MILLENNIUM

A JOURNAL FOR TOMORROWLAND

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2.2:

May 1997

Spread The Word.

As always, MILLENNIUM is absolutely FREE. We encourage you to make as many copies of the program as you like, and to distribute it as widely as possible. Please do not alter the contents in any way, or distribute it in an incomplete form. Everything in MILLENNIUM is copyright © 1997 by the individual artists.

Starting with this issue, you can print MILLENNIUM on your home computer printer. This wasn't the case with #2.1; we were concerned about copyright issues and thought that disabling the print function would solve that problem. But then we began to wonder how many people would actually sit at their computers and read a magazine on-screen. We certainly wouldn't -- we would want to make a paper copy so that we could curl up on the couch under a good blanket and read it with a mug of coffee at our side. So we decided that our readers should have that option, too. Please don't abuse the privilege (ditto the last sentence of the paragraph above), and keep in mind that MILLENNIUM won't look the same on paper as it does on screen -- though all the words will be there, and that's what counts.

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Last year in a letter to Kinesis magazine, one of our regular contributors wrote, in reference to Scottish writer and artist Alasdair Gray, “The list of living writers that I admire this much is small and growing smaller (R.I.P., Robertson Davies); let us

support them while they are still alive to benefit. Posthumous recognition never did anybody a damn bit of good."

Now, there is a good deal of personal resentment and frustration hidden in those words, but the point is still a good one; it is a good part of MILLENNIUM's reason for being. The act of granting posthumous awards or recognition to creative people, writers, artists, inventors both high and low, makes us cry in our beer. Do we honestly believe that death improves an artist's work, that the act of dying somehow legitimizes creative people? Are we such creatures of pack mentality that we must all flock in the same direction the minute Oprah Winfrey holds a book up to the camera, without regard to the thousands of other works out there that we might like better if we only took the time to find them? Or, worse, are we so petty that we cannot acknowledge a singular vision until after the visionary has been rendered "harmless" by death?

The question we ask ourselves every time we read an outside submission is, "Does this deserve to be published?" -- not "Would we have written it this way?" or even "Is this our kind of story?" We believe that there are scores of serious literary professionals out there who cannot find publication because their work does not fit into a particular mold. We believe that even Robertson Davies, Alasdair Gray and Garrison Keillor would have a hard time getting published in this market if they had not already established themselves twenty years (or more) ago.

So please read everything in MILLENNIUM, grant these writers the favor of your attention, and the next time you go to a bookstore, buy one of many magazines that publish short fiction and editorials; browse through the shelves and pick out something new that attracts your attention and interest.

Remember, Stephen King doesn't need any more of your money. If you must buy one of his books, buy it off the sale table and use the money that you save to support another writer or artist who deserves your attention. We are not knocking Stephen King in any way; but his future is more than comfortably settled, while other writers of equal or greater talent are going begging. With the exception of Mr. King and a few others, writers are treated worse by our culture than they have been at other time in history. Withholding your support until after they have gone not only won't pay their rent; it will not enrich or gladden their lives with the knowledge that they have enriched yours.

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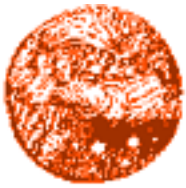
Next  Page

Print the E-zine 

MILLENNIUM
A JOURNAL FOR TOMORROWLAND

Featured Fiction:

This issue, MILLENNIUM features tales of death and betrayal. In "Snookered," by Bruce Canwell, a friendly pool game turns nasty. In "The Death's-Head Man," by Douglas Thornsjo, a news reporter finds an unusual way to come to terms with mortality. Bios of both authors can be found with their stories, but we particularly want you to know that you can find Mr. Canwell's byline on a special bookshelf edition of Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight, coming this summer from DC Comics.

Choose a title from the selection below and click on the button to go there.

"The Death's Head Man"

"Snookered"

FICTION • BY DOUGLAS THORNSJO

All the way out to the penitentiary I kept my eyes open for something that would hold me up. I didn't want it to be a bar, in part out of fear that I might run into someone who would know where I was supposed to be, but mainly because I didn't want to be drunk when I finally reached Death Row. There were a few cafes squatting beside the highway, but I wasn't hungry. There was a Drive-In movie theater playing the latest Disney cartoon, but that would have depressed me all the more. I ended up pulling off the road about ten miles east of the pen. Dust rolled up in my wake and overtook me, billowing around the wheels of my car. I climbed out and walked a few paces into the desert, listening for the things that I knew were out there, although they made no sound. Against the blue night a cluster of Joshua trees stood with their arms raised, their blades spread out like the fingers of a hand. I went back and sat against the hood, and lit myself a cigarette.

By the time I reached Death Row, the hanging was done. Out of a square of light, the six or seven witnesses came at me down a length of black hall. One of them had been sick; two other men dragged him along by the shoulders, holding a wet handkerchief to his mouth. Another fellow was giving the sick man a hard time. Somebody told him to fuck off. I pressed myself against the wall and they poured by me in a solid wave. Then I looked ahead into the lighted room, and wished that I hadn't.

It wasn't anything like what I'd expected, prepared for: the legs of the dead men were not dangling just in view, there were no crowds of ghastly onlookers as there always had been in the pictures I'd seen of Klan lynchings, men and women and children gathering in shadow below the corpse, looking gleeful and serene as if they had done nothing worse than toast a marshmallow. It was a bare, steel-walled room, empty as far as I could see, lacking even a sense of unseen motion in the corners where sight could not reach. There were no horrible silhouettes falling against the walls or floor; the room was too brightly lit. The only signs of the thing that room was used for were in the wire-mesh window that ran its length, the iron bar bolted underneath, and the sounds that came drifting out.

I heard weight being lowered from an indeterminate height, the creaking of thick rope, a

voice full of effort sighing "Now… here now… just another foot." I heard breath and a whispered curse, followed by the same profound silence of the desert, that isn't true silence at all.

As I was coming up to the doorway I heard a guard enter the hall behind me, and at the same moment a little man appeared in the spaces behind the wire mesh. He was wearing a black rubber suit. His hair was white and clipped very close to his scalp. The skin of his neck was thick and rough, sunburned or perhaps chafed by the rubber collar. He had blue eagle's eyes and a nose like an eagle's beak. Deep lines cut away from this to the corners of his mouth, and branched into twisty marks like cuts that covered his face. As I watched, he unzipped the rubber suit and pulled his arms free.

I hadn't moved in any direction, and now the guard clapped his hand down hard on my shoulder. I think it was meant to be a friendly gesture; that was what galled me about it. "Show's over," he said with some brightness. I said Well, damn. I missed the whole thing.

I was parked about a mile down the road when the hearse came out through the prison gates and rolled on by. It was a big Ford sedan with tailfins out to here and fenders that hung over the wheels like hooded masks. It drifted heavily along the road at thirty miles an hour. I hadn't seen the driver, only pictured him in my head, hunkered down with his thickfingered hands gripping the wheel, in the heavy green air behind tinted glass.

It was the old man, all right. I followed at a distance as he drove the straight line across the face of the desert. Sand from under his wheels spattered against my windshield; I could have dropped back a mile or two without ever losing him.

At the outermost fringe of town he turned into the drive of a seedy-looking funeral home with a yard full of broken-down cars and metalwork and dirt. A plastic sign like something off a gas station hung beside the road, lit from within by two ghastly yellow bulbs. It splashed its message across the faces of three other houses nearby. It said:

AMOS BEND
Mortician
24 Hours

The letters were nothing more than decals stuck onto cloudy plastic. A hole the size of my fist had been knocked through its lower right corner. There were black coils of wire inside.

I stopped the car just outside its pulp-novel glow. The old man parked his hearse before an old-fashioned, two-door garage, then came scuttling around the back. He'd changed out of the rubber suit, into a grey pair of overalls and a plaid workshirt. From the back of the hearse he unfolded a steel contraption like a gurney, then effortlessly drew out a brown oblong box and strapped it down.

I couldn't help but consider that the thing inside the box had been breathing and walking around just an hour before. But I had to mentally kick myself for that; it was just trite. Alive is alive; alive not is alive not: where was the revelation in that?

He pulled open the garage doors, and wheeled the thing into darkness beyond. A moment later, yellow lights came on inside. He had nothing so terrible in there; nothing I could see that wouldn't have looked proper in the garage of any amateur hobbyist; but there was something horrible in the way the shadows fell, in the suggestive angle of a steel beam crossing my view, and I decided that I had seen enough. The car was still running; I had not even taken it out of gear. But I didn't turn the headlights on until I'd reached the end of the block. As I crept from the neighborhood I saw a white face looking out at me from the corner house, like the threat of cancer: like the eyes of death.

*

My editor, Frank Harter, was not happy when I told him that my execution story still had some gaps, and was less so when I could not even tell him what the gaps were about. He would not have shared my interest in the empty spaces left behind by the killers, nor in the rubber man who carried their bodies, like some feral Sandman, along desert roads in the hours before dawn. In the end, Frank ran an account of the executions that came through the wire service, and I got a dressing-down. By way of a punishment, he sent me out to interview a woman who had found her cat at the local pound, three weeks after its disappearance from her yard.

She was about five years my senior, orange-haired; she kept her face hidden behind an oversized pair of glasses. She had only the cat. Talking to her felt like a distraction, but I tried to take her story seriously. I gave her twenty minutes, then walked back to the office, wrote the piece, and told Frank that I'd be at home catching some sleep.

Instead I drove out to where the desert started, and parked under Amos Bend's plastic sign. By daylight the place looked more like a junkyard than a mortician's, with the remains of two cadillacs resting collapsed on the ground, half-gutted for parts, a pair of chickens wending their way between piles of metal, and the house itself with its cracked paint showing the wood underneath. It reminded me of a scary scene in an otherwise not so scary movie, which in turn reminded me of a house that had frightened me as a child: when my sister told me about the girls who lived there, who loved to torture small animals (including little boys) in its basement. This house had the same dark eyes, windows that revealed nothing more than a reflection of the yard and the street beyond. I climbed out of the car and watched myself approach.

The door was opened by an old woman wearing a housedress with yellow flowers against a faded green background. I told her my name, and the name of my paper, and asked to see Amos Bend. She asked if I was the one who had parked outside the night before, and I said yes.

Without any harshness or sudden movement, almost without transition, her face was replaced by Bend's. Up close he looked like a wrecked dockworker, white as paper, pale blue eyes surrounded by sunken flesh and a pulpy nose drooping over his upper lip. He wasn't wearing any teeth. He stood in the doorway and looked at me without saying a word.

I repeated my speech and added that I would like to talk to him, that it was nothing serious but I had some questions that needed answering, and perhaps the reading public shared them.

"Questions like what?" he said.

They were there but they didn't want to be put into words. Yet I had to ask him something. I said, "How long have you worked for the state?"

Bend said nothing. His face sank back into the blackness of the house, and I thought he was retreating until I realized that the door was standing open. Inside there was stale air, black shapes of furniture against the windowlight, dust and the steady whisper of television sounds from the next room. The floor had not been vacuumed in some time. I followed Bend down a narrow hall leading straight through the building into a sunlit vestibule where a side door opened out to the driveway and the garage at its end. "Are you the hangman?" I said. "Do your neighbors know where the bodies come from?"

His lips had sunk so deeply over his gums that I could not tell if he was wearing a grimace or a poker face. He lifted a checkered winter coat down from a hook on the wall, shoved his arms inside, and pulled a matching cap down over his ears. "Come on," he said.

It was better than eighty degrees out, but the coat didn't seem to bother him. "How cold do

you keep it in there?" I said. Bend swiveled his head in my direction and said, "'bout thirty-seven degrees." His left hand raised itself palm outward to meet the muzzle of a German Shepherd that came loping 'round from behind the garage to meet us. The dog moved along at Bend's side, almost in step with him, its head raised to brush against Bend's cupped fingers. It looked almost as sad and old as the man himself.

His yard had the austerity of a concentration camp. The grass was clipped down close as the white bristles on the top of his head; in places it had worn completely away, trodden down to bare earth or killed by a hunk of machinery left sitting for too long in one place. One of his chickens had wandered down the path and was poking at a piece of metal with its beak; for a moment I was afraid that Bend was going to reach down and wring the bird's neck before my eyes.

