

Tengo's Popular Songs crosses genre boundaries



Image courtesy of Matador

MUSIC

Yo La Tengo Popular Songs

GENRE: Alternative Rock

LABEL: Matador

TRACK PICKS: "Periodically Double or Triple," "Here to Fall," "When It's Dark" and "All Your Secrets"

RELEASED: Sept. 8, 2009

OUR TAKE:

By Yameen Huq
Contributing Writer

If you're in the mood for literally any kind of song, then Yo La Tengo's latest album, *Popular Songs*, is perfect for you. Formed by a married couple and their friend, the band's latest album runs the gamut of different music genres, from psychedelic rock to peaceful acoustic.

An alternative band with a strong, cult following, Yo La Tengo is known for performing a wide variety of music as well as a vast number of cover songs.

Never featuring a dull moment, this album contains a song for any kind of listener, whether one prefers fun rhythms or music with a spacey, more cosmic feel.

With such a wide range of songs, it's difficult to review such a schismatic general album; it is preferable to examine each individual song. However, each song does exhibit a preference for looped melodies and drawn out build-ups.

The album starts off with "Here to Fall," a mix of chill rhythms and a mildly jazzy piano accompaniment. The song has the feel of spy movie theme and the music video of skywriters helps enhance this cool, re-

laxed feeling.

The next song, "Avalon Or Someone Very Similar," marks a 180-degree shift in tone, capturing a pleasant, acoustic sound. The song's cherubic female vocals, light drums and guitar all create a very pleasant environment for the listener to be lost for 3 minutes, a short song compared to the rest of the album.

The music video for this song is a simple scene of kites in the park, serving to highlight the relaxed, almost "hippie-ish" nature of the song.

"By Two's," another radical shift in tone, follows "Avalon." This song continues the folk-influenced feel.

However, the focus is changed from "earth" to "sky," continuing the peaceful sounds, but replacing the pastoral feel and nature setting with otherworldly tones and psychedelic, spacey sounds and rhythms.

The esoteric feel of "By Two's" is contrasted with the next song, "Nothing to Hide." Bringing us back down to "earth," the song "Nothing to Hide" contains a classic rock sound and grunge feel. The slight element of grunge and group vocals reminds us of this band's alternative roots.

"Periodically Double or Triple" continues the trend of "earth" music, but switches the traditional alternative music to a more groovy, funk trend.

The song in general carries a fun, crazy feel exemplified by light, fast drum beats and a music video featuring nothing but literal messy eating. The song also features heavy solos by the Rhodes piano, an instrument that

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Batman sets the bar high for future comic book games

GAMES

Arkham Asylum

GENRE: Action-Adventure

CONSOLE: Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 and Microsoft Windows

DEVELOPER: Rocksteady Studios

RATING: Teen

RELEASED: Aug. 25, 2009

OUR TAKE: ★★★★★

By Danny Spiller
Senior Staff Writer

Given the wildly uneven history that Batman has had with video games, I didn't get my hopes up when I first heard about *Batman: Arkham Asylum*.

Sure, the story sounded

appealing, the screenshots were stunning and the inclusion of so many major characters was a plus, but I still wasn't convinced. I knew I wouldn't get a real sense of the game until I played it. So I did, and it's incredible.

The story begins with Batman returning Joker to Arkham Asylum, Gotham City's mental health institution for the criminally insane. Upon arrival, Batman grows increasingly suspicious at just how simple it was to capture the Joker and suspects that the clown is up to something.

Sure enough, Joker has planned some elaborate trap for the Dark Knight, and Batman must race all over Arkham Island to stop the criminal mastermind and

save Commissioner Gordon.

While this may sound like typical Batman fare, character biographies, hidden patient interview tapes and the mysterious Spirit of Arkham all make the story a much richer and more fulfilling experience.

As far as its presentation, *Arkham Asylum* is the game that finally gets it right. It's dark, moody and gets away with a lot considering its Teen rating.

All of the characters look fantastic, and even though the designs on some of the villains have been changed (like Scarecrow), the new looks are respectful of the original characters and should not be a problem for fans.

The design of Arkham

is terrific as well, as more is present on Arkham Island than just the intensive treatment facility that bares its name.

The inclusion of other buildings (such as Arkham Mansion, a medical facility with underground sewers), as well as the mass of land between all of these locations, give Arkham Island an authenticity that is rarely matched in other game environments.

Of course, it doesn't matter how great a game's characters and environments are if the game doesn't play well. Fortunately for *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, the controls are intuitive and the gameplay is very enjoyable.

