

THE SPHERE

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OH, DEM FANNOY

Several years ago, Richard Lynch ran a "history" of New Orleans fandom written by (of all people) Lester Boutillier, who when I lived there was a scorned outsider to probably more N.O. fan groups than any other individual, and whose passionate bias against certain other individuals is widely known.

Lynch's running that article, then flatly ignoring attempts to offer accurate information in response to it, is prominent among the things that led to my realization that he is utterly incompetent to write the fan history he then proposed to do (and may still propose, for all I know - I'm not what you'd call an expert on his doings).

As a result of that article, I requested that Lynch never mention my name in his fanzine again. Naturally, he ignored that, too. I never actually saw my name there again, but that may be because I didn't look very hard - I'm not what you'd call a regular reader of his, either. In any case, he didn't respond.

Now, I see he's put that article, complete with false "information" from its original publication, up on the Web. Needless to say, I wrote and asked him to take it down. Needless to say, he ignored the request.

I guess he figures he's safe - he knows very well I don't sue people for annoying but stupid and trivial things by the likes of him and Lester Boutillier, even if they are libelous.

Of course, I've got a professional reputation to protect these days, but Lynch is where fannish stuff belongs, around the fifth or sixth page of an Internet search on my name, behind such prominent things as reviews of my 1994 *Hot Tips* book and German language trivia questions of which my name is the answer. So for all his incompetence and ill will, the damage he's capable of is slight.

He also knows this won't lower my respect for him, which has stood at absolute zero for years.

Anyway, what do I expect from a guy who uses "jophan" in his e-mail address? In the self-absorbed world of fandom, where adolescent squabbles among people now dead of old age are considered "history", I know how vital it can be to ensure all that mouldering old mimeography is properly preserved and available to new generations.

No, I'm not entirely scornful of fandom. I've been involved with it myself for very nearly 40 years now, and at various times in the past (distant, thank God) it's been the source of the bulk of my social life. But while not rejecting what is good about fandom (e.g., a higher percent of intelligent, well educated people than in my neighborhood, tho of course I roll my

eyes at expressions like "Cosmic Minds") I did move out into the Real World, where I can look at fandom in perspective and see how small and inconsequential it really is.

Of course, I'm not privy to Lynch's thought processes, but from what I know of others who use ancient, obscure fannish references to identify themselves, I can see where he might think he's fulfilling some sort of Sacred Mission (tho he may express it differently) by immortalizing his little fanzine.

If so - too bad for him.

And too bad he doesn't feel that way about promulgating accurate information.

(Contrary to the impression I may give here, I don't hate Lynch, or wish him ill, or anything else as energetic as that. I merely think he's an idiot, and wish he'd curtail his stupidity where it concerns me.)

By the way - bizarre as it may seem to those reading this who are not members of fandom (assuming I finally get around to compiling a mailing list and do send out a PDF version of this zine), I am not exaggerating when I say "Adolescent squabbles among people now dead of old age are considered 'history'." In fact, just a few years ago, there was a case right here in SFFPA, where someone actually **took sides** in a brouhaha that occurred in 1939! And argued the position for **months!**

Like I said - Oh, dem fans!

DON MARKSTEIN'S TOONOPEDIA™

Last issue, I told you about my most bizarre spike in readership, when a porn site linked to my Elmer Fudd article, which then suddenly became both my most-read article of all and the one with the lowest percent of repeat visitors.

In terms of bizarreness, I may have topped that one. At the very least, this was my most puzzling. And I put a lot of effort into tracking it down.

Shortly after my last SFFPAzine went out, my Fritzi Ritz page suddenly registered hundreds of unique page views - more, in fact, in one day, than any other except Elmer. And they weren't coming from one easily spotted place, like that porn site. No, these came from search engines - all of a sudden, people were **seeking out** my page on Fritzi Ritz.

This was doubly puzzling, because there wasn't even an article there! All did was say "See Nancy" (Fritzi is the former star of the strip now headlined by her niece) and give a link.

