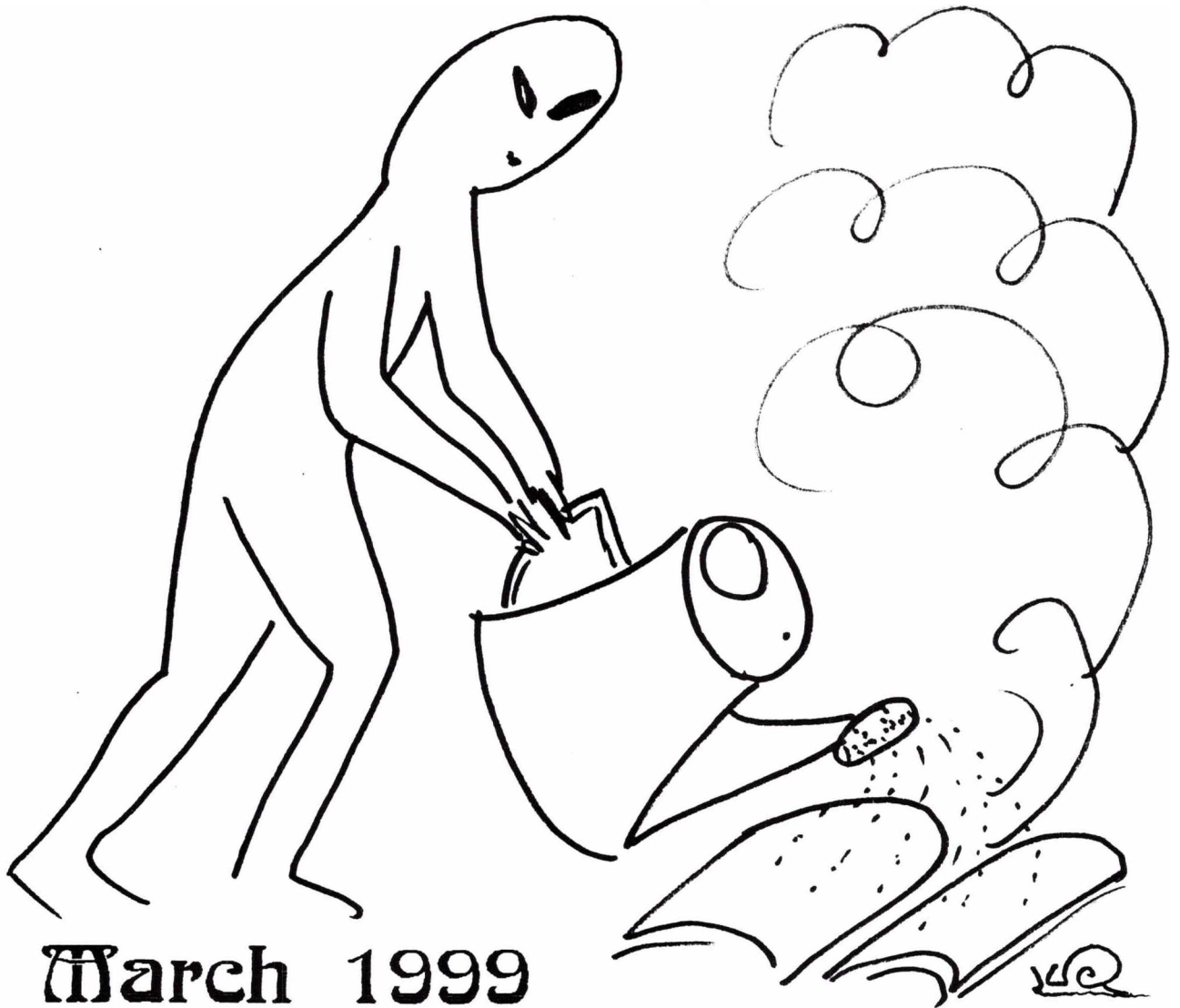


**Grow your own
INTERNATIONAL
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GARDENER 2**



March 1999

INTERNATIONAL REVOLUTIONARY GARDENER

"Fomenting proletarian insurrection in the potting sheds of South Tottenham!"

Issue 2, March 1999

Judith Hanna & Joseph Nicholas

15 Jansons Road, South Tottenham, London N15 4JU

E-mail: jehanna@gn.apc.org and/or josephn@globalnet.co.uk

So here we are again, at last. You can't remember back to the last *IRG*? Neither could we. In fact, *IRG* 1 was (except for North Americans) published in January 1998. Over a year ago. We had to wait for the return of the cold, dank, non-gardening season to muster quality desk time for finishing off stuff we started writing, er, quite some time ago. You will, no doubt, spot internal evidence.

So what have we been up to? Joseph has conquered *Privateer 2: The Darkening* and been progressing intermittently through *Age of Empires*. He has reached a state of armed truce with the works of Bill Gates, without conceding that Windows 95 is other than worthless garbage. He has read stuff, seen many moofies, monitored *The X-Files* (the truth is out there -- trust no one), chaperoned Xena the warrior princess and Buffy the vampire slayer, kept me more or less Tidy, dug up the potato harvest, shifted whole compost heaps, lined the greenhouse with bubble plastic insulation, built log piles for our local frogs to overwinter in, and drunk too much. But he hasn't roofed over the passage outside the kitchen. Poot.

I've cut the twenty separate "save the world" projects I wrote about in *IRG* 1 down to an almost manageable six, have assembled, decorated and electrically lit one dolls-house basement (blue and white kitchen, pink and grey bed-sitting room) and begun construction of the upstairs rooms, grew almost enough tomatoes (25 tomato vines is not too many), have eaten too much chocolate (albeit fair-traded Maya Gold), am crocheting a grey-pink-and-purple rug, and think I'm now gaining on the paper paving my study (there's a desk and carpet under there somewhere). The preserving shelves are stacked with pickled radish pods, oven-dried tomatoes in olive oil, bottled tomatoes, blackberry jam, and mint jelly.

We went to Australia in February 1998, and produced a trip report distributed at the Leeds Corflu in March last year. We had visiting Australians in September, and I went off with them to Brother Cadfael country for a week. Then Joseph and I took a week's tour of Andalusia, Moorish Spain, in the residual warmth of October. We now want a long strip of formal Moorish pool with intricately carved alabaster arches reflected in the water at each end, set about with plumbago, jasmine, roses, and orange trees, under clear blue skies. Our own little Alhambra, with a climate to match. Oh yes.

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This fanzine impartially supports your choice of Davies, Headlong or Kincaid for GUFF (vote early, give often!) and mourns the loss of former GUFF winner, artist, humorist and all-round good guy, Ian Gunn.

Wearing an Ethical Dilemma

Judith Hanna

Despite living in this cold climate, I've never bought an overcoat in my life. Those of you who've seen me huddling rugged up to the gills on days when Joseph is bouncing about in bare legs and t-shirt will know that I wear them, couldn't survive autumn and spring, let alone winter, without one.

I buy jackets now and then. Mostly, it seems, from Cornucopia, a higgledy-piggledy clothes recycling emporium in Upper Tachbrook St, Pimlico, its ceiling blooming with racks of stiff taffeta deb or 'come dancing' ballgowns. The other customers you notice there are luvvies fluttering about, bargaining to equip whole casts from its lavishly varied stock. I bought my wedding dress there, a slinky blue velvet number. All of a fiver, it cost. So did a swirling green corduroy three-quarter length jacket, and a peat-green blazer with leather patches on its elbows. I miss no longer living around the corner from Cornucopia.

But full-length overcoats... The first I ever acquired was for a summer evening home on the farm (see FTT 21). A Rural Youth 'progressive dinner' hayride was programmed. This meant riding on the back of a truckload of prickly hay, with each course eaten at a different farmhouse. Even summer nights in the Australian interior are chilly. "Mum, I need a coat," I said, reaching for Mum's stylishly swinging '40s three-quarters beige jacket. "Not my good jacket, you don't, not on a hayride," said Mum, and produced an elegant black wool trenchcoat, "You can have this one." So I took it back to Sydney at the end of my summer break. Sydney even managed to muster a couple of winter days cool enough to wear a full-length coat.

When I moved to London, it came too. There it got plenty of wear, and after half-a-dozen years or so, it wore out. Specifically, the patch where my shoulder-bag, always loaded with reading matter, rubbed against my hip wore through. So I had to retire it to gardening use.

Then I popped down under for a family visit, and Mum suggested I dug through the moth-balled chests where she'd laid up what used to be her favourite clothes. Basically, that is how I've acquired all my overcoats, elegantly tailored to the family size and shape back in the '40s and '50s when she came over to work as a physiotherapist in post-war Blighty. I wonder how long the supply will hold out?

Last time we nipped back to the ancestral home, to check out my little sisters' new hobby of real live babies, what Mum produced was a full-length wallaby fur coat, bought in Bond St, London. "Do you want this one?" she asked. After all, I'd previously passed on a fox cape, and a collar made of a couple of minks. All with heads attached, glass eyes and little paws.

"Umm," I answered. Then "Okay." And I wore the wallabies to Corflu in Leeds when we got back from the trip and found ourselves immersed in the northern winter.

"I take it that's a fake fur you're wearing," commented Rob Hansen as a group of us walked out for dinner. A sensible assumption.

"No, it used to be wallabies," I told him. Dropping of Hansen jaw.

The way I look at it is as a variant of the "You kill it, you eat it" principle. Is it more immoral to leave creatures which were killed for their fur mouldering in mothballs, or to appreciate their sacrifice by wearing them about? I wouldn't buy fur, as things stand -- not until there's some fair-trade/sustainable use certification scheme, equivalent to the Forestry Stewardship

Certificate for timber. But these poor little wallabies having been killed 40-odd years back, it seems to me less ethical to waste their sacrifice than to wear them.

To my mind, too, it's important to appreciate that the fur was once real live animals -- just as I reckon the really perverted approach to meat is those who are happy enough chomping it down as long as they think of it as coming from hygienic plastic trays, but can't bear to think of eating fluffy lambkins and chickies and big-eyed calves. Now, that is hypocrisy. Veganism is, at least, an honest response, facing up to the horror.

But looked at another way, Veganism gets up my nose. Refusing to make use of any animal product -- honey, wool, eggs -- seems to me unnatural, an arid denial of being part of the web of nature and chain of life. I suspect many vegans become converted when, after a childhood without actual contact with food growing, either from the dirt or on its own two or four feet or fins, they suddenly realise that blood and killing and pain and messy stuff like that are involved. That is, vegan revulsion strikes me as alienation from real life, and therefore almost as perverse as supermarket-pandered hygienic plastic denial of animal ex-life.

After all, in a world run on vegan principles, what place would there be for animals? They couldn't be farmed, so the existing high populations of sheep, cattle, pigs, poultry and so on would have to be either killed off and left to rot, or set loose to fend for themselves. What effect would the latter, the only humane alternative, have on native wildlife and habitats? Australia, particularly, has been damaged more than enough by stock gone feral: camels, buffaloes, goats, donkeys, let alone dear little pussy-cats. Funny that so many vegans dote on their own little predators, red in tooth and claw. Even in Britain, the rabbits that now run wild were brought over by the Normans as meatstock -- that's why poaching them is illegal.

There seems an assumption that if you're a greenie, you must also be a bunny-hugger and vegetarian. This is piffle. It's not that I'm in favour of cruelty to animals. People shouldn't be cruel to animals. Other animals are cruel enough. That's nature. The 'green' question is, just how and where should we humans fit into nature?

