

The Cunning Plan 299

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"Just when the BBC had got over the shame of Bashir, this had to happen !"

I have gone for humour again and opted for Eurovision related cartoons as the All-reader game is hotting up a little.

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DEADLINE = FRIDAY 26th Jan 2024

Your Credit is:

Waiting lists: - (see below)

Std Dip: - Vick Hall Stephen Agar, Toby Harris, Colin Smith, Alexandre Marcondes, Tony Sait - Just 1 player and a working Dip Adjudicator wanted!

Gunboat Dip: Got 4 - 3 wanted.

Any of Mike Pollards's games.

Machiavelli: Got 4 - 4 more wanted

Any suggestions?

TCP 299 Pre-Eds Bit

I was going to use this little slot for some (very) brief national/international chatter, but am now going to address something a little closer to home - namely 'deadlines'. I know there are no dip games in progress at the moment, but deadlines are still a thing. For obvious reasons, I try to keep busy all the time, which requires like, work level planning and time management. I can't be chasing and haggling with readers 2 days after the deadline and having to re-jig an almost complete zine to accommodate laggards. So, please, please, guys get your stuff in as fast as possible.

Neil.

Homework for next time:

- How many civilian deaths in Gaza will be sufficient so that a cease-fire can be called?
- We got (at least) three major General Elections in 2024, UK, US and Russia - what are your thoughts?
- Which celebrity demise in 2023, has affected you the most?
- Are any TCP readers intending to attend any 'Cons' in 2024 and if so, which one(s)?

TCP 299 Eds Bit

Intro:

Blimey, I can't believe that we are at the arse-end of the year already. Another less than satisfactory year at that. However, I would like to try and avoid the moaning and navel gazing if possible and just chat about other stuff. Like, in general. Trying to avoid feelings and stuff like that.

Festive period:

I started rather late getting things and preparing, but somehow managed to get it all done in the last couple of weeks. I had wisely got my database work done in the first half of December and also wisely cut-back on the invigilation. These moves gave me the time I needed. I was also aided by the fact that as most of my tribe are brassic, a bunch of bank transfers sorted out the bulk of the pressies. Plus, the older members have opted to mutually pass on pressies anyway.

I nervously fired up the small freezer in the cellar and to my amazement, it still works! All the more amazing as I have had it over 20 years and it was second-hand when I got it for a tenner, or some such ridiculously low price. They do not, as they say, make 'em like that anymore.

I did not do a tree or decorations again and tbh, I doubt that I ever will again. After Xmas 2019, I resolved to ditch the 40+ year old decorations I'd been using and replace them with new stuff. Then lock-down hit and two Christmases got cancelled. Then we lost Lizzie and that has cancelled Christmas in perpetuity so far as I'm concerned. No-one complained and the consensus was that the company, the food and the games was all we needed to mark the event.

On Boxing Day, for some unknown reason, I decided to set up the pool table. I suppose I felt it would make a nice change, game-wise. Not played for years, maybe decades. So, it came as a shock to everyone, especially me, as I took down one challenger after another. It was ridiculous and I was seriously embarrassed - I had expected to be a 5 minute-wonder, sending the cue ball into orbit and potting the black with my first shot. I had to retire undefeated, as I was in charge of cooking the dinner.

As it was the year Katy and hubby would be spending Xmas in London with her in-laws, I effectively got a third festive day on 27th. We managed to persuade Michelle to go to London and spend it with Katy and co, rather than staying on her own. So, I drove up on the 27th to spend the day with them all, and then bring her back to Basingstoke. It did not start well, taking me over three and a half hours for the 90 mile trip. So much traffic. I observed that I actually drove faster in London, than I had on the M25. (The M3 was ok).

Once there, the drive was soon forgotten with a roast that I had not had to cook myself and which was ten times better than what I had done! As well as chatting and more games, it is worthwhile reporting that I actually got to play the "Eurovision" game that my Dutch friend had helped me to acquire for Katy. We did had a great laugh with it, even though it was mainly Eurovision trivia Q&A stuff, about which I have bugger all knowledge. Katy won the game with 322 points, but the consensus was that Michelle had in fact been

robbed! She had answered more questions than the rest of us put together, but only came second on 317 points. I came last, of course, with a ridiculous 295 points, but I only got that many because we 'cheated' to get to the final. I think we'd have still been playing it now 4 days later, if we'd relied on me to get thru 'conventionally'!

There is a potentially fun and appealing to a greater audience game there with a few simple tweaks. We thought of some as we played and looked at each other blankly at some of the questions. I would be happy to give it another go sometime.

Gig going:

Prior to Xmas I had begun a search for gigs in the last week of the year. I knew that I could probably do with letting off a bit of steam after being couped up with family for three days - love them to bits, but you know what I mean.

For several days, the jungle drums remained silent and all I had was a New Years Eve show in Brighton. Then suddenly loads popped up and I had choice! One in Salisbury was a tribute to a local promoter, (who I knew vaguely), who had died suddenly on Boxing Day aged only 36. A great show, but more than a little sad.

Bizarrely the best one has been a Psychobilly covers band from Oxford, called the Corsairs. I am not really a fan of covers, but these guys were brilliant. They played a diverse range of material and it's always amazing to see a real double-bass being played. Which included the dude getting up and surfing on it. Loads of banter and engagement with the crowd. (And not only was it in Basingstoke, but it was free entry too!)

Other Stuff:

I have decided, in a moment of madness, so actually record a semi-solo EP under my, KRUST WORTHY banner. I cannot handle the continuing unpredictability of the band situation(s) at the moment. I am getting better at programming the old drum machine and with most of my crusty-punk songs only about a minute long, means I can probably do most of it myself. I will have some 'guest' appearances, hence the 'semi' bit. I may also try over-dubbing some 'real' drums and cymbals to cover up the fact I am using a drum machine. As I have a 'Lizzie' related song that I want to record anyway, in for a penny, as they say. I don't know how it will turn out, but no harm in trying.

Other than that, I have a busy January ahead of me. Both local colleges want me for invigilation and I have to write the big, "State of the Nation" report on the database for Aylesbury and that always takes a fair few hours. I am actually looking forward to this as I hope it will highlight how much I have improved the new database I inherited towards the end of 2022. You gotta love a bit of 'blowing your own trumpet' haven't you?

Well, I think I have largely managed to avoid the doom and gloom this time. One final snippet - last night, when unable to sleep, I actually watched that, "Don't Look Up" film. Not bad. A bit strange and unsettling and about as subtle as a brick. I guess that it was supposed to be satire, but way too close to reality for my liking. And no, it did not help me sleep any better.

Neil.

THE TCP 29 LETTER COL

TCP: Right - with part one of the festivities over, let's make an early start on this.

Vick Hall - Apologises:

On another note, sorry you floundered a bit in this year's zine poll and sorry for not voting. I had meant to get round to it, but forgot whilst I was flouncing around in the States. You deserved a higher placing for sure as TCP is by far the best zine still out there. I will propose myself as your campaign manager for next year. So, no folding in the meantime!

TCP: Thanks for that Vick, but really no need to apologise. I have no idea where TCP even came in the poll. And truth be known, I did not even vote myself!

Vick - moves onto Israel/Palestine:

The whole Palestinian/Israeli crisis has gone well and truly out of control. I still recall the notorious Sabra and Shatila massacres that occurred over 40 years ago in Lebanon where several thousand Palestinian refugees were killed by Christian Militias and Israeli Defence Forces and that was hardly the beginning of the conflict. And in all this time little has changed, which is very sad.

