

# Pieces of Intelligence



The Existential Poetry of  
*Donald H. Rumsfeld*

COMPILED AND EDITED BY HART SEELY  
Coeditor of *O Holy Cow! The Selected Verse of Phil Rizzuto*

Until now, the poetry of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld has been hidden, “embedded” within comments made at press briefings and in interviews. His preferred medium is the spoken word, and his audience has been limited to hard-bitten reporters and hard-core watchers of C-SPAN.

Just as *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* were spoken aloud by many bards, in many variations, before Homer captured them on paper, the Rumsfeld improvisations have finally met up with their perfect editor/enabler. Hart Seely, coeditor of *O Holy Cow! The Selected Verse of Phil Rizzuto*, uncovers the gems hidden within hundreds of hours of Rumsfeld commentary, in the form of Zen verse, haiku, sonnets, lyric poetry, and free verse. In addition, Seely’s sharp sleuthing has uncovered two thematic collections: Rumsfeld’s *Songs of Myself*, and *Nine Poems on the Media*.



FREE PRESS

A Division of Simon & Schuster Inc.

1230 Avenue of the Americas

New York, NY 10020

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Manufactured in the United States of America

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Is Available

ISBN 0-7432-5597-6

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# Introduction

THE POETRY OF D. H. Rumsfeld (as he is known to the literary cognoscenti) demands to be read aloud. Like the epics of Homer, or modern African-American street poetry, Rumsfeld's oeuvre originated as oral improvisation, initially heard only by hard-bitten reporters and round-the-clock viewers of C-SPAN. Unlike most modern poets, who closet themselves with pen in hand, Rumsfeld surrenders to his poetic muse when confronting the boom microphones and iron-willed interrogators of the Washington press corps. During news briefings and media interviews, Rumsfeld quietly inserts haiku, sonnets, free verse, and flights of lyrical fancy into his responses, embedding the verses within the full transcripts of his sessions, which are published on the U.S. Defense Department's website.

A former Navy pilot, congressman, White House chief of staff, and pharmaceutical executive, not to mention a two-time secretary of defense, Rumsfeld has made a career out of turning divergent schools of thought into one coherent message. That versatility is reflected in his poetry.

At times, Rumsfeld composes in jazzy, lyrical riffs that pulsate with the rhythm of his childhood on the streets of Chicago. From there, he'll unfurl a Homeric tale cautioning us about the ways of bureaucracy. He'll fire off rounds of irony with a Western cowboy's sensibility, enough for some to call him "America's poet lariat." Or in poems like "The Unknown," his most disturbing work, Rumsfeld mixes Zen-like enlightenment and indifference, probably culled from his many trips to the Far East. "There are some things we do not know," the poet warns. "But there are also unknown unknowns."

For all its known and unknown unknowns, *Pieces of Intelligence* is less about national affairs than about the poet himself. From the era when gas stations held "little things" of glass to the leak-filled corridors of present-day Washington, Rumsfeld stands out as a man whose quest for real answers long ago required the kinds of questions no reporter dared to ask. "What in the world am I doing here?" he says, in "A Confession." His answer is no less a riddle. "It's a big surprise," and nothing more.

Sometimes comic, sometimes dark, D. H. Rumsfeld's poetry is irreverent but always relevant, occasionally structurally challenged and always structurally challenging. *Pieces of Intelligence* is the U.S. defense secretary's long-awaited first collection, combining precision-guided insights and a revolution in metaphorical affairs, to take the reader on a dazzling journey of the spoken verse.



# War is Peace

The Zen Master Poet

## The Unknown

As we know,  
There are known knowns.  
There are things we know we know.  
We also know  
There are known unknowns.  
That is to say  
We know there are some things  
We do not know.  
But there are also unknown unknowns,  
The ones we don't know we don't know.

*Feb. 12, 2002, Department of Defense news briefing*

## Needless to Say

Needless to say,  
The president is correct.  
Whatever it was he said.

*Feb. 28, 2003, Department of Defense briefing*

## Muscles

Abu Zubaydah.  
He had holes in him.  
And he had some infections.  
And he was not in great shape,  
And he obviously talked  
When people asked him questions.  
And he said this, that and the other thing.  
Has he started to give any intelligence?  
I would assume so,  
But anything useful?  
It's not clear yet.  
And I don't know that I want  
To get into daily reports on it.  
But his health is improving.  
Now why don't the rest of you people  
Go do pushups like this guy?  
Look at those muscles!  
He's got muscles in places  
I don't even have places.  
Look at him!

*April 12, 2002, stakeout at the Pentagon*

## Polls

Opinion polls go up and down,  
They spin like weather vanes.  
They're interesting, I suppose.  
I don't happen to look.

*Sept 8, 2002, media stakeout following CBS's  
Face the Nation*

## Political Lines, Invisible Lines

Deer and moose and elk  
Walk back and forth.  
People walk back and forth.  
There are a lot of places  
You don't even know  
Where the border is.  
That's the way it is.

