

# DISPATCH FROM THE VALLEY OF THE WEIRD:

Madness in Paradise—Al Qaeda and SONGS, Alpha Death Ray Goes Black, Bush and the Rapture

By Ned Madden

From somewhere in the Valley of the Weird, a.k.a.:

- 33:26:50N 117:36:40W (global coordinates)
- Ground Zero—San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station (SONGS) Evacuation Zone
- Orange County/San Diego County borderline at the Pacific Ocean.
- Mid-point in the L.A.-San Diego megalopolis sprawl
- Southeastern edge of San Clemente, Calif.
- San Mateo Canyon/San Mateo Creek
- Proposed Route of the 241 Toll Road
- Setting for the 1984 sci-fi adventure story “The Wild Shore” by novelist Kim Stanley Robinson.

Home (in addition to SONGS) of:

- Camp Pendleton Marine Corps Base
- Northrop Grumman Capistrano Test Site for Weapons of Mass Destruction
- San Onofre State Beach Park
- Christianitos Canyon
- Trestles surf beach
- Casa Pacifica (Nixon Western White House)
- Highland Ranch cucumber and tomato farm
- Rancho San Clemente Business Park
- Juaneno Indian burial ground.

Years of heavy history impacted by Bush and war and waste have made “Surfing’s Yosemite” a front line in the battle for civilization’s survival. This dispatch is for the 100,000 people who live within the 10-mile-radius evacuation zone around the SONGS plant, the 500,000 people who drive by the plant every day on I-5, the million people who come to San Onofre State Beach Park every year, 35 million Californians, 300 million Americans, 6.4 billion humans, animals uncounted, all life on Earth, the planet itself, etc. For an update, I’ll start at the top with the dead and maimed Marines. Then I’ll get to Al Qaeda’s SONGS drive-by.

## CAMP PENDLETON

On Halloween Night 2001, a full hunter’s moon pumpkined up over the Valley of the Weird, chasing away the sun-run world and covering the land in a red-orange glow that in retrospect seems to have foretold the post-9/11 bloodletting to come.

Soon after, on December 16, 2001, came the first Valley casualty. Cpl. Chris Chandler, part of the Camp Pendleton-based 15<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit, lost a foot that day in Afghanistan to a landmine at Kandahar’s airport. Cpl. Chandler had been part of an advance infantry party safeguarding the explosives-clearing teams behind them.

At least the corporal survived, because as of now, war widows weep in the Valley of the Weird. Hardest hit are those inhabitants of the “Home of the Brave”—United States Marine Corps Base Joseph H. Pendleton, the largest American military installation in the world. The base covers approximately 200 square miles of pristine, undeveloped Southern California real-estate-in-waiting.

The base’s northernmost outpost abuts the Valley. The tiny San Onofre community occupies Basilone Ridge, built in 1974 for the “trigger pullers,” according to a base-housing official. For between \$600-\$1,400 a month, six hundred USMC families—infantry, a mixture of all ranks, assigned by rank and family size—enjoy the same spectacular views as San Clemente residents living in million-plus-dollar homes just across

San Mateo Creek. "Two-hundred-seventy degree canyon and ocean views," the official told me. "That's prime location. It's very popular housing, and people who get to live there are generally very happy with it."

The rent's good, but the price can still be steep for some of these working folks. In January and February 2004, 14,000 Camp Pendleton Marines deployed to Iraq, where many had fought during last year's invasion. The Pendleton Marines make up more than one-tenth of the 125,000 American military personnel in Iraq. I asked the base media department how many Camp Pendleton military personnel had died fighting in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

"We do not keep track of the number of Marines who have given their lives during the current operations," responded "Sgt. Moore" in an email. "If you want to figure out the total number, you have to go the press release section of [www.defenselink.mil](http://www.defenselink.mil) and count each one individually."

/ have to do the counting? Surging violence in Iraq has cost more than 3,000 American troops their lives, but I could not determine the precise number of Camp Pendleton Marines KIA. One online source put it at "about 30" by mid-summer, with a dozen or more since then.

The newly deceased were mostly young men in their 20s with names like Juan Lopez, Pedro Contreras and Deshon Otey (all of whom died in late June). Some single, some with families, all now dead and gone.

I emailed Sgt. Moore about the Camp Pendleton Marines in Afghanistan, but received no reply. The same result followed requests for information on the wounded. Goodbye, good neighbors.

(NOTE: On Tuesday, July 27, 2004, local news media reported that U.S. Vice President Dick "Go Fuck Yourself" (GFY) Cheney visited Camp Pendleton during an election campaign fund-raising swing through California. Cheney stood between two 155-millimeter howitzers in front of a gigantic American flag, protected on all sides by lethal firepower. As a young man, GFY "had other priorities" while taking five deferments instead of performing any military service during the Vietnam War, but that day at Pendleton he defended the Bush administration's decision to launch a pre-emptive attack on Iraq. Some of the 2,500 camo-clad Marines listening to the lecture had recently returned from the Iraqi hellhole just in time to hear the nation's senior avoider of active military duty—and a fat rat-bastard besides—tell them out of one side of his mouth: "President Bush is determined to remove threats before they arrive. Terrorist attacks are not caused by the use of strength. They are invited by the perception of weakness." This coward's bravado was reportedly greeted with shouts of "Hoo-rah!"—a traditional Marine Corps battle cry. Apparently, the Marines were too polite to ask the un-elected, blustering, head-up-his-ass chicken-hawk hypocrite why he has such scathing contempt for them, their dead and their hopelessly maimed and why he's so hyper-enthusiastic about having paycheck-to-paycheck people fighting and dying in foreign wars when he himself assiduously avoided similar combat risks? And all the while, GFY's Halliburton is making/stealing billions from all the current chaos: on Wed., August 11, 2004, the Wall Street Journal reported that Pentagon auditors have concluded that Halliburton Co. "failed to adequately account for \$1.8 billion of work in Iraq and Kuwait." To quote my ex-Marine buddy on tough-talking punks who let others do their fighting for them: "*Semper fi*, motherfucker!")

## **Pendleton 8**

In addition to the mounting number of deaths of Camp Pendleton Marines in Iraq, the war has brutalized surviving grunts into committing atrocious war crimes. All Marines are trained in the Law of Armed Conflict and are expected to fully comply with its provisions. According to the Marine Corps, it takes allegations of wrongdoing by Marines very seriously and is committed to thoroughly investigating such incidents. The Marine Corps also prides itself on holding its members accountable for their actions—claiming to be "absolutely committed to holding fair and impartial proceedings in full compliance with the Uniform Code of Military Justice." This requirement for justice has created an infamous group that has come to be known as "The Pendleton 8."

### **'Why, Mister? Why?'**

On June 21, 2006, members from 2nd Platoon, Kilo Company, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division were charged in connection with the death of Hashim Ibrahim Awad, a 52-year-old retired Iraqi police officer and father of 11, whom they dragged from his bed in the middle of the night and murdered.

On Jan. 18, 2007, Marine Cpl. Trent Thomas pleaded guilty to unpremeditated murder in Awad's death, telling a military court at Camp Pendleton that he was one of five Marines who shot and killed Awad on April 26, 2006, in Hamdania, Iraq, which is west of Baghdad.

According to Thomas, minutes before Awad was shot and killed last year by members of his Camp Pendleton unit, Awad asked them "Why, Mister? Why?"

Thomas, a 25-year-old St. Louis-area native and the married father of one, also pled guilty to kidnapping, assault, housebreaking, larceny, conspiracy and making a false official statement. His pleas made him the first of the seven Marines and their Navy corpsman to plead guilty to the charges. The eight men are from the Kilo Company platoon attached to the 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment.

In late 2006, Thomas and three other Marines pled guilty to lesser offenses in exchange for their testimony, receiving jail terms ranging from 12 to 21 months.

Thomas' pleas came as a result of an agreement with prosecutors and the convening authority, Lt. Gen. James N. Mattis. The fact that he pled guilty to the eight felonies he was originally charged with makes it unlikely Thomas will face the maximum punishment for unpremeditated murder—life in prison without the possibility of parole.

During his daylong court-martial, Thomas told the judge, Lt. Col. Tracy A. Daly, that neither he nor any other member of the squad had any information that Awad had ties to insurgents or represented any kind of threat to U.S. forces. He also said he knew the killing had no justification under the rules of engagement in place for U.S. troops.

Thomas testified that Awad became the focus of the squad after their original target, who lived in the home next door to Awad's, could not be found.

Awad was killed in the early morning hours after being seized from his bed by a "snatch team" that included Thomas, marched to a hole created by an earlier roadside bombing and shot multiple times.

In a calm voice, Thomas described the events that took place that night under what he said was a bright, moonlit sky. When the squad was unable to locate the suspected insurgent, a man named Saleh Gowad, Thomas said he and three others invaded Awad's home, waking him and dragging him outside.

"If we couldn't find him (Gowad), we were going to get someone else to make a statement that we the Marines were sick and tired of being bombed," Thomas told the court.

Thomas said he, Corpsman Melson Bacos and Marine Lance Cpls. Marshall Magincalda and Robert Pennington, forcibly marched Awad about 1,000 yards from his home to the site where he was killed. The men bound Awad's hands and feet and forced him to lie in the hole, Thomas said.

It was along that death march and as he was being bound that Awad, who Thomas said spoke very little English, kept asking, "Why, Mister? Why?"

Thomas said the squad then took up firing positions about 80 yards away and that he and four others began advancing on Awad and firing at him.

When the initial shooting ended, Thomas said the squad went to the site where Awad lay and saw he was still breathing. The corporal testified that the squad leader, Sgt. Lawrence Hutchins III, then shot the man three times in the head during a procedure termed a "dead check."

