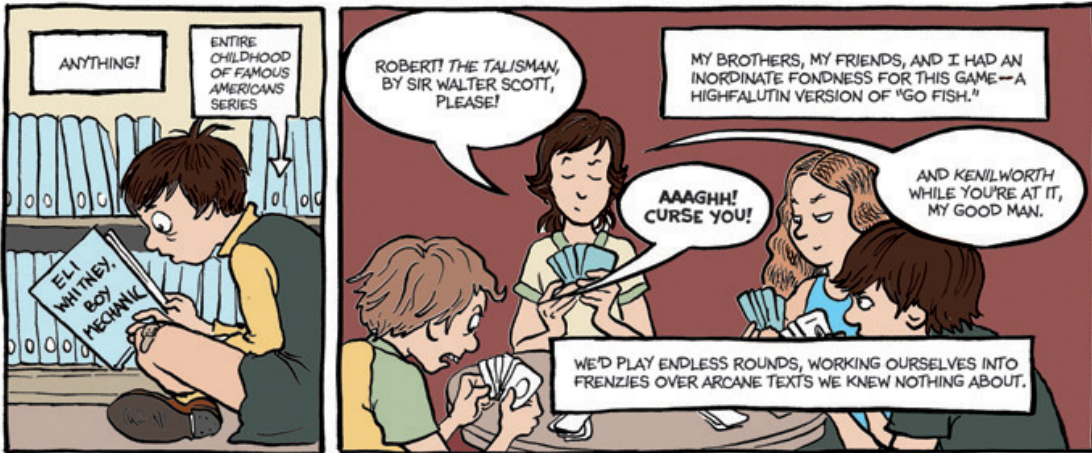


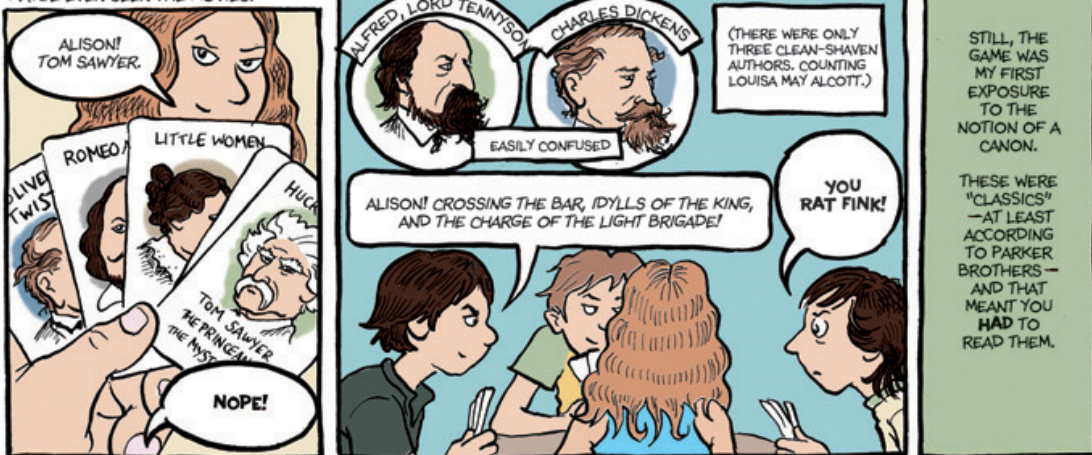
BY SECOND GRADE, I WAS MAINLINING ANYTHING I COULD GET MY HANDS ON.

IN THOSE DAYS, THERE WAS WORLD ENOUGH AND TIME. I ASSUMED I'D GET TO EVERYTHING EVENTUALLY. EVEN THE WEIRD BOOKS IN THE "AUTHORS" DECK.



WELL, WE'D HEARD OF SOME OF THEM, MAYBE EVEN SEEN THE MOVIES.

BUT MOSTLY WE GROUPED OUR CARDS BY FACIAL HAIR.



