
FROG & Tadpole TIMES



ABOUT THE COVER

The cover should have been a limited edition silk-screen print by Judith Hanna, but have you ever tried to re-silk a sagging silk-screen? After several hours of stretching, stapling and swearing -- in the middle of which the doorbell gave up, the hot water boiler went kaput, and a mysterious smell of burning pervaded the neighbourhood -- we had to abandon the idea as unworkable and liable to lead to the collapse of civilisation as we know it. Bugger!

FTT 18

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It's August 1995; it's sunny (much of the time); it's time for a Worldcon (even though we're not going); therefore it must be time to (as they say) "pub our ish", in the hope that we can hand copies to overseas fans as they pass through London to or from Glasgow (known in the jargon as "pamphleteering the masses"). As before, this fanzine is available for the usual reasons for which fanzines are available, viz:

- your publication in exchange (we trade all for all);
- a letter of comment on this or a previous issue;
- a contribution to future issues (but please ask us first); or
- money (in the shape of a clinking pound coin).

Since we prefer an active to a passive readership, the fourth should be contemplated only by those who genuinely have no time for the previous three. A number of people failed to do any of these four things, and having been warned last time, will eventually discover that they have not received this issue. Let those who find a warning mark adjacent to this paragraph pay heed!

Those secure in the knowledge that they have done or will do the first three things may press on to enjoy this issue's contents, as follows:

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All internal illustrations are by Judith Hanna.

Spotted in an advertising feature for Lynx male toiletries in *Chemist & Druggist* weekly:

"The market continues to grow and develop -- from £365 million just six years ago to £450 million today, due in no small part to Lynx's massive growth. Worth £1.5 million in its launch year, this figure now tops £78 million, making it bigger than Heinz Tomato Ketchup and the entire marmalade market!"

As a retailing comparison, this is most odd. Is the manufacturer really arguing that the Lynx range sells as well as it does because people don't want to smother themselves with marmalade?

"The Conservative approach to patriotism is perhaps best summed up as follows: if we're going to send Our Boys overseas to be shot at by Johnny Foreigner, we would prefer them to be shot with British bullets made on British-built machine tools."

(From Andrew Moncur's column, "And Another Thing", in *The Guardian*, 3 July 1995)

FROG & TADPOLE TIMES

Joseph Nicholas

No previous issue of this fanzine has contained anything resembling an editorial, or the introductory anecdote with which other fanzines commence; this is therefore not only a first, but also possibly unique in relating directly to the title of this issue.

As related in *FTT* 16, two frogs turned up to bask in our pond mere weeks after we'd dug it in the summer of 1994. Others came and went throughout the year; we decided, ultimately, that we had a total of five visiting frogs. Frog activity ceased at some point during October, due presumably to falling autumn temperatures making it too cold for them to be out and about; we piled some rubbish at the base of the shady fence by the wildflower corner, and hoped that this would provide a suitable place for them to hibernate during the winter. (Although the pond-care books are as ever contradictory; some suggest frogs hibernate away from ponds, others that they overwinter in the mud at the bottom.)

On the first weekend in April, I saw the first frog of this year -- or at any rate the disturbance it caused as it scurried for cover in the roots of the water hawthorn. Subsequent observations confirmed that it was light in colour, striped on its back and belly as well as its legs, with a body about as long as my thumb. Another frog materialised about a week later: same size, but with a darker, more rounded body and stripes only on its legs. From the way this one positioned itself amongst the floating oxygenators, mouth and eyes just above the surface of the water and body half-hidden in the blanket weed below, we hypothesised that this was the same frog which last year we'd identified (rather childishly, I know) as Big Froggy.

In subsequent weeks they were joined by a number of smaller frogs. The first appeared during the VE Day anniversary heatwave. Its body was about as long as the top joint of my thumb, and it was promptly dubbed Pebble. Later the same day (as we sat out by the pond, pursuing our Heavy Reading Programme), Judith spotted an even smaller frog lurking amongst the moneywort in the shallow end -- one so small that you had to look very hard to see it at all, when it resolved itself as two tiny golden eyes and a thin yellow line around the upper jaw. Its body was about as large as my thumbnail, and we named it Micro-Pebble.

The Harveys came to lunch later that month, bringing a bowl of tadpoles from their pond in Hertfordshire to colonise ours. Not that we didn't welcome our visiting frogs; but in pursuit of the theory that they return to the pond where they developed to spawn the following year, we wanted to see if we could grow some frogs who would call our pond their own.

The last week in May brought more bright sunshine and more reading by the pond, watching the tadpoles grazing the blanket weed -- when it became apparent that we were now host to two Micro-Pebbles. They were backed side-by-side into a crevice among the stones along the rear of the pond, mouths and eyes just clear of the water, and when they didn't move were practically invisible. They were joined by Pebble, surfacing from the roots of the water hawthorn to rest on one of its leaves; and by the dark-coloured Big Froggy, taking up its favourite position amongst the floating oxygenators.

After a while, I went indoors to change books. Judith called me back out; there were now five frogs in the pond, Pebble having been joined by another of the same size, also resting amongst the water hawthorn. When I returned, however, the number of frogs had risen to six, with the light-coloured Big Froggy now stretched amongst the water iris leaves at the point where they met the surface. According to two of our pond-care books, this behaviour was unheard-of. Frogs, they claimed, visit ponds only to mate, and spend the rest of their time on land. Clearly, our frogs preferred those texts of a more wildlife bent, which state that frogs like to live in company and can often be seen sunbathing on warm days. We took several photographs.

For a few minutes, nothing happened. Then the new Pebble leaped off its water hawthorn leaf onto the back

of the light-coloured Big Froggy, hooking both front feet under its armpits. Was this the fabled amplexus position? Were we about to witness batrachian bonking? Were our imported tadpoles shortly to be joined by home-spawned ones?

It was a tense moment. Again, for a few minutes nothing happened. Then the new Pebble shifted position slightly, seeming to tighten its grip on the light-coloured Big Froggy's armpits. It let out a soft croak in response -- the first time we'd heard any of our frogs utter anything. But either it was too late in the year for frogs to mate, or new Pebble's attentions were unwanted. The light-coloured Big Froggy suddenly lurched forward, throwing off the new Pebble with a splash and then vanishing into the depths. The new Pebble swam off around the stems of the iris to fetch up below the paving stones at the front, where it clung to the edge, head up, looking hungry. Or peeved. Or whatever else it is that frogs might feel....

The weather turned cool and overcast after that, and frog activity dropped off to nothing. Even the tadpoles seemed to disappear, and for some weeks we wondered whether they might have died of cold or even been eaten by their larger brethren. But they re-appeared in early July, swimming vigorously about the shallows, and as we peered down at them with something like parental affection we noticed that they were beginning to change -- their bodies were more rounded, their tails were shorter and more translucent, they had grown tiny back legs at the point where the two joined, and some even had the buds of forelegs beginning to show. And at the end of July we saw our first fully formed froglet, scrambling through the floating oxygenators at the front edge of the pond; so small that two of them could fit on my little fingernail with room to spare.

See one froglet, see another. And another, and another -- it was fascinating to watch them clamber up onto the pebbles and moneywort leaves, to see them take their first steps into the new world above the water. What did they make of it? And what did they make of us, crouching close enough to pick out their little round eyes?

But the peril of being a froglet is that you can be mistaken for an insect by a proper frog.

It's apparent that what we thought of as our "visiting" frogs are visitors no longer, but have taken up full-time residence in and around our pond. It's difficult to tell them apart, of course -- although there is another Big Froggy with a very distinctive black patch on its back -- but we suspect there could be up to a dozen of them. I've even spotted the favourite hiding places of two of them -- one Big Froggy likes to hide beneath the overhang of the paving stone at the back, where the bay tree pot currently sits, while a Pebble can sometimes be spotted bounding through the alpines to or from the compost heap in the corner. One evening in early August, we saw this Pebble sitting amongst the water hawthorn, apparently staring at a spot on the rear wall. We followed its gaze, to find a froglet hauling itself up the rough grey concrete. What did it think it was doing? Where did it think it was going? What did it think it would do when it got there? No answers were available, however; instead, gravity supervened, and the froglet fell back into the water. Pebble did not move.

Then the froglet tried the climb again, at a slightly different location, and this time Pebble did move. With two quick strokes of its forelegs, it was at the rear wall directly beneath the froglet. It seemed clear that the small black froglet, with its minute legs, had been mistaken for a tasty insect. It was time to act.

We leaned forward, jabbing our fingers down at Pebble. Clearly frightened, it ducked beneath the floating oxygenators. The froglet repeated its earlier trick of falling off the wall, probably without ever realising the danger it had faced. Slowly, and with many pauses, it began to make its way back towards the shallow end: the place of crevices and moneywort, where it could remain safely hidden. But the danger wasn't over: up popped Pebble once again, this time orienting itself for a jump towards its hiding place in the compost at the back. But that meant the froglet would enter its field of vision, and again be mistaken for an insect. It was again time to act -- but instead of ducking away into hiding, Pebble merely sank to the bottom, staring up at us. It was obviously very surprised -- who were we? What did we want? Why did we threaten it so? And as it sat there, it had three tadpoles swimming around it, passing repeatedly in front of its mouth. Surely, if it felt that hungry it should attempt to eat them? Or can frogs recognise tadpoles as larval forms of themselves?

Eventually, the froglet made it back to safety. Pebble hopped out and bounced back into its compost. And we went indoors to consume our dinner.

VOLCANO STORIES

Zena Hanna

My first volcano was Gunung Gede (2958m), just half an hour's drive from Jakarta where Pete and I are living. On a (very rare) clear day in the city, you can get a marvellous view of it from the top of a tall building. Indonesian teenagers with guitars head out to it on weekends in groups of a dozen or so, climbing at night to the summit to serenade the dawn. We tackled the 12 hour climb and return with a friend Andrew, generally known as Stan.

We drove out the night before, glad to be getting away into the cool of the hills from Jakarta's sticky, grimy heat, and by getting up at dawn managed to begin our climb by 8am. By then, the day was already starting to warm up. Through the rainforest of the lower slopes we slogged our way, ever upwards. It took three hours longer than we expected, the last two of them in pouring rain, before we arrived at the summit. We were soaking wet, knees knocking together with cold, and the heavy rain cutting visibility down to just a few metres in front of us. So much for what Sir Stamford Raffles wrote last century of being able to see clear over to Sumatra in the west and the southern Java coast. Then the air cleared, and we looked into the mouth of the volcano. It was disappointing -- like an ugly open-cut mine, utterly bare of trees, with occasional whiffs of sulphur.

After a memorably distasteful snack of sugary Indonesian 'bread', we set off down. Pete sprained his ankle, but managed to keep limping on. We reached the bottom exhausted -- but happy at having notched up our first volcano.

The Sumatran Mt Merapi (2890m) -- which should not be confused with the Javan Mt Merapi near Yogyakarta -- was my second volcano, and gave us more than a mere mishap. With long-time good friend Jenny and elegant friend Bel, I was exploring Sumatra on a budget. We had reached a small mountain village called Bukittinggi in Central Sumatra, spectacularly overshadowed by the chains of tectonic fold mountains created by the Australian continental plate sliding under the South East Asian plate, and one volcano. Jenny and I wanted to climb the volcano. This would mean a night-time climb, in the cool, to watch the dawn break at the summit. But having heard other travellers talk of sleepless nights and aching limbs, and knowing the volcano was classed as active -- it had last erupted two years before -- Bel felt inclined to rest in bed.

Jenny and I took on the challenge. We engaged a local guide, Amy, who picked us up at 11pm with two of her friends and drove to the last house up the mountain, a farmer's house where it's high enough to grow cabbages and carrots instead of rice. The walk to the top would take five and a half hours, and we would set off at midnight. While we were there, another group of four young English tourists, three boys and a girl, public school types, very worldly in a nineteen-year-old way, very boisterous and excited about travelling, turned up with their three guides. Setting off at the same time, our two parties naturally kept overtaking each other.

The walk through the rainforest of the lower slopes was slow and dark, and I was checking for leeches at each rest point. Then, as normal with volcanoes, the climb suddenly became very steep. The steady pace, silence and the cleansing feeling of hard exercise were just what I craved after months in crowded and confining Jakarta. But the other group was an irritant. Our guide told us they were not respecting their guides -- respect is very important in Indonesian culture. They were not stopping when they should, not staying together as a group should. The two young men who kept wandering away from their guides might easily lose the trail in the dark and get lost or fall.

After four hours of steep rainforest, suddenly the trees stopped. Then the really hard work began. The path disappeared and we had to scramble over rocks. At first these were large and fairly stable, but as you

ascend they progressively shrink until they're just scabbly, slippery scree. And by this time, the two fool boys have disappeared! It is still dark and all the guides are worried. So indeed are we. A tourist was lost for three days up here because he left his guide, we are told. By this time we are near the summit, and the two groups have joined together -- including the two strays, who rejoin us. Thirsty and panting, at each rest point we find ourselves able to make out more of where we are as we climb to the top of the world. Dawn is approaching, and we are racing to beat the sun to the summit.

We make it. The summit is all pre-dawn grey, jagged dark silhouettes of the other mountain tops beyond. Dawn breaks as the yellow sun lifts itself up behind those distant mountains. At the moment of dawn, you can see forever -- across the distant ocean islands off Sumatra, and all the peaks across to Mt Kerinci, Sumatra's tallest peak. Ripples of mountains disappear into the wide open horizon, flushed with the goldy-red colours of dawn. This lasts some twenty minutes, then as the sun lifts, clouds begin slowly to creep across the world beneath us like a meandering river gathering volume, as the sun's heat draws moisture from the rainforest. All we can see around us is forest-cloaked mountains, rich green. No roads, no houses except the distant town of Bukittinggi. We sit watching, feeling happy and proud. Amy unrolls a mat and prays to Allah; she makes a beautiful shape, a sole kneeling body draped in a white gown against the grey-white of the crater edge, with dawn lifting around her.

The other group have gone off exploring. When Amy rejoins us, we walk to view the crater. She says the other tourists are recklessly venturing too close to the crater's edge; the edge is loose, the scree might slip. We rest some more, and daydream, then at 8.00am say goodbye to the other group and begin the descent. A zig-zag way down, concentrating on the steep rocks and scree, on where next to put my foot.

Then from the silence comes a *BOOM!*, and the earth quakes.

Amy throws her body over mine. The *BOOM* is continuing, and an atomic bomb shaped cloud is evolving above us. Ash and rocks begin to come back to the earth. I think: I'll die soon. I think of my body overrun by molten rock, or perhaps flung floating through the air by the next eruption. I wait for a wall of lava to appear, and picture myself trying to outrun the speed of its approach. As the boom dies away, I wait for poisonous gases to kill me. As I wait, I am also a stunned voyeur, impressed by the majesty and power of the event. Everything seems stopped except for the earth erupting. I feel so mortal, so temporary -- alive now, but insignificant should the earth will that this is my time.

Alive, terrified and confused, my hand is grasped and I stand up. Jenny is standing with the two other members of our group. My knees are shaking, but trying to be strong and keep me up. We descend as quickly as we can. The other group's guides catch up with us; they have abandoned their tourists, and are fleeing from the summit ahead of them. Down the steep stony descent into the rainforest we flee until someone decides we are out of danger and it is time to stop. Inside the shelter of the rainforest, resting on old boulders, we contemplate our escape. A crazed alive feeling hits us, a feeling of exhilaration, of heroism, of excitement and with it laughter.

The guides from the other group tell us they were all resting on the top when they last saw their tourists. We wait and one of the boys arrives. Then another, gashed and without his boots: he had been startled from a doze by the eruption and had jumped off a cliff. Jenny, a nurse, bandaged the gash using a bandage I had in my daypack. A longer wait, then the other two arrived, the boy supporting the girl who had some cuts, a sprained ankle and was hysterical. Once she'd calmed down and Jen had checked none of her injuries was serious, we said our goodbyes and went on. Our guide told us they had been taught a lesson: tourists should have humility in front of the mountain, and should respect their guides.

