

away, but that is not often. Sucking on drugged milk, mumbling inanities about the 60's, putting his hair up with a pin, lolling on his back instead of sitting up straight, serving as a sperm bank for a pushy feminist, lying in his tub, losing every physical encounter he has with anyone, unemployed and unemployable, this whiny bowling bum is only one hilarious character in a movie full of them. But most important for our purposes, he is no kind of a man. He is literally a baby, perhaps the most passive and put-upon *schlemiel* in the history of film.

I do not think that the Coen brothers meant to advocate any political position when they created Jeff Lebowski—they have instead brilliantly satirized a figure who represents what has already happened in a certain subculture of L.A. Chandler's hero of modest proportions has become the hapless victim of the slightest force—passivity can go no further than the pathetic as well as ridiculous weakness and narcissism of the little Lebowski. As the narrator says in introducing the film and parodying Chandler himself, "Sometimes there's a man . . . The man for his time and place, he fits right in there." We can add that Jeff Lebowski is a member of a trio of losers, a male ménage that has become a twosome, an odd couple, by the end. They wind up hugging and returning to their bowling alley. But having claimed so much for this superbly crafted movie, I have to say also that "the f-word" is used in it more often than in any other film: an average, I think literally, of more than two and a half times a minute. You have been warned.

What does it all mean? Well, let's see. I remember when a professor asked me only half ironically, "What is our place in the world-historical process?" If we could figure out that one, then we might coherently answer. So here is one way of putting it: We live in a world that, instead of projecting a Humphrey Bogart (as not so long ago it did), now lives by the image of Woody Allen whining about not being as heroic and romantic and strong as Humphrey Bogart.

Let's put it another way: Feminism should be seen as a symptom and not a cause of modern decadence, endorsed by men because of lust. The destruction of masculinity is an essentially post-industrial requirement, sponsored by government and justified by science as well as ideology. Playing their part in the destruction, and making a lot of money, movies help in urging the process along. The consumers—that is to say, ourselves—have been complicit in self-destruction, and have cooperated with it, even helping pay for it. The agenda of "change" was identified by Mary Shelley and Nathaniel Hawthorne, among others, a long time ago. Seizure of control of life itself, and of its creation and destruction, is part of a Faustian agenda that has been agreed to again and again by the denizens of democracy. The Gothic tradition, as known to us through the horror movie and the science-fiction flick, speaks to us most powerfully as to the implications of our politics. With her knowing smile, Sigourney Weaver in *Alien Resurrection* has managed to imply both that lesbianism is a Gnostic privilege and that we must become the alien Other.

Watching comedies that are horrible and horror movies that are morally, not only graphically, grotesque, we may perhaps reflect upon the progressive agenda that permeates the *zeitgeist*: feminization, infantilism, dehumanization. Classics like the original *The Thing* and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* showed ordinary human love as the last defense against the very dehumanization which is now the ineffable and inevitable goal of the elite who define "popular culture." That's entertainment. Is everybody happy? c

Correct

by Paul Lake

Hermione Herperson examined her conscience
And found herself guiltless on every score:
No unspeakable isms deserved her remonstrance;
Her views were all sound: her tenure, secure.

For holding an endowed chair of English (Romantic)
Only heightened her horror of things hierarchical;
"Woman-centered," she was otherwise wholly uncentric,
Unchauvinistic, and antipatri-otic and -archal.

She had an ardent affection for all things ecological,
Though she never wrote "nature" except in scare quotes,
Her passion being primarily ideological,
Her world's flora and fauna confined to footnotes.

So imagine her shock when a large pregnant rat
Eyed her back from a shelf, and her first inclination
Wasn't pacifist-anarchist, but a cruel-intemperate
Policy of total annihilation.

She sat on the couch till the first impulse passed,
Then decided that permanent cohabitation
Was far better than having the poor creature gassed
Like some conscienceless Nazi or cold corporation.

