised images that we have. Even if you try hard not to think about it, the images still come to haunt you in your sleep. Then you wake up and spend the rest of the day trying to figure out what's been real and what was not.

By comparison, very few people know how a snowflake looks like. Very few people have actually seen a snowflake up close. Snowflakes are beautiful. Each one of them is uniquely shaped, so there is never a danger of losing interest. Every time you see one close up, you will be pleasantly surprised, as you will find something you have never seen before.

But we don't have magazines in bookstores filled with pictures of snowflakes. Snowflakes come in a huge variety of shapes, sizes, patterns, all apparently random. But, no pictures, no magazines. No. People don't care about them much. The amazing display of beauty and creativity generates no interest at all among the population. There simply is nothing there.

Even trees. Tree are big and tall. You don't have magazines that sell pictures of different trees found in Anytown USA, with headlines: "Extra: The biggest trunk you'll ever see!"

No. People are fascinated with naked human bodies. No matter what, they can't get enough. They buy magazines, video tapes, DVDs, decks of cards, books, tickets to movies, just to see other people naked.

Naked mystery

Even if we all want the same nakedness in our lives, people still tend to look at you funny when you pull that dirty magazine off the shelf. Either they think you are in need of some counselling, or they admire you for your courage and your general lack of social awareness. Either way, you are being noticed. And that's the worst feeling in the world. Everyone wants to be famous when they grow up, but that's a bad start toward stardom.

It is quite intriguing, this sexuality of ours. Admittedly, all naked people look the same. Once you've seen one, there's really not that many differences down there, or everywhere else for that matter, when you look at another. All that's really different are the faces. You can glue different faces to the same body, and that'd be exactly how those *Playboy* playmates would look like. Skinny, tanned, stretched like lasagne. But we still want to see the entire thing. No one buys

a magazine with a bunch of head cut-outs.

We are still fascinated by naked human bodies. Huge multinational empires are built based on showing people identical arrangements of topographical elements. I think what people are hoping for, at the end of the day, is something to surprise them. The old man who has been paying for subscription to those adult magazines for the entire adult part of his life still has not given up that hope.

The ultimate satisfaction for these people is that one day, the old man hopes to open the well-sealed envelope and go: “Holy shmolly, I’ve never seen *that* before! ... Hmm, this is really quite disgusting. Yep, sick indeed.”

And then he spends the rest of life wishing that he was more careful about what he wished for.

Of course, sex sells. It is a very well-known undisputable fact. The quality of a book can be easily estimated by observing how provocative the cover picture is. If it is an old woman with her cat, it’s probably that year’s Pulitzer prize winner. If it’s a young skinny blonde in bikinis against a fake Cuban beach at sunset, the author is probably at a soup kitchen right now. If the cover depicts two of those

blondes making out, swallow your credit card and run before your instinct makes you the laughingstock of your book club.

Dog clothes

The Western civilization has really come a long way in accepting nakedness. People are starting to understand that being naked is beautiful. But as always, there are people who don't embrace new cultural phenomenon. They not only want every person to be covered up from head to toe, but won't mind seeing pets dressed up as well.

Imagine what the little poodle must be feeling when he walks down the street with those little shoes and a cotton sweater over the fur in 90 degree weather.

It should be a crime if the owner actually takes the time to shave the fur and then covers the poor little animal with woollen sweater.

I wonder if the dogs even realize that they were naked to begin with. In the park, do the other dogs mock the one in the sweater? Do they point at him and go, "Boy, doesn't someone feel insecure!"

I think clothes have really helped to retard our growth as a civilization. Without them,

we would have accepted our bodies centuries ago. We'd be like, "Well, this is it. We either accept this, or we're gonna be very sorry some day."

That would have done us much good, in case one day all the cows in the world get together and kill themselves in protest. That's really what "Mad Cow Disease" is. It's the cows testing how easy it is to kill themselves before they are all made into leather coats.

The only real purpose clothes have served well is to be a conversation starter. You can start with the ridiculous hat that you chose to wear because it was the fashion in Paris two weeks ago. Then the stories go on about your adventure at the summer sale that you went to where you got that ugly bright yellow T-shirt. The story continues with you being duped by a street vendor to shell out a hundred dollars to buy the stain-proof pants. It turned out not to be that way. And that explains why you are walking around with a football sized coffee stain on Monday morning. You finish with the shoes that helped you to shave 50 seconds off your daily commute because "it's like walking on air."

Without clothes, two people would just be awkwardly looking at each other from head to

toe while trying to avoid the sensitive body parts. “So... What’s that black spot near your left nipple there? Looks very interesting. I’d have it checked out if I were you.”

The hair

The one thing that most people don’t like about being naked is definitely the hair. There’s something bizarre about the hair. It’s not just linear growths in general. People do love furs. They pick cats, dogs, birds, mice, hamsters, as pets because they like the fur on them. There’s something warm and fuzzy about furry animals. Lions are adored for their furs. Fur coats are, for no other particular reasons, statements of good taste and luxury. Yet, if someone has a lot of hair on them, we find them repulsive. It really is a double standard.

And it’s not just double standard comparing with our pets. We discriminate against different types of hair on our own bodies. There are subclasses of human hair. First of all, there’s the head hair. It starts to digress from there.

For women, all the rest are classified under “other”. Everything else that can stand on its own on a woman is frowned upon. That’s

when at a secret meeting taken place a few decades ago, all the women in the world decided to kill all the rest with whatever it takes. And their resolve is unquestionable. The act of pulling one single hair is startling enough for some to faint. It takes real courage to repeat the process several times on a weekly basis. If that same determination was simply re-focused on politics, I don't think that men would have stood any chance at ruling the world.

The greatest social irony is when the female environmentalists pose nude for calendars with the pretext of saving the forests of the world from the senseless destruction by capitalism. Entirely hypocritical, I would say, given the unnaturally barren snapshots of their own skins.

Male hair etiquette

For men, it's the moustache and the beard by themselves in the second category. There's also the omnipresent chest and back hair.

Guys are very touchy about their hair. Common sense would dictate that women would be the most sensitive about their hair. That's why all those shampoo commercials are starring tall young women moaning in the shower, which I'm

sure is quite fictional.

To the contrary, however, men are much pickier about their hair. Not only do they worry about having long or short hair, they also have the option of going bald, or getting ponytails.

Beyond that, the question is where the side burns should end. Next to the ears, below the ears, or maybe above the ears? How far up above the ears is another issue. A quarter of an inch? Half an inch? An inch? Should one have side burns at all? And how often should they be trimmed? Daily? Twice a week? How about a moustache? A beard? A goatee?

Then there's the chest hair. No man in history knows what to do with them. They are not sure if they like them. They are not sure if women like them. They are never secure however chest hair is handled. The two options of either having them grow like wild weed or shaving them off smoothly both sound wrong. Men are very insecure about their chest hair, and it bugs them greatly.

Shaving is a very painful exercise. You are trying to get rid of the hair, but it always sticks around. It's like a very bad dream that repeats every morning. And once it comes back, it just grows thicker and more stubborn.

One blade is so passé. It's now two blades, three blades. Before you know it, you have got a whole lawnmower stuck up against your chin with an airplane motor trying to uproot those annoying tree things. It's a painful exercise. But people, generations after generations, learned to put up with it. Unfortunately, the hair, generations after generations, learned to survive our collective attack on them, and always managed to grow back. We, as an intelligent species, cannot control hair. We can't control stuff on our own body. Hair is among the few things that we still have not learned how to control. We can land a man on the moon, and we want to conquer Mars. But hair, we've given up on that. We are powerless over something that's all over our body. ◊

GENDER RELATIONS

The eternal question

A relationship between a man and a woman is the most talked about topic in the world. That, and the merits of capitalism. And yet, after millennia of timeless conversations between buddies, couples, strangers, enemies, through couriers, telegrams, telephones, fax machines, and electronic mail, people still have not given a plausible answer to the nagging question that started this avalanche of repetition: what the heck is going on?