Instead he unlocked a side entrance into the garage and passed through a wall of cold air, leaving the door open for me to follow. It was an arctic room at the edge of the desert, with a polished wooden table at its center and freezer in back with windows looking through on indistinct meat-locker shapes depending in darkness. Rows of tools hung on the near wall. "How did the state come to hire you?" I said. "What are the qualifications for what you do?"

He shuffled straight on and opened the freezer. In the moment before I averted my eyes, I convinced myself that I'd seen the two men still hanging there, naked; fixing my gaze on the floor, I said "--what did you know of these men? How long did it take them to die?"

Bend wheeled something out and with effort managed to roll its weight onto the wooden table. "Was it fast?" I said. And I thought, Well this is something. You came here to see, and you won't even look.

At first glance it was just a shape on the table: then when I started to focus on it I began to wonder what I had been afraid of. The stillness bothered me; but it was just a man. Middle-aged, or just past. I didn't recognize him. His eyes were closed. He had not died from hanging.

"Who is he?" I said. "D'you know his name?"

Amos Bend coughed and drew the covering sheet down and away along the length of the empty man, and for the second time I had to look away. It was not that there were wounds or marks on the body; there was just too much of it, too much white. "What did he die of?" I said. "Even that much would tell me something."

Bend came around the foot of the table and awkwardly lifted down a metal and plastic contraption from his wall of tools. It looked like some kind of torture device; it had tubing on both ends. I said "What is that thing?" and Bend turned his back on me. His hands worked just out of my sight. "Cavity pump," he said.

I went out into the hot desert air. His dog was waiting beside the house. We stood there and looked at each other until I got my breath. He's a monster, I thought. Anyone else who kept bodies in their garage, who worked on them with pumps and needles and knives would be sent up for life. Would be tried and hung…

I turned in the sand and shuffled on down to my car, taking care to appear casual, so that Bend, or at any rate the dog, would not think that I was running away.

*

At home that night I sat quietly with the humidifier droning in the background, smoking again though I had promised myself three months before that I would quit, trying to figure what it was about the old man that bothered me. The obvious answer was that he represented that horrible mystery no one wants to solve. My parents were still alive in their separate corners of the state, but they were both in their seventies, and for some time I'd

been having bad nights wondering not so much about their eventual death as about the role that I would have to play when the time came. What was my responsibility to their end? To what extent would I have to participate? Would their final days be so unendurable that I would be forced into the awful position of wishing them gone? Would I feel them more powerfully after death than I had ever felt them in life?

But it went farther than that. I had believed, for a time, that dreams were proof of the soul's existence; but, more and more often, the things that I saw and the books that I read and the dreams that I dreamt suggested that the subconscious mind that I had come to value so much for its intuition and insight was really nothing more than the physical body making its needs known, processing chemicals, flushing out waste. If that was the case, then the subconscious would flick out at the very moment that life passed from the body, and death really was the end of all things: no heaven, no hell, no purgatory: just No.

I thought: Is the subconscious merely the voice of our bones? The grey-and-black people flickering on my TV screen had all been dead for a decade or more. Yet they still moved. Even that did not settle my mind. I finally decided that it was not about Death, or my parents, or fear. It was about the man himself, the dry bulk of him, his taciturnity, the plodding inevitability of his movements that all conspired to make such a commonplace affair as death into something sinister, something that needed looking into, something worthy of a reporter's time.

I knew that if I mentioned any of this to Frank he would probably just urge me to take vacation time, or else assign me to an endless string of lost cat stories, groundbreaking ceremonies, interviews with High School sports figures. The notion of death, or even of the man who administered to its needs, as viable material for a newspaper story would only make him uncomfortable, and Frank when he was uncomfortable was not a good man to work under. When it came to Amos Bend, I would have to fish on my own hook.

*

The next morning I found him bent over the grille of a blue sedan that had appeared in his yard overnight. Of the two cadillacs there was no sign, not even a crushed patch of earth where they'd been lying in state the day before. As I came up the drive I saw Bend ripping parts out of the car's insides, piling them up in the sand at his feet. His hands were black. I said howdy; Bend looked up from his work, spotted me, and turned his face back down without answering.

"You deal in spare parts," I said. It wasn't a question; if there was one thing I had learned from the day before it was that Bend did not respond well to questioning.

Bend said Mmm. It was more than I expected. He lifted out a complicated looking arrangement of metal, waggled its moving parts with his middle finger, and gave me a toothless grin. I said I had a friend who had worked in a garage once, while still in his teens, but that I myself did not know much about cars. Books were more my thing. Novels mostly. I said I knew they published books about cars, but I didn't own any of them.

He shot me a quick look that made me feel as if he would be seeing me soon on the business end of a rope. I didn't know whether it was the comment about the books or the fact that I had made it, the fact that I would not shut up. I felt humiliated enough to turn tail again and run -- but that was what I had done the day before, and all it had accomplished was to put me in a position where I had to come back. I stood awkwardly beside the wreck of the car, doing about everything short of shuffling my feet in the dirt. When I saw that he was having a difficult time loosening a bolt down inside the machine I had the idea of asking if he needed a hand; but I decided this would be a stupid thing to do, as I had just admitted that I

didn't know the first thing about cars. I held my ground, and kept silent.

At length Bend stood upright, stretched his back, and pointed to a block and tackle lying in the drive behind him. I went over and picked it up by the soiled rope winding into its works, brought it back to the car. Bend motioned for me to lean in under the hood.

He had already fitted some lengths of rope around the bulk of the engine; now he looped these through the block and tackle's hook, waddled off across the yard and came back pushing a metal frame on wheels. It had brakes that worked like a bicycle kickstand. I helped him hook up the block and tackle, then the two of us took up positions on the rope and started pulling.

I suppose that I was more comic relief than actual help, but Bend didn't seem to mind. After a time, the old dog came around from his house behind the garage and sat down in the dust to watch. We hefted the engine out over the front fenders, losing oil from the block onto the faded polish of the car and then down into the waiting sand, where it vanished almost without trace, leaving only a black spot the size of a pencil point. Without pausing to get his breath, Bend kicked off the brakes and began manhandling the entire contraption, frame and engine, along one of the well-worn paths that lined his yard.

I followed with my hands raised ineffectually, trying to keep the engine from swaying. Behind his garage we came to a garden of car parts spread out neatly in the sun. Sand had blown in off the desert, covering everything in a sad dusting of yellow. The dog was there waiting for us. I wondered how Bend decided what pieces to keep and what to leave, but I wasn't about to ask him any more questions.

*

That night Amos Bend's kitchen was lit only by the blue glow of his television screen. We sat in steel-frame chairs covered, like every other piece of furniture in the house, with frayed blankets, towels, shawls, or all three, and ate in silence from plastic plates to the predictions of the local weather man. The old woman, Bend's wife, kept to herself at one end of the table, merely waiting: she did not join in the meal, nor even lift her eyes to the set, but sat quietly listening with her chin resting in the palm of her hand, three fingers curled over her mouth, the fourth resting against the bridge of her nose. One of her fingernails was black. She wore her hair twisted up onto the back of her head, save for a single white wisp of it that had escaped her, and drooped down into the folds of her neck.

The meat was swimming in a kind of sweet sauce; Bend chewed at it with the bull-like dumbness that characterized his every move. It was the same quality that had caught my attention, and made me believe that he had something to hide. I wasn't so sure about that anymore; I was beginning to wonder if the only thing that it masked was emptiness.

When we had cleaned our plates Mrs. Bend rose and carried them away. She dumped them into the sink and left the room with the clear manner of having done her part for the day. I watched her go, then turned back to Bend, who had not so much as shifted his eyes from the set. A folded copy of the morning paper was resting close beside his elbow. He didn't give it any more attention than he had his wife.

I waited maybe twenty minutes for something to happen. The local news ended and Huntley/Brinkley came on. I couldn't tell if Bend was getting anything out of it. When at last I got up to leave, Bend looked around as if to say, So soon? But I could not take any more of the awful stillness that filled up Bend's house. I said "Much obliged for the dinner," and went out into the black dry desert air.

As I stepped down from the front door the old dog came around to sniff me out. Nothing had changed. The only answers that I had were the dead answers of silence and

impenetrability. I had projected all my own fears about death onto the shoulders of this old man, who was the perfect figure for such a transaction not only because of his age or his job but because he had no discernible personality of his own, was ready for whatever construction I saw fit to press upon him.

All the way down the yard I felt the dog keeping step beside me, lifting its head against the fingers of my left hand. I said, "Well you're alive anyway old boy," and then I knew what I had to do.

*

The next day was a Sunday. I stayed at home and pecked fruitlessly at the typewriter, walked down to the market and back, and in the evening read a book about Shiloh. The following morning Frank sent me down to attend a meeting of the Highway Commission. I went home for lunch, filed another story in the afternoon, and went straight home after work. I didn't go back to Amos Bend's place until Wednesday night.

I hoped it was dark enough so that no one from the house could see into my car. But it was another one of my useless worries; Bend didn't even trouble to look, just appeared in the dark opening of the door and vanished again before I had a chance to say hello. And so I thought at first that my experiment had failed. By the time I followed him inside Bend had disappeared, leaving only the same heavy stillness made worse by gloom, the thickly covered furniture and the smell of moth balls. The old woman was moving about in the living room; she looked out and saw me, then turned her face away and went off deeper into the house.

I found Bend in an alcove under the stairs. He was sitting with his hands clenched between his knees, in the yellow light of a desklamp resting on an unfinished shelf next to the telephone and a legal pad covered with cramped notations. He looked as if he weighed a thousand pounds. His head was turned down and away; still I could see the corners of his mouth drawn tight and hard into the white bristles on his chin.

"What's the problem?" I said.

"Went out Sunday morning and couldn't find Shelby," Bend said. "Ain't seen him since."

"Shelby," I said. "Your dog?"

Bend nodded and chewed on his lips. "He never run away before. But he ain't out there."

I said, "D'you think he's dead?"

Bend looked up at me for the first time. His face was covered with moisture as if the tears that he would not allow to escape through his eyes had all backed up and were running from his pores instead. His eyelids were puffy and red. "I called all over," he said. "Ain't nobody seen him."

I don't know if I even said excuse me. I turned and ran out of his house, down to the car waiting for me under the unlit sign that carried Amos Bend's name. This, after all, was what I had wanted all along; it seemed important to gather the evidence while it lasted.

As I leaned in behind the steering wheel the old dog sat up in the back seat and pointed his ears forward at me. He was well into the overhead light; anyone could have seen him. I said, "Just one more minute, boy," and grabbed up my camera from the seat.

Bend hadn't moved from beside the telephone. As I approached he lifted his eyes and saw the camera that I was holding ready just below the level of my chest. With both hands he began probing aimlessly through the pockets of his shirt and pants. "What the hell are you doing?" he said.

I said "I think people will want to know you're something more than just a troll working away at your nightmare occupation. I think they want to know that when the end comes they

will be in the hands of someone capable of more than just clinical detachment. I think they will want to see the face of a man who is still capable of sorrow."

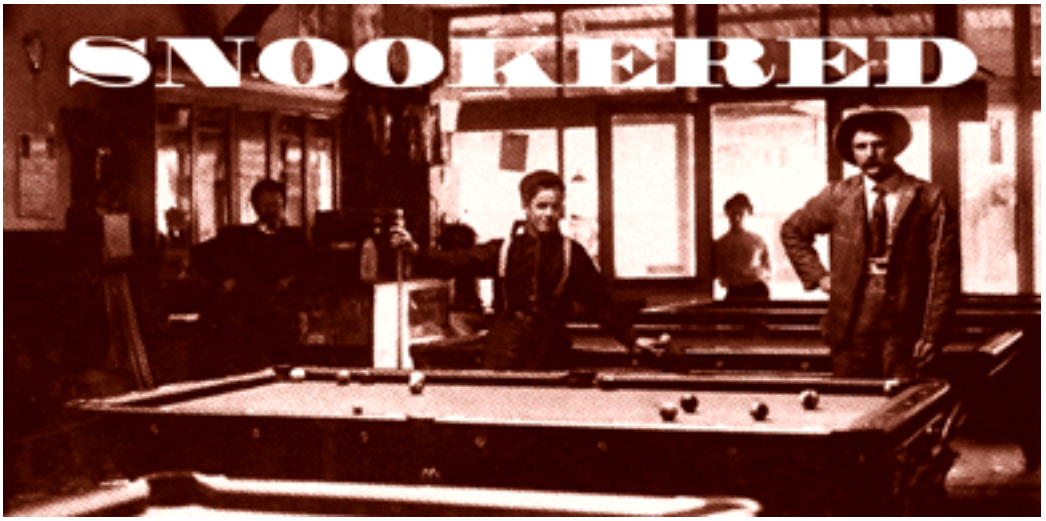
The irritation dropped away from his features, leaving only the grief, and I snapped the picture.