We kept up the speedy pace: no rests and few water stops. We were anxious to let our friend Bel, and the other guides, know we were safe. Sooner than we expected we were out of the rainforest and into the cropped land, then reached a road. We had begun climbing at midnight; sunrise was about 6.00am, the volcano erupted at about 8.10am, and we were down the mountain and had reached that road by 11.15am: a quick descent. By midday we were back in Bukittinggi feeling lightheaded and *alive!* We ended our twelve-hour volcano adventure hot, certainly not tired, and ready to tell our story.

(Editorial Note: The following article was written in the first couple of months of this year, when a ceasefire in the states of former Yugoslavia seemed to be holding and it was thought that talks about talks were a possibility. The wars restarted shortly afterwards, however, but since Bruno is largely concerned with what was rather than what is, his observations are not invalidated by the conflict.)

THE LOST PLEASURES OF AKSHAMLUK

Bruno Ogorelec

When you mention Bosnia these days, the images that spring to mind will be of the streets of Sarajevo lined with the gutted shells of burned out apartment blocks, of people lugging water-filled plastic jerrycans trying to dodge the snipers' bullets, or huddled in godforsaken villages to which the UNHCR aid convoys are trying to deliver food. Needless to say, it used to be different.

The Bosnia I remember was a place of riches, perhaps not so much in the material sense of the word as in rough warmth, humour and colourful diversity. Bosnians used to be relaxed, carefree, unhurried, but keen and witty. They were *tolerant*. I know that sounds improbable, now that they are passionately blowing each other to smithereens or equally passionately raping each other's wives and daughters, but there you are. Who said life was simple?

Bosnia has never been simple. It is the farthest territorial outpost of Islam in Europe, the point at which the Ottoman conquest slowed down and stopped. A friend of mine tells me that the opposite may also be true: the Christian "conquest" also stopped there, petering out, rather than overwhelming all and sundry. While the Christian churches of Orthodox and Catholic persuasion are very firmly present in Bosnia, indeed entrenched and apparently quite secure, they have essentially remained outposts among the heathen. Bosnians always looked to me like commonsense heathen, picking from the religions offered only what they found suitable. Or picking the religion they found suitable at any moment. The Turks, when they arrived, provided a shield of Islam against the (sometimes threatening) world of Christianity. To my mind -- and in the opinion of some wise men I talked to while writing this -- it was a haven for those who found Christianity too much to bear. Once the Turkish rulers departed and Islam ceased to be *de rigueur*, the Moslem Bosnians took the opportunity to become quite secular.

Since time immemorial, the Balkans have been the point where the serrated edges of the political tectonic plates of Europe and the Near East rubbed together with intense friction. The various peoples of the region have always had the misfortune of being squeezed between those vast plates and crunched rather mercilessly. The departure of the Turks thus did not bring freedom -- it merely delivered the country and its people into Austrian hands.

Liberated from centuries of Turkish rule, the Bosnians embraced Austrian culture wholeheartedly. At one point, Sarajevo may well have been the most intensely Austro-Hungarian town in all the Balkans, and remained so until very recently. For instance, right up to the latest war, the municipal administration in Sarajevo, still echoing the stiff tenets of the Hapsburg bureaucracy, would produce documents and do its other paper-shuffling work with speed and efficiency probably unmatched in former Yugoslavia. For all its dozens of colourful mosques, Turkish baths and the big *souk*-like market, the centre of Sarajevo was nevertheless the epitome of late 19th century Austrian architecture.

For ages, Bosnia was thus an interface between Islam and Christendom. If a village was divided by a river, the east bank would often boast two or three minarets, while on the west bank a solitary church might proclaim the presence of Christians. Sometimes the village's halves would even have different names. The Christian half might have either a church spire to satisfy the spiritual aspirations of the Catholic Croats, or

the domes of an Orthodox temple of the Serbian populace. Only in the cities could you find all three peoples living together; in small towns and villages it was a combination of Moslems with one of the two distinct brands of Christians. The nationalities intermingled, but not completely. Being tolerant certainly did not include wholeheartedly embracing the different. Within a general tolerance there was a kind of mild, informal and voluntary apartheid, in which each kept to their own in private and family matters. (There was once a fourth people, Sephardic Jews, who had immigrated in droves after being expelled from Spain at the end of the fifteenth century, adding their own distinct flavour to the complicated pot until World War Two, during which, for an obvious reason, their numbers declined precipitously.)

Among the Moslems, another level of complication was added by the fact that there's no such thing as a Moslem nation and never has been. The Moslems were, ethnically speaking, either Croats or Serbs, with only a thin sprinkling of Turks -- thin because the formerly numerous Turks had been "encouraged" to emigrate in the 1930s and 1940s. Then Tito's intellectual minions, usually over-eager to stamp out national feelings and nationalism, paradoxically invented a new Moslem "nation" in the late 1960s in an effort to dilute the Croatian-Serbian problem in Bosnia. From 1971 one could, for official purposes at least, be a Moslem by nationality. Many Croats and Serbs of the Islamic faith took the chance to express their religious and cultural difference in this way. And it was the Moslems, really, who gave Bosnia most of its specific, inimitable spirit.

While the people did tend to be very tolerant, looking back one can see the need to handle very carefully such an intricate web of wildly different peoples, customs and faiths. That need was not recognised at the time. It is now clear that the communist version of Bosnia, like the wider commonwealth of Yugoslavia, was a contrived thing after all, ill-conceived and shoddily put together. It may have looked otherwise, but it seems that what kept it all together was simply the brute force of totalitarian pressure, first in the Versailles-produced version of Yugoslavia, 1918-1941, and later under communism. The latter was less visibly totalitarian than in the other socialist constructs of Central and Eastern Europe, inasmuch as Yugoslav communism in general seemed to be more relaxed, at least on the surface; but the force was certainly there, waiting to pounce on the unwary.

It was in Bosnia, the place with the most complex national-cultural-religious mixture, that tolerance of diversity in the socialist utopia seemed to work best after 1945. The Bosnians were culturally neither here nor there -- a law unto themselves and much more relaxed about everything than the rest of us Yugoslavs. A gentle dose of Islamic fatalism, perhaps? Armed with our dour inflexibility, we Croats found socialism much less easy to digest. The Bosnian approach seemed to be just right for the peculiar type of socialism we used to have.

And then, all of a sudden, even while the guns were still silent and the idea of civil war seemed but a malevolent fantasy, the Bosnians divided among themselves. They did it quickly and easily as soon as the communist leadership allowed political diversity. In an instant, everyone seemed to find their particular national-cum-religious trough in the common stable. It was so unexpected, given the strong image of tolerance and co-existence. Three ethnically distinct parties claimed the lion's share of their people's allegiance, while the secular and non-nationalist alternatives were virtually ignored.

I don't really know why and it worries me. On the face of it, in Bosnia tolerance had the best possible conditions in which to thrive. Yet, forces conspiring on the outside and resentments building up on the inside proved stronger than the whole keeping the cement together. The disintegration of Bosnia has certainly been an ominous sign for proponents of cohabitation.

On the other hand, there always remains a voice of reason in the wilderness, a bud of normalcy ready to flower when the time is right again. There was a telling incident, now almost legendary, during a war of graffiti in Sarajevo. At the height of Serbian nationalist frenzy, just before the guns spoke, slogans were sprayed on many prominent walls in the city. The most inviting canvas for such efforts seemed to be the bright yellow, freshly repainted facade of the central post office. Some hothead used it to splash "This is Serbia", the commonest pearl of wisdom of Serbian nationalists, all over it. The very next day, however,

one of his saner fellow citizens wrote a disclaimer right next to it: "This is a post office, you idiot."

It is hard for even the most cynical observer to avoid a feeling of loss at the disappearance of the easygoing Bosnian spirit. So tolerance may have been a mirage, but what about humour, for instance? That was real enough: you cannot feign humour. Bosnian Moslems used to be the butt of 99 percent of the jokes told in the Yugoslav Balkans. In a joke, the archetypal Bosnian, usually called Haso or Mujo or Suljo (popular abbreviations for Hassan, Muhammad, and Suleyman, respectively), would be ludicrously carefree, mindful only of immediate fun and enjoyment. He'd try hard to be clever but fail, usually in a very slapstick manner.

There was a joke which described the common perception of the local "national" character rather well. A man travels to Bosnia, attracted by the zany stories, and comes to a village with a mosque in the centre. As he approaches the mosque, out comes a very old imam wearing a turban, walking with a limp and using a cane for support. "Ah, I see I'm in Bosnia at last," exclaims our traveller. "What makes you think so?" the imam asks him. "It's obvious, isn't it?" the traveller says, "It's your leg that's bad, but it's your head that's bandaged!"

Significant of the detachment from Judeo-Christian morality was the jokey approach to sex. In a joke, Mujo or Haso would also be horny, and not particularly choosy about the object of his lust: women, men and beasts were all fair game. An example: Haso is walking by the river, and around the bend finds Mujo bugging a rather wet and dishevelled Suljo. Alarmed, he confronts Mujo and demands an explanation. "Well," Mujo says, "Suljo was drowning and I pulled him out of the water. He had to be resuscitated." Haso, still suspicious, remarks that resuscitation is usually administered mouth-to-mouth, not anally. "Well, yes," counters Mujo. "That's exactly how it started."

Most stereotypes are at least partly grounded in fact. Thus, of the Bosnians I used to know, every single man was a philanderer. Also, they seemed to preserve the habit (and, presumably, the ability) well into advanced age. One of them, Meho, otherwise a distinguished, dapper elderly businessman, seemed to have had a half-century long, unbroken string of troubles arising from his libertine ways. It started while he was still legally a minor with an expulsion from high school after being caught in a house of ill repute. (Caught by one of his professors, that is.) He always spoke very fondly of the genteel institutions the faculty (and obviously the alumni too, on occasion) had been wont to frequent in those days. His last dissolute act was shortly before his death, and may have hastened his departure to *djehenet*. Apart from living in an apparently passionate concubinage with a lady of approximately his own age, he found himself a much younger lover who was married to a man with little sympathy for the concept of free love. The husband, being younger, was also faster, which made escape from *fragrante delicto* rather difficult for Meho, especially as the old man always tried to retain a modicum of dignity.

Another unlikely rake was, well, let me call him Rahim, the head of a local civic centre. I knew him fairly well; a rotund and jovial little fellow with a great passion for theatre. The civic centre included a small auditorium with a stage, and he directed many a promising play there with a cast of local university students. But his troupe would rarely last until the opening night. As the rehearsals continued, the budding young actresses would each in turn discover that the portly drama guru was enjoying a whole set of romances at the same time, bedding two-thirds of the cast at different times of the day and/or different days of the week. And the people not in the know used to wonder why he insisted so much, and for so many seasons, on staging Aristophanes's *Lysistrata*, seeing how difficult it was to assemble a big all-female cast.

Even casual acquaintances confirmed the rakish image. On a train, somewhere between Germany and home, I befriended a group of Bosnian *gastarbeiter* returning home for a brief holiday. We had an intensely interesting conversation about the difficulties of life and work in a strange foreign country. One of the most obstinate problems was that of sex. A German *fraulein* would generally hesitate to succumb to the rough charm of a Bosnian bricklayer, so they often resorted to the services of professionals. I pointed out that the hookers were expensive, at about a hundred Deutschmarks a go. "It's not so very expensive," they claimed in unison. "It buys you a whole hour, and in an hour you can do it three times if you want to!"

The funny thing is that the Bosnian Moslems themselves didn't seem to mind the jokey stereotyping. Indeed, they originated the great majority of the jokes themselves. The wacky detachment from the rigours of mundane logic apparently became a source of pride and confidence. There was inner strength to be derived from watching the rest of the world cling desperately to a tense, laboured, almost humourless reality. The most precious thing about such an approach was the absence of righteousness. Bosnian humour would not prick your balloon to enjoy seeing you fall flat. A joke would not subject you to ridicule to make the jokester feel superior. No, it allowed the ridiculous to stay ridiculous with a semblance of dignity.

Witty people are often resourceful -- another mark of a true Bosnian. The horny bricklayers on the train told me an apocryphal story about themselves which, while probably invented, nevertheless offered an insight into the way a Bosnian mind works.

The construction site they worked at was in an old and run-down part of a big German city, slated for large-scale redevelopment. Old, damp and grimy blocks of rickety *kleinburger* housing were being torn down and shiny new high rises erected in their place, with nice lawns, trees and parks scattered in between. The demolition of old, rat-infested buildings brought with it some unforeseen problems, as the hundreds of rat families were suddenly faced with the necessity of finding new shelter. Of course, they tried the new, spick-and-span apartment blocks first.

The new tenants in the area looked somewhat askance at the rats' efforts and asked the district authorities to Do Something. Apart from spraying the neighbourhood with various vile substances, a public rat extermination was started as well. A prize of a few Deutschmarks was instituted for each rat corpse delivered to the local pest control post. It worked wonders. Squeezed between the products of modern chemistry and the earnest efforts of yuppie suburbanites, the rats soon vanished from sight. Even the *gastarbeiter* from the neighbouring construction sites took part in the rat hunts and earned themselves a little beer money.

With time, however, a curious pattern developed. The rats were nowhere to be seen and the apartment dwellers were happy, yet the concrete pourers, bricklayers and plasterers continued to claim the bounty money at about the same rate as before, regularly tendering their weekly catch of rodents. It was the very regularity which ultimately did them in. A suspicious official in charge of rat extermination tracked the steady supply of fresh rats to a vacant shack just off the construction site. The Bosnians were keeping a small rat farm there in a score of chicken wire cages, feeding them lunch scraps and other edible refuse. "We'd probably have stopped of our own accord anyway," one of them confided to me. "You feed them every day and give them water, and after a while they're just like any other pets. Almost friends, if you know what I mean. In the end we had to draw lots each Friday, to determine who would have to kill a few dozen. It was so unpleasant."

I'm not claiming that the majority (or even a notable number) of Bosnians indulged in similarly preposterous activities, but there's little doubt that they often coped with life's contingencies by refusing to acknowledge their seriousness. As you may imagine, such an approach to everyday life provided a fertile ground for art. It was art of a very specific bent, too. For a while, for a few years before the end of it all, there was a cultural explosion in Bosnia, particularly in Sarajevo, which projected the earthy zaniness far beyond its original source. Rich sardonic Bosnian rock, innovative Bosnian theatre, and absurd Bosnian comedy were all the rage in the former Yugoslavia. They brought the therapeutic value of the peculiarly Bosnian disengagement from the sullen and self-important socialist routine to a much wider audience.

It is difficult to tell if their easy acceptance, gentle humour and relaxed detachment have helped the Bosnians in the bloody mess they now find themselves. Actually, it may have been their undoing. Faithful to tolerance, they were quite unprepared for hate and violence -- when all hell broke out, it was too late to mount an effective defence. On the other hand, the hell won't last forever. I hope. Once the apocalypse is over, the Bosnian traits may help them rebuild the country and restore sanity. If they do, I hope they return to some of the old ways; the ones that I, as an outsider, found so attractive.

The complex social melange of Bosnia gave birth to a host of welcome, colourful peculiarities which used to be enjoyed by natives and visitors alike. One of the most unlikely products of this diversity was probably the only Moslem community in the world which, while properly devout, nevertheless enjoyed and practiced drinking -- real drinking, not fruit juice. How's that for tolerance?