No one understands the relationship between genders. Psychologists have been studying it, and giving out standard advice to everyone who bothers to ask, but since everyone's situation is unique, results to those standard procedures vary widely. Courageously asking the flirty female colleague out for a drink Friday night might either mean a romantic dinner to fire off the beginning of a big-screen

worthy Cinderella story, or a harassment complaint that signals the end of your employment at the company for which you worked your butt off for half a decade.

The most definitive statements of gender confusions are evident in gender-specific magazines. With headlines like “This is what he likes” and “List of things she hates” and each copy selling millions, one would hope that the information would be rather useful. Disappointment is evident, then, when an innocent sneak peek into the magazine for the opposite gender reveals just how little one apparently knows of what one wants as an individual of his or her own gender.

We all know what the root of the problem is. It's sex. Genders cannot be understood without putting sex out there in the open for all to inspect. The truth is no one is really sure what sex is. And by that, it's not a simple matter of mechanical expressions, because the abundance of those is reaching the point of oversaturation. It is more about what sex means. Is it a routine tool for reproduction, or is it a substantiation of love? Is it the shortcut to Heaven, or is it the damnation of the human kind?

Because really, all everyone wants at the end of a courtship is to get into each other's pants. That is the goal of all romantic pursuits. But the road there is like a NASCAR race with no specified number of laps. You keep going and going in circles and you don't know whether you have actually reached the finish line. Sometimes you stop the chase because you think you've run enough, only to find out that the finish line was still two laps away. Instead of finally fulfilling your fantasy after two and half years of sucking up, you see your own labour slip away because you ran out of gas and have to drop out of the race.

What we want

Truth is that everyone wants the same thing in a relationship. They want a physically attractive someone with a great personality. There, I have pinpointed it. That's what every single human bachelor and bachelorette is looking for. That's the solution to the questions "What do men want?", "What do women want?", and "What do I want?"

I know that many books and articles have been written to discuss that issue, but this book is here to help you. So I'm helping you to

get straight to the point.

The problem, of course, is that everyone's definition of beautiful and personable is different.

I can see how that can make things trickier. That's *your* problem.

For a start, you can set your standards a little lower. To that end, alcohol has been universally deemed to be helpful. It is known to disturb one's perception about the world around oneself. Drunk people seem to be a rather happy bunch, and cheeriness is always a great asset while weaving the tangled and sad web of relationships.

What is it with alcohol that makes people go gaga with each other? Is it the pleasant odour of the breath that seems to linger around for hours after you are trashed, or the attractive sight of the mess you make in the sink afterwards? Alcohol brings out the most unique characteristics out of people. Otherwise responsible singles adults are walking into doors, talking to the wall, and burning legal bills as recreational pastime. People start to claim ownership of the presidency of the United States, and fight over who had sex first with the aging First Lady. And yet, in that heat of that moment,

passion really seems to flourish. It's really quite remarkable.

I think people like to date people who are less bright than they are.

In this case, "less bright" is euphemism for "dumber", "more moronic", among other technical descriptors.

Dating someone "less bright" makes people feel superior. Everyone likes to have the upper hand in the relationship. Thing is, you usually only have two people in a stable and legal relationship, so if you are not smarter than the other person, you are by definition relatively dumb.

That's why alcohol-induced people are so attractive, because they can't add five to eight. There is an immediate sense of superiority and thereby feeling of control and power for the other person. The biggest disappointment would come the next morning when he regains his arrogance and starts to recite the Constitution backwards. Damn.

Some desperate people, though a minority, resort to drugs. I'm not a big fan of drugs. Neither am I of alcohol, but hey, something's got to give.

The upside of drugs is that when you get

arrested and thrown into correctional facilities for a few months or a nice decade or so, at least you don't have to worry about impressing women for a good while. The time would allow you to regroup. It provides you with an excuse to really lower your standards. Because the next-best excuse would be a self-proclamation of "I really do suck," which is usually followed by long-term depressive behaviours. If you ask me, lower standards mean more prospects. Who can argue with that?

Pretend relationships

You meet them everyday. On the street. On the bus. At work. Maybe they are even your buddies. You know them. You follow them around. You are obsessed over them. You know, those couples who you think are in no way supposed to be together, but are. Maybe one is too good. Or one is too dumb. Or maybe one is a real pain, and the other a really nice person. Maybe they like different brands of orange juice. Whatever it is, you swear on everything that's holy that there's no way those two can be with each other. If you were the judge, the two can't even stand each other if they were the only two people left in the universe. But you see them

being together. Then you wonder why. It annoys you greatly. Not because you actually care for them, but because your curiosity is boiling over.

Let me tell you a little dirty secret: your instinct is right. They are not really together. They are only pretending to be together so that you take notice of them. It is well-documented that people go to impressive lengths to sell themselves. What better sales pitch is there than to pretend to be in a relationship?

The reason is quite straightforward. The fact is that people in relationships tend to be talked about much more than people who are not. Couple stories fascinate people much more than the sorry life of some loser staying home very Saturday night. Once you're coupled, you become the focal point of office gossips, of neighbourhood rumours, and of tabloid trash.

People start to take note of you. They observe your every move. They want dirt, and they need it like air. If you don't give them dirt, they will make things up. They will spread rumours about fake boobs and nose jobs. Rumours about her being a virgin. Rumours about you being her sex pet. You will be the news person. You'll be invited to parties because people will not be afraid that you are going to

steal their dates. You'll be the confidante to more people than you thought you ever knew because everyone now assumes that you understand "couple problems". You'll be a star. You are a celebrity. You'll be swinging up and down the hill, flashing the couple's card. And when you've finally met the perfect mate, you break up from your pretend relationship. That provides you with the perfect sobbing story to run to your new prospect for consolations. You talk, make love, and you get yourself a real relationship. Victimless crime. And no one had to know.

Life is so uncomplicated.

Dating manual

I would pay a generous amount for a standard dating guide for dummies. Not necessarily for personal use, but rather for giving out to every couple who keeps bugging everyone else about the asinine details of dating etiquette.

Every person should be given one such guide for free when they first hit puberty. Prevention is always the most effective cure, and there is no more urgent a problem that requires preventative measures than a couple breaking up because of a simple disagreement on the timing of reaching second base. The little yellow book

would include such basic information as to how to ask someone out, what the best make-out place in the city is, and what to do when your bimbo partner starts to cry uncontrollably after watching *Titanic* because they forgot butter in the popcorn.

The little guides would be provided to the citizens by the Department of Defence or Homeland Security, since a society that understands each other makes everyone feel more relaxed and safer. People should be able to refer to this manual when they feel awkward about bringing the subject up with the one person in the world who they should trust their lives with. Ground rules would be laid out in black on white with no room for dispute to avoid simple, debatable awkwardness. Things like paying for dinner, phone call frequency, and platonic interactions with their opposite gender friends come to mind since on their own, they endanger potentially virtuous courtships. And, of course, the always confusing kiss goodbye ritual deserves emphasis on the back cover.

Not just that. We also need to standardize commonly used technical terms, because many people get really confused and end up with more than they bargained for. Foremost,

the bases need to be defined. First base, second base, a triple to third. With the dwindling baseball fan base, maybe baseball terms are not the most logical choices these days, anyway. A replacement of lexicon that is not only current but also internationally agreeable is sorely needed.

The most controversial issues are when things get intensely physical. Take patting, for example. Patting as a signal tool can be the most subtle and effective of all. However, its full potential is difficult to harness. The last thing you want on a date that's going nowhere is to send the girl complaining to your parents because you sent the wrong signals.