The End.

Title Page

More Fiction

FICTION • BY BRUCE CANWELL



About the Author

The front room of The Scratching Post is packed -- Rennie and Poughkeepsie Pete are over at table five, deep into the latest round of their never-ending Rotation tournament; Sammy Slade is chattering away at his girlfriend Carolyn as he leans across table eight and pots an easy bank shot. I don't recognize any of tonight's other customers, but a couple of frat boys at table two give us frosty looks that say they were hoping a couple of hot-looking honeys would walk through the door instead of two balding, over-thirty types. The one with the bad complexion rolls his eyes at his pal as if to say, "Jesus, just what this place needs -- two more old farts! I hope we don't end up like them in another fifteen years!"

Amen to that, kid.

Maurice waves from behind the counter, calling over to us, "Plenty of tables in the back room!" I give him a thumbs-up. Scott just nods. Together we slip down the center aisle and through the saloon-style swinging doors, interrupting Bing's solitude. From the look of it I'd say he's been back here for at least an hour, shooting around, perfectly content being isolated from the hackers in the next room. His cuestick is bone-colored, custom-made: he calls it White Lightning and right now he's cradling it with the touch of a dedicated craftsman; Scott says hello to him and the response is a mild grunt, something quick, low, and unintelligible. Those frost-blue eyes remain locked on the elaborate three-ball combination sitting on his table.

Scott and I move the opposite end of the room, figuring we'll stay out of Bing's way and he'll return the favor. While Scott racks I take down a seventeen-ounce stick and check its

warp. Then Scott chooses his weapon -- I'm sure that's how he thinks of it -- and we lag for break. I win.

I bounce the cue ball off the head rail -- once, twice, three times; a ritual for luck begun in my college days and reinforced over many years of shooting eight-ball in uncounted places like The Scratching Post. I rest the cue on the head spot before drawing it back and to the left about four inches. At the other end of the table fifteen balls patiently wait for the game to begin, and perhaps for a friendship to end.

I assume the position -- bent at the waist, left arm straight with the tip of the cue bridged between index and middle fingers, right arm bent and pumping the stick in search of the proper angle, just the right amount of force. Usually this is a comfortable feeling, but not tonight. Right now my hands feel big and clammy, like twin catcher's mitts abandoned on the field in a midsummer downpour: even my hands don't like being in this situation. I take a deep breath and. . .

BAM!

Stick spanks cue, cue scurries the length of the table and blasts the target balls, sending them into a mad scramble worthy of Calvin and Hobbes. The six wobbles an unsteady course toward the right-center pocket but fails to disappear into the cup; the orange five-ball breaks right, accompanied by the one, fourteen, and thirteen balls. That ugly number four spins to the left, accompanied by its purple-striped cousin, the twelve, as well as the number ten ball. Amidst the chaos the cue strolls back up the table, mocking me as it slows and comes to rest at the right of the head spot.

It's the two-ball that sets my molars grinding. The miserable blue devil rolls and rolls and keeps on rolling -- until it stops about a tenth of an inch short of the middle-left hole. A sneeze would knock it in.

"Don't say I never gave you anything," I grumble. Failing to sink a ball off the break, I surrender control of the table to Scott, who wastes no time dropping the two. He uses a little more <u>oomph</u> than necessary: the ball rattles in the cup until the force of the shot dissipates.

"I get low balls," he says. "Funny -- I thought you were the low-ball expert. . ."

"Hey!" Suddenly he's trying to pull my chain, and all the anger of recent weeks flares once again. "We can forget this whole thing if you aren't going to abide by the agreement. No psych outs and no bullshit, remember?"

"Right, right, right." Scott waves his right hand as if to brush off any further complaints; he turns his attention back to the game and scowls. In killing the two, the cueball caromed off the side bumper and retreated to the very end of the table, cozying up to the center of the back rail. Now the angle is all wrong for him to shoot at his closest ball, the six; he'll have to come up the table through traffic for a difficult shot at the seven.

"Hey, hey, you guys!"

Scott and I both look up at the sound of the familiar bullfiddle voice. Maurice has escaped his front-counter duties long enough to waddle back and take care of us. We've trained the banty little French Canadian well in the time we've been playing at The Scratching Post -- he's carrying our usual pair of long-necked Rolling Rocks in one hand, two dollars in quarters clutched in the other.

"Here's d'beers," he says, grinning as he thumps the dew-covered bottles onto a nearby window sill, "and d'money for the jukebox. Y'know, you really had a close call on Tuesday. The music fellas come in, wanting to take out your Roy Orbison songs, but I say to dem, 'No way! I got two regulars who'd <u>kill</u> me if you do dat!'"

"Thanks, Maurie," I say in a tight voice, handing him three singles to cover the beers but refusing to take the coins. "No music for us tonight, though. Roy would only be a distraction."

Now Maurice <u>knows</u> something is wrong: a funny look flashes across his features. He

stares down at the bills as if force of will alone could turn them into his usual five-spot. After a long moment he shrugs and drops the money into his pocket. "Okay, guys. I catch you later on."

Once Maurice has returned to his duties out front, Scott hovers over the table and shoots the seven, turning it into a maroon streak that bangs the bumper below the middle-left pocket, then moves a quarter of the way up the felt. The cue returns to the back rail where my fifteen-ball also waits, practically begging to be dumped into the right-rear cup. I shoot and oblige it, using a soft touch that creates a good leave for the thirteen.

Scott says nothing, sipping Rolling Rock and coolly watching as I snipe at my orange-striped target and muff it. That's the opening salvo in a volley of missed opportunities. Both of us are struggling to find our shots. As I work through the dry spell I keep trying to figure out some other way we could have resolved things. Scott is an irresistible force and I'm an immovable object -- the stubborn streak we share has actually helped hold our friendship together on more than one occasion during these past fifteen years, but now Scott's loyalties are divided. He wants me to pretend nothing has changed between Dusty and me since college, and after what that bastard did I refuse to play that game. Now Scott and I are deadlocked -- we've talked and argued and cursed and got exactly nowhere. So we decided to let The Gods of The Green Felt settle things. A single game of eight-ball, the loser honor-bound to abide by the winner's wishes. It seemed a good idea at the time, but right now I find myself wondering if the loser's pride will take precedence over his honor. . .

Scott takes a long walk around the table, sizing up his position from every angle. My last futile shot left the cueball just below the middle-right pocket, only slightly angled from the green number six; with the proper english Scott should be able to dump it into the left-center cup. Instead he surprises me, shooting up-table at the seven, the cue kissing it in passing and sending it backspinning into the left-front hole. As the seven swirls into oblivion the cue rolls on, taking a leisurely bounce off the front rail before threading the gap between the nine and thirteen. It ends up exactly where Scott wanted it: neatly placed behind the five for a right-center shot.

He disposes of the five with no fuss or muss, leaving the cueball near center-table. The four-ball slithers into the far left pocket with the next shot. Scott is three balls up on me, but his run appears to have ended -- the cue has cozied up to the right rail, above the back pocket, which right now is the equivalent of being stranded in no-man's land. The angle is all wrong for him to convert on the six and worse, his green ball is close enough to my fourteen to form a cordon that prevents a shot across the table at the one. Scott plays to set himself up for the future by shooting at the six-fourteen duo, breaking the blockade and whisking his lime-colored ball into a very nice position along the back rail.

"We don't have to play this out, Bobby." Scott looks me in the eye for the first time all evening as he surrenders the table to me. I can tell he's been thinking many of the same things that have been running through my mind, but his next words prove he's still unwilling to give ground. "All you have to do is say you'll give Dusty a chance. Then we'll put 'Blue Bayou' on the jukebox and forget this whole silly thing."

"Silly?" My knuckles go white as my fingers clench around my cuestick. "You think I'm 'silly' because I've had it up to here with that miserable sonuvabitch?" I pause, taking a deep breath, looking down the table. I see my next shot with a crystal clarity I haven't felt all evening. The eleven goes scorching into a back pocket. "All through school I tolerated Dusty, no matter how obnoxious he got. When he moved out of state back in 1990 I didn't hear from him for five years and you know what? I didn't miss him a bit."

I send the cueball on a search-and-destroy mission: like a good soldier it blitzes the nine into the right-rear hole. "But then good old Dusty comes back to attend Hank's wedding, and what does he do?"

"Well, you know he is. . ."

"He zeroes in on me as soon as he sees me, trying to create a scene, needling me all through the reception. Then he gets into the booze and he gets louder and even more obnoxious, and when none of his little games work he accuses me of coming on to his wife! He wants to fight me, for Chrissakes, right there in the VFW Hall!"

"You know he'd had too much to drink," says Scott, and it makes me even angrier that he's still defending the little putz.

I snap, "Even totally ploughed he knows me well enough to realize I would never chase a married woman, and I sure as hell wouldn't chase any woman with the piss-poor taste to marry him!"

"Dusty's your friend. . ."

"Wrong!" I'm shouting now. Bing's concentration has been broken; he flicks a glance over at us, trying to figure out what the sudden commotion is about.

I don't care; I keep on hammering at Scott. "He's not my friend, he's yours. Yours! I tolerated the ignorant little shmuck all those years out of courtesy to you, the same way Hank and Alex and Shaun tolerated him. None of us ever liked him, it was a drag having him tag along with us. What he did to me at the wedding was piss-poor payback for all the courtesy I've shown him, and I sure as hell am not going to spoil my Thanksgiving by having a drink with him and give him another chance to thoroughly insult me!"

Scott shakes his head. "I don't think you're giving him enough credit. Did you ever think he might feel bad about what he did? It could be he's coming back home for the holiday just to get some time with you so he can apologize."

"It's too damned late for apologies. He's crossed the line, and the only way you'll ever get me in the same room with him again is to win this game from me." I crank up another shot and force the fourteen to exit, middle-right.

Suddenly there's a chh-whump! from Bing's table. He miscued badly, sending his cueball leaping over the rail and off the table. Like some albino alien life form it charges across the floor, smacking into the wall with a loud klakk-ing noise. Bing looks over at us and makes a shrugging motion, as if to say, "Hey, it happens to the best of us every once in awhile." Scott retrieves the errant ball, meets him partway across the room, and flips it into his outstretched palm. Bing inclines his head by way of thanks before turning back to his table.

After my last shot our cue has continued to roll down the table. For a moment I think it's going to scratch into one of the back pockets, but it stops with about an inch of green showing. I have no good shot at any of my remaining balls, but I have taken away Scott's three-ball advantage: we're on equal footing again. "I don't think I'll toss in the towel yet, if it's all the same to you." I cut low on the ten-ball, which rolls half-heartedly up the table, not coming close to any hole, then I wave angrily at the table, inviting Scott to take his best shot.

My friend stands motionless: I wonder if he's pondering how it would feel to break his cuestick over my head. I can tell Scott's opinion hasn't budged: more than honor, more than pride, more than simple questions of right and wrong, Scott values loyalty above all else -- he figures you stand by your friends, and if one of them is a complete asshole you stand even more closely by him, because he needs all the support he can get. I'm sure there are instances where that's an admirable trait. . .this isn't one of them.

Scott bends and gives his attention to the one-ball. "You want to do this the hard way, that's how we'll do it," he mutters as he shoots, putting a nice soft touch on his canary-yellow target and gently nudging it up the felt until it runs out of room, dropping neatly into the right-rear pocket.

