



Food for thought

The Oatmeal's website has a funny taste

For as long as I can remember, my grandfather, who lived to be 93, started every day with a bowl of oatmeal. That doesn't prove that eating oatmeal everyday is good for you, but it surely demonstrates that it's not bad for you.

The same probably can be said for **TheOatmeal.com**. While visiting this website regularly may or may not be good for you, it's probably not bad for you.

The site, which features healthy portions of humorous writing and cartoons, is cooked up by Matthew Inman, aka The Oatmeal. Be warned though, while a hot bowl of Quaker Oats is a fine meal for kids, the dish Mr. Inman serves is full of ingredients not fit for their consumption.

I would hesitate to classify the content on the site as adult humor, since fart and poop jokes are plentiful, but the language and much of the subject matter are definitely R-rated.

Variety of ingredients

The Oatmeal writes and draws sarcastic, satirical and often crude observations on life, and then self-publishes them on his website. He also puts many of his creations on prints, T-shirts, coffee mugs and other trinkets and books that can be purchased from his online shop.

The commentary covers a wide range of human experiences, such as relationships, work place situations, cats, dogs, horses, food, technology, language and more. The Oatmeal uses a variety of formats to

share his observations. The most common form is a multipanel comic strip that explores multiple aspects of the subject, such as the behaviors of dogs or religious dogma. They usually contain multiple jokes and some of them are really funny.

Some of his musings are contained in longer essays that are accompanied by occasional spot art. These also usually contain several good jokes, but some of them go on longer than necessary. There's an ode to Nikola Tesla, one of The Oatmeal's personal heroes, that seems to go on forever.

Another technique he uses is the infographic. These feature diagrams of a particular situation or subject, such as an idealized movie theater with a special dome-covered section for inconsiderate jerks.

There's a section on the site that has humorous quizzes you can take. Actually, the premise of each quiz is funnier than the actual questions. For example, you can find out how many Justin Biebers you could take in a fight, or how many hungry weasels your body could feed.

The Oatmeal also has a blog which serves mainly as an extension of the website. It features more of the same types of comics and essays. The main difference between the blog and the rest of the site is the interaction with readers' comments at the end of some blog posts.

A spicy mix

The visual style of the website is a bit of a mishmash, especially the typography. Most of the features and links use a font that looks like hand-lettered comics. But every so often he'll throw in different fonts for links, essays or as labels on items in

the comics. Sometimes, it makes sense visually, and other times it looks completely random.

The drawings also suffer from a lack of consistency. The Oatmeal is a better writer than artist, but his drawing style does have a crude charm to it. However, he often adds clip-art type elements that have a completely different style than his drawings. The result is a mash up that is not as effective as when he draws the entire panel.

A matter of taste

The design and navigation of the site are pretty straightforward. Most pages feature a main menu bar at the top with the site's logo and links to the main sections: Comics, Book, Quizzes, Blog, Shop and social media links. Below that is a secondary menu bar with links to various categories of comics. The bulk of most pages is taken up with a grid of illustrated links to the comics. There's usually a single advertisement nestled in the grid. At the bottom of the page the main links are repeated and a second, different site logo is displayed.

I think it's a good idea to start off the new year — and every day for that matter — with a good laugh, and a serving of The Oatmeal is as good a way to do that as any. While the style of his humor may be viewed as off-putting by many, at its core it shines a light on the many absurdities in life. And pointing out the ridiculousness of many of our social and institutional interactions is the first step toward improving them.

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