

A Conversation With “The Bishop”

by Geoffrey Merrick

Illustrations by Robert Bishop

Originally published in Bondage Life No. 9, June 1981

Scanned and Transcribed by guardian46w

As I wrenched my rented Toyota off the tortuous highways of greater Los Angeles, the immortal words of Sgt. Joe Friday echoed through my mind. “Los Angeles is a big town.” Accompanying the words was the image of the TV movie those words came from – “DRAGNET 1969”. It was the image of a pretty blond squirming in coils of rope that bound her wrists, arms, ankles and legs. Although the sound of her mewling piteously through the cloth tied between her teeth as her homicidal captor came closer was soft, that sound overpowered Friday’s declaration in my mind.

It was a fitting thought to herald my first meeting with Robert Bishop; far and away the premiere bondage artist of the 1970s and beyond. For his whole career has been taken up with giving visual life to fantasies that most enthusiasts couldn’t (and wouldn’t) dream of realizing. In fact, Bishop is not only one of the greatest talents in the genre, he is also one of the finest observers of the people and psychology which makes up the category known as “B&D”. He not only makes a living thrilling his select audience, he also has respect and passion for his craft – the art of tying people up and the art of the art of tying people up.

His present home is a comfortable, rustic condominium, although his spiritual self longs to live under a dome in Colorado. Parking the car along the sloping, wide street, I feel comfortable moving toward the wood and stone structure of the sprawling condo, although I can’t help feeling a bit excited about finally meeting the man known as “The Bishop” fact to face. We had been cross-country phone friends for quite some time – ever since I had become successful enough in the publishing business to get his address and number from a friend – so I already knew his manner belied the image his work and fame put across (perhaps that of a secretly sadistic monk insidiously grinning as he drew while kidnapped joggers, orphans, disco dancers and hookers struggled and moaned in the dungeon around him).

Actually, Bishop is the nicest, most casual of men. Talking to him is like sitting back in your favorite armchair to watch “The Collector” or shrugging on your favorite corduroy jacket to read “At the Villa Rosa”. He’s a good guy – a conservative liberal who’ll listen to other points of view but has his own way of doing things and his own staunch morality. He’s down-to-earth in reality while his fantasies lie in empty warehouses, in cellars, in the backwoods shacks and the rundown motels where innocent young girls are chained, taped, and tied.

I went to his door, ignored the nasty little doorbells these condos all seem to have, and knocked. The door opened and there was the man behind the drawing board. The man behind “Terri Tyde”, “Fanni -Hall”, “Bishop on Bondage”, dozens of paperback books covers, and some of the best House of Milan films ever unleashed on the all-too-expectant world. Our physicality’s didn’t disappoint each other. We both looked the way we sounded; me the bearded,

paunchy East Coast writer – he the redneck, easy-going West Coast artist. As always, we settle into a comfortable talk about a subject we could never indiscriminately discuss with anyone else. It wasn't so much an interview as – as usual – a conversation.

GM: So, you're really Robert Bishop? That's your real name?

RB: (taken aback a bit, surprised that I even suspected otherwise) Yeah.

GM: Why didn't you change it when you got into this business? My real name isn't Geoffrey Merrick, as you know, and it might change my career if it were known I was into seeing women bound and gagged.

RB: Oh, Christ, I don't know. I never thought about it. I just put my last name on the pieces.

GM: And that's where you got the moniker and the image of "The Bishop"?

RB: It was one of those strange things like where John Wayne was suddenly called The Duke for no apparent reason. He was named after a dog. In my case, there was a guy at the HOM office who was called "Boots" because he wore cowboy boots all the time as a kid. He came up with "The" Bishop.

GM: The Duke, A Dog. Boots. They're never going to believe this. Anyway, let's go back a bit. You know my story about discovering bondage. What I can't understand is why or how it started. All I knew is that seeing pretty girls chloroformed, bound, and gagged got me excited at an age when I didn't even know what sex was. Do you have any idea where you interest started?

RB: Well, no, not really. I never really knew why it happened. Same as you, there never really were any environmental underpinnings. My mother was always a good little Catholic girl, so sex was never something that was above board. The old man didn't really care, but he deferred to her. Consequentially I found out about sex behind the barn like everybody else.

GM: Where did you grow up?

RB: In Michigan.

GM: Hmm. I grew up in Connecticut. The first time I came into contact with bondage was when I was watching "Richard Diamond Private Eye" over at a friend's house at the age of 4 or 5 or 6. In the pre-credit sequence, a pretty nurse was tricked into leaning over a supposedly sick woman in the back seat of a car. The woman suddenly leaped up grabbed the nurse and shoved a chloroformed pad over the nurse's mouth as the car sped away. I always felt terrible because I've never been able to see the rest of that show. We left right after that. Anyway, the point is that I was too young to really know what was going on but this scene created... stirrings, shall we say?

