

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

This One Compiled by

Sam Aurelius Milam III
c/o 4984 Peach Mountain Drive
Gainesville, Georgia 30507

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My essays and other of my writing are available on [Pharos](#).



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Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

Introduction

What writer can resist the temptation to write an introduction? Surely not me. So, I hereby introduce this compendium of wit and wisdom. There are dozens of such collections already available, so why do another one? Because it's fun. That's also why I'm writing this introduction, and why I'll keep messing with the compendium. It's fun, and it'll never be finished.

One of the fun things about a collection like this is to figure out just what it is that's being collected. Some of these things are laws, some are axioms, some are theories, some are opinions, or warnings, or observations, or merely comments. A while back, I came across the interesting term *obiter dicta*.¹ Anyway, I'll just call them *old sayings*.

There are hundreds of old sayings that I could have included in this compendium, but didn't. Why? Beats me. For quantity, read *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*. The next question is, where'd I get them? They came from all over. I read them somewhere. I heard them somewhere. People gave them to me. I even made up a few of my own, although most of those went into either [Milam's Notes](#) or the *Stray Thoughts* sections of the [Frontiersman](#). From time to time, I discover, in the collection, an incorrectly quoted old saying. When that happens, I make the correction. Some of the old sayings are credited, and some of them aren't. The ones that aren't credited came to me that way, and I wasn't able to discover the authors, although I did try. The others might or might not be credited correctly. Who knows? The most reliable credits are the ones that I recorded when I personally overheard somebody make the statement, or from fiction that I was reading. That brings me to an interesting point. I haven't made any distinction whatsoever between old sayings by fictional characters and old sayings by historical characters.

The most important difference between fictional characters and historical characters is the intentions of the authors who created them. —[Milam's Notes](#)

Truth and wisdom are found as often in fiction as in fact and are sometimes easier to understand in fiction —[Frontiersman, February 2012, page 2](#)

In either case, fictional sources or historical sources, the old sayings are equally true.

I've arranged these old sayings alphabetically by title, but I didn't use the first word of the title. I used whatever word seemed important and gave that word a bold initial, to indicate that it was the key word. It still might not help to find a particular old saying, because the titles don't always match the content. Sometimes they don't seem to match anything at all. I debated with myself for a while if these old sayings should even have titles. I finally decided that the compendium would be more fun if they did, so they do. And here they are.

1 **1** : an incidental and collateral opinion that is uttered by a judge but is not binding

2 : an incidental remark or observation

—*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, Eleventh Edition, © 2011

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~ A ~

the Aaron's Philosophy

Man shares certain significant characteristics with the rat and cockroach: He will eat almost anything. He is fiercely adaptable to a wide variety of conditions. He can survive as an individual but is at his best in swarms. He prefers to live, whenever possible, on what other creatures store or biologically manufacture. The conclusion is inescapable that he was designed by nature as a most superior sort of vermin - and that only the absence, in his early environment, of a sufficiently wealthy host prevented him from assuming the role of eternal guest and forced him to live hungrily, and more than a little irritably, by his own wits alone.

—The Aaron, in *Of Men and Monsters*, Chapter 24
by William Tenn

Acheson's Rule of the Bureaucracy

A memorandum is written to protect the writer, not to inform the reader.

—Dean Acheson

the Airplane Law

When the plane you are on is late, the plane you want to transfer to is on time.

Allen's Law

Almost anything is easier to get into than out of.

—Agnes Allen

Allen's Prediction

The lion and the lamb shall lie down together, but the lamb won't get much sleep.

—from *Without Feathers*, Random House, 1977
by Woody Allen

Allport's Law of Mistakes

It's impossible to make a single mistake. Single mistakes become multiple mistakes.

—Milton Dickens
Professor of Speech, U.S.C.

Anderson's Observations, Poul Anderson

After all my time here (Jupiter V), I've yet to see any problem, however complicated, which when you looked at it the right way, didn't become still more complicated.

—Arne Viken
Call Me Joe

The aspect of having “worked out for the best” is the inescapable consequence of the viewpoint of the people who descended from the victors.

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

“... It’s practically a *sine qua non* of a field agent staying alive, that he be able to outthink not just the opposition, but his superiors.”

—Captain Sir Dominic Flandry

A Knight of Ghosts and Shadows, Chapter 1

the Expected Answer Principle

When solving a problem, it helps if you already know the answer.

Arthur’s Prayer

May God grant us the wisdom to discover the right, the will to choose it, and the strength to make it endure.

—King Arthur

speaking at the Round Table in the movie *First Knight*

~ B ~

the Laws of Backpacking

1. Any stone in your boot migrates against the pressure gradient to the point of most pressure.
2. The number of stones in your boot is directly proportional to the number of hours you have been on the trail.
3. The size of each of the stones in your boot is directly proportional to the number of hours you have been on the trail.
4. The weight of your boots is proportional to the cube of the number of hours you have been on the trail.
5. If you take your boots off, you'll never get them back on again.
6. The weight of your pack increases as you consume food from it. If you run out of food, the pack weight increases anyway.
7. The difficulty of finding any given trail marker is directly proportional to the importance of finding it.
8. The remaining distance to your chosen campsite remains constant as twilight approaches.
9. When you arrive at your chosen campsite, it will be full.
10. The local density of mosquitoes is inversely proportional to your remaining repellent.

Baer's Quartet

1. Good politics is bad economics.
2. Bad politics is good economics.
3. Good economics is bad politics.
4. Bad economics is good politics.

—Eugene W. Baer
Middletown, Rhode Island

Bambi's Comment

Eat, sleep, defecate, procreate. That's all they [*the insects*] do. That's all we do, but at least insects don't kid themselves that it's anything more than that.

—Dr. Bambi Barenbaum
War of the Coprophages, Season 3, episode 12
The X-Files

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

Bannerman's Principle

One who can define kindness only as the absence of cruelty has surely not begun to understand the nature of either.

—from the Journal of David Bannerman in *Angel's Egg*
in the anthology *Good Neighbors and Other Strangers*
by Edgar Pangborn

Barth's Distinction

There are two types of people: those who divide people into two types, and those who don't.

Beifeld's Principle

The chance of meeting a desirable and receptive young female becomes increasingly probable when you are already in the company of

1. a date
2. your wife
3. a better-looking and richer male friend.

—Ronald H. Beifeld

from the Bene Gesserit Philosophy

A world is supported by four things: The learning of the wise, the justice of the great, the prayers of the righteous and the valor of the brave. But all these are as nothing without a ruler who knows the art of ruling.

—the Reverend Mother Gaius Helen Mohiam
Proctor Superior of the Bene Gesserit school on Wallach IX in *Dune*
by Frank Herbert

Berkeley's Laws

1. Most problems have either many answers or no answer. Only a few problems have a single answer.

Also see
the Laws of **C**onnections

2. The moment you have worked out an answer, start checking it. It probably isn't right.
3. Check the answer you have worked out once more - before you tell it to anybody.

—from the article *Right Answers: A Short Guide for Obtaining Them*
by Edmund C. Berkeley in *Computers and Automation*, September, 1969

Berra's Law

You can observe a lot just by watching.

—Yogi Berra

Bester's Observation

A genius is someone who travels to truth by an unexpected path.

—from *The Men Who Murdered Mohammed*, by Alfred Bester
in *The Best From Fantasy and Science Fiction*, 8th Series
edited by Anthony Boucher

the Bicycle Law

All bicycles weigh 30 pounds:

1. A 20 pound bicycle needs a 10 pound lock and chain.
2. A 25 pound bicycle needs a 5 pound lock and chain.
3. A 30 pound bicycle doesn't need a lock or chain.

Bierce's Lament

Woman would be more charming if one could fall into her arms without falling into her hands.

—from *Epigrams*
by Ambrose Bierce

Billings' Advice

Live within your income, even if you have to borrow to do it.

—Josh Billings

Blake's Observation

Nothing is quite so convincing as a threat with teeth in it.

—Joel Blake, in *Whisper from the Stars*
by Jeff Sutton

Bok's Warning

If you think education is expensive, try ignorance.

—attributed to Derek Bok
quoted by Ann Landers

Bolton's Law

Under current practices, both expenditures and revenues rise to meet each other, no matter which one may be in excess.

—Joe Bolton

Bombeck's Rule of Medicine

Never go to a doctor whose office plants have died.

—Erma Bombeck

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

Boren's Guidelines for Bureaucracy

1. When in doubt, mumble.
2. When in trouble, delegate.
3. When in charge, ponder.

—James H. Boren

the Nonchalance Rule of Borrowing

In order to get a loan you must first prove you don't need it.

A Principle of Boundaries

Boundaries are limits of power, not of law or of treaty.

—from *Jack of Shadows*, Chapter 4
by Roger Zelazny

Boyle's Laws of Experimentation

1. When things are going well, someone will inevitably experiment detrimentally.
2. Deficiencies never appear during dry runs.

—Charles P. Boyle
Goddard Space Flight Center

Boyle's Laws of Bureaucracy

1. An original idea can never emerge from committee in the original.
2. Information travels more surely to those with a lesser need to know.
3. If not controlled, work will flow to the competent man until he submerges.
4. The crucial memorandum will be snared in the out-basket by the paper clip of the overlying correspondence, and go to file.
5. Clearly stated instructions will produce multiple interpretations.
6. When the product is destined to fail, the delivery system will perform perfectly.
7. The lagging activity in a project will invariably be found in the area with the highest overtime rates.
8. Talent in staff work or sales will be interpreted as managerial ability.
9. The "think positive" leader tends to listen to his subordinates' premonitions only during the postmortems.
10. On successive charts of the same organization, the number of boxes will never decrease.

