

Rocky Arredondo & My Mom Present...

THE COBRA'S NOSE

Vol. 24

Welcome to the Solar System, Plutino!

17 Nov. 2000

The Cobra's Notes...

I was sitting on the Cosmodemonic smoking porch talking up **THE NOSE** to a potential subscriber. The conversation was proceeding as well as could be expected. I still get tripped up on the question, "Why do you think I should be reading this thing of yours?" but have found that recruitment-wise, talking is less trouble than my old strategy of sleep deprivation, cold baths, and chanting. Not as effective, but there's always some give and take.

Anyway, that's when Mr. Flintstone burst through the door from the Break Room, red faced, yelling, and waving his arms. Mr Enigma followed close behind, grinning like a Buddha. I have no doubt whatsoever that whatever the opic of the altercation, Mr E started it and provoked Mr. F's wrath. None. But I can't help but admire how gentle he seemed whilst Mr. Flintstone demanded sympathy for his position in a tone that would be grounds for a restraining order. My brother Chuck used to do the same thing all the time (oh yes you did), and somehow managed to time the instant I blew my top with the arrival of a parent. He was very good. Mr E may be one of the greats. He has refined his talent so that now he uses it not only for sport, but for...well not good *per se*, but he does effect change in his environment and when I approve of these changes I'm all for it.

And I don't mean when he gets Mr. Flintstone all riled up; frankly, that's a little scary. But I was thrilled when he made Twig quit.

Twig was one of those rare...okay, not all that rare...people whom I disliked at first sight. He wafted around Cosmodemonic like an orb and asked permission to do things like make a pot of coffee or leave for lunch. He would linger like a smell after any encounter, and like a smell, you'd want to wave your arms around vigorously to make him dissipate. In looks and behavior he was a dead ringer for Beavis and Butthead's sensitive teacher who sang about lesbian seagulls. "Lesbian Seagull" was in the running for Twig's Cobra name, but it has five syllables and takes fifteen key strokes (counting the space) so it got ruled out pretty quickly. In addition, Mrs. Twig was insufferable in equal though opposite ways. My theory, and I think it's one of my better ones, is that they were only of middling irritation to humanity before they met, but thereafter rarified each other into a world class toxic combo of passive-aggressive and aggressive-pain-the-ass; but still small time to Mr Enigma.

And so after Mr E's careful campaign of boy-I-wish-I-knew-what, Twig was taken on his farewell tour of the building. At least that's how Mr E tells it, and I'll buy it because I hadn't been so happy to see anybody go since I thought Cosmodemonic was losing Miss Byron and his stupid fat bottomed Starbuck's mug forever. The latter was not to be. Miss Byron returned after only a couple of days, as did the bellowing calls from Mrs. Miss and his mom. Twig, on the other hand, seems to have vanished into the ether; and Mr Enigma sits Cheshire Cat-like and alone in the office they would have shared.

Somewhere in this tale is a moral I should absorb. These are my favorite candidates:

One: To find happiness and direction in my job and life, I have to learn to tune out pernicious influences like Mr Enigma and Chuck. Heh, heh—that's not it.

Two: Everybody has a place in this world, and if one searches long enough one will find it—even if one is Twig. No, the smart money isn't on this one,



The Comptess de Castiglione

either.

To present the only moral I can really get behind on this one, I'm going to relate another little story. On an evening not too long ago, I was sitting on the porch with Pat, whining about my many faults and evil tendencies (of which "too lazy to change" is number one and "constantly whining about it" is a close second). After listening as long as he could manage to my "I'm such a bad person" lament, and it was a good two or three minutes, he finally burst in with, "Good grief. Just embrace it." I think that's what is behind his weird "Hot or Not?" fixation (which can be traced on his website www.davidbowie.com/users/theguyna/narcpat.html), embracing stuff.

And *that* is the wisdom I'd like to espouse for the month of November, when we all gather 'round to give thanks for this and that—*embrace* the personal qualities that would normally cause chagrin and make them work for you. Like the Doctrine & Covenants says, there are gifts (like speaking in tongues) to be grateful for, but the absence of these gifts is also a blessing (especially *not* speaking in tongues, I mean, can you imagine?). Or as Johnny Mercer put it, "Ac-Cent-Tchu-Ate the Positive," even if it is "negative" by some narrow, societal, religious, workplace, etc. standards.