*Feb. 23, 2002, interview with editor of  
The Sunday and Daily Telegraph*

## Chasing the Chicken

If you're chasing the chicken  
Around the chicken yard  
And you don't have him yet,  
And the question is, how close are you?  
The answer is, it's tough to characterize  
Because there's lots of zigs and zags.

*Nov. 14, 2001, with editorial board of  
The New York Times*

## The End of the World

Puffs of dust  
End up crawling  
Up your leg  
And hitting your knee  
Because it's,  
There might be  
As much as an inch  
Or two or three.

*April 18, 2002, town hall meeting with troops  
at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois*

## Changing

I don't find it hard to change,  
But some people seem to,  
And some countries seem to,  
And some institutions seem to.  
But it is particularly important.

*Sept. 22, 2002, media availability en route to Poland*

It

It's enormous.

It's not September 11th,

It's September 11th, cubed and squared.

I'd have to really go back

Mathematically

And see what cubed and squared

Would produce.

Do you know?

*July 19, 2002, interview with The Washington Times*

## What It Will Take

The truth is, look:  
If something is going to happen,  
There has to be something  
For it to happen with  
That's interested in having it happen.

*June 27, 2002, interview with The Washington Times*

## In the Red Sea

The Red Sea begins and ends.  
And then there's an area  
Just beyond the Red Sea,  
And it may very well be  
That people choose to do it  
Before they get in the Red Sea  
Or after they're in there—  
Possibly, probably, certainly.

*Dec. 9, 2002, to reporters, en route to Eritrea  
(speaking of smuggling terrorist cargo)*

## Unanimity

Now,

Is here unanimity?

No.

Did anyone ever expect unanimity?

No.

Life isn't like that.

*March 6, 2003, interview with CNBC*

## On Walking Towards a Wall

If you're walking towards a wall  
And you decide you want to go to the opposite wall,  
The sooner you make the correction,  
The easier it is.  
If you wait until you're right face up against the wall,  
Then you've got to make a sharp turn.

*June 24, 2002, interview with Bloomberg News*

## Doing the Capable

The United States isn't going to do anything  
That it's not capable of doing.  
And if we do something,  
We'll be capable of doing it.

*May 23, 2002, interview with Wolf Blitzer on CNN*

## Doing the Doable

What we are doing  
Is that which is doable  
In the way we're currently doing it.

*Oct. 8, 2001, Department of Defense briefing*

## Secrets Revealed

Eighty-some odd percent  
Of what is knowable inside the government,  
What is known inside the government,  
Is probably known outside the government  
In one way or another.

*Sept 8, 2002, interview on CBS's Face the Nation*

## Calibrations

You sound like my wife  
When you say, "Briefly."  
You're giving me calibrations.

*Feb. 14, 2003, response to question during Salute  
to Freedom at Intrepid Sea-Air-Space Museum  
in New York City*

## End Zen

How does it end?

It ends,

That's all.

*Feb. 8, 2003, media Q&A in Munich, Germany*

## II

## Three Haiku

## In Command

A government is  
Governing or it's not. And  
If not, someone else is.

*March 23, 2003, on NBC's Meet the Press*

## Evasion Haiku

I'm working my way  
Over to figuring out  
How I won't answer.

*Dec. 3, 2002, Department of Defense news briefing*

## Impatience

It takes too long for  
Anything to happen, as  
Far as I'm concerned.

*Nov. 12, 2002, Pentagon town hall meeting*

### III

East is East and West is  
West, but in Private  
Conversations, They're  
Really Behind Us.

Twelve Sonnets

## Glass Box

You know, it's the old glass box at the—  
At the gas station,  
Where you're using those little things  
Trying to pick up the prize,  
An you can't find it. It's—

And it's all these arms are going down in there,  
And so you keep dropping it  
And picking it up again and moving it, but—

Some of you are probably  
Too young to remember those—  
Those glass boxes, but—

But they used to have them  
At all the gas stations  
When I was a kid.

*Dec. 6, 2001, Department of Defense news briefing*

## Before Air Conditioning

I don't know how many times  
I've been to Guantanamo Bay,  
But it's a lot,  
And it frequently was in the summer  
When I was Navy pilot,  
And that was back in the days before air-conditioning.

And it's just amazing,  
But people do fine. I mean,  
There are a lot of people in Cuba  
With no air-conditioning.  
I know that will come as a surprise!  
But I was in Washington before there was air-  
conditioning

And the windows used to open!  
It's amazing.

*Jan. 22, 2002, Department of Defense news briefing*

## Happenings

You're going to be told lots of things.  
You get told things every day  
that don't happen.

It doesn't seem to bother people, they don't—  
It's printed in the press.  
The world thinks all these things happen.  
They never happened.

Everyone's so eager to get the story  
Before in fact the story's there  
That the world is constantly being fed  
Things that haven't happened.

All I can tell you is,  
It hasn't happened.

It's going to happen.

