



Rachel Stroud

WE LOVE HER, just as she is. And that's why we're getting our Absolutely Enormous Pants in a twist about the general release of *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* last week.

Bridget's appeal is not only that of a popular character. She has progressed through the various ranks of cultural icon-hood to become a British Institution. Like all the best works of fiction, the true genius of Helen Fielding's comic creation lies in its essential truth. We can all recognize aspects of the hapless young female 'singleton', struggling simultaneously to be both feminist and feminine.

There will be those who say that Bridget's dippy demeanor and bumbling incompetence at, well, most things really, creates a derogatory image of modern woman as being dysfunctional and scatty. To which I

woman can no longer rely on, or comfortably allow, the Bachelor to seek her out and simply sweep her off her feet. The modern woman is liberated, and therefore able (and fully expected) to go out and snare him for herself, not with flattering words, dropped handkerchiefs or the obvious batting of eyelids, but by flirting, refusing dates and pretending not to be interested. She is also expected to be as - if not more - competent at this process (and at everything else including the management of her own successful career) as men, despite having, oh, a few centuries less practice at it. In addition to this, she must retain more 'traditional' skills, such as cooking and entertaining (remember the blue soup?), and 'looking after' Mr Right (or Mr Darcy, to give him his new name) once she has succeeded in catching him.

Add to this the fact that



would reply that though she may be all of the above, she copes just fine. This feminist heroine consistently falls back on exactly the things that a girl knows she can always rely on - chocolate, vodka and her friends. Ok, yells Fielding through the medium of Bridget, so women are dysfunctional. But men are even more so. They aren't any better at coping with the confusion of the real world, and they've not been smart enough to establish a similar support network for themselves.

Bridget's bumbling attempts at pursuing an Exciting Career in Television whilst simultaneously negotiating pressure from parents and Smug Marrieds alike to Find a Husband expose a dilemma at the heart of what it is to be a woman in the post-patriarchal, post-feminist 21st century. In the 1950s, the male bachelor was readily accepted, and often applauded as such, while the single woman was expected to Find a Husband. Both principles seem still to apply today, despite being confusingly less explicit.

Despite this, the modern day counterpart of the 1950s

men aren't what they used to be, either. The rise of the liberated women has seen the decline in numbers of chivalrous gentlemen with honorable and openly-stated intentions, and now success at the Dating Game means learning to traverse, with confidence, a minefield of the treacherous and lecherous (i.e. Daniel Cleaver) against the clock. The remaining singleton seconds slip away, advancing with terrifying swiftness toward the time limit which will socially confirm the single thirty-something woman as a Spinster.

How, you cry, is it possible to negotiate all this without making an idiot of yourself? Answer: it isn't, and we wouldn't have it any other way. We love watching Bridget's valiant attempts because we are laughing not only at her, but also at ourselves. And not taking yourself to seriously is, after all, what the *Bridget Jones* phenomenon is all about. Despite being the Last Person You Should Ask For Advice on Life Ever, she has one crucial lesson to teach us: Humiliation is temporary, but there will be chocolate in the fridge forever.