Sharon C. McGovern
Editor/Publisher/Cobra-in-Chief

Diary of a Mad Scullery Maid

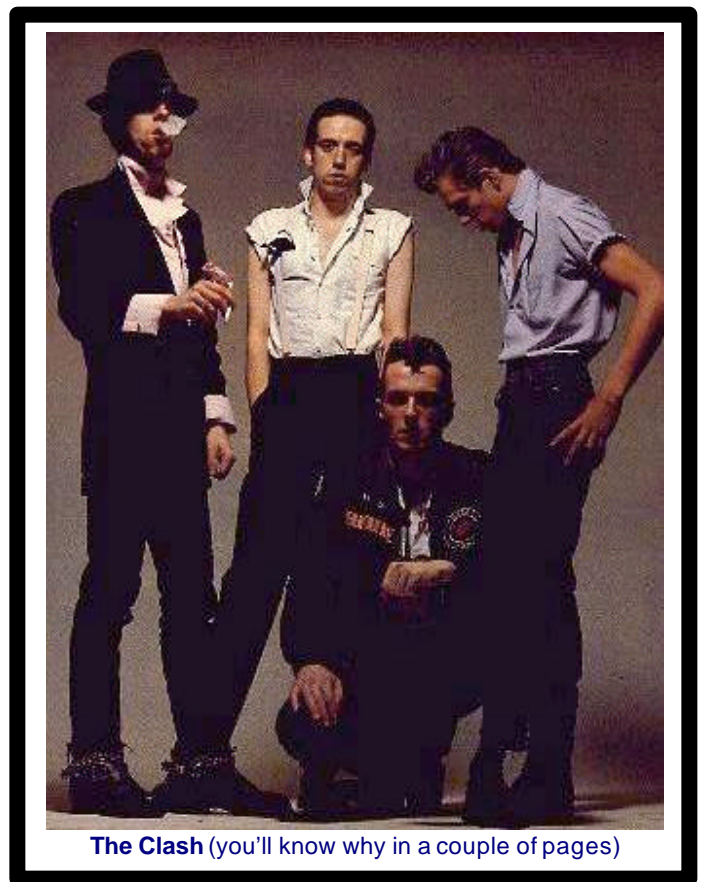
Somehow, word has gotten out that “kitchen slave” is part of my job description. Well, not just mine. One of the women in my department dropped a note in the Cosmodemonic suggestion box which proposed the company buy a dog or goat to dispose of scraps and other bits of trash from the Break Room because she was tired of doing it herself. When she mentioned her request to the company president, he chuckled and mentioned that the managers were vested with the power to give cash rewards to whomever they saw perform random acts of cleanliness. Unfortunately, any acts of cleanliness our department performs are seen not so much as random as compulsory, and the myth of cash bonuses hasn’t been enough to mobilize most Cosmodemons to such demeaning activity.

A week or so ago, I was putting a sinkful of dirty coffee mugs into the dishwasher whilst Empress @\$%, Mrs. Giggler, and one or two others slouched in their chairs, the evidence of their meal broadcast on the table before and the floor around them. Empress yawned and said, “I don’t know why people don’t just take a minute to put those cups away. It’s not like it’s hard or anything.” There was a murmur of agreement from her companions. When I finished with the dishes and started wiping down the counter, Mrs. Giggler dragged herself over to the refrigerator to check the status of an abandoned cheesecake.

This was an item I was compelled to plead for earlier in the day. It was packed in a plastic wrapped cardboard box, probably bought at Costco or some such place, and completely intact—or so it seemed. If I am conscious of the horrors of the fridge, I am somewhat compelled to do something about it. Sure, I know what you’re thinking: *Ah, the glamour, romance, and adventure of cleaning an office refrigerator!* But it isn’t like that at all. It’s smelly, and grimy, and wrecks your nails, and is shadowed by the likelihood that Pus will come in screaming about your ambush on his lunch that occurred after three e-mailed messages and one printed announcement—which in all fairness *was* concealed next to the sign-in sheet on the Reception Desk. “That’s so ignorant!” he bellowed at me on one memorable occasion, then stomped off to write to My Boss that restitution should be made for the lunches (frankly, he was not the only one who bellowed at me that day) that were tossed “without warning to there owners.”

So, I try to delay these episodes by sending out missives on behalf of the food. “You loved us once,” the food gravely asserts. “You bought us, packaged us, exploited our tender bodies. How could you leave us here to rot?” The cheesecake struck me as a particularly tragic case, going from bought to rot without ever knowing the joys of being plundered. And now, Mrs. Giggler was headed over to kick its corpse.

