

SOUTHERN GOTHIC

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HONKYTONK CAPPUCCINO

Mystery Science Theater 3000 is over for another year. I could cry.

I really could. It's the only television I watch with complete devotion. The last time I was this involved with a tv show I was crazy for Jack Lord and Hawaii 5-0. I was 12 at the time so you see how often I fall for anything other people like. Generally I hate tv. I'm not in tune with popular culture. In fact, I tend to think I'm immune to it. But if I actually was, I wouldn't find parodies of it so immensely funny.

MST3K just finished their fifth season on Comedy Central, cable's all-comedy channel. The original host and creator, Joel Hodgson, stepped down from camera range to pursue other interests and a new host in the form of head writer Mike Nelson has taken over broadcast duties from the Satellite of Love. It's still the same low-rent premise: an innocent worker at Gizmonic Institute is shot into space by two Mad Scientists and forced to watch bad movies every week as an experiment, aided by two homemade robot pals. They watch the movie while we watch it with their sillouettes superimposed at the bottom edge of the tv screen. They make wisecracks and talk back to the screen just like we do when we watch Saturday afternoon monster movies. It's goofy and brilliant. A dazzling array of cultural references fly by like shrapnel as human and robots respond to poor acting, bogus special effects, holes in the plot, lame continuity problems, pompous premises and sophomoric dialogue. It's great comedy plus I get to watch *really bad* movies, some of which I can't believe got made. God bless Sandy Frank and Bert I. Gordon. .

I'm not going to pretend that the only attraction are the movies, though. I had a major crush on Joel all last year. He somehow managed to walk the line between kiddie show host and dark humorist with his sleepy-eyed charm and the weekly invention exchange he and the Mad Scientists do at the beginning of each show. My favorite was the guitars with squeaky dog toys glued to them. Smash 'em together in rock hero tradition and drive the neighborhood dogs wild in the bargain. Anyway, Mike's real good but it's kind of a Picard versus Kirk situation.

Just like any decent cult favorite, there are behind-the-scenes complications and hard-to-find old episodes. Completists go crazy trying to obtain video tapes of the missing first season which has never been re-broadcast. What happened to Larry, one of the original Mad Scientists? Josh Weinstein left the show, no explanations were given, and that season is not part of the Comedy Central contract. And then there's the original show, broadcast on a Minneapolis station in 1989, featuring nascent versions of the cast and set. Joel has a seriously bad haircut and a pretty bad attitude. The robots look even hokier than they do now (though Crow T. Robot always was constructed out of parts of a lacrosse helmet and a bowling pin). The tone is distinctly laconic and unrehearsed but clearly has its priorities in place: to lampoon society by lambasting its entertainment. Not a lot of people videotaped that original foray so it's agreeably hard to get.

I find myself laughing involuntarily as the cast toss quips back and forth. They really love the old Star Trek series so an actor who stumbles over his lines is mimicked in pompous...short...pauses like...William...Shatner. Any hapless actor in pseudo-medieval garb will be relentlessly greeted with a hearty "Huzzah!" and endless pseudo-Old English. The feeling I get, and it seems to be common to everyone who likes the show, is that the writers all grew up watching and listening and having the same dubious reactions to the same things I did. They blend sports talk, literary quotes, political soundbites, movie dialogue, and obscure tv show references as they wisecrack their way through a movie. It gets kind of eerie sometimes (did they read my mind?) but it's also a joy to think that I'm not alone.

I recently taped three of my favorites for Kim Huett in Australia who sent a plea for copies of the show. Even though he didn't grow up in the States I have a feeling he's going to get a lot of the jokes. Science fiction, politics, and old tv series have crossed international boundaries often enough to make MST3K intelligible to anyone. Besides, the movies themselves are hilariously awful. I chose *Teenage Caveman* (featuring Robert Vaughn as a quite obviously overaged surly you-know-what), *The Cave Dwellers* (also marketed as *Ator* and by far my favorite Bad Barbarian Fantasy movie) and *The Magic Voyage of Sinbad* (which features a bafflingly Russian cast). Stinkburgers, one and all. Kim will love 'em.

I can't imagine any science fiction fan failing to love it. These guys aren't fans and it appears they don't think highly of science fiction conventions but they've read the same books and seen the same movies, they've been to a lot of Renaissance Faires, listened to all the Firesign Theatre albums, and otherwise existed in a parallel universe except they did stand-up comedy in their twenties instead of going to cons. They know the turf. And they are very funny in the bargain.

