

# THE SPHERE

Vol. 202 no. 1, published for the 231st SFPA Mailing by Don Markstein, P.O. Box 55148, Phoenix, AZ 85078, (602)485-7860, [ddmarkstein@cox.net](mailto:ddmarkstein@cox.net), [don@toonopedia.com](mailto:don@toonopedia.com), <http://www.toonopedia.com>, <http://www.uncadonald.com>. Headline type: Harpoon.

A couple of mailings ago, I wrote about the furious and thoroughly irrational protest some right-wingers have made against the new HIV-infected *Sesame Street* character and the recent expansion of Captain America's origin story to include a black test subject. They're doing it again — and **of course**, that tired old euphemism for xenophobic hatred, "politically (in)correct", is prominent in the rhetoric.

Marvel Comics plans to do a new mini-series about one of its old western characters, The Rawhide Kid, and they've decided (retroactively, of course) that he's gay. He was always shy around women (at least, that's what they say now — personally, I don't remember the character well enough to confirm it), and now we know why. Seems to me shyness around women would be more likely in a man who is sexually interested in them, but what do I know?

The main body of the opposition seems to be that they don't want their memories of that grand old character whom they love so dearly "tarnished" by association with — **eeewwwwww!** — homosexuality. I just roll my eyes at this one. When did anybody start caring about The Rawhide Kid?

Anyway, if they're worried about tarnishing the heroes of our youth, there are more egregious cases of hero tarnishing on every comic book rack in America — few if any of the heroes of our youth maintain a decent moral compass anymore, or hesitate to use extreme violence whether or not more reasonable methods of attaining their goals are available. Compared to **that** tarnishing, who cares if a guy most current readers never heard of doesn't like girls?

Then there are the ones who bitterly condemn it as a mere grab for publicity. My response to this one is okay, so what's your point? This isn't anywhere near as stupid or offensive as some of the things they've done to attract attention over the years, and it does have one saving grace — it seems to have worked. The Rawhide Kid made CNN, Fox News and lots of others. He was a **regular nine-day wonder** in

mid-December, and this, in an era when most wonders slide right off the front page within minutes. I wouldn't be surprised if comics' first gay western hero is optioned for a movie before the mini-series is over, just because of all the media attention.

Of course, it's hard to reconcile condemnation of a publicity stunt with the right-wing attitude that anything is okay if it makes money for somebody who wears a suit. One guy launched a pre-emptive strike against that argument by claiming it's doomed from the start as a money-making proposition, because no "pro-homosexual" movie has ever made money. That one is so utterly stupid just on the face of it, I won't even bother to address it.

Of course, I have my own objections, but mine are based on probable implementation, not the move itself. The guy writing it, Ron Zimmerman, also writes for Howard Stern, so I don't expect much more out of it than a string of "flaming faggot" jokes. One of them has already turned up in press releases — Rawhide thinks The Lone Ranger is way cool because of that divine powder blue outfit he wears, and can easily see why the Indian follows him around.

After the debate had gone on a week or two, I posted "Get over it. He probably will, 20 years from now when everybody's forgotten this and they revive him as a vampire."

Bottom line: More people care about The Rawhide Kid than ever did before. They **may** have a winner.

don markstein's  
toonopedia™

In December, like October, I registered an average of more than 10,000 page views per day — despite a holiday slump toward the end of the month. November didn't fall much short of that, and so far January looks like it's going at least as well as December, so I think that's

pretty much the norm now. Total page views since opening passed the 5.5 million mark in mid-January, and will probably close in on 6.0 shortly after the site's second anniversary (Feb. 13). I wonder what it'll be like if I ever put any real effort into promoting the thing.

There was an aberration in the traffic rankings of the various articles, where Mighty Mouse, Bugs Bunny and guys like that are usually on top. After reading the above, you will not be surprised to learn what the aberration was: my most popular article for December was The Rawhide Kid, which was read 2,723 times that month. For a week or two after the news came out (so to speak), it was even out-performing "Today in Toons", which has a fairly sizeable regular readership. For the vast majority of readers, Rawhide was the entry article, which means they found it from a search engine (I'm currently second in a Google search on him, tho that's been fluctuating since the news broke) or direct outside link, rather than from elsewhere on the site. And considering how many times it was the exit article, it appears about 10-15% of those who found it that way clicked through to something else before leaving.

