

# SOUTHERN GOTHIC

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## HONKYTONK CAPPUCCINO

I'm going back to college. Middle Tennessee State University to be exact.

I'll be completing my Bachelor of Arts degree in English literature. I've thought about going back ever since I dropped out fifteen years ago. Most people who go straight through and get their degrees in four years say it's no big thing and they don't understand why I care about having it. *Of course* they don't. They've probably never failed a subject in their *life*. They probably haven't slaved in the service industries or sold their belongings for grocery money. They don't know how awful it can feel to find your best wasn't good enough or you didn't have sufficient discipline to see a long, complex project through. I don't need the degree for a job and no, I'm not planning on another career change. I just want the damn thing. I'm tired of spending most of my time around people who don't read. I want to write about the books and history I'm interested in. I'm hungry for information and I'm positively starving for useful and challenging feedback. And don't tell me I won't find it at university. I will. Because this time I'm looking for it. And I'm much smarter than the first time around.

The requirements for graduation are a lot more stringent here than they were at the University of Washington. MTSU ensures all their undergraduate students get a good old-fashioned general education; everyone takes math, biology, history, etc., with no substitutions allowed. MTSU is also very efficient, unlike the behemoth UW, undoubtedly due to the smaller enrollment. I sent off my application and transcript in September and was accepted right away. I had my transfer evaluation a month later and emerged a Junior, much to my relief. I cleared off all but one semester of Social Sciences, all of the lower division English requirements and one upper division course, numerous Liberal Arts electives, most of my Foreign Language credits (in French), and absolutely zero in Natural Sciences and Mathematics. I fear I'm destined for Remedial Math, having been math-impaired all of my life. Dang. I hope algebra is not as odious as I remember.

I was enormously pleased by my meeting with the Chairman of the Music Department when I trotted over to have my former major re-evaluated as a minor. He went through my transcript checking off courses right and left, asked a few questions, and said, "Congratulations, you've completed your minor! Now, I want you to seriously consider joining one of our choirs and I can arrange for you to continue your vocal studies if you are interested. Are you sure you wouldn't rather finish your music degree?" I declined but with a certain amount of regret.

This was all very exciting but then I worked out how many classes I had left to take and how long it would take me to finish if I took one course per semester at night and on weekends. Yipes. I wouldn't graduate before the turn of the century at that rate. And considering the increasing demands of my job and the unpaid overtime I had to put in to keep up with the work load it was easy to forecast massive stress and strain. Ulcers, tension headaches and scheduling conflicts loomed large.

So I quit my job. Sort of.

What I did was resign from my position in Quality Control and become an outside sales agent -- no regular office hours, no salary, but I split the commission with the company. I now have time to handle my friends' travel arrangements if they wish (air, car, hotel, rail, cruises and tours) so I'm including my business card with this issue for my U.S. readers and my Internet address for everyone else. I'm also teaching Sabre four nights a week at our company's travel school which is so much fun I don't know why I never thought of doing it before. It's non-stressful, inspiring and the pay is better than my previous position. I also get to keep my benefits and perks. What's not to like?

All the same, it is horrendously scary to step off the career ladder and go back to school. I don't feel entirely easy about not having a full-time paycheck which only goes to show I'm not the slack tart I once was. I will have to sacrifice a certain amount of discretionary income and (ulp!) cut back on traveling for a while. The weird thing is, I'm willing to do it in order to have access to the halls of Academe.

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Plus I can finally unqualifiedly state that I am a grown-up. For I am going to take math of my own free will *and pay for it myself*. It hardly seems possible.

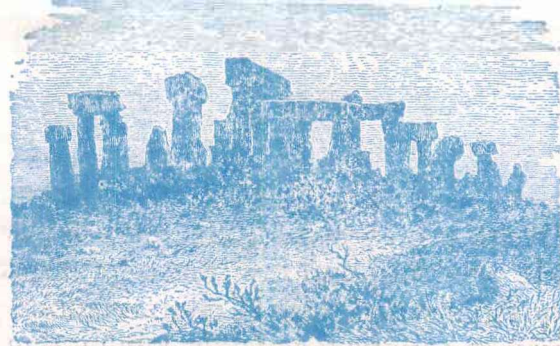
Anyway, now you know. So expect to get a frantic phonecall some night and be prepared to explain square roots, zygotes, the John Brown incident, proton decay, gerunds, the influence of Verlaine and Mallarmet on the Nabis, or the various properties of inert gases. Because I'm not going back to college alone, oh no. I'm dragging all of my friends with me.