So if you get a chance, catch the show. Me, I've got at least ten episodes from this season held back against the dreaded end of the year. If I stretch it out I could almost make it until July when it all starts again and things seem a little brighter.

Or I could get a life. One or the other. I'll let you know.

SAY IT AIN'T SO, JOE

"You've got it all wrong. Men don't *care* about fingernails, Lucy."

It's 10:30 p.m. and I'm about two hours into my weekly phone call to Joe Wesson.

"You're kidding. Then why do all the women in porn movies have long dragon-claw fingernails? Those films are made for men, not women."

"Men aren't looking at their fingernails!"

"Sure, but the women all have 'em. So they must serve some erotic purpose," I reply stubbornly.

"Listen. Men like a lot of things but they won't talk about it, not even to other men," Joe says. "So there's no way you could know."

Joe knows. Joe knows a lot about a lot, which always impresses the hell out of me because I can't remember information if I don't use it on a regular basis. I decided a long time ago I only have room for so much at one time so I just keep the things that interest me in my head and the rest I either forget or ignore. I never win at Trivial Pursuit. But Joe has flypaper-mind. His specialty is International Economics. He has a doctorate to prove it. He seems to keep up with everything. He thinks things over. I believe him when he says men don't talk about what turns them on. But if I ask him he'll tell me the answer.

"Name one," I challenge him.

"Shoes," he shoots back. "A guy might say to his friend, 'great legs' about a girl they're both looking at. You'd probably think he meant he thought she had great legs if you overheard him. But what he means is her legs look great in *those shoes*. High heels. Extended and taut. Sexy. It's the shoes."

I laugh. "Well, okay. I'll buy that. I know what the sight of shapely legs in high heels does to some men. I seem to remember you falling on your knees to worship my four-inch black stiletto heels one night at the Worldcon in New Orleans. Art Widner was terribly unsettled by the scene. He kept earnestly asking me why women would wear such uncomfortable shoes. I was kind of embarrassed that he didn't know."

An undignified snort echoes down the line. "I'll bet. Here's another. Chiffon. The sight of chiffon really turns men on. Same with silk."

"Satin?" I venture.

"Definitely satin. But not latex or spandex. Unless maybe the guy's a fetishist. But mostly women wear spandex because they think men like it. Which is a complete waste of time. Men would rather see women undressed if given a preference between any fabric and nudity."

"I knew it!" I cry triumphantly. "I've always thought Victoria's Secret stores were catering to women's fantasies about men's fantasies. Men always want women to get out of



their clothes pronto, not loll about the bedroom in fluffy peignoirs and so on."

"Not stockings. Men do like hosiery on women," Joe corrects me gently.

I accept the distinction. Joe knows. I talk to him about everything.

We spend hours on the phone. It's as if nothing is real until it's been discussed, analyzed, turned over and over like a stone in a polishing machine, fining down the rough exterior and exposing the clear essence of the experience. There's always so much to talk about.

My parents, being religious and naively conservative, didn't teach me anything useful about living in a profane and illogical world. I could have used some practical guidance but I didn't get it. I grew up yearning for simple, obvious answers, coveting black and white in the midst of the grey shifting fog. It's still my fallback position when some event or emotion takes me offguard but at least now I have a few coping mechanisms that help me work through problems. When all else fails, I pick up the phone and call a friend to get some feedback.

"Okay, tell me this. Why is it if you ask a man whether or not you should cut your hair they always say don't cut it but a woman will take into consideration your face shape, your lifestyle, your whole personality and give you an answer based on that?"

Joe is not fazed. "Because men like the *idea* of long hair. It's part of their

primitive instincts. It has nothing to do with the woman who's asking. It has to do with what makes a man club a woman over the head and drag her back to his cave. Hair, breasts, hips equals female. Hair is just hair to a man."

"Aha! Whereas hair is an accessory, a statement, an important part of defining self to a woman," I point out. "That's why the first thing a woman does when she gets a divorce or dumps her boyfriend is cut her hair. Hair *matters*."

"Good God," Joe says, revolted.

Our conversations drift from topic to topic, veering between the ridiculous and the earnest, but always coming back to human behavior. It's a fascinating subject and for me, at any rate, a necessary one. I'm still making up for lost time.

