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BAGMAL NEWSLETTER

BOSTON ASIAN GAY MEN AND LESBIANS

March 1988

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STAFF for this Issue

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The BAGMAL Newsletter is published monthly except during the summer, when a bi-monthly schedule may be in effect. Subscription is \$10/year. One free sample issue will be sent upon request, after which payment is expected. Subscriptions will be exchanged with other organizations. The Newsletter staff encourages submissions from its readers. All contributions not accepted will be returned provided a SASE is enclosed.

GAY ASIAN IMAGES: WHOSE POINT OF VIEW?

Three Reviews by S.H.

Oriental Guys November 1987 Premier Issue Volume 1 Number 1 (Network Orient Publishing, Sydney Australia.) \$18.95 at Glad Day

Thailand Song of Life: Video distributed by International Wavelength San Francisco USA

The Men of Thailand Khon Thai Phuu Chai Guide by Eric Allyn & Dr. John P. Collins (Bua Luang Publishing Company San Francisco). \$21.95 at Glad Day.



OG's "star discovery": Beauty for whom?

When the *Gay Asians of Toronto* (GAT) first started putting out their newsletter I remember discussing with them the need for Asian gay men to create our own erotica. This we saw as a way to redress both the invisibility of Asians in mainstream North American gay culture and also to meet the crying need for the Asian point of view - our own aesthetics - our own sense of what is beautiful, sexual, erotic. We did not discuss what that aesthetic was, how it was different from or similar to mainstream white gay culture. Our optimism said that if the images were created by Asian men themselves our sense of the beautiful and erotic will come through.

Since that time there has been a mini-boom in the US of commercial products featuring sexual images of Asian men. Except for a few gay porn videos with Asian performers coming out of California most of this material is imported from East Asia, primarily Japan and Thailand. The two that we review here - *Ori-*

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CALENDAR

April 7 (Thursday)
7 p.m. Meeting to organize BAGMAL's Open House. Place: Arthur Carbonell's 160 West Brookline St. Boston (South End) 622-6000.

April 9 (Saturday) 8 a.m. - 6:30 p.m.
Conference sponsored by Fenway Community Health Center at Suffolk University, 55 Temple St. Boston. Info: 267-1538. An opportunity to share experiences, game skills and learn what others are doing about AIDS in their communities with particular attention to women of color.

April 14, 15, 16
Watch out for the Outsiders, the movie of Pai Hsien Yung's *Niezi* which has been scheduled for the Boston Gay and Lesbian Film Festival to be held at the Nickelodeon.

April 24 (Sunday) 7 p.m. on. Japanese Spring party. Place: Michael Blake's: 15A Falkland St. Brighton, MA 782-2218

Gadding about with Arthur Carbonell

This may come as a bit of a surprise, but you and I have just recently been engaged in a meaningful relationship, the duration I hope will be long term. It goes without saying but I'll say it any way, that I very much need your cooperation and understanding for without it our relationship will be meaningless. Therefore, it is vital that the line of communication between you and me is kept open.

I realize of course that we are separated by space and anonymity but we can always meet through the mail and by phone. The mailing address is BAGMAL, c/o Glad Day Bookshop, 673 Boylston Street, Boston 02116; you can call me directly at 622-600, BAGMAL's page beeper message center.

Whatever ideas you have, no matter how exotic or far fetched, I am always open and interested in knowing your whims and pleasures. So look for me in the pages of this monthly newsletter, for I will try to be here promptly and in good cheer, to be as entertaining as I possibly can and, for that moment perhaps, ease some of your cares away.

The good folks here at BAGMAL have found it fit to post me in the position as Social Coordinator. And as I see it, my task is to see that the social functions are properly explained and announced ahead of time so that folks will be able to plan their schedules accordingly. I will also be coordinating the needs of the person or persons hosting their upcoming function with pertinent folks in BAGMAL. Also, I shall write on the happenings of the various functions, what happened, who did what, highlighting the event, and include photographs, provided of course people give their permission to publish.

BAGMAL's Chinese & Vietnamese New Year Banquet

There was a healthy turnout for the banquet held on Sunday evening February 21st at the *Royal East Restaurant* in Cambridge. Three large round tables were dressed for the occasion in one of the restaurant's function rooms. And to set the mood for the rather festive occasion, place cards were provided, with names written in the style of 15th Century Italian miniscule calligraphy. We apologize if your name was not written out completely. The Calligrapher was provided with whatever name was given at hand. But in the future such details will be properly accounted.

The evening banquet started with people milling around for a little over an hour, meeting other folks, some with drinks in hand. The atmosphere was relaxed and unhurried. During dinner, there was a relaxed steady stream of conversation at all three tables.

On a frivolous note, flowers were provided for the banquet. In our haste to arrange the tables, we had forgotten to put water in the flower vases. Towards the end of the banquet the Irises could no longer stand up on their own merits and simply gave way to drooping over the rim. We felt a bit foolish for forgetting something so simple as putting water in the vase. Oh well!

Connie and Barbara arrived looking on top of it all. Family life certainly appears agreeable with them. Then there was Johnny L. I didn't realize how healthy and how much masculine sexual energy he seethed till that evening. Nadia came looking very attractive, smart and stylish. She reminded me of how women looked before women's liberation came into full sway. I'm sure Vickie, when reading this, will call me and gun me down with both

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barrels. Sorry Vickie, though I believe in equal opportunities for everyone, I do miss the look women had before the onset of women's liberation. I don't think there is anything quite like a woman's femininity, especially when she's wearing *White Shoulders* (it's a perfume!). It triggers something in me and the world seems a bit more civilized.

The nine course dinner was smoothly served one at a time. Most of the entrees were unfamiliar to me. Of course my repertoire on Chinese cuisine is rather narrow. I had no complaints about the entrees. But I was not used to being served such small portions - two to three spoonfuls. My mind, however, was continuously preoccupied with trying to photograph everyone when they least suspected they were being photographed. The lighting was poor, and I was using an unfamiliar camera. Thanks to Michael Blake, I had the film pushed one full stop during developing. Otherwise the exposures would have been dark. Sorry Peter, but the roll of film which contained the shots I took of you and your friend, who was due to leave, was ruined. Somehow, the film did not wind back into the cassette. So when I opened the back of the camera, the roll of film became ruined. We hope to publish the photographs taken at the banquet in the April newsletter.

