

# FLAMINGOS

# TURNING TRICKS

FTT 10 -- AUGUST 1990

Published in time for distribution to the favoured few at the Hague Worldcon, this fanzine finally reaches double figures a mere four years or so after its first issue -- but still well ahead of some other titles we could name. Persistence obviously makes perfect. Those encountering us for the first time should know that we're nominally a science fiction fanzine, which means that if we mention the subject at all it's almost certainly by accident; the best guide to the sort of things we're interested in is to read us (although this issue may be untypical in that it includes far more letters than articles).

FTT is available for "the usual", which means either your publication in exchange, a letter of comment, or a contribution of relevant text or illustration (but please enquire first); those not wishing to produce any of the above may obtain single issues for £1.00 a copy (no subscriptions will be accepted!). In order to keep mailing costs under control, our address list is subject to stringent discipline, and several people who have failed to do any of the preceding will eventually discover that they have not received this issue; let this be a warning to the rest of you!

FTT is edited and published by the 5A Frinton Road Helicopter Model & Herbal Tea Association, otherwise known as JUDITH HANNA and JOSEPH NICHOLAS, of 5A Frinton Road, Stamford Hill, London N15 6NH, United Kingdom, Just Off North-Western Europe, The Earth, The Solar System, The Milky Way, Space, The Universe. The electrostencils and the ink were once again provided by Vince Clarke, and the duplicating facilities by Rob Hansen, to whom we offer our grateful thanks.

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The illustration on page 6 is an original by Judith Hanna; all the others, on the cover and pages 12, 19 and 24, have been taken from *The Guardian*.

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On the evening of Saturday 21 July 1990 we watched the television broadcast of the megaconcert of *The Wall* from Berlin. It took us until close to the end to realise that the raddled old scarecrow singing the lead was indeed Roger Waters. Bloody hell. And Mick Jagger is even older.... On the other hand, this presumably means that if we want to become rock stars it's still not too late to start.

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# KALI JUGGLING:

## THE OTHER LETTER COLUMN

Edited by Judith Hanna

Most of the thirteen letters commenting on my Peach Fuzz, Bums & Feminists Against Censorship in FTT 9 took a constructive discussion line; most focused on censorship and sexual exploitation, which wasn't all I was writing about. Pornography is the extreme end of a continuum of annoyance, on which Caroline Mullan comments:

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"I loved Lesley Ward's 'saturated solution' metaphor and can quite see, and agree, the point. But if one does not possess a TV, does not read women's magazines, except occasionally *Spare Rib*, works in an environment where *The Sun* and *News Of The World* are conspicuous by their absence, and lives with a man

who reads no newspapers or magazines except *The Financial Times*, there are not all that many sources of salt to pour into one's personal solution.... The disproportionate irritation from which I suffer arises from the fact that after twenty years of consciousness raising on feminist issues people (not, unfortunately, just men) writing for the so-called 'quality' press still haven't caught onto the fact that half their readers are women and offended by these things."

"THE GENE THAT MAKES A MAN": headline on The Guardian front-page story. Have they deciphered the 0.02% of genetic difference which distinguishes *Homo sapiens* from Pongo the chimpanzee? No. The story is about a sequence on the Y chromosome which may code for maleness in mammals. New Scientist used almost the same headline. How silly of me to think that "man" stands for "human being". Of course "man" really means "male". Life is full of these little cognitive dissonances.

Take, for instance, the New Scientist leader on "manpower shortages" in science, which make it imperative to attract more women and girls into scientific studies. Or consider The Guardian's continuing laments about the safety implications of "manning levels" and "unmanned" stations on the rail system. Personally, I couldn't care if stations are staffed by men, women or eunuchs as long as there are human staff on hand.

Yes, what currently most annoys me is the fact that, three decades on from "women's lib", seventy years on from getting the vote, the female half of the population still routinely has to sort out that double-think, even from the liberal end of the quality press: when they say "man", do they mean me?

And when we say "feminism" what do we mean?

Mog Decarnin

"It's very interesting to see my zine (*Rabbitears*) in the context of British feminism. In the US, feminism is an 'accepted' ism, which is to say, television shows which are in fact highly sexist in their structures and basic messages nevertheless pay lip service to the more mundane and easily codified feminist ideas (equal pay, opposition to rape, not putting women down in obvious ways, and so on). But the country is anything but monolithic so there are all flavours of feminism as well as all stages still around. I can remember when I thought feminism was something you joined, and I wasn't into clubs. It took only a little exposure for me to realise feminism was a point of view, not a political party; and a bit of rowdy rough-and-tumble 'in' the movement for me to realise it was a whole hell of a lot of points of view, with only the most tenuous common threads sometimes. It's such a kick to think of how flabbergasted AverageMan would be at even something tame like *A Women's Apa*, composed as it is and has been of anti-abortion feminists, I'm-not-a-feminists, pro-censorship feminists, sadomasochist feminists, separatist feminists, anarchafeminists, pagan feminists, paedophile feminists, homophobic feminists, sissy queen feminists, and straight sober WASP temporarily able-bodied middle class male feminists, existing not in idyllic harmony but anyway existing. Never mind the more 'normal' differences of party (communist to

libertarian), nationality, race, religion, sexual gender preference, class, age, and repro technology. And AWA of course is just a little sheltered bay, not even out in the 'real world' of feminist politics -- the place where you get the broken bones, the guns, the bruises, some of the stuff Avedon was reacting to. If there was ever anything that proved women and men are pretty near identical given the opportunity, this is it. Factionalism: the thing that separates us from the animals, identified at last.

"I confess to a wistfulness at just missing being commented upon in *Fuck The Tories*. I loved that title; I think it said it all. True, we must stop using the word 'fuck' in a negative sense if we ever expect sex -- not to mention the most frequent fuckees, that is, women -- to accrue positive connotations in the English-speaking world, but it will be a long time before another word with just that kickass quality evolves to replace it."

When it comes to the "more mundane and easily codified feminist ideas", the UK is well behind the US, Australia or the rest of Europe. Theoretically, the EC ruling on "equal pay for work of equal value" is in force; the derisively funded Equal Opportunities Commission now and then manages to take up a test case which is usually upheld. The idea of "affirmative action", let alone targets or quotas in line with demographic make-up for recruiting women or black people into specific jobs (police, doctors, management, university places) is regarded with deep suspicion. Women's average pay is 67% of men's average pay level; but then, in the US even with anti-discrimination legislation on the books, the disparity is not much less.

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"I haven't seen Jan Ory's article in *VSOP* 5 though the 'I'm not a feminist but...' line is familiar enough. I think that kind of resistance to identifying oneself with a cause one clearly believes in lies in a reaction to the vague image of that cause condensed out of impressions and half-understood sound bites.

Thus one develops a feeling about feminists as bra-burners and wannabe-castrators without the slightest idea of what they're actually going on about. Some feminists blame this distortion on a Patriarchal Conspiracy but I think it's something inherent in human nature that makes us remember and pass on the most outrageous gossip and not the reasonable stuff. In my old age (ahem), I've become reconciled to the idea that the race is inherently sexist. That is, interactions between women and men will always have a sexual tension to some degree. We can recognise and learn to overcome the more egregious aspects of this sexism but I think men are always going to see women in terms of their sexual allure because that's something hard-wired into us."

Up to a point, Brian, up to a point. Maliciously amusing gossip in private is one thing; the name-calling of the tabloid press (routinely dubbing female Labour Party MPs as "Kinnock's harridans") and the indifference (noted above) of the quality press do amount to (part of) a conspiracy to preserve the Man's World status quo. A conspiracy need not be an elaborate or efficient plot; all it needs is a bland inertia against the need to change. Nor is the Conspiracy only against women; we're facing the same Conspiracy of Complacency when it comes to the need to stop manufacturing CFCs, cut down fossil fuel use, and reduce and recycle waste. As a way to run the world, The Conspiracy amounts to a monumental cock-up, but that, I think, makes it more dangerous, not less.

Then again, there are social situations of establishing a personal relationship, which do involve dealing with sexual awareness even if only to rule it out from that friendship or working relationship. In a lot of other circumstances, like booking into a hotel, ordering a meal, walking down the street, buying a dozen screws and an electric connector in a hardware shop, waiting for a train or bus to arrive, "sexual tension" is an intrusion. As for being "hard-wired", let's plunge into controversy with:

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"Let us begin ass-backward with the bums admired by Mog Decarmin. First off, there is a term for the male movie starlet, and the term is 'hunk'. Second, men and women are not, on the whole, attracted by the same qualities in the opposite sex. The hard-wired portion of the male brain responds to evidence that

the female is capable of bearing a child. What evidence? The smooth skin of youth and sufficient athleticism (or appearance thereof) to indicate general good health. Billion dollar industries are supplying women with cosmetics and other aids to meet these perceived needs. The hard-wired portion of the female brain seeks evidence that the male is willing and able to stick around and help her raise their children. What evidence? Well, the protestations of undying love which are ubiquitous in popular music have a foundation in reality; they are something many women need to hear during courtship. Other useful evidence is that the male (a) has money which he is (b) willing to spend, indicating in theory that he (a) can and (b) will support wife and children.

"Part (a) is surely one of the main motives driving the young man to achieve material success. Part (b) leads to all sorts of difficulty, because the callow male imagines that spending his hard-earned cash entitles him to something. (This is not patriarchal, by the way, nor capitalistic, this is plain old stupidity of which the world has a bloody surfeit.) He paid for it; it's his. Wrong. Better to think of it as a crap shoot, where you have the potential for a big return on your investment, and otherwise have the fun of playing.

"Returning to Mog and the responses to human beauty: certainly the female seems more calculating even as the male seems more spontaneous. (Q: Why do women have no brains. A: Because they don't have a penis to carry them in.) Also youth and beauty in men are not necessarily sexy, except to the very young girls of 13 and 14 for instance, who look at a man of 17 as grown up. Or paedophiles...

"We move on to censorship, which Avedon forthrightly opposes. Nevertheless, Judith quotes Lesley Ward, who has become sensitised to the pervasive presence of sex in advertising and the media, as evidence of the need (of some women) for censorship and says: 'What, Avedon, should we do about that?' This is the well-known leading question implying censorship is, after all, OK for the proper stuff. The answer, of course, is: 'We should do nothing'. Lesley's reaction reminds me of one of Dostoevsky's characters, who would go into a rage at the hypocrisy of the Russian Orthodox Church every time he heard the church bells ring. Lesley needs a little desensitising, a little help with her head. Somewhere I have a cartoon in which the wizard is talking to a woman, and he says: 'You want a political solution to your sexual problem, lady, you've come to the right place.' And outside the balloon: 'Weird is my middle name'."

