

L. MROBEL 90-



AVEDON CAROL

# Spinners

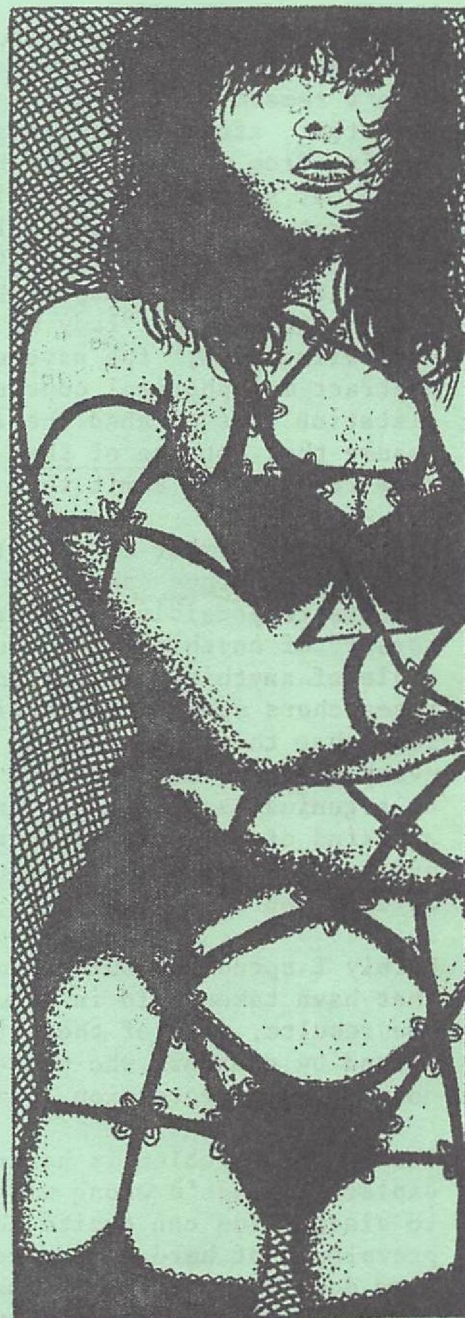
ASK MR. SOCIAL SCIENCE For today's assignment, you are asked to match the skills of a poetry critic known as "UCLA" in interpreting the possible meaning of the following verse by the poet James Robert Page Plant:

"There's a lady who's sure all that  
glitters is gold/and she's buying a  
stairway to Heaven./When she gets  
there she knows if the stores are  
all closed/with a word she can get  
what she came for."

Got your answer yet? Wonder why psychologists at the University of California should care? Well, it seems that, with everyone so worried about what the impact of nasty drug/sex-oriented song lyrics might be on impressionable young minds, social scientists have been running around asking Led Zeppelin fans what the group's most famous song is about--and do you know, not one of them interpreted the song to be about smoking dope? According to the psychologists, this is evidence that kids don't listen to song lyrics.

Now, I'm not going to argue with the theory that people don't actually spend much time giving careful examination to the meaning of rock song lyrics--in my experience, a lot of people don't. On the other hand, who says these psychologists have such a firm handle on rock song lyrics? Personally, I find it astonishing that any reasonably literate person could be so certain that the song in question is about drugs rather than about, say, believing that things of spiritual value can be purchased with material goods.

One might say that the psychologists have gone for an overly literalist interpretation of this piece of verse, but, judging from an article in the International Herald Tribune, these people wouldn't recognize that problem if it chewed their legs off up to the hip. They describe as "a typical response"



this interpretation by a student: "It's about going to heaven through a stairway and the stairway has problems along the way." What the psychologists didn't remark on (and should have been moved to View with Alarm by) is the fact that, after a certain age, this kind of literalism in trying to take meaning from metaphor is a recognized syndrome of cognitive failure--but one which, it seems, the psychologists suffered as well, since they were unable to interpret "Stairway" themselves without first finding a concrete word to attach material meaning to ("gold," according to these people, refers to "Acapulco gold"). Despite the fact that the song contains many clues to an ironic view of the "lady we all know"\* and her stairway that "lies on the whispering wind," the psychologists never recognized the possibility of abstract metaphorical content. Even when no Led Zeppelin fan gave an interpretation that matched their understanding of the song, they preferred to assume that not one of them had listened to the lyrics and tried to interpret them rather than admit that their own interpretation might be incorrect.

There are a number of social scientists whose work I have a great deal of respect for--they ask good questions, define their tasks clearly, detail their results responsibly, duplicate their work before attempting to represent it as "proof" of anything, and don't leap to wild conclusions that are way off the scale of anything their studies can really support. Unfortunately, such researchers seem to be getting pretty thin on the ground lately, despite the fact that there seems to be more money and time being given to large studies every year. So many of them reveal shoddy, irresponsible work that you have to be a genius as well as an expert at reading these things to be able to give any kind of reasonable interpretation to their data. But shabby study results are being released into popular culture at such a rapid rate that one can hardly keep up with them.

Lately I spend the bulk of my time trying to counteract widely-held beliefs that have taken hold in the general culture because unsafe interpretations of raw results, some of these themselves of dubious reliability, are being spread around by speakers who pretend to be experts in the fields of sex, sex crime, pornography, aggression, women, men, and other related areas.

The biggest problem is having to overcome the essentially boring nature of explaining what's wrong with the studies in language that won't put listeners to sleep. You can excite lots of people with police reports of "a growing prevalence of hard core pornography in Britain," but it's a lot harder to calm them down by pointing out that, in fact, studies show a decline in hard core availability and the cops are just trying to get more funding by creating a sense of outrage and the feeling that, "Something must be done." You can impel whole rooms full of angry women to march in the streets by telling them that, "Studies in America showed that men became more violent after watching pornography," but you might merely bore them by trying to explain that no one has been able to duplicate this result, and in the two studies quoted, one was not using actual pornography but was using general release films like Taxi Driver, and the other couldn't find porn that fit its category description ("violent pornography"--the only kind that was deemed to create aggression), so they had to make their own.

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\*Ah! Margaret Thatcher!



The atmosphere in Britain at the moment is one in which almost everyone seems to be jumping on the bandwagon to ban all that horrible awful violent degrading porn that they just know is out there everywhere--little realizing that, under current law, that stuff is already banned, and with censorship by the primary distributors of skin mags (and fear of prosecution under the already vague laws), most of what is available on the shelves is so tame that most people didn't used to call it "pornography"--Penthouse is a popular example. By law, you can not have pornographic videos in this country. By law, you can't have anything that might "deprave and corrupt," which by case law has been interpreted to mean you can't show erect genitals or penetration by objects. The Obscene Publications Squad are currently targetting SM porn of any kind. The major distributors will not carry anything that contains pictures of two people together, or any sexually-oriented magazine if the cover photo shows nipples (male or female).

What little is left--including the lesbian sex magazine, Quim (edited by Sophie Moorcock, you might be interested to know)--is refused by the alternative bookshops because they have been so convinced (or just cowed) by the anti-pornography "feminist" rhetoric. The "feminist" argument against porn, which is that it presents a one-sided and male-oriented stereotyped view of sexuality in which women pose for men, has created an atmosphere that encourages the authorities to stop all visual sexual material--but what is being stopped now is work created by women--On Our Backs and Bad Attitude, both lesbian magazines, are stopped at the airports. Intellectual material like the feminist book Caught Looking, which examines the political context of the porn debates, is prevented from coming into the country by the Customs service because it contains photographic examples of its subject matter--the argument that the book is not itself intended as pornography and has what might be called "socially redeeming value" cuts no ice with them.\*

The anti-porn rhetoric has it that women feel "degraded" and even "assaulted" by seeing skin mags on the top shelves of newsagents' display stands. Being 5'4", I didn't even notice they were there until I was made aware of it by the Off the Shelf anti-porn campaign, but according to Teresa Stratford of the Campaign for Press & Broadcasting Freedom, "pornography places, quite literally, a straitjacket on sexual expression," would you believe. You bet--every time I walk into a newsagent, porn leaps right down and wraps me up so I can't express myself sexually. (But, you know, I would have sworn those restraints were on me from other sources--not least among them the anti-porn campaigners who insist that, because I am female, I can not possibly have any interest in looking at potentially sexually arousing material.)