See *Arkham*, page 17

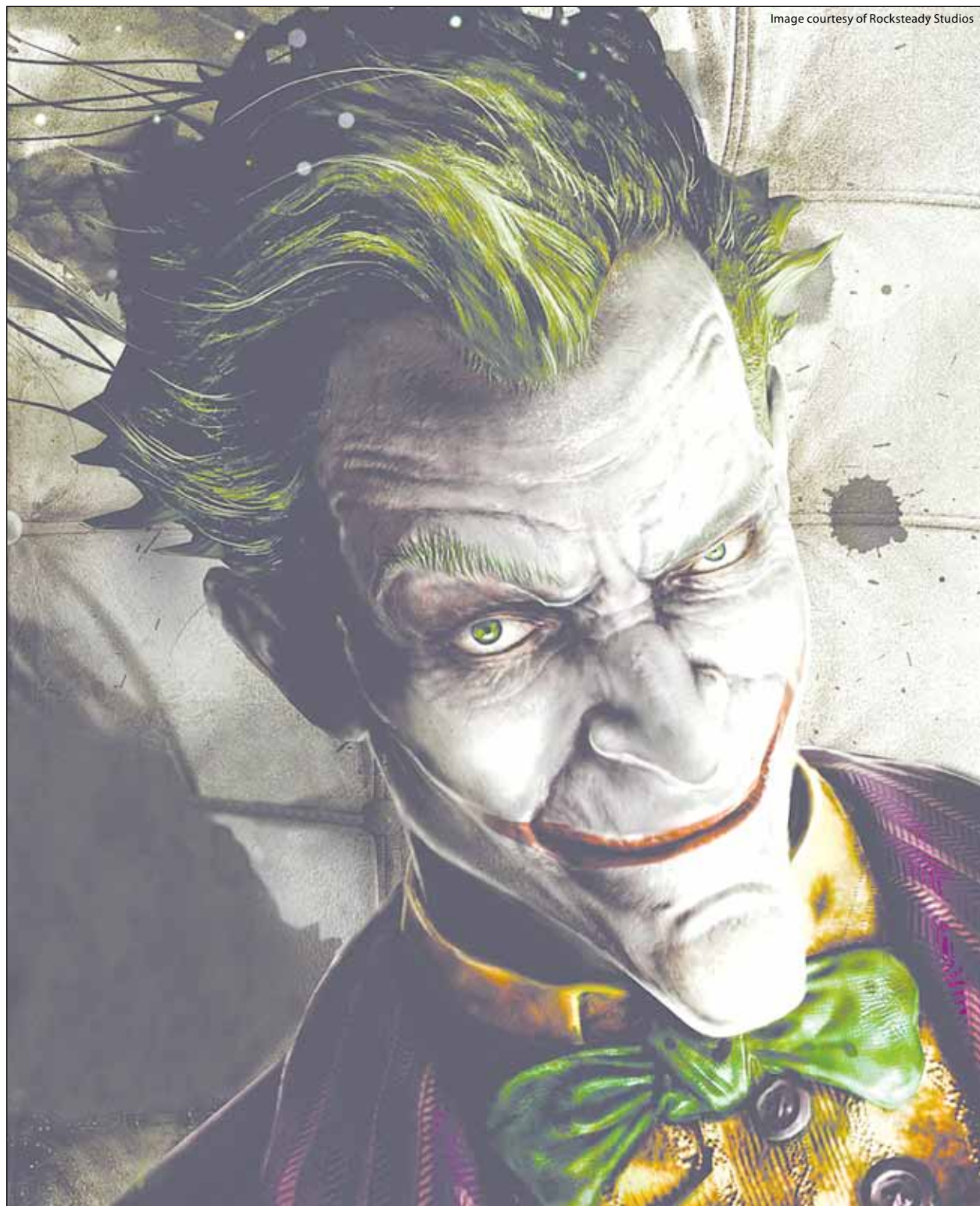


Image courtesy of Rocksteady Studios

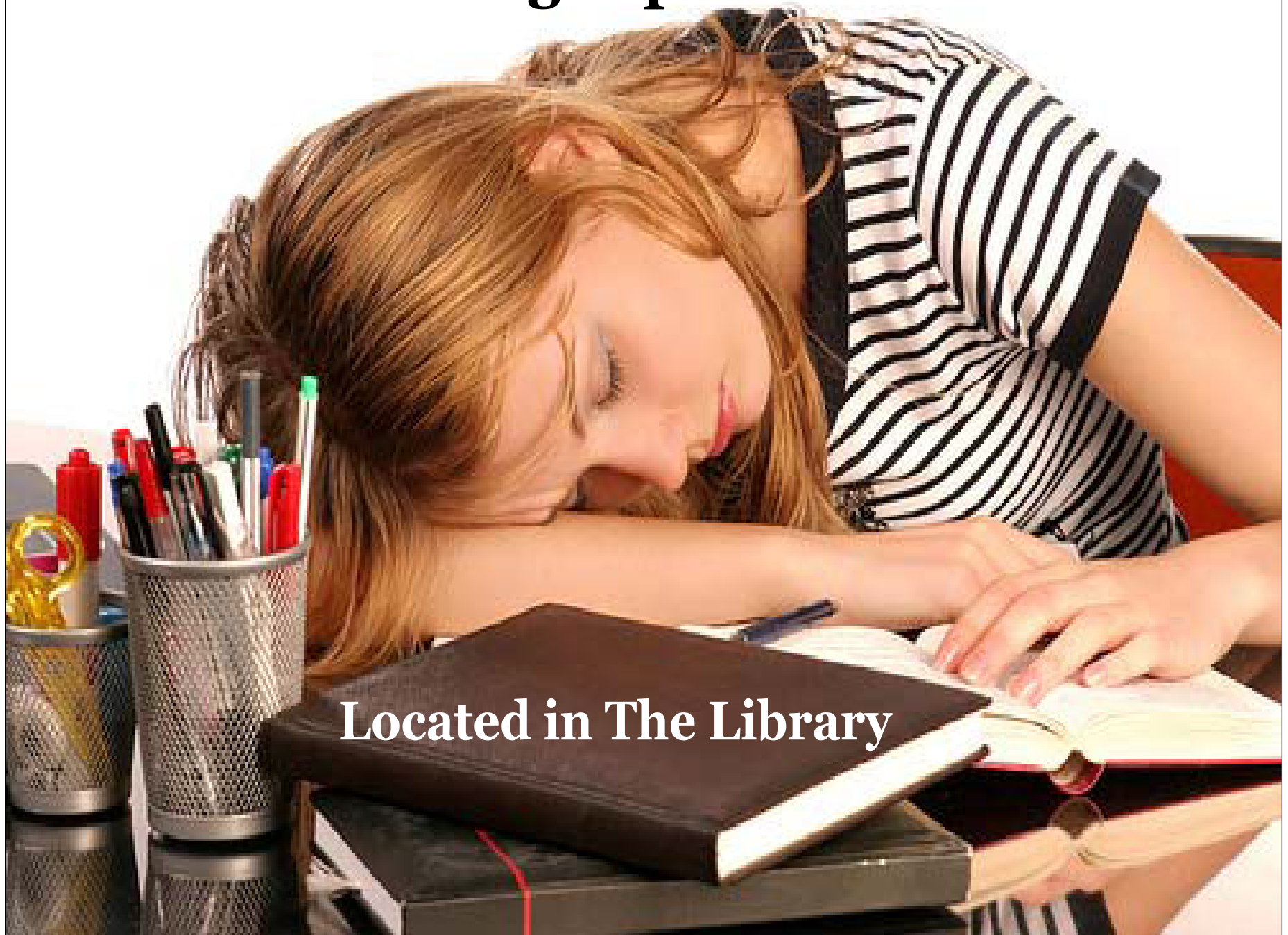
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Arkham from page 15

At first, the control for movement – and especially for combat – may come off as too simple. In reality, it's a decent way to ease the player into the game. Before you start swinging from gargoyles, gliding from rooftops and hurling batarangs, it's important to know how to move around and fight some goons.