*Feb. 28, 2003, Department of Defense briefing*

## World View

One or two or three or four countries  
Have stood up and opposed it,  
And that is considered "the world" by people  
For some unknown reason to me.  
It's utter nonsense.  
That's not the world.

Those are important countries.  
Many of them are good friends of ours.  
And they have a different opinion,  
And that's fair enough. And God bless them.  
They ought to say what they think,  
And they ought to do what they think.  
But they are not the world.  
There are lots of countries in the world.

*March 6, 2003, interview with CNBC*

## The Digital Revolution

Oh my goodness gracious,  
What you can buy  
off the Internet  
In terms of overhead photography!

A trained ape can know an awful lot  
Of what is going on in this world,  
Just by punching  
on his mouse  
For a relatively modest cost!

As a matter of fact,  
I'm trying to get  
a picture of my ranch  
And seeing what it looks like  
From two-hundred miles up!

*June 9, 2001, following European trip*

## Poindexter

I have met Poindexter.  
I don't remember him much though.  
I had known him  
Years and years and years ago  
When he was [in] a junior position  
And he explained to me  
What he was doing at DARPA  
But it was a casual conversation.

I haven't been briefed on it.  
I'm not knowledgeable about it.  
Anyone who is concerned ought not be.  
Anyone with any concern  
Ought to be able to sleep well tonight.  
Nothing terrible is going to happen.

*Nov. 18, 2002, media availability en route to Chile*

## And Then It Leaks

Hundreds of things in this department  
Start with an idea,  
Here or here or here.  
They then work their way around  
With other countries—  
If it involves other countries—  
And then they start moving up a process...and then it  
leaks.

And everyone in the world thinks it's this,  
And then it goes up another,  
And it gets changed and fixed...and then it leaks  
again.

And it's different.  
And then finally something gets decided,  
And it's been fully vetted in the world  
More than it probably needed...and then something  
happens.

*Feb. 28, 2003, Department of Defense briefing*

## Reports

I don't even know who reads them,  
But we're killing trees all over the globe.  
And it's—they get put into the law  
And then people just keep doing it.  
If we just could knock off  
Half of the reports  
And cut the rest of them in half  
And use a single color—  
Like black and white—  
And then put them  
On the computer  
And give them the electrons  
And let them make the paper,  
We could save so much time.

*Nov. 12, 2002, Pentagon town hall meeting*

## The Economy of Oil

If a bad person owns the oil  
And a good person owns the oil, different oil,  
And the bad person doesn't want to sell it to you,  
But the good person is willing to, it doesn't matter.  
Because then the good person sells it to you.  
You're not going to be buying this person's oil,  
But this person's going to be selling it  
To somebody else.  
And the world price will be the same.  
Everyone will have the oil they need.  
They aren't going to hoard it.  
They're not going to keep it in the ground.  
They need the money from the oil.  
So it's not a problem.

*Feb. 25, 2003, interview with Al Jazeera, in response to  
questions about a possible oil boycott*

## Bad Only If They Ask

The Vice President has  
Absolutely no economic interest  
In any company  
That he was ever connected with.  
I have no economic interest.

None of the other people  
Serving in the government  
Have an economic interest  
In any company  
They were previously associated with.

Therefore, it ought not to look bad.  
It only will look bad  
If people raise the question  
And say it looks bad.  
It does not look bad.

*July 15, 2002, interview with CNBC*

## Coward

Any businessman that went  
To their board of directors and said,  
“Well, board of directors,  
“I think I’ll build a plant in South Asia right now!”

The board of directors would say,  
“Well, wait a minute, wait a minute!  
“Aren’t they?  
“Don’t they have forces  
“On each other’s borders?  
“Don’t they have a tense situation?  
“Aren’t they not talking?”

And investments don’t get made.  
Money’s a coward.  
People vote with their feet.

*June 13, 2002, joint press conference with Pakistani  
foreign minister*

## Young at Heart

The minister and I  
Were both elected  
To our respective  
Legislative bodies  
In our early 30s.

And the minister and I  
Were both named  
Secretary of Defense,  
Minister of Defense  
In our early 40s.

And so,  
For the younger people here,  
I'm alerting you:  
You could very well  
See this gentleman  
Back here in 2030.

*June 18, 2002, joint press conference with  
Portuguese minister of defense*

## IV

A Rose is a Rose,  
Unless the President  
Says Otherwise

Lyrical Poems

## Transformation

Let me just say one last word  
About this word "transformation."  
It leaves an impression  
That you start in an untransformed state,  
And then you transform  
And become a transformed state.  
Life isn't like that.  
Life is dynamic,  
It's changing,  
And really it's transforming.

*March 6, 2003, Pentagon town hall meeting*

## Always Hard

It's always hard.

It's always hard.

Change is hard for people.

We know that.

You get up in the morning

And the first thing you want to do,

You don't want to change,

You want to do what you're doing.

