

The Sharps Shooter

March 24

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A MESSAGE FOR SHARPS SHOOTERS

Welcome all, to the latest issue of the Sharps Shooter.

It's been called the Green Fairy, Green Muse, Green Torment, and the Devil in a bottle; Absinthe is a mysterious drink with a with a long and sometimes dark history. It's been said that the Green Fairy inspired Picasso, Van Gogh, and Oscar Wilde. Earnest Hemmingway drank Absinthe during the Spanish Civil War, and even created a cocktail called Death in the Afternoon.

It's also been said that the Devil in the bottle will drive you mad, and that this what caused one man to murder his family in 1905.

This issue we'll look at the rise and fall of the Green Fairy.

And did you know Pablo Escobar had “ Cocaine Hippos”, and that they've attacking people?

Plus Trip-Killers, Angry Gen Z, and Padadoz Mahone.

We hope you enjoy it.

The Editor

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PABLO ESCOBAR'S 'COCAINE HIPPOS'

ESCOBAR'S HIPPOS ARE NOW APPARENTLY ATTACKING PEOPLE

Evy Kwong

Multiple people reportedly have recently encountered hippopotami descending from Pablo Escobar's so-called "cocaine hippos"

Some people who have encountered the animals have apparently been hospitalized

The Colombian government has pledged millions to culling the hippos.

Experts believe the population could grow from about 170 now to about 1,000 in 2035 if proper action is not taken





Escobar rose from humble beginnings to become the world's most powerful and feared criminal.



The entrance of Hacienda Napoles, the estate built by Pablo Escobar which once featured his own personal zoo

The population of hippopotami descending from Pablo Escobar's so-called "cocaine hippos" is reportedly on the rise — and some locals are growing increasingly concerned about their presence.

There are currently about 170 hippos roaming northwest Colombia, according to CNN and Vice. Local officials have since been attempting to mitigate the issues surrounding the invasive species — which is now apparently starting to attack people.

Some residents who have encountered the animals have been hospitalized according to CBS News and Vice.

"They're very, very dangerous," one local told FOX Nation.

Students and parents at a school in Doradal are among those who have reportedly encountered one of the "cocaine hippo" descendants. One of the animals recently showed up in a schoolyard while they were all present.

"The mothers get scared when they see an animal of that size," teacher Dunia Arango told AFP, per CBS News.

Multiple hippos have made themselves at home in a lake just 20 yards from the same school. David Echeverri, an official with the local environment authority, said about 35 children play in the area and could "provoke a tragedy" should they make contact with the animals.

"While they may look very calm, at any moment, given their highly unpredictable behavior, they can attack, as has happened before," Echeverri added.

Four hippos were originally brought to Colombia in the 1980s and were part of Escobar's private zoo, Hacienda Nápoles, according to Vice and NPR. The animals were abandoned after the drug kingpin's death in 1993, allowing them to rapidly multiply.

However, experts believe the population could explode to 1,000 by 2035 if proper action is not taken, CBS News and CNN reported.

In November 2023, Colombia's minister of environment and sustainable development announced a three-point plan to try and mitigate the country's invasive hippo population, which includes sterilization, relocation, and even "ethical" euthanasia, per CNN and the BBC.

The plan began with the sterilization of 40 hippos shortly after the November announcement, according to the AP. Additionally, 70 hippos have been transported to India and Mexico.

"Here we are in a race against time in terms of the permanent environmental and ecosystem impacts that are being generated," Environment Minister Susana Muhamad said in a statement, per CNN. "And that is why we cannot say that only one strategy is effective for our objective, which is to control the population."



Using 'trip killers' to cut short bad drug trips is potentially dangerous

As interest in psychedelics has grown, so has interest in ways to end a bad trip. Recent research reveals that people are giving potentially dangerous advice on social media on how to stop a trip that is less than pleasurable.

Psychedelics cause changes in a person's perception of reality. One of the earliest descriptions of a psychedelic experience in western literature can be found in Aldous Huxley's 1953 book *The Doors of Perception*. Huxley describes mostly beautiful visions while tripping on mescaline.

And then there were the Beatles seeing "tangerine trees" and "marmalade skies" and "a girl with kaleidoscope eyes".

The last few years have seen a resurgence of illicit use, not only of established psychedelics, such as LSD and magic mushrooms (psilocybin), but also of the novel psychoactive substances that are psychedelics, such as AMT, 5-MeO-DALT, mCPP and methoxetamine.

There is also renewed interest in studying these drugs as treatments for mental health conditions, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression.

Even a single dose of these drugs appears to have long-term therapeutic effects.

