

By the WAY #11

by W. Andrew York
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Commentary

Well, this is the end of the By Popular Demand game. Congrats to Nathan Simmons in his win. For those of you who are wondering who he is, he's a long-time friend of mine who made the mistake of asking me what I was doing when I was getting ready to do the first turn of the game. So, he was dragged into submitting answers and he did surprisingly well for someone who's not involved in the Dip (and related) hobby. It just goes to show that this truly is an "anyone plays" game - so see if someone in your family, a housemate or friend would like to participate in the next "anyone plays" game starting below.

As I write this, Austin is in the midst of "The Big Chill" - an every couple of years ice storm (and even snow!). This storm is a bit worse than normal with a lengthy period below zero (around 48-72 hours) with continually reforming storms coming up from Mexico through Del Rio, across San Antonio to Austin.

We've been mostly below freezing since early today (Monday) and we aren't expected to go above it until maybe Wednesday afternoon. The Agency I work for was closed today (MLK Day, skeleton crew due to the Legislative session was told to stay home) and Tuesday. I expect we'll be closed at least a half day on Wednesday and maybe open late on Thursday. It's an unexpected break, but quite welcome.

As these are types of storms are infrequent, we have no snow trucks or other specialized winter storm equipment to keep the streets passable. In addition, we have a number of critical flyovers and elevated roads that easily freeze over in extended cold temperatures with precipitation. So, ice storms generally shut down the City.

Late Update - We didn't get above freezing until Thursday.

Texas Spotlight

Texas History is now Texas Spotlight as I want to talk about 'things Texan', and that may not be something to do directly with history. So, the name change and the topic for this time. If there's something you'd like me to write about or are curious about something Texan, just let me know. I know when I first came to Texas (yes, nearly 23 years ago) I had the wrong impression of what it was going to be like (visions of tumbleweeds and the ilk - I still haven't seen a tumbleweed in the wild).

I mentioned above that the Texas Legislature is in session. Some of you may wonder why that is notable. The Texas constitution is very specific about when the Legislature may meet and how the session is structured. Every two years, for 140 days, the House and Senate convene to consider bills, pass legislation and establish the bi-annual State budget. The only other reason the Legislature may meet is if the Governor calls a special session. In that case, they meet for a maximum of 30 days and may only consider topics specifically determined by the Governor.

Bills may only be introduced during the lead-in to the session through the first two months. After that, new bills can only be brought to the Legislatures under a small set of exceptions. Bills all must be passed by the end of the session and signed within a month by the Governor. Unless specifically passed to take effect immediately, the bills become effective at the beginning of September or the following January (which depends on how it is written and what it will take to implement it).

One would expect this would focus the legislators on important topics, critical changes to laws and ensuring the proper funding of the government for the next two years. However, all sorts of interesting bills have been filed such as:

- making the bolo tie the official tie of Texas
- encouraging the NFL and cable networks to resolve differences in carrying college and professional football games (one of the few bills filed in both the Senate and the House)
- naming Friona (a city in the Panhandle) the Cheeseburger Capital of Texas
- a requirement that every state agency list on their website "every expenditure" made using state funds, presumably including such things as a \$1.25 charge to make a copy of a key. This might be workable if the bill included a floor (all expenditures over \$5,000 or something like that)

All in all, each legislative session is an interesting time for those working in State government. You never know what will eventually pass and how it will change the way you do your job.

A perfect example of that is last session's House Bill (HB) 1516 which mandated the outsourcing of the 27 largest state agencies' server/mainframe hardware and their systems administration. Currently, the effective date for the private company to take over is April 1 (an ominous day in its own right) and we're in a sprint to prepare for the handover (I've been one of our Agency's primary coordinators for effort, being a part of my job for the past 16 months). Unfortunately, for our Agency, it appears the outsourcing will add a significant amount to what we spend annually for those operations. However, the overall goal is that across the involved agencies there will be a net decrease in costs for the State.