The Bosnians used to glory in offering good food and drink, and serious hospitality, in contrast to the present hunger and misery. Let me introduce you to just one quintessentially Bosnian custom, a wonder of social synergy: *meze*. It is fairly common in the Islamic world and Islam-influenced countries: an array of tidbits, morsels, small snacks, put on the table to fuel conversation, its composition varying not just from area to area but from home to home and from day to day. It depends on what your hosts have in their pantry. It could include, say, two or more kinds of sheep or goat cheese, choice cold cuts or roast lamb or beef, sliced *sudjuka* (smoked beef sausage), maybe a *pita* or two (flaky pastry rolls filled variously with cheese, minced meat or a mixture of shredded spinach and thick cream), and cold *japrag* (vine leaves stuffed with seasoned rice). Some fried aubergines, ready to dip into a cream sauce, or a few baked green peppers stuffed with minced lamb and beef, might have remained from lunchtime.

Most products of Arab-influenced cooking are just as tasty cold as hot, and for a very good reason. Due to the warm climate, a Turkish (or Greek, or Egyptian) village would often have just one oven -- the baker's. In the morning, before going out to work in the fields, people would bring the family pans to the village baker's and let the food simmer there until the afternoon. On the way back from the fields, they would pick up the cooked meal and take it home. By the time it arrived on the family dinner table it wouldn't always still be hot, but it had to remain tasty. Bosnia does not really have a warm climate, yet the cuisine has clung to its Near Eastern roots. And why not? All the food in *meze* is invariably good -- it is, after all, what you introduce your household with, a kind of showcase. But that is not all. In contrast to other Moslem countries, the Bosnians added liquor to the synergy. For a few centuries, their drink of choice has been plum brandy, *sljivovica* (known in Western Europe under the German-corrupted name of *sliwowitz*).

Fruit brandies are often considered somewhat plebeian, and maybe rightly so. Their bouquet is inconsistent, depending too much on the fruit vintage and condition. Even one rotten, worm-infested or unripe fruit, very difficult to detect among the thousands, may ruin a whole batch of brandy, giving it an unpleasant, sour or bitter note. Fruity aromas don't interact well with the oak of the casks, so ageing is rarely considered. Besides, ageing is expensive, and the market for expensive fruit brandy is simply not there. Even in the parts where people appreciate quality fruit brandy, the onslaught of "modern", "worldly" and "Western" spirits like whisky has pushed the traditional brandies aside and given them a "peasant" image. The large-scale distillers discovered all this a long time ago, and largely ceased trying to develop a superior product. As a rule, therefore, with very few exceptions, liquor store fruit brandies are a slop for the unsophisticated.

In Bosnia, where every other tree is a plum tree and the people have always harboured a healthy suspicion of fashions and things newfangled, *sljivovica* used to be a way of life. Slop would not sell, and neither would whisky or cognac. As the good stuff was not commercially available, most families in rural areas brewed moonshine and took great pains to perfect it.

Sljivovica is not just liquor, it is part of *meze*. It is drunk with food, like wine or beer. It must be "soft", as they say, not strong, so that the tongue or the palate are not numbed to the pleasures of food. It is distilled only once, with first and last fractions poured down the drain. The alcohol content is between 20 and 30 percent. In the rest of the Balkans, plum brandy is ordinary hard liquor, twice distilled -- or, rather, the first distillate is mixed with a fresh batch of fruit mash and distilled anew, giving it an alcohol content of up to 50 percent and a different taste. When mass produced in an industrial facility it is sometimes so awful that it has to be seasoned with aromatic herbs to make it palatable. In Bosnia, however, the once-distilled "soft" *sljivovica* is never seasoned and is drunk straight, never mixed with anything.

When talking about liquor or food, people all too often discuss the discrete elements -- individual dishes, or particular vines or liquors. My experience, of having drunk a fair amount of diluted ethanol in its

various forms and eaten a veritable mountain of miscellaneous food in a score of different countries, tells me that such a piecemeal approach is sterile. Food and drink, when worth talking about, are almost always social events. The circumstances in which the socialising is conducted, the mood of the moment, the company, all contribute to the synergy. The palatal sensations by themselves should not really be considered separate events, divorced from the other sensory inputs.

Meze and *sljivovica* are at their best in the *aksham* (evening), when there is no pressure and no hurry, and food, drink and conversation can be enjoyed at ease. Amazing amounts are sometimes imbibed with no apparent ill effect in the course of a long, slow summer night. Such an occasion is called *akshamluk*, which might be translated as "making the evening". It's a very apt term. Soft *sljivovica* is sipped between bites, with unhurried conversation and light banter among friends and good neighbours. *Meze* is a palatal delight, the banter witty and barbed, talk thoughtful. *Sljivovica* lubricates it all, leaves the taste buds pleased, vocal chords supple and the belly warm. *Akshamluk* is a thing to tell your grandchildren about.

How are you to partake of all this? First, you must wait for the wholesale butchery of the Bosnian war to stop. After that, a few years should pass to allow people's lives and the economy to return to something resembling normal, although I wonder if that future normal can ever resemble the normal of the past. For instance, there are indications that the war has hardened the formerly relaxed attitudes towards religion. The once easygoing Moslems seem to have made a turn towards the fundamentals of Islamic faith. There are reports that, among other things rigidly Islamic, their army units have taken to closing the bars and prohibiting the sale of liquor in the parts of the country under their control. Pork, if sold at all, will have to be offered by separate butchers.

But even if the former easygoing ways of Bosnia are restored, the true, traditional *akshamluk* will not be commercially available. It never has been. You may perhaps learn how to produce good smooth brandy, or to bottle and market it commercially, but you can never bottle hospitality. You must therefore acquire a Bosnian Moslem friend first if you are to sample the pleasures of *akshamluk*. Few people will sell you their moonshine: they brew it for themselves. Even fewer will invite a tourist home and set the table with *meze* for them. With an effort you might convert yourself from a tourist to a traveller -- tourists are seldom welcome, except in the tourist traps, but a traveller has always been a treasured guest, and not just in Moslem homes. He is gladly offered food, drink, shelter and company, and expected to provide nothing but tales of his travels.

Do try, once the sound of artillery starts fading into memory -- the rewards will certainly be worth the effort.

SOME TERMINOLOGY EXPLAINED

<i>Computer:</i>	Large box that...erm...computes.
<i>Modem:</i>	Small box that you stick on to a large box so you can talk to other large boxes.
<i>Nerd:</i>	Person who finds boxes of any size absolutely fascinating.
<i>Internet:</i>	Imaginary world composed of lots of large boxes connected to each other by small boxes, where nerds run up vast phone bills talking to each other about <i>Star Trek</i> and <i>Dr Who</i> .
<i>TCP/IP Protocol:</i>	Erm...you've lost me there.
<i>Cyberpunk:</i>	Snivelling dreadlocked bore who's read <i>Neuromancer</i> and knows what a TCP/IP protocol is. File under "plague", as in "avoid like the".

"Defeating the red menace is turning out expensive for the taxpayer but a windfall for the Treasury. It seems that all defence equipment is subject to VAT at 17.5%, with the exception of ships over 15 tons and aircraft over 8 tons. These desirable items are VAT-free if delivered overseas. But now the boys are coming home they have to be delivered in Blighty -- which makes them liable to VAT. This came to light when the MoD told the Commons Defence Committee that the new Cobra artillery radar system was to cost an extra £15 million."

(From *NUCPS Journal*, monthly newspaper of the National Union of Civil & Public Servants, April 1995)

THE LETTER COLUMN

Edited by Joseph Nicholas

Although most of the British copies of FTT 17 were distributed at the Ducklands Eastercon in mid-April, the North American copies didn't enter the mails until several weeks later -- leading us to think that this issue would have a much shorter letter column than usual. But then people wrote such interesting letters we had to think again -- so let's plunge straight in with:

Stephen O'Kane
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"As a long-time ME sufferer, and for that reason officially a member of the underclass (I write, but converting that into big money is another matter), I appreciate some of the sentiments in your letter column about the NHS, health insurance, and political conservatives. Unfortunately, it's fairly clear from the experience of people with long-term conditions like ME and MS -- not the same, although they occasionally get confused -- that they'd need to band together and fight even if the health service were well-funded! The welfare state has suffered quite as badly as techno SF from our learning that experts can't be trusted. After years of doctors not listening (or appearing not to listen) and patients being told they are malingerers or neurotic, it was not surprising that many turned to DIY solutions or alternative medicine. Some alternative or 'complementary' medicine like homeopathy or acupuncture is finding its way into the NHS (depending on where you live). But a DIY spirit in these things could be roped in with New Right economic libertarianism as well as the decentralist neighbourhood democracy which forms the theme of the romantic Left these days. *Both* of these claim to reject old-style Fabian socialism and the expert. Still, the present government are finding experts in the shape of DSS doctors convenient for demonstrating that people are not entitled to the new Incapacity Benefit. The current trends are sickening both literally and metaphorically."

Neil K Henderson
46 Revoch Drive
Knightswood
Glasgow G13 4SB

"I sympathise (nay, *empathise*) with Pat Silver's pre-Restart interview exasperation. I've been subject to such interrogation for years. In fact, I must be eligible for a gilt hour-glass, having been first 'promoted' from the mundane Jobclub to the *Executive* Jobclub, with its better class of Jobless, and now being nudged into something called Community Action (it's *voluntary*, honest), which seems to be the same thing in the same place with £10 extra dole per fortnight -- the Big Question being whether this is as well as, or instead of, my travelling expenses, which are more than £10. I think the forms now tell you what you are expected to say, regardless of 'irrelevant' self-worth. And, after all, anything you say may be taken down and used to falsify the unemployment figures -- 'actively seeking work' being the magic phrase."

I'm intrigued by the concept of an Executive Jobclub -- it's obviously a step up from ordinary Jobclub, but is it intermediate between that and, say, First Class Jobclub? One has visions of a sort of ladder of progression modelled on the classes of travel available on airlines, with its equivalent of extra leg-room and complimentary eye-shades, not to mention the ubiquitous Air Miles: the longer you sign on, the more points you accumulate towards....towards a week when you can claim benefit without having to sign on! And by this wheeze the government could reduce unemployment by thousands, as each week people cash in their points for seven days of genuine indolence! Why hasn't Gillian Shepherd thought of this? We must move fast -- put on baggy suits and floral ties and sell the idea to her with fancy flip-charts and multi-colour graphics at consultancy fees of £400 per hour plus VAT! We could make millions!

Neil K Henderson
(address as before)

"Executive Jobclub is more your graduates and professional types -- unemployed architects, down-at-heel accountants, financially fucked consultants, and finless fish-worshippers like me. It doesn't just provide stamps and telephone -- you have access to PCs and a fax, and they'll send letters to Hong Kong for you (no phone calls to Australia, though). It's

run by a private company called B.E.S.T. (of course), and when I started nearly a year ago the bloke in charge was actually called Winning -- though a lot friendlier and more easy-going than the name might imply.

"Alas, I am no longer an executive of the idle classes, having been 'voluntarily' shunted sideways onto a Community Action programme on the same premises (so I still get to use the facilities). So now I have to turn up for three whole days a week for dole money plus £10 per week (minus the first £4 of travel costs per week). I may have officially ceased to be an executive, but I'm still a *commuter*. But -- and this fits with your 'ladder of progression' -- I am not required to sign on. Unfortunately, I don't get the 'genuine indolence' experience, since I have to get out of bed three mornings in a row, but actual *work* has not so far been mentioned to me. But the obvious economic miracle is that, although I still have no job as such, I am now officially Not Unemployed. (At this rate, the act of signing on will soon be designated Skilled Labour.) We can't sell the idea to the government, though, because it's already in operation. The First Class Jobclub (codename *Directorshipclub*) is obviously where redundant chancellors of the exchequer end up. Seems to have a pretty high success rate, too....

"You do meet some interesting bods at the Executive Jobclub, though. One Andy Nimmo is currently promoting his plan to send 1p coins into space (see -- the Space Programme isn't finished after all), and along with the likes of Duncan Lunan is trying to get money out of the Millennium Commission for it. I think they're going to be drumming up business at the Worldcon."

Neil enclosed a press cutting about this scheme, which involves dumping a load of coins on various moons and asteroids and then challenging people to go and find them, so triggering an upsurge of space travel. It's schemes like this which remind one why Duncan Lunan is often known as "Duncan Loony"....

Chester Cuthbert
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Canada

"Pat Silver and Derek Pickles have expressed vividly the fears I entertain regarding present social and economic trends to the Right. Our most important province -- Ontario -- has just elected a Conservative government which has promised a 30% reduction in its provincial taxes and a 20% reduction in welfare benefits, the latter being denied to anyone unwilling to accept training or working, which is now being termed 'workfare' Every Canadian political party has espoused the cause of deficit reduction because of the propaganda threatening the total collapse of our country's credit rating if this is not done. Deprivation of the poor and jobless is inevitable. Employers and the government will be delighted that union and non-union workers will be battling each other instead of them

"I was the only one of my family employed full-time during the Depression of the thirties. My father and brother had a sample of workfare: they dug up dandelions and mowed the boulevards of people in Winnipeg's wealthier districts, and chopped wood in the city woodyard which provided fuel to 'relief' recipients. My brother offered to work without wages if he was taught the fruit business: he had worked for one hour when the foreman called him over and asked what he was doing. He explained; the foreman said: 'Get out of here. How safe do you think our jobs are if you are willing to work for nothing?'

"I could tell of my experiences trying to re-enter the workforce after I took early retirement from the insurance business, but it would be a long and useless story and no different from the many which middle-aged jobless will soon be telling."

Pam Baddeley
55 Union Street
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Hampshire GU14 7PX

"I can't claim to have had personal experience of the deprivation Derek Pickles recounts from his childhood, but I can report that there were even worse circumstances. My Dad was 19 in 1938. By that time, he'd been laid off a job down the pits because he'd reached the age where he qualified for 'man's money' instead of 'youth's money'. The way it was done was that you went down in the cage to the coal face as usual, but when you got there your shovel was given to a young boy and you had to sit there until the end of the shift. The family were so hard up they had canvas sacks on the floor for rugs, two or three kids slept in a bed, and Dad had had to work on Jackson's farm near his home both before and after school since the age of 9 -- the farmer paid him in food for the family. They didn't even qualify for relief until they had sold most of their furniture, as the Relief Officer ordered. His father had been disabled by a lifetime of working in the colliery, so could only manage the lower-paid surface jobs, and his mum earned extra money on various heavy work, such as taking in laundry (all hand-washed in

great tubs, of course) and even loading a cart for the local coalman! (Both of my grandparents died in their fifties, probably of sheer overwork.)

"When my Dad lost his job in the pits, he managed to get work in a pottery for a short while, but was laid off that too. After that, he had to leave home because his parents couldn't afford to support anyone out of work, and slept rough until the police took him down to the local recruiting office. Apparently, this was common practice. He was signed into the Royal Navy, a great relief to Dad since it meant regular meals and a roof over his head, at least until war broke out!

"The result of hearing about all this is that since my own childhood I've been a lifelong Labour supporter, as of course has my Dad. I know Labour come in for a lot of stick these days, but they still seem better than the alternative. As for why working people vote for parties which have no intention of helping them, I can only think it's the carrots of tax cuts combined with scaremongering about trades unions (not so effective now that they've been flattened, of course). Personally, I think such people need their brains tested! Alternative politics is all very well, but if you don't vote the wrong ones get in and stay in (as we've seen for the past sixteen years). Civil liberties, the health service, the whole structure of British life since 1945 that masses of working people fought and sacrificed for has been dismantled. I call that apathy!"