But not all trips are pleasurable. Research shows that if someone is in a bad mood or depressed then they are more likely to have a bad trip, as are people who take too high a dose.

This sort of experience might include extreme fear, time standing still and mood swings. Very high doses of LSD can also cause agitation, vomiting, high blood pressure, hyperthermia and other nasty side-effects. But at regular doses, psychedelics are relatively safe.

To mitigate against bad trips, people will often take the drug in a relaxing and safe environment, and they might include a friend, or "trip sitter" to look after them for the duration of the trip. This was a common practice in the 1960s among people taking psychedelics.

Trip killers

More recently, though, some psychedelic users have been turning to "trip killers" to end a bad trip. These are drugs that can either block the direct effects of the psychedelic or simply reduce the anxiety associated with a bad trip.

Few clinical studies have examined trip killers, but one has found that ketanserin – a drug used to treat high blood pressure – reverses the psychedelic effects of LSD.

A recent article in the Emergency Medical Journal analysed posts on Reddit about trip killers. The researchers found 128 threads with 709 posts from 2015 to 2023.



LSD is generally safe, but very high doses can cause unpleasant side-effects. Darrin Jenkins/Alamy Stock Photo

Trip killers were discussed most often for LSD (235 posts), magic mushrooms (143 posts) and MDMA (21 posts). The most commonly suggested trip killer was Xanax (an anxiolytic) followed by quetiapine (an antipsychotic), trazodone (an antidepressant) and diazepam (an anxiolytic). Alcohol, herbal remedies, opioids, antihistamines, sleep medication and cannabinoids were barely mentioned.

Receptor blocking

LSD and magic mushrooms create their effects by activating certain proteins in the brain. These are called 5-HT_{2A} receptors and are usually activated by the neurotransmitter serotonin (5-HT). There are 14 known 5-HT receptors, but psychedelics have specific activity at only the 5-HT_{2A} subtype.

To kill a trip then, one simply has to give the drug user another drug that blocks (rather than activates) the 5-HT_{2A} receptor. Many prescription drugs can do this and they tend to be antipsychotic drugs.

Quetiapine from the list above is one popular example, while another antipsychotic, olanzapine, was mentioned in 14 posts in that study. Similarly, the atypical antidepressants trazodone and mirtazapine also block the 5-HT_{2A} receptor.

One can think of these trip killers as working in the same way that naloxone would be used for heroin or fentanyl overdose. These drugs activate opioid receptors in the brain, while naloxone blocks these receptors. Naloxone is therefore used to treat life-threatening respiratory depression from opioid overdose.

Another option for the psychedelics would be to decrease the anxiety associated with the trip by taking anxiolytics, such as benzodiazepines – alprazolam (Xanax) and diazepam (Valium) being the most popular in the posts analysed above. These would also help the drug taker to fall asleep.

Some of the trip-killing drug doses suggested in the Reddit posts were high. For example, quetiapine was suggested to be used at 25mg to 600mg, but clinical guidance for these drugs suggests a single dose of up to 225mg.

The doses suggested on Reddit for alprazolam are 0.5mg to 4mg but the clinically suggested maximum dose is usually 2mg to 3mg. Four milligrams could cause low blood pressure, oversedation and respiratory depression.

Unfortunately, benzodiazepines are also highly addictive and can lead to overdose deaths.

People who turn up at A&E suffering from a bad trip or overdose of a psychedelic will be reassured in a calm environment. If that doesn't work, they are likely to be given an antipsychotic or low-dose benzodiazepine, at a clinically advised dose.



Colin Davidson

Professor of Neuropharmacology,
University of Central Lancashire

THE HISTORY OF ABSINTHE, THE ONCE FORBIDDEN DRINK

Michael Cranmer

Banned for almost 100 years, believed to induce madness in those who drank it, absinthe is making a come back.

Invented by a French doctor, the highly alcoholic drink has a colourful history.

What is absinthe and where does it come from?

A certain Dr. Ordinaire (you couldn't make that up) fleeing the guillotines of the French Revolution, settled across the border in Couvet, Switzerland. He adapted a local herbal folk remedy to cure patients, and, on his death-bed, passed on the secret recipe. Fast forward five years and we find Henri-Louis Pernod, father of the brand still in existence today, opening a distillery in Couvet, then, in 1805, to dodge the excise-men, a bigger one over the border in Pontarlier, France. The Doc's wormwood potion, now called Absinthe, was proving very successful and soon Pernod was churning out 25,000 litres a year. Before long there were 22 distilleries utilising the locally-harvested plant – *Artemisia absinthium* – which, with the addition of imported Spanish aniseed, gave the drink its emerald-green hue.