*Thank you, Alexis, for so bravely exposing yourself and exemplifying The Problem. Hell, says The Man, it doesn't bother me none, if it bothers you that's your problem, you're just weird. What a load of codswallop, Alexis. And how rash of you to rush forward with complacent generalisations when so much of my comment on Jan Ory's piece was about the danger of generalising.*

*What does that buzz phrase, "hard-wired portion of the brain" boil down to? Humans are "hard-wired" to feel horny from time to time, just as they are "hard-wired" to feel hungry, thirsty, scared, happy. Beyond that, individual and cultural factors seem to determine just what people find sexually attractive (or scary, or pleasurable). In our culture, 90% or so of people look for partners of the opposite sex, while (as Alexis acknowledged) 10% or so cleave to partners of the same sex, and a few find various fetishes more sexually exciting than people of either sex. Hard-wired? But what of the incidence of homosexual behaviour in ancient Athens where real love was what men felt for boys, among the Big Nambus of Malekula (Solomon Islands) where male sexual bonding within lodges is the key to status, and in prisons in our own culture? Certainly, there's plenty of evidence that sexual attraction gets bound up with the cultural factors of wealth, status and power. But Alexis's assertion that it is women who are particularly attracted to evidence of these boils down to an assumption that it is men who naturally possess these socially desirable attributes -- which is the crux of the feminist critique.*

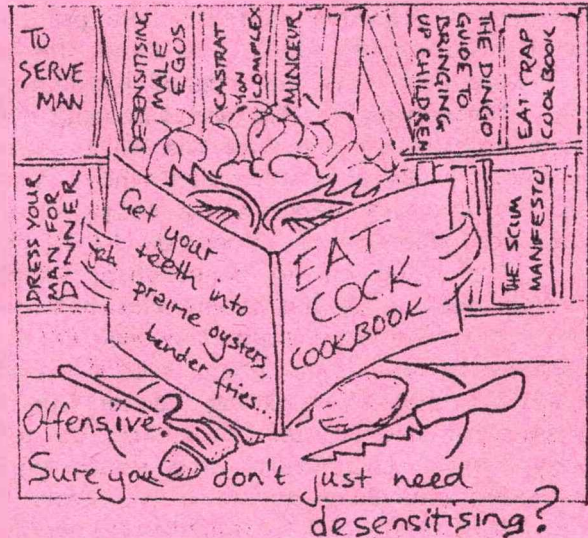
*A person with wealth and power is well-placed to compete for a younger, pretty lover: there are sugar mummies as well as sugar daddies. A person whose main survival asset is beauty is sensible to use that lure to ensure material security: there are gigolos as well as gold-diggers. It may be that part of the reason our western culture has moved from arranged marriages, based on securing family property deals, to romantic marriages based on personal (including, not just, sexual) attraction is to do with the rise of a middle class comfortably insulated from the extremes of*

status and survival.

The next part of Alexis's generalisation was about what constitutes prettiness. This he sees as something that only matters in women, to attract men. Since much of my article was about the different ways Jan and Mog wrote about being attracted to pretty men, Alexis has achieved the striking faux pas of simply denying what two women were saying quite clearly: that they, as adult women, do respond quite powerfully to beauty in males. As for what attractiveness is, Alexis is right enough that looking young and healthy is basic. On top of that, we get various canons of fashion at different times, places, cultures: in Polynesia, fat is beautiful -- perhaps because it's evidence of abundant food. Here and now, invasive advertising pushes thin, tanned, symmetrically featured images that few of us measure up to -- but when it comes down to real life, most of us somehow manage to link up with partners we find attractive, as much because of personality, intelligence, even niceness, as looks which may bear little relationship to the canonical images. And every now and then we light up with lust for a pretty passing stranger.

Perhaps the most difficult thing is to pull out the tiny nodules of sense embedded in Alexis's imposing cardhouse of prejudices, asserting that men and women have different brains, that men have wealth and power while women exist to look pretty and have kids. And that if he's not bothered by a problem, then it doesn't really exist -- it's all in your head, there's something wrong with you. This is not "just plain old stupidity", it is plain selfish stupidity, and it is the bedrock of The Patriarchy, which is a branch of The Conspiracy.

Without speculating just where Alexis carries his brains, let's move on:



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"Jan Orys doesn't get upset when a man wolf-whistles; how about when he says 'Hey Baby, great tits!?' How about....well, it can get a lot worse than a wolf whistle. A friend has said that when she was younger, comments from men on the streets were not necessarily offensive; as it was pointed out that some such comments were offensive (there have always been assholes), all

the sensitive guys stopped doing it, so that by the time people my age noticed such things, virtually all the comments were crude and insensitive and the whole process had become intrinsically unacceptable behaviour. When she was a teenager, she had complete confidence that the men who called out 'Hiya cutie!' as she passed on the street would have sprung to her assistance had someone given her serious trouble, or even said something rude -- like the average sort of comment you get today.

"When it comes to pornography and censorship, I mostly agree with Avedon. Erotica is like those comments on the street; only some of it is offensive. Mind you, the kind of pornography I like has absolutely no women in it at all; nonetheless, you can see the oppressor class having its fun from time to time: going on, for example, about how sexy black guys are because they never think about anything but.... Some men can't enjoy sex unless they're exploiting someone. Some textual pornography (the kind I prefer) treats all the participants as equals, and while most of the description is about bodies, the prose occasionally crosses over into the positively lyrical; one could enjoy the writing even if one were not equipped with a libido. I admit that this is a rare pleasure in an ocean of schlocky Wham-Bam-Thank-You-Sam garbage, but it does exist. Whether it exists on the other side of the famous fence, I don't know.

"I do know that I've begun to feel the effects of increased depiction of the male form in advertising; for a while it was nice until I realised that I feel unattractive and unacceptable because my belly is not a perfect washboard, because my chest is not the canonical shape, and because I don't have this year's face. The context is different since men, as a group, are not oppressed; but I do find myself comparing my body to the models, and feeling rotten because of it. This is just the beginning

though: women have been putting up with it forever....

"If only they weren't so strident' reminds me of 'if only they weren't so blatant'. In order for society at large to notice challenges to their assumptions, the challengers have to be louder than the thunderous white noise of 'Of course that's the way it is; that's the way it's always been'. It's like trying to talk to someone on the subway in New York when, as soon as you're loud enough to be heard over the train noise, s/he says 'Must you shout so?' The point, of course, is that s/he doesn't want to hear what you have to say. Well, tough, say I."

Some of us aren't built to attract the "great tits" variety of street calling, and so are spared some of the most offensive comments; the "get a load of that"/"wouldn't mind a bit of that" comments are bad enough. Yet still, not all street calls from workmen are offensive. It seems to be the more local the area, and the closer you are, the more you're likely to get friendly chat, of the "Good day, nice smile" type. For instance, garbage men emptying bins along the streets liven up their day by a quick word with passers-by who make eye-contact, likewise workers refurbishing a house in a residential street. It seems to be from fenced off construction sites that you get the show-offs calling down from scaffolding, showing off to their mates. Or groups of guys out for a drink, again showing off to their mates by using passing women as sexual targets. Maybe when other guys dismiss that sort of calling as showing sexual inadequacy, inability to deal with real women, then the nuisance may disappear.

Another person who agreed with Avedon about censorship is:

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"That paragraph of Avedon's you quote about not defining women is actually fairly radical -- any suggestion that we not define people in categories is radical, because it means we have to actually look at individuals long enough to find out who they are and what they think, in a society that lives by statistical analyses: over here in the States, there are companies that think they can define who you are by what neighbourhood you live in.

"I'm on Avedon's side as far as censorship and pornography goes. I find most pornography just plain boring, but that isn't the point. The point isn't even that I disagree with the basic assumption of the feminist anti-pornography movement: that is, I do not believe that pornography leads to or encourages violence. (I'm not even sure that it leads to sex, in general, but that's a whole different question.) The point is that, like Avedon, I think censorship of any kind is far too dangerous. I would love to see a lot of these publications go out of business because people stopped wanting to buy them -- but I don't expect that to happen unless we first change things enough that people aren't ashamed of their sexual desires, and feel free both to ask 'would you like to make love' and to say either yes or no without giving offence. Not in my lifetime, I'm afraid. And I don't think that I, or any woman, have a 'civil right' not to see pornography any more than fundamentalist Christians have a 'civil right' not to hear about evolution. Complaining to advertisers, as you suggest, may be a good place to start -- quietly not buying the products might do some good, even if we don't make the effort to write to manufacturers and tell them why."

Brian Earl Brown  
(address as above)

"I remember Lesley Ward's article in *Sounding the Ritual Echo 3* and suspect it was what got me to realise how much sexuality appears in television commercials and that, to a degree, it has been an aggravation. Commercials are, by their nature, meant to irritate, that's what makes them memorable and any kind of sexual imagery or content goes to make it more memorable. But almost every commercial these days seems to flaunt some kind of sexual image, often suggesting that consumption of the product will result in The Good Life, which is equated with endless and effortless sexual success. It's virtually a form of torment because on the one hand it objectifies women as sexual objects, then reminds us males of our lack of success in propagating our genes.

"But censorship is such an ugly word. It doesn't become easier when the subject of censorship becomes the likes of Andrew Dice Clay or 2 Live Crew. These people are offensive and advocate demeaning attitudes and treatment of women. But once we start saying they're obscene, where does it stop? This is where Avedon's complaint

against the Women Against Pornography comes in, from what I understand of the situation. WAP seems to feel that any erotic content is the same as pornography so when they talk about bans are as likely to include *Hustler*, which I think actually does offend most community standards, with *Playboy*, which doesn't. Then there have been the laws whose enactment was attempted in Minneapolis and Indianapolis. Both bills would have defined pornography as a violation of a woman's civil rights -- a personal violation rather than a civil violation, thus removed from the rough male hands of the District Attorney. And defined pornography in very broad terms. In Indianapolis I think the language included depiction of a woman in an inferior or subservient position, which would have meant every romantic novel in B Daltons became pornography solely on the basis of their covers. While this might be dismissed as simply exaggeration and fear-mongering I think it does illustrate the problem of dealing with the over-eroticisation of our culture through legislation. Someone is always going to think the law goes too far or not far enough and will be used to harass others. I hear a lot of crap here in Detroit about this or that being racist (e.g. press investigation of corrupt black politicians) but I think it is significant that while white rock groups like Guns'n'Roses have been noted for their offensiveness, it is only the black rap group 2 Live Crew that has actually been prosecuted."

*In fact, white college boy group The Dead Kennedys have been the subject of prosecution; as I understand it, not simply for sexual obscenity but for political subversiveness. This is perhaps a good place to bring in:*

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"Censorship is an issue briefly touched upon in several of the fanzines we received of late. If I did not know the meaning of the word and had defined it by the context in which it was used, I would certainly have decided from most of these writings that 'censor' meant exactly the same as 'ban'. Your comment on what is acceptable in private compared to what is acceptable on the streets is one of the very rare references to censorship that indicates a meaning other than banning *per se*

"I've heard many fans say that they do not agree with any form of censorship. Does this mean that they would consider it acceptable to screen explicit sex scenes or adult oriented horror during children's prime time TV? Does it mean that they resent the current film classification certificates of 'Parental Guidance', etc.?"

"I believe that censorship has an important role to play in restricting distribution of material that could be offensive or possibly dangerous and also in warning the public of content that could cause distress, so that those likely to be upset by such items could avoid exposure to them. I would like to see more warnings given so that I could choose to avoid films featuring sexual violence. Whether I would approve or disapprove of the way the sexual violence was depicted is another matter. From the reviews I've seen of *The Accused*, it seems like a film I could thoroughly approve of, but that is not the same as saying I would want to see it -- I have no intention of doing so, I know I would find it very distressing.

"A small symbol at the corner of the screen, or a written warning on cinema posters and video boxes, a warning in newspaper reviews or a verbal warning before a film is shown on TV; something to highlight sexual violence content -- would this be such a deadly restriction of anyone's freedom? Surely not! If you want to give the public a choice, surely an *informed* choice is the best kind?"

