

THE COBRA'S NOSE

Vol. 14

The basement is flooded. Please comply.

27 Jan. 2000

The Cobra's Notes...Remember how last month I whined about having only twenty minutes in which to think Vol. 12 of *The Nose* was cool before I was disabused of that notion by about a half dozen or more of you? Oh, how I came to treasure the memory of that one third hour! Attacks on Vol. 13 began immediately upon its release.

I tried to tough it out and wait for the chief purveyor of complaint, Mr Enigma, who claims to speak for all of humanity (that would make you all Redskin fans, and therefore your have my sympathy re their elimination from the pennant race) to be discredited, but as time passed and *none* of you said *anything* for *weeks* while Mr Enigma nattered on and on and *on* about its flaws, I wondered if maybe I shouldn't start taking his spokesperson of the world rap seriously.

I tried to cope with this unsettling thought by drowning my sorrows in Café Nikos' house blend, but that just caused me to express them louder, faster, and less coherently than before. Between tables, Pat was a comfort. "Vol. 13 is your *Diamond Dogs*," he said. "Give people time, they'll come around." Whenever he left, though, doubt reasserted itself. "Of course he would say that," hissed doubt. "He was featured in two thirds of it." And I had to admit doubt had a point. After a while, Pat got tired of reassuring me so I went back to waiting (and waiting) for you other readers to do it.

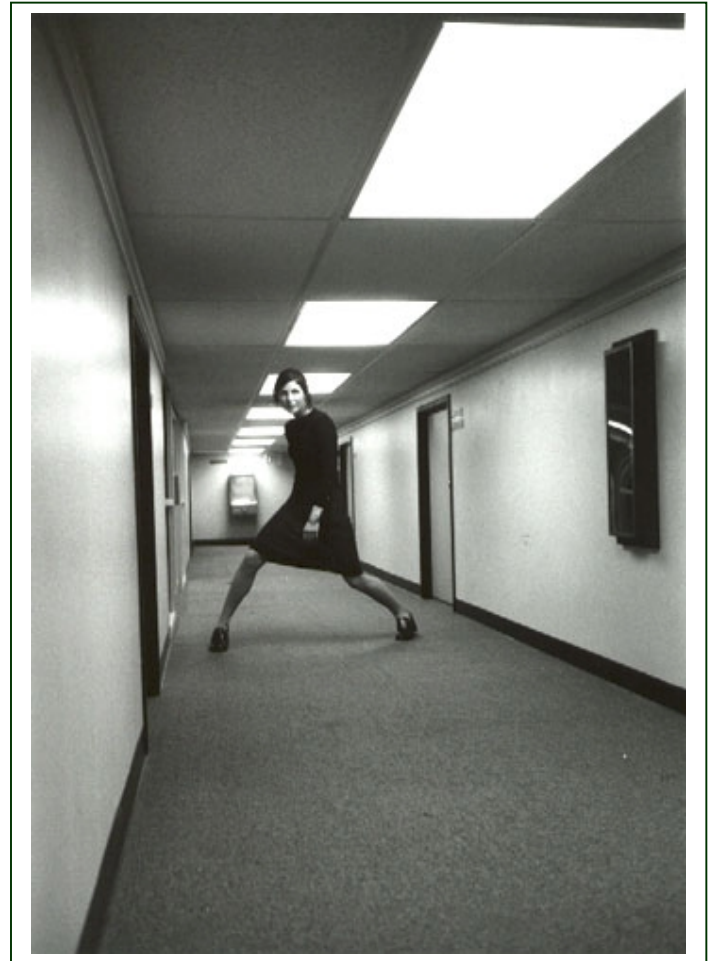
In the interim, I turned to my long neglected web page. Between assaults on the print version of *The Nose*, Mr Enigma taught me how to use tables and links in its cyber incarnation. "Look at this tiny print," he wagged Vol. 13 in my face. "It's a pain in the ass to read. I speak for everybody. I will e-mail you the code for the best drop down menu available." Later, "Why can't you just get to the point?" as he smacked the offending page with the back of his hand. "Sixty percent of this article is about nothing, and this picture doesn't look like me. I speak for everybody. This is a link." And he handed me a piece of paper that read `<a href= "xxx.html">click here, *%#!wad</a>`.

