

# THE SPHERE

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My goodness! Don't we all have a lot of addresses nowadays! Back when I was first doing this, we barely even had Zip Codes, and only the Avant Garde put phone numbers in their zines.

I'm trying something different this time. I've been getting a few e-mailed fanzines in PDF form lately, and thought I'd try doing this one that way. It'll involve a couple of extra steps in production, but shouldn't be too hard. That way, I can e-mail it to folks who've been sending me stuff, and maybe even spare a few for friends and relatives.

Just like the old days, when I used to send overruns all over the place. Except I don't have to bother to over-run anything, or go to the trouble of licking stamps.

(For those seeing this zine for the first time — I've always tried to write the mailing comments so you don't have to have read the previous mailing to understand them. Some people think I succeed reasonably well; but of course, that would be for you to decide.)

## RACHEL IS PREGNANT

I'd tell you how I feel about being an expectant grandpa when the daughter in question is only 18, but it's kind of hard to decide. I'd better stick to the facts.

Due date is Oct. 30. She'll be 19 by then. She's decided to have and raise the kid, but has no intention of marrying the father (whose name is Roy Trevino, by the way). We've discussed the situation with him and he seems like a reasonably responsible guy, which is quite a relief. (First thing he wants to do is give her a car soon as she learns how to drive — we held off teaching her until we could be reasonably sure she wouldn't steal the car, but I guess it's time now.) Rachel is eating healthily (at least at first), and laying off most abusable substances (even to the point of avoiding caffeine).

This could be wishful thinking, but it's possible she may actually be starting to show signs of growing up. I know for damn sure, she'd

better grow up. She's gonna need to be seriously mature during the next few years.

Interesting times ahead. I'll keep you posted.

Thank God this didn't happen two years ago, when she was at the height of what I euphemistically call her "Katie Ka-Boom" phase. It might have been the death of her.

## [HTTP://WWW.TOONOPEDIA.COM](http://www.toonopedia.com)

Yeah, I went and did it — got myself a domain, hired a server, slapped it up on the Web, signed up for a tracking service, spent a couple of days cleaning up, submitted it to all the search engines, and (on Tuesday, Feb. 13) announced the Grand Opening.

Six days later, I was a Yahoo Pick of the Day. The day after that, I was a USA Today Hot Site. I started getting hits from Lithuania, Israel, Singapore, Morocco... People are linking to me from England, India, Finland, some country that doesn't use our alphabet, and lots more. I'm already linked to from a list of TV-related encyclopedias, a public library in Indiana, a site about elephants on TV, and a place for tax accountants taking breaks. If you "Ask Jeeves" what "he" knows about cartoon characters, "he" will show you my table of contents.

Last year, we figured we could probably get the site up and running for \$200 or less, and were only hoping we hadn't failed to take anything major into account. It came in at \$44.95. Kinda hard to imagine a less expensive business launch, eh?

Prior to opening, my goal (expressed to various friends and relatives) was to be getting 100,000 unique page views a month by my 55th birthday. I made it by my 54th — and that only gave me one month to do it. Altogether, the first month totaled (as determined by checking my tracking service as closely as possible to the exact time of day I made the first public announcement) 124,746 — and it was a 28-day month!

Of course, that kind of traffic can't last. For

one thing, there's a certain newness factor, where people try it out when they first hear of it, then move on to the next novelty. For another, it includes one day that had 15,000 hits, and Yahoo isn't going to make me a Pick of the Day twice. But it's looking now like the second month is going to come in close to 100,000 too (probably more, counting about 15% repeat visitors to each page), and there are some major search engines that haven't kicked in yet. What's more, I haven't even started promoting it, beyond the bare minimum of submitting it to search engines and mentioning it in personal correspondence (like SPPA).

My new 55th birthday goal is to average 10,000 hits a day. Let's see if I can get to that one early, too.

The major promotional efforts will come after I start making money from it. No use making a big effort to pump up the page views before I've got somebody paying for them, when I already have enough to convince advertisers I'm worth dealing with. I'd rather put my efforts into building the site itself, so there'll be more to see when I do start promoting it. Right now, I'm looking at three advertising brokers, all of which have looked over the site and seem pleased with its content (and traffic). By next mailing, I'll probably have signed on with one of them, and we'll just go from there.