—Charles P. Boyle
Goddard Space Flight Center

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

Braggs' Assertion

Nations are like people. When they grow old and rich and fat they get conservative. They exhaust their energy trying to keep things the way they are — and that's against nature.

—Mark Braggs, in *Alas, Babylon*
by Pat Frank

Brandeis' Warning

Experience should teach us to be most on our guard to protect liberty when the government's purposes are beneficial. Men born to freedom are naturally alert to repel invasion of their liberty by evil-minded rulers. The greater dangers to liberty lurk in insidious encroachment by men of zeal, well-meaning but without understanding.

—Justice Louis Brandeis
Olmstead v. United States, 277 U.S. 479 (1928)

Brien's First Law

At some time in the life of every organization, its ability to succeed in spite of itself runs out.

—*The Managerialization of Higher Education*
from *Educational Record*, Summer, 1970
by Richard H. Brien

Brooks' Law

Adding manpower to a late project makes it later.

—from *the Mythical Man-Month: Essays on Software Engineering*,
by Frederick P. Brooks, Jr. S.T.L., Addison-Wesley, 1974

Brozik's Advice

Never ask a question unless you want to know the answer.

—Dallas Brozik
Braidwood, Illinois

Brunner's Observations

Doubtless you know better, O my beloved, than to try and make me jealous of a rival. The world holds too few intelligent lovely girls. I'd feel it selfish to keep one all to myself. Do, though, choose for lovers men I can respect. Otherwise, I shall lose all respect for you.

—Mustapha Sharif in *Web of Everywhere*
by John Brunner

Once a fool who loved gold killed his rival to possess a lovely golden statue of a god. Afraid of being caught, he melted the statue down, saying fire could not destroy its worth. They found him starved to death in a waterless valley, his bare fingerbones clutching the gold. I do not call him foolish because he could not eat gold, but because beauty is the food of the soul.

—Mustapha Sharif in *Web of Everywhere*
by John Brunner

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

Once you had been shown the path of the powder-train, it was hard not to believe that a spark would sooner or later light it.

—*The Stone That Never Came Down*
by John Brunner

Bucket's Assertion

Marriage is a fine institution, designed to eradicate feelings like that [*sexual desire*].

—Hyacinth Bucket, [pronounced *Bouquet*]
The Boy Friend, Season 5, Episode 7, *Keeping Up Appearances*

Second Order Rule of Bureaucracy

The more directives you issue to solve a problem, the worse it gets.

—in *New Engineer*, November, 1976
by Jack Robertson

~ C ~

Caesar's Reply

Pardon him Theodotus: he is a barbarian and thinks that the customs of his tribe and island are the laws of nature.

—Caesar, in *Caesar and Cleopatra*, Act II
by George Bernard Shaw

Cahn's Axiom

When all else fails, read the instructions.

Calhoun's Observations

1. A plague kills off those who are susceptible to it, leaving immunes to build up a world again. But immunes are the first to be killed when a mass neurosis sweeps a population.
—in *This World is Taboo*, Chapter 2
by Murray Leinster
2. Generally speaking, facts are hidden only from people whose job it would be to act on them.
—by Murray Leinster

Capp's Complaint

The only thing worse than being wrong is being right with nobody listening.

—Florence Capp
from the *Andy Capp* comic strip

Carnot's Advice

Speak little of what you know and not at all of what you do not know.

—Nicholas Leonard Sadi Carnot

Carow's Observation

Precedent is no substitute for logic.

—Don Carow
General Electric Company, San Jose, California, April 12, 1979

(When I asked him if I should use “Don” or “Donald” in the credit, he said “However you’ve done it before.”)

Carson's Consolation

No experiment is ever a complete failure. It can always be used as a bad example.

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

Delany's Observation Concerning Causality

Science never assumes that if A is correlated with B, then A causes B or B causes A, since there is always the possibility that a third variable, C, is intervening to cause both A and B.

—from *Psychoanalysis and the Edgar Cayce Readings*, by Dudley Delany
in *The Edgar Cayce Reader*, © 1969

Claghorn's Assertion on Change

No human condition endures forever, with the corollary that the more complicated such a condition, the greater its susceptibility to change.

—O. C. Charle, Twenty-Sixth Hagedorn, a Claghorn of the Overwheles
in *The Last Castle*, Chapter II, Section 1
by Jack Vance

Cheop's Law

Nothing ever gets built on schedule or within budget.

Churchill's Comment on Man

Man will occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of the time he will pick himself up and continue on.

—Winston Churchill

the First Law of Civil Liberties

The defense of civil liberties, by definition, involves the defense of persons who are most despised by the public.

—Aryeh Neier
American Civil Liberties Union

Claghorn's Comment on Human Motivation

Our own brains are remarkable for their utter lack of rational structure. Considering the haphazard manner in which our thoughts are formed, registered, indexed and recalled, any single rational act becomes a miracle. Perhaps we are incapable of rationality. Perhaps all thought is a set of impulses generated by one emotion, monitored by another, and ratified by a third.

—O. C. Charle, Twenty-Sixth Hagedorn, a Claghorn of the Overwheles
in *The Last Castle*, Chapter V, Section 1
by Jack Vance

Clark's Laws

1. When a distinguished but elderly scientist states that something is possible, he is almost certainly right. When he states that something is impossible, he is probably wrong.
2. The only way to discover the limits of the possible is to go beyond them into the impossible.
3. Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

4. Every revolutionary idea passes through three stages of reaction:
 1. It is completely impossible. Don't waste my time.
 2. It is possible, but not worth doing.
 3. I said it was a good idea all along.

Clark's Prediction About Fanatics

Fanatics are always followed by fools, of which there is an inexhaustible supply.

—in *Minus Planet*
by John D. Clark

Clopton's Law

For every credibility gap there is a gullibility fill.

—Richard Clopton, quoted in *Peter's Quotations*, William Morrow & Coby
by Laurence J. Peter

Cohen's Laws

1. The more time you spend in reporting on what you are doing, the less time you have to do anything. Stability is achieved when you spend all your time doing nothing but reporting on the nothing you are doing.
2. What really matters is not the facts themselves, but the name you succeed in imposing upon them.

Cole's Law

Thinly chopped cabbage.

Comins' Law

People will accept your idea much more readily if you tell them Benjamin Franklin said it first.

—David H. Comins
Manchester, Connecticut

Committee Rules

1. Never arrive on time, or you will be stamped a beginner.
2. Don't say anything until the meeting is half over. This stamps you as being wise.
3. Be as vague as possible. This prevents irritating the others.
4. When in doubt, suggest that a subcommittee be appointed.
5. Be the first to move for adjournment. This will make you popular. It's what everyone is waiting for.

—Harry Chapman

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

Commoner's Four Laws of Ecology

1. Everything is connected to everything else.
2. Everything must go somewhere.
3. Nature knows best.
4. There is no such thing as a free lunch.

—from *The Closing Circle*, 1971
by Barry Commoner

First Law of Contracts

Anything that is unenforceable is not contractual.

—Evelyn Cyril (Oscar) Gordon, in *Glory Road*
by Robert A. Heinlein

Duncan Idaho's Principle of Control

Good subjects must feel guilty. The guilt begins as a feeling of failure. The good autocrat provides many opportunities for failure in the populace.

—Duncan Idaho, in *the Children of Dune*
by Frank Herbert

Coolidge's Immutable Observation

When more and more people are thrown out of work, unemployment results.

—Calvin Coolidge, in *Treasury of American Political Humor*, Dial, 1964
by Leonard C. Lewin

Cormier's Notes

1. Half a loaf is better than none, but half a bridge is not.

—July 18, 1989

2. It's easier to get forgiveness than it is to get permission.

—July 26, 1989

3. Equality? Ants are equal.

—date unknown

—Donald Joseph Raymond Cormier Jr.
San Jose, California

Correspondence Corollary

An experiment may be considered successful if no more than half of the data must be discarded to obtain correspondence with your pet theory.

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

~ D ~

Davis' Dictum

Problems that go away by themselves come back by themselves.

— Marcy E. Davis
Philadelphia

DeAmicis' Observation

Bad “lines” work with desperate women.

— Dante DeAmicis
San Jose, California, August 24, 1996

First Law of Debate

Never argue with a fool. People might not notice the difference.

the Rules of Decision Making

1. Good decisions come from experience.
2. Experience comes from bad decisions.

Decker's Prayer

Dear Father, we are Thy servants in an unknown land and there is a deadly pride upon us. Teach us humility and lead us to the knowledge, before it is too late, that men, despite their far traveling and their mighty works, are still as children in Thy sight. Bless the bread we are about to break, we beg Thee, and keep us forever in Thy compassion. Amen.

— Commandant Tom Decker
in *Beachhead*, in the collection *Strangers in the Universe*
by Clifford D. Simak

Deep Throat's Observation

... a lie, Mr. Mulder, is most convincingly hidden between two truths.

— Deep Throat
speaking in *E.B.E*, Season 1, Episode 17
The X-Files

the Delusion Principle

Some people have delusions of grandeur. Others have delusions of adequacy.

