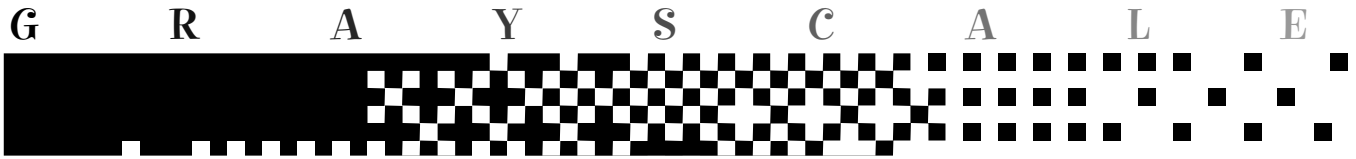


The illusion of gray created
by an arrangement of
alternating black and white dots



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Debbie's decision to permanently alter Intercourse's June deadline to accommodate WisCon delighted me, of course. (Thank you!) At least I am able to lay out the comments I wrote on *I99* last month and send them in before the deadline. But Maureen Kincaid Speller and Paul Kincaid are staying with us this week following WisCon and so I'm putting off responding to *I100* till next time, not to mention writing up a WisCon report. WisCon was great. It was wonderful seeing so many of you here in Madison. (The hotel tells us that WisCon is the only one of its customers whose attendance did not decrease or plateau out this year. WisCon is the only event that actually increased in size; about 100 more people attended this year than last. We think word of mouth is really working and that our web site is helping too.)

© Arthur Hlavaty

I hope you had a great time at Minicon as Guest of Honor. I was sorry not to be able to make it up there this year.

© Karen Summerly

I'm sorry to hear that things are so difficult between you and Bat.

I'm also really sympathetic about how you must be feeling with regard your employers' expectations of full-time commitment in spite of your part-time status. Your situation reminds me of a co-worker of mine, Julee Barnett who is a cartographer for the DNR. She used to be part of my graphic artists' unit but was transferred to another bureau. Nevertheless we keep in close contact because so much of our work overlaps with ours. Julee has been feeling incredibly frustrated that although she works 2/3 time, which is an arrangement she negotiated several years before she transferred, the bureau chief obviously expects full-time production from her. I think it's likely that she will eventually quit because of the pressure she is getting from her boss, who has already started campaigning for one of we three graphic artists to transfer to his bureau. He has no idea how his own conduct towards Julee has made it next to impossible that any of us would ever willingly accept his invitation.

Interesting question about Bush's conduct after the attacks on 9/11. I had no problem with Bush lying low after the attacks so much as I did about the false rumors that seemed to be generated somewhere in the administration concerning the terrorists' intended "third target." Within hours of the attacks on the Towers and the Pentagon, I heard reports on the radio about rumors that terrorists had targeted US Airforce 1, the president's plane. There was no need, in my opinion, to make up reasons why the president's location needed to be kept secret at that time. But it seemed like the administration felt the need to manufacture a clear and present danger to excuse Bush from behaving more like our popular culture heroes -- like TV starship captains who disregard regulations and lead the boarding crews or landing parties in dangerous situations.

© Lisa Hirsch

A few weeks ago I spent some time dealing with a de-cluttering project that I've been meaning to get to for a long time. Normally, I'm a fairly organized person; I get rid of clutter pretty quickly because it's psychologically hard for me to work around it. And I really really like knowing where everything is. But my back-up and archive computer diskettes, zip disks, and old optical drive cartridges have been accumulating since I bought my first computer in 1987, and I had never developed a good archiving system. Even worse, some of my files are getting more difficult to access. When I eventually replace my current G-3 Macintosh, the new model will no longer have diskette drives. Even with a superdrive attachment, which I've got at work because my customers still depend on diskettes, I can only read the 1.3 MB diskettes; I need to use an older computer to take files off 800 K disks. And my optical drive isn't even hooked up to my computer anymore. Zip drives made optical drives obsolete and I moved over to zips less than a year after buying the optical drive. Nevertheless, I had 9 optical cartridges, each holding 128 megs worth of files. So I temporarily reconnected my optical drive and copied files from them and from the dozens of zips and hundreds of diskettes onto my computer, organized all the files into useable categories, compressed them, and then burned a couple CDs.

That was the mind-boggling part. Once I'd compressed all the files, even though most of them were graphic files, all my home files from the past 14 years fit on two little CDs! It was hard to believe. But the same thing happened at work when I started archiving files onto CDs there. 10 years worth of work fit on one CD. Then the next year's worth fit on a single CD. Since then, I've had to burn a new CD every six months and the interval continues to shrink. The size of my files grow proportionately to the amount of RAM available on my computer.

But it was really cool to be able to get rid of two whole grocery sacks worth of diskettes and optical cartridges, not to mention 9 diskette file drawers. The de-cluttering project cleared up a lovely, big space on my desk.

