

Predictions Re: The Politics Of Gene Wolfe

The Urth list — 51 messages, 13 voices, 27 Jul 2012

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/6278>

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Gwern Branwen — 27 Jul 2012, 16:28

On Fri, Jul 2, 2010 at 7:50 AM, Gwern Branwen <gwern0 at gmail.com> wrote:
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gwern
<http://www.gwern.net>

Bailey Swartz — 27 Jul 2012, 17:56 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

Are you trying to say that Wolfe is a conservative old fool? In the first email, you use the word, "littered", to describe the inclusion of libertarian ideas in his recent stories, as if they were trash. In the second, your zeal for showing Wolfe's predictions false is hardly veiled.

On Fri, Jul 27, 2012 at 9:28 AM, Gwern Branwen <gwern0 at gmail.com> wrote:

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gwern
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Allan Anderson — 27 Jul 2012, 17:59 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

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Regarding the "wrong predictions," I wonder if Wolfe was trolling his readers, hoping to get them off their rears. I think he wrote them to perturb current readers, not to accurately prognosticate.

António Pedro Marques — 28 Jul 2012, 00:00 · in reply to Allan Anderson

No dia 27/07/2012, às 18:59, Allan Anderson <rubel at goosemoon.org> escreveu:

Regarding the "wrong predictions," I wonder if Wolfe was trolling his readers, hoping to get them off their rears. I think he wrote them to perturb current readers, not to accurately prognosticate.

Almost no one predicted the end of the USSR and that did were derided. A prediction that the Russians and Americans would keep on their standoff while becoming very much like each other is not very off the mark.

Nor do I see the Illiteracy thing as misplaced. Give it a bit more time. I blame the breakdown of familial transmission of culture brought about by modern jobs.

For me, the shocking bit is that it really was possible to seriously predict technological development far beyond what we have now.

Fernando Gouvea — 28 Jul 2012, 13:45 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

I'm wondering why you care so much. If I were going to worry about all the kooky ideas I meet in various writers, I'd be left with not very much to read. Do they work as stories? Then good. If not, then they fail as stories, not because of whatever political stance they take. It's hard to see how anyone could enjoy Homer, Virgil, Dante, and Milton if the issue was their politics. (Only

Dante comes close to fitting mine in that quartet, and even then not very close.)

Fernando

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Fernando Q. Gouvea <http://www.colby.edu/~fqgouvea>
Carter Professor and Chair
Dept. of Mathematics and Statistics
Colby College
5836 Mayflower Hill Editor, MAA Reviews
Waterville, ME 04901 <http://www.maa.org/maareviews>

There are three kinds of lies: Lies, Damn Lies, and Statistics.
-- Disraeli

Gwern Branwen — 28 Jul 2012, 14:18 · in reply to Fernando Gouvea

On Sat, Jul 28, 2012 at 9:45 AM, Fernando Gouvea <fqgouvea@colby.edu> wrote:
I'm wondering why you care so much.

I have a long-standing interest in predictions and what they reveal, which would alone would justify my interest, but besides that...

I care because I wish one of my favorite authors to be an intellectually respectable author, perhaps along the lines of Chesterton or Buckley or Charles Murray who I also enjoy reading, and it's disappointing to me to see that it's not a few allusions or plot twists that I perhaps was simply misinterpreting or being overly sensitive to.

And also because people here seem to have a hard time accepting it, so additional data is

welcome; witness the previous attempts to explain it all away, or in this thread the suggestion that maybe he was joking or trolling!

gwern
<http://www.gwern.net>

Marc Aramini — 28 Jul 2012, 22:31 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

He was far far more overtly political in his short stories of the early 70s and in Operation Ares, and most of that stuff was not reprinted. If anything as we get farther away from the bogeyman of socialism actually being the dominant zeitgeist of our time his fiction leaves political obsessions behind for narrative and spiritual preoccupations. Just my two cents.

