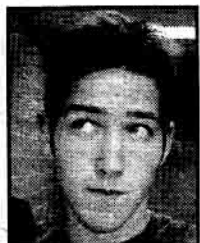


SWM Seeks Tall Half-Caf Americano Misto with Wings

by Chris Ladd
A&E EDITOR

I never used to understand coffee, thought it unnecessary, stupid, and bitter. "Drinking black coffee," I once proclaimed, "is like drinking out of a mud puddle."



WHERE THE
HELL IS
WAYNE,
MAINE?

I'm not sure precisely when that statement became false, but recently I can't keep myself away from the stuff.

Even now that I drink several cups a day, I don't understand the fascination.

It may just be something to do, something to keep me occupied. Coffee, like smoking, lends a task to my hands and mouth, keeps me content in the knowledge that I am, in

fact, doing something while I do, really, nothing at all. True, I've never been a smoker, but I've always envied them for having something to fiddle with and keep them ever-busy and fulfilled. They always seem so contented and at peace.

Well, not anymore, really, since they've been relegated to the freezing out-of-doors and shunned from public life; in the winter I see them huddled outside the dorms like junkies over a barrel fire, each drag on their cigarettes punctuated with heavy shivers, muttered complaints, and hacking coughs.

Smoking has indeed lost its glamour, but coffee is still undeniably stylish.

You can't help but look scholarly in a coffee shop, blowing delicately on a tall Columbian Narino Supremo, complaining about how juvenile soda pop is, and reading an un-illustrated periodical, like "The Wall Street Journal," or "Penthouse Forum." Why, just the other day I was at Starbucks, and an unseemly young gentleman slouched through the door - if you could call him a gentleman, and I wouldn't. Skateboard under one arm, one of those helmet things under the other, he requested a Coca-Cola. Honestly, at Starbucks of all places. I don't know who these ruffians think they are. Soda pop. Harrumph.

And I never pictured myself as a 'coffee drinker,' per say; it just happened. When I was younger I wasn't even allowed coffee. It would, supposedly, 'stunt my growth.' In those young and crazy days of youth I didn't give growth

stunting the due and serious attention I do now. Of course, I snuck cups of coffee after dinner when no one was watching, and of course I scalded the hell out of my tongue and spat it back into the cup, staining my shirt and soiling the carpet. I hate burning my tongue; it gets all grey and disgusting, and I get self-conscious about sticking it out at people. Beside that, it was undeniably gross. The coffee was gross, too. However much I wanted to be adult at age seven, I decided to find another route to manhood than through such a revolting and nasty brew.

Coffee itself doesn't start out so bad; it isn't born brown, or even green. Coffee 'cherries', as they're called, are red and squishy, like Pat Buchanan. It takes about twelve pounds of them to make just a few pots of coffee. Twelve pounds! Americans drink an average of 350 million cups of coffee a day. 350 million! Stop repeating all these random coffee factoids. Random coffee factoids! No, seriously. Seriously!

