What Really Happened? A Critical Analysis of Carol Valentine's "Flight of the Bumble Planes" Hypothesis

by Leonard Spencer

It's funny how the 'Conspiracy Theory' — a phrase that today is sprayed around as though it's some kind of magic spell that renders untrue any idea at which it is aimed — often gains immeasurably in stature with the simple passing of time. Take for instance the case of the Reichstag fire, the terrorist incident that kick-started Hitler's transformation of Germany from a liberal democracy into a fascist dictatorship. Those 'Conspiracy Theorists' who claimed that the incident was perpetrated by agents of Hitler himself and not by Communist terrorists as was originally claimed are these days more politely called 'historians'. Similarly, few in ancient Rome concluded that it was Emperor Nero who ordered the destruction of the city by fire in AD 64 and not the Christians, as Nero himself proclaimed, yet today this is accepted as an incontrovertible fact. It's something to do with being able to assess the facts coldly and dispassionately, uninfluenced by the propaganda and brainwashing prevalent at the time.

This is not to say of course that all 'Conspiracy Theories' are true, only that they should be judged solely on their factual accuracy and analytical precision rather than the 'political correctness' or emotional palatability of their conclusions.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the events of September 11 have given rise to several 'Conspiracy Theories', all challenging in one way or another the veracity of the official explanation of what happened that day. Of these, none is more uncompromisingly 'conspiratorial' than that set out by Carol Valentine in her article entitled 9-11: The Flight of the Bumble Planes, first published on the web in March 2002.

It is remarkable that, one year on, Ms Valentine's hypothesis has still to be seriously refuted. The reason for this is that, outlandish as it may at first appear, it actually offers a far more plausible explanation of events than does the official account, taking into consideration all the known facts and available evidence.

Even the most mindless and vociferous of proponents of the official version of events must concede, perhaps in quieter and more reflective moments, that a number of very strange and inexplicable things happened that day. How was it for instance that the USA's entire air defense system — the most sophisticated and responsive in the world — seemed utterly paralysed until it was too late to stop the terror attacks? How did the alleged hijacker-pilot of Flight 77 (according to his flight school trainer he could barely fly a Cessna) manage to execute an expert high-speed aerial manoeuvre before guiding the plane like a missile through a ten-foot high ground-floor Pentagon doorway without damaging the door frames or scuffing the lawn? How were such amateurish pilots able to switch off transponders and navigate unassisted across north-eastern USA with such unerring accuracy? And why have there been no proper public enquiries into the catastrophic lapses of the air defense system, the collapse of the towers or indeed any other aspect of the 9-11 fiasco? There are plenty more inconsistencies than that, but the beauty of the scenario laid out in "The Flight of the Bumble Planes" is that it just about explains them all.

Let's recap on what it says. Based upon a series of email exchanges with one 'Snake Plissken', Ms Valentine suggests that the planes that hit the towers and the Pentagon were not the same planes that left Boston and Dulles. They were in fact unmanned, disguised military planes (or missiles) flown by remote control which were substituted for the original planes when the transponders were switched off. The switching off of the transponders was therefore not the elaborate yet pointless oddity that the official account demands, but an absolutely critical part of the whole plot. It was only by ensuring that the planes that actually hit the towers and the Pentagon were unidentifiable and anonymous blips on the radar screens that the operation could proceed successfully.

So what happened to the original planes? The theory suggests that, under instruction from NORAD agents infiltrated into Air Traffic Control, the planes' own pilots turned off the transponders. The pilots were then instructed to fly the planes to an (unidentified) airport or airbase somewhere in north-eastern USA. Here, any security personnel who may have been on board disembarked, their day's work done. A more grisly fate however awaited the remaining passengers and crew. When Flight 93's transponder was switched off it too landed at the given airbase. The passengers and crew from the first three planes were herded onto it, joining those already on board. It then took off again and was shot down or blown up over Pennsylvania, conveniently eliminating all the innocent witnesses to the real course of events.

