

The Cobra's Nose

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They're against NATO? What are they for? Soviet troops racing across Europe eating all the croissants?

The Cobra's Notes

The climax of *Gangs of New York* is not the climax of the narrative. The story builds to a showdown between competing thugocracies, but before either gang leader throws so much as a punch the infamous Draft Riots begin and swallow them up. The Civil War had simmered in the background throughout the movie. One memorable scene shows Irish immigrants arriving on the docks only to be enlisted in the Union army and waved onto other ships. These, having unloaded their cargo of caskets of Union soldiers, have room to transport fresh troops to the battlefield. But the main characters, Bill the Butcher, Amsterdam, and The Girl are too involved with their own problems to pay it much mind, until they are mugged by history.

The historical accuracy of *Gangs* has been debated in more worthy forums, but there are two especially notable things about its approach to the past. First, it shows the impossibility of knowing what events will effect an individual most. It might be a street fight or the reverberations of a conflict hundreds of miles away. Ignoring the world is no guarantee that it won't come busting down your door, torching orphanages (knocking down skyscrapers), murdering innocents and provocateurs alike. Second, the past was lousy and a lot of horrific violence was prelude to a significantly less lousy present. These are scary times, but not one moment of *Gangs* made me nostalgic for secessionists, slavery, the potato famine, anti-Irish discrimination (by Americans or Britons), Boss Tweed's political machine, or the dominance of gangs that kept the Five Points district even more of a sewer than the rest of New York City. While vestiges of these evils remain, and while the present isn't ideal, please look around and appreciate *how much better* it is.

Tom Wolfe has written the average American has a lifestyle that would make the Sun King blanch. I'm not even middle class, but I wouldn't trade modern plumbing, much less modern dentistry, for the Crown Jewels if it meant wearing them 100 years ago. I doubt you would either, Amy. I have a job (really!) that reminds me minute by minute how marvelous modernity is. Using high speed internet which transfers information in seconds, vast numbers of people are enabled to travel in jets to virtually anywhere on earth within hours. A grocery store which offers every staple and a huge number of luxuries, and unheard of selection, is within easy walking distance, as are a number of fast food restaurants which sell a balanced meal for a fraction of a day's pay. And they are just examples of thousands of such establishments. I can't even get worked up about those fat kids suing McDonalds because living in a country where poor people are more likely obese than starving is *wonderful*--again, not ideal, but stop a moment and reflect on how revolutionary, how humane that is.

I'd go on, but this font is way too small already. But remember, we live in an age of genius. The human intellect that a few millennia ago built the pyramids to house one dead king only a few decades ago brought the Green Revolution that spares *millions* from starving every year. Human beings are living in outer space *right now*. Don't even get me started on pharmaceuticals. And it all started with the overthrow of gang rule and tyranny, and the liberation of populations, of people like us. Just...*look around*. And be amazed.