His next move will be toward the center of the table, but the eight ball -- Black Mariah herself -- obstructs his path to the six. He's forced to try for the three-ball, which sits practically at the midpoint of the playing surface. This shot is even lighter than his last, but

the angle is all wrong -- the red ball misses the right-hand pocket, bounces off the rail, and stops in the vicinity of my own twelve-ball. The cue, meanwhile, makes a few extra lazy revolutions until it stops, aligned with the head spot, then ten, and the left-front cup.

"Damn," Scott says, more to himself than anyone else.

I waste no time dumping the ten off the table, evening the score once again.

"So, you guys want a couple more beers, or what?"

I look up from the green and discover Maurice has popped in from the front room on one of his periodic sweeps to dump ashtrays and collect empties. He stands at the head of our table with his left hand filled by three drained Miller Lite bottles he's gathered up so far. He hands both Scott and myself the same innocent look, giving no sign he recognizes this night is different from any other.

"I'm okay, Maurie," I tell him. "Thanks."

Scott reaches for his Rolling Rock and shakes it. There's still about a quarter of the bottle remaining that languidly sloshes from side to side.

Maurice shakes his head with mock seriousness. "No music, only one beer apiece. It's sad to see d'great ones fade, I tell you."He spins on his heel and disappears through the swinging doors.

I return my attention to the game: my leave has put me in a good position. I blow the thirteen into the right-middle pocket, its orange stripe offering a final wave before disappearing into darkness. Once I eliminate the twelve-ball only Black Mariah stands between me and victory. That knowledge causes me to rush my shot, which goes wide. The cue bangs the rail, bouncing back and kissing its target on the rebound, sending the twelve on a drunken weave into the middle of the table. At last it stops, tantalizingly close to the right-center pocket.

It's a chess game now. I've left an impossible angle on the three, and the six-ball isn't in much better shape, perched as it is on the lower part of the left rail. Scott's goal must be to use this shot as setup, to position his two remaining balls so they can be quickly run off the table while simultaneously leaving the cueball in a position that will make it difficult for me to sink the twelve.

Scott kicks the six away from the rail and succeeds in giving me that lousy leave; I settle for a long shot up the felt that caresses my twelve in passing, making it back-spin and slide closer to the right-rear cup. Then Scott assumes control again.

He leans over the table, frowning: I've left a lot of green between the cue and his remaining two balls. It's going to take some sharpshooting for him to get something off the felt. He worries his lower lip with his teeth, then squeezes off a precision strike that makes the cue clip the six up high, imparting exactly enough spin to send it skating into the middle-left pocket.

"Hah! What do you think of <u>that?</u>" Scott snaps as he pushes past me to take his next shot from the foot of the table. I hang my head, not because he has evened the score but because this whole bright idea has gone sour on us. I hate Dusty more than ever for creating this problem; I hate Scott and myself because we're each too stubborn, too proud, too principled, and just a bit too competitive to let the other off the hook. I wonder if even a friendship as strong as ours can survive the type of strain we're putting on it.

Scott takes a deep breath, holding it while he shoots hard and straight, the cue rocketing past the twelve and clipping the three-ball, which dutifully flops into the right-center pocket. Its primary mission accomplished, the cueball keeps slithering up the greenery, coming to a halt within striking distance of the eight-ball.

The game is in Scott's grasp: he must hit Black Mariah high and to the right. making her spin into the rear pocket. It will require a precise touch, but Scott should be able to make it. He's sunk tougher.

"It's still not too late," he says as he bends low to study the setup. We both know it's kill or be killed time, but I do my best to sound unconcerned as I reply, "Go ahead and shoot it. Just don't choke under the pressure."

With a sigh, Scott calls his shot -- "Back pocket" -- and bends down, taking practice strokes, the tip of his stick flicking at the cueball like an adder's tongue. He shoots.

"Son. Of. A. Bitch!"

The shot is off, causing the eight to hit the rail ahead of the pocket. It rolls up-table toward the left-center hole, and while Black Mariah does her dance the cueball comes to a halt along the rear rail, giving me a perfect jab at the twelve. Suddenly it's my game.

I waste no time -- a quick shot and the twelve vanishes with a satisfying clunk. My leave has the cue two-and-a-half inches from the right corner of the table. It's an easy shot from here: hit the eight straight on and she'll dive into the left-center pocket. I'll make good on my desire never to see that bastard Dusty again; I have to take the win. I'll drive a wedge between myself and Scott that could sever our friendship; I can't afford to win. My legs feel like tonweights as they propel me slowly around the table, buying me time to weigh the options. I don't like any of them. And that's when the speakers connecting the back room to the jukebox fill the air with sweet sound.

Dum-dum-dum
Dum-be-doo-wah
Oh, yeah yeah yeah yeah
Oooh-oooh-oooh
Oooh-oooh-oooh-wah

Then the chorus singers fade and Roy Orbison makes us believe that only the lonely know the way he feels.

"That's a guy you oughtta be listenin' to."

The sound of Maurice's deep-throated voice makes both Scott and me jump. The little bartender is standing just inside the back room, holding a swinging door in each hand. He releases them and takes two steps in our direction. "That ball goes off the table an' you're both gonna regret it. I dunno what's happened t'make you act like this, but y'gotta talk it out or fight it out, 'cause neither of you's gonna win dis game. I want y'to walk away from it and come have a beer with me out front."

"I'll drop it if he will."

"And I'll drop it if he will."

Maurice grunts, "Just like a couple'a kids," as he keeps walking toward us, giving us a look of fatherly disapproval. As he reaches the foot of our table he lifts his right arm, bent at the elbow, until it's level with his shoulder. With his eyes still fixed on us he calls out, "Hey, Bing!"

From his table Bing looks up, spots Maurice's outstretched hand, then pitches White Lightning like a javelin. The bone-white stick crosses the room in a heartbeat and in one smooth motion Maurice plucks it from the air, bends while fitting the narrow end of the stick between the first two fingers of his left hand, then pops the cueball with one single, smooth stroke. Black Mariah doesn't stand a chance.

"Now what do ya got to say, hotshots?"

We don't say a word, either of us. We laugh instead. The show we've just witnessed is so improbably, so god-almighty-amazing, how can we do anything else? Great gusts of laughter burst forth, melting the tension the way warm March winds melt a winter snow. I laugh so hard I have to lean against the table for support, and I can see Scott wiping tears of mirth from his eyes. It's close to a minute before either of us can gain combine enough breath and

composure. At last Scott manages to gasp, "What are you two, The Flying Wallendas of the poolhall set?"

"Hang around dis place as long as we have and maybe you'll pick up some flashy tricks, too," Maurice grins. His chest is puffed out with pride, but whether it's over his trick shot or the clever way he's played peacemaker, it's impossible to tell. "What say to dem beers?"

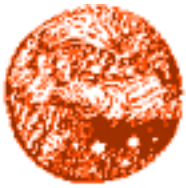
"After seeing that I think I need a drink! " Scott adds.

Still holding my aching sides, I say, "A Rolling Rock does sound pretty good right about now, Maurie." I breathe a sigh of relief -- the Dusty problem hasn't gone away, but for now the situation has been defused. When we come back to it, maybe this near-disaster will temper our approach.

"All right, den!" Maurice flashes a twenty-candlepower grin. "I still got dem two kids hanging around table two. Help me get rid of 'em and I'll have one wit' you. It ain't every day Bing buys one for the house, y'know!"

Bing's reply starts off with something about Maurice catching a stick up some other part of his anatomy if he isn't careful. Scott and I are laughing too hard to catch the rest of it.

The End.

 Contents More  Fiction Next Section 

Life and Death in Four Colors.

At least two of the novels reviewed in this issue are marred only by an isolated, unnecessary vulgarity popping up in the late stages of the action. Is there some crazed editor out there advocating late-pages crudity to raise reader's eyebrows just before the final act? Is some creepazoid agent counseling his writers to deliberately gross us out, oftentimes in stories where no gross-out should reasonably be expected, promptly at page 207? What's going on here? Neither instance of bathroom shock-value has bought the writers a position on the best seller lists, and in both cases the incidents described damage the impact of the novel to greater or lesser degree. What gives, writers? When reading what Faulkner called "tales of the human heart in conflict with itself," we don't want to have to pause in the middle and wrinkle our noses over something that either doesn't belong, or should have been presented with more subtlety. If vulgarity is a central point of your story, then go for it; make it big. If you're just trying to inject some color, make sure that the color you inject doesn't clash with the overall design.

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There is color in abundance, of various kinds, in Tom De Haven's magnificent new novel **DERBY DUGAN'S DEPRESSION FUNNIES** (Holt/Metropolitan, 0-8050-4445-0, $23). Set, lovingly and accurately, in the world of 1930's newspaper comics publishing, **Derby Dugan** chronicles three or more affairs of various sorts: platonic/romantic, as hack writer Al Bready wonders about his ongoing friendship with a married woman; platonic/creative, as Bready pairs with disagreeable, lecherous comic strip artist Walter Geebus to produce a work (the "Derby Dugan" of the book's title) greater than either man could have accomplished on their own; and the very real love affair that Bready and Geebus shared with the nation: our love affair with newspaper comic strips.

In the 1930s **Little Orphan Annie** and **Popeye** and **Flash Gordon** and **Barney Google** shaped the nation as surely as did FDR and the Great Depression. The men who created these characters were true visionaries -- setting the dreams, the fancies, the whims, the outlandish hopeful adventurism and also the moral standards of the common American down on yellowing newsprint, in a palette of four versatile colors, in a medium controlled by magnates and distributed to broader effect and impact than any medium has achieved since, yes including television. But they were also human, and it's the human side of these visionary hacks that interests Mr. De Haven. A central point of his narrative is that the men who gave us The Funnies were not naturally amusing, charming, or even particularly happy human beings. They were just people, as fallible and as full of frustration as anyone else, perhaps more frustrated because they were compelled by the ambition and drive, the sensibility of artists -- though they were not, in their time, considered true artists (even by themselves).

As a follow-up to De Haven's earlier **Funny Papers** (a big, ambitious, picturesque novel marred only by a weak ending), **Derby Dugan** is a sequel only in the sense that it shares a common setting and a couple of common characters; but **Derby Dugan** is far more mature, more humorous, more melancholy and more satisfying than anything De Haven has accomplished to date. Its principal characters -- most especially Dugan artist Walter Geebus -- are more or less analogous to some real writers and artists of the time (the Dugan strip, which in the earlier novel was a fictionalized version of The Yellow Kid, has since evolved into a fictionalized version of Orphan Annie), but De Haven has humanized them in the way only novelists can: by inventing their hearts. Geebus is not merely a ranting, whoring right-wing extremist: he is essentially childlike and vulnerable. His partner Al Bready, narrator of the tale, is not merely bruised and fatalistic: he is aware that he has become the filter through which something greater than himself must pass. The relationships that De Haven writes about are difficult ones, all bound up in a four-colored thread. Like the relationships between characters in the best comic strips -- the Kats and Mice, the orphans and billionaires, the sailors and old maids -- they mean something that is not easily defined.

Though **Derby Dugan** is the only novel we know of to come complete with its own Sunday comics page (drawn by Art Speigelman), it is far from being the first novel to draw its influence from the funnies. Lesser writers have been making hash out of the American comic strip for years. In **Krazy Kat: A Novel**, one ill-advised scribbler had the balls to give Geo. Herriman's soulful feline a set of fully-functioning sex organs and a drive to match. The novel sank into deserved obscurity while Herriman's Kartoon Kat lives on blissfully in his eternally shifting, eternally enduring Coconino County built of decomposing newsprint and Dr. Martin's dyes.

The same thing happened to Hergé's **Tintin** a year or so later, when another writer with too much time (and perhaps other things) on his hands tried to posit the youthful adventure hero as a post-pubescent with a heat-seeking missile attached. We forget the name of the novel, and the novelist, but Hergé and Tintin and Snowy are still children, still solving foreign capers in the back of our minds.

These idiot novelists all asking the same questions, all belaboring the obvious, all trying to drag the Funnies kicking and screaming into the real world are all missing the point, and dishonoring some of our best creative minds in the process. What Tom De Haven has done, in part, with **Derby Dugan** is to draw a bold, solid line between the funnies and the real world -- and then connect the two with dotted lines of hope, endurance, faith, love and aspiration. This is not a novel about the funnies, but a novel about the people who made them, the contradictory nature of the human heart, and "the better angels of our nature" that sometimes find fruition in populist art.