Meanwhile, I fished shamelessly for compliments. I e-mailed, phoned, and polled co-workers as they signed in. "What did you think of *The Nose*?" I queried. "I have it right here!" preceded a preemptory change of subject, if not outright flight. "Nobody will read it until you reduce it by two to four pages," said Mr Enigma. "I speak for everybody."

Finally, finally, I heard voices of dissent. Scott and Pam independently e-mailed that they had finished reading Vol. 13 and thought one part was funny, though they couldn't remember which part that was. Audrey sent a complimentary e-mail, and while she is still unhappy about the pictures (particularly the one of my new little first cousin once removed Sydney, and I sincerely apologize about that, Kelley), she is reconciled that they aren't awful on purpose. And Greg Moody, who seemed hurt that he didn't get a pseudonym last time he was mentioned (you know, when he was so beastly and called me fat) and so shall forthwith be known as "Tiger," told me a number of times Vol. 13 made a fine bookmark.

So, Mr Enigma, there you go.

In other news, did you happen to notice Andrew Norris's new leather jacket? *Mon dieu!* You'd think the Fonz was wandering the IKON's halls. When you see him, give him thumbs up and say, "Aaayyyaah!"



Being John Malkovich, More Best Movies of 1999 on page two.

Also, I got this tub and tile spray that is supposed to be used only after the tub and tile are already clean, you know, to keep down the dirt and germs. Well, I thought the spray was up to a bit more of a challenge and started spraying it all over my unprepared shower after each use. The effect is horrible. My shower looks like it has leprosy.

But back to projects that are working out, under Mr Enigma's tutelage, *The Cobra's Web Page* is much improved. You should see it. I mean that, go there now:

www.geocities.com/cobrasnose/

Cool, right? And it will just get better and better, so visit often. I've got counters on it everywhere, so I will know if you do. And no, you don't *have* to read the text (Pat always asks), but it's even better when you do.

Please enjoy Vol. 14, but if you don't I'm sure I'll hear about it from your representative.

Editor/Publisher/Cobra-in-Chief

Resolution Shmesolution

The end of December has arrived, time for people everywhere to sit back and ponder the question, “What the heck is wrong with *me*?”

That’s what the whole Resolution business is about, isn’t it? Assessing one’s flaws, choosing one that seems especially egregious, and vowing to correct it in the coming year. And every year, USA Today runs what looks to these eyes like the same statistics gauging the American Resolution failure rates, always abysmally high.

Which makes sense, because these so-called “flaws” are part of the overall package, as much a part as the so-called “virtues.” To suddenly eliminate them from the program is the psychic equivalent of removing wolves from the Yellowstone ecosystem—in the absence of that checking mechanism, some other aspect, like deer, comes roaring into prominence, then excess. For example, the other day I called the Anti-Molly Demi-Goddess Melanie, who could out cuss a Tarantino movie whilst teaching a Relief Society lesson, and noticed her end of the conversation was uncharacteristically bland (like deer). I sensed a Resolution in progress, and she confirmed she was striving cut down on unclean thoughts and language. A quick algebraic formula revealed the dullness of discussion was directly proportional to the purity of Melanie’s thoughts and language. (Not that pure thoughts and language are inherently boring, they just aren’t, as yet, Melanie’s idiom.) I told her I’d call back in a month or so when that nonsense was over with.

“You mean after I’ve shot that Resolution to hell?”

Pause.

Then, “Goddam it.”

Our chat became much more lively after that.