Some Comments about Democracy

Tytler's Analysis — A democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government. It can only exist until the voters discover that they can vote themselves largesse from the public treasury. From that moment on, the majority always votes for the candidates promising them the most benefits from the public treasury, with the result that a democracy always

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

collapses over a loose fiscal policy, always followed by a dictatorship. The average age of the world's great civilizations has been 200 years. These nations have progressed through this sequence: From bondage to spiritual faith; From spiritual faith to great courage; From courage to liberty; From liberty to abundance; From abundance to selfishness; From selfishness to complacency; From complacency to apathy; From apathy to dependence; From dependence back into bondage.

—Alexander Fraser Tytler
Scottish economist, 1776

Moira's Observation — Majorities always settle for the lowest common denominator and the rule of the uninformed.

—Moira, in *Survey Ship*, Chapter 3
by Marion Zimmer Bradley

The Rigged Election Principle — Democracy is two wolves and a lamb voting on what to have for lunch. Liberty is a well-armed lamb contesting the vote.

—Author Unknown

Biggle's Laws of Democracy

1. Democracy imposed from without is the severest form of tyranny.
2. Democracy is not a form of government. It is a state of mind. People cannot arbitrarily be placed in a state of mind.
3. One measure of the urgency of revolution is the freedom the people have, compared with the freedom they want.
4. Fundamental to any democracy is the people's right to be wrong. No democracy has ever survived the abolishment of this principle.

—from IPR Manual 1048-K in *The World Menders*
by Lloyd Biggle, Jr.

Donohue's Law

What's worth doing is worth doing for money.

—Joseph Donohue

Douglas' Law of Practical Aeronautics

When the weight of the paperwork equals the weight of the plane, the plane will fly.

—Donald Douglas

Dress Code

A woman's costume is a failure unless it makes men want to tear it off.

—Star, Empress of the Twenty Universes, in *Glory Road*
by Robert A. Heinlein

Drucker's Observation

Strong people always have strong weaknesses.

—Chairman Peter Drucker

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

Lord Durslan's Precaution

When one lies, it's well to have a record of what one said.

—Melsa Ostrak Gouer, Lord Durslan, in *The Regiment*, chapter 44
by John Dalmás

Duty versus Choice

And the truth is that as a man's real power grows and his knowledge widens, ever the way he can follow grows narrower: until at last he chooses nothing, but does only and wholly what he *must do*....

—a statement by the Master Summoner in *A Wizard of Earthsea*
Chapter 4, *The Loosing of the Shadow*
by Ursula K. LeGuin

Dyer's Law

A continuing flow of paper is sufficient to continue the flow of paper.

—Professor John M. Dyer
University of Miami

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Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

~ E ~

Edwards' Observations

1. Some very competent witnesses had certainly seen a very strange sight—almost as strange as the official explanations.

—*Flying Saucers—Serious Business, Some Classic Cases*, Chapter 5, page 60
by Frank Edwards

Bantam Books, Toronto, New York, London, © 1966

2. Then, as now, the bitterest skeptics were the uninformed.

—*Flying Saucers—Serious Business, Life Out Yonder*, Chapter 6
by Frank Edwards

Bantam Books, Toronto, New York, London, © 1966

Elaine's Advice

If you get a job with a company and then decide you don't like the company, you should try to ruin it from within by stealing all the pencils and screwing all the secretaries. If, on the other hand, you decide you LIKE the company, there's no reason to steal any pencils.

—Glenna Elaine Milam
San Jose, California

Elaine's Observation

I stink. Therefore I am.

—Glenna Elaine Milam
San Jose, California

Eleson's Observation

God gave man free will — not Limited Liability!

—Eric Richard Eleson
P.O.W. J-59564

Eliot's Observation

Nothing is so good as it seems beforehand.

—*Silas Marner*, chapter 18
by George Eliot (Marian Evans Cross)

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

Enemy's Legacy

I am your enemy, the first one you've ever had who was smarter than you. There is no teacher but the enemy. No one but the enemy will ever tell you what the enemy is going to do. No one but the enemy will ever teach you how to destroy and conquer. Only the enemy shows you where you are weak. Only the enemy tells you where he is strong. And the only rules of the game are what you can do to him and what you can stop him from doing to you. I am your enemy from now on. From now on I am your teacher.

I will devise the strategy of your enemy, and you will learn to be quick and discover what tricks the enemy has for you. Remember, boy. From now on the enemy is more clever than you. From now on the enemy is stronger than you. From now on you are always about to lose.

—Mazer Rackham, in *Ender's Game*, Chapter 14,
by Orson Scott Card

Engineering Objective

One of the primary activities of the engineer is directing the inevitable degradation of energy so that in the process some useful result is obtained.

—*Circuits, Devices, and Systems: A First Course in Electrical Engineering*
by Ralph J. Smith

The Entrepreneur Distinction

The difference between an entrepreneur and a con artist is that an entrepreneur believes in the dreams he's selling.

—Anthony DiNozzo, Sr.
The Artful Dodger, Season 12, Episode 17, *NCIS*

Eowyns Observation

Those without swords can still die upon them.

—Eowyn, of the House of Eorl
The Two Towers (2002), New Line Cinema

Erhard's Observation

If you stand in the rain you get wet, whether you understand water or not.

— Werner Erhard

the First Rule of Experience

Learn from the mistakes of others. You won't live long enough to make them all yourself.

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

~ F ~

Falkland's Rule

When it is not necessary to make a decision, it is necessary to not make a decision.

—Lucius, Second Lord Falkland

Falk's Observation

To use the enemy's weapon is to play the enemy's game.

—Falk

in *City of Illusions*, Chapter 5, by Ursula K. Le Guin

Fiedler's Forecasting Rules

1. It is very difficult to forecast, especially about the future.
2. He who lives by the crystal ball soon learns to eat ground glass.
3. The moment you forecast, you know you're going to be wrong, you just don't know when and in which direction.
4. If you're ever right, never let them forget it.

—Edgar R. Fiedler

Some Comments About Finance

Finch's Observation — Banking is mostly looking clever and wearing the right clothes.

—Herald Finch

in *Person of Interest, Risk*, Season 1, Episode 16

Economists' Indictment — Economists, like all pseudoscientific charlatans, know that they can hold onto their high-paying jobs only as long as they can keep the common people convinced that money matters are so mysterious that only economists can understand them.

—Juan Orfo in *The Way to Dawnworld*
by Bill Starr

Gross's Law — When two people meet to decide how to spend a third person's money, fraud will result.

—Herman Gross, Great Neck, New York

Wellick's Assertion — Give a man a gun and he can rob a bank. Give a man a bank and he can rob the world.

—Tyrell Wellick
in *Mr. Robot*

The Oz Allegory — People read *The Wizard of Oz*, written in 1900 as a children's fantasy, but other people think it's a story about gold. A country kid from the Midwest loses her house, teams up with a farmer and an industrial worker, and battles wicked forces from the West to the East. The only way to save herself is to follow the yellow brick road, which sure looks like gold to me. And by the way, what's gold measured in? Ounces, or Oz. When she gets to Oz, what does Dorothy find behind it all? A corrupt politician behind the curtains pulling strings and controlling the little people.

—Brad Meltzer
speaking in [Brad Meltzer's Decoded Ft. Knox](#)

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

The Gold Bullet Principle — ... Yes, the United States has been rigging the gold market for at least a half a century....

... it's certainly good for the United States in the sense of maintaining the American empire because the rigging of the gold price maintains the value of the dollar and maintains the value of U.S. government bonds and it keeps the world using the dollar. The rigging of the currency markets has been the central objective of U.S. foreign policy for at least 50 years....

... Because the currency market is the most powerful mechanism of imperialism. Occupying a country militarily is nothing compared to controlling its currency market. If you control a currency market, you can get everybody to work for you as your slave.

—Chris Powell, Head of Anti Trust Action Committee
speaking in [*Brad Meltzer's Decoded Ft. Knox*](#)

Ford's Admission

A government big enough to give us everything we want is also a government big enough to take from us everything we have.

—Gerald Ford in the closing statement of the Presidential Debate
September 23, 1976

Forsh's Warning

The one must be sacrificed for the good of the many, until the many are all sacrificed, one by one.

—Martha Forsh, in *Joyleg*
by Ward Moore and Avram Davidson

Frankel's Laws

1. Whatever happens in government could have happened differently and it usually would have been better if it had.
2. Once things have happened, no matter how accidentally, they will be regarded as manifestations of an unchangeable Higher Reason.

—from *High on Foggy Bottom*, by Professor Charles Frankel
Harper and Row, 1969

Fuchs' Warning

If you actually look like your passport photo, you aren't well enough to travel.

—Sir Vivian Fuchs

Fudd's First Law of Opposition

If you push something hard enough it will fall over.

~ G ~

Law of Gardening

You get the most of what you need the least.

—Jane Bryant Quinn

Gandhi's Observations

There's more to life than increasing its speed.

All compromise is based on give and take, but there can be no give and take on fundamentals. Any compromise on mere fundamentals is a surrender. For it is all give and no take.

—Mahatma Gandhi

Ged's Clarification

Do you see, Arren, how an act is not, as young men think, like a rock that one picks up and throws, and it hits or misses, and that's the end of it? When a rock is lifted, the earth is lighter; and the hand that bears it heavier. When it is thrown, the circuits of the stars respond, and where it strikes or falls the universe is changed. On every act the balance of the whole depends.