Sharon C. McGovern

Editor/ Publisher/ Cobra-in-Chief



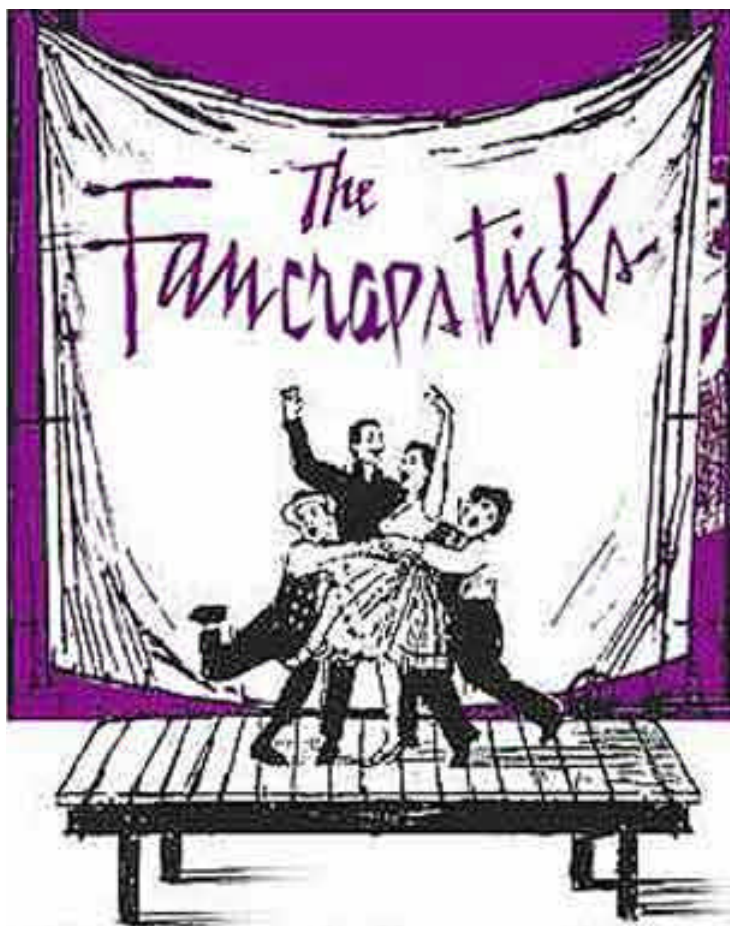
On Why this Cobra is Overrun by Dogs

I am currently in denial, but I may be turning into one of those weird spinsters with an unwholesome fixation on their pets. At one of my temp jobs, one of them had pictures of her dogs on her desk. Another had pictures of rabbits. I don't even have pics of a pet of my own--I have to use my brother's. Mojo. Who is barking at the front door because somebody on *The Simpsons* made a phone call. But I do think he is quite photogenic, if flighty, in the tradition of high fashion models. He also vomited on the carpet the other day. So anyway, the dogs on this page and those that follow are all Mojo: stud crumpet.

A Cube of One's Own

After all this time I thought I'd lost the taste for it, but I am now happily and gainfully employed full time in Phoenix. I'm still learning the secret handshakes and how to work the coffee maker, but I did get to choose my cubicle (*the biggest one*), and have begun to furnish it. And I have not touched a company phone one time since I started. Which is just as well, because I consulted the employee handbook and they have all these *issues* about employees making international phone calls to friends. So I guess you will just have to e-mail me, Lee.

Anyway, I'll keep you posted on how it goes, though I made the tactical error of telling my overboss about this publication and now feel obligated to say nice things about the company therein. Fortunately, and I'm not only saying this to suck up, they're all true.



Toward the end of last summer, betwixt temp jobs for me and international adventure for the Amazing Amy, I was updating thecobrasnose.com and indulging an obsession with *West Side Story*. Not all of it, understand. The talking bits are painfully bad, and when the music parts are scaled to the small talents of leads Natalie Wood and Richard Beymer (both singing voices were dubbed) the action grinds nearly to a halt. No. I was going nuts over the athletic, balletic musical numbers, like Chapters 2 ("The Jet Ballet") and 29 ("Cool"). That wasn't just dancing, they evoked tribal ritual and initiation, power struggles with physical displays of power behind them. In fact, I tried to imitate one of George Chakiris's leg extensions, the one depicted on the disc face, just to see what it meant to the body to do something like that. In my case, it meant walking funny for a couple of days, but it gave me a greater appreciation of what the dancers were up to. I couldn't stop thinking about it, and wouldn't shut up about it, and finally Amy permitted me to show her the selections I knew were essentially risible, but equally irresistible.

Or so I thought.

Turns out, Amy found them not only resistible, but repellent. Watching the dancers leap and emote, then leap a lot more had an acute physical effect on her, as if every kick were directly to her gut. I pressed on with the impromptu clip show, believing that there are events in culture significant enough to warrant a little discomfort, and that the "Cool" dance is one of them. Afterward, however, when I walked Amy to her car and she repeatedly asked if she had done something to make me hate her, I had my doubts.

They were mostly forgotten by the time my benevolent, non-hissing mother called and asked if I was interested in seeing *The Fantasticks*. Well, it wasn't something I would have

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thought of on my own. The spelling was troublesome. Still, I was curious about a musical that had outrun the likes of *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Cabaret*, and, yes, *West Side Story*. In its forty plus years, it had become one of those indisputedly beloved fixtures of American theater and I thought I owed it my attention. Partick and Sophia were also invited in honor of their birthdays, and while it wasn't the former's scene, he was prepared to make the best of the evening.

