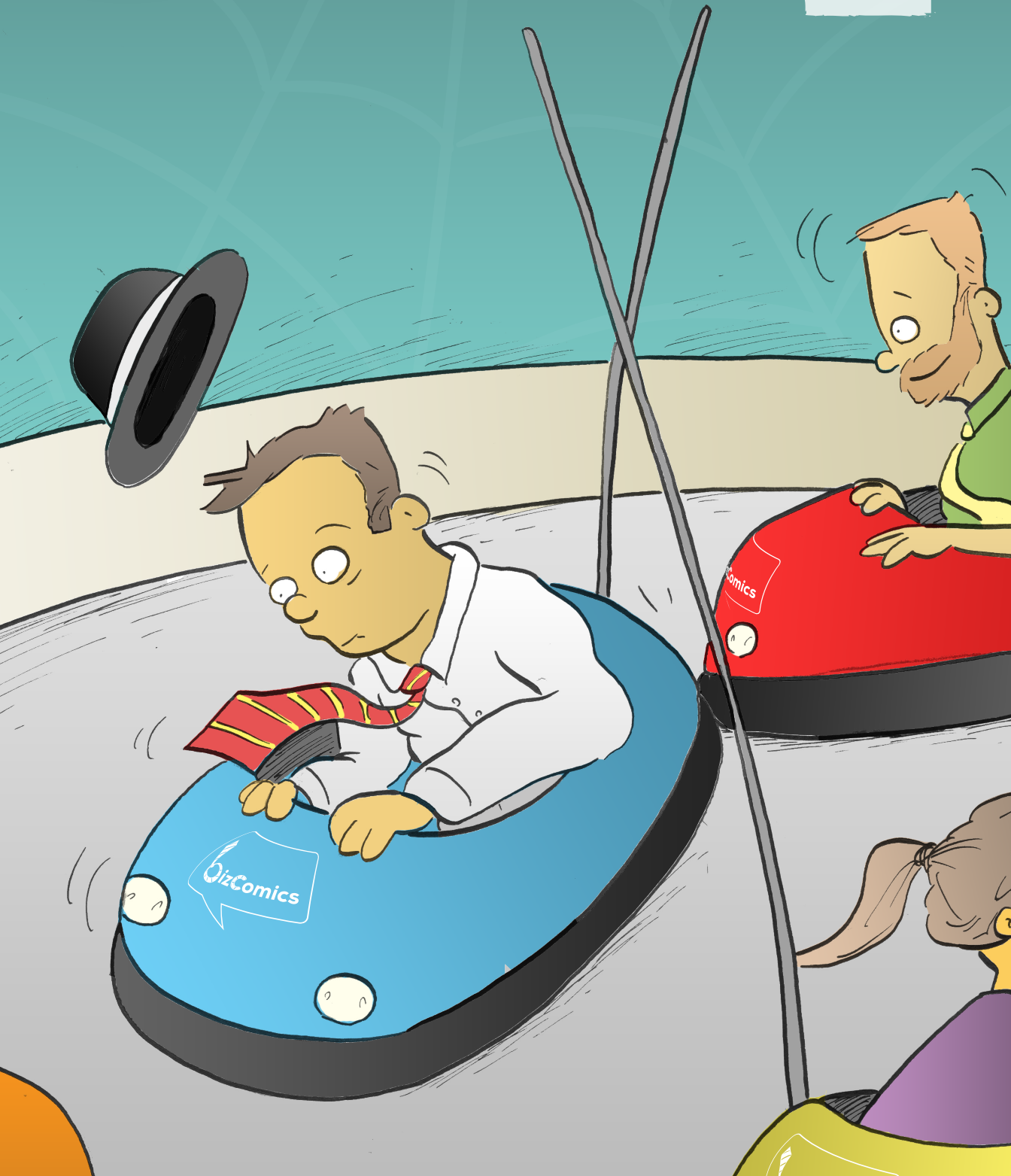


THE TANGLED WEB

A
MAX IMPACT
MYSTERY

VOLUME ONE
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YA KNOW THAT OLD EXPRESSION, "THE MORE THINGS CHANGE THE MORE THEY STAY THE SAME?" I WAS THINKING ABOUT THAT THE OTHER DAY BECAUSE EVEN THOUGH WALLY SCOTT LIVED IN THE LATE 18TH AND EARLY 19TH CENTURIES — LONG BEFORE AL GORE INVENTED THE INTERNET — HE SEEMED TO UNDERSTAND WHAT A MESS THE WEB WOULD BECOME.