—Ged, in *the Farthest Shore*
by Ursula K. LeGuin

Reflection on Genius

A genius is someone who travels to truth by an unexpected path.

—from *The Men Who Murdered Mohammed*
by Alfred Bester
in *The Best From Fantasy and Science Fiction*, 8th Series
edited by Anthony Boucher

Gerrold's Laws

1. Understanding the laws of nature does not mean we are free from obeying them.
2. Hell hath no fury like a pacifist.

—David Gerrold
in *Starlog*

Gilmore's Regret

Sick minds will find encouragement, no matter what.

—Gary Gilmore
prior to his execution for murder

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

Ginsbert's Theorem

1. You can't win.
2. You can't break even.
3. You can't even quit the game.

A Speculation About God

God is subtle, but he is not malicious.

—Albert Einstein

Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem (a simplified restatement by somebody)²

In any closed mathematical system there are an infinite number of true theorems which, though contained within the original system, cannot be deduced from it.

—Kurt Friedrich Gödel
(April 28, 1906 - January 14, 1978)

Meltzer's Speculations about Gold and The Wizard of Oz

People read *The Wizard of Oz*, written in 1900 as a children's fantasy, but other people think it's a story about gold. A country kid from the Midwest loses her house, teams up with a farmer and an industrial worker, and battles wicked forces from the West to the East. The only way to save herself is to follow the yellow brick road, which sure looks like gold to me. And by the way, what's gold measured in? Ounces, or Oz. When she gets to Oz, what does Dorothy find behind it all? A corrupt politician behind the curtains pulling strings and controlling the little people.

—Brad Meltzer
speaking in Brad Meltzer's Decoded Ft. Knox

the Golden Principle

Nothing will be attempted if all possible objections must first be overcome.

The Wisdom of Gor

1. Beware of a silent enemy.
2. Invisible chains are those which weigh the most heavily.

—Samos

—Tarl Cabot
—from *Tribesmen of Gor*
by John Norman

Gordon's Law

Anything not worth doing at all is not worth doing well.

² For any self-consistent recursive axiomatic system powerful enough to describe the arithmetic of the natural numbers (for example Peano arithmetic), there are true propositions about the naturals that cannot be proved from the axioms. —from Wikipedia

Gordon's Observation

All freedoms arise from cultural conflicts because a custom which is not opposed by its negative is mandatory and always regarded as a "law of nature."

—Evelyn Cyril (Oscar) Gordon, in *Glory Road*
by Robert A. Heinlein

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~ H ~

Hagerty's Law

If you lose your temper at a newspaper columnist, he'll get rich or famous or both.

Haldane's Law

Now, my suspicion is that the universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we *can* suppose.... I suspect that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of, in any philosophy.

—*Possible Worlds*
John Burdon Sanderson Haldane

Hale's Rule

The sumptuousness of a company's annual report is in inverse proportion to its profitability that year.

—Irving Hale
of the Sarvis Group Inc., Denver

Hamlet's Assertion

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

—*Hamlet*, act I, sc. v, l. 166,
by William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

Hardin's Law

You can never do merely one thing.

—Biologist Garrett Hardin

Hardin's Advice

1. It pays to be obvious, especially if you have a reputation for subtlety.
2. Never let your sense of morals prevent you from doing what's right.

—Salvor Hardin, in *Foundation*
by Isaac Asimov

Hartley's Prediction

You can lead a horse to water, but if you can get him to float on his back you've got something.

Harvard Law

Under the most carefully controlled conditions of pressure, temperature, volume, humidity, and other variables, the organism will do as it damn well pleases.

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

Haswari's Observation

Women should never get involved in politics. It's a waste of beauty.

—Ari Hasware
NCIS, Season 1, Episode 23, *Reveille*

Hawking's Postulate

Given infinity, all things are equally probable.

—Stephen Hawking
Cambridge University

Heller's Advice for Managers

1. Think before you act; it's not your money.
2. Cash in must exceed cash out.
3. The easiest way of making money is to stop losing it.
4. If sophisticated calculations are needed to justify an action, don't do it.
5. If you are doing something wrong, you will do it badly.
6. If you are attempting the impossible, you will fail.

—from *The Great Executive Dream*, Delacorte, 1972
by Robert Heller

Heller's Myths of Management

1. The first myth of management is that it exists.
2. The second myth of management is that success equals skill.

—from *The Great Executive Dream*
by Robert Heller, Delacorte, 1972

Heller's Truths of Management

1. No executive devotes effort to proving himself wrong.
2. Either an executive can do his job or he can't.

—from *The Great Executive Dream*, Delacorte, 1972
by Robert Heller

Hendrickson's Law

If a problem causes many meetings, the meetings will become more important than the problem.

Herbig's Advice

Never do anything for the first time.

—Paul Herbig
Chicago, Illinois

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

Historian's Rule

Any event, once it has occurred, can be made to appear inevitable by a competent historian.

—from *The Public Speaker's Treasure Chest*, (Harper & Row)
by Lee Simonson and Herbert V. Prochnow

Philidor's Observation On History

I know that the history of man is not his technical triumphs, his kills, his victories. It is a composite, a mosaic of a trillion pieces, the account of each man's accommodation with his conscience. This is the true history of the race.

—A. G. Philidor, in *The Last Castle*, Chapter III, Section 2
by Jack Vance

Howe's Observation

Every man has a scheme that won't work.

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~ I ~

the First Law of Ignorance

There is nothing more frightful than ignorance in action.

Milam's First Corporate Corollary to the First Law of Ignorance

There is nothing more frightful than ignorant management in action.

Italian Proverb

She who is silent consents.

Invisibility

So they took up stones to throw at him; but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple.

—*Holy Bible*

John 8:59, Revised Standard Version

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~ J ~

Jacquin's Postulate

No man's life, liberty or property are safe while the legislature is in session.

Jones' Laws

1. The man who can smile when things go wrong has thought of someone to blame it on.
2. Friends may come and friends may go, but enemies accumulate.

—Thomas Jones
former president, University of South Carolina

Jones' Rule of the Road

The easiest way to refold a road map is differently.

—Franklin P. Jones
in *The Wall Street Journal*

Jude's Observation

The true point of entry into an alien land is when you can no longer read the road signs.

—Jude Rowe in *A Rumor of Angels*, Chapter 20
by M. Bradley Kellogg

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~ K ~

Kaczynski's Five Principles of History

First Principle. If a small change is made that affects a long-term historical trend, then the effect of that change will almost always be transitory — the trend will soon revert to its original state.

Second Principle. If a change is made that is sufficiently large to alter permanently a long-term historical trend, then it will alter the society as a whole. In other words, a society is a system in which all parts are interrelated, and you can't permanently change any important part without changing all other parts as well.

Third Principle. If a change is made that is large enough to alter permanently a long-term trend, then the consequences for the society as a whole cannot be predicted in advance.

Fourth Principle. A new kind of society cannot be designed on paper. That is, you cannot plan out a new form of society in advance, then set it up and expect it to function as it was designed to do.

Fifth Principle. People do not consciously and rationally choose the form of their society. Societies develop through processes of social evolution that are not under rational human control.

—from paragraphs 100-106
Industrial Society and Its Future
Theodore John Kaczynski

Kaczynski's Observations on Mental Health

The concept of “mental health” in our society is defined largely by the extent to which an individual behaves in accord with the needs of the system and does so without showing signs of stress.

—paragraph 119

“Parenting” techniques that are taught to parents are designed to make children accept fundamental values of the system and behave in ways that the system finds desirable. “Mental health” programs, “intervention” techniques, psychotherapy and so forth are ostensibly designed to benefit individuals, but in practice they usually serve as methods for inducing the individual to think and behave as the system requires.

—paragraph 148

Industrial Society and Its Future
Theodore John Kaczynski

Katz's Law

Men and nations will act rationally when all other possibilities have been exhausted.

Kelso's Doctrine

I believe in my own instincts and my own wits, and both say to be distrustful of all authority. There are laws that I respect because I recognize those laws as serving a common good. There are laws that I break because I see them as serving private interests. But in no case will I bow to any dictum that says I must obey or serve, in ignorance or faith, some

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

so-called higher order because those who tell me I must do so are better or higher than myself and understand things I don't. Human history has proved that to be a colossal (sic) crock. *Nobody* is higher than anybody else in that sense, and the moment some fool or collusion of fools begins to think he — or they — *are*, then in my book they've joined the worms and should be promptly and categorically squashed.

—Mad Jack Kelso, speaking in *Under The City of Angels*, chapter 18. Acceptance
by Jerry Earl Brown

Klipstein's Observations

Design

1. The more innocuous a design change appears, the further its influence will extend.
2. The necessity of making a major design change increases as the fabrication of the system approaches completion.

Servicing Equipment

1. After all mounting screws have been removed from an access cover, it will be discovered that the wrong access cover has been removed.
2. After all access cover screws have been re-installed, it will be discovered that the gasket has been omitted.
3. After an instrument has been fully assembled, extra components will be found on the bench.

—D L. Klipstein

Knower's Ratio

If the proposed problem is big enough to be significant, it cannot be solved. If it is delimited enough to be solvable, it is not worth solving.

—Milton Dickens
Professor of Speech, U.S.C.

Kristol's Law

Being frustrated is disagreeable, but the real disasters in life begin when you get what you want.