So, on a cold, bleak January night, we settled into the balcony of the Herberger Theater and hoped for the best. The stage was barely set, featuring little more than a raised platform, a tree, a trunk, and a patch of fabric meant to represent grass. There was also a canvas drape with "The Fantasticks" written on it in a jaunty purple font, but soon after the house lights dimmed it was removed by...a mime. A thin lipped, bright eyed, top hatted, mincing mime. A Narrator, sort of like the Stage Manager from *Our Town*, followed the mime (or Mute, as the program had it). He introduced himself as El Gallo—the pronunciation of his name led to mucho hilarity later on. I mean, is it "Gallo" like "gallows," or "Gallo" like "guy-o," or...well, that's about it. He appeared a nice enough fellow, and had a pretty if thin sort sort of voice. That put him at odds with his wardrobe, which (cont. on page 5)

COBRA DEFENDS TOWNSHEND (Not on the Foosball Table)

At the end of a series of events not really worth going into, I found myself playing foosball for Pete Townshend's honor. Alas, Pete didn't do any better with me as his champion than he has with the rabid British press, but I hope to do better here.

On January 13th of this year, London police questioned Pete Townshend and confiscated his computer on suspicion of his trafficking in child pornography. The charge itself is grave enough to threaten his career, and if proven true, to ruin his life. Not without cause—the evils of that sort of exploitation will go unchallenged here. Townshend has written of them himself, eloquently, and in fact owned up to just about every bit of material evidence the police have accused him of having in an essay written a year ago.

Entitled "A Different Bomb," the essay describes his sorrow at the suicide of a friend who was a survivor of childhood sexual abuse. Her recovery had been going well until she learned her father/abuser had entered into a relationship which gave him intimate access to small children. She wasn't his first or only friend who suffered as a result of childhood sexual abuse, nor was she the first to end her life for causes relating to it. Furthermore, Townshend stated (cont. on page 4)



This is Jeff. Do not play foosball with him, especially for somebody's honor. He lies about his abilities and ridicules those who buy it.

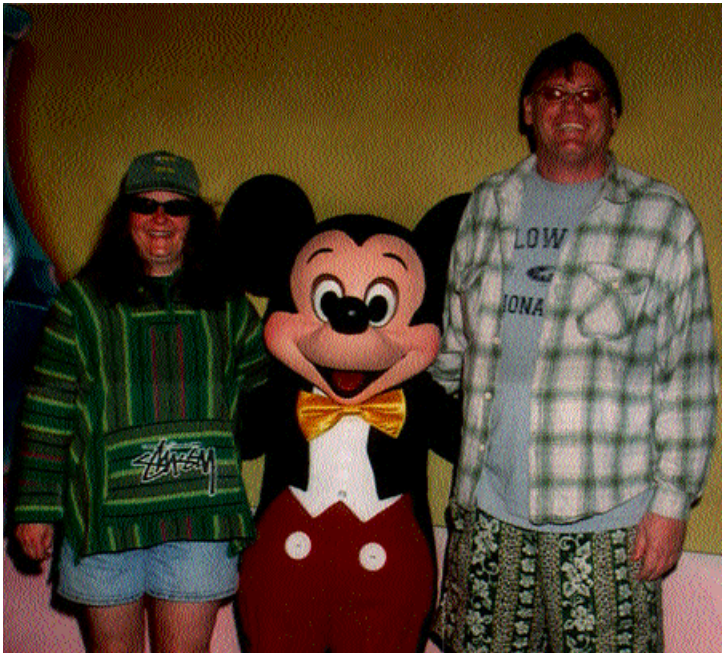
Cookin' With Cobra

It's been a long time between Cookin' with Cobras, but though *The Cobra's Nose* is (apparently) a bimonthly publication, genius doesn't strike as often as you'd think. Fortunately for us all, it did strike a couple weeks back and now the world is graced with a new recipe for tuna salad. There are three ingredients in it, so you might want to grab a pen.

First, you'll want one **can of tuna**. I don't care what size. How hungry are you? Drain the water or oil or whatever the tuna is packed in. Put the tuna in a dish.

