



The sixth issue of a weekly, or thereabouts (job, weather, life etc., permitting), letter substitute from:
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The Empire Strikes Back

The search for my lost childhood continued today with a visit to the local cinema to see The Empire Strikes Back. I can remember back then we expected a hell'uva lot more from the sequel than from the original - it is nice to know that some things don't change. I wanted more spaceships, and bigger. More fight scenes and on a grander scale. More magic from the force and to see just what Darth Vader was really like. I can actually recall thinking these things, discussing them with the kids in class and reading the then SF magazines looking for clues.

As a kid I was gob-smacked that everything in the movie was what I'd hoped for, and then some. It had grabbed my sensawonda and thrashed it - "You thought the first one was good? Get a load of this kid..." The Empire Strikes Back was made by George Lucas specifically for me. He had entered my dreams, realised what a great imagination I had and just had to use all my ideas. Even then my ego was quite big. When the film came out I was telling everyone who would listen that it was exactly what I'd predicted. My best mate and my mother weren't that impressed, to be honest. (Stephen Nash was always too smarmy by half...)

After seeing the movie as an adult, in the cinema, with Dolby THX Digital sound on a really big screen I can see just how manipulative it is. We had to find out more about this 'Force' which was central to Star Wars. The Empire had to make a comeback - if there was no baddies, there was no film. And, given the impact of the first movie, there had to day series of movies: each instalment has to build on the characters, what they are about and provide more thrills and spills than the previous one. The Die Hard series developed John McClean's 'character' a bit with the relationship with his wife in the second movie, and his inherent racism and alcoholism in the third. Yeah, these were well second to the bigger and better spills and thrills but they were there. We had to interact with his character (and similar characters in the Lethal Weapon, Rambo, Beverly Hills Cop, Alien etc. sequences or else the thrills and spills would not be enough.)

In Empire the characters are everything, in as much as the series mentioned above: the plot and action sequences hang around them like a shroud, more sort of draped really. And I noticed more about the characters as well, especially Princess Leia. For example, Carrie Fisher is cute and sexy. Strangely enough, twenty years later, she still is. She was the focus of the original movie - the princess had to be rescued and Donkey Kong had to be killed. Simple really. She was an object with funny hair and robes. But in the second movie she is a very active participant, dressed in uniform (and very fetching it is too) and blasts away with the best of them. She even kisses Luke and Han - though not at the same time unfortunately. A much more rounded character altogether, I always suspected those bumps meant something. "Though the hair, dear, really must do something with the hair..."

Other characters in the Star Wars Trilogy were also expounded upon: who is Darth Vader, did Obi One really die? Would Han or Luke get the girl? Would she get a new hairstylist and just how much better could those huge space ships get? Lucas answered all those questions, gave us a huge slice of entertainment and posed a few more questions in the process - what will happen to Han Solo now he is carbon frozen (Que?)? Will Luke go back to Yoda? How will he deal with the new knowledge about his father etc, etc.

I was disappointed as a kid at the ending of the Empire Strikes Back, because it ends on a thoughtful note. It leaves the audience pondering and thinking about the movie, the characters and what has just happened to them (always leave 'em wanting more...) and as such defines the role of every second part of any trilogy: build the characters up, provide a bit of intermediate action and set-up the conclusion. I get this now, as an adult and, effective technique that it is, I'm looking forward to March 7 when the Jedi returns. (Obi One lives...)

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The last issue got some really good responses, some of which even I balk at quoting, they were so nice. Let me just thank Greg Pickersgill, Lesley Reece and Evelyn Murray in particular. Other responses whilst not so effusive were similarly gratifying:

Julia Daly (daly.julia@traf.com) "Gosh, working in an "Irish" restaurant - it must be real novelty for them to have a real Irish accent - it sure is in Sheffield "Irish" pubs. How long does it stay cold in Toronto?" ((Er., quite a long time. But it should be okay for your visit in April...))

Valerie Westwood (westwoodv@aecl.ca) epitomised a lot of reactions when she said:)) As I read Tommyworld five about your tussle with alcohol all I could think was "Oh Tommy!" ((But went on to add:)) It is interesting that you think of alcohol as him. I have always thought of alcohol as she. Is this a sex related association? Alcohol is a flirt

who at first is light and frivolous but for those who fall under her spell she becomes quite dark and demanding. She beguiles and promises of great times, confidence and is actually quite social. When we know alcohol in this sense we know only her good side. However if she takes possession of your soul, then and only then does she show her dark side.

Alcohol is very jealous of all other relationships and demands that you pay attention only to her. She does not really mind most people working because it does help to keep her in the lifestyle which she has become accustomed to. Only a few unfortunate have forsaken all for her. You, I am sure know some of these poor souls as they usually have no permanent shelter for their bodies, and live on the streets of major cities and Toronto has its fair share.

Alcohol makes the others in your life feel as if they have been forsaken by you and can not break through the barrier which she has set up to protect herself. Relationships with other humans then suffer. Wives (the majority who are up against her are) and others (usually parents and children) end up exhausted both emotionally and physically after encounters with her when they encounter a possessed soul. By the time she has complete possession of you, you usually have no other friends to lose. If you do they are usually possessed as well. Not only does she possess your relationships with other people, she also commands your dreams and ambitions, twisting and discarding them as she takes a more commanding hold of your soul. Soon you are morally, physically and spiritually bankrupted.

To break up with her is very treacherous, as she is very vindictive and does not give up easily. She lets go of the body quite quickly but her hold on the soul is much tougher to break. She is quite beguiling and some people never quite manage to make the break and are always controlled by her. I have lived with the dark side of alcohol and maybe she has tainted me. I do not think of alcohol as male because male traits tend to be "wham bam thank you mam" and drop you cold and want no further association. Although alcohol could be related to men who are abusive. Such as if you love me ... and physically beat upon the weaker ones surrounding him.

Hope this wasn't a downer but just a different perspective of alcohol, from an observers side.

((Yep, a downer. But just to let people know that when I say I'm serious about my relationship with alcohol it doesn't necessarily mean I'm joking. Okay, a humorous and trenchant quip from Nigel to lighten things up:))

From: "Nigel E. Richardson" <nigel@impolex.demon.co.uk> "4 days w/out food? I'm sure the Tommy Ferguson A-plan diet would go down a treat with "fans of substance". Fun, fun, fun...."

From: bevansa@cix.compulink.co.uk (Bernie Evans) Alcohol has been a mere acquaintance for me for some time now, I've just simply not been able to get to the same places he gets to with anything like my ertswhile frequency, and when I do I find his company just too much in large doses. Maybe it's age, maybe it's that I've become unused to him, whatever, I don't half miss him!!

From: gfs@toad_hall.com (Geri Sullivan) My email program translated your document into Microsoft Word 4.0 for me (OK, so I'm *really* behind the times). In the process, it gave me the second half first and the first half second, with a lot of untranslatable stuff at the edges. I believe I got all of "The Abyss: A nice place to visit..." -- a terrific little piece of writing, by the way, on a subject that's anything but. Looking forward to meeting you at Minicon.

((Me too. Now time to get this, much delayed issue out. It was nice to meet all you folk in Vancouver and Seattle - more of which anon. Sorry I missed the latest Bid Committee meeting folks, new job is killing my life. Talk to you all soon..))

This is being distributed to a whole bunch of friends on the net, if you received this and would NOT like to be on the mailing list please accept my apologies for this intrusion and let me know so that you will not be bothered by further ramblings. If you know someone who would like to be on the mailing drop me a line.