*May 20, 2002, interview with CNBC*

## Clarity

I think what you'll find,  
I think what you'll find is,  
Whatever it is we do substantively,  
There will be near-perfect clarity  
As to what it is.

And it will be known,  
And it will be known to the Congress,  
And it will be known to you,  
Probably before we decide it,  
But it will be known.

*Feb. 28, 2003, Department of Defense briefing*

## Diggin' the Feeling

I like the feeling,  
The idea of beginning,  
And putting something in the ground!  
Or in the air!  
Or at sea!  
And getting comfortable with it.  
And using it!  
And testing it!  
And learning from that.  
A lot of things  
Just don't arrive  
Fully developed, full-blown.  
And there it is!

*Dec. 17, 2002, Department of Defense news briefing*

## **There's No Debate in the World**

There's no debate in the world—

As to whether they have those weapons.

There's no debate in the world—

As to whether they're continuing to develop  
and acquire them.

There's no debate in the world—

As to whether or not he's used them.

There's no debate in the world—

As to whether or not he's consistently threaten-  
ing his neighbors with them.

We all know that.

A trained ape knows that.

All you have to do is read the newspaper.

*Sept. 13, 2002, media roundtable with BBC and the  
Voice of America*

## By Golly

Military people are organized,  
They're capable,  
And when the president says,  
"Let's go do that!"  
We say "Fine!"  
I said, "Fine!"  
I'm not stupid.  
But I also said, "By golly."

*April 18, 2002, town hall meeting with troops  
at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois*

## So Many Things That Could Happen

You know...

Who knows what's going to happen in the U.N.?

Who knows what could happen on the ground?

There are so many different things that could happen.

You know...

As we're meeting, he could decide to leave the country.

It's a nice thought.

Someone could decide to help him leave the country.

Not a bad thought.

I just don't know.

There are so many things that could happen

*Feb. 25, 2003, remarks to the Hoover Institution*

## Ode to the Facts

When people are working off the same set of facts,  
They tend to come to quite similar conclusions.

When people are working,  
Everyone is entitled to their own opinion,  
But not their own facts.

And if you're all on the same sheet of music,  
Why, you tend to sing the same song.

*Sept. 24, 2002, news conference in Poland*

## Pieces of Intelligence

This isn't military business,  
This is law enforcement business.  
This is intelligence business.  
It's gathering pieces of intelligence.  
Scraps of intelligence.

This is what the FBI  
And the CIA and sheriff's offices  
And intelligence organizations  
Around the world do,  
And they live their lives doing that.

They gather this information.  
They run down leads,  
And they run down leads,  
They hope.  
And sometimes it works.

*May 1, 2002, Department of Defense news briefing*

## Perfection

Nothing we have,  
Nothing in the defense establishment,  
Nothing you own in your homes  
Is perfect.  
Your cars aren't perfect.  
Your bikes aren't perfect.  
Our eyeglasses aren't perfect.  
We live with that all the time.  
Does that—  
If you cannot do everything,  
Does that mean you should not do anything?

*Dec. 13, 2001, Department of Defense news briefing*

## A Classified Story

This has been an interesting subject for the press.  
Everyone's had a big time with it.  
And, the only time I've ever opined on the subject  
Was when one day I said to the CIA,  
"Gee, folks, why don't you give me an"  
(I keep getting asked this question)  
"Why don't you give me an unclassified piece of  
paper?"

And I brought it down here and I read it.  
And for weeks afterward,  
I was accused of having a different opinion  
From the Central Intelligence Agency  
Or for drawing connections,  
Some sort of connection.

And this was repeated in the Senate,  
And repeated in the House,  
And repeated in the press.  
And I really had a minimum of high regard  
For the way the whole thing was handled.  
So, I've decided  
That I'm not going to go asking  
For an unclassified piece of paper.

. . .

I don't need it.  
You need it.  
So what I do is  
I read the classified.  
I know what's going on.  
And I'm perfectly happy.

*Dec. 3, 2002, Department of Defense briefing, commenting on the department's reanalysis of intelligence concerning an Iraq-Al Qaeda connection*

## Lawyers

I just came out of a meeting with the president of  
this country.  
And we talked about an access agreement  
And some other arrangements.  
And you won't believe it  
But when I turned to our ambassador who's here—  
Where are you Mr. Ambassador?  
You're not here?  
There he is.  
He looked at me and said  
It's waiting for a couple of lawyers  
To come from Washington next week.  
And I take him at his word.  
So all I can say is,  
He's a good ambassador  
And he's pressing it hard  
And I'm gonna go back to Washington  
And press it from the other end.  
And uh the only problem we've got is  
We've got some lawyers in the middle  
Who work like beavers  
Who get in the middle of the river and dam it up.

*Dec. 12, 2002, in town hall meeting at Camp Lemonier,  
Djibouti*

## When

You're going to embarrass me  
Because I can't remember  
If it was yesterday  
Or the day before.  
I have certainly signed an order,  
A deployment order,  
With respect to the movement of forces.  
And I just honestly do not remember when.

