

JFK Jr and Madonna

○ The
handcuffs

○ The
X-rated
movies

○ The
peanut
butter



**PLUS! THEIR
BABY SECRET**



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So we're watching *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* the other evening, and it's one of the few episodes JJ can watch, so Liz, JJ and I are all curled up on the bed. Then there's this commercial. For genital wart creme. And I explain to JJ, while the commercial is going on, what genital warts are, and why they're a problem. And then that commercial is followed by another one. For Victoria's Secret.



We spent the first weekend in November in Las Vegas, when we left the children at home by themselves and we met up with old friends Robin and Lisa Roberts. We stayed at the Luxor, saw some shows, had some so-so Mexican food, got to sleep in a couple of mornings. Didn't look at computers all weekend — except of the video poker variety. My attention span for gambling is about 45 minutes, so the point of the exercise was warmth, laziness, and visiting. They were mostly achieved. Liz will no doubt provide a more extensive trip report in her zine.

Passing through an airport 6 weeks after September 11th was an interesting exercise. On the one hand, the airlines are desperate for customers. On the other hand, they've laid off much of their on-the-ground staffs, so that waits are guaranteed to be long. On the third hand, they've made going through passenger security so obnoxious that you must check your baggage, which guarantees you must stand in not one, but two, long lines. The upside is that the functionary sheparding people through every metal detector we saw spoke English as a native language, which was the first time I've seen that in perhaps 15 years. The unintended consequence

is that instead of being any better at detecting a bomb or nail clippers or knitting needles, the police and national guardsmen looking over the crowd have more time to watch every one. In this, we appear to be approaching the Israeli solution to airport security — don't inspect the baggage, inspect the people — even though we're adopting this approach as a side-effect rather than by design.

(Robin Roberts pointed out — correctly, I believe — that the events of September 11th weren't a failure of airport security, but a failure of imagination on the part of the defenders. If we now consider that any possible weapon has to be prevented from being on an airplane, we must be sure to remove the fire extinguishers, coffee pots, and champagne bottles.)

Now, given that the process is obnoxious, why would I fly rather than drive if I can? Why would I not cancel my travel altogether rather than drag my family through that if I had the option? Why are the airlines surprised that their business has fallen off?

It is disturbing to me that current trial balloon is to issue national travel id cards to make air travel easier. This way, the argument goes, people who have the cards will be able to pass through security faster, without showing their drivers licenses three times. Not true: how will the airline 'bots know who you are unless you show them the national id card? If you have one, will you get to bypass the check-in line? Will you get to skip security altogether? Will you get to board the plane without showing some form of id? The airlines already know who their frequent customers are: they carry frequent flyer cards, which have much more information about habits backing them up.

This has nothing to do with airline security, but everything to do with sneaking in a national id card, which the FBI has wanted for years. "Sure," say all the businessmen the paper interviewed at the airport, "I'll get one: I don't have anything to hide." *Jawol, Ich hab meine Papiere! Seig Heil!*

Someone asked me in late September how I thought Gore would have been handling this national crisis if he'd been elected President.

I don't know what his military response would have been, but I'm sure that he would not have blindly signed an executive order allowing secret military trials for anyone the president declares to be a suspected terrorist, without the possibility of civilian review. And he certainly wouldn't have had the audacity to declare that this was "a full and fair trial."

In his speech before Congress on September 18th, Bush's biggest applause line



JOHN ASHCROFT'S WAR ON TERRORISTS

was "Whether we bring our enemies to justice or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done."

For justice to be done, it must be *seen* to be done. The point of the public trials at Nuremburg was that those crimes against humanity were openly declaimed and decried. As prosecutor (and later supreme court justice) Robert Houghwout Jackson said in his opening address before that tribunal, "The wrongs which we seek to condemn and punish have been so calculated, so malignant, and so devastating that civilization cannot tolerate their being ignored..." Trying the accused in private, in secret, under cover of darkness, and then lynching them makes this a proposal from the Ku Klux Klan.

Because Bush's outlandish executive order doesn't even require that these so-called military tribunals operate under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, because his order does not require a unanimous vote to sentence someone to death, the Spanish government has refused to turn over to the United States eleven members of al Queda they have captured.

As Jackson said in a decision he wrote in 1950, "It is not the function of our Government to keep the citizen from falling into error; it is the function of the citizen to keep the Government from falling into error." In this matter, my government has made the gravest possible error.

Reviews

D *Driven* is a piece of crap. Rennie Harlan used to direct movies, not the movie equivalent of a vanity press edition. Sylvester Stallone acted in a movie once and now he's written this dreck, which is *Grand Prix* meets *Bull Durham* with the charm of neither. Stallone plays the old driver trying to teach the new one some tricks. Burt Reynolds plays the racing team manager; his performance would be improved if he wore a bucket over his head. I don't find Gina Gershon attractive in the best of circumstances, but in this she plays a character who's so horrible, it's a surprise the other characters don't vote her out of the movie. I wouldn't recommend *Magnolia* over this, but almost any television sitcom probably has more plot surprises.

If it says "Movie by Sean Penn", run the other direction. *The Pledge* is a complete waste of time. An hour of story crammed into two hours of movie, expanded by artful slow motion, long lingering views of ticking clocks, overlaid images of children on swings, and Jack Nicholson staring off into the distance meditating on the voices in his head. The operative plot point: Nicholson's character manages to pimp his girlfriend's daughter in an attempt to catch a serial murderer. Bleh!

The people on television who got excited last week about *The Patriot* are getting excited this week about *X-Men*, and they'll get excited next week about something else. But if you write critically you have to do something besides get excited. You have to examine what's in front of you. What you see is a movie industry in decay, and the decay gets worse and worse.

— Pauline Kael interview in the on-line version
of *The New Yorker*, 8 October 2001

If *Sister Mary Explains It All* is a movie written Christopher Durang. It's apparently a redo of his play *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You*, which I understand was fairly amusing. The movie provides more pathos and less humor, I suspect. It is, in the end, an unkind caricature of Catholic nuns — and I say this as someone who has no reason to be particularly charitable towards Catholic nuns.

If *Midnight Fantasy* is the Luxor Hotel's version of the classic Las Vegas show with comedian, singers, mimic, and (incidentally) topless showgirls. A pleasant evening's entertainment. The mimic managed to do James Brown, Michael Jackson and Tina Turner — he even had the legs for Tina's spangled dress. The comedian's schtick was short, but frighteningly amusing. And thanks to the educational experiences offered by SFPA, it was possible to watch this show and know which breasts were artificially enhanced.

¶ *Penn & Teller* are always entertaining, whether they're writing or performing. Unfortunately, their short-lived variety series on television, *Sin City*, didn't do them justice. Fortunately, the show they're currently doing at the Rio in Las Vegas is much better. They did a number of wonderful tricks, including some I'd not seen before like Penn's three-deck force with Teller's interspersed mentalist act. The tricks are always good, but it's the showmanship that makes their act memorable, such as Penn's opening monologue, which includes the thought "here in Sin City you've got a lot of choices of magic acts and we appreciate that you chose to see us over those Germans with big hair who abuse endangered species."

¶ *Pirate's Price* by Darlene Marshall is a bit more explicit than last romance I read. (This is probably a good thing.) Nonetheless, it's a rollicking great adventure. The whole gender confusion of a woman masquerading as a male pirate is a lot of fun.