The combat system is a great example of the old "easy to learn, hard to master" adage. One button used for attacks, one button for countering enemy attacks and one button for a cape stun are the three basic buttons that will be

needed for fighting.

It seems too easy in the beginning when you can get away with just mashing the attack button and never taking a hit. However, as you progress, the game requires you to abide by its "freeflow" philosophy: seamlessly moving from enemy to enemy and chaining together a large combination of attacks by using your basic attack, counter and stun. Gadgets and special takedowns are eventually introduced and further help Batman bring about his special brand of justice.

Speaking of gadgets, Batman comes well prepared when he shows up on Arkham Island. He is

initially equipped with the iconic batarang as well as a combination grappling/spear weapon called the grapnel gun. As the game progresses, Batman will receive more gadgets that will assist in transportation, enemy submission and access to previously unreachable areas.

The grapnel gun quickly becomes one of the most important gadgets, both as a mode of transportation as well as strategic advantage. The grapnel gun plays a large role in the excellent stealth missions, where Batman is required to stay out of sight if he plans on surviving the threat of armed guards.

Players will have to choose their own means of subduing the gun-toting goons, whether it is hiding in a vent until the right moment or jumping from a gargoyle when a guard's back is turned.

Fortunately, *Arkham Asylum* doesn't lose sight of Batman's reputation as the "World's Greatest Detective." Early on, in an effort to prove he is smarter than the Caped Crusader, the Riddler challenges Batman with a list of riddles, interview tapes and trophies that can be either solved or found somewhere on Arkham Island.

While the trophies and tapes can be simply found, the riddles take a little more effort and require the player to use a little more brainpower.

Though completely optional, the Riddler challenges are by far some of the most enjoyable aspects of the game and feel much more rewarding than the typical inconsequential side quests of many other games.

There are some minor downsides to *Arkham Asylum*. Playing through the game will not take a terribly long time, and even though the Riddler challenges and an additional challenge mode add some length and options to the game, the main quest is still a brief experience.

Also, there will be times when Batman might need to jump from one ledge to another, and the slightest miscalculation due to sluggish controls in a tight spot lead you to fall over the edge and backtrack. While not a huge inconvenience, a few of these misses will cause some unnecessary and frustrating hikes back to your previous position.

But these minor issues don't change the fact that *Batman: Arkham Asylum* is an absolutely phenomenal experience. It comes highly recommended for anyone interested in stealth/action games, but it is absolutely unmissable for fans of the Bat.

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hasn't been often featured since it was made famous by Ray Charles in *The Blues Brothers*.

"If It's True," the next song, uses an orchestra intermixed with optimistic, positive lyrics to create a cheerful uplifting feel. While the song may lack the complex groove of some songs and the spacey feel of others, this cheery tune is perfect for keeping your spirits up.

This is followed by "I'm On My Way," another uplifting song with lyrics and hushed male vocals similar to that of Pink Floyd.

"When It's Dark" brings us back to the peaceful hippie feel. This song continues the nature imagery while featuring chord progressions reminiscent of Jethro Tull.

"All Your Secrets" continues to mimic the style, this time of the Beatles, featuring a soft contemplative ballad with nostalgic lyrics. In fact, many of the band's songs feature a style reminiscent of the Beatles music and lyrics.

The last three songs are substantially longer in length than the previous nine totaling about 10 minutes each.

"More Stars Than There Are in Heaven" resonates with that slightly grungy rock feel, while "The Fireside" works as a soft, acoustic ballad. The schizophrenic album ends with "And The Glitter Is Gone" which again takes us from soft, acoustic melodies back to the grungy, alternative rock.

Music is said to be an art form that demands violation of its previous rules in order to be beautiful. Every musical movement can be seen as a reaction to an earlier one. In that sense, this album succeeds, giving the listener a vast array of very different songs and sounds.

While you may not like every song on this album, the wide range guarantees that there's something for anybody.