AND RIGHT WHEN MY PHILOSOPHICAL MUSINGS WERE ON THE VERGE OF GETTING DOWNRIGHT PROFOUND, MY PHONE RANG. EXCEPT WHEN IT'S A PAYING CUSTOMER, I HATE IT WHEN THAT HAPPENS.



MAX IMPACT
HERE. WHERE
DOES IT HURT?

ARE YOU THAT
MARKETING
DETECTIVE?



NO. I'M THE TOOTH
FAIRY. AND I DON'T
PAY FOR CHOPPERS
WITH CAVITIES.

UNLESS YOUR
WORK IS
BETTER THAN
YOUR JOKES, I
CAN TAKE MY
BUSINESS
ELSEWHERE,
WISE GUY.



DON'T GET YOURSELF
ALL EXERCISED THERE,
JUNIOR. WHAT CAN
I DO FOR YOU?

I GOT A
WEB PROJECT THAT
WENT SIDeways. I
WANT TO KNOW IF
YOU CAN FIGURE
OUT WHY.



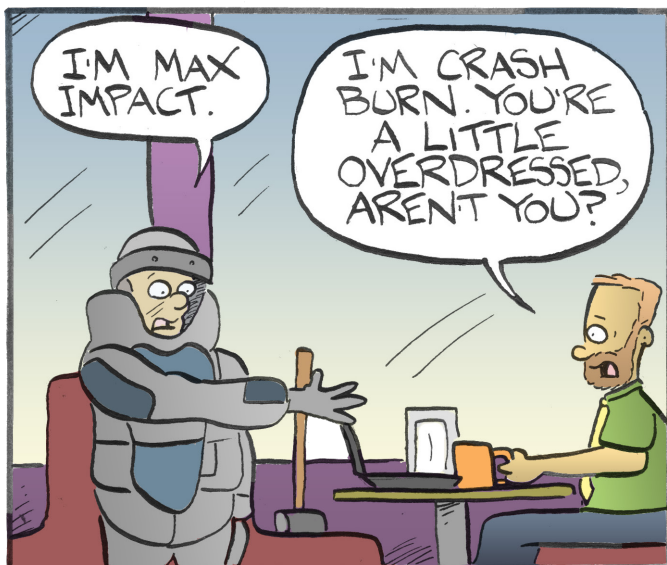
I THINK I
CAN HANDLE
IT. WHERE DO
YOU WANT ME
TO MEET YOU-
AND WHEN?

MEET ME AT THE
GREASED SPOON
DINER IN 20 MINUTES.
I'LL BE THE DUDE
WITH THE LAPTOP
AND THE SLEDGE-
HAMMER. I'M
BUYIN'!



I WASN'T SURE HOW BADLY MY CALLER HAD BEEN DECEIVED. BUT, APPARENTLY, HIS WEB PROJECT WAS A KNOTTED MESS OF SOME SORT. I WASN'T SURE IF HE'D REALLY PICK UP THE TAB AT THE GREASED SPOON. SO, I MADE SURE I PACKED MY WALLET.

AND I WASN'T SURE IF HE'D ACTUALLY TAKE A SLEDGEHAMMER TO HIS LAPTOP, AT LEAST NOT IN A PUBLIC ESTABLISHMENT. BUT IF YOU TAKE A COMMENT LIKE THAT AS AN IDLE THREAT AND SHOW UP UNPREPARED, YOU DO SO AT YOUR OWN PERIL.

