

The Sphere

Vol. 195 no. 1, published for the 224th Mailing of The Southern Fandom Press Alliance by Don Markstein, 14836 N. 35th St., Phoenix, AZ 85032, (602)485-7860, ddmarkstein@home.com, don@toonopedia.com (Notice to all who care: **MY EARTHLINK ADDRESS IS NO LONGER OPERATIVE**), <http://www.stormloader.com/markstein>, <http://www.toonopedia.com>. Headline type: Lucida Handwriting Bold.

Point of Perspective: The World Trade Center attack killed somewhere in the mid-four-figure range. About twice that many were being killed **each day** in Rwanda a few years ago, and the slaughter went on for **months**. The people who did that need to be moved out of this world every bit as much as Osama bin Laden.

Maybe more — not because their crime was larger, tho it was, but because it was more horrifying. They didn't just slam a big object into another big object and be done with it — they killed their victims up close and personal, with machetes, and they did it over and over, day after day, week after week, for no reason other than unvarnished hatred. Maybe you don't find it more unnerving to know there are people in the world capable of the latter, but I do.

I also find it disturbing that so many people are shocked and horrified by one crime, but not by the other. Both are shocking and horrifying to decent people, of course — but in terms of both magnitude and ferocity, the World Trade Center is way down on the atrocity meter.

Personally, I'd place it about on the same level as the bombing of Tripoli.

Point of Perspective: I recently saw a couple minutes or so of an hour-long documentary on the release of those folks who got jailed in Afghanistan for preaching Christianity. I can't resist pointing out in passing that anybody stupid enough to preach Christianity in Afghanistan deserves what he gets, and maybe it would improve our species if he were no longer part of the gene pool, but that's not my main point.

How many people are in U.S. jails right now, on suspicion of being from the Middle East? Most will probably be free in the reasonably near future (unlike the Nissei, who had the misfortune of living in less "politically correct" times), and some may wind up with reasonable settlements (at taxpayer expense) as victims of racial profiling, but the disruption to their lives is probably at least as great as that of those happy little Christians now home from Afghanistan. Why don't we hear more in the allegedly liberal news about unjust jailing on the home front?

The country with the world's largest percent of its adult population behind bars, most for stupid reasons like smoking pot, has little room to criticize another over the incarceration of a handful of Americans for what it regards as subversive teaching.

Point of Perspective: Early on, the Afghan government offered to turn Osama bin Laden over to the U.S., provided the U.S. could offer evidence he was really behind the attack. Of course, we don't know how sincere they were — they're probably even less trustworthy than the U.S. government, whose promises are worthless.

But sincere or not, from a side trying to put across the idea that it's the good guy, was "No conditions!" the best possible response? After all — isn't it considered more-or-less **reasonable** for countries requesting extradition to be asked for evidence that the accused actually did it? If you're trying to position yourself as the good guy, you supply the evidence, and if they refuse to honor their word, **then** you get to claim the high moral ground.

I'll admit, Osama bin Laden was the first person I thought of when I saw the thing happening. But of course, that's just because the supposedly liberal U.S. news media have been pushing him as Mister Terrorism ever since he jilted the CIA. Now that I think of it, I'd like to see some evidence myself.

Of course, the evidence the U.S. has (whatever it may be) does seem to have convinced NATO. But I'm not impressed by NATO taking its cues from the U.S. If their evidence is good enough to, say, convince twelve impartial jurors, why won't they tell us what it is?

Not that I seriously doubt he did it, of course, but I balk at taking **anything** on faith, **especially** faith in the U.S. government.

Point of Perspective: Why Afghanistan? Most of the names connected with Al Qaeda are Saudi billionaires. If bombing is the proper response, why isn't it Saudi Arabia that's getting bombed?

My guess is, it's because bombing Saudi Arabia would adversely affect billionaires, whereas there are no billionaires in Afghanistan.

Nobody of consequence cares if you bomb a pile of rocks back to — well, wherever it is you get bombed back to when you're already in the Stone Age because you got bombed back there 15 years ago.

Afghanistan can probably expect to be bombed back to one age or another a few more times during the next century or two. When you just can't get the adrenaline out without bombing somebody — who better?