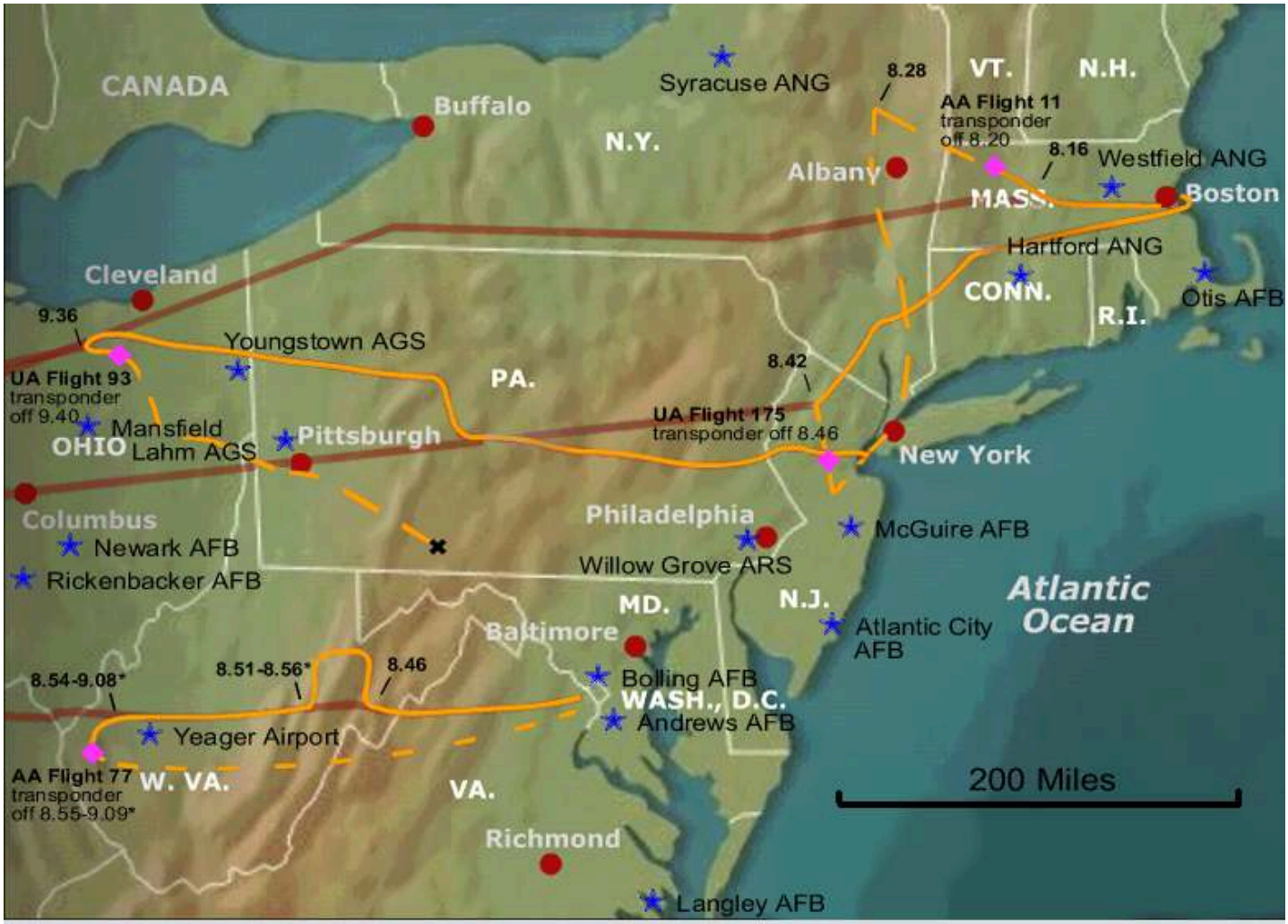
The scenario requires us to dismiss as total fiction the many cell phone calls allegedly made from the passengers of Flight 93, or rather, if the calls were actually made we must conclude that they were made from somewhere other than Flight 93. We must deduce this because the great majority of the alleged calls took place between 9:40 (when the plane's transponder signal ceased) and 10:00, the very period during which Flight 93 was landing, taking on its extra passengers and taking off again. Nowhere in the transcripts or witness statements is there any indication that the plane was doing anything but flying normally. The theory suggests also of course that there may have been no genuine hijackers at all.

