

Fair division: A play in one act

By Jack Schmidtspeare

Aesop: One day, a donkey [**Donkey** bows], a fox [**Fox** bows], and a lion [**Lion** roars] formed a hunting party. They were quite successful and soon returned with lobsters, sheep, and other food. But how should they divide the loot?

Lion: Donkey, why don't you divide the food for us?

[**Donkey** divides the food into three even piles.]

Aesop: The donkey divided the food into three even piles.

Donkey: Lion, King of the Beasts, why don't you choose the first share?

[**Lion** roars and eats **Donkey**.]

Aesop: But the lion was not pleased, and so ate the donkey on the spot.

Lion: Fox, why don't you divide the food for us?

[**Fox** pushes all but one morsel into a giant pile next to the lion.]

Fox: Lion, King of the Beasts, here is the fair division.

[**Lion** smiles.]

Lion: Wise Fox, where did you learn such fair and perfect division?

Fox: I learned it from the donkey, and from the fate that befell him.

A couple has just realized that while the golden road to destiny opens before them, they are tired of being in the HOV lane. Just as they are getting into their separate vehicles on the highway to happiness, they realize their CDs are mixed up between their cars. How do they divide the CDs now that they have long forgotten whose CD is whose?

They both agree that whatever the division, neither should feel cheated, and they want to arrive at the division without any bargaining, haggling, or sharing of their musical tastes.

	CD	Guy	Gal
The young (former) lovers' (secret) value system:	REM	\$50	\$50
	Weird	\$20	\$20
	Mystikal	\$20	\$10
	R+J	\$10	\$20

They hire a mediator named Don to divvy up the loot. He puts REM and Weird Al in one pile, and Mystikal and Romeo+Juliet in the other. He then thinks the two people will choose their pile and be done. What goes wrong?

Suddenly a lion devours the first mediator, and a second mediator suggests that the guy divide it up into two piles, and the gal will choose which pile. Unfortunately, their relationship was not built on mutual understanding. Not only does he not know her name, he has no idea what kind of music she likes. He decides to make one pile he likes, and just hopes she chooses the other. What goes wrong with these divisions:

Try #1: REM Weird Mystikal — R+J

Try #2: REM R+J — Weird Mystikal

Try #3: REM Weird — R+J Mystikal

How can he divide the loot so that no matter which pile she chooses (and he cannot know which one she will choose) he will not feel cheated?