Next, add a dollop of **mayo**. Mix.

Now, you may be thinking you're familiar with this recipe, but before you reach for the pickle relish...reach for the **green chile salsa**! *Ole!* Mix some more. Eat with Ritz crackers. Sure, you *could* use another sort of cracker, but I cannot be responsible for results. Enjoy!



You may remember my friends Sue & Bill Zierle. Never cared much for the rat.

Anyway, this photo came in the mail accompanied by a real letter, delivered by a government employee, through the shoot in the laundry room. "Don't see these paper and ink things too much," Bill wrote. "Call the kids in, let them touch."

He also reminded me of a few things I should have included in previous *Noses*, but hadn't. Like Peter Fonda swimming in their pool when they were living in Hawaii. Or giving his budding coffee empire Lou & Al's a plug when I mentioned *Lilo & Stitch*. Then again, I was promised a big ol' can of premium Hawaiian blend, but it would be petty to mention it here.

Bill & Sue are back in Salt Lake City, which is one reason why I love that town. All of you other reasons who live there should look them up and bestow upon each other my platonic but very sincere love.

CHINESE PROVERBS

An episode of *The Simpsons* has Krusty the Clown choking at a benefit. In desperation, he slaps on a pair of thick black rimmed glasses and a pair of buck teeth, squints his eyes, and in a broad Asian accent declares, "Me so solly!"

The audience is aghast, except for Bart who cracks up and shouts, "Classic!" in appreciation. The point, I believe, is that while making fun of Asians may be retrograde and politically incorrect, that doesn't mean they aren't funny. After all, even Kim Jong Il, North Korea's lunatic dictator who is culpable in the deaths of millions of his subjects and is currently black-mailing the world with ill-gotten nuclear arms, named his missiles "No Dong." Surely this wasn't for the benefit of low-comedy fans in the West, but *come on*—"No Dong."

So let us all rejoice in St Janet Formerly of the TP's new job, which requires her to correspond with Chinese contacts on a regular basis. Below are some excerpts from here-mails from suppliers, though some proper names have been changed to protect her employment, which for entirely selfish reasons one hopes will be long and Asian filled.

I wish Dang can wake up long time, I spent a whole day with my sweat runs down like rain-drops to meet "MISSION IMPOSSIBLE" that you ask me, Here is my the best delivery for your satisfaction. I am looking forward to receiving your virtual gift to encourage me.

After we works out, we found we still shortage of one item.

I asked Kelvin no more major quality issued again, let us to encourage him.

Please kindly waiting for our instruction on when to proceed the contacts supply.

Thank you to get business continually even the price is too bad.

Dear my buddy, I write this message with tears and bloods in heart, I asked supplier chain and manufacturer 24 hours working to meet 'mission possible', there is only concerning about 'ILLEGAL 2' which will get a very.....big trouble in China custom contract, You knew that, Custom trouble is a criminal law not the civil law in China, I can not send Jimmy to jail in the future.

The most of China are shut down for holiday, I am trying to find material cost and give you a quotation as EP (early and possible) as I can. But....., if I get any delay, Please do not shoot me!!!!

(cont. from page 2) he suspected some sort of childhood abuse in his own life, which while vague even to himself and not substantiated, would account for his history of violent, self-destructive behavior. Perhaps his most famous work, the rock opera *Tommy*, is the story of a boy who traumatized by exposure to violence and abuse (though the song "Fiddle About" which describes the abuse was written by The Who's late bassist John Entwistle).

But his first (admitted) exposure to child pornography as a commercial enterprise coincided with the prosecution and eventual conviction of a person described as a musical peer and employee of Townshend's, probably Gary Glitter. Much has been made by the press of Pete's remark (in the essay) that that prosecution (both criminal and public) had aspects of a "witch hunt." Rather than referring to the relative guilt or culpability of his associate, however, he was remarking upon the ease with which pornography of all sorts is available on the internet, and how even the most innocent of searches can result in vile content. In his case, he describes how a search for information on Eastern European orphanages (inspired by a documentary made by a friend of his) resulted within minutes to a "free" image of a male infant of about two being buggered by an unseen man." He further noted that upon entry to such a site, or any site, the signature of the user's computer is logged into the web site's records. That traffic encourages the site's proprietor, however casually or accidentally the viewer happened to come across it. And he didn't mention it, but all graphic content viewed on the web is automatically downloaded into cache files on the computer's hard drive. These are flushed after either a few days or after they have filled a set amount of space, but whether you want them or not, they are there.