—Irving Kristol

Kuiper's Assertion

It is not a foregone conclusion . . . that the problem [of understanding the origin of the solar system] has a scientific solution. For instance, an enclosure in which the air has been stirred gives, after some delay, no clue on the nature or the time of the stirring. All memory of the event within the system has been lost.

—Gerard P. Kuiper
astronomer, University of Arizona

Kynes' Warning

Beyond a critical point within a finite space, freedom diminishes as numbers increase. This is as true of humans in the finite space of a planetary ecosystem as it is of gas molecules in a sealed flask. The human question is not how many can possibly survive within the system but what kind of existence is possible for those who do survive.

—Pardot Kynes, First Planetologist of Arrakis in *Dune*
by Frank Herbert

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~ *L* ~

La Rochefoucauld's Warning

It is more ignominious to mistrust our friends than to be deceived by them.

—La Rochefoucauld

Laboratory Procedures

1. When you don't know what you are doing, do it neatly.
2. Experiments must be reproducible. They should all fail the same way.
3. First draw your curves, then plot the data.
4. A record of data is essential. It indicates you've been working.
5. To study a subject best, understand it thoroughly before you start.
6. In case of doubt, make it sound convincing. Talk loudly and authoritatively.
7. Do not merely believe in miracles. Rely on them.
8. Teamwork is essential in the laboratory. It allows you to blame someone else.

Lady Jan's Pronouncements

Life's a virgin. If it was a bitch, it'd be easier.

Computers have spooks in 'em.

—Lady Jan the Voluptuous
Firth, Idaho

Lafferty's Reflection

You think people are silly to believe in ghosts? You should hear some of the silly things ghosts believe in!

—in *Fourth Mansions*
by R. A. Lafferty

Lani's Principles of Economics

1. Taxes are not levied for the benefit of the taxed.
2. One hundred dollars placed at 7% interest compounded quarterly for 200 years will increase to more than \$100,000,000, by which time it will be worth nothing.
3. In God we trust, all others pay cash.

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

Lawyer's Obligation

He [the lawyer] is, however, in a sense an officer of the state, with an obligation to the courts and to the public no less significant than his obligation to his clients. Thus, an attorney occupies a dual position which imposes dual obligations. His first duty is to the courts and the public, not to the client, and wherever the duties to his client conflict with those he owes as an officer of the court in the administration of justice, the former must yield to the latter.

—7 C.J.S. Attorney & Client § 4

Lawyer's Rules

When the law is against you, argue the facts. When the facts are against you, argue the law. When both are against you, call the other lawyer names.

Lewis' Observation

The approval of one's own conscience is a very heady draught; and specially for those who are not accustomed to it.

—from *That Hideous Strength*, chapter 12
by C. S. Lewis

Lincoln's Objective

My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it; and if I could do it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that.

—Abraham Lincoln
in a Letter to Horace Greeley, August 22, 1862

Lippmann's Thought

When we all think alike, no one is thinking very much.

—Walter Lippmann

Locke's Axiom

The greatest error of legal theory in the entire history of law is the idea that just because a thing is bad, that thing should also be illegal.

—Warrick Merrill Locke

Locke's Conjecture

Logic is a device whereby people find excuses for getting the right answers.

—Warrick Merrill Locke

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

Lord Jeffrey's Observations About Computers

1. If you don't have at least one crash per day, then you're not **really** using your computer.
2. If it happens once, then it's a glitch. If it happens twice, then it's a problem.
3. A restart will cure many problems.

—Lord Jeffrey the Studios of Lystra

Lowery's Law

If it jams, force it. If it breaks, it needed replacing anyway.

Luce's Law

No good deed ever goes unpunished.

—Clare Boothe Luce

Luck Defined

Luck is a tag given by the mediocre to account for the accomplishments of genius.

—Elihu Nivens' father, "the Old Man"
in *The Puppet Masters*, by Robert A. Heinlein

Lyle's Objection

When any government, or any church for that matter, undertakes to say to its subjects, "This you may not read, this you must not see, this you are forbidden to know," the end result is tyranny and oppression, no matter how holy the motives.

—John Lyle
in *If this Goes On-*, by Robert A. Heinlein

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~ M ~

the Wisdom of Mahasamatman, Sam Kalkin

...A thing happens once that has never happened before. Seeing it, a man looks upon reality. He cannot tell others what he has seen. Others wish to know, however, so they question him saying, 'What is it like, this thing you have seen?' So he tries to tell them. Perhaps he has seen the very first fire in the world. He tells them, 'It is red, like a poppy, but through it dance other colors. It has no form, like water, flowing everywhere. It is warm, like the sun of summer, only warmer. It exists for a time upon a piece of wood, and then the wood is gone, as though it were eaten, leaving behind that which is black and can be sifted like sand. When the wood is gone, it too is gone.' Therefore, the hearers must think reality is like a poppy, like water, like the sun, like that which eats and excretes. They think it is like to anything that they are told it is like by the man who has known it. But they have not looked upon fire. They cannot really know it. They can only know of it. But fire comes again into the world, many times. More men look upon fire. After a time, fire is as common as grass and clouds and the air they breathe. They see that, while it is like a poppy, it is not a poppy, while it is like water, it is not water, while it is like the sun, it is not the sun, and while it is like that which eats and passes wastes, it is not that which eats and passes wastes, but something different from each of these apart or all of these together. So they look upon this new thing and they make a new word to call it. They call it 'fire.'

If they come upon one who still has not seen it and they speak to him of fire, he does not know what they mean. So they, in turn, fall back upon telling him what fire is like. As they do so, they know from their own experience that what they are telling him is not the truth, but only a part of it. They know that this man will never know reality from their words, though all the words in the world are theirs to use. He must look upon the fire, smell of it, warm his hands by it, stare into its heart, or remain forever ignorant....

—from section i, pages 43-44

It is difficult to stir rebellion among those to whom all things are good.

—from section i, page 48

The personal strengths and weaknesses of a leader are no true indication of the merits of his cause.

—from section iii, page 136

—in *Lord of Light*, by Roger Zelazny

the Laws of Maintenance

1. If it ain't broken, don't fix it. (Sleeping Dog Rule)
2. If it's broken, fix it.

Majeski's Observation

A teacher should be a leader who doesn't require anyone to follow him.

—James Majeski
Milpitas, California

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

Principles of Management by Crisis

1. To get action out of management, it is necessary to create the illusion of a crisis.
2. When it perceives a crisis, management will over-react.
3. Management is incapable of recognizing a true crisis.

—from *Computers and Automation*
by Gene Franklin

Marshall's Generalized Iceberg Theorem

Seven-eighths of *everything* can't be seen.

Marshall's Warning

The power to tax involves the power to destroy.

—John Marshall
in *McCulloch v. Maryland*, 4 Wheaton 316, 407 (1819)

Maslow's Maxim

If the only tool you have is a hammer, you treat everything like it was a nail.

Biggle's Conjecture Concerning Matrimony

Matrimony has two basic flaws: husbands and wives. Every male has an innate talent for being a deplorable husband. Females match this with a truly astonishing aptitude for being wretched wives. What the human race needs is a third sex, neuter, with a boundless domestic capacity. Then either of the present sexes could marry it and be happy.

—Jan Darzek, in *Watchers of the Dark*, chapter 1
by Lloyd Biggle, Jr.

Maud'dib's Lesson

Empires do not suffer emptiness of purpose at the time of their creation. It is when they have become established that aims are lost and replaced by vague ritual.

—Maud'dib, in *Dune Messiah*
by Frank Herbert

McMillan's Plan

I only have two things to do today, but one of them is to get through the day.

—Kathy McMillan, Advanced Micro Devices, Sunnyvale, California
Monday, July 28, 1986, 7:55 AM

Mencken's Observation

A puritan is a person who is terribly afraid that someone, somewhere is having a good time.

—H. L. Mencken

Mercy Lesson

They always cry first to receive mercy who would be the last to bestow it.

—The Black Panther
comic book hero

Meskimen's Law

There's never time to do it right but always time to do it over.

—John K. Meskimen
Fall Church, Virginia

Milam's Observations

1. Within any bureaucracy, it's safer to be consistently wrong than to be right some of the time.
2. Within any bureaucracy, it's safer to appear competent than to be competent.

—Sam Aurelius Milam III

Milam's Response to Katz's Law

Katz was an optimist.

—Sam Aurelius Milam III

Milam's Restatement of Falkland's Rule

When it isn't necessary to enact legislation, it's necessary to not enact legislation.

—Sam Aurelius Milam III

Mill's Theory of Cause and Effect

We know nothing of cause except as an antecedent—nothing of effect except as a consequent. Of certain phenomena, one never occurs without another, which is dissimilar: the first in point of time we call cause, the second, effect. One who had many times seen a rabbit pursued by a dog, and had never seen rabbits and dogs otherwise, would think the rabbit the cause of the dog.

—Quoted by Moxon, attributed to Mill in *Moxon's Master*
by Ambrose Bierce
in *The Pocket Book of Science-Fiction*
edited by Donald A. Wollheim

Miller's Law

You can't tell how deep a puddle is until you step into it.

Mobil's Maxim

Bad regulation begets worse regulation.

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

Modeski's Law

No matter how paranoid you are, you're not paranoid enough.

—Susanne Modeski
Unusual Suspects, Season 5, Episode 3, *The X-Files*

Mollari's Lament

It is a terrible truth that as one accumulates power, one loses friends.