Can you imagine living your whole life in such a situation as that is what is the case for most Palestinians. I was shocked by the Hamas attack, but the Israeli response is well out of proportion. The Israeli leadership don't really care about the suffering they are inflicting on Palestinian people and are showing no humanity in their actions. They view Palestinians as a cancerous growth of sub humans, who are taking up space that does not belong to them. Time and time again over the last 40 years more and more land is taken and settled by Jewish settlers and Palestinian people displaced from their homes.

Although we were all shocked by the Hamas attack, really, we should not have been surprised by it given the amount of suffering they are continuously put through. I don't see that Israel have done anything over the last few decades to try and foster any peaceful understanding between these two cultures. It is a shame but the only solution they seem to have is extermination. I know that not every Jewish person thinks this way, but it seems strange that this 'solution' is the same as the Nazi's were proposing for Jewish people back in the 40's. It's partly why this whole situation just seems so wrong.

TCP: Like you, I find it unbelievable that a people who have suffered so much, can then turn round to do likewise to

another group. But in all fairness, I think that most actual Holocaust Survivors do not agree with what the Israeli government at doing. A lot of Israeli's themselves are unhappy about it, as well as many people of Jewish descent around the world, also taking a very dim view of things being done, ostensibly in their names.

Vick - continues:

Anyway, I had forgotten how angry this conflict makes me feel at times so I will change the subject on to your more mundane topic of semi-retirement activities. Mostly we have been relaxing in our new former medieval farmhouse after having for rid of the boat (financial liability). It is a really quirky old building with a wine cellar and dungeon, although no longer a farmhouse! The only animal in residence is our adopted cat Popi who is currently trying to stop me spending time tapping away on the computer as I write this. I'm thinking we might get her another cat companion to keep her company, but I suspect this will then end up with me having two cats trying to stop me using the computer in order to get their attention! Apart from keeping Popi company we are also trying to have a few more holidays again and see a bit more of the World, which for 10 years on the boat we did not really do. We just finished our first big trip to the North America where we toured down from Vancouver to San Diego and then back up again via Las Vegas to San Fran and home. We covered a lot of ground, a diverse range of scenery and some amazing places and met some lovely people. It was a real good trip, which hopefully we will in the future do more of.

TCP: Yes, I tend to avoid *that* topic, out of both anger and frustration at being unable to influence it in a positive way at all. Glad to hear that you are having some time to do fun/exciting things again. Though I am a little gutted I never got to see your boat - my bad.

And the final Vick - agreeing with Mike:

Mike is right in that one of the reasons women did not use to go into science in comparison to men is down to the lack of role models as really very few apart from Marie Curie, seemed to exist although in reality there are many, but as with many women, not referred to or written out of history. Hypatia for example was a pretty influential scholar in astronomy and mathematics as well as philosophy but unlike contemporary counterparts such as Aristotle is hardly a household name. This is thankfully becoming less of an issue these days, although I think even now there is still a bias against reporting the achievements of prominent women or trying to ridicule or belittle the achievements of those that are successful. Greta Thunberg springing immediately to mind!

TCP: "Agreeing with Mike?" - I dunno Vick, this could make you a target for you-know-who, regardless of how laudable your motives/observations are.

It seems to have gone very quiet on the Greta front recently. I guess that the Ukraine/Russia-Israel/Palestine wars have eclipsed the more mundane topic of the destruction of all human life via climate change.

Colin Hobbs - Grandma we love you:

I am surprised that Alan has difficulty differentiating prepositions from conjunctions. I am sanguine about split infinitives. The crew of the Starship Enterprise may go boldly or boldly go as they see fit. I am relaxed about them that trespass against the them/those rule. I bemoan the demise of 'whom', and associate myself with those (or them) to whom it may concern. I regard datum as the singular of data. I am definitely swimming against the tide on that one. Broadsheet journalists have been instructed that treating 'data' as a plural is contrary to their 'house style'. Ending a sentence with a preposition is to be avoided. [I am reminded, though, of Churchill's reaction to his secretary correcting his grammar: 'This is something up with which I will not put.']

TCP: Colin, expecting that, I was not. Next, what?

Colin continues:

Starting a sentence with a conjunction is far, far worse. Starting a paragraph with a conjunction is terrible!

TCP: But is it, really?

Colin - still going strong:

Most of the decline in English grammar is due to sloppy journalists. It is sheer laziness that has caused N.A.T.O. to evolve to NATO and then to Nato over the past sixty years. The under-use of Capital Letters is a particular bugbear of mine. In the Eighteenth Century it was the Convention that all English Nouns started with Capital Letters, as in German. I wouldn't go that far. Journalists who routinely write 'prime minister' and 'foreign secretary' when they mean 'Prime Minister' and 'Foreign Secretary' should have their Press Passes rescinded. Journalists who write 'female actor' should be sent to Rwanda.

TCP: I don't know Colin, sentences that start with, "In the 18th century....." rarely bring anything good to the table.

More Colin - making me chuckle:

Alan was a bit harsh on 'cousin marriages'. I write as one whose grandparents, on both sides, were first cousins. That might say a lot about me. No, I don't have a Muslim or

Christadelphian family background. No, I don't have a Royal or aristocratic family background. No, Tottenham and Wood Green were not remote villages in the early 20th Century.

TCP: Sorry to skip over the main point, (cousin-marriages), but the phrase, "Alan was a bit harsh....." is kinda like saying, "Vlad the Impaler was a bit harsh....."

More Colin - geography:

John Colledge writes that someone on Twitter thought the Middle East was part of Africa. He isn't alone. I remember an episode of 'Any Questions?' when no less a person than Jonathan Dimbleby referred to Syria as being an African country. A rather bemused Lady Bennett said that most people regarded it as in the Middle East. Perhaps JD was just confusing Syria with Libya. Iran/Persia is not in the Middle East. It is in the centre of the Earth; one of the great early civilisations of the World at the crossroads of the Greek/Egyptian/Mesopotamian civilisations with those of India and China.

TCP: The terminology is not of the same category. "Africa" is a continent, the "Middle East" is not, I don't know what you'd call it, a 'region' perhaps? The centre of the "Middle East" is in "Asia" and I would put some of it in North Africa - Egypt for starters. I assume there is some specific definition of the ME, or maybe more than one, if people don't agree.

Colin - continues:

Asia Minor is Anatolia (i.e. Turkey without Thrace, Antioch, Hatay, Trebizond, Armenia, Kurdistan and Upper Mesopotamia). The Near East is a near obsolete term for Turkey-in-Europe.

TCP: I suspect that most of the time someone says, "the Middle East" - most of us know what they are talking about.

Colin - laughs at Alan:

Alan Frost's comment, in his musings on multiculturalism, that, "the exuberant Caribbean lifestyle also causes problems" is so silly that it made me laugh.

TCP: I am just waiting for him to quote, from 'I'm Sorry I'll Read That Again' - "Dis and one of doze delicious watey melons, dat grows by de river!"

Colin - moving onto Alans' squeeze:

To be fair to Suella Braverman, she wasn't the first to describe those who sleep rough as exercising a 'life-style choice'. John Major said much the same thing when he was Prime Minister. It wasn't true then and it isn't true now. It won't take much of an effort for Colonel Cleverly to be a less callous Home Secretary than Mrs Braverman.

TCP: I'm not sure Cruella deserves, 'fairness' - a quality she is quick to deny others.

