

# the sphere

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In the big lie there is always a certain force of credibility; because the broad masses of a nation are always more easily corrupted in the deeper strata of their emotional nature than consciously or voluntarily, and thus in the primitive simplicity of their minds they more readily fall victims to the big lie than the small lie, since they themselves often tell small lies in little matters but would be ashamed to resort to large-scale falsehoods. It would never come into their heads to fabricate colossal untruths, and they would not believe that others could have the impudence to distort the truth so infamously. Even though the facts which prove this to be so may be brought clearly to their minds, they will still doubt and waver and will continue to think that there may be some other explanation.

— Hermann Goerring

Here's an example of a Goerring-style Big Lie: Republicans stand for smaller government. In particular, they favor fiscal responsibility, and a conservative approach to such matters as deficit spending and skyrocketing government debt.

I instinctively roll my eyes at claims like that. The idea that one political party has a better or worse record on **anything** is absurd. Or — so I thought.

Then I happened to read an actual comparison between the parties, using hard numbers. A guy named Dwight Meredith went to the trouble of gathering the facts, and posted them on the Web. You'll find them at <http://www.sideshow.connectfree.co.uk/JustForTheRecord.htm> — or if you don't feel like typing that (or don't think you can do it accurately), go to my personal site, specifically <http://www.uncadonald.com/sfpa.html>, where I've placed a clickable link to it.

Covered are Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush I and Clinton — 20 years of Republicans and 20 of Democrats. Briefly, the Republicans ran absolutely no surpluses, and increased the National Debt a total of \$3.8 trillion in their 20 years. The Democrats ran five surpluses, and increased the National Debt a total of \$0.72 trillion. During Clinton's eight years, the debt actually went **down** — not by much, but that still beats driving it up, which all ten of the other presidents during my lifetime did.

Those with unshakable faith in Received Wisdom from Fox News will no-doubt try to credit Clinton's Republican Congress. But Congressional majorities seem not to be a decisive factor — the Democrats controlled Congress from Eisenhower to Bush I, and Republican presidents **still** managed to out-spend Democrats by a very significant factor.

Besides, the Republicans control Congress right now, and the minute they got that Democrat president out of their way, they went fucking berserk with

spending — apparently, the combination of Republicans in Congress and the White House has no effect other than to **intensify** their fiscal irresponsibility. In fact, this year's budget deficit alone is larger than the **total** deficit of any Democrat; and altogether, Bush II will wind up adding more to the National Debt than all the Democrats put together — even if, as I confidently predict, he doesn't get a second term.

Why do I predict that? Because (a) he made the same mistake with Iraq as his father, i.e., invading while there was still plenty of time for it to blow up in his face; and (b) much as he'd like to hide the fact until after the election, people are already catching on that his economic so-called "recovery" — isn't. And no matter what they say about the beneficial effects of giving tax money back to a class that includes all the major campaign contributors, it isn't **going** to be until the federal government starts acting like money **means** something. And it's **still** the economy, stupid.

Anyway, it turns out I was wrong thinking rhetoric about Republicans being the fiscally responsible party was merely untrue. Seems it's the **exact opposite** of true. But as Goerring said, the Big Lie works.

Another Big Lie goes back to the days of Spiro Agnew and the Nattering Nabobs of Negativism, yet still has a great deal of currency. Of course, nobody with any brains believes in the Eastern Liberal Establishment Press (or as us hip, with-it 21st century guys call it, the Liberal Media). But even today, years after its original promulgator shuffled off this mortal coil, there are a lot of people who believe in it anyway.

Like the one above, I figured the truth was that there isn't really any overall media bias at all. The evidence cited by so-called "conservatives" promoting the Liberal Media myth seems very lightweight — not that I disbelieve research showing more street-level reporters are registered as Democrats than Republicans, I'm just dubious about the relevance of that statistic when it's the **owners** who set policy (and anyway, there's no connection between the Republican Party and conservatism). I'm especially dubious in a media environment in which Nexis lists 13,641 stories about Clinton's draft dodging, which some people may not like and which may have been done in slimy ways but was still as legal as my own, but only 49 about Bush's disgraceful military record, including the fact that he was AWOL from the Texas Air National Guard, a felony, for more than a year (a statistic I ran across recently and just had to come up with an excuse to squeeze in). The fact that some people take so-what? things like reporters' voter registration seriously was, as I saw it, merely a function of their observed intolerance for dissenting points of view — while they give lip service to the principle of free speech, they don't

appear to like it very much when free speech is exercised by anyone who disagrees with them.

