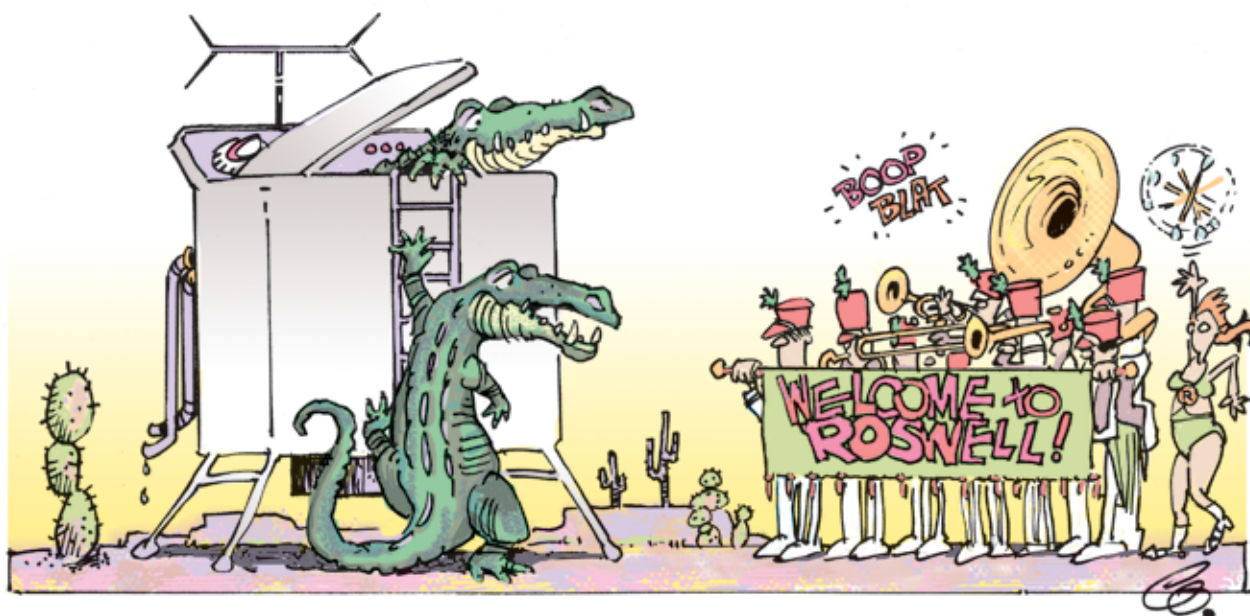


SNAP! Liti-gators and a Lawsuit With Teeth



When aliens landed in Roswell, N.M., in July 1947, their mission was not that of exploration, but to found a new religion.

→ Robert E. Horseman, DDS

ILLUSTRATION
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It was in the late '60s when digital watches first appeared in upscale stores like K-Mart and Sears. Nobody at that time knew what digital meant, but it was supposed to be the opposite of analog, an equally obscure term destined to join buggy whips as the ranking symbols of old-fashioned technology.

What is known is this: When aliens landed in Roswell, N.M., in July 1947, their mission was not that of exploration, but to found a new religion. Everyone in the galaxy knows you can't go broke sponsoring a new sect. Their belief was based not on people, but numbers, specifically ones and zeros. Called Microsoft by converts, it was immediately popular, especially with toddlers who had mastered digits up to four. Adults soon caught the fever, mainly because they didn't have to dress up and go to church. Sprawled in front

of a monitor, attired in their underwear if they wished, graven images could be worshiped on the screen right in front of them. The digital revolution was born.

But I digress.

The hope of possessing a wristwatch with little red numbers flashing on a black background was more than any advanced techie such as myself could resist. No daily winding, no mainspring. Instead, a tiny battery stimulated a microscopic piece of quartz, or two pintz, to vibrate at a precise frequency and ... well, there was more, but it was enough to know that a single button on the case turned the red numbers off and on and it was advertised as so simple a child could set it for time.

The child could; I couldn't.

In a very short time, digital watches had evolved to the point a half-dozen

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buttons around the periphery activated functions that seemed to have no relationship to time. The only feature with any link to the past was the word Timex on the face. As if they didn't enjoy enough power already, the under-10 set could manipulate these buttons with irritating success much as they could line up a Rubik's Cube in 45 seconds. Paradoxically, as they evolved into teens, they could not be taught that wearing a baseball cap backwards wasn't cute anymore. The average adult, unless gifted with degrees in physics and nuclear electronics with a major in Caribbean voodoo, was hopelessly lost in the digital milieu. As a religion, the only tenet it shared with others was that of Hell.

Nearly 10 years passed during which things got worse with the introduction of the personal computer (see Roswell/Microsoft). In response to the demands of a frustrated public whose ability to acquire hardware far exceeded its understanding of how to operate it, the "For Dummies" series of booklets appeared.

What a godsend! Without embarrassment, one can now pick up everything from *Programming DVD Player/Recorders for Dummies* to *Astrophysics and Its Relationship to Massive Subnuclear Cyber Hydroponics for Dummies*. *You Lost Me at HELLO: iPhone Operation for Dummies* is a bestseller.

The long overdue *Dentistry for Dummies* is scheduled to appear in kiosks toward the middle of this year. Just in time, too, if you follow Reuters reports from London. The "dummies" in this case were a couple of British dentists named Dr. Simon Moore and Dr. Tim Rumney who ran afoul of copyright laws, but luckily escaped by the skin of their teeth (Nasmyth's membrane).

It seems Drs. Moore and Rumney

chose a Kermit-colored lime green crocodile as their practice logo. The croc featured a mouth full of the kind of teeth one would expect from dentists who had done a full-mouth rehab on the reptile as a third-year dental student research project and could probably do the same for you. Proudly displayed on a sign outside their building and highlighting their office stationery, the logo was duly registered with the UK Intellectual Property Office.

That's when the trouble began. Across the Channel in France, the famous French tennis player Jean René Lacoste, resting quietly in his grave since 1996 when he died at age 92, stirred restlessly. Nicknamed "the Crocodile" because of his pugnacity on the court, he became CEO of La Société Chemise Lacoste, a company that produced the tres chic crocodile-embroidered tennis shirt. An argument persists to this day as to whether the reptile is a crocodile or an alligator. A large dissident group stated they would as soon have the posterior of a hippopotamus stitched on their shirts as an idiotic green saurian. Dentists, on the other hand, have always had an understandable professional interest in crocs and alligators.

Confirming that litigators in the UK and France can be as hungry as their counterparts here in the colonies, the French fashion giant Lacoste promptly sued the two lads from Cheltenham, southwest England, claiming copyright infringement.

The verdict: Wellington versus Napoleon revisited. Le humiliation!

France: You have stolen le crocodile sans gene (without embarrassment, remorse). That's 42,597,432 francs, s'il vous plait!

UK: Come off it, mate! Your croc's got a

red tongue; ours has big, white teeth. Yours has a knobbly back; ours has a smooth-as-a-baby's-bottom back. Our logo says "The Dental Practice"; yours is tacked onto a bloody tennis shirt. Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner (translation: Give over).

France: Sacre bleu!

American dentists are well-advised to not tangle with global copyright laws but to stick with our own concept of the perfect smile wherein everyone will have exactly the same look and nobody can sue anybody for infringement.

Dummies rule! ■■■■■