MP Clare Short managed new levels of notoriety a while back by introducing a bill to make "page 3" photos of semi-nude women in the tabloids illegal, and she's been running around ever since insisting that "women" are "disgusted" by pornography of every kind. She gets to talk about this on TV a lot, and when she does the producers have tended to bring on an opposing point of view in the person of one of the few women in the UK who is pro-sex and won't lose her

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\*I am desperate to get a copy of this book, but it seems to be impossible to get. If you weren't using your copy anyway, why not send it here where it can get a good home? Ditto the magazines - care packages welcomed eagerly.

job by saying so on TV--Isabel Koprowski, managing editor at UK Penthouse and Forum. As soon as Isabel points out that she actually likes pornography, Short (like every other opponent Isabel gets dragged out to confront on this issue) crows that "the only people they can ever find to disagree with me on this are people like you who work for the pornographers," implying that it's significant no one without a vested interest ever seems to want to go on TV to contradict her. Forget the possibility that Isabel took the job in the first place because she liked porn--nope, it's just part of her rationalization for having the job, and promotion of her product, they think. They are wrong. But what Short and others like her also ignore is that the TV stations want people with recognizable credentials, people they've heard of, people they know how to contact--and your average porn-reading housewife, teacher, secretary or student isn't on any media lists and probably wouldn't want to go on TV in the first place to become "Pro-Porn Patti" in tomorrow's tabloids and out of work by Monday morning.

Gloria Hunniford's research staff were wise to this by the time it got round to having Clare on the Gloria Live show to promote her book of letters from women who wrote in to support her Page 3 bill--so they phoned up Nettie Pollard of Feminists Against Censorship to present the opposing view from someone who wasn't a "pornographer". Short at first balked at this, but was told that if she wouldn't appear with a FAC member, she wouldn't be on. So Clare went along with it until the very last minute, by which time it was too late to create a new item to put on the air--she wouldn't, she said, be on with "some vituperative feminist." Funny, that--I wonder if she will be appearing with Isabel again in future claiming that "they can only get people like you" to oppose her. "Vituperative," huh?

But go ahead and find a way to explain the background of these things to people after the damage is done. The television viewer doesn't know that Isabel is the only woman Clare hasn't refused to be opposed by, any more than the audiences at the anti-porn slide shows know that the "horrible, violent, degrading" porn they are shown is very rare and in no way representative of most of the porn people look at, contrary to what they are told by presenters who insist that, "This violence is what men are really fantasizing when they look at porn."

In my experience, most men do not generally fantasize anything resembling real violence in their sexual fantasies, whether or not they use pornography. True, I can't read their minds and find out what they are really thinking, but then neither can Clare Short, who apparently thinks she can. Ken Livingstone, MP, says that, "The boys back at school looked at porn and snickered over it and they were thinking about rape." In fact, there seem to be a whole lot of women who are sure they know what men are thinking, and men who are sure they know what other men are thinking, when they look at porn, and what those men are thinking about is doing violent and horrible things to women.

Okay, so what are men thinking when they look at porn? Well, they might be thinking it would be nice to be in the sack with someone who doesn't act like she's doing them a favour (which for some men would be a novelty). They might be thinking how neat it would be to see a lover really getting hot with them. They might be thinking about having a woman so crazy for them that she'd do anything they wanted and love every minute of it. The way people assert that



they know what men are thinking about when they look at porn, you'd think someone had done a study on it, but no one has, since everyone "already knows" what everyone else thinks. The main finding of the Home Office report on pornography was that there isn't much research to tell us anything. I've given this a great deal of consideration myself, of course. Let's look at the responses of some men in a completely unrepresentative sample in the preliminary stages of a survey with no reliable controls:

Q: What kinds of sexual fantasies do you have?

A: "I mostly fantasize about being with my lover, things we usually do together, me going down on her, her going down on me, fucking, the way she calls my name, the sounds she makes when she gets off."

"A maternal woman, with a big backside and big breasts and a round belly, and she does things to me...I don't do anything. She kind of coos when she talks to me, and she takes my clothes off me and she touches me and plays with me."

"Being tied up, looking really cute and helpless. Not being able to get free by myself."

"Being with two women."

"Anything... The idea of a woman who wants me, I'll do anything she wants."

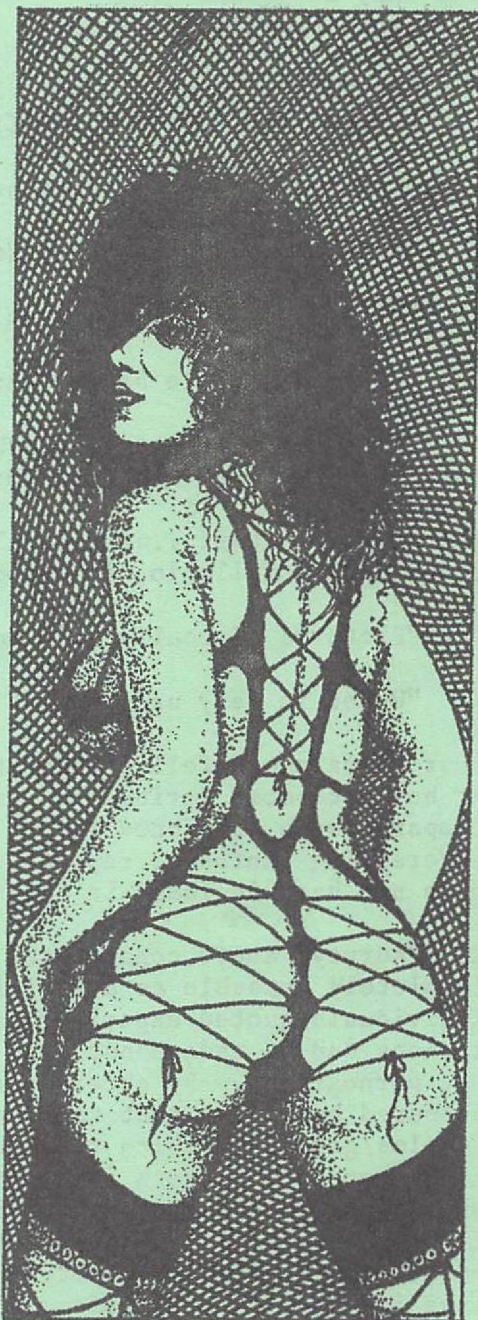
"Fucking."

"Women in sexy underwear, suspender belts, stockings, high-heels. That turns me on."

"You know--sucking, fucking, the usual."

(Our researchers were disappointed by the mundane nature of these fantasies, how vanilla most of them were, and particularly the fact that none of them were tops.)

Q: Do you have any unusual fantasies-- things you've never done, things you wouldn't want to do in real life, or things you don't think other people fantasize?



A: "No. I've done everything I ever wanted to do. I'm not interested in anything kinky."

"I wish I could find a woman who wanted to tie me up."

"I fantasize anal sex sometimes, but I've never been with a woman who wanted to, and I'm not sure it's that good an idea to try out."

"I fantasize about having several women treat me like a plaything... they have sex with each other, mostly ignore me, but I just sit there and watch, and they sometimes grab me and play with me. I can't imagine how I could put this into practice."

"Nothing unusual, nothing I haven't done, really... but in my fantasies, I'm good at it. So that's different from real life, I guess."

(Our researchers became depressed.)

Q: What kind of pornography do you like to look at?

A: "It doesn't really do much for me. I don't like just pictures."

"Films of people having sex."

"Pictures of women in leather, looking dominating. Or pictures of women in silky underwear tied up, and I can imagine I look like that."

"Written stuff...stories about people having sex. Ordinary sex, I mean. Cunnilingus, fellatio, intercourse."

"Pictures of really slim women with small breasts."

"Women in sexy underwear."

(Our researchers fell asleep at this point. When they woke up, they marvelled at how much more boring and less adventurous the sample's fantasies were as compared with the fantasies of the researchers, who were all female. Far more interesting fantasies reported by well-known science fiction professionals have not been included in this sample.)

The "survey" above constitutes what is known as "anecdotal evidence", and is completely unusable as a real indication of how people other than the specific individuals quoted experience sexual fantasy, of course. No broad generalizations can be made about what the larger group of "men" fantasize or how they use pornography. By sheer accident, you will note, there were no men who answered by saying that they have fantasies about spanking or involving couples/groups in which they were not the only males present--and yet, we know, men do have such inclinations and there is a market for pornography that appeals to such tastes. A variety of social factors skewed the sample in the first place, and a prejudice of the reporter eliminated variant data that did not fit in with the stereotype needed for the above reports--that is, I could have included examples of male dominance that just didn't happen to have been



reported in the specific conversations I quoted from, but I decided not to. By factoring out "irrelevant" data (famous male-dominant sf writers), I was able to "prove" that men have either submissive fantasies or "ordinary" fantasies, for the most part. Or, to put it bluntly, no responsible social scientist would even bother to report from data of this type, let alone take it seriously.