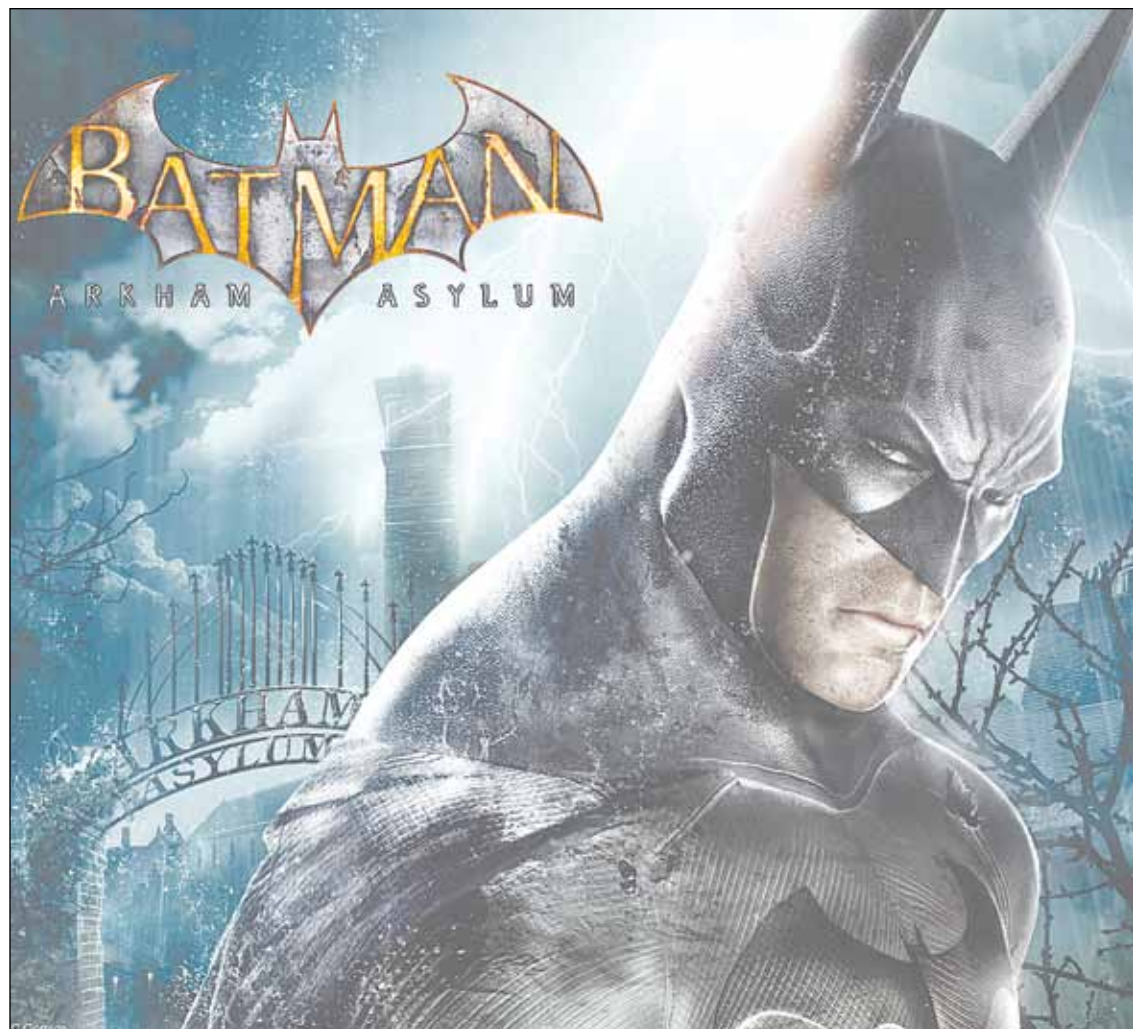


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Extract squeezes out familiar laughs

FILM

Extract

GENRE: Comedy

STARRING: Jason Bateman

DIRECTOR: Mike Judge

RATING: R

RELEASED: Sept. 4, 2009

OUR TAKE: ★★☆☆☆

By **Kenny Phillips**
Senior Staff Writer

Extract, the newest film written and directed by Mike Judge, begins in a small flavored extract factory owned by a man named Joel. It is the perfect setting to satirize Joel and his rag-tag gang of employees. But, much as in Mike Judge's earlier *Office Space*, the entire film centers on the personal life of one man. The setting is completely irrelevant. It could have been anywhere. It is merely a physical location that adds another source of stress for Joel.

Joel is a man whose life is under perpetual stress. From the moment he wakes up to the nights he spends at the bar, Joel is constantly abused by life's annoyances. His factory is filled with idiots, his home is plagued with the world's most pestering neighbor, and his wife promptly denies any "tender access" past eight at night. Joel trudges through, hoping his ship will come in.

Of course, as soon as the sale of his factory is almost assured, an on-site accident involving an employee's lower appendage brings an even greater degree of chaos to bear. The pending lawsuit postpones the sale, the nearly handicapped man set to gain a million dollar settlement attracts a money-seeking vixen named Cindy to the factory and then this fair creature brings unrighteous thoughts to poor Joel's head. In pursuit of Cindy, Joel does nothing but horribly complicate his life further.

With compliments to *Extract*, I find myself captivated by the litany and talent of film-industry stars in this movie. Jason Bateman fills the shoes of Joel well, making a relatable icon of the frustrated everyman.

The rest of the cast also sports

an unusually high amount of talent for a Mike Judge film. Mila Kunis as Cindy steals the show with comedic moments paired with feminine wiles. J. K. Simmons and Ben Affleck do well as "buddy" characters to Joel. Simmons builds a serious rapport with Bateman as the gruff company manager Brian, whereas Affleck takes a humorous route as the amiable, drug-addled bartender, Dean. Kristen Wiig holds a major role and completes an expectantly effective performance as Joel's wife. The rest of the cast includes David Koechner, Beth Grant, Gene Simmons, Dustin Milligan and Clifton Collins Jr.

Following the protagonist around is something that Mike Judge does well. I was hoping for a bit more in this movie. The picture easily flowed with some exceedingly funny moments and presented a humorous atmosphere that contained no poison of forced phony gags. Judge precisely controlled the camera to represent the scenes in the best angles.

Judge directed every aspect of his film as expertly as always, capturing the audience's attention as they watched Joel's life slowly circle the drain. I felt like I had seen this identical tale before, that the factory was too similar to the cubicles of *Office Space* or the future society of morons in *Idiocracy* to be considered original.

How many times will Mike Judge write a story about a man confounded by the life around him, thrust into a worse situation, just to work his way out into a better position and end it with a final scene that this one guy's life might just be on the up-and-up from now on? I have seen it three times, and time has not sweetened it.

It's not that this is a bad movie. No, the comedy is genuine and plentiful, the acting is great with a large selection of strong performers and Judge knows how to craft this story and lead his audience. I only wish that perhaps next time a Mike Judge film comes to theaters it will not follow the same story line as his past films.