Colin - moves on to sleep:

I would like to point out that there is no particular virtue in sleeping in a bed rather than an armchair. Lying in bed, on my side, with the radio on at low volume, works for me. It doesn't even seem to preclude dream-sleep. Alan's ideal of going to bed at 10.30pm and waking at 8am seems a bit excessive. At a Games Convention, I seem to recall, student-types can survive with no sleep at all and just play games all day and all night.

TCP: When the kids were young, I often recall falling asleep on the settee, whilst watching whatever. Perhaps I should try returning to that 'lifestyle' choice, rather than the more formal, 'going to bed' routine.

Still wonder about how our distant ancestors slept..... Perhaps we just catnapped in our very distant past, then went thru a period where we could sleep more fully and securely and it was all the extra, restfull sleep, which enabled us to super-evolve our brains?

Now, we seem to be backsliding.

More Colin - playing with fire:

I suggest that Alan Frost learns the Urdu for 'Pass the Persil' in case he finds himself in crowded Birmingham laundrettes in the future. I appreciate that Alan is not Empress of India, but if Queen Victoria can learn Urdu, then so can he.

TCP: I think Alan is from the, 'raise the volume of your English' school of cross-cultural communication.

And the final Colin:

The Eurovision Song Contest occasionally throws up some good songs. They don't tend to be the ones that win or even do particularly well. In 2023 the entries from Cyprus (Andrew Lambrou's 'Break a Broken Heart') and Switzerland (Remo Forrer's 'Watergun') were particularly good.

TCP: I don't disagree with that. But for me it is rather like, "Top of the Pops" back in the day - where you would what the whole thing in the often-forlorn hope that they would play at least one song you liked!

James Hardy - Alzheimer's-bound:

Gordon Bennet, I was "guest editor" two or three issues ago - I can't remember last week let alone late summer! At least I think it was late summer...? Did I really come across as being pro-Tory as I thought I made it pretty clear I'd sack the lot of them, after taking all the stolen money back first of

course and possibly even throwing a few in prison (new homework subject - which politician would you bang in the slammer (fnarr fnarr) if you were El Presidente del UK?).

TCP: Good question, I might have to pinch that idea and pass it off as my own.

I dunno James, with all the mudslinging and name-calling that goes on in politics and the press, it's difficult to distil the real issues out of the quagmire.

It's pretty much full-on 1984 out there and I don't think even George Orwell could have imagined just how fucked up our world has become.

More James - has a good point (oo-er):

I liked the suggestion of mooring the barge outside Parliament - be harder for them to ignore if nothing else as the problem would be on their doorstep rather than absolutely anyone else's. Frankly I'm amazed the barge was moored anywhere south of a line from Exeter to Norwich. Maybe London's Lebensraum requirement is shrinking back to 20th century levels with the never-ending rail strikes and the canning of HS2?

TCP: Interesting point. Bloody surprising the thing wasn't bumped up to Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland! Still, at least you have a GE to look forward to next, (which is to say, this) year. I'm sure that we'll get a new and improved government, by the people, for the people. Just don't know which people it will be.

More James - Outrageously cynical:

Of course, the real solution is Rwanda. Anyone that believes that voted Brexit. My assumption there is one of Suella's relatives, that never left Africa, has been set up as the Rwandan contact in order to skim off the billions being sent there. Just another Tory family hedge fund courtesy of the British taxpayer.

TCP: As if anyone in his majesty's government would do such a thing. I did not know about this guy, but never considered a 'Leasehold' purchase.

And the final James - Really taking the piss:

Happy New Year doctor.

TCP: As if..... I am curious about the 'doctor' bit?

Des Langford - Greets and observes:

Wishing you a happy festive season and all the best for the New Year. Hope it's a lot better than recent times have been for you.

The "homework" doesn't appeal this time around but I attach an article I've written which may

be of interest. It may be controversial - but no more so than Alan Frost's offerings!

TCP: Thanks for that Des, it can be found after the letter col. And BTW, homework is hardly ever interesting, it just needs to be done.

Des - roams around to seize a new topic:

I've also been watching the BBC series about Julius Caesar and his story really resonates today. He was a populist and a self-publicist, skilful at twisting the truth in his favour. He broke the rules, manipulated allies and used violence to silence his enemies. After becoming popular for conquering most of Gaul he returned to Rome and instigated a civil war by "crossing the Rubicon". This induced a mob to break into the senate house and set it on fire. Having won the civil war, he turned the republic into a dictatorship with himself as dictator. He then enlarged the senate with his supporters and chose magistrates himself. His dictatorship should have lasted only 6 months as an emergency measure, but it became 10 years and finally he was established as dictator for life. When he was finally assassinated on the Ides of March, he had turned Rome from a relatively enlightened 500-year old democracy into an dictatorship ruled by a single emperor.

Who does this remind you of?

TCP: Well, I can think of a couple of names who loosely fit the bill.

But really, yet another prog about JC? You'd think there were hundreds more (less well known) Emperor/dictators that could be covered.

And the final Des:

I do enjoy reading the letters in TCP and think it should have scored much higher in the zine poll. I've only not signed up for a game because I am pretty well committed already

TCP: Vick (Hall) has made a similar sort of observation - I really should pay more attention to it. (I probably need a 'zine-poll' election agent for next year - anyone fancy the job?)

John Colledge - with an update:

Denny and I have fallen foul of whatever bug is doing the rounds. My few remaining brain cells feel as if they are floating about in treacle. The guy I was meant to be meeting to go over my script with today was saying there's a bug with the tagline, '100 cough' attached to it. That we could well do without that.

With luck I'll get some homework done by the deadline but I wanted to make sure my orders at least were in.

If you don't hear from me before then, all the best for the Festive Season, though I'm sure it will be somewhat subdued. 2024 must surely be better for you and the family.

TCP: Thank you for the good wishes and sorry to hear that you are staying in lurgy-ville. (If you had said that the germs had crossed the channel in rubber dinghies, I'm sure you would have gotten more support and sympathy from certain quarters. Hopefully you are both on the mend.

Andrew Greco - quiet cars:

On Tony's comment about the danger of quiet electric cars on narrow country roads, I have had that experience of a car coming up right behind me unheard. Not sure what could be done about it, as it would be weird to add an artificial noise to an electric car.

TCP: I guess that would be a tad bizarre, but it sounds, (pun intended) like the most obvious solution.

The final Andrew - on Colin:

Colin wrote that he disagreed with me that life in Britain was better in the 1980s to early 2000s. I don't mean everyone had it better. What I miss is the sense of freedom from that time.

TCP: Watch out Andrew, Colin may take a birch rod to your backside, if you continue to disagree with him!

Mike Dommett - Starts with cars:

Have you seen the figures for electric cars? Tons of materials required, use of child labour in the Congo, battery costs, battery life 7 years, battery cars catch fire, or some of those factors?

What you don't see is what's required for a petrol or diesel cars, using the same measurements so that "tons" appears a lot. You don't see anything about where child labour is used elsewhere and the inaction in those cases. You don't see the latest battery life, or indeed that the batteries are almost entirely recycled, so the calculations for a new battery from scratch are not actually relevant, though the messenger implies that it what is needed.

Battery cars do catch fire, yes, but the fact that petrol and diesel cars catch fire by over an order of magnitude more often seems to be missing. An electric car has a bigger carbon footprint than a petrol car when made - that is actually true. In under two years the position is reversed, and gets wider and wider as time passes. There aren't enough charging points. As pointed out the Conservatives promised to spend £3 billion a few years back. Just that they haven't spent a penny.

TCP: I don't know a lot about electric cars, but I am sure you are right that some of the opposition issues, can also be applied to conventional cars.

It's almost like capitalism was actually part of the problem.