There is, however, real truth in the above "survey". The men were real people who were undoubtedly trying their best to be as honest as possible under the circumstances (i.e., being grilled by crazy women). Some of them were men who look at pornography regularly, but none of them were reporting fantasies that involved any violence toward women. This does prove that there are some men, at least, who don't seem to equate sexual fantasy with violence against women. What it doesn't tell you is that there are other men who do.

Anecdotal evidence is now being used heavily by both "feminist" and traditional anti-porn crusaders to "prove" that women detest pornography, pornography is the cause of violence against women and child abuse, and that men have violent thoughts about women whenever they look at porn. The Meese Commission relied almost wholly on reports by women who had been assaulted by men who used pornography in some context and men who said they had been somehow corrupted by porn, and discouraged testimony that was contrary to this prejudice. The Minneapolis hearings on pornography had statements from one woman after another whose "evidence" consisted largely of saying, "I was raped, and I think porn was responsible,"--in cases where pornography had nothing to do with the rape, to anyone's knowledge. Those same hearings contained testimony from two women who both said that they had been exposed to pornography in the form of Playboy, Penthouse, and Oui, and that from these magazines they "learned that the relationship between men and women is one of violence." (No one at the hearings asked how they could get that from the aforementioned magazines.) The Campaign Against Pornography & Censorship\* provides male speakers who will attest that they were "branded by pornography" and that porn caused them to have "degrading" thoughts about women.

Additionally, Catherine Itzin placed an article in Cosmopolitan explaining how pornography "causes" violence against women and ran a survey alongside it asking women if they had been assaulted and if porn was involved in the assault. (Interesting tactic--first tell people what their answers should be, then ask the questions.)\*\* Consistent with most studies on groups of women, about 25% said they had been sexually assaulted. About 14% of these women said pornography was somehow implicated in the event. Itzin calls this study "proof" that porn causes rape, but of course this rather ignores the 86% of these assault victims who may know men who read pornography, may read porn

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\*Catherine Itzin's anti-porn group, an offshoot of the Campaign Against Pornography. CAP wants legal bans on porn; CPC wants to use Dworkin-MacKinnon type legislation to make pornographers liable to "civil rights" suits when women are raped. I leave you to imagine the legal workings of this process and who the chief witness would be.

\*\*Ms. Itzin did not wonder whether the effect of reading a magazine which tells women they have to starve themselves to death in order to attract men could possibly have any negative effects on women.



themselves, but cannot say that they have ever been victim to any violence in which pornography was implicated. (Perhaps more importantly, and like most studies of this nature, it ignores the largest single factor in rape reported by women in surveys--as opposed to police reports, where records of rape are skewed by what is legally considered rape at the time. Most studies show that 40% of female rape victims were raped by their husbands. In England and Wales, until this year, marital rape was treated as protected violence, and therefore not a reportable crime.)

What is missing from data of this kind is controls--something to measure results next to. If the only evidence about porn you listen to comes from violence victims who will try to implicate porn, you're leaving out, for a start, all those battered and sexually abused women and children whose assailants don't look at porn, to say nothing of all those porn users who don't assault people. Here's a piece of anecdotal evidence about what men think of when they see nude women, from a well-known peeping-Tom:

Is lust acceptable? I like to defend those poor, unappreciated prurient feelings; I think they're kind of, well, sweet. And, at best, awesome. I remember one of my first experiences with sexual longings; it was in the winter of 1957 and I was trudging home from school in the slush and twilight. I happened to glance up at an apartment window where I saw a young, blond woman, in the nude, admiring herself in a full length mirror. I stood there for what was probably a full minute, totally transfixed by the sight. I experienced beauty, awe, tenderness, and the feeling of being utterly blessed. This is one of my most treasured memories.

- Steve Stiles, BSFAn #18, Winter 1990-91

Violence, huh?

But Catherine Itzin spends a lot of time trying to convince women that pornography has made our lives such a walking nightmare that we can't travel safely on the streets, despite the fact that most rape occurs inside the homes of the victims. Although it is undeniable that rape--even stranger rape--does occur in the streets of this country, the portrait of terror that Itzin continuously paints is wholly inconsistent with reality. Most women, at most times, are pretty safe walking through London alone--something I've been doing for years now, travelling home on the underground all by myself at closing time, too. On the other hand, I'm glad I'm not a young male, the most likely victim of street violence. Martin Smith was walking back to my house from the off licence in broad daylight last summer and a complete stranger smacked him upside the head and knocked his glasses into the street--Martin spent the rest of the evening in pain, nursing a shiner. John Brosnan and Alun Harries have both been assaulted by strangers on the street in the time I've known them, and Martin Tudor spent most of Follycon taking painkillers for similar reasons. The only woman I know to have been a victim of violence in this country during that same period was one woman who is alleged to have been assaulted by her husband, in their home.

Itzin would have you believe that life for women, in every respect, has become worse over the last 30 years because pornography has become more available. Men don't respect women such as herself, who are authority figures ("Doctor

Itzin," she stressed pointedly at the 1990 annual general meeting of the National Council for Civil Liberties). People make rude remarks to her and disagree strenuously and stuff like that, because she's a woman, you see, and they don't respect her because of pornography. Ms. Itzin apparently harbours the belief that men never say rude things to other men. She also doesn't seem to realize that the reason people laugh at the remarkable things she says is that they are laughable. I mean, does she really believe that there was no violence against women 30 years ago? (For the record, she says she does.) Did Hugh Hefner invent rape, or what? And for that matter, how many women had doctorates 30 years ago? Get real folks, women were given so little credibility back in those days that even all the experts on being a housewife, having a child, or being a lesbian were men.\*

30 years ago, if you got raped, you didn't tell anyone. Today, people are aware of rape, they talk about it, sometimes the police even take reports seriously, and in some countries marital rape is actually treated as a serious crime. Maybe pornography even has something to do with that--is it really any accident that a higher percentage of victims are likely to report rape in countries where hardcore is most widely available? We read sexual material, sex is part of the public discourse, and now we actually say out loud the things we all hid in secret before, and one of them is the fact of violence against women.

Do you feel more frightened because there's more violence, or do you just feel more endangered because you know about it? We keep hearing of rising rape rates, but is it the number of rapes that is going up, or just the percentage who report? And when people quote numbers to you, are they really bigger than previous numbers, or do they just sound bad because you didn't know how bad it really was? Last year when I was in the States, an anti-porn activist attempted to shock me with the "rising" frequency of rape by telling me that, "There's a rape reported every six minutes in the United States." "Really? Are you sure that number is correct?" She was, and she quoted all sorts of reports to prove it. The problem with this statistic is that in 1977 the frequency of reported forcible rape in the US was one every three minutes--twice the new, "higher" rate.

Anti-porn campaigners will tell you that there are more rapes in areas where porn is widely available and widely consumed. This is not exactly true, but there is an illusion of truth in that high rape rates are consistent with other factors (principally, a high percentage of divorced men in the population) which happen to coincide with high porn consumption where it is available (that is: divorced men appear to consume a lot of porn; rape rates are high where the percentage of divorced men is high, whether porn is available or not; rape rates are low even where porn is widely available when the population does not contain a high percentage of divorced men. You get to guess why). What is true is that (a) victims are more likely to report rape, and (b) the police and courts are more likely to treat more kinds of rapes as serious crimes, in countries where pornography is legal and widely available.

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\*Itzin is not wrong in thinking that women are treated with less intellectual respect than men are; she's just wrong in thinking it is worse, not better, than it used to be.



So, since porn has become more widely available\* we have seen an increase in rape awareness--people recognize that women do get raped, even when they aren't necessarily "bad" women, and that the figures are a lot bigger than anyone admitted before. As women have become more aware of the threat of rape, we have become more fearful. But is the danger really any greater? Surveys that ask women about their experience do not really reflect a higher likelihood for women to be raped, but we do appear to think we are in more danger than we were before. This is good if it means that women are forwarned, of course, and it is helpful to victims if they are not made to feel like exceptions. People--and particularly women--are far more sympathetic to and understanding of rape victims than they were 30 years ago. But is a new fear of leaving the house helpful, or is it just paranoia? Female fearfulness went down in the late '60s and up again by the late '70s. The implication was that women were "fooled" by sixties liberationist rhetoric into believing they were entitled to equality of public freedom with men, but now we "know better" and think it wiser to hide behind the illusory protections offered by patriarchy and the state.