RB: I had an experience similar to yours except I was older. I suddenly found myself watching a show that had my eyes bugging out. My grandfather and I left before it ended. It was a “Man From Uncle” with Elsa Lancaster. She ties up the heroine and puts a great big piece of tape over her mouth. It thought “Hot damn!” you know. But then I had to leave and I didn’t get to see it again until about three years ago. Frustrating. Anyway, that was one of the first times I ever saw anything on TV that really got me going.

GM: I know that one. That’s “The Brain Killer Affair” Elsa Kidnapped Yvonne Craig, who later became Batgirl.

RB: The Penguin did it, once.

GM: And Cat woman did it, as well. It seems as if I was always just missing classic TV bondage, I saw the first fifteen minutes of the “M Squad” episode where an heiress is kidnapped and spends thirty minutes squirming in the basement of a slum that’s set for demolition. I’ve never been able to see that one complete. Talk about sexual frustration! But getting back to the roots, once I discovered that captive women ground my loins, I had a hard time dealing with it. Were you always an artist or did you generate that talent as a means to express yourself?

RB: Well, that’s not the way it works with talent; you either have it or you don’t and then you set about developing it. I have just enough to realize that I don’t have enough. The bondage was a separate thing. The drawing just makes it easier for me to bring my fantasies out of my head and put them down somewhere where I could see them – where I could have a record of them. But I had always drawn pictures. I seemed to have a pencil in my hand for as long as I can remember.

GM: Well, I didn’t. I did other things to creatively express my various frustrations. Especially since I didn’t fit in with school crowds. How was high school with you?

RB: Pretty much the same as with you, I guess. I hated high school with a passion that bordered on a kind of monomania. It was four years of babysitting; you were too big to put diapers on and you were too young to go out and do anything really useful. The only class I found to be genuinely useful in any “trade” sense was the drafting class. The “art” class spent more time on basket-weaving and knitting doilies and that other artsy-craftsy bullshit than on drawing, particularly the fundamentals of drawing, so I ended up being pretty much self-taught by the time I went to college. Maybe it was for the better. Like most kids in high school, I was a member of



a clique, but we weren't exactly your "beautiful people" kind of a crowd, more you basic Vicksburg High School Auxiliary Beer Drinking, Mailbox Bombing and Sign Board Demolitions Squad. Real sophisticated crowd. Had a helluva good time. Best part of high school. Just lucky we never got caught.

GM: Did your "gun thing" start at that time as well?

RB: It wasn't really a "gun thing". It's just that I grew up in a town of 2500 people and everybody hunted. So, I grew up with guns. And owned them and enjoyed them anyway, back then the beer was a lot more fun because we weren't supposed to be doing it.

GM: In the meantime, how was your fantasy life going?

RB: Fine. I guess. I could articulate it through art and since I was basically a loner, I had lots of spare time to spend on the drawing board. And it wasn't just all sex fantasies; it was mostly the boyhood fantasies when you're 8, 9, 10, 12 years old. I used to draw war pictures and I'd make all the noises of the guns going off and the P-40s screaming by. Art, for me, was a part of the... gestalt... of growing from a kid into an adult; I was becoming a man and discovering women and learning how to draw a straight line and developing fantasies, all at the same time.

GM: Now, for some tough stuff. How did you get on with girls at the time? Did you go out? Did you go to the proms?

RB: Um (long pause)

GM: I ask because I didn't start dating until I was nineteen and I didn't go to the prom. I wanted to see if you own experience was similar.

RB: Not really. I'm a loner, pure and simple. I've always felt... what?... "complete" is about the first word that comes to mind. I've never really felt the need for a partner in life. The hassle of having somebody else cluttering up my tidy little monk's world for simple sexual gratification is more than its worth. And women, God bless their warm little souls, take a helluva lot of time and they demand extreme amounts of participation. If you tell them you want to be by yourself, they don't understand and take it as a personal rejection. Women I've worked with tell me I come across as being cold, detached. I guess maybe it's true. I don't mean it to be. My father didn't go out much and didn't get married till he was 27. At 33, my brother is three years younger than I and he isn't married. I guess it runs in the family. Whatever.

GM: Does your family know what you do for a living?

RB: No, not to my knowledge.

GM: So, there's no questions like "What do you want to be when you grow up?"

RB: I don't want to "grow up". I've thought about that for a long time. I've watched my friends get married and play house and make babies and get in hock right up to their eyebrows

and I always wonder if they're performing this amazing ritual because they genuinely enjoy it or because they think that's what's expected of them. Are they in fact more mature than I or are they simply terrified of being alone; are they having children out of a philanthropic interest in perpetuating the species or is it because they're scared to death of being alone in their old age, or is it simple ego gratification? "There, I made that (kid) and that proves I'm a man/woman"? or all of the above? More than that, "growing up", now that you've got me started, connotes – to me, at least – a distinctly humorless view of life; everything is taken very seriously. "You matter!" is the phrase and the sad fact of the matter is that most people, for all the good things they might have done, for all the new thoughts they might have had for all the fine and brilliant and noble inventions that only humans of all the animals on earth can produce, might just as well have not been born at all. I can't take a species very seriously that gets down on its collective knee and wails to the God of its choice one day and breaks every single one of that God's commandments the next; that eats its young in wars that are fought for reasons that aren't even reasons; that turns the whole damned earth into an open sewer so that every single house can have the latest in electric bee-pluckers; that breeds like flies when we've already outstripped our capacity to grow food... Nope. A species that's that deliriously aggressively suicidal is not something I can take seriously. Here we are, the most intelligent animal on the face of the earth, and we're going to do ourselves in with our own hand. I think that's funny as hell. That's why I'm not a grownup

GM: Let's get back to your art. What happened after high school?