There is a Fritzi Ritz article there now, tho. I had one up by 2 PM. And right at the top, I put a note, in

bold-face type, asking those reading it to please tell me **why** they were doing so. Of the hundreds of readers, three actually responded. It turns out a popular "gaming" site had a trivia question about the character, with a \$50 prize for the first correct answer. Of course, by that time, the money was gone, but the readers kept pouring in all day.

That was my 350th article. I've since changed the manner of reckoning them, but by the criteria in place at the time, Fritzi Ritz the one that made it possible for me to claim 350. (The alteration in criteria, by the way, is that I changed the word "articles" in that claim to "toon topics", and decided about a half-dozen things that make perfectly good "articles" [still no final decision how many or which ones] couldn't justifiably be called "toon topics".)

New since my last zine: Charles Addams, The Addams Family (1937), The Addams Family (1973), The Brownies (1881), The Brownies (1942), Captain Klutz, Crime Does Not Pay, Dynamo, EC Comics, Fritzi Ritz, The Gumps, Harold Teen, Hippiety Hopper, Hoppity Hooper, Hopsy the Marvel Bunny, Chuck Jones, Knights of the Galaxy, Lena the Hyena, Little Jimmy, Magilla Gorilla, NoMan, The Outbursts of Everett True, Spacehawk, Jimmy Swinnerton, Timmy the Timid Ghost, T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents, and Werewolf by Night. By the old reckoning, that would make 374 total, but I'm now counting it as something in the neighborhood of 368.

The way I was counting them before, I'm still averaging three articles a week. I'm going to have to make those decisions about which ones to de-count, before I know how far I have to go to catch up.

TOON-RELATED ADVERTISING

I'm doing the advertising very differently now. As of last mailing, I was going completely through an ad broker. The way they work is, I put their code into each of my HTML files, and the code retrieves a banner from one of the advertisers I've chosen, each time the file is read; then the broker and I split whatever fee the advertiser pays. If there don't happen to be any paying ads available at that moment, it will put up a default banner.

My default (that particular broker only allows one) is an ad for "Salty Jack's Piratical Books", an Amazon.com affiliate site that I haven't updated in a couple of years, but what the heck, if the Salty Jack banner is only going to be displayed when I can't get a paying one anyway, I might as well see if I can squeeze a buck or two out of it.

The first thing that happened when I put the broker's code up was, I was appalled at how little the "paying" ads were earning – as it happens, I came along right when the Internet advertising industry was at its lowest ebb to date (tho it's since gone lower). The dot-com die-off has left relatively few Internet companies to pay for advertising, the same number of impressions are available from sites like

mine, and supply-and-demand therefore dictates **amazingly** low per-impression revenue.

This effect is exacerbated by the fact that at those prices, I'm just not interested in putting up a banner that I personally find obnoxious. I won't take one with garish blinking lights, or one that generates a pop-up window, or one that in any way benefits Microsoft, the U.S. government or any other evil power broker. I simply do not need a twentieth of a cent so badly that I'm willing to subject one of my esteemed readers to that sort of thing. So – that reduces my pool of available advertising.

Another thing I was appalled by was how many of those "default" impressions were turning up – 20, 25, even 30% of my page views had a Salty Jack banner. (No, I didn't count them and extrapolate – this is from my broker's own reports – and from before I started getting fastidious about whose banners I'd allow on my site, too.) Now, if you ask me, that's entirely too many – not just because I'm not likely to get anything out of those, but also because seeing the same banner that often is **boring**. I don't want it to look like I have that few advertisers, even if I do.

And then it got worse. All of a sudden, in early July, the default rate started soaring. Last I saw (a couple of days ago), it was approaching 95%! And I am simply **not** going to shove a Salty Jack banner in front of my readers practically every time they click on one of my pages.

