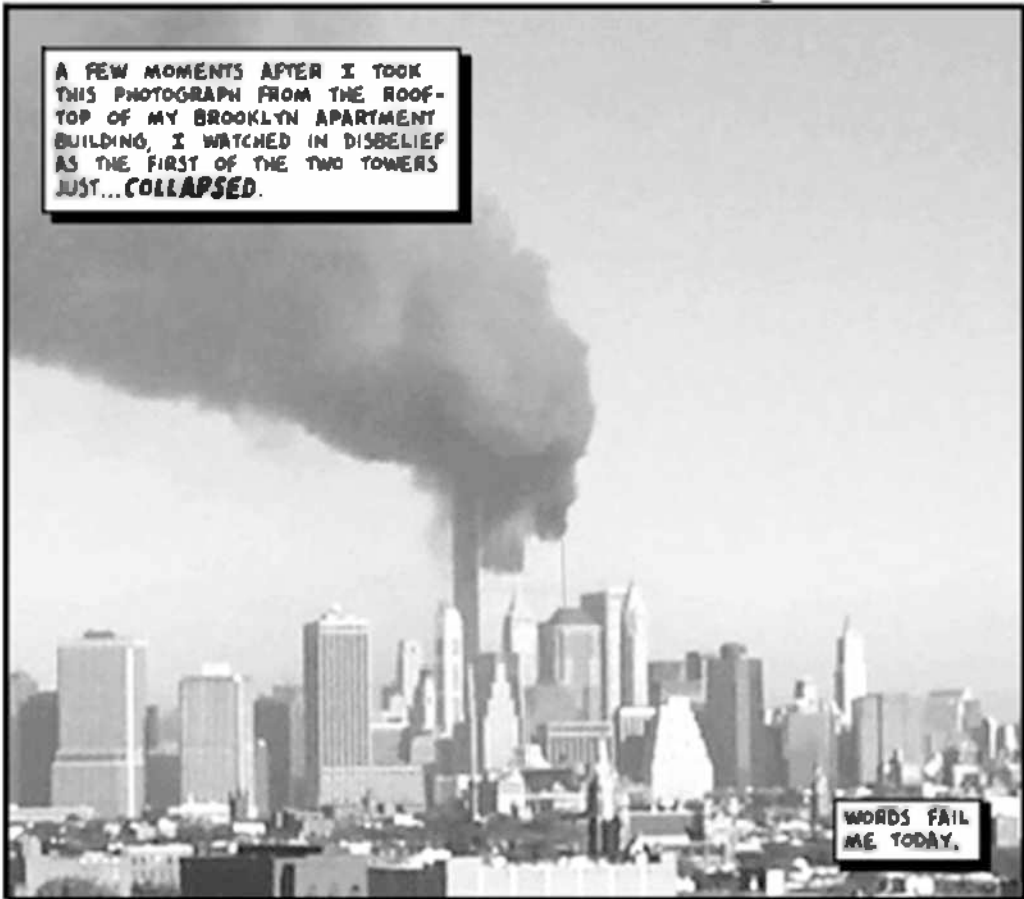


# THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW

A FEW MOMENTS AFTER I TOOK THIS PHOTOGRAPH FROM THE ROOFTOP OF MY BROOKLYN APARTMENT BUILDING, I WATCHED IN DISBELIEF AS THE FIRST OF THE TWO TOWERS JUST...COLLAPSED.



WORDS FAIL ME TODAY.

TM TOMORROW 2001 ... www.thismodernworld.com

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**O**n Sunday, September 9th, I finished drafting my November column. I included a reference to Charles Stross' excellent story "Antibodies", which I'd just read in *The Year's Best Science Fiction*. On Monday evening, I stayed late at the office, and had occasion to reread the opening of Stross' story:

*Everyone remembers where they were and what they were doing when a member of the great and the good is assassinated. Gandhi, the Pope, Thatcher—if you were old enough you remembered where you were when you heard, the tickertape of history etched across your senses.*

Of course, on Tuesday morning I woke up to the tickertape of history clattering loudly.

**L**iz told me, as I came up from my shower, that a plane had crashed into the World Trade Center. "Stupid pilot," thought I and ran downstairs to check on CNN.

My first reaction on seeing the pictures, and realizing that it wasn't one, but two, was, "Baghdad, before nightfall: nuclear slag." But then my better, calmer, nature kicked in, and the enormity of what I was seeing sunk in.

Twenty thousand people. Maybe more. Anger was replaced by sadness.

Maybe they managed to evacuate like they did after the truck bomb.

Twenty thousand people. Maybe more. Twenty thousand *families*. Maybe more. Sadness was replaced by disbelief.

I watched those towers being built, and, like Tom Tomorrow in the cover cartoon, I'd just seen one of them collapse. Fall down. Into rubble. The destruction of such a thing of beauty is not a cause for happiness. To an engineer, these were truly things of beauty, the height — literally and figuratively — of human beings striving for something amazing.

But: Twenty. Thousand. People.

It took most of the day for that to sink in. It took my daughter coming home from school and saying, "There are some kids who said 'bye' to their parents this morning, and who are now orphans" to make it stick.

As I write this now, a week later, it looks like it may only be six thousand. But that's still too many. The *bastards*. Disbelief has been replaced by cold fury.

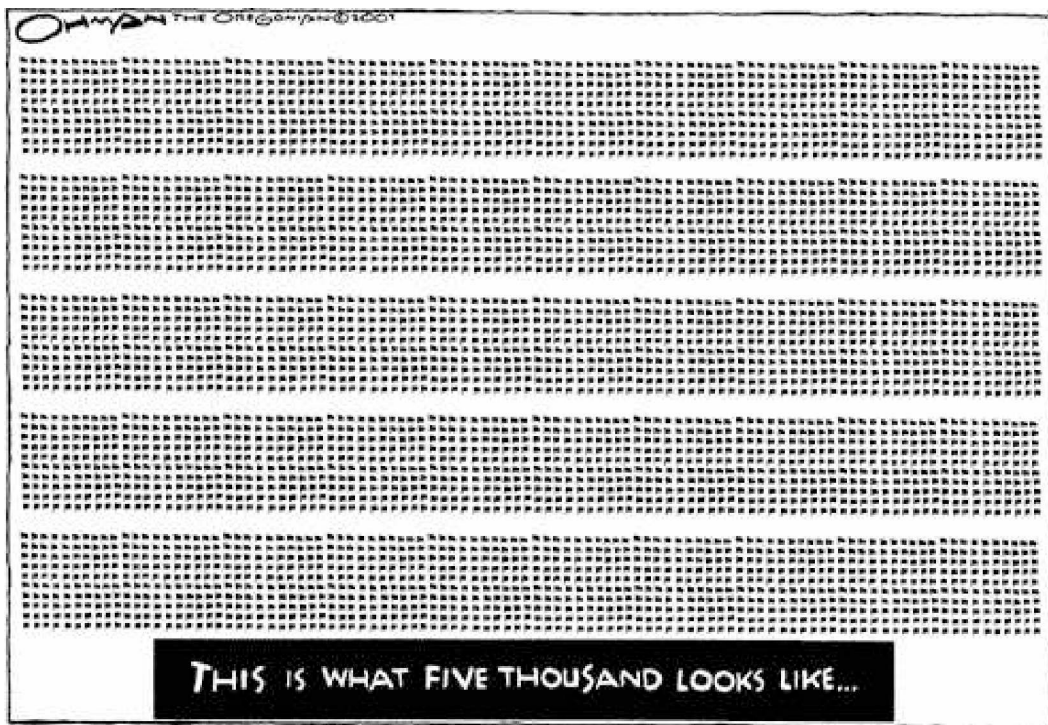
**L**et's not forget, also, that we're Americans. Americans don't target innocents. Americans believe in justice and right. Let's not turn this into our Reichstag Fire. If we fail to live up to our principles, we're no better than the scum who did this.

Conservative editor Bill Kristol floated two trial balloons on NPR one evening shortly after: In the first, he suggested that we can't expect our way of life and civil liberties to be unchanged. If by civil liberties, he means having my baggage inspected — really inspected — before getting on an airplane, I don't have a problem. If he means throwing out the fourth amendment, he can piss up a rope. If we throw out the Constitution, the thing that makes us Americans, the civil compact that binds us together, we are no better than the people who would destroy us.

His other trial balloon was just as disquieting. Asked how certain we had to be that we had found the people responsible for this before taking military action, he responded that it didn't matter, they were probably bad guys and guilty of something. My immediate flash of insight is that that's exactly how they administer the death penalty in Texas. (Let's all go and re-read Terry Bisson's Hugo Award-winner, "macs", for an exploration of the value of revenge.) We need to find who did this. For justice. To stop them from doing this or something worse again. If we throw out our principles in our search, we are no better than the people who would destroy us.

This morning, John Ashcroft announced that he wants to loosen up the wire tapping laws, so that they can tap the person, not the phone line. This makes perfect sense in an age when I'm likely to be talking on a lot of different phone lines. But, it doesn't mean that the FBI should be allowed to vacuum up every phone call in the country to find Osama bin Laden's henchmen by the process of elimination. We have restrictions on wiretaps because the FBI demonstrated that they couldn't be trusted. If we throw out the right of privacy, we are no better than the people who would destroy us.