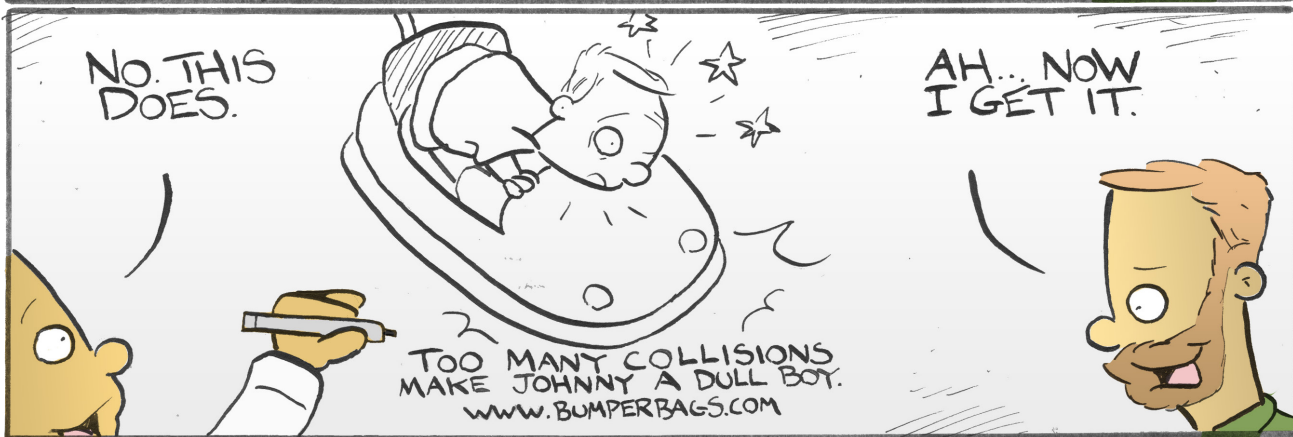
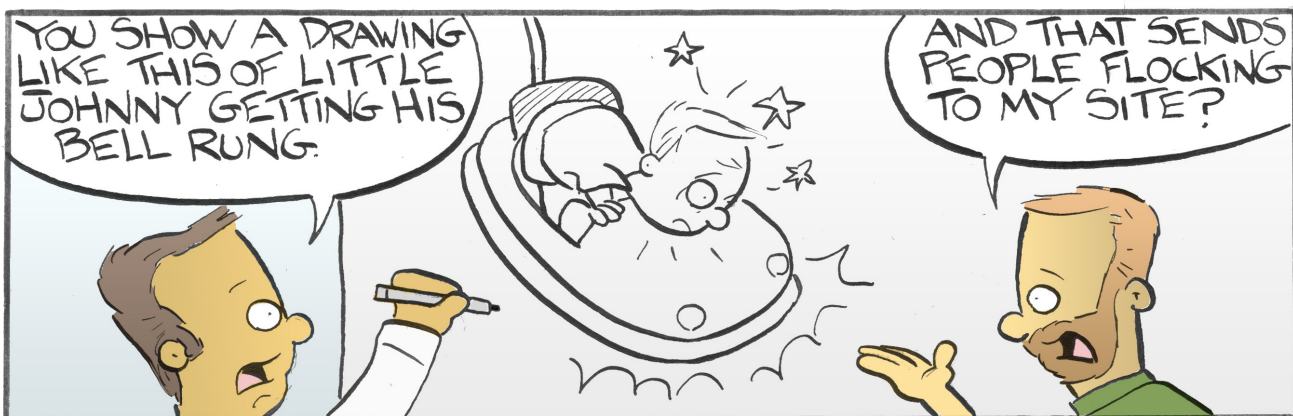
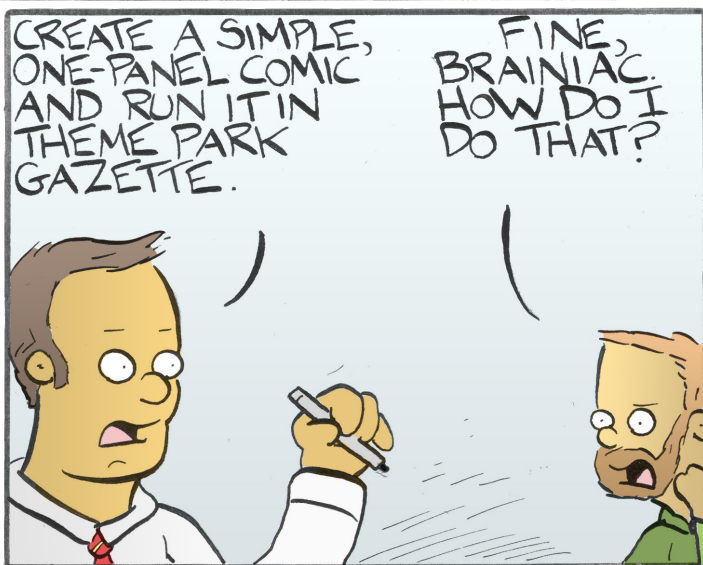
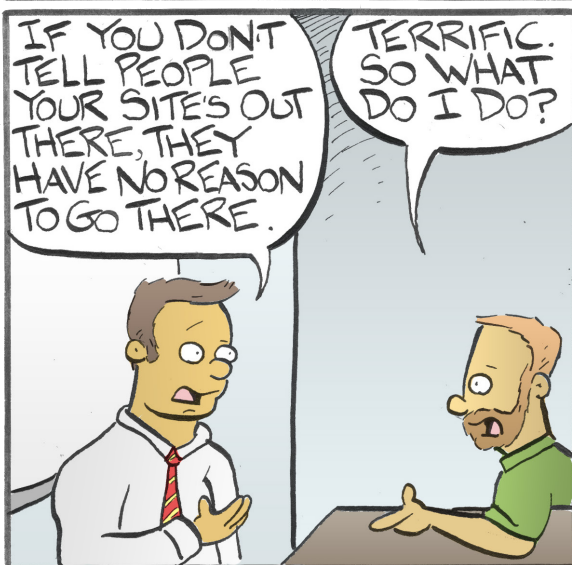
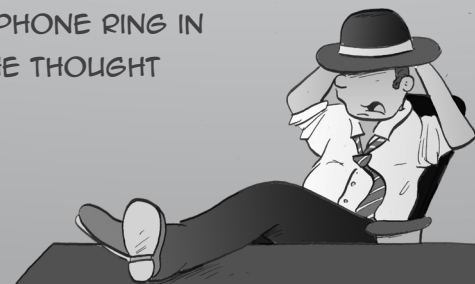