Throughout the '80s, we saw an increased willingness to condemn promiscuity for a variety of reasons; AIDS, the fear of rape, high divorce rates and other factors gave people with a repressive agenda an excuse to trumpet their cause loudly once again. Even some people who were noted sexual libertarians in the '60s were "re-evaluating" the situation and coming to the "mature" conclusion that monogamy was a Good Thing. Feminists who once condemned marriage were finding it a reasonable alternative to the uncertainty of less "stable" relationships. Worst of all, if traditional, institutional, heterosexual marriage was being embraced, it could no longer be treated as a factor in sexual violence, and therefore a new villain had to be found: pornography.

Anti-porn campaigners warn women that the possible dangers of sexual violence are too high a price to pay for freedom, whether it be freedom of expression in general or the specific right of women to explore their sexuality. We should cower once again in the "safety" of marriage rather than risk the fear of sexual assault, we are told. Pornography "gives men ideas", you know, and those ideas are of no use to women. Anyway, porn is just "pictures of women for men", and shows "no mutuality"--and you know, they are absolutely right about that, where the UK is concerned, because the existing censorship doesn't much allow you to show anything else. How can you have mutuality if you can't show people together? How can you portray men sexually if you can't even show erections? Anti-porn "feminists" say this is an innate trait of pornography, but it certainly isn't a factor in the porn available in Europe and America, where plenty of porn shows mutuality, cocks, female sexual assertiveness, and such. The much-deplored "imbalance" British women find in porn is an artifact of censorship, not of human sexual interest in sexual material. In other

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\*For about five years in the UK, actually. Then the Obscene Publications Acts came in and made hardcore fairly difficult to get. It is perhaps no accident that this did not happen in the US, but marital rape became a crime instead. It is only now, 15 years later, when sexual issues are being fought over once again in the UK--around the issue of pornography-- that the courts are beginning to treat rape in marriage as a crime.

countries, women consume pornography; they don't do it here because there's nothing to buy.

So, once again, everything you know turns out to be wrong. Big deal, you knew that already, right? Just a new detail in the fabric every day - porn doesn't cause rape, Eli Whitney didn't invent the cotton gin, and there was a female Einstein, after all.\* Just remember that the next time you read yet another "study" or hear someone else describe their fantastic analysis of the "real" meaning of Madame Bovary.\*\*

**Questions for study:**

1. What is "Stairway to Heaven" actually about?
2. Can Robert Plant write poetry?
3. Do you fantasize acts of violence when you:
  - a. look at pornography;
  - b. masturbate;
  - c. have sex?
4. What do you think (other) men think about when they look at porn?
5. Since when did Cosmopolitan become less reprehensible than Playboy?
6. If you can find a place to buy it, will you get Quim?
7. Of the following, whose opinion on sex would you trust more:
  - a. Clare Short;
  - b. Ken Livingstone;
  - c. Steve Stiles?
8. Why will pictures of erections "deprave and corrupt"?
9. What do pictures of nude models standing around have to do with violence?
10. If Einstein was known to be so weak at mathematics, who did the math for his theory of relativity?

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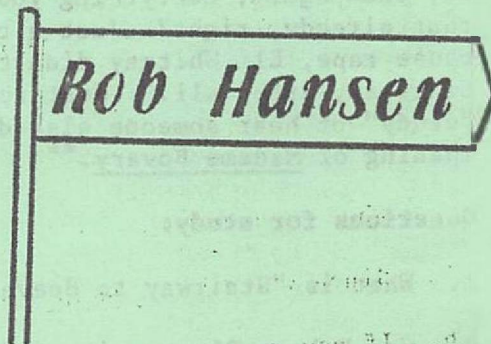
"People laugh at the funniest things!" - James White

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\*"Dogs flew spaceships. The Aztecs invented the vacation...."

\*\*For a hilarious interpretation of Flaubert's text, see Andrea Dworkin's Intercourse, in which it is proved that women are destroyed by enjoying sex.





Something would have to be done about Martin Smith, I decided - but what? I was thinking about my fellow Fanhattonite while sitting at a table in the lounge of the Cairn Hotel with a convivial group of fans, supping a tasty pint of bitter and gazing out the windows at the surprisingly charming town of Harrogate. We were indulging in that casual character assassination of absent friends that we all deplore yet enjoy so much, when committee person Abi Frost came dashing over. There was nothing remarkable in her doing this. Indeed, Abi dashed everywhere all weekend, a twitching streak of nervous energy propelled by adrenalin and fuelled by prodigious cigarette consumption. Just watching her made you tired. She could have dashed for England. After a breathless greeting she showered us with copies of a flyer in support of her TAFP candidacy before zooming off again, crisp packets and flyers bowling along in her wake.

MEXICON 4 started on Friday, as conventions usually do, and after the opening ceremony we were launched straight into the play, the latest production from Geoff Ryman and his troupe. Having enjoyed earlier Ryman stage adaptations of Philip K. Dick's *TRANSMIGRATION OF TIMOTHY ARCHER* and of D. West's *PERFORMANCE*, I had high expectations of *THE UNLIMITED SEX COMPANY*, a totally original piece rather than an adaptation of an existing prose work. Unfortunately, it was incoherent and incomprehensible and, like many others, I left before the end. I did, however, stay long enough to see the bit where one of the players, Simon Ings, pranced around the stage wearing nothing but a black leather jock strap. The interest of the women in the audience picked up noticeably at this point - particularly since, if the size of the bulge in the jock strap was to be believed, Ings was improbably well-endowed. There was much speculation in the bar afterwards as to just how much of this was him and just what he used for padding. I suggested a cucumber, one of the more sensible theories on offer.

I'd started handing out copies of *THEN* #3, containing my history of 1960s British fandom, as soon as I arrived at the hotel. One of those who features prominently in its pages, Pete Weston, was delighted when I gave him his copy.

"What a fine fellow you are, Rob," he said, putting his arm around my shoulders and hugging me chummily. "Let me buy you a drink. Let me buy you two drinks."



He would buy me drinks all weekend. Even before he'd read it Peter Weston was impressed with THEN #3. Eileen Weston was impressed with Martin Smith. What impressed her about him was how French he looked. Martin's alleged Gallic qualities remained invisible to everyone else (though I suppose he does bear some resemblance to a crumpled Gaulois packet), but this didn't stop Eileen from pushing his jacket sleeves up to his elbows and ruffling his hair to emphasize his Frenchness. Personally, I didn't think this could be achieved by anything less than a complete body transplant.

I too was working on Martin's image. Over the previous twelve months Martin had achieved a rate of sexual success with women from different parts of the world and from different parts of the sexual spectrum that was the envy of lesser mortals such as myself and I thought that more people should know about this. Most fans knew Martin only as an amiable dope and butt of my jokes, but I was determined that from now on he would be known for what he truly was - a superstud and butt of my jokes. That's what friends are for, after all.

One of the first people I told was John Harvey. We were at an item organized by Linda Kraweke (the former Linda Pickersgill) that involved us standing around listening to taped music and drinking lots of punch at the time, sitting on the edge of the stage and feeling mellow. Earlier, at that same item, Eileen Weston had introduced Martin to a couple of teenage girls as a visitor from France who spoke no English and he had danced with them both, all the while responding to their attempts at conversation with a shrug and a feigned air of Gallic incomprehension. They were a little miffed when they discovered he was about as French as a bag of French fries only less tasty, but he still succeeded in luring them into the stalls. We could see them from the stage, and John whooped with laughter when I pointed out this doomed attempt at seduction. Just then Rochelle Dorey happened by and we told her what we found so amusing.

"I've got an idea," I said. "Why don't you go over to Martin, thump him on the shoulder, and shout: 'You bastard! You said you were coming straight back to bed!'"

John almost fell off the stage at this suggestion, particularly when Rochelle marched up to Martin and actually did it. I think I've only ever seen one other person's jaw drop as far as Martin's did then. (That had been a few weeks earlier, the jaw in question had belonged to a work colleague, and it had dropped thanks to my response to his simple greeting of "How are you?" "Well hung," I'd replied. Sometimes the quickness of the mouth deceives the brain...) Martin, possibly clued in by the laughter from the stage (John was going into meltdown beside me), soon figured out what was going on and gave me the finger. At which point Robert Stubbs wandered along, narrowly avoiding being knocked over by Abi as she dashed by, and wanted to know what was going on. We told him, and he asked if we wanted him to pull the same stunt as Rochelle had. We did, boy did we, but in the end he chickened out.

This anecdote went down well whenever I told it, which I did throughout the rest of the convention on the slightest pretext and, frequently, on none at all. Why, the very next morning it was appreciatively received by the group we were both sat with in the bar. It was definitely more fun telling the story when Martin was present. As his mentor and fanfather I felt it was my



duty to harden him against such mockery. Later he would thank me. Now, not realizing that I had only his best interests at heart, he protested that:

"If you're my fanfather then this is child abuse!"

