

# Curmudgeon-at-Large

## Three Hours a Day Adds Up

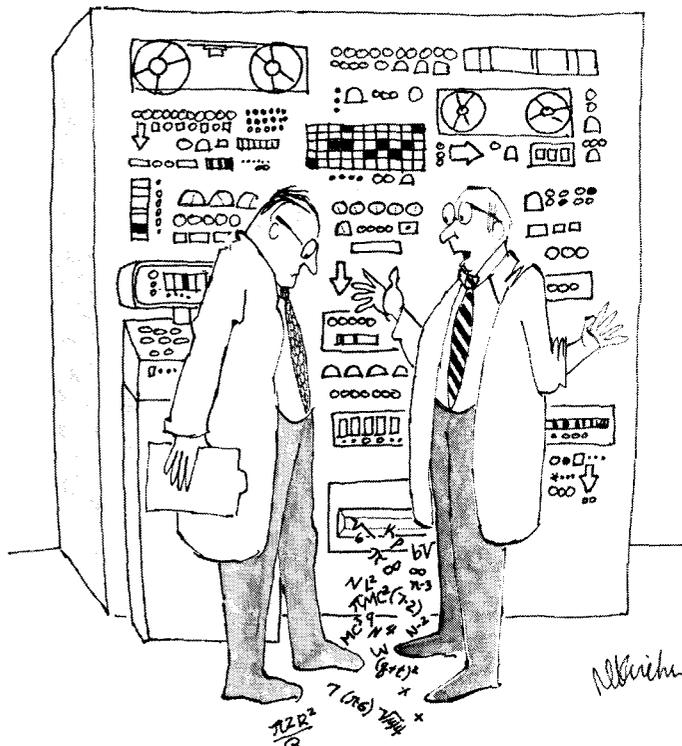
by Cleveland Amory

**A** YOUNG lady whom we know takes a full hour to get ready in the morning—for anything, we might add, even for just showing up at breakfast—and another full hour to get ready at night for bed. She also makes an average of at least one total change of dress a day; at the end of the day, say, for a late date. So what we are talking about here is a total of three hours. Almost all of this time, we have noticed, she spends in the bathroom—out of which she makes a combination of full living room, sitting room, parlor, drawing room, and, for all we know, loggia. In any case, although mathematics is not our long suit, we recently did some figuring. We gave her, to begin with, not the old-fashioned three score and ten, or seventy-year life. We gave her a full, modern, four-score life—eighty years!

And then we started our calculations. Three hours out of every twenty-four is,

even by our low mathematical capabilities, one eighth. And one eighth of eighty—surely we can do that—is ten. So when all was said and done, we reached the inescapable conclusion that our young lady friend would spend ten years of her life in the bathroom. However, we realized that since she was now just thirty, and had only spent approximately four years there so far, there was still time to save her.

Boldly, we approached her. "Did you know," we said, "that in the average firehouse, the average fireman must be able, from sleeping in bed, to get up, dress, slide down the firepole, and be on the fire engine in under three minutes?" We waited for this intelligence to sink in, and then we added, in our most withering tone, "You wouldn't have made a very good fireman, would you?" Our young friend was unimpressed. "A very good what?" she asked. "A very good fireman," we repeated. She smiled. "Fireperson," she said.



"It still has a few bugs."

**That Damn Government Dept.**—as undercovered by Alexander Sanders of Lincolnwood, Illinois, in the *Lincolnwood Life*:

The Federal Government and its agencies now have a staggering 18 flies for every man, woman, and child in the U.S., according to a report from the Office of Management and Budget. These statistics were cited at a symposium on Public Disclosure vs. Right of Privacy held recently at The John Marshall Law School.

It seems like only yesterday we heard a fellow say there weren't no flies on him.

**Senior Citizens Note**—as bifocaled by T. E. Parks of Dover, New Hampshire, in *Foster's Daily Democrat*:

The Dover Senior Center has announced that after-the-holidays activities have begun to take hold and a number of classes are going full swing.

Monday afternoons a crocheting and knitting class is held with instructors available for help. Tuesday afternoons an arts and crafts class is being conducted. Wednesday afternoons there is a leatherwork class and also a bowling team at a local bowling alley which provides a discount. Thursday afternoons a needlework and bordello class is given.

Well, they say it's the world's senior profession.

**Foreign Desk**—as intelligenced by Doris Jacobson of Philadelphia in the *Philadelphia Daily News*:

DAR ES SALAAM, Tanzania (UPI)—Agriculture Minister John Malecela says the American consumer boycott of coffee really is a plot by big business interests who hope to reap windfall profits on tea and cocoa.

Malecela said, "The boycott campaign will not serve the interest of the consumer because the same retailers would raise the prices of tea and cocoa if there is an increase in consumption.