Meanwhile, remember that new Orthodox Republicanist mantra I noted last issue? The one about how whatever response we make must be "effective", as opposed to bombing a pharmaceutical factory in Sudan (stated) or a residential neighborhood in Tripoli (not stated)? It's too bad people whose political beliefs are based on blind faith have such short memories. I'd love to throw that one back in their faces in another decade or so, when Afghanistan is once again the alleged source of the world's most newsworthy (by "liberal" media standards) terrorism.

Point of Perspective: Much was made of the fact that a few people in Arab countries were dancing in the street immediately following the attack. Personally, I regard it as the precise equivalent of Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson claiming God allowed it because the U.S. tolerates homosexuals (marginally) and abortion clinics. Religious hatred is vile and repugnant no matter what worshipers of the God of Hate call him.

Point of Terminology: Was it an act of war, or a crime? It doesn't fit standard definitions of an act of war, which is usually instigated by an institution that actually functions as government for some definable portion of Earth's surface.. But if it's an act of war anyway, insurance companies are off the hook, because their coverage includes crimes but doesn't include acts of war. So — it seems to be an act of war, by some arcane, unstated definition.

The alternative would be to force a few large corporations to pay out, as opposed to allowing them to stiff a lot of ordinary people, and that simply is not acceptable.

Point of Terminology: I see the Chechnyan separatists are no longer "rebels" but "terrorists". Same for the ones in Chiapas. Used to be, insurgents the U.S. didn't like were called "Communists". I guess that just doesn't have the propaganda value it once did.

And Somalia has recently gone off-line. The

only company providing Internet access there was shut down by the U.S. because of alleged "terrorist" ties. What did it do to warrant cutting all the innocent people of that entire country off from the Internet? Sell Web space to the Chechnyans?

Is it a coincidence this happened to a country that gave Bush's daddy a big black eye a decade or so back?

Just what the hell is a terrorist, anyway?

Point of Information: September 11 was the 80th anniversary of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

Most people I mention this to find it at least interesting, but some scoff loudly — big deal, every day's the anniversary of **something** (a fact I prove every day in my "Today in Toons" feature, located at <http://www.toonopedia.com/today.htm>). Oddly enough, every single scoffer is a Republican, and the stauncher the Republican, the louder and more insistent the scoff (tho the reverse isn't always true — some Republicans don't scoff). It's as if they feel such an urgent need to discredit its significance, they can't simply shrug and move on. I haven't yet figured out why this divides along party lines, but so far, there hasn't been a non-Republican scoffer.

Personally, I don't think it's a coincidence that this extremely well planned and well organized event was engineered to climax on a significant date connected to the infamous "lines in the sand" the European Great Powers later drew across the vast territory of their fallen enemy. The "lines in the sand", of course, are how Iraqis and Kuwaitis, who are ethnically indistinguishable (which **may** be why they were a single province under Ottoman rule), became residents of two separate countries, because it suited the Great Powers to deal with them that way. It's how Kurdistan got divided among Iraq, Turkey, the U.S.S.R. and Iran, so the Kurds could be second-class citizens of four different countries instead of having one of their own, in which to pursue Kurdish interests.

And more, of course. Many historians consider the interference of the Europeans on the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire to be the very root of most of today's Middle East problems — they simply weren't allowed to work out their own national borders. Many people living within its former borders regard September 11 more-or-less the way Americans regard December 7 — or the way Americans would, if Japan had won that war and continued occupying the

U.S. to this day, but pale as it is, it's the best analogy I can think of.

No, I **really do not** think the date is a coincidence.

But to admit it isn't would be to acknowledge there actually are deep-seated, legitimate resentments among the people of that region, resentments which, if not adequately addressed, are quite capable of fueling terrorism. Not that anything could possibly **justify** attacks on innocent people of course (as the vast majority of those who hold those resentments agree), but admitting that root causes actually do exist would call into question the efficacy of dealing with the situation by simplistically pursuing active terrorists, rather than pursuing the active ones while making a more realistic effort to deal with the issues that keep spawning new ones.

I just happened to hear of this anniversary in a single interview on an obscure NPR talk show — never caught even the slightest mention of it in mainstream news. It can't possibly be the case that no reporter has ever been made aware of it, so I guess the so-called "liberal" press must be among the scoffers.

Don Markstein's Toonopedia™

Rolling on toward a million page views now. Every day, I get letters from people who aren't into cartoons, but who have found something interesting and fun there. And that's my goal, of course — reaching the general public instead of just those who particularly like the stuff.

