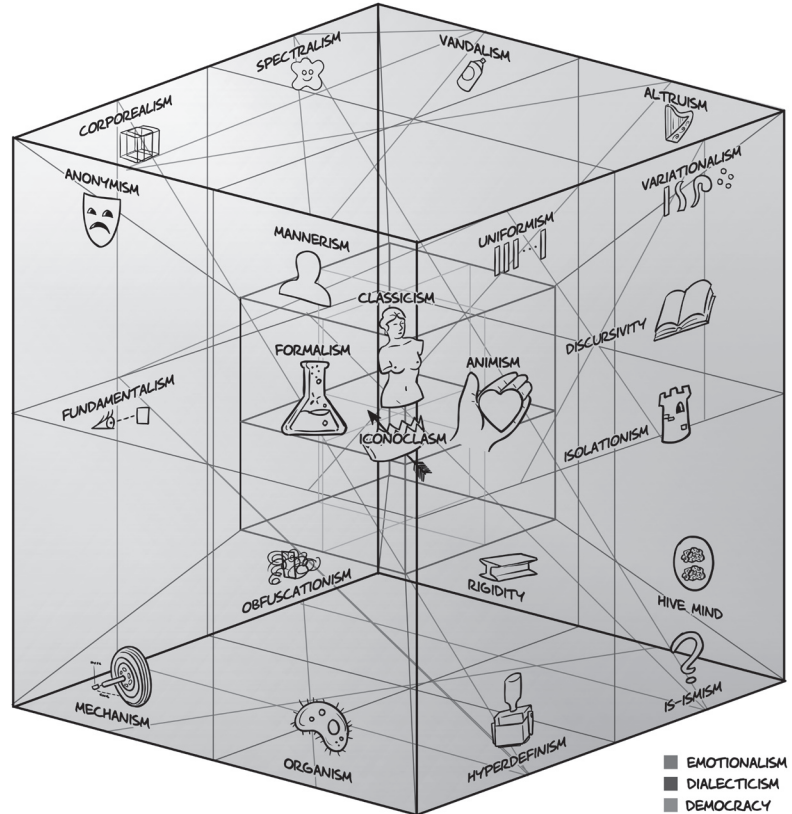




**NEW 2014
FOREWORDS**
FROM THE AUTHOR
AND CHECKERBOARD
NIGHTMARE

CHECKERBOARD NIGHTMARE
A BRIEF HISTORY
OF WEBCOMICS
by Kristofer Straub

HYPERCUBIC EXTENSION OF MCCLLOUDIAN DRAUGHTSMANSHIP CATEGORIZATION



CHECKERBOARD NIGHTMARE A BRIEF HISTORY OF WEBCOMICS

by Kristofer Straub

Checkerboard Nightmare: A Brief History of Webcomics

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Second Edition

FORE-FOREWORD

You should know something: this whole book is the work of a churlish young man.

I wrote the original contents of *A Brief History of Webcomics* in 2006. I'm writing these words in 2014, several *e*-pochs hence, and almost everything has changed: from how webcomics are made and monetized, to the philosophies behind them, to the players involved. Even the word “webcomics” has fallen into disuse. (They're *comics*—I don't know why we were all so eager to make everyone think they weren't.)

I still have the greatest respect for parody and satire. I don't know what it says about me that the first thing I tried my hand at wasn't an original story, but a meta-gag strip built on the charred corpses of everyone else's hard work. Even the title is a side-eye at T Campbell's seminal *History*! It seems like the kind of thing you write as a lark after you've been around for years, and understand all the ins and outs of a genre. I have a good eye for mimicry, but *understanding* comics? I did not.

One of the things that I love about parody is that, in order to execute it well, you have to truly know your target. And many of those targets I do know and love. But it's not very sporting to make fun of someone else's thing and not have the courtesy of writing something they can make fun of you *back* with. I always said, “I'd love it if someone poked at my work the same way I've poked at theirs!” But how are you supposed to mock a self-mocking mockery? Looking back, there was such a defensiveness in *Checkerboard Nightmare*.

Come on, 2006 Kris. *Christ*.

These days I am doing much more original work in *Broodhollow* (and before that, *Starslip*). I do miss Chex and company, and there's some fun to be had in these pages, but I don't think I agree much with my past self's viewpoints anymore. I upset a few very smart, very sensible people, and I regret it. Plus a lot of the references in here are less a time capsule of eight years ago, and more a *tomb*.

So take it with an entire mine of salt—dark, dry, and silent. Like a tomb. *Where it belongs*.

Kris (né “Kristofer”) Straub
June 7, 2014

ANTI-FOREWORD

Hey guy! Maybe I should learn to be a *mechanic*, given how much time I spend *under a bus*.

We had it pretty good for five whole years, right? That's a thing. That's a *real* thing. And then you go and pull this "oh, bleah, I'm kinda embarrassed by Chex now" business. Who do you think you are, everybody I know? I *made* you, son. I remember when you *started* doing webcomics. You had a *day job* back then, as a programmer! I opened more doors for you than a *malfunctioning door-opening machine!* If it wasn't for me, you'd be hacking away at the *hulls of digital ships* amid a sea of *Frenchmen!*

And now you're gonna tell me to scam because I said some *salty things* about *Ryan North?* And *Penny Arcade?* And *Jeph Jacques?!* Where are those losers now?!

... Oh. Oh *wow*. That's *real success* in *dollar form*. That's *scam-you money*.

(What *is* a Twitter? Does *everyone* have a Kickstarter? Is it too late for me to be interviewed for the documentary *Stripped?*)

Okay. Well, I get it—consider it *got*. Back in the "D" (short for "day"), things were different. There was a whole lot of *cheating* off each others' papers. A lot of "why *them* and not *me?*" And a *lot* of bile-filled blogging. Comics mostly ran out of things called *collectives* that resembled weird *hosting cults*. Was there sex stuff at night? *Maybe*.

Nobody knew the right way forward. But then everyone figured out there *isn't* a right way forward. There's a zillion of them. And the only real lesson is that the people who made it to the top were just *too dumb to quit*. They were just doing what they couldn't live *without* doing, every day.

And that takes *for-frigging-ever*. Which is for saps.

Meanwhile, I'm working *smarter*, not harder. I just haven't hit on the *secret combination of words and actions* that will guarantee me my *instant-yet-always fame and success*.

Lately I've been trying a new tack: not making a webcomic anymore.

That makes good sense, right? The *opposite* sure didn't work.

Checkerboard Irving Nightmare

June 7, 2014

PRE-FOREWORD

It is difficult not to write satire.

— *Juvenal*

Satire is a sort of glass, wherein beholders do generally discover everybody's face but their own.

— *Jonathan Swift*

You can't make up anything anymore. The world itself is a satire. All you're doing is recording it.

— *Art Buchwald*

The satirist who writes nothing but satire should write but little — or it will seem that his satire springs rather from his own caustic nature than from the sins of the world in which he lives.

— *Anthony Trollope*

—

There's no sign of intelligent satire here, no sign of competence of any kind, just amateurish bile.

— *Rob Balder, Partially Clips, on Kristofer Straub*

All satire is riding the coat-tails of something that exists already, right?

— *Phil Kahn, I'm Just Drinking Podcast, on Kristofer Straub*

... A sub-par example of the fine art of satire and derision, the performance of which requires not only a degree of skill with wordplay but also a piercing insight pertaining to the subject one wishes to address.... Such skill and insight were not in evidence.

— *Conservative radio host Jasyn Jones on Kristofer Straub*

FOREWORD

When first approached to write a foreword for *A Brief History of Webcomics*, I salivated at the prospect. An opportunity to introduce an audience to a thoroughly Modern subject, written by a professional introducer.

It is what I live for.

Webcomics are just like comic strips you can read in the newspaper, except that they appear on the Internet. Sometimes they are collected in print editions, such as this one, but their chief currency is the pageview, the hit, the number of kilotrons transferred across the cyberzone.

In the last four years, while newspapers have struggled against their online counterparts, online comic traffic has increased by a factor of 349,485,804%. The amount of new content being generated every day on the Internet by “web cartoonists,” if printed out, would reach the planet Ceres and back.

The Digital Age was characterized by the rise of the Internets, where man stared at the shimmering effulgence of a monitor long into the night. But leaps in technology have freed us from our desks — Prometheus bounds, unbound, like a gazelle. Antlers or antennas? One and the same in this, the Post-Digital Age.

Handheld devices have changed the way we entertain ourselves. Though the methods are still manual, Freud would be astonished to find an object the size of his figurative cigar now streamed movies and music. Even the language is the same: our very cultural essence is now delivered in binary. But then how is this a *Post-Digital Age*?

Technology has broken the word “Digital” free from its old moorings. It’s lost its trademark. Analog gave way to digital — something must come next. And that is the Post-Digital. But what *is* Post-Digital?

You’re holding it in your hands — a marriage of the old, the new, the borrowed and the blue.

Checkerboard Nightmare is one of the few webcomics brave enough to cast itself under the magnifying glass. Self-reflexive commentary delivered as light-hearted entertainment? It’s never been done before. Ever.

Post-Digitally, of course.

Lance Sharps
Editor-in-Chief, *Modern Humor Authority*
August 30, 2006

A NIGHTMARE IN REPOSE

A Webcomic Pioneer Reflects on Five Years

by Isobel Rai Belpheger

LIKE SOME STRANGE POST-MODERN HARLEQUIN DEITY, the Checkerboard Nightmare sits uneasily in the Bonaventure Hotel lobby in downtown Los Angeles, trying to look casual as he leafs through last November's issue of *Maxim*. (Upon closer inspection, it's upside-down.)

With a jolt, Chex spots his interviewer, and his look of anxiety-wracked terror gives way to a grin so broad, the word "maniacal" would not be out of place. "*Hey buddy,*" he calls out in a high-pitched, yet peculiarly gravelly voice. He shakes hands — a little too tightly, for a little too long. "So, let's *fire up* this wingding!"

It's almost as if Chex isn't standing in the room at all, existing as an animated glossy 8x10 you bought off eBay, pre-autographed, with the dubious certificate of authenticity missing. Just then he softens a little, and the edges of his smile droop ever so slightly.



The worried look returns. “I gotta *say*, just between you and me, I was about ready to *wet my pants*. I *hate* waiting for interviews. Something about ‘em makes me sweat like a *robot* at a *rust factory*.”

As this metaphor is considered, he adds hesitantly, “Because when a *robot’s* sweating, *man!* You know there’s some problems.” Indeed, and Nightmare should know — he constructed one of his cast members from an imported robotics hobby kit. “Worth every... Japanese... I don’t remember what currency I used. But it was worth every whatever.”

Checkerboard Nightmare began his professional career in the University of California at Los Angeles college newspaper, the Daily Bruin. Although grateful for the break, he felt hindered by the restriction of a single-panel format.

“I was doing Ziggy stuff, sight gag material. That’s all well and good if your audience is like, *eighty-thousand years old*, but it was tough to push the *ultra*-envelope with an editor breathing down your neck.”

He is quick to add, “not that eighty-thousand-year-olds are a bad demographic.”

Obscure Comics Monthly asked him about how the internet has expanded his horizons. “Well, for one, we could never get away with the Vaporware-hates-mankind-and-chokes-Lyle gag in a liberal college newspaper. That’s why I really appreciate the *creative freedom* of the internet. Well, okay, it’s mostly that you can get merchandise done cheap as free.”

That first foray started in November 2000, and since, Checkerboard Nightmare has skewered bleeding-edge cultural phenomena of all types: online comics, video games, film and television. But Chex is quick to say it’s not parody. “I just... usually don’t have a lot of my own ideas.”

Now Chex is a man ready to reflect on five years in the business.

—

OCM. Describe your work in a few words.

CN. Huge mechs in real-time combat with dinosaurs, using bullet-time ninja magic. Oh, with the latest in e-cyclic cross-generation taste placement metrics. Sometimes there’s nekkid

chicks. But if I just had to use a few words, I'd say "masterful."

Do you see yourself as some outspoken champion of webcomics?

Outspoken, underspoken, inspoken. I think some of those are words. To be honest, I don't know how I got saddled with that reputation. But I have a feeling it has to do with jealousy? And childhood trauma.

Some would say you complain a lot about webcomic standards and conventions, and that's the source of your reputation. Do you think that's true?

"Complain" has the word "play" in it. I think it's a waste of time to just complain when you could be complaining *and* working on some exploitative way out of it. So I would say there are two kinds of people in the world: complainers, and comworkners.

Which do you see yourself as?

Whatever I said the latter one was. My mind is working on so many new, fresh ideas that I already forgot it. And your name.

Is it all work, then?

Not all of it. My robot pal Vaporware is always around. And once or twice a month Lyle hangs out on the weekend and we hit up Taco Inferno. I get a lot of thinking done there. Or a mirror funhouse at a carnival — that's very indicative of the kind of thing you have to do to really make it in showbiz. Look at yourself in new ways, and constantly reinvent your image. Using carnivals.

What about when there's no carnival in town? Any other techniques?

Sure, the abandoned carnival near Redondo Beach. There's a funhouse there too, but last time I went a hobo offered me a Ziploc bag full of baby powder. What's going on with that? I guess he was trying to say I was acting like a baby. Everyone's a critic.

What would you say to an aspiring comics character?

Read Checkerboard Nightmare.

As inspiration for their own work?

(long pause) What?

Aspiring characters should use you as a sort of template for their own careers?

Yes. I mean, no. People need to find their own way. My way is different, since, you know, it's mine. That one is mine. What I mean is, if you want to be inspired by my, you know, bold successes, you can. But I would also say, to those more successful than me, that my being inspired by them often involves elaborate homages. So there's no need for legal threats. I'm homaging you. That's French for "allowed."

Is it at all limiting to focus your work on the medium of internet comics and "zines?"

Some would say yes, but see, I think there's a lot of big things on the horizon for the interspace and so forth. I'm not one of these types to, you know, naysay science. Science is a good thing. I've worked with science.

Will webcomics essentially remain the domain of amateurs, semi-professionals, and the self-published?

I think we're on the verge of something big here. Webcomics are already going mainstream, culturally. Take a look at Cartoon Network's Adult Swim lineup. All that random, obscurist, cut-and-paste humor had to come from somewhere. And think about this: Cartoon Network, *Checkerboard Nightmare*. Same initials! What a scam!

What are you up to these days, now that your canonical strip has ended?

I'm all about keeping my options open. I was considering giving my movie rights to Platinum Studios just so I could issue a press release that I'd been optioned. Oh, and I've been doing a lot of reading. I have two subscriptions to *Advertising Age*. Gotta have a copy for the can!

Thanks for taking the time to talk to *Obscure Comics Monthly*, Chex.

Hey, the pleasure? It belonged... to me.

—

As Checkerboard Nightmare stands to leave, he extends his hand to shake once more, and asks: "so when is this going to print? What's your circulation?" ◊CM

CHAPTER 1

THE BORING YEARS

(1996 – 2000)

Webcomics have always been here. Webcomics predate the dotcom crash, America Online and CompuServe, the Information Superhighway itself. Webcomics are older than either World War, the Civil, the one in 1812. Webcomics hang in the Guggenheim, the Getty, and the Louvre. Webcomics were born when the first Aborigine spat dye upon his outstretched hand on a cave wall. We are all part of Art. And Art is what makes us human. Art is our soul.

— *SexyFoxfur33*, Yiff City Psychic P.I. *Forums Moderator*

It would be easy for the layperson to say that nothing interesting happened in the nascent period of webcomics, as well as correct. Oddly enough, the web comic strip widely considered to be the first webcomic — David Farley’s *Doctor Fun* — began well before this period, on September 24th, 1993. However it does not fall under the scope of sequential art as defined by comics guru Scott McCloud, and therefore is not actually a webcomic. Discussion of *Doctor Fun* will cease immediately. (Also it is not a real doctor.)

Perhaps it was a function of the relatively new environment of cyberspace, or perhaps it was related to the type of mindset that appears in people drawn to put comics on the web in the first place, but early webcomics all had one thing in common: ultra-complicated storylines.

The distinction of actual first webcomic would fall to the space parody romp *Melonpool* by Steve Troop. *Melonpool* featured a crew of pint-sized aliens in a spaceship shaped like a duck, who, having learned all they needed about Earth via old TV signals, wound up shipwrecked on Earth. Troop’s smooth art style and zingy punchlines drew readers in, as its reams of impenetrable time travel punched them in the face when they got there.

Close contender for the “Got Here First, Guys” title is Chris Morrison’s gaming strip *Polymer City Chronicles*, revolving around a scientist, his mammoth-breasted, hugely-muscled girl Friday, a mammoth-breasted, hugely-muscled girl adventurer, and a mammoth-breasted, hugely-muscled breast with muscles. And a dragon.

Pete Abram’s *Sluggy Freelance* began in August of 1997 as a series of parodic one-offs, then quickly gained its own following. The full plot synopsis for the first year requires more words than exist in the English language. (Later years would herald the arrival of the impossibly confusing storyline “Oceans Alive IV: The Mekriox Perjorative” and its sequel, whose name is unprintable due to the inability of printer ink to assume the shape of the letters and words in it.

Rounding out the early adopters is the webcomic *User Friendly*, by creator Illiad. Popular among the tech crowd, the strip has taken flak for its primitive art and deep, observational humor related to operating system use, but much of it remains unfounded — the observational humor is not particularly deep, for example.

1998 brought a new breed to the playing field, in the same way dadaism arose after World War I. The climate online was ready for change, ready to trudge out of the enjoyable dungeon crawls of complicated storylines, and into the light of carefree, sunny-day comics where one character stabs the other one in the last panel. The year would be responsible for the birth of two webcomic giants, along with movies *Armageddon* and *Lethal Weapon 4*. So don’t go all thanking 1998 or anything. It knows what it did.

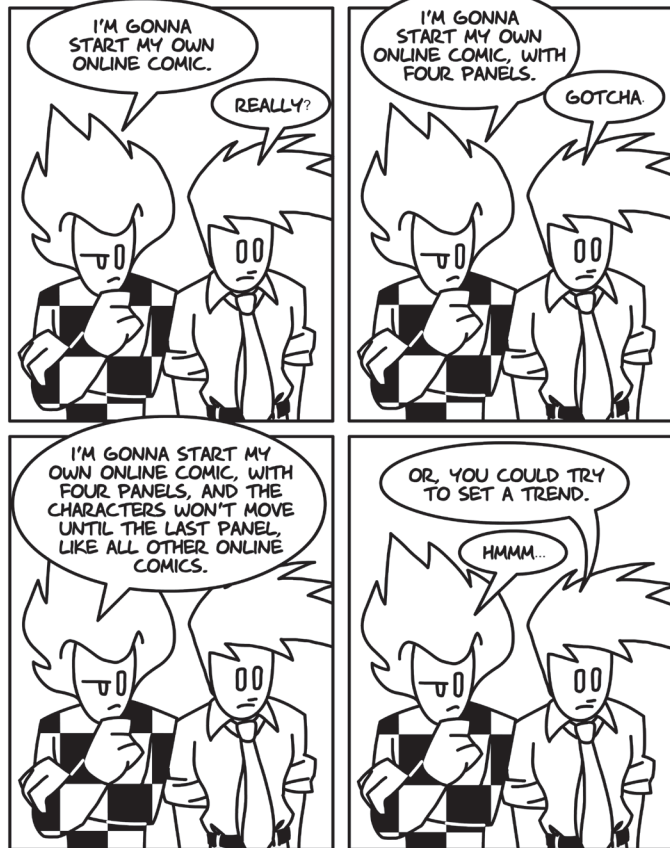
Scott Kurtz emerged from the relative obscurity of Ultima Online fancomic *Samwise*, to arrive at the slightly less obscure *Player vs. Player*. From the very beginning, Kurtz was known for his crowd-drawing savvy and ability to start flame wars (which were later revealed to be the same skillset). *PvP* was a very different animal from *Melonspool*, *Sluggo Freefall* and *User Friends*, eschewing complex stories for more simply structured gags.

Eschewing more simply structured gags, *Penny Arcade* slipped from the birth canal in November 1998, drenched in Jerry “Tycho” Holkins and Mike “Gabe” Krahulik’s amniotic fluid. The (again) video game comic strip was actually a subtle satire of the gaming industry that, in 1998, did not require reading four goddamn pages of words like “eschatological.”

The number of webcomics increased exponentially in the years following — so much so that it would be a waste of space to list all of them, much like it is a waste of time to read most of them. (The author humbly leaves any minutia-extruding to the basement-dwelling Wikipedia crowd.) However it is important to note that, in 2000, the stage was more than set for webcomics to become the earth-shattering, mind-breaking force they would become in a few short years.

Decades, really, but who’s counting?

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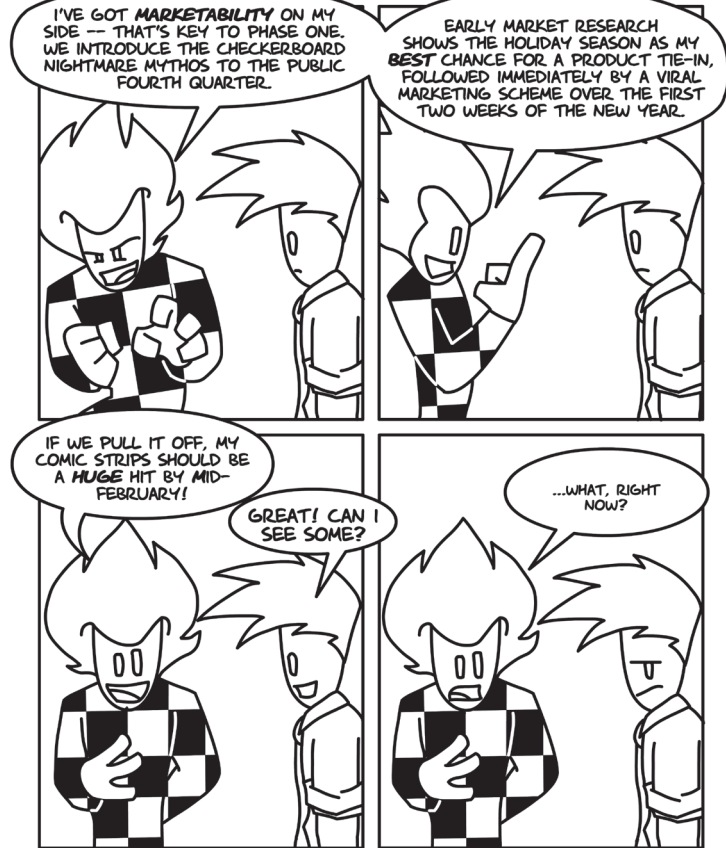


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This strip started it all. In my webcomic infancy, I believed I had spotted some trend of laziness among webcomics, in that the art was recycled panel to panel.

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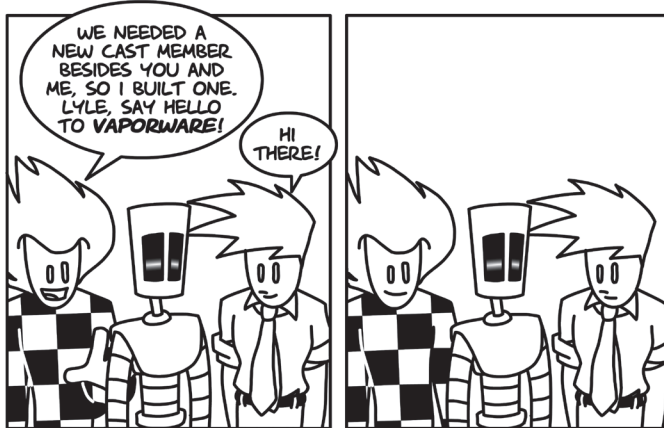


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Sooner rather than later, I would stop making fun of that mechanism and embrace it wholeheartedly.

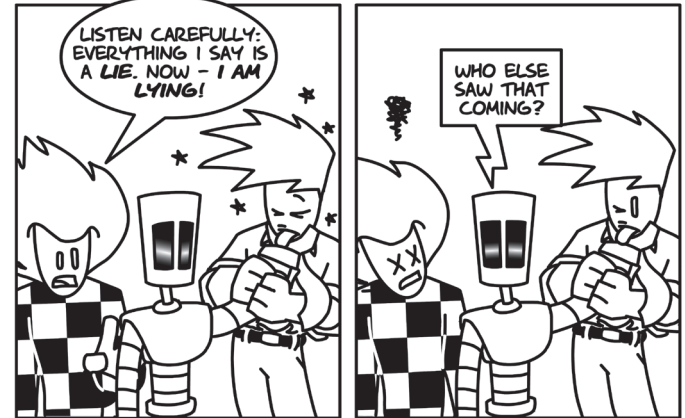
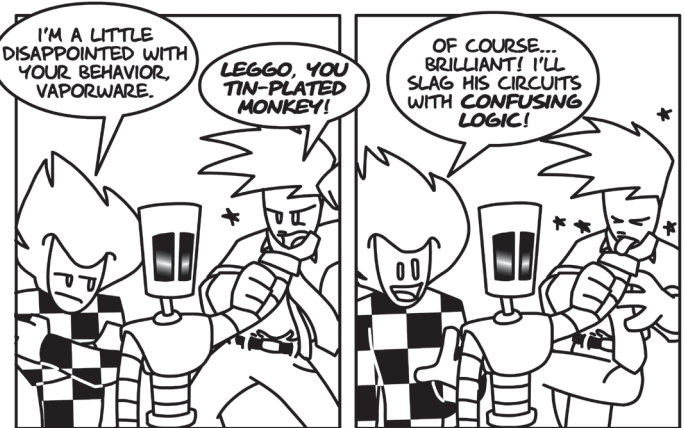
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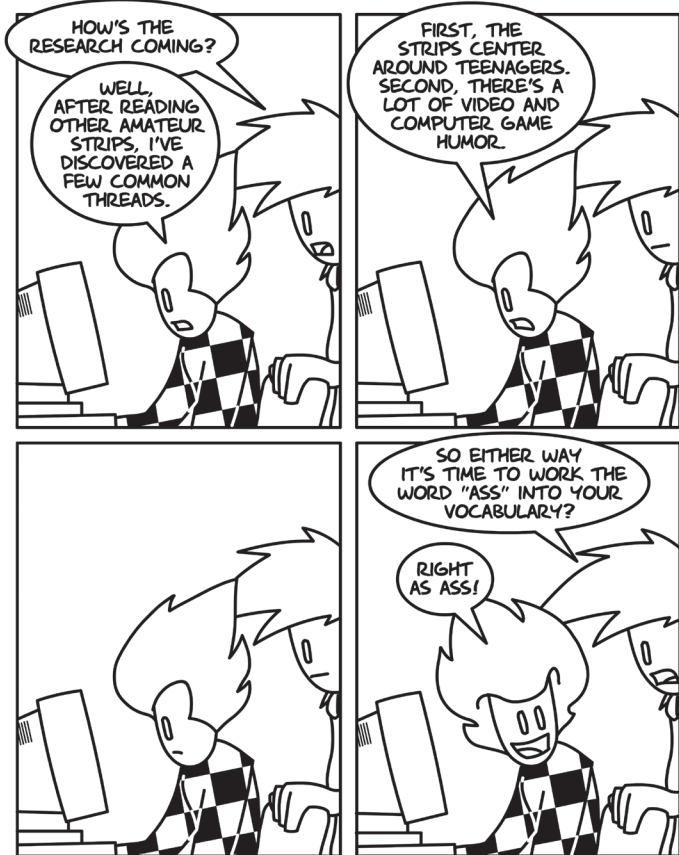


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Vaporware was incredibly anemic-looking when I started the strip. An early sketch of him shows that I had intended him to have a unicircular wheel instead of legs.

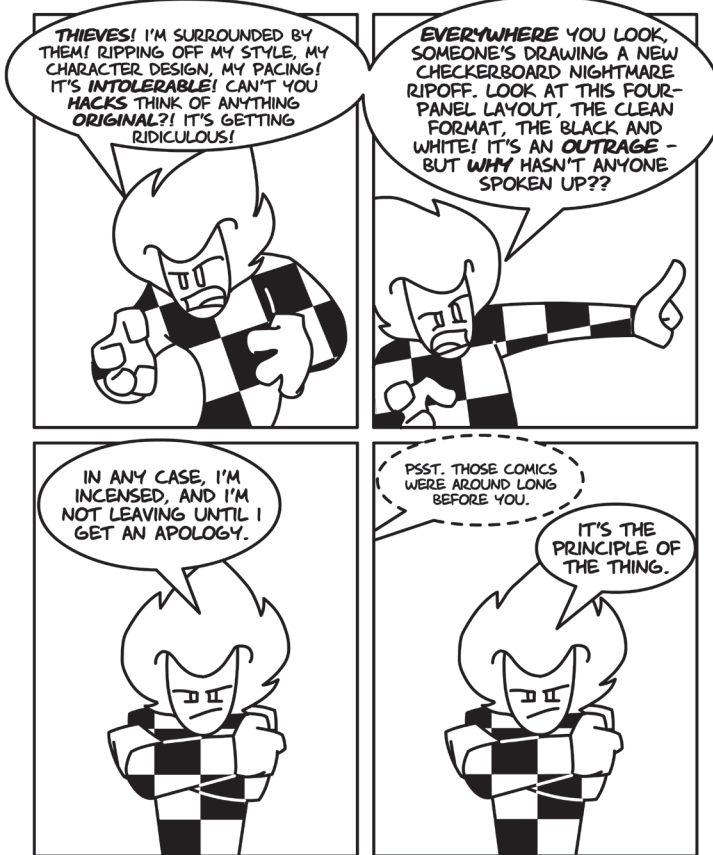
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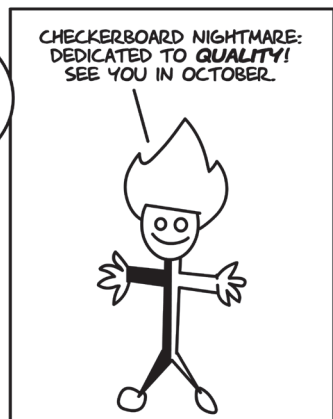
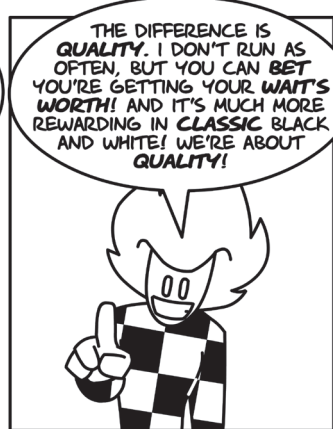


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The strip that spawned this one was *Greystone Inn* by Brad Guigar. In my hubris, I actually believed I had come up with the first self-reflexive webcomic! I later found out they all were. Like a plague.

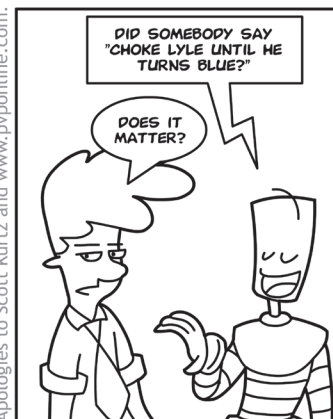
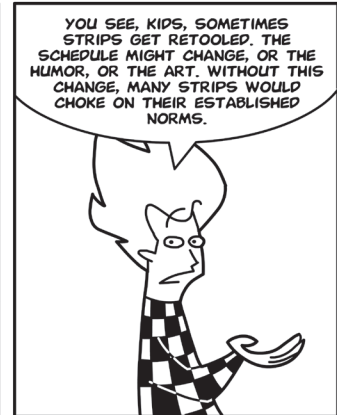
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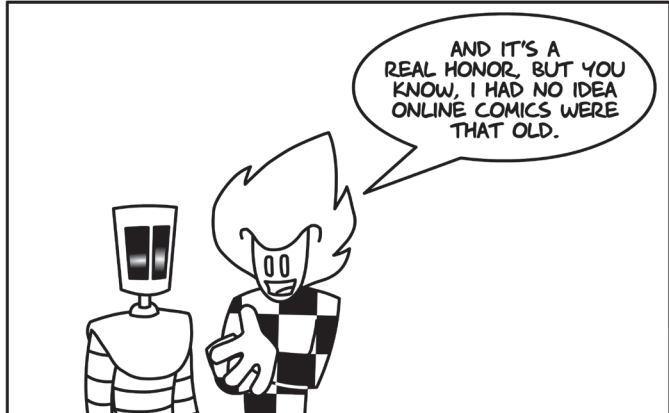
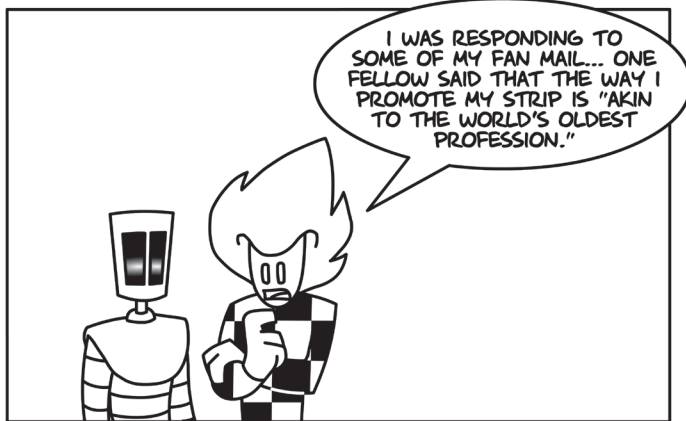
Apologies to Scott Kurtz and www.pyonline.com.

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I don't really see Lyle as having a big nose, it was just a contrast with Chex's "Brent Classic."

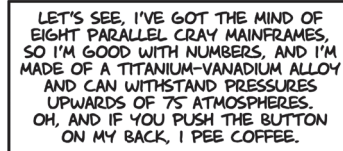
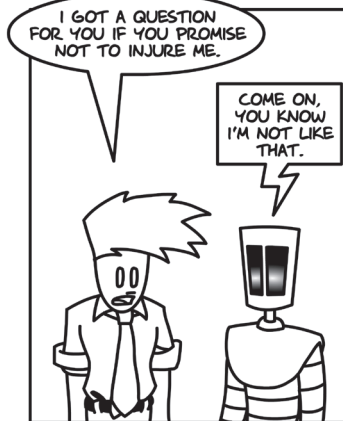
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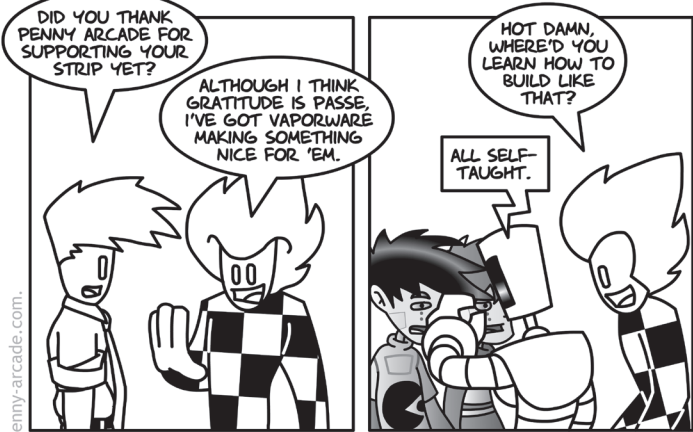
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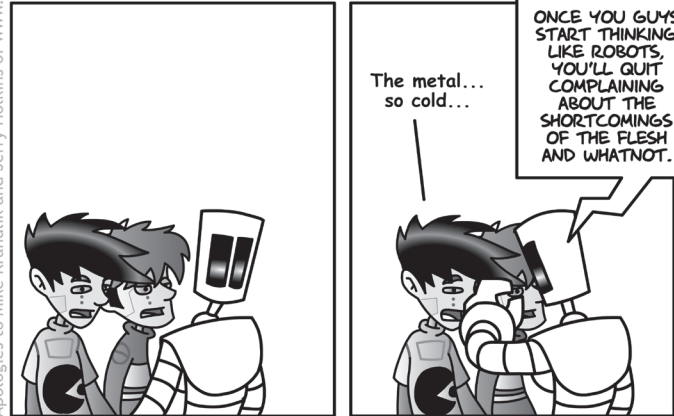
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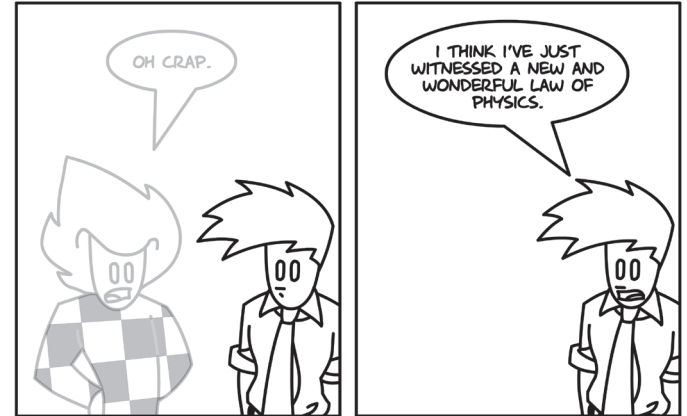
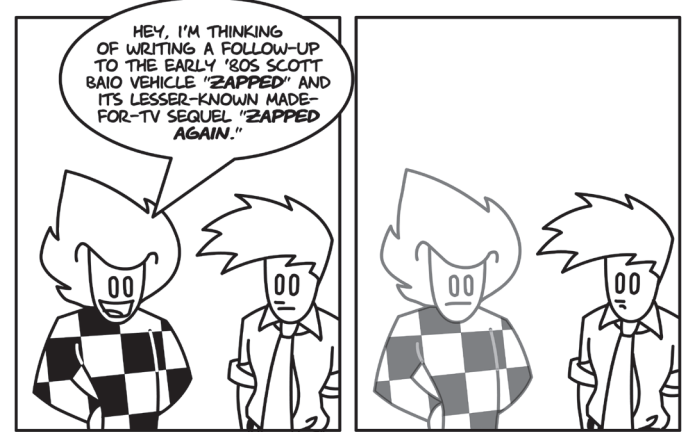
Apologies to Mike Krahtulik and Jerry Holkins of www.penny-arcade.com.