So I put up an ad rotator of my own, and filled it with about 30 toon-related affiliate programs. Then I added my formerly exclusive broker to the rotation, and gave it no more weight than the rest. And for good measure, I signed up with a second broker, and put their code in the rotation too. If the default rate goes down, I may increase the brokers' weights, but I will no longer have a Salty Jack banner turn up more frequently than any of the others.

So, aside from improving the appearance of my site, I've assumed more control over the ads – I can even accept an advertiser without accepting his more obnoxious banners (which my broker wouldn't let me do – the only choices were all or none). If one of my affiliates isn't performing, I can just yank it. And any time I see an affiliate program I like, I can add it to the mix. In fact, I can make my own deals for advertising now, should any happen to come my way, and deliver exactly as many impressions as an advertiser pays for.

My main affiliate program, tho, is Amazon.com, and I haven't yet done much about getting that one rolling. When I get a chance, I'm going to put together an entire new section of my site, devoted to book and video lists (and put a banner advertising that section in the rotation), but time for that sort of thing just isn't available.

Meanwhile, the mainstream advertisers (Coke, McDonald's, etc.) seem to have discovered the Internet (probably because of the incredibly low prices – Internet advertising now costs less per impression

than highway billboards), so maybe there's a light at the end of the tunnel. So far, they're only going to the big brokers like DoubleClick (which I can't get into because I don't have a quarter million page views a month [yet]), but that stuff will eventually reach guys like me. The Internet isn't going to go away just because it's now in its first major slump.

GRADEASCIENCE.COM

I'm also launching a new site, this one sponsored by a publisher called WebSeed. It's just an experiment, to see if they actually can pay me real money for my efforts – but since the efforts will be small compared to the Toonopedia, I can afford time for it. If it pays off, I may do more with them.

Unlike ThemeStream or The Vines (another post-freely site that supposedly paid but is now dead), WebSeed strikes me as a professional outfit. Their contract, for example, resembles those of meat-world publishers (no clauses saying they can change the rules any time they like, with or without notice, to cite only one fishy item in ThemeStream's Terms of Service). Also, they don't make unrealistic promises. Most important, they screen writers, so the real content doesn't get lost in a sea of garbage.

The deal is, the writer proposes a topic and offers writing samples. If they like the samples and the topic idea, they buy a domain and the writer starts uploading content (weekly additions are strongly suggested). They supply not just the domain, but also a more-or-less standard layout and software for pouring content into it. They sell advertising (no banners – dignified text links only, and related to the content) and split the take 50-50. The publisher owns the domain, but the writer owns the content.

The URL for my first venture with them will be www.gradeAscience.com. I may have the first weekly upload done by the time you read this, so you can see how it reads – if not, check back in a couple of weeks, because I definitely want a fair amount of it in place by the time school opens. The idea behind it is a column I was shopping around a year or two ago, science factoids written to a 12-year reading level, done in question-and-answer form. If I make any money at it, I can use the same idea for other topics, like history and literature, and they can all benefit from cross-promotion.

So if you happen to know (or be) an elementary or junior high school teacher, take a look; and if you like it, pass the word on, okay? My best promotion will be word of mouth in the education community.

(By the way, the idea came from a column I used to read in the paper at that age, called "Uncle Ray's Corner". Anybody else remember that one?)

UPGRADE

We signed up for the high-speed Internet service I was yearning for last mailing – seems we can get a good deal by buying phone, cable and Internet from the same outfit, so it scarcely even costs more.

Turned out, tho, there were obstacles to networking the machines, mainly due to the fact that GiGi's was an antique with a mere 150-mhz processor. (It can't be that long since a 50-mhz processor was the cover feature of an industry magazine.) Mine, at 200, wasn't much better, but at least it would run the new modem and process the data as it came in.

So we looked at major upgrades, and found that most of the newer stuff won't even plug into our mother boards. What's worse, if we got new mother boards, most of the stuff we're using now wouldn't plug into it. It looked like upgrades were completely out of our price range, because we'd have to buy so many things all at once.

Until I checked prices on whole new machines. Turns out we could get an entire computer, missing only the monitor and printer, for \$374, and it came with a \$75 rebate!

