



osushigumi

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For a number of years, in these pages, I've advocated a zero tolerance policy on very few things. Iraq having weapons of mass destruction was one of them. It's long been my belief that nuclear or biological weapons in the hands of Saddam Hussein would be remarkably dangerous, not only for countries in the region — most notably Israel and Saudi Arabia — but also (in the age of universal air travel) for the United States.

Former UN weapons inspector (and former US Marine) Scott Ritter claims that Iraq was mostly stripped of biological weapons and that its nuclear program was destroyed. On the other hand, chief inspector Richard Butler says that there were too many places they weren't allowed to search and that they were held for days in busses outside their headquarters when they found evidence, so he has no idea what the state of Iraq's weapons program is. If a weapons inspection program is to be restarted — and Iraq has rolled over on doing so in the last week — the inspectors must be under United Nations control and the United States *must* make a firm commitment to not load the inspection teams with spies, as they were last time.

The inspection program needs to continue. This is a circumstance under which close isn't good enough. If Iraq has *any* weapons of mass destruction, that's too many.

Yes, despite the profusion of nuclear weapons, they have only been used twice. In some sense the United States and the Soviet Union kept each other from using nuclear weapons through mutual fear. Why wouldn't this work in the case of Iraq? Why would Iraq use an atom bomb with the sure knowledge that it would be answered by nuclear bombardment from Israel? Because all it would take for Saddam Hussein to be willing to launch a nuclear attack would be assurance that *he'd* be safe. He has gassed his own citizens. Why do we have any assurance that his use of nuclear bombs would be restricted by his fears for his own population? I have a sense that even at the height of the cold war the principals (with the possible exception of Richard Nixon) were not willing to kill a large fraction of their populations. Hussein has no such qualms.

The other red herring being bandied about has been the number of Iraqi civilians who have died because of the “onerous” requirements of the UN resolutions and the armistice that ended the Gulf War. During the period since the Gulf War while Iraq has been under an export embargo, it has been allowed to sell a certain amount of oil for food and medical supplies. It has never sold as much oil as it was allowed to. Meanwhile, there are documented cases of Hussein smuggling additional oil under the cover of the “oil for food” program, and getting kickbacks from the middlemen receiving the oil.



This all is past, but it brings us to 12 September and our only President speaking before the United Nations.

Let me say first that every time Shrub says “nucular” I want to reach through the screen of my television set, grab his labels and scream in his face, “You twit: you went to Yale! Can’t you say ‘new-clee-ur’?”

That complaint out of the way, I have to note that his speech was the same old litany of complaints the United States has been making about Iraq since the end of the Gulf War, and adds the canard of Iraq harboring terrorists — more al Queda members and Taliban soldiers are from Saudi Arabia than from Iraq or Iran. Bush Minor demands a new government in Iraq because that new government would be more willing to cut good deals with Shrub and Cheney’s oil buddies. The time to install a new government in Iraq was at the end of the war, and Bush Major passed up the chance at the insistence of the House of Saud, who didn’t want a kurdish government on their northern border.

However, I have to admit, Bush Minor may be right, even if for all the wrong reasons. It may well be that only by having Saddam Hussein out of power can we ensure that Iraq, once stripped of nuclear and biological weapons, won't rebuild those programs, just as it's been rebuilding its nuclear program in the absence of inspectors over the past few years. However, these actions — inspection, stripping of weapons, possible military action — must be undertaken under control of Congress and the United Nations. The Bush administration cannot be allowed to take action without control or oversight.

(Bush's requested Congressional resolution —

The president is authorized to use all means that he determines to be appropriate, including force, in order to enforce the United Nations Security Council Resolutions referenced above, defend the national security interests of the United States against the threat posed by Iraq, and restore international peace and security in the region.

is broader than the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. And that turned out to be a license for excess and destruction that nearly tore the country apart and, in the end, handed Vietnam to the Communists.)

What are Hussein's real goals? Does he really think he can become a regional power? If we had diplomats or intelligence agents in the middle east, we might be able to tell. We may be on the verge of once again proving that war is the failure of diplomacy. (But we should never forget — particularly in this case — that diplomacy is the art of saying “nice doggie” until you can find a rock.)

Unfortunately, the fantasy being played out in the corridors of Washington holds that “after all, all we had to do was show up in Afghanistan and there's now a friendly, stable government there. So Iraq will work the same way.” Nothing is further from the truth. The United States will need to be in Afghanistan for at least another five years before things are stable. (You'll note that an attempt was made against Hamid Karzai in Kandahar over Labor Day weekend — by a member of the Kandahar governor's security staff.) And even then, I'm not sure that in the absence of US troops, the government in Kabul will be pro-US. Suggesting that Iraq will be easier, when the opposition has been systematically exterminated, is foolish at best, lying at worst. Suggesting that a war against Iraq this time will be merely a matter of air war followed by mopping-up by a few tanks is wishful thinking at best, a Vietnam-era Westmoreland-sized lie at worst.

There is no guarantee that a new government installed in Iraq — even one that was to the liking of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and Syria and Israel — would be stable in its own right. So the US is committing to spending an indefinable period occupying Iraq for “state building” purposes. And this is all complicated

by the inability of the US State Department and CIA to agree on who is running the government-in-exile.

All these worries about the motives of the Bush government are complicated by last week's submission to Congress of the Bush administration's National Security Strategy. In this document, it is declared that the United States is rejecting the past fifty years of balanced policy, and adopting a stated policy of always being the biggest bully on the block. We will strike where we want, with or without support of the world community. This is a new policy of American isolationism enforced by American military might projected to the world at large. It is arrogant. It is dangerous. It will be counterproductive.


Things are moving quickly enough that I've re-drafted this essay twice. If it appears a little disjoint, it's because you're reading the third version, written on the afternoon of September 21. If it doesn't match reality in the spacetime where you're reading it, things have changed once again.



Helpful Household Hint number 217: When cutting up French bread, ensure that your fingers are no in the range of the serrated blade of the bread knife, or you may shorten the index finger of your left hand by a couple of millimeters, as I did making brunch on the morning of Labor Day. When it was said and done, we spent only about four hours in the emergency room, and nearly three weeks later, it still stings but I can actually write and type again.

With two teenagers in the house — yes, James isn't yet a teenager, but he's already displaying the attitude of one — I'd be willing to pay to have a Nerf door installed. That would mean that when Allie's coming in at midnight on Friday, or JJ's upset about being asked to go out in the rain to get the newspapers off the driveway, the door slamming won't rattle the fillings in my teeth.

Reviews

 I finally got around to reading all the *Hugo Novella Nominees*, though not soon enough to get them marked on the ballot before the 30 July deadline. Just as well, since they seem to adhere to Sturgeon's approximation.


- “May Be Some Time”, Brenda Clough: Guy gets dropped 150 years forward in time. He decides to learn about his new surroundings. The territory was better covered by Spider Robinson in a Callahan's story, “The Time-Traveler”.


- “The Diamond Pit”, Jack Dann: An adventure story in the roaring twenties, with a secret diamond mine, kidnapped flyers, a beautiful (and evil) heiress. Billed as an homage to F Scott Fitzgerald, I suspect the old drunk is spinning in his grave.

- “The Chief Designer”, Andy Duncan: A fictionalized account of the Soviet space program. Very nicely done, but I'm not sure I see the point.

- “Stealing Alabama”, Allen Steele: Had I read this before reading Steele's short story nomination, “Days Between”, the short story would have made more sense, since it's preceeded in story time by this novella. Presume a United States where the south won the War Between the States, and where the government in Atlanta has become corrupt and dangerous and capable of launching an interstellar space program. What if the senior commanders of the space program were in a conspiracy to take dissidents off the planet? I'd love to know more of the alternate history leading up to this story.

- “Fast Times at Fairmont High”, Vernor Vinge: Kids in junior high school do mirrorshades, to no real effect. Yawn.

 I finally read Ursula LeGuin's Hugo short story, “The Bones of the Earth”. I was prepared to be disappointed, but was actually very impressed. Sixty-five hundred words of wizardly heroism. Good stuff.

 While Liz's mom was visiting, we decided we wanted to watch a movie one evening. Allie and I went to the video store. We kept finding movies we wanted to see, but which would cause Barb's head to explode. “Let's see... How 'bout *Boogie Nights*?” “Boom!” “*Bound*?” “Kablam!” “*Sex and the City*?” “Brains all over the walls.” “*Sabrina*?” “Whew!”

So we saw the original 1954 Billy Wilder version of the movie with Humphrey Bogart and Audrey Hepburn. Rough plot précis: Younger son of a wealthy family becomes engrossed with the chauffeur's daughter, endangering his engagement and hence a corporate merger. The older brother, who actually runs the company, decides to break them up, and falls in love with the daughter in the process. Very nicely done, with the trademark Wilder droll dialog. We get a very stylized ending:

a steamship steward arrives, exchanges some French with Hepburn (no subtitles! you're expected to know what "chapeau" means), Bogart appears, they embrace on the ship deck, fade to credits,...

...which we (the following week) compared and contrasted to the 1995 *Sabrina* remake with Harrison Ford and Julia Ormand, with script revisions by Barbara Benedek (who co-wrote *The Big Chill*) and David Rayfiel (*Absence of Malice* and *The Firm*) and directed by Sidney Pollack. Rather than plot points being implicit and low-key, they're painted on with a broad brush, most notably in the ending sequence: rather than a hug and a fade to black, (since we've understood the story up until now) Ford launches into a long self-explanatory monologue to make sure we've tied everything up with a bow.

(Speaking of subtlety: While I was working on the beginnings of this zine during my week off, I re-watched *Contact*. I was impressed by the way in which at the important junctures the scientific jargon is just allowed to flow. The audience is expected to know what a prime number is and what "4.2816 gigahertz" means. Robert Zemekis' direction and sense of visual composition is wonderful: I was delighted to see — and watched four times — the wonderful long tracking shot where we watch the young Ellie run up the stairs to get her father's heart medicine, run down a long hallway, and then see that we're been watching the whole thing in the medicine cabinet mirror. Our heroine never cuts her conscience to achieve her ends and is willing to continue loving the man in her life even though they have vast areas of disagreement. And, again, as always, I'm impressed by the ending: even though the antagonists know that she isn't crazy, she has to finally take what she experienced on faith alone, and does.)

In any event, Allie had never seen *Bound*, so we got it to watch after Grandma Barb was safely home, and the danger of head explosions was gone. I'd forgotten how cool a caper movie it was. It's got quite a bit: mob money, three competing sets of folks seeking it, a bit of gore, a bit of double cross, hot lesbian sex.

