



Comments 17



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OH NO!! IT'S THE DEADLINE

It's been a rather busy time for us and I find myself sitting here, the week of the deadline, trying to get a zine out in time for the mailing. Why have we been so busy?

Well there's all that yard work, not to mention roadwork on the road up the mountain we live on, a trip to St. Thomas, working on the National Stereographic Association national convention, hang gliding including my best ever flight of an hour and 40 minutes and working on my book. That last is slowly becoming an obsession.

THE BOOK

After fooling around with being a "writer" for the last couple of years I've finally realized that I really want to do it and that it's a full time job. I now know that I cannot treat this as a hobby if I ever want to produce anything. I've resisted this decision for some time mostly out of laziness and that the fact that my current life is pretty nice. I put so much effort into anything I think of as a 'Job' that it tends to take over my life. This can be rather stressful ☺.

SPEAKING OF STRESS

A few weeks ago I had the traditional full physical exam. Everything looked pretty good except the doctor didn't like the minor chest pains I have from time to time. So he had me take a "stress test." For those fortunate enough to never have had one, this is a test to find out what happens when your heart is placed under heavy stress. They wire you up to an electrocardiograph and then have you run on a treadmill.

The speed and angle of the treadmill are gradually increased until the victim is close to passing out. In my case I got my heart rate up over 180 very close to the maximum safe rate. The test did not show any problems.

ME AND SFPA

I feel a little bad that I'm spending so little time on SFPA but it is, regardless of what anyone says, "just a hobby" and I've put a lot of effort into the APA over the years. If we had a robust waiting list, I'd probably bow out to make room for someone more active. As it is, I'll try to get *something* into every mailing and try to comment at least most of them.

Oh about the "me" part. As most of you must have noticed by now, Suzanne and I don't really do a lot of things as individuals. Almost everything is a joint effort. In the past zines have been about 70% Steve and 30% Suzanne. That will probably be reversing in the near future.

MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Mailing Comments

The Southerner #229

I'm sorry to see Irv leave the APA even though it's hardly a surprise.

Revenant #13

Shelia Strickland

Listening to *The Fellowship of the Ring*. We played the BBC radio version of *The Hobbit* on our last road trip and really enjoyed it. For the most part, I find radio plays are easier to listen to when I'm driving.

DSC in Chattanooga. We won't be making that. It directly conflicts with the 3D photography convention we're helping with. Pity since it would be a short drive.

imax. We saw the IMAX remastered version of the latest Star Wars flick and it looked very nice on the big screen. Of course a nice print didn't help the acting but they did cut about 10 minutes from the film and that helped make it a little less draggy.

"YNGVI IS A LOUSE" and Other Graffitos

T.K.F. Weisskopf Reinhardt

Higher brain functions. Interesting that you assume most people would notice the difference if their higher brain functions atrophied. Seriously though, I think it's just the reverse. As we find ways to off load routine tasks we free the brains limited resources for other tasks.

Real research into things like brain capacity is pretty scarce since everyone doing it is afraid they might find something that shows a difference based on race or gender and get themselves run out of the scientific community. Or they could be accused of confusing the physical body with the mind and get hounded by the religious types.

It's amazing that any real work ever gets done. Fortunately it does. The latest little tidbit is the discovery that our vision is processed in two layers. The first finding basic shapes and deciding if information needs to be passed on for 'higher' processing. It implies that the brain uses distributed process to solve problems.

Arming pilots. My real problem with this idea is that I just know we will have pilots going out back to play hero when they should be up front flying the plane. Hijackers can do little more then down the plane as long as they don't have control of the cockpit. In a hijacking, the pilots job should be to get the plane down on the ground as fast as possible so that some poor bastard of a fighter pilot doesn't have to live with having shot down a plane full of passengers.

AIDS. Part of your confusion about how AIDS is transmitted is rooted in American political correctness, we don't won't to admit that it can ever be transmitted by casual contact, and part of it comes from some assumptions you're making about sexual habits. Here are a few facts:

First, any bodily fluid can contain the AIDS virus. As an example remember those poor souls who caught aids from their dentist. In that case saliva and sweat were the transport mecha-

nism from the dentist to the patients mouths where open cuts allowed the virus easy entrance to the body. Most of us have slight cuts in our mouths almost all the time from eating things like popcorn with sharp edges. This means saliva almost always has a little blood mixed in with it.