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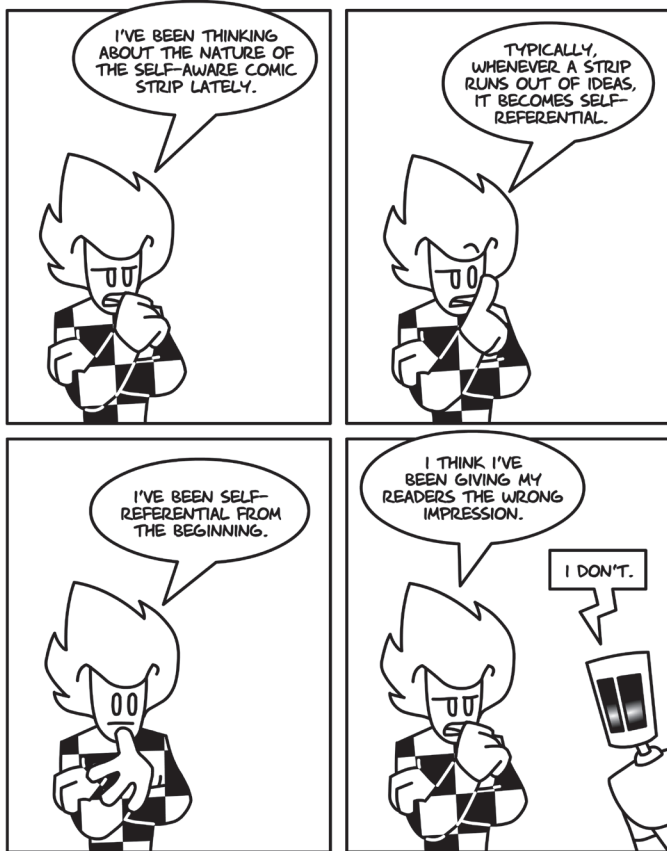


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This comic was some kind of a benchmark in Checkerboard Nightmare. Some stride had been hit. *Something was happening.*

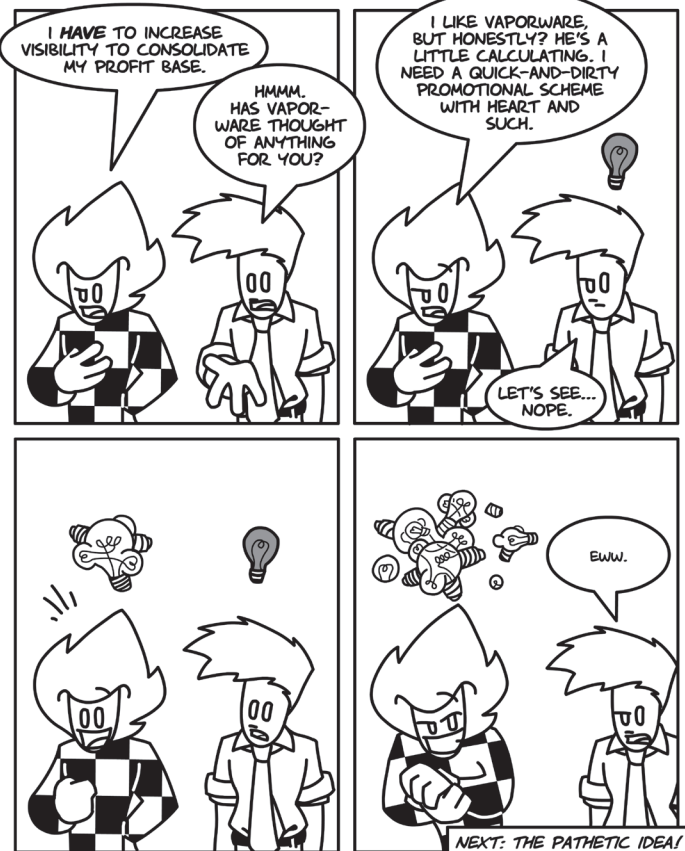
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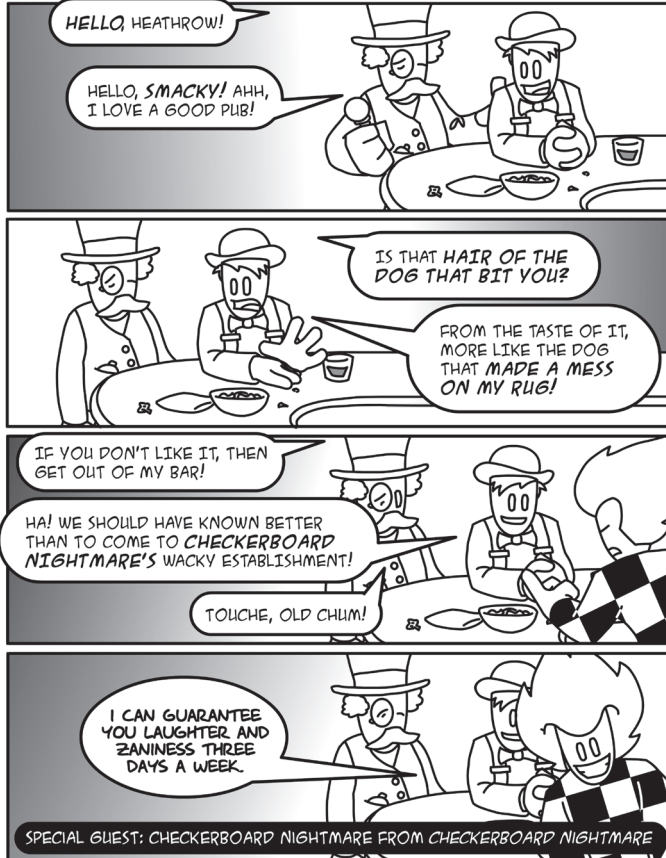


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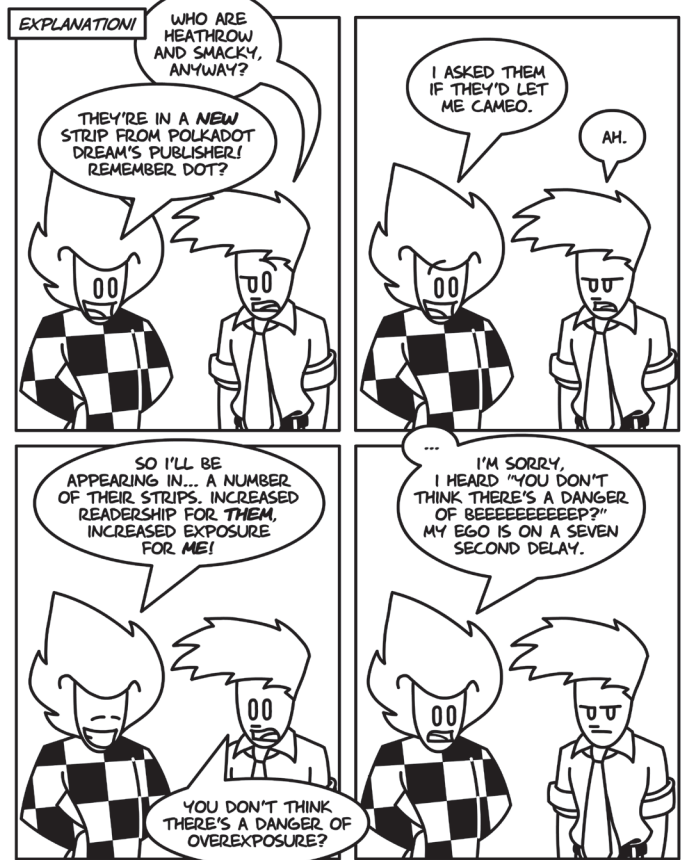
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HEATHROW & SMACKY!

by Kristofer Straub



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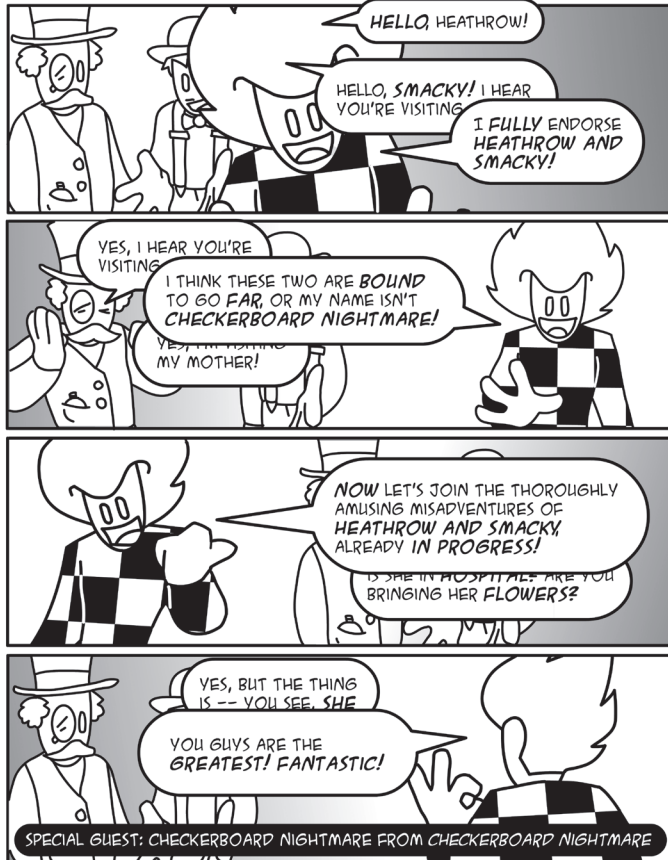


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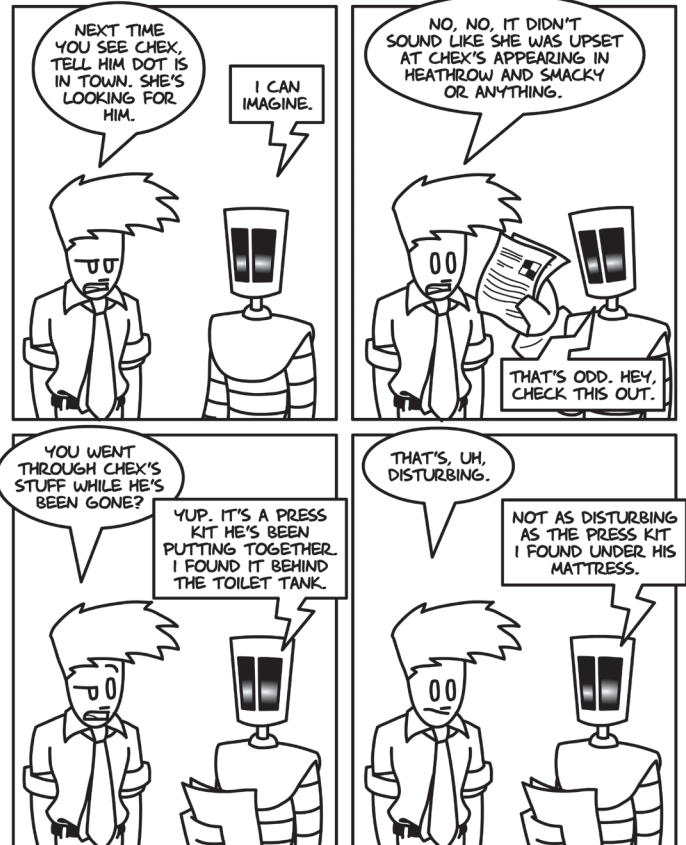
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HEATHROW & SMACKY!

by Kristofer Straub



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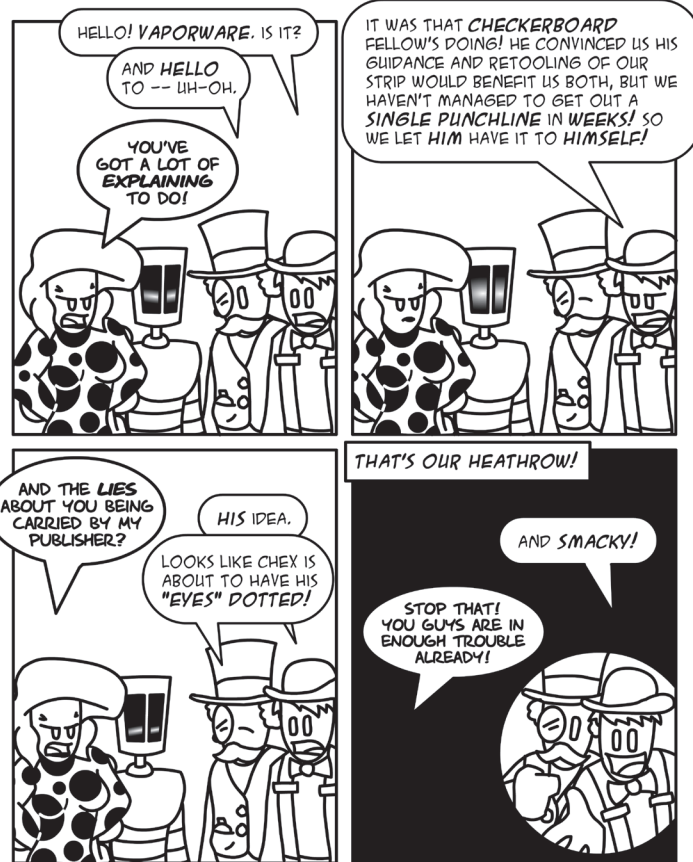


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I like the idea that Lyle is just poised and waiting. Like that's probably all the desk he needs to do his job.

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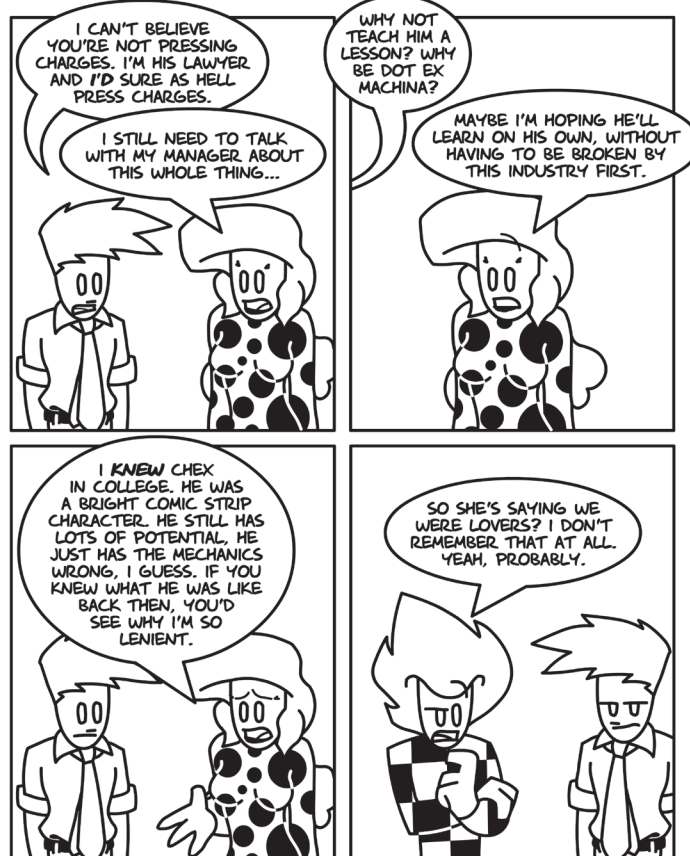
I hate webcomic collections that have commentary for the sake of commentary. Everything breaks down into "I liked this one, I liked this one." Anyway, I like this one.

The Thoroughly Amusing Misadventures of
HEATHROW & SMACKY!

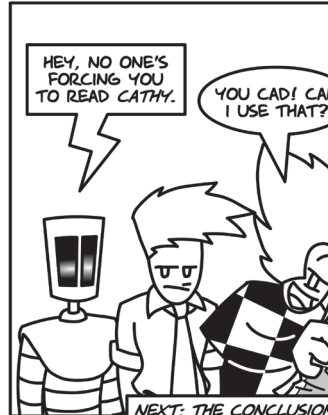
by Kristofer Straub



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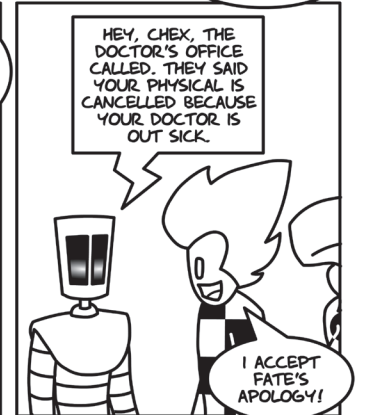
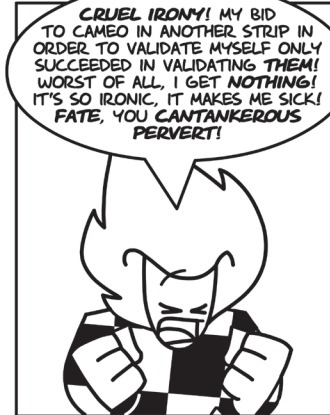
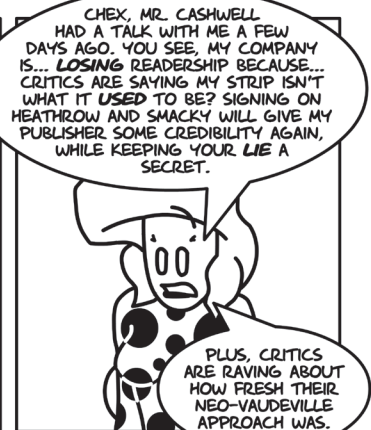
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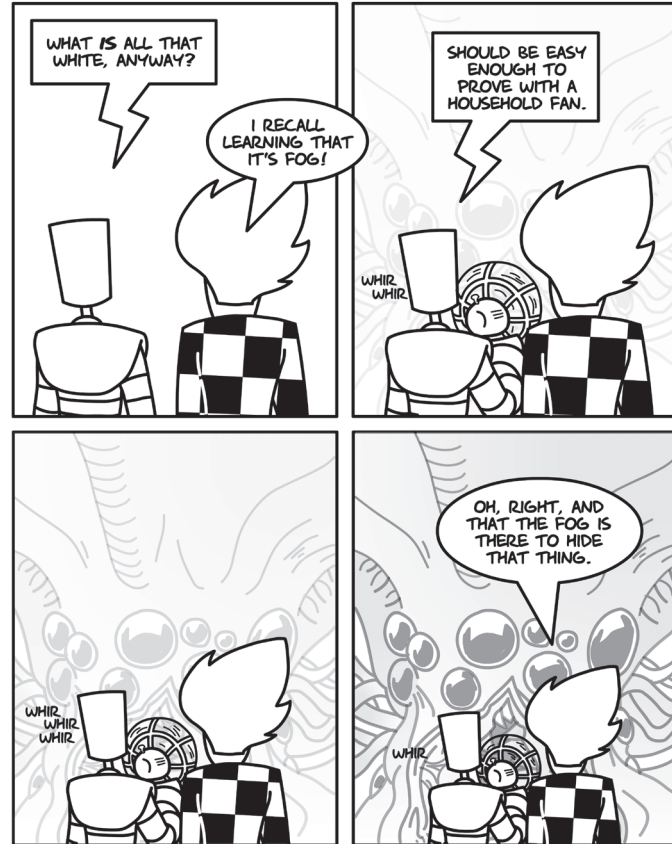
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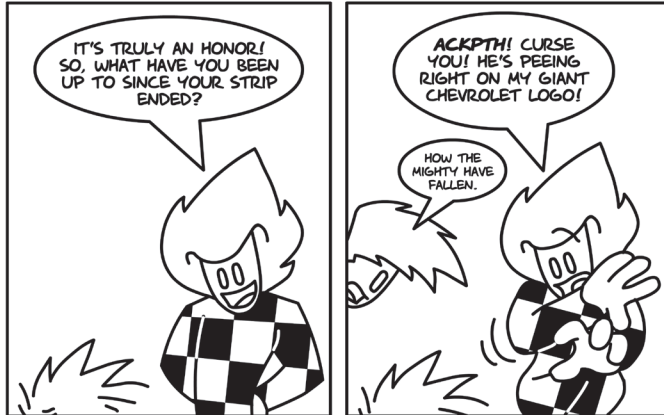
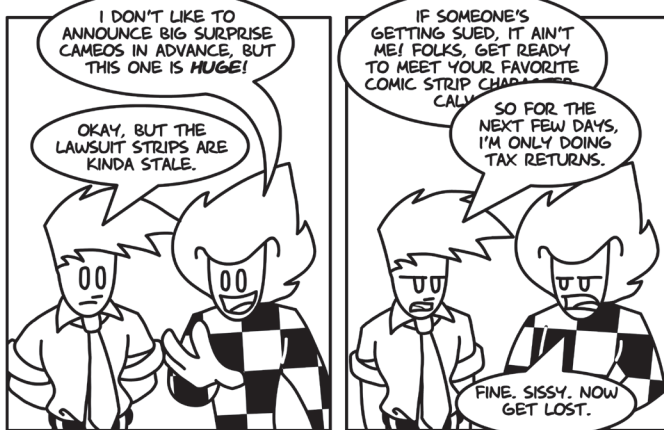


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Consider how, after this strip, you are forced to picture that creature behind the fog of *every other strip in existence!*

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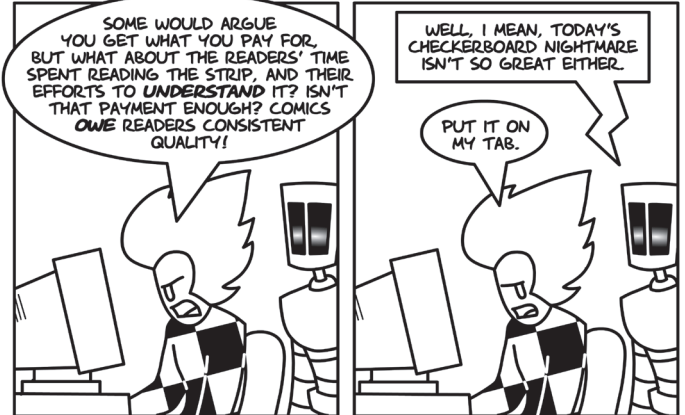
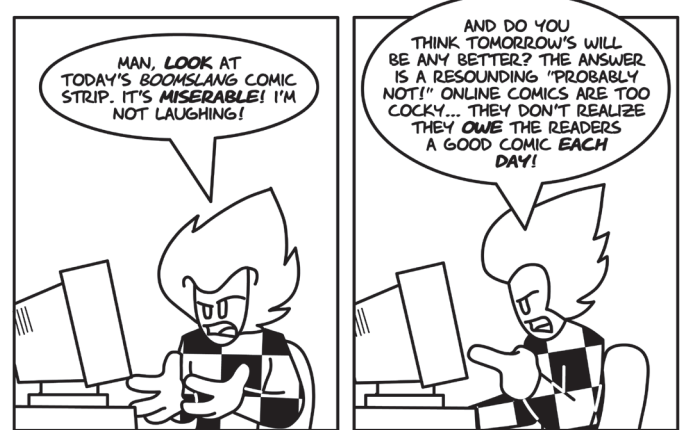


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The character below frame, is, of course, the dustball from *User Friendly*.

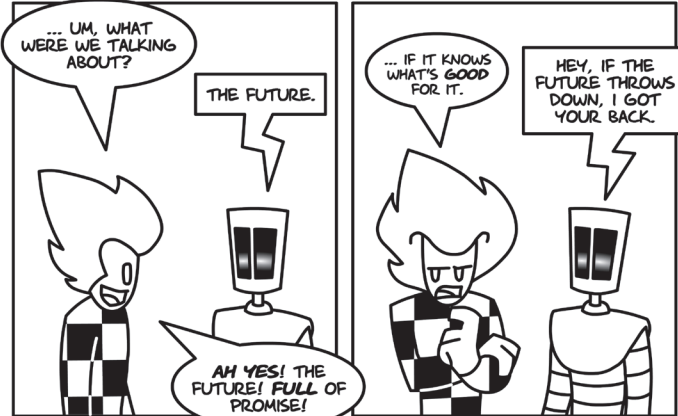
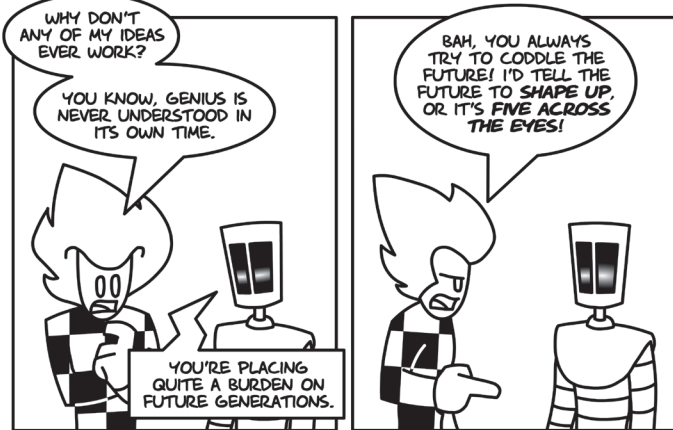
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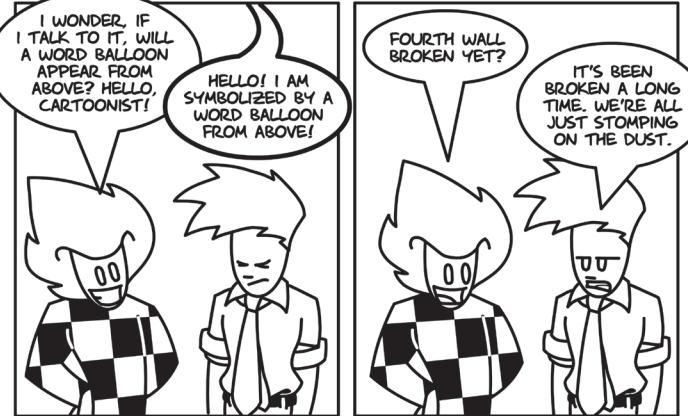
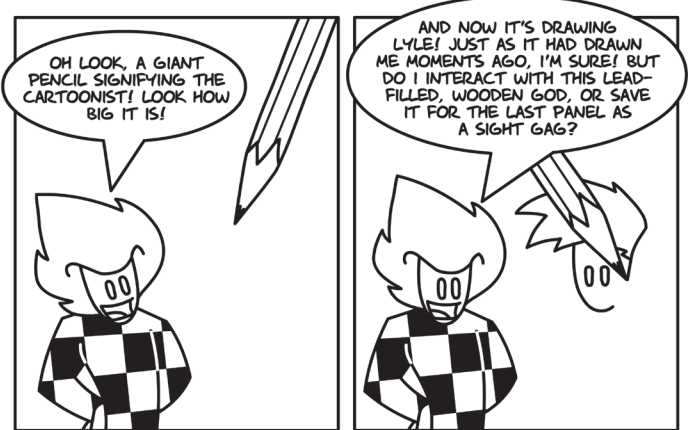
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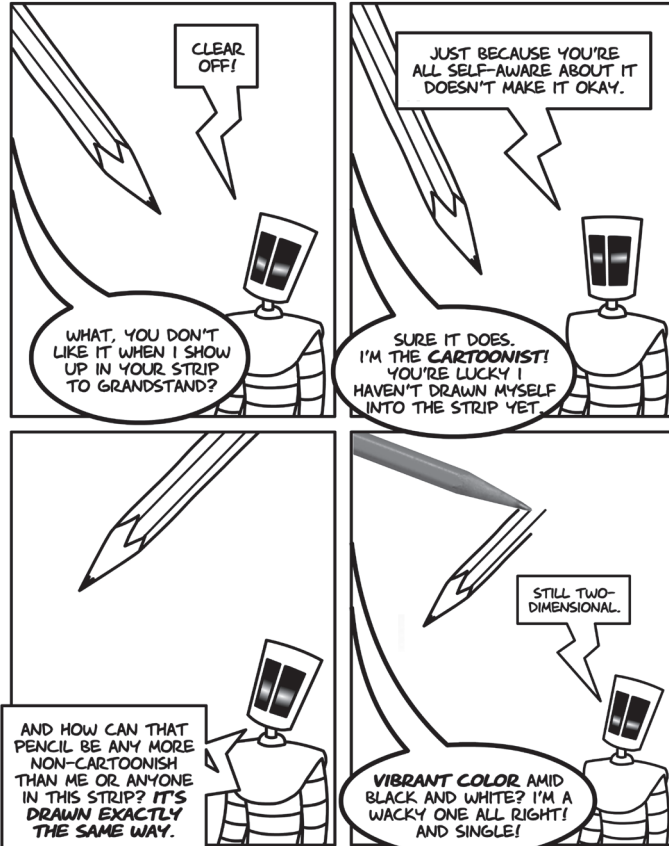


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Forget what I said about strides. Here's the stride. I was sick of the device of self-insertion in self-aware webcomics. Why couldn't the cartoonist just stay out of it?

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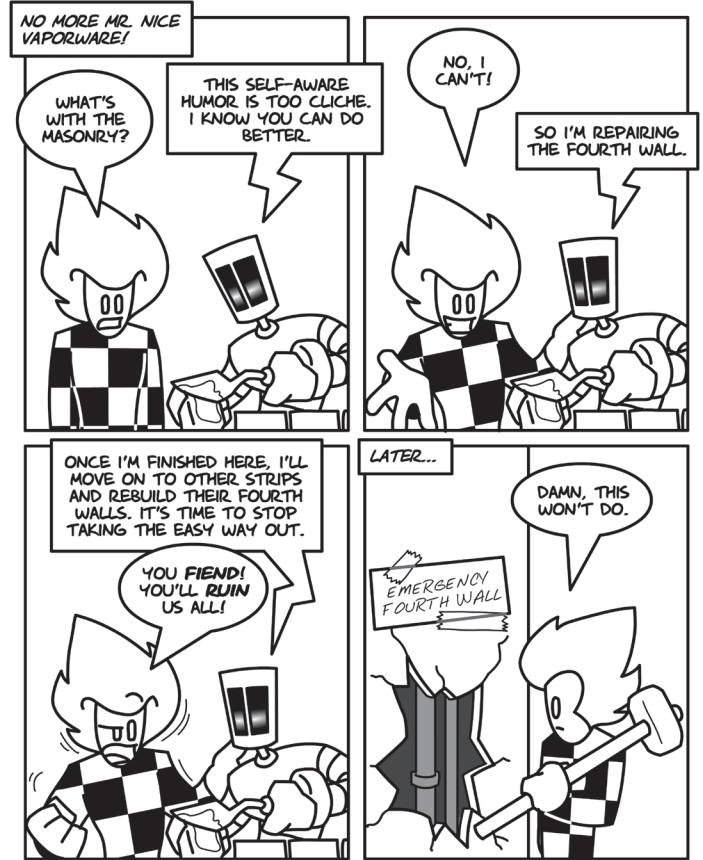


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Worst of all is when the cartoonist fluffs himself up and makes himself sound all cool and all-knowing. It's just awful, and it was rampant!

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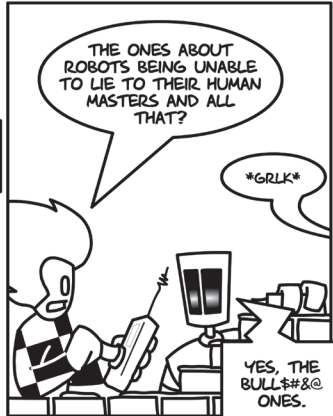
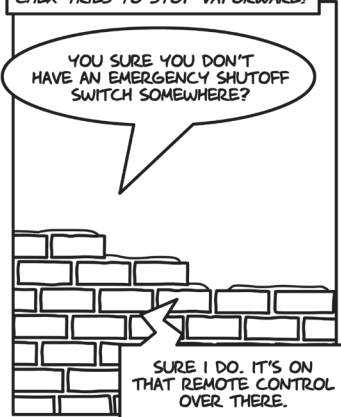


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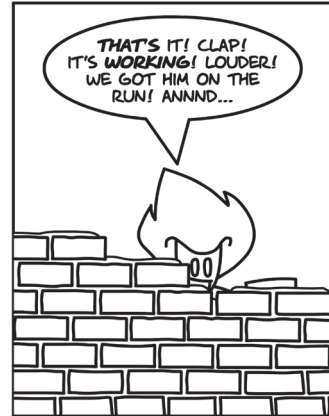
CHEX TRIES TO STOP VAPORWARE!



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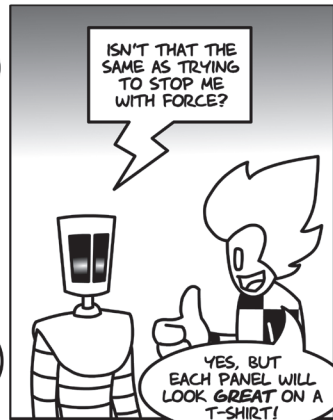
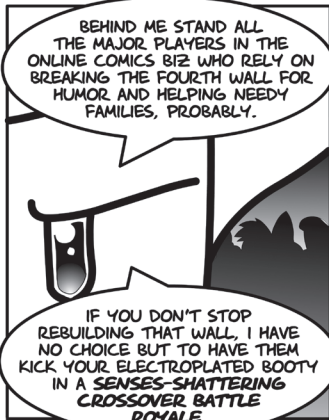
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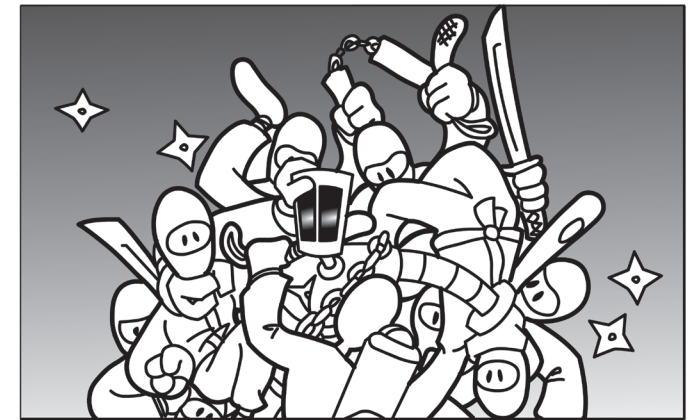
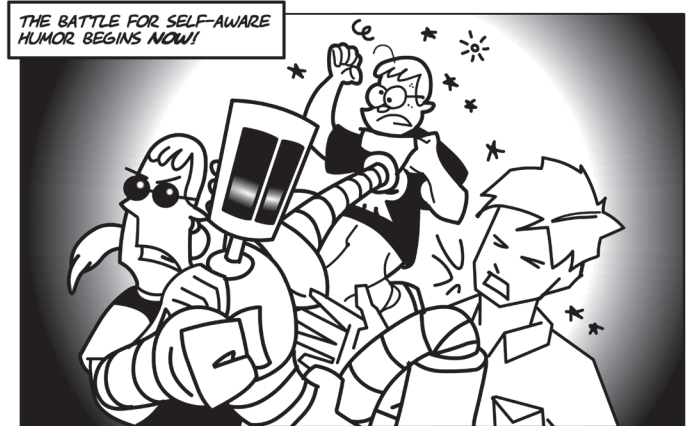
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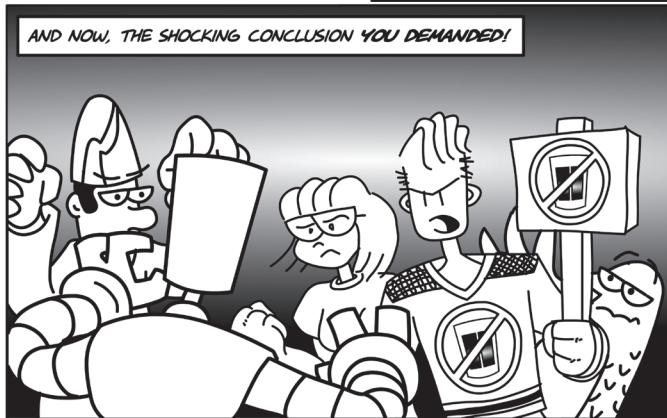
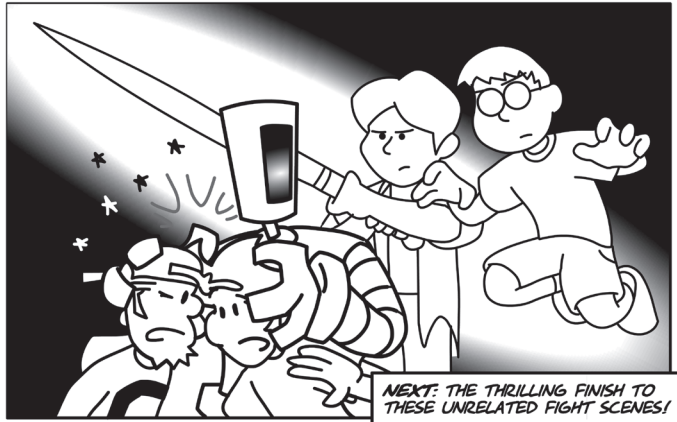
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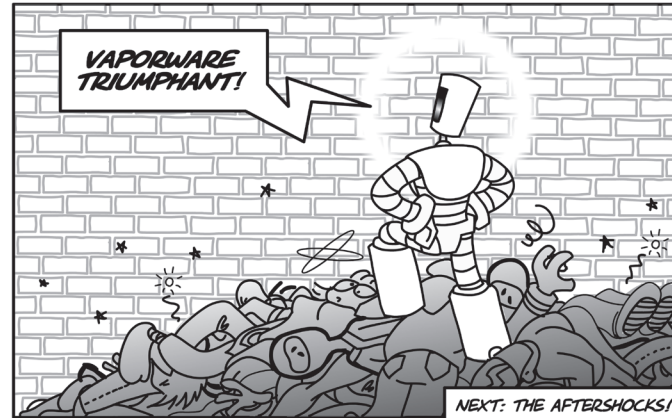
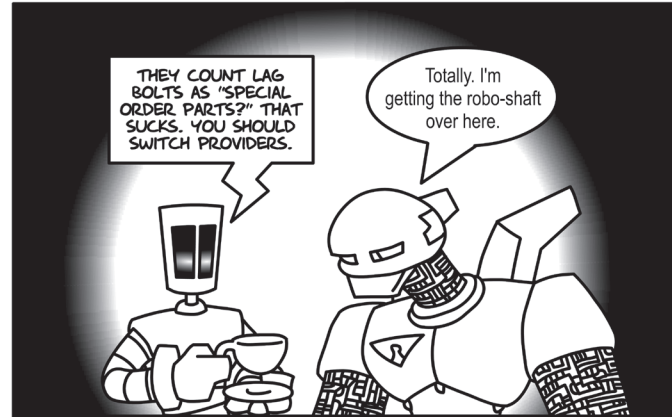
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Brent and Francis from *PvP* by Scott Kurtz; Nick Yu from *Bad Boys of Computer Science*; the IT Ninjas from Barry T. Smith's *Angst Technology*.