I can only recommend this film to those that greatly loved or have not yet had their fill of previous Mike Judge films, for I am sure they will enjoy this laugh riot.

EXTRACT



Image courtesy of Miramax Films

Houston's *Look* botches return to previous glory

MUSIC
Whitney Houston <i>I Look To You</i>
GENRE: R&B, Dance-Pop
LABEL: Arista
TRACK PICKS: "Nothin' But Love," "For the Lovers" and "I Got You"
RELEASED: Aug. 28, 2009
OUR TAKE: ★★☆☆☆

By Chris Ernst
Staff Writer

Whitney Houston's last successful CD was released in 1998. *I Look To You* has been highly anticipated since the commercial disappointment *Just Whitney* in 2002.

The anticipation has built up for seven years, the world in desperate need for Whitney to divorce Bobby Brown and grace the universe again. Whitney had the best-selling album by a female artist as well as the first female artist whose album debuted at the top spot on the Billboard 200.

But that was a different person in a different time. Without any context, this album would not get much attention. There is a serious gap between the Whitney Houston who sang "Didn't We Almost Have It All" and this new one. The album lacks all the star

power for which she is famous. The entire affair is slightly underwhelming and more than a little unexciting. This is quite unfortunate for her, because while there are many shudder-inducing songs in her body of work, none of them are on this album.

Gone is the Whitney of "I Have Nothing" and "The Star-Spangled Banner." Say hello to a Whitney that smells of nostalgia and melancholy. This album is an utter disappointment, fit for a D-List, talentless hack.

Somehow Akon got on this album. Think David and Goliath, but sad. Akon has nothing on Whitney, past or present.

The album's production ranges from pedestrian to really quite good. "Nothin' But Love," "For the Lovers" and "I Got You" are all well produced, with interesting sound design not usual of a typical R&B album. They take the focus off Whitney's voice, which is a good thing.

Whitney's voice is an imitation's shadow of its previous punching, pounding power. It sounds like rocks in a sack, compared to what it once was. Some would argue that her voice has "matured" appropriately for a 46-year-old. Others argue that her lifestyle is to blame. Regardless, it sounds years beyond what it should.

Because Whitney's voice has exponentially aged, gone are the "gear shifts" for which she is fa-

mous: those unnecessary, yet amazing key changes that take an ordinary song and make it soar (see "I Will Always Love You" and "I Have Nothing"). This album should not be vocally challenging for Whitney, however she sounds strained and even in pain much too frequently.

If you can get over Whitney's voice, then the more subtle aspects of the album can be heard. *I Look To You* really is not too bad, aside from Whitney's voice. It is a disappointment, but from many other artists, this album would be something of which to be proud.

It is underwhelming, yes, but only when great expectations are expected to be met like they have in the past. This album is much slower and requires time to get into its groove. No song here is good enough to be a classic, but there are a couple of nice ones.

"Million Dollar Bill" is the most Top 40-friendly. It has a great groove and at least a whisper of Whitney's old abilities. There is a funky guitar going in there and driving drums to keep it going. It does not sound restrained by Whitney's new voice, like almost all the others do.

However, it is still obvious she's just not what she used to be. There are no other songs like this one on the album, which is a shame because she struck gold with it.

"I Didn't Know My Own Strength" is a piano ballad, a poor decision because there's nowhere

for her voice to hide. The cracks and wheezes comes out in full force. The song itself is all right, but this is where Whitney's voice sounds perhaps its worst. This song is ripe for some huge runs and incredible gear shifts, but instead lacks this titular strength. It is a sadder version of "The Greatest Love of All."

This album features a disappointing version of Whitney's voice. However, there are some good elements worth hearing. It

does take a while to get beyond how far her voice has fallen. There are no big bombastic songs like the Whitney of before, but there are some mid-tempo grooves. There is nothing innovative here.

Do not expect the Whitney you know and love because you will be disappointed. Consult YouTube and your personal music collection for when you want to hear some real Whitney. Realize that this is something different that is not as good.

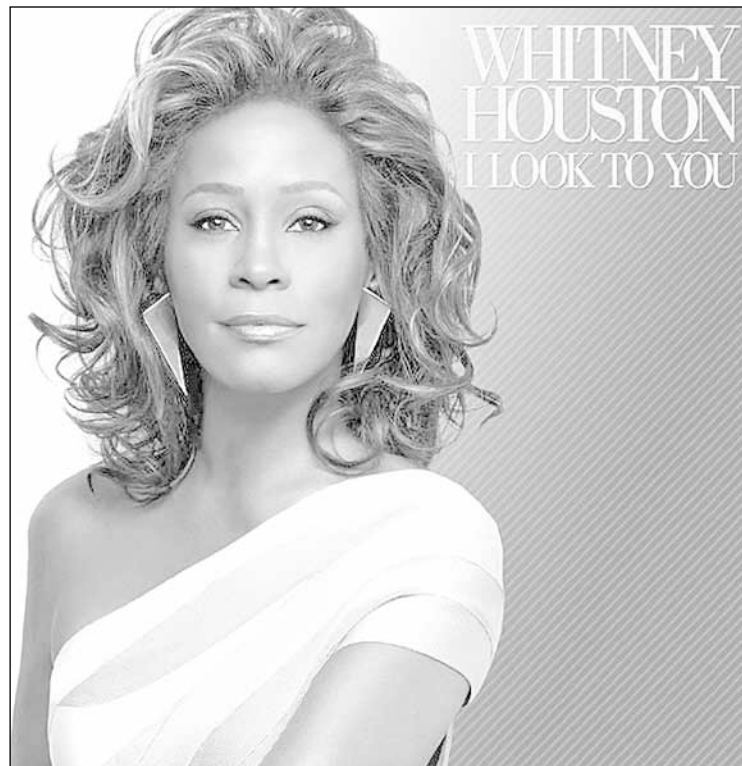


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Top Chef sizzles in new season

TELEVISION
Top Chef: Las Vegas
NETWORK: Bravo
WHEN: Wednesdays, 9 p.m.
GENRE: Cooking, Drama
STARRING: Padma Lakshmi and Tom Colicchio
OUR TAKE: ★★★★★☆

By Chris Harless
 Contributing Writer

The beginning of the new school year marks the return of many of our favorite shows. The premiere of *Top Chef: Las Vegas* occurred on the same night as the finale of *Top Chef: Masters*. The sometimes deemed inferior, *Top Chef: Masters* managed to reduce some of the anticipation for the normal *Top Chef* over the summer months, but fans are still understandably excited for the return of the real *Top Chef*.