—Londo Mollari
Babylon 5

Moltke's Observation

No plan of battle ever survives contact with the enemy.

—Helmuth von Moltke

a Few of Murphy's Laws

1. If anything can go wrong, it will.
2. Nothing is ever as simple as it seems.
3. If you play with something long enough, you will surely break it.
4. Whenever you set out to do something, something else must be done first.
5. If you make things absolutely clear, you will confuse people.
6. The more urgent the need for a decision, the less apparent becomes the identity of the decision maker.
7. After all is said and done, a lot more is said than done.
8. Blame will never be placed if enough people are involved.

Mulder's Observations

I've often felt that dreams are answers to questions we haven't yet figured out how to ask.

—Fox Mulder
Aubrey, Season 2, Episode 12, *The X-Files*

Ya know, they say when ya talk to God it's prayer but when God talks to you it's, uh, schizophrenia.

—Fox Mulder
All Souls, Season 5, Episode 17, *The X-Files*

Murphy's Laws on Technology

1. Any circuit design must contain at least one part which is obsolete, two parts which are unobtainable and three parts which are still under development.
2. If an experiment works, something has gone wrong.
3. A failure will not appear until a unit has passed final inspection.
4. New systems generate new problems.

~ N ~

Newton's Little-known Seventh Law

A bird in the hand is safer than one overhead.

Ningauble's Truth

He who lies artistically, treads closer to the truth than ever he knows.

—Ningauble of the Seven Eyes from *Swords in the Mist*, chapter VI
by Fritz Leiber

Noise Discipline

Mountains are enemies of talk. Conversation was born a lowland art.

—from Chapter XI, *Stern Discipline for Travellers*
in *Helliconia Winter*, by Brian W. Aldiss

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~ O ~

The Oligarch, Obiter Dicta

Then there were the obiter dicta supposed to filter down from the very lips — the beak, some claimed — of the Oligarch himself.

“We may debate here in council. But remember that the world is not a debating chamber. It more closely resembles a torture chamber.”

“Do not mind being called wicked. It is the fate of rulers. That the people want nothing but wickedness you can ascertain by listening at any street corner.”

“Use treachery where possible. It costs less than armies.”

“Church and State are brother and sister. One day we will decide which shall inherit the family fortune.”

Such morsels of wisdom passed through the oesophagus of the Inner Chamber and into the body politic.

As for that Inner Chamber, it might be expected that those who belonged to it would know the nature of the Will. Such was not the case. The Members of the Inner Chamber — they were now in session and came masked — were collectively even less sure of the nature of the Will than the ignorant citizens living in the damp streets below the hill. So close to that formidable Will were they that they had to fence it about with pretence. The masks they wore were but an outer cover for a barrier of deviousness; these men of power trusted each other so little that each had developed a posture with regard to the nature of the Oligarch by which truth could not be distinguished — much like insects which, if predatory, disguise themselves as something innocuous whereby to deceive their prey, or, if innocuous, as a poisonous species to deceive their predators.

—from *Helliconia Winter*
Chapter V, *A Few More Regulations*
by Brian W. Aldiss

Oppression Principle

The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.

— Steve Biko
South African activist

Orben’s Packaging Discovery

Today, one bag of groceries produces two bags of trash.

—Robert Orben

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~ P ~

Paige's Sixth Rule

Don't look back. Something may be gaining on you.

—*How to Keep Young*
by Satchel Paige

Pangborn's Laws

1. A crisis passed usually means another one approached.
2. Of the many ways of persuading a woman to change her mind, sitting on your butt thinking sad thoughts is not one.

—in *Maxwell's Monkey* in the anthology *Good Neighbors and Other Strangers*
by Edgar Pangborn

Parker's Law of Rhetoric

The truth of a proposition has nothing to do with its credibility, and vice versa.

Parkinson's Law

Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion.

—*Parkinson's Law*
by C. Northcote Parkinson

Parker's Rule of Parliamentary Procedure

A motion to adjourn is always in order.

Pastore's Truth

Even paranoids have enemies.

Patrick's Theorem

If an experiment works, you must be using the wrong equipment or you left something out.

Peckham's Law

Beauty times brains equals a constant.

Peers' Law

The solution to a problem changes the problem.

—John Peers

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

the Peter Principle

In a hierarchy, every employee tends to rise to his level of incompetence.

—*The Peter Principle*
by Dr. Laurence J. Peter

Peter's Inversion

Internal consistency is valued more highly than efficiency.

—Dr. Laurence J. Peter

Peter's Paradox

Employees in a hierarchy don't really object to incompetence in their colleagues.

—Dr. Laurence J. Peter

Pierce's Law of Inevitability

Everybody's a turkey to somebody.

—Gerald A. Pierce
General Electric Company, San Jose, California, July 12, 1976

Playboy's Observation

Nothing is more wasted than a smile on the face of a girl with a forty-inch bust.

—More Playboy's Party Jokes
Playboy Magazine

Poppa's Pronouncements

1. Rules for Successful Public Speaking
 1. Be sincere.
 2. Be brief.
 3. Be seated.
2. (During reassembly) Son, get all them sonsabitches started before ya tighten any of 'em!
3. It's the days that seem long. The years fly by!
4. Indian build little fire. Keep warm by sittin' close. White man build big fire. Keep warm by carryin' wood.
5. A diplomat is a man who can remember a woman's birthday, and forget her age.
6. When they said "Two can live as cheaply as one." what they really meant was, "A man and his wife can live as cheaply as their teenage daughter."
7. Son, nine times outa ten, the problem ain't the bolts in the engine, it's the nut behind the wheel.
8. Son, don't ever take off on a cold engine.

9. Don't ever tell anybody everything you know.
10. Son, if ya lose your brakes, aim for somethin' cheap.
11. All progress is change but not all change is progress.

—Sam Aurelius Milam, Jr.

The Poverty Credo

The best thing you can do for poor people is not to be one of them.

—Rev. Ike

Prince Johar's Advice

Make your choice not upon that which is offered you but upon that which you may offer others.

—Prince Johar
in the Night Train to Kathmandu

the Laws of Programming

1. A working program is one that has only unobserved bugs.
2. Every non-trivial program has at least one bug.

Corollaries:

1. A sufficient condition for program triviality is that it have no bugs.
2. At least one bug will be observed after the author leaves the organization.
3. The subtlest bugs cause the greatest damage or problems.

Corollary:

A subtle bug will modify storage, thereby masquerading as some other problem.

4. Bugs will appear in one part of a working program when another unrelated part is modified.
5. A debugged program that crashes will wipe out source files on storage devices when there is the least available back-up.
6. A hardware failure will cause system software to crash, and the CE will blame the programmers.
7. A system software crash will cause hardware to act strangely, and the programmers will blame the CE.
8. The documented interfaces between standard software modules will have undocumented quirks.

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

Comments about Progress

Progress is our most important problem.

—Bob Donselman
Redwood City, California

All progress is based upon a universal innate desire on the part of every organism to live beyond its income.

—*Notebooks*
by Samuel Butler

Human progress does not involve anything really new in kind, but only increased convenience and availability of highly primitive comforts.

—in *The Mutant Weapon*, Chapter 2
by Murray Leinster

All progress is change but not all change is progress.

—Sam Aurelius Milam, Jr.

Not blind opposition to progress but opposition to blind progress.

—a National Wildlife Federation slogan

Putnam's Assertion

You can trace the history of every piece of land back to the guy who stole it.

—Harlan Ray Putnam
Department of Economics, Texas A&M University

~ *R* ~

Raskin's Zero Law

The more zeroes found in the price tag for a government program, the less Congressional scrutiny it will receive.

—Marcus Raskin
the Institute for Policy Studies, Washington, D.C.

Ray's Exclamation

Come on! You know better! Does the contract have to say “think”?

—Linda Ray speaking on the telephone to a subcontractor
General Electric Company, San Jose, California
April 15, 1981

Morningstar's Comments About Reality

Jack seated himself upon a rock and, as did Morningstar, stared into the east.

After a time, “You told me that you wait here for the dawn,” he said, “to see the sun rise above the horizon.”

“Yes.”

”I believe that you will wait here forever.”

“It is possible.”

“Don't you know? I thought you knew all things.”

“I know many things, not all things. There is a difference.”

“Then tell me some things. I have heard daysiders say that the core of the world is a molten demon, that the temperature increases as one descends toward it, that if the crust of the world be pierced then fires leap forth and melted minerals build volcanoes. Yet I know that volcanoes are the doings of fire elementals who, if disturbed, melt the ground about them and hurl it upward. They exist in small pockets. One may descend far past them without the temperature increasing. Traveling far enough, one comes to the center of the world, which is not molten — which contains the Machine, with great springs, as in a clock, and gears and pulleys and counterbalances. I know this to be true, for I have journeyed that way and been near to the Machine itself. Still, the daysiders have ways of demonstrating that their view is the correct one. I was almost convinced by the way one man explained it, though I knew better. How can this be?”

“Your were both correct,” said Morningstar. “It is the same thing that you both describe, although neither of you sees it as it really is. Each of you color reality in keeping with your means of controlling it. For if it is uncontrollable, you fear it. Sometimes then, you color it incomprehensible. In your case, a machine; in theirs, a demon.”

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

“The stars I know to be the houses of spirits and deities — some friendly, some unfriendly and many not caring. All are near at hand and can be reached. They will respond when properly invoked. Yet the daysiders say that they are vast distances away and that there is no intelligence there. Again...?”

