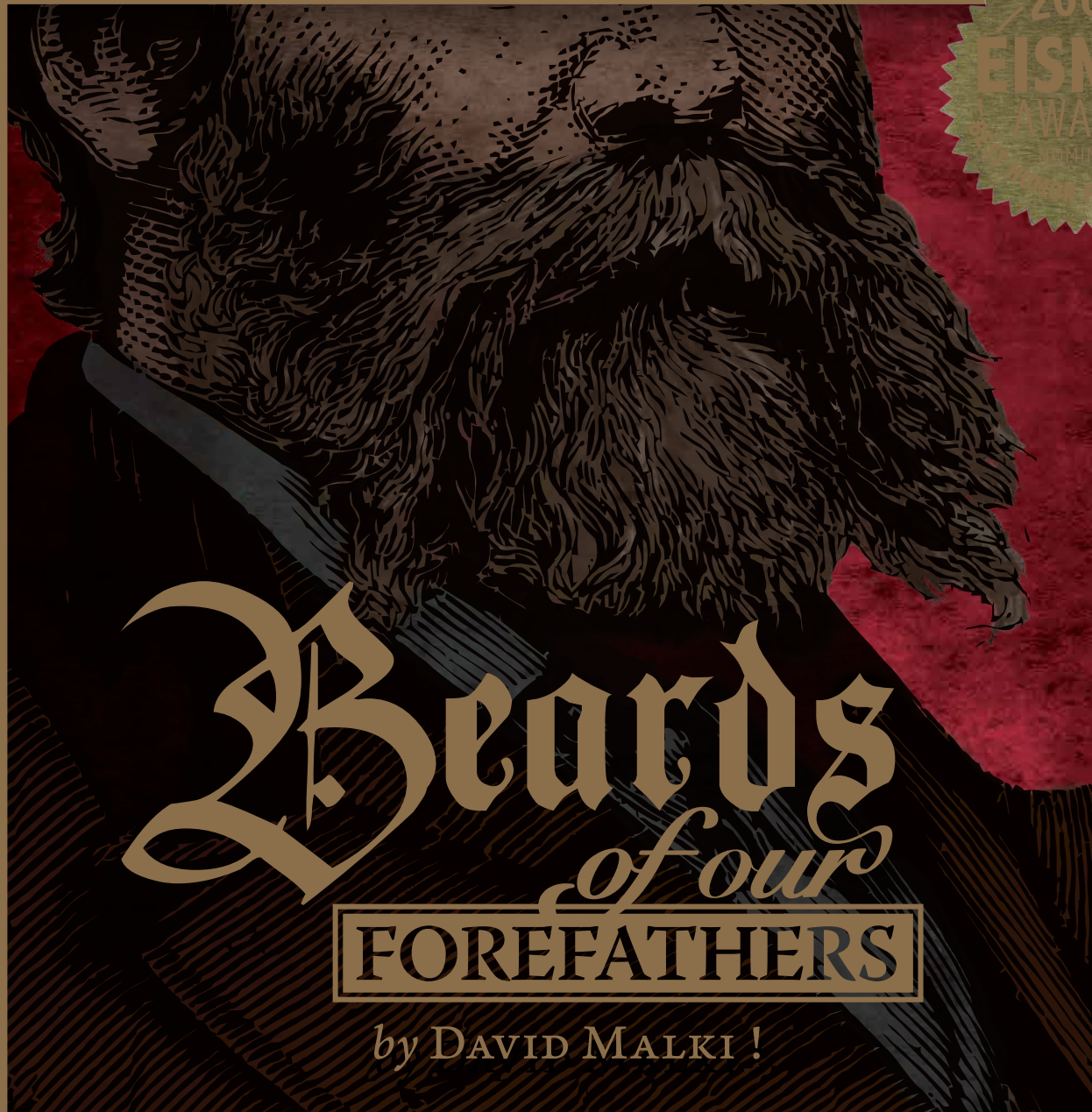


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WONDERMARK



Beards *of our*

FOREFATHERS

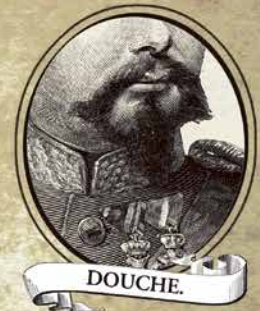
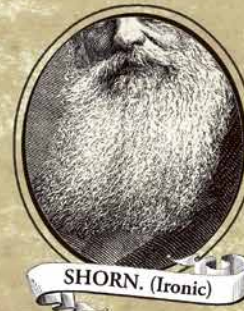
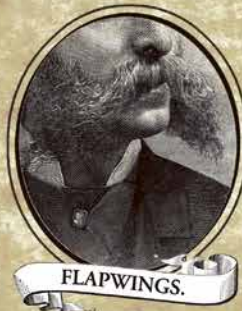
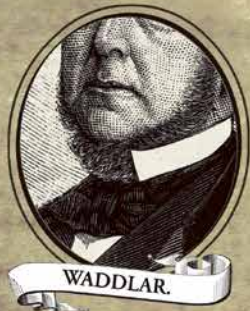
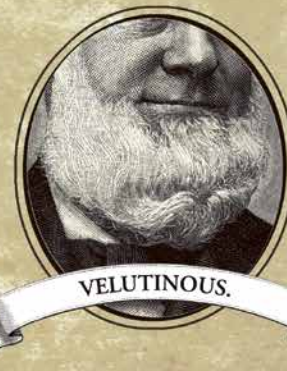
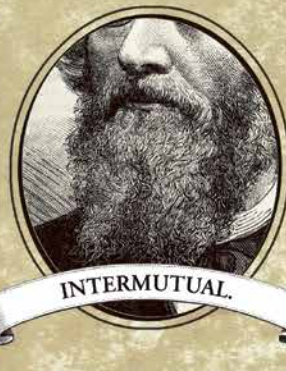
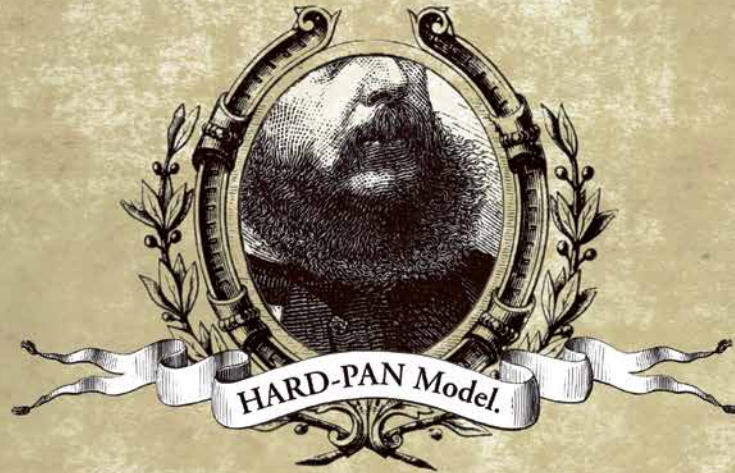
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WONDERMARK: BEARDS OF OUR FOREFATHERS™

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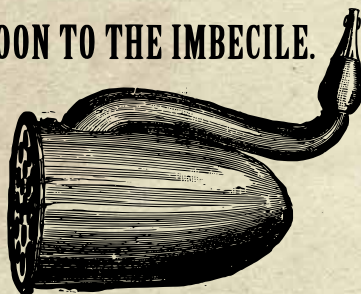
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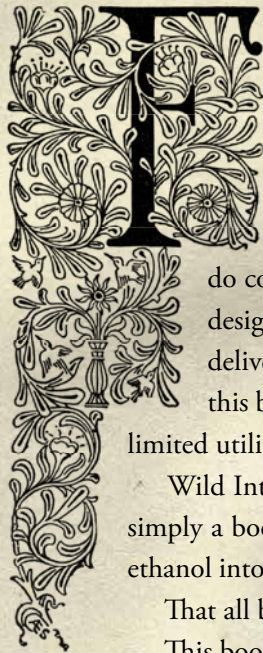
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AN IMPORTANT PREFACE TO THE READER.



FIRST and foremost, it should be stated for the record: This volume is not intended as a fire-fighting device. Its pages are not fire-retardant and should not be used to smother any sort of flames, whether electrical in nature or not. This book is also not rated for use as a hang-glider. Do not leap from a cliff holding this book above you. You will fall, and likely die.

This book should not be considered a life-saving manual. While its pages do contain, in some areas, descriptions of various physical techniques, these are not designed to open the airway of a choking person, and will be of little help if you are delivering a baby in the back of a speeding station wagon. You also cannot drink this book in a desert emergency. (It should be noted that the book's covers *may* be of limited utility as snowshoes, but this is an "off-label" use at best.)

Wild Internet rumors have generated unreal expectations. It must be reiterated: This is simply a book, made of paper and ink. It cannot rescue puppies from raging rivers, refine ethanol into motor fuel, or cure cancer. It is printed in China, so it may in fact *cause* cancer.

That all being said, there is one persistent rumor that is absolutely, 100% true.

This book *can* quell the aching loneliness deep within every one of us.

As you peruse this book, watch for the emblem to the right. Wherever you see it, simply hold that page up to the light, and read the secret message that appears in the center. You will feel a sense of calm wash over you at once.



A-HA! You've turned the page! Did you feel it? Was it invigorating?

You've taken an important step into the larger world of Wondermark. In the following pages you will discover as fine a collection of japes, drollery, questionable assertions and straight-faced poppycock as has ever been published. Should you already be familiar with Wondermark, you need no further introduction; you may skip the following paragraphs and proceed directly to the section headed "A KEY TO SUPPLEMENTARY FEATURES."

But what of *you*, gentle soul, still tentatively reading in a brightly-lit bookstore aisle? Your feet may be weary; to either side may be the garish covers of this year's current best-sellers, *If You Buy This Book I'll Claim You Can Be Rich* and *I Agree: People Unlike Us Are Bad*. What does *this* slim volume offer that you can't find in *those* famous titles?

One word: Paget's disease of the nipple. It's not an easy thing to promise, but you won't be disappointed. In fact, it's already too late—we've coated the pages with a rare, insoluble toxin.

But perhaps you're *not* in a bookstore? Perhaps it's Christmas morning, and you've torn open the wrapping to discover *this*, instead of what you *really* wanted. Don't cry; it's not all that bad, and besides it's unbecoming. You really are lovely, you know, and don't let anyone else tell you differently.

You're going to like this book. It's right up your alley.

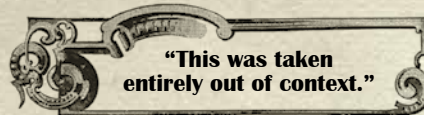
And if you *don't*? Well, plenty of other people *have*, so...maybe the problem isn't with the *book*. Just throwing that out there.

A KEY TO SUPPLEMENTARY FEATURES.

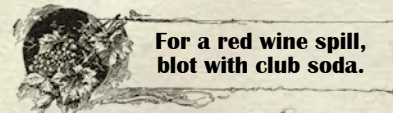
You will find the following symbols throughout the pages to come. Each spotlights some content that may be valuable to the reader. The "secret message" emblem, introduced on the previous page, will not be repeated here, because you might hold *this* page up to the light, and you'd just get some gibberish backwards-text from the previous page, which would frankly ruin the effect.



Designates an explanatory sidebar for those who may have trouble comprehending some item on the page.



Heralds an additional perspective on the item, either from an affected party or outside commentator.



Indicates a handy tip that may be useful in a variety of common situations.

FEAR YOU MAY BE
QUITE AS WRETCHED AS YOU
YOU ARE PROBABLY NOT

You are now prepared to read this book. Enjoy!

THE PUBLISHERS.

WONDERMARK BY DAVID MALKI!

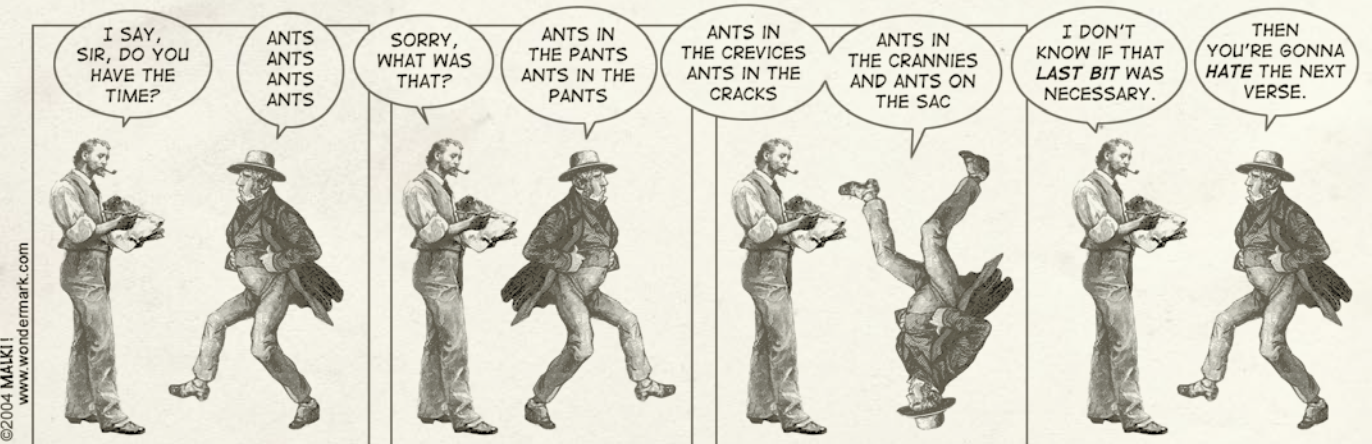
soap it up at WONDERMARK.COM



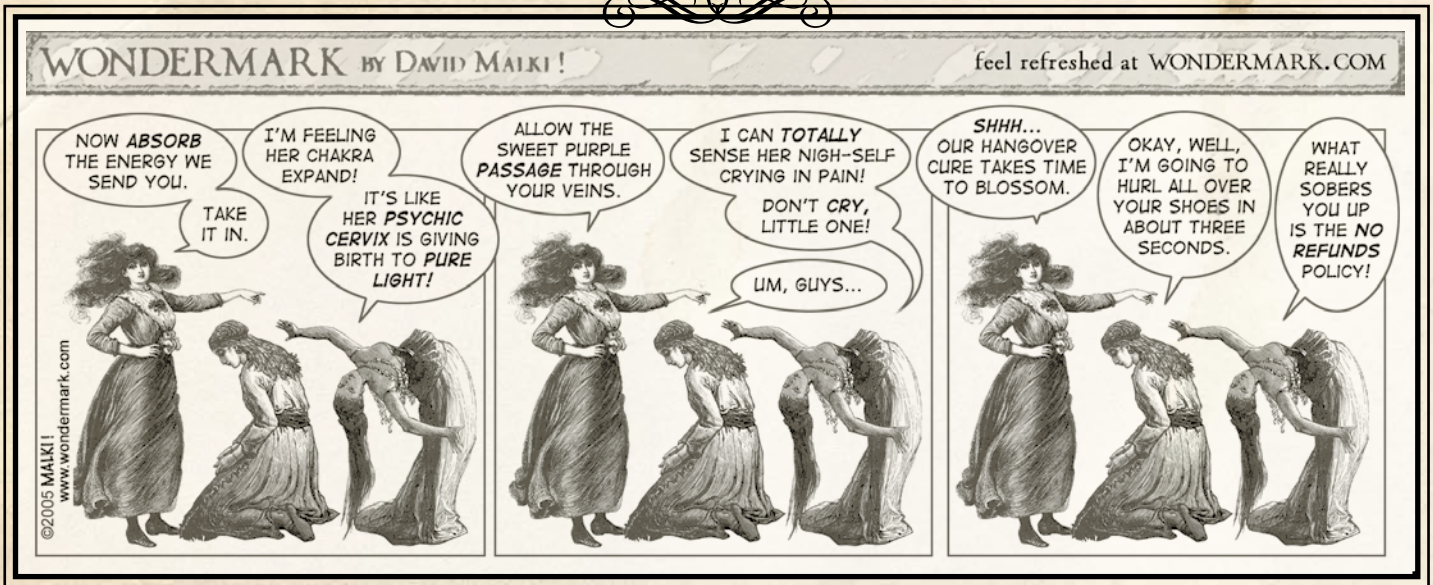
considering the pick-up line, i'm not really sure what kind of party he expected it to be

WONDERMARK BY DAVID MALKI!

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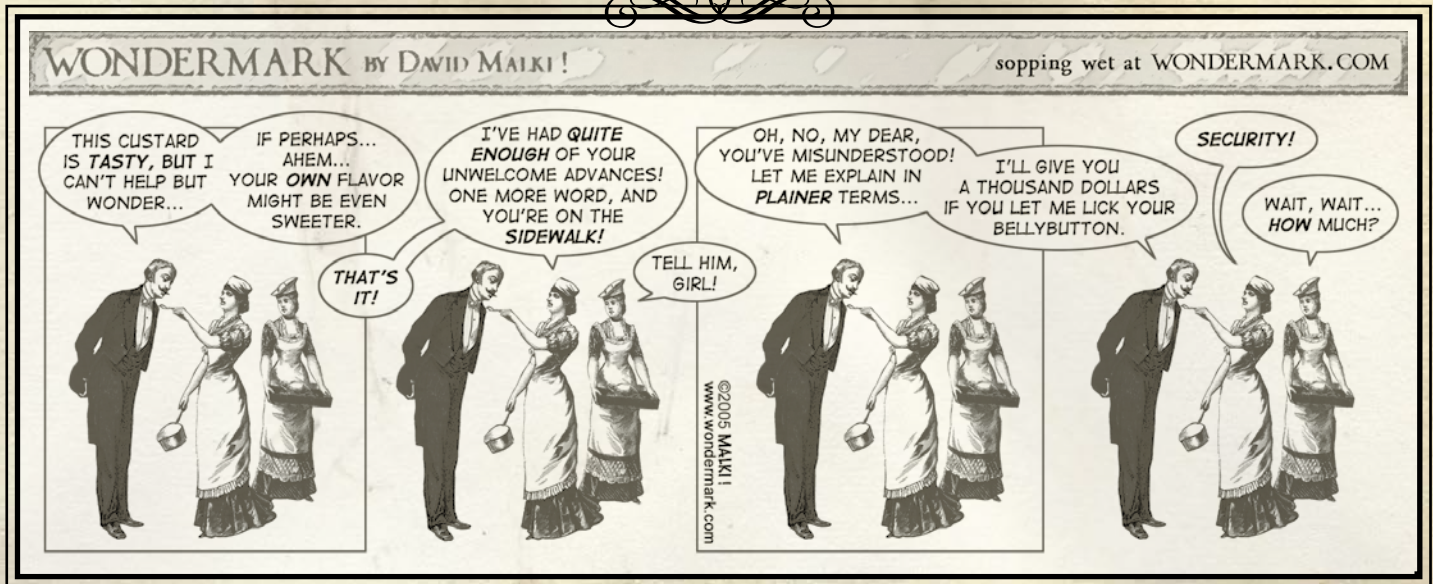
an infestation of insects is invariably interesting



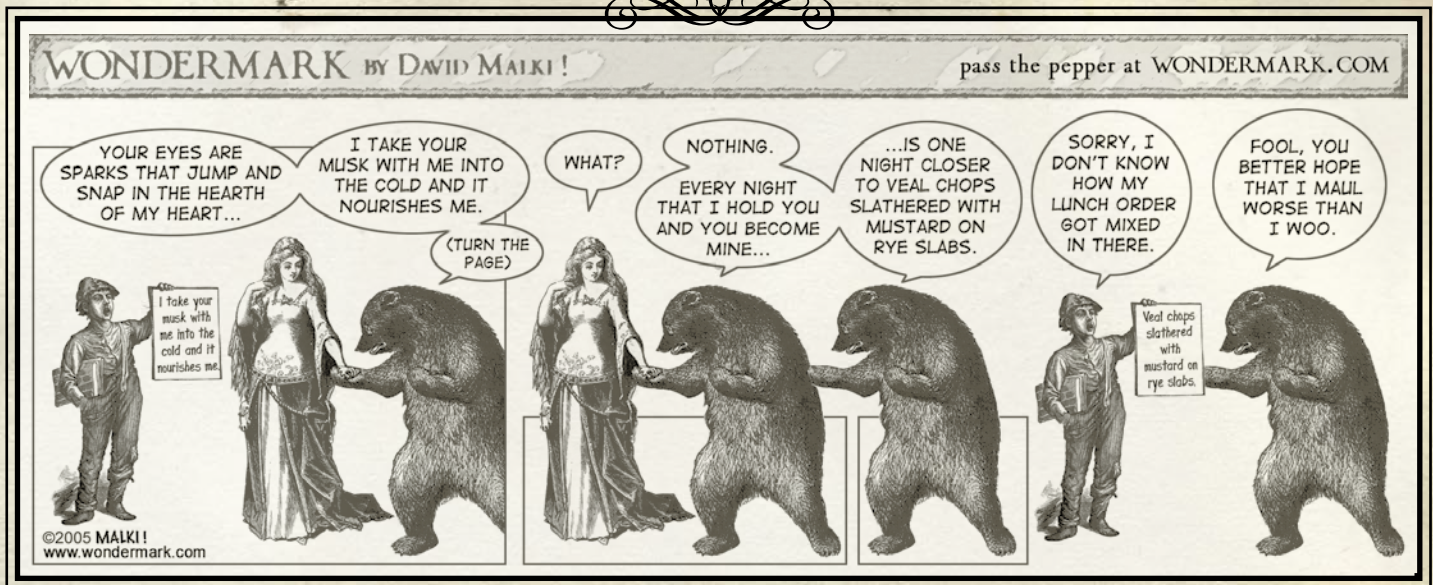
your psychic cervix is, uh, located in your esophagus!
THE VOMIT IS A KEY PART OF THE PROCESS



if you say 'what's in the barrel, 100 gallons of cocktail sauce?' i will cut you



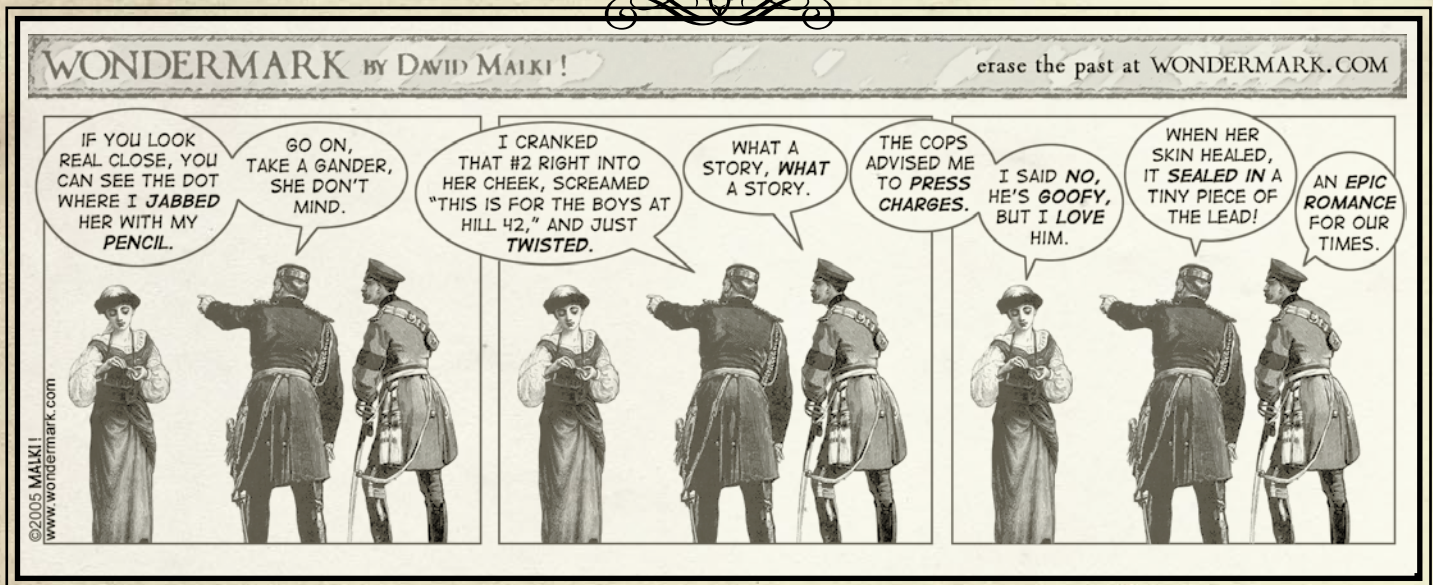
always hear the offer out, after all it is textbook-buying season



i hope it's not racist to say that grizzlies are ALWAYS this temperamental

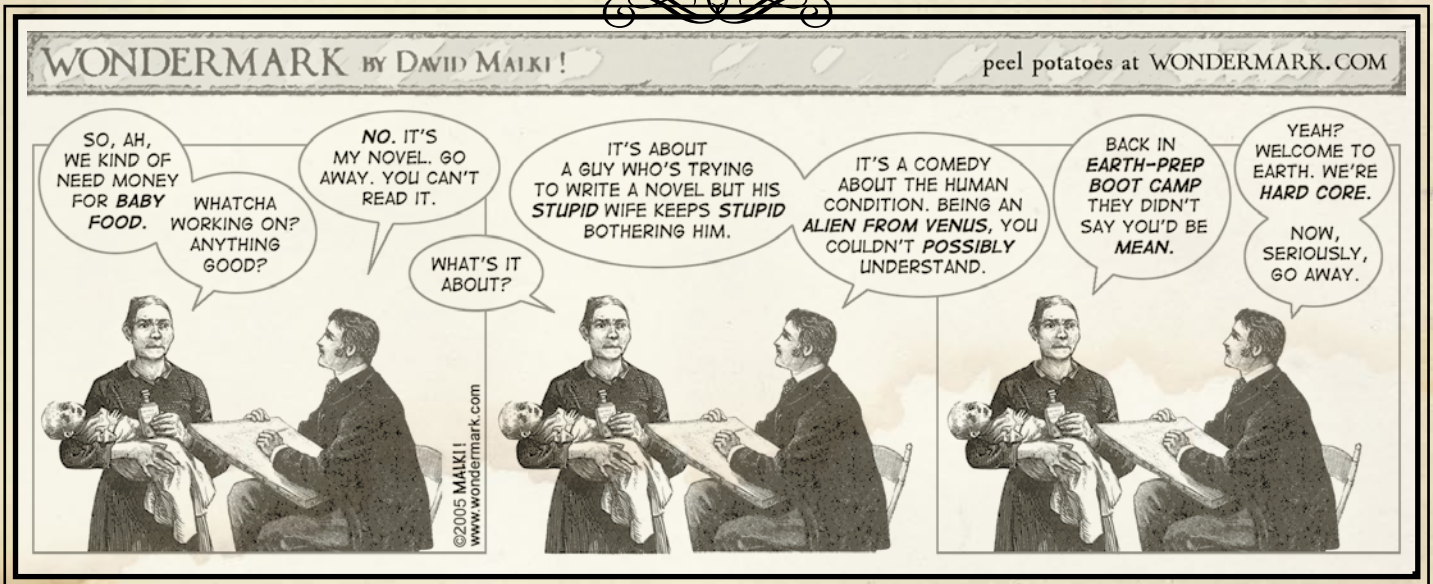


DEEEEMAAAAAAND IIIIIITTT



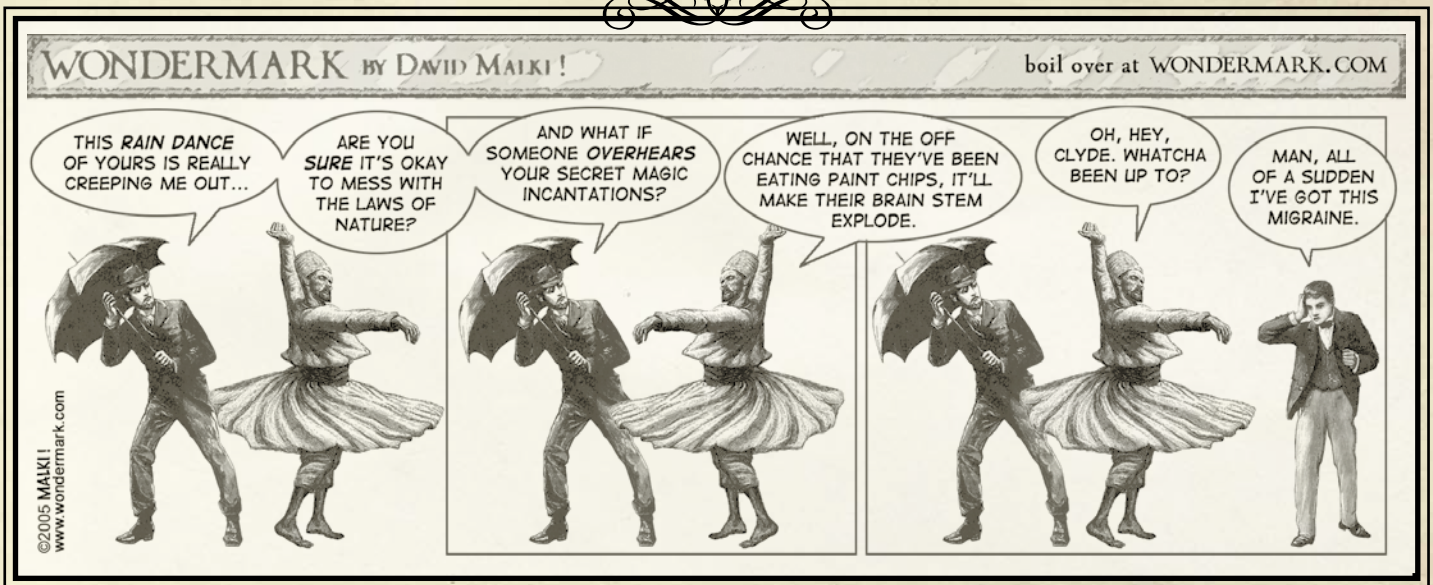
thus, the boys at hill 42 can rest, avenged.



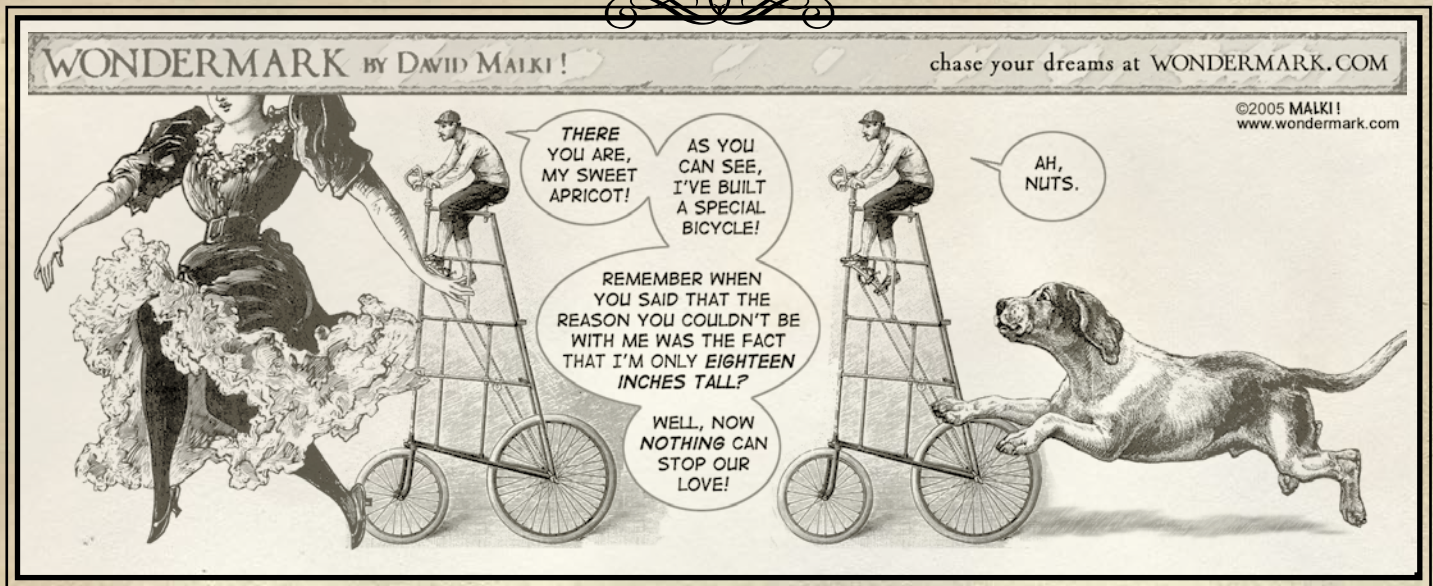


the days back in earth-prep boot camp were actually shockingly softcore

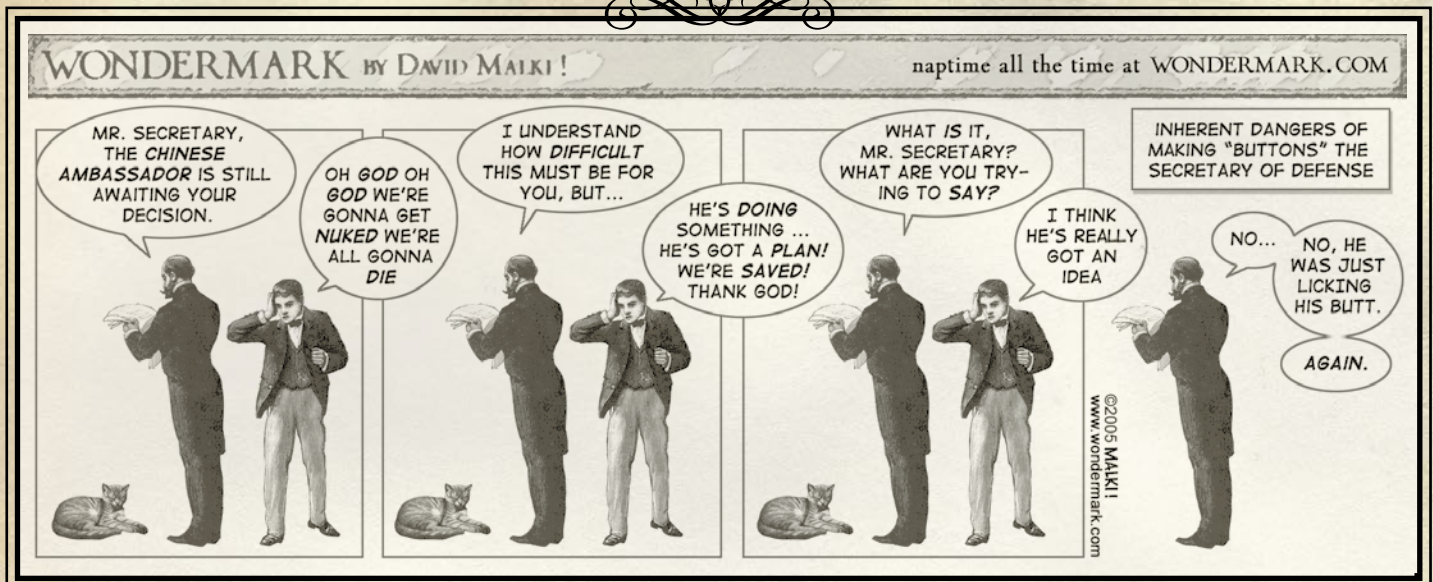
IN WHICH A PASTIME IS EXPOSED



CLYDE IT WAS A TRAP ALL ALONG



oh no! a dog! i'm horribly allergic!



the critical flaw of the appointment system





man, nimble



**“A performance drawn
as finely as any, ever.”**

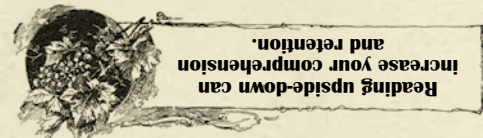
AS AN ACTOR, Norbert the Elephant is invested with all the charms and characterized by all the defects which belong to enthusiastic genius. Before taking to the stage, Mr. the Elephant began life as a shop-boy; tried the sea, and was discouraged by a storm and shipwreck; obtained in Amsterdam a position as small clerk at an annual salary of 800 francs (equal to \$160), half of which he spent upon his studies; and adopted, if he did not invent, a new method of learning languages. His remarkable performance in this comic-strip is without par in any venue; this should not be surprising, for the strip itself is a wrought work of dramatics unsurpassed in the modern era.

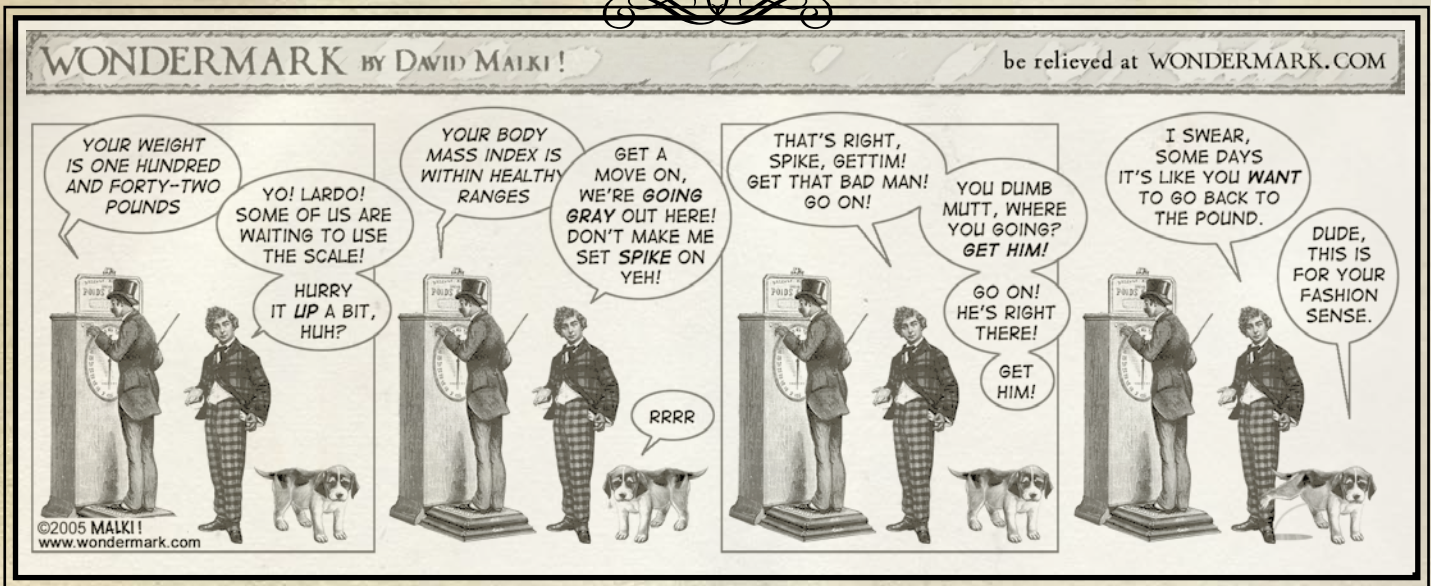
We recall in literature no parallel to this skillful employment of the tensions of adolescence to awaken the alternate pity and wrath of the reader or the audience. As a picture of the times, this strip is as accurate and painstaking

as a history. As a study of character it is more just, and therefore more true, than the works of any of the masters now known. ABIGAIL, the central character, is admirably delineated by the fine actress Rebecca McAvoy; CALLOWAY, as portrayed by Mr. the Elephant, though occupying a subordinate position, is no less admirably conceived.