Well, lo and behold, it appears another statistics gatherer has unearthed evidence that once again, the truth is not merely the falsity of the Big Lie, but more closely resembles its polar opposite. I'm not very fond of the title of the article ("Conservatives: The New Stalinists"), but at <http://slate.msn.com/id/2086691/> (again, I've put a clickable link at <http://www.uncadonald.com/sfpa.html>), a study is cited showing that while individual media outlets may exhibit either Democrat or Republican biases, those with the latter show much less deviance from strict orthodoxy.

Which, of course, doesn't prove more media outlets are "conservative" than "liberal", whatever those words mean nowadays. It merely indicates the "conservative" ones seem to be **more** "conservative" than the "liberal" ones are "liberal". And it's perfectly in keeping with what I noted a couple of paragraphs ago, that they tend not to like it when anybody strays from the Party Line — which ties right in with what I see as the reason behind the longevity of the Liberal Media myth itself.

If nothing else, this at least shows my observation a couple of mailings ago, that their intolerance of deviance from their brand of political correctitude makes them all sound alike, isn't just my imagination.

And let's not even mention the Big Lies that got us into those — those — well, in the interest of avoiding what has become a very familiar cliché, I don't want to use the "Q" word, so let's call them Tar Babies — in Afghanistan and Iraq.

## speaking of lies . . .

More Internet stuff: Starting with the very reasonable, perhaps even self-evident assumption that presidents, like other politicians, don't always (or often, for that matter) tell the truth, *The Washington Monthly* did a piece called "The Mendacity Index", which compares and contrasts known lies told by the last four to hold the office, including the incumbent. You can find it at <http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2003/0309.mendacity-index.html> or, as before, use the link I've placed at <http://www.uncadonald.com/sfpa.html>.

The basic idea was to poll journalists on the Top Six untruths uttered by Reagan, Bush I, Clinton and Bush II. One of the things I found interesting was what managed to get into the Top Six — especially in the case of Clinton, who, according to the Liberal Media, is the biggest liar to hold the office in Living Memory. To come up with a mere six, they had to scrape the bottom of the barrel with minutiae like "Since I was a little boy, I've heard about the Iowa caucuses" (he was in his mid-20s when the Iowa caucuses began) and "I have vivid and painful memories of black churches being burned in my own state when I was a child" (there's no evidence that anybody ever set fire to a black church in Arkansas). Does anybody even **remember** those particular lies, much less care about them?

Rating each lie on a scale of 1-5, then averaging all

the judges' judgments on all the lies, Clinton, with a score of 3.1, came out least mendacious and Bush II, with 3.6, most. No surprises there. I was, tho, kind of surprised Bush I (3.2) came out less mendacious than Reagan (3.3) — I mean, "Read my lips" and "I was out of the loop", if you ask me, are serious biggies. The latter, in fact, was said under oath, which, as any Democrat basher will tell you, can intensify even a piddly little thing like "I did not have sex with that woman" beyond — well, beyond **credibility**. But by and large, I didn't see very much in the scores to argue with.

I thought it was interesting, tho, to look at the sort of lies that constitute each president's personal style of bullshit. Reagan's Top Six lies, which included a goofy concept about trees causing more pollution than automobiles and an idiotic claim that he'd been an army photographer during World War II, taking pictures of Nazi death camps (in reality, he spent his army years in Hollywood, making training films) sound to me less like a willful attempt to deceive than not-yet-diagnosed Alzheimer's. I mean, what non-senile person would even **imagine** he could get away with dumb whoppers like that?

