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## THE LOW POST: I, Left Gatekeeper

*Why the "9/11 Truth" movement makes the "Left Behind" sci-fi series read like Shakespeare*

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A few weeks ago I wrote a column on the anniversary of 9/11 that offhandedly dismissed 9/11 conspiracy theorists as "clinically insane." I expected a little bit of heat in response, but nothing could have prepared me for the deluge of fuck-you mail that I actually got. Apparently every third person in the United States thinks George Bush was behind the 9/11 attacks.

"You're just another MSM-whore left gatekeeper paid off by corporate America," said one writer. "What you do isn't journalism at all, you dick," said another. "You're the one who's clinically insane," barked a third, before educating me on the supposed anomalies of physics involved with the collapse of WTC-7.

I have two basic gripes with the 9/11 Truth movement. The first is that it gives supporters of Bush an excuse to dismiss critics of this administration. I have no doubt that every time one of those *Loose Change* dickwads opens his mouth, a Republican somewhere picks up five votes. In fact, if there were any conspiracy here, I'd be far more inclined to believe that this whole movement was cooked up by Karl Rove as a kind of mass cyber-provocation, along the lines of Gordon Liddy hiring hippie peace protesters to piss in the lobbies of hotels where campaign reporters were staying.

Secondly, it's bad enough that people in this country think Tim LaHaye is a prophet and Sean Hannity is an objective newsman. But if large numbers of people in this country can swallow 9/11 conspiracy theory without puking, all hope is lost. Our best hope is that the Japanese take pity on us and allow us to serve as industrial slaves in their future empire, farming sushi rice and assembling robot toys.

I don't have the space here to address every single reason why 9/11 conspiracy theory is so shamefully stupid, so I'll have to be content with just one point: 9/11 Truth is the lowest form of conspiracy theory, because it doesn't offer an affirmative theory of the crime.

Forget for a minute all those Internet tales about inexplicable skyscraper fires, strange holes in the ground at Shanksville and mysterious flight manifestoes. What is the theory of the crime, according to the 9/11 Truth movement?

Strikingly, there is no obvious answer to that question, since for all the many articles about "Able Danger" and the witnesses who heard explosions at Ground Zero, there is not -- at least not that I could find -- a single document anywhere that lays out a single, concrete theory of what happened, who ordered what and when they ordered it, and why. There obviously is such a theory, but it has to be pieced together by implication, by paying attention to the various assertions of 9/11 lore (the towers were mined, the Pentagon was really hit by a cruise missile, etc.) and then assembling them later on into one single story. But the funny thing is, when you put together all of those disparate theories, you get the dumbest story since Roman Polanski's *Pirates*.

The specifics vary, but the basic gist of what They Say Happened goes something like this:

A group of power-hungry neocons, led by Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, Bush and others and organizationally represented by groups like the Project for the New American Century, seeks to bring about a "Pearl-Harbor-like event" that would accelerate a rightist revolution, laying the political foundation for invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Your basic Reichstag fire scenario, logical enough so far. Except in this story, the Reichstag fire is an immensely complicated media hoax: the conspirators plot to topple the World Trade Center and pin a series of hijackings on a group of Sunni extremists with alleged ties to Al Qaeda. How do they topple the Trade Center? Well, they make use of NORAD's expertise in flying remote-control aircraft and actually fly two such remote-control aircraft into the Towers (in another version of the story, they conspire with Al Qaeda terrorists to actually hijack the planes), then pass the planes off as commercial jetliners in the media. But it isn't the plane crashes that topple the buildings, but bombs planted in the Towers that do the trick.

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For good measure -- apparently to lend credence to the hijacking story -- they then fake another hijacking/crash in the Pentagon, where there actually is no plane crash at all but instead a hole created by a cruise missile attack, fired by a mysterious "white jet" that after the attack circles the White House for some time, inspiring the attention of Secret Service agents who point at it curiously from the ground (apparently these White House Secret Service agents were not in on the plot, although FBI agents on scene at Ground Zero and in Shanksville and elsewhere were).

