



Flat taste didn't go away

by Ed Greenwood

Its cover was beautiful; I bought it eagerly, and retired from the din of the GEN CON® XIV dealer area to a dimly lit booth, to devour a pizza and my brand-new FIEND FOLIO™ Tome.

Four hours later, I set the book aside, hoping my views would change upon later reflection. Perhaps it had been the pizza.

Come later reflection, and much discussion with friends and other gamers at the convention: no change. The FIEND FOLIO was a disappointment. Not a crushing disappointment — a new collection of official AD&D monsters is not exactly a cause for sorrow — but irritating nonetheless. Perhaps it should have been a D&D® book, not one for the AD&D™ game.

The beauty of the AD&D rule system is its careful attention to detail, “serious” (i.e., treating monsters as creatures in a fantasy world, not as constructs in a fantasy game) tone, and consistency.

The FIEND FOLIO Tome mars this beauty. In its pages this DM finds too much lack of detail, too many shifts in

tone, and too many breaches of consistency. I do not know *why* the book has these failings—and I hasten to add that I do not know of Don Turnbull or British gaming beyond what one learns from a few contacts and magazines such as *White Dwarf* (which I’ve followed eagerly since its first issue) and *Trollcrusher*.

I suspect that most of the book’s flaws have come from viewing the AD&D game as one in which monsters are sudden new challenges to a party rather than creatures who live out an existence before — and sometimes after — a party encounters them. But perhaps it would be better not to speculate. Here, then, is what I find wrong with the book.

First and foremost, contradictions of, or inattention to, existing (official) AD&D rules. Careful editing should have prevented these mistakes — such as the mention of *raise dead fully* in the description of the Pernicon, and “anti-paladin” in the listing for Githyanki.

Minor quibbles? Not if the careful “international tournament standard” consistency of the AD&D game is to be maintained. Gary Gygax speaks of this as one of the reasons for creating the

game in the first place, and an official AD&D book such as the FF Tome should contribute to that sought-after consistency. In many places throughout the work, one is reminded more of the free-wheeling, decide-it-yourself D&D rules than the more specific and detailed descriptions of the AD&D game.

There are many incomplete or inadequate monster entries. Monsters such as the Al-mi’raj and the Hook Horror have strange appearances and little else; there is no depth to their listings. Certainly not enough information is given to ensure that one DM will present them in a manner similar to another DM’s handling. Similarly, one needs to know more of the real nature of the Dune Stalker, the Dire Corby, the Eye of Fear and Flame, and the race of Dark Creepers.

Why are the languages of the Dark Creeper and the Babler incomprehensible? Many weird creatures in the Monster Manual have languages usable by other creatures through study and magic (i.e., a Tongues spell); DMs should be told why these two are special.

And phrases like “mysteries so far unexplained” (in the Berbalang listing) are

not good enough — in an official rule-book, complete listings should be required. The origin of the Achaierai, for instance, would seem to be Acheron ("infernal regions") but the exact home plane would be nice for DMs to know. The Guardian Familiar's plane of origin is likewise a mystery. The identity of the Vision's "own plane" is unclear, as are its powers when on that unknown plane. Explanations should be given for the humanoid appearance of plant life such as the Cifal and the Needleman, or the believability of such creatures suffers.

Other monsters seem to have no ecological niche, being merely "gamey" party opponents — such as the Adherer (originally the Gluey of *White Dwarf* #7) and the Enveloper. In the pages of *White Dwarf*, no rationalizations are required for the appearance of such things as the Russian Doll Monster, the Dadhi, and the Nilbog. When (as in the case of the Nilbog) these creatures are adapted and/or rewritten for inclusion in official AD&D rules, the results are sometimes clumsy or worse.

Some of the monster's names grate on the mind's ear; one cannot envision sweating adventurers fleeing a cavern with one saying, "Warily, now! That Protein Polymorph almost slew us, friends!" Try inserting "Caryatid Column" or "Symbiotic Jelly" into that sentence, and the result is the same. One would expect adventurers, and not 20th-century North American scientists, to have named such beasts. (I suspect this is the root of my disaffection with the "Adherer.")

There are two other major problems with the book. First, a host of new undead (specifically described as such) or undead-like creatures see print. Many contributors to the expansion of the AD&D rules have felt that there is no more room for additions to the undead class save under the "Special" heading; there is little one can add that is not a simple variation on, or overlapping of the powers of, existing undead.

