

The Sphere

Vol. 207 no. 1, published for the 236th SFPA Mailing by Don Markstein, P.O. Box 55148, Phoenix, AZ 85078, (602)485-7860, ddmarkstein@cox.net, don@toonopedia.com, <http://www.toonopedia.com>, <http://www.uncadonald.com>.
Headlines: Tiffany.

"Trying to eliminate Saddam ... would have incurred incalculable human and political costs. Apprehending him was probably impossible. ... We would have been forced to occupy Baghdad and, in effect, rule Iraq. ... [T]here was no viable "exit strategy" we could see, violating another of our principles. Furthermore, we had been self-consciously trying to set a pattern for handling aggression in the post-Cold War world. Going in and occupying Iraq, thus unilaterally exceeding the United Nations' mandate, would have destroyed the precedent of international response to aggression that we hoped to establish. Had we gone the invasion route, the United States could conceivably still be an occupying power in a bitterly hostile land."

- George Bush, explaining why he didn't continue his Iraq war as far as certain others wanted him to
A World Transformed (1998)

Oh, if only the author had, like me, succeeded in instilling in his children a love of reading books!

Phoney Letters to the Editor and the Phoney Phoneys Who Sign Them

Unlike some who have commented on the identical letters that turned up in diverse newspapers in October, I'm not morally outraged. If that's the way those soldiers feel, it's okay with me if they signed their names to cleverly disguised form letters. (Of course, that's **if** that's the way they feel, and in the case of those who didn't even know their names had been signed, I kinda have a few niggling doubts.)

Be that as it may, I stand in awe of the Brain that hatched this brilliant scheme. Or was it Pinky? I mean, geez, even a trekkie knows you get less embarrassing results if you tell them to write in their own words.

(I am indebted to Joshua Micah Marshall (talkingpointsmemo.com), whose phrase I stole for the heading, without so much as a by-your-leave.)

This Sucks!

Mother Theresa, who has been dead - what, six years? - she's just been declared "Blessed", the second of three steps on the road to sainthood.

Meanwhile, **my ancestor**, Fr. Francis Marie Paul Libermann (a great-uncle six generations back), still languishes at "Venerable", where he's been practically since the day he died, in 1852.

What're they, prejudiced against Jews or something?

L'Affaire Plame

First, let's dispose of the ridiculous notion that it was no big deal to blab Valerie Plame's Secret Identity because she was only a CIA "analyst", not an "operative". (a) The best source we have on that is the same self-serving, intensely partisan asshole who did it in the first place, whereas more

reliable sources (you'll find a good summary, which should piss off dogmatists of all stripes, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/10/11/opinion/11KRIS.html> or, as usual, I've placed a clickable link at <http://www.uncadonald.com/sfpa.html>) say otherwise and (b) isn't it a felony to reveal **any** covert CIA employee's name?

Second, let's dispose of the even more ridiculous notion that what was revealed was merely common knowledge. If it was common knowledge, how come it was treated as news, and how come it took a high-level administration leak to get it there?

Third, let's dispose of the most ridiculous notion of all, that it's under control because the Justice Department is investigating the case. The **Bush** Justice Department? Puh-leeze. The first thing Bush did was issue a stern warning to his employees about what evidence "not" to destroy.

That said, I applaud the current administration for its efforts to reduce the effectiveness of the CIA. It's true, I've been very nearly 100% critical of it (like most administrations) in the past, but credit where due. If this had been done in time to prevent the 1951 CIA coup in Iran that ousted the democratically elected Mohammad Mossadegh in favor of the brutal, universally hated Shah Reza Pahlavi, the inevitable (tho because of U.S. support, long in coming) backlash wouldn't have subjected that country to decades of rule by Ayatollahs and wouldn't have subjected this one to decades of abuse, both verbal and physical, from same.

We would also have been spared the CIA's MK-Ultra program, which even now, a half-century later, stands as the best (in fact, only) evidence that LSD is an evil drug. And we would have been spared no end of other invidious results of CIA tampering with the world.

If it had been done as recently as the 1980s, Osama bin Laden would have had nobody to teach him all those dandy terrorist techniques. In fact, there's a good chance he wouldn't have been motivated to use them.

