

THE SPHERE

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THE TOPIC

Okay, **now** it's the 21st century. Last time I said that, I was just referring to the dates.

Decades and centuries don't always begin exactly where they're supposed to. Sometimes it isn't apparent until much later, exactly where the line is drawn — the '60s, for example, probably began when Kennedy was killed, but we didn't know that at the time. And sometimes it isn't 100% clear even in retrospect — did the 20th century start when World War I made the European aristocracy seem like such an anachronism, or when, in 1898, President McKinley slaughtered the Philippine Moro tribe, providing a role model for Hitler, Stalin, Kemal Ataturk, Pol Pot and other 20th century genocidists?

But I think history will confirm what we all know — the 21st century started with the destruction of the World Trade Center.

So far (that is, as of Sept. 21), I'm not too displeased with the responses of the elected officials in the hot seats. Of course, it's a good chance for politicians to shine. Even Babybush, as long as he sticks to platitudes supplied by his handlers, which is what he's apparently doing, doesn't look **too** bad. I was afraid he'd start lobbing nukes all over the place, like Papabush probably would've done. (Date inserted to cover the possibility he'll make a liar out of me by the time the mailing arrives.)

And boy, doesn't Giuliani look good! Out there all day, every day, with his baseball cap, chatting with reporters and whatnot. As far as effective support and administration goes, he could probably do as good a job from his office, but the man is a true politician. Give him credit — being so visible can't hurt a bit, and his implied message, that the thing to do now is pick up the pieces and move on, is worth saying. I like the attitude he's been showing in this.

As for Bush's prepared announcements about prayer and belligerence, I gotta say, I'm certainly relieved that after ten days, nobody's been nuked. Of course, it's pretty obvious this isn't the sort of situation where nukes are very

helpful, but I can see the visceral satisfaction some folks would take in carpet-nuking the Afghanistan, even if it wouldn't be very effective in preventing such catastrophes in the future, and collateral damage seems to be a price such people would be "willing to pay".

I'll spare you the polemic **that** phrase elicits from me. Let's just say that while I have no objection whatsoever to anything bad happening to anybody involved in what is so far the biggest crime of the century, anybody who harms an innocent person, just because he looks like them or lives near them, is a terrorist himself, and should be treated like one.

A guy in Mesa, a city near Phoenix (not quite close enough to be a suburb), was shot three times in the back last week because he wore a turban, spoke with an accent and had dark skin. He was born in India, but I don't know why that should be held against him. The accused (and almost certainly guilty) murderer is alleged by family members to be a nice guy, with not a racist bone in his body.

It's going to be a popular war. And it's hard to imagine anything more frightening than a popular war.

A couple of notes on the language of the war: I keep hearing the phrase "America's New War" — but only on CNN. (Or am I not listening carefully enough?) Is that their name for the event, or a blanket title of their coverage of it, or what? Is that the war's name, at least for present? I don't like it, personally — it seems designed to incite feelings of jingoism, which may make things easier for the actual wagers of war, but also seems likely to contribute to the war's ferocity. Not that this one is going to need much of that.

Another word I hear a lot is "effective", but in an odd context. I'd heard it several times before I realized it's a new Orthodox Republicanist mantra. Our response to this atrocity must be "effective", unlike Clinton's bombing of that pharmaceutical factory in Sudan. What a wasted effort! Obviously, that was done just for the visceral satisfaction of responding with a big, loud explosion. Boy, that Clinton . . . (Parts of this mantra are sometimes [tho not

always] left unspoken, but if so, they're always present in the silences.)

And I can only shake my head in wonder. For one thing — it's okay to bomb pharmaceutical factories, if in doing so you actually do deter terrorism? Remember that ol' 1960s expression? "Fighting for peace is like fucking for chastity." So is bombing pharmaceutical factories to fight terrorism.

Second, if pharmaceutical factories are off limits except when it's "effective", how come it's okay to bomb residential sections of Tripoli even tho that isn't effective either? The only difference I can see (aside from the fact that there were babies involved) is that the latter was ordered by a Republican. And related to Second,

Third, for the love of God, they will seize upon **even this** as an excuse to bash Clinton.