Second, transmission via oral sex is possible for the same reason as above. Small cuts in the mouth and/or on the penis allow the virus to move between individuals. A lot of men have HPV, the virus that causes warts, and the tiny warts HPV causes on the penis is another way for the virus to get into the blood.

Third, “dry sex”, where the female vagina isn’t adequately lubricated before penetration, can cause small tears in the vagina and on the penis. Again this permits infection. *This is a major source of infection from sex with African prostitutes.* African men in some areas actually prefer to have sex with partners who are totally dry. The prostitutes know this and even go so far as to apply various mixtures to the vagina to make it dryer.

Fourth, anal sex is a lot more common among heterosexuals then people normally admit. It’s also a very good way to transmit AIDS for the same reason as “dry sex.”

What scares me is the success the Religious Right is having getting safe sex classes out of schools. The whole idea of teaching abstinence as a way of controlling teen sex is ludicrous. Teenagers will have sex regardless of what anyone tells them. If we take the knowledge of how to lower the risk of catching AIDS away all we will be doing is setting ourselves up for an explosive AIDS epidemic.

As you might gather I’ve been researching this topic since we had our last discussion on the subject at your house. It’s fascinating to me how much information is suppressed about AIDS because we don’t want to run the risk that infected people will be discriminated against.

The New Port News 205

Ned Brooks

Smuggling trash. It’s pretty sad when you have to sneak a nice biodegradable material like wood into a landfill. Mind you, we used to do the same thing in Atlanta. Suzanne would cut up ceiling tile and old carpet into small pieces and mix it in with the trash. Up here in Ellijay trash pickup is not a problem: there isn’t any. We make regular runs to the dump.

Lightning rods. Yeah you’re right about our needing them. My problem is that you need to ground them pretty well or they can cause problems. Up here the soil is so rocky it’s hard to get a good ground.

Variations on a Theme #76

Rich Lynch

9/11. You know for a sensible person you sometimes let your political feelings get out of control. You can’t have been seriously suggesting that any President should have put 10 to 20 thousand armed guards on airline flights for an indefinite period of time to try to prevent a possible hijacking?

I went out to the FAAs web site and looked up the number of flights out of just the top 20 airports in the US. It was a little hard to work out, that’s why the range, but it looked like they handle at least 10,000 flights a day on an average day. Since you would need at least two guards on each flight and they couldn’t work 24 hours a day, you would need at least 15,000 guards.

Mind you even today after 9/11 no one has suggested we should do anything like that and we now know for a fact that terrorists could try it again.

As for using drink carts to block cockpit doors...let's just let that one pass.

Party Animals. I would really like to see those. More to the point I'd like to photograph them. I saw a slide show of the Chicago cows they were pretty cool.

Historical Hugo Hysterics

Jeffery Copeland

Very nice! It was fun going through it and seeing how many of them I've read.

Twygdrasil And Treehouse Gazette #78

Richard Dengrove

Source for stereoscope. Decent ones are very hard to come by. If you actually want one, check out "reel3D.com." They sell kits to make them. Your best bet is to pick one up at a yard sale or flea market. A good price is somewhere around \$50 for one in good shape. You'll see ridiculous prices on them in antique stores and on Ebay since a lot of people don't know that millions were made in the early 1900s and they are not at all rare.

Or just wait awhile and I'll send you something that will work. I bought enough inexpensive lorgnette viewers to put though SFPA and I'm going to do so as soon as I get time to do another 3D zine.

Grabbing Bin Laden. I've read a lot of people saying we should have grabbed him first before the action started in Afghanistan. Problem is you have to know where someone is before you can grab them. If you remember the way we got in trouble in Mogadishu was by trying to grab the bad guy. In that case we even knew what city he was in and still couldn't find him. People, especially the military types, tend to greatly over estimate the accurateness of intelligence data. In fact it's often pretty bad. Just consider the bombing of the Chinese embassy or the wedding party we shot to pieces in Afghanistan.

Heck even here in the USA, where we should have the best possible information and nothing to hinder us, it took years to catch the uni-bomber and we are still looking for Richard Jewell. Finding one man is very hard to do unless he gives you a lot of help.