Similarly, if the airlines are responsible for airport security, they are also responsible for the failure: American and United Airlines and their respective chairmen are accessories before the fact to a conspiracy to use weapons of mass destruction. Bob Crandall and Jim Goodwin should be in federal holding cells right now, ready to answer those charges. Attempts to wiggle out of this by having Congress pass an *ex post facto* liability limitation don't wash. If we get to rewrite history to suit the pocketbooks of some bankers, then there is no justice.



**T**hat said, we are in for a dramatic, protracted fight. The people responsible must be found. They must be brought to justice, even if that justice is delivered by B-2s instead of a jury of twelve Americans. The people who support them must be stopped, even if it means seizing assets of the Saudi royal family — since Saudi insiders managed to make some prescient transactions in insurance stocks on Tuesday morning in Europe, they’re presumed involved. The camps where they train must be bombed and destroyed. Their sources of arms must be stopped, even if it means the United States’ defense industry loses sales.

“Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty.”

Kennedy’s words were never truer: None of this will be easy. None of this will be pretty. If we have to extract bin Laden bodily from Afghanistan, it will almost certainly mean American soldiers coming home in body bags. None of this will be cheap.

**E**very disaster is a time for displays of stupidity.

Conservative pundits leaping on Shrub for keeping his butt out of harm's way on September 11th is stupid. I don't particularly like the man, but he did the right thing. He was in constant touch, he knew what was going on, and he didn't go back to Washington until he knew the danger was past. I don't care if he *looks* "presidential," I care that he do the right thing.

In other news, Jerry Falwell opened his mouth on Pat Robertson's TV show. Normally that would be enough, but the stupidity that came out was even more than normal: "I really believe that the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and lesbians who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU, People for the American Way — all of them who have tried to secularize American — I point the finger in their face and say, 'You helped this happen.'"

This reached my desk Friday just before lunch, just before the painful Minute of Silence. Among my thoughts were wishes for Falwell's enlightenment.

Friday, just after lunch, a nice piece from *PCWorld* arrived across my screen, via [rec.arts.sf.fandom](http://rec.arts.sf.fandom), eulogizing Mark Bingham, a PR guy in Silicon Valley who was on the plane that crashed outside Pittsburgh. Bingham was almost certainly one of the passengers who led the charge against the terrorists.

Mark Bingham, it turns out, was (to quote our usual correspondent in the gay community) "a six-star fag."

That God, She sure has a sense of humor. And She brought a much-needed sense of levity to an otherwise drab and horrible week. Thank You.

**S**ix thousand people. Six degrees of separation. Do the math and not one of us is untouched.

Everyone we know first-hand was removed from the danger zone and is safe. There will be stories in this mailing of lost souls and of close calls, but at the moment. . .

I talked to my parents and made sure they were safe at home before the second tower fell.

We had e-mail almost immediately from George Wells, and through his good offices from Arthur Hlavaty and Dick Lynch. Richard Dengrove was heard from later.

My cousin, the commercial banker whose office was just south of ground zero, was safe and on her way home to Connecticut with her husband by 10am.

My brother Ian, in London, closed his City office across from St Paul's, sent everyone home, and canceled all travel plans for his multi-national staff and all his subsidiaries.

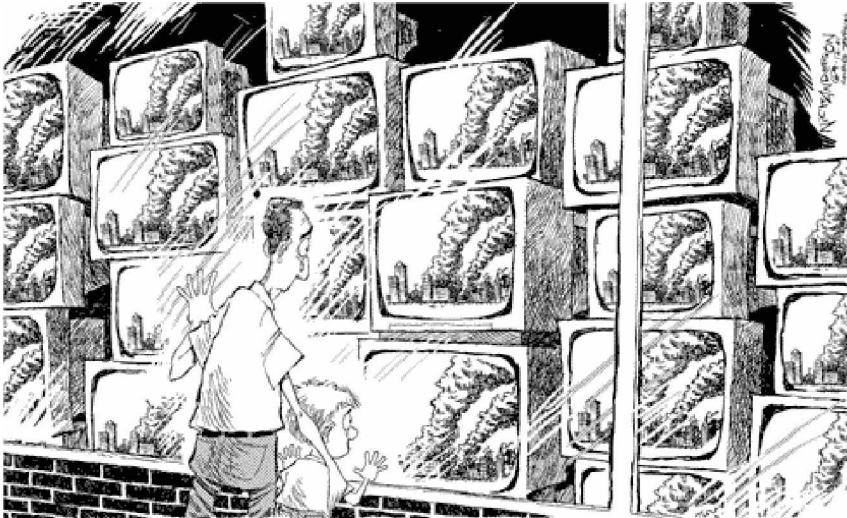
My sister-in-law, Deb, who was a back office broker for Nomura before she married Ian, hasn't been able to contact all her old colleagues yet, and it begins to look like some are lost.

Jason Zions' sister-in-law was late for work, and was in the subway station under WTC 1 when the first plane hit. If she'd been on time, she would have been on the 101st floor.

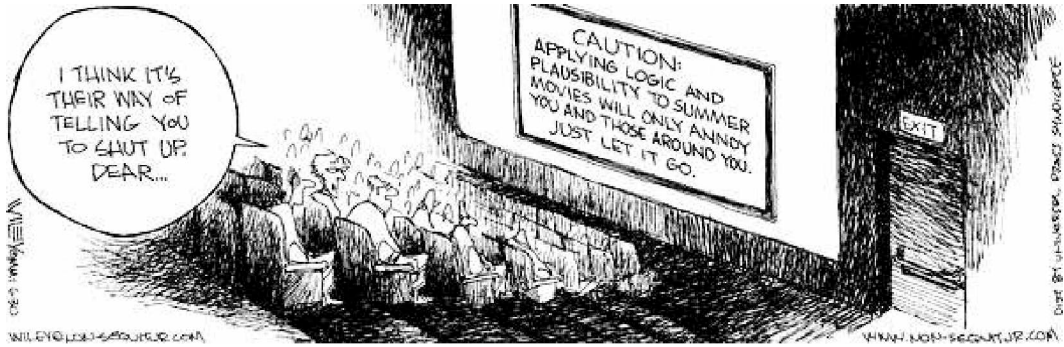
A member of our church in Austin had a very unsettling thirty-six hours until he could track down his brother who worked in the Pentagon.

The village next to my parents' in the Hudson River valley lost fifteen out of fifteen New York City firemen who live there. The daughter of my parents' next door neighbor is best friends with a little girl who suddenly doesn't have a father. When her mom explained that "Daddy's in God's hands now," the little girl asked, "Are you sure God's got enough hands?"

It may seem strange for the humanist to be so sure but, yes, God has enough hands.



It has taken me eight full days to process this bad news. Longer than I expected. The world has changed, and not for the better. Perhaps putting this on paper will help bring me some sense of closure and calm, which I desperately need.



Enough. We'll try to get at least a little back to normal here.

## Reviews

‡ *The Score* is one of the slickest, most stylish caper movies we've seen in a while. Edward Norton and Robert DeNiro are the robbers forced into partnership. The only jarring note is Marlon Brando's dissipated old fence.

This movie does point up the absurdity of the movie rating system, though: It's classed as an *R* because the word "fuck" is used about a dozen times. There are no nude scenes, and one episode of implied sex. There is no gore, no blood, and violence only as necessary to advance the plot. Yet we have movies with much more violence rated *PG-13*. I'd happily take JJ to see this movie, and recommended it to Allie. What gives?

‡ *Empire Records* is a movie Allie brought home from the video store. It features a record store with a crew of bizarre teenagers as staff, each with an interesting back story. Reasonable casting: Liv Tyler and Renee Zellweger and Anthony LaPaglia. Not bad at all: one ended up actually caring about the characters at the end.

‡ What can we say about *Barb Wire*? Pamela Anderson Lee. Tits. Nippleage. Leather. Guns. Things that blow up. Minimal plot and that swiped from *Casablanca*. Fortunately, that's enough for a no-brainer movie.

‡ Irish teenage phenom Sarah Flannery wrote a book this spring. Haven't heard of her? That's probably because she's a math student at the University of Dublin, and the reason she's famous is that she invented a replacement for the ubiquitous RSA encryption scheme, and won the Intel Science Fair with it. When the story appeared in the London *Times*, her fifteen minutes started. *In Code* is the resulting book, and is actually fairly fun.



¶ *Just for Fun* is the book Linus Torvalds' wrote because he's famous now and should write a book. It's the sort of light auto-biographical blather one would expect, even the parts that are bracketed by "if you're not a nerd skip to page xx" warnings. His one interesting observation — that everything moves from a matter of survival, to a matter of social order, to entertainment — is stolen from *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. No additional insight, but amusement was provided. Or as Linus might put it, this book had nothing to do with survival or social order, but was pure entertainment.

¶ *Clerks* and *Mallrats* are first two of five movies in Kevin Smith's New Jersey Chronicles series. In *Clerks* we meet two guys who are the clerks at a convenience store and the video store next door, and follow their adventures through the day. The convenience store clerk, Dante, has a girlfriend, an ex-girlfriend, and a frustrating life — and this (as he keeps reminding us) is supposed to be his day off. We also meet the two drug dealers who hang out on the sidewalk, Jay and Silent Bob, who turn out to be the R2-D2 and C3PO of Smith's universe.

*Mallrats* takes place in a single afternoon at the shopping mall as a jilted young man tries to regain the affections of his young lady, who has already taken up with the manager of a shop at the mall. We have a raft of odd characters, from the game show producer, to the teenage sex researcher, to the ubiquitous Jay and Silent Bob. Not nearly as raw as *Clerks*, nor as desperate his later *Chasing Amy*, it's still fairly amusing.