¶ *Along Came a Spider* is a thriller that I presume was better in book form. Morgan Freeman and Monica Potter search for kidnapper. Yawn. One good plot twist. As a bright spot, Penelope Ann Miller gets to play the matronly mother of the kidnap victim, even though she's exactly wrong for the job.

¶ The movie of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* is what it intended to be: a faithful rendition of the book, thus preserving the storyline for future movies in the same vein. Richard Harris does a passable Dumbledore, and Maggie Smith is a good McGonagall, but Robbie Coltrane is a spot-on Hagrid.

¶ We got to see the trailers for *Star Wars Episode II* and *The Fellowship of the Ring* along with *Harry Potter*. *Attack of the Clones* looks entertaining, and appears to advance the romance between young Skywalker and the princess. As long as Jar Jar Binks has been relegated to the cutting room floor, the plot rather than the special effects may be able to carry this. On the other hand, *The Lord of the Rings* is one of the great adventure stories of any other time, and I eagerly await seeing it.

I note with some annoyance that we're now up to five commercials along with our four trailers at the movie theater. Pervasive advertising is a real drag.

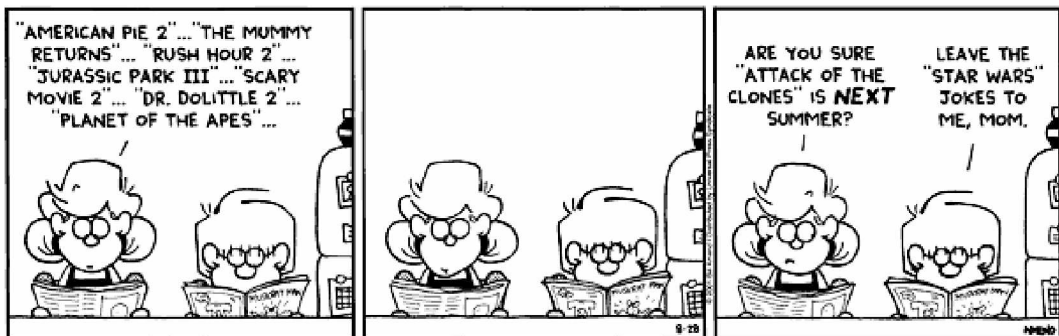
¶ *The Family Man* features Nicholas Cage and Téa Leoni doing a rendition of *It's a Wonderful Life*. It doesn't have a pat ending, and it's not completely clear what's going to happen when it's over, but that adds to its charm. On the other hand, since it's the inverse of Capra's version — in this one the hero sees what would have happened if he'd made better choices originally, rather than the other

way 'round — we don't have the satisfaction of seeing an ending including the same version of reality as in the fantasy.

S *Swordfish* came from the video store with a little yellow warning label: "There are scenes in this movie that may be upsetting to people still distressed by the terrorist attacks of September 11th." It is certainly true. The movie poses an interesting question: what measures are morally acceptable in fighting terrorism? Is killing innocent civilians from your own side allowable? The ending on this movie was engineered through several revisions to ensure that we know John Travolta's character really is a patriotic renegade intelligence agent, and not just a high-tech bank robber. Nonetheless, as a thriller, it works on its own merits.

H When we were living in Durham more than a decade ago, Duke professor Henry Petroski already had a reputation as a talented teacher and writer. I'd not read any of his stuff before, which is why I finally grabbed a copy of *The Book on the Bookshelf*. After muddling through part of this, I can only conclude that his talent is in lulling his students to sleep, and then hypnotizing them into favorable evaluations.

Before there was Malcolm Gladwell, there was John McPhee. His books, nearly all of which appeared in pieces as articles in *The New Yorker*, are triumphs of careful study. *The Curve of Binding Energy*, his profile of nuclear bomb designer and nuclear proliferation alarmist Ted Taylor, is no exception. McPhee follows Taylor around understanding how easy it would be to steal enough enriched uranium or plutonium to build a dirty fission bomb. The technology to build the bomb is not complicated — I suspect I could probably do it — but we've assured ourselves for years that we're safe because the fissionable material is protected. McPhee, writing in 1974, showed that it isn't.



Mailing Comments on SFPA 220

220!?!? I'm way behind. I need to catch up. I'm going to restrict myself to mostly typing up comments responding to comments to me for a while, and we'll see how far I can get.

Richard Dengrove ✉ *Twygdrasil and Treehouse Gazette* ♣

ct me: "The Microsoft Outlook at work certainly is vulnerable to email viruses." As I've said, there are problems with having most of the mail readers in the world be of one type. Both technically — everyone tends to generate e-mail geared to be read by the dominant reader, so those who don't use it can't read a lot of stuff — and in terms of health of the e-mail system — I can bring down half the world's mail readers by writing a single virus, so I choose to attack the big fish. Of course, the real error is allowing e-mail with active content.

✎ "Taxing away speculation? I read a book that claimed that the way nations normally have dealt with speculative bubbles is they have loaned money, Manias, Panics and Crashes by Charles P Kindleberger (1978)." Investment advisor Andrew Tobias (*The Only Investment Guide You'll Ever Need*) recommends *Memoirs of Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*, which was written in 1841 by Charles MacKay. The first three chapters are on land speculation on the Mississippi, the bubble in South Sea investments, and the boom and bust in tulip bulbs.

✎ "I hear that Microsoft, listening to the hue and cry against the animated paperclip, now includes other possible animated icons. One is Einstein." The other little animated things have always been available. In principle, they're now all gone, replaced by a less animated help system in Office XP. In practice, I occasionally get a little puppy dog in places where the damned paper clip would appear.

David Schlosser ✉ *Peter, Pan & Merry* ♣

ct Liz: "Have you considered that the borrow-read-find sequence for books may only work at Liz and Philip's home?" It actually also used to work at Seth's.

ct me: "I'm not quite into the 'plot' sort of vacation since I like to do things. I just don't want doing to be predominant over resting." The problem with vacationing with Liz's mom is that doing often predominates over resting. I really like vacationing with just Liz, because she and I tend to have the same plot tolerance. When the kids are along, they get fidgety pretty quickly, and we have to go do something. This trip to Las Vegas was a little more do than plop for my tastes, but that's okay, since a large component of it was visiting.

Bimonthly Mafia ✉ *Marching Through Oneshot* ♣ Despite the meta-oneshot later on about the difficulties of printing this, Steve, it's very pretty.

Trinlay Khadro ☒ *Planet of the AFAs* ♣

Months later, I finally get to welcome you to SFPA. Very nice zines.

ct me: “Was page 1 supposed to be the centerfold or was this particular copy mis-stapled. I had a few moments of confusion when opening the cover and discovering I was on page 17.” Odd. You apparently did get one that was misstapled. Or perhaps miscollated. That really was supposed to be a wrap-around cover, but it seems to have confused everyone. Sorry about that.

☞ “Re: Phantom Menace, . . . even though the choice may be rash, ill-informed, misinformed, or forced, what side the hero ends up on hinges on a choice. Anakin hasn’t hit that critical turning point just yet, but I suspect the die roll that didn’t free his mother is part of the series of events that forces the turning point.” That’s a reasonable guess, but having seen into the future — or at least having now seen the trailer for the next movie — I’m betting it’s got more to do with the conflict between Jedi trainees having to take a vow of chastity and his desire to be with Princess Amidalla.

☞ “I got an optical mouse at yuletide. . . .” As I think I said, I rather like mine. Unfortunately, I have the Microsoft one, which has five buttons, which is an annoyance. Most software is not geared to use the left- and right-side buttons, so if you hit them accidentally, sometimes random things happen. Also, the middle button is actually the roller, which in Internet Explorer can roll you back to the previous page. I wish that the nice three-button Logitech I have came in an optical version.