--- On Sat, 7/28/12, Gwern Branwen <gwern0 at gmail.com> wrote:

From: Gwern Branwen <gwern0 at gmail.com>
Subject: Re: (urth) Predictions Re: The Politics Of Gene Wolfe To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net> Date: Saturday, July 28, 2012, 7:18 AM

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António Pedro Marques — 29 Jul 2012, 00:52 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

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I've read it again. I can see no connection between the predictions and your comments on them. You even say all of them are wrong, except most of them. About the only thing wrong there is the one on sex, which is so alien that people are justified in seeing it all as mere ideas to play with. More than the missing fall of the SU, the two important things no one had predicted are the rise of islamic fundamentalism and the Russian mafia. Unless you mean that the vision of controlling government is bonkers. Well, sorry, but you'll have to look very hard to find an sf writer who doesn't share that view.

António Pedro Marques — 29 Jul 2012, 00:55 · in reply to Marc Aramini

I don't find 'socialism has taken over the free world' in those predictions.

No dia 28/07/2012, às 23:31, Marc Aramini <marcaramini at yahoo.com> escreveu:

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gwern
<http://www.gwern.net>

Marc — 29 Jul 2012, 04:37 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

Nor do I. I am merely saying he became less thematically political in fiction after his early efforts.

Sent from my Kindle Fire

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David Stockhoff — 01 Aug 2012, 02:25 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

#4 is perhaps the most interesting premise (and one Wolfe has approached many times), and yet the silliest as far as realistic prediction goes.

I take heart in his pessimism though. ;)

On 7/27/2012 12:28 PM, Gwern Branwen wrote:

On Fri, Jul 2, 2010 at 7:50 AM, Gwern Branwen <gwern0 at gmail.com> wrote:

I've read through most of *Starwater Strains* now, and my initial belief has hardened: Gene's writings are definitely getting more political. In his older works like *Peace* or *Book of the New Sun* (pre-90s), I didn't notice anything political, or at least, contemporary. But in stuff from the last 2 decades? My suspicion has become certainty.

The stories in SS though are absolutely littered with libertarian/conservative plots or asides. Some stories do nothing but push such ideas. "Viewpoint", for example, has a dystopian government

which claims to own all money and which suppresses all weaponry, the better to oppress its citizenry; the protagonist, who is a heroic moral wilderness survivalist fellow, spends most of the story trying to get a weapon. His great victory is to murder a government agent. "Has Anyone Seen Junie Moon?", when it's not trying to channel Lafferty, ends with best wishes for a rebellion that will kill 'the big important gangs with suits and guns' (the government). "The Fat Magician" ends with a rant about totalitarian governments. Another story seems to imply that the government is responsible for taking away everything interesting and handing over power to machines and rules ("Petting Zoo"), while in "The Dog of the Drops", the government seems to engineer the extinction of dogs because dogs don't pay taxes and don't love the government but their owners. (I'm speculating a little with this one because the dialect is so hard to read.) And so on.

I haven't even finished, but it's all far more blatant than An Evil Guest. Today on Hacker News I saw a link to <http://www.writersofthefuture.com/time-capsule-predictions> "1987 Time Capsule Predictions" for 2012 (25 years in the future; HN discussion:

<http://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=4299337>). It included some predictions from Gene Wolfe. I will take the liberty of quoting them in full:

GENE WOLFE

MORE THAN HALF OF YOU CAN'T READ THIS

But the Writers of the Future Contest has asked me to read your palm, nevertheless. Twenty-five years is not great length on the scale of the history, and thus I am conservative, limiting myself to the following five predictions one for each finger. And indeed, they are less prediction than certainty.