And you're all invited to my graduation in 1998. Wish me luck.

## MOO BRITANNIA -- PART 1

My name is Lucy and I am an Anglophile. No twelve-step program exists to help people like me. Far from it. The tourist industry couldn't exist without us: Brit Twits, the kind of client who snaps up copies of *Majesty* and *Tatler* like they were going out of business. In my case, it's travel guides and picture books, dozens of them. I've been obsessed with Britain since I could read. To be honest, I'm most fascinated by England and English history. I've had sporadic fits of interest in Scotland and Wales but I've never mustered any enthusiasm for Ireland. Ironically enough, I'm first generation Irish-American. But that's the way of obsessions. They're specific as hell. I just can't get enough of England.

I visit as often as possible. My disposable income burns a particular hole in my pocket; let two hundred dollars extra accumulate and I start shopping for plane tickets. I've visited enough times that I get confused over what I saw on which vacation, a perverse source of pride. Although I'm intrepid enough to go alone, I also enjoy traveling with someone. If I go during the school year I miss the crowds of summer; on the other hand my husband, who is a professor, is unable to go with me. So in October 1991 when Bill Bodden expressed interest in junketing around England with me sometime in the near future, but



before the summer tourist season started, we settled on April. I arranged a four day car tour through Shropshire with Judith Hanna and Joseph Nicholas. Then I booked myself a ticket.

As a travel agent I'm eligible to fly on deeply discounted rates. It's a tradeoff because most of those cheap tickets are standby basis, meaning the agent can be bumped by a paying passenger at any point along the journey (okay, not mid-air). To complicate matters it is not possible to fly to Europe direct from Nashville as its claim to being an international airport is based on one daily flight to Toronto. I had to choose a gateway city in which to change planes. Being relatively new at this agent stuff I tried to get to London via New York. What a ghastly mistake. Denied boarding on my original flight with United, I talked my way onto a Virgin Atlantic flight (which turned out to be pretty deluxe even in the economy cabin; I can definitely recommend them). But did I ask which airport they flew into? Nein, lieblich.

Thus I arrived at Gatwick at the ungodly hour of 7:00 a.m., nerves frayed and eyes gritty, a full 80 miles from my London destination and darn near as far from my rental car waiting for me at Heathrow. Worse, the local car hire firms didn't open for an hour. But the final tragedy was that the cafes were

closed for inventory that morning. And so I spent the first hour of my precious vacation sitting on the floor of the arrival lounge, reading magazines and hoping my insurance covered accidents due to caffeine deprivation.

At 8:00 sharp I was hovering at the curb where the courtesy vans circulate. I obtained a seat on the Alamo van by hurling my luggage through the door as it opened, nearly taking out the driver who (in a decidedly un-American move) was standing up to help me aboard. I felt awful about it but subsequently endeared myself to him by guessing he was from Suffolk. Since he was from Norfolk he spent the entire drive to the lot delightedly explaining to me what rotten bastards all Suffolk men are. He didn't mention the women. We shook hands when I departed.

At the counter the cheerful Alamo Car Rental girls were very sympathetic as I explained I had arrived at the wrong airport. Oh yes, they were terribly sorry about the mishap, so upsetting, and they could indeed rent me a car but most unfortunately the only thing available was twice the price of the other car. I must have looked comically crestfallen. They instantly huddled around the computer and started to figure reductions. I pulled out my conversion calculator and tapped ineffectually at it for a while, inexplicably converting drachmas to marks several times but eventually working out how much

it was all going to cost in US dollars. I was horrified. They came up with a smaller figure. I bit my lip and tapped furiously. They huddled again and one of them kept her eye on me, perhaps afraid I might devolve into a gun-toting maniac if I didn't get a car. I leaned dejectedly on the counter, mentally preparing myself for bankruptcy. The lead agent looked at me and whacked off an extra £20. "Welcome to Britain," she said and gave me a conspiratorial grin.