RB: After I got out of high school I went to a little trade/technical school up north. It was a two-year course in technical illustration and we were even supposed to get some kind of degree out of it at the end but I missed two of the courses. One was, let's see, the basic orientation class everybody was supposed to take during the first couple of weeks of your freshman year and... something else. I forgot. Advanced Beetle Bugging of something like that. Then I moved to Detroit and worked for an outfit called Graphic Engineering Services which was kind of a sweat shop for technical drawers. It was good experience, on balance, now that I think about it: it honed, well, it started to hone, the style I still use – the tight, controlled lines. When I see a picture of some luscious little wench strapped up like a package, I want to see all those little nuts and bolts and knots. Detail is the name of the game, for me. You know what I mean, with a photograph you get detail up the ass, assuming you aren't using a Coke bottle for a lens, where, with a drawing, you don't necessarily get the same precision. Ward's stuff is kinda sketchy, for example. Jim's stuff was really tight. Stanton and Willie were about the same, although Stanton tends to get a mite loose from time to time. Whatever. Then I went in the Navy. I was in Homestead, Florida during my tenure. Bumstead, we called it. It's about 30 miles south of Miami. I was a communications technician, a CT R-branch. We listened to the Cubans. Worst Morse Code in the world. The only people I heard as bad were Americans. The Russians were perfect. I just couldn't keep up with 'em.

GM: Interesting.

RB: Yeah, so there I was for just under two years before I was accepted at the Art School of the Society of Arts and Crafts, back in Detroit. I was going to be a car stylist. I thought. Well, the VA screwed up and wouldn't give me my GI Benefits. I was starving so I thought so much for

being a car stylist. I went back to GM until the Great Layoff of 1970 came. It was just before Christmas and Michigan tends to get a little brisk that time of year so I thought to myself, well, if I stay in Detroit I'm not just going to starve, I'm going to freeze to death. A friend of mine was in California, so I decided to go on out; I might still starve, but at least I wouldn't freeze. I stayed with him and his wife for a couple of months until the lady got real tense about the extra company, and then I finally got a place of my own. Then I stumbled onto "Centurian" (Author's note: a kinky magazine). There was some art in there and I thought, hell, I can do better than that. So, I sent them some stuff, which they liked.

GM: Now, hold on there. Had there been any problem in adjusting to the uh... what can I say not to upset the masses? I was going to call bondage a perversion. What would you suggest I call it?

RB: A perversion. Anything other than Reverend Ralph's Approved Missionary Positions is a perversion, to Reverend Ralph. All perversion means is a turning away from the norm, whatever the hell that is. It's not altogether specious to say that the people who said the earth was round were perverts to the flat-earthers, many of whom still survive, apparently, judging from the Draconian bullshit the new "moralizers" are slinging around.

GM: All right. Had you pretty much accepted... oh, here we go again with the difficult words... the abnormality of your perversion?

RB: Well, I never really accepted it as an abnormality because I never thought of it that way. You know you have to be taught that something is wrong before you get stuck with making a value judgement about it. My parents never talked about sex, as I said, and I grew up like most little boys imagining sex to be something infinitely appealing and unspeakably filthy. The great Christian way. To me, sex is just sex and bondage sex is normal. For me. Other people have their own games. Some people even enjoy the Missionary Position, I guess; face to face, turn the light off, man on top, woman on the bottom, get on, get in, get out and get off... gee, it was nice but kinda boring.

GM: The Avengers, to my mind, introduced a whole generation who may have never seen a dirty book store – to the concepts of bondage and released a lot of pent-up frustration.

RB: Welllllll..., I don't know. I think a lot of people were turned on by it but they didn't know why or what to do about it. And they didn't know where to go, so they just wrote it off. As you say, most people won't go into a dirty book store. Even me, Mr. Prevert (sic), doesn't like going into them. It wasn't until I did, however, in 1965, that I even knew that what I like was a separate entity, "Bondage", oh, so that's what you call it!

GM: Yes, and within that genre, there's a lot of sub-genres. For instance, in Bishop on Bondage #1, and Fanni hall #3, there's some male bondage. Did you do that for yourself or for your readers?

RB: Normally I draw what turns me on, I tried to do some gay bondage stuff a few years ago but it was a dismal failure because I couldn't go on gut reactions to what I was drawing. A guy

bound and gagged doesn't do anything for me. A girl is a different kind of thing. In the early days it wasn't as much male bondage as female domination I was getting at. Now I run into people who say movies about female domination are the big thing. I don't agree.