Just off the top of my head, I can think of one on his part that was actually pretty egregious — his claim of justification for bombing residential neighborhoods in Tripoli, on grounds of convincing evidence (which he didn't show us) that the government afflicting those residents was also sponsoring terrorism. Later, he admitted his "convincing evidence" consisted of knowing in his heart that it was true. He never did explain why his "evidence" made it okay to bomb the ordinary people who suffered under that government on a daily basis, not just as sporadic terrorist victims. But for some reason, they passed over that one in favor of stuff that had nothing going for it but ludicrousness.

For Clinton, they had a couple about things that matter (one on sending troops to Bosnia and one on not sending them to Rwanda), but they were toward the lightweight end of those issues (they weren't going to stay in Bosnia, whereas in fact they're still there; and he didn't realize how serious things were in Rwanda, whereas in reality he had no excuse for not knowing, and anyway, seriousness is never a factor in sending troops, just whether or not it serves the troop sender's interests). There was one that only a moral zealot or a Republican would care about, and the rest sounded like his main motive to lie was not wanting to take the trouble of listening to the speech writers' words as they came out his stupid-ass mouth.

The two Bushes tended to lie in an attempt to make things happen like they wanted. Clarence Thomas's resumé, Saddam Hussein's WMDs, that sort of stuff.

If we've got to have liars in the White House, and I believe we do (how could anyone who told the truth even get nominated?), I'd prefer buffoons like Reagan and Clinton to manipulators like Bush and Bush.

Unless, of course, the worst of Clinton's and Reagan's lies simply haven't been discovered yet.

# toonopedia™

I've slowed down some since last mailing, due to a plethora of other stuff that needed to be done. Stuff like the longest single comic book story I've written to date, major upgrades to the household computers, CopperCon, and things like that. (What's keeping me from writing them at the moment is this zine.)

Still, I managed to get articles written on Alpha Flight; Canyon Kiddies; Dastardly & Muttley; Destroyer Duck; Eclipso; Firestorm; Heathcliff; Henery Hawk; Kona, Monarch of Monster Isle; The Little People; Marvel Boy; Penelope Pitstop; Rich Uncle Pennybags; Sally the Sleuth; The Star Spangled Kid & Stripesy; The Teenie Weenies; and Wacky Races. New total: 676.

Busy-ness is why I didn't add any Animaniacs articles on Sept. 13, the show's tenth anniversary (a decade being the current cut-off point for inclusion). I'd rather take the time to do them up right, so I'll try to get two or three written during October.

There are a few obscurus in this lot, including one that's both obscure and famous at the same time. Rich Uncle Pennybags is the guy that takes walks on the Boardwalk, rides the Reading and keeps getting thrown into and sprung out of jail. But while practically everybody has seen him doing all that and more on Chance and Community Chest cards, relatively few have ever actually heard his name.

The obscurest of the lot, Sally the Sleuth, has a distinction that guaranteed her inclusion sooner or later. She appeared as a comics feature in the pulp magazine *Spicy Detective Stories*, and is the first American comics character, of a long line that includes Little Annie Fannie, the original Sally Forth and other famous toons, to make a schtick of getting her clothing torn off. What an innovator, eh?

Canyon Kiddies is obscure now, but it's a long-running, famous-at-the-time work by a major cartoonist. Kona is obscure to most people, but a cult classic among comic book fans of a certain age. The Little People is obscure, but high-quality, and I needed something I could bat out quickly and easily because I was in a busy period and jonesing to get more articles up.

Like last mailing, I've done fewer Hanna-Barbera articles than I probably should, considering I'm hoping to have a book on them completed in time to be used as gifts for next year's Xmas.

And I've been thinking — given there's no way on God's Green Earth I or anyone else can cover **everything** the studio has ever done, just what **do** I have to cover to make a respectable book? Clearly, the early stuff, which fans of the studio consider "classic", has to be in. But I don't happen to be one of them (born just a few years too soon), so I don't instinctively know where the cut-off is.