Angst for the Memories

What if Theodore Geisel -- Dr. Suess to you and I -- had suffered the loss of a child, in consequence of which he fell into a deep depression, in consequence of which he was admitted to a psychiatric ward, in consequence of which he was exposed to an hallucinogenic drug that caused his wildest fantasies to take shape in the real world?

What if American office buildings were slowly being taken over by the murmuring, shuddersome "Old Gods" from the fiction of H.P. Lovecraft?

Like as not, those questions would never occur to you; but they did occur to William Browning Spencer, which is exactly what makes Spencer an instant and indispensible giant on our literary landscape. In **ZOD WALLOP** **(St. Martin's, 0-312-13629-3, $21.95)**, children's author and illustrator Harry Gainsborough must shake off depression and drug haze to save the world from his own flying, nightmare creations, while simultaneously coming to grips with the death of his daughter and attempting to patch up what seems to be a terminally ruptured marriage. Here, fantasy and reality feed off of each other, and the one cannot be mended without the other.

The novel almost doesn't survive its loony-bin refugee supporting cast or the extremity of its fantasy; but Spencer's grip on Harry Gainsborough is rock solid, and the very real causes of Harry's breakdown are things that any reader can understand. Though filled with images as crazed as any you are likely to find between two covers, **ZOD WALLOP** is a realistic novel about grief, loss and the possibility of personal redemption; and it deals with those issues more effectively than many more straightfaced and straightlaced novels possibly could.

Anyone who has ever held a job, or hopes to hold one, should read Spencer's **RÉSUMÉ WITH MONSTERS** **(White Wolf, 1-56504-913-6, $5.99)** and take heed. Here, a failed, middle-aged novelist named Philip Kenan begins to suspect that his job as a typesetter is more than deliberately dehumanizing: that, in fact, the demons Yog-Sothoth and C'thulu are using American businesses as a means of crossing over into the real world. Philip may be crazy; or he may not be. The question soon becomes irrelevant: because the demons and their slaves are real enough to Philip, and one way or another, whether in reality or within his own mind, he has to find a way to stop them.

Ultimately, Philip's story is about self-worth, or lack of it, and the battle to live a satisfying life against overwhelming odds. Spencer calls this his "most autobiographical" novel and it should be easy for anyone working in an office building to see why. Though it shares similar themes with **ZOD WALLOP** -- loss of a loved one, mid-life crisis and the power of fantasy to focus and define the real world -- **RÉSUMÉ WITH MONSTERS** has its own agenda, one that will certainly cause you to rethink the prospect of life as a wage slave, and may even leave you peering watchfully into the dark corners of your workspace.

William Browning Spencer doesn't mince words; his style is plain and unadorned; it is his images that carry the weight of his meaning. He is tuned more closely to the spirit of our

times than any other working writer. He is the closest thing we have to a wild-eyed Romantic. We could use more like him.

Poppy Ott and the ‘Way Back Machine.

As a legacy from my father’s childhood, I inherited custodianship of a complete set of “Poppy Ott” books. Like the better-known Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew series, also published by Grossett & Dunlap, these were light mystery stories for children. Unlike those better known heroes, the Poppy Ott books combined their mystery with a heady mixture of other influences: “Our Gang” clubhouse trappings, Horatio Alger bootstraps capitalism, small-town atmosphere and a hefty helping of unsubtle humor.

The unlikely hero of the series is introduced in Poppy Ott and the Stuttering Parrot, when narrator Jerry Todd (just an average small-town boy, son of a brickmaker, star of another mystery series bearing his name) and his gang discover a pair of tramps -- an old man and a boy -- squatting in a tumbledown trailer at the edge of Tutter, Jerry’s home town. Instant mystery: who is this shabby New Kid and where did he come from? Before Jerry can answer these questions, a traveling medicine show arrives in Tutter, bringing with it a deeper mystery of pirate gold and murdered men -- and the possibility that one of Tutter’s respectable citizens may have had a more colorful past than was recently supposed. The tramp boy, at first implicated in the goings-on, takes charge, clears his own name and solves the mystery. By the end of the book, this Poppy Ott has been cleaned up and transformed into a respectable citizen, with more ambition and bigger ideas than most of the rest of the town combined. Later books show him opening all manner of businesses -- toy novelty manufacturing companies, pancake restaurants and interior decorating firms to name but three -- while continuing to solve mysteries as the head of the boys’ Juvenile Jupiter Detective Club, engaging in frequent battles with the rival Stricker gang and having the kind of Outdoors Fun that went the way of all flesh with the invention of TV. All, presumably, while still attending grade school.

The books were illustrated by Bert Salg, in an engaging, scratchy style that still brings the characters -- and the period -- to life, and written by one Leo Edwards, who appears to be the only writer of ‘thirties juvenile mysteries who didn’t work with quotations around his name. Many of the books featured a special “club house” section which included Edwards’s home mailing address in Cambridge, Wisconsin; children were encouraged to write letters and form “Freckled Goldfish” clubs of their own. These “Chatter-Box” pages -- the equivalent of fan clubs -- were often as much fun to read as the books themselves:

“Our chapter held a big Hallowe’en Party. First we had ghost stories, dancing, singing and biting money out of apples. Then ‘eats.’ We had apples, grapes, nuts, fruit punch and cake. Then the real fun began -- ducking for apples and money! I went after a nickel in the tub. When I came up for air I found my shirt and tie were wet. We had regular printed tickets which we sold. The tickets (printed at school) read like this: *HALLOWE’EN PARTY, for the benefit of The Freckled Goldfish Ozone Park Branch, 9115-107 Avenue, at 4:30 O’clock, Admission -- 10 cents.* We cleared $3.25 and now we have in the treasury $5.50.”

There is no question as to whether these Poppy Ott books withstand the test of time -- they don’t, which may be the most compelling reason to go back and read or re-read them today.

Unencumbered by any kind of literary worth, the books are free to show us other things: more than simple-minded nostalgia (it's hard to feel nostalgia for a world that has been as completely obliterated as the one these books -- albeit in a wildly distorted, idealized form -- represent), Poppy Ott offers us Time Travel in its purest, most honorable form: sending us back, from the comfort of our easy chairs, not to the world of our fathers, but to the world our fathers dreamed about when they were lads. That is no small accomplishment.

Revoltin' Development

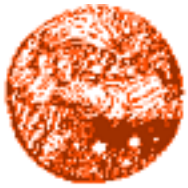
THE HAPPY MUTANT HANDBOOK
Mischievous Fun for Higher Primates
Mark Frauenfelder, Carla Sinclair, Gareth Branwyn & Will Kreth, editors.
Designed by Georgia Rucker. Published by Riverhead, a division of Berkley.
205 pages, $15, paper.

Here at MILLENNIUM, we cannot pretend to have been inspired, influenced or moved to action by this fascinating book; but we might have been if we had known about it sooner. As a tonic to perk up the frustrated mind after a day of brain-numbing donkey work, you could not ask for much more than what THE HAPPY MUTANT HANDBOOK provides: here are recepes for tweaking reality, articles on the subject of creating your own culture and the people who have done so, arrows leading you to resources, and reviews of off-beat projects that you might not otherwise have known about, all delivered in a style at once colorfully '50s retro and gleefully anarchic.

It comes as a pleasant surprise to learn that the purveyors of THE HAPPY MUTANT HANDBOOK are not members of the lunatic fringe (though they sometimes find fascination in such people), but creative people who wish to stay that way: writers, designers and artists who delight in anything cheerfully out of the ordinary, and who are not above needling the poor deprived brownshirts that make up most of the rest of humanity. Their agenda is not so much anarchy as it is to live a satisfying, inriguing life while laughing at stuffier life forms. If this sounds like you, then THE HAPPY MUTANT HANDBOOK may be just your kind of brain candy. Though short on practical information, it is long on ideas and inspiration, and it does at least make an attempt to provide inquisitive mutants with addresses, e-mail and telephone numbers where they can find the information and tools that they need. Our only complaint is that it isn't twice its size.

Death and Antiques

Fans of the British antiques/caper/mystery series **Lovejoy**, which aired for several years on A&E and is currently making the rounds (complete and uncut) on local PBS stations, might want to take a look at the novels by Jonathan Gash upon which the series is based. They will find a Lovejoy that is harder edged than the television version: Lovejoy's TV sidekick, a sweet old gent called Tinker, is portrayed in the books as a grubby, coughing drunk; likewise, his assistant Eric and paramour Lady Jane Felsham, who go a long way towards lightening the series' touch, are to one extent or another inventions of the show's producers. Nonetheless, the Lovejoy of Gash's novels is every bit the charming rogue that viewers of the series have come to know, and his adventures (narrated by Lovejoy himself in his own Antiques Trade cum East Anglian slang) offer the same pleasing mixture of danger, eccentricity and classical Romanticism. In The Very Last Gambado, Lovejoy is hired to advise a film company producing a dubious epic about an attempt to rob the British Museum -- only to find that the film is a cover for an actual robbery attempt, with Lovejoy on board to play the part of Fall Guy. In The Tartan Sell the theft of an Edwardian bureau -- thought to be a fake -- precipitates a string of murders, and Lovejoy's attempts to clear himself only draw his own neck farther into the noose. Other titles in the series include Pearlhanger, The Firefly Gadroon, The Sleepers of Erin, Lies of Fair Ladies, and many more; Gash cranks out a new Lovejoy at a rate of nearly one a year. Gash can plot a fair thriller, but what sets his Lovejoy books above the ordinary is the sensibility of Lovejoy himself, a sort of refined pleasure and faith in the fine things that sometimes shine out of our collective past. As Lovejoy puts it, "antiques, those precious wonderments whose very existence is proof of something more than the brute Man."



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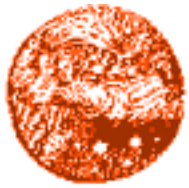


DON'T GET ME STARTED…!

A Rant by Gavin Millar

In December I read The BOSTON SUNDAY GLOBE's year-end Movie Section (that's what it's called -- the Movie Section, capital M, capital S), and my blood boiled. Not because of the articles or regular features, and not because of "Year's Ten Best" lists provided by Jay Carr, Matthew Gilbert, and Betsy Sherman -- no, it was the advertisements that roused my ire. As a sometimes-film-critic myself, looking at ad after ad peppered with reviewers' break-out quotes made me yearn for those not-so-long-ago days when readers could trust that the people who get paid to understand motion pictures were telling it like it is.

Let's say you are the film critic for a major newspaper or magazine: Tinseltown is your beat, you make your living giving your readers the inside scoop on the current crop of films and what's in the pipeline for the future. You need the movie studio publicity flacks to keep you in the loop, you need access to the big-name stars and directors for phone quotes or face-to-face interviews. You can't afford to be shut out, and you know it. Unfortunately, everyone else knows it, too, and they use that knowledge to make you toe the line.

Go ahead -- rip Paramount's big summer blockbuster to shreds. Just don't be surprised if your sources at Paramount dry up faster than a mud puddle in the Gobi Desert. Pan the performance of a Schwarzeneggar, a Meryl Streep, a Jim Carrey, or some other multi-million dollar ego on a rampage, but be prepared to have them pass you by when they're granting interviews to damn near every other reviewer in the country. How's your boss going to react to that, boychik? Could reassignment to the House and Garden Section be right around the corner?

This fear of being isolated drives many reviewers to pay lip service to new movies at the time of their release, only to take a revisionist look a year or so down the line. How many critics told you STAR TREK: GENERATIONS sucked pond water through a flavor straw while it was playing in cineplexes across the nation? Damn few. Only when the next film in the series (FIRST CONTACT) appeared did the brotherhood of reviewers dare talk about the major flaws in GENERATIONS, which studio execs and fans alike felt damaged the venerable TREK franchise.

That type of scenario plays itself time and again in what passes for contemporary film criticism, because it's simply easier to play ball, to say something nice about this star or that movie and make all the "important" people happy. Who knows? The next time the studio has one of those junkets to promote their winter lineup, you may get invited to fly out to Tahoe or Palm Springs, spend the week, and hobnob with the pretty people -- all expenses paid, of course. . .

