

The Sphere

Vol. 198 #1, published for the 227th Mailing of The Southern Fandom Press Alliance by Don Markstein, 14836 N. 35th St., Phoenix, AZ 85043, (602)485-7860, ddmarkstein@cox.net, don@toonopedia.com, <http://www.toonopedia.com>, <http://www.uncadonald.com>. Headlines: New Order Engraved.

Don Markstein's Toonopedia™

On May 1, I was a *USA Today* Hot Site — again. (The first was about a week after I opened.) This time I made the print edition, and from there got passed on to Gannett's news service. The first I knew of it was when somebody I know in Boise, who has no interest of his own in the subject matter, called to say he saw my name in his local paper. I also seem to have been on the TV news in several areas.

This has had the effect of more than doubling my traffic during the first half of May. As I write this, it's fallen off some but is still higher than before. I'm now getting 8-10,000 page views per day, up from about 5,000 as of last mailing but down from 12-15,000 at the peak. Which means it's time to pay the Success Tax — again.

The Success Tax comes due when you have a Web site that so many people like, you overflow your data transfer limits. Then you have to upgrade your service, and consequently pay more for it. This will be my third Success Tax assessment.

It was about due anyway — I've been exceeding my monthly limit practically all year, and would have upgraded months ago if I weren't already at the top level my server offers. Now that this — this what do you call it, sustained spike? Anyway, now that I've shot through the roof (I'm now well over twice my data transfer allowance for May, and the month still has days to go) I guess it's time to bite the bullet and move to a bigger server.

Bitch, bitch, bitch. Actually, it's not that expensive — in fact, I may be able to get what I need for less than I'm currently paying, tho I'll have to learn how to do a couple of minor things my current server is doing for me. It's just a hassle to change servers.

And I'm going to stay with my current server for my new domain. Did I mention I bought a new domain? I now own [uncadonald.com](http://www.uncadonald.com) — would've had it long ago, but until recently, somebody else owned it. Never figured out who, because they didn't have anything up there. I don't know why they maintained it as long as they did, but they renewed it once just since I've been watching it, and never did put up a site.

And neither have I, at least not yet, tho I'll probably move my personal site there when things are a

little less hectic around here (first week in June, probably). I've offered the girls a few pages of their own there. Karen will probably use hers for a Weird Al fan site, and if it gets too popular I'll make her pay her own Success Tax. Kid has more money than I do anyway.

As I was saying, the Toonopedia™ — Even as I pay the Success Tax, I'm cutting off my only source of revenue. Such as it is. I haven't actually been collecting anything to speak of from the banner ads I've been running across the top, so it won't hurt that I decided to drop them. I'm thinking of possibly putting them back, but at the bottom of the page instead. They looked really cheesy on the top, tho, and weren't doing enough good to warrant cheapening the site that way.

So instead of banner ads at the top, I'm going to try asking for donations through PayPal or Amazon.Com. If people would donate an average of **one cent** per page view, I'd be making wages-plus for the time I put into it.

Soon as I have time to set it up, in other words, I'm going to put out a begging bowl. That looks way less cheesy than a banner ad, right?

New articles since last mailing are Babs & Buster Bunny; Beaky Buzzard; Boner's Ark; Boy Commandos; Bozo the Clown; Bozo the Robot; Bruce Gentry; Davey & Goliath; Dr. Fate; Half Hitch; Humphrey Bear; Inferior Five; Jonah Hex; José Carioca; Bill Mauldin; Mr. Justice; Plucky Duck; Red Ryder; Robin the Boy Wonder; Rugrats; Sherman's Lagoon; Tiny Toon Adventures; Tony the Tiger; The Two-Gun Kid (1948); The Two-Gun Kid (1962); Turok, Son of Stone; The War that Time Forgot; Willie & Joe; and Young Romance. New total: 469.

Meant to mention last time that I'd added 130 new articles during its first year, an average of 2.5 per week.

As always, it's located at <http://www.toonopedia.com> — and you might also drop by <http://www.uncadonald.com> and see if I've done anything there yet.

The Kids, etc.

Rachel (who turned 20 a few weeks ago) has had rather an interesting time. She lost her job, then went through two crummy ones before getting what looks like a real one. Meanwhile, she hasn't moved out into her own place nearly as fast as we'd like,

and we've had occasion to remember why we had to ship her out to my brother when she was 17. The prognosis is good, tho, for getting her out again before too long.

