

# DITHER

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for April 1995 Apa V distribution school  
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And now, on *ow-er* stage, that great *purr*-forming team—Trash and Sleaze! *Yeaaaaa-a-a-yyy...*! Image: Enter a slightly aged Shields and Yarnell in gaudy, slightly too-revealing outfits—she's been silicone-enhanced—and embarrassing makeup. A typical strip-joint band—lots of cymbals and a bass drum—is playing *The Stripper*. The team is moving a little like their robot-people act but as if the robots' joints have been over-oiled, to scattered but enthusiastic applause and a few whistles. As they approach the

divan in center stage I draw the mental curtain, but there may be some of you who wish to peek a while longer..

Okay, not a perfect image. But hey, we're talkin' trash, here. We're talkin' sleaze.

Yeahhh... But—*Shields and Yarnell?*

Maybe not.

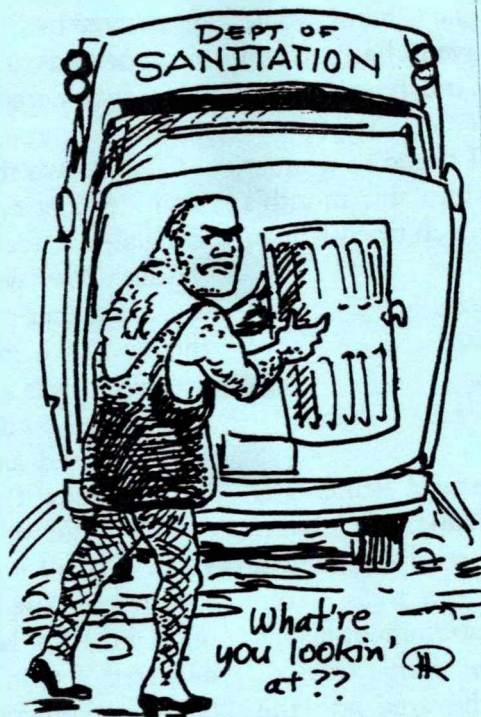
Hey, it could be worse. How 'bout Donny and Marie...? Talk about sleaze!

I've had other strange thoughts recently. In one case—well, it's a kinda obvious thought to be writing about here (albeit definitely departing from The Topic), but it wanders a little, and I'd kinda like to share some of the trail. (Back to The Topic later.)

I listen every so often to the *Vortex* album. In case it occurs to anyone to wonder, what's a *Vortex* album?—and I daresay they're not a huge number in this circle, but I'm getting to that—it's the soundtrack written for a computer game—

Okay, someone snorted. One of one of the incrowds that overlap this one, okay? Hold on, I'll get to that. Call *Vortex* a strange semi-interactive movie, a psychological adventure with futuristic background. Kinda one of those things futurists and science fiction writers predicted computers would get us into, but not yet on the William Gibson jacked-in level. It's Virtual Reality without the surround sound, sorta, except that's literally inaccu-

rate—VR without peripheral vision is closer to it. Anyway, I met Greg Roach, the guy who created the game, at CES and got a little of his time in conversation (not enough for a story) and he introduced me to composer Candice Pacheco of D'Cückoo, who did the music for *Vortex*. She describes the style as "tribal."



If that should be a Capitalized Major Category like New Wave, then sobeit... The album cover describes the group as techno-tribal, which sounds like sooo trendy a designation, donchaknow, but I suppose it could be real. Or both.

[Don't try to picture me doing catty. It's isn't a pretty sight. Go for, oh, say, British Snide: raised nose and eyebrow, slightly widened eyes and sidelong twitch—ideally, with a slightly flabby quiver of the jewels and underchin. Works for me. Or have I just described Outrage?

Snit? Hmm... It's in how the head works during the twitch, actually.]

Yeah, okay. So I was playing the album, *V*—you know—and a sorta parochial thought came to me: the Katz household in particular, but also many in this rough circle we call the Vegrants, would no longer have second thoughts

about discussing a soundtrack album from a video game. I guess there must have been, at some point on hearing about the first such album, if not a thrill then at least a shake of the head and a "So it's come to that!" One wonders, however, if it has yet reached the point that, across the country and the world, in the living rooms and rumpus rooms and bedrooms and other recreation areas (gin joints?) where other gatherings of companions of mutual interest congregate (congregations gather?), there are discussions of the latest music albums wherein *Vortex* (and/or other game-soundtracks) are discussed. With or without the caveat.