Now we've got all the setup we need — having earlier seen *Chasing Amy*, and being very fond of *Dogma* — to watch *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back*.

(However, [imdb.com](http://imdb.com) reports that there's actually a movie between *Mallrats* and *Chasing Amy* named *Drawing Flies*, which I've never seen mentioned anywhere else.)

¶ *Charles Stroll* appears not once, but twice, with "Antibodies" and "A Colder War", in Gardner Dozois' reprise of 2000's science fiction, *The Year's Best Science Fiction, eighteenth edition*. Both Stroll's stories are dense with ideas and references, slowly revealing themselves to be more than they appear — or as Gardner puts it they have "high bit rates." Why didn't either of these appear on the Hugo short list, instead of the dreck that did? Watch this guy. There will be more good stuff from him in the future. And soon enough, he'll collect a silver rocket of his own.

¶ I'm not sure I'd call *The Exorcist* the scariest movie ever made. It's certainly up there, and certainly a lot of movies that come later owe it a lot. However, having seen it for the first time recently, I found it dated. It's pace suffers from 30

years of MTV-driven onslaught. The reaction from Allie, the kid who wanted her boyfriend there to hold onto while she watched it? “Yeah, so?”

† *Breaking the News* is James Fallows’ 1995 book about the failures of the media in supporting American democracy. His contention is that by concentrating on politics rather than policy, and on punditry rather than reporting, the news media doesn’t inform the public at all about the things we need to know to govern ourselves. Well done. Let me recommend it.

† *March Upcountry* is the first in a pair of books by some guy named Weber and John Ringo, about the foppish second son of the galactic Empress. After he’s shipwrecked he has to figure out how to grow up in a hurry. Fairly nicely done. If anyone in SFPA has any influence with the editorial staff at Baen, tell them these guys make a good team, and should be encouraged to work together again.

† ABC had intended to show *The Peacemaker* over the weekend of Sept 15th, but decided against it, since the plot involves Serb terrorists smuggling a nuclear weapon into New York. We went and got it at the video store anyway, for catharsis as much as anything else. I don’t remember if I’ve reviewed it here before, but it’s a very thoughtful movie, the first big budget picture by Mimi Leder, who went on to direct *Deep Impact*. It’s got George Clooney and Nicole Kidman, and they’re both very good in it. (Indeed, one might guess that Tom Cruise divorced Kidman because she’s a much, much better actor than he is.) The Russian bad guys are genuinely bad, but the Serbo-croatians are truly slavish — they are tortured in their concern, driven to desperation. We understand their distress and why they are driven to terrorism. Even if I’ve reviewed this before, let me recommend it again, give-or-take your ability to see terrorists in New York without it cutting too close to home for you.

† It is not usually done to review a single issue of a magazine, but *The New Yorker* for 24 September is a tour de force. This is an issue with only one cartoon in place of its usual array of three dozen: Booth has drawn one of his little old ladies hunched in sadness, with her dog covering its eyes in fear. Art Spiegelman’s cover alone is worth the effort to find a copy: it is, at first appearance, all black, until you notice that there is a shadow of two towers in a darker black. It features a “Talk of the Town” section with first-person impressions from the best writers of our time, John Updike, Jonathan Franzen, Susan Sontag. There is a long, long, “From Our Correspondents” section, written by David Remnick from reporting by the likes of Joe Klein, Lillian Ross, James B Stewart, Jeffrey Toobin and Seymour Hersh. Photographs by Joel Meyerowitz and Gilles Peress. This is the story of

what happened on the ground on 11 September in personal, painful detail by the A-team of American letters.



## Mailing Comments on SFPA 219

Janice Gelb ✉ *Trivial Pursuits* :

ct Lillian: "The Nation magazine actually did a cover taking advantage of the resemblance you note here of GW Bush to Alfred E. Newman, and the button he wears said 'Worry' ." Which (as you know by now) I ran as a back cover for "Aristotle Meets Gernsback" in March. (Boy, I really should get caught up some time.)

☞ "As you know, I don't think Team Hugo should be congratulating itself at all: the fact that they had an entertaining ceremony was no thanks to them but the things that went wrong were because of decisions they made or things they screwed up." Y'know, it's always something. That's not to say that the criticism isn't warranted. Patrick Nielsen Hayden's comments at the time about Team Hugo were well aimed: Among other things, he explained how it was a matter of simple courtesy to spell people's names right and to not be so clumsy in the manipulation of PowerPoint that you revealed the names of the winners before they were announced, and that Team Hugo did both. I won't argue that these guys didn't screw up big time, cause it's apparent they did.

But, in the aftermath of this year's Hugo ceremony, the criticism seems to be about length. After LAConII, the grouching was about the late start time, particularly from a pro with a large flock of children and epaulets on his T-shirts, who I won't name. So, there's always some problem. It's only gotten worse in the context of making the Hugo ceremony some big media event, rather than a family gathering, since that provides much more chance to screw up.

(Janice I'm particularly interested in your thoughts on that notion, since you've had a turn in the Hugo-ceremony-running barrel.)

ct Hlavaty: "I've been spending a lot of time correcting this misapprehension: 'He was born on third base and thinks he hit a triple' was not said about Shrub. It was said about Daddy Bush by

*Jim Hightower.*” I still believe it was Ann Richards who coined that one. She was certainly the one who made it famous, along with the more famous quip, “Poor George: Born with a silver foot in his mouth.”

*ct Feller:* “Paul Henreid is the other person who was in Don Juan in Hell with Ricardo Montalban.” Ah, thanks. Even though Montalban was in the production I saw, I’m fairly sure that Henreid wasn’t.

*ct Schlosser:* “There are other arguments to be made for recess, like kids need to work off energy during the day rather than being expected to sit indoors all day.” Some kids are kinetic learners and actually *must* move around to process what’s been poured into their tiny shell-like ears. On the other hand, some of them have dimwits for teachers who think that moving around is a sign of not paying attention.

*ct Strickland:* “As undoubtedly you know, you’re not the only one to have become uncomfortable with the direction in which the Southern Baptist church is moving; probably the most high-profile Southern Baptist in the world has renounced it.” When Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson have hijacked the Baptists, and there’s no difference between them and Islamic Fundamentalists who advocate murdering innocent women and children, I’d question the sense of anyone who *didn’t* leave the Baptist church — and Lillian Carter didn’t raise no senseless children. Well, give-or-take Billy.

*ct Koch:* “I’m with Kay about being afraid of the bug bomb stuff. When I had to bomb my place because of fleas, I put all of my dishes and pots in sealed plastic bags.” Once when we flea bombed in Los Angeles, we ended up calling the 800 number on the can because we’d left Allie’s stuffies on her bed — she would have been about three — and we wanted to make sure that it was okay for her to sleep with them. Since it was after hours, we got shuffled to the company’s chief chemist at home, who lived in New Jersey in the next town over from the one where I grew up.

*ct me:* “Ok, I’m confused my camera uses CompactFlash cards so I just pop one out and put in another one. No zip drive required.” Ah, but by carrying the little drive around with us, we don’t have to carry the laptop to offload the pictures. I *hate* taking the computer on vacations. I don’t take a whole lot of pictures on vacation — compared to, say, Allie — but I still came back from Legoland with 60 megabytes worth. (Yes, now a 64 Mb CompactFlash card is a common thing. But two years ago, when I took those pictures, it was a \$400 special order.) Even for Alaska, I used two of the little 40Mb Clik disks.

☞ “I don’t get why putting a checksum in a photograph would be useful: what’s to prevent you from scanning the photo, modifying it, and then producing a new original without any checksum at all? ...” Because a scanned photo doesn’t have the Kodak checksum on the CD, and modifying the picture off the PhotoCD removes the checksum. If I didn’t mention it, the checksum is one-way encrypted, so that you can tell Kodak generated it, but

can't re-generate a fake one for a modified picture.

☞ "On the *New Yorker* cartoon front, we ended up using two of the same cartoons plus you used one (the construction guys and feng-shui) that I planned for this mailing. Because I use old-fashioned paste-up, mine are clearer than yours, though!" Yes. I need to spend some time improving my skills at scanning line art for printing. Part of the problem with those cartoons was that I was printing them at different resolutions than I'd scanned them. But, Janice! Paste-up?! How *last century*!

ct Wells: "(He also just got a job on 'The Huntress' as a mime. He's not only pleased for the work but also because there will finally be a mime on television who knows what s/he is doing!" We just saw *This is Spiiinal Tap* again after all these years. (I seem to remember seeing it the first time at Dennis Dolbear's place on Betz Avenue, with Allie sleeping on my lap.) But, I was amused to see that Billy Crystal was the head of the mime troupe of waiters at the cocktail party; I don't think I recognized him the first time I saw it.



Toni Weisskopf ☒ *Yngvi is a Louse* ☛

Charlotte says: "Yesterday, Julie and I went to see *Family Man*... But I was impressed with Téa Leoni. I had not seen her in anything before." Yeah. She's actually not bad. She's in *Deep Impact*, which I think is a great movie, made more so by her understated acting. (Imagine Julia Roberts in the same part: completely over the top.) But I think my favorite Leoni role is in the last episode of *X Files* I ever bothered to watch: she plays Dana Scully (opposite Gary Shandling as Mulder) in the movie that FBI director Skinner's old college frat brother is making. Completely hilarious, and no doubt George Wells will fill in all the details I've forgotten. (Of course, she got the job on that show because she's married to David Ducovny.)

