

**THE BLOG**

# Our Mister Mxyzptlk

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Bush's people no doubt thought it would be a masterstroke, to have him field questions from students at Johns Hopkins' School of Advanced International Studies. The takeaway for us, his viewers, was intended to be something like, if *W* can hold his own with those brainiacs, surely he can't be as dumb as I thought.

The trouble with that strategy, though, is that the problem with Bush isn't that he's dumb; it's that he inhabits a private universe, an alternative reality concocted by Cheney, Rummy & Rove, where the facts in our reality simply don't apply. In Bush's own galaxy, he's a straight A student, because no contrary evidence is permitted to intrude on it.

Sometimes, though, a wormhole opens up, a tear in the cosmos, through which we can see how his mind works over there in that other dimension. His Hopkins Q&A offered one such opportunity. In response to a student question, he explained that his effort to export democracy wasn't imperialism, because freedom is a basic human right, which should be made available everywhere. Then he went on to say that it was important to take tyrants at their word — that when they say they want to crush freedom-loving people, we should know that they really mean it.

That, he said, is the lesson of 9/11. Do you remember the world before 9/11? he asked the students. Things were going along pretty well. Some problems, sure — a bubble here, a bubble there — but basically fine. But 9/11 changed that. We got attacked because we didn't take tyrants seriously. They said they were going to destroy us, and we didn't believe them. That's not going to happen any more.

Imagine the worldview you have to have, in order for that account of history to be true. *You still have to believe that Saddam was behind 9/11.* You have to forget what Bush's counterterrorism advisor, Richard A. Clarke, subsequently told us: that the incoming Bush Administration turned its back on the fight against Al Qaeda in favor of an Oedipal obsession with Iraq.

Do you remember Mister Mxyzptlk, the Superman villain whom you could banish to the fifth dimension by getting him to say his name backward? Sometimes I wonder whether Bush will stumble over the pronunciation of some word — Kennebunkport? — so badly that the Republican equivalent of Kltptyxm will emerge from his lips, sending him back to the galaxy where things are true if you just say they are true, and leaving us to pick up the broken crockery he's left us because, alas, in the real world we inhabit, words actually do have meanings, false is not the same as true, and thoughts really do have consequences.