



“shouldn’t float, but does”

volume 2 number 2 extra september 2001

**NO**

**WAR**

**NOT NOW. NOT EVER.**

OUT OF PRINT BOOK REVIEW: DORIS LESSING’S THE WIND BLOWS AWAY OUR WORDS BY JP HUNT. MOVIE REVIEW: STARSHIP TROOPERS BY SHA LAR. POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL COMMENTARY BY DAVE YOUSSEF AND JULIA LANDAU

# WEEPY, YET RANTY, FIRST-PERSON ACCOUNT OF HOW THE AUTHOR *FELT* ON THE 11TH AND 12TH

*IF I WERE AN EGOMANIAC, I'D CALL THIS AN EDITORIAL*

9-11-01

I feel like crying, but I can't. Sha asks what our emotional response was to the deaths in Rwanda and post-war Iraq, etc. – I remember this same heavy feeling, tightness in the chest, to much lesser degree. That's confrontational Sha all over, though. I think he's mad at us for making such a big deal of this tragedy. Unfortunately his point is completely valid. In fact, it might be the crux of the whole damn thing.

Earlier I started to feel responsible. I'm a citizen of the U.S., but me and mine do not find the time, usually, to let our government know much how we feel. Not about Rwanda, not about post-war Iraq and not about foreign policy in general. I always figure that Ralph Nader and Noam Chomsky and Michael Moore are doing it for me, or that students are keeping an eye on those things. I just can't bring myself to go to those pitiful little demonstrations organized by annoying, patronizing hippies.

As a result, the U.S. Government, my government, feels pretty good about propping up dictators all over the place and being the world's biggest pig. And people get mad, some of them insanely so, and there you go. So I can't really cry. I have no right.

9-12-01

One of the things that keeps coming up is the inevitable, sure-to-get-worse racism against people perceived to be "Arabs" and what can be done to stop it. Obviously nothing can be done to stop it. Even now we are starting to hear about some schoolchildren who got beaten up, a

bomb threat against a grocery store in San Jose, some men who were harassed and beaten. We think to ourselves that no one with half a brain could even consider doing such a thing, could even get halfway



ideologically there, but it's going to get a lot worse and we'll be forced to admit that many, many people might only have half a brain.

One thing we could do would be to stop living in denial. Putting your head in the sand about that is part of white privilege anyway. So what can be done to counter it? When I was in France in 1985 there was a big HIV education campaign whose slogan was "Cane passera pas par moi." "It won't pass by me." That might be a good way to think of it. Never let it pass.

It really pisses me off that left politics is always under this stupid cultural hegemony-type situation. Aside from dumbshits of the it's-not-cool-to-care-about-anything type, who are inherently right wing,

by Hiya Swanhuysen  
there are a considerable number of people who just are not comfortable with the horribleness of being part of a group with a bunch of hippie stereotypes. Do I care about a lot of issues that people get together to protest? Yes. Can I sit through a meeting with Jim Cosner's massive mouth interrupting everyone? No. I mean I have, but the prospect of doing it again makes me furious. Will I go to Robert Norse's ridiculous, puny, laughable demonstration? No. Maybe. Only if there are other kinds of people than hippies. It just feels like the definition of useless when everyone there is exactly the same in whatever way.

For example, I can't shake the terrible memory I have of the last demonstration I went to. It was a free Mumia rally, an issue that seems clear-cut: he shouldn't be in prison and no one should be executed by anyone let alone the government. That guy is super smart and great in every way. I want him out of there. But my memory of that demo is of a white woman with great big dreads, very revealing purple batik clothing and a blissful look on her face, dancing and singing "Free Mumia Abu-Jamal." I didn't even have to see the look on the guy's face next to me: I could just feel the lust pouring out of him. So I left. What could I do in the face of gross idiocy? It was disrespectful,



the  
**CEMENT  
BOAT:**  
"shouldn't float, but does"

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Anti-War Poster Artists

## Disclaimer

We have made this issue out of a sense of urgency, to counter the flow of nationalist militaristic bullshit that seems to be everywhere. We know the people who want to beat up Arabs aren't waiting around to get their thoughts in order, so we didn't want to wait either. As a result, this publication is bound to be a little rough. Hopefully our wonderful, smart, kind-hearted readers will forgive any stupidity or orthographic errors. We know that our horrible, shit-for-brains, asshole readers will be judging us harshly and repeating our mistakes back to us for years to come.

ineffective and alienating. *Too bad this ended on such a crappy note, I guess. Things are still crappy. We're going to war. What will we do?*

**STARSHIP TROOPERS:  
FACT OR FICTION?**

by Sha Lar

Perhaps the best place to view the world of the 21st century is, to echo Mike Davis, “from the ruins of its alternate futures.” Paul Verhoeven’s *Starship Troopers* (1997) is one such ruin. *Starship Troopers* is a bad action movie, of that there is no doubt, but so is the U.S. media’s coverage of the attack on the World Trade Center. Both are, it would seem, bad by design.

