

A Midgett Blog

Volume 1

2003

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2003

Arlo Midgett
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Juneau • Alaska

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Why turn a blog into a book? That's a good question. As it turns out, publishing a book – doing it right, anyway – is hard work.

I started writing online in 2003, and it wasn't long before I realized that I'd strung together quite a few words. *A Midgett Blog* will, for the foreseeable future, remain the repository for all those thoughts, ideas, and recollections, but when my blog approached 200,000 words, I began to worry about what would happen if my server experienced a catastrophic data loss. Oh, I might be able to restore from a backup, or in a pinch, I could probably even dig up the pre-write drafts for all those entries, but that would hardly be time well spent.

I decided the best course of action would be to archive my blog in a less transient medium. I had hoped to find an automated solution (some sort of “export to .pdf” option for Wordpress), but I couldn't find anything with the control I needed. I resolved myself to the long copy/paste/design/layout/edit/proof/print process that self-publishers everywhere must be familiar with. It was much more time-consuming than I thought it would be... which is why my first attempt has been scaled back to just what was posted in 2003.

Nevertheless, I'm quite happy with the results. The text you hold in your hand is the product of many hours of learning and hard work. Reader comments have been included, the text has been proofread and edited once more, and footnotes have been added in obsessive detail. Consider this Volume I of the definitive backup of *A Midgett Blog*.

Now to get to work on 2004.

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Every blog – that’s short for **web log**, by the way – has to have a first entry and this is mine.

Why a blog? Well, it’s something I’ve been interested in doing ever since working on my wedding pages¹ last year. For the most part, I enjoyed the writing and, I must admit, liked hearing what others thought about it. Besides, there’s something strangely attractive about posting your thoughts in a public forum. I can’t quite nail down why that is, but maybe after a few dozen entries I’ll have more insight to share.²

Aside from all that, I think this might be a good way to share what’s going on in my life with my friends and family. Thirty years into this thing called life, I’m finally coming to terms with the fact that I’ll never be any good at writing letters.

So, if it’s the kind of thing you might do, please feel free to bookmark this site³ and return every so often to find out what’s new in Arlo’s World. Just don’t shatter my illusions and tell me that you don’t pour yourself a cup of coffee, slip into your favorite bathrobe, and snuggle up to your computer every night before reading my journal!

¹ I plan to publish those in a similar book. Someday.

² Four years later, I still don’t know what the attraction is, but it’s still there.

³ Bookmarks, how quaint. The Internet and my blog have evolved quite a bit since 2003. If I were writing this today, I’d recommend subscribing through e-mail updates or RSS feeds.



Jeff, Mona, and Cody on the set of Boomstick

Saturday, June 7th, 2003 was an interesting day.

About a year ago, I had an idea that I should form a video club with my friends. Ever since Sheldon, a friend from high school, let me use his video camera, I've been envious of the people that find the time/energy/creativity to tell stories through that medium. Luckily, my job has allowed me to pursue that to some extent, but I've never felt that I've done it *right*.

In 1995 I took a class titled "A/V Technologies" at UAS. The semester was arduous and the class left a lot to be desired, but if I learned one thing, it was that doing video well requires planning. Sure, anyone can pick up a camcorder and hit the record button, but if you want anything other than "home video," you're going to need more people, and you're going to have to work hard.

Knowing this, I've struggled to find a way to attack some video projects that have been rattling around in my head. In the last month or two, I've approached friends and co-workers who have similar interests and discovered that quite a few of them would be more than willing to form a little club to do this stuff together. After putting to bed a few other "pay projects" in May, I was finally able to get some friends together to take a crack at forming the club...

There was enthusiasm... some of it tempered by realistic expectations, some of it overly ambitious. I made a point that if we, as a group, wanted to actually get a concept like this off the ground, we'd have to abide by a few guidelines:

- Meet for production only once a month. Any more than that, and we'll burn out fast.
- Each month is a different person's project. This way everyone has time to develop his or her own ideas.
- Commitment is important. If no one shows up for a shoot because it's sunny or something, we'll face a lot of frustration.
- Keep it Simple, Stupid. Short projects only – we'll only tackle projects with an edited time limit of 3-5 minutes (for now.)

Most of the group saw eye-to-eye on these points, and I was relieved. One idea came out of that first meeting that I didn't foresee – the desire to meet more than once a month. Mike Heiman thought that we should have a planning session about two weeks before the shoot. That turned out to be a great idea.

After work, on a Wednesday evening in late May, we reconvened to discuss our first project. Since it was my idea to form this club, I hoped to step up and lead by example. So, I wrote a 4-page script¹ for a parody of your typical television deodorant commercial – instead of showing the product from an athlete's (or a socialite's) perspective, I wanted a hard-core computer gamer in the starring role! It's a project I'd had in mind for at least 9 months – I remember telling my friend, Rob, about it last September – and I thought its time limit of 30 seconds would fit within our goals quite well.

That night, we sat down and read my script. I was happy that most everyone got the esoteric geek humor it contained. We discussed it, batted a few ideas around, and finally sat down to create a list of everything we'd need to make it happen. "Everything" included

¹ See Appendix A on page 101.

cameras to furniture, empty pizza boxes to boom mics, lights to breakfast donuts. We were determined to make this an actual production, not a grainy, shaky-cam, home video! With that meeting behind us, on the eve of our Saturday shoot, I firmly believed that, together, we had planned sufficiently to allow us to be finished in a quick four or five hours.

I was wrong.

Saturday, for me, started bright and early at 7am. My alarm went off and I forced myself to go straight from my bed to my computer. The night before was our weekly Deep Space Nine² get-together and I didn't have time to finish up the deodorant labels before going to bed. So, for the next hour, between bites of last night's cold pizza, I managed to finish up three labels for "Boomstick Deodorant." Before I was done, I had to print them out in various sizes, because I wasn't even sure what size deodorant stick we were going to adhere them to.

At 8am, JJ stopped by with a Jeep-load full of equipment for the shoot. JJ is, among us, the hands-down king of video. I would wager that he has more hours logged, in almost every category of video production, than the rest of us *combined*. When he told me the day before that he wasn't going to be able to make the shoot because of an emergency meeting, my heart despaired. Lucky for me, he was able re-reschedule.

With JJ chipping in as a second beast of burden, we loaded up two milk crates full of "set dressing" and my plush computer chair into my own Jeep. On the way to our shoot, we stopped by my workplace, UAS Media Services, to gather mounds of video equipment – including DV video cameras, monitors, light kits, connectors, adapters,

² There's a long, yet-to-be-written blog entry about Deep Space Nine night. DS9 is what we call our very consistent Friday night social gatherings. They've been going on since February 2003.

tripods and more. We were out the door by 8:45am, and running only 15 minutes late.

Karl, Joe, and Jeff were waiting for us at UAS housing. Karl works for UAS Facilities Services and is that department's liaison to the dorms. Earlier in the week he had cleared permission for us to use one of the empty rooms on campus. This was perfect, in that it allowed us to build our own set from scratch rather than attempt to adapt my own apartment as I had originally planned. When I learned that we had indeed secured an empty dorm, I had a mental picture of us dragging a computer desk from one of the student rooms into the living room (where there would be more space for the lights) and shuttering the windows so that we could completely control the lighting...

At the earlier meeting, Joe had a great idea to time-lapse the whole day's work with his own digital camera. Before the four of us started hauling in all our gear, we connected his camera to my laptop and let Premiere start capturing a frame every two seconds. With that running, we set about moving all the furniture out of our "set" and then brought in all three carloads worth of equipment.

Immediately, Karl began to make himself indispensable by going elsewhere on campus and finding us all sorts of necessary items. Right off the bat he was out the door looking for a desk shelf that would allow a giant monitor to rest beneath. Not long after, it was a rolling platform and drill for an ineffective idea (of mine) to create a motorized dolly system. Much later he came back with a spray bottle, tools, and he even renegotiated the length of our dorm reservation when it was obvious that we weren't going to leave in the early afternoon.

As the four of us started in on set decoration, others began to arrive. First Beth, Mona, and Cody; later Elise and Oksana. As the room filled with equipment and people, it became more difficult for me to dole out assignments.

Mona and Beth were put to great use readying the deodorant labels for the sticks that Mona had bought. And that was no small task, either, considering that they had to buy another stick of deodorant *and* go to Mona's house to pick up a paper cutter and some double-sided tape!

Elise had brought a homemade "clacker" for scene designations and audio sync. She did a great job with some plywood and some spray-on blackboard... stuff. Unfortunately as the shoot got more chaotic, I thought that having another person trying to get in front of the cameras would be an unnecessary distraction. (After the number of takes we needed to get everything in the can, though, I regret that decision. Editing could have been so much easier!)

With the set design progressing nicely, I took Jeff into one of the dorm rooms and told him to study up on his lines. I had written the script with Karl in mind – I believed that if he could get into a certain character, he could play the perfect overconfident and stereotypical gamer – and ever since I'd had trouble thinking of anyone else in the role. Jeff had volunteered, and another member in the club, Michael, had offered to do it as well. While I was sure that Michael could pull off the character, Jeff had the tousled hair and unshaven look that I wanted. Hedging my bets, I asked them both to do it – and they both agreed. But what seemed like bad news when Michael had to cancel turned out to be a blessing in disguise...³

Returning from the other side of the dorm, I found JJ teaching Cody some of the basics of video camera work and Joe making sure his computer, a prop, was hooked up and running well. Looking for something useful to do, Mona and I started on the audio setup. We dug Mike Maas' Minidisc recorder out of a milk crates and promptly

³ Michael never really took up the invitation to join our video club. He was willing to fill in as The Gamer this one time, but only if we couldn't find someone else. When Jeff stepped up, Michael stepped back and we never saw him at another video shoot.

discovered that we didn't have the right connectors for his microphone. Once again, we wasted time sending someone to go get more stuff.

At about 11:35am, for the second time that day, JJ and I went to Media Services. On the way out the door, I looked at my watch for the first time and realized that we were going to fall far short of my goal to finish up in the early afternoon. Karl, Joe, and Cody were working on the dolly system and lights for our first shot when I left. I hoped to begin taping as soon as I got back, just before noon.

Not so. Due to lighting inexperience and painful test runs of the drill-dolly system, we didn't start shooting until almost 1:30pm. It was extremely frustrating trying to bring so many elements together for such a complicated shot. With 20/20 hindsight, I now know that we should have started with a much simpler scene.

Let me outline that first shot for you: There was myself, of course, sitting on a "director's chair" watching a monitor showing us the camera feed. Karl was lying on the floor at my feet, trying to run a hand drill at a slow, steady speed. A string, coiling around the drill, attached to a tripod-dolly rig, was jerkily pulling the camera across the carpeted floor. JJ was moving back and forth across the room, holding onto the tripod to lend it some stability and to make sure it wouldn't tip over. Joe was in charge of setting the digital clock to 9:07am each shot (to maintain continuity) and Cody worked hard to eliminate the glare from the lights on our posters. Jeff stood directly behind JJ with an LCD projector held over his head, raised literally to the ceiling, projecting some dancing lights onto the upper shelf of the computer desk. Elise sat behind us taking notes on the various shots. Fortunately, Beth and Mona had nothing to do on this shot – I'm not sure an audio crew could have fit in there if we'd needed them!

That first shot, a dolly left of the just computer shelf, having to rely on everything working *just so*, took way too long to figure out.

Finally, acutely aware of the attention spans of the people around me, I decided that it just wasn't that important to have a perfectly smooth dolly shot, nor have my birth date showing on the alarm clock. In comparison, the next shot was so easy it was a joke – if only because I'd compromised my vision once again. Instead of an even more problematic overhead dolly shot, we made do with JJ's suggestion of a smooth pan from a tripod raised high enough to almost touch the ceiling. It was a good suggestion. It saved time and, what's more, I think the project might be better because of it.

While working on that second shot, I asked Beth to run over to my apartment and pick up a whole bunch of stuff. A ton of halibut and salmon left in my fridge that morning by JJ, plates, plastic silverware, my BBQ, extra propane, a digital camera, my computer speakers and an extra set of headphones for Mona. Elise opted to go with her and by the time they got back we had progressed all the way into our third shot.

Oksana arrived around lunchtime and she and Beth did the bulk of the cooking for our video crew. Some of our club members remarked to me later that they felt useless because they didn't yet have any skills to lend to the production process, but by the end of the day I realized that wasn't the case at all. Without people running errands for forgotten items or cooking lunch for others who were working on the video, we might never have finished that shoot! I am immensely grateful to Beth and Oksana for that reason alone and I would be more than happy to spend my time on Beth's shoot being "just a gopher."⁴

Before lunch was even over, I hauled JJ and Joe away from their plates of fish to help me get the set organized for our first "talent" shots. Jeff was ready to tackle the acting part of his role, but we

⁴ Unfortunately, I never was able to repay the favor. This was the only time that Beth worked with the video club.

needed to get the lights and camera repositioned and the microphones set up for our first audio capture. Joe also needed to figure out how to get his computer to mirror the video output to both the monitor and a video camera so we could record the on-screen gaming action. Ultimately we weren't able to figure out how to do that and had to compromise yet again. But it wasn't a big deal (and again the final product may be better for it), though it did mean another hour lost to insufficient planning.

Elise, Oksana, and Beth decided to leave us after lunch, which again reminded me that we were going far over my original time estimates. Cody in particular had told me that he had other things to do and guilt became a factor in my post-lunch decisions.

So it was in this state of mind that we dove into the longest portion of the commercial script – Jeff's monologue. It took us quite awhile to figure out the mechanics of the script. Some of the seemingly simple things wouldn't work the way I'd envisioned them. For instance, we didn't have enough room to position the camera far enough on Jeff's right, so when the script called for him to swivel his chair around to face the lens, he swiveled right out of frame! More compromises were hastily made, sometimes without consulting the script, and we later found out that presumably small changes create dire consequences to the pacing. Live and learn.

It took us longer to get through the first gamer shot than any other. Jeff needed to settle into his role as an actor and I had to do the same as a director. It felt great to sit with my back to Jeff and focus solely on the monitor in front of me as each shot unfolded. Saying "Action!" each time made me feel like a poser, but it wasn't long before I began to think that I could really get into this director stuff! Even though I felt terrible when I put on the "bossy hat" to tell Jeff that I didn't like what he was doing on camera, I told myself that it would help the production later on. It was hard for both of us. For

instance, at one point I asked Jeff to make motions (like wiping his brow) that seemed perfectly natural to me, yet that he had never done himself. And many times I wanted him to change the way in which he read a line.

We finally got a shot that everyone agreed we could use – it was good enough – and I said, for the sake of time, let’s just move on. Before we had a chance to take everything down, Jeff asked if he could just try it one more time. Okay, whatever. If he didn’t mind one more shot, I didn’t either. Hell, I thought I was the perfectionist.

JJ fired up the camera, Mona signaled her readiness on the audio, and Jeff launched into his, by now, well-rehearsed scene. And *nailed* it. See, Jeff had been a little worried about how far to take the character in previous takes, and had been delivering his lines safely – if rather blandly. But since we already had the shot in the can, he found the freedom to be a little more creative, to ham it up a little. In this take, he over-emphasized his lines and made faces as he delivered them; we were finally seeing eye-to-eye. It was also gratifying when, after he had finished the take, the whole crew agreed with me!

I’ve got to give Jeff a ton of credit. I didn’t know if I’d ever “see” him as my idealized gamer, but I knew right then that he’d pulled it off.

After that, we finally got into a groove, and it didn’t take us too long to work through the remainder of Jeff’s scenes. We banged them out as fast as we could, doing a number of takes before calling them good. Only once did Jeff and I again fail to see eye-to-eye and that was on the last shot. We tried 14 takes (because it was short) and although we definitely got some usable video, I don’t believe I got the shot that I really wanted. At that point in the night, we were all understandably tired and it was just plain time to move on.

To wrap up the shoot, we only needed a few more B-roll takes. Mona and Cody had cobbled together a great product shot using two

chairs, a coffee table, three boxes, and a nice, white sheet (again, provided by Karl on one of his valuable matériel runs!) Looking through the lens and thinking toward the editing process, I again decided to veer slightly from the script. We shot the deodorant labels in a variety of poses to give me different options on what to use later on – In some you could see Jeff playing games in the background. Others obscured him to give us a better view of the labels upon which I had worked so hard. All things considered, I liked what I saw though the lens.

Towards the end of the shoot, Joe Sears arrived with an offer to help out wherever he might be needed. Unfortunately, everyone was, by that point, fairly comfortable and set in their roles (whether that be setting lights, listening to audio levels, or running a camera.) It became obvious how much he'd missed when we started casting about for an empty Diet Coke can for Jeff's next scene. Joe said, "Here's one!" as he reached for one of three or four apparently discarded soda cans on the floor. Jeff and everyone else sitting close startled him by yelling out, "No! Not that one!" Turns out, they were a part of the set. Joe took it well enough, although I think his desire to help may have been a little discouraged by our freak out.

In any event, the last two shots were simple enough. In one, Jeff had to reach for a soda can, and in the other he had only to retrieve a deodorant stick from the desk drawer. Besides paying attention to getting clean audio, the shots themselves were not complicated. In fact, they would have been the perfect shots to start with.

And so, about twelve hours after we began work on our detailed set, we wrapped without knocking over a single action figure, not moving a single empty can, and maintaining perfect continuity! Well, except for that stupid alarm clock...

Congratulating ourselves on simply sticking it out and surviving a nightmare of a shoot, we plunged directly into cleaning up

the hundreds of little items of our day. Lights, cables, adapters, cameras, deodorant, D&D dice, posters, blankets, donut boxes, halibut, propane, spray bottle and sponge, dozens of cans, a half-eaten slice of pizza, magazines, wrench, books, microphones, Minidisc player, etc., etc., etc. It only took an hour before everyone got all their own equipment back into their own cars...!

Before leaving our dorm-room set for the night, Joe practically demanded that, while it was still fresh (and painful) in our heads, we all sit down and discuss how the day went: What worked well, what sucked hard, and what we could do to make it better next time. He went so far as to get Joe Sears to take notes on a laptop so that we wouldn't forget as soon as we left.

We spent the better part of 45 minutes going over it all. I believe the general consensus was that, A) Not everyone realized how much work was involved in a "professional" video production, and B) Better planning and testing could have expedited almost every aspect of our production. Those that stayed, though, were in agreement on one thing: The day may have been a nightmare, but what we had on tape at the end of it kicked ass!

—

I want to take this opportunity to shout out my props to everyone that participated that Saturday (and will participate in the post-production phase!) As dysfunctional as it was sometimes, it *would* have been much worse without you!⁵

⁵ This paragraph, separated from the rest of the entry, really sums up why I wrote this. I wanted a record of our hard work and cooperation, a written account crediting all those that helped out that day, because I never had a chance to thank each person individually. The comments I received back lessened the guilt I was feeling for overworking everyone.

Cody Bennett | June 13, 2003 | 1:32 pm

Hey Arlo,

Great job with the posting. It did a great job encapsulating the day as well as our perspectives throughout it.

Couple things for you: 1. There wasn't any need to feel guilt for me having other stuff... Schedules can be like that. 2. Great job with directing... Not just the scenes, but the entire project, from the idea of the "Video Junkies" to having a FULL Saturday shoot. You've certainly got my props! 3. One thing that I'd suggest to make your entries a little lighter on the reading intensity would be to include pictures periodically (perhaps even with captions.) That way, the eye would be able to take a break once in a while from heavy reading.⁶

Nonetheless, you've been fantastic, wonderful, great, spectacular, stupendous, neat, smart, nice, and a pleasure to work with.

Let's get to that post production... Whaddy say?

-CB

Jeff | June 13, 2003 | 4:48 pm

Wow. Pretty good writing Arlo, I wish I could write and sound as natural as you do, and heck, I want to be a writer!

The video shoot Saturday was awesome. Yeah it was hard work and we were all exhausted by the end, but I would not trade one single minute for anything else I could have done on that Saturday. Making movies has been a dream of mine since the Sheldon series with Chris

⁶ I remember thinking that this comment was more suited for a newspaper or magazine than a blog. Today, in 2008, I'm often posting more than one photo, but only because I want to share some of my better pictures. I actually worry that it breaks up the text too much.

as the spy and we were all downstairs in the State building. Yeah, that was cool.⁷

I went into Saturday nervous as all hell. It's been 10 years since I did anything that even resembles acting. And coming in on Karl shadows, well let's just say it's a hard shadow to fill. Karl just has something about him.

When we went into the back room and you started telling me what you wanted my heart sank even more; I couldn't be "that guy." And I was thinking, man, Arlo is going to hate this. I felt bad because I know you are as passionate about this as I am. But let's face it; I'm no Harrison Ford.

So there we were, cameras rolling and everything is happening, and you said, "I can use that shot." And I said in my mind, "Now or never." And you know what? It felt good. I am glad that the end result is something you liked.

It's funny. Later on in the shoot we were all getting tired and you started urging me to take a moment and think about my lines and that was great. At some time during the night, though, something strange happened and I just couldn't get my line right. And I realized what it was...

You had stopped saying "Action."

It really bothered me that we were just filming. I needed to hear that to tell my brain "This is it." So I asked, and you did, and it helped a lot. Like I said, wouldn't trade it for anything.

I hope that next month, when I shoot, I will have it as together as you did. I think you make a great director, and I look forward with zeal to your next project.

-Jeff aka "The Talent"

⁷ Jeff is referring to one of the first video projects we ever worked on back when I lived in Ketchikan. It was Miami Vice in theme, improvised instead of scripted, acted poorly, and never edited. In short, it was a bunch of kids goofing off with a video camera.

Karl | June 20, 2003 | 12:57 pm

Ace,

Great summary of Saturday's action and a pretty well written one, too. And ye'r not near as whiney as Wil is.⁸ ;)

-K

⁸ Karl is referring to Wil Wheaton's blog, www.wilwheaton.net, which we'd recently discovered.



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My USAA Check

The Best Garage Sale I'll Ever Have

Thursday 19 June 2003

Just slightly over a year ago, probably half of my worldly possessions went up in flames. I posted an account¹ of it on my web site, but I've always meant to follow that up with the (mostly) happy ending.

Barely two months before the fire caught us by surprise, my fiancée and I were engaged in engagement ring shopping. Throwing that whole “two month’s salary” thing right out the window, I had decided (without the DeBeers’ corporations input, thankyouverymuch) that a \$1500 to \$2000 ring would adequately demonstrate my love for her. We looked at Costco. We looked at over-priced jewelry stores downtown that typically cater to tourists with more money. Some rings were cheap, some we wanted to buy, but unfortunately none of the ones we wanted to buy were cheap.

