

The Sphere

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Barry Bard 1951-2005

I don't know how many of you knew Barry Bard. I knew him only locally, but I also know he attended and worked on a lot of cons in other areas. When I first met him — very shortly after moving here, which puts it about 1978, '79 at latest — he was very prominent in the area, but I don't think he was all that active nationally. I believe that changed, but since that's when I was getting less active, I could easily be wrong.

Barry was listed on most local convention committees as "procurer". He'd "procure" goodies to be given out at the convention, such as movie posters, buttons, T-shirts, promotional freebies of all sorts. He knew all the places to go to for them, and all the people to talk with. For CorsairCon in '98, he scored a case of Captain Morgan Rum, to be poured in the con suite as samples.

He also brought the stuff to parties — he was part of practically every social set of con-goers. He'd turn up frequently at pirate parties, anachronut parties, Trekkie parties, whatever. He even brought it to some of our Bunny Burnings.

He also sold books. You could spot his table from across the room, at any convention — shelves jutting up, boxes all over the floor, piles and piles of disparate stuff, of interest to every sub-group there, but not always in any particular order. Browsing his table was an experience, often rewarded with unexpected gems..

About six or eight months ago, word went out that Barry had pancreatic cancer, inoperable, and probably wouldn't live another year. I talked with him, briefly, at CopperCon, where, by the way, he looked awful.

He said impending death turns out to be not all that bad — happens to everybody, y'know. But he could sure do without the constant pain. He also noted that everybody wants a chance to wind up his affairs — he was hard at work trying to find good homes for all his stuff, a gargantuan pile of books, comics, magazines, collectible gewgaws of every kind (I put him in touch with some people about the comic books) — but it'd be a hell of a lot easier to just drop dead.

Four weeks later, he died.

I knew I was going to miss him, but I was surprised at how quickly, and how hard, it hit me.

There was a guy at his funeral, handing out cheap yarmulkas, like they usually do at Jewish affairs. As I politely put it on, I reflected about the last time I'd worn one — Barry's wedding.

Scootergate

Much more euphonious than "Plamegate", wouldn't you say? And it would help people remember who it's

about. Otherwise, one might get an impression that quasi-clandestine politico's name is Skippy or Snooker or Spooky or something, and we can't have that! (Aaron McGruder of *The Boondocks* suggests calling him "Fibby McLibby".)

Can't say I'm impressed. This hasn't been as big a debacle as Kenneth Starr's spectacular failure, but considering these people conspired to plunge the world into war, killing six figures so far and ultimately, most likely, seven or eight, and I only hope I'm not being too cautious in prognosticating, by fraudulently touting phoney intelligence — geez, you'd think they could come up with something more substantial than derivative crimes, committed against the investigation itself.

I mean, c'mon — Perjury? Obstruction of justice? That's what they charge people with when they can't pin any real crimes on them. Where's the beef?

Still, I look forward to fuzzy-brained right-wingers decrying this collapse of the Rule of Law, even tho this particular reeking scandal is only peripheral to the ongoing collapse of the Rule of Law. I mean, wasn't it perjury, which is all Starr ever managed to charge Clinton with, that constituted collapse of the Rule of Law during the last administration?

Well, at least the investigation continues, so maybe they'll eventually come up with something a reasonable person would consider worth prosecuting. It's a start, anyway. I predicted last year that Bush's second term will be about as smooth as Nixon's or Clinton's, and it still has three years to go. This evil, incompetent administration has only begun to unravel.

Black Racism

I got a letter at the Toonopedia™ mailbox a few weeks ago, that — but let me quote:

I would hope this is not a unique question, but I don't have a clue as to where to get an answer. I like Betty Boop, but I'm a black lady and I cannot wear anything with all white people on it. I would love to purchase Betty Boop stuff with a black Betty Boop. Is this an option anywhere? If not, why not?

I wrote back that in fact, this question is indeed unique in my experience, then went on to criticize it as racist. I also suggested she only wear items where Betty appears with her pal Koko, and tell everybody he's black under the clown make-up. And by the way, Betty started out as a dog.

It was only after I'd replied that I had the idea of telling her Betty Boop **is** black. She's just "passing". Too bad I didn't think of it in time, because it's the best answer. In the real world, she was the product of a studio run by working class New York Jews, and shows all the influences you'd expect from the New York Masses of the 1930s. There is definitely an element of

blackness in her. She even did duets with Cab Calloway.