Mike moves on - to the grid:

There are problems connecting new power sources to the grid. Or the PRIVATISED National grid is not ready to connect to new power sources, has no direction and perhaps like privatised water, privatised railways, privatised care homes, privatised water companies, put shareholders first and their service provision a long way back.

TCP: Perhaps the problem can be summarized thus: When a resource is limited, government intervention is required to ensure it is fairly shared out. However, a rare resource means mega-bucks for the lucky few, who would rather keep the government out of it!

Mike - Postal peeves:

Problems with the post office and the universal provision for post-delivery. It was noticeable, that when the government allowed postal competitors, that the competitors had no such requirement. So, they'd deliver big postal quantities from companies to city hubs, everything else went to the nearest post box. A letter to the Orkneys - post box. The profitable stuff to the private competitors, the costly stuff to the post office. Bit like privatised landline phones. You never saw the privatised phone box in the village or small town.

TCP: I get that, like the NHS, the ideal is to spread the risk/effort, so we all carry a tiny bit, whilst those who's need is greatest get it, without breaking the bank. And we ALL have that safety net.

Mike - continues:

Then you privatised the post office. Split in to two parts. Parcels and post. Parcels profitable and with many competitors who had poor working conditions for staff, and the post no longer cross subsidised. Stamp costs up, numbers of postmen cut, parcel delivery a priority. It's profit, letters often lose money.

TCP: This is the usual tactic, run the nationalized stuff really badly and (falsely) claim that the ONLY solution is, 'privatization'. (Rather than the more logical, 'running it better'!

Mike - on elections:

It still worries me that Trump and Farage approved Putin's actions, and the Trump republicans would rather Ukraine fell to Russia. As Trump's promise to end that war in 24 hours suggests.

TCP: Indeed. I think that the opportunity to make a fast buck/Rouble 'trumps' (pun intended) genuine concern for national security.

Mike - Arab/Israeli conflict:

There are those on the right wing of the Israeli Government who desire a Palestinian free "river to the sea" with everything under the rule of the Israeli government. Expelling Palestinians suits these people just fine. It is not the view of all Israeli's, and it is not something to blame Jews for in the UK and elsewhere.

Though it's sadly noticeable that right wing groups in the UK blame people with different skin colours for acts committed by someone with the skin colour elsewhere. The Israeli Government with effective rule over the west bank has done little or nothing to stop the killing of over 300 Palestinians on the west bank since the Hamas attack.

TCP: Indeed. I do not understand how and why the American establishment, (not necessarily the majority of Americans) think that unqualified support for the state of Israel is in their best interests. What was the UN cease-fire vote, 157 for and just 10 against? Where is your democracy America?

(Also the mere existence of a 'veto' for some and not others is inherently unfair and undemocratic.)

Mike - continues:

Andrew Greco suggests the left supports Hamas. I don't agree. One of the banes of student life were the 30 lefties, 20 international socialists, 7 international Marxists and 3 workers revolutionary party. They'd be at any demo, any protest with their banners whether they were wanted or not. (I was with the conservatives back then, but Macmillan, not Monday club). So, a picture of a banner does not tar the demonstration, any more than the far-right slogans and flags damns conservative demonstrations.

Singing or saying "from the river to the sea" is equated to wanting all Israelis exterminated. I doubt that this is what is intended. Palestinians need to be free in what's left of Palestine or expelled if there's going to be peace. The Israelis who extol the latter do not seem to meet with criticism by the right-wing media.

TCP: This is definitely part of the problem - the same rules are not applied to both sides in this situation. This makes having a sensible and honest conversation rather difficult.

I think that in broad terms, Andrew is correct in observing that in the main, the Left-wing generally sides with the Palestinians, but I understand what you are saying about groups (of whatever persuasion) being able to hi-jack or insert themselves into any event/cause. It's almost impossible to restrict who decides to support you.

Mike - continues:

In 1967 Ben Gurion advised the Israeli Government against occupying the West Bank and Gaza strip, he wasn't the only one. Other voices suggested occupying the ridge line on the west bank overlooking Israel, and compensating with land toward Galilee, largely Palestinian areas anyway.

TCP: There were a lot of options, any of which would have been better than what was actually done. (And all this crap was predictable in advance.)

Mike - Agreeing with Andrew:

I do agree with Andrew Greco that most MP's are not bad. They have two jobs. One, super social worker, a task I have found most have been very good with, and the other is turning up to vote for things that they haven't listened to and don't understand at all in most cases.

TCP: I have to say that, "haven't listened to" and "don't understand" does not make an MP, 'not bad' - just the opposite in fact!!

Mike - moves onto "I'm a Celebrity":

An entitled elite money boy was paid more than the majority of us will earn in a lifetime. It's not my thing, but then neither is "East Enders" or "Coronation Street". Others can watch it. It's like books. I think, but correct me, if necessary, that Mr Farage has a large band of followers and their support may have skewed the voting. Certainly, on GB News there was a lot of "ITV deliberately skewing the result to stop Nigel winning" content.

TCP: Likewise. I have zero interest in such individuals, or TV programmes, so I don't watch them. I do think that divisive people can be harmful to society at large, but I would not advocate banning them or censoring them. However, if they do spout untruths and/or try to incite violence/hatred, then they do need to be called out.

Mike - on licences:

The dog licence was seven shillings and six pence. It was the same as the marriage licence, and an amusing Victorian music hall song was "she cost me seven and six, I wish I'd bought a dog!"

But the marriage licence increased and you couldn't do it for dogs because pensioners rely on their pets. (you could increase the pension..... but think how Labour treated the TV licence for pensioners). So, there's no overwatch on dogs and their owners, and the posturing by MP's increasing police powers on dogs - I don't know an area where the police are out looking for owners and poorly trained dogs in fields, but they aren't in west Dorset.

TCP: Was that really the argument against raising the Dog Licence fee - pensioners? It would have been easy enough to up the pension by whatever amount, which would still be way lower than the current cost of a TV licence. I would argue that pensioners need a telly way more than they need a dog.

Mike - on cousins marrying:

The link posted doesn't say that 46% are married to a relative from Pakistan who is brought into the country. Some still are. Forced marriages can be repudiated. OK, support for the repudiator is not high. The article says arranged marriages are becoming less and less common. That is what happened in the Jewish Community. Marrying someone whose skin colour is different to yours is acceptable now in a way it wasn't 50 years ago.

TCP: Custom, practice and tradition aside, perhaps families need to be advised/counselled on the potential genetic pitfalls of marrying too close a relative. I don't know whether I would go so far as to ban it, but 'informed consent' seems like an appropriate step to take.

Mike - on the Covid Inquiry:

William Hague writes in the Times that the inquiry is concentrating on what was said, and not on what we did wrong. It was the Conservative Party who wrote the terms of reference for the inquiry and the format, so it wouldn't report until well after the next election. So far it seems clear what we thought was happening was happening, even as the right-wing newspapers insisted it wasn't.

TCP: Indeed. No surprises there.

Mike - continues:

Mr Frost mentions the September spike. I remember that Johnson kept the figures from Starmer for two weeks and so when labour saw them and called for immediate lockdown, Starmer was hailed by the Conservative Press as Mr "Hindsight". The Telegraph had an editorial at the time about how Johnson couldn't do a lock down now, because of the embarrassment of acting on Starmer's words. And Johnson didn't for another 3 weeks. You could add the April Spike, where Pakistan and Bangladesh were showing a surge and were embargoed, but India wasn't because we were hoping for a post Brexit deal with India.....

TCP: Oh yes, Brexit, the gift that keeps on giving.