One day, Oksana was going through her own jewelry and pulled out a gaudy ring that could almost fit on my thumb. It had a gigantic, eight-pronged CLAW holding a diamond that was large enough and clear enough that we decided it must be fake. Long story short: It had been a gift her dad had given her mom way back in communist Russia and a \$20 appraisal revealed that we *really* shouldn't carelessly misplace it.

The choice was obvious: The ring had to go and the diamond had to stay. We laser-inscribed a single facet of the stone with her family name; created a custom, Oksana-original band; and promptly

¹ See Appendix B on page 107.

called USAA, my auto insurance company. They informed me that: 1) Yes, they'd insure the ring, but 2) it would be a "rider policy," hence we would first need to pay for renter's insurance, and 3) we could save a lot of money by switching Oksana's car insurance — but that's beside the point.

For about \$300 a year, we received a \$25,000 renter's insurance policy that had too many conditionals to follow. War? No, not covered. Aerial and space debris? Yes, covered. Destruction brought about by aerial objects, such as missiles, used in war? No. The list of what was and wasn't covered in our policy was too long to read without more caffeine, so I just ignored it and moved on to the ring policy — which is all we were really after. (Heck, the ring policy was easy to decipher by comparison. Basically you could do anything but irradiate it or intentionally throw it away!)

Then one terrible day in June, when the fire took out storage unit J238, I immediately thought about that mile-long list of qualifiers in our coverage. Fire? Maybe I'm not covered if there weren't any sprinklers in the mini-storage or something. I could imagine the telephone conversation: "Your property was in storage? Oh, gee, we're sorry — your renter's policy only covers items in the *apartment* you rent. Don't forget your next payment is due at the end of the month!"

After sorting through the (non) remains of my unit (which had been bulldozed to make a path into the building's rubble, by the way) I went home to read that policy. In the middle of all those qualifiers, damage by fire was included. Low and behold, it was practically the only one that didn't have *any* conditions attached to it! (Water damage? Covered. Provision #642: Unless it was due to rain, or a flood, or a broke water pipe, or...) I'm no insurance agent, but darned if it didn't also look like our property would be covered anywhere in the world. Which was lucky because, until the day before, that's where my mini-storage had been located.

Too good to be true? Probably. I called USAA.

I dialed them up and gave my claim information to a telephone peon. Of course they couldn't answer my questions, couldn't even bring up my policy. That wasn't his job; he was just a telephone peon. I would just have to wait until a claims adjuster contacted me.

It wasn't too long before she did, though. Her name was Jana and she told me she was probably going to have to come up to Juneau to survey the site before the company could proceed. Apparently they had insured at least four people that had belongings in that building. I assured her that there wasn't much to salvage for anyone, but for some unfathomable, internal reasons she was going to have to do a site inspection. Too bad they were going to bulldoze the place before she could get here, because she had to follow up on some claims in Anchorage first. In the meantime, she'd mail me a packet that would take me step-by-step through the painstaking process of detailing every lost item.

By the time the packet arrived in the mail, I'd already drafted a considerable list. The hardest thing to categorize was the collection of 4000 or so comic books I had in there. I hadn't looked at them since high school, but they were all protectively bagged and boarded as an investment towards the future. How would USAA let me list their value? Could I get away with a blanket statement of, say \$2 or \$3 per comic? Or would I have to list every single issue? **ZOUNDS!**

Other items were easier to deal with. For instance, I had hundreds of audio CD jewel boxes sitting in mini-storage because the discs were in a jukebox-like changer at home. My collection of 400+ paperback books just happened to have been cataloged when I boxed them up in preparation of the move from my trailer to an apartment. (I found the complete book list on an old CD-ROM backup.)

Most of it, though, was a months-long, pain-in-the-ass game of memory spelunking and price research. How many college textbooks

did I have in storage? What books, modules, and boxed sets constituted my potentially collectable Dungeons and Dragons collection? How much are old clothes worth? How many videotapes did I have in those two, huge footlockers? How much software did I lose, and how much were the two old (but still functional) computers worth?

And yes, Jana made me list every single comic book. The only way I could think to do that was go through all 992 pages of The Official Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide (23rd Edition), page-by-page, column-by-column, entry-by-entry and record every issue of each series I could remember collecting during the five years of my comic book phase (1987-1992). Two or three weeks of intimate evenings with a highlighter left me with a total of 3243 – 757 short of my estimated 4000 comics. I just crossed my fingers and hoped that USAA would cut me some slack and allow me to estimate the remainder at their lowest possible value (according to the Overstreet Price Guide) of \$2.25 each.

If there was anything that delayed the issuance of a check, it was all that work.

Compared to racking my brain for every item in all of the dozens of boxes in that storage unit (and all the emotional agony that goes along with cataloging a loss like this), meeting with my claims adjuster was a pleasure. Jana stopped by the university one day and I took half an hour off from work to meet with her. I gave her the photos and videotape I had shot of the rubble that used to be my storage unit and handed over a long list of the personal items I would never see again.

Surprisingly, in such a short frame of time, she took all my items, the estimated values I had attributed to each, and condensed it into a spreadsheet outlining their respective depreciation values. Of course, early after the accident, I hadn't yet dredged from my memory

every item lost in the fire, and for many of the ones I *did* know were lost, I couldn't find an accurate estimate for them on the Internet. How do you assign a value to an empty CD jewel case? How much is a 5-year-old computer for which you paid more than \$3000 worth? (Answer: Not a whole hell of a lot! Would you believe about \$250?) But Jana didn't let that stand in the way of doing her job. To underscore how pleasurable it was working with USAA: Jana asked me to estimate how many cardboard boxes were in the unit – and then added about \$4 for each one lost! Although I hadn't yet included the “big ticket items” (e.g., my books, collectibles, and comics) in the claim, Jana assured me that they could already cut me a check for over \$12,000. Two weeks after such a disaster, that was a big weight off my chest.

Eventually, after submitting a claim that included a comic book collection estimated at over \$15,000, books over \$4000, and audio CDs over \$3000, I found myself with a total north of \$40,000.² After depreciation, I came out just *barely* above the maximum I was allowed to collect – twenty-five thousand dollars. (They took a nice, round 20% off my comic book collection because they wouldn't accept that every comic I owned was in mint condition. That was understandable and I wasn't going to argue because if I couldn't get more than the \$25,000 limit, anyway.)

Jana managed to get my check mailed to me just a few days after my wedding and a just a day or two before Oksana and I left on our honeymoon. Twenty. Five. Thousand. Dollars. Two-Five-Zero-Zero-Zero-dot-Zero-Zero – USAA was even kind enough to take the \$100 deductible out of the \$40,000 estimate! At the time I received that check, I wasn't sure it was worth the loss. That fire destroyed some personal, historical artifacts. To this day, what bothers me the

² See Appendix C on page 111.

most is the loss of all my schoolwork collected since the 6th grade. That and a box of souvenirs from 5 trips through 7 Latin American countries. Things I will never be able to replace.

But it could have been much worse. Earlier in the year, I had taken home the box that contained all my home video tapes. And I never did put any of my dozen or so photo albums (and negatives) into storage. In the year since the accident happened, I have only once or twice found myself in need of some material item that exists now as ashes. I guess that's why all that stuff was in storage in the first place – because I didn't really need it.

Noah, a good friend of mine, tried to cheer me up with some advice: “It's the best garage sale you'll ever have.” At the time I was still too depressed to see the wisdom in it, but now that's exactly the way I look at the situation. Would you throw out half your material possessions for 25 grand? No? Well, what if it's just the stuff in your attic?

Barely two months after the check arrived, I'd already spent the last of it. No, there wasn't a Brewster's Millions motif to the spending, just a short list of things that I had to put behind me.

About \$16,000 went away, just like that, to student loans and credit card bills. Paying them off made me 100% debt free and about 80% happy. Most of the rest covered every last dime remaining on our wedding and honeymoon bill. The last couple thousand dollars bought me something I've wanted for a very long time: A tiny Sony PictureBook.³ In fact, if you're reading this, it's likely due to that purchase alone. Having a laptop that I can bring with me anywhere is the biggest factor in letting me explore my creativity through writing...

³ Which you can see a picture of on page 58.

But the best thing the money bought me was the ability to marry Oksana (an accountant, no less) without my financial baggage. While up to my eyeballs in debt, I told myself that I would never marry someone until I was free from it, but I knew after a year with Oksana that I couldn't wait that long and risk letting her get away. Even so, when the check cleared there was that old hesitation: "I *could* pay off all my debts this month, but maybe I should just pay off half this month and the remainder next month. I mean, the money will still be there, right...?" Ha! That kind of thinking was what got me in credit card trouble!

Paying everything off – every last cent of debt – was the right decision. Now we have no car payments to make, no mortgage, and our credit card debt *always* gets paid off by the end of each month (and earns us Alaska Airlines miles, to boot!) Now that Oksana is raking in the dough at her full-time job with Mendenhall Auto, we're socking away (what seems to me) a ton of money. It's amazing how far your paycheck can go when \$400 per month isn't paying interest!

I would like to end this little story on such a happy note, but I don't think it would do justice to this small chapter in my life. Not once, not even when receiving the largest check I've ever seen, did I consider this to be a "good thing." No, I wouldn't wish an accident like this on anyone...

Did I say accident? Oops. I forgot to mention that I went through this because someone intentionally burned my, and hundreds of others', property to the ground.

In the weeks and months that followed the fire, Juneau police were called in to investigate. Knightwatch Security had checked the building earlier that morning and all the fire doors had been closed. So why were they open later, allowing the fire to spread so quickly? The Juneau Police Department offered a reward to anyone that had information about the fire and it wasn't long before someone called

into to tell them about a couple young adults that might have broken into some storage units that same night.

This rumor made its rounds around town and it wasn't long before the Police called and asked me to come down to the station. The first thing officer Sell told me was that I shouldn't get my hopes up. "Thieves are like raccoons; they usually only take whatever is bright and shiny." She wasn't kidding. The geniuses that broke into the storage complex made off with a set of screwdrivers, someone's button collection, a butane lighter refill kit, and other assorted knick-knacks. It was depressing not to find any of my own property among that recovered, but I hoped that someone else, at least, would be able to identify the stuff as their own (and consequently be able to press charges.)

Apparently someone did, and more of the story was later reported in the newspaper. Yes, they did find and arrest two people – it wasn't hard to find these two criminal masterminds, either. You know where they were? In the Juneau Correctional Facility awaiting their trial for stealing cash and checks from the Gastineau Human Society earlier that weekend.

In talking with the police, I learned that they were to be charged with arson in the first degree – the best that could be hoped for (from my perspective, at least.) I remember remarking, "We'll sure, since they were responsible for the destruction of millions of dollars worth of property!" Officer Sell then informed me that monetary value had nothing to do with it. Only when the firefighters' lives were put in danger (when the roof collapsed, and when propane tanks started blowing up, and when approximately 3000 rounds of ammunition cooked off) was the charge raised to Arson in the First Degree.

I stopped following the whole situation in the Juneau Empire when I heard that one of the hooligans pled completely out of the charges and the other's sentence was reduced when he agreed to plead

guilty to the earlier “crime spree.” Things like that make me lose faith in the human race as a whole, and there’s no sense dwelling on them.

You know really gets me, though? What drives me nuts about the whole situation? If those two bozos had simply cut the locks, stole their \$100 worth of crap merchandise and left well enough alone, the police would have told the owners that there wasn’t anything they could do. But, no. They opened the fire doors and burned the place down to “*cover fingerprints they may have left at the scene.*” After such a fire, of *course* the police would be under public pressure to find them – they caused millions of dollars worth of damage, destroyed some people’s lives! Offer a big enough reward and their own mothers would probably turn them in!

You know we should do? I think we should wait for these punks to grow up, start a family, take a lot of photos and build up their households... then show up one day and present a court order to burn it all to the ground!

Sounds harsh? Well, I was one of the lucky ones. A good friend of mine had packed everything he owned into that storage building in anticipation of moving to Seattle. After the fire, he was left with a single change of clothes (*gym clothes*) and his computer. He lost everything else. Can you imagine? Your clothes, your furniture, your software. Years’ worth of collected “demo reel” material, lost, mere weeks before you begin looking for your dream job? And you know what? He didn’t have insurance.

If there’s a moral to this story, I guess that’s it. If you don’t have homeowner’s or renter’s insurance, you should call an insurance agent *right now* and get it! It’ll cost you maybe a half-hour on the phone and, if you’re like us, about \$25 a month. Paying for insurance never seems like it’s worth it... until you need it.

Marjorie Woeber | May 22, 2005 | 4:23 pm

My name is Marjorie Woeber. Previously Marjorie Baguya. I am most likely related to one Cresencio Baguya or Bagoyo (Name depending on whether or not he changed the spelling of his name like the rest of the family or if it was never Baguya in the first place.)

I am replying to all that I have read on this one particular site. I have to say that it is so unfortunate for yourself and all of those that have greatly suffered in this very sad tragedy. I can't begin to understand how any of you must feel. I pray that emotionally and financially, many of you by now are doing better. I hope that this does not sound insulting in any way at all, for that is not my intent. I am very much ashamed that I am even possibly related as a 1/2 sister to one of those so-called hoodlums. I have never been close to him, and nor will I ever. I disown anyone that can commit such a stupid, idiotic, heart-wrenching crime. I was never really in the know of how devastating the burning down of the mini-storage was. Thank you for informing myself and the public of this much needed insight from your point of view as the victim(s).⁴

⁴ This comment came in almost two years after I posted the original entry. When I read it, I was blown away. I didn't know how to respond (and I feel guilty for never doing so.) Comments on blogs are usually trite, but this one reminded me that what I write here is very public and sometimes very powerful.

Which also reminds me of the time when a friend was thinking about moving to Juneau. He let me know that the number 1 hit on Google for "Juneau Mini Storage" was this blog entry. I wouldn't be at all surprised if that's how Marjorie found my web page.

I like to take my lunches late. When you get back to work at two or three in the afternoon, the rest of the day seems to fly right by. In the last couple years, I've come to realize there are other benefits, as well.

For instance, the Drive-Thru at McDonald's (called the "Auto-Mac" in the Spanish-speaking world – how wacky is that?) is always empty and, at the intersection nearby, it's actually possible to make a left turn (if you live in Juneau, you know what I'm talkin' about!) And if, like me, you find yourself using your lunch break to run errands, it's nice to know that the lines at Costco and at the bank are quite short at 2pm. For the most part, late lunches rock.

You know what totally sucks about a late lunch here in Juneau, though? Go on... Take a guess!

AM Radio. That's what you were thinking, right? Yeah, I'm sure it was your second guess.

In three cross-country driving trips, I developed a sort of love/hate relationship with AM radio stations. On a long-distance trip, sans-XM Satellite radio, you constantly find yourself switching stations. Even the most powerful FM broadcasters only stay with you for about a half-hour on each end of a big city. Just when it seems you find the perfect station, it fades back into static, leaving you cruising the frequencies once again with the scan button.

¹ I never explained the title of this entry, but I think about it every time I see it. In the Dr. Laura radio program, she often spells out her phone number. The last three letters, U-R-A, always seem to me to be a leading statement, "You are a..." A what? Well, that's at the end of the post.

AM at least gives you slightly more listening time because the signals propagate farther. (In fact, I remember hanging out with Sheldon some nights in Ketchikan, each eating a pint of Ben and Jerry's ice cream, in a parked car, and cruising the AM dial to pick up stations from Seattle, Vancouver, even Japan!) On the trips I drove through British Columbia, long sections of the road had only AM reception. They might have been only logging reports, but at least it's something to listen to.

Now I actually like to listen to AM talk radio stations when I drive. Eventually, even the best mix CDs grow old in the car, and music stations bother me because I end up waiting through a dozen songs I hate just to hear one that I like. Doesn't matter what station it is, they never come close to matching my musical tastes. Talk radio is usually more engaging, at least for me, because I find myself actively listening to and thinking about the programs.

In the mornings, on my 2-minute trip to work, I'll catch a piece of the Glenn Beck program or maybe Rush Limbaugh. Afternoons, I'll sometimes listen to Mike Reagan's talk show. Even at night, usually when driving home from late ultimate games, The Laura Ingram show might be on. And of course, every hour (on the hour!) I look forward to a brief CBS news snippet.

At this point, I'm so far off on a tangent that you've probably forgotten that I have a problem with late lunches. Let's get back on track. You see, when I take my lunches in the early afternoon, I almost always catch a piece of the Dr. Laura Schlessinger program. This woman annoys me.

You'll just have to trust me when I tell you that I'm not one to form opinions about people without first giving them the benefit of the doubt. In fact, when they have very little bearing on *my* life, I usually don't consider what those people say and do at all. But this Dr. Laura character (and how she conducts her show) is just so hard to stomach.

Let's back up a step and consider one of the other talk radio hosts I mentioned. Rush Limbaugh is a good one. Sure, you're not going to like him if you don't share his political views. He definitely takes the party line on every single topic – even going so far as to use “blatantly ignoring his caller's points” as a debate skill. But in his defense, he's obviously educated, he listens to what people have to say, and then either agrees with them or vehemently argues with them.

(And here I'm giving him the benefit of the doubt. Let's take his stance on the war with Iraq. I've heard callers, dumb Democrats to be sure, call in to tell him their opinion that they don't think we should go to war on moral grounds. A typical Rush answer? “So you believe we should just do nothing? Just let them continue their reign of terrorism and development of weapons of mass destruction?” He presents *going to war* and *doing nothing* as our only two choices and leaves the caller foundering. I can't believe when he cuts a caller like that off the line that he really thinks that they didn't have another alternative in mind – say, working within the United Nations' guidelines, leveling economic sanctions, or what have you. No, I suspect Rush simply cuts them off to make them appear ignorant and to appease his target audience. If he really does think that the world is as black and white as he makes it out to be on his program, well, I guess he's a bigger idiot than I give him credit for... But at least he's entertaining!)

So how is Dr. Laura different? For one, she's downright rude to the people that call her. With Rush, I somehow find this attitude more acceptable. You'd be a fool to try to argue with him when he holds all the cards – he can put you on mute or hang up on you at any time. And besides, you'll never convince him to cross the Republican Party's line, anyway. But the people that are calling Dr. Laura are, in many cases, different. They are in dire need of advice – personal advice – to help them through tough emotional situations.

Make no mistake, Dr. Laura is just as opinionated as any other radio talk show host (and that's saying something!) She has set herself up to be a proponent of family values and, to her, there is no gray area. Your relationship with your *nuclear* family is the most important thing in the world, and she never deviates from her moral stance.

I don't want to paint you a picture of "Arlo vs. Family Values." I come from a family where my parents divorced when I was 11 years old, and I lived, for a time, with a stepfather and stepbrother. I know the importance of family values, but I also realize that there are extenuating circumstances.

The problem with Dr. Laura's show begins as soon as someone calls in and, more often than not, Dr. Laura starts making assumptions. I can't count the number of times I've heard her verbally cut a caller off in order to render an answer before she even hears the background info! How can you render judgment on someone without listening to his or her entire story?

"Dr. Laura, I really need your help. I'm thinking about getting a divorce from my husband and I'm worried about my kids..."

"Don't divorce him. Work it out."

"But, Dr. Laura..."

"No buts... You love your children, don't you?"

"Yes, but..."

"No buts! If you love your children, and you understand that to raise them effectively they need a father, then you know that you'll have to work it out with him."

"But..."

"Next caller."

(I can only imagine the caller staring at the disconnected phone in her hand) "But my husband sexually and emotionally abuses me in front of them..."

Okay, so maybe it's not quite that bad, but if you've listened to the show for any length of time, you'll realize I'm not too far off the mark. The point I'm trying to make here isn't that she's too abrupt or too terse with callers. Far from it... it's a radio talk show and I'm sure they're working under tight time constraints. You can't have a caller chatting on the line for a half an hour now, can you? No, what Dr. Laura does, or rather doesn't do, is listen to her callers.

"Dr. Laura, my mother-in-law-to-be wants me to change our wedding date..."

"So, do it."

"Well..."

"You want to be happy, don't you?"

"Yes, but..."

"Then do it. You don't want to start your new life together fighting with his family."

"Okay, but..."

"No buts, just change the date."

"Yes, but my mother..."

"Oh, "*Your* mother!" "*His* mother! Just go out and do the right thing!" (This one was actually a true exchange, if paraphrased)

Yes, granted, Dr. Laura shouldn't be expected to tell them only what they want to hear. (It's rather obvious that some of the callers are trying to settle an argument by bringing in the opinion of "an expert.") But with a little empathy, she might realize that many of these people are in situations that can't be simply remedied. Sometimes it appears as though she doesn't even realize that people are calling out for help.

I really feel for the people that are facing a true dilemma when they call Dr. Laura looking for advice. If Dr. Laura would just *listen* sometimes and render her advice in a apologetic, soothing way that doesn't take the caller one step closer to suicide, that'd be something. But, no. I suspect "soothing and apologetic" would lower her ratings.

There's probably a sideline audience that just loves to hear people "put in their place" on the radio.

Well, I'm not one of them and I've lost count of the number of times I've stabbed the power button on my radio with the only sentence that seems adequate echoing through my mind: "That bitch!"

Arlo | June 24, 2003 | 4:53 pm

Sorry, Mom, for the bad thoughts.

And sorry, Karl, for the slam on Rush.²

Karl | June 29, 2003 | 1:10 am

No worries about the slam. Rush can handle it. In my opinion, the greatest thing about Rush's show is his obvious delight in poking fun at Liberals and other silly people. To use your example above, I'm not really interested in what some anti-war guy thinks. I'm much more interested in what Rush thinks. Since it's called the Rush Limbaugh Show and not the "Anti-War-Guy" Show, I appreciate not having to listen to the same damned ill-formed arguments for the thousandth time.

I do however agree with you on the Dr. Laura issue. She stinks.

Mike | August 16, 2003 | 10:06 pm

Way back in the dark ages of the Internet a bunch of sites were propagating a set of pictuers³ of Dr. Laura naked. They were old pictures, from when she was much younger, and from what I recall, taken by a boyfriend (I think it was controversial because she was still married, and you know how she views that kind of thing today). Anyway, my point is that the pictures were kind of depressing. She looked so happy and carefree in them, and then you hear her show and wonder what the hell happened to make her into such a shrew. It's sad, really.