The question is where you are supposed to pat when you want to console someone while sitting in a couch. You can't pat the back, because you have no access. Adults don't exactly pat each other's heads. A shoulder pat is fine if the two people really can't care less about each other. Where else is left? And how many times should one pat? How heavy should each pat be? What should be the pauses between each pat? And what's the exit strategy in case something goes awfully wrong?

The ideal rulebook would say something

like “Thou shall make gentle light contact of between 0.15 to 0.2 horsepower. Reach out by extending your four longest fingers, with freshly trimmed nails, and move through a 25 degrees scan area at 20.6 rpm rotational motions, from a position one sixth the distance from her knee on her thighs, for 2 consecutive seconds. Take a break for 3 seconds by reaching for her hand that is the nearest to you. Repeat steps after break.”

There. It’s so much clearer now. And since everyone would have a copy of the manual, there’s no room for misunderstanding. If a rule in the code book is found to be biased or unfair, a panel of bureaucrats would be set up to analyse each case and allow for overrules. Of course, by the time these judges have finished their five month vacations and decide to sit down to look into the complaint, the relationship is now probably more dodo than the dodo birds.

Having someone to love

The biggest fear of people is that they won’t find someone in life. You get incessantly whined to by your friends about how they fear that they’ll be the only ones left to be single after hitting forty. The odd thing, of course, is you have a dozen single friends hanging out on

Saturday nights to gather around and complain about how being single sucks. And then, you realise that if everyone in the group was to be paired up with someone else, you'd be six really good couples who just happen to be really good friends at the same time. But for some reason people would rather complain than play with reality.

Is there someone out there for everyone?

Of course not.

Duh.

Unless all the parents in the world got together and made sure that they were conceiving children in complete sync with each other, there would be systematic deficiencies in the mating system. It is inevitable that among billions and billions of people, you would have a unbalance in the pool of mating prospects.

The trick, of course, is to grab someone before a competitor gets a chance. When they say that there are plenty of fish in the water, they forgot to mention that there are plenty of – even an excessive abundance of – fishermen sitting by the dock. You have to act fast to avoid ending up shopping around in the underground market when the sun sets.

The problem with finding the ideal mate

is further complicated by the fact that it is constrained, unfairly or not, by the various social criteria that are so established that they cannot be ignored.

First of all, most people prefer one gender over another. That's quite a miscue. Right away, you eliminated 50% of the people you meet. That's not a good sign, and that's just the beginning.

Then you have the age thing. The norm is plus/minus a decade. 15 at most. More than that, you get into the situations of dating your parents' best buddies, which fortunately in most cultures today is still frowned upon. But right there, you eliminated over half of the people who were left from the initial fifty-fifty cut-off.

And then there are the picky issues of race, religion, class, earning potential, education, family background, and so on. And that's just the start of you parents being paranoid.

Parents

The role of parents, or any relative for that matter, in the selection process of prospective mates is outrageous.

It is understandable that parents are interested in getting involved with their

children's lives. However, the value of their input is highly questionable.

Why they are involved is the first question. It is you who is going to be spending the bulk of the time with your choice, and whether that may be for better or for worse can only be judged by you.

However, all parents think they possess an ability called "super-judgement". Basically, they believe that they are better positioned to judge someone in one evening than you are in weeks, if not months.

That's why taking your date home to meet your parents is such a risky business. Ironically, it is not the disapproval that is the most difficult to take. Rather, the risk lies in your parents liking your date too much.

Because if your parents disapprove your date, you can always run away from home. It's been done time and time again, done to death, and is largely a non-event.

But if they fall in love with your date, the tables are turned.

"We truly enjoyed this kid's company last evening, and I think it is prudent for your to spend the rest of your life with him. If you choose otherwise, we'd be truly curious about what is

inherently wrong with your head.”

It is not a good sign when your parents like your date so much that they invite him to coffee more often than they invite their best friends. Then you are really trapped in a relationship that you can't get out of. He'll be around all the time, and your parents would be pressuring you so much that you have no way out. You object to this, and refuse to marry this guy. The worst case would be that your parents then decide disown you and adopt him instead.

And then you wish that you had parents who could help you decide between person A and person B two years down the road.

Hope less one

Of course, it's undeniable that people are still getting hitched. People are getting married because of – or in spite of – love. Everyone seems to be looking for love these days. The problem with that, of course, is that no one is really sure what love is.

There are times when “You'll know it when it's here” just isn't a good answer. We don't send a space shuttle into space without telling the astronauts how the moon looks like, do we? “We are not sure what the moon looks like but if

you crash into something big, let us know, because that's probably it."

A very popular excuse to getting married seems to be pregnancy. People know that that's a risk, but instead of avoiding the risk, they leave their brain cells out by the bedroom door. Then they get married and realise after twenty years that since the baby still wasn't coming out, the test strip probably was faulty.

Arranged marriage

I'm intrigued by the idea of arranged marriages, especially those arranged before birth. Now here are the ultimate arrogant parents who think they are a couple of know-it-alls. There you are, in your diapers, your only goal in life being to try to stand up straight, and your life is already padded out for you. You already got a date for the prom, graduation, and your retirement party. You have no idea what she looks like, what she will do, or whether she'll even like you at all.

I guess that's why everyone likes to believe in something supernatural. They gave that a four letter word, too. There's something with four letter words that just draw people together. Fate is a response by people to make themselves feel important. It's like everyone's

best invisible friend.

“What if I never find someone?”

“Don’t worry, Fate will bring people together.”

Now, wouldn’t you think that a popular icon like Fate would have better things to do than to visit Springfield, Ohio and make sure that every person gets a spouse?

Santa Clause really got off easy. He has a whole year to prepare the presents, and when the day comes, he just drops the boxes and move on. And people have enough trouble believing in Santa. People simply cannot believe that Santa can travel around the world in a twenty-four hour period.

But the poor bastard Fate is working on a whole different level. This person has to travel around the world around the clock all year round. It’s difficult enough to fix up every single person in the world, but Fate has to make sure that these people stay together too. Because people themselves really can’t care less.

“If it’s meant to be, Fate will keep us together.” So Fate is left with all the responsibilities of maintaining a relationship, and when something breaks, It gets all the blame.

The darnest thing is that Fate never gets

the credit at weddings. No one puts Fate on their guest lists. I've never been to a wedding where the guest of honour is Fate. You'd think that the matchmaker would deserve some kind of recognition. It worked Its butts off trying to get those two people together. Would it kill the mood to just mention It somewhere in the wedding vows?

“Do you, the bride, take this man, by the recommendation of Fate, as your lawfully wedded husband?”

Courting

Dating has been refined over the years to an art form. You have the crazy pickup lines, the asking-out, the dinner-and-a-movie-and-perhaps-some-action Saturday night date, the climax, and the break-up. Some people have become so comfortable with this routine that they usually go directly from pickup line to the break-up effortlessly in less than two minutes.

The key to successful courting is, like everything else in life, persistence. And that's an excellent skill to have. Popular statistics dictate that if you ask a sufficient number of prospects, there is bound to be one who's going to say yes. If the two people do magically decide to keep each

other, they attribute the miracle to Fate, because it is simply too embarrassing to truthfully acknowledge persistence as the key.

“You know, I tried to ask every single girl out in Cincinnati, and she was the only one to say yes. I guess it must be Fate.”

Bar scene

The bar scene is the most curious hotspot for single people looking for relationships. The good thing about the bar scene is right there, you find people who have common interests as you, which is to consume alcohol. That must be an encouraging sign. After all, the only people who refuse to consume alcohol these days are right-wing religious nuts and people who are too poor to pay cover charge.

The favourite line would have to be “So, do you come here often?”, which roughly translates into “So, how desperate are you?”. Of course, the target always plays the defensive game. “This is my first time.” That, as everyone would know, is a lie. It’s the same lie that she’ll repeat in bed five hours later. And men just love that line.

And that’s the story of Bobby and Susie that their daughter, who was magically conceived

that night, will never know.