(Say, here's how I should've replied: "Go ahead and wear it. She's black, but passing. (Geez, what a maroon!) (Uh, the mike isn't still on, is it?")

What gets me most about this question is the final part — "If not, why not?" The implication is, this is an undisputed example of non-rightness in the world, and I'm required to either come up with an explanation for it or commiserate with the self-appointed victim.

The only explanation I could possibly supply is that the owners of the Betty Boop property have not chosen to make such products available. I can't go any deeper because they've also not chosen to confide their reasons for not so choosing to me. And I think practically anybody could make that explanation, so why ask me?

Actually, the demand is that I **justify** it. The correspondent sees grounds for moral outrage, and is daring me to refute them. But life's too short. I refused to rise to the bait.

By the way, I had very good traffic that day. Next day, better yet — good enough, in fact, that I began to suspect there might be something going on (as when CNN made me a "Fun Site of the Day" or a porn site linked to me as a joke). I poked around in available info about recent traffic, and — why, that's odd! My most-read article of the month was Betty Boop!

I checked older stats, and it had been about six months since she was even in the top 30. For some reason, people were clicking on my Betty Boop article at well over twice the usual rate.

Might my correspondent have been a powerful blogger or something? And might my reply have prompted her to write something highly emotional about me?

If so, bring on them bloggers! I'll piss of a **dozen!**

More Thievery

I had another run-in with Archive.org a few weeks ago. These people are nothing but a den of thieves — and self-righteous, to boot! They're just like the creeps who think I should thank them for stealing from me, because it's "free publicity", as if I needed promotion from the likes of them, except they use bigger words.

This time, they only stole one article, instead of stealing multiple, dated copies of the entire site. In offering their stolen copy of an old MGM cartoon starring Flip the Frog, they stole my article on Flip the Frog to serve as "commentary".

They leave space for reader comments after "their" commentary, so I registered with them and said exactly what I think of the practice. Without even apologizing, they replaced it with an article from *Wikipedia*, which allows free use of its intellectual property. They know what they're doing is wrong, obviously, or they wouldn't shrug contemptuously and comply so easily, but what the heck, they can get away with it as long as the owner doesn't catch them. (I don't know how long they had it up before a friend of mine caught it.)

I think what they need is a class action suit. Next time they steal from me, instead of complaining, I'm going to talk to a lawyer. There should be enough money in something this size to interest a phalanx of

them. And somebody should tell Harlan Ellison they probably still offer a copy of the story that guy stole from him a few years ago. (No, maybe not — I believe that was on a message board sponsored by Warner Bros. or some other media giant, and Archive.org knows better than to steal from anybody they think can hurt them.)

Ordinarily, once I succeed in getting my stolen property taken down, I move on. Even with these guys I'd have pretty much gotten over it by now. But the other day, I got an e-mail about how I'd do well to petition Archive.org to take my comment down because all it does is make me look bad — like, maybe I'm some kind of contemptible anachronism, still clinging to the doomed notion that I'm entitled to own what I create.

He also mentioned that by not allowing them to display my work forever, I've assured my own eventual literary death. This is like saying nothing at all — I'm not delusional about my chances of literary immortality, tho I do expect my work to outlive me by a decade or three. (My family will maintain it as long as it produces income.) But then, I'm also not delusional about Archive.org's ability to make me immortal even if I don't deserve it.

I shouldn't have replied, but I did. In the brief correspondence that followed, I learned a new word, one they'd obviously made up as a euphemism for what they do. They're not plagiarizing — they're "rehosting". When I pointed out that getting it from the host authorized by the owner, and hosting it themselves, is actually stealing, the guy blandly replied, "I disagree."

What colossal arrogance! Even very young children know that if they don't ask permission before using someone else's belongings they're guilty of stealing, but this clown "disagrees". If Mommy and Daddy failed to teach him right from wrong, you'd at least think he could take cues from how actual owners of intellectual property feel about their depredation.

What is this guy, a college professor? Archive.org is rife with them, and nobody else could be smart enough to learn big words and even make up a few new ones, and yet too stupid to recognize one of his organization's own coinages as the pathetically transparent, self-serving conscience palliative of a thief that it is.

Finally, I told him to go to Hell and broke it off. Shouldn't have replied in the first place. These guys never see themselves as criminals, and maintain their favorable self-image by being utterly impervious to reason and superciliously dismissing their pissed-off victims as ignorant non-academics.