“Ew,” she said, “Ew.” I studiously ignored her. “Ew. This should be thrown away.” She paused a moment, but I was deep in my counter wiping meditation. “I will throw it away.” She pulled it out of the fridge and stalked over to garbage can with a look of horror on her face that would inspire the envy of the most (cont. on page six)



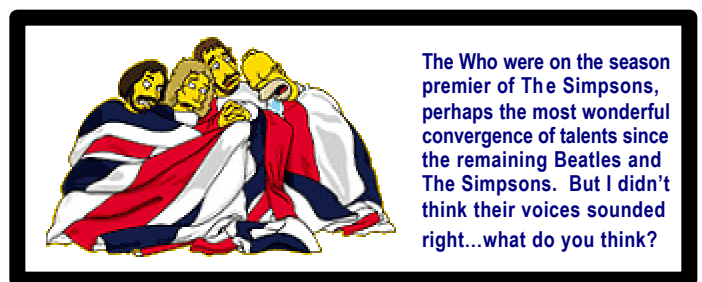
The Clash (you’ll know why in a couple of pages)

CHALLENGE ACCEPTED, CHALLENGE MET!

In Volume 21 of this publication, I passed along a challenge by The Man to whoever had the bravery and technical know-how to record Empress @\$% paging somebody, alter it so that she would request a call to her “new” extension “666,” and play it during business hours. Today, I am thrilled to report the challenge was met and rewarded by none other than Maestro Toe.

It was a dark and stormy Thursday afternoon suddenly interrupted by an organ playing in a minor key, then a ghoulish laugh, then most chilling of all, the very voice of Empress @\$% saying, “Topper, call me at extension 666.” This was followed by a more hysterical cackle from the ghoul, and that was that. You’d think all that production design would provoke a lot of comment, but aside from somebody in Empress and Topper’s department calling to tell me they had gone home for the day, I didn’t hear a word about it.

For good measure, Maestro Toe played an unadorned version of the page a few minutes later and was rewarded soon after. I have heard rumor of another Empress @\$% Challenge, and will let you know if and when its conditions are formalized. 🍷



The Who were on the season premier of *The Simpsons*, perhaps the most wonderful convergence of talents since the remaining Beatles and *The Simpsons*. But I didn’t think their voices sounded right...what do you think?

Cookin' with Cobra And Friends



The other day, my new friend and co-worker (and the Future Mrs. Larry Mullen, Jr.) offered me a portion of her leftover lunch. It was an example of Middle Eastern cuisine—that is to say, it was a pile of mashed up stuff to be eaten with flatbread. As your friend and Cobra, I am always on the lookout for yummy foreign delicacies to share with you. I pressed Mrs. Mullen (may as well get used to calling her that now) for the recipe, and she selflessly agreed to share. I myself plan to make an enormous batch for Thanksgiving, then settle in to watch every inning of all the football matches. Does anybody know if the Native Americans are playing? --ed.

To make mouth-watering Hummus (pronounced “hummus”) the Amy way, start with a clean, empty medium-sized bowl. Pour dry hummus mix into bowl and throw away or recycle the cardboard box.

Then dig through the garbage or recycling container to retrieve said hummus box to see amounts of other ingredients necessary. Add roughly the amount of required water and stir in clockwise direction only. Stirring counter-clockwise (or “anti-clockwise” for our British friends [*you know who you are—ed.*]) will ruin it, I’m pretty sure. I haven’t tried it and don’t know anyone who has, but my cousin once knew a guy.)

Find box again to see how much oil is required and add twice as much. Stir but leave some oil unstirred.

Set microwave for 3 minutes but take it out after about 25 seconds. Add tomatoes and maybe some more oil. Grab some pita bread, a kitchen towel and take everything down to a carpeted floor and eat ‘til you’re sick of it.

Martha Stewart, watch your ass. Happy Thanksgiving 🍷



A view of our backyard, photo by Patrique

A Spoiled Walk Redeemed

For the second time in my life I reside on the perimeter of a golf course. I’ve never thought much of golf, despite it being a product of our family’s Celtic heritage. Not directly, of course. My dad who had more Celtic blood than anyone else in the most recent couple of generations taught his children to disdain the sport, likely his greatest success at teaching us anything. But whatever you can think to say pro or con (my favorite con being Mark Twain’s quip that “golf is a good walk—spoiled”), the courses make a fine backyard.