The **entire world** would be a better place to live if the CIA had been hobbled from the beginning, but it's mainly the United States of America that the CIA repeatedly shoots in the foot. This may be too little, too late, but if the outing of Valerie Plame is the harbinger of a trend, it will certainly be a healthy one.

I shouldn't ignore beneficial results of the CIA's existence, even tho I can't think of any offhand (unless you count its efforts to head off the lies that got us into war in Iraq, and it didn't do a very good job of that). But all told, the agency is responsible for a great deal more harm than good. **Bravo!** to the Bush administration for this small but significant attempt to cripple what is perhaps the world's most destructive organization.

The fact that what they did is a felony only makes them more heroic, for risking so much to save us.

Of course, this makes Valerie Plame a sitting duck for anyone who dislikes the CIA, and if you count non-Americans who don't hold responsible positions in allied governments, that includes a large majority of those living on Earth. And that's unfortunate. Really. But since she obviously won't be doing any more operating for them,

or even analysing, I'm sure those folks will be glad to let bygones be bygones. Besides, when one works for the CIA, or any other criminal organization, one must know from the outset the possibility of being - what is the expression? - "terminated with prejudice" - is just part of the job.

Anyway, the beneficial effect of rendering every CIA front she ever worked with, and every agent she can be found to have had contact with, impotent, far outweighs inconveniences to an individual. Isn't it a CIA maxim the end justifies the means? They certainly **behave** as if they believe that.

And the "chilling effect" this must have on CIA recruitment is all to the good. Now that there's precedent for the White House deliberately blowing the cover of those who do its dirty work, perhaps less dirty work will be done.

I understand there are several Americans, some of whom may even be members of SFPA, who disagree with my assessment of the CIA. Naturally, the **sincere, consistent, non-hypocritical** ones will avoid the lame rationalizations we so frequently hear from Orthodox Republicanists (some of which are dealt with above), and view Plame's outing with extreme opprobrium. Those that are not sincere, consistent and non-hypocritical will, of course, express a different point of view, or ignore the issue.

But that's okay, because free speech applies to wrong-headed jerks just as it applies to reasonable people like me. I look forward to honest debate with those sincere, consistent, non-hypocritical CIA boosters, and to a good laugh at the expense of the others.

Peas in a Pod

Michael Moore and Rush Limbaugh bear many more resemblances to each other than the obvious but inconsequential fact that both are fat and ugly.

Both are clever and often entertaining, but more often irritating.

Both are unwavering ideologues - in fact, **stereotypes**, perhaps even **parodies** of unwavering ideologues.

Both make many, many factual errors, which they justify by asserting they are entertainers and not journalists.

Both make occasional statements I agree with, but a lot more statements I find abhorrent.

Moore hasn't been publicly revealed as a hypocrite yet, but maybe he is anyway - give him time. I'm perfectly willing to believe he has something like Limbaugh's drug addiction hanging in his closet, whether it eventually comes out or not.

Then there's that other news Limbaugh was making at the same time, about the quarterback who supposedly wasn't any good, and was promoted by the Liberal Media for reasons having to do with political correctness.

I'm not a sports fan and don't know or care whether or not that quarterback, whatever his name might be, is any good. (Quarterback - that's football, right?) I do know opinions about him fall within the category of free speech, which, having had it granted to him by God like everybody else (and more, the U.S. Constitution having "guaranteed", for whatever the U.S. Constitution is worth, not to interfere with it), Limbaugh is perfectly entitled to exercise.

Discounting the slight possibility his resignation was - ha! - voluntary, it was just plain **wrong** to force him out of his commentator's position for speaking his mind. Moreover, it was **stupid** - stupid first because those who put Limbaugh in a position like that have no business being

shocked when he says things that embarrass them, and stupid second because when you make a big deal over that sort of thing, all you do is draw attention to it.