That, in its simple elegance, is the essence of the Plissken-Valentine hypothesis. And although it may at first seem fanciful and far-fetched in the extreme, it does, remarkably enough, fit all the known facts far more successfully than does the official account. It explains for instance why the transponders were switched off and how the planes were able to find their targets. It explains why the eyewitness reports in respect of Flight 11 describe the plane as being the size of a business jet and why the Fireman's Video shows that it had no engines attached to its wings and fired missiles at WTC1. It explains why at least two shots of Flight 175 show that it had a mysterious device attached to its underside, unlike any other Boeing 767 to come off the production line. It explains why Flight 77 was able to perform improbable aerial manoeuvres before disappearing into a ten-foot hole.

It explains too of course why no meaningful black-box data have been recovered or why the tapes of the conversations between Air Traffic Control and the planes have not been made public. It explains why there have been no official enquiries into the catastrophic failure of the air defense system or the bizarre collapse of the towers. This is because the hypothesis leads us inexorably to conclude that the only people capable of perpetrating such a conjuring trick were people close to — and most probably including — members of the Bush Administration itself. It is this aspect of the analysis that most rankles with the delicate emotional sensibilities of the American public.

But does it really stand up? Is it logistically possible? Persuasive as it is, the hypothesis demands careful analysis because, unless it is genuinely feasible, it must be dispatched to the waste-bin forthwith and we must think of something else. We should for instance be able to identify the airbase to which the planes were directed after the transponders were switched off. We must also pay careful attention to the timing of the whole operation. From the time that Flight 11 first went off course to the time that Flight 93 crashed spanned a period of less than two hours — rather a short time in which to do a lot of to-ing and fro-ing, a lot of loading and unloading.

To assist in this analysis I've prepared a map showing the flight paths of the planes, the major airbases in the region and a timeline of all the major events. It is shown below. The red lines indicate the intended flight paths of each plane. The unbroken yellow lines show the actual flight paths and the broken yellow lines show the imputed flight paths after the transponders were switched off. The blue stars denote the principal US Airforce and Air National Guard bases in the region. The basic map and flight paths are lifted directly from USA Today's useful Flash presentation of the day's events and the locations of the airbases have been taken from the comprehensive map of US military bases available at http://www.cr.nps.gov//nagpra/NACD/basindex.htm. All times come from either cooperativeresearch.org.'s timeline or Malcontent X's excellent 'Unanswered Questions', which can be found at http://www.communitycurrency.org//MainIndexMX.html.



AA Flight 11	UA Flight 175	AA Flight 77	UA Flight 93
Boston-LA	Boston-LA	Dulles (Wash.)-LA	Newark (NY)-SF
Boeing 767	Boeing 767	Boeing 757	Boeing 757
81 pgrs. 11 crew	56 pgrs. 9 crew	58 pgrs. 6 crew	38 pgrs. 7 crew
t/o: 7.59 (sch. 7.45)	t/o: 8.14 (sch. 7.58)	t/o: 8.20 (sch. 8.10)	t/o: 8.42 (sch. 8.01)
1st deviation: 8.16	1st deviation: 8.42	1st deviation: 8.46	1st deviation: 9.36
Transponder off: 8.20	Transponder off: 8.46	2nd deviation: 8.54-9.08*	Transponder off: 9.40
Hit WTC1 8.46	Hit WTC2 9.02	Transponder off: 8.55-9.09*	Crashed (PA): 10.06
		Hit Pentagon: 9.37	

* No concensus on these times

The first thing to which I'd like to draw your attention is the remarkable correspondence of the times of key events. With the exception only of Flight 11's take off and Flight 93's crash, all key events coincide with one another in some way. The colour coding of times in the timetable brings this out. Flight 11 for instance first deviates from its route a minute or two after Flight 175 takes off, and its transponder is switched off at the same time that Flight 77 takes off. Flight 175 first deviates from its route just as Flight 93 takes off and its transponder goes off at the same time that Flight 11 hits WTC1, which is also the time that Flight 77 first goes off course. It carries on like that right to the end. It's uncanny. It's either an amazing sequence of coincidences or it means that 9-11 was an incredibly well co-ordinated operation with someone in full control of — and in communication with — the four planes from the ground. Those crafty al-Qaeda scallywags.