As time goes on in the evolution and cross-breeding of electronic entertainments, it's inevitable that it will happen, just as it was inevitable within that evolution that such albums would sprout. But...Popular? We haven't had such an album go silver, yet, have we, much less gold or platinum? In time...

After all that, of course, I began to wonder how to insert this concept into this month's Dither when it didn't really match the theme of Trash and Sleaze.

Trash and Sleaze,  
Trash and Sleaze,  
Go together  
Like a Hive of Bees...

Nah.

It occurred to me that, like most elements of evolution, the arrival of game soundtrack albums was part of a non-exclusive trend effect. And there are certainly trends in the areas of the trash-and-sleaze genre of entertainment just as there are styles and fashions in the areas of music, film, literature and the arts, and the lifestyles, that it overlaps (disclaimer). Trends aren't always easy to recognize as such while in the midst of the flow of them, though soon enough they call sufficient attention to themselves that they are noticed beyond the circles where they originate—or, to be more accurate, gestate. (Arnie and Joyce and Bill were accurate enough trend-spotters to ride the curl on video

games and electronic entertainment. Now the beaches are crowded...)

Trends rarely ride alone. I doubt key-chain spinning and zoot suits were seminal either to the other, but they seem forever linked. In their time the popular music was linked to big band jazz and show tunes, with bebop and boogie sliding in from the side; the big underground became the beat of the beat generation and its cool jazz and existential poetry. [It's *Bird*, man!] Black influences were strong but, if not exactly sub rosa, unofficially acknowledged. When country/western began to take on some of the more raunchy blues elements, rock 'n roll began to slip between the song sheets of white bands and rebellion rose its ducktailed and sideburned head among the bobbysoxers, then slacks turned from loose to form-fitting, lapels and ties all but disappeared and leather jackets supplanted wide-shouldered suit jackets as the cool threads of the dangerous.

What was the status of raunch? In this period, *The Tropic of Cancer* and *Lady Chatterly* were circulated underground while *Fanny Hill* and Twain's *1601* were whispered-about collector's items. *Catcher in the Rye* was controversial (by the time I got around to reading it I was unimpressed). I was a naive youngster and teenager even by the standards of the time, or so I gather. When I read an adult novel that more than hinted at sex, I was quite suffused with secret delight in the wickedness of it all. As a teenager I hid a small collection of Hal Ellison novels about street life in New York because maybe once in each book something vaguely sexy occurred. I didn't get to Steinbeck until a bit later. And then there was Thorne Smith... a hilarious writer of the 20s and 30s whose heroines were more than fond of prancing about in their stepins or nothing at all, and were quite prepared to hop into the hero's arms (not to mention beds) that way. Wow...

I frankly have no idea if Grove Press and Lyle Stuart were in business (Stuart himself was around of course) or what they published before



the landmark Supreme Court decision that opened up the floodworks, though I (no longer a teenager, but still pretty wet behind the ears) was lucky enough to be working at Bookazine (a New York book wholesaler) then and during the transition period following it. This facilitated my acquisition of many of the naughty books that came out (erupted!) at that time.

Before then—My older brother Hale was a collector of erotica. The Thorne Smith books were his, but I'm not sure they really come under the category. Oh, he had a collection of the nudist magazine, *Sunshine & Health*, and I found another one (I've forgotten its name, but "Sun" appeared in it somewhere) at a newsstand at the edge of the Texas A&M campus. That one, unlike S&H, airbrushed the naughty bits frontal views. (Always women—neither magazine, if I remember correctly, ever showed male genitalia.) I got good at touching these up a bit closer to reality, but since at that time I had had no live experience with nude members of the opposite sex, I still had to use my imagination... I used cut those retouched pictures out of my magazines (not Hale's) and send them to a school buddy of mine who had been sent to Korea. (He came back with a bit more worldly knowledge and we lost touch after that.)