The "good old boy" network that has risen up in the critic's circle has given rise to

relentless shills like Peter Travers of ROLLING STONE and Joel Siegel of "Good Morning America." F'chrissake, these guys have never seen a movie they disliked! I won't subject you to a reprint of one of their complete reviews; a look at the excerpts from the ads in that year-end SUNDAY GLOBE is enough to set one's teeth grinding:
Siegel: "You will love this movie! JERRY MAGUIRE scores big! This is a big hit movie. What's wonderful about the film is you're never sure where it's going to go."
Siegel: "MICHAEL is a heaven-sent holiday fable!"

Travers: "[ONE FINE DAY is] A charmer that lifts off on the winning chemistry between [Michelle] Pfeiffer and [George] Clooney."

Travers: "[THE CRUCIBLE is] Electric! A seductively exciting film that crackles with visual energy, passionate provocation, and incendiary acting."

Travers: "Smashingly scary! [SCREAM is] A delicious blend of fun and fright! Drew Barrymore gives a tour-de-force performance that rivals Janet Leigh's in PSYCHO!'"

And, finally, Siegel on THE PREACHER'S WIFE: "Denzel Washington and Whitney Houston light up the screen!"

Based on this pair's come-ons one would assume we were in the midst of a cinematic Renaissance the likes of which Hollywood last saw in 1937. Here's a clue -- it ain't so. Oh, THE CRUCIBLE is excellent, and all the other films Siegel and Travers cover may be perfectly decent and inoffensive, but the praise these two toss around would be effusive for a NINOTCHKA or a WIZARD OF OZ, let alone the mediocre likes of SCREAM and MICHAEL. The overall tone Travers and Siegel adopt is more breathless than believable -- they aren't telling their audience what they think, they're cranking out their reviews using the Shill-O-Meter and in return they get a pat on the head from the studios.

Of course, if the problem was limited to a handful of panderers I might see red, but not the incarnadine was that has been swimming before my gaze since that fateful Sunday. You see, it gets worse. . .

Alluvasudden, anyone and everyone willing to stand on an orange crate and say, "This is great!" is treated as a movie reviewer worthy of notice. This is a phenomenon of the '90s, and it is not a step forward -- it used to be break-out quotes were dominated by the nation's best critics: if you were a Vincent Canby, a Pauline Kael or a Charles Champlin, your praiseful quote meant something and would be featured in the national publicity campaign, because attention must be paid to what reviewers of that caliber had to say.

Today the rabble have moved in, and all their gibbering has leeched away much of the break-out quote's strength in the knowledgeable filmgoer's eyes. The sheer volume of break-outs attributed solely to "60-Second Preview's" Jeff Craig would lead one to believe he has some depth of knowledge about the medium, when he actually comes across as nothing more than a radio shmuck, more carnival pitchman than cineaste. And Hollywood's use of a stalking-horse like a Jeff Craig so frequently lends him and his usually-positive opinions, in the eyes of the unschooled reader, a weight they do not deserve while simultaneously devaluing the knowledgeable and reasoned opinions of someone like Janet Maslin, who is far more stingy with her praise.

Of course, Craig isn't the only reviewer-come-lately -- who the hell is Ron Brewington of the American Urban Radio Networks and why should I care when he calls MY FELLOW AMERICANS "A Comedy Masterwork!" Or Joanna Levenglick of The Kids News Network, who makes my gorge rise as she proudly proclaims JINGLE ALL THE WAY, "This holiday season's best movie. Nonstop fun!"

There are so many reviewers tilling the cinematic soil these days that a red flag should go up whenever an ad is filled with break-outs from enthusiastic but obscure critics. Even though James Woods received a Golden Globe nomination for his performance in the movie, my alarm bells started jangling over Rob Reiner's GHOSTS OF MISSISSIPPI as soon as I

saw the gaggle of second-raters whose reviews were being excerpted in its advertising. Janet Maslin or Kevin Thomas or even poor- old- parodies- of- themselves Siskel and Ebert were nowhere to be seen, replaced instead by Mark Moorehead of the PHOENIX NEW TIMES, who raved, "Gripping!", while Bob Healy of K-BIG-FM in Los Angeles chimed in with, "Powerful and Passionate!" and National News Syndicate's Bonnie Churchill opined, "[Alec] Baldwin is definitely Oscar-bound!" Here's another hint: if the knowledgeable critics had good things to say, the PR flacks would be using quotes from them, not second-rate nonentities like Bonnie Churchill and Mark Moorehead.

Finally, there are the ads which show such sheer, brazen chutzpah they make my jaw creak in disbelief. I like Beavis & Butt-Head and I laughed out load while watching their DO AMERICA movie, but the publicist who put together the December ad for the picture is doing no one any favors when he runs three positive quotes from influential critics (including the aforementioned Kevin Thomas and Siskel & Ebert) side by side with this piece of claptrap:

"A '90s version of Mark Twain's Tom and Huck. Quite funny."
-- Dave Kehr, NY DAILY NEWS

Earth-to-Dave-Kehr: didn't Composition 101 teach you to try to avoid hyperbole at all costs? The comparison Kehr makes is ludicrous from all but the most essential angle (sure, both Beavis & Butt-Head and Sawyer & Finn are young boys who adventure through an adult world -- but there any reasonable comparison ends): it's difficult to decide whether to be angrier at him for committing a moronic comment like this to print, or the publicist who believes the audience is so ignorant they'll swallow such guff in the blink of an eye.

As we approach the millennium the sensibility that is increasingly fostered in situations like this is, "Well, what does it really matter? So maybe a few people read these scruffy quotes and end up seeing movies they might not have otherwise seen -- where's the harm in that?"

The harm is in the way these shoddy practices tarnish the reputation of all reviewers. When you can't tell who's in which pockets, or who's writing what to advance his career, then everyone becomes suspect. It perpetuates two stereotypes: that writers are toadies, and that the opinions of the biggest know-nothing shlemiel should be equally weighted against an expert in a chosen field. Neither of these stereotypes are true, but certainly those willing to stand up and challenge them seem few and far between.

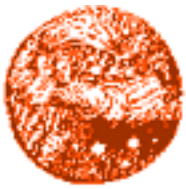
As for me, I'm just glad I don't write a lot of film reviews these days -- I'd live in mortal fear someone might run my break-out quote right next to one from Jeffrey Lyons.

That would really make me angry!

Of course James Garner and Jack Lemmon do what they do, and they can do it better than anyone else in the known universe. You really shouldn't need any other reason to trot on out and see **MY FELLOW AMERICANS**, the comedy thriller in which Garner and Lemmon play two ex-presidents trying to get to the bottom of a new

Washington scandal. The film itself is a bit uneven -- in the third act it bogs down on comic car chases (Just who could be dumb enough to hire Garner and Lemmon and then waste them in car chases? Jon Peters, that's who), and the script frequently uses profanity in place of wit -- but its first half-hour is quite smart, especially when you consider current Hollywood standards, and once the two stars take up the reins nothing else really matters. The director quite wisely allows his stars the latitude to dominate the body of the film, then steps in to sweep things up into a tidy, perhaps- not- inspired- but-at- least- satisfying conclusion.

The movie's weakest link is Dan Ackroyd, stretched to the limits of his not very considerable talent as the nominal HeadVillain of the piece. How this man has continued to land jobs post-Belushi is beyond us. Perhaps the filmmakers deliberately cast someone a) with moderate name value who b) would not detract attention from the stars. In this case, they need not have worried. On their worst days, Garner and Lemmon can hold their own against anyone -- and in **MY FELLOW AMERICANS,** they are both at the top of their game. Though the two actors have their quite differing styles, there's never really any doubt but that they should work well together -- and they do.



It is a treasure not to be ignored when a movie that you never knew existed featuring a favorite departed star turns up on video. It's one of the things video does best: giving us the opportunity to view fully restored movies, whether classics or not, that we would never have the opportunity to see any other way. Such a movie is **SIX OF A KIND**, directed in 1934 by Leo McCarey, featuring, among other pleasures, a fine supporting performance by W.C. Fields. Fields is a star whose work has been seriously neglected on video, and the only reason we're seeing him here and now is because the film also features George Burns and Gracie Allen (the video release of **SIX OF A KIND** is one of a package of three Burns & Allen films designed to capitalize on Burns's recent death). This is a minor note in the Fields canon -- pleasing, solid, but remarkable only for being previously unknown (to us, at any rate): a fresh new glimpse of Fields at the height of his career. Here, as a corrupt tank-town sheriff, Fields hits all of his trademark chords, and is allowed to steal the film out from under its nominal stars. Is there any modern comedian who could get an uninterrupted five minutes of comedy out of a pool stick, without ever making a shot? We think not.

If Uncle Billy is not to your taste, try Charlie Ruggles, Alison Skipworth and Burns & Allen on for size: Ruggles, known to people of my generation primarily as the voice of Aesop in Jay Ward's Aesop & Son cartoons, is a master of Timid Soul comedy; Skipworth, a wonderful and under-rated actress, specialized in crotchety old world-weary ex-cons -- she was paired with Fields once before in Tillie & Gus (still sadly unavailable on video); and Burns & Allen -- well, you know.

The story has Ruggles and his wife headed on a two-week road trip for their second honeymoon, with Burns & Allen riding along to "share expenses." The expected calamities occur right on schedule, and if **SIX OF A KIND** is never inspired it is never less than self-assured. We're not talking the Hope Diamond here -- this is a formula road comedy with its stars as its greatest asset. It may not be new, but it is new to us; what it delivers is 63

minutes of smiles -- and if that isn't worth $14.95, what is?

Twenty-five years ago I did not like to admit that stage and screen are different media, driven by utterly incompatible engines -- but time has shown that some wonderful stage productions are just plain unfilmable; and by rights the early '70s New Testament Rock Musical **Godspell** should have been more unfilmable than most.

Yet somehow director **David Greene** managed to pull the thing off. Released in 1973, Greene's film version of Godspell stripped the Broadway show of its dead weight, refined its design and musical score, and siphoned off the best players from several stage productions (notably Victor Garber from a Canadian production and David Haskell and Robin Lamont from New York). That alone would not have insured success. But Greene's gimmick -- that of setting the show's action in the middle of a deserted, pristene New York City, retained the flavor of the stage production while placing it within an entirely filmable framework. Suddenly Godspell was as much movie as stage show. The fact that it never really clicked with a mass audience says more about its timing than it does about the value of the film.

Godspell came along just as the Broadway Musical was taking its last gasp of fresh air -- and about ten years after the Hollywood Movie Musical had begun to rot in its grave. Not long after Godspell came Bob Fosse's Pippin and a little show from out of nowhere called Grease (since butchered and bowdlerized in its transition to film, and altered even more offensively in its transition back from film to stage); by then, Andrew Lloyd Webber had begun to dig his toes in, and it would not be long before the Brits effectively put us out of our own theaters.

If Hair capitalized on the cynical, rebellious side of hippie subculture, Godspell's emphasis was on the sweetness and innocence of that same movement. It began as a college theater project that set the Gospel According to St. Matthew in a modern junkyard, and presented Christ as a heartfaced mime in clown pants and a Superman sweatshirt, leading a

company of costumed Flower Children in musical enactments of the parables. As such, even the stage version came about five years too late. Flower Children were already trite stuff for all but those -- like myself -- who had just missed that bus flashing by at psychedelic speed. Godspell had to rise above the Flower Child, and it did so on the charm of Stephen Schwartz's musical score, on a glib mixture of stage technique and most especially on the vitality of its players.

By the time of the film's release, the sad old Flower Child was looking horribly, grotesquely passé. Godspell was a relic before it ever hit the screen. Its distributor, Columbia Pictures, didn't know how to market the thing. Nor did ABC TV, when they aired the movie, just once, a year later. After that, Godspell dropped out of sight faster than a brick in a murky pond. Its director managed to cop a good career for himself helming television mini-series, notably Rich Man, Poor Man and Roots. Of its actors, only Victor Garber (lately Goldie Hawn's Evil Ex in the film version of The First Wives Club) has carved out anything that remotely resembles name recognition, though a few -- among them Lynne Thigpen (currently host of the PBS children's series Where in The World is Carmen Sandiego) -- still turn up from time to time in films, commercials and sitcoms.