Spiritus Mundi 191

Guy H. Lillian III

First I like your "Challenger" cover on this zine.

The Australian ballot system. I was reading a long article on the subject of electoral systems just the other day and you could have been right about the Fan Artist award not being fair. But it's not likely. Of all the system floating around the "Australian" is one of the hardest to mess up. The one we use, simple plurality, is the easiest. Mess up being defined as letting someone other than the person most of the voters would choose win. There's an enormous body of work on the subject but most of it's really boring to read.

Why doesn't the Pentagon have missile defenses? It probably does at this point. Why didn't it? Set the way back machine to the earliest days before WWI and take a quick look at Americas approach

to self-defense. It was all based on not having to defend our own soil. The basic concept was that we were separated from our likely enemies by a couple of oceans and we would use those as our primary defense.

So we had lots of coastline guns and a pretty good navy. The biggest homeland defense issue was saboteurs.

WWII seemed to have proven that the concept worked with the small addition of a good air force to stop bombers before they could reach the mainland. But even after WWII there seemed little reason to defend the interior of our country. Anyone who was going to attack would most likely be using nukes and there was really no way to defend against them.

Move on to Korea and Vietnam, both very distant and no way threatening to the US. Then the Soviets developed long-range bombers and the possibility of a sneak attack was a very real threat. As a result we have a wonderful surveillance system to detect and intercept anyone trying to approach the US. Note the word "approach." The idea of an attack from inside the country was not a serious consideration.

It's still not. Consider this: If the World Trade Center had been built as a traditional skyscraper it probably would not have fallen. In that case the death toll from 9/11 would have been around 400 people. Those on the planes and those on the floors the planes actually hit. In that case would we have reacted the way we have? It would have been a shock and a bad one but one more comparably to our worst domestic terrorist act.

The 9/11 terrorists wrecked as much havoc as they did because they were very lucky and very smart. Their target was weaker than anyone suspected, that was the lucky part, and they played on years of training in how to handle airline hijackings which was the smart part of the plan.

I've not done the numbers, but if we were to guard every possible high-risk target in the US I suspect we would have to reinstate the draft and keep a substantial percentage of our population in the military at all time. It would take a lot of manpower and a lot of money.

The old approach of stopping the enemy before he reaches our shores is a far better way of insuring our security. Cheaper, less manpower intensive and more practical in the long run. You can never guard everything and if you try to you will have so many guards that some of them will turn out to be the bad guys.

By the way, I've started writing my analysis of why the WTC fell but I keep having to rewrite it as more and more data comes out. The latest thing is that it looks like it was the thousands of gallons of diesel fuel stored in the buildings that did most of the fire damage and not the jet fuel.

Osushigumi

Jeffery Copeland

The end of the Gulf War. Actually the UN resolution under which we prosecuted the war was very specific on the subject of not invading Iraq. It wasn't just the Saudi's who didn't want a Western military force in control of a Gulf State but just about everyone else, with the exception of Israel. I was very disappointed at the time that we didn't "finish the job" but understood the reasons.

War in Iraq. I don't know who you're listing to but I've not heard anyone in the Bush administration claim there is a stable government in Afghanistan. What I've heard is a strong message that we are not in the nation building business. In my opinion there is little chance of there being a stable Afghani government in the next 50 years let alone the next 5. What there will be is a government

that does not *openly* support action against the US.

Nor have I heard any briefing from the Pentagon suggesting war in Iraq will be either fast or without the possibility of heavy losses. Quite the contrary.

On the whole I am against any US military action unless this country is directly threatened. In this case I don't care if Iraq has a stable democratic government, about as likely as the Confederacy staging a comeback, or a nasty dictatorship. It's their country and they should be left alone to run it however they want. But letting them develop nukes is a completely different matter.

I'm not a big fan of Israel these days but I don't want to see Tel Aviv go up in smoke any more than I want to see it happen to New York. There is no doubt in my mind that if Saddam gets nukes he will use them at some point. So I'm all in favor of destroying Iraq's ability to make or buy them. Period.

Linux in the home. We are definitely going there. *Windows XP* has delayed the process a little by being a whole lot more stable than the old version we were running on. When your house is run by your computer "more stable" is still not good enough.