Basically, nature produces biomass, which feeds other biomass, a complex recycling system. So claims that it is morally wrong to kill and eat our fellow-creatures seem to me a cop-out. Rather, I'd say it's wastefully wrong and an offence against nature to kill things and not eat them -- and of course, that must go for human warfare too. It is pretty unhealthy to eat your own species, since the bugs that infest it can all infect you, so killing people is wrong. But surely, you kill 'em, soldier, you eat them and take your chances.

Where the vegans/vegetarians have got me is when they point at the way most meat is now produced. Forcing naturally vegan cows to become cannibals was, of course, asking for trouble. Industrial agri-business uses up more fossil fuel energy to produce a kilo of beef than the calorific value you get when you eat it -- and this is claimed as economic efficiency! But then, much the same the same applies to intensively grown vegetables. People starve, despite that fact that our species farms more than enough for everyone to have an adequate diet, because the best food-growing areas supply cash-crops to rich, already over-fed customers in rich nations, rather than supplying local people and local markets.

Perhaps the logical conclusion is that it is as wrong to eat what you haven't yourself grown and killed, as it is to waste what you do kill by not eating or otherwise using it? Well, there goes trade, and city living. Clearly, this couldn't be strictly applied -- children only survive because their parents feed them. One of the reasons I like permaculture is because it collects up useful principles for applying to this sort of issue. The relevant principles here are to keep activity as local as possible, and to ensure that all flows in the system are closed loops, as short as possible. So grow what you can yourself, and what you can't, buy locally -- and what you don't use yourself, sell or give to someone who can. And design your life, and your community, so that as much as possible of what people need is available locally. For instance, fruit and nut

trees in parks and along streets, as community orchards; edible window boxes and roof terrace gardens, could let even city-dwellers pick their own leafy fresh greens and fruit.

So that brings us back to gardening and composting. But what about meat eating and wallaby fur coats?

We thought about keeping backyard quail here. I admit I'd have trouble killing the dear little fluffy things, once they're hatched. Likewise guinea pigs or cute little bunnies. So a small, relatively quiet egg-layer that doesn't dig burrows seems the best bet for expanding our animal husbandry beyond the worm bin composting colony. The main reason we don't have quail is worry that local cats or rats would get them. Also, we'd need to sort out a cage or run for them, and what would happen to them when we went away? Joseph is convinced they'd be untidy. Besides, I haven't seen a pair for sale since we moved here.

(Then there's the two-volume *Farming Snails*, advertised in the Eco-logic Books catalogue. There's certainly no shortage of them in these parts. Frogs' legs, however, are off the menu. Frogs are our friends. They just take their chances with the local cats and birds -- including the grey heron that every now and then perches on our fence and sniffs dismissively at our tiny pond.)

You are probably asking whether my confession of sentimental squeamishness when it comes to actually killing perfectly good small game pets is entirely consistent with my scorn for 'killing and eating meat is wrong' as a basis for vegetarianism. I have, in effect, just been arguing that I should be vegetarian, except for whatever I can bring myself to kill and dress (or get from a neighbouring farmer): meat killed in its own home, by someone it trusted.

So it seems to come down to the frame of mind needed to steel yourself: if you couldn't kill it, don't eat it, is a perfectly consistent and sound philosophy. I had a feeling it was going to come down to animism as the best belief system going. That is, believing that animals have souls, that we humans are somehow related to the species we live with and on, that we have responsibilities to them and should treat them with respect. And that part of the relationship is that sometimes we eat them. Or if we're unlucky, they eat us.

We humans are storytelling animals, so much so we get caught up in believing our stories are The Truth, rather than a way of capturing a useful point of view. This means, too, that we twist our stories about. No story we tell can ever be trusted -- but can always be interrogated.

Meanwhile, so far this winter, there simply hasn't been a day cold enough to give my wallabies an outing. Global warming?

At one time, the legal penalty for leaving hospital in Scotland while suffering from leprosy was to be hanged.

China produces a three-penis wine as a cure for anaemia, shingles and memory loss. Made from one part seal penis, one part dog penis, and four parts deer penis, it is described as "robust and nutritious".

("World of Medicine", *General Practitioner*, 31 July and 14 August 1998)

Spot the Contradiction Dept:

"Defence Secretary George Robertson yesterday said he wanted to help rid the world of nuclear weapons. But he insisted Britain would maintain its nuclear deterrent."

(*Daily Express*, 6 July 1998, quoted in *CND Today*, Autumn 1998)

From a letter in *The Haringey Independent* for 23 October 1998, from a local resident complaining about "the ladies of the night":

"Even my husband, who is a disciplined Christian, also said that he was almost seduced by one of them who lifted her mini-skirt to expose nothing underneath as he drove back from church late one evening. If it wasn't for God's guidance, I am I almost certain he would have crashed his car or pulled over for her custom."

FIGHT THE FUTURE

Joseph Nicholas

Until a few years ago, I had next to zero interest in gardens or gardening -- an indifference doubtless attributable to the fact that we simply didn't have one, and that a couple of window boxes and some houseplants constituted the totality of our vegetational holdings. Even when we moved from our grotty rented flat in Pimlico to the rented bottom half of a terrace house in Tottenham in 1989, and acquired a small, weed infested back garden as part of the package, I wasn't very interested. A place to sun oneself in the summer months, clearly (or at any rate for that part of the day when the sun actually shone on the garden; after about 2.00pm, it was in deep shadow, and I usually went to the cinema); but grow things in it? I left such worries to Judith, reasoning that as a country girl she would clearly know much more about that sort of thing. Even if I did find myself caught up in the odd spot of plant-watering and snail-murdering....

Then we bought our current home.

Perhaps it was the change from renting to purchasing: from something over which you have a temporary lease to something you can actually remodel to suit yourself. Or perhaps it was just gardening as a species of tidying up: our first full-scale foray into the tussocky, abandoned rectangle that was our new back garden, on Boxing Day 1993, disclosed immense quantities of semi-buried rubbish, including a rotary clothes line which had obviously collapsed some years previously. And a lot of bricks with which to demarcate what would be left as lawn -- and a connecting path -- from what would be dug over for flowers and vegetables. (The pond was very much an afterthought, shoehorned into a space which at that time didn't have anything else in it.) I stapled pea and bean netting along all three fences, as instructed by the Head Gardener, then went back inside to drink beer and watch a TV broadcast of the 1920s silent classic *Wings*, with a new score by Colin Davis.

The resulting story of our garden has been described on various occasions -- including a book entitled *The Permaculture Plot* (which lists private organic gardens open to arranged visits) and a gardening programme on a cable TV channel (which must have been seen by an audience running into at least two figures) -- by both the Head Gardener and, er, yours truly. To some surprise on my part, I must acknowledge. Never mind the surprise of others -- at a first-

Thursday meeting during our first summer, for instance, Keith Oborn's response to my enthusiastic description of all the things I'd done to get the garden looking tidy and attractive was open-mouthed astonishment, and a remark that in all the years he'd known me he would never, ever have suspected me of an interest in gardening. Nor me, I acknowledged -- and subsequently wrote an enthusiastic letter about the garden to Bruce Gillespie, who published it a couple of years later in one of his telephone directories. By which time we'd acquired a half-allotment, and more food-growing space, so I wrote an enthusiastic letter about that, too. It appeared two years later, in another of Bruce's occasional magazines. And is now quite out of date, since instead of sub-letting half an allotment we've moved up to renting a whole one of our own.

The great advantage of an allotment is that it gives one the room to grow things which would otherwise take up too much space in the back garden -- the plants of the brassica family being the obvious example, but also jerusalem artichokes and potatoes. And gooseberry and raspberry bushes, donated in one case by the immediately neighbouring allotment-holder who was thinning out her holdings and in the other by a man who was giving up his plot because he thought that at ninety years of age he was too old to manage it properly and wanted the plants to go to a good home. And of course there was space for a really large pond, to compensate for the smallness of the home pond and provide us with somewhere to transfer our surplus tadpoles. Even if they were (as we suspect) subsequently eaten by what looked very much like a dragonfly nymph we saw crawling along the bottom a month or two later....but frogs of various sizes have since been spotted in and around the pond, so we assume either that some survived or that others were attracted from elsewhere (or even both). And the more the better, since that means fewer slugs and snails to prey on our food.

Use slug pellets, I hear someone suggest. To which I riposte that we are damn well not spreading any nasty bloody chemicals on our crops, thank you very much. We grow our own food not just to help reduce our food bills but to assure ourselves of what we're eating and the conditions under which it's grown. No pesticide residues on our fruits. No nitrate-

soaked fertiliser ruining the soil, or herbicides to destroy the grass and weeds and the insects along with them. Just water, compost matured *in situ*, and occasional applications of a strong-smelling supplement bought from an organic supplier. Growing food in any other way would simply defeat the whole purpose of having an allotment in the first place.

Indeed, I can't think of any of our fellow allotment-holders who would garden in any other way either (although the Head Gardener has her doubts about one of them, whose onions seem suspiciously large), and while this low-tech approach may strike some as old-fashioned, it in fact reflects a growing desire for a move away from the industrialisation characteristic of contemporary agricultural processes -- not as an attempted return to some lost rural idyll, but as an activist demand for greater control over the food chain. And where better to start than one's one back garden -- or, if that isn't large enough, an allotment?

The outside world may still hold to the image of allotment culture reflected in the 1940s' "Dig For Victory" posters, showing ruddy-cheeked middle-aged men wielding giant carrots in one hand and ridiculous-looking pipes in the other, but the actual reality is very different. Largely unnoticed by the outside world, allotment culture has undergone a quiet (and continuing) revolution as increasing numbers of younger people, often couples younger than ourselves and often with small children, have been queuing up to rent plots from their local authorities, leading to a marked shift in both the demographics and the gender balance of tenure. The only continuity between then and now is that organic growing remains the rule, and if anything a rule adhered to more strongly than before. Salmonella in eggs, BSE, constant outbreaks of *e coli* 0157, the looming presence of GMOs -- who can be surprised that more and more people are worried about the food they eat, and are seeking as far as possible to ensure its safety by producing it themselves? Or, if they haven't the space or the time to grow their own, to purchase it via farmers' markets or vegetable box schemes, where they can be sure of its provenance?

Or, to put it another way: who would ever have thought that something as simple as a plate of food could become a hot political issue?

At which point I have to declare a professional interest, since last September, after eight years in the Department of Health, I transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food on secondment to what is currently known as the Joint Food Safety & Standards Group -- the body which will in due course achieve an independent existence as the

Food Standards Agency. So anything I say from this point on could be taken as conflicting with both what I do for a living and government policy on food, on the grounds that public servants should avoid openly pronouncing on issues of public controversy -- except that few people would dispute that MAFF has failed in its duty to protect consumers because it has become too close to producer interests and that the FSA is necessary to resolve its failed attempt to reconcile the inevitable conflicts between the two. In addition, the government has announced increases in financial support for organic production (particularly for farmers who wish to convert to it), a Commons Select Committee has urged it to promote growing one's own food for both its dietary and health aspects, and I wouldn't have sought a transfer to the JFSSG-cum-FSA if I hadn't wanted to. So what's controversial?