Then from your collection of stuff from the *Federalist* newsletter:

"In 1950, the tax burden on the typical American family was about 5 percent of their annual income. Today, the government burden on families is about 40%." Well, think about it. In the 1950s corporations paid 40% of the taxes in the country. By the 80s, it was

down to 17%. Now many corporations pay no taxes at all. The burden is picked up by individuals. Worse, if the top 2% of individual returns represent 20% of the income and 35% of the taxes currently — I'm rounding the numbers here from ones I've explored in these pages before — consider how much *less* the highest-income Americans are paying than in the days when the highest marginal rate was 72% (even though your annual income had to be an inflation-adjusted \$2 million before it kicked in). How much more would the *average* tax burden be if we really had a flat tax rate?

I'm not advocating a return to the steeply-graduated tax rates of yesteryear — far from it — but I'm pointing out that the changes in our tax structure in the eighties had real consequences, one of which has been to shift the burden more onto the lower- and middle-class taxpayer than it was fifty years ago. I really don't know what the right answer is on tax policy, but every possible answer has winners and losers from the current status quo, and a raft of unintended consequences.

(Really good references on tax policy are two books by *Philadelphia Enquirer* reporters Donald Bartlett and James Steele, *America: What Went Wrong?* and *America: Who Really Pays the Taxes.*)

And then on your election stuff, you've simply got some facts wrong. To choose a couple of instances:

*"If Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton can visit Florida to demonstrate, I don't see why Republicans can't either."* There's a vast difference between someone from outside coming to rally local folks to protest and outsiders coming in to both foment *and stage* a riot. The last time that was done — Tom Hayden, Abby Hoffman, Chicago, 1968 — the organizers ended up charged with felonies.

*"Even if you ignore the legal implications of changing the rules, no it wouldn't: George W. Bush would have gained six votes more than Al Gore if all the dimples and hanging chads on 10,600 previously uncounted ballots in Miami-Dade County had been included in the totals..."* Six votes in Miami doesn't count the ones in Palm Beach, or the uncounted-but-clear overvotes in Lake County, or the oddly changing number of ballots for Gore in one of the Republican counties on the panhandle, or the reported numbers of spoiled ballots that don't match the number of ballots that the newspapers got when they asked to examine them. My read of all the *Miami Herald's* numbers have Gore winning the state by six hundred-something. But those magical six votes from Miami is the only statistic James Baker's boys are quoting. Again, this is moot, because the Florida lege, in high-handed fashion appointed their own electors. *That* was rewriting the rules.

*"The U.S. Supreme Court acted against state's rights in reversing the Florida Supreme Court. Nope, the other way around. The extremely activist (even before the vote) Florida Supreme Court arbitrarily changed Florida state law in extending the time for recounts."* No law was changed.

The Florida supreme court acted to resolve a very real conflict in Florida law. On the one hand, the law says that the votes have to be counted by a certain date. On the other hand, the law says that the intent of the voter is the standard by which you determine a vote. Since the Bush boys had successfully held up the recount in many counties, the court ruled that the law saying to count the votes trumped the law that set a date. Courts balance conflicting law all the time. But, they don't then get to write "but, hey, this decision only applies in the current case, and no precedent is set, even if we would have decided this entirely differently if Gore had been ahead," which Scalia did.

"Katherine Harris is a terrible person because of her hairdo and makeup... The best they could come up with was that she was rich, Republican (duh, Secretary of State of Florida is a political appointment)... " Oh, Toni, you're making that up, amusing though it may be. I saw no criticism of Harris for her hair or makeup. She was an official of the Bush campaign in Florida; she was ruling on issues affecting the outcome of an election she had a personal stake in; she had Republican lobbyists for Bush working out of her state office during the recount while she was claiming to be non-partisan. And yes, Toni, Florida's secretary of state *was* elected; they've rewrote the constitution two years ago to do away with the job after Harris' term is over.



### **Eve Ackerman** ☒ **Guilty Pleasures** ✨

"I'm going to be real optimistic and hope Pirate's available by the time you have this disty in your hot little hands." As I think I mentioned last time, I've already downloaded a copy, and violated the Digital Millennium Copyright Act so I could convert it to a form readable on my Palm.

ct Liz: "The Alaska trip sounds wonderful. \*sigh\* It looks I'm not going anywhere this year..." It was very cool. You'll have read our trip report by now.

ct me: "Your final essay has given me much to think about. Thanks for sharing it with us." I was way confused, trying to figure out what essay. I was reading the markup of that

zine, not the final product. In the markup, the essay from my *Server/Workstation Expert* column is included by reference, so I kept missing it. Anyway, thanks for the kind words.

**Norm Metcalf** ☒ *Tyndallite* ✪

ct Metca.f: “As for Harlan Ellison being stalked by Forrest J. Ackerman I heard that Ackerman has been ‘spamming’ Ellison’s fax machine,” In *Greetings, Carbon-based Bipeds*, Arthur Clarke reprints an article he wrote when he got his first fax machine. He bemoans losing the delay inherent in mail service to the antipodes, and suggests adding a delay circuit to the fax machine so that letters from friends would come through immediately, letters from his agent would be held up for a day, letters from editors would wait a week. Then, there’d be a list of people who would get a note back saying “we’re sorry, but the person you want should be reached at ...” and then provide Harlan’s fax number.

**Steve Hughes** ☒ *Random Thoughts* ✪

“I think the deepest bellow laugh I got out of the whole thing was the oft-heard comment, ‘Of course a manual count is more accurate than a machine count.’ Oh, God it’s still funny!” Ignoring the veracity of a manual recount under current rules — I think we disagree on those — I found the wild-and-wooly stories of small county southern politics from your youth fascinating.

☞ “Well, it’s time to wrap this up or I won’t have a chance of getting it in the mailing. I suspect my AFA activity is going to be rather less than in years past. I am seriously trying to, no I am going to, finish my SF novel this year.” And how is the novel coming? I hope the move to Elijah didn’t screw things up too much.

... if you can furnish me with a piece of work that contains even the seed of novelty, the ghost of a shred of a scintilla of a germ of a suspicion of an iota of a shadow of a particle of something interesting and provoking. . .

— Prof Donald Trefusis in *The Liar*, by Stephen Fry

**George Wells** ☒ *Crouching Tiger, Itchy Swimsuit* ✪

George, this is an absolutely wonderful title.

“URGENT- If you have any jewelry and keep it where other people do, move it. Our apt. was broken into, and the burglar(s) went right to the bedroom to the ladies dresser and threw everything from jewelry boxes on the bed.” I’m sorry to hear about this, George. Liz’s jewelry is in the most obvious place possible, but there are three computers, two VCRs and a DVD player between the front door and her dresser.



**Gary Robe** ✉ *Oblivion* 🍷

*"My Headlight Project"* This is so very cool. I want one.

*ct Dengrove:* "I think it is interesting that the termination of Linda Tripp made such big news lately. As an appointee she was OUT and she knew it. Am I wrong, or was she originally a Bush appointee that Clinton just left in place because she was at too low a level to bother with?" Yup, you're right. She was a low-level civil servant in the Bush White House. The Clinton administration kept her around because they needed some folks who knew how to navigate the bureaucracy. When it became apparent that she was a flake — she kept trying to interest the *Washington Post* in lurid stories about Bush's affairs when he was president — they shuffled her off to the Pentagon, where she was good enough at navigating *that* bureaucracy that she ended up getting a political appointment.

*ct me:* "I think you are right on when you say we've never bothered to upgrade The Constitution, but I'm still unsure if it really needs one. . . . Even after this fiasco, I don't hear anyone coming up with a better system than the Electoral College. It may not be pretty, but at least the EC gives the small states a voice that they otherwise would not have in a majority election." There are ways of doing that that don't involve having all states be winner-take-all. As time goes on, I really like the idea of splitting up the electoral votes by congressional district. It's a minimal change with the serious of pushing decisions down to a lower geographic level. It *does* pretty much require a constitutional amendment, though, unless you can get all the states to agree. Currently, the states absolutely get to pick how they appoint their electors — which is why the Florida legislature appointing Bush electors despite the actual vote was legal. If the states aren't all forced to do it the same way, they'll end up in an "arms race" to figure out how to have more influence with candidates, which will result in them going back to winner-take-all.

**Liz Copeland** ✉ *Home with the Armadillo* 🍷

Boy, that's pretty bad photocopy, which would be my fault. Sorry. Blame it (in part) on the badly-tuned Xerox machine at the office. Why is it that HP printers just work and work and work, and a Xerox needs constant fiddling?

*ct Brown:* "I wish the Congress would declare presidential election day as a national holiday to let people take time to vote and not have to rush early in the morning or late at night." I agree on the holiday idea, or even just doing it on the weekend, but such ideas usually get shot down because of who would probably show an increase in turnout." Carter and Ford suggested that in their proposals after the recent fiasco. Along with common poll-opening hours regardless of of time zone. I'm sure they'll be ignored like these proposals always are, but maybe that's just the cynic in me.