New articles since the last SPPA mailing:

Actually, "New Articles" comes in two parts this time (before and after opening), plus this intro. Prior to Opening Day, I reorganized the Glossary into a single big file, so I feel justified in calling it an article now. (Earlier, I thought in terms of so many articles and so many glossary entries, which is kinda sloppy.) That was a major job, going through the entire site and changing all the glossary links — but I was going through it anyway, to change the titles of all the pages from "Cartoonopedia" to "Toonopedia™", and that made it somewhat easier. And as long as I was calling the Glossary an article, I figured I ought to call the Acknowledgments page, the Links page and the Introduction articles too — they meet reasonable criteria for it. (I've since started using software for mass-editing HTML files, so the next whole-site edit will be much easier.)

Actual toons I artclized were Apple Mary,

Baby Blues, The Demon, Mary Worth, Shoe and Timely/Atlas Comics. By my count, that gave me 304 on opening day. Some might have called it a mere 299, but I didn't listen to them because I wanted to open with 300+ and the energy to write more just wasn't there.

Since opening, I've added a "Today in Toons" Archive, a Site History, an Awards and Citations page and a FAQ, all of which I'm counting as articles but others (the ones I'm not listening to) might not. Toons artclized since opening are Alfred E. Neuman, The Berenstain Bears, Dickie Dare, The Far Side, Funky Winkerbean, The Heart of Juliet Jones, Henry, John Darling, Koko the Clown, Life in Hell, Mother Goose & Grimm, Reddy Kilowatt, Rip Kirby, Roger Rabbit and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Also, on March 27 (the Carl Barks Centennial), I inaugurated a new section on toon creators, and made Barks its first entry. Total: 324, so I'm already almost halfway to being able to claim 350+. My current quota/goal is to average at least three articles a week.

From the total kilobytes of HTML files, minus the few that contain no real writing, minus the approximate total overhead for boilerplate code, and figuring in the standard estimate of six bytes = one word, I currently figure the total verbiage to be approaching 200,000, with the average article running a bit under 600 words (which is more loquacious than I really want to be — I'd rather average about 500).

I mentioned a "Today in Toons" Archive — yeah, I was talking last mailing about "Today in Toons", which I think is one of the cool things about the site. I started it on Opening Day, with the anniversary of the first *Prince Valiant* page, and have dutifully uploaded an anniversary a day since then, each day transferring the previous day's entry into the Archive. So far, I've done Blondie and Dagwood's wedding anniversary, Skeezix's birthday from *Gasoline Alley*, the day Bongo (son of Binky) was conceived, Beetle Bailey's Army induction, and lots more, including (of course) the Carl Barks Centennial.

The plan is for "Today in Toons" to move out into opt-in e-mail, soon as I master the techniques of automatic mailing. (I'm sure it's very simple, but there are a lot of things I need to master, and until I'm promoting more actively, that's a lower-priority one.) That way, people can get it without the bother of actually point-

ing their browsers, and I get to nudge them each day with a reminder of my existence — complete with links, and every “Today in Toons” links to at least one Toonopedia™ article, even if I have to stay up late the night before writing it (like I did for the anniversary of *Henry* in *Saturday Evening Post*).

Another thing I plan (after advertising is up) is a new section, “Toonopedia™ Special Reports” — basically, rereads of articles on comics and animation that I’ve already gotten use out of, but might as well earn a few pennies from on a continuing basis. A survey of the early history of Bugs Bunny (from *Apatoons*), a squib on the dialect used in *Krazy Kat* (from an old *Comics Revue* editorial), a piece on the 1966 version of Captain Marvel (from *thecomicstore.com*), a complete history of *Walt Disney’s Comics & Stories* (from SFPA), that sort of stuff.

And a message board. And a weekly newsletter. And all kinds of stuff, soon as it gets to the point where it can pay for the time it takes to maintain it all.

Now that I have a whole-site tracking service, I get to see all kinds of details about how it’s doing, from which I can deduce a little bit of demographic information. The main thing is, I’m apparently appealing to more than just funnybook geeks, because my articles on Bugs Bunny (read by 1074 people as of March 23), Betty Boop (1071), et al. are out-performing X-Men (822) and Spider-Man (645). I count that as a major success — I was aiming at the general public because it’s a lot bigger than comics fandom, and it looks like that’s what I’m getting.