Thomas said that during the shooting, Bacos fired a stolen AK-47 assault rifle in the opposite direction from where Awad was placed to make it appear and sound as if the squad was engaged in a firefight. Pennington grabbed the spent shell casings and later spread them around the area where Awad died.

When all the shooting finally stopped, Thomas said, Hutchins radioed in that the squad had encountered an insurgent in the midst of planting a roadside bomb and who had fired upon them, and the Marines had fired back.

When a quick-reaction force of Marines arrived, Thomas said he and the other men stuck to their stories that Awad was an insurgent they had encountered.

He told the judge during questioning on each of the charges he pled guilty to that he fully understood what he was doing and that his pleas were made voluntarily.

The plan that led to Awad's killing was dubbed "Operation Vigilante," Thomas said. He said Hutchins had wanted to kidnap and kill Saleh Gowad and that a tentative plan to do so was hatched about a week before Awad was killed.

That plan went awry on the night they tried but could not find Gowad, and Awad became the victim. The Iraqi nearly escaped death, Thomas said, because Bacos began to "spaz out," telling the squad they were going to get caught.

Thomas said Magincalda told the corpsman to stay calm, eventually saying, "No, we are going to do this."

After the men reported the killing and had returned to a commandeered house the platoon was staying in, Thomas said Hutchins conducted a debriefing.

"He told us we did good and to stay calm, stay cool and everything would be all right."

A few days later, that part of the plan fell apart when relatives of Awad complained to authorities and the Naval Criminal Investigative Service began a probe. Several of the men made incriminating statements, particularly Bacos, who was the first of the squad to plead guilty in the case and was given a 12-month jail sentence.

In addition to the unpremeditated murder and related charges he pled guilty to, Thomas also pled guilty to assault for his role in the beating of an Iraqi man in Hamdania on April 10. The victim in that case was beaten by Thomas and three others to the extent that he could not stand up and had to be hospitalized.

As a result of his guilty plea, Thomas is now required to testify if called in the upcoming trials for the remaining defendants in the case--Hutchins, Magincalda and Pennington.

He also could be called as a witness in an ongoing Article 32 hearing for the platoon's commander, 2nd Lt. Nathan Phan, who also is a defendant in the April 10 assault and in two other alleged beatings in Hamdania. Phan is not charged with any crimes related to the Awad killing.

Hutchins, Pennington and Magincalda also face trials later this year and each has entered not guilty pleas.

On Aug. 16, 2006, charges were preferred against Phan for allegedly assaulting three Iraqi civilians. He was also charged with making a false official statement. The charges were based on findings of a Naval Criminal Investigative Service investigation.

The alleged incident took place on April 10, 2006, near Hamdania.

Phan was assigned to the 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, while deployed to Iraq in 2006. He is currently assigned to Headquarters Battalion, 1st Marine Division at Camp Pendleton.

Marine leadership became aware of the incident in early May 2006, during a criminal investigation into an unrelated incident.

Based on preliminary findings of the criminal investigation, Phan was reassigned to the battalion headquarters at Camp Fallujah, Iraq, and restricted to his living quarters pending his return to Camp Pendleton on May 24, 2006.

Upon his return, Phan was initially placed on pretrial restriction to the base. He was later released from restriction after further evaluation.

### **SERRA, NIXON AND AL QAEDA**

If they knew a bit of the Valley's history, the residents of 'Nofre Village probably wouldn't feel too surprised about the misfortune being visited upon them. This area has always been a lot about suffering (Basilone himself was a gunnery sergeant killed in battle). San Onofre Mountain was named in honor of St. Onophrius, a fourth century Egyptian monk who lived naked and alone in the desert for 70 years. Father Junipero Serra, the second (or third or fourth) most significant of the tortured souls to ever visit the Valley of the Weird, named the landmark peak in 1769 on his way to northern California. Men like Onophrius fit nicely into the crazy story the dusty padre chose to tell about this place.

Serra's people also named Christianitos Canyon, up the Valley and incised into the low range of hills on the western edge of the 427,000-acre Cleveland National Forest just north of the San Onofre Mountains, where Pico Blvd. deadends at the Northrop Grumman Capistrano Test Site (CTS) on San Clemente's northern edge. In July 1769, Serra and other Spanish priests of the Portola-Serra expedition gave the name "Christianitos" to the place as they journeyed through the area. Because the priests conducted California's first Christian baptisms for two dying Indian infants, the soldiers referred to it as "Los Christianitos" or "the little Christians." The baptismal site, located just inside the USMC guard gate at the end of Christianitos Road, is today an official California Historic Site.

Serra, a Franciscan missionary and the priestly president of California, built the California mission system in order to evangelize the Christian message during the Spanish conquest of Alta California and to head off Russian intrusion into California. The soon-to-be sainted Serra was a religion-crazed sociopath who liked to savagely beat on Indians, other Spaniards and even himself with equal ferocity. According to one account: "...(Serra) privately scourged his (own) flesh with rough hair shirts, made either of bristles or with points of metal wire, with which he covered his body...he used a chain to scourge himself...he used the burning torch, applying it to his uncovered chest, burning his flesh in imitation of St. John Capistran..." (In honor of that self-immolating precursor, Serra established the mission of San Juan Capistrano in 1776.)

Many locals in these parts once thought that, in his incredible capacity to deal out maximum human pain, the fiery Serra could only truly be topped by the self-loathing Nixon. That is, while Serra got off on the sensual immediacy of flowing blood and cooked living flesh, Nixon kept his distance from the stench of his handwork, ordering the carpet-bombing of anonymous peoples in faraway lands as he enjoyed San Clemente's crisp salt air and sparkly ocean view from the Western White House (Casa Pacifica at Cotton's Point). Indeed, for decades Nixon exceeded even the bloody Serra here as the Valley's unchallenged king of wicked behavior, standing out as our own ranking Vile Being Emeritus. But the Trickster's hands-off brand of evil by proxy was eventually eclipsed by something more pernicious. The arrival of the new millennium brought along a dread infinitely worse than 'Pero and Dick put together, some terrible *thing* that came hard by road and wheel on the wrathful way to mortal mayhem—Al Qaeda.

## SONGS

In June 2000, according to the bipartisan commission investigating the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, two future 9/11 hijackers took a car trip up Interstate 5 from San Diego to LAX. The two Saudi men—Nawaf Alhazmi and Khalid Almihdhar—later crashed American Airlines Flight 77 into the Pentagon. On their journey northward that day, the two psycho-fanatic mass-murderers-in-training rode on I-5 past San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station (SONGS), located at the tip of Camp Pendleton just across the highway from 'Nofre Village. SONGS, one of 103 similar plants located nationwide, reportedly supplies nearly 20 percent of the power to more than 15-million people in Southern California—2.2 million homes from Santa Barbara to San Diego.

Here's what the eyes of those two depraved homicidal/suicidal Al Qaeda terrorist maniacs smitten with glorious martyrdom saw that day:

Two big, fat, ugly-gray 100-foot tall concrete nuclear reactor containment domes (and their squat decommissioned older brother) sitting defenseless on 84 acres of sand at the edge of the Pacific Ocean just 50-60 yards from I-5 (a road called "the backbone of the region" by a former Caltrans director).

This fact is extremely important to everyone here in the Valley of the Weird because, in his 2002 State of the Union speech, George W. Bush revealed that intelligence agencies had uncovered plans of U.S. nuclear power plants at terrorist bases in Afghanistan. Moreover, the hijackers who forced United Airlines Flight 93 to crash into a field in Pennsylvania during the September 11 attacks may have been intending to use it to bomb a nuclear power station to cause a Chernobyl-type disaster. Within a week of the attacks, the FBI reported that a "credible source" had said that the terrorists might have been planning to hit a nuclear plant. The four terrorists who seized Flight 93 may have been attempting to steer it towards a cluster of east coast nuclear power stations. The most likely target was Three Mile Island, site of America's most serious nuclear accident in 1979.

The significance of Flight 93 and what it might mean for the local nuke plant has not been lost on Hollywood. SONGS starred in a recent made-for-TV movie called "American Meltdown." Broadcast on the FX Networks in June 2004, Meltdown achieved excellent ratings across the country. The timely fictional thriller is about a group of terrorists who take over the "San Juan" nuclear power plant near San Diego to prove how vulnerable the Americans remain even after 9/11, and it reveals a shocking truth—the terrorists are ex-U.S. Marines.

SONGS, which began operations in 1968, is far and away the most important structure ever built in the history Southern California. But the plant holds a precarious grip on the ground of the Valley of the Weird, squared in by forces both natural and man-made.

To begin with, the braintrust who first came up with SONGS (owners are Southern California Edison, San Diego Gas & Electric and the cities of Anaheim and Riverside) put it at the epicenter of one of the world's biggest bottlenecks. This plate boundary land formed in deep time, brought in from the ocean and uplifted from the sea and carved into its present shape by earthquake, wind, rain, glacier and ocean. SONGS is located on a narrow coastal terrace pass where nature climbs sharply in just a few miles from sea level to high sky: 'Nofre Hill—1,000 feet; San Onofre Mountain—1,725 feet, Margarita Peak—3,189 feet.

To the east, SONGS sits next to the north-south routes of the always-humming I-5 highway paralleling the rollin' rumblin' railroad tracks that carry Amtrak passenger trains and cargo-laden freight cars. To the west, the beach, the surf and the Gulf of Catalina. Above—unprotected skies; below—earthquake faults.

Completely boxed in.

Perched on a slender shelf of land next to the sea, SONGS is vulnerable to a myriad of terrorist threats: ground-based weapons (e.g., mortar rounds or rocket propelled grenades shot at the spent fuel pools or the control room), truck bombs, train bombs, or even chemical/biological assaults aimed at the operating work force. Any southbound 18-wheeler with a suicidal driver could pull over to the side of the road and self-detonate, “McVeying” the place into oblivion.