French soldiers fighting in Algeria had been given the medicine as an anti-malarial treatment and brought a taste for the 73° alcohol back home. Mass-production cut prices, and a disastrous wine harvest propelled absinthe to the top of the French drinks charts.



Why is absinthe called the “Green Fairy”

Enter la Fée Verte...the Green Fairy. Named for the swirling emerald opalescence triggered by the addition of iced water to the neat liquid, both the working class and wealthy bourgeoisie consumed 36 million litres a year.

A stroll through Montmartre at 5.00pm in the 1860s would have revealed tables with men and women, often alone, contemplating their glasses of the spirit. This was the l'Heure Verte – the Green Hour, origin of our 'Happy Hour'. A single absinthe was tolerated by the waiters. Drinkers solved that problem by moving to another, and another and another...

A closer look, perhaps, at the café tables, and we spot the poet Rimbaud and his lover, fellow poet Verlaine, both devotees of absinthe. His artistic life ended as abruptly as his relationship with Verlaine, who in a fit of drunken madness, shot the young Rimbaud.

Here we might encounter Guy de Maupassant, writer of 'A Queer Night in Paris' which tells of a provincial at an artist's party who drinks so much absinthe that he tries to waltz with a chair, falls to the ground in a stupor, and wakes up naked in a strange bed.

Does absinthe really cause hallucination?

Picasso, Toulouse-Lautrec, Oscar Wilde, Hemingway, Degas, Gauguin... none were strangers to la Fée Verte and her tempting powers. Symbolist Alfred Jarry rode his bicycle with his face painted green in celebration of the joys of absinthe. Van Gogh drank it to excess.

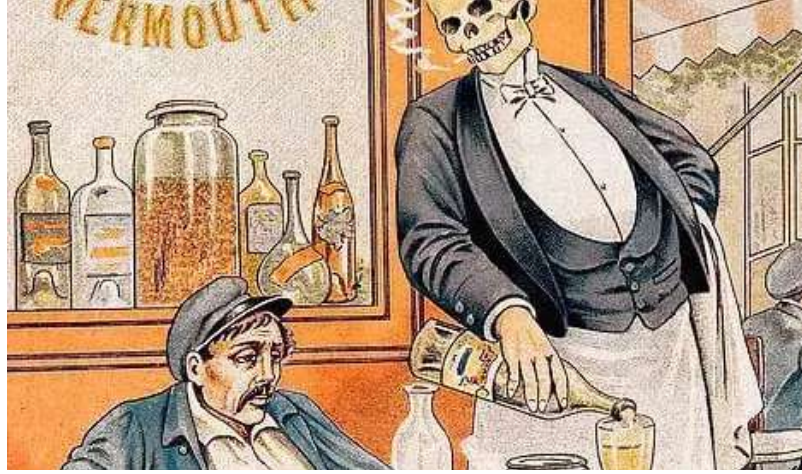
The Green Fairy's effects were being felt in society, much as cannabis is today. High in alcohol, cheap, seductive, reputedly hallucinogenic, it was blamed for epilepsy, tuberculosis, crime and madness. In 1905 in Switzerland a man killed his family, caused it was claimed, by drinking absinthe. Public morality was outraged, bans followed: Belgium, Brazil, the Netherlands, and Switzerland in the early 1900s, the U.S. in 1912, and in France, unequivocal epicentre of absinthe culture, in 1915.

It turned out that the killer had been drinking since he woke up the morning he committed his foul deeds, and the day before that and the day before that – supposedly without sleep. Years later, it's agreed that any strong drink would have the same effect.

Two World Wars followed, the Green Fairy was dead and forgotten. Or was she?



the absinthe murders: the shocking tale of jean lanfray



It was the drink of artists, poets, and la vie bohème. It inspired timeless artists like Vincent van Gogh, Charles Baudelaire, and Oscar Wilde. Absinthe became known and loved for its rich flavor, hypnotic louche, and supposed psychoactive properties that could create feelings of euphoria or excitability.

But it wasn't always a happy high... One horrible day in Commugny, Switzerland back in 1905, when he was 31 years old, Jean Lanfray brutally murdered his pregnant wife and their two small children.

He then unsuccessfully attempted to commit suicide before being arrested by the police. Later, while in prison, he would make another attempt and ultimately succeed.

This horrible event became known throughout Europe as the Absinthe Murders.

While there were complaints and controversies about the effects of absinthe on society before Jean Lanfray's actions, these murders became the rallying cry that would lead to absinthe's ban in many countries.

Today we're going to explore the details of this story and how it ultimately shaped public opinion on absinthe at the beginning of the 20th century.

Who Was Jean Lanfray?

Jean Lanfray was a French peasant and laborer living in Commugny, Switzerland.