This was true as a kid in Maine, where (I recall without a pang of conscience) we drove the golfers nuts by ranging all over the course with a perfect sense of ownership. We laid low enough to avoid being Spoken To by the authorities, but basically those were our estate lawns and the sportsmen were nothing more to us than crabby gardeners. It is true now, as (I relate without a pang of conscience) Pat tosses the golf balls that stray onto our complex’s courtyard into a fountain. And it is especially true when after a heavy rain and the entire golf course is bisected and incapacitated by a river.

This morning, after luxuriating in a weekend of thunderstorms, I looked over my backyard and saw a green valley sparkling with dew and wrapped in an honest to God mist, all this under a purple sky with pink clouds and a teensy little crescent of moon, and no golfers anywhere. Looked over to the right and saw cranes, one gray one white, standing in the water. I like to think of it as a preview to my European Adventure, only lots cheaper and I didn’t have to pack. Or maybe I am a character from *Women in Love*, I’m thinking that grim spinster Hermione. 🍷

All are Safely Gathered In, Let the Winter Storms Begin

Thanksgiving is all about sacrifice, and remembering the early settlers of this country—a religious community that barely survived. While these are very fine principles and worthy memories, they make forbidding topics for a movie. In fact, I don't think I've seen a movie about Pilgrims ever (elementary school film strips don't count), and I'll be you haven't either. So let's go ahead and celebrate Thanksgiving with a story that takes place a couple of centuries later.

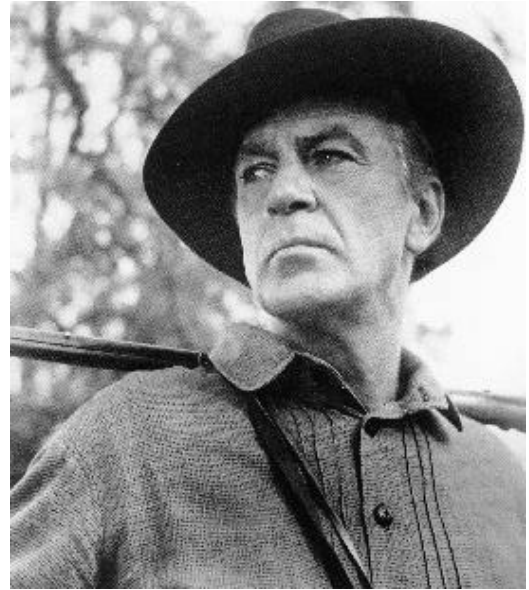
Friendly Persuasion is also about sacrifice in a religious community, and set at time when the country's future was in peril; but in this case, the sacrifices and are personal and ethical matters rather than distribution of tiny bits of grain, the religious community is composed of the moderate Quakers rather than firebrand Pilgrims, and the crisis is the inherently dramatic Civil War rather than phantasmal disease and starvation.

The movie takes a time establishing family and community relationships and poses various minor conflicts that foreshadow the big

one; but the major theme of the movie is the compromise. Every member of the Birdwell family is forced to give up some aspect of themselves that is key to their self-conception. For example, the patriarch makes a show of defying his wife, Eliza, and installing an organ in their house (she thinks it will threaten her standing as a Quaker minister), but joins her voluntary exile in the barn and agrees to her terms for keeping and playing it. Their daughter's vanity is injured when her would-be boyfriend overhears her rapturous description of him, but when she realizes he is returning to service with the Union Army she runs to him and cops to it all.

The most anguishing compromise is that of the eldest son, Joshua, who is disciplined enough to let bullies abuse him at a county fair, but cannot stand by while others fight and die in the service of principles he shares. The community pressure, both for and against his enlistment, is enormous. In one striking scene, an army recruitment officer enjoins the Quaker men to sign up with the local militia. He is rebuffed by Eliza and the elders in the congregation, but as her son watches him leave, he hears both her prayers for the continuance of pacifism and the tap of the officer's cane—evidently the result of battlefield injuries. The decision he has to make seems either to be between two equal goods—pacifism or the vigorous fight against slavery (the Birdwells employ an escaped slave, so the matter is close to home) and defense of their homes, or equal evils—shirking duty while profiting from the efforts of others and, well, killing people.