Maybe the guy is a great quarterback, in which case anything said by an obvious ideologue like Rush Limbaugh isn't going to hurt him, and maybe he's not, in which case what Limbaugh said needed saying. Now, tho, he may never get past this incident. For the rest of his career, there are likely to be questions about the sincerity of any comment about his ability. Is it by a Limbaugher trying to justify his hero's pronouncement, a "liberal" commenting as much on Limbaugh as on the athlete, or is it possible it might be the speaker's actual opinion?

Like I said - just plain **wrong**. Rush Limbaugh runs off at the mouth. We know that. Why get upset over it?

Final note: I saw an article, can't remember where, that says yes, the guy is only a so-so quarterback, yes, the media make more over him than he's actually worth, but no, it has nothing to do with political correctness. It just happens more people watch football games with black quarterbacks, for some reason, and therefore making a star of him leads to more advertising revenue. I have no idea if that's true, but if so, it's an interesting point.

Weblogs

One of the weblogs I read regularly is talkingpointsmem o.com, by Joshua Micah Marshall. He characterizes himself as a liberal (as opposed to being called one by Orthodox Republicanists, who use the word as a smear meaning "not right-wing enough") but he has a decent enough head on his shoulders to have earned the respect of many real conservatives. (Don't take this as indicative of my political leanings. I also read Pat Buchanan's on-line column. Reading stuff I disagree with keeps me on my toes.)

On October 26, Marshall proposed an unusual move. He wanted, he said, to go to New Hampshire a week or so before the primary, and spend his days tooling around the state, reporting on it for his blog. But he wanted to do it independently, and that meant not having his syndicate (he makes his living as a columnist) or any magazine he may work for pay for it. So he asked readers to donate to a special fund to pay his expenses.

24 hours later, he started to do a little "thermometer" graph, putting the amount he'd calculated would be needed at the top, then checked the fund to see how high to place the red bar. And he'd **already** taken in about twice his projected need!

Now, this may say something about the esteem in which his readers hold him. But it also says a **lot** about the future of Web journalism - which, in case you haven't noticed, is about as free as journalism has been since pamphleteering was effective, not just from government interference but also from corporate dictation. If a single individual, representing a single point of view, can make a living reporting things as he and he alone sees them - and I'm not saying this is an example of it, but it's a start - we could, despite the efforts of powerful people the world over to manage the news, be entering a Golden Age of free speech!

What's more, I'm even looking forward to his blow-by-blow coverage.

And speaking of making the Web pay -

Toonopedia™

Last mailing, I mentioned a new ad program Google was running, which I planned to try out as soon as I had some free time to get it up. That finally happened in late September. After I got their codes on all the pages (on the bottoms, just to try it out), I went off and did something else. An hour later, I figured I'd see if it was as easy as they said to check the balance, so I followed the instructions, and they worked fine, and that's not all - I found I'd already made 76 cents.

Now, 76 cents an hour isn't exactly what you'd call a living wage, but if it comes in that way 24/7, i.e., the Web's hours of operation, it adds up to more than \$500 a month. And while that's not a living wage either, it ain't hay! I figured it wouldn't remain at that level, and I was right - the actual hourly average, it turned out, was a little over half a buck. (Maybe the fact that the Western Hemisphere's night hours are really, really slow had something to do with that.) A few days later, I expressed confidence by moving the ads to the tops of the pages. (This doesn't seem to have made much difference in the click-through rate, tho, so I may move them back, especially if I find a banner program that pays decently, and put it on top.)

Since opening the site, in February, 2001, the only promotion I've done was to alert the search engines **one time**, mention it on message boards, and do a little "hand-selling", i.e., talk it up at parties, conventions, comic book signings and suchlike. The reason was, why take the trouble, when it brought in the same amount of money, i.e., none, no matter how many people read it? Especially when I've had several episodes of exceeding my monthly data transfer allowance. The income-less state remained, pretty much, with or without affiliate programs, ad banners or even a begging bowl (which until now was the most lucrative thing I'd done, tho it barely pays out-of-pocket expenses). Still, I saw traffic rise steadily, just through word of mouth, from about 3,000 page views a day to more than 15,000. I expected October to hit a daily average of 16,000.

But now that there's money in it - Time to promote the Toonopedia™!