But an argument that at the end of the day you have to vote for a political party or nothing will happen is essentially to re-assert the old paradigm against the new -- to say that we can't achieve anything ourselves and that we need politicians to lead us. I disagree. The protests against veal calf exports I mentioned in the previous issue were just the most recent example of politicians' slowness to respond to popular issues; the history of British politics since the advent of universal suffrage demonstrates over and over again that Westminster politicians are the last to wake up to popular pressure: that they do not lead, but follow. For example, the government recently passed a Bill to set up an Environmental Protection Agency, but did so not because it's suddenly turned green but because it was forced to act by the rising tide of concern amongst Conservative supporters about water, air, forests, and motorways -- Conservative supporters who were in turn "radicalised" by people who'd spent years campaigning in a political wilderness with Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace but saw their persistence pay off in the late eighties as environmental issues finally crossed into the mainstream. Sure, the Environmental Protection Agency set up by this government will be pretty toothless, but we wouldn't have it at all without popular pressure "from below", and the fact of its existence means that its powers can be strengthened by any future government (probably in response to public disgust at the Agency's obvious failings).

You say that Labour comes in for a lot of stick but at least it's better than the Conservatives. It's undeniably more concerned about unemployment, pensions, housing, healthcare, and education, and would clearly prioritise these social issues over contemporary Tory nostrums of deregulation, privatisation and covert arms sales to foreign dictators, but....but we've had Labour governments, and a survey of their history forces one to ask whether their achievements are as enduring as claimed. For example, everyone points to Attlee implementing the Beveridge Report and establishing a National Health Service free to all at the point of use; but as the past sixteen years have shown, not even the NHS is immune to a successor government's desire to re-privatise healthcare and undo "progress".

*Why? Because Labour still fails to grasp the fundamental importance of constitutional reform to the long-term success of its programme. Constitutional reform isn't just about changing the voting system or replacing the House of Lords with an elected second chamber: it's about taking on and defeating "the establishment", that nexus of commercial, financial, judicial, military, land-owning, and civil service interests which control the institutions of the state and which -- as Will Hutton argues in *The State We're In* -- is responsible for Britain's failure to modernise itself to cope with a world in which it's no longer an imperial power. Labour clings to an unreconstructed Fabian view that to gain an absolute majority of Parliamentary seats is sufficient to gain control of the institutions of the state and thereby bend them to its will; but this has never been the case, and is laughably myopic now that so much of the nation's affairs are controlled by an unelected quangocracy of Tory placemen. Without thoroughgoing constitutional reform to root out "the establishment", its entrenched influence and position will force Labour into one exhausted compromise after another, once again reducing its programme to minimalistic tinkering at the margins.*

Assuming that Labour has an identifiable programme to begin with. These days it seems to be little more than "Not the Conservative Party" -- but it adopted that tag during the last years of Thatcher, and was

duly clobbered when she was dumped in favour of new boy John Major. Will the same happen again, now that the price of Major's re-election as Conservative leader has been his de facto surrender of control of economic policy to Michael Heseltine, who will begin to pull the government back towards the centre ground Labour has recently tried to claim as its own? Given Labour's apparent failure even to recognise the Heseltinian threat, I wouldn't be at all surprised in the months to come to see it running desperately to catch up, yet again inventing policy on the hoof in an attempt to fill the vacuum and yet again telling itself that it should have learned from previous experience.

Of course, there was Tony Blair's recent "tough on inflation, tough on the causes of inflation" speech -- a speech with which he signalled that like the Tories he'd run the economy for the benefit of TNCs and international currency speculators rather than the British electorate; so goodbye increased spending on health, pensions and education, environmental protection, a switch of transport investment from road to rail, the re-assertion of public control over the privatised power and water utilities, the introduction of a minimum wage, and everything else for which it claims to stand. If, as Blair's speech suggests, Labour intends to place the interests of the City ahead of everyone else, then what real difference is there between its economic priorities and those of the Tories?

All of which constitutes another stupendously lengthy answer to a very short letter, and means that my analysis of the timing of the next general election, the long-term strategy of the Tory right, and the fate of the Blair government's first-year programme will have to be held over. Instead, let's hear from:

Steve Brewster
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"It's not surprising that single-issue pressure groups are gaining influence at the expense of traditional political parties: the old big certainties seem dead, so it feels wise to concentrate on what you *really* believe in (whether it's fewer roads or more housing or British withdrawal from the EU) and just support, well, what you *support*, rather than toe a party line. I do wonder sometimes whether issue-based politics is, however, inherently less effective than standard politics, and also detrimental to those who devote themselves to it. The worst thing about pressure-group politics is its utterly adversarial nature. It's very bad for anyone who has a Cause at heart to mix only with fellow-believers. Membership of a political party which covers a broad range of viewpoints (nasty translation: whose policy is a compromise concealing internal division) at least gets you *arguing* with your colleagues, stating your case, learning to back down, etc., from day one. Political parties know how to back down, but a pressure group can never, well hardly ever, do so. This kind of politics, bereft of thought, too often makes do with righteous anger. 'The residents of Brightlingsea show their righteous anger', and so on -- I am reminded of those awful shits one sees screaming and hammering on the prison vans outside murder trials (I keep hoping that one day the van will accidentally on purpose reverse into the crowd and splat a few of them). Righteous anger is not always accompanied by virtue."

Pressure group politics is "utterly adversarial"? People who have "a Cause at heart" associate "only with fellow-believers"? This doesn't sound like the sort of pressure group politics with which we're familiar.

Forget crusties tangling with police at Brightlingsea in veal export protests, or street marches fronted by head-banging Socialist Wankers calling for all-out general strike now: these images have the currency they do because they satisfy news editors' needs for dynamic, active pictures, but are no more typical of pressure group politics than people in Star Trek uniforms are typical of SF fans. They may be -- like people in Star Trek uniforms -- pressure groups' most visible manifestation, but are scarcely characteristic of them. Most pressure group work consists of decidedly non-confrontational activities, such as leafleting, running street stalls, collecting signatures on petitions, lobbying councillors and officials, meeting in each others' houses to plan the next stages of a local campaign, and so forth. Pressure group activities at regional or national levels may be more cerebral and higher-powered -- conferences, publishing reports, writing articles for newspapers, appearing on Newsnight -- but are just as sedate. (Ask Christina Lake if you can borrow her copy of FTT 13, to read Judith's account of what working as assistant director of a pressure group actually involves.) In any case, an argument that pressure group activities are adversarial because they are situated in opposition to something is a non-argument, because politics is adversarial by its very nature. How could it be otherwise, when it concerns differences of priorities and preferred goals?

The New Economics Foundation, Transport 2000, the Ramblers Association, Friends of the Earth, the World Development Movement, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament; these are all pressure groups.

The key distinction between them and a political party is that they are not in competition for Parliamentary representation, and are therefore free to concentrate only on those issues of direct relevance to them -- while political parties, by contrast, have to have a policy for everything. In addition, members of political parties do very little of the arguing or stating of cases you claim, since they are usually regarded as canvassing fodder to be wheeled out at elections to campaign for policies decided elsewhere. That, or spending time in meetings fussing about the accuracy of the previous minutes....

Pamela Boal
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"I do agree that quiet, long-term people politics is becoming the way of combating harmful party politics, although those who are living the life of barter, recycling, organic gardening, walking, or sharing transport when needful (rather than making token efforts while continuing to live the same old high energy- and product-consuming life) do recognise that they will not be allowed to get a foothold if they do not become involved at least locally in traditional politics. For example, members of a group fighting eviction from their own land (over lack of planning permission) are also standing for the local parish and district councils.

"I was amused that some members of the group who had been unemployed (in the 9-to-5 earning hard cash sense) for some time were only too happy to take part in a Public Service Employment Scheme, clearing the area's public footpaths and repairing (or replacing) the stiles and bridges. They are also identifying ancient paths and rights of way, making sure that they're put into the system for legal inclusion in survey maps, and signposting routes that landowners have fudged in hopes of getting them disused. Thus the group is getting the system to contribute to work they would do anyway in their immediate area."

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"It does get depressing to read what our governments and big businesses are up to but, as you mention, people are starting to bypass them. I sometimes wonder, though, if the middle classes aren't their own worst enemies. One sees many yuppie couples staggering under a mortgage on a house far bigger than they need. In the neighbourhoods of my parks maintenance district, I have noticed that the places with huge barns of houses are deserted during the day, with little or no traffic beyond lawn care companies. Everyone is out working, husband and wife, to pay off the mortgage. It is one thing for a common labourer to be struggling to raise a family in a subsidised (council) house, but I see far too many people with BMWs, big houses and annual trips to Hawai'i complaining about how many hours they have to work. They don't have to work long hours if they really didn't want to."

Leigh Edmonds
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"I'm not at all sure about your rhetoric in the letter column and in your erudite articles. I get the strong impression that the discourse here is an attempt to explain the current state of affairs and then to set it into a framework which would have been totally at place in the dialectical process which Marx and his friends and enemies were using a century and more ago. This is the discourse where the use of skilfully crafted words would explain reality and, more to the point, create reality. It is as though the more strongly and earnestly you argue a point the more likely it is to be true. But what you end up with is discourse, you don't end up with resolution. A very post-modern state of affairs.

"The kind of discourse taking place here is not much different from the earnestness of street marches and the like, and it is certainly in the same area of human activity where you might get the delight of actually engaging with the enemies of truth and beauty, but you are not likely to overcome them and reach a resolution.

"I had a very interesting experience a few months ago, when I was invited to be a guest speaker at a meeting of interest groups at a 'Fix Australia -- Fix The Roads' summit. I was there to talk to the assembled mass (we're talking State Ministers for Transport, State Road Authority CEOs, local government politicians and the like) about how roads had been important to the development of Australia. I thought this would bore people to death, so I decided to put on a bit of a performance in my little slot so, while they were all wearing black and grey suits with amazing florid ties (have you noticed that men's suits are becoming more and more mundane but their ties are becoming outrageous), I wore my lovely pink outfit with my black tie (yes, I do have two ties). And I stood up there for thirty minutes and told them anecdotes about roads, and told them that they were completely out of touch with the people out there who used roads.

They all seemed to listen, because they told me how good it was, but they didn't hear what I was saying because they went on with their own way of doing things, a technocratic view of the world which was tedious beyond description and sometimes completely bamboozling. For example, the Western Australian Commissioner of Main Roads got up and gave a long exposition with facts, figures and slides which boiled down to the basic fact that the roads have more pot-holes in them because there isn't enough money for roads. I completely missed the point of what he had to say because it was in a discourse of statistics and technical language in which I don't think. There was also a fellow from a transport company who gave basically the same presentation, only much worse, so I went to sleep.

"The lesson for me in all this is that these people are very good at talking to themselves, and they hire public relations consultants to try to get their message out to the public. However, these people have a technocratic or mechanistic view of the world, and are unable to see that other modes of discourse are more effective. Although the people at the 'Fix Australia -- Fix The Roads' summit probably never read an issue of *Astounding*, they think that way. People who are now in their teens and twenties are right to simply ignore this way of doing things, and I'm not sure that we're doing them any kind of service by trying to explain what they are up to in the old modes of discourse.

"At the question session at the end of the summit, one fellow got up and asked what was the point of building more and better roads if there was going to be a shortage of energy to power the vehicles on them. The local Minister for Transport responded that there was no need to worry about that because the back-room boffins would come up with something to replace petrol (not his exact words, but that was his meaning). After the meeting, I had a nice chat to this man about the second law of thermodynamics, the postulated fourth law governing systems, energy gradients, the social construction of reality, and a few other basic concepts which anyone with a handle on the history and theory of technology should have. While this was going on, one of the Managers from Main Roads stood by with a blank expression on his face. At least it was fun to talk in a discourse that they found confusing and probably boring.

"The problem is that it is those guys and not us who have their hands on the levers of power. They have constructed a way of seeing the world which discounts the important kind of things Joseph has to say by giving them a second or third category level of significance, things to be considered after other more pressing problems such as funding of work-place reorganisation have been solved. Joseph might have a good time chatting to us, but we don't need chatting to. And even if we did, we're not the people who are going to make a difference. The people who are going to make a difference are too busy reading reports written by people who think just like them. Or if they are the coming generation, they are out there playing on the Internet and, in my opinion, being distracted by the music while Rome burns.

"In other words, I find your articles a bit like sports commentating: it's very interesting, but it's not the game itself. Perhaps you've been reading *The Guardian* for too long and not playing the game. One of the reasons I enjoy things like teaching and talking on the radio and in public is because it gives me an opportunity to help people take on board the kinds of perspectives we share. For example, during a lecture I was giving to the Mature Age Learning Association (a form of University of the Third Age), I brought up the question of the cost of development in relation to roads, and many of the people there had some interesting thoughts on the subject. At a recent talk to the Royal WA Historical Society, I got them to think about the fact that work in the 1920s and 1930s was different in nature to what it is now. I don't know that it has a major effect, but every little bit out there in the real world where the game is being played helps."

Too much theory, not enough praxis; this must be the nicest rebuke I've ever had. I take your point, Herr Doktor Professor Edmonds, but in my defence must point out that I don't have anything like the opportunities you do to instruct the masses on the establishment of workers' democracy throughout the sevagram (etc. etc.). But I do my little bit in whatever way I can -- letters to newspapers, donations to good causes, and so forth. In this fanzine, however -- in the absence of, say, a regular column in a nationally disseminated journal -- I prefer to indulge myself in ideas rather than action. Well, it's (half) my fanzine, after all....

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"As I read through your article it occurred to me that while I've observed some of the individual items you discuss -- particularly the crazy idea of rock music being the catalyst for change -- I probably wouldn't have gone from there to draw them together. This is a reflection of where I'm at these days more than anything else; I don't read as widely or as well as I used to. Without that constant barrage of style,

art, information and opinions, I'm often not in a good position to look beyond that first stage. So you'll have to excuse me if I only pick on individual lines and paragraphs, rather than the overall themes, to which to respond.

"I found the images presented in the first paragraph of the article to be funny. When Wendy and I decided to buy some classical music albums I was waiting to meet someone who'd tell us we had to have 'X's recording of'. And you know, I've never met that person. I wonder if they're a straw person of someone's imagination. I've had people whose prime hobby is classical music recommend particular recordings, but always qualified by the discussion which came before.

"I watched the same BBC TV documentary on the Woodstock Festival. My memory of Richie Havens's discussion of 'Freedom' is somewhat hazy, but I think his claim that he came up with on the spot is not too far fetched. Didn't he say the song was constructed out of bits and pieces which he'd tried before -- unfinished songs, segments from well-remembered jam sessions? If so, the song wasn't so much made up on the spot but constructed on the spot. I'd imagine that his backing musicians knew both Havens and what those bits and pieces were, and on the stage were simply doing a good job of following his lead."

Steve Palmer
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"I've never noticed that much sonic difference between vinyl and CD except for the complete lack of clicks, crunches and buzzes on CD and of course the extra clarity. I'd go for CD every time. Most of my CDs are new music, produced on new technology, and thus a comparison with, say, The Beatles is impossible. But I do have Yes's *Relayer* on vinyl and CD (I'm not afraid to say what a great, great album it is -- in fact, what a great, great band Yes were), and you do notice a lot of hiss at the end of the tracks on the CD although the listening quality seems to me better. But surely it is difficult to compare the two formats since so much of listening is personal preference? The musicians' comments you relayed were basically personal feelings; perfectly okay to use as 'evidence', but not comparable with the feelings of others. What I've said above is personal preference, although some music -- for example, digitally produced ambient music -- is clearly better on CD.

"The difference is with the distortion. Analogue systems (tape, vinyl) distort at high volumes, when the medium is overloaded. Digital systems distort at low volumes because the information comes in finite packages. Try listening to a very quiet passage on a CD or a DAT at high volume. It's weird.

"Oddly enough, there's a great debate in ambient/synth/keyboard circles at the moment about the sounds produced by digital versus analogue keyboards. The two keyboard players in my band both prefer (though they like digital sounds) the sounds produced by old analogue keyboards, even those made in the seventies, which they say give 'warmer, fatter sounds' and, more importantly, allow greater real-time control over sounds. They're not quite as stunning as digital sounds, but they have definite advantages. Many bands in the current explosion of psychedelic, 90s-hippy, ambient, cosmic festival type music are using these old synthesisers to great effect -- Ozric Tentacles, Mandragora, Optic Eye.