That conflict is handled with all the respect it deserves, even though there was a “now you've gone too far” Death Wish impulse of the part of a certain cast member that the author of the collection of stories upon which *Friendly Persuasion* was based had to veto. And if the above does not convince you that this is an ideal Thanksgiving's Day movie, perhaps the saturation of autumnal colors will sway you. Either way, rent this film. 🍁



Lost in the Supermarket (Strummer/Jones)

CHORUS

I'm all lost in the supermarket
I can no longer shop happily
I came in here for that special offer
A guaranteed personality

I wasn't born so much as I fell out
Nobody seemed to notice me
We had a hedge back home in the suburbs
Over which I never could see

I heard the people who lived on the ceiling
Scream and fight most scarily
Hearing that noise was my first ever feeling
That's how it's been all around me

CHORUS

I'm all tuned in, I see all the programmes
I save coupons from packets of tea
I've got my giant hit discoteque album
I empty a bottle and I feel a bit free

The kids in the halls and the pipes in the walls
Make me noises for company
Long distance callers make long distance calls
And the silence makes me lonely

CHORUS

And it's not here

Invasion of the Cosmo Girls

I don't know why, though I do have a theory or two, but at least three quarters of the new employees to Cosmodemonic have been cute, skinny blonds. Even as I was typing this, another one came in to fill out her paperwork for a job here. I find this situation strange and threatening.

Soon after I typed that, another one came in to fill out *her* paperwork. It's like an invasion from Sweden or Conde Nast.

Departments are being overwhelmed. Sales, not surprisingly, was the first to go. It is entirely comprised of Cosmo Girls (The Man likens them to stewardesses, and it's hard to find fault with the comparison). The fact half of them check "male" on their gym memberships is just a technicality. The last four hires in marketing have been in this mold, plus a couple of new Product Managers, and this other toothy chick with hair done like the Cowardly Lion's at the end of *The Wizard of Oz*—but I don't know what she does. Her name ends in an "i," though, and that's got to be trouble. Accounting used to be a bastion of brunets, but The Pill and The Supplement have put so many highlights in their hair I don't know that they count any more.


To be fair, they seem to be nice enough. One of them distinguished herself by saying weird things like, "What a comfortable looking couch; I shall take a nap on it so you can see how like an angel I am when I sleep," and threatening to quit every fifteen minutes. But I think she'd be a standout in any crowd. Most of them cruise around with big smiles on their faces

that make me want to shout, "WHAT?" at them.

For my birthday, I really wanted a wig, a good one, not like the one I let Pat borrow when he was Norman Bates's mother for Halloween a couple of years ago. I was thinking it was my ticket to a new and improved identity: Suddenly Sharon! Pat and I walked past a wig store on the way to getting a bite and sip, and I asked his opinions on their inventory. "How would I look in that one? How about that one? No? Are you sure?" et cetera. This is the kind of game Pat tires of fast, and eventually he just walked away. "Can't you see me as a blond?" I panted, trotting after him.

At the restaurant I pestered him with queries designed to help my image renewal, but he was shrewdly unhelpful. "Do I strike you as a whiny sort of person?" I asked. "More like a neurotic sort of person who would ask a question like that," he said. By the time I told him some co-workers had seen us together and had taken us for a couple and he retorted that they probably also thought I was getting paid too much, I knew it was time to let that line of inquiry drop.

The best way I found to alter my persona was to stick it on a business card. That was my Friday project from a few weeks back, and after Audrey showed me how to cut them properly (I regularly dismay her with my incompetence), I understood perfectly the business card showdown in *American Psycho*. If beautiful bits of paper could invest that pack of narcissistic weenies with an air of confident credibility, certainly it could do the same for me. Identifying myself as the Sharon C. McGovern, Editor/Publisher/Cobra-in-Chief of my card seems like a bold abstraction. That person is so remote that I regularly miss allusions people make to stuff I printed in the newsletter. Just yesterday, Maestro Toe challenged its authorship. Anyway, I cavalierly hand out cards and make extravagant claims for Sharon C. McGovern. Then I giggle and think, "This is how Ralph Nader's staff must feel."

So I think The Clash might be onto something when they go shopping for a guaranteed personality. Yes, I know the subtext is ironic and that consumerism is part of the singer's ennui. But as he identifies with and is characterized by objects—the coupons, the impenetrable hedge, the empty bottle—it's not a stretch to believe that a different set of objects will indicate then create a different kind of person. It may be a round about way of doing things, but from my experience with the cards I think there's some truth there. Cosmodemonic is busily acquiring Cosmo Girls and the whole character of the place has been affected by their arrival. Maybe I should do something to fit in, like buying that blond wig and grinning at people. But frankly, I've always pictured Sharon C. McGovern as a redhead. 