"Why this fuss about child abuse?" I asked. "When I was a child we had to abuse ourselves."

It was a stolen line, but it had the desired effect. The beer that everyone at the table except me was drinking was a Mexican lager called Corona. Allen Baum, a visiting Californian, was suitably dismissive, announcing that Corona was as burro piss compared to Dos Equis. I agree, but a remarkable quantity of the stuff was downed during the weekend nonetheless, most of it after a slice of lime had been twisted into the neck of the bottle. Slouching in the comfortable armchairs that filled the lounge, the Corona drinkers all tended to hold the bottles in their laps which, as someone at the table pointed out, looked remarkably phallic. This led inevitably to a discussion of the manly images often used to sell beer.

"You've heard of that macho Israeli beer, of course?" I queried.

"Which one's that?"

"He-brew."

Taking their groans as my cue, I left the table and wandered over to the bar, still pondering over what to do about Martin Smith. As Abi Frost dashed by, Pete Weston strolled over.

"Let me buy you a drink, Rob," he said. Ever polite, I did.

We talked fanhistory, and Pete revealed that the company he owned had made the actual Hugo award trophies, though not the bases, for every Worldcon since 1984.

"I was over there in 1983, talking to Craig Miller, and he was complaining about how much it cost to get the Hugos made and how badly cast some of them were. Since L.A.CON II had a collection of old Hugos on loan as part of an exhibition they wanted to put on, he was able to show me just how poor they were. I told him I could do a better job at half the price and when I got home I found I could, too."

Pete had made a mould from the 'spare' Hugo that had been left over after SEACON '79, a trophy that he said he had "wrestled Malcolm Edwards for". Images from Ken Russell films sprang to mind, but for once the mind was quicker than the mouth and I said nothing.

These days Viné Clarke spends much of his time tending the temperamental electrostenciller that produces most of the e-stencils used by British fandom. After many months of this he badly needed a break. So he came to MEXICON and instead spent most of his time tending the temperamental electrostenciller that produced most of the e-stencils used for the convention newsletter. It was the same machine, too. In between trips to the committee room he, like me, got to meet Derek Pickles, who was attending his first convention in 37 years, a record for British fandom and pretty damned impressive in anyone's

book. So going cold turkey can break you of the fannish habit, eh? Don't you believe it. Once a fan always a fan. If only the same were true of dancing...

The convention disco is an old and venerable tradition at British conventions, one at which old and venerable fans risk coronaries as they throw themselves around the dance floor with the same abandon as fans half their age and a third their weight. On this occasion the committee had arranged for the DJ to play records from the top 100 singles in the book by MEXICON guest Paul Williams. In the event things didn't quite work out that way but there was enough overlap to make it, in terms of the music at least, the best convention disco in years.

Usually I pace myself at these things, but there was enough good stuff that I let caution be bludgeoned into submission by the irresistible beat of that ol' debbil music and ended up dancing to three fast numbers in a row. This was not a good idea. At the end of the third track I was completely knackered. My heart was hammering furiously at my rib cage, Niagara Falls was gushing from my brow, my breathing sounded like a defective vacuum cleaner, and I was sure the pizza I'd eaten a few hours earlier was planning a comeback. I wanted to die. Pete Weston flopped down onto the chair next to mine, red-faced and drenched. He looked worse than I did.

"Rob," he gasped, "let me buy you a drink."

Pete is a good ten years older than me, so his condition was only to be expected, but I had let myself go. No longer a giant of the convention dance floor as in my glory days (sound of mournful violins), I was nonetheless confident that my place would be filled by the young lions of British fandom, those energetic fans coming through, hungry for recognition. True, Martin Smith shows little sign of being energetic, at last not while vertical, and all he ever seems hungry for is Kentucky Fried Chicken, but I remained confident. This confidence crumbled when L.Steve Hubbard, who is younger than Martin, collapsed onto the chair opposite Pete and me. I was shocked. L.Steve looked worse than either of us. The young lions are already grown mangy, it seems. Dismayed, I retired for the night, hopeful that things would look better on Sunday.

Perhaps being on a panel moderated by TAFF candidate Abi Frost while wearing a badge proclaiming my support for TAFF candidate Pam Wells wasn't the most tactful thing I've ever done. Then again, Pam's campaign manager, Martin Tudor, was also on the panel. Was Abi just being a good sport, I wondered, or was the panel going to be an experience she wouldn't wish on any of her own supporters? I'd soon find out. Not that I'd ever intended appearing on any of the programme items at MEXICON 4 in the first place. No, Abi had come looking for a sucker to take the place of the suddenly unwell Lilian Edwards (who had come down with an acute attack of sanity) on a fanzine panel. She found me. Knowing that some in the audience would have come expecting to see Lilian Edwards, I decided that when Abi introduced me I'd say "I may not be as cute as Lilian, but I've got better legs." That should get a cheap laugh. However, no sooner had Abi announced me as Lil's replacement than Martin Tudor had leapt in with "He's got cuter legs," and stolen the cheap laugh for himself. I was amazed. Was this an example of telepathy or had Martin



somehow got a look at my legs, which I seldom bare? I think we should be told. (I should, anyway.)

The panel was a mess. The editor of BACK BRAIN RECLUSE, a small press SF fiction magazine, was one of the panellists and Abi kept trying to draw parallels between fanzines and small press magazines that just don't exist. The two are entirely different, with fanzines, to my mind, being the superior form. Some idiot in the audience tried to claim that fanzines had once been largely given over to amateur fiction. When I contemptuously demolished that argument he retorted by saying:

"But surely convention reports are just another form of fiction?"

"No," I replied. "Magic realism."

This got an appreciative laugh and silenced my questioner, as I'd intended. Convention reports 'another form of fiction' indeed! In fact they are always rigorously accurate and unexaggerated accounts of the proceedings. Just like this one. Still, while up on the stage I'd at last decided what to do about Martin Smith. I found him and told him about the convention report I'd be writing as the first step in my plan for him.

"Martin," I told him, "I'm going to make you a fannish legend."

"You bastard," said Martin Smith.

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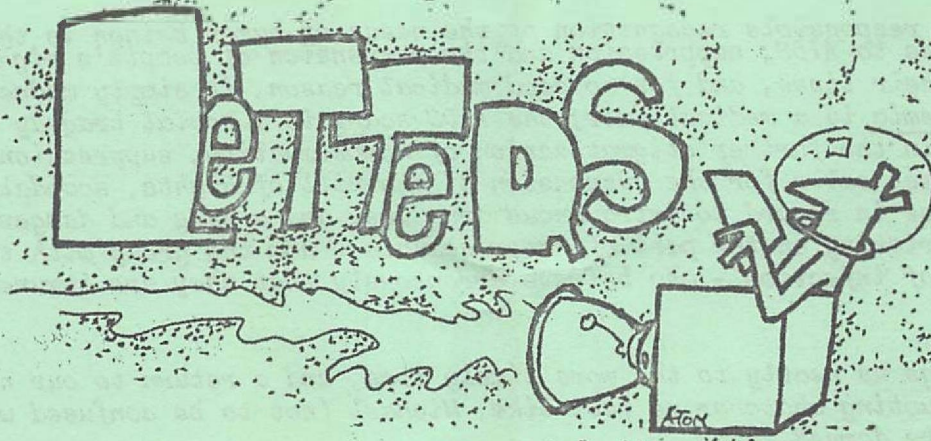
I sure wish I had a great interlineation to go in here.

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YOU GUESSED, RIGHT? By now you've probably noticed that Dave Langford has gotten tired of pushing himself to write a column on deadline, even one as lax as ours, just so he can be rewarded by having his best friends insult him. And Chuck Harris has been giving aid and comfort to the aged all over the place, so we haven't had a lot of mail from him lately we could scavenge from. And Avedon really wanted to do a BLATANT but didn't have the money or the energy to do two fanzines at once and anyway the PULP schedule has gotten really shabby and we thought we'd try to get out more than one issue this year, and... Well, that's all obvious enough, isn't it?

NEWS BITS: Meanwhile, Walt Willis seems to be recovering nicely from his aneurism, Pam Wells is gearing up for her TAFF trip even as I write (who's taking bets on the likelihood of you reading this before she gets back?), Spike Parsons is about to get married (Oh no, Patty Sue got married!) and Yugoslav fan Pavel Gregoric has been conscripted and is not too happy about it. Sadie Shaw will be missed, and we hope Bob is coping with her loss. Edinburgh fandom took a serious blow when Sandy Brown of INDIAN SCOUT fame had heart failure during a holiday in France. And I hope I don't remember any of the other depressing stuff that's been happening.