☞ “I’ve also acquired a Visor PDA which is just a charm for LOCing, but is very very handy for a whole multitude of tiny tasks.” As I think I’ve mentioned, while I use my Palm as a calendar, todo list and address book — basically taking over the functions of my Filofax — it is also an acceptable electronic reading device. Not a great one, mind you; I’m not sure the Pocket PC, with the really superior Microsoft Reader software on-board is a great reading device yet. Out of the 8 megabytes of memory on my Palm — I can’t imagine what I’d have done with 8 megabytes of memory when I first started programming 28 years ago — roughly four of them contain stuff to read. Currently, I’ve got a bunch of fiction downloaded from fictionwise.com, including the electronic version of the January 2002 *Asimov’s*, some long articles, like Andrew Sullivan’s article from the Oct 7 *New York Times* on Islamic fundamentalism, and Seymour Hersh’s article on the corruption in the Saudi Arabian royal family from the Oct 17 *New Yorker*, and current issues of Peter Neumann’s *Forum on Risks to the Public in Computers and Related Systems* from comp.risks.

ct Robe: We’ve actually become fans of “Apples to Apples”, too.

ct Liz’s George Will column: “Technically a chain with weighted ends (i.e.: wallet/keys, or lead weight/dart) is a weapon — but one that isn’t of much use to anyone outside of a highly trained martial artist specializing in that sort of weapon.” Well, as the events of the past three

months have shown us, imagination and shock are even more powerful weapons.

I got two copies of *Planet of the AFAs* inside *Dewachen*, so please read these comments twice.

There's a story around about how they tried cleaning out a few memories completely. The poor people who had that done to them couldn't walk, couldn't talk, couldn't do anything. The only thing anybody could think of to do with them was to housebreak them, teach them a basic vocabulary of a thousand words, and give them jobs in military or industrial public relations.

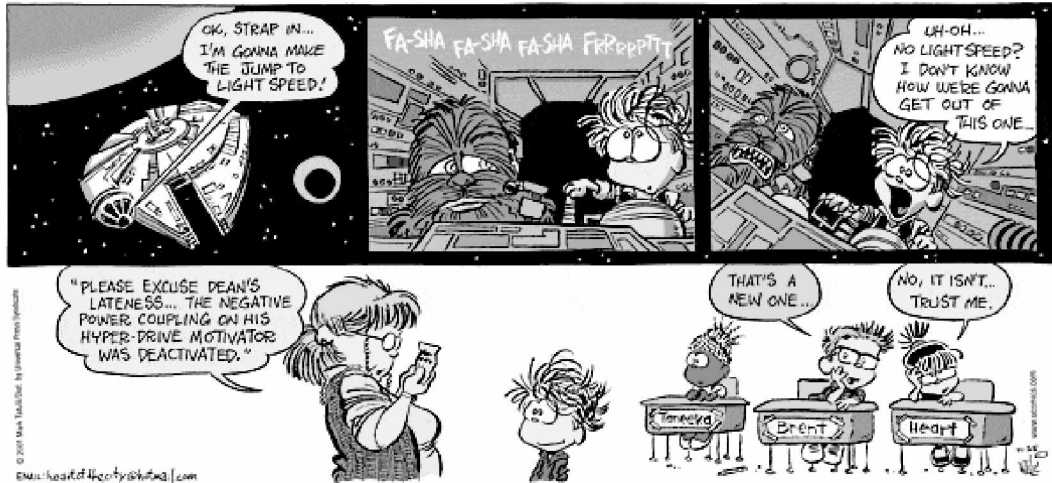
— Kurt Vonnegut, Jr, *The Sirens of Titan*

Janice Gelb ☒ *Trivial Pursuits* ♣

"Friends have also gotten zapped by falling stock options (now 'underwater' or lower than their grant price)." Y'know, it's probably a bad idea for anyone in the high-tech industry to treat their stock options as regular income. Some companies pay crappy salaries on the theory that the stock options are an expected part of the compensation, and that's simply wrong. And some employees try to play tax games when they exercise options on the expectation that the price of the underlying stock will continue to rise. As I said earlier, I have a fairly short attention span for gambling in Las Vegas; I have not tolerance at all when real money is on the line.

ct me: "I once proved to one of my high school teachers that the office didn't read absence notes by ... presenting a note in my own handwriting saying I'd been out with a bad case of *chronosynclasticinfundibulum*... it was stamped approved." The newest trick at Allie's school is that tardiness can only be excused for a series of pre-approved reasons. So when Allie oversleeps, I have to consult carefully before writing a note, which of course screws up the time during which I get JJ ready, and make him late. Oddly enough, if she misses a day of school, a note saying "she wasn't feeling well" is sufficient, so my tendency when she oversleeps is to tell her to just skip the day of school. Petty functionaries are the same all over the universe — and with the same brain power — a point made in the lino above from that same Vonnegut book from which you took *your* mythical disease.

☞ "I believe Ben has quoted some virus that hit Unix systems back when the Internet was young." That would be young Robert Morris, Jr's Internet worm, I suspect, which exploited a possible buffer overrun in `sendmail`. It propagated itself more wildly than he planned — he bobbled the code for how frequently it would replicate by a factor of 10 — which caused the 'net to pretty muchly shut down. Two interesting points: The amusing one is that Jeff Haemer managed to take a photograph as a conference a year or so after this of Morris talking to Eric Allman, the original author of `sendmail`. The not-so-amusing one is that Robert Morris, Sr was, at the



time, working on computer security for the federal government, I believe for the NSA.

✍️ *"I liked the shoulder-holster Palm holder idea better when I thought it was a single-shoulder deal."* Going through airports recently, I also realized that convenient though it might be, it would be just the thing to freak out already-trigger-happy security people.

Gary Robe ✉️ *Tennessee Trash* 🍷

I'm glad that the new hotel for Concave worked out so well.

Interesting comments on your experiences with Promise Keepers in Mexico. Having lived in Boulder, where the University of Colorado football coach founded the group out of guilt over his own infidelities, I've been paying attention to them for a while. I agree with you that their basic premise is a bit screwy — I'm nowhere near convinced that most of modern society's problems come from men's infidelity. To be sure, their suggestion that men pay attention to their families is a good one — but I think that's one you and I probably have down. On the other hand, in a country with as big an economic gap as Mexico, it seems counter-productive to be preaching that all of society's ills will be solved if husbands stop screwing around.

Eve Ackerman ✉️ *Guilty Pleasures* 🍷

"Pirate's Price is on sale at Daylight Dreams... I'm encouraged by the responses I've been getting from readers. No one has yet said 'I couldn't barf enough.'" As you'll see from my review above, I rather enjoyed it. So did Liz, though I haven't read her review yet. For

some reason, I found romance among the pirates more fun than Katherine Asaro's romance-in-space stories — even though Asaro manages some interesting world-building. I'm looking forward your next one.

George Wells ☒ *Only an idiot would have waited so long . . .* ♣

I'm amused to finally read the complete transcript of your correspondence with my daughter over Dawn, the character on *Buffy* she most loves to hate. She's got a long mailing comment to you as the very first zine in this mailing.

As for long titles, I saw a story on fictionwise.com the other day by Joe Murphy entitled "Attack of the Giant Werehand Shadow Puppet People From a Mysterious Blood Guzzling Planet in Another Dimension Boyond Our Galaxy at the Center of Time." All I could think was "George Wells title."

