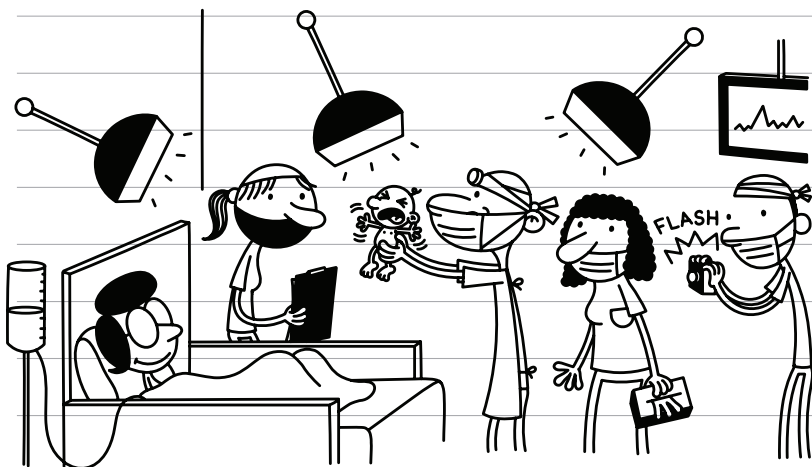


Wednesday

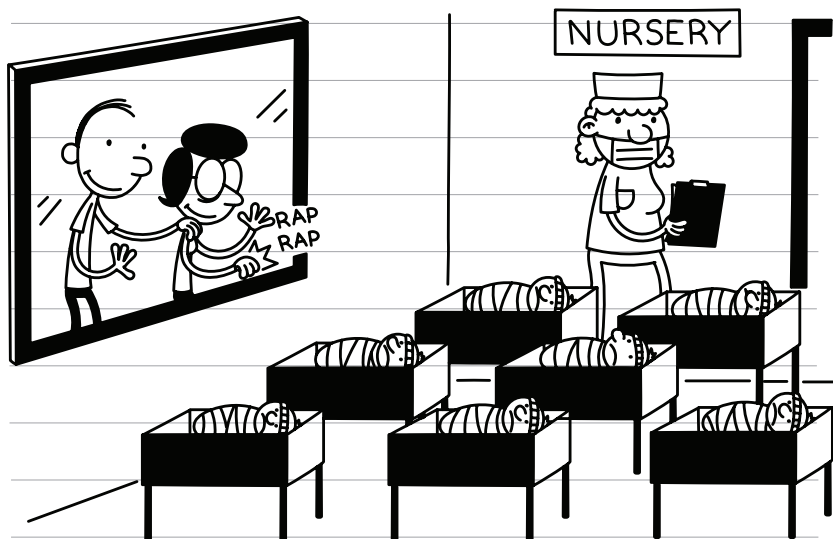
If you think about it, it's kind of weird that people even celebrate birthdays to begin with. Because for most of us, the actual day of our birth isn't something to cheer about.

One second, you're floating around and minding your own business, and the next, you're stark naked, surrounded by a bunch of people you've never even met. So right out of the gate, you start off in an embarrassing situation.

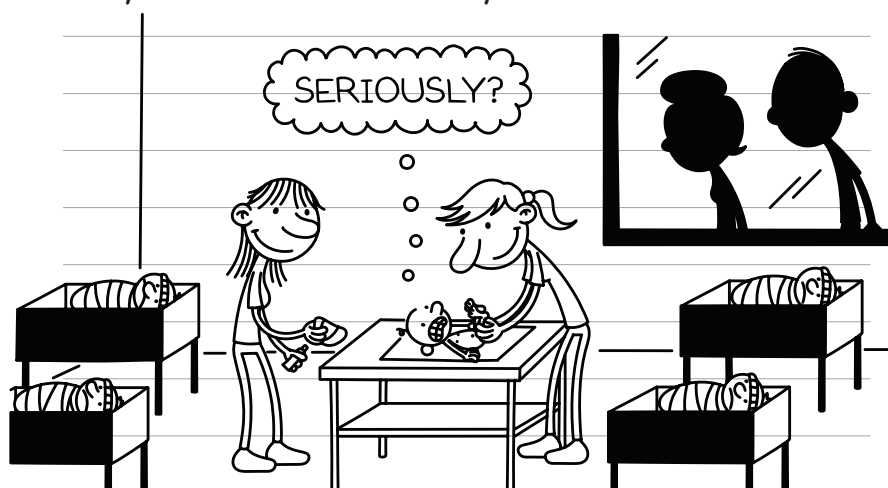


Five minutes later, you're wrapped in a blanket so tight that you can't move your arms or legs.