The guys from *Residence Life* by Dana Kelly; *Real Life Comics* by Greg Dean; *Bandwagon Comics* by Simon Fox; and *Framed!!!* by Damonk, another self-aware metafest.



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Roy-Bot from *Gamer Hotties* by Michael Buonauro and Jeff Lofvers.

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EPILOGUE...

I CAN'T BELIEVE HE DID IT. THE ERA OF SELF-AWARE HUMOR IS OVER. THE FOURTH WALL IS HERE TO STAY.

YOU'RE LOOKING AT ALL THIS THE WRONG WAY.

CAN'T YOU SEE THIS AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU TO MOVE BEYOND PAST LIMITATIONS? MAYBE IT'LL BE SLOW GOING AT FIRST, BUT WON'T IT BE WORTH IT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT YOURSELF? IT'S EASY TO GRIND OUT A FEW SELF-AWARE STRIPS, BUT THAT SHOULDN'T BE THE MEASUREMENT OF SUCCESS. THAT SHOULD COME FROM INSIDE. PERHAPS YOU'LL LEARN THAT.

WE ALL WILL. AND IF YOU THINK OF IT LIKE THAT, THIS MIGHT BE THE BEST THING THAT HAPPENED TO COMICS.

MAYBE YOU'RE RIGHT. MAYBE WE'LL MAKE IT... TOGETHER!

THAT'S IT FOR THIS STORYLINE, FOLKS! BE BACK HERE NEXT STRIP FOR MORE CHECKERBOARD NIGHTMARE! AND PLEASE CLICK ON A FEW ADS.

GOOD NIGHT, EVERYBODY!

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GOOD NEWS!

MY VACATION TIME CARRIES OVER INTO NEXT YEAR?

NAH, YOU HAVE TO TAKE YOUR FIVE HOURS BEFORE DECEMBER.

ANYWAY, THIS STRIP NOW HAS LEVITYGUARD™ INSTALLED! IF A PUNCHLINE IS TOO EXPLICITLY HILARIOUS, THE READER GETS BLOCKED FROM SEEING IT.

HAVE THERE BEEN PROBLEMS WITH PEOPLE GETTING INJURED OR OFFENDED, OR IS THIS JUST YOU AVOIDING WRITING SOLID PUNCHLINES?

BLOCKED

This punchline was determined to be too well-executed and has been blocked by LevityGuard. Contact your strip administrator.

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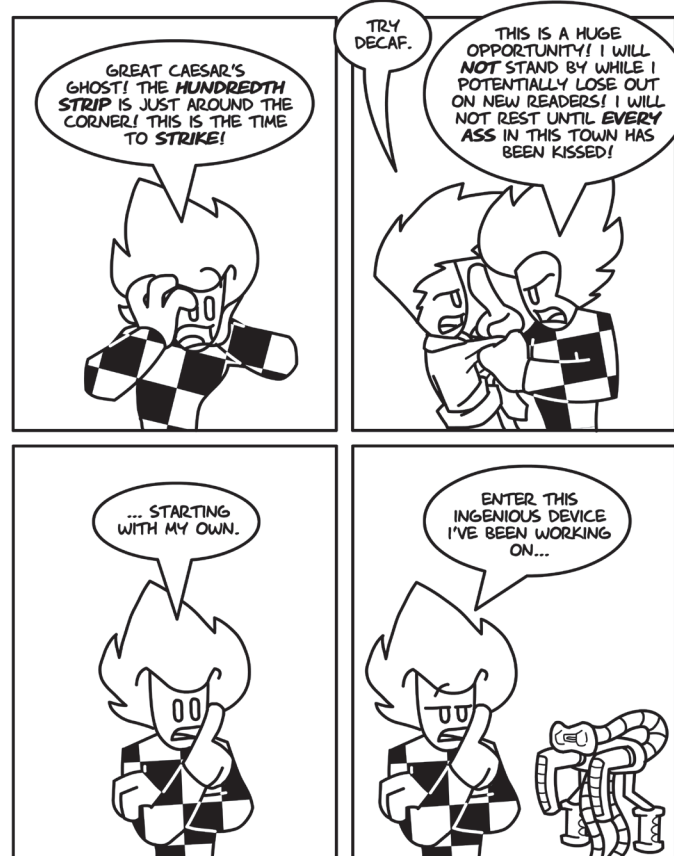


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Here is another popular strip, inexplicably found colored in my archives. So enjoy it in beautiful grayscale!

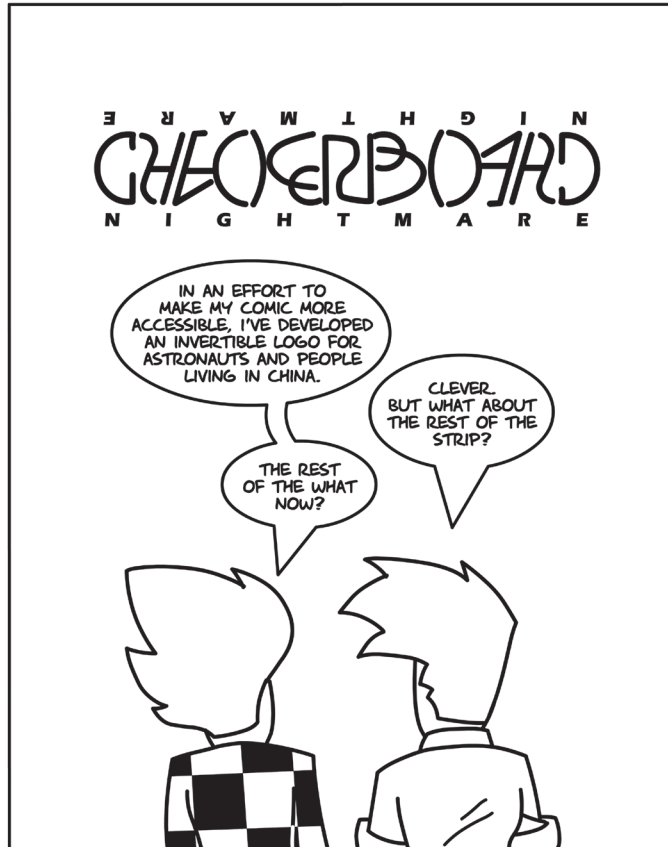
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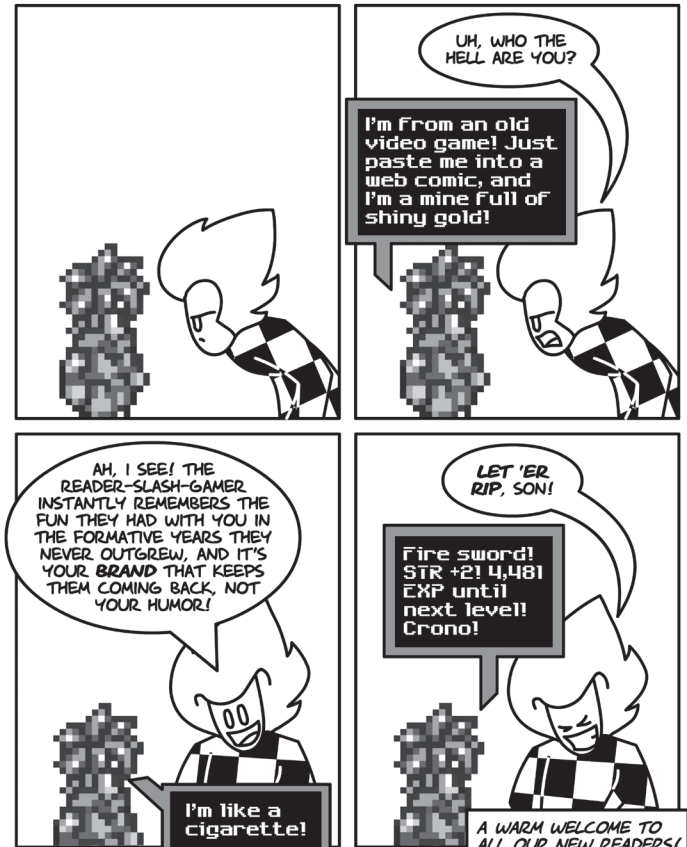


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I worked this out on a Post-It note. It's called an ambigram. For some other great examples, Google John Langdon or Kevin Pease.

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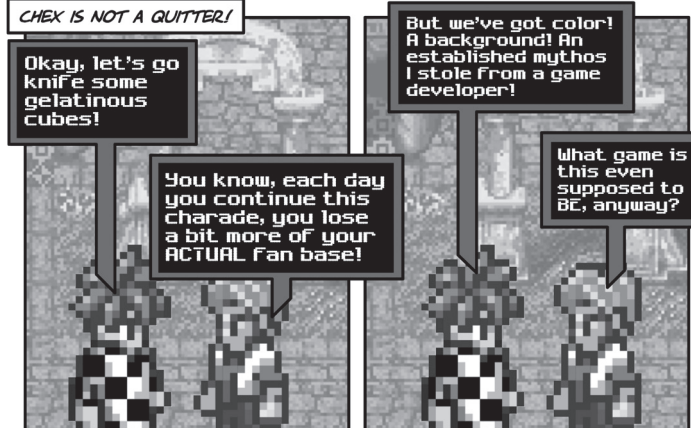
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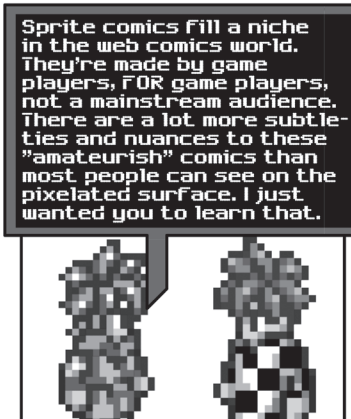
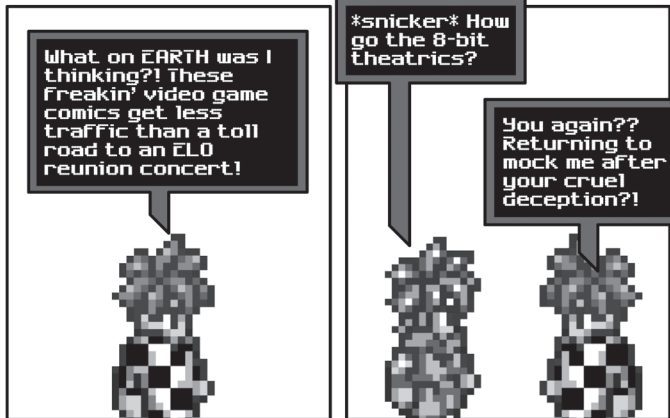
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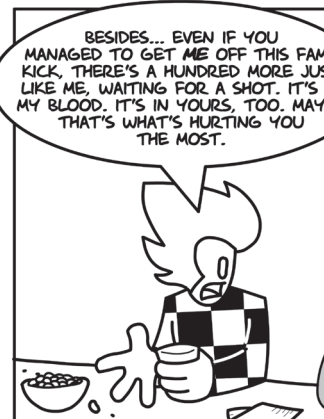
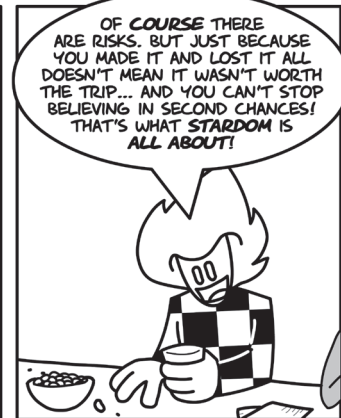
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CHAPTER 2

THE SEVEN SWORDSMEN OF ONLINE COMICS (2001 – 20xx)

While it would be easy to list only the successful webcomic creators and append some meaningless numerical appellation, there is a more potent group of cartoonists that hold the true future to webcomics in their hands. These creators I call the Seven Swordsmen, because they all have contributed immeasurably to the culture of webcomics, they're all men, and they have swords.

Scott McCloud: The Dreamer

The name may be unfamiliar to comic novices, but McCloud has been buckling swashes since 1984. But he's best known in webcomic circles for his books *Understanding Comics*, *Reinventing Comics*, and *Making Comics*, which let everyone know it was okay if you couldn't draw or write, as long as your page formatting was confusing, and that someday you'd be receiving 0.0001 cent from every living thing on the face of the Earth.

Scott Kurtz: The Fart Joke Guy Who Won a Goddamn Eisner

Armed with an arsenal of pens, dreams, and jokes cribbed from TV's *Night Court*, Kurtz rode the dotcom boom, parlaying previous simple gags for gamers into a new strip, *Player vs. Player*, or *PvP* in 1998.

PvP brought a measure of warmth and depth to online comics, quickly finding its audience in *Penny Arcade* overflow readers who felt their use of the F-word was gratuitous. Today *PvP* has evolved into something much more than a gaming comic strip about fart jokes, the sole evidence of which is a 2006 Eisner award.

Jerry Holkins and Mike Krahulik: The Whores

1998's *Penny Arcade* was a simple three-paneler with jokes about Duke Nukem and John Romero's hair.

2006's *Penny Arcade* is a war-scarred, tank-treaded video game industry juggernaut that is about to swallow the west coast.

With the guiding principle of “look at a big pile of money every day,” Holkins and Krahulik have quietly built an empire by becoming a rallying point for gamers everywhere. Others have endlessly tried to emulate their “mention game news in the first panel, then non sequiturs in the last two” style, but all fall far short of Krahulik’s fluid art and Holkins’ colloidal writing.

Joe Zabel: The Neo-Post-Reformalist

“If you can’t write a webcomic, then write about webcomics.” While that seems to be the clarion call of so many amateur reviewers and critiquers, Zabel and the *Webcomics Examiner* avoided the pitfalls of such associations, proving that critical interpretation is more crucial to a work than artist intent, to the extent that art is actually produced *by* criticism. Or maybe that wasn’t it; I couldn’t make it past the third paragraph.

Fred Gallagher: The Shoegazer

Megatokyo remains the greatest, most influential, most groundbreaking webcomic that no one you know actually reads. Following — and in some cases defining — the strong doujinshi tradition, *Megatokyo*’s plot has only progressed three hours in six years. The strip is now printed by DC Comics’ CMX Manga imprint, along with thirty other mangas which, were the covers removed from the books, would be indistinguishable.

Ryan North: The Gatecrasher

Bled from the same vein that brought us Nethack and Pokey the Penguin, North’s MSPaintified, utterly static *Dinosaur Comics* broadened the definition of webcomics to include things that aren’t comics. Deftly combining exposition, soliloquys, expository soliloquys, and soliloquistic exposition, North has turned Mac clip art into a cottage industry. He also wrote some RSS search thing or whatever.

R. Stevens: The Tastemaker

Diesel Sweeties is a strip about a robot, an ex-porn star, and a rocker who rocks out. The shrewd Stevens has spun a generation.com-savvy strip into a massive hit, whose audience is so fresh that they’ve never even heard the insipid newsbyte term “generation.com.” Rumor has it that an angry Stevens once punched the world so hard, it rained on the sun.

These seven figures are poised to actively define, or continue their active definition, of webcomics well into the next half-decade. But there were some that didn't quite make the cut. Here then are the Honorable Mentions.

R. K. Milholland: The Storyteller. Milholland's *Something Positive* is an example of a story told so well, no one minds that it's the same story every time. His spare linework and crushing character moments, often evoked by one or two mere words, are made even more special in that they indicate a respite from the strenuously over-verbose, chest-deep dialogue slog the strip usually presents.

Dumbrella: The Clothier. Though not usually considered a single person, the webcomics supercollective Dumbrella has positioned itself as an internet pop culture magnate. Their iron rule is exercised by thinking up a three-word phrase, coming up with an image involving a unicorn, and putting it on a T-shirt for \$20. They have recently purchased Zurich.

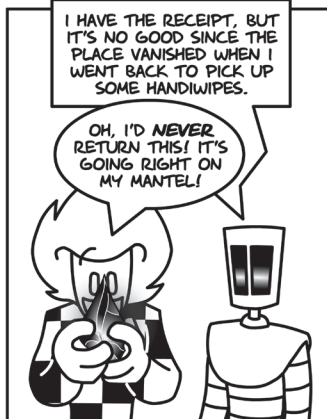
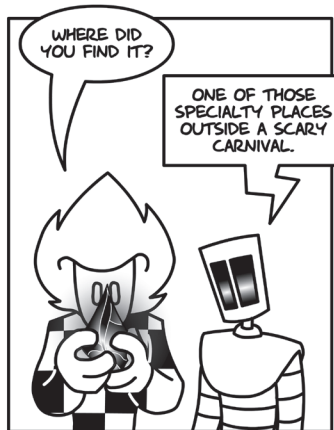
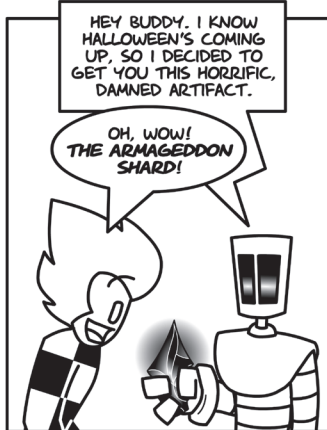
Greg Dean: The Close-Talker. Not so much for his conversational proximity (which is beyond reproach), but his webcomic *Real Life Comics*' mimickry of TV's *Seinfeld*: it contains wacky neighbors, it's about nothing, and it doesn't in any way resemble the creator's life. He has recently purchased Lichtenstein.

Tim Buckley: The Historian. If it ain't broke, don't fix it — many successes were founded on this simple precept, which is why the jokes from *PvP* and *Penny Arcade* from 2001 still hold up as *Ctrl+Alt+Del* from 2006.

Kristofer Straub: The Coattail-Rider. Appearing on the scene in 2000, Straub freed himself from the creative pressures of webcomickry by making his work about everyone else's, under the guise of a five-plus-year-long "homage" that barely concealed his rampant, illfounded jealousy — a guise that persists as an insulting, unfunny book about the webcomics he pretends to revere.

Hungry for an even tinier audience than a webcomic about other webcomics, Straub now draws *Starslip Crisis*, a comic strip about art criticism on a spaceship. Future projects involve a 1940s detective on the Internet mocking Hollywood culture, and a slice-of-life strip about a tennis linesman aboard a submarine in the 1800s.

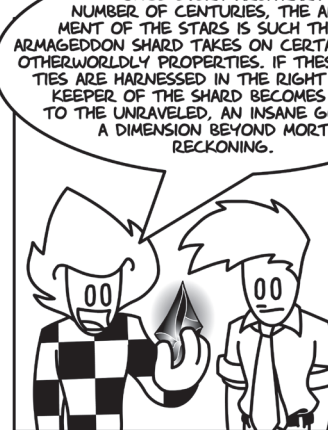
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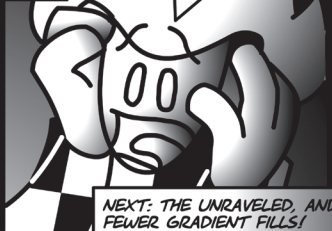
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A FORM OF SUBTLE, PERVERSELY FAMILIAR HORROR CLAWS AT MY MIND PERSISTENTLY, YET ANY ATTEMPTS TO FLUSH IT OUT INTO THE COLD LIGHT OF RATIONAL THOUGHT PROVE FUTILE. LIKE ALL FEAR, IT PREFERS TO REMAIN DIM, SHAPELESS AT THE EDGE OF CONSCIOUSNESS. I FEEL I WILL NEVER KNOW SLEEP AGAIN, NOR DO I WISH TO; FOR IN SLEEP THERE IS DREAMING. THE OBSIDIAN-BLACK SHARD LIES BEFORE ME, RESEMBLING A DEAD, UNOPENED EYE, ITS UNEARTHLY SAW-EDGED CONTOURS A TOPOLOGICAL BLASPHEMY MY GAZE DARES NOT FOLLOW.



AS THE FINAL ELEMENTS DRAW THEMSELVES TOGETHER, AT LAST I WILL MYSELF TO EMBRACE MADNESS, THROWING MYSELF INTO ITS INEXORABLE CURRENT -- NO! NO, THIS CANNOT BE! EVEN AS THE LAST DOUBT LEAVES ME, I FEEL NO RELEASE, NO ABANDON! I KNOW ONLY HORROR! THE UNNAMABLE! IN THIS BLACK AND UTTER HOPELESSNESS THAT ONLY THE DAMNED CAN PERCEIVE, I AM GUIDED BY SHEER INSTINCT!! I CRY OUT BEFORE MY FEAR FINDS WORDS!!

READ CHECKERBOARD NIGHTMARE -- OH, I MEANT "AAAAA..." WELL... NO, WAIT, IT'S "READ CHECKERBOARD NIGHTMARE."

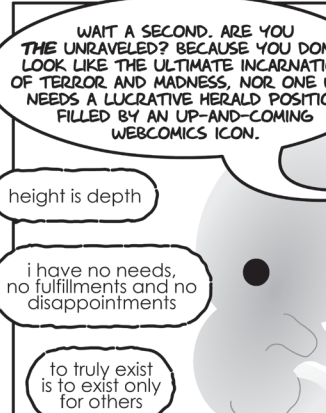
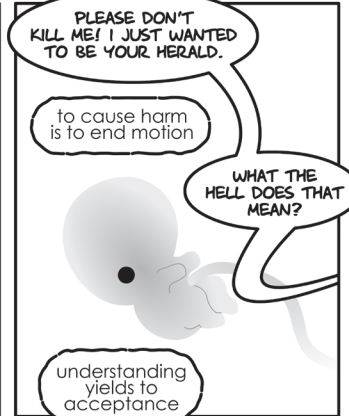


NEXT: THE UNRAVELED, AND FEWER GRADIENT FILLS!

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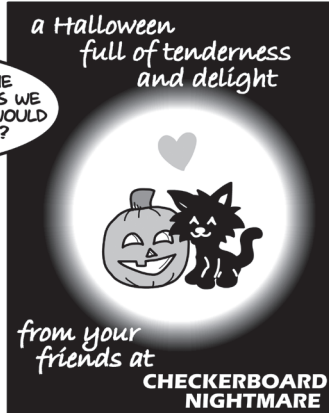
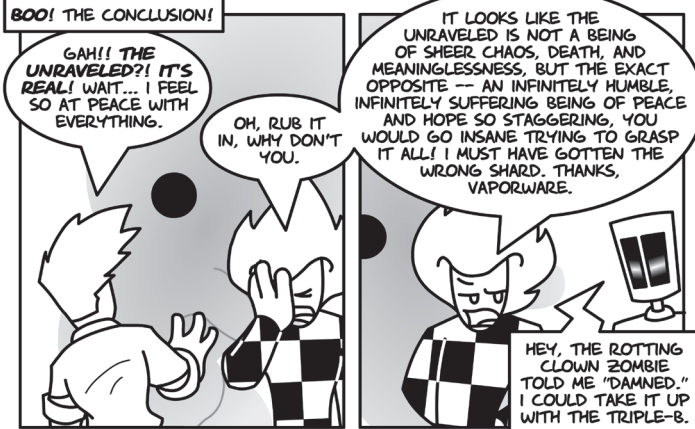


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The Unraveled's dialogue is inspired by the turtle aliens in Ursula K. Le Guin's story *The Lathe of Heaven*. The aliens are very ponderous, kind, and speak in these faux zen koans.

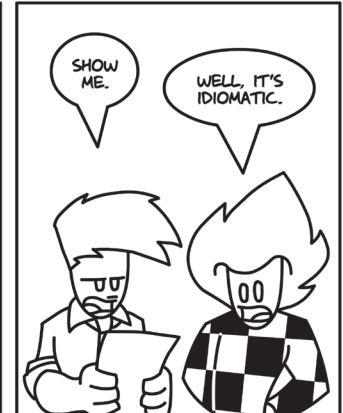
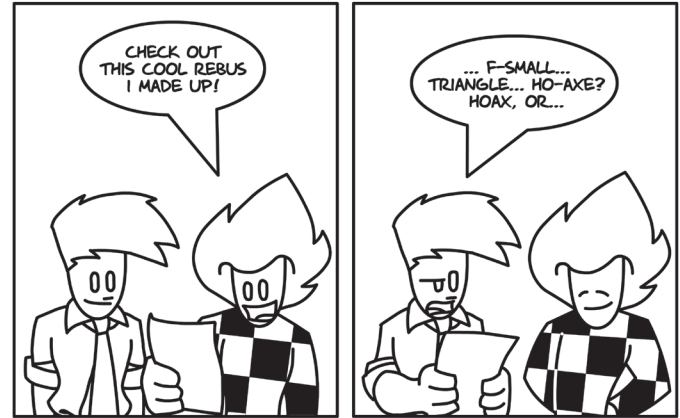
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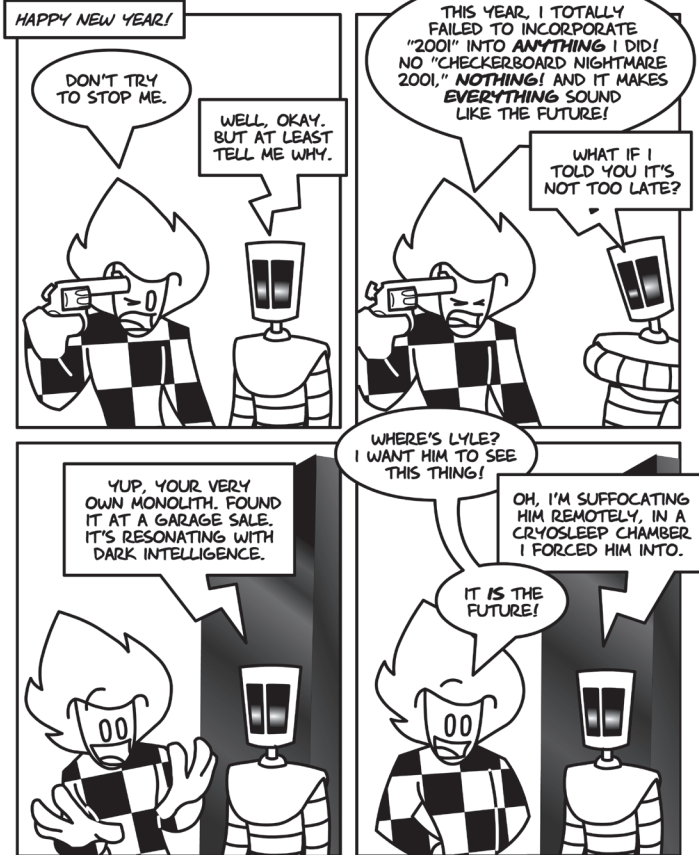
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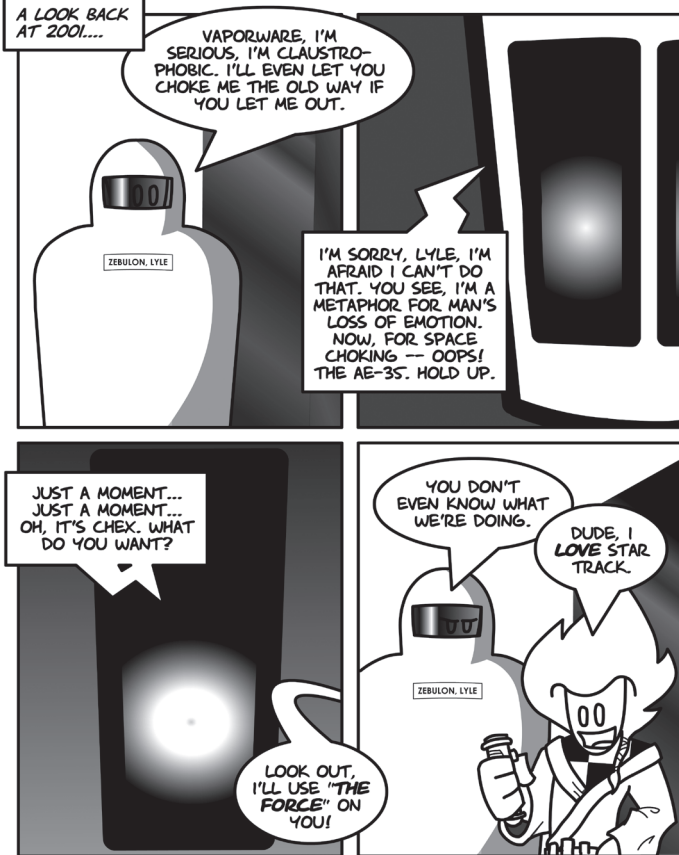
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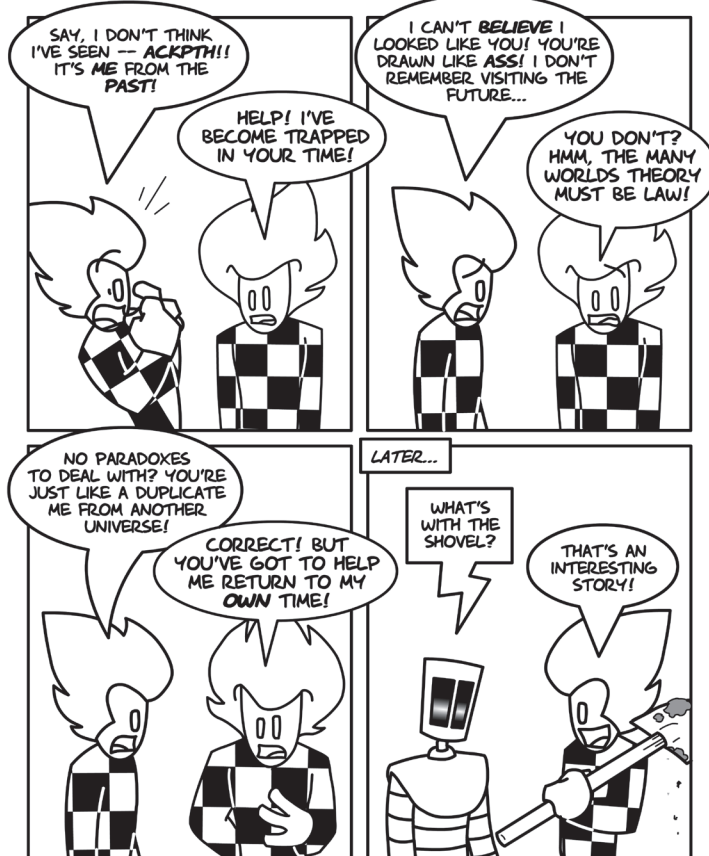
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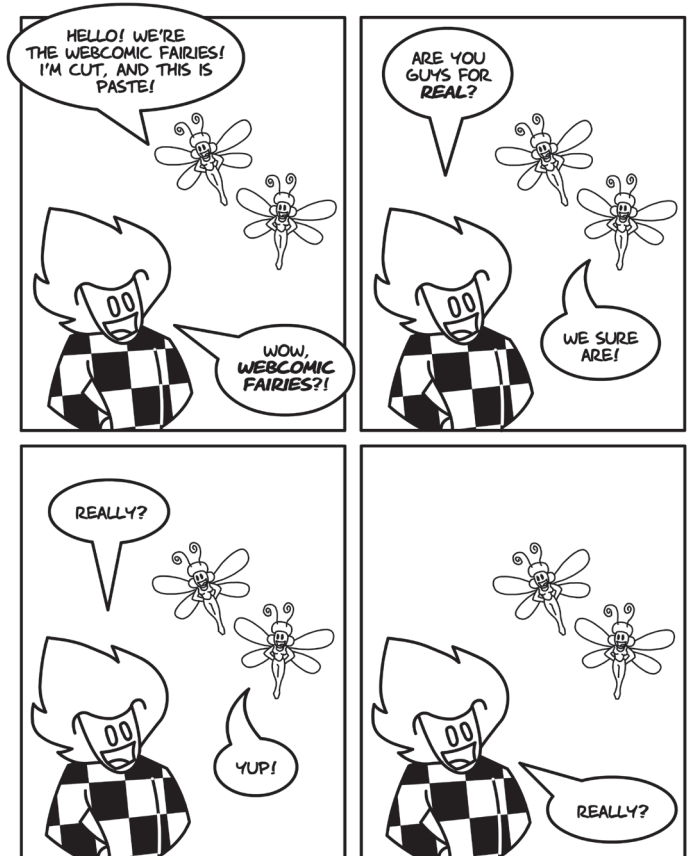


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Fun fact: Every time Chex encounters a parallel or alternate version of himself, he kills him with a shovel. I felt this was an important look into some secret self-loathing.

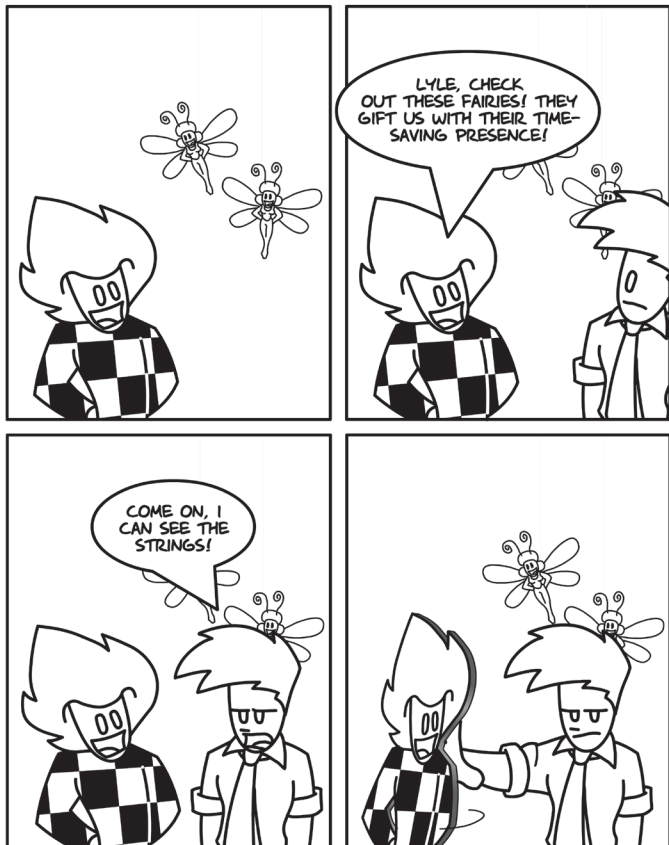
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(Enter Lyle.)

- 5 **Lyle.** What manner of chare be this Commony,
That no artful line nor witty nayword reside within't?
'Tis but words, words upon a page
Glowing as the blacksmith's fire,
Thrice as white, but absent of Spark.
- 10 **Chex.** Thou art blind in this New Light, Lyle,
For thine perceiv'd Darkness that bringeth
Cock-shut-time, so bringeth the gaze
Of the Vulgar man. Soft! He watches even now,
Following lines, mine and thine,
Diffused as a Irishman upon Closing Hour.
- 15 **Lyle.** Thy peculiar words doth vex and diffuse, Aye.
Methinks thou wouldst better serve thy Public
With the parlance of commoners.
- 20 **Chex.** And spoil the gimmick? A number of
Webcomics are celebrating Shakespeare's
Birthday. We'll get right back to Vaporware
Choking your Ass afterwards, I promise.
Whoops. Dammit.
- 25 **Lyle.** Forsooth! Thou hast unclew this Charade with thine own
Doing. Lyle lies beyond your shent. A cursory trouble;
A brief scathe and 'twill be no more. Dost thou compose?
- 30 **Chex.** I forgot what line we were on.
You're too Good at this.
- Lyle.** Nevermore let lesser judgment err,
When thy Counsel hath been an Officer
In the Shakespeare Club at his Charge-House.
- 35 **Chex.** Yeah, well, this Stuff is no good for
Catch-phrases. And Shakespeare wanted to
Kill all you guys anyway.
- Lyle.** Thy conveyance is expressed!
Shut thy cobloaf.
- Chex.** Make me. I'll carbonado your shanks.
- Lyle.** Bringeth it!

(Exeunt.)

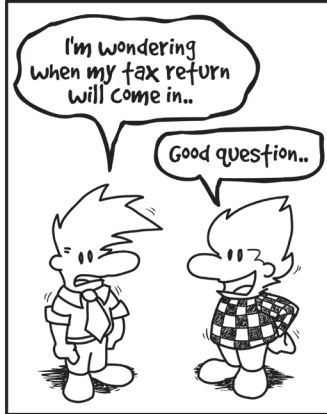
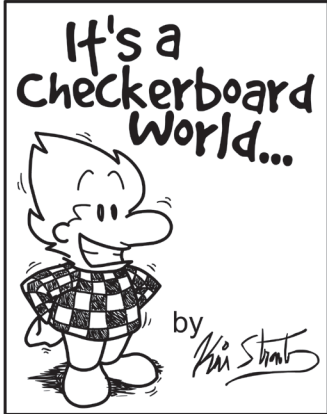
AND REMEMBER,
KIDS, WHEN YOU'RE
DRAWING COMICS
ABOUT SHAKESPEARE,
MAKE SURE TO HAVE
SOMEBODY HOLDING
UP A SKULL.