Randy Cleary ☒ *Avatar Press* ♣

ct me: "I was amazed at the HTML that Word generates. It's neat if you have lots of space, which is why I converted most of my own web-site to hand-coded HTML (to save space)." If you look at the coding of most commercial web sites that deal in text — say *The New York Times* site, for example — you'll discover that while the wrapper has lots of crud in it, the actual text content is amazingly lean in terms of coding.

✎ "Good luck with the India production of your zines." Still haven't made it to India. Probably just as well, since we're now in the death march phase of the project, and I'm not sure that the goal of the Indian part of the team isn't to cause the project to fail.

Liz Copeland ☒ *Home with the Armadillo* ♣ I must say that the Seven of Cups is a really cool quilt, even if the picture I took doesn't do it justice.

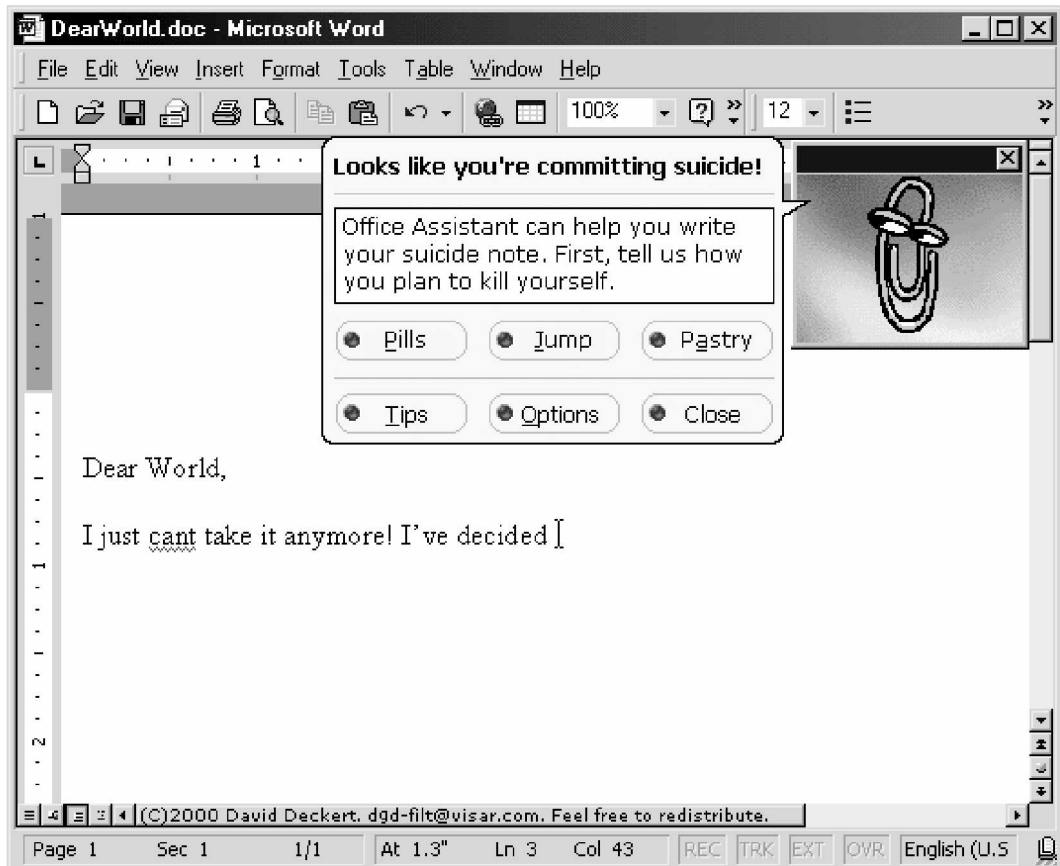


Arthur Hlavaty ☒ *Confessions of a Consistent Liar* ♣

ct me: "Maybe it is a guy thing. To me, recreational shopping sounds like recreational hanging by the thumbs." Yup. Me, too. Just like Arlo in that comic strip above.

✎ “I like your Punk Paper Clip, but I prefer Mr Clippit’s advice on the suicide note, which I imagine you’ve seen.” I thought I’d already run it. (flip) (flip) (scrabble) I guess not. OK. Now I have.

✎ “The NESFA collection of [Frederic Brown’s] short fiction is finally out; I’m reviewing it for NYRSF.” Is it any good? I should probably get a copy of it.



Janet Larson ☒ Passages ☛

They *are* beautiful children.

And, that sounds like excellent advice for parenting twins: “Try to keep your sense of humor — often when the going gets tough, the tough get the giggles.”

ct the Southerner: “Sorry for messing up your first mailing with my non-attendance. I was there in spirit though.” No problem. It wasn’t messed up. And you just had a better excuse than most. There was a story in the *LA Times* some years ago about

a furniture maker who had a studio in Venice. He talked about how they were backed up all the time, with orders stretching out for a year or more in advance, and everything was built in the order in which it came in. Except for cradles. "Babies don't wait," he explained, and so cradles took priority over everything else.

ct me: "You know, I really enjoy hearing your political viewpoint. You seem so intelligent, and it really seems like you've thought about your political stance. And yet you've come to the completely opposite conclusions that I have." I find that exchanging political views with folks who I don't agree with is often educational, and serves to give me an important different perspective. Even if it does occasionally lead to my banging my head against the wall asking "how could they *think* that!?" By the same token, in these perilous times, I've tried really hard to remember that in all likelihood John Ashcroft is really trying to do the best for the country in the short term. It just makes me really, really upset that he's trying to do it by taking the path of least effort, which unfortunately cuts across the Bill of Rights, setting a dangerous precedent.

Similarly, the insight that Liz provided about W a month ago really made me a bit more sympathetic to him: My wife pointed out that he's fairly seriously dyslexic, which explains (among other things) his spotty grades.

☞ *"For what it's worth, the Miami Herald's recount proved that Bush would have won if all the recounts had been done after all."* Actually, not: The recount story from the *Herald* in the late winter said that if the undervotes in Miami/Dade had been counted as proposed by Gore's campaign, that Bush would have gained votes *in that county*. November's fuller story about a full statewide recount was heralded with headlines in both the *New York Times* and the *Palm Beach Post* that said that the Supreme Court didn't decide the election. The stories, said exactly the opposite. If you look at both the over- and undervotes, taking a conservative approach to both, you find that Gore got about 500 more countable votes, roughly the same certified margin that Bush had. It makes no difference, though: Bush was declared the winner. He holds the office. End of subject, even if I think he didn't actually win it.

The net effect is that when it comes time to vote in 2004, I suspect the grassroots organizations on the ground are going to be a fair bit more careful about getting the votes out, and making sure people know how to mark ballots. Part of what we learned out of this exercise is that exit polls are an accurate indicator of who people *intended* to vote for, not what they actually succeeded in marking a ballot for.

☞ *"Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying the Republican party is perfect."* I'd be the last one to argue that the Republican party is perfect — the ideological goons who took over with Roger Ailes make my skin crawl. But I'd be about as likely to argue that the Democratic party is perfect.

"I'm just really tired of how much money I have to give to the IRS, and how much waste there is in

our Big Government. You have to admit a lot of silly, expensive, wasteful bills pass in our Capitol." Yes, there is an awful lot of pork barrel spending, and it's pretty ridiculous. That's why I actually thought Gingrich's idea of a line-item veto was a good idea. Unfortunately, neither president who's had the power has really used it.