² I felt guilty spelling out "bitch" on my web site, if only because I knew some of my family would be reading. Making fun of it in the comments was my way of rationalizing its use. Also, Karl's a Republican friend that I suspected would be reading. I was trying to defuse his potential defense of Rush Limbaugh, but in retrospect, I suppose I cast him in a favorable enough light.

³ In editing this for dead-tree publication, I decided not to correct this typo. It reminds me of my web site's referral statistics. You'd be surprised how many people search for "Dr Laura pictuers" each month!



Photos of Yozbik

It's not necessarily easy to purchase a trendy pet. If you happen to live in a land-locked town of 30,000 people and your pet store is fresh out spiked animals, you'll likely find that the, say, African Pygmy Hedgehogs have to be flown in.

Last year, for Oksana's birthday, I looked into doing just that. I inquired at the Wee Fishee Shoppe first and it so happened that they had just parted company with their normal hedgehog distributor and had not yet found another. We scoured the Internet for information and learned that purchasing one in Alaska was at least legal, but the hard part was first finding a licensed... grower of hedgehogs.

Fortunately, Anchorage has one. I called them up and got the important information: They sold hedgehogs for \$125 each. It's Expensive, but not unacceptable. In further conversation, though, it became much more complicated.

For us to buy a little *Yoj*, we were going to have to "Goldstreak" him down to Juneau. That's a fancy way of saying we had to buy him a seat on an Alaska Airlines flight. That alone would have cost us another \$75 or so, but Alaska Air also requires that vaccination papers be presented for any animal traveling on their airlines – even if it's only in-state. If the sky-rocketing cost of this tiny pet wasn't already over our yearly budget for warm-blooded spike-balls, I might have tried to contest their policy on the grounds that, in Alaska at least, hedgehogs are not required to have any vaccinations!

¹ This is Russian for "Where's (the) Hedgehog?" I would guess every Russian is familiar with the phrase, if only because those five letters line up like that in the middle of the Cyrillic alphabet.

We briefly toyed with the idea of asking a traveling friend to escort a hedgehog from Anchorage to Juneau, but we'd still have to buy the \$75 pet ticket. One friend was planning on making the drive down through Canada, but it didn't seem like a good idea to have him try to smuggle an African animal across international borders. I'll bet the drug-sniffing dogs would go nuts.

So it was that I missed my opportunity to buy a pet for Oksana's birthday, but miraculously, just two days later, a family put a hedgehog up for sale in the local newspaper's classifieds! After calling the number listed, we discovered that their hedgehog was purchased from the same people in Anchorage (one of them worked for Alaska Airlines, so they dodged the super-first-class-ticket-price that hedgehogs incur.)

Oksana made an appointment and we went together to check out the strange little critter. We were led upstairs to the youngest daughter's room and found a homemade wood-and-wire cage with lots of shavings inside. No sign of a hedgehog, but as soon as the little girl lifted up a small blanket, we saw a bristling, apricot-colored sphere.

It didn't take long at all to figure out why they were trying to find him a better home. When I reached into the cage to pick him up, that little sucker hissed and shook his balled-up frame in the most intimidating manner! In fact, my first reaction (after yanking my hands back out of the cage) was to pack it up and leave. "Thank you very much, but we're holding out for a pet that doesn't kill."

The only other hedgehog I'd seen before this was one of my students'. It was blind, and maybe because of that, it had absolutely no qualms about running all over my hands. In fact, it was so docile that he would keep his hedgehog with him through the day, sleeping in the pouch formed by the hood of his sweatshirt. The hedgehog in front of us was very much afraid of our giant human hands and it was probably

due to the little girl neglecting to hold him every day. After trying to pick him up myself, I couldn't blame her.

Oksana was persistent and better able to combat her fight or flight reaction. While the little girl's mom was running through the house looking for gloves, Oksana found a small blanket and managed to cradle the prickly beast into her grasp. Turning the blanket over, we could still only see more criss-crossed spikes and only a tiny opening where the rest of the poor little guy's body must have been sheltered. For a few moments there was much shaking and hissing, but eventually he poked his head out to see what was going on.

That was when we decided to keep him.

You see, hedgehogs are cute. Adorable, loveable, precious, darling. In fact, our little hedgehog is so darn cute that I can use words like that to describe him without feeling as if my masculinity is in jeopardy, because, dammit, it's just plain as day.

For the sake of our bank account, Oksana and I played it nice and cool. Since he'd had so little human contact in his formative hedgehog years, we didn't know if he'd ever become comfortable around people. So when we didn't jump at the chance to pay their \$125 asking price, the mother told us we could take him for a weekend to see if he'd grow on us. She even told us that they weren't that interested in the money, just in finding him a good home. Score!

We did take him home, but keeping him was already a no-brainer. In the two days we had him, he must have already grown accustomed to our scents because, while still touchy when we picked him up, he would rapidly calm down and begin climbing around. That following Monday, Oksana called the family back and, after a bit of haggling, arranged to buy him for \$80 (we should have had him for \$75, but when we got there, no one could make change for a twenty.)

Oksana already had a name in mind for our little pincushion: Yozhik. It's Russian for "Little Hedgehog," or as we often call him,

“Hedgie.” All Roman alphabet spellings of Russian words are phonetic, so it’s pronounced pretty much like it’s spelled. “YOJ-ick” might be a little closer. After paying up, Oksana stopped by the store and bought him some big plastic bins for a cage and then got to work sewing together a couple yozhik-sized “sleeping bags.” To this day, he still spends most of his daylight hours inside them.

I suspect that a lot of people that have yet to hold a hedgehog can’t imagine owning one. Believe me, it’s probably not as much like having a sea urchin for a pet as you’d think – actually, maybe it is. I’ve never really played with a sea urchin before (more Spanish language trivia²: Sea urchin translates to “erizo del mar” or “hedgehog of the sea!”) When he calms down, Yozhik’s not so bad; although I doubt he’ll ever really be friendly towards us... indifferent is the best we can hope for.

Hedgehogs are nocturnal animals, which explains why we decided very early on not to keep his cage in our bedroom. Most nights, almost the instant as we turn off the lights and the living room quiets, Yozhik emerges from his little plastic penthouse and begins to explore his three-tiered home. He might stop on the middle level to eat (our hedgehog food is a lot like hard kitten food) or take a drink from his little water dispenser, but that’s always on the way to the bottom level where pine shavings cover the floor and his exercise wheel dominates the enclosure. He’ll then commence running. And running. And running. If I wake up any time before sunrise, I’ll find him going round and round, stopping every minute or so to peer outside the wheel – perhaps to see if he’s gone anywhere. If you flick the light on he’ll freeze in place and stare through the cloudy plastic walls of his cage...

² You can tell how deep into Spanish I was back in 2003 just by the tangential references here and in the Dr. Laura entry. Understandably, I think more about Russian now, even though my Spanish is so much further along.

Now that we know how to pick him up without hurting either him or ourselves, we take him out of his cage almost every night to hang out with us. His behavior is never exactly predictable, but if he doesn't simply crawl under the first pillow he finds for a nap, it usually it boils down to just three modes:

- Frozen mode
- Licking mode
- Zoom-zoom mode

Frozen mode is simple. Sometimes when we take him out, all he wants to do is sit perfectly still and stare at us. For hours. He doesn't ball up or even bristle when we get too close. Loud noises and rapid movements don't seem to overly annoy him. Nope, he just sits there, frozen, staring. Now that I think about it, it's kind of creepy.

Licking mode is more interesting. When Yozhik happens upon a new and interesting smell, he often stops and starts licking and chewing at whatever it comes from. Sometimes it's a specific spot on our couch. Sometimes it's the deodorant on the armpit of my shirt. Sometimes it's a friend's hand (I don't want to know why.) At any rate, he licks whatever-it-is ferociously for a minute or two and then stretches backward to spread lathered saliva over his quills.

I suspect this is some sort of survival mechanism – taking on the scent of the environment or something. Whatever it is that he's doing, he gets *way* into it. His tongue is freakishly long, but in and of itself, not long enough to reach to his back. To compensate, Yozhik bends over backwards, arching his back and his spines, then flick-flick-flicks his tongue as far down his body as he can. I've actually seen him fall over backwards (and off the couch!) while doing this. When he does finally finish, though, he seems quite happy and goes off on his sofa explorations with big, bubbly wet stripes on each flank.

The only other mode we consistently see Yozhik in is what we call zoom-zoom mode. Let me tell you, zoom-zoom mode is what having a hedgehog is all about! A few times a week, Oksana and I turn down the lights, start up a DVD and extract Hedgie from his sleeping bag. We'll put him on the back of the couch and then forget about him – if he's in zoom-zoom mood, we'll see him soon enough.

Yozhik is a rather small animal and not much of a climber. With zoom-zoom mode activated, he'll criss-cross the backs of the six sections of our couch looking for a way down to the seat cushions. If we don't prop a pillow in the corner, he'll come to us and descend by way of our torsos. Most of the time he'll just cruise right on by, hunting for food perhaps, verifying his memory of the surroundings, more likely. Eventually he might crawl under a pillow and go to sleep, but on rare occasions, he has been known to cuddle up on one of us.

Since we didn't get Yozhik until he was already an adult, it's disappointing that he'll never be completely comfortable with us.³ Despite the current trend of having a hedgehog pet, they still have a long way to go before being considered domesticated. Nevertheless, now that we've figured out how to hold him and now that we've discovered that pine shavings make cleaning his cage so much easier and now that we can hand-feed him anything from mealworms to sunflower seeds... Oksana and I are quite happy to have him. Hopefully, he feels the same way about us.

³ Not true! In the last year of his life, Yozhik would come out of his sleeping bag as soon as we came home from work and we eventually built a door into his cage so he could have the run of the apartment. I think fondly back to the times we'd be cooking in the kitchen and would suddenly find him nosing around between our bare feet.

Anya | September 29, 2003 | 2:27 pm

I've seen Yozhik in all three modes. I just hope you don't think caring for kids involves three modes as well. Before you decide to go for the "real thing" maybe you should get a puppy. It will have about 50 different modes, you multiply that by about a thousand and here we go. You will need about three modes yourself: blocking out noises, I will sleep in my next life, and speed eating.

Gabriela | October 17, 2003 | 10:03 am

Hi, Arlo. :) Little Hedgie is adorable. At the state fair here I saw a display on a disease some hedgehogs can get called "Wobbly Hedgehog Syndrome" (or WHS.) For no apparent reason, they can suddenly lose the ability to stand, walk, etc., and are very unsteady. Hence the name, I guess. Anyways, I'm not so sure how common this is but just thought I would let you know about it.

P.S. We moved to Portland. :)⁴

Marcela | August 5, 2007 | 7:07 am

Hi, I found this page because I'm thinking of purchasing an African Pygmy Hedgehog. Yesterday I found one at a vet near my house (like 20 min away by car). It was the cutest thing I have seen, the cost in my country's currency is very similar (in US\$ it cost \$117).

I live in Costa Rica so it's really easy to find "strange" little animals everywhere, difficult to find someone that is selling them legally. =o(

The point is that I was looking for care info, my boyfriend told me that a salesman will say anything to sell, so some facts could not be totally true, due to the fact that you have one for a long time, can you help me out if you read this? Thanks!

⁴ This was the first I'd heard of WHS and, unfortunately, our own Yozhik eventually succumbed to something like it. We know for sure that he developed cancer in one of his lymph nodes – we had a tumor surgically removed – but the symptoms he exhibited later very much resembled WHS. But that's a story for later...

Arlo | August 6, 2007 | 9:28 am

Hi, Marcela.

Personally, I think a hedgehog makes a great pet. They can be trained to some extent, they're fairly clean, and it doesn't cost much to feed and care for them. You'll have to decide for yourself if the initial price is worth it, but once you get the hedgehog and the cage, feeding expenses are minimal.

We mostly fed our hedgehog dry food. Here in the US, you can order hedgehog food from pet stores. If you can't find pet food that's specifically for hedgehogs, you can substitute cat food. Some books we read specifically recommended kitten food. Also, we discovered that our hedgehog really loved canned (wet) cat food.

You can also feed a hedgehog plenty of treats. Find out what he likes! Ours loved mealworms, pine nuts, wet cat food, and some fruits. What worked best for us was to keep his food dish full of dry cat food, and only feed him the treats by hand. Over time, he lost his fear of humans because he associated us with treats.

I don't know what other facts you might be looking for. If you want to ask me any specific questions, I'd be happy to try to answer them.⁵

-A.

P.S. Where do you live in Costa Rica? I proposed to my wife there!

⁵ Marcela and I continued the conversation in e-mail. She promised to let me know if and when she ever bought a hedgehog, but I never did hear back.



My Sony PictureBook

Way back in junior high, I had an English teacher assign a creative writing project. I forget the details, but I do remember that when she gave us the homework, we all thought that the minimum page requirement (five pages? three?) was extreme. Here we are in eighth grade and she's assigning us high school-length papers? Was she kidding?

The topic was something along the lines of, "What would you do if you were stuck on a deserted island?" I was freaked – about the page limit, not the theme – but once I actually began writing, I enjoyed the process immensely. I dreamed up the situation that put me on the hypothetical island (a shipwreck), described the survival materials I found in the wreckage, wrote in a fellow student as a second protagonist, and then had us befriend a tiger. At some point along the way I discovered that writing five pages wouldn't be a problem... keeping the story under ten would be.

I kept that paper right up until my unfortunate storage fire last year. I don't think I ever actually went back and read it – I'm sure it was awful – but I do recall seeing the big "A++" on the cover page. If nothing else, I probably wrote more than any other student in the class.

High school hindered any writing ambitions I may have fostered the year before. In my four years at Ketchikan High School, three English classes were spent with Mrs. Miller. While not an altogether bad teacher, she was the least favored of the available English faculty and was considered an unlucky draw. (Despite that, I thought I was taking advantage of the system when I actually

requested her creative writing class for my senior year. Most students didn't think far enough ahead: Senior English required a 20-page term paper!)

Mrs. Miller and I often clashed. I recall questioning her about the writing style of a famous author – Hemmingway, perhaps:

“Isn't it possible that he simply wrote a story and all the neat-o writing junk that was in it – symbolism, foreshadowing, and all that – was just a coincidence?”

“No.”

“Not even remotely possible?”

“No.”

Another time I completely and totally did not participate in a quarter-long section on poetry. When detained after class for an explanation, I explained that, by my calculations at least, I could fail the poetry section completely, ace the next section on reading, and still comfortably average a “C” for the semester. She simply could not understand why any good student might want to do that.

Just so you know, it's because I *really* dislike poetry.¹

Throughout the nine years it took for me to earn my four-year college degree, I got more practice writing. I think it might surprise people to learn that I only completed two English classes in all that time. For those keeping track, that's actually less than what is normally required for a Liberal Arts degree – I petitioned to have two of my Spanish classes accepted as upper-division English-Communication credits. What? You don't think *you'd* learn how to manipulate the system after nine years?

The two English classes that I did take were the absolute minimum required: English 111 and 211. I dropped or failed English

¹ I look back on my high school English classes now and grudgingly admit that Mrs. Millar, more often than not, was right. I still don't appreciate most poetry, though.

111, ahem, three times before finally taking it for a passing grade in my “senior” year. Oh, the excuses I could give... but it all boils down to the fact that the class didn’t hold my attention because there wasn’t anything in there that I hadn’t learned my freshman year of high school. As far as The University of Alaska is concerned, it doesn’t matter if you have already passed *all* your upper-division classes (with writing samples), if you only missed one question on the English placement exam, or *even if you have already turned in the written portfolio required for graduation*. At UAS, you must take English 111, and even if you complete all the work on time, you can’t skip more than five classes (because you’ll miss the “*essential* peer reviews.”) Trust me, I know.

So, during the majority of my college career, my writing stagnated. Oh, there was the occasional fun project. During the most boring of classes, I wrote half of a “mockumentary” called *Space Chum*² that, even in later readings, I thought was pretty funny. Also, I recently found a 4-page, sci-fi story that was saved on an old CD-ROM. I wrote it for English 211 and was surprised to discover that it was... decent. Salvageable, anyway.

It wasn’t until I started work on the story of my engagement that I thought I might again enjoy writing. The short retelling was to be part of an important announcement to friends and family. I took the time to try to get it right; I wanted them to be captivated by the story, not any typographical errors. I think I *did* get it right... A couple compliments were interspersed among the congratulatory e-mails delivered to my inbox.

Shortly after that success I decided to keep people updated with our wedding planning. To be perfectly honest, it was a clever ploy to get members of my family interested enough to make the trip for our

² See Appendix D on page 143.

big day. I mean, seriously, they all say “someday I want to get up there and see Alaska,” and even though I’m ready house them and show them a good time, they never seem to make it. I was sure a well-written wedding journal would do the trick.

There were only 129 words and a smattering of web links in my journal’s first entry on February 25th, 2002. Somewhere in mid-August, just before the wedding, the word count had swelled to over 25,000! Using the old college rule of thumb that says an average page has about 250 words, my little journal was now over 100 pages! For some reason, I thought back to that assignment in my eighth grade English class.

And, believe it or not, it’s not even finished. You don’t know it yet, but that’s the reason why I haven’t updated this blog recently.³

Undoubtedly the largest impediment to my writing is simply getting started. Once I get going, I never have a problem pounding away at the keyboard. If there’s nothing else for me to do, I can sometimes type for hours, but in my normal day-to-day life I always seem to have so many other things going on.

First, there’s work. Nine to five, got to earn that paycheck, baby! At first glance, the after work hours seem like a good bet; 5pm until 10 or 11pm is a healthy span, but there’s always other stuff to do like cleaning, starting up a fledgling business, cleaning, other creative projects, and cleaning. Not to mention the distractions imposed upon writing by such innocuous concepts as THE TELEVISION, or A COMPUTER WITH GAMES INSTALLED, or FRIENDS WHO WANT TO PLAY FRISBEE GOLF. Writing, somehow, rapidly works its way down to the bottom of the list.⁴

³ It’s still not finished. I keep telling myself I’ll get around to writing about the most important day of all, but it’s already been five years...

⁴ Funny. Some of those are no longer distractions. Others have become even more distracting.

Funny thing is, I actually like doing it *when* I have the time. Usually the urge to write blindsides me while I'm on vacation, but of course, never in the first few weeks. No, it seems that I need to be bored to write. On a typical vacation⁵, it's usually a week of seeing the sights, then a week of watching TV, perhaps followed by a week of reading. After that I'm itching to do something worthwhile and guess what! That's just about the time to go back to work.

Maybe you're starting to catch on to why my blog is stagnating. Let's talk about my wedding journal again, shall we?

In the week before our wedding last year, I became so busy that I had no time to write about the myriad events of each day. For the last few days I was only able to jot notes, and for the wedding day itself, I wrote nothing at all. That's was okay, because I had decided to take a laptop with me on my honeymoon! Well, I took the laptop with me, all right, but my idealized view of myself writing poolside or in a hammock all day didn't materialize. I'm not complaining, mind you, I found other enjoyable things to do, but with respect to my journal, it did leave me with an unfinished, guilty feeling.

And then we went home, back to work, back to the thank you cards, to Russian 101 and ultimate Frisbee, back to episodic television and all the other things that sucked away my free time and left me with no energy to finish an overly long wedding anecdote. As I write this, it's over a year later and the only real parts left to finish are half the day before the wedding, the wedding itself, and maybe a partial synopsis of our honeymoon. Oh, and the post-wedding INS stuff.

Okay, so perhaps starting isn't always the hardest part. Sometimes finishing can be pretty tough, too. Looks as though if I'm ever going to explore writing in any sort of professional capacity (I've

⁵ I'm thinking of the typical family-gathering type vacation here, not the international-trekking type.

toyed with the idea), I'll have to quit my day job just to have enough time to put in the practice. For most Americans stuck in the paycheck groove, that's a scary concept.

Just like I had plans to write on our honeymoon, I had plans to write on our vacation to North Carolina this year. Well, the first week I showed Oksana the sights. Week two was spent reading in the hammock and working on my tan. The third and final week of our vacation found us socializing with family and watching a borrowed copy of the first season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* on DVD (Thanks, Karl!)

My plans to add a host of entries to my blog were dashed... and not just because of the abysmally slow dial-up connection, either. My mistake was to put a wedding entry (or four) at the top of my writing list. I thought it might make an interesting read and anyone coming across the blog might find themselves inclined to browse over to my wedding pages. By the end of the plane trip home, I had quite a bit written about the post-wedding stuff, but I still hadn't even tackled the more important wedding day stories.

Even now, three weeks after returning home, I haven't typed one word more about the wedding. Instead I've spent three lunch breaks writing about writing and I suspect I'll spend another one rereading, revising, and correcting this post.

And here I've arrived, in my long-winded way, at my point. Using slightly over 1800 words, I'm able to say: "Hey, my blog hasn't been updated because I've been writing about my wedding!"⁶

⁶ I don't much like this entry. It's the same whiney, apologetic thing that you find on countless other blogs on the Internet. "Sorry I haven't written in awhile, but..." It's presumes somebody out there even cares.

I suppose every blog goes through the same growing pains. The initial urge to write carries you through the learning curve of getting your site up and running, then tapers off when an avalanche of morale-boosting feedback fails to materialize. I constantly find myself reevaluating my reasons for writing. If I wrote about that as often as I thought about it, it would probably be the thesis of my blog.

Jeff | September 19, 2003 | 9:22 am

Well, from a guy who wants to be a writer when he grows up, you are pretty damn good. Bastard.

Amelia | September 23, 2003 | 9:16 pm

"...and then had us befriend a tiger" Yeah. Have you ever read "The Life of Pi"? After a shipwreck, the boy is forced to befriend a tiger. Someone read your homework and won a Booker for it!

Karl | September 25, 2003 | 10:13 pm

I want Buffy back on Friday. ;)

Arlo | September 26, 2003 | 3:06 pm

Curse that Yann Martel! I knew he (or she) was peeking over my shoulder as I wrote my 8th grade masterpiece!

(On a more... real note, I found an interesting story about the writing of the Life of Pi on the Internet.) Interesting even despite not having read the book!⁷

⁷ After Amelia's comment, I did eventually get around to reading the Life of Pi. Good book. Didn't much like the heavy-handed moral at the end, however.

Parlez-vous Usted English?¹

Wednesday 8 October 2003

I like science fiction. I'm hooked the way lonely housewives are addicted to romance novels and the Lifetime Network. I'll watch the movies, I'll quickly commit to a season of episodic television, I'll read the novels and the short stories. I doubt there's any *one* reason why I'm drawn to fantastic descriptions of utopian or dystopian futures, rather it's probably the same combination of events in my youth that nurtured my fondness for hi-tech gadgets, comic books, and computer games.