With its cataclysmic destruction of Buenos Aires by an asteroid—traced by Earth’s military propaganda officers to “bug” planet Klendathu, *Starship Troopers* anticipates and satirizes the anti-Arab jingoism so prevalent in the contemporary U.S., but the film consistently confuses both viewers and reviewers by undermining its own arguments every step of the way. Unfortunately, as with the mainstream media propaganda we are currently subjected to, very few people seem to “get it”, despite its shiny cast hand-picked from the second string of *90210*, its blatantly Americanized version of Nazi fascism, and its flag-waving news updates and recruitment ads.

“The only good bug is a dead bug,” grumps one civilian, echoing a catchy phrase first applied to American Indians by General Sheridan in 1869. And the only good Arab? Orientalism, colonialism, and future-war fantasies have always gone hand in hand, but to Verhoeven’s credit the “bugs” are truly an empty cipher, unlike the thinly disguised racist stereotypes marketed by Lucas and Disney. Of course, the American news media’s “Arabs” are just as much of a free-floating signifier as Verhoeven’s “bugs”; both serve, in their respective bad movies, as excuses for unthinking violence, that “supreme authority from which all other authority is derived,” to quote the film’s war-mongering schoolteacher, and both obscure the compassionate compromise which is our only hope of keeping these two virtual wars in the ruins of our alternate futures—and out of our own present.

*The Wind Blows Away Our Words:  
A Firsthand Account of the Afghan Resistance*

By Doris Lessing (Random House, 1987)

by Jonathan Hunt

British novelist Doris Lessing’s forgotten portrait of a superpower’s doomed attack on Afghanistan is suddenly relevant again.

Like Osama bin Laden, the Taliban and Islamic militants in Afghanistan were late-Cold-War allies of the US. As NATO revs up its jets and cruise missiles and George W. dusts off his father’s Gulf War speeches, it’s easy to forget that George the First’s mentor Ronald Reagan funneled billions of dollars in aid (e.g. weapons) to the Afghan *mujahidin*. To clear the way for a military response to terrorism, these former allies are now transformed from tenacious freedom fighters to the evil-of-the-moment. Lessing’s book is a reminder of the real people—fanatics and feminists, professors and peasants, victims and killers—who will be on the ground when NATO’s bombs fall.

Lessing is best known for her ’70s-feminist classic *The Golden Notebooks*, and for her acute portraits of late-twentieth-century unease in novels such as the subtly ominous *The Summer Before the Dark* and the more openly omi-

nous *The Fifth Child*. *The Wind Blows Away Our Words*—dedicated “to the gallant people of Afghanistan”—documents Lessing’s 1986 trip to Peshawar, Pakistan, a border city then home to millions of Afghan refugees and headquarters-in-exile of the anti-Soviet resistance movements.

She traveled to Peshawar on a feminist mission: she hoped to investigate the daily experience of Afghan women under harsh wartime conditions and increasingly strict Islamic law, and also to chase down rumors of women commanding all-female combat units in the mountains. But she also investigates her own attitudes, and concludes that the Soviets, the US, and Europeans all share the same set of imperialist preconceptions about Afghanistan. One fighter reminds her that “the British invaded half the world on the argument that it was their right to ‘civilize’ people. They tried it on us... when the Russians invade and destroy, they call it ‘modernizing’...”

Like most travel literature, the book is filled with generalizations about the “character” of this or that nationality or ethnic group.

Not that the blame rests solely with Lessing—in her book, generalizations are dispensed with equal fervor by rebel commanders, exiled literature professors, soldiers of fortune, and European journalists. Yet some of these generalizations may be instructive for the present moment, such as this observation by a Kabul-area mujahidin leader.

He tells Lessing that “The Russians have a certain characteristic which is to their disadvantage; if something goes badly then they do not change tactics or try something else, they simply bear down more heavily and intensify what they are already doing. They often destroy what they try to do... But of course, if the Russians were subtle they would have found a way out long ago...” This remark is equally descriptive of US policy toward Islamic nations, which for thirty years has demonized popular leaders and fantasized that their elimination will result in mass conversions of peoples and nations.

