

Stargazing 101: It's Out of This World

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It's out of this world, literally.

A cosmic slideshow, including burning balls of gas, swirling nuclear cesspools, and the possible fabric that holds space and time together, beckons on any clear night in your backyard.

The hobby is astronomy and it's surprisingly easy. It's a misconception that it's a costly and highly involved hobby, costing hundreds of dollars, and requiring you to pay attention in physics class. Northern Michigan is a treasure trove of darkness, which is important to any level of astronomer.

So you have decided to swing into astronomy, what do you need to start? At this time of year, the most important item you will need is many layers of warm

clothing, which you most likely have at your disposal. The key to stargazing is comfort. If you are comfortable, you will remain outside for long periods of time, and see more. The other thing that is necessary for the amateur astronomer is a clear night, and with Michigan's constant overcast skies, this poses a problem for the astronomer in Michigan, that short of moving to another state will not be solved. But with luck and patience, this can also be obtained. The next thing that you are likely to need as a budding astronomer is a customized "red" flashlight. This will enable you to read charts, and planispheres in the dark, without affecting your eyesight, cutting down on the time it takes your eyes to adjust to the darkness.

You can purchase lights with

red filters at any army surplus store, or make your own. Red taillight repair tape, red plastic report covers, even a red balloon stretched, or taped over a flashlight lens will make a good light. Lastly on the list is a good compass, this will aid you in finding celestial object, and tell you what way to look in the sky.

Don't spend money on this hobby; astronomy is a hobby that you can start out with for free. So give it try, fifteen minutes a night, weather permitting, go outside, and just look around at what you see. If the moon isn't out, and you are away from porch lights, and traffic, you might start to notice things. For instance you might pick out a m el e of bright dots in distinctive patterns, or a dim violet haze that is quite noticeable. Or the pattern of Orion the Hunter, with

brightly lit stars making his shoulders, and three identical stars, placed at perfect intervals to form his belt. Many start out by noting the many phases of the moon, and how they change from night to night. Another edge-on view of our galaxy is the Milky Way, most often mistaken for clouds. If you would like to take these fifteen-minute stargazing sessions a bit further, you can get a few more items to help you.

Armed with your red flashlight, you are now able to seek out constellations, and other galactic masses. One tool that is good for finding constellations is a "planisphere" or a star chart. Planispheres include the brightest stars, and noticeable deep space bodies; some can be adjusted for different seasons of the year. Or you

can get an atlas such as The Complete Idiot's Guide to Astronomy an informational source for the beginner, which includes detachable planispheres for every season.

You might notice on your star treks, no pun intended, that a very bright dot of light will pass overhead at a fast rate, and die out. This is a satellite. A satellite can be defined as anything from the International Space Station to a rusty bolt from the Mercury Space missions. If you would like the FYI on satellites, check out Heavens Above, at www.heavens-above.com. This site is tailored to your specific location, and includes some of the more

popular satellites and a vast array of astronomy information.

Before you know it you will be picking out constellations, man made satellites and even some star clusters if the conditions are right. One thing to look for in the tale end of February and the month of March is the distinct pattern of Orion the hunter. If you pick out a slightly orange/reddish star that makes up Orion's left shoulder, you have spotted Betelgeuse. On March 2 look for a "new" moon, but don't be discouraged if you don't see anything. A new moon is when the moon is not visible at night from the earth. With time, and practice you will have an interesting hobby, and turn some constellations into old buddies, that you can visit again and again.

Drop an Anchor Down at North Coney Island

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North Coney Island, with its unique dining facility, pulls in a wide variety of customers for a place to enjoy a hearty meal. Red Wings sports memorabilia decorates each wall with staff uniforms sporting their favorite players' numbers, all as you watch your food being prepared right in front of you.

Besides having the classic coney dog or coney burger with fries, North Coney Island serves up breakfast. They also offer a cholesterol free meal, a kid menu, and a variety of desserts.