*ct Robe:* "Believe us, schools actively try to slow down the fast students." The Bellevue district

has a very strong enrichment program with some that are part day and some that are full day." I've been really happy about our experience with the Bellevue schools. In particular, Bellevue seems to not have the "all kids learn alike" disease as badly as other school districts we've seen. But I wonder if the Bellevue enrichment program is good because 20% of the kids in the district are Asian, and their parents have different level of expectation. 🐾 "Austin had a minimal program with a rigorous test to get into it, Boulder didn't believe in enrichment which is why we did a charter school, and Bellevue seems to provide special programs for both ends of the spectrum." Allie didn't get into Austin's program for politics as much as anything else — the functionaries at the district weren't going to let her into the enrichment program as long as her father was objected to the Pat Robertson clones on the school board. The other problem with Austin's enrichment program was that the parents of the kids in it were all social climbers: it was very important for them to have their kids be the smart ones.

*ct Schlosser: "I don't actually know from personal experience the exact use of the tongue studs in oral sex, but I'm assuming it's cunnilingus that it is supposed to improve tremendously. I could ask Sean, the one down the hall from Jeff who has a tongue stud, but he's Canadian and would probably be shocked at the question." Sean shocked? Not likely. The only less Canadian Canadian I know is Carol Miller. If you asked, Sean'd happily launch into an explanation of why the tongue stud was useful, what size was best for what kinds of oral sex, what kinds of stud are best based on whether you're straight or gay, and how to judge whether stud-aided orgasms were better.*

### *me* ☒ **Fantasy and Reality** ♣

*ct Weisskopf: "'Under Guiliani it felt—and was—safer to ride the subways than under either Dinkins or Koch. His policies worked.' Malcolm Gladwell has some interesting comments about this in The Tipping Point." Two things: First, I've been really impressed Guiliani in the aftermath of September 11th. Like Clinton doing a town meeting, Guiliani's actually doing what he does best.*

But the scarier point which falls out of that is one from Malcolm Gladwell's *Tipping Point*: Gladwell observes that after a particularly public suicide — Curt Cobain, for instance — the suicide rate jumps noticeably. Indeed, the number of fatal single-car traffic accidents increases, even of ones with passengers in the car. I wonder if the same effect applied in the aftermath of the Trade Center attacks, particularly since there were televised pictures of people jumping from the upper floors ahead of the flames. Particularly since there were about ten days of epidemic depression across the country.



## Mailing Comments on SFPA 220

**Norm Metcalf** ☒ **Tyndallite** ✨

*ct Hlavaty:* "I like your comment: 'Heinlein's superwomen associate with his males because, being Heinlein women, they are desperate to breed as soon and as much as possible.'" Spider Robinson has observed that many of the women in Heinlein's books bear a more-than-passing resemblance to his wife, Ginny. If I needed a super-woman in a science fiction novel I was writing, I'd probably model her on Liz. Or Allie.

**Ned Brooks** ☒ **The New Port News** ✨

That cover picture looks like Harry Potter playing quidditch.

*ct Dengrove:* "It never occurred to me that Arthur Thomson's aliens were based on vegetables, but you could be right!" I rather like the aliens in Brin's books: the Machiavellian nine-foot tall stalks of broccoli are particularly interesting.

☞ "I can't make out from the PDF file I dumped off the Net what airmail to Central and South America is." I have a copy of that very table sitting on my desk, so I can have the rates to Europe and Asia. It is complicated beyond belief and beyond necessity. It's almost as though they were attempting to make it unusable.

*ct Gelb:* "You're not going to be at DSC? And here you were one of the people that talked me into being Fan GoH." Janice isn't the only one, as you now know: we didn't make it either. We had so much required family travel this summer that it wasn't possible. I'm glad we at least got down to Westercon. Next year we probably won't be able to make it either, since we're going to have some more of the same. This really annoys me because I'd really, really like to take JJ to visit Huntsville.

*ct Markstein:* "I'm afraid the True Believer syndrome is coded in our DNA..." In *Fountains of Paradise*, Clarke suggests it's actually chemical activity in the brain.

*ct Robe:* "I have read that the US beef industry is in severe denial about the possibility of BSE here, ... One thing is clear - if the beef cattle were not fed BGH (Bovine Growth Hormone) to force them

to market weight faster, they would not need the protein supplements in their feed made from animal byproducts. ... Of course such a change in policy would cut into the profits of the beef industry - and into the budgets of the hamburger addicts, as beef would become more expensive." Range-fed buffalo are certainly healthier for you. They're lower fat, tastier, eat grass, and aren't force-fed artificial stuff.

ct me: "The ditto fluid — though it was the same for all makes of spirit duplicator — seems to have been a trade secret, probably because they couldn't sell it if anyone could make his own." I thought ditto fluid was mostly some form of alcohol. It would be interesting to know what the adulterants were.



### Guy Lillian ☒ Spiritus Mundi ☘

"I'll dance in the treetops if Crouching Tiger wins. Rosy thought the movie silly, but I was wowed. Named it on my Hugo ballot." *Crouching Tiger* got cheated: the Academy gave it Best Foreign Film, not Best Picture. I hope our Hugo made up for it a little bit. I understand Ang Lee sent a nice thank you note. Though I heard some grouching that he couldn't be bothered to show up, which I think is kind of silly.

ct Southerner: "I understand that Media Mail, ostensibly the replacement for Book Rate, is meant for videotapes and the like - not books, and certainly not fanzines pretending to be books." Yes, Media Mail isn't the exact replacement for Book Rate, but the new Book Rate is (like that rate chart Ned and I were talking about on page 18) more complicated than need be with rates dependent on distance zones.

☞ "Even after 30 years on the roster, I still tremble to see who did what." I have this image of you as an Irish Setter, Guy, trembling in anticipation. "Give me the mailing. Oh, yeah! Throw the mailing and I'll catch it. Oh please, ohplease, ohplease!"

ct Brooks: "Here's a question I've carried around for a while; what does 'd/w' mean? I know it means the dust jacket is still on the book, but what do the letters stand for? I should know this." I'll just cut to the chase and save you the embarrassment: Dust wrapper.

For the national press, scandals have become the main obstacle to keeping news in perspective. Real and alleged scandals, involving figures from Bill Clinton to Michael Jackson, have come to serve as a distraction machine, systematically diverting attention to a spectacle whenever the political system threatens to deal with an important but dull-seeming question affecting the way people actually live.

— James Fallows, *Breaking the News*

*ct Brown:* “Why isn’t the Congress investigating the election rather than Clinton’s silly pardon?” It’s a good thing we have a liberal press in this country because if we didn’t, the newspapers would have been going to town on the pardon. . . It’s a matter of “pay no attention to the man behind the curtain.” See the James Fallows quote around here. Just be glad that they haven’t blamed Clinton for the terrorist attacks — after having vilified him for his attempts to attack bin Laden.

*ct Lynch:* “With Dick Cheney ill, I see a way for the 2000 election finally to come out just. Cheney should resign the vice presidency due to his heart condition and Bush should immediately appoint Al Gore to replace him.” This wouldn’t work, because as I pointed out last time, Cheney is the president; Bush is just the head of state. (Or to quote a quip from Patrick Nielsen Hayden: Cheney is Brain and GWB is Pinky.) Actually, it seems to be working in some sense: Bush spends 8-to-6 (with a two-hour break for lunch and workout) in the office, making public appearances, giving speeches. Meanwhile Powell, Rumsfeld, Cheney and Rice run the country. Bush really is doing what he’s good at here — he’s got the pressing-the-flesh part of being Bill Clinton down pat.

*ct Hlavaty:* “Another movie subject who appeared in his own flick was Melvin of Melvin and Howard. And of course Chuck Yeager in The Raht Stuhff.” My favorite, favorite example of this is John Frankenheimer’s *Grand Prix*, which featured a number of the era’s Formula I drivers as themselves, or as not-well disguised simulcra of themselves. The best bit, though, is the scene at the big party after the Grand Prix of Monaco when Juan Manuel Fangio — the winningest F1 driver of all time, and by then eight years retired to running a Chevy dealership in Argentina — leans into the shot from the right, looks straight into the camera, and waves.

*ct Feller:* “... venison, which I’ve had but once, and veal, which offends my sense of humanity even as it delights my palate. How would we like it if super-intelligent cows from outer space raised us in boxes, stuffing our faces with grain so our flesh would melt on their tongues?” I’m reminded with glee that “To Serve Man” was my choice for Retro Hugo Short Story this year, and it even won. Wonderful story. Great punchline.

☞ “Chattacon shouldn’t regret losing David Brin as a Guest; he’s arrogant and nasty.” Brin?

Nasty? You must be thinking of a different David Brin. I've always found him to be a nice guy. (On the other hand, he and I were members of the same house at Caltech, albeit separated by a few years; we didn't meet until he was an astronomy post-doc at San Diego and part-time science fiction writer. That may explain why I've never seen a nasty side.)



*ct Schlosser:* "I used to fly from SF to New Orleans all the time in my college years: You had to expect a bumpy flight because of the mountains you passed over; apparently they always made for a rough road." Um, if you look at a map, you'll notice this big bump in the middle of the country. The air going over that bump tends to be a little . . . well, I guess you'd call it bumpy. It explains how people living on the immediate sides of that bump get hundred mile-an-hour winds through their backyards. (Okay, what do you expect after "dust wrapper"?)

*☞ "LASFAFA was youth and wild abandoned sex; no other apa ever cavorted the way we did..."* Liz says it wasn't cavorting, it was frolicking. I wouldn't know. . . I only have one pipe cleaner in my LASFAFA styrofoam ball, having come on the scene slightly later. (Of course, it's a really, *really* good pipe cleaner.)