Of course, I'll miss every-day contact with Nathan (my grandson, if you came in late). He's six months old now, seven when you read this. Really a good-natured kid — smiles at the drop of a hat and never cries unless he has a good reason. I've always gotten along with babies in the house, but he's a particularly pleasant one to deal with.

On the other hand, I won't miss being responsible for him during much of the day. It doesn't matter how easy he is to get along with. He's very time-consuming, and the hours I baby-sit (between GiGi leaving for work and Karen getting home from school) happen to be my best ones for writing. I have a couple of Mickey Mouse assignments backed up right now, and several smaller things that need working on, and getting any work done on the current schedule is like slogging through molasses.

Karen is the one who's in the news this time, tho. She's 18 now, and has just attended her first con. Not that we haven't been taking her to the things all her life, but this time, she did it on her own. She decided several months ago that she was going to attend Al-Con 3, a convention for fans of Weird Al Yankovic, which was scheduled for the end of April in Chicago, and by gosh, she did.

She worked several part-time jobs to save up for it, and seems to have taken to the idea of having money roll in on a regular basis. Anyway, she's keeping the jobs. She bought her own plane ticket, got her own hotel room, provided her own spending money, packed her own bags . . .

I was worried sick, of course, but since I knew I was being silly I managed to keep the fact to myself. And of course, she had a **glorious** time. If I have uncadonald.com up by the time you read this, you **must** go there and look for the picture of her with Al. I'm sure it'll be one of the first things posted.

While she was planning this, she announced one day that she'd be late relieving me on Grandson Patrol, because she had an appointment with a counselor at the community college a couple of miles up the road. When she got home, she told me she'd enrolled in two summer classes (she graduates high school this year), and would be paying the tuition herself.

Time to start thinking of her as a grown-up.

The Daily Quack™

Remember The Daily Quack and The Weekend Quack? They tanked when the company publishing

them reneged on its agreement with its contributors (and later went bankrupt, stiffing us altogether, but that's another story). The idea was that Monday through Friday, I'd write a mini-essay — 150 words or less — that would hopefully be interesting enough to get people to come by and read it every day. It was a tough exercise in writing small, and apparently at least a moderately successful one, because my subscriber base gradually grew. (The weekend edition ran between 150 and 400 words.)

I was recently looking through my old Daily Quack file, thinking of reviving it on uncadonald.com with a begging bowl on it, soon as I have an account set up for that. Ran across the following Weekend Quack (weighing in at 321 words, well within range), which relates to recent discussions here in SFPA on whether or not certain people really do want to get government off our backs. (This is not eligible for SFPA credit because of prior distribution, but I'll have more than minac at default settings without it.)

Freedom and Responsibility

Freedom and responsibility are two sides of the same coin. There's no use talking about one without the other, because they do not exist separately. If a person or other entity is free to act without taking responsibility for his actions, then his victims, unable to obtain redress for his depredations, are not free.

This is so clear, and so basic to the understanding of freedom itself, that the fact that it's possible for some people not to see it without prompting can only be a result of faulty education (another topic entirely).

A corporation is a legal entity which exists for the purpose of divorcing freedom from responsibility. It gives its owners the power to act any way they please, and be held accountable only to the extent of the corporation's assets — the personal assets of a corporation's owners are untouchable under virtually all circumstances, no matter how much damage they allow, or even cause, their corporation to do. And even in those rare cases in which they can legally be held accountable, as a practical matter, it's almost impossible to actually do so.

This "limited liability" aspect of corporations, which is established and maintained by government action, is what allows them to grow without restraint, making it more and more difficult, as time goes on, for individuals to make a decent living without kowtowing to at least one; and marginalizing individuals whose point of view is inconsistent with the goals of corporate "culture".

We hear politicians talk about "free markets" — but no free market has existed anywhere in the

world, in the lifetime of anyone reading this. We live in a world in which economic behemoths, which could not exist without government chartering and maintenance, dominate the market and can not be held responsible, in any meaningful way, for their actions.

If we ever want to be economically free, we're going to have to re-introduce responsibility to the marketplace.

The Bunny Burning

Our annual Easter dinner party is now in its eighth year. We moved the date this time, so as not to conflict with an April Fool party that's now in its 25th year, and is **always** held on the Saturday closest to April Fool's Day. A lot of people attend the April Fool who have otherwise drifted away, so if it's moved they'll show up on the wrong date; whereas the Bunny Burning has already shifted from Easter to the day before, and was moved once before because of an April Fool conflict, so people pay attention to the date we announce.