“It is again but two ways of regarding reality, both of them correct.”

“If there can be two ways, may there not be a third? Or a fourth? Or as many as there are people, for that matter?”

“Yes,” said Morningstar.

“Then which one is correct?”

“They all are.”

“But to see it as it *is*, beneath it all! Is this possible?”

Morningstar did not reply.

“You,” said Jack. “Have you looked upon reality?”

“I see clouds and falling stones. I feel the wind.”

“But by them, somehow, you know other things.”

“I do not know everything.”

“But have you looked upon reality?”

“I — Once ... I await the sunrise. That is all.”

Jack stared into the east, watching the pink-touched clouds. He listened to falling stones and felt the wind, but there was no wisdom there for him.

—from *Jack of Shadows*, Chapter 6
by Roger Zelazny

Reese’s Hierarchy Principle.

The higher up you go, the harder it gets to tell the good guys from the bad.

—John Reese, in *Person of Interest*
Season 1, Episode 14, *Wolf and Cub*

First Law of Religious Freedom

Religious freedom in a cultural complex is inversely proportional to the strength of the strongest religion.

—Evelyn Cyril (Oscar) Gordon in *Glory Road*,
by Robert A. Heinlein

The President’s Observation on Responsibility

Buck noticed the President nod, receiving the agreement as if both men were in the same room talking together. The President continued, in part thinking aloud: “This disappearance of human responsibility is one of the most disturbing aspects of the whole thing. It’s as if human beings had evaporated, and their places were taken by computers. And all

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

day you and I have sat here, fighting, not each other, but rather this big rebellious computerized system, struggling to keep it from blowing up the world.”

“It is true, Mr. President. Today the whole world could have burned without any man being given a chance to have a say in it.”

“In one way,” continued the President, “we didn’t even make the decision to have the computerized systems in the first place. These automated systems became technologically possible, so we built them. Then it became possible to turn more and more control decisions over to them, so we did that. And before we knew it, we had gone so far that the systems were able to put us in the situation we are in today.”

“Yes, we both trusted these systems too much.” A new grimness crept into Khrushchev’s voice. “you can never trust any system, Mr. President, whether it is made of computers, or of people...” He seemed lost in his own thoughts and his voice faded.

“But we did trust them,” said the President. “We, and you too, trusted our beautiful Fail-Safe system, and that’s what made us both helpless when it broke down.”

—from *Fail-Safe*, Chapter 22, *The Conference Line*
by Eugene Burdick and Harvey Wheeler

Roger’s Rule

If a woman is available, there’s a reason.

—Roger Hopkins
San Jose, California

Runyon’s Law

The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, but that’s the way to bet.

—Damon Runyon in *Peter’s Quotations*, William Morrow & Co.
by Laurence J. Peter

Russell’s Comment on Jealousy

Jealousy must not be regarded as a justifiable insistence upon rights, but as a misfortune to the one who feels it and a wrong toward its object. Those who shut love in a cage destroy the beauty and joy that it can display only while it is free and spontaneous. He who fears to lose his love has already lost it.

—Bertrand Russell

Rutherford’s Rule

The more you don’t know how to do, the less you have to do.

—Larry Rutherford
Virginia Military Institute

Ryan’s Law

Make three correct guesses consecutively and you will establish yourself as an expert.

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Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

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Schnebly's Apology

We don't supply answers around here, just excuses.

—Larry E. Schnebly
General Electric Company

Schnebly's Quote

Never tell the truth if you can think of a lie that sounds better.

—attributed to a previous acquaintance
by Larry E. Schnebly, General Electric Company

Schnebly's Reply

We don't have any hard limits on that, just different degrees of nervousness.

—Larry E. Schnebly
General Electric Company, April 21, 1976

Schnebly's Speculation

I expect they will find a cure for cancer long before they find a cure for government.

—Larry E. Schnebly
General Electric Company, November 10, 1976

Scully's Concern

Priest: Sometimes you must come full circle to find the truth. Why does that surprise you?

Scully: Mostly it just makes me afraid.

Priest: Afraid?

Scully: Afraid that God is speaking but that no one's listening.
—Dana Scully
Revelations, Season 3, Episode 11, *The X-Files*

Scully's Observations

1. Nothing happens in contradiction to nature, only in contradiction to what we know of it.

—Dana Scully
Herrenvolk, Season 4, Episode 1, *The X-Files*

2. It is my experience that lawyers ask the wrong question only when they don't want the right answer.

—Dana Scully
Terma, Season 4, Episode 9, *The X-Files*

Scytale's Warning

Reason is the first victim of strong emotion.

—Scytale the Face Dancer in *Dune Messiah*
by Frank Herbert

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

Selassie's Command

Everyone will now be mobilized, and all boys old enough to carry a spear will be sent to Addis Ababa. Married men will take their wives to carry food and cook. Those without wives will take any woman without a husband.... Anyone found at home after the receipt of this order will be hanged.

—Emperor Haile Selassie
as Italians invaded Ethiopia in 1935

Selkas' Observation

A civilized culture plumbs depths of depravity unknown to a genuine primitive.

—Selkas in *Veruchia*,
by E. C. Tubb

Sevareid's Law

The chief cause of problems is solutions.

Shay Tal's Observation

First, fate moulds our character; then character moulds our fate.

—Shay Tal
Helliconia Spring, Chapter VII, Brian W. Aldiss

Sheckley's Law

In order to ask a question you must already know most of the answer.

—Answerer, in *Ask a Foolish Question* in the anthology *Citizen in Space*
by Robert Sheckley

Shevek's Observations

If you can see a thing whole, it seems that it's always beautiful. Planets, lives.... But close up, a world's all dirt and rocks. And day to day, life's a hard job, you get tired, you lose the pattern. You need distance, interval. The way to see how beautiful the earth is, is to see it as the moon. The way to see how beautiful life is, is from the vantage point of death.

—chapter 6

The individual cannot bargain with the State. The State recognizes no coinage but power: and it issues the coins itself.

—chapter 9

You cannot buy the Revolution. You cannot make the Revolution. You can only be the Revolution. It is in your spirit, or it is nowhere.

—chapter 9

Sacrifice might be demanded of the individual, but never compromise: for though only the society can give security and stability, only the individual, the person, has the power of moral choice.

—chapter 10

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

We are not subjects of a State founded upon law, but members of a society founded upon revolution. Revolution is our obligation: our hope of evolution. “The revolution is in the individual spirit, or it is nowhere. It is for all, or it is nothing. If it is seen as having any end, it will never truly begin.” We can’t stop here. We must go on. We must take the risks.

—chapter 12
—all from *The Dispossessed*
by Ursula K. LeGuin

Shirley’s Law

When dealing with government, you cannot be too paranoid.

—Daniel Torrence (Hard Eyes) from *Eclipse*
by John Shirley

Simon’s Law

Everything put together sooner or later falls apart.

Thoughts About Sin

1931

The greatest sins in the world today are selfishness and the domination of one individual will by another will.

—*Mental Telepathy, Edgar Cayce*
The Edgar Cayce Reader, under the editorship of Hugh Lynn Cayce
February 15, 1931

1978

One of this country’s historic problems has been the inability of its lawmakers to distinguish between crime and sin.

—Playboy Forum
September 1978

Sitting Bull’s Warning

Indians who set their hearts upon the goods of the white man will be at his mercy, and will starve at his hands.

—Sitting Bull, Hunkpapa Chief and Holy Man
after the battle at the Little Bighorn
as quoted in *Little Bighorn, the Untold Story*

Skar’s Observation

Worship arises from ignorance.

—Datnil Skar in *Helliconia Spring*, chapter 8
by Brian W. Aldiss

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

Smart's Reassurance

Don't worry Chief, I can stand the torture if they can stand the screaming.

—Maxwell Smart
Secret Agent 86

Spacer's Philosophy

A test of any kind of gear proves only that the gear was working at the time of the test. Furthermore, such a test may well be the penultimate straw, the straw just before the last one that breaks the camel's back.

—an unknown Rim Runner in *Rendezvous on a Lost World*,
by A. Bertram Chandler

Specht's Metalaw

Under any conditions, anywhere, whatever you are doing, there is some ordinance under which you can be booked.

—Robert D. Specht
the Rand Corporation

Star's Observation

Good intentions are the source of more folly than all other causes put together.

—Star, Empress of the Twenty Universes in *Glory Road*, Chapter 19
by Robert A. Heinlein

Storm's Challenge

Go big or go home.

—Kyler Storm
performing in the American Gladiators competition, 1995

Stramback's Response

We don't answer customer questions. We respond to them.

—George Stramback, Manager, Technical Licensing Support
General Electric Company, San Jose, California

the Stupidity Warning

Never underestimate the power of human stupidity.

The Subversion Principle

Patience is the greatest of virtues if you're going to subvert a society, and there's no substitute for preparation.

—Qwin Zhang in *Cerberus: A Wolf in the Fold*, chapter 4
by Jack L. Chalker

Formulae for Success

1. Rise early, work late, strike oil.

—J. Paul Getty

2. Buy low, sell high.

—anonymous

3. Don't bet on the ponies.

—Poppa

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Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

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Taubman's Principle

The first principle of the design of high-density accommodation is that you design it for somebody else.