I hope you are able to plan your vacation in Hawaii with your mom in such a way as to let you feel like there is room for relaxing. I admire how you are consciously making room in your schedule for spending time with your mom. I tend to wiggle out of opportunities to spend extended time with my folks.

At one point my folks suggested that my brothers and their families drive down to Austin to visit my sister Julie and that my folks travel with Scott and I to Austin. Luckily it wasn't necessary to make up an excuse, because it was impossible for us to get time off from work at the time. We visit my folks every few weeks, but only for a day or two at a time. That's about all I can take. But I don't expect to feel guilty about it after they're gone. It seems to me that I'm maintaining the best relationship possible, given our differences.

© Christina Lake

What an amazing story about your sister Mary and ex-husband Mike. As you say, sometimes the oddest part of such family stories is that they have endings, that we see the whole cycle and feel the implications of mortality.

I think I'm primarily a star-person who happens to have lots of relationships with web-people. I don't think I've ever introduced someone from work to an outside-work friend. In fact, I tend not to do things outside of work with work colleagues. And I notice this about myself: although I'm open about my involvement in WisCon and SF conventions (it's hardly possible to be secretive about WisCon in May), I like and even nurture the impression among my colleagues that I am a little weird. I may even do something similar with family members; nevertheless, I enjoy watching interactions between family and friends. I think there must be a behavior range between web and star characteristics, rather than an either-or condition.

This apa is certainly a web artifact ... one that I rarely mention to other friends...

© Debbie Notkin

Your insight about the possible consequences of wanting to also "put [your] life down" sent shivers up and down my spine as I thought about the power of wishful thinking. Thank heavens you aren't in a situation in which your best option is to cast everything away and start over again from scratch. I know I've had similar thoughts at times, but every time I've ever envied someone who declared "responsibility bankruptcy," and wished that I could follow their lead, I've never really considered about how hopeless things would have to be, and of the pain that would make such a decision seem worth it. Thanks for the insight.

Good advice to Janet about allowing oneself to wallow in discouragement and pessimism as a way to short-circuit ones mood. It doesn't seem like this would be a good strategy for someone who suffers from chronic depression, but I agree it's sometimes a good way to hasten the end of a simple bad mood. I find that if I push myself to imagine the worst that can possibly happen, my worries quickly becomes unreal and sometimes even ridiculous. More often, though, the exercise helps me to focus on ways I can deal with the lesser *real* things that are currently making me unhappy.

During the Madison pledge-of-allegiance flap, there was always a bit of confusion in my mind about the crucial "under god" phrase. I didn't actually remember reciting that part of the pledge when I was in grade school, but I avoided saying anything because I figured my memory was at fault. Later, learning that "under god" only recently replaced "indivisible" cleared up my confusion. I was one of the kids who used to say "invisible" at that point in the pledge, never quite understanding its meaning any more than I understood the use of its synonym "catholic" in the Roman Catholic Creed when I recited *that* pledge in church. It all makes me shake my head at the importance adults put upon the exact details of what gets taught to kids. Do they (do we) believe that merely hearing (or reciting) parent's and guardian's rules and standards will somehow imprint kids with an indelible understanding and honor for them? Of course, we all have examples of this very thing happening – of a book, an experience, an epiphany, or a lesson – grasped in our youth that stays with us forever. But it is so rare that such indelible imprinting happens around things *meant* to do so....

For years now, every time there is a big disaster, it crosses my mind that there will be people who will make use of the event as an opportunity to disappear, a chance to plant evidence of their demise and start their lives fresh. It seems to me that as identity gets more and more difficult to "lose" in our electronically/biologically documented society, that some people who would have "gone west" in the previous century, nowadays must resort to more complex and drastic strategies of escape. The times and places where the bureaucracy of identity breaks down, as in great disasters, probably offer strong temptation to those who yearn to disappear. I wonder if some of them change their minds later and what they do.

© Vicki Rosenzweig

Your comments to Art about the problem inherent in transcribing dialect-by-pronunciation, when there is no commonly accepted "master" pronunciation guide, were thought-provoking. Thanks! The whole idea of a written language becomes such an interesting concept when considered from this angle. It is not merely the symbolic representation of spoken language, it is much more. Everyone may be pronouncing individual words differently, but (ideally) everyone maintains a common definition. As an extreme example, Latin's pronunciation is only theoretically based upon actual speech, while the *meaning* of its words continues to influence dozens of other languages.

© Michael Sturza

I'm so glad you're feeling "ridiculously happy," no matter what the cause. And I wish you much fun in the process of finding a new partner!

Thank you so much for pointing me to the on-line article about *Memento*. It was really excellent. I was so impressed by that film, and the article makes me want to see it again (or a third time, rather). I loved the way the story was told backwards in the movie because it put we viewers into exactly the same situation as the central character. We never knew what came "before," only what was happening "now."

© Donya Hazard White

It seems reasonable that you might feel tentatively optimistic about Amber. She has stepped outside her home and reached out for outside support gives her some leverage for change ... this is good, right?