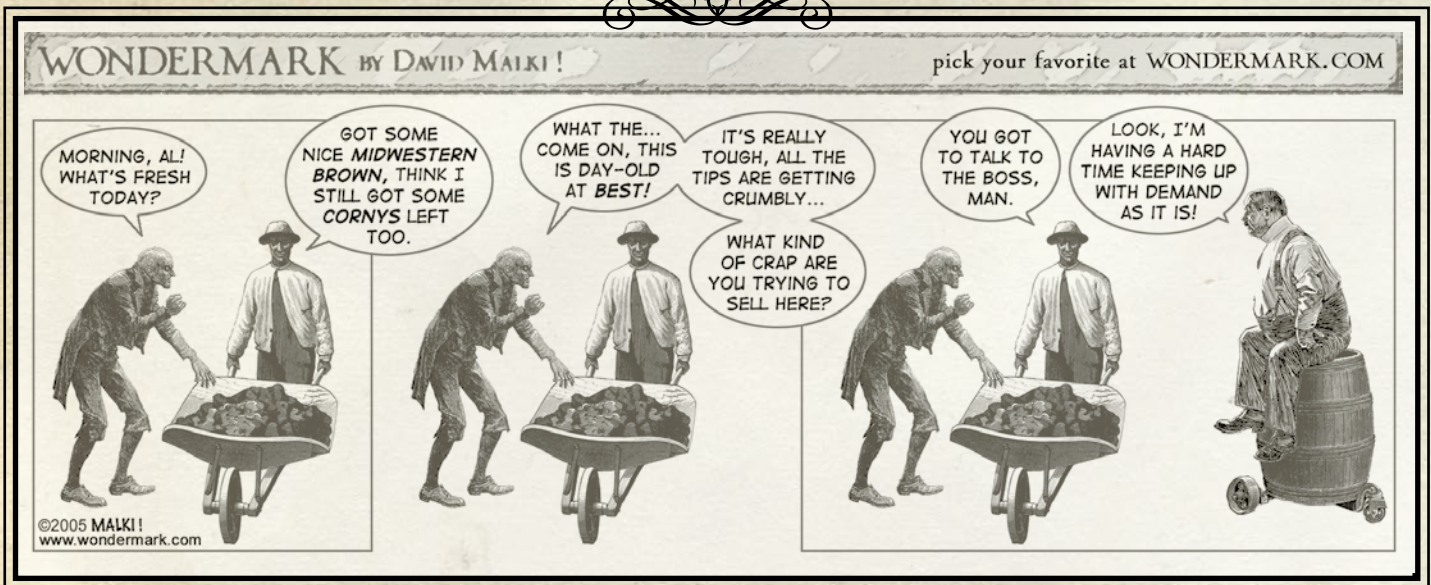
We should not dare to prophesy what measure of success may be expected to attend the production of this drama; but we should not expect the largest success for a work of art so high and pure. There is nothing sensational; the fire and blood are all behind the scenes. There is little of mere sentiment, though much of deep and earnest passion.

Yet the author has added a new laurel to his crown by this strip, for he has demonstrated that the twenty-first century is not too materialistic nor too sensational to produce a true drama of the heart.





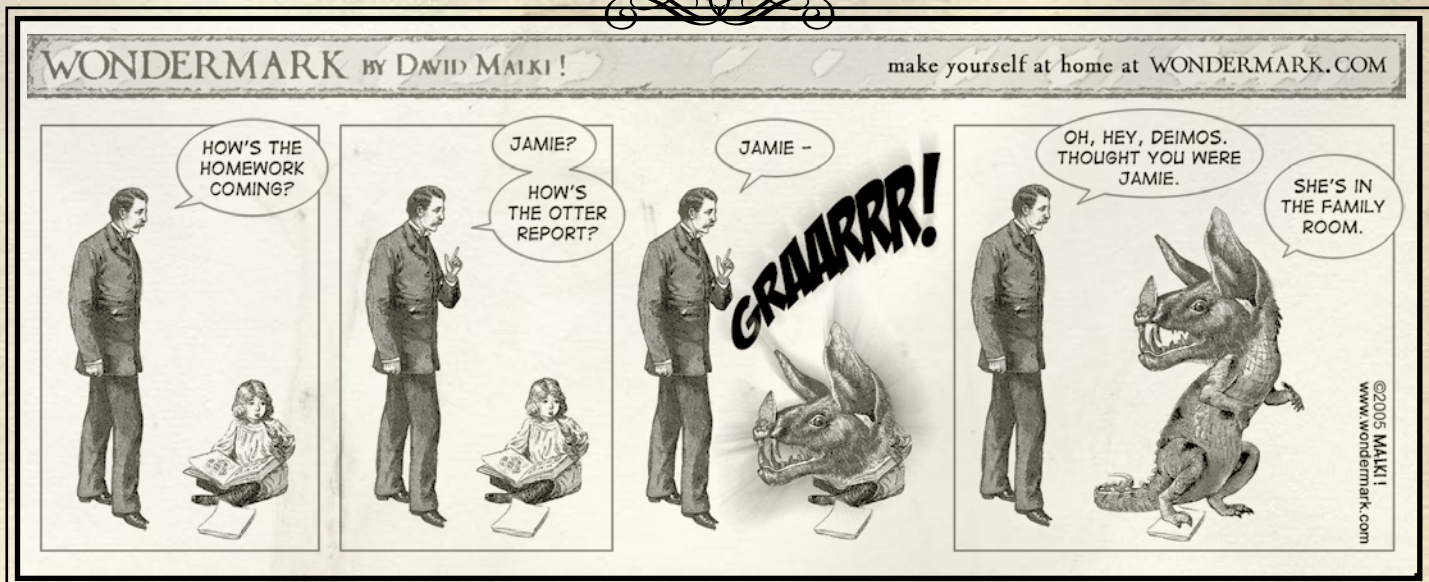
back at the pound they had a lot of People and US Weekly sitting around



the inevitable failure of poop-side economics

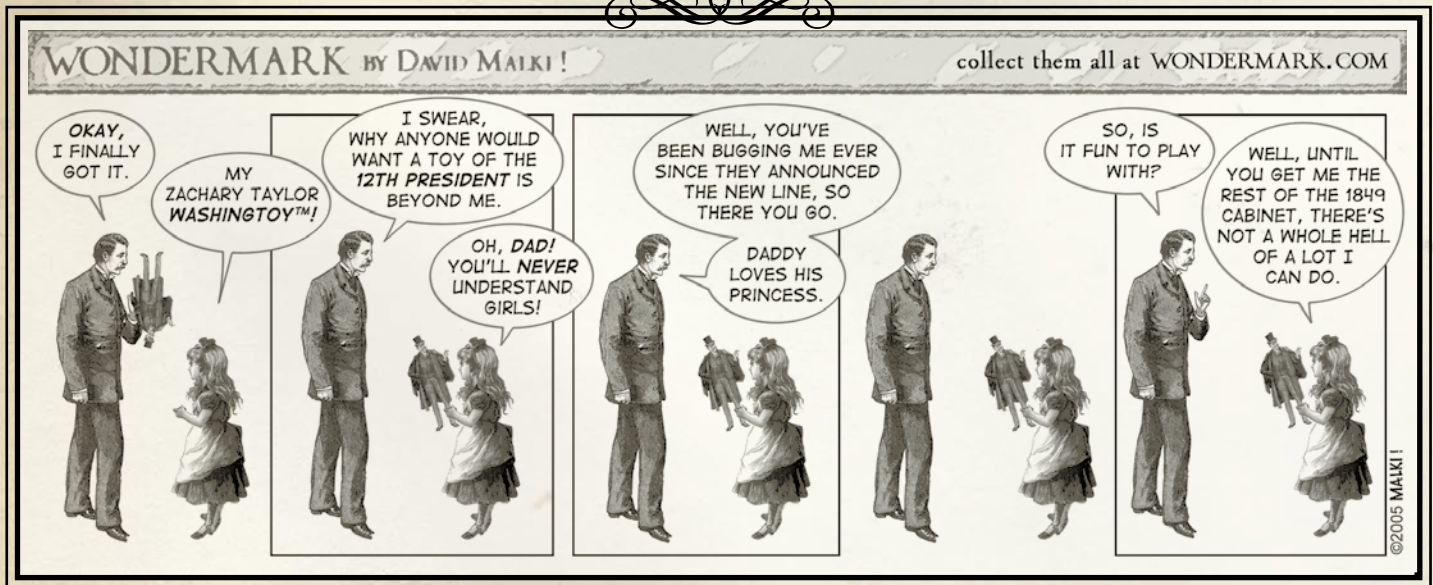


this may not be much consolation, but if it helps, just know that julio is certified in nearly TWICE as many different types of massages as you

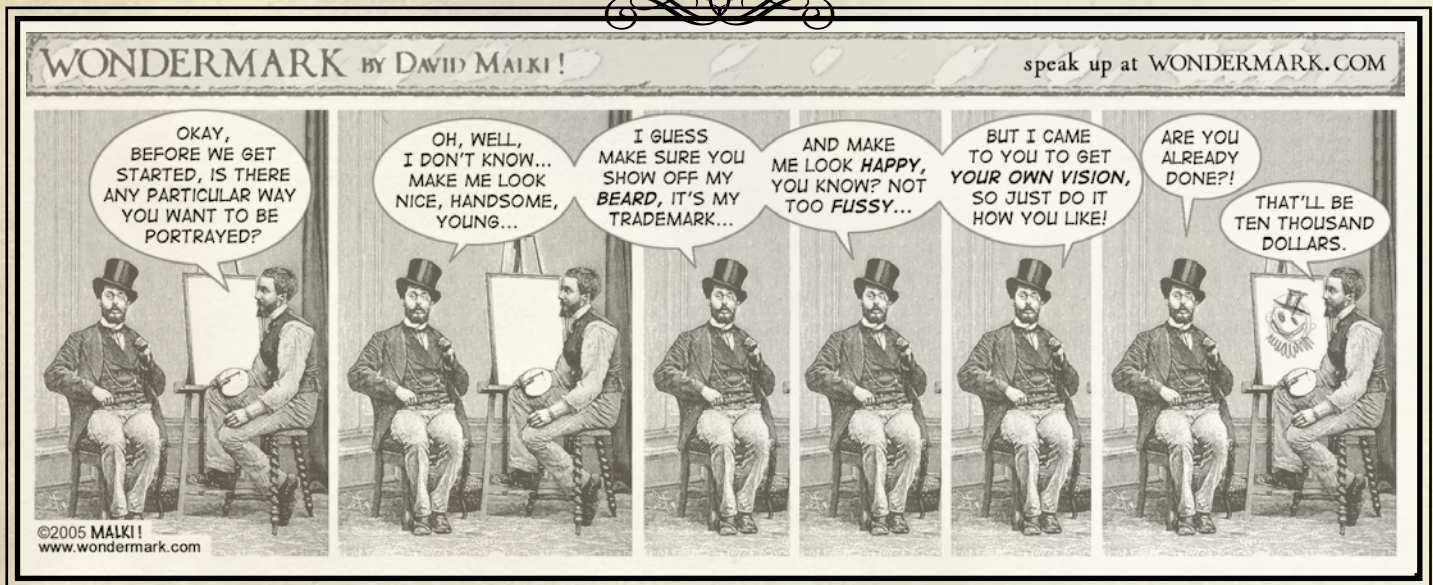


sometimes a second skin is just so much more comfy

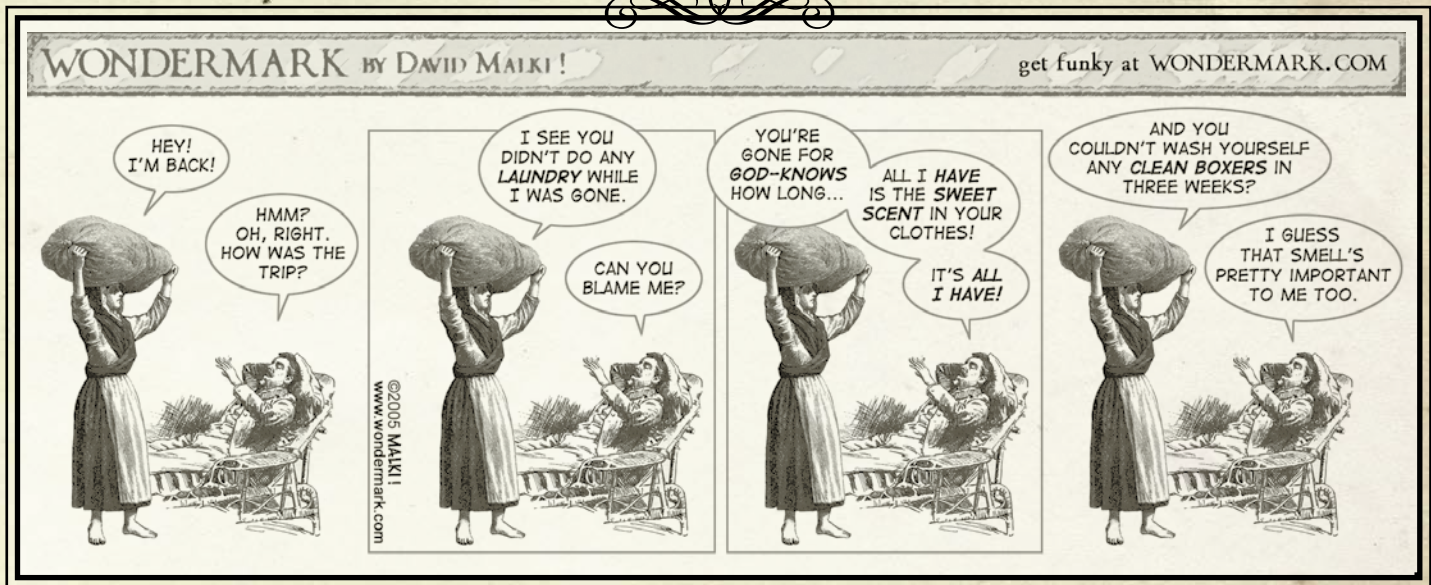




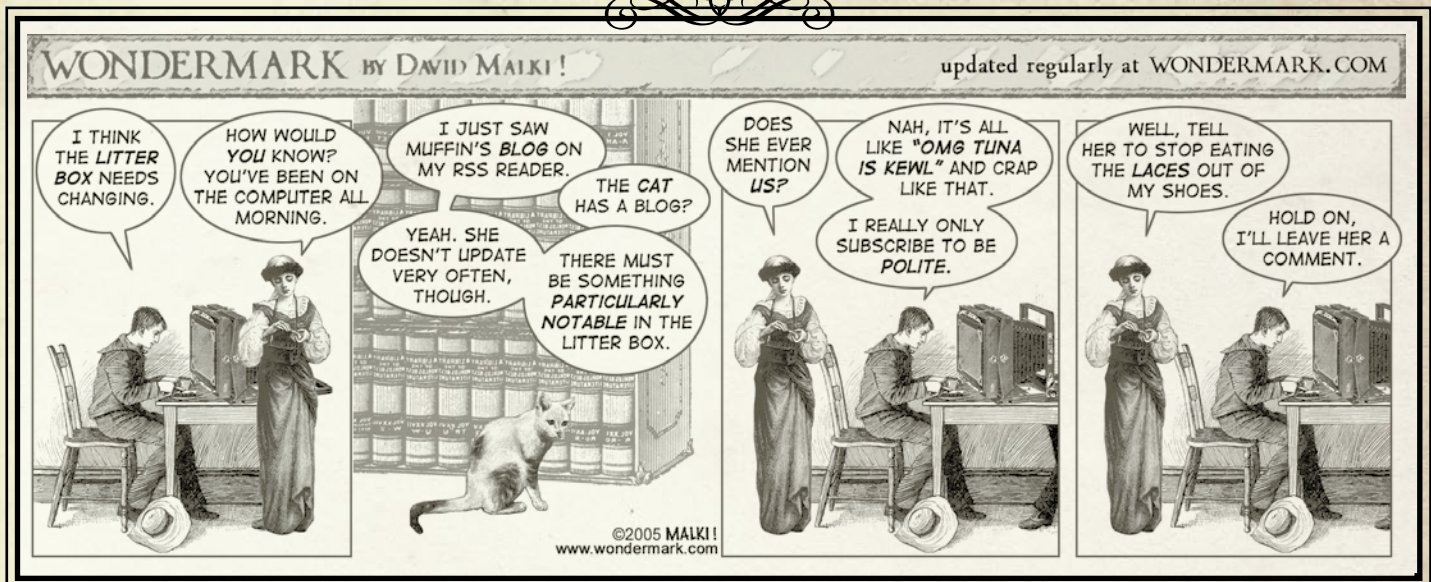
officially licensed u.s. government merchandise is the best way to combat the national deficit



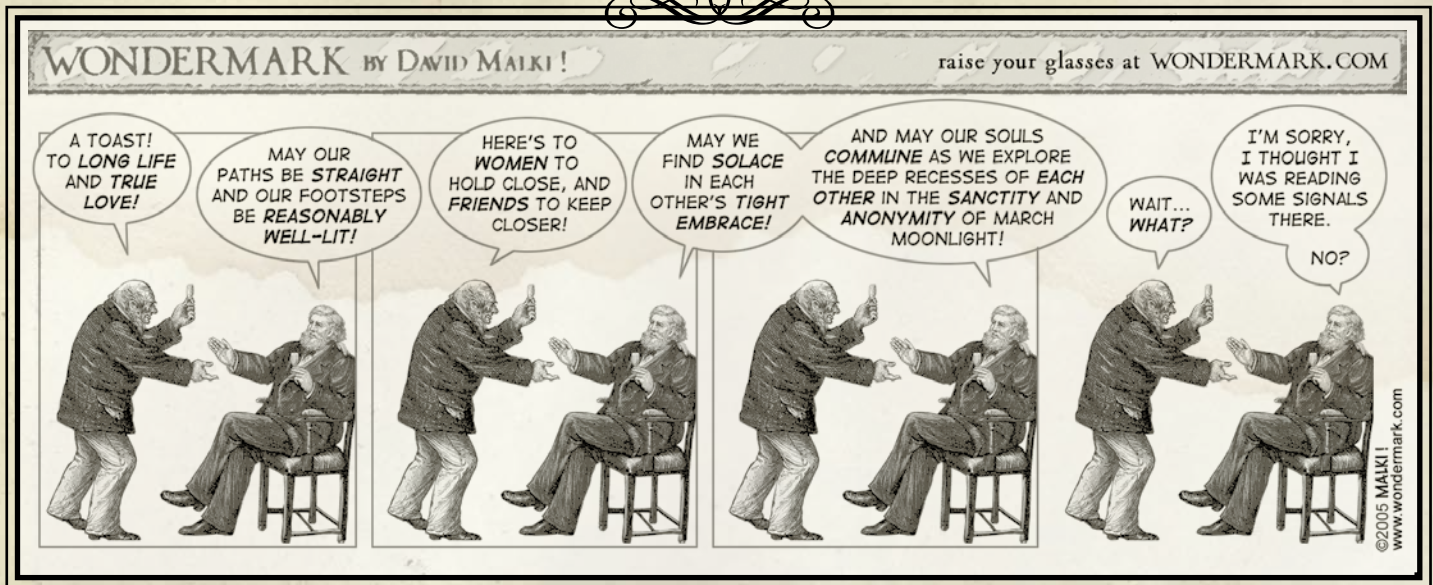
the dangers of leaving it to discretion



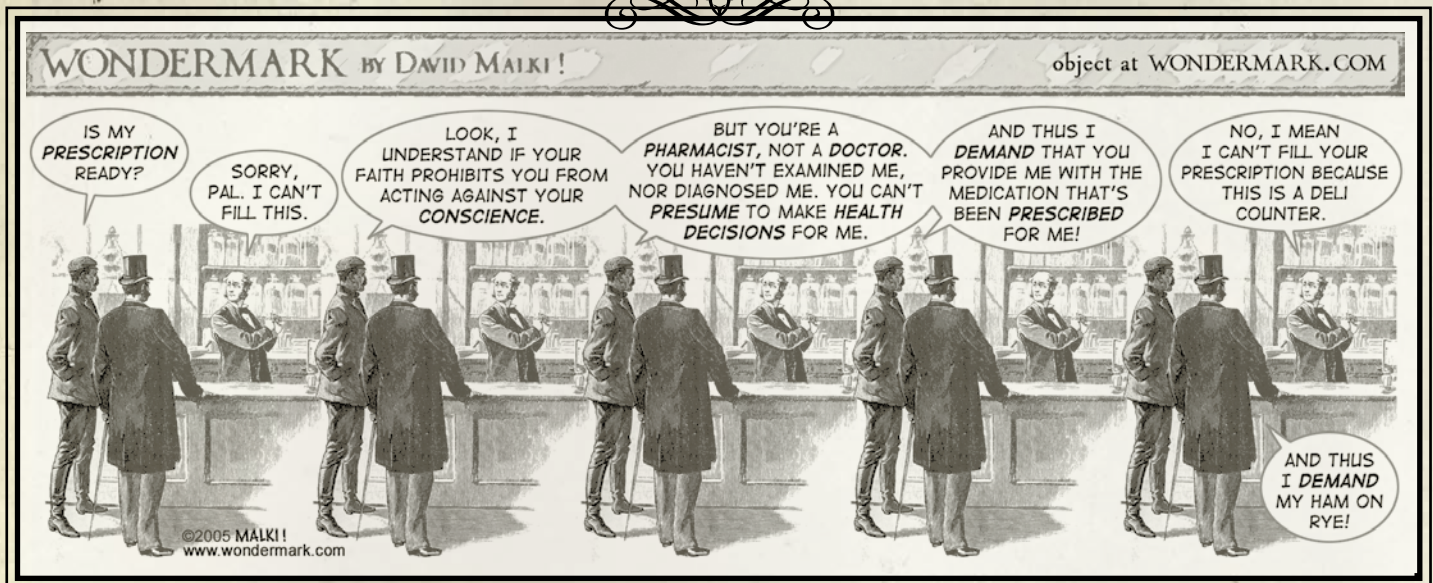
true story comics



it's not even wordpress or blogger, it's, like, xanga

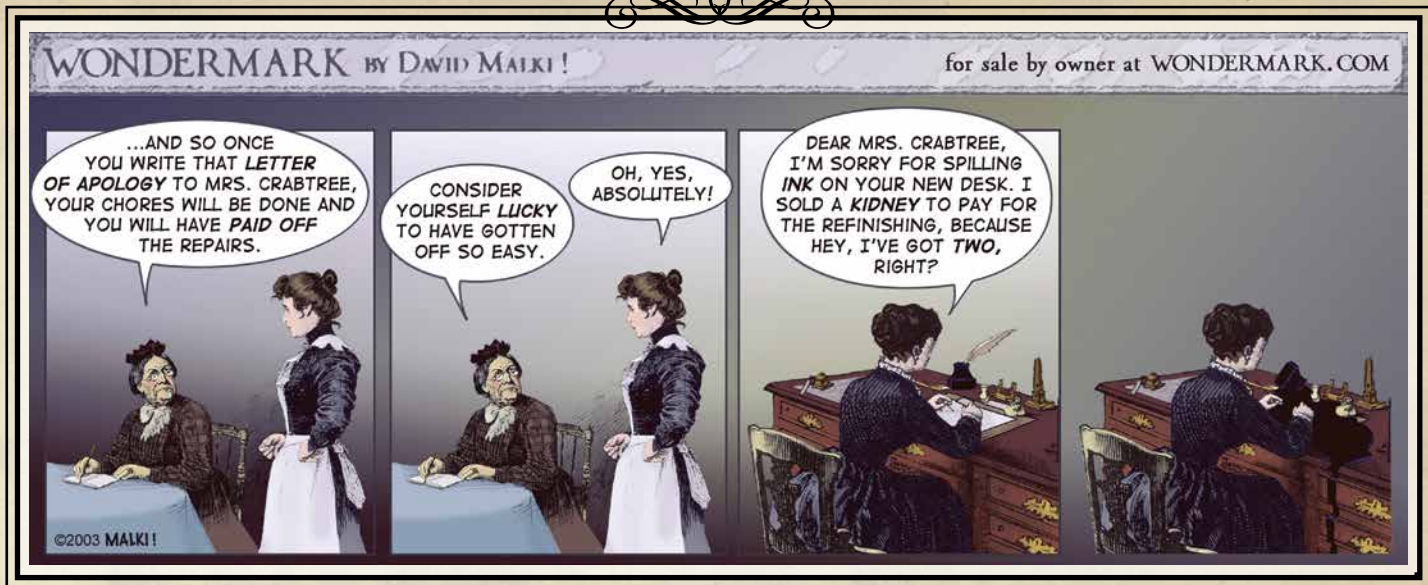


90% of communication is body language. the rest is just hopeful guesses



PRESCRIPTION STRENGTH ham on rye





it was...a...a squid! I HATE SQUIDS SO MUCH DON'T YOU AGREE

READER MAIL.

SIR: I am writing to express my shock and dismay at the latest episode of your comic strip. Human organ trafficking is no laughing matter. Upwards of twenty billion human organs are illegally sold every day in the United States. Often these organs are taken from immigrants or others who are coerced, and who may fear reporting the crime to authorities. I hope that future episodes of your comic will speak out against this barbaric practice.

MRS. E. EMMETT POLK, FAIRFAX, VA.

SIR: As a professional furniture-refinisher, and the owner of my own refinishing shop for the last thirty-one years, I felt I had to comment on the recent "Wondermark." Furniture refinishing has come a long way in the last decade alone, and the idea that a full refinish costs as much as one might earn from the sale of a kidney is an outdated one. Modern refinishing techniques may not be cheap, but they no longer cost "an arm and a leg."

MR. S. P. CRANFORTH, TACOMA, WA.

SIR: I used to work in a large ink-foundry, and we often experienced similar mishaps. It became such a problem industry-wide that inkers successfully lobbied Congress to pass legislation requiring that all commercially-produced ink-binders to inhibit adhesion to desks, tables, etc. Nowadays, ink spilled on a desk will wipe away in an instant. I realize that your comic is not meant to be a bastion of accuracy (and it's also possible that the girl is using home-mixed or gray-market ink that does not follow the Congressional guidelines), but I thought you might like to know that the situation described is not one that could happen today.

DR. PAUL LEE, GUAM.

SIR: I am disgusted that you would characterize individuals with the surname "Crabtree" as vindictive and surly. I am not named Crabtree myself, but I am sure that those who are saddled with that awful name would take great offense.

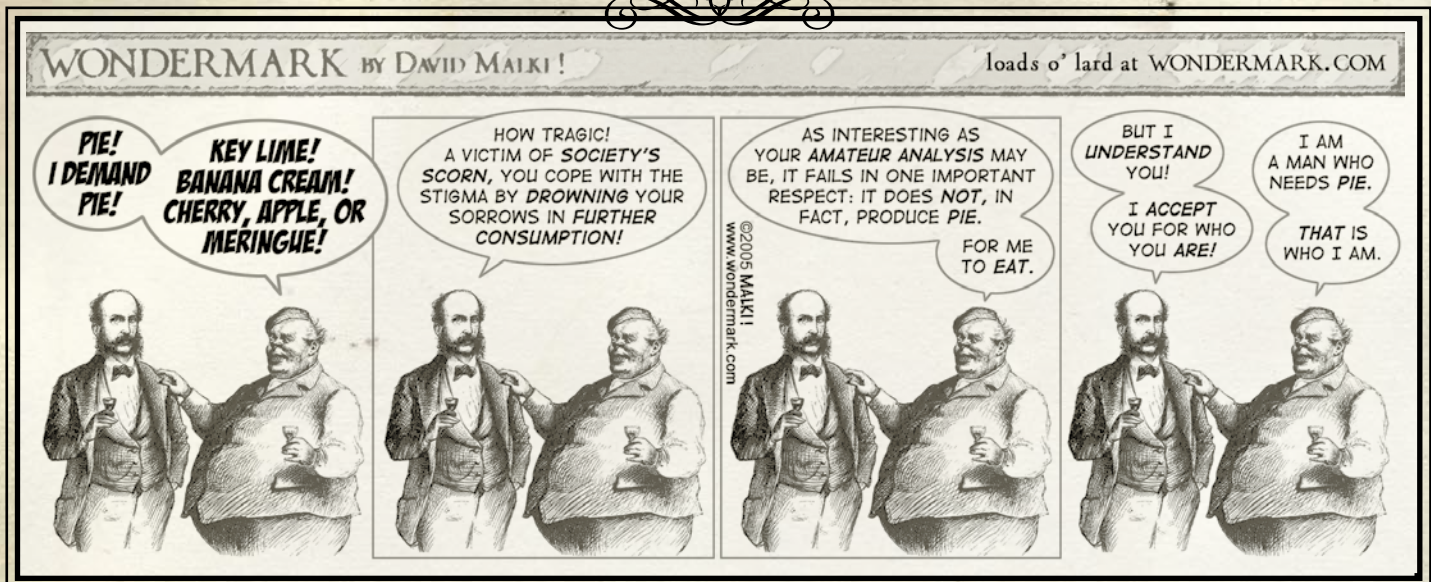
MS. N. POOPQUICKLY, MADISON, WI.

SIR: Where can I buy a cheap used cornea? I have cash.

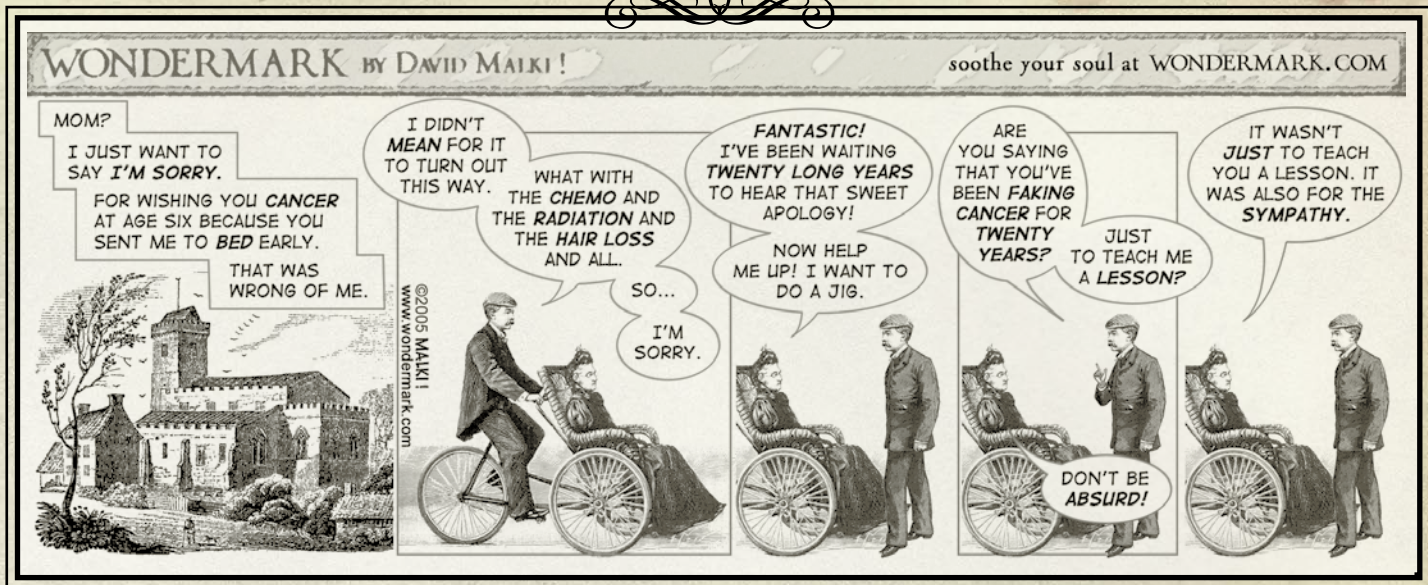
W. CRABTREE, ADDRESS WITHHELD.



the power went out in L.A. today in the middle of the workday, and it made everyone so cheerful

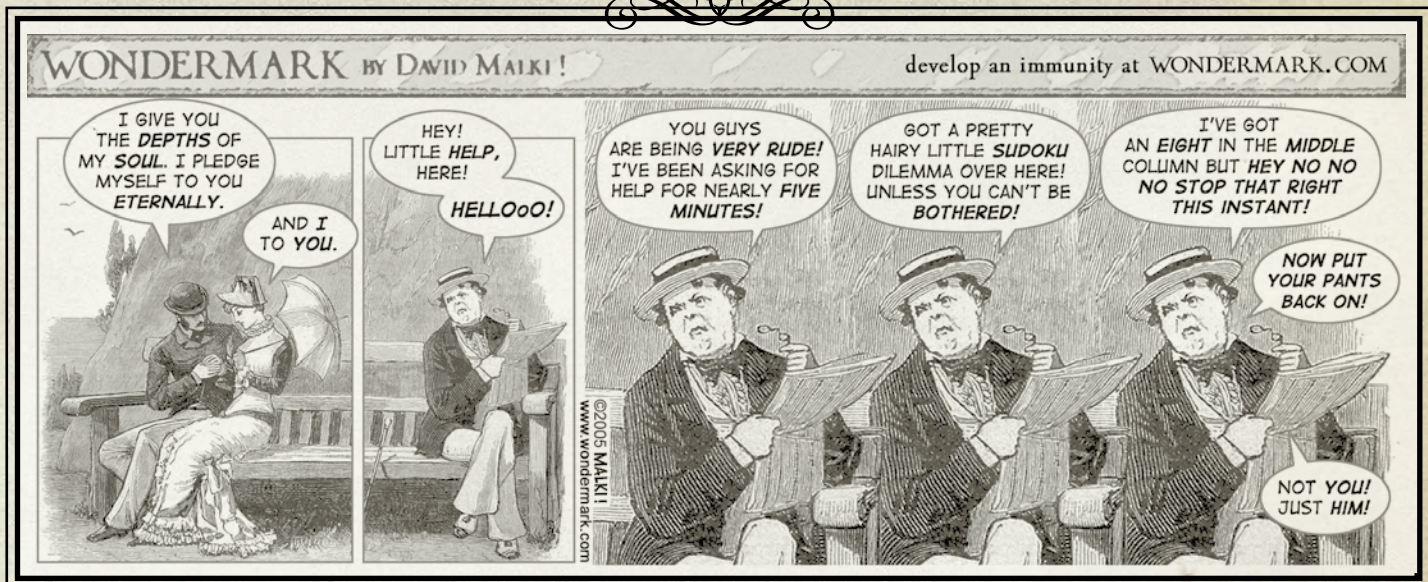


in sophist argument, i demand pie = automatic win

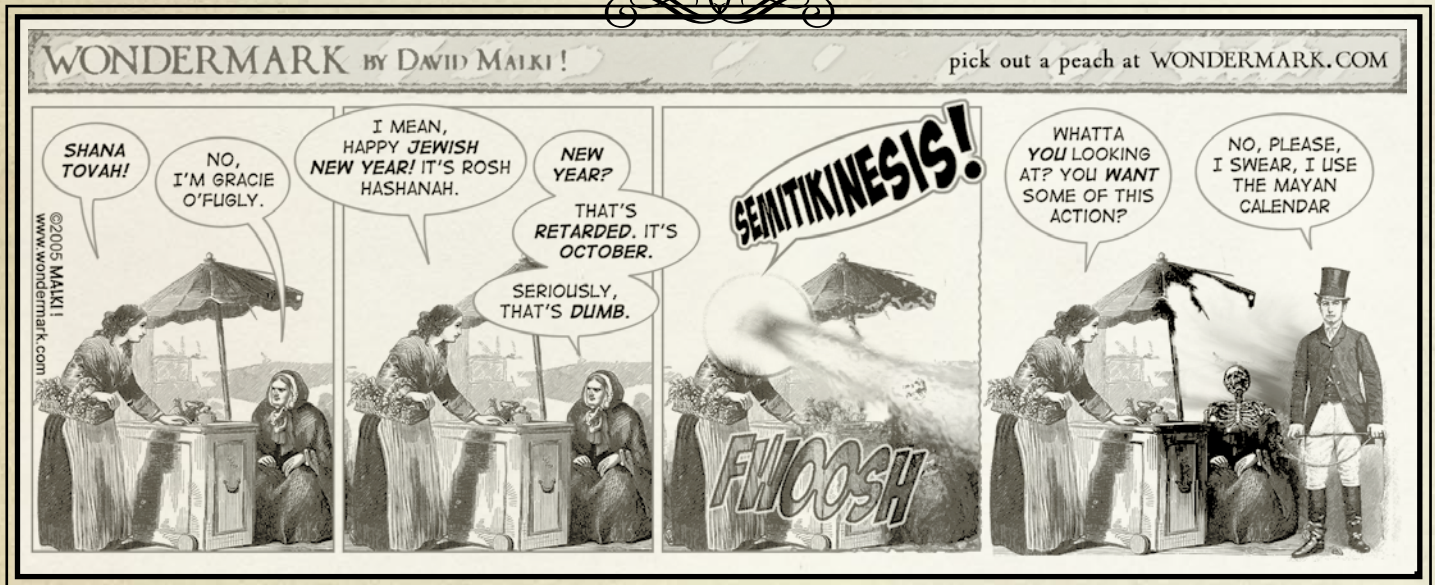


not everything is about you, charles.