We're not much alike, me and Joe. He's passive and idiosyncratic, disposed to follow his own notions without being much bothered about anyone else. I'm far more interactive, caring more for others' opinions, demanding that life explain itself. My life is dramatic, filled with emotion, turbulence and extravagant gestures. But we share one similarity. Once I decide I like someone then I expect to always like them. I have a steadfast loyalty that I find difficult to give up even when I should. Joe says if he likes someone at first then he finds he always likes that person, even if he doesn't see them for years at a time. They just pick up the conversation where they left off.

I think he's lucky. I think people change a lot and when enough time has passed you hardly ever have anything left in common. I brood about this, resenting the fickleness of others. I still like them, I'm still the same, why have they changed? People are so *slippery*.

"Have you heard Mitch Thornhill moved to Vermont?" Joe offers.

"No way!"

"Yeah. He's living in a log cabin in the woods. No electricity. No running water. No indoor plumbing, if you know what I mean."

"Double no way!"

"With a hippie Grateful Dead woman. I went to visit 'em. Stayed one day. It was all I could take. Love, huh?"

"Yeah. I guess." We are silent for a moment, picturing our friend living in a log cabin in Vermont with a back-to-nature Deadhead. Probably eating squirrel and rabbit and so on. What makes a city boy go back to nature? We can't imagine, being city folk ourselves and fond of all that civilization has to offer like dim sum and good coffee and CDs. We are bonded by that sense of awe at someone giving up all that we think of as essential, at the strange urges other people succumb to.

"How's the job hunt going?" I ask tentatively, hoping for good news.

Joe sighs. "I've sent out over a hundred resumés this year. Got a call

from a couple of places. No interviews, though. Might go to a conference next week. See if I can network a bit. I guess this means getting a new suit."

"Oh, come on," I say, trying to cheer him up. "You'll be in the forefront of fashion if you keep wearing that awful old thing you wore to Stever's wedding in the 70's. Wide lapels are coming back, you know."

Joe makes several rude sounds designed to convey his disgust. "Well, I'm not wearing bellbottoms again, that's for damn sure."

"Or leisure suits."

"Or fat ties with hideous patterns."

"How about moonboots?" We're starting to laugh, exhuming our style skeletons. Joe finally admits he only recently gave away all his clothes from high school. They hadn't fit in a long time but he kept them because they weren't worn out.

"Holy cow, of course they weren't worn out. They were made from the most icky, unnatural, undestroyable substance known to man..."

"A fabric which will live on, long after the earth is ruled by cockroaches..."

"Polyester!" we chorus in mutual glee. I flip over on the bed and switch the receiver to the other ear, trying to find another comfortable position, feeling happy and normal. It's so good to talk to someone who likes to talk.

Joe, you see, understands the need for conversation. And frankly, few men do. They don't seem to comprehend the lifeline conversation represents for women, dismissing it as inconsequential or pointless. How many times have men asked themselves, "What do women really want?" It's so obvious. Women want to talk. Since the world began women have allowed themselves to be bopped over the head and dragged back to the cave in hopes that later, after the procreative urge is dealt with, men will feel expansive and talkative. We need to know, to hear, to share. We need to laugh with someone over how weird everyone else is. Otherwise, we might go nuts.

It's been three hours now. Important personal concerns have been dealt with, much gossip dispensed, several conclusions reached, a few truisms reaffirmed. It's provided a much needed reality check. We've learned a little bit more about what makes people tick, what separates the genders. I've had a chance to bounce some ideas off someone other than John. I've been given several new ideas to contemplate, ideas I would never have come up with myself. I've come up with a fanzine article.

"I'm going to write about this, Joe. You don't mind?"

"Naw. I can't wait to be immortalized in your fanzine."

"Gee, thanks. You might feel differently when you see it. I never can remember exactly how the words go. I paraphrase. It all gets

filtered and reworked. But I think you'll recognise everything as essentially true to the original."

And to be honest, I don't know that you can ask much more of anyone. That's part of the art of conversation. Joe knows.



San Francisco --- An abandoned parking barrier worshiped as a shrine to the Hindu god of destruction has been moved from Golden Gate Park.