Next time I was able to spare the time (late October), I spent an entire day applying to join Webrings. I'd been advised early on that they were even better promotion than search engines. I doubted that would work quite so well in my case, because I do **really well** in search engines - dozens of my articles are #1 on Google for their categories, and hundreds are at least on the front page. (The secret of search engine success? Content - piles and piles of content. There's no substitute.) But by the time I'd gotten a dozen or so running, I was noticing a marked upswing in traffic - and more important, revenue. Not enough to be completely unambiguous at first (it coincided with an endorsement in Earthlink's on-line magazine, so it was hard to be sure where the traffic came from), but it soon became clear. Instead of 16,000 page views per day in October, I got 17,000 - which made it the first month to go over half a million altogether.

I've got more rings to apply to, and when I finish that, I'll start applying for awards and get a message board going. I submitted the URL to Bored.com, which I understand is pretty good for steady traffic. Anybody have other ideas?

I did take advantage of a couple of promotions that one

can't really instigate - Yahoo gave me a very nice write-up at <http://ask.yahoo.com/ask/20031111.html> (clickable link at <http://www.uncadonald.com/sfpa.html>), and that brought in a few thousand page views. And I was interviewed on "Ozarks at Large", a local show on KUAF, NPR's Fayetteville, AK affiliate, about the 48th anniversary of the King Features strip *Ozark Ike*.

Anyway, the Toonopedia™ took in more than \$100 in September and more than \$400 in October (the first full month), so I'd have to say Google's ad program looks a lot like a success. It's fallen off some in November (the click-through rate has gone from 1% in October to 0.9% in November, and Webrings seem to produce an initial surge and then level off somewhat below the peak), but it still seems likely to take in \$350 or so from about 550,000 page views. It would be nice to see it hold steady at that rate, while I work on promotion and poke around for other possible income sources.

As the Internet slowly recovers from the Dot-Bomb of 2001, I'm hopeful this is only the beginning. This time, maybe it won't be mucked up by stupid venture capitalists with dollar signs dancing before their glazed eyes, creating an unsustainable financial bubble. Maybe the people who are serious about the Internet and build their presences there sensibly and with a certain amount of care (I name no names) will find it possible to be financially rewarded on a long-term basis.

New articles since the last SPPA: Abie the Agent, two "The Angel"s, Animaniacs, Birdman, Captain Flash, Casey Ruggles, Cool Cat, The Dodo & the Frog, Dr. Doom, Elmyra Duff, The Hawk & the Dove, Hector Heathcote, Herman & Katnip, Katie Ka-Boom, Little Joe, Luann, Man-Wolf, Moon Girl, Morbius the Living Vampire, Pinky & the Brain, Ricochet Rabbit, three "Starman"s, Tito & His Burrito, Toots & Casper, The Warner Brothers (and Sister), and The Watcher. New total: 705. Hawk & Dove was #700.

I said I'd try to get some *Animaniacs* articles done, now that it's past its 10th anniversary, and this list contains four. Plus, I did one on the *Tiny Toons* character Elmyra, because she did a season as co-star with *Animaniacs*' Pinky & the Brain. Naturally, one of the four was Katie Ka-Boom even tho hers was about as minor a segment as the show had, because I really relate to her parents. I e-mailed Rachel (now 21) to tell her the latest Toonopedia™ article was dedicated to her, which she declared "cute".

I'd been putting off Starman, the last member of The Justice Society of America I hadn't written up, because that's not one article, but three. It would've been four, in fact, but I can get away with skipping the current one for now, on grounds of not enough historical perspective. Similarly, I'd been wanting to write up The Angel, one of Marvel's more prominent 1940s characters, but couldn't do him without doing the current one (founding member of The X-Men) as well. Since one of my not-too-distant future goals is every character created by Lee and Kirby that eventually got his own series (hence, Watcher and Dr. Doom), I'm going to have to get all the original X-Men in anyway.

Cool Cat, a late Warner Bros. character, got in because it was his anniversary, and I needed the article up so I could link to it from "Today in Toons". (I suppose now I'll have to do his equally famous contemporary, Merlin the Magic Mouse.) Hector Heathcote, Tito & His Burrito and Herman & Katnip, same thing. I did Luann on Greg Evans's birthday.