*Sept. 20, 2001, Department of Defense briefing*



Nine Poems on  
the Media

## Free Society

Oh, my goodness,  
You can't imagine  
The number of things  
You see and hear  
That are wrong.  
It is just breathtaking  
How much misinformation  
Floats around.  
I guess it's part of our free society.

*Dec. 18, 2002, interview with Larry King, CNN*

## Not My Fault

The problem is  
That people think  
That news is something  
That is announced  
Before it happens,  
As opposed to something  
That is reported  
When it does happen.  
And I can't help that.

*Feb. 28, 2003, Department of Defense briefing*

## The Pentagon

The Pentagon's a big place.  
Hundreds and hundreds  
Of thousands of military personnel,  
Hundreds of thousands of civilian personnel.  
Any reporter who wants to  
Can go find one or more and—  
That'll have a position on any issue,  
All the way across the spectrum.

Then what they do is,  
They write stories  
That seem to fit what they feel  
Might make a good story.  
And they go around and ask questions  
Until they find people that say those things,  
And then they print.

. . .

Now I don't know.  
I, they don't say who those people are.  
So I can't go and say,  
"Gee, have you got a better idea?"  
Can't seem to do that.  
Who they are no one knows.  
It's a big mystery.  
And life's like that.

*July 29, 2002, media availability with Norwegian  
minister of defense*

## They Know Nothing

Anyone who knows anything isn't talking

And anyone with any sense isn't talking.

Therefore:

The people that are talking to the media,

By definition, people who don't know anything,

And people who don't have a hell of a lot of sense.

*Sept. 22, 2002, media availability en route to Poland*

## This Rotten World

In this world of ours  
If you get up in the morning  
You're running a risk  
Of having someone lie  
And someone mischaracterize  
What it is you're doing.

*Oct. 7, 2001, briefing on "Enduring Freedom"*

## The Story

I was briefed on that story before I came down.

I have not gone over it.

It's interesting.

Let me try to put it in context,

And then I'll see if I can answer it.

I have no idea what it's about.

*Dec. 17, 2002, Department of Defense news briefing*

## Not for Me

There have been a number of editorials.  
I have seen one editorial  
And one op-ed piece.  
And on the other hand  
I don't read them.

*Nov. 18, 2002, media availability en route to Chile*

## Cheating Woman

She said she had a question  
And she asked three.  
I asked for an easy one  
And she gave me a tough three.

*April 26, 2002, meeting with troops in Kyrgyzstan*

## Template for Success

I think I probably said  
To *The Washington Post*,  
Although I don't recall precisely  
What I said,  
But I'm sure it's roughly  
What I say all the time.

*June 4, 2002, Department of Defense news briefing*

VI

Because I Could Not Stop  
for Death, He Kindly  
Stopped for Saddam

Free Verse

## The Barnyard

Where's the barnyard?  
I see literally dozens and dozens  
And dozens of pieces of intelligence every day.  
And if you took all of those scraps  
And looked at them,  
The first conclusion you would reach  
Is that they don't agree.  
And therefore,  
One can't know with precision  
Until the chase around the yard is over.

*Dec. 6, 2001, Department of Defense news briefing*

## Straight Talk

I mean, look,  
There are no secrets around here.  
This capability will be what it is,  
And it will be fully understood by the world.  
Other countries will know what we are capable of.  
To the extent we have a capability.

*Dec. 17, 2002, Department of Defense news briefing*

## Philosophical Journey

When you ask the question,  
“Are you concerned?”  
There’s always a risk,  
If one says they’re not concerned,  
That the headline will be  
That the Pentagon is not concerned.  
And it happened to me.  
When I was asked  
In a lengthy interview by BBC about the detainees  
And how they were being treated,  
And I described how they were being treated.  
(They were being treated very, very well,  
And properly, and humanely,  
And consistent with the Geneva Convention.)  
And we went through all this  
And I described it.  
And then he said something to the effect,  
“Well, are you concerned  
about how they’re being treated?”  
And I said something to the effect: “No.”  
(Meaning, as I said, in the context,  
Because I know how they’re being treated  
And they’ve been treated very, very properly  
And humanely)  
And that has roared around Europe

That the Secretary is not concerned  
About how they're being treated,  
When the context was that  
I was not concerned,  
(Because I know how they're being treated,  
And they're being treated  
And handled very, very well.)  
Now, when you say,  
"Are you concerned about these?"  
And if I say, "No, I am not concerned,"  
(About what as you cast the question,  
Which is, "Are you concerned  
"That they are going to be negative  
"And take support away  
"From the campaign of the war against terrorism?")  
If I had answered and said,  
"No, I'm not,  
"Because I have confidence in the American people  
"And in the people of the world  
"Recognizing how much better off  
"The people in Afghanistan are today  
"Than they were!"  
And yet I do have a concern.

*Feb. 12, 2002, Department of Defense news briefing*

## Rules

Anything that I say  
That I shouldn't have  
Is off the record.  
I want you to  
Understand that  
Right now, up front.