(cont. from page two) renowned Kabuki master. She dumped it with a final, mournful, “ew,” and returned to the fridge.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw her pointing at the space the late cheesecake occupied. “Look,” she said, “goo.” I decided I may as well set the timer on the dishwasher and fill the pan with soap. “GOO,” she repeated. “Ew. Somebody should clean this.” I closed the dishwasher door and watched her point at the alleged goo a few more times, then close the refrigerator door and return to her place at the table.

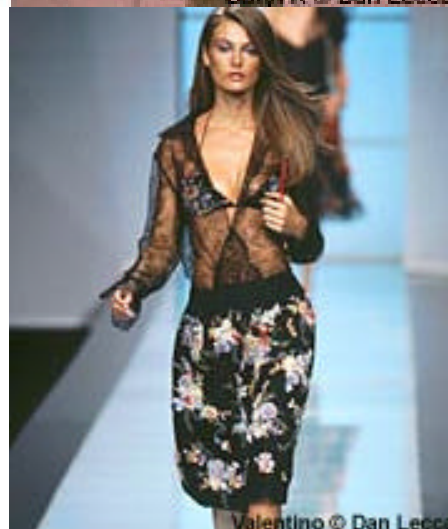
I don’t doubt for an instant that these people make more money than I do, and may well be from wealthier families, but did Mrs. G honestly expect me to start channeling a servile Cockney maid? “Coo! Goo, you say! Blimey if ‘taint so!”

I strolled back to my desk and left the goo to collect a protective layer of lint which I’m going to have to try and remove with cold Windex one of these days. And the day I do, every person who passes through the Break Room will shake their heads and tut-tut, and say, “I don’t know what’s wrong with people.” Everybody except Mr Enigma, that is, who will laugh and say he loves to see a woman at work in the kitchen, then leave his coffee cup in the sink. Pervicious, but at least he has the courtesy of being a forthright bastard about it.

Unlike Miss Byron, one of the hypocritical clucking hens who condemns the Break Room behavior of his colleagues then engages in it himself when my back is turned. Confront him and he’d certainly open his eyes wide in sorrow and shock and deny everything, but hardly a day goes by that I don’t see his stupid Starbucks mug sitting in the sink awaiting transport to the dishwasher. My co-worker (the one who wanted to buy a company pet) and I have made a pact to leave it there, hoping it would teach him a little something. Unfortunately, Our Boss usually puts it in before she goes home at night and we’re both too timid to seek a formal injunction against the practice. On the one morning when the mug was left in the sink the whole night, the cleaning staff, apparently having tired of knocking over all my picture frames, washed it.

That was really too much. A sort of mania overcame me and I poured coffee left from the previous day into it and swished it around. That didn’t look as bad as I had hoped, so I took the cup and lasciviously kissed the rim, leaving a trail of Great Wear by Mabelline that I hoped would give him pause and be at least as hard to remove as, I don’t know, Bill Clinton, say.

Did it work? Not by any measure I can think to use, but then, such childish measures do not deserve to. So the next time I see that mug sitting unwashed in the sink, I will simply hide it. 📦



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Use them.

End Nose...I'm hoping to

get this newsletter to most of you before Thanksgiving to give you a little something extra to be thankful for this year.

I was going to write something here about multifaceted experience, looking on the bright side of life (whistling here), that sort of thing. Then my head started hurting and all I want to do is sit here and look out the window. I don't know if there is a connection here or not. Maybe I'll listen to a little Dire Straits.

Anyhoo, have a pleasant holiday season and send me a Christmas card or I will shame you in these pages. And please give a big Cobra Welcome to Mr. Jim Cherry, a new subscriber and one of the first recipients of my fabulous new business cards.

Cosmo Girls, though clearly not on “Causal Friday,” at Cosmodemonic, because if it were “Casual Friday” at Cosmodemonic they would no doubt be wearing their Polo-style shirts with the company logo on them. I don’t understand why companies making a big deal about giving their employees crap with the company logo on it. If Cosmodemonic was serious about giving me a present, it wouldn’t have their name on it. It would have Donatella Versace’s name on it.