Spy Kids 2 is Robert Rodriguez' nice sequel to his fun family movie of last summer. Kids get to save the world again, with help from their secret agent parents and grandparents.

If you want to see Vin Diesel do James Bond with a punk and techno soundtrack, you could do worse than see *XXX*. The hero is an extreme sports fanatic, gets arrested for a particularly spectacular stunt, is plucked on his way to jail to be a secret agent. He gets gadgets, has sex, blows things up. Very nice.

🐼 M Night Shyamalan, the writer-director who brought us *The Sixth Sense* has now provided *Signs*, which is his attempt at an alien invasion horror movie. The tempo is cranked way down, with scenes paced glacially. Tak Fujimoto (who did excellent cinematography in *Philadelphia* and *The Sixth Sense* and *MacGyver*) should have his director of photography license revoked. In the end, I was reminded of Ted Chiang's horrible Hugo nominee "Hell is the Absence of God," except that Shyamalan's god doesn't deliberately fuck over his creations.

🐼 I've finally read *Smoke Filled Rooms*, the second book in the Smokey Dalton series by Katherine Kristine Rusch, writing as Kris Nelscott. In story time, we go from the Martin Luther King assassination covered in *A Dangerous Road* to Chicago and the 1968 Democratic convention. There are some continuity glitches, and it's the first thing of Rusch's that I've read that failed to make me say "wow!" Nonetheless, she does manage to capture some of the frustration and flavor of a horrible week in American history, a job she did better in the first book of the series.

🐼 Check out the amusement of user-supplied *Four Word Film Reviews* at www.fwfr.com. For example, one of the reviews of *Signs* is "X-files meets GuidePosts magazine." Or check out *Deliverance*: "Worst banjo vacation ever." Or *A Fish Called Wanda*: "Lawyer, killer, tart, twit."

🐼 I'm having a year where I'm completely gushy about Nicole Kidman, so I'd had to see *Birthday Girl*. It's a caper movie built around a Russian mail-order bride scheme. Kidman plays the bride who is both more and less than what she seems. Ben Chaplin plays the hapless bank clerk seeking human companionship to replace his collection of bondage magazines. Bilingual confusion and blackmail ensues. No giraffes were actually harmed in the making of this movie.

🐼 After reading Stephen King's *On Writing*, in which he discusses the process of putting together a novel, I was inspired to again try to read something of his. I grabbed *The Dead Zone*, which he talks about in particular. Would have been more interesting as a novella.

The movie that asks and answers the question, "Do you need talent to star in a movie?" – Answer: No.

— Roger Ebert re: *Spice World*

🐼 James wanted to see *The Adventures of Pluto Nash* for an outing while I was on vacation. It is not quite the disaster that reviewers have painted it. You've seen the story before: barkeep has to defend his place against the mob, and in

the end beats them and gets the girl. Except that this version with Eddie Murphy takes place on the moon, which lends some extra amusement, even though Dennis Quaid is simply unfunny as the robot bodyguard.

☛ If you want a drama about why decisions on the battlefield should only be made on the battlefield, you could read “Charge of the Light Brigade” or see *Blackhawk Down*. America got involved in Somalia for all the right humanitarian reasons, but when targets started being dictated from Washington, and tactics directed by officers at the local headquarters, disaster was sure to follow. It’s now become trendy to blame the deaths of eighteen soldiers in a failed raid in Mogadishu on Osama bin Laden and Al Queda. The fault however was not in our stars, but in ourselves. Tennyson knew this; why haven’t we learned?

☛ *High Crimes* is a military court-room thriller. Bad guys, sort-of good guys, a coverup, murdered South American civilians. The best things about it are Morgan Freeman and Ashley Judd.

☛ If I’d seen *Amélie* sooner, I would have nominated it for a Hugo. We have the story of a little French girl who grows up with two completely neurotic parents, and ends up being a shy waitress in a little café in Paris. She has some engaging adventures, and along the way meets a range of weird and interesting characters with their own unique quirks. It is a delightful movie with wonderful elements of the fantastic. But reading the subtitles made me really, really wish my French was much better, because it was clear I was missing a lot.

☛ I picked up *Rocky Horror: From Concept to Cult* off the “new books” shelf at the library recently. Don’t bother. It’s a series of verbatim transcripts of interviews with everyone who had anything to do with the original London and Hollywood stage and film productions of *Rocky Horror*, interspersed with painful introductory drivel. I’m sure there are interesting historical bits buried in there, but the few nuggets are hidden in a such a pile of manure that they’d be hard to find.

I poo-pooed the popular theory that the excesses of the Sixties had a corrupting influence. ...but I would have to admit that some of the more extreme manifestations of the Sixties may have inspired emulation by those weakest and most corruptible: the Republican Right.

— Arthur Hlavaty

Warning: political review follows....

🐼 Apparently, there actually *was* an organized right-wing conspiracy to attack and destroy Bill (and Hillary) Clinton. It was waged by a bunch of homophobic, anti-abortion, fundamentalist Christians and Republican apparatchiks, funded by Richard Mellon Scaife and a shadowy Chicago man named Peter Smith (whose been much better than Scaife at keeping his name out of the news). Their journalistic point man was a gay Berkeley grad by the name of David Brock, who has now written *Blinded by the Right* about how his ego got the better of him and he took the adulation of people who hated what he was rather than thinking about the full picture of the politics he was supporting.

His writing is uneven, and littered with no small amount of self-pity and self-justification. However, it's invaluable as an insider's view of the concerted effort to hound the duly-elected President of the United States from office by any means, fair or foul. I realize that it's become trendy for the right-wing to belittle Brock with the argument "well, he's admitting he lied, so why should we believe anything he says now?" Why would you believe anything he said back then, either? If you believe that Brock made up everything he ever said, you have to also accept that Clinton never met a woman named Paula Jones, and that Anita Hill was, in fact, hit on by Clarence Thomas.

Certainly, if you take Brock at face value, you have to accept that two past and one current Solicitor General of the United States, two past US Attorneys General, at least three Federal Judges, and two Supreme Court Justices were all materially involved in the effort to unseat Bill Clinton. While the efforts of people on the other side of the political fence to oppose a President shouldn't be surprising, the vituperativeness of their efforts is, as is their willingness to spin their evidence to fit their needs and ignore their own offenses in the process. It's interesting that they began *before* the election of 1992, while Clinton was still running for the Democratic nomination for President.

One of the fascinating things Brock talks about is that after *Esquire* published "Confessions of a Right Wing Hit Man," the article that signalled his break with the conservatives, he became friends with Sidney Blumenthal, one of Clinton's closest advisors. Brock gave Blumenthal a brain dump on what he knew about the Jones case, including the plans to depose Clinton. That is, Brock warned Blumenthal about the planned perjury trap, which was the main basis for his impeachment, before anyone had heard the name Monica Lewinsky. That Clinton knew the trap was coming and fell into it anyway suggests the depths of his denial about his responsibility for his own problems.

Mailing Comments on SFPA 227

Rich Lynch ✉ *Variations on a Theme* ♣

"[J.S. Bach] was a fascinating person, and the more I read and learn about him, the more interesting he becomes." I'm not sure I need to know much more than I do to be impressed as all get out. He raised something like ten kids, several of whom turned out to be decent composers in their own right. He wrote some of the best music of the last millennium. And for his day job he noodled together a magnificent piece of music every week.

Perhaps the safest thing to do at the outset, if technology permits is to send music. This language may be the best we have for explaining what we are like to others in space, with least ambiguity. I would vote for Bach, all of Bach, streamed out into space, over and over again. We would be bragging, of course, but it is surely excusable for us to put the best possible face on at the beginning of such an acquaintance.

— Lewis Thomas, on how to communicate with extraterrestrials in *The Lives of a Cell*

Norm Metcalf ✉ *Tyndallite* ♣

ct Brown: "You mention that 451 degrees Fahrenheit is the temperature at which book paper bums. Ballantine also brought out a limited edition printed on asbestos. I passed on buying one." I think it was the Limited Editions Club that did a version in large format with aluminum covers, and internal illustrations and decoration by Joseph Mugnaini, who did the original Ballantine cover. In his introduction, Bradbury talks about how, in preparing this edition, he discover that over the years successive editions have left out a word here and there, have, in fact, expurgated his book about censorship, and that he'd gone to some trouble to ensure that this edition was complete and correct.

Ned Brooks ✉ *The New Port News* ♣

ct Hlavaty: "I hadn't noticed the expensive Space Stamps – I don't collect stamps, but I like to use fancy stamps. I might rarely have occasion to want the \$3.20, I suppose." The reason for the \$3.20 stamp is that it's the old one-pound flat rate Priority Mail postage. Since you don't use priority mail, you've never had reason to use them.

🐕 *"I never understood how Chelsea Clinton became a political target. The Bush daughters seem to have gone looking for notoriety."* Well, that's because we've got a liberal press in this country. Which is why nobody ever put up a picture of Chelsea captioned "White House Dog" on their television show. Which is why the gossip columns

aren't making a big deal about her dating behavior while she's a student at Oxford, and the press didn't harass her boyfriend's parents when she was at Stanford. Which is why, when the Bush twins were arrested for underage drinking at a bar in Austin which every middle-class kid knows is aggressive about checking IDs, every paper reported how theirs was the only case since Texas' underage drinking law was signed (by their daddy) that a case was handled, not by the local DA, but by the state Alcoholic Beverage Commission (whose members were all appointed by their daddy), which rather than fining the girls, tried to pull the liquor license of the restaurant where the twins were arrested, only being prevented when the Travis County DA stood in their way. (I don't know about you, but I had to read the last in Jim Hightower's newsletter.)

ct Dengrove: "I have done software installations to the computer where the instructions warned that the anti-virus software should be turned off during the installation and turned back on after — this is easy enough, it turns off and on with a couple of mouse-clicks." Seems to me that if you have software to detect when you've installed software with a virus, and turn it off everytime you install software, you might as well not have the virus-detection software. Of course, the first generations of virus-detection software operated by screaming at you every time they detected a new file, which was not the most productive thing.

ct Gelb: "I had not heard of armadillo racing, I wonder how that was managed." You set the armadillos in the road, and you race to run them over. At least that's how it's done in Texas.

ct me: "My main problem with Brin as a storyteller is that, like Stephen King, he doesn't know when to stop. The Postman would have been excellent at 1/3 the wordcount." Actually, *The Postman* is a collection of two or three novellas. The first, which I think was the one actually called "The Postman," is the best of the set.