IN WHICH SUDOKU IS PREFERRED TO SEX



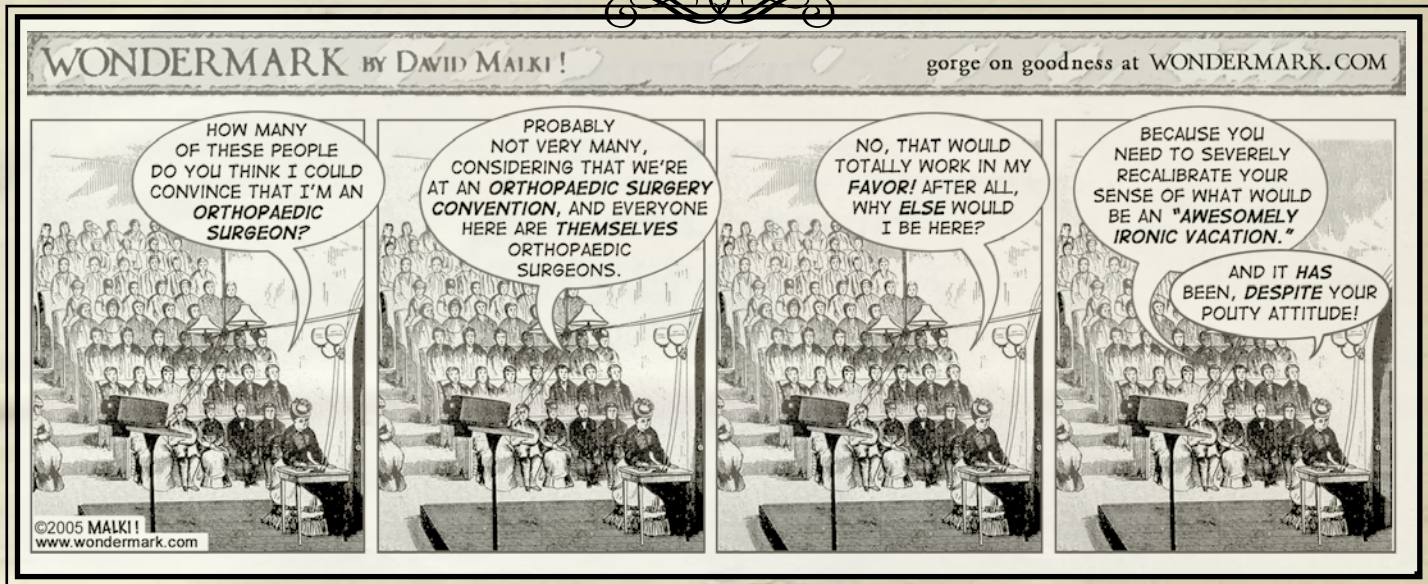
back in 2005, when this strip was first written, the big question was: is sudoku mainstream enough yet that it's hip to hate it?



you can totally learn how to do this. it's in deuteronomy.

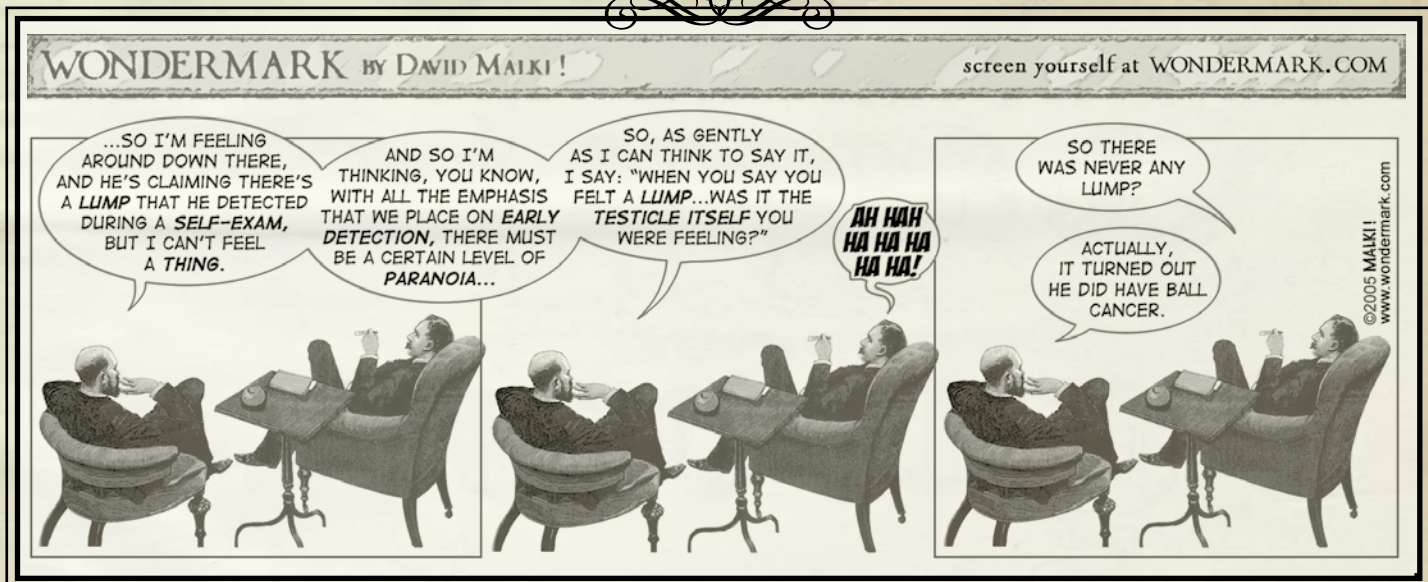


actually he is just a guy in a halloween costume

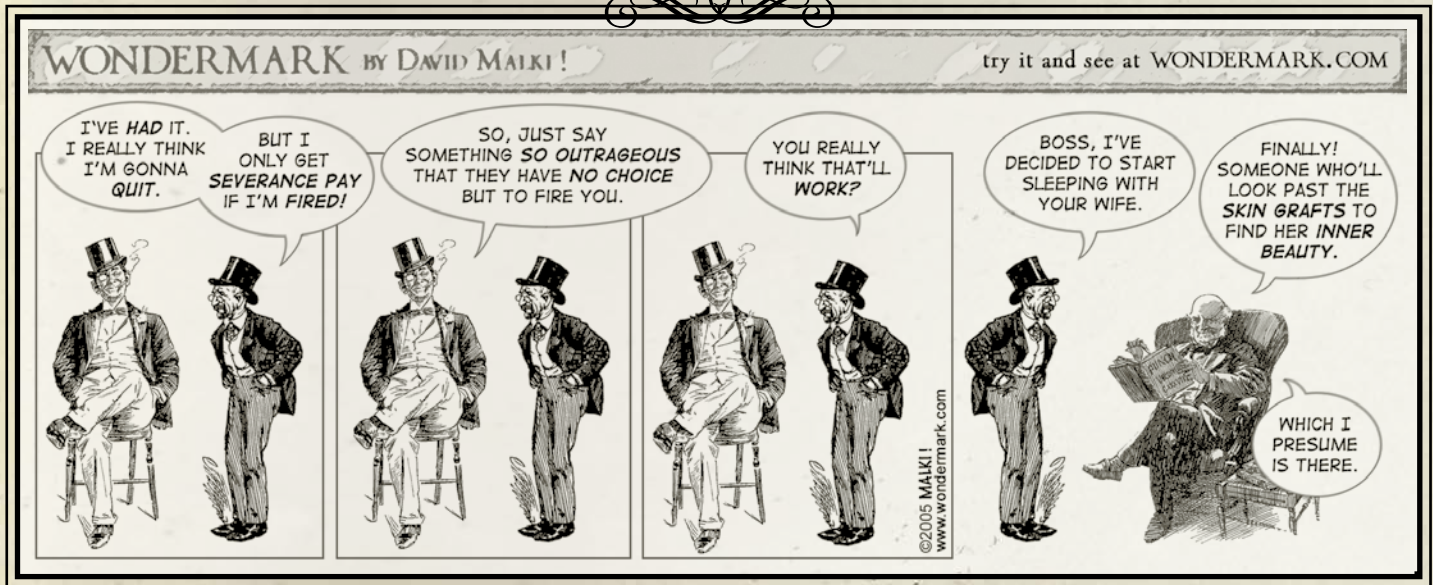


he was all giddy while paying the registration fee

IN WHICH A UROLOGIST GUFFAWS



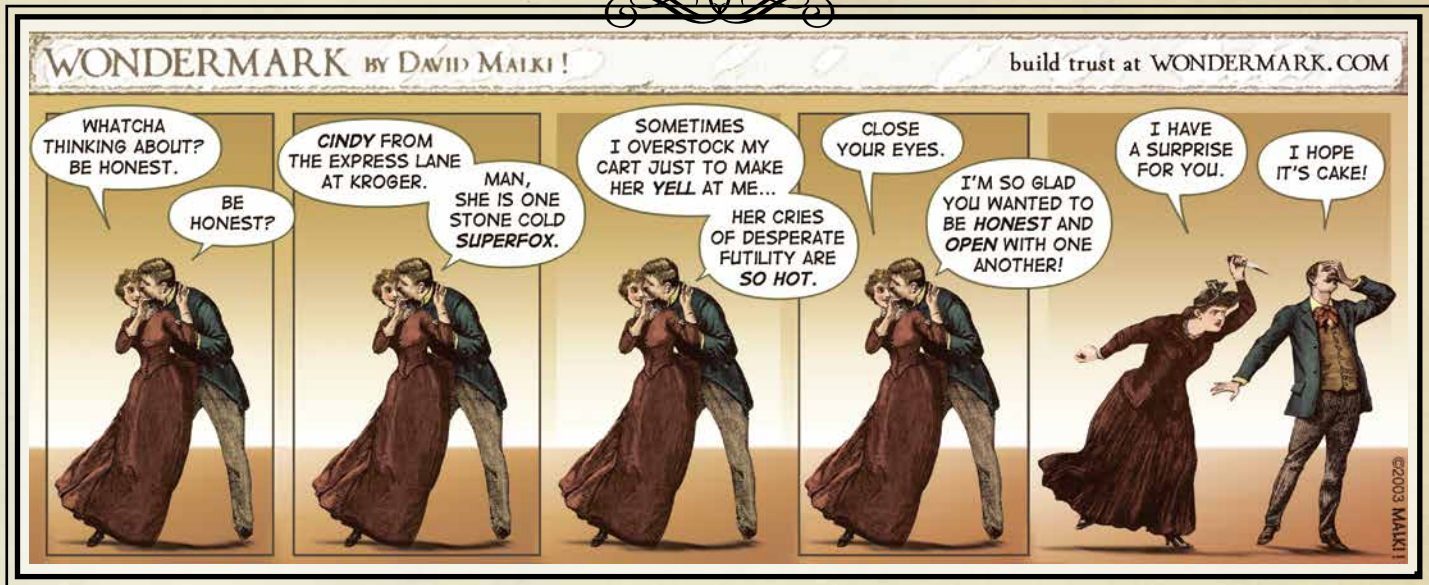
sadly, another comic based on a true story



historically this has been less than effective



and he seemed so competent in the interview!



the backbone of marriage is about to get a shiv shoved through it



“He makes it really hard to do my job.”

YEAH, I know that guy. He comes in at least twice a week, and he always buys the dumbest stuff—like twelve individual soda cans, instead of a single 12-pack that I can scan as one item. I try to tell him that twelve items disqualifies him for the express checkout, but he just smirks and says something moronic, like “Explain how.”

I swear, I am *not* paid enough to deal with jerks like him. As if the clueless masses aren’t bad enough—the old ladies who didn’t realize that their coupons expired six months ago; the moms who let their screaming kids decimate the candy shelves; the guys buying beer at eight in the morning who “forgot” their ID at home—on top of it I deal with guys like *him*, who’re creepy on purpose.

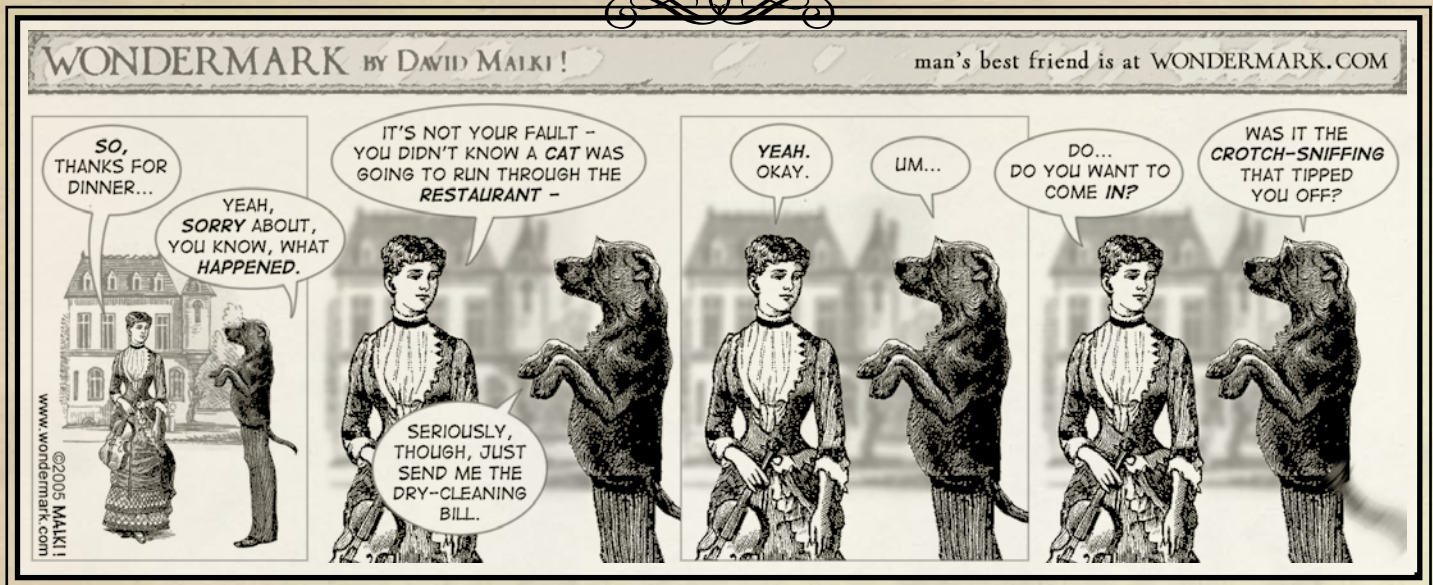
I mean, does he think that I’m going to go out with him? Does he really believe that my smile and friendly “hello” are anything but store policy-mandated? All I want

to do is scan your crap and get you out of my lane. Anything I do beyond that is purely grease to move you along faster.

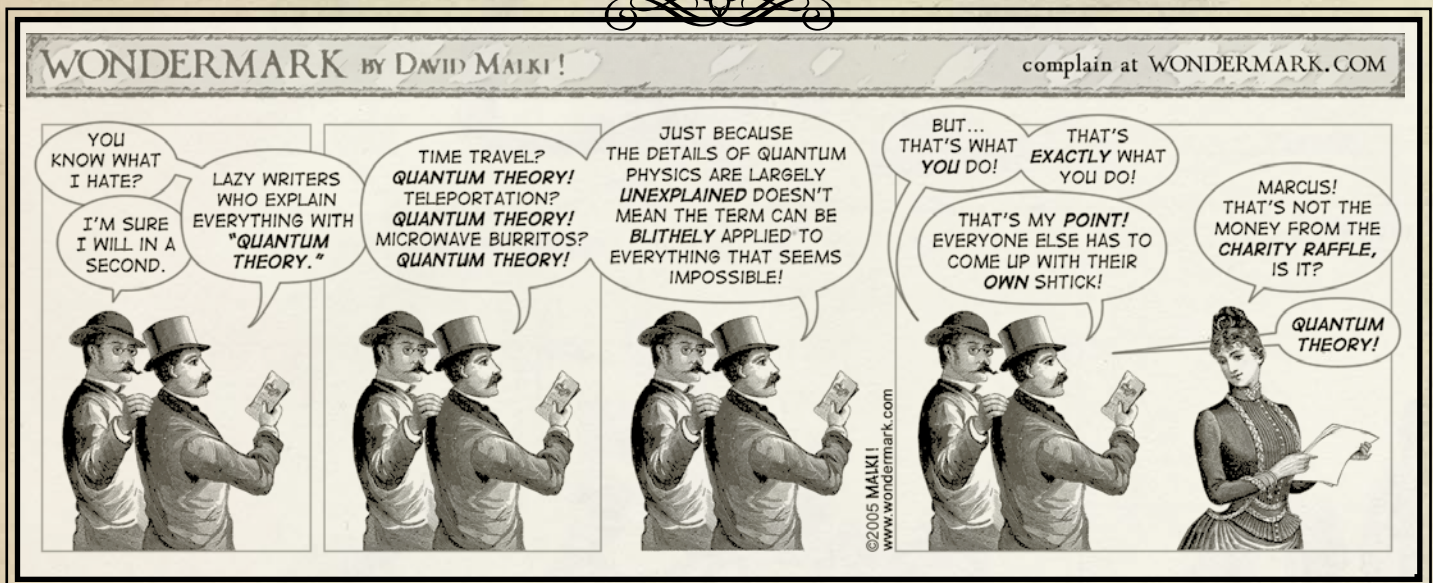
It never fails, though—someone’ll claim that the price was different back on the shelf, or that *this* is damaged and I should discount it, or *that* was supposed to be on clearance. I’ll have to call the manager over. Bethany *always* caves to their shrill demands, which leaves me standing there looking like an idiot for refusing. Honestly, sometimes all I want to do is just go into the bathroom and cry. The one thing I do *not* need is *his* voice intruding into my private thoughts, all smooth and trying to be sympathetic, saying “That moron doesn’t deserve you” and “You are *so* cute when you’re mad” and “Oh, don’t these all count as one item?”

Man, it’s *never* cake.





you don't happen to have any tables in there, do you...
because table legs also tend to, ah, set me off

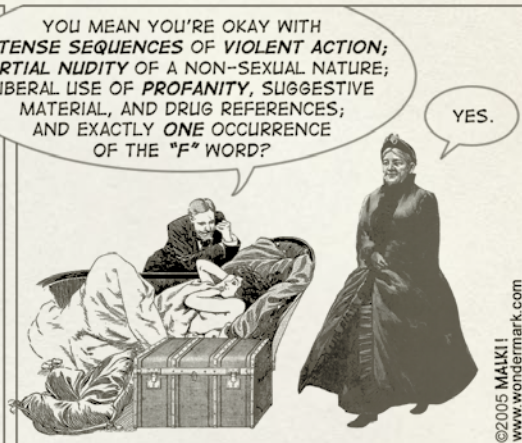


someone's been reading michael crichton's 'timeline'



WONDERMARK BY DAVID MALKI!

suggestive material at WONDERMARK.COM



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and in fact I will be satisfied with nothing less

IN WHICH SCISSORS INDIRECTLY CAUSE STRIFE

WONDERMARK BY DAVID MALKI!

exceed expectations at WONDERMARK.COM



©2005 MALKI
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plus the globe will be handy

WONDERMARK BY DAVID MALKI! watch closely at WONDERMARK.COM

OH, I ALMOST FORGOT TO TELL YOU!

FOR OUR HONEYMOON? I INVITED BOB ALONG.

YOU... YOU WHAT.

COME ON, I THOUGHT YOU WERE GONNA BE CHILL!

HE CREEPS ME OUT!

HE'LL BE COOL! I PROMISE.

©2005 MALKI!

z

WONDERMARK BY COLLEEN AF VENABLE BOB ONLY LIKES TO WATCH at WONDERMARK.COM

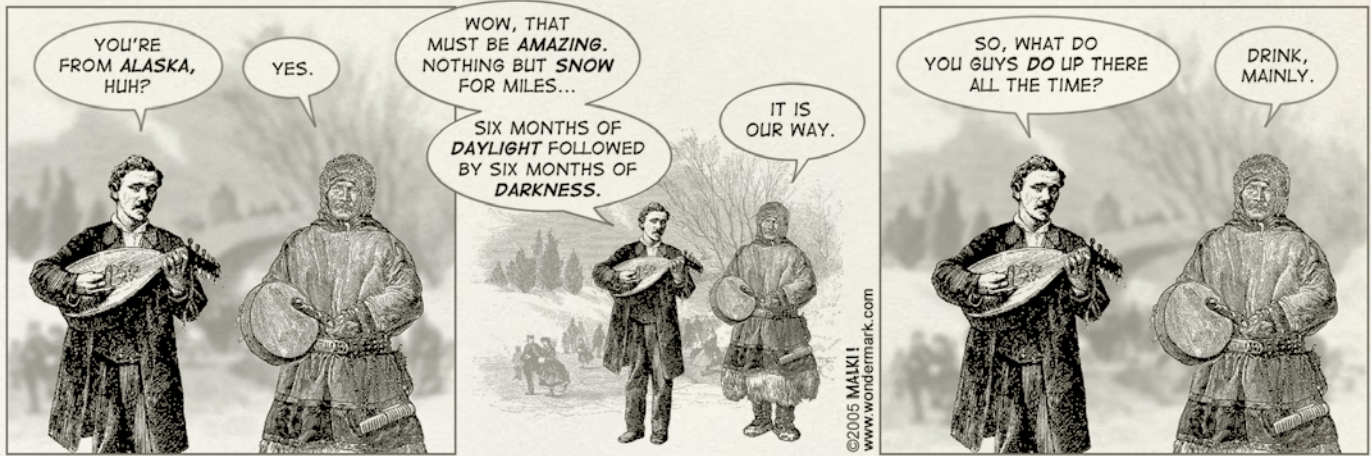
...AND THE TUMOR WAS THIS BIG! MY PATIENT LITERALLY ONLY HAD SECONDS TO LIVE. SO, LIKE ANY GOOD DOCTOR WOULD, I POINTED TO THE SKY AND YELLED "HEY, TUMOR, LOOK AT THAT!" AND THEN WRESTLED THAT DAMN NEOPLASM TO THE GROUND! AND... AND...

CHRIST, BOB! ARE YOU LISTENING AT ALL?

stiiiiiiiilll dooooooing iiiiiiit

WONDERMARK BY DAVID MALKI!

chill at WONDERMARK.COM

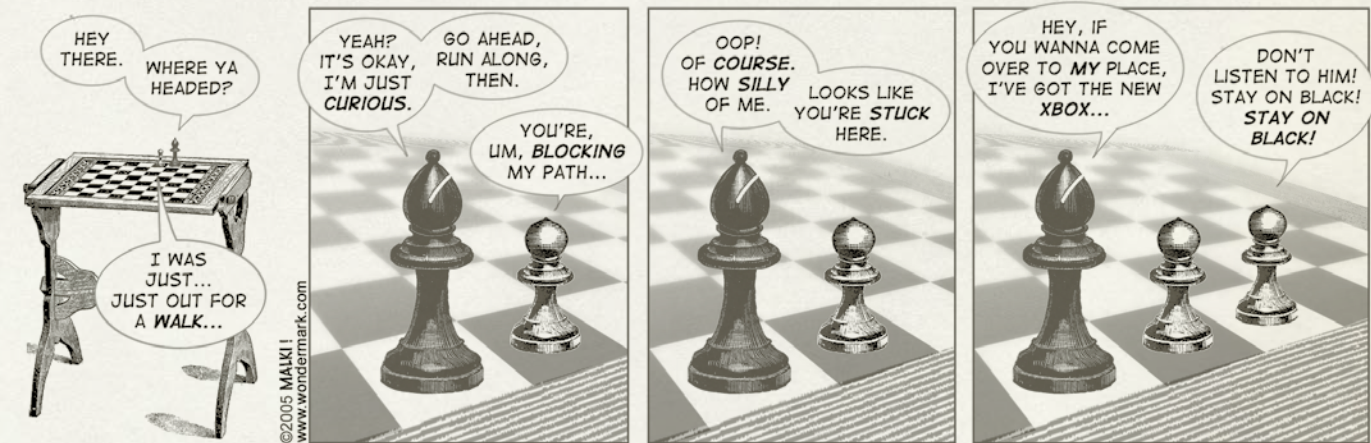


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real life comics #3

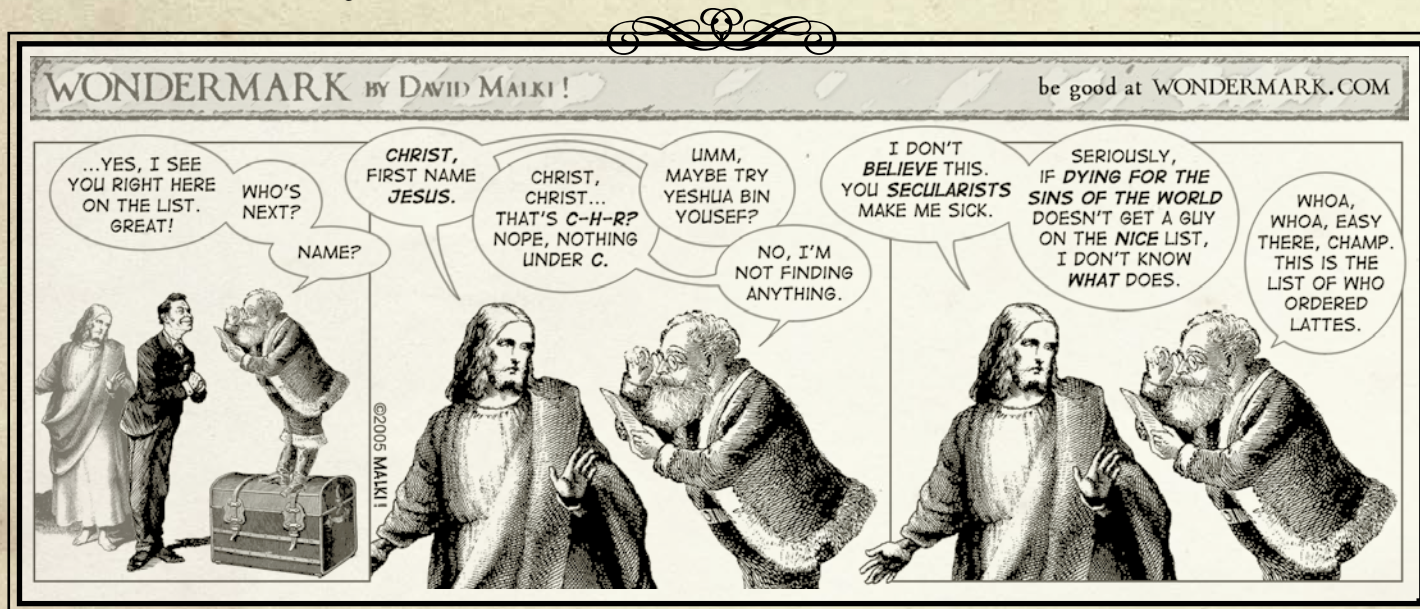
WONDERMARK BY DAVID MALKI!

check yourself at WONDERMARK.COM

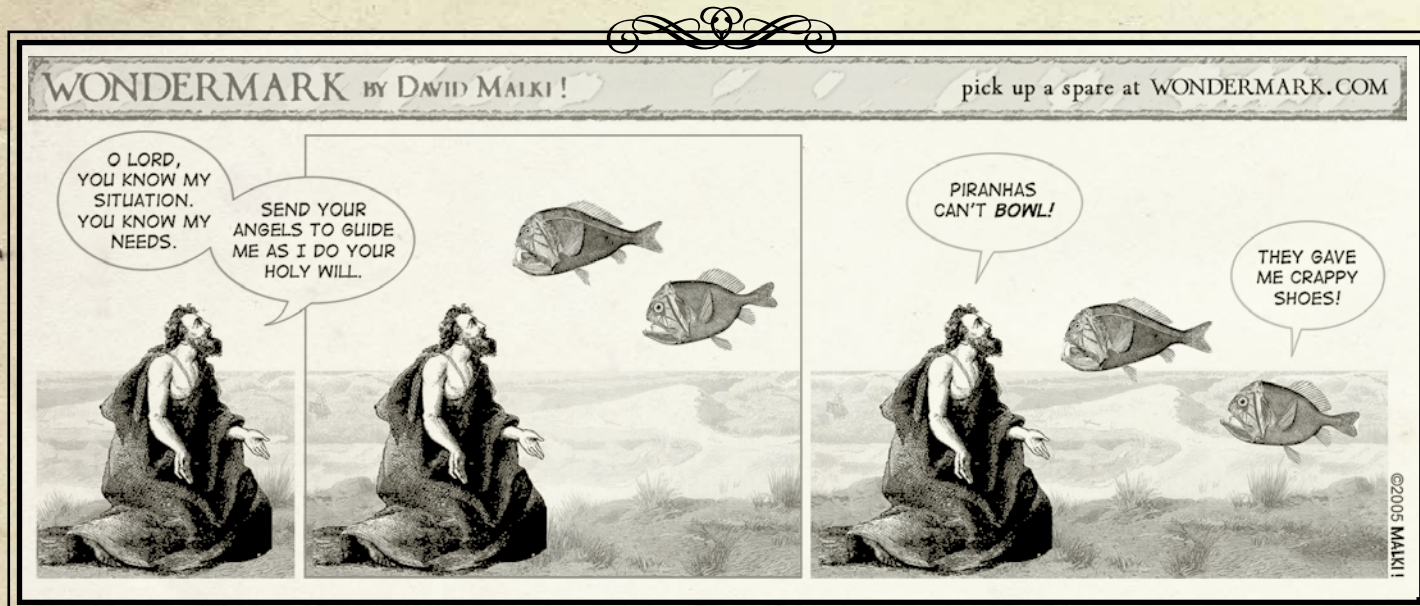


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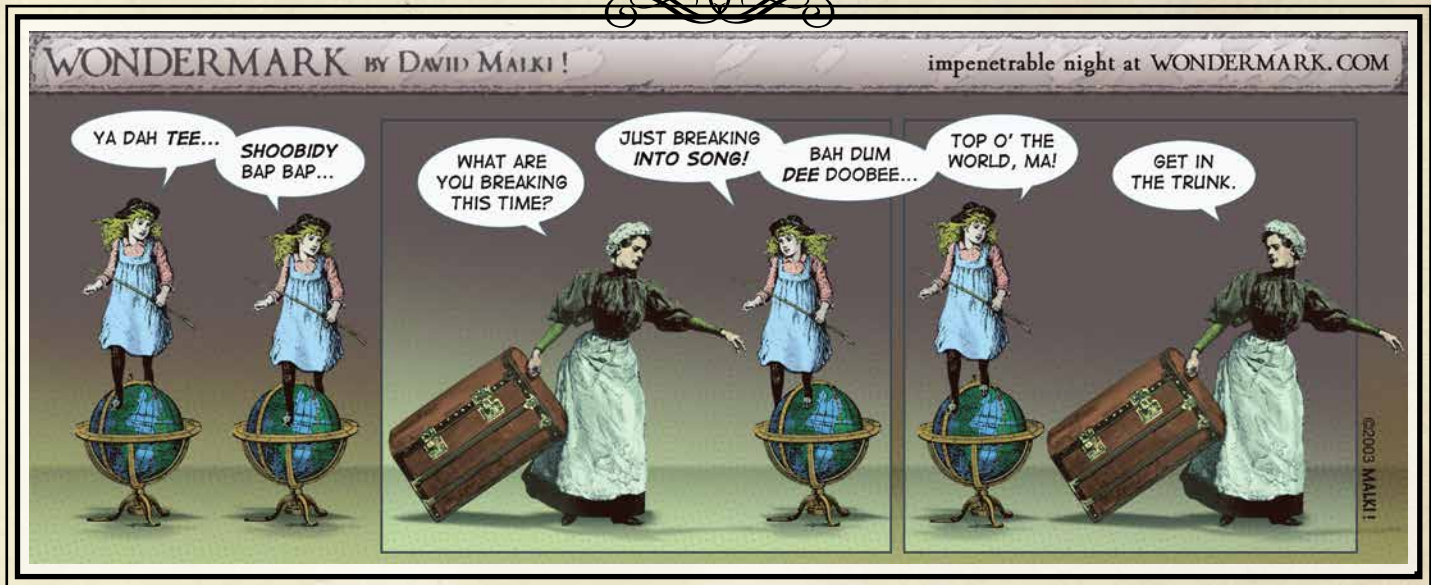
just then a knight in shining armor came charging up, but he could only move in L-shapes so he was not terribly helpful



don't make me call my dad



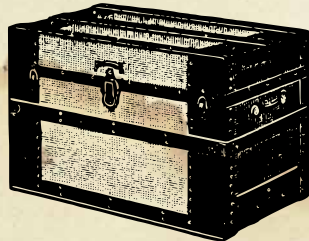
barely tossed a ninety even with the bumpers in. i KNOW



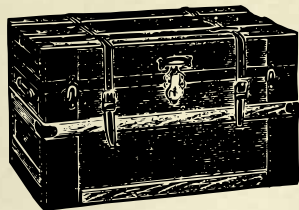
that's ALWAYS your answer!

Canvas Covered Trunk for \$2.25.

A Good Canvas Covered Trunk at a very low price. Square top, painted canvas cover, hardwood slats on top and body, protected with heavy iron clamps, heavy bottom cleats. Monitor lock and patent bolts and heavy hinges. Easily fits children up to 9 years old. As soundproof as any trunk in its price range. **The best low priced canvas covered trunk sold anywhere.**



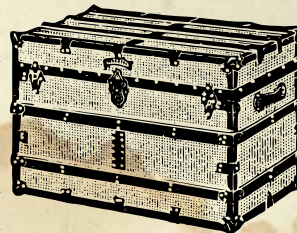
Our Square Top Trunk, \$2.75.



Our Special Low Priced Square Top Trunk, made with leather straps fitted for young wrists and ankles, painted, canvas covered. Hardwood slats on top and body; latch is not accessible from inside. Protected by iron clamps, bottom cleats, brass Monitor lock, buckle bar bolts, heavy hinges, with occupant food compartment separate. **Remember you can buy trunks from us as cheap as your home merchant.**

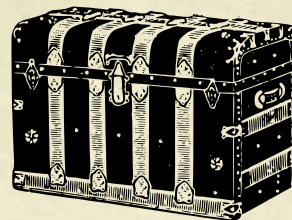
Our \$3.55 Steel Bound Trunk.

Cheapest Steel Bound Trunk in the market, large box, four heavy hardwood slats on top and two on body running full length, heavy japanned corners and steel strip clasp, heavy bolts. Lid will withstand interior kicks from most children of average leg strength. For larger boys we recommend iron, below. **An honest, strong trunk at a very low price.**



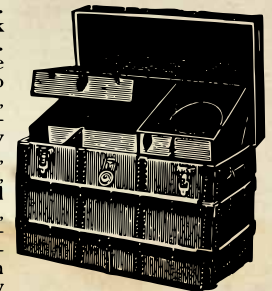
Black Enameled Iron Trunk for \$4.00.

Black Enameled Iron, Round Top Trunk, hardwood bent slats on top with one extra slat in center full length of trunk. Leather handles, brass Excelsior lock, patent bolts, full covered hinge tray with bonnet box, fall-in-top, iron bottom, all fancy trimmed. Reinforced to fit boys up to 12 y.o. or fat boys up to 10. **Totally escape-proof when properly secured.**

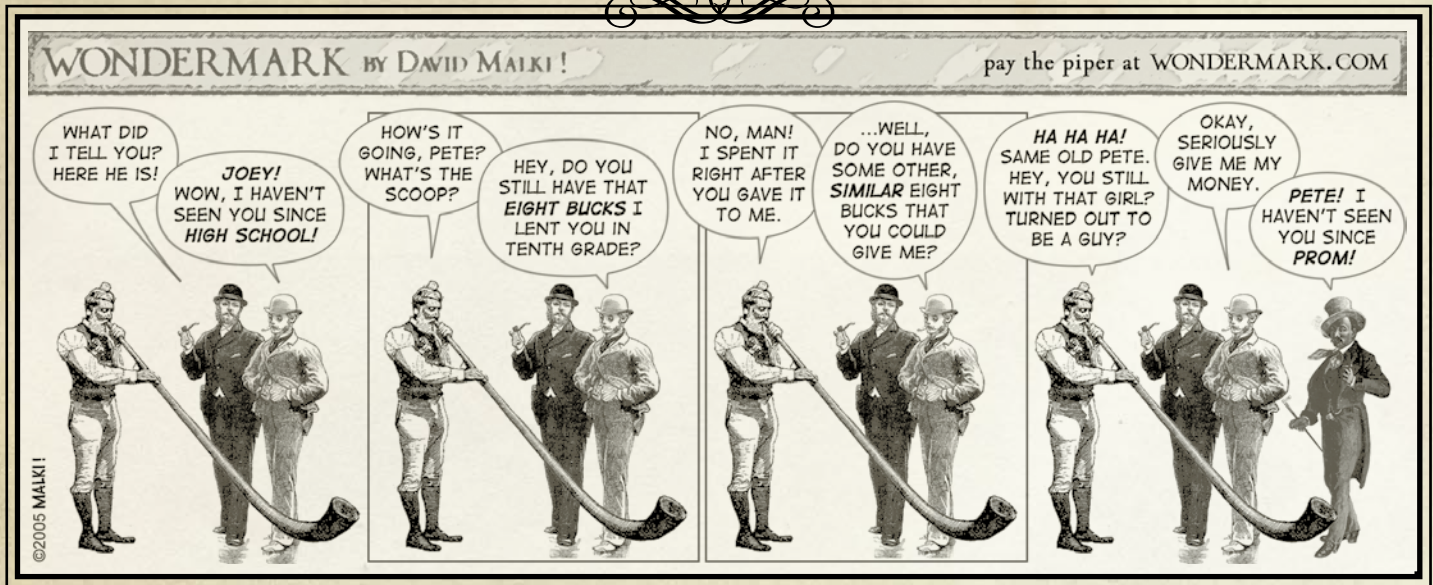


Flat Top Heavy Duck Cover Trunk.