Here's another that went on longer than it should've:

A blogger, singing the praises of Wicked Wanda (*Penthouse* magazine's 1970s celebration of depravity), lifted my entire article on her. By chance, I happened to find out a mere four hours later, and immediately registered a complaint.

(By the way, as part of her own commentary, the blogger disagreed with my characterization of Wanda as "fundamentally evil". Inasmuch as Wanda (as noted in my article) launched her career by murdering her father, stuffing his corpse, and putting it on display in the room where she carried out her most disgusting activities so he could "watch", the fact that the blogger

doesn't think she was evil gave me my first clue about what kind of person I was dealing with.)

This blogger doesn't seem to know much about reader-friendliness (tiny gray type on a black background), so I didn't risk eyestrain by looking too hard for an e-mail address. Also, the top-level domain was .ca rather than .com, which makes it a bit harder to get hold of the host through a "whois" query. So I just posted my demand that she take down my copyrighted article as a comment. Next day, I checked back to make sure it had been removed, and found the article still there but my comment gone.

I went to Webmasterworld.com for advice on how to track down the host, which didn't take too long. But by the time I got back, my comment had been restored, my article had been taken down, and the blogger had added a character study of me that — well, try to imagine the stupidest possible posting by the least mature member of an extra-rowdy message board devoted to pre-teen anger as discussed by those who experience it, and you'll come close to this paean to flame. She even tracked down my personal Website so she could ransack it for things to ridicule and revile (but missed several potential whoppers, the dork). The silly diatribe is down now, but if anybody wants to see, I archived it. (I always archive when dealing with people like this.)

But what the heck, my copyrighted property was down, and nobody cares what a two-bit no-name blogger says, so — move on. But that afternoon, I got an e-mail from the guy who runs Plagiarismtoday.com, asking if I'd mind him using the incident, together with a few screen captures, in an article he was writing. His attention had been attracted by her little hissy fit — if not for that, he'd never even have noticed. I said sure, why not? Always glad to cooperate with anybody who opposes plagiarism.

The article turned out to be less than I expected — it was about proper terminology, which I hadn't used in my complaint. Technically, he was correct — it was piracy, not plagiarism. I posted a comment defending my decision to use what I know is imprecise language, and the blogger posted more bile. Also, one of her bloggy little friends posted about what a jerk I am for exercising ownership — if I'd been less piggy I might have avoided acrimony and made a new friend.

He (or whatever) actually said that. A new friend. I had to laugh. I'm laughing again right now. Geez, what sane person would want **that** for a friend?

The whole thing is at <http://www.plagiarismtoday.com/?p=107> or, if you don't trust yourself to type all that complicated stuff, you can, as always, use the clickable link at <http://www.uncadonald.com/sfpa.htm>.

Anyway, that was the end of it, except the blogger took it all down a few days later, claiming she didn't want anything to remind her of me and wasn't willing to give me any of her abundant "free publicity" (see first paragraph of this section).

Tho it was a real nose-wrinkler, ultimately, this was just a child behaving like a child. Move on. Hopefully, she'll eventually grow up and learn to leave other people's belongings alone, or at least stop accusing the owners of — well, whatever it is she was accusing me of. (Who reads garbage like that all the way through?)

But if she doesn't, it's not my problem as long as she keeps her hands off my stuff.

At this point, I have to apologize to SFPA. The preceding rant would have been much better reading if I'd done it closer to the event, when I was still riding high on the annoyance. I'm just coasting now. Sorry, but to the zine's detriment, I've made considerable progress in moving on. Oh, there was a time, a couple of weeks ago, when I could have carried on about it like I did about the one just before it.

But then, the Archive.org guy represents a genuine threat. He's an adult, who expertly rationalizes his contempt for property rights and is warped enough to consider this a noble way to think. Also, I suspect him of having influence on how young people think. It's people like him that form the constituency for anti-life philosophies like Communism, which has the abolition of property at its very core.

At the end of our exchange, when I told him to go to Hell — I was quite sincere about that. And everybody else who rhetoricizes against private property can go with him. It's just lucky for them I'm not the arbiter of who goes to Hell.

Toonopedia™

I hit a nice milestone in October. One million page views for the month.