The shrine, a 4-foot-high, bullet-shaped stone, resembles a Hindu "Shiva Linga." It was dumped in the park several years ago by a city crane operator. Last fall, Hindus and New Agers discovered it and began to worship at it. The city wanted it removed, citing the need for separation of church and state. Self-described visionary artist Michael Bowen, who also goes by the Hindu name Kali Das, then agreed to take the stone.

Sometimes I get so homesick...

ARMCHAIR PASSPORT: ICELAND

Armchair Passport is an occasional column featuring recent or favorite destinations. Many people have expressed awe or envy of my restless feet. Quite simply, I'd rather travel than have nice furniture or own a home. I take lots of vacations: five to six long weekend jaunts and two or three week-long vacations a year. I hope this column clarifies why I find travel so irresistible and why I'm willing to sacrifice certain creature comforts in order to make one more trip. Readers are invited to respond with their own travel stories or recommendations. I'll print the most interesting responses.

Iceland in December is a wild northern land stripped of all gentleness by the icy winds of winter. Snow outlines the frozen undulation of volcanic landscape. A pale sky heavy with slate grey clouds passes low over a tumble of jagged lava and steaming craters. Any minute now Gamera might heave up from beneath the ice-fast tundra and leap into a fiery spin. Hot air and water meet the arctic atmosphere and condense into roiling clouds all across the earth. Geysers bubble and spout dramatically in counterpoint to the horizontal flows of old eruptions where the only harvest is rock and moss. Massive glaciers stand sentinal over deep rivers rushing through the snowy banks of their courses to plunge over chasms in shimmering translucent falls. The northern tip of the island is only a few miles short of the Arctic Circle. There are no trees in the wilderness.

Even in winter the land is alive, glowing with internal activity, its southern shores warmed by the Gulf Stream so that winter temperatures rarely dip below freezing. In December there's not much wildlife around, just a few hardy seabirds and the shaggy little Icelandic horses whose pure bloodlines run directly back to their ninth century ancestors brought over from Norway when the Vikings arrived in their long wooden ships.

I arrived via jet courtesy of Icelandair. Since I was travelling in the off-season I discovered a little-known fact about Icelanders: they are unabashedly nuts about Christmas. Each overhead compartment on the plane had its own wreath fastened with red and green ribbons. Christmas carols filled the air instead of the usual inane pre-flight muzac. It lent a festive air to the short overnight flight.

We made landfall with no warning, the black velvet of the night ocean giving way suddenly to a low snow-covered coastline. Five minutes later we were on the ground. The airport featured a large sculpture called "Jet Egg," a huge stainless steel egg with one sharp talon piercing through. I was instantly smitten. Any country which would commission a Jet Egg for their primary airport is my kind of country. Iceland is, in fact, passionate about sculpture and other visual arts. The ecclesiastical architecture is particularly adventurous. One church was quite clearly based on an American Indian teepee. The Icelanders love it.

The landscape dominates everything. Houses are few and far between. Only 255,000 people inhabit Iceland, half of them settled in Reykjavik. The air is virtually pollution-free thanks to geothermal heating. Distances are deceptive in such clean air. Stars crowd the skies at night. Mountains many miles distant look as though they march on the edges of the city. Towns and villages seem oddly tidy without intrusive chimneys. There are few ornamental trees and no stands of timber; the settlers cut down what wood there was centuries ago. Everything is clean, spare, devoid of embellishment through necessity and habit.

At Christmastime electric Advent candles glow in every apartment window. The nine (some say eleven) wicked trolls of Icelandic legend have been homogenized into Santa's helpers to dovetail nicely with the wholehearted embracing of American Christmas customs. The trolls make their appearance one by one leading up to Christmas and then leave in the same order until Epiphany. During my visit Bowl-licker and Window Peeper arrived, leaving presents or lumps of coal in little children's shoes set carefully on the window sills of their homes.

Icelandic sheep grow wool in sober winter tones of black, brown, grey or white and I was informed that Icelanders prefer undyed wool. With only four colors to choose from monotony might seem inevitable but nature and artistic vision provide an infinite array of shades and textures for the classic *lopi* sweaters. Fish is the primary export of Iceland but wool is next in importance and the majority of gifts available in shops involved one or the other. I ate enough fish to last a month. I couldn't afford a sweater. I couldn't afford much, actually. Prices were monstrously high. Lunch was usually 1400 Icelandic kroner or about 20 dollars. Fortunately, everyone accepted whatever currency you happened to have, at the same exchange rate anywhere, whether in a hotel or at a restaurant or in a shop or at the airport. I thought this was astonishingly civilized not to mention handy.