LOCs

Doug Kent (dougray30 of yahoo.com): FYI - Often the ink with new printers is only 1/2 full, if that means anything, plus they look at the item itself as a loss-leader because they know they'll make \$\$ with the consumables. [WAY] With this printer, I think everything was full. At the end of the first six months, I had to replace the colored inks for the first time and the second time with the black ink cartridge. I do a decent amount of printing (I'm very much a hands on, paper kind of guy) so I think that's fair.

Berend (Berry) Renken (berend02 of aol.com): About your printer and the ink you bought for it: in the time your printer lives (several years at least, hopefully) you'll always spend more on ink than you did on the printer, so it makes sense to consider ink prices rather than printer price prior to purchase. Canon printers are a good deal (very good quality of prints, paper never jams, cheap ink, and the printers themselves aren't expensive either (ours was \$140 and prints as well as copies, scans and faxes). [WAY] I went into this printer purchase fully aware of the cost of the ink cartridges. The friend who told me about this particular printer, when all the inks run out, just buys a new printer so that it is always under warranty. I just couldn't be that disposable with a piece of equipment.

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Feature: Well, this section is going to be abbreviated this time around - it'll only have a couple of updates on previous columns. The item I was working on hasn't gelled. Right now it sounds like a rant rather than a serious piece. It's on the media's use of "red" and "blue" states, portraying American politics as a black and white issue. Hopefully I'll be able to revise it sufficiently to use in a future issue.

Update on the last column: If you'd like to look at MilleniumCon activities, go to www.milleniumcon.com and click on the pictures link. They had a person take pictures of every event (or at least try to!) and have uploaded hundreds of them to the site. However, if you were interested in the "Circus Maximus" stadium, click on "5", last column, third picture down (I'm on the left in the blue shirt without a head). That picture and the four pictures to the left of are that game and stadium. To get a better picture of me, click on "18", fourth row, second picture down. I'm to the left of center in the ballcap.

Update on the lost wallet (two columns ago): I was able to clear up the fraudulent charge, after a few phone calls, on a major credit card fairly easily. On the other hand, the charge on the gas card was completely different. After calling, I was told to write a letter (no clue on what they wanted in the letter) about the situation. I just received the feedback - their investigation is that "this item belongs to you". So, I'm stuck for the \$21. The difference between how the two companies handled my case amazes me. I would have expected the exact opposite process from each of them.

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Review: "Children of Men" is an amazing film highly recommended to all except the younger crowd as it deals with difficult topics and has a fair degree of violence. The setting is a beleaguered Britain eighteen years after the last child has been born. The general population operates in a fatalistic environment heavily skewed under an oppressive police state enforcing stringent anti-immigrant laws. As immigrants are discovered, they enter into a system that carries not-to-subtle overtones of the processing at the death camps and the living conditions of the ghettos of the Nazi period. Meanwhile, the ruling class lives in an idyllic enclave, enjoying the best of what remains and has been "salvaged" from the rest of the world which, apparently, has lost much of the trappings and constraints of civilization.

The underlying theme is a portrayal of what could happen when hope and the possibility of a future is lost to mankind. Most people are living day-to-day, the underpinnings of the economy having been knocked down. There is little need for investment or long term capital projects with the drive to improve or innovate suppressed by the knowledge that there is no next generation to benefit from it. Additionally, the rapidly shrinking population crushes the basis of a free market economy which, in many forms, looks to growth to drive it along.

The acting is generally good, but Michael Caine gives an award winning performance. He captures his character and provides what little light-hearted tone there is to the movie. Some of the other characters are a bit one-dimensional, such as the leader of the resistance movement, but I think that is more from the way the character is written rather than the abilities of the performer.

One note when seeing the movie, be sure to pay attention to the entire screen. Many times, incidental actions foreshadow future events or emphasize the extremes of the movie's world. For instance, when Owen is shown waking up, watch the video screen and when he goes to visit his brother, look at the brightness of the park and what the actors are doing in the background.