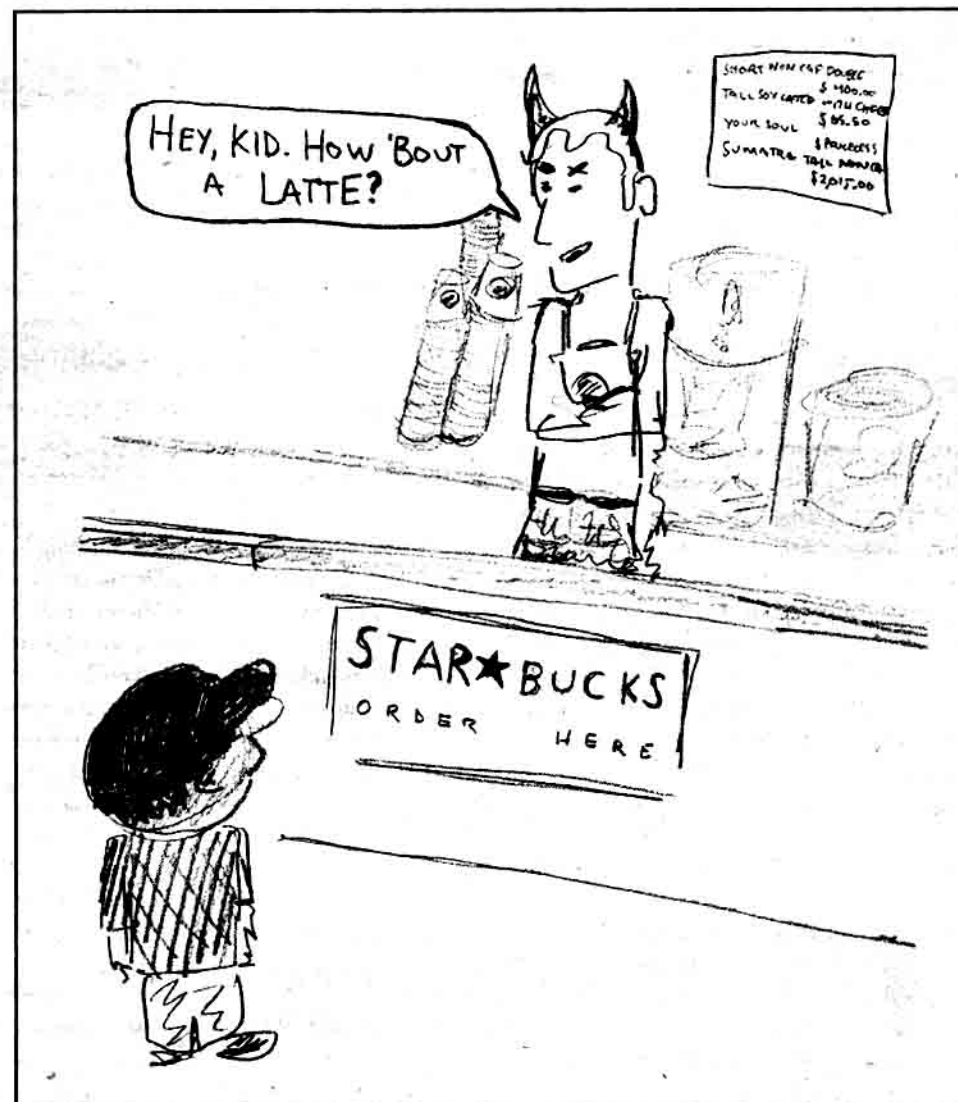
At that rate, it takes roughly 670 quintillion coffee cherries to make one grande cappuccino. Most of the coffee in the world comes from Brazil. Is it really any wonder they're better than

us at soccer? Picking 600 pounds of coffee cherries from the side of a mountain and then lugging them down again every day is enough to a) make you really, really strong, and b) make you want to do something else, like play soccer. They're so

quick and fast when they get out from under those great gargantuan baskets of coffee fruit, playing one measly game of soccer is no big deal. It's like they're swinging two bats all day, every day. Rocky never fought a Brazilian. Know why? He'd lose.

Drinking as much coffee as I do now, I haven't acquired any of the many performance-enhancing benefits coffee affords the Brazilians. In truth, I'm just wide awake and jittery. And I have to pee. A lot. Really.

I think coffee consumes me as much as I consume coffee. It's become a part of my life, something I can't go without. I have a shiny black coffee maker with a timer on it so I can have piping hot coffee waiting for me when I get up. Sure, it never works right, and I inevitably end up buying a cup from the Spa, but the timer's there all the same. I hate getting my coffee in paper cups; it's only at the right tempera-



ture for about five minutes. There is a fine line between too hot and too cold, and I always seem to miss it.

Sometimes I take the top off to speed up the cooling process, but invariably I'll scald the roof of my mouth one minute and the next cautiously ease myself to the rim of the cup and wince in preparation as I bring it to my lips, drawing in my breath all the while to ensure proper cooling, and then roll my eyes in disgust as my mouth fills with lukewarm brew. I can't stand it. I feel like Charlie Brown with the football. Cousin Larry with Belki. Shak with free throws. Phil Mickelson with Tiger Woods. Tom Arnold with life. I just can't win.

Lately, my coffee habit has begun to rule my life. I'm on the bean. It's already started to invade my other senses. I used to worry about spilling coffee on things; now I just think about how good they're going to smell. My desk and

most of my notebooks are stained and splotted with the mark of the afflicted: brown concentric circles overlapping and crisscrossing from where I've rested my mug. My dorm room has an aroma not unlike the Starbucks dumpster. Last week I had a rather embarrassing dream about Juan Valdez. And his ass. Donkey. I meant donkey. This has gone too far.

I can't stop. Again, like the smokers and the tobacco, I'm hooked on the java. Maybe I'll try to cut back some, but they all say that. I know I won't. You might see me sometime, a week worth of stubble growth, dressed in rags, slumped in a corner, mumbling jibberish, and clutching a trembling paper cup. Don't bother with spare change, it's not your money I'm after. What I want is a refill. A refill is all the change I need. A refill is a friend, indeed.