After the banquet, a group of us went to *Metro* while others trooped over to *Paradise*.

A Night in Japan:

Sunday April 24th at 7:00 p.m. till when...

Host: Michael Blake
Address: 15A Falkland Street
Brighton, MA Phone: 782-2218

Michael Blake will be hosting a party at his home for the *BAGMAL* group on April 24th. The theme of the party will focus on Japan. He would like members from the *BAGMAL* group and especially the Japanese folks to contact him for any helpful suggestions and assistance. Takeo will be working with Michael but he will still need additional assistance. Michael really would like everyone to have a wonderful time at his place. And I strongly suspect the event has the potential of being great and wonderful. Here is a chance to experience a taste that is uniquely Japan. Perhaps you can come in a Kimono. Several of the folks will be wearing theirs.

Potluck & Slide Show

Again, there was a good turnout at Karin San Juan's apartment in Somerville Sunday March 20. I counted seventeen people, an even mix of men and women. It was certainly refreshing to encounter so many women there that evening.

One of the people I met that evening had so much charm and sexual magnetism that while I was standing and engaging in conversation with him, lust ripple unceasingly through me. Unfortunately, I consider it a bad practice to engage in intimacy among fellow members. It can only foster an incestuous clan which will eventually negate the group's well being.

May Social Event

The month of May is still open for anyone wanting to host a social event. Simply contact me to discuss your plans and ideas and I'll bring it to the attention of the Steering Committee.

Write or call me if you have any ideas or gossip you want published in this column., issues you want discussed or gripes you want aired.

A Note on Rice Queens

One topic that has been toiling in my brain these past few weeks is the label, Rice Queen! I have been in Boston for quite some time now, and not until recently have I come across such a phenomenon. The first time I ever heard such an expression was from my former lover of ten years. He was over at *Sporters* one evening when an Asian youth walked by him and started yelling, Rice Queen! Rice Queen! He related the event to me which left me at odds end. Surely Dick was by no means a Rice Queen by any long shot!

I constantly had to practically drag him to go with me to a Japanese or Chinese restaurant.

When I walked into Nicholas' apartment the first time, I immediately noticed a few very peculiar things. He had a photograph and books pertaining to things Asian. Of the several history books on the shelf, the book on Asian history was well turned. I said to me self, hmm! surely this is a guy whom my gay Asian comrades would term a Rice Queen. I asked him about it later on and he answered me forthright and was very open about it. I interrogated him those first days. Having come to know him sufficiently well enough, I do feel badly for him to have to bear such a label. He had mentioned about not wanting to attend a *BAGMAL* function for fear of being looked at and being thought of as a Rice Queen.

I should like to hear from people Asian and Caucasian as to their feelings and thoughts about this topic. Δ

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ental Guys, a glossy, soft-core magazine published in Australia and *Thailand Song of Life*, a hard-core (everything goes) video from that fabled sex paradise - provide launching points for a discussion of the gay Asian sexual aesthetic.

ORIENTAL GUISE

From their family names (Chew and Tan) the publishers, editors, writers and producers of OG appear to be Overseas Chinese based in Australia. The photographer is Jeremy Gani - in all likelihood an Indian name. The many glossy pictures of nude and semi-nude young men are "The Guys of Singapore", the majority of them also Chinese. We have Asian models, an Asian photographer and Asian editors. The essential ingredients appear to be there for a gay Asian product which should presumably embody an Asian sensibility. However another element by far dominates this equation - the intended audience for this material happens not to be Asian.

The message of any creative work whether a novel, an article, a photograph, or a TV documentary is targeted towards a primary audience - the people the creator of that work is speaking to and often for, whether consciously or sub-consciously. When the DeeJay of a rock 'n roll station says something like "If you are alone with your girlfriend tonight..." we know immediately that he is speaking to teenage males not their girlfriends. Similarly when Dan Rather on a *CBS News Special on AIDS* announces that "The scary reality is that gays are no longer the only ones getting it" we know he is speaking to

straight people (see *The Guide to the Gay Northeast, March 1988*). Gay people who have lived with "the scary reality" for a long time are not part of his intended audience. Beginning with its name *Oriental Guys* and its self-description - "Asia's gorgeous young men & the fascinating Orient!" - it is clear who the magazine is speaking to - the Western and Australian tourist out to sample "the Orient". The magazine goes on to portray Singapore in terms of lazy, tropical beaches, ornate Chinese architecture, quiet Malay vil-



An OG: Who's looking at whom?

lages and rickshaws - probably the last remaining ones in the Republic. Nowhere do we see the skyscrapers, the electronic factories, the blocks of Housing Development Board flats that characterize this island-state - one of Asia's most ruthlessly competitive and regimented "economic miracle" societies. (Its leaders model Singapore after the state of Israel after all - an enclave for Overseas Chinese, the Jews of Asia surrounded by envious and backward Islamic nations). The photographs of the young men - all in their early twenties - are similarly exotic-fied. We

see them mainly on beaches, nude or semi-nude (only one model sports a hardon) sipping from coconuts, riding on rickshaws. The pictures are accompanied by languid, confectionery prose with an overuse of the words "brown" and "tanned".

"High above the rocks, peached (sic) on a cliff... three tanned and gracious guys. The trade winds blew by them, gusts of it..."

OG is probably the only place where you can find the inhabitants of this highly urbanized republic referred to as "tropical islanders". The feature photo spread - "Him of the Kelongs" - borders on the ridiculous. OG's "star discovery" is shown paddling a sampan against the backdrop of a Malay fishing trap (known as the *Kelongs*) dressed in the skimpiest and the most fashionable of designer bikini briefs. (No tan line on this girl.) The accompanying prose goes on about "him" "wandering the wild uninhabited isles....", enjoying "the freedom to roam free (as opposed to the freedom to roam chained, I suppose) the unclustered (sic) space".