Here’s an interesting little tidbit. My most popular article, day in and day out, is — of all things — **Droopy** (1104). Seems there’s a really huge Droopy fan site that links to the old Cartoonopedia article (and apparently hasn’t updated despite the fact that I sent them a note about it), and about 20 people a day are clicking through. In fact, the old Droopy page is the second-most popular way people find my front page, #1 being (get this!) a site in Brazil that I can’t even read. (Another result of the latter is, I’m getting spammed in Portuguese.)

Another surprisingly popular article is Alley Oop (836). I haven’t managed to track down the source of those, but it’s also a consistent one, and I can’t figure it out because I thought Alley

Oop wasn’t that big a character anymore.

There have been some interesting spikes. When Fred Lasswell died, I expected one in the Snuffy Smith article (408 total) — and I got it (highest spike day 29). But I got an even bigger spike in Barney Google (515 total, highest spike day 42). I eventually tracked that down to a message board where a guy had posted some kind of code that simply read the whole thing off mysite every time anyone opened the thread. I’d creb about theft of bandwidth (I may not know what it is, but I do know this — they make me pay for it), but what the hell — my links all worked, and if I’d had an ad up, I assume it would have retrieved that along with the rest.

By the way, speaking of Fred Lasswell’s death, a radio station in Fayetteville, AK took that as the occasion to do a few minutes on hillbilly comic strips (except they said “rural Southern” instead of “hillbilly”). And they interviewed me for it. So now, because of my *Toonopedia™*, I’m one of those experts you hear interviewed on the radio.

I got a huge spike in the British version of Dennis the Menace (543 total, highest spike day 57), when both Dennises were having their 50th anniversaries. Even bigger than the American version’s spike (404 total, highest spike day 33). I tracked that one down to a London newspaper’s Web site, which celebrated the anniversary by linking to every good article they could find on their Dennis.

About the same time, there was a **humongous** 36-hour spike in Tom Terrific — (658 total, highest spike day 140). I never did figure that one out.

Now that I have a steady flow of mail, I’m getting even more ideas about my demographics. And again, there are some surprises. The one character requested by more people than any other is — again, of all things — **Smilin’ Jack**. Major Hoople isn’t far behind, followed by The Little King. More proof I’m reaching the general public more than funnybook geeks — and that my audience isn’t mostly kids.

Smilin’ Jack got married on March 31, 1973 (the day before his strip ended). Maybe I’ll note that in “Today in Toons”, and write the article to coincide with it. Check out the site, and see if that’s what I did.

## #\$%^&#! Sci-fi FANS

The first local publicity on the Toonopedia™ was at a party on the last weekend of February. I was handing out business cards with just the logo, URL and subhead (“A Vast Repository of Toonological Knowledge”), and bragging that I was closing in on my 60,000th unique page view. (In fact, I’d just that morning weathered my first crisis — I’d had to upgrade my service in a hurry when I unexpectedly ran through a month’s bandwidth in less than two weeks.)

It was a mixed crowd — some people from the old Pirate group, a lot from an SCA household, some from the local science fiction community... Predictably, the **only** expression of disinterest came from the latter. Everybody said it sounded really cool, and they’d take a look soon as they had a chance, except this one guy who handed the card back with a condescending “I’m not into that stuff.”

Well gee, I know most people aren’t “into” it — that’s why I wrote it for a general audience, rather than people who are “into” it. Very little jargon (and what’s there is covered in the glossary), no fanboyism (like referring to 1960s superhero comics by the incomprehensible term “Silver Age”), a wide variety of popular features rather than concentrating exclusively on weird stuff that only those “into” it would look for . . . My target reader is anybody who enjoys glancing at *Baby Blues* in the newspaper or has fond memories of *Huckleberry Hound* — not the guy who can rattle off the Justice Society of America’s 1942 roster from memory, then follow it with a detailed explanation of the changes made in the post-Crisis version.

In other words, my target reader is practically anybody at all. And I seem to have had some success, at least, in hitting the target — at least, I don’t **think** Yahoo’s Daily Picks include sites aimed at geeks.