So now I have a 700-mhz processor, 20-gig hard drive, 64 megs of RAM, and DVD-ROM; and GiGi has inherited my old machine (its equal only in RAM). That's bottom of the line now (as seen in the price), but a hell of a lot better than what I had before.

At first I tried to switch hard drives and run it from my old one, which is set up just the way I like it. No go. It would freeze and require manual rebooting at inopportune times, and wasn't able to run the on-board video and sound right. I don't know how or why they've done it this way, but the various parts of this machine seem to work right only with one another.

Apparently, then, we've gone the same route with computers as we did with phonographs. When I was a kid, you'd get a box with a turntable and needle on top and speaker holes in the sides, and that box, all by itself, would play records. Then came component stereo systems, so people could spend countless hours and dollars fiddling with amps, turntables etc. Eventually, we went full circle, as those components gave way to complete-in-one-unit systems.

I've been thinking of computers in terms of components – switch out the CD-ROM, upgrade the video card, throw in a new modem... Now, apparently, at least for low-end systems (which still seem like science fiction to the likes of me), it's time to think of them as complete in one box.

We made the big leap to a Windows machine in 1992. (Before that, we had a Kaypro for word processing, a Commodore for the kids' games, a Vari-Typer for typesetting, and as for the Internet, don't make me laugh – but the Kaypro, at least, was an entire computer, albeit a primitive one, in one box.) Between then and 2001, every single molecule of that 1992 Windows machine, with the possible exception of some of the screws, was replaced. But since it was done one piece at a time, it was still possible to think of it as kind of the same computer.

Now, there's been a big break in that continuity. I don't know how I feel about that, but I do know this – I sure do like what this new machine can do.

גאג'י גיג'י גוג'יג'י

(Or Comic-Con International, as I think it's now called.)

I wasn't planning to go. Then GiGi said I should. Then I thought I'd go just for the trade show and pro con at the end (Sunday and Monday). Then Egmont invited all their writers and artists to dinner at the beginning (Thursday). I added up the cost of a hotel for all the days in between, and there was just no way I could afford it – to say nothing of the fact that I simply don't have so much going on that I'd be able to stay productively busy for almost a week, or so much stamina that I could stand it.

Then the Egmont editors, Byron Erickson and Anna Maria Vind, invited me, personally, to lunch right in the middle (Saturday), and I thought maybe I could afford it after all – if I avoided hotels by flying in before lunch and flying out after.

Since I've never flown anywhere for lunch before, and could easily come up with the money just for a plane ride, I decided what the heck. So – up at 3:30, on the plane at 6:15, in San Diego at 7:30, breakfast with the current *Apatoons* guys (who were nice enough to arrange their 20th anniversary get-together around my schedule) at 8:30, lunch with Byron and Maria at 11:30, bum around the convention in the afternoon, on the plane again at 7:30, asleep in my own bed by 11.

And that's about how it worked out. I really enjoyed the *Apatoons* meeting. Afterward, I managed to talk the con folks into comping me (would've been easier if I'd sent in their pro form a month ago). Had a great time talking with Byron and Maria (who took my picture for the Egmont Web site). Spent a couple of hours in the afternoon hanging around Scott Shaw!'s table, a great place for meeting and greeting (Don Rosa, Bob Foster and lots of others came by, and the guy at the next table was Sergio Aragones). Scott did a sketch for me, Uncle Scrooge as Hanna-Barbera would have designed him.

Only down side is that I'm still aching from all the walking and carrying. That convention is **huge!** If you haven't seen it since it moved to the bay-side convention center, you haven't seen it! My poor old bones just can't take it anymore. But a few days of stiff muscles are a small price for a terrific day.

(Oh, yeah, the *Apatoons* 20th anniversary, which mails one day after SFPA – hard to believe it's been that long since GiGi and I started it, but there you have it. Which gives me one more deadline in the already-crowded couple of weeks surrounding my trip, but I haven't missed an important anniversary there yet. *Apatoons* is my fannish monument – co-founding it with GiGi is the best thing I did during all my years in fandom.)