In other news, we didn't go to 20con in Birmingham (no money), but we did get some fanzines. There was a XYSTER from Dave Wood a few weeks back, a fanzine from Anonymous (but I recognized the handwriting) in Seattle called THE STRANGER, I agree with West on fnz publishing in DAISNAID 7, and Michael (not to be confused with Mike) Ashley put out a decent fanzine. So there.



*Although the last issue was ultimately published thousands of years late, or so it seemed, the lettercol was actually completed and handed over on disk early enough that there really were late locs on #17. However, just to show our profound respect for Michael Ashley (not to be confused with Mike Ashley), we will WAHF everyone who failed to insult us and just print the one that complained - all positive comments have been deleted, of course.*

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Avedon's editorial leaves me somewhat shocked. Surely she must understand the danger of exposing to children the notion that sex is always something "warm and friendly". Doesn't she understand how this sort of erotic comic book can ruin all the efforts

sensible people are making to teach children to beware of sexual overtures which they're too immature to handle safely? Doesn't she realize how serious and permanent a trauma can be when a child is lured into acquiescing to a brutal sexual attack? Does she want young people to be indoctrinated in the promiscuous way of life at the earliest possible age? I think her reference to "the AIDS scare" might not satisfy those who have seen a relative or a friend die from AIDS. "Scare" is hardly an adequate noun to describe a plague that is going to wipe out most of humanity if carriers are not identified and quarantined within the next few years.

*((Praise for Harris & Hansen here omitted - ed.))*

Alas, the next two items in this issue didn't interface properly with me. My stomach started to hurt after a page or two of Dave Langford's ulcer-nourishing food narrative and I stopped reading Kate Schaefer's explanation of why she thinks unborn babies should be killed, halfway through.

*((The worst thing you can feed an ulcer is milk, Harry. And one comic book is unlikely to teach children that sex is "always something 'warm and friendly'" when the entire world is already very busy trying to convince children that sex is always something nasty, dirty, dangerous and violent - a message no one growing up in our culture can miss entirely. Stories which show sex in a non-violent, non-coercive, mutual environment do not teach children to accept brutal assaults; ignorance supported by scare tactics does not arm children against exploitative adults.*

*And "scare" is exactly the right word for an attitude that recommends quarantine to deal with an epidemic of an infectious - but not contagious - disease.*



Education and responsible recognition of the needs of human beings is the proper response to AIDS; suppression and the suspension of people's rights for the rest of their lives, and for no good medical reason, is simply madness. The AIDS epidemic is a medical fact; the AIDS scare is a social tragedy which has resulted in the further stigmatisation of homosexuality, suppression of sexual openness, calls for the suspension of the Bill of Rights, scandalously stupid policies in regard to intravenous drug use, and a smug and dangerous sense of superiority on the part of heterosexuals - now the group with the highest rate of infection - who believe erroneously that they are immune to AIDS.

And that brings us neatly to the more timely locs, and a return to our normal schedule of quoting whatever we feel like, Michael (not to be confused with Mike) Ashley be damned.)

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Nice to have the re-recycled Langford and Shaw in semi-permanent form. Rob's Tafftrail seems hideously dated and naive and, of course, no longer entirely true-to-fact, but that's the whole point about

progress. Pity someone doesn't know that prophesy is a verb (the noun is prophecy, and the word always reminds me of my Bristol days for there, instead of forecasting the weather, "they do prophesy rain," can you believe).

Harry Bond has taken an awful lot of words - obviously falling into the JoNicholas prolixity fallacy - to tell us JoNic writes propagandistic crap and has no sense of either proportion or humour. Or to put it another way, JoNic thinks he is God.

It's all very well John Harvey "playing with DTP" - sooner he should learn either to spell or to check what he has typed, the most striking slip being that hoary old one that he misuses as "shit scarred" (the original tale is of a provincial newspaper reporting that they wished to apologize for referring to Brigadier Farnes-Barnes as a 'bottle-scarred' warrior; they had in fact, they said, meant to say 'battle scared').

The loccol is as ever challenging, but it's a darn good job my misfiling system still permitted me to locate the previous issue so I had some idea why they (and I) had written what we wrote. Do you think we could get the nextish in just a wee bit shorter time, like say a year or so?

((Probably not. As for the rest - it just proves I miss all these little subtleties - here I thought Harry was merely disagreeing with Joseph.))

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I can't speak for Martin Tudor, but I'd rather decline the "honour" Harry Bond awards us in Pulp #18 with the title of "fannish fandom's front-men," apparently on the single criterion of editing a large-circulation (by fanzine standards) publication

which carries news and features concerning science fiction and its community.

I would have thought it was obvious by now that Critical Wave is not a fanzine in the established sense. This is not to claim any superiority over fanzines; there is a freedom of expression particular to that form which cannot be

carried over into a "small press" publication, which is why both Martin and I still write for fanzines on occasion and may very well publish our own fanzines again in the future.

True, Critical Wave carries an occasional fanzine review column, its regularity governed by our success in finding people to write it. But that does not make us a "front" for fanzine fandom, any more than Wave's video reviews make it one for media fans, or its audio reviews one for folksingers. Rather, our intention has always been to cover all forms of imaginative fiction (fantasy and horror as well as sf, another distinction which seems to have evaded Harry), regardless of format, providing a central meeting point for all their myriad followings. Our sales demographics back this up; fanzine fans are only one element in our readership, and by no means a dominant one. We still value their views, of course, but we are equally interested in the opinions of convention organizers, of media fans, of costume fans, of all "the tribes of fandom."

Harry also seems somewhat confused as to the purpose of the "Fanzine File" column. It is not, and was never intended to be, an uncritical advertisement for the SF Fanzine. With varying degrees of success, the feature has aimed to analyse trends within fanzines, to comment upon those trends and to spotlight individual fanzines of note. Martin and I have also endeavoured to offer a platform for divergent views of fanzines, to highlight the different "voices" which exist within fandom; Joseph Nicholas is not alone in his opinions as to the current state of fanzines, much as Harry no doubt has support for the views he puts forward in his column for Pulp. But, to be fair, Wave has also carried fanzine columns by Paul Kincaid, Alan Dorey, Phil Greenaway, Maureen Speller, Eve Harvey, Ian Sorensen, Martin Tudor and myself, so the one edition Harry takes exception to must be seen in its wider context.

Regardless of whether you judge the above justifies inclusion in Pulp #19, I'd be grateful if you could correct the two major errors in the final paragraph of Harry's column. Martin's address is now 845 Alum Rock Road, Ward End, Birmingham B8 2AG (and has been since the end of last year). Critical Wave's subscription rate has risen since its July 1990 issue (as has its pagecount) and is now £7.50/year if paid by reminder, £6.50 if paid by standing order (forms available from Martin).

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Harry goes right for the jugular in his criticism of Joseph's supposed hypocrisy. Unfortunately, there are several jumps in logic and unexplained assumptions which severely weaken his arguments (although that's not to say it strengthens Joseph's).

The first fault I didn't spot until second reading. Harry criticizes Joseph's explanation of the shift from fanzines to conventions being based on disposable income as being basically flawed, but he has failed to provide evidence (i.e., a quote or paraphrase) that this was Joseph's explanation for the shift. Regardless of the truth of the matter, Harry appears to have conjured up the disposable income angle out of thin air. He has either assumed prior knowledge on the reader's behalf, or failed to include information he thought he had.



disagree about fannish fans not being comprised of cliques. They self-evidently are, but the other splinters which make up fandom (i.e., Small Press, mediafans, RPGers, filkers, etc.) are also composed of cliques, and that it is a basic mistrust of outsiders which engenders this paranoia as well as encouraging it, in effect making a suspicion a fact as everyone huddles around in little groups for self-protection. You can see this process at work in Harry's article as he becomes increasingly patriotic about this little country he calls Fannish Fandom. I suffer the same fears and in the past have often sought self-preservation through either a defensive position or attack. And I can see the same process at work, here.

His second mistake is more serious and complicated. He quotes Joseph as saying: "To survive, -(fanzine fandom)- has to...recognise that...it's just another special interest group within society. To suggest that fanzine fandom is somehow not a part of this 'non-mainstream' culture, and that it exists separately from it, is simply idiotic."

