

Somewhere between birth and adolescence, many a good young idea makes the wrong friends.

Idea for a teeshirt: *Why are you with stupid?*

Ah, the *Times* magazine made you do a double take. Did you really read the teaser right? *Searching for profits in the next big weather catastrophe.* Look again. Right as rain.

8/27 Suspiciously clear morning.

Across the street from where you've parked the Gray Ghost, amidst the gingkoes, their lower trunks hidden behind plywood hoardings, the seminary is engaged in boring a series of geothermal wells. The idea is to harness subterranean brimstone sufficient to heat and chill their compound in perpetuity, not to mention the immense speculative slab they're planned build on the Ninth Avenue edge of the block and the new Desmond Tutu Educational Center on Tenth, already under construction in flagrante.

You sit on the steps of a townhouse, to wait out the forty minutes or so until the car goes legal. Lulled by warm breezes and the mechanical racket of Episcopal drills worming toward Beelzebub, you fall into a kind of trance state, somehow centered on the ex-Archbishop of Capetown, whom, some months ago you'd briefly encountered at Le G., – held the door open for him to exit as you went in – not recognizing him in the moment. "You know," you'd said to Guy when he brought your coffee, "that fellow

who just left was a ringer for Desmond Tutu.” To which Guy replied “un-huh” and nodded sagely, and then it clicked: the Center ‘round the corner. Not just a myth, nor righteous hero, nor a sign on a building, but a corporeal presence in the neighborhood. See where your abstraction takes you!

*Desmond, you say, not aloud, but ex-cathedra from your stoop-seat. Desmond, you haven't gone and licensed your name to these greedy bastards at the Seminary? Say it ain't so!* But whatever answer might have come, internally or otherwise, subsumes itself in the voices of lord knows how many cicadas, unseen in the foliage surround, ramping up, almost before you notice the sound, to nearly drown out the drilling. Now, you're in the cycle. After each crescendo comes a steep, smooth trailing off, followed by a pause before the next surge – the waves of meta-clamor taking on the effect of a dream within a dream. *How do they time themselves, Desmond?* He's gone. Check your pulse. Then your watch. No apparent pattern. These creatures own their own time signature and they're giving it away. Today.

8/28 Saved by the cellphone in his breast pocket. Not a chance.

Soon, soon the annual murder of political crows – Rudy and Bloomie among them – will flock to the edge of the pit to caw out, in alphabetical order, The Names. Nevermore. In the shadow of Deutsche Bank, the black ruin.

8/31 Up to the Delacorte of an evening to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. You've read the play twice or more and seen it performed a half dozen times, but only now, have these lines of Titania's, rebuking Oberon for his intransigence, struck home:

*Therefore the winds, piping to us in vain,  
As in revenge have suck'd up from the sea  
Contagious fogs; which falling in the land  
Hath every pelting river made so proud  
That they have overborne their continents.  
The ox hath therefore stretch'd his yoke in vain,  
The ploughman lost his sweat, and the green corn  
Hath rotted ere his youth attain'd a beard;  
The fold stands empty in the drowned field,  
And crows are fatted with the murrion flock;  
The nine men's morris is fill'd up with mud;  
And the quaint mazes in the wanton green  
For lack of tread are undistinguishable.  
The human mortals want their winter cheer;  
No night is now with hymn or carol blest.  
Therefore the moon, the governess of floods,  
Pale in her anger, washes all the air.  
That rheumatic diseases do abound.  
And throughout this distemperature we see  
The seasons alter. Hoary-headed frosts  
Fall in the fresh lap of the crimson rose;  
And on old Hiems' thin and icy crown  
An odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds*

*Is, as in mockery, set. The spring, the summer.  
The chiding autumn, angry winter change  
Their wonted liveries; and the mazed world,  
By their increase, now knows not which is which.*

9/1 Up betimes to Danny B.'s bar mitzvah, on the *echt* Upper West Side. As the cantor intones, you have recourse to the *Siddur* to follow his chanted prayer. But opening the book, your eye falls first on the Introduction where you learn how, in approaching the task of translating the Torah for contemporary worshippers, the editors "struggled with the use of the pronouns 'He' and 'Him,'" to designate God. They first considered "avoiding the use of all third person pronouns," but rejected this as "both incompatible with the rules of English grammar and style, and the sense of the Hebrew text." Further, they considered the alternative of "changing all third person pronouns to the neutral 'You'..." but decided that this would "negate a central rabbinic principle, that we use the second person in describing God's nearness, but revert to the third person to depict God's majesty..."

And never – never O my sisters and brothers – shall the twain of majesty and nearness meet?