This time, it was on April 6. About 40-45 people attended, and were treated to Citrus Cilantro Bunny (last year's favorite), Sesame Honey Bunny (the favorite from two years ago) and Bunny Parmagiana (new this year). Others in GiGi's repertoire include, but are not limited to, Lemon Garlic Bunny, Creamy Mushroom Bunny and Teriyaki Bunny. I keep telling her she should write a bunny cookbook. It would make a great Easter gift.

GiGi is so good at this stuff, at first I wasn't even sure I liked the taste of rabbit — I thought maybe I just liked the sauces she cooks them in. But over the years I've managed to isolate the common factors and decide that yes, I do like rabbit meat. The only thing wrong with it is that it has more little bitty bones than chicken.

In response to the most oft-heard criticism, it's okay. Rabbits are food. In fact, at least three super-market chains in the Phoenix area carry them (which is a good thing, because sometimes we don't know how many we need until the last minute). And buying them that way, you don't even have to look at their fuzzy little ears and their twitchy little pink noses — they come frozen, in styrofoam trays, covered with celophane, looking just like funny-shaped chicken.

And what better time to eat them, than Easter?

LepreCon 28

28? This was LepreCon **twenty-eight**!!
Good God, I must be 55 years old!

The usual — panels (I was only on two, but they were pretty good), parties, etc. We stayed at the hotel instead of commuting, which gave us access to their Happy Hour (free drinks 5:30-7:30) and breakfast buffet (one of the better ones I've seen). Nice place to stay, but I don't care for the layout of the function space. The next three local cons will be there, which is okay with me because I generally don't attend panels I'm not on, and usually do just one or two walks through the huckster room.

Naturally, Nathan was the star, at least as far as I'm concerned. I made an effort not to accost too many people more than once or twice with the "Have you met my grandson?" refrain, but if I did, they were at least polite enough not to run away, screaming. He did his part and poured on the charm, greeting everybody with a big smile. He seems to have enjoyed his first convention.

So now he's a third-generation con-goer, at the age of six months. Of course, by that age, his mom had been to **three**.

I saw the guy who starred in my first version of "Oh, Dem Fans!", the one who is so profoundly uninterested in anything except science fiction, NASA and SCA personalities that he wouldn't even take a polite look at a Web site on any other topic (and it shows in his ability to carry on an ordinary conversation). To show that my site **really is** aimed at the general-interest reader rather than hard-core fans of comics and cartoons, and successfully so, I mentioned my second citation as a *USA Today* Hot Site. He thought that was nice, and quickly changed the subject to who's screwing whom, among people whose names I scarcely recognize.

I ain't saying there aren't a lot of normal folks going to these things, the kind that take in the various aspects of life in relatively normal proportions (tho perhaps with some emphasis on certain special interests) — but there are an awful lot of True Fans, too, the kind that are, shall we say, tightly focused.

Like I said — oh, dem fans!

An Apology to Hank Reinhardt:

I'm sorry, Hank, but I missed what you said about me last September. I was kind of rushed, as usual, and didn't read the mailing as carefully as I might have. I was skimming, looking for the few little things that might provide grist for intelligent discussion; and since your piece appeared in a part of the mailing where I don't expect to find that sort of thing, I'm afraid I skipped right over it.

Of course, this does not excuse such churlish behavior, but I hope it does help to explain.

It was six months later, in a phone conversation

with another SFPAn, that I learned of its existence. A few weeks after that, straightening up for the Bunny Burning, I happened to run across the mailing, and took the trouble to flip through the relevant zine — and there it was.

Your silly cheap shots and ad-hominem insults are as entertaining as always, Hank. That they fell flat is entirely my fault. I've grown older (sigh), and no longer find that sort of thing as amusing as I once did. But by all means, keep it up. Maybe you'll help me re-find that spark of youth, so I can again laugh at the childish things I once thought were funny.

My grandson is helping me find that spark, just as my children did years ago. To see an attempt at this sort of aid from a really old guy like you is certainly encouraging.

One side note — I didn't insult Toni for her zine title. I insulted her for having gotten so vehement, several years ago, about taking sides in a fan feud of which most participants are long dead, and the fact that the side she chose was based on what I now realize is her religion. Due to an unfortunate juxtaposition of semantic elements (my fault entirely, and I do regret the carelessness), it was very easy to misinterpret, and I can understand how she did so — but really, all zine titles are dumb, including and maybe even especially mine, and I had no intention of singling hers out.