- The Thumb?Power: America and the U.S.S.R. preserve an uneasy accord, each testing the other's will within well-defined limits. No major nuclear war has taken place. Soviets are more like Americans (and Americans more like Soviets) than anyone else.
- The Index Finger?Learning: Vestiges of reading, writing, and spelling remain in the curricula of the public schools. Those who can read a few hundred common words are counted literate. The schools train their students for employment how to report to computers and follow instructions. (Called interaction.) Fifty million adult Americans are less than fluent in English.
- The Fool Finger?Entertainment: Sports and televised dramas are the only commonly available recreations. The dramas are performed by computer-generated images indistinguishable (on screen) from living people. Scenery is provided by the same method. Although science fiction and fantasy characterize the majority of these dramas, they are not so identified.
- The Ring Finger?Love: There is little sex outside marriage, which normally includes a legal contract. A single instance of infidelity is amply sufficient to terminate a marriage, with damages to the aggrieved party; this is a consequence of the two great plagues of the past 25 years. (I do not include the one we call AIDS, because it began well before this was written.) The population of the planet is below six billion. People live in space and on the moon, but their numbers are not significant.
- The Little Finger?Minority: A literate stratum supplies leadership in government and most (though not all) other fields. Its members are experimenting with sociological simulations that take into account the individual characters and preferences of most of the population. Its aim is to increase the power of the literate class and further limit literacy, without provoking war with the U.S.S.R. or alienating the rising powers?China and the Latin American block. A literate counterculture also exists.

Its products, too, are largely science fiction and fantasy; it tries to broaden the literate base, in part in order that its output can be read. It is of course to you of this counterculture that I write to say, take heart! Twenty-five years is no great length upon the long scale of history. In my time too, the

age was dark. But we are summoning the sun.

What is striking about these is that they are all wrong. Of the dozens of discrete predictions here, there are perhaps 4 which are correct (no major nuclear war, Soviets more like Americans, widespread use of simulations, the rise of China), and a few more which are debatable (rise of genre fiction, SF/Fantasy in TV & movies), and the rest are blatantly incorrect or if correct, correct for the wrong reasons (eg. I haven't looked up whether 50m adults are functionally illiterate in English, but if there are that many, I bet much of that will be due not to the educational system - which continues as it usually has - but due to immigration and other such factors).

It's hard not to see what ideological trend characterizes Wolfe's wrong predictions.

(On the plus side, some of the others made some remarkably prescient predictions: Benford on shale oil and Wolverton on the Men's Right Movement, for example.)

David Stockhoff — 01 Aug 2012, 02:36 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

On 7/28/2012 8:52 PM, António Pedro Marques wrote:

No dia 28/07/2012, às 15:18, Gwern Branwen <gwern0 at gmail.com> escreveu:

On Sat, Jul 28, 2012 at 9:45 AM, Fernando Gouvea <fqgouvea at colby.edu> wrote:

I'm wondering why you care so much.

I have a long-standing interest in predictions and what they reveal, which would alone would justify my interest, but besides that...

I care because I wish one of my favorite authors to be an intellectually respectable author, perhaps along the lines of Chesterton or Buckley or Charles Murray who I also enjoy reading, and it's disappointing to me to see that it's not a few allusions or plot twists that I perhaps was simply misinterpreting or being overly sensitive to.

And also because people here seem to have a hard time accepting it, so additional data is welcome; witness the previous attempts to explain it all away, or in this thread the suggestion that maybe he was joking or trolling!

I've read it again. I can see no connection between the predictions and your comments on them. You even say all of them are wrong, except most of them. About the only thing wrong there is the one on sex, which is so alien that people are justified in seeing it all as mere ideas to play with. More than the missing fall of the SU, the two important things no one had predicted are the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and the Russian mafia.

Unless you mean that the vision of controlling government is bonkers. Well, sorry, but you'll have to look very hard to find an SF writer who doesn't share that view.

But they are all wrong. Taken as a whole, they are way, way off. Of course I would not expect much "accuracy" so I don't care. Maybe they are in fact better than others' predictions.

I think Gwern is suggesting that they work better as predictions of "what cranky, ill-informed old people will believe/fear/desire in 2012." I take the point. You have heard of the, er, "Red Rose Brigade"?

(hint: they're a potent cup of tea!)

Ryan Dunn — 01 Aug 2012, 05:07 · in reply to David Stockhoff

On Jul 31, 2012, at 10:36 PM, David Stockhoff wrote:

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David,

Personally, I took the whole essay as a bit of a lark on the part of Mr. Wolfe. I did like how he associated each finger with a facet of our human nature, though, then used it as a platform for his societal predictions.

. . .