The Penanggalan, the Revenant, the Skeleton Warrior, and the Death Knight — although possessing some abilities of existing AD&D undead — are well-developed and therefore distinct. But other of the book's contributions appear to be no more than skeletons with special powers tacked on, such as the Huecuva, the Crypt Thing, and the Eye of Fear and Flame. (The latter creature probably isn't undead, but the entry doesn't say enough to determine this with certainty.) One must know more of the origin of all of these creatures and their powers. The Sheet Phantom, in particular, needs more information to link it with already-existing undead. Is it a wraith or an undead lurker above? The listing hints at both, and in the end gives no reason for the formation of this monster.

The origin of the creature needs be a

part of every new undead write-up. An undead lacking an origin has the air of a one-shot "DM's special" variant concocted for an interesting party encounter ("Well, *this* mummy is green, and it drains levels . . . heh-heh, surprise, surprise!"). The "statement of origin" is the anchor that lends an air of legitimacy to other new undead entries in the FF Tome such as the Coffin Corpse, the Apparition, and the Son of Kyuss.

In all, the FIEND FOLIO Tome adds several good low-level undead to AD&D play (although I had hoped to see the very playable Blink Skeleton also make the leap from *White Dwarfs* Fiend Factory to the Folio). All of these should see yeoman service in AD&D campaigns; the three skeleton variants mentioned above need more depth if this expected heavy use is not to put too many DMs in the position of having to invent justifications for the creatures' existence.

The second large problem found in the Folio has to do with races: too many of them, that is. Some new races such as the Firenewt, Flind, Forlarren, Norker, Quaggoth and Skulk may assume a comfortable place in the AD&D bestiary rolls. Others, such as the Crabman, Booka, and Bullywug, leave one desirous of more information as to their social life and activities, but are adequate.

And then the problem is upon us. Too

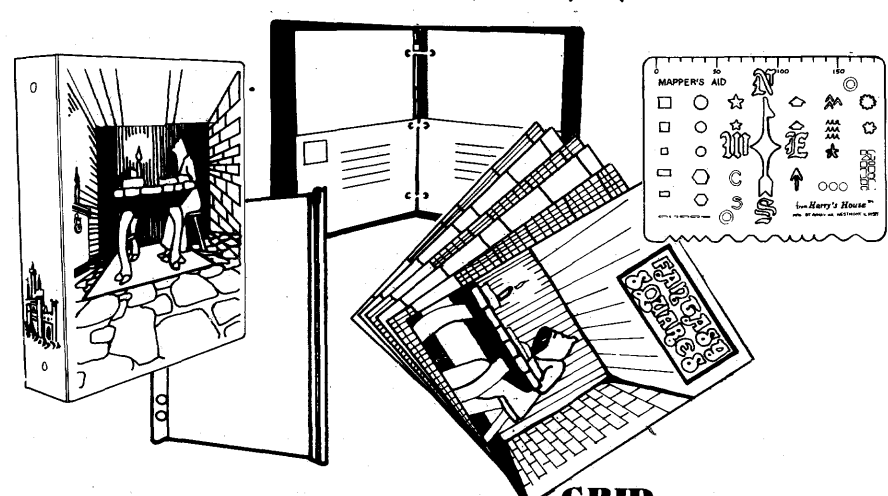
many races are incomplete — is the Frost Man human (as in "Men, Berserker" et al from the *Monster Manual*)? Is the Qullan race humanoid? What are their interests and aims? Why do the Lava Children — "offspring of a union between spirits of earth and fire" — appear human, specifically resembling the famous visage of Alfred E. Neuman of MAD magazine fame?

Too many races must be fighting for elbow room in the caverns and deep places beneath the earth; in addition to the Jermlaine, Drow, Kuo-Toa and Svirfneblin (from TSR™ modules), found herein are the (deep breath) Gibberling, Grimlock, Hook Horror, Kenku, Killmoulis, Meazel, Meenlock, Mite, Snyad, and Xvart. All of these creatures have promise, but the Hook Horror and the Grimlock again seem incomplete.