I would ask you to please convey my apology for the misunderstanding, but it's probably better not to. Spin, to many people, is more important than substance; and she is, let's face it, firmly convinced of (for example) the Orthodox Republicanist spin that Al Gore claims to have invented the Internet, which would of course be untenable if she looked up the substance, i.e., his actual words in context.

Being spin-oriented, then, she'll probably be comforted by being able to dismiss anything I say because she thinks I once insulted her zine title. That way, she won't be troubled by the fact that she has no answer for the many internal inconsistencies I point out in her arguments, or the fact that I won't let her get away with altering everything I say before replying to it.

So please, Hank, be kind. Let her go on believing I insulted her zine title.

Gary Brown:

Yes, it was a couple of Jews who came up with Superman, but that's not why he should have religious significance to Jewish kids. Isn't Superman's origin story pretty much like that of Moses?

I didn't mean to imply there was anything wrong with recounting the votes and looking at various ways it could have played out. But when I noted how

prominently they mentioned the outcomes favorable to Bush, compared to how carefully they hid the fact that when you get right down to it, Gore actually got more votes in Florida Bush . . . when I said "Liberal, man — real, real liberal", it wasn't a comment on the coverage, but on implacable belief, against evidence, in Liberal Media.

That's an excellent source for the info on *Turok*. Since you saw it in several magazines, and it didn't just come from the company's hype, I went ahead and used it in the *Turok* article. I'd put you in the I'd-Like-To-Thank's, but you're already there.

Ned Brooks:

Bill Blackbeard, who has collected the stuff since Time Began, claims newsprint won't turn brittle and yellow, if properly cared for. I don't know, personally, but I do know he's very dedicated and if anybody can preserve the stuff, it's Bill Blackbeard. Since very few people are like him, tho, for practical purposes, yeah, newsprint has a finite life. But that's not the only very good reason for throwing originals away after microfilming — they also take up too much space. I ran across the "how could you?" routine when I decided to extract the worthwhile stuff from my old *Comic Buyer's Guides* — lots of people were aghast that I'd throw that stuff away, and I do mean lots. But most of them understood the "I can't live with all this stuff!" argument.

If you're unsure what to believe about aspartame, hook yourself into the Conspiracy Theory newsfeeds. You'll find lots of beliefs to choose from.

Your local paper runs *Doonesbury* and *Boondocks* on opinion pages, rather than with the comics? How about *Mallard Fillmore* and *B.C.*? I mean, just how liberal are these guys?

Nigerian spam must be paying off, because it's spreading. I'm getting it from Malaysia and South Africa now. (Or so they say.)

Janice Gelb:

For heaven's sake, there's another *Gilmore Girls* fan in SFPA! I latched onto it almost by accident — happened to be stuck in the room with the TV while it was on, and I happened to notice that any time there was a disagreement between two of the three generations, I was on the side of the older. Got interested, and here I am, still watching it. In fact, it's the only hour-long show I make an effort to catch every week. I get a little impatient with Lorelei sometimes, but not so badly that it spoils the scenes with her parents, which are always a delight.

That's some punishment they piled on the guy who tried to skip a second trip through airport security. And the amazing thing about it is that it

doesn't make me feel the **least bit** safer. They're confusing draconian with effective, which is not uncommon among people whose only language is force. I still hear stories about how easy it is for people who plan carefully to get past security.

Arthur Hlavaty:

You say you question the assumption that you owe anything but the most superficial civility to those who vocally invade your home. I question **your** assumption that you owe them **even** the most superficial civility. The **kindest** treatment they deserve for interrupting my concentration with useless prattle is to be hung up on without a word. If I could shove an icepick into the phone and have a reasonable expectation of piercing a phone solicitor's temple, I would consider that, too, an appropriate response.

Sheila Strickland:

In my carrying-on about the jailed Christians in Afghanistan, the **least** salient point was the fact that they were breaking the law. That law is wrong no matter what level of proselytizing it covers (short of unsolicited phone calls, of course). The main points had to do with the U.S. locking people up for no crime at all, if they happen come from certain countries, then having the nerve to point a finger at Afghanistan jailing people for acts of what it sees as sedition. (I will, tho, say that if you go to a foreign country that has unjust laws, for the major purpose of breaking those laws, going to jail for it, proper or not, is within the range of expected outcomes. It should be planned for and not whined over.)