These pictures are without doubt of good technical quality and highly erotic - the "guys" are good-looking, sexy, of great physical beauty whatever one's standards. Perhaps from the arguments above one can fault the creators of OG for false advertisement, for trying too hard for the mysterious, the exotic, the Oriental. But then the whole point of good porn (or erotica if you must) is to

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conjure up a sexual fantasy, an imagined ambiance charged with eroticism. Why strive for accuracy when the point is fantasy? Yet the argument against *OG* goes beyond accuracy. It has to do with its vantage point - the point of view from which we are looking at the models, the "guys". Presumably we are

argument goes further than that. I think many Asian gay men have also learnt to view other Asian men (sexually at least) as exotic, foreign creatures meant for other people, a/k/a the well-travelled Western "rice queen". This sexual imagery of the Asian man or boy reinforced by tourist-targeted magazines such

video produced for a Thai audience presumably by local Thai video-makers and featuring an all-male all-Thai cast. Although the video is now available in the US it was obviously not made with a Western audience in mind. For one thing the video has a story line - a voice-over narrative in Thai recited by the protagonist, a Thai boy, Kan Kitsada, who tells us the bittersweet story of his search for love and happiness. Although the voice-over is dubbed in English for an American audience, the narration situates us right away in the point of view of Kan. He interprets and explains all the action for us - we see the world through his eyes - from the point of view of a quite believable Thai character. (In contrast the one fiction piece in *OG* has a white tourist writing about his sexual/romantic encounter with a Malay boy. Nowhere do we encounter the consciousness, the point of view of the Malay boy himself who remains a remote and passive love/sex object). Those readers who are used to video porn of the California variety may find the production values of *TSOL* somewhat lacking. Yet there is lots of fucking and cock-sucking, an attractive "cast" and a consistent if somewhat thin story line. We also get occasional glimpses of Thai gay society. In one scene there is a meeting in a Thai gay bar - a comfortable, well-lit place with disco music and fashionably dressed local guys, not the glitzy tourist hangouts bump-ful of sweaty go-go boys which sex tourist mags have led us to expect in Bangkok. In fact what is most attractive in the video is the total absence of the intrusive sex tourist or his consciousness. All the men in the video appear to be gay-identified, which is to say they seek romantic love and sex from other men. They move around in circles of men like themselves. None of them are doing it for money (at least



Same *OG* from a different view (or is it?)

looking through the lenses of J. Gani, an Asian photographer but because his photographs are targeted towards the Westerner - the white sex tourist - the images he creates speak to their point of view, their fantasy of "tanned" and "brown" beach boys "roaming uncluttered spaces". An Asian viewer cannot help feeling excluded - feeling that this material is not for us. It is like gay men looking at lesbian porn - we sense that we are looking at images meant for someone else.

Some Asian gay men complain about not being attracted to others who are Asian. Some argue that this is because we apply Western standards of beauty in evaluating our objects of desire. This may well be true but the Western-point-of-view

as *OG*, excludes our participation. When we internalize this perspective we go on to exclude ourselves from choosing Asians as our love and sex objects.

SONG OF LIFE

(WITHOUT THE WEST)

What distinguishes gay sexual imagery that includes the Asian man as both subject (model) and audience (viewer) and perhaps creator as well? This question needs to be explored further on a theoretical level. In practice we are beginning to see such images already in, for example, *GAT's Celebrasian Newsletter*. The video *Thailand Song of Life* (*TSOL*) provides another interesting example. Here we have a

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Hawaii Revisited

Arthur Carbonell

I have had the good fortune to have lived my childhood and adolescent years in Hawaii, for nowhere else in the world have I come across a place where the climate is so healthy and the society a true cultural melting pot! When I was two, my parents emigrated to the Hawaiian Islands, where I grew up on the island of Oahu, in a sleepy town of Wahiawa. It is located in the central part of the island, nestled in a lush and fertile valley between two mountain ranges whose slopes are low and gentle. The valley floor was cultivated with Pineapple and Sugar Cane.

It has been many years since I had left my island, not realizing then that I would never go back. The Hawaii I knew in my early years is no more. But of the few vivid memories I can still muster in my mind's eye is the vision and ever changing colors of the mountain ranges. In the early mornings, the mountains come out with the majesty of deep purple, then by mid-day the majestic purple would have turned to a washed-out blue and at times blue green. If ever I missed anything at all about my days in Hawaii it would be those mountain ranges, the glorious Hawaiian sun and the colorings of the island.

Looking back I can imagine what a romantic spot to be in from a Gay point of view. A beautiful setting it is to make wild, passionate love on the still-warm sand, the hours before sunset. The comfortably warm air, the sound of the rushing surf. But I never did graduate to that point. The extent of my gay life was that of meeting guys at the Honolulu bus station. I discovered it quite by accident. My life till I turned seventeen was quite strict and sheltered. I knew very little about life outside the religious or-

ganization my family was associated. At any rate, the guys I met at the bus station would be all servicemen from Schofield Barracks which was a half mile out of Wahiawa. I was only seventeen. The extent of my activities with them was a mutual hand job. I wasn't aware of such things as oral copulation or anal copulation. But the mere fondling of another guy's genitals was enough to satisfy my homosexual desires. It wasn't until I was in the Army that I became acquainted with such activities. Even then, they were not to my liking. It has only been the past couple of years that I'm able to appreciate oral copulation. But this is about my years in Hawaii and not about my sex life!

The temperature then was fairly constant the year round. It would get a bit chilly December through February, when the early morning temperature sometimes dipped to sixty degrees then would warm up to seventy degrees as the day progressed. The summer months the temperature would climb up to eighty-five degrees. Those nights I would toss and turn in my bed from the heat. The average year-round temperature then was seventy-five degrees.

The most beautiful time of day for me would be just before sunset, the hours between 5:30 pm to 7:00 pm. I recall the times I spent with my family and friends in open courts of velvety green lawns, lush bordered vegetation with exotic flowers of Torch Gingers, Birds of Paradise, Gardenias, and brilliant Hibiscus flowers. The air was usually balmy, the sky a deep blue with a few wisps of clouds which looked like pink cotton candy just before sunset. The soft slant rays of the sun would cast long shadows. Tranquility perme-

ated the atmosphere as we sat down to dinner outdoors. By the time we ended dinner, the sky would be a palette of pastels which gradually changed to fuchsia.