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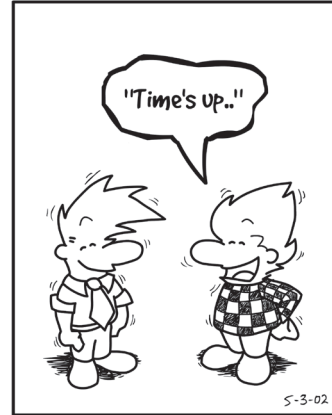
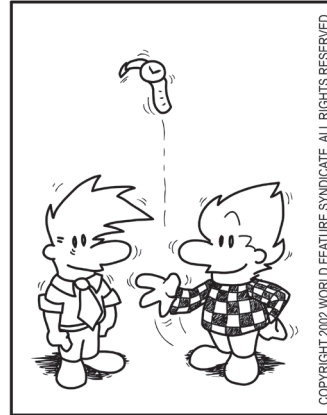
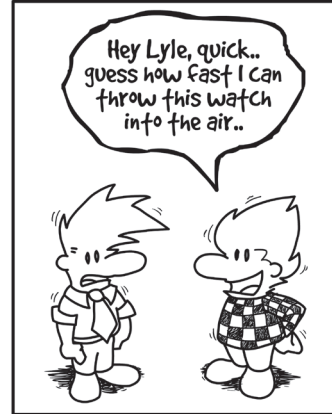
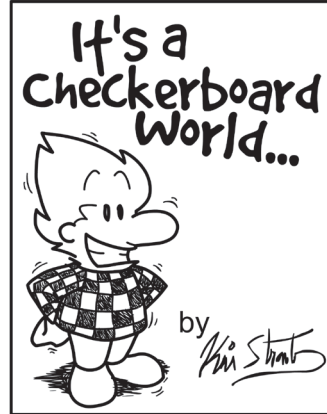
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Apologies to the group of playwrights publishing under the pseudonym "William Shakespeare."

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THE NEW FORMAT ROLLS ON!

It's a checkerboard world...



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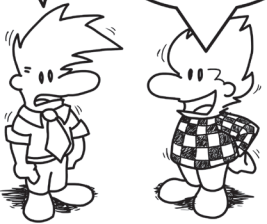
HEY, WHERE THE HELL IS VAPORWARE? AND COULDN'T DOT HAVE SHOWN UP?

VAPORWARE IS STRAIGHT OUT, TOO BIZARRE. DOT WILL PROBABLY SHOW UP LATER IN SOME "WE'RE MARRIED AND MY HUSBAND IS LAZY" GAGS.



AND HOW LONG ARE YOU GONNA BE DOING THIS REFRIGERATOR MAGNET HUMOR?

AS LONG AS IT TAKES TO NOT GET SHUT DOWN BY THE GOVERNMENT.



BY THE WAY, IT'S A "HAND-DRAWN" STRIP AND WE'RE STILL REUSING ART?

YEAH, LIKE THE SPACE ALLOTTED TO CARTOONISTS IN THE PAPER GIVES THEM OPTIONS.



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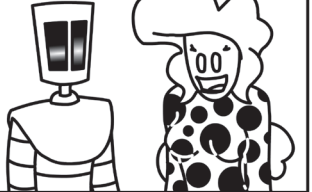
I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY I CAN'T PARTICIPATE IN CHEX'S DUMB NEW "SAFE" COMIC. ROBOTS CAN HAVE A GREAT SENSE OF HUMOR. ESPECIALLY ROBOTS BUILT BY CHEX. NAMED VAPORWARE.

WELL, YOU CAN'T BE IN THE NEXT ONE. THAT ONE'S ABOUT DONE, I THINK.



YOU "THINK?" ISN'T THERE A SCRIPT BEFOREHAND?

I'VE BEEN WRITING THEM. THIS KINDA STRIP IS MY BREAD AND BUTTER!



HEY, FIGURE OUT A WAY TO WRITE ME IN THERE! WHAT COULD I BE DOING?

I COULD WRITE YOU IN, BUT ONLY AS AN ADORABLE PUPPY, OR A TEENAGER USING DATED LINGO.



"HEY, MARMADUKE'S HAD A ROBOT ON BOARD FOR YEARS -- THE AUTHOR!" SEE, FUNNY! OR IS THAT TOO MEAN?

A LITTLE... SAY "GRODY TO THE MAX" A FEW TIMES?



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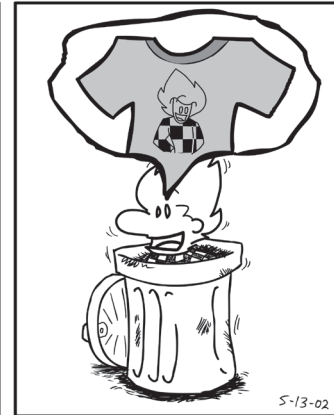
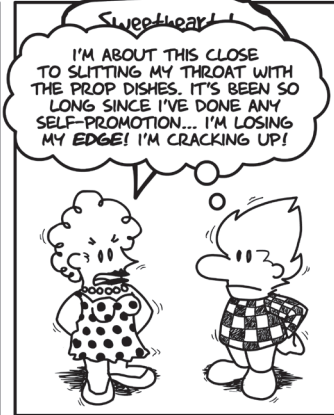
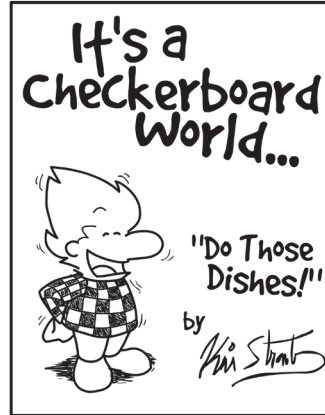
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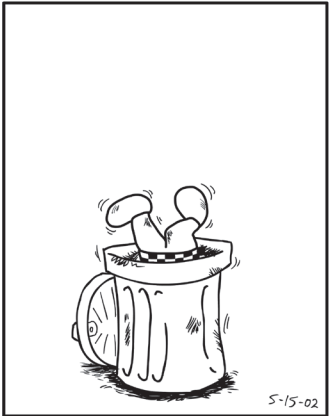
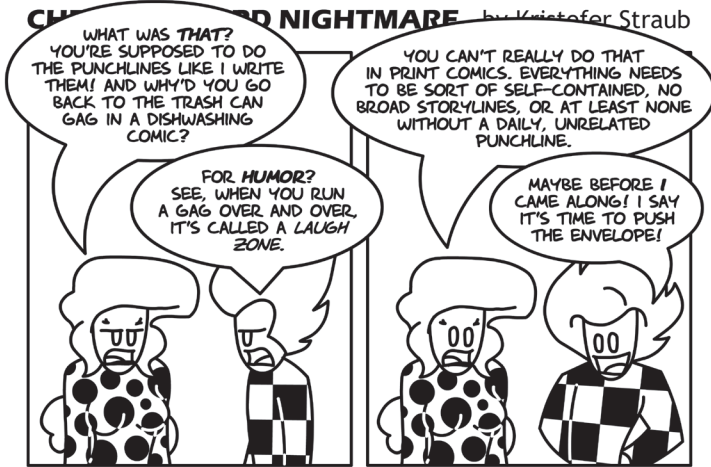
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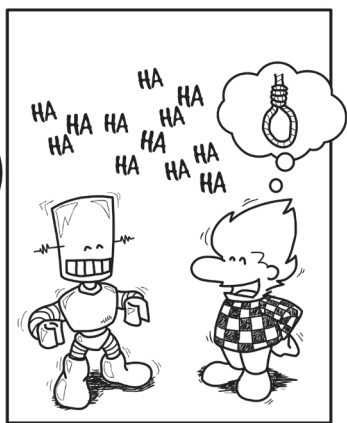
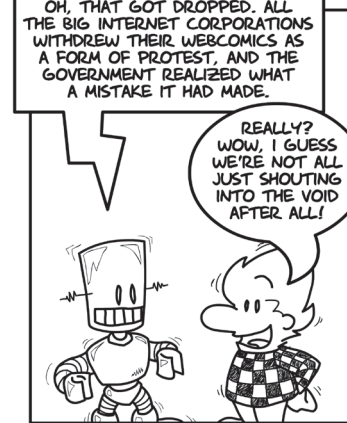
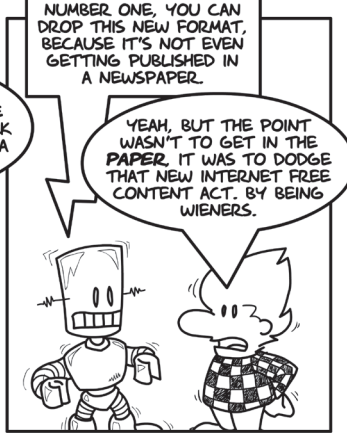
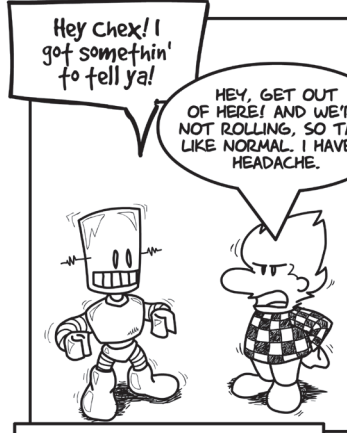
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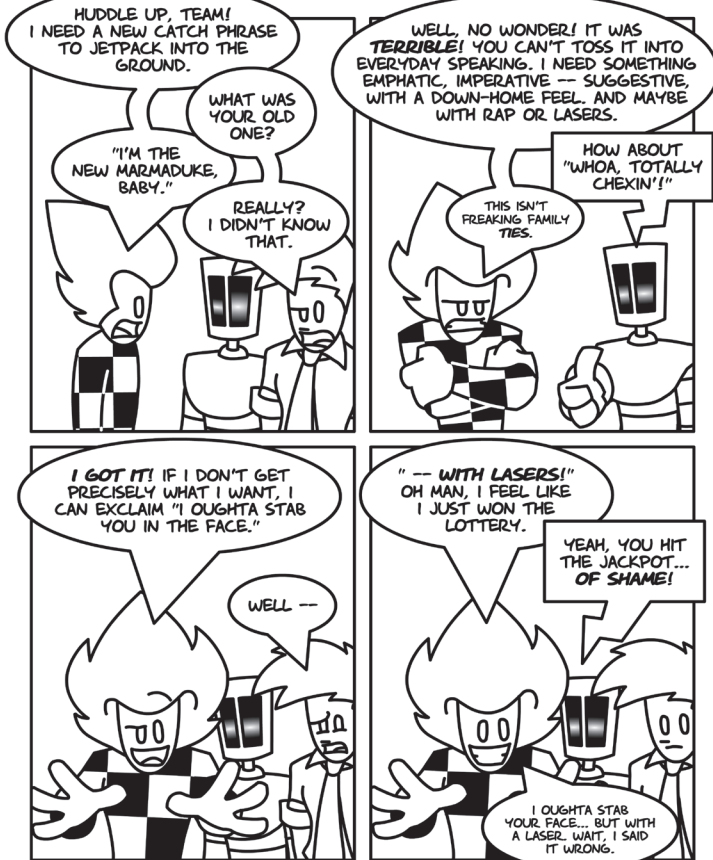
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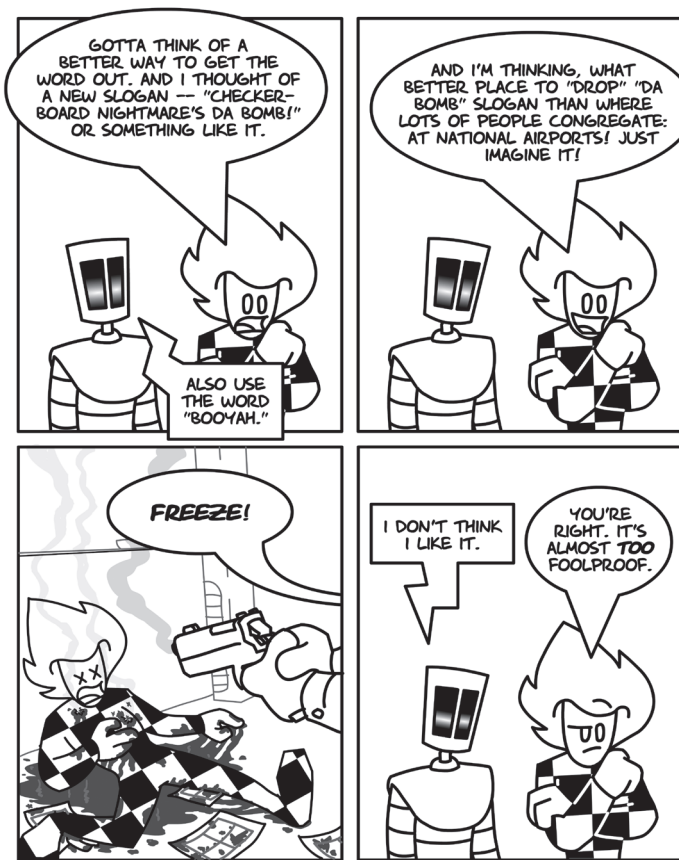


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“Stab you in the face with lasers” was a minor catchphrase, and a distant second to Doctor Hot’s execrable “Hot!”

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Maybe it is indicative of some kind of my own self-loathing, but I love to draw Chex dead.

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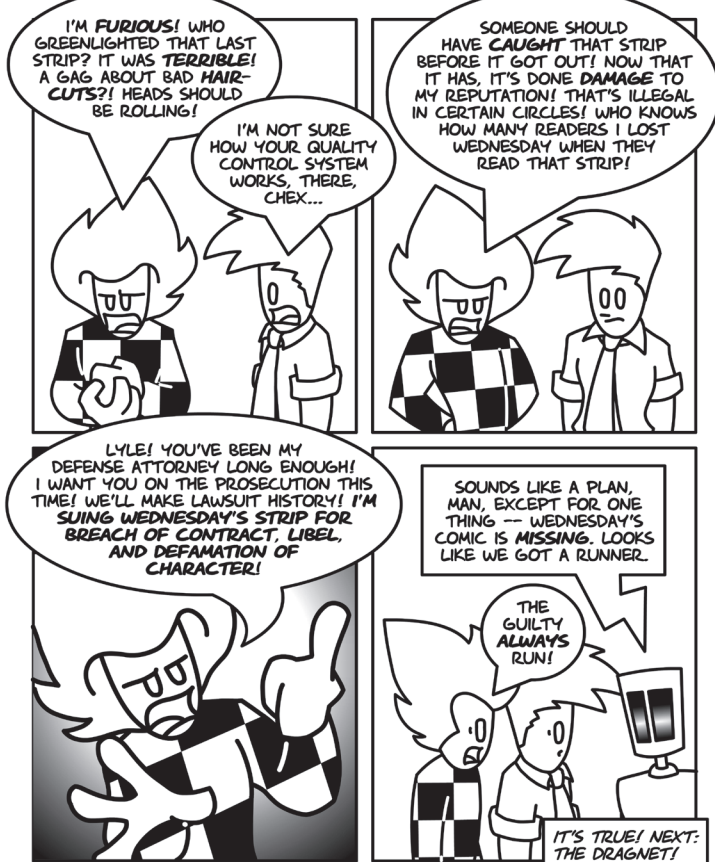


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This strip was not cleverly awful, it was legitimately awful, and my desire to remove it from the site spawned the following storyline.

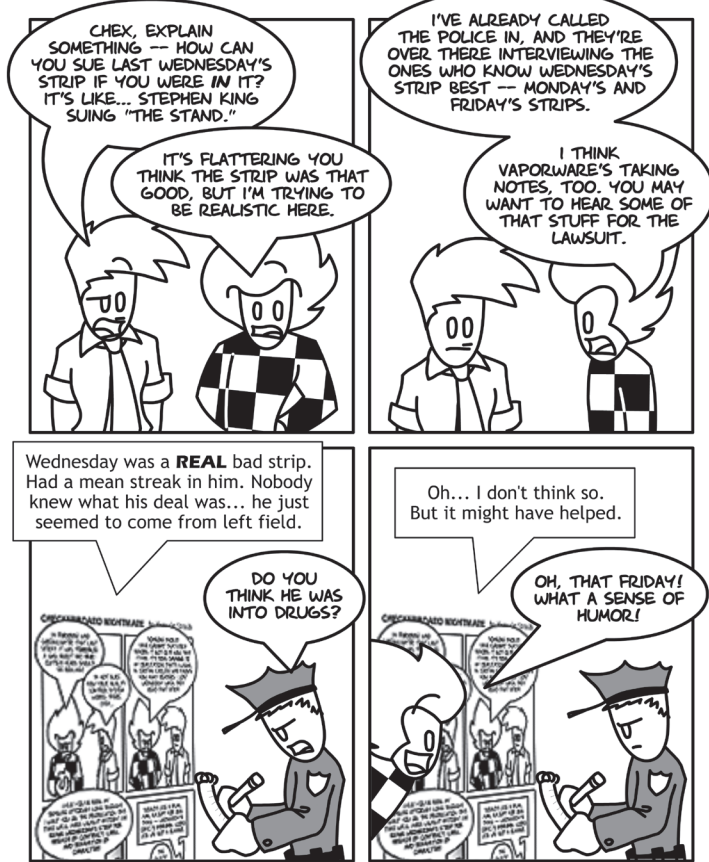
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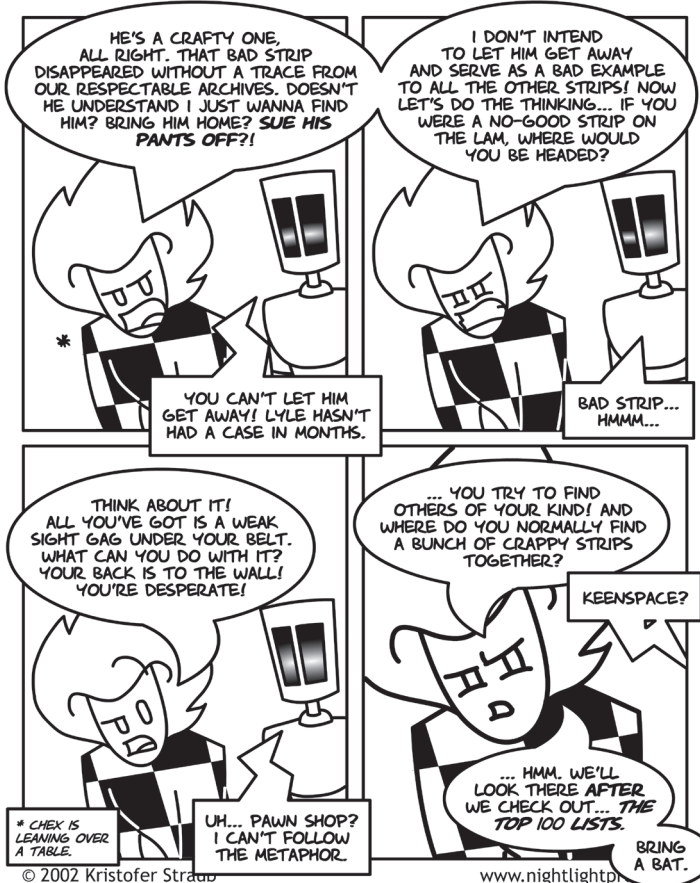
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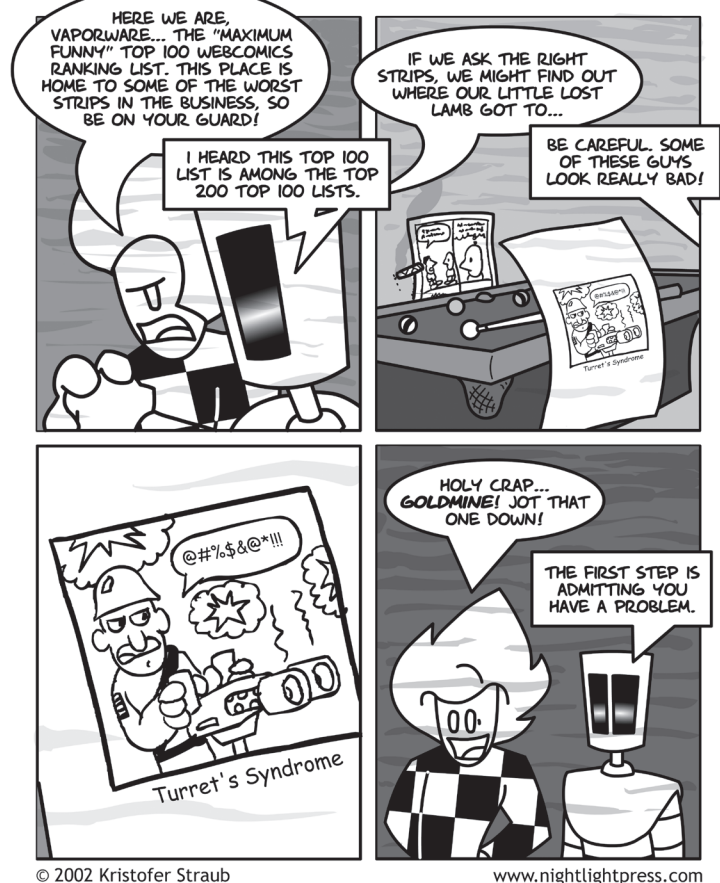
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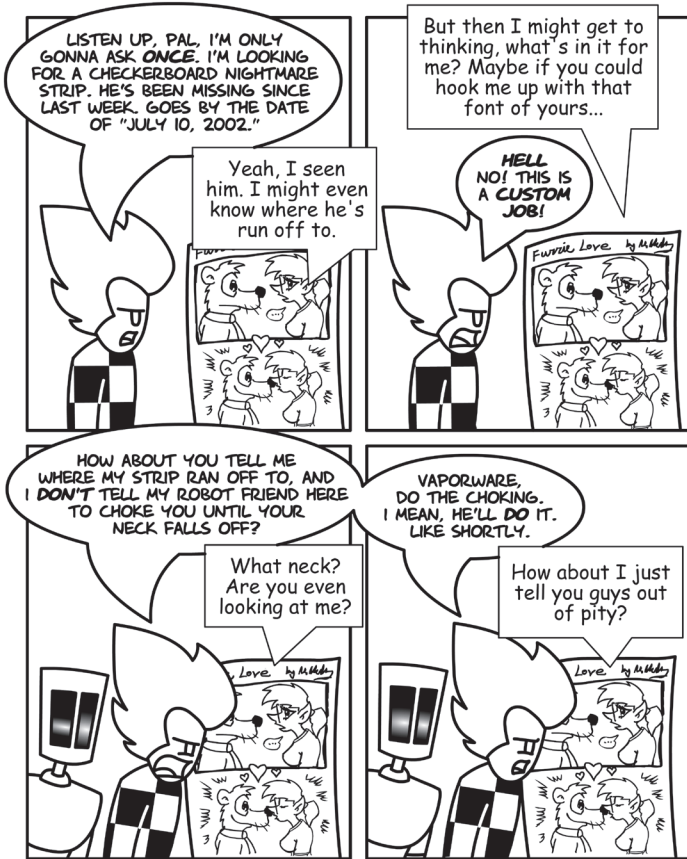
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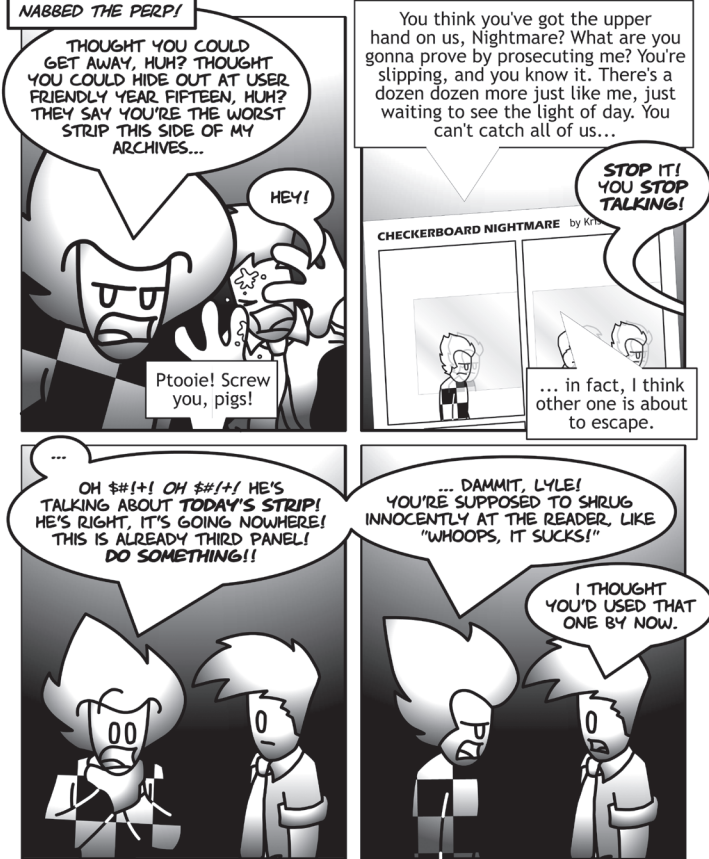
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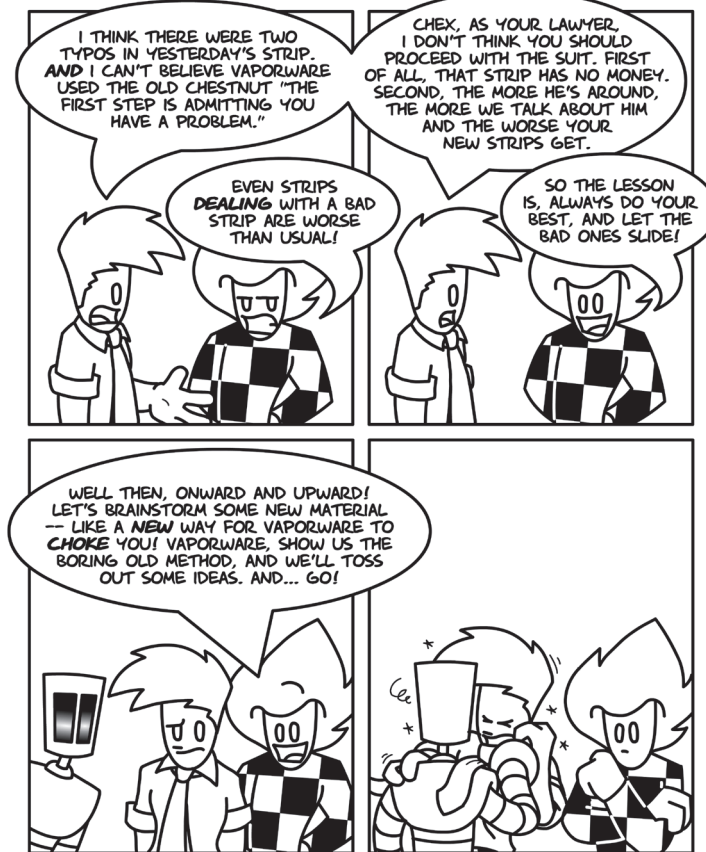
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CHAPTER 3

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

One of the fascinating aspects of webcomics is their limitless potential, the promise of endless possibility in a freeform world that employs not only traditional images and text, but sound, and color, and animation. One of the other fascinating aspects of webcomics is their total failure to use the first aspect.

Characters

A webcomics character can only be one of the following: the Sarcastic Everyman Who's an Abstraction of the Author, the Wacky Scheming Pal Who Drives Situations, the Uninspired Female Character Who Says Things Like "Men are Idiots," the Adorable Non-Human Character That's Actually Evil, or Mega Man.

"Journal" comics like Jeff Rowland's *Overcompensating* or James Kochalka's *American Elf* contain a special classification of character — the Guy Who Looks At Something Then Wonders Aloud Why It Is That Way, Then Asks the Reader For Some Money.

"Lazy" comics like *Wondermark* by David Malki ! use recycled art, and aren't as good or valid as hand-drawn comics. In fact, he should just stop right now.

Comic Formats

The schools of webcomic formatting and layout are numerous, for sufficient values of two.

Traditional. Most webcomics fall into this category. Despite their primary publishing on the web, these webcomics are static images with a defined size, and could easily be collected in printed book form. Users of this format are eager to be considered Cartoonists.

Experimental. These webcomics experiment with unorthodox multi-path panel navigation, animation, and reader interaction. Users of this format are eager to be considered Practicing Experts on Sequential and Asequential Sociodigital Artforms. They also cannot write or draw, but by God there is a stick figure 40,000 pixels to the right and you will scroll there and mouseover to see him say "*i am alive/unalive/therehere.*"

Scenarios

Obviously there are far too many storytelling scenarios in existence to enumerate them all, but most of them involve one or more characters looking at the reader, shrugging, and saying “Hey — *I* didn’t come up with this stuff! Complain to the cartoonist!” The reader can at this point mentally insert an iris out, followed by an iris back in, the character winking at the reader, then iris out once more.

Merchandise

If webcomics were given the status of a sovereign nation, the populace’s wallets would be stuffed with T-shirts. That is to say, the currency of webcomic success is the ironic garment. Sold at \$16 above what you would pay for a comparable T-shirt at Target, webcomic T-shirts can be broken up into three categories:

The Cast Image. A straightforward image of the cast smiling out at the viewer. Typically the first article of merchandise attempted by the neophyte webcartoonist. Owning one of things is the same as saying “I like to pay for commercials.”

The Post-Ironic Metastatement. Slightly more savvy creators will opt for the text-only T-shirt, featuring slogans like “If this were your T-shirt, you’d be me by now.” In two years these will be available at Hot Topic, but for now you will have to make do with faux-faded Jem and the Holograms ringer tees.

The Non-Sequitur. Recently coming into popularity are shirts with iconography and text that make no attempt at sense. Designs here include “It’s gonna happen” featuring a shark poised over a toilet, and a drawing of a macaroni bust of FDR shouting “Take that, dinner!”

The ultimate goal of the webcomic T-shirt is to set the buyer up for an experience that will occur sometime in the next year, whereupon he or she will open their underwear drawer and find only things he or she is now mortified to wear.

Conventions

Webcomics of all sizes and success levels can be found at comic book conventions across the globe. In most cases, finding them is as easy as looking for the slumped-over individual wondering why he paid \$800 for a table and chair to have a hundred pounds of books shipped next-day-air to. For an exclusive discount, wait until the convention is closing, then follow the creator out to the dumpster.

Advertising

Ad banners. This advertising needs paying for. Animated GIF technology allows the creator to begin a banner ad with the text “What happens when you take...” followed by a three-second delay, then the text “... a pair of high school friends...” followed by the viewer losing all interest and scrolling down.

Ad buttons. This ad format was popularized by D.J. Coffman of *Yirmumab*. It is similar to the ad banner, except that it is half an inch wide and at the bottom of the page.

Google AdWords. Google allows website operators to create their own automated advertising campaign, by entering their credit card and forgetting that they’re spending \$100 a month on advertising until goddamn July when you finally figure out where the money was going.

Project Wonderful. Ryan North’s auction system has completely changed the way webcomics advertise. For a mere \$3.51 a day, you can trick another site into thinking they’re getting \$13.00 a day from you.

Viral advertising. This involves either link-bombing another webcomic’s community forum with your webcomic, or writing a book that mentions other webcartoonists in the hopes that they will mention you on their site. Chris Onstad of *Achewood*.

Collectives

Recently gaining press for their “strength in numbers” approach to publishing on the Internet, the webcomic collective consists of several underpowered comic strips combining their traffic to create a single underpowered syndicate. The collective is similar to the outdated “link exchange” concept from the mid-1990s, except that here, the phrase “link exchange” has been replaced by “collective.” There are many types.

Blank Label Comics. In this kind, you do exactly what every other collective did, except you issue a press release saying you were the first.

Boxcar Comics. This collective began as an offshoot of newsgroup alt.sex.fetish.hobos. Much of the original charter is still in place.

Dayfree Press. Subtlety is paramount here, as evidenced by the percentage of their readers who are completely unaware that the comics belong to a collective.

Dumbrella. This collective has cornered the markets on pop culture, self-loathing, and money.

Keenspot. The easiest way to identify this collective is to hold one of those Ghostbuster traps under all the collectives. This one will get sucked up.

Modern Tales. This is not so much a collective as a wall that costs \$3.00 to peek over.

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AT THE SUPERMARKET...

DAMN, WOMENS. THE TABLOIDS SURE HAVE BEEN GIVING DOT THE BUSINESS -- THE BAD BUSINESS.

DID YOU JUST CALL ME "WOMENS?"

ACTUALLY I SUBSCRIBE TO A LOT OF TABLOIDS, BELIEVE IT OR NOT. THEY'RE A GREAT SOURCE OF INFORMATION ON TODAY'S HOTTEST CELEBS.

DID YOU JUST USE THE WORD "CELEBS?"

I MEAN -- WHICH ONES DO YOU READ? WEEKLY WORLD NEWS?

ROB
DUFF'S
WILD NEW
FACE LIFT!

"GILLIGAN
DENVER'S
GAY LOVER!"

**NATIONAL
BLAB**

AMERICA'S LEADING NEWS-LIKE PAPER

**NAKED
DRUGS**

**POLKADOT DREAM'S
FURRY FRENZY!**

EXCLUSIVE PICS OF HER HOT
...LINE LOVER! SICK!

NAH. THAT ONE IS ALL SELF-AWARE. YOU GET THESE TABLOIDS THAT JUST MAKE UP STORIES, LIKE THEY WERE A BUNCH OF DEPOSED HUMOR WRITERS OR SOMETHING. THAT'S NO GOOD. IF THE PAPER **HONESTLY** BELIEVES IN THE TRASH IT'S SHOVELING, IT'S A LOT MORE FUN AND INTERESTING!

WHICH IS WHY YOU WILL NEVER ALLOW YOURSELF TO REALIZE THAT YOU'RE --

OH GREAT. ANOTHER DENIAL COMA.

NEXT: CHEX WAKES UP, BUT DOESN'T ACKNOWLEDGE WHAT WAS SAID!

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LOOK AT THESE VULTURES! THE TABLOIDS ARE HAVING A MEGA-RUN OF DOT STORIES LATELY.

I THINK IT'S BECAUSE SHE JUST BROKE UP WITH GOSSAMER THE CHICKEN.

FIRST A DUCK, THEN A CAT -- A WORTHLESS CAT, I MIGHT ADD -- AND NOW A CHICKEN? WHY DOESN'T SHE DATE SAFELY WITHIN OUR SPECIES?

I THINK SHE'S A FURRY, CHEX. YOU KNOW.

WHAT THE HELL IS A FURRY? A FUR-WEARER? THOSE POOR CHINCHILLAS! ... CHINCHILLAE?

CHEX, A "FURRY" IS A PERSON WHO ENJOYS THE COMPANY OF ANTHROPOMORPHIC ANIMALS AND GETS MADE FUN OF BY WEBCOMICS. BUT IT'S ACTUALLY A COMPLETELY NATURAL FETISH AND ALTERNATIVE LIFESTYLE.

CRIMONY, LYLE. YOU SOUND LIKE SOME LIMP-WRIST DEFENSE LAWYER.

I AM YOUR DEFENSE LAWYER.

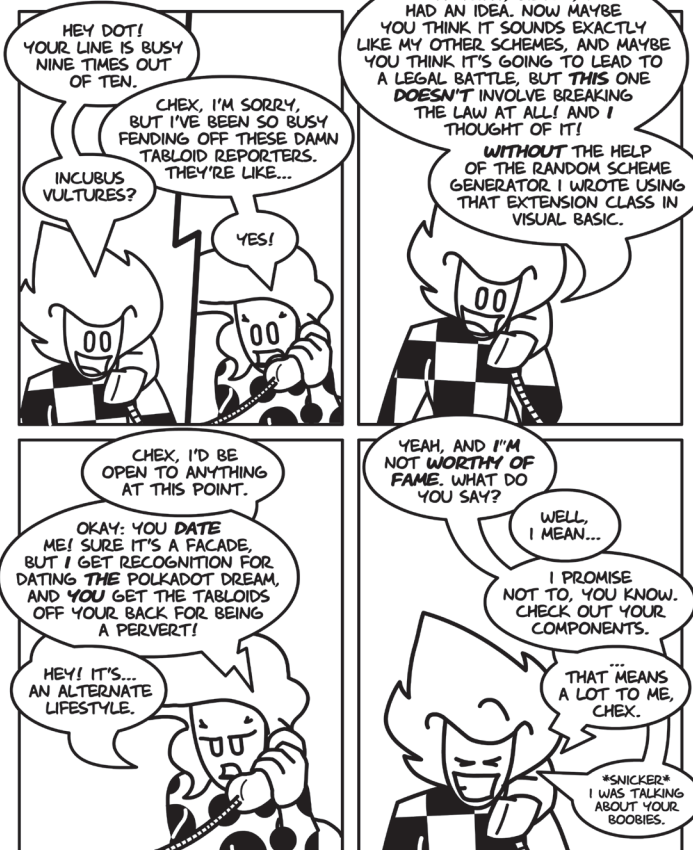
WELL, HOW COME YOU HAVEN'T WON ANY OF MY CASES?

YOU'RE ALWAYS GUILTY.

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HEATBEAT™
NOT HOT HOT HOT GOSSIP GOSSIP GOSSIP! IT'S HOT! DAMN!



HOTTIE DOTTIE DREAM SEEN SCHEMING WITH CHECK-DECKED UNKNEEN* *"unknown"

by Chiffon Van Maximillion-Peter

Looks like comics queen **Polkadot Dream** is dating a horse of a different color -- and he's human! That's no typo! The new pair was seen having a **hot, sexy conversation** over some **hot toddies** or **margin!** Followed by a night of **sex**, presumably! But who is this handsome new beau? He's **Checkerboard Nightmare**, whose misdemeanor mischief has gotten him into trouble with **Dream's** legal eagles!

But has **Dottie Dream** truly given up her furry ways? Throughout her career, she's been linked to sexy up-and-coming anthropomorphic ingenues like **Heisenberg the Duck**, **Sylvester the Cat** and most recently, **Gossamer the Crazy Chick**.