*Jan. 12, 2002, interview with the Washington Post*

## Iraq

It's an enormous country.  
You know, it's bigger than Texas,  
Or as big, I guess.  
I haven't looked lately,  
But it is a very big place.

*Dec. 23, 2002, Department of Defense news briefing*

## Not Well

We're not doing that well,  
And of course, the reason is  
It's not an even playing field.  
We're a democracy  
And they're a dictatorship.

So they control their ground,  
And they manage the press,  
And they lie repeatedly.  
And we don't manage the press,  
We don't lie—

No, we don't at all.

*March 6, 2003, interview with CNBC*

## Ode to Cheney

It's this wonderful mix of a background,  
Where he's steeped in the issues of government  
And the issues of the private sector—  
The political, the economic and the security issues,  
Which is a wonderful blend for a human being to  
have.  
Plus his heft as a person. And I don't mean his  
weight.

*March 13, 2002, interview with U.S. News and World  
Report*

## Central Question

It's awfully hard to know,  
In fact, it's impossible to know,  
Unless one just speculates.  
I don't know how many people  
Who live in an exceedingly repressive regime  
Actually like it.

*Feb. 25, 2003, remarks to the Hoover Institution*

## Balloons and Music

You saw what happened in Afghanistan:  
The people went out in the streets,  
And they were joyous  
And they had balloons  
And they played music  
And they welcomed the U.S.  
Because everyone knows  
The United States doesn't want to occupy Iraq.

*Dec. 4, 2002, interview with Al Hayat LBC TV*

## Nothing to Do With That

Nonsense!

It just isn't!

There are certain things like that,

Myths that are floating around.

I'm glad you asked.

It has nothing to do with oil,

Literally nothing to do with oil!

*Nov. 14, 2002, interview with Steve Croft, Infinity CBS  
Radio Connect*

## What Should Be Spoken When Saddam Speaks

He's an accomplished liar,  
And every time he lies,  
It's carried in televisions all across the globe,  
And no one says that,  
"This is a man who has repeatedly lied!  
"And when you listen to him,  
"You should be on notice:  
"He's a liar!  
"He doesn't tell the truth!  
"He's got a history of denying  
"And deceiving and tricking people!  
"And so, listener,  
"We're going to show it to you!  
"But be on notice:  
"It's probably not true!"  
No one says that.

*March 6, 2003, interview with CNBC*

## S.T.U.P.I.D.I.T.Y.

### H.D.L.D.

It's high density—No.

High demand, low density.

In other words, we need lots of them

And we don't have many.

It's a euphemism for stupidity,

For not buying enough of what you need.

And so they've got an acronym.

*Nov. 14, 2001, with editorial board of  
The New York Times*

## Chicago

What's your definition of security?

I read yesterday,

I think there were something

Like six-hundred and sixty-six murders

In Chicago last year,

In a city,

Not a country.

Is that security?

Yes.

I lived in Chicago

And I think it's a great city.

I love it.

*Dec. 17, 2002, Department of Defense news briefing*

## Behind the Curve

What happens in life is  
In any one year  
You can get by  
Without making the necessary investments.  
People do this in their own houses.  
The roof leaks a little bit—  
“Well, I’ll fix it next year.”  
You do that for very many years  
And you’re behind the curve.

*Dec. 12, 2002, in town hall meeting in Doha, Qatar*

## Freight Train

Every day I get up  
And I go into a meeting  
And someone starts telling me  
About something that started  
A year and a half ago,  
Two years ago,  
Three years ago.  
A freight train got filled  
And it's coming across the country,  
And here it is right now,  
And you get to look at it,  
But you can't change it  
Because it was loaded  
Two and a half years ago.

*April 18, 2002, town hall meeting with troops  
at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois*

## From Mars

The fact of the matter—

The facts of the matter are there.

They're clear.

And I think that there's no question but

That if someone looked down from Mars

On the United States

For the last three days,

They would conclude that America

Is what's wrong with the world.

America is not what's wrong with the world.

*Jan. 22, 2002, Department of Defense news briefing*

## Lovely Lady

I would like to interrupt.  
Since you brought up General Myers,  
Do you remember the day in here when General  
Myers said,  
“Even my wife understands it?”

I'd like to introduce his wife.  
Mary Jo, would you stand up?  
There she is.  
Look at that lovely lady.

*June 26, 2002, Department of Defense news briefing*

## Observation of the System

It's hard enough just to keep track  
Of the things that are really happening,  
Without having to worry about  
All the things that aren't really happening.

*May 1, 2002, Department of Defense news briefing*

## Field of Schemes

Is the playing field this wide?

Or is it that wide?

One can't know that

Until one knows up above.

The president can't know that

Until he knows what the possibilities are

And what the risks are

If the playing field's this wide

As opposed to that wide.

