

"many of our miseries are merely comparative; we are often made unhappy, not by the presence of any real evil, but by the absence of some fictitious good."

benzene #45

november 13, 1988

special pre-election-day issue

yes, i know "pre" means before, and it's after the election. benzene's primary reason to be is to serve as a repository for thoughts which i want to clear out of my cluttered mind, and i need to unload a lot of pre-election thoughts to make room for the post-election new arrivals. originally, i had hoped that you would see this before you vote. then i hoped to have it in the mail before i vote. then i hoped to have it all written before the election even if i typed it later. then i hoped to at least have the political stuff written before the election -- and i actually achieved that, though i had to go back and change the tense from present to past.

tense-changing is becoming the norm here. sometimes i feel that bz lags three weeks behind the rest of the world. three weeks is about how long it takes me to bring one of my muddled thoughts into a state of coherence. i always think that if i keep at it, writing will start to come naturally, but so far that hasn't happened. one consideration which contributed to my decision not to go to college is that i dread writing for a deadline. when bz was a callow subzene, reviewers would call it a "stream-of-consciousness" zeen, saying that i seem to write down my thoughts as they come to mind. would that i could.

this is benzene, an approximately monthly ~~sub~~zene published by ignatz jerome "mark" lew, who resides at 438 vernon #103, oakland, CA 94610, and can be phoned at (415) 268-8626. sub rates are 60¢ per issue, and trades are welcome.

as expected, a dukakis surge was reported during the final weeks of the campaign. this development of the story was inevitable once the bush-has-it-locked-up story was played. it has little to do with what the voters may be thinking; it's the dynamics of the media script. it just couldn't have been reported any other way.

in the final episodes, the television war became almost comical. the democrats discovered that bush too could be linked to a furloughed felon gone awry. but bush's felon didn't just rape and torture someone, he actually killed someone -- and not just anyone, but (get this) a pregnant woman. so there.

i thought that with those willie horton ads the television campaign had sunk about as low as it would go, but to my surprise those bush surrogates were outstoooped -- not by more bush surrogates, as one might expect, but by the california democratic party. the party's ad starts with the camera panning slowly over a landscape that looks like something out of blade runner, but dirtier and bleaker. we get a quick glimpse of a video monitor which lets us know that the voice we hear is that of a fictitious news anchor in this futuristic dystopia. over a background warning which intones, "warning, warning," he says, "today the republican administration declared an environmental crisis," and proceeds to give us bits of bad news like, "today the last beach was closed down due to ocean pollution," and "if you must go outside, use extreme caution and protect yourself from toxic gases." by this time the camera has settled on a dreary and ugly (and presumably closed down) beach, where we see the backs of a young couple, huddled close together as if trying to enjoy the sunset. now the real announcer comes in and says, "if we don't make some changes now, just imagine what the future might be like." the ad ends when an alarm horn sounds and the young man and woman jump up and turn around to reveal to us the grotesque gas masks they are wearing.

like bush's effort to attach dukakis to reckless furlough programs, like pat robertson's claims about aids and missiles in cuba, and like the deodorant ad that shows a guy who smells bad but doesn't realize it because his underarms are dry, this ad tries to instill fear in its audience by playing on their normal concern about the unknown. and like them, it's despicable.

meanwhile, the governor himself was showing the resigned cynicism of a beaten idealist. we saw the same thing in richard gephardt last december when he finally faced the fact that voters really are stupid, and that all his proffered good deeds, good ideas, and good sense were like pearls cast before the iowa swine. dickie

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do-good gave in and became a born-again hypocrite. eleven months later the duke is doing the same.

last week, benzene explained why "american is being bought up" and "america is exporting jobs" are contradictory claims (though one of my readers has challenged my logic). as if on cue, a new dukakis ad appeared, featuring the governor making both claims in the course of about 12 second. (the sad thing is that this was a good ad. the middle class doesn't want to hear intelligent statements about economics, they want to hear a message that let's them believe that they are the wronged victims of those greedy bad guys on wall street. take away all their scapegoats and they might have to admit that in truth they're spoiled brats who piss away their allowance on candy and video games and then whine to the president that life's not fair because they can't afford a new house or a four-year birthday party for their teenage kids.) it's ads like this that remind us to be skeptical whenever democrats describe what's wrong with the economy. (which is not to say that there isn't anything wrong with it, by the way. there is, and it's debt. debt debt. everywhere, not just in the government.)