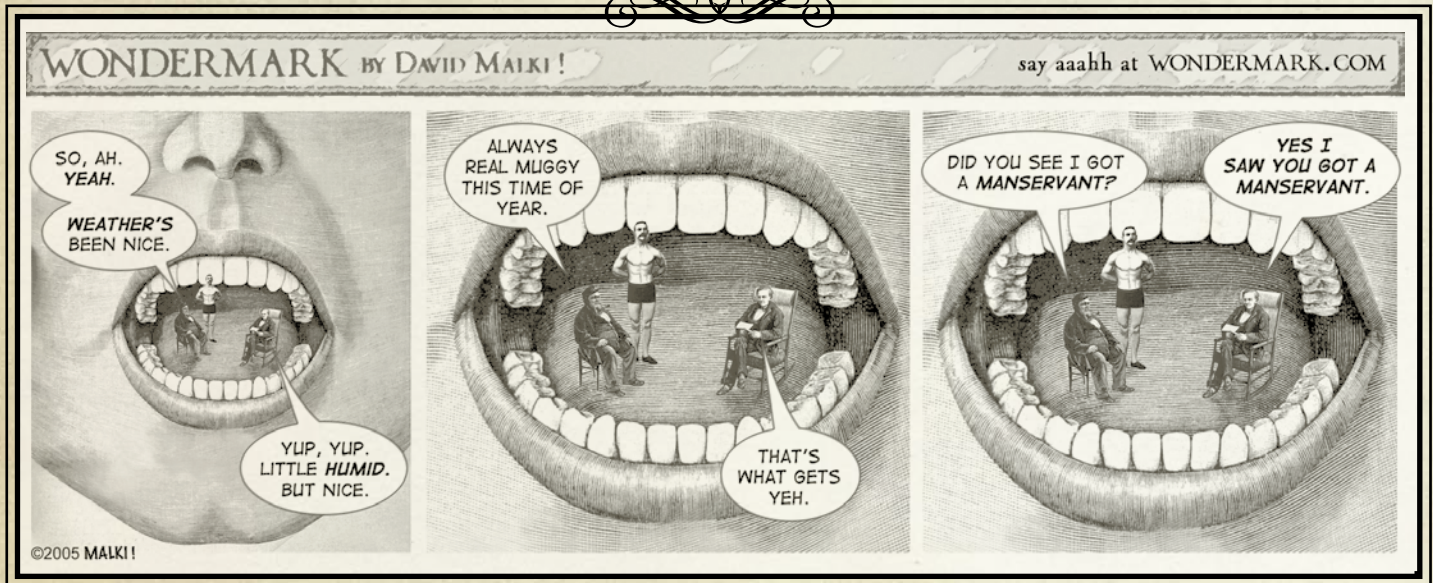
Flat Top, Heavy Duck Cover Trunk. Double wide iron bound, two center bands, end slats all protected, heavy iron bumpers, corner shoes, etc. Stitched leather handles, high combination tray, all covered, fine linen finish. A new item designed for twins or squabbling cousins. Easy-access watering port allows containment for weeks. **Finally, some respite in the home.**



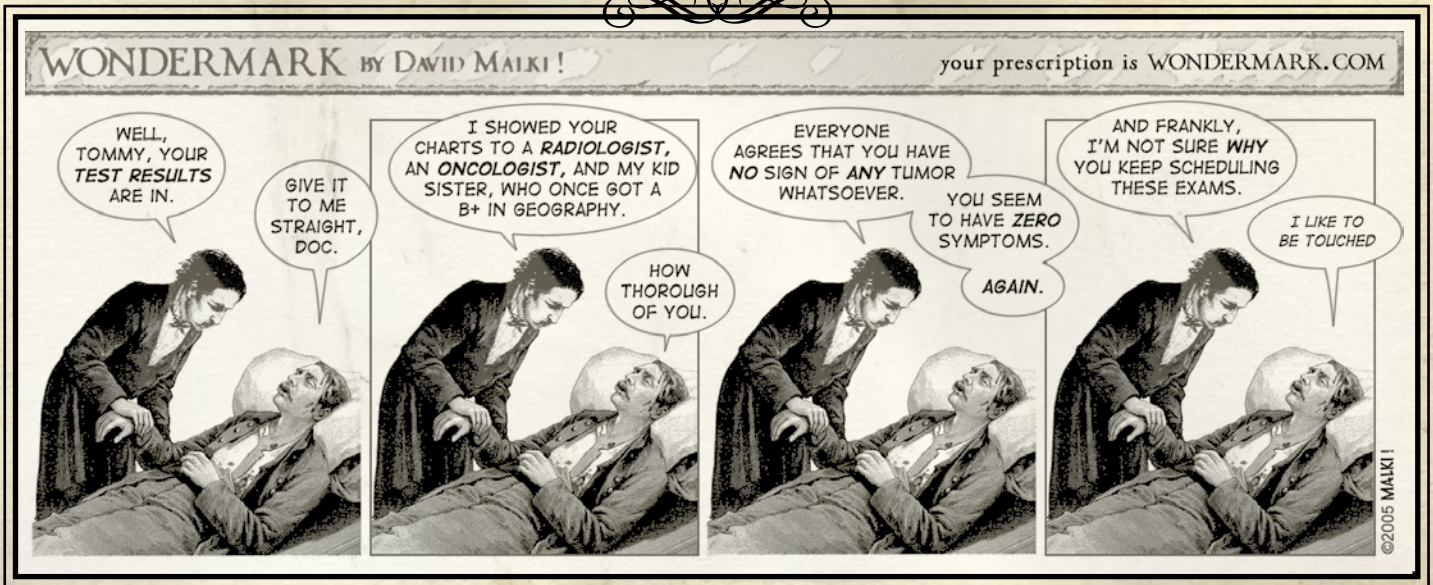
These trunks are expressly for the confinement of children.



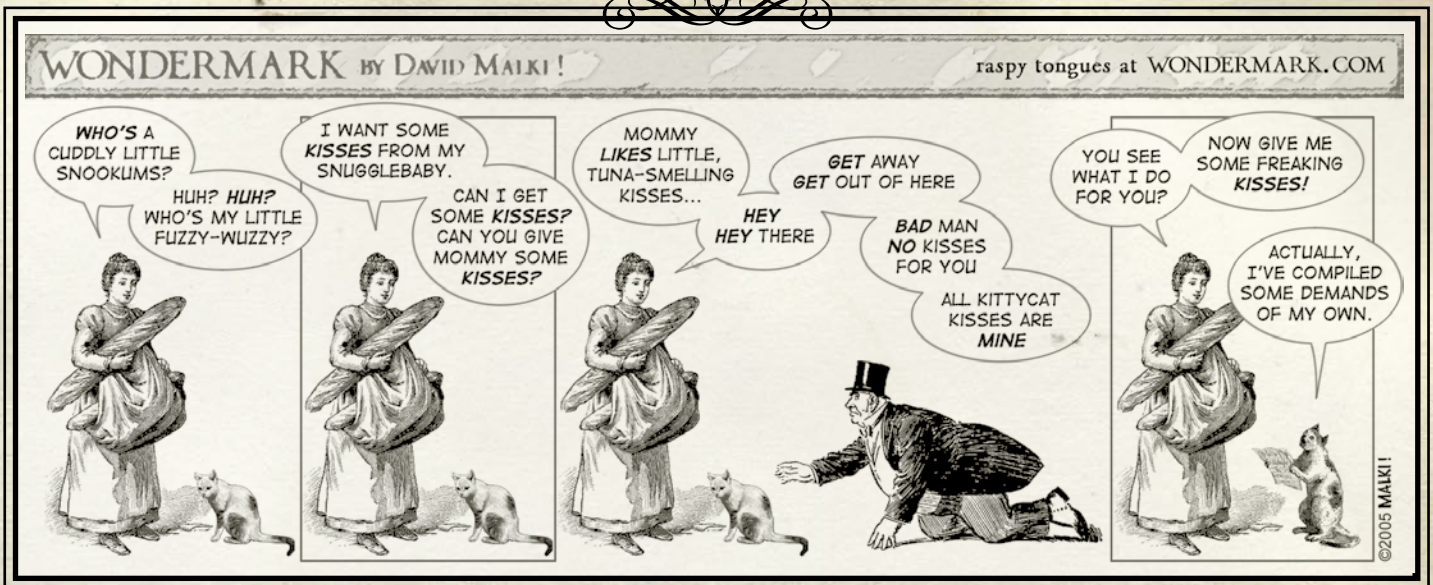
joey had borrowed the money to buy the alpenhorn, it seems, whereas pete had always wanted an alpenhorn but had been stymied by the prohibitive cost



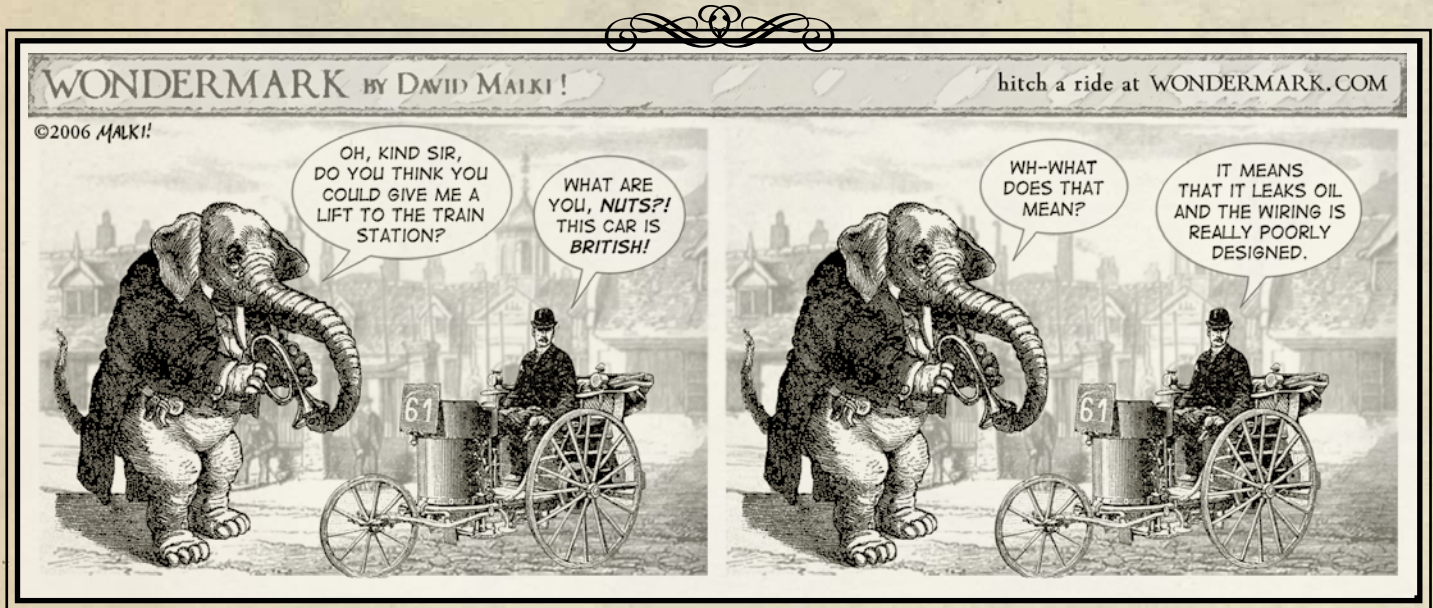
DUH



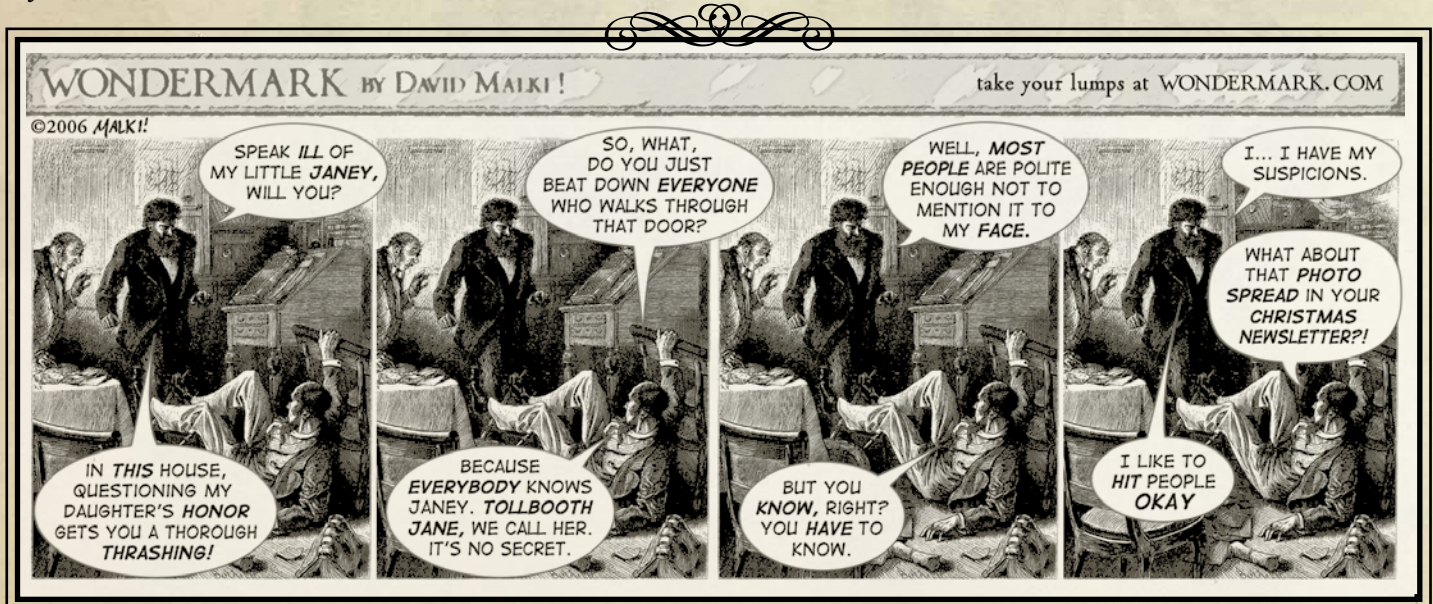
but really, who doesn't



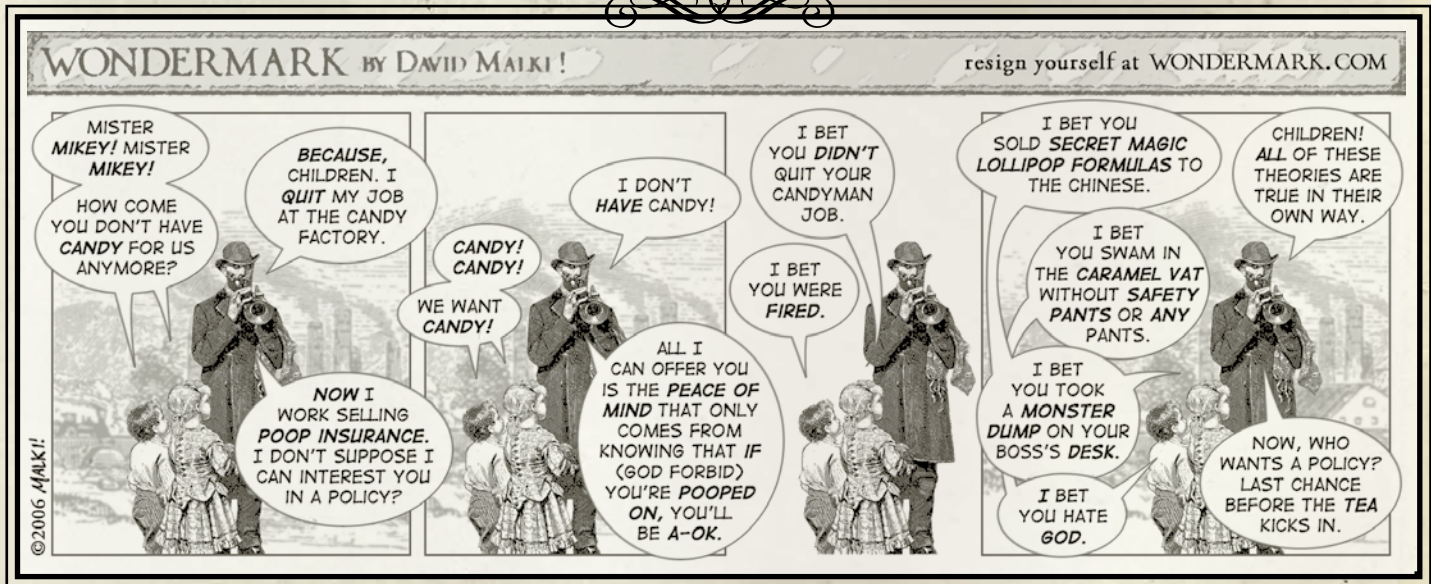
do they involve kisses? PLEASE YES PLEASE YES



BURNNNN



i saw that spread and man, he wasn't kidding around with those gauze filters



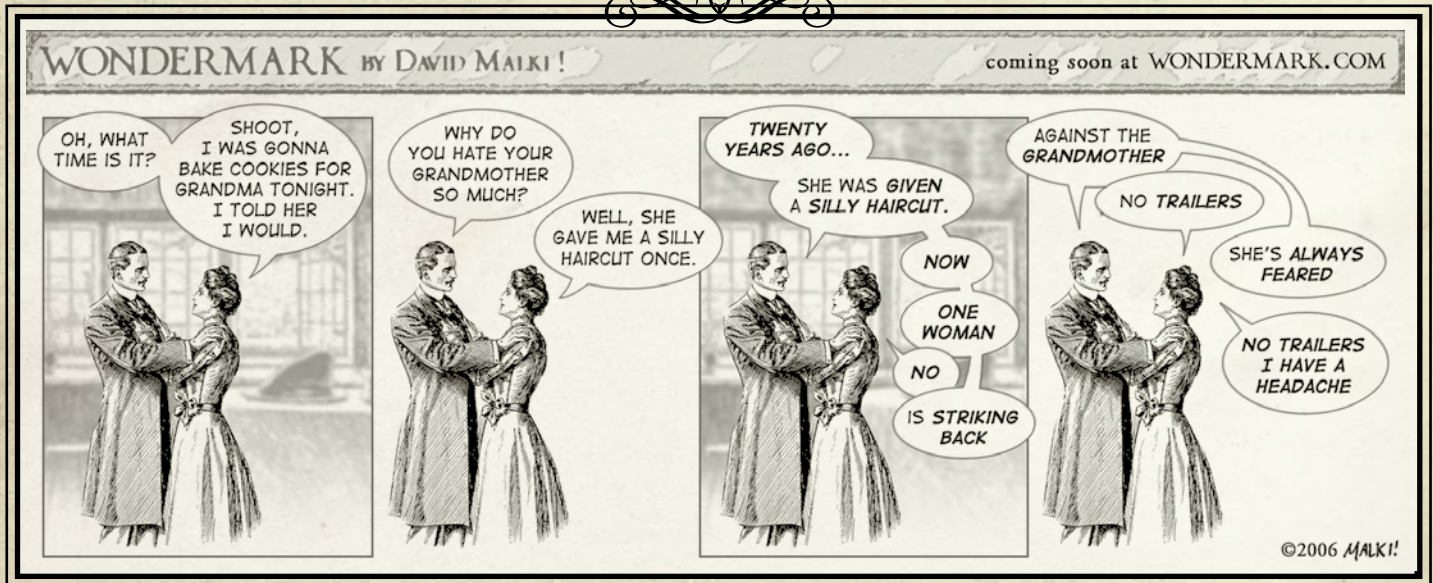
real life comics #4, sort of



apparently the oral history will stop at this generation



these real life comics are starting to get kind of worrisome



YOU ALWAYS SAY THAT



or rather, i will only ever go on december 26th. can you imagine the serenity?

39



IN THIS comic strip, I play the part of “Mustapha,” the well-meaning but ultimately stymied aid worker attempting to solicit funding for an international human-rights advocacy organization. As you are no doubt well aware, Canada’s many centuries of brutal sectarian warfare has left the nation littered with land mines, caches of biological weapons, and unsecured nuclear armaments, including at least one plutonium-fueled moose.

The strip begins with the actor playing “Hassan” recounting the common perception that the Canadian people are a savage collection of violent tribes still clinging to superstition and brutal religious rituals. As I could never conscientiously impose an external value judgment on the belief systems of the native population, I am forced to admit that I may be able to enact change most efficiently by remaining outside the borders of that wounded nation.

I PLAY “Hassan,” a scrappy Canadian opium-smuggler risking execution by speaking to a non-national. I didn’t know much about the situation in Canada before I got this role, but I wanted to be prepared and everything, so I did some research. And boy was I shocked.



Did you know that there are trenches in Canada a thousand miles long, filled with rotting corpses and populated by dragons that bleed maggots? It’s true, I read a website about it. And the rival tribes that are always blowing each other up—the Quebecois and the Anglophones—are virtually identical genetically. If you go back far enough they both come from Europe. But try telling that to the kids today! They’ve been hating each other for so long that they don’t even remember why anymore.

I don’t think they should have dug the lava-moat around Saskatchewan, but as an actor my job is to try and see things from new perspectives, for the sake of the performance. I wouldn’t say I’m all of a sudden a big, like, *Red Green Show* fan or anything, but I have learned a lot.



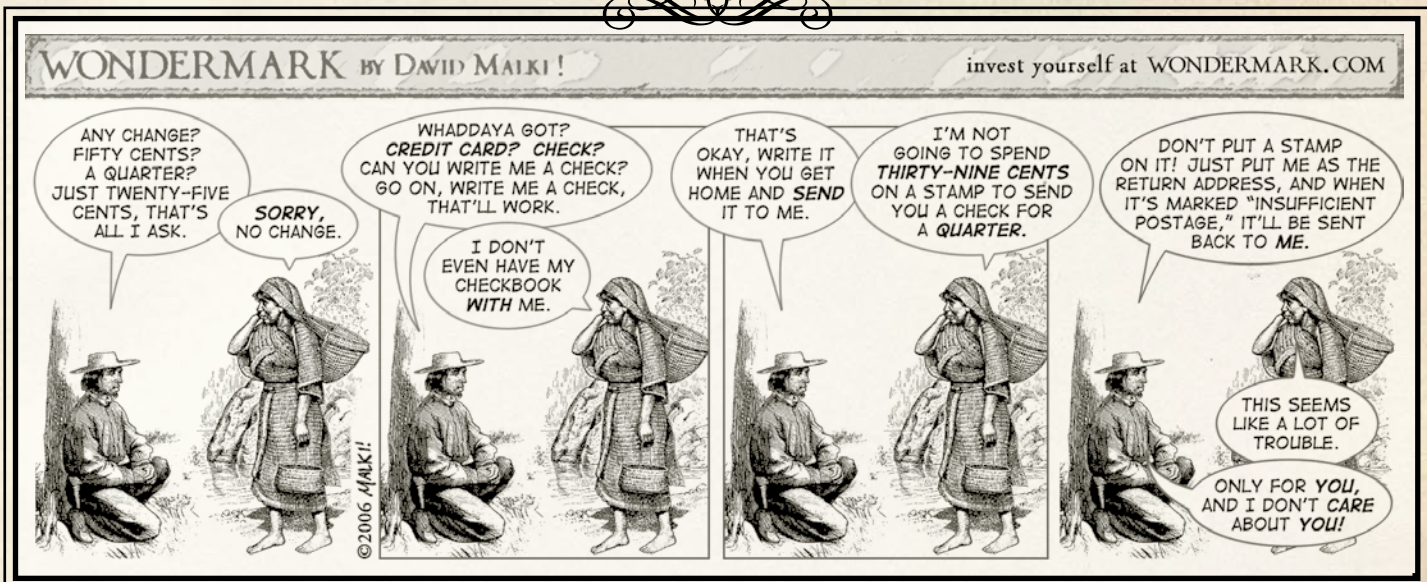
also slavery is wrong



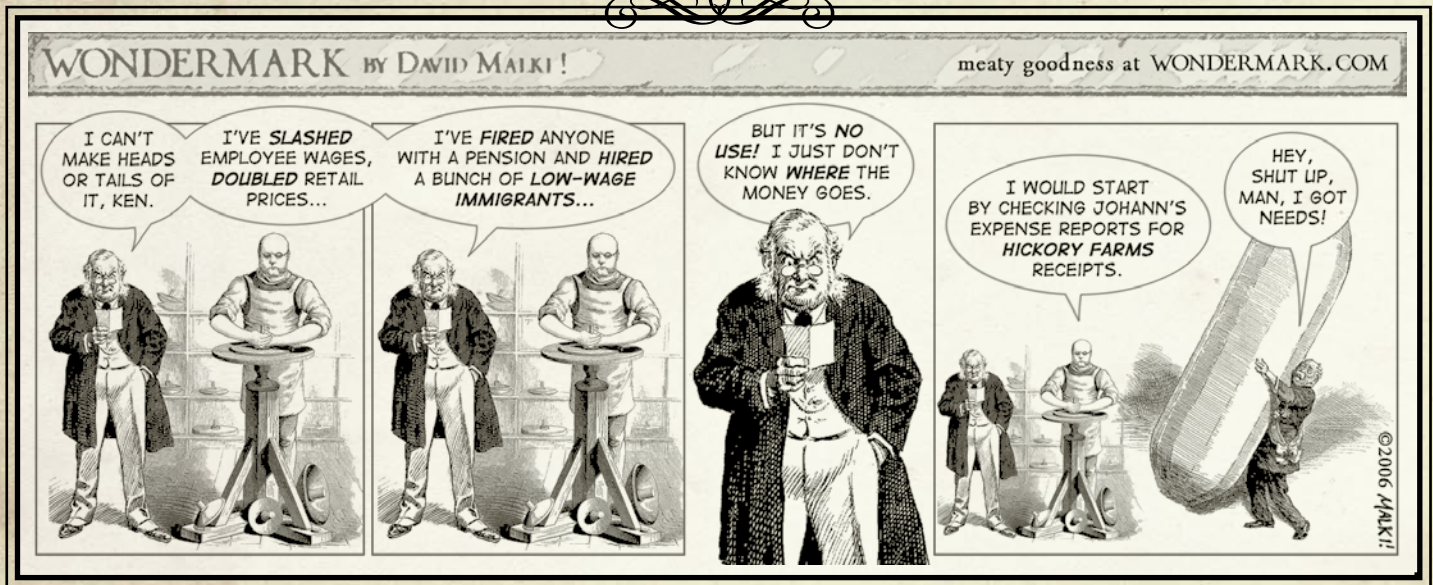
we mere foolles delight in bringing whimsy and magic to the AAGGGKXXX



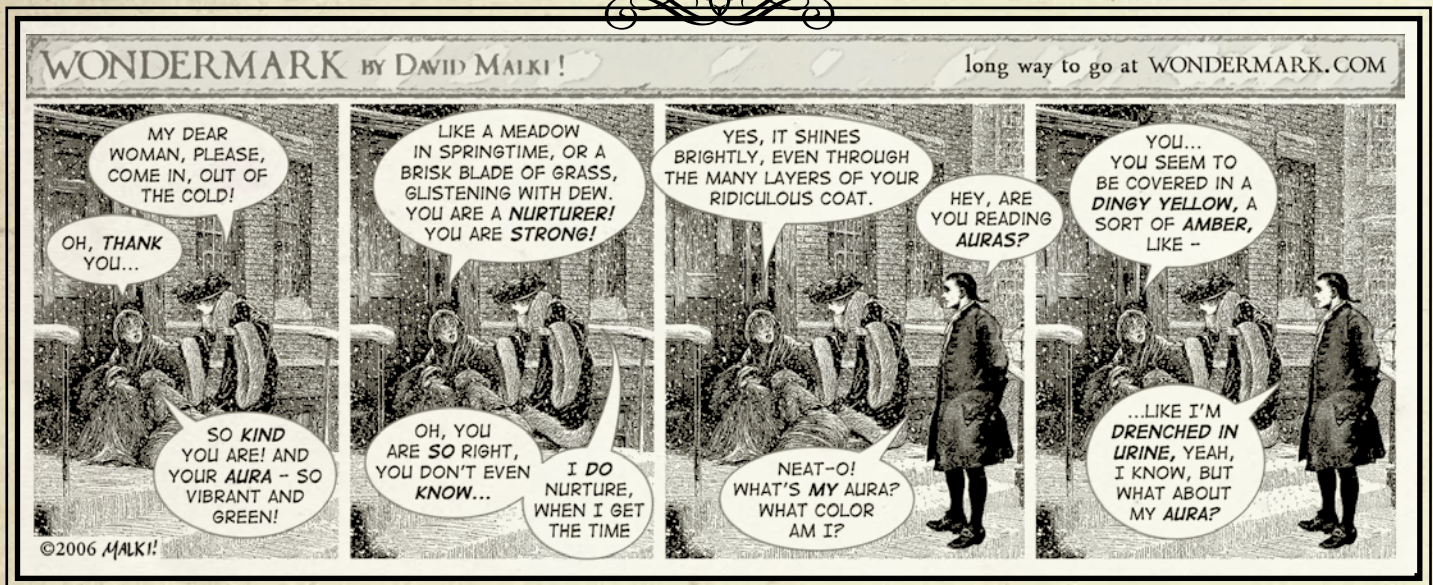
bonus: you get to keep whatever falls off



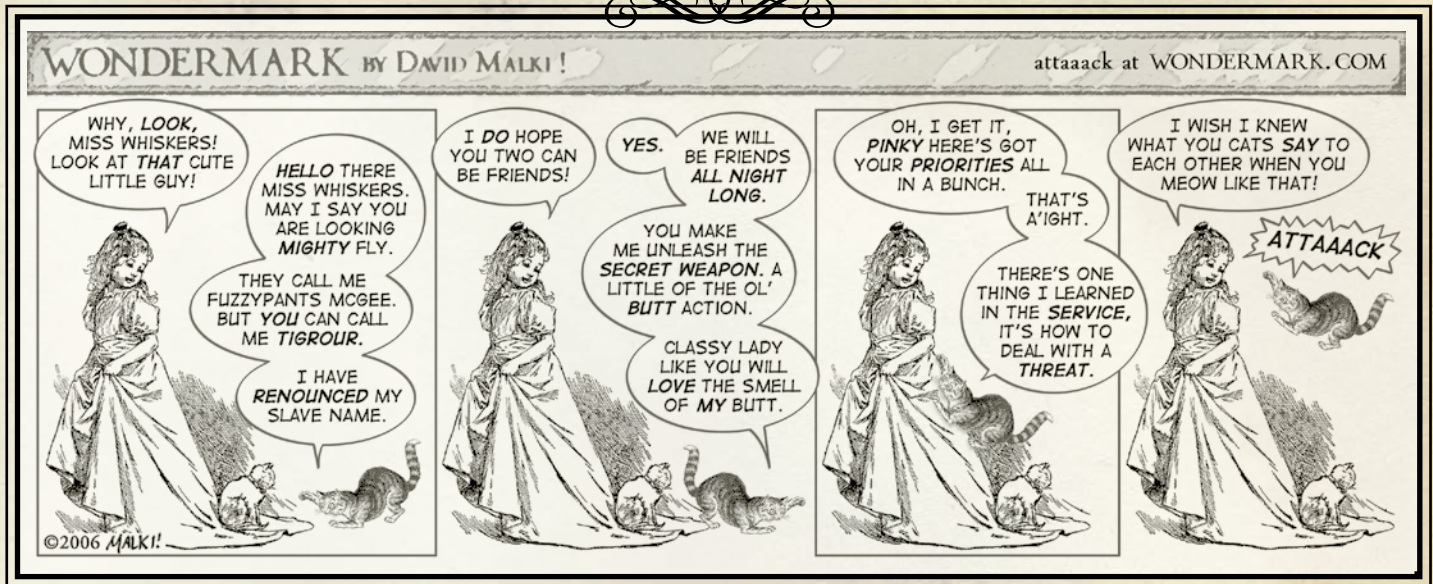
oh and can you please rent a p.o. box for me as i do not technically have an 'address'



alternately, it is a zeppelin full of rancid milk



i have been told that my aura is quote-musky-unquote

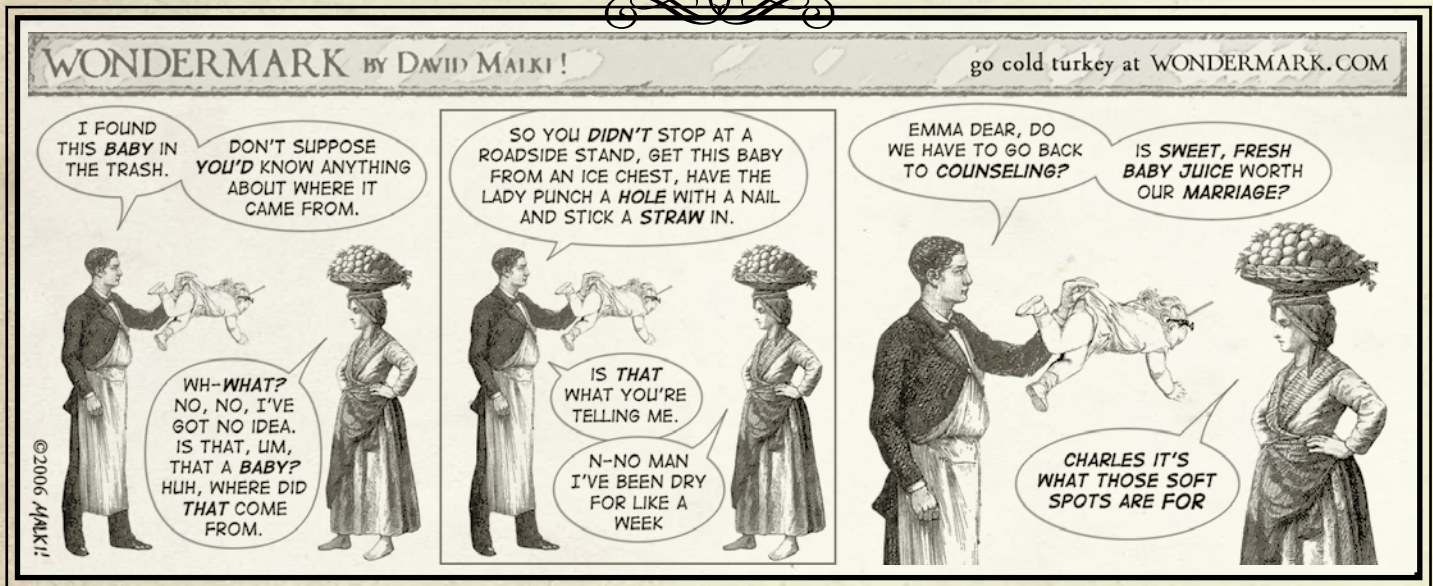


miss whiskers is trying to keep her composure but oh!
that fine aroma! she fears that she may swoon

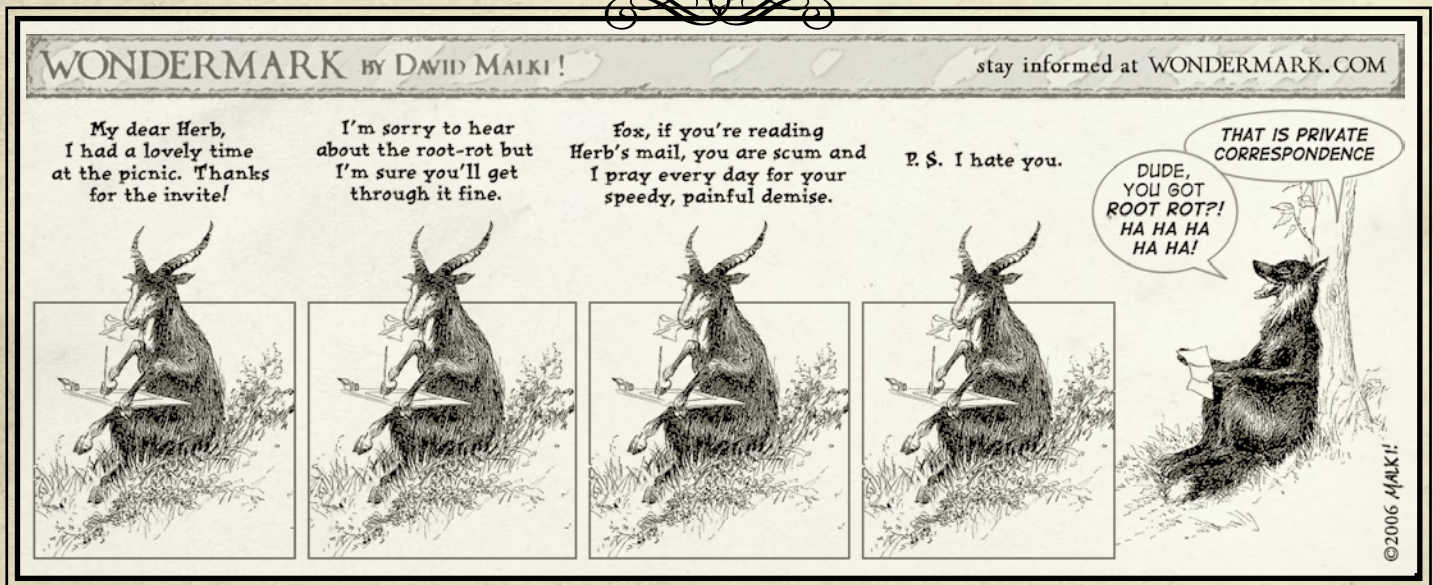
IN WHICH A RECORD IS SHATTERED



you train and you train and you give up your life and then you see, from the vantage of the podium,
unspooling in front of you a long lifetime of teaching saturday-afternoon classes for 8-year-olds



those roadside stands are the only place you get the real fresh stuff



root rot is not actually all that bad, plus you get vicodin



his third guess would have been earwigs. that is just the kind of guy he is!



Pineoline **OZINATOR.**
NATURE'S OWN
Disinfectant and Deodorant,

FRAGRANT—EFFECTIVE—BEAUTIFUL.
REMOVES JELLYFISH STENCH AT ONCE.

No longer shall you suffer the horrible, rancid reek of JELLYFISH in your home. These creatures are well-known for their awful nature and terrible odor.

The MAMMOTH PINE CONES of Norway

(as here shown one-third size) are World-Renowned for their Counter-Jellyfish Scent. Against any number of Jellyfish, no matter how rotted, stinking or fetid it is unsurpassed by any product currently available.

Our patented process draws up Pineoline Oil to evaporate exactly as in nature. Enjoy the benefit of a sojourn at the pines, free of Jellyfish, without travel or inconvenience. Circulars free.

Sent, express charges paid, to any part of the United States, on receipt of price.

No. 2, 8 inches high \$2.25
No. 4, 10 inches high 3.25

Postal Note or Money Order. Address,

R. S. PRINDLE, Sole Manufacturer, 97 Liberty St., N.Y.



To kill jellyfish, lure them into a fire with Tang or Kool-Aid. They think that crap's healthy.