The Xvart, a rewritten Svart from the Fiend Factory in *White Dwarf* #9, is redundant; the Factory original was a poor variant of Alan Garner's presentation (in the novel *Weirdstone of Brisingamen*) of the svart-alfar and lios-alfar of Scandinavian mythology. The svart-alfar are already in the AD&D rules; they were the model for Gygax's Drow. The Xvart, a 3-foot-tall beastie with no strikingly unique or colorful characteristics, is a prime example of needless overpopulation.

(Continued on 2nd page following)

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FIEND FOLIO Findings

by Alan Zumwalt

I was about to enter my friendly neighborhood hobby shop on my weekly visit to see if any new AD&D modules or accessories were in, when out of the corner of my eye I saw something in the store window. I did a double-take, then my eyes bulged out, and alarms went off in my head. At last it was here—the FIEND FOLIO had arrived!!! I had been waiting for it for a year, since I saw it mentioned in the DEITIES & DEMIGODS™ Encyclopedia. I grabbed a copy off the shelf and sprinted to the counter.

After I left the store, I sat down on the curb and started looking. It was a good-looking cover: a blue background with a hideous brown and yellow humanoid in the foreground (which I later found out was a githyanki). I would have liked to see more monsters on the cover (like the Monster Manual has), but the cover is not the most important part; the inside is. I quickly flipped through the pages and

Observations of a semi-satisfied customer

looked at the pictures — and boy, what pictures! Drawings of all sorts of new weird monsters — from tall, stilted birds that are mostly head, to lady vampires with no body. More illustrations than the Monster Manual. “So far, so good,” I thought. “All outward appearances look fine.” But are the words as good as the pictures? I looked further, and found most of the monster descriptions to be interesting and original, but...

But a few of them are just Monster Manual creatures that are changed or crossbred with other monsters. The Vodyanoi is a prime example. The Vodyanoi is an aquatic umber hulk that, instead of the ability to confuse, has the ability to summon electric eels. This monster is a cheap ripoff of the original AD&D monster, and shouldn't have been allowed in the book. Others I don't like for similar reasons are the Kamadan, the Lamia Noble, the Lizard King (I would accept this monster as a leader of lizard men, but not as a separate race), the Ogrillon, and all the new trolls. This book was going to have new monsters, I thought, not mutations of the old.

One pleasing thing to see, at last, was the establishment of some official neutral dragons. The Oriental dragons in the book are fairly interesting dragons (although I was sort of disappointed that some of them didn't have a breath weapon), but I did find three problems in their presentation that makes these dragon descriptions inferior to the ones in the Monster Manual.

First, the names of the dragons are given in the wrong order. If you look in the Monster Manual under the entry indexed as “Dragon: White” you would see at the top of the description, “White Dragon (Draco Rigidus Frigidus).” The Latin name of the dragon is put in parentheses after the English name. But in the FIEND FOLIO under “Dragon, Oriental” a subtitle will read, “Li Lung (Earth Dragon),” with the Chinese name first and the English name in parentheses. Now, who is going to call this dragon “Li Lung” when “Earth Dragon” is much easier to remember? The names should have been given in reverse form (Oriental name last) for the sake of convenience, if nothing more.

Second, these dragons are distinctly and undeniably Oriental in nature, and I don't think Oriental monsters fit very well into the European medieval-era environment that most AD&D campaigns use. I wish the game's official neutral

dragons had been constructed more similarly to the Monster Manual dragons.

The most important problem of all is the lack of a leader for the Oriental dragons, corresponding to Tiamat and Bahamat. A rulership structure of some kind for each type of intelligent monster helps lend credibility to the existence of that type of creature.

I discovered that many of my favorite monsters from past issues of DRAGON magazine and AD&D modules were not included. The only module monsters included in the Fiend Folio were from G3 and the D series. I realized the monsters from the more recent modules and issues of DRAGON could not be included in the FIEND FOLIO, but the S series monsters and some of the earlier *Dragon's Bestiary* monsters could have been included.

One of my favorite monsters in the book is the Slaadi. At last, creatures that live on the chaotic neutral planes! The race has leaders (unlike the Oriental dragons) and understandable names (except for the leaders). Reading about the different types of Slaadi brought a question to mind: Why no monsters for the lawful neutral planes or the lawful, neutral, or chaotic good planes? I would have liked to have all the planes around the astral plane “filled in” by having resident creatures among the listings in the second book of official AD&D monsters.