Lastly, again apparently to lend weight to the whole hijacking cover story, they burn a big hole in the ground in Pennsylvania and claim that a jet went down there, crashed by a bunch of brave fictional civilians who fictionally storm the fictional plane cabin. The real-life wife of one of the fictional heroes, Lisa Beamer, then writes a convincingly self-serving paean/memoir to her dead husband, again lending tremendous verisimilitude to the hijacking story. These guys are good!

Just imagine how this planning session between Bush, Rummy and Cheney must have gone:

**BUSH:** So, what's the plan again?

**CHENEY:** Well, we need to invade Iraq and Afghanistan. So what we've decided to do is crash a whole bunch of remote-controlled planes into Wall Street and the Pentagon, say they're real hijacked commercial planes, and blame it on the towelheads; then we'll just blow up the buildings ourselves to make sure they actually fall down.

**RUMSFELD:** Right! And we'll make sure that some of the hijackers are agents of Saddam Hussein! That way we'll have no problem getting the public to buy the invasion.

**CHENEY:** No, Dick, we won't.

**RUMSFELD:** We won't?

**CHENEY:** No, that's too obvious. We'll make the hijackers Al Qaeda and then just *imply* a connection to Iraq.

**RUMSFELD:** But if we're just making up the whole thing, why not just put Saddam's fingerprints on the attack?

**CHENEY:** (*sighing*) It just has to be this way, Dick. Ups the ante, as it were. This way, we're not insulated if things go wrong in Iraq. Gives us incentive to get the invasion right the first time around.

**BUSH:** I'm a total idiot who can barely read, so I'll buy that. But I've got a question. Why do we need to crash planes into the Towers at all? Since everyone knows terrorists already tried to blow up that building complex from the ground up once, why don't we just blow it up like we plan to anyway, and blame the bombs on the terrorists?

**RUMSFELD:** Mr. President, you don't understand. It's much better to sneak into the buildings ourselves in the days before the attacks, plant the bombs and then make it look like it was exploding planes that brought the buildings down. That way, we involve more people in the plot, stand a much greater chance of being exposed and needlessly complicate everything!

**CHENEY:** Of course, just toppling the Twin Towers will never be enough. No one would give us the war mandate we need if we just blow up the Towers. Clearly, we also need to shoot a missile at a small corner of the Pentagon to create a mightily underpublicized additional symbol of international terrorism -- and then, obviously, we need to fake a plane crash in the middle of fucking nowhere in rural Pennsylvania.

**RUMSFELD:** Yeah, it goes without saying that the level of public outrage will not be sufficient without that crash in the middle of fucking nowhere.

**CHENEY:** And the Pentagon crash -- we'll have to do it in broad daylight and say it was a plane, even though it'll really be a cruise missile.

**BUSH:** Wait, why do we have to use a missile?

**CHENEY:** Because it's much easier to shoot a missile and say it was a plane. It's not easy to steer a real passenger plane into the Pentagon. Planes are hard to come by.

**BUSH:** But aren't we using two planes for the Twin Towers?

**CHENEY:** Mr. President, you're missing the point. With the Pentagon, we use a missile, and say it was a plane.

**BUSH:** Right, but I'm saying, why don't we just use a plane and say it was a plane? We'll be doing that with the Twin Towers, right?

**CHENEY:** Right, but in this case, we use a missile. (*Throws hands up in frustration*) Don, can you help me out here?

**RUMSFELD:** Mr. President, in Washington, we use a missile because it's sneakier that way. Using an actual plane would be too obvious, even though we'll be doing just that in New York.

**BUSH:** Oh, OK.

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**RUMSFELD:** The other good thing about saying that it was a passenger jet is that that way, we have to invent a few hundred fictional victims and account for a nonexistent missing crew and plane. It's always better when you leave more cover story to invent, more legwork to do and more possible holes to investigate. Doubt, legwork and possible exposure -- you can't pull off any good conspiracy without them.

**BUSH:** You guys are brilliant! Because if there's one thing about Americans -- they won't let a president go to war without a damn good reason. How could we ever get the media, the corporate world and our military to endorse an invasion of a secular Iraqi state unless we faked an attack against New York at the hands of a bunch of Saudi religious radicals? Why, they'd never buy it. Look at how hard it was to get us into Vietnam, Iraq the last time, Kosovo?