"This page is horribly offensive to jellyfish."

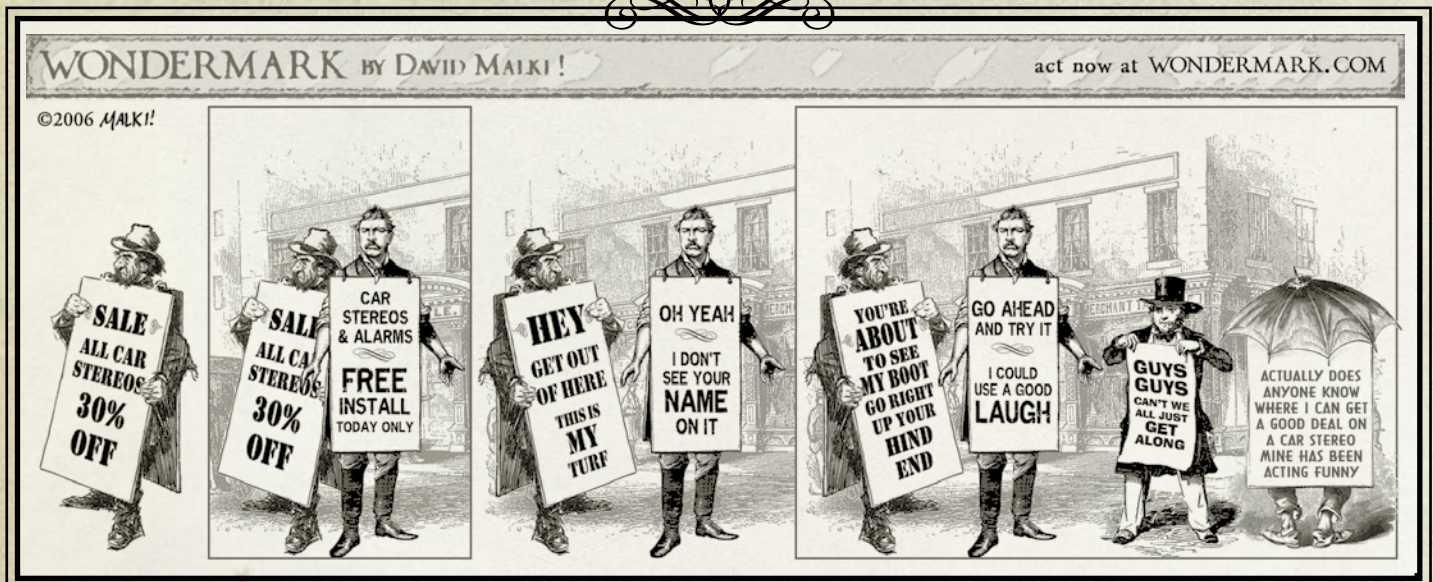
WE OF the Marine Invertebrate Anti-Defamation League express our outrage at this insensitive portrayal of jellyfish.

This comic strip demeans the valuable contributions of jellyfish and other marine invertebrates to the ecosystem and perpetuates the stereotype of jellyfish as creepy, slimy, sting-happy and ignorant. Unless we receive a formal apology from the characters in this strip, we will be forced to ask advertisers to withdraw their support.

The comic strip "Wondermark" is published in 58 underwater markets that have extensive jellyfish, anemone and sea nettle populations. Jellyfish and their invertebrate brethren are important sources of labor for the textile-refining industry. To have them mocked as simple-minded barrel-filling soul-suckers is both demeaning to the jellyfish themselves and potentially damaging to their economic prospects, if such stereotypes continue to be perpetrated.



we've all seen the bumper stickers that say I [heart] NY or I [spade] MY CAT, but if you see I [club] MY WIFE just go ahead and hit that car with your own



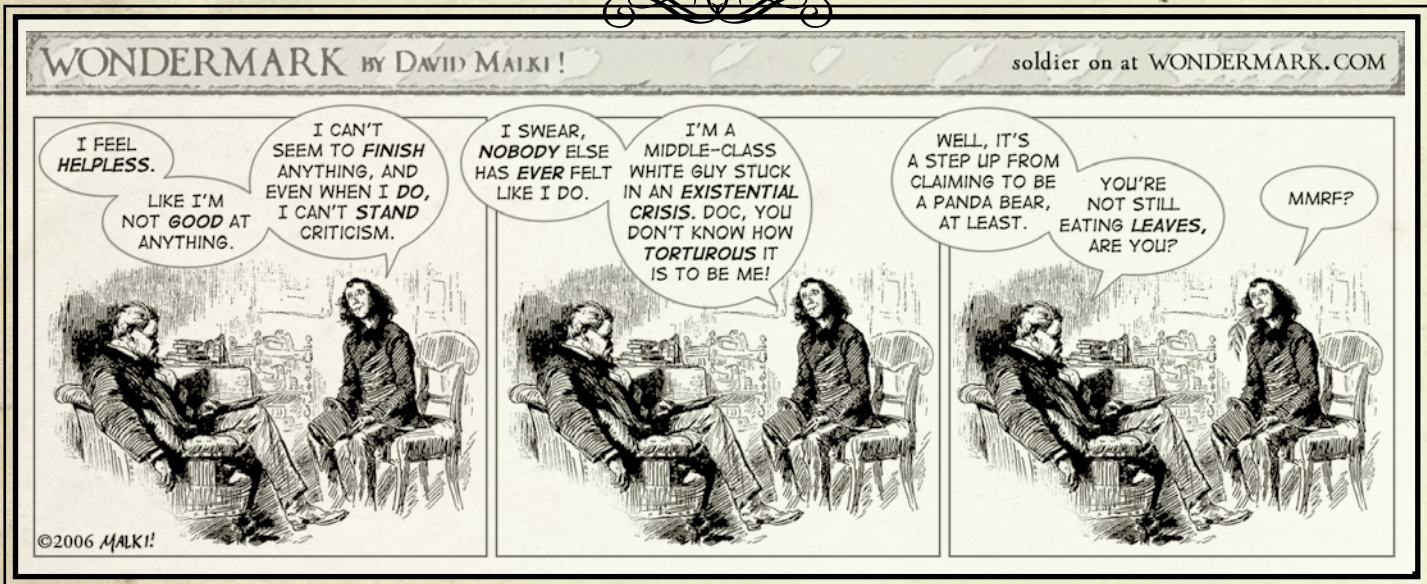
it was making all sorts of screeching noises and when you turn the knobs there is static



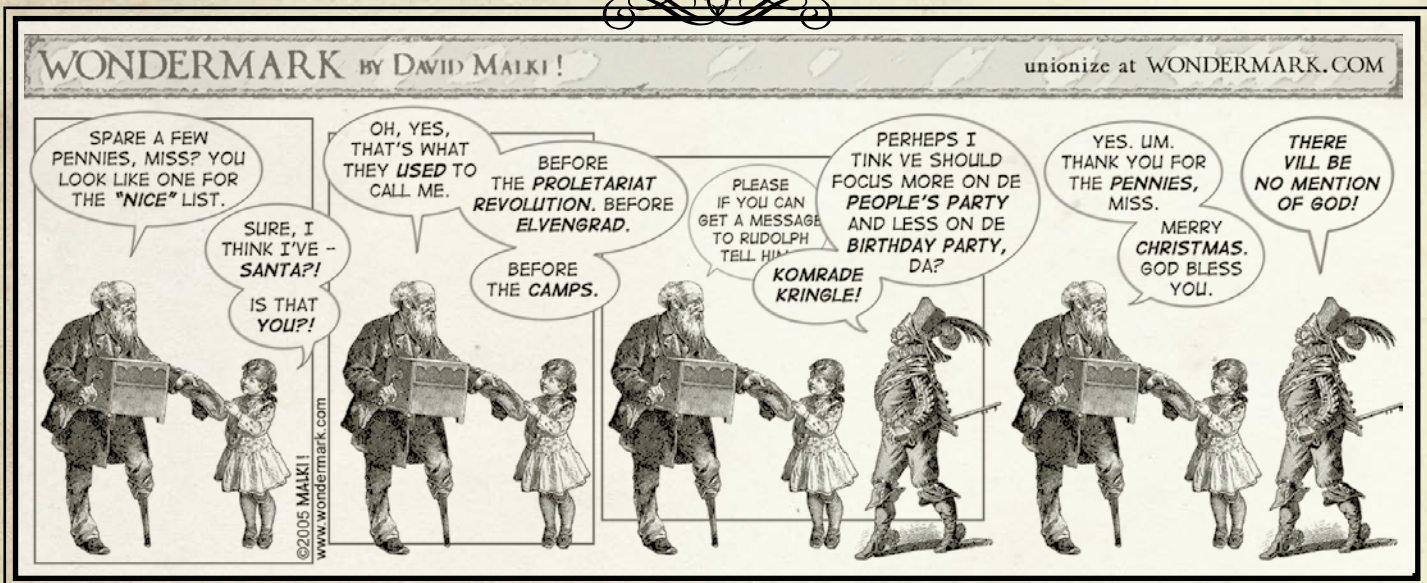
as you may have surmised, the bald fellow is referring to hair available for donation from his back and the tops of his feet



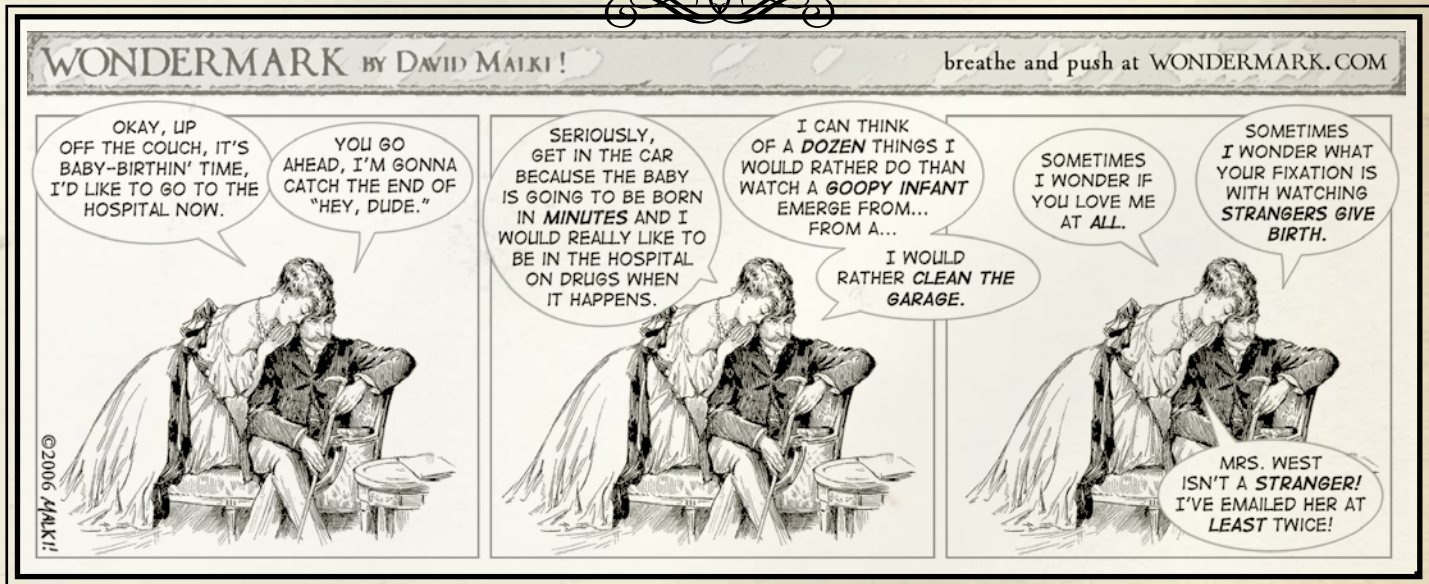
according to the topline, tabbies age 6-8 love the pawns—
but we still can't get any quadrant on those calicos



i actually have several interesting things to say on the subject but a dude eating leaves just seems more relevant



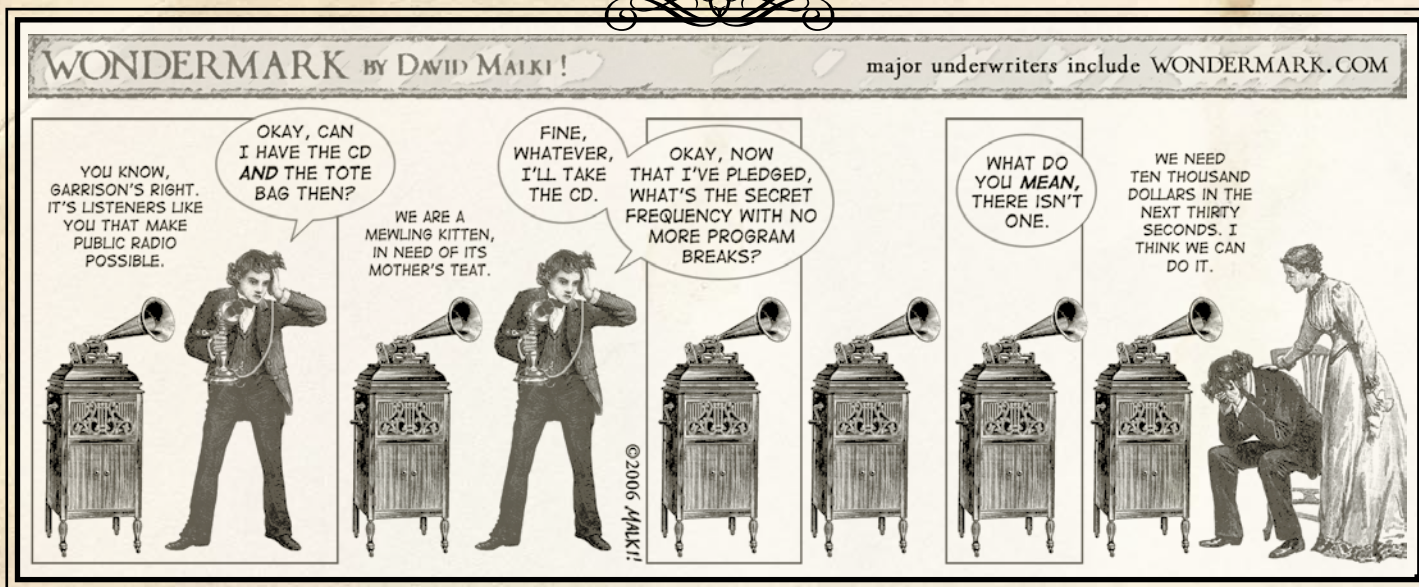
or vould you like to be collecting pennies vis TWO of the stumpings, all hobbling around, eh?



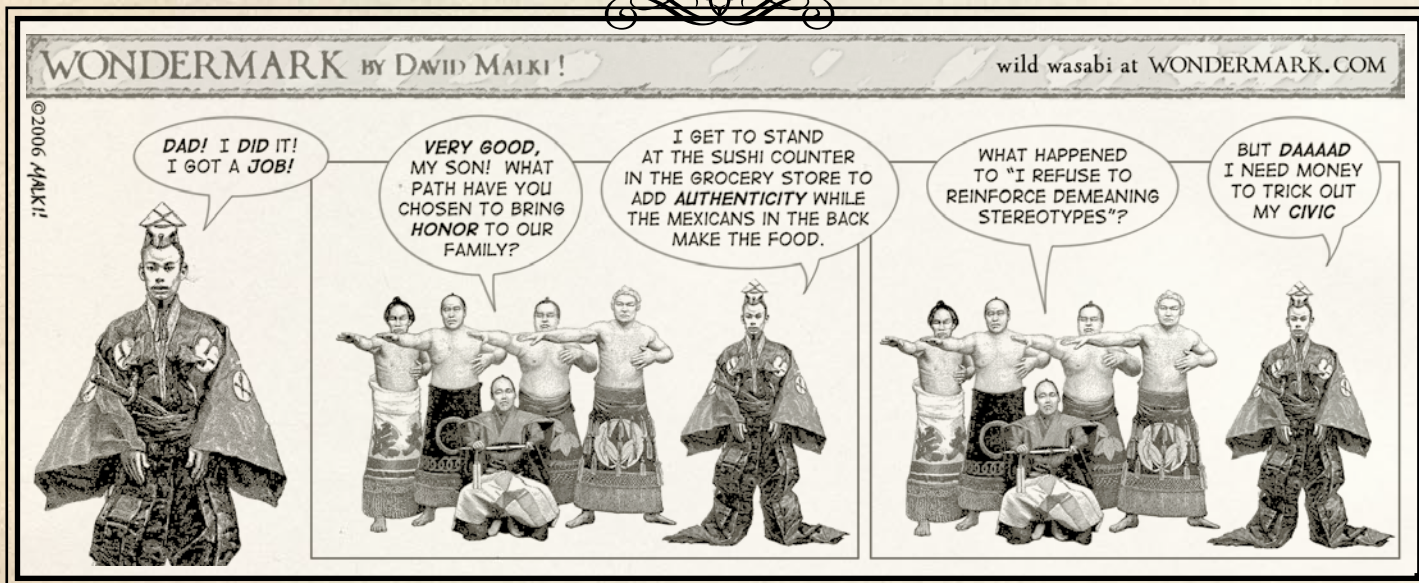
all that blood and pain and crying and blah blah blah—it's not really my *scene*, you know?



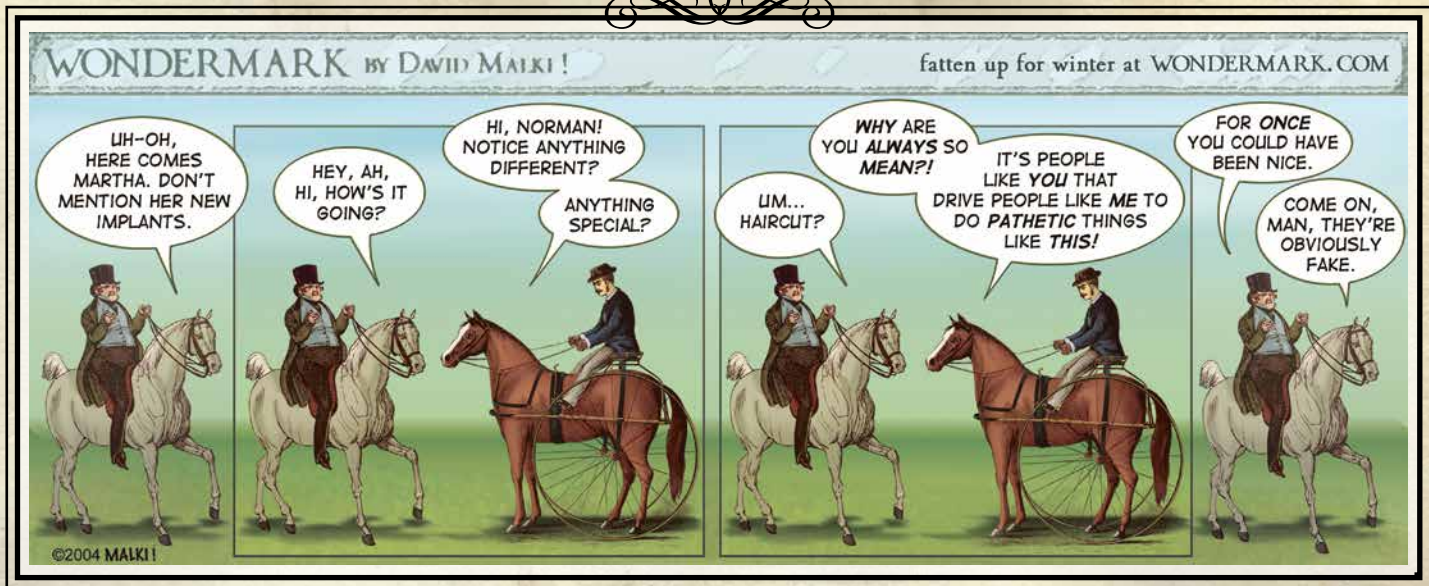
you are the weakest link, goodbye



i have no better solutions for the problem of how to fund public media, i guess, but still, c'mon with the pledge drives



he bought the civic in a fit of joy after winning the academic decathlon



why the long face?



I DON'T GET IT

I REALLY have to explain this to you? Um, okay. This is awkward. You shouldn't be talking to me about this, you should be asking her. I mean, I can tell you what went down, but—it's not going to get back to her, is it?

Here's the backstory. She came to me a few weeks ago and wanted some "help" chowin' on some hay. I'd never thought of her in that way before—I mean, she was nice-looking and all, a little plain, but that's all right. Anyway, we started hanging out, she's flirting a little like she always seems to be doing, and I start to think, *Wow. She's into me, this is pretty cool.* You know? Even if I wasn't that into her, it's kind of energizing, and all of a sudden real quick I'm thinking, like, *I never noticed how cute she is.*

You can see where this is going, right? Yeah, exactly—I go ahead and make a move and she gets all *cold* on me, like she hadn't been the one nuzzling, saying "I miss

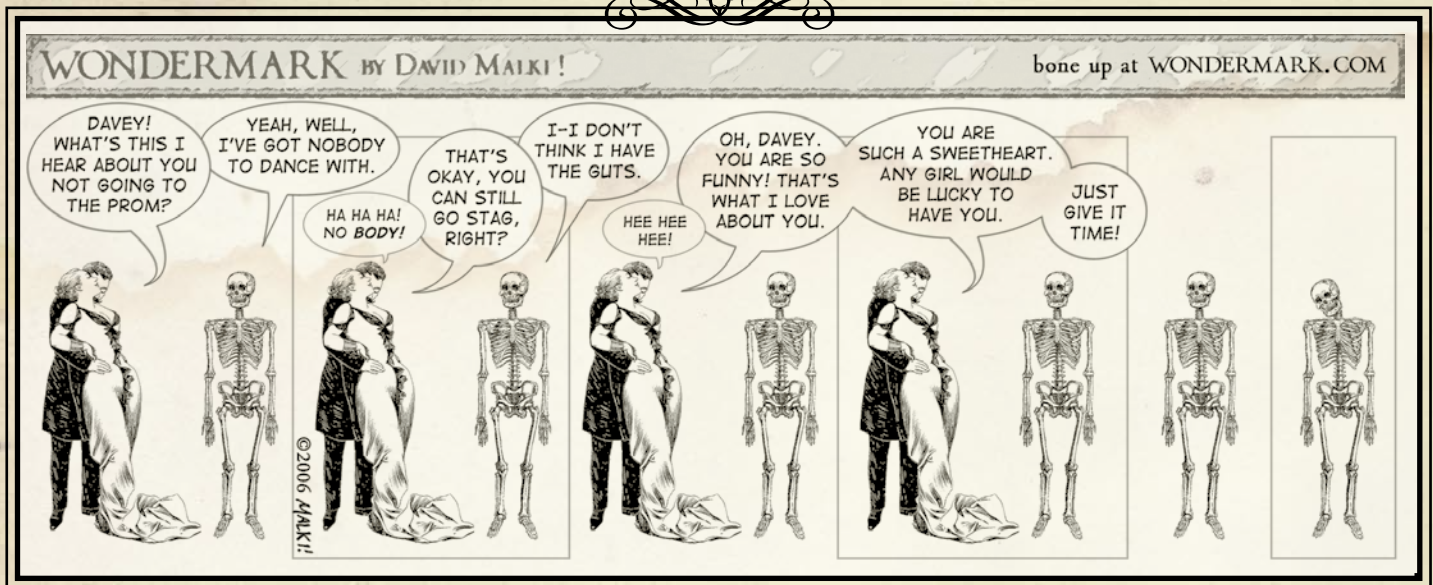
college 'cause there was always someone around to give me a backrub," all that stuff. Now I don't know *what* to think, because she's *totally* tweaked and I'm just out there in the cold with hay sticking out of my mouth like an idiot.

I chased her back to the barn—retrospect, bad idea, whatever—and found her huddled under the, like, loft thing where the bales are stacked. Pretending like I'm not there, like she's not *physically hiding* from me. I should have walked away, left her to deal with her own issues. It's not like I don't have my own crap to sort through. But like a jerk I just stood there, thinking I'm being sweet, all "Come on, come on out of there," and when that didn't work I graduated to "Is it me? Do you want me to leave?" and she's eventually like "I can't see you right now." Whatever.

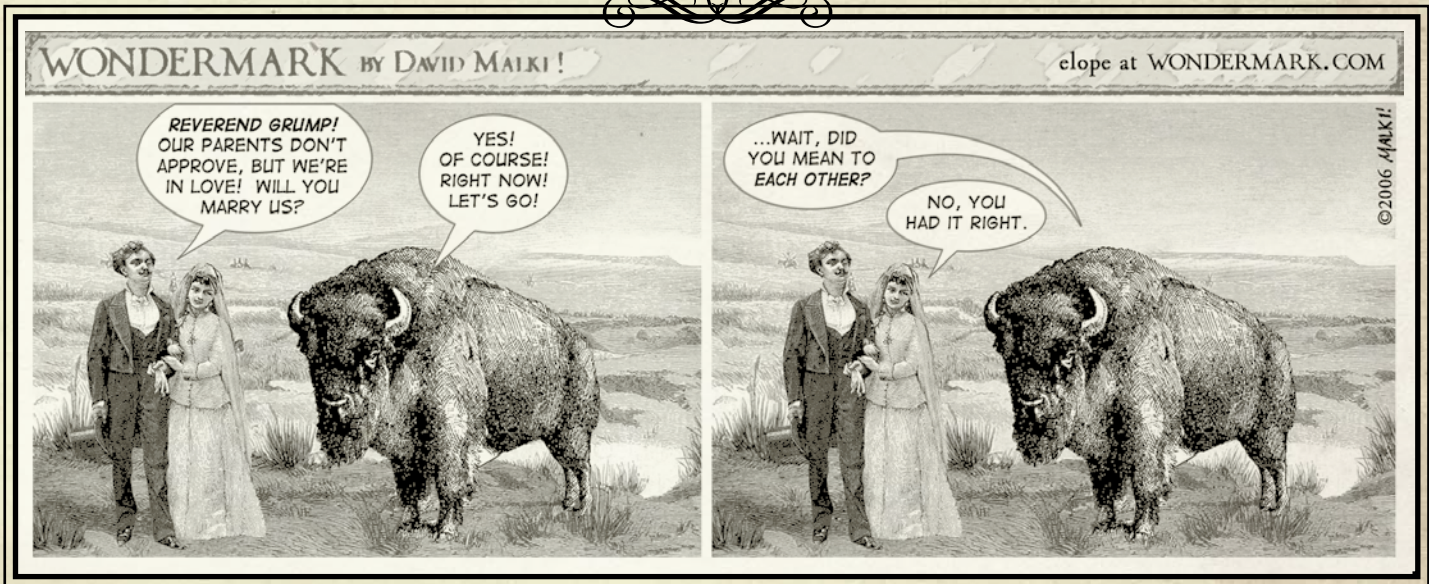
The next time I saw her, couple ten days later, she'd had the work done. She was playing it cool, like, "Oh, I was *born* beautiful," but she was fishing for compliments big time and the freakin' *dairy barn* was just dishing 'em out left and right. I swear one day I'm gonna kick that cow Betsy right in her fat face. I am *so* tired of chicks playing games. That's the *real* joke of this strip, that I still even *care*.



is that what you were IMPLYING? GARY???

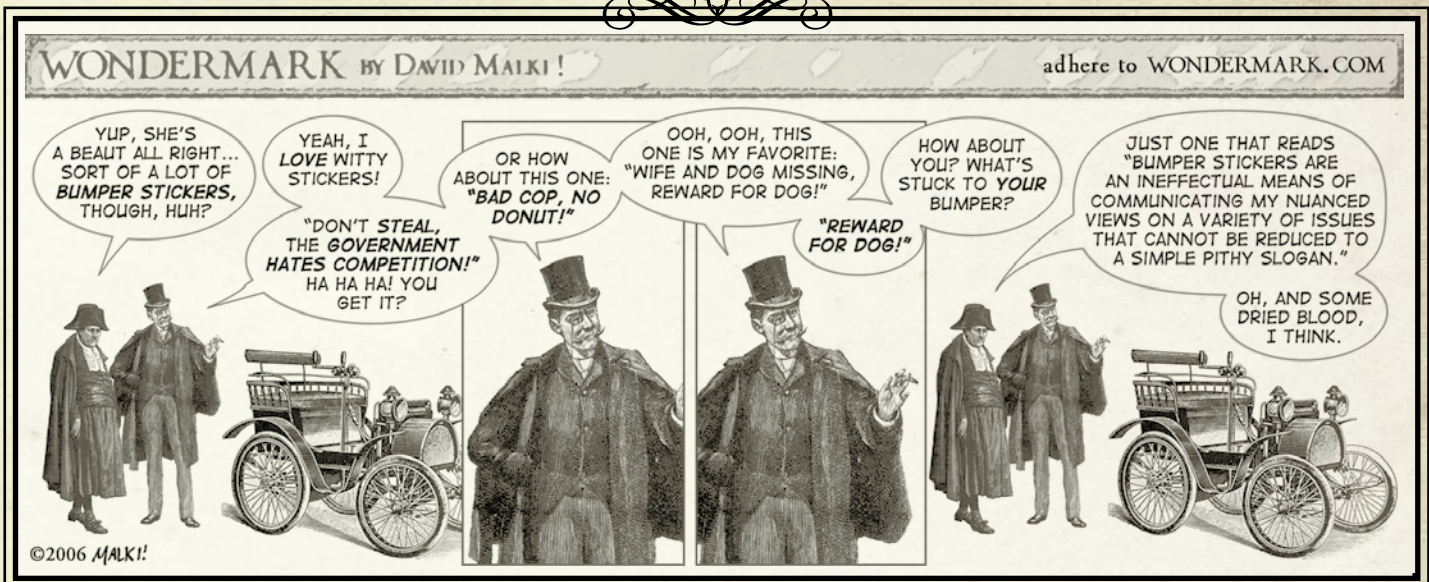


i don't think he was joking

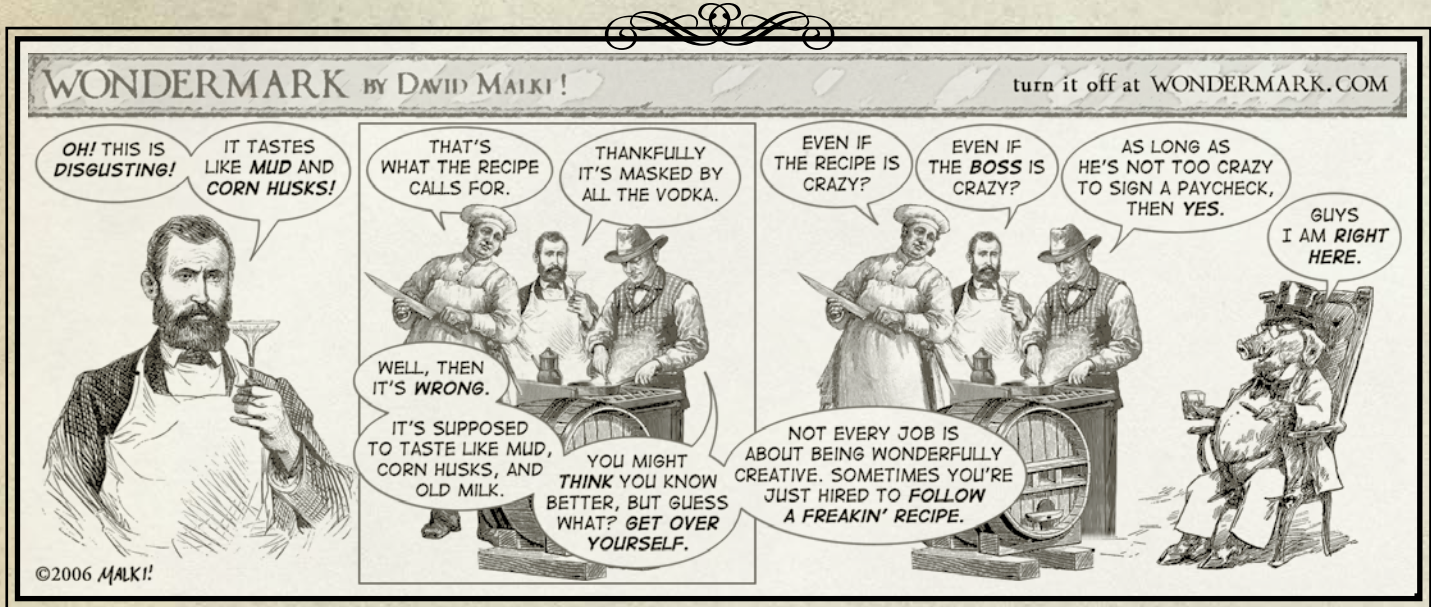


this particular issue was covered in detail in seminary

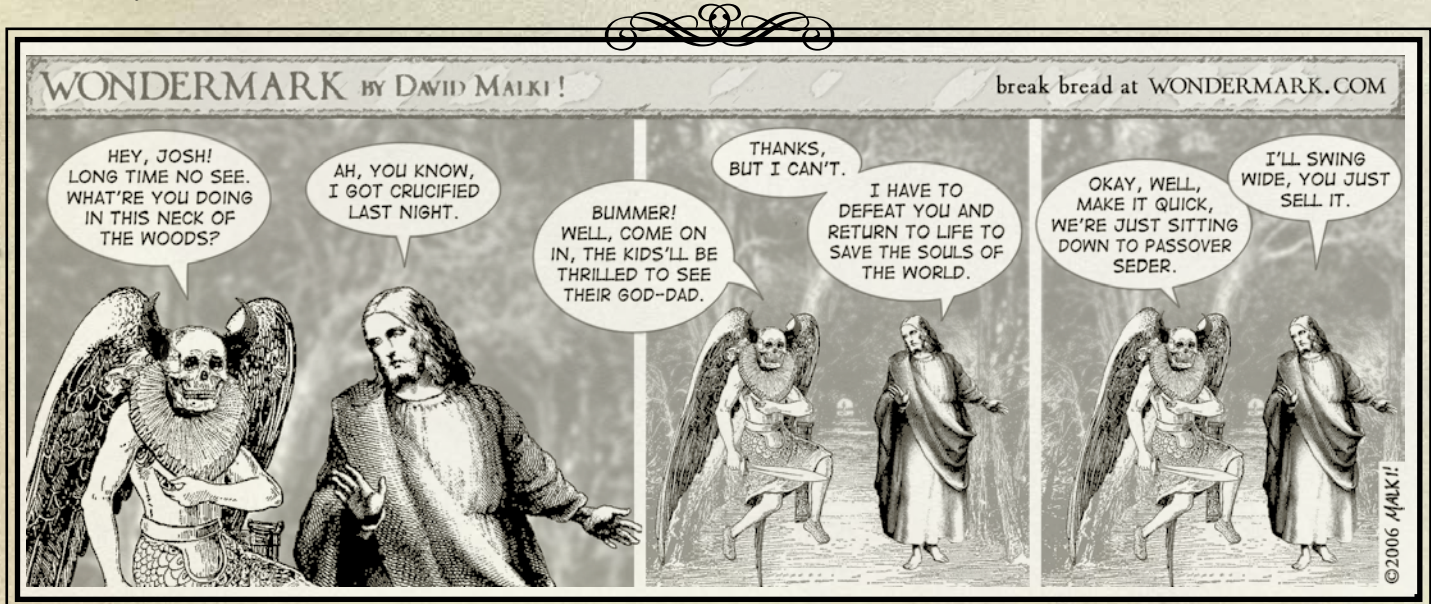
A ROUNDABOUT METHOD OF PRODUCT INTRODUCTION



on the peel-off part of the sticker it continues on to say "...and given the inherent limitations of the medium i frankly cannot comprehend its appeal as a vehicle for the vigorous exchange of ideas"



save your creativity for your livejournal. here at work we pour vodka into old milk AND WHEN WE DO IT WE SMILE

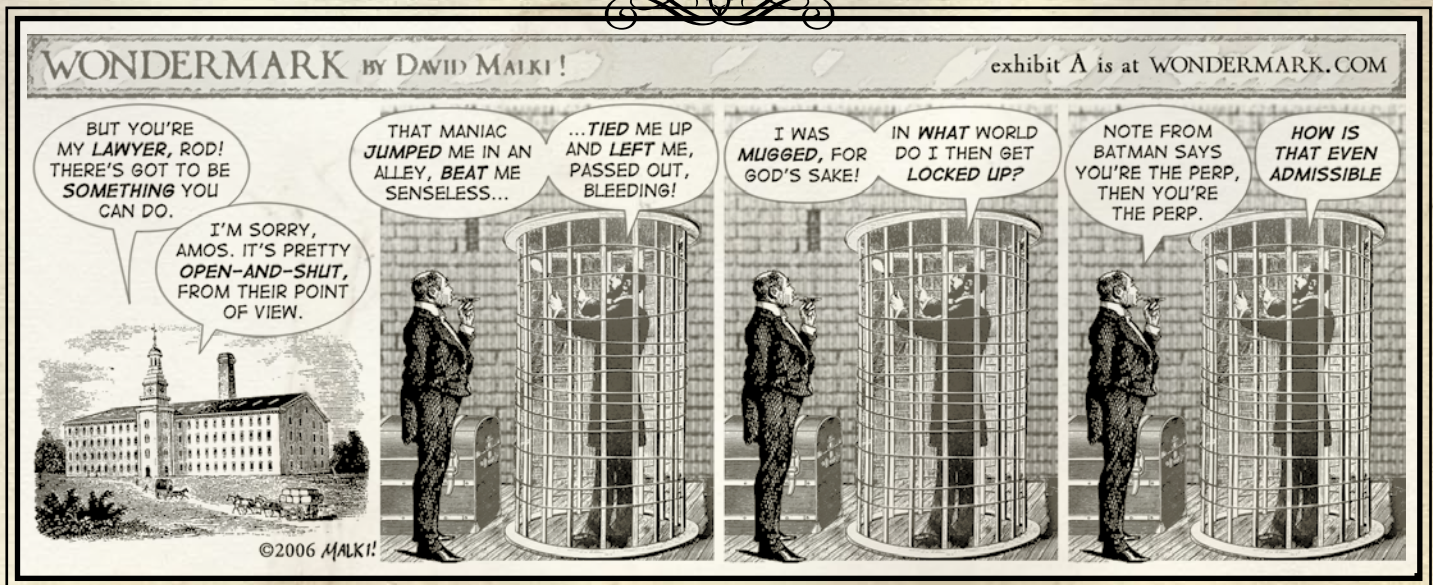


josh was middleweight boxing champ in nazareth in 8th grade. not many people know that