Like I said, they **may** have a winner. Who would ever have guessed a no-account like him could draw so much interest?

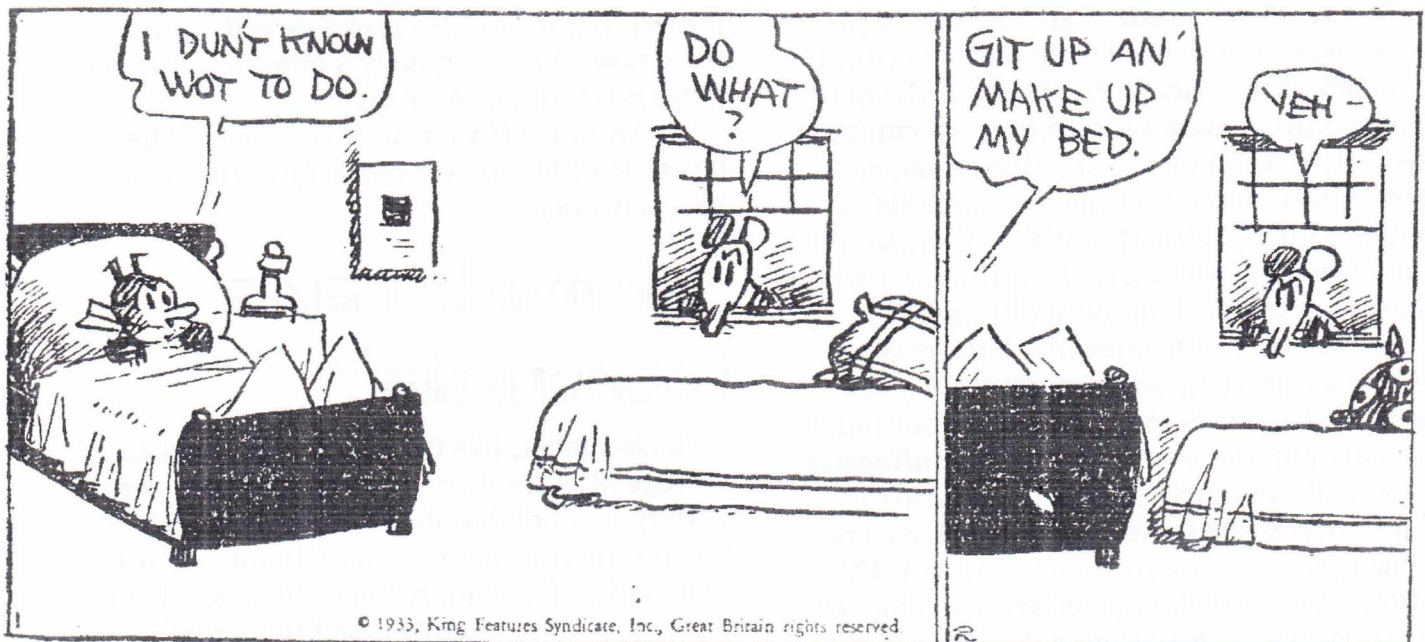
I did get one very amusing response at the Toonopedia™ mailbox. This guy wrote and said he'd been considering donating to my site (I've

had an Amazon.com begging bowl up for several months now), **until** he heard the news about The Rawhide Kid, but now — no way!

Geez, how stupid is this guy, thinking whether or not he chooses to give **me** five bucks or so is a good way to put pressure on **Marvel Enterprises**? And how stupid does he suppose I am, expecting me to believe he was actually planning to do so before he discovered this terrible, terrible news?

Unrelated to the big news, I also got an odd piece of spam there, one of the few ever to catch my interest. According to trafficranking.com, my site is the 112,311th most popular on the entire Internet. I didn't read far enough down to figure out how they plan to use the alleged fact to squeeze money out of me, but it's still pretty interesting to know. I strongly suspect it's bogus, tho, because (a) my place hasn't changed in the several weeks since they sent it and (b) they have a ridiculous idea of my link popularity — they say I'm linked to by a whopping eight outside sites, whereas I know very well I'm linked to in more than that many **different languages**. (Anyway, who cares about a number like that? Buzz me again when I break 100,000.)