*Jonathan Hunt collects bicycles and typewriters. In his off hours, he enjoys fawning over his crabby yet adorable wife.*

**Three Other Books about Why War in  
Afghanistan Sucks**

**RUSSIAN ROULETTE**

by Gennady Bocharov

Written by a Soviet journalist covering the war in Afghanistan in the early ’80s. A writer’s conscience is destroyed, “normal, decent Soviet lads become xenophobes, killers, and sadists,” and superpower arrogance “provokes a conflict that could go on for centuries.”

**SOLDIERS OF GOD**

by Robert D. Kaplan

An US journalist hangs with the mujahidin, especially the astonishing Kabul-area commander Abdul Haq. Numbing descriptions of war’s destruction paired with vivid portrait of the enormous diversity (political, religious, personal) of Afghan Islamic fundamentalists.

**BEHIND RUSSIAN LINES**

by Sandy Gall

Fawning portrait by a self-centered Brit journalist (dedicated “To Masud and his Wonderfully Heroic Mujahideen”). Masud was an early hero of the anti-Soviet resistance and, until his assassination earlier this month, was prominent in an anti-Taliban coalition (see page. 5).

## ERRORISM BACKLASH: THE EMERGENCY TISSUE

### GOOD WARNING?

Whip it. Nuke it. Blast them back to the Stone Age. If we bury them in their own sand, we'll be safe. Why don't I feel safe?

To whip terrorism is to export the death penalty abroad to Arab countries, in a hasty and faulty swing of our political justice bat. In this case, "justice is blind" is taken too literally to be true—in order to achieve justice, we must be blind to who we are actually punishing. This blindness comes as a necessary cost to punishing the devils outside. As we begin to master our shock with mourning and retribution, everyone looks to the media for what to think. We still don't know exactly who we could punish for this mass murder, but we think we're getting closer, and someone's going to pay. With no one, really, to blame—except for the dead-by-symbolic-suicide criminals aboard the aircrafts—where can Americans find closure? The attacks as we know them are over, yet our government gathers support for a war to stop terrorism.

Just as "nothing comes of nothing," (*King Lear*) terrorism begets terrorism, and is unfortunately the last thing—so jarring, devastating and reckless—to make a society criticize itself (whether U.S. interven-

tionism or Serbian "ethnic cleansing") rather than the foreign foe. Violence like this is alien to so many. The question "who could do such a thing?" gets a rapid reply as our leaders in government and media point our eyes overseas. So where is justice? Death isn't, can't be, enough—the execut(ion)ers of the deeds have welcomed America's most grave form of justice, giving themselves the last laugh and leaving those we'll find guilty by association to pay for their audacity.

So what does make us reflect, exactly? What makes the elite—a group of usually content, comfortable people—realize finiteness and the possibility of ourselves, as Americans, all being affected by the same thing? Fear comes first. I peruse portraits of the dead and for the first time in my lifetime view (part of) a city in ruins, as we have glimpsed shots of Sarajevo, Belgrade, and even Hiroshima if we're lucky. How many of us think, when we see those vestiges: "Well, that place was already pretty crummy to begin with"? Now that the shiny sanctity of Manhattan is rubble and dust, we can imagine (form mental images) the emotional reaction, the desperate response of "us and them," and understand (literally, to stand

underneath and support) what bombing does to people's sense of the future. If only we could have gotten this kind of coverage over there. If only we could have known the intimate images, the day-after despair, the leaflets and lost limbs—what it means to bomb in reality rather than Hollywood. Surely, this is to be avoided, anywhere.

*Julia Landau is a playwright, director, actress, and smart-mouth. She enjoys freestyle walking and contentious discussion.*



## HOW TO WRITE A LETTER

by Hiya Swanhuysen

OK, before any anarchists get all over my case about this, letter-writing isn't my favorite thing to do. As activism, it bites. It's boring, and largely ineffective. But here's my theory: **DO IT ANYWAY, JACKASS!** At certain times, it does make a difference, **LIKE NOW.** Not everything you do has to be super cool. In fact, don't even tell anyone you did it. Just take a few minutes out of your busy judging-other-people schedule and write to Sam Farr to tell him what you think. And if you do, be sure to **include the number of a specific bill.** That goes for when you're writing to any elected official, as does the fact that a **handwritten letter** counts for about a million times more than anything else. The number of the bill (\$ for the war) that Sam Farr was absent during the vote on but made sure everyone knew he would have supported (jerk! jerk!) is **S.J. Res. 23.** I've been told the usual thing is to start your letter out with "I oppose your support of S.J. Res 23" or like that. Then just say whatever, it doesn't matter at all, but don't cuss, it ain't nice.