In all, the living environment was quite peaceful, and healthy, It is as near paradise as ever there was one on earth. There never was the conflict of race, color or culture. Instead, we married each other regardless of color or ethnicity, producing very attractive men and women. We were brought up to be oblivious to race, color, or culture. So there never was any conflict or preoccupation with such things. Of course we were aware of each other's ethnic background, but we never compared our questioned it on the level of superiority. I believe it was the ethnic Hawaiian people who were responsible for promoting in all the islands the acceptance of one another regardless of origin. It is part of what the Aloha spirit means.

The climate being so tropical, we boys went wandering around and to school barefoot until we entered junior high school. So, we went barfoot by day, but at night we wore either slippers or shoes. For the usual social and church functions, we always wore shoes. But I can't ever recall the girls walking barefoot to school. And always we washed our feet before we entered out homes. When I first arrived in Boston, I had a time getting used to walking in my apartment with shoes on. As of late though, I have reverted back to taking my shoes off before entering my apartment.

Though the Hawaiian race is now extinct, partly due to the introduction of diseases by Captain Cook and partly through inter-marriage, which is a very common practice,

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some of the ethnic Hawaiian food has been passed down intact. The Hawaiian Luau is a tribute to the glory of old Hawaii. It is a feast signifying the Hawaiian way of life, a celebration to life itself. Lomi-Lomi Salmon, Lau-Lau, and the famous Kalua Pig are some of the more well known Hawaiian fare..

From *The Monarch Room* at *The Royal Hawaiian Hotel* in Honolulu, one of the oldest and most distinctive hotels in Hawaii, come the formula for preparing Lomi-Lomi Salmon and cooking a facsimile of a Kalua Pig in an oven. Originally, the Kalua Pig was cooked in an imu, a round pit lined with burning rocks where the prepared and bundled pig was placed and covered over with banana leaves and *ti* leaves then with earth.

Lomi-Lomi Salmon

Slice fresh, raw salmon into small bite-sized pieces and soak in very cold iced water. Combine the salmon with thinly sliced scallions and diced tomato. The proportions between the salmon, tomato and scallion vary according to one's own taste. Voila!

Kalua Pig

Use the loin of a pig, then brush on, before and at various intervals during cooking, the product, liquid smoke. Cover the meat well with tin foil and place it in an oven at 250 degrees for several hours until the meat is done. The result I'm told by one of the staff members from the *Monarch Room* is very much like the Kalua Pig from an imu. By the way, *The Monarch Room* at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel fetes a luau every Sunday evening.

COMMUNITY BULLETIN BOARD

CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

You can make a Difference!

Since 1985, the Fenway Community Health Center has been conducting an ongoing study of the sexual transmission of HIV among Gay and Bisexual Men.

You can Help!

By enrolling yourself, along with at least one sexual partner, in this study. Participants receive a physical exam and blood tests including HIV-antibody twice a year. You have the option to know or not know your test results. Should you decide to receive any or all results, they will be sensitively interpreted by study personnel knowledgeable of the latest research and medical developments.

In addition, a comprehensive individual interview about your sexual activities is required. ALL information is strictly confidential. Interview forms and blood samples are coded by ;number, not by name.

All Gay and Bisexual Men are eligible regardless of antibody status or health status. We currently have a low minority enrollment and are especially interested in minority participation. While AIDS has had a devastating effect on our community, it has also proved that we CAN take control of our lives and our health. Your participation will benefit you, your partners, and the community.

For more information call 267-0849 and ask for a "Partners Study" staff person, Mon-Fri from 9-5.

This study is funded by the Centers for Disease Control.

this notice is posted by the *Fenway Community Health Center*
16 Haviland St. Boston MA 02115

An Editorial

The following is not the usual interview that the reader might have come to expect in the *BAGMAL Newsletter*. In fact because our readers have come to expect an interview in each issue of the *Newsletter* I decided to write this article in the form of an interview with myself. Plus I like the format of the interview - it makes for livelier prose and the more direct presentation of information. The reason for this interview came in the form of a telephone call I received quite soon after the last issue of the *Newsletter* (Feb 1988) was sent out. The caller was irate and complained that he/she found the featured interview - *Odyssey of a Gay Teen* - offensive. After pressing repeatedly for specifics I was finally able to determine the following:

1) The caller thought that I portrayed the interviewee William Loc in a poor light. (The caller had not checked with William for his opinion at this time.)

2) The caller found the explicit references to sex and sexual acts in the interview offensive. In the caller's opinion these descriptions of sex were tantamount to pornography (as opposed to erotica) and amounted to "objectification".

3) In the caller's opinion, the interview reflected badly on both the *Newsletter* as well as the community it represents. This was to the extent that the caller felt ashamed to be associated personally with the newsletter. At a subsequent *BAGMAL* Steering Committee meeting the same person demanded that this particular issue be pulled from *New Words*

Bookstore which had agreed to display and sell copies of the *Newsletter*.

Although this response may be limited to one person at this point I think the particular point of view and politics it represents need to be addressed. In addition this seems like an apt juncture to lay out for our readers the philosophy behind the writing and editing of the *Newsletter*. Because there is a philosophy that guides the presentation of what might superficially appear to be a rather random collection of interviews, letters, articles and announcements. Here goes.

Why interviews in the first place?

Because that's what the *Newsletter* is supposed to be. The voice, the cultural expression of Asian gay men and lesbians. But not all Asian people that we want to hear from feel, rightly or wrongly that they can write a newsletter article especially in English. But everyone can respond to questions - engage in conversation. Recording that conversation allows them to express themselves. The Asian community has been silent, ignored for so long. It is only now beginning to define itself - to find its voice, to express our opinions and our ideas. We need to hear from everyone - not just those who are competent in English composition. Otherwise we will only be a journal for middle-class college-educated professionals.

When people talk about their lives, their experiences - they provide information that others can benefit from. How other Asian

homos deal with coming out, with discrimination, with lovers, with sex partners, with co-workers - all this can help us understand our own lives, our own anxieties, deal with our sense of isolation - that feeling that we are the only one with a unique problem. It is part of a collective pooling of resources.