The host of the show, Padma Lakshmi, promises that this season will bring "more chances to win big than ever before." That certainly fits in with the Las Vegas setting of *Top Chef* season six. There will likely be some very interesting Sin City themed challenges including the occasional high-stakes Quickfire Challenge. These challenges give the contestants the opportunity to win large cash prizes.

This season promises to be bigger and better in every way. As always, the guest judges include some big names from the culinary world as well as some big celebrities. The season premiere started

off with a particularly recognizable guest judge, Wolfgang Puck. Other judges include Tyler Florence, Todd English and Natalie Portman.

The contestants for this season reinforce the bigger and better nature of *Top Chef: Las Vegas*. They include some of the most experienced chefs of any of the seasons as well as a few chefs on the other end of the spectrum. Like always, all of the contestants seem to have their strengths and weaknesses.

The chefs from this season include a 2009 James Beard nominee and a chef who worked with Eric Ripert, a superstar in the French-American culinary world. Of course, there are lesser-known chefs as well including a caterer and several restaurant owners.

All of the chefs are given an equal chance of winning the grand prize. This prize is normally \$100,000 and a feature in *Food and Wine* magazine. However, this season's prize is even bigger than previous seasons because it also includes \$100,000 of merchandise from Macy's.

This season also has the added drama of a sibling rivalry. The two brothers, Michael and Brian Voltaggio, are expected to be very competitive with each other, and it is already apparent that this is true. Although they live about 3,000 miles apart, that competitive sibling rivalry is still very much alive.

Top Chef is a rare type of reality show. In most shows of this genre, the contestants frequently fight or argue, but this rarely happens in *Top Chef*. It's refreshing to watch a show with people who are respectful to one another for a change,

and to many people, this is one of the more alluring aspects of the show.

As a relatively new *Top Chef* aficionado, I can report that I have thoroughly enjoyed the show since I began watching it. While most new fans will not understand some of the culinary terms used in the show, they will quickly pick up on them. You may even learn a thing or two about cooking from watching *Top Chef*.

Avid fans of the series are naturally very excited for the new season, and they are definitely excited for good reason. The first two episodes of the season were filled with different twists and exciting challenges, and I fully expect to see more twists and turns as the season progresses.

If you already watch *Top Chef*, then the new season will surely live up to your every expectation. If you don't currently watch the show, then *Top Chef: Las Vegas* will definitely turn you into a fan of the series. I know I look forward to the rest of season six and many more seasons to come.



Image courtesy of Bravo

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THEME CROSSWORD: WASHINGTON SLEPT HERE

By Robert Zimmerman
United Features Syndicate

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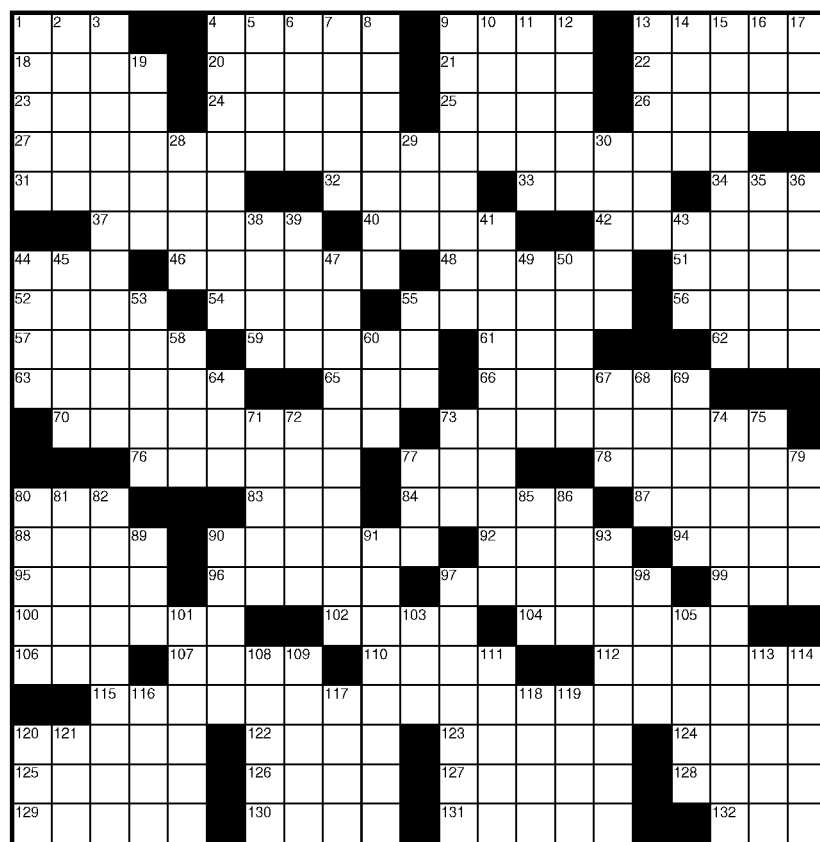
- 1. Cul-de- --
- 5. Penn and Lennon
- 10. Gibe
- 14. Badenov or Godunov
- 19. Son of Aphrodite
- 20. Simple dwelling
- 21. Burn plant
- 22. Circumstance
- 23. A state: abbr.
- 24. Something for a maestro
- 25. Do in
- 26. Shrewd
- 27. Start of a quip by Steven Wright: 6 wds.
- 31. Soap opera, e.g.
- 32. Baseball's Slaughter
- 33. Layer of ore
- 34. Abbr. in bus.
- 37. WWII's "Big Three"
- 40. Anthracite
- 42. Jumbled mass
- 44. Mil. facility
- 46. Game of cards