"As for restricting or banning pornography, the arguments for this seem quite sensible. Giving women the choice *not* to be constantly besieged by the stuff while about normal pursuits like buying confectionery or stationery seems eminently reasonable to me. I will buy goods from newsagents where pornography is sold, providing that its display is very low-key -- just the titles shown in an overlapping display, the end cover tucked under another sort of magazine is a display that some newsagents opt for. In other newsagents, I have seen covers of gynaecological detail so displayed that you really could not help but notice them -- a bit of tape stuck on the public region the only concession. I can walk a little further to a different newsagent, but why should it always be women inconvenienced in order to avoid porn?"

"The other argument is concern over possible endangerment to women. Throughout history, well before film and magazines were invented, women were raped and lived in



fear of rape. Banning pornography won't change that -- but I don't think that flooding the environment with images of women as objects for male exploitation and abuse is going to make the problem easier, and may well make it more difficult to live with. Hard rape porn magazines will always be with us. Banning won't stop them being available, but will hopefully restrict that availability. In less graphic form, images of rape and titillation are everywhere and not even restricted. One of the most sickening pornographic images I've seen was on a magazine rack in a railway station (well in sight and reach of children). Detective magazine with blazing headline: 'Being raped by this man nearly drove me insane' over a picture of topless blonde bimbo grinning in the usual inane fashion: obvious implication -- insane with pleasure. The same implication is inherent in the tabloids' mixture of reportage of sex crime and titillating images in direct juxtaposition. While sexual aggression against women has always been with us, this relatively new factor in human history, the omnipresence of such imagery all around us, may well prove to have sown a very bitter harvest for women. One only hopes that the emergence of a vociferous feminist movement may help offset this influence."

*In fact, the Oxford English Dictionary definition of "censor" or "censorship" is not very helpful. "A censor" is an official charged to uphold public moral standards, or to expunge passages offensive to morals or the government; "censorship" is what a censor does. But when it comes down to it, a word means what it is used to mean. Perhaps much of the confusion is about what forms of censorship, in what circumstances, may be appropriate to the different forms of sexually offensive or violent material. When it comes to "choice", then only with the information needed to reach a decision can one be said to have real choice; this is an important point.*

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"I suspect Judith of being disingenuous when she complains that I haven't mentioned the effects of being deluged with nudity, sexism, sexual harassment and general misogyny before taking a stand against censorship of pornography. As she well knows, I discuss these things all the time, but even I tire of having to say the same thing over and over, and can't resist the desire to go on, at last, to the next thing. If you want to read about rape and mayhem against women, you need only pick up the paper. Not that it does any good -- I note with increasing irritation that even when I only refer to something which has had extensive coverage on television and even in the tabloids, I still get accused of inventing it all out of some sort of paranoid, sexually crippled man-hating derangement. You might recall that when I referred to male resistance to using condoms in one fanzine, the editor and some letter writers responded that there really aren't men who feel that way anymore, and hinted that I might be writing out of some sort of personal weirdness, despite the fact that as AIDS consciousness grows, TV shows, news reports and newspaper articles have continually covered the disappointingly large number of males who still refuse to use condoms. Or there's that certain fan who suddenly admitted that I might not be paranoid about sexism after all (after years of suggesting that I was) when he heard about the guy in Canada who shot up all those female engineering students -- as if this were the first case of a man who had committed obvious misogynist violence against women. It's no use citing rape statistics, sexist laws, or anecdotes about battered wives to people who have been hearing about these things all along and pretending that sexism and violence against women don't actually happen.

"What is important to me is making sure that no laws are passed which make it even more difficult to discuss or portray sex. You have to bear in mind that in the United Kingdom, there are no actual legal rights, no protections of free speech or freedom of the press. Even in the USA where the constitution guarantees an absolute right to free speech and freedom of the press, the fight to keep that right in practice is hard fought, difficult and continually compromised.

"I don't see how any law of censorship could be written that would really offer women any protection. How could you phrase it in such a way that it would prevent sexism without censoring harmless erotic material or material which is instructive, or discusses sex in political terms? Who is going to interpret these laws? Who will enforce them? Who will the judges be? What makes anyone think that ordinary sexist male cops and courts will interpret publications in this nice non-sexist feminist

way?

"I've taken a good look at Dawn Primarolo's pornography location bill, and no matter how long I stare at it I can't see that any good at all can come of it. It can easily be used to encourage police raids on gay book stores, prosecute any bookseller who carries any publication that contains any ordinary nude portraiture, and make life miserable for lesbian artists and feminists. It is unlikely, however, to make a dent in the incidence of rape and harassment, so I really don't think it's a very good idea."

*And so to what I think, without italics....*

On the one hand, on the other hand... It needs as many hands as Kall, each hand juggling a double-edged sword. I don't know the answers, the way through the maze. If you step back to take in the whole picture, you see a blur of sex-gender-censorship-politics-power-prejudice-exploitation-violence-housework, and how do you get a handle on that? Or (change metaphorical special effects), trying to take on the whole lot at once is as depressingly hopeless as trying to budge a brick wall by banging your head against it.

The alternative is to break the complex picture down, one step, one hand, one sword at a time (call on the freeze-frame magic of philosophical thought), keeping a wary eye out all around to make sure you're not stepping into one of the other whirling swords. It would be helpful to have an idea of the objective we were heading for, there's no map reference for Erotopia City which is located in Equality Fields. Personally, I visualise it with azure-tiled domes, palm trees, and fountains playing in gardens; naturally it's inhabited by enlightened People Like Us who read proper sf not (just) escapist skiffy rubbish, who recycle their trash, believe in reasoned debate, and never buy *The Sun* or *USA Today*. The one thing I know about how to get there is that I wouldn't start out from here. What are the safe steps forward, from here?

Start with the "commercial exploitation of sex": I reckon the handle on this is to carry through the logic of the market, that basis of capitalism. Two moves seem obvious. On the one hand, explicit protests to advertisers and other vendors explaining that such images don't attract you as a customer, but turn you away. Active customer boycott campaigns have worked against South African goods, "walls of death" drift-net fishing for tuna, chlorine bleaching of paper products (including tampons and baby napkins), against Nestle aggressively marketing artificial baby milk to Third World mothers, against aerosols containing CFCs. Sure, they're most effective as a co-ordinated mass campaign. But bunging in a postcard or phonecall of complaint when you personally get narked by an offensive ad, particularly if it's a product you might be expected to buy, gets your point of view into the balance. And the more ordinary you sound, the better; trendy activists may be discounted as a small market segment which is not in any case the target customer profile, but when the Women's Institutes around the land start getting upset, even multinationals cave in: that's what did for CFC propellants in Britain, and why supermarkets are saying they won't stock irradiated food.

The other handle on the market angle is to call, as Lesley does, for clear labelling. The basis of the market is choice, which depends on information on which to base decisions. It's a major issue in relation to nutritional value and additives in processed foods; "environmentally friendly" labelling the latest development. We all complain about the extent to which publishing these days works by assigning books to marketing categories, but equally I suspect we all drift to the shelves handily labelled "sf and fantasy" as likely to contain a book or two we might want to read, then we check out the covers and blurbs which give further clues: "adventure" too often does mean violence. "Feminism" was the growth publishing sector of the eighties, apparently. As a marketing category, "pornography" seems of limited appeal, unless a ban is slapped on it; pornographic material is no problem if it's displayed with discretion (as Lesley notes); it becomes a problem when it's splashed all over your local streets and shop windows, frightening the horses -- or when male partners, workmates, etc. use porn magazines and so on to reinforce their views about women as a subservient, sexually available (unless owned) species.

What is annoying about billboard advertisements and *The Sun*'s use of images which are offensive to substantial segments of "the public" in contexts which ought to be "for general viewing". No one can avoid seeing what's 10 feet high beside their local high street or alongside a station platform: London Transport already do censor ads for acceptability -- nothing political allowed -- but they don't seem to define images of naked or sexually inviting women as "offensive" despite a long history of women complaining about the experience of waiting at lonely stations decorated with such images; it may be that the alarming rise in reported sexual crimes on the Underground will change this, ruling out erotic imagery as inappropriate to the social context.

Perhaps a newspaper which sells itself by titillating images, gossip about stars, and intrusive "human interest" stories ought to be defined as something other than a "newspaper"? If such journals were redefined as "scandal sheets", would that change the way they were marketed, waved about, and read? As I argued on a panel at Mexico 3, in practice much censorship comes down not to banning material but to what gets promoted by the giant marketing conglomerates that now dominate the scene. The rise of such conglomerates, it might be argued, is the opposite of a free market, for they are able to crush competition and artificially restrict choice to the marginally differentiated brand-names they offer.

On the censorship hand, the most threatening spectre on our horizon is the British Official Secrets Act, a laughable legislative implement which makes it an offence for a civil servant to reveal anything at all, for instance, the colour of loo paper in government offices. No whistle-blowing, no more Tisdalls, Pontings, Massiters. Replacing it with a Freedom of Information Act, as the USA has, is the clear step needed; that's the main thing the Campaign for Freedom of Information is pushing, as is Charter 88. But as US readers will know, even with a Freedom of Information Act newspapers and individual journalists still exercise self-censorship. Most journalists don't waste time writing stuff their editors won't allow into print; they write the news that's fit to print. Philip Knightley's very thorough *The First Casualty*, a history of war reporting, shows just how self-censorship operated in war after war. In Korea, where there was (in theory) no official censorship, correspondents actually called for it to be set up; in part because without an official approval apparatus the rule boiled down to "write what you like, and if we don't like it we'll shoot you".

That is, even where there is no formal censorship, less explicit forms of censorship do in fact operate, entirely unaccountably. The market mechanisms I discussed above, for instance, have a degree of self-interest in labelling their goods (of any kind) so that they signal to those people who are looking for that sort of thing, and to warn off others who would complain if taken in by misleading labelling. The film censorship we have which applies neat little labels showing degree of "disturbing" content is an explicit and accountable mechanism for censorship. (According to the latest *New Statesman*, the video industry was so perturbed by the recent publicity against "video nasties" that it is now bending over backwards to establish itself again as a "family-oriented" industry: that is where they perceive the major spending power to be. Videos are subject to the film censorship system, originally set up by the film industry as a voluntary screening, but recognised in legislation on licensing of videos for distribution, which now gives it a statutory status.)

Avedon's point about who does the censorship is the crux of it: who sets the standards? to whom are the censors accountable? who appoints them? Once we have people we trust doing the judging, that will be the sign that we've reached Equality Fields. Until then, the safe principle is that if you can't trust the people running The System, then what you should aim for is to define The System as tightly as possible, to give Them least scope to pervert it. From that perspective, pointblank denial of censorship may be more dangerous than seeking to codify the forms that it does and will in any case take. That is, go for labelling, and campaign on defining what the labels should tell, and how each labelled category should be treated.