It has to be the most traumatic story for a child to learn that he or she was born purely by accident. “You know son, you really aren’t supposed to be here.”

Sometimes you wonder if some of the most famous people in the world were born by accident. If Galileo’s parents used better birth control, would we still be thinking that the Earth is flat? If Shakespeare’s parents were more careful, would we all have been spared from analysing Juliet’s teenage psycho maniac tendencies? If Henry Ford never came, would Wall Street executives still be riding horse carriages to work?

It has to be accepted that some burnings questions can never be answered.

Asking out

The most difficult task, and perhaps the most important one, is to ask someone out. Asking a stranger out is like going to a job interview naked. You lose all control over the situation. You are simply putting yourself on the line; this is you, and that’s what you want. And now, anything that will happen will be beyond your control. You put yourself at the mercy of

another person, and once the question goes out, it's not coming back.

That's when people get creative. "Could someone like you maybe at some point in your life decide somehow to agree to spend some time with someone like me somewhere sometime doing something remotely similar?"

The goal is to confuse the other person so that a rejection can be simply re-interpreted as a mutual misunderstanding of the question, while a positive reply can be stretched to mean anything in the world.

Same gender relations

The increasing general acceptance of homosexuality is great for homosexual people. But for heterosexual people, it has offered nothing but bad news. If anything, it has increased the intolerable tension between the genders. It used to be that the opposite gender is something that is, though not fully understood, still generally loved. But now that coupling of people of the same gender is a real alternative, people have the option of completely giving up on the gender tolerance project.

May just as well, because it wasn't going anywhere anyway.

It has become a trend for all authors to state their sexual orientations in their books. I don't really understand why. I guess if there's a way to keep their three stalkers at bay, they'd take that high road.

Stalkers

What's with stalkers?

Throughout the history of mankind, an abundance of evidence tell the same stories: stalking did not work, does not work, and never will work.

Yet, stalkers exist in every generation.

Attitude toward stalkers is really quite contradictory. On one hand, people want to be obsessively liked. Everyone, at the back of their mind, dreams to be stalk-worthy at some point in one's life. It makes you feel good to have someone truly amazed by you and who, despite all your indifferences and rejections, still find you highly desirable.

In some aspects, stalkers are like the best pets you never had. They love you unconditionally, hold dear to their heart everything you say and do, and follow you everywhere you go. And if you are in need of money, just auction off some of your

undergarments and you make someone really happy while generating a little shopping cash for yourself.

Of course, no one actually wants to actually be stalked. It's just a fantasy. Like streaking through Central Park in broad daylight, or telling your boss to get lost.

The date

A date is an opportunity for two people to show how they would behave if they could pretend not to be themselves for a definite period of time.

You get dressed up in something that you have to return to the store by 10 o'clock tomorrow because otherwise the credit card company would revoke the loan you asked for to rent the limo that you would be using to pick up your date. You put on an amount of cologne or perfume that makes the smoke detector malfunction. For the first time in your life, you actually managed to kill that stubborn little growth behind your left ear. To top it all off, you stuff your entire saving in your wallet because you are such a cool high school dropout.

You see the same person the next day walking down the street wearing a T-shirt soiled

in sweat and mud and shorts with more patches than a boy scout uniform. He's picking pennies off the sewage covers and having French fries for breakfast.

If a date is meant to be used as an effective form of courtship, more realism has to be part of the equation. Don't be afraid of giving snapshots of a normal evening in your miserable life to another stranger, because if it were to work out, you'd be spending many more such miserable evenings together. May just as well get the disappointment out of the way first, because whatever is left is surely more impressive.

The perfect date would one where two people just sit in front of the TV channel surfing with potato chip crumbs all over their faces on a beautiful Saturday afternoon. If the two can silently exist that way for more than an hour without irritating each other, you've got a match made in heaven.

Dinner and movie

The movies as a dating tool is absolutely appalling. Here you have this person you would really want to get to know more about. After spending half of your life coming up with the perfect plan to ask her out, you spend what could

be the most crucial three hours of your life in a noisy room with hundreds of other people surrounding you two lovebirds. Everything you say, assuming that your partner has the superhuman ability to successfully fish your question out of all the noise, will be heard by the person before you, behind you, to the left of you, to the right of her, and the four people in the four corners diagonally from you. Those people have no real interest in your conversation other than to prepare for more materials to tell at the office on Monday.

The “dinner and a movie” date with the movie before the dinner is the worst. The couple wants to talk, but is absolutely convinced that the two share no common interest. They are scared that the two will have nothing to talk about during dinner, so the movie is a desperate last-minute attempt to create a common experience.

That’s why the theatres charge for a ticket what you would normally spend on your breakfasts in a week. And that’s why we keep letting them do that.

Break up

The break up is undoubtedly the most interesting phase in a relationship. In most

relationships, it is most probably the only time when the two people can be completely honest with each other.

It's is really quite remarkable. Two people can know each other for years, and over the course of a five minute break up, a person can name more wrongs about the other than he did during the entire relationship.

Because while you are going out, you always put on a brave face. So what if she forgets to shave once a while? So what if he bangs his head against the wall in his sleep. You do get by. No one's perfect. You want to convince yourself that you are doing the right thing, so you belittle every nagging details. The things bug you, but collectively not as much as the dire prospect of watching porn at night all by yourself.

But when you break up, you really have nothing to lose. If you are going to break someone's heart, at least be a gentleman and be honest about it. You've lied to her long enough for her to deserve some truth from you. Throw in a few pointers for her, too, if you really care about her. "You know, honey, I lied. You really weren't *that* great in bed. I don't know about other people, but sneezing like there's no tomorrow during it is a real turn-off for me."

Friends

Many ex-lovers remain friends. It mostly seems to be more of a female initiative. When a guy is finished with a girl, he wants to stay away as far as possible. You never know what kind of support payment she's going to demand.

But the girl always wants the guy around. "Let's be friends."

Admit it. You can't really be friends. The reason that you're not together anymore is exactly because you are not the same type. Being friends simply prolongs the agony of a mismatch. There is really very little joy in being someone who, when the truth came out, really believes that she has better ways to spend time than being with you.

So please, do yourself a favour. Don't make it more awkward than it already is. ◇

MEDIA

The point

Now that this book has warmed you up, you should understand a little more about this book before going any further.

First of all, this is not a humour book.

This is not a fiction book.

This is not a philosophical book.

This is just a book.

This book has no real point to it. Any point that looks like a point should not be mistaken for being a point. There are no points in this book, and it is not the goal of the book to make a point.

I would just like to make a point about that; about not having a point.

I guess there is a point to this book. The point is about not making a point.

Now I've made my point, you may proceed to the other points of the book.

Books

Books are great. I have always had a special place in my heart for libraries and bookstores. As a kid, I loved libraries. You see shelves and shelves of books that you can legally take home for free for however long you want.

I don't understand why we still have bookstores. It makes very little sense why anyone would want to pay for something that they can legally get for free. But as always, human nature is not to be understood.

Books are like liquor bottles that refill themselves. Someone checks the book out, and drains every idea out of the book until there's absolutely nothing useful left in it. One puts it back on the shelf, and to another person, it's again filled with new ideas. Now that's magic.

Romance novels

Of course, the ideas in the book don't come out of nowhere. Each book is a short autobiography of the author. Each paragraph is an insight into the details that shaped the author. Every author is looking to immortalize a piece of his or her life.

The annoying thing is that some people have really boring lives, and they still can't resist

the urge to write about them. That's when they start to stretch the truths. That's where they add exotic vacations on South American beaches, and include a gorgeous girl and a charming guy in the story. They put an erotic image on the cover, because there really is no other valid reason that anyone would pick that book up. And then a whole industry called romance novels sprang out of nowhere overnight.