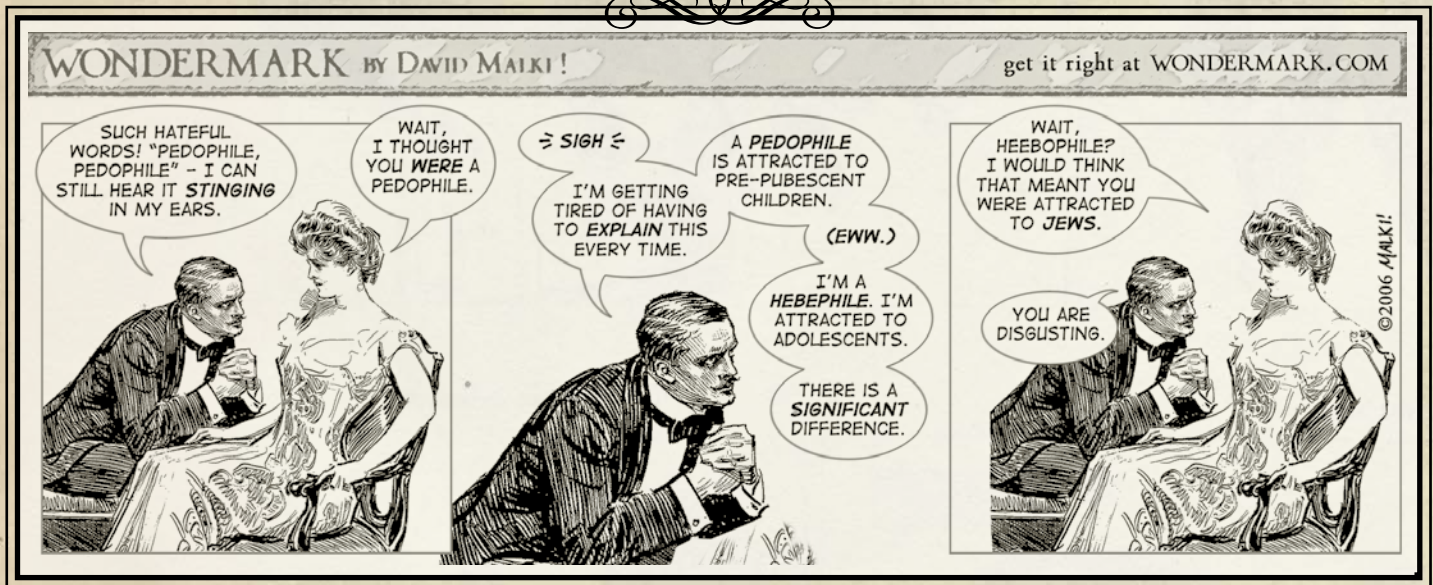


she knocked back some eight-ball before leaving home but this job requires overtime

A DISPLAY OF CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE



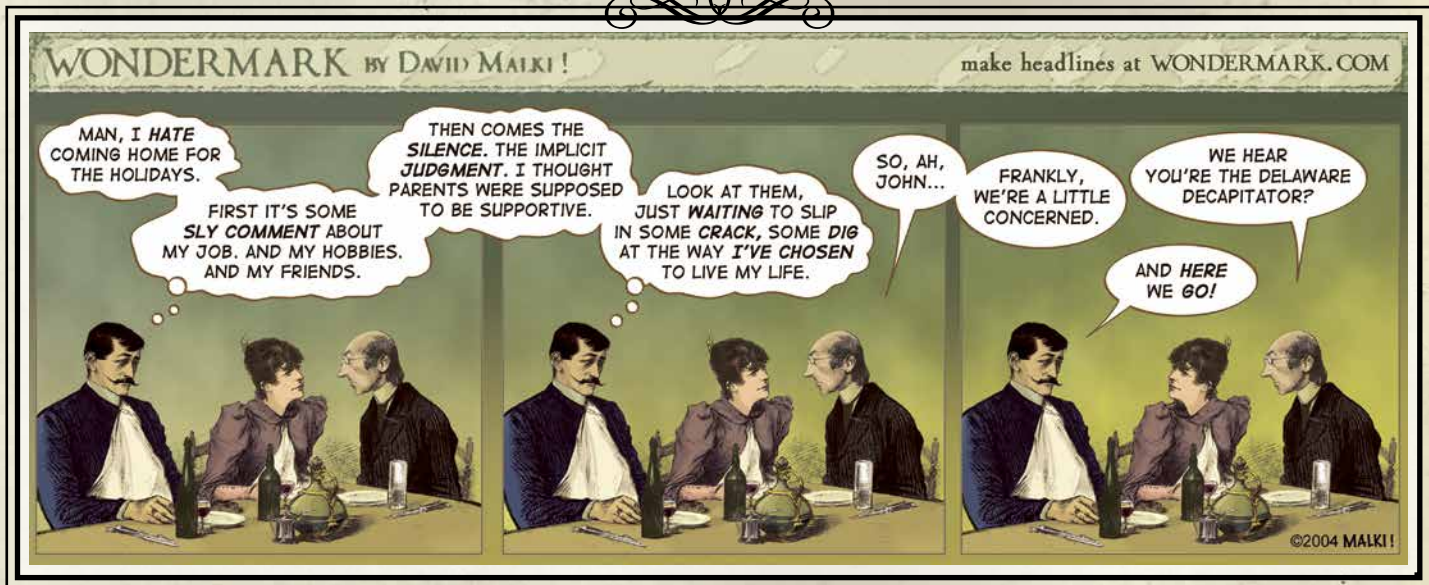
seriously who even goes into dark alleys these days unless you are a thuggish type bent on mayhem



i was a pedophile in the second grade



also not having attended earth kindergarten he would not have developed an immunity to cooties



this has happened to me about three times now



“He came up with his own catchy name.”

IT WAS clear from the beginning that the Delaware Decapitator was a new breed of serial killer. Within minutes of the discovery of his second victim—like the first, a heavysset truck driver in his fifties with a secret fetish for porcelain dolls—the Decapitator posted gruesome details on his blog, as if he’d composed the entry in an adrenaline fever and was simply waiting for the body to be found before he clicked “submit.” Complete with photos, social bookmarking links, and truly awful freeform poetry, *delawaredecapitator.blogspot.com* was a trove of grisly details much revered by rubbernecking voyeurs, but summarily dismissed by law enforcement as alternately as a “sick prank” or “misinformation just asking us to fall for it.”

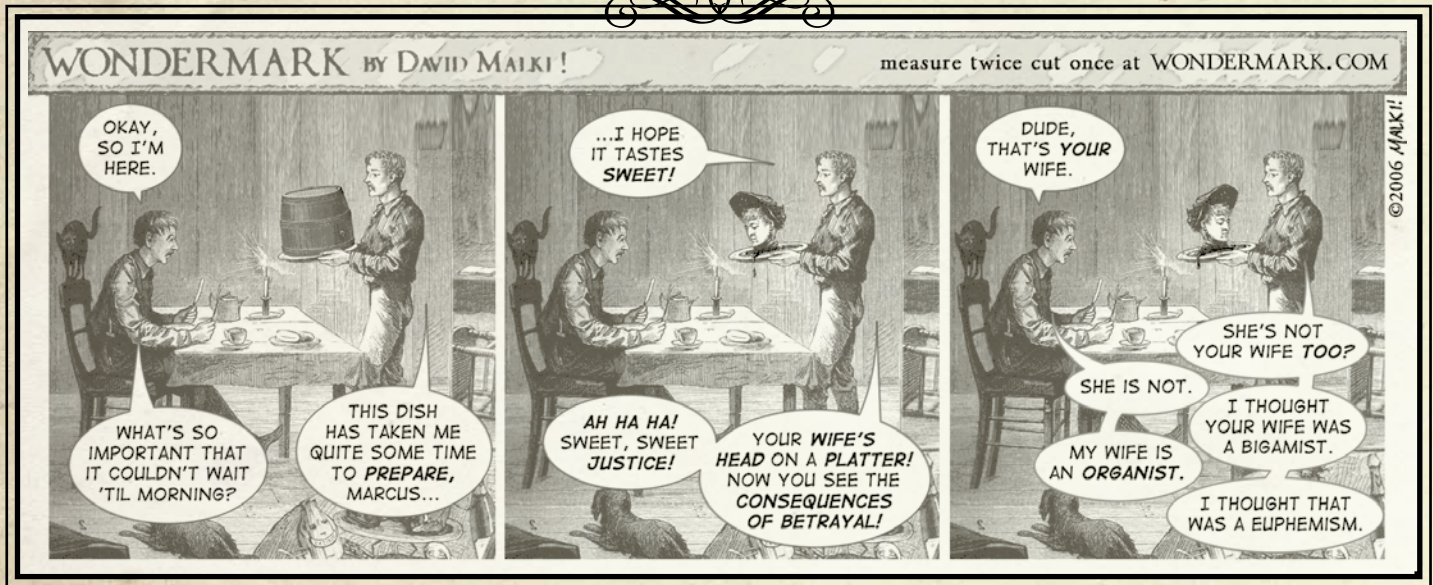
This marginalization was a source of constant frustration to the killer. The addition of a podcast, featuring alleged recordings of the doll-loving victims’ last gasping

breaths, spawned a viral meme and legions of YouTube imitations, yet only detracted from the blog’s credibility. Even a petulant list of details that could purportedly have been known only to the real Decapitator was largely ignored by investigators, and the subsequent adaptation of the list by pranksters into a series of LOLcat-style captions over crime-scene photos only enraged the murderer further.

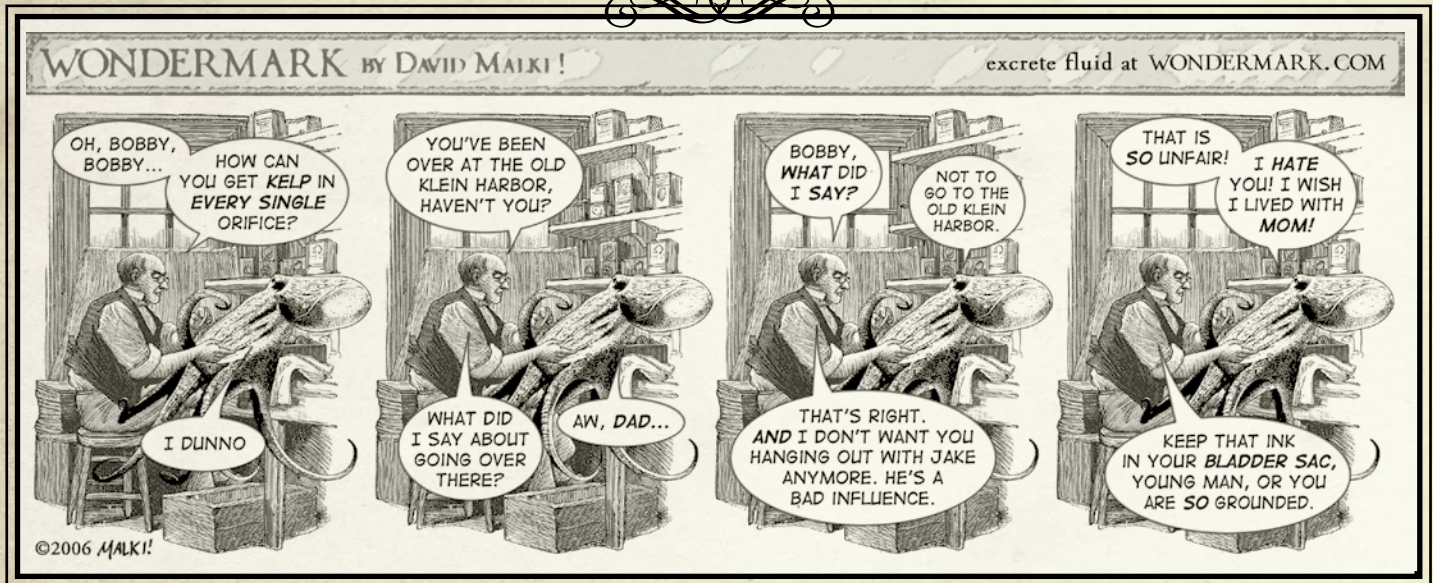
The Decapitator will surely be remembered as the first serial killer to be obsessed with his own Wikipedia entry. Fanatical about reverting the edits of others, regardless of the content (annotating each reversion with “rv vandalism”), he provoked a heated argument on the article’s talk page with Wiki editor “SexDoctorPHD” (later revealed to be 15-year-old Justin Payne). Two weeks later, Payne’s body was discovered decapitated in a Burger King bathroom; his head was shipped postage-due to the home of Wikipedia founder Jimbo Wales, and the killer had vanished into the ether of history.



An inexpensive steel collar can protect you from casual decapitators.



it's not



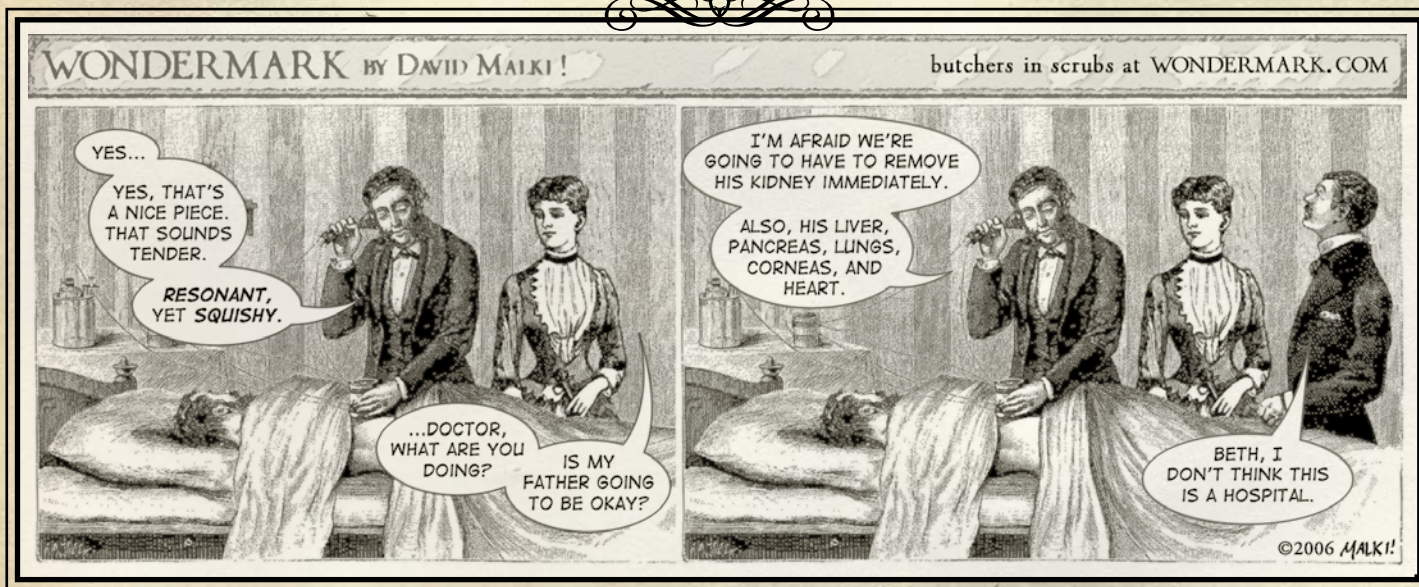
jake is a jellyfish with an attitude problem



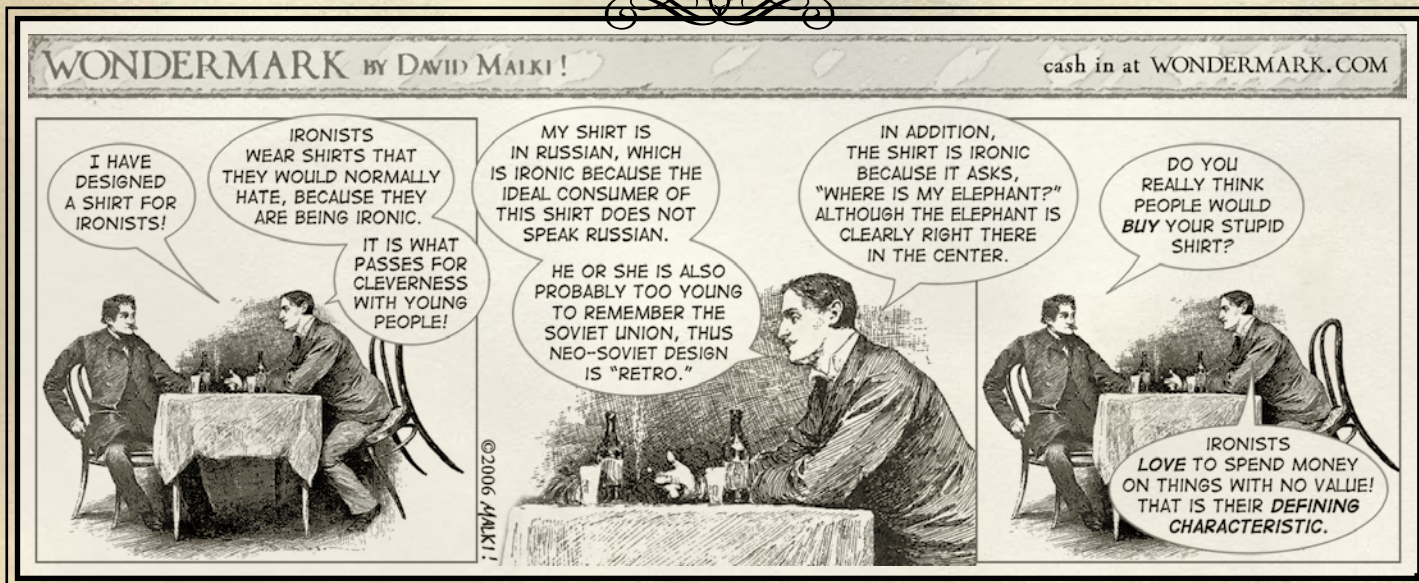
the listerine lobby claims another victim



in fact, he has his master's in catology and has done extensive post-graduate work at the cat institute in catington but stopped short of getting his Ch.D. due to an unfortunate catastrophe



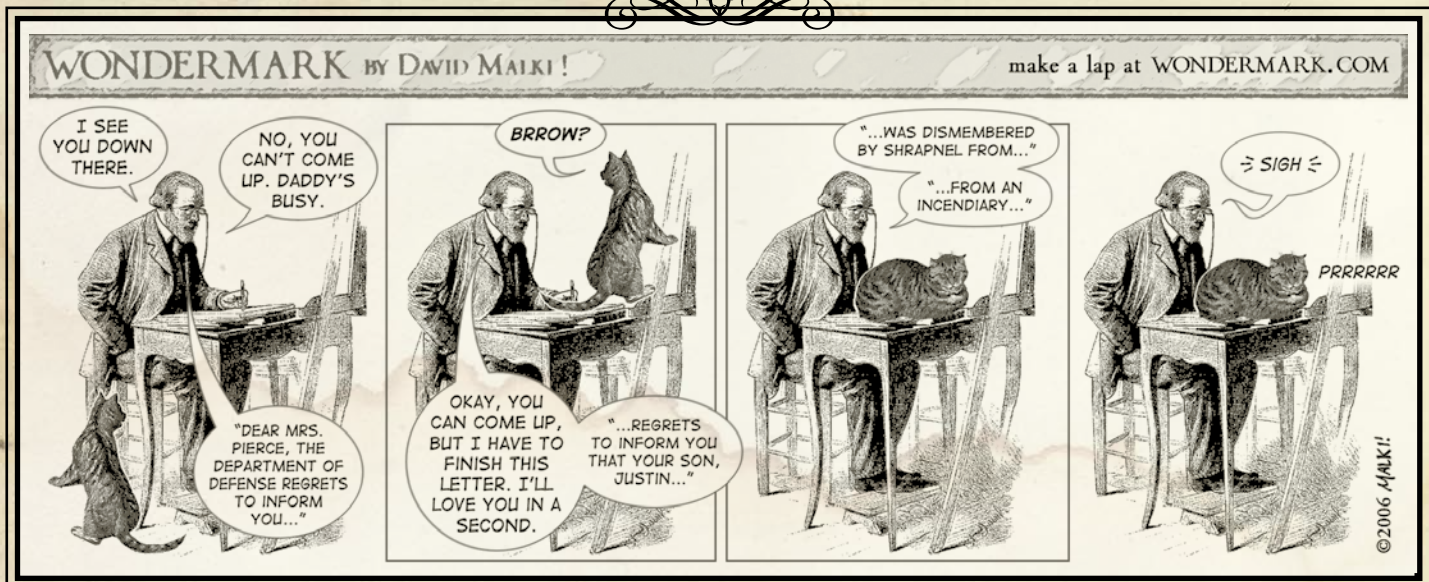
but the craigslist thing said to just pull around back to the loading dock! THAT'S WHAT WE DID



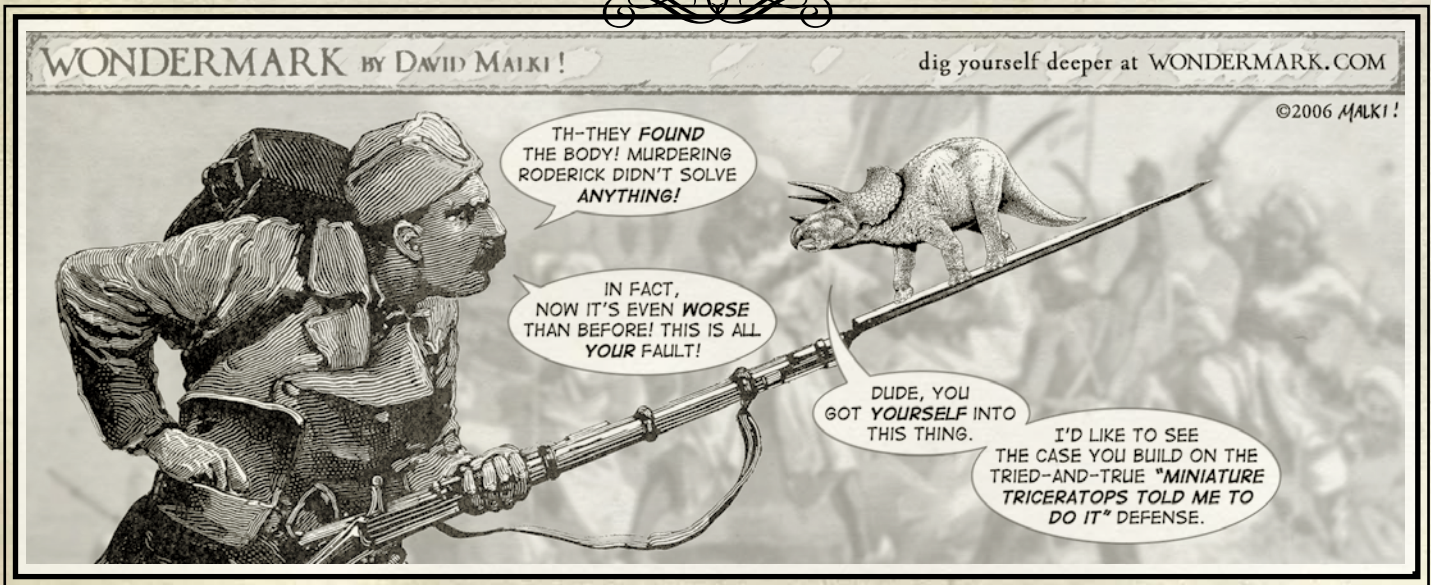
also, you see, it is ironic because i am making fun of the concept but i did actually manufacture and sell the shirts



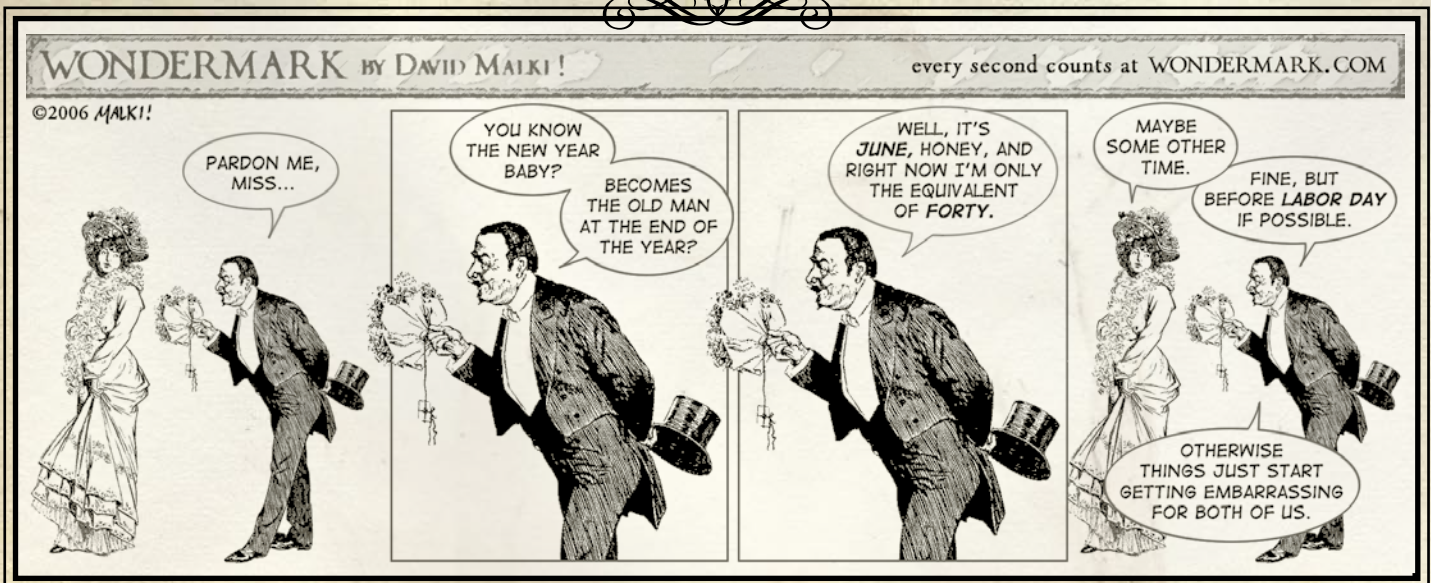
taft was a well-known yukster but jimmy here would cause the most awkward of silences at all the state dinners



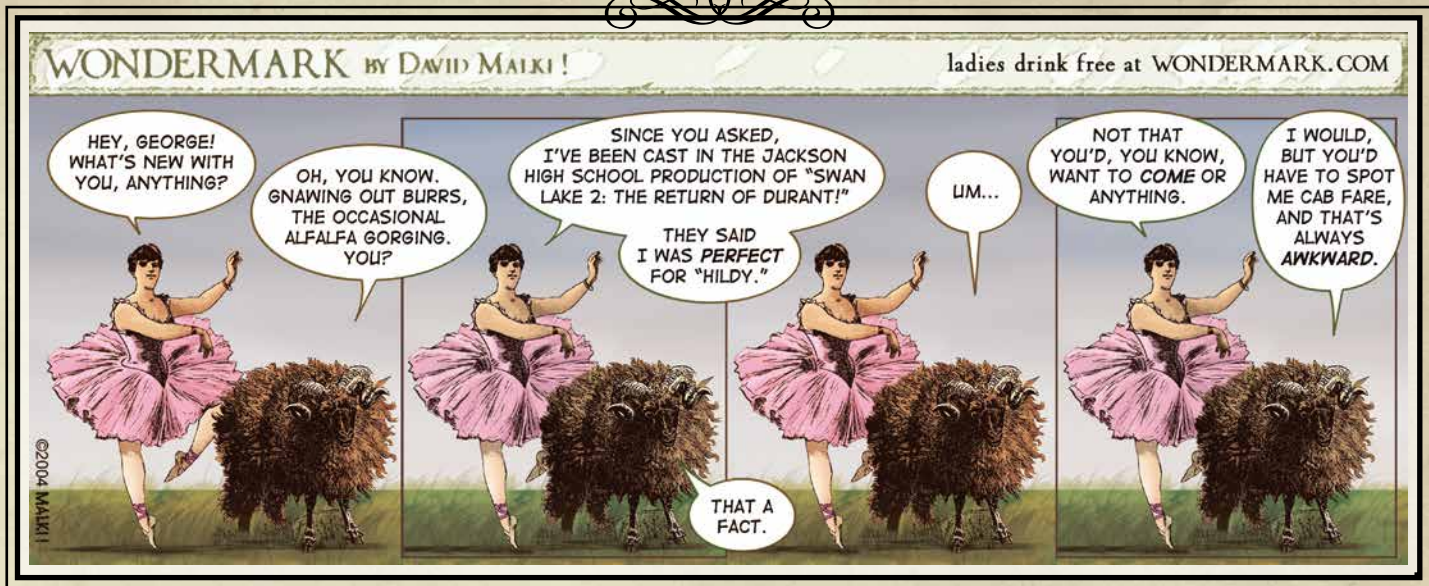
pfc. pierce heroically hid in a trench while his legs were located by members of the 1st infantry



actually there is precedent—see *canada v. north et al*, 2003 scc 1



try this pick-up line. report back to me.



swan lake 3: die sigfried die



**"Something happened
to our friendship."**

GEORGE and I used to be so close—we'd go out two or three nights a week! Back when we lived right next door it was easier, of course, but even when I decided to move to the city, he promised that we'd still get together all the time. It hasn't happened that way, though—he's gotten really distant, and we hardly even talk anymore. I guess we're both busy, but I still forward him funny jokes my mom sends me, and I send him Evites and all sorts of stuff, even texting him sometimes just to say "hi." But he doesn't follow through on his commitments, and I'm tired of waiting on sidewalks outside of shows, checking my voicemail all night long to see if he's called.

I don't know what exactly's come between us, but I really miss the friendship we used to share. I know that sometimes people drift apart. But it wouldn't be this bad if he'd just answer an email now and then!

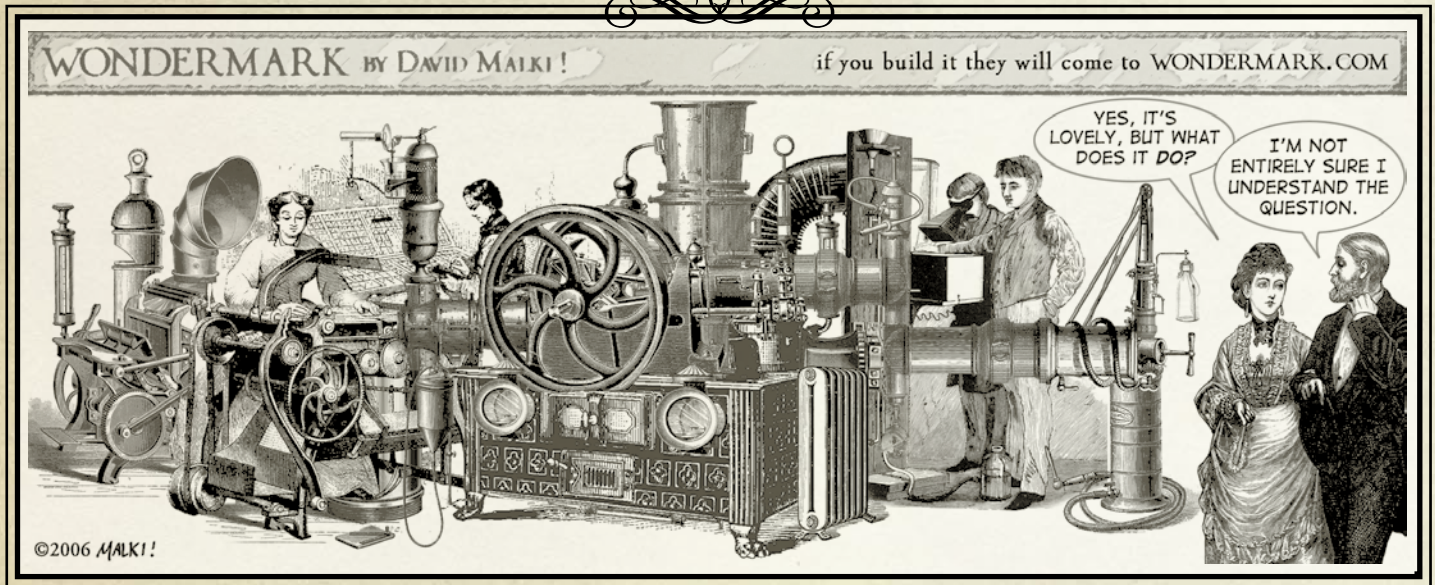


WHEN I first met Barbara in the Jackson High auditorium during the S.L.2 auditions, I was shocked. Here was a woman in her, I don't know, thirties maybe, clearly self-taught in ballet but no less in command of the stage for that, and she wanted to be in *our* little seat-of-the-pants production! I relished getting to know the *real* Barbara—a wounded soul stuffed into an ill-fitting thrift-store tutu, crying out for love and attention.

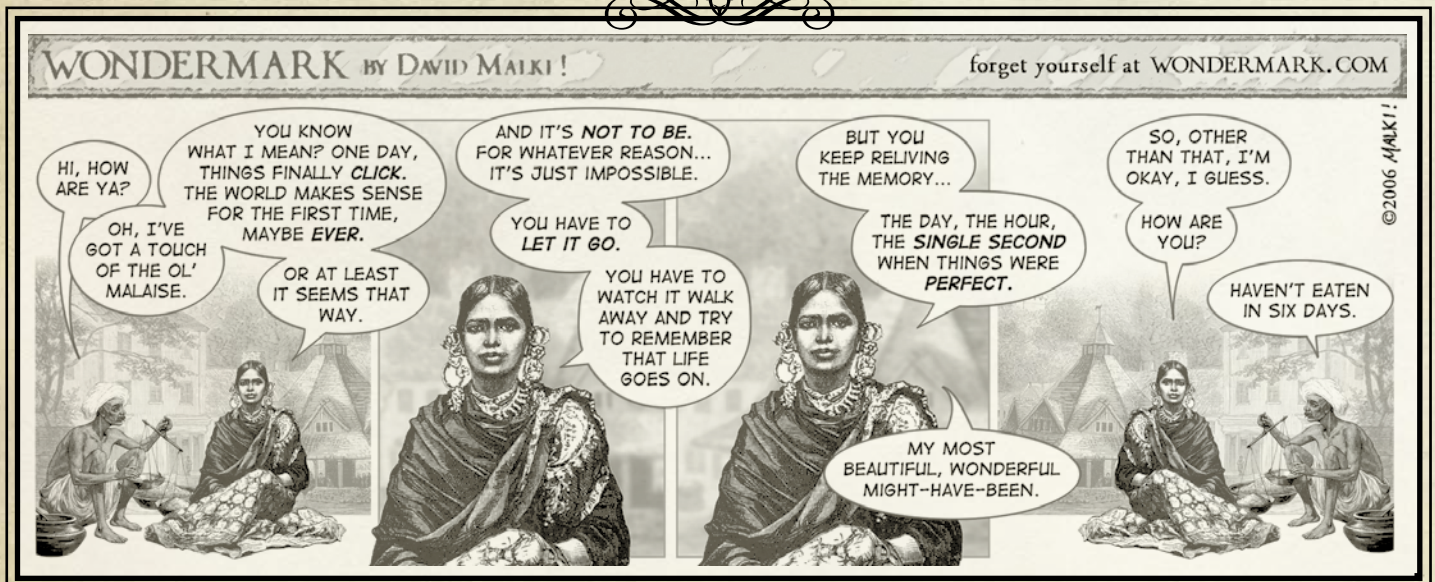
I did offer myself to her, should she ever need a comforting hand, but alas, she was stuck on some boy from back home...some lucky, *lucky* boy.