However, we pay a lot less in taxes than any other industrialized country, even our Canadian neighbors, and we get a hell of a lot of service for that money. Not always the services we want, but that's part of the problem with the proliferation of pork in budgets. I'm not even sure, though, that I'd call that "waste" — the folks in those congressional districts are getting something. It's not the most frugal use of money, but it's not wasted. Jobs and services are provided. Again, not necessarily the most efficient way to do it, but it happens.

LASFAPAn Greg Chalfin used to say about any number of endeavors, "It's just guys doin' stuff." So is government. Government, after all, is just people. Government isn't evil. In a democracy, government is *us*. Government is sloppy and imperfect like all human institutions. Government is folks doing their jobs, from the clerk behind the counter at the passport office, to Dick Lynch traveling around trying to find ways to turn technology into economic benefit for the United States, from member of the Boulder school board, retired teacher, and survivor of the Hungarian uprising Janusz Okolowicz, to Rudolf Guiliani, from Frank De Martini, who worked for the Port Authority of New York as the construction manager of the World Trade Center and died helping people find routes out of the north tower, to the cop at Allie's high school. *It's just guys doin' stuff.*

I'm in awe of the sloppy, inefficient, helpful, frustrating, inclusive, annoying, populist, repressive, anarchic, God-fearing, humanist way we run this country. It ain't perfect, but it's a pretty cool idea. In six thousand years of human history, it's the best anyone has been able to come up with.

☞ Your last thought in that paragraph was: *"On the other hand, as ex-military, I would like to see better defense spending."* Be careful what you wish for: We seem to have accidentally hit on a scheme (or more accurately, were hit with a scheme) that caused us to increase defense spending. But, like with pork barrel spending in the rest of the federal budget, one would like to see the defense money spent on salaries and training and supplies and not on boondoggles like the Joint Strike Fighter.

☞ *"I wouldn't mind living in Seattle... But if I wanted to go to Maui more, why wouldn't I just move to Maui?"* Because all that sunshine would get really boring without the contrast to Seattle's rainy season.

☞ *"I have a comment I make to my patients when they all say the same thing before their pap smear; they all say 'I hate this,' and I always say, 'Well, you know, people who like this really worry me.'"* I guess in these politically correct times, it would not do for the doc to say

Would that be “I’d like a rheum for me and my minkey”? Or am I the only one other than Peter Sellers who can pull off the Inspector Clouseau schtick?

✍ This news story you quote about the twelve-year-old who committed suicide over the teasing she recieved at school strikes a little closer to home than you realize. A twelve-year-old from our church in Austin who had just been diagnosed as bipolar committed suicide a little less than two years ago, just after we moved here. We had had lunch with her and her parents and a bunch of other folks the week before.

Handcuffs and Peanut Butter

years.

☞ “It’s been what? – fifteen years? – since I saw [Allie] last?” Yeah, probably: we moved back to LA from Durham just after her second birthday. “That was the trip where we went to a party somewhere, and i reflexively turned and scooped her out of the back of the car...you said something like ‘She doesn’t take well to strangers’ as she settled peacefully down into my arms.” I don’t remember doing that. Odd. Particularly since she was quite the flirt at the time. Perhaps I was worried that she’d be upset about the beard: she’d just gotten used to mine being gone, which was quite a confusing transistion for her. We went through a couple of days where she kept looking for Dad, and finding a guy with a bald face.

Toni Weisskopf ☒ *Yngvi is a Louse* ♣

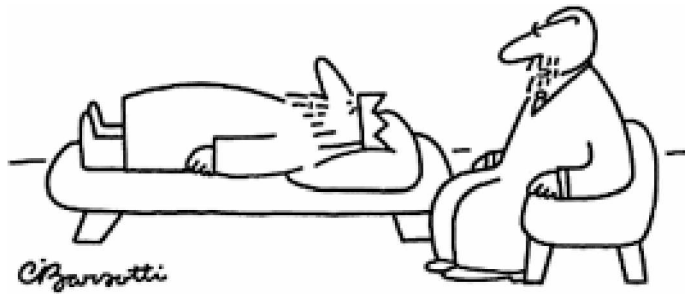
ct me: “...this also invites sharing a sort of zen poem composed over at Hank’s when we wee having a collation party and went out back to watch Hank throw axes: ‘Sun dapples on my lover’s head.’ / Axes fly. / I’ll soon be dead.” Oh, that’s wonderful. *Domo arigato, Toni-san*. I actually had occasion in a recent *Server/Workstation Expert* column to discuss the problems of translating *Furuike ya kawazu tobikomu mizu no oto*, Bashō’s most famous haiku. I mentioned, but didn’t quote from, Hiroaki Sato’s *One Hundred Frogs*, which finishes with a hundred different translations of that poem, including the usual pedestrian “An old pond: a frog jumps in—the sound of water.” Two of my favorite translations are William Matheson’s: “Jumpe, jumpe, lyttle Frogge! / Water soundeth / All aroundeth / In thyss olde Bogge.” and: “— ah vecchio stagno — / — una rana ha saltato / ... dell’acqua il suono ...”

(And in one of those odd bookshelf juxtapositions that has Machiavelli shelved next to Saint Exupery, I note that Sato is shelved with Bashō to his left, but Stirling Moss and Denis Jenkinson to his right.)

☞ “Needless to say I disagree with your concept that Bush is in the White House as a usurper, but I’d defend to the death your right to say it!” As I’d defend to the death your right to disagree with me. (Read what I say to Janet Larson earlier about exchanging political views. I was thinking also of you when I wrote it, Toni.) I think Bush is a usurper in the same sense that Henry VII* was: he got the job by hook or crook,† but having gotten it, we have to deal with the situation. As I say above, to Janet, I think the grassroot Democrats have learned their lesson about making sure people know how to cast their ballots, and careful pay in the postgame.

* Seventh? Sixth? Whichever one was the first of the Tudors.

† And, if the Supreme Court hadn’t been responsible, the Florida lege would have awarded Bush the state by specifying Bush-friendly electors, and both moves (while high-handed, and anti-democratic) are arguably legal.



"And do you feel that you are a pretender?"

Remember that Madison expected this sort of after-the-election confusion, and figured that most elections would be decided in the House, rather than directly by the Electoral College. They didn't have any past experience with democratically elected republican governments, and fully expected three or more major political parties, not the two we've ended up with.

☞ "Since I will have FedExed you a box of donuts along with my zine, you will have had a chance to rectify your apostasy: There is only one donut, and that donut is Krispy." The Krispy Kreme in Issaquah has now opened, to much fanfare, including their being served at the launch party for Windows XP. I found the ones you shipped better than the ones at the launch party; I suspect that the latter ones were more than a day old. I haven't made it down to Issaquah to get a fresh one yet, and passed up the chance in Las Vegas, where it was immediately after lunch when we discovered there was a Krispy Kreme just on the Excalibur side of the Luxor-Excalibur pedestrian bridge.

☞ "What's an 'international baccalaureate course'?" IB is a high school college prep curriculum. It's based on a set of courses that are pretty much internationally standard. It's weighted a little heavily towards the liberal arts, with less emphasis on science and math than I'd like. One big advantage is that the program's got consistent exit criteria across all schools that teach it: to graduate with an IB diploma, you've got to pass six exams (including in both the literature of your native language and a foreign one) plus write a major research paper. Some schools discourage taking a single IB course, but that seems to me to defeat the purpose of stretching kids to take at least *some* rigorous stuff.