Romance novels are the worst books in the bookstore. They are truly fictionalized stories of two illogically perfect human beings falling in love at the right place at the right time using the lamest pick-up lines.

The storyline is fixed from the start of the book. The two characters cannot *not* fall in love, because the book is a romance novel, so it by law has to include two people falling in love. Even if the two hate each other so much that common sense would predict a murder suicide, they will still, through the magic of perverse logic, end up together in the end.

And the readers are fully aware that the two main characters will fall in love. They know exactly what will happen in those books. And yet, they keep reading these books, never getting tired of the same plot line over and over again.

I have an extremely negative feeling toward these romance novels, because they give girls ideas that are simply impossible to realise. You have eight year old girls who, while learning to add two whole numbers together, are expecting that by the time they turn 18, a tall handsome prince would ride a white unicorn down the main street of St Louis, buzzing her from the apartment lobby, asking for her hand. She'll become the queen over an empire of ten thousand faithful citizens, and live happily after.

It's simply sad for these girls to turn 35 and settle for a grave digger living in his fifteen year old minivan.

Newspapers

I am very impressed that in today's society, we are still relying on newspapers to provide us with information.

What is a newspaper really? Basically, you spend half of your today reading about what happened yesterday. And while doing that, you miss out on what's been happening today, so you are compelled to read about what happened today by reading the newspaper for half of tomorrow. And of course, the Saturday paper takes all weekend to read, so you spend all of

Monday catching up on what happened over the weekend.

The thing about newspapers is that no matter how many pages they contain, it always seems that the editors are running of space. Every single inch of white space is covered with something. There seems to be so much to write about that the writers find it hard to contain their excitements.

I just wish that one day when I flip open *USA Today*, there'd be an enormous blank spot on the third page with the phrases: "This space is intentionally left blank. Our journalists have ran out of things to write about. This world is very dull. Thank you."

Predictably on the next day, all the newspapers in the world would have the front page headline: "USA Today speechless!" And there'd be an endless sea of articles discussing this new media phenomenon.

CNN

And why is CNN still on the air? Now that is a thought exercise.

CNN was created to bring live images of the Gulf War to the living rooms of millions of Americans. I still question the value of such a

broadcast. A typical American middle manager goes home after a stressful day at work, and turns on the TV, and all he is greeted with are the live pictures of Baghdad being flattened. He must be thinking, “Great. I wonder what I need to do have my house flattened like that? I could use the insurance money to pay off my credit card bill, and maybe make the move to Canada. I’ve always wanted to live in an igloo.”

News anchors

The most professional of all news anchors are those who have no emotional memory. Every news station has them. They are those who report news day in day out. They never let two adjacent stories effect their mood. And that’s the thing; the news writers have absolutely no regard for the positioning of news segment, so it really is the job of the news anchor to show professionalism.

The anchor has tears in his eyes: “Three teenagers were seriously hurt in the traffic accident...” The anchor shows signs of rage: “The killer suspect was apprehended on the spot.” The anchor starts to laugh. “And now to our Bob for the sunny weather forecast!”

It’s quite amazing, the speed at which he

switches on and off.

That would be a useful skill when dating your subordinates. You know, you can switch your emotions on and off at will.

You call your employee slash girlfriend up to your office at 4:58 and speak to her using a deep sorrowful voice: “You know Jenny, your work frankly isn’t up to the standards of our organization, so I regrettably inform you that I have decided to let you go effectively immediately.”

Then the clock turns 5:01, and you put on a completely innocent cheery smile, “And now on a personal note, you wanna do a quickie before the movie?”

Television

Television is created for the sole purpose of giving those whose lives are utterly dull something to talk about on the next work day. It is there to give millions of people a common experience. Arguably, people would still be eating potato chips and getting stuck to the couch without TV, but that would just be sad. When the TV is on, people feel like they are doing something, even though in reality, they’re really doing nothing at all. And doing something while

doing nothing is the most satisfying illusion in the world.

The TV, as a saviour, exists to help people so that when they go get coffee the next morning at work, they won't have to put up with the most awkward ten seconds when they bump into someone they barely know.

“So what did you do last night?”

Pause. Tries to think.

“Nothing, really.”

Pause. Pause.

“All right then. I'll get back to work.”

Water cooler conversation

It seems that each time an office conversation is about to end, at least one person would say, “Well, that was fun, but I'll get back to work.”

It's as though if that is not said, people would have no idea where you are going after this.

Where else would you go? You are not going to take a nap. You are not going shopping. You are at work. You work at work. Or least pretend to work at work. Where else would you go back to at work? Even if you are not going back to work, even if you are going to run a

marathon between 3 and 4, you are still going to say, “I’ll get back to work.”

Work seems to be something everyone goes back to. You don’t really want to stay there. You are always trying to run away from it just so that you get to say, “I’ll get back to work.” And work is perpetual. It started a long time ago in the past, and will not finish indefinitely into the future. “Boy, I’ll have to get back to work.”

You never hear people say, “Gee, I have to go start working.”

Or, “I have to go finish working.”

If you said that, you’d be the next in line to be fired.

What does “fired” mean anyway? When someone does a good job, he’s on fire. “Great job Bob. You are on fire!”

I don’t think you want to be on fire. Because after the fire dies, you will be the one who’s fired. Fire has always been a symbol of excitement, but I have never met anyone who’s excited after getting fired.

Late night commercials

I enjoy watching infomercials, especially really late at night. It’s the only TV show that you can watch without sound and still get the

information you need.

The weight-loss commercials are always a handful. For once, I'd like to see a weight-gain commercial to combat anorexia. Like, "Do you always need to buy your dress in the children's department with your teenage daughters? Do you for once want to feel like a real woman? Then join our weight-gain program!"

You get to eat your brains out. Triple chocolate fudge cake with 80% chocolate and 20% flour. Sugarcanes dipped in molten sugar. The only drinks you are allowed to have are maple syrups and chocolate dipped in water. You fail the program if you can walk to a spot further than the bathroom.

And who can forget meat. Beef, pork, chicken, turkey, lamb; anything that moves is your delicacy. Morning is sirloin steak. Lunch will be a triple cheeseburger. Dinner is a feast of the fattest products that can be legally sold in a supermarket. If you don't double your weight in a month, they'll start feeding you McDonald's around the clock.

As an added bonus, the weight gain commercials can save money by borrowing the weight-loss ads and swap the before and after pictures.

I think that's a pretty good idea.

Cooking shows

Cooking shows are my favourite. I don't care what food is being prepared, I still enjoy watching them. Everything on TV looks better than what you have at home, and the food on there is no exception. You see the chef dipping raviolis in butter. Smoke starts to come out from the grill, but he's a professional, so I guess that makes it okay.

The fact that the cooking process itself is sped up is very exhilarating. An entire chicken gets fully cooked in four seconds in the chef's magic oven. It's black on the outside, red on the inside. You don't care. You can't smell it, and you can't taste it. The person who always hangs around the cook but does nothing really useful always says how delicious it is. She always appears so impartial. The surprises she fabricates every time she tastes something are better than some Oscar shots.

For once, I'd like to see her say, "Oh my, this tastes like burned plastic."

Or when she starts to eat, she pukes on stage. That'd be gold. I mean, chefs are human, so they should make a mistake once in a while.

I like to watch cooking shows when I'm eating. I keep my eyes fixed at the screen, and stuff whatever happens to be on the table in my mouth. It's easy to pretend that I'm eating what I'm looking at. It makes the meal go a lot better. It works surprisingly well. I may be eating leftovers from a week ago, but my taste buds are over on the other side of the cable line, on stage tasting that great looking dish with decorative dead flowers around it.

Remote control

The TV remote is the single most difficult object to find on earth. You remember vividly everything that was on TV last night. You can even memorize a couple of the punch lines. But whatever happened outside that box is pure oblivion. You remember using a rectangular object last night to change from one channel to the next, but you have no idea where it is now. And that's when Celine Dion comes on TV screaming at the top of her lung.