Richard Dengrove ✉ Twygdrasil and Treehouse Gazette ✉

ct Hlavaty: "It's true civil libertarians will not protect us from a plane coming at us. But apparently neither will John Ashcroft." Yeah, but he'll protect us from guys who might want to talk to a lawyer. And he'll protect us from having to share constitutional rights with anyone who's not a citizen.

ct the Lillians — Patriotic Route: "I have often gone to the Strand bookstore. In later times, for occult books. I don't know why. They never had a really great selection of them. Still, I have to admit they have had an incredible selection of other types of books." The Strand is a very cool place. I used to hang out there when I was a teenager, and on vacations from college. I got at least one of my several copies of *The Physics and Chemistry Handbook* there, and any number of my volumes of Arthur Clarke's fiction. (My

high school physics teacher tells me that when *he* was in high school, he and his classmates used to hang out at the mothership Barnes and Noble, back before it was a chain. Of course, it was across the street from their school.) 🍷 “Years later, I applied for a job at the Strand but, with a masters, they considered me overqualified.” The Strand could do worse than to hire people who actually know about books. That’s certainly the strategy that the good video store in Boulder, Video Station, used: you had to demonstrate some knowledge of a particular film genre when you applied for the job. That way, there was always somebody there who you could ask “Hey, what’s that movie with Robin Williams and the monkeys?” (However, I hasten to add that in my experience the staff at the Strand have been pretty knowledgeable.)



ct Lillian: “I am willing to give the Bush Administration credit for two things. One, they have coordinated the search for al Qaeda and bin Laden well between countries. Also General Franks claimed they finally did get around to searching the battlefields for bin Laden memorabilia.” Franks is such a clueless dink. He’s been running the campaign for Afghanistan from the Central Command headquarters in Florida, unlike his predecessor, Norman Schwarzkopf, who actually spoke several languages from the region and ran the invasion of Iraq from as close as he could get.

🍷 “But I don’t think I saw any of [the Matt Helm films] to completion. And they marked an era for me. So, in my mind, they weren’t so bad. I would never get the DVD, but in the part of my brain that processes nostalgia, they weren’t so bad.” In the same vein, but with more humor, are the James Coburn *Flint* movies, which became available on DVD in the past month.

🍷 “You know the Empire State Building mysteriously was built pointing toward the flying saucers — i.e., up?” And the Washington Monument, too. Isn’t that why the caps of all those buildings are aluminum? So the flying saucers can magnetically dock to them?*

* Since I bobbled the explanation of why 32 and 212 are the interesting Fahrenheit temperatures

ct Lynch: *"In part, I was doing what Catherine Asaro warned against: judging her books by her covers. Her publishers, she complained, have used misleading covers with abandon. Often advertising her last book better than the one the cover is supposedly for."* If you've ever seen Toni's slide show of cover art, you'll know that some large amount of the commentary is "and this one is wrong because..."

ct Schlosser: *"In fact, I hear Congress could eliminate the Supreme Court if it wanted. And Robert Bork, failed Supreme Court nominee, recently was advocating that Congress do just that. Which didn't help those who have wished to claim his views have been in the mainstream."* Nope: Article III, Section 1, specifically names the Supreme Court. And if Bork was really advocating this, it convinces me more than ever that he's is a complete loon.

ct Feller: *"It is more than a coincidence that the young Lex Luther has become a sympathetic figure after the young Darth Vader, Anakin Skywalker, has become so popular as a sympathetic character. Makes box office sense."* No, I think it's a matter of "nothing's as black and white as you think." Verheiden's scripts make Lex into an interesting multi-dimensional character.

ct Koch: *"Yup, Google is the best search engine as far as I can tell. A number have come out and I have tried them. They have all been touted as the wonder of the age; and as far as above, Google is as 'man is to the dinosaur.'"* My test is the vanity search: I type "Jeffrey Copeland" into the box, Google's the only search engine that gives me my own web page on the first page of results. However, <http://www.kartoo.com>, the result of a French research project, gives a graphical representation of a similar search. It provides pointers to two items *linked from* my main web page in its first set of results.

ct Brown: *"Literally, Ray Bradbury is wrong. In the internet world, we have to read and write. The '50s with its television culture has not been totally a harbinger of the future. But he is right in another way. The tendency is to crush anything with intellect and anything with depth. And cling to the conventional for dear life."* As Gore Vidal put it with his usual wit, "I was hired when television was desperate enough to scrape the top of the barrel." (Or, to quote Ernie Kovacs, "Television: A medium. So called because it is neither rare nor well done.")

ct Hugheses: *"A friend of mine suggested Orbitz. And so I have used it like you, only in reserving a flight to Hunstville for this year's DeepSouthCon."* We've been using Expedia ourselves. In planning our Christmas expedition to Indianapolis and West Virginia it appears that Orbitz and Expedia give the same fares. Orbitz' advantage is that it has a grid comparing fares and number of stops vs airlines.

ct weber: *"And I bet the government now wished that it had chosen to try Lindh by military*

lately, I hasten to add that, yes, I know aluminum isn't magnetic. Or, maybe it is, and *they* want us to believe it's not.

tribunal. His lawyers have brought out photos of him tied to a stretchers and blindfolded.” Well, since the government didn’t have a great case with Lindh in the first case, I’m surprised they actually even brought it to trial. And I’m surprised Lindh took the plea bargain. The best Ashcroft could do is prove that Lindh is a misguided loon. He couldn’t prove Lindh actually acted against Americans — yes, two Americans were killed in a prison revolt while Lindh was being initially interrogated, but since Lindh was literally tied up at the time, he can’t be accused of having anything to do with that. It’s clear Lindh went to Afghanistan when the Taliban were the good guys, and that he wanted to leave *after* the September 11th attacks. A bad case all around. Where are the defense services of Guy H Lillian when you need them?

☞ *“Then we said, What the hey!, and joined the Northern Alliance in overthrowing the Taliban.”* See my opening essay on how this doesn’t translate to action elsewhere.

ct me: *“Why doesn’t someone make a computer’s platform the internet? And beat Microsoft to the punch.”* Well, that was certainly the direction that Netscape was heading in. The threat to Microsoft wasn’t so much that someone else had a compelling application, but that applications running on the net are — by definition — independent of operating system, and hence don’t require you to buy Windows. Moreover, if you’ve read *Breaking Windows*, you’ll know that two Microsoft executives, Jim Allchin and Brad Silverberg, had a battle for the heart-and-soul of the company in the early nineties. Essentially, Silverberg wanted to develop web versions of all the software and Allchin wanted to pursue a “Windows everywhere” strategy. Allchin won. This is why your cell phone may be running Windows — a completely inappropriate operating system for the purpose. ☞ *“He worked for a firm that was doing all sorts of things with the internet. You would have an account and could get your email, do your own calendar, and be capable of other good stuff. I went to the website and it appeared to work. He claimed it was lot less complicated than the LAN we have. And lot less prone to disruption. Search me.”* Here’s the downside of Silverberg’s strategy: This solution is no less complicated than the LAN you have. In fact, because it’s actually a wide area network, rather than a local one, it’s got at least one more point of failure: the long-haul network connection. Further, the integrity of your data depends on the stability of the servers of your service provider.

☞ *“The Chandra Levy Case a tempest in a waterglass? More a drop of water. Often, though, it amuses me to see how shallow the media can become squeezing a story after story out of a bit of fluff.”* I was in the gym the other morning and each of the televisions — all four were tuned to different stations — suddenly broke away for an hour for the verdict in the Westerfeld murder case. Who’s Westerfeld? Who did he murder? Why was the case so important? Why should I care?

☞ *“The one thing I heard about the birth rate increasing during 9-1-1 said it was a myth.”* As

I said earlier, I can't imagine that the aftermath of all the destruction would be arousing.

ct my travelogue: *"Phonics being the only way kids actually learn to read? You bet. Way back in the '50s, I was taught to read with the Progressive method."* Actually, I was probably overstating what that *Scientific American* article said. As I recall, I said "The folks who wrote it explain clearly that phonics is it for teaching reading, period, end of subject." It's certainly the case that different kids learn better from different methods. I think the statistic is that about three-quarters of kids can learn to read from phonics, about ten percent can learn from whole language, some small percentage learn by osmosis — comments by Ned Brooks suggest he fell into this category — about a third can learn from other methods. Some kids can learn from more than one method. Unfortunately, even though whole language is not remarkably successful, it was the only allowable doctrine for too many years, and was a complete disaster. Part of the problem is the political overloading: the Christian fundamentalist homeschooling community insisted that the only allowable way to teach reading was phonics. Even though they were basing that on the clear disaster of whole language, they were ignored by the educational establishment, who just dug in their heels in opposition. So, by being right, the fundamentalists caused the bad practice to continue longer than it might have. (Of course, this is not the only reason I believe that everyone with a PhD in education should be shipped to Iraq. That would set Iraq back so far that they'd be no threat any more.)

If the average man is made in God's image, then Mozart was plainly superior to God.

— Phil Spector

Rich Lynch ☒ *Variations on a Theme* ♣

ct Dengrove: *"On classical music: 'People can shoot off cannons seriously as part of the "1812 Overture." There are parts that seem almost to call for a cannon.' Absolutely there are; the composer (Tchaikovsky) wrote in fourteen cannon shots at specific places in the score, in fact."* Thanks for confirming my remembrance.

ct my travelogue: *"On Indian highways... 'Traffic ... is huge lorries, bicycles, motor scooters, motor cycle cabs, and regular cars. And lane markers are suggestions.' You forgot to mention animal-drawn vehicles, but I don't think those are common inside the cities."* I actually saw several bison-drawn vehicles hauling construction material out near the office tower shared by Microsoft, Oracle, and the GE call center.