☞ "Re: Teens in black: ...if I wear black ... it makes me look like I'm trying to be trendy. When will we get preppy back again?" For them or for you? I never stopped wearing preppy. I have virtually nothing but button-down shirts and khakis. Thanks to Steve Hughes' inspiration, I've started keeping some polo shirts around to wear with my many-pocket khaki shorts, but the basic theme still holds.

☞ “Reyrcmt Steve about management layers in India — Hank always had problems getting the Indians to understand the notion of quality control. Not quality per se — they could make good things; but getting them to do it consistently, that was harder.” I’ve recently questioned whether the guys in India are even operating out of the same agenda we are. But we’re at the over-heated last stretch of this project right now, so tempers are little frayed. Assuming no conspiracy of the form “the goal for the Indians is to get the Americans who invented the technology to quit in annoyance”, I figure there are probably four-and-a-half main problems:

- Time: they’re exactly upside-down on clock, so picking up the phone and talking to them requires advance planning or getting someone out of bed;
- Distance: they can’t hop on a commuter flight for a visit, like we could if they were in Silicon Valley;
- Experience: the least experienced line guy on our side of the project has been writing code since before their most experienced line guy was *born*;
- Culture: it’s really easy to get confused about what you mean in e-mail if you haven’t had any face time with the other guy, and he’s never spent any time in your country and comes from a culture that prizes clerks and bureaucrats; and
- Culture: the folks in the Indian office who worked in Redmond are all from an era of Microsoft that valued technical aggressiveness over all else, which is what got the company into trouble with DoJ, and they’ve transmitted those out-of-date values to the young kids there. (Put less circumspectly, the old hands who moved back to India to open the development center were raised in a corporate culture that values being an asshole.)

Mailing Comments on SFPA 221

Arthur Hlavaty ✉ *Confessions of a Consistent Liar* 🐘

ct me: “There are at most three guys in the booth for an NFL broadcast.” Ah. So it takes three people to report on athletic stupidity. They only need two guys in the booth for a political convention. “MNF also has reporters on both sidelines: one bimbo and an inarticulate Hall of Famer...” It took me a moment to figure out that “MNF” was “Monday Night Football.” My first guess was “Masturbating Naked Friends.” Isn’t “inarticulate Hall of Famer” redundant?

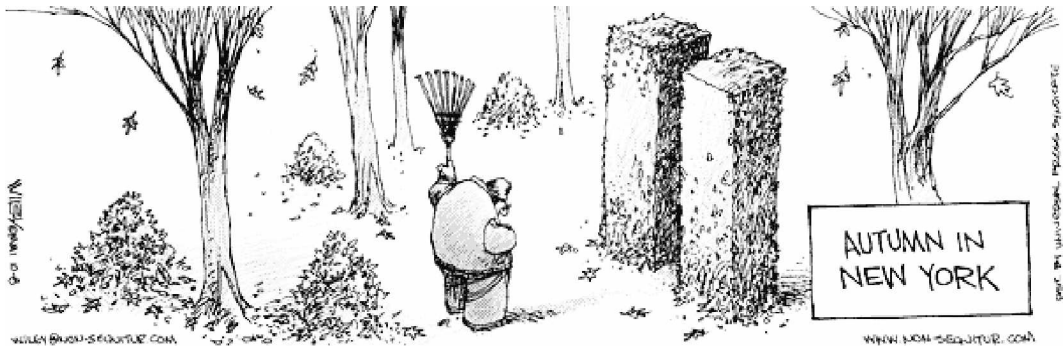
☞ “I believe The Syndic won a retroactive Prometheus Award from the libertarians.” Yeah, that’s about right. Let’s see, *The Syndic* first came out in 1953, which would have made it eligible if there had been Hugos awarded in 1954. Have we done the 1954 Retro Hugos yet?

Ned Brooks ☒ *The New Port News* ♣

ct me: "One of the great movies of the 60s has at last appeared on video ... the 1968 John Huston *Candy* ... One of the few movies that is far better than the novel it was based on!" There was an article about Terry Southern in (I think) *The New Yorker* recently, and I've been wanting to read *Candy* ever since. I'll be on the lookout for the movie, too, but I suspect it's not something we'll be able to get at Blockbuster. (Damn! And it doesn't look like netflix.com has it either.)

☞ "Much as I enjoy DSC, I am hardly amazed that even a dedicated fan might not be able to attend from the opposite corner of the country." If money were no object, we'd be there every year. Unfortunately, we have these really expensive other hobbies, named Allie and JJ. "We'll miss you though!" And we all missed being there.

☞ "There has been a big flap locally over the attempt of the Margaret Mitchell estate to suppress the publication of a parody of *Gone with the Wind* called *The Wind Done Gone* — of course this may be just a manufactured issue to boost sales of both books, as the current copyright law, like the old one, specifically exempts parodies." I saw a pair of compared passages at one point, and it struck me that there what was involved was plagiarism not parody. Also, I'm not sure how much the races of the writers in question play into this.



Richard Lynch ☒ *Variations on a Theme* ♣

ct me: "You're working for a company that appreciates its employees. I last worked for private industry ... as a research chemist...and in that time there were many patent applications filed under my name... But whereas you get a nice bonus for each application filed, what I got for all the applications and the eight patents that did result was zippity-doo." Well, it's not clear that the company cares about its employees: I've been trying to get a decent slice of pizza on campus for a year now, and it's hopeless. But I jest. It is clear that it cares about (and rewards) results, and a patent application is the sort of result they want. (It's only in the last five years that Microsoft has had any kind of depth to its patent portfolio. In a world where patents are tools for beating up competitors or using as chits in

bargaining sessions, this was a real problem.)

✍️ *"The advantage of traveling trans-Pacific is the flights break such that you get an overnight someplace in southeast Asia like Tokyo or Bangkok.' You do. I've never had that luxury in the few times I've gone trans-Pacific, mostly due to limited travel budget and the perception that it would cause a public uproar about the US Government wasting money ... with unnecessary overnight stops."* I'd have to look at the airline schedules involved, but starting in Seattle, I don't think it's possible to get farther than Bangkok in one day. You end up there late in the evening, and then you'd need a redeye from there to Delhi or Bombay, which I don't think exists. And then, for my purposes, you'd need to be able to get a domestic flight from Bombay to Hyderabad, or have a place to hunker down for several hours until one is available. I'd feel safer hunkered down in an airport hotel in Bangkok rather than in the terminal in Bombay.

But, as I've said before, I think the government's travel policies are fairly silly. A lot of those decisions are made for form rather than substance. Case in point: our county needed some SUVs recently. It turned out that the best deal they could make for the quantity they needed was for Lincoln Navigators. This actually makes sense: the local economy is contracting with Microsoft's stock price down and Boeing laying people off, so the local Ford distributor is stuck with some high-end cars that he's willing to let go at a loss before they go out of date. The hue and cry has been tremendous, based on the mis-informed assumption that list price was coming out of people's taxes.