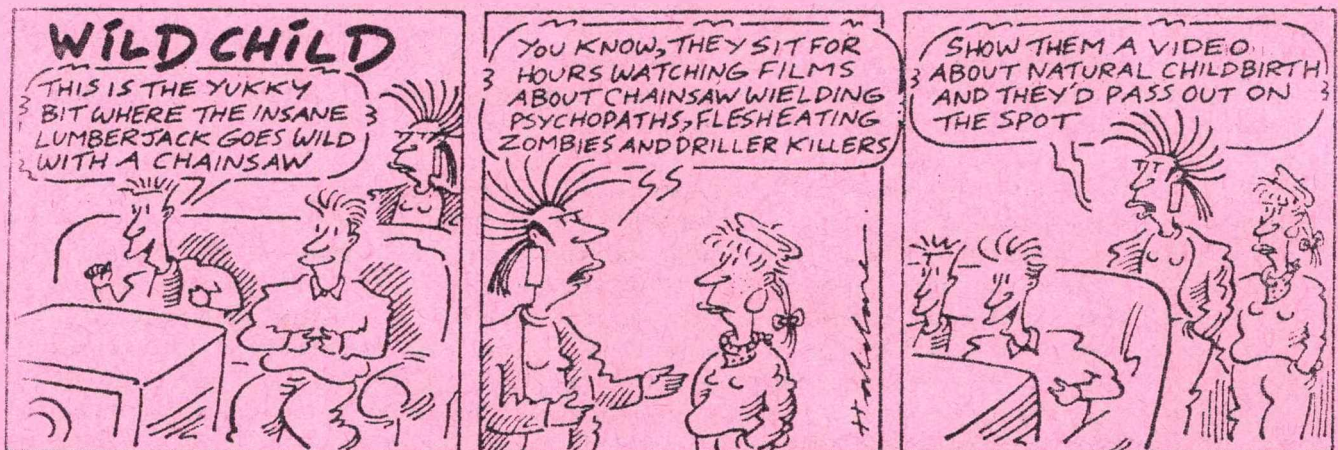
What it takes is not necessarily new legislation: I suspect that much existing

legislation which is not necessarily enforced could be used. After all, I understand that there is still a law on the books providing for anyone not attending Church on Sunday to be fined one shilling. Nor are the relevant powers necessarily specific to pornography or sexual harassment. For instance, the Public Order Act (brought in to deal with peace campaigners and striking miners) makes it an offence to cause "alarm or offence" to a member of the public: if women's views were taken seriously, these provisions might be used to deal with the pervasive atmosphere of menace that keeps over 70% of British women over 60 years of age from ever going out on their own after dark. But much legislation is like speed limits: yes, they exist, but they are hardly enforced and if most drivers don't observe them, local speed limits can be adjusted upwards to fit the speed motorists are prepared to drive, regardless of residents' views on safety. Public decency laws have that sort of flexibility: what will be enforced (within the resources available) is what is seen as the consensual standard of the reasonable man. The reasonable woman is not always consulted. The reasonable person, in essence, is one who thinks the same as the decision-makers. Other legal powers can deal with other aspects of the problem: for instance, paedophile snuff videos are currently the focus of a multiple murder investigation.

Another hand might try to sort out whether billboard displays of sexual imagery which inappropriately eroticise the street environment when it should be neutral, safe ground do not also de-eroticise sex and romance by spreading them like margarine all around the marketplace. A neighbouring hand might consider the extent to which "public places" become threatening because they have become dehumanised, no longer "owned" by local residents let alone some sense of local community, leaving a neglected litter-strewn vacuum for commercial display to through-passing motorists. On another hand, while "community" is a cosy word that stands for cake-stalls, mums and families (women as the pillars and conscience of society), it also stands for gossip and ostracism of anyone different -- which brings us back to the freedom, and risks, of labelling. A city is a network of multiple groups, each embracing their own labels (political lesbian, feminist, sf fan) and pinning labels on neighbouring groups (vanilla dyke, chauvinist, Trekkie): we define ourselves by what groups we are not. As Mog said, factionalism.

All of which has kept ranging away from the feminist starting points, relating how we think through gender relations to all sorts of other political issues and processes. But then, how can you separate half the human race from the rest of human life? Feminism isn't a ghetto, but a perspective.

All life is here; even gardening is punctuated by the shameless spectacle of bumble-bees fucking snap-dragons... which I think counts as consensual intercourse rather than rape. There is, however, nothing monogamous about the hymenoptera-angiosperm relationship; the bumble-bees spread their fertilising favours around the nasturtiums, convolvus...



# I LEARNED TO CROCHET IN THE SLAMMER

Andi Shechter

In 1971, I was in college in New London, Connecticut. I had a longstanding interest in "doing good" and, after the massacre of inmates at Attica prison in upstate New York, I began thinking about a career focused on some sort of prison work; that or Native Americans. I had started out thinking I'd major in sociology and become a social worker, until halfway through my second sociology class when I threw a book across the room and declared the field full of crap. Toward the end of the school year, I read a notice in the college paper about a volunteer programme connected in some way with the "State Correctional Institute, Niantic". This translated as the state prison for women. I enquired about it and was told to check back the following semester, which I dutifully did.

When I showed up that next semester, I was greeted with: "The two people who were going to run the programme aren't going to. Would you like to?" I was 19, didn't know a thing about organising, but knew that if the programme was going to exist Someone Had To Do It. Thus began "Niantic Volunteers". Describing the red tape involved in setting it up would take too much time. I ran the programme for at least four semesters, and every semester I had to start from scratch, telling the same story to a different person, explaining who and what we were, getting clearances, waiting for phone calls to be returned.

Somehow, in spite of bureaucracy and the semester system, we got the programme going. Six or eight students (there was only one male student involved -- there were not yet that many men at my previously all-female college), sometimes more, sometimes less, headed for Niantic every Tuesday evening. One reason we were a valuable resource was that we were treated like the clergy, or attorneys, in that there were no limits on the number of visits we made. Family and friends of inmates had far more restrictions. Of course, like most prisons Niantic was in an out-of-the-way location, not easily reached by public transport and almost inaccessible from the major cities in Connecticut. We were, I believe, a welcome diversion. The students were not trying to save souls, or accomplish anything great. I never questioned anyone's motivations. I assume we believed that as white college students we had privileges that others did not, that prisons were horrible places, and/or that we needed to learn and understand if we were going to help people or change society. (In 1971, changing "the system" and making justice meaningful were serious commitments for those of us who were, or were becoming, "political".)

In the early 1970s, the population of a women's prison was quite different from today. As I remember, there were fewer than two hundred inmates, the vast majority of whom were doing time for crimes directly or indirectly related to drugs -- dealing, obviously, or prostitution or shoplifting to support a habit. One small quiet woman I got to know told me that she was in for grand theft. "There was this room full of antiques...." she once told me. Most of the women were there for non-violent and what is known as victimless crime. They seemed average, very ordinary. They were both black and white, came mostly from the cities, and were not so very different from you and me. And yet, my opinions and impressions changed dramatically in the first year of the programme, when I realised that but for accidents of birth, better educational opportunities, parents who cared a little more, and a little more money, we were alike. This was not some separate species of person I could help -- this was some young woman I might be sort of friendly with, who got stuck in the wrong life. I was not helping to rehabilitate someone who was obviously wrong or evil. I was helping pass the time with someone who made some bad decisions, some bad choices, and didn't have any alternatives.

In some ways, the students weren't very different from the women in the prison --

but some of the women grew up, as I did, in the working class neighbourhoods of Hartford, and we knew the same places and the same schools. We lived in completely separate and often incomprehensible worlds, but we students had the freedom to go places -- so we went to Niantic. We helped on the prison newspaper, and did other things, but mostly we visited, and talked, and tried to help relieve the monotony and boredom of the place.

One night, after the programme had been running for some time, we arrived at the prison, and found it quieter than usual. No one stopped us, so we continued on to the building where we helped put out the newspaper. After about half an hour or so, we learned that the prison was actually locked down, that someone was missing, and that they were going through a recount and a search of the grounds. I was baffled. The woman who was supposed to be missing was one of the most together, intelligent people I'd met there. She had a very short time left to serve, and it made no sense that she'd jeopardise her chances by escaping. After an hour or so, we learned that she hadn't escaped. She hadn't gone anywhere. Somehow, during the previous head count, she was missed because her closet door had been open, or she'd been in the bathroom, and either hadn't responded or hadn't been seen.

Boredom. Oh Lord, it was boring at Niantic. Compared to many prisons, this was not a horrid institution. There was some form of privacy, minimum security, and it was quieter than any number of larger facilities. There was however, little to do during the day, and nothing at night. So one thing that the inmates did to keep busy, besides the endless TV watching, was to knit and crochet. It seemed like everyone there was busy with yarn. They could arrange to buy yarn, and spent hours making everything in the world.

As I sat there, week after week, watching, I realised that I could, at last, figure this stuff out. My mother was an expert knitter, but I am left-handed, and all attempts to teach me had been failures. I couldn't work in reverse. I still can't knit. After several weeks of watching, I asked for help from someone and realised that suddenly, somehow, I could crochet. I don't know how, but it had sunk into my brain. I either borrowed or bought yarn and a hook and got started. Crocheted vests were very "in" back then, and I recall making a lot of things with granny squares.

The woman who did the most to help me, Elaine, was someone I got to know pretty well. I wasn't very good, and she was an expert, so I commissioned some work from her. I paid money into her account and bought her the yarn for a gold crocheted poncho, which I wore to death throughout college. When Elaine got out of Niantic, she called me, I wanted to get together with her, but never did. I didn't have a car, and never could or never did follow up.

When the conversation turned personal, one of my main topics was what someone would do when she got out of Niantic. I just didn't want to think of anyone going back in. I didn't really care what they'd done to get there. This was a really important issue to Elaine, for good reason. She was pregnant while she was there, and when we talked about the future she said she planned never to go back. She wanted to take care of her baby. Elaine's kid was born with one of the most extensive hand-made wardrobes any child has ever known. I swear this kid had two years worth of baby clothes.

I have no idea what it's like today at Niantic. I know that prison populations have changed and that Niantic probably reflects the tougher times. It was a prison, and in every single situation the women there were controlled and told what to do and treated like low-intelligence drones. I also know that I've never quite forgotten what it felt like in there, and hope that it made it a little less tedious and awful for the inmates to have someone to talk with, laugh with, hang out with once a week.

I never did learn how Elaine made out. When I think about her, I believe, because I want to, that she made it. What's really corny and true, though, is that I don't think that in eighteen years I've crocheted a single thing without Elaine and Niantic coming into my thoughts.

# MESSING ABOUT ON THE RIVER, OR HOW WE NEARLY DROWNED IN TEXAS

Joseph Nicholas

"When you get to these particular rapids," said the driver of the van taking us and our hired boats up to the launching point from the boatyard at Gruene, "aim to the left of the little tree standing all on its own, then turn hard right." "A little tree all on its own?" said Sherry. "Sure," said the van driver. "I'll just pull in here and let you take a look at it." He stopped the van on a curve of the road above the Guadalupe River and told us to look out of the window to our right. We did so. I couldn't see any such tree, and neither could anyone else. "Don't worry," said the driver, "you will!" As we drove off, Mike remarked that the level of the river had clearly risen some three or four feet since they went down it a couple of weeks ago. "All that rain, presumably," I said, remembering the downpour Judith and I had experienced in New Orleans a few days previously and the flooded fields and silt-laden rivers visible on our flight from there to Austin only the day before this -- but if Mike hadn't mentioned that the water level had risen I'd never have guessed. After all, the river looked fairly innocuous to me -- water rushing across the stones, trees with the tips of their branches trailing in the stream, a light overcast and the promise of some hazy sunshine; the babbling brook, the sylvan glade, the Grand Old British Tradition of messing about on the river....