Another note on language, tho this isn't a specific word or phrase: In many unobvious ways, we are being led to understand and accept the fact that this is not a war with a particularly reachable goal. It will be war as an ongoing stopgap effort to keep things from getting worse. It's not surprising that the U.S. is going to be in a perpetual state of war from now on — they've been keeping that up since before I was born. But to hear them **acknowledge** it, and **admit** it's never going to end, is rather jarring. They must be counting on better support this time than they've been getting for the War on Drugs.

Meanwhile, the stories are coming out about how much the FBI knew about these guys before it happened, and how clearly they could tell something was up. And I see legislation has already passed, broadening the FBI's legal ability to spy on citizens, something it's always lobbying for no matter how much it gets. (How long before it starts asking for internal passports, so you have to show ID to cross state lines? How long before it gets them?) I'm not saying the FBI deliberately ignored something as big as this — not something they knew at the time would be as big as this, anyway — but I gotta ask, did **anybody** else get what they wanted out of this mess?

And I hear only passing mention of where Osama bin Laden got his early terrorist training, tho it's common knowledge it was the CIA. What do things that go around do? How does that line go about sowing and reaping?

DON MARKSTEIN'S TOONOPEDIA™

But life goes on, as it will, and as long as it does for me, I'll probably continue adding to my Toonopedia™. Articles added since the last SFPA are Ally Sloper, Andy Capp, Apartment 3-G, Tex Avery, Captain Comet, Comics Revue, Jack Davis, Lyonel Feininger, Bud Fisher, Fox-Trot, The Heap, Inspector Willoughby, Judge Parker, Kerry Drake, Mary Perkins On Stage, Obadiah Oldbuck, Power Pack, Rex Morgan M.D., Space Cabby, Ultra the Multi-Alien, Winnie Winkle and Yellow Submarine. By the old reckoning, that makes a total of 396 articles.

But since I'm now (as mentioned last mailing) counting "toon topics" covered, rather than articles, I've disallowed the Awards page, the Acknowledgments, the FAQ, the Privacy Statement, the Site History and the Contents Page. Most of those are "articles" by reasonable criteria, but the new count has me at 390. Either way, I'll surely hit 400 by next mailing, even tho production has fallen off in the past couple of months and I don't see it picking up in the next few weeks. (I'm afraid I'm going to have to let the average of three articles per week slide.)

If this every-mailing recitation of new articles and the counting thereof bores you, you have my sincere sympathy, but that won't have any effect on what I write here. I do it mostly so I'll have a record of how the Toonopedia™ progresses in what I've come to think of as my ongoing autobiography. The Site History notes the date each article is added, but it's kinda hard to step back and get an overall picture from just a bare list. I'd rather have it summarized in my SFPazine.

By the way, the bunch above contains the two oldest features I've written up, both of which predate *The Yellow Kid* by decades.

<http://www.toonopedia.com>, if you've forgotten.

OTHER WEB ACTIVITY

gradeScience.com is running, tho it's been kinda knocked for a loop by recent events. (Not only was I too dazed to work effectively for several days, the people maintaining the site are at least partly located in New York.)

I've spiffed it up some, but plan to do more when the publisher updates the user interface, which I've thus far found practically opaque. I have about a dozen articles posted so far.

I'm not the owner of that site, by the way, tho I do own all the content. My official title is "Content Manager".

I am, however, the owner of a site so new, it isn't up at all. I've been hanging around Webmaster message boards lately, which has made me aware of a type of site I'd never seen before — the "affiliate mini-site". I checked out an example, which consists entirely of a long and not very well written article on how nice it is to have a credit card, with links all over the place to a site that issues credit cards. The owner gets paid every time someone coming from his site gets a card. Allegedly, that site took a couple of hours to set up, has not been maintained in over a year and a half, and is bringing in several hundred bucks a month.

The idea is to put up just enough content to where the search engines won't completely turn up their noses at it and other sites aren't embarrassed to link to it, and do nothing else except pound a (hopefully) lucrative affiliate program. Personally, I don't think I could stomach pushing a credit card, but there are plenty of affiliate programs out there.

So I decided to experiment with a site devoted to Christmas collectibles. GiGi offered to write a couple of essays about Christmas, and that would suffice for content. So I signed up for a collectibles affiliate program, and started putting it together. It would take considerably more effort than that credit card one, but would be a more interesting thing to work on and one that I could adapt to any number of other uses.