Richard Dengrove ✉️ *Twygradrasil and Treehouse Gazette* 🍌

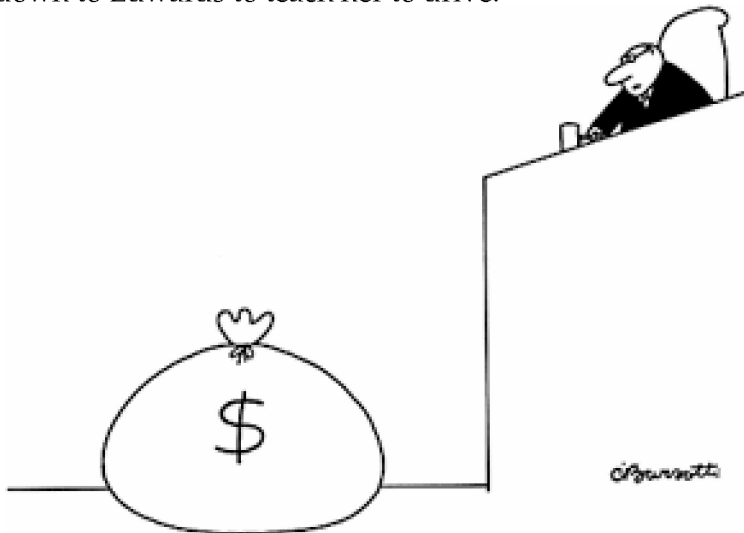
ct me: *"The problem with the Fairness Doctrine was that it fit the monopoly/oligopoly era of the '40s and '50s. I'm not so certain it's applicable to our current free wheeling era. Cable TV, the news, the web, talk radio are all competing."* The web and print are a fairly limitless resources, but television and radio aren't. Even with cable, there are a limited number of channels of programming you can get into your house — note the recent pissing match between Rupert Murdoch and Time-Warner over allowing more networks owned by one of them onto cable systems owned by the other. That's the underlying philosophy behind the law that set up the Federal Communications Commission, and mandated the fairness doctrine: because there's a limited amount of it, it has to be available to all, and used for the public good. The bean counters who run the cable companies don't want a fairness doctrine because it allows them to sell more political commercials each election cycle. Worse, since there is more and more consolidation of media interests, there are fewer corporate interests owning larger chunks of the available broadcast companies. This means that there are fewer disparate voices.

☞ *"The Republicans own inexperienced lawmakers are to blame for the 1995 government shut-down. All political pros knew it would end in disaster..."* Wasn't Gingrich a pro?

Guy Lillian ☒ *Spiritus Mundi* ♣

Nice picture of Gargarin on the cover. Is even appearing in appropriate shade of **красный, товарищ**.

"Teaching a kid to drive on roads lined with cliffs and poisoned stakes doesn't make any sense. I learned to handle a car on a dry lake bed. Find one of those around Seattle and take Allie there." Yeah, sure. It would be dry for about three minutes in August. It would be easier to take her down to Edwards to teach her to drive.



"Not guilty."

Janice Gelb ☒ *Trivial Pursuits* ♣

ct me: *"You are the umpteenth person I know who was bored with Gladiator. I didn't see it but assumed from its front-runner Oscar status that it must be great. No one I know liked it so how did it win?"* I bet between the folks that Russell Crowe and Joaquin Phoenix have slept with, we've got a majority of the Academy. Actually, I think the rest of us just didn't get the nice little gift baskets from the studio encouraging us to vote for it.

☞ *"These comments from Tynan make me even more eager to see Shrek. ..."* It's actually very amusing, as you'll have seen from my review in an intervening mailing.

☞ *"Given your views on copyright here, I'll be interested to see if you discuss the controversial Wind Done Gone case this time."* I'm not sure I actually have a "view" on copyright, just a recognition that something's going to have to give in the digital age. But, I've

actually discussed *Wind Done Gone* above, with Mr Brooks. *"I find it a disgrace, especially given that the copyright has already run out and was extended for no apparent reason."* There was a very apparent reason. I've said it before and I'll say it again: US copyright law is being actively jiggered for very specific corporate interests. In other words, the reason is as plain as the mouse tattooed on Michael Eisner's butt.

Steve Hughes ✉ **Comments** 🍷

ct me: "I once went to one of those awful management seminars... whose main topic was the difference between 'leadership' and 'direction.' 'Leadership' was a good thing; 'direction' was what a bad manager... did because he was too incompetent to provide leadership..." As I think I said, I don't get a lot of direction unless I ask for it. I get a fair picture of what the overall goals are, and what the rules are to get there. I have a long note from the legal department sitting on my desk about how the new consent decree affect what I'm doing, for example, and as we've neared this deadline, I get a daily e-mail telling me where the team is on tasks-to-be-completed. Now, that said, I think that leaders are fairly rare, even in a company that doesn't direct people: only about half of the folks in the line between me and Steve Ballmer are guys I'd be willing to follow into combat. But that's an infinitely better ratio than at Systemhouse, the only other big company I've worked at.

David Schlosser ✉ **Peter, Pan, and Merry** 🍷

ct me: "I did indeed mean that Sen Thurmond was early in line for the Oval Office if the election became a total mess. Of course, *Thurmond vs Helms* doesn't strike me as much of a difference anyway." In one of the early Fletch books, Gregory McDonald has Fletch explain to another character that he wished a child had a sibling so that he could beat one of them to death with the other. Such is it with Helms and Thurmond.

Sheila Strickland ✉ **Revenant** 🍷

ct me: Thanks for the explanation about British actors, giant squirt guns, and propeller beanies.

Gary Robe ✉ **Tennessee Trash** 🍷

ct me: "Arthur C Clarke may have been behind the curve in Imperial Earth as far as PDAs are concerned, but we're halfway through 2001 now and there's no sign of HAL yet!" Well, we've got the voice recognition under limited circumstances, we've got expert systems that can pass the Turing Test in some cases, we're beginning to get artificial vision. We've almost got Franken-HAL.

☞ *"First one to the doorway wins, eh? Sounds like a good Earthquake plan to me!"* Yeah. It's a really good strategy.

It has been over three weeks since the clean up of this terrible disaster began. During that time, both the mood of the site as well as the momentum of the work has vacillated.

...

We have suffered a tremendous blow, huge and terrible losses. In no way, however have we suffered any defeat, not that can be seen while standing in the streets of lower Manhattan.

— Charlie Cappello, Bechtel Corporation, in one of his periodic dispatches from the site of the World Trade Center cleanup, 7 Oct 2001

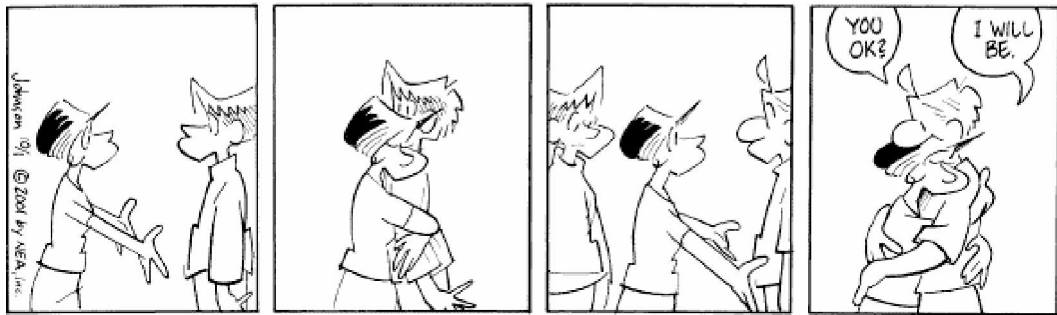
Gary Brown ☒ **Oblivion** ☛

Thanks for the article from the 11 May *Palm Beach Post*, “When Do Comic Strips Step Over the Line.” Liz uses the most offensive Johnny Hart cartoon in a while in her zine: the two characters looking at a splotch on the ground. “What’s that?” “A chalk outline of a corpse.” “An asterisk?” “He jumped off this thousand-foot cliff.” It ran on September 24th. Twelve days earlier, *The New York Times* ran a quarter-page photograph of one of many people leaping one thousand three hundred sixty-two feet rather than burn to death — that’s ten and two-tenths seconds of terror, which ends as you hit the plaza at one hundred and twenty miles an hour. Gary, you’re in the news business, you’ve been in budget meetings: how important does it have to be for a *photo* to take a quarter of a page? The *Times* thankfully did not run the photographs of the blood smears on facing buildings caused by people who tried to leap laterally from lower floors of the south tower to nearby roofs and missed.

