

Toys steal more than sanity

Interactive playthings increase trend toward an aliterate society

The new millennium did not arrive alone. Close on its heels was the less-celebrated arrival of highly realistic and interactive toys. It seems that the appropriate accessory of the 21st century is "reality." Everyone from television producers to toy manufacturers seem to have embraced (in a tight, strangling, bear-hug-like manner) reality as a means of taking mass consumer dollars, children's imaginations and the general public's sanity.



JENNIFER LOZANO

Toys abound with names like i-cybie, Poo-Chi, Meow-Chi, Chirpy-Chi, Furby and its newer and more annoying counterpart, Shelby. Growing up with Barbie, G.I. Joe and Legos, it is hard to imagine what it must be like as a kid today, where everything is interactive, realistic and always predictable. Not only are parents spending increasingly large amounts of money on new, interactive toys, but children are growing up defunct of incredible literary experiences that enrich and define one's childhood experience and lead to a successful and literate adulthood.

The days of hours upon hours of play and make-believe has passed. Instead, children take home annoying little creatures like Shelby, the hairy shellfish with interactive sensors and a 180-word vocabulary in English, Furbish and Shelblish (its own language) that can, and will, go on forever. The scary part is, as our society moves closer to becoming completely interactive, it also moves closer to becoming completely aliterate. An aliterate person is someone who can read but chooses not to. Unfortunately, it seems that our society has already begun its downward spiral to aliteracy.

According to the latest Gallup Poll, the number of people who do not read has been rising for the last 20 years.

"People don't take the time to read anything," said Jim Peters, editor of Brand Packaging magazine "Marketers and packagers are giving them (consumers) colors, and shapes as ways of communicating." Words come in dead last for effective marketing.

It is not merely adults who do not like to read. Teachers claim that the aliteracy trend begins with children. Then again, what child would not pick an interactive computer game over a classic children's book that requires more time and energy before achieving the desired outcome?

Technology is a double-edged sword. It serves as a tool to help hu-

mans excel above and beyond the best of their abilities in many key areas, but in the end, it can never equal the levels that a child's imagination can take him or her. Interactive educational toys are a beneficial tool that past generations of children did not have. However, parents should not forget the benefits of reading and should think twice before popping in the film version in-

stead of reading E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web* out loud.

As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "In the highest civilization, the book is still the highest delight. He who has once known its satisfaction is provided with a resource against calamity."

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RUBEN DELUNA/The Battalion

Viewpoints

Explanation for firing DJs needed

On June 18, radio disc jockeys Kramer and Twitch of KEGL-FM, a Dallas-based rock station, were fired after airing a false radio report saying Britney Spears had died in an auto accident.

The report resulted in a deluge of phone calls to the Los Angeles police and fire departments by distraught fans trying to confirm the report. The radio personalities should never have been fired for what was merely a joke. Clear Channel Communications, which owns KEGL, denies that the firing is the direct result of the fake report, but from the timing of the firings, the event definitely served as the catalyst.

For Clear Channel Communications to fire the two is like firing Orson Wells for airing *War of the Worlds*. Halfway through Wells' radio broadcast people began to fear for their lives and ran through the streets believing that Martians had invaded the Earth.

KEGL claims that the decision was based solely on other controversies sparked by the duo at their previous job in San Jose, Calif. If this was true, then why were they fired right after their fake news report?

According to Kramer and Twitch, the report was approved by their program manager. With that in mind, Clear Channel Communications should seek to rehire the two, or provide an adequate reason for the firings.

Reid Bader is a junior journalism major.

Politician's stand on stem cell research admirable

Trent Lott, a Republican from Mississippi and majority leader of the Republican-controlled Senate, said yesterday that he saw "great promise" in medical research which uses stem cells from human embryos.

This topic has been a political nightmare for most politicians because, while stem cell research has shown progress in curing diseases such as Parkinson's, the cells are harvested from human embryos, usually those that would otherwise be thrown away after an abortion.

Lott should be commended for making the first step in taking a stand on such a controversial issue.

While he stopped short of endorsing public funding for such research, it bodes well for the Republican Party that a staunch conservative like Lott would be willing to even consider political suicide for something he believes.

It is doubtful that Lott will come right out and say he believes the research is the right thing to do and that the government should fund it, but he should be applauded for making an effort.