GM: Neither do I. in fact, the big mainstream movies today are the ones where young girls are slaughtered all over the place. There's some decent bondage in "Silent Scream", some passable but painful junk in "Motel Hell" and "Mother's Day", but some really sick torture of a bound and gagged girl in "Maniac", which is truly a morally reprehensible film. The rest of them: "Friday the 13th", "Prom Night", "Terror Train", etc. – just have the usual stalking and murder by knife, saw, sword, machete, pick-ax, chain-saw, razor blade, glass shard, scalpel, etal. But getting back to your cleaner fantasies, what happened with Centurion?

RB: I did a lot of stuff for their catalog, which they are still running today, to my great woe. But then I went down there one day and they said to me, "Hey, look, this lady is trying to get a hold of you." And that was Barbara (Behr). I call and she says, "How would you like a job?" I'd been broke for the last nine months so I said, "Hmmm, well, yeah, OK." So, I bicycled nine miles to her place where we talked and she offered me \$85 a week – which was low but \$85 a week more than I had been making, so I said, "Fine, I'll do it, I'll take it!" So, that's when the whole damn thing started. August or September of 1971.



GM: So, the first few years you drew spot stuff for Ms. Behr's new bondage magazines like Knotty, Bound to Please, and Hogtie. I always loved those titles. Really subtle stuff you'd be happy to mention in polite conversation, aren't they? Anyway, lots of that stuff was collected in the first Bishop on Bondage publication; the heavy, thick-lined stuff with soul but none of the control and realism you would develop. It wasn't until Bishop on Bondage #2 & #3 that I got to see more representative material which actually had men happily waylaying their victims rather than sticking to the formula of an all femme bondage world as the Irving Klaw artists seemed to. Further, the Bishop kidnappers had

more than mere voyeurism in mind. They not only took the girls away, they took advantage of them. In most of your pictures, the girls do not merely rest in a bondage world – I can always imagine a slaving man just outside the door waiting for an opportune moment to have his way with the helpless victim. Did you draw this kind of stuff to change the direction of bondage art or did you even care?

RB: No, I didn't care. I draw pictures for myself, as I've said. Ultimately, being an artist is a selfish pursuit, kind of a professional solipsism. I know that sounds crass as hell, but that's about the long and short of it. But, then again, I'm not really being clear on this, I guess. Saying that it's a solipsism suggests that I have a control over what I do and that really isn't the case most of the time. For years, I really didn't know where my ideas came from. I really didn't. For a long time, there, I had a sneaking science fiction-type suspicion that I was being "used" by some other kind of consciousness; I was just the hands that made the lines that some other entity wanted to see. When the ideas come into my head, they come full-blown, they don't sneak out bit by bit and gradually assemble themselves, it's just one big bang and there's the shot. Then, a couple of years ago, I read about the apparently fundamental dichotomy between the right and the left side of the human brain. According to what I read, the left side of the brain is the logical, reasoning, analytical do-it-by-the-numbers CPA of the brain, whereas the right side is the screaming, illiterate anything-goes artist side of the brain. And they don't talk to one another. The article said something to the effect that most people are combinations of both, but that some people are very clearly affected by one side more than the other. With me, I'll just be bumbling along doing my little number and then all of a sudden, the right side of the old melon says, Hey, Dummy, this is the trick of the week, and I've got a nifty new idea. Trying to make it sit up and do tricks when I tell it to is a whole different matter. I pretty much take what I can get. So maybe it's not so much selfishness as simple lack of control. A few years ago, one of the computer companies apparently figured out a way to store virtually every written fact about the human species – his business and technology and hang-ups – into one quart of a special liquid. The only problem was information retrieval; they never knew what the hell they were going to pull out of the soup. It's the same with me. It's magic. Occasionally, I'll do things out of economic necessity (and because my ego likes the stroking of being in ID magazines), like the Hustler drawings I've done, but when you come down to the brass tacks, I do things for an audience of one. Myself.

GM: What are these Hustler drawings?

RB: Straight stuff for Hustler magazine, where I'm dealing with an art director, for God's sake! Talk about being caught between a rock and a hard place, that's an art director. He has me doing drawings of a girl on top of a giant ice cream cone and another girl giving a knob job to a guy in front of a peep show. (Sarcastically) That's real exciting stuff to me.

GM: You also did a full bondage pictorial for them in the October, 1977, issue. Any reaction to that?

RB: I read one letter a month or two later from, of all things, a woman, which said, "Bishop is the premiere erotic artist of the century" or something like that. Other than that, the only response I got was that my originals were ripped off.

GM: See? I told you, you were loved for more than just your suave, sophisticated manner. So, now let's get to the good stuff. How did "Fanni Hall" come about?