*Hiya Swanhuysen's usual approach to writing includes drinking a beer and using the word "fuck" in the first sentence. Experience has shown,*

# MORE POLITICS

## The Page Five Babe



Ahmed Shah Masud,  
Afghan anti-Taliban  
resistance leader  
1954-2001

from the horrors of the world, has been challenged categorically as well as physically. It is at this site— one which previously remained below the threshold of consciousness—that the “debates” around retaliation center. For although a tragedy, this event also presents an opportunity for the nation and the citizen to be reinterpreted in some corrupted version of a “public forum.”

This is where the media comes into play, using one of its most powerful strengths—quantity. With a nation disoriented and shown to be vulnerable, everyone is more influential, as well as easily influenced. These are the stakes of the struggle over national identity. Media power must proliferate interpretations of nation and citizen in an attempt to galvanize a disoriented public into formation where it can become a reunified identity against a world of doubt and insecurity.

*Dave Youssef is one smart cookie.*



## THE RETURN OF A BURIED NATIONAL IDENTITY

by Dave Youssef

The magnetic field of US power, where contradictions are so embedded that they have become invisible, has been disrupted. The once tacit frames of political desire have been monumentally disoriented, because their referent—for a brief moment—became *real*.

The reality of the attacks on New York and Washington is undeniable, but it has of course been redrawn and reimagined by scores of interpretations. The shock, although tragic, may have been sorely needed in such a depoliticized public, but its recontainment—performed skillfully by an omnipresent media—pronounces a new-fangled reallocation of the US citizenry to its own right-wing archetype.

This political direction is accomplished by the media, whose surgical operations on the American psyche represent a regime that was forced to display more of its essential components of brutality. The destabilization of the US magnetic field has provided a better vantage to see the magnet, as well as allowing a repressed political formation to arise from the American underbelly.

In this case of toxic revenge, it is not simply economic interests militarizing themselves into war, but a problem within the moral-psychological status of U.S. power and identity. The U.S. responded to the attacks by constructing a national identity

founded entirely on victimhood, defining itself as an entity which has undergone an onslaught of real physical, infrastructural, and psychological *damage*. This damage, in most regions of the world, is not far outside of a cultural imagination, but it seemed that previously the US could only comprehend this kind of damage as something lost in translation.

The US has tasted the recipe of horror, which it has itself perpetrated on many occasions, such as the Gulf War or in Vietnam, as an international power. This small—yet extremely important—taste of violent reality has ignited an inflammatory response within most facets of the body politic which is determined to purge the most viral of afflictions—lack.

The US is rallying to be rid of this affliction, its loss—which is of course practically impossible—by destroying those responsible for it. But who really is responsible ultimately? Can responsibility in this case really be *identified*? It seems quite clear that the perpetrators of the recent attacks have enunciated in the terms of the attacks—namely that *American Airlines* attacked America’s financial capital—that officially determining responsibility cannot be disentangled from an interrogation of the “victim” of the attacks.

The identity of the American citizen, as one enjoys freedom



## FLYING THE NON-FREAK FLAG HIGH

By Hugh Holden

All this flying of the flag feels like a big “shut up” sign to me. “AMERICA IS UNIFIED,” this act of patriotism seems to shout. But who’s really flying the flag, and what is their opinion? I feel like a person’s opinion to any given situation is as unique as a fingerprint. But the flag people are flying is the same flag.

I’m sure my Dad is flying the flag. I’m driving over the hill to eat dinner with him next Friday. He faithfully flies the flag on every 4<sup>th</sup> of July and Veterans Day. He served in Vietnam and returned to the States to take up a career in the fire department. He’s a macho dude. But I’m not afraid to tell him my feelings about September 11<sup>th</sup>. I’m not afraid to tell him about my disgust at the war drums beating. But then again, it might end up easier just to not talk about it. But I doubt it.

My Dad gives me some perspective on all the flags flying freely though. For all the super-patriots to fly their flag with a “Love It or Leave It” message, and all the racist shit-heads who are feeling inspired to commit their own acts of terrorism on the streets, be it through attacking a mosque, verbally assaulting a non-white person on the streets (I saw a white dude confront a black dude this weekend down by the boardwalk, and he said to him “I’m an American! What country are you from?”), or the iciness of shoppers not patronizing the cart manned by an Arab man at the Cabrillo College farmers market (well, maybe this one is not as uncommon), I feel like most people are going to respond to the tragedy with as many different views as there are different fingerprints.

*Hugh is not a rock star. Do not ever call him a rock star. He remains vague about the possible implications of his last name.*