I was curious that he should see this fairly innocuous opinion as a horribly desperate remedy (or even that Joseph saw it as a remedy), because it is hardly prescriptive enough to suggest anything more than a direction towards a remedy. So I pondered at this very revealing phrase, 'horribly desperate'. It shows the difference between Harry's and Joseph's view of fandom. Joseph is portrayed as a reformer - an impassioned, but not a fanatical one, in the sense that whilst fandom means a lot to him, he is too knowing of its vices to feel a blind love for it. Harry, on the other hand, portrays himself as a man with a deep and heavily dependant love for it with his wildly over-protective, feverish defence. How to explain this seemingly inappropriate reaction?

Reading on, the mistake becomes apparent. First, in his assumption that fanzines, by their very nature, publish material "not available elsewhere". This is patently untrue. Harry admits as much when he later tells us PTT uses cartoons from The Guardian, but there are two further examples in this same edition of Pulp. Bob Shaw's article started life as a speech, and was first heard (and thus available as material) at an sf convention. Dave Langford's article was printed in a computer magazine. So maybe Harry meant that when fanzines do, they publish material that could not be published elsewhere. However, this view is also at fault. It reveals a chauvinistic egocentrism when we are reminded that the same rule can apply to any publication on any given topic, in any form, be it knitting for beginners, classic cars, or fanhistory.

Secondly, well, the latter part of his sentence doesn't make any sense. To begin with, it has no internal logic. This can be seen better if I turn the names into equations:

"Would you believe that A, B, and C would keep on publishing M if you could simply pop out to a newsagent's and buy some publication with columns by Y and Z and a lively letter column? Of course they wouldn't."

If you applied this proposition to the small press, it would be even more evident that it was nonsensical. Just because Y and Z may be available on a newsstand, it doesn't mean you would lose interest in A, B, and C, or that A, B, and C would lose interest in M, just because a similar product was univer-

sally available, for a price (or not, as the case may be). Dave Hughes continues to publish Works, despite the success of Interzone. In fact, Dave's success may be a direct consequence of the existence of IZ. The nature of the material is irrelevant, so long as people enjoy producing and consuming it. And if this strange proposition came to pass, why would A, B, and C cease production? Harry justifies this odd reasoning with the explanation, "It's the unique qualities of fanzines that make them what they are." This axiom is true of any worthwhile (i.e., quality) production, be it Prokofiev, Peter Greenaway, What Micro?, Locus, Pulp, or any preference of your choice. But by saying this he has also made a connection between a product's availability and its worth, and there is no absolute connection you can reasonably make between the two. I prefer Locus to Pulp, although Locus has a much higher print-run, and Mimosa to The Sun, despite its much lower print-run. Uniqueness, alone, is not worth a recommendation, and that Harry needs to qualify it with the word "qualities" suggests he is vaguely aware there may be a flaw in his own reasoning.

Harry then suggests Joseph wants these qualities submerged and indistinguishable from other groups' fanzines, but this is not what he quoted Joseph as saying. Harry quoted him as saying that fanzine fandom should recognize that it is nothing superior to other special interest groups and that it is making an error in cutting itself off from them. He doesn't actually say how this should be remedied, and Harry cannot therefore assume Joseph wants this submersion of quality and distinguishing features. Joseph's comments, as quoted, seem aimed more at addressing an attitude than a form or style. The quote beginning, "not just poetry, punk rock..." is not credited to anyone, although I assume it is Joseph's. If Harry so abhors Joseph's desire to see fanzines less self-referential and reverential and less arrogant and posturing, does he not wonder that this might suggest to his readers that he is not only recognizing a clique he denies, but identifying with it? A clique is defined in my dictionary as a small, exclusive group of friends. If he abhors the idea of fanzines appearing in newsagents, and more open to other speciality groups, then isn't he saying that he prefers fanzines which aren't widely available, which do only go to a select few?

Moving on to conclusions, I agree Joseph does not appear to have done much to encourage new blood into fandom, or to expand the idea of what a fanzine should be about; but I agree from my own limited observation and readings of FTT, not Harry's criticism of it. FTT doesn't even inspire me to loc it. It is a mainstream fanzine, with the added disadvantage of being a political one, a further off-putting factor, but generally I think that despite it being extremely well-written, it is dull. But that is only my opinion.

His note of patriotism at the end gives the game away. It is plain from Harry's comment that, "Fannish Fandom will unquestionably survive, as it always has in the past," that he did not approach Joseph's comments with an open mind. This goes a long way to explain his lapses of reason during the course of his argument, and reveal as biased attitude which isn't very fair towards Joseph.

His optimism that fanzines will "throw off their perceived air of cliquishness and unfriendliness," therefore, rings a particularly false note after the above. I find it ironic that Harry should deny the truth of these words even



as they are read. The comment, "For Fannish Fandom always survives," reminds me of the great British Empire, in India and elsewhere - those arrogant military men who said it would never die even as the Zulus and Ghandi's followers overwhelmed them. The sloofness of the remark, the loyalty and pride, seem entirely misplaced and desperate.

What fandom needs is fewer people arguing about its faults - surely we know them already? And if we don't, we never will. We need people who will do something, stick their necks out, experiment with the materials available to them, rather than copying the path of the herd. And if we don't do anything it is because we don't want to do anything, because we don't care (enough) to be bothered - whether it is to produce a fanzine or loc one, or to do anything else to freshen things up. Apathy is as much a killer as antagonism.

A thought-provoking review. Harry is trying to do in-depth reviews of fanzines, and we need more of such reviews in fandom. But if he is to be an effective critic he needs to make sure his arguments are cogent, that there are no missing pieces from his conversation with us. A review should never reveal more about the reviewer than the subject under scrutiny.

*((This year, Teresa Nielsen-Hayden got enough Hugo nominations to make the ballot in the Best Fanwriter category. No, you haven't missed all the great stuff she's been writing in fanzines - the popular explanation for her nomination is that she is on-line. I said years ago that I thought a considerable number of people who ordinarily would have become fanwriters/editors have taken the hook for oomputer bulletin boards instead. Teresa's absence from fanzines and apparently much-appreciated presence on-line tells me I may not have been far off in my suspicion that the river that used to feed fannish fandom's pond has been mostly diverted into the intimate electronic media. I can appreciate that - it is certainly more convenient and faster than making fanzines. The answer to Harry's question is that I, too, might be drifting off into cyberspace if I could afford it, and it's possible I would already have done so if I hadn't moved to Britain six years ago.))*

*I like fanzines because they are a lot more interactive than other publications. I like fanzines in sf fandom because I'm not interested in football and because here there are a certain number of convenient literary references, linguistic games and assumptions that are consistent with my experience and my way of thinking. I also like the rare and valuable sexpol fanzines because they talk about things I think are worthwhile - but they are harder to get.*

*Fandom is fun and energizing when it takes the serious seriously, maintains a sense of humour and friendship, and looks at itself in mutually supportive and myth-making ways. Fandom is tedious and boring when it spends this much space agonising over what's wrong with it. Which is why I'm not going to type any more about it.))*

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As usual, I enjoyed the writings of Chuck, though I took a dim view of the way he mentioned me without the complimentary additions he gave to Ina and Pam. He might at least have mentioned that although now 70 I am still mobile.

I was glad to catch up with another instalment from Rob. His description of his arrival in New York, of course, brought back memories of my own arrival and being met by Don and Elsie Wohlheim. I never thought then that we would lose both Arthur and Don in the same year. Added pathos is mention here of Rick's move when his death came so soon after. I suppose that's what reaching 70 means - you start losing your good friends.

Whilst chuckling at the dilemma outlined by Dave Langford, I congratulate myself on not having a word processor. All that glares at me is a typewriter, and I can put the cover on that.

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When/if (Ghoh forfend) Langford passes on to that great Mexican Bar in the sky, there will be a comfortable living to be made by some latter-day Christopher Tolkien sorting out, comparing, contrasting and publishing in interminable glosay hardcovers

the variant texts of his fannish oeuvre. I was sufficiently intrigued by a discrepancy between the Jetbuff version in this ish and my memory of the 8000 Plus version to search the latter out and run a quick textual analysis. The Jetbuff (which I will call J) version contains what may be taken as the Urtext, complete with the >COMMANDS, whereas the 8P version, in a refinement typical of late-period Langford, cunningly omits them, allowing the reader to form his or her own conjecture as to the player's side of the dialogue. Indeed, in this text the reader may well find himself identifying with the player in formulating his own responses to the game's conditions, and a vivid impression of the experience of playing a late twentieth century computer "game" may be gained from the fact that whatever the player's decisions may be, the computer's responses are unvarying. It has been suggested, by Bülg, among others, that the commands might have been omitted through an editorial error, or simply to fit the article into a specific wordage. Needless to say, such speculations are beneath the dignity of true academics...

And so on. Endless fun.