© Lyn Paleo

Your description of diving deep delighted me. I understand how dangerous it must be. Indeed my sister Julie has also done some very deep dives and she's told me about them in detail, but I find adventures in water completely different (in my fears and imagination) from similar adventures on mountains or in the air. I can't imagine myself in a glider, for instance, or clinging to the side of a mountain without panic. Water is different though. I think I could be much more brave in that medium.

I'm fascinated by your rule about sharing confidences about yourself being OK as long as your name is mentioned. Most people, I think, would

probably say that as long as their name was kept confidential, they didn't care if you repeated their confidence. Are you more concerned about "owning" your story than that too many people will know personal information about you?

© Janet Lafler

Many years ago, a cutting board accident also resulted in the loss of a sizeable chunk of my left index finger. In my case, I was cutting Bristol board for a mat, not collard greens, but one of the results was the same ... a blood-free cutting board. In fact, I've talked to quite a few people, mainly artists who are particularly prone to this particular accident, and every single one of them ends their story with the punch line that they moved their hand quickly enough to save their artwork and the cutting board from getting stained with blood. Odd. I'm glad you're OK.

And that your job is safe for now. I send best wishes to Matt in hopes that he finds a new and good job soon.

I hope we have as much luck as you did with your house renovation work. Two weeks after WisCon, the carpenters will begin tearing up our upstairs bathroom. It's a very old bathroom which has not experienced any modernization since the house was built in the early 1920s. The bathtub is no longer up to code (there is no secondary drainage outlet), and the room is generally in poor condition. So the guys will come in and take out the old window, destroy the solid cast iron tub (not the valuable claw foot variety, don't worry), and toss the pieces out through the window opening. Then they'll detach and throw out the sink, toilet and plywood closet and tear out the floor covering. After all that destruction, they'll put in a new bath/shower, toilet, sink, medicine cabinet, two other cabinets, and linoleum. Then they'll paint. Assuming there are no surprises (please, please), we should have a new bathroom with a much desired working shower on the same floor as our bedroom by mid-June. Wish us luck.

What kind of surgery helps an arthritic toe joint? Will they remove it? Good luck. All your reasons for dealing with your painful toe sound eminently sensible.

Did you know that a movie was made of *Restoration*. I thought it was pretty good, but I'd be interested to hear from you how the book and film compared.

Your comment about how the viewpoint characters in *The Lord of the Ring* changes in from scene to scene is an interesting insight. As I started this comment, I thought you were the person who pointed out that

these changing viewpoint characters tended to be the less powerful characters. (Do you remember who suggested this idea?) Very seldom are the points-of-view those of Gandalf or Strider (and never Sauron). Perhaps the more consistent point of view in *The Fellowship of the Ring* is due to the fact that we see the action primarily through Frodo's point of view in that first book. However, once Frodo accepts the responsibility of the ring at the end of that book, and demotes his own self-interest to the responsibility of disposing of the ring, Frodo *becomes* one of the powerful characters and therefore are viewed as if from a distance by Tolkien and the readers of the novel. It's interesting to think about *why* Tolkien might have preferred to tell the story through the eyes of less powerful witnesses. Perhaps because suspense is maintained by characters who know less of the overall story. Or perhaps because he felt that internal agendas of the powerful would taint the story with too strong a point of view. Interesting. But I wish I remembered who suggested the idea.

Your response to my comments about gratitude and patriotism -- as being based on "unshakable loyalty as an ultimate virtue," suggests that we should enlarge the net of this particular idea to include the idea of "faith." This is the religious translation of the idea that our acknowledged superior/guardian (i.e., god), must be accorded unshakable loyalty in gratitude for their care. In any guise, I really dislike the assumption. "Question authority" seems the appropriate response in all situations.

© Ian Hagemann

No, there is no regulation that I know about in Madison that outlaws "objectionable looking." But there is a lot of mythology out there, spread about by people who think Madison is way too "politically correct." On April 1st this year, the *Capital Times* ran a joke article saying that Madison was banning the selling of greasy hamburgers in the city limits. It was obviously a joke, and if you read all the way through the article, it said "April Fool," but apparently a significant number of people were willing to believe that this could happen here and wrote outraged letters to the editor. There has been a lot of debate in recent years on campus here about the banning of "objectionable speech," and I bet that someone trying to make a point about the craziness of attempting to define such a thing, parodied the idea with the term "objectionable looking." And then, some people as they will, assumed it was a real law.



LITTLE THINGS CHANGE. Here are two versions of the cover I did in October 2001 for the annual *Fish and Wildlife Report*. The version on the left features a turkey hunter. The version on the right features some fisheries guys hauling their equipment out of a river. Not being a hunter and not recognizing what is apparently a quite familiar scene during turkey-hunting season, my first impression was that the guy on the left was a terrorist in somebody's backyard. The editor of this publication was stunned when I mentioned this impression to her. She is a hunter and hadn't looked at that image with a non-hunter's point of view. I was immediately sent a new photo to use on the cover. The guys even look sort of heroic, don't you think?