

Mblem

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Mensa Holiday Party

LG News (for December)

Danene Groenke

When: Dec 8th 7pm to 1am-ish (RDU Dec Games canceled)

Where: ...

In December, the RDU 2nd Sat Games night is taking a break, so that I can host the Mensa Holiday Party. Following in Ed's footsteps, I'll provide savory appetizers & munchies. If you want to bring something, bring something sweet.

For folks who really want to play games, I have a pool table & darts. I also will have a table setup for game playing (if you can find someone to play with).

Kids are welcome, but the house is not Child proof. Some non-Mensa folks will also be attending.

Directions below. If you want directions from a different way, please e-mail me.

Questions, comments, wine/beer suggestions e-mail: ...

Directions:

(See printed copy of Mblem. — Editor)

Editors Note: Please pay attention: this is for December, not for this month. We are fortunate to have Danene to host our 2007 holiday party. Many of our members already met her because she has been very active in hosting and helping games nights. Usually, the second Saturday of each month is RDU games night. It is canceled for December this year. Games enthusiasts, please come with a good party mood. Even Danene said you could play if you really, really wanted to do so and if you could find some one to play with, I still wish you remember the saying that playing games is a good excuse when you don't want to play with other people. In any case, I hope you thoroughly enjoy yourself, meet other people, stuff your face, munch and dessert yourself out, and set up the mood for the whole month of December. I usually put directions in the section behind the calendar so I can leave it out when I post the Mblem on our website. I have it here because it is for December and the back of calendar page is saved for the current month I just have to remember to remove it then.

Special Casting News

Shiangtai Tuan — editor

The Casting Director of the TV reality show “Beauty and the Geek” called me about the time this is going to the press. They are casting its fifth (5) season. They will be in Raleigh, NC and the tentative dates are from November 1 to November 7, “seeking smart and lovable guys ages 21 and up for season 5 of Beauty and the Geek”, in her own words.

Check out their websites

<http://cwvtv.com/shows/beauty-and-the-geek>

And

<http://www.myspace.com/beautygeek5>

I know you are all beautiful AND geeky, or not. In any case, being on a TV show and having the chance to win money in reality is not that bad, is it?

Schedule Change

RTP lunch has been changed from fourth Wednesday to **third Tuesday** every month.

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- *SPACIAL CAST INFO*
- *Holiday Party, ***next month***—Page 1*
- *Intellegence test Page 2*
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Intelligence Tests

David Skaar

Some time back, a topic of discussion was raised in the Mensa Bulletin regarding retesting of Mensa members, in order to purge the ranks of those who no longer meet the 2% standard, perhaps through illness, injury, or laziness, and do not merit rights and privileges anymore. After all, drivers' licenses must be renewed, and if your eyesight or knowledge of street signs falls below the standard, you should not be allowed to drive anymore, for the safety of all. Is it fair, or even safe, to have people thinking at a speed they can't control, in mixed company with rapidly changing conversational conditions?

But that's not what I'm going to be talking about today, as interesting and potentially inflammatory a topic as retesting of Mensa members and booting them out is. I am, however, going to be looking at real world intelligence testing. I believe that it's going on all the time, often not deliberately, but it's out there, and it's important. In fact, natural selection (or Darwinism) fits right in with this sort of intelligence testing – fail the really important tests, and you're out of the gene pool. One of the easiest examples is giving and following directions, especially around here (Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill) where there is no such thing as a straight road, streets change names three times, and there's eight variants on "Chapel Hill" something (road, street, blvd, etc.). I do better in the woods with a magnetized needle for a compass and a map drawn on the back of a napkin than I do on the streets around here with a professionally drawn map, detailed directions, and a passerger yelling at me when to turn. This happens even with places I've been before. I have equal luck with giving directions, for similar reasons, since I can't remember the name of the street, which way is north, or which city I'm in.