[[A nod to a friend, Ken, who I often see movies with along with his wife. He and I were chatting after the movie and he helped formulate some of these ideas]]

Observation: After having said uncomplimentary words about how much plastic goes into the shell of a car, I'm going to do a 180 and make a kudos about it. The resiliency and pliability of the plastic makes removal of thick ice much easier. This morning, with a short inch of ice, I was able to push down on the roof and in on the doors, fracturing the ice and making it fairly easy to clear it away - and as an added bonus, got a start on the ice on the windows.

Playlist for this issue: Extended News Shows for "The Big Chill", Golden Globes telecast, CBS Evening News, KASE 101 (Country Radio Station)

Coming up Next Time: State holidays in Texas and ???

=====GAME SECTION=====

On TAP:

Scattergories! (Join Now! Open to Anyone at Any Time!)
Let me know what else you're interested in seeing here.....(sorry, we're out of Old Milwaukee)

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BY POPULAR DEMAND

The goal is to pick something that fits the category and will be the "most popular" answer. You score points based on the number of entries that match yours. For example, if the category is "Cats" and the responses were 7 for Persian, 3 for Calico and 1 for Siamese, everyone who said Persian would get 7 points, Calico 3 and the lone Siamese would score 1 point. The cumulative total over 10 rounds will determine the overall winner. Anyone may enter at any point, starting with an equivalent point total of the lowest cumulative score from the previous round. If a person misses a round, they'll receive the minimum score from the round added to their cumulative total. And, if you want to submit some commentary with your answers, feel free to.

NOTE: I always acknowledge an Email submission. If you've sent something in and don't hear back from me after a couple of days, send again or check with Jim. I let him know if I expect to be away from the computer for any extended period of time.

Round Ten Category – People

Round Ten Results:

- 01) Favorite Comedienne: Ellen DeGeneres 4, Robin Williams 1, Janeane Garofalo 1, Samantha Bee 1, Phyllis Diller 1, Wanda Sykes 1, Lucille Ball 1, Dawn French 1, Rosie O'Donnell 1
- 02) Favorite Singer: Frank Sinatra 2, George Strait 1, Dean Martin 1, Barbra Streisand 1, Tori Amos 1, Amy Lee 1, Britney Spears 1, Bob Dylan 1, Faith Hill 1, Bing Crosby 1, Eva Cassidy 1
- 03) Favorite Movie Personality: Angeline Jolie 2, Harrison Ford 1, George Clooney 1, Tom Cruise 1, Albert Brooks 1, John Wayne 1, Paul Newman 1, Gene Hackman 1, Cary Grant 1, Steve McQueen 1, Tom Hanks 1
- 04) Favorite TV Star: David Letterman 2, None 2, Tom Welling 1, Tony Shalhoub 1, Ray Romano 1, Patrick McGoohan 1, Keifer Sutherland 1, Bradley Whitford 1, Hugh Laurie 1, Oprah Winfrey 1
- 05) Favorite Politician: George W Bush 2, Hillary Clinton 2, Barack Obama 2, Bill Clinton 1, Sonny Bono 1, Marc Ellinger 1, John Danforth 1, Gerald Ford 1, None 1

Pardon any spelling errors in folk's names, I corrected as many as I could find. For instance, there were four different spellings for Ellen on the orders...

Individual Scores:

01) Nathan Simmons:	Williams, Strait, Ford, Welling, B Clinton	= 155 + 5 = 160
02) Jamie McQuinn:	DeGeneres, Martin, Clooney, Letterman, H Clinton	= 138 + 10 = 148
03) Edi Birsan:	DeGeneres, Streisand, Jolie, Monk (Shalhoub), Obama	= 137 + 9 = 146
04) Jim Burgess:	O'Donnell, Sinatra, Hanks, Winfrey, Ford	= 138 + 6 = 144
Steve Koehler:	Ellen (DeGeneres), Sinatra, Cruise, Raymond, Geo W Bush	= 134 + 10 = 144
06) Doug Kent:	Garafalo, Amos, Brooks, McGoohan, Bono	= 130 + 5 = 135
07) Brendan Whyte:	DeGeneres, Spears, Jolie, Letterman, GW Bush	= 121 + 11 = 132
08) Marc Ellinger:	Bee, Lee, Wayne, Sutherland, Me!	= 126 + 5 = 131
09) Tom Howell:	Diller, Dylan, Newman, none, none!	= 120 + 6 = 126
10) Kevin Wilson:	Sykes, Hill, Hackman, Whitford, Danforth	= 110 + 5 = 115
11) Fred Davis:	Ball, Crosby, Grant, None, H Clinton	= 105 + 7 = 112
12) Christopher Janik:	[[no entry received]]	= 81 + 5 = 86
Berry Renken:	French, Cassidy, McQueen (Papillon), Laurie, Obama	= 81 + 5 = 86