Passing months brought the small pitter-patter of feet
To nerve-torturing heights as Hermione graded theses,
Teeth clenched, till a step caused their sudden retreat,
Leaving bare kitchen floors punctuated with feces.

As she skimmed yet another stiff hair from her tea,
Hermione wondered, Could this be the source of disease
That had plagued her for weeks? then recalled dizzily
The vague aches, the odd swellings in knuckles and knees,

Growing hot with alarm . . . Or perhaps it was fever!
She flew to the nearest emergency room,
Where the doctors tried every known cure to relieve her,
Drugging her into a nightmare delirium

In which Hermione had such a startling vision
Of militant lymphocyte and macrophage
Furiously deploying, division after division,
In xenophobic frenzy, and so fierce to engage,

She recoiled in shock from her body's defenses,
Which seemed to her now like angry white men—
Or quarreling factions at feminist conferences—
And rejecting the doctors' too-rigorous regimen,

She surrendered to sleep, in which razor-beaked vultures,
Deconstructed her flesh and unraveled her brain;
Her body became a host to diverse cultures,
And, ungendered, unclassed, slipped being's binding chain.

G.I. Jane

I Love a Gal in a Uniform

by Christopher Check



DESFIREX, the Desert Firing Exercise, is a semi-annual celebration of cordite, steel, white phosphorous, and sand held at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center in Twenty Nine Palms, California. During the weeks before, the howitzers and trucks are prepared for the field: They are rushed through a maintenance pipeline that at all other times of the year moves at a snail's pace. Marines suddenly "find" the missing spare parts that the Corps' byzantine supply system has not been able to produce for months: everything from Humvee door handles and windshields to the red tube lights which fasten to the gun barrels and make the cannons legal for the freeway journey from the back gate of Camp Pendleton to the high desert three hours away.

Eleven years ago, I was a second lieutenant experiencing my first DESFIREX. I was running "the box," or Fire Direction Center (FDC). Here—in a seeming chaos of computers, radios, field telephones, maps, slide rules, and charts—is, as Freddy Cannon put it, where the action is. At the eye of the storm is the Fire Direction Officer (FDO), whose command triggers the "mortal engines, whose rude throats the immortal Jove's dread clamors counterfeit."

My first trip to the desert as an FDO was a baptism of fire, thanks largely to a battery commander fond of quoting (he claimed) Frederick the Great: "A soldier's enemy in peacetime is his commanding officer." We got Frederick the Great when things were running like clockwork. More often the battery commander's voice came booming over the landline: "Lieutenant Check! Come and see me when you get your FDC

unf---ed!" In time I did, by the grace of God and with the patient help of a first-rate Ops Chief, a "field Marine" if ever there was one: a squat staff sergeant as skilled at training second lieutenants as he was at trigonometry and smuggling Jim Beam to the field.

For one of my fellow lieutenants, however, the exercise almost meant the end of his career. He was the Assistant Regimental Communications Officer. In that billet, he was forced to tolerate something infinitely more unpleasant than a battery commander who took seriously the job of preparing his officers for war: Women Marines, a.k.a. "WM's"—the American military's foremost oxymoron.

Female radio operators and technicians are permitted to serve with artillery units in the Marine Corps at the regimental level (which is sufficiently removed from the fray, goes the justification). My friend had a half-dozen such WM's under his care. On this trip to the desert, one of them came down with the sniffles or a stomachache (not uncommon when women go to the field) and convinced the corpsman to medivac her. My friend carried her ALICE pack up to the landing zone as she shuffled along behind him. Dumping the pack on the sand at the edge of the LZ, he turned to her, said, "You owe me one," and left her there to await the incoming helicopter.

Three weeks later, back at Camp Pendleton, he found himself standing on the carpet in front of the regimental commander's desk, responding to the charge that he had told the lady lance corporal that, in exchange for his carrying her pack up the hill to the LZ, she owed him one—well, you fill in the blank.

A story that could have ended badly did not. My friend had a reputation as a solid officer; the WM in question had another sort of reputation; and the man who ran the 11th Marine Regi-

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