"The Thumb?Power: America and the U.S.S.R. preserve an uneasy accord, each testing the other's will within well-defined limits. No major nuclear war has taken place. Soviets are more like Americans (and Americans more like Soviets) than anyone else."

- I dunno, besides the nuclear war (correct) prediction, I don't see much of a commitment one way or another here.

"The Index Finger?Learning: Vestiges of reading, writing, and spelling remain in the curricula of the public schools. Those who can read a few hundred common words are counted literate. The schools train their students for employment how to report to computers and follow instructions. (Called interaction.) Fifty million adult Americans are less than fluent in English."

- Feels hyperbolic bordering on sarcastic.

"The Fool Finger?Entertainment: Sports and televised dramas are the only commonly available recreations. The dramas are performed by computer-generated images indistinguishable (on screen) from living people. Scenery is provided by the same method. Although science fiction and fantasy characterize the majority of these dramas, they are not so identified."

- The dramas performed by CG humans who replace actors? Come on. Even CG characters need Andy Serkis!

"The Ring Finger?Love: There is little sex outside marriage, which normally includes a legal contract. A single instance of infidelity is amply sufficient to terminate a marriage, with damages to the aggrieved party; this is a consequence of the two great plagues of the past 25 years. (I do not include the one we call AIDS, because it began well before this was written.) The population of the planet is below six billion. People live in space and on the moon, but their numbers are not significant."

- I felt some seriousness in PART of this prediction, but even still, the front half feels fictional even in his own words. World population indeed above 6B. It was 5B when he predicted that, and it is just under 7B today.

"The Little Finger?Minority: A literate stratum supplies leadership in government and most (though not all) other fields. Its members are experimenting with sociological simulations that take into account the individual characters and preferences of most of the population. Its aim is to increase the power of the literate class and further limit literacy, without provoking war with the U.S.S.R. or alienating the rising powers?China and the Latin American block. A literate counterculture also exists."

- Literacy was a big paranoia back then, eh? Even still, half of this prediction could be interpreted as totally true. Or that same half could be interpreted to be completely false. It seems to me like Gene was giving non-predictions as much as predictions. Maybe that's just me.

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And yet he succeeded---in my estimation, by /more than/ half. That must mean something.

BTW, literacy paranoia has been in vogue in the US since at least the 1960s.

Ryan Dunn — 01 Aug 2012, 12:41 · in reply to David Stockhoff

On Aug 1, 2012, at 8:07 AM, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> wrote:

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David Stockhoff — 01 Aug 2012, 12:55 · in reply to Ryan Dunn

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Understood. But what's "lofty" about making an observation about the written word---or trying to make sense of another reader's observation?

One could easily write whole books of criticism about the paranoid style in Gene Wolfe, and in dystopian SF in general (as someone has already noted). I don't know what they would conclude, but I'd be interested in reading them.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Paranooid_Style_in_American_Politics

Ryan Dunn — 01 Aug 2012, 13:18 · in reply to David Stockhoff

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Dave,

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My point is that he seems to be a bit flippant, half smiling, and not all together serious in these predictions. So when someone takes "a great interest in predictions and what they reveal," for instance, I would hope that Mr. Wolfe's five fingered prediction would have revealed that he is indeed a sly, shifty, elusive prankster, even when portending to dole out 25 year predictions. I got the vibe that it was not being interpreted with as light a hand as that, however. In fact, I got the impression they were used to support a feeling of disenchantment with him as a man, which may have gotten me riled a little bit. While he may write from an extreme, and detailed perspective on society, he does not seem at all to be a dystopian, right-wing loon who is increasingly using his prose to somehow push a conservative, anti-socialist agenda (which was also inferred on this and other threads recently).

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Daniel Petersen — 01 Aug 2012, 13:41 · in reply to Ryan Dunn

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Gonna have to tend to agree here...

(And Gwern, please don't assume this is an inability to see no wrong in Wolfe from some of his fans - it might be a very considered opinion just like yours. Don't get me wrong! I like your insights in this group - but I think you might be a bit dismissive sometimes of people who don't see Wolfe as a scary right-winger to the degree you do.)