I APPRECIATE VARIETY AS MUCH AS THE NEXT GUY. BUT SOMETIMES THE BEST PLACE TO START SOMETHING IS AT THE BEGINNING. IT WAS FAIRLY EVIDENT CRASH BURN HAD JUMPED IN SOMEWHERE NEAR THE MIDDLE.

AND THE AGITA HE CAUSED HIMSELF HAD ME THINKING ABOUT HIS BROTHER, HEART. I DECIDED BABY STEPS MIGHT BE THE BEST WAY TO PROCEED, SINCE I IMAGINED CRASH WOULD BE EVEN HARDER TO GET ALONG WITH IF HE PULLED A HAMSTRING OR SUFFERED A GROIN STRAIN. I WAS ALSO GOING TO SEE IF I COULD GET HIM TO LOSE THE SLEDGEHAMMER.



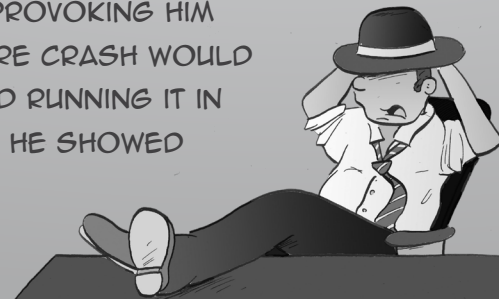
I'D CRACKED SOME HARD NUTS BEFORE. BUT CRASH TOOK THE CAKE. IF I COULDN'T FIND A WAY TO BREAK THIS DOWN FOR HIM AS SIMPLY AS POSSIBLE, I WASN'T SURE I'D BE ABLE TO SOLVE THE CASE. AND IF THERE'S ANYTHING I HATE MORE THAN HAVING MY PHONE RING IN THE MIDDLE OF A PHILOSOPHICAL REVERIE, IT'S THE THOUGHT OF HAVING MY PERFECT RECORD BROKEN.