*Jan. 23, 2002, interview with Readers Digest*

## On a Day in May, Wishing for Fun

It would be much more fun for me,  
If I could just go up to Congress and say,  
“Golly, every single thing in there is just wonderful!  
“I just think it’s perfect!  
“And we’ll just keep getting more and more!”

And then you find you don’t have enough to do it,  
And then something has to stop,  
And then somebody doesn’t like it.  
It would be much more fun.

*May 20, 2002, interview with CNBC*

## Of Looters and Vases

The images you are seeing on television  
You are seeing over, and over, and over,  
And it's the same picture of some person  
Walking out of some building with a vase.  
And you see it twenty times,  
And you think, "My goodness!  
"Were there that many vases?  
"Is it possible that there were that many vases  
"In the whole country?"

*April 11, 2003, Department of Defense news briefing*

## I'm Out of Here

I wish it were possible to do everything at once.  
The procedures in this department  
Start two years ago and then run,  
And the freight train comes down the track  
And it's filled way over there,  
And until it runs to the end,  
You can't see what's inside of it.  
And every time you try to reach in,  
It's like putting your hand in a gear box,  
Because this depends on that,  
And this depended on that,  
And this depended on that,  
And each piece depended on something else.  
And you think you're making a wise decision  
If you grab in the middle of it,  
But in fact—

If all the layers that led to those things  
Are not re-addressed back up,  
You end up with a situation that is kind of ad hoc.  
It's a perfectly responsible, isolated decision,  
But if you make a series of them,  
They end up random;  
They don't end up with coherence.  
And so all of this appetite to kill this,

Or do that, or start this,  
My attitude is,  
Look, we'll do it the best we can.  
And as I look back, I say to myself,  
"Not bad."

Oh, no, no. I love that ending.  
If you think I'm going to mess that one up,  
You're wrong!  
No, sir!  
I'm out of here.  
I'm out of here!

*May 1, 2002, Department of Defense news briefing*

**VII****Songs of Myself**

## A Confession

It's amazing.  
Once in a while,  
I'm standing here, doing something.  
And I think,  
"What in the world am I doing here?"  
It's a big surprise.

*May 16, 2001, interview with The New York Times*

## The Author

I will start by saying,  
“I’m Don Rumsfeld,  
“Dutifully saying  
‘I am Don Rumsfeld.’”  
My affiliation is  
the United States of America,  
Ex of Chicago.

*June 7, 2001, press conference after NATO meeting*

## Question Mark

I don't remember  
That I've ever thought of anything  
Original in my life.  
I go around with people  
Who are smarter than I am,  
That know more than I do  
And have done things I haven't done  
And asked questions  
And talked to them  
And figure out what I think.

And when I figure out what I think,  
I will then talk to other people about it.  
And we end up on the phone  
And I'll say what about this?  
What about that?  
What about this?  
What about that?  
And he'll have ideas  
And we'll talk about things  
And ultimately out of that interactive process  
Comes what happened.

. . .

And trying to—  
It's like trying to take a rubber band ball  
And a string knot  
And say how do you follow it through  
As to where something came from.  
I don't know where it came from.

*Jan. 14, 2002. interview with Newsweek*

## Self-Portrait

I went to Washington  
In Nineteen-fifty seven,  
Working for a congressman,  
Fresh out of the Navy.  
I'm a broken-down ex-Navy pilot.  
I hope you won't hold that against me.  
All the planes I used to fly  
Are in museums now.

*Feb. 20, 2002, town hall meeting  
at Nellis Air Force Base*

## Better In French

Explain this to me...

Just in English...

Oh, I was asking

If there was going to be a translation.

There's not?

Fair enough.

I'll have to do it particularly well then.

I always sound so much better in French.

*June 6, 2002, press conference at NATO headquarters,  
Brussels, Belgium*

## Meat

I now just got  
The wrap-up signal.

Really I'm just  
A piece of meat.

They just move me  
From here to there.

*June 7, 2002, with troops at Geilenkirchen, Germany*

## Gerbil

I feel like a gerbil.  
I get on that thing  
And I run like hell.

*May 17, 2002, interview with Armed Forces  
Radio and Television Service*

**Uh Oh**

I can't remember.

I might have.

Hope I did.

If I didn't,

I should have.

*Sept. 24, 2002, news conference in Poland*

## Rappin' 'Bout My 'Tude

I don't get—

I don't get furious.

No!

I get cool.

I get angry!

But not furious!

Yeah!

True.

*April 10, 2002, interview with Marvin Kalb*

## People Who Meet People

It's helpful to me  
To meet with people  
Who are not people  
That I normally meet.

*Sept. 27, 2002, interview with ABC affiliate  
WSB Channel 2, Atlanta*

## Them

They are terrific.  
If you think of—  
They really are.  
And I don't say that  
Just because I used to be one.

*March 6, 2003, Pentagon town hall meeting  
(speaking of Navy reservists)*

## I Love My Wife

I probably spend more time  
With General Pete Pace  
And General Dick Myers  
And the chiefs of the services  
And the combatant commanders  
Than I do with my wife.