-DOJP

On Wed, Aug 1, 2012 at 2:18 PM, Ryan Dunn <ryan at liftingfaces.com> wrote:

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DAVID STOCKHOFF — 01 Aug 2012, 18:04 · in reply to Ryan Dunn

From: Ryan Dunn <ryan at liftingfaces.com>
To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>
Sent: Wednesday, August 1, 2012 9:18 AM
Subject: Re: (urth) Predictions Re: The Politics Of Gene Wolfe

On Aug 1, 2012, at 8:55 AM, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> wrote:

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Yes it does, thanks!

Of course, in order to reach a conclusion that Wolfe was playing specifically with "right-wing loon"-ness, one must first agree that he came off a little "right-wing loon"-y. If you think he wasn't doing that, there is still that cast or quality to explain. I'm very inclined to agree with you, but at the same time it seems valid to wonder exactly how self-aware on this point a man in his 80s can be.

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Marc Aramini — 01 Aug 2012, 18:14 · in reply to DAVID STOCKHOFF

--- On Wed, 8/1/12, DAVID STOCKHOFF <dstockhoff at verizon.net> wrote: (I think it was David, the formatting is a little off here)

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I think for a religious conservative he is remarkably open minded in personal correspondence, all things considered, and ageism (however that's spelled) really shouldn't be an issue when we talk about Wolfe. (Though I have feared that when I approach my 80s the innate tyrannical facism I have hidden and suppressed from everyone around me will come boiling out, if I live that long)

Ryan Dunn — 01 Aug 2012, 18:15 · in reply to DAVID STOCKHOFF

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To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>
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James B. Jordan — 01 Aug 2012, 20:38 · in reply to Ryan Dunn

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Gwern Branwen — 01 Aug 2012, 20:52 · in reply to James B. Jordan

On Wed, Aug 1, 2012 at 4:38 PM, James B. Jordan <jbjordan4 at cox.net> wrote:
It's odd that a man who has written from a Christian, in his case Roman Catholic, strongly libertarian, anti-welfare state, and traditional conservative semi-isolationist perspective -- which after all is and has been advocated by people with IQs well over 150 for centuries and was the position of the founders of the United States -- is considered loony for doing so.

I sincerely hope the Founding Fathers would not have endorsed those predictions when they were made; I had more respect for them. (On the other hand, the colonists *were* conspiracy theorists who thought that England was systematically undermining their liberties in order to convert the colonies into fiefs which the Church of England and monarchy could drain the blood out of for their private profit and interpreted every move as a step in this cunningly laid plan by the King's councilors and allies, so perhaps we shouldn't be overly concerned with what they might have thought. No one's perfect.)

I don't consider him 'loony' for writing from that perspective. I even cited 3 of my favorite authors who all fit that description (well, except for the Roman Catholicism part - I believe Murray is not Catholic).

I consider him 'loony' for making predictions that were obviously going to be wrong at the time, and are even more obviously wrong now, in the same way I consider contemporary Communists to be loony.

gwern
<http://www.gwern.net>

James B. Jordan — 01 Aug 2012, 21:15 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

Ah. I see these predictions as tongue in cheek.

JBJordan

At 03:52 PM 8/1/2012, you wrote:

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James B. Jordan — 01 Aug 2012, 21:27 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

On 7/27/2012 11:28 AM, Gwern Branwen wrote:

On Fri, Jul 2, 2010 at 7:50 AM, Gwern Branwen<gwern0 at gmail.com> wrote:

I've read through most of *_Starwater Strains_* now, and my initial belief has hardened: Gene's writings are definitely getting more political. In his older works like *_Peace_* or *_Book of the New Sun_* (pre-90s), I didn't notice anything political, or at least, contemporary. But in stuff from the last 2 decades? My suspicion has become certainty.

Sorry I did not see this earlier. If you can find a copy of */Operation ARES/*, his first (and pretty uneven) novel, you'll see lots of political and contemporary stuff pretty much on the surface, including a satirical ending. I think the viewpoints have always been there. I should also mention */Free Live Free/*, which is contemporary and highly "political" and was published in 1984 (!).