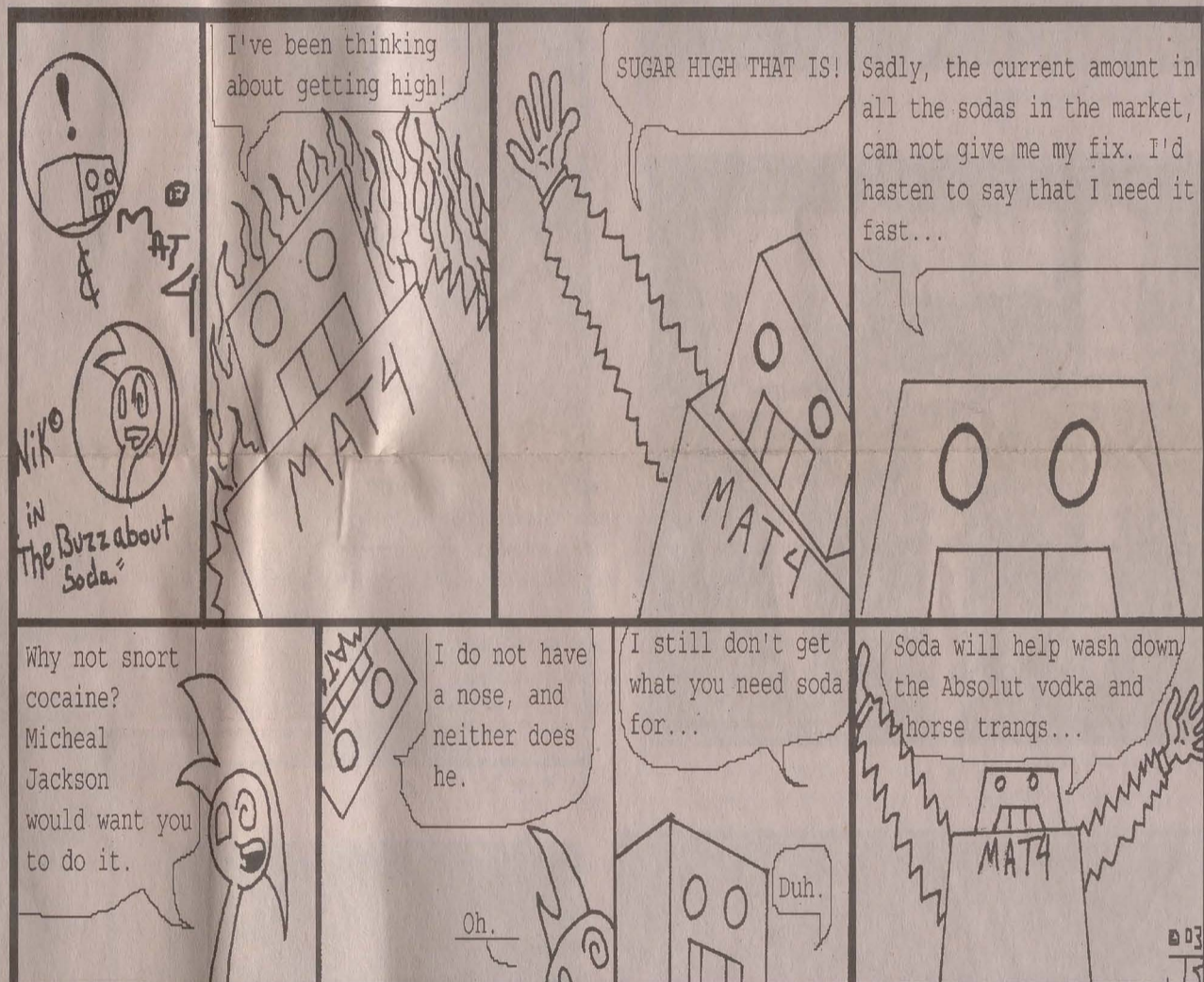
Although packed around lunchtime, the service is extremely fast. You are greeted as soon as you sit down with silverware and a glass of water. The average wait for food preparation seemed to be

about four minutes.

The Coney dog with fries for example, was surprisingly good. No "dirty water" dogs here. Plump, juicy, and just all out great. One hundred percent beef, and a tube skin worthy of any summertime meal.

With no meal priced over \$5.95; the three egg omelettes and all beef coney dogs are a fantastic deal. They also offer take out service so if you're really on the run, you can grab and go then dine in the comfort of your own home.

North Coney Island is located at 2688 US 23 south, right next to the Secretary of State office in Alpena. The hours of operation are Monday-Friday from 7:00 a.m.-7:00 p.m. and Saturdays from 8:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. North Coney Island is a great place to dine with its friendly fast service and excellent food.



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