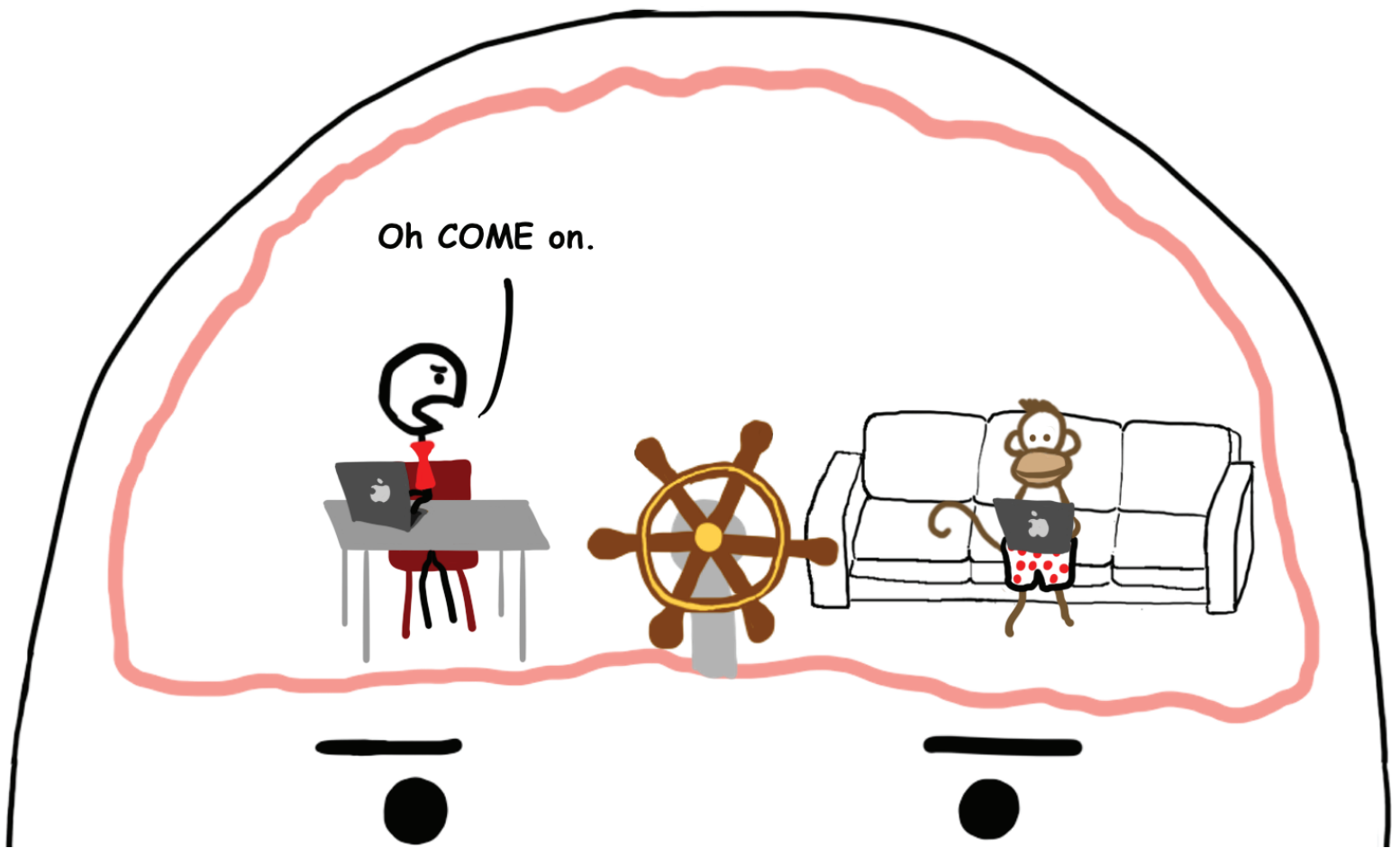




WAIT BUT WHY

The Procrastination Matrix



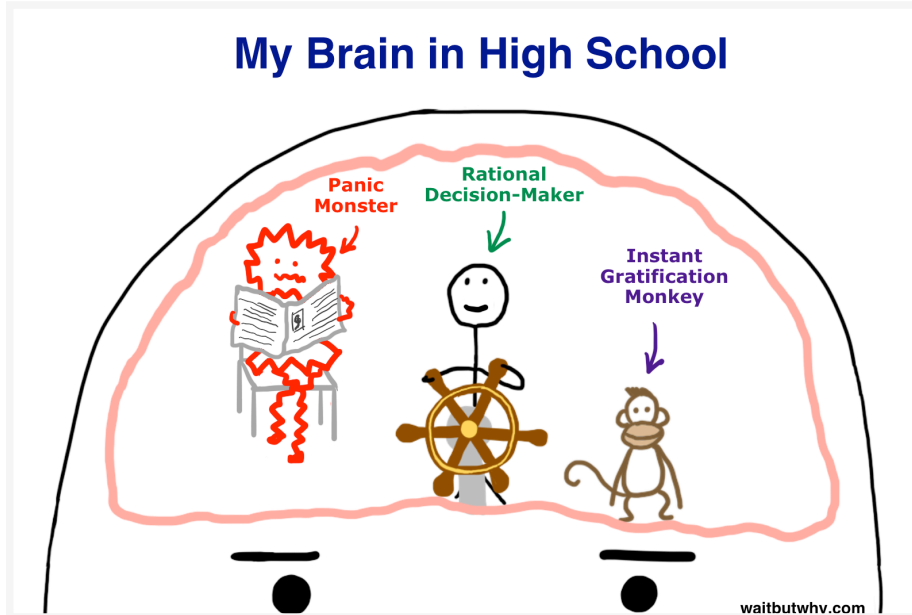
By Tim Urban

Note: To best understand this post, you should first read Part 1 of Wait But Why's [previous post](#) on procrastination.

Back in high school, if you had asked me if I was a procrastinator, I would have said yes. High school students are given all these lectures about “pacing yourself” on longer projects, and I proudly paced myself less than almost anyone I knew. I never missed a deadline, but I only did anything the night before it was due. I was a *procrastinator*.

Except I wasn't. High school is full of regular deadlines and short-term projects, and even longterm projects had sub-deadlines that force pacing upon you. There were a *few* dire moments, but for the most part, I was just doing everything at the last minute because I knew I could probably still do well that way—so why not.