I should have no trouble covering the 1950s, '60s and early '70s. But — *The Amazing Chan & the Chan Clan* came out in 1972, and surely, nobody considers **that** one a classic! Does the fact that it was licensed mean I can get away with skipping it, while still extending the Classic Period into the '80s? And irrespec-

tive of what is or is not part of the Classic Period, which more recent things "have" to be included?

Are there any Hanna-Barbera fans out there who have opinions on this?

(And by the way, I do plan on including *Amazing Chan* sooner or later. I just don't feel like there's a real hurry about it.)

Traffic continues to rise steadily (averaging a little over 15,000 page views per day now, not counting a mysterious spike in June), but there's still no income to speak of. There are begging bowls for both Amazon and PayPal, as well as links to affiliate merchandise, on every page, but those aren't bringing in a whole lot. There's currently no other advertising on the site, tho that may change by the time you read this.

Google now has an advertising brokering service, where they serve text ads chosen by their own key words. Google has always done pretty well by me (placing dozens of my pages in the #1 spot, and perhaps a majority at least on the first page), so I signed up. Turned out the first two formats they offered didn't work very well with what I'm trying to do, but they've recently added two more. One of them looks like it might work without defacing the site, so I plan to try it — soon as I can spare a day to work on getting their codes on all my pages. (This isn't as bad as it sounds — it wouldn't be a very long work day, just one where I wouldn't be able to schedule anything else major; and it won't involve my verbal track very much, so I can mostly listen to stories while doing it.)

This program gets high marks at Webmasterworld (which I ought to drop by more often than I do). One of the things making me optimistic about it is the fact that they seem to have a fairly meaningful screening process to eliminate sites full of junk, which is good from the point of view of selling the ads. And a content-heavy site like mine never has any trouble getting through screening processes like that.

So — as is so often the case, We Shall See . . .

One thing about this key word driven ad service, tho — my first test of the code was to put it on a few pages at my personal site, unacadonald.com. One of those pages is about Bugs Bunny, and the ads that came up were mostly for exterminators. I think there may still be a few of that key word in the system.

Most popular article for August: *American Splendor*. Until the movie came out, I'd been #1 in a Google search on that title.

The location is still <http://www.toonopedia.com>.

## computer upgrades

GiGi's machine has been giving her a lot of trouble lately, and we decided what she needed was a new hard drive, with a completely fresh installation of Windows. Besides, she wanted more storage space (amazing how small 13.6 gigabytes can become). And, I needed more RAM (64 megabytes just won't cut it anymore, tho that many kilobytes used to seem so adequate). Karen was having trouble getting and staying on the Internet. And I was disgruntled by the

fact that I couldn't use an old piece of software that I like on my more up-to-date operating system. (One of the big reasons I originally went for Windows over Mac was exactly that sort of upward compatibility — I don't see why I should be forced to upgrade my application software when I upgrade my operating system.) Also, my CD writer had suddenly started frying a lot of disks, and there were a few other little doodads we wanted to hook up.

So we bought a new hard drive for GiGi and some memory for me. We repaired Karen's network connection. And we got one of those fancy switches, so I can easily move my monitor, mouse and keyboard between my machine and a re-commissioned obsolete one where I can still run the software I like. (The fact that this would result in four computers in regular use, when there are only three people living in the house, merely goes to show something or other.) And a new CD burner, new scanner, and more.

We paid for this with the money from that extra-long story (which also bought us a new refrigerator, a freezer, a few car repairs and other stuff — we made good use of our temporary affluence). But of course, there is more than one cost to this sort of thing — we also had to pay in time and frustration installing it all.

I won't go into details, but it took weeks, and we needed outside help. And it still isn't over — I'm sure there won't be any real problem getting my new scanner running, but I'm putting off even attempting it until other things, for example this zine, are out of the way. And my much-desired switching mechanism isn't doing me any good, because the obsolete computer seems to have lost the ability to support a CD-ROM, and therefore I can't install the software I want.