"So there y'are. We have digital and analogue; let's use them both!"

Steve Jeffery
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"The first thing which struck me was that we have a shared enthusiasm for June Tabor. We met her, of all places, at an Ellen Kushner signing for *Thomas The Rhymer*, and were rather pleased when June remembered us and came over to chat some months later when we saw her at Banbury. I didn't know of the vinyl release of *Against The Streams*. It's a long time since I bought something on vinyl, though having seen the prices some of my early punk singles are fetching in specialist shops, I'm tempted to keep them carefully stacked away. I'm sure I had a tape of Jefferson Airplane's wonderfully titled *Worst Of...*, but can't find it anywhere now, when I came over with a desire to hear it again. I've given away too much of my past to the Notting Hill Record Exchange -- a since much regretted short-termism.

"I can't agree with your dismissal of *all* opera as 'utter wank' -- just Sturgeon's percentage of it. I can't get on with Wagner, but big chunks of *Rigoletto* are immensely hummable. And I've just found that thing which BA uses in its adverts, which I've always thought rather beautiful.

"But I agree that we won't storm the barricades to Pulp, Blur, Suede or their ilk. Or even to Ministry, Rage Against The Machine or Nine Inch Nails. Music is far too short-term a catharsis for energising long-term change."

Pascal Thomas
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France

"I never thought that rock music really was revolutionary, which enables me to dig MC5 to the max while retaining my mildly reactionary world views. In fact, I figured out early enough that rock music was the ultimate product of the capitalist system and that, indeed, an authoritarian version of bourgeois democracy (such as the Nixon presidency in the USA, Pompidou in France, or Thatcher in Britain) fostered the production of exciting music, stimulated by the desire to protest against the system. Let's face it, what good rock'n'roll was produced under Jimmy Carter?"

Fleetwood Mac's two best-selling albums of the late seventies, actually. But your statement that you didn't think rock music was revolutionary is rather contradicted by your claim that exciting music is produced under authoritarian versions of bourgeois democracy -- that is, rock music is at its best when it has a political motivation!

However, one of your "authoritarian" examples, Margaret Thatcher, doesn't support this claim because the music produced during her reign was scarcely political at all. Spandau Ballet, Duran Duran, Orchestral Manoeuvres In The Dark, Culture Club, Wham, ABC, The Pet Shop Boys -- all celebrated rather than dissented from the prevailing yuppie values. The various strains of techno, the rave culture which the Criminal Justice Act attempted to outlaw, and to a certain extent the contemporary indie scene are equally optimistic, hedonistic, and unconcerned with politics qua politics. Elastica's "Waking Up" is all about the joys of, well, waking up in the morning, and The Cranberries' Dolores O'Riordan gets the inspiration for her songs from her family background rather than the daily news. (Most of her songs, anyway. That about the Troubles on No Need To Argue is dreadful.) Yet what music was produced during the period of complacency, indecision and policy drift which characterised the Callaghan government of the late seventies? Punk, that's what -- The Damned, The Clash, The Sex Pistols, Sham 69, UK Subs, The Lurkers, The Only Ones, Elvis Costello, The Jam: political songs for an apolitical era.

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"I'm with you on the revolutionary potential of rock music. Even as an uppity teenager in Detroit in 1992, I knew along with everybody else that music was for partying and that John Lennon's 'Power To The People' was just getting in the way. "We agree on the failure of agenda SF, too. Since Moonbases and such are not on the cards, it's hard to get excited about books which feature them. But I don't think Iain Banks playfully mocks SF's lost technocratic future -- I found *The Use Of Weapons* much too grotesque, cynical and nihilistic to get into."

I stand by my remark about Iain Banks. The Use Of Weapons is dark and grotesque, but actually received better reviews than the previous two "Culture" novels, Consider Phlebas and The Player Of Games, perhaps because it was more character-oriented. The previous two, by contrast, were much more ideas-oriented, with ur-Stapledonian vistas of history stretching out both before and behind and a clever political intellect to give it all a sense of purpose. Most reviewers of the first two were perhaps not politically sensitive enough to grasp this, and therefore missed the jokes: in The Player Of Games, for example, there's a blink-and-you'll-miss-it riposte to Marx's theory about the alienation of the worker from the process of production using William Morris's theory of the worker as craftsman who invests something of himself in each product. I read the passage again to make sure that Banks was saying what I thought he was; then laughed.

Pamela Boal
(address as before)

"Is it not odd how two people can read the same book and see it in an entirely different light? I saw *Fallen Angels* as a well-paced, often gently humorous, adventure yarn. The background of the plot is surely rooted in World War Two underground rescue stories. When you have a them-and-us situation, it is convenient to have a place for 'Us' and, being fans, space is a natural choice. The message there seemed to me not to be that space is our only salvation, but that space could be utilised at far less cost, a point of view long held by many fans. The real message (and frankly I think the book is too lightweight to carry it) seemed to me to be the danger of extremism: that going overboard on one aspect of a complex system is as dangerous as ignoring warning signs. After all, we've been there so many times. We accept that the total problem is A, and that the answer is therefore B, hence DDT, nitrates, introduced predators *et al*, which are but the tip of the iceberg of wrong or incomplete answers."

I wasn't insensible to the resistance and rescue stories on which the plot of Fallen Angels was based, but don't think it can be read in isolation from the "implied personalities" of its authors, both of whom are closely associated with the US space lobby and have often claimed that transferring the US space programme from NASA to the private sector is necessary for its revitalisation. It's apparent from their afterword that they think they've found the (relatively) cheap spaceship with which to finesse the gargantuan costs of spaceflight, but the arithmetic behind this and similar claims that the private sector can undertake it more economically is absurd. Aerospace corporations simply can't function without governments to buy their high-tech hardware; so no government-as-customer means no spacecraft construction (with the usual cost overruns and inflated prices characteristic of featherbedded military contracts).

I agree, however, that Fallen Angels is lightweight -- a failing traceable directly to the fact that the underground is run by SF fans. This is daft enough in itself, but rendered even more implausible by the alleged totalitarianism of the green state they oppose. If the government is as oppressive as claimed, it would never allow fans to gather for conventions, publish samizdat magazines, or drive around in large groups without police tails. The Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe gave their writers a hard time; readers who tried to do more than just read would scarcely be exempt from the same attention.

Dale Speirs (address as before) "Your remarks about *Analog*-type SF reminded me of a panel at last year's Winnipeg Worldcon. The panel 'One Language For The World?' was immensely popular with the Canadian fans, the subject of bilingualism being one of Canada's obsessions. The panellists included *Analog* editor Stanley Schmidt, who seemed shocked that the audience didn't agree with his suggestion that every country should have one universal language. (The unspoken assumption was of course that everyone would learn English.) As the panel went on, it became apparent that he believed people would just naturally conform to the vision of the High Frontier, if only they were shown the way."

Andy Sawyer
1 The Flaxyard
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South Wirral L64 4BT "I'm not sure how much I actually disagree with the 'failed technocracy' argument but I do think that space is in the future in some form even if the reality of orbital factories won't necessarily be how they're pictured in expansionist propaganda. I see in the rush to define paradigms in terms of complexity and chaos a process not dissimilar to the technocratic optimism of earlier decades: i.e., the interpretation of social process through whatever theory is meant to be at the cutting edge of science. The similarity of Robinson's Mars mission to von Braun's is due not so much to lack of vision in Robinson as to the factual constraints he's working within; you could say the same about most post-cyberpunk which, despite the existence of *Wired*, is saying little new. There are about half-a-dozen basic themes and images which *Wired* or *Mondo 2000* cover in rotation: just like *Good Housekeeping* or *The Face*, they are lifestyle magazines rather than exploratory expeditions; we're just talking something a little bit closer to whatever that mythical territory known as 'the edge' is. The problem with Robinson's Mars books, which I admire for the same reasons Platt lists, is that they were out of date before they were published, in that the possibility of space exploration replacing Cold War militarism as a way of sorting out the problems of a redundant military-industrial complex existed for about five minutes before the MIC became most emphatically *non-redundant*.

"My own feeling -- and this is pessimism rather than optimism -- is that the fragmented series of futures we are flowing into will include Space -- not space as the means of bringing about any sort of utopia and (for the foreseeable future) not space in terms of physical expansion, but space as spectacle and as displacement activity when similar tensions to the Cold War arise, as well as a way of disposing of some of the vast profits accrued when everything else is privatised. The old US cliché of space being colonised by private enterprise is coming closer, but it will be more the cyberpunk corporations than the clean-cut kids building rockets in their backyards who do it, and they will do it not for the thrill of adventure but because in the end it will be so much *easier* than dealing with looming social and economic problems."

Colin Greenland
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Middlesex HA2 0DA "That SF books don't sell as well as they used to must certainly be due to the collapse of linear progressive models of history -- very good, that comparison of Asimov's psychohistory to Marxism -- but even more, I believe, to Edward James's point in his editorial in *Foundation* 62: that whatever the genre had to sell (imagery, concepts, perspectives), it has sold so well that the original fiction itself has become

redundant. He points to the sheer volume of SF in the media, including the iconography of advertising, video games and juvenile cartoons. Nobody needs to have the future laboriously constructed for them in time-consuming and thought-intensive print when they can access it (and, as Charles Platt says, play with it, morph it) at the touch of a key -- and have been doing so since the age of 4. SF, in the larger sense of an imaginative enterprise, is alive and well, and flourishing on a VDU near you.

"At the same time, SF the literature has exploded (i.e., increased dramatically in volume as well as fragmented) beyond the capacity of any individual reader, which is as much to do with books going out of print more quickly as it is with more titles being published all the time, more and more books chasing fewer and fewer readers. Given this, your notion that there is a 'core' SF, technocratic 'hard' SF, and that it is still 'dominant' is, I'm afraid, terribly out of date. There are not a dozen *Fallen Angels* for every *Virtual Light*, as any issue of *Locus* will show you.

"What is dominant now, in any sense, is fantasy. What a book like *Harm's Way* is doing, while finding pleasure and irony in redesigning space opera as a romance of the British Empire instead of the American, is releasing the *fantasy* that is the essence of both traditions.

"SF is fantasy, and always has been. To me, as presumably to the kids with the Nintendos and the Power Ranger videos, that's axiomatic. SF is one of the ways we dream about ourselves, a Carrollian inversion whose foreground, its ostensible content, is what we might be, and whose latent content, always and inevitably, is our current assumptions about what we are. SF always describes the present, whatever Roland White thinks I said on page 25 of this week's *Radio Times*.

"You're right that the realisation that the future is fractal has put the literalists and extrapolators at a disadvantage. If Niven and Pournelle's latest 'verges on the hysterical', it is no surprise. On the other hand, a 'discontinuous and incomprehensible' world is perfectly hospitable to those of us who always assumed it was so, and who were listening when J G Ballard said that hysteria is intrinsic to the genre, just as it was to Dali and Ernst. One of the reasons Jim Burns's painting for the cover of *Seasons Of Plenty* is so right is that it has exactly that quality, of nonsense given substance, hallucination made flesh: a spaced-out coffee-coloured ex-truckdriver and her sapient felinoid bodyguard encountering a baby Mekon in a cavern of-ossified alien saliva!"

Stephen O'Kane (address as before) "Now here's a case for getting Back to Basics! First, SF has always depended heavily on *sense of wonder*. After all, that's what we read Captain W E Johns for when we were 10! My associates in the Friday night group in Brighton sometimes talk about the traditions of imaginative fantasy about unknown lands and places; as old as Homer's *Odyssey*, the Atlantis story, More's *Utopia*, or whatever. Are these SF? The point being, of course, that we have always been dreaming and wondering about the far away. During most of the twentieth century the easiest way of doing so seemed to be nipping about the galaxy, dropping in on strange planets with bug-eyed monsters, or playing around with whizzo gadgets. (Especially before SF writers tried to get sophisticated and bring in awkward complications like time dilation.) The 1990s mix of scientific sophistication and funding cutbacks squeezes out the childlike sense of wonder which was the core of old-style SF. An illustration: scientific probes tell us about Mars, while we can't find the money to go there.

"I'd be interested to know how others feel -- however good they may be (although often aren't), fantasy and horror don't replace that for me. Even when they're not just stylised and predictable, the worlds they create are totally detached. When I finish a story about vampires, I know they won't be discovered, except as a metaphor for sexual repression or whatever, so there seems nothing to wonder about. A simple question: where's the wonder to come from in the twenty-first century, when our own world is thoroughly known except for how we can avoid messing it up, and religion again comes forward as a mess of sectarian groups squabbling amongst themselves?"

"Second broad point: perhaps Charles Platt, John Clute and others might remember that 'science fiction' just means fiction claiming some sort of scientific basis, even if it's utter bosh. (I realise that this brings in realistic fiction with a social science basis, but not to worry.) In essence, 'science' means any empirical investigation to test hypotheses about the natural world. So fiction involving nanotech, smart drugs, sex changes, ecology, etc., is still just as much science fiction as space opera, surely? It's just harder to feel any sense of wonder when it's all too near home. Yet that's another reason why I read SF. If you're going to bother with realistic fiction, I reckon SF has been able to do the job better than the mainstream since (say) 1930, and at its best it does."

I think there's an important, if very narrow, distinction to be made between science fiction and works like The Odyssey and Utopia, however. Historians of SF often cite such works as antecedents of the genre, and often attempt to construct some sort of ur-genealogy to show that Robert Heinlein's The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress is a direct descendant of (say) The Adventures Of Baron Munchausen, but if there is a connection it's more that science fiction has appropriated these works' subject-matter than because it is their modern equivalent. This is one of the reasons why I referred to SF as 'genre science fiction' rather than just 'science fiction' (although I slipped on a couple of occasions), to indicate that I was dealing with a narrower and more specific stream of writing than the wider literary facets often swept into the SF fold.

From this perspective, though, SF can be read as a specialised form of the older literary tradition of imaginative fantasy, which perhaps reinforces your point that in this century the easiest way of satisfying the sense of wonder on which all imaginative literature depends has been by climbing into a spaceship and banging around the galaxy. One is reminded of J G Ballard's comment that science fiction is the only genuine literature of the twentieth century, because it is the only literature which responds directly to its hopes and concerns. I'm not hubristic enough to compare myself with Ballard, but I would suggest that my argument that genre SF is a specifically technocratic literature is evidence of the same.

Is genre SF therefore dying, as the technocratic worldview which underpins it collapses and Hobsbawm's short twentieth century runs out? If so, what might take its place? It's probably too early to make any sensible guesses, but there are one or two straws in the wind -- for example, a possible revival of the Wellsian scientific romance by such as Stephen Baxter, who may be writing under the science fiction label but is clearly reaching further back into literary history than it allows. But whether scientific romances can be sustained, given what we now know about the misuses of science, is another question altogether.

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"Your idea that Asimov's psychohistory was influenced, through Frederik Pohl, by Marxism is a cute notion that *may* have some truth to it, but even a Marxist ignoramus like me knows there is precious little true Marxist thought in the *Foundation* trilogy. A technological elite which plans to take over society and rule according to the laws of science and rationality has precious little to do with the working class, of which there's little sign in Asimov -- as in most Campbellian

fiction, whose leading characters are mostly technicians or scientists who may be drawn from working class backgrounds but who have no identification with or loyalty to their roots. The idea sells Asimov seriously short -- though shallow in his appreciation of literature outside SF and with little interest in politics (but enough to be repelled by Campbell's rightward drift in his later years), he was an extremely intelligent man with a near-photographic memory who had, even at the early date we're talking about, read his way through a respectable fraction of the New York library non-fiction stacks. It's bloody unlikely that he would not at least have skimmed an encyclopedia entry to gain a superficial knowledge of Marx for such influence as may (arguably) be found. So your speculation fails Occam's Law (although by the evidence of his autobiography Pohl was a firebrand dedicated to the cause who probably brought up the subject with everyone who didn't run for their lives at the first mention of it, while Asimov, according to his autobiography, was a shy youth who might have found himself trapped in such a conversation). What we have here may be a case of parallel evolution -- two Jewish (though non-believing) Rationalist intellectuals who think that the great task of humanity is to free itself from the superstitions of the past, one writing in a field meant to provoke concrete political action and the other producing a type of fiction despised by all but a few and expected to disappear into the dustbin after its brief appearance on the newsstands.