Janice Gelb ☒ *Trivial Pursuits* ♣

My condolences on Effinger's death. *"I mention the letters because I found myself being extremely grateful that the Internet had not existed back then: I would never have had those letters if we'd met later."* E-mail may not be tactile, but it's not necessarily ephemeral: I have important e-mail saved back to 1980. When we moved to Austin in 1990, I converted my data archives from nine-track tape to 8mm data cartridges. I recently cut CDs from those tapes.

ct Lynch: *"There was a fascinating article in the New Yorker that I still have about medical phenomenon and medical emergences and treatment in space."* That was a very good article. I particularly liked Bonnie Dunbar's reaction when asked about the dangers of long-term space travel: *"I think of my grandfather who came from Scotland. He had a dream to come to America, took a rickety boat across the sea, and went west into the wilderness. Did he stop because of the risks? I'll be fifty-one this year. I've spent my life training to go into space. If my life ends on a Mars mission, that's not a bad way to go."*

ct Lillian: *"As for the Olympics, the French judge's troubles continue: a Swiss judge claims the French judge said she said she was going to support the Russians three months before the Olympics."* So, now, even amateur sports have become criminal enterprises. I'm amused that one of the skaters (or was it a judge?) let slip her involvement with the Russian mafia, and was forced to backpedal over her original comments.

ct Schlosser: *"In other naming news, the HP/Compaq merger is going to mean the renaming of the arena where the San Jose Sharks play from Compaq Center to HP Pavilion."* Boy, what a mistake. The merger, that is. HP's corporate culture had been strong and vital, but was getting weaker. Carly Fiorina's changes had been damaging it further. Now, with the integration of the Compaq guys, it will pretty much destroy any vestiges of the HP Way. Compaq had gotten itself into a mess of trouble by buying Tandem and Digital and making some bad business decisions besides. Compaq was big enough that it couldn't be as nimble as Dell. I'm still not sure what HP gets out of the merger, except for Carly showing her board that she's doing something by pissing off the Hewlett heirs.

ct Stickland: *"I agree that supermarkets in foreign countries can be great — cultural indicators."* Supermarkets are cool, but stationary stores are almost a better indicator. When I'm in Tokyo, I always oscillate between the basement (groceries) and fourth floor (stationary and lacquerware) in department stores. (Yes, they're usually laid out similarly, even different chains.)

☞ *"I've tried Buffy too but the violence got to me, even in its television-dumbed-down state."* Buffy's violence is so cartoonish that it's not nearly as offensive as say, Paul Verhoeven's *Total Recall* or (yech) *Starship Troopers*.

ct Ackerman: *"Yes, Jerry's DVD donations have come in handy. I've watched Gosford Park,*

Microsoft didn't want a lot of other companies writing code that could compete. It wanted to keep the barriers to entry very high. The idea, in fact, was to keep raising the bar, putting in more layers of software and APIs, which developers would then have to support. Microsoft wanted to make it so gnarly that anybody who couldn't devote a team of one hundred programmers to every Windows application would be out of the game.

— Jennifer Edstrom and Marlin Eller, *Barbarians
Led By Bill Gates*

Legally Blonde, and *Amélie* so far. Of course, by the time I get to the rest of them, they'll probably be out on regular DVD." As I said earlier, when we were watching *Amélie* I kept wishing my French was better. It's just a wonderful movie. You'll have seen my reviews of *Gosford Park* and *Legally Blonde* in previous issues.

ct me: "I guess I didn't make my point about MS sharing code clearly: if they shouldn't share their Windows code with outside developers for the business reasons you cited, then they shouldn't be sharing it with non-Windows business units like Office. It means that those products, which are not Windows, have an unfair advantage over other software developers producmg the same category of products." Microsoft isn't doing that kind of preferential code-sharing any more. My group is working on a thing that will be useful to application developers. The Office group has been interviewed just like other big external development groups. My understanding is they'll get to see what we've produced when we release the developers' drop in a couple of months. ☞ "The states agreed to the original MS settlement proposal of old machines to schools before they fully understood it according to what I've read." Well, like the lawyers' fees for the tobacco settlement, perhaps the state AGs should have read the agreement before they agreed to it. It's pretty silly to come back later and say, "Oh, we didn't realize we were agreeing to pay you an ongoing percentage of the money they were paying us." My understanding of the Microsoft agreement, though — at least as explained in our cave — was that it was a win-win: slightly older machines and unrestricted money for the schools in the settling states, and a tax writeoff for Microsoft.

☞ "As for a Mercedes, I've been wanting a silver 450SL for years. I'd never buy one, but it's my favorite car to look at. (The BMW 633CSi is a close second)" As I said earlier, I'm not sure I'd want a Mercedes. This is conditioned by my experience in Southern California where Mercedes drivers are uniformly dickheads. Similarly, in LA, BMW drivers tend to be self-important assholes. (By the same token, in Boulder, folks drive Volvos because they want something safe to protect them from their incompetence behind the wheel.) I'll admit that for built-like-a-tank, Mercedes is it, but I'm not

sure I'd want the baggage that goes with it.

ct my travelogue: "Did you ever find out what the Shalom Watanabe sign was for?" I asked my friend Tak, and his response was roughly, "it's the name of the building" which didn't strike me as the most informative answer. I suspect we were talking at cross-purposes through a language barrier.

☞ *"I'm surprised you were trying to use your American Express card in ATMs. Doesn't that count as a cash advance? I've used my bank's ATM card in the UK, Australia, and Scotland and it worked fine."* I tried my ATM card, but it didn't work, I suspect because we bank at a credit union, fairly far out on a network node. And yes, the actual transaction counted as a cash advance, but I just put the usurious fee on my expense report, like I did with the travellers' check fees.

Janice Gelb ☒ *The Ellison Webderland Experience* ♣

Boy, it's painful to read Harlan's multipage diatribe at you for suggesting that he might have been out of line. It's...um, is "encouraging" the right word?...to see that the little fuck is still at it.

Tom Feller ☒ *Frequent Flyer* ♣

ct me: "Anita and I recently watched the original Rollerball on cable. It holds up well, although one of the main premises, that the world will be ruled by a handful of corporations, seems more remote now than it was in 1975." I don't know: We've got Nigeria hanging dissidents to the order of Texaco; China executing political prisoners and selling their body parts (no, that's Larry Niven); China and Federated Department Stores in each others' pockets; Mobil having its officers tried in London for trading with Iraq in an attempt to build a pipeline across Afghanistan; Bob Dole's presidential campaign being sponsored by Archer-Daniels-Midland (much as Carter's was by Coca-Cola). We perhaps don't explicitly have a world governed by corporations, but their employees are drafting more law in the US than our elected representatives and their staffs.

ct Brown: "By the way, I recently watched the History vs Hollywood episode on Tora, Tora, Tora, which was mostly favorable toward the movie with the exception that it did not include Japan's highly efficient espionage service in Hawaii prior to the war." When I was in college, the Friday evening movie for 6 December 1974 was *Tora, Tora, Tora* because the guy in charge of the movies wanted to have an early morning showing the next day, timed so that Takahiro Tamura's boys could drop their bombs again thirty-three years to the minute later.

Guy Lillian ☒ *Spiritus Mundi* ♣

We were talking about *Forbidden Planet* last time, and I've been thinking: *The Day the Earth Stood Still* may be better science fiction, but *Forbidden Planet*

is a better science fiction *movie*, if you catch the distinction. Sort of like *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* being better science fiction than *Star Wars* even though *Star Wars* was a more striking movie.

ct Metcalf: “Yes, I admit to not knowing The Syndic. I am a fakefan ... or, perhaps I just have a lot of good stuff left to read.” Me, too, I’m afraid. There’s vast swatches of stuff from the “golden age” I haven’t read. I’ve read *Foundation*, but not the Robot Novels, for one example. And I’ve actually read no Doc Smith, for another.

ct Hlavaty: “Catherine Asaro won the Nebula this year for *The Quantum Rose*. I’m a big fan of hers, and someday may even read something she’s written.” Asaro’s the second absolutely gorgeous physicist I know of. The first is a woman named France Córdova, who was a grad student in the department back when I thought I wanted to be a physicist. She’s now the chancellor at UC Riverside.

ct Dengrove: “Of course, Ashcroft’s philosophy – like Scalia’s — declares that the Bill of Rights applies only to citizens, so dirty foreigners like Inge Glass and Lloyd Penney visit America at their own risk. Is that the country we want?” The Constitution has to apply to us all in the United States, or it applies to none of us. What the Bill of Rights describes is not the rights of citizens, but basic human rights. Ashcroft kept saying “the constitution applies to citizens; we won’t suspend it for our own people, only for non-citizens,” and now it turns out that he was lying. He’s holding multiple citizens incommunicado under various Catch-22 rulings.



As we’ve seen again and again, if the government can take away any of the basic rights in the Bill for people it doesn’t like for some momentary reason, it can *and will* take those rights away for any of us. Freedom to have private contact with your lawyer? Not if you’re a drug dealer. Or a suspected terrorist. Or a mobster. Freedom from illegal searches? Not if you’re in a car. Or a suspected terrorist. Or if we don’t want to disclose the warrant. Freedom of speech? As long as we don’t find out from the library that you’ve been checking out suspect books, which we can do under the new laws — and we get to arrest the librarian if she tells you we asked. Were I looking for a conspiracy, I’d believe those who’ve told me that Ashcroft’s staff started drafting the USA Patriot act (two lies in one in *that* name) last July and August.

ct Lynch: “I like the Einstein statue in D.C.; photographed Beth there once. He’s like a giant bronze grandpa.” I get a similar hit from the statue of Alice in Central Park.

ct Feller: “I’ve been taping *Smallville* since word of its excellence finally penetrated my concrete brain. ... Ages me fast to think of Annette O’Toole playing Ma Kent, though.” I’m also amused

since she played Lana Lang in one of the Christopher Reeve *Superman* series. But she's is still a babe. Not quite as smashing as she was paddling around nekkid in a pool in the 1982 *Cat People*, but still pretty good. (That remake of *Cat People* was a disaster in some dimensions, but O'Toole was fun to watch, and Malcolm McDowell was just brilliant in his physical acting. Natasia Kinski, on the other hand, just couldn't keep her accent straight.)

ct Koch: "Won't the '05 NASFiC be decided this year, since UK in '05 is unopposed?" Nope. UK hadn't actually won yet. You have to hold the NASFiC selection two years out. (I've forgotten: how did this used to work when Worldcon sites were selected two years out? I seem to remember that the NASFiC site was selected by packing the business meeting. The WSFS constitution in the Noreascon II program book talks about an "interim Continental convention" being in the same region that would have had the North American Worldcon, but doesn't discuss how the site is chosen. It appears that the procedure wasn't actually codified until we starting picking Worldcon sites three years out.)

ct Brown: "I don't understand those Democrats who bad-mouth Al Gore, and publicly call for another candidate in '04." I don't get it either: Remember that the second largest popular vote total for a presidential candidate ever was for Gore in 2000. (The first was for Ronald Reagan in 1984.) If all else was equal, but Gore managed to carry the electoral votes for either Florida or Tennessee, he'd beat Shrub. (It's pretty clear more people went to the polls in Florida in 2000 intending to vote for Gore. If the bizarreness of voting machines and counting could be overcome, he'd win easily. But, with the disaster in which the democratic Florida primary resulted this year, I'm not sure we're not in for more of the same in the 2004 presidential election.)

ct Gelb: "Rosy's a big fan of the Nero Wolfe series. Me too, ... We like the continued casting of Kari Matchett in all the femme fatale roles." Yes, Kari Matchett's fun, but having Penelope Ann Miller as the widow in *Motherhunt* was absolutely cool.