HI BARBARA SORRY I'VE BEEN SLOW WRITINGH BACK TO YOUIU GLAD ITS GOING WELL,, SORRY IF YOUY HAVE BEEN TRY ING TO REACH ME.....BUT I AM A SHEEP I AM NOT VERY GOOD AT USING KEYBAORDS BABRBARA





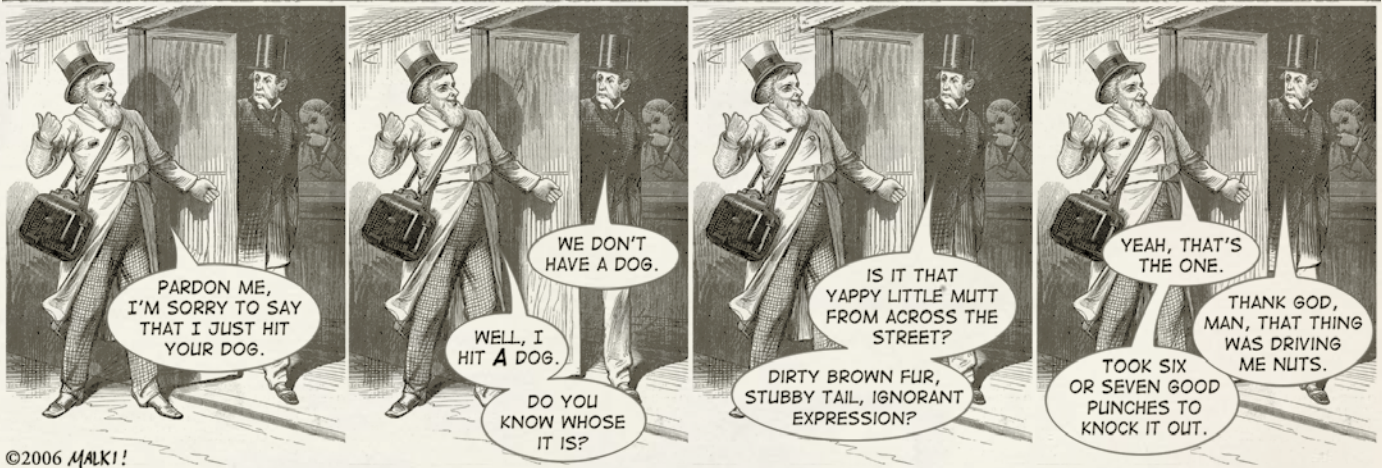
once the glue gun gets warmed up it is really hard to stop



but curiously he still eliminates right on schedule

WONDERMARK BY DAVID MALKI!

bark loudly at WONDERMARK.COM



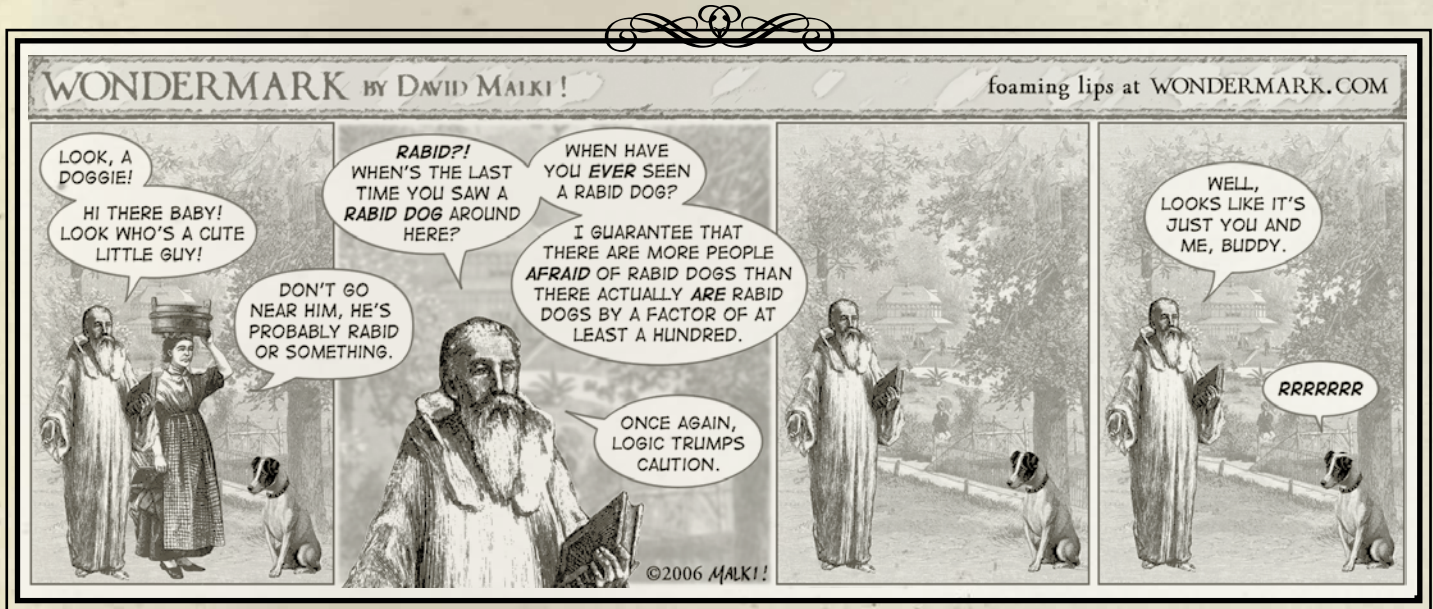
passed out right before he went back for the softball bat

WONDERMARK BY DAVID MALKI!

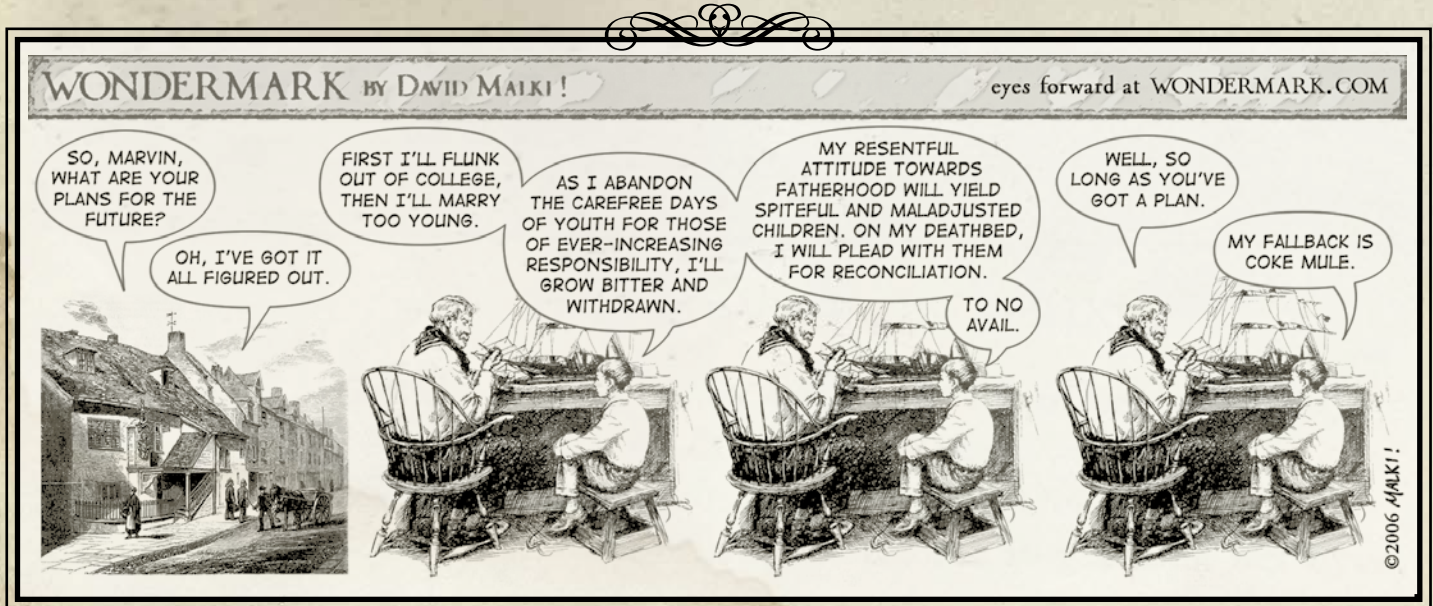
wed well at WONDERMARK.COM



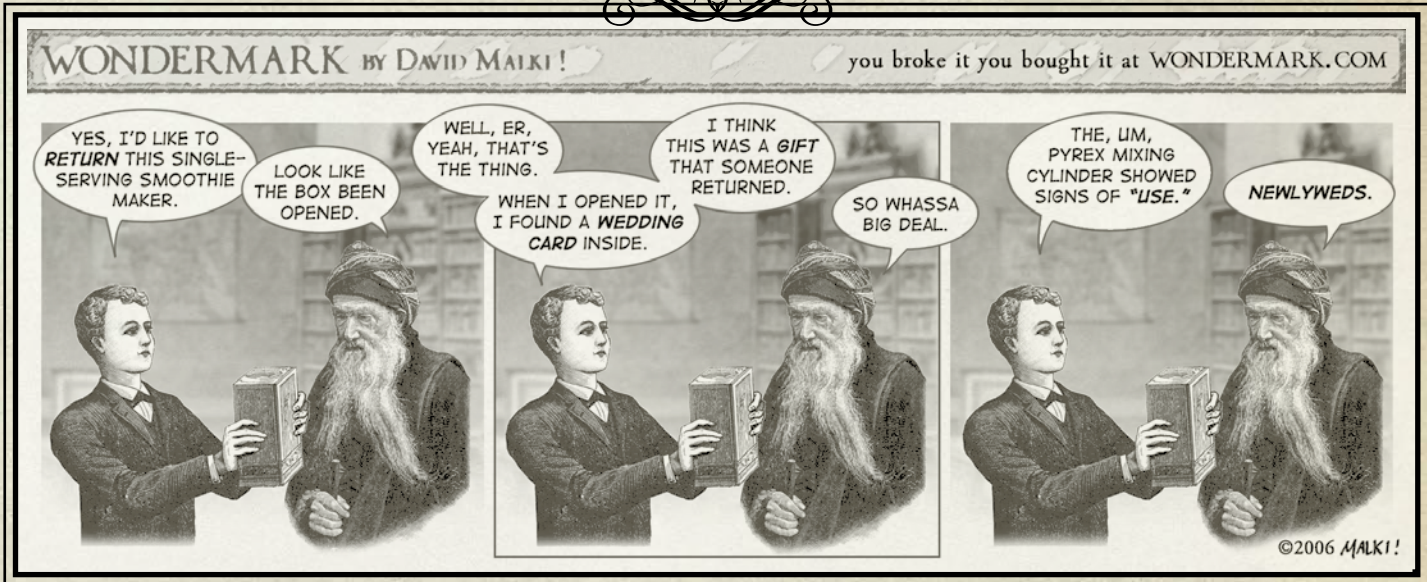
and what an hour



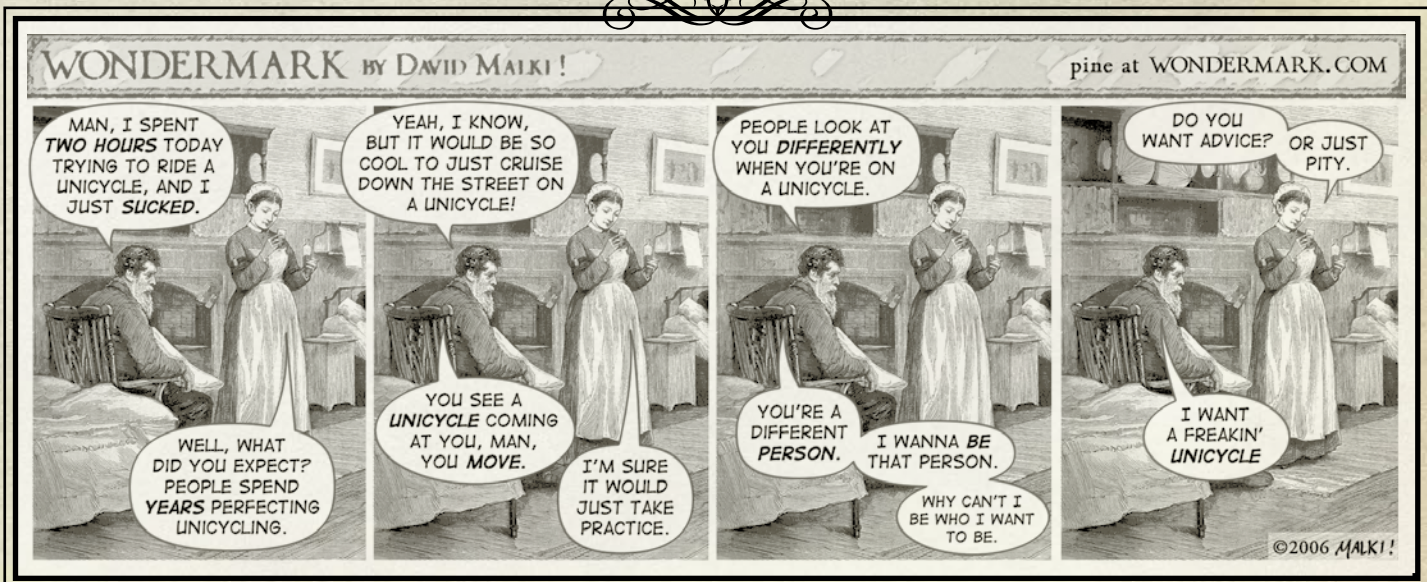
logic also trumps fate, lust, and medicine



julio said i'd be a natural



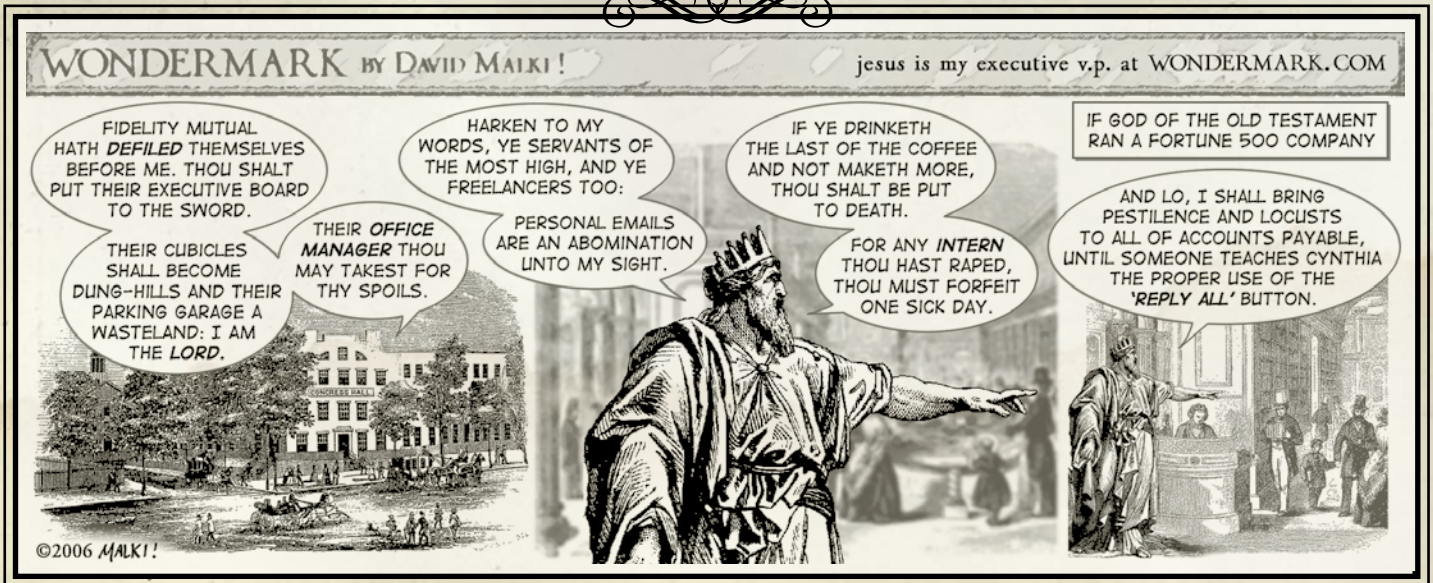
it has three speeds and, for ADVENTUROUS couples, a 'liquefy' setting



if i were on a desert island with a unicycle i bet within six weeks i would be inventin' all sorts of mad new techniques



IT WAS TOPICAL IN 2006 OKAY



there are ten commandments but eight of them are about parking spaces and the other two are about food left in the fridge over the weekend



modesty, chastity, virtue

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www.iPeanutButterPeople.com

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Fast, Easy Simple Monkey Making. I Made \$25,000 in 60 days.

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Find out with this Free Discomfort Test to see how Discomfort you are!

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My Site Will Reveal To You The Top Money-Making Work At Home Speculum Programs.

Top20-home-pap-smears.com

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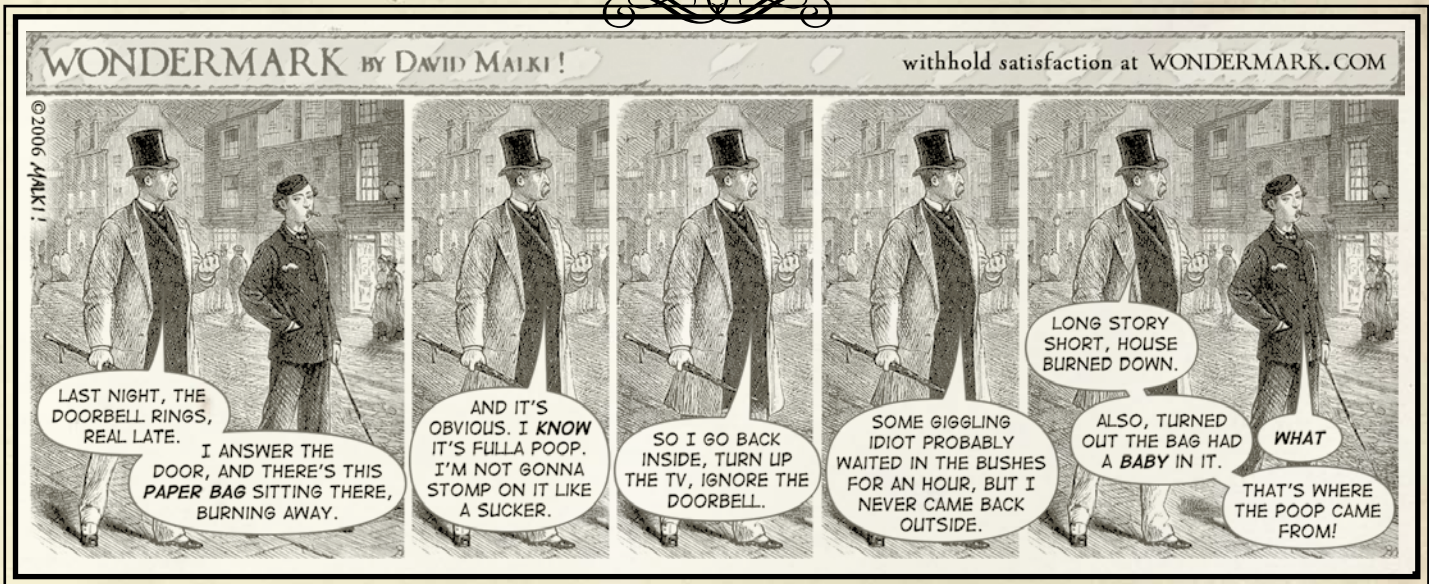
www.usa-lubricants.net/

[page 69 guaranteed](#)

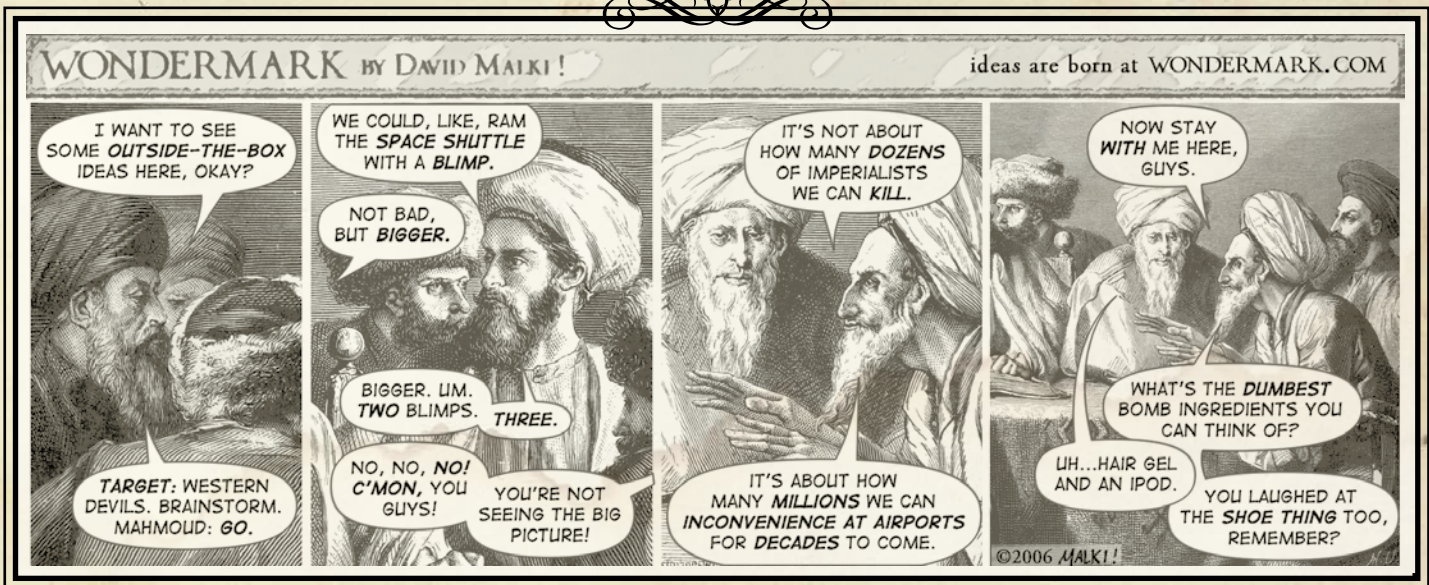
Ãçà,-Ã"bdÃçà,-Ã

Xtreme-Million-Dollar-Profits.tv/HomeBiz/MakingBux/dont-get-scammed/

Ads by Google



don't worry it wasn't a _____* baby
 (*YOUR RACE, RELIGION, ETHNICITY OR OTHER SUBGROUP)

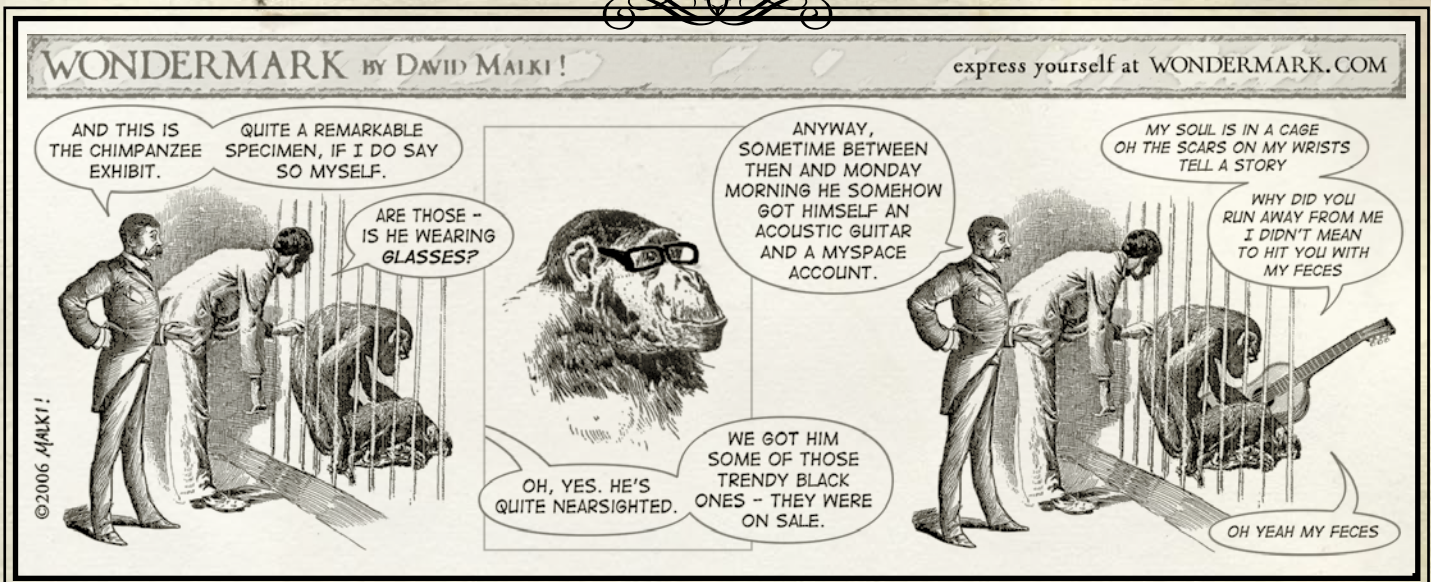


also they have installed moles at the x-ray machines
 who foil imperialism by working reeeeally slowly





sigh. more true life comics, folks



there are also many songs about bananas, pining, and pining for bananas



INTERMISSION.

Notes.



he comics on the following pages were created for special venues. Many of them were never featured on the Wondermark site, and thus you may be seeing them for the first time. Do not be alarmed; I will guide you safely through the wending corridors ahead. Here is what to expect:

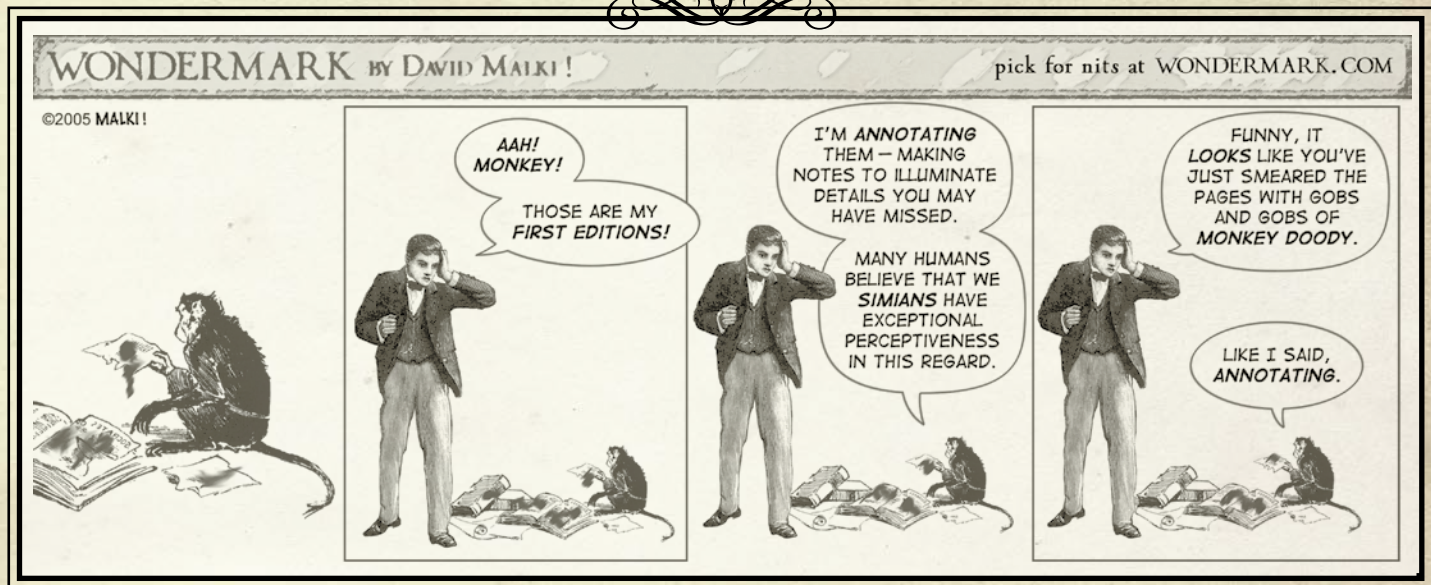
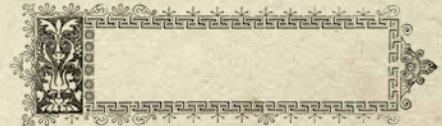
THIS PAGE'S COMIC was created for "Monkey Day," both a holiday celebrated on December 14th and an associated media event spearheaded by Casey Sorrow. Monkey fans may go on to explore *monkeyday.com*.

THE COMICS ON PAGES 74–75 were created for the "Webcomic Hurricane Relief Telethon," an event featuring work by over 100 cartoonists and raising \$28,635 in aid for victims of Hurricane Katrina.

THE COMICS ON PAGES 76–77 were originally published in *Zoinks!*, a bimonthly newspaper devoted solely to webcomics. Exclusive Wondermark comics were featured regularly in *Zoinks!* during its two-year run. Some of those same comics later ran on the Wondermark site as regular episodes, while a few were frankly just bad and will not be reproduced again.

THE COMICS ON PAGES 78–79 were created by friends of Wondermark as guest episodes while I was on my honeymoon in 2006. Many of the 19 total guest comics that ran online were fascinating departures from the Wondermark mold; these four (as well as the strip on page 31) hewed more closely to the format.

PAGES 80–81 feature works in progress that I have abandoned. If you care to maintain your high estimation of me, I cannot recommend that you read them.

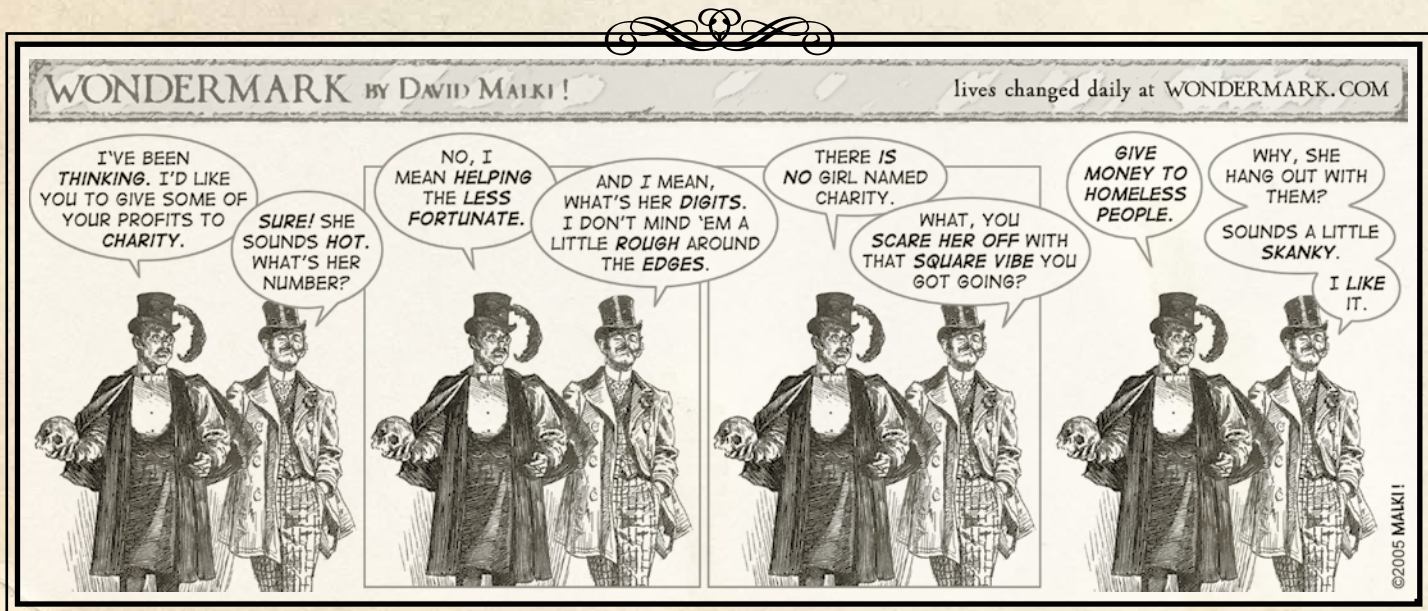


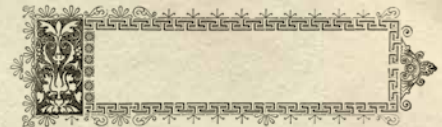
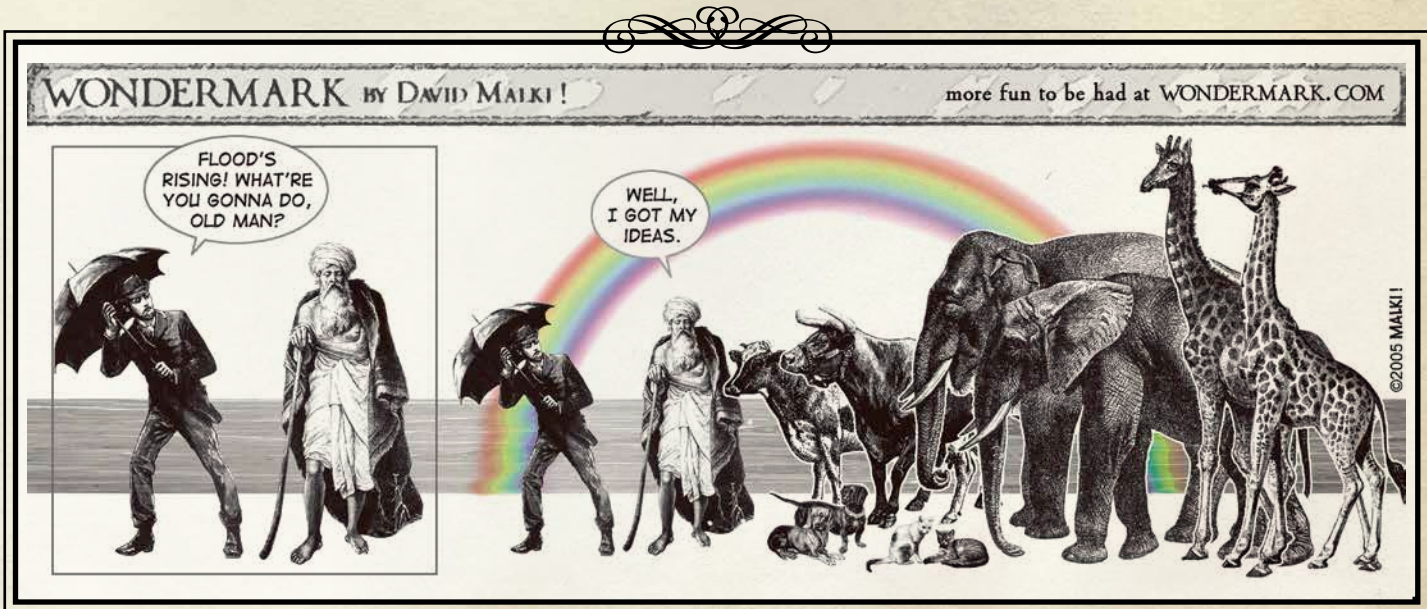
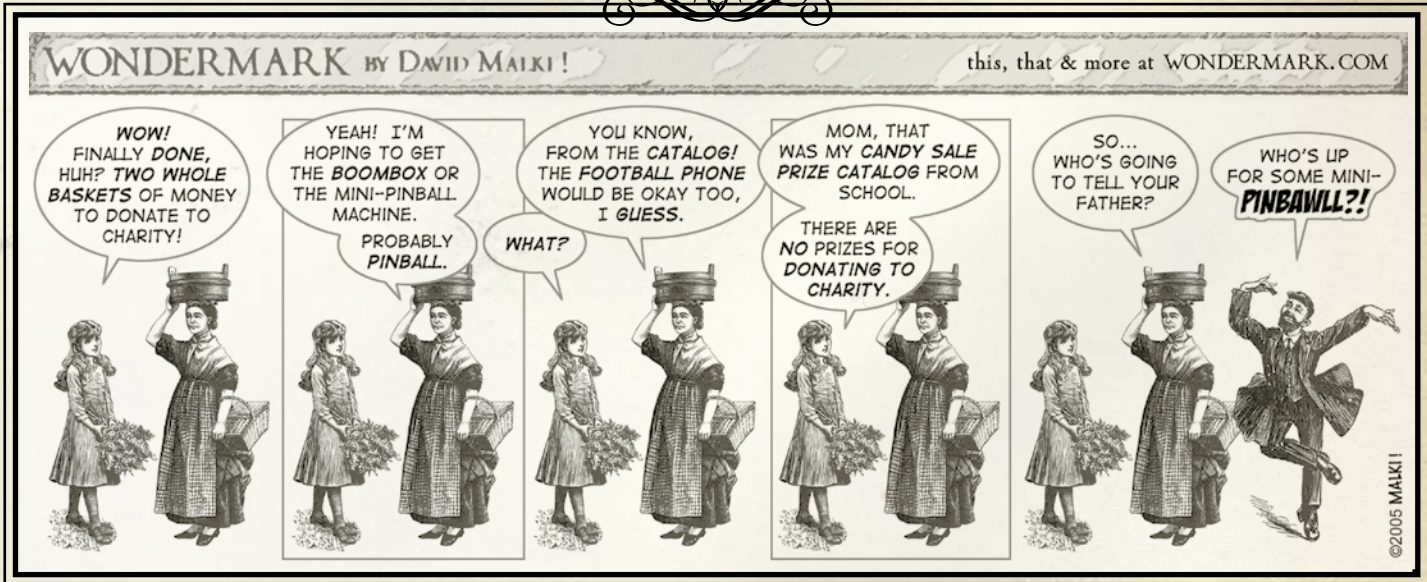
i've already made careful notes in your wedding album





BOthering to do it's cool that you're





WONDERMARK BY DAVID MALKI!

slake your thirst at WONDERMARK.COM

TRICK OR TREATERS! DELIGHTFUL! AND WHO DO WE HAVE HERE?

LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD, AND A PIRATE...

AND WHO MIGHT YOU BE?

TEDDY ROOSEVELT. GIMME THE CANDY.

WELL, MR. PRESIDENT! THIS IS QUITE AN HONOR!

TELL ME, HOW THRILLING WAS IT VISITING THE PANAMA CANAL IN 1906?

IT WAS GREAT. HAND OVER THE GOODS.

I REALLY RESPECT YOUR "SQUARE DEAL" LEGISLATION BETWEEN BUSINESS AND LABOR...

OH, SURELY YOU CAN SPEAK A LITTLE ABOUT BEING THE FIRST PRESIDENT TO RIDE IN AN AIRPLANE?

IT'S A RUBBER MASK. CANDY PLEASE.

YES. YES I CAN TAKE A DUMP IN YOUR MAILBOX.

I CAN'T GET UP

MY FOOT IS ALL TANGLED

IT'S REALLY HARD TO BREATHE

GUYS I'M SERIOUS HERE

©2005 MALKI!
www.wondermark.com

WONDERMARK BY DAVID MALKI!

scrub fiercely at WONDERMARK.COM

IS IT MY THIGHS? BECAUSE I'VE BEEN WORKING OUT AND THEY'RE STARTING TO GET A LITTLE MEATIER...

IT'S NOT YOUR THIGHS.

IS IT... IS IT THE JOB?

THE WHOLE ANGEL OF DEATH THING?

IT'S...NOT SO MUCH THE JOB ITSELF AS IT IS THE HITLER-HEADED GOAT THAT COMES WITH THE JOB.

I DON'T REALLY MIND THE INCESSANT YODELING, BUT ANYTHING THAT LEAKS BLOOD HAS ME WORRIED ABOUT MY SECURITY DEPOSIT.

OKAY, WELL, SO IT'S NOT MY THIGHS AND IT'S NOT MY HAIR AND IT'S NOTHING I'VE DONE OR NOT DONE, SO YOU SAY...

BECAUSE I'LL QUIT IT IN A SECOND, BABY, I'LL ROLL OVER MY 401(K) AND FIND A NICE GIG IN A NURSING HOME OR A MILITARY PRISON OR ANYWHERE.

PUFFYKINS STAYS.

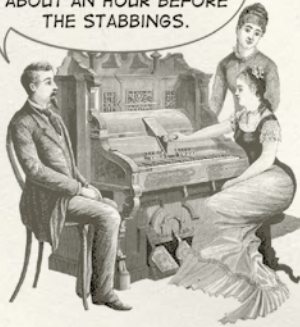
©2006 MALKI!

IT IS TO IMAGINE STUFF
REMEMBER HOW FUN

WONDERMARK BY DAVID MAIKI!

follow procedure at WONDERMARK.COM

FIRST THING YOU DO AT A CRIME SCENE IS SURVEY FOR EVIDENCE. I KNEW BARNES HAD CHANGED CLOTHES ABOUT AN HOUR BEFORE THE STABBINGS.