Nuclear reactor containment domes are built hard—at SONGS, the twin domes are made of steel-reinforced concrete 3 to 7 feet thick. But terrorists would not have to destroy a containment dome to threaten the nuclear reactor inside. There are many more things than containment domes that must stay intact to avoid a nuclear disaster at a nuclear power plant. The spent fuel pools at every reactor, the dry fuel storage casks, and the control room, backup pumps, backup generators, emergency core cooling systems, etc.—all these exist outside the containment domes in a relatively small area. One airplane strike, let alone four or five, could destroy all of these at once.

The federal government concedes that a loss of water in a spent fuel pool at any of the plants nationwide will lead to a severe radiological fire, which could be comparable or worse than the 1986 Chernobyl accident. In fact, a 1997 report for the NRC by Brookhaven National Laboratory concluded that a severe release from a pool could cause as many as 28,000 cancer fatalities and \$59 billion in damage, rendering about 188 square miles of land unfit for habitation. And while it is generally true that “older is colder” (the potency of spent fuel declines somewhat with time), a 2000 NRC study found that even much older fuel could catch fire, with similar consequences.

Finally, a study conducted in 2000 by the National Council on Radiation Protection and Measurements warned that the consequences of a spent-fuel release dispersed by a bomb could be far worse. Radioactive-iodine plumes caused by nuclear disasters can travel for hundreds of miles and cover large areas, threatening the lives and health of thousands of people.

Each SONGS dome holds a working 1,120-megawatt reactor that uses as its principal fuel metal rods containing ceramic pellets of deadly uranium-235. San Onofre’s twin reactors, both licensed to run until the year 2022, rely on several supplies of water, including water drawn from the ocean, to keep the cores from overheating, even after nuclear fission has been shut down. If terrorists managed to cut off primary and backup supplies of water, that could result in a reactor meltdown. Moreover, in the 36 years that it has been active, San Onofre has accumulated more than 1,600 tons of spent-fuel assemblies in three large pools of water housed in steel-reinforced concrete buildings. If an aircraft crashed into a spent-fuel pool, the pools could be seriously damaged and spent-fuel assemblies could be exposed to the air. If that happened, the fuel assemblies most recently removed from a reactor could ignite.

“The resulting fire could carry radioactive particles offsite, and the consequences could be significant,” said a Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) June 2000 report.

In 1982, the NRC commissioned Sandia National Laboratories in New Mexico to analyze the potential results of a reactor failure at SONGS. Sandia found that such a failure at SONGS could result in 27,000 deaths within a year of the accident, 18,000 additional long-term deaths from cancer, and \$186 billion in property damage.

Russell D. Hoffman is a high-tech environmentalist who operates a software company in Carlsbad, Calif. He is a student of all the doings nefarious and otherwise at SONGS, and he wants the place closed immediately because he sees it as a menace to mankind.

“The so-called ‘spent fuel’ at San Onofre is not just U-235,” Hoffman told me. “It’s a rainbow of carcinogenic substances with a rainbow of half-lives, and very little of it has any conceivable use to society. Some people talk about ‘reprocessing’ nuclear waste, but it’s very dangerous, very dirty, very expensive, and of no net value to society. France does it and they make a terrible mess while doing so. Most of the spent fuel will take thousands, tens of thousands, and even millions of years to decay. If you reprocess it, you still have huge amounts of very dangerous waste anyway, from the process.”

All the waste is supposed to be eventually shipped to Yucca Mountain, Nev., for safekeeping until 12,000 AD, when everyone involved will be fully retired. But issues like groundwater contamination and fear of accidents in transit have pretty much stopped cold those bold plans.

Another problem is the original SONGS reactor, built in 1968 and decommissioned in 1992. The future of the radioactive 450-megawatt steel reactor is supposed to involve a long, slow barge trip to South Carolina. But those plans are on hold while places like the Panama Canal and South Carolina debate the wisdom of allowing in such a dangerous lump of poison. Meanwhile the 600-ton reactor continues to reside at SONGS, tucked into a thick steel canister filled with concrete.

A lot could go wrong with keeping all that radioactive material around, but airplane strike currently ranks as the greatest threat to SONGS, which lies beneath a major air corridor unencumbered by flight restrictions. Incredibly, SONGS remains in the flight path (a jetway shown on Federal Aviation Administration maps as "Victor 23") of airliners, loaded with passengers and full of fuel, outbound from San Diego's Lindbergh Field. Flights are routinely routed on this course. A hijacked jet from San Diego or a large chartered craft from Carlsbad's Palomar Airport could crash into the plant long before air traffic controllers could determine the danger and alert military aircraft.

At night you can watch the blinking lights of the jets hugging the coastline overhead. According to TV producer, author and journalist Dave Forman, jetliner after jetliner flies directly over SONGS at altitudes that would allow an attack similar to 9/11 with less than three minutes warning, a fact that greatly concerns pilots and security experts who are familiar with the area.

"From about 17,000 feet, jets on Victor 23 could drop at well over 5,000-feet-per-minute in a quick but normal descent, much faster if deliberately sent into a nosedive (as happened in the case of Egypt Air Flight 990, which was deliberately crashed off the East Coast by its co-pilot)," Forman wrote in WorldNetDaily.

"The plant was never designed for the impact from a commercial airplane," says Ray Golden, Edison's spokesman for SONGS, which is majority owned and wholly operated by the private utility. "That does not mean we wouldn't withstand it."

On Monday, Jan. 29, 2007, the NRC concluded that it is impractical for nuclear power plant operators to try to stop terrorists from crashing an airliner into a reactor.

Plant operators instead should focus on limiting radioactive release from any such airborne attack, the agency said in a revised defense plan for America's nuclear plants.

The agency approved the new defense plan, most of which is secret, by a 5-0 vote at a brief hearing in which it was not discussed in any detail.

The new plan spells out what the operators of the nation's commercial nuclear power plants must be capable of defending against. It assumes that a terrorist attack force would be relatively small--and that its weapons would be limited.

Critics of the NRC have said the revisions, which have been in the works for more than a year, do not fully take into account the threats to nuclear reactors in light of the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

"Rather than requiring measures to prevent a plane crash from damaging vulnerable parts of a nuclear plant ... the government is relying on post-crash measures and evacuation plans," said Michele Boyd of Public Citizen's Energy Program, a nuclear industry watchdog group.

Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., in a Jan. 26 letter to the NRC, said the agency's defense requirements should "ensure that ... the plants are prepared to defend against large attacking forces and commercial aircraft." Boxer is chair of the Senate committee with jurisdiction over the NRC.

While NRC officials have all along declined to discuss specifics of the defense plan for nuclear power plants, formally known as the Design Basis Threat, it is known to assume a relatively small attack force of no more than a half dozen attackers.

Also, the plan does not assume that any such attacking force would be armed with certain weapons like rocket-propelled grenades or other weapons frequently used by terrorists in the Middle East.

NRC officials have emphasized that the defense plan should require what is "reasonable" to be expected of a civilian security force at the 103 commercial nuclear power reactors.

The nuclear power industry has argued that it would be unreasonable to expect them to guard against any attack that employed a large, hijacked aircraft. They contend that protection against that sort of attack--or one using a large ground attack force--should instead be a responsibility of the government.

In the meantime, Golden reports that SONGS personnel are taking precautions to prevent terrorist attacks on the plant. Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, San Onofre and other nuclear plants have stepped up security with perimeter patrols, ID checks and armed guards at gates.

Way too little, says the Nuclear Control Institute, a Washington, D.C.-based non-profit group that wants the government to install anti-aircraft guns at all nuclear plants, including SONGS. The group has also demanded that the SONGS site be protected by National Guard troops.

From the sea, San Onofre is under the jurisdiction of the Coast Guard Division based in San Diego. Those boys apparently have a full plate with Navy ships in the San Diego harbor and bridges and dams on the Colorado River, because while the agency has stepped up patrols, it has opted against establishing a security zone in the area around SONGS. Vessels can still come right to shore. Beachgoers can still walk the few hundred yards of sand strip between the plant and the water.

Like dozens of other U.S. reactor facilities that have repeatedly failed even modest security tests over the years, SONGS has a spotty security record.

On October 9, 2001, NRC inspectors found two unescorted visitors trying to use a visitor badge on an automatic security device to gain access to the control room. When questioned, they said they were trying to rejoin their escort. The inspectors told them they did not have security clearance to enter the control room, and remained with them until the escort returned.

A month later, a special forces team from the military involved in a five-day drill by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) staged a mock terrorist attack against SONGS using unloaded weapons. The mission: to simulate the sabotage of a set of targets critical to plant safety. Security guards objective: to repel the attack and protect the plant. Exactly what happened that night is classified, but the NRC did report that it uncovered two weaknesses in the plant's defense system that represented a "credible impact on safety," according to the NRC summary of the findings. Details of the findings were never disclosed.

On January 8, 2002, San Juan Capistrano police arrested a 43-year-old former SONGS maintenance worker who had threatened to shoot up the plant and his former coworkers there. He had an arsenal of almost 300 weapons, including illegal assault rifles, 5,000 rounds of ammunition, an antitank rocket launcher, four live hand grenades, tear gas, survivalist material, etc. The man was fired from the plant in December, 2001, after 17 years of employment. He had previously had access to nuclear areas, but it was revoked in 1995 and "never restored." So he knew exactly where to go and how to get there.

Nor is the safety record perfect. For example, on May 13, 1999, a SONGS reactor was shut down when a valve that regulates water to a steam generator failed. "Not an uncommon occurrence," said a company spokesman at the time.