Let me say that again, loud. **One million page views!** That's more than one every three seconds. November isn't shaping up to be quite as good, and by December the holiday slump will be in full swing, but that's okay — I've now had a month in which my Web pages were read a million times. (This is only a little higher than the circulation I had back at The Times-Picayune, and pales to insignificance beside the circulation of my Mickey Mouse stories — but I attracted the Toonopedia™ traffic all by myself.)

Of course, I should acknowledge that October is the longest month of the year — an hour longer than the other 31-day months (Daylight Time switchover, y'know). Still, I'll bet I do it again in January.

They say on Webmasterworld.com that the first million is the hardest. After that, it's just up and up and up. I dunno. Seems like there's got to be a limit to the site's growth, but so far, it isn't in sight.

Money-wise, it's reached a point where GiGi doesn't want me talking in public about specific numbers. Suffice it to say, then, that it now accounts for a very substantial portion of our family's income. We might be within a year of the point where we could, if necessary, get along with the Toonopedia™ alone. Based on what it brings in, modified by standard multipliers to determine the value of an asset, the Toonopedia™'s current worth is well in the six-figure range. And it keeps on growing.

New articles since last time: The American; Big Ben Bolt; The Black Orchid; another one called The Black Orchid; The Buford Files; Dixie Dugan; Etta Kett; Firebrand; Galaxy Rangers; Grandma Duck; The Human Target; Jon Sable, Freelance; Killraven; Little Sammy Sneeze; The Lockhorns; Melvin Monster; Mlle. Marie; Nova; Oil Can Harry; Savage Dragon; Scrapy; Spyman,

The Squirrel Cage; Tom Slick; West Coast Avengers.
New total: 1,035.

The American, you may recall, was created and written by former SFPA member Mark Verheiden as a modern (well, 1987 at least) take on the Captain America theme. Mark is also responsible for one called Timecop, which I plan to cover in the fairly near future for reasons cited in the next paragraph.

I've mentioned quite a few times lately that I'm hoping before too long to get every comic that was ever made into a movie or TV show included. I was fortunate enough to get hold of something on the Web where somebody made an attempt to list them all, so now I have something to check them off against. Dixie Dugan, The Human Target, Jon Sable and Savage Dragon are all from that list. I'd have done them all eventually (unlike, say, Barb Wire, which I did a couple of months ago for no reason other than her movie), but this is a good reason to get them squared away sooner. I haven't counted up, but there are well over a dozen to go. I should, tho, have that category pretty much wrapped up in a few more months. (Unless I decide to abandon the project before completion — some are very obscure, and I may not be able to dig up info.)

I was merrily going about getting one of them, Sable, done for inclusion on November 5, when it had been four days (a longer span than I like) since the last new article. I was about 3/4 of the way through it when I found out the short-lived TV show debuted on November 7 of whatever year, so I instantly shelved it for a couple of days and got started on a quickie to post on the 5th. I posted Sable on the anniversary, so I could link to it from "Today in Toons". (Second time that's happened — A few months ago I did Space Western as a quickie so I could put Quincy off until its anniversary.)

"The Squirrel Cage", an obscure topper to an obscure knock-off of a long-defunct comic, has one important characteristic that ensured its inclusion eventually, tho of course the fact that I needed a quickie right then (that happens a lot, especially toward the end of the year, when I'm trying desperately to get all my Disney stories written while preparing to spend much of December as Santa Claus) was also a good reason for writing it up when I did. If you've ever had the phrase "Nov shmoz ka pop?" running through the back of your mind (not likely if you're under 50), and have no idea where it came from, "The Squirrel Cage" is where. I've fielded at least a dozen queries about that phrase over the years, so it's about time I had a page to point to.

You probably remember Oil Can Harry as Mighty Mouse's main villain in the cartoons that were done opera-style. The reason for giving him a separate entry was, he actually pre-dates Mighty Mouse. I have no memory of having seen one of his 1930s cartoons before (tho I probably did in the '50s), but recently acquired a couple of Terrytoons DVDs that include a complete set of them. That gave me both the remaining info I needed and a source of artwork, so I had that one up a few days after they arrived. (Now I can do Kiko the Kangaroo any time I please. I've got lots of potential quickies, but one more never hurt.)

Last mailing, I ran a picture of archie and mehitabel, which I'd prepared for the site, and said I'd probably

write it up fairly soon. Well, I didn't. There's still a chance for next mailing, when the time crunch will have eased up, but that article is going to take a fair amount of research, and right now I just don't have time for very much research. It'll be quickies from here until the last week in December.