When people try to find things, they always start from the most obscure of all places. If you can't spot it in the next five seconds, it must be hidden underneath the couch cushions, between the mattress and the bed frame, or in

the closet behind stuff that you haven't moved in ages. You are absolutely convinced that some higher power moved the object to take away the only free Friday afternoon you get in a year. You spend the entire time flipping through piles and piles of chaos. And just after you have given up all hopes, the darn thing awaits you faithfully on the coffee table right next to you on top of everything else.

Your sense of accomplishment is nevertheless quickly dashed as you forget why you were looking for it in the first place.

Shopping channel

I love the shopping channels. I've never bought anything from the shopping channels. I have never considered buying anything from the shopping channels. I will never buy anything from the shopping channels. But I will continue to love shopping channels.

The shopping channel is here because we believe that, literally, everything looks better on TV. It is all that the TV executives think about in their towers. That's the only place that can push through invisible pantyhoses for twenty-nine fifty each.

The amount of time they spend on an

item is mind boggling. They can spend an entire afternoon promoting the widescreen TV. After you've circled around your 560 cable channel line-up, they are still emphasizing on the comfortable push buttons on the remote control. You yell at your TV, "Shut up! You know, we get it! It's a very nice TV. You can take a break now!"

They keep talking about the TV for another half an hour. You get so annoyed you throw your remote toward your TV. Your TV's now toast, and you need a new TV. Now you wonder what number you need to call to buy that phenomenal TV set you just saw on TV.

Shopper count

I especially like the counter on the screen that shows you how many items have already been purchased by unsuspecting couch potatoes. It always starts off at some big number and keeps increasing periodically. It's the best reassurance the executives can give to the viewers that there are actually other people buying these products.

For some reason, I don't trust that counter. It's suspicious enough to see those pantyhoses flying off the shelf, but there has got to be one item that never sells. You have one such item at every store, so intuitively, they must

have one on the shopping channels.

If they want us to believe that counter, once in a while, they should have a big zero at the bottom. Then the announcer will tell the promoter, “You know Bob, your thing just isn’t selling. Let’s move on and come back in an hour and see if we can catch some rich idiot off guard by then.”

Radio

I think the only real qualification for radio personalities is to be able to talk to themselves and not be ashamed to admit it.

You go into a little booth for your interview. You are shirtless with oil-stained shorts and mismatched socks. The interviewer can’t care less about your looks, because you’ll be boxed in a soundproof cubicle for 4 hours straight.

“So, how often do you talk to yourself?”

“Pretty much all the time.”

“Do you like it?”

“I love it.”

“Great. We’ll teach you how to push those buttons that hang up on callers, and you can start Monday?”

Some radio stations have street level

booths where people can just walk up to where the DJ works around the clock. That has to be a humiliating experience, to have people looking at you talking to yourself behind the glass wall. You are like some type of exhibit.

“Here we have Smashing Dylan hosting the Top 40 show. As you can see, he’s about to change to another song. He has just pressed that button. That was the highlight of our tour.”

Radio contests

I think the only reason people still listen to radios is to win those contests. They always have the easiest contests that take no real skill other than luck to win. It’s always the ninth or tenth caller through. And they give out everything from concert tickets to trips to Brazil.

Radio stations are like the pathetic rich snobs in your grade school. They will give you absolutely anything in the world if you could just spend a few minutes playing with them everyday.

Sex

What always amazed me is the media obsession with sex. Everything needs to be involved with sex. It has to sex this, sex that, and sex the other. The more sex, the better.

Really, it's like a bunch of sex-deprived honour roll students from Ivy League schools along with a couple of high school dropouts who previously served burgers and are still undergoing puberty, who got together weekly in those luxury network television meeting rooms with the mission to come up with new ideas to put on the air to corrupt young adults for another year.

After an hour of these hotshots staring at each other quietly, one intern from Stanford would come up with another multimillion idea. "Oh I know, let's make a show about sex!"

They'd high five each other, fill out their vacation request forms, and roam free in downtown L.A. for the rest of the afternoon. ♦

OCCUPATION

Spelling

When was the last time you spelled “occupation” with one ‘c’? And how did you feel about it when that SAT essay score came back to haunt you when you were interviewing for the regional sales manager position? Not too fun, was it?

Spelling is an extremely divisive issue. There are good spellers, and there are bad spellers. Good spellers will for the most part stay good spellers. They do make mistakes, but to make mistake is human. Since they are good spellers, all sins are forgiven if they don’t make the same mistake twice.

Bad spellers will always be bad spellers. Once you are labelled a bad speller, you will never become a good speller, because all spellers make mistakes, and that’s what bad spellers do; to make spelling mistakes. Once someone calls you a bad speller, you are doomed for life.

That's what phonetic spelling is. It's a new club started by bad speller activists. They are so sick of being called bad spellers that they are trashing all the rules that made the language civil. Phonetic spelling calls for the freedom of spelling words however one wishes. It's like bad drivers calling for the removal of lane dividers. It will lead to chaos.

As a decent speller, I'm very disturbed by this trend. We're one people. We're all spellers, and I think we need to compromise.

Dictionary

The dictionary is the most unquestioned and the most arbitrary non-fiction book. You have a group of maybe two dozen people deciding on what billions of people should use to talk to each other. Where do these people get the nerves?

The weird part is that there are more than one brand of dictionaries. It seems like even those experts have problems agreeing with each other on the definitions. The way these dictionaries could really screw our minds is when they start putting in different definitions in for directional words.

“Go left.”

“Left?”

“Yes, left.”

“Why are you pointing forward?”

“No, that’s left.”

“No, *that’s* left!”

“No, that’s right!”

“No, that’s *left!*”

“What’s right?”

“*That’s* right!”

“That’s *left!*”

New words

I have never, ever, found a spelling mistake in dictionaries. And trust me, I have been looking. The thing with dictionaries is that even if there is a spelling mistake, no one can really be sure anyway. Writing dictionaries is like that perfect job that can never go wrong.

And every year, they come out with a new edition of dictionaries, and on the cover, it always brags how many new words have been added to the dictionary. It is simply impossible to have that many new words every year in use. I bet there’s a squad in the editor’s office just sitting in the office all day making up words.

“Reincarnation’.... That’s a funny sounding word. Is it taken?”

“Yes. Years ago.”

“Let’s add a new definition to it. ‘Reincarnation’: to put something back in the car in one’s native country.”

Thirteen thousand more to go to meet their quota and they’ll get a bonus this year.

Payday

There is no such thing as a perfect job. Job implies work. My dictionary says work means an activity requiring effort and not for amusement. Anyone who says that work is fun is not working and should be fired.

By the same token, a perfect job would not exist. What would this fictional job be, anyway? A job that requires exactly the right amount of effort, or one that takes away an exact amount of amusement?

The happiest day for every employee is payday. It’s so popular, in fact, that “payday” is an actual word. People are always excited about paydays. But really, the reason for excitement is really overrated. You work with the expectation of being paid. You know you will be paid.

That money should have been with you for every second that you put in at work. The only trick is that the employers have been keeping

that money themselves and releasing it in chunks to you at their free will.

If your wife did the same thing to your with sex, you'd be suing her for emotional distress. "Your honour, I'm trying hard to be faithful but this bull about holding a month's worth of bed-hopping to the very last day because it generates more excitement simply *has got to stop.*"

Bills

Why do bills have to come in on different days of the month? It's always a great feeling, isn't it? At the end of the month, you have one envelope with one piece of paper in it; that's your pay check. And next to you is this mountain of bills from phone companies, cable companies, insurance people, lawyers, accounts, government.

Sometimes you wonder whether working your butts off just to let all these strangers keep their fancy German automobiles is worth it. I mean, if you don't pay them, what are they going to do? Sue you?