Other than a couple of the anniversary guys, everything I

wrote up this time had a decent reason for being there, tho a few, notably Captain Flash and Moon Girl, are pretty obscure. (The former is credited by some misguided souls with having sparked the 1960s superhero revival, and the latter is EC's only superhero.) Not too self-indulgent, tho I have to admit, I did some of them mainly because they were quick and easy.

As always, the URL is <http://www.toonopedia.com>. See it before I load it up with ads and my burgeoning bandwidth crashes the Internet.

Ned Brooks:

Justin Winston's mother was a Rosicrucian, so I know at least a little more about them than I used to read in the ads in sci-fi digests (not being **anywhere near** as old as you, I didn't read them in pulps). One thing I know is they distribute an herbal product called dithany, which their adherents burn like incense to help them relax and open their minds to Rosicrucian teachings. Justin said he preferred to roll it up in a joint and smoke it.

Alan Hutchinson once did a 3-D SFPA cover by hand-drawing the red and blue lines, and hand-making glasses with cardboard and cellophane.

You'd vote for **any** of the Democrats over Bush? **Any?** Bush is pretty intolerable, to be sure (possibly the worst president in my lifetime so far, which says a **lot**), but I don't know that there isn't at least one Democrat that would be even worse. Wesley Clark vs. Bush, if you ask me, would be Tweedledum vs. Tweedle**really**dum, and a person with a similar attitude toward foreign policy, who actually has average or better intelligence, would be even more horrifying. And I just wish some enterprising reporter would ask Clark where the butchers of Waco (or should that be barbecuers?) got that U.S. Army hardware they used in defiance of the Posse Comitatus Act. (There's an interesting article on the subject at <http://www.insightmag.com/news/525789.html>, or as usual, find a clickable link at <http://www.uncadonald.com/sfpa.html>.)

Any Democrat **except** Clark, tho - okay, tho there isn't a one that would be more than the lesser of very great evils.

How many men are named Joe King? If you take my brothers-in-law as a representative sample, it looks like about one in five.

Gary Brown:

Bush etc. claiming what they **really** meant was Saddam Hussein had **programs** to develop weapons of mass destruction is one of those things I'd laugh at, except it's not funny. Sure, programs. Pretty advanced ones, apparently, since they were alleged to be only 45 minutes away from nukes in the air.

To the extent that we have *The Far Side* back (i.e., reruns), we **do** have *Calvin & Hobbes* back. It's in reruns too, and you can find a link on my "Toons Online" page at the Toonopedia™.

Ahem. Pre-emptive strikes at nations that pose no credible threat to us do **not** constitute isolationism, no matter **how** hard the chickenhawks ignore world opinion. Isolationism means staying out of other countries' affairs, not telling others to fuck off while you egregiously violate that principle. The isolationist point of view was well expressed by President Adams in 1821, when he said, "Wherever the standard of freedom and independence has been or shall be unfurled, there will be America's heart, her benedictions and prayers, but she goes not abroad in search of

monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator of her own." It's a good policy (as is minding your own business in most other areas of life), and if America had practiced it during the 20th century, our world today would have fewer vicious dictators alleged to practice democracy, and propped up because they're useful to Washington's machiavellian plans, who then "have" to be forcibly removed when the plans change. And there would be fewer well-trained terrorists, as the "freedom fighters" of the 1980s (no kidding, Reagan actually did call Osama bin Laden that) wouldn't have been taught by CIA experts.

It's not surprising the *Major Inapak*, *Space Ace* cover looks familiar to you. There was a warehouse find of that comic in the mid-1970s, so all of a sudden it became very common. Practically every comic book store has had it hanging on the wall at one time or another.

Yeah, we had to make an appointment with each other just to say hello at San Diego. What you forgot to mention was that we made it **weeks in advance!**

I'm glad you like the way I get into a story so fast. In most cases, I like that way of writing too. And you're **so** right that it's dictated by the necessity of getting the whole story into so few pages - if I'm not into the main part of it by page 3, I'll run out of space before the story's over. What they nowadays call the "decompression" method of comics writing (which I suspect is usually a form of apologism for the fact that most of today's comic book writers have no idea how to write small) is not practiced at Egmont.