New articles since the last SFPA mailing: Black Lightning, Bulletman, Captain Planet & the Planeteers, Care Bears, Curly Kayoe, Daredevil (1940s version), Duckman, Farmer Alfalfa, He-Man & the Masters of the Universe, Hong Kong Phooey, Joe Jinks, Kewpies, Lippy the Lion &





Hardy Har Har, Modesty Blaise, Ms. Marvel, The Newsboy Legion, Santa Claus, The Super Friends, Super Rabbit, TaleSpin, The Timid Soul (which starred Caspar Milquetoast himself), Tailspin Tommy, Tommy Tomorrow, and three guys named The Sandman. New total: 572.

Some obscuros this time, but there are also characters like Modesty Blaise, who is famous everywhere but the U.S., and Caspar Milquetoast, who is so famous, his last name doesn't even set off my spellchecker. Some of the ones that actually are obscure, like Farmer Alfalfa and Lippy the Lion, are still remembered by the Baby Boom, including myself, and are probably searched for about as often as Tom Terrific or Ruff & Reddy, which draw a pretty good amount of traffic from non-fans about my age.

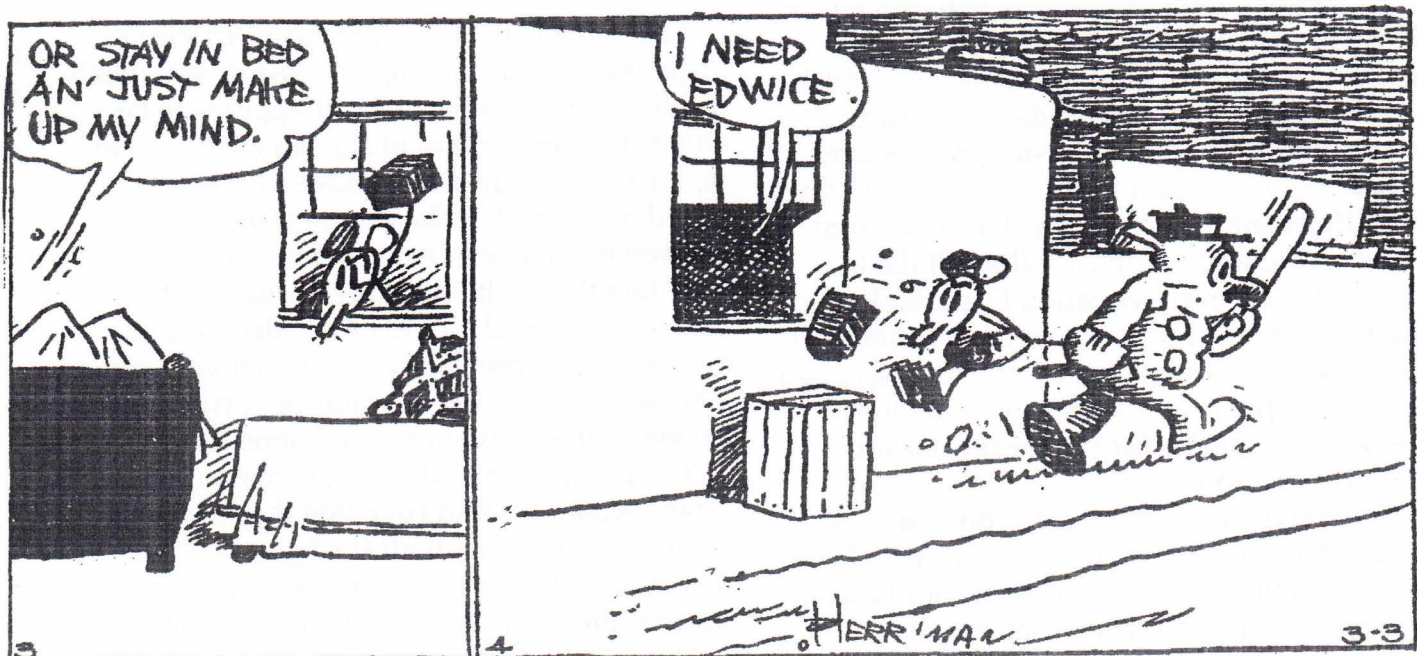
Joe Jinks and Curly Kayoe, which truly are obscure, went up on the anniversary of the day the title was changed from Jinks to Kayoe, when I didn't have a better anniversary, just so I'd have something to link to from "Today in Toons". Tailspin Tommy is pretty obscure, but it was the first aviation adventure strip, so as long as Steve Canyon and Smilin' Jack are in, I suppose it should be too. I had a really good picture of Bulletman, so I put him in even tho there are off-brand 1940s superheroes that are better remembered, and aren't in yet.