גאג'י גיג'י גוג'יג'י

I can tell you don't have kids – you don't even know why head lice would prefer one shape of hair over

another. We parents know **all** about those critters. I can see where they might prefer one type over another, because before they even hatch, the nits grabs hold of the hair with the tenacity of a wolverine. There are probably shapes they can't get as good a grip on, so they'd fall off in regular washing.

Whether or not it's mentioned in The Bible, beer has been around just about as long as wine. Grape and grain – they've both been fermented as long as people have been growing them.

Before we can consider the question of who should interfere with trade in land mines, we have to get the government out of the practice of **using** them. If they interfere with the trade now, it's only because they don't like competitors. If there ever comes into being an agency capable of interfering with the trade, that isn't itself **involved** in the trade, **then** we can think about who might have a right to interfere with it.

גאג'י גיג'י גוג'יג'י

Yeah, Gary, I suppose it might be argued that a better solution to my storage problems with those years and years of *Comics Buyers Guide* would have been to give them away. But I swear to God, **I tried!** All through the 1990s, I tried every way I could to sell them for lower and lower prices, eventually to the point of offering them in return for postage. If you wanted to forestall my cutting out and filing the parts I want, then throwing the rest away, all you had to do was take them.

That said, I'm glad nobody did, because I now have a wonderful and possibly unique information resource, one that I've found useful over and over in Toonopedia™ work.

That U.S. plane that made a forced landing in China... Weren't the guys in it, like, **spies?** And aren't spies who get caught traditionally – well, **shot?** For Bush to act all belligerent about it may go over with his chest-thumping Orthodox Republicanist constituency, but it strikes me as kinda like a criminal lawyer trying to get his client off by threatening the judge. I think it would be a bit more seemly if he were to kiss the Chinese officials' feet in gratitude for their amazing leniency in sending the spies home after a minimum of sabre rattling.

I certainly agree that people shouldn't use violence to resist the government unless things get to where absolutely nothing else makes a dent. But y'know, after Ruby Ridge, Waco etc. – and I suppose we can add Palm Beach County to the list now – a fair number of people seem to have come around to the point of view that we're there.

גאג'י גיג'י גוג'יג'י

It's true, the libertarians don't have a solution to the world's environmental problems. But – neither does government. Haven't you noticed that systems instituted by fickle politicians, dictated by the politicians' corporate sponsors, and administered by bored, venal bureaucrats, have the exact opposite of the effect you want?

You're right about the fall of the dot-coms – many of them, anyway, which had nothing going for them but new-tech glitz. The classic way of doing business, i.e., delivering value for money, triumphs again.

You're also correct that the dot-com collapse is what mostly brought on the implosion of Internet advertising, tho again, part of it is due to the wearing off of the newness. (TV commercials, too, didn't need so many psychological tricks when they were brand-new, and people hadn't yet gotten into the habit of mostly tuning them out.)

But I fail to see a connection between that and your main thesis, i.e., your claim that advertising doesn't work. If that's true, explain McDonald's.

McDonald's is a good example not only because its phenomenal success is due almost entirely to its relentless assault on our attention, but also because it's the example most often given to discredit click-through rate as the **only** valid statistic for evaluating the success of an ad. McDonald's doesn't expect you to go out and buy a hamburger every time you see one of its commercials, does it?

McDonald's ads, like most TV advertising, are what they call "branding" ads, and with good reason. They're designed to imprint the name on your brain, so when you're thinking about where to grab a quick bite, it'll pop into your head. That kind of advertising not only works – it works **even better** on people who think they're too smart to fall for it.

The TV ads most analogous to Internet banners are the ones that give you a phone number and say operators are standing by. Tho only a tiny fraction of a percent call in, that kind of advertising is still so effective, there are entire channels devoted to it, with no programming at all.