I also bought a domain to house it and anything else along those lines that I might do — www.webstore-one.com. Don't bother going there — like I say, it's not up yet. Hopefully, I'll have something there next mailing, but right now all the machine will tell you is that it can't find the server.

When there is something there, it won't be that Christmas site, because I decided to blow it off this year. There's no point in doing it if I can't have it up by the first of October, and even that would be cutting it very thin. What with one thing and another, I've only managed about a quarter of what I need for it to consti-

tute a reasonable experiment, and there are too many end-of-September deadlines (e.g., SFPA) to allow me time for getting the rest done. Basically, I got started too late to do it this year, and should have known that before stressing out on the looming deadlines.

Instead, I'm going to shoot for a Valentine's Day site, with a deadline of mid-October. This zine passes out of my life on the 24th (I hope), then from the 25th to the end of the month I have to get a Mickey Mouse script done, then hopefully, I'll be able to devote a good, solid week or so to the Valentine site. In addition to the collectibles company, I'll have to get affiliations with people selling chocolate and flowers. Once it's set up, it should be pretty low maintenance (go through every November or so to make sure it's up-to-date for the coming February), and maybe it'll bring in a buck or two.

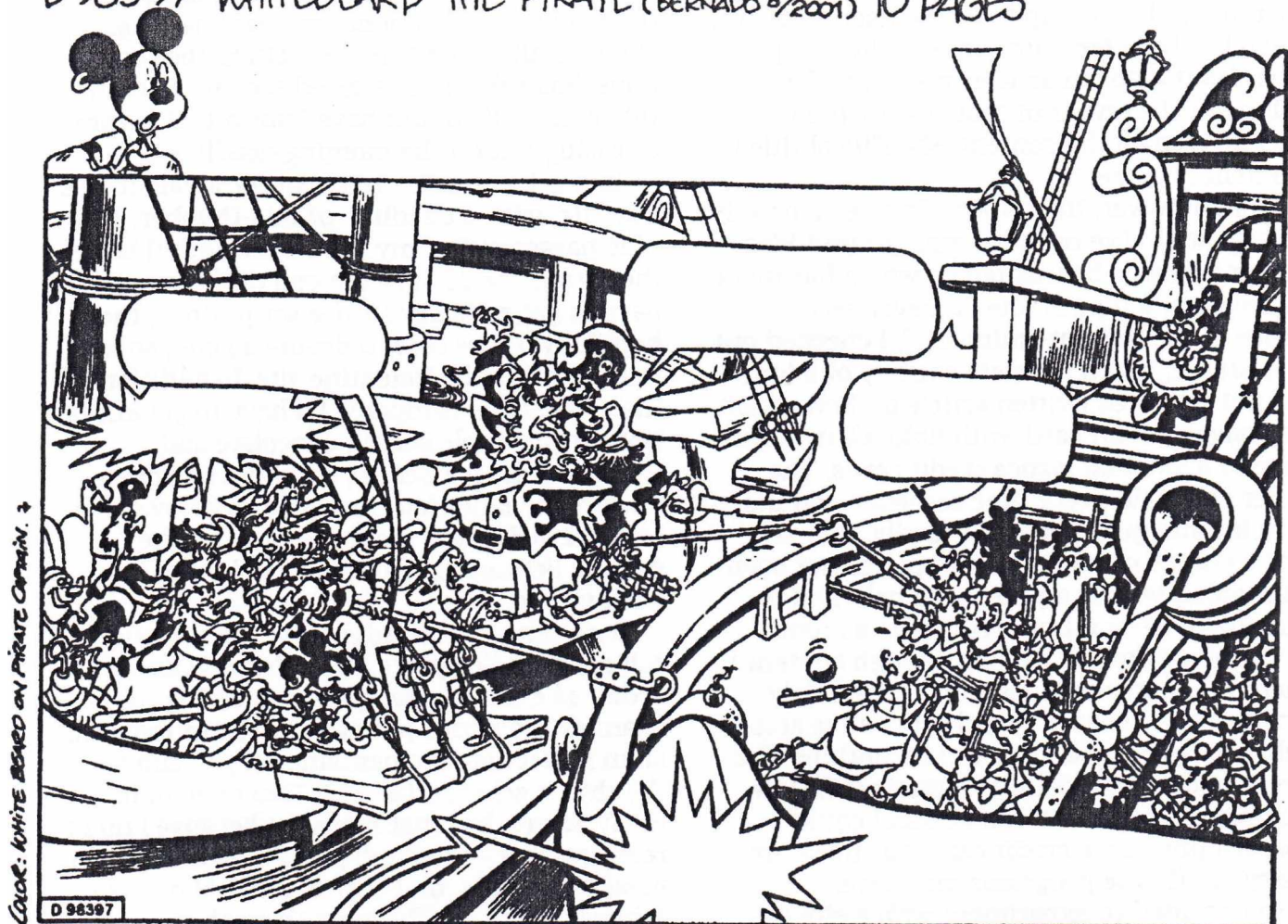
If nothing else, it might give me a venue to sell sonnets. For years, I've offered sonnets to order, as extra-special gifts, containing the enamorata's name, pet name, description, etc., all in perfect iambic pentameter, you choose the rhyme scheme, for \$50. Don't get all that many takers, but that might be because I don't really push it — just tell people, mention it on message boards, that sort of stuff. Maybe if I can get decent traffic going through this Valentine site, I can try selling them there.