Here, he lived with his pregnant wife and two children (aged four and two) in the second floor of an old farmhouse. His parents and brother lived on the first floor.

Lanfray had served three years with the Chasseurs Alpains (the French mountain infantry). Some claim that his time in the military is why he was so prone to raising his voice.

It wasn't unusual for him to yell at his wife, but nobody else in his village thought much of it. There was certainly no reason for them to believe that he would be a murderer.

However, Jean Lanfray did have a reputation for being quite an alcoholic.

Some days he was known to put away upwards of five liters of wine in addition to whatever else he could get ahold of!

He would often go on benders in the local bars, getting in arguments with strangers and embarrassing himself. If he was "cut off," it wasn't uncommon for him to have fits of rage if he didn't get enough to drink.

Nevertheless, the 31-year-old Jean Lanfray was also known as a hard worker who did whatever it took to support his family. He would wake up before dawn and work all through the day to provide for them.

It made what would happen in the autumn of 1905 all the more shocking...

The Absinthe Murders

It was August 28, 1905.

That morning, Jean Lanfray had told his wife to wax his boots since he would be gathering mushrooms the next day.

Lanfray, his father, and his brother all made their way to a cafe for a drink before they began their workday at the vineyard. Throughout the day, Lanfray would go on to drink a massive amount of alcohol during his lunch break and at a cafe once the day's work had been finished.

Once home, Lanfray continued drinking a strong homemade brandy until he saw his still-unwaxed boots.

An argument ensued between the Lanfrays until Jean, wildly drunk from an entire day's worth of drinking, stormed off into the next room.

When he returned, Jean Lanfray was holding a rifle. He shot his wife then proceeded to shoot his two children. In the commotion, Jean's father had run to get the police who hurried to the farmhouse.

Jean had tried to turn the rifle on himself, but only managed to shoot himself through the jaw. He was arrested by the police and treated at a nearby infirmary before being imprisoned.

Lanfray's lawyers maintained that he was not responsible for the gruesome murders because of his drunken state. Dr. Albert Mahaim, a prominent Swiss psychiatrist, explained that this was a case of "absinthe madness" that affected Monsieur Lanfray.

Nevertheless, the prosecution won and Jean Lanfray was sentenced to thirty years in prison on four counts of murder.

He wouldn't serve that sentence, though. After just three days, Jean Lanfray committed suicide by hanging himself in his cell.

Absinthe Prohibition

The prosecution overcame Lanfray's defendants' claim that the two glasses of absinthe he had consumed were responsible for the madness. But there were already temperance movements to ban absinthe throughout Europe that now had the perfect example of why the Green Fairy had to be banned immediately.

Even though there were at least 5 other types of alcohol in Jean Lanfray's bloodstream, it was the absinthe that got the most attention.

Studies were released that blamed absinthe for all manners of things such as hallucinations, madness, and death. While these studies were not peer-reviewed and lacked the type of scientific validity that one might expect, they further increased the fear of absinthism.

And so, by 1910, Swiss doctors and temperance leaders got what they wanted: manufacturing, selling, and possessing absinthe was banned throughout Switzerland.

Most of the rest of Europe quickly followed as well as the United States.

The bans would remain in effect for nearly a century until they were gradually lifted.

The Legacy of the Absinthe Murders

Jean Lanfray's murder of his family and the subsequent prohibition of absinthe influenced people's perceptions of absinthe for decades to come. It wasn't until recent years that people have begun to better understand the truth of this particular drink.

Many of the myths, legends, and lies told in the early 1900s in an attempt to ban absinthe still linger to this day.

This misinformation is a large part of why absinthe is so notorious. Even despite the Green Fairy's revival in modern times, there's still a great deal of work to do in fighting the misinformation and opening doors for new distillers and absintheurs alike!

Conclusion - Jean Lanfray and the Absinthe Murders

Few, if any, spirits can rightly claim to have a history as controversial as absinthe!

In a way, the same fervor that led to the ban of absinthe following the Absinthe Murders isn't unlike the infamous "Reefer Madness" concerns in the United States in the mid-20th century.

At what point does misinformation (backed by quack science and the media) become dangerous?

Even beyond the fake science and sensationalist newspapers, Jean Lanfray's actions were the exact spark that the prohibitionists had been waiting for.

While we can safely enjoy absinthe today, it's important to remember its troubled history. That's how we can really enjoy the wonderful future of the Green Fairy!



Absinthe Fiend

Writer, absintheur, and cheeky devil. Don't let the name fool you! I'm actually very friendly (though a bit eccentric...)