In the event of terrorist attack or meltdown, Valley denizens would be immediately alerted via loud sirens, part of the local Community Emergency Alert System. When I asked Ray Golden for a copy of the SONGS

emergency plan, he was kind enough to send me a pamphlet from the City of San Clemente's Emergency Services Division titled "Domestic Terrorism Preparedness."

After reassuringly stating that "...the likelihood of a terrorist attack reaching the containment vessels at SONGS is remote," the pamphlet helpfully reminds the reader that "The public also has a role in reducing the impact of terrorism on their lives."

Specifically, the role-playing "public" can prepare for the possibility of a terrorist incident in the area by following directions on what to do at three different junctures: Before An Attack, During An Attack and After An Attack. First on the list comes some sound (though more or less long-range) advice: "Learn about the nature of terrorism." Other bits of wisdom focus on more immediate activities: "Remain calm," "Be aware of your surroundings," "Stay informed." "Shelter-in-place" means to stay indoors. "Evacuation" involves leaving the area via one of the designated routes out of the city, which at this time means PCH, I-5 North and the Ortega Highway.

I've got my potassium iodide pills tucked away in the medicine cabinet. State health officials distributed them earlier this year in communities around California's two nuclear power plants. It's medication for people who live, work, attend school and vacation in the area. The pills are supposed to reduce the effects of radiation poisoning after an accidental radiation release or act of terrorism (evildoers). The thyroid gland absorbs the potassium iodide from the bloodstream. The gland, saturated with iodine, will not absorb the radioactive iodine released during contamination (if taken in the first four hours of exposure). Unfortunately, the pills protect the thyroid against just a single type of radioactive isotope. And they have a shelf life of just a few years, so the best protection remains just getting the hell out.

So, that's The Plan: listen for a long steady siren sounding for two-to-five minutes each time, turn on the radio or TV (DO NOT call 911!), swallow pills, and then head out into the monumental, immobile traffic jam that will be blocking the couple roads out of town. Unwritten coda: abandon car, start walking, avoid radioactive plume, head for desert, make like Onophrius, don't come back for 10,000 years. It's not like no one knew the potential downside to locating SONGS here. Ever since the '60s when SONGS first fired up the Unit I nuclear reactor, San Clementians have spent the years cringing at news about each and every cracked pipe, steam leak, accident and shutdown.

There are many reasons the place should never have been built. To cool the generator, they suck in 1.6 million gallons of ocean water each hour—a daily take equal to a lake-sized one square mile of ocean 12 feet deep. Water (non-radioactive) discharged back into the ocean has clouded the sea, killed fish and shrunk nearby kelp beds. While making electricity, they waste heat on an unimaginable scale, dissipating enough into the air above the plant each day to warm a city for a year. A Friends of the Earth study done in 1994 showed that a nuclear power plant must operate for 18 years before realizing one net calorie of energy. The nuke never paid off.

And it gets worse. At SONGS, the deadliest poison in the universe lies just way too close for comfort to this world's most dangerous section of fractured planetary crust—the notorious San Andreas Fault. The "master" fault of an intricate fault network that cuts everywhere through the rocks of the California coastal region, the San Andreas is the senior tear fault in a large family of parallel faults in an overall swath at least 50 miles wide. And SONGS sits atop a labyrinth of intersecting geological folds and branching faults related to it.

SONGS was built at the foot of the San Onofre Mountains on the western flank of the Peninsular Ranges batholith, a massive coastal mountain system extending south from the Los Angeles Basin to the Baja Peninsula. For 20 million years the San Andreas Fault has ripped the ranges, consistently pushing the entire West Coast northward, one earthquake at a time, at a rate of 2.5 inches a year, in the process uplifting the San Onofre Mountains high into the sky. All of us on the 'Nofre side of the big break ride the Pacific Plate relative to southward moving North America Plate on the other side—a colossal slide-by tectonic collision that regularly causes earthquakes along the San Andreas Fault and its branches.

Apparently, the fact of this inherent geological instability beneath the very fragile SONGS plant never appreciably registered on the people who designed and placed the facility where it now stands.

As the OC Weekly reported in 2003, SONGS now ranks among the U.S. facilities most likely to suffer a meltdown, according to the Union of Concerned Scientists, a scientific group that monitors nuclear safety. A serious meltdown at SONGS would result in a massive release of radioactivity that could immediately kill more than 100,000 people in South County and northern San Diego County and ultimately cause hundreds of thousands of cases of cancer and genetic defects.

So...if SONGS burns or experiences meltdown, Southern California empties out, multitudes die immediately, cancer, leukemia, and birth defects plague generations to come, and the land is ruined forever. As a result of such a disaster, the U.S. itself could come apart.

They should close the place down, but data from the California Energy Commission shows that closing SONGS could result in a loss of some \$7 million per day in revenue. This means closure won't be happening anytime soon. SONGS owner Southern California Edison (SCE) has too many friends in high places for that to happen.

## **SCE**

In addition to operating the dangerous SONGS, SCE is a ruthless political competitor close to the heart of many of California's recent energy problems—in particular deregulation.

An Edison International company, SCE is one of the nation's largest electric utilities. SCE serves a population of more than 12 million via 4.5 million customer accounts in a 50,000-square-mile service area within central, coastal and Southern California.

In September 1996, California lawmakers unanimously enacted a law (AB1890) deregulating the state's energy markets. SCE, along with the other two of the "big three" private utility companies—Pacific Gas & Electric and San Diego Gas & Electric—gave \$1.8 million in contributions supporting the law.

There was very little public debate leading up to the California's decision to deregulate its electric utilities in 1996, according to author Harvey Wasserman, an investigative reporter and authority on all things energy in California. Wasserman is senior editor of [www.freepress.org](http://www.freepress.org) and author of "The Last Energy War" and "Power Struggle: California's Engineered Energy Crisis and the Potential of Public Power." Explains Wasserman:

"The early battles were muddled and muzzled. The state legislature deliberated for a scant three weeks. The media barely covered the few hearings that were open to the public. *Southern California Edison essentially wrote much of the legislation (AB1890) in its corporate offices...John Bryson, president of Southern California Edison, was widely regarded as the bill's chief architect*" (emphasis mine).

In 1996 hearings, SCE branded its SONGS nuclear reactors as "too uneconomical" to compete in the competitive free market that deregulation would allegedly bring. SCE demanded that ratepayers compensate them for these and other bad investments before deregulation kicked in (a line item on my monthly utility bill is called "Nuclear Decommissioning").

To create competition, the AB1890 deregulation bill of 1996 established a complex scheme by which the utilities divested some, but not all, of their power plants. Those promoting the dereg bill claimed the utilities would become pure distribution companies that would battle one another for the business of small customers. The transmission wires that delivered the power would remain as regulated monopolies.

The oil and gas companies close to George W. Bush smelled blood in the water and moved in for the kill.

The key to the utilities' deregulation scheme was the assumption that wholesale electric prices would stay low. SCE had devised its cap on consumer prices based on the idea that they could dominate supply. According to Wasserman, the utilities did not divest themselves of all their power plants, but for a series of complex reasons, they failed to enter into long-term contracts with the new power generators who'd bought

the plants. Incredibly, this left the utilities dependent on spot markets, where energy is sold daily, often in small quantities, and short-term prices often shoot up without notice (imagine doing your grocery shopping at a lunch wagon).

Whereas long-term contracts might have established stable prices over time, the spot market is prone to price spikes. Those spikes are supposed to be moderated by the Federal Electrical Regulatory Commission (FERC). But demand on the spot market is regularly higher than the supply that generators make available at any given moment. Prices soar, leaving utilities little choice but to bid prices up dramatically in an effort to procure the electricity to supply their customers.

Thus California was put at the mercy of a handful of out-of-state energy speculators, most notably Duke Power of North Carolina, and Dynergy, Reliant and Enron, all of Texas.

“These are very big players, who more closely resemble the OPEC cartel than feisty Silicon Valley-type competitors that free market zealots envisioned,” laments Wasserman.

On May 22, 2000, the California Independent System Operator announced the first of 123 total “daily emergencies” that comprised the California energy crisis. Instead of going down as deregulation promised, wholesale electricity rates in California began to rise exponentially—as much as 300 percent.

## **BURNIN' BUSH**

In late 2000, following the U.S. Supreme Court’s selection of George W. Bush for the office of the U.S. presidency, a report on campaign contributions from the Washington, D.C.-based group Public Citizen detailed money provided by the utilities.

- Enron, Dynergy and Reliant gave in excess of \$1.5 million to Bush's campaign and inauguration committee, and to the Republican National Committee. Enron ranked among Bush's top 10 presidential campaign contributors, giving more than \$110,000. (In the spring of 2001, Enron helped sponsor a \$7 million Republican Party fund-raiser.)
- The Edison Electric Institute (EEI), the leading trade association for U.S. shareholder-owned electric companies) gave Republican candidates more than two-thirds of its \$193,000 in contributions.
- Edison International, whose holdings include SCE, was also a major donor, in 2000 giving \$535,000 to Republicans (and, to cover all bases, \$330,000 to Democrats).

Heeding the lobbyists’ siren call, Bush wasted no time in addressing the “shortages” in California. Shortly after the inauguration, he asked Mr. “Go Fuck Yourself” himself to convene an energy task force. Two weeks after being sworn in, the Bushistas set up a “National Energy Policy Development Group” and appointed GFY as its chairman. His team, the identities of whom remain secret, is rumored to have been selected largely by Enron Chairman and CEO Kenneth “Kenny Boy” Lay.