I signed a paper and they pointed to my car. I flung open the office door, took a deep breath, and strode masterfully to the passenger side of the car. I stopped and cursed under my breath, convinced everyone in the office must be snickering. Then I casually pretended I was just putting my luggage on the seat as though I regularly travel with a suitcase next to me for ballast. Carefully maneuvering out of the lot I confronted a minivan driving on the appropriate side of an English road, unlike me. "This is bound to end in tears," I said with great satisfaction, evoking a favorite British sentiment. Then I jammed down the gas pedal and barreled onto the London Orbital with no sleep, no coffee and all my reflexes geared to the mirror image of everyone else on the road. "I'm awake!" I shrieked every few minutes. "Don't kill me, I'm a foreigner!"





After a while I decided I probably wouldn't be killed instantly and the scenery was tediously suburban. I couldn't figure out how to turn on the radio so I sang the Halleluia Chorus at the top of my lungs, once in English and once in German. It cheered me up no end and I launched into a lengthy program of every German song I knew. "Tod! Wo ist dein stachel?" I roared at a miserable little MG that cut me off near Woking. "Meine ruh' ist hin, mein Herz ist schwer," I crooned as I drowsed along at 85 miles per hour in the slow lane. The lady walking her dog near the Potters Bar exit was treated to a full-throated version of "Jesu, Meine Freude." Shortly after that I turned off the Orbital and dawdled down the A10 at a civilized 55 mph to Judith and Joseph's flat, humming Teutonically all the way.

Judith met me at the door. I'd describe her as delicate except she has this incredible air of competence, a farm lass with no nonsense about her. She is, on the other hand, the only person I know whose eyes actually twinkle and is certainly slender and willowy enough to qualify for comparisons to otherworldly beings. At the moment she appeared to me in the guise of a congenial angel of mercy whose first words were, "Hello, Lucy. A bath?" I nodded gratefully and added, "Coffee." I did not feel capable of complete sentences until much later. Refreshed by my ablutions and fortified by caffeine I felt renewed, ready to drive at a

clipping pace through the vernal beauty of the English countryside, a ludicrous underestimation of the distance or the traffic we had to negotiate before reaching our evening's destination. We collected Bill at Pam Well's flat and headed north to Shrewsbury where we were meeting Joseph.

"But first," Bill said hopefully, "Warwick Castle." Burgmeister Bill has a serious medieval architecture jones. I'd promised him a castle a day when we were planning our trip. His evil laugh echoed down the phone line when I asked if he was interested. "Only one? You jest!" he thundered.

As we drove through the outskirts of Warwick we could see tantalizing glimpses of massive walls and round towers. I realized this was the largest complete medieval building I'd ever seen. I felt an intense pleasure at being in England again. We caught glimpses of some people in Renaissance costume setting up a jousting tournament as we peeked through the palings surrounding the gardens. I was breathless with excitement as we approached the huge stone entrance.

I nearly fainted at the £6 entry fee. Judith wore her We Are Not Amused expression, used to £2 fees at heritage sites. "This had better be worth twelve bucks," I said darkly, keeping my voice low so Bill wouldn't hear us. It wasn't necessary. He surged ahead and was out of earshot in a minute. I hoped



it was a dream come true for him. Me, I was disappointed. Warwick Castle was sanitized and carefully packaged. I wouldn't have believed one could diminish such a noble structure but I found it impossible to imagine the messy middle ages in the center of such a tidy keep. The scale was vast but the grass was clipped, a very Sir Walter Scott beau ideal. The wax Edwardian figures from Madame Tussaud's in the State Apartments were gorgeously attired and, I hang my head to admit, were the most interesting part of the structure for me. After a reviving tea in the dungeon we attempted to push on to the west though we nearly lost Bill among the crenellations and had to call repeatedly for him like a bad dog that wouldn't come to heel.

By this time I was worn pretty thin and driving seemed like a test instead of a treat. I was desperately afraid of smashing up the car but I was even more in terror of the traffic on the lesser roads. As soon as we turned off the motorway I felt like I was trapped in one of those video games where You Are The Driver and large obstacles constantly zoom up in your face. I gave Bill a good scare several times but I kept assuring him we would much rather hit a stationary object than the huge lorry bearing down on us and anyway, I'd pay for his knee surgery. Bill was not convinced and Judith kept offering helpful hints about relaxing so I finally agreed to rest a bit and pulled off the road into a car park

fortuitously belonging to a bakery. We stocked up on pastries and fresh bread to bear with us to Shrewsbury, now visible as a series of spires over the horizon silhouetted by the setting sun.

