

Regarding the Appropriateness of
Songs for Dustmites
for Children and Other Small Mammals

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1 Preliminary Research

Hello there. How are you? I hope you have your science cap on. Because we are going to do some science. Do you know what science is? It's the ability to produce solutions in a problem domain. Sometimes it involves superstrings. Sometimes it involves quarks, the unified field theory, pretzels, and nanogears. Not to mention multiple universe theory, like that discussed by Deutsch and others.¹

So today is a very special day, because we are going to use science to come up with solution to the question "will my kids like Steve Burns' new album, *Songs for Dust Mites?*" Who wants to know, you ask? Steve himself. He asked me (my name is Paul, and I'm a scientist) to analyze the problem and come back with a solution. Here's how it happened:

Steve Burns approached stealthily, creeping like a jungle cat intent on pouncing. But, right before it was too late, I turned. "I see you," I cried. "Stand away, beast!"

He laughed—laughter so cruel is rarely heard²—and gave a smile that thrust a wave of fear into my deepest bowels. "I have a favor to ask you," he said, his insinuating tone disgusting to my ears. "I've been working on this album for almost two years now, and I am fairly certain that this is an album for adult people, or very, very tall children whose brains are abnormally well developed. But basically, what's happening is that everyone hears I'm doing an album, and they want to know if it's for kids. Frankly, I don't know. So I want you to research the problem using science and suchlike, so I have something to tell them."

"Back, you creature!" I said. "Why would I do this thing for you? You who have stolen the heart of my sister with your devilish ways, who have cast my bosom friend Harland Lambert, who was her fiance, into a pit of tar as dark as night! Tell me, tell me why I should ever acquiesce to your foul demands?"

At which point that monstrosity pulled from his breeches a small leather enclosure and opened it. I covered my nose, expecting some vicious, choleric poison to emanate,³ but he instead produced a *wad* of *greenbacks* which shook like leaves in his nefarious hands.

"Sure, sure. 50 bucks, but it needs to be done by Thursday."

What could I say? To see pure science reduced to such base uses! I had no choice. I moved towards the brute, and he handed me the money. I took it, expecting it to burn my palm. But evil is most subtle. It burns the mind, not the palm.

¹Hambdell, Eldridge. *The Frisky Biscuit*. Screaming Lark, 2000.

²Outside of the time my pants ripped while he was carrying a sofa down a set of stairs.

³Nakinaki, Damlain. *Dorcas' Adventures in Spain*. The Insitute Institute Press, 1432.

“I will do this!” I said, “and then you will trouble me no more! And you will release my sister!”

Steve looked at me quizzically, confused. “Yeah, okay, Paul,” said Steve. “But you don’t have a sister.”

“And I don’t know why you are surrounded by lightning bolts,” I replied, “but keep your brain-ghosts out of my roadster.⁴”

“I’ll talk to you later,” said Steve, staring sadly, then turning to go.

2 First Experimental Approach

My fears that Steve Burns had absconded with my sister and was sending mental energy-constructs into the bushes around my apartment subsided, and I realized that he was merely a regular human being. He was certainly not a horned devil-being intent on destroying me and my family by sending brain-hungry zombie chimpanzees⁵ to attack my house. Ha! How could I ever think such a thing? You’d think I was crazy, not a very rational scientist. Ha! HAH! Side-splitter!

In short, I began to feel much better, and truly grateful that Steve would continually support my research even after I accused him of having space-ray hypno-eyes. We decided to use the Helmholtz method of acoustic identity to complete the project.

2.1 Initial Results

Henceforth, according to the guidelines set down by Burns, my research team and I gathered together several pre-adult agile ruminants of (genus *Capra*⁶) and played the *Songs for Dust Mites* album for them. I myself wrote up the results, providing a statistical overview of the reaction of the ruminants to the album. Of particular note, some eyelid flutterings were noted during “Mighty Little Man” and “Troposphere” encouraged them to stop eating the styrofoam coffee cups and begin baaing.

A full report of 80 single-spaced pages and a chart (of the price of economy cars from 1975-1985, but nonetheless a chart) was presented to Mr. Burns at his extensive New York studios, where he sat on a strangely patterned overstuffed red chair, surrounded by his minions of toadies, flunkies, hangers-on, sybarites, parasites, and sycophants, who attended him like flukes⁷ in an intestine.

I waited patiently for him to read through the paper, noting with satisfaction how his lips moved as he encountered the more difficult words. Finally, he looked back at me. I smiled, nodding and awaited his his approval. “Oh,

⁴There was a terrible itchiness right then.

⁵Goar, Chickadee. *Cats Can Dance*. Mousetrap, 2000.

⁶It’s a wonderful life.

⁷Flukes are always unsuspected.

Paul,” said Steve. “When I said I wanted to know if the album worked for kids, I meant *human* kids. Not *goat* kids.”

I felt another episode coming on. The deceiving beast! His glowing skull emanated an evil glare from below his pellucid skin. But no, I reminded himself, he was simply a man. He could not control my thoughts with his oily soul-tongue any longer. “Ah, Steve!” I said, “In the name of science, you need to be more clear! I spent the best portion of our research funds on those goat kids.”