A beautiful space, this temple, through which the service flowed like a river. When it came time for Danny to recite from the Torah, he performed superbly – great connectedness combined with youthful energy – as though no more real a place for him or anyone else could possibly exist than in that space and time. For his own offering, he

read a considered, intelligent and often hilarious exposition of the difference between “awesome” – as a term used casually among himself and his friends – and his sense of the Awesome power of God as revealed in the Bible.

Throughout, the room seemed filled with a rare mix of respect, dignity and decency. And at the close of the service, the rabbi’s blessings upon Danny and the congregation felt as genuine as anything you’ve experienced in a house of prayer. Yet this evening, your mind’s a monkey swinging from branch to branch on the great tree of absurdities. You pick up Chaucer and on the cover read *The Cantor’s Buried Tales*. Oy – stop him! The bar mitzvah’s made him barmy. For his own good, better put him on Torahzine. Outside on the street, a car alarm goes off. Distorted by distance, it sounds like a robot chanting *yoy yoy yoy yoy yoy*.

9/2 Sunday a.m. and the sky is so menacingly clear that you immediately have an allergy attack, wracking sneezes that go on for perhaps forty-five minutes. That’s it, gorgeous as the day is, you can go nowhere.

9/3 Labor Day. A hawk soaring over Chelsea. Shadows appreciably longer in the slowboat afternoon.



Jason Reed/Reuters

President Bush at Al Asad Air Base in Iraq today with Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. [*NYT online*, 9/3/07]

9/4 Bang says the little pipe bomb that coulda but didn't do bodily harm in front of the Studio Dante theater on 29th between Seventh and Eighth at one o'clock in the morning. Windows blown out of the Chevy Astro Van parked curbside and a blackening of the tiled ledge on which the bomb was placed. This you find out later, since the explosion doesn't wake you. What jackknifes you up in bed is the police chopper that arrives soon after and parks itself over the crime scene, a few blocks distant but acoustically just outside your window. Upsy-daisy, close the windows and turn on the air convector. The rotors still audible, but baffled just enough to allow you to drift off again. Troubled sleep, though the whirlybird is gone when the alarm goes off at 6:06. Time for Ba Gua.

Intending uptown. Just missed the E. Like a resigned zoo animal you ambulate the platform. For want of better employ, you scan the evermore uninteresting posters. Hmm. Here's an image for you: two guys and a fly-looking young woman, assault rifles at the ready, half-crouch on what looks like a highway strewn with debris and an overturned vehicle. A body, presumably that of an adversary, lies at the woman's feet. This could be an LA freeway or any of a gazillion other similar loci of car and war culture. But no. The movie's title is *The Kingdom* and these folks are "An elite FBI team sent to find a killer in Saudi Arabia. Now they have become the target." The agent man in the foreground is black, enormously handsome, wears reflective shades. Agent woman occupies the middle ground. Commando duds, blonde hair pulled back, great cheekbones, wide eyes. Present, yet too far back to be distinct, agent three, a white fella frozen in a generic action figure pose. Above all this, some wag with a has inscribed the scene with a black magic marker, bold enough to be seen at platform's edge. "The title of this movie ought to be "FUCKED" because these guys are deep in Al-Quaida country with no hope and no way out. Should have kept your asses home in America." Some later commentator has crossed out "your" and written in "ya."

9/5 The Studio Dante theater, it turns out, is co-owned by Victoria and Michael Imperioli who were also partners in Ciel Rouge, a watering hole a few blocks south on Seventh and popular into the early oh-oh's. Michael managed the bar before landing the role of Christopher Moltisanti, Tony Soprano's nephew and protégé, who rises to the rank of capo, before Tony finds it necessary to whack him. Victoria's ex, you are reliably informed, was formerly married to a member of the Russian mob. According to

its website, Studio Dante is “an unexpected jewel-box that was built to house progressive new plays.”

Michael, who has also frequented Le G. now and again, told the *Times* he was “completely baffled” as to who might have planted the bomb. “This whole day,” he said, “felt like a hallucination.”

9/6 You sit on Cheyney’s couch waiting for her to finish cutting her current head and beckon you over to the swivel chair. Meantime, eyes and ears stray to the huge TV that clamors over the roar of the AC. Some ghastly morning fare. *The Toady Show*? Not the usual format. This is a group of women – you recognize Whoopi right away – sitting at what looks like a coffee table, engaged in a conversation amongst themselves and, implicitly, with the viewer who would be positioned just outside the semi-circle were this actually a Starbux. Ah, close up on Barbara Walters, looking serious, delivering a message to the camera. It seems that Fred Thomson – whomever that is – has just announced his intention to become “leader of the free world.” Did Barbara really say that? Yes, she repeats the trope, the rest of the sentence slightly rephrased as the camera flashes across her companions’ faces. Neither Whoopi, nor – yes, that’s Bette Middler – nor a blonde who looks familiar, but whom you’re too pup culture clueless to recognize, registers any sort of affect at all. Reaction shots that aren’t. And the juggernaut rolls on.