BB guns. Well bb guns shoot little round steel balls, are pretty inaccurate and have very little hitting power. Pellet guns shoot soft lead pellets, can be very accurate and have enough hitting power to kill small animals. Pellet guns are not toys.

Enron. I am very happy to see that the Enron people screwed up and may very well have to pay the price. As I investigate that mess it becomes obvious to me that the company was run as a scam from day one.

As far as the Enron managers selling their stock, no one would have noticed or cared. Its expected that low level employees in companies will use their stock options as income. The SEC doesn't even require them to report their sells. What raises eyebrows is the senior managers selling too much stock. That was one of the early signs that got people worried about Enron.

WorldCom. Their problem, shared by several other companies like AT&T and Northern Telecom, is crushing debt and falling profits. AT&T may have gotten itself out of trouble by selling off it's cable business but it's a little too early to be certain. By the way, all the large telecoms *are* in trouble. That's not just my opinion but fact. It's just a question of how much trouble and how hard it will be for them to dig their way out.

The other telecoms are not worried that WorldCom will go under, they hope it will. That would mean they get to divvy up WorldCom's customers. They're afraid they won't but will get a lot of debt relief from the bankruptcy. Without their debt, WorldCom would be able to drop prices and gain market share.

Well at this point I have to wrap this up or it has no chance of making the mailing. Still I want to address a few comments made to me but I'm not going to pretend that I'm commenting the zines.

Tom Feller – WorldCom acquisitions. They will have to take substantial write-downs on many of their acquisitions. In the late 90s a lot of companies paid a lot of money for assets that now have little or no value. Banks that took those assets as collateral on loans are in even more trouble.

David Schlosser – The SEC budget. I give Clinton most of the blame for the SECs budget because I believe that in the budgets he submitted to Congress he cut or froze their budget every

year. I may not have checked every year, it's very hard fighting your way through the official US budget ☺, but I did most of them. My point was not that Clinton was to blame for the mess but to point out that it's the System and not any one person, even Presidents, who create these problems.

Gary Brown – My defense of Enron and WorldCom. Gary, I don't expect people to read my zines, especially when they are as long and dry as that one was but if you're going to comment on them maybe you should.

If you go back and read that article again you'll find that I described Enron using words like "fraudulent" and "criminal actions" and expressed a hope that the execs would go to jail. I can't imagine anyone construing my discussion of Enron as a defense! In everything I've looked at, the top Enron execs seem to have run the company as a scam from day one.

Yes, I questioned their "looting" the company 401(k) and did a lot of research that pretty clearly shows they did no such thing. And why should they since there was no profit in it for them.

What I'm even more outraged by is the way leading banks, like Citicorp, seem to have bent over backwards to help Enron hide it's true financial condition.

As to "the WorldCom CEO and top executives LIED about the deals they were making on...", I don't know what your talking about unless you have Enron and WorldCom confused. Enron's execs seem to have lied (by the way I use "seem" a lot because I've been trained to avoid statements that could land me in court for libel) about a wide range of shady deals mainly to inflate the stock price.

WorldCom, on the other hand, is accused of misreporting short-term expense as long-term capital expenditures and counting fraud lose reserves as income. As of today, 11/25/02, that's it. In their case they were not trying to inflate the stock price, *it had already fallen by 90%*, but to make the company look like it could pay it's debts so it's creditors would not force it into bankruptcy.

Both actions were illegal but the motives behind the two were very different. WorldCom's actions were like those of a person who uses one credit card to pay another while Enron was more like someone counterfeiting credit cards. The WorldCom CEO will be forced into personal bankruptcy because he did not sell his stock like the Enron execs.

"..that's just business.." how in the world did you get that from that zine? I was trying to describe a horrible business problem almost unique in American history.

By the way, the last part of my comment to you in the last zine somehow got moved to the top of page 4. I still haven't figured out how.

Gary K. Robe – Retirement plans. I've seen some reports in the last few weeks that suggest that the retirement plan problem, many of them are under funded, isn't nearly as bad as people had thought. There are going to be some companies that take pretty good-sized hits but it's not likely to trash any of them.

Your comparison to investing in stock and buying Beanie Babies is a good one. Back in the middle of the bubble I was using the market price of a Furby as an example of the problem. Funny that in the end even though I could see it coming I still got bit by it myself.