We met up with Joseph who was engagingly dressed as an elf although I understand he thinks of it as a very snappy modern style. He wore tight grey leggings and a shirt barely long enough to cover his buttocks, dangly earrings, and an incredibly goofy hairstyle consisting of fluffy lovelocks around his ears and the rest of his hair pulled back in a ponytail. I tried to convince him he looked supremely untidy but he had A Serious Plan for his hair, apparently involving looking like a disgruntled King Charles spaniel until it all grew out, and would not be teased into interim measures.

Knowing Joseph, I made sure to introduce him to Bill right away. Bill had been warned that Joseph does not talk to unacquainted people, perhaps decrying the modern trend of casualness, upholding ancient traditions, being brought up correctly and all that. Or possibly he's just a nut but anyway he really won't talk to anyone he hasn't properly met. Bill, being a casual American, was suitably amazed. Since bonhomie was the order of the day we went out for a congenial dinner at the local Indian tandoori house.

*Thus endeth Part the First*

## SHADOWBOXING THE BLUES

In August I went back to Seattle. I grew up there. I haven't visited much since I left. Twelve years ago I couldn't wait to get out the hell out. You know the story: small town girl yearns for something more than a series of dead-end jobs and lights out for the big city. Me, I headed for San Francisco and pitied anyone still deluded enough to stay in boring old Seattle.

It is consequently no small source of amusement to me that in my absence Seattle has become a mecca for the terminally hip. Destiny's a funny thing.

Anyway, now that I live in the center of the country I find myself looking back on my west coast days with some affection. At least I knew how to talk to people there without sounding like some weird over-educated dork. In Seattle it's normal to sound like a weird over-educated dork (Hi, my name is Fleur and I have a liberal arts degree, will that be for here or to go?). Maybe it was a surfeit of iced tea or an aversion to 97% humidity; at any rate, I had a sudden yen to pop in on the cool Pacific Northwest for a long weekend. I didn't think of it as going home, though. Too much has changed, too many years have intervened.

My family was pleased that I was coming, particularly since it would be John's first visit. My father wanted my sister and me to sift through boxes of family photographs; anything left would be thrown out. Mary Lou, my wonderful step-mother, immediately began planning a party for the three of us who have August birthdays. My sister Sarah said we could stay with her in her new house in Redmond, just down the road from Microsoft where she works. It all sounded pleasant and relaxing, the perfect vacation.

Then some bright soul suggested we have a formal photograph taken since the whole family would be together. Even though this is a rare enough occurrence, as we're all constantly traveling or moving house, I was immediately on my guard.

I probed cautiously for information. Did this mean my brother would be coming up from Portland? Yes, it did. Was he still heavily involved in his ludicrous religion, The Church Universal And Triumphant? Yes, he was. Did he still think St. Germain reincarnated every century and inconveniently dead Ascended Masters communicated through living channelers? No one had asked recently but presumably he did since he was still going to church several times a week. I was troubled by the news.

When we were children my brother and I were extremely close. We lived in a wonderful secret world of our own peopled by elves and talking animals. We played and bickered and united against all outsiders including our parents with whom we had a combative relationship. I felt no one else understood me.

To compound matters, we were being raised as Christian Scientists and were deeply confused about whether or not the world would still be there the next day. An early diet of metaphysics did us no favors when we got to school and had to interact with other children. My report cards are unanimous in describing me as intense, oversensitive and unable to get along with my peers. My brother had the same problem though he had a sunnier personality at first.

By anyone's standards we had a difficult childhood. Even now that we're all adults and more or less on speaking terms none of us really understands why it was so hellish. I think our emotional natures disturbed our phlegmatic parents and their attempts to control us were disproportionately severe. At the time we assumed we were being punished for being ourselves. In the war between adults and children our weapons were mostly passive. We learned to hide, to lie, to forget. Forgetfulness was a skill we sought eagerly. We became experts at it, so much so that to this day Mark and I have a five year gap in our memories.

Still, everything was okay as long as we had each other. Then it changed.