It was doubtless just that sort of nonsense -- another manifestation of the English rural idyll with which I dealt in the seventh issue -- which had bewitched me into enthusiasm for boating on the Guadalupe in the first place, although because this was Texas rather than the Edwardian Thames of Jerome K. Jerome cucumber sandwiches, parasols and striped blazers were right out. We were using not skiffs or punts but what were popularly called "kayaks" -- inflatables shaped rather like canoes, which reminded me irresistibly of the ones in which people habitually splash around at the seaside but which were much larger and tougher; you could apparently run them right over the rocks and they wouldn't tear at all. There had been some debate about the type of paddles we would use -- whether they would be single-bladed ones of the kind the Indians in bad Westerns are always shown as wielding, or competition-style ones with a blade at each end -- and while I was changing the others plumped for a modification of the latter, with the blades offset at ninety degrees to each other. Mike showed us how to use it once we'd arrived at the launching point: dig in with the blade on one side, as normal, then use the upper, non-stroking hand to rotate the paddle a quarter-turn towards you as you pulled it out to position the blade on the other side for entry into the water. Then repeat in reverse. And repeat. And repeat. After several tries on dry land, I began to get the hang of the movements required: dig, pull, lift, rotate, dig, pull.... Then we put on our flotation jackets and pushed off, and I discovered that once in the water it was as much as I could do to keep the damn boat pointing in the right direction, never mind fart about with all that fancy paddling. Like, messing about on the river is *hard work*.

Quite why generations of people should have continued to indulge in it is something of a mystery -- perhaps an atavistic, devolutionary urge to return to the embrace of the watery environment that gave rise to the mammalian species in the first place, or a decayed latter-day manifestation of Britain's historical associations with the sea, from the defeat of the Spanish Armada to the control of the trade routes that sustained an overseas empire. By the usual process in which convenient populist myths come to be substituted for complex historical explanations, maritime prowess has thus come to be perceived as an expression of national identity, and anything which unites the individual Briton with the sea helps nurture and sustain the ideological and cultural formations that have accreted around it -- although in fact the identity of the nation concerned is not Britain but England, the elision between the two having been successfully perpetrated by the ruling classes in the histories they construct to legitimise their vision of society. Despite which, I personally can claim some direct relationship with the sea through my great-grandfather Murdoch

McKenzie, who ran away to sea to join the Royal Navy at the age of fourteen and worked his way up to become a commissioned warrant officer in command of a ship chasing slave traders during the later years of the American Civil War -- not, you understand, that he was therefore violating Britain's position of official neutrality, since the traders in question had initially violated British laws forbidding slavery by taking people from her overseas colonies. By all accounts, this was a pretty terrible and even useless business, since any slave trader who felt himself in danger of being overhauled would simply throw his human cargo overboard and thus dispose of the evidence; it may be coincidence that my great-grandfather was eventually retired from active service on the grounds of invalidity, although this was thought to be a euphemism for the first part of an equation whose other two components were sodomy and the lash. But then the sight of so many people being deliberately drowned would surely have driven anyone to it.

And if my great-grandfather had not run away to sea? Actually, he did it twice -- the first time, he was brought back and told that if he ran away again the family would disown him and he would be cut off from his inheritance. Which they duly did; thus he fell out of line for succession to the Lairdship of Ross & Cromarty (although as a second son he would have been unlikely to gain the title). But in his position, and at his age, who can blame him -- if you had to look forward to a life of collecting tenants' rents, shooting deer and hosting balls for the local gentry, or seeing the world from the poop deck of a first-rater, which would you have chosen? Answer: young boys love adventure. Or at least the prospect of adventure -- as Nicholas Rodger put it in *The Wooden World: An Anatomy Of The Georgian Navy* (a book that deals only with the middle third of the eighteenth century, and almost wholly with the period of the Seven Years War with France from 1756 to 1763, but whose sentiment here is surely applicable to the nineteenth century also): "The sea was a unique and in many ways forbidding prospect. It was not only a hard and dangerous life, but it took a boy away from family and friends in a peculiarly stark and uncompromising way. One thing which drew boys to go to sea in spite of it all was undoubtedly the romance of it. It may be that boys had always longed to go to sea, but the outlook of the eighteenth century was especially encouraging to them. Among all classes there was an increasing interest and pleasure in the created world for its own sake, in the beauties of nature and the curiosities of foreign parts. Foreign travel was undertaken for the first time as a pleasure in itself rather than a means to an end. In this new, outward-looking world of curiosity, the sea was attractive as a highway to the new sights and experiences of distant lands. For the first time men joined the Navy to see the world." I have no idea how much of the world my great-grandfather saw, since family knowledge of his life is astonishingly scant; what is recorded is that, as a commissioned warrant officer, he had the right to carry a sword with a white handle -- as opposed to the swords with red handles carried by commissioned officers who trained at Dartmouth Naval College rather than worked their way up from able seaman. Perhaps disgusted by such classist nonsense, and by being placed on the reserve list and given command of a borstal ship, he finally resigned from the Navy and went off to captain clipper ships on the tea and wool runs from China and Australia (albeit none of the famous ones, such as *Cutty Sark* and *Thermopylae*). He lived until a great age, at least into his nineties: my mother remembers being taken down from Manchester to visit him at his house in Plymouth Devonport at the age of two, and the little round eyrie he had on the roof where he could sit looking out over the Sound, his telescope pressed to his eye, watching the traffic, presumably remembering his own time at sea.

Clipper ships had to cope with the Roaring Forties; we, by contrast, had only rapids to face. From the banks of the river, they seemed fine: a narrow channel, a little bit of white water, an obviously rougher passage. But as I approached my first one, I suddenly realised how rough: the current seemed to grab at the boat, and I had to work hard with the paddle to keep the nose straight as it rocked heavily in the turbulence; a couple of small waves broke across me, I scraped sideways against a rock I hadn't noticed was there, and then I was through, bobbing gently as the current smoothed out. Three seconds of terror, mingled with the odd frisson of delight. Or vice versa. I looked across at Judith in her boat, and she looked back at me. "Gosh," I said, "is this all there is to it -- moments of crashing through



rapids interspersed with long periods of just drifting along?" "Oh bugger," she said, "I forgot to take my hearing aid off." I laughed, and wished that I'd found a way of protecting my camera from the water so that I could have brought it with me -- photographs of the rapids as we approached and left them, or of the banks of the river, or just of stretches of the river itself, would have been an addition to the record of our trip, but this first set of rapids had indicated that the plastic bags I'd initially had in mind would have been quite insufficient. As it was, I was now sitting in an inch of water, and beginning to feel a bit cold around the bum.

Mike paddled up to remind us of the little tree somewhere up ahead that we should be looking out for, and to give me some more instruction in the art of rotating the paddle backwards every time it came out of the water. Dig, pull, lift, rotate, dig, pull...the trouble was that I couldn't co-ordinate these movements with the actions required to propel the boat forwards and keep its nose pointed in the direction I wanted to go, so had to abandon the scientific method in favour of a non-rotating grip which ensured that whenever a blade entered the water it did so at the correct angle but kept the upper, non-stroking hand bent over at the wrist. And even then the grip kept slipping....

So we passed through another set of rapids, so we continued down the river. Mike paddled on ahead, I fell behind Judith and Sherry. All three had gone from my sight when I noticed that I was finally approaching the little tree the van driver had told us about; one that would probably be standing clear of the river but whose own island was now, after the rain, entirely submerged. Off to its right was a larger, only partly submerged cluster of rocks covered with trees and bushes, and between the two a slight ripple of white water. I aimed the nose of the boat well to the left, trailing the blade of the paddle sideways, setting myself up for the sharp turn to the right once I drew level with the tree; then, feeling thoroughly pleased with myself, executed it swiftly and cleanly. The rapids were dead ahead; a few short strokes with the paddle helped line me up, and then I shot through them, rocking heavily and shipping water, feeling at any moment that I was about to capsize, and feeling immense relief that I hadn't.

Then I saw what we hadn't been told about -- the weir. Ahead and to my left, requiring a ninety degree turn to face it properly, a three-foot vertical drop with a tall standing wave immediately beyond. And was that a flotation cushion from somebody's boat just turning in the wave? All of a sudden, the river seemed very dangerous. The current grabbed at the tail of my boat, pushing me sideways towards the weir. Frantically, I stabbed the paddle into the water, straining to turn the nose towards it. To no avail; I had just time to realise that it was really too late to try anything, and then went over the weir broadside on -- down the drop, across the trough, up the side of the standing wave; and over. With no time to gasp in a mouthful of air, I was suddenly upside down under water, and choking on it. I felt something brush the top of my head -- the riverbed, my paddle, perhaps my sunglasses being torn off by the current -- and then my flotation jacket had dragged my head back above the surface. My hair was streaming in my eyes, the current was shoving me hard in the back, but my feet and shins were dragging along the riverbed; and I realised that I could stand up. I grabbed at a tree root, snatched at a rock, and on my second try (knocked down on my first by my paddle hitting me in the back) managed to get my feet underneath me and hauled myself in to the right bank. I was alive -- but if that was a flotation cushion I'd seen just before the weir sent me under, then what had happened to everyone else?

A few yards downstream, on the opposite bank, Sherry was pulling two of the boats out and attempting to drain the water from them. I had to yell twice to get her attention: "Where is everyone?" Perhaps responding to the note of panic in my voice, she replied, simply, "Judith is over there" -- meaning, on my bank of the river. I went crashing through the undergrowth, and found her, as soaked as I. "I saved your paddle, dear," she said. "Fuck the paddle," I said, "and fuck this river too." Then, obscurely, I felt behind her ear to see if her hearing aid was still there.

Eventually, we re-assembled ourselves, and related our individual weir stories. Mike

and Sherry had gone over without incident, although when coming off the rapids Mike had been wrongly positioned and had to turn his boat so that he went over backwards -- and then had gone some way downstream before realising that the rest of us hadn't followed and, hearing some shouting, had decided to sit and wait for us....only to end up paddling furiously back and forth to capture the flotation cushions, paddle and a waterlogged boat that had drifted down to him, before setting off back up the river against the current and wearing himself out to reach us. Judith had gone over second, and had been positioned as near straight as would have made no difference if the current had been weaker -- and as her boat filled with water and foundered under her she looked, said Sherry, remarkably calm. "It felt," said Judith, "just like being dumped by the surf at Albany." I had gone over last, and my immersion had been the most spectacular, if seen by no one. I had lost my sunglasses and the cans of Coke I was carrying in the back of my boat, Judith had lost one of her shoes, but we were in fine shape. Once back on the river, it was as though it had never happened.