Lately I've been thinking a lot about one of the big conceits of sci-fi – interspecies communication. Each movie, show, or book has a God-like device inserted to enable the author to get past the language barrier. Douglas Adams imagined the improbable Babel Fish (appropriately adopted by AltaVista search engine geeks as the name for their web-based translation tool), but it was Star Trek that introduced the Universal Translator to the general public.

Whatever the contrivance, the intent is the same: To shelve the language barrier in deference to the story being told. It's understandable. As a viewer, can you imagine watching every sci-fi story with a realistic alien language barrier? You would either have to read a lot of subtitles or miss out on half the story. Of course, if written well, the process of communication barriers could be very interesting – but how many authors or scriptwriters have the ability to create believable languages while telling a compelling story?

¹ Taken from a line in *The Big Lebowski*.

It wasn't until high school that I came across my first spell checker (stick with me here!) Back then they were still fairly simplistic – mine could tell me if a word wasn't in a dictionary, but not much else. Before long (college, in my case) clever Microsoft programmers introduced a thesaurus and a grammar checking feature. It occurred to me recently that these may have been the first steps toward a true Universal Translator.

Think about it. With Word's ability to spell-check in real time (underlining enigmatic words in your document with wavy red and green lines) it must be going through all sorts of cross-referencing in background databases. I'm sure it wasn't long after Word became widespread that some cunning linguist realized that translation software would be a piece of cake. All you'd need is fast processing and two big, linked databases. 20,000 English words linked to 20,000 Spanish words – how easy as that? Click the “Translate” button and your fancy program could simply substitute each Spanish word for its equivalent in English.

I had a program that did exactly that by the time I was enrolled in a Spanish Literature class, and let me tell you, it wasn't worth much more than a dictionary. Anyone that's studied another language can tell you that direct, written translations are not altogether useful. Most of the time, they can give you a clue towards the meaning of a sentence, but that's about it.

In studying Spanish, I'm amazed at how many similarities and cognates the language shares with English. (Conversely, I'm amazed that Russian has so few – and I'm comparing it to *two* languages!) Sometimes the resemblance is obvious: Any English word ending in -tion, for instance, is essentially the same with -cion in Spanish, but often it goes deeper than that. Take this sentence: “I have to go to the store.” In Spanish you would say, “*Tengo que ir a la tienda.*” What's interesting is that you use the verb “to have” in both cases. Why is that

interesting? Well, “to have” usually indicates *possession* (e.g., I have a car.), but in both languages you use the same verb, the same conventions even, to indicate *obligation*.

Of course, if parallels like that were universal, becoming fluent in Spanish would be nearly effortless. Often a very common saying in English has no translation in Spanish. “Can I have a ride?” can’t be expressed in Spanish because there is no noun for “ride.” And let’s not get started on idiomatic expressions... If you think someone might be teasing you, in Spanish you might ask, “¿Me estás tomando el pelo?” or “Are you taking my hair?” Doesn’t make much sense, but then when you think about it, neither does: “Are you pulling my leg?”

Have you ever really thought about phrases like, “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush?” “He let the cat out of the bag?” Or a great one I learned from my grandfather, “So nervous he was pinching his seat?”

An episode of Stargate SG-1 was the catalyst that brought all these thoughts together in my head. In it, two members of the SG team are caught in a “time loop” and are forced to repeat six hours of the same day. Breaking the loop took “months” because they were forced to learn Latin in order to translate the instructions on the time machine. The story takes a whimsical approach to what someone might do in six hours if they knew that there would be no consequences to their actions – resigning after kissing a coworker one day, taking advantage of the Stargate to hit a golf ball across the galaxy in another.

At the end of the episode, to describe his situation, the main character used the phrase “The King of Groundhog Day.” He tells this to an alien character and we have to assume that the Universal Translation makes it understandable (or we could choose to assume that the alien speaks English – I’d rather not.) Think about that. What would a Universal Translator have to say in order to get that particular point across in an alien language?

Let's take a stab at it, but to simplify, we'll ignore the pitfalls associated with grammar – from trying to learn Russian, I can vouch for the fact that even simple things like articles and prepositions might not even exist in other languages. Let's just focus on the remaining nouns, shall we? And for bonus points, I won't even use a dictionary!

“The King of Groundhog Day.” Hmm, well, “king” should be fairly easy to translate. How about “leader of a nation?” Not quite. How about “principal leader of a nation usually established by birthright.” Okay, better.

“Groundhog Day” is a little harder. A “day” is “one complete axial revolution of the 3rd planet in the solar system.” (I leave it to the reader to figure out what's wrong with using “solar system.”) “Groundhog” would be the easiest word to translate... if the alien knew what a groundhog was. I doubt it, but let's hope they have mammals, because I don't want to get into internal gestation and lactation distinctions. Let's go with: “A furry, non-sentient animal that lives in a hole in the ground.”

That's all fine and dandy, but we haven't even come close to explaining what Groundhog Day is about. To do that, our Universal Translator will have to explain how, on a specific day of the year, people traditionally gather to watch a Groundhog emerge from his hole and observe it looking for his shadow, and if he sees it, the winter season will have been assumed to have been extended. Okay, I'm not going to even *try* to break up that run-on sentence for translation!

Oh, but we're not even done. Even assuming that we could get all that information across to the alien, for him to understand the original comment, a translator would have to explain something else: That there was a popular movie that captured the public's conscience for a time, and in that movie, the protagonist was forced to endure the same day repeatedly.

Put together, even on the most basic level, that's a massive amount of information to convey. (*To be the principal leader by birthright of a nation for one complete axial rotation of the 3rd planet of the solar system during which a small, furry animal is, one time in each of the planet's orbit around its sun, observed searching for its shadow to establish upcoming meteorological events, said with irony with respect to a movie in one of the planet's societies' conscience about a man forced to repeat the same duration of the planet's axial rotation many times.*) In cases like this (a very common one across alien races and even human cultures, I would imagine), I can't decide what would be worse: A direct translation, or a complete one. Either way, it's going to be hard as hell to make yourself understood!

One of the writers for Star Trek; The Next Generation, must have been thinking about languages, too, when he or she wrote "Darmok." The dilemma in that episode was that, while the Universal Translators were working, their *direct* translations of everything communicated very little back to each race. Eventually, Captain Picard discovered that the alien race spoke only in metaphors. Without an historical context, the humans were only able to understand the individual words, not the meaning behind them. It's not quite the same as trying to communicate in idiomatic expressions, but it's close enough for government work.

It all comes down to your point of reference. So much of a way in which a language is created is dependent on the shared experiences of a society. I wonder: Is language necessary outside society? Different societies have different collections of experiences and therefore have different words, grammar, and concepts to describe them.

So, will anyone ever build a Universal Translator? Oh, they're already on their way. My trusty copy of Microsoft Word can tell me when I mistype (not misspell!) you're and your; they're, their, and

there; or its and it's. And, more impressively, if I type a sentence in Spanish instead of English, Word will switch over and spell-check my document against a Spanish dictionary. (Which really freaked me out the first time all those red squiggly lines switched places!)

Grammar checkers are beginning to understand context, but judging by the number of times I get green underlines and choose not to accept the program's suggestions, they still have a long way to go. Computers are great at sorting through massive amounts of information in very short periods of time, but they're not at all "smart." Unless software engineers make big breakthroughs in coding fuzzy new types of logic, we won't have a *real* Universal Translator until computers develop artificial intelligence.

Bummer. If science fiction has taught me anything, it's that artificially intelligent computers will be far more interested in our destruction than our translation!

(By the way, I just love that if Microsoft Word had its way, my opening paragraph would have read: "...fantastic descriptions of utopian or *dustpan* futures...!")

Amelia | October 11, 2003 | 2:37 pm

"...mine could tell me if a word wasn't in a dictionary, but do anything else." Add couldn't.

Amelia | October 11, 2003 | 2:48 pm

Which is why I prefer magical realism to science fiction. Are you saying my script wouldn't translate well?² Heh heh: You said "cunning linguist." That wouldn't translate well either. Did you know there are already programs that can generate an abstract for your academic papers? And even more freaky: write jokes. One of my professors was on a panel of humans set to read a list of jokes and determine which were human and which were machine made. They couldn't tell.

Arlo | October 12, 2003 | 8:44 pm

Hey, Amelia, thanks for pointing out my mistake... but now that I fixed it, won't your comment look silly?³

Oh, and for your information, all the jokes in this blog were written by a computer!

² Amelia is referring to her video club script for *Once Upon a Time on a Dark and Stormy Night*. She wrote a dialog between two people using only idiomatic expressions and clichés.

³ Amelia asked me in an e-mail if I'd like spelling errors on my blog pointed out. I said, "yes," but here we see the problem with using comments to do that.

Not too long ago a friend commented that I always seemed to find cool and interesting places on the Internet. He asked me why I didn't have a section of my web page devoted to my favorites. Honestly, the thought never occurred to me.

I've rarely found the huge list of links that some people put on their web pages very useful. In theory, it sounds like a good idea to organize, categorize, and publish your own bookmarks for the enlightenment of the online masses, but I can't seem to find a good implementation. One of the most annoying virtual experiences is to click on a link that someone professes to be worth your time... only to have a 404 error show up.

Relishing my propensity to type, I thought I might take a different approach to sharing my favorites. Instead of supplying a list, I'll take some extra time to tell you why I think the site is worthwhile. (Apologies to those who come across this blog entry 10 years from now when all the URLs are broken.)¹

¹ At least I foresaw how useless this list might be in the future. Obviously it's even more useless now that it's in a book.

My Home Page

Slashdot²

(www.slashdot.org)

I chose Slashdot as my home page because its content is always changing. Slashdot calls itself “News for Nerds, Stuff that Matters,” and it’s a compilation of relevant newsworthy events that I frequently find interesting.

Here’s how the site works: Anyone can submit a story for posting on Slashdot as long as they can get the moderators to deem it worthy. If they accept your submission (which isn’t likely since they get thousands of submissions a day and only post 1 or 2 an hour), a short synopsis of the information is presented on the main page. Slashdot readers can then follow the links to obtain the information directly from the source. Often, this results in the “Slashdot Effect,” the merciless pounding upon of servers by millions of nerds hell-bent on not being left behind, information-wise. It’s not uncommon for a site to reach its bandwidth limit in a matter of minutes after being linked to from Slashdot.

Each article typically attracts a huge discussion, but I rarely participate in the forums. Slashdot is simply my news sources for hi-tech gadgets, computer games, science fiction, virus news, book reviews, the war on spam, privacy rights, astronomy, and a dozen other topics.

² Slashdot’s no longer my home page. I’m using Google’s portal now.

Useful Links

Hotmail

(www.hotmail.com)

Even though I've got my own domain now (and with it my own mail server), I still use my Hotmail account frequently. I signed up for my free e-mail account in 1998, just before going to Ecuador. I needed to be able to have an e-mail address that could be accessed anywhere in the world, and Hotmail fit the bill. For the price of the air you breathe, you can get 2MB of storage space. It's usually enough, if you don't want to risk missing e-mails when your limit is exceeded, you can upgrade to 10MB for about \$12/year – not bad for only a dollar a month.³

The only drawback is that there's a lot of spam nowadays. I guess this is a problem anywhere, and at least Hotmail tries to stem the tide with its junk mail filters.⁴

I'll also hold onto my Hotmail account just because it's my login for MSN Messenger. Messenger is an online chat tool with so much more built in – file sharing, audio/video conferencing, games, and even application sharing. It's another great *free* tool and I use it every day. Want to talk to me online? Add me to your Messenger contact list: a_midgett@hotmail.com.

³ Google's Gmail sort of redefined the free e-mail landscape. My \$12 a year now fetches me 5 Gigabytes of storage space. That's 500 times what I had in 2003.

⁴ Which it's doing much better now, four years later.

Google
(www.google.com)

Google is the best search engine on the web, hands down. Once you learn the ins and outs of narrowing your search down with good keywords and Boolean logic, Google will quickly find just about any site out there.

If your name's rare enough (as far as I can tell, I'm the only Arlo Midgett on the planet!) submit an ego search by putting your name in quotes. Get a few hits? Cool. Now try clicking on the "Images" tab to see if any pictures of your smiling mug appear – Google finds three of mine. Think that's it? Search for my name in "Groups" and you'll see some frighteningly dated posts I made in Usenet *over a decade ago!* Input someone's name and zip code and there's a good chance Google will supply you with their address, phone number, and a map straight to their home!

Google also has a lot more to offer than just what's on the front page. If you find yourself searching a lot on the Internet, you owe it to yourself to download the Google Toolbar. It will create a new toolbar in your browser that makes searching for other pages even easier (you don't have to go to Google first), and it has a ton of other useful features, such as pop-up ad blocking, too. I highly recommend it.

Google's caching system is yet another feature that elevates it above other search engines. If a site Google links to is down or has been removed, you can still click on the [cache] link to at least see the web page as Google saw it when it was cataloged. If you're looking for information – any information – on the web, start with Google.⁵

⁵ I doubt any site in this list has both changed so much and yet remained so definitively useful. I use Google for e-mail (Gmail), web statistics (Analytics), writing (Documents and Spreadsheets), and as a portal to dozens of other web sites (iGoogle).

Dictionary.com

(www.dictionary.com)

Having a dictionary within reach all the time isn't very practical, but if you're online, you're only one click from Dictionary.com. In fact, if you download their toolbar, you can look up any word with a single click! Without costing a cent, Dictionary.com will give you multiple definitions, etymologies, and a pronunciation key. For a small fee, you can upgrade Dictionary.com to get audio pronunciations, illustrations, and a distinct lack of banner ads. I should really do that.

Thesaurus

(www.thesaurus.com)

Spanish Dictionary

(www.spanishdict.com)

I visit Thesaurus.com and Spanish Dictionary far less than Dictionary.com, but they're still valuable online resources. Thesaurus.com works well when Word fails me, and Spanish Dictionary is great for a quick check to make sure I have my Spanish words spelled correctly. Spanish Dictionary will also let you listen to audio pronunciations, if that's what you're after.

Anywho

(www.anyway.com)

Anywho is run by AT&T. It's a decent way to look up a phone number or address for just about anyone – as long as they're listed in a phonebook somewhere. Actually, the reason I end up at Anywho most

of the time is for their reverse lookup feature. Just type in that perplexing phone number you found on your caller ID and you should get a name back. Unfortunately, cell phones are not listed in the reverse lookup, but I have a hard time faulting Anywho for that when Oksana was able to track down a Siberian relative's phone number on their site!

Entertainment

Wil Wheaton Dot Net⁶
(www.wilwheaton.net)⁷

Wil Wheaton was a Hollywood child star. You may remember him from such films as *Stand by Me* and *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Now, let's get one thing straight: I was not a fan of Wesley Crusher on TNG. Excepting, perhaps, Wil's "sneering confused face," I don't think it was the actor's fault – rather, the writers had the 15-year-old character saving the Enterprise about ten times too many for me to be able to suspend my disbelief.

Anyway, a funny thing happened about a year ago. As I was just beginning to get interested in Slashdot, I came across an interview with Wil on the site. In it, he answered ten of the best moderated questions from the nerd crowd and, low and behold, he came across as interesting. He plugged his own web site and blog, and I, being a dutiful Trek fan, visited it once or twice. Like a soap opera, it was hard to get involved at first, but once I learned the characters, I was hooked.

Wil's site is well written, often funny, and sometimes a little whiney.⁸ To be honest, after seeing the kind of readership he was able

⁶ I actually met Wil Wheaton at the Penny Arcade Expo in 2007. Amelia and I got a couple of his books signed while we were there.

⁷ Actually, it's now wilwheaton.typepad.com.

to build, he became a sort of inspiration for the blog you're reading now. (Don't worry. There's a voice in the back of my head that lets me know I'll never gain his Hollywood fame-fueled number of readers on my own site.)

To his credit, Wil also introduced me to Homestar Runner and Strong Bad.

Homestar Runner

(www.homestarrunner.com)

Homestar Runner... *it's dot com!* Homestar Runner is a fascinating site that will either grab a hold of you... or not. The concept is simply a bunch of rejected children's book characters that have found an unlikely home in Flash animations. It might not seem like much, but when you consider the weekly updates are created solely (writing, voices, animations, music, etc.) by two brothers, it's nothing short of amazing. The humor is decidedly juvenile – take that for what it's worth. (Personally, I love it!) If you look at nothing else on the site, I heartedly recommend the Strong Bad e-mails. If you “get it,” I fully expect you to buy a Trogdor or Stinko-Man T-shirt just like mine!

Penny Arcade

(www.penny-arcade.com)

Penny Arcade is the place I go for video game information. Run by two guys, Gabe and Tycho, it's another web site that may be an acquired taste. Once you're privy to their quirks, though, you'll be hooked.

⁸ See Karl's comment, back on page 26.

PA is updated every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday with one comic strip and one blog entry. Tycho writes and Gabe draws. The comics are funny enough if you're into jokes encompassing video games, but often you need to be current with the industry news to understand where they're coming from. If you're the kind of person that needs the punch line spelled out for you, Tycho's articles usually do a fine job. As a bonus, they are exceedingly well written... I dream of the day when I can turn a phrase like Tycho.

One potential problem with Penny Arcade (potentially your problem, not mine) is their propensity for vulgar language. If you're one of those assho*es that can't handle a four-letter word, then you best stay the hell away from their site! Oh, and they lean a bit too much towards consoles games for my tastes, too.⁹

Apple Trailers

(www.apple.com/trailers)

I love movie trailers. I believe that they are the earthly manifestation of pure, elemental video editing. Can any old editor introduce the characters, distill the plot, *and* build sufficient hype for a movie without spoiling anything in thirty seconds? No. Trailer cutting is an art form.

For years now, Apple has been showcasing their QuickTime video codec with movie trailers. Their trailer page may not be the best place to get information about upcoming movies on the web, but they update it consistently, keep the interface clean and simple, and do the best they can to provide the finest quality video clips. If you like

⁹ My link to Penny Arcade is a little stronger than an <a href> tag now. I play a computer game, World of Warcraft, with Gabe and Tycho, and then actually met both him and Tycho at the Penny Arcade Expo in 2007.

trailers as much as I do, bookmark their site and check the “Newest Trailers” section daily!¹⁰

Zombo Com
(www.zombo.com)

You can do *anything* at Zombo.com.

Art

Photo.net
(www.photo.net)

Photo.net is a great site. I only wish I had more time to participate in the communities that spring up there. Besides being able to get all the photography information you might need from your virtual peers, you can critique other people’s photos while soliciting requests for comments and ratings on your own. It’s been awhile since I posted any new photos of my own, but I still visit the site a couple times a week to marvel at the technical skills, digital creativity, and eye for lighting of other photographers.

The best way to get acquainted with the site is to hit the main page and look for the “Top-rated Photos” link. Want to see the best of the best? Change the browsing parameters to: “Rank = Sum of Ratings” and “Period = All.” Prepare to be amazed.

¹⁰ Never mind, it’s 2008. Subscribe to the RSS feed instead.

Ofoto¹¹

(www.kodakgallery.com)

What do you do with all those photographs after you've snapped them? Take them online for printing, of course! In the last couple years many printing services have sprung up on the web and they all want your business. Ofoto is one of the first I tried, and I still think it's one of the best.

Here's what you do: Set up a free account on Ofoto and upload your digital images – any digital image will do, whether it be from a digital camera or a scanned print or negative. Once Ofoto has it on their site, you can choose what you want to do with it. Typical photographic prints range from wallet size to poster size and the prices are reasonable (29 cents for a 4" x 6" print, \$22.99 for a 20" x 30" poster.) You can also create cards, calendars, and even archive your images to a CD.

Ofoto's interface is intuitive and responsive. It's quite simple to give your friends and family access to your online portfolios so that *they* can pick and choose which of your prints to order. But the best thing about Ofoto is their service. Every time I've placed an order with Ofoto, they've sent me an e-mail within an hour or two to tell me that my order has been shipped. This isn't just a confirmation e-mail, mind you. They're telling me that FedEx already has it on the way!¹²

¹¹ Ofoto changed its name to the Kodak Easyshare Gallery awhile ago. Prices are even lower now.

¹² I struggled with the big-white-space formatting here. It's either a big white space or page break between the title and its corresponding paragraph in the upcoming section. Also, footnotes crack me up.

Sony Imagestation¹³
(www.imagestation.com)

Sony's Imagestation is almost exactly like Ofoto – they're just not as good. While Ofoto's image handling interface is simple and easy to use, Imagestation's is often slow, confusing, and convoluted. Where Ofoto has excellent customer service and quick shipping, you can expect to go a week or more before getting an e-mail from Imagestation (and then they don't offer you any sort of tracking information through UPS or FedEx – in fact, you can't even tell *when* they shipped your product in the online order history.)

But still, Imagestation has a lot going for it. The calendars have more options and can be larger than Ofoto's. They have a nifty, as-yet-unseen-by-Arlo, vinyl photo book where you can have them print individual pages of your text and photos. If that's not enough to convince you, Imagestation is the only place I've found where you can get your photo printed on a mouse pad, a night light, a coffee mug, a lollipop, a T-shirt, and a Rice Krispies treat!

Zazzle
(www.zazzle.com)

Zazzle is my newest, favorite site. Basically they do the same things Imagestation and Ofoto do on a smaller scale. Where the other two let you print on everything under the sun, Zazzle sticks to T-shirts and photographic prints.¹⁴ By concentrating on only two things, they sure do those two things well.

¹³ Imagestation shut down in November of 2007.

¹⁴ Actually, they can do a lot more now. I still love Zazzle and recommend it often.

I dismissed Zazzle a few months ago because it looked like the only way to deal with them was by setting up a public shop. I wasn't interested in having my own prints sold online at a place where I only get a tiny commission. But when I looked at it again, I discovered that you can set your product to "private" and no one but you will know where it is.

That reassured me somewhat, but the clincher came when I actually started playing around with the shopping interface. After uploading some images, I was able to customize T-shirts and art-quality prints to my heart's content. Want your logo to go on the back of a T-shirt? No problem. Front. Sure. You can even have it placed on the pocket or sleeve. Heck, you can decide at the last minute to put it on a sweatshirt instead. Or a tank top, baby doll, casual nightie, basic raglan... the list goes on. Quite a bit more control than ImageStation's "You'll get a square photo on the front of a plain T-shirt – and you'll like it!" attitude.