Another reason to put off installing the scanner is it'll mean re-opening the Ancestor Photo Project, which is why I got the 600-dpi scanner I'm using now, as well as my original CD burner, in the first place. In the 5+ years since closing it, my siblings and I still haven't managed to get together and distribute the things. Since the pictures all still here, I can't in good conscience pass up the opportunity to use the more advanced technology to make even better scans for all our descendants. Back then, I was marveling at the fact that some of the photos took up as much as 80 megabytes. Now, tho, I'll be able to scan them so fine, there are a few that will take up an entire CD-ROM each. And that's very good, I'm sure, but it's also going to be very time-consuming.

## **Coppercon**

Another of those came and went, just like it always does this time of year. This one was kind of special because Karen's on-line boyfriend, Bill Putt (whom she met in person at a couple of cons she went to on her own), came in for it. Seems like a nice enough guy (and he, by the way, was the outside help that got us past a lot of our upgrade problems — my advice to parents is to encourage your daughters to date computer nerds), but the idea that my youngest child is carrying on

romantically with somebody thousands of miles away — or carrying on romantically at all, for that matter — is a little disconcerting (even if her only slightly older sister does already have a kid of her own).

More evidence of Karen growing up: There was a cute junk jewelry item on sale in the huckster room, magnetically-attached earrings that flash different-colored lights. It wasn't long before GiGi was wearing them in her nostrils and lips. She'd have put them in her cheeks, but the magnets won't work through quite that much flesh.

Making the party rounds Saturday night, I ran into Karen and Bill at one point, and Karen was wearing those earrings on the two parts of her dress that stick out farthest in front. Cute, but I'd like it better if I saw somebody else's daughter wearing them that way.

I happened to be talking just then with a notorious dirty old man, a guy about my age who is well known for pawing any teenage chick who will sit still for it. Characteristically, he reached over and started fingering Karen's non-ear-bound earrings. The words **D'ya mind?** were out of my mouth before I even realized I was going to say them, loud enough to attract a fair amount of attention. Very amusing, I'm told, tho I have to admit it was less so to me than to others.

It has correctly been pointed out to me that it is Karen's prerogative to choose whether or not to take offense. I reply that I wasn't taking offense on her behalf, but my own. If you ask me, doing that while her father was standing right in front of him was just plain inconsiderate.

## **still more spam**

I sometimes have to laugh at the stupidity of spammers. I mean, I realize its profit doesn't come from a decent return on each piece sent out, but from the extremely low cost per piece — but geez, there must surely be better return on spam that halfway looks like real e-mail, than spam that shouts **THIS IS SPAM** right in the header.

Never having spammed, I don't know precisely how spamming software works. But I gather (from observation) there is something about it (or at least, the cheap versions of it that would be available from, say, a spammer) that, if the sender doesn't take the trouble to counteract it (or isn't bright enough to figure out how), will generate random characters in the header. These random characters have become a sort of signature indicator of the stuff — if you see them in your inbox, you don't need to look at anything else before deleting, right?

Here's a recent example from my own "Deleted Items" box, which currently exists only because I haven't bothered to empty the box lately.

**Do You Want a BIGGER P@\*is b df aa z owbpghxj ngufzqn**

Kinda sad, isn't it? It makes me think of a dinky little tin robot suddenly popping up to deliver an earnest message, before lapsing into incoherence as its ultra-cheap battery runs down. The last "word" would

be accompanied by a sound effect, and delivered with the robot's head wobbling on the end of a sprung spring. Fade to inaudibility . . .

## **ned brooks:**

I don't see much "nasty unsupported political mudslinging" in SFPA either, but like I said in my opening section, people of a certain point of view have very low tolerance for any disagreement at all. When I've been accused of that, it's almost invariably in response to my pointing out that such people aren't really the conservatives they fancy themselves, but merely rabid Republicans. They can't make a rational response to that (since there isn't any), so they dream up excuses to dismiss the person saying it altogether. I suppose one could accuse such people of nasty unsupported political mudslinging, but why bother? By the way they accuse others, they've made it very clear what they are.

I agree about manual back-ups to electric car window cranks, and would add that the same applies to electric starters. Several's the time I've wished modern cars came with hand cranks as back-ups.