Best possible score: 12. Best score achieved: 11 by **Brendan!**

WAY's Commentary:

- 01) Favorite Comedienne: A good cross section of who's out there with DeGeneres being one of the best known females doing comedy today. She'd probably be my choice.

- 02) Favorite Singer: Recently, I started listening to country; however, my all time favorite singer that I listen to often is Meatloaf. Interesting split between current singers and older staples.
- 03) Favorite Movie Personality: I don't know of any actor that, just because he's on the bill, I'd see the movie or by the DVD. So, I might have had to answer "none" for this one. The names chosen by the players are definitely top notch (though some are a bit quirky).
- 04) Favorite TV Star: Probably I'd have chosen someone from Star Trek - Shatner, Nimoy, Stewart, Koenig, Wheaton, Kelley, McFadden - I try to keep an eye out for when something they are in is broadcast. Of those listed, when I watch late night TV it is always Letterman and I do catch Monk. Most of the rest I don't really look out for.
- 05) Favorite Politician: I had expected more listings for Ford due to the extensive news coverage; but was a bit surprised to see Bush get more than one entry. He may be influential, but based on his poll numbers, he isn't a favorite of many folks. Obama and Hillary I'd expected would have more matches.

Player Commentary:

- 01) Favorite Comedienne: **[Edi]** Not that I watch a lot of comedy, but she has a high profile. **[Steve]** I don't know if there is a modern one who is actually doing comedy... Rosanne and Rosy are definitely has-beens. Of course, I also thought of the grandmother of all... Lucy. **[Marc]** Samantha Bee (John Stewart Show). **[Kevin]** I like Wanda Sykes. She has the mix of off color, attitude and everyday observation that gets me laughing every time. **[WAY]** You should see the outtake on the Clerks II DVD of her riffing on her part. Hilarious!
- 02) Favorite Singer: **[Steve]** This one is so wide open, I would be surprised if anyone got more than two votes. **[Marc]** Amy Lee (from Evanesence). **[Kevin]** Faith Hill. Just enough pop and country to add a bit of variety.
- 03) Favorite Movie Personality: **[Edi]** She is Fantastic. I especially liked her role as the mother of Alexander the Great. **[Marc]** James Bond or John Wayne (does personality mean actor or character?). **[WAY]** The former as the category was "People". **[Kevin]** Gene Hackman. Ever since BAT 21 I've been hooked and he never gives a bad performance, even in the cheesy stuff. **[Berry]** Papillon (as played by Steve McQueen in "Papillon").
- 04) Favorite TV Star: **[Kevin]** Bradley Whitford. I liked him in The West Wing and I still like him in Studio 60. **[WAY]** I quite liked The West Wing, but after watching the pilot for Studio 60, have passed on that show. **[Berry]** Hugh Laurie (plays House in "House").
- 05) Favorite Politician: **[Edi]** My first reaction is one that is unemployed. Considering the rise of Obama recently, he may be a favorite on the left of this group and on the other side will be McCain but I will go with Obama because right now he is so undefined that you can project any hope on him and it would reflect back... where as McCain is far to the right and on the wrong side on Iraq, abortion, the Christian Republican perversion etc. **[Steve]** Seems obvious... whether you like him or hate him, he's been the main man since 9/11... Personally, I think his presidency has been worse for the country than the attack itself. **[Marc]** Me! (won election to Country Presiding Commissioner in November after being outspent 2-1 and having a brutal third party candidate siphon votes off of me). **[WAY]** Congrats on the win - is this the first step to the White House for you? **[Kevin]** John Danforth. A good mixture of fiscal conservatism and social liberalism. We need more like him in our government today. **[Berry]** Barack Obama (there's clearly something wrong with any politician, in that apparently one enjoys and seeks (or at least doesn't mind) disproportionate amounts of attention to one's personal appearance; I'd like to see this guy become an important factor, though)