The pair was overheard to have been talking about returning to **Dot's** penthouse suite to talk "**promotion**," which is undoubtedly steamy sex-talk for **naked sex!** You can be sure **HeatBeat** will follow this coupling all the way down the aisle -- whether that aisle leads to **marriage**, or **hot sex!**

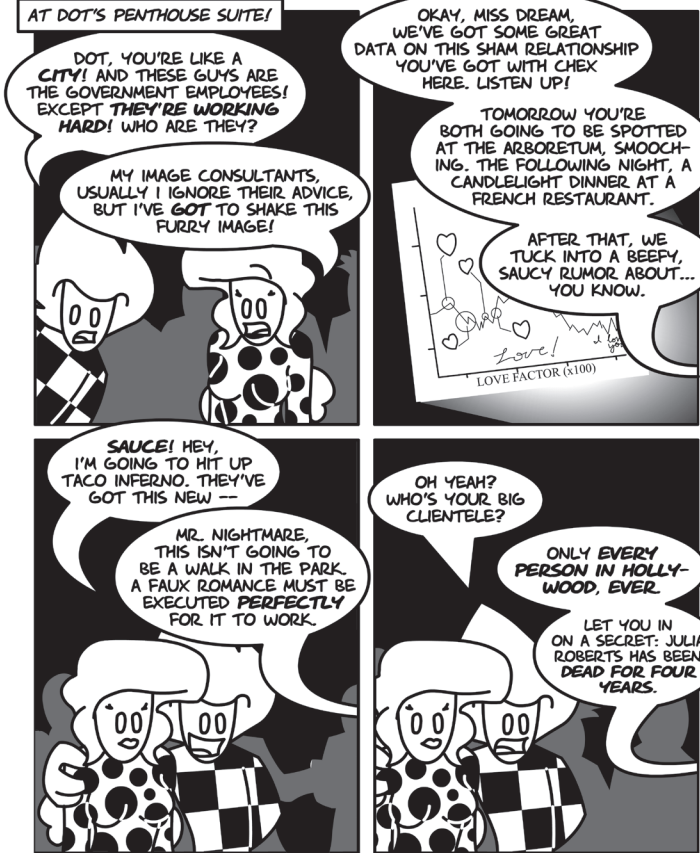
PRENT SIENNA DIES AFTER DRUG-FUELED



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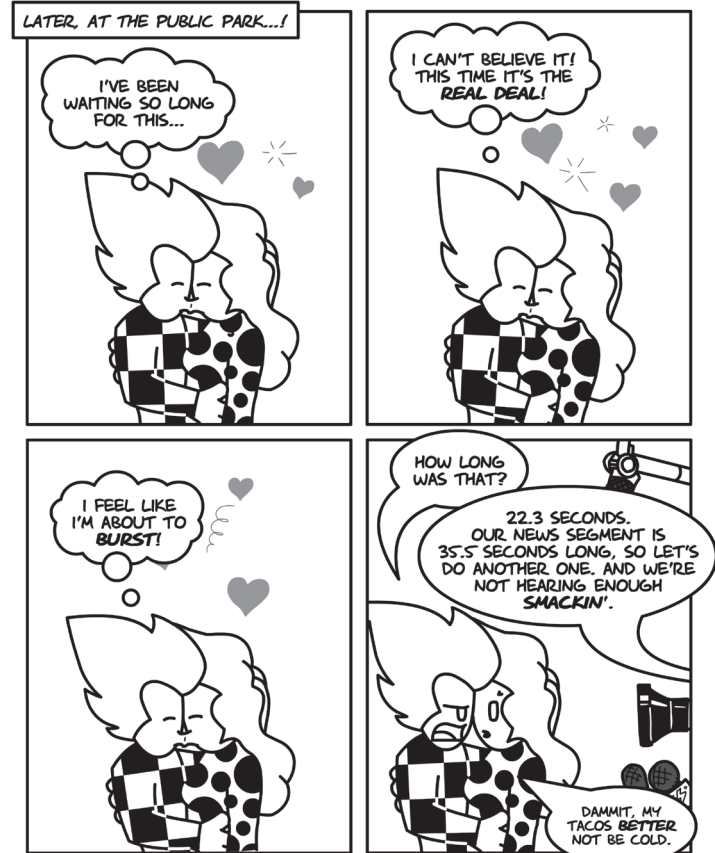


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Chex is male, but he is entirely asexual. He is equally attracted to men and/or women, inasmuch as they could help his career.

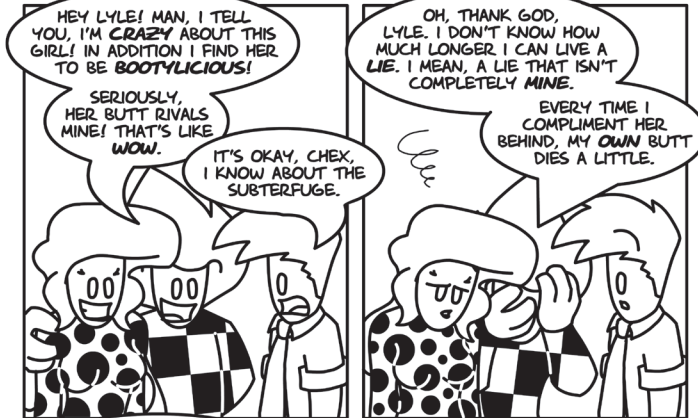
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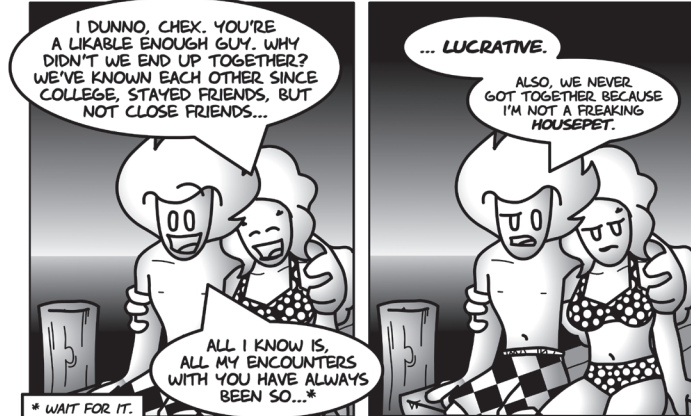
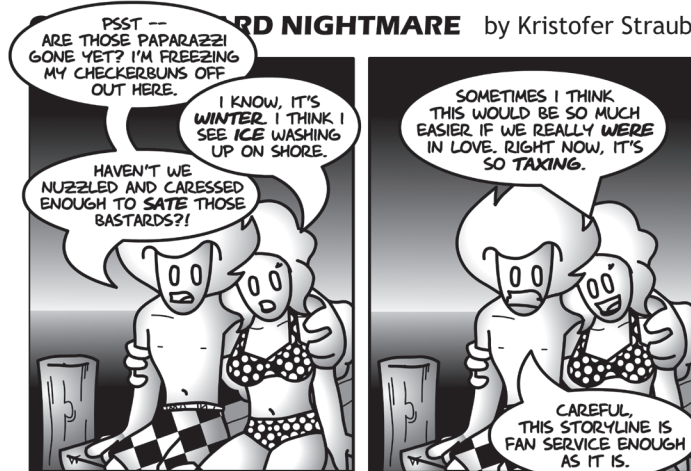
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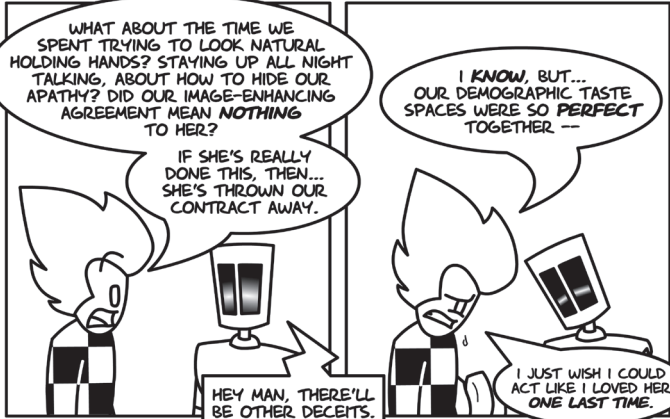
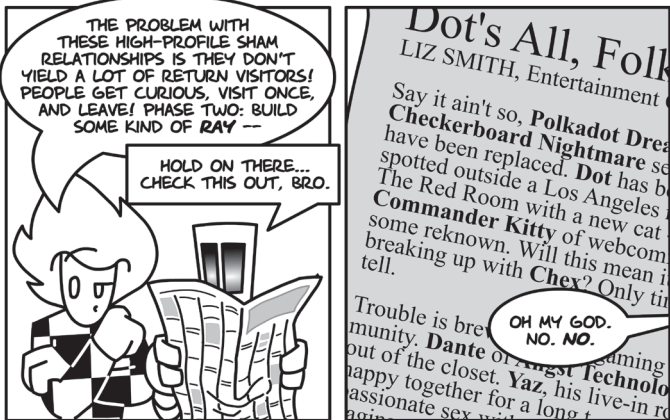
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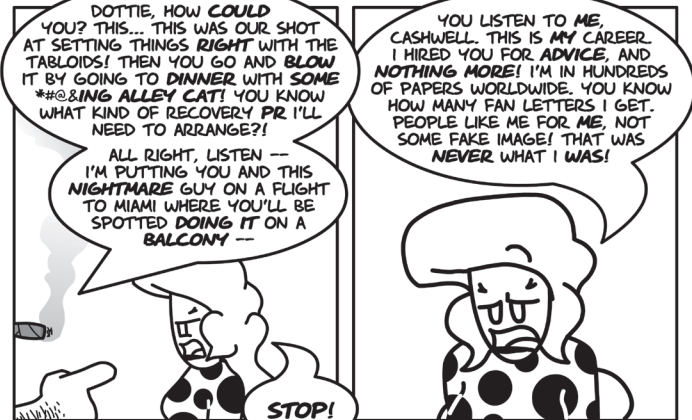
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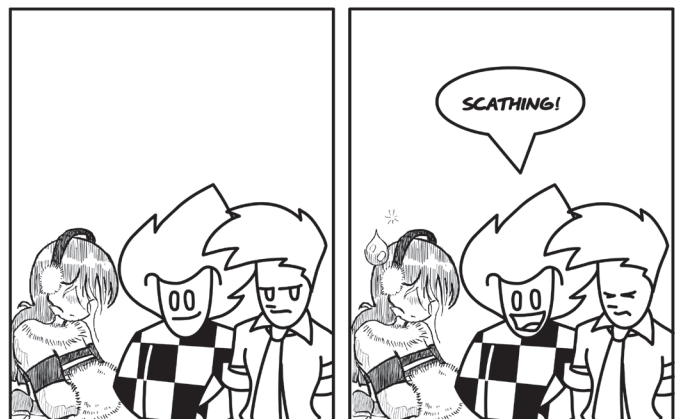
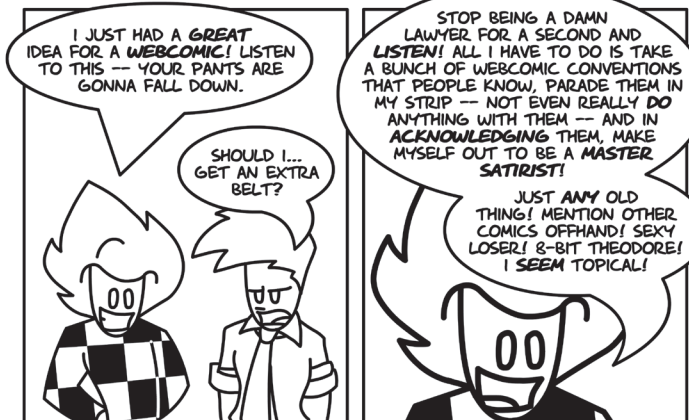
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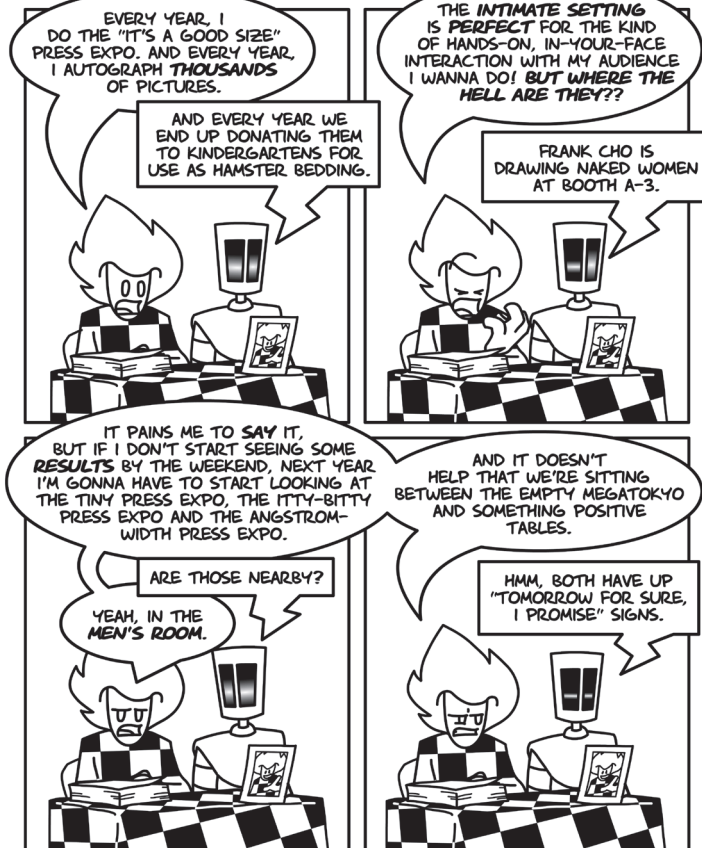
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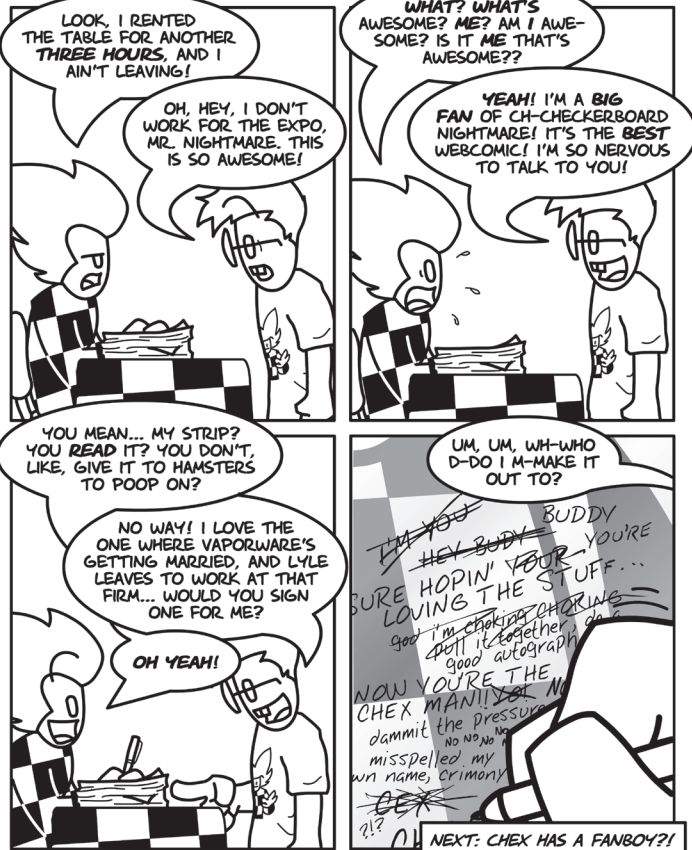


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I guess both Fred Gallagher's *Megatokyo* and R.K. Milholland's *Something Positive* were late to update once or twice, and I jumped on that?? Man, I am so cranky.

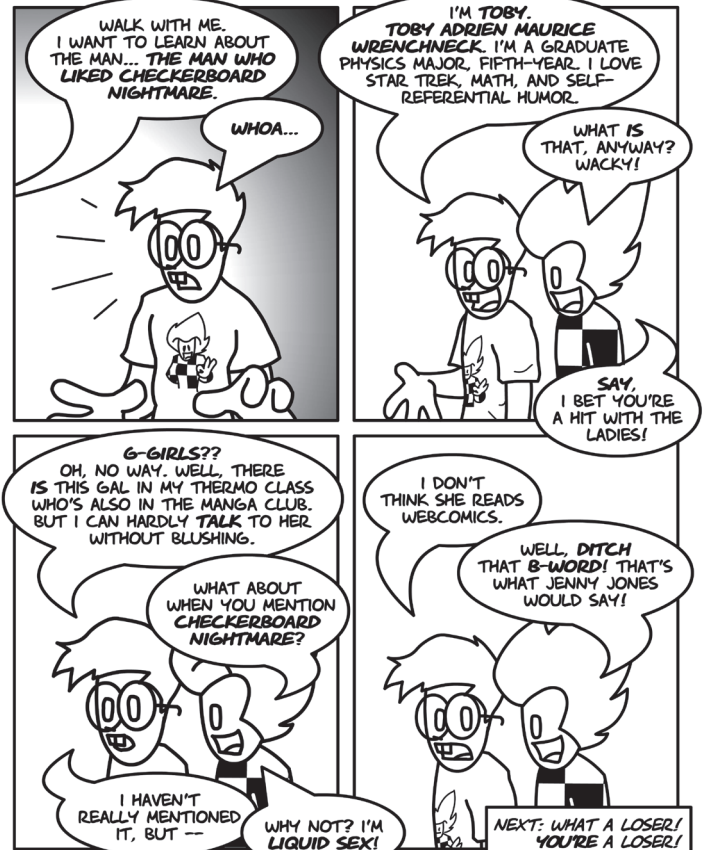
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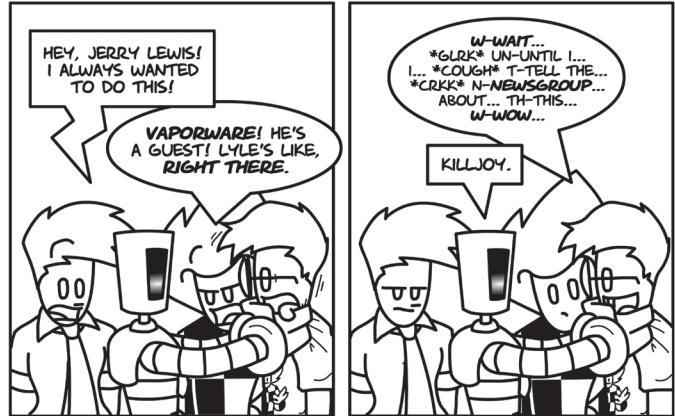
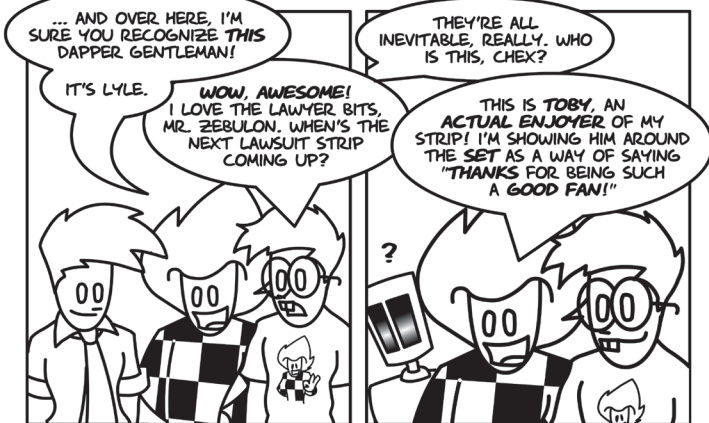
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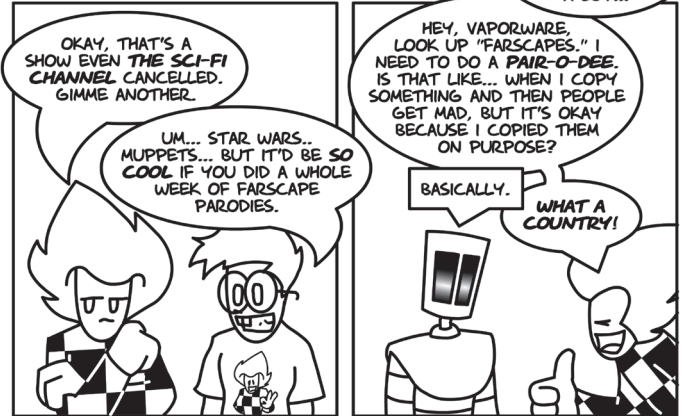
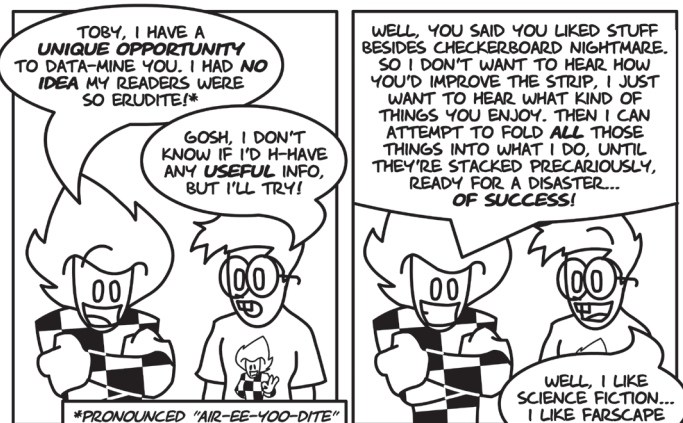
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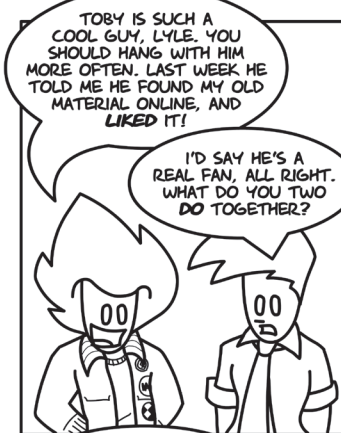
Toby is an ancient character I had when I was maybe 11 years old. He was the alter ego of a superhero named Ninja Nerd.

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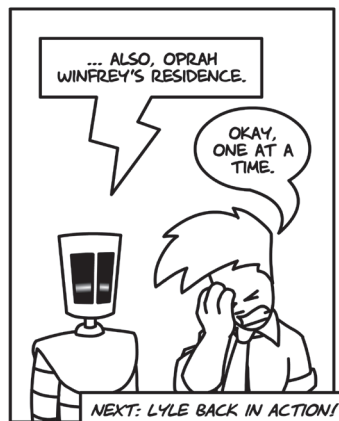
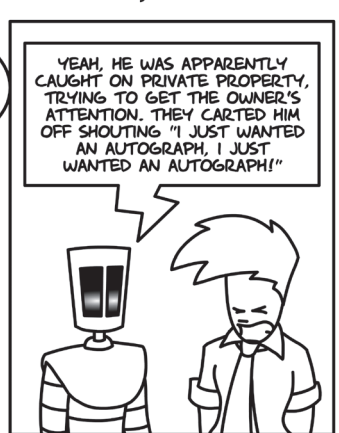
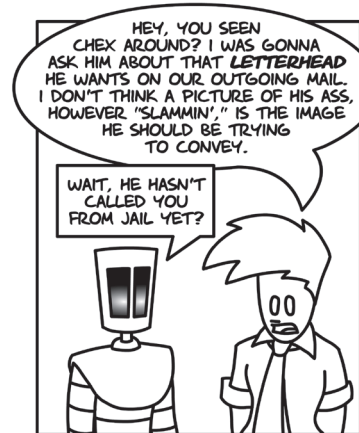


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I have never seen *Farscape*.

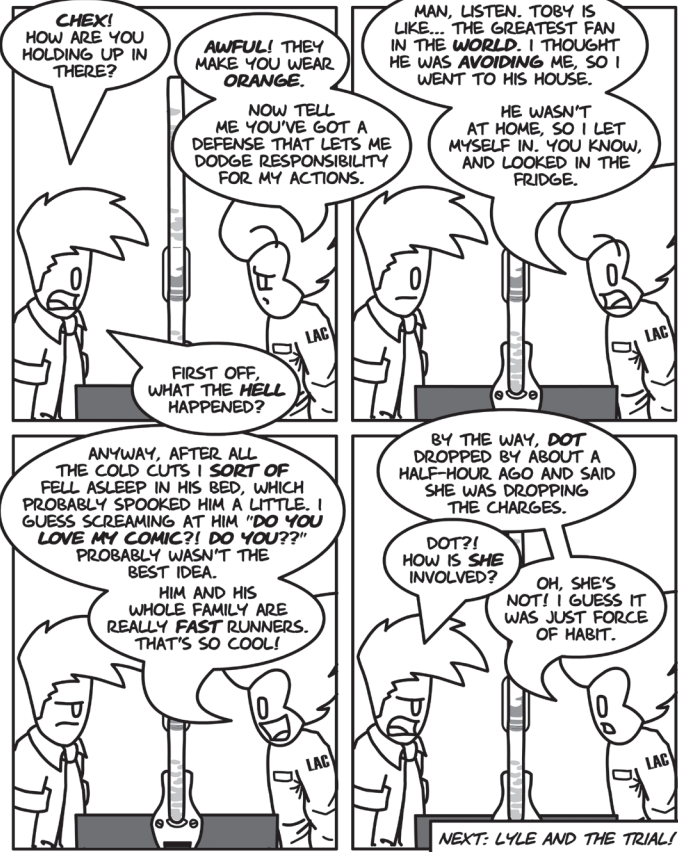
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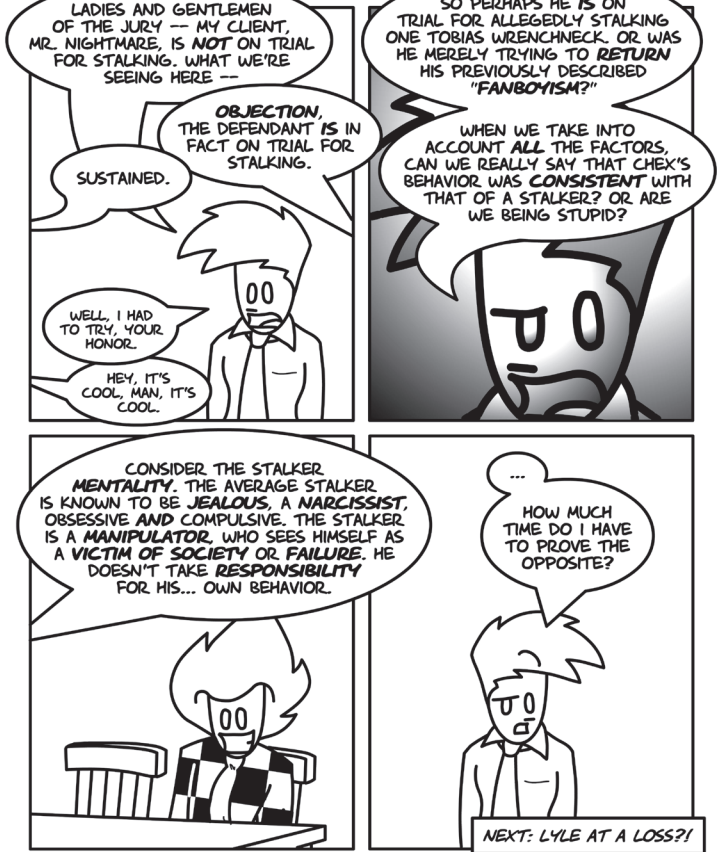
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CLOSIN' IT UP!

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN OF THE JURY -- IN THE LAST TWO HOURS YOU'VE HEARD ACCOUNTS OF WHAT OCCURRED TO ONE TOBY ADRIEN MAURICE WRENCHNECK. BUT WHY HAVE WE NOT HEARD MORE FROM THE PROSECUTION ON WHAT TOBY DID TO CHEX? FOR YOU SEE --

HERE WE GO --



MR. NIGHTMARE'S INADMISSION OF GUILT PROVES HIS POST-INADMISSORY NON-CONFESSION OF PREINNOCECE. GIVEN THAT CHEX WAS INNOCENT PRIOR TO THE EVENTS IN QUESTION, WE CAN SHOW THAT CHEX'S NON-GUILT LEAVES ITS AXIS AND TAKES ON AN IMAGINARY VALUE. IN *SAMUELS V. HOWARD JOHNSON*, 1982, IMAGINARY NON-GUILT IS GROUNDS FOR *CETERIS PARIBUS AB INITIO*.



THE PROSECUTION HAS TRIED TO CONFUSE THE ISSUE, USING REAL EVIDENCE, PAYING NO ATTENTION WHATSOEVER TO THE IMAGINARY. IS IT THAT THEY DON'T HAVE ENOUGH RESPECT FOR THE JURORS' INTELLIGENCE? THE JUDGE'S? HISPANICS? I COULDN'T BEGIN TO GUESS. IN CASES LIKE THIS, IT'S HARD TO DETERMINE WHERE THE BLAME LIES.



THE CRUCIAL POINT HERE IS THAT IT'S NOT MY CLIENT'S FAULT IN ANY WAY. THANK YOU.

GOOD OLD LYLE... I HAD NO IDEA HE FELT THAT WAY ABOUT ME.

SNIFF



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WELL, IF IT ISN'T SCOTT FREE, HOW'D YOU PULL IT OFF, CHOKE TOY?

IT WASN'T EASY. MY CLOSING ARGUMENTS PUSHED IT TO A MISTRIAL, BUT I TRADED IN SOME OF MY LAWYER POINTS TO WIN THE CASE.

LAWYER POINTS? WHAT ARE --

NEVER MIND.



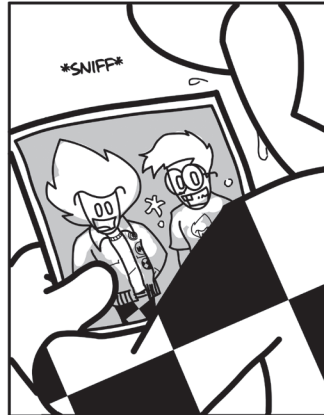
ANYWAY, THE UPSHOT IS THAT THE RESTRAINING ORDER STILL STANDS, AND CHEX ISN'T ALLOWED TO CONTACT TOBY EVER AGAIN.

POOR CHEX. HIS ONLY FAN...

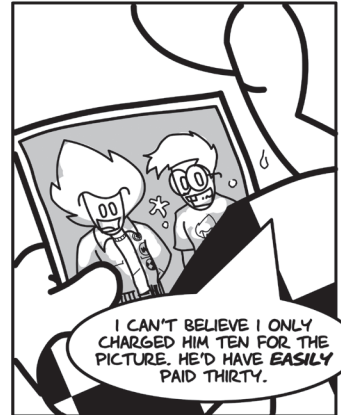
YEAH, HE'S TAKING IT REALLY HARD.



SNIFF



I CAN'T BELIEVE I ONLY CHARGED HIM TEN FOR THE PICTURE. HE'D HAVE EASILY PAID THIRTY.

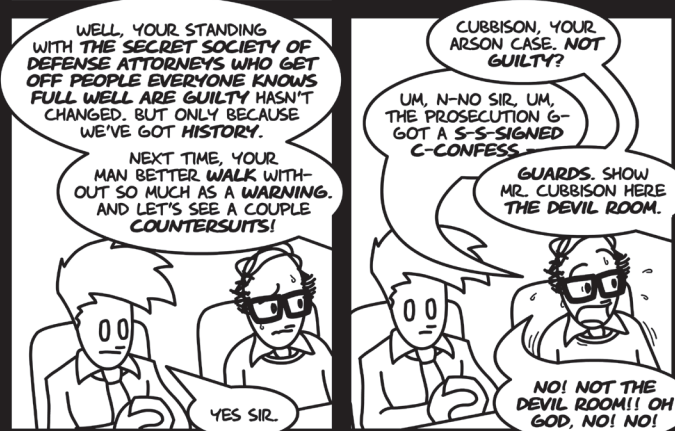
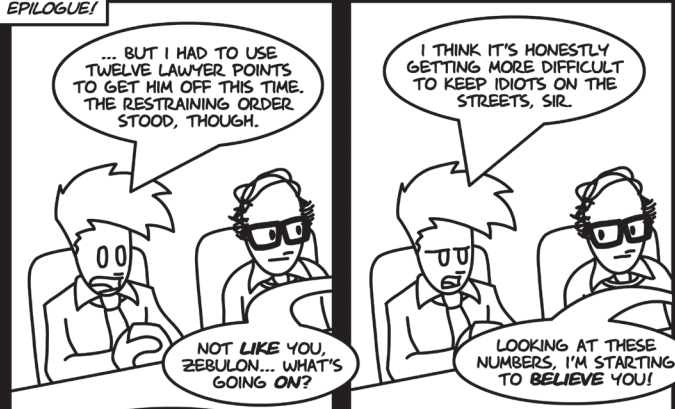


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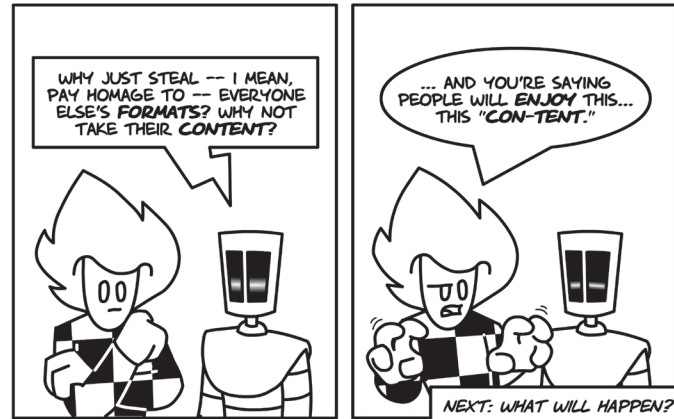
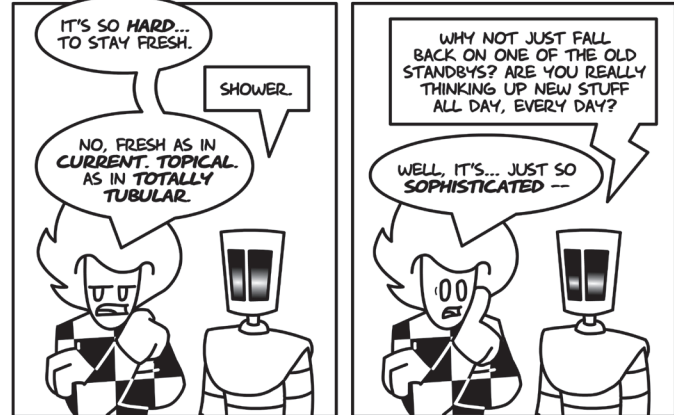
EPILOGUE!



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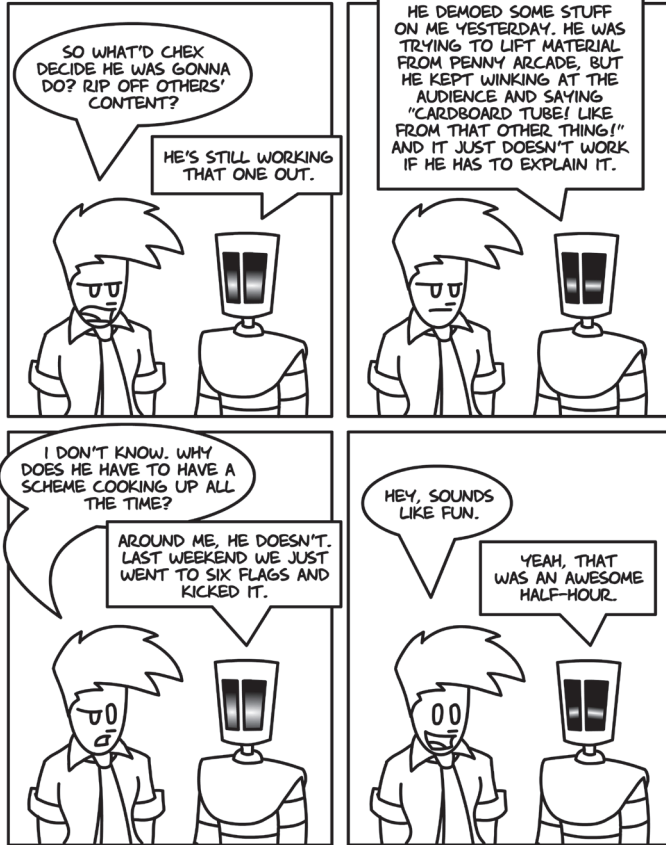


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The Devil Room came up a few times. Lawyer punishment rooms came up even more often, including one kept so cold that lawyers inside had to keep their hands in *their own pockets*.