"The truth of the matter is that whatever [the] increase in the price of coffee, the producing countries are continuing to get relatively less and less benefits from the production efforts."

The agriculture minister called on the International Coffee Organization to look into the ways of countering the boycott. **HOW IN THE HELL YOU EVER CAME UP WITH JOSE IS BEYOND ME. AND MY NAME IS JOSEPI THE MAGNIFICENT, SOON TO BECOME A HOUSEHOLD WORD.**

Frankly, we don't know how in the hell you ever came up, period. ©

# Light Refractions

## Between Facts to Junk

by Thomas H. Middleton

**G**ERALD B. MATHIAS, who teaches Japanese at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, wrote to me a few months ago to ask if I had noticed the phenomenon of *between thirty to forty things*, and the like. I answered that I hadn't seen that bit of misuse, so a few weeks ago he sent me a couple of clippings illustrating his point. One of them is a news story about a 17-foot-tall, foam-rubber Santa Claus that was stolen in Seattle. "The big Santa," says the article, "weighs between 300 to 500 pounds." The *to* in the clipping has been crossed out in red ink and changed to *and*, and Mr. Mathias has noted in blue ink, "My daughter's correction."

The other clipping deserves, or in any case is about to get, some severe excoriation. It's a Wrigley's Spearmint ad from the Sunday comic section of a newspaper. There's a drawing of a knight in armor leaping into the air and clicking his heels together. The panel reads **FUN FACTS FROM WRIGLEY'S SPEARMINT GUM**, and the text says: "Contrary to myth, medieval suits of armor only averaged between 50 to 60 lbs. and they were so well fitted, the wearer could move about easily."

We shouldn't expect comic strips to use correct English, of course. If, for instance, Joe Palooka says, "I only hit him oncet, Knobby," it's all right. Joe is, after all, a palooka, and "I hit him only once" would be all wrong for him.

I'm probably going to give more importance to this silly little **FUN FACTS** than it deserves, but the longer I look at it, the more peeved I get. It's obviously supposed to appeal to children, and it strikes me as the ultimate in junk food for young minds. It's beside the point that this is in the comic pages. Comic strips exist primarily to entertain. This panel is clearly intended not only to entertain but to inform. A child might be expected, in spite of the title **FUN FACTS** and the fanciful little drawing, to take the text a little more seriously than that of, say, *Dennis the Menace*.

For openers, anyone who has gone through grammar school should know bet-

ter than to place *only* before *averaged*. I won't belabor the point except to say that "armor only averaged between 50 and 60 lbs." indicates that that is all armor did. It didn't protect; it didn't rust; it didn't do anything but average between 50 and 60 lbs. Of course, this little gem didn't say "between 50 and 60"; it said "between 50 to 60," which is absurd.

**M**Y MAIN objection to the text, though, is that it is nonsense. "Contrary to myth." What myth? I asked Jeannie what she figured a medieval suit of armor might have weighed. She said, "About fifty pounds?" That's about what I would have guessed. Then I phoned three friends and put the same question to them. Two said forty pounds and one said sixty. So if there is a myth, the myth appears to be precisely that the armor averaged somewhere near fifty pounds. But that, in itself, is probably false.

I decided that as long as I was in the game, I might as well check out the "fact," fun or not. I didn't go very deeply into the

subject, but I did go deeply enough to satisfy myself that the "fun fact" had little basis in fact. No basis, in fact.

Medieval suits of armor varied enormously in style and weight, depending on the period as well as on the taste and wealth of the wearer, and they ranged from coats of mail to full plate. To check this, I turned to one of my favorite passages in T. H. White's *The Once and Future King*—the scene where King Pellinore and Sir Grummore have at each other (T. H. White was an authority on the medieval period, I believe):

To be able to picture the terrible scene which now took place, there is one thing which ought to be known. A knight in his full armour of those days, or at any rate during the heaviest days of armour, was generally carrying as much as or more than his own weight in metal. [When fully armoured] he often weighed no less than twenty-two stone [300-odd pounds], and sometimes as much as twenty-five [350 pounds]. This meant that his horse had to be a slow and enormous weight-carrier, like the farm horse of today, and that [the knight's] own movements were so hampered by his burden of iron and padding that they were toned down into slow motion, as on the cinema.

Contrast that with the "fun fact."

Perhaps I'm making too much fuss over a chewing gum ad in the funny papers, but someone was paid to write that garbage, and children are supposed to read it, and presumably they take it seriously, as children are wont to do.

Is it any wonder so many of them grow up to write the verbal equivalents of large globes of bubble gum? ©



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THROUGH HISTORY WITH J. WESLEY SMITH

"And for the final joust of this tournament, the challenge is accepted by our last remaining knight—Wesley, Coeur de Poulet!"