But there ain’t **nobody** geekier than a Trufan. And as Trufans go, the science fiction variety is less willing to read anything outside his **extremely narrow** range of interest than **anybody**. Well, not quite — but the adolescent funnybook Trufans who have no interest in anything but heroic fantasy usually outgrow it eventually, and this guy is pretty near **my** age.

Present company excepted, of course — or is

it? Anybody here remember the reception Dave Hulan’s sutff about Russian history got in SFPA?

## BUNNY BURNING

The Seventh Annual one will occur on April 14 (i.e., Saturday of Easter Weekend, its usual date).

We’re expecting a smaller turnout for this year’s rabbit dinner party — maybe a couple dozen or so. At its peak, the Bunny Burning drew about 60 people. But the organization that officially “sponsored” it has been in decline, to the point where last year, it was pretty much running on fumes. This year, we’re not even mentioning its name on the flyers — it’s just us putting it on.

The menu hasn’t been decided yet. I’m clamoring for a repeat of Sesame Honey Bunny, but Teriyaki Bunny and Lemon Garlic Bunny are also possibilities. Doesn’t matter a whole lot, tho, because they’re all good. GiGi usually debuts at least one new style a year, but no word yet on what it might be.

I’ve been telling her for years, she ought to write a rabbit cookbook, but she won’t listen. Now, she’s getting the same thing from an Internet writers’ group she’s been hanging around with, and **them**, she takes seriously! Maybe soon . . .

## THE DAILY QUACK™ . . .

. . . is no more. I was forced to end it short of my one-year commitment, because the venue in which it was appearing, themestream.com, suddenly sank so far below the level of a professional outlet, it became impossible for me to continue to be associated with it. It never was held in extremely high respect by most pros, but until recently it was at least arguably marginal. Now, it’s become impossible to make excuses for it.

One doesn’t like to be a snob, but there are standards. Themestream has now positioned itself as an outlet for “writers” who can’t be published any other way, and who mostly read each other. As I said in my final contribution there, as a publishing venture, it’s a lot like a coffee house where you can read your poetry to other coffee house poets.

I could go into detail, but it’s not worth the

effort. The bottom line is, after several shifts away from professionalism and businesslike integrity, they finally dropped into the abyss on March 1 (after giving less than 12 hours notice of the impending changes). Basically, they've now set things up so that instead of rewarding their writers according to how widely read they are (like the benefits that come from royalty-paying professional publishers), the rewards come only from incestuous little reading circles (like the benefits that come from circle jerks). And in so doing, they've cleverly managed to rearrange things so that the April checks will quite possibly be the last they'll ever have to pay for content.

I don't mind writing for fanzines, which aren't designed to make money for either the publisher or the writer. But the weasely way they've set things up so they make money but the writers don't would not be acceptable even if for some reason I wanted them to make money. It so blatantly appeals to wannabes who will grasp at any opportunity to be "published", that I simply can't let myself remain associated with it. My current plan is to write something very short about why I've left, put in links to the things I'm currently promoting, and gradually, one by one, whenever I get can spare a few minutes for the task, replace all of my 220 Daily Quacks and my 33 separate, non-Quack articles with it. (I'm going to start soon as I hear the April checks have gone out — I don't want to give them any excuse to behave even less professionally, by keeping the money they owe me.)

So if you ever want to read them there, now's the time. They can still be seen at <http://www.back.to/quack>, and once again, (and for the last time) thank you, Republic of Tonga, for the cool URL.

There are places I could move The Daily Quack to, but that kinda took the wind out of its sails. I had some momentum going back at Themestream. It would take a certain amount of time and energy to get it established elsewhere, and as long as I'm working so hard to get my Toonopedia™ off the ground, I can't spare it.

When I get a chance, I'm going to evaluate what I've got, and probably wind up publishing the whole batch (with some minor editing for the two or three instances in which I included

Themestream-specific stuff) as an e-book. Maybe during the spring or summer. And I might pick it up again as a daily column later on, when things slow down. But not right away. There's just too much going on.

## Mailing COMMENTS

No time for a good set of them (story of my life), but a couple of things from the last mailing particularly called out for comment (not necessarily for any good reason), so I'll at least deal with those.

### GARY BROWN:

I thought about the same as you do of that *Fly #3* cover (the one where he takes an oath to stamp out crime), when I first saw it. In fact, I still think enough of it to have used it as my illustration of the character in the Toonopedia™. But I lost some respect for it when I found out the cover of *Black Hood Comics #9* (1943) was almost exactly the same, except the older one had slightly better wording. Joe Simon and Bob Powell may have drawn that version of it, but I wouldn't exactly give them the credit for it.