A few months ago, I read an analysis of the Jayson Blair case that maintained he was a victim of Affirmative Action. His career advancement was accelerated by the fact that he's black, so he made it to *The New York Times* before he was ready for it. If, like others, he'd made his youthful errors at less high-profile papers and learned from experience before arriving at the *Times*, he might (tho we may never know) have been a decent reporter. But because his normal learning experiences were done in front of a national audience, his career is in ruins, perhaps permanently. Too bad, but that's what happens when social disadvantage becomes as big a factor in hiring decisions as ability.

Re:yrctme: Is this "frown" business a threat I should take seriously? Sounds like a joke, but with wingnuts, you can never be completely sure.

## **gary brown:**

Downloading your photos into your computer is not only easier, cheaper and cooler than taking them to Photo-Mat or something similar. It's also a lot safer. I trust you've read the first book Hannibal Lecter appears in, *Red Dragon*, the one that came out before *The Silence of the Lambs*.

I had alternator problems a couple of years ago. I found alternators aren't that hard to install, and got by for just the cost of the part (about \$150) and an hour or two of work that didn't produce too awfully much cursing. As a stopgap, to keep the car usable until the work could be done, I got a cheap battery charger, and just plugged into that when the car wasn't being used. Not something I'd want to do for very long, but it got us through a period that would otherwise have been rather difficult.

Good seeing you at San Diego too. I'm still a little numb from the revelation that it was the first time

we'd laid eyes on each other since the early 1970s. Along the same lines, I've been trying to think of any time I laid eyes on a SFPAn since seeing former member Faruk von Turk in 1990, when I was in New Orleans for my cousin's funeral, and am coming up blank. Before that, it would be the 1988 WorldCon (the most recent one I've been to). I did see Mike Weber's brother when he was guest of honor at LepreCon a couple of years ago, but the SFPA connection wasn't, like, a prominent part of the experience. Guess I'm just out of the loop.

Yeah, you can put the fact that I've written for *Walt Disney's Comics & Stories* in my obituary, all right. In fact, carve it on my tombstone. If you ask me, it's America's all-time greatest anthology comic book, and I was saying that years before I ever dreamed of seeing my own work in it. But that Horace Horsecollar story in #635 wasn't my first credit there. When Gladstone was publishing it, I did rhyming English dialog for six Dutch Bucky Bug stories.

## **roddy cleary:**

I don't think there's much argument that Saddam Hussein was a monster. But that's an interesting choice of words in your comment to Ned, as "monsters" are precisely what Founding Father John Adams said the United States does **not** properly cross oceans to destroy. And when you consider the results we've already seen from this alleged attempt to bring down a monster (I say "alleged" because it may be the only excuse Bush and his cronies put forth that's still standing, but still bears no more relation to their real motives than do any of the others) — results that include renewed persecution of Iraq's Assyrian Christian minority (persecution which had been suppressed under the secular Saddam Hussein regime), restrictions on Iraqi freedom of speech and gun ownership that go far beyond even those imposed by the monster, rampant crime and chaos, and approximately 37,000 dead civilians (which, in a country of 24 million, ensures that practically everybody left standing is mourning at least a few acquaintances if not family members) — I don't think there's any doubt as to whether or not that war was the "right" thing.

From the level of terrorism to the price of gasoline, can anybody cite **even one** thing that got better because of the war?

And okay, your opposition to the war is noted. I'm ranting at you because you allowed even a possibility that it might somehow have been the "right" thing. It is **never** the right thing to make life even worse for people just because you don't like the creep who oppresses them.

Re:yrctme: Now that you mention it, I **suppose** it's **just barely possible** I **might** have gone a **teeny bit** overboard in my comment to you.

That said, there **was** a certain usual-suspectiness discernable in your comments on the **minor** revamp of the Captain America origin story.

I say "minor" because as I hear it (I haven't read it

and probably won't), it does not contradict any of the known "facts", but merely adds previously-unknown ones. It does not reduce either the stature or the valor of the Captain America we've known all these years. It does not affect the ongoing Captain America series in any major, or even particularly noticeable, way.