—Dr. Gordon Taubman in *Horizon Alpha*
by Douglas R. Mason

Terman's Law of Innovation

If you want a track team to win the high jump, you find one person who can jump seven feet, not seven people who can jump one foot.

Thoreau's Advice

If you see a man approaching with the obvious intent of doing you good, run for your life.

Thurber's Conclusion

There is no safety in numbers, or in anything else.

—*Fables for Our Time*,
by James Thurber, Harper & Brothers

Comment on Time

Time is just nature's way of keeping everything from happening at once.

—graffito
men's room of the Liberal Arts Building, University of Arizona

Traveler's Consolation

It's not where you are that counts, but how far you've traveled from where you started.

—Dell and Tracy Ford
Seattle, Washington

Trischmann's Observation

A pipe gives a wise man time to think and a fool something to stick in his mouth.

Brown's Promise Regarding Truth

Religion and science, philosophy and psychology, the truths discovered by the ancients as well as by the moderns, will be equally welcome here. Nothing is banned except trickery, sham, falsehood. All truth will be used so far as it may be applicable to the betterment of human life, no matter who was its discoverer or in what country or age it was found.

—Dr. William Moseley Brown, of Washington and Lee University
Speaking on November 11, 1928 at the dedication of
Edgar Cayce's hospital at Virginia Beach, Virginia
from *There is a River*, Chapter 18, by Thomas Sugrue, © 1942

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

The First Law of Truth

We must face the truth, however great the cost.

—Kui Chang Caine
in the T.V. series *Kung Fu*

~ U ~

U Thant's Warning

I do not wish to seem overly dramatic, but I can only conclude from the information that is available to me as Secretary-General that the members of the United Nations have perhaps ten years left in which to subordinate their ancient quarrels and launch a global partnership to curb the arms race, to improve the human environment, to defuse the population explosion and to supply the required momentum to development efforts. If such a global partnership is not forged within the next decade, then I very much fear that the problems I have mentioned will have reached such staggering proportions that they will be beyond our capacity to control.

—U Thant
Secretary General of the United Nations, 1969

Unnamed Law

If it happens, it must be possible.

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Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

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Vail's Axiom

In any human enterprise, work seeks the lowest hierarchic level.

Vique's Law

A man without religion is like a fish without a bicycle.



Virtue Defined

Virtue is right conduct in the face of temptation. If there is no temptation, there can be no virtue.

—Evelyn Cyril (Oscar) Gordon, in *Glory Road*
by Robert A. Heinlein

Vry's Law

No observation, however simple, can be made except by those predisposed to make it.

—Vry, in *Helliconia Spring*
by Brian W. Aldiss

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Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

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Walker's Observation

Lust is universal. Only inhibitions change from time to time and place to place.

—Lou Walker
July 30, 1979

Walters' Law

If you're already in a hole, there's no use to continue digging.

—Roy W. Walters
Roy Walters Associates, Glen Rock, New Jersey

The First Rule of War

One of the fundamental rules, if not the most fundamental rule of Vietnamese military science, is that in war you must win.

—General Vo Nguyen Giap
the Democratic Republic of Vietnam

Watkins' Cautionary Note³

When you try to take the credit for something, you often receive the blame, instead.

—K. E. Watkins
General Electric Company, November 29, 1977

Weiler's Law

Nothing is impossible for the man who doesn't have to do it himself.

Weinberg's Corollary

An expert is a person who avoids the small errors while sweeping on to the grand fallacy.

Weiss' Instructions

1. Oh well, you don't have to calculate that, you can just figure it out.
—D. T. Weiss to Bill Jamison, General Electric Company
January 5, 1976
2. Oh, we don't have time to draw the graphs! Just guess at it!
—D. T. Weiss to Sam A. Milam III, General Electric Company
January 19, 1976
3. We've got to insert more discipline into our work. I want you to be thinking about that.
—D. T. Weiss to L. E. Schnebly, G. A. Pierce, and Sam A. Milam III
General Electric Company, February 5, 1976

³ As of November 29, 1977, K.E. Watkins has declined to accept credit for the above statement.

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

Welch's Hypothesis

The amount of trouble varies directly as the square of the number of "dollies" involved.

—Jim Welch

National Reactor Testing Station, Idaho Falls, Idaho, 1967

The Mystery of Wheat

Another figure from Greek mythology who flew in a serpent chariot was Triptolemos, the god who first introduced wheat to earth. This early recognition of wheat as an alien plant is remarkable, since its origin has always been a mystery. There is no native plant anywhere on earth from which cultivated wheat appears to have descended.

—from *The Flying Saucer Vision*

Chapter 2, *The Flying Saucer Tradition*, by John Michell

First Law of Wing-Walking

Never turn loose of what you've got until you've got hold of something else.

—Donald Herzberg

Winnegan's Reminder

One man's nightmare is another man's wet dream.

—Grandpa Winnegan, in *Riders of the Purple Wage*

by Phillip José Farmer

in the anthology *Dangerous Visions #1*

edited by Harlan Ellison

Wiseman's Assertion

The burning conviction that we have a holy duty toward others is often a way of attaching our drowning selves to a passing raft. What looks like a giving hand is often a holding on for dear life. Take away our holy duties and you leave our lives puny and meaningless. There is no doubt that in exchanging a self-centered for a selfless life we gain enormously in self-esteem. The vanity of the selfless, even those who practice utmost humility, is boundless.

—Jim Wiseman

General Electric Company, August, 1974

Woldow's Worry

There would be nothing worse than if they actually built a panel exactly to print.

—Virginia J. Woldow, General Electric Company

September 12, 1978

Woldow's Observation

Nepotism begins at home.

—Virginia J. Woldow, General Electric Company

July 16, 1979

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

Woldow's Objection

This company produces vast projects from half vast plans.

—Virginia J. Woldow, General Electric Company
February 15, 1979

Wolf's Law

Those who don't study the past will repeat its errors. Those who do study it will find other ways to err.

—Charles Wolf, Jr.

A Principle of Worship

True worship is solitary; when the religious gather together, they put on pageants for their gods.

—from *Helliconia Summer*, Chapter XIX, *Oldorando*
by Brian W. Aldiss

Writer's Confession

... Disturb a writer when he is in the throes of creation and he is likely to turn and bite right to the bone . . . and not even know that he's doing it. As writers' wives and husbands often learn to their horror.

And — attend me carefully, Gwen! — there is no way that writers can be tamed and rendered civilized. Or even cured. In a household with more than one person, of which one is a writer, the only solution known to science is to provide the patient with an isolation room, where he can endure the acute stages in private, and where food can be poked in to him with a stick. Because, if you disturb the patient at such times, he may break into tears or become violent. Or he may not hear you at all . . . and, if you shake him at this stage, he bites.

—Colin Richard speaking to Sadie Gwendolyn
in *The Cat Who Walks Through Walls*, Chapter III
by Robert A. Heinlein

Rules for Written Reports

1. Always present as foresight what you have learned from hindsight.
2. The more dubious the results, the longer the lack of conclusions.
3. The conclusions are less important than the explanations for the lack of conclusions.
4. For an ordinary failure, write as clearly and as confidently as possible. Perhaps you can get by if you sound convincing.
5. For a bad failure, write as complexly and technically as possible. Perhaps you can confuse the issue.
6. For a colossal failure, write as pedantically and lengthily as possible. Perhaps no one will ever read the report.

—Milton Dickens
Professor of Speech, U.S.C.

Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom

Wyndham's Assertion

The passion for order is a manifestation of the deep desire for security. The desire is natural — but the attainment is fatal.

—Clytassamine
in *Pillar to Post*, by John Wyndham

Wyzanski's Warning

More than once the judges of a court have been indirectly reminded that they personally are taxpayers. No sophisticated person is unaware that even in this very Commonwealth the Internal Revenue Service has been in possession of facts with respect to public officials which it has presented or shelved in order to serve what can only be called political ends, be they high or low. And a judge who knows the score is aware that every time his decisions offend the Internal Revenue Service he is inviting a close inspection of his own returns.

—District Judge Wyzanski
in Donald R. LORD et al. v. Alvin M. KELLY et al.
Civ. A. No. 63-932., United States District Court, D. Massachusetts
April 13, 1965

~ y ~

Yama's Declaration

An army, great in space, may offer opposition in a brief span of time. One man, brief in space, must spread his opposition across a period of many years if he is to have a chance of succeeding.

—Lord Yama, Deathgod, in *Lord of Light*, chapter iii
by Roger Zelazny

Yamamoto's Comment

. . . according to the American radio, our ultimatum was not delivered until 55 minutes after the attack. I can think of nothing that would more enrage the Americans. I fear that all we have done is to awaken a sleeping giant and fill him with a terrible resolve.

—Admiral Yamamoto, Japanese Chief of the Navy
(statement after the attack on Pearl Harbor)

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Zapata's Beliefs

Seek justice from tyrannical governments not with your hat in your hands but with a rifle in your fist.

I want to die a slave to principles, not to men.

The enemies of the country and of freedom of the people have always denounced as bandits those who sacrifice themselves for the noble causes of the people.

—Emiliano Zapata, from *The Ideology of a Peasant Revolutionary: Zapata*
by Robert P. Millon

Zimmerman's Law

Regardless of whether a project expands or contracts, administrative overhead continues to grow.

—Charles J. Zimmerman

Zymurgy's First Law

Once you open a can of worms, the only way to re-can them is to use a larger can.

Zymurgy's Second Law

People are always available for work in the past tense.

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