Plus I like interviews mainly because people do have interesting experiences - interesting things to say. Even middle-class college-educated professionals.

But how can you be sure that you accurately portray someone in a two to three page interview?

Obviously no one can. And I don't think that the people I interview demand that I portray the whole person. We focus on particular aspects of their lives, particular experiences and talk about them. We just have to trust that the readers do not go on to stereotype people just because of something they elaborate on in an interview.

As the interviewer I obviously exert some control through the questions I ask. I try to get at what I consider to be the interesting experiences, the interesting ideas. However I usually do very little editing when I transcribe the verbal exchange - even when people stray from the topic at hand. Editing has the danger of taking remarks out of context and I try to be faithful to the spirit if not the letter of the original conversation. In the same way I do not edit if I can help it the letters and other articles that we publish.

Shouldn't some editorial control

an Interview

by S.H.

be exerted especially when it comes to discussions of sex which go beyond the bounds of good taste?

But whose standards of good taste? There is enough censorship of our lives out there without us censoring ourselves. People may debate all they want about the difference between pornography and erotica but what they are usually talking about have to do with depictions of heterosexual copulation. Mainstream USA finds all depictions of gay male and lesbian sex illicit, pornographic, in poor taste - even when they are in the form of safe sex information designed to save lives. All gay sex - the very acts which we find most gratifying, most satisfying - is considered disgusting and abhorrent by straight Amerika. Need we be reminded of last year's Supreme Court ruling on sodomy. As another example this past week's *Gay Community News* reports on a People with AIDS newsletter which has been banned by several New York hospitals because of its Valentine's Day cover showing two men kissing. Even a moment of tenderness between two men is considered in poor taste by them. The only way we can combat these negative attitudes, these distortions of the most fundamental aspects of our lives is to be honest, direct and explicit in our own discussions of sex. Honesty and truth must be our only criteria. Lies are in bad taste not truth.

So you think it is important that there are explicit discussions of sex in the Newsletter?

I do think it is important but also I don't see how it can be avoided. Men and women don't define themselves as homosexual or lesbian so that they can attend foster care rallies or sew quilts or eat tofu. When I ask someone about his/her coming out experience - this invariably brings up the recollection of a sexual experience because this is when we first confront the sexual truth about ourselves. Also sex is such a fundamental and important part of our lives - we are stigmatised by our sexuality after all. We have nothing to gain by denying the importance of sex unlike the Jimmy Swaggarts/Gary Harts/Jim Bakkers of the world. Many lovers I know become lovers after an initial anonymous sexual encounter. One of my best friends in *BAGMAL* I met through a chance sexual encounter in a porno cinema. If we cannot come right out and say these truths honestly we are saying that there is something dirty, shameful about these experiences, which is the same hypocritical morality that keeps us stigmatized. Certainly if someone I interview wants to tell me about an important sexual experience in explicit detail I am not going to censor him/her because that is the worst put-down.

When you spend too much time in an interview on sexual experiences don't you run the risk of reducing the person to a sexual object?

On the contrary. That person is elevated to a sexual subject. The difference is fundamental. An object has no feelings - no con-

sciousness, no thoughts, no desires, no will of its own. It can be owned and manipulated. On the other hand the subject whether it is of a book or a movie or an interview is a conscious being with needs, desires, feelings, opinions. We see the world through his/her eyes, we understand events interpreted through his/her consciousness. In the *BAGMAL Newsletter* the Asian gay man and the Asian lesbian are our subjects. We hear their opinions, the expressions of their needs and feelings - we see the world through their eyes. Nowhere else in either straight or gay culture do we have this - the world interpreted through the consciousness of gay men and lesbians who are Asians. Of course there is nothing wrong really with being a sexual object if you can also be a sexual subject as well.

How do you mean? You don't think it is bad to treat human beings as sex objects?

The question of "objectification" has been a favorite denunciation of heterosexual feminists who see their reduction to nothing more than "sex objects" at the hands of heterosexual males. Gay men I think can offer more depth to this debate. Certainly gay men treat one another as sex objects all the time. "That a cute number." "He has a nice basket, etc." We use these remarks all the time. The problem arises when one group is always the sexual object while the other always the sexual subject. This has always been the situation with women and heterosexual men. Hetero men as a group have

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EDITORIAL: from page 9

traditionally had the exclusive power, resources and control to produce, manipulate and consume sexual images of women. Everything is seen from the viewpoint of the hetero male speaking to other hetero males. He is both the subject and the audience; we never hear from the women themselves as to what women want, what they feel, what women desire. Things are changing now on the heterosexual front, finally. Of course the more conservative feminists call for censorship but progressive women, straight and lesbian are beginning to produce

sexual images and sexual ideas from their own point of view - with women as the subjects and women as the audience. This is a political act - to break the monopoly by hetero men on sexual images, on ideas about sex - about what feels good, what looks good to women. And of

course like all political challenges this brings about resentment and reaction from the male status quo. Look at the attack on Shere Hite's recent book *"Women and Love: A Cultural Revolution in Progress"* where she reports that many heterosexual women she surveyed are deeply dissatisfied with their sexual and emotional relationships with men. What's more 11 per cent of her respondents are lesbian and don't need men at all. This really brought down the wrath of both the media and the male research establishment on her. (See *GCN March 20-26, 1988* for a good analysis of this).

So you think publishing expressions on sexuality by gay Asian men and lesbians in the Newsletter is a political act.

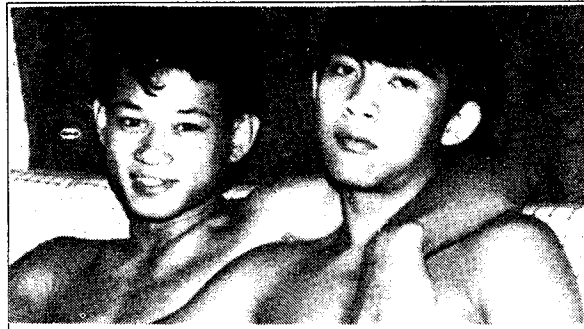
Certainly. Not just sexual expres-

sions of course but certainly including sexuality. Mainstream gay life is organized around the middle-class white gay man as its subject. (I won't speak for lesbians here.) Books, records, videos, theater express his desires, his needs, his viewpoint - when we consume this cultural material we become used to interpreting and seeing the world from the point of view of white middle-class gay men. In this cultural perspective and where sex is concerned Asian men do not even feature as "sex objects". The conventional images of us are stereotypically asexual ones - computer nerds or funny

must present the Asian gay point of view. The Asian gay man as sexual subject (and political subject and philosophical subject, etc.) That's why we interview the snow queen not the rice queen.