If you don't spend a lot of time on the web or follow these sorts of controversies, you may not be convinced by how easily those sorts of accidents occur. But, for instance, at the beginning of the anthrax flap from a year or so ago, I typed "what are the symptoms of anthrax" into the entirely reputable Ask Jeeves search engine. A geocities (free personal web sites offered through Yahoo!) site was listed, and titled, conveniently enough, "the symptoms of anthrax." Although there are plenty of dodgy personal sites on the web, some are very helpful and informative, so I clicked on a link and was immediately connected to a porno site, which spontaneously opened new windows of pornographic content. Although I shut them as quickly as possible (on top of everything else, I was at work), this went on for almost a minute. A friend of mine typed her unusual name into the address bar of her browser window, and the same thing happened (she also was at work). Porn venders have for years been notorious for registering site names that are similar to names that might easily be misspelled, especially those that may be of interest to kids (disny.com, for example). Townshend noted that one of the convicted musician's telling search words was "lolita," which should give anybody doing research on Vladimir Nabokov pause.

According to the article, Townshend considered going to the police with the data he had collected, but his distant connection to a child porn conviction led him to seek advice from his lawyer instead. At some point, however, he did consult a detective on the London police force (now retired). Both the detective and his layer immediately confirmed his story, and the detective offered to give testimony on his behalf.

Townshend also reported his findings to Britain's Internet Watch Foundation, which inexplicably refused to confirm his account upon his arrest. On January 30th, they did. (cont. on page 6)



And Now, a Word or Two from Amy

Above is a picture of Amy and some guy from Nepal from one of her recent international journeys. Now there are many cool things about Amy, but one of my favorite is her failure to be transformed into a gentle, spiritual, vegan truth seeker as a consequence of her Asian experience. Hey, I've seen The Razor's Edge (both the Tyrone Power and Bill Murray versions), and that just doesn't go well. Rather, she remained the audacious, spirited, omnivorous truth teller who has captivated so many. She is currently in South America, from which the following missive was e-mailed. Turns out she likes camping about as much as she liked Nepal. [Reprinted here with tacit permission--ed.]

There came a time during our trekking experience when I found myself re-evaluating my whole life and the decisions made that put me in that spot. Not that I'm playing the victim, I realize it was all my choice, but come on. As a reasonably functioning and semi-privileged adult who used to live quite comfortably in different homes and in different states of the comfortable US, to find myself stuck outside in the dismal, depressing and ongoing rain, squatting beside a freezing cold river, pounding my wet socks on a rock to scrub the out mud really caused me to think - What in the world am I doing? (I think I used stronger language at that time, no one was around anyway.) No one wants to do this, not even people who love the great outdoors, and I am not one of them. Tents are best for kids to use in their living rooms. No non-poor people should have to sleep outside on the ground.

Here's my little joke about camping:

Q. What's the difference between living on the street and camping?
A. The price.

We had to PAY to camp. Plus we had to rent a (cont. on page 6)

(cont. from page 2) was part *gaucho*, part pirate, and slightly oversized to suit his pudgy form. He explained that he was a worldly, dangerous babe magnet, no matter that he seemed more suited to antiquing than the dueling and seduction he would be simulating later on.

As El Gallo sang the musical's signature song "Try to Remember," he introduced the nitwit girl, Luisa, the conceited square, Matt, and their yokel dads. And every time a line from the song ended with the word "follow," one of them would echo "followfollowfollowfollowfollow!" It might have been the only time when a mime wasn't the obvious person to take a swing at.

The first half of the play unfolded a scheme by the dads, who pretended to feud in order to make their children desirable to one another. As the culmination of their plan, they hired El Gallo and a couple of seedy actors (who specialized in misquoting Shakespeare) to set upon the young lovers as they canoodled in the woods. The boy foiled the attempted rape (their word), and swept the girl off her feet. The act concluded with the engagement of the couple, a heart shaped tableau of the two families, and not a minute too soon.