Quickies doesn't necessarily mean lightweights, or useless inclusions. One of the quickest in recent memory was *The Lockhorns*, and I was surprised at how good it made me feel to get it done. After a moment's reflection, I figured out why. It's one of the longest-running comics currently distributed, that I hadn't covered yet. So I made a tentative list, and it appears the time has come to think of current comics that have been syndicated for 25 years or more as a fillable category. Several of those will probably be quickies.

There are also a lot of quickies ahead if I decide to polish off the 1960s superheroes in their own comics. In fact I undertook Spyman mainly because it was a quickie, and the other Harvey characters from that batch are going to be pretty much the same.

Question: Does anybody know the origin of the expression "Let George do it"? You don't hear it very much anymore, but when I was much younger, it was a fairly common way of saying that's not my responsibility, somebody else can take care of it. There was a comic strip of that name in the 19-teens, and I'm wondering if that might be where it came from (not impossible — "Keeping up with the Joneses" came from a comic strip title). Obviously, if it did spark a popular phrase, it should be in the Toonopedia™, but even if it didn't, it should be in because there were a couple of one-reel comedies based on it, so if I'm ever going to fill that comics-to-movies category, I'll have to include it. When I write the article I'll have to say something about the phrase, which I'm not the only one old enough to remember, and I'd like it to be accurate.

Did I mention the URL is <http://www.toonopedia.com>? Well, it is.

Webrings

I'd do this as a mailing comment, but I suspect this is going to be one of those times when I don't do them. In fact, I'm not even going to track down who asked me what a Webring is (tho I think it was Gary Brown).

As the name implies, it's a ring of Web sites. You see them all over the place. Usually, the codes are located toward the bottom of the page, where they appear to the viewer in the form of an image with links for navigating the ring (known as the navigation bar). You can click to the next site in the ring, to the previous one, to a random one, or to the ring's hub (a page that lists all the ones in it, tells what the ring is about, and gives instructions on how to join). If you keep clicking forward, you'll eventually come back to where you started.

The attraction, to the reader, is that if he's interested in a topic he can click through the ring and see one site after another about it. To the owner of the site, it's free traffic. Of course, he has to send traffic to the next guy, but what the heck, readers were eventually going to go somewhere else anyway. (The average visitor to my site reads about three pages before moving on.)

It's just plain amazing how many of the things there are, and on how many different topics. And tho it's only a tiny subset of the whole, it's also amazing how many of those topics are relevant to my own pages. When I posted the article on Savage Dragon, for example, I used it to apply to one about Image Comics. I used Oil Can Harry for one about villains. Big Ben Bolt is in one about the sport of boxing. Little Sammy Sneeze — geez, you wouldn't expect there to be an entire Webring about sneezing, but there you have it. Even my glossary is in one for glossaries.

I generally do only one per page, exceptions being some of the early applications, where I applied scatter-shot, joining as many as I possibly could. But I've since decided that given peculiarities in the way the codes work, that shortchanges the ring. I have enough pages to where I don't really have to do that. (I wouldn't mind two or more from different systems, tho, and will probably go for it once I begin exploring others, probably next year.)

After posting The American, I got the idea of seeking out rings about patriotism, and applying with all the superheroes I've covered that wear flag-themed costumes. Captain Flag, Fighting American, The Star Spangled Kid . . . Most got in, but one was rejected on grounds that isn't about patriotism, but merely a (sneer) cartoon character. I suspect some people take this stuff too seriously, but what the heck, there are plenty more. (The American himself is in one where the description specifies you can be patriotic even while opposing what the government does, which of course I know, but a lot of folks running these things don't.)

I have a page that does nothing but list my Webring memberships, with their navigation bars and links to the pages they apply to. You can find it at <http://www.toonopedia.com/webrings.htm> — and be amazed how diverse they are. Or you can go to Webring.com (one of several sites that run the things, and the only one I've seriously explored) for a truly dazzling array of them.