AND YOUR LABOR FOR THAT WHICH SATISFIETH NOT?

another pair of uncomplementary economic laments is that savings need to be increased but interest rates need to be held down. it is surely true that americans aren't saving enough, but what are high interest rates but the market's way of urging us to stop buying on credit and start setting a few dollars aside for a rainy day? yet both of the presidential candidates vowed to keep interest rates low. to do so is to address a symptom but not a problem. sometimes that makes sense, as when a dentist uses novocaine to suspend the pain which would result from filling a cavity. i wonder if our president-elect's plan to keep interest rates down isn't more analogous to injecting novocaine into one's wrist to suspend the pain which would result from touching a hot stove.

i get really tired of hearing democrats complain that joe american is just one small misfortune away from living on the streets. if his home were looted or if he were to suffer a bad case of mononucleosis or if he were to lose his job on short notice, they tell us, the poor guy just wouldn't be able to make ends meet. gosh.

long-time bz readers will perhaps recall that before i got my current job this march, i was unemployed for four months, and a year before that i was unemployed for about the same duration. part of the reason i stayed unemployed for so long was that i didn't look too hard for a job because i could afford not to. at my current job i earn about \$23,500 a year, which i consider good for a young person with no degree, but no extraordinary. when i started, my savings had been depleted, so i promptly embarked on a policy of putting 30% of my earnings directly into savings. five months later i was comfortable in the knowledge that if i were to lose my job or suffer some serious but not catastrophic injury, i'd be able to survive it without too much stress. now, after five more months, i'm beginning to enjoy the knowledge that if i were suddenly seized by a whim to quit my job and fly to brazil, i could do it. in fact i have no interest in going to brazil, but that's not the point. the point is that now when i walk down the street, i'm more cheerful than most of the people i pass because, unlike most of them, i don't feel stuck.

it didn't have to be this way. there were plenty of enticing alternatives. i could have rented a bigger apartment, i could have bought a car, i could eat out more often or make a habit of buying those expensive frozen meals so beloved by bachelors who hate to cook, i could wear fancier clothes, or i could have bought some of the fun toys (e.g., a vcr, a computer, a microwave) which i'm starting to consider now. but i set my priorities elsewhere -- not because i'm noble, but because i know that it feels good to have money in the bank. i value the knowledge that i haven't taken from the world more than i've put back into it. i value the sense of security and unstuckedness which savings provide, and, more important, i see it as my own responsibility.

i suspect that more and more people are beginning to believe that their security and unstuckedness is the responsibility not of themselves, but of a nebulous "someone" (as in, "that's not fair; someone ought to...."). it is natural for any professional

to want his work acknowledged, and naturally he'll be tempted to claim credit for 3
accomplishments which lie outside the scope of his work. teachers, for instance,
are caught in a contradiction in which they claim that it is they who bear the respon-
sibility of the education of our youth, but at the same time no one can make a child
learn if that child doesn't want to learn. just as teachers exaggerate their respon-
sibility in order to be paid better, politicians will exaggerate their responsibility
in order to be elected. public figures, and particularly (but not exclusively) democrats,
like to tell us that we deserve this, or we have a right to have that, or it's only
decent to expect such-and-such. maybe it is decent, but sometimes it's unrealistic.
sure we deserve. as far as i'm concerned, each of my friends and acquaintances
deserves to have a million dollars, and furthermore the entire human race deserves
peace and prosperity everlasting, but that doesn't make it happen.

jesse jackson says that health care is a basic human right. well, sorry, but it's
not. history and logic are clear about that. how much health care? no right is ever
going to deny the fact of death. life is by nature a deteriorating and potentially
unpleasant process. however, there are things which can be done to slacken the deteri-
oration and to avert the unpleasantness, thus we all work to make our lives better.
the key concept here is that things get better not because we want it or deserve it,
but because we work for it -- and to precisely that extent. (as ye sow, so shall ye
reap.) natch. that's the whole point of working, and in a nutshell, that's the whole
point of our entire economy.