Note there is a certain lack of unanimity regarding the times that Flight 77 deviated from its intended route. Many sources give the time that its transponder signal ceased as 8:55, but as Malcontent X points out in the footnote to his chapter on Flight 77:

> The plane took off at 8:20, and crashed at 9:38: a 1 hour/eighteen minutes journey, or seventy-eight minutes. This is now universally confirmed in all media reports. At first glance, we would probably look on the map, and see that the distances the plane took to get from Washington to the Ohio border — and back again — are roughly equal. We would thus assume that it took Flight 77 half of the seventy-eight minutes, (39) to reach Ohio, (8:59). This roughly corroborates the Newsday article of Sept 23rd, which says that the plane turned around at 8:55; yet we must also take into account the flight deviation on the path away from Washington, (add ten minutes?); and

> we also remember that when Flight 77 was nearing Washington, it was flying at over four-hundred miles an hour, well over the legal speed limit for airliners, (250 mph? — not sure the exact number). By the time the plane struck the Pentagon, it was flying at 480mph. We can thus assume that Flight 77 took less time to fly back to Washington than it did to fly towards, (subtract ten minutes?). By this estimate, we could assume that Flight 77 turned around at the Ohio border at approximately 9:09, and took twenty-six minutes to reach Washington. However, this differs markedly with the Newsday article, by fourteen minutes.
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> For the moment, we have little recourse but to estimate the time that Flight 77 turned around as being halfway between these two credible, yet differing accounts; that is, (add or subtract seven minutes) at 9:02, just after 9 am.

9:02 eh? The very time that 'Flight 175' struck WTC2.

Let's now look carefully at the time constraints to which the Plissken-Valentine scenario is subject. We know that Boeing 757s and 767s have a top cruising speed of around 600 mph, or ten miles per minute. We know from the seismic records, courtesy of Columbia University's Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory team (those unsung heroes of 9-11 research) that Flight 93 crashed in Pennsylvania at 10:06. We know too that after its transponder signal ceased at 9:40, Flight 93 was next detected on radar at 10:02 near Shanksville, PA and that two minutes later Johnstown-Cambria County Airport reported the plane to be '15 miles south and coming fast'. We can safely conclude therefore that Flight 93, with its full complement of additional passengers, must have been airborne again sometime before 10:00 am. Given that it was 'coming fast' at 10:04 and that passenger jets need some time to reach high speed after take-off, it is not unreasonable to conclude that Flight 93 must actually have been airborne again no later than 9:45 — possibly rather earlier, depending on the location of the receiving airbase. I will address this issue later.

At the other end of the time-scale, we know that Flight 11's transponder signal ceased at around 8:20, Flight 175's at 8:46 and Flight 77's at some time between 8:55 and 9:09. Allowing time for the transfer of passengers, it is again not unreasonable to conclude that these three planes must have arrived at the target airbase at really no later than 9:30. Flight 11 therefore had no more than 80 minutes to get there, Flight 175 44 minutes and Flight 77 35 minutes at the most — and possibly as little as 21 minutes.

Attentive readers will have noticed that we have already encountered a major problem with the Plissken-Valentine hypothesis. The problem of course concerns Flight 93. Even if the target airbase was immediately below Flight 93's position when its transponder signal ceased at 9:40, it still leaves an improbably short time for the plane to land, take on board 200 or so new passengers then take off again and reach high speed over Pennsylvania by 10:04. And if the receiving airbase were close to Flight 93's position at 9:40, would Flight 77 have enough time to get there and transfer its passengers and crew onto Flight 93?

These problems do not, I believe, scupper the hypothesis entirely but they do mean that we have to refine it somewhat.