If you go to Iceland you must absolutely visit the Blue Lagoon. It is formed by the run-off from a geothermal processing plant near the coast. When the energy of the geysers has been diverted the run-off water flows back to the sea. It's hot, bubbly and full of invigorating minerals. The water is milky aquamarine blue and steam billows from it in great clouds. The industrial bulk of the power plant rises up behind, barely glimpsed through the steam. Underneath is sharp lava and a bit of sand. The edges are white with encrusted minerals. Surrounding the pool are craters and broad lava fields. It is spooky and very, very scientific.

There was so much to see: the Mid-Atlantic Ridge where Eurasia and North America meet, the many beautiful waterfalls, the original Geysir from which we derive our word geyser, the glowing greenhouses scattered across the valleys like UFOs in the pre-dawn darkness, the stark coastline with its vivid red lava, the austere beauty all around. Someday I'd like to see if summer softens such a stern and dramatic landscape. But Iceland in winter showed me why the Scandinavian gods were so fierce. I know where Odin lives now. He lives in the Jet Egg.

MORE THAN CHOCOLATE

This is a reprint of the biographical article about Pam Wells which I wrote for the program book of the 1992 British Eastercon at which she was a Guest of Honor. To my dismay, the article was credited to TAFF winner Jeanne Bowman. In the interest of clarifying authorship and amusing those of you who think you know the real Pam Wells, here it is again.

London, 1984

The night I first meet her she giggles and squeals over my gift of a pink plastic cowgirl jacket. She especially likes the smiling cactus and bucking burros on it. She puts it on and instantly becomes Pamelita, one of the vicious and beautiful Las Hermanas Chingadas, the famous Fuck You Sisters. Las Chingadas (Pamelita, Luz and Leeeeenda) write and perform a song at the first Mexicon in Newcastle. The audience is stunned by the presentation which includes many yips and high stepping kicks. Pamelita is a hit. I admire her unreserved enthusiasm, her inability to carry a tune, and her flirtatious cha-cha-cha. We become very good friends.

She promises to make me a batch of her special brownies when I say I am getting awfully tired of British cooking. She brings them to a party. Fans line up to get at them. "Quite the little homemaker, are we?" I say, watching people wolf down three or four as fast as they can get them in their mouths. "Well, I'm rather good

at brownies," she replies modestly. Later, when the entire party is lying around on the floor giggling at the ceiling I ask her what her secret is. She just smiles and helps me and Linda Krawecka draw up a Langdon Chart of British fandom's sexual relationships. Our chart makes the rounds of fandom for weeks afterwards, most people professing shock at the idea but maneuvering to get a copy. Pam knows all the inside dirt. People tell her the most remarkably intimate things. She calls it her Agony Aunt persona. It's one of her specialties, like brownies.

Brighton, 1987

"This is killing me, it really is," she confesses approximately two seconds after I arrive at the Worldcon. "I can't stand all these twits. Christ, the sheer numbers of them! How can Americans take this?" I tell her we like our twits in bulk. She groans and retreats to the Fan Lounge, tastefully hidden several corridors and three construction sites away from the main programming area. I see her briefly throughout the convention, assisting publication of the daily newsletter here, conducting Martin Smith away from an amorous adventure with a speaker stand there, always popping up when needed and ready to dance like a maniac when someone puts Talking Heads on the sound system. It looks like a lot of work being a guardian angel. She still has a hell of a cha-cha-cha. I tell her all about my latest tangled romance. She nods sympathetically and offers me a brownie.

London, 1988

Upon arrival at her flat I present several packets of hair dye with a flourish. "Passion Pink?" she says with glee. "Oh, marvelous. Let's do it right now!" Later, with passionately pink hair and rather goulishly pink fingers we drink the last of her Brontë Liqueur, a foul combination of French brandy and honey marketed in Haworth as a tourist treat. Pam adores it. Just right on a damp March evening for evoking the consumption-inducing chills of the Yorkshire moors. We both come down with dreadful colds and produce noses to match our hair. Pam asks me to send her more packets for future hair experiments. She can't wait to shock her co-workers.