Another theory regarding the demise of most Resolutions is that deep down, people are content being who they are, that they inherently realize that change is dangerous and bad, and *that’s* what makes them Resolution resistant rather than weakness of character.

Which brings me to **Sharon’s Picks for Best Movies of 1999!**

The peerless *The Thin Red Line* continues to hold the number one position, and is expected to remain there well into the twenty first century. But beyond, way beyond, it lay five superior offerings with a common motif, that of characters defying their characters and the awful consequences that follow. They are, in order of when I saw them, *Election*; *Eyes Wide Shut*; *South Park: Bigger, Longer, and Uncut*; *Being John Malkovich*; and *Boys Don’t Cry*.

Don’t Get Caught In both *Election* and *Boys Don’t Cry*, the lead characters deceive their communities as a moral imperative. In *Election*, Jim McAllister, the dedicated, multiple Golden Apple Award winning civics teacher *must* stop that over achieving bulldozer Tracy Flick from winning the Class Presidency, for the good of the school (which deserves diversity and equitable representation), the community (which—especially in the person of his best friend and neighbor—has



You don’t know what she’s thinking. (**Eyes Wide Shut**)

been left damaged in the wake of Tracy’s single mindedness), and Tracy herself (who would be humanized and humbled by a defeat, and aren’t those qualities essential to sound leadership and a balanced life?). In *Boys*, misfit lesbian Teena Brandon becomes Brandon Teena—supportive, tender boyfriend (maybe husband?), and a welcome addition to a tiny Midwestern community. Neither could imagine opposition to a small, *minute* thing like electoral misconduct or bit of gender bending, not when their motives were so beneficent.

McAllister and Brandon are blinded by their good intentions, but a man honored for elucidating human interaction and a woman always running from the wrath of the straight community should have foreseen the backlash. They knew their crimes were minor in comparison to the offences committed by those around them, but didn’t understand that that wasn’t the point. Superambitious control freaks are supposed to lie and cheat, not affable school teachers; and who would blame violent psychopaths for being violent psychopaths? It’s their nature and they never pretended it wasn’t, not like that *girl*. Jim and Teena dared disrupt the universe, they violated its predictable surface, and the price of its correction was McAllister’s marriage and career, Brandon’s life.

Head Trips The characters in *Being John Malkovich* and *Eyes Wide Shut* wreck themselves while barely impacting their communities. (cont. on page five)



Lee Follett Takes the Plunge (Women of Two Nations Mourn)

The Cobra's Nose is proud to announce the recent betrothal of my favorite American expatriate who studies dead Irish monks in Toronto (no the monks aren't in Toronto, don't *hassle* me you know what I mean) to somebody named "Tonya" whom I don't know at all, but the expatriate (Lee) seems to like her, and I think we should trust his judgment even though our long friendship would ordinarily cast doubt on his taste in female companions. Besides, from what I've heard about Tonya (albeit from a most favorably biased source (Lee)) she sounds like a good match for him. In fact, in all the time I've known Lee, I've never known him to do anything really foolish (unless you count posing with giant teddy bears, but he wasn't *nude* or anything, so I don't think that would

count as *really* foolish, more like "moderately unwise"), so I'm sure this will turn out to be another in a long series of sound decisions. The only drawback I can imagine is that it might adversely affect attendance at his lectures. It happened to Donny Osmond. When word of his engagement got out, thousands of tickets to the Osmond Brothers' sold out shows at Madison Square Garden were promptly returned and Donny's career never recovered. Not that Lee and Donny necessarily appeal to the same demographic, though I'm sure there's some overlap.

Anyhoo, I'd wish him luck if I thought he needed it, but I don't. For Lee and Tonya, I predict a long and happy union. ♥♥♥

A Tiny Article to
Attract the
Attention of Tiny
Attention Spans
Already Lost by
the End of this
Lengthy Title

(Fiona Apple has Nothing on Me)
(cont. on page 4)

T ravel and T ourism

Patty cakes,

Ohh how glad I was to hear back from you. We are well prepared to house you for the duration of your visit.