RB: Barbara came to me and said, "Let's have a long-term comic strip that holds together from year to year." My biggest challenge after that was coming up with a name. naturally, I remembered the old erotic classic "Fanny Hill". So, with a little adulteration, I came up with "Fanni Hall". That's where the whole thing got started.

GM: And did it start with the first strip pictured in "The Collected Fanni Hall" with Fanni getting out of her car and entering the house where Madame lay in ambush? Or were there other establishing strips that were never published?

RB: No, that was the first one.

The Harmony Mode As Seen By Bishop



GM: And between the second and third installment in Knotty your style changes spectacularly. It goes from the heavy lined sketchiness to a soft, clear realism. Between 1972 and 1973, the change is spectacular. What happened?

RB: I discovered the air-brush. I discovered Paasche's Model AB. It's a peculiar instrument which produces a line as thin as a pencil line up to a half-inch wide band of tone. So, for the first time I had this art pistol which I could play all kinds of neat games with. I was happy with the way it came out because I wasn't as jaded and cynical then as I am now, I was still young and eager to learn. I still am learning more about art but I know all I want to know about the business. When you get cynical, it permeates your whole damn existence.

GM: Cynical how?

RB: Just a simple observation about life, by boy, I don't trust people. Man's historically the most murderous sonofabitch on the face of the Earth. People promise you things and then give you a good shot long side of your head when you turn away. It's happened to me and it's happened, probably, to every other living human animal on the rest of the Earth, so God knows there ain't no distinction to it. Most people just react better to it, I guess. I tend to sulk and polish my guns a lot.

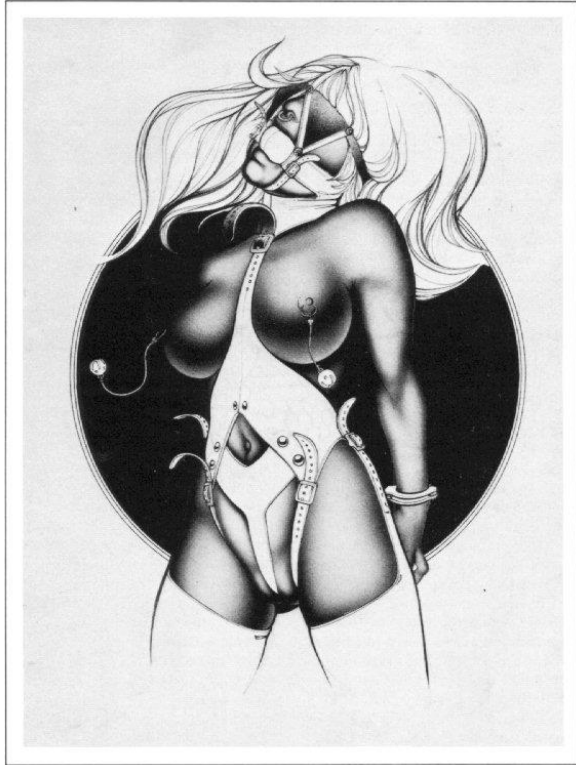
GM: Sounds like you had some trouble in the business. Is that why the Knotty episodes disappeared and work by you started appearing published by Tao?

RB: Tao wasn't until 1974 or 1975, when Barbara and I had a major blow-out and I left. This was just after the – "And Now For Something A Bit Different" strip (published in 1976 after the last comic strip "Fanni").

GM: I loved that one. I also enjoyed your illustrations for the two Tao mini-magazines, "Arrogant Amazon vs. Bondage Burglar" (another subtle title) and "In The Hands Of The Inquisition".

RB: At the time, I guess maybe I did, too. Now, they look pretty fucking awful. I was starting to get hidebound with the damned airbrush – everything was sprayed and everything was a shade of grey – to the point where the style was getting out and out stagnant. In looking back at the last of the Fanni magazines the other night, I was appalled at how little small-scale detail is in the pieces. It's just big block of grey. Boring as hell. I'm going to have to do something about that in #5. I've kind of backed myself into a corner style-wise; to get the line-control I demand. I have to use a sable brush and with the brush there isn't any tactile feel between my hand and the paper – you can't support the weight of your hand on the tip of the brush – ala a pencil or pen – unless you want a line about a half-inch wide so there's a helluva lot of hand-to-mind control involved and it gets wearing on a big piece. And then the airbrush is so damned flexible that nothing else even comes close, so I'm stuck using that, too. And that's another case of mind/hand control, and it was further complicated by my insistence on working one-to-one (Author's note: the technique nowadays is to draw much larger than the magazine page and reduce it to the proper size with a camera.) in fact, I figured I could work small and shoot it bigger. What the hell did I know? I figured, hey, I'm an artist. I can do anything.

GM: In terms of the work you did, I think the audience felt the same way. But let's talk about Fanni. Is she basically your idea of a big chested Emma Peel?



RB: (Pause) Yeah. I guess so.

GM: Do you have a different idea of your own, perfect fantasy girl?

RB: (Long Pause) Not really (various mutters) ... well, if you pushed me into a corner, I'd have to say a definite Diana Rigg type. With the English elocution and accent and all.