Steve sighed, something he did frequently during the research phase of the engagement. “It’s okay, just a mixup. I can pay you for them. But Paul—”

“Please call me Emperor Xortar Cheemchim. It is the name given to me by the lobsters.”

“Okay, Paul, that’s fine, but *human* children from here on out,” he said. “Find out if *human* children like the album.”

“What about fox pups?⁸”

“Sure, them too,” he said, laughing once more. “And octopi, and hunchbacks.”

“I don’t have sufficient experience with octopi and hunchbacks,” I said.⁹

“Then just the fox pups.”

“\$150,” I said. “Science is not cheap.”¹⁰

He frowned. “Yeah, okay, we have a deal.”

Around this time, I began to follow a prescribed plan of medication which left me feeling much better. Before this, I was frequently extremely concerned that a space presence known as Xortar Cheemchim, of the Frange people on Alpha Droxy, had possessed my mind in service to the desires of a conspiracy of space lobsters. But now I was enjoying myself day-to-day, loving life, and went for a ride on the Cyclone at Coney Island and ate some cotton candy.

3 Revised Experimental Approach

Thus we gathered a group of children ages 3-5 in one room, and a group of fox pups¹¹ in the other room, and played them my copy of *Songs for Dustmites* once more. The experimental facility was a rented garage in Bergenfield, New Jersey, which I lined entirely in stainless steel, and sterilized using fire.

The children’s reactions to the album varied, and results were inconclusive. One danced around the room, but when asked what she liked about the music, indicated she was a “bird.”¹² A statistically significant number of children (45.54% out of a sample group of 3) asked for the bathroom, or to see the kitten.

⁸Dzord, Nevets. *The Brainburner, and Flaming Laps Around the Swimming Pool*. Spare Coyne Press, 2000.

⁹I have since obtained this experience, and I am much happier and more satisfied.

¹⁰It often costs over \$1000 for the smallest things.

¹¹Age indeterminate.

¹²Ford, Paul. *I Must Go to the Gym More Often*. Terrible Accident Press, 2000.

One child wanted to watch a television program involving a puzzle-solving dog. A representative conversation:

Researcher: How does the fact that this album is created entirely using various forms of laser technology feel to you? Do you like this, dislike it, or have no opinion?

Child: Can I have candy?¹³

Researcher: Can I measure your brain using the craniometer?¹⁴

Child: Pops pops pops.

Researcher: Do you prefer this song in its unencoded form, or would you like to see it psychoacoustically compressed and thus more portable?

Child: Itchy nose.

In the other room, the fox pops simply yapped and bit one another playfully, ignoring the album, save that they howled loudly at the sound of “Henry Krinkle’s Lament.” Interviews with the fox pups were inconclusive, and their perky ears interfered with standard methods of craniometrical fact-finding.¹⁵

3.1 Secondary Results

What are we to make of these results? To understand the reaction, we may turn to the Czech-Vietnamese scholar Krnznskn Ng, who in his “Search for Vowels” tested the Rolling Stones’ *Sticky Fingers* on tadpoles. It is Ng who famously said “it is a true test of the moral boundaries of a creaturehood [his term for any group of interacting species] how it amuses, how it encourages its young ones to play.” Using Ng’s research and our own findings, we were able to identify exactly how much a given population of children would respond to the album *Songs for Dust Mites* using the following equation:

$$\sqrt{x_{\sigma} + \frac{\frac{\tau_{90\eta^2+364\eta-75}}{219\mu+8} - \sqrt{\int_{\epsilon=\chi}^{\theta} \phi_{\epsilon} \cdot d\epsilon}}{\sum_{\nu=0}^{\xi} \omega_{\nu}}} = \sum_{\kappa=-\infty}^{\infty} \iota_{\sum_{\kappa}}^{\infty}$$

Where x is the eye color of the children and the other x is whether you own a dachshund (or rent one)¹⁶.

4 Final Recommendations

“But look at this equation! It has all those squiggly special math E things!” I shouted.

¹³Candy is tasty.

¹⁴Tom Eagle, Colonel, USMC. *We Must Get the Russians And Use Phrenology to Beat Them and We Need Laser Beams in Space and are You There God, It’s Me, Tom Eagle, USMC?*. Anachronistic, 2000.

¹⁵Which did not in this case involve a laser drill, before everyone starts sending letters.

¹⁶Fessenbecker, Wallis. *Unstriping the Forest-Colored Rugby Shirt and the Sky-Colored Dog: A Critical-Poetic Analysis of the Trope of Misunderstanding in Children’s Television*. Debord Press, 2000.

“Look, this is *not what I asked for*,” said Steve. “I don’t know what to tell you.”

“Tell me that my research is not in vain.”

“I’ve got the record people breathing down my neck,” said Steve. “Can you get this done or not?”

“I gave you an equation that describes the situation exactly.”

“Well, try something else. Time is money, Paul. I’m beginning to regret this.”