But back to real erotica. Hale had a copy of *1601*, printed in solid, difficult-to-read black-letter [~~much like this but even tighter and harder to read~~]. To those unfamiliar with the work, Mark Twain wrote it as if it were one of the diaries of Samuel Pepys; the subtitle was something like "A Conversation by the Fireside" and the conversors were, presumably, such luminaries as Queen Elizabeth I, William Shakespeare and Sir Walter Raleigh, among others. According to the introduction to the Lyle Stuart edition, which was in part a facsimile of the original that Twain had had privately printed (not in black-letter), it seems that Sam Clemens had made a point of using in it every naughty word he knew.

Hale also had a copy of *Aphrodite*, by Pierre Louÿs (1870-1925). The works of Louÿs were thrilling erotic material for a teenager (as I was then) to indulge in,

though *Aphrodite* and *The Songs of Bilitis* and others of his titles didn't seem to appear among the titles made available in the erotic revolution of the 60s. Maybe they weren't really all that "dirty." I did find a copy of *The Songs of Bilitis* somewhere during or after that period. There was (and may still be) a Lesbian organization in New York, called the Daughters of Bilitis, which was named after the titular heroine of that collection of poems.

It was also possible to find the occasional unexpurgated version of Boccaccio's *The Decameron* or Sir Richard Burton's *Arabian Nights (The Thousand Nights and a Night)* before that period, but not as readily. I shall always be grateful to the Supreme Court for giving me the opportunity to read *The Diary of a Flea*, *A Man and a Maid* and *My Life* by Frank... (uh, hm—it's been too long, remind me, Arnie), as well as opening up the outlets for more modern eroticists. Not to mention the collections of erotic art from around the world, the *Kama Sutra* (illustrated with photos of Indian temple statuary), the Chinese Pillow Books, the art of Pompeii, etc.

And there was that short-lived hardcover periodical, *Eros*, produced by the chap who later brought us *Midnight Blue* on cable. I keep wanting to say Allen Ginsburg, but that's the poet, the author of *Howl*—I'm confusing the name with who...?

But (not yet addressing *Midnight Blue*) most of the above are works of erotic literature, and while they were once classed in the public eye with trash and sleaze, I have to share the more liberal point of view that these belong with the world's works of art. Attempts to bring high eroticism into the world of cinema were less successful, I think. There was already a body of work, both underground and foreign, that did succeed in this to some extent. Here in the U.S. we had the "Nudies," some flicks that engaged in production values slightly higher than the underground porn films, which allowed glimpses of T&A but no serious genitalia, and even sported some minor celebrities (so minor I can't think of any names at the moment), but beyond that were definitely aimed at the leering crowd. I think these came out of an underground that was already there but which I'd seen only glimpses of in those barely tolerated art

theatres where one could also catch nudist documentaries and, yes, some of those foreign films. (Whatever happened to Marina Vlady?)

The Nudies came closer to what I think of as sleaze and trash. There were publications like *College Humor* that had been around a while that were perfect for the sniggering adolescent, but evidently weren't too morally corrupt to be placed on the newsstands. But even by that criterion there were plenty of magazines that would fit the bill. Many of the would-be *Playboy* imitators of the time certainly could be categorized as trash, and bordered on sleaze. Girly-mags galore...

And then there were the infamous eight-pagers. I would never have seen any of them if it weren't for a series of books of collections of them I found available through a mail-order house. These I delighted in, though never found them at all erotic; they were so totally crude. The appeal, of course, was that of slapping the establishment in the face; of treating goody-goody popular characters like Dagwood and Blondie, Jiggs and Maggie, Popeye and Olive Oyl, Ella Cinders and even Little Orphan Annie and Moon Mullins as moral cheats as well as sexual athletes. Sure it was fun just to imagine what they would do in private, too. But with the eight-pagers, at least, they were hardly ever making love—they were out for the make. Just as with many of the dirty jokes we told and were told as kids, where the point was almost entirely the inner thrill of using the bad words rather than the humor of the situation (later, some of us graduated to punchlines that didn't include a dirty word: "Tomorrow, it's your turn in the barrel."). Neither the setup nor the point of such stories had anything to do with emotional involvement. It had to do with bodily function, and, as far as the jokes were concerned, though it never if ever appeared in the eight-pagers, the function could just as well be one of waste elimination as readily as sexual.