About the time Mark turned fourteen he started hanging out with his male friends more often. He wouldn't take me along. He didn't want to play much any more. We started to have arguments. I was upset by the distance I sensed in him. I thought I was being shut out just because I was a girl and I resented it deeply. On rare occasions he would ask me to sing the songs we used to love and we would talk about Tolkien and science fiction with some of the old enthusiasm. But mostly he was becoming taciturn and unhappy. I felt deserted by him and betrayed by puberty. I had troubles of my own. We drifted apart.

Our interest in drugs momentarily reunited us in college. Having battled the "real world" for so long we turned to marijuana with gusto. It was a relief to find something that muffled the vicious self-criticism that haunted us both. It was nearly as momentous as our discovery that aspirin really did cure a headache and we no longer had to suffer needlessly from minor ills (though we had to hide the aspirin bottle from our parents). Only a few friends were as dedicated to getting high as we were so once again we shared a secret interest. We smoked a lot of pot, listened to the Grateful Dead constantly, and tried to reconnect. It almost worked. Still, he was restless, constantly seeking spiritual truth. I wanted the world to be what it was and no more; Mark wanted enlightenment.

He was always experimenting with lifestyles. First it was tarot cards and psychics, a flirtation with the occult. He became a vegetarian and tried to convert everyone to the joys of wheat grass juice and fasting. He ate so many carrots his skin took on a yellow tinge. He found a book on Breatharians and was greatly taken by the concept of being so spiritual that one could live on air alone. I scoffed and the distance between us inexorably widened again.



I discovered science fiction fandom. Mark discovered Elizabeth Clare Prophet. Our paths diverged further. I eschewed all religion. He became a dedicated follower of a woman who preached a combination of Buddhism, Christian Fundamentalism, and New Age woo woo. I said he was a lost person who needed someone else to think for him. He said I was blind to the unseen forces at work in our world. His religion didn't seem to make him very happy. I had many sad and terrifying dreams about his burning eyes.

We moved to California together and shared a household off and on for three years. I grew to despise his religious morbidity. He tried desperately to convert me, worried that I'd be left behind when the Apocalypse came and took all the true believers to heaven. No logical argument moved him, no reasonable discussion got very far. Finally one night I lay weeping on my bed and admitted defeat. The twin soul I once knew was gone and in his place was a self-righteous fanatic stranger. I told my parents that I would not have further contact with him. He moved to Montana and my life went on. I grieved as though he had died. After a while I didn't dream about him any more.

Thus I was wary when Mary Lou said Mark was coming up to Seattle for the family portrait. My dad had indicated Mark was slightly less fanatic than he used to be. Apparently his guru's prediction that the world was going to end in October 1989 left him disillusioned when it didn't happen. He was working in Portland renovating historical homes which seemed responsible enough. Sarah was thoroughly disgusted by his avowed non-materialism and evangelical tendencies but she had a strong sense of family and kept trying to "understand" him. She thought I should, too, but I disagreed. He didn't want to be understood, I argued. He had his agendas and his value system in place. Why bother?

Mark showed up for the birthday party. We hugged awkwardly and stood looking at each other. I finished telling Mary Lou why I had just come inside. The wind whipped up the long tails of the streamers attached to the flagpole, I said, and kept whacking me in the face. I laughed and so did Mary Lou.

"Hmm," Mark said, nodding his head wisely. "Now what do you suppose that was trying to tell you?" I looked at him steadily and replied that sometimes the wind was just the wind. He obviously disagreed but kept silent.

When dinner was served we all scrambled for seating. John and I sat at a card table and were digging into our steaks when Mark pulled up a seat. We got to talking about the weather, a generally safe topic of conversation in my family. I was glad the weather was so beautiful, I said, especially since last summer was so terribly wet. Mark looked up from his vegetables and rice.

"Well, I was reading about that," he said calmly. "You know, the Russians have a weather machine and they control our weather. They shoot ray beams into the sky and cause it to rain. They were concentrating on the Northwest last year."

John was about ready to laugh at the obvious joke but caught the serious look on my face. "Mark," I said slowly, "the Russian economy is in collapse. They can barely feed themselves. They don't control our weather and they don't have the money to waste on speculative science." Mark pressed on.

"I suppose you read that in a newspaper," he said pityingly. I allowed as how I did, in fact, obtain some information from newspapers. He shook his head. "The Communists control our media," he confided, eyes dark and intense, radiating his zealotry. I felt a rill of fear lift the hair on the back of my neck and head. "You can't believe anything you read. It's all Communist lies," he added with great earnestness. I looked down at my plate and felt sick to my stomach.