Quite a lot, obviously. As I remarked in my interview for the job, an extraordinary number of interests now contend for dominance over something apparently as simple as a plate of food (and, yes, I did use the po-mo term "contend for dominance"): the question of organic versus industrialised food production, the issue of rural employment and support for the rural economy in general, the need to secure environmental protection and develop sustainable futures, the matter of "food miles" and the degree of control supermarket corporations exert over the food production process. No one individual will ever work on them all, I said; but I think it helps to be aware that these issues exist and that food policy should be "joined-up" enough to accommodate them all. (And then I went on to give MAFF a good kicking for its BSE cover-ups. The interview board, all MAFF personnel, took this in good spirit.) I shall assume that readers of this august journal are equally aware of these issues, at least in outline -- and that they do not require lengthy elaboration to arrive at an approximation of my position on them.

In fact, albeit unknown to readers of this august journal, I was making my position on (some) food issues plain well before I thought of joining the JFSSG, when in 1997 I wrote a short play about food miles for some Friends of the Earth activists who had initially come together to perform a street theatre "putting the car on trial" in 1996. (Another assumption I shall make at this point is that readers either know or can work out what "street theatre" means. How I came to be involved with this group is too long-winded to explain here.) Having been assigned, or having volunteered (I forget which), to dramatise the subject at a "script conference" in early 1997, I eventually hit on the idea of doing it as a parody

of the various cookery programmes which then, as now, dominated mid-evening television schedules: a gourmet chef to construct the menu for a select dinner party, using only the finest ingredients from around the world; an oenologist to suggest the wines which would most complement the dishes, while drinking most of them and finally falling under the table after an unsuccessful attempt to snog the chef; and a po-faced Monty Python-style Alan Whicker commentator to itemise on a flip chart the distances travelled by the various products selected by both and condemn them for their environmental vandalism.

It seemed to work. It wasn't performed quite as often as I'd hoped, perhaps because the last-minute cancellation of the 1997 London FOE Groups Conference denied us the launch platform which would have brought the play to the attention of other activists in the capital, but the script remains available for anyone who wants a copy. (See me afterwards.) I played the oenologist (in a skirt, make-up and imitation pearls) on one occasion, and the commentator on the others. We were heckled only once, at the Muswell Hill Festival that summer (where one of the festival stewards tried to persuade us that we needed his authority to sell food and drink before realising that our wine bottles were empty and our king prawns made of papier-mâché), by someone who seemed to think that foreign food was better because ours was riddled with BSE and other contaminants; but he didn't stay around after the performance to debate the issues with us. (On the other hand, he had clearly had one drink too many, so it wouldn't have been much of a debate.)

But even framed as a pseudo-cookery demonstration, food miles is still a rather abstract issue. No matter how diligently one scans the range of exotic (and, increasingly, non-exotic) fruit and vegetables now routinely available in most supermarkets, it's difficult to visualise the (hidden, unquantified) environmental and other costs of their production, such as the distortion it causes to Third World economies and the atmospheric impacts of the (untaxed) fuel burnt in air-freighting food from around the world. Genetically-modified food, however, is another issue entirely -- even more abstract, but exciting much greater attention precisely because the modifications can't be seen. If they can't be seen, runs the public's argument, then how can GM food be assumed to be safe? And can the public really trust the word of corporations who are motivated primarily by profit?

No on both counts, obviously -- a resistance which GM proponents such as Monsanto clearly felt could be overcome by

clever PR purporting to put both sides of the argument, only to find that the more they spent on advertising the less they were trusted. It's hardly surprising that other corporate players in the GM debate, such as Novartis and Hoechst Marion Roussel, who knew from the outset that US technophilia is not shared by Europeans and that a different approach would be needed to overcome our more ambiguous attitude to new technology, are now complaining that Monsanto's blunders have undermined whatever case they might have made. But then if big corporations are dim enough to repeatedly shoot themselves in the feet because they fail to think fully through the public impact of their activities, why stop them?

But although the public is clearly swinging ever more strongly against GM food, this negative opinion is not shared by farmers, at least to judge by the editorials and articles in *Farmers' Weekly* and the enthusiastic comments by "barley baron" Oliver Walston in his recent television series *Against The Grain*. According to him, GM crops will help promote sustainable and environmentally-friendly farming because they will reduce the indiscriminate use of fertilisers and herbicides, and help feed the world because they can be engineered to be resistant to particular insect pests or more tolerant of marginal soil or climatic conditions -- yet the first claim is dubious, since common sense suggests that there's little need to make a plant resistant to a herbicide unless you plan to use more of it, and the second is utter nonsense. Food shortages in the Third World are the product not of capricious nature but of poverty, which is directly attributable to the concentration of resources in the hands of an unrepresentative elite -- for example, the ownership of large blocks of land by absentee landlords who produce mainly for export to the developed world (or even leave the land fallow, so that it produces nothing at all), transforming the majority of the population into mere labourers and piece-workers and forcing those peasant farmers who remain onto marginal land which they would otherwise never touch. Peasant farmers, it should be obvious, will not be helped out of their poverty by GM crop plants which, because they have been deliberately engineered for sterility or termination, will force them to buy new seed every year. Indeed, the introduction of GM plants into the Third World would merely repeat the errors of the Green Revolution of thirty years ago -- then, the technocratic pretence that the high-tech, high-cost, high-input methods of the industrialised North were of universalist application was a failure; now, it would be a disaster

The only people who stand to gain from

the commercialisation of GM planting – that is, growing the crops on an industrial scale, for eventual feeding to animals and/or humans – are the politicians who will be wined and dined by the multi-national bio-technology corporations in their drive to be allowed to commercialise; and the corporations themselves, who clearly perceive a vista of apparently unending annual profits opening up before them. Presumably Monsanto *et al* are uneasily aware that the public perceive this too, or why else cloak their greed in a veneer of pretend altruism with lavish publicity campaigns about feeding the starving? That this altruism is quite fraudulent is nowhere better shown than in the USA itself, where Monsanto has prosecuted a number of farmers for various breaches of the detailed contracts they have to sign – for instance, failing to pay royalties on non-sterile seed stored for planting the following year, using herbicides purchased from other firms which happen to be less expensive than its own, and even spraying its own herbicides at other than the stipulated times. There's little doubt that it would attempt to pursue the same course of action once, or if, it got a foothold in the Third World – as poor Indian farmers, for one group, are well aware. Already angered by Western attempts to patent the fruit and bark of the neem tree – the same fruit and bark whose medicinal properties they have been exploiting for many hundreds of years – poor Indian farmers are now taking action against the threat GM poses to their traditional agricultural methods and the security of their food supply, to the extent of uprooting and incinerating the crops themselves. And because there are more of them, and more people in the Third World, than in the industrialised West, they can be overcome only by threatening them with a WTO ruling that a ban on GMOs would be a barrier to free trade – which the USA, supported only by its faithful lackey the UK, has recently said it will seek. As in other areas, the real needs of real people cannot be allowed to stand in the way of economic globalisation and the cultural hegemony it enforces.

All of which takes us a long way from the apparently simple matter of growing one's own food – but at the same time demonstrates, as I indicated earlier, how political food has become. As I write, three national newspapers – *The Independent*, *The Daily Express* and *The Daily Mail* – are running high-profile campaigns against the genetic modification of food while a fourth, *The Guardian*, frequently runs articles on the broader questions of food safety, food hygiene and food production in general, with all four calling for the early establishment of a proactive Food Standards Agency with robust powers of enforcement to prevent future food

emergencies (up to and including advising people how to store and cook their food after they've bought it – even though, as everyone admits, there can be no actual control over that). William Hague's Conservatives, predictably, refer to this as "nannyism", another manifestation of Blair's incipient authoritarianism – but as the Tories were largely responsible for the BSE crisis in the first place, they have little support. The greatest opposition to the FSA, if not to its establishment then certainly to its powers and its funding, is likely to come from the food retail chains and their allies in the corporations from which they source their products, who will no longer be able to hide behind voluntary (and thus ineffective) codes of practice and partial labelling which conceals or obscures as much as it reveals – and who will be quick to throw their financial and legal weight against anyone who suggests they have other than the interests of the consumer at heart.

As we know from the allotment. In general, there's rarely anyone else there when we're working on our plot (just as, presumably, we're not there when others turn up), but occasionally we run into other allotmenters and spend a few minutes commiserating over the state of our respective harvests. During last summer and autumn, we became friendly with a young woman called Helen who had the plot diagonally across the path from ours. We initially struck up conversation because Judith had grown more Brussels sprouts seedlings in the greenhouse at home than we actually had room for in the beds, and naturally preferred to give them away to someone else rather than compost them. From this, we discovered that she had once had an allotment somewhere else but (for unexplained reasons) had had to give it up a few years previously. Several weeks went by before I realised why this might be so, and why she seemed so familiar; so when I next saw her I asked if she was indeed Helen Steele of the McLibel Two. She allowed with a smile that she was.

We haven't seen her recently, but then at the time of writing she and her co-defendant Dave Morris had recently commenced their appeal against the verdict in the McLibel trial, so she wouldn't have had much time for anything else, such as turning over the soil in preparation for spring planting. However, the appeal is likely to take up less court time than the two to three years consumed by the original hearing, so she might not have to give up the present allotment as well. Apart from the personal thrill of acquaintance with minor celebrity, we need someone to whom we can give our excess Brussels sprouts seedlings.

14 February 1999

Chundering in shoes and leaning sideways: Britfandom review

Judith Hanna

The most memorable zine in the pile was definitely Michael Ashley's *Saliromania* 12. This doesn't mean I liked it, or admire it. Michael combined miserable git denunciations of happy smug middle-class fans hanging out at Corflu UK with what some will presumably hail as 'searingly honest' accounts of drinking himself to death. "What's the point?" as Ashley himself asks rhetorically. Self-destruction as page-filler.

How are you supposed to respond to stuff like: *"Drinking alcohol for the taste seems a little perverse anyway. It's just another drug. And this drug's side effect is memory loss. I can't remember anything more about Saturday night at Corflu.... I don't feel so good Sunday morning. I look a bit pale but that could be just the plaster [falling from the ceiling]. I drink three cans straight after waking up and am surprised at just how good they make me feel. I suppose the fact that I haven't eaten for some time might have something to do with how quickly they work."* And:

"The rot sets in on Monday. I have to be up at 7am as the plumbers, electricians and joiners all want to stir the dust up in my flat as early as possible. Getting up early isn't difficult though. As soon as last night's alcohol starts wearing off, I am unable to sleep. I do, however, find it easy to start trembling and sweating. It's like being in an Irvine Welch story or an Arab Strap song, but without any kind of glamour. I'm too old for this. Why can't I be normal? I ought to be getting the kids off to school before driving off in my expensive car to my high-powered job as Chief Executive of the Woodside Anti-Drugs Waste of Money project. Instead I am scrabbling round the flat looking for that last can in the four pack. Still, the shaking does get rid of the plaster."

I think the idea is that the reader ought to be impressed and sympathetic. With what? The cynical wit and macho endurance of being an alcoholic slob? Sure, it sounds a miserable and pointless way to carry on -- but it looks to me like self-inflicted injury. Unless, of course, he's exaggerating. And Michael seems such a nice boy when you meet him.