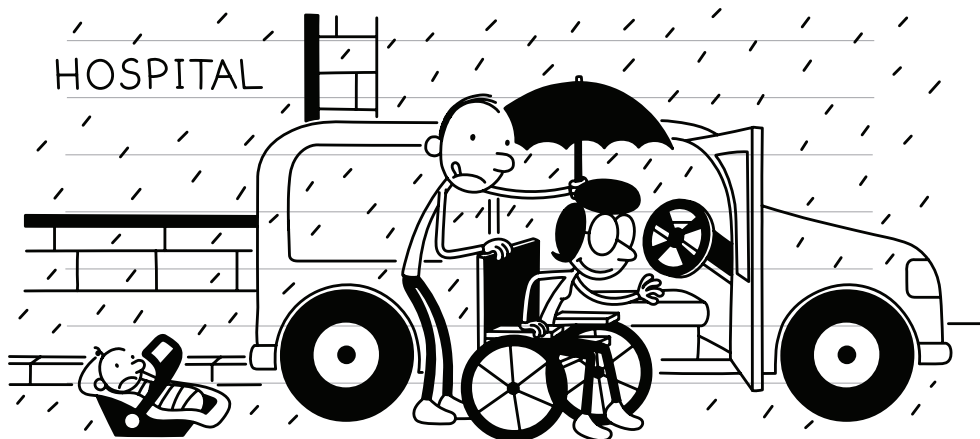
And if you don't like the little knit hat they put on you, there's nothing you can do about it.



The only time they let you out of the blanket is to change your diaper, and that's when you find out you have ZERO privacy.



Just when you finally start to get used to everything, they tell you it's time to leave. And then you discover the world outside is a harsh place, and you're not the most important person in it.



Back in ancient times, they didn't celebrate birthdays, and nobody even knew how old anyone was. So it was probably pretty crazy for a while.



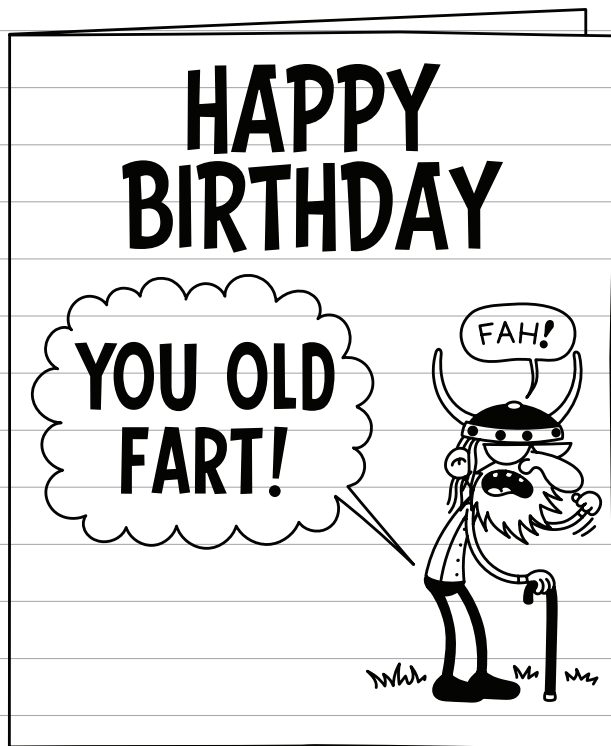
One day someone must've announced it was their birthday, and that was the start of it all.



I guess the whole birthday thing was a popular idea, because the next thing you knew, parents were throwing themed birthday parties for their kids to make the other parents jealous.



Then some genius came up with the idea of selling CARDS on top of everything else. The cards were printed on thick paper, and sometimes they had jokes in them that older people thought were funny.



Later on, someone invented THANK-YOU cards, and if you didn't send one of those to the people who bought you gifts, it meant you were an ungrateful jerk.

I'm not always great about sending thank-you cards after my birthday. Some of my older relatives get pretty annoyed when I forget, and they'll let me know they noticed.

Dear Greg,

I am writing to see if you received my birthday gift. I am worried it didn't arrive since I never received a thank-you card from you.