The rest, I think, have some cachet, at least, in the real world. Kewpies, more than most — they were huge from the 19-teens to the '40s,

even if they're pretty much forgotten today (except for a very hazy cultural memory of kewpie dolls). Santa Claus, of course, is a superstar, but I was mostly dealing with his toon-like aspects. I wrote the article on Xmas Eve and posted it the morning of the 25th. Researching it, I ran across a really good image of the original edition of Montgomery Ward's Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer give-away, so I have a pretty good idea what article I'm going to post next December 25.

Lately, I've been noticing I have a real dearth of articles on TV animation from the 1970s and '80s. That's probably because I don't particularly care for the stuff — lot of treacly boring garbage if you ask me (or practically anybody else that's into cartoons), largely fueled by powerful "Parent Action Groups" with a collectivist agenda that makes any character not going along with the group automatically wrong. (In fact, a prominent one is actually **named** "The Get-Along Gang".) Gotta be covered, tho, if I'm to make any claim of completeness, so I'm going to try to emphasize them for a little while, until I feel like things are a little more balanced. Hence, Care Bears, Captain Planet et al. Got a bunch more to slog through before they're decently represented, but at least I've made a reasonable start on the yucky old things.

As always, find it at [www.toonopedia.com](http://www.toonopedia.com).



## duck tape

(I realize most people spell it differently, but this is the way I prefer.)

My favorite Duck Tape story is when David Anthony Kraft moved his house away from the cliff (or vice versa). He lives on the side of a mountain, and several years ago, realized there wasn't enough crawl space behind the house for repair men and suchlike. Analyzing the problem, he decided the only way to deal with it was to wallop the cliff with an axe until he'd broken off enough rock to provide access. So he set aside a weekend for the job, bought a brand-new axe, and got to work.

He'd gone only a few feet when the axe handle broke. At that rate he figured he could probably spend the whole time replacing handles, but he had a bright idea. He repaired the handle with Duck Tape, and it lasted the rest of the job.

I was thinking about that story a couple of weeks ago, when I was repairing the seat on my bike, which was badly worn and losing its stuffing. Since I don't care what the bike looks like (in fact, I try to cultivate a grungy, broken-down look so it'll be less attractive to thieves) I simply slathered Duck Tape all over it to hold everything in place. And I got to thinking . . .

The biggest obstacle to bike riding in Arizona is flat tires. All the plants are armed, and any bit of vegetable matter may be full of thorns. I use extra-strength inner tubes, keep a strip of plastic between the tube and the tire, and try to avoid rolling over even an occasional tuft of dried grass. Still, I can only ride my bike (which I use for neighborhood errands) an average of three or four times before having to fix a tire.

Then there's the fact that I have never, in my entire life, managed to get any decent amount of wear out of a tire patch. I follow all the instructions, with every variation I can think of, taking all the care I possibly can, but I just can't make a patched tire hold air. I gave up years ago — now, I simply keep a supply of spare inner tubes around, and replace the leaky ones instead of trying to fix them.

But for some reason, 27-inch tubes are getting harder to find, at least in this area. I can get the so-called "self-sealing" ones, but I don't use them because in reality, they're self-

deflating. They seem to hold air no more than two or three days before spontaneously dying, with gunk around the nozzle just so I'll know where the air got out.

I guess you can see where this is going . . .

Right. Instead of going through the lengthy rigmarole of patching a tire with approved methods and materials, I tried slapping a little square of Duck Tape over a leak. It's been holding air ever since.