Despite the sudden dry-up of the dot-coms a few months ago, there's still money to be made off the Web. If I can set up a routine that would make constructing the pages go quickly, maybe running a little string of affiliate mini-sites would be a way to tap into it.

FUNNYBOOK WRITING

A couple of years ago, seriously pressed for time, I made a SFPazine out of all the stages an Egmont Mickey Mouse story went through, up to the point of writing the script (the last where I'm personally involved). The one I used as an example was "Whitebeard the Pirate", which I **just now** got artwork back on.

Since I'm again seriously pressed for time, and looking for filler so the type on my barer-than-usual minac doesn't look too ridiculously big, I thought I'd take the top of the next page to show you the splash panel from it.



The "burst" shaped balloon at the bottom is the director yelling "Cut!" because Hugo von Hamfister, the guy playing the pirate captain, flubbed his lines during the dress rehearsal.

Mailing COMMENTS

I'm more than ordinarily under the gun this time. Last year, I'd have filled up the zine with about-to-be-published *Toonopedia*TM articles. But these days, I don't have any about-to-be-published ones — they go up at midnight of the day they're written, and that makes them ineligible for SFPA credit. So I'm basically just trying to fill up at least six pages at the word processor's default settings, then format it into a zine and send it off.

Mailing comments tend to suffer when I'm doing that. But one thing leapt out of the mailing at me — needless to say, it was something of Toni's — so I'm digging the mailing out of wherever the hell it went while I was cleaning up for last week's baby shower (oh yes, Rachel

is still pregnant and if all goes well I'll be a grandpa next mailing), I'll get that one written, and then we'll see how much more I can do before I hit the wall.

I'll make an exception to my usual practice of arranging them in alphabetical order, and start with the one that got me digging for the mailing.

Toni Weiskopf:

Respect, Toni. It is respect for those who hold different viewpoints that you lack, not "sensitivity".

And I must say, your attempt to switch words is an excellent example of it. To characterize my topic as "sensitivity" rather than "respect" is to downgrade what I said about your behavior — to belittle it — to show lack of respect for it.

Respect is one of the cardinal virtues of social intercourse. If one habitually thinks of

those who disagree as "morons", "stupid" and the many other things you've called all whose opinions differ from yours, then what basis has that person for intelligent conversation?

Sensitivity — i.e., regard for one another's feelings — is also very nice, but intelligent conversation can be carried on without it. I don't really care all that much whether or not you're sensitive. I'm told, in fact, there might even be those who would suggest, however unjustly, that I myself might at certain rare times in the past have been considered, erroneously of course, to have displayed lack of sensitivity, tho I have no idea why anyone would ever say such a thing. But to earn my **disrespect**, one has to do a great deal more than disagree with me about politics.

I made what I believe is a valid observation about your behavior patterns, one that I think ought to be said — not just to you but to **anyone** whose faith-based certainties lead him to automatically dismiss whatever a non-believer, i.e., moron, might say. You've turned around and portrayed it as a hand-wringing whine about touchy-feely stuff that's no-doubt related, and not very distantly, to liberalism.