New articles since last mailing: Brick Bradford, Dinky Duck, Doll Man, Dondi, Ferd'nand, Fractured Fairy Tales, Hairbreadth Harry, Male Call, Miss Fury, Moon Mullins, Thomas Nast, Space Ranger, Spy vs. Spy, Tales from the Crypt, Treasure Chest of Fun & Fact, The Tick. New total: 406 (the 400th was The Tick).

I'm way down from my earlier average of three per week, but still getting a new one up every few days or so — and I did, as expected, reach the point where I can claim "over 400" toon topics covered. Also, tho this isn't anywhere near as exact an account, I'm now at a point where I can claim to be "in the neighborhood of" a quarter-million words, rather than "approaching" that mark.

From the paucity of available reference

material, and the obscurity of the subject, I suspect I might be the only person ever to write an informative article on *Treasure Chest*, just as I might have been with Genius Jones.

<http://www.toonopedia.com>, as always.

Nathan Alexander Markstein

That's what Rachel wound up calling her son, who was born November 6. 8 pounds 6 ounces, 20.5 inches long, one-minute APGAR 8, 5-minute APGAR 9, all the other necessary and expected numbers and stuff. Baby's First Web Page can be found at <http://www.stormloader.com/markstein/nathan.html>.

We were calling him "Alex" before he was born, because Rachel decided on his middle name before his first. (GiGi's sister, Susie, wants to know who the hell Alexander was — three or four of her grand-nephews have that as a middle name, so there's gotta be somebody they're named after.) Once he was out, tho, she decided he'd be addressed by his first name just like everybody else, so my grandson is hereafter to be known as Nathan. It's taken an inordinately long time to get used to the change, but I've probably made a successful switch. It's three or four days now since I called him Alex.

Cute little guy, I can tell you that much. It's a big hassle having him in the house, of course, but not as big as it would be if I didn't have the grandparent's privilege of handing him to Mom when there's dirty work to be done. As expected, I feel much more grandparently now that I'm able to look him in the face. I'd forgotten what it's like to fall in love with a baby.

They sure do things differently from before, tho. When I was born, the only male allowed in the delivery room besides the doctor was the baby himself, if applicable. By the time my own kids were born, fathers in the delivery room had become common, and it was possible to talk them into letting a coach in, even if the coach wasn't the father.

Now, tho, it's wide open! GiGi's friend, Jo Weber, had volunteered to be coach; and Rachel's old Girl Scout leader, Tina Mitchell, showed up early and stayed all day as an auxiliary coach. Karen and I were both in and out — we'd have been there the whole time, but GiGi was (by an odd and not very welcome

coincidence) two floors away, with respiratory problems, and we were also hanging out with her. (They did let her visit a couple of times, tho, provided she wore a mask and didn't stay long.) Nathan's father was also there, and a few of his relatives came and went. No less than five friends and relatives were still in the delivery room when Nathan was born.

It was an induced labor. Like GiGi, in all her pregnancies, Rachel ran late. She was carrying Nathan so comfortably, she continued working even after her due date (Oct. 30); still, following current practice, the first time she saw the doctor after he was due, they scheduled a room at the hospital. She and Jo were there at 6 AM. He was finally born at 6:48 PM. What a day!

Rachel has matured a lot over the past few months — in fact, she's matured a lot just since Nathan was born, coming up to three weeks ago as I write this. I ain't sayin' she doesn't have a long way to go, of course, but it's great to see her acting so responsible. She was a real "problem teen", causing GiGi and me an amazing level of anguish as recently as a couple of years ago — but I knew this'd grow her up! She's really taking to being a mom.

She's 19 years old, by the way. Too young, of course — but what the heck, Nathan is really cool!

I Love Technology!

I sent out birth announcements by e-mail, of course. My sister phoned from Boston a couple of days later. I gave her the "Baby's First Web Page" URL, and she went straight there while talking. She caught a typo, which I corrected, then I uploaded the revised file. She clicked her "Reload" button, and saw the correction. The whole operation took place in Phoenix, Boston, and God alone knows where the site is physically located, and I don't think it took a whole five minutes.

To me, who lived more than 30 years before even entertaining the notion of someday owning a computer, this is amazing and delightful. Tho Rachel has grown up with computers, she can easily remember when they weren't anywhere near this good. Still, she isn't all that impressed by something like this (and delights in saying so). Nathan, of course, will never be able to appreciate how wonderful it is.