I recently did very poorly on an unannounced intelligence test at my children's daycare center, mainly because I didn't realize it was a test until too late. As the culmination of a week-long program about animals, there was an art auction with the proceeds going to animal charities. Two paintings were created by groups of 4-5 kids on each project, the art was displayed with the title and artists listed. Open bids were on a piece of paper, with parents expected to bid on the creation their child worked on. I was slow in recognizing that the point of the auction was for parents to show that they care about the charity and love their child by fighting other parents to win the painting (that's why it was clever to have art by committee, so that the bidding could get ugly as parents demonstrated who loves their child the most). As a result, my wife and I were too slow to put in a token bid on our son's painting (as most other parents did), to prove our good intentions and love without having to make an inflated bid that we wouldn't want to pay. As a result, by the time we realized what was happening, the bid had gone well past the point we wanted to get involved, and the bid sheet was there, for everyone to see, with our names conspicuously absent. On the other hand, we made a donation anyway, and have an infinite

source of kid-produced art for just the cost of materials, so maybe we failed the public test but passed the private one.

Commercials and other advertisements are a great source of material for finding intelligence tests, deliberate or not. A few months ago, I ranted at some length about a Diet Pepsi ad that made oddly worded (and vague) claims that were not fully explained, based on "research" that was not described. Another ad series from the recent past was from a car company (I can't remember which one) about the great new safety features on their cars. These features were not to protect the passengers, but rather to reduce injury to pedestrians. What kind of selling point is this for a car? Given the amount of concern that I usually see for pedestrians, most people wouldn't care about these features, and anyone who does, worries me. I can think of two motivations for wanting to merely severely injure pedestrians rather than kill them: 1) The driver is psychotic and wants to deliberately target people but not face homicide charges, or 2) The driver wants to be relieved of the burden of having to pay attention to people crossing the street, and can cope with the reduced guilt of just breaking their legs. I wish I could remember what car this was, so that I could be sure and keep my distance when I'm on foot.

The commercial that is probably the most disturbingly astounding example of intelligence testing is from a certain national company that tutors children. This company takes a "skills assessment" approach in order to identify specific areas to focus on in the tutoring. That's fine, it seems like a good approach. However, the way this is described in the commercial is not particularly effective. A junior high age student is failing algebra and describing his situation. The skills assessment determined, as he put it, "my real problem was that I didn't understand percentages", and once he understood them, everything was just fine.

This commercial blew my mind, as percentages have nothing to do with algebra, and to make the claim that special tutoring in percentages would help shows astounding ignorance. I swore than I would never have anything to do with this tutoring service for allowing that sort of statement to be made in their name. I went on blowing up every time that commercial aired, until something else occurred to me. Maybe it was intentionally wrong. Maybe they wanted me to get disgusted and have nothing to do with them. By deliberately saying something stupid, they identify the people who know enough to catch the stupid statement, and keep them away. Intelligent parents would be the most likely to complain about the effectiveness of the tutoring, and also the most likely to catch dumb things done by the tutoring service, and would raise a stink about wasting their money. That's bad for business. Parents who don't know any better are much more likely to go with the flow, assume the tutors know what they're doing, and be afraid to complain, since they can't be sure if they're right. So, this ad is either very badly made, or very cleverly made. In the end it doesn't matter, this company winds up attracting the people who don't know better, and taking their money.

(Conti. To P. 3)

(Conti. From P. 2)

And now, the pointless intelligence test I offer to you. I'm pretty sure that I've already discussed the "Monty Hall" pick a door probability problem, so now I'll mention another puzzler that I posed one day at work, and brought a world class research institution to its proverbial knees.

The Logical Pirates

Five pirates are ready to divide up their treasure of 100 gold coins. These pirates operate democratically and logically. Also ruthlessly. Starting with the most senior pirate, each will propose a division of the gold, then they will all vote on the proposal. If at least half of the pirates vote yes (3 out of 5, 2 out of 4, 2 out of 3, or 1 out of 2), the split is accepted. If not, the pirate who proposed the split will be killed, and the next most senior pirate proposes a new split. The question is – what division of the gold can the most senior pirate offer that will both keep him alive and maximize his share of the loot, assuming that all the pirates will vote according to strict logical principles.