He continued to tell me all about his church papers and communications with the Ascended Masters. John finished his steak and took his plate into the kitchen. I listened to the stranger with my brother's face and tried not to cry. The evening was a success for everyone else; birthday presents and funny cards were exchanged, news and gossip traded, plans for the rest of the weekend discussed. The following day we sat for our family portrait and then John and I went into Seattle to visit friends and shop. We didn't see my family again except for Sarah.

Back in Nashville I told my therapist about it. I had discussed my brother's oddness a few times but we hadn't gone into it much. She asked a few questions: when did he start to change, how long had he been paranoid about the Russians, and so on. She was silent for a minute and then gently said she thought he was not just a little odd or offbeat. He was most likely schizophrenic.

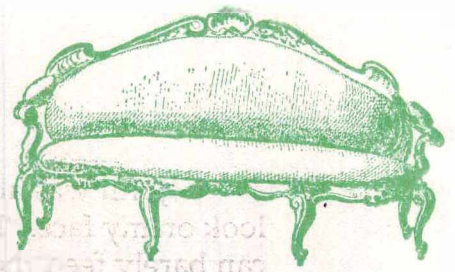
It hit me hard, the way the truth usually does when I've been trying to ignore it. I'd had a couple of friends who were diagnosed as schizophrenic; the clues had been there all along. It explained why no amount of love or understanding could help Mark find an elusive peace, why he needed to create an enemy to account for the sense of paranoia. It's difficult to accept but at least it makes sense. The hard part is knowing he'll never seek conventional treatment. He doesn't believe in it. He just knows he's miserable and he thinks it's a lack in him, a spiritual void that can only be lived with if he concentrates on a life hereafter where all questions will be answered and all heartaches soothed at last.

So there will be no "cure" for Mark. Without medication he will live in his perpetual twilight world of enemies and suspicion and a harrowing sense that everything is wrong and he the wrongest of all. Long ago I lost my beloved brother to a chemical imbalance, a series of missteps and dead ends and bewildered cries for help that never came because no one knew how to answer.

I miss him with all my heart: my old playmate and companion, my pride and joy, my laughing baby brother. I only wish I could forget this, too. But I can't.

And without him I can't truly go home.

## MODERN VERNACULAR: THE LETTER COLUMN



*At Corflu 11's Dead Dog Party I sat around getting contact sercon and listening to Ted White, Robert Lichtman, Dan Steffan, and Art Widner discuss what they liked and didn't like about Southern Gothic. Ted held out for vigorous letter columns and Art chided me for not taking a larger part in mine. Dan and Robert thought the locs were the heart of a fanzine, where the give and take of personalities illuminated the current state of fandom, and therefore I was doing fandom a disservice by not giving my readers adequate space to respond. Steve Schwartz, a nice chap from Madison, was listening to this appraisal and leapt in to defend me from the heavy artillery. I appreciated it greatly but it wasn't necessary. These guys are family. I value their opinions. I thought it was pretty flattering to have four experienced writers critique my work. And you know, upon reflection I think they're right. So go to it, kids. The playground's yours.*

### Steve Stiles

I have noticed that some women have taken to wearing abstract designs on their nails. With ten fingernails one could probably create a decent little mini-comic strip, and zipatone would probably adhere well, but the splash panel with headline lettering and credits would have to start on the left hand pinkie nail and that would be a difficult challenge to solve.

Thanks to you, we'll be getting some Mystery Science Theater 3000 tapes. We were at Disclave and I mentioned reading about the show in SG to Kip Williams. He's making us some dupes while we're sending him "The Flintbones," a porno satire starring the famous porn slob Ron Jeremy.

*I spent one summer watching every porn film I could find with a sword-and-sorcery theme and Ron Jeremy was in all of them. Hoo boy, he's ugly. I still mean to write an article about science fiction and fantasy themes in pornography someday. I'd like to get some use out of the remarkable example of Star Trek slash literature which Joanna Russ bestowed upon me in great glee some years ago at a Vanguard meeting.*

### Candi Strecker

I loved the analogy of Joel versus Mike to Kirk versus Picard and am quoting it to all my MSTie friends. Did you know that Miles O'Keefe, the hang-gliding barbarian [in "Ator" aka "The Cave Dwellers"], is now in the cast of Roseanne?