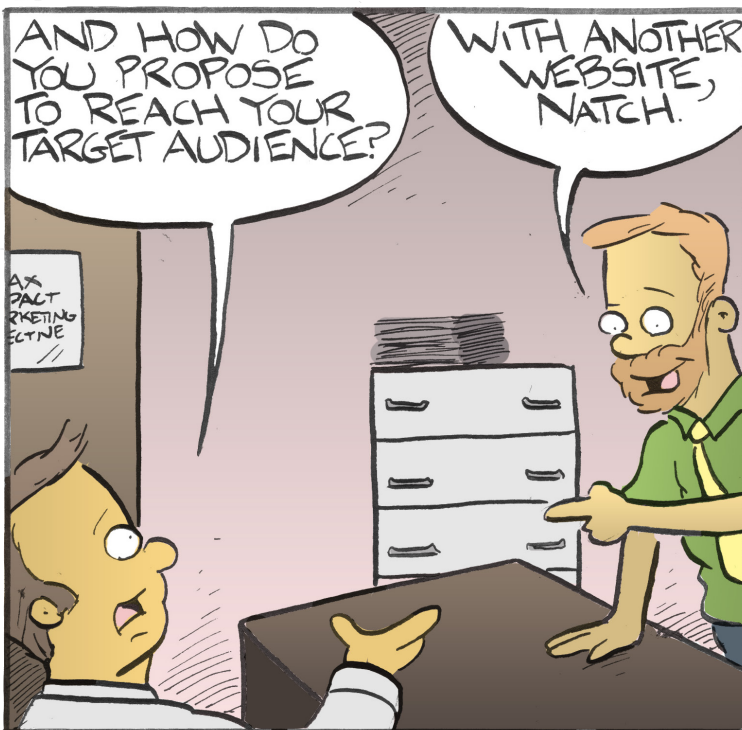
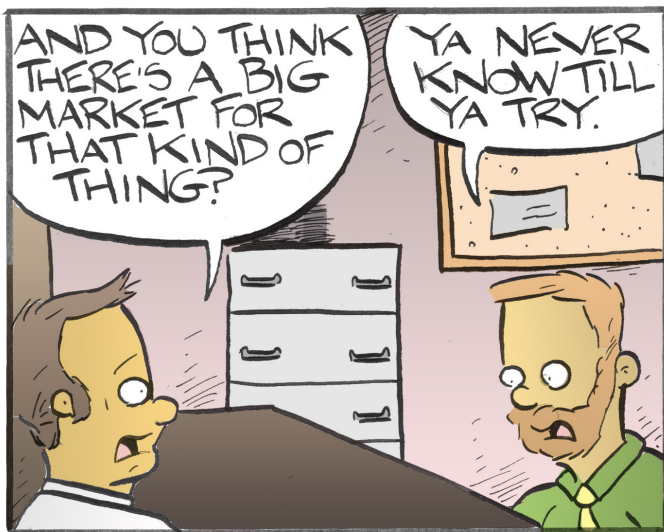


CRASH'S REACTION REMINDED ME OF THE OLD WORDPLAY:

"I SEE," SAID THE BLIND MAN, AS HE PICKED UP HIS AXE AND SAW.
BUT I DIDN'T TELL HIM THAT.

I WAS TAKING THE REVELATION TO WHICH I'D LED HIM AS A MORAL VICTORY. AND I DIDN'T WANT TO TARNISH IT BY PROVOKING HIM TO TAKE A POKE AT ME. BESIDES, I WASN'T SURE CRASH WOULD FOLLOW THROUGH BY CREATING THE COMIC AND RUNNING IT IN THE GAZETTE. SO, IMAGINE MY SURPRISE WHEN HE SHOWED UP AT MY OFFICE A COUPLE OF WEEKS LATER.





AFTER CRASH LEFT, I COULDN'T HELP BUT DRIFT INTO ANOTHER PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEMPLATION. THIS ONE WAS ABOUT WALLY SCOTT AGAIN. EVEN THOUGH HE PUBLISHED *MARMION* IN 1808, IT'S ALMOST LIKE HE KNEW GUYS LIKE CRASH WERE COMING — THAT CRASH, LIKE EVERYBODY ELSE, SAW HIS LITTLE SLICE OF THE WORLD AS HIS KINGDOM. OR MAYBE WALLY JUST UNDERSTOOD THAT CONFLICT IS AN UNAVOIDABLE ASPECT OF THE HUMAN CONDITION. WHO KNOWS? I, FOR ONE, WAS CONTENT WITH KNOWING THAT I'D, ONCE AGAIN, MADE THE MARKETING WORLD A BETTER PLACE THROUGH COMICS.



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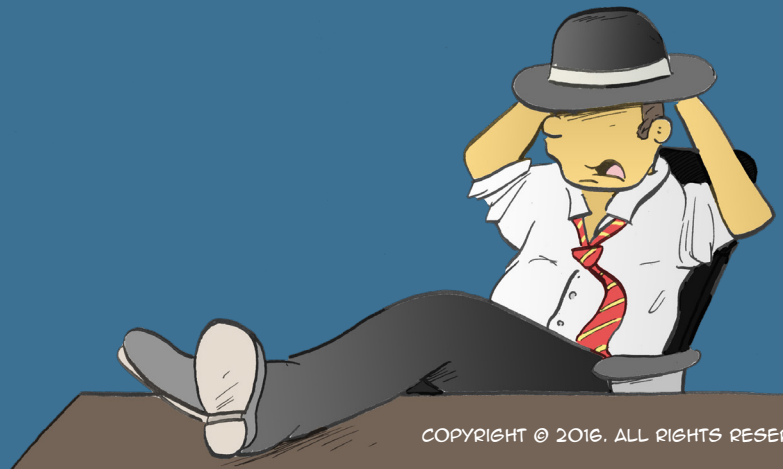
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