Disney Work

It's almost a week since I added the above section, and now the deadline is breathing down my neck. There will **definitely** be no mailing comments, and what's more, it's looking like it could be a large type, large margins issue (despite the fact that I'm well past minac). To make it look less dorky, I've decided to add some "canned" material, you lucky ducks. Following is a Mickey Mouse story that I wrote last year, which was rejected after the synopsis stage (on grounds that Byron Erickson didn't like the old *Wacky Races* TV show and decided after approving the springboard that he didn't want a story that reminded him of it). They paid half the regular fee, tho in my case that wasn't enough — the synopsis is the hard part for me. If it had gone on to script the other "half" of the job would have been just a few days listening to music, following the outline, and laughing at the story as it progressed. (If I'm not doing that as I write the script, there's something wrong with it.)

Since the publication part never came out, it's eligible for SFPA credit, unless you count the fact that

editors read it, and, as was the case once or twice before, I'm claiming they're contributors since their comments helped shape it as it stands now. (Anyway, I have minac without it.)

Background info: Doc Static is Mickey's inventor friend, a scientist type rather than a tinkerer like Gyro Gearloose. Sam Simian is a character of my own, that I've used in five stories. He builds and operates those giant robots with a human pilot in the head, the kind that are always ravaging Tokyo. When Sam is on the scene, Mickey, too, is an expert "robot wrangler". The "Robot Wrestling" story is Sam's second. He and Mickey were rival contestants in the eponymous competition. I think you'll catch on fairly quickly what kind of a guy Sam (a big gorilla) is. The remote control makes the robot bend and extend its hand down so the pilot can get in. Mickey lives in Mouseton according to some publishers, but at Egmont it's Duckburg. The title of this flawless gem is "Anything Goes".

Page 1: Mickey sees a sign announcing a "build any kind of vehicle" race, and gets excited — he's enjoyed free-for-all races in the past, and it's been years since Duckburg had one. But his excitement is dampened when Sam Simian walks by and acts interested in the same sign. He expresses his disappointment, and Sam asks why — scared of the competition? Mickey says not really, but — well, don't take this the wrong way, Sam, but let's face it, you do have a tendency to cheat. Quick flashback to the robot wrestling story, mainly to remind readers Sam is a robot wrangler.

Page 2: Sam gives Mickey his solemn word that this time, he won't break a single rule. Mickey is skeptical, until Sam points out a line at the bottom of the sign. First vehicle to cross the finish line wins, and there are no other rules. Sam walks off, laughing, while Mickey resolves that if nothing else, he's at least going to beat Sam. Later, Mickey surveys the race course (which runs along a mountain road full of hairpin turns and natural obstacles) with Doc Static, who advises him on features to include in his vehicle, such as an extendable outrigger for balance when taking hairpin turns at high speed (which Mickey also envisions as a means to knock others off course) and leaping ability to get over, rather than around, obstacles (Mickey envisions coming down on top of opponents to take them out).

Page 3: Other apparent contestants also look around, making notes about the course. They run into Sam, leading to an exchange of good-natured insults (tho Mickey, still put out, is a bit more sarcastic). As Sam swaggers off, laughing, Mickey wonders what kind of vehicle Sam, who must be a mechanical expert considering his ability to build and rebuild his robots after repeatedly wrecking them, will make. The day of the race, Mickey has built a very odd-looking vehicle, but not odder-looking than the others. He surveys his fellow contestants. One vehicle has very large wheels. One is a tiny one-man helicopter. One is a clear plastic sphere with a cockpit floating inside. One has many legs, like a scurrying spider. There are more, to make a nice crowd. He evaluates each as a potential threat.

Page 4: All this time, he's looking around for Sam and

not finding him, but as he heads back to his own, he hears a steady booming sound, looks up, and sees Sam approaching in one of his robots. Sam alights to say hello, with a book in his hand marked "race rules". Mickey angrily protests that a robot isn't a vehicle even if Sam did build it, and Sam says, oh yeah? He tosses Mickey the "rule book". "Show me the rule that says it isn't." Mickey fumes and Sam laughs as Mickey opens it and sees the pages are blank. As Sam re-mounts his robot, he tosses a device into Mickey's car, telling him that's a communicator from one of his other robots — maybe they can exchange a little banter during the race. Neither Mickey nor Sam notices that Sam's remote control (for getting up and down, which he has just used and therefore won't notice the absence of until afterward) has gotten tangled with the communicator, and lands underneath it.

Page 5: The race begins. As the one-man helicopter lifts off the ground, Sam's robot casually reaches over and crimps its rotor, crashing it. Mickey reflects that's one guy who won't be winning, as he takes off. Sam takes an early lead over Mickey (tho others are up with or ahead of him), swatting or kicking other contestants out of his way. Sam's voice comes through the communicator, a mocking "eat my dust!" Mickey mutters "It ain't over till it's over!" as Sam, using a tree for a handhold, swings around a hairpin turn and disappears.