"There are actually far fewer parallels than might be expected, and if I were asked to write on the subject of Marx and Asimov I'd concentrate on the differences: the faith in the working man versus a belief in a technical elite; the acceptance of violence as a necessary tool of social change versus the statement that 'violence is the first resort of the incompetent'; the belief in the social construction of all knowledge, including science, versus a belief in the absolute impersonal truth of science; and the subordination of the individual to a cause versus the individualism of Asimov's protagonists. Hari Seldon says in one of his appearances in the time vault that the selfish designs of people in the mass will enhance the common good, which sounds more like Adam Smith than Karl Marx to me.

"'Technocratic' seems to me the wrong word to describe Campbellian SF. Its premises were that science/technology/rationality (the distinction was never clearly made) was one of the greatest (maybe the greatest) of human discoveries, that this was unambiguously a good thing, and that the brave explorer blazing

a trail for the rest of us should be restrained by the minimum of bureaucratic and social constraints -- all expressed in a basic adventure format derived from the pulps, and all (or most -- it wouldn't be hard to find stories that Campbell published which contradict this argument) embedded in a right-wing individualistic (although unconscious) American chauvinistic vision. To call this technocratic implies a future where a council of scientists rules, which isn't very Campbellian. What is very Campbellian is the climax of Poul Anderson's *Tau Zero*, where the competent man -- having seized power during a crisis and having competently dealt with it -- laughs off attempts to set him up as a permanent dictator and returns power to the people. There are of course dangers in such a vision, but they're a special case of a general problem, which is that having a moral vision sophisticated enough to admit that there are exceptions to practically every rule, one wants to protect the general rule from those most eager to take advantage of such licences.

"As for theorising about social influences on SF, I guess I take the view presented by Samuel Delany in his *Silent Interviews*: that there are such influences -- SF writers read the same newspapers, watch the same TV programmes, eat the same cornflakes for breakfast as their mundane colleagues -- but also deep scepticism towards the idea that reflecting the social climate is what all art does and that there is therefore no difference between SF visions and those of general literature. After all, there's a difference between black writing or women's writing and other literature, so why not SF and other literature? If SF were taken as just more of the same, the conclusion would be a big bonfire at the Foundation Library, as SF would then have to be justified on the basis of sheer writing and the direct (as opposed to symbolical or allegorical) depiction of reality."

Your comparison of Marx and Asimov, although interesting, rather misses the point -- I wasn't arguing that Marxism could be mapped one-to-one onto psychohistory (or vice versa), but that it was one of the currents of thought which would have informed the zeitgeist at the time Asimov was formulating his ideas for the Foundation series, and could therefore have helped shape it. The chief characteristic of both Marxism and psychohistory is that they are ur-scientific: they both believe in an ordered, rational world in which human behaviour can be predicted by quantifiable, statistical means, and thereby controlled. Indeed, for psychohistory the parallel goes further: in its insistence that history has a predictive dynamic, it mirrors Marx's own conception of history as something outside us, with its own iron laws and immutable doctrines.

*The question is whether Asimov was conscious of this when he embarked on the series, or whether he ever became conscious of it later. My suggestion that Asimov picked up some knowledge of Marxism from Frederik Pohl was, I confess, rather tongue-in-cheek -- from what I recall of his *The Way The Future Was*, Pohl said he joined the US Communist Party because it seemed the right thing to do at the time, in which case it would have been just another response to the zeitgeist. Just as, for example, the Michelism briefly pursued by Wollheim and others was explicitly socialist in its conception and just as, in its early days, Technocracy was explicitly anti-capitalist. But the distinction you make between the Foundation series' celebration of the rule of a scientific elite and Marx's (actually Lenin's) "dictatorship of the proletariat" is an important one. Indeed, it could even be argued that the series was a science-fictional response to the Marxist-Leninist worldview: that while the predictive dynamics (laws) of history are the same for all classes, the guidance of an elite rather than the rule of the mass is necessary to realise the most perfect outcome. There's scope here, perhaps, for a thesis from some clever post-graduate....*

I stand by my description of Campbellian SF as technocratic. A faith in science, technology and rationality as the best means of ordering society is the precise characteristic of the technocratic worldview: that is, a perspective derived from scientific or technological ideas. Campbellian SF's "competent man" is by all instincts and behaviour a technocrat, applying rational solutions to resolve a threatened upset to the perceived or desired order of affairs, whether that upset be economic, social, political, or an alien warfleet from Betelgeuse. That the competent man subsequently refuses to retain his privileged position once the crisis has passed does not alter this fact -- nor the fact that by applying his specialised technocratic knowledge he is behaving, for the duration of the crisis, as a member of a technocratic elite.

I'm not quite sure what point you're making about social influences on SF, but I can't see how it would lead to burning down the SF Foundation. It's obvious to me that SF writers, like all writers and artists, are bound to be influenced by what they see, hear, think and read; how can they not, when they share the same world as the rest of us? The point is that they just happen to write about it in a different way. (As Colin Greenland says, all SF is about the present.) One purpose of the article in the previous issue was to draw attention to some influences which are habitually overlooked in histories of early genre

SF, but which I consider constitute the bedrock on which much of the genre is founded. (Perhaps I should have put in a bit about the Whig conception of history and the myth of progress as well!)

But after all this chat about science fiction -- a subject not often seen in science fiction fanzines, as several wags remarked -- let's have some chat about fandom, a subject utterly alien to this fanzine:

Irwin Hirsh (address as before) "Judith's 'Once A Jolly GUFFman' is a fine piece of writing. It had my added interest as I was involved in so little of Joseph's 1981 GUFF trip. Adventon 81 seems to be one of the more important conventions in Australia's fan history, and continues to be one of the handful of conventions I wished I hadn't missed. (The Melbourne Film Festival, which in those days I wouldn't miss, screened Robert Altman's *Quintet* and *Health* that weekend. To date, those screenings have remained my best chance to see these two films from my favourite director. Not that either film is much good, which explains why further viewing opportunities have not arisen.) On the other hand, not attending Adventon had an important positive effect on my fannish landscape. Listening to the convention post-mortems got my creative juices going, and I rang up Andrew Brown to ask him if he'd like to co-edit a newszine. Within two or three weeks of Adventon, *Thyme* had been born.

"In typical nitpicking style, I have a couple of corrections to offer. Adventon 81 wasn't an Eastercon, but a Queen's Birthday Weekend Holiday con. I've already gained mileage from the remark that Marc and Cath Ortlieb have three children (they have two). And to say that Carey Handfield was dubbed The Real Official Carey Handfield was to tell only half, and the less interesting half, of the story. First off, there was the Real Official Carey Handfield Fan Club (as opposed to the ersatz Official Carey Handfield Club). The Club was a well-timed, well-executed joke, designed to get back at Christine Ashby, who had put out a flyer announcing the Official Carey Handfield Fan Club but gave Marc Ortlieb's address as the contact. It should have been left to enter the fannish mythos at that, but the joke was diluted by the ongoing use and application of the Real Official tag to Carey himself. I have no doubt that some people used the tag without knowing its origins. It quickly became boring, and within a year some people were wondering how to go about killing the thing off. Some years later Jo Handfield said to Wendy and I that Carey 'may have been Real Official but he still doesn't put the toothpaste lid back on' (that, or 'put the toilet seat down when he's finished')."

Ian Gunn
P.O. Box 567
Blackburn
Victoria 3130
Australia "Judith's description of the difference between British and Australian fannish drinking habits is rather wise. Many of the current crop of Australian fans hardly touch a drop -- myself included -- although Karen is a founding member of the Drunken Trollops Society, a group of raucous women who *appear* to be heavy drinkers (at odds to the truth) in order to annoy the puritanical.

"I think it's also a cultural thing. In Britain, pubs have for centuries been the village meeting place, where families can gather to socialise. In Australia, pubs were gender-segregated until a few decades ago, and now tend to be somewhere you go to get drunk, get laid, pick a fight, or listen to deafening garage bands. It's something the mundanes do."

Steve Jeffery (address as before) "The different drinking habits of UK and overseas fans was something I noticed at Philcon, although US fans seem to be primarily addicted to soft drinks: Coke, Pepsi, and Dr Pepper. They also appear to prefer them as 'super-unleaded' versions, with all the active ingredients taken out, in sugar-free, decaffeinated Diet varieties. Oh, for proper high-octane coffee.... Cheap (but good -- Jacob's Creek is rather fine) Australian wine seems a far preferable convention beverage.

"The only other perspective I've gained of Australian fandom is through 'A History Of Australian Fandom' in Ron Clarke's *The Mentor*. This mostly documents, with copious footnotes, the incessant procedural wranglings among the Sydney Futurians through the 1940s, 50s and 60s. It is not something which would have inspired me to leap into fanac as a hobby, let alone a way of life."

Leigh Edmonds (address as before) "I really enjoyed Judith's little wander down nostalgia lane. Golly, thinking all the way back to Adventon and the things that went on. It sometimes strikes me that our brains are amazing things, that they can carry around so much information from decades ago. In the oral history course I run, we go out and interview people about things they did fifty

or sixty years ago and they can fill hours of tape. Some pedants claim that it isn't accurate, but who cares; it's just amazing that people can remember so much about what happened so long ago.

"I'd completely forgotten about Mike McGann's threats, since both my memories of Advention are about grog. One is helping Denny Lien smuggle some wine and beer into the hotel with a paranoia which I found difficult to understand. The other is of Joseph wandering around the convention with a wine cask in one hand and a glass in the other, the kind of logical connection which we natives had simply not made. I'd have to disagree about Australians saving drinking until the evenings, since that was mainly what the hotels forced on us.' Some of the best conventions were held at the Victorian in Little Collins Street, Melbourne, where there was a good bar open all the time. I spent a couple of very pleasant conventions there ignoring the programme almost entirely except when I was called upon to do something.

"Valma and I seem to have drifted out of the convention-going scene. We forgot that there was a convention on in Perth this year, and didn't go to it. We would also have been totally oblivious to the fact that there was a National Convention in Tasmania this year had it not been for the fact that when Valma was at Murdoch University one Friday she thought she'd call in on Grant Stone but found he'd gone there. Part of the reason for our lack of interest is that we've got too much to do and not enough spare time, the other is that our life of genteel poverty doesn't allow for things like trips to the eastern states.

"I had my 47th birthday in June, and have got to the stage where I consider myself almost fully grown up. I'll probably go out and have a wild time to celebrate my 50th birthday, except that I'm not as fond of hangovers as I used to be. (I was at a book launch a few weeks back where the wine was free but I only had four or five glasses because I had work to do the following morning. Such self-restraint!) The thing about being grown-up, I figure, is that I can do exactly what I like (within the parameters imposed on me by society, the laws of nature, and so). And I do too: I stay up late, I watch sport on television, I make plastic model aeroplanes, I play computer games occasionally, and all sorts of terrible things my parents would never have allowed. And a few years back I wouldn't have allowed myself to do some of these things either."

Sue Thomason
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"Ageing is strange. I have quite a bit of grey in my hair, and my skin isn't as elastic as it used to be, but I don't yet find myself less fit, or less able to do things than I was (say) ten years ago. On the other hand, I'm clearly still not grown up. I don't feel that I have any of that wonderful Crone Wisdom yet, the stuff old women are supposed to be respected for having. I still do things which embarrass me shortly afterwards.

"A friend of mine recently said something about doing that part of mythological womanhood that was 'neither the Maiden, the Mother or the Crone'. In other words, what do you call an adult woman who hasn't gone in for having children? What sort of process of maturation are we supposed to go through? And how do our long-term close relationships develop, if we don't have to deal with the usual adjustments of children arriving, then departing some two decades later?"

It would have been pleasant to discuss my own response to growing up at last, but we're two-thirds of the way down the fourteenth page of the letter column and therefore out of room. Maybe next time....until then, let's have the WAHFs: David Bratman (a late letter on FFT 17), Graeme Cameron, Phillip Greenaway, Bridget Hardcastle ("I enjoyed the GUFF report -- cunning, that, getting someone else to write it for you" -- you weren't the only person to make that comment), David Langford (who sent a copy of a page from a recent Terry Jeeves fanzine, ranting about someone called "John Nicholas" and "his obnoxious fanzine"), Mike McInerney ("I prefer CD sound to vinyl. I have more than 500 vinyl albums, and most of them are scratched, dirty, popping or mildewed. Maybe the first time I played each record it sounded great, but each time after something got lost" -- sounds like straightforward lack of care to me), Par Nilsson ("FTT 17 was the most accessible issue to date, I think" -- a sentiment shared by many other people), Bruno Ogorelec, Rebecca Ore (also on FTT 16), Marc Ortlieb ("Judith missed mentioning the delightful chutzpah shown by Peter Toluzzi at Advention 81 -- not only did he get seven copies of his room key made at a local locksmith, but he plonked all seven down at the cashier's desk when checking out"), Lloyd Penney, Derek Pickles, Jilly Reed ("You're so clearly present before me as I write; Judith's voice and Joseph's legs, what a combination. Not to mention Judith's face -- I sigh for looks as elegantly beautiful as that but have to be satisfied with mere bounce"), and Walt Willis. Our thanks to you all!

WORLD-HOPPING IN THE PACIFIC

Judith Hanna

Indonesia is a string of islands as vast and diverse as Europe. A two-week visit allowed some superficial impressions of the parts I visited -- Jakarta, Yogya, passing Javanese countryside, and Bali -- but I make no claim to have come to grips with the real Indonesia. The phrase 'One World' has become an idealistic catchphrase -- we all share the same globe, we are one human species. But Indonesia struck me as a myriad of very different worlds jampacked into crowded space.

In Jakarta, outside Zena and Peter's spacious colonial style bungalow complete with satellite TV which brought the world news the state-controlled local media can't report, street sellers ambled and cycled past all day crying their wares. Household staff from all along the street sat in groups along the roadside, chatting as they kept an eye on the homes they ran. My first morning in Zena and Peter's small but lush front garden, 15 different sorts of butterfly -- swallowtails, birdwings, black, deep red, shades of yellow, green, whites -- drifted by as I sat sketching. So did five little birds including a crimson sunbird (the local version of hummingbird) and a green chameleon like a mobile leaf lurching along the treetops. There were dragonflies too. "The only birds in Jakarta are those too tiny to eat," said Pete. This was not quite true: the Indonesians keep a spectacular variety of cagebirds.

Jakarta was, on the whole, grimy, noisy, dirty. Queues of traffic snarled, beeped, jammed and polluting -- a lesson in what London, New York or Paris would be without their subway trains. Peter was being paid about three times the salary he'd get in Australia or the UK to build housing developments with golf courses attached (or vice versa). "We design in mains sewerage," he said, "but the developments get built without it." The open canals built by the Dutch for 17th century Batavia are still the main drainage for all Jakarta's wastes, he explained. "They're going to have to put in modern underground mains, the calls for it are building up, it will break out as a scandal soon, and the longer they leave it, the more expensive and difficult the job will be."

Meanwhile, the *kampongs* where poor people live line the reeking, yellow-mud sludge of the canals.