Items that you must be aware of before you check in.

1. NO CLOTHING AFTER 12:00, THAT WOULD BE NOON.
2. WE LIVE RATHER CLOSE TO THE PRISON AND YOU MAY HAVE TO SHARE A BED WITH ED.
3. YOU COULD POSSIBLY BE ANALLY PENETRATED DURING YOUR STAY.
4. MY HOUSE IS A STINKY PEE HOLE. (ME AND KAMILLE COULD NOT STOP OURSELVES)
5. SHEETS ARE RUBBER, EASE IN CLEANING.
6. FAR, FAR, FAR AWAY FROM THE BIG CITY.
7. AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST, WE LIVE REALLY CLOSE TO SOME SEXY *;&\$#^!! SHEEP!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Looking forward to seeing you. I have a bit of a present for you. Write me back and let me know when you will be here.

Loves and Kisses,

Kamille the crack whore jones &

Willey Walrus your 36 inch tusk man

Utah Department of Tourism and Commerce

Here, There and Everywhere

If somebody had come to me this morning and told me The Beatles' *Revolver* is a great album, I would have said, "Of course it is, you ninny. What do you take me for?" And yet this afternoon, here I am to tell you what a great album *Revolver* is.

Revolver is one great album.

Great for many reasons; obviously for the individual excellence of the fourteen songs and the musical ground they cover, and all in thirty four minutes, fifty two seconds—now *that's* economy. Key to keeping the droning tabla on "Love to You" in harmony with the submarine and party sound effects on "Yellow Submarine" and the weird birdcalls and backward guitars on "Tomorrow Never Knows" are Paul McCartney's contributions. As with his Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band conceit the following year, McCartney provided a solid, classic pop base from which dizzying experiments like "She Said She Said" (on *Revolver*) or "A Day in the Life" (on *Sgt. Pepper*) could be launched. Unlike *Sgt. Pepper* idea, which musically bookends the album, his songs on *Revolver* hold the record together by telling a story in five parts.

The plot is not groundbreaking: introduction ("Eleanor Rigby"), boy meets girl ("Here, There and Everywhere"), boy gets girl ("Good Day Sunshine"), boy loses girl ("For No One"), boy gets girl back ("Got to Get You Into My Life"). But what drama!

Strings on a pop song was a novelty when "Eleanor Rigby" was produced, but Paul and George Martin imitated a familiar source, film composer Bernard Herrmann. The arrangement is heavy, percussive, recalling Robert Mitchum menacing a family in *Cape Fear*, or Janet Leigh fleeing Phoenix in *Psycho*. "Rigby" sets the scene and the stakes: in this world of people who die alone the goal is avoid becoming like lonely celibates Eleanor or Father McKenzie.

The urgency of "Eleanor Rigby" is supplanted by the wonder in "Here, There and Everywhere." Although my opinions on romance occasion bemused snickers from virtually everybody I know, I'll go ahead and state it: "Here, There and Everywhere" is one of the top ten love songs ever (I haven't decided what the others would be, I'll have to get back to you). It has the spare, formal structure of a legal brief written by e.e. cummings.

Proposition: To lead a better life I need my home to be here

Article One: Here, making each day of the year, changing my life with a wave of her hand

Notice how he links the end of the first phrase with the first word of the next to announce it as the subject of the verse? He does it again:

...Nobody can deny that there's something there.

Article Two: There, running my hands through her hair.