Insider trading may have been what Martha Stewart was **originally** charged with. But they were unable to make a case for that, so what she's now charged with is **covering up** her alleged insider trading. "Covering it up", as I've heard it described in this case, sounds to me like exercising her First Amendment right to speak of her innocence, her Fourth Amendment right to keep prosecutors without warrants out of her papers and effects, and her Fifth Amendment right not to declare her own guilt. There is something distinctly Orwellian about criminal charges for allegedly covering up a supposed crime they can't even prove was committed in the first place. Let me modify my question of two mailings ago. What is she charged with, **that could possibly be against the law in a free society?**

And like I said back then, don't get me started on whether a free society would forbid people to sell their own property on the basis of their (always imperfect, I point out) personal knowledge. It's too close to the deadline.

Tom Feller:

What I can't believe is that you actually read the list of new Toonopedia™ articles, to the point where you noticed Pixie & Dixie on it. While it's true I run that list for my own benefit (for one thing, it's how I keep track of how many articles I've written, and if I ever made a counting error then all subsequent counts are wrong as well), but I'm not **completely** indifferent to whether or not anyone else reads it. Thanks!

Arthur Hlavaty:

I once let myself pass for gay. Twice, actually, if you count a kind of sideways reference to it when the U.S. government tried to enslave me at the height of the Vietnam War. The one I was thinking of, tho, happened in the 1980s, when I was working part-time at various typesetting shops around town. One was owned by a gay guy who had

lots of connections in his community. One day I was there alone, and somebody came in to talk about a big hunk of work for a newly formed gay rodeo association, mentioning he was very much interested in keeping all the wealth inside the community. I took down his info so the owner could get back to him, and didn't feel a need to burden him with the knowledge that I like innies, not outies.

Toni W. Reinhardt:

I thought of you this morning as I woke up. The radio was blaring in some Republican senator's voice, carrying on and on about how he and his party **couldn't wait** until a Democrat president started appointing judges, so they could get revenge for the way the Democrats are treating Bush's nominees. (I gotta admit, I can't wait until there's a president besides Bush either, but that's neither here nor there.) What a wonderfully silly way to start the day! I'll bet the Democrats couldn't wait for that exact same form of revenge back when Clinton used to appoint judges. Don't know why it made me think of you, tho, unless it was the extreme, blind partisanship, carried to the point of laughability, accompanied by the speaker's utter obliviousness of the fact that it precisely mirrors the other side.

Lots of good howlers in this one, Toni. First to catch my eye was (naturally enough) the one you put a big box around, about how reasonable it was to believe Saddam Hussein had those elusive Weapons of Mass Destruction, starting with your "Fact" #1 - that he was **acting** like he had them. **Of course** he was acting like he had them! He was probably the most vulnerable dictator in the world, and no-doubt saw making his enemies think he could nuke them as his best hope of survival. You call it perfectly reasonable to assume he actually did have them, but you'd have to **really want** to believe, to let him gull you into thinking his weapons capability had survived 12 years of sanctions, no matter **how** many pre-1991 defectors, eager to please U.S. warmongers, claimed he used to work on them in the distant past. (Besides, when did you start believing what Saddam Hussein says?)

And if you believe the U.S. went in there to liberate the people from a dictator - well, we already know you're pretty gullible, but that's above and beyond. By the time Bush delivered his ultimatum, the carpetbaggers weren't even trying to hide the fact that they were queuing up and licking their chops, knives and forks in hand.

As for even a bare possibility of making the world safer from terrorists - what world would that be? The fuzzy pink one inside the heads of Republican dupes? Out here in reality, which even you must catch at least an occasional glimpse of, making fresh widows and orphans in areas where there are already a lot of people inclining in that direction makes the world **less** safe from terrorists. Last month, when they were bulldozing innocent farmers' orchards because resistance fighters (which they call "terrorists") were allegedly in the area, didn't you hear the mutters of "ten dead Americans for every tree"? Don't you hear similar mutters every time they kill a 12-year-old up on the roof to adjust a TV antenna? If not, Rupert Murdoch must be your only source of news. Even if 99% of it is just blowing off a little petulant steam (a generous estimate, given that even towelheads love their children, and how many have nothing left to live for after something like that happens), that's an awful lot of terrorist recruits.

