

The Leacock Medal for Humour

Canada's Award for Literary Humour

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War, Sports, and Massage Parlours

by

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It's Day 223 at the outpost, and the enemy is closing in. I have few rations left, and can't get any signal. It's time to make one final stand.

Oh, I'm sorry. Perhaps you're under the impression this is a story written from the perspective of a soldier. It isn't, but it's still a story about war. By outpost I mean dorm room, by rations I mean care package crumbs, and the signal is the ever-waning wi-fi waves that can make it through these chic concrete walls. What follows are my trials and tribulations of pursuing a degree in Aerospace Engineering, and answering the question: "What should I do with my life?" So buckle in, as long as your seat isn't on a Boeing 373.

Seeing the word "Engineer" can set off flares in the creative world. Everything here is matter-of-fact. The standard in visual presentations is font type Arial, size 11. Maybe a low quality .jpeg from Google Images if someone decides to add some pizzazz. So I understand any prejudice you might have. How did an engineer end up writing a short story? The better question is: How did an artist end up in STEM? The answer: I could do math. Note the use of past tense. Now, I'm not so sure.

One of the first things they tell you here, while you're still green as grass, is that there are limitless possibilities of what you can use your degree for. Satellites, nano-tech, telecommunication, lasers, it's literal rocket science. But you start to see a common character appear in every field. He's big, bad, and hiring with reasonable pay! If you're making money, chances are you're making missiles. And if you can find an engineer who doesn't want to make enough money to swim in, give me a call and we can see about reviving Victorian-era travelling shows of curiosities. I however, am not too keen on designing the next Machine-of-Deathinator 3000. I'd like to say it's my artistic spirit that's to blame for helping my morals, but that wouldn't be a historically accurate take, considering the actions of one Austrian painter circa 1939.

Besides, I wage enough war in the here and now. The people I share a bathroom with aren't the most courteous with their habits. Every day I wake up to fight what looks like the Battle of the Atlantic with all the shower water on the floor. Even when you're armed to the teeth with disinfectant, scrubbing pads, and rubber gloves, sometimes the enemy will pull a fast one and decide the shower is the best place to clean his muddy

Crocs. Also, someone needs to tell them the Geneva Protocol banned the use of noxious gas.

So war is out. On the other hand we have sports. There's money to be made in sports. And boy does a career in designing racing airplanes sound fun. But if as many engineers get to work for racing teams as hockey players from my hometown make it into the NHL, I know well enough not to expect it to just fall into place. You must first endure hours of hard work, hours of studying, hours of test-taking, and hours of standing in awkward silence in the elevator with quasi-acquaintances. Where do you look? Where do you put your hands? I couldn't tell you. Knowledge of calculus and social skills have an inversely proportional relationship.

Whatever my fate may be, I know there is one career I can never have. They teach you in your first class that there's a myriad of opportunities come graduation. You don't even have to limit yourself to engineering! Reach for the stars! And it's true, I've heard many successful figures introduce themselves as "Current CEO, former engineer," or "I work as a financial advisor, but first I was an engineer." Now try that with a massage therapist, and see how it falls apart. No self-respecting masseuse would have ever considered learning about vectors and differential equations first. The problem starts with the association of the word "therapy." There is no consoling to be done by an engineer. This applies to regular therapists too. Imagine if someone told you that for their mental health, they started talking to someone who arranges traffic flow in metropolitan areas. It might go something like this: You might say, "I feel as though my partner doesn't understand that I want personal space sometimes," and the engineer-turned-therapist would say, "Well that's easy. First go to Home Depot and get two 4x4 posts, and twelve half-inch planks. That should be enough to build a small fence in your living room and then you'll have all the privacy you need."

Some people might look down on a hands-on profession such as the massage business. Especially if the business is a little too hands-on. That kind of work must've been plan B right? You give math or science your best shot, and then you fall back on something "simpler." I'm here to tell you that it's the other way around. No amount of God complex and caffeine can help you achieve this one. Don't have any people skills? Not familiar with the word intimate? We have a slide ruler and an HB 2 pencil waiting for you. But take heart dear reader, it isn't all so tough. I really am very passionate about what I'm learning. I'll just have to take people to the moon the old-fashioned way.