What it **does** do is piss off jingoistic right-wingers, who claim it turns everything upside-down and de-means the character they've admired all these years, when in reality, it merely gives a black man a legitimate claim on the "Captain America" title (and it's not like Steve Rogers is the only guy who ever had one in the past), and impugns the integrity of certain elements within the U.S. military in a few small but (considering history) quite plausible ways.

These "usual suspects" (who tend also to be the homophobic right-wingers who got outraged over the silly Rawhide Kid mini-series that came out earlier this year, which is why I call them "usual suspects" — they're **always** getting upset over things that upset right-wingers, and always have what seem on the face of it to be very good reasons to be upset, which simply don't hold up to analysis) have a tendency to compare this minor revamp to DC having turned the 1960s Green Lantern into a homicidal maniac, which is not even **remotely** comparable since that one involves **actual** invidious revision of the character whereas the Captain America business didn't affect the character himself at all. And since you, too, make that comparison, if I should **happen** to have **mistakenly** lumped you in with them, well, **excuuuuuse me!**

Now — if my characterization of you in that regard was unfair, I humbly submit it is equally unfair of you (in your comment to Gary Brown) to characterize me as an anti-Republican bigot. Perhaps even more so, as you're apparently trying to pass yourself off as some kind of a non-bigot. (Cheap shot. So sue me.) Tho (having voted for the jerk in 1968) I felt personally betrayed by Nixon and the Republican party, the fact is, that feeling of betrayal was mainly attributable to youthful naivete (I was 21 in '68). I now expect **all** politicians to act like weasels, and of course, they all do. If, during the 1990s, it sounded a little like I favored Democrats, that was only in comparison to the **rabid** Clinton bashers found in certain other areas of SFPA and (of course) in the Liberal Media.

Since each of us has treated the other with gross unfairness, shall we call it even?

### **gary robe:**

I'm with you on the anti-educational practices of public schools (as expressed in your review of the current Harry Potter book, and I **do** hope the kids are able to see the parallels between Dolores Umbridge and many of their own teachers). I realize it's generally not a good idea to attribute anything to malice that can be explained by incompetence, but this business seems too rampant, too consistent and too systematic to be the latter. It makes sense, too, that as the noose tightens on America's free speech, free association,

privacy, etc., the people who run the school system (i.e., the government, and increasingly, government at the federal level — am I the only one who notices the correlation between more tax money for schools and declining quality?), would want fewer critical thinkers and more unquestioningly placid citizens.

In particular, Umbridge reminded me of an administrator in my kids' high school, who is now principal. (Last I heard, at least — I no longer follow her career now that my children are safely out of her clutches.) I wrote several pages about that horrible woman in SFPA a few years ago. If I were trying to keep kids from learning and turn them into frustrated, anti-social tinderboxes, I'd run schools exactly the way she does.

### **shella strickland:**

I've got a kid with a job and no responsibilities to absorb the income from it, so of course there's a copy of the new Harry Potter book in the house. I read it soon as Karen finished, and I gotta say, I'm a big admirer of Rowling's ability to make me keep turning pages. I also like the fact that she includes solid intellectual content for young readers to grow on, even while pandering to their sense of outrage at the terrible injustices of the school system and thrilling them with exciting action scenes. Good job all around!

I can certainly see her winding it up after a couple more books, and will be very disappointed if she gives in to demand and doesn't let the overall story come to its natural conclusion. It's not just wanting a sense of closure (a story has a beginning, middle and end, and suffers badly if any one of those is missing). I also want to see what she does next.

I have no idea why rr.com decided toonopedia.com was a source of spam, nor do I care. I did find a successful strategy for correcting the situation more quickly than would be likely the approved way, i.e., jumping through their hoops, and am pretty pleased about that. I've passed that letter on (and even posted it at <http://www.uncadonald.com/spam-letter.html>), and I'm told a couple of other people have used it successfully as well. That's pretty pleasing to me too.

I think it was Ed Cox who used to call this stuff "embarrassing blank space". Personally, I'm not the least bit embarrassed by it. I had over 12 pages before formatting, so minac is made.