michael dukakis says that americans have a right to have good jobs at good wages.
i disagree. just as one makes friends by being personally likable, one makes money by
being economically likable. money, as number-crunching economists are apt to forget,
is simply a quantification of lives being made more pleasant. unhappy workers every-
where are driven by the myth that a job's value is a function of how much hardship it
causes the worker (and thus they seek to make themselves more valuable by taking on more
hardship). wrong. a person's earnings is a function of the unhardship he grants to
someone else -- his employer, his clients or customers, or his employer's clients or
customers. one could get lost in semantics debating exactly what is meant by the
"right" to good wages, but it represents and encourages misguided thinking if it says
that a person's worth as a worker is anything but a reflection of how much he causes
others to value him. (as ye sow....)

SCRABBLE

the current player for the rack is jake halverstadt, who says: "tempting to go
10h:odious, leaving HIP in the tray. dr afflerbach would love that one, almost a
guaranteed double word score. b11:pious looked good for vowel removal and 14 points,
but i don't like how that play opens things up in column 15. b11:shop grabs 18
points but leaves IIUO in the tray.

"so here's the move: b11:hoop. its 18 points matches what chuff scored in the top
of the inning and it rope-a-dopes pretty well, as seems to be the style here. not happy
with the leftover SUII, may be suicidal but it suits me for now."

jake seems to have forgotten all the discussion in previous turns about the hodaddy
play. chuff checked in to point out that it's still available. so did pete gaughan,
who says: "everybody, i'm sure, will see the various words i've considered (b11:shop;
10h:odious; b11:hoops among them). still, i'll send these in case nobody kibitzes.

"g10:pads;pod,oxeyes=31.

"12b:hodaddy;ho,ox=30.

"i prefer the latter because you will probably be able to go back to pads on the
following turn, but not vice versa. also, i prefer to leave IIPSU in the rack instead
of HIIUO, though it's a marginal choice. so my vote for the hodaddy play."

i too think that 12b:hodaddy is superior to g10:pads. nobody saw my favorite play,
14a:phi;oh,xi=35. it scores a few more points than hodaddy and leaves a rack which is
just as good, i think. IOSU has a higher percentage of vowels, but it breaks up the I
pair.

though it's not clear whether 12b:hodaddy is better than 14a:phi, it is clear that
it's better than b11:hoop, so on the board it goes and pete takes over as the player
for rack B.

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A=1
B=3
C=3
D=2
E=1
F=4
G=2
H=4
I=1
J=8
K=5
L=1
M=3
N=1
O=1
P=3
Q=10
R=1
S=1
T=1
U=1
V=4
W=4
X=8
Y=4
Z=10

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
A															
B												H	O		
C												O			
D													E		
E												A	Y		
F											O	D	E		
G											A	D			
H									L	O	R		Y		
I								G	O	A	D				
J															
K															
L															
M															
N															
O															

TRIPLE WORD SCORE

DOUBLE WORD SCORE

TRIPLE LETTER SCORE

DOUBLE LETTER SCORE

Your rack contains: AGILSTV

The score is:

85-91

↑

(the other rack contains: IIPSU)

WHAT WOULD YOU DO? Send your orders to: mark d lew
438 vernon, #103
oakland, ca 94610

the score is now 85-91. IIPSU remains on rack B. chuff draws four tiles and rack A now contains AGILSTV.

i think i need to remind players that the gm participates in the kibitzing in this game. once i have drawn tiles for a player, i do not comment until the player has taken his turn, but after a play is made and before the next player's tiles are drawn, i like to add my commentary about board position, potential moves and the like. i might comment on anything i am aware of and that includes any comments others may have made to me. so if you have a clever move in mind, don't mention it to me and expect me to keep it a secret. if it's a secret, keep it to yourself and hope i don't notice it on my own.