But the best howler in the issue is your assertion that there's no reason anyone should be worried about criti-

cizing the administration on a T-shirt. Guess you haven't heard about all the folks being hauled in by the FBI for "questioning" when they do things like that. I have, but then, I pay attention to news from a greater variety of points of view than you seem to.

And the best thing in that paragraph is "It's not like we're living in the Clinton era, and ..." [continuing at some length about FBI info and IRS audits used against opponents]. Neither of these, of course, is especially associated with Clinton, as every president since FDR (who was only recently eclipsed as the most fiscally irresponsible in history, by the way) has had a minor scandal or two about exactly that (and Nixon, in particular, was far more notorious for it than Clinton).

But what makes it funny is the juxtaposition of that statement with the Valerie Plame business, which endangers the woman's **life**, as well as the lives of any CIA people she can be found to have had contact with. While I may (facetiously, at least where real danger is concerned) think that's just ducky, I'm guessing you don't, or wouldn't if a Democrat had done it. It's true, Plame hadn't yet become a household word when you wrote that, but everyone who cares about such things knew about her in July, and if you didn't, your only excuse is the quality of news you take in.

Then there's your assertion the "tendency to equate Republicans with conservatives" is misguided. Hey, I knew that. But as you cite reporters' party affiliation as evidence to support Liberal Media Dogma, I didn't think you did.

And you ended on a high note, with Hank's theory about politics having become a form of religion. I'm glad to see he's accepted the point of view I expressed three years ago, in my essay on "Comparative Religion" (which, by the way, you can reread at <http://www.uncadonald.com/religion.html>), and that you Orthodox Republicanists are finally beginning to see yourselves for what you really are.

By the way, one more howler: anybody who thinks it's okay to kidnap a child from Cuba to Florida, but refuses to address the question of why that doesn't make it okay to kidnap a child from Florida to Iran, has no business criticizing other people's ability to use logic.

Excellent job all around! KUTGW!

Sheila Strickland:

There's a statute of limitations on assault and battery, armed robbery, and aggravated rape. But flub a college course at 18, and they'll hold it against you until you're too feeble to hobble into class. The Academic World proves over and over that it cares more about its own bureaucratic rules than education.

It's not too surprising you were unable to get into the later Oz books as an adult - quite a few of them, especially toward the early-middle part of the series, are pretty dull. Baum did a lot of plotless travelogues where the characters all went from place to place and gazed in wonder at the magical things they found, which were just ever so charming but not much fun to read. But some were quite good, especially toward the end. *Tin Woodman of Oz* (for example) was top-notch, and raised some reasonably interesting metaphysical questions, especially considering the age group it was aimed at. I'd have enjoyed that one even if I hadn't been reading it aloud to the kids. (The best of them, tho, is still the first - Dorothy, who knows what she wants, goes straight for it and doesn't let wicked witches stand in her way, is a fine role model for little girls.)

Your comment about Arthur probably not being com-

forted by the fact that others have had it worse reminds me of an incident involving my mother, a year or so before she died. Because of various things going on in the family, a hospital was required to send a counselor to her, to make sure she was psychologically okay, and this was about as comforting as government-mandated things like that usually are. One of the counselor's first simpery questions was "Do you sometimes have feelings of sadness?" Mom started in on a long, long, litany of all the awful things going on in her life, which would make practically anybody have feelings of sadness, to the evident exasperation of the counselor, who expected her to play by the rules and say she did without commenting on what a stupid question it was. The counselor finally interrupted to say "You know, a lot of people have it much worse", to which Mom shot back (in a somewhat elevated tone of voice), "That makes me sad too!"

(I'm laughing right now, thinking about it. Right up to the very end, she never lost that quick, caustic wit of hers.)

Where and when did Bush say that thing about heeding the Voice of God (in his head)? Uh, let's see, I must have that info around here somewhere. Where would I have put it? Oh, I know! I'll check the two lines **directly underneath my printing of it**. Yup, there it is. June 26, in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*. Glad you asked. I may never have found it.