It was in the big city, Jakarta, that the sense of worlds in collision was strongest. The city, for a start, was a different world from the patchwork of emerald padi fields over which the plane had flown in from Perth. But all the same, the urban kampongs carried echoes of picturesque traditional rural kampongs -- woven rattan panels for walls and roofs (mixed with scrounged urban materials), and little patches of garden, growing fresh vegetables and fruit-trees, tucked into the slum crowding. They are patches of almost moneyless economy transplanted to a world where you need money to live well. They are cut through by World Bank funded motorways on which the air-conditioned range rovers of the semi-Westernised, Pacific Rim 'tiger' moneyed elite -- native Indonesian, Indonesian-Chinese and expatriate -- jostle with crowded diesel-belching old buses, and with the lorries and taxis owned by 'small men' for whom \$10 a day is good money.

It's a ten-hour train trip between Yogya and Jakarta. The track out of Jakarta is lined with shacks and shanties, many with spick and span children filing off to school through lines of washing hanging out to dry among tiny patches of food crop. When the railway crosses or follows one of the open canals, you see fragile thin people scooping out rubbish from the thick brown sludge. Further out, you reach neat rows of small brick houses, modern developments for the likes of the taxi drivers and shop workers, which look as if they'd be swelteringly uncomfortable in the prevailing tropical heat. By contrast, the shacks cobbled together of salvage look both more picturesque and more liveable. The rail line runs eastward along Java's north coast, through a quilt of rice fields -- *padi* is the word for rice -- where groups of people are reaping, winnowing, planting out in ankle-deep water. Then it twitches south through the mountains.

Basically, the Indonesian islands are the folds thrust up as the Australian continental plate rides

up over the Asian plate. Java is two chains of fold mountains, with volcanoes bubbling through between them. Reaching Yogya involves going through both these mountain chains, with river valleys below, hillside terraces alongside, and jungle clad peaks above you. It is worth taking the day-trip one-way, but ten-hours solid of spectacular scenery is pretty exhausting. I took the night train back.

From the train to Yogyakarta, the Javanese countryside looks luxurious, a land dripping with tropical fruit. The villages are groves of fruit trees and palms surrounding woven bamboo and rattan houses. Hedges of mangoes, pawpaws, coconut, cassava and jackfruit grow on the raised banks around the padi fields. Television aerials rise here and there. Robust grey water buffaloes or delicate white Brahmin cattle graze or pull ploughs in the fields. Shimmering flocks of dragonflies and lazily flapping butterflies are thick in the air. It seemed a very garden world, bursting with life, floating past outside the train windows.

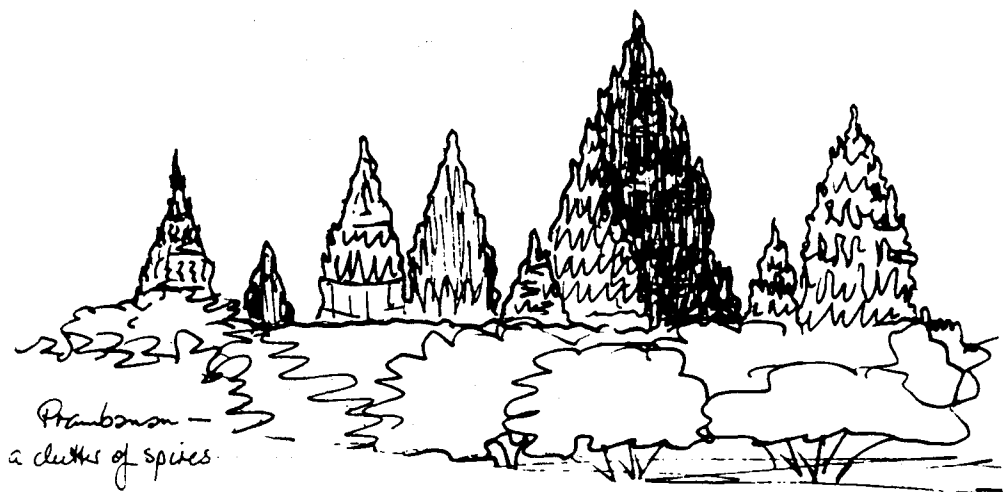
Inside the *bisnis* class carriage, a video set showed Western violence movies. Tidy clean-cut hunks in suits ran around blowing holes in unshaven chaps, while women wore tumbled blonde manes, pouts and little else. It hardly seemed a decent model of civilised life to export, and one felt an urge to dissociate oneself from its culture of guns, violence and tawdry sexploitation. On the train back from Yogya, the video set showed Eastern violence movies. Tidy clean cut hunks in white pajamas or kimonos leapt around and waved samurai swords. A token woman or two also got to leap around, wave swords and even breathe fire, but ended up killed by the ultimate villain in order to save the hero. One realised gratefully that Indonesian and Chinese viewers probably swallowed the Western gun operas as just the same sort of exotic action fantasy.

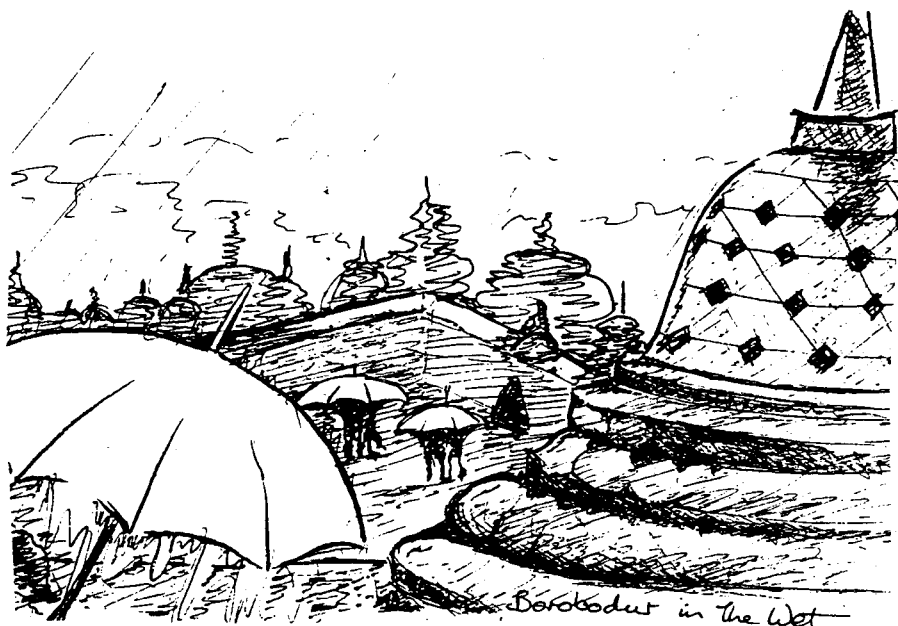
The reason one goes to Yogya is to see Borobodur, the world's largest Buddhist monu-

ment, declared a World Heritage site, and the Prambanan Hindu temple complex. Borobodur is like a mountain, a rounded, terraced mountain, with a majestic and serene simplicity to it. At least, that is how it seems when the heavens open over it, rain floods down, and waterfalls cataract arcing cascades all down its stairways and from its bell-shaped stupas. Ant-like humans scurry under futile umbrellas -- all you can do is laugh, be grateful the water that's soaking you is warm, and marvel at the vigour of the tropical downpour. That's what keeps Java green.

By contrast, Prambanan in the sun was all intricately carved spiky spires, every inch carved with scenes from the Ramayana epic, like a vast comic strip. There used to be a lot more of it until the local volcano -- the central Javan Mt Merapi -- erupted a few centuries ago, causing much to fall down and burying most of the rest. The cluster of stupas now restored sit in a vast archaeological park. Each stupa is a steeply ornate mini mountain, with statues of the god to whom it's dedicated in the carved caves at its top level. Each stupa was crawling with tourists -- Japanese, Chinese, Singaporeans, Malaysians, Filipinos, schoolparties of Indonesian kids and students keen to practice their English on the relatively small number of us pale certified-Anglo types.

Yogya is one of the very few bits of Indonesia geared to Western tourists. As the Lonely Planet guide points out, the place to stay there is a street with a very long name, full of moderately priced little guest-houses and a range of restaurants. First I found a bad hotel -- the Airlangga -- which showed me oppressively what Pete had meant about lavishly vulgar wealthy Chinese taste. Then I found a good one, and am happy to recommend to





you the Prambanan Guest House, 14 Jalan Prawirotaman. Its clean and simple rooms, cooled by ceiling fan, opened onto a garden courtyard with a small swimming pool, with a couple of chairs on the tiled verandah outside each room where you could sit and scribble postcards or read while exchanging 'good evenings' with fellow guests. Breakfast was brought to you there when you emerged in the morning: tropical fruits, a boiled egg, a pancake and a cuppa. As I was travelling on my own, the sociable atmosphere was welcome.

For getting about, I let myself be adopted by *becak* driver #38, Budih, a solidly-built fatherly chap with adequate English and blue flags. A *becak* is a cycle rickshaw. He hailed me at the station, offering drive to hotel and free city tour for 2000 rupiah, which Zena had briefed me was the going rate. It translates as about 70p or \$1.50. The fare gets supplemented by a kickback commission from the hotel you register with, and by kickbacks from any shop you buy from. We established that Budih and I were the same age, 40, that he had three children and was a Christian -- as many who dealt with us tourists seemed to be. Keeping one child at school for a week cost 10,000 rup (£3/\$6) "Big money, lot of money," for Budih. The hour-long city tour took in the walled Royal City and Sultan's *keraton* (palace), with stops at shops selling shadow puppets, batik, brasswork and carved stone. That trip, I resisted buying, but on another tour with Budih on my last day in Yogya, I picked up the pieces I had spotted on that first tour around -- a blue stone

frog, a rose stone turtle, a pair of flowing batik trousers. I presume that when I bought a ticket for the Ramayana Ballet Theatre to which he took me at the end of the city tour, he collected a kickback before going off to catch more fares or yarn with mates before picking me up at the end of the show. Naturally, I chucked in an extra 1000 rup at the end of the evening to cover his waiting time.

For sightseeing outside the city, I booked a couple of minibus tours from one of the offices in the street of hotels. First, through intensively gardened hill terraced countryside, and traffic-choked towns and villages, up to the Dieng Plateau, the 'home of the

gods', where we walked through a field of bubbling hot sulphur -- volcanic activity seeping through the earth's surface -- and around a lake startlingly turquoise with volcanic salts, with a nice young German student couple and a pair of elderly Austrians. Next day, to Borobudur and Prambanan, with a Danish woman living in Jakarta and her mother, and a Japanese student. On the train back to Jakarta, the only other white people in the carriage were a pair of French students, who confessed to some problems getting about a country where all Europeans are assumed to be English speakers, with older people maybe having some fall-back Dutch. Learning a bit of Bahasa Indonesia, which is much the same as Bahasa Malay, is strongly recommended -- you miss out on a lot when you can't show willing with the local language.

I had not been sure I wanted to visit the tourist cliché of Bali.

But all flights out of Jakarta back to London were booked out, so I had to go to Bali. "Bali is magic," Zena told me, "You will love it. Just stay away from Kutar." Kutar Beach is the tourist stretch, the beach bum mecca. You will like Ubud, said Zena, up in the hills, which is the cultural centre. To sample the beach, head for Seminyak, at its far north end, where it's quieter. "At first, you'll wonder what all the fuss is about. Bali isn't striking, the surf is nothing to write home about," warned Pete. "But it just gets to you."

The beach sand is grey with grains of volcanic rock, there was no discernible surf, and you had to wade a hundred feet or so into the sea before the water came even thigh-high, just deep enough to swim in. You could walk a mile or so along it, south past relatively modest guesthouses towards the garish hotels and signboards of the tourist mass, shooing off occasional swarms of boys selling watches, women offering massage and toenail painting. Where there were shells, most were the little pale-violet butterfly shells. I found just a few tiny cowries and mini-trochuses to beachcomb as souvenirs.

What the beach did have was crabs. The first I noticed of them was rays of scattered sand around groups of little holes between the tide marks. When I sat down to investigate, a grey shimmer of mini ghost crab surfaced at each burrow, and hovered there to check the coast was clear. With no movement in sight, tiny crabs skittered out, shimmered back and forth, then slid back down their holes as if pulled in by elastic as another shadow passed by. The coast clear, up they'd pop again.

On I went, paddling where the waves lapped up. As each wave washed back, the retreating water swilled around tiny round shapes in the sand. Scrutiny found tiny crab claws as the shapes dug themselves back down into the semi-liquid sand. Each crab was like a coin-size pinky-white moon -- and those left momentarily exposed by the retreating waves more often than not clasped a butterfly bi-valve in their claw, or were a pair wrestling for possession of one. The beach's other charm, besides the crabs, was a spectacular sunset over the sea. But next morning, by 7.30am the sun was baking. So, after breakfasting on fresh pawpaw and pineapple while watching black, white and red striped finches gather nest material from the garden outside my room, stalked (unsuccessfully) by skinny, big-eared cats, I headed for the hills.

In Bali, I was told, there seem always to be festivals and ceremonies going on. My taxi drive up to Ubud was held up by village processions heading towards the beach, taking offerings to the water-spirits to purify the villages in advance of Ne-pe, the Balinese New Year. In the temples along the road, lichened statues of Hindu gods were dressed in black

and white checked sarongs, with garlands around their heads and necks. Hideously garish papier mache monsters stood in some temples -- 'ogo-ogo' evil spirits to be paraded around the villages the day before Ne-pe, to be driven out with drums and fire-crackers. Ne-pe itself would be a day of stillness and silence.

In Ubud, the taxi driver deposited me at the perfect place to stay: the Puri Saraswati Bungalows, next to the Lotus Cafe, both part of the local rajah's palace in the centre of town and owned by his number two wife. It was like living in an old temple, with the carved gateways of its three courtyards still intact, and holy figures here and there amid the traditional-style verandahed guest bungalows, each named for a god or hero rather than having a room number (I was in Krisna). A traditional style open pavilion in the middle courtyard served as breakfast and dining room, and each morning one of the hotel women put little offerings -- a teaspoon of rice and spices on a tiny woven bamboo dish -- in front of each guest room and at the foot of each statue. Trails of ants lined up for the tribute. Tucked in behind the vast lotus pool next door was a temple to Saraswati, Hindu goddess of wisdom, beyond that the rajah's palace and an open-air theatre with nightly performances of traditional Balinese dance-dramas. Along the road outside was a bustle of shops and the bazaar. Ubud was the only place I visited in Indonesia which had the civilised luxury of actual sidewalks for pedestrians.

Ubud's charm seemed quite feminine -- it is a town for meandering into the surrounding countryside, for pottering about the craft and art shops, for sitting reading or chatting at one of the dozen or so



Balinese padi terraces --
a very gardened countryside, shimmering with dragonflies.