TITAN:

following are the rules to the titan variant some friends and i conceived of about a year ago. none of us ever worked out any rules until now. the game has not been playtested and i'm not even sure if the rules are complete and unambiguous, but pete has been pestering me to release them, so here they are. pubbers are encouraged to reprint these rules, and anyone is encouraged to send me comments on understandability of the rules and playability of the game.

dogpile titan:

in dogpile titan, battles are not resolved all at once within a single game-turn. instead, they are played one battleround per game-turn. play continues on the masterboard while the battle is in progress, and other legions may join the battle.

rules are the same as in regular titan except as contradicted below:

- 1) engagements may be resolved by fleeing, concession, or agreement, as in regular titan. an engagement can be conceded to one of the engaged players, at any time, if all of the other engaged players agree to it.
- 2) when a battle occurs, the legion marker of the attacker remains on the masterboard, as in regular titan. for the purposes of movement on the masterboard, players treat it as an enemy legion which may be engaged.
- 3) when a player engages an enemy legion which is already engaged in battle, that player becomes the new attacker. (if he was already the attacker, he remains so.) the erstwhile attacker is now considered a defender. if the new attacker was already a defender in the battle, his legion marker on the turn record track is removed and he is no longer considered a defender. when the new attacker's maneuver phase comes, his characters enter the battleland as if the battle were just beginning.
- 4) during the engagement phase of any player's turn, one battleround is played in each battle. the mover determines the order in which the battles are visited.
- 5) a battleround consists of one maneuver phase for each engaged player with a mutual strike phase following each maneuver phase. the defender who has been defending longest (that is, whose legion marker has progressed farthest on the turn record track) takes his maneuver phase first, followed by the other defenders in order of seniority. the attacker takes his maneuver phase last.
- 6) during a strike phase all players engaged in the battle attack with their characters. the player who just completed his maneuver phase conducts his attacks first. the other players follow in the same order in which they take their maneuver phases, with the senior defender taking his turn after the attacker.
- 7) a battle may not end except at the end of a battleround. at the end of a battleround:
 - a) any defender with no characters remaining in the battle removes his legion marker from the turn record track;
 - b) if the attacker has no characters remaining, his legion marker is removed from the masterboard and replaced by the legion marker which has progressed least on the turn record track. the defender owning that marker is now considered the attacker;
 - c) if only one player has characters remaining, that player has won the battle; and
 - d) if a defender has completed his seven turns as defender and still has one or more characters remaining in battle, he wins a time-loss victory.
- 8) any defender is entitled to a reinforcement on his fourth maneuver phase, subject to the usual restrictions. the reinforcement enters from the side opposite

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the one from which the current attacker entered, regardless of which side the defender entered from. note that it is possible for a player to get more than one reinforcement per battle.

9) an attacker may summon an angel to a battle during his first maneuver phase following the first strike phase of that battle in which one of his characters slays an enemy character. if that phase comes when the player is a defender, he loses his opportunity to summon an angel to that battle (though it doesn't matter if he was a defender when the slaying took place). an angel may not be summoned if it is currently engaged in battle. a player may summon more than one angel during a single engagement phase.

10) a player may move one of his legions to join a battle in which he is a participant, even if the total number of characters currently engaged in battle and in the legion joining the battle is more than seven. however, unless some of his characters are slain before his maneuver phase, some of the characters in the joining legion will not be allowed to enter the battleboard. a player may never have more than seven characters in battle.

11) the winner of a battle (unless he wins a time-loss victory) scores points for all characters slain in the battle except his own, regardless of which player slew them.

12) when a titan is slain in battle, credit for the slaying goes to the victor of that battle, regardless of whose character slays the titan.

characters in the slain titan's legion are removed from the battleboard at the end of the strike phase in which the titan is slain. the eliminated player's other characters are removed from the game at the end of the battleround in which the titan was slain.

the titan and slain characters in his legion score full points to the player credited with slaying the titan; other characters in the titan's legion and characters not involved in engagements score half points to the player credited with slaying the titan; and characters involved in another engagement score half points (if unslain) or full points (if slain) to the victor of that engagement. the eliminated player's legion markers go to the player credited with slaying the titan.

if a battle is still unresolved when the eliminated player's characters are removed from it, the number of points owed the victor is noted, and the points are awarded when the battle is resolved.

13) note that these rules will necessitate extra battleboards and another method (besides facing) of keeping track of which characters belong to which players and of which side each attacker entered the battle from.

LETTERS

eric ozog (9/16): "i've been 'in the field' camped out 10 days at a time working on a wild turkey habitat study on sitgreaves national forest. to be brief we would radio-track turkeys fitted with radio transmitters, and once we cornered a bird and got a visual on it we would measure the vegetation and other site characteristics. once all this statistical data is crunched and conclusions are drawn the info will be useful to forest managers so turkey populations can be maintained or increased. that was how i spent my summer. now i'm back in school and the work load is increasing, so it's time to disappear for a while.