And the prints! Oh, the prints! Upload a large enough digital image and you can have a "colossal" print made for you. Is six-foot, six-inches tall good enough for you? Would you like three colored mattes, a silver brushed-metal frame, and UV resistant glass for your archive quality photographic print? No problem – it'll just cost you a pretty penny. I found it very easy to go over \$500 for a single framed print, but at least with Zazzle's intuitive interface, it's easy to cut back on a few items and whittle the price down to something that's a little more reasonable.

If, like me, you spend a lot of time in Photoshop, you owe it to yourself to check out Zazzle. Just be ready for the ensuing war between the contents of your wallet and your desire to obtain physical manifestations of your digital creativity.

High Technology

Digital Photography Review

(www.dpreview.com)

Before I bought my first digital camera, I researched and compared many models on the web. The best site I came across for reviews, specifications, and suggestions for digital cameras was DP Review. They put cameras through every test imaginable and carefully weigh the pros and cons of each so that you can spend your money with confidence.

Look for the full reviews of the more popular cameras and browse the forums to read debates between owners on the merits of the rest. Compare any camera's specs, side-by-side, with its competition. View full-resolution samples of pictures taken with most models. They only thing you shouldn't do is buy a digital camera without visiting DP Review!

Shopper, Pricewatch, and Pricescan¹⁵

(www.shopper.com)

(www.pricewatch.com)

(www.pricescan.com)

Before buying just about any piece of technology, whether it's a laptop, more RAM, or a digital video camera, I'll run the model number through each of these price search engines. I'm not necessarily looking for the lowest prices – those usually come from suspicious web sites – but getting a big list of prices will give me a good idea of

¹⁵ And now: Froogle, Google's price scanning sub-site. I think they may have renamed it "Google Products," however.

the “street price” for any given piece of high-tech gadgetry. Each of these sites will point you right to an online store ready to sell you whatever you need. I’ve never been burned on an online purchase yet, but maybe that’s because I never order from e-commerce sites that use blink tags and animated .gifs.

[Tiger Direct](http://www.tigerdirect.com), [Mwave](http://www.mwave.com), [Dell](http://www.dell.com), [Sony](http://www.sonystyle.com), and [Costco](http://www.costco.com)
(www.tigerdirect.com) (www.mwave.com)
(www.dell.com) (www.sonystyle.com) (www.costco.com)

What do these sites have in common? They’re my recommendations for people who ask me where to buy a computer.

Tiger Direct is cheap and reliable – but you can’t expect to configure your own perfect computer on their site.

Mwave, on the other hand, is all about configuration. Choose only the equipment you want and have them assemble and test everything for a modest fee. If you like to build your own computer but don’t like the time it takes to do so, check these guys out.

Dell and Sony are the two computer makers I have some laptop experience with. I trust any computer made by these companies because I know that if there’s a problem, they’ll make sure it’s fixed. Even in Juneau, Alaska, Dell will find a way to get a technician to your house to work on your computer – now that’s service! Also, Dell and Sony will let you tweak the configurations of a number of base computer packages. Not quite as well (and inexpensive)¹⁶ as Mwave, but a good deal nonetheless.

And finally, if you already have a membership to Costco, I recommend them if only for their phenomenal return policy. I

¹⁶ Actually, Dell’s probably cheaper now. That’s one of the reasons why my last computer purchase was a Dell.

personally know people that have returned a computer to Costco ten months after purchasing it... for a full refund. In a world where your computer is outdated by the time you get it out of the box, that's got to be worth something. It's just too bad Costco seems to be partnered with mass-market computer manufacturers, HP/Compaq.¹⁷

ICDSOft
(www.icdsoft.com)

I used to host my web site on my workplace's web servers (the University of Alaska, Southeast.) I felt guilty for breaking the rules by redirecting arломidgett.com traffic to my student account, but I *so* enjoyed the perks of fast uploads, unlimited bandwidth, and flexible file space allocation! It wasn't until I wanted to start a blog and put a commercial web site together that I started to look for another host.

After much searching and reading of reviews, I settled on ICDSOft. I'll be the first to admit it's not for everyone, but it's good enough for me. Their business offices are located in England, but the servers in which my copious web data live is in Hong Kong. That may seem sketchy, but based on the speed of the transpacific path these words likely took to reach you, would you have even guessed? I thought not.

For \$5 a month I get 333MB of disk space, my own mail server (and web mail interface), 5 sub-domains, 5 Gigabytes of bandwidth per month, statistics tracking, a MySQL database, personal cgi-bins, and a 30-day money back guarantee.¹⁸ They even registered my

¹⁷ Costco has had to put restrictions on their return policy because so many people were taking advantage of them. Currently it's limited to 90 days, no questions asked.

¹⁸ ICDSOft is still hosting arломidgett.com and my blog. I still pay \$5 a month, but they've upgraded just about everything twice since I originally wrote this. I think I'm up to 1GB of storage space and up to 20GB per month of transfer.

domain name for me! If you can stand not having a command line interface and can live with only e-mail tech support (They claim an under-ten minute response time, but I've never even needed to use it¹⁹), check out ICDSOft.

Miscellaneous

Winamp Music

(www.winamp.com/music)

Winamp makes a good mp3 player, but they make my list of favorites because they keep a great listing of Internet radio stations on their web site. When my workplace gets too loud and distracting to get any work done, I'll click on over to Winamp's site, put on some headphones, and have them serve me up some streaming hot music. Feel free to choose your music by genre or search for a specific song or artist that's on the air presently. Just remember: Unless high fidelity is a foreign concept to you, stay away from the 28.8 modem streams!²⁰

TV Guide

(www.tvguide.com)

I guess I'm still surprised that TV Guide has accurate listings for Juneau on their web site. Just punch in your zip code and tell them whether you have cable or a satellite dish and you'll get the whole schedule in two-hour increments. Even better, search for your favorite syndicated show and TV Guide will give back a list of each and every

¹⁹ I've since used their tech support and they've been consistently awesome.

²⁰ Winamp uninstalled. I rarely listen to Internet radio anymore, and iTunes and the Windows Media Player handle all my .mp3 organization now.

time it airs in the week. Which is great and all, but I really only watch about three TV shows anymore.²¹

My Favorite Site
(www.arlomidgett.com)

And finally we come to the last site on my list – but unlike a big jar of Jelly Belly jelly beans, I’ve saved the best for last!

—

So, what incredibly entertaining or exceedingly useful sites did I leave out? Where on the web do you find yourself visiting a couple times a week to stay current? What am I missing?!

²¹ Using BitTorrents, a new cable-box-slash-DVR, and a home-built TiVo has pretty much made TV Guide’s online service obsolete.

Comments

Jeff | October 16, 2003 | 2:05 pm

I keep telling you to go and read www.sluggy.com. If you would, I bet it would be on here as one of your favorite sights. Sluggy.com.

Learn it.

Love it.

Live it.

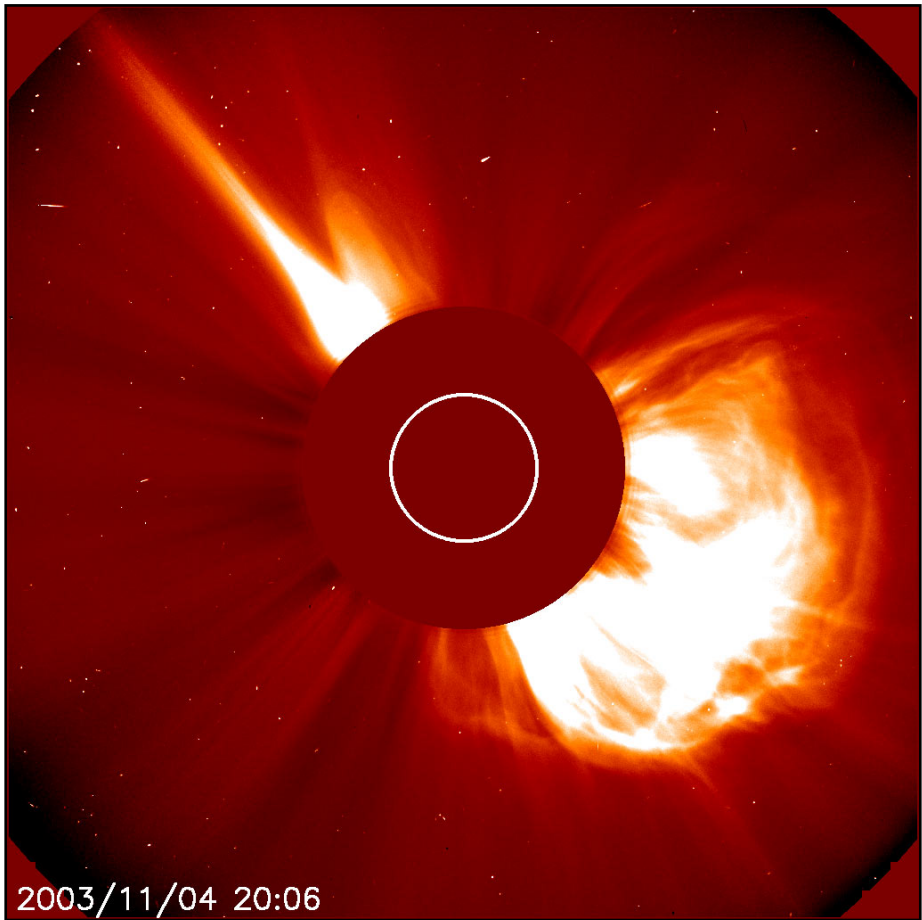


Image of a solar flare from <http://visibleearth.nasa.gov>

The United States Department of Homeland Security has turned its attention towards the Sun this week in an attempt to determine the cause of some anomalous solar activity. President Bush has authorized a country-wide elevation of status to Yellow Alert until terrorist activity can be conclusively ruled out.

For the past two weeks, scientists have been reporting an unprecedented rise in the amount of solar activity coming from our Sun. This atypical activity began with a series of four flares on Oct. 22nd and ended 13 days later with the largest flare recorded since satellite observations began in 1976.

“It’s like the Earth is looking right down the barrel of a giant gun pointed at us by the sun... and it’s taken two big shots at us,” said John Kohl of the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics last week. Because the Sun reached the peak of its 11-year activity cycle in late 2000, scientists are at a loss to explain this sudden rise in solar flares. “I have not seen anything like it in my entire career as a solar physicist. The probability of this happening is so low that it is a statistical anomaly,” Kohl added.

It’s precisely that low probability that has the government worried.

“Since scientists can determine no astronomical reason why our Sun should be acting strangely, we have decided to use resources of our own to find a solution closer to home,” said Tom Ridge, Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, in a White House conference today. “The president will be asking Congress to allocate

more funds to our continuing War on Terror, and we are confident that history will judge us as being safe, rather than sorry.”

NOAA scientists confirm that such solar activity will likely result in noticeable repercussions here on Earth. One of the larger solar flares in the series resulted in a coronal mass ejection (or CME) of over two billion tons of solar material that was hurtled towards our planet. Even with the advance warning of the SOHO Spacecraft, installations here on Earth typically only have a few hours’ warning before the arrival of the highly charged particles.

The most noticeable result of these fast moving particulars coming into contact with our atmosphere is an increase in the colorful Northern and Southern Lights or Aurora Borealis and Aurora Australis.

President Bush said, “The impact on the American public by the effects of observable Aurora in the lower latitudes should not be dismissed. Strange lights in the sky have always upset people that don’t understand what they’re seeing and it’s not inconceivable that an al-Qaeda or Islamic Jihad terrorist cell is engaging in their own ‘Shock and Awe’ campaign.”

“Shock and Awe” refers to the war plan used by the United States against Iraq. In March, the greater American force struck cities and military installations with an unprecedented number of guided cruise missiles. By using overwhelming force, the plan focused on the psychological destruction of the enemy’s will to fight.

But the confusion caused by the Northern Lights appearing as far south as Texas is not the government’s greatest concern. Scientists and space weather forecasters warn that severe geomagnetic storms caused by the CMEs could disrupt radio communications, disable satellites, and even knock out power grids.

Smaller solar storms have wreaked havoc in the past. In 1994, a solar flare caused problems with communications satellites and

disrupted television and radio signals in Canada. In March of 1989, the Hydro-Quebec power grid was knocked offline for over nine hours after an X15 flare was recorded.

The potential energy of our Sun is staggering. Over one million Earths could fit within its 1.4 million kilometer-wide sphere and the nuclear energy generated each second is more than that of 100 billion tons of TNT exploding. Proportionally small CMEs directed towards Earth with a rating of only X1 can have noticeable repercussions and in the past two weeks SOHO has recorded an X10, X17.2, and an almost off-the-scale X28.

“To put it into laymen’s terms, these clouds of hot gas constitute a mass greater than that of Mt. Everest and explode outwards at speeds up to five million miles per hour,” said Bush’s National Security Advisor, Condoleezza Rice. “Our current missile defense technology is not yet up to the task of defending against such a threat. It is therefore obvious that we need to allocate more funds towards sustaining our ongoing strategy of homeland security.”

“Whatever it costs to defend our country, we will pay,” President Bush added. “We will use the extra funds to improve intelligence, tighten border security, and develop countermeasures against possible attacks directed at us from the Sun.

“We will not back down in our War on Terror. The Axis of Evil’s tampering with what we consider to be the ultimate weapon of mass destruction will not be tolerated.”¹

¹ This is one of my favorite blog entries and, I think, the only creative writing sample on the site. The idea for it came to me as the November 2003 solar flares were still big news and I raced to get this written and online while the story was still relevant. I have fond memories of the two lunch hours I spent next to a huge stack of printed articles, paragraphs marked with highlighted passages, margins filled with hastily scrawled notes...

Karl | November 13, 2003 | 2:10 am

This reads like a news item I might find with an AP tagline. The quotes from Condi Rice and President Bush sound quite in the dark (so to speak). Did you assemble all this data yourself, Ace?

Arlo | November 13, 2003 | 8:33 am

It depends on what you mean by "assemble." Yes, I did research solar flares quite a bit online. I also dug up and read a few articles about "shock and awe," "the axis of evil," and one of the President's past State of the Union Addresses.

But are the quotes real? Yes and no. Most, if not all, of the scientific ones are. One or two of the political ones are actual quotes, obviously taken out of context. The rest... I just made them up and tried to make them sound somewhat believable.

My goal was to try striking a balance between the "newspaper style," and flat out goofiness. By the end, I wanted people to think: *That wasn't real... was it?*

Where did the idea come from? I remember reading an article on Space.com that talked about the flares. Two things stuck in my brain — the improbability of this happening and the expected AWESOME aurora effects. "Shock and Awe" popped into my head and, a couple seconds later, the rest fell into place.

I had fun researching and writing this article, but I don't think I'd ever want to be a reporter/writer for the media.

Appendix A: Boomstick Script

DEODORANT COMMERCIAL (PARODY)

by

Arlo Midgett

Note: Revisions after peer script review are
highlighted in yellow.

Box 210228
Auke Bay, AK 99821
(907) 790-2756

FADE IN:

INT. - NIGHT

COMPUTER DESK

DOLLY LEFT of upper shelf on desk. Geek toys, action figures, etc. are in the dark, seen only because of a flashing light emanating from a computer monitor (off screen.) In the middle, a red LED alarm clock reads 9:07.

 AMBIENT (O.C.)
Muffled sounds of fighting,
deaths in UT '03. Sounds from
a keyboard can be heard under
the commercial's music.

Cut to

OVERHEAD DOLLY shot across an endless sea of open soda cans
(Mountain Dew? Code Red? Jolt?)

 AMBIENT (O.C.)
Sounds continue...

Cut to

Close-up of GAMER'S face (similar lighting, although we can start to make out images projected onto his glasses and facial features.) GAMER is scruffily unshaven, disheveled hair, sweat on his brow. His eyes are intent, darting, following the action on an unseen screen.

 AMBIENT (O.C.)
Sounds continue...

Cut to

Video feed direct from computer showing the last seconds of an Unreal Tournament 2003 deathmatch.

 AMBIENT
You have WON the match!

Cut to

Wide shot of COMPUTER DESK. GAMER is facing computer monitor. GAMER drops headphones to neck (music fades to background) claps his hands twice (lights come on), leans back, wipes his brow with his forearm.

GAMER
"Pshew!"

GAMER reaches for a soda can.

Cut to

Close-up on soda cans. A hand comes into view, lifts and shakes two soda cans before finding a third can approximately 1/3 full of soda. Can is lifted out of frame.

AMBIENT (O.C.)
Sounds of empty cans shaking,
sloshing liquid in full can.

Cut to

Medium shot of GAMER at COMPUTER DESK. GAMER downs the last of the soda and smacks his lips.

GAMER
Ahhh...

GAMER turns chair towards camera and stretches with an audible groan. Arms extend above shoulder level and we see enormous sweat stains on his GAMER T-SHIRT.

GAMER
You think athletes on TV
sweat? They should try
playing Unreal for eight
hours straight!

When you're down by 10 frags
with two minutes to go in the
match... let's face it, even
the best antiperspirants just
won't cut it!

Cut to

Close-up of GAMER's hand, gripping a stick of deodorant.

GAMER

That's why I use BOOM-STICK
DEODORANT to cover up my
over-night stench!

Cut to

Medium shot of GAMER

GAMER

Unlike lesser personal
hygiene products, Boom-Stick
doesn't try to stop you from
sweating... Instead, it bonds
with your sweat and allows
the stains in your clothes to
exude a more "publicly
acceptable" aroma.

And because its penetrating
power is so thick and clingy,
you can even use it directly
on your clothes.

Cut to

Wide shot of GAMER at COMPUTER DESK. GAMER quickly applies
stick of deodorant to entire area of both sweat stains. When
finished, he sets the deodorant down and inhales deeply, head
tilted down towards one armpit.

GAMER

Ahhh... Good enough for any
public gathering! (pause)

Cut to

Close-up of GAMER's face, looking into camera.

GAMER

Yeah. Right.

(Or: As if!)

(Or: Maniacal laughter)

(Or: ??)

In one motion, GAMER **replaces headphones (music swells)** rapidly
swivels chair back towards monitor.

Cut to

Wide shot of GAMER finishing his rapid swivel back towards the monitor. He takes up the mouse and keyboard and starts another game of Unreal Tournament 2003.

FADE TO BLACK

FADE IN

Two deodorant containers are sitting in a PRODUCT SHOT (Gamer can still be seen playing in the background, blurred out by camera's depth of field.) Both labels are visible - "BOOM-STICK, Blue Plasma" and "BOOM-STICK, Hot Lava." A hand coming into view, setting down a third, see-through stick of deodorant - Invisibility Gel.

ANNOUNCER 1 (V.O.)
Boom-Stick deodorant!
Available in Blue Plasma, Hot
Lava, and NEW Invisibility
gel!

Background fades to a washed out image as...

ANNOUNCER 2 (V.O.)
Available at these fine
stores.

A TARGET LOGO (red circles as crosshairs) FADES IN over the washed out still image. Under TARGET LOGO reads: Shoot more, Run less.

ANNOUNCER 2 (V.O.)
Target. Shoot more, Run less...

Target logo FADES OUT and is replaced with a FADE IN of an S-Mart logo. Subtitle under S-Mart logo reads: Shop Smart. Shop S-Mart!

ANNOUNCER 2 (V.O.)
...and S-Mart. Shop Smart. Shop
S-Mart!

FADE OUT



Standing on the remains of my possessions

Appendix B: Mini-storage Fire

Sunday 2 June 2002

I've never been involved in a natural disaster. I've never lost a significant amount of my personal property. That certainly changed yesterday when I found out that my storage unit burned to the ground...

Oksana went to Costco on Sunday afternoon and called me when she got there to tell me that one of the mini-storage units had burned down. Judging from her description, I didn't believe it was the one that housed unit J238. Monday at lunch, we drove out that way to pay our rent. We stopped by the storage place and, even then, I really didn't think it was "my" building that burned down - until I walked into the building still standing and realized that the doors and hallways were all wrong.

There's a feeling you get when something really bad happens to you. Your throat tightens up and a physical pain develops somewhere slightly below your heart and slightly above your stomach - these are clenching sensations that, for me, still haven't gone away 24 hours later.

After work on Monday, Oksana and I were joined by Joe and Michael as we attempted to sort through the ashes in the hope of finding something worth keeping. Before long, it became apparent that the only job worth doing was searching for clues as to what was in J238. It wasn't easy - most of my stuff was strewn about 20 yards away from the original location of the storage unit. It seems a backhoe was used to clear a walking path for the victims of the fire, and my unit was one of the ones in the way.

Comic Books and video tapes were the most easily identified artifacts in the sodden ashes. Occasionally we'd come across a mangled computer, a college textbook, or a video cable. My 9' tall stack of boxes was reduced to a 2' tall pile of soot. I at least expected to dig down and find a soggy, but unburned box resting on the cement floor - somehow protected by the ashes above. Unfortunately, that wasn't the case. Ash, ash, and more ash.

What did I lose? I don't exactly know - I don't have a catalog of the stuff I've been storing in that 5' x 5' room throughout the last year. What I do know is that my childhood collection of comic books (~4000) was in there. All my schoolwork from junior high to college was in there. Books. Computers. Clothes. More. Lots more. The unit was literally filled front-to-back, floor-to-ceiling. So much so, in fact, that I found it comical enough to warrant snapping off a picture or two with my digital camera just a couple weeks ago when I put a few more things inside.

I hope there is a silver lining in this thunderhead of a cloud. Two months ago, I signed up for \$25,000 worth of renter's insurance for the simple fact that, without it, I couldn't get a "personal item policy" on my fiancée's engagement ring. Now I begin the arduous task of determining what it was I'd put in storage. I have yet to speak with my USAA claims adjuster, though, so I don't know how they'll handle my case.

Wish me luck.