Writing like that amounts to begging for pop psychologising in response, for readers to try to help Michael sort out why his life's such a mess. So I will. First, though, let's be clear that none of us has any right to demand that Michael (or anyone else) bare their soul or deeper motives to us, or tell the bare truth. It's up to them what they want to make public, and polishing it up to heighten the melodrama is fair enough literary game. I respond only to a written persona lurching pitifully about, an episode written down in the aftermath of a con when Michael's flat in a run-down inner city area was undergoing annoying messy renovation. At other times, he may be perfectly cheerful and sober for all I know -- even though he writes *"Venus in Furs suddenly comes on the pub's sound system... It sounds better than ever and I realise that as self-destructive and meaningless as my life is, I do actually want to go on living, at least for a little while longer. It would be nice to feel like that more than once every six months but I suppose it's better than not feeling it at all. (Note for my usual readers: I'm sorry for being so positive.)"*

In the previous *Saliromania*, Michael wrote about his job as a community worker *"trying to stop evictions, keep people out of prison and hold off the bailiffs"*

and his social life "hanging out with a bunch of drug users with nocturnal lives... I can't say it's an unpleasant way of life. At 5am this morning staring out the window and watching the cop cars cruise by, I felt curiously content. But all the same, something's gone wrong." That was back in 1996.

So why the hell doesn't he pull himself together and get the hell out of it? There seem two things to worry about. One is financial insecurity, ie being poor -- but he seems to have all the disadvantages of that already. If that's the case, then why not go off adventuring, picking up what odd-jobs and adventures he can, seeing interesting parts of the world instead of stagnating, bogged down by the weight of his own and other people's problems?

The alternative is that he is abusing himself because he actually doesn't like, respect or trust himself, and if that's the case he'll be just as fucked-up wherever he runs to. In that case staying put, among people he knows, may be as good a course as any. Medical treatment or therapy for depression might help, if he hasn't already tried it. Or, of course, it might not, and Susie Orbach's *Guardian* columns were living weekly proof of what nauseating drivel gets paraded as therapy-speak. Or, on the other hand, still being a depressed alcoholic among better scenery and a job that doesn't require loading yourself down with a other people's problems might be a better bet for a bearable life.

So might some form of group living -- but the way he describes carrying on doesn't seem something anyone else should be asked to put up with. Unless he treats himself decently, why would he treat anyone else with more care or respect?

It's a worrying zine. It seems out to pull our 'sympathy' and 'impressed by macho cynicism' strings. Rather, my reaction is an impatient "For God's sake pull yourself together, lad. Get a life." Blame it on my brutal farm and gardening background.

From across the Atlantic, Michael's Corflu report was seen by puzzled Americans like Andy Hooper in *Crifanac 4* as the tip of a worryingly pervasive alcoholic Brit-fan culture. I remember thinking that the way he and others reacted was kind of off-beam. If Joseph hadn't moved our fanzine pile into the inaccessible heights of the attic, I'd be able to check and quote the specifics.

There seemed, however, two valid questions in the air. First, do British fans really all drink as much as fanzines suggest they do? Without counting empty glasses, it's hard to reach a reliable answer. My impression is that a lot of them talk more alcohol than they sink. Nor is drinking alcohol obligatory -- some of us manage to get through whole conventions without touching the noxious stuff. Me, I don't particularly like the taste, and it makes me sleepy. I party better without it.

Second, is the alcohol-soaked tenor of so much British fan-writing a symptom of an unhealthy level of drinking? Again, hard to get a clear picture of what people do in their own homes between conventions and pub meetings. But I reckon that a worryingly high proportion of typical fans may well be borderline alcoholics, drinking enough to damage their health. By making a joke or macho point of pride of heavy drinking, fandom over here makes it easy for them to pretend they haven't a problem and it eggs them on, making it harder for them to get on top of their drinking. So yes, I reckon the Americans are right to see the alcohol-fixation in British fan-writing as unhealthy, pretty fugg-headed, and for some, life-endangering.

Err, yes, that does go for my co-editor and his amusing habit of falling asleep. Please don't give him a drink. It's bad for him.

Desert Island Books

Judith Hanna

Does everyone dream of running away to a tropical island? It wasn't an idle daydream for me. I used to plan very carefully what I needed to take with me, how to build a house and what my garden needed to grow, how to make all sorts of essential and useful things for a comfortable and civilised life among the palm trees.

Nor was my careful planning based merely on such essential reference works as *The Swiss Family Robinson* -- much though I enjoyed immersing myself in the thick-papared hardback children's edition that had been my mother's, with its pen and ink line illustrations. A much-bowdlerised *Robinson Crusoe*, being less inventive about the resources that presented themselves and were put to use, I found less engaging. Later, of course, there was *Gilligan's Island* on TV, which really didn't take the exercise in the proper serious spirit.

After all, from when I was six until after I turned eight, we had lived on a tropical island, Manus, off the top of Niugini, a mere 70 miles south of the equator. Weekends were spent either puttering off in a Royal Australian Navy workboat for picnics on the smaller islands around it, or bouncing in the back of a jeep to beaches around its coast. So I had seen kapok trees spilling fluffy cotton from their pods along the roadside, knew that tropical beaches were just 6ft wide because there was so little tide, knew that any cut or scratch would almost certainly get infected and things kept in cupboards would grow almost instantly mildewed in the moist tropical warmth, knew that going barefoot risked picking up hookworm so you had to wear flip-flops (thongs/getas) for protection, had seen how sago was milled from sago palm trunks and how to make a 'haus sak-sak' clothed with their leaves -- so many little details of how people lived, that just weren't in any of the books.

Of course I realised even then that detailed planning for life on a tropical paradise island of one's own was infinitely preferable to actually doing it. Really setting up your own little paradise on a desert island would hard, hot work, even with a carefully selected choice band of friends to share in it. But thinking about all that work, working out a step by step plan from the initial landing with a mere boatload of supplies is infinitely engrossing. As Jerome K Jerome says: "I love work, it fascinates me. I can sit and watch it for hours."

When I was young, I was a loner bookworm who used to sit around with my head in a book. These days I've realised that without people to argue with and bounce ideas off, my brain falls into a sheep-like placidity. Even back then, though, if I remember rightly, most of my desert island escapist fantasies involved taking along a dozen or so others to do the work, be impressed by my brilliant planning, and chat with. Of course, in real life, they'd want to work on their own bright ideas, not be pawns in my brilliant master-plan -- understandable enough, but not what the game is about.

What I enjoyed was planning the details of house, garden and farm construction and development, with associated water supply, windpower, arts and craft workshops

and programmes. Even back then, most of the books I mentally took along were practical manuals.

So my Desert Island Book 1 would be *The Comprehensive Practical Desert Island Survival Manual*, incorporating *Tropical Plants and their uses: an illustrated encyclopedia*, plus *Polynesian and Melanesian material culture and horticulture*, and *Identification, Prevention and Cure of Tropical Ailments*. That just about covers the basics. Someone jolly well ought to write, illustrate and publish them.

DIB 2 is a real book: *Permaculture: A designer's manual* by Bill Mollison (1988, Tagari Press, Australia, 575pp) -- the bible of designing sustainable, eco-friendly systems for almost any environment. In real life, I have a copy. It's a volume for dipping into, to check the practical procedures and angles that need to be thought about, plus inspirational maxims and ideas. It's the only book on my list that someone has already produced.

It needs, however, to be supplemented by, for DIB 3, a *Harnessing Natural Energy Sources using everyday materials*, which would give detailed construction diagrams for solar, wind and wave power installations and storage batteries, plus of course how to build a poo-power plant, or methane biodigester. After all, one needs light to read by after dark, which near the equator falls at an even 6pm year round.

At DIB 4 is the *Definitive Encyclopedia of Useful Crafts: or how to make all sorts of things, including the kit to make them with*. This would have plans for spinning wheel and loom, basketry techniques, paint- and paper-making instructions, as well as wood and metal work basics. Musical-instrument making, and tuning too -- surely at least one of the group would have the talent of keeping tune.

This instruction book would of course need to be supplemented by a comprehensive tool-kit, including a lathe for wood-turning, and welding gear. Together, these should cover making a printing press. Having lived on a farm means that my idea of what a tool-kit should include amounts to a good shedful, not a mere tool-box. The welding kits would, of course, have to run on solar-power, which probably rules out oxy-acetylene. But with a sufficiently robust battery set-up, it should surely be possible to run arc-welding off sun-power.

We'd also need a solar-powered computer and satellite Internet connection -- which needs, as DIB 5, the manual on how to build, program and fix it. After all, have to produce the desert island newszine. The crafts manual (DIB 4) read with the plants and Polynesian culture section of DIB 1 above should deal with making paper to print on, and ink.

That, I think, covers the practicalities, so we can get frivolous for DIB 6: *Games, pastimes and diversions: rules, guidelines and variations*, and a pack of cards, for when the choice band runs out of things to talk about during the long dark evenings. Just thinking of it takes me back to those carefree student days when we used to play endless rounds of Botticelli, Black Bitch, Pontoon, Rummy or whatever else was the current obsession way into the wee small hours or through to dawn. (I'm sure home-brewing is covered in at least one of the books above).

At DIB 7, we get to leisure reading, comprising the *Collected Works of Terry Pratchett, Cordwainer Smith, Rudyard Kipling, Jane Austen, Elizabeth Goudge, Georgette Heyer and PG Wodehouse*. That should just about cover it.

Finally, for DIB 8, we need *Navigation and Boat-building*, for escape from the escapist retreat when even one's imagination decides it is time to move on. And for fish and exploration in the meantime.

With that lot packed for the trip, we just need to add a seed collection of useful tropical plants in an airtight insulated chest (to go with the gardening book), a thorough medicine chest and vaccines (to go with the Tropical Diseases book) with plenty of total sun block, a frivolous collection of bright pigments for painting and decorating, and a starter supply of insect repellent and fly screening to tide us over until we get construction of mosquito-proof living quarters and home production of useful herbal prophylactics underway.

Now, who wants to come along as a member of the choice, hand-picked company of castaways? Joseph, I have to admit, scores highly for his DIY, digging and keeping things tidy skills. And I didn't even know he was such a practical chap when I decided to marry him.

The following appeared on the McDonnell Douglas website in the second week of April 1998. Clearly posted by a hacker, it was soon removed, but not before it had been recorded for posterity....

Thank you for purchasing a McDonnell Douglas military aircraft. To protect your new investment, please take a few moments to fill out this registration card.

1. Mr Mrs Ms Miss Lt
 Gen Comrade Classified Other
 Name:.....
 Password (max 8 characters):.....
 Code Name:.....

2. Which model did you buy?
 F-14 Tomcat
 F-15 Eagle
 F-16 Falcon
 F-117A Stealth
 Classified

3. Please check where this product was purchased:
 Received as gift/aid package
 Catalogue showroom
 Independent arms broker
 Mail order
 Discount store
 Government surplus
 Classified

4. Please check how you became aware of the product you have just purchased:
 Heard loud noise, looked up
 Store display
 Espionage
 Recommended by friend/ally
 Political lobbying
 Was attacked by one

5. Please check the three factors that most influenced your decision to purchase this product:
 Style/appearance
 Kickback/bribe
 Backroom politics
 Negative experience opposing one in combat

6. How would you describe yourself?
 Communist/socialist
 Terrorist
 Crazy
 Neutral
 Democratic
 Dictatorship
 Corrupt
 Primitive/tribal

7. How did you pay for your product?
 Deficit spending
 Suitcases of cocaine
 Oil revenues
 Personal cheque
 Ransom money

8. Your occupation:
 Sales/marketing
 Revolutionary
 Clerical
 Mercenary
 Tyrant
 Eccentric billionaire
 Defence Minister/General

9. Please indicate the interests and activities in which you and your spouse enjoy participating on a regular basis:
 Sabotage
 Propaganda/disinformation
 Destabilisation/overthrow
 Default on loans
 Back market/smuggling
 Interrogation/torture
 Crushing rebellions
 Espionage/reconnaissance
 Mutually Assured Destruction

Thank you for filling out this registration card. Your answers will help McDonnell Douglas serve you better in the future and help us develop the products that best meet your needs and desires.