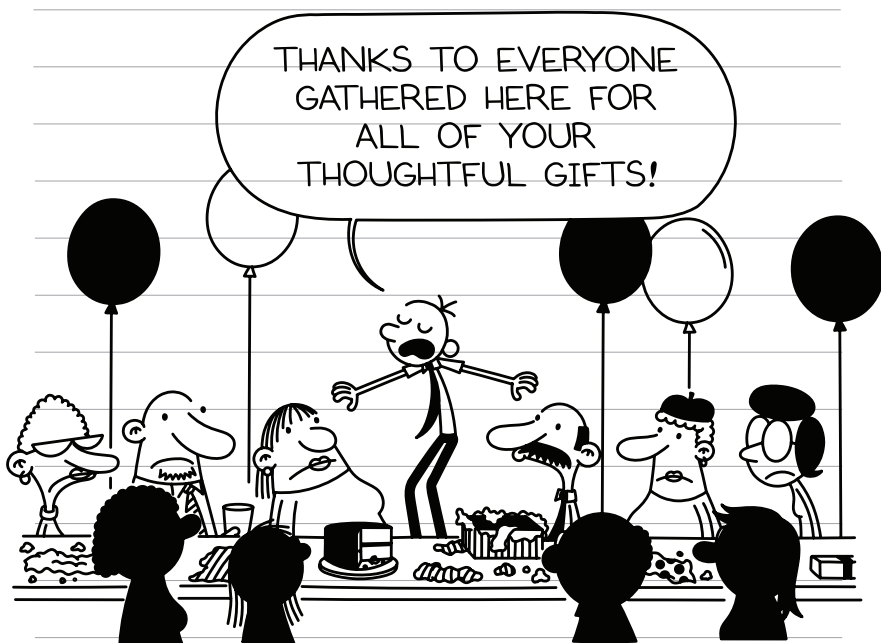
With concern, Aunt Dorothy

When I DO get around to writing my thank-yous, people like my Aunt Nancy will send another card BACK, which is a little much, if you ask me.



Personally, I think writing a thank-you card for every gift is way too much effort. Not to mention it costs a lot of money in stamps and envelopes.

So last year, I decided to say my thank-you out loud to everyone gathered at my party, and I was pretty proud of myself for being efficient.



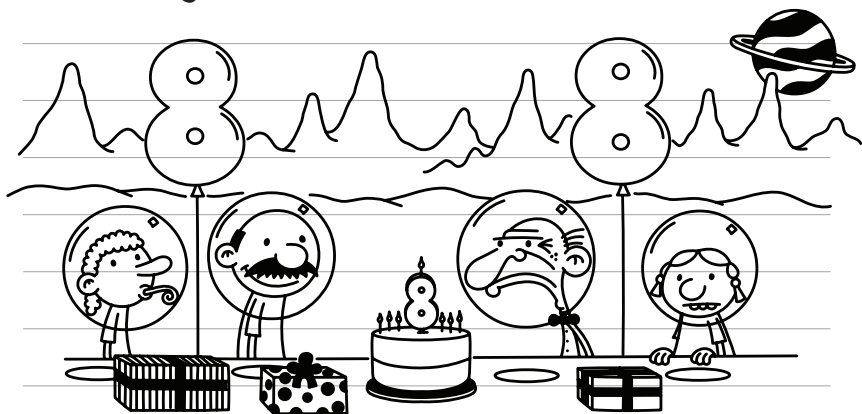
But Mom said I STILL had to write thank-yous to everyone who got me a present, because she said the older generation likes that sort of thing.

So when I wrote my thank-yous, I added a little message at the end to cover me for a while.

Dear Aunt Nancy,
Thank you for the awesome gift. It
was so nice of you to think of me!
Love, Greg

P.S. Please save this card and read
it again next year at this time.

The problem is that you have a birthday once a year, so it feels like you're constantly writing thank-yous. But on a planet like Jupiter, a person would only have a birthday every twelve Earth years, which would make staying on top of these things a whole lot easier.



My Great Uncle Albert actually celebrates his birthday a few times a year, because he forgets things pretty easily. So we try to cheer him up every time we see him at the nursing home.

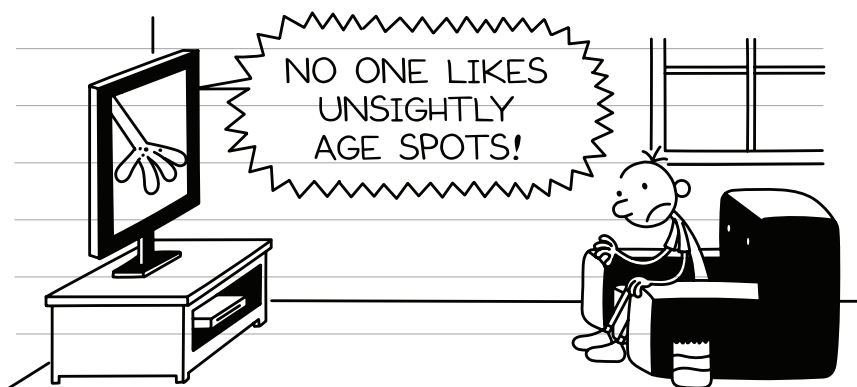


I have a feeling that Uncle Albert is just faking it for the birthday cake, though. But I like cake, too, so his secret's safe with me.