There was definitely an **Instant Gratification Monkey** ① in my head, but he was cute more than anything. With deadlines looming constantly, my **Panic Monster** ② was never fully asleep, and the monkey knew that while he could have some time at the wheel each day, he wasn't the one in charge.



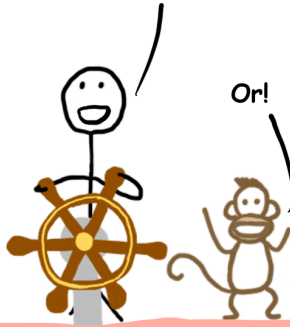
1

For the uninitiated, the Instant Gratification Monkey is the part of your brain that makes you procrastinate—he's a primal part of you who lives to maximize the ease of the present moment. Read more about him [here](#).

2

For the uninitiated, the Panic Monster is the part of your brain that wakes up and has a freakout when a deadline draws too close. He's the only thing the monkey is terrified of and the only reason a procrastinator ever manages to get anything done. Read more about him [here](#).

If I get my homework done now, I can enjoy some good TV later tonight.



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We can dick around for the next four hours and make everything stressful!

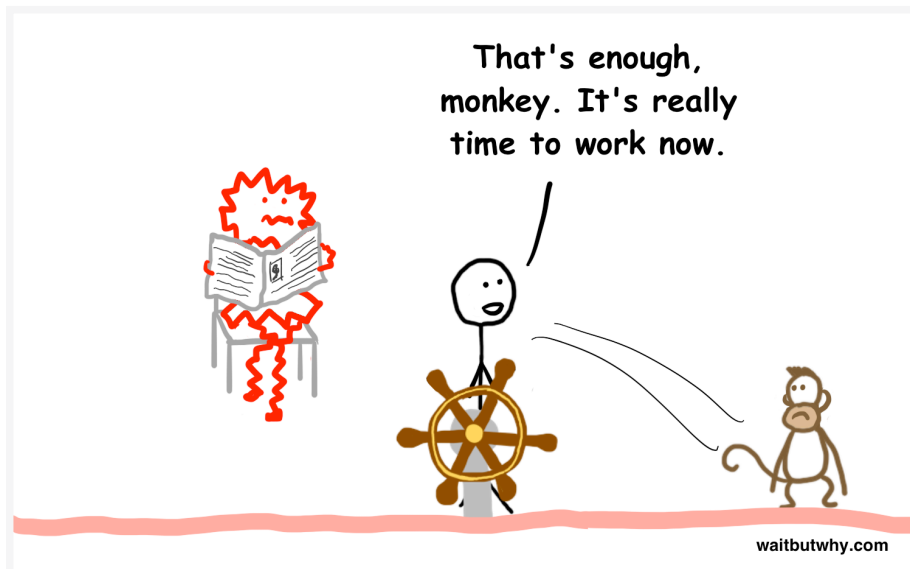
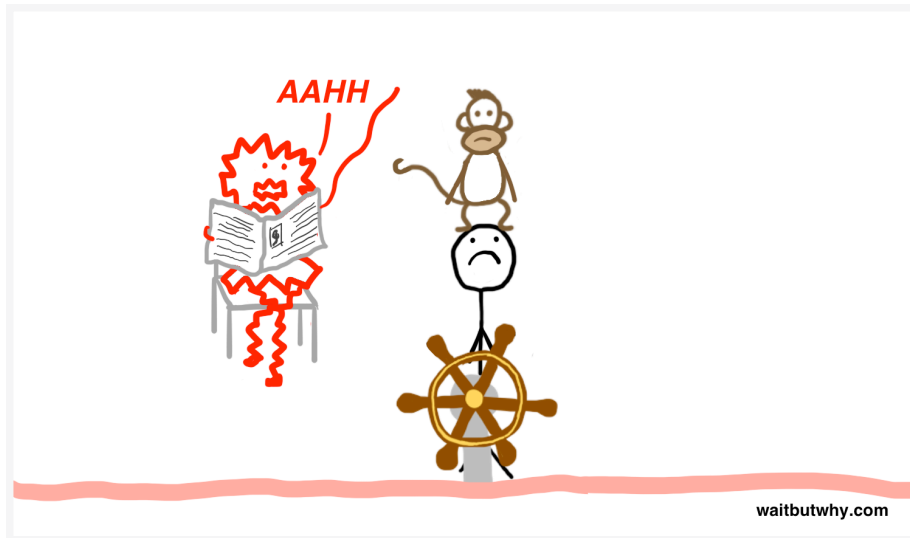