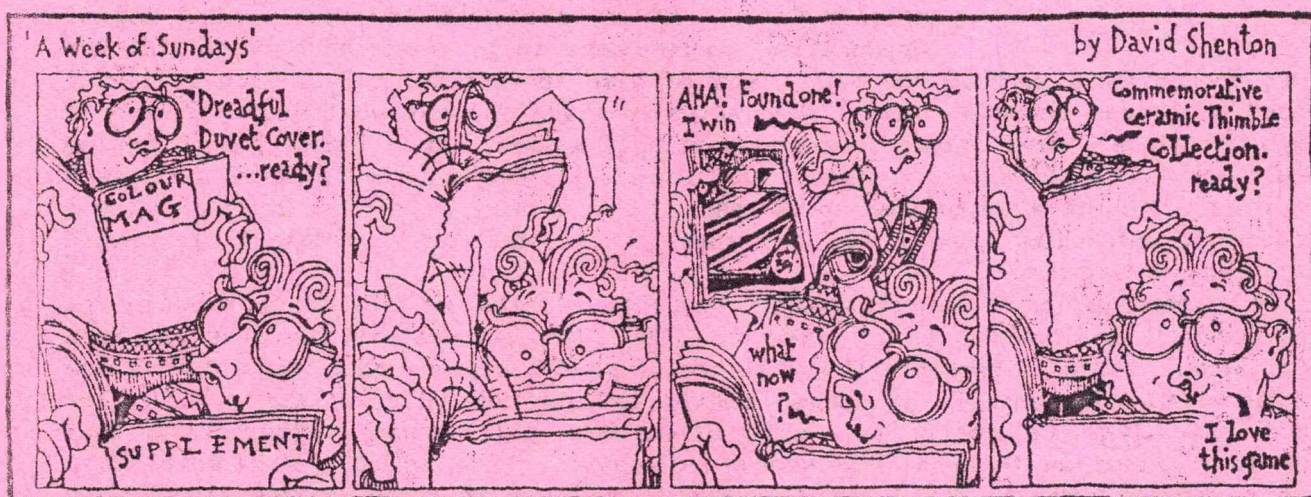
Later, as we shared a beer from her supplies, Sherry and I were passed by a group of good old boys drifting along on a linked group of giant inner tubes -- or "toobs", as the boatyard at Gruene called them -- guzzling from their own cache, kept in a locker floated in one of the tubes so its bottom half stayed wet. "Hey, longhair!" they called, "bit long in the back there!" "Assholes," said Sherry, "you can count on them to ruin your day." As the four of us prepared to overtake the toobers further down the river, Sherry advised Judith to address me as "husband" if they said anything to us. She didn't have to; perhaps they'd worked that much out for themselves. At least they didn't see my dangly ear-rings (which, amazingly, had not been lost at the weir).

Later still, we came to another large set of rapids, divided in two by an island in mid-stream; here Judith became stuck on one of the rocks and, with both insufficient leverage and depth of water to refloat her boat, had to get out and, shoeless, be helped to clamber down from rock to rock. I went through what I thought was the safest channel in the rapids, but which I was told shortly afterwards was more dangerous than it looked: frothing white water meant rocks near the surface meant a danger of getting badly hurt if I was thrown out. Er, I said, and set about trying to bail out my boat with Judith's remaining shoe, but having no success attempted to climb into another in order to turn mine over -- only to fall between the two with shrieks of laughter from all present. I felt very sheepish. As we pushed off again, I saw, not a foot from me and level with my chest, two dragonflies mating on the wing, the long abdomen of the male above curved down to meet the tip of the female below. Then, a few feet further away, a flash of colour, a whirl of tiny wings, something appearing to stand in the air above the river before flying off again; a hummingbird. Native Texas wildlife, of all kinds....

All too soon, it was over -- through the last, small, set of rapids, and there we were at the boatyard. The sun had failed to appear and there had even been a minute of two of rain, but in between the rapids and the dunkings had been long, timeless interludes in which we'd leaned back and just drifted with the current, letting the afternoon take us as it found us, expecting nothing and doing nothing. Perhaps this is the main reason that so many people seem to like messing about on rivers: because it offers an opportunity to step outside the artificial currents that dictate the pace of human affairs and surrender instead to a more natural flow from which civilisation has purportedly cut us off. Thus, perhaps, students go punting on the Isis at Oxford, not just because it's something one ought to be seen doing but because it's relaxing -- and although never a student there it's something that I once did too, so many years ago that until recently I'd quite forgotten it. This is perhaps just as well, since the enthusiasm of my poling was such that I managed to thrust it firmly enough into the riverbed to be faced with the choice of either hanging onto it as the boat floated away from beneath me (as in Jerome K. Jerome's apocryphal tale of the man who was left up the pole) or letting go and leaving it behind. I did the latter; but we were close enough to other, larger boats moored along the bank to be able to use them to haul ourselves back and wrench the pole out, and so were never in any danger of being cast helplessly adrift, pleading sheepishly for assistance from other boating parties who would surely have guffawed hugely. Mind you, it would probably have been blackly hilarious if we had; the sort of wild story on which one can dine out

for years afterwards, adding new and more dangerous-seeming twists with every telling. The Darwinian struggle for existence, to conquer and subdue nature, to rebuff its rude and sudden attempts to drag one beneath its placid-seeming surface to confront its ancient primordial force, etc. etc. etc.; was it not only two days before launching ourselves upon the Guadeloupe that Judith and I had taken a trip around the canals and bayous of the Mississippi at New Orleans, with the pilot-cum-guide telling us that, yes, there were alligators out there, and that we should watch out for water moccasins which might try to come aboard? Not that they were likely to be attracted to a chugging boatload of noisy, chattering tourists, but such remarks probably helped spice up the duller bits of the trip, where oil extraction platform gave way to pipe-laying barge gave way to some other boring artefact of the late industrial era.

And for dinner following the Mississippi trip, I had an alligator stew -- an authentic taste of the frontier. Well, Cajun cooking, anyway. "The principle of this," said Judith, "is that anything which doesn't run off is killed and eaten." It was certainly different. I wonder if my great-grandfather ever tasted any?



## BEATING A PATH TO YOUR DOOR

Mike Shearing

I woke up on Tuesday morning at 4.30am to the sound of scratching in the kitchen -- my mousetrap had worked again for the third time in a little over twenty-four hours.

The problem seems to have started, as all problems do, when the Thatchers moved in, and disturbed the mice from their home in the loft. It took me a little time to realise it -- at first I thought it was just the packaging biodegrading when I found holes in my packets of biscuits. I only really cottoned on when I went to put my football boots on and a couple of dozen chick peas fell out from where they were evidently being hoarded for a rainy day.

At first I didn't mind sharing with the mice, until my landlady confided to me that besides their visible and easily removed droppings, they wee every three seconds. I didn't fancy watching the house cat Chaucer eat them alive, and he showed little interest in or capacity for catching them anyway, so I decided to try the organic approach. I left eight uncooked red kidney beans out on the fridge overnight. Result: seven red kidney beans and a pool of sick on the cooker, but continued mouse activity on subsequent nights.

My new successful method involves a chick pea, a piece of blue-tak, an egg cup and a saucepan (no sticky-back plastic). Design details on request for a substantial fee. I understand that mice will not be able to find their way home if they are taken more than half a mile away, so for the past couple of nights I have been tramping through the village in the early hours carrying a saucepan and a piece of board. I hope I can get my trap patented before I am certified.

# THE LETTER COLUMN

*Edited by Joseph Nicholas*

*Those readers who flip through fanzines before actually reading them from start to finish will have already noticed the vastness of this letter column. So much, then, for our preference for short ones -- although by forcing us to keep everything else fairly short it should provide you all with less to comment on, and thus allow us to restore the balance in the next issue. Such, at any rate, are the plans. Robert Burns, I recall, had something to say about those....*

## TIME OF THE SEASON

John D. Berry  
525 19th Avenue East  
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Washington 98112  
USA

"Entropy takes many forms. Around here it seems to attack the calendar, even the day and the hour, finding the weak bits and rotting them until, like leprous limbs, they drop off and leave a lessened whole. There's not enough time, in other words. As if to confirm the once-popular Law of Compensation, there seems to be more than enough physical

Stuff around here; perhaps the dead limbs of time convert themselves into stacks of unread books and unsorted paper. I've actually given thought to hiring a Tidier (a Tidyist?), since I seem unable to keep up with it myself. By a Tidier I mean not so much a maid or a housekeeper, since I can usually keep up with my part of that, as a secretary. This is a weird idea to me, and so far nothing at all has come of it, but I found it refreshing when I realised that I *could* do such a thing, if it seemed warranted. A way out!

"I've been giving a lot of thought in recent months to this whole question of time and work and demands on my attention. The twentieth-century disease is Too Much Information. (This is probably linked to the twentieth-century question, which is How We Perceive.) My mail is no longer mostly letters and fanzines (hasn't been for years, actually); it's mostly junk mail, often from well-meaning organisations that hope to convince me to send them money. (Sometimes I do, which spawns more mail.) When a fanzine does arrive, I usually skim it and put it aside, unless it's from a close friend (sometimes even then!), because even such a welcome arrival is another obligation, another Thing To Do, and the list of these is already endless. The obvious response to this untenable situation is to shut down, to accept no input but what I most desire, to cut myself off from all outside information except a small, handle-able flow of pre-chosen input. (It occurs to me that this is what kings and presidents and dictators do, of necessity, and how they can get completely out of touch with the world beyond their sycophants and informers.) The trouble with this is that I would cease to participate in the world; it's an essentially selfish approach. There must be some better answer, some way of changing my thinking about incoming information so that I can cut out the crap and keep to the important stuff, yet keep my filters permeable so that the new and unexpected can reach me. Darned if I know how to do it.

"The reason I share a part of Joseph's lust for tidiness is that my mind reflects the world around me, on a very local scale. If my home office is cluttered, it's very, very hard to sit down in it and think clearly and get any work done; it becomes much easier to wallow in cluttered thoughts of inertia. If I gaze out the back door and the blackberries are growing over the garage roof and the thicket of Scotch broom is dead and the grass is high and the kids next door are screaming antiphonally, my mind turns to turgid jello and I can neither relax nor get to work."

Exactly. At work, I have the tidiest desk and the tidiest files, simply because this makes it so much easier to concentrate on the tasks at hand. My colleagues, by contrast, seem to thrash around in a sea of dislocated paper which would prevent me from ever getting started -- and Judith's desk here, as you'll know, looks pretty cluttered too. I can never find anything on it, but then perhaps I'm not supposed to!

We also receive large amounts of junk mail, also from well-meaning organisations; the curse of joining such things in the first place is that they sell their mailing lists to each other, and before you know it you're inundated with appeals. We've

received so many in the past few years that we can now recognise one without having to open it first. Mind you, since we moved the number has fallen off dramatically....

Sue Thomason  
111 Albemarle Road  
York  
North Yorks YO2 1EP

"In one of the intervals when I wasn't typing at work this afternoon (I can't stare out of the window, it's too high), I noticed a peculiar thing about my perception of time. I have a watch with a second display. If I glance at it unprepared, the first number-change always seems to take a much longer interval of time than subsequent seconds. Why is this? Do I always catch the number just after it's changed? Or is there some perceptual trick at work, the new stimulus taking up more subjective brain-time to process the information? Or is time really distorted by an observer perceiving it passing? I bet it doesn't pass regularly at all. Certainly 'creation time', in which I'm absorbed in doing something is always a moment. Sometimes a long moment, an hours-long moment, but if the creative activity is going well, time is distorted around it. 'Bored time' takes ages to pass; whole unpleasant half-hours can be fitted into five minutes or so."

#### THE SONG OF THE CLOGGED-UP ROAD

Harry Andruschak  
P.O. Box 5309  
Torrance  
California 90510  
USA

"I giggled at Chuck Harris's comment that he was impressed by the ease with which one can drive from one place to another in the United States. That may be true on the roads between cities, but just about every city in the USA suffers from traffic jams. Some have it just during rush hours, but some, like Los Angeles, are crowded all the time and gridlocked several hours a day.

