

## Letters (cont.)

or *Internal Correspondence*), and we don't have to toe any corporate line. We've added a disclaimer in this issue. I think it adds some bite, but what does everyone else say?

Finally, parties: A pretty good case can be made that parties fulfill goal #3: to offer networking opportunities for women in comics. Beyond the bare-bones outline in the last newsletter, we are planning events in both Chicago and San Diego that will be quite a bit beyond just "having fun." Mentoring and scholarships are indeed a high priority, however, and the Mentoring Committee is moving along with plans for programs of this type. I should also mention that to date all FoL parties have had sponsors, so the money for them has not come out of membership funds.

**Jim Shooter**  
**Broadway Comics**  
**New York, NY**

In the March FoL newsletter, the "Lulu's Diary" section implies a cause-and-effect relationship between exclusive distribution and the layoffs at Marvel, Malibu, and elsewhere.

Exclusive distribution arrangements are part of the effect of the recent ongoing industry-wide disaster, not the cause. The real causes were many, most notably greedy publishing, speculation, and short-sightedness on all levels. Blaming exclusive distribution for the crash is like blaming the evacuation of Dunkirk for the fall of Europe.

I advise against making such inflammatory, negative, and patently naive statements in any FoL forum.

I was equally concerned by Trina Robbins' characterization of American publishers' failure to accomplish what Japanese publishers have accomplished for female readers and cartoonists as "criminal negligence or inexcusable stupidity." I understand and share her frustration; however, it does not serve FoL's goals to print such offensive, naive statements.

If we want to change things, let us not start by alienating the people who must be our partners in effecting change. Let us be very careful about placing blame or insulting people—let's learn the facts first, understand the dynamics, study the history, ferret out the real mistakes and the true culprits. Let us not make naive indictments that make us

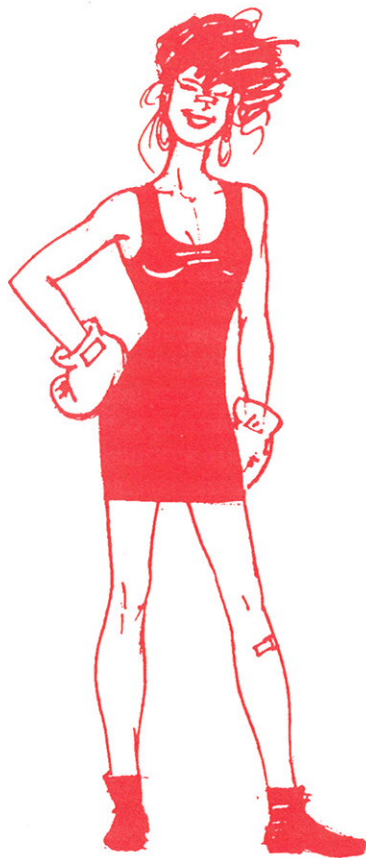
look foolish, uninformed, bush-league, and ultimately inconsequential.

Focus!

**Heidi MacDonald replies:** Ah, that lively and controversial "Lulu's Diary" section strikes again!

We could spend a lot of time (and drink a lot of beers) arguing over how much exclusive distribution had to do with hastening the implosion. The benefits of exclusivity have proven dubious, and several publishers (Event and Crusade among them) have decided exclusivity wasn't in their best interests.

Were the exclusives the root cause of the 90s implosion? No. Did they hasten the end? In my opinion, definitely. Since Marvel bought *Heroes World* in December of 1994, it's been a downward spiral. More important, ever since the *Heroes World* purchase, everyone has been "waiting for the other shoe to drop" instead of doing anything about the real problems. Handwringing over the end of



the "good old days" has led to a complete inability to focus on finding solutions.

At Pro/Con 4, I saw people beginning to break away from moping and starting to move forward, and a lot of them were FoL members. That's one of the healthi-

est signs I've seen in a long time. In the long run, I think what we will accomplish will be far from inconsequential.

**Patti Duffield**  
**Japan**

I just got your latest newsletter and felt the need to respond to your article "Comics for Girls in Japan." I have always wondered why there is virtually nothing for girls in the U.S. comics market. I think it's not just "criminal negligence and inexcusable stupidity" that's responsible for the difference between Japan and the U.S. It is also publication methods and history that have caused the difference.

Each weekly or monthly manga has 10–20 titles in it. The more popular titles carry the majority of readers, allowing new titles the chance to be published without risking the entire publication. Would comics on fly fishing, chess, or cooking ever since print in the U.S.? Publishers recognize that just because superheroes sell doesn't mean that nothing else will. The multiple-title method of publishing allows titles that don't cater to "mainstream" interests to be published.

There is also the history of comics in Japan to consider. Osamu Tezuka's stories spanned the spectrum of fiction and age groups. Without him, comics in Japan would not be what they are today. Also, when faced with the kind of censorship the U.S. comics industry dealt with in the 50s, the Japanese publishers did not throw in the towel or focus on a younger audience. Why cut off the adult audience when they have more spending power? Also, people are not so car-dependent here. Manga are a great way to kill time on your crowded train ride to work. 20 titles for \$2! Even if you only like half the titles, it's a bargain!

There are manga here that sell 5 million copies a week. There are amateur publication conventions that have tens of thousands of booths and over 100,000 attendees per day. How is it possible? The publishers never limited their audience by age or gender. Perhaps the U.S. will never be able to use the same publishing methods as Japan. However, I'm hoping that, with the popularity of *Sailor Moon* and more shows like it to come, perhaps the U.S. can begin laying the groundwork for girls' comics in the future.