"re: the duke vs the bush. that was some delightful duke bashing from hood -- makes me confused. i was a registered independent but since there's no independent party to speak of i switched to democratic and voted for jackson in the caucuses. voted for anderson in '80. i don't recall voting in '84. i told my father-in-law, who is very much a republican, that 'a vote for the duke is a vote for eric.' he agreed with my reason -- that if the duke gets in maybe i would have a better shot at landing a job with the feds upon graduation -- if the federal land management agencies get some more bucks so they can hire me! i am a good investment of taxpayers' money 'cause i'll take care of the woods well: a civil servant who won't degenerate into a bureaucrat (said with a loathing sneer). a civil servant become a bureaucrat when he becomes a screw-up, insensitive, paper shuffler, desk pilot."



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me: i'd add to that when he sacrifices the goals of his employer for the sake of his own career. i've heard it said that it is the duty of every worker to try to make himself obsolete. most of us are in no danger of ever completing our jobs (sometimes it's hard to even keep up), and the government is not likely to ever finish its work of providing for the common defense, promoting the general welfare, and all that. but i wonder if somewhere among those promoters and providers there isn't a disincentive to make the department work as efficiently as possible. best of luck.

jim burgess (9/20): "i wouldn't totally cease your habit of running off in different directions with readers' comments. that's what i like most about benzene. in fact, frequently i make comments designed to generate response from you.

"i found your quayle discussion extremely well-balanced. i currently am extremely upset that the media is so polarized (especially the print media, since that's what i see --) for one candidate or the other while i'm floundering hopelessly in the middle. jake halverstadt and i always seem to be on the same wavelength (especially voting patterns). so since i'll have to do an absentee ballot anyway, i'm voting again for babbitt too at this point. i am pleased that bruce babbitt was still on the primary ballot in RI on super tuesday so i could vote for him then."

((i find myself with strongly mixed feelings about quayle. on the one hand i feel bad about criticizing him because the accusations being made against him are so undeserved. on the other hand, i feel bad about defending him because he really does leave me unimpressed. i guess that's what it means to be well-balanced.))

"mark berch spends most of his time looking at patents -- he works in the u.s. patent office. it wasn't clear that you perceived that. ((i knew.)) i'd really like to know about the electric car patents too. i hope berch gets around to answering that. speaking of auto companies, how many people gathered that cloverleaf corporation in who framed roger rabbit? is based on general motors? does everyone know why? ((i'll bite. why?))

"i'll encourage you to map the political spectrum. i have three indices in mind too, roughly based on economic, social, and individual freedom. i am curious where i would fall on such a spectrum. in wrobel's 'snowman' i'd fall somewhere near you and peel, but i don't find that descriptive, since i don't identify well with reagan democrats or moderate republicans."

me: my three indices are more psychological. they'd be roughly based on: basic trust of one's environment; interest in the well-being of others; and estimation of one's own worth. i think political opinions can be traced back to these. i suspect people would balk at being classified, though.

if i ever decide to write a book, it'll probably be about the psychological roots of the political attitudes of the left. it's a topic i keep coming back to in bz -- the discussions of anthropophobes, of seeing oneself as an object of one's environment, and (especially if i ever get around to printing chris carrier's letters) the shock and guilt experienced by young american bourgeois when they discover poverty. this is years away, of course. for one thing, i'd like to get a more solid background in psychology before i get too serious.

more jim burgess (this next part is a response to david hood's letter in bz #43, page 9): "in the position of knowing a great deal about the dukakis administration in massachusetts, but not really wanting to defend him, i'd still like to torpedo david hood's (via the bush campaign's) blatant lies.

"1) the spending growth figure of 65% between 1983 and 1988 is caused by two things (about equally), inflation (which it shares with the feds) and population growth (much faster than the rest of the united states). real per capita MA state spending has fallen slightly over this period. nothing pisses me off more than 'proving' things with inflation and population growth.