Before attempting to do that however we need to address that other very important matter of identifying the airbase to which the planes were directed after their transponders were switched off. This should not actually be too difficult because the pressures both of time and the size of the planes delimit our field considerably. Let's be clear about this; an airport capable of receiving four Boeing passenger jets must be a substantial one, with a large runway and located in an area with clear approaches. We can therefore dismiss immediately any notions of a small, secret airstrip situated somewhere in a mountainous region. North-eastern USA is divided down the middle by the Appalachian Mountains so the airbase must be either to the west or east of this mountain range. Any airbase to the east of the Appalachians would be too far away for the planes to get there within the time limitations, given their positions when the transponders were switched off. So we are confined to looking for a base somewhere to the west, in Ohio, W. Virginia or Pennsylvania.

Excluding for the moment Flight 93 — whose time problems appear to invalidate the Plissken-Valentine scenario in its current form, wherever our airbase may be located — the plane with the least amount of time available to it was Flight 77. Its transponder signal ceased at around 9:00 (give or take a few minutes), giving it, as noted above, as little as 20 minutes additional flying time. We should perhaps

therefore look for an airbase somewhere close to Flight 77's position when it disappeared from the radar screens. As can be seen from the map, this narrows the field down to three: Newark AFB and Rickenbacker AFB in Ohio and Yeager Airport near Charleston, W. Virginia. Both Newark and Rickenbacker are some 100 miles or so distant from Flight 77's last officially confirmed position, ten minutes flying time at top speed. Yeager Airport however is only a couple of minutes away. To minimise our time problems, Yeager might be a good choice. It's interesting to note too that, unlike the others, Yeager has the distinction of being a USAF base that also serves as a commercial airport. This is interesting because it means that local residents would not be at all surprised to see commercial aircraft landing or taking off.

Again excluding Flight 93, how does Yeager fit in with the time available to the other planes? In the case of Flight 11, Yeager is approximately 500 miles from the point between Boston and Albany where Flight 11's transponder signal stopped, or around 50 minutes flying time at top speed. Its transponder went off at 8:20, so Flight 11 could have been showing up at around 9:10. With regards to Flight 175, Yeager is around 400 miles from the point just south of New York where the plane's transponder went off, giving a flying time of around 40 minutes. Flight 175's transponder signal ceased at 8:46 so it could have been at Yeager by around 9:25. And the airport is around 160 miles from Shanksville PA — perhaps 25 minutes flying time away, taking into account take-off and the time it takes to accelerate to top speed.

This all fits the Plissken-Valentine hypothesis rather neatly, except of course for one thing. We can't keep on excluding Flight 93. And Flight 93 just doesn't fit! Well actually I think it does. Or at least it might. Let's tinker a little with the Plissken-Valentine hypothesis.

Suppose for a minute that Flight 93 didn't land at the airbase, or at least not during the critical time period with which we have been working. Suppose instead that Flight 93 was substituted with another plane when its transponder was switched off, just like the other three planes. Suppose the plane that crashed in Pennsylvania was not the plane that left Newark but a plane that was ready and waiting at Yeager. If this were the case, we can safely disregard the time problems that emerge from the original hypothesis. All that would then be required would be for the first three planes to reach Yeager in time for their passengers and crew to transfer to this new plane and be airborne by (say) 9:40, which we have already established is just about feasible.

There are a couple of other factors that I believe support this amended version of the hypothesis. Unlike the other planes, Flight 93's black-box recorder was discovered by the FBI. Its cockpit voice recorder was intact, though the conversations recorded on it mysteriously end some three minutes before the time of the crash. The flight data recorder was blank, with no recoverable data. Is this just another 9-11 anomaly, or is it indicative of yet more evidence fixing? It has been suggested also that Flight 93 (perhaps we should now call it pseudo-Flight 93) had explosives on board, thus accounting for the marked absence of debris and identifiable body parts at the crash site. All this strongly suggests to me that the plane that crashed in Pennsylvania had been very carefully prepared beforehand. It is most unlikely that doctored black-boxes and high explosives could have been fitted to the plane during a brief and hectic stopover.