A Medieval Remedy

Nathalie et Mathilde



In the Middle Ages, recipes for absinthe-based remedies can be found in the works of Hildegarde de Bingen. For Hildegarde, who is considered to be the first naturalist in Germany, absinthe had positive effects on digestion and everything to do with the stomach. Depending on the pathologies she advises to drink absinthe juice or an absinthe elixir. Hildegarde has published her recipes in different books. Even today you can still find absinthe-based medicinal products made according to her precepts.

In the Middle Ages it was also common to drink wine mixed with honey and absinthe.

Frédégonde was the ambitious wife of the Merovingian king Chilpéric I. She never hesitated to kill her opponents. She's been known to have, among other things, poisoned a lord who came to accuse her of murdering the Bishop of Rouen. Frédégonde served him a large glass of poisoned absinthe wine and the unfortunate man barely had time to warn his comrades before dying.

« Touch not this drink, save yourselves, wretch, save yourselves, that you may not perish with me! »



A surplus of budgetary bullshit: a Gen Z guide to rage

John Delmenico

Today's young people have grown up watching 'grown ups' hurl shit at the world's metaphorical fan, well past the point of maximum shit saturation – the world's scientists nervously pointing out the truly alarming quantity of shit on the walls – knowing full well that at some point it will be our job to clean up said shit, or drown in it.

You don't need to worry about when today's youth will "crack". As a Zoomer myself, I can assure you we broke years ago. In fact, Gen Z are the least hopeful generation, because, in case you haven't noticed, the world is a wee bit fucked.

We watched the Millennial generation try their hardest with hope in their eyes to get the same so-called 'grown ups' to stop throwing shit at the fan, right up until they couldn't 'live laugh love' any longer; we watched their souls get crushed. From that generation, mine learned that hope is hopeless.

But hey! Let's not wallow in our collective depression. That's what TikTok is for. Instead, I welcome you to this Gen Zer's guide to rage!

To begin, let's address the myth that older generations want young people to get involved in political discourse. They really don't. When a young person enters a discussion they are cheered on by those older, right up until the point they say something that doesn't align with old biases. Then the patronising begins. We are told we're 'naive' and 'don't understand how the real world works'. Personally, people tend to throw in a bit of ableism, and my female friends cop a lot of ol' fashioned misogyny for good measure. Holy fuck, no one ever seems to want to address how both 'sides' of politics are fine with bigotry when they disagree with the person it is directed at.

With that in mind, if at any point you feel the compulsion to pull out an iPad and tweet at me to tell me I'm wrong about this, just... don't. I can assure you I'm familiar with the tired traditional political theories, I just also know the world is fucked and these theories are getting us nowhere. Ok, gramps?

Derision like this helps justify the surplus of budgetary bullshit older skills like to peddle. Take JobSeeker. As an unemployed young person, Labor basically told me to go fuck myself and starve. How very 'empathetic' and 'un-Scomolike' of them!

They promised to be better than this. Last year the government told David Pockock that they couldn't raise the rate until an expert panel of their choosing investigated it but they would implement the panel's recommendations. The panel came back and unsurprisingly said no one should be living in poverty. The report said the rate is so low it works as a barrier to entry for the job market, suggesting at a minimum it be lifted by \$100 a week. The government, of course, backflipped on doing the bare minimum and last week announced a raise for over 55s, in a manipulative plot to divide the poor and to stop the negative headlines about the 'the fastest growing at risk group' of people, headlines that by the way aren't even fucking true!

According to the ABS, young people are the most at risk of homelessness because of fucking course we are. Just like the sea levels, the intergenerational wealth gap is rising and, again like the sea levels, the Australian government only wants to make it worse while pretending to care. The next most at risk group is children (many coinciding with single mothers fleeing abuse) followed by Indigenous Australians. None of this should even be fucking relevant, though, because why the fuck would you cherry pick which groups have to choose between eating or shelter?

So much for that promise of 'nobody left behind'. Why is that the only election promise that the government is fine with breaking? Instead of, say, tax cuts for the rich? I guess the government didn't get the memo that Australia voted for change.

This public vibe-check for how much callous disregard the electorate can handle was the political class saying the quiet part out loud. It is how every policy is decided. After not getting the positive headlines they wanted from this move, the government 'clarified' that over 55s are being added to the higher amount (by a couple bucks a day) and everyone else is getting a jump of \$2.85 a day – a jump that is 20% of what their own panel called the bare minimum. Or in other words, fuck all!

My guess is that PM Albanese wants to set up a future generation of people like me to have to fight and struggle even harder than he did, so we can grow up and become even bigger class traitors. The biggest taste of 'King Shit' from 'Albo' since he was kissing Charles' arse on the weekend.