*ct Dengrove:* "This election has been an American milestone, and I dread what it will do to the country. Bush will win over the populace — he has an easy personality and no one objects to getting a few dollars more back from their taxes." Well, two things to consider: First, there's going to be one hellacious backlash when people finally realize that those nice checks they got that said "tax relief for America's workers" were actually an advance on the tax refund they were going to get in spring 2002. Second, remember that it didn't matter for Bush Major that he'd had a successful war — he got thrashed at the end of one term anyway. Shrub's war shows no sign of being easy, or short, or an all-out win.

*ct Gelb:* "Damn! Waiting for Guffman is still nowhere to be found on NOLa video shelves. I've wanted to scan that movie since I heard of it." That's too bad. Let me also recommend Christopher Guest's equally hilarious *Best in Show*, which I've reviewed recently. That may be more available.

☞ “That bacover page ‘thanking’ Ralph Nader for delivering the country into the hands of that nincompoop *W* is priceless.” Even though Gore had the higher-content message, Bush’s campaign had better on-the-ground mechanics, like get-out-the-vote drives. A really vital part of that was keeping Nader’s ego pumped up just enough to keep him in the race. It cost Gore more votes in Florida than the Palm Beach ballot.

ct Weisskopf: “I share Charl’s irritation with movies that introduce a character or a plot point and leave it unresolved. Minor but memorable example: Stallone’s daughter in *Demolition Man*. All through the movie he’s talked about going to see her as a grown lady after his years encased in ice or whatever — and then he has his big gun battle with the villain and she’s never mentioned again.” Interesting side point: if you look at the thugs collected by the bad guy in *Demolition Man*, one of them’s Jesse Ventura, the governor of Minnesota. But Tom Clancy’s guilty of the same leave-loose-plot-points-dangling offenses — I’ve railed before about *Executive Orders* in particular. I can’t offer an opinion about *Rainbow Six*: the dick swinging got sufficiently oppressive that I never finished it.

ct Ackerman: “The Professional was really grand, one of my favorite action films of recent times. Terrific hero, villain, gunfight, and climax (BOOM!).” Oh, yes, *The Professional*’s wonderful.

ct Liz: “The struggle to keep it all straight – mailing number, issue number, Press Pub number, dedicatee – is surely among life’s noblest endeavors. ‘Nitpicky detail.’ \*shudder and sob\* I am ashamed. From a great lady, a former OE, a former SFFA president... a yankee sentiment.” What’s the line from the ladies at Castle Anthrax in *Monty Python & the Holy Grail*? Something about “spend all day dressing, and undressing, and knitting exciting underwear.” But much better would be to consider it as a haiku: *nitpicky detail: / warm day to generate zine / much loved, bald faned*. (That’s actually the product of the haiku generator I wrote for my November column, with some specialty words plugged into its vocabulary, like “bald” and “faned” and “nitpicky.”)

☞ “Speaking of Celko, whom you recall so fondly from the 1975 DSC, I recently heard from him. Lives in Austin, of all places, atop the pyramid in his technical writing, and is married, believe it or not.” Austin!?! The bum! How come I don’t get to live in Austin? As I may have mentioned, a couple of years ago (perhaps five, at this point) Celko wrote a piece for *Datamation*, one of the old-line computer trade rags. Since he was fairly well-known as a writer then, they trumpeted it quite a bit. I wrote them a letter saying something like, “How can you trust anything written by a gun-toting, beer-swilling, southern loon like Joe Celko?... And give him my regards.” Of course, they were too chicken to publish it.

ct me: “I like the word ‘usurper’ when applied to *W*... What we need is not less outrage, but more. No truce. Never.” Never, as you say earlier in this very issue of “*Spiritus*”, Guy, is a long time. But, I for one, continue to be outraged. It was former LASFAPAn Matthew Tepper, of all people, on [rec.arts.sf.fandom](http://rec.arts.sf.fandom) who quoted David Ben

Gurion: “We shall fight the war as if there were no White Paper, and the White Paper as if there were no war.”

☞ “Did that daughter-murdering prisoner to whom *W* gave a stay, no doubt for public relations, evade execution for keeps, or only temporarily?” Only temporarily. The stay was allowed to lapse quietly, and even though the stay was announced on the front pages, the execution was a one-paragraph item on page 27.

☞ “I’ve been told that Windows 2000 is ‘twitchy,’ whatever that means. When I had this machine’s hard drive re-programmed, Windows 98 was recommended.” That’s probably the right choice under the circumstances. Windows 98 second edition is more stable than its successor Windows ME. I wouldn’t call Windows 2000 “twitchy” by any stretch of the imagination, though — it’s much more stable than *its* predecessor, WindowsNT 4. Here’s the basic taxonomy: There are two families of 32-bit Windows operating systems. The first is the Win95 family, which was the home computer family. The other, which is from a completely separate code base, is the Windows NT family, the office operating systems. (You probably don’t care, but NT was the brain-child by a guy named Dave Cutler, who came to Microsoft from Digital Equipment Corp, where he’d been responsible for both RSX-11 and VAX/VMS, DEC’s two most successful operating systems.)

Part of the anti-trust problem with Windows XP, the most recent entry in the Windows NT tree, is that now the home version is built on the same base as the office versions, so that some classes of software — like the stuff for operating sound and video cards — is the same for both home and office.

☞ “Speaking of our favorite teenager, I bet one reason Allie enjoys school more in Seattle than she did in Boulder is that she’s grown up a little, and is more self-assured, better able to handle teenage angst and anguish.” Yes, being a little older helps, but it really is a little less frenetic here. Her friends here aren’t the wierdos — they’re the mainstream. “Has she mentioned college yet?” Yeah, she’s talking about going to Reed, in Portland, where her predecessor as editor of the literary magazine went.

☞ “About those strange bumper stickers ... ‘WWJD?’ stands for ‘What Would Jesus Do?’ but I don’t get ‘JWRIFM’. Best guesses sought!” “RTFM” is computerese for “read the *fine* manual.” But I’ve heard it said that if you are a follower of another religion you say “WWED — What Would Elvis Do?” Of course, the answer is usually have the fried banana sandwich, shag the girl and overdose.

### **Tom Feller ☒ Frequent Flyer ✪**

ct Dengrove: “The first electronic computer was ENIAC. It was designed during World War II and finished in 1946. You may be thinking of mechanical tabulating devices that used punch cards. InMan and the Computer, John Kemeny describes working in the Los Alamos computation center in



1946. It consisted of seventeen IBM bookkeeping machines, and a staff of twenty kept the computer going twenty-four hours a day, six days a week..." That book of Kemeny's is very cool. I read it when I was in junior high school. That book was certainly influenced by Vannevar Bush's thoughts. By the way, the young turk at Los Alamos who ran the computing section was a young Princeton grad student named Feynman.

In the simulator, Conrad was spectacular. The instructors would throw everything in the book at him, and there wasn't anyone who could solve problems faster, or react quicker. If Conrad had one weakness, it was his language. When decorum was required, Conrad carried himself with all the poise of a Princeton-educated navy officer, but most of the time he raised colorful to an art form. In the simulator, he whistled and hummed and cracked his chewing gum so loudly that the instructors winced under their headsets. And when the malfunctions got thick, he swore like a sailor. The instructors smiled and shook their heads — "What's this guy gonna do during the *flight*?" — and in the next minute they'd break up laughing because they'd hear Bean's quiet voice in the background: "Yep, that's astronaut talk. A-OK. I gotta learn that."

— Veteran Pete Conrad and Rookie Alan Bean  
in the Apollo simulator in *A Man on the Moon*,  
by Andrew Chaikin

### **Sheila Strickland** ✉ *Revenant* ♣

"Guy mentioned this one last time; but I want to add my recommendation for 'O, Brother, Where Art Thou'. Wonderful movie, marvelous music. I'll be getting the CD so I can hear those songs again." There's actually a movie about the music, *Down from the Mountain*. But for good music, there's also the movie we saw again last weekend: *Tin Cup*, Kevin Costner's golf movie, full of wonderful Texas-style stuff.

*ct Schlosser*: "The sight-seeing I've done in New Orleans has mostly been with out-of-town friends... it's the old cliché that locals never bother to see the tourist attractions." That's why we always want Guy as our tour guide in the city that care forgot. He's the least local local I can name.

*ct Gelb*: "Your shuttle watching experience may have been less than perfect, but at least you were there. That's something I've not managed to do; so maybe one day." I think I quoted Spider Robinson a couple of months ago on this subject: "I could not believe they proposed to hurl that enormous massive object into the air, so high that it wouldn't come down until it was damn good and ready. I felt an enormous thrill of pride to belong to a species that could even conceive of a thing so splendidly arrogant — let alone pull it off."



*ct Weisskopf:* “Ct Sheryl Birkhead’s letter that SFFA couldn’t be stopped by a nuclear holocaust: did you ever read ‘A Way of Life’, by Robert Bloch? First published in 1956, it’s an after the blow up story, in which the two big political parties are the FAFA and the NFFF. Faans organized things because they had the contacts all over.” Robert Bloch? Oh, what a cool notion. I think for after-the-apocolypse, though, Kornbluth’s *The Syndic* is very cool.

*ct Liz:* “So, did you feel the great quake there in Bellevue?” Oh, just a little bit.

*ct me:* “Nice cover, neat quotes. I’ll have to look for *A Man on the Moon*, sounds interesting.” Chaykin’s book is very nice, very thorough. It covers the science and the politics and the personalities very well. Your library should have a copy if you don’t already.