I also liked the Elemental Princes of Evil — but where are the Elemental Princes of Good? Surely there must be some, or else the Elemental Princes of Evil would just be called Elemental Princes.

In my first look at the end of the book, I was pleased to see a new random monster encounter table containing all the monsters from both books. But there isn't an ocean encounter table, although there were plenty of new sea monsters in the FIEND FOLIO Tome. This was probably an oversight, and I hope such a table will soon be offered. Tables for sea-shore encounters and underground-lake encounters would also be good.

This commentary has been predominantly negative; maybe that's because it's easier to put negative comments into specific words than it is to do the same with positive comments. As a whole, it is a good book, with a lot of interesting creatures that are destined to become someone's favorite monster.

How to sum it up? I would say the FIEND FOLIO Tome is like a basket of peaches: Most of it is pretty good stuff, but part of it is the pits.

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(Continued from page 7)

Including the other new races of small beings, the list (just of those who dwell in subterranean or related surroundings) is now comprised of goblins, kobolds, dwarves, halflings, gnomes, svirfneblin, meazels, mites, snyad, jermlaine, and kill moulis. The race of xuart need not have been added to the list.

Obviously, a DM need not use all of the above races in a campaign, but all now are now considered to officially exist in the AD&D multiverse. To their ranks the Folio adds yet another creature type not listed above: the mysterious Dark Creeper, about which too little is revealed to be certain of its nature. It is of dwarf height and wears clothing over its lower face in such a fashion as to cause one GEN CON attendee to disgustedly label it a "bedouin dwarf," and another to add, "No, it's a dwarf ninja."

Those descriptions are personal reactions, yes, but they are rooted in a real problem; either or both of them could be correct, given the vagueness of the FF description. Likewise, too many of the book's other entries offer too little information to play a creature without running into questions.

The Monster Manual has many truncated entries, but most of these cause no problems, since the creatures (for example, the dinosaurs, "Herd Animal,"

and "Cattle, Wild") need nothing more. The FF Tome has a few entries which can be taken care of with brief descriptions; the Rothe is one. But most of the book's creatures require longer, more carefully worded entries.

The only entries in the Monster Manual I have often heard criticized for incompleteness or lack of clarity are the beholder — Does the central eye produce the anti-magic ray? It would seem so, but there is room for argument — the rakshasa, the lich, and the vampire. (Speculation concerning the rakshasa usually centers on its place in the ranks of the demons vis-a-vis the demon princes and their orders, conjurations and the like.) Many DMs have filled in the details of these complicated monsters as they saw fit, or perhaps have followed the guidance of magazine writers. Similar salvage work is needed for many entries in the new book — more than there should need to be, given the advancement of the state of published AD&D rules between the release of the Monster Manual and the FIEND FOLIO Tome.

Other criticisms of the Folio fall into the category of personal disagreements over style. Every DM has these disagreements with many parts of the AD&D rules, but I have more with the FIEND FOLIO Tome than with any other of the official volumes. Here are a few:

If new dragons, why oriental dragons and not also the carefully composed neutral dragons published in DRAGON™ #37?