An even closer analog, tho, is direct mail, which is targeted like Internet advertising, and which often doesn't invite an immediate purchase but just asks people to send for more free information – like clicking through to a Web site. Of course, banner ads get almost an order of magnitude less response than direct mail (probably because mail may linger for a day or two before you get around to throwing it out, but with an Internet ad, either you click right then or you don't), but then, they're several orders of magnitude less expensive.

But branding advertisements work on the Internet, just like they work on whatever else human beings look at or listen to – and with the Internet, advertisers get the **added** benefit of giving viewers something to click on. This is why, as an Internet publisher, I'm encouraged by seeing McDonald's and Coke moving onto the Internet. They're not interested in your clicks – they're branding. (It's also why I almost immediately stopped accepting pay-per-click ads. Advertisers quickly caught on that if they pay by the click and don't put anything in the banner to encourage clicking, they can get their branding practically free.)

Anyway, so the dot-coms that existed only on hype

all fell down, and Internet advertising went into its first big slump. It happens in every industry, and now it's happening in this one. Big deal. Don't you think it would be prudent to wait until the body's cold before dancing on its grave?

By the way, that Bob Dole/Viagra example you gave... Doesn't the existence of those commercials **prove** advertising people know how to sell? I mean, isn't it the mark of a good salesman that he can sell people things they have no use for? Snow to Eskimos, sunny resorts to Arizonans, that sort of thing?

Well, these guys sold **advertising** to the makers of **Viagra!**

NORM WEISINGER

Okay, so somebody published a science fiction fanzine in 1888 (no-doubt using one of those inexpensive letterpresses that made the first apas possible). And America was discovered by an 8th century Irish monk who went to sea in a wooden bucket. I'm not impressed by incunabulous anomalies. What counts is the discovery that sparked widespread European interest in America, and the fanzine that started the teenage fan movement that continued without interruption to the present day (tho they did get chronologically older). For the discovery, it's Columbus. For the fanzine, it's Julie Schwartz and Mort Weisinger.

TOM WEISINGER

First off, a minor clarification. For some reason, when my brain said to refer to the Miami *Post* analysis in the third paragraph of my comment to you, my fingers typed **announcement**. I don't know why that sort of stuff sometimes happens, but I usually catch it in proofreading. This time, tho, adding the phrase it appeared in happened to be the last thing I did before running the zine out and sending it off, and I failed to proofread properly. I didn't realize it until the zine was in the mail. Sorry – it wasn't an **announcement** that indicated Gore would have won if not for the illegal and probably deliberate obfuscation of the ballots, but an **analysis**. (Of course, your faith in Liberal Media Dogma remains unshaken even after eight years of the press's relentless assault on Clinton, so you undoubtedly disbelieve anything said in any newspaper other than the Republicanist tracts you rely on to bolster your beliefs, and therefore it doesn't really matter.)

Since I print my mailing comments in alphabetical order, I don't necessarily write them in the order in which you see them. But this one was written last as well as appearing last, because I've been putting it off. Your allegation that you and I are "not so far apart" except for what we think are appropriate actions in what you call the "real world" is so **amazing**, I don't even know where to begin!

I think I'll start with the fact that we're not even talking about the same "real world". In the world I live in, the idea of breaking up a stable family, for no stated reason other than visceral hatred of the political system under which the family lives, is too

abhorrent to be considered. Even discounting my devotion to principle over practicality (since you evidently believe the ends justify the means), tweaking Castro's nose at the expense of creating precedents useful to every fanatical Muslim that ever carried a child off to Iran can't possibly be a desirable thing in what non-True Believers think of as the "real world" – to say nothing of the fact that it makes a mockery of the phrase "family values".

And "distrust" scarcely even **begins** to characterize my attitude toward government – an attitude which you don't even **begin** to share, as you believe becoming personally involved with it could possibly achieve a desirable goal. As Dracula said, "Enter freely and of your own will." For a cautionary tale of where **that** well-traveled road leads, I need only look at you.