In April 2001, GFY met with Lay to discuss the Bush administration’s response to California’s energy crisis. Though GFY has just recently got his U.S. Supreme Court duck-hunting lapdog Antonin Scalia to prevent the release of notes from that meeting, some info has leaked anyway. Apparently, Lay gave GFY a three-page document containing eight points spelling out Enron’s case for why federal authorities should refrain from imposing price caps or other measures sought by California officials to stabilize runaway electricity prices. Just weeks after his meeting with Lay, GFY told the press he agreed with Enron’s opposition to any regulatory moves: “We think that’s a mistake.”

According to a letter from GFY to Rep. Henry Waxman dated January 3, 2002, GFY or members of his staff met with Lay or Enron staff on four separate occasions preceding the release of the administration's energy plan. In addition to Enron’s Lay, GFY’s meetings included Edison Electric Institute, California Republicans, and the senators from Nevada, home to the proposed Yucca Mountain federal nuclear waste site.

On May 11, 2001, Lay hosted a Los Angeles meeting with L.A. Mayor Richard Riordan, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Michael Milken and others in an effort to shore up support for deregulation in spite of the growing catastrophe.

On May 16, 2001, one month after GFY met with Lay, the White House issued the Bush-GFY "National Energy Policy" plan.

In it, the Bush junta called for *reinvigoration of the nuclear energy industry* (emphasis mine), expansion of domestic oil drilling into the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and the furtherance of efforts to "open energy markets" by continuing deregulation plans throughout the country. SONGS and Enron teamed up in one sentence to completely screw Southern Californians.

California's last energy emergency took place on July 3, 2001, soon after the FERC intervened to remove the perverse incentives that California legislators and bureaucrats had imposed on the California energy markets as part of their deregulatory experiment.

It took a few years, but eventually the truth about what happened emerged. Four years after California's disastrous experiment with energy deregulation, Enron energy traders can be heard, on audiotapes obtained by CBS News, gloating and praising each other as they helped bring on, and cash-in on, the Western power crisis. CBS News Correspondent Vince Gonzales revealed the tale of the tapes:

"He just fucks California," says one Enron employee about another. "He steals money from California to the tune of about a million."

In response to news that the utilities were trying to get their money back from Enron, one Enron employee complained on the tapes: "They're fucking taking all the money back from you guys? All the money you guys stole from those poor grandmothers in California?"

"Yeah, grandma Millie, man."

"Yeah, now she wants her fucking money back for all the power you've charged right up, jammed right up her ass for fucking \$250 a megawatt hour."

And the tapes appear to link Lay and Enron CFO Jeffrey Skilling to schemes that fueled the crisis.

"Government Affairs has to prove how valuable it is to Ken Lay and Jeff Skilling," says one trader.

"Ok."

"Do you know when you started over-scheduling load and making buckets of money on that?"

Before the 2000 election, Enron employees pondered the possibilities of a Bush win.

"It'd be great. I'd love to see Ken Lay Secretary of Energy," says one Enron worker.

That didn't happen, but they were sure Bush would fight any limits on sky-high energy prices.

"When this election comes Bush will fucking whack this shit, man. He won't play this price-cap bullshit."

They knew well their Dubya.

"We will not take any action that makes California's problems worse and that's why I oppose price caps," Bush said on May 29, 2001.

Both the Justice Department and Enron tried to prevent the release of these tapes. Enron's lawyers argued they merely prove "that people at Enron sometimes talked like Barnacle Bill the Sailor."

Let's see.

### **Barnacle Bill The Sailor**

*Who's that knocking at my door? Who's that knocking at my door?  
Who's that knocking at my door? cried the fair young maiden  
It's me my love it's only me, cried Barnacle Bill the sailor  
It's me my love it's only me cried, Barnacle Bill the sailor*

*Where were you for seven years, where were you for seven years  
Where were you for seven years? cried the fair - young maiden  
I've been to sea, I've been to sea, cried Barnacle Bill the sailor  
I knew that you would wait for me, cried Barnacle Bill the sailor*

*I detect the smell of rum. I detect the smell of rum  
I detect the smell of rum cried the fair - young maiden  
I've only had a drink or tw , cried Barnacle Bill the sailor  
I'm only drunk with love for you, cried Barnacle Bill the sailor*

*Come and meet your son of six, come and meet your son of six  
Come and meet your son of six, cried the fair young maiden  
A sailor's pay won't do for three, cried Barnacle Bill the sailor  
Farewell, I'm off across the sea, cried Barnacle Bill the sailor*

Yes, a tale of a drunk and a deserter of family, but nope, not a word about “Grandma Millie jammed right up her ass for fucking \$250 a megawatt hour.”

Evil was indeed afoot, according to Wasserman, “The blackouts that raged through California in 2000-2001 were 'blackmails' set by Enron and the other Bush gas cronies to rip \$60 billion out of the state, leading to, among other things, the ouster of Gov. Gray Davis. When the lights went out, Davis kissed the feet of Southern California Edison's John Bryson, who engineered a deregulation bill that gouged \$30 billion out of the ratepayers for the state's failed nukes. That opened the gates for the gas pirates to steal yet another \$60 billion. Davis got caught in the backdraft.”

Bush then used California's energy problems as an excuse to promote the use of nuclear energy, joining the nuclear industry to make an intense push to revive nuclear power in the U.S.

“It's like reviving Frankenstein—this is the sequel,” says Robert Alvarez, executive director of the Standing for Truth About Radiation (STAR) Foundation and co-author of “Killing Our Own: The Disaster of America's Experience with Atomic Radiation.”

The Bush administration struck a close working relationship with the nuclear industry well before taking office. In their energy report, GFY's group declared its support for “the expansion of nuclear energy in the United States as a major component of our national energy policy.” The plan would substantially increase the use of nuclear power both by building new nuclear power plants—many to be constructed on existing nuclear plant sites—and extending the 40-year licenses of currently operating plants each by another 20 years. In June of 2003, the U.S. Senate voted its support for federal loan guarantees to help build as many as six privately owned but publicly funded reactors.

It will take a generation and a renascent anti-nuke plant movement to fight off these projects.

### **NORTHROP GRUMMAN CTS**

Just a ways up the road north of SONGS, the I-5 bridges San Mateo Creek. This lush riparian wonderland drains to the sea the watershed of the 39,700-acre San Mateo Canyon Wilderness in the chaparral 'n

coastal sage-covered mountains south of Highway 74 between Camp Pendleton and Lake Elsinore. Had the marauding Arabs bothered to look around, they'd have seen a genuine earthly paradise—the San Mateo Creek estuary, home of the San Diego Horned Lizard, the Orange-Throated Whiptail lizard, the Cactus wren and the Arroyo Toad, the mule deer, mountain lion, coyote, skunk, gray fox and raccoon.

And if they'd swiveled their heads a bit and looked inland and up-canyon, they'd have glimpsed, in the distance, the Valley of the Weird's second most conspicuous landmark: yet another dome. Unlike its sister domes at SONGS, though, this hemispherical structure plays a direct part in the gargantuan U.S. war machine.

Glistening brightly in the California sunshine on a Christianitos Canyon hilltop sits a little pocket of artificial interplanetary space captured in a 50-foot luminous white bubble-top building—a “radome” (radar dome)—a hollow shell vacuum chamber used for housing and testing satellite radar antennae (and, at one time, laser weapons).

The radome sits on the Capistrano Test Site (CTS), a 2,700-acre weapons systems “proving ground” currently leased by Northrop Grumman Corp., the nation's second-largest war contractor (behind Lockheed Martin). Northrop Grumman leases the land from the San Juan Company, which owns the Mission Viejo Ranch. The land where the CTS is situated is part of Rancho Mission Viejo (Mission Land Grant).

Five years have passed since I came to this place to write about it for the Weekly, getting as close as the gate for some photos before the site's supercops scrambled to protect their domain. At that time, the CTS corporate owners (TRW Inc.) didn't much like the Weekly's editorial slant, and so refused me admission. Now, under Northrop's ownership, they say I'm welcome to come on in and look around, but...

“Radar antennas are tested in the big dome, but we won't be able to take you inside,” Northrop's PR guy told me. “CTS is a restricted facility. There's actually only one or two buildings where you'll be allowed inside, and those would be the general administrative offices.”

I passed.

CTS is known near and far for its alien strangeness scraped into pristine California backcountry. The place contains techno-industrial areas\* (see URL links at end of article) used to develop and test spacecraft and rocket propulsion systems, antennas and, until recently, “directed energy systems”—i.e., “Star Wars” anti-missile lasers. So enigmatic for so long, CTS always has a fresh mystery brewing. The latest: whither goest Alpha—the most powerful “beam weapon” in the U.S. military arsenal. The \$200 million megawatt-class Alpha chemical space-based laser (SBL) got “lit” at CTS numerous times in the past 17 years, but now has gone dark...and missing. And no one can tell me where to find the Big Flashlight (currently sans batteries). TRW participated in numerous space-based missile defense projects, including, in addition to the SBL, development of the Tactical High Energy Laser and the Airborne Laser (ABL). All of it seems to have gone away.

At least the dome's still there.

CTS once belonged to satellite maker TRW Inc., which aerospace and war conglomerate Northrop Grumman absorbed in 2002. Best known for its B-2 stealth bomber, Northrop could serve as poster child for the “military-industrial” complex that Ike warned us about in his farewell address.

Military spending consumes one-half of the U.S. government's annual discretionary budget, and Northrop wants ever-closer proximity to that trillion-dollar feeding trough, where only the truly large boys get to slurp. The company certainly qualifies in that regard: 125,000 employees in all 50 states and 25 countries, net sales in FY 2003 of \$26.2 billion, #1 in shipbuilding (including warships), #2 in aerospace war products. In an age of corporate consolidation, this all makes sense.