Given that Home Video didn't begin to take off until the mid-to-late eighties, it has still taken better than a decade -- nearly a quarter of a century after its screen release -- for Godspell to finally turn up on video. It is perhaps more difficult to market than ever -- Columbia has washed its hands of the picture, leaving its video release to a company called Bridgestone (we'll take a wild guess and call it a religious organization -- but we're not sure).

In 1973, it was not a movie to suit every taste. That remains true today. Modern viewers are likely to feel as if they have wandered into a Big Hair Convention by mistake. Whatever horror we might experience at the sight of '70s fashions and hairstyles is moderated somewhat by the device of setting the action outside of the real world, in a city outside of time, combined with the deliberate eclecticism of the costuming and performance styles; but Godspell is still very much a product of its decade. Nonetheless, it manages to survive the test of time quite well.

We love its playfulness, its color and joy; we love its cheerfully talented cast. Some critics, notably Judith Crist, objected to the funny voices, the deliberately broad performances, the skipping, the adults acting patently like children -- but these are essential to Godspell's theme: that we are all children in the face of Eternity, that to renew one's spirit is to become a child again. If that message has no meaning to you, then this is not your movie. If it does have meaning to you, then you need not be a Christian to enjoy what Godspell has to offer.

Director Greene brings a full range of film technique to bear on the material, an artist's eye and a dramatist's sensibility. He moves his camera only to achieve deliberate effect, and choreographs his shots as carefully as he does the actors. Joy is a terribly difficult emotion to convey, so easily brushed aside by audiences at the first sign of a false note. Yet Greene and his youthful cast succeed at infusing the entire film with Joy -- it is probably the last great Movie Musical to have been filmed, and one of the happiest ever.

All that is outrageous eventually becomes established: Godspell and its darker cousin Jesus Christ Superstar were roundly condemned at the time of their release by the religious right, whereas both are now, seemingly, being embraced by the same people. We raise our eyebrows at the thought that a religious distribution company is marketing a film that has the balls to present the Resurrection matter-of-factly as a metaphor, not as a physical event. For several months after we saw Godspell in its initial release, we walked around feeling very high-toned and religious, which seems as silly to us now as all of the marketing heebie-jeebies still surrounding the movie. Godspell the movie has about as much to do with religion as Robert Schuller, which is to say very little. What it really preaches is what the

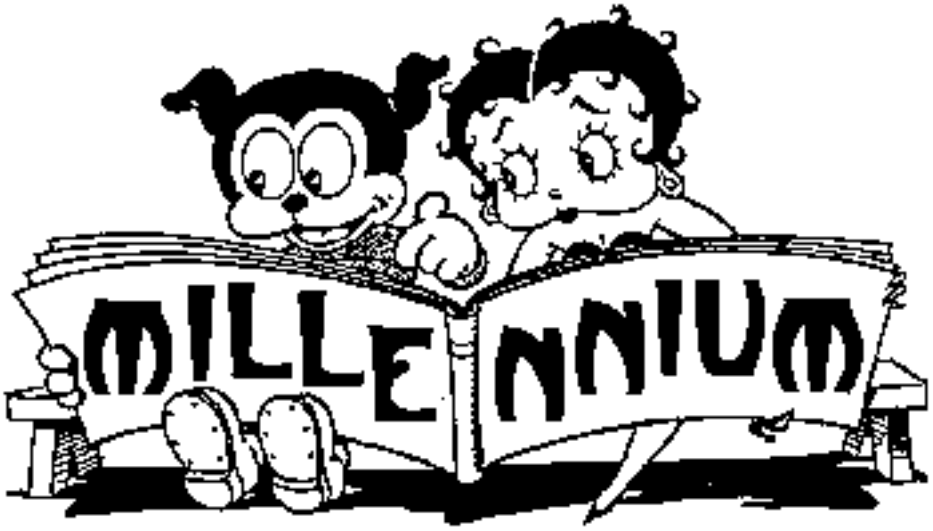
religious right likes to call Secular Humanism -- the Brotherhood of Mankind.

But even that message is not the film's primary concern. Godspell is a Director's Movie; just as the stage version was, more than anything else, about theatrical technique and the ways in which old stories can be freshened up with modern presentation, the film version is about the ways that film techniques can be applied to the same end. Renewal is its theme; how appropriate then, that it has been returned to us after all these years.

Next Issue: Made of Pen and Ink, She can Win You with a Wink! Betty Boop: The Definitive Collection!

Gee, Betty!
I kin hardly wait!

Oooh! You said it,
Bimbo!



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Click above for whys and wherefores.

Highgate Cemetery

A Memoir

In the spring of 1994, GM and I traveled to England and Scotland. For him it was a return trip; but for myself, as it had been for Helene Hanff in 84 Charing Cross Road and its sequel, The Duchess of Bloomsbury Street, this was the fulfillment of a life-long dream. At the time, I was recovering from yet another romantic disappointment, one of a long string of heart failures. This is some of what happened there, on a grey Wednesday morning in May:

After making a wrong tube stop in Highgate, where the station hides as nothing more than a doorway in the greenery at the dead end of a pretty, quiet suburban street, we made our way uphill (Swain's Lane is a narrow, tree-and-shrub lined path that climbs almost straight up from a densely urban avenue below) and crossed through a pleasing ramble of public gardens, finally arriving at the door to Highgate Cemetery. The iron gate was closed and locked, but there were hints of activity in the stone rooms beyond; we waited for half an hour with a gradually thickening group of men in business suits, tourist types and a young gang of mods, and at last were allowed through into what can only be described as a Fairyland of Death.

Admission was about a pound; GM had to pay extra for a camera permit. Video cameras are not allowed at all; mixed blessing then, that my batteries had gone dead two days before in Wales. Our guide was a middle-aged, blonde, boxy woman in a raincoat, plain and charming, who spoke from a base of knowledge rather than a prepared script. She gathered us all, rather more a mixed group than one finds in museums or galleries, in the stone-floored plaza beyond the gate, and told us of the private funeral company that had purchased this once-public cemetery, and had set out to make it a going concern that accommodated the rich and the middle class, devout and unbeliever alike. She told of the chapel divided into two halves, and the mechanized winch that lowered caskets onto a conveyor belt that carried them under Swain's Lane to the (newer) Eastern Cemetery. Then she led us on up a short flight of stone steps, and into the jungle of the Western Cemetery itself.

"Every tour I give is a bit different," she said. She explained that despite the constant restoration going on, nature had taken irrevocable hold over the grounds, and Highgate

Cemetery was now thought of as a nature preserve as much as an historic cemetery. We walked up past gothic copulas and angels choked with foliage. I recognized several stones right away from movies and from John Gay's fine book of Highgate Cemetery photographs, including the Raphaelite angel that graces that book's cover (a detail from that same photograph appears on the red and green tickets issued for both branches of the cemetery).

Not far along the path, we paused. One of the suited men was searching for a particular marker; our guide pointed to it from where we stood, but it was so buried in foliage that she had to promise to bring him by for a closer look, after the tour. No details about the marker, or the person it represented, were given; no mention of the man's relation, of his interest in the stone, was made. It remained a private transaction between him and the guide, though it was carried out in front of us all.

The tour lasted perhaps forty minutes, wending us up through the colossal faux-Egyptian archway that leads into Highgate's inner circle -- a nest of vaults set around (and into) a fifteen foot tall island with a tree growing high out of its middle. I imagined the roots of that tremendous tree twining down into the silent rooms below. We saw the vault where Radclyffe Hall had finally joined her lesbian lover, and the grave where Dickens's wife lies alone. We saw the famous lion tombstone that graces the grave of a menagerie owner. Missing from the tour were the faithful dog, the slumbering angel, the lamb and the balloon, the fireman's hat and the Thornton piano, those beautiful examples of Victorian stone carving and Victorian sentiment that had attracted me to Highgate in the first place. But it had been so long since I'd looked at John Gay's book that I didn't think to ask the guide if she would take us to them. Perhaps they had been overgrown and hidden by vines since Gay's time. Perhaps the guide was leaving us with an excuse to come back.

I would have liked the freedom to prowl and scout about on my own, but it's easy to see why the preservationist society that now owns Highgate can't operate any other way. These sad days, the only people who can see all of the place are the people who work there, among the stones, cleaning the marble, cutting back the green. As we went out I slipped a few additional pence into the society's donation cup; not much of a gift, but then again GM and I had decided to make the additional walk through the Eastern Cemetery; and to do that, one has to pay a wholly separate admission fee.

We crossed Swain's Lane. A much smaller gateway opened onto broad green grounds dotted with flowers. There, a funny, fumbling old man came down to us from a tiny gatehouse, gave us our tickets and pointed us in the direction of the more famous tombs. We went on.

The eastern wing of Highgate doesn't have nearly the Victorian charm, the gothic appeal of the western. It's not as old, not as wild, and the mixture of modern white tombstones among the more romantic, figural carvings tends to spoil the effect. But there are side trails leading off into heavily overgrown, almost forested, areas where black and grey slabs of stone jut out of the weed and vine. Here you can find a few carved angels pointing heavenward, or praying with their stone eyes turned down, their wings bowed steeply above their shoulders.

Free from the guide and the group, we walked all the way around the periphery of the yard. The grave of Karl Marx is impossible to miss: a huge block of granite topped by a formidable bust of the man looking noble and fiercely dignified over the heads of all who pass. As we approached, I saw a woman starting off down a side path, and I could no longer look at the stones. She was the double of my recently ex-girlfriend Cathryn. The hair was exactly right, the height was exactly right, as were the clothes, the walk, even the backpack that Cathryn had used on journeys. GM moved on; I hung back for a second look.

No, the profile was very slightly different; but the longer I looked, the more disoriented and confused I became. I knew that Cathryn was in Europe at the same time; this was a trip we had originally planned to make together.

GM and I had walked past George Sand's grave without seeing it, which was as good an excuse as any to turn back. The woman who might have been Cathryn came wandering back up the path, and turned south the way we had come, stopping first to gaze at the stones of some West Indian occupants. Even her manner was right. GM was looking for Sand's grave, and I pretended to help, but I wasn't much use: whenever the girl turned away I snuck a look, and each look made me less and less certain of myself. I thought, should I speak to her? If it isn't Cathryn, would my intrusion on the woman amount to assault? And if it is, would my speaking to her make any difference?

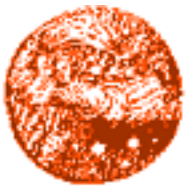
By then the woman was aware of me. From her manner she might have been thinking "Does he recognize me" or "that creep is staring at me." I thought it must be the latter, but how could I know? When I tried, inarticulately, to voice these thoughts to GM, he only said, "You're living in a dream world. Cathy's in Prague reading her poetry aloud in the bookstores."

And that was all. The Cathy doppelganger started off casually down the path, and GM and I went on in the other direction. We never did find George Sand's grave.

•

Walking back through the park we passed a duck pond and paused there to halloo the ducks. These ducks had been well treated by tourists: they came swimming towards us to the edge of the pond, looking for bread. One of the little baby ducks waddled bravely up the bank and hopped through the fencing onto the footpath. The more I tried to shoo him back the bolder they all got. A parade of baby ducks lined up behind me.

With several dogs running about nearby I worried that the ducks might get eaten if they didn't stay inside the fence. We ran away from there, and rolled on downhill to the Underground.



Click here for PT Barnum.

Marvel Comics

In December 1996, Marvel Comics filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. This came as no great surprise to comics industry insiders, who had known for some time that Marvel was barking up the wrong tree, or to comic readers above a certain age, for whom Marvel Comics had been dead for nearly a decade.

Marvel's decline began nearly twenty years ago when Jim Shooter was named editor-in-chief. Shooter promptly withdrew key creative controls from his writers and artists, and dissolved the position of writer/editor which in one form or another had been the key to Marvel's success since 1962. Much of Marvel's best talent immediately defected to other comics publishers, or to animation, where they had no more creative control than Shooter

would have allowed them; and their skills, to a great extent, began to deteriorate.