"The US mostly feels that somehow, some way, public transport should pay for itself. Only recently have subsidies become acceptable again, mostly because Reagan is no longer president. In the June primaries for the gubernatorial elections later this year, Californians approved two new state bond issues. One is proudly titled *Passenger Rail & Clean Air Bond Act 1990*, which will fund rail improvements and capital spending on Amtrak, and the other is called *Traffic Congestion Relief & Spending Limitation Act 1990*, which raised taxes on petrol. But it will be several years before any of this starts to change things.

"Right now, for example, I have to leave the house by 6.00am so that I can drive on the freeway fast enough to arrive at work by 6.30am. If I leave at 6.05 or 6.10, I'm in danger of hitting the morning gridlock, with bumper-to-bumper traffic, and might not get to work on time -- although I don't start until 7.00am. Likewise, I leave at 3.30pm, and just barely miss the start of the afternoon gridlock, which lasts until 7.00pm or so.

"Public transport in LA is slow and dangerous. (For me, to bus to work is an invitation to be beaten and robbed, because I'm a white man travelling through black slums.) Anyone who has money in LA has a car, so we now have the worst traffic mess in the world. I doubt if even London can match Wilshire Boulevard at 5.00pm."

Harry Warner  
423 Summit Avenue  
Hagerstown  
Maryland 21740  
USA

"I never thought the time would come when I agreed with you rather than Chuck Harris, but it has happened, involving new roads. There is an additional problem connected with their construction that you didn't mention: not only the space taken and the pollutants, but the tendency for a new road to attract new construction which will further deplete the greenery and do other undesirable things. If the new road has unlimited access, it will soon be lined with businesses and residential developments. If it is a controlled or limited access road, construction will cluster around the spots where traffic can enter or leave it. Many commercial enterprises attracted to a new road aren't new ones but old ones that abandon their former sites, which often remain idle and a detriment to the neighbourhood. Two of the major interstate highways on the East Coast, I-70 and I-81, meet just a few miles south of Hagerstown. In the quarter-century since their completion, an enormous hunk of former woodland and agricultural land in the immediate vicinity has been paved over. The largest commercial development in that area has grown to cover an area about one-half mile long and one-half mile wide, and by the end of century it will probably

expand to a full square mile of parking lots, ugly buildings and access roadways. Meanwhile scores of former stores and factories in nearby Hagerstown stand idle because their former tenants have moved to such new sites."

A similar thing has happened in the UK. The eighties saw a craze for the construction of hypermarkets on the fringes of urban areas, which apart from requiring new roads to connect them to the existing network also drew commerce away from town centres -- leading to the eventual closure of the businesses left behind, unable to compete with the economies of scale enjoyed by the hypermarkets. And, frankly, we'd rather buy our fruit and vegetables at a friendly corner shop rather than some anonymous great warehouse!

#### OTHER SNAPSHOTS OF THE SOVIETS

Mike Glickeohn  
508 Windermere Avenue  
Toronto  
Ontario M6S 3L6  
Canada

"Despite my lack of interest in matters horticultural, I thoroughly enjoyed Judith's article in *FTT* 8 on your new abode. I suppose because almost all of the British fans I've visited and stayed with have been buying their own homes, I'd developed an erroneous belief that this was the normal state of affairs amongst British fans, so Judith's

descriptions of your change from such a tiny flat was a real eye-opener. I can't imagine two people with your active intelligence crammed into such a small space as your Denbigh Street flat. I've got a four-bedroom house and I can't wait until I can afford the mortgage payments on my own, without a housemate, so I can take over the whole place for myself and finally feel that I've got enough space. I've also got a garden some 120 feet long that I'm forced to mow all summer and rake the leaves off all fall, but there'd not be much use offering you an allotment. I get sparrows by the ton, a few cardinals, a blue jay or two, and some doves provided they all stay out of the claws of the neighbour's cat; but I've never seen a blue tit. I make no effort to feed these birds, but this isn't entirely due to ornithological indifference. The neighbour's cat is very good at catching well-fed distracted birds, so I feel I'm actually doing my bit to preserve that natural environment by failing to lull them into a false sense of security. (At least, that's my story, and I'm sticking to it.)

"Joseph's very political and historical trip report was extremely interesting reading. I doubt I'll ever visit the Soviet Union (and if I did it probably wouldn't bear much resemblance to yours), so I got considerable vicarious enjoyment from what he wrote about. I was a little surprised, though, that there was no mention of the Moscow McDonalds which must have opened shortly after your visit and must surely have been a topic of conversation in Moscow. (They say that the opening day's volume of business was very impressive, but it doubled the next day when Muscovites realised the people in uniform were taking orders instead of giving them.)"

In fact (although I can't remember the exact date), I think the Moscow McDonalds opened a couple of months after our visit, and although it probably was a topic of conversation amongst Muscovites we heard not a word of it -- after all, neither of us speak the language, and while we were there had to rely either on what our guides told us or what we could see and deduce for ourselves. We did share tea and grapes with some old men in a tea-house in Dushanbe (who were quite evidently fascinated by Western tourists in general) but otherwise we interacted with the citizenry not at all. Which was of course a great pity -- although if I had mentioned the Moscow McDonalds in my travelogue it would probably have been to denounce it as another example of Western consumerist mediocrity corrupting the local culture, etc. etc.

Zy Nicholson  
University of Warwick  
Coventry CV4 7AL

"It's rather cute to think of Joseph being mistaken for a metallist in the Soviet Union. Despite being something of a metallist myself, I was quite disappointed to discover that East European heavy metal falls into two categories:

crap thrash and crap heavy rock. And they shove these really crappy guitar solos in just about everything. I think it's a question of context, and I could write a whole thesis on why it will be ten years before they produce anything like Faith No More. But I won't. Fortunately, I could also speculate that a group like Loop would never find success in any country that doesn't have a thriving soft drugs market....

"Much as I share Steve Brown's enthusiasm for The Pixies, I feel it ought to be explained that they are only brilliant in context, and that to chuck out the rest of my record collection would deny any contrast and render them less interesting."

Pascal Thomas  
7 Rue des Saules  
31400 Toulouse  
France

"Joseph's travelogue was the *pièce de résistance* of FTT 8. Central Asia has always held a special fascination for me, as this vast place from which came all those different tribes which pestered the Chinese, often conquered them, and promptly vanished into the Chinese demographic sea in a generation or two. Think of all the diversity which got lost that way. I guess the Chinese, on top of their numbers, had this advantage of a totalitarian bureaucratic system with a centuries-long tradition of entrenchment.

"Totalitarianism (if that's the word) is not what it used to be anyway. Seeing how greedily it is dismantling itself, I realised that I erred in thinking, a few years ago, that it was succeeding, i.e., was going to stay in place for ever. Utopia is not for tomorrow, but I share Joseph's buoyant optimism in the redeeming value of capitalism -- er, I guess I mean peaceful economic co-operation."

David Redd  
48 Cardigan Road  
Haverfordwest  
Dyfed SA61 2QN

"My first impression of Joseph's Soviet article was that he had tried to be nice to everyone, painting an unwarrantedly rosy picture of the places you visited, but on looking back over what he'd actually written I found the overview much tougher and even-handed. I can't see the Soviet Union heading for a boom, though. The last time a strong central authority collapsed there the result was chaos, with local warlords and multi-sided local wars, until a new strong central authority emerged that was powerful enough to repress everybody else. You're probably more familiar with the histories than I, but I've found a seemingly consistent tale of what happens when such an authority collapses in the memoirs of various refugees from the Russian Revolution. The picture they give does not bode well for the coming transfer of power, if it occurs.

"Now I know I haven't been to the Soviet Union and you have. (The nearest I got was stepping aboard a Russian cruise liner in Helsinki harbour twenty years ago.) But the lesson of Russian history, for me, is that freedom is too liable to be hijacked by power-seekers. Goodwill isn't enough when the political mix starts to include hunger and personal ambition. But no doubt there are reasons for optimism about the future; it's just that reasons for pessimism seem to come more easily."

#### EUROPE BEYOND THE BLOCS

Gregory Benford  
1105 Skyline Drive  
Laguna Beach  
California 92651  
USA

"I mightily doubt your optimism about the Soviets. I've travelled there and have a lot of friends, including a colleague currently working with me here. Seventy years of socialism have left a deep cultural problem, a mindset, which will take several decades to dispel. Free markets are complex and the USSR has little of the apparatus which can make a market work.

"This links, non-linearly, with your leaving the UK for Australia. I wonder if you feel as I do -- the class war in Britain is worsening, and the great opportunity of the post-war era, of getting beyond the hierarchy, is dribbling away. Yet bright people such as yourself seem to feel that the key to Britain's future lies in more slugfests between workers and executive, settling scores. Societies founded on the paradigm of class warfare collapse around the world, yet you seem to believe the idea simply needs fine-tuning to avoid the Soviet nightmares. Seeing Thatcher and NATO as the big problem seems wonky these days."

*My comments about a future Soviet economic boom were based solely on the presence of exploitable mineral wealth in Siberia; I didn't say anything about the economic system that would do the exploiting. But if the class war in Britain is worsening, then it's entirely due to Thatcher -- under her, the slow progress towards a more equal society made since 1945 has been utterly reversed, and the differentials between rich and poor are markedly more pronounced. Rectifying this has nothing to do with "settling scores", but although we've now reached the point where more than*

economic measures are necessary to overcome the British malaise -- such as the constitutional reforms advocated by Charter 88 -- it's worth repeating that those parts of Marxist theory which concern the economic relationships between those who manipulate capital and those who are manipulated by it are as true today as a century ago. The collapse of Stalinist political systems in Eastern Europe means not the end of the class paradigm but the end of a command economic management system that claimed to act in the name of the people but in fact simply replaced one ruling elite with another. Now that it's gone, we can resume a discussion that the victory of Leninism aborted seventy years ago: what socialism is really about.

Nor is it "wonky" to view Thatcher and NATO as obstacles -- indeed, a suggestion otherwise in respect of the former will provoke only laughter from most of this fanzine's British readers and many of its overseas ones. And if she, in Dennis Healey's memorable phrase, is Rhoda the Rhino, then NATO is a dinosaur unable to shake free of its Cold War confrontationalist mentality and its fantasies of imminent Soviet invasion. The changes announced at July's summit in London look radical only by comparison with its usual excessive caution and lack of imagination, and in any case it simultaneously proposes to undermine its new policies by deploying a new range of Tactical Air-to-Surface Missiles (TASMs, or air-launched cruise missiles) on F-15E and F1-11 aircraft based in the UK and whose only conceivable targets lie in the newly-democratised countries of Eastern Europe. British readers who agree with the editors that there is no need for these weapons are urged to write to any US Congressperson they can think of, protesting against their deployment -- and to remember that it was such representations from the British public about proposals to base more squadrons of F1-11s at Lakenheath which revealed to Congress that only the Thatcher government supported such plans and persuaded the US to abandon them.

1300

Steve Bell



Mark Nelson  
112 Huntley Avenue  
Spondon  
Derby DE2 7DU

"I believe that your response to Ken Lake about deterring nations that harbour and support terrorists is flawed. You claim that it hasn't worked; I'd suggest that it hasn't been used. Except in one case, when the USA sent bombers against Gaddafi in 1986. I was appalled then, but looking back on it now I think it was a good decision. That is the only way to combat terrorism, and it seems to have had some effect. The recent US report on the Lockerbie bombing is therefore of interest. Not that I support gunboat diplomacy...."