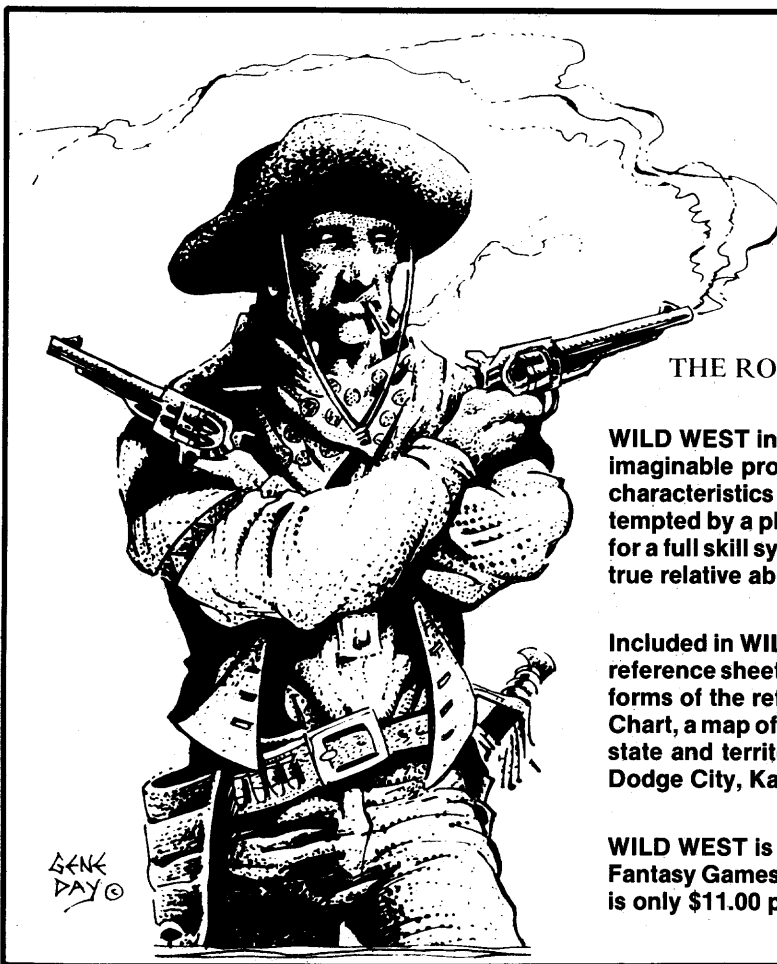
Why is a poltergeist lawful evil, when its behavior, both as described in the FF and as allegedly exhibited in the real world, suggests a chaotic evil, or at least chaotic, alignment?

Why are distinctly separate listings necessary for creatures which are essentially sub-races or variants of, or additions to, existing Monster Manual entries? Examples of these are the Lamia Noble, the Lizard King, and the Babbler. These could be sub-classified in the same manner as the Drow, the new Giant sub-races, and the new Demon and Devil are, so that the MM and FF are closely linked.

The Aleax entry is uneasily vague; it is of necessity not firmly tied to any deities, but I feel it should contain more directives for the DM as to what sorts of deities would and would not employ such a creature.

The Hell Hound from the Monster Manual is a familiar DM's friend, but adding the Death Dog and the Devil Dog to the canine community is perhaps too much of a good thing.

When some names such as "Screaming Devilkin" threaten to outstrip the monsters they describe, why must there



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also be such unimaginative names as “Gorilla Bear” or odd-sounding names such as “Ogrillon” (for an orc/ogre cross-breed)? But enough of style grievances; others will find reason for praise in the same things I complain about.

The graphics and overall layout of the FIEND FOLIO Tome are both beautiful and clear, making for ease of finding and reading desired information. Some illustrations are particularly effective — the Revenant scene on page 76 comes immediately to mind.

But many illustrations are irritating, in that they do not closely resemble depictions of the monsters already published in the official AD&D modules. The Mez-

zodaemon is one such example; so is the related Nycadaemon. Some illustrations are not as visually striking or as complete as those published earlier in the Fiend Factory (such as the Sheet Phantom, Tween, and Sandman) and the modules (the Kuo-Toa, Jermlaine, and Kelpie). Why the change, if it was not markedly for the better? Other illustrations are noticeably crude, particularly those of the Mephits and the Enveloper (which at first sight earned the nickname “Pillsbury Doughboy” among gamers at GEN CON XIV). But all in all, the artwork and design of the book are excellent.

Also on the positive side, there are some very good monsters here. It is nice

to see the Volt and the Necrophidius made official; new arrivals such as the Slaad, the Elemental Princes of Evil and the Penanggalan are also worthy additions to any campaign. Monsters from the modules such as the Drow and Kuo-Toa are expected attractions, but good to see nonetheless.

The FIEND FOLIO Tome has much promise; a revised edition which disposes of most of the omissions and problems mentioned above would win my warm welcome. Many thousands of people consider the AD&D game to be the best thing going; a revised and polished edition of the FF Tome would help reinforce that opinion.

Apologies — and arguments

by Don Turnbull

Managing Director of TSR UK, Ltd.

and

Editor of the FIEND FOLIO™ Tome

I will be more careful in future when passing Kim Mohan's door on my visits to Lake Geneva. He pounces! On this occasion, politely but firmly, he asked me to reply to the comments by Alan and Ed on the FIEND FOLIO™ Tome and not to leave the country until the job was done.