The company began its metastasis toward behemoth-hood in 1994, when Northrop Aircraft Company purchased and subsumed the financially ailing Grumman Aircraft Engineering Corporation of Bethpage, New York, forming the Northrop Grumman Corporation, based in Los Angeles.

But Northrop Grumman aspired to more, more, more and much more of all the air and sea military contract opportunities available. It went on a major corporate acquisition spending spree that put the company into military, commercial and space electronic systems, computer systems, electronic and optical components, military and commercial ships, oil tankers, amphibious assault ships, nuclear-powered submarines and aircraft carriers (with the military surveillance and combat aircraft to go on 'em). But, as only the truly addicted could understand, none of it was enough by a long shot because, for these guys, even the sky is not the limit.

Beyond the sky is better. Northrop wanted into aerospace bad, but had failed in its attempts to merge with Martin Marietta, Hughes, E-Systems, and Lockheed Martin, and was stuck at being a mere \$9 billion-a-year suborbital *playa*. In its reach for space, though, the company saw TRW as the way up.

On Dec. 12, 2002, Northrop Grumman completed an \$11.8-billion takeover of TRW, following approval of the transaction by stockholders and antitrust enforcers. After making a hostile bid four months earlier, Northrop Grumman had wrangled with TRW over chump change before agreeing to buy the smaller company for nearly \$2 billion more than it originally offered. The TRW merger capped years of efforts to transform Northrop from just being the prime B-2 contractor into a leader in unmanned and computer warfare and a major diversified defense contractor on par with Boeing Co. (\$50.5 billion total 2003 company revenues) and Lockheed Martin Corp. (\$31.8 billion 2003 sales).

Kent Kresa, Northrop Grumman's chairman and CEO, said at the time of the acquisition that TRW added a "critical node" to his company's business: *space*. TRW's \$2 billion Space and Electronics unit, which made satellite systems, filled a gap in Northrop Grumman's spectrum of services. Northrop most benefited from TRW's satellite production unit, which made satellites used by the military to spy on enemies and coordinate the movement of troops, ships and airplanes.

According to Kresa, Northrop acted for the good of the nation in acquiring TRW, saying, "This is in the best interest of the country's national defense and homeland security." Kresa said he expected the combined company would benefit from increased defense spending "as the nation tries to protect itself from terrorist attacks and other threats."

Said Ray Bjorklund, vice president of consulting services at Federal Sources Inc., "The real plum in TRW is its ability in the space sector."

But, by the time Northrop gobbled it up, TRW's reputation in the space weapons business had become a bit tarnished.

Over the years, TRW was a target of numerous false claims suits and anti-trust lawsuits. In 1984, TRW was forced to pay the government \$17 million to compensate for overcharges. In 1998, the Justice Department joined former senior TRW financial executive Richard Bagley in a lawsuit against TRW for defrauding the government of over \$50 million on various space contracts throughout the 1990s.

In 1996, former TRW senior engineer Dr. Nira Schwartz blew the whistle on her former employer, stating publicly that TRW blatantly lied to the Department of Defense about rampant test result failures. She alleged that TRW had faked results during testing of the ground-based midcourse missile defense (GMD) system. Dr. Schwartz claimed that TRW's sensor did not have the ability to distinguish incoming warheads from decoys. "It's not a defense of the United States," declared Dr. Schwartz. "It's a conspiracy to allow them to milk the government. They are creating for themselves a job for life."

(But hey, what's a bit of fraud and a few fudged test results among friends? On Feb. 25, 2003, the Los Angeles Times reported that the lawsuit had been dropped. Citing concerns about "national security," the government dropped its case against TRW after company lawyers subpoenaed classified documents it

argued it needed for its defense. Schwartz has said she will appeal the ruling: “They say it will endanger national security, but I say that if this doesn't go to trial the national security will be in danger.”)

Northrop Grumman didn't seem to particularly mind TRW's transgressions because the company itself doesn't have completely clean hands. In May 2002, a report published by the Project On Government Oversight (POGO) listed Northrop Grumman among the U.S. government's largest contractors that have repeatedly broken the law or engaged in unethical conduct. Northrop's record: Number of Violations and Alleged Violations—21; Total Fines/Penalties Restitution, and Settlements—\$87,876,581; FY99 Contract Awards—\$3.5 billion. “However, they are never even temporarily suspended, let alone debarred, from gaining additional government contracts,” the report said. As for the fines: just the cost of doing business.

Annoyances like Schwartz's complaints aside, Northrop still had CTS, which it calls “a recognized national asset for propulsion, directed energy and energy testing.” The one-company war machine states proudly on its website that CTS “has hosted more than 28,000 engine firings.”

CTS has occupied its location since the early 1960s, when its engineers developed the Lunar Module Descent Engine (LMDE), which gently landed the Apollo astronauts on the moon six times between 1969 and 1974, and even rescued the crew of Apollo 13 in 1971.

TRW turned CTS toward military applications in the 1980s when it began zealously pursuing defense industry business streaming from Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), popularly known as “Star Wars” because the program called for placing high-powered lasers in orbit to shoot down any nuclear missiles aimed for the U.S.

When Bill Clinton became President in 1993, SDI aka “Star Wars” was toned down and relegated to a lower agency, renamed the Ballistic Missile Defense Office (BMDO). In April 1996, the Clinton administration decided to upgrade the national missile defense research efforts from a technology-demonstration and development effort to a deployment-readiness initiative. The National Missile Defense (NMD) Program was designated a Major Defense Acquisition Program.

After George W. Bush was installed as President in 2001, he called for ballistic missile defense to become a major priority again, and called for a break in the 1960s ABM Treaty. The new slang phrase for the missile defense system under George W. Bush is “Son of Star Wars.”

On January 2, 2002, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld issued guidance on the execution of the U.S. missile defense program. Included here were instructions that the BMDO be renamed the Missile Defense Agency (MDA). Under MDA, the NMD system would be a fixed, land-based, non-nuclear missile defense system with a space-based detection system, which kind of left the orbiting laser weapons in the lurch.

TRW built the world's first high-energy chemical laser—the Mid Infrared Advanced Chemical Laser (MIRACL), a 2.2-megawatt deuterium fluoride chemical laser. But MIRACL suffered from very poor beam quality, which led to Alpha.

Alpha was part of an NMD program called the Space-Based Laser Integrated Flight Experiment (SBL-IFX). Team SBL-IFX was a joint venture involving Lockheed Martin, TRW and Boeing. The program called for a satellite carrying a high-energy laser, planned to be launched in 2012, with an on-orbit demonstration of its defensive capabilities against a live, boosting target planned for 2013.

On Dec. 23, 1987, TRW conducted the first “hot” test of Alpha at CTS, mixing hydrogen and fluorine gases to gauge their energy production. The weapon was first fired in 1991, and was then fired 12 more times through Sept. 18, 1996, when TRW successfully completed a five-second, full-duration, full-power test.

At CTS, the end for the SBL program came on Dec. 8, 2000, when Team SBL-IFX conducted a final six-second lasing test of Alpha. The test looked at using discrete variations in the laser's chemical flow rates to tailor the laser's chemical efficiency and output power and the uniformity of its beam. Whew...now they

could relax. Following this final test of the Alpha laser at CTS, the SBL testing action moved to the Stennis Space Center in Mississippi.

Stennis exists because it's a scientifically proven fact that pork grows in the land of cotton. In February 2001, after four years of intensive lobbying, former Mississippi Sen. Trent Lott got his wish for some good ol' fashioned gummint patronage: the Pentagon agreed to build a \$115 million Space-Based Laser Performance Test facility at Stennis.

To get ready for the SBL-IFX, the Air Force began preparing for a new test facility at Stennis. A sophisticated vacuum chamber would allow engineers to shoot the laser in an atmosphere-free environment, as it would in outer space. In testimony to its extraordinary resourcefulness, Northrop Grumman was responsible, in addition to the laser payload, for building the test facility at Stennis as well.

But Alpha never made it to Mississippi. Congress drastically cut SBL funding in the Fiscal 2003 budget, and the Bush administration has elected not to try to pursue the effort for now. The SBL program was to produce an experimental capability around 2012, but perished from a combination of politics, shifting treaty realities, and technical challenges related to the system. The experiment would have cost "billions to put up, and it would not have offered an operational capability," according to an industry official closely associated with the effort. "Also, it was conceived at a time when we were still following the ABM treaty ... and there were opponents in Congress who wanted something in exchange for the increases in other parts of the defense program last year," he said.

Moreover, the SBL project also faced some huge technical challenges. A government report said the system envisioned for eventual operational use was expected to weigh in at 80,000 pounds and require a fairing (structure whose primary function is to produce a smooth outline and to reduce drag) more than 26.4 feet in diameter. The report observed that no existing rocket could lift such a payload, nor is one even on the books.

Also, the SBL would have needed a five- to eightfold increase in power over the proposed experimental version to be operationally useful against ballistic missiles. Given the long list of engineering breakthroughs necessary to make an operational system workable by 2020, the SBL got rated as a "high risk" project.

After Alpha's final test firing at CTS, Northrop Grumman reported that the "SBL testing action" had moved to Stennis. But what about Alpha itself? Curious about Alpha's new home, I emailed Stennis to see if they were still building the facility. Paul Foerman, a spokesman for NASA Public Affairs, responded in an email: "The SBL project for Stennis was canceled I believe the same year the announcement came out about building it at Stennis."

Was Alpha still safe and sound at CTS? On Wednesday, April 21, 2004, a Northrop Grumman media spokesperson emailed me with the message: "The CTS general manager...confirmed that there aren't any missile defense laser tests being conducted there right now. And as you might expect, we wouldn't be able to talk about any upcoming tests."