"2) my opinion dovetails more and more with yours on higher property taxes except for the fairness cost of the confiscation of land. ((i'm intrigued. please elaborate.)) since i've just been teaching henry george etc to my students, i'd sound excessively pedagogical if i tried to discuss it. i know it's not sufficient

but hood (bush) is being very misleading.

"3) again, job growth (and wage growth) in MA has made it very difficult to keep state agencies running with qualified people. they have unfilled state jobs because the salaries are too low. if it is business's fault, perhaps they should be taxed. in any case, the last thing MA needs is more businesses moving in. besides, tax distortion is one of the least efficient ways to run the free enterprise system david hood seems to be supporting.

"4) the productivity argument is wrong too, for some very technical reasons that i'll spare you (interest rates and international exchange rates), but the united states is very definitely in the middle of a productivity growth slowdown. oh yes, one easy-to-see fallacy in the argument is that reagan presided over a serious recession. productivity must be measured across business cycles, not starting from the deepest recession in the post-war period.

"5) health plans -- did you know singapore (bastion of free market ideals) ((but not exactly democratic)) has one of the most extensive and successful socialized health systems in the world? care to guess why? they view labor as a natural resource that must be protected and kept healthy to remain employable. i'm not proposing anything, just being a gadfly. defend singapore, mr hood. leaving blue collar workers uninsured will not solve the health cost crisis. ((true, but i think dukakis's national health care plan is a mistake. remind me to address this in a later issue.))

"i'm sure david hood will now be stabbing me in the dip game we're in together, but i wish these radical republicans would see the fallacy in their free market ravings. i agree with you, that the big problem is that social programs don't work. slowly, we are inching our way toward the correct solutions ((oh?)). i won't bore you with details, but the basic idea is incentive schemes for government agencies to take away the incentive to spend one's entire congressionally allocated budget. that's why \$1,000 screwdrivers appear.

"i'm sorry you cut yourself off. the last few pages were really humming: sasso to minimum wage (sometimes your economic intuition is better and more easily understood than mine, i tend to think mathematically and then translate back) to pledge of allegiance to felons on parole, but let me close by saying that i wouldn't let me stop you from talking about football. i used to follow it on its high level intellectual strategy plane, but couldn't stand watching the games, so i let it slip. i still think football coaches are extremely smart."

me: i can't watch a full game unless i'm doing something else at the same time. if i pay attention, i get bored after about an hour. the best-kept secret about football is that behind all the hitting and grunting it's the most strategically sophisticated sport. sure, the size and talent of one's players is very relevant, just as the luck of the die is relevant in titan or backgammon. the trick is to recognize these variables and strategize taking them into account.

mr wrobel too asked for my belated football predictions. i have them in my response to his letter, which probably won't make it in this issue.

i'm pleased to hear that you like my economic intuition, but i fear that as i slowly begin to understand economics i'm losing my layman's touch. a few weeks ago i was expressing to a friend some thoughts about the rjr-nabisco leveraged buy-out and about buy-outs in general. her response was, "oh, i don't understand any of that stuff." later i remembered that she minored in economics. yikes.

please stop hiding behind excuses like, "i won't bore you with the details." i'm sure your intentions are good, but it's difficult to resisting thinking that your arguments are unsound. at least provide the details for my sake, and if they really are boring, i'll keep them out of the zeen.

chuff afflerbach (9/27): "great show, that carmen. what a gal! lots of fun watching you belt it out and ham it up on stage. we all know about causal relationships between operas and fat ladies, but from my seat in the second row i learned a new truth: it ain't really over till the last one clears the aisle. this was my first time ever at the opera, and i couldn't have picked a better introduction. oakland sure has come a long way. four hours in a crowded theater in the middle of downtown, and the only stabbing was on stage!

"spent three weeks at yellowstone, and after the firestorms, windstorms, snow, and

rain came michael dukakis -- a day late and, well, just plain short. he flew in for the better part of an hour, just long enough to stand in front of a burnt tree and shake hands with park superintendent barbee -- a man most residents of montana and wyoing are ready to lynch! an unintentionally ironic photo op, but i suppose the campaign has already written off those states, right?

"by now everyone is sick of hearing about the yellowstone fires, right? a national disaster, an environmental catastrophe, a bureaucratic debacle -- well, yes and no. having done my small part to fan the flames of media hysteria for the world's most important network, i'd now like to clarify a few, ahem, misconceptions inadvertently passed on during the journalistic frenzy.