☞ "There is a distinction between amateur writers... and professionals that goes beyond merely getting paid for one's writing.Mike Resnick writes about fannish stuff. Greg Benford writes about fannish stuff... What could be more significant recognition than awards — four Hugos for Mike, a Nebula for Greg. Now Langford has that recognition — a Hugo for his fiction. He should abandon the Fan Writing category." It seems to me that Resnick and Benford (and Silverberg and Carr before them) are writers fanzines as well as fiction. And are rightly recognized as being so. If Langford continues to write both *Ansible* and short stories — both of which are amusing in their own ways — I think he's eligible in both categories. Or are you saying Langford should stop writing fanzines?

☞ "The best weapon airlines could give their employees is better security, of course, the best

defensive weapon: a locked and impenetrable cockpit. But in a pilot's hand, the stun gun seems adequate. A pistol shot could penetrate the hull and cause a Goldfinger-like catastrophe." According to an interview with some senior Boeing engineer in the local paper, the *Goldfinger* effect is myth: a bullet is remarkably unlikely to pierce the body of the airplane, and if it does, it won't necessarily cause explosive decompression. On the other hand, the experience of Seattle cops with stun guns is that they aren't always effective in stopping someone coming at you with lethal force. Pilots having firearms is not my first choice. Like you, I'd rather the cockpit could be made impenetrable in an emergency, but under the circumstances, and with proper training, I'm willing to give the pilots the option. (On the other hand, I saw a demo on one of the morning TV chat shows last week where a pilot coming out of the cockpit *with his gun raised* didn't have time to react to the chap waiting to take the gun out of this hand.)

☞ *"Annie Winston asked about slash fiction the other night, and Dennis Dolbear and I got to tell her all about it — even the hobbit style you mention here. She didn't believe it. Of course, it didn't help that, in years past, we had also told her all about a Laurence Olivier porn film we'd just seen, Country Matters, juggling the lie in the air for several minutes before the bullshit became too much for even us to manage."* Annie can be remarkably gullible at times. I remember when we visited Chez Dolbear on our moving trip from Los Angeles to North Carolina, you were out grabbing a pizza when Annie and Justin arrived. In response to the obvious "where's Guy?" query, Dennis told her he'd gotten pissed off at you one too many times, knocked you unconscious with a frying pan and then dismembered you in the backyard. When Liz and I joined in, and started adding details, Annie was not quite sure until you stepped back in the front door. (But also see the article on slash fiction I franked in this mailing.)

☞ *"Alas, the bones of Chandra Levy have been found, and here's a prayer that the forensic boys, thanks to ever-advancing CSI skill and technology, will tap her murderer. And who will that be? Condit? John Walsh's serial killer? I hope we see the answer soon."* There's no chance. Like the Boulder Police and JonBenét Ramsey, the DC police have screwed this up. Condit was boffing her, but that doesn't mean he killed her. As I've said before, this wouldn't have been an issue if (a) Fox hadn't been starting up a new "news" network, and needed a compelling drama, and (b) the Levy family in their grief hadn't been willing co-conspirators.

ct me: "The only thing I know about Dawson's Creek is that the lead character was supposed to chafe his charley to Katie Couric every morning. I kept watching Today in hopes that she'd look into the camera and yell 'Cut that out! You'll go blind!'" That admission — the "every morning to Katie Couric" — was in the very first episode, lo these many years ago. It was clear then that a couple of the actors were the only thing going for the show, and

that it would have been far more interesting if they'd been able to get the sex scenes past the censors. But, yeah, it would have been just perfect if Couric had ended an hour of the "Today" show one morning with a special note to young Dawson...

☞ *"The Frank Langella Dracula was insipid.....No, the best Dracs are the two versions of Nosferatu — Klaus Kinski was wonderful and Max Schreck was ... well, ..."* I found the Kinski *Nosferatu* to be a little silly. It probably captured the darkness of the original better than the Langella version.

☞ *"24 finally reached its midnight hour this month, a thrilling yet downbeat ending to an outstanding show."* I still have to see this. The four videotapes are sitting on the shelf across the room. I keep meaning to start watching it, but I keep not making the investment.

☞ *"What's 'source code'?"* As you know, the computer operates on ones and zeroes. It's possible to program the ones and zeroes directly, but it's remarkably painful. Instead, we use assembly language, which consists of instructions like "add the contents of this memory location to the contents of this memory location." Assembly language gets translated directly into binary, one machine instruction per line. Alternately, we write in what's called high-level language, which gets translated into multiple machine instructions per line. FORTRAN was the first high-level language. Probably the most common now are C, (the language the Unix operating system and its successors are written in), or C++ or Java (successors to C in style, but taking slightly different approaches).† "Source code" is the assembly or higher-level language text that gets translated into binary for the particular machine.

There are two other important related points:

First, we use higher-level languages when we can because of density of expression and portability. A single line of C translates into a lot of instructions in the native binary for the computer; a single line of assembly language translates into a single instruction. Since programmer productivity is independent of language used — that's not quite an intuitive result, but the data goes back to the mid-sixties — using a higher level language allows one to write more productive code. As a result, frighteningly little code is actually written directly in assembly or machine language. Portability means that I can translate ("compile" is the nomenclature) the higher-level source code into machine code for different underlying machines. So, in effect, I can run the same program on different computers without rewriting

† Note to the nerds among the audience: Yes, I'm ignoring some aspects of why C++ and Java are important, but those aren't germane to answering the current question.

The process of preparing programs for a digital computer is especially attractive, not only because it can be economically and scientifically rewarding, but also because it can be an aesthetic experience much like composing poetry or music.

— Donald E Knuth, introduction to volume one of *The Art of Computer Programming*, 1968.

it, only by recompiling it.

Which brings us to the other thing about source code. Part of the fun of programming is getting other people to run your programs. Sometimes they'll say nice things about you. Sometimes they'll give you money. I can distribute the programs already compiled, or I can just distribute the source code. If I distribute the source code, the person I'm sending my program to can then compile it for his own environment. In fact, if he's got the source code, he can read it and modify it and make changes in my program for his particular needs.

And that brings us to something you didn't ask about, but we've been talking about lately: the Open Source movement. When you give someone a program under an open source license, you distribute the source code with it, you don't require your customer to hold the source secret. In return, they promise that any time they pass the program on, they'll also include the source code without restriction.

"One minor disagreement: our reaction to 9-1-1 should have been violent, but not the violence of a 'God-forsaken Berserker.' The colder, calmer, meaner, and more controlled, the better. Wild sloppy anger makes dumb mistakes, and fades quickly." Tearing off madly might actually have given better results than what we did, which installed a government of crooks and opium traders in Afghanistan, allowed bin Laden to get across the border to Pakistan, spirited his relatives out of the US to Saudi Arabia without questioning by the FBI, shredded our constitution, and has done fuck all to actually find the living conspirators.

Arthur Hlavaty ☒ *Confessions of a Consistent Liar* ♣

ct Lillian: *"Seventh graders would mostly not appreciate a stripper. I don't know where the line should be drawn: obviously after puberty, but I don't know how far."* The last time Allie was at one of the used book stores on our usual list, she picked up a few old issues of *Playboy* to cut up for collages. There were actually articles I wanted to read in a couple of them — Jeff Bezos interview in one, a political thing by Bruce Jay Friedman in another — so they've been sitting on my bedside table for a month. Our resident seventh grader appears to have ignored them completely, even though he often watches TV in our bedroom. (On the other hand, I'm way past seventh

grade, and I *don't* appreciate strippers. I find them remarkably boring. When a chap in my old group at work had a bachelor party recently, part of the reason I'm just as happy I missed it was that I didn't have to feign amusement at the "entertainment.")

☞ "My guess is that Harlan Ellison said, 'The gargoyles have taken over the cathedral,' and it was not original with him." And he's just the right height to see eye-to-eye with the gargoyles. . .

ctBrown *"The Afghan invasion was a complete success (except of course for what we went in there for), so I assume we'll have more of them. They're probably saving up a particularly good one for October 2004."* See my opening essay on this, but also my comment very nearly above to Guy.

ct me: *"Ted Chiang is another writer who everyone agrees has written two great stories, but there is much argument as to which they are. My choices are '72 Letters' and 'The Story of Your Life.'"* I still haven't had a chance to force my way my way through to the end of "72 Letters." But I've gotten the new volume of his short stories, which I'll read. I'll see if I can come up with my rendition of the Ellison breakdown — these are brilliant, these two are crap — for Chiang. ☞ *"'Hell Is the Absence of God' strikes me as an unedifying tale of how the Lord could be a real shit if He put His mind to it."* The god in "Hell..." is, to borrow your words, guilty of conduct unbecoming a deity. That's part of why I found the story uninteresting. Even allowing for suspension of disbelief, I couldn't get past the notion that if I was trapped in this universe, the simplest solution would be to kill myself.

☞ *"Verdana may be as good as sans serif gets."* No, Zapf's Optima is as good as sans serif gets. But comparing Hermann Zapf's work to Matthew Carter's is like comparing Bach's work to Handel's, I think. It's the difference between singular, inspired brilliance and interesting workmanlike stuff. Verdana is still the typeface of choice for low resolution applications, like your computer screen. (Though for my Palm screen, which is even lower resolution than my computer, I've been having good luck with Rainer Zenz's Alpha Book font: www.rainerzenz.de/palm.)

☞ *"Violence should never be the first resort. As the Teachings of Don Vito tell us, always try to reason with them first."* Oh, alright. We'll ask nicely. And *then* beat the shit out of them. (What was it Capone said? "You can get better results with a nice word and a gun. . .")

David Schlosser ☒ *Peter, Pan and Merry* ♣

ct Brooks: *"I don't think that the countries are part of the 'axis of evil' because they are working on nukes except to the extent that that makes them more dangerous and thus more of a concern."* Again, see my introductory essay. But, there's John Steinbeck's conversation with

the storekeeper in *Travels with Charley*:

“You think then we might be using the Russians as an outlet for something else, for other things.”