I will now digress to give you a chance to think about the problem, as I have thought of another common form of everyday intelligence testing. Television, movies, and books. You don't have to try very hard to find any of these forms of story telling that depends on stupidity for the plot to work. As the old riddle goes, why doesn't Hamlet kill his uncle (Claudius) as soon as he learns that Claudius killed Hamlet's father? Answer – because then the play would be over in the first act, and the audience would ask for their money back. Hitchcock once said that he tried to avoid any "refrigerator moments" in his films, i.e. a flawed plot element that would register at 1AM when the film's viewers were back home and looking in the fridge for a snack, causing the logic of the plot to completely collapse. I guess standards were higher in those days, for it to take several hours for the plot holes to become apparent. I see movies with Tootsie Pop logic, where I haven't even bitten through to the chewy center before I find the flaws that cause the entire plot to collapse. I read too many books and see too many movies that would end much, much earlier, if one character didn't make such an incredibly stupid and ill-informed decision, or if the person who knew the key information did the sensible thing, and told the people who needed to know, what they needed to know. An interesting counter example to this is the movie Dude, Where's

LocSec's message:
Wade Hatcher has agreed to be our new S.I.G.H.T. coordinator as of Nov 1
 Editor: Congratulations.

My Car?_, which was soundly mocked when it came out. I later saw the movie (for free, in a hotel), and it was actually cleverly written. True, everyone in the movie is a complete moron, but the plot is clever and logical, and the characters behave sensibly, within their limitations, in unraveling the mystery behind the lost car.

Anyway, back to the pirates. I have heard a couple different answers to this problem, which I can't find any real logical difference between, so I'll give the answer that makes sense to me at the moment. I find the best way to work through the problem is to work backwards. Assume that the offers of pirates one through three (one being most senior, and five being least senior) were rejected, and they were killed. Pirate four can then offer to split the money, giving himself 100 coins, and pirate five nothing. Pirate four then votes for himself, gets half the votes, and gets the money. Logically, pirate five will then try to avoid reaching this point. So, backing up to pirate three, he could then give himself 99 coins, and pirate five 1 coin, which pirate five would then take, because it's better than the alternative. From my point of view, things get a little tricky now. I say that pirate two should offer one coin to pirate four, since if pirate three gets to choose, pirate four gets nothing. One theory also says that pirate two could also offer one coin to pirate five, but maybe he should offer two, since pirate five knows that he's guaranteed one coin from pirate three's division. If he waits for pirate three, he can't do any worse, and it's possible that pirate three will lose his mind, and offer something more than one. (Also, if pirate three gets the big haul, then it's easier for pirates four and five to knock him over the head and take all the money). So, pirate two will offer one coin to pirate four. I think the key thing to consider is that each pirate will vote against the proposal of his immediate senior, as if he gets the chance to divvy the loot, he wins big. Therefore, to stay alive, a pirate must offer money further down the chain. So, by my logic, pirate one should offer one coin each to pirates three and five (and 98 to himself), since if pirate two gets the option, pirates three and five get nothing. I think I've seen another "official" answer (or come up with one myself, I forget) which I didn't particularly like, and was not offered the logic behind it, so I'll stick with this answer until the next time I work it out myself, and get a new different answer.

Until next time, remember to watch out for those secret intelligence tests.

Letter to the Editor

In response to "My Biases"

(Mblem, September, Ed Williams)

Douglas Holzworth

Sir,

I'd like to submit the following essay/response for consideration in the Mblem.

Regards, Douglas Holzworth

I read, with interest, the article entitled "My Biases," by Ed Williams, in the September Mblem.

First, I'd like to extend my sympathies to Ed -- being a first-hand witness to terrorist acts had to be a traumatic experience that no one should have to experience. I can think of no justifications for causing death and injury to innocents.

However, the challenge Ed posed at the end of his article startled me and compelled me to respond. In the article, he describes a situation he witnessed and then asked "Your dilemma -- should the police NOT have violated the terrorist's human rights to get the confession?"