Well, I guess they could.

It always seems that these companies can't find enough stuff to fill those envelopes.

You know, you have your actual bill. In bold red letters, they tell you that you have only so many days left to pay up or they'll take legal actions. And attached with the bill, you get a stack of ads for a million other things you can buy from them. The envelope becomes so bulky that the postage stamp is sometimes more than the balance due. There's a really smart company right there.

Why can't they stuff some flyers in our pay checks like they do with bills? Instead of just giving me a check, they'd give you a list of other things you can do to make more money.

"Are you good at flipping burgers? Then our cafeteria would love to have you on board!"

"Can't wait for the new promotion? Join the car wash team and earn vacation bonuses!"

Now there's something I can use.

Balance due

The most interesting structure of a bill is that it is possible to get a negative bill. That's when you have become so overeager with your bill payment that the phone company actually owe you money.

First of all, if you are dumb enough to pay more than what you are supposed to, you really don't deserve that money back. You are

better off without money, period. I'm sure your local charities are desperately looking for someone just like you, so give them a call.

When I cancelled my cable, there was a refund policy that states that refunds are only given out when they exceed two dollars.

Where in this universe did they come up with this policy? Earth? Not this earth. Have you ever tried to shop in a convenience store for gum? The store clerks says, "Hey Bob, what you got there?"

"Just a pack of gum."

"What's the sticker on that?"

"One forty nine."

"That's less than two bucks. You don't have to pay for it. Go ahead Bob, have a nice day."

The most annoying check-out story is when you are paying for \$5.01 with a ten dollar bill. They always give you four dollars and 99 cents in change back. They never give you a five dollar bill back, because those pennies are apparently what's keeping those stores afloat.

But now you are really mad because you overpaid the parking meter by a dime.

It works out all for the better though when your date spots your now grossly enlarged

wallet as you attempt to find another penny to tip the waiter.

Tips

What is a tip?

Actually, that's not really my biggest concern.

I want to know who in history, in their right mind, would invent the tipping program.

If I buy something, I look at the price, and I pay for it.

I don't need to be told a price, and then be socially shunned because I didn't add another 15% to that already hideous tab.

Basically, the way it works is that these employees get paid for working. And if they do their job well and the hungry flock is happy with the food, the person who serves the bill gets a bonus from the customer.

First of all, if an employee is potentially bringing back customers, shouldn't the employer food the bill?

Secondly, it means that if you don't do the job well, you'll just earn your basic salary. If you suck at what you do, you get paid. If you do good, you get paid more. That has become a dream job.

And people complain that corporations these days are heartless bullies?

Loyalty programs

Of course, if you don't pay for something, you won't get those oh-so precious reward points.

You see those loyalty programs all around you. You spend a dollar, and they give you a point. It's like getting a star in kindergarten, except that it's actually worth something. If you collect enough points, you get a mug with your name on it.

They tell you about all these exciting things you can redeem with your points. Sometimes they even put out a catalogue. I have tried to flip through the catalogue. There are very exciting things in there. Except that I don't think I'll live long enough to earn that many points.

You can only afford to fly so many times around the world, and even if I did it once a week, I'm not going to earn enough point to get that coffeemaker. But if you fly around the world every week, you can probably afford your own darn coffeemaker.

That's why they give you large quantities of points because each point really isn't anything

but whatever the company makes up. If you buy a can of soup, they give you a thousand points. You feel happy about it. Then you find out that you need sixty four cans of soup to get a free hair clip.

Besides, you know you are spending too much money when even the discount warehouses start to give you things for free.

Tax

Taxation is the one thing that everyone questions but no one can do anything about.

And they always take the money after all your other bills. You know, you pat yourself on the back for having successfully pulled off another year without bankruptcy. January is the happiest month each year when you have finally finished paying down all the debt of the previous year.

As you start to actually like this new year three months into it, bang, the government hits you on the head.

The tax agency is probably among the nicest bully you can find. At the beginning of the year, he sends you a nice package with a ten page form and a booklet with your rights. He demands that you fill everything out. If you should miss

something, you risk getting locked up in a cage. The only reason that you do what he asks is because, as an individual, you try not to get yourself locked up in a cage.

So you fill everything out. You take all your receipts from the previous year, fill in all the little blank spaces. Then the form tells you to take a percentage of that, and send it to them. They're happy because they got their money. You are happy because you didn't get locked up. It's a win-win situation.

It really doesn't get any better.

The quirky part of the whole process is that the person who was going to beat you up was the same person you so fervently campaigned for in last year's election. Now there's a nice friend you'd rather not have.

Introduction

What's so identifiable about one's occupation that makes it a mandatory piece of information to share with strangers? You know, you meet Bob, and he tells you he's a carpenter. You meet Margaret and she works at the deli counter. What can do with this information?

"Have you heard? Bob's a carpenter. You know carpenters, right?"

No, I don't. There are thousands of occupation and millions of titles, and dozens more are invented every year. One naturally lose count of which each job does.

The thing is, even though they tell you their occupation and expect you to stereotype them, they get really upset if you let them know that you are stereotyping them. "Jeff, let me introduce you to my buddies Sean, Jo, and Tom. He's a lawyer, that's a priest, and Tom's a bartender."

"So, have you guys heard about the one with a lawyer, a priest, and a bartender?"

You won't leave that party alive.

Title

Of course, we all need a title. It's like an empowerment. We need our titles to reassure ourselves that we are still useful. We need the titles to make sure that we are still getting paid.

We keep adding words to our titles because we can never have enough for those. The "technical engineering management supervisor" will turn out to be neither an engineer nor a manager. And at best a supervisor of one other member on the team. And that member is a summer intern. And the intern is getting paid

more than he is. And the intern is dating the CEO's daughter.

That has to be depressing.

Name tags

Why do some employers make their workers wear name tags?

Now, isn't it humiliating enough for them to be forced to wear bright orange hats with little pointy flaps on the side? Do they really have to identify themselves?

And I still haven't figured why I need to know their names to begin with. People have enough trouble just trying to recall the names of people they interact with everyday. What is the purpose of additionally knowing the names of the every underpaid teenage brat at the ten McDonald's that you frequent in your neighbourhood?

Frankly, those names sound made-up in the first place. It is simply implausible that by a strange act of God, half the waitresses in Toronto are either named Stacy or Michelle.

Or maybe parents should stop naming their daughters Stacy or Michelle. The two seem to lead to odd career paths.

Critics

There are very interesting careers choices out there for all of us. Some are simply borderline bizarre. But the one that interests me the most is the so-called “critic”.

Now, who is this critic person?

I think all you need to be a critic is to have an unyielding ability to be logical and paranoid at the same time.

You have to be critical. But you need to convince other people that you are not just another nut. You have to be critical, but refrain from being cynical.

There’s a tough job.

The real trick is to be never happy. You simply cannot be happy. Your job is to criticize, so you always have to find faults with things.

Because you know that the instant you can no longer find problems, you are no longer a critic, so you will be out of a job.

So the real skill to keeping the job as a critic is to tell people what’s wrong with society, and then criticize the way people are trying to fix what’s wrong with society. The goal is to criticize the fix so persistently that those who are trying to fix the faults will get tired of it and give up fixing the problems.

So you can go back to pointing out the original faults that started it all. And you keep going in circles till your retirement checks kick in.

Or when a disgruntled fixer hits you on the head. Whichever happens first, I guess.

Lawyers

I honestly forgot why I was supposed to not like lawyers. But I do know that as I was growing up, the social pressure was so great that even the slightest hint of liking lawyers would have been against the basic foundation upon which the free world was built.

I do not know.

The fact that lawyer is a blossoming occupation in this society is a very frank statement of the common man. “That’s it. We’re through. I don’t understand the laws of this land. I really don’t know what’s legal and what’s not, so I’ll just do whatever it is that I need to do. If something’s amiss, hopefully my life savings can afford a lawyer who understands, or at least manipulates, the law better than the one hired by the government.”