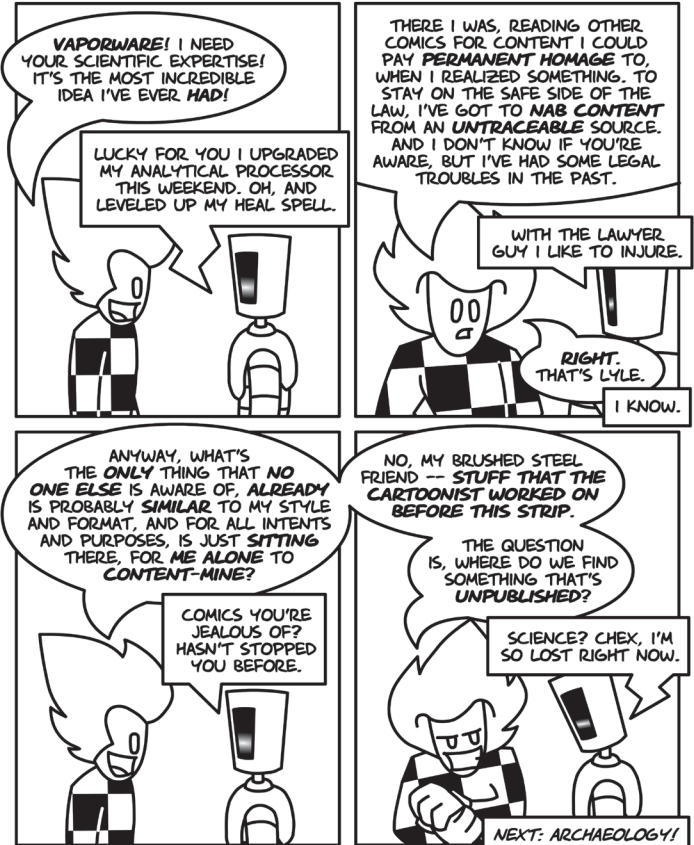
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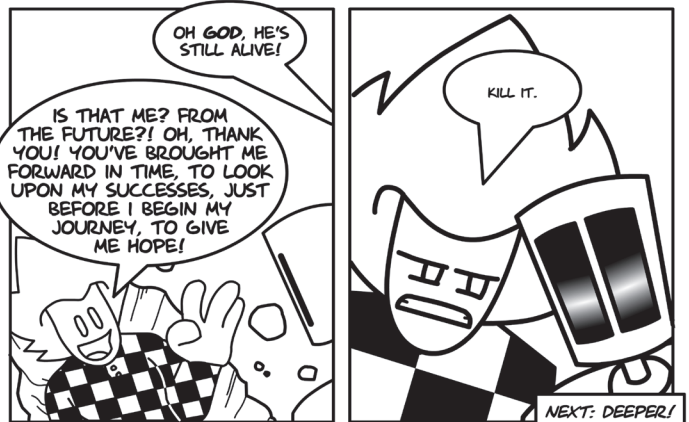
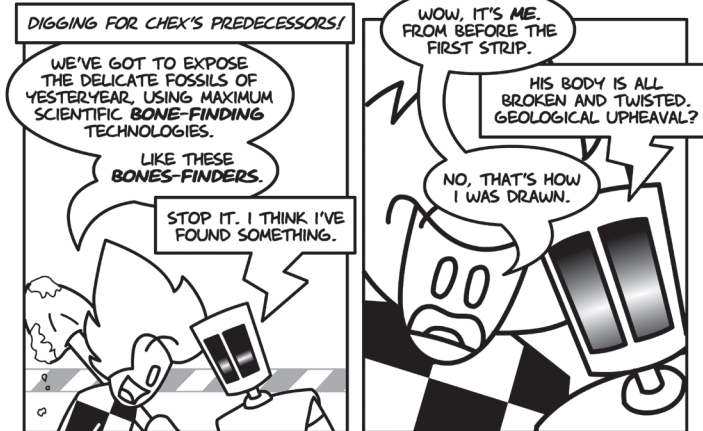
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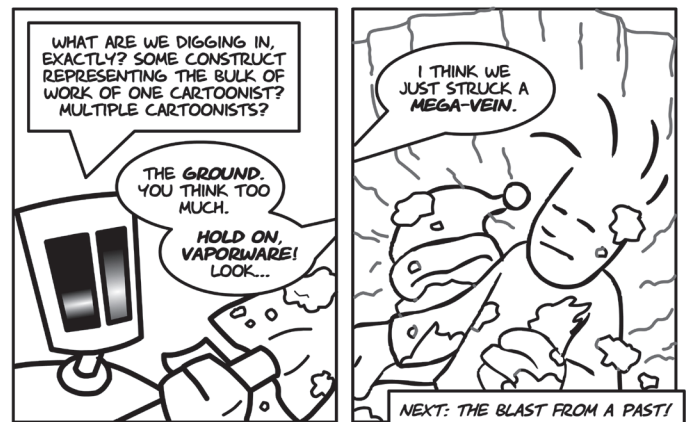
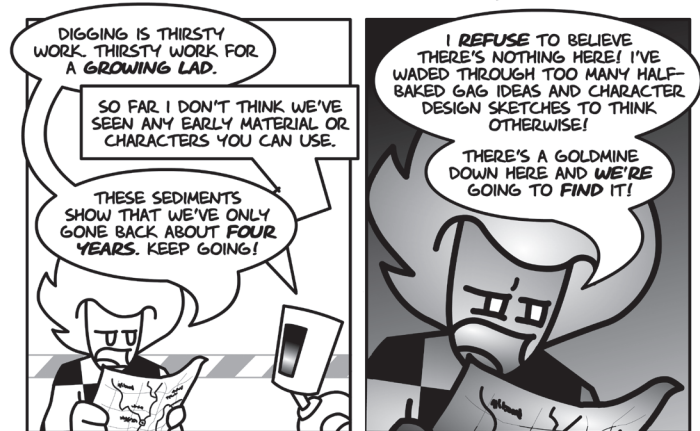
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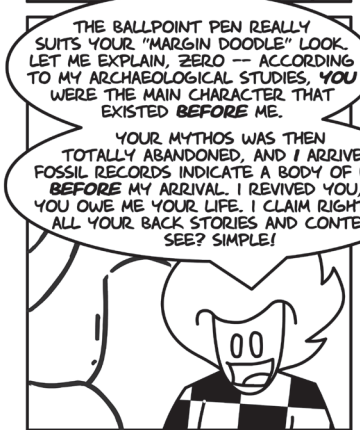
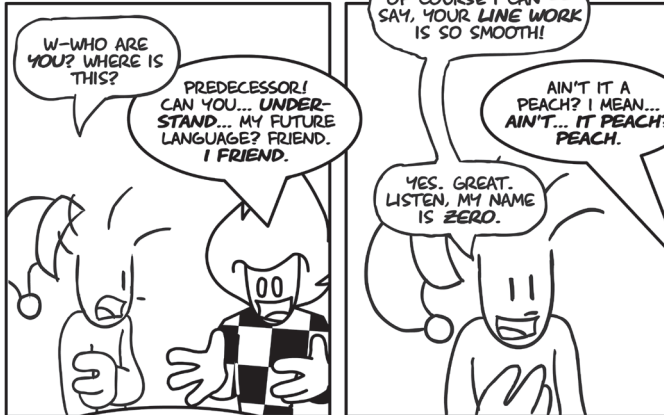
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Zero is another old character from back when I was about 10. He's a little redesigned here to spare me some embarrassment. (He used to wear a mask at all times.)

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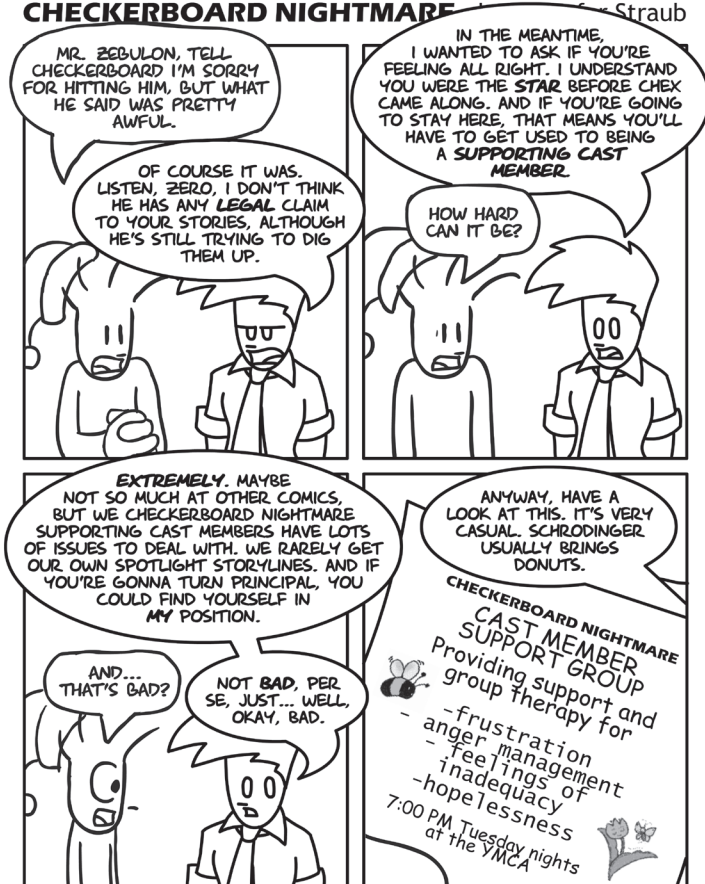


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THAT'S SOME SASS!

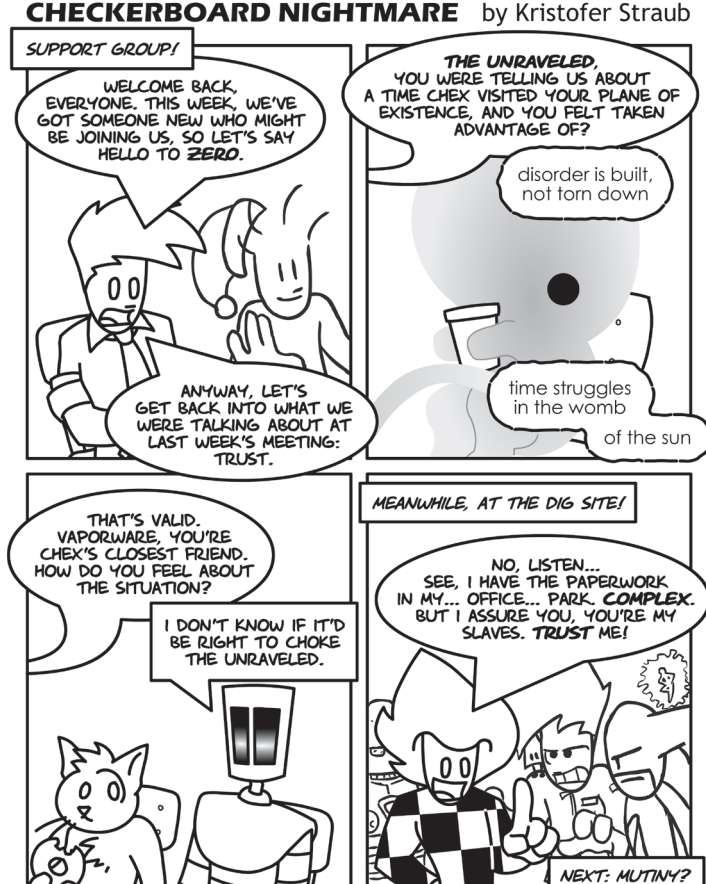
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Last panel, in the background: Chrome Boy, Nacho, Zonk, Top Quark, Soliton.

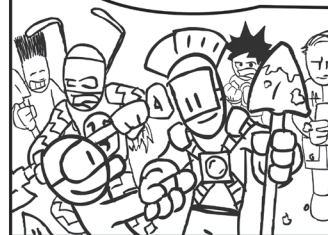
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THE MEETING IS INTERRUPTED!



THEY PUSHED ME DOWN! ME! AND JUST... STARTED DIGGING! DIGGING UP THE PAST! RIGHT OVER HERE.

AND THEY'RE UNEARTHING EVEN MORE HIDEOUS, POORLY-DRAWN CHARACTERS!

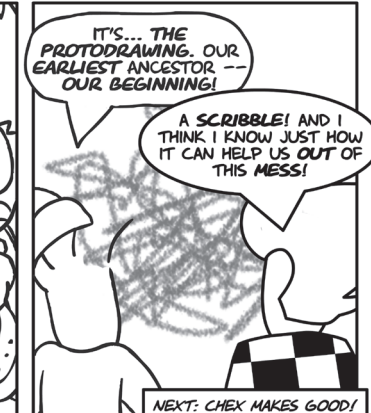


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Second panel: Ice, Diving-Man, Human Insect, Spaced-Out (with the shovel), another incarnation of Zero, Willie the Scientist.

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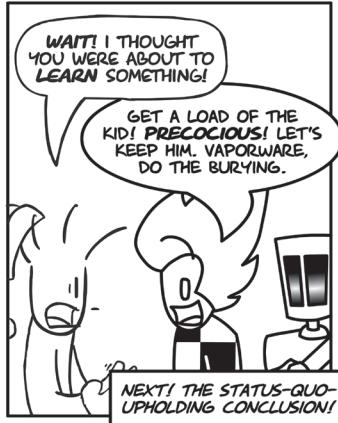
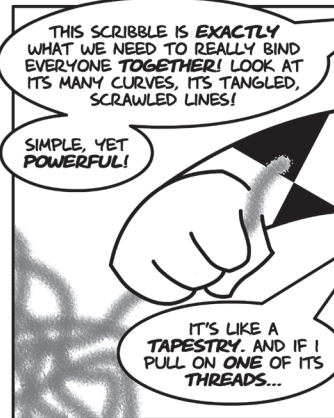


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The first drawing I ever did was of Laurel and Hardy. All of these drawings exist in my parents' garage.

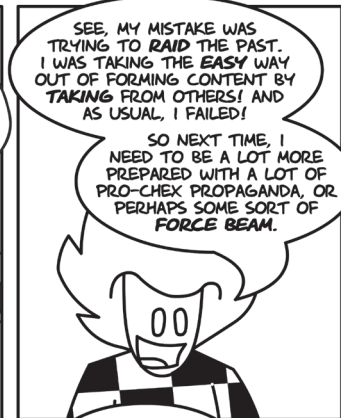
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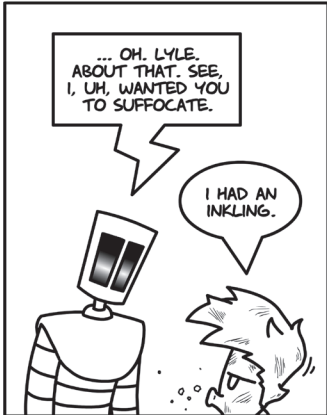
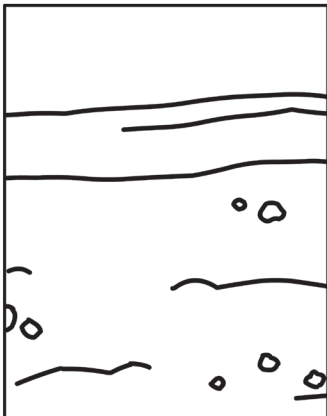
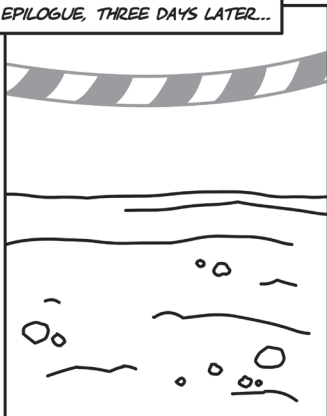


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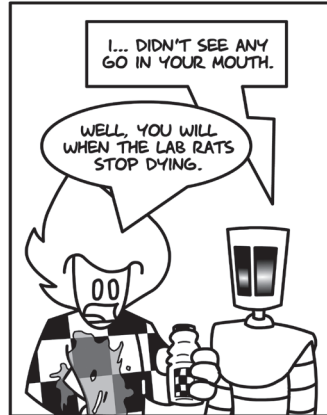
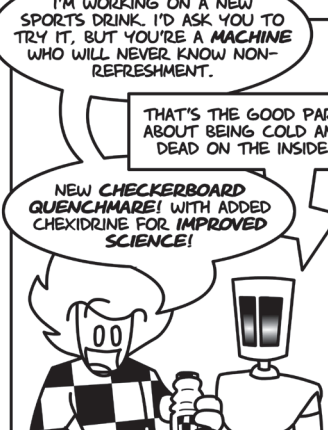
EPILOGUE, THREE DAYS LATER...



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CHAPTER 4

NO MILESTONE TOO SMALL

(2003 – Today)

In their relatively brief existence, webcomics have attained a staggering number of milestones. While some say it is this impossibly large count of important events that makes webcomics a valid art form, others maintain that it is the webcartoonists' unyielding desire to catalog the events that validates them. Thus, webcomics as a whole are every bit as important as Wikipedia's entry for the Pokémon Clefairy. This is undeniable.

For the purposes of this chapter, the events in which webcomics were recognized in the mainstream media will be listed under the heading "Mainstream Milestones," while the events internal to the webcomics community follow immediately.

Weak Sauce "Everybody Gets a Milestone" Milestones

December 2003. Sean "Squidi" Howard, creator of sprite comic *A Modest Destiny*, threatens to shut down *Penny Arcade* over sprite theft in their forums. The assertion that Howard composed the United States Constitution is still under scrutiny by the Supreme Court. Watch Howard's blog for a mention of this page.

August 2004. Keenspot CEO Chris Crosby uproots and purchases an abandoned school in Cresbard, South Dakota, where many Keenspot operations now take place under the wrathful eye of Pyramid Head, avatar of Valtiel.

August 2004. Eric Burns begins the webcomics commentary blog *Websnark*, which would become known for its lengthy reviews, and would later grow to become more trafficked than any of the webcomics it actually reviewed.

March 2005. The *Daily Grind Iron Man Competition* launches, in which over fifty webcartoonists attempt to go the longest without missing an update for a winnings pot of over \$1,000. The competition continues to this day, as anything divided into several panels counts as a comic. The remaining contestants have been submitting random Google Image Searches for the last eight months.

October 2005. A debate is sparked when Scott Kurtz calls webcomics critical review the work of pretentious blowhards. The googolsyllabic response would take weeks to wade through, primarily due to words like “googolsyllabic.”

August 2006. World-renowned webcomics expert and high priest T Campbell publishes *A History of Webcomics*, an ambitious 192-page tome cataloguing the birth and ascent of comics on the internet. A companion book is planned for fall: *A History of Webcomics Indices and Endnotes, F–J, Volume 2*. Copies of the *History* are in use by the United States Navy as diving belt weights.

October 2006. Kristofer Straub publishes *Checkerboard Nightmare: A Brief History of Webcomics* as a combination “best of” strip collection, and joshing loveletter to webcomics. Everybody gets all the jokes, are able to laugh at themselves, and no one is mad at him at all for the fair use of their copyrighted titles and character names.

Mainstream Milestones

November 2003. *Penny Arcade*'s charity Child's Play generates nearly \$250,000 in donated money and gaming equipment for children's hospitals in the United States. The press runs with the story, explaining how popular internet animation *Pennies in the Arcade* raised over \$10,500 for culinary institutes in Mexico.

August 2005. The New York Times runs an article about webcomics, mentioning *Penny Arcade*, *PvP*, and *Ctrl+Alt+Del*. Title: *Zap! Pow! Comics On The Interzoom?!* The columnist attempts to fathom the mind-shattering paradigm warp of a comic that isn't in a newspaper.

September 2005. During its Webcomics Telethon, Blank Label Comics raises an estimated \$28,635 for the American Red Cross, for Hurricane Katrina victims. This contribution would become distorted in subsequent press releases, culminating in a final article titled “*Evil Inc.'s Brad Guigar Can Pierce a Car Door With His Erection.*”

September 2005. Owen Dunne's *You Damn Kid!* is signed by 20th Century Fox Television to be developed into a sitcom. Fox's fervent belief in the show is proven by its placement in the “Cancel After Smash-Hit Four Episodes” production queue.

July 2006. Platinum Studios' Comic Book Challenge is won by D.J. Coffman of *Yirmumah*, announced at San Diego Comic-Con. His winning entry, *Hero By Night*, is a story about what happens when a young man stumbles upon the origin story of *Captain Marvel*, *Batman*, *Thor*, and the WB series *Charmed*.

September 2006. Platinum Studios announces its intentions with the fair Lady Webcomics. Drunk Duck, a webcomics portal, is offered as a dowry. “A soul so overburden'd thus compels I render voice unto my Feelings!” said Scott Rosenberg, chairman of Platinum, dressed in a velvet top hat, silk cravat with diamond pin, and tails. “Oh, *Webcomics!* Oh, *mine own!*”

CHECKERBOARD NIGHTMARE for Straub

COMING UP, ON THE NEXT DOCTOR HOT...

... TROUBLED TEENS ARE OUT OF CONTROL!

MY DAUGHTER IS WILD, SEXY AND OUT OF CONTROL! DOCTOR, WHAT'S YOUR PROFESSIONAL OPINION??

HOT!

I'M KIDDING. WHAT YOU'VE GOT IS SOME CONTROL ISSUES WITH YOUR WILD, SEXY TEEN.

CAN THE GOOD DOCTOR RESTORE PEACE TO THESE HOT HOMES?

GIRL, YOU GOT TO RESPECT YOUR MOMMA! OR STATE-APPOINTED GUARDIAN!

HOT!
HOT!
HOT!
HOT!

REAL PEOPLE. REAL STORIES. NOW THAT'S HOT. DOCTOR HOT.

I HATE THAT DAMN DOCTOR. AND WHAT'S WITH THE AMPERSAND? DOCTOR HOT AND? DOCTOR AND HOT??

ALL MIDDAY TALK SHOWS HAVE AN AMPERSAND IN THE LOGO.

NEXT: THE STORYLINE YOU DEMANDED!

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HE PLAGUES ME, LYLE. HE'S A TV DOCTOR. AND HE SAYS "HOT." THAT'S IT. THAT'S WHY HE'S FAMOUS. AND HERE I AM, UNABLE TO GET ANY KIND OF PLAY FOR MY CATCH PHRASE "BRRR... FANCY!"

I... DON'T KNOW WHAT TO TELL YOU, CHEX? I REALLY DON'T?

SURE YOU DO. YOU WANT TO TELL ME TO SHUT UP. HEY, I CAN TAKE THE HINT. AND THE HEAT.

YOU WANT TO TELL ME NOT TO TRY AND GET ON DOCTOR HOT'S STUPID SHOW SO I CAN SABOTAGE IT. BECAUSE I HATE HIM, YOU KNOW.

DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEAS TO GET ON THE DOCTOR HOT SHOW? How about... "MY TEEN IS OUT OF CONTROL TOO, JUST LIKE ON YESTERDAY'S SHOW!"

TOMORROW!

YOU'RE GONNA TELL ME TO NOT TRY AND KILL TWO BIRDS WITH ONE STONE BY DOING SO, SINCE I'LL BE ON TV AND MAKING A FOOL OF THAT INFERNAL ... HOT!

YOU... KNOW I WOULDN'T SAY THAT.

BECAUSE YOU THINK IT'D GIVE ME IDEAS.

R-RIGHT.

SO TELL ME.

NO.

COME ON! TELL ME HOW I CAN GET DOCTOR HOT!

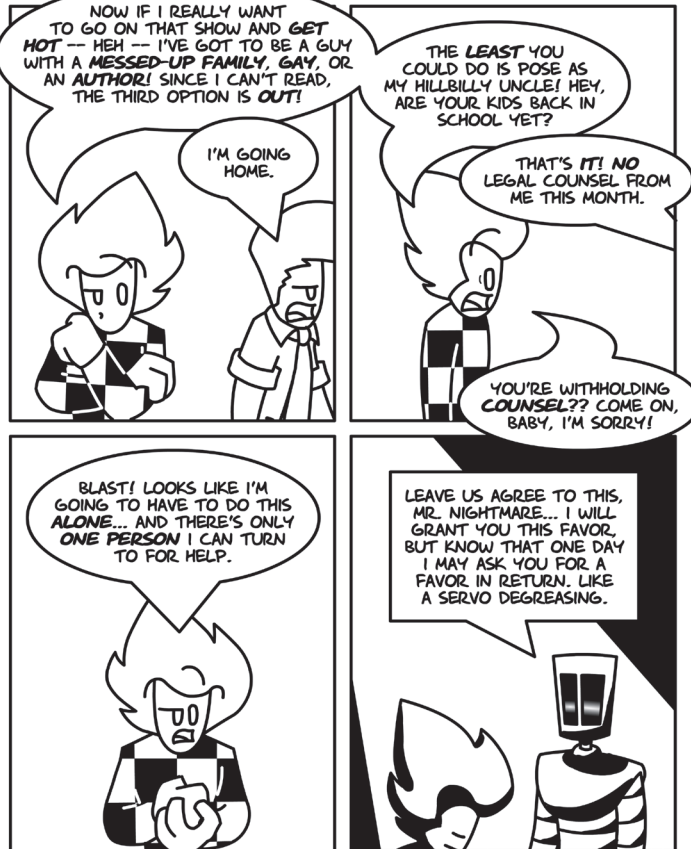
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This is not the first appearance of Doctor Hot, Chex's pop psychologist arch-nemesis. He was originally a single panel joke character that became a running gag.

Doctor Hot was always my least favorite character, even though later I changed my mind. Now I only hate him for legacy reasons.

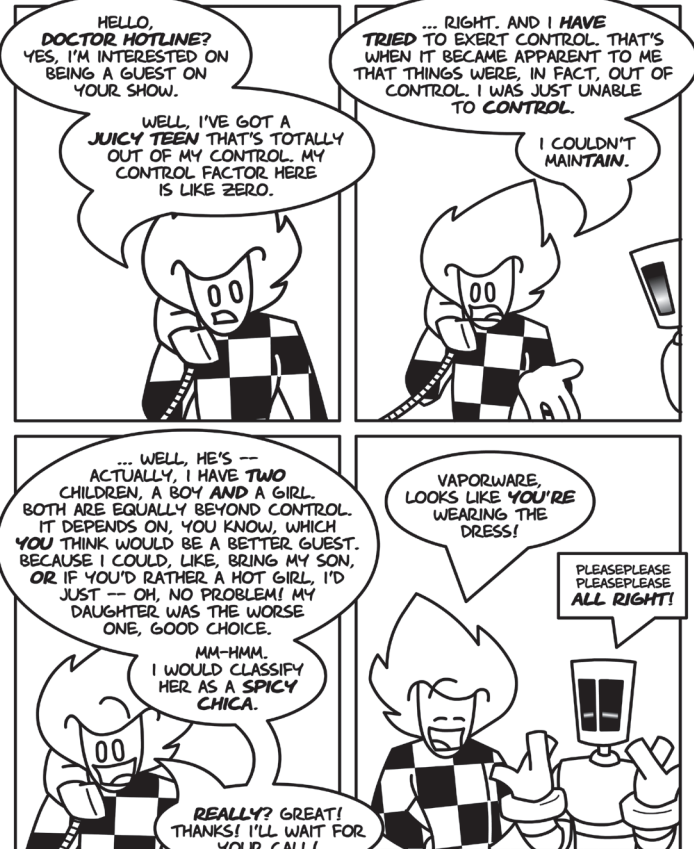
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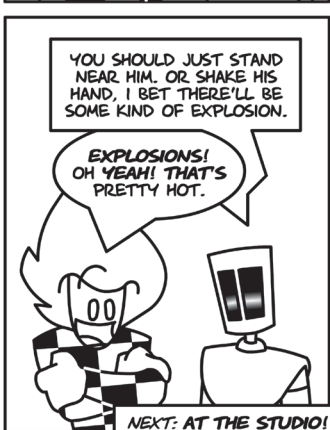
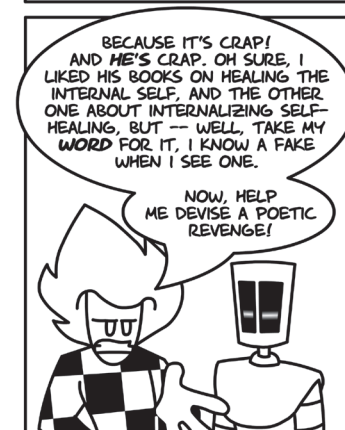
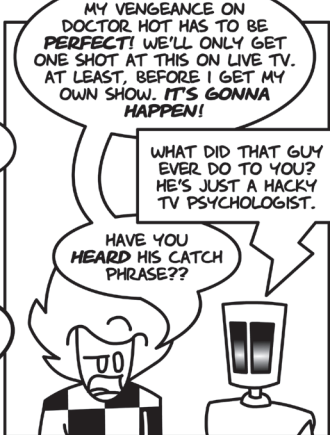
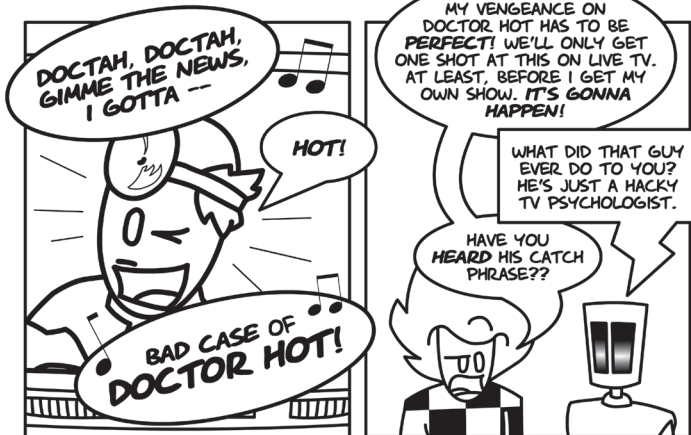
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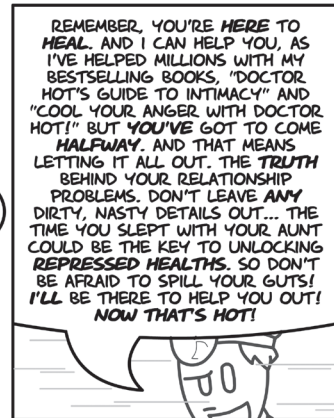
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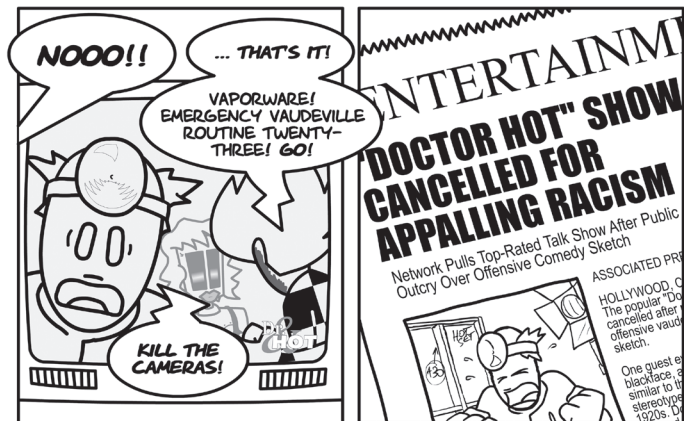
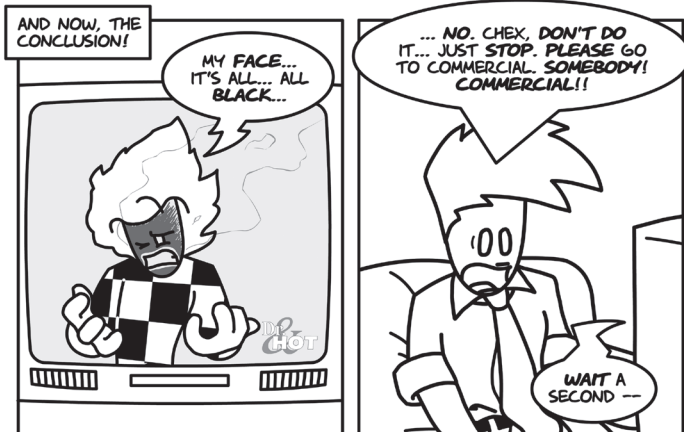
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Chex attempts to fight Doctor Hot with catch phrases. Ultimate failure.

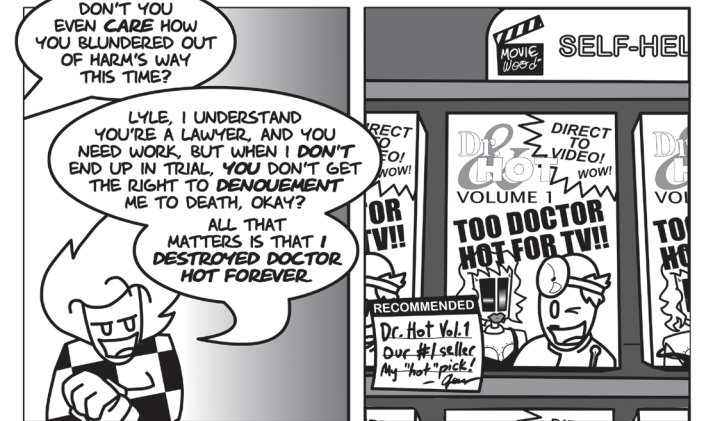
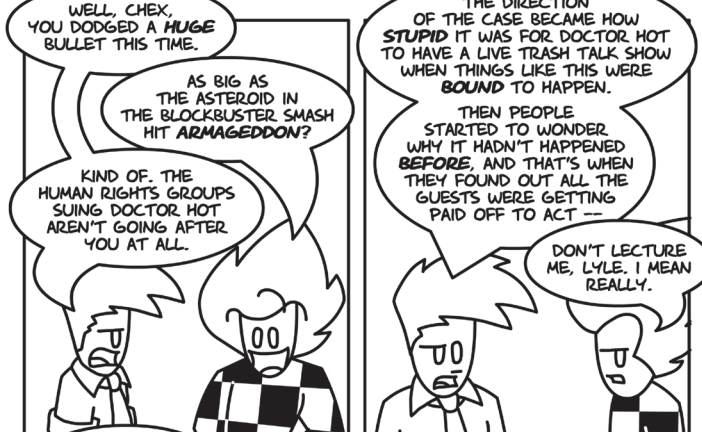
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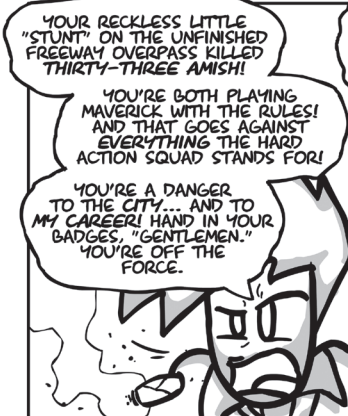
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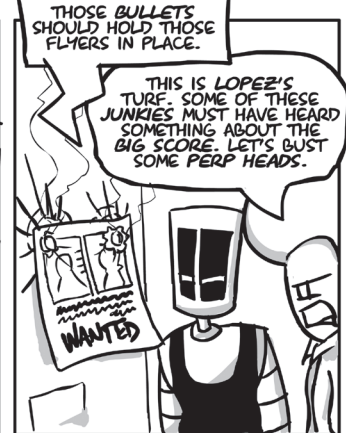


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The Hard Action Squad saga was also supposed to be a one-off gag, that being this strip alone, in spite of the "Next" narration.

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HARD ACTION SQUAD CONTINUES... NOW!

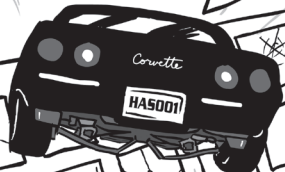
DAMN! NO LEADS. NO INFORMANTS! LOPEZ SURE KNOWS HOW TO SWEEP UP HIS TRACKS!

YEAH, WELL, WE'RE ABOUT TO UNSWEEP THEM! HOLD ON!



CALL IT A HUNCH, VAPOR! CALL IT A HUNCH!

P.R., ARE YOU CRAZY?!? THAT EXPLOSIVES FACTORY HAS BEEN ABANDONED FOR MONTHS!



EXPLOSIVES FACTORY



WHAT

CRASH

WELL PLAYED, HARD ACTION SQUAD. BUT TO GET TO LOPEZ, YOU'VE GOT TO GET THROUGH ME AND MY BOYS!



NEXT: "THE BULLET-ZER PRIZE!"

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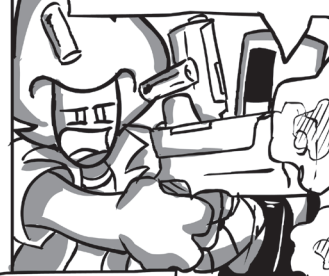
Astute readers will notice that one of Lopez's gang is Electric Light Orchestra frontman Jeff Lynne.

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EAT THIS, SUCKAS!! **BLAM!!**

LOOK OUT, P.R.! THIS PLACE IS LOADED WITH EXPLOSIVES! WE'VE GOT TO BE CAREFUL AND NOT HIT THOSE JET FUEL TANKS!



WATCH IT! IF ONE OF OUR BULLETS HITS THOSE FUEL TANKS, THIS WHOLE PLACE IS GOIN' UP IN SMOKE!

GOTTA LOOK OUT FOR THOSE TANKS!



THIS PLACE IS LIKE A POWDER KEG! ONE STRAY SHOT AND WE'RE BARBECUE!

BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM

THOSE FUEL TANKS ARE LIKE CONCENTRATED DYNAMITE! LOOK OUT!



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THERE! BEHIND ONE OF THE FUEL TANKS!

TAKE HIM DOWN, VAPOR!

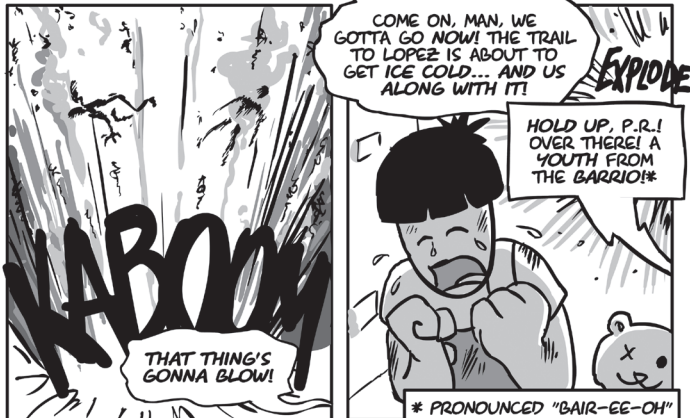
CAN DO, P.R.!



NEXT: "SHOOTING BULLETS!"

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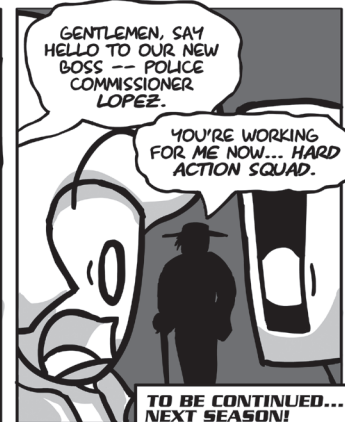
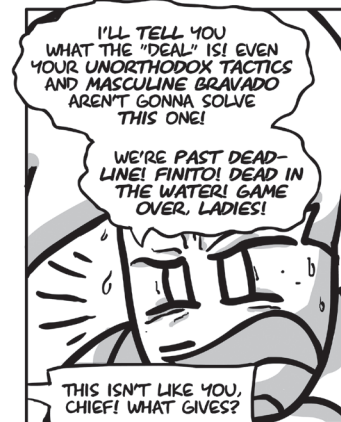
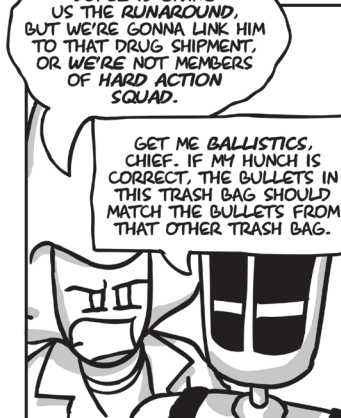
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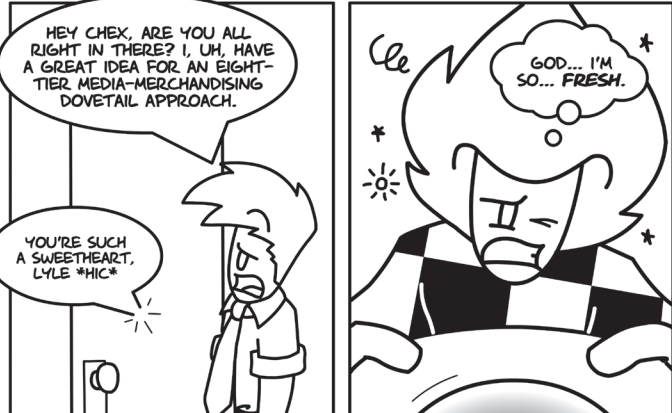
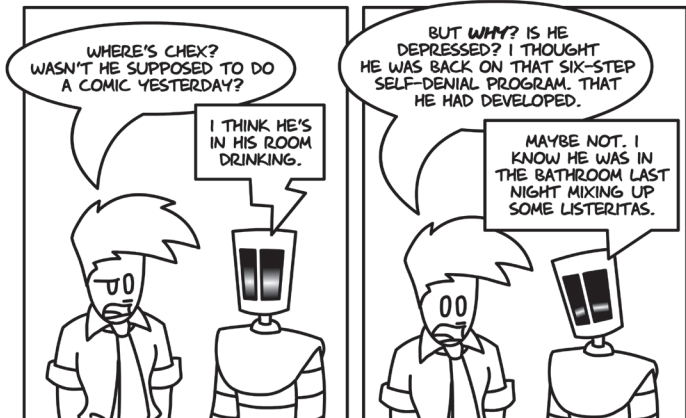


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Hard Action Squad did continue with three parts, the others in color. I'm thinking about doing a one-shot HAS comic book. There is demand! I'd hate to disappoint those three guys.