According to the MDA, the SBL-IFX program office was disbanded and its constituent elements consolidated under another CTS project—the U.S. Air Force's Airborne Laser (ABL). The ABL involves a high-energy chemical laser carried aboard a modified Boeing 747-400F freighter. Capable of autonomous operation at altitudes above the clouds, the ABL is designed to locate and track enemy missiles in the boost phase of their flight, then point and fire the high-energy laser with the hope of destroying the missiles near their launch areas. In the Fiscal 2003 budget, Congress shifted some \$30 million from the SBL to the ABL, for which CTS was also the test center.

ABL got off the ground at CTS in 1996, when the U. S. Air Force awarded a team of Boeing, TRW and Lockheed Martin a \$1.1 billion contract to develop and flight test a laser weapon system to defend against the threat posed by theater ballistic missiles such as the Iraqi Scuds used during Desert Storm.

On Oct. 12, 1999, Team ABL reported that it had successfully completed the testing of the TRW-developed laser module intended to serve as the technical foundation for the ABL's flight laser modules. During a four-month long program at CTS, the flight weighted laser module-3 (FLM-3) was tested for laser power and beam quality requirements.

On March 29, 2002, Team ABL engineers at CTS completed test-firings of the first flight laser module (LM-1) for the ABL. The ABL system was intended to use six such laser modules to create a megawatt-class chemical laser flying in a specially built Boeing 747-400F to shoot down missiles in the boost phase.

Following the final tests at CTS, TRW disassembled LM-1 and delivered it to Edwards Air Force Base for integration into ABL's flight system. The company also began delivery of the components required for the integration of the remaining five modules needed for the first ABL-equipped 747.

On July 12, 2004, Defense News reported some bad news about the ABL.

"The MDA's ABL program, which has undergone serious developmental delays and seen its costs spiral upwards, may be at the breaking point and either be canceled or shelved. Former MDA head Lt. Gen. Ronald Kadish, who stepped down on July 2, said of ABL that 'we haven't been able to invent this on schedule.' He notes with frustration that of cost, performance and schedule, '[W]e were able to keep only one of the three things under control. What happened is we tried very hard to keep the performance as good as we can make it, but we were unable to control the other two variables because of the unexpected difficulties in matching the laser plants with the optics.' While Kadish says that MDA is 'not in any way, shape or form ready to give up on the ABL,' the agency may have to radically revamp it or redo some of the lab work. ABL is already on a short leash, with the program office required to give weekly reports to MDA of what Kadish calls 'inchstones, not milestones.' MDA has asked for \$4 billion for ABL between FY 2005 and 2009. The House Appropriations Committee recommended that the \$74 million in the FY 05 budget request be rescinded, due to recent restructuring, but this must be pounded out in conference since the Senate Appropriations Committee recommended an additional \$5 million for more international participation."

A billion-dollar laser candle snuffed before its time. Or was it?

In the June 1, 2004 edition of Canada's Ottawa Citizen newspaper, a story reported on the sudden disappearance of the SBL technology.

"The U.S. has renewed its interest in building a space-based laser as part of its missile shield, but could be moving the development of such a weapon into 'black' territory to keep its existence from the public, Canadian defence planners believe. Black programs are considered ultra-secret and in the past have involved the development of such revolutionary weapons as the stealth bomber and fighter."

The article quoted Theresa Hitchens, vice-president of the Washington-based Center for Defense Information, so I emailed her about Alpha. She responded promptly:

"I'm not going to be much good on the Northrop-TRW thing, since I haven't followed the business angle. As far as SBL is concerned, MDA claims it was cancelled when the program office was abandoned three years ago. That said, there continues to be money spread around the DoD budget for work on lasers, and the Canadians think SBL actually didn't die but went into the black. We have had conflicting signals on this from sources here in DC: one Senate staffer in the know said there is definitely not a black SBL program. A House staffer said that it was his understanding that SBL had gone into a classified budget pot called Advanced Concepts, Evaluation and Systems as a super-duper top secret program. Then, one of my industry buddies also very in the know said that 'If SBL has gone black, it's only because that is the color of magic it will need to overcome the laws of physics."

"If you go to the CDI web site, [www.cdi.org](http://www.cdi.org) and click on the Space Security hot spot, you will find in there a report on Space Weapon Related Programs in the FY 2005 Budget Request that tried to break out laser research.

"My own feeling is that considering what trouble they are having with ABL - with optics and power generation capabilities vs. weight - SBL is an optical illusion. Even if you can do the beam stabilizing at such great distance (alone a pretty major feat), I don't see how you could ever afford to send the power modules into space when you are STILL talking about \$10,000 per pound in lift costs alone. ABL's paltry six laser modules - there are ultimately supposed to be 12 to provide enough power to get a beam that could rupture the incoming missile's skin -- weigh something like 180,000 pounds. And the beam put out of those six at the moment couldn't, to quote (out of context of course) the immortal Woody in 'Toy Story,' even 'blink them to death.' Instead, they are trying a fancy way of boosting each power module's beam output, but that effort seems to be going awfully slowly if at all.

"That said, it doesn't mean the Pentagon has necessarily given up the dream. In the Air Force Transformation Flight Plan released late last year - which you can also find on CDI's web site - that lays out a wish list for a future, transformed Air Force, Ground-, Air- and Space-based lasers are envisioned not only for missile defense but also for anti-satellite missions. Go figure."

The Bush administration has tried to cast the missile defense shield as a defensive weapon, a kind of giant umbrella that will prevent enemy missiles from attacking the American people. But the truth is more complicated.

The missile defense system is just the first step in a much larger plan to transform the military. The Rumsfeld Space Commission Report, presented to Congress just before Bush took office, proposed an offensive U.S. Space Corps that would dominate and control space by military means. The U.S. Space Commission's mission statement, "Vision 2020," even argues that the United States should "control and dominate" space and "deny other countries access to space."

Bruce Gagnon, international coordinator of the Global Network Against Weapons and Nuclear Power in Space, says that "This whole missile defense program is ultimately a Trojan horse. Pentagon officials understand that they can't come before the American people and say, 'Give us hundreds of billions of dollars so we can have offensive weapons in space.' We are talking about creating a new arms race in space that will make the aerospace corporations richer than one could imagine."

Loss of the lasers hasn't much affected business as usual at CTS. Bush has called for boosting defense spending, so Northrop Grumman funnels campaign contributions to the Republicans through the PAC of the lobbying firm of Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher, whose clients also include defense contractors Boeing, Lockheed Martin/Loral.

In April 2002, Northrop Grumman won a three-year, \$30 million contract from MDA to design, develop and support a risk-reduction flight of a liquid booster. Targets currently being fielded by the U.S. government use solid rocket motors. Since many of today's "threats" use liquid propellant, MDA is developing a liquid booster alternative for future tests and evaluations. As a result of Northrop becoming the MDA's contractor for the liquid booster target program, CTS is now home to "the propulsion integration test stand," which is dedicated to MDA liquid engine development efforts.

In March 2003, Northrop successfully initiated hot-fire testing of a hydrogen peroxide-based engine at CTS. By June, they had successfully conducted 38 full-scale hot fire tests to verify engine performance and demonstrate "plume signatures." A planned "risk-reduction flight" is scheduled in 2005.

\$60 billion.

That's what the U.S. spent on missile defense from 1983 to 1999. "Bush's budget for next year includes more than \$10 billion for the complex and costly antimissile system project, more than is allotted for any other military program," says Frank Gribney of the Pacific Basin Institute and author of "The Pacific Century."

With the lasers gone into "black" ops (awaiting rebirth as orbiting satellite killers), NMD has hugged the ground, glaring at the commie roquestate North Korea and its non-flying Taepo Dong missile. In July, the

antimissile defense program's first ground-based interceptor missile was placed in its silo at Ft. Greely, Alaska, southeast of Fairbanks.

Meanwhile, the lights continue to burn brightly at CTS thanks to that \$30 million NMD engine contract, the one that's sucking up all the war machine money and therefore directly fucking Northrop's neighbors down the Valley. You know who I mean—those undermanned, under-protected patriotic U.S. Marines who are getting obliterated every day in the Iraq hamburger maker.

### **CTS Tidbits**

On Sept. 30, 2003, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reached a settlement with Northrop Grumman Space and Mission Systems Corp. that requires the company to pay \$33,214 over violations of federal hazardous waste laws at CTS. Hazardous materials stored at the site include deuterium, hydrogen, isopropyl alcohol, fluorine, nitrogen trifluoride, liquid nitrogen, helium, gaseous nitrogen, gaseous oxygen and sulfur hexafluoride.

Philco-Ford Aeronutronics previously leased a large tract of land immediately to the north of CTS which was reportedly used for *testing of depleted uranium munitions* and other munitions research. The facility lease ended in approximately 1990-1991 and the area has been restored, according to a USAF Environmental Baseline Survey (EBS) dated November 1999. (Note: Philco-Ford would eventually be purchased by Lockheed-Martin, current reigning master of the Pentagon's procurement budget.)

Toll-road builders want to extend the 241 Toll Road from its current end at Oso Parkway to the I-5 south of San Clemente. The road would slice along the edge of CTS next to the last largely undeveloped streamside habitat in the county, potentially wiping out a broad assortment of rare and endangered animals. Among these are the Pacific pocket mouse, several protected birds and the arroyo southwestern toad. Twenty-five thousand acres of intact habitat on Rancho Mission Viejo could be subject to development if attempts to create the road succeed.

A monument called the Hand of Hope sits astride nearby Christianitos Road. The statue commemorates the warm reception given by the American people to thousands of Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees during "Operation New Arrival" in 1975. Nearly 50,000 refugees fleeing Nixon's disaster in Southeast Asia found shelter at Camp Talega, Christianitos and San Onofre while awaiting processing and American sponsorship. Vietnamese artist Nguyen Luu Dat designed the statue, which represents prospects of a new life and hope for the future. Two American Marines under the artist's supervision constructed it.