And of course when Asian gay people speak up for themselves - to express our viewpoint - it is a political act. When we become the subjects when we are no longer passive, silent objects this is a challenge to conventional wisdom as to what Asian gay people are. Look at the controversy around those *Passport* pin-ups at the *Washington Bridge* party. Those pictures assert a very particular

viewpoint - Asian boys as cute, young playthings for the consumption of the Western tourist. Their presence on the wall at the party determined the character of the room and the gathering. They changed the tone of the evening's event from what was supposed to be a gathering of



Subjects or Objects? The back cover of The Men of Thailand awaits an answer.

Japanese tourists or blood-crazed Vietcongs. This is one side of the polarity. On the other side we find Asian gay men as a specialty item - reserved for white men with special tastes known as "rice queens". The images we find here in such magazines as *Passport* and *OG* (see review in this issue) are exclusively of some cute Thai beach boy or Filipino go-go dancer lying nude in hotel rooms. The viewpoint is very clearly that of the Western sex tourist - the travelling sex consumer and nothing more. So we have two opposite poles but at neither end do we encounter the thoughts, the feelings, the ideas of what Asian gay men themselves want, what we ourselves find desirable, sexual, exciting. This is the gap that the *Newsletter* can fill, must fill. We

Asian gay activists and their friends to one where the focal point was again white gay men - the ones whose point of view was displayed prominently on the walls. White gay men became the subjects of the gathering surrounded by sexy objects both on the floor and on the wall. ("A meat market" in Andrew Li's terms.) The pin-ups were a very clear political challenge and it is to their credit that the Asian activists present were able to recapture the political initiative. Through speeches and introductions of the organizations present they re-asserted the presence of Asian gay people as conscious, autonomous individuals, as more than passive pin-up material.

(continued on next page)

EDITORIAL: from page 10

But don't you think presenting the more sordid sexual details of our lives will give a bad impression of Asian gay people?

Well who are we trying to impress anyway? Our subject and our target audience are very clearly Asian gay men and lesbians themselves. We have only tried to distribute the newsletter more widely through *New Words*, a feminist bookstore and here we are again targeting Asian lesbians, those may not be on our subscriber list. Our purpose is to educate, to inform, to exchange and learn from one another. We spend enough time in our daily lives compromising with straight people, with our parents, with the mainstream gay community. Here in the *Newsletter* we should focus exclusively on ourselves, our own needs, our own aspirations. We should not allow what we think the rest of the world might or might not like about us to influence what we have to say about our lives that is truthful and honest. Those should be the only criteria.

The gay and lesbian Asian community is only beginning to define itself after years of silence and invisibility. We need to listen to others, hear the experiences of others like us and we need to do this in an open, non-judgemental way. We are starting from very small numbers and we cannot afford to reject others just because we think they are too promiscuous, or too leftist, or too effeminate, or too *fofob*. To repeat an old cliché, diversity is strength. "FATS, FEMS S/M OK". The *Newsletter* and *BAGMAL* itself must always follow that philosophy. Δ

Agenda Planning Meeting Report Mar 13 1988

by Jack Lo

1. East Coast Asian Lesbian Retreat Until Fall

BAGMAL cannot commit itself to this retreat until the Fall. We are going to organize to reach out to local Asian lesbians.

2. Boston Gay Pride March in June

Our theme this year is, "Celebration-Asian Gay and Proud". We will be carrying a new banner along with balloons or posters. We are currently working on putting together literature for the day.

3. Open House

Tentative date for the Open House will be May/June. There will be a Forum, to introduce BAGMAL to the gay and lesbian community, in particular, to people of color. We want to address our issues, introduce our Asian culture, and history. After the Forum, there will be a party with DJ and cash bar. We will need your input and assistance to

organize this important event. Our next meeting in planning this Open House will be at Arthur Carbonell's apartment on 3/27/88, 1:00 pm, 160 West Brookline Street, Boston, MA 02118, or call BAGMAL's hot line, 622-6000. The following meeting will also be at Arthur's apartment on Thursday April 7 at 7:00 pm.

4. North American Gay and Lesbian Conference in Toronto

There are two issues BAGMAL would like to suggest to GAT, Gay Asians Toronto - the organizer of this conference: Asian gay youth and future North American Asian gay and lesbian projects. The Open House scheduled for May/June will help raise funds to subsidize transportation for Asian members who need it. We encourage Asians to attend this conference.