GM: Now would that be your fantasy girl or your favorite bondage victim?

RB: Well, no... well, maybe both.

GM: The reason I ask is that there seems to be a recurring victim in your work of a short-haired, big chested blonde. The girl "Jani" in the last Fanni strip, the girl kidnapped in the "Something Different" strip, and, of course, "Alicia" in the Fanni magazines, all look this way. Any idea where she comes from?

RB: Um, no. I really don't. I guess she's easy to draw.

GM: What isn't easy to draw, I'll bet, it is your intricate bondage techniques and devices. You rarely fail to intrigue me with your style. For instance, when Jani was brought to the warehouse, her legs were bent back, tied ankle to thigh, and there was the infamous rope between the legs. I'd never seen that sort of thing before. Where did all your bondage concepts come from?

RB: Hmmm. That's the thing about being a technical illustrator. Over and above demanding a very high level of line-control, you tend to draw everything as a machine. The human body is a machine and there are certain ways to immobilize the human machine. Now I'll grant you that the simplicity and effectiveness of those ways were somewhat elaborated on for the purposes of embellishing my own fantasies, but I basically use my pseudo-engineer's logic. As to the ideas, as I said before, I don't really know where the hell they come from. They're just in there, somewhere, like a big porridge. If I just sit down in front of a clean sheet of paper, something will always pop up. It's easier if I have a specific article or idea to illustrate for; most of the major creative effort has already been done. Then it's just a question of details. Inevitably, the

specifics of the bondage itself are the first things I think of rather than the exact nature of the girl that's getting bound. That's if I'm doing something strictly out of my head.

GM: That's another thing. Do you draw from photos or models or what?

RB: I draw from my head. If I ever have any questions, I just prop open my copy of the David Reubins anatomy book and go from there. I'd say that's clearly the best single anatomy book I've ever seen because he begins right down with the bare skeleton and then, layer by layer builds up the muscles to the surface of the skin so that you can see not only what muscles are right at the surface, but also what's under them. That's more important than you might think. It's a kind of tech illustrator's anatomy book rather than an "artiste's" anatomy book. By the time the artistes get through using artistic license on the human form, you can't tell a patella from a latissimus dorsi. Reubins just says, hey, so you want to know what muscles look like and how they join the bone, eh? Feast your eyes, chum. Sorry about that. One of my pet peeves. Like an art class I once had at Arts and Crafts that had you stand beside the easel and reach out over the paper, blind, and draw by "emotional feel".

GM: You really don't seem to care about the bondage formulas of the past; the ones established by Irving Klaw and company, in particular, stuff like stiletto heels, white gloves, bathing caps, garter belts and all the rest. When girls fall into your clutches, you have your own unique way of dealing with them in terms of decoration. Did you ever see any of the Stanton, Eneg and assorted other bondage art of the 30's, 40's, 50's and 60's?

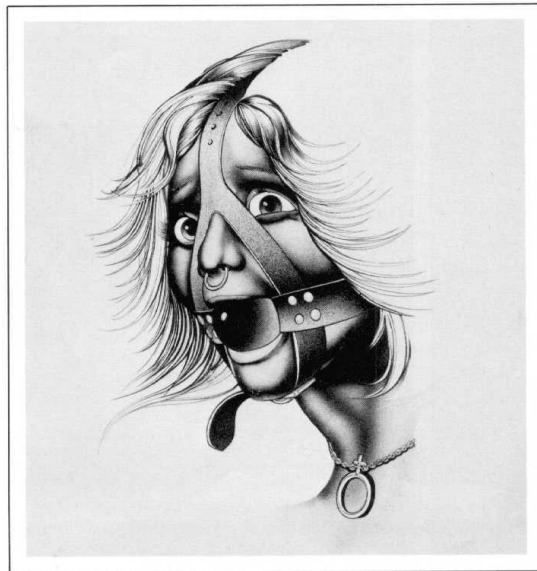
RB: Sure, in bits and pieces I finally saw Sweeter Gwen and those were the first drawn pieces that really affected me. I had the book for about a year and then lost the damned thing. Lots of screaming and gnashing. There it was in all its pungency and suddenly it was gone, so all the images I remembered became all that much more strong (sic). On the period stuff from Stanton and Willie, you have to remember that their stuff was influenced to one degree or other, I think, on styles current when they were drawing and shooting. Women used garter belts on their hose in those days because the damned things fell off if they didn't; L'Eggs weren't exactly common in 1940. I don't have anything at all against the older style. In fact, I think some of it's pretty damned nice. It's just that there's so damned much else to play around with now; cheerleaders, gymnasts, preppies... Emma Peel's leather catsuit is to me what garter belts and spike heels were to those older guys. Damn, that reminds me of Jane Fonda in Klute when she went prancing down the street in those thigh-high boots. Christ, I think I damn near licked the screen. Anyway, yeah, I don't really follow any particular trend. Like I said, there's just so damned much new to fuck around with.