☞ “I was amused by the annoying paper clip on page 19. I don’t use Word very often, but it is on the computers at work.” Well, the claim is that the new version of the Office suite retires that annoying paperclip — the very embodiment of Arthur Hlavaty’s lament “Stop holding my ears: I know what I’m doing”. They even had guys dressed up in paperclip suits riding the cable cars in San Francisco handing out resumés and looking for work. But it’s not completely true: the popup help is still there, but in a different form. Worse, I actually saw the damned paperclip popup the other day in Word XP when I was trying to prevent it from fixing my typing for me.

☞ “*ct me:* ‘I can loan you a teenager’. Ah, no thanks. I’m sure she hasn’t finished instructing you how to drive!” Yes, she finally is. Over Labor Day weekend, I took her out one more time to teach her how to drive a stick shift, so she could start using my Saturn. After the third yelling match,\* I told her to get out of the driver’s seat. I drove her home, got Liz and the title for the car, and drove up to the Saturn dealer. I walked,

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\* Which isn’t really a fair characterization: she’d been doing really well up until then and almost had it down. But she was not really confident of her abilities. She very much wanted to be able to drive the Saturn to school when it started on the Tuesday. She was just tired and frustrated and panicked.

in handed them the car keys and said "Here's a 2000 Saturn SL2 in good shape. I'll swap you this for a used one of the same with an automatic transmission." There was a little more cash than I wanted to spend involved, but it made life a lot easier. Even better, Liz discovered that the Saturn two-door with a sunroof is very nice, and that she was willing to drive it instead of the Toyota convertible she's been faunching after, so we ordered one on the spot. So net, we got two cars and saved about five grand over just the Toyota. Of course, I'm not driving the damned minivan...

### **Steve Hughes** ✉ **Comments** ↗

*ct Southerner:* "You know I was wondering if the Post Office would treat Stamps.com postage as metered mail. That's the only reason I can think of for using their service but it is a pretty good one." Yes. That's the main reason I'm using them. They charge a 10% premium on the postage you print as their cut, and their minimum monthly fee is now \$5 (instead of \$2), so it's really geared toward a small business rather than the casual home user — not counting SFPA, but including the copies of zines we send to friends, we only spend about \$15 a month on postage. I'm willing to absorb the cost so that I don't have to hassle with waiting in the line at the post office — which is not nearly as simple a matter here as it was in Boulder and Fort Collins.

*ct Brooks:* "Sorry you couldn't play the video. I suspect it's a problem with out of date DLLs in your machine. ...It's also a very common Windows problem." Somebody should take those guys from Microsoft out behind the barn and beat the shit out of them. DLLs not having versioning information is stupid. That means that if I have a CD with game on it that have an old version of (say) Direct X on it, when I load the game, I clobber the newer version of Direct X that I already had installed. Why nobody thought this through amazes me.

*ct Feller:* "Humm.. so your fund manager thought that tech stocks were approaching a bottom. He was right in the same sense that a meteor is making a soft landing when it hits the earth. I don't think we'll see a 'bottom' until the end of this year. If then." I find it interesting — nay, absolutely fascinating — that in the aftermath of September 11th, the scum-sucking, bottom-feeding, money-grubbing institutional investors have been running around like chickens with their heads cut off, madly selling, madly screaming "the sky is falling." The only thing propping the market up is that individuals have been going out and, outside of their 401(k)s, buying up stock at bargain prices. We're trying to figure out how much Amazon stock to buy while it's at 5.

*ct Dengrove:* "I suspect we will be seeing that cartoon of the ballot used on your front cover for a long time because both parties find it funny. The thing I think is the funniest about it is that it was actually carefully designed to make the type clearer so older voters could see it better." It was

“carefully designed” in that special sense of the words where one person (Theresa LePore) said “oh, I know how to solve this graphic design problem.” She didn’t consult with anyone else. She skipped the side discussion on ballot design at the meeting of Florida county election supervisors in September, when people actually discussed how to solve the problem. I’ve talked about the graphic design and user interface bungles in that ballot before.

*ct Lillian:* “As far as ‘the bastard not beating Clinton’, I think you may be a little bit premature. It’s clear from the way people are taking the Fifth Amendment in their testimony that there was definitely something illegal going on with the pardons especially of Rich’s.” I think you’re wrong here: Clinton left office with an approval rating slightly higher than Ronald Reagan’s. The flurry of outrage immediately thereafter seemed calculated to drive that approval rating down. We had stories about how many pardons Clinton had signed (not noting that per term, he’d had lower totals than either Reagan or Bush, but he’d just saved them all till the last couple of weeks, nor stories noting how many pardons Bush signed for contributors), and stories on how much Clinton’s office space was going to cost (not noting that Reagan’s — which he never uses — costs 20% more). The Rich pardon was irrelevant in itself; it was just the most convenient stick.

I guess the thing that I’m still failing to understand — and this is in all seriousness, Steve (and Toni, too) — is just what it is about Clinton personally that pisses people off. I don’t see it at all. He has failings — it would take more space and time than I’ve got to enumerate them — but I think at root, as a human being, he’s a nice guy. Just like I think that George Bush was — policy questions and Iran-Contra aside — a nice guy, and a good human being. The criticism of Clinton seems to transcend policy, and descend to the personal. I don’t get it.

We shall not pretend that there is nothing in his long career which those who respect and admire him would wish otherwise.

— *The Times* on the accession of King Edward VII, Jan 1901, in reference to his lifestyle

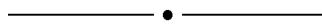
*ct Cleary:* “Sorry the jewel case was mashed on the CD. We used the small cases in the hope they would survive better than large ones. I think if I do another one, when I do another one, I’ll try packaging them just in cardboard envelopes.” I’ve actually recently discovered that there are polypropylene jewel cases, are slightly thinner than the one you shipped here, and don’t crack. I haven’t been able to get the name of the supplier for them, but when I do, I’ll let you know.

*ct Brown:* “Suzanne and I have decided to sell our house in Atlanta and move to Eljay. We’re thinking we sell now and maybe, in a few years, buy or rent an apartment in one of the downtown

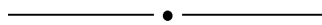
*Atlanta areas.*” You know, Steve: now that he’s divorced again, and he’s being forced out of the company he founded, I bet Ted Turner might be willing to let go of that apartment he has on top of the CNN building. It would make a nifty  *pied à terre*.

*ct Gelb:* “It’s kind of funny hearing the same complaint about John Ashcroft as attorney general from several people: he has strongly held opinions on some subjects.” I don’t mind that he has strong opinions. I mind a lot that he’s got the job of enforcing the laws of the United States, and he doesn’t believe in lots of them. How can we expect him to enforce the laws about protecting abortion clinics (or prosecute clinic bombers) if he thinks abortion is murder? How can we expect him to administer the civil rights division when he prevented a black judge from being appointed by lying about him — indeed, blocked the appointment of any black federal judge in Missouri — and how can we expect him to support anti-discrimination laws when he writes articles in publications that advocate racism?

☞ “What was really silly in California was fixing the price that consumers paid for electricity while not allowing the power companies to sign long-term contracts with their suppliers.” But the little utilities signed long-term contracts. The big ones were greedy and just decided they’d only buy on the spot market. Also, there’s some artificial shortage going on when on a slightly warm spring day, the generating companies can claim they’re at 90% of capacity. The regulators screwed up, yes, but the subsequent mess wasn’t all their fault by any means.



*That’s all the comments this time. Still not making forward progress, only keeping from falling father behind. I’m afraid such is life in the software lane.*

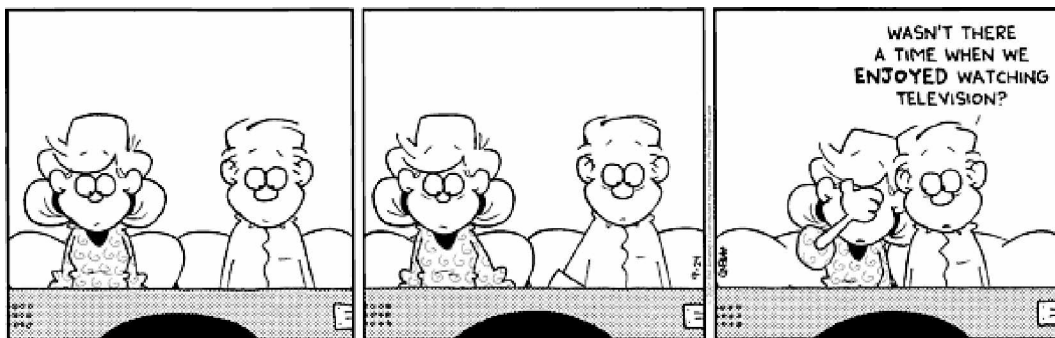


## Closing Thoughts

I’m finishing up writing this zine on Friday 28 September, and I’ve had some time to reflect on the things I said at the beginning of this zine, and can provide some more disjointed observations:

A good friend suggested that the only way we’re all ever going to be normal again is to redefine normal. I hope not. To be this disjointed and unfocused from here forward would not be a good thing.

There’s a lot of folks calling for not taking military action, much of which I think is wrong-headed. Nonetheless, the pacifists have some good points. For example, our struggle isn’t with the people of Afghanistan. Bombing them won’t do any good, since they’re already pretty much living in stone age conditions. However, sending them rice and flour would help. Bomb them with food and



blankets. This is exactly the opposite of the overwhelming force strategy used by the US in Vietnam. We don't grab them by their balls so their hearts and minds will follow, we give them full stomachs and computers, so their hearts and minds will follow.