Reading to kids is some of the most fun I've had with them. With my own, I read *Prince Valiant* from the beginning to 1966, two books of the *Gormenghast* trilogy, the unabridged version of *The Count of Monte Cristo* . . . I managed to make them sit still for it until they were in their mid-teens, by always staying ahead of their reading level. I can't see myself managing that with Nathan (it requires every-night contact to do much in the way of continued stories), but they're never too young for Dr. Seuss.

When my kids were in pre-school, we constantly saw Rachel's name spelled "Rachael", tho none of the papers we'd filled out had that spelling. No matter how many times we tried to correct them, they never got it right. Finally, I told them if they wanted to know how to spell Rachel's name, ask her!

Artwork

I wasn't going to use any, but these two items turned up in the Sunday comics just as I was winding the zine up. The one overleaf — I've known

people **just** like B.D. You probably have too, unless you are one.

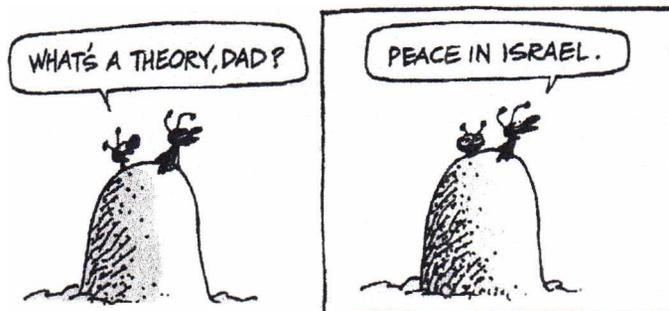
I suppose this is another example of Liberalism in the Media, but to me it looks like a plain, unvarnished fact, used in such a way as to make fun of people who think only a Dirty Liberal could ever be able to conceptualize such a thing, but trashing the man who got through Kenneth Starr's investigation without a single real charge validated is something that **continues** to need doing. And making fun of ridiculous people is a cartoonists's job.

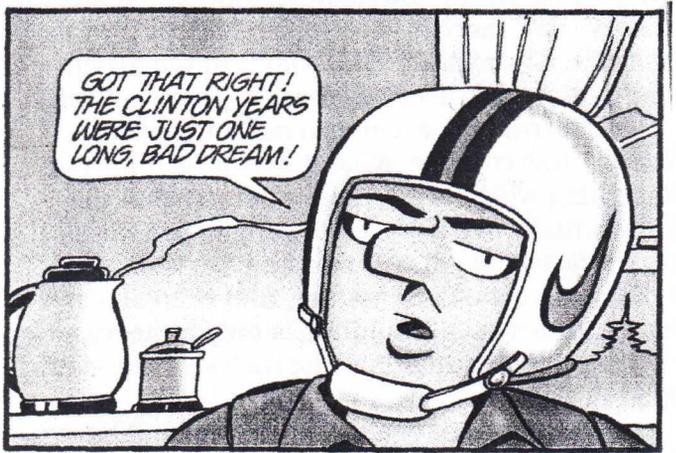
The one directly below (the opening two panels of *B.C.*) is anything **but** plain, unvarnished fact. Peace in Israel is not a theory. Not to me, anyway, nor to anyone I know. Do **you** know anyone who holds the "theory" that there is peace in Israel? I suspect there isn't actually anybody at all who is in touch with reality, and who theorizes there is peace in Israel.

I also suspect an attempt to make the word "theory" less credible. What it says is "A theory is something which is not true" whereas what the word actually means is "something which fits all the known facts and yet may someday be disproved". If it **did** mean something untrue, that would bolster such arguments as "Evolution is **only** a theory, whereas **my** argument has the rock-solid basis of **blind faith**."

I emphasize, once again, it's his strip and he can do whatever he wants with it. By the same token, this is my zine, and if I see someone behaving dishonestly, whether anybody's entitled to prevent him or not, I claim the right to speak my mind about it.

Of course, this is just more stuff that isn't eligible for SFWA credit, and it's all condensed into the usual six-page package. That's just formatting, tho, and at WordPerfect default settings I do have more than six pages of eligible material. But it's for the OE to decide whether or not type size counts, and therefore whether or not I owe pages. (And he **absolutely should not** take into account the fact that if I don't, next mailing it will be a third of a century since I owed activity.)





www.doonesbury.com