### **RAPTURE IN SAN CLEMENTE**

Just past San Mateo Creek Bridge, the Al Qaeda warriors would have ridden into San Clemente and crossed under the overpass of the Christianitos Road exit off the I-5. If they noticed the freeway sign, they might have shuddered a bit at the sight of the word "Christian," considering all its attendant associations with anti-Islamic crusaders and historic mutual religious hostility. But they needn't have worried. Christians understand all too well the unending holy war against Unbelievers whom one meets on the path to glory in paradise.

Christianity has a strong presence in San Clemente, sprinkling the town's seven square miles with Catholic and mainline Protestant (Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran) churches. And the beautiful "Spanish Village by the Sea" also has its share of fundamentalist Christians among the 50,000 residents here. A few miles into town, the mad Arabs had to drive right by Pastor Mike Fabarez's Pacific Coast Church on Calle Frontera. Over in the 300-acre Rancho San Clemente Business Park, just across the valley from CTS, sits Pastor Jim Glynn's Heritage Christian Fellowship building on Avenida La Pata. Up the street a bit from there, Maranatha! Music runs a full-on recording studio in a beautiful modern building with a spectacular view of the CTS domes. Maranatha (meaning "behold, the Lord cometh"), publishes "Songs For a Purpose Driven Life." Their website features Kathie Lee Gifford and her new album "Gentle Grace"—"Kathie Lee returns to her inspirational (though not genetic, since she is Jewish) roots with her new CD, songs about faith, hope and encouragement."

The citizens who pack the fundamentalist churches on Sunday can be pleasant, friendly folk, but also fierce Republican Bush Christians enjoying the good life in God's country. The late model cars that fill the parking lots and line the adjacent streets display lots of anti-abortion and Bush/GFY in '04 bumper stickers alongside less secular messages like "Going in the wrong direction? God allows U-Turns," "I'm Not Perfect, Just Forgiven," and "I'm Going to Heaven—Follow me."

Oddly, for a religion about the Prince of Peace, their Jesus Christ is no peacemaker. Many fundamentalists would be quite comfortable with the notions of bloody vengeance that Osama's infidels nursed in their black hearts. Christians even have a name for it all: "the Rapture and Tribulation."

According to Pastor Glynn's website, the ex-Marine and his flock "...believe in the bodily resurrection of the just and of the unjust; the everlasting reward of the saved; and the everlasting conscious punishment of the lost."

Pastor Fabarez's website echoes the lambasting theme in his take on something called "Last Things"—"All people will be physically resurrected, the saved to blessing and reward, the unsaved to torment and punishment. God has appointed Jesus to judge the world, both Christians, concerning rewards, and non-Christians, concerning punishment. Jesus will return for His church and rapture her from earth at which time the dead in Christ will rise and those who are alive will meet the Lord in the air. This will initiate the celebration in honor of the awaited union of Christ and His church. On earth, the rapture will allow for the beginning of the great tribulation, and the rise of the Antichrist. During this seven-year period, God will righteously judge mankind and prepare Israel to receive her Messiah. Following the tribulation God will establish His Kingdom on earth, Satan will be imprisoned, Christ will reign as Messiah, and God will fulfill His covenant promises to Israel for one thousand years. Ultimately, God will provide a new Heaven and a new Earth where the redeemed of God will dwell forever. Our understanding of last things motivates us to live in light of the future that God determined. It provides comfort and encouragement as well as leading us to live a pure life."

In "Understanding the Religious Reich," author Isaac Bonewits provides a more sanguinary version of the Tribulation and Rapture:

"Just prior to Jesus' return to set up an earthly kingdom, argue most amillennialists and all premillennialists, there will be a time of persecution, called the Great Tribulation. Jews will suffer the Great Tribulation. Born-again Christians will have flown the coop – literally. This is the doctrine of the pre-tribulation Rapture. Jesus will come secretly in the clouds and raise deceased Christians – and only Christians – from the dead. Immediately thereafter, every true Christian will be transported bodily into the sky, and from there to heaven: the Rapture event. The doctrine of the imminent Rapture allows Christians to believe seriously that they can go to heaven without dying. In order for most of today's Christians to escape physical death, *two-thirds of the Jews in Israel must perish, soon*. America must therefore support the nation of Israel in order to keep the Israelis alive until after the Rapture. The presence of Israel validates the hope of fundamentalists that Christians, and Christians alone, will get out of life alive."

Wow, what a surprise. Hate each other as they might, Islamic and Christian religious zealots are really deep-down ultra-conservative monotheist brethren locked in wholehearted agreement about and possessed of absolute certainty on one thing shared for sure: when the right time comes and the tribes rampage, the Jews have got to go. Seriously.

Too many Americans believe literally in this scenario, but the True Believer who matters most is Terrorist-in-Chief George W. Bush, because he has the power to call down the nukes. And after Iraq, the unelected oil patch millionaire just might be crazy enough to do it. He certainly has support within the military.

Lt. Gen. William "Jerry" Boykin energetically endorses Bush's religious extremism. The deputy undersecretary of defense for intelligence has been speaking, in uniform, in fundamentalist churches around the country about America's "Christian army," the holy war we're waging against the "idol" of Islam's false

God, and the “spiritual battle” we’re fighting against “a guy named Satan” who “wants to destroy us as a nation, and he wants to destroy us as a Christian army.”

Boykin calls himself a “warrior for the kingdom of God” (though most of his service has been with the Special Forces and the CIA). He says, “We in the army of God, in the house of God, in the kingdom of God, have been raised for such a time as this.” He expresses his belief that “America is still a Christian nation,” while other nations “have lost their morals, lost their values.” He believes that “George Bush was not elected by a majority of the voters in the United States,” but that Bush was “appointed by God. He’s in the White House because God put him there.”

Gulp. America as a fundamentalist theocracy ruled by anger, hatred and fear. End-times religion exported by the military force of the United States Government. According to this vision, writes J. Orlin Grabbe, “sending cannon fodder to die in heathen Babylon is a good thing because a spreading Middle East war will hasten the Apocalypse: whereupon the scapulae of the faithful will sprout wings, lofting them into Bliss Eternal while infidels will be consumed in the fiery furnace.”

The vision: Jihad Jesus returns to Earth as Maximum Middle-Eastern Terrorist, a MegaOsama in a bloody Second Coming (parousia) primed for some serious ethnic cleansing, wiping all non-Christians from the planet in a spasm of endlessly splendid 9/11s reversed and multiplied intensified deepfried sallyride theyalldied.

## THE AMERICAN TALIBAN

According to my City of San Clemente Domestic Terrorism Preparedness pamphlet, the FBI defines terrorism as **“the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.”** I don’t think I could find a better definition of the actions of the Republican Bushistas (and the Democrats who collude with them)—the true American Taliban.

Authoro-terrorists Bush and GFY, while devious doers of bad deeds indeed, are but a lower order of demon in the saga of the Valley of the Weird. SONGS presents us with an endlessly looping bad dream starring Springfield’s Homer and Mr. Burns channeling Mordor’s Saruman and Sauron, all of which morphs into Three Mile Island-meets-Chernobyl by way of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Of course, those thermo-blasted Japanese municipalities serve as appropriate antecedents here as well, though this version of their tale reverses the order of things. In the 1945 original, the city waits helplessly as a plane brings the devastating radioactive megabomb. In the updated sequel, the devastating radioactive megabomb already sits on the ground (in an ironic twist, placed there by the government of the very victims who live there) and the city waits helplessly for the fateful plane to come light the torch.

The final nightmarish element recently added to this toxic mix involves the self-immolating Islamic Igniter—now represented in the wraiths of extremists Nawaf Alhazmi and Khalid Almihdhar (surely surprised and disappointed about the complete absence in the afterlife of compliant virgins—hey guys, if you had tried to talk to at least one female even once you’d know that no gal likes a sorry jackoff loser). The shades of those cruel killers now forever ride the I-5 near SONGS, always arriving and rolling, rolling, rolling by, dead eyes reflecting the two dead towers—the perfect summary proof-positive image to reference a nihilistic certitude about the complete, utter and maximally irredeemable failure of the modern world.

## EPILOG

Well, that’s it from the Valley of the Weird for now, though the story never stops unfolding. Still breathing and reporting from somewhere near a shore crackling with the terror and hot with radioactivity in the Valley of the Weird, where deranged Islam rolled through and angry Christians seethe and war engines roar and the shock troops of empire train for invasion and death. Despite those realities, I can’t ignore the beauty of the place—home to the black sage, violet bush mallow, morning glory, lemonadeberry and monkeyflower, the striped skunk, long-tailed weasel and dusky footed woodrat, the red-shouldered hawk, American kestrel, western bluebird, white-tailed kite and California gnatcatcher, the native coast live oak and western

Sycamore. Why, it was here that earth sisters Aine and Rose stood back-to-back post-9/11 in the center of a stone circle, facing east and west on the dry rocky riverbed, calling out to the world in soft voices on the gentle sea breeze to respect the ancient Indian burial ground placed here long ago on a land that ties all of us together in the Valley of the Weird.

\* \* \*

\*CTS aerial photos, Maps. Cut and paste this URL into your Web address bar:

[http://www.st.northropgrumman.com/capabilities/SiteFiles/docs/Capistrano\\_Test\\_Site.pdf#search='Capistrano%20Test%20Site'](http://www.st.northropgrumman.com/capabilities/SiteFiles/docs/Capistrano_Test_Site.pdf#search='Capistrano%20Test%20Site')

<http://ax.losangeles.af.mil/axf/studies/docs/ctsebs.pdf>