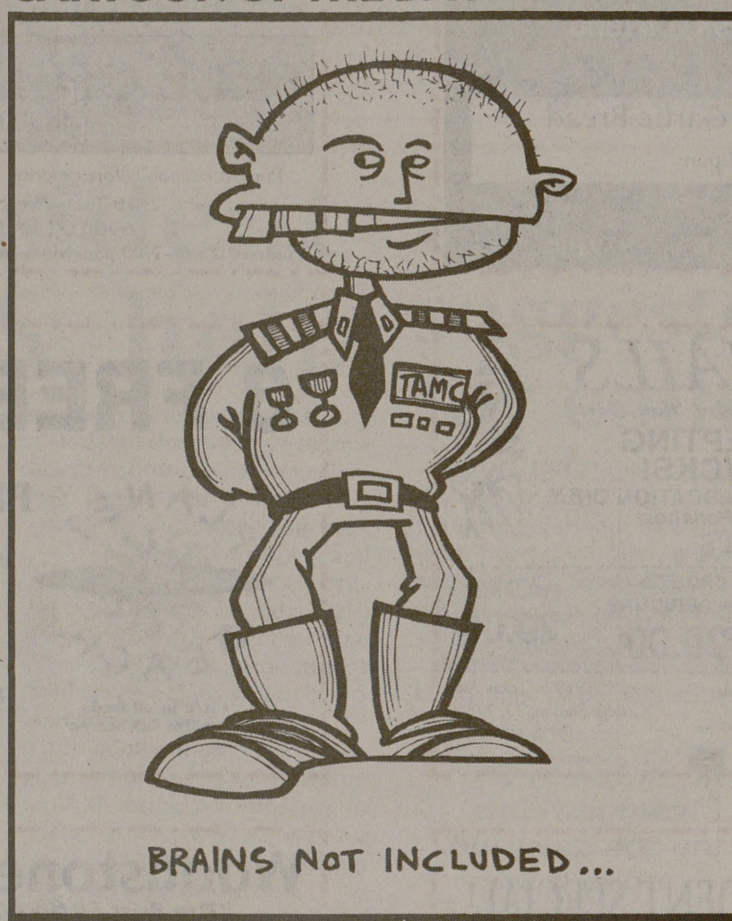
In the modern age, when politicians are no more trusted than the local pickpocket, it is refreshing to see one make a move toward his convictions, even if it is only a single step.

Apparently, the fever has caught on as other high-profile Republicans, including Sen. John McCain of Arizona and Orrin Hatch of Utah, are urging the president to sanction this research.

No matter what the public's feelings are on stem cell research, and it is more than likely that a large number of Americans do not support it, all Americans should be excited to see politicians doing what they believe is the right thing, rather than bowing to the pressure of opinion polls.

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CARTOON OF THE DAY



THE UNCARTOONIST ©

They die needlessly

U.S. policies to blame for immigration deaths

(U-WIRE) — Not a drop of water remained in the canteens, the air was a scorching 115 degrees and the sun, high and bright like a vengeful god, was burning through the flesh of 27 trekkers. In every direction spread out the shadeless terrain of southern Arizona.

Of those 27 poor, unfortunate souls, 14 did not live to see June 2001. After five days of horrible conditions, they succumbed to heat exhaustion. The survivors were promptly deported to Mexico.

Sound like a nightmare? It is. Unfortunately, though, predicaments like these are also reality for the thousands of people who try to cross the United States-Mexico border every year. Last year, 367 people are officially recorded as having died crossing the border. The actual number is probably three times as high, because many of the dead are never found in the vast expanses of land.

The most distressing aspect of this story is that it continues to repeat itself. Last month's fatalities were particularly notable because such a large group perished, but smaller groups and individuals die at the border every week.

Much of the blame for the tragedies goes to the coyotes, or guides who take immigrants across the border, and often, as in the case above, leave their employers stranded. But these

coyotes would be out of a job were it not for the United States' harsh border policies. Operation Gatekeeper, the most recent initiative, has turned the border into a militarized zone. There are now thousands of well-armed patrol agents and miles of fence along the border.

To get into the United States, undocumented immigrants often have to risk their lives by either going through the guards or crossing the border in the most remote, and

"To get into the United States, undocumented immigrants often have to risk their lives."

dangerous, areas. Many would say the militarization of the border, and the subsequent deaths of so many immigrants, is justified because the United States government is trying to maintain its boundaries and the lifestyles of its "legal" citizens. Although this argument may be true in some instances, it does not hold here.

Illegal immigration is actively encouraged in the economic sector. "Illegals" work in thousands of hotels, restaurants, poultry-processing plants, construction teams and garment factories.

Because the country's economy is so dependent on the six to nine million illegal immigrants, the Immigration and Naturalization Service rarely monitors employers who hire them. In one hand, a smirking Uncle Sam offers the illegal immigrant a wad of cash, the other hand is holding a whip.

If our economy continues to utilize and profit from immigrant labor, then immigrants should not have to risk death to get here. Furthermore, employers should not be allowed to exploit immigrants because they are not "legal." As long as the United States is the wealthiest country in the hemisphere and we continue to offer excess work here, the tide of immigration will not recede.

The militarization of the border will not stop illegal immigration. Instead, it will continue to make criminals of and kill off people who are, for the most part, honest and hard-working.

When defending our current border policies, many politicians say the militarization of the border is necessary to preserve our "national integrity." But if we truly have integrity, then we should develop border policies that do not degrade human life. Maybe then, last month's deaths will not have been in vain.

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