During the show, I monitored the reactions of the audience. Two couples sitting in front of us in the balcony slipped out. Mom's opinion was evident from her negative answer to Sophia's whispered query, "Do you like this?" Partick was pressed back in his seat, his arms and legs crossed. He glared at the stage as if the cast were profaning David Bowie. When the lights came up, we McGoverned looked at each other, aghast. We began by making ginger criticisms of the play, always careful to express appreciation of the idea of watching a play, and of the company. But had Mom knowingly brought us to see a mime? She protested her innocence, but though she had quite a high tolerance for the whimsical, the aggressive preciousness of the play beginning to wear on her.

Then we had to decide whether to sit out the second act or bail. Mom declared she wanted to see if the show could possibly get worse, and besides the tickets were really expensive, so let's stay. This necessitated a trip to the restroom for me. Standing in line, I tried to gauge the old lady opinion of the show. As I am slightly deaf and easily distracted, the casual eavesdropping approach flopped. So I asked the woman behind me what she thought of the show.

"You know, I wasn't sure what to make of it at first. But then I started to like it."

I made some noncommittal sounds intended to discourage her from asking my opinion; then

said, "This Tom Jones guy who wrote they lyrics—is it *Tom Jones* Tom Jones?"

"No. I think he's from Texas."

"So it wouldn't be appropriate for me to throw my underwear on the stage?"

She went quiet, and when the handicapped restroom next to her opened up, she darted into it.

Act Two began with the cast standing in the same heart shaped tableau, but quivering with the strain of having stood there for so long, which was really funny because they hadn't actually stood there during intermission they were just pretending. As may have been predicted from a conspiracy to thrust two shallow, immature youths together under totally unnatural circumstances, Luisa and Matt's relationship began to fall apart. Then their dads fight. Then all the characters' adorable idiosyncrasies that have been driving the audience nuts for the past hour and a half begin to bother the characters, too. The lovers quarrel and Matt makes good on his threat to explore the wild world. How wild? Well, the curtains open up wider to reveal all manner of lewd neon signs. But before you can say, "it's about time!" he is shanghaied up by the seedy actors.

And here is where the play becomes almost tantalizingly oblique. While Luisa practically begs El Gallo to corrupt her (and he does seem loath to make the effort), Matt is shown in various places and situations being abused by the actors. Believe me, what they do to him goes well beyond stealing his wallet. Whenever she peers beyond the border of her father's property and notices a man (Matt) is being, say, beaten with sticks or set afire, El Gallo beguiles her with a comic mask and convinces her that she was mistaken and it is a beggar or a monkey. Why she decides this is still good fun could be ascribed to El Gallo's malign influence, her established fanciful nature, or her even better established moral idiocy. Doesn't seem to matter which.

Which makes sympathizing with her pretty hard when El Gallo abandons her and returns to The Mute. True, he steals her favorite possession, a necklace that belonged to her late mother; but the object is trivialized as cheap costume junk with strictly sentimental value, and though a symbol of her virginity (or more generally, "innocence"), her attachment to it is just another affectation. All in all, the loss of an accessory is a pretty light punishment for a silly girl recklessly flirting with...well, El Gallo, but supposedly a heartless villain. Meanwhile, Matt's adventure with the actors is treated as a typical, even inevitable consequence of leaving the farm, as if homosexual assault is just something city people *do*.

Between the implicit S&M and the rape fantasies, how *The Fantasticks* got the wholesome rep is puzzle enough. But furthermore, young, heterosexual love is shown as the plaything of three all male couples: the dads, the actors, El Gallo /Narrator and The Mute. I have no interest in condemning gay couples *per se*, but let the record reflect that it's the relatively out actors, who in their choice of profession, flowery speech, enthusiasm for drama and dress-up, and abduction of Matt, rack up the most pernicious gay stereotype points. The Narrator and Mute characters are magical, fanciful constructs. If Shakespeare, whose work is burlesqued in this play, had written *The Fantasticks*, he would have had to change his name and kill himself. But he also would have made The Mute and The Narrator fairies. That leaves the handily wife-free dads, who feign hatred but can't keep their hands off each other. Strangely, for such a gay narrative—and it makes *Can't Stop the Music* look like *Full Metal Jacket* in comparison—(cont. on page 6)



Page Six: Where Articles Come to End



(cont. from page 4) a stove and rain gear and buy kerosene so I could work for a hour every night just to boil tasteless pasta. And then try to scrap and wash out dishes in freezing cold water behind a shed. I can hardly bring myself to think about what I've been through.