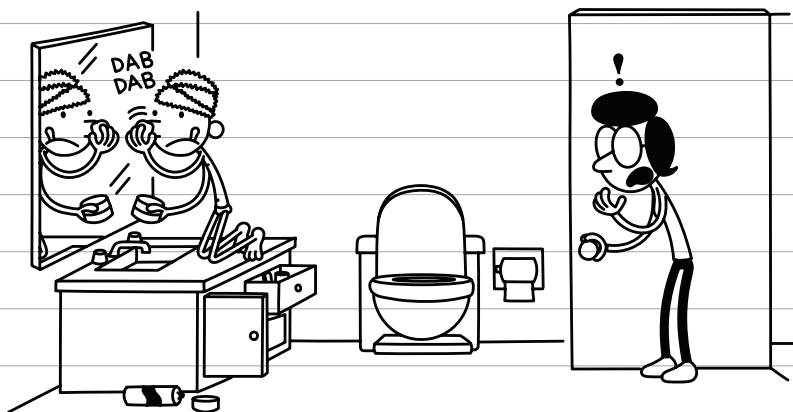


The problem with knowing how old you are is that you're constantly thinking about how much time you've got LEFT.

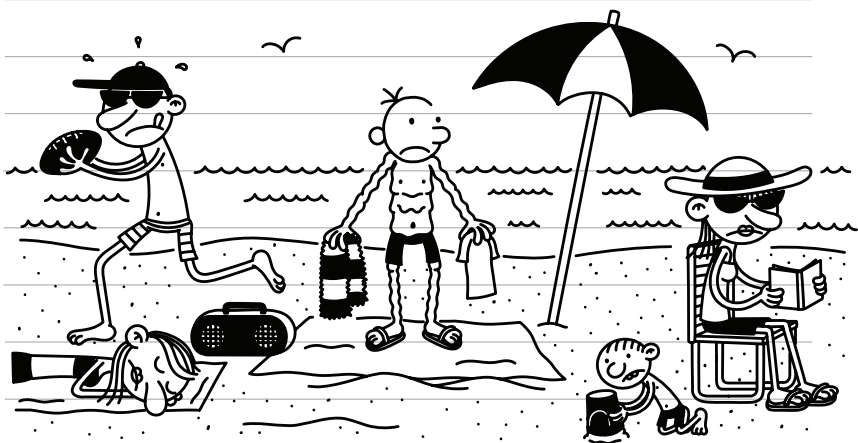
There are all these commercials on TV that make you worry about getting older. And even though I'm not the target audience for those ads, sometimes I get worried I'm aging faster than I should be.



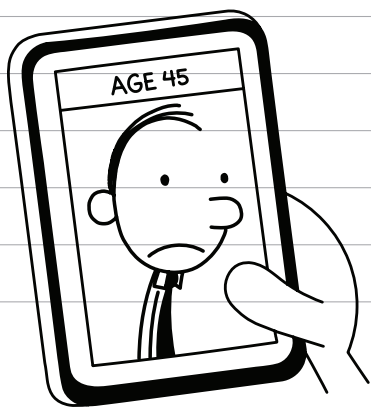
So I started a skin-care routine, just to try and stay ahead of things. I even used my mom's antiaging cream before I went to bed every night, until I got busted.



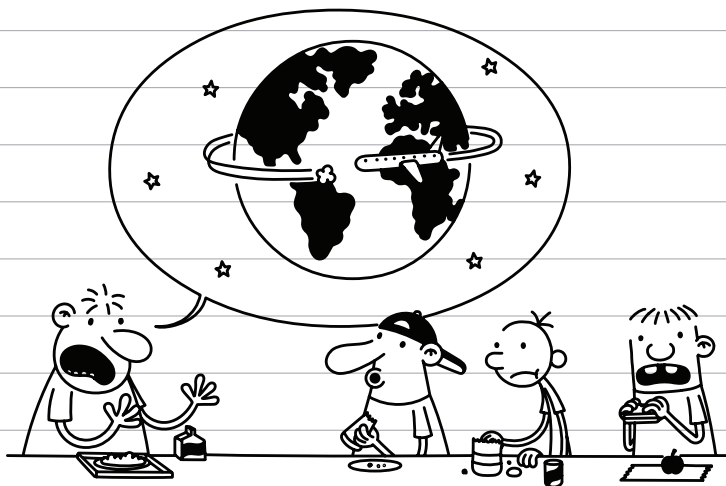
Now I'm kind of worried, because I'd only been using cream on my FACE when I should've been using it all over. I just hope I don't look ridiculous at the beach when I'm in my seventies.



I know EXACTLY what I'm going to look like if I let myself age naturally, though. Rodrick has one of those age-filter apps on his phone, and I made the mistake of checking how I'll look when I'm middle-aged.



But there are ways to slow things down. This kid at my lunch table named Albert Sandy says that if you fly around the world from right to left, you go back in time. And if you keep going in that direction, you can actually REVERSE your age.



He said one person ended up flying TOO far and got younger than they wanted. And I wouldn't want that to happen to ME, because middle school is hard enough without having to wear a diaper.