“I didn’t think that at all, sir, but I bet I’m going to. Why, I remember when people took everything out on Mr Roosevelt. Andy Larsen got red in the face about Roosevelt one time when his hens got the croup. Yes, sir,” he said with growing enthusiasm, “those Russians got quite a load to carry. Man has a fight with his wife, he belts the Russians.”

“Maybe everybody needs Russians. I’ll bet even in Russia they need Russians. Maybe they call it Americans.”

ct Dengrove: “*I don’t think a technothriller has to be SF. What about Fail Safe for example?*” Mostly for the sake of argument, I’m going to suggest that *Fail Safe* is a political thriller. While it’s always dangerous to suggest that you can’t use a word for something from before it was invented, remember that “technothriller” was invented for the sake of *Hunt for Red October*.

☞ “*I get a receipt for having voted (the top of the ballot sheet) but it doesn’t show who I voted for. While a receipt could be made to show that info, I don’t think it would be either necessary or wise.*” No, but the receipt from a California ballot doesn’t tell you that you accidentally voted for Herman Göring rather than Neville Chamberlain because you’re five-foot-three-inches tall and can’t actually see the ballot form on the voting machine. Why is it unwise? It nullifies the secrecy of the ballot? Don’t print the name on the itemized receipt — your ballot receipt doesn’t have your name on it now.

ct Lynch: “*While they may never use the WTC design again, as was pointed out in an article in USN&WR, you don’t design buildings to resist every possible form of damage. The biggest flaw I’ve seen about the design seems to be the clustering of the stairs near the center.*” The design goals were to lower the weight of the floors, to not have internal pillars, and to have all the windows unobstructed. Leslie Robertson made the tradeoffs he did — including a central load-bearing service core with elevators and triple staircases — to meet those goals. Remember: he knew that the Empire State Building had been run into by an airplane, so he designed his building to survive an impact by a 707, the largest plane in use at the time.

ct Lillian: “*Kay and I both felt the ‘using drugs help terrorists’ ads were a rather interesting tactic for taking away the ‘I’m only hurting myself’ line of argument. The more paranoid implications hadn’t occurred to me. Besides — it makes just as good an argument for legalizing drugs so the \$\$ stays out of the hands of foreign drug kingpins and terrorists.*” Let’s see: countries that pour money into terrorists, and export things that are used addictively by Americans. Um... Saudi Arabia? Oil?

☞ “*The non-counting of Challenger in the box scores can probably be traced to my bring up*

*the question of whether it should count for your total or not.” Were I doing the counting, I’d include *Challenger* (since it’s a result of Guy’s vision), but I wouldn’t include my quote zines, since they’re compilations of other peoples’ words. Even without counting the pages in the box scores, though, I’d encourage Guy to keep franking *Chall* through SFPA.*

ct Gelb: “But would you (or Sun) really want to drop people in the middle of the project that was proceeding well? Or imply that they would be cut after the project?” Large companies have duplicate projects — even well-run ones. But, still, swapping people into a project in mid-stream is a recipe for disaster. Worse is telling people that they’re history when the project is over.

[I’ve perhaps related the story about the project at USWest: they presented the project plan to the senior executives — senior vice presidents and the CEO — and the project manager made up the schedule through just-in-time lying to match the expectations he was perceiving in the meeting. The chief information officer asked my correspondent (the architect on the project) if he thought the team could stand by that schedule; he said roughly, “yes, if we sleep in the office.” OK, said the senior executives, we’ll do it. The next day, the word came down that the team was all going to be laid off when the project was done. The *next* day, the question came down from the CEO: “Being laid off isn’t going to affect the schedule, is it?”]

☞ “You must remember this, a bris is just a bris...” Ouch. Is the next line, “the fundamental screams apply as time goes by?”

☞ “In saying that Chandra Levy was only a story because of Condit, I was referring to his being in Congress rather than him per se. I agree that any Congressional intern would have had the coverage if it had happened to them.” Actually Levy wasn’t interning for Condit; she was an intern at the department of agriculture. But if she’d been having an affair with Henry Hyde or Dan Burton, Fox “news” would have buried the story, and we’d never have heard about it.

ct weber: “I’ve tried that Google search for Supergirl, etc and haven’t had nearly the luck you have with images.” Me neither, but then I’ve only looked at the first page or two of the results.

Sheila Strickland ☒ Revenant ♣

ct Brooks: “The local cable company here uses numbers above 100 only on its digital signals; then rents you a box so you can get those numbers.” As I’ve explained before in these pages, until the cable box interfaces nicely and cooperatively with the VCR we won’t get a cable box. Which means we don’t get HBO or any of the fancy digital channels.

ct Gelb: “The notebook computer has indeed been fun. I bought it with an eye toward using it to write papers for grad school. I may also cart it along with me this summer on trips to work on SFPA



mailings or such.” I must say, when I am on the road and take a laptop, writing is the principal thing I use it for anymore. I used to also use it for reading, but now I use my Palm for that instead. There’s sort of a taxonomy of portable devices, though. The three kilogram laptop is something that you take with you on vacation when you need a computer with you. The two kilogram laptop is one that you carry around with you a lot because it’s fairly light. If you’re only doing light input, and no display intensive applications, you can probably do with a handheld of some kind — a Palm or a PocketPC. But I’ll be interested to see how the new tablet PCs — machines intended to be used primarily on their touch-sensitive screens, basically a big-screen Palm — fit into the ecosystem. I suspect that the ones that sell are going to be machines like the Acer that have a keyboard anyway.

ct Ackerman: “Everybody gets to go on a fabulous vacation but me. Sulk, sulk, . . .” Actually, I’m in the annoying position of having to take vacation this year — I’ve got too much unused time on the books, and have to take it or I’ll lose it — and our travel budget is completely depleted. So my week off in August was spent at home with a book in my lap. (I’d intended to spend it working on my own software and organizing my office at home, but thought better of it and worked on SFPA some instead.)

Gary Brown ✉ **Oblivion** ☼

“My cousin died May 6 of pancreatic cancer. He was 51.” Steve Ashe, who hired me at QMS, did the same at the end of June, at age 52. Steve was diagnosed back in about January, and spent the last months of his life painting and working on his telescope. I don’t think he actually touched a computer again.

ct Hlavaty: “No, I don’t agree that the Don Wright cartoon about civil libertarians is a right-wing solution to problems. My take on it was that it was a response to extremes. . . . This cartoon appeared after a bank of lawyers announced they were suing the airline, airport security system and the builders

of the World Trade Center on behalf of a client. The apparent belief was all three of these entities could have prevented the death of their client." Sorry, that's even more silly than my initial contention that the airlines were accessories. This was a failure of imagination, not of intelligence or security. Hell, the CIA kept saying "nah, these reports about using an airplane as a weapon have to be wrong." OK, maybe it was a failure of intelligence, but in the other sense.

ct Brooks: "If Scalia says any Catholic judge who follows the church position on the death penalty should resign, I guess that means he thinks it's OK for the same judge to molest little kids and stay on the bench." I laugh. Much as I laughed at an item that was on Usenet newsgroup `rec.humor.funny` a couple of weeks ago:

Newsgroups: `rec.humor.funny`

From: `leob@mailcom.com` (Leonid A Broukhis)

Subject: Dying Words

Date: Wed, 28 Aug 2002 19:30:00 PDT

From `www.sfgate.com`:

DYING WORDS: Powerhouse gay political consultant Robert Barnes got quite a sendoff from Mayor Willie Brown and friends at a big City Hall memorial service Monday – but the most memorable moment came when City Attorney Dennis Herrera recounted how, shortly before Barnes died of a blood clot at age 42, a pal had summoned a priest to his bedside.

"Thank you," Barnes told the friend as he pulled aside his oxygen mask, "but sex is the last thing on my mind right now."

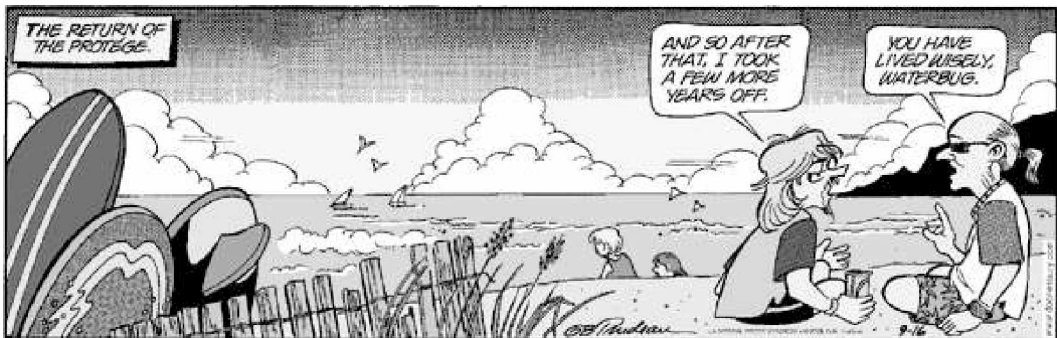
☞ "Right, I recall complaints at first about irradiation of the mail from postal workers. ... It seems the machines that moved the mail stirred it up and caused more of a problem than anything." Stirred up what? The anthrax spores? Or the radiation? I can't imagine the equipment spreading radiation, unless it was bombarding the mail sufficiently that it was radioactive. I'd have to do the back-of-the-envelope calculation, but I think that would require enough irradiation that mailmen should be wearing lead underwear.

ct Lynch: "I see they now are claiming that the jet that went down in Pennsylvania was headed for the White House. Could be a ruse, but I suspect it is true." Were I planning the raid, I'd have aimed for the Capitol. There's more damage — both in terms of government function and people lost — to be caused that way. On the other hand, I'd suspect that Osama bin Laden would have aimed for the White House, because Shrub's daddy put us in Saudi Arabia, and that's been a burr in bin Laden's ass for quite a while. I wonder if it mattered that Shrub wasn't home? Or if they even knew that he wasn't home? (But there have been several articles since I wrote the preceeding claiming that captured al Qaeda members have identified the last target as the Capitol, notably the *Seattle Times* front page of 9 Sept, and the *Washington Post* on 16 Sept.)

ct Lillian: “I think Don probably had the best explanation for the lack of Pentagon crash coverage—these were mostly soldiers and military personnel.” Actually, I think it goes beyond that: the images were less spectacular — the property damage in New York was simply staggering; the number of victims was much lower; and I suspect also that the DoD didn’t want pictures of the Pentagon blasted about — remember that almost immediately, they erected a barrier to cover the construction work.