GM: The thing that often stays with me from your stuff is the gagging technique. Such a wealth of gags I've never seen in anyone else's work either.

RB: Bondage ain't bondage to me unless she's got something in her mouth. As one of the characters in Fanni #5 says, "A full mouth is a happy mouth".

GM: Do you think your work has affected the bondage public?

RB: I don't think my work has any real effect at all on the market. At least not in any kind of mass way. I've always suspected that individual bondage people are into very specific aspects of bondage and it's always a hit-or-miss prospect for them. Hell, people are known to buy an entire magazine for just one photograph! And it's the same for my work; sometimes they'll see something they like and sometimes not. You can be damned sure that when I draw Fanni – or just single shots – that she does exactly and precisely what I tell her to do. It's just that I have the option of telling her what to do. The buyers don't. I'm extremely fortunate when it comes to that. Extremely fortunate. If I were to get into polemics, if I were to attempt to affect the bondage public, it would probably be along the lines of trying to say that people really can enjoy a bondage relationship... as strange as that may seem to the missionary position crowd. Fanni doesn't really lend itself to that kind of "white paper" approach and people into bondage know it's the case, anyway, so why bother? In taking any kind of an overview of the stuff I've done the last few years, and Fanni in particular, I don't see much in the way of technique changes, and I want to work on that. One of the nifty things that came out of this string of four Fanni books was the writing. As I said in the preamble of #4, English is an outstanding language; you can mangle the hell out of it and it still comes back for more. So, to a certain extent, the writing became almost as much fun as the drawing, although God knows I ain't no writer (sic).



GM: But is the drawing still fun when it's finished? Or are you anesthetized to your own work?

RB: Oh, I'm never anesthetized to it. No, wait a minute. When I first do the roughs and then get it down to a tight drawing, it has some interest, but when it comes down through the process of transfer, lining and tone build-up, it gets pretty nuts-and-bolts. But if I put it away and look at it a few weeks later, I go, "Hey, that's not too bad...", or, "Damn, that's awful". More of the latter than the former, unfortunately.

GM: So, let's put it in perspective. You've seemed to have gained a niche. You've illustrated tens of books and magazines. You've had nine books of your own out. How does it feel to be a star?

RB: (Snorts) Bear in mind that being published within this industry is a very insular experience. You're not as in touch with other people as you might be otherwise. You sit in your ivory tower and draw your little pictures and that's pretty much it. "Star", to me, has other connotations.



GM: So, perhaps in an effort to get away from that, you went into doing 8mm movies for House of Milan and HOM, purely from a monetary point of view, as I understand it.

RB: Well, not completely. I enjoy shooting film. And stills, for that matter. You have to understand that it was different when I just drew for myself. Now that I draw for a living, there's a hell of a lot more stress involved because a lousy drawing means I don't eat. Since there's so much less of "me" in the films, it's easier to deal with. It's more a technical exercise than "art", although that oversimplifies the hell out of it.

GM: Films? Easier? Those two words are diametrically opposed?

RB: Not really. Think about it; if you write a book and use a nom de plume and it bombs, it's just a thing of dollars and cents – you might go a little hungry, but your psyche is still relatively unscathed. But if you write a book with your name on it and it bombs, that's a rejection of you personally and to hell with the dollars and cents! Sure, films are more of an aggravation

because I get dragged out of my little cave and I have to deal with people. And people don't work as well as a pencil does on a piece of paper; if I stick a gag the size of a watermelon in a model's mouth, she ain't going to like that too much and she'll probably have very specific instructions concerning the part of my anatomy where she'd like to see that melon. Film, to me, is just a fairly logical extension of drawing pictures. You use a camera instead of a brush. And if I cock it up, I can always sit back and say, hey, what the fuck do you expect, I draw pictures for a living, not shoot them! And who knows that I shot loops... um, well, before this? I had the best of both worlds.

GM: Well, let's finally return to the Bishop's persona. As created by your work and title, you are a cross between John Willie, Howard Hughes, and Merlin. But in reality, you're the person the description "laid-back" could be coined for.

RB: Your basic beer-drinking redneck, yeah.

GM: So, what do you foresee for the Bishop who's a combination Marquis De Sade and Frank Fra Zetta, as well as the Bishop who's a combination John Wayne and Jeremiah Johnson?

RB: You're putting me into my fantasies again. I'm not in the fantasies except as a kind of Mr. Hands who arranges ever more Byzantine God-awfuls for Ms. Bill/Fanni. In one of my fall-off-the-stool blinders, it occurred to me that maybe Fanni is me in drag, but I doubt it. Liver Eatin' Johnson was probably a decent sort, except for his... uh, culinary preferences. Wouldn't mind having one of Duke's ivory handled SA Colts, but that's about all we'd have in common,

I'm afraid. More to the point is that it appears that a lot of people have a tendency to confuse what I draw with what I am. I don't have slaves dangling around by their toenails and wearing dildos the size of phone poles and laced up in two miles of barbed wire. I do have fantasies rattling around in my head and, when I can grab onto one, I put it down on a piece of paper to look at. And fantasies are just fantasies. What I can't understand is why or how it started.