Speaking of doing fuck all, let's talk the housing and rental markets. My generation will likely never own a home unless we have rich parents willing to help with the cost, leaving many to rent overpriced shitholes for the rest of our lives. FUCK YEAH WHAT A GREAT SYSTEM!

Australia has a unique problem where housing, a need, is treated as an investment, one that is uniquely not allowed to be seen as a risk.

In Australia rentals are getting harder to find, renters have fuck all rights and prices are skyrocketing. Meanwhile, any attempt at meaningful action is met with media outlets and rich politicians cherry-picking stories of struggling homeowners, before doing nothing to help them either.

Instead, the government announces programs to 'help owners' who want to buy even more properties to rent out. So sorry anyone who doesn't own a large investment portfolio, I guess we all deserve to go fucking homeless!

Maybe we can all go live in those fucking submarines!

Another dread for young people is student debt, or 'HECS HELP' as we so patronisingly call it in this country. 'Oh I am going to be in debt for the rest of my life, but it's called HELP, well then how fucking helpful.'

HECS debt indexation is rising so fast, making it harder and harder to pay off, but the closest thing we can get to actually addressing this growing crisis that further entrenches the growing income inequality is having people who went to uni for free scoffing while they tell us that this is the 'good type of debt'. A phrase that would be too on the nose for a cheesy rich guy villian in a soap opera to say.

And the planet that all these other issues occur on, Earth, this one, is deteriorating. Climate change is only getting worse. Even our current government is shovelling billions of dollars on new fossil fuel projects, while calling it 'green energy', for the simple reason that they won't have to live through the disasters these decisions cause. They set the rules so it's not legally considered corruption to give fossil fuel companies billions of taxpayer money and in return collect hundreds of thousands of dollars in donations to the parties.

But even more soul crushing than that is what happens when we protest the destruction of our planet. If we peacefully protest for the sake of our species, we are thrown in jail for longer than paedophiles are. Meanwhile, when Terfs and Nazis threaten violence over plans to read books to children, governments fold to their demands. Gen Z are the most openly LGBTQ+ generation. We support and stan our LGBTQ+ friends. The world doesn't. Vile hatred is normalised and perpetuated by the media. Our PM is hanging out with Kyle Sandilands and is yet again dropping transphobic dog whistles, this time while chatting with Piers Morgan.

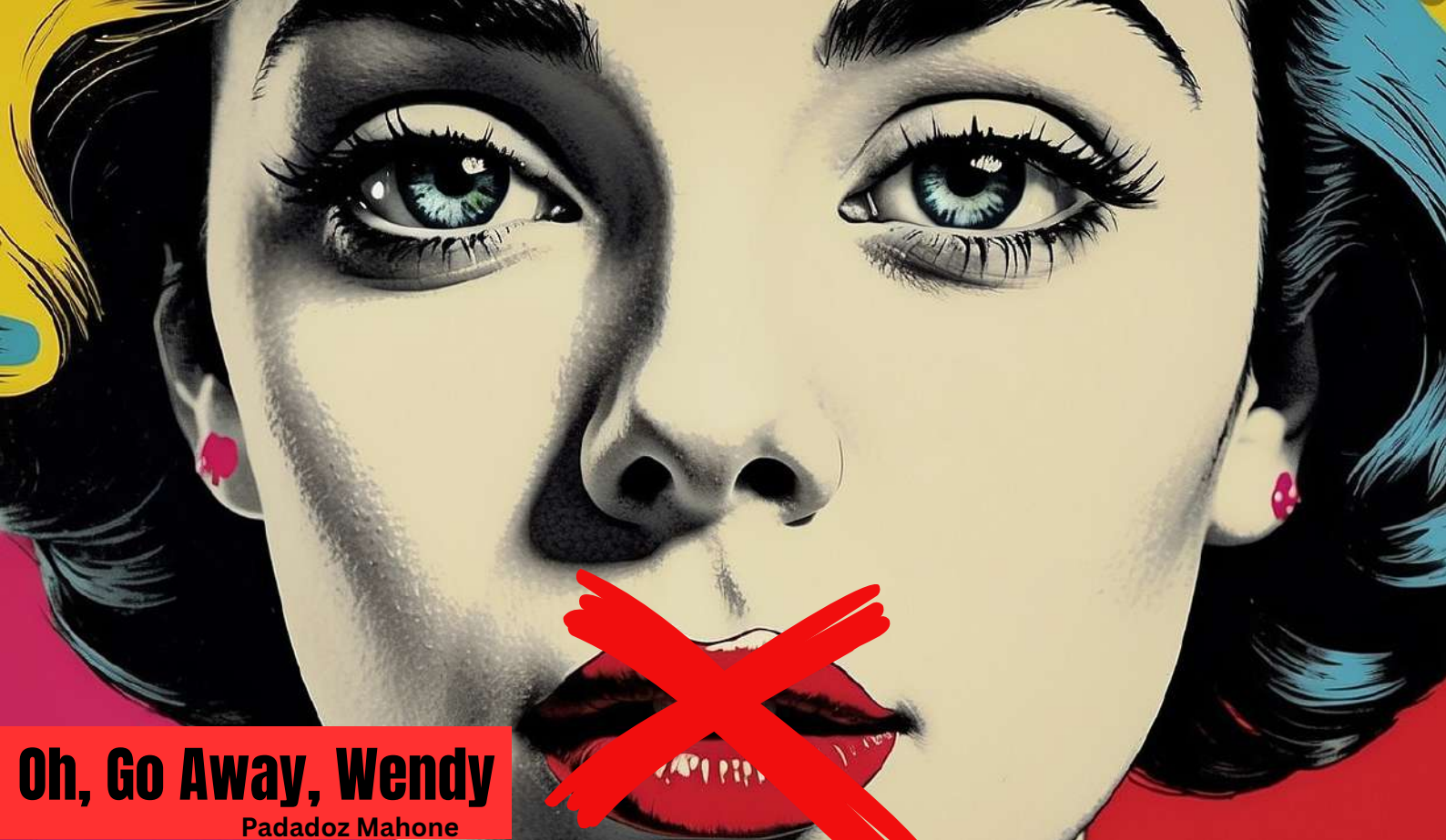
All these factors play into the fact that Gen Z is the most depressed generation ever. It's why vaping is so popular with young people. I don't vape, but a lot of my friends do. They know it's bad for them, but it's also the only semi-affordable vice left to help cope with everything else. But the government had to appease Boomer fears and ban vaping, while smoking, which is worse in every way, remains legal. That's like banning drink-driving but legalising absolutely fuckeyed driving.