Mike - on going online:

I'm against it. Going online saves money for the providers, but pays no attention to those who cannot cope with online, for whatever reason.

TCP: Indeed. Ad how many times has anyone, ever found a useful response in the FAQ's? It's like the automated option things on the phone - you give 3 or 4 obscure options, each maybe addressing 1% of the calls, meanwhile, 96% of the time we have to wait in the bucket item for a human to grudgingly agree to speak to you.

Mike - confusing me:

Assist with fossil walks, help in community orchard, trustee of church hall, D&D group for autistic teenagers; explore locally and further afield, read about 3-4 books a week, Board Games at U3A, but no dancing till knee and now hip sorted out.

TCP: I have no idea what comment by whom, prompted this response and I don't know what to do with it.

Mike - NHS woes:

The government published a plan to bring the NHS up to strength, which means we will have our first new GP's in 2034. Do people think we will keep all our existing ones till then?

TCP: Without wishing to sound too maudlin, the way things are going, I probably won't even be alive by then and as there is literally nothing, I can do to positively influence the situation, I will do my ostrich impersonation instead.

Alan Frost - missed point:

The Jagger-Delon-Faithfull picture shows my age. I suppose many younger readers weren't aware of the implications. I guess it's from about 1968, when Delon and Faithfull were starring in *Girl on a Motorcycle*, which was considered pretty racy at the time. Jagger was at the early peak of his career, when he could have any woman, he fancied. The one he fancied was Marianne Faithfull. And why not? She was an absolute cracker and still is, for her age. When the Stones were busted for drugs, the police famously found her dressed only in a fur rug. The story goes that Jagger was eating a Mars Bar out of her anatomy. It's an oft-repeated urban legend and may well be true. I recall seeing a newspaper interview 20-odd years ago, which included "I didn't ask her about Mars Bars".

TCP: Hey, I remember, "Girl on a Motorcycle." I believe I have the paper back and maybe a DVD kicking around. I remember being shocked, not by the raciness, but rather by the fate of the main protagonist.

Alan - continues:

But Delon was conventionally handsome, confident, smooth and knew how to dress. Maybe the photo was just one of those incidental moments that mean nothing, but it's so easy to interpret it as Jagger hiding his jealousy, thinking "This guy has seen my girl with her kit off and has run his hands

over her. And simulated sex. Who knows what else? And now he's chatting her up."

TCP: I didn't recognise/remember this, 'Delon' dude. (If I was James, (Hardy), I probably would have said, "I only remember two things about that film.....")

Alan - continues further:

It's somehow comforting to normal males to discover that an international sex symbol can be upstaged and feel the same jealousies that the rest of us would.

TCP: I guess, not really thought about it. But it does seem to be human nature to crave what another has, even if there is no great 'need' for what is being craved.

Alan - on rape:

Mendy, who was accused, tried and acquitted of rape, is now, quite rightly, suing Manchester City for wrongful dismissal (or something similar) because they refuse to employ him, despite his innocence. Hope he wins.

TCP: Not familiar with this case, but if he was dismissed irrespective of the outcome of the trial, then it sounds like his employers were a tad hasty with the old P45.

More Alan - more on rape:

Meanwhile, somebody, Colin, I think pointed out that the law on rape involved informed consent. Exactly my point: a woman who is so drunk and/or drugged that she cannot give informed consent is not the same as one who is raped with a knife at her throat. They are not even similar and assuming the drink/drugs were willingly taken on board, is really responsible for her inability to give informed consent. Indeed, arguably, if she was so out of it at the time, when she comes round, she is in no position to prove that she didn't consent. We've all done things pissed that we regret next day but it would be wrong to suppose that we didn't "consent" to doing them.

TCP: No Alan, you are wrong. A woman is free to get as pissed as she likes without some douche claiming that her self-inflicted inability to give consent = her giving consent! What kind of fucking scientist are you?

Alan - continues..... I think:

And a Jewish feminist professor is claiming that Hamas was using rape as a planned weapon because so many Israeli women were raped before being murdered and it couldn't be coincidence. Really? You've been in combat. You're in an unusually heightened state of awareness. You see a nice-looking and scantily-clad (to a Muslim) enemy woman who you're supposed to kill. Why not? Who can say how any of us would react in the circumstances? Rape happens a lot in wars.

That doesn't excuse it, just adds to the horror, but to claim that it isn't spontaneous is ridiculous.

TCP: I think two things can be true at the same time. In war time, sometimes soldiers take advantage of a chaotic situation to commit all sorts of heinous acts, including rape. However, there are plenty of instances where 'rape' has been used to terrify and intimidate the population an army is attempting to subdue.

Alan - windy mill joshing:

I know I said I wasn't going to engage in any more renewable bollocks but this one is too good to miss: From today's BBC website:



There'll never be another Adolf, but this comes close for irrational worship.

TCP: I'm not sure anyone worships wind turbines, (or solar panels, or hydroelectric dams or nuclear power stations or any other energy-generating kit) irrationally or not, so I think the joke you are looking for doesn't exist. (And kids pointing vs nazi-salute is a little tenuous.....)

Alan - compares and contrasts:

[Krasowo-Częstki massacre - Wikipedia](#)

This showed up on the Wiki homepage today. In what way is this "Nazi war crime" (sic) different from what is going on in Gaza? Apart from its small scale, of course. Well, I suppose no Jews were involved.

TCP: I am fairly confident that the majority of TCP readers, if not all, would make the connection, with this WWII event and what is happening today.

I have noticed on social media that many non-Jewish/Israeli commentators on the events in Gaza, start their videos with:

"I condemn the actions by Hamas on October 7th unreservedly....."

Given that the dead count for Gaza is over 20K, (the overwhelming majority NOT being Hamas fighters), one would like to see the Israeli-apologists issue a similar disclaimer, before going on to mention crimes of Hamas.

Alan - continues:

Is everybody noticing what I predicted some time ago: the US is getting fed up with Ukraine and will pull the plug, pretty soon, making all those deaths on both sides pointless. As they always do. Hitler was probably right to fight to the end; a few more months and the Yanks would likely have changed their minds. And, as we all noticed, the split effort between Gaza and Ukraine is too much for their poor little brains to handle.

TCP: Hence the idea that Putin has had a hand in the Hamas/7th October thing, in combination with 2024 being a presidential election year.

I think if a cost/benefit analysis was done, I am not sure Israel would not get quite as much as it does now. Apart from wars without end, amen, I have no idea how America benefits from the Israeli connection.

Alan - on Sir David:

Somebody was applauding David Attenborough. He is, it seems, a really nice guy. My drama director sister-in-law turned up at some BBC colleague's party and he opened the door. "Hi, come in. I'm David." as if nobody knew. He was helping to host and she said that there was absolutely no side to him. Just another face at the party. Don't think she slept with him but I bet many women would have liked to.

TCP: Probably would have liked to. I dunno how many would swoon over a 90-something year old.

More Alan - more sodding technology:

So, it's the Monday before Christmas. The electricity goes off just as I put some toast on. Check with the neighbour. Theirs is still on. Shit. But it's some sort of 3-phase system so it's likely only one house in three. Why me, Lord?

OK. Ring up the Electricity people. Ah, but the phone now works through the router and has no power, so it's not working. Well, when the line was redirected through the router, they fitted, for free, an emergency phone with a back-up mobile number. Use that.

Fine, so who do you ring? And what is their number? Look it up on t'internet. But the router needs electricity...

