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Unseating The Tickle Feather Dictator

As pawns in global game of power, money and terror, we jump when the panic button is pressed and wave our flags when the bad guy's name is read. We are the comic book masses who are fed fairy tale lines of good and evil.

By Jon Letman

10/31/04 "ICH" -- These are times of real-life comic book enemies. The evil bearded Arab millionaire who appears on TV to order terror strikes from his cave hideout, the defiant military tyrant seeking to gain weapons to rule the world, the reclusive despot who hoards forbidden missiles, dusky men in long black robes that inflict justice with the swift stroke a sword – it reads like something out of a cartoon.

But what about the good guys? Real-life examinations reveal the distinctions between the forces of evil and those that counter them, are often blurry at best.

As the Bush administration makes its final plea before the electorate, appealing for another four years of power, we would all do well to take a moment and step back from the flying mud to study a cartoon villain from forty years ago who can provide a fresh perspective what this election means.

That villain, a diabolical character named Simon Bar Sinister, was one of the arch enemies of the unlikely hero, Underdog. The popular cartoon created by Joe Harris which ran on CBS from 1964 to 1973 featured the patently ugly and downright nefarious mad scientist who was reputed to be “the most wicked man in the world” with a singular ambition to “rule the world.”

Assisted by his mindless lackey Cad, Simon Bar Sinister endeavoured to control ordinary citizens with a ceaseless slew of iniquitous inventions such as shrinking water, a weather machine and a snow gun. Every time the scowling bald headed mastermind of evil (imagine a shorter Dick Cheney with dark circles under his eyes) uttered the phrase, “Simon says...” followed by a calamitous command (Go snow! Shrink! Thunder, lightning!), terror would ensue.

In a chilling portent of the events of September 11th, one episode shows Simon flying an airplane over Washington D.C. and dropping a ‘forget-me-net’ over the entire city, leaving everyone in mindless fog. Examining the words and deeds of the Bush administration over the last four years, one wonders if they do not believe we too are subject to a ‘forget-me-net.’ For a recent example of similar sinister tactics, visit the White House web site and read about President Bush’s forget-me-net achievements on the home page <http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/achievement/> .

The similarities between Simon Bar Sinister and George W. Bush are more clearly illustrated when Simon, determined that “there’s got to be a better way to rule the world,” decides to run for dictator. In an attempt to appeal to the public, Simon comes up with the banal campaign rally, “Vote for Simon, he’s true blue, he will do a lot for you,” which he blares from a helicopter that circles the city.

When he visits voters door-to-door, he is rejected outright. One bathrobe clad housewife

in curlers admonishes him saying, "You're Simon Bar Sinister, the wickedest man in the world. Nobody is going to vote for you!" before slamming the door in his face.

Even dim-witted Cad observes, "It's no use boss, nobody is going to vote for you."

"Not quite," shoots back Simon, "I know two people who are going to vote for me – I am, and you are."

But, as Cad points out, you can't win with only two votes, to which Simon counters, "I'll use one of my diabolical machines to fix it so nobody else votes. Then I'll win by two votes and rule the world!" before falling into a fit of crazed laughter.

After failed attempts at using a sneezing gun, a crying gun, a relaxation gun and an upside-down machine, Simon creates a tickle feather machine which, when fired, tickles voters into such a state of laughter that they are unable to vote.

Simon Bar Sinister proceeds to drop tickle feathers over the nation and then while all of America is in tickle feather induced hysterics, Simon Bar Sinister steals the election and wins by two votes. Even Underdog has fallen prey to the tickle feather machine, leaving Simon to do as he pleases.

Simon, now legally elected dictator, revives a builder to build him a mansion, a banker to bring him all the money, a chef to cook him fabulous meals and Sweet Polly Pure Bred to provide endless entertainment.

It appears that nothing can stop Simon because he was legally elected dictator. As Simon simply states, "You must do exactly as I say or I'll have you thrown in prison. Nothing can stop me! He-he-he."

All appears lost until, owing to a flaw in the tickle feathers, the power wears off, leaving Underdog free to combat the dastardly dictator. Underdog arrives at the television station where, on live TV he produces an official document and says in characteristic rhyming fashion, "All of you, please take note, Simon was not registered to vote." [Keep in mind, this cartoon was made in the 1960s]

Suddenly the tables turn on Simon – the chef pours soup on his head, the banker takes back all the money and the builder tears down the mansion, leaving Simon dazed in a pile of rubble and once again powerless.

Today, on the brink of the election that will decide if America gives Bush's performance a thumbs up, the evil scientist cartoons and wolves dressed like gangsters seems not so far-fetched. Tickle feather machines and forget-me-nets; the politicians are engaged in similar diversions, if only slightly more sophisticated.

It's enough to make one cry, where, oh where is our Underdog?

But there is no comic book hero to rescue us. We must do that ourselves and in an election like next Tuesday's in which villains and illegally elected dictators would prefer you sit this one out, every vote is going to matter if we are to unseat Mr. Bush.

It is getting late and the dead continue to pile up in the streets of Iraq. Meanwhile George W. Bush goes on bleating Orwellian mantras like "freedom is on the march" and "we will act to restrain the violent, and defend the cause of peace."

Such empty slogans only elicit loathing and suspicion from the rest of the world, which sees this administration as making the world more dangerous, not safer. No matter how many yellow ribbons you tie, no matter how many stars and stripes you spangle, lies festooned in cosmetic patriotism are still just that - lies.

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