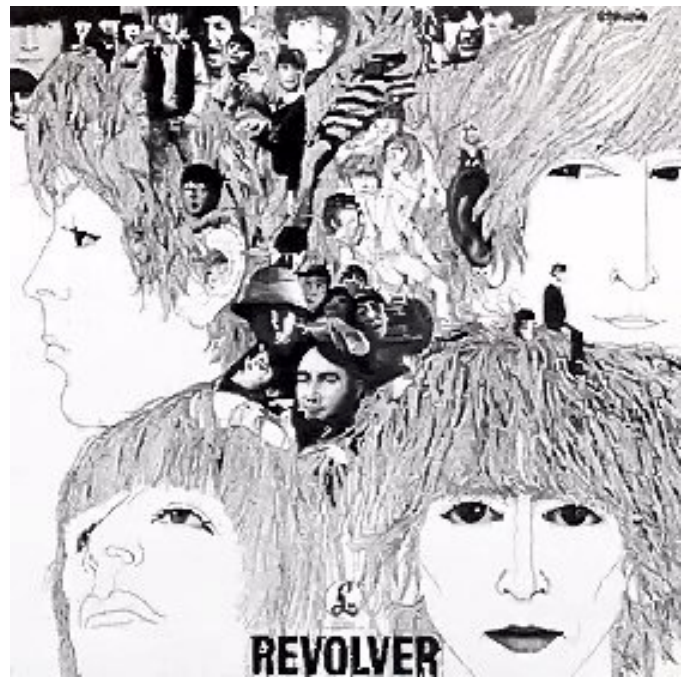
Both of us thinking how good it can be

Someone is speaking, but she doesn't know he's there

"Here" and "there" are places, places evoked by the actions "here" and "there" describe. The dual purpose of the words, as adverbs and adjectives is enlarged in the song's bridge:

Article Three (Declarative): I want her everywhere

And if she's beside me I know I need never care



Article Four (Conditional): But to love her is to need her everywhere, knowing that love is to share
Each one believing that love never dies
Watching her eyes, and hoping I'm always there.

"Everywhere," the amalgamation of here and there—the place and the event that would subsume the world—is not quite reached in the song's narrative. But as I'm sure you noticed, the letters "H E R" are in each of the words "here," "there," and "everywhere," and that all of the strong rhymes in the song correspond with either those words ("hair," "care," "share,") or "I" ("beside," "eyes," "dies"), thus creating a constant, subtle interaction between "her" and "I" that comes close to fulfilling the exclusive ideal:

Conclusion: To be there, and everywhere,
Here, there and everywhere

The connection is celebrated in "Good Day Sunshine."

Still, there is that someone speaking (Article 2, line 3) that she doesn't acknowledge—the suggested presence of a former lover, and bad news for the singer. "I'm in love and it's a sunny day" from "Good Day Sunshine" becomes "Your day breaks, your mind aches" in "For No One," which chronicles the relationship in decline. (cont. on page 6)

(cont. from page 3)

So this guy calls up and asks for...

"Anita?"

"We don't have an Anita here," says I.

"Maybe it's...Annnn...annn...McCaw...?"

"Could that be Annette McCrary?"

"Yes, that's it. Annette McCraw."

"May I ask who's calling?"

"Nick Symak."

"With which company?"

"Oh, I'm a personal friend."

Thank you, thank you very much.



Being John Malkovich

(cont. from page two) Acting and puppeteering are the florid tropes for submission and control in *BJM*. Bodies are commandeered by strangers, but when an actor's (or child's) body is possessed the world does not notice, when a nobody vanishes into that body the world does not care. Individual individuals are not important to the social order.

Near the beginning of *Being John Malkovich*, the puppeteer Craig Schwartz enters a porthole to John Malkovich's brain, and leaves behind a piece of wood, a splinter in the actor's mind. Near the end, Schwartz and the wood are expelled from Malkovich's head after his months long occupation by a group of people who want to take possession—the stick is gone, but the mind itself is irrevocably splintered. John Malkovich, who when he entered his own porthole saw himself projected in every person in the community, is himself invaded by a community, his body overtaken by a body. In this movie, society functions because everyone in it is consumed by monstrous egoism.