Use your smart phone to look up the number? Yeah, it comes round to it again: we don't have one. Look it up in the phone book? Doesn't exist anymore because "everybody" has a directory in their smart phone.

TCP: I think I know where this going. I bet you didn't even have 50p for the public telephone that no longer exists at the end of your road.....

Alan - continues:

And there's more: having switched from a hot water tank to a combi boiler, there's no hot water or central heating.

Well, luckily the neighbour does have an iPhone and checks for me. Turns out that you ring 105. Well, I did, on the backup mobile (costing god knows how much) and discovered that it was a general fault, not just us. They were on it and, as the lines are buried, the estimate is 6 sodding hours. By which time it will be dark at this time of year. Candles are so Christmassy, aren't they?

Obviously, a fault at the sub-station, as it came back on within the hour. And rang me personally to tell me that it was back up. Good service, to be fair.

So now that toast, already slightly crisp, starts from scratch and burns because the toaster doesn't work on a simple thermocouple any more.

But note, yet again, that, in order to function in the modern world, you need any amount of gadgetry, starting with a bastard smart phone. At least the gas fire worked and we could have boiled water on the hob, but when we're all electric with a heat pump, we'll be fucked. Are we putting too many eggs in one basket?

Last one before Christmas (I hope).

TCP: I hesitate to suggest this but - have you considered solar-power with battery-back-up? [Pause for the sound and shock-wave from a colossal explosion up North!]

Alan - mobbies the gift keeps on giving:

As I mentioned, my ancient mobile had its sim card deactivated for non-use. As we're going south for Christmas and have to spend several ages on the M6, we decided to fire up the wife's just in case of emergency. Well, she'd not used it since May, we find, so it, too, has been deactivated. Can I get it reactivated on line? Can I even contact them on line? Guess. All I can get is a primitive AI with limited responses that can't understand my request. If that's a sample, it's going to be a long time before they take over the world. And the phone number is dead, but shows the call going somewhere, so I expect it was one of those premium rate bastards that will have cost a fortune. It gives you a number to ring from your mobile, but since the mobile is deactivated... There's, astonishingly, a snailmail address, but that's not going to get us anywhere before next Sunday, when we actually need it, especially as the Christmas post will swallow it forever..

So, off to the O2 shop, which is, fortunately, on the nearby shopping park. The meeter and greeter gets a "manager", who

looks about 16. An hour later, an older manager, who, weirdly, looks like an early Christian priest, all shaven forehead and huge beard, spends a long time on the phone, talking to Bangalore Tom* and gets him to re-activate the sim card. Hmm. Well, the phone has now forgotten the wife's contact list and the £25 credit. Ah, well: just get a new sim card? Nope, they don't do pay-as-you go any more. The only route is a contract. £5 a month for the first year being the cheapest. So much for the burner phones that are in all the police procedurals. She hasn't used £5 in a decade!

So, the one time when having a mobile phone might actually be useful, it fails. And cost me an afternoon that I'll never get back. So much for technology being a time-saver.

Give it 24 hours to wake up, they said. Not holding my breath. I suppose I'll have to go back and take out a contract. Do I then give in and get a smartphone, too? It's not the expense. I really don't need it. I've got a perfectly good desktop PC and a laptop. And I really object to being manipulated by the system. Bastards.

*Bangalore Tom: when you call a helpline or get a cold call and the person on the other end is clearly Indian, but claims to have a common English name. A lot of them do work out of Bangalore, which is a big IT centre, but may not actually be their base. Worthy people, I'm sure, with a living to make, but they're treating me as an idiot, presumably as company policy. And a real Tom, even if he was a Weegie, Scouse or even, God forbid, a Brummie, would be easier to understand. Bastards.

TCP: Whilst I do have, (and use) a smart phone, I am with you completely on all this techno-bollox.

Not had the same issue as you, touch wood, but dealing with my brother's affairs was the stuff of nightmares. The worst offender was Nat West (bank) - you ring up and as you navigate thru the automatic bs and get told a dozen times about the poxy website. Had I wanted to step into that nightmare, I would have done it already, so shut the fuck up and put me thru.

They don't even try to hide the fact they are taking the piss. The number to call on the letter from the 'bereavement department' is just the bog standard, usual all-and-sundry call centre. I've lost count of how many calls and letters and weeks passed trying to sort this out.

I dunno why it did not occur to me before, but in the end I just walked into town and into the branch. I had with me all the paperwork I could

possibly need and it was all sorted out, in person, in less than 30 minutes.

Online is easier - my arse!

Alan - crosses the pond:

See a Colorado judge has banned Trump. Well, yes, good, we say; the man is a dangerous arse. But it's part of my complaint: like the alleged rapists, he hasn't (yet) been convicted of anything, so he's innocent until proved guilty. But when the judiciary are able to interpret the law for political reasons, there's something wrong with justice. Colorado, it seems, is solidly Democrat. (Who'd have guessed?) Just because we dislike Trump and think he'll be an international disaster; it doesn't justify distorting the law. Exactly like our own judges who won't allow the Rwanda flights and the spider lady who blocked Brexit. You might rejoice if you're a woke lefty, but blocking the will of the people is not what our legal system is for. Of course, the lawyers still get (over) paid and the more turmoil there is, the more work they get. Bastards.

TCP: The American system is so bizarre at the best of times and I think it can be argued that, 'President' (of the USA) is a special case. Especially if a defence tactic is to just delay and delay so that he can get elected and then pardon himself.

I think Maine has also banned him and I think others will too. We will all sleep better for him not getting a second term.

Alan - sauce for the goose?:

Today's news is that an ex-soldier has been jailed for 4 years for planning to firebomb a bookshop in Nottingham that specialises in LGBT+ and black literature, leaving the slogan "White Lives Matter." I daresay a fair proportion of society would agree with some or all of his sentiments and, be it noted, less than a century ago, they'd have been considered normal. Zeitgeist, see? Well, quite right to jail him. However much we may agree with his beliefs, we should not condone law-breaking.

Now compare Dr Gail Bradbrook, founder of Extinction Rebellion, who smashed windows at HS2 and who knows what damage she'd have done if she could actually have got in? 15 months suspended sentence and it will expire in 15 months, when the soldier will still be in jail. However much we may agree with her beliefs, we should not condone law-breaking.

Note that he only planned, and might not have gone through with it, whereas she actually did it. What sort of dual standards are we operating?

TCP: I agree that as outlined by you, it does sound like double-standards are

in action. I know nothing more than what you have said, but perhaps, 'fire-bombing' is seen as potentially more dangerous/destructive/unpredictable? We probably need more info/background to comment further.

(*Cue: Alan finds out that Dr Gail is a black, one-legged, lesbian with ADHD and he goes completely bat shit crazy!*)

Alan - times have changed:

For Saturnalia, I was given David Mitchell's *Unruly*, which is an irreverent history of the English monarchy up to Elizabeth I. Reasonably accurate and quite amusingly written, but pitched at ignorami, so I've not learned anything new. His language is disgraceful. The caption to the picture of the Murder of Thomas a Beckett: "Note the monk on the right, doing fuck-all about it". There is much in the same vein. Hmm. I'd not thought of him as a big user of obscenity. Not big and not clever and quite unnecessary, David. But it will sell millions. Might have written it myself and caused complaints from Mike. Seems I'm bang on trend. How things have moved on since Lady Chatterley ended up in court.

TCP: I did not know of this book, but can guess, from what I know of DM, it's general style. I have seen/heard him use profanity before, but granted, not often - which I guess makes it funnier and more impactful when he does.

Don't talk about it, (writing a book) - do it! You are retired now, why not create something that will outlive 'Z' and the TCP letter column?!