That's easy.

Of course they should not have "violated" the person's human rights. And let's dispense with euphemisms and call it what it was: Torture.

Here's why:

* Torture is an excellent way to obtain a confession. With enough torture, one can elicit a confession from anyone. You. Me. Jay Leno. Anyone. Torture is not, however, effective in eliciting accurate information. If it's intense enough to force a person to talk, they'll tell you whatever you want to hear, whether it is true or not.

* Ed's premise seems to assume perfect knowledge of guilt:

That everyone who would be subject to torture is, indeed, guilty. I would point to the majority of people swept up and imprisoned in Guantanamo to demonstrate that is not a valid assumption. In my opinion, the horror of potential terrorism is eclipsed by the horror of systemically torturing innocent people.

* Ed's premise seems to assume that the people/organizations entrusted with this license to torture would never misuse or misapply this form of coercion -- that they'd never label someone a "terrorist" for ulterior motives. All we have to do is look at the current abuses of the FISA-evading wiretaps to see that that is a dangerous assumption. Unless you want to make a case against those treacherous Quakers. ;-)

* While I agree completely that the actions Ed ascribes to the ERP were horrific and unjustifiable, may I remind everyone that just because one side is undeniably wrong doesn't make their opponents (some government, I assume -- the victims are mere pawns) unquestionably right.

* I urge people not to confuse Vengeance with Justice. The need for a vengeful catharsis can be intense. But let's call it what it is and not pretend it is something nobler.

* I agree with Ed *completely* that having a bias against Terrorists is an inherently justifiable attitude. However, as we have all learned when dealing with syllogisms and logic constructs, just because some members of Set A (let's call them "Terrorists") are a subset of Group B (let's call them "Marxists"), doesn't mean that all B = A. May I suggest, Ed, that your *real* bias is against "Terrorists" rather than "Marxists." And with that, I whole-heartedly concur.

In summary, I would warn that "More Evil" is never an effective response to perceived "Evil." That merely produces a self-reinforcing cycle and we become no better (and sometimes worse) than those we fear/loathe. If we really believe the platitudes that we mouth: That we believe in Democracy, the value of Human Life, Freedom, Honor, Principle, Morality, etc., we must *act* true to the words, even when it is inconvenient, frustrating, or dangerous.

Salute to Triad At Large Column Shiangtai Tuan

Congratulations for the rebirth of the Mensa Triad Group. This is written as a little tribute to remember our neighboring relationship.

Years back when I first joined Mensa, I learned that there were three groups in NC. It was sort of surprising what a large area MENC covered. It was (still

is) hard for any activities to serve the whole area of the group. Then on the other hand, it was surprising that Hillsborough was in the Triad group though it was so close to us. As I remembered, a lady lived there used to run a regular games night. She used to make an announcement on our newsletter because most of her attendees was from MENC. That was not the only exchange we had. We used to agree to trade information. For a while we made

announcement on each others newsletters. For a while, our Jerry Asher named himself the inter-group coordinator or some title like that. The LocSec at the time (I think it was Lois) used to have me put her name in our e-mail list so she could find out what was happening and put in her newsletter. Later, I had to take her name off because of our Betsy Barbeau's objection that our e-mail list

(Conti. To P. 5, Salute)

Editor's note: Since Douglas Holzworth's article was a response to the September Mblem Article "My Bias", I had to send it to the original author to see if he would offer an answer to be printed in the same issue. Here it is.