My reply to Ken Lake concerned specifically nuclear deterrence; but I don't agree with any of the above. Firstly, the immediate provocation (the attack on an American military disco in Berlin) was caused by Syria, not Libya; but even though this was suspected at the time retaliation was mounted against the latter rather than the former as part of Reagan's long-standing obsession with "bringing Gaddafi to heel". Secondly, the attack has not deterred Libya; it has instead shifted its activities from the supply of arms to others (such as the IRA) to the manufacture of its own, far deadlier chemical weapons, and US policy towards the Gaddafi regime is thus a complete failure. Thirdly, the recent US report on possible deterrents to future Lockerbies essentially advocates terrorism to defeat terrorism, either by launching pre-emptive strikes against potential aggressors and so casting the US itself as a



terrorist nation, or by launching retaliatory copycat strikes and so pretending that two wrongs do in fact make a right; neither argument has any moral force, so cannot command any respect or support.

Mark also commented that he couldn't believe I was serious in suggesting that if Britain disposed of its nuclear weapons the behaviour of those states developing their own would be affected; but this was a misreading of my remarks. My point was not that by disarming Britain would set an example to others but that unless it is seen to honour its treaty commitments it can't realistically expect other signatories to do the same. The bargain in the Non-Proliferation Treaty's Article 6 is that in exchange for other nations not developing their own nuclear weapons the NPT's three founders (UK, USA and USSR) will commence negotiations "at any early date" to end the nuclear arms race; but they've done nothing of the kind. To which Mark replied:

"What intrigued me was your comment about 'the pro-deterrence theorists' frantic attempts to find a new enemy now that the old one is melting away'. I see what you're getting at, but think that your view is irrelevant! Perhaps the only deterrent value nuclear weapons have is against other countries which possess them, but the absence of enemies is in itself no reason to get rid of one's offensive/defensive capability -- it's easy to stop work, but difficult to start up again should it ever be needed. I suppose that the NPT was more of a PR exercise by the nuclear powers, since the political climate for disarmament has only just arrived. But even if the signatories had started to disarm, what would the aspiring nuclear nations have done? I suspect that things would have changed very little, and those which wanted such weapons would have continued to do the required research."

One could equally argue that without the example of the nuclear states to "encourage" them such nations would have tried to obtain military advantage over their neighbours by other means; but this is just as unproveable. And as far as deterrence theory goes I can only reiterate what George Kennan once said: "The nuclear weapon is the most useless weapon ever invented. It is not even a defence against itself". It certainly hasn't made for a more peaceful world: at least 30 million people have died in the 170 "small" wars fought in the Third World since 1945 -- many of the nations involved, as George Orwell foresaw in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, armed by and acting as proxies for the superpowers.

## HISTORY WORKSHOP

Mark Nelson  
address as before

"Ken Lake seems to be putting forward a philistine's approach to archaeology. He may like to consider the following analogy: in genetics one doesn't preserve merely the most important genes. Variety is required, not only to keep the stock healthy but to be prepared for future developments.

"At the beginning of this century, archaeologists concentrated on digging up the big structures, the buildings and the artefacts. The soil around them was considered worthless, and no attention was paid to it. Yet today most archaeologists would contend that the soil containing the artefacts is as important as the artefacts themselves -- seeds, bone fragments, dead insects and so on can tell us a lot about past diet and climate. Thus items which were previously discarded as of no worth have come to be recognised as very important.

"How, then, can we state definitively what parts of the past are and are not important, when it seems likely that in fifty years time new techniques will put new emphases on old data?"

Martin Gittens  
134 Poplar Avenue  
Edgbaston  
Birmingham B17 8ER

"You mention the Jorvik Viking Centre, and that visitors to it usually marvel more at the technological wizardry of the displays than the pastiche reconstructions it presents, with the actual remains coming a poor third. How much is this true of many modern museums and art galleries, where the exhibits come second to the environment in which they are displayed? You mentioned that you visited the Pompidou Centre, to which the majority of visitors come to admire the building and enjoy the spaces rather than view the exhibits.

"The best example of this I experienced recently was in Frankfurt, when I visited

the Museum of Arts & Crafts. Designed by New York architect Richard Meier, the building is an architectural masterpiece, unabashed pure white modernism, with exciting spaces and a dramatic plan. But the truth is that I couldn't tell you one item actually on display (except for an architect-designed chair that didn't really belong there). Nor, I expect, could most people who visited it. Posters of the museum itself far outsold posters of the actual exhibits.

"What can we conclude from all this? That people generally find the displays rather boring? This would certainly seem to be the view of most museum planners, who try to glorify, hype up, falsify and largely ignore their exhibits in order to make them appeal more to the punters. As people have limited leisure time, museums must vie with other forms of entertainment to attract visitors, the number of which is the most important statistic. So as museums compete in the market place, those with exhibits of little interest to the public are forced to present their collections in a more and more fantastic fashion, leaving those who are actually interested in what is on display hard done by.

"So that's the problem, but what's the solution? Doing away with any attempt at recreation and reinterpretation would be to risk reducing many museums to yawn-inducing stay-aways to all but the most interested visitor. The solution is surely to mediate between the fun recreations and the hard facts, with less importance placed on numbers of visitors. The Science Museum in London perhaps exemplifies the happy medium; and, to use an old cliché, people learn best when they're enjoying it."

Caroline Mullan  
address as before

"Joseph's 'Glass Of Fashion' article was a bit of a ramble, and not all of its paragraphs contribute to the eventual conclusions, but one of the points he made prompted some thoughts about our recent trip round the exhibition of fakes at the British Museum. And that is that making fakes can be another way of making history from below.

"Among the fakes displayed were Books of Hours, jewellery, icons, Roman statues, Chinese porcelain, Vuitton luggage and Johnny Walker whisky. Some of these were one-offs, such as a 'Roman' statue assembled from fragments of many statues. Some, such as the Chinese porcelain, were the products of whole industries devoted to manufacturing fake porcelain in the styles of long-dead dynasties using 'lost' techniques. All shared the characteristic that the originals have (or had) high status: either the originals have high intrinsic value and only the rich can afford them, or they are highly valued by people with high status, or very often both.

"In a different class of fake, but sharing this characteristic of being valued by people of high status, the original photographs of the (fake) Cottingley fairies were created by two young girls, and deceived Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and other eminent people whose will to believe exceeded their rationality.

"So how about this for a hypothesis: fakes are manufactured by the powerless to exploit the powerful. The powerful in this context are the people who can afford to value the *significance* (status) of the original items rather than the items themselves, or who in other words value the status these articles are supposed to confer upon their owners. While the people (the powerless) who know better roll around in their seats, laughing. Another way to put it is to say that the powerless are getting some of their own back. (What a nice thought.)

"Unfortunately for my thesis the exhibition also included *The Protocols Of The Elders Of Zion*, a document forged to 'prove' that an international conspiracy of Jewish bankers was responsible for all the ills of the world and still believed by some people. (And in *The Guardian* for 26 April there was a story about the security services in the 1970s faking documents so discredit politicians. *Plus ça change....*)

"So bang went my theory. But I still had fun thinking about it."

*I'd point out, in response to your comments about the structure of the article, that while not every paragraph contributed to the conclusion, they provided a context in which the argument could be voiced. Nothing was said without a reason!*

Vince Clarke  
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"I wonder at your continued fascination with sightseeing, or as Judith put it, 'to theorise the history and scenery'. To go to a cathedral and gaze at this monument to the foolishness of several generations may give a sort of sadistic pleasure but I can't see that travelling to a

historic site -- especially in this day and age -- can win over the experience of studying the thing in photos in the quiet of your living room.

"Even the more dramatic experiences don't last. I remember being in Hamburg about 18 months after the war ended; the place was still a mess, ruin after ruin after ruin, people living in cellars under piles of rubble, no dogs about because they'd all been eaten, a picture of devastation and degradation. A good deal more colourful than Avebury or Salisbury on a quiet Sunday afternoon. But what does it matter to the outsider in the end? I knew of the horrors of war before I went to Hamburg; I'm not aware of carrying any extra knowledge from then on that I couldn't have obtained from books and pictures. No, I'm afraid that the only purpose I can see in such expeditions is that sometimes it gets you out in the fresh air."

*Fresh air, certainly; but I dispute vigorously that photographs are any substitute for the real thing. They can record what you saw, but they can't convey the experience of seeing the thing itself -- particularly the scale of some of the monuments. On our Soviet trip last year, for example, we made a side trip from Samarkand to the mountain town of Shakrizzabs, where Tamurlane had his summer residence, the Ak Sai Palace. All that remains of this are the stumps of the arch over the main gate. Each stump is ninety metres high. Only when you see them in situ can you start to appreciate how huge the rest must have been. A photograph, with a tiny human figure in the foreground to give some sense of perspective, is no competition.*

#### THE FINAL CUT

Harry Warner  
address as before

"I hope your projected move to Australia proves a smashing success. However, you do make it sound something like booking passage on a flight to Alpha Centauri on a space liner that can't attain the velocity of light. Is it really necessary to hurry up and visit all these European nations and do other significant things in the United Kingdom before you depart, as if you were as unable to return in the future as the Europeans who inadvertently colonised Australia in its early years? By the time you've migrated, planes will be making the trip even more rapidly than they do today, and fares could be lower if the airline industry ever comes to its senses and has fewer but fuller scheduled runs on its long-distance flights.

"I like your new title. However, you don't make it clear in your explanation of the change which of the words in the former title was so offensive to your parents."

*I'd like to believe that air fares on the Europe to Australia routes will fall, but fear otherwise: it's not a high volume route like the North Atlantic or North Pacific, therefore doesn't attract much competition, and the airlines hence have no incentive to change anything. Returning here could thus be very expensive; and thus the need to tick it off the list before we go. Fares on the routes from Australia to East Asia and the US West Coast are likely to fall, however, as the global economic focus shifts and the Pacific becomes more important -- which means that our future tourist destinations will be places like the Philippines, Malaysia, China and Japan.*

WE ALSO HEARD FROM: Quite a lot of people, actually -- presumably a consequence of publishing two issues so close together. Here's the list: Ian Bambro, Sheryl Birkhead, Terry Bohman, Harry Bond (who found the Soviet travelogue tedious), Ken Cheslin, Jeremy Crampton, Peter Darby, Bernard Earp, Arhvid Engholm (more drivel about SEFF -- when we asked him not to send any more, Joseph was accused of acting like a dictator and censoring mail), Paul Forrest, Steve Green, Teddy Harvia, David Haugh, Matthias Hofman, Elise Krueger, Ken Lake (several times, once entirely DNQ), Nicholas Mahoney ("I'm a little disappointed to hear you've changed your title -- the obscenity was more than balanced by the sheer beauty of the sentiment"), Phil Palmer, David Redd (again, on FTT 9), Yvonne Rousseau ("I can't comment on FTT because I haven't yet discovered where John put it"), Andy Sawyer, Charles Stross, Alan Sullivan, Lucy Sussex, Amy Thomson (a long and fascinating letter on the outcome of her assault case -- see her letter in FTT 7 -- but perhaps too personal to quote), Alexander Vasilkovsky (who wanted to know how the 22 Denbigh Street People's Revolutionary Collective worked), and Roger Weddall (getting the issue number wrong, as usual). Our thanks to you all, and apologies for not having room to quote more of your letters!