As we were hiking during the day, I would rehearse my story about camping because I really thought that I would be featured on *CNN World* for surviving such an ordeal. Trekking and camping should be done only as a last resort, a method of escaping a disaster, like a plane crash in the wilderness. And that's how I felt, like either or victim or a survivor, depending on whether I was inside or outside again. I'd tell the imaginary interviewer of the horrors: "Yes, and we walked for hours and hours, and we had to carry everything on our backs."

"Oh no!"

"Yes, at then, at night, we were still too far from help and we had to sleep OUTSIDE... in TENTS!"

"Oh my god, how did you survive?"

Then I'll sigh, roll my eyes and say, "Barely."

Come back soon, Amy. You'll complain about Chili, I'll complain about The Fantasticks—it'll be great.

**Please take the Zierle's example, and contact me via letter: 3910 N Granite Reef
Scottsdale, AZ 85251**

or phone: 480 GAY KATS

or e-mail: thecobrasnose@yahoo.com

You'll feel better about yourself, and I'll feel better about you.

(cont. from page 4) The aspect of Townshend's defense that has earned the most derision is that he was doing research for a book. Apparently, this excuse is as old as it is feeble. What commentators invariably neglect to note, however, is Townshend is a published author who works as a consulting editor for the established English publishing house Faber. His decades long charity work for underprivileged, orphaned, and abused children only sometimes gets a mention.

Sure, it's possible Pete Townshend laid all the above ground work, contacting legal agents and abuse support groups, writing about how to block internet porn from invading innocent computer screens, and publicly decrying the pernicious effects of child exploitation, as a cover for his pedophilia. And now is probably the time to offer the ritual denunciation of Townshend and everything he is about if the worst is proven true. But, and this is a but even bigger than my own, there are excellent reasons to suspect that his defense is on the level, and they should be palatable to more than those dazzled—not blinded—by his brilliance as a musician. All we are saying is give Pete a chance.

Postscript

And encourage Jeff to let up with the wisecracks. And never, ever choose me as a champion for yourself or anybody else in any sort of sporting event. Especially foosball. Now, Jeff is talking about getting a table of his own, and pasting little Townshend faces on the figures of which ever team he opses. But I think someday, he will feel really bad about it. If not, I'm looking for somebody to clean his clock. If you qualify, please contact me using one of the methods below.

(cont. from page 5) *The Fantasticks* advocates cloistered living. The two families decide that everything went to hell with the destruction of the wall that divided the properties and kept the world at bay. When Luisa and Matt reject the world, they essentially race back into the closet, slam the door, and nail it shut.

The self-imposed exile comes as a relief. You don't want those genes getting into the general population, nor the trite, tuneless songs that impart such wisdom as "when you plant a turnip, you get a turnip." And yet, among those who didn't walk out (a few more during the second act), there were those who stood and cheered *The Fantasticks*. That was one of the many things that baffled us almost to the point of interrupting our giggles on the way home. Shrilling "followfollowfollowfollowfollow!" in the strident, off key manner of the young woman who played Luisa was a good way to get them going again. Many enjoyed the play (it was held over by popular demand). We felt as if we had survived it. Seriously, we discussed getting tattoos to commemorate the event.

In any case, I felt as if I'd had a dollop of what I'd administered to Amy—the castor oil of pop culture. And I must say I felt better once I'd purged myself of it. Maybe even fantastic.

Postscript

A few weeks after we saw *The Fantasticks*, I caught *Rosemary's Baby* on cable. In it, Mia Farrow tells her doctor that she and her satanic husband went to see *The Fantasticks* and liked it very much. Later, when I tried to grab *Fantasticks* images off the web to illustrate this article, the browser windows would spontaneously shut down and leave me a curt message about illegal activity. Does this mean *The Fantasticks* is the work of the devil? Clearly yes.