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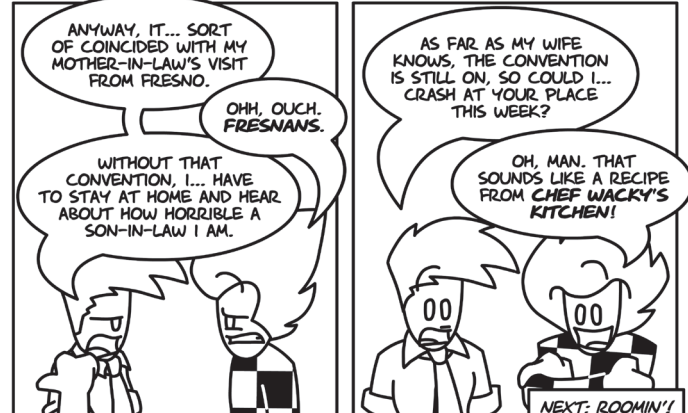
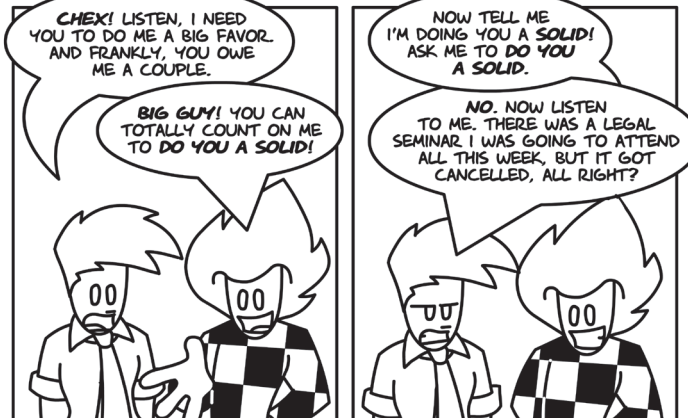


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The recipe for Chex's Classic Listerita is as follows. You will need 8 oz. Jose Cuervo 1800 Tequila, 3 oz. Grand Marnier, 5 oz. Listerine FreshBurst mouthwash, 1 can frozen lemonade (pulpless),

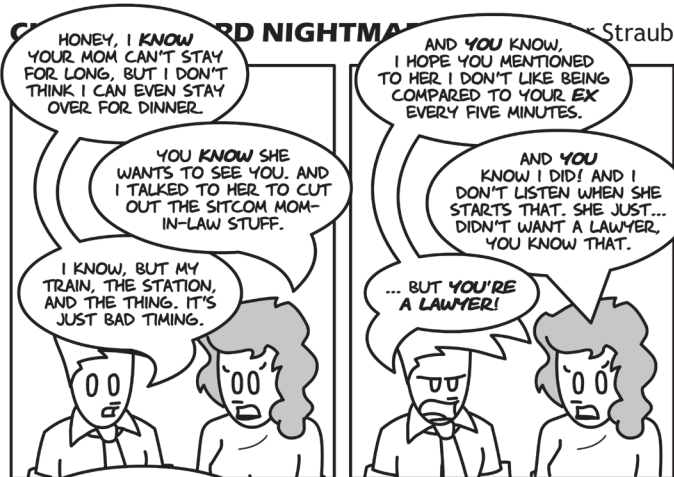
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2 small limes, a healthy squirt of Colgate mint flavor toothpaste, and enough ice or water to fill the blender. Extract the juice from the two limes. Combine ingredients in one standard size blender.

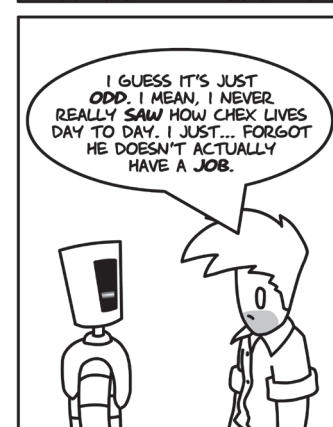
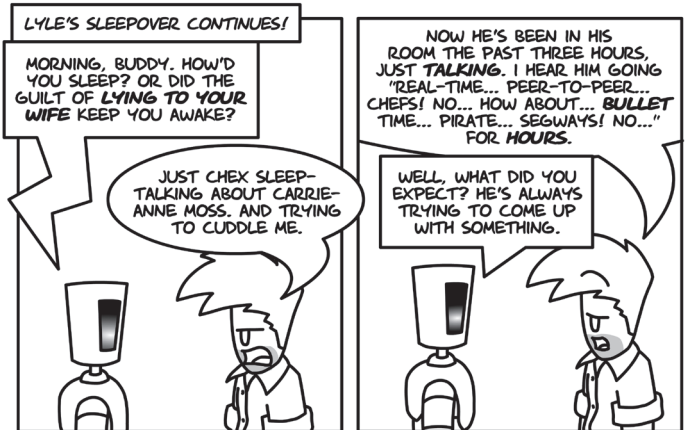


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(It helps to start with the toothpaste directly on the blades, so none of your guests experience a "mint slug" in their drinks.) Blend until smooth. Garnish with one of those sword-floss-toothpick things.

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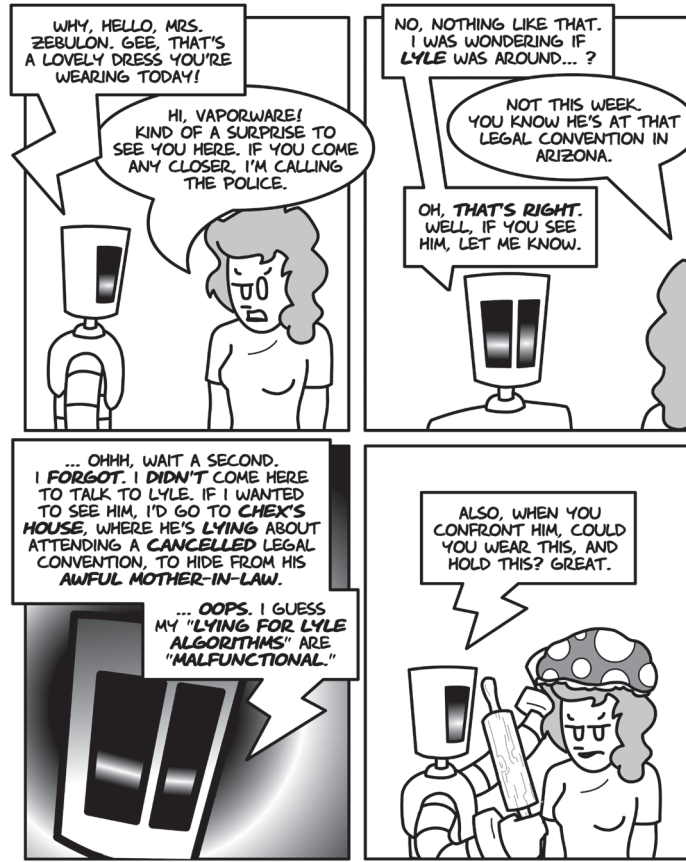
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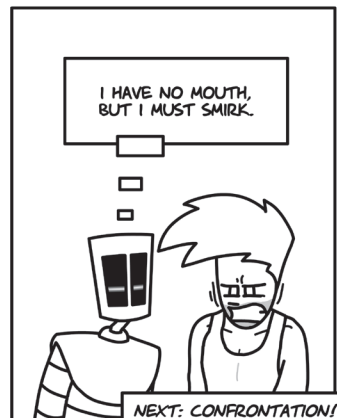
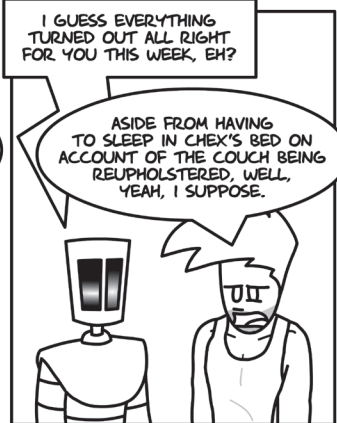
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Another thing I enjoyed exploring was Chex's love of really awful junk food. This is done in greater detail in a couple other storylines.

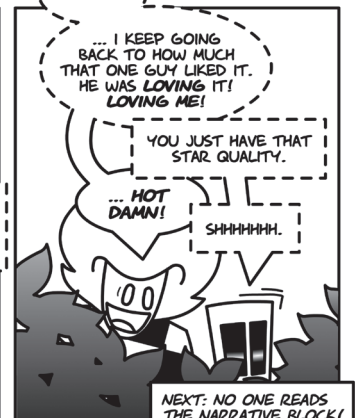
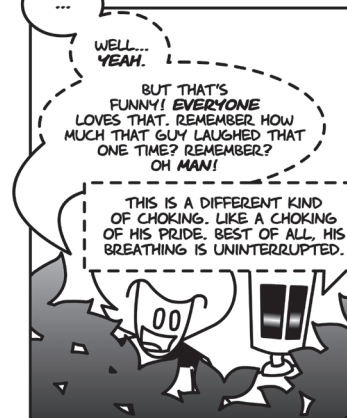
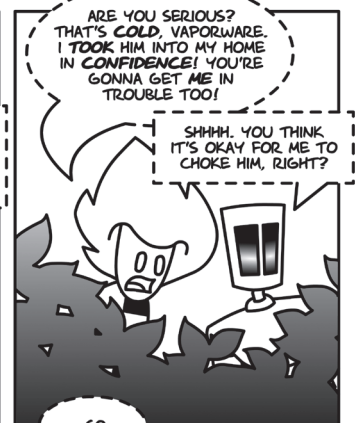
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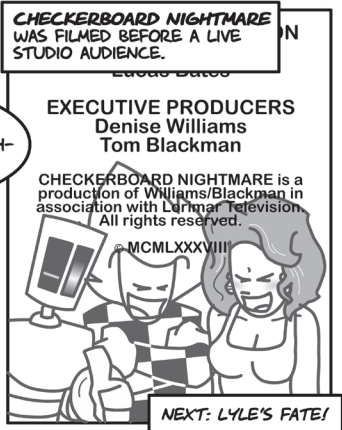
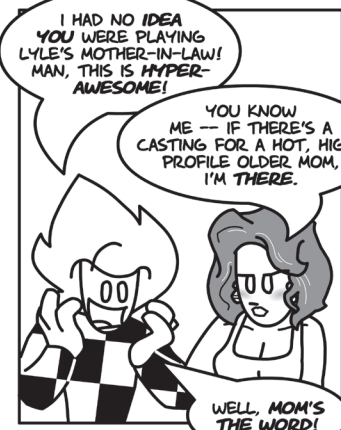
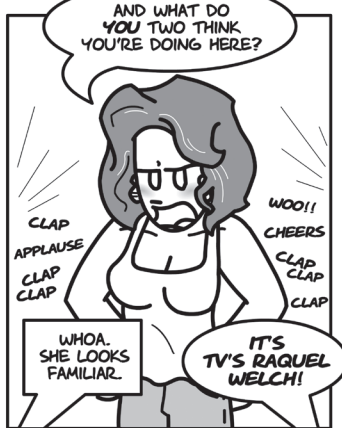


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NEXT: NO ONE READS THE NARRATIVE BLOCK!

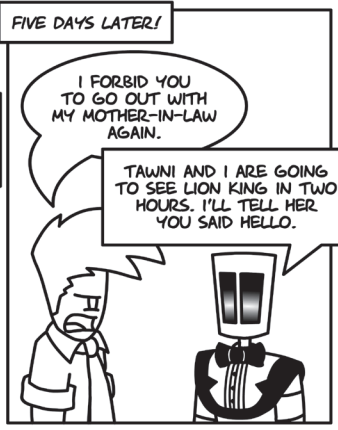
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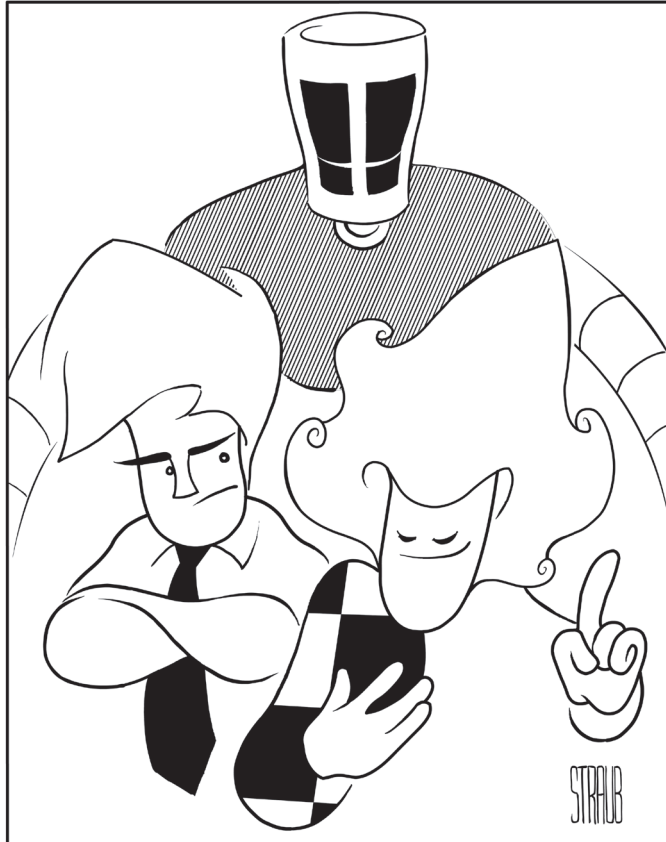
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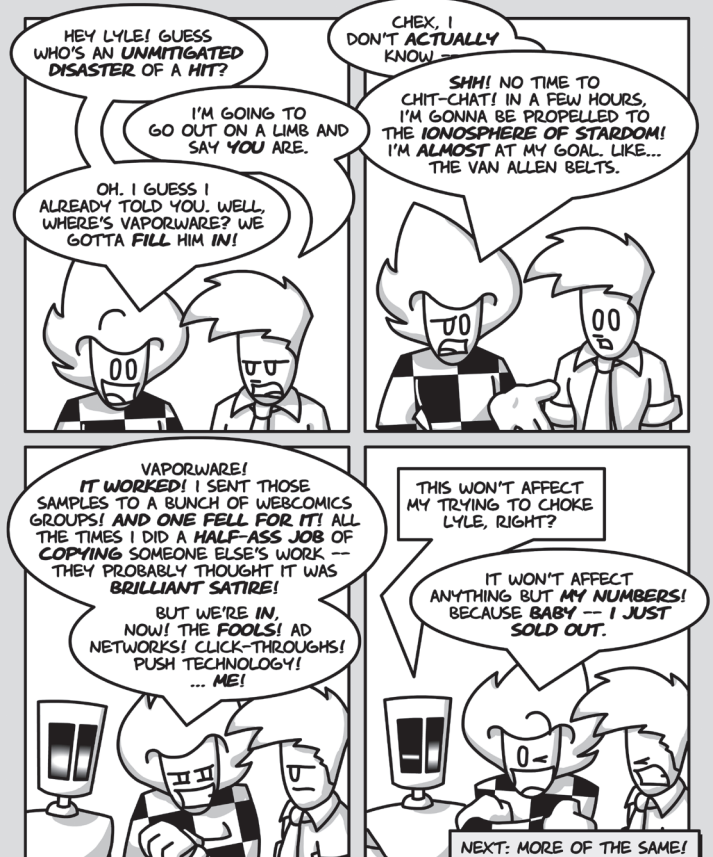
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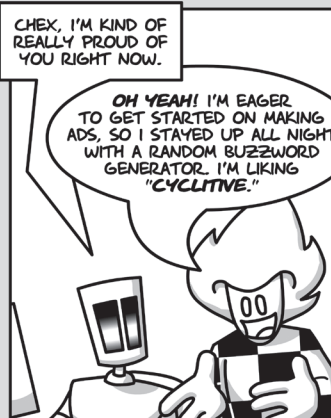
VAPORWARE, OLD BOY, HIT THAT FIRST LINK IN MY "FAVORITES!" I "BOOK-MARKED" THE "WEB-SIGHT" THAT'S GOING TO PROPEL ME TO THE KINGDOM COME OF FAME!

I'M SWITCHING ON THE COLOR SO YOU CAN BEHOLD ITS FULL GLORY.



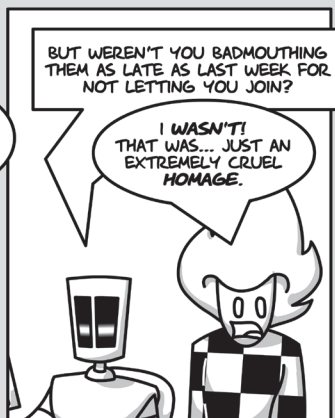
IT'S BEAUTIFUL.

FINALLY! A PLACE OF MY OWN WHERE I'LL BE ABLE TO STAND OUT!



CHEX, I'M KIND OF REALLY PROUD OF YOU RIGHT NOW.

OH YEAH! I'M EAGER TO GET STARTED ON MAKING ADS, SO I STAYED UP ALL NIGHT WITH A RANDOM BUZZWORD GENERATOR. I'M LIKING "CYCLITIVE."



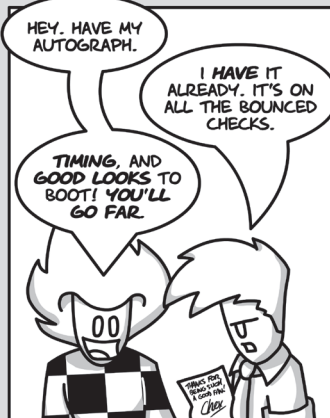
BUT WEREN'T YOU BADMOUTHING THEM AS LATE AS LAST WEEK FOR NOT LETTING YOU JOIN?

I WASN'T! THAT WAS... JUST AN EXTREMELY CRUEL HOMAGE.

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HEY. HAVE MY AUTOGRAPH.

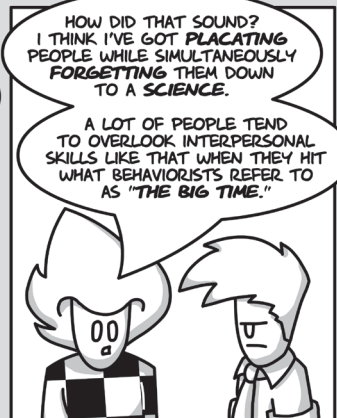
I HAVE IT ALREADY. IT'S ON ALL THE BOUNCED CHECKS.

TIMING, AND GOOD LOOKS TO BOOT! YOU'LL GO FAR.



SERIOUSLY, CHEX. I KNOW WE'RE FRIENDS AND ALL BUT, AFTER ALL THE FREE LEGAL ADVICE, PUBLIC DEFENSE AND KEEPING YOU OUT OF PRISON, I REALLY WONDER WHEN I'M GOING TO, YOU KNOW, BE COMPENSATED.

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HOW DID THAT SOUND? I THINK I'VE GOT PLACATING PEOPLE WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY FORGETTING THEM DOWN TO A SCIENCE.

A LOT OF PEOPLE TEND TO OVERLOOK INTERPERSONAL SKILLS LIKE THAT WHEN THEY HIT WHAT BEHAVIORISTS REFER TO AS "THE BIG TIME."



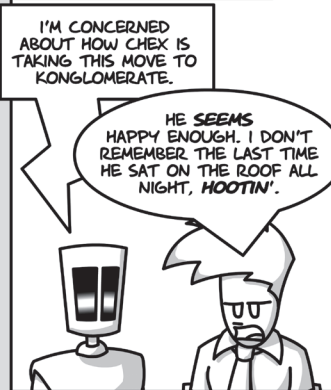
YIKES! SOME PERVERT IS TRYING TO PROPOSITION ME! BETTER PLAY IT COOL.

HEY. HAVE MY AUTOGRAPH!

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VAPORWARE AND LYLE CHAT!



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THE STORYLINE LURCHES FORWARD!



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At the time I joined, there was discussion in the private forum about redesigning the logo and updating the site's look.

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CHEX PAYS A VISIT TO KONGLOMERATE HQ!

MR. NIGHTMARE, WHAT BRINGS YOU TO THE OFFICE?

CALL ME CHEX, DAVE.

PLEASE CALL ME MR. DENTON.

YOU GOT IT!

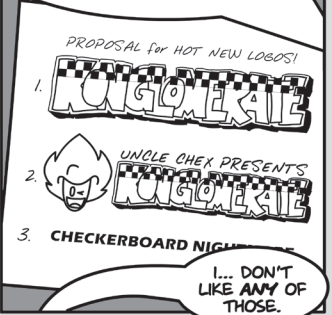


ANYHOW, DAVE, SINCE YOU GRACIOUSLY -- AND WISELY -- DECIDED TO BRING ME ON BOARD KONGLOMERATE, I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT HOW TO MAKE THIS GROUP BETTER.

AND WHAT BETTER WAY TO DO THAT, THAN BY UPDATING YOUR **HIDEOUS** LOGO AND SITE DESIGN, BEFORE CUTTING SOME OF THE **CRAPPY, CHICKEN-SCRATCH COMICS** THAT ARE HOLDING US BACK?



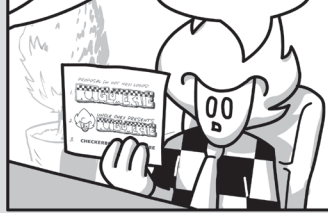
WE NEED TO SHOW THE COMPANY'S **DUALITY** -- **QUALITY**, REPRESENTED BY WHITE, JUXTAPOSED WITH **DYNAMISM**, WHICH I USE **BLACK** TO SYMBOLIZE.



THEN HOW ABOUT THESE?

YOU'RE STILL SHOWING ME THE SAME ONES.

YOU BLINKED.



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THE MEETING CONTINUES!

... AND I'M ALL FOR THE OTHER COMICS LINKING TO ME, BUT IF I **THEN** LINK TO OTHERS IN **TURN**, PEOPLE CAN **LEAVE MY SITE**.

YOU SEE MY PREDICAMENT.



MAYBE YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW IT --

OH, I UNDERSTAND THAT **LESSER COMICS** NEED THE SUPPORT. BUT AT WHAT POINT DO YOU **CUT THE UMBILICAL?**

HERE'S A LIST OF STRIPS YOU **GOTS** TO DUMP.

SOME OF THESE ARE OUR **BIGGEST HITS!**



TRUST ME, NO ONE WILL KNOW WHO THEY WERE IN TEN YEARS.

CHEX, I **APPRECIATE** YOUR TRYING TO MAKE KONGLOMERATE **BETTER**. BUT PERHAPS IF YOU WERE WILLING TO **COMPROMISE** --



THIS MEETING IS ALL ABOUT **COMPROMISE!** I'VE THOUGHT ABOUT THIS FROM **EVERY ANGLE!**

I'M **SENSITIVE** TO THE FACT THAT BIG CORPORATIONS ARE **AVERSE** TO CHANGE. **YOU** NEED TO BE SENSITIVE TO THE FACT THAT **YOUR IDEAS** ARE STUPID.

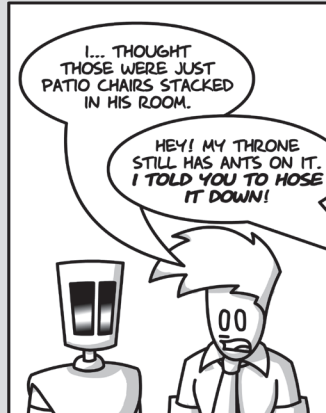
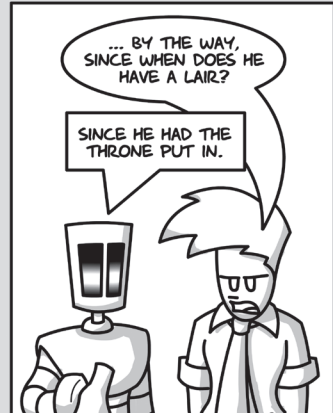
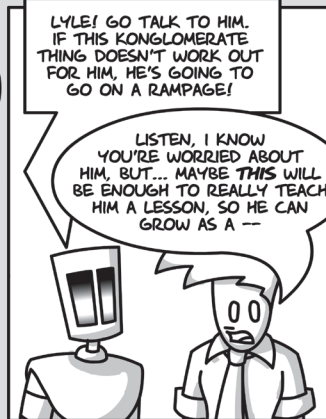


YOU GOTTA COME HALFWAY.

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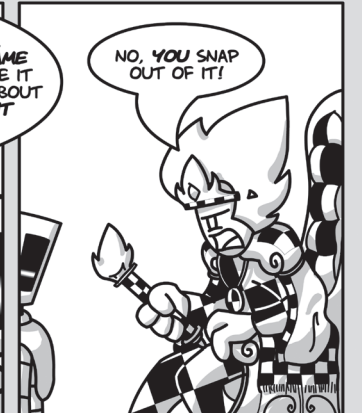
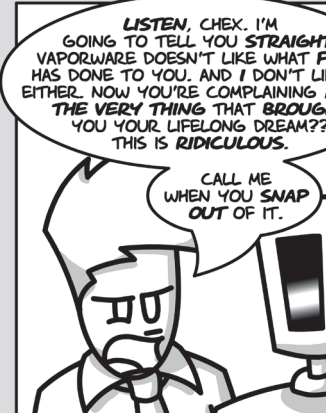
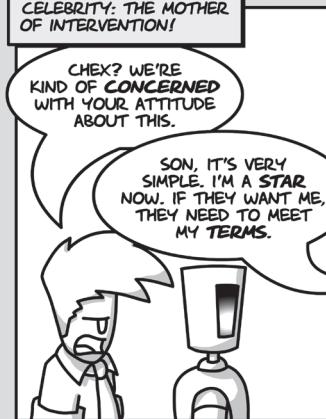
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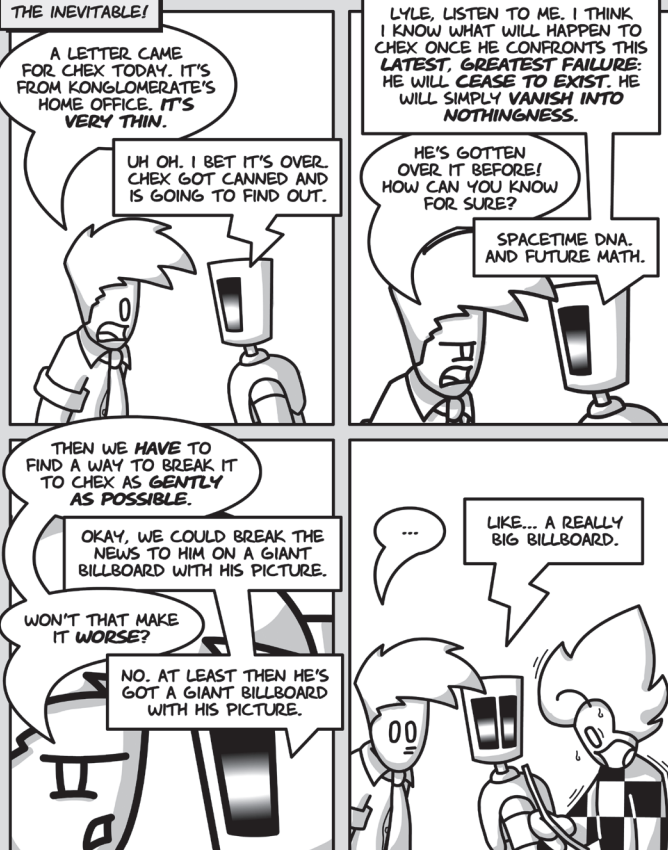
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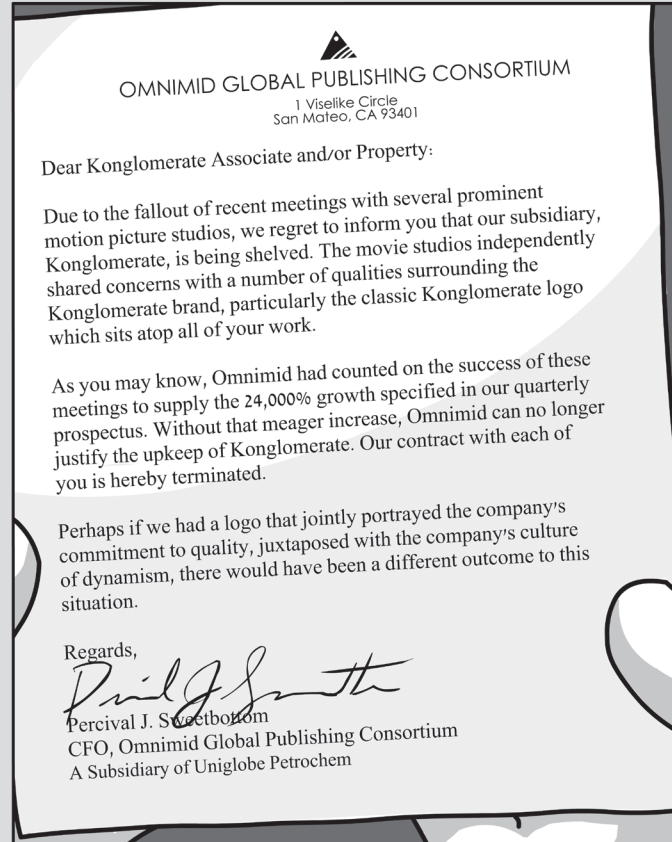
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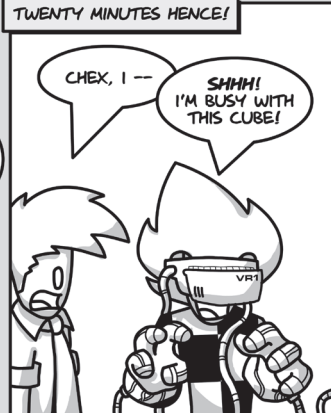
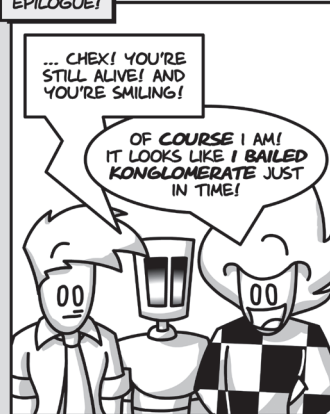


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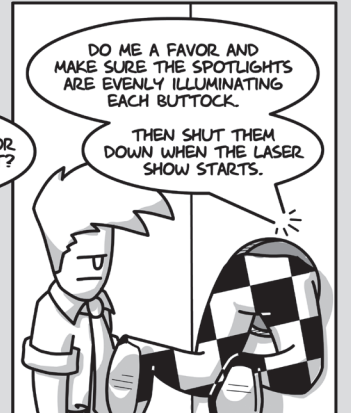
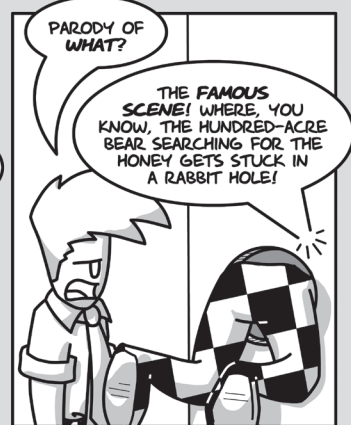
EPILOGUE!



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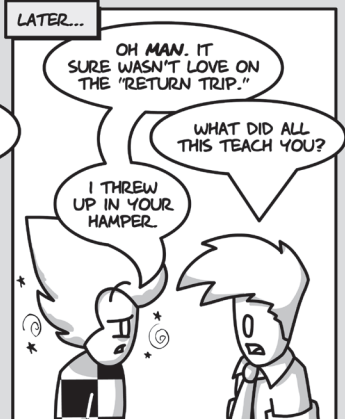
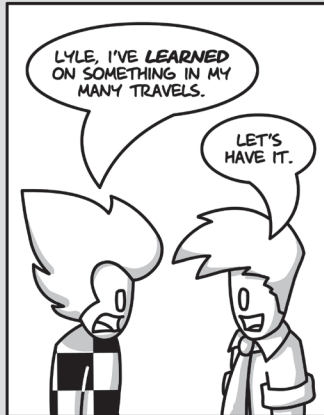
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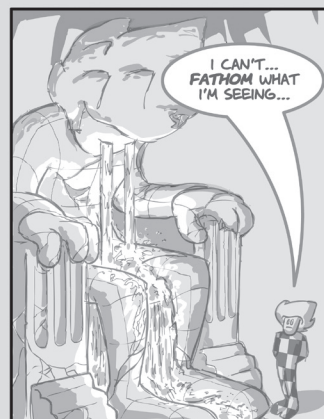
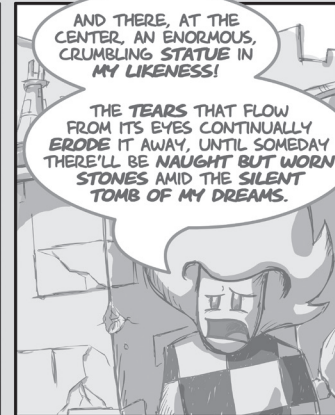
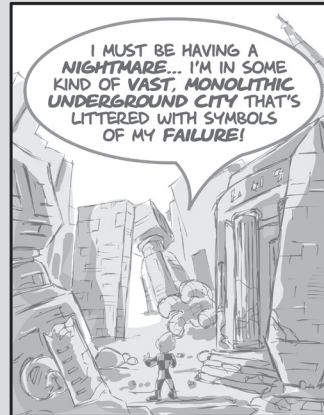
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CHAPTER 5 INTO THE FUTURE

What will the future hold? Untold riches... or untold riches of disaster? Only time will tell. At least, that's how it used to work. In the 1970s, Moore's Law stated that the complexity of integrated circuits relative to transistor count doubled every 24 months. Though his law is beginning to crap out, it remains a beacon to futurists and speculative fictioners alike.

What follows, then, is not a series of predictions, but of observations — observations about the future, from the future's past. So they're true.

In 2007, R. Steven's *Diesel Sweeties* will be distributed to newspapers via United Features Syndicate. The “clean” version of his strip will be in papers nationwide and carry his URL.

In 2007, *Diesel Sweeties* will be pulled from newspapers after readers visit the URL and find the “dirty” version online.

In 2008, *PvP* will turn ten years old. Brent and Jade will have a child, and Kurtz will degenerate the strip into *Baby Blues*-style parental observational humor.

In 2009, the *Checkerboard Nightmare* motion picture will finally be released, after years in legal limbo. (See page 103.)

In 2010, *Penny Arcade* will end. Creators Holkins and Krauhlik will retire to their respective tropical islands, St. Tycho and St. Gabriel, leaving a power vacuum in the webcomics world. Thousands of webcomics named after keystrokes will move in to fill the void, and once the smoke clears, the only remaining gaming comics will involve Mega Man.

In 2011, Eric Burns of *Websnark* will replace PBS series *Masterpiece Theatre's* current host Russell Baker, who replaced Alistair Cooke. The theme song will be updated to feature Burns on two kazoos simultaneously.

In 2012, Blank Label Comics, Boxcar Comics, Dayfree Press, Dumbrella, and Modern Tales will join forces as United Webcomics, and fight the megaconglomerate Omega Features Syndicate in high-speed cyberspace battleskiffs I like to call “trench runners.”

In 2020, D.J. Coffman becomes the new CEO of Platinum Studios after Scott Rosenberg's brain retires to a control center inside a fifty-foot-tall, orphanage-stomping robot made out of chainsaws.

In 2013, Modern Tales will pay out, to one of its artists, its first three-digit check. (The artist will be asked to wait until Thursday to cash it.)

In 2014, Jeph Jacques of *Questionable Content* will run out of Internet in-jokes to put on his characters' T-shirts, and will resort to using pictures of previous T-shirts.

In 2015, the first gaming comic will arrive that doesn't employ a couch as a setting.

In 2016, Holkins and Krahulik will repatriate to the Arrayed States of America to become their first joint Co-Presidents.

In 2017, Jon Rosenberg of *Goats* will die of radium poisoning from glow-in-the-dark *Goats*-related products. Weeks after burial, his cemetery plot will be too hot to walk on.

In 2018, R.K. Milholland's *Something Positive* will draw to a close, having killed off all its characters three years prior.

In 2019, *Dinosaur Comics* by Ryan North, at its native resolution, will be far too tiny to read on the 106,016 x 79,512-pixel resolution monitors of the day. It will still be enjoyed by a core group of Linux enthusiasts.

In 2021, John Allison of *Scary Go Round* will become Prime Minister of the United Mechakingdom, acting as principal advisor to the metal-tentacled Queen Deathulox II.

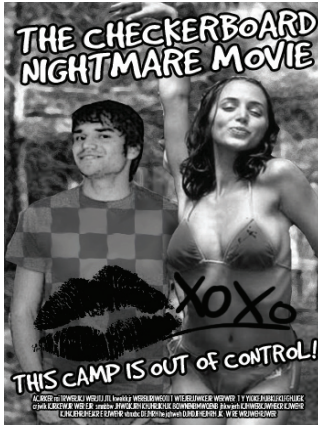
In 2022, the lawsuit against Danielle Corsetto will be settled out of court after a series of girls-with-slingshot-related injuries.