DOWN

- 1. Tractor-trailers
- 2. Originate
- 3. Viola da gamba cousin
- 4. Finnish composer
- 5. Old oath
- 6. High: prefix
- 7. Not a soul
- 8. Sound
- 9. Fundraising event: 2 wds.
- 10. Inter --
- 11. Trundles
- 12. -- Epoque
- 13. Turn

- 48. Start computing: 2 wds.
- 51. The Emerald Isle
- 52. Loud sound
- 54. Portico
- 55. Comes back
- 56. Gentle one
- 57. Inventor Nikola --
- 59. Poet
- 61. -- Pasha
- 62. Colletti or Rorem
- 63. Adopt
- 65. Wedding-notice word
- 66. Colleens
- 70. Part 2 of quip: 2 wds.
- 73. Part 3 of quip: 2 wds.
- 76. Set in position
- 77. Tatami
- 78. Straw hat
- 80. Flatfoot
- 83. Earlier
- 84. Friendly relations
- 87. Vehicle with pedals
- 88. Copied
- 90. Disinclined
- 92. America's Cup shape
- 94. Fed. agents
- 95. Desperate
- 96. Patty and -- of "The Simpsons"
- 97. Stage remarks
- 99. -- -de-France
- 100. Begrudges
- 102. Scoria
- 104. "-- --, no gain"
- 106. Reception
- 107. Do a farm job
- 110. Pitfall
- 112. Perilous
- 115. End of the quip: 6 wds.
- 120. Private road
- 122. Jason's ship
- 123. Leporine animals
- 124. Legal claim
- 125. Place for gutters
- 126. Commotion
- 127. Garment shape
- 128. Loose and bitter
- 129. Exhausted
- 130. Attempt
- 131. Aeries
- 132. Pistol

- 14. Closed curve
- 15. Performance
- 16. Auberge
- 17. Hogcote
- 19. Slow crawler?
- 28. Old school
- 29. Outback animal, for short
- 30. Opens wide
- 35. Check
- 36. Nicene --
- 38. Outside: prefix
- 39. Wearing footgear
- 41. Regions
- 43. Directed
- 44. Official records
- 45. In the --
- 47. Picnic spoilers
- 49. Labor camp
- 50. Hibernian
- 53. God of wealth
- 55. Itinerary: abbr.
- 58. Yank: abbr.
- 60. Collection
- 64. Biblical judge
- 67. Paved ways: abbr.
- 68. Coup d'--
- 69. Jersey
- 71. Time off



- 72. Broadway backer
- 73. Manufacturing group
- 74. Doing away with
- 75. Bumpkin
- 77. Anna -- Bullock, aka Tina Turner
- 79. Descartes
- 80. ROTC student
- 81. Think
- 82. Omnipresent
- 85. Double
- 86. Tokyo, once: var.
- 89. Agnus --
- 90. Something of worth
- 91. Russian thistle
- 93. Repels
- 97. Muslim title: 2 wds.
- 98. Rational
- 101. Borgnine the actor
- 103. Macaw genus
- 105. Fiber from the agave
- 108. Collect
- 109. City in Australia
- 111. Norman Vincent --
- 113. "-- -- cold, starve a fever"
- 114. Surrealist painter
- 116. Regular
- 117. Exchange fee
- 118. "Exodus" author
- 119. Confined
- 120. -- Plains
- 121. Kind of sheet