I'm not sure if that's a definition for trash and sleaze, though I'm tempted by it. Eroticism requires some emotional involvement, if only investment in the effort, whereas trash and sleaze are purely (?) reactive. No? Maybe not. If I react physically to any of pretty sleazy stuff I see on cable stations from time

to time, is that erotic involvement? Or just body functions at work? Probably. But does that mean that if I react similarly as the lovely heroine of a highly involving film and her lover get past the dewey-eyed glances and the music slips into something more smooth and moody, the film is (or has suddenly become) sleazy? Some folk would have you think so.

I don't know. Ask Paul Rubens. Enhhhh... or maybe not.

And does the reality differ for different folks? Are those who swing and those who only autoeroticize on opposite wings of one spectrum of sexuality, or both at different corners of a range that stretches from celebacy to hypersexuality? One person's porn is another's yawn is another's titillation.

Yeah, until now I hadn't used the p-word. I don't identify sleaze with pornography directly—much of that is trash in its most disposable sense. I tend to think of the word "porn" as expressing pornography-lite, meaning diluted by mere soft-X and even some R rating stuff. Or, to be more specific, the stuff I find most amusing and harmless.

After the Supreme Court decision, Grove Press was among the first to publish some of the better known works of previously suppressed literature, and also to release new titles under the Evergreen label. They also started a film subscription thing (\$mm films) that I joined briefly—I really couldn't afford to keep that up, and, to be quite frank, the ones I did get were too "artistic" and not enough getting it on. And they had a theater, also called the Evergreen, I think, which is where *I Am Curious Yellow* and *I Am Curious Blue* were shown first, at least in NYC.

I'm not keen on S&M and B&D and some other areas of erotica involving power play. Initially, though I couldn't afford to buy all the books, or even many, I was relatively unselective about which ones I did get. As time went by, however, it seemed that more and more of Grove's titles were going for the power trip stuff. After a while I stopped even looking. Different strokes...

Which returns me to a train of thought begun earlier, before the topic turned to that naughty stuff. It had to do with friendship circles and where they overlap with others.



Friendship circles vary in breadth and depth, of course, and people can belong to more than one depending on their areas of interest. The Vegrants is such a circle, and it overlaps with circles of game-players, of speculative fiction readers, of musicians, of miniatures collectors, of environmentalists, of professional journalists.... etc. When I referred to incrowds, earlier, this is what I was talking about.

Here's where the thought gets weird. Suppose one were to chart these circles across the town, or across the Southwest, or across the country, or around the world. Where physical patterns or designs overlap, meta-patterns emerge—moiré patterns such as seen when looking through two window screens. Such constructs vary in clarity and design dependent upon the patterns that give rise to them, though their appearances may differ widely from those same patterns, and sometimes seem to have nothing to do with them. I have a theory (or hypothesis) that most of what we consider our reality is based upon such constructs built upon some under-realities we neither perceive nor understand—or possibly we do see them but misunderstand their nature.

I could go into that more, but that would again be diverging from the topic. I was wondering if the moiré patterns created by these personal acquaintance circles (incrowds) would provide a valid overview of our society. Whether the metaview offered a randomized hodge-podge or coalesced into a coherent, possibly pleasing aspect could tell us much about the society we live in.

Maybe.

To esoteric a thought? Too outré?

Nahh—probably just nonsense. It came to me while under sercon circumstances, and probably should have slid away as such thoughts often do.

Here's another thought that came that way recently, which I added to my notebook—

**Intelligence hates to be shown wrong. In this it**

**does not differ from stupidity.**

The difference is that intelligence will forgive you if you explain—convincingly.

You see what I mean.

Here's another note I put down in my handy dandy notebook, but the only bad influence on me at that time was TV:

3/23 - Tonight, during a documentary tribute to Warner Bros. on A&E, there was a commercial on which the entire sound track was Janis Joplin singing "Oh Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes-Benz..." On screen was an elegant sequence of images of stately automobiles turning before a sunny blue sky. Yes, sure enough, it was a commercial for Mercedes-Benz!

Joy-Lynd remarked, "I wonder if she's getting the money." I responded, "I wonder what kind of estate she left. Who in fact has the rights to her stuff?"

The commercial was among, or perhaps kicked off, a series of M-B ads aimed at that generation or younger—high spirited and nostalgic.

