

ZELDA'S LAW AND 9/11

By Michael Ventura

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Zelda Fitzgerald gave us an invaluable tool for the study of history and politics. Call it Zelda's Law: "People always believe the best story."

I'll tell you a story so screwy you probably won't believe it:

Fanatical but sophisticated Muslims, savvy about America, plan to piss off and unbalance the Great Satan. They employ suicidal dingbats to conspire in plain sight at tourist-friendly joints in Florida and Las Vegas. These guys train in disparately located flight-schools (without concealing that they don't need to learn how to land). Cleverly armed with humble box-cutters, they intend to fly East Coast commuter planes into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and the White House.

These bastards know their enemy. Flash a box-cutter at a planeload of Montana ranchers, Los Angeles street toughs, or Texans of any description, and you'll hear: "Put that away, sonny, or I'll shove it right up your ass." Business commuters won't do that. They're not cowards, but in their world, the protocol is to follow instructions. They won't catch on until it's too late.

The FBI finds clues in time to stop the plot, but it's hampered by computers can't search more than one word at a time. The CIA finds other clues, but the CIA and the FBI don't share. Bush ignores warnings about Osama bin Laden, and, a week before the attack, calls for cuts in antiterrorism funds.

The attack succeeds. America goes nuts. Afghanistan's Taliban won't deport bin Laden. We send troops who corner the rat in Tora Bora, then assign his arrest to Taliban, which didn't want to give him up in the first place – probably because the White House doesn't want him caught. The president is betting that an anxious America frightened of bin Laden might be bamboozled into gambling on grandiose and unrealistic Middle Eastern schemes.

U.S. intelligence agencies dummy up to cover up. Bad enough that they couldn't predict the Iranian revolution or India's and Pakistan's nuclear bombs. (Our presidents learned of these from CNN, not the CIA). If it's proved they flubbed 9/11, someone might actually have to resign.

For a decade, Americans comfort themselves in the "knowledge" that we've forced the sonofabitch ringleader to live in caves. Turns out he's lived in villas. He fucked with us, then made fools of us. Finally, we proudly shot him down like a dog, violating international law and earning the further distrust of the few who still admit to being our allies.

Worst of all, in this story our heroes tend to die. On 9/11, many of the truly heroic died. Weeks after the bin Laden hit, Navy who performed the mission died in a chopper crash. And 10 years after 9/11 we're still warring (and not winning) in Iraq, Afghanistan, and (semisecretly) Pakistan.

I don't want to know this story, much less believe it. Good luck selling it to Hollywood. Hollywood will tell a *Titanic*-type tale, but only if the heroine gets naked and lives happily ever after. (William Dean Howells: "What the American public always wants ... is a tragedy with a happy ending.")

Ditch that dumb story. Let's have a story that sells:

Evil, flawlessly efficient, superbly secret masterminds control our government and our economy. They are bent on world domination. They employ sinister assets to finesse Muslim patsies into hijacking planes while a brigade of secret technicians rig skyscrapers and the Pentagon to fall on cue. Throw another plane in for dramatic effect: Let U.S. suckers have a Pyrrhic victory to emote over. The White House is in on it, along with the CIA and the FBI. Everybody fucking knows. But these masterminds are so deft that they screw us even if we know they're screwing us.

Believe this story and we're victims, but not idiots. We're special enough to see through the masterminds' hideous ruses, though, of course, we can't do anything about it but rant and blog. Still, we're in the know. That's got to count for something. We understand the real story.

Recognize that story's plot? It's pure James Bond – but without James Bond. It's a Bond movie told from the evil mastermind's point of view. SPECTRE is a worldwide conspiracy, loyal only to itself, that invents incredible plots to dominate us all, and nobody can stop them, nobody but Bond. If there's no James Bond, SPECTRE wins.

As 49 years of Bond films prove, this plot weaves into endless variations. Different actors play the same roles to equally enthusiastic audiences. You'll make a bundle every time as long as you don't cast George Lazenby (the boring Bond of *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, the franchise's first flop).

James Bond, not Superman, is the prototypical superhero. Superman shrinks from kryptonite. Bond dips his chips into kryptonite pates and washes it down with shaken-not-stirred martinis -- brilliant, brave, invulnerable, suave. Only Bond can best SPECTRE's superevil, supersmart, supersecret, superrich, and supercilious villains who, if truth be revealed, control the world. (Time out: Honestly, does this look like a controlled world to you?)

Always the same, yet endlessly variable, the Bond plot is great storytelling with or without Bond.

In some circles, that's called an archetype. Archetypes make suckers of us all. Many were suckered not long ago by a glib and handsome fellow who played a slick variation of an old favorite: the once and future king, who, alone can pull the sword from the stone. He ain't the first sweet-talker to try for the White House hustling that hoary story.

Back to business:

The Internet is crawling with more proof-positive 9/11 videos than my Brooklyn tenement had roaches. Seriously, given today's technology, if you cannot reasonably verify the source, you cannot trust the authenticity of any photo, film, or video. To trust 9/11 videos is to live in 2001, when special effects were primitive compared to now. Want proof? Watch *Inception*. Watch it in slo-mo. (Why would anyone phony up a video? See below.)

I didn't tape 9/11 because I never wanted to see that day again. I wish I had, because, given my limited resources, my own tapes (or the tapes of a trusted friend) would be the only 9/11 tapes on which I'd base conclusions.

As for tower-detonation theories, they omit one crucial aspect:

We cannot know accurate construction specs for the World Trade Center. New York City permits construction with recycled structural steel, guaranteed by its manufacturers to be as strong as (and cheaper than) new steel. Believe that, if you like, but this much is verifiable: New York has the most famously corrupt construction industry and inspection

system east of Las Vegas. When the World Trade Center was built, New York City was in its most corrupt cycle since the days of Tammany Hall. Cops and city government alike were dirty. Regulation enforcement was a lucrative hobby. There is no way to be certain of the World Trade Center's steel, concrete, or wiring. Maybe they were up to blueprint specs, but "maybe" is as good as it gets. No one can know.

As for expert testimony: Big Pharma, among others, openly buys experts at all levels of research and government. Believing experts whom you haven't personally vetted makes for good stories but lousy evidence.

Not that I don't believe in conspiracies. Here's a stab at the plausible:

Elements in our intelligence agencies knew something was up. It suited their intentions to look the other way. Then they created special-effects conspiracy videos spiked to go viral. Conspiracy theorists took it from there, obsessively thinking up variations that make James Bond screenwriters look like pikers. Fed a good foundation story, they'll chase their own tails long after the perps are safely rich and dead.

Thomas Pynchon gave us the first principle of misinformation: "If they can get you asking the wrong questions, they don't have to worry about the answers."

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