5. Visibility Campaign

We are writing articles

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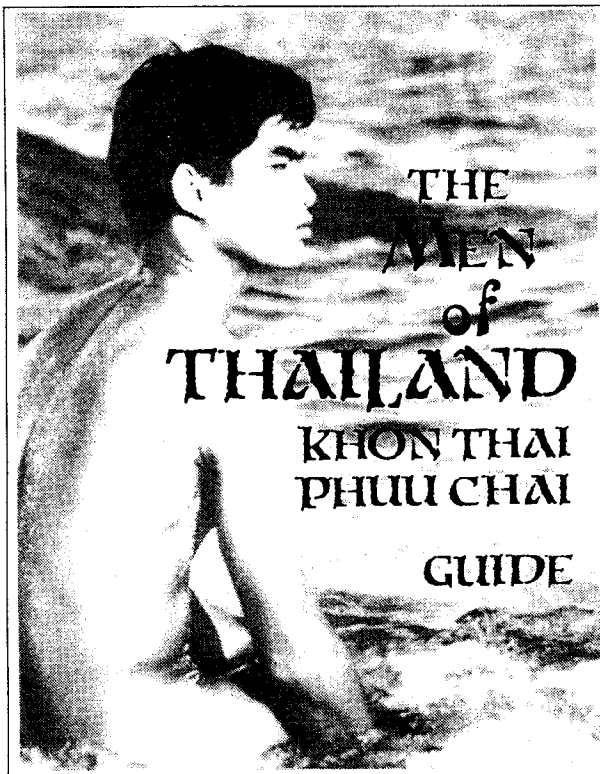
IMAGES: from page 1 not in the story) - no straight go-go boys supporting the family back in the village here. And there are the stock gay situations - one-night stands, jealousy, betrayal, bed-hopping and melodrama. The physical settings themselves are all spare, lower middle-class apartments with clock-radios by the bedside. (In contrast sex tourist magazines like *Passport* invariably feature snapshots of X waiter or Y dancer lounging post-coitally on hotel bedsheets.) No one goes to the beach either in this video unlike the ubiquitous brown beach boy in sex tourist magazines. In one scene in fact the lovers go out strolling hand in hand dressed in fashionable shirts and jackets. A bit overdone maybe for the ninety-degree climate in Thailand but we all know how young gays won't compromise when it comes to fashion. All in all *TSOL* is a refreshing work - a work created by and for Thai gay men with no reference whatsoever to the Western point of view.

"NOT A SEX GUIDE"

For the sex tourist thinking of visiting Thailand - *The Men of Thailand: Khon Thai Phuu Chai Guide* (*TMOT*) is, I am told, indispensable. The reader will find here a great deal of general information useful to the visitor - everything from travel and accommodations to local customs, local food, how to deal with

street hawkers and peddlers, how to bargain, useful Thai phrases and so on. Like most gay guides *TMOT* offers information on gay bars and hotels: four major Thai cities are covered - Krung Thep or Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Pattaya and Phuket.

The Asian reader must however be cautioned that this guide is written primarily with the Western (i.e. white) sex tourist in mind. Asian sex tourists



even those from the West may likely not find the same reception that *TMOT* say *farangs* (Thai for foreigner) can expect. For example a Chinese-American should probably not expect to "stand out like a sore thumb, needing tending", as the guide tells its *farang* reader, so much so that anywhere the itinerant *farang* goes, "men eager to meet you" will "immediately approach you". The Thais we are also told are a status-conscious race who respect scientific and technological advancement. *Farangs* because they come from the technologically superior West are automatically accorded higher status. It is unclear however if a Vietnamese-American *farang*, for example, will necessarily be accorded this automatic status elevation by virtue solely of his residence in the USA. Bearing in mind this caveat it can still be said that *TMOT* is thorough and quite entertaining in guiding the Western *farang* consumer through

Thailand's gay sex industry.

The writers of *TMOT* of course claim that theirs is not a "sex guide", rather they are reporting on "Thai gay society", the *TMOT* being a "guidebook on the *Gay culture* (their italics) in Thailand". Nevertheless except for an occasional note that "Thai locals" frequent such-and-such gay bar we get no sense at all of a non-tourist oriented local gay society. From all other accounts by those who have lived and visited there the local Thai gay milieu is large and thriving with its own publications, magazines and so on. *TMOT* itself lists as one of its contributors Anan Thongthua, founder of *Mituna*, Thailand's first gay publication. But this is the last we hear of him or his publication. We learn nothing of where or how local gays meet (i.e. those who are not working in the industry) where they cruise, whether they are organizing, or how they might be dealing with discrimination as they become more self-defined and visible. So much then for the report on "Thai gay society".

The information on the gay sex industry is as I've mentioned thorough. The guide itself estimates "conservatively" that Bangkok's 40-odd gay bars alone employ over 1000 "off-boys" (men or boys available to "go off" with the sex consumer), the "vast majority.... farm kids from all over the Kingdom" who send "much of the money they receive...to their families". (It is reassuring to know that they don't waste it on drugs and alcohol.) Informal ways

(continued on next page)



**ASIAN IMAGES : HOTEL ROOMS &
TROPICAL BEACHES**
(From The MEN OF THAILAND Guidebook)

IMAGES: from page 12

of meeting or "cruising, in its Western sense" we are told is "an unnecessary and furtive alternative" because of the "extensive commercial system" of meeting "friends", TMOT's preferred term for the farang's companion met in this manner.

This commercial system works through a network of "host bars" or clubs most featuring live entertainment in addition to its "host" services. Here the farang or local Thai sex consumer (of which there are many TMOT assures us) can pick out his "friend" by number. ("Working boys" in tourist bars sport numbers so the farang can avoid the rude habit of pointing; farangs are encouraged by TMOT to observe local customs.). Alternatively he can select from a photo album using the flash light conveniently provided by the helpful club manager. The farang must then first pay the bar charges for the boy (no representative prices are quoted by TMOT), then he can bring his choice or choices back with him either to his hotel room or where available, to short-term rentals located right on the bar premises. What follows, of course, is the requisite "tip" which, we are told, the "off boys" get to keep for themselves. Thai "off boys" do not charge fixed prices but TMOT assures us that the appropriate range is from 300B (or Baht) to 500B (1987 prices). At the current exchange rates of 26B to US\$1 this translates to between US\$11.54 to US\$19.23.

Apart from its description of the workings of the sex industry TMOT is most fascinating where it attempts to rationalize the participation of the farang sex consumer in the "extensive commercial system". This the writers attempt to do by propounding what they claim to be the "Thai point of view" - in terms of Thai culture and tradition. No,

no this is not prostitution or hustling which are "Western concepts laden with moral controversy", the writers insist. Instead the system of the "host bar" is a "uniquely Thai institution", created and patronized by Thai men themselves and dependent on Thai concepts of "status obligation" and its traditional "system of patronage". Historically, they tell us:

"the Thai social order has been governed by the seeking of affiliation with one of power such as ...a government administrator, a monk, a teacher, an aristocrat. The system of patronage is a mutual relationship by which the patron offers protection, favors, and prestige to the client, who in turn provides services and loyalty and adds to his patron's prestige".