This is the Tim Smith of policy decisions. A decision made by a generation of politicians who all did cocaine when they were our age. Zoomers can't afford cocaine! This would be like if the environment minister spent all day posting photos of her holding koalas saying she wants to save the koalas meanwhile approving shit tonnes of new coal and gas projects to fuck, sorry 'frack', the planet for decades to come... Oh wait!



Maybe if they really want young people to stop vaping and stop being so social media obsessed, they should start working to address the systemic issues that lead people to being so depressed and disenfranchised by the oppressive systems they control?

I have seen kids and teens articulate the problems with the world better than those who are meant to be trying to solve them. This is because young people are experiencing these problems. We aren't naive, we are sharp and aware. We are too smart to have any hope for this broken system, and until anyone starts trying to actually do anything about it, the only question to ask is are young people just depressed, or are we depressed and angry enough to do something about it? And to those in power and older than me: when are you going to grow up and take some fucking responsibility? You live in the real world now buddy, fix your shit.



Oh, Go Away, Wendy

Padadoz Mahone

The other Sunday, in the pub, I read one of those Sunday magazines articles that said Roald Dahl books are being edited and censored by "Sensitivity Readers" so as not to offend modern audiences. I looked it up and it's true, seriously, google it.

The Oompa-Loompas in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* are now described as "small" instead of "tiny", and they're gender-neutral, The BFG no longer turns "white as a sheet!" but now stays "still as a statue!", and the tractors in *The Fantastic Mr Fox* are no longer black.

These last two edits left me with one hand on my head and the other scratching my arse in confusion. A tractor is a machine and black is a colour. Who or what is being offended? Are white sheets racist? I know those KKK assholes wore them, but that was hardly the sheet's choice. I have no idea.

So, I looked into this, and started with the term "Sensitivity Reader". The Cambridge Dictionary defines a Sensitivity Reader as: "someone who reads documents, books, etc. in order to check that they do not contain anything that might upset or offend people who read them, especially before they are published."

So, you might ask, "What's Mahone on about? What's wrong with not wanting to offend people? Well, that depends on who decides what's offensive.

Now I want to be very clear about this! If you write a book and want to hire a sensitivity reader to make sure you don't piss anyone off, go ahead, and I'll support you all the way.

It all starts to twist my melon when it comes to already published books, and when the people deciding what you should be able to read have very restrictive view of what's ok. These dudes are deciding what's good for you and what's not. And that is a big fucking problem.

Well, for a start, who are these people?? I don't know who they are or what measure of ok they're using. Who made them book-Yoda? What if they decide entire books are offensive? Then we're getting into Big Brother territory, or, as a Sensitivity Reader would say, Big Sibling territory.

That could never happen, right? Oh, shit, hang on, that's already happening. Yes, it's in the US, but as you'll see, we're starting to go down the slippery slope here too.

