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INTERNET

C O L U M N

Conspiracy theories thrive on the Internet

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THIRTY-THREE YEARS LATER, SOME aren't sure who really shot JFK. Last year, there were rumors that the Oklahoma City bombing was a bit of an inside job, just as in recent weeks speculation was rife of a missile shooting down a TWA flight near New York.

In all the cases, the conspiracy theorists run amok, most recently and virulently on the Internet. Just ask veteran journalist Pierre Salinger, deftly taken in by online rumor-mongering about the TWA crash.

Spreading the gospel about conspiracies is an Internet art form. Some of it is harmless and amusing, much of it strains credulity, but aspects of it are disturbing and problematic for a new medium that wants to remain freely expressive.

There's no easy task in separating the entertainment from the propaganda, when a claim that mad cow disease arises from alien DNA brought to the planet eases into territory about banking ownership and firearms registration.

About all the typical Internet surfer can do is keep the antennae up, try to have some fun with the abounding range of theories and steer clear of questionable data. In short, where a newspaper or broadcaster helps the audience filter the credible from the inane, you can be very much on your own online.

Best to start with the 50 Greatest Conspiracies Of All Time (www.webcom.com/~conspire) to help understand the lay of the land. Conspir-



bit of an historical reference point, but the strongest research into hatched schemes can be done through a searchable index at NameBase (www.blythe.org/NameBase).

A little bit down the food chain is ParaScope (www.parascope.com), with both imminent plots and the ones we stupidly missed. UFOs, Political Scams and Conspiracies (www.advweb.com/kw) nicely widens the target of our suspicious thinking, while The Electronic Bunker (rainbow.rmii.com/~tph/bunker.html) suggests we should get to a real one soon to avoid the impending plot.

Nexus Magazine (www.peg.apc.org/~nexus) keeps up the file on such matters, while Joel's Conspiracy Theories (www.bangor.ac.uk/~osu413/j2.htm) is one man's rant. A nice antidote is the JFK Records Archive (www.nara.gov/nara/jfk/jfk.html), a nice house of information dispelling the conspiracy theory.

Interesting sites:

- Take in an electronic calendar at Digiday (www.visionx.com).
- Why go out to play bingo? It's not for money, but it is relatively sociable to play at home (www.bingozone.com).
- Those easily offended will not find easy the International Slang Dictionary (www.notam.uio.no/~hholm/altlang).
- Create a street map at MapBlast (www.mapblast.com).

Conspiracy Web (www.awpi.com/ConspiracyWeb/index.html) is a monstrous resource with a lot of links, while Conspiracy Net (www.warwick.ac.uk/~aeram/conspir.html) offers a decently humorous perspective to the earnest, serious pile.

Conspiracy Theory (www.netcom.com/~dick.mac/conspire.html) is a

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