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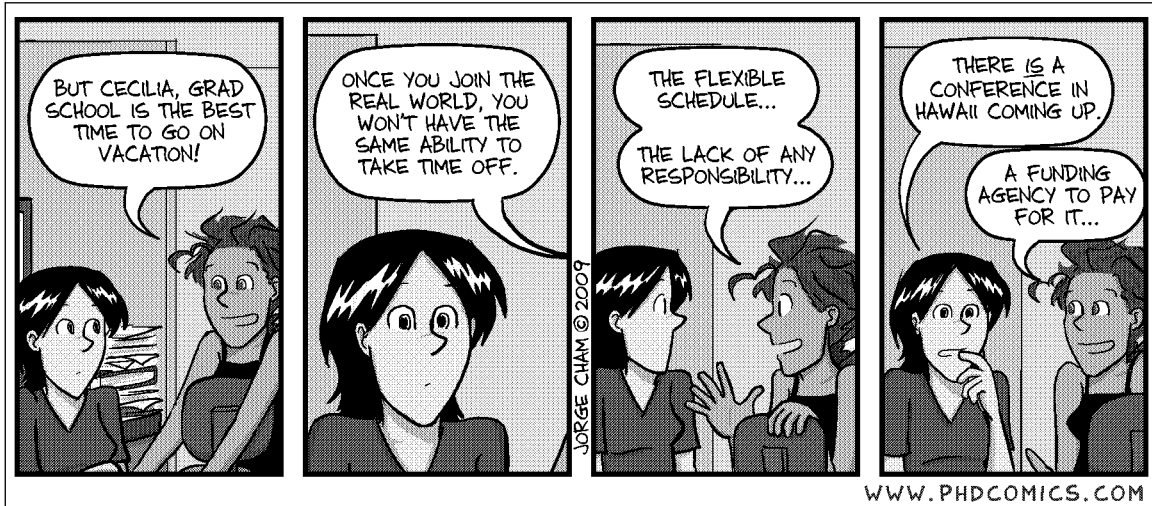
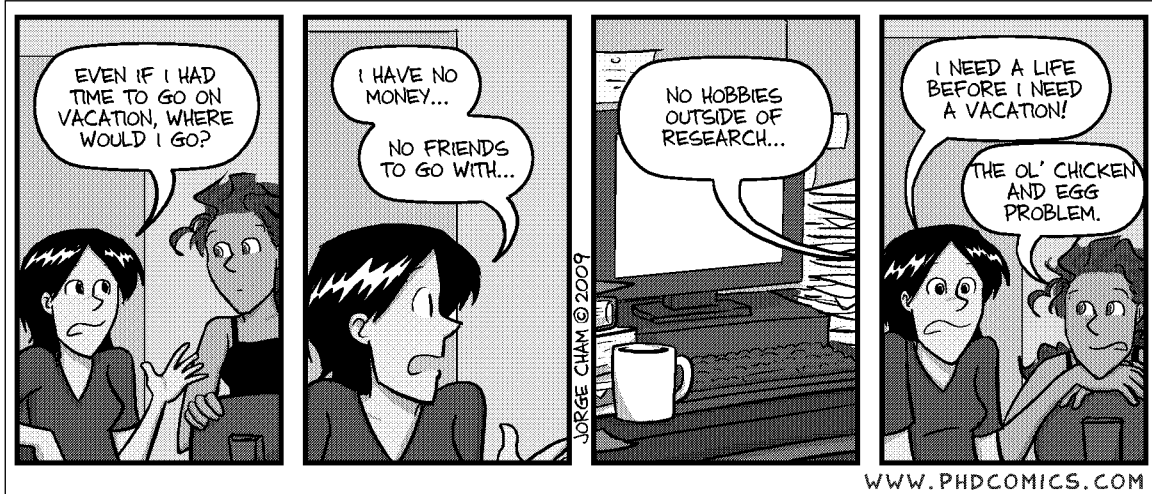
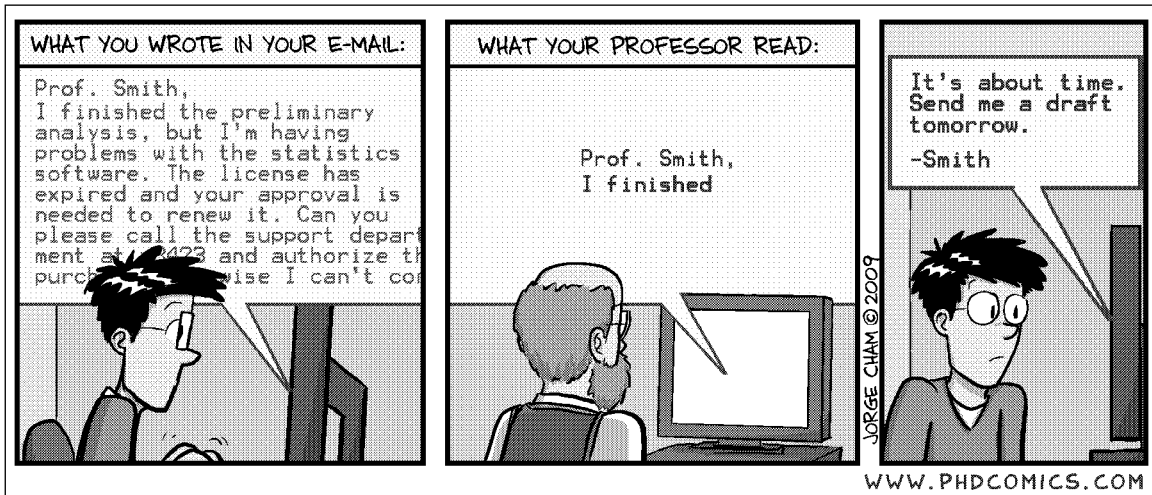
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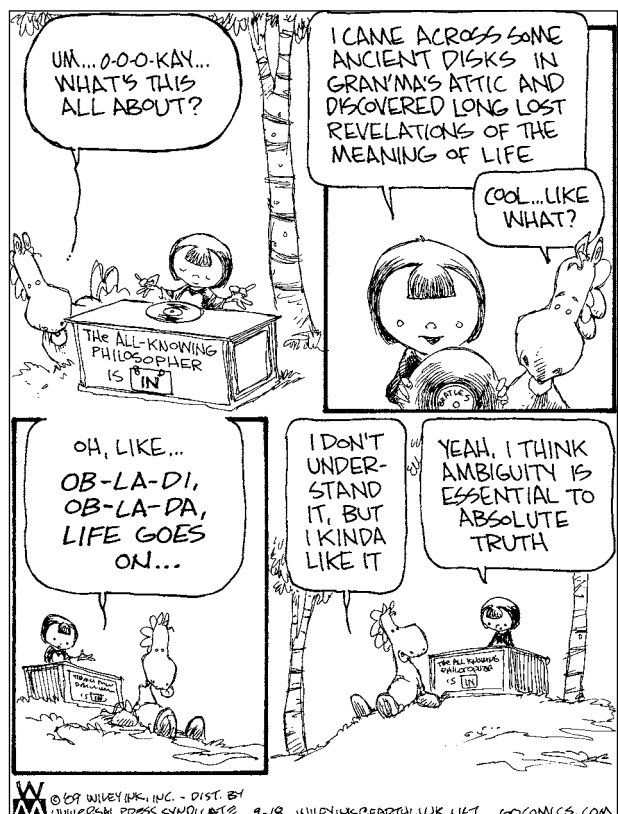


CROSSWORD SOLUTION FROM PAGE 21

S	A	C		S	E	A	N	S		B	A	R	B		B	O	R	I	S		
E	R	O	S		I	G	L	O	O		A	L	O	E		E	V	E	N	T	
M	I	N	N		B	A	T	O	N		K	I	L	L		C	A	N	N	Y	
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C	L	A	P		S	T	O	A		R	E	C	U	R	S		D	O	V	E	
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