FWIW

JBJordan

David Stockhoff — 01 Aug 2012, 22:09 · in reply to James B. Jordan

Actually, nobody said that, and we obviously don't know the IQs of anyone born before the IQ test was developed, and the "founding fathers" were deists (who hated and feared Roman Catholics, but hey, nobody's perfect).

Otherwise, great comment!

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James B. Jordan — 02 Aug 2012, 00:14 · in reply to David Stockhoff

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António Pedro Marques — 02 Aug 2012, 00:23 · in reply to Daniel Petersen

I just can't see what it is that those predictions, in jest or dead seriousness, reveal about their author's sinister (ha) politics. It has been stated they do, I'd like to know what and how.

António Pedro Marques — 02 Aug 2012, 00:28 · in reply to DAVID STOCKHOFF

No dia 01/08/2012, às 19:04, DAVID STOCKHOFF <dstockhoff at verizon.net> escreveu:

(No, setting fires out West would not be a clever way for a terrorist to create terror. It would require a lot of work by a lot of people and they'd get caught. And so on.)

Eh? Setting forest fires seems to me to be one of the most cost-effective ways of provoking damage and terror. If terrorists don't do it it's because even they can't justify killing innocent wildlife and leaving the attack unclaimed would make it worthless. What is it I'm nit getting?

António Pedro Marques — 02 Aug 2012, 00:30 · in reply to Ryan Dunn

No dia 01/08/2012, às 19:15, Ryan Dunn <ryan at liftingfaces.com> escreveu:

Dave,

Thanks for the response. I just wanted to call out one bit...

YOU WROTE: "I'm very inclined to agree with you, but at the same time it seems valid to wonder exactly how self-aware on this point a man in his 80s can be."

I'm not sure if you have ever had the good fortune to hold a conversation with Mr. Wolfe, but as of

last year, I found him to be the type of conversationalist that always to seem to be two steps ahead of you, ready with a quip, eager for an anecdote, anxious to counter point your point, in a wry, light-hearted, jovial manner.

I personally know people around their 90s who talk and write as if they were 30.

Jerry Friedman — 02 Aug 2012, 01:40 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

From: Ant?nio Pedro Marques <entonio at gmail.com>

No dia 01/08/2012, ?s 19:04, DAVID STOCKHOFF <dstockhoff at verizon.net> escreveu:

(No, setting fires out West would not be a clever way for a terrorist to create terror. It would require a lot of work by a lot of people and they'd get caught. And so on.)

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I was going to mention something about that. ?Setting forest fires is so easy that one person can do it by accident. ?See for instance the two biggest fires in Arizona history: the Rodeo-Chediski Fire (one part set by an arsonist, the other by a woman trying to signal rescuers) and the Wallow Fire (started by an abandoned campfire).

You can get caught, though, as happened to the two men who accidentally started the Wallow Fire.

<http://www.abqjournal.com/main/2012/03/28/abqnewsseeker/updated-cousins-plead-guilty-to-ariz-fire-charges.html>

And it may look more like vandalism than political action on the home front.

Jerry Friedman

David Stockhoff — 02 Aug 2012, 01:46 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

On 8/1/2012 8:30 PM, Ant?nio Pedro Marques wrote:

No dia 01/08/2012, ?s 19:15, Ryan Dunn <ryan at liftingfaces.com> escreveu:

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I personally know people around their 90s who talk and write as if they were 30.

I'm in my 40s and I don't think even I do that. ;)

David Stockhoff — 02 Aug 2012, 01:56 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

On 8/1/2012 9:40 PM, Jerry Friedman wrote:

From: Ant?nio Pedro Marques <entonio at gmail.com>

No dia 01/08/2012, ?s 19:04, DAVID STOCKHOFF <dstockhoff at verizon.net> escreveu:

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Jerry Friedman

Exactly. I'm sure terrorists consider and reject all sorts of ideas.