General Player Commentary:

- [Brendan]** Going for lowest common denominator, American people... let's see how many low common denominators there are out there.....
- [Kevin]** Tough categories this time. Should be some wide and varied answers. I'm not sure if any category will hit multiple matching answers. You're a mean one this time.

[Edi] I think you need to narrow the categories a little.... [WAY] You're right, I'd meant to put "Current" in front of "People" as the round 10 category so that folks would choose of those individuals on folk's minds in today's society.

[Doug] I'm hopeless on this one.

[Steve] Seems I am not alone in my bafflement over the Internet sites. [WAY] I must say I was a bit surprised considering how comfortable folks I know are with the Internet (and not just at work, as I work in the computer field). Of my immediate neighbors that I know, all have computers and three of the seven work in the computer field. Maybe being Austin has given me a skewed view of the reach of the Net.

[Fred] You didn't say whether these had to be live people, so I've put down my all-time favorites. [WAY] As mentioned above, I meant to say "Current People". [Fred] I know I sent in answers for Round 9. They must have gotten lost in the mail, or arrived too late. [WAY] Actually, I got a late note from you saying you were sorry you didn't send in any answers for Round 9. But, you're back on track this round! [Fred] These last few rounds have been tough ones.

[Berry] I'd like to join your BPD game in By The WAY at this late stage (your last round?) if that's OK with you. [WAY] Absolutely, welcome aboard. And, yes, it is the last round. But, you can get in the ground floor of the next one (see below). [Berry] Even eruptions of infinite improbability won't help me win, so rather than guessing popular answers I will submit my actual responses to the categories you posted. [WAY] That's perfectly OK. I'm glad you mentioned Dawn French - I think she's hilarious, though I've only seen a little of her work (primarily Vicar of Dibley and the Harry Potter movies. There was something else, but I don't remember what it was beyond it being a Brit-Com).

[Jim-Bob] I'm going to lose this round, I don't feel comfortable about any of my answers. None of these are who ***I*** would choose without trying to match others. Yuck, I drop a few places on this.

New Game - SCATTERGORIES!

Each round, you are given five selections and a letter of the alphabet. The player is to choose something that matches the selection and starts with the given letter. The goal is to pick something that no one else chooses, or the fewest folks match. After ten rounds, the person with the lowest score is the winner. The GM will disallow an entry that doesn't fit the selection and letter (i.e., Letter "B", Selection "Color of Sky", Entry "Blonde" or "Azure"). If modifiers are used to match the letter, they will be disallowed (i.e., Letter "B", Selection "Eye Color", Entry "Bright Red"). If an entry is disallowed, the player will score the highest amount for the selection. All entries must be in English.

Anyone can join at any time, starting with the highest score from the previous round. If a person misses a round, they'll receive the maximum score from the round added to their cumulative total. And, if you want to submit some commentary with your answers, feel free to.

NOTE: I always acknowledge an Email submission. If you've sent something in and don't hear back from me after a couple of days, send again or check with Jim. I let him know if I expect to be away from the computer for any extended period of time.

Letter: Any Vowel (not including "Y")

- 01) Gemstone
- 02) Month of the Year
- 03) Language Commonly Spoken in US
- 04) Annual Entertainment Award/Statue (i.e., like the Golden Globe)
- 05) Last Name of US President

Submit Email entries to wandrew88 of gmail.com or by mail to W Andrew York; POB 201117; Austin TX 78720-1117

Deadline is: March 10, 2007 at high noon Central Time