LETTUCE

Edited by Judith Hanna

Revolutionary Gardening

Neil K Henderson
46 Revoch Drive
Knightswood
Glasgow G13 4SB

And so the old order is overturned by the spades of the inevitable, and yesterday's fanzine becomes the green manure

for a fresh crop of communicative endeavours. Indeed, the new name has brought a mulcheral revolution into effect upon the life-mould of my own loamy existence -- at a stroke transforming my status in the community. No longer the intellectual wallflower, I can command the attention of my fellow public transport travellers with the simple utterance: "I was reading in the *International Revolutionary Gardener* this morning..." or dominate a dinner party with the remark "I see in the *International Revolutionary Gardener* that manure is fluctuating again". This should satisfy Vicki Rosenzweig's status-defining requirements, since all your readers can now consider themselves big fish in an internationally revolving garden pond.

Which brings me to Monika Best's tap-dancing turtle. Could this be a European pond tortoise, or possibly a terrapin? If it starts smashing the dinner service and dancing on the table-top, it's probably a common or Greek restaurant tortoise.

Not that there's much hope for my own revolutionary (or even reactionary) gardening prospects right now, with the globally-warmed February mild-wave, and accompanying northern wetness, bringing everything on in what is normally the off-season -- and me with a fractured lawn-mower handle. I actually had the foresight to order the two lengths of tubular steel required to fix it last summer, when the old bits were bent but still useable. Here we are approaching spring -- New Labour, New False Pre-End-of-Winter Weather -- the Qualcast agent still can't get the parts from source, and the handle is now totally useless. There is nothing else for it. I am going to have to evolve into a tortoise. NOW.

Mat Coward
15 Rossiters Road
Stroud, Somerset
BA11 4AN

You know, I always dreamed of doing a gardening fanzine. I became entirely obsessed with horticulture in, I think, about 1987, and soon discovered there wasn't much in the way of 'grown-up' writing about it. It was seen as a hobby for elderly and working class people who, so the logic seems to go, can't read. I couldn't get anyone interested though, and certainly wasn't going to do it on my own.

Another wheeze I had about the same time was writing to all the newspapers offering (begging, really) to write a semi-humorous column, something like 'Diary of an allotment novice'. I never got a reply from anyone. These days, every broadsheet paper has an allotment diary columnist, and the fucking *Telegraph* has three! None of them are me, obviously. Now I remember, I even asked the *New Statesman* if I could write a gardening column for them, but they couldn't see it, and I ended up having to write tedious humour stuff instead.

As for 'revolutionary gardeners', when I was doing the NS column, I used to slip in gardening references whenever possible, and a couple of allotmenters in Suffolk (an underpopulated county, as I understand) adopted me as their official Guru. We still correspond, and I occasionally issue Guidance on the Line concerning such matters as the Valiant Struggle against Couch Grass, the Urgent Necessity to Prepare for the Coming Imperialist Storm by making Cloches out of Coathangers, and the like. All of which tells us, I suppose, that there are no new gags anywhere. Not that I need telling; I've been writing the *Orgasmic Gargling*¹ column for ten years. Believe me, if there were any new gags I'd have dug them up by now.

These days, of course, gardening is a consumer fad.

¹ Organic Gardening. But I'm sure you realised that without this footnote.

especially the fantasy of *Instant Garden Makeover*, as seen on TV. Gardening work is said to be one of the fastest growing labour market sectors. To add insult to injury, of course, the new Blairite Statesthing pinches the gardening correspondent of its right-wing look-alike, the *Spectator*, for an occasional bourgeois country-house gardening column. The *Guardian* likewise casts gardening as something for those endowed with country acres and gets its Saturday column from venerable Christopher Lloyd and his 14th century Great Dixter manor. Ironically, the *Torygraph's* Elopeth Thompson, who mingles with permaculturists and other crusties (and wrote up our backyard and allotment a while back), seems the best revolutionary of the lot. Apart, of course, from Mat.

Over to someone who hailed us as 'the Militant Tendency of Gardener's World':

Steve Jeffery
44 White Way
Kidlington
OX5 2XA

Now I realise why the splurge of titles across the cover of the last *FTT*. You were using them up before the sell-by date, and

clearing the ground for *IRG* (notice subtle metaphors creeping in?)

Do you do home visits, like Ground Force? What's left of the grounds of Inception Towers is now (February 1998) in a sad and confused state after the recent bout of wonderful but totally unseasonable weather. All the gnomes started taking their clothes off, and now they're turning a sad shade of blue.

Actually, although most of the garden is dug in, and its previously sprawling and untidy shrubs either cut back or uprooted, a nice little cluster of bluebells is shyly making an appearance at the front. And this year, the passion flower around the front door has gone mad, not having died off over what little there was of winter, has sent long tendrils across the front to start another spurt of growth up the side of the neighbours front door. This year we even got half a dozen passion fruits, typically, more on the neighbours' side.

The trouble with passion fruits is that they look like a bundle of sad dried twigs up the side of the house until very late into summer, then they go insane, sending tendrils everywhere. Tuck them back at night, and they will be across the door again in the morning. I've seen nothing grow this fast except kudzu. But the flowers are incredibly beautiful.

Out the back, on the conifers, it is the start of green beetle time. Again, unseasonably early. We're

still not exactly sure what these are. Green and rust brown, with a back like a medieval knight's shield. Hence our other term: shield beetles.

Shield beetles they are, comrade. True bugs, as biologists know them -- sap-sucking mouth parts, and give off a characteristic bug stink when frightened. We only do home visits if 1) lavishly and extravagantly bribed, and 2) when there's space in the saving-the-world schedule. Meanwhile, for anyone who is enjoying this wallow in horticultural trivia and reaching for their writing implement of choice to share with us all the intimate details of their purlieus, let me draw to your attention the 'Secret Garden' apa run in a relaxed and informal way by Priscilla Olson of NESFA, USA and currently being overrun by the Pommie hordes². Surveys find, after all, that gardening is Britain's favourite outdoor pursuit. Secret apan Sue Thomason wrote back immediately IRG reached her:

Sue Thomason
190 Coach Rd
Sleights
Whitby
YO22 5EN

Heartening to read my letter on whichever *FTT* it was and realise the worm bin is a year old and worming away beautifully; the water butt is in place in the backyard, we

have loads of salsify coming up in the 'lawn'. I have just persuaded my workplace to run on Cafedirect instead of (spit) Nescafe, and there were goldfinches in the garden when we got back from our profoundly Ideologically Unsound skiing holiday. Yay, and the village has finally won its battle to get a pedestrian crossing installed across the main road between the shops and the Post Office, very close to the primary school. But the air is full of the scent of burning: I hope it's an 'official moorburn' (some people are now cutting heather rather than burning it) rather than an accidental moor fire or arson, which we're seeing more and more of.

Oh yes, the bit about the effect of global warming on invertebrates/soil composition rang two alarm bells in my mind. 1) New Zealand flatworms massacring our native earthworm population will have a hell of a knock-on effect on eg, badgers, let alone what it does to plant communities. 2) My main disappointment with Kim Stanley Robinson's inspirational but essentially incredible Mars trilogy is the huge gaps in his ecopoetic descriptions of

² If seriously interested, contact Priscilla Olson, 10 Shawmut Terrace, Framingham, Mass 01702 or polson@mlolson.tiac.net for a sample copy. Mailings 3-4 times per year, dues to cover costs.

Areoforming: where are the decomposers? He needs far more invertebrates before he can get spectacular top predators like CO₂-tolerant polar bears going.

Isn't the correct method of moor-management having it grazed by the right density of herbivores? But what, after all, do us southerners know of these mysteries. Joseph, too, is fuelled by fair-traded Cafedirect and we eschew the baby-formula-pushers evil products. Oh yes. Our dilemma is that the only local shop selling organic veg, free-range birdies, and fair-traded legal psychotropic drugs (including chocolate) is the local Tesco, despoiler of green-field sites and enemy of diverse small-scale local economies. Sue likes dandelions (as does Vicki Rosenzweig). Not all are readers are converted:

Henry L Welch
1525 16th Ave
Grafton, WI 53024
USA

I actively deter dandelions from my lawn and keep them out of everywhere else in the yard. They will simply choke out just about

any other short non-woody vegetation. They hold their own against blackberries and I haven't tried them out against lilies. They will, though, take over your grass, your flowerbeds, and they are doing the same out in prairie areas and wildflower areas. While I generally prefer not to use herbicides -- bad for aquatic invertebrates (we are on the river) and they don't really kill off the dandelions -- I have used them on part of my lawn in the past two years to soften them up. My typical strategy (15-30 minutes a day in the active season) is not to let them go to seed. Every dandelion flower is picked, composted in a closed container (they can still go to seed after being picked) and the plant is pulled up even though I don't usually get the whole tap root.

I am also actively removing wild cherry trees from the yard. Their fruit is basically useless, and each cherry that falls turns into a tree which must be pulled up roots and all or it will come back. Eventually they form a very dark forest which only second generation trees (maple, etc) have a chance of surviving in. They were choking out all the wildflowers including jack-in-the-pulpit, mayflower, trillium, columbine, solomon seal, etc.. Over the last four years I have removed over 50 mature trees and unknown thousands of seedlings. The wildflowers are loving it.

Community gardens are becoming more common in the larger cities of the USA. Sometimes as shared vegetable plots, or as in Grafton, residents managing small flower plots in boulevards, etc..

Ahh, if only our back patch was big enough to have trees run wild in it! I hope you're keeping one or two wild cherries for the birds, and perhaps planting a few orchard trees for yourselves and as bird habitat. Over here, dandelions are under-appreciated wildflowers; on your side of the pond, I gather, they are alien invaders. Clearing them out to make space for your local wildflowers is, of course, ecologically sound. And some of the wildflowers you mention have become traditional cottage garden flowers over here. We have columbines happily self-seeding on London clay, and I'm on the lookout for a solomon seal. More on US community gardens:

Jae Leslie Adams
621 Spruce Street
Madison, WI 53715
USA

Madison is a sort of Green hotbed in the middle of Wisconsin, the Dairy State. Not only do we have what you call

'allotments', organised by the county-funded Community Action Coalition, but the Madison Area Community Supported Agriculture Coalition (MACSAC for obvious reasons) keeps a long list of local organic farms that encourage subscription memberships and involvement of various kinds; the college agriculture and various research centres at the University here are also involved in statewide and international outreach; the University's Arboretum features the first restored prairie in the Midwest, now 50 years old; and the local public television show has been producing shows on sustainable agriculture in Wisconsin.