António Pedro Marques — 02 Aug 2012, 02:08 · in reply to David Stockhoff

No dia 02/08/2012, às 02:56, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> escreveu:

On 8/1/2012 9:40 PM, Jerry Friedman wrote:

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Exactly. I'm sure terrorists consider and reject all sorts of ideas.

But what did you mean by it requiring a lot of work and their likeliness to be caught? Those are the bits I inquired on. Lot of work to set fires? I mean, that could apply to lots of other ideas, but here?

David Stockhoff — 02 Aug 2012, 02:26 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

On 8/1/2012 10:08 PM, António Pedro Marques wrote:

No dia 02/08/2012, às 02:56, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> escreveu:

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In order to create a wildfire that is bigger than "natural" wildfires, you'd have to start several fires over a wide area. If it's not bigger than normal fires, what's the point?

Jeff Wilson — 02 Aug 2012, 03:44 · in reply to David Stockhoff

On 8/1/2012 9:26 PM, David Stockhoff wrote:

On 8/1/2012 10:08 PM, Ant?nio Pedro Marques wrote:

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Considering how much press and FUD just a threat like a fake bomb scare can get, it wouldn't have to be even as "big" as a natural fire. Natural and accidental fires happen infrequently, but if you make it plain you are willing to set them on purpose, you create a perception of significant risk on a daily basis.

A terror org could deliberately set a fire in an area with a high danger of spread to inhabited areas, then when fire fighting resources are concentrated there, they set another one at another high-risk area in a distant part of the same or adjacent state - now there are two fires! Limited resources have to be diverted from the big established one to fight the new one, they take much longer to respond than normal because they are already deployed instead of at the ready and farther away, and now the pols get to explain to the first fire's victims why they decided the second fire was more important, to the second fire's victims why help was so slow to arrive, and to the fire fighters why they cut the budget last year, etc.

Then whenever the terror org needs some publicity, they call in another arson threat, and everyone running an unsanctioned weenie roast gets to enjoy the half-assed security theatre "zero tolerance" policies...

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at clueland.com
Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana
< http://www.tamut.edu/CIL >

Jeff Wilson — 02 Aug 2012, 03:52 · in reply to Ryan Dunn

On 8/1/2012 1:15 PM, Ryan Dunn wrote:
Dave,

Thanks for the response. I just wanted to call out one bit...

YOU WROTE: "I'm very inclined to agree with you, but at the same time it seems valid to wonder exactly how self-aware on this point a man in his 80s can be."

It seems to be it would depend on the man.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at clueland.com
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Jeff Wilson — 02 Aug 2012, 04:16 · in reply to David Stockhoff

On 8/1/2012 8:46 PM, David Stockhoff wrote:

On 8/1/2012 8:30 PM, Ant?nio Pedro Marques wrote:

No dia 01/08/2012, ?s 19:15, Ryan Dunn <ryan at liftingfaces.com> escreveu:

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I personally know people around their 90s who talk and write as if they were 30.

I'm in my 40s and I don't think even I do that. ;)

I've had the wonderful honor to hobnob with various elder authors who were quite cogent. Damon Knight, for example, sounded like one of the cool kids despite being in his late 70's back in the old GENie days.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at clueland.com
Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana
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David Stockhoff — 02 Aug 2012, 11:45 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On 8/1/2012 11:44 PM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

On 8/1/2012 9:26 PM, David Stockhoff wrote:

On 8/1/2012 10:08 PM, Ant?nio Pedro Marques wrote:

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Then whenever the terror org needs some publicity, they call in another arson threat, and everyone running an unsanctioned weenie roast gets to enjoy the half-assed security theatre "zero tolerance" policies...

All true, but there's a big difference between "terror" and "media hysterics." I just have to assume terrorists know the difference too.

Jeff Wilson — 02 Aug 2012, 21:11 · in reply to David Stockhoff

On 8/2/2012 6:45 AM, David Stockhoff wrote:

On 8/1/2012 11:44 PM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

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That difference is largely in the eye of the media consumers in countries that rely on popular support of government.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at clueland.com
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David Stockhoff — 02 Aug 2012, 21:18 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On 8/2/2012 5:11 PM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

On 8/2/2012 6:45 AM, David Stockhoff wrote:

On 8/1/2012 11:44 PM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

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Perhaps. But even granting that terrorists are not all-knowing why don't they try things like this?