**CHENEY:** Like pulling teeth!

**RUMSFELD:** Well, I'm sold on the idea. Let's call the Joint Chiefs, the FAA, the New York and Washington, D.C., fire departments, Rudy Giuliani, all three networks, the families of a thousand fictional airline victims, MI5, the FBI, FEMA, the NYPD, Larry Eagleburger, Osama bin Laden, Noam Chomsky and the fifty thousand other people we'll need to pull this off. There isn't a moment to lose!

**BUSH:** Don't forget to call all of those Wall Street hotshots who donated \$100 million to our last campaign. They'll be thrilled to know that we'll be targeting them for execution as part of our thousand-tentacled modern-day bonehead Reichstag scheme! After all, if we're going to make martyrs -- why not make them out of our campaign paymasters? Shit, didn't the Merrill Lynch guys say they needed a refurbishing in their New York offices?

**RUMSFELD:** Oh, they'll get a refurbishing, all right. Just in time for the "Big Wedding"!

**ALL THREE:** (cackling) Mwah-hah-hah!

You get the idea. None of this stuff makes any sense at all. If you just need an excuse to assume authoritarian powers, why fake a plane crash in Shanksville? What the hell does that accomplish? If you're using bombs, why fake a hijacking, why use remote-control planes? If the entire government apparatus is in on the scam, then why bother going to all this murderous trouble at all -- only to go to war a year later with a country no one even bothered to falsely blame for the attacks? You won't see any of this explored in 9/11 Truth lore, because the "conspiracy" they're describing is impossible everywhere outside a Zucker brothers movie -- unbelievably stupid in its conception, pointlessly baroque and excessive in its particulars, but flawless in its execution, with no concrete evidence left behind and tens of thousands keeping their roles a secret forever.

We are to imagine that not one of Bush's zillions of murderous confederates would slip and leave real incriminating evidence anywhere along the way, forcing us to deduce this massive crime via things like the shaking of a documentary filmmaker's tripod before the Towers' collapse (aha, see that shaking -- it must have been a bomb planted by the president and his ten thousand allies!). Richard Nixon was a hundred times smarter than Bush, and he couldn't prevent leaks and cries of anguished pseudo-conscience from sprouting among a dozen intimately involved conspirators -- but under the 9/11 conspiracy theory, even the lowest FBI agent used to seal off the crime scene never squeaks. It's absurd.


I challenge a 9/11 Truth leader like *Loose Change* writer Dylan Avery to come up with a detailed, complete summary of the alleged plot -- not the bits and pieces, but the whole story, put together -- that would not make any fifth grader anywhere burst out in convulsive laughter. And without that, all the rest of it is bosh and bunkum, on the order of the "sonar evidence" proving the existence of the Loch Ness monster. If you can't put all of these alleged scientific impossibilities together into a story that makes sense, then all you're doing is jerking off -- and it's not like no one's ever done that on the Internet before.

Whenever anyone chooses to dismiss 9/11 conspiracy theorists, accusations fly: the Internet screams that you've aided and abetted George Bush. I disagree. To me, the 9/11 Truth movement is, itself, a classic example of the pathology of George Bush's America. Bush has presided over a country that has become hopelessly divided into insoluble, paranoid tribes, one of which happens to be Bush's own government. All of these tribes have things in common: they're insular movements that construct their own reality by cherry-picking the evidence they like from the vast information marketplace, violently disbelieve in the humanity of those outside their ranks, and lavishly praise their own movement mediocrities as great thinkers and achievers. There are as many Thomas Paines in the 9/11 Truth movement as there are Isaac Newtons among the Intelligent Design crowd.

There's not a whole lot of difference, psychologically, between Sean Hannity's followers believing liberals to be the same as terrorists, and 9/11 Truthers believing even the lowest soldier or rank-and-file FAA or NORAD official to be a cold-blooded mass murderer. In both cases you have to be far gone enough into your private world of silly tribal bullshit that the concept of "your fellow citizen" has ceased to have any meaning whatsoever. It may be that America has become too big and complicated for most people to deal with being part of. People are longing for a smaller, stupider reality. Some, like Bush, sell a prepackaged version. Others just make theirs up out of thin air. God help us.

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