A recent Guardian article, 'Eating away at democracy' quoted a study by Pen America, a non-profit that supports freedom of expression in literature, reported "3,362 instances of book bans in public school classrooms and libraries between July 2022 and June 2023, affecting 1,557 different titles."

If you're wondering what horrors must have been in these books, then prepare to be underwhelmed, confused, but not really surprised, and angry all at once. The books mostly covered LGBTQ+ individuals, transgender, and / or what some people call "woke" character themes but include books that cover historical events that right-wing types find inconvenient or uncomfortable.



Rosa Parks' mug shot

For example, one book that is banned in Florida is **The Life of Rosa Parks**. Rosa Parks was the African American woman arrested for refusing to give up her seat on the bus to white passengers in Montgomery, Alabama. It was the law that black people had to move so white people could sit. Rosa's arrest led to the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which helped kick start the civil rights movement.

Through her act of bravery, and it was bravery considering that where Rosa lived, the lynching of black people by those white sheet-wearing assholes I mentioned earlier were common. She became a symbol of dignity and strength in the struggle for equality for African Americans.

So yeah, a book about her life is banned in Florida, because of course it is. What else would we expect in a place where the school curriculum tells kids that slaves "benefitted from slavery". And I'm not even joking about that last bit.

The book that has the most state bans is *Gender Queer: A Memoir*, by Maia Kobabe. This book is banned in dozens of school districts and removed from libraries in several states including Alaska, Iowa, Texas, and Pennsylvania. One, not mental review of this book said that it's "a deeply personal exploration of the author's gender identity throughout their life, all at once gentle, charming, and horrific." The people that railed against the book said it was "disgusting, pornographic, indoctrination". For fuck's sake. THE GAY INDOCTRINATION AGENDA DOES NOT EXIST!

Banned classics

Some of the probably more well-known books that are banned in several states, and the reasons given for banning them include:

Maya Angelou's 1969 memoir *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, banned because it's "likely to corrupt minors, profanity, drug abuse, sexually explicit conduct"

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*: "offensive to Christians, sexually explicit" (Fun fact: after some right wing bellends burned copies of it, Atwood and her publishers responded by producing an "un-burnable" edition made from fireproof materials.)

JK Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, aka the philosopher's stone: "satanic, offensive to Christians"

John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*: One of the reasons given for why this was banned in Kern County, California was simply, "lies".

The list goes on and includes books by George Orwell, James Joyce, William Golding, and Ernest Hemmingway. And, to show the absolute fuckedness of these bans, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, banned for the use of the words "damn" and "whore lady". Jesus Christ, these fuckers are more offended by swearing than the appalling racism the books speaks about.

Porn in schools?

And this censoring of stuff some people don't like isn't limited to books. Back in Florida, a school principal named Hope Carrasquilla was fired after outraged parents complained that she'd shown students "pornography". This horrific event happened in a class on classical Italian art, and the pornography in question was a picture of Michelangelo's statue of David. The Victoria and Albert Museum call David "one of the greatest masterpieces in the history of art", but all the pearl-clutchers see is pornography!



Michelangelo's David, dressed for Florida School Censors would like to see him



Wendy Francis from the Australian Christian lobby says sex-ed books are "filth".

Here in Australia, The Australian Christian lobby is getting on the book-banning bandwagon. Their political director, Wendy Francis has referred to sex-education books as "obscenity" and "filth" and recently succeeded in getting Melissa Kang's book, *Welcome to Sex* taken down from Big W shelves. Wendy believes that we should all be reading the bible to our kids.

They've even gone as far as to urge Christians to visit libraries and send photos of "harmful" children's books for their chance to receive a prize. No, it's not free tickets to a burlesque show, it's a child's book written by Wendy Francis herself, titled, ~~You Can't Wave to Jesus if Your Hands are Full of Penis! Okay, I made that bit up, it's titled, What Are Little Boys Made Of.~~ Just imagine how shit that book is.

To me, Wendy has become the face of intolerant, prudish, yet sneering morality. People like Wendy want to tell you how to think and act according to their beliefs. They feel uncomfortable so they think you should too. Fuck that, and fuck them. They're often ghastly people, full of hate for anyone with a different idea than their own narrow view of right and wrong. They have no right to tell me or you what we should read.

Anyone who is ok with a world that is full of people with different views and values welcomes those differences, even if they're uncomfortable. We can't let Wendy control what we believe because it outrages her and her small-minded views. Fuck off Wendy.

Today, you can take a stand against her and her gang of crusaders. Go to a library and pick one of those books, banned in the US, while you still can. Then sit and just read for a while.

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