Duck Tape — It Keeps America Together.

## nathan

Not much new on the grandson front. He's 14 months old now, 15 as you read this. Walking all over the place (running, too), and getting into practically everything, but I was talking about that last mailing. Eating regular human being food, but that too is old news.

He likes visiting me in my office, partly because I have little duck toys and figurines and stuff all over the place, and he likes to say "Duck duck duck duck!" But that's old news too — I mentioned last mailing or the mailing before that his first word was "duck".

And I read to him sometimes, but he doesn't sit still for it very much of it. Like I said, nothing much new. Cute as can be, of course, but there's not much new in that, either.

## fool me twice

That's the title of an interesting article at <http://slate.msn.com/id/2076561>. If you don't feel like typing out the URL, it appears to be about the recent claim of human cloning, and the fact that while it may indeed have happened, the fact that the people claiming it won't provide credible evidence (tho they claim they have lots they're holding back), change the subject when evidence is demanded, and are generous with pseudo-evidence that isn't convincing but looks like it might be if you already believe, tends to point to the opposite.

The point is well taken — anyone thinking clearly would have to conclude they're hiding something; and that if all the facts were known, it seems likely there wouldn't be much cause to think a human being actually has been cloned.

Down at the bottom, it's revealed that the



whole article is written in code. If you make a few simple substitutions, everything in it is still congruent with what's going on in the real world, but now it's about the Bush administration's efforts to make us believe there are legitimate reasons for going to war with Iraq.

And the point, of course, is that the U.S. news media are way too smart to completely fall for one story, but not nearly smart enough to avoid falling for the other.

Which, of course, only proves how Liberal they are, right?

## cui bono?

Speaking of the upcoming Iraq invasion, I was nosing around the Internet, looking for a good copy of James Montgomery Flagg's famous "I Want You" Uncle Sam poster (thinking sooner or later I'll have to do Uncle Sam for the Toonopedia™), and ran across a cute parody (findable at [www.tompaine.com](http://www.tompaine.com)), where Uncle oSAMA says "I Want You To Invade Iraq". It's accompanied by the following text:

Go ahead. Send me a new generation of recruits. Your bombs will fuel their hatred of America and their desire for revenge. Americans won't be safe anywhere. Please, attack Iraq. Distract yourself from fighting Al Qaeda. Divide the international community. Destabilize the region. Maybe Pakistan will fall — we want its nuclear weapons. Give Saddam a reason to strike first. He might draw Israel into a fight. Perfect! So please — invade Iraq. Make my day.

So — aside from Bush and his plutocratic right-wing radical cronies, whose agenda we can only guess at (but which could very plausibly include provoking more terrorism so as to "justify" more "anti-terrorist" legislation), do any **Americans** want this?

Anyway, I did find a good copy of the poster, and will probably write up the character for July 4 (like I added Santa Claus, whom I also don't believe in, on Xmas). In fact, I'll probably do two articles on him, the other being on the comic book superhero version (published by Quality Comics and now owned by DC). For that one, I have a great picture by Will Eisner, of Sam punching an Indian in the face.

## Gary Brown.

For me, the significant thing isn't so much that my 200th consecutive mailing was in September, but that the 201st was in November, this is the 202nd, the 203rd will be in March, and they'll just keep continuing into the indefinite future. Every SFPA mailing is another consecutive one for me, which is why I don't do anything special to mark any particular one. The fact that the September one had two zeroes at the end is significant only if you happen to belong to a species that has ten fingers.

Don't worry about reminding me when *Spongebob Squarepants* reaches its 10th anniversary, and becomes eligible to be written up in my Toonopedia™ (assuming I don't change the requirement between now and then). I'll know it. Just like I know *Animaniacs* will hit the ten-year mark in September. (Expect to see articles on at least two or three series from it on or shortly after the 13th of that month.)

I guess you've heard about the change in publisher for *Comic Book Artist*. Don't be too sure about that Little Archie stuff being in when you expect it, because I gather they'll be moving a lot of things around. Still, I'll keep an eye out, and maybe get the Little Archie article done about when it does finally appear. I'll pass on little Ambrose, Mad Doctor Doom and other supporting characters, tho. When I start doing supporting characters, I'm guessing Lois Lane (who did have her own comic book for 16 years) will come before those guys.