By the way, I recently found out the *Black Hood* radio show used that same pledge in the opening. The way I found out was, an episode of it happened to come through an old-time radio group on the Internet, and I grabbed it as it went by. Accompanying the sound file was a note from the guy posting it, asking who this oddball funnybook guy was. At least two people, no more than one of whom was me, responded by posting the URL of my Toonopedia™ Black Hood article.

Yes, there are differences between the weaponry of 200 years ago and that of today, and differences in the social structure as well. But one thing remains: The foundation of freedom lies in the ability of the people to **resist the government** — because then, as now, nothing else stops them from steamrolling our rights. The wording of the Second Amendment is very clear. Our Founding Fathers understood that a free society can not exist without a good, strong militia — a militia being a self-sufficient, self-run military group that has no obligation to take orders from

Washington if it doesn't like what Washington is trying to accomplish. But "militia" has been turned into a dirty word in modern America, hasn't it?

In fact, we've been conditioned to the point where the whole notion of resisting the government probably gave some of you a shiver. They've pretty much won the propaganda phase of disarming the law-abiding segment of the populace, haven't they?

Your theory that the Second Amendment was placed in the Constitution just "to make sure Britain knew we were serious" has absolutely no basis in reality. Aside from the fact that anyone can simply **read** the Second Amendment and **see** why it's there, look at the dates! By the time the U.S. Constitution went into effect, the British had stopped fighting, gone home, and recognized American independence — so long ago, that the new republic had time to go through the entire Articles of Confederation era. And the Bill of Rights came four years **after** the main body of the Constitution! Impressing the British with our determination had **long** since ceased to be an issue.

You've **got** to know these things, Gary. Where does a statement like that come from?

### Toni Weisskopf:

I laughed out loud when you took umbrage at my referring to your political stands as "stupid". Didn't you even **notice** it was a direct echo of material published in **your zine**, in which people were called "stupid" for their political positions? I thought I was being **spectacularly** unsubtle about it! And aren't you the one who calls people you disagree with "morons"? 'Pears to me, **some** people can dish it out . . .

Want to make me laugh out loud again? Accuse me of stereotyping Republicans in last issue's "Comparative Religion" essay.

As an editor, you should be more careful in your use of words. To "rationalize" means to come up with supposed reasons why it's okay to hold a point of view which is not, in actual fact, based on rationality. It does not require that the rationalizer ultimately adopt that point of view. By presenting specious arguments by which a person claiming to oppose government intervention in private enterprise

might nonetheless support trade sanctions against Cuba, you were **certainly** rationalizing trade sanctions against Cuba.

For that matter, from the point of view of one who **actually** opposes government intervention in private enterprise, your rationalizations of **both** sides of the question are specious. To quote:

*"The argument for liberalization of trade with Cuba, China and other totalitarian regimes is that freedoms [sic] will creep in with the trade, alongside the Coke, McDonalds [sic] and nuclear weapons technology."*

No, Toni, the argument for what you call "liberalization" of trade (would "conservatization" mean the forcible prevention that's in place now? or would that be "Republicanization"?) is that **the government has no business interfering with trade.**

Period.

The very instant you start arguing whether or not free trade will advance what you consider a good cause, you have accepted the legitimacy of government intervention. You're saying that it either is, or is not, desirable in this particular situation, according to whether or not it will advance "freedoms" (**whatever** the hell you mean by **that** word, when your philosophy on government regulation is clearly based on pragmatic concerns rather than principles); whereas if you actually believed in economic freedom, you would, regardless of your personal pleasure with its outcome in a particular situation, stand firmly in favor of — well, of economic freedom.

And once you accept the idea that it might be okay to curtail freedom in a good cause (e.g., to advance "freedoms" — the mind boggles), next thing you know, you're arguing whether or not it's okay, in a given instance, to use land mines.

Oh, but I'm stepping on your toes again. You actually **favor** land mines in service of an allegedly good cause, don't you?

Which is just one more way in which Orthodox Republicanist dogma stands in opposition to the clear, straightforward idea of **getting government off our backs.**