Appendix C: Insurance Documents

USAA Claim

<u>Item</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>Cost</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Comments</u>
Atari Jaguar 64-bit gaming system	3	\$249.99	\$749.97	
Atari Jaguar CD-ROM attachment	1	\$149.99	\$149.99	
Atari Jaguar Games	20	\$39.99	\$799.80	Games: Club Drive, Kasumi Ninja (2), Checkered Flag, Brutal Sports Football, Iron Soldier (2), Tempest 2000, Defender 2000, Aliens vs. Predator (3), Cybermorph (3)*, Raiden, Crescent Galaxy, Cannon Fodder, Zool2, Castle Wolfenstein, Flashback, Blue Lightening*, Dino Dudes, Rayman (* = included with console)
Telescope	1	\$ 149.95	\$149.95	Bought at Costco
Tools	1	\$ 199.00	\$199.00	Mostly socket set in plastic case
Micro telephone	1	\$19.99	\$19.99	Bought at Fred Meyer
Kenwood portable CD Player	1	\$ 199.00	\$199.00	with remote and ac adapter
Computer Games (Apple II)	3	\$30.00	\$90.00	Estimate (all materials included, including original boxes)
Souvenirs	4	\$ 100.00	\$400.00	Approximate value of Latin American souvenirs from 4 separate vacations to Mexico; Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia; Cuba; and Venezuela
Paintball gun and accessories	1	\$ 495.00	\$495.00	Tippman Pro-am gun, Vents Predator mask and goggles, Thunderwear gloves, Whaler paintball loader, CO2 canister (buyer's estimate attached)
Weight sets	2	\$50.00	\$100.00	Two weight sets, one metal, one plastic
Recurve Bow (sectional)	1	\$ 150.00	\$150.00	Hunting bow without string
Computer	1	\$2,930.00	\$2,930.00	Quantex Pentium 90 Computer (16MB ram, 730MB hard drive, 15" Mag Innovision Monitor)
Add-ons for computer	1	\$ 800.00	\$800.00	Sound Blaster 16 SCSI, Adaptec 2940UW, Intel Network card, 4X CD-ROM, 2GB hard drive)
PII 266 Motherboard w/192MB ram	1	\$ 350.00	\$350.00	
14" Gateway 2000 Monitor	1	\$35.00	\$35.00	
Computer	1	\$ 400.00	\$400.00	Pentium 150: Non-operational, parts (case, hard drive, network card, CD-ROM, etc)
Gravis Phoenix	2	\$99.00	\$198.00	Flight simulator joystick
Gateway 2000 Anykey keyboard	1	\$49.00	\$49.00	Bought from Gateway.com
Misc Computer accessories	1	\$ 250.00	\$250.00	Estimate value of one box full of misc computer equipment (cables, adapters, floppy drives, etc)
Software	2	\$ 250.00	\$500.00	Including Adobe Premiere 4.2 (\$250 educational discount) and Elastic Reality (\$250)
Clothes & bags				
Darth Maul Costume	1	\$75.00	\$75.00	Makeup, Costume, Mask, Light saber
Boxes of Clothes	3	\$ 200.00	\$600.00	Approximate value of a box of clothes
Colombia Winter Coat (Whirlybird)	1	\$ 260.00	\$260.00	(Buyer's estimate attached)
Sierra luggage	1	\$ 150.00	\$150.00	small duffel (buyer's estimate attached)
Sierra luggage	1	\$ 185.00	\$185.00	large duffel (buyer's estimate attached)

Sierra luggage	1	\$ 185.00	\$185.00	backpack/carry-on (buyer's estimate attached)
soft camcorder bag	1	\$34.99	\$34.99	
Backpacks	3	\$25.00	\$75.00	Three daypacks, one purchased in Bolivia

Video

VHS Video collection	120	\$10.00	\$1,200.00	Estimated cost per tape of original videotapes (stored in footlocker 1)
VHS Video collection	120	\$ 2.00	\$240.00	Estimated cost per tape of "blank" tapes with recorded television programs (stored in footlocker 2)
Video Switcher	1	\$ 150.00	\$150.00	Composite audio/video switcher
VCR	1	\$ 149.00	\$149.00	Mono VHS VCR
Misc Phone and Video Equipment	1	\$ 250.00	\$250.00	Estimated value of one box full of misc phone and video equipment (cables and adapters, mostly)
¾" tapes Sony U-matic SP 60min	30	\$18.59	\$557.70	XBR series, Most blank

Jewelry

Fossil Watch	1	\$50.00	\$50.00	Gift
High School Class Ring (Jostens)	1	\$ 300.00	\$300.00	Jostens may have on record exact cost

Furniture

Sony Stereo Cabinet	1	\$50.00	\$50.00	
Bean Bag chair	1	\$50.00	\$50.00	
Audio CD racks (wood)	2	\$39.99	\$79.98	Holds approx 100 CDs
Footlockers	2	\$34.95	\$69.90	Footlockers filled with videotapes

Audio CDs

Audio CDs	200	\$14.98	\$2,996.00	Approximate cost of 200 Audio CDs -- mostly purchased in Ketchikan (Physical Graffiti)
Sony CD250 CD changer	1	\$ 249.00	\$249.00	(See box in original pictures)

Kitchen Items

Pots and Pan	1	\$59.00	\$59.00	Pots and Pan set from Costco
Kitchen stuff	1	\$ 150.00	\$150.00	Estimate of misc silverware, dishes, etc
Box of glasses	1	\$39.00	\$39.00	Costco set of glassware

Misc

Sporting goods	1	\$75.00	\$75.00	One duffel bag with the following contents: football, basketball, 2 Frisbees, 2 Aerobies, Nerf football
Board Games	2	\$39.99	\$79.98	Axis and Allies, and Shogun (Shogun, possibly a collector's item after name changed to Samurai Swords)
Books (paperbacks)	283	\$ 7.99	\$2,261.17	Estimate -- full list attached
Books (hardback)	27	\$20.00	\$540.00	Estimate -- full list attached
Books (large soft backs)	15	\$12.95	\$194.25	Estimate -- full list attached
Books (collector's)	3	\$60.00	\$180.00	Hardbacks, signed by Terry Brooks (estimate based on 3x normal)
Books ("coffee table books")	3	\$39.99	\$119.97	Aleut Masks (gift), King: Nightmares in the Sky, Koontz: Oddkins
College Textbooks	27	\$40.00	\$1,080.00	(\$227.83 official - see attachment) \$227.83 is way too low an estimate of the books I'd kept from school. This new, CONSERVATIVE estimate is based on my transcripts (See attached.)

Dungeons & Dragons Gaming Accessories	1	\$ 850.00	\$850.00	See attached sheet of estimated value (possibly has collector's value)
Subtotal			\$21,749.64	
Additions				
Automobile Title	1		????	
College Diploma	1		????	
Packaging			????	Epson 1520 Printer, Tiger Direct computer, Quantex Computer, Mag Monitor, Magnavox 27" Television, Sony CD-250 changer, Epson 600 printer
Schoolwork			????	Schoolwork from Junior High to College
Batman CD	1		????	Prince, in collector's tin (still shrink-wrapped)
Batman VHS tape	1		????	Signed by screenwriter
Baseball Cards	1000		????	Approximately 1000 (unknown value)
Game Developer Magazine	48	\$ 5.95	\$285.60	
DV Magazine	48	\$ 4.95	\$237.60	4 years of DV and Game Developer Magazines, as well as a few of 3D Artist
Insurance papers			????	Insurance details from work
Billing information			????	10 years of credit card and misc other billing information (including receipts for many things lost in the fire!!)
Comic Books	4000		\$15,132.25	See Excel Spreadsheet
Dragon Magazine	60	\$ 3.50	\$210.00	5-year collection of Dragon Magazine (1987-1992) Possibly collector's item?
Soccer Ball	1	\$ 199.00	\$199.00	New, in package, signed by Mia Hamm (with documentation)
Bridging the Galaxies by Larry Niven	1	\$ 288.75	\$288.75	Signed, one of only 250 printed (hardback, with case) See web page attached
Jewel Boxes	200	\$14.98	\$2,996.00	Empty Jewel Boxes and Linear Notes for Audio CDs at home (replacement cost?)
Batman (the movie) Trading Cards	1 set		\$25.00	1st Series. Complete collection (estimated going price found on Internet)
Batman CD (Prince soundtrack in "tin")	1	\$20.00	\$20.00	Going price on the Internet
Specialty boxes (with Styrofoam packaging)	7	\$30.00	\$210.00	Estimate of cost to replace special boxes for electronics
Total Additions to Claim			\$19,081.00	
Total Claim Submitted to USAA			\$40,830.64	

Cataloged Books Lost in the Fire

Hardbacks and Large Format

- Douglas Adams:** The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy (5-in-1 hardback)
- Roger Zelazny:** The Chronicles of Amber v.1
The Chronicles of Amber v.2
- Michael Moorcock:** The Elric Saga pt I
The Elric Saga pt II
- Barbara Hambly:** Dragonsbane
- Stephen King:** Nightmares in the Sky
Nightmares & Dreamscapes
Needful Things
Wizard and Glass (Large Paperback)
- Dean Koontz:** Hideway
Oddkins
Cold Fire
Strange Highways
- Larry Niven:** A World Out of Time
The Ringworld Throne
Bridging the Galaxies (signed and numbered)
- Raymond E. Feist:** Shadow of a Dark Queen
Rise of a Merchant Prince
Magician
Shards of a Broken Crown
Rage of a Demon King
- Robert Jordan:** A Crown of Swords
The Path of Daggers
- Terry Brooks:** Wizard at Large (signed)
The Black Unicorn (signed)
Magic Kingdom for Sale: Sold! (signed)
- Robert Asprin:** Myth Directions (Large Paperback)
Myth-ing Persons (Large Paperback)
M.Y.T.H. Inc. In Action (Large Paperback)
Little Myth Marker (Large Paperback)
Another Fine Myth (Large Paperback)
Myth Adventures One (Trade Paperback)
Myth Adventures Two (Trade Paperback)
- Michael Crichton:** The Lost World

Paperbacks

Stephen King:

The Bachman Books
Nightmares & Dreamscapes
The Green Mile (1-6)
Christine
The Dead Zone
Carrie
Thinner (2)
Rose Madder
Firestarter
Pet Sematary
Misery
Four Past Midnight
Needful Things
The Tommyknockers
The Stand
Insomnia
The Wastelands
It
The Dark Tower
Cujo (2)
Salem's Lot
The Talisman
Danse Macabre (2)
The Eyes of the Dragon (2)
Bag of Bones
The Shining
The Regulators
The Dark Half
The Drawing of the Three
Desperation
Skeleton Crew

Dean Koontz:

The Servants of Twilight
Lightning (2)
Watchers
The Mask
The House of Thunder

Larry Niven:

Shadow Fires (2)
Mr. Murder
New Destinies (Kzin short story by Dean Ing)
The Magic Goes Away
The Magic May Return
The Integral Trees
The Mote in God's Eye
The Patchwork Girl
The Smoke Ring
World of Ptavvs
Flatlander (2)
Fallen Angels
Playgrounds of the Mind
Ringworld
Neutron Star (2)
All the Myriad Ways
Tales of Known Space (2)
Protector (2)
The Long Arm of Gil Hamilton
Convergent Series
Man-Kzin Wars
Man-Kzin Wars II
Man-Kzin Wars III
Man-Kzin Wars IV (2)
Man-Kzin Wars V (2)
Man-Kzin Wars VI (2)
Man-Kzin Wars VII
Limits
The Flying Sorcerers
The Ringworld Engineers
Inferno
Footfall
Destiny's Road
N Space
The Descent of Anansi
Rainbow Mars
Oath of Fealty
The Gripping Hand (2)
Achilles' Choice

Dream Park
The Flight of the Horse
A Gift from Earth (2)
A World Out of Time
The Legacy of Heorot
Beowulf's Children
A Hole in Space
The Barsoom Project
The California Voodoo Game

Joe Haldeman:
Forever Peace
Forever War
Tool of the Trade

Robert Heinlein:
Requiem
Farnham's Freehold
Citizen of the Galaxy
Tunnel in the Sky
Sixth Column
Friday
Assignment in Eternity
The Green Hills of Earth
Stranger in a Strange Land
The Number of the Beast
The Puppet Masters
Tomorrow, the Stars
The Cat who Walks Through Walls (2)
Between Planets (2)
The Menace from Earth
Time Enough for Love
The Moon is a Harsh Mistress
To Sail Beyond the Sunset

Arthur C. Clarke:
2001: A Space Odyssey
2010: Odyssey Two
2061: Odyssey Three
3001: The Final Odyssey
The Hammer of God

Greg Bear:
Tangents
Far Horizons (short story anthology)
Anvil of the Stars

Isaac Asimov:
Fantastic Voyage II

Lawrence Watt-Evans: The Ugly Little Boy
Foundation and Earth
The Misenchanted Sword
With a Single Spell
Taking Flight (2)
The Unwilling Warlord
The Blood of a Dragon
The Spell of the Black Dagger
Shining Steel
Touched by the Gods
Newer York (Editor)
Crosstime Traffic
The Rebirth of Wonder (2)
Out of this World
In the Empire of Shadow (2)
The Reign of the Brown Magician
The Seven Altars of Dusarra
The Sword of Bheleu
Nightside City
The Cyborg and the Sorcerers
The Book of Silence
Denner's Wreck
The Lure of the Basilisk
Raymond E. Feist: Prince of the Blood
Silverthorn (2)
Servant of the Empire
Shadow of a Dark Queen
Magician: Master
Magician: Apprentice
Faerie Tale
Mistress of the Empire
The King's Buccaneer
A Darkness at Sethanon
Michael Crichton: Eaters of the Dead
Jurassic Park (2)
Congo (2)
Airframe
Rising Sun
Disclosure

Robert Jordan: The first Part of Book One of The Wheel of Time
The Eye of the World
Lord of Chaos
The Dragon Reborn (2)
The Shadow Rising
The Great Hunt
The Fires of Heaven
The Shadow Rising

Robert Asprin: M.Y.T.H. Inc. In Action
Myth Directions
A Phule and His Money

Clive Cussler: The Sea Hunters
Sahara (2)
The Mediterranean Caper
Night Probe!
Shockwave (2)
Vixen 03
Cyclops
Treasure
Iceberg
Deep Six
Pacific Vortex! (2)
Inca Gold
Flood Tide
Raise the Titanic!
Dragon

Tom Clancy: Op-Center
Op-Center: Mirror Image
Op-Center: Games of State

Miscellaneous Sci-Fi

L. Ron Hubbard: Battlefield Earth
Fear

Peter Telep: Descent
Space: Above and Beyond

Paul Cook: Halo

Irwin M. Berent: The Dictionary of Highly Unusual Words

William Goldman: The Princess Bride

John Brunner: Stand on Zanzibar

Wil McCarthy:	Bloom
Carl Sagan:	Contact
Berkeley Breathed:	A Wish for Wings That Work
Bob Shaw:	A Wreath of Stars
William Gibson:	Burning Chrome
Howard Weinstein:	V: East Coast Crisis
Alan Dean Foster:	Alien ³
Gordon R. Dickson:	Invaders!
Frederick Pohl:	Search the Sky
Philip K. Dick:	Our Friends from Frolix 8
John DeChancie:	Starrigger
Margaret Wander Bonanno:	Probe (Star Trek novel)
Wynne Whiteford:	Lake of the Sun
Michael Moorcock:	Legends from the End of Time
Kenneth Bulmer and Fritz Leiber:	The Million Year Hunt / Ships to the Stars
Kathy Tyers:	Firebird
Ashley McConnell:	Quantum Leap: Prelude
Keith Laumer:	Time Trap
	Retief and the Pangalactic Pageant of Pulchritude
Jack L. Chalker:	Twilight at the Well of Souls
	Midnight at the Well of Souls
Dennis L. McKiernan:	The Dragonstone
J.E. Pournelle:	Warrior!
Frank Herbert:	Dune
David Brin:	The Postman
Piers Anthony:	Bearing an Hourglass
John Norman:	Tribesmen of Gor
Simon Hawke:	The Ivanhoe Gambit
Margaret Weis:	Triumph of the Darksword

Star Wars

Timothy Zahn:	Dark Forces Rising
	Heir to the Empire

Forgotten Realms

Troy Denning:	The Titan of Twilight
	R. A. Salvatore: Canticle
	Streams of Silver
Richard Awlinson:	Tantras

DragonLance

Terry Phillips:	The Soulforge Tales v.1 Tales v.2 Heroes v.2 Heroes v.3 Preludes v.1
Margaret Weis:	Dragons of Summer Flame Time of the Twins Dragons of Spring Dawning "Star Trek Technical Journal" (trade paperback)

Miscellaneous

Sydney Sheldon:	Master of the Game
Elmore Leonard:	Pronto Cuba Libre
John D. MacDonald:	On the Run
Gregory McDonald:	The Buck Passes Flynn Flynn Son of Fletch
Robert Ludlum:	The Matlock Paper The Rhinemann Exchange
Bill Bryson:	A Walk in the Woods
Alfred Lansing:	Endurance: Shackleton's Incredible Voyage
Jimmy Buffett:	Where is Joe Merchant?
Dave Barry:	Big Trouble Dave Barry Talks Back
Carl Hiassen:	Lucky You Skin Tight
Louie L'Amour:	Education of a Wandering Man (Hardback) Haunted Mesa (Paperback)
Todd Balf:	The Last River (Hardback)
Norman Maclean:	A River Runs Through it and Other Stories
James Moffett (Editor):	Points of View
Herman Melville:	Moby Dick
Tim LaHaye:	Soul Harvest
Charles Barry Townsend:	World's Most Baffling Puzzles
Richard Adams:	Shardik

Neil Gaiman (Editor):

The Sandman: Book of Dreams

Fred Saberhagen:

The Complete Book of Swords

Clint Willis:

Climb: Stories of Survival from Rock, Snow and Ice

Computer Games

Ultimate V

2400 A.D.

Ultimate IV

Estimated Comic Book Collection Lost in Fire

<u>Title</u>	<u>Issue Numbers</u>	<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Value</u>	<u>Total</u>
X-Force	1	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
	2-4	3	\$3.00	\$9.00
	5-10	6	\$3.00	\$18.00
	11-15, 19-24	11	\$2.50	\$27.50
	16-18	3	\$3.00	\$9.00
	annuals 1-2	2	\$3.00	\$6.00
X-Men	213	1	\$22.00	\$22.00
	214-221,223,224	9	\$6.00	\$54.00
	222	1	\$20.00	\$20.00
	225-242	18	\$6.00	\$108.00
	243,245-247	4	\$6.00	\$24.00
	244	1	\$25.00	\$25.00
	248	1	\$20.00	\$20.00
	249-252	4	\$6.00	\$24.00
	252-255	4	\$6.00	\$24.00
	256,257	2	\$8.00	\$16.00
	258	1	\$8.00	\$8.00
	259	1	\$6.00	\$6.00
	260-265	6	\$6.00	\$36.00
	266	1	\$40.00	\$40.00
	267	1	\$15.00	\$15.00
	268	1	\$16.00	\$16.00
	269,273	2	\$6.00	\$12.00
270	1	\$7.00	\$7.00	
271,272	2	\$7.00	\$14.00	
X-Factor	1	1	\$6.00	\$6.00
	2-4	3	\$4.00	\$12.00
	5	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
	6	1	\$10.00	\$10.00
	7-10	4	\$4.00	\$16.00
	11-22	12	\$3.00	\$36.00
	23	1	\$7.00	\$7.00
	24	1	\$9.00	\$9.00
	25-26	2	\$3.00	\$6.00
	27-39, 41-83	57	\$2.50	\$142.50
	40	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
	annuals 1-7	7	\$3.00	\$21.00

World's Finest	1-3	3	\$5.00	\$15.00
Wonder Woman	0	1	\$8.00	\$8.00
	1	1	\$7.00	\$7.00
	2-5	4	\$5.00	\$20.00
	6-20	15	\$4.00	\$60.00
	21-49	29	\$3.00	\$87.00
	50	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
	51-60	10	\$3.00	\$30.00
	annuals 1-2	2	\$4.00	\$8.00
	annual 3	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
	annual 4	1	\$3.50	\$3.50
annual 5	1	\$3.00	\$3.00	
Wonder Man	1-24	24	\$2.25	\$54.00
	annual 1-2	2	\$2.50	\$5.00
Wolverine Saga	1	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
	2-4	3	\$5.00	\$15.00
Wolverine	1	1	\$40.00	\$40.00
	2	1	\$20.00	\$20.00
	3-5	3	\$15.00	\$45.00
	6-9	4	\$12.00	\$48.00
	10	1	\$30.00	\$30.00
	11-16	6	\$9.00	\$54.00
	17-20	4	\$9.00	\$36.00
	21-30	10	\$6.00	\$60.00
	31-40, 44, 47	12	\$5.00	\$60.00
	41	1	\$7.00	\$7.00
	42	1	\$7.00	\$7.00
	43	1	\$6.00	\$6.00
	45, 46	2	\$6.00	\$12.00
	48-51	4	\$6.00	\$24.00
	52-60	9	\$4.00	\$36.00
	annual 1-2	2	\$5.00	\$10.00
annual 3	1	\$6.00	\$6.00	
Who's Who in the Legion of Super-Heroes	1-7	7	\$4.00	\$28.00
Who's Who: The Definitive Directory of the DC Universe	1-26	26	\$4.00	\$104.00

Who's Who Update '87	1-5	5	\$3.00	\$15.00
Who's Who Update '88	1-4	4	\$3.00	\$12.00
What The--?!	1	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
	2-24	23	\$2.25	\$51.75
	25-26	2	\$2.50	\$5.00
What If...?	1	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
	2-5	4	\$3.00	\$12.00
	6	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
	7	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
	8,10,11,13-15,17-30	20	\$3.00	\$60.00
	9,12	2	\$3.50	\$7.00
	16	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
	31-36	6	\$3.00	\$18.00
Web of Spider-Man	22-28	7	\$3.00	\$21.00
	29	1	\$8.00	\$8.00
	30	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
	31,32	2	\$5.00	\$10.00
	33-37,39-47,49		\$3.00	\$0.00 [†]
	38	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
	48	1	\$9.00	\$9.00
	50	1	\$3.50	\$3.50
	51-58	8	\$2.50	\$20.00
	59	1	\$3.50	\$3.50
	60-73	14	\$2.50	\$35.00
	Watchmen	1	1	\$7.00
2-12		11	\$5.00	\$55.00
TPB		1	\$18.00	\$18.00
V for Vendetta	1-12	10	\$3.00	\$30.00
TSR World	1	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
Tick's Giant Circus of the Mighty	1-3	3	\$4.00	\$12.00
Tick: Circus Maximus	1-4	4	\$3.50	\$14.00
Tick	1	1	\$6.00	\$6.00
	2	1	\$50.00	\$50.00