"1) not all burning trees look alike. what you saw on tv night after night was the same tree burning again and again -- or more correctly, the same footage of that tree the one day it burned. personally, i was as scrupulous as deadlines would permit about always editing fresh flames into our reports, but back at w.m.i.n. headquarters in atlanta such distinctions get blurred. some 'file footage' is always lying around, maybe from another day, another fire, another year. heck, flames is flames, and frankly, the network is queer for flames.

"2) camera crews did not wander freely through the holocaust, and neither can you. as much as we would have liked to, the park rangers did their best to prohibit it. we had a few accidental brushes with wildfire, but almost all the dramatic footage seen on tv was shot during 'controlled' burns; the firefighters would deliberately back-fire a meadow or stand of trees to create a fire break in front of the advancing flames. in that case we would be escorted to the fire line, wait for the trees to torch, and then grab a few sensational seconds of video before the rangers forced us to move to safety. the burning buildings you saw were not deliberately torched.

"3) the park was definitely not incinerated. parts were badly burned, but not nearly as much as people were led to believe. the park service reported daily on estimated acreage within the fire perimeters; simple-minded reporters compared this to acreage in the park for an inflated percentage of park burned. first off, not everything within the fire perimeter fell within the park boundaries. also, not everything within the perimeter was destroyed. supposedly a fire only burns about 30% of the terrain it passes over. so the million acres 'affected' were not all announced. at any one time only a tiny part of the forest is actually burning; the fire moves about in hot spots a few acres at a time, a few miles per day.

"4) there's still plenty to see in yellowstone. the yellowstone river, from the lake down through the grand canyon, was virtually untouched. and plenty of back country didn't burn. it's so obvious most folks overlook one fact: the fire, like wind, water, and people, follows the path of least resistance. in the park the rivers flow through mountain canyons, and the roads follow the rivers. these canyons act as wind tunnels, and that's where the fire gets the hottest. the madison river canyon, along with its tributaries the firehole and gibbon, were the hardest hit areas. these are also the most frequently travelled roads in the park. so the first impression is likely to be pretty bleak. but hike over the nearest ridge and things are bound to look greener. and after the first light snow, we could hardly tell the burnt area from the good. come next spring, new growth will further hide much of the damage.

"5) as most folks suspect, a raging forest fire is fearsome and fascinating. it creates its own wind, which sounds like a jet plane coming right at you. it casts its own eerie glow as the smoke blocks out the sun. and at fifty yards you can feel the heat. of course it is deadly, mostly to burrowing rodents. the larger mammals have little trouble getting out of the way. among those who stand and fight, the most common injury is broken bones caused by falling trees. the only fatality among the 10,000 workers was a firefighter who got his throat cut in a bar up in bozeman. our one close call came when hot embers started a grass fire in the meadow where we had parked. it almost cost us a rent-a-car, but with a 20-second dash through the smoke the crisis was over.

"6) hurricane gilbert did not put out the fire. it merely knocked it off the front page. in fact, the fire is technically still burning (smoldering, anyway), in hundreds of stumps and roots across the park. it supposedly can hibernate all winter

under a thick blanket of snow. then in the spring, it can reawaken again, without warning. but with no flames to show the folks at home, our job was done. the satellite truck (dubbed the 'deathstar'), headed for the hurricane, and we headed home to add up our overtime. i worked three eighty-hour weeks!"

FILLER:

i wanted to get ed wrobel's letter in here, but my voluminous response would put me over an ounce, so it'll have to wait.

i heard that ted turner's boys have now colorized gone with the wind, and predictably siskel and ebert are in high dudgeon. i wish they'd stop whining about how old movies are being "vandalized." the original is still unharmed, it's just been used to develop an inferior variation of it. what's the big deal? so you'd rather see the movie in black and white? fine, just use the color knob on your tv set to make it black and white. hey, you can even watch movies that were originally color this way.

i read an article which mentioned malawi's president-for-life h. kamuzu banda. funny, he used to call himself hastings k. banda. i wonder what brought on the change.

the line on the top of page one in by samuel johnson.
all.

U2



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(T)

i'm contemplating cutting our trade
CCC is pretty warehousey.