*I hear Miles likes the send-up of Ator. I wish he'd been at the MST3K convention which was fun, by the way. The cast members worked the registration desk; can you imagine the guests of honor at any science fiction convention doing the same? The MST Alive show brilliantly skewered "This Island Earth." Universal Pictures is talking about releasing it.*

Harry Warner, Jr.

Bless you for losing that last loc from me. Just recently I received a fanzine whose loc section contained four separate and distinct letters from me. I felt like a van Vogt or Dick character who can't escape a repetitive stitch in time.

*That's what you get for being a fannish legend, Mr. Warner, sir.*

Jeanne Bowman

You think *you* were dismayed at my being credited with writing about Pam Wells. Imagine having everyone who read the thing presume that this convention [Eastercon 1992] was just another chance to visit with Pam. It completely baffled me the first time someone asked me how this con compared to Mexicon. People were so earnest about it that I *couldn't* pass myself off as you.

*I wish you'd tried, though. I would have enjoyed being tall and blonde for a while.*

Yvonne Rousseau

I was pleased to read your account of how effortlessly Abi Frost recognised you at the Worldcon -- which I set against the rather different view of her visit presented by Bill Kunkel and Laurie Yates in Habakkuk.

*Abi seems to have polarized fandom on the issue of how a TAFF winner is supposed to present themselves. I think that if you voted for Abi you got good value for money and if you had to put up with a bit of idiosyncratic behavior you ought to thank your lucky stars you didn't catch Greg Pickersgill on a bad day during his TAFF trip. The whole idea of fan funds is to meet someone from a different fannish culture and when somebody runs smack into one of our shibboleths, like smoking, we ought to be helpful instead of critical.*

George Flynn

Most of the writing is of such lapidary perfection that further comment would be nugatory.

*You sweet-talkin' thang, George. Go on, say something else.*

The map on page whatever seems to come from an alternate universe where Georgia and Mississippi have partitioned Alabama (no great loss).

*Funny, I feel the same about Alabama. First prize for catching the singularity of the map.*



### Walt Willis

Your report of your conversations with Joe Wesson makes fascinating reading, though I'm not sure I agree with his theory about high heels. I think he's right about finger nails in porn movies, though. I think they're there because the makers of porn movies think it's important that the girls look well turned out while they're dressed. For instance they usually go in for ambitious earrings. It must occur to women that long finger nails make for difficulties in some of their activities, but perhaps the thought doesn't bother male watchers so much.

### David Bratman

Men do like to talk. It's just that men tend to draw a strict distinction between business and conversation.

### Joseph Nicholas

...but there's a logical lacuna in [Joe's] remarks on the subject of what men like about women. If, as he says, men don't discuss these things amongst themselves, then he cannot possibly know for certain what men, in the plural, like.

### Peter Larsen

A lot of men don't talk about what really turns them on but some do and even more buy what looks like it might. Generally, when dealing with abstract sexual attraction, people prefer their images partly dressed. The distraction of some clothing gives a sexual image scale. Take it from Minneapolis' premier Deviant Bookseller -- there's a lot more fetish activity out there than you'd think.

*The male readership rushed into print with their opinions; I didn't hear a peep from the women. My own take is that sexual fetishes are hilarious unless they're your own.*

*I also heard from Andy Andruschak, Brian Earl Brown, Gary Deindorfer (who thinks I'm "one of the most unappreciated writers in fandom." Thanks, Gary, and that check is in the mail), Cathy Doyle, Jeanne Gomoll, Bridget Hardcastle, Mark R. Harris, Kim Huett, Robert Lichtman (who wouldn't let me quote the most interesting part of his letter), Gary Mattingly, Berni Phillips, Nigel Richardson, Tracy Shannon (though she's using her maiden name now and I've forgotten what it is), DM Sherwood, and dozens of fanzine editors who sent trade copies. Particular thanks go to Joseph Nicholas and Candi Strecker who regularly send clippings from the newspapers so that I can read about theories that humanity is descended from beavers, Martha Stewart climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro in designer hiking gear, the Guardian's opinion of Architectural Digest, and other lunacies.*

**SOUTHERN GOTHIC 3**

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