"We're all going to Tony Berry's housewarming party in Nottingham next weekend. You come, too," Pam urges. "You simply won't believe the wallpaper." I arrange to attend the party and am, as promised, struck dumb in disbelief. Each wall has a murderously clashing color scheme and design. She drags me into the kitchen. "Look," she says with unholy amusement, "brick wallpaper covering up real bricks! Isn't this worth travelling several thousand miles to see?" I can only agree. Pam loves the bizarre aspects of her native culture. She is easily the best-travelled Briton I know in terms of seeing her own country. She's lived in London all her life yet in contrast to most big-city dwellers she regularly visits other parts of the country. She avoids the xenophobia of island dwellers and enjoys other cultures on their own

terms; still, she's very conscious of her British attitudes and values. I suspect that if she had enough money and time she would emulate the great Victorian lady-adventurers and trot off to see the world with sketchbook and British panache at her side.

Hampshire, 1989

Pam is delighted to visit Jane Austen's house at last. "This is fantastic," she enthuses as we patter up and down stairs and peer into Jane's own room. We are happy to imagine ourselves dressed in muslin, perhaps meeting the Prince Regent, immersing ourselves in Jane's day and admiring the Austen ephemera on display. Pam selects the newest Austen biography to take away as a souvenir and conducts me across the street for tea where we pore over our treasures and discuss our favorite Austen novels. This is just one stop on our erratic tour of Regency England, including Bath, Cheltenham, Iron Bridge, and all three Wallops.

It is in Nether Wallop that I discover Pam hates feet. "You're not going to take your shoes off and wade, are you?" she asks with a shudder. It's blisteringly hot and we've found a pretty little stream running along the road. I tell her yes, I certainly am, and she refuses to watch. She loathes the sight of bare feet, it transpires. "But you love shoes, how can you hate feet?" I insist, not at all inclined to deny myself a cooling footbath. "Shoes," Pam replies with awful dignity, "are one thing and Feet are another." I can hear the capital letters.

Chicago, 1991

"This is much, much worse than 1987," Pam blurts out when I ask her how she likes her first American convention. "Worldcons are crap," she elaborates, in case she has not been clear. But this one is quite small, several people assure her, only 3000 or so, very small by Worldcon standards. Pam is unmoved by these arguments. She knows what she likes and this isn't it. She explains to fans throughout the weekend what makes British conventions so much more fun than these behemoth get-togethers Americans throw. Suddenly, she sounds tired.

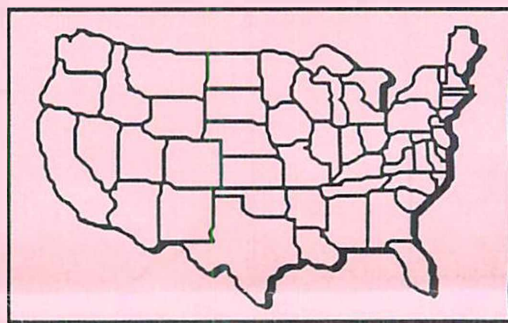
"The problem is," she confides while a dozen people are strung along the hallway in classic hall-party formation, "I've realized even Britain doesn't do many good conventions any more. 1984 was the last really good year for cons. I've felt let down by nearly everything I've been to lately. There just isn't the commitment to doing a genuinely superb con anymore. It's very depressing." I ask her how she feels about being Guest of Honor at 1992's British National Convention. "Well," she says, perking up, "that actually stands a good chance of being the best thing to come along in ages. They've got a good attitude. I'm very proud they asked me. Coming to see me give my speech?" she adds, paraphrasing Christopher Robin.

I might, I said. But it didn't work out. So I wrote this for her instead.

THE EDITOR APOLOGIZES

You know, I bet this particular column becomes a regular one. I made certain errors last issue which I would like to correct. This is the problem with doing one's own fanzine. No other editor hanging around to say, "Hey, Moshe's friend was named Janice, not Ellen, the Giants played the Pirates, not the Phillies and they lost!" Oops. Guess I was enjoying myself so much mere facts failed to impress themselves upon my memory. I had a great time.

Also, I have been informed that saints have to be dead, pretty much, before they go through the process of official sanctification. Though there are exceptions so I think we ought to get started on Saint Don the Ever Helpful. He can be patron saint of fan lounges.