Some years ago, when I was living in an apartment right off the Capital Square, I took one of these 'allotments' (this is a word we could use here) on what turned out to be the side of a working railroad yard. Mine was a new site; I dug a lot of clinkers and gravel out of it, and hauled in exhausting amounts of leaf mulch and compost with the aid of friends who had a car.

Many of the CAC gardens around Madison are located along abandoned railroad rights-of-way, occasionally in public parklands. Most prominent are the Hmong gardens, an exotic patchwork next to a state highway interchange where the full cloverleaf exit was never constructed.

In summer, we gardeners had a bit of comedy trying to get water through a garden hose across Fordem Avenue -- four lanes of sparse traffic -- until the CAC office figured out how we might use the fire hydrants on our side of the road. It was always interesting to see what other people grew and how they did it, the old black ladies who showed me

what okra plants looked like, and other old-hippie book-reading gardeners who lived nearer and could attend their tomatoes more often than I. Yet I harvested a surprising amount of tomatoes myself, hauled them into town on my bicycle, and another friend taught me how to can them in my very small kitchen. It was all much easier the next year, although I was never able to duplicate the pickled Roma beans I put up the first year. The year after that I moved to an apartment where there was a real garden at the back that I shared with another tenant who was a horticulturist. I dug my vegetable beds way in the back, right along another railroad line. The CAC site on Fordem Ave has since been sold by the printing company that owned it, and is now paved over with blacktop and rows of storage garages. Just real estate.

For the last several years, our household has been a member or subscriber to an organic CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) farm, Harmony Valley. We were introduced to it by Jim Hudson (formerly of Boston but a Madison fan now) whose household has also been involved with Harmony Valley for some years. The produce we receive each week is more than the three of us can eat, which encourages us to share the bounty with neighbours and friends. It is interesting to get a box of whatever is in season; I have learned to cook a lot of things I wouldn't have thought to buy at the store, and we have all learned to eat more unusual root vegetables: beets and rutabagas, parsnips and celery root. The quality of the produce is at least on a par or better than we find at the grocery, which is for the most part shipped in from California. I certainly find it satisfying to give our dollars directly to a local producer we know, instead of the grocery corporation and distributors and trucking industry.

We also get a one-page Harmony Valley zine, excuse me, newsletter, each week during the season, from May to December. It gives news of the weekly farm activities, a little political background, and recipes for seasonal eating. We don't usually visit the farm more than once a year, as it is by the Mississippi, a long day's excursion from here -- in British terms, about the distance from Bristol to Cardigan on the Welsh coast.

'Organic vege box' schemes are taking off over here, some of them with CSA links to the main supplier. Some, like Green Adventure in South London and Growing Communities in North London, take part payment in LETS currency, to make the produce more affordable for people with little money. We belonged to one for a while, but we now grow too much of our own

food to cope with weekly or even fortnightly delivery. After all, even in mid-winter we're harvesting Brussels sprouts and broccoli, working our way through the potato and garlic harvests, and have Jerusalem artichokes, a smattering of parsnips and leeks, and self-sown spinach beet hanging in there for occasional picking -- all planted last year. Strawberries and assorted home-grown herbs inhabit the freezer; and we have a couple of shelves worth of blackberry jam, mint jelly, and pickled radish pods and cherries.

Murray Moore
2118 Russett Rd
Mississauga
Ontario L4Y 1C1
Canada

I am neither a gourmet nor a gourmand, but appreciate plain fresh food. We ate beans this evening, which I grew Last summer and froze.

Strawberry season has just ended (July 1998). This year I didn't have time to pick strawberries, but bought them from a farmer's stand; they were still grown within five minutes of our house in midmost Midland, population 16,430. The first mouthful each year of asparagus, peas or beans, grown in our garden, are separate sensual explosions. But as I had no time this year, being home only at weekends, all we ate from our garden was asparagus.

But we will not see flourish the Dutchman's Pipe we planted three years ago, as the day after I finish this letter, we move to Toronto. We have lived in Midland for 18 years, at 377 Manly St since 1983. I have been spoiled. The south end of downtown Midland was one block north and two blocks west of our house. Ten minutes or less distance afoot were the town hall, library, movie theatre, our dentist, a used book store, restaurants, our bank, insurance office, hair stylists, Member of Provincial Parliament's office, Member of Parliament's office, driver's licence renewal office. A small grocery store was around the corner. Everything was there but work for me. Thus the new address, above.

Death of the local economy. There's speculation that teleworking may in due course allow white-collar brain-workers to sit at home, attached down-the-line to the company network but paying their own light and heating bills -- in exchange doing away with daily commutes and the traffic jams they create, and allowing breaks to be used for personal and domestic pottering about. So far, however, it seems more hopeful portfolio-career punditry than reality. A shame you had to move from your neighbourhood and

the roots you'd grow. Murray. Another Canadian, in April 1998:

Lloyd Penney
1706-24 Eva Rd
Etobicoke
Ontario M9C 2B2
Canada

There's been far too many letters of mine whinging about lack of employment, or at least, not enough employment.

I am now a jack-of-all-

trades with an engineering firm with the mouthful name of Medhurst, Hogg, Sobottka, Leong & Associates Limited. I am the word processor, the back-up receptionist, the circulation manager for one of their two magazines, proofreader for both magazines, and the potential vice-chairman of a revived convention for condominium builders and developers. All this joy and delight for just \$12 an hour. While it's great to be employed again, the resumes continue to go out.

Once again, the idea is out and about that cellular phones and electric transmission towers and lines are dangerous because of some sort of radiation. I bring this up because in Toronto, there is farming/crop-raising on small plots in the right of way for these transmission towers and lines. What's this supposedly dangerous radiation doing to the crops growing beneath them?

And now, a warning to you all -- the Teletubbies have arrived in North America. Cartoon I wish I could draw....the Teletubbies explode into a million pieces and parents everywhere shout, "Again! Again!"

We at TRG 2 are shocked by this cynicism. Lloyd. Teletubbies was the very first programme we videoed when we splurged out on electronic time-shifting technology just after Xmas, and brought ourselves into the late 20th century, before it ends. We had to: Buffy the Vampire Slayer is on early in the evening, before M gets home from work. And of course, Teletubbies is on much too early for any normal grown-up. About the right time for students and suchlike to catch at the end of a long night, of course. For them, and for early-bouncing 2-year-olds, the fluffy psychedelic bouncing seems just the stuff. It's babysitter TV, of course. Parents aren't supposed to watch.

And have you left MHS&A long behind, or taken over the company by now? See how delayed lettercols produce time-binding...

E B Frohvet
4725 Dorsey Drive
Box A-700
Ellicott City
MD 21942, USA

The problem with job-sharing, at least as practised (or not practised) here, is that most part-time jobs here do not include pension rights or (more important) health insurance. To the company, a worker's salary is only about half the cost of employing that worker. Most people cannot afford to reduce their employment to part-time. Even if they could afford the reduction in income, they can't take the risk of jeopardising their health insurance.

Used to be similar over here, but a European Directive under the 'Social Chapter' of the Maastricht Treaty is that part-timers must be included in the same benefits and protections as full-timers, at pro rata rates. Signing up to the Social Chapter was one of New Labour's first acts. Nonetheless, even when most part-timers over here weren't entitled to maternity leave, redundancy, etc, more women worked part-time than full-time. They still do -- and this is almost never mentioned in press and media reporting on employment trends. E B continues:

I decline to comment on someone's assertion that the British 'Don't cook or grow anything worth eating'. I have been reading *Food and Drink in Britain*, which traces the use of various foods back to the Neolithic period, and examines how eating habits have changed. Nor have I ever tried 'cowpat soup'. My worst culinary experience involved a deceased muskrat, which a friend insisted is regarded as a delicacy in some rural parts of North America. We both took a small bite, threw it out and ordered pizza.

Interesting item in *F&DIB*: well into the Middle Ages, farmers in Britain grew 'maslin', a blend of wheat and rye, on the theory that if the more delicate wheat failed, the crop would not be a total loss. Also darnels and other weeds with edible seeds were tolerated in the grain crop, for the same reason. By the 18th century, however, even the lowliest workers regarded it as their right to eat white wheat bread. Rye, even if grown, was largely unsaleable, and bakers adulterated wheat with alum -- and worse things -- to make their bread whiter.

*One of the edible weeds in our garden is fat-hen, a wild spinach (*Chenopodium album*), whose seeds are among the food found in the belly of Lindow Man (aka Pete Marsh), one of the Bronze Age 'bog men' excavated from peat bogs in Northern Europe. ?*

gather that it is called lambs quarters in the US. We eat its young leaves in spring. We also grow Good King Henry, an old-fashioned perennial spinach cultivated in the Middle Ages, and which is now enjoying a revival as a 'heritage vegetable'. Very deep, tough roots, a slightly bitter taste, tough stalks, not a gourmet experience. But a great name to cultivate.

'Cowpat soup' is the only thing I've ever cooked that Joseph refused to eat, bless his cast iron digestion. It was supposed to be a puree of cream of spinach, but the mouli mill merely turned it into a steaming, quivering pulp. "I can't eat that, dear, it looks like a cowpat," apologised M, poking it gingerly. So I ate his. And when we got married, we got an electric blender that made spinach puree like it should. We grow swiss chard (silver beet to Australian readers), and spinach beet or perpetual spinach, self-seeding lavishly around both back garden and allotment. But I don't seem to have much luck with proper English spinach.

Meanwhile, what are darnels? Neither Food for Free nor Flora Britannica, both by Richard Mabey, indexes it. Nor does my Wildflower Key for Britain & North West Europe. So I turn to the OED (the 3-vol set with magnifying glass). "Darnel," it says, "A deleterious grass, *Lolium tumulentum*, which in some countries grows as a weed amongst corn. Now rare in England... brought in with seed-corn from the Mediterranean, where it abounds. Now thought to be deleterious only when infected with ergot, to which it is particularly liable." The name, it notes, is sometimes also applied to corn poppies (*Papaver rhoeas*) and corncockles (*Agrostemma githago*). The former is the same species as annual garden poppy varieties; the latter is a slender-growing pink flower of the same family as carnations, soapworts and champions. Meanwhile, the wildflower book notes that a *Lolium* grass does grow commonly here: perennial ryegrass (*Lolium perenne*), an ingredient in lawn-seed mixes for hard wear.

There we are, all knowledge is found in fanzines. Back to the urban jungle (or desert):

Alan Sullivan
Ash Road
Stratford
London E15 1HL

I certainly like the idea 30
of having more time to
live, but I seem to be
caught up in this capitalist

system of bills, debts, rent, payments, demands... The cold equations are pretty simple in pauper-land, where my fellow Poor White Trash and I live. No money = no rent = no home = dead meat on the street. As near as I can see it, my only hope (and that of many others like me) is that I can scrape up enough capital to get a place of my own, which at least gives me a secure base. Then I can start planning. Well, in theory, anyway. Frankly, if 'society' -- or at least the bits that are beneficial to its members -- is to survive, it is going to have to be very seriously re-structured. The trouble is, we also need a short term fix to keep things stable long enough to implement the long-term solution. With public and civil order falling apart at the seams, mass homelessness and unemployment and all those in power going all out for themselves, if things don't fall apart completely in the next ten years, I for one will be rather surprised (and would like to be really). I'm not sure what the future holds, but I suspect it will be drastic.