I'm on the phone with Tom Franks,  
I would guess,  
Two or three times a day.  
I probably meet with him  
Once every two weeks,  
Including tomorrow.  
Don't draw any conclusions from that.

*July 29, 2002, media availability with Norwegian  
minister of defense*

## Night at Camp David

We had our dinner, went to bed,  
And I think he came in, and someone said,  
“Do you want to go to a movie?”  
I didn’t want to go to a movie.  
I’m not sure that was that night,  
But it was one of those nights.

In any event,  
That’s the last thing I need, is a movie.  
My whole life’s a movie.

*Jan. 9, 2002, interview with The Washington Post*

## Man and Wife, Talking at Dawn

My wife Joyce is here.  
Every once in a while  
In the morning  
As I get up about five o'clock  
And get ready to take a shower  
And head for the office,  
She says, "Don, where is he?"  
I tell her that,  
If I want to bring up  
Osama bin Laden,  
I'll wake her up  
And bring it up myself.

*Feb. 20, 2002, town hall meeting  
at Nellis Air Force Base*

## The Proper Word

I ought to sit down and think about that a bit.  
In fact, I think we all ought to,  
If we want to serve our audiences well.  
I haven't had time to do that.  
What I do know is the standard words  
Jangle in my head when I hear them,  
And then I put them onto the subjects they're  
relating to,  
And I know what's going.  
And I think to myself,  
"Gee, that isn't really as good a word  
"as we ought to be able to find."  
And I will invest a little time on that, and—  
I'm still working on English though.

*Sept. 20, 2001, Department of Defense briefing*

## Not Me

I had nothing to do with  
Helping Saddam Hussein  
And his regime against Iran.  
We had, I think, one or two meetings.  
The United States then  
Did provide intelligence information,  
As I understand it—  
But I was back in private business at the time.

*Dec. 11, 2002, in Qatar*

## Bad News Day

I'm not into the news business.  
I'm into informing,  
And developing,  
Understanding,  
Backgrounding,  
And all of that.  
I'm not into hard news.

*June 27, 2002, interview with The Washington Times*

## Conceptic

When they told me what  
This was about,  
I sat down last night  
And made some notes.  
I'm not into this detail stuff.  
I'm more concepty.

*Jan. 9, 2002, interview with The Washington Post*

## Hello I Must Be Going

If you're in it for thirteen, fourteen,

Fifteen, sixteen months.

You just spend the first two months

Running around, saying hello to everybody,

The next couple of months making mistakes,

And the last few months saying goodbye.

*April 18, 2002, town hall meeting with troops  
at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois*

## Flying, Too

Now that is not always true.  
Think of the B-fifty-two.  
It's still flying just fine, thank you.  
And so am I... thank you!

*April 26, 2002, meeting with troops in Kyrgyszstan*

## My Era

You know what happened?  
I met with a minister of defense from another  
country the other day,  
And I am not going to tell you who it is  
And you are not going to say who it is,  
But during lunch one time he said -  
(He was talking about something.)  
He said, "You know that was in your era."  
I looked at him, and he laughed  
When he realized what he had said.  
And I said, "You're right,  
"But I kind of think this is my era too."

*Feb. 2, 2001, en route to Munich, Germany*

**Me**

I'm brusque.

I'm impatient.

It's genetic.

I can't help it.

*Dec. 18, 2002, interview with Larry King, CNN*

## Final Poem

No, no.

No, no.

No, no.

No, no.

No, no.

No, no.

We really have to go.

We've run over 15 minutes,

I think.

*Dec. 17, 2002, Department of Defense news briefing*

ing book both by and about one of the world's most powerful men.

**HART SEELY** is an award-winning reporter for the *Syracuse Post-Standard*. His humor and satire have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *The Village Voice*, *National Lampoon*, and on National Public Radio. He is coauthor (with Frank Cammuso) of *2007-Eleven: And Other American Comedies* (Villard, 2000), a collection of short humor, and coeditor (with Tom Peyer) of *O Holy Cow! The Selected Verse of Phil Rizzuto* (Ecco Press, 1993). Seely lives in beautiful Syracuse, New York, with his wife and three children.

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Jacket design by Eric Fuentecilla

Jacket illustration by Andrew Dutkowsky

Printed in the U.S.A.

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## FROM THE INTRODUCTION

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At times, Rumsfeld composes in jazzy, lyrical riffs that pulsate with the rhythm of his childhood on the streets of Chicago. From there, he'll unfurl a Homeric tale cautioning us about the ways of bureaucracy. He'll fire off rounds of irony with a Western cowboy's sensibility, enough for some to call him "America's poet lariat." Or in poems like "The Unknown," his most disturbing work, Rumsfeld mixes Zen-like enlightenment and indifference, probably taken from his many trips to the Far East. "There are some things we do not know," the poet warns. "But there are also unknown unknowns."

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ISBN 0-7432-5239-X