Response to Douglas Holzworth

(See opposing page)

Ed Williams

Thanks to Douglas for his sympathies. Also, I am glad to get any response to my article, even a negative one. However, I must reproach him gently for taking unwarranted liberties with what I said, and imposing his own world view on my brief paragraph about the dilemma. He proclaims that my statement about the Argentine police's treatment of the Marxist terrorist ("violated his human rights") is a euphemism for "torture". The Universal Declaration of Human Rights uses the phrase "...torture or cruelty, inhuman or degrading treatment..." (see those "or's"?). Obviously, I didn't make myself clear enough. I don't know what specific methods they used to get the terrorist to confess,

I don't know what Douglas means by my "premise", but I was NOT "assuming perfect knowledge of guilt". Nothing is ever "perfect", but the police had excellent reason to believe that this terrorist was involved in a plot to kill many people by the use of bombs. It turned out they were right, and whatever torture or "degrading treatment" he suffered resulted in saving the lives of many children. To me, it is almost incredible that anyone would think that the terrorist's pain or discomfort was not a good trade for those children's lives. Of course his

intention might have been "only" to kill a couple of dozen police or ordinary civilians. The precise target was not known when the interrogation started.

Douglas expands his argument way beyond the single, isolated event of my "dilemma". He seems to imagine that my proposing this dilemma constitutes an argument in favor of "torture" anywhere and everywhere, perhaps even "systematically torturing innocent people" (who are these "innocent people"?). NO! I asked for readers' answers to a specific case. And then somehow, "vengeance", a totally irrelevant point, gets dragged in.

Douglas has a point in saying my "real" bias is against terrorists rather than Marxists, and he supports me on that. I did not say that all Marxists are terrorists. I have personally known some Marxists who were not terrorists (in fact, I used to date one - some of you old-timers may remember her). But in the '70s (before the rise of Islamo-fascism) all the terrorists in Argentina were Marxists. Also, Douglas seems to have misinterpreted my article as somehow saying that the government was unquestionably right, even though the terrorists were undeniably wrong. This reminds me that somebody on the MENC Forum made a deranged interpretation that I was "helping Latin American dictatorships", perhaps because I did not criticize the Argentine government as harshly as I did the Marxist terrorists. In any case, I would like to hear other comments and responses to the dilemma and to my article. Indeed, other people who write for Mblem have remarked to me that they wonder if anyone really reads what they (we) write. More comments would be welcome.

(Conti. From P. 4, Salute)

can only take applicants from MENCans. (We can keep people who had been a MENCAn. So, all Triandans, or Triad Mensans who had been on our e-mail lists will stay on there until you unsubscribe by sending a message to menc-unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com or menc-forum-unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com.) Answering our invitation, several people from Triad came and joined one or two of our Outer Bank's trip. I don't particularly remember any invitations from them though (other than the general invitation to the RGs they run. I will talk about that a little later.)

There were some personal exchanges too. One of our members, Ellen Devlin, a very witty person, the punster of all punsters, with a well received published book under her name, used to live in Durham. She went to Greensboro for a masters degree. After she got her degree, she worked in Greensboro for a while but moved back to live in Chapel Hill and worked in Raleigh. Unfortunately, she passed away just as her second book was about to go to print. Then there was Pete Fuchs who was on our ExComm and was our treasure for a long time. He married Lois from Greensboro. They lived in Raleigh for years, generously inviting MENCans to their house for games night every month. They also organized a Thursday morning walk until they left this area.

Triad group had a few talented people who knew how to run RGs. They used to take turns with the Charlotte group and the Columbia, South Carolina group to run Al'Carolinah RG. I remember going to one of their earlier ones in Burlington or some where like that, met a lot of interesting people and had a lot of fun. That was why I was very surprised when I heard their group was dissolved for no one even wanted to run their own group, let alone an RG. Because of this, our groups actually merged. Portion of the members became members of MENC. As I mentioned above, MENC had been covering a large area. It has not been possible to have any activities to serve the whole group anyway. Even though Durham, Raleigh, and Chapel Hill form the so called Triangle area, not many people from Raleigh come to Durham brunches or dinners and vice versa. So it is natural to have individual activities in smaller areas such as Wilmington, Fayetteville, or then Greensboro. MENC serves as an umbrella to sustain the structure of a Mensa Local Group. We supply a newsletter, an ExComm and a name. Come and go as you wish. We are glad to help. In the meanwhile, we tapped quite a few talents to work together in MENC. Their contribution is enormous for MENC and we serve as their training ground to redevelop themselves and regain their confidence, I believe.