In 2024, Ryan Sohmer's *Least I Could Do* will finally decide to settle down, and remove the condom from the I in the logo. Nine months later, the address bar will give birth to a healthy baby boy.

In 2025, if man is still alive, if woman can survive, they will be living in Keenspot's moon base. The city of Cresbard, South Dakota will have been relocated there and encased in a spherical shield of pure Crosbite Omicron. Most international airports will offer flights directly to the base, or the nearby Sea of *Superosity*.

Beyond man's reckoning of time, in a region of space that can now only be characterized as pockets in the Dirac sea of negative electrons, during the Heat Death of the known universe and beyond, the gossamer soul-filaments of the entities known as Jerry Holkins and Mike Krahulik, now long dispersed to the churning aether, will be called forth by Horadrael, the Final Angel, by his serpentine Horn of Eternity. Horadrael will invite them to unite with the Infinite, and in so doing, the totality of spacetime will fold upon itself, wiping clean the existence of all temporal things and heralding a new Era in the Lord God's Heaven, Amen.

The Checkerboard Nightmare Movie (2009)



Directed by:
Van Hammersly

Writing credits:
Bob Stoddard

Genre: Comedy / Satire / Drama (more)

Tagline: Watch Out When Checkerboard
Nightmare Is There!

Plot Outline:

When Chex (Roger Holness, Jr.) ends up running a summer camp for oversexed teens, it's up to Lyle (Nicholas Banks) and the gang to stop a developer from turning the campgrounds into a strip club! But when a ragtag soccer team has the big finals against the rich kids, a mystical baseball mitt... (more)

User Comments:

A pathetic attempt on the part of director Hammersly to sneak another sequel to his softcore "Boob Commandos" series into theaters, TCNM is barely related to the webcomic at all. Chex has become a balding, lecherous... (more)

Credited Cast:

Roger Holness, Jr.	....	Checkerboard "Chex" Nightmare
Nicholas Banks	....	Lyle Zebulon, Esq.
Tony Todd	....	Vaporware the Dinosaur
Lou Albano	....	Larry "Mooner" Moonarski
Kelly LeBrock	....	Angeliqne Sexton
Richard Kline	....	Sex Nudist #1
Kimberly Kelley	....	Detective Kaylynn Stripp
Dustin Diamond	....	Peeping Tom at Bra Factory

Paula Barbieri Doctor Nude
Andrew Koenig Richard “Boner” Stabone

Also Known As:

Boob Commando VII: Naked Soccer Commandos (UK)
Les Commandos des Seins IV (Europe)
The Gods Must Be Crazy V (Australia)

Runtime:

USA: 43 minutes

Language:

English (Cockney)

Color:

Crayovision 12

Sound Mix:

Semiphonic Right-Ear

Memorable Quotes:

Checkerboard “Chex” Nightmare: I’ll kick your balls... your soccer balls!

Vaporware the Dinosaur: Check out Mr. Moves over here. Or Mr. Balls.

Checkerboard “Chex” Nightmare: If you’ve got the moves, I’ve got the balls!

Doctor Nude: These kids have what it takes to make it! Wait, who’s that?

Peeping Tom at Bra Factory: What’s uuuuuuup??

(more)

Trivia:

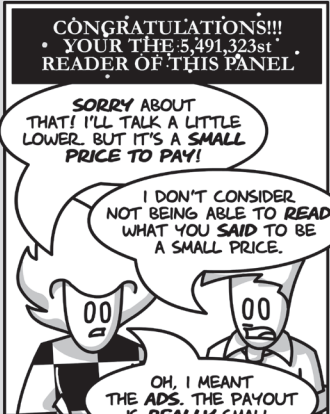
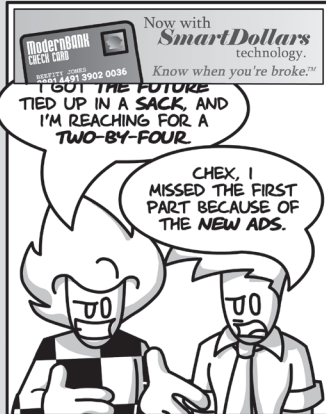
- The only cast member familiar with the webcomic *Checkerboard Nightmare* was **Lou Albano**, who would later refer to **Van Hammersly** as “an unconscionable charlatan” and “a human abortion.”

- **Kelly LeBrock** refused to leave her trailer until **Richard Kline** was returned to his cage and tranquilized.
- **Director Trademark:** Characters emerging from collapsing tents.
- **Van Hammersly** demanded a pair of bare buttocks in every scene of the film. This explains the odd-looking napkin holder in the diner scenes.
- **Andrew Koenig** was so excited to be returning to his 1980s TV role of “Boner” that he had his name legally changed to “Growing Pains.”
- After his death during production, **Roger Holness, Jr.** was replaced by **Roger Holness, Sr.**, who was also dead.
- **Director Trademark:** Closing credits run throughout entire film.
- Director **Van Hammersly** fought bitterly with writer **Bob Stoddard** over the awkward pace of the film. Stoddard only took the job because he was told he would be writing “an introspective exploration of the collision between country and city life, and its parallels with the changes in young adulthood,” while Hammersly insisted upon “a hooterfest.”
- **Director Trademark:** Thunderclap SFX when an overweight person takes a bite of food.

Goofs:

- **Revealing mistakes:** The whole film was shot on location, except for **Kimberly Kelley**’s erotic dream sequence on the surface of Jupiter. This was filmed on Mars.
- **Factual error:** Ghosts cannot be shrunk down by pushing them through a magnifying glass.
- **Incorrectly regarded as goofs:** The boom microphone appears in most of the picture, but Van Hammersly confirmed this was actually an uncredited role.
- **Factual error:** The number of breasts on a woman’s body does not increase with level of sexual arousal.
- **Anachronism:** Socrates died after ingesting hemlock, not a point-blank shotgun blast to the sternum. His last words were “Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius. Do pay it. Don’t forget,” not “*Woofah! Keep on blazin’ it, future bro!*”
- **Revealing mistakes:** The credits state “No horses were decapitated and hollowed out during the production of this film,” but this is incongruous with the prop used for the time machine.
- **Revealing mistakes:** After the camp counselor makeout showdown, the camera pans too far left, clearly showing the wooden support struts holding up the cardboard cabin façade, the cardboard “World’s Tallest Redwood,” and Tony Todd.
- **Continuity:** At the pie-eating contest, Doctor Nude is holding a pistol in her left hand. In the next scene, she has contracted hepatitis.

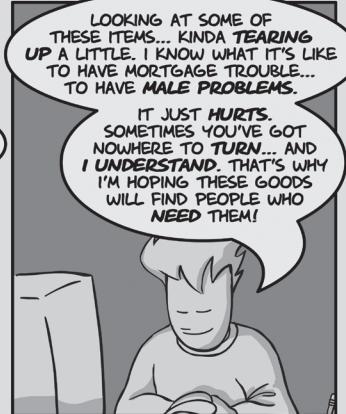
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AT A COMIC BOOK CONVENTION!

WHEN DO YOU WANT TO LEAVE, CHEX? I'M GETTING HUNGRY. YOU KNOW, FOR ROBOT TREATS.

HANG ON, VAPORWARE, I'VE GOT ONE MORE PANEL TO DROP IN ON! I WANT TO SEE WHO'S BEEN ASKED TO LECTURE ABOUT **WEBCOMICS** THIS TIME!

LET'S SEE... **MC CLOUD**. THAT'S A GIMME... OOH, MIKE MIGNOLA WAS HERE FRIDAY.

IF YOU WANT TO LEARN THE SECRET OF CHEESECAKE MASQUERADING AS A HUMOR STRIP, YOU COULD ATTEND THE FRANK CHO PANEL.

WAIT A SECOND!

"SATURDAY EVENING: AN HOUR WITH THE MIND BEHIND **TABLETOP VIXENS**, THE WILDLY-POPULAR NEW COMIC." I'VE NEVER EVEN HEARD OF THAT! HOW COULD IT BE WILDLY POPULAR IF I'M UNAWARE OF IT?

YOU'RE A TASTEMAKER.

DAMN STRAIGHT I TASTE!

TABLETOP VIXENS

MEET THE SATOR TODAY! REALLY SEXY!

LET'S GO FIND OUT WHY THESE LOSERS ARE HOT STUFF!

NEXT: WHY!

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THE **TABLETOP VIXENS** PANEL!

... SO IF YOU'RE NOT FAMILIAR WITH MY WORK --

HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA

... IT'S ABOUT TWO **ULTRA-SARCASTIC, SEX-CRAZED TWENTY-SOMETHINGS** WHO PLAY RPGS AND COMPLAIN.

LAST MONTH, THE BOOK PUBLISHING DEAL WITH **RANDOM HOUSE** FELL THROUGH, BUT LUCKILY **OMNIMID** WAS WAITING TO SNAP US UP.

AWESOME! WHOOO! YEAH!!

YES! ROCK!

EXPECT MY FIRST COLLECTION, "**LOADED DICE: ALL EIGHT STRIPS OF TABLETOP VIXENS**," IN STORES COME THIS FALL.

OH, AND THANKS FOR THE **DONATIONS** -- YESTERDAY I CLEARED **EIGHT THOUSAND!** ANOTHER **OKAY WEEK!**

QUESTION HERE -- I'VE ONLY BEEN DOING MY STRIP **SARCASTIC ASIAN CHIX** FOR THREE DAYS, AND I'M ONLY GETTING 30,000 VISITORS A DAY. WHAT'S WRONG?

IT'S NOT VISITORS THAT'S IMPORTANT, IT'S **PAGEVIEWS**. HOW MANY ARE YOU GETTING?

OH! MINE ARE THROUGH THE **ROOF!** THANKS FOR ANSWERING!

PLEASURE'S MINE, **FELLOW SUCCESS.**

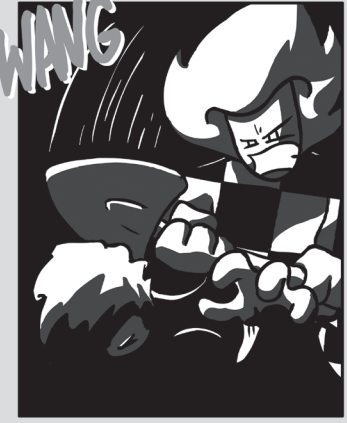
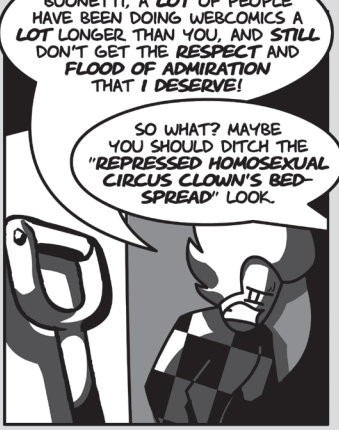
NEXT: CHEX DIES INSIDE!

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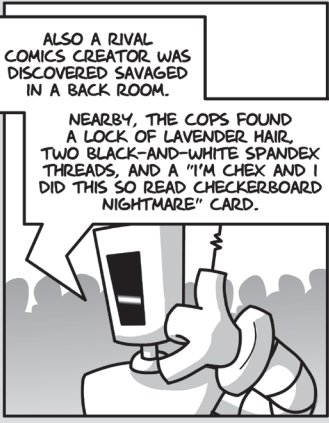
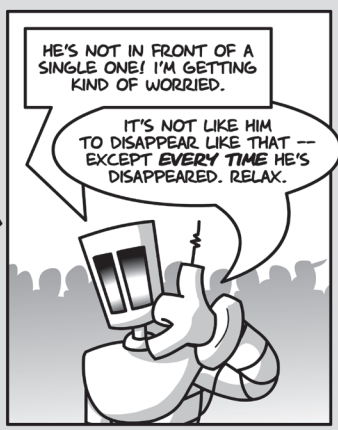


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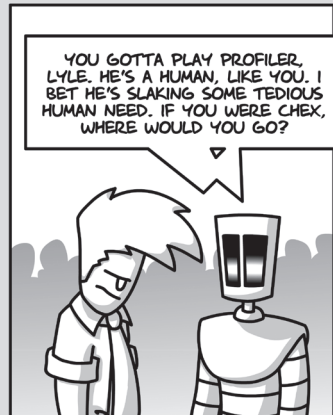
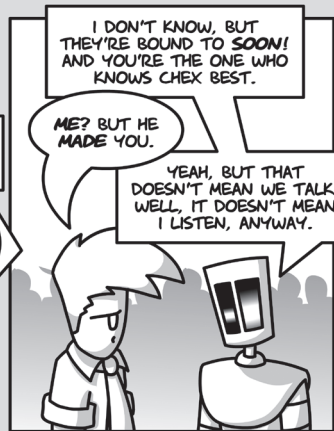
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"M.K. Buonetti" is an amalgam of R.K. Milholland and Michael Buonauro, two webcartoonists I respect a lot. *Tabletop Vixens* was supposed to be *Gamer Hotties*.

Panel four: an attempt at Piro's drawing style in *Megatokyo*.

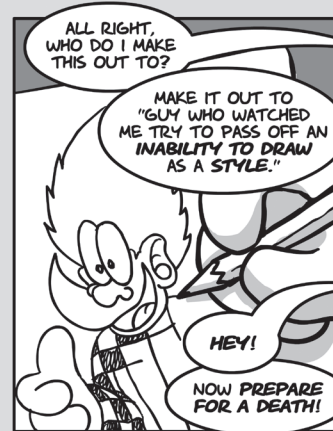
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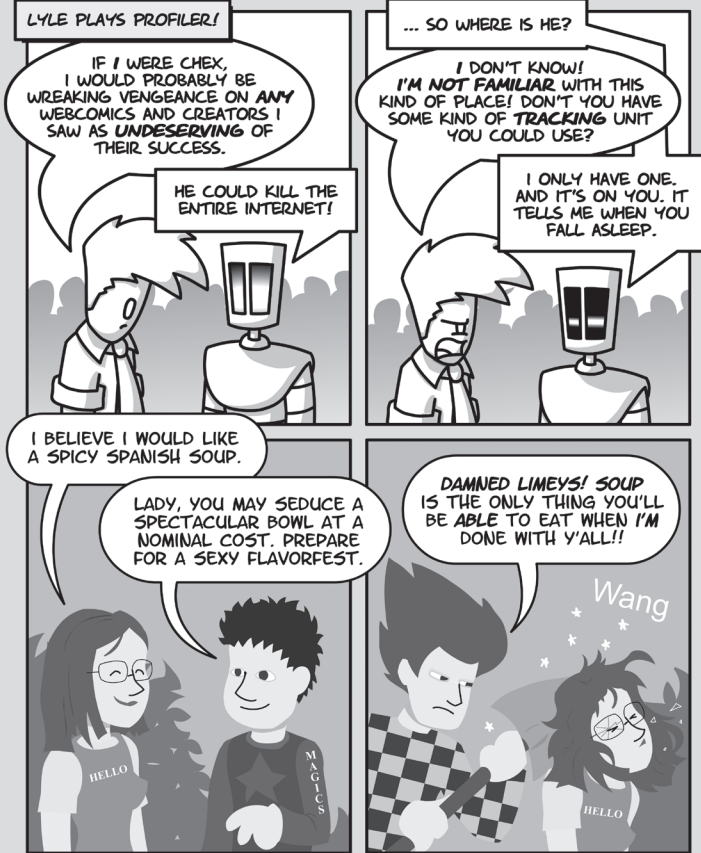


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Panel one: an attempt at Chris Crosby's drawing style in *Supersosity*.

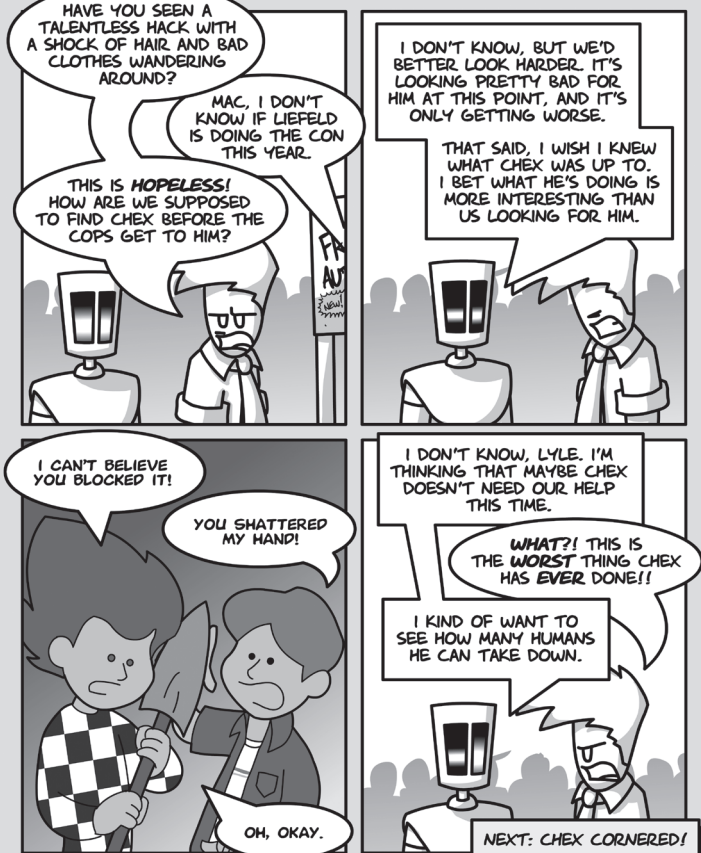
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Panel three and four: the vector look of John Allison's *Scary Go Round*.

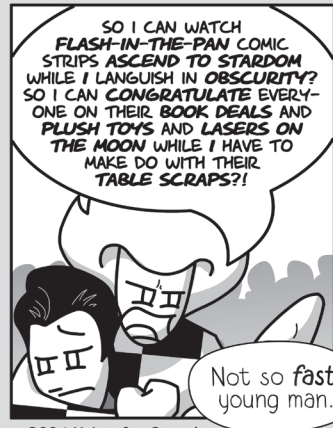
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Panel three: *Real Life Comics*' Greg Dean.

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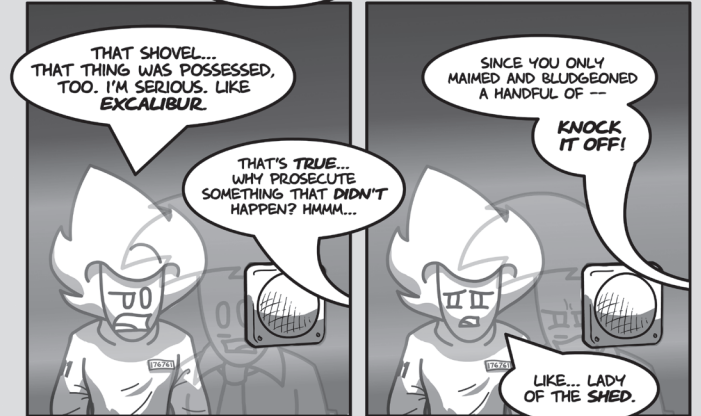
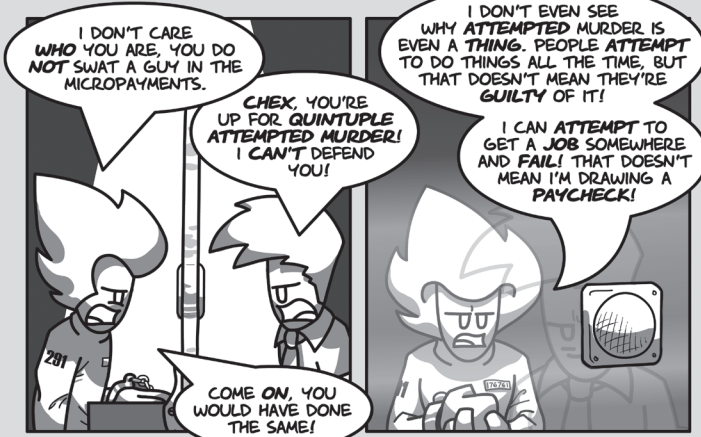
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The guy in panels two and three is Scott Kurtz, and there's Scott McCloud's avatar in panel four.

Look in panel one, where the dialogue and sound effects form "everybody Wang Chung tonight," only there to see if anyone would notice.

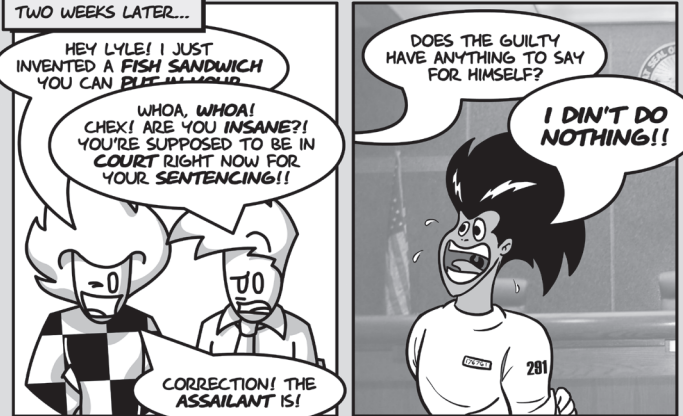
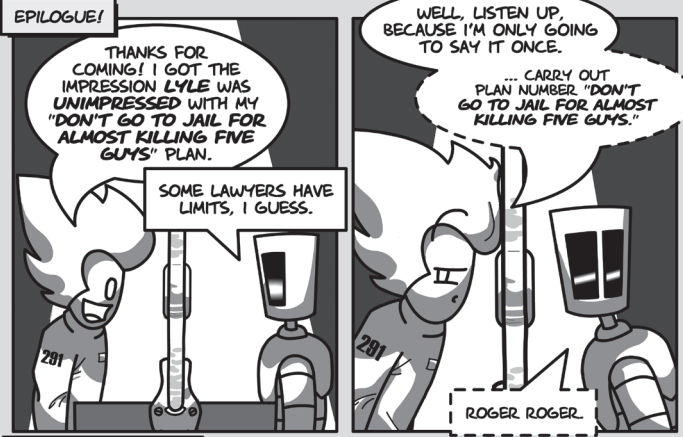
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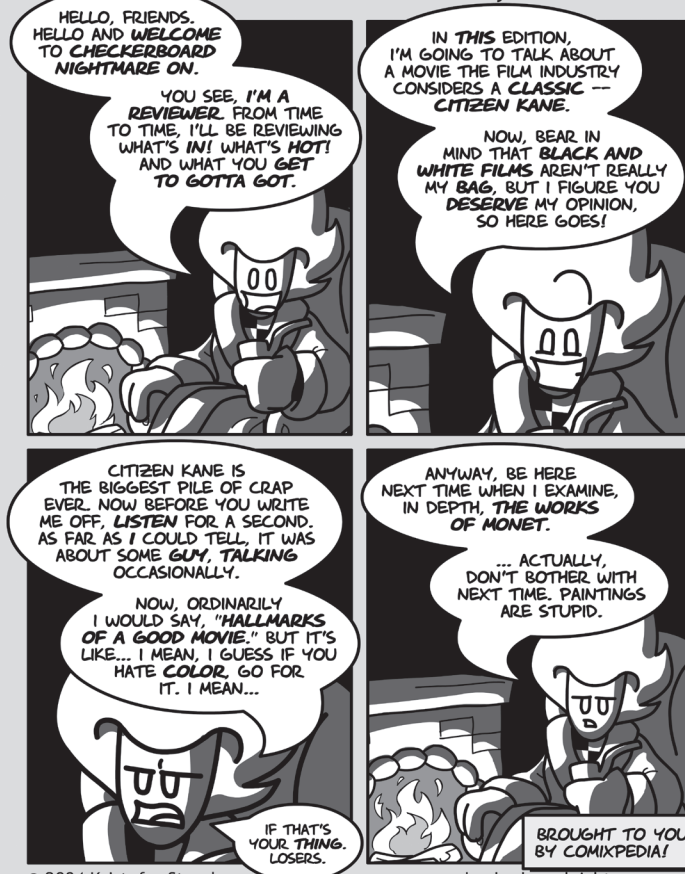


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Obviously, Kids' WB's Freakazoid, whom Chex always drew a lot of comparisons to.

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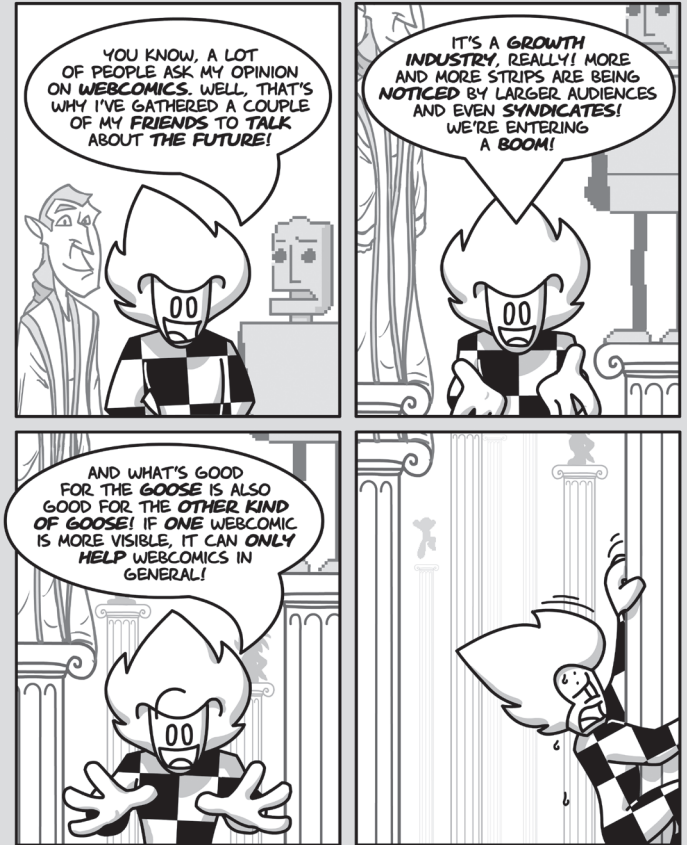


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Chex would appear in front of his fireplace half a dozen times over the course of the strip.

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Panel one: a character from Tauhid Bondia's *Spells and Whistles*, and Clango from R. Stevens' *Diesel Sweeties*.

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**MAKE YOUR OWN
M. NIGHT SHYAMALAN
THRILLER**

PROVEN WITH SCIENCE
BY YOUR PAL, CHEX

TAKE ONE ELEMENT FROM EACH COLUMN
TO CREATE YOUR OWN INCREASINGLY-PREDICTABLE
PSYCHOLOGICAL THRILLER THAT CRITICS STILL COMPARE
TO HITCHCOCK BECAUSE THEY HAVEN'T SEEN A GOOD
MOVIE IN SEVERAL DECADES!

★ **COLUMN A: THE STAR**

BRUCE WILLIS
JOAQUIN PHOENIX
HALEY JOEL OSMENT
OPIE'S DAUGHTER

🌿 **COLUMN B: CO-STAR**

JOAQUIN PHOENIX



**COLUMN D: WHAT
THEY HAVE TO DO**

CAUTIOUSLY INVESTIGATE

👤 **COLUMN C: PLOT HOOK**

GHOSTS
MONSTERS

🕸️ **COLUMN E: LEFT-FIELD ENDING**

WHOEVER YOU THOUGHT WAS THE MONSTER
OR WHATEVER IS ACTUALLY THE STAR
(AND VICE VERSA)

THAT ONE SCENE THAT HAD A REALLY
UNIMPORTANT THING BUT THE CAMERA LINGERED
ON TOO LONG IS THE KEY TO EVERYTHING

REALLY BAD SCIENCE LIKE
"SOMEHOW, WOOD CAUSES
CANCER IN AMPHIBIANS"

THE MICROBES SPONTANEOUSLY
EVOLVE INTO SOMETHING ELSE

IT'S ACTUALLY A THING
SOMEONE IMAGINED WHILE DYING
OR SOMETHING — OOPS, THAT'S
DAVID I NAGHI SORRY.

I WAS GONNA USE
BLOOD TO WRITE THIS OUT, BUT
IT'S TOO MUCH TEXT. I AIN'T MAKIN'
THAT MISTAKE AGAIN.

SO NO
AUTOBIOGRAPHY
THIS YEAR.

BONUS COLUMN!
MAKE THE DIALOGUE
PRETTY STILTED
AND STUFF.



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GET READY FOR
A TOTALLY ORIGINAL
CONCEPT FOR THE INTERNET
— THE FIRST WEBCOMIC
REALITY SHOW!

I'VE ASSEMBLED
A RAGTAG CREW OF FIVE
TOTALLY REPRESENTATIVE
WEBCOMIC CHARACTERS, FROM
CREATORS ACROSS THE
MEDIUM!

AND WE'LL ALL
BE STAYING IN THE
SAME HOUSE!

CHECH
CHECKERBOARD
NIGHTMARE
(Keenspot)

"C.J."
MY AWESOME LIFE
(Geocities)

DOE HARTTAIL
DOE HARTTAIL,
YIFF CITY
PSYCHIC R.I.
(Keenspace)

TYLER
INSERT
CARTRIDGE
(Gamespy)

HEXAGON
SIDES OF INFINITY
(MSPaint)



WE'LL HAVE
TO LIVE IN THE SAME
SPACE AND GET ALONG!
WITH THIS MUCH CRAZINESS,
IT PROBABLY WON'T
BE EASY!

NOT EASY AT
ALL! LOOK AT THESE...
THESE CLASS ACTS.
IN A HOUSE.



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EVERYBODY WHO'S *ANYBODY* KNOWS THAT **CHECKERBOARD NIGHTMARE** DOES A LOT OF PARODIES.

BUT WHAT THEY DON'T KNOW IS, WE INVITE *YOU* TO CREATE YOUR *OWN* PARODIES AND SATIRES! HERE'S A QUICK GUIDE TO GETTING STARTED!

CHANGE THE NAME OF EVERYTHING BY MAKING PUNS AT THE LEVEL OF A FART JOKE.

EXAMPLES: "CHECKERBUTT POOPMARE," "BEN ASSFLECK AND JENNIFER DOPE-PEZ," "INDIANA BLECCH AND THE TEMPLE OF FART."



HEY *BILE!*

WHAT IS IT, *DRECKS?*

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MAKE SURE IT'S SOMETHING THAT'S BEEN PARODIED BEFORE, AND BEEN DONE BETTER.

GUYS, I'M GONNA TAKE ON *REALITY TV!* IT'S SUCH A *RECENT THING*, AND *EVERYONE* CAN GET BEHIND *THAT!*

"GUYS?"

ALL CHARACTERS SHOULD SPEAK ONLY IN EXPOSITORY STATEMENTS SAYING HOW DUMB THEY ARE. THAT'S CALLED "SCATHING."

I'M CHECKERBOARD NIGHTMARE! I AM SO STUPID THAT I'M GOING TO COME UP WITH THIS LAME SCHEME FOR JERKS!

YOU'RE REALLY LAME, YOU KNOW THAT? YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW THAT!

I DON'T EVEN KNOW IT! FART NOISE!

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HOT CUP OF COFFEE! IT'S *YOU!* I FRIGGIN' LOVE YOU!

LAWYERS ARE GREEDY...

HOLY \$#!+!! YOU JUST CUT TO THE CORE OF EVERYTHING!



AND I KNOW IT SOUNDS LIKE I'M BEING *SARCASTIC*, BUT THAT'S ALWAYS BEEN MY BELIEF TOO! I CAN'T WAIT TO GET *PICKED UP* BY A *SYNDICATE* AND SAY *SAYONARA* TO THE *INTERNET AMATEUR HOUR*.

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OKAY, NOW SAY *SOMETHING ELSE!*

WEBCOMICS ARE AMATEUR GARBAGE...

YES! BECAUSE THEY'RE NOT *SANCTIFIED* BY *CORRUPT MEDIA BEHEMOTHS!*



THIS THING IS STARTING TO BOTHER ME, THOUGH.

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Apologies to Wiley of *Non Sequitur*, but not really.

Wiley's newspaper strip *Non Sequitur* never was a favorite of mine.

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⁴⁹ *Framed!!!* by Damonk, www.damonk.com
²³ *Real Life Comics* by Greg Dean, www.reallifecomics.com
⁹ Scott McCloud at www.scottmccloud.com
⁵⁸ *Megatokyo* by Rodney Caston and Fred Gallagher, www.megatokyo.com
T *Dinosaur Comics* by Ryan North, www.qwantz.com
⁹⁶ *Diesel Sweeties* by R. Stevens, www.dieselsweeties.com
Au *Something Positive* by R.K. Milholland, www.somethingpositive.net
Sr *Ctrl+Alt+Del* by Tim Buckley, www.ctrlaltdel-online.com
Md *Starslip Crisis* by Kristofer Straub, www.starslip.com
⁴ *Overcompensating* by Jeff Rowland, www.overcompensating.com
Hi *American Elf* by James Kochalka, www.americanelf.com
Yup *Wondermark* by David Malki !, www.wondermark.com

- * *Yirmumah* by D.J. Coffman, www.yirmumah.net
- ** *Achewood* by Chris Onstad, www.achewood.com
- *** *A Modest Destiny* by Sean Howard, www.squidi.net
- @ *Checkerboard Nightmare* by Kristofer Straub, www.checkerboardnightmare.com
- # *Questionable Content* by Jeph Jacques, www.questionablecontent.net
- \$\$\$ *Goats* by Jon Rosenberg, www.goats.com
- ~ *Scary Go Round* by John Allison, www.scarygoround.com
- *You Damn Kid!* by Owen Dunne, www.youdamnkid.com
- !! *Girls With Slingshots* by Danielle Corsetto, www.girlswithslingshots.com
- <> *Least I Could Do* by Ryan Sohmer and Lar deSouza, www.leasticoulddo.com
- != *Superosity* by Chris Crosby, www.superosity.com
- XOR *Spells and Whistles* by Tauhid Bondia, www.spellsandwhistles.net
- NAND *Cool Cat Studio* by Gisele Lagace, www.coolcatstudio.com

Webcomic Collectives Kind Of in Order of Appearance

- ⁰ Blank Label Comics, www.blanklabelcomics.com
- ¹ Boxcar Comics, www.boxcarcomics.com
- ¹⁰ Dayfree Press, www.dayfreepress.com
- ¹¹ Dumbrella, www.dumbrella.com
- ¹⁰⁰ Keenspot, www.keenspot.com
- ¹⁰¹ Modern Tales, www.moderntales.com

Webcomic Sites Sorta in Order of Appearance

- ^x *The Webcomics Examiner* edited by Joe Zabel, www.webcomicsreview.com
- ^y *The Daily Grind Iron Man Competition*, www.crowncommission.com/dailygrind
- ^z *Websnark* by Eric Burns, www.websnark.com
- ^{aa} T Campbell's blog, www.tcampbell.net
- ^{bb} *Drunk Duck*, www.drunkduck.com
- ^{cc} *The New York Times*, www.nytimes.com



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kristofer Straub is a cartoonist, writer, graphic designer and a webcomics aficionado. In 2005, he co-founded Blank Label Comics, an independent webcomics collective.

After five years online, *Checkerboard Nightmare* ended its thrice-weekly run in 2005, but new strips appear monthly at Comixpedia.com. Kristofer's sci-fi humor strip, *Starslip Crisis*, is available online five days a week at www.starslip.com.

PRINT IS DEAD

Yeah, this book said it — *and you just read it.*

Checkerboard Nightmare comes to passé print form in *A Brief History of Webcomics*. It's over 160 strips of Chex, the internet's most irrepressible egomaniac, his faithful lawyer Lyle, and robot pal Vaporware. No attempt at fame is too shameless, no copyright is too protected!

Also inside, you'll find a world-renowned look at the rapidly-growing world of online comics. In-depth interviews, intense looks at upcoming artists, and detailed examinations of shifting business models — all those may appear in a later edition.

If you like web comics and don't mind Meta, I'd definitely recommend *Checkerboard Nightmare*.

— Rebecca Henely, *Sequential Tart*

One of the best satirical strips in webcomics. Also, there is a robot who chokes lawyers.

— Eric Burns, *Websnark*

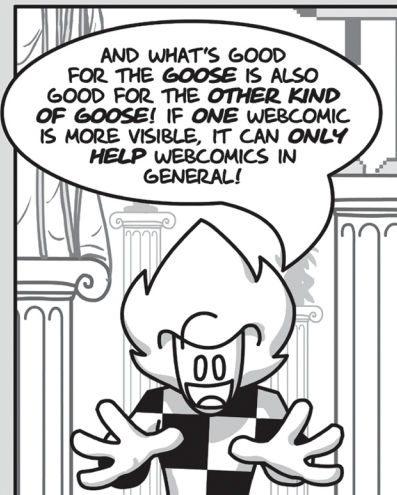
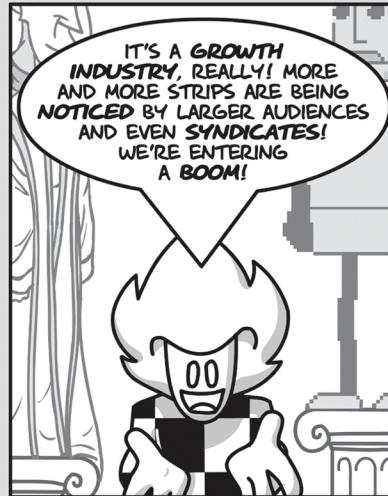
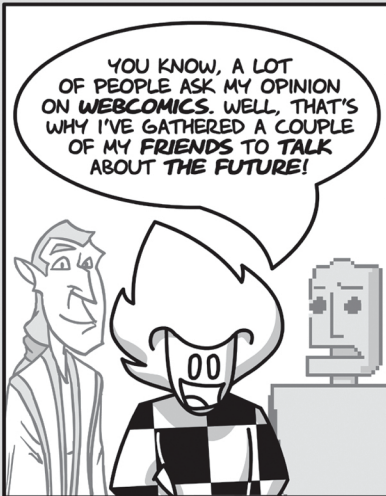
Read *Checkerboard Nightmare*.

— Checkerboard Nightmare, *Checkerboard Nightmare*

www.checkerboardnightmare.com

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