## Janice Gelb.

The True Origin of Alfred E. Neuman is at [http://www.toonopedia.com/alfred\\_e.htm](http://www.toonopedia.com/alfred_e.htm). Gary's isn't inaccurate (according to my sources, which take into account both Kurtzman's and Feldstein's claims), but it's very incomplete.

Re: Not being allowed to carry anything, including ID, on Shabbat, and consequently being worried about accidents on the way to and from synagogue. Have you thought of printing your necessary information on your underwear? It shouldn't be too hard, given the easy availability of T-shirt transfers that will go through a printer. Surely, you're allowed to carry your clothing! (There may even be a market for that.)

## arthur hnavaty.

Oh, I know you don't necessarily disbelieve Bush and his buddies callously sat back and let the September 11 atrocity happen because it could be counted on to advance their political agenda (and did), just as Franklin Roosevelt is now known to have callously allowed the Japanese to attack Pearl Harbor for the same reason. But you did, if I recall correctly, say you disbelieve Bush etc. were active in the actual planning of it. I don't necessarily believe that either, but I'm not absolutely certain I disbelieve it.

I do, tho, think it's more likely (in fact, **quite** likely) they were passive but knowing spectators. I await further evidence, should what remains of free enquiry and the free press survive much longer into his administration.

## toni w. reinhardt.

If Hank got a passport to go to New York, he's ahead of the times. It'll probably be several more years before the folks in power are able to push through internal passports as an essential element in the War Against Terrorism. I mean, geez, they still haven't succeeded in signing up all the mailmen to spy on us.

## gary robe.

If you think that training to be a Cub Scout leader is bad, I was a shopping mall Santa Claus once (and just now realized it was 18 years ago — gack!). They made me go to Santa School.

Look for the Harry Potter movies to get longer and slower-moving as they get farther into the series, unless they start being less faithful to the source material. You can see from the boxed editions of the books that they're getting much thicker. I suspect what's happened is that Rowling has gotten too big to edit. Writing small can be a hell of a lot of work, and when no editor dares require a writer to do it, fiction tends to sprawl.

## david schlosser.

No, the difference between Liberals and Republicans is that Liberals advocate institutional control of the world through direct regulation at home and strengthening the United

Nations abroad, whereas Republicans advocate institutional control of the world through direct military action abroad and strengthening corporations at home. Too bad nobody in politics **opposes** institutional control of the world, but one bunch of them has at least managed to put across what right-wing politician Hermann Göring called the "Big Lie" that they stand for freedom. (They've even put it across to the point where those stupid enough to believe it call others "morons" for being able to see the truth.)

## mike weber.

I can't find it right now to verify, but somewhere, printed in a book about George Herriman, I believe I have a facsimile of his 1880 Louisiana birth certificate. I think the exact word it uses is "Colored". I don't know exactly how that's to be interpreted. But the modern use of "Black" usually does include people who can "pass", and that would be Herriman.

As for Krazy Kat's gender — she's a "she", and I'm not absolutely sure there's anything ambiguous about it. Before I knew the strip, I thought of her as "he", but that was more-or-less by default, because there are more male protagonists than female in fiction of all kinds. When I did get to know the strip, I realized the truth. Gilbert Seldes, the guy who originally brought Krazy to the attention of the Literati, says her gender is ambiguous, but he may have come to her the same way I did. Her gender isn't immediately obvious (which is in keeping with her status as a Kat), but I can't think offhand of any instances of Herriman actually being ambiguous about it. Some day when I don't have anything else to do (I'll pencil it in for midway through my next life), I'll have to go through the Texts and see if I can find an instance of him actually saying anything to indicate she wasn't unequivocally female. (Or maybe I'll just pick up a Krazy Kat book and it'll jump out at me — maybe the reason I don't recall it is because I've never looked for it.)

Large type . . . illustrations taking up space . . . That's okay. Before adding the pictures, and at default settings, this zine was just about eight pages. Call me a minacker if you will, but nobody can say I'm doing **less** than minac.