You'll have gathered we agree about the desirability of some serious restructuring. But here we sit, business as usual, while the Asian economies tumbled, Russia's collapsed, and now Brazil runs down the tubes. How have the US and Western European economies survived unscathed? A testimony, of course, to the power of the money markets and their ability to play the game to their own advantage. A memorable Guardian front-page contrasted Wall Street organising a \$15bn bail-out for debtors of the Long-Term Capital Management hedge fund and efforts to pull together a mere £13m rescue package for Honduras and its neighbouring victims of Hurricane Mitch. Pamela Boal picks up the theme:

Pamela Boal
4 Westfield Way
Wantage, Oxon
OX12 7EW

I agree with Joseph's comments on multinationals and the ever-decreasing power of governments of nation-states. Oddly enough, to a certain extent I believe the situation to be relevant to the merry ringing of horticultural consortium tills and millions of flowers being left to die in their cellophane and paper wrappers when Princess Diana died.

While the great mass of ordinary citizens may not be able to analyse the causes, they are certainly able to feel that the quality of their life is deteriorating, not just materially but environmentally and in social spirit. They watch TV and see people protesting about specific issues, earnest heads giving

advice that completely contradicts last week's advice, and of course the change of government. Their situation remains the same, there is nothing left to do but mourn. For some years now, Britons have been adopting the practice of other cultures and leaving flowers at the site of traumatic events. The media coverage of the first people laying flowers as a tribute to Diana was all that was needed to set the ball rolling, for people to publicly mourn for themselves, their families and neighbours.

As for the Millennium Dome, it reminds me of that futile effort, the Festival of Britain. I remember it because I played in a hockey exhibition match held on the site, which meant I got free entry. Most of the wonders in the Dome of Discovery were superseded or disproved by new discoveries or research within a couple of years, and in any event were better displayed and explained in the Science Museum, which was free in those days. The Pylon stopped being a talking point even before the Festival closed. Battersea Fun Fair was a financial disaster for many people and an eyesore for years. Most people wouldn't have a clue if you asked them what or when was the Festival of Britain. Like the International Garden Festivals which offered such hope and were wonderful events to attend but had no lasting benefits, the Dome will turn out to be yet another very forgettable waste of money.

Surely there must be someone in the country -- other than Peter Mandelson -- who believes in the Dome? But it doesn't seem to have given rise to any good Dome jokes. Or am I just not looking at the bits of the Web where they're flying thick and fast?

Your point about the orgy of public mourning for Diana being an expression of people's personal mourning seems right to me. One of my local friends was very upset by flippanant comments of fans gathered in the kitchen at one of our parties soon afterwards. She was missing her husband, who died of a heart attack a couple of years ago, and was still in shock from the sudden death of a young mother who lived just across the road from her. So she went and laid flowers for Diana, and joined in the solidarity of sharing grief.

Having become a secular society, Diana's death seems to have provided a new myth, filling the need that in other areas and times was met by myths of the death of Baldr, Adonis/Dummuuz, the loss of Persephone or Eurydice, Samhain, and the Crucifixion. The Hollywood/Hello celebrity mag

pantheon is, it seems, the new mythos for the TV and tabloid age.

Pamela continues:

While I agree that localism is a move in the right direction, sad to say I fear we are a long way from finding the key that makes it a viable tool affecting more than a minority. As you make good use of allotments and develop community gardens, in other areas people are fighting losing battles to retain their few remaining green spaces. In the North of England, most workers in mines and shipyards took the right to rent an allotment for granted, an integral part of their life, and made good use of them. In the 1960s, for an all too brief period, people enjoyed a better standard of living, wanted to use their leisure time differently, and could afford to buy their vegetables. This led to a decline in the provision of allotments, meaning fewer places and higher rents, so that on a return to endemic high unemployment people could not afford to rent, and allotments were sold off by Councils to developers.

As you know, part of my family live in environmentally friendly homes, use renewable energy sources, practice permaculture, recycling, a form of LETS and, where possible, job sharing. Gummer called in their planning application and it was taken all the way to the High Court, where he lost on a technicality. In fact, a change of local government also keeps them fairly safe from further harrassment but as far as they are concerned they failed. They have not set a precedent to allow people to live on their own land (where appropriate) in a manner not reliant on the nearest urban society.

They have had media coverage not only from British TV and press but from many parts of the Continent. Most has been sympathetic (if occasionally a little off the factual beam) but rather like the New York Community Garden coverage, it makes no impact. People do not see these activities as relevant to them, they only reach the committed. Worse, they do not influence the next generation. In primary school, our grandson's friends were fascinated by his different lifestyle. In secondary school (when they are more involved in the real materialistic world) he has failed to make friends and is bullied because of his differences.

I do hope the LA21 projects bear fruit. Alas, I suspect most will go the way of a similar set-up here in Wantage. Every local organisation was invited to come together to seek ways of sharing resources; approved projects would attract extra funding from the Council. A great deal of earnest talking and paper-shuffling later, with tremendous

input of hard work from the few, the whole matter has just faded away.

Since Pamela wrote, the Tinker's Bubble sustainable smallholding (similar to her daughter's project) has been given five-year permission for a small number of temporary dwellings, so the people growing organic food and forestry crops there can live on the spot, rather than have to drive back and forth. At the end of that time, the planning authorities are to assess whether they have achieved their objective of making a sustainably eco-friendly living.

I ought to take up Pam's cue to say something about how our Local Agenda 21 is going. After two and a half years of basically being bugged about by the Council, which was supposed to be co-ordinating work to draw all sections of the community into drawing up an sustainable development action plan, a small group of us who'd stuck with the process declared 'ND' and have been meeting as a 'community steering group'. This meant we have organised meetings to formally negotiate with the Council hierarchy (rather than the lowly and inefficient officer doing, or not doing, the work). We will, over the next few months, find out whether we can kickstart constructive action, from the Council and by making links with other bodies, such as the local Voluntary Action umbrella body, the Healthy City partnership, and the regeneration partnerships. I'm also on the Board of the new London 21 which exists to help people working on the local LA21s to share experiences and get joint action underway to influence the new Greater London Authority and mayor which are to start up next year.

Chester D Cuthbert
1104 Mulvey Ave
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3M 1J5

Pamela Boal's letter about the future of work, particularly work sharing, and the fact that job security is no longer to be

depended on, reinforces my view that if nations are to base their economies soundly, it must be on the basis of a universal Guaranteed Annual Income. This can be taxed back from those who do not need it, would eliminate the ill-feeling now existing between the workers and the unemployed, and be fair to all. The disparity between rich and poor would lessen because, with a living assured, everyone would be free to accomplish something, which the unemployed now, with limited or no resources, can't even attempt.

I agree with the case for a Guaranteed Annual Income, or basic Citizen's Income as it's called over here. The Irish Government is seriously considering it -- largely due to lobbying by Richard Douthwaite, whom Joseph mentioned last issue.

Marty Cantor
11825 Gilmore St #105
North Hollywood
CA 91606, USA

I'm a political junkie sorts. I also admit to having held appointed political office in three small California cities when I lived

or was running a business in them. I was on city commission in a city where I was running one of my small shops 10 hours a day, six days a week, and was simultaneously vice-chairman of the Traffic and Safety Commission of the city where I owned a house -- and had very little money for anything at all and wanted to spend my copious spare time reading SF. I was trying to eke out a living whilst trying to pay back society in which I was living in some small, voluntary way. In some manner, I was thoroughly enjoying myself even whilst I barely had the money for necessities -- and I would have done more in the way of volunteer effort had I the wherewithal.

Then the lack of money forced me to move myself and my shop to Los Angeles, a city and society much larger than the small cities in which I had lived and operated for many years, and larger than I wanted to operate in. So I gave up all the volunteer work and decided to concentrate on the SF fandom I'd just discovered. In fandom, I found other ways to volunteer -- being simultaneously in charge of two apas, for instance.

Your comment about the megalopolis scale of LA strikes a chord. London is also too big a city to get a grip of -- something like seven million residents, and about twenty million when you include workers commuting in, shoppers, tourists and business visitors. More people than many whole nations, packed into less than a 10 mile radius. But it's grown around what used to be villages: Islington Spa was the first stagecoach stop outside London. Tottenham, Chelsea, and others appear as villages in the Domesday Book. So the modern shopping and municipal centres cluster around what's left of old village greens. Hell for traffic -- and makes traffic hell for people. But you can still feel that there's a soul to the locality, which could be revived.

There seems pretty widespread agreement that rolling back the traffic is the basic step to humanising

the city. It's worked in much of Europe, it's made a dramatic difference to smaller British cities like Leeds centre, York, Bath, Chester etc. But at last there's a serious move in London, at least in principle: the London Planning Advisory Committee (a post-GLC artifact) has calculated that to meet air quality standards and achieve the 30% cut in traffic casualties set as a Government target quite some years ago, London needs a 40% cut in central city traffic, a 30% cut in inner zone traffic, and has got the outer boroughs to agree (grudgingly) to a 10% cut. The idea is that these targets will inform the Traffic Reduction Plans all local authorities now have to draw up. And, of course, will provide a basis for the new Mayor of London's transport strategy once he's elected.

(Yes, he -- all the credible candidates are blokes. There was a wavelet of interest in the possibility of Glenda Jackson recreating her Elizabeth R act, but she seems to have turned into a pretty mediocre politician -- and as junior transport minister hasn't grasped the gap between the government adopting a policy and the reality of what happens.)

Guns, Germs and History

Austin Benson
82 Catherine St
Cambridge
CB1 3AR

I was reading IRG1's letter column, musing that one of your correspondents seemed a remarkably sensible chap, and I realised it was me!

I heard Jared Diamond speak when he was thinking about what became *Guns, Germs and Steel* -- he was interesting enough that I bought the book when it appeared. He was not as impressive as Joseph appears to have found him in written form -- which is why I haven't actually read the book yet.

Nonetheless, I think Joseph is being a little premature in announcing the death of alternate histories positing non-European dominance. It just means paying attention to different aspects of the explanations required to allow the suspension of disbelief. These might involve changes to geography and the movements of peoples, as well as history and the movements of individuals, or explaining why Diamond is wrong. Perhaps positing a reason for Western European civilisation to fail -- a convenient asteroid, maybe? After all, the presentation of the theory of relativity didn't stop the production of stories involving faster than light travel. It just meant

that the problem had to be addressed in a slightly different way.

JN speaks in this typeface: Actually, greater rigour on the part of such writers is what I thought I was calling for, but perhaps that wasn't as plain as it could have been. However alternate historians respond, I certainly don't want to see any more of the lazy 'let's suppose' of the Aztecs inventing the wheel or the Roman Empire never falling, which have always struck me as most unlikely. And we may not have to wait long for a response: Kim Stanley Robinson's next novel is reportedly titled *A World Without Europe*, which sounds to me as though it might be his take on Diamond's thesis.

Cedric Knight
85 Boleyn Rd
London E7 9QF

Europe's east-west orientation must have been a small factor in its development. Surely the

temperate belts of North America and eastern Asia are as wide east-west as Europe's?

No historical event is contingent if its causes are researched enough, but what amazes me is that an 'Aztec Century' scenario *could* nearly have happened. Supposing that people worldwide were in a similar state around 10,000BCE, why did territorial expansion begin independently in the Americas and southern Africa immediately before Western colonisation? For example, the San Agustin people in southern Colombia existed, in apparent stability to judge by their relics, from 3000BCE to 1300AD when they were overrun by definitely the most extensive and agriculturally advanced South American civilisation, the Incas.