Only just twigged the 'Z' of your 'Zeitgeist' chimes with the 'Z' the Russians have been using in their 3-day special military operation, in spite of there being no 'Z' in the Russian alphabet..... Coincidence?

And the final Alan:

Incidentally, he's a bit sugary about his Mrs. I predict divorce in the next couple of years. You read it here first, folks.

TCP: No idea, don't know enough about either of the parties and don't really concern myself with celebrity stuff. But your prediction is now recorded in TCP and you will have full gloating privileges should it come to pass.

TCP: That will do, not really any room, or mood for jokes this time - wait, hang on, just thought of one:

2024 is gonna be my year!!

That must have made you laugh.

Why does religion exist?

Human beings have invented a whole range of supernatural beliefs such as astrology, homeopathy, ghosts, fairies, healing crystals etcetera. But by far the most prevalent of superstitions is religion in its many forms. Whilst it is understandable that primitive peoples have many superstitions because of their ignorance of science, I have long pondered on the following question: why do otherwise intelligent people believe in unproven, absurd and often self-contradictory religions?

Emotion

People fear the unknown void of death. They also grieve for lost loved ones and cannot bear the thought of never seeing them again. Religions almost always offer an afterlife, which is naturally more perfect than life on earth (heaven/rapture/virgins). However unlikely this may be the desire for it to be true is so intense that it overcomes rational thought processes. It is similar to people being duped by scammers into believing they have won a lottery which they never entered. Religion offers the carrot of a blissful afterlife with one's loved ones, but it also threatens the stick of punishment for disobedience or lack of faith. The old saying that there are "no atheists in foxholes" clearly illustrates how religion can exert control over the rational mind in the most stressful situations, just as a torturer gains control over his victim through pain, fear and psychological pressure.

It is also a natural human instinct to desire and seek out order. Randomness is anathema to human beings because we feel out of control, which is terrifying. Science seeks to explain cause and effect, but there are limits to scientific knowledge. So, we try to impose order on randomness by positing a supernatural cause, however unlikely that may be. We also like to believe in justice, which is why we create laws. It seems terribly unfair that the wicked often prosper, while the good suffer. We cannot accept such unfairness so we derive comfort from the idea of an afterlife where injustices are corrected. Since we arrogantly place human beings at the centre of the universe, we imagine that actions we take must have some influence on events which we cannot fathom. This creates a tendency to blame ourselves when things go wrong because we have in some way failed. Therefore, if we appeal in the right way to the supernatural it gives us the comfort of believing we can influence events and exert control. Some people can and do invent their own sets of rules, such as obsessive compulsive touching of objects or avoiding doing

certain actions. But religion offers a ready-made set of rules which saves us the effort of creating our own individual ones, as well as the confidence of a shared belief.

Finally, there is the strong emotional desire to be loved. In the same way a dog longs to please its master or pack leader, human beings desire to please an invisible friend so that they can achieve the enduring love they so strongly desire.

Religion plays on strong emotions such as fear, love and guilt. Essentially, it boils down to wishful thinking.

Group think

Most human beings have similar emotional needs so it is inevitable that that they will invent similar supernatural beings. Since we are social animals, we feel a strong need to belong to a group. Religion binds a social group in the same way as nationalism, political allegiance or sports, but in much more powerful way. We desire to fit in with a tribe by believing the same thing, however far-fetched it may be. This is particularity strong when children are raised in a certain faith so that all their loved ones tend to believe the same. It is incredibly difficult to break away from such beliefs, because this would mean being an outsider in the tribe and possibly even ostracised or cast out by loved ones. This is particularly true of closed groups such as cults which allow little or no contact with other tribes or individuals. Tribal bonding is strengthened through group activities such as singing and praying, so that even when individual have doubts about a faith, they feel pressure to join in with the majority. It is further strengthened by authority figures- prophets, priests, imams, or elders- who have the respect of the tribe. Religion is also, like political ideology, a very useful method of social control, so that elite groups or individuals can maintain their privileged positions at the top of the tribal hierarchy. They are helped to maintain that social dominance through long established rules, punishments and rewards. This explains why religion is very slow to change and frequently lags behind more enlightened views on human rights, freedom, equality and sexual liberation. The ultimate rule which must not be broken is to leave the faith, which is why apostasy is severely punishable offence in many religions.

Reinforcement

Confirmation bias is a powerful factor in religion. Whereas science seeks to prove or disprove hypotheses by testing them to the point of destruction, religion seeks only evidence to reinforce the faith and ignores

evidence to the contrary. Only looking for one type of evidence means you will usually not even be aware of counter arguments and evidence. If you are aware of it, you can dismiss it as insignificant because it does not coincide with established religious view. Chinese whispers can be important because facts are distorted to meet the world view of those that interpret them, so that over time they bear little or no resemblance to reality. Eventually religions may mutate and splinter to meet the slightly different desires of different groups, which explains how different sects arise. However, the faith which is most attractive (or most difficult to escape) for the great majority will tend to dominate within a community over time. Just as viruses mutate so as to become more effective in contaminating their hosts, so religions mutate so that those with more powerful control mechanisms tend to dominate over ones which are more tolerant of rebels.

An example of religious manipulation

LivingWaters.com is typical of bizarre, comical but frankly scary evangelical sites. Here are some of its quotes:

"Have you ever lied, stolen, or used God's name in vain? Jesus said; Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (stage one: identify your target audience- in this case everyone).

"If you have done these things God sees you as a lying, thieving, blasphemous adulterer at heart"

(stage two: create guilt)

"He will punish you in a terrible place called hell"

(stage three: create fear)

"But Jesus paid the fine, the case can be dismissed."

(stage four: create feeling of indebtedness)

"Repent and trust Jesus and God will give you eternal life."

(stage five: create hope and longing with ridiculous promises)

"God will never fail you."

(stage six: create dependence)

The cycle of emotion, group think, psychological manipulation and reinforcement is incredibly difficult to break. I believe this explains how even among intelligent people reason and rationality is cast aside in favour of illogical but emotionally attractive religious superstitions.

Des Langford 12/12/2023

ZEITGEIST

Being the distilled wisdom of Alan Frost
alan.frost43@ntlworld.com

"It's now very common to hear people say, 'I'm rather offended by that.' As if that gives them certain rights. It's actually nothing more... than a whine. 'I find that offensive.' It has no meaning; it has no purpose; it has no reason to be respected as a phrase. 'I am offended by that.' Well, so fucking what."

Stephen Fry

You see: I'm in good company.

REPRESENTATION

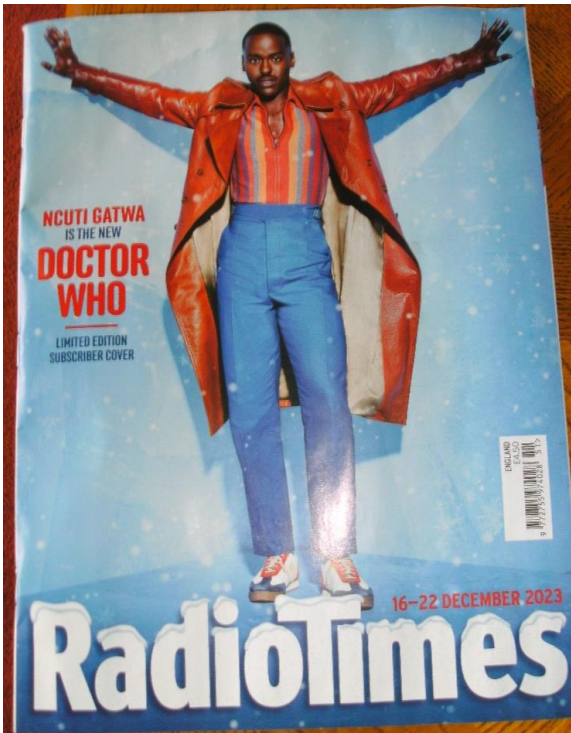
Yes, well, I get that if minorities don't see themselves represented in everyday culture, they feel overlooked and invisible.