Monstrous egoism is also a problem in *Eyes Wide Shut*, one that is corrected with stunning finality. Bill Harford is a handsome young doctor, so confident in his splendid practice and of his beautiful wife that he chides his rich employers for their excesses and flirts openly with models. Mrs. Harford is so self-absorbed that she can't drag her eyes away from the mirror when her husband makes love to her; but part of her narcissism is vested in insecurity—the reflection proves her existence. You see, Mrs. Harford has lost her job in an art gallery, and thus displaced she has begun to slip. Outside her realm of competence, she spends her time puttering



Boys Don't Cry

around the house, looking after the kid, and taking lots of drugs. One night in a marijuana induced haze she tells her husband about a sexual fantasy that has haunted her for two years. Bill is so alarmed by the thought that he is not always and forever the center of his wife's universe that he embarks on a quest to reassure himself of his own importance.

It goes well, at first. The daughter of a patient comes onto him by her father's deathbed, a prostitute marvels at his generosity when he insists on paying her for services not rendered, he intervenes in the corruption of a child, and a woman sacrifices herself on his behalf when his cover is blown at an opulent orgy. An evening of high drama, all about Bill.

Except it isn't. When Dr. Bill cancels his appointments and tries to resume his adventures, he is made to realize how tangential his involvement in the big picture was: the patient's daughter is secure in her engagement, the prostitute is diagnosed with HIV, the child is thoroughly corrupted, and the orgies are for members only—and not the likes of Bill. His most harrowing notion, that a woman died to redeem him, is as lurid and untrue as his increasingly vivid imaginings of his wife with her would be lover. His client Victor Ziegler, an authentic Master of the Universe, finally clues him in. Far from being the hero of the drama, Bill was a bit player and a stooge. The role he played was genuine only to the extent that he nearly let it ruin his life.

The moral of these movies is this: no matter what desperate measure you take to change you will be stuck forever with your essential self; best get used to it.



South Park: Bigger, Longer, and Uncut

So, What's to be Done? The antidote to America's "self-improvement" mania can be found in the high minded low brow cartoon *South Park: Bigger, Longer, and Uncut*. Reform runs rampant in Colorado after four third graders sneak into an indecent Canadian movie (is there any other kind?). Their parents mistakenly assumed it caused their darlings' moral degeneracy when in fact all it did was teach them a few new words. Instead of honestly confronting the Natural Child, the parents try to restore the kids to a fantastical state of innocence. Their crusade comes to include censorship, aversion therapy, self-immolation, war with Canada, and it nearly ushers in the Apocalypse.

Meanwhile, Kenny is dispatched early in the film, denied heaven and thrust into hell. He is a trailer trash boy with a vocabulary allegedly so foul that his speech is completely obscured on the television *South Park*, and in most of this deliriously obscene movie as well. He is killed in every episode, perfunctorily mourned, devoured by rats, then forgotten. For most of the running time of this movie, he watches Satan cavort with Saddam Hussein. In short, Kenny embodies every fear the parents of South Park harbor for their children.

At the end of the movie, with the world on the brink of cataclysm, Kenny's death is revealed to be a mistake and he is given the power to change history. To everybody's astonishment, he opts only to alter those events that happened after his death—an act that will save the world, but keep him in hell for eternity. As a reward for his unselfishness, Kenny is elevated to heaven to frolic forever with topless angels. (cont. on page 6)



Eyes Wide Shut

(cont. from page 5)

In the Year 2000 These movies, coming as they do on the cusp of a new millennium, are telling us something, and I think we should listen. With the hysteria surrounding the end of the century/millennium, from the doomsayers of the Y2K catastrophe to those disappointed that we're not flying hovercraft to work, the best *fin de cycle* movies have responded with an essentialist backlash. *Election*, *Boys Don't Cry*, *Being John Malkovich*, *Eyes Wide Shut*, *South Park: BL&U*, plus top movie contenders *Fight Club*, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, and *Iron Giant* are fables about the dangers of betraying one's own true self.