☞ “I haven’t counted *Challenger* pages for the last several issues and stated why. I decided to stop crediting those large franks from folks. I know there are hairs to be split here, but I was trying to keep the Box Scores to SFFA zines only. Not an exact science, though, I’m afraid.” See my comment to Schlosser earlier. But you’re running these numbers, not me.


ct Strickland: “*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is very good and well thought out. Sometimes they get a tad too silly, but the writers always bring them back to ‘Buffy reality.’ My favorite show was one in which there was no dialogue. They had these floating, ugly monsters that actually scared me at one point.” As I’ve said before, the season finale last season was completely over-the-top. At this point, I believe that *Buffy* has jumped the shark, as our television friends say.



ct Gelb: “I’d guess not everyone knows what they want to do as early as I did, although I’m sure the light goes on early enough in the education process. I’ve always considered myself luck that I didn’t have to wring my hands over what I wanted to do in life. And lucky that I got to do it.” When I was five, I wanted to be a scientist. When I was seven, I wanted to be an architect. When I was nine, I wanted to be a cartoonist. When I was twelve, I wanted to be a scientist. When I was fifteen, I wanted to be a computer programmer. When I was sixteen, I wanted to be a chemist. When I was seventeen, I wanted to be a physicist. When I was nineteen, I was a physicist for a year, which was why when I was twenty, I wanted to be an engineer. When I was twenty-two, I wanted to be a computer programmer. (And I got to be.) When I was thirty-five, I wanted to be a software architect. (But I got to be a manager, instead, and turned out to

be reasonably good at it.) When I was thirty-seven, I had to fire a whole office full of people who worked for me, and I decided I didn't want to be a manager again. Until I was thirty-nine and got stuck with the job. When I was forty, I had a mid-life crisis, asked to be laid off, took a job at a startup, and became a software developer again. Now that I'm forty-five, Steve Hughes and Ned Brooks are my role models, and I want to be retired, so I can write the kind of software I want to write.

ct me: "And to add to my comment about the odds of getting laid during a great national tragedy, I would bet the odds are much better during times of national cheer, like the end of a war. For example, soldiers coming home from World War II undoubtedly found very friendly greeters they didn't know ready to welcome them back into the American mainstream." There's an old joke about the infantryman climbing off the troop ship in Brooklyn in August of 1945, and being accosted by a reporter. "What's the first thing you're going to do now that you're home?" "I'm gonna go home and fuck the bejesus out of my wife!" The reporter realizes he can't print that and asks, "Um, what's the second thing you're going to do?" "Take off these fucking combat boots!"

 *"Good point about those killed in the World Trade Center. I think I read that there were people of 90 different nationalities. That's something to think about."* As I may have mentioned, the London Times printed a magnificent world map with little flags and pointers and death tolls the week of the attack. Egypt? One dead, three missing. Japan? Two dead on the planes, 24 missing. Canada? Between 50 and 100 missing. Turkey? 131 missing. I was going to run it as the centerfold of my issue last September, but didn't have space.

Gary Robe ✉ *Tennessee Trash* ♣

Love your color cover pictures as usual. That's one unhappy cat in the middle picture on the top row, though.

"That was when the pediatrician explained that it appeared that Isaac had Rheumatic Fever, but that it would take consultation with the specialist to confirm it." As we've all said: yowch. I hope he's seriously on the mend by now. (For what it's worth, my mother had rheumatic fever twice as a child, and any problems she's had — but that's another story — seem unrelated to the illnesses.)

"See? All of you with the possible exception of Janet have now acquired some more medical knowledge!" Yes, this was probably more than I needed to know. Interesting nonetheless...

"My other trip of the period was to Venezuela, a country that seems to be cursed with being the second worst in South America..." Thanks very much for explaining the politics around the Venezuelan coup. There were clearly a bunch of things going on there, not the

least of which was the Bush administration egging on the military, and this puts it all in perspective. ☞ *“It was rather ironic that communistic Hugo Chavez was essentially forced to take a couple of days off by the common workers of Pedevesa.”* A way long time ago in SFPA, before the Berlin Wall came down, I made the observation that I thought there was a powerful irony to the fact the Poland’s communist government was being put in a world of hurt by a shipyard worker named Lech Walesa and his workers collective, Solidarity.

☞ *“At another location a chemist explained that while she had a stable job with the second-largest paint company in the country, her whole family had sold all their possessions in Venezuela and had moved to Miami where they were now living illegally. They felt that was preferable to living in Venezuela. I’m glad I don’t have to make those kinds of decisions.”* But I can imagine that you might take that course of action for political rather than economic reasons, too, if, for example, you were landed gentry and thought the workers collective was about to overthrow the government. (Or were a member of the ACLU and John Ashcroft was appointed attorney general.)

Steve Hughes ☒ **Comments** ⚡

“It’s amazing how much more like a home this place feels like now that the books are accessible. ... The bookshelves were made for us by a local cabinetmaker and came out much better then we expected. They are double-sided library stack style in natural birch and big enough to hold our entire collection with room for growth.” I’m still short one shelf in my office at home, I think. Then I need some more file cabinet space. I was going to spend my August week off working on organizing things there, but decided that it was a vacation dammit. Once my office is in order, I’ll breath a great sigh of relief, and feel like we really are living in this house.

☞ *“Then there’s the printer table. ‘Printer table’ does not convey the image of a 10-foot long cabinet with bookshelves on one side and paper storage, with doors, on the other. It was made by a company in Blue Ridge to our specs and came out really well.”* Wow! I want one of these. We really need some place to store paper stock so that broken reams don’t get mangled, even though we don’t do massive printing of whole zine runs here at home. Won’t have room to put such a thing until the kids move out, though. In my best of all possible home computing environments, we’d actually have a print server machine and all the printers would be attached to it, and we’d have a nice duplexing Lexmark full-bleed printer that would take 11×17 paper. In the best of all possible home computing environments, we’d be running Linux on most of the machines in the house. But we can’t do that now because the kids have software that only runs on Windows. (Quicken and the annual tax package are also compelling applications for us, so we’d need one Windows machine even in

the BoAPHCE. Also, I need to be able to provide Windows versions of the Hugo software. Even when it's relabelled as DUFF software for Janice.)

"Our latest toys are a couple of fancy BB guns. OK, pellet guns if you want to be technical." OK, since I'm a gun doofus, I've got to ask, "what's the difference?"

ct Dengrove: "Backing up data on CDs. ... Another trap is writing directly on the CD to label it. Lots of markers use an alcohol-based ink that will eventually eat through the CDs protective coating and damage the data. If you're going to write on a CD, use a pen made for the purpose." Oh, crap. I've been using a Sharpie, which is almost certainly alcohol-based. I'll have to stop doing that.

☞ "Enron. I've been following this very closely and so far I don't see any evidence of large-scale dishonesty by the Enron people. It seems more like a lot of people covering up various bits of bad news." I have the advantage of seeing this four months down the pike, where we've had testimony that part of the reason for some of Enron's Cayman Islands subsidiaries was to funnel money directly into the pockets of folks like the CFO. Again, there were an awful lot of subs in places that don't have reporting laws, when all they had to do was make them in tax havens.

Those who engage in the business known as gambling are despised by those who engage in the gambling known as business.
--

— Mark Twain

ct Lillian: "Enron. ... I don't expect to see companies stop using stock for matching contributions. ... Cash contributions come out of the companies' profits; stock contributions do not." My remembrance (and you've probably read a corporate balance sheet in detail more recently than I have, Steve) is even if stock isn't expensed against profits, it's reported on the balance sheet someplace. But I'm willing to bet that *that* rule's about to change. (Which will make Microsoft's share price take another dive, since the value of the outstanding options is huge.)

☞ "It is difficult to see how any Enron executive could have profited from 'forcing' employees to hold stock. The amount of Enron stock in their 401(k) plan was not all that significant." The 401(k) money may not have been significant, but even with the big brokerages touting Enron I suspect somebody would have noticed if the Enron 401(k) managers had to start dumping stock, and that would have precipitated a downward spiral.

ct Schlosser: "Enron. Not to over stress the point but there is no evidence that any employee at Enron was ever forced to invest their money in company stock. Quite a few did, but that was their own choice." They did it on the advice of bullish executives. Now, I certainly want the guy in charge of the company to be bullish on what it's doing. I *want* the executives of the company to passionately believe in what the company's doing and to love it and love its products. I *want* Steve Ballmer to jump around like a monkey at

a developers conference and yell “developers! developers! developers!” twelve times.‡ On the other hand, I tend to consider myself an outsider, even in companies I work for, so I take the executives’ enthusiasm with a grain of salt, but that’s just me.

ct Feller: “Flying post 9/11. Our own experience has been that the security lines are completely unpredictable. We’ve walked though the Atlanta security in 5 minutes and taken two hours. It’s the unpredictability of the whole mess that annoys me the most.” I can’t help but agree. However, as I noted in my Asian travelogue, I really liked the predictability of the procedures there. India? Don’t look like a muslim, we’ll ignore you. Japan? Thorough and polite search of everyone. Thailand? Pardon me, sir, but your rocket launcher will have to be stowed in the overhead bin.

ct Koch: “Investing. I hope you’ve enjoyed the MCIT dividends since by the time you read this they will probably be gone. It’s amazing how quickly WorldCom got in trouble. I know the company and it’s management well and I’m very surprised that they let themselves get cornered this way.” Certainly lying about whether particular expenses were capital or operating expenses is a bad idea, but I’m not sure whether that actually makes Worldcom less viable as a company. Further, since the whole telecom industry is so intertangled, using and trading capacity back and forth, it’s not clear to me that Worldcom going under means all the other telecom giants will be in deep trouble, too. (On the other hand, Global Crossing, which as nearly as I can tell was nothing more than a shell company that did arbitrage in excess telecom capacity, deserved to go under.)

ct Robe: “Business Travel. OK, I have to admit that I do miss it. After all those years of complaining about too much travel and too many presentations, I really do sort of miss them.” As much of a pain as it is being away on business, and as difficult as it is for a relative introvert like me to be “on” all the time, there’s a certain adrenaline rush to business travel, a feeling of actually accomplishing something. That doesn’t mean I’d be eager to go back to travelling for a living, though. (Though I wonder how much of the feeling of accomplishment has to do with the natural human tendency to confuse motion and action?)

ct me: “New Job. I hope the new job works out! Working for an organization located in another part of town is hard enough; working for one on the other side of the world would be a real pain. Designing type setting software really seems like an interesting job.” Well, it’s not working out as well as I’d hoped. I’m spending all my time working backwards and fixing badly designed old code — in the GDI subsystem, if you remember how Windows fits

‡ Which was caught on video tape, and the sound track is now remixed by a Japanese DJ into a four-minute dance track. I don’t have an external web site from which you can get it, I’m afraid, but the video of it I’ve seen has cheerleaders, and ends with a screen that says (in Japanese) “PC yell!”