Mailing Comments (such as they are)

Randy Cleary:

I'm using PageMaker 6.5 to make PDF files. It's not the "preferred" way, of course — the reason they distribute Acrobat Reader free is to create a market for Acrobat Writer. So there are functions I can't make full use of, but it makes a file quite good enough to meet my needs. I hear WordPerfect 9 does them too, but I haven't seen it yet. I'd say it's likely most of the new word processing and desktop publishing releases can make them by now, or at the very least, will be able to in the near future. In fact, if you look around, you might even be able to find shareware by now that will do it.

Yes, I am still laughing at the "threats" of Panama, Grenada, Kosovo etc., and am puzzled as to why you seem to think I wouldn't be. I never did laugh very much at Osama bin Laden, tho. I'll admit to an occasional sarcastic snicker at the fact that he got his basic terrorist training from the CIA, at U.S. taxpayer expense, but that's only because the alternative to laughing about it would be to hijack a plane myself, and smash it into the CIA's headquarters — and I can't do that because it wouldn't be right to do it with a passenger plane, and a military one would be too hard to hijack.

If you're trying to relate Panama, Grenada, Kosovo etc. rhetorically to the World Trade Center attack, I can only think of one way to do it, like so: If the U.S. weren't in the habit of sending soldiers all over the world, swaggering around like they own the place, shooting up the countryside, setting fire to people's homes, leaving land mines to maim and kill future generations, etc. — maybe the Osama bin Ladens of this world wouldn't find it quite so easy to recruit people who hate America so much, they're willing to carry out a scheme like **that**.

Surely, you're not under an impression that the gigabucks lavished on the U.S. military can in any way be an effective defense against an attack of that sort. Of course, each and every one of us sincerely believes that in the wake of this tragic event, we must all set aside our partisan differences and unite under **my** point of view (and there's a good example of it one para-

graph up) — but there are limits!

By the way — is "stabilizing" the world (as you call it) really a good thing to do? You can't prop up the status quo in the face of often overwhelming popular opposition forever; and if it's been propped up too long, and too forcefully, it has a way of bringing about far more bloodshed when it finally does come down. Iran and Yugoslavia come to mind, but they're far from the only examples. (I also can't resist pointing out that right at the moment, the world's most stable regime is Castro's.)

There's also the question of ends justifying means. Can good truly come from such behavior? Maybe, but only by accident — and if you believe otherwise, or that any such good results can justify the behavior, then your way of thinking (along with that of Hitler, Stalin, Toni, Roosevelt and other adherents of that point of view) is at odds with mine in very basic ways.

That's accepting, of course, your claim that U.S. domination has indeed stabilized the world, when its specific and perfectly open aim is to destabilize local governments it doesn't have a use for.

Richard Lynch:

Why, for goodness sake, a response! How ... unexpected! Too bad I had to bring out the 2x4 to get it, but that's the kinda guy you are.

Another unexpectedness is the length to which you're willing to go, to get away with (in your eyes) smearing me. I thought your main vice was stupidity, but I now see there's malice involved as well. An unfortunate combination, but luckily for me, you mostly aren't my concern. Carry on (tho as I've said before, I'd appreciate being left out completely).

Yet another (and a somewhat chilling one) was how easy it apparently was for you to recruit eager assistance in the endeavor — and after all these years, too. Geez, eager assistant, get a life!

I should point out, tho, that there are easier ways to get the information you were looking for, at least if you save your SFPA mailings. I'm not the least bit embarrassed about having clashed with authorities on matters involving censorship; and tho I didn't always succeed, I did try to maintain my sense of humor when describing it here.

If you were skilled at getting information from primary sources, of course, you'd know

that. You'd also know what I **really** objected to in that pack of lies.

Which I won't go into because it's a moot point now that you've informed me the offending material has been taken down. I gotta laugh, tho, at why you did it — **Don Walsh** objected. You put it up because Lester Boutillier said it happened, and you took it down because Don Walsh said it didn't. What a historian! Don't you trust **any** reliable sources?

And I **do** have to thank you for helping to restore my sense of humor, by putting the whole affair in such stark perspective. I have now — **woo hoo!** laughed again (sorry) — I have now been called "nothing more than a minnow" by a guy whose proudest achievement is a fanzine!