Travel Dates 1994

January	Palm Desert, CA
March	London/Bermuda
May	Arlington, VA
July	Albuquerque/Taos
October	Caribbean cruise
November	New Orleans, LA

MODERN VERNACULAR: THE LETTER COLUMN

Those of you who regularly publish may think 20 letters of comments a piffling amount but I confess I'm charmed. It's a darned good return on a print run of 100. I usually have to settle for the comforting thought that everyone who got a copy probably read it. Now that no one ever sees me from one end of the year to the next they can't slack off with just verbal comments. Maybe living in such a fannishly isolated locale has its good points after all. I have often been told that my writing is amusing but contains no comment hooks which is not an excuse I much admire. At any rate, SG1 didn't leave quite as many readers dumbfounded as, say, Rude Bitch did in its day. So it is with great pleasure that I present the following helpful critical assessments of my too-generous margins, uncentered illos, and wasteful postage practices. Oh, and a few comments on the contents.

Don Fitch:

Having finally gotten the Macintosh (Ah! Bliss!) and been freed from the constraints of a typer, I'm now looking with a much more Graphic Arts awareness at fanzines (not always unalloyed Bliss). Southern Gothic passes this scrutiny handily; the finest aspects of the grand legacy of Euro-American typographic design are obvious throughout and even a Killer Review could hardly do more in this aspect than indicate a personal prejudice (framed as a Cosmic Law, of course) against some particular typeface or the idea of using Clip Art in a fanzine. Perhaps even Ted White would find difficulty in getting excited over the couple of spots that are centered by ruler rather than by eye.

I sincerely hope so.

...though the sight of such abundant -- even luxurious -- margins stirs up dark and shapeless feelings of unease in my Thrifty Fannish Soul. The disquiet grows, finally becoming impossible to resist, and I peek at the bacover, discovering that the second postage stamp is indeed a 29¢ one rather than the adequate 23¢er. Gee, I remember the days when such prodigality would've prompted a dozen two or three Fannish Articles and perhaps suggestions that Architectural Digest may have had a corrupting influence on your fanzine productions.

Andy Andruschak

You used two 29¢ stamps on the fanzine you mailed me. You could have saved 6¢ per fanzine. The correct postage for mailing first class over one ounce but under two ounces is 52¢, not 58¢.

Well, you know what they say: sometimes an extra stamp in the hand is worth more than a wait at the Post Office.

Alan Baum

I got me some nails once. Well, *a* nail. It was at some home show in Oakland. One of the exhibitors had some fancy epoxy nail coating which you had to cure under intense ultraviolet lights. They were selling these kits for, oh, I don't know, \$75 to \$100, which included a little UV light. They invited Donya to sit down and have a nail done. I, as patient husband, got to wait but business was obviously slow so I was coaxed into having mine done, too. Whatever they put on me was clear, not colored, and completely indestructible. It finally grew out but it sure wasn't going to come off any other way. I guess that wasn't real nails, though.

Ieanne Bowman

Jaime has one very long fingernail. He has been fascinated by them since a very early age. I had to set certain limitations, tho - if they stayed clean he could grow those nails as long as he wanted. He was smart and would always plead for just one to remain after inspection. As he's gotten older the length he can sustain before it gets broken off is amazing. It has never gotten to the extreme of curling under but it's as long as one of his knuckles. He says he likes it because it comes in handy...and, I think, impresses his friends. After all, he conforms in so many other important ways (black clothes, knit caps, Led Zeppelin music).

Led Zeppelin? LED ZEPPELIN?

Peter Larsen

Oh, and nails -- it gets even weirder when men get into it. Wearing polish...or in my case, henna in the hair, becomes a very heady thing indeed. Obviously, the joys of genderfuck are boiling but there's also the pleasure of confusing (even subliminally) the status quo. It's a body mod thing, Lucy, it is.

Yes, yes, I believe you. Body modification is (among other things) a way of establishing or controlling your position in society by pushing the envelope of acceptable appearance. Nails and hair are more flexible areas than piercing or tattooing but it's still remarkably easy to mess with people's minds by co-opting the visual cues of another gender.

Maxine Detroit

Loved the nails piece so much I went out and got a pedicure. Fire Engine Red -- the *ne plus ultra* latest. Revlon but what the hell.

Thanks, Max. Wish I could see those fire engine toes guiding a windsurfing board off the shores of Nuku Hiva and other far reaches of the South Pacific. You must be a sight.