They're never-never lands that everybody's got inside his head; it isn't just me. I'm just lucky enough to be able to draw them in some semblance of order. It is not totally inconceivable that at some time in the future I might actually meet a woman who really, genuinely enjoys playing the bondage game, and if that were to happen, I might consider transferring the fantasies from paper to a rather more tangible form. It would have to be very much a consensual arrangement, though – we'd both have to enjoy it before either of us could enjoy it. Until then, fantasies are nice and safe; they're never going to let you down, you're never going to get any nasty little surprises.

GM: Excellent point, I've always felt that the bondage enthusiasts far outnumber the bondage practitioners and most B&D people would rather see your stuff and great media fantasies rather than become professional whippers or white slavers. I've always used the metaphor of a football fan; just because he knows all the teams and players doesn't mean he's going to tackle everyone he comes into contact with. The same is true of a bondage man. I'm happily married and I don't tie my wife down to get it up... Of course, if she'd let me, my joy would be complete. Anyway, what do you see for your future?

RB: My future? Geez, I'd have to think about that one. Well, hell, I'll keep drawing; it's not so much a decision I've made as a compulsion; I don't have a choice in the matter. As long as there's a market for bondage I'll be out there kicking and screaming. And even if there's not a market, I'll do it for myself like I've always done. That's not going to change. My future, eh? Ideally, I guess, I'd like to be a "gentleman artist" and put up a dome someplace out in the boondocks and work strictly by correspondence. Realistically, though, that's a helluva long way down the road. Closer to home, I'm a bit worried; the industry's going through a period of real pronounced ambivalence, at least where publishing is concerned. I was in a book store about six months ago and there just ain't much on the racks. If I were out shopping for books, things would be looking pretty damned dismal and I really don't know if they're going to get much better. About the only quality book, I've seen in the last two or three years, as a matter of fact, is the one this interview is appearing in, and that's because it's done by a guy who seems to know what the hell he's doing. Most of the rest of the market is just shit. As for me, I guess I'll just play it as it lays; expect the worst and hope for the best. Just like everybody else.

GM: Any regrets?

RB: Yeah. Rich Corbin and Gilbert Shelton are two of my favorite artists and they're still alive; maybe one day we'll meet. But my other two favorites are gone. One was Vaughn Bode, outrageous and brilliant and full of black humor. He liked my stuff and said so in a letter he sent to House of Milan, years ago. I worked up a wise-assed cartoon and sent it back and I think I hurt his feelings. A year or so later, he was dead. I felt bad about that. There was a very real sense of loss for me, because I knew that never again in my life would I see any new craziness

from him. It hurt. And then there's Willie. I'd like to have sat down and talked to that old man. He's still the best. His characters had a peculiar, charming innocence to them that none of my characters have. Maybe the times have changed and the characters with them. Maybe I could have learned some things from him if he'd lived longer or I'd been born, sooner. Ah well, what the fuck, I'm only 36, I've got most of my life and art still ahead of me. Maybe one day I'll get it right.

Reluctantly I took my leave of Bob, his artwork and his collection of bondage slides, books, film and everything else. But since our talk, he has done something I've always suggested he do since we met: go public. The Bishop is now open for offers. Offers for his original art, offers to buy his growing collection of 8x10 signed prints (\$30 apiece) – small enough to keep private, big enough to enjoy – and offers to perhaps draw your fantasies. Finally, he has decided to come out of his cave and move among the living. Even if you don't want to buy anything but need someone to talk to about the specific area of bondage art, there's Bishop. You can get in touch with him through HOM, Inc. and if you want to talk bondage movies, bondage comix, bondage films, and just mondo bondage, there's BONDAGE LIFE.

Yours truly,
Geoffery Merrick
I'll see you soon.

INVITATION FROM THE BISHOP

Dear Harmonizers:

A few months ago, I explained in one of HOM's brochures that I thought a market existed for my original drawings and signed and numbered lithographs. I was hoping to drum up some business for myself, but I was just as interested in opening up our lines of communication - easier for us to talk directly rather than through the machinery of a magazine.

All of this because I have been told for years that people want to purchase original material from me, and that people want to talk to me directly.

As for that last part, just drop me a line.

Now, down to business; the limited-edition/lithos will cost \$30 each. I am told that my signature and numbering on the lithos will add to their exclusivity and thus their collector's value. Naturally, the originals will be more expensive, although I haven't yet zeroed in on a price - that will depend on the difficulty of the piece involved.

I'll be doing a lot of work for HOM in the near future, so, when you do see something of mine you like, you can contact me and we'll go from there.

But, even if you aren't interested in acquiring my material, at least let me hear from you. I want the feedback. I want to know what you like and what you don't like. Like that guy on television

says, "I'm in touch; you be in touch."

Robert Bishop