Not that there's anything wrong with fanzines, of course (done a few hundred myself), tho as a proudest achievement, they'd kinda suck. But I can sort of understand that from your perspective, the toe I still dangle in your little pond might look that way.

David Schlosser:

When you cite World War II as an example of the U.S. using its awesome military capability in defense, I take it you're referring to Pearl Harbor? Unless you've got something better than that, I very much doubt it would stand up in court. If the attackee knows an attack is coming, and does nothing to prevent it because it's looking for an excuse to pound the attacker into the dirt — well, that considerably weakens any self-defense argument, doesn't it?

It was only suspected at the time, but it's now known with absolute certainty, that the U.S. had broken the Japanese code and was fully aware of the coming attack. Roosevelt decided to sit back and let it happen, and to let all those men die, because he had what he considered very good reasons for getting the U.S. involved in a big war with Japan.

Another requirement for a self-defense argument to stick is that the defensive actions be carried out only to the extent required to neutralize the threat. Aside from the fact that the Pearl Harbor Naval Station was a legitimate military target (and one aimed directly at Japan, for that matter) and the entirety of Hiroshima (talk about your terrorism!) was not — once Japan had reached a point where it was unlikely to attack even so marginal a part of the U.S. again (about — what, 1943?), there was no justi-

fication for continuing — unless you consider it okay to finish off an already-hospitalized attacker, just to make sure he doesn't get better and attack you again.

A good rule of thumb is, anything that takes place anywhere but your own soil is non-self-defense unless proven otherwise.

Still, I'll allow it, at least marginally, because not everybody holds nation/states, corporations, royalty, etc. to the same moral standards as human beings, like I do. To some, it's okay for one or more of those classes to behave with absolute disregard for the basic human rights of common people, provided it can dream up an excuse, or at least get away with it. If you're one of them, then okay, there's no use arguing the point — World War II was fought in self-defense. (Rolls eyeballs.)

Got another one?

Toni Weisskopf:

I was quite puzzled, at first, by your quoting the U.S. Constitution at me. Then I remembered how many times Christians have expected me to acknowledge the truth of what they say when they point out that it's supported by the Biblical passages they quote.

You may find this very surprising, but I don't consider your Holy Writ any more compelling an argument than theirs. Admit it, Toni. It's absurd for you to claim your Republicanist beliefs are anything but a religion.

That bit about Elian Gonzales being marched around at gunpoint was a point I was supposed address? Sorry. I thought you were ranting.

In fact, I have to apologize again, because even scrutinizing it carefully, and even regarding the phrase "at the point of a gun" as figurative (apparently, you go along with Mao Tse Tung's observation that all governmental authority comes from the barrel of a gun), I can't find much of a point there that needs addressing. What you seem to be saying is that you disagree with the ruling of a child custody court, and object to what you've heard about Cuba's compulsory education laws, and therefore the child's father has no parental rights.

Am I missing something?

I disagree with many rulings of child custody courts here in America, and am certainly no fan of American compulsory education laws. (We saw a good example of their effectiveness as a means of political indoctrination a couple of

mailings ago, when that Patrick J. Gibbs character claimed educated people all "know" U.S. states are sovereign, as opposed to mere provinces of the Washington empire — guess it depends on what "educated" is, eh?)

And yet, I think my rights as a parent should be respected. In fact, I even think **your** rights as a parent should be respected, and you can't ask for a better deal than that! Where's the beef?

But while we're on the subject of unaddressed points, Ms. Queen of the Unaddressed Point . . .

You haven't addressed my point that if a child shouldn't be returned to his custodial parent in Cuba, after being kidnaped by his non-custodial parent and brought to Florida, then why should a child be returned to his custodial parent in Florida, after being kidnaped by his non-custodial parent and brought to Iran?

It's a shame you've opened the door to unaddressed points right when I don't have time to make a list. But then, all my SFPAZines these days are squeezed out between other pressing deadlines. May I have a rain check? I'll try to jot a couple dozen or so down for next mailing.

Last-minute Note

(Added just before running the zine out.)

Nathan has a tooth! He spent his 20th day crying and carrying on and just acting all kinds of disgruntled. We all took turns holding him and sweet-talking him and stuff, and while I had him, I happened to notice a little white spot on his upper gum. I passed him to someone with cleaner hands, for closer inspection, and sure enough — his terrible, terrible suffering appears to be from cutting his first tooth, months before the books say he should.

That's my grandson, all right. What a guy!