Whilst Rupert M., apparently, encourages his punters at the *Post* to let it all hang down. Hence John Crudele and his column on the PTT (Plunge Protection Team) – the gang that regulates the plumbing in the basement of the Fed so that a very special

category of its clients – them that Treasury Secretary Hank Paulsen calls “market participants” – can continue to buy low and sell high for at least one more rush the river. Liquidity! Uction for the Great Dysfunction at the junction. The nude deal. No, the naked deal. And the dead. Trance actions. Then exit, quick! Pursued by a platoon of ravening bears. ‘s going to be a winter’s tale of discontent tha’s foshizzle.

Velocipede over to the scene of the crime. Studio Dante occupies the ground floor of a pretty red brick tenement toward the northwest end of a block dominated by industrial buildings. Blue collar street traffic apart from the Orthodox Jews. Right, this is the fringe of the fur district. Three floors of apartments over the theater, lots of greenery in the windowboxes and in pots on the fire escapes. These are obviously used as balconies since the folks who live directly above the theater have set up chairs and a little table outside among the plants hanging from the ironwork brackets above. And there’s a miniature Statue of Liberty standing there too, like a green-tinged urban garden gnome.

Below, on the storefront’s plate glass window – amazingly unbroken in the blast – the theater’s logo has been painted: the name surrounding a large medieval *Fraktur*-style capital “D,” which oddly looks a bit like a Hebrew character. Masking-taped to the façade at eye level on either side of the building, a police flier: HELP US HELP YOU, plus a short description of the incident and a number to call with info.

Look closely at the tiled ledge beneath the window where the bomb went off. No scorchmarks. A few cracked tiles, but they could have had a thousand other causes. You’re about to push off and head home when a man pops out the theater’s door: blue-gray shirt, dark slacks middle height, trim build, clean features. Preoccupied air. He

walks quickly toward Seventh. It's him! You've never actually watched the show, but overheard plenty about its characters from fans, not to mention the osmosis of media bleed-through. So the words well up, but you swallow them whole: "Yo, Christo-fa! Whassup?"

You have done a great deal and will do a great deal more. Abide. Abide.

In the abode of the global trashoisie.

9/7 Yesterday, three American soldiers, members of Task Force Lightning, were smitten, fatally, inside their million dollar tin can on the road near ancient Nineveh.

*Enlil blew an evil storm; silence lay upon the city...*

*Ningirsu wasted Sumer like milk poured to the dogs.*

These texts on a cuneiform tablet, circa 1740 B.C., lamenting the destruction of cities long gone.

"I have in mind another human being who will understand me. I count on this. Not on perfect understanding, which is Cartesian, but on approximate understanding, which is Jewish. And on a meeting of sympathies, which is human." Said Saul Bellow forty-odd years ago in response to the question "Is there an audience you write for?"

Long time passing, a Dutch colonial naturalist catalogued the flora and fauna of Brazil. Today, his efforts are commemorated in a samba. Says Rosa Magalhães,

carnavalesca of Imperatriz Leopoldinense in Rio: “I want them to be happy. I want them to think it was beautiful. And I want them to know the story.”



Left, Osama bin Laden in an a video broadcast in 2004. Right, he appears in a recent banner advertisement on an Islamic militant Web site. [Photo: Associated Press]

Bin Laden issues a video epistle to the Western World inviting it to embrace Islam. The *Times*, wherein these pictures appeared, speculates that ObL may have dyed his beard in the three years separating these images. Possibly, they say, the beard may be a fake one. But truly, is that the only incommensurable element among these pictures?

9/8 “I would guess that 12,000 is not going to be enough. It is possible they would lay off 20,000 employees. You don’t need 60,000 employees with a plain-vanilla conforming mortgage operation,” quoth Guy Cecala, publisher of *Inside Mortgage*

*Finance*, on the firing practices of Countrywide Financial, the largest U.S. Mortgage lender and subprimer supreme.

From Jabès in *Book of Questions*:

*“We are living in a foreign country,” said Reb Dambah, “where the sabbath is kept only in our hearts. Ah, when will our heartbeat be one with that of the city?”*

*And Reb Mendel: “We live in the open fan of our voices in the void.”*)