And I guess that’s why some people hold lawyers in contempt. Because society has rules,

and lawyers are the gatekeepers to those rules. Everyone is bound by the rules, and know that the rules exist in writing somewhere in public libraries. But really, only lawyers actually know the rules and the ways to bend them. So basically, lawyers are simply specialised in things that we all should be familiar with but for one reason or another are not.

Basically, if life were a football match, the smart players would be running away from the ball because they don't know how to avoid penalties.

Drivers

The one dream that every worker shares in common is to make loads of money, buy a cool automobile, and drive across the country.

Truck drivers do that every single day. Logic dictates that truck drivers have the best job in the whole wide world.

I guess the dream retirement of a truck driver is to get up at 7 o'clock each morning, walk to the library across town, sit at a desk, and read newspapers till clock strikes 5.

A problem starts to surface if every office worker starts to drive transport trucks across the country for fun and every truck driver starts to sit

down and watch the clock for fun. No one would be getting paid, and the free market experiment would be over by dusk.

What the heck does a train operator do anyway? They are always locked up in their own little cabins supposedly doing very important things, but one can't help but wonder what there is to do. The tracks are already there. There's no navigation involved. There are no manual turns. All manoeuvres are predefined. All there is left is to pull a lever to make it go forward, and push it down to slow down.

I think the only important qualification for a train operator is super-vision. The interview test is to distinguish a grain of sugar from a grain of salt. The skill is extremely useful to oversee the conditions of the railroad tracks a few hundred metres up ahead.

“Slow down quickly! I think there's a fly on the track out there. I don't think we should unnecessarily kill an innocent creature, not if I can help it!”

Then you have the entire New York Stock Exchange staff reporting late to work. Europe panics and starts to dump American stocks.

The free market experiment would be over by lunchtime. ◇

TRIVIA

Chewing gum

What is it about chewing gum that makes a person feel cool? Gum is a piece of condiment whose only purpose is to fight bad breath. They are putting all kind of chemicals in there to make sure that you feel the sensation of something not quite natural having a party in your month. Mint is no longer good enough. You want extra mint. More mint. More extra strength mints. One piece is not good enough. The more the better. Makes you cool. Makes people realize how badly your breath smells.

And people like to make noises when they chew gum. They feel proud that they can afford a dollar to buy gum. They want to show the world that they can chew the gum without swallowing it. They intentionally grind their front teeth, and try to make clicking sound.

The only problem with gum is the disposal. It's a huge problem. Some gums come

with wrappers. You can wrap your slimy chewed up piece of rubber with those tissue type of paper, put it in your pocket, and forget that they are in there after two minutes. Two hours later, you sit on the jacket and there goes a two hundred dollar Nike logowear.

Cellphone

Cellphones are the greatest piece of communication device ever invented. There has never been a communication channel that is so easy to stop talking. There are about a dozen plausible excuses to get yourself off the cellphone. The battery is dead. Your connection is getting dropped. The static is unbearable. Air time is almost used up.

Cellphone is the answer that the phone companies have come up with to convince people to call each other more frequently. They know that the vast majority of people don't like using the telephone. Sooner or later, they will discover that they are actually paying for a service so that telemarketers and relatives thrice removed can reach them at dinner times.

Baseball

I am a baseball fan. I enjoy watching that

sports tremendously. It does make me wonder how the concept of baseball was first drafted. You grew up playing with your friends on the street, and out of sheer boredom, you picked up a little piece of rock and threw it at your best friend. After a fiery exchange, he discovered that if it doesn't hit his head, it's actually pretty darn fun.

So instead of trying to avoid a piece of rock flying toward you at high speed, we started to try to catch it instead. Of course, our hands are too small to be capable of catching that. But this is where human persistence prevails once again. Instead of giving up on the idea, we skin the cows and make an artificial extension to our hands.

Of course, it still does hurt to get hit on the head by that projectile. Helmets must have been widely available back then, but instead, they invented baseball caps that protect you no more than wearing nothing at all.

And the Americans made it their favourite pastime.

Roman numerals

Why are we still keeping dates in Roman numerals? Why are we still using those notations to keep track of numbers?

Admit it, there is no practical reason

anyone is still using it. It's hard enough for most people to count normally, let alone decrypting messages from centuries ago. Why don't we go a little further, and go back to counting with sheep? You know, ration every household with ten thousand sheep and teach them how to do their tax returns properly.

I think using Roman numerals ultimately comes down to our fear of our past. We are still banking on the day when the Romans resurrect. We'll just run to the emperor with things with Roman numerals engraved on them and yell for clemency. "Look, your highness. I have proof that I have always respected your culture. Please spare me from whatever it is that you'll do to us."

That's why it highly worries us that we still don't know exactly what killed the dinosaurs, or at least made them disappear. Because we need to be assured that we know how to get rid of them just in case they come back from their little vacations to Jupiter.

US president

The President of the United States should be the most attractive person on Earth. No other person comes close to the press coverage of the US president. You see him on TV,

in magazines, on protest posters, Wall Street billboards, everywhere anyone would possibly go. So, it's really annoying to have an ugly looking president around. You can't turn on TV because you'd throw up on your couch. You can't buy newspapers because you end up trying to avoid half the pages in there with his pictures.

That's why I think it's about time the US has a supermodel as its president. Maybe they should have two presidents. One is a supermodel walking around in tank tops and miniskirts, the other to satisfy the eye candy factor of the female population around the world. I think that would make this world a much prettier place to live.

That is a far fetched thought, however, since no woman has ever been, or appear to be in the near future, president of the United States. I think the problem ultimately lies in the terminology. When the United States has a male president, he is always accompanied by the First Lady. But if the president is female, the terminologies of "First Man of United States" or "First Couch Potato of United States" are far less than soothing to the ears of the public.

Beautiful criminals

There should be laws against pedestrians

who look too pretty. A police cruiser would make the usual noise speeding down the street to stop a young blonde in miniskirts. “Sorry to bother you ma’am, but your beauty is dangerously distracting to the motorists. Please either put on more clothes, or I’ll have to give you a ticket.”

And then the girls would collect these ticket stubs and compete nationally to see who gets the most tickets in one pre-defined period. Miss America would be chosen among the most recidivist law-breakers.

Monogamy rocks

If anything profound can be realised after watching the various dating elimination shows, it is that monogamy laws start to make a whole lot of sense. Heck, if it weren’t for the decisive foresight of our lawmakers, there’d be nothing on TV after nine o’clock.

Expired conversations

With the advance of ultra-cheap long-distance phone services, the good old reliable line of “I have to hang up now; this is an expensive call.” Doesn’t work anymore on your boring third cousin-in-law twice removed. The conscientious thing for the phone companies to do really is to

quadruple their rates back to pre-industrial standards. And while we're at it, let's make the Internet slower so that people would stop getting mad if you don't reply their "yo wasuuuuuup" emails within five minutes.

Unequal exchange

Men really got the short end of the stick from gender equality. Today's women can design computers, lead Fortune 500 companies, and fly to the moon. In return, men are allowed to sew, do laundry, and get up at 3 AM for diaper changes.

Tall people

The most definite advantage to being extremely tall is when you are stuck in an elevator that was designed to fit six people with twelve other guys who haven't showered in two days. You'll be the lucky one who doesn't have to rub your face into another stranger for thirty seconds that seem to last forever.

Bad smell

When a person notices a bad strange smell, instead of telling others to avoid the smell, the person always comes up with the same line:

“Hey guys, I smell something rotten. Can you smell it, too?” Now you have two dozen people actively trying to find this offensive odour. As their curiosities peak, the group is only fully satisfied when each one of them is filled with the toxin and can pinpoint the exact origin of this offensive odour. ◊