	3-5	3	\$10.00	\$30.00
	6,8	2	\$5.00	\$10.00
	7	1	\$6.00	\$6.00
	9-12	4	\$4.00	\$16.00
	13	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
Terminator: The Burning Earth	1	1	\$15.00	\$15.00
	2-5	4	\$10.00	\$40.00
Terminator: All My Futures Past	1-2	2	\$3.00	\$6.00
Terminator (Dark Horse)	1	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
	2-4	3	\$3.00	\$9.00
Terminator (Now)	1	1	\$6.00	\$6.00
	2-5	4	\$4.50	\$18.00
	6-17	12	\$3.00	\$36.00
Teen Titans Spotlight	1-21	21	\$3.00	\$63.00
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	8	1	\$6.00	\$6.00
	50	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
Swamp Thing	84	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
Superman: The Man of Steel	0	1	\$2.50	\$2.50
	1	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
	2-16	15	\$3.00	\$45.00
	17	1	\$7.00	\$7.00
	18	1	\$9.00	\$9.00
	19	1	\$6.00	\$6.00
	20-22	3	\$2.50	\$7.50
	23-24	2	\$2.50	\$5.00
	Annual 1-2	2	\$3.00	\$6.00
Superman (2nd Series)	1	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
	2-8,10	8	\$3.00	\$24.00
	9	1	\$4.50	\$4.50
	11-15,17-20,22-49	37	\$2.50	\$92.50
	51,52,54-56,58-67	15	\$2.50	\$37.50
	16,21	2	\$4.00	\$8.00
	50	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
	53	1	\$3.00	\$3.00

	57	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
	68-72	5	\$2.50	\$12.50
	73	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
	74	1	\$6.00	\$6.00
	75	1	\$18.00	\$18.00
	76,77	2	\$3.00	\$6.00
	78	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
Starblast	1-4	4	\$2.25	\$9.00
Star Blazers	1-4	4	\$3.00	\$12.00
Spitfire and the Troubleshooters	1-3,5-9	8	\$2.25	\$18.00
	4	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
Spider-Man vs. Wolverine	1	1	\$20.00	\$20.00
Spider-Man	1	5	\$10.00	\$50.00
	1	5	\$25.00	\$125.00
	1	5	\$10.00	\$50.00
	1	5	\$6.00	\$30.00
	2-24	23	\$4.00	\$92.00
Spelljammer	1-15	15	\$2.25	\$33.75
Spectacular Spider-Man	122-129	8	\$3.00	\$24.00
	130-132	3	\$5.00	\$15.00
	133-140	8	\$3.00	\$24.00
	141-143	3	\$3.50	\$10.50
	144-146,148-152	8	\$3.00	\$24.00
Spawn	1	1	\$25.00	\$25.00
	1	1	\$35.00	\$35.00
	2,3	2	\$18.00	\$36.00
	4	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
	5	1	\$12.00	\$12.00
	6-8,10	4	\$9.00	\$36.00
	9	1	\$12.00	\$12.00
	11-12	2	\$6.00	\$12.00
Solo Avengers	1	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
	2-20	19	\$2.50	\$47.50

Solarman	1-2	2	\$2.25	\$4.50
The Silver Surfer	1-2	2	\$4.00	\$8.00
The Silver Surfer	1	1	\$9.00	\$9.00
	2-17	16	\$4.00	\$64.00
	18-33,39-43	20	\$3.00	\$60.00
	34	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
	35-38	4	\$6.00	\$24.00
	44,45,49	3	\$4.00	\$12.00
	46-48	3	\$4.00	\$12.00
	50	1	\$7.00	\$7.00
	51-59	9	\$3.00	\$27.00
	60-72	13	\$2.50	\$32.50
Shazam: The Beginning	1-4	4	\$3.00	\$12.00
Shadow War of Hawkman	1-4	4	\$2.25	\$9.00
The Sensational She-Hulk	1	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
	2-3,5-8	6	\$2.25	\$13.50
	4,14-17,21-23	8	\$2.50	\$20.00
	9-13,18-20,24-48	33	\$2.25	\$74.25
Secret Wars II	1,9	2	\$4.00	\$8.00
	2-8	7	\$3.00	\$21.00
Secret Origins of the World's Greatest Super-Heroes	nn	1	\$7.00	\$7.00
Secret Origins	1	1	\$6.00	\$6.00
	2-6	5	\$3.00	\$15.00
	7-12,14-26	19	\$2.50	\$47.50
	13	1	\$2.50	\$2.50
	27-49	23	\$2.50	\$57.50
	50	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
	annual 1-3, special 1	3	\$3.00	\$9.00
Sandman	1	1	\$30.00	\$30.00
	2	1	\$12.00	\$12.00
	3-5	3	\$10.00	\$30.00
	6-7	2	\$7.00	\$14.00
	8	1	\$18.00	\$18.00
	8	1	\$60.00	\$60.00

	9-14	6	\$9.00	\$54.00
	15-20	6	\$6.00	\$36.00
	18	1	\$25.00	\$25.00
	19	1	\$20.00	\$20.00
	21,23-27	6	\$6.00	\$36.00
	22	1	\$9.00	\$9.00
	28-30	3	\$5.00	\$15.00
	31-49	19	\$4.00	\$76.00
	50	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
	50	1	\$8.00	\$8.00
Robin III: Cry of the Huntress	1-6	6	\$2.25	\$13.50
Robin: A Hero Reborn	tpb	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
Robin	1	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
	2-5	4	\$3.00	\$12.00
	annual 1,2	2	\$3.00	\$6.00
Ralph Smart Adventures	1-3	3	\$2.50	\$7.50
	book1	1	\$8.00	\$8.00
	3-d special	1	\$3.50	\$3.50
Punisher: War Zone	1	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
	2-22, 24, 26,25-41	38	\$2.25	\$85.50
	23	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
	25	1	\$2.50	\$2.50
	annual 1,2	2	\$3.00	\$6.00
Punisher War Journal	1	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
	2-7	6	\$4.00	\$24.00
	8-49, 51-60	52	\$3.00	\$156.00
	50	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
Punisher: P.O.V.	1-4	4	\$5.00	\$20.00
Punisher Magazine	1-16	16	\$3.00	\$48.00
Punisher Armory	1-10	10	\$2.50	\$25.00
Punisher (miniseries)	1	1	\$14.00	\$14.00
	2-5	4	\$7.00	\$28.00

Punisher	1	1	\$6.00	\$6.00
	2-9	8	\$3.00	\$24.00
	10	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
	11-74, 76-84	73	\$2.50	\$182.50
	75	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
	annual 1-7	7	\$3.00	\$21.00
Intruder Graphic Novel Return to the Big Nothing Graphic Novel		1	\$20.00	\$20.00
		1	\$25.00	\$25.00
Psi-Force	1-25	25	\$2.25	\$56.25
	26-32	7	\$2.50	\$17.50
	annual 1	1	\$2.25	\$2.25
Predator 2	1,2	2	\$3.00	\$6.00
Predator	1	1	\$6.00	\$6.00
	2	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
	3,4	2	\$4.00	\$8.00
Power Pachyderms	1	1	\$2.25	\$2.25
Power Girl	1-4	4	\$3.00	\$12.00
Plastic Man	1-4	4	\$2.25	\$9.00
Pitt	1	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
Pitt, The	1	1	\$3.50	\$3.50
Phoenix	1	1	\$10.00	\$10.00
Phantom Stranger	1-4	4	\$3.00	\$12.00
Phantom	1-4	4	\$3.00	\$12.00
Peter Porker, The Spectacular Spider-ham	1	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
	2-17	16	\$3.00	\$48.00
Paul the Samurai	1-6	6	\$2.75	\$16.50
Original Ghost Rider Rides Again	1-7	7	\$2.25	\$15.75

Original Ghost Rider	1-20	20	\$2.25	\$45.00
Oriental Heroes	1-3	1	\$2.25	\$2.25
Official Justice League of America Index	1-8	8	\$6.00	\$48.00
Ninja High School	1	1	\$15.00	\$15.00
	2,3	2	\$10.00	\$20.00
Nighthawk	1-3	3	\$3.00	\$9.00
Nick Fury vs. S.H.I.E.L.D.	1,2	2	\$5.00	\$10.00
	3-6	4	\$4.00	\$16.00
Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.	1-12	12	\$2.25	\$27.00
New Titans	50	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
	51-59	9	\$3.00	\$27.00
	60,61	2	\$3.00	\$6.00
	62-72	11	\$2.50	\$27.50
New Justice Machine	1-3	3	\$2.25	\$6.75
New Gods	1-28	28	\$2.50	\$70.00
The 'Nam	1	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
	2-50	49	\$2.25	\$110.25
Moon Knight Special	1	1	\$2.50	\$2.50
Moon Knight: Divided we Fall	nn	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
Moon Knight	1-6	6	\$2.50	\$15.00
Mister Miracle	1-28	28	\$2.50	\$70.00
Millennium	1	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
	2-8	7	\$2.50	\$17.50
Mayhem	1	1	\$10.00	\$10.00
	2-4	3	\$9.00	\$27.00
Maxx	1/2	1	\$10.00	\$10.00

	1	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
	2-12	11	\$2.50	\$27.50
Marvel Tails Starring Peter Porker the Spec. Spider-Ham	1	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
Marvel Swimsuit Special	1-4	4	\$7.00	\$28.00
Marvel Super- Heroes Secret Wars	1	1	\$8.00	\$8.00
	2-6, 9-11	8	\$6.00	\$48.00
	7,12	2	\$7.00	\$14.00
	8	1	\$28.00	\$28.00
Martian Manhunter	0	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
Marc Spector: Moon Knight	1-49, 51-54,58,59	55	\$2.50	\$137.50
	50	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
	55-57, 60	4	\$3.50	\$14.00
	special 1	1	\$2.50	\$2.50
Man of Steel	1-6	6	\$4.00	\$24.00
Manhunter	1-24	24	\$2.25	\$54.00
Man-Eating Cow	1-10	10	\$3.00	\$30.00
Lobo	1	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
	2-4	3	\$2.50	\$7.50
Leonard Nimoy's Primortals	1-3	3	\$2.25	\$6.75
L.E.G.I.O.N.	1	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
	2-22, 24-47	45	\$3.00	\$135.00
	23	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
	48-49	2	\$3.00	\$6.00
	50	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
	annual 1-4	4	\$4.00	\$16.00
Legends	1-5	5	\$4.00	\$20.00
	6	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
Justice Machine Featuring the Elementals	1-4	4	\$2.25	\$9.00

Justice Machine	1-4	4	\$2.25	\$9.00
Justice Machine	1-29	29	\$2.25	\$65.25
	annual 1	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
	summer spectacular	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
Justice League Quarterly	1-12, 14-17	16	\$3.50	\$56.00
	13	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
Justice League of America	228-230, 253, 258-261	8	\$3.00	\$24.00
	244-245	2	\$4.00	\$8.00
	260	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
	261	1	\$7.00	\$7.00
Justice League Europe	1	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
	2-10	9	\$2.50	\$22.50
	11-49	49	\$2.50	\$122.50
	50	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
	annuals 1-4	4	\$3.00	\$12.00
Justice League	1	1	\$6.00	\$6.00
	2,3	2	\$4.00	\$8.00
	3	1	\$45.00	\$45.00
	4-10	7	\$3.00	\$21.00
	11-17,22-23,25-49	34	\$2.50	\$85.00
	51-68	18	\$2.50	\$45.00
	18-21,24,50	6	\$3.00	\$18.00
	69	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
	70	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
	annuals 1-6	6	\$3.00	\$18.00
Jademan Collection	1-3	3	\$2.50	\$7.50
Invasion	1-3	3	\$3.00	\$9.00
Huntress	1-16	16	\$2.50	\$40.00
	17-19	3	\$3.00	\$9.00
Heroes Against Hunger	1	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
Hawkman	1-17	17	\$2.50	\$42.50

Hawk and Dove	1	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
	2-5	4	\$3.00	\$12.00
Hard Boiled	1-3	3	\$7.00	\$21.00
Guy Gardner	1-12	12	\$2.50	\$30.00
Groo the Wanderer	1	1	\$12.00	\$12.00
	2-10	9	\$5.00	\$45.00
	11-20,50	11	\$4.00	\$44.00
	21-49, 51-99	78	\$3.00	\$234.00
	100	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
Greatest Batman Stories Ever Told	1	1	\$17.00	\$17.00
Gotham by Gaslight	nn	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
Gilgamesh II	1-4	4	\$4.00	\$16.00
G.I. Joe, A Real American Hero	21	1	\$10.00	\$10.00
	22,26,27	3	\$7.00	\$21.00
	23-25,28-30,60	7	\$5.00	\$35.00
	31-59,61-90	59	\$3.00	\$177.00
	91,92,94-99	8	\$4.00	\$32.00
	93	1	\$10.00	\$10.00
	100,135-142	9	\$6.00	\$54.00
	101-134	8	\$4.00	\$32.00
	143-149	7	\$5.00	\$35.00
Ghost Rider	1	4	\$18.00	\$72.00
	2-5	4	\$3.00	\$12.00
	6-14,16-24	19	\$2.50	\$47.50
	15	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
	annual 1,2	2	\$4.00	\$8.00
Forgotten Realms	1	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
	2-25	24	\$2.25	\$54.00
	annual 1	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
Flash	1	1	\$10.00	\$10.00
	2-10	9	\$4.00	\$36.00
	11-61	51	\$3.00	\$153.00
	62-72	11	\$4.00	\$44.00

	annual 1-6	6	\$3.00	\$18.00
Firestorm: The Nuclear Man	65-99	35	\$2.50	\$87.50
	100	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
	annual 5	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
Firestar	1,2	2	\$5.00	\$10.00
	3,4	2	\$3.00	\$6.00
Excalibur (miniseries)	1-4	4	\$3.00	\$12.00
Excalibur	se nn	1	\$6.00	\$6.00
	se nn	1	\$10.00	\$10.00
	1	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
	2-4	3	\$4.00	\$12.00
	5-10	6	\$3.00	\$18.00
	11-49,51-60			\$2.50
	50	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
Epicurus the Sage	1-2	2	\$10.00	\$20.00
Epic Illustrated	26-28	3	\$9.00	\$27.00
Elfquest	1	1	\$25.00	\$25.00
	2	1	\$15.00	\$15.00
	6-9	4	\$8.00	\$32.00
	10-21	12	\$5.00	\$60.00
The Elementals	1	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
	2-29	28	\$3.00	\$84.00
	v3:1-3	3	\$3.00	\$9.00
	lingerie	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
	special 1,2	2	\$3.00	\$6.00
Dragonlance	1	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
	2-34	33	\$2.50	\$82.50
	annual 1	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
The Draft	1	1	\$3.50	\$3.50
D.P.7	1-20	20	\$2.25	\$45.00
	21-32	12	\$3.00	\$36.00

Doom Patrol	1	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
	2-18	17	\$3.00	\$51.00
	19	1	\$6.00	\$6.00
	20-30	11	\$4.00	\$44.00
	31-49,51-56,58-60	28	\$2.50	\$70.00
	50,57	2	\$2.50	\$5.00
	61-72	12	\$2.50	\$30.00
	annual 1	1	\$2.50	\$2.50
	annual 2	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
Doctor Fate	1,15	2	\$6.50	\$13.00
	2-14	13	\$3.00	\$39.00
	16-41	26	\$2.50	\$65.00
	annual 1	1	\$3.50	\$3.50
Dirty Pair	1-4	4	\$3.00	\$12.00
Detective Comics	570	1	\$8.00	\$8.00
	571,573	2	\$5.00	\$10.00
	572	1	\$6.00	\$6.00
	574	1	\$6.00	\$6.00
	575	1	\$15.00	\$15.00
	576-578	3	\$12.00	\$36.00
	579-597,601-610	29	\$3.00	\$87.00
	598	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
	599	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
	600	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
	611-626,628-654	43	\$3.00	\$129.00
The Demon	1	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
	2-18,20-24	22	\$2.50	\$55.00
	19	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
	annual 1	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
	annual 2	1	\$16.00	\$16.00
The Demon (miniseries)	1-4	4	\$3.00	\$12.00
Darkman (Movie)	1	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
Dark Horse Presents	24	1	\$18.00	\$18.00
	28	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
	36	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
	42,43,46	3	\$3.00	\$9.00

Crisis on Infinite Earths	1	1	\$15.00	\$15.00
	2-6	5	\$10.00	\$50.00
	7	1	\$18.00	\$18.00
	8	1	\$18.00	\$18.00
	9-11	3	\$10.00	\$30.00
	12	1	\$12.00	\$12.00
Concrete	1	1	\$10.00	\$10.00
	2	1	\$6.00	\$6.00
	3	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
	4-10	7	\$4.00	\$28.00
Clive Barker's Nightbreed	1-25	25	\$2.50	\$62.50
Classic X-men	1	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
	2-10	9	\$4.00	\$36.00
	11-45	35	\$3.00	\$105.00
Classic Punisher	1	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
Checkmate	1	1	\$7.50	\$7.50
	2-12	11	\$2.50	\$27.50
Catwoman	1	1	\$10.00	\$10.00
	2-4	3	\$9.00	\$27.00
Cage	1,3,10,12	4	\$3.00	\$12.00
	2,4-9,11,13-20	16	\$2.50	\$40.00
Booster Gold	1	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
	2-25	24	\$2.50	\$60.00
Blue Beetle	1	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
	2-19,21-24	22	\$2.00	\$44.00
	20	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
Black Canary	1-4	4	\$2.50	\$10.00
Batman vs. Predator	1	1	\$6.00	\$6.00
	2,3	2	\$5.00	\$10.00
Batman: The Dark Knight Returns	Hard-c, trade edition	1	\$50.00	\$50.00

Batman: The Killing Joke	1	1	\$15.00	\$15.00
Batman: Digital Justice	1	1	\$25.00	\$25.00
Arkham Asylum	1	1	\$30.00	\$30.00
Batman	403	1	\$6.00	\$6.00
	404	1	\$12.00	\$12.00
	405-407	3	\$9.00	\$27.00
	408-410	3	\$6.00	\$18.00
	411-416,421-425	11	\$5.00	\$55.00
	417-420	4	\$8.00	\$32.00
	426	1	\$15.00	\$15.00
	427	1	\$12.00	\$12.00
	428	21	\$12.00	\$252.00
	429	1	\$8.00	\$8.00
	430-432	3	\$3.00	\$9.00
	433-435	3	\$3.00	\$9.00
	436	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
	436-441	6	\$3.00	\$18.00
	442	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
	443-456,458,459,462-464	19	\$3.00	\$57.00
	457	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
	460,461,465-487	25	\$3.00	\$75.00
Aquaman	1-5	5	\$2.50	\$12.50
	6-13	8	\$2.50	\$20.00
Aquaman (miniseries)	1-5	5	\$2.50	\$12.50
	special 1	1	\$2.50	\$2.50
Aquaman (limited series)	1	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
	2-4	3	\$3.50	\$10.50
	special 1	1	\$3.50	\$3.50
Appleseed	book one, 1-5	5	\$4.00	\$20.00
Animal Man	1	1	\$6.00	\$6.00
	2-10	9	\$3.00	\$27.00
	11-49,51-55,57-89	77	\$2.50	\$192.50
	50	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
	56	1	\$4.00	\$4.00

	annual 1		\$5.00	\$0.00†
Amazing Spider-Man	284,285	2	\$8.00	\$16.00
	286-288	3	\$8.00	\$24.00
	289	1	\$20.00	\$20.00
	290-292,295-297	6	\$5.00	\$30.00
	293,294	2	\$7.00	\$14.00
	298	1	\$35.00	\$35.00
	299	1	\$22.00	\$22.00
	300	1	\$75.00	\$75.00
	301-305	5	\$12.00	\$60.00
	306-311,313,314	8	\$9.00	\$72.00
	312	1	\$14.00	\$14.00
	315-317	3	\$14.00	\$42.00
	318-323,325	7	\$7.00	\$49.00
	324	1	\$7.00	\$7.00
	326,327,329	3	\$4.00	\$12.00
	328	1	\$8.00	\$8.00
	330,331	2	\$3.00	\$6.00
332,333	2	\$6.00	\$12.00	
Alien: The Illustrated Story	1	1	\$20.00	\$20.00
Aliens vs. Predator	1	5	\$24.00	\$120.00
	0	1	\$9.00	\$9.00
	2,3	2	\$5.00	\$10.00
	4	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
Aliens: Hive	1-4	4	\$3.00	\$12.00
Aliens	1	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
	2-4	3	\$3.00	\$9.00
Aliens	1	1	\$15.00	\$15.00
	2	1	\$7.00	\$7.00
	3	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
	4-6	3	\$4.00	\$12.00
	Mini-comic	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
Adventures of Superman	424	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
	425-435,437-462	37	\$3.00	\$111.00
	436	1	\$3.50	\$3.50
	463	1	\$5.00	\$5.00

	464	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
	465-495	31	\$2.50	\$77.50
	496-497	2	\$3.00	\$6.00
	498-499	2	\$2.50	\$5.00
	500	1	\$3.50	\$3.50
Action Comics	584	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
	585-599	15	\$3.00	\$45.00
	600	1	\$6.00	\$6.00
	601-642	42	\$3.00	\$126.00
	643	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
	644-649,651-661	17	\$2.50	\$42.50
	663-673,675-683	20	\$2.50	\$50.00
	650	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
	662	1	\$4.00	\$4.00
	674	1	\$5.00	\$5.00
	684	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
	685,686	2	\$2.50	\$5.00
	687	1	\$2.50	\$2.50
Total of known comics		3243		\$13,429.00
Remaining total				
(Up to collection estimate of 4000 factored at Comic Guide's minimum value)		757	\$2.25	\$1,703.25
Total Estimated Collection Value		4000		\$15,132.25

† In reviewing this table for this printing, I discovered at least three omissions in my Excel spreadsheet that resulted in lowering the value of my comic book collection's estimated value by \$172.50. A significant enough error in terms of dollar value, but with my insurance already maxed out, it hardly mattered.

Appendix D: Space Chum

Prologue:

FADE UP FROM BLACK. We see beautiful, sunny day scenes from Juneau.

Narrator (VOICE OVER.):

Juneau. Located in Southeast Alaska, this state capital is a juxtaposition of a modern, teeming city and pristine wilderness.

Southeast Alaska has a stunning variety of wildlife. Summer announces the arrival of bald eagles, whales, bears, tourists, and insects.

The isolated city and outlying areas are home to some 30,000 people. Contrary to popular belief, Juneauites have long since traded in their sled dogs and igloos for the familiar modern conveniences of the western world. In fact, Juneau is home to the 3rd largest university in the entire state.