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Four hours later

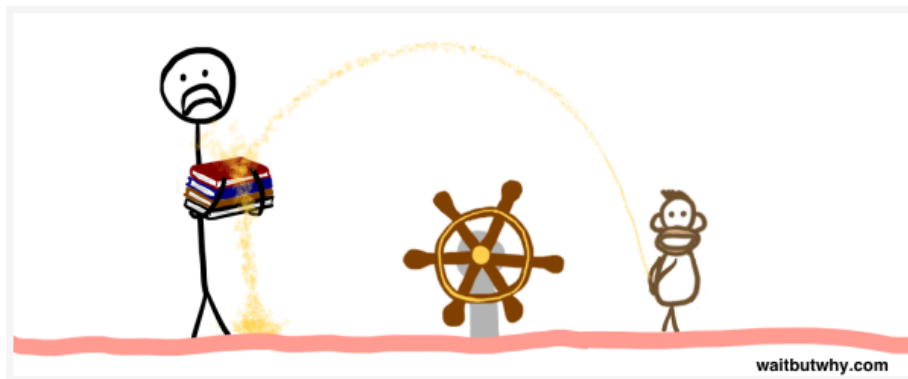
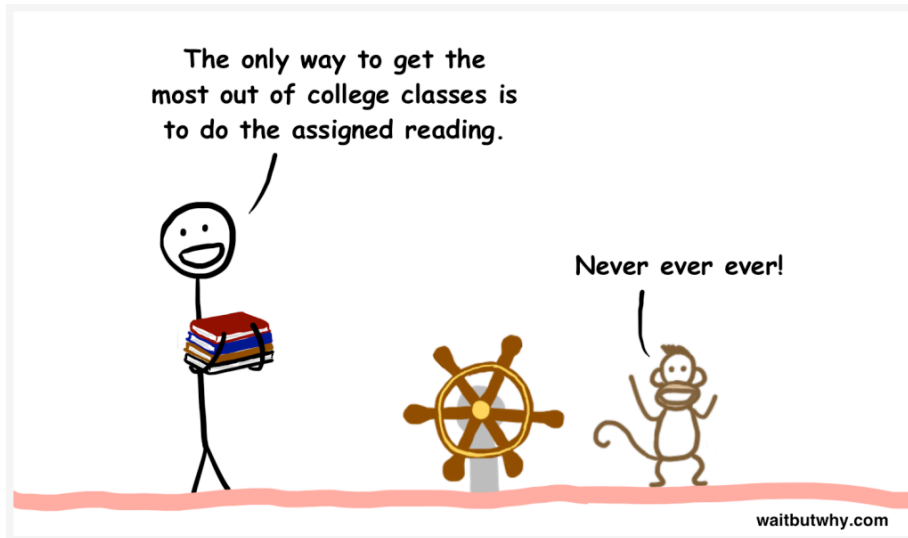


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One day, high school ended, and so did my life as a somewhat normal-acting person. College is not like high school. The assignments are big, with a lot of time between deadlines, and since you're not a child anymore, classes don't treat you like one—no one forces you to pace anything. As a Government major, most of my classes involved a couple papers, a midterm, and a final exam over a four-month stretch, which means most of the time, there were no hard deadlines anywhere on the horizon.

Without deadlines to occupy him, my Panic Monster, who can't think too far ahead, began to spend a lot of time in hibernation. My Rational Decision-Maker, who never realized how much he had relied on the Panic Monster, began to have difficulties carrying out his plans.



The more the Panic Monster slept, the more confidence the monkey gained. The Rational Decision-Maker, the only member of the brain who sees the world clearly, was concerned—he knew that college assignments were a lot bigger than high school assignments, and that pacing was no longer something to scoff at, but a critical thing to do. He'd put his foot down about social commitments when a deadline began to draw closer, but that wouldn't solve the problem.