Anyway, my "distrust", as you call it, is not directed specifically toward government. I feel that way toward **all** gargantuan power brokers. You, on the other hand, positively **dote** on the so-called "private sector", i.e., a coterie of government-chartered collectives which could not even exist, far less grow to their present level of power, without special protection granted by government, which absolves their human benefactors from responsibility for their depredations. (If a dog kept and cared for by a human tears up a neighbor's garden, his "owner" can be held responsible – but if a corporation "owned" by humans renders the neighborhood itself uninhabitable, not only can its "owners" not be held responsible – **you** support legislation that would limit the degree to which the corporation itself can be held liable for irresponsible behavior!)

And how can you claim to "distrust" government at all? Your stated reason for supporting free trade with China (which curiously doesn't apply to free trade with Cuba, where prominent Republicans have no significant business interests) amounts to support for using government power for social engineering!

This "real world" you speak of doesn't even conform to basic rules of logic and common sense, as it includes oxymorons like "small-government, big-defense" – a combination so bizarrely absurd, it can exist only in the mind of a True Believer. What size government would a thinking person expect to be **capable** of what you call "big defense"?

Speaking of which – when was the last time the U.S. used its horrifying military might in defense? 1861-65? No, only the part that was trying to **get away** from the U.S. was fighting defensively. I suspect the answer is much closer to "never". And if you say **one word** about defending "our" economic interests overseas (usually from the people U.S. corporations took it from), you'll **never** convince me you're anything but an Orthodox Republicanist True Believer.

"Defense", in this context, is nothing but a government-created weasel word. What it really means is "war on foreign soil". But the U.S. taxpayers might balk at seeing such stupefying sums spent on "war" – sums that apparently can **never** get big enough to

satisfy arms junkies like you – whereas quite a few seem gullible enough to let us all be taxed into poverty for "defense".

If you were using the word properly, you'd be forced to admit defense is what the rest of the world needs against the planet's most egregious aggressor, i.e., the U.S.A. If I were in a position to organize the defense of **my** country, the first thing I'd do would be to attempt to free us from the evil empire based thousands of miles away, in Washington. Plenty of time to worry about the less immediate threats of Moscow and Beijing, after the horror at hand has been dealt with. As for the "threats" of Panama, Granada, Kosovo, etc. – Ha!

Anyway, except to those blinded by uncritical belief in centrism, it's obvious best way to defend against a foreign aggressor is to make him do more conquering to capture the same territory. A country that rules a vast area is relatively easy to conquer – no amount of armed might can stand against an enemy sufficiently determined and patient, because nobody stays strongest forever. When the time does come to take it over, a military conqueror can consummate the union by simply changing administrators and leaving the rest of the bureaucracy in place. Have you big-government enthusiasts (whether or not you admit, even to yourself, that you truly are one) learned nothing from history? The more tiny political units an area is divided into, the less headway empires are able to make into them. Think of the Roman Empire in northern Europe, which they would have had to conquer tribe by tribe, versus their success around the Mediterranean, where centralized governments already controlled large (for the time) territories.

In other words – the best **true** defense would be to eliminate the federal government.

If you really distrusted government, you wouldn't parrot their use of the word "defense" to refer to their mind-numbing accumulation of offensive weapons. You wouldn't want them to have any weapons at all!

By the way, you probably recognized yourself in my opening section. I don't have much inclination to dig that old stuff out, but thinking of it after having seen your knee-jerk frothing over Clinton... Vaguely recalling that some of the participants in that **ancient** feud you somehow got so partisan about (even to the point of bolstering your arguments by disingenuous misinterpretation of what the unfavored side actually said) thought of themselves (in their youthful idealism and naivete) as Stalinists, I'll bet I know which side you were on.

And to answer at least one of your nitpicks: There is a difference between not using all of the nice but non-essential skills at your command because a little apazine isn't worth the effort (e.g., not typesetting it back when that would have meant an extra step) and a professional editor misusing words when their misuse seems to make her points better.