Cathy Doyle

I think your opinion of Nashville is sort of how we feel about this place [*Newport News, VA*], civilization is slowly dawning and by the time we're about to retire it might get here. I don't know that you've talked about my favorite part of Southern hospitality, inviting the newcomer to join you at your place of worship. The small town we lived in while we were stuck in Georgia had 15,000 people and 20 Baptists churches (no waiting...). Their initial greeting went something like, "Hi, I'm George, wanna come to my church?" Well, no, not really. Took me a while to get used to this. Probably still haven't, as a matter of fact.

An excellent point. The part I can't get used to is when they ask me during job interviews which church I attend. They're so offended when I politely remind them that the question is illegal under the EEO regulations. Funny, you know, I never get those jobs...

Joseph Nicholas

[Regarding my query as to my fannishness] If it's any consolation, you are not alone in feeling thus, nor are you the first to experience such feelings; you've simply reached the point that every fan comes to sooner or later, where the pull of fandom begins to compete with the lure of everything else. We all (I suppose) still think of ourselves as fans; but what do we *do* to justify the label?

Well, I go to the Wellington every month (mostly). And, er, that's about it. It could be said that the fact I co-edit a fanzine gives me a better claim on the label 'fan' than some others, but the direction in which FTT has recently been moving, and in particular the trajectory of the articles I've written for it over the past couple of years, has made its claim to actually be a fanzine, as an SF fan would understand the term, seem increasingly tenuous.

Come to that, we're so out of touch with contemporary British fannish doings that (you'll fall about, I promise you) we rely on you to tell us the latest gossip.

George Flynn

Hell, of course you're a fan. I hadn't heard any of this gossip so you must be better connected than I am.

I see. A merry little fannish gossip bee, cross pollinating among the continents. I think I can just about live with it. I have a secret weapon, actually: the keen-eared Sisters of the St. Brontë Sisters. Burdened as we are with female guilt we feel obliged to keep a sharp eye on what goes on in our communities. And boy, do we keep in touch. I could have gone around the world twice with what I spend on international phonecalls. But it's worth it. I feel connected to my part of fandom. That would be fanzine fandom, of course.

Robert Lichtman

I was called Mister Robert a few times myself when I used to hang out with various rural Tennesseans. For several years it was my job early each fall to get out and scour the countryside for second-hand heating stoves. I spoke the language of Wood Kings and Ashleys, Stovepipe adapter and firebrick. Early on I ran across a couple of ol' boys outside of Pulaski (the town where the KKK was founded) who were onto the same gig, except they did it piecemeal. As we got to know one another a little bit, they invited me into their house one day to meet the rest of the family. Among these were three small children, the oldest of whom couldn't have been more than six or seven. They were dressed in full Country Ragamuffin style, and when I was introduced to them they all said in chorus, "Hello, Mister Robert." I lak ta dahd. But that's not the coolest thing that ever happened to me with these guys. The coolest was when they turned me on to some of their moonshine. Now drinking was strictly against the rules of the Farm but Stephen had also said, on numerous occasions, never to "pass up communion." I knew these two guys were downright religious about their hooch so it took me no time at all to accept a couple-three swigs from their bottle. And yes, it was one of those classic moonshine jugs: the ones with the narrow mouth and little ring handle to hold it. The next best thing to "drinkin' your likker from an ol' fruit jar." And it was smoooooth....

Why, Mister Robert, that reminds me that the only wedding I've attended in Tennessee featured moonshine in fruit jars, though it was done a bit secretly out back where the preacher couldn't see us. Guess I just don't appreciate hard liquor because it made me choke and cough like anything. Whee doggies!

I also heard from Harry Warner, Jr. whose letter has gone walkabout so I can't quote from it (but I sure did appreciate getting it, Harry, thank you), Janice Murray, Candi Strecker, Bill Bodden, Ann Green, Bill Donaho, Michael Ashley, Redd Boggs, Nigel Richardson, Berni Phillips, DM Sherwood, Jeanne Mealy and about a dozen fanzine editors who sent their publications and/or extended my stay on their mailing lists. I've also gotten some nice reviews in British fanzines. Guess I should do this more often.

Final quiz: spot the travel agent in this line up of Mac's People, Working clip art.



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SAY IT AIN'T SO, JOE

ARMCHAIR PASSPORT: ICELAND

MORE THAN CHOCOLATE

MODERN VERNACULAR

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