Those familiar with Boston City politics may well find this tradition not so uniquely Thai. Nevertheless the writers explain

"Seeking patronage from a superior is still at the core of Thai relationships....part of a long Thai history of affiliation with those who have power....as a means of attaining power for oneself".

Again this sounds suspiciously like what lies at "the core" of traditional heterosexual marriage, yet another institution unique to the Thais. Nevertheless the argument is clear. The farang, because he is relatively wealthy and/or associated with the industrialized West is considered to have superior status. Naturally he is cased as a potential patron by many Thai "working boys". Thai bars we are told abound with g-

strings-to-riches stories whereby some "off boy" makes the big time through the patronage of a rich and generous farang godmother. As a patron the farang must observe certain "status obligations"; living strictly according to one's status and fulfilling "status obligations" the writers tell us, are the overriding concerns of Thai culture. One such "status obligation" of the patron-farang is to be generous to his friends. The relationship is not the Western "classic hustler-john" but rather "patron/client", the writers assure the morally ambiguous farang contemplating post-coital "tipping". It is a "system of mutually obligatory relationships.....Your role in giving him money is part of your status obligation; his role in being with you and pleasing you is part of his".

Patron/client or hustler/john - it is unlikely that the average "off boy" gives a damn. It is clear though that he would prefer US\$19.23 to US\$11.54 even if it means being labeled a "hustler". In fact in its haste to assuage the potential guilt of the sex consuming farang, TMOT glosses over the primary economic element (that ugly Western concept) of the relationship. It is also in this regard that TMOT must be faulted for being mean-spirited and petty in the advice dispensed in the section entitled "Overgenerosity and Being Foolish". If the "friend" asks for 1000 B, the farang is advised that he would be "foolish to give it" unless he thinks that his companion "really deserves it". Whether one agrees with the writers' view that the farang and his "friend" represent a benign "patron-client" relationship or is in fact "sexual exploitation" - "a debate some Westerners (my emphasis) seem obliged to indulge in" say the writers - it is quite clear that the Thai "off boy" has few options and is working at a disadvantage.

(continued on next page)

REVIEWS: from page 13

As in other areas of international commerce, unfavorable exchange rates and low commodity prices work against the third world producer whether his commodity be sex or sugar cane. Therefore if a less budget-conscious *farang*, who is after all fulfilling his "status obligation", wishes to pay (reward) his "friend" with something closer to US prices - US\$38.46 is certainly still well below market rates for an all-night companion who may be, quoting *TMOT*, "incredibly attentive, tender, passionate" or alternately "exuberant, playful and lusty" - it seems that *TMOT* should not castigate this more fair-minded "patron" for being "foolish" and opening himself up for - gasp! - exploitation. Certainly *TMOT* should refrain from guiltting the "foolish *farang*" about "disrupt(ing) the Thai's system" for other *farangs* or, what is even worse, "creating unrealistic expectations" on the part of the "working boys".

Of final interest is *TMOT*'s little paragraph on "reverse culture shock" - that harsh come-down the *farang* experiences on arriving back in the West. The writers warn that the *farang*, who is of course no longer one, may experience "a kind of revulsion for (his) own Gay culture...where people do not smile...where meeting people is fraught with suspicions and even rejection." It goes without saying that not being automatically elevated in "status" solely because of one's race and not to have large numbers of "warm, friendly, playful, attentive and loyal" young men tending to one's needs at deflated prices can take some getting used to. What is truly frightening however is *TMOT*'s suggestion that the returned *farang* may well try to affect his situation at home by "bringing back some of the social skills (he) developed in Thailand." (my

emphasis). Many gay Asian men I'm sure have had the misfortune to encounter the *farang* who forgot to leave patron/client lifestyles at his last vacation stop. (Recall Andrew's *gomenasai*-ing friend). We too have had to deal with our share of "unrealistic expectations".

Whatever one's views on gay sex tourism in East Asia it is clear that gay Asians living in the US are by no means insulated from the lives of "off boys" working in Thailand. The proliferation of the sex tourist point of view - attitudes propagated by the nostalgic *farang* or though the increasing numbers of gay sex tourist magazines focusing on Asia - have and will continue to affect all our lives in this, our shrinking world. Δ

REPORT: from page 11

for and placing advertisements in local gay media to publicize the Open House. We will also be printing BAGMAL's business cards for out-reach purposes.

6. Social Aspects

Proposal for social events are as follows: April: Japanese festival celebration; May: Cookout; July: Beach party or weekend in Provincetown; August: Aloha! a Hawaiian Luau. Please contact Arthur Carbonell if you have any ideas or input.

7. Newsletter Committee Meeting will be Announced.

8. BAGMAL'S Name

Two names have been forwarded for consideration. The name, **BALGA** (Boston Asian Lesbian, Gay Alliance) has been proposed to be the new name for the organization. The second proposed name is **AMALGM** (Alliance of Massachusetts Asian Lesbians and Gay Men). We have also decided on using the Lotus flower as the organization's logo. BAGMAL's business card and letterhead will be designed by Arthur Carbonell.

9. BAGMAL's new Hot Line

Thanks to Arthur Carbonell, BAGMAL has a hot line: 622-6000! Δ

Untitled

by Jack Lo

*There is the beautiful lion
Wearing bright red, green and blue stripe
Wearing the shining glitter stars
And two stalks of red paper flower on her head.*

*Dancing along the drum beat
With the cha cha cymbal noise
Jumping over the burning fire crackers*

*She is showing me her emotion
Cheerfulness, sadness, anger and happiness*

*There are children and a lot of smiling faces
Gung Hae Fat Choi*

*I feel my Chinese culture
I feel my Chinese pride*

*My Pao Pao told me about the Herder and the Sewing
Woman
I know about the Monkey King*

*I go to flower markets in New Year's Eve
Wearing my brand new clothes
Am not allowed to eat kao jai until the New Year Day
morning*

*Shing, Lai Kueng, Lai Fong and I
We are brothers and sisters
Waiting in line to greet my Pao Pao, Ah Bae, Ah Mom
With a cup of lotus seed tea
Wanting our lucky money*

*I was in Chinatown at Lunar New Year
Wish me a wonderful Dragon Year
But stop asking my Wedding Date*

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Lesbians choosing children: an interview.

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