Stopping terrorism is more than just stopping the currently practicing terrorists. It is important to prevent the spread of the fundamentalist dogma that is causing more fanatics to join up. Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Algeria, Egypt are all countries that are riddled with pockets of muslim fundamentalism. If we can convince the fundamentalists that it is sufficient to practice their brand of their religion without imposing it on the world, we will be better off. (I'm probably fooling myself, though: this argument hasn't worked on Pat Robertson.) Getting the cooperation of local governments is going to be complicated, too: they need to be careful about not making new martyrs to the cause in the process of rooting out the potential terrorists. The Saudis, for example, have been scared about this for more than a decade. The government of Pakistan is constantly run in fear of a coup by the mullahs.

The last thing we need now is a national missile defense. We've proved that our enemies can build a weapon of mass destruction for the cost of two dozen plane tickets and razor blades. It was the assurance that using nuclear weapons would be a Pyrrhic victory that got us through the cold war, not some fancy weapon that would never work.† The nukes of the 21st century will be delivered in suitcases and trucks and small boats, not on top of intercontinental ballistic missiles. We need to spend the money instead on intelligence. We need to revamp the CIA so that it relies on real analysis, rather than the holy grail of satellite pictures. The satellite can tell you where a particular truck is, but not why it's full of fertilizer.

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† Have the folks in the National Security Council never read Clarke's "Superiority"?

At the height of the cold war, a KGB officer named Anatoly Golitsyn defected to the US. He claimed that there was high level Soviet agent in the counter-intelligence operation of the CIA. He also said that there would be additional defectors who would provide information to undermine his own story. The next defector was a guy named Yuri Nosenko, who the CIA drugged, imprisoned, kept in solitary confinement for years, and who was unshakeable in the information he provided, some of which was at variance with Golitsyn's. The net effect of these two defectors was to tie up the CIA in a mole hunt for more than two decades, and to lead to the forced retirement of James Angleton, head of counter-intelligence, among suggestions that perhaps Angleton was the real Soviet mole.



Can I be blamed for remembering that story when I read the front page article this morning about Ahmed Ressay? Ressay, you'll recall, is one of bin Laden's minions from Algeria. He was caught crossing from Canada into Washington just before the New Year's 2000 celebrations with a car full of bomb-making material. He was apparently on his way to leave a suitcase bomb at LAX. Since his conviction, Ressay has been singing like a canary, according to the usual unnamed sources. He's been telling stories of crude biological weapons, or training camps, or bomb-making. Some of the stories are more fantastic than others. But I kept thinking "what if he's a plant, and telling tall tales to get the FBI to suspect everyone and everything?" And then I thought, "and what if the FBI hasn't asked him any questions, but is just leaking stories of their own?"



Given the question of intelligence, one must also question the sweeping new powers that the government is asking for. I'm pleased that the notion of restricting civilian access to cryptography has fallen out of consideration in Congress. Our elected representatives are bright enough to figure out what the FBI and CIA haven't: that horse is out of the barn door. On the other hand, John Ashcroft keeps pushing for more and more powers of surveillance and wire tapping. His claiming "It is not a wish list; it is modest set of essential proposals" is not reassuring. The wiretap laws were put in place for a reason — the FBI has proven again and again

that it's untrustworthy — and should not be changed in our panic. In the interim, I'm planning to begin all outgoing phone calls with the words, "Hey FBI: Stick it in your ear." If nothing else, it will cause everything I say to be vacuumed up by their voice recognition software, and cause them to spend time checking it.

In the same category of stupidity, we've now got comprehensive restrictions on carry-on luggage. No nail files through the security checkpoint. (But you can buy another one on the concourse.) No razor in your toilet kit. No pen knife. Turn on your computer. Our security focuses on the stuff rather than the people, on the props instead of the actors. Wrong.

The long-standing requirement to show identification when checking in at the airport was actually implemented by the airlines to ensure that their frequent-flyer programs weren't being subverted. Similarly, I think that they're using this current scare to get people to check their luggage rather than have carry-on baggage. I'd be perfectly willing to do that if they'd have a "got tickets, just need to check bags" line so that I don't have to wait forty minutes, and then promised to have the bags back in my hands within 30 minutes of the door opening. To fix the remaining problems add some rules about a \$2000 fine if they lose your bag, and hanging the heads of baggage handlers who rifle your luggage on pikes in the parking area.

(Alternately, we could prohibit cabin baggage completely, require everyone to fly naked, and replace the seats with waterbeds, and mazola oil, enacting the Air-otica dance number from the movie *All That Jazz*. Boy, *that* would give the Taliban just more cause to hate us!)



Also in the stupidity department, we've got the on-going backlash over Bush not being in Washington on September 11th. Who cares? Press secretary Ari Fleisher's transparent lies about Air Force One being a target were ridiculous. Apparently, staffers in the White House misunderstood what they were told by the Secret Service, and Fleisher just repeated the story *even though he knew it was false*.

Again: Bush did what he was supposed to. He was not in the same place as the



Vice President during a time of grave crisis so they couldn't both be killed by the same attack. Cheney being at Camp David during Bush's September 20 speech to Congress was more of the same, and I not only don't fault it, I applauded the caution. The lies were not necessary, and cause me to doubt everything else that's been said.



It is still too soon. It's too close. The fright is too raw. We are all still in shock. For about a week, I thought we were never going to laugh again. And then I read something Ulrika O'Brien wrote and laughed so long and hard that I was crying, so I know that laughter is possible in the new world order.

As a New Yorker — even though right now we're *all* New Yorkers — as a Microsoftie, I swell with pride to know that the main product launch event for Windows XP will still be held in New York City, and that Bill Gates went to New York to announce the fact.

I thought I was fairly recovered, and then the other evening, during the first episode of *Enterprise*, the new *Star Trek* series, I saw that Visa commercial for the first time: Black-and-white images of New York, intercut with backstage scenes from a Broadway show, a ballady rendition of "Give My Regards to Broadway" for background music, a final title card saying "The curtain will never go down on New York City." Liz and I both burst into tears.

*We'll have to redefine normal.*

Lastly, it's a little scary to contemplate getting into a land war in Asia. It's particularly a bad idea to think about a war of any kind in Afghanistan. The Russians got thrashed. The British got thrashed — "into the valley of death rode the four hundred." The Mongol hordes took a detour through *Europe* to avoid a second trip through the Khyber Pass! If we can find out where bin Laden is and kill him, that's probably a sufficient start. As Shrub said in his speech, "Whether we bring our enemies to justice or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done." It doesn't stop his network, but it does stop him.

I find the endless breast-beating a little pointless: "oh, we need to think what

we did to offend these poor people and fix it". We offend them by being us. There is going to be no way to turn the Taliban or the al Qaeda terrorist network to our side. They hate America. And in one regard Robertson and Falwell are right: If we were more like them, Stepford clones of religious fanatics, the muslim fanatics would have less reason to hate us. But we aren't. We've got women in short skirts. We've got guys in hardhats who whistle at them and use "fuck" as an interjection. We've got Britney Spears, and Hugh Hefner,‡ and Jerry Bruckheimer, and Camile Paglia and Michael Jackson. We've got movies and baseball and barbecues and the freedom to travel when and where we want. We've had a sexual revolution, and divorce laws. We've can call the leader of the free world an idiot. We've got the internet. That's what makes this America. That's what makes this the not-Taliban.

And *that's* worth defending.



Maybe our next sixty days won't be so scary. Actually, fifty-nine of our last sixty might not have been bad. But that *one*... it was just hell.

Wishing better for all 6 billion of us...

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‡ Now, *there's* an advertising slogan! "Piss off Osama bin Laden: subscribe to *Playboy*"

## Art Credits

Tom Tomorrow's cartoon from [salon.com](http://salon.com) for 12 Sept is on the cover. Page 3: Jack Ohman from *The Oregonian*, 16 Sept — it may not be obvious if the copy is fuzzy, but those are little flags Page 5: Nick Anderson from *The Louisville Courier-Journal*, 12 Sept. Page 6: *Non Sequitur* from 30 June — No nitpicking over summer movies in this household, no siree. Page 9: *Sally Forth* from 13 Sept — with all the events of this month, this holds more true than ever. Page 11: *Baby Blues* from 12 Aug 2000. Page 13: *Overboard* from 14 July — yup, every dog I've ever met thinks exactly the same way. Page 17: *Shoe* from 16 March 2000 — sometimes you don't need a magician, you need Robert Heinlein to write a superwoman. Page 18: *Doonesbury* from 7 July — it's not surprise that Gary Trudeau didn't believe in the missile defense system — by now, nobody should. Page 20: *Jumpstart* from 10 May 2000 — sometimes flying is just flying. Page 24: *Shoe* from 22 April.

Page 28: *Foxtrot* from 24 Sept. Page 29: Flags at half-mast at the Kremlin and European Union headquarters. Both pictures are from a web collection of pictures from memorial services around the world at <http://coldleaf.org/thankyou.htm>, plus other mirror sites. Page 30: *Foxtrot* from 26 Sept. Page 31: *Foxtrot* from 28 Sept. Page 32: *Foxtrot* from 29 Sept — hug your local hero. Do it now.

The back cover features a satellite image of centered over the lower Hudson River, 11 September 2001, 11:55am local time. Copyright 2001, CNES/SPOT (<http://www.spot.com>). Both the front and back images were originally color, and I'd normally go ahead and run them in color for the egoboo mailing, but somehow they seem more natural and capture the mood better in black-and-white.

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