Niggling away somewhere at the back of my mind there's another potential problem with the Plissken-Valentine theory and that concerns passenger numbers. The official account says that there were 45 people on Flight 93, 38 passengers and 7 crew. According to the scenario, the plane in fact had well over 200 people on board when it crashed. This discrepancy in numbers is problematic. One thing about bringing down a plane by missile or explosives is that it's difficult to control the behaviour of the debris once you've pressed the button. You don't know exactly how or where it's going to land. The explosives might not even go off — it can be unreliable stuff. It's inherently risky to bring down a plane with over 200 people on board when it's only supposed to have 45 because, depending on how and where the wreckage lands, it might be immediately apparent to investigators that there were far more than 45 bodies lying around at the crash site. Such a revelation would immediately provoke too many unwanted questions. I think pseudo-Flight 93 might well have only had around 45 people on board when it crashed, in accordance with the official account.

So who could these 45 people have been, probably just taking off on pseudo-Flight 93 when the original Flight 93's transponder was switched off? I can't say for sure, but I do have a hunch, which is based on an intriguing piece of arithmetic. It's interesting to note that if you tot up the total number of crew from the first three planes and then add 19 'hijackers' (yes, there may have been some after all) you get 45.

This may just be a coincidence but it's certainly worth considering. If the plane that crashed in Pennsylvania only had on board the crews from the other three planes plus 19 'hijackers' it means that every single remaining passenger on those planes was in on the plot in some way. It also means that in all probability the original passengers that day are all still alive.

Is this too far-fetched? Possibly, but it does ease the time pressures inherent within the Plissken-Valentine scenario because it involves the transfer of far fewer passengers to Flight 93 (or pseudo-Flight 93). It might also explain one or two details that have hitherto been dismissed as oddities or coincidence. Like the fact that known Israeli agent Daniel Lewin was a passenger on Flight 11 and US Naval Intelligence Officer William E. Caswell a passenger on Flight 77. There were also at least five Raytheon employees distributed among the first three planes, all with known connections to the development of Global Hawk technology. Could the official passenger lists of the four planes have comprised a mixture of military personnel responsible for overcoming the hapless 'hijackers' and taking over the planes, and other key personnel whom it was convenient to 'disappear' so they could carry on their specialist work in complete anonymity and secrecy? It is certainly interesting to note the research of Woody Box who, in his article entitled The Cleveland Airport Mystery, establishes that at 10.45 on the morning of 9-11 an unidentified United Airlines 767 made an unscheduled landing at Cleveland Airport with around 200 passengers on board. These passengers were taken to the adjacent NASA Glenn Research Center and have not been heard of since.

As for the original Flight 93, this was perhaps little more than a decoy flight, though its passengers have entered modern folk-lore as the plucky American heroes who took on evil Muslim terrorists with their bare hands. This myth is based on the cell phone calls allegedly made from the stricken plane but, as Professor Dewdney and others have pointed out, it is not actually possible to use cell phones on aircraft flying at altitudes above 2000 feet and at speeds in excess of 230 mph. Since Flight 93 was at cruising speed and altitude when the calls are alleged to have been made, it is likely they were made from the ground if they were made at all. This of course means we must treat with some suspicion either the people who allegedly made them, the relatives who reported them, or both.

There is another reason why the four original planes might well have had no *bona fide* innocent civilian passengers on board and that's to do with what we might, with some irony, call the 'Flight 93 Syndrome', i.e., the excessive and uncontrolled use of cell phones. They may not be much use above 2000 feet, but cell phones can be used at airports and on planes that are taking off or landing. If you were really going to pull a stunt like 9-11 in the manner many now believe it was, then the last thing you need is some idiot in the toilet telling his friend all about it, just as the plane is landing at an airbase in W. Virginia, some time after it was supposed to have crashed into a New York tower. Far better to keep everything strictly under control with as few risks and unpredictable elements as possible. And that means no civilians.

It's perhaps ironic that, in attempting a careful analysis of "The Flight of the Bumble Planes" — a hypothesis I call at the beginning the most conspiratorial of 'Conspiracy Theories' — I have ended up with a revised version that is even more conspiratorial. So it goes. As I also said at the beginning, we must be guided only by a hypothesis's factual accuracy and the cogency of its reasoning. On both scores I may of course be well wide of the mark. The devil, as the saying goes, is in the detail and if my grasp of the detail is flawed then perhaps everything I have said collapses like a pack of cards. It's fascinating though how small details can sometimes open up whole new ways of seeing the big picture.

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