It's here, at the University of Alaska - Southeast, situated on the shore of Auke Lake in Juneau, overlooked by the Mendenhall Glacier, that three, seemingly normal students have openly challenged NASA to a first in the history of the space race.

FADE TO BLACK.

Act I. How it all began

FADE UP FROM BLACK to a black slate with white writing.

"The Beginning"

FADE TO BLACK.

I. Interior. Dormitory.

FADE UP FROM BLACK. A FISH TANK in the background, COUCHES in the corner. We see ARLO, MIKE, and JOE sitting.

Arlo

I don't quite remember how this all got started...

Mike (pondering)

Wasn't it something medical? Didn't we think we could work towards the cure of something?

Joe

No, no, don't you guys remember? It was after we saw that CNN story about... um...

Mike (snapping fingers)

Right! The _____.¹ That guy's 15 minutes of fame.

Joe

That's the one! And Arlo got us going on how easy it would be to get on CNN.

Arlo

I did?

Joe

Yep.

Mike

I remember.

Arlo (directed at both)

You're sure?

We see JOE and MIKE nodding.

Arlo

I don't remember at all.

Joe (back to camera/narrator)

Well, anyway, we talked about it for a few minutes... How one could squander their fifteen minutes of fame. Then Arlo says, "I'll bet we could get on CNN in we did something outrageous."

Arlo

Wasn't that Mike?

Joe

No, it was you.

¹ There's a blank here because I didn't remember what the actual CNN story was about. Yes, the idea of launching a fish into space was based on an actual conversation between myself, Joe, and Mike.

ARLO shrugs.

FADE TO BLACK.

II. Interior Dormitory.

We hear bubbles in water, then MIKE's voice. Camera FADES UP FROM BLACK focused on MIKE as seen through a fish tank.

Mike (tapping glass, peering in)

Hello, little fishy-doo! Are you hungry? Spit that out! That's poo! I'll give you some food.

MIKE reaches into cabinet, extracts FOOD and shakes it in front of fish tank. Then POURS some in. He watches for a moment, then POINTS to food floating on the surface.

Mike

It's up here, fishies! No, no, Spike. That's a rock. Up here, up here...

CAMERA ZOOMS OUT and JOE and ARLO come into view. They are facing each other, situated on the couch beneath the fish tank. AUDIO UP on their conversation while AUDIO down on Mike's conversation with the fish.

(MIKE continues through JOE and ARLO's scene.)

Arlo

So, you're giving me the credit for coming up with all this?

Joe

Well, no single one of us gets all that, but yeah, I suppose this is all your fault. (Smiling) You still don't remember?

Arlo

No.

Joe (sighing)

We were talking about how to get famous and you said, "I'll bet we could get onto CNN if we launched a fish into space."

ARLO, with dawning realization, turns towards fish tank and stares at fish for a few moments. We still hear MIKE cooing to fish (faintly).

Arlo (slowly)

That's riiight. I was watching Sheldon, there, and thinking about how he'd fare in zero gee. How any fish might swim without gravity.

Joe

Well, anyway, we decided on a salmon because of the attention it would generate. (Pauses and looks towards fish tank) Knock it off, Mike.

FADE TO BLACK.

III. Interior. ARLO's room.

FADE UP FROM BLACK. We see ARLO sitting in a CHAIR. A COMPUTER is positioned in front of him.

ARLO (to camera/narrator)

Actually, it's not going to be as difficult as it sounds. After researching the subject of space flight for a few hours, it became apparent that the resources need to launch a craft into space is not as expensive as NASA has let on. (ARLO reaches for the mouse)

CUT TO:

A NETSCAPE SCREEN is showing an obviously amateurish WEB PAGE. Lots of flashy banners, blinking text, etc. HEADLINE on the page reads: "NASA Covers up Accidental Discovery of 'Perfect' Rocket Fuel."

Web page scrolls down. More "Enquirer" HEADLINES appear.

CUT TO:

IV. Exterior. Gas Station. Daytime.

We see a dog's eye POINT OF VIEW of a CAR pulling up. CAR DOOR opens and MIKE's foot steps into view.

CUT TO:

LONG SHOT of MIKE getting out of car. He walks around it while talking to the camera.

Mike

A cheaper alternative than rocket fuel? In the beginning we didn't have any idea something like that existed. In fact, because of the excessive costs, I never considered this a viable project from the start.

While continuing to talk, MIKE opens gas tank and unscrews gas cap OFF CAMERA.

Mike

All that changed when ARLO showed us the fruits of his research...

MIKE reaches off-camera and pulls a GAS PUMP into view.

Mike

...GASOLINE!

MIKE stylishly (like a gunslinger) SHOVES the nozzle into the car's tank.

CUT TO:

V. Interior. Dormitory Kitchen.

We see JOE by counter. Counter is filled with apparatus: POTS, COLLANDER, MEASURING CUPS, GAS CAN, GUNPOWDER, Kerosine, etc.

Joe

We've actually been able to improve on the formula with very few incidents.

JOE pauses to mix a few ingredients.

Joe

You may have heard of the fact that a single cup of gasoline can explode with as much force as a stick of dynamite. Well, we've been able to increase that to... one-AND-A-QUARTER sticks of dynamite!

JOE finishes mixing proportions, picks up a BOX OF KITCHEN MATCHES, and draws a match across the striking surface...

CUT TO:

VI. Exterior. Dormitory.

LONG SHOT. CAMERA VIEW shows the windows of the dorm as seen from the outside. LONG SHOT holds for three seconds.

CUT BACK TO:

VII. Interior. Dormitory Kitchen.

CLOSE UP of JOE. He blows out MATCH. JOE grins as smoke drifts up from the extinguished match.

CUT TO:

VIII. Exterior. Gas Station.

GAS PUMP COUNTER is going up, up, up.. (in the \$50 range²)

CUT TO:

MIKE is topping off a red, plastic GAS CAN. He moves to the open TRUNK and we see an assortment of containers - all full. MIKE places the newly filled container in with the others. During this process, MIKE tells CAMERA/NARRATOR:

Mike (with enthusiasm)

It's really amazing! Why does NASA spend so much money when we've almost achieved the same results with so little? We're shaving millions of dollars off what it costs for NASA to send up a shuttle. In fact, by using gasoline, I, myself, will be able to fund this entire project!

CUT TO:

IX. Exterior. Bank ATM (drive-thru)

OUTSIDE SHOT of CAR. We see ARLO in CAR. He's withdrawing money from the ATM.

CUT TO:

² When I wrote this, \$50 seemed like a lot of money to pay for gas. It'd have to be \$150 now, at least, to get the reaction I was looking for.

Interior of CAR. We see ARLO completing his transaction through window.

Arlo

If Mike doesn't bring anything else to our venture, I'll still be completely satisfied with his contribution. He's already taken out six student loans totaling over seventeen thousand... (Pondering briefly) Twenty-seven thousand..? No. (Nodding) It's seventeen thousand dollars. (Pauses a beat) I think.

ARLO is understandably confused because he's counting \$300 dollars worth of bills from the ATM.

CUT TO:

X. Interior. Dormitory.

The "showdown" scene of THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY is playing on the television.

MIKE is relaxing on the couch, arms propped behind his head. He barely glances at the CAMERA/NARRATOR as he begins talking.

Mike

Money? No, I'm not worried. Why should I be? Once we get our sponsor, I'll pay back my loans. (He pauses.) It's strange... Everyone we've approached has turned us down... Hold on.

MIKE sits up - leans forward to watch the (OFF CAMERA) television.

CUT TO:

Captured video is displayed of Clint Eastwood's "Power line." AUDIO of MIKE saying, "Oh, YEAH!" barely proceeds a

CUT BACK TO:

MIKE again watching TV.

Mike (sighing in awe)

Clint Eastwood is so cool. Where was I? Oh, yeah. I think NASA's paid off all of the obvious, potential sponsors. We'll have to find some non-traditional sources of money.

XI. Interior. Dormitory dining table.

JOE is sitting at the TABLE. PAPERS are spread out in front of him.

Joe

No, I don't know what's wrong. (Takes off GLASSES and rubs his eyes) Well, that's not completely true... I got nominated to give the sales pitch to prospective clients - all because I once took a business class. (Pauses) I think I'm conveying my, OUR, enthusiasm well, but most prospects reject us because we (Makes air quotes with his fingers) "have no idea what we're getting into."

CUT TO:

XII. Interior. Spike's Café (when closed).

ARLO is sitting at a TABLE facing CAMERA/NARRATOR. JOE is facing ARLO with his back to the camera.

Arlo (agitated)

I don't know what's up with that...!

AUDIO continues as we CUT TO:

XIII. Exterior. Daytime. Eagle Beach.

ARLO, JOE, and MIKE are standing to the side of JOE NELL who is getting ready to launch a modest (3-4 ft) MODEL ROCKET. While we hear ARLO continue (VOICE OVER), JOE NELL launches the rocket. CAMERA ON all four people as rocket streaks skyward. JOE NELL is excited, dancing around a little. JOE NELL looks up and a little down the beach - MIKE, ARLO and JOE go running off down the beach.

Arlo

...A friend of ours, Joe Nell, goes out every weekend and launches some model rockets and we went out every weekend with him for THREE WEEKS!

(Barely audible speaking is heard from OFF CAMERA)

Arlo

Right, okay. Every sunny weekend. What's the difference? We can do this! This isn't exactly rocket

science, you know... (Hastily) I mean, well, it *is* rocket science, but -

CUT TO:

XIV. Interior. Cafeteria at UAS.

Cafeteria is half-full with students. In the foreground, JOE has books spread out on TABLE and is eating some FOOD. MIKE and ARLO sit down at his table with more FOOD.

Joe

It's really not like we have a lot of options here at UAS. With only 600 or so full-time students, they can't afford to offer many specialized degree programs.

JOE takes a bite of food.

Arlo

The University of Alaska in Fairbanks has some sort of rocketry program, but it's too damn cold up there.

Mike

Less salmon, too.

Arlo

True. At any rate, we do what we can. There's an astronomy course offered here, and Mike got an "A" in that.

Mike

"A-minus"

Arlo (exasperated at being interrupted again)

Whatever!

Joe

And I'm taking math and meteorology next semester.

Arlo

Yeah, who knows? They may be useful, too...

FADE TO BLACK.

ACT II. Early Concepts and Failures

FADE UP FROM BLACK to a black slate with white writing.

"If at first you don't succeed..."

FADE TO BLACK.

I. Interior. Classroom.

FADE UP FROM BLACK. We see a BLACKBOARD covered with diagrams of projected flight paths, tons of irrelevant math equations, etc. JOE is standing next to the board looking confused and dejected at the same time.

Joe

I can't understand why we're having such a problem getting the fish into space. You'd think getting it back down would be something that would take a lot of planning, not shooting it up!

CUT TO:

II. Exterior. Bike path.

ARLO is seen walking. He has a BACKPACK slung over one shoulder. CAMERA dollies backward.

Arlo

Problems? (sighing) Yeah, I suppose we have to admit to having a couple problems. I prefer to call them temporary setbacks or learning experiences, though.

CUT TO:

III. Interior. Mike's Room.

MIKE is sitting in a BLUE CHAIR, facing CAMERA/NARRATOR. After the first three sentences, we CUT TO different scenes of MIKE working with salmon.

Mike

Well, let me tell you something. Catching and keeping a salmon alive for a space launch is no small task. They're not like goldfish, you know. Besides the fact that they're hard to catch with your hands, (MIKE starts to tick items off on his fingers) they usually

live in saltwater, they're bigger, they don't eat fish flakes, they have sharp teeth, they jump and flop around a lot, and they're just generally hard to catch without damaging them. I keep trying to tell them that we could get just as much coverage if we used a goldfish, placostamus, or even a few neons, but they won't have it. So I have to live with it and get us a salmon.

IV. Exterior. Stream.

MIKE is seen chasing salmon up a shallow stream. He runs with his arms hanging down, and we can see at least one salmon wriggling upstream out of his reach.

CUT TO:

V. Exterior.

Skiff in Auke Bay. MIKE is seen looking over the edge of a SKIFF into the water. There is a DIP NET next to him, unused. MIKE looks back and forth and then looks over the other side of the skiff.

CUT TO:

VI. Interior. Science lab (Anderson building).

A large LIVE SALMON is in a 10 GALLON AQUARIUM. MIKE is tapping in a small amount of FISH FLAKES into the aquarium. Suddenly the whole canister empties into the water. MIKE shows surprise and immediately reaches for a small DIP NET to get them out of the water.

CUT TO:

MIKE trying to pick the salmon up off the floor of the SCIENCE LAB. The fish is flopping around and MIKE can't get a grip on it.

CUT TO:

VII. Interior. JOE's Apartment.

JOE is sitting at his dining room TABLE. There are many PAPERS spread out in front of him. He is showing signs of stress (rubbing temples, etc.)

Joe (sighing)

Our first test launch was a disaster. First, the rocket didn't go up. We had plenty of fire, but not enough thrust. The burners fired for about 10 seconds before the fuselage started to lean to one side and eventually it fell over. Lucky for us, the body of the rocket was recovered intact.

Unfortunately, the rocket skidded along the ground in a zigzag path for a couple hundred yards.

Continue as VOICE OVER and CUT TO:

VIII. Exterior. Mendenhall Glacier, in front of lookout point.

Static shot of Arctic Tern Nesting Ground sign at the Mendenhall Glacier. We see COMPUTER GENERATED SMOKE far in the background (and possibly torn up ground in the foreground).

Joe (continuing)

Worse still, we apparently took out a major portion of some protected Arctic Tern nesting grounds. Those eco-freaks had a hay-day with us...

CUT TO:

IX. Exterior. UAS Campus.

We see KARL in a MEDIUM SHOT. Classic opinion poll situation - his name is printed briefly across the bottom of the screen identifying him as JOE's brother.

Karl

Hey, I'm no tree-hugger, but I have to tell you that what those boys did was wrong. Birds like them can't defend themselves against rockets, you know. If I ever see one of them around town...

KARL clenches his fist at the camera while simultaneously shaking his head and pursing his lips.

CUT TO:

X. Interior. JOE's Apartment.

JOE is still situated at the TABLE.

Joe

...And then we tried a launch last winter. With the Tern Disaster in mind we thought that launching from a frozen lake would minimize the potential of another wildlife disaster as well as give us the perfect flat surface. It did both, but we lost the rocket and the launch structure when the fire melted through the ice.

(JOE takes off his glasses and rubs his eyes) At least no one found any evidence of that mishap and threw it back in our faces.

CUT TO:

XI. Interior. Russ' garage.

HANDHELD CAMERA ON ARLO who is standing in RUSS' garage with TOOLS in the background. RUSS is to ARLO's left (camera right) OFF CAMERA is a CAPSULE with open door. Inside the capsule is an empty AQUARIUM held in place by a web of BUNGEE CORDS. There is a LID on the aquarium.

Arlo

Oh, we were having quite a bit of trouble at first getting our vehicle off the ground. The size and weight of the rocket itself seem to be very important factors to consider - not just the weight of the payload. We spent too much time and energy on the fish apparatus in the early stages, but that effort will pay off later. Here with me is Russell Beal, our chief engineer on this project. Russ, care to explain the fish capsule?

CAMERA moves so that we can see into the capsule. ARLO moves OFF CAMERA. RUSS begins pointing out elements and explaining them.

Russ

Sure, Arlo. As you can see, we have the aquarium supported by approximately 25 bungee cords. This is very important because without them, we expect that the stresses of the launch might damage the structural integrity of the glass.

RUSS begins to push down on the aquarium to demonstrate that it bounces.

Russ (continuing)

As you can see, the bungee cords do a remarkable job of absorbing any shock that might otherwise break the glass.

RUSS, as he finishes moving the aquarium, reaches for the LID on it and peels off the tab of duct tape that secures it to the top. The lid opens on HINGES in the back.

Russ (continuing)

Also, thinking ahead, we decided to invest in a sturdy cover for our aquarium to make sure that the salmon doesn't jump out during the flight. We were able to save some money by cutting some corners, too. If you'll notice, there is no filter on this tank to oxygenate the water. We believe that we could do without one because the flight will only last a few minutes - not long enough to worry about fish asphyxiation.

XII. Interior. Mike's room.

MIKE is sitting in his BLUE CHAIR.

Mike

We had to make some adjustments to insure the safety of the fish. Our whole goal here is to be the first to launch a live salmon into space. When we were finally able to get the first rocket to leave the ground, it didn't reach orbit - actually it didn't even get out of our sight. When we got to the crash site we saw just what had happened to the poor fish inside (shaking his head). Well, you can't make an omelet without breaking a few eggs, right?

CUT TO:

XIII. Interior. Joe's apartment.

JOE is sitting at his TABLE with PAPERS.

Joe

The ruins of that crash gave us something else to think about. How were we to prove that we had actually got our salmon into space? Nothing in the wreckage of our equipment indicated how high the fish had gone... On our next attempt we installed an altimeter and a video camera - both secured with bungee cords - so that we'd have proof of our success to show to CNN.

XIV. Exterior. Upstairs walkway behind Novatney and Whitehead buildings.

MIKE is walking to class with BOOKS under his arm. He is speaking to CAMERA/NARRATOR in front of him.

Mike

We still had one more problem to conquer. It seemed that our rockets just weren't getting high enough. We made it to the height of one mile, at least, but I'm pretty sure that that's not even half-way to achieving orbit. Arlo had some creative ideas about how we could use a balloon...

CUT TO:

XV. Interior. Joe's apartment.

JOE is sitting at his TABLE with PAPERS.

Joe

The Helium Assisted Launch, or HAL, looked good at first, but it just involved too many more materials than we have at our disposal...

While JOE continues as a VOICE OVER, CUT TO:

ARLO is at a BLACKBOARD. He is drawing and gesturing wildly (his enthusiasm shows) in a large, previously-erased section mathematical symbols. There is a DIAGRAM of a huge balloon with a rocket attached to the bottom high over a depiction of the Earth.

Joe (continuing)

...It's too bad, really, because Arlo was really into this new idea. He even went so far as to create a great computer animation to demonstrate how it would work...

While JOE continues as a VOICE OVER, CUT TO:

XVI. COMPUTER ANIMATION of H.A.L.

We see a 16 color, jerky-motion representation of a H.A.L.

Joe (continues)

...But I just couldn't see us coming up with a balloon big enough to lift our whole rocket. That's not

to mention all the helium we'd need or even how we'd trigger the launch once everything was ready.

CUT BACK TO:

XVII. Interior. Joe's apartment.

JOE is sitting at his TABLE with PAPERS.

Joe

So... I suppose it's back to the drawing board. (Joe pauses, then smiles) So to speak.

FADE TO BLACK.

ACT III. Fame

FADE UP FROM BLACK to a black slate with white writing.

"Support and opposition."

FADE TO BLACK.

I. Exterior. UAS Campus.

FADE UP FROM BLACK. ARLO is interrupted from his answering of another question by a couple of STUDENTS who walk past.

Students (flirting)

"Hiiii, Arlo."

ARLO smiling, acknowledges their salutation and continues on, changing the subject.

Arlo

Ladies. (Nods head) That's another thing: We've gained a bit of notoriety on campus with this project. I suppose that's to be expected when the student body is so small - word definitely gets around - but it's a mixed bag. Some people offer nothing but encouragement and advice, while others give constructive criticism that borders on outright insults.

CUT TO:

II. Exterior. UAS Campus (different angle)

We see a LONG SHOT of a STUDENT across the lawn. He is looking toward the CAMERA/NARRATOR.

Abusive Student (cupping hands to mouth, then pointing)

Hey, Midgett! You SUUUUUUCK!

CUT TO:

III. Interior. Anderson Building science lab.

MIKE has his attention focused on live salmon in an AQUARIUM. His attention is split between the antics of the fish, and the CAMERA/NARRATOR.

Mike

Oh, well, obviously we like the positive attention better than the negative - although I suppose you could make an argument that the negative behavior only reinforces the drive and determination that we have to be the first to put a salmon into space. You want to hear something interesting? We've all noticed that we get far more criticism from the guys than we do from the girls... Now why do you suppose that is?

CUT TO:

IV. Exterior. UAS Campus - picnic table.

JOE is sitting at a PICNIC TABLE on a sunny day. He has many BOOKS stacked in front of him and a NOTEBOOK in front of him. We can see that there is WRITING on the page. The books' titles tell us that he is studying math, biology (ichthyology), and astronomy as well as other project-related subjects (perhaps faster-than-light travel, or something similarly outlandish.)

Joe

I have a theory. Each and every one of us with a stake in this project has noticed a sharp increase in the, shall we say: "dating quotient." I believe that the girls know that we're going to be famous, and that they might get a piece of it. The guys, on the other hand, are jealous that we're getting all the babes. What else can explain why we nerds are getting so much action?

CUT TO:

V. Interior. ARLO'S house.

Arlo

I'm a jock³.

³ An abrupt ending, I know. I never did get back to finishing this script.

Notes:

This section is included AFTER the script above so that readers will approach the story unbiased by what my goals were in writing it. Did I succeed? You be the judge.

Goal:

A 22-minute documentary

Vision:

A "mockumentary" of three college students who attempt to launch a salmon into space. Starts very seriously and while the interviewer stays serious, it's apparent by the end that the whole thing is a farce.

Audience:

College students with a sense of humor (especially UAS students). They should be left thinking: "That wasn't real... was it?!"

Plot:

- I. Idea
- II. Failures
- III. Opinions of others
- IV. Optimism for the future

Characters:

Arlo:

The "Idea" guy. Naïve, he doesn't rely much on logic.

Joe:

The "Make It Happen" guy. Trusts Arlo until failure. He's the guy who actually does all the work.

Mike:

The "Why Do We Have Him?" guy. Total trust in project.

Narrator:

Impartial, disembodied.

About the Author

Arlo Midgett lives in Juneau, Alaska.

He works for the University of Alaska Southeast, where his daily duties do not often correspond with his job title. If required to file for unemployment, however, he will still have to write “Digital Media Specialist” on the application.

He shaves his head because he started to lose his hair at an unfairly young age, but he’s comfortable trading that particular genetic malady for all the other things that could have been bestowed upon him at birth (failing eyesight, a slow metabolism, early-onset death, etc.)

He prefers two spaces after a period and stands behind the use of the Oxford comma.

His favorite color is #002AFF.

He finds that writing a bio is surprisingly difficult.

He secretly still hopes that a mysterious, wealthy patron will materialize and fully finance his dreams of world travel.