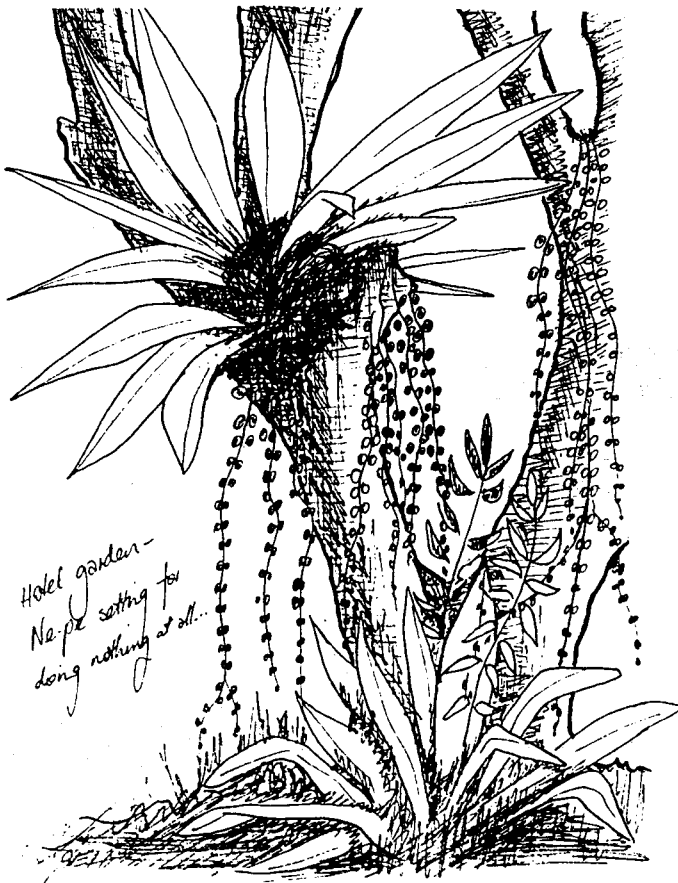
pleasant cafes, some run by Australians who've married local Balinese. Then there's Ary's Warung, which boasts not only a small lotus pool at the front, beside the main road, but another in the (modestly secluded) outdoor loos. 'Discovered' in the 1930s by a group of European artists, who were fascinated by both the traditional art skills and the local scenery, Ubud is geared toward visitors who want to fit quietly in with the traditional relaxed and decorous way of life. People are friendly, without servility -- and without the Muslim hang-ups which force tense caution on women travelling alone in Java. The feeling is that the locals are happy enough to share their town with visitors, within the bounds of the concessions to outside ways permitted by the rajah.

Part of Ubud's charm was that it seemed almost a single, comfortably self-sufficient world, safely distant from the stresses of real life. "We had a woman the other week who was going on about the terrible poverty here. It made me so angry," said Annushka, an Australian hotel management graduate working at our hotel. "In Bali, no-one would ever be left to starve, no-one is homeless or lonely. You don't need money to live well here." In Ubud, that seemed believable. Traders seemed relaxed about whether you decided to buy or not. Away from Ubud, though, touring

the main temples, children swarmed around like wasps, screaming at you to buy from them. Whether or not they were in need of the small money they got for their little carvings, tourism could certainly be accused of eroding their good manners and the decorum central to traditional Balinese culture. Running the gamut, it certainly seemed those kids saw tourists as money-cows landed from an alien world.

In Ubud, it was easy to be gently sociable with other grown-up women travellers: chatting with fellow-guests on the verandahs in front of each bungalow or at breakfast; a drink at the Lotus after the Ramayana dance theatre or at the end of an 'island of temples' tour. There was Hildegard, tourist information officer from Munich, who'd spent a couple of months travelling around Java on her own without knowing more than a few words of Bahasa, who introduced me to mangosteens during the temple tour; two Dutch sisters I joined for a midnight swim in the hotel pool before they flew back to snow in Amsterdam next day; artist and gardener Lucinda from Ohio; Bud and Colleen who ran a 'natural emporium' at Pahoa, Hawa'i and who swapped serious buying chat with Esther who was financing her trip by import-export, buying up vast quantities of local crafts 'cheap, cheap, *cheap*' to resell at fairs and markets and through friends' shops back home. It was the third time Esther had stayed at the Saraswati Bungalows, so she knew who to talk to for the local news.

Ne-pe was the main news topic. A 'day of stillness and silence' meant that no-one would be allowed to step outside their home, or hotel. No shops would open, no-one was allowed out on the streets. No transport would run. None at all. No taxis to the airport. Just half-a-dozen hotels within a kilometre or so of the airport had permission to ferry people to and from the airport, so if your flight was Sat 1 April, you needed to book yourself into one of these, and get down there by the previous morning. If your flight was the day after, as mine was, no buses would run. But, said our hotel staff, they would organise me a taxi, no trouble. Those who balked at being unable to step outside their hotel decamped for the beach, sure that the restrictions would be more relaxed there and would allow tourists to go loll about on the beach. For myself, Puri Saraswati seemed the perfect setting to be





banged up for a day of positive duty to do nothing at all, just read a bit, take the occasional dip in the hotel pool, maybe essay a sketch or two, chat a bit, and tuck into the lavish Balinese-style buffet lunch and dinner the hotel laid on, complete with rambutans picked as we watched from the tall trees in the courtyard.

But first, there were pre Ne-pe processions to catch on film for Joseph. The rajah's wife, her long-haired, guitar-strumming son, Annushka, Wewik the diminutive reception clerk, all had been generous in offering predictions of when the crowds of locals gathered at the main temple in their best sarongs and sashes would move off in procession: "After lunch-time", "About two o'clock, three o'clock", "Maybe half an hour." So, with Lucinda and Esther, into Ary's Warung on the main street, to lunch while keeping an eye out -- and the heavens opened outside, the sky greeny-black with storm-cloud. The processions took place, we realised, either before the afternoon rain -- or if they hadn't managed to start before it set in, then after the rain stopped.

So we splashed under umbrellas to the bakery for fruitshakes and cakes with Colleen and Bob, while Esther filled us in on the background debate -- would the pre Ne-pe procession include the spectacular

giant ogo-ogo monsters? The rajah of Ubud had, at the beginning of the week, decreed that they should not be carried in the procession here. The figures were a recent innovation -- this is a live culture, not fossilised -- and in previous years the crews of men and boys carrying them had got too much into the evil spirit of things, lunging their demons at each other and the crowd, and fights had broken out. That sort of thing might be all right down at Kutar beach, but not in civilised, dignified Ubud, the island's heart. But five of the villages around Ubud had made their ogo-ogos before the rajah's ban was pronounced, and their people would be very disappointed if they could not parade them. Our hotel landlady was much involved in the negotiations, and over the two days before Ne-pe, Esther kept us up to date with the latest stage of the discussions.

At the very last hour, the rajah relented: those ogo-ogos that had been built could be carried in the parade, but in Ubud even demons would be expected to behave.

They did.



A TOWN MOUSE'S TALE

Jilly Reed

The country's a rum place; they do things differently here. Septic tanks, for instance. In our village there simply isn't any mains drainage. They never quite got around to connecting us back in the fifties when All That was going on, I suppose because we're tiny -- 25 houses, a pub and a cricket pitch -- and at the top of a hill. (Don't laugh. There *are* hills in Suffolk, it's just that they're mostly so long you don't notice the slope. Unless you're cycling, of course; when your thighs turn to spaghetti and you fall over gasping, *then* you notice.) So everyone has a septic tank. Until you're in possession of your own sewage system you can't imagine the fascination they hold. Mere weeks after moving in, I'd become a hardened discussor of rodding out and weeper drains and was cheerfully swapping stories that would have made my ears fall off in the sissy old days.

It can trip you up, though, this hardening process; the need to ignore various icky aspects of living in the country -- muck-spreading springs to mind -- means you get in the habit of discarding sensibilities. Thus it simply never occurred to me, giving a supper party for comfortably old friends, that cesspits and septic tanks might not be a fit topic for post-pudding discussion until I saw my Best Friend turn slowly green. (The other guests were fellow tank-users and we'd got absorbed in that eternal question, Is it leaking?) Her expression of horrified disbelief was the first sign that living here might be having its effect. She gave me the same look my mother uses, the one that says "How did you turn into this?" And it is a bit odd to remember that I was glamorous once; nail varnish and everything. These days there's half the county under my fingernails. How are the flighty fallen.

But it's not just the Sewage Question. Nature red in tooth and beak has been a revelation. I'm a townie -- where I grew up, the sparrows cough. As far as birds were concerned, the only ones I could identify were blackbirds, pigeons and robins, and even they gave trouble without the tinsel (though I wasn't as bad as a friend of ours who divided all birds into two classes: sparrows and not-sparrows). This garden, though, half an acre, well tree-and-shrubbed, is full of the things. With the help of a country-bred husband and the Big Boys' Book of Birds, the mysteries of woodpecker, partridge and chaffinch were opened to me. The thrill, however, of seeing a kestrel standing on the path not ten feet away is balanced by the sick powerlessness of glimpsing the local sparrowhawk snatching up one of our moorhens. They're daft creatures, the moorhens, but they've been here since they hatched and I'm fond of them. It was pitiful to see the bereaved one wandering about, cronking mournfully.

And that's another thing: the *noise* they make. I'd expected the cockerels -- though the one down the lane is terribly considerate and never crows till noon -- but not the owls or the foxes or the midnight moorhens on the pond, throwing wild parties and inviting all their little friends. Even the damn bats are noisy -- like the frantic opening and shutting of distant leather umbrellas -- and as for the dawn chorus, it's tweet bloody tweet from four o'clock onwards. At least the ducks have the decency to stay asleep.

Oh yes, the ducks. The pond in our garden was once the village water supply and is well-nigh big enough to go boating on; you really wouldn't want to fall in. The first thing we did on moving here was to chuck in a piece of timber so that anything which did would have something to cling to while it worked out how to climb the near-perpendicular banks. The cats were much too sensible to fall in, thank goodness, and the floating plank made a marvellous toy for the brood of ducklings which hatched last June (nine in all, three speckled brown and six yellow as egg). Charming as they are, however, they do pose problems for the unwary (*viz*, me). There are two sets on our pond, and I say "set" because they seem to breed in threes round here, one to keep off the opposition while the other treads the female. This is particularly vital where there are large numbers of them: on the lake in the park I've seen aquatic gang-bangs which all but drowned the protesting female. (My husband, a man wise in the ways of propagation -- he used to help pigs fornicate in his holidays -- says that sometimes she actually does drown.)

The real puzzle with these ducks is, to feed or not to feed? It was irresistible the first year -- they're the only animals I know both comical and elegant at the same time -- and the fun of having them come to my call was tremendous. I soon saw the error of my ways. Not only do they mug you every time you set foot out of doors, chasing after you at a high-speed waddle, but it doesn't take long for them to start following you into the house. The first time it happened I went into the drawing room to find the mallard drake turning his emerald head interestedly from side to side and his two sidekicks poking their beaks through the french windows. The senior cat was at bay, eyes rolling in his head, so naturally I yelled at the ducks and flapped my arms. Mistake -- what do ducks do when startled? And all over the carpet, too. Did you know duck-muck is viridian green?

The other kind of natural urge seems to loom larger out here, too. I'm fascinated by the ins and outs (sorry) of this mating stuff and the pond makes an excellent observatory. Not everybody is quite so blase, of course. The Best Friend (poor woman, she's suffering from culture shock) visited us in March and gingerly accepted the invitation to "come and see our lovely frogs". She's fiercely intelligent and formidably well-educated but, urban to her manicured fingertips, surprisingly naive in what Shakespeare called country matters. It being Spring, the surface of the pond was roiling with copulating amphibians and I was just peering interestedly down, idly wondering how they managed not to go round in circles, when she asked what they were doing. I thought she was joking, so started to say that the first little froggie was lame and the second was pushing it to the hospital, but she really didn't know. When I gently explained -- "They're mating, you fool!" -- she shrieked the immortal words: "What! In the *daytime*?" I know she's never had pets, but even so.... After that, I didn't have the heart to tell her the truth about why the goldfish were floating nonchalantly near the spawning grounds. (The horrible bit was the way they waited patiently for the frogs and toads to finish.)

It's not just the wildlife that's surprising. Take Freddy's goats, for instance. He's an elderly smallholder at the other end of the village and his blasted creatures are always getting out and straggling across the road. Really, he's too decrepit to look after his stock, but nobody would dream of suggesting he get rid of them. We're forever roping in passing strangers to stop their cars and help round them up. The funny thing is that he doesn't *like* goats; they actually belong to his equally aged bit of fluff (it's a long story) but as she runs the darts team, nobody wants to upset her. I sometimes wonder if Freddy deliberately puts them on a loose tether in the hope of a passing boy-racer's making goat stew of them. Still, it's all good clean fun, and I've finally discovered why herdspersons of whatever sort cry something like "Gerroutofityerbuggers!" -- it's because you feel a total prat yelling "Shoo" at top volume.

And then there's the old lady down the lane, Mrs-Battle-Call-Me-Flo. Among other pets, she's got two tortoises; they were both strays. (Think about it.) Knowing this, when our friends at the end of the village found one sitting in the road the other week they took it to her. "Oh no me dears," she said when they held it up for her to look at, "Tain't one of mine." So now we have a *third* stray tortoise; where the hell are they all coming from? Vague memories of Aesculapius and the eagle dropping a tortoise on his head made me glance with wild surmise towards RAF Wattisham a couple of miles away....but I couldn't really see those nice helicopter pilots bombarding us with tortoises. Besides, they'd burst. (I told you I'd got coarser since living here.) So the mystery remains.

I'm getting used to it. It helps that I've got a native guide -- my husband was brought up round here so I haven't made the worst mistakes. (Unlike the idiots who moved in down the road and got up a petition against the sheep because they were baa-ing too loudly.) He says you know you've acclimatised when six sacks of horse-muck turn up on the doorstep and you say Oh Good. At that rate, I'm dangerously close. Who knows -- give it thirty years and it might even seem normal.

A Crocodile Dundee lookalike wanders into a suburban pub with a crocodile -- very much alive -- on the end of a chain. He waltzes up to the bar and asks: "Do you serve politicians here?" "Of course," says the barman. "Beaut -- then it'll be a middy for me and a politician for my crocodile."

(Contributed by Judith's father, Jack Hanna.)

100 million Asian women are "missing" because of female infanticide and abortion of female foetuses.

500,000 women every year die from pregnancy complications.

On average, women earn 30-40% less than men.

In the USA, a woman is beaten every 18 minutes.

Of the world's 18 million refugees, 80% are women.

A fifth of the world's people live in acute poverty; 70% of them are women.

100 million children, two-thirds of them girls, have no chance of school.

The rich are living nearly twice as long as the poor.
(Average lifespan in least developed countries: 43. In highly developed countries: 78.)

The average US citizen's energy use is equivalent to the consumption of 3 Japanese, 6 Mexicans, 12 Chinese, 33 Indians, 147 Bangladeshis, 281 Tanzanians, or 422 Ethiopians.

Oil rigs in the Gulf of Mexico have spread waste over a seabed area greater than England and Wales.

(Kilometre radius of drilling waste and oil pollution around North Sea oil rigs: 4. Platforms in the Gulf of Mexico: 3100.)

The 1994 spawning season in the USA's Snake River, main tributary of the Columbia, consisted of one sockeye salmon.

(Number of times logging roads in the US's Pacific North-West could girdle the world: 10.)

Fishing trawlers kill on average 16 kilos of marine life for every 1 kilo taken to market.

It would take a jam of juggernauts two kilometres long to deliver the shredded lead that birdshooters fire into Spain's marshes and wetlands every year.

Pollution officials take to court one works site in every 36,000.
(Prosecutions undertaken by HMIP in 1993-1994: 15. UK works sites: 540,000.)

Social security for agribusiness has nearly doubled in a decade.
(Cost per Briton of all forms of agricultural corporate subsidy per week in 1993: £4.15. In 1985 (equivalent): £2.39. In 1965: £0.82. Percentage increase in total farming income: 35.9.)

The end of the Cold War has reduced defence spending in Britain by 16%, in Germany by 27%.

(UK defence expenditure in 1990 (at constant 1985 prices): £16,596 million. In 1994: £13,934 million. German defence expenditure in 1990: Dm60,653 million. In 1994: Dm44,373 million.)

Roads appear to be getting safer because vehicles force pedestrians off them.

(Percentage of 7-8 year-olds going to school alone in 1971: 80. In 1991: 9. Proportion of child pedestrians killed or injured by drivers in 1992: 1 in 264.)

In only three years, British parents spend more time escorting their children to and from school than modern homo sapiens has spent on Earth.

(Age of modern human race: 270,000. Hours per year spent by British parents escorting children to school: 900 million.)

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