On the other hand, perhaps Europe and the Middle East really were more 'developed', because they had the wheel and some sizeable empires 1500 years before contact. Looking at Roman and Renaissance frescos, it occurs to me that the Italians cheated. Western Civilisation II was really a remake.

The answer to your speculations is quite simple: read the book, where it is explained why the territorial expansions you posit did not happen (and in Diamond's view could not have happened). And although I might agree with you that width of temperate zone is not in itself sufficient -- while disagreeing with you that North America's is as wide as Europe's, and pointing out that it has both a different geography (especially length of coastline) and climate -- the fact that Europe and Western Asia had a more biologically diverse "suite" of plants and animals to be exploited gave its peoples an edge that never deserted them. If -- and only if -- the era of European expansion had been delayed for a century or two beyond 1500, might other cultures have been able to resist. But then again, perhaps not -- after all, the Spanish conquered

south and central America not by force of arms but by smallpox and measles, which the native peoples had not previously encountered but which Europeans had originally acquired from their domestic animals.

Kim Huett
PO Box 679 Woden
ACT 2606
Australia

Since you went to all the trouble of visiting Australia in order to present me with your new fanzine, the least I can do is present you with

some sort of response.

The nature of the New Labour government in Britain fails to surprise me since I've seen a similar evolution occur in Australia. If anything, I think we moved to a two conservative party system even earlier than the UK. I can't say that I'm pleased about this shift in ideologies as I would like some real choice, however flawed, when voting. To make matters worse, our Democrats seem to have devolved into a watchdog mindset. While this is better than nothing, I would still prefer a minority party willing to push its own vision. At present, the only political party I find myself in sympathy with are the Greens. I may not agree with everything they stand for but at least they appear to live in the same universe as myself. The others could be alien greys for all they relate to me.

I can only assume that DM Sherwood's description of your alternative economics and 'back to gardening' stance as 'medieval' and his own as 'Rational Scientific Civilisation' is a crude attempt to make his choice appear more worthy. The selective use of capitals struck me as a particularly clumsy and somewhat pathetic ploy. Not that I believe his option has anything to do with science beyond the science of marketing. To my ears his comments echo post-1950 advertising that promoted 'convenience' as more important than quality or good value or recycling. Still, if DM can't imagine being anything more than a passive consumer I doubt anything we can say will change his mind.

Funny, Joseph, that you should suggest 1917 as a possible turning point in world history, as the day before I read your article, I had reached the end of WWI in Geoffrey Barraclough's *The Origins of Modern Germany*. I've long been curious about why Germany was so late achieving unification in comparison with the other nations of Europe (except Italy), and Barraclough certainly put forward a reasonable explanation. As an added bonus he confirmed my suspicion that it was the French who caused most of the trouble in Europe since the 9th century. By the way, your description of conservative forces risking our environment for financial gain sounds so much like Barraclough's

description of conservative forces risking war in Europe in order to stay in power. Some things never change, do they?

Stephen O'Kane
Flat 168, Wick Hall
Furze Hill, Hove
BN3 1NJ

Bearing in mind that gardening had to do with (presumably) all the major agricultural revolutions of the past, revolutionary gardening is at least nostalgic.

Joseph's 'Live and Let Die' closing piece is interesting in relation to Gary Westfahl's 'Why the stars are silent' in *Interzone* 128. Westfahl cuts across the issue about whether there is life for *Homo sapiens* beyond 'the spike' by suggesting that computers will probably be the next stage of evolution, and we will carry on as some inferior form (like cats or dogs) while all the real action, like swanning around the universe, is done by the machines which have surpassed us. This is his explanation for why we don't hear anything from other civilisations. The machines that any intelligent species would build to augment, first, their limbs or equivalent, then their brains, will have taken over and not be interested in hearing from lower animals.

Let me say that I am not sold on Westfahl's assumption that machines can (or will) develop a superior, even if different, intelligence from ours. But maybe the point that evolution might determine that complex cerebral functions are surplus to our requirements offers possibilities for machines/computers as well as rats or stick insects. *Computers* could remain stupid from our point of view, but still be better placed to handle a mass extinction scenario than us.

Specifically, am I right in suggesting that an electronic system could maintain some sort of 'intelligence' with relatively much less energy input than human brains? Precisely because a machine is *not* a biological system, maybe (given some kind of self-editing program) it could arrange its own adaptation, eliminate bad 'mutations' (unfortunate information corruption) and replicate, without waiting for sex and death to do the job? Bearing in mind the standard Darwinian stuff about any organism competing for mates, and therefore status, we might have here entities which, precisely because they are not organisms, can be much more economical in ecological terms than we are.

You may reckon this is all balderdash, and Westfahl certainly talks about intelligent machines, even if he is careful to say machine 'intelligence' will probably be very different in kind from ours. But I reckon some version of the above scenario is possible without the machines being 'conscious' (however we view *that*) at all. I would leave the question of

whether they could then be 'intelligent' to philosophers or cognitive scientists to sort out.

We also heard from:

Harry Cameron Andruschak "No matter how much such groups as Sons Of The Pioneers sing romantic songs about the tumbling tumbleweed, for most farmers and ranchers it is still Russian Thistle and they say the hell with it."

Greg Benford "Just to tweak your noses, here's a wildly different view on climate change. Please attack viciously..."

Sheryl Birkhead "So far this year (June 98) it is so wet that the slugs have destroyed all but two tomato plants. So much for gardening. At Penn State University plots were made available to grad students for gardening -- and there was always a waiting list."

Jackie Duckhawk "I was amused that Judith has taken up dolls-houses. I had a fad for it last year when Katherine was given one for Christmas. I was particularly pleased with the baby's bouncing seat I made out of paper-clips and material. I even made our own people, who all appear to be suffering some kind of reduced-chin syndrome."

Susan Francis "I've always had a dream of working part-time. I could afford to do three days a week for 3/5 of what I'm getting now, but I don't think asking to work less time is an option, even if the project that was supposed to be ready for beta-testing in March is finished this summer... Governments and employers who talk of 'flexibility' don't mean the work is flexible!"

Bridget Hardcastle "I'll resist passing comment on your typo about making community gardens from New York's 'derelict vacant blacks'." -- *as did others. Err umm, a perfectly natural Freudian slip after three years editing for the Commission for Racial Equality, no?*

Teddy Harvia "Working in the yard over the weekend, Diana and I were amazed at how many plants native to our semi-arid climate have spines, thorns, stickers or razor-sharp leaves. And can't tell that what you are doing around them is for their own benefit.... The Spice Girls are no worse role models

than self-destructing male rockers that wannabes emulate. Individuals who might make good role models don't get media coverage because tales of those riding high or falling make splashier headlines." **Dave Langford** "For the sake of fairness, shouldn't the urban improvement project you call for be extended to derelict vacant whites?"

Rodney Leighton "I've just written to EB Frohvet suggesting we might soon have some problems if she refuses to admit to gender and provide something like a real name. But Vicki Rosenzweig made a good point. Short of actually meeting face to face, how does anyone know that any person is who he or she says he or she is. Vicki Rosenzweig might actually be Taras Wolansky. Rob Hansen once wondered if Rodney Leighton was a hoax. I kicked my ass for years for not picking up on that fast enough to run with it. Could have had a ball."

Gary Mattingley -- *holidaying in Lassen National Volcanic Park and surrounding Forest*

Par Nilsson "The gardening at this end is rather limited -- three boxes on the balcony. But we're with you, comrades!"

Derek Pickles -- *sent a photo of their house and front garden, just to reassure me that he hadn't really cemented over it all, plus a variety of clippings*

David Redd -- *stationed in Manchester* "to help delay traffic" *sent an idyllic Welsh coastal postcard captioned "Just the place for a 12-lane motorway!"*

John Ricketts -- *who sent a real estate ad for a house in London's other Janson Rd. E15*

Yvonne Rousseau -- *who wins a special prize for responding to her hand-delivered copy while we were still in Australia, and who sent the Red Ochre Grill's recipe for Wattleseed Pavlova from Adelaide. The bush tucker book I picked up last trip down under shows that the wattles that grow up Mt Clarence in Albany, behind my parents' home, bear the edible seed. Yvonne's recipe gives coffee essence as a substitute. Now I just need a backyard macadamia nut tree*

As always, far more interesting stuff than room to quote. Thank you, one and all!

"Eternal Joy! When facing a future completely exhausted of natural resources, is it not comforting to envisage a near-starved future dweller scrabbling in the mud for something to trade, and instead discovering your personal/business memorabilia encased in a time capsule? Dream No Longer!"

Advertisement in *Private Eye*, 7 August 1998. from
The Millennium Time Capsule Company of Ruthin, North Wales

Anonymous 1998 Research Jargon and what it means:

"IT HAS LONG BEEN KNOWN" -- I didn't look up the original reference.

"A DEFINITE TREND IS EVIDENT" -- These data are practically meaningless.

"WHILE IT HAS NOT BEEN POSSIBLE TO PROVIDE DEFINITE ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS" -- An unsuccessful experiment, but I still hope to get it published.

"THREE OF THE SAMPLES WERE CHOSEN FOR DETAILED STUDY" -- The results of the others did not make any sense.

"TYPICAL RESULTS ARE SHOWN" -- This is the prettiest graph.

"THESE RESULTS WILL BE IN A SUBSEQUENT REPORT" -- I might get around to this sometime, if pushed/funded.

"THE MOST RELIABLE RESULTS ARE OBTAINED BY JONES" -- He was my graduate student; his grade depended on this.

"IN MY EXPERIENCE" -- Once.

"IN CASE AFTER CASE" -- Twice.

"IN A SERIES OF CASES" -- Thrice.

"IT IS BELIEVED THAT" -- I think.

"IT IS GENERALLY BELIEVED THAT" --

A couple of other guys think so too.

"CORRECT WITHIN AN ORDER OF MAGNITUDE" -- Wrong.

"ACCORDING TO STATISTICAL ANALYSIS" -- Rumor has it.

"A STATISTICALLY ORIENTED PROJECTION OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THESE FINDINGS" -- A wild guess.

"A CAREFUL ANALYSIS OF OBTAINABLE DATA" -- Three pages of notes were obliterated when I knocked over a glass of beer.

"IT IS CLEAR THAT MUCH ADDITIONAL WORK WILL BE REQUIRED BEFORE A COMPLETE UNDERSTANDING OF THIS PHENOMENON OCCURS" -- I don't understand it.

"AFTER ADDITIONAL STUDY BY MY COLLEAGUES" -- They don't understand it either.

"THANKS ARE DUE TO JOE BLOTZ FOR ASSISTANCE WITH THE EXPERIMENT AND TO ANDREA SCHAEFFER FOR VALUABLE DISCUSSIONS" -- Mr. Blotz did the work and Ms. Schaeffer explained to me what it meant.

"A HIGHLY SIGNIFICANT AREA FOR EXPLORATORY STUDY" -- A totally useless topic selected by my committee.

"IT IS HOPED THAT THIS STUDY WILL STIMULATE FURTHER INVESTIGATION IN THIS FIELD" -- I quit!

*Posted to the sci.archaeology newsgroup
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This is *International Revolutionary Gardener 2*,

from: Judith Hanna & Joseph Nicholas

15 Jansons Road

South Tottenham

London N15 4JU

United Kingdom

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