Now, after three or four years they have found enough people to get the name Triad back on the Mensa map. Congratulations.

Words From Nick RVC Column

Nick Sanford

In September Atlanta held a first of its kind Regional Gathering headed by Jason Hoffman. This was more of an upscale gathering. The event was held at The W hotel. Room rates were a bit high; however, I have never stayed at a hotel with flat panel TVs and beds that you would not mind dieing on. Did you know The W has a night club atmosphere? I didn't know such places existed.

Anyhow, there were three a la carte activities that required an extra fee: wine tasting, a murder mystery dinner, and an engineering challenge. I have to be honest, I predicted that the wine tasting would do well and the other events would flop. I was wrong. As it turns out, all three events went

over very well.

I think there is a lesson to be learned from Atlanta. It may be that having high end events and charging extra for them is a great way to provide a benefit to those that are interested without penalizing those that aren't. It could also indicate a fundamental change in the general thinking about RGs. This was by far the most expensive gathering that I have ever been to. The attendance also rivaled the greatest head count I have ever seen at a gathering that did not have an AMC meeting. Maybe this means that people want to pay more to receive a better event? I think both of these fundamental ideas need to be explored.

The M-Friends group of Memphis also held a gathering in September. If memory serves attendance was around 30. However, it was not an official gathering and hence was not heavily advertised. This was my first "small gathering" and I must say that I defi-

nately see some appeal to keeping the head count down. It was fun spending a lot more time with individuals than is normally possible. The hotel was very inexpensive, and it did show. However, that was more than made up for by the management letting us do pretty much anything that we wanted to.

So there you have it, two polar opposite gatherings, both very enjoyable, and both coming with lessons that are worth listening too. Which one did I like the best you ask? Well, all that I'm going to say is that I will be at both of them next year.

Your homework for now is to ask yourself what you would rather have: A relaxing \$300 weekend with friends at a motel, a \$400 weekend at a run of the mill hotel with a pair of exciting events, or a \$500 weekend at a high end hotel with half a dozen exciting events. Would you be willing to add \$50 to that last one for even more excitement?

Silk Road Shiangtai Tuan

From August 23 to September 6 I went on a trip with a commercial tour group to Silk Road region in China. It was a commercial tour group because it was organized by a commercial company. They arranged transportation, hotel, meals, etc. However, it was also a "Cultural Tour". A group of us who are interested in the history, geography, and people of that region got together and invited a professor to go with us. He was an expert for that and had been giving lectures about it for years. He not only gave lectures in the bus, in hotel dining halls, but also helped share the duty of the touring guides who were very knowledgeable already. Now what is "Silk Road" and what is the significance of the region so we have to make a special "cultural tour" for it. To explain that, I would have to give a little historical back ground.

Generally speaking, SR refers to the old trade routes between Europe and Far East, that is, China. Silk happened to be the major merchandise and most valuable and exotic at that. Why it was so? It would take at least one article of many pages to explain. It might be the project of another time. In any case, SR should include the large area covered by the trade routes from XiAn, the then Capital of China, to Rome. However, travel and trade within China

was easy and the same within the Europe proper. The mystery about China for the Europeans was created by the difficulty of going there through a "hard to travel" area including a dessert and a huge "tribal" occupied area in Middle East. So, Silk Road usually refers to the region as far east as the east edge of Gobi dessert and as far west as the Middle East. As a result, a narrower definition of Silk Road means the few paths going through that difficult area and routes leading to it.

Going across a desert was like traveling across the ocean, or worse. You could never say for sure if you can make it. Before going out, in addition to storing up food and water, the merchants would pray for a safe journey and safe return. After having crossed the desert, they would pray to give thanks. Back than, Buddhism was the dominant religion in that area. So, they built a lot of Buddhist temples. Because of the restriction of building material in that region, "the temples" were built in the form of caves. Many of them survived nearly two thousand years. They are the main "attractions" of Silk Route. This issue is fairly crowded, I will talk about the history, the caravan, the caves, etc. in some coming issues of Mblem.