An Aleax, cunningly disguised as Kim Mohan, has struck; I have somehow transgressed the unwritten law; retribution and penance are sought. (Who, me? Behaviour outside alignment??)

Very well — I'll try.

Perspectives change, don't they? There never was a time when I regarded the Tome as perfect; anyone thus making himself a hostage to fortune deserves what he gets. But my view of “my” work has changed perceptibly over the years, and the years themselves are responsible for that change.

The fact is that, for various contractual reasons with which I won't bore you, the book was in a sort of legal limbo — untouched and untouchable — for nearly two years after completion. A very great deal happened in the AD&D™ world during that time, didn't it? For instance, the DEITIES & DEMIGODS™ Cyclopedica was born, raised to maturity, and published. For instance, DRAGON™ magazine advanced from issue 29 to the late 40s. (*Editor's note: DRAGON #52 was on sale when the FIEND FOLIO tome was released at the GEN CON® XIV Convention.*) For instance, a host of new modules made their debut.

These are the reasons why monsters from more recent modules were not included and why monsters from DRAGON™ magazine did not appear. It is also, at least in part, the reason for my *Raise Dead Fully* gaffe; for this I accept full responsibility and, red-faced, back off to the position of “I'm sure you know what I mean.” (But not for “anti-paladin” — the full reference includes words which clearly deny any implications of official status.)

I suspect this information alone answers a number of questions in readers' minds. There has been some temporal distortion — enough to raise at least a flicker of curiosity but not enough (I sincerely hope) to detract.

Ed criticizes some entries on the grounds of incompleteness and inadequacy. This begs the questions — what is “complete”? What is “adequate”? I suspect these are, in the final analysis, matters of personal taste. For every person criticizing absence of information on these grounds, someone else will say that certain information actually presented is superfluous, and accusing me of padding. I have no god-like wisdom on this score (nor, I suspect, has anyone else) — only instinct about what

“feels” right within certain obvious boundaries. If my instinct differs from others, perhaps it's because we're only human.

Mind you, I don't accept what Ed says about certain languages being incomprehensible. If one admits to the existence of the *Tongues* spell, then surely it requires no further stretching of one's imagination to postulate a language which somehow has defied analysis. In like view, it would be a dull world (real or fantasy) if everything was explained and comprehensible.

A personal point of view, certainly, but one which I believe is shared by many. Once every problem is solved, every question has an answer, and every mystery has been explained, the imagination can turn up its toes and call an end to the matter, its work accomplished. A sad and boring death.

Names. Try inserting into Ed's quotation the Baluchitherium, Titanothero, or (this is a real beauty) the Ixitachitl. Or even the duck-billed platypus and many others from our real world. No, I did not name monsters with particular regard for the smooth flowing of the vocal chords. I imagine the word “man” might not flow too well off a Martian's tongue (or whatever organ is appropriate).

The Eye of Fear and Flame is **not** undead. If it were, it would be on the undead table (page 115). Nor is the Crypt Thing an undead monster. In neither case does the text leave any doubt — and even if it did, the undead table would resolve the matter.

No, the Frost Men are not human. The text makes it quite clear by saying they are “...in most respects very like normal humans...” and then going on to say in what respects they differ. The Qullan isn't human, either — it says in the text that they are humanoids. Ed, you are either not reading thoroughly or just trying to put words into my pen in order to criticize them. Tut — this is not worthy of you.

If Ed reads *White Dwarf* as carefully as seems to be the case, he knows the Xvart is far from redundant to some, since the monster features quite prominently in a “mini-module” in the magazine's pages, and furthermore, a mini-module which I am assured is very popular. Are the dinosaurs (5 pages) in the Monster Manual redundant? I doubt if one answer suits all.

As for the Elemental Princes of Good (or of Neutrality, or of any of the nine ways), the leaders of the oriental dragons (if they have any; they could simply be real democrats), the inhabitants of the other planes Alan would like to populate and literally hundreds of other new and not-so-new monsters which would have been included... well, perhaps next time.

There are three types of complaints. In one category I retire red-faced; in another I fear the critic is mistaken. But in the third — and largest — category I think we have conflicts or less major differences in personal opinion (and for this reason I haven't commented on every example cited). If my personal opinions don't align with yours, I'm sorry. What more can I say?