So yes: I understand why minorities are included in all sorts of TV programmes, even when they're not necessary. And why adverts now always seem to include a pretty mixed-race woman with the occasional black family. But seldom an all-white one.

Sure, if advertisers want to sell to all races, they have to represent them in their adverts. I suppose. If you want to sell to gullible black people, you put them in your ads. Never mind that you alienate the gullible whites, who don't see their own experience reflected in the scenario. And, yes: stereotypical roles, such as all senior policemen being white males, might need to be challenged.

But most senior policemen *are* white males. And, outside London, mixed race households are not the norm (and I don't believe they are in London, either, but maybe more common). I rarely see a black person and, unless I travel out of my comfort zone, any other racial group. *My* experience isn't being represented.

All right: I see why Dr Who could equally be a woman. I see that she *might* have a transgender sidekick. But what are the odds of that? Or maybe that the next one is a gay black man. Although it's pretty tasteless to dress him thus:



Give him a woolly wig and he's dressed exactly as a gollywog. Even the striped shirt.

Well, I've never given a shit about Dr Who anyway, but I *do* care about *probability*: what are the odds that all these people would represent minorities?

So, if I'm not going to watch it anyway, why should I care? Well, I really don't. But the muddled thinking behind it all offends my sensibilities.

Then there's *Famous Five*: You'd have thought that, in this day and age, a girl who calls herself George and dresses as a boy would be exactly what they want. Make her black (ish) as well? Yeah. Why not? Except that she clearly wasn't in Enid Blyton's mind. Because she was a member of a long-established Cornish family. Well, maybe Uncle Quentin's ancestor abused his slaves?



But then, from the publicity stills, she has fairly long hair (put that on Dr Who and you see what I mean about gollywogs) and wears rather frilly blouses. And why change her surname from "Kirrin" to "Barnard"? Well, I see that it's the name of a brand of androgynous clothing. But surely that's Ok? Isn't that what they want? At least Timmy is still a dog and hasn't morphed into a robot or, heaven forfend, a cat. I hope.

And I've complained before about the unhistorical use of ethnic minorities in historical dramas. We *know* that non-white characters were rare back then. Sure, there were a few and, for the most part, they seem to have been accepted and integrated as perfectly normal members of society within their social class. But to suggest that every fifth or tenth person on a street in Tudor/Georgian/Victorian England was black is just ludicrous.

Compare this with a world in which it's impossible for a white actor to play Othello, where Dr Who's transgender sidekick can only be played by an actual trans woman; where a gentile actor with a prosthetic nose is unacceptable to play a Jewish composer. And yet the ethnicities for whom these parts are reserved are at complete liberty to play outside their race or orientation.

Well, it's fiction, so why should we care?

Ah, yes, but that's to point, isn't it? Go back to the start. We're supposed to care that minorities are under-represented but we're not *allowed* to care if our own groups are under-represented. I'm supposed to ignore stuff that doesn't reflect my experience while the minorities are not expected to return the compliment. What sort of thinking do we expect from luvvies? Quite so.

And another thing:

While minorities are being over-represented, we might note *which* minorities: A quick trawl through the *Radio Times* shows that there's a black face on nearly every spread. But it *is* black. There are very few Asians. And *which* black people? The overwhelming majority of black British are of West Indian origin, but the actors getting the parts tend to be of direct African origin, like Ncuti Gatwa, Dr Who, above, who is Rwandan. Native British blacks are under-represented. It's just virtue signalling and the origins are entirely from the US, where black is black and other minorities don't get a look-in.

Update: inter-generational communication.

Related American blindness: Readers may recall that I was bemoaning the fact that the mindset of current generations leads them to dismiss attitudes that were perfectly acceptable and normal not long ago. Contrary

to what detractors have suggested, I don't equally dismiss their opinions. I respect their right to hold them but regret that they aren't prepared to accord me the same privilege.

Turns out that the problem is inter-cultural, too:

[Tyla's racial identity: South African singer sparks culture war - BBC News](#)

I'd never heard of her and I suspect that, as a singer, she has nothing that could interest me, but she's a very pretty girl:



She's black, but if you look at her features, they aren't African. Even the somewhat frizzy hair might actually be affectation. She's from South Africa but of very mixed heritage, from Irish to Zulu with a lot of "Indian" of one sort or another. She celebrates this and is proud to be a "Coloured". That's the normal term for all mixed-race people in South Africa and is not in the least pejorative. Just a descriptor.

Ah, but she's due to tour the US, where "colored" has a different freight, having been used for non-whites who were barred from bits of the bus or white-only drinking fountains or whatever. In its original use, it was polite, being a euphemism for "black" or beyond, but its context made it a no-no. (And yet "person of color" was acceptable last time I looked, although the speed at which these things move might mean that is no longer the case. The outragists designate some inoffensive word as unacceptable and, when that's done, move on to the next, wrong-footing everybody who has adopted it to avoid giving offence.)

Thing is, some fuckwit Yanks can't see beyond their own cultural horizon and are up in arms because of her self-designation and refuse to accept her.

And so we see two of my bugbears: the misappropriation of words to mean something other than their original, harmless sense, and the blindness of so many who cannot see that their opinions, which are no more than the current zeitgeist and generate outrage because they *can*, are no more valid than those of others. Not just snowflake millennials, then.

Supplement: woke outrage in action

After I included a picture of my obsolete mobile phone, Neil suggested that I should take it to *Antiques Road Show*. I replied that I'd inherited it from my son-in-law, who died young, so it had sentimental value and didn't he feel awful, now? Yes, he said.

Well, as I explained to him: this is a classic case of woke outragism. The original suggestion was not intended to be offensive. In fact, I didn't really take offence, but I couldn't resist twisting his tail because I'm a mean bastard. The thing is:

No offence was intended.

But I "took offence" because I *could*.

Even though I was not offended, other people in my position *might* be.

Therefore, it is my right and my *duty* to simulate offence. So runs the thinking. There's something similar in the news today. Next have a jumper with the Pan Am logo on it. Residents of Lockerbie have complained because of the Pan Am plane that fell on them and it raises unpleasant memories. Next have apologised and removed the jumpers from their shelves. WTF? Pan Am stood for an awful lot of things, only a tiny part of which was that one terrorist disaster. Are the Lockerbie residents such snowflakes that the sight of the logo is enough to traumatise them? Or are they just offended because they *can* be? I sympathise with their trauma, but is it enough of an outrage to justify the withdrawal from sale to the other 60 million who aren't upset and are simply desperate to wear them? Surely not.

TCP: Ah yes, the prehistoric mobile phone - I remember that, you bastard! I think you deliberately used the picture, knowing that I could not resist having a jibe.....

Touché Mr F, touché.

Re the advert, and I suppose TV progs - these organisations pay a shit-ton of money to put these things together and are (very) adverse to simply flushing their cash down the drain. I guess a lot of market research and focus-group results have gone into these 'casting' decisions and they have gone for the selection that will generate the most income. You have said that you don't watch Dr Who, so they don't give a monkeys what you think, the target audience has spoken.