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## How Do We Read Comics of the Quotidian? (Part II of a Series)

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# How Do We Read Comics of the Quotidian? (Part II of a Series)

In my [previous post](https://pencilpanelpage.wordpress.com/2012/05/10/how-do-we-read-comics-of-the-quotidian-part-i-of-a-series/) (<https://pencilpanelpage.wordpress.com/2012/05/10/how-do-we-read-comics-of-the-quotidian-part-i-of-a-series/>) on the textures of the everyday, I explored the blend of everyday occurrences during wartime. How do people who live during times of war construct their day-to-day lives?

In this post, I want to extend the notion of the quotidian to a popular web comic called [Questionable Content](http://questionablecontent.net/index.php) (<http://questionablecontent.net/index.php>). This daily comic, created by Jeph Jacques, is about the lives of urban twenty-somethings, some of whom work at a coffee shop or at a library, but all of whom are attempting to create and maintain friendships and romances as well as trying to figure out what they want out of life. (You might think of the television show *Friends* as a mainstream media parallel.)

There is little action in the comic; most of the strips are dialogue-based, in which the characters talk their relationships into being. Here are two images from the same comic strip (#1720) that show Dora, the coffee shop owner, hiring new employees:



(<https://pencilpanelpage.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/1720-hiring-practices-at-coffee-of-doom-panel-1.png>)

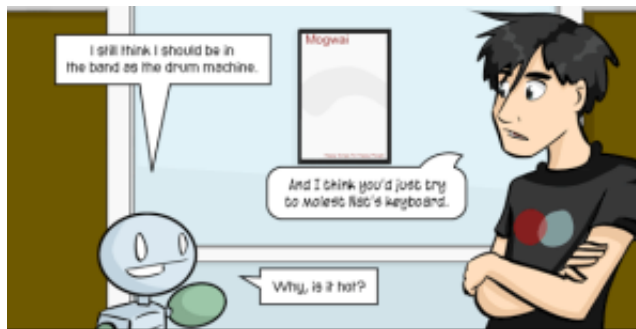
The language that Dora uses clearly demarcates her role as 'boss,' and the silence of the other characters likewise demarcates their role as 'employee.' The joke, of course, is resolved in the final panel of the strip:



<https://pencilpanelpage.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/1720-hiring-practices-at-coffee-of-doom-panel-5.png>

Dora realizes that she has overshot the mark with her speech and attempts to soften the impact. Faye, a long-term employee, reads Dora's social role not simply as 'boss' but a blend of 'boss' and 'friend,' which of course is very tricky territory in the workplace.

Readers of *Questionable Content*, though, know that there are elements of the comic that might nudge it outside the boundary of the realistic quotidian. There is a small but significant set of robots that (who?) complement the human characters. The humans and robots interact in unremarkable ways. By this, I mean that conversations occur between humans and robots just as conversations occur between humans. Almost no distinction is made between these characters with a few exceptions. Even the robots are occasionally prone to making socially awkward comments or to behaving in socially inappropriate ways. For example, the robot Pint Size has a range of topics and a point of view that is slightly askew from that of the human characters (comic #660).



<https://pencilpanelpage.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/660-musical-instruments-and-sexism.png>

Most often, Pint Size verges on sexual harrassment, of both humans and other robots. Although this happens rarely, Pint Size behaves in ways that make a few individual comic strips NSFW.

How do we perceive comics like *Questionable Content*? Do we think of them as outlandish, futuristic, inflected ever so subtly by science fiction? Does it count as a comic that manages to achieve a strong sense of the everyday, the very essence of the quotidian?

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## About Frank Bramlett

Until June 2014, I am a visiting lecturer in the English Department at Stockholm University, where I offer seminars in Sociolinguistics; Language and Gender; and Language and Comics; among others. For Fall 2014, I will return to the English Department at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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