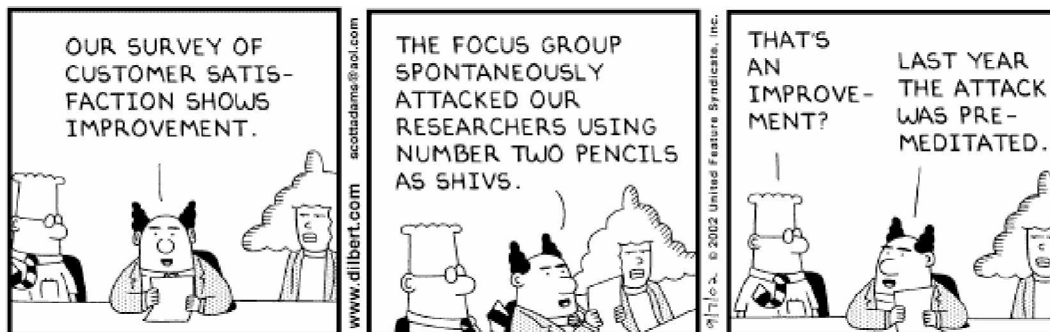
together — rather than looking forward and getting to use my internationalization and typesetting skills to write any new code. I'm annoyed that I'm literally the only person in my whole development organization who's doing no work at all on the new things.

☞ *"The simple truth is that the searches, no matter how careful, will not prevent another group of determined terrorists from taking over a plane if they really want to...."* As I think I've pointed out Malcolm Gladwell^o has done some interesting writing about airline security. In early October last year he wrote an article in *The New Yorker* about the arms race between hijackers and airline security people, pointing out that all the extra security hasn't reduced the number of hijackings in the least. It's just made a more determined breed of hijacker. ☞ *"On our last flight, I worked off my irritation at the 'security' delays by outlining, in my head since doing it on paper could be harmful to my personal freedom, 10 ways to take over a plane using only things already on the plane or still legal to carry on. I was a little shocked that it only took me a few minutes to come up with 10 reasonable scenarios. Yes, I do know more about planes than most people but not all that much more."* I've spent more time in the last six months waiting at Seattle airport to pick people up than I have departing, but I play a similar game. If I was a bad guy, how could I do the most damage to the crowd that now has to wait outside the security checkpoint to pick people up? The Egyptian limo driver who shot up the El Al counter at LAX over fourth of July weekend demonstrated that you don't have to be inside the cordon to do damage.

ct my travel zine: *"The Japanese subway. My only experience with the Tokyo subway system was taking the Narita Express to get to our hotel located about a mile from the Shinjuku station."* I'm surprised you didn't take the airport bus, which makes the rounds of the major Shinjuku hotels after it stops at the station. ☞ *"Shinjuku station is BIG and we came out on the wrong side and couldn't find our hotel. Fortunately the people are very friendly and someone pointed us in the right direction."* Shijuku was a huge station thirty years ago when I first went to Japan. Bigger than Ueno or Tokyo stations. It's even bigger and more confusing than Grand Central station in New York, which is the best example of train station we've got in America. On this trip, though, I found out that the prefecture government was relocated to Shinjuku over the last decade, which has made the district even more a bustling center of urban life than it used to be.

"We really liked Japan and plan on going back sometime. The people were friendly, the food

^o Interesting aside: there's a backhanded swipe at Gladwell in the September *Harper's*. *The Tipping Point* is described as one of "those books that complacently flatter the business culture." Careful reading of the book will indicate no such thing, and that Gladwell has no particular sympathy for traditional conservative tropes such as Giuliani taking credit for the decline in crime in New York, and is firmly opposed to normal urban conservative trends like gentrification.



was good, if astronomically expensive, and there was a lot to see.” I’m always shocked when people tell me how expensive food is in Japan. I spent \$75 on a meal in Japan for myself once, but I had to eat at a French restaurant in a major hotel to do it. This last trip, I spent 3500 yen — a little less than \$30 — for my most expensive dinner, but that was my share of the group dinner the last evening before I went on to India, which involved quite a bit of booze. Typically I spend about \$30 a day for food total in Japan. But I eat at little mom-and-pop places and sushi bars in department stores, and carefully avoid western-style restaurants.

“Credit cards. Oh, the Platinum card is only worth it if you can use the free airline ticket benefit. Otherwise it’s basically the same service you get with a gold card. I get offers from them three or four times a year and it never makes sense to spend \$300 for a credit card. Amex is not your best choice for an international credit card. Visa or Mastercard either one are much more widely accepted and they often give better exchange rates.” I was actually surprised on this trip that American Express’ exchange rate for yen was worse than the spot rate I was getting on the ground. That didn’t used to be the case. (Though on our last couple of trips to Canada, the Amex rate has been very close to the actual exchange rate.) Amex keeps trying to twist my arm to get a platinum card, too, but if it’s the same service as with the gold card, there’s really no point. Certainly not for \$300 a year. As I said, I was just disgusted with their phone service this time; they’re usually much better. (I found out recently that for company travel in the future, I must have a Corporate Amex card. Except that they won’t give me a Corporate Amex card without my social security number. Except that Amex has *never* had my social security number, and I see no reason to give it to them now. Certainly not for a card that’s guaranteed by Microsoft’s credit, not mine. I guess this means I’m not travelling for Microsoft any more.)

Changing the subject slightly, Steve, I realized a couple of weeks ago that you’d caught the tremors from outside the company before I did from inside: Microsoft

has got a case of big company disease. We had talked about this back at the last Jekyll Island DSC. My tip-off was the T-shirts the HR folks were wearing at the annual company meeting — bright yellow, emblazoned “Think.” That was followed by Steve Ballmer’s talk about the company’s 7 businesses, 6 core values, and 5 tenets of customer care. That’s such a Dilbertesque profusion of bullet points, it’s almost not worth mentioning that the company’s had three mission statements in the three years I’ve been here.

(I had written a much longer version of this by way of clarifying my own thoughts on these issues — some of which come up because of the development work I’m doing [or not doing] at the moment — but it occurred to me that lifting my leg to pee on my employer in public was probably not a good idea.)

(And then, as I was editing this on Friday evening, I found an item in the paper that in Microsoft’s most recent 10Q, it reported raises of 13% and bonuses of 40% for both Gates and Ballmer. I note this only because the pool of raises for the Windows division was 2% this year — and the Windows division generates 40% of the company’s income. Microsoft is now truly being managed like IBM.)

Toni Reinhardt ☒ Yngvi is a Louse ♣

“I thought after I got something in the mailing for July 1992 after Katie was born, there’d never be anything so much more traumatic in my life that I’d miss a mailing. And for almost ten years that was true. And it’s still true—there was no great tragedy that kept me from doing a zine last time. I was just damn busy.” I owe you a bit of an apology here, I think. In the normal course of events, I’d have called you up and said “hey, I don’t have a zine from you, what’s happening?” That would have given you a chance to dash off a page and fax it, or ask me to hold the mailing until Monday so you could FedEx a zine. But that mailing was put together under such hectic circumstances that I didn’t.

I realize this is a dangerous question to ask a woman who’s armed and married to a man with a prodigious sword collection, but didn’t “Yngvi” used to include comments?



I’m afraid my friends that I’m now back to being a full mailing behind. I will do better next time. I’ve perhaps said this before, and so I quote Elie Wiesel telling the story of the last appointed rabbi of Berditchev, Levi-Yitzak Derbaremidger (1740-1809): “Every night before falling asleep he reviewed his day: ‘Levi-Yitzhak sinned today,’ he would cry, ‘but Levi-Yitzak promises to not do it again. He made the same resolution yesterday? Yes, but tonight he really means it.’”

Art Credits

The front cover features a box of gummy sushi, which the kids gave me. The word balloons on the cutaway picture in the upper right describe the candy: they say “gumi” (gummi) and “chiyokoismashiyumaro” (chocolaty marshmallow). The title of the zine itself comes from the large type in the shield at the upper left: “osushigumi.” Also, I’m using a new typeface this time. The Hiroshige family was designed in 1986 by Cynthia Hollandsworth for Alpha Typography. It was originally commissioned for a book of the eponymous Japanese artist’s woodblock prints. It seemed appropriate for a zine with Japanese-themed cover art.

Page 2: *Toles* from 20 Sept. Page 4: *Get Fuzzy* from 19 Sept. Page 12: *Boondocks* from 7 Sept — the answer to the question is “yes.” Fillo on page 19 from *The New Yorker*. Page 27: *Shoe* from 14 Sept — especially for Gary Brown. Page 29: *Doonesbury* from 16 Sept — Zonker enjoys retirement; he’s my role model, too. Page 35: *Dilbert* from 7 Sept — sometimes lack of customer satisfaction has consequences.

The back cover has a picture of the Excalibur condom box, a well-known Japanese brand, which has such a wonderful image that it begged to be shared.

Index

<i>The Adventures of Pluto Nash</i> , 7	“The Diamond Pit”, 5	Richard Dengrove, 11
<i>Amélie</i> , 8	“Fast Times at Fairmont High”, 5	<i>Rocky Horror: From Concept to Cult</i> , 8
Arthur Hlavaty, 23	<i>Four Word Film Reviews</i> , 7	Sabrina (1954), 5
<i>Birthday Girl</i> , 7	Gary Brown, 27	Sabrina (1995), 6
<i>Blackhawk Down</i> , 8	Gary Robe, 30	Sheila Strickland, 26
<i>Blinded by the Right</i> , 9	Guy Lillian, 18	<i>Signs</i> , 7
“The Bones of the Earth”, 5	<i>High Crimes</i> , 8	<i>Smoke Filled Rooms</i> , 7
<i>Bound</i> , 6	Janice Gelb, 15, 18	<i>Spy Kids 2</i> , 6
“The Chief Designer”, 5	“May Be Some Time”, 5	“Stealing Alabama”, 5
<i>Contact</i> , 6	Ned Brooks, 10	Steve Hughes, 31
David Schlosser, 24	Norm Metcalf, 10	Tom Feller, 18
<i>The Dead Zone</i> , 7	Rich Lynch, 10, 15	Toni Reinhardt, 36
		XXX, 6

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