Somehow, that seems appropriate to tie off an article that was supposed to be a discussion of trash and sleaze, even though it doesn't directly apply at all, save in terms of perception, classification—and perspective. We tend to classify things according to our expectations. Janis's song was intended as satire (would you agree?) and not at all as a promotion for Mercedes-Benz. Yet, now, from the perspective of a quarter of a century, it's a "Yes!—All right!" kind of thing...

Perhaps more appropriate to The Topic was Jay Leno's introduction of the Judge Ito dancers on his show a week or so ago—a bunch of guys in black robes and black beards—and, dancing with them, a Marsha Clarke (sp?) lookalike in black mini-skirt, showing lots of leg.

I found it embarrassing...

**PowWow #17 - Joyce**

I find it amazing how frequently things that have to be done exterior to the magazine work coincide in timing with its deadlines. Your moving in the middle of it and succeeding in getting magazine work done despite that strikes me both as awesome and a monument to dedication. But it's the lines— "When we planned the move, we knew it would occur right in the middle of our deadline period.

... So we arranged the move to have the least disruption in our working lives as possible." —that, distant as I am from the reality of what you went through, and just seeing the statements, that are hard to understand. The move couldn't have been scheduled at some other portion of the month where it didn't hit the deadline period?

You mean—it *isn't* cheaper to eat out than cook at home?

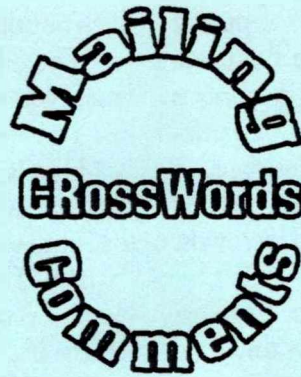
**Implosion #17 - Amie**

I remember the initial discussions of the Su Williams Slam Challenge. I'd missed the initial intriguing suggestion that it be Betty Huggins instead of Su, and also overlooked my appointment, along with Ray Walle, as ambulance attendant. Hey, I'd have been pleased to join the ranks of the contend— oh, hi, Joy-Lynd. Hm? Nothing, nothing at all.

**Roll of the Dice #6 - Peggy**

Joy-Lynd has told me many times (and may have touched on it in *Chuckles*; I'd go back and look, but it's that old Saturday afternoon time again and the time is going fast) that she felt immediately at home here on her first visit, which was primarily a stopover on her way elsewhere. Acknowledged, that was a couple of decades ago, at the time you are nostalgic about. Circus Circus had just been built, and she was also enthralled with the idea of seeing circus acts overhead (they were, then) for free...

In some ways, even though we're still relatively newcomers here, and part of the problem, we too feel some discomfort with the rapid population growth



and its effects on the city. Even since we came, our clear view of the mountains to the west has been blocked by a new housing development across the street... Only the nearest of a number of new complexes that have built up in the stretches between us and the Route 159 circle over last three years.

**Revel-Action #2 - Marcy**

The closest thing I've ever come to the kind of work you were doing at the convenience store was one week behind the counter at a supermarket on Long Island. I was but a callow teenager, but I didn't have what it takes to deal with the kind of work that entails. Until I began my career in journalism at *Quick Frozen Foods*, all but that and one other of my jobs did not entail encountering the public. They were clerical—i.e., stock clerk (twice) and order clerk (10 years at the book wholesaler). The other one was driving cab. I wasn't too bad at it but didn't have the hustling instinct to make much money. Shall I trot out my usual quip here? Okay: I couldn't hack it.

**Υπτιλεδ #4 - Ben and Cathi**

I think the striking difference between Las Vegas and New York, Boston or, probably (to name one where I haven't lived), L.A., is that family troubles and small crimes still make the news here. That's decreasing, even in the period since we arrived, but it's noticeable.

Last month I questioned where you found a dictionary that included "Fandom," Ben. And then, after I wrote the comment, and too late to do anything about it, I found that it is listed, with a star (meaning an Americanism), in my *New World Dictionary of the American Language* (2nd College Edition), as follows: *n.* Fans, collectively, as of a sport or entertainer. This dictionary was last revised in 1980; two other dictionaries I own do not include it.

Well, dammit, Ken, JoHn and Belle, I'm sorry. Too little space and time... (how science-fictional!). Bye!