The gent with the dicotyledonous dong reminds me of the one point where Richard Cowper's beautiful and harmless Kinship trilogy and I regretfully parted company. With the best will in the world I cannot believe (a) that slitting someone's tongue down the middle is an op that can be performed with the equivalent of a penknife in the open without grave consequences; (b) that the two half-tongues thus created will operate independently, as in the playing of music on a pipe of any description; or (c) that someone who has undergone this process would ever be able to talk properly again. The same goes for the willy. Fine, if you're willing to risk never being able to use it again, but I think a man who can contemplate that with an easy mind is on another planet to start with.

Caroline Mullan is an extremely nice person and anyone who commits violence on her deserves to have his willy bifurcated to the neck; this goes without saying. In all fairness, though, Caroline has a tongue that could (metaphorically) do just that, and a seriously disparaging remark from her would provoke me into an extreme reaction (probably bursting into tears). I remember D. West comparing the relative effects on a person of an unfavourable fanzine review and a kick in the balls, and while I sort of see his point, if



you aren't being kicked in the balls at the time a well-aimed word or two can seem very painful indeed. The moral of which, I suppose, is next time go easy on them and use violence.

If what Chuck says about Quinsy 23 is still so, I am definitely asking, please nicely.

Goshwowboyoboy. I don't get to hear Bob Shaw talks much these days, so this is an unexpected bonus. The foreword seems horribly like an apologia, though. Is the BoSh losing his nerve? When did a Serious Scientific Talk ever need to be explained, let alone excused? Let us have no more of this excessive modesty, please.

I've often wondered what a yerba is and what defines a good one. And thank you, Rob, for articulating what I haven't dared to about graffiti-as-art. One question: what did you do in the Bergeron Affair, daddy?

Rap, like reggae, acid house, most heavy metal, so-called "modern classical" and a whole lot more, evokes a gut antipathy in me which is entirely to do with the sound of the music. But then, I actually enjoy some New Age music, so who gives a damn what I think.

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Creative Random History is a happy return (one I often beg of zine editors) of including con reports in zines. Chuck always tells it with a smile. If Chuck's boggle was out of sight, mine reached further frontiers than the Enterprise. What a wimp marketing has made of modern man that the sad creature will be conned into buying such uncomfortable gimmicks in the belief that they will enhance his own and his partners' enjoyment of his natural endowments.

Thank you, Rob, for the trip report (arm chair travel through fellow fan's writings is one of the great things about fandom), something to be enjoyed rather than commented on.

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I watched the report on TV, in April, about the attempted censorship of rock music in the USA (*Damned in the USA*) It was, I thought, one of the better programmes of the C4 "Banned" season. Since I was brought up Christian, I am almost automatically against Satanism, but I don't think that anyone could honestly approve of the explicit worship of the embodiment of evil, and some of the groups are certainly dancing on the edge of Satanism. But that is different to the rather wild claims that seem to have come to the courts, like the Judas Priest case. I have this mental image of some rising heavy metal star setting Hamlet's soliloquy to music, and getting charged with inciting a suicide. Are heavy metal iambic pentameters possible?

A lot of these things seem to be parents trying to find a way out of their guilt by blaming somebody outside the family, and the American system of lawyers taking a percentage of the damages, and general Christian fundamentalism.

What I found particularly creepy was the special school where teenagers were converted back to Christianity from good old Rock'n'Roll. It all seemed very nice and pleasant, though strict, but what was it like when the film crew had gone home? And what comes next? "Only the Thought Police mattered..."

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Regarding Janice Eisen's comments about Virginia Military Institute: the sad fact is, as America's service academies have shown, in no case are women cadets really treated with the same severity as the men. Part of it is that (at least in this culture) only a handful of the most athletic women can make the physical standards. Part of it, that traditional gentlemen simply can't treat women as harshly as they treat other men. Part of it, that our society would never accept it, even if they could. (Remember the Federal case made of the woman cadet handcuffed to a urinal for a gag!)

*((Do men want to be treated like rats? US servicemen have long had a reputation as the most obnoxious soldiers in the world, so I'm not sure clever gags like handcuffing people to urinals and just generally treating them like garbage has ever done us much good. Maybe the trick is to treat men as un-severely as the women are treated, and perhaps we'll get a higher standard out of our armed services.))*

WAHF: Kathleen Gallagher; Kev McVeigh (getting right to work on that condom survey); Valma Brown; Brian Earl Brown; Steve Jeffery ("Neat cover for PULP 17 by Stu. I haven't read Sturgeon's Microcosmic God for yonks now - the little benied Atom character in the magnifier was a nice touch."); Alan Sullivan; Peter Larsen ("Glad to see that Mr. Langford is upholding his country's reputation for peculiar ideas about what does and does not constitute food."); Lee Edmonds; Derek Pickles ("I liked Chuch's appendix to the Kama Sutra. When I was in the book trade I had acquaintances who were sent to one of Her Majesty's holiday camps for selling far more innocent stuff."); John D. Rickett (Oh god, this man actually approved of Langford's recipes, I can't bear it!); Steve Stiles; Gary Deindorfer (who has gotten into opera, which is interfering too much with his fanac, if you ask me); Andy Sawyer (no votes for nipple rings so far, boys and girls); Jonathan Covic (who is still trying to work out what all this fanstuff means, Mr. Natural!) & Joseph Nicholas.

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#### NEWS FROM NOWHERE

"Could you imagine saying "ombudskvinna" instead of the correct "ombudsman"? Or, even worse, "skjukskotarperson" instead of "skjukskoterska"? - Andreas Bjorklind 1989

"I regret that we of the FBI are powerless to act in cases of oral-genital intimacy, unless it has in some way obstructed interstate commerce." - J. Edgar Hoover (date unknown)

"The trouble with ghods, fannish and otherwise, is that they just do not exist." - Walt Willis 1960



"However the shroud was created (perhaps it floated down from the sky during a particularly heavy cloudburst of escargots and garlic butter), it remains a remarkable testament to someone or something's artistic talent, perhaps even genius."

"I thought real fans were fans who aren't divisible by the square root of minus one."

"Here the signs are currently giving evidence of a sort of satirical underground. A big sign reading 'FREE LOYALIST PRISONERS' has been provided with an explanatory footnote, 'WITH EVERY PACKET OF CORNFLAKES.' And more recently a poster declaring 'ULSTER SAYS NO' (to the Anglo-Irish Agreement) has been amended by the warning, 'BUT THE MAN FROM DEL MONTE SAYS YES.' A later afterthought pointed out, 'AND HE'S AN ORANGE MAN.' - Walt Willis 1989

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**SKIFFY SECTION** For those of you who wouldn't mind a trilogy or a series so much if you didn't find out it was one after you read the first book and had to wait two years for the next bit, here are a couple that are already finished so you can read them all together without that long tedious wait during which you forget what it was all about.

For pure cotton candy, Simon Hawke's Time Wars series is lots of fun and doesn't have too many anti-gun control speeches in it. There are ten books - all nice normal paperback-sized things that fit in your patch pocket easily. Great for reading on the train, too, and none of them end with those unsightly cliff-hangers that make you pissed off that you ever picked the thing up. Zen physics is a trip even if it is hard to follow. It is surprisingly non-cexist and has a few nice touches. He takes lots of entertaining liberties mixing legend (Robin Hood) and classic fiction (Dumas) with historical fact, but this is not nutritional sf here, it's just plain - well, like I said, fun.

I never would have read Christopher Rinz's trilogy if the person who recommended it (Hansen) hadn't said, "God knows why he picked such a lousy title, but it's real page-turning stuff." Dave Cockfield had recommended it to him with pretty much the same words, so I thought I'd give it a try, despite the fact that the titles of the books are the kind that would normally guarantee that I'd never pick the things up. Are you ready for these as titles for science fiction books? Get this: Liege-Killer, Ash Ock, and Paratwa. Really makes you never want to see it, right? But I tell you, I couldn't put them down. The middle book, predictably, is just the set-up for the third book, but altogether it's fairly absorbing stuff. These are fat books, too, so if you're the sort of person who really likes to keep going once you've gotten into a world picture, you get many pages of involvement out of this.

**FANZINE BIBLIOGRAPHY** Once upon a time Peter Roberts published the first three parts of the 'British Fanzine Bibliography' covering the years 1936-50, 1951-60, & 1961-70. After many months' research, Vinç Clarke has now completed part four: 1971-80. He has also acquired limited supplies of the earlier parts. These are available from Vinç at 80p each or £3 a set (overseas \$2 each - US bills only) from Vincent Clarke, 16 Wendover Way, Welling, Kent DA16 2BN.

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