My first answer, even before all the other stuff, is: because there are so few of them. (Real ones, I mean, not FBI extras.)

Jeff Wilson — 02 Aug 2012, 21:32 · in reply to David Stockhoff

On 8/2/2012 4:18 PM, David Stockhoff wrote:

On 8/2/2012 5:11 PM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

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Yes, however, as the number of radicals hardcore enough to do some unthinkable thing starts off very small, as they do more of it it becomes thinkable to more, less hardcore people who see the actual results of the act as a way to further their agenda. At least, this happened with skyjacking.

Also, the recent anti-terror, anti-shooter measures have made bomb and shooter hoaxes more effective at causing disruption, and are just now starting to saturate to the point where some places' cops are declining to shut down public venues on single reports, IIRC.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at clueland.com
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David Stockhoff — 02 Aug 2012, 22:17 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On 8/2/2012 5:32 PM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

On 8/2/2012 4:18 PM, David Stockhoff wrote:

On 8/2/2012 5:11 PM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

On 8/2/2012 6:45 AM, David Stockhoff wrote:

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Sure. And skyjacking got boring too.

nate jarvis — 02 Aug 2012, 22:23 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

I think the simplest answer is that terrorists prefer urban areas or resorts (eg the Red Sea beach resorts) as targets. A large scale forest fire doesn't affect as many people as a subway bomb or a skyjacking that could shut down a large city's trains or one (or all, as with the 2nd WTC attack) airports. Also, if you set the fire on Tuesday morning, claim responsibility Tuesday afternoon, and it rains on Tuesday evening, you look silly. If a group wants to use arson as a terror attack, setting fires in multiple sites in a city makes more sense, especially if they can sabotage the fire department's response in some fashion.

Nate

David Stockhoff — 02 Aug 2012, 23:13 · in reply to nate jarvis

On 8/2/2012 6:23 PM, nate jarvis wrote:

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Nate

The attack on Mumbai is a classic example: media, modernity, population, national identity, vulnerability.

Fires in Colorado? Nah.

antonio at gmail.com — 03 Aug 2012, 10:14 · in reply to David Stockhoff

No dia 02/08/2012, ?s 22:18, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> escreveu:

Perhaps. But even granting that terrorists are not all-knowing why don't they try things like this?

I stand by my original answer:

If terrorists don't do it it's because even they can't justify killing innocent wildlife and leaving the attack unclaimed would make it worthless.

That they prefer urban areas is the same reason, IMO.

Jeff Wilson — 03 Aug 2012, 11:34 · in reply to antonio at gmail.com

On 8/3/2012 5:14 AM, antonio at gmail.com wrote:

No dia 02/08/2012, ?s 22:18, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net
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Apparently not:

<http://wildfiretoday.com/2012/05/02/al-qaeda-magazine-encourages-forest-fire-arson-in-the-us/>

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at clueland.com

Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana
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David Stockhoff — 03 Aug 2012, 11:45 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On 8/3/2012 7:34 AM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

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Hilarious. I'm not trying to be dogmatic about it, but note that no one has taken them up on their suggestion.

On another note, I call on all jihadis to secretly join suburban American swimming pools and pee in them.

;)

Ryan Dunn — 03 Aug 2012, 13:07 · in reply to David Stockhoff

On Aug 3, 2012, at 7:45 AM, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> wrote:

On 8/3/2012 7:34 AM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

On 8/3/2012 5:14 AM, entonio at gmail.com wrote:

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...ryan

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On another note, I call on all jihadis to secretly join suburban American swimming pools and pee in them.

I did note that they targeted Montana, one of the thinnest and least populous states. :)

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at clueland.com
Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana
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Jeff Wilson — 03 Aug 2012, 13:29 · in reply to Ryan Dunn

On 8/3/2012 8:07 AM, Ryan Dunn wrote:

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"Al-Queda peed in it, Mom, I swear!"

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at clueland.com
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