The drama is in discovering (or not) who that self is and recognizing the disparity between who what is and what was imagined. The befuddled creatures in *BJM* never find their fundamental beings even though they are utter egoists, preferring instead to engage in ever more grotesque masquerades ("Don't stand in the way of my actualization as a man.") Tom Ripley and The Narrator in *Fight Club* trade away as much of themselves as they can—even their names—but can't escape the essence that remains, now poisoned and horrified at the costs of the alterations. Dr. Harford in *EWS* on the other hand learned his place so well that the smirk was wiped off of Tom Cruise's face for the first time in his nearly twenty year career.

The community will enforce identity integrity to the best of its ability, as in *Election* and *Boys*, but the only genuine measure is an honest internal audit. The *Iron Giant* tests himself and is satisfied that he "is not a gun," and Kenny saves humanity and his soul without changing anything about himself.

If you must make a resolution this year, nix "improvement" and consider becoming more like yourselves.

(cont. from page 4) The tender conversation between "her" and "I" in "Here, There and Everywhere" becomes a stern lecture in third person to "you" on the subject of "she." The singer of "For No One" is too wishful ("a love that should have lasted years!") and too sensitive to the male half of the relationship ("You want her, you need her/ And yet you don't believe her when she said/ Your love is dead, you think she needs you") to be anyone other than the singer of the previous songs, but changed. He has become a ghost in the home he imagined would contain their love ("To lead a better life I need my home to be here"), the home she has abandoned ("You stay home, she goes out"). He smarts with nostalgia, but she has become a blank: no longer, no-thing, no sign, no one.

The resolution to this song cycle is "Got to Get You Into My Life," which tells the story of the affair in three grammatical tenses

Past: I was alone, I took a ride,
I didn't know what I would find there

Present: Ooh, then I suddenly see you

Pluperfect: Had you gone you knew in time
We'd meet again for I had told you

Plus some conjectures on the future

If I'm true I'll never leave
And if I do I know the way there

...and the forward thinking imperative of the title: Got to get you into my life. The song is the antidote to "Eleanor Rigby." Nervous strings are replaced by euphoric horns, and every stage of the affair is recounted with insistent optimism. I was alone—but I fixed that. You left me, but I knew it wasn't forever. Where "Rigby" ends with a final dark chord, "Got to Get You" trails off with the jubilant shouts of somebody embarking on a romantic quest, "Suddenly I see you! Did I tell you I need you? Every single day!"

I am as familiar with the songs on *Revolver* as any ever written. Still, after not having listened to them for years in some cases, I was taken aback when I heard "Eleanor Rigby" on Pat's *Yellow Submarine* DVD a couple of weeks ago. As your friend and cobra, I urge you to run to your cd collection and re-encounter this masterpiece (if you don't have *Revolver* on cd, give yourself a talking to then run to Tower and buy it right away). It's glorious music, and you should have it here, there, and everywhere.

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Use them.

End Nose... I was sitting at my table at Café Nikos, swilling house blend and disparaging the naciente Vol. 14 to Pat, Nick, Alyssa, Tiger, and other diners whom I didn't know but still deserved to be warned about the pile of literary awfulness sitting before me that was smelling up the joint and spoiling their meal. Pat listened for a while before sighing, "Well, it just wouldn't be The Cob r a's Nose unless we went through *this*."

Which is to say, I hope you enjoyed Vol. 14. I would ordinarily count on Mr Enigma to brief me on the reasons you didn't, but I'm pretty sure he won't make it past the desultory articles in tiny print that meander over six pages, so if you want to register a complaint please feel free to use one of the means listed on the left.

Early buzz is not good. I told Magi in passing to expect a hot fresh Cob r a today and he cried, "Oh no!" But he has promised to contribute an article in the near future and that should raise the profile of The Nose somewhat. He speaks French, you know.

Have a merry post-holiday season, and a prosperous millennium.