Page 6: Mickey isn't fazed by the hairpin turn — he takes it at high speed, sticking an outrigger out for balance. Ahead, Sam is climbing an obstacle instead of taking the long way around. Mickey leaps onto Sam's head, then leaps from there to the top of the obstacle, sending Sam to the ground. The communicator squawks Sam's protest. Mickey leaps down from the top of the obstacle, and lands on top of the clear plastic sphere. He teeters on it for a moment, then falls forward, landing upside-down, while the sphere goes shooting to the rear.

Page 7: Mickey tries to turn back over by rocking back and forth, manipulating his outriggers, when another vehicle crashes into an outrigger in passing, sending him into a spin. While he spins, the vehicle with very large wheels rolls over the end of an outrigger, sending it flying into the air, spinning, with Mickey, from appearances, getting very sick. But he lands on his wheels, and speeds ahead.

Page 8: On a straightaway, the spider-legged vehicle tries to pass him on either side, but each time, an outrigger juts out to stop it. So the spider simply crawls over Mickey and disappears ahead. Just then, the communicator beside Mickey crackles to life, startling him — I see ya, says Sam through it, and I'm comin' on strong! Mickey turns to look, and Sam's robot is about to catch up. It takes a leap, obviously about to land on Mickey, but Mickey jams on the brakes. Sam lands ahead of him and keeps running. Sam makes a cutting remark on the communicator. Mickey has had enough of Sam's commentary, and starts to throw the communicator out.

Page 9: It's then he notices Sam's remote control. He smiles wickedly. He can use this when the time is right.

He guns his engine. A couple of hairpin turns later, with the finish line in sight, he sees a cluster of vehicles. Sam is preventing anyone from passing, but the spider is crawling all over his head, and he's trying unsuccessfully to swat it. Mickey chuckles, and flips the switch on the remote control. Sam's robot immediately bends over and holds its hand down, as if for its pilot to get in. Most vehicles crash into it, creating a pile of rubble, while the spider flies off to Mickey's rear.

Page 10: The plastic sphere is about to catch up, but Mickey sees it can't do so in time. All Mickey has to do is avoid the rubble, and he has a clear shot at the finish line. But the spider lands on the sphere in such a way that the spider is wrecked and the sphere is propelled forward uncontrollably. It crashes into Mickey, taking both out. The contestants gather together, limping, most blaming Sam, with Sam blaming Mickey and Mickey wryly amused — looks like none of us are gonna win, eh? Just then, to everyone's astonishment, the guy with the one-man helicopter staggers into view, dragging his vehicle. All watch in slack-jawed amazement as he slowly, inexorably wins the race.

Your Tax Dollars At Work

I've mentioned Riverbend before. I just read what she said about white phosphorus in Fallujah, which even Americans, the most heavily propagandized people on Earth, have been seeing in the news lately, and my hands are still shaking. Go to <http://www.riverbendblog.com> if you want to gross yourself out.

Is there anyone at all, other than the professional cheerleaders of the news media, who still supports the U.S. government in this business? How much lower can they sink?

It's not hard to guess why Bush repudiated Clinton's signature on the treaty that would allow American soldiers and politicians to be prosecuted as war criminals. We've known for a long time Fallujah will go down in history as one of the great atrocities, but it's actually far worse than we knew.

So now, we've got the U.S. Senate overwhelmingly passing a law against torture, which nobody would ever have expected would even come up for discussion, with the president threatening to cast his first veto against it and the vice-president lobbying for exceptions.

Another thing I'd never have expected occurred to me this morning, as I watched a rerun of *Murphy Brown* on Nickelodeon. Remember when Dan Quayle railed against Murphy Brown and they used his actual speech to give verisimilitude to the show? What a hoot that was! In fact, what an amusing guy Dan Quayle was altogether! So entertaining! And since he never succeeded to the presidency — so harmless!

And so different from what we have now!

Given how much I've hated every single president and vice president of my lifetime, who would ever have expected anybody in those offices to make me long for the good old days of his predecessors? And yet . . .

Torture. White phosphorus. Indefinite imprisonment on one man's sayso. And so much more.

Good God. Can this really be America?