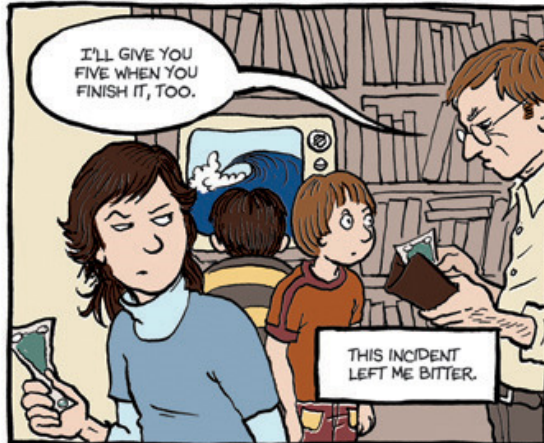
THIS COERCIVE PARADIGM BEGAN TO IMPINGE ON MY INNOCENT READING PLEASURE IN OTHER, LESS SUBTLE WAYS.



ONE DAY WHEN I WAS 11 OR 12, DAD TRIED A NEW TACK.



ALTHOUGH I'D NEVER READ TOM SAWYER, THE BOOK'S PREQUEL, EVERYONE KNOWS THE STORY ABOUT THE FENCE--HOW TOM TRICKS THE OTHER KIDS INTO WHITEWASHING BY PRETENDING IT'S FUN.



MY FATHER GREW UP IN A BOOKLESS HOME, AND LITERATURE HAD BEEN HIS SALVATION. BUT NOW HE'D BECOME AN ANNOYING MISSIONARY.



I DIDN'T WANT TO GIVE HIM THE SATISFACTION, BUT FIVE BUCKS WAS A LOT OF MONEY IN THOSE DAYS.



I WOULD SHOW MY FATHER. I WOULD FORCE MYSELF TO READ THINGS. WHEN I WAS 14, I BEGAN A GRIM LIST.

- Summer Reading*
1. 1984
  2. Animal Farm
  3. The Diary of Anne Frank
  4. Romeo & Juliet
  5. The Count of Monte Cristo

I DEVELOPED A SEVERE AVERSION TO READING ANYTHING ANYONE ELSE TOLD ME TO, EVEN MY FRIENDS.



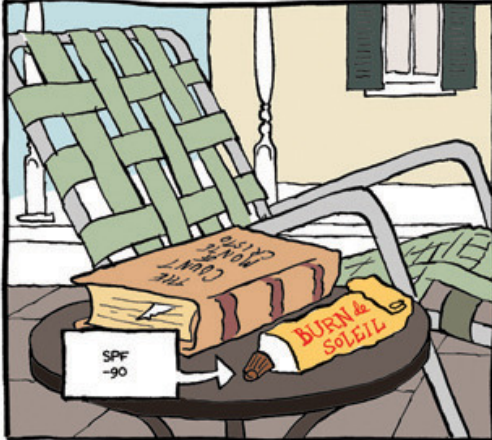
AND WHEN I DID INDEED BEAT MY YOUNGER BROTHERS TO THE FINISH, I COULDN'T HELP FEELING A TWINGE OF SUSPICION.



THE VARIOUSLY IMPRISONED AND DOOMED PROTAGONISTS REFLECTED MY OWN JOYLESS SELF-INCARCERATION.



I ACTUALLY LIKED ANNE FRANK. AND I GOT THROUGH ORWELL, THOUGH I MISSED ALL THE ALLEGORY. BUT THAT WAS AS FAR AS I GOT WITH MY LIST.



I CAN'T HELP BUT THINK OF MR. KNIGHTLEY'S DRY OBSERVATION ON A SIMILAR PROJECT UNDERTAKEN BY EMMA WOODHOUSE.

'Emma has been meaning to read more ever since she was twelve years old. I have seen a great many lists of her drawing up at various times of books that she meant to read regularly through - and very good lists they were - very well chosen, and very neatly arranged - sometimes alphabetically, and sometimes by some other rule. The list she drew up when only fourteen - I remember thinking it did her judgment so much credit, that I preserved it some time; and I dare say she may have made out a very good list now.'



I LEFT THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO LANGUISHING IN THE CHATEAU D'IF BECAUSE I HAD DISCOVERED A KIND OF READING THAT WAS INFINITELY MORE COMPELLING.