5 A New Experimental Approach

The research team decided that we needed to step back and work from a different angle. The question was, after all, not whether children liked the music on the album, but whether they liked the album itself, as a physical object. Perhaps the cold, shiny plastic was off-putting. Thus we fabricated three different versions of the CD: one made of graham crackers, the other entirely plush, and the third from chocolate.

Reaction to these versions was mixed. Children said the music on the CD made of graham crackers was “stale.” The plush CD “lacked edge.” And the chocolate CD was “too sweet.” We attempted to graph these responses using the Ng method, but the sample set produced a great degree of statistical noise (see Figure 1). Several invocations to the ghosts of Shannon and Weiner proved fruitless, and all of our checksumming and error-correction routines were in vain. We even Huffman-encoded. But ultimately all was for naught, and I stood in desperate likelihood of having to once again stand before Steve Burns and confess my failure. I was not sure that I could take it.

Then, in our darkest hour,¹⁷ sitting bleakly around the office, my research staff and I arrived a moment of profound insight: *children like puppies*. With 9 days left, we hit upon the course of action that would make or break us: we would encode the album *Songs for Dust Mites* into the genetic material of a puppy. The technique is foolproof (or so we thought); the method is often used by major corporate lobbyists to produce senators, and has a proven record of success. Instead of barking, the puppy will howl out the album, reading the musical notes from his own altered gene spool. What could be cuter? Ethics were of no concern; after all, this is science.

The experimental approach, stated simply, was as follows: puppies which howl the songs from *Songs for Dust Mites* will be produced using genetic manipulation. Children will play with the puppies and react to the music. If they continue to enjoy the company of the puppy and play with it, this will mean we have an album that is appropriate for children. If the children do not like the puppies, then the album should not be marketed to children. My entire team rose from their chairs and gave the high five. Science at its finest!¹⁸

¹⁷I later opened the shades.

¹⁸On the shoulders of giants, even.

I once again returned to Steve's palatial lair and presented my case. A visibly agitated Burns was willing to try, and handed over what he promised was our *last* \$50. I immediately checked the yellow pages for the best genetic engineering lab within our budget, and found one in Jersey City, New Jersey, "conveniently next to the PATH train!"

In hindsight, we should have been more aware of potential difficulties in contracting with EasyGene, Inc. The offices were temporary, set up with large pieces of cardboard. The scientist we spoke with, Dr. Charles Pinglador, wore a smock and nothing else. Also during that meeting, a goat ran out in the middle of the meeting, screamed out several key scenes from *King Lear*, and keeled over dead.

However, as I reasoned at the time, the big genetic engineering companies want \$50 just to talk to you. Pinglador was willing to start immediately. Thus a contract was signed, we handed over a copy of the album, and were told to return a week or two later to pick up the puppies. We returned excited and hopeful. However, EasyGene's previous client had been Greenpeace, and, as Pinglador apologetically explained, "someone forgot to clean the autoclave."

I will briefly summarize the results, as too much detail is humiliating and may push me into relapse. What I was forced to present to Steve Burns was two dozen humpback-whale/corgi-hybrids, which communicate by singing *Songs for Dust Mites* in the subsonic range. In good conscience we cannot present these creatures, which flop around the apartment and leave messes the size of hatchback cars, to small children, who are delicate and may become afraid, particularly because these whales have 3-foot tusks.

The revocation of our funding by Burns has led us to close up the laboratory and disperse our fine group to other climes. Perhaps the saddest result is that we were not able to isolate and answer the problem posed to us at the beginning of this project (to wit, whether children would like *Songs for Dust Mites*), and thus science was not served. The only fruit borne of our research is unintentional, but it could be called significant: we are now in possession of 24 18-ton plankton-eating puppies with gigantic tails, which we plan to release into the Hudson River once the ice clears.

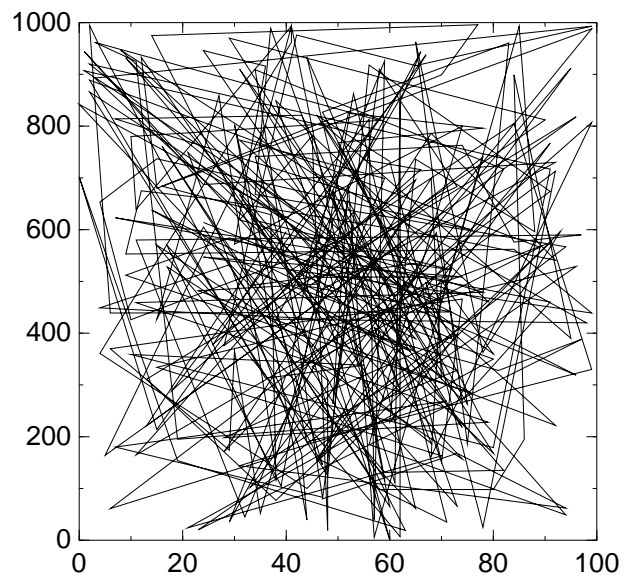


Figure 1: Graph of children's reactions to the "Chocolate Album."