Hmm... My abrupt spike of 68,484 page views in one day as a flash crowd... Sure, why not? That's the best explanation I've seen so far.

mike weber:

You say recordable CDs aren't as stable as manufactured ones, because they use a layer of dye in some essential function. What about the older ones, that recorded onto an extremely thin layer of gold? The manufacturers said they were good for at least 75 years, tho of course, since nobody had ever tested them after 75 years in use, it's kinda hard to place full credit in a claim like that. Still, gold is a lot more chemically stable than those dyes, and maybe that makes the CDs more stable too. (The reason I'm asking is, most of my ancestor photos are recorded on gold-based CDs, and I'm wondering how often I should copy them onto fresh media.)

So, the fact that Sherman's March to the Sea was designed at least in part to break the will of the Confederate citizens to continue waging war makes it a legitimate military operation? I take it, then, you approve of (for example) the fire-bombing of Dresden and the "Shock and Awe" method of winning the hearts and minds of Iraqis, which were done for exactly that reason? If the burning of Atlanta was a legitimate military operation, what would you call terrorism? I mean, what's the difference between attacking enemy civilians for purposes of demoralization in Atlanta and attacking enemy civilians for purposes of demoralization in the World Trade Center?

I don't doubt the assertion that Sherman was the first modern general. Sure, they all behave worse than barbarians nowadays. (Barbarians may have raped and looted, but at least they didn't wantonly destroy for no reason other than to demoralize enemy non-combatants. And by the way, has that tactic **ever** worked on people being invaded from outside, or is it merely an excuse for generals to express their beast-like natures?) (Sorry, I forgot. Beasts don't do it either.) Being first in a long line of unconscionable butchers is hardly a mark of distinction.

If the reason you don't want kids is your desire to be able to hand them off to the other parent when your patience runs out, then what you need is grandkids. I really like mine.

I thought the reason the World Trade Center collapsed vertically instead of sprawling over several blocks was because that's the way they do modern buildings - engineer them so they'll collapse inwardly, when the day comes that they have to be taken down. (Speaking of which, that incident just about tripled the record for the tallest building ever demolished.)

Gilbert Seldes's essay, "The Seven Lively Arts", which is where *Krazy Kat* was brought to the attention of the *Literati*, was originally published in 1923.

It's a Good Thing, I'm sure, that Saddam Hussein is no longer in power. But the question of whether or not it was a Good Thing take active steps in removing him is a little iffier. For an outside power, hated and feared throughout the region, to march in and topple what was, for better or worse, the only stable government Iraq has had since the fall of the Ottoman Empire doesn't seem to have had very beneficial results, has it? **Could** an outside power, hated and feared throughout the region, marching in and toppling it **possibly** have had beneficial results? Doesn't seem so to me, but there are people with **awfully** strong faith in Washington, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, to accomplish good by such methods. What remains to be seen is whether American occupation is better or worse for Iraq, even discounting the "collateral damage" (a euphemism for impoverishment and bereavement of innocent people) already done, than Saddam Hussein. At the moment, the prospect doesn't look good. But let's not ignore the possibility of God's direct intervention to effect a miracle.

I recently had a discussion on a message board where someone made the point you did about musicals - the credibility factor when cast members with or without other speaking lines suddenly start singing and dancing in harmony with one another. I've never had a problem with it, personally, maybe because I've never regarded the proscenium as a window onto actual events. It's just a way of telling a story, like ballads (where the dialog, incredibly, comes in meter and rhyme), TV shows (where the action, incredibly, breaks down into portions that each climax right before a commercial) or comic books (where the people, incredibly, look like giant, talking ducks).

In the mid-1980s, What's-his-name, the guy who played BJ on *M.A.S.H.*, espoused a non-Attila-like point of view in some magazine interview. A right-wing jingoist I knew, holding a copy of the magazine, asked me, with obvious disapproval, what I thought of actors using their fame to promote political agendas. I said, "You mean, like Reagan?" To his credit, he got the point and shut up.