What **appalling** lack of respect!

Well, that's what I dug the mailing out for. Now that it's out, I'll catch you again in the regular mailing comments.

JANICE Gelb:

It's entirely possible Johnny Hart (the ultra-Christian *B.C.* cartoonist) does expect conversations from his strips. Many religious folks seem to think relentless evangelism gets results — I mean, if you're in the habit of believing things without evidence, what's one more? At a convention a couple of years ago, I grew bored with a conversation I was having with a True Believing Christian who kept saying the same few things over and over. Seeing that I was looking for an excuse to get away, she said, rather smugly, that I was obviously afraid she was going to convert me. I still laugh whenever I think of that.

Trinlay KHADRO:

Thanks for the timely reminders about what I think of as The Rachel Situation. There have been times during the past few months

when it's been more than ordinarily difficult to remember that I love her. I'm sure I'll feel more like a kindly old grandpa when I'm actually looking at the kid — right now, I feel like a guy with a hell of a lot of family shit going on. Having her back in the house has been mostly bearable — a few blowups, with only minor damage to the house, but no shrieking horrors. I guess pregnancy hormones aren't as virulent as teenage hormones. Wouldn't wish either of 'em on a dog, tho.

I do expect to be pretty involved with Alex (the kid's current name), since we're all going to be together for at least the first few months. I generally get along with kids in the house, tho they do make it harder to get anything else done.

MIKE WEBER:

I don't recall getting your Toonopedia™ corrections, but I had some problems with my e-mail there a few months ago. If you can re-send them, I'll see that they're taken care of.

I didn't do much to publicize the Toonopedia™ initially. Just submitted it to the usual search engines, announced it on a few message boards, sent notices to people I thought might link to me . . . Once I'm able to make it pay, which seems far away in the present economic climate but will undoubtedly change eventually, I'll start really pushing it.

Toni Weisskopf:

And another thing —

The fact that you apparently expected to get away with substituting "sensitivity" for "respect" is another way in which you show lack of respect. How stupid do you think I am?

I'm not going to argue about whether the media append "ultra" more often to "liberal" or "conservative", or whether they bashed Clinton **enough**. Christians are convinced they're a persecuted minority too. Comes with the True-Believerism. You can cite allegations from your Republicanist tracts till the cows come home, but you can't turn **any** institution controlled by a handful of mega-corporations into a hotbed of liberalism. But I don't expect you religious folks to ever see that, so you go just ahead and believe it. Pay no attention to my jeering. I'm just a moron.

You can also try to obfuscate the fact that

Clinton is the one who knew what "is" is, but you can't change it. In citing all the different ways the Republican lawyer described sexual relationships, you're merely trying to draw attention away from the fact that the issue is not whether or not he adequately described sexual relationships, but **whether or not he included the past tense**, which he did not.

And to call my description of the true facts "admiration" is just one more example of lack of respect — you're trying to polarize me into one of your Clinton-loving straw men. I made it absolutely clear, using such locutions as "weasely" and "lawyer-like", that I don't admire such technical analysis of language when lawyers do it any more than when 12-year-olds do. But just as the 12-year-old is usually correct — technically — so is Clinton correct — technically. Obviously he was being evasive, but that's not against the law. The exchange took place in a courtroom, where what is considered shameful behavior by decent human beings is perfectly acceptable to lawyers. You may think Clinton was being untruthful when

he answered as he did, but that's just because, like others of your faith, you don't understand what, from a lawyer's or a 12-year-old's point of view, "is" is.

Well, there's that "wall" I was talking about at the beginning of the mailing comments. I do have more than the necessary six pages at the word processor's default settings, so there's my minac. Of course, when it's formatted up, the type looks kinda on the large size, so to keep it from being **too** ridiculously big, I've added a half-page from one of my Mickey Mouse stories. For further fill, I'm adding another one below. This is from "Foes in Fellowship", in which Mickey and his arch-enemy, Pete, are forced into what became rather a complex state of cooperation. In addition to having to help Mickey avoid a hit man, Pete winds up in a three-legged race with him.

And so, with sufficient content in place and barely time to get it out on schedule so I can tend to other deadlines, this zine is now concluded.