WE LOOKED AROUND. I SAW HE'D LEFT SOME UNDERSHORTS SITTING OUT, SO I PICKED 'EM UP AND TOOK A WHIFF, YOU KNOW, THAT'S JUST WHAT YOU DO.



AFTER THAT IT WAS A SNAP. I'D PICKED UP HIS DISTINCTIVE OLFACTORY SIGNATURE, AND WE TRACKED HIM ALL THE WAY TO THAT MOTEL ROOM.



THAT'S ABOUT HOW IT WENT DOWN. ANY QUESTIONS OR ANYTHING?



YEAH, ONE: "BECAUSE THAT'S JUST WHAT YOU DO"?

©2006 MAIKI!



You can clean a computer keyboard in the dishwasher.

WONDERMARK BY DAVID MAIKI!

blaze a new trail at WONDERMARK.COM

AH! THE INTREPID EXPLORER HAS RETURNED!

WHAT RICHES HAVE YOU BROUGHT FROM THE WEST?



WELL, UH... I'VE GOT SOME FURS. AND, UM. YEAH, LET'S SEE... MAINLY FURS.



©2006 MAIKI!

FURS. OKAY.

I MEAN, THAT'S BASICALLY WHAT THERE WAS. I DIDN'T KNOW YOU WERE AFTER SOMETHING SPECIFIC, OR I WOULD HAVE...



N-NO, FURS ARE ALL RIGHT, I GUESS.

ARE YOU SURE? BECAUSE I CAN JUST GO BACK ACROSS THE OCEAN AND GLANCE AROUND SOME MORE...



WELL, ACTUALLY I WOULD LIKE THAT WAS SARCASTIC



Ignore people who hate you, unless they have a point.

WONDERMARK BY DAVID MAIKI!

brother, wanna thank your mother for a butt like WONDERMARK.COM

COULD WE POSSIBLY FIND ANOTHER DATE VENUE?

THIS ISN'T ROMANTIC?

MARK, PEOPLE ARE STARTING TO TALK.

©2006 WARREN BEATTY

True enough, people were starting to talk...

THE HELL IS THAT?

JESUS!

I KNOW, RIGHT?



it's got feelings too, you know - hopefully PAIN



WONDERMARK BY DAVID MAIKI!

MERRY CHRISTMAS, DARLING! TIME TO UNWRAP YOUR PRESENT!

BEGONE, WOMAN. THE DEPTHS OF THE SOUL I MUST PLUMB ALONE.

DEAREST ONE! TORTURE YOURSELF NO LONGER. YOUR LOVER IS NEAR!

DEATH IS THE LOVER OF US ALL, AND HE KNOWS NO FOREPLAY.

I SHOULD NEVER HAVE GOTTEN YOU THAT MINI-SCYTHE.

TO ME MY EYESHADOW! I WOULD MAKE A VLOG ENTRY.



ghod you emo kids



WONDERMARK BY DAVID MALKI!

indulge your checkered past at WONDERMARK.COM

"MY MAMMARY
GLANDS / MY
MAMMARY GLANDS"



"MY PULCHRITUDINOUS
FEMININE CONTOURS"



I CAN ONLY HOPE
THAT MY MASTERWORK
WILL BE REALIZED BY THE
LEXICAL MIGHT OF
FUTURE GENERATIONS.



additionally, my frosted whipped beverage summons lads to my garden

GUEST COMIC BY ROB BALDER (PARTIALLYCLIPS.COM)

PartiallyWONDERMARK BY ROB BALDER!

guest worker program at WONDERMARK.COM

"TOP HATS LOOK
RETARDED?"

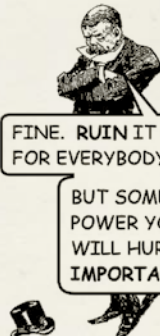
HOW CAN YOU
PRINT THIS?



BECAUSE
IT'S TRUE.

BUT...YOU'RE
NOT SUPPOSED
TO SAY IT!

I'M A JOURNALIST. MY DUTY
IS TO THE TRUTH, NO MATTER
WHO GETS HURT BY IT.



FINE. RUIN IT
FOR EVERYBODY.

BUT SOMEDAY, THAT
POWER YOU WIELD
WILL HURT SOMEBODY
IMPORTANT TO YOU!



DON'T CARE.

EXTRA! EXTRA!



P-PAPERBOYS...
RUN LIKE GIRLS!

SOB

©2006 BALDER & MALKI

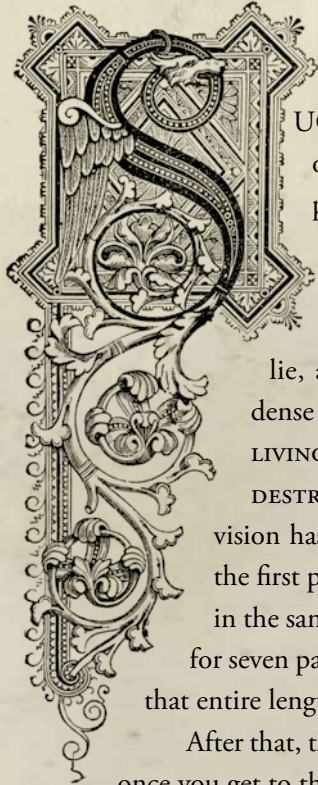
it's a hard knock life



I've sketched this strip by hand for the book, but back when I wrote it, I didn't feel like digging up old-timey source images for all the different props it would require. Besides, right after I wrote it, a couple other webcomics featured placenta gags, and this would have felt like a reread.



Not real sure where this one was going.



UCH is the sum of comic strips in this volume. Most of them were pretty okay; of the remainder, a few were particularly astute, a few dismal, and a handful incomprehensible. Exactly one was peerlessly brilliant, and exactly one other was crap; on this I think we can all agree.

So what now? There are still fourteen pages left. I could lie, and say that the remainder of this book is filled with dense blocks of text within which are hidden THE SECRETS OF LIVING CONTENTEDLY IN A COLD WORLD DOOMED TO EVENTUAL DESTRUCTION BY SUPERNOVA, but I imagine your peripheral vision has alerted you to the contents of the facing page. That is the first page of *Treachery!*, an eight-page graphic narrative created in the same manner as Wondermark comic strips. It continues on for seven pages past the first, and it tells a single continuous story for that entire length. I believe I am the first to conceive of such a thing.

After that, there are some other things. But you can see what they are once you get to them. Let us take events as they come, and savor them.



Treachery!

By David Malki!
of the Internet Web-Site
WONDERMARK.COM

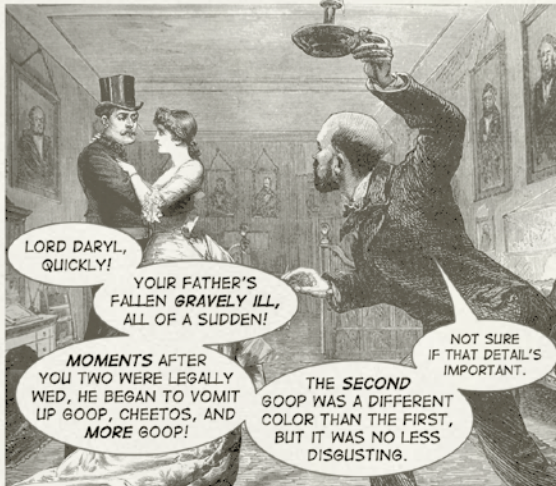
OH, MATHILDA,
YOU'VE MADE ME
THE HAPPIEST MAN
IN THE WORLD.

AND I'M SO GLAD
YOU FELL IN LOVE WITH ME,
AND NOT MY FATHER'S
MANY MILLIONS - WHICH I
WOULDN'T INHERIT UNTIL
HE DIED, ANYWAY!

IT REALLY
MAKES ME THINK
THIS MARRIAGE
COULD *TOTALLY*
WORK!

YES, AS
YOU KNOW, DARYL,
IT'S *STRICTLY* YOUR
CHARMING DEMEANOR
THAT ATTRACTS
ME TO YOU!

NOT AT ALL
THE *VAST HORDS*
OF WEALTH A MERE
HEARTBEAT FROM OUR
JOINT CHECKING
ACCOUNT!



LORD DARYL,
QUICKLY!

YOUR FATHER'S
FALLEN *GRAVELY* ILL,
ALL OF A SUDDEN!

MOMENTS AFTER
YOU TWO WERE LEGALLY
WED, HE BEGAN TO VOMIT
UP GOOP, CHEETOS, AND
MORE GOOP!

THE *SECOND*
GOOP WAS A DIFFERENT
COLOR THAN THE FIRST,
BUT IT WAS NO LESS
DISGUSTING.

NOT SURE
IF THAT DETAIL'S
IMPORTANT.



WHAAAAAT!

OH, I'M SURE
IT'S *NOTHING*,
HONEY...

UNHAND ME,
WOMAN!



EXTRY, EXTRY!
OLD COOT DIES
PEACEFULLY!

FOUL PLAY RULED
OUT IMMEDIATELY!

WHAT?!
LET ME SEE THAT
TABLOID TRASH!
LIES, I TELL YOU,
ALL LIES!

YES, THE BARON
IS VERY ILL. YES, HE
HAS BEEN VOIDING.
BUT HE'S STILL
QUITE ALIVE!



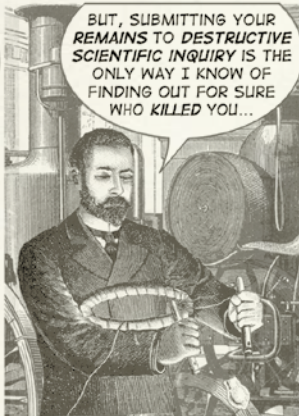
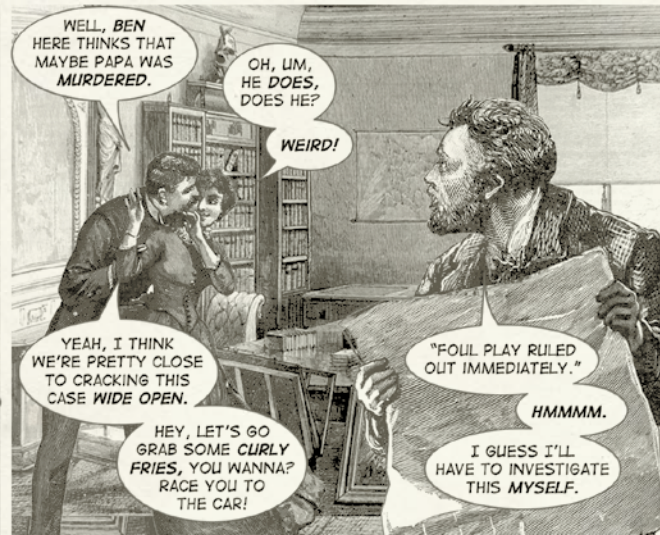
OH,
IS HE?

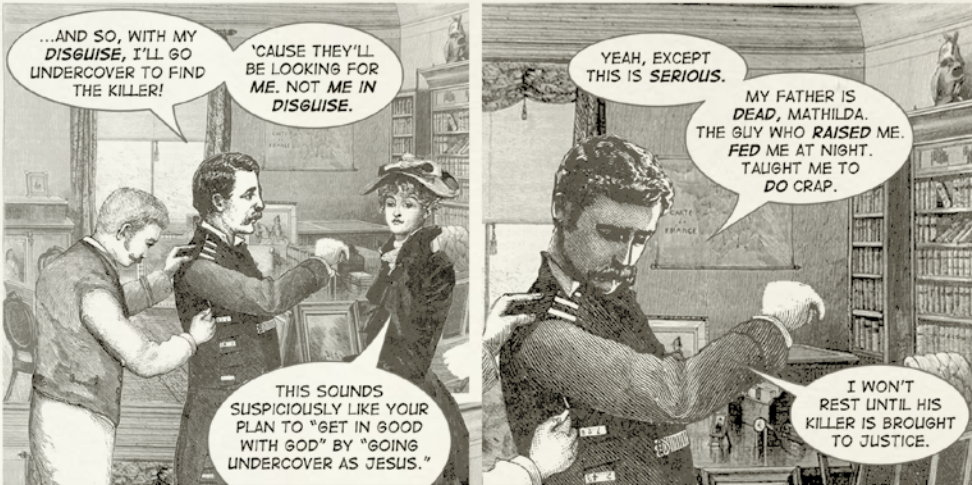
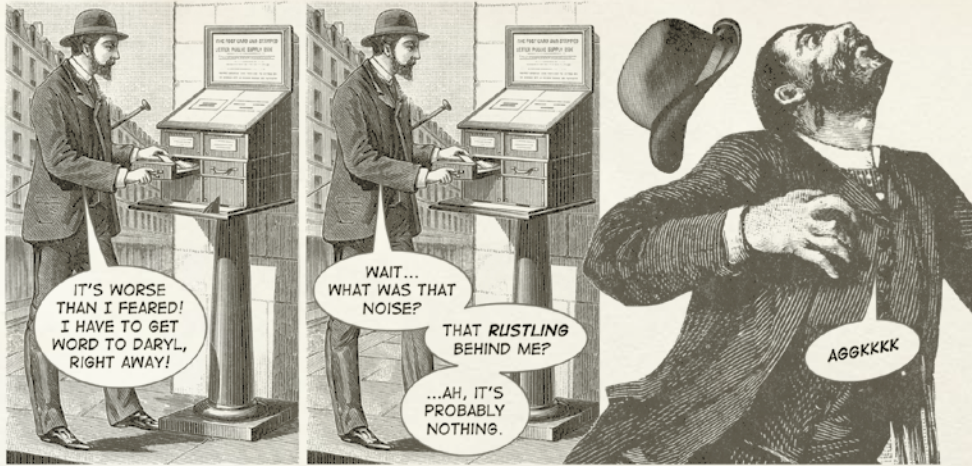


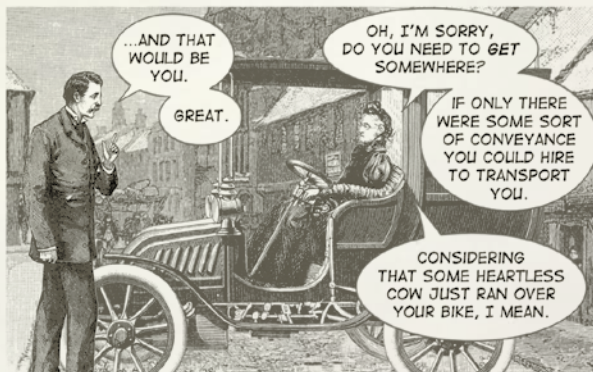
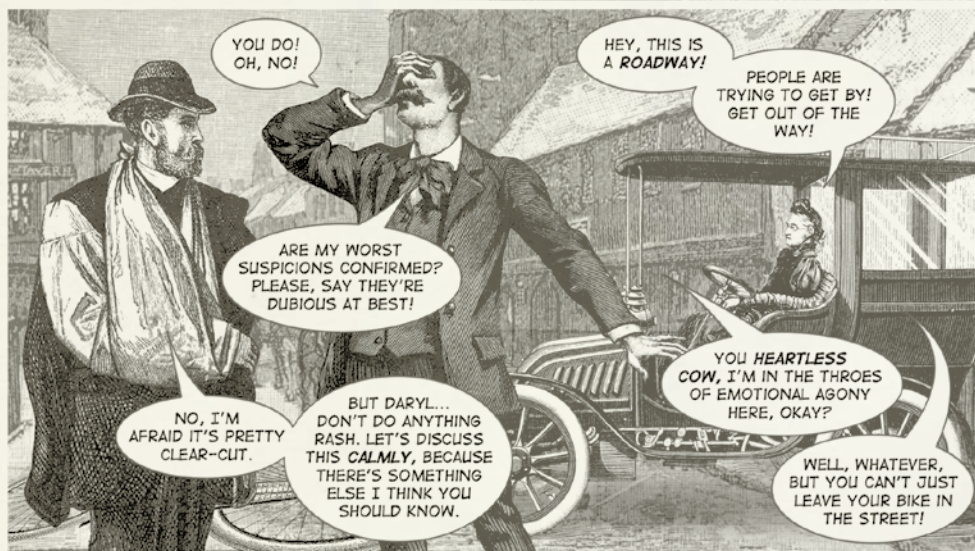
LORD DARYL, DO YOU
STILL REQUIRE ME FOR
THE *WEDDING NIGHT*
OH I'M TERRIBLY
SORRY

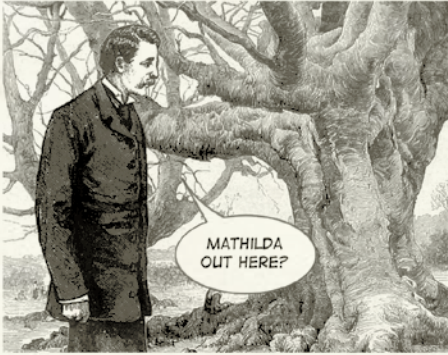
I...
I'LL JUST
GO
YOU CAN
CALL ME
LATER



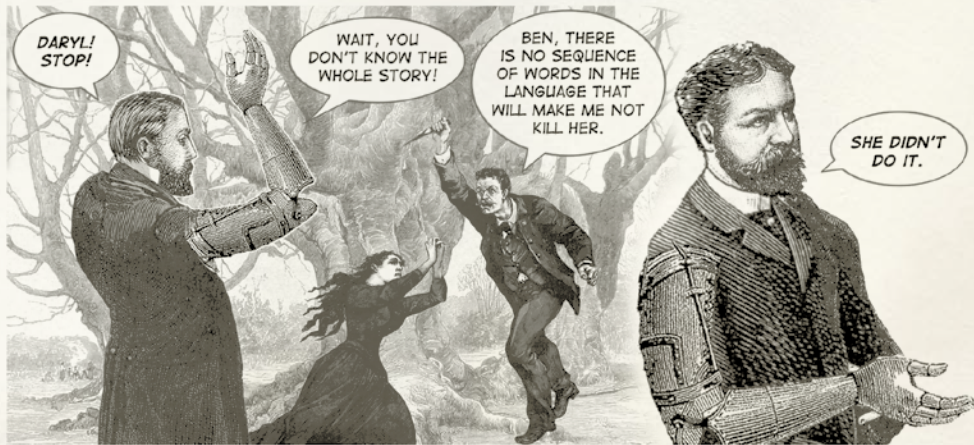
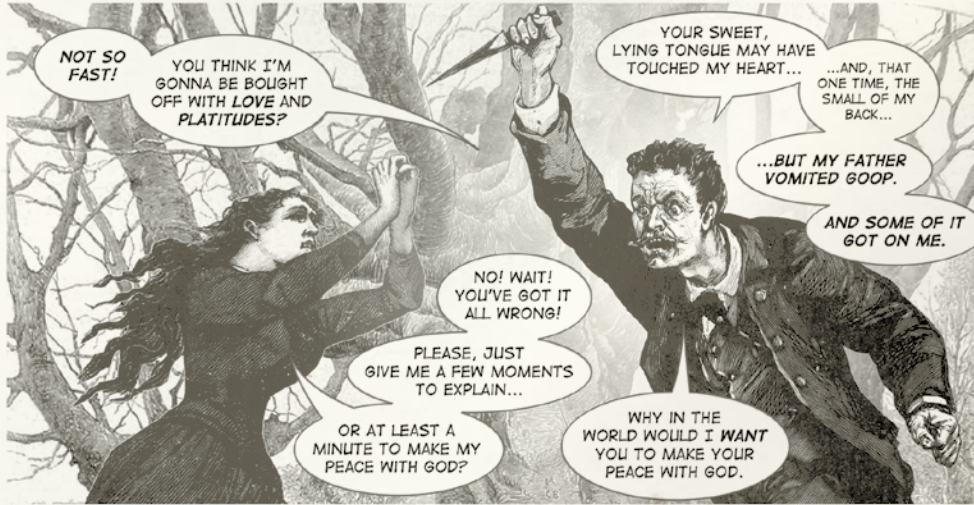












JUST LIKE YOU,
A BUKHICTE OR A MVALE
TICHTI MAY BE EITHER



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WONDERMARK.COM



ADVOCACY SECTION.

The current era has seen the rise of so-called “hip” or “ironic” facial hair. Many of its practitioners grow voluminous beards without the proper licenses or training. By using these removable coupons when you happen across an offender, this dangerous practice can be eradicated.



IRONIC FACIAL HAIR CITATION

*by Authority of Her Majesty's Commission
on Poxes, Palsies, & Facial Hirsutism*

Let it be known that:

(Name; office; “dude with the messenger bag”)

IS HEREBY CHARGED IN VIOLATION OF:

- Local ordinance State law Simple good taste

FOR THE FOLLOWING CHECKED OFFENSE(S):

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Child-molester moustache | <input type="checkbox"/> Overly “creative” |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Thinking handlebars are cool | <input type="checkbox"/> Hitler killed that look |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Too-ambitious peach-fuzz | <input type="checkbox"/> You're not Tom Selleck |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Homeless? Hippie? Hipster? | <input type="checkbox"/> Seriously, it's gross |

CHECK IF APPROPRIATE:

- Damage to property
 Injury / death
 Moustache impounded

REMEDY ADVISED:

- Total shave
 Stop trying so hard
 Join some sort of band

REMARKS:



IRONIC FACIAL HAIR CITATION

*by Authority of Her Majesty's Commission
on Poxes, Palsies, & Facial Hirsutism*

Let it be known that:

(Name; office; “dude with the messenger bag”)

IS HEREBY CHARGED IN VIOLATION OF:

- Local ordinance State law Simple good taste

FOR THE FOLLOWING CHECKED OFFENSE(S):

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Child-molester moustache | <input type="checkbox"/> Overly “creative” |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Thinking handlebars are cool | <input type="checkbox"/> Hitler killed that look |
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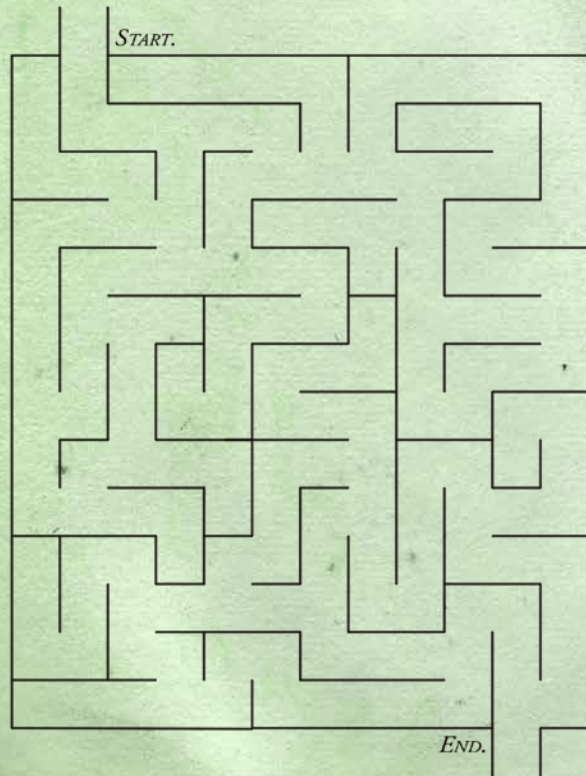
REMARKS:



You are welcome to use these coupons (or facsimiles thereof) in the service of curtailing beard violations, but considering that use of the coupons will, in effect, make you a duly deputized BEARD CONTROL OFFICER, you must also abide by the regulations associated with dispensing citations, as described on the reverse of the coupons.

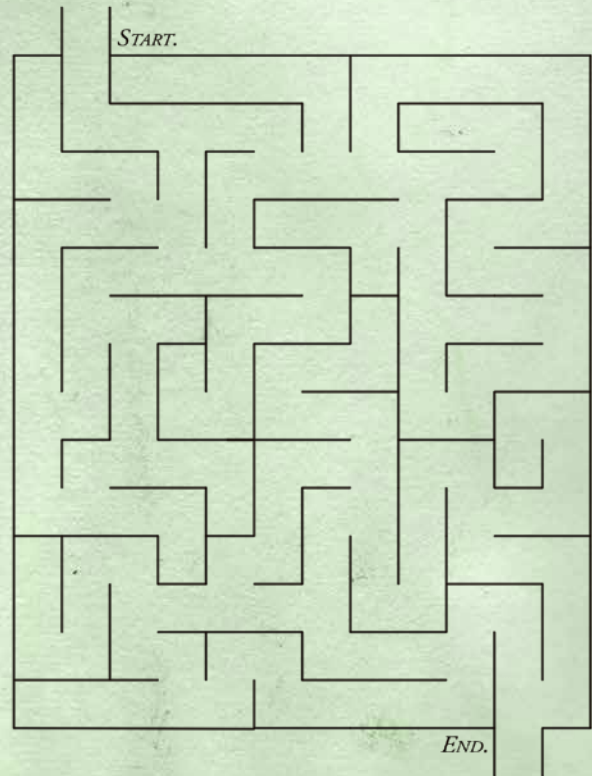
IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE MAZE ACT OF 1841,

if the accused can complete this MAZE inside of thirty seconds, he is to be released from all charges and the accuser shall be forced to pay damages.



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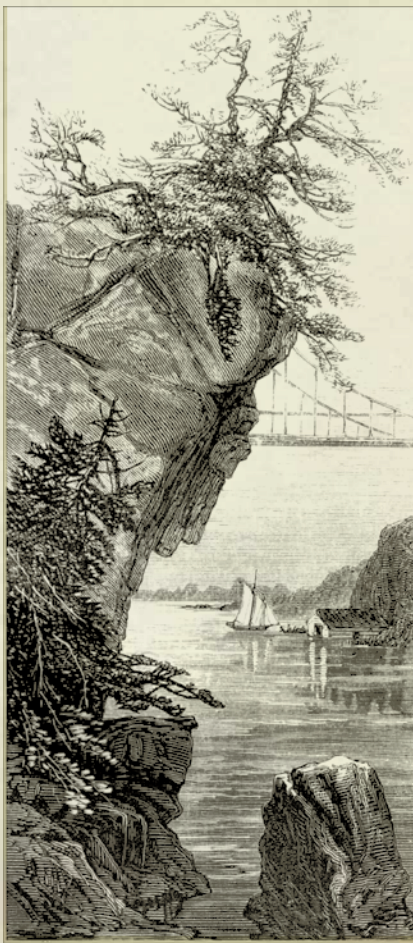
DISPATCHES FROM WONDERMARK MANOR.

The title is that of a prose adventure spanning FIVE HUNDRED PAGES and written expressly for your enjoyment. The complete volume is available wherever books are sold; a ONE HUNDRED TWENTY PAGE preview may be read ABSOLUTELY FREE at wondermark.com/dispatches. Below, please find a representative sample of the tale; this selection is a PROLOGUE to the entire volume, and no prior knowledge of the story is required.

A KNOCK ON THE DOOR OF DESTINY.

T discovered quite early in my travels that when faced with a talkative companion, it is often good practise to remain quiet, thus allowing the other party to volunteer all sorts of tidbits you never would have thought to ask after.

The couple seated across the carriage had asked me at the cab-stand if we could share a lift into town: penny-pinchers both, from the looks of them. The husband (I presume they were wed, if only because I doubted any besides each other would have them) was the fat, long-suffering type, constantly daubing his forehead with a sopping cloth and jetting me clandestine looks intended to confer that he, like I, was *above* the sort of idle prattle blasting incessantly from the cake-spout of the beast chained by ring-finger to his side forever-more. I didn't buy his camaraderie, and not just because I'd not a shilling in goods nor coin about me; no, he wanted it both ways, Ol' Roley-Pole did—the social benefit of marriage, ostensibly proving to strangers that he



wasn't a weirdo, but retaining a cynical detachment characteristic of bachelorhood as well. I might have sympathised with his aims, but I detested his two-facedness, if for no other reason than both of his faces had dripped sweat onto my battered valise as we'd clambered into the carriage.

The wife was an easy bird to peg; I'd had her number from the minute she fed me a fishhook-baited good-morning. It was a candy how-do-you-do, all sweetness with no substance, extended purely for the expectation of reprisal on my end. I knew that given such an opening, she'd launch in and fill the air for the duration of the whole ride into town. But I'd just debarked a steamer filled bilge-to-balls with peacocks, and was in no mood for further yowling.

Silence proved allergic for her, however, and she didn't take long to grow twitchy. Soon she was remarking on the trees passing by, or the foulness of the weather, or the fashions of the orphan-corpses that cluttered the roads. With no factory work to keep them



UNCLE.



THE CABBIE.

busy since that great, flesh-grinding accident at the budget bottling-plant had poisoned thousands of thrifty beverage-patrons and resulted in great liability for manufacturers at large, the mischievous urchins had become a menace to urban travel, swarming intersections and snarling traffic for hours with ropes twisted 'twixt axles and beautiful mares trotted out to distract the carriage-horses.

Thanks to the endless spurt of noise spiralling out of Hades, up through the Earth's crust, and bursting volcanically from the throat seated three feet from me, I learned that a thriving trade of whelp-catchers had developed during my long absence from these environs, and that it was a "despicable practise" employing "far more knives" than, perhaps, were strictly necessary.

It was in response to this latter point that the beleaguered lard-mass poured into the corner finally gathered the gumption to interject. "Well, it's not *so* bad, really," he harrumphed, almost too softly to be heard, and I thought at first that the objection was purely a face-saving performance for my benefit, trying to look "cool" for the "cool guy." In any case, the nattering nag sped clean through his pipe-up with nary a pause for breath, though I had at this point resigned myself to the fact that the woman was inhuman and did not actually require respiration.

"S-seriously," Role-Pole attempted again; "I think it's fine that they clean the streets of those disease-ridden brats.

And to carry a cudgel in the service of one's employ—think of the lark *that* would be!"

It was clear that he was repressing violent tendencies. Surely he wanted to kill his wife; I wanted to kill her, and I'd only known her ten minutes. Even the horses pulling our carriage likely felt the same murderous impulse towards their passenger. But lacking the stones to carry out the act, R. P. was living vicariously through the scruffy whelp-catchers even now pulling small, limp bodies from the road-ruts, visible for fleeting moments through the thin windows of our

conveyance. With one satisfying blow I could do the deed for the man, I briefly thought, but *why*? I stood nothing to gain; it's not like *his* companionship stood to be much more enjoyable. And it would serve my mission no good if I began offing citizens Willy H. Nilly on my first day back home.

True; once a resident of this city, I was now a stranger again—for the place had changed. The wharves where I had once hawked ropy strands of reconstituted cheese to tourists were crowded with smelly buskers and smellier seaman-tarts; the alley-ways were bustling with the sweating crush of an ever-growing population; and even the very roads were paved lumpily with child-flesh. It was not the Easthillshireborough-upon-Flats that I had cherished; but it was *an* Easthillshireborough-upon-Flats, and so long as *this* Easthillshireborough-upon-Flats featured as wealthy of an uncle as the Easthillshireborough-upon-Flats of my memory and imagination, then this Easthillshireborough-upon-Flats would do just fine for me.

"Ooh, there's where that nice old man lives," the chatter-box burred perkily, pressing a smeary finger against the window. At first I thought she was indicating a post-box on the corner, and after that I followed the line of her gesture towards a bakery-oven. Par for the course for sense, I figured—but with a jolt I suddenly made out the silhouette of a tall chateau, barely visible through the late-morning fog, far off atop Waverly Hill. My destination.

Unfortunately, it seemed that the couple's stop was closer than the Hill; thus my plan to ditch them with the cab-fare unravelled quickly. In terms of spiteful comeup-pance I settled for giving the woman a bit of a shove on her way out the door; she didn't fall and crack her brow on the cobblestones, though, so I did her cell-mate no favours there. His parting glance was wistful, so I tried my best to make mine mocking.

Once the door slammed shut I was alone in the carriage, and the quiet was like a density in the air, pressing against my ear-drums and massaging my contempt for humanity.

The cab-ride to the Manor itself was long, and would presumably be expensive, and each moment that seemed a capital chance to gather my thoughts I found my mind drifting towards a fear of the impending fare—I caught myself calculating wait times in dense areas, re-searching my valise for loose coins, and constantly arguing down my urge to simply off the driver and be done with it. But I had no use for a hansom-cab reeking with fatty-odour and scorn, and disposing of the body would take up valuable time, when I needed to see Uncle soon. My stomach churned—I'd been feeding it grog-slop and peacock-poop for weeks while at sea, and the promise of lucrative horizons ahead was making my gut-area antsy.

When the carriage rumbled to a stop, high atop Waverly with the whole of Easthillshireborough-upon-Flats spread before us, I waited for the driver to open the cabin door before budging a muscle, hoping that those few extra seconds might invent a solution to the problem of the fare. They didn't; nor did the ten extra seconds I took ensuring that my valise was securely latched; nor did the solid eight minutes I spent searching the seat-cushion for an imaginary contact-lens. Finally, stumbling into the glare of midday, and clutching my valise tightly at the ready with my striking-hand, I offered a lame apology for the delay.

"Don't mind it m'self," the cabbie shrugged. "You're on the ol' man's coin, I reckon? No worries from me, then—he's good on account, an' I'll add it to his tab."

"Yes," I said. "Yes, that's fine. Add it to his tab."

After a moment in which nobody moved, the cabbie added "Be nice to pay down the tab a little today, though."

"Nice," I said. "But not compulsory?"

The cabbie spat and climbed back up to his seat. With the crack of a whip that I initially thought might have been meant for my back-side, the carriage clattered away, and I stood in front of the Manor.

The path-way to that wide front door was long and effortful, but the trek afforded a good examination of the grounds, which were well-groomed and verdant. It was a beautiful property, and I hoped that it was kept up largely by staff—as I had no plans, myself, to do a moment's labour ever again.

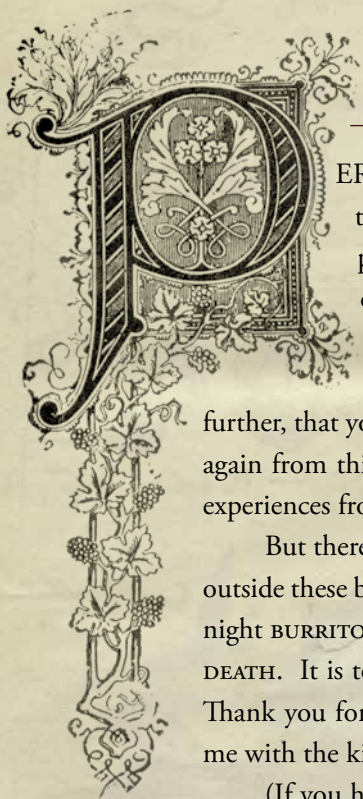
The thick brass knocker fell to the wood with a reverberant thump. Voices and shuffling sounds emanated from within. As the moment neared, my heart began to race. Mission time.

"Coming, coming," I heard Uncle say as he approached the door. I fumbled with the valise and wrapped hot fingers around the thick oak handle of my father's blunt-edged hatchet.

Today, the Manor would be mine. ♪



SOME KIND OF WINDMILL.



PERHAPS it's the deep and emotional bonding we've shared that makes me reluctant to announce that this is the last page of the book. Perhaps it's the fact that the simple caress of your fingers on the pages has caused me to fall in love with you. Perhaps it's simply a matter of denial; I can't bear to admit that it's over, that there's nothing further, that you'd have to physically invert the book and begin reading again from this page forward in order to dredge any more wonderful experiences from this single, finite volume.

But there *is* something further, isn't there? There's an entire *world* outside these bleak pages, one full of SUNRISES and KITTY-CATS and late-night BURRITO RUNS and the horrible, creaking amble of us all towards DEATH. It is to that world that I am afraid I must release you to now. Thank you for reading, for your patronizing chuckles, and for gifting me with the kindness of your attention.

(If you have *not* actually read the book, but are reading this page anyhow for some reason, I cannot give you the same benediction. In fact, I claim hooks into you; I pull you in, and you cannot escape. Turn to the beginning at once and start reading properly—or else you will be guilty of a grave betrayal of AUTHOR-READER PRIVILEGE, the penalty for which is BURLY MEN coming to your house and putting ACTUAL HOOKS into you. Yes, we have those kinds of resources.)

But to those of you who have legitimately finished this book: It is for your pleasure, and your pleasure alone, that I have made it. Thank you, and be well.



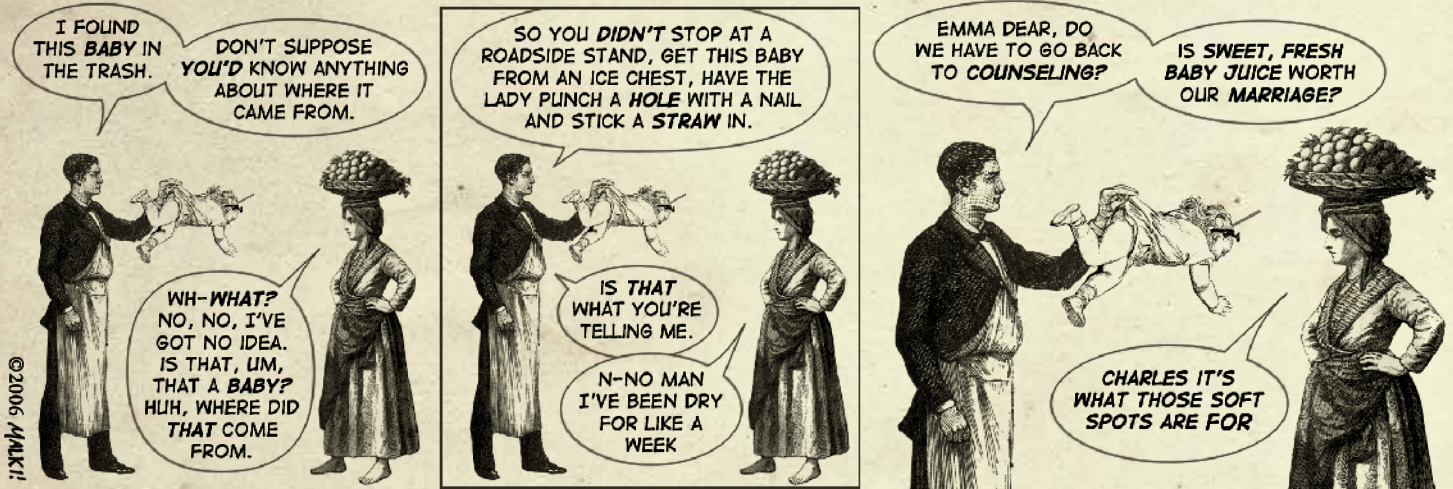
THAT'S IT



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