And yet, Mr Hart, living in Endicott, New York, a two-hour drive from Manhattan, couldn’t be bothered to pull or change this comic strip. Gary Trudeau managed to fix a whole week of *Doonesbury* — and those were just strips that criticized Shrub.

Johnny Hart is an asshole. A self-important, irresponsible, insensitive, over-indulged, shit-smearing anus. Nothing — not apologetic editors, not the fondness other cartoonists have for him — nothing will convince me otherwise.

ct me: “I think most people would like to work at a place that offers specific and measurable goals, but minimal supervision. There’s a real trick to having that work. I’ve worked for bosses who give you a lot of latitude, but then pull out the rug when something doesn’t go the way they want it to go.” Fascinating article that Hal O’Brien pointed out to me in *Fast Company* a couple of years ago about the GE aircraft engine plant in Research Triangle, North Carolina. (“Engines of Democracy”, *Fast Company* issue 28, October 1999.) An absolutely flat management structure, where a highly trained, have a lot of autonomy, and almost no direction. They get told almost nothing about how to do their jobs except when



the next engine has to ship, and how many defects are acceptable. (The answer to the second, by the way, is “none.”) Apparently, careful hiring is a big part of it.

Nice, meaty, thought-provoking zine. I wish I had the time to comment more extensively, but if I do, I’ll never get caught up.

mike weber ☒ *New Tools, Old Me* ♣

Thanks for reprinting Jonathan Freedland’s piece from *The Guardian* of 25 April on the occasion of Shrub’s 100th day in office, “A Presidency of Dunces.”

ct Liz: “i recommend either scanning the cartoons and then pasting them in, or else copying them to an intermediate master sheet...” Blame me. There were a couple of Liz’s zines there that I did the copying on and bungled the job badly.

Randy Cleary ☒ *Avatar Press* ♣

ct me: “In regards to your comment to Ned Brooks, did not that ‘Bach’ group reform later as BTO?” BTO? The Bach Technical Office? No, no, those would be the guys who promote the MP3 format.

Toni Weisskopf ☒ *Yngvi is a Louse* ♣

Charlotte talks about Gary Sinise as an “actor’s actor.” Like Kevin Kline and Matthew Broderick, he’s very serious about being an actor, rather than a movie star. (Note to self: must see Kline in “Life as a House”.)

ct me: “Obviously, I disagree with you on the ‘stole the presidency’ issue... Oh, well, we live in interesting times, dammit. The incompetent boobs of all persuasions in the Senate are drawing my ire now.” Yeah, we’ve fallen back into the politics over policy problem. Fallows blames the media for this in *Breaking the News*, which I reviewed last time. It’s much easier to talk about the minutia of how this particular statement dings that particular party. In the end, rather than discussing policy, Congress ends up being the OJ Simpson trial: played to the television audience rather than for the purpose of deciding anything. Worse, actually, because in the Simpson trial, people all over

the country were entertained; with Congress, it's being played for a select set inside the Beltway. It would be real nice to see an economic stimulus package passed, but they're too busy trying to score points rather than figuring out what to do.

Liz Copeland ✉ *Home with the Armadillo* 🦔

"I was particularly pleased that the Krispy Kreme doughnuts fedexed by Toni arrived right after I finished and hung up the Seven of Cups over the mantle... Anyone know the ingredients list? I'm just curious if there's anything in them I'm not allergic to." In Krispy Kreme doughnuts? I'm surprised you didn't immediately go into anaphalactic shock.



That's all we have time for, folks (and all the filler we have handy, which is why the index is on the back cover).

However, among this month's annoying news, I have to report that Computer Publishing Group, who've been producing magazines with columns by me and Jeff Haemer for a decade, has called it quits. Their losses for 2001 were fairly high, the falloff in advertising after the terrorist attacks only made it worse, and the investors pulled the plug with the December issue.

They never paid more than a couple of cheese sandwiches a month (to borrow Spider Robinson's explanation of what Ben Bova paid him for all those book reviews), and for many years, I just gave those away to charity. But boy, it was fun. It gave Jeff and me a chance to have an on-going project together. The folks at CPG were really entertaining people, and we had the pleasure of working with some really talented editors. We got to correspond with some interesting people who read our columns, like the woman in Romania who's been asking our advice on setting up a consulting business, and the colorblind physicist in LA, and the British defense contractor, and the guy who wrote to us out of the blue to explain that the quotation we'd used from Thomas Carlyle was blasphemous.

It was a fun gig, and I'm going to miss it.

Art Credits

The cover is graced by a front page clip from *The Globe* tabloid from 19 June. This is probably the real reason the *Globe's* parent company, American Media, was the first victim in the anthrax terrorist attacks.

Page 1: *Non sequitur* from 17 Oct. Page 3: *Don Wright* from 15 Nov. Page 6: *Foxtrot* from 28 Aug — sometimes, they really do all seem like the same movie. Page 10: *Heart cf the City* from 25 Nov. Page 11: *Arlo&Janis* from 23 Nov — Recreational shopping? Fetal position on the couch? The choice is clear. Page 12: another annoying interaction with the Microsoft animated paper clip. Page 15: *Luann* from 13 Oct — a hopeful thought delivered at the end of a hopeless month. Page 17: *New Yorker* from 12 Nov — Charles Barsotti's king undergoes psychoanalysis. Page 19: *Non sequitur* from 8 Oct — another post-Sept 11 cartoon. Page 21: *New Yorker* from 1 Aug — Barsotti again on guilt and innocence. Page 24: *Arlo&Janis* from 1 Oct. Page 25: *Doonesbury* from 2 Oct — everything's changed.

Index

<i>Along Came a Spider</i> , 5	Gary Robe, 10, 22	<i>The Pledge</i> , 4
Arthur Hlavaty, 11, 18	George Wells, 11	Randy Cleary, 11, 24
Bimonthly Mafia, 7	Guy Lillian, 21	Richard Dengrove, 7, 20
<i>The Book on the</i>	<i>Harry Potter</i> , 5	Richard Lynch, 19
<i>Booksheif</i> , 6	Janet Larson, 12	Sheila Strickland, 22
<i>The Curve cf Binding</i>	Janice Gelb, 9, 21	<i>Sister Mary Explains It</i>
<i>Energy</i> , 6	Liz Copeland, 11, 25	<i>All</i> , 4
David Schlosser, 7, 22	<i>Midnight Fantasy</i> , 4	Steve Hughes, 22
<i>Driven</i> , 4	mike weber, 15, 24	<i>Sworafish</i> , 6
Eve Ackerman, 10	Ned Brooks, 19	Toni Weisskopf, 16, 24
<i>The Family Man</i> , 5	<i>Penn & Teller</i> , 5	<i>Trailers</i> , 5
Gary Brown, 23	<i>Pirate's Price</i> , 5	Trinlay Khadro, 8