We will not dwell on Shooter's many faults; but he set Marvel on a downward spiral that continued and deepened when he was ousted from the company in the early '80s. Several changes of ownership and an increasingly oppressive corporate structure -- made up entirely of suited oafs with no understanding of or interest in comics as a form of entertainment, much less as an art form, eventually killed what had once seemed an indestructible giant. When Marvel execs hired out their longest running series to the creators of Image Comics late last year, it was in effect an admission of their own inability to produce comics that anyone with half a brain would care to read. But their selection of Image as the recipient of that contract merely compounded the error -- in effect, not only was Marvel unable to halt the downward spiral of their own product, they could not even hire the right people to do the job for them.

Spider-Man, The Fantastic Four, Captain America, Thor, Doctor Strange, Howard the Duck, Conan the Barbarian, The X-Men, The Incredible Hulk, all drank deeply from the spirit of their time. The Marvel combination of Soap Opera with Super Hero mythology was genius of a sort; a unique and powerful mixture with a flavor all its own. For people of a certain age and a certain way of thinking, the Marvel characters are a permanent fixture of cultural subconscious. They wander the misty byways of Eternity now, along with their progenitors: Doc Savage, The Shadow, Orphan Annie, Psyche, and a host of others…

•

Elizabeth Montgomery died in 1996; we knew her best as the sexy Samantha of Bewitched, but she kept busy after that show's demise in a variety of television films which departed from her Bewitched image more or less drastically. If her performances did not shake the earth or rattle the rafters, she was a good solid commercial actress nonetheless; we suspect that she worked in a lot of projects, Bewitched included, just to pay the bills, and that makes her all the more human to us.

Cancer took her; disease of one sort or another took a hard toll on the Bewitched crowd. They're all gone now. Of course Bewitched was not Shakespeare; it was not even an original idea. But it had a sense of light mischief, which we miss in modern programming, and it reflected its time. You could ask for more, but you won't get it.

•

Songs for Drella, a musical piece by Lou Reed and John Cale (Sire, 26140-4), is a heartfelt look at the life of Andy Warhol. It is billed as being entirely fictitious, and insofar as it tries to present the thoughts and feelings of Warhol himself that must be true. But where it reflects the vagaries, the ups and downs of Reed and Cale's longtime personal and professional association with Warhol, SONGS FOR DRELLA becomes very real. "No matter what I did it never seemed enough," Reed writes. "He said I was lazy, I said I was young / He said 'How many songs did you write?' / I'd written zero, I lied and said Ten. / 'You won't be young forever / You should have written fifteen.' / It's work, the most important thing is work."

Whether this is entirely factual or not, it still rings true. The lyrics are exceptionally strong and moving; the subject matter is as much the fragility of life and friendships as it is the life of Warhol. SONGS FOR DRELLA chronicles a difficult relationship, one where mutual respect

exists but accord cannot be reached. Love and honor are never more costly. "I really miss you, I really miss your mind / I haven't heard ideas like that in such a long, long time / I loved to watch you draw and watch you paint / But when I saw you last I turned away."

Musically, Reed and Cale, once the core of The Velvet Underground, create patterns that fit together like a precision timepiece. The one is thoughtful and hard-driving, the other thoughtful and melodic; middle age has caused them both to look back, with care and, sometimes, regret: "They really hated you, now all that's changed / But I have some resentments that can never be unmade / You hit me where it hurt, I didn't laugh / Your diaries are not a worthy epitaph."

You need not have been an admirer of Mr. Warhol to appreciate this work. It makes as eloquent a case as any for the value of Warhol's contribution, but it accomplishes so much more than that. Warhol never seemed quite human to Middle America while he was alive; Lou Reed and John Cale have chronicled a very human life indeed.

•

Robertson Davies died early in 1996; more than a novelist, he was an actor, teacher, playwright, newspaperman and raconteur who found great joy and amusement in life, a quality that infused his every project, whether fiction or essay, anecdote or review.

His novels include Fifth Business, The Manticore, World of Wonders (the loosely defined "Deptford Trilogy," in which two generations of men -- including a schoolmaster, a rationalist, and the greatest magician of the age -- find their lives shaped by a pebble in a snowball), What's Bred In The Bone (detailing a clergyman's search for the key to unlock the secret life of Francis Cornish -- benefactor, collector, artist, fakir), and his last, The Cunning Man, one of his best stories, pure Davies, in which an aging holistic physician examines the death of a priest, once a friend, and in so doing follows the vein of his own life and the lives of his friends from root to outermost branches.

Davies also wrote essays and criticism, always from his own holistic viewpoint, and these are as entertaining as any of his novels. We find that we do not always share his enthusiasms, though hearing of them is always a pleasure. He believed that life must be savored, not charged through, and this belief -- often religious and moralistic without ever becoming stern or sacrificing fun and mischief -- leaps from his writing into the souls of unsuspecting readers. Where other writers deliver appetizers, Davies always serves up a hearty eight course meal.

His books are so full of vitality that we cannot believe he is gone. We still check the shelves for new work by Robertson Davies every time we visit the bookstores… and are always disappointed to find that we've read all that's available, that there will be nothing more to come from this dedicated, charming and delightfully well-informed man.

His last published words, closing lines to The Cunning Man, are not merely prophetic: they are definitive: "…this is the Great Theater of Life. Admission is free but the taxation is mortal. You come when you can, and leave when you must. The show is continuous. Good-night."

The New Yorker

For twelve months in 1976-'77, I subscribed to The New Yorker. I was then eighteen years old. When the subscription ran out I did not bother to renew; not from dissatisfaction with the magazine, but because it had piled up so rapidly, once a week like clockwork, each issue filled with more than a week's worth of reading. I kept up with it at first; but there were other things that I wanted to read, and soon I was giving each new issue of The New Yorker a quick glance, maybe reading the stage and film reviews through, and then setting it aside onto a growing stack, telling myself that I would read them all cover to cover one day, when I had the time.

And once every other year or so I would pull out an issue and read it through. It was always worthwhile. Even then The New Yorker was not the magazine that it had once been; on the other hand, it still had a long way left to fall. Still, I never did get through that stack. Life went on; I always had plenty of reading to do.

The other day I thought about The New Yorker again. I went to my closet and took another issue off the top of the pile. Cover price one dollar. It was dated November 14, 1977. Twenty years gone by --

-- and looking at those back numbers of The New Yorker now is like taking a cold slap across the face. Two decades is a long time. Or so I always thought, when I was just eighteen.

The first thing that you notice is how old the magazines appear. I can remember looking at old magazines from twenty years or more before my time, and wondering if what was then The Present Day would ever seem so dated as those old magazines did at that moment. Well the answer is yes. Oh yes oh yes. Look here: On the back cover Zenith is advertising one of the first home VCRs: the thing's a dinosaur, big as a house; it has two knobs on the front and a row of push-buttons: you could fit three or more modern VCRs inside its casing. Look at the hairstyles. Look at the fat ties, the collars on men's shirts. Look at the design of the ads themselves: Cooper Black, Helvetica and worse. It's not that the styles are so horribly ugly -- but they are so indisputably Alien that it's hard to accept that we lived that way without noticing anything untoward.

Look at the theater listings: In the world of 1977, Yul Brynner, Jessica Tandy and Robert Preston are still alive and active on Broadway. Liza Minelli has The Act; Annie is still in first-run. Long runs include For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuff and, still, The Fantasticks. Frank Langella is starring in the Edward Gorey production of Dracula; an "impressive young playwright" named Michael Christofer (what happened to him? in the twenty years that have passed since, did he fulfull his promise?) has just premiered The Shadow Box. I saw both of those productions: the Gorey Dracula was pure theatrical hokum, I loved the hell out it; Shadow Box I saw later on a blind date with the young cousin of my father's illicit lover --let's not talk about that.

In the world of 1977, Star Wars is something new; but New York movie houses are still playing films like Children of Paradise, Deception and The Big Pond -- the latter starring Maurice Chevalier (when I mention Chevalier's name to slightly younger co-workers, they don't even know who I'm talking about, never 'eard of the man -- I'm only 38, this shouldn't be 'appening to me for anozzer twenty yairs).

In the world of 1977, Charles Addams is still drawing for The New Yorker. His cartoon in this issue is captionless; it is, as always, wonderful, whimsical, and it works in defiance of verbal description. We dig deeper: in the opening Talk of The Town section, alongside a beautifully written piece about humanity surviving in the midst of urban decay, we find a report on the First Annual Personal Computing Expo. A young man named Steven Jobs is in attendance, just a year out of his garage. The wry, understated superiority of the author leads us to believe that The New Yorker doesn't think much, in 1977, of the future of personal computing. On some level, the writer is correct: the personal computer as it existed then did not have much relevance to the world that we lived in. But we look back from the future. I am writing this piece on a personal computer, for an electronic magazine produced and distributed entirely by means of the personal computer: in the world of 1977, this was science fiction.

Something else you won't see in today's New Yorker: the fiction leads off with a new translation of a story by Bruno Schulz, a Polish surrealist writer gunned down by German troops in 1942. His work is difficult, but rewarding: his metaphoric visions are far more humane than Kafka's, and not nearly as burdened by adolescent paranoia. We doubt if the current editors of The New Yorker are familiar with his name.

In the world of 1977, writers are still allowed the freedom to roam. There are no photographs on the editorial side of The New Yorker: the burden of reportage falls upon words. E.B. White no longer contributes to the magazine, but there are others brought along in the White tradition: Calvin Trillin, Pauline Kael and Roger Angell are all in their prime, and have elbow room to make the most of it. In the world of 1977, the writers defined The New Yorker's distinctive attitude: perhaps it wasn't your attitude (it didn't entirely reflect mine), but Attitude nonetheless: one that refused to pander to changeable Style, and didn't care a whit if any individual was not Up to it.

When, two or three years ago, a copy of The New Yorker dated November 20, 1937 fell into my hands, I never suffered a moment's apprehension. I was not alive when it was published: a look at its theater listings is a look at ancient history: BABES IN ARMS, George M. Cohan, The Lunts, Broderick Crawford and Gertrude Lawrence; because I did not live through the time I'm immune from being made to feel old by its passing. What's impressive about The New Yorker of November 1937, as with the 1977 issue, is its freshness, its vitality, its relevance and interest to us so many years later. The writing is rock solid. The stories are real. The passage of time merely adds flavor.

To some degree, The New Yorker has changed more in the last twenty years than it ever did in the forty years between '37 and '77. We're not talking about the sort of cultural changes that are reflected in the magazine's advertisements, the fashions, the cars, the stylistic variance of ad design; we're talking about the magazine itself. Several of the cartoonists contributing to the 1937 issue were still contributing in 1977; the style of type and the tone of articles remained unchanged; the magazine managed to retain its former image and standards while keeping its contents fresh and contemporary. That's no longer true. Under Tina Brown, the queen of Pander, The New Yorker became a slave to fashion; in 1997, it survives only as an ugly imitation, a wholly separate magazine recognizable only by its name and a few -- much altered -- features. Most of those who feel that the "New" New Yorker is something great are people who never read the magazine in its prime, and wouldn't have liked it if they had.

As for the rest of us, there remains a lot of worthwhile reading in our future, if we can stand the cold douse of water from the past.

Recently, a well-meaning relative mailed us a list of "15 Principles to Live By." We are as open to self-improvement as the next person, but this list was clearly written by someone who had quaffed too deeply of the Tom Peters cup: what bothered us perhaps more than the actual principles was the effusive earnestness of the thing, as though it had been written by a desperately nervous, jumpy little yappy dog in a three piece suit, the sort of Business Animal that has had its nose to so many sets of hindquarters that it has come to enjoy the smell. "Early to Work, Late to Leave" he extolls. Well, that's easy enough to agree with, so long as one remains one's own master. But it becomes a lot harder to swallow when applied to 99% of the slavish jobs into which most people sell themselves. Here, then, is a list of principles for the rest of us:

15 Principles to Live By that Tom Peters never learned:

1) It's Only A Job.

2) It's Not Your Life.

3) Your Life Is What You Do OUTSIDE Of Work. This could mean community service, writing a novel, raising a family, growing a garden, making art, publishing a 'zine, starting a business of your own -- whatever gives you a sense of accomplishment or fulfullment.

4) Your job is important only insofar as it allows you to maintain a life. It does not exist to give you a sense of fullfillment. It exists only as a means to an end.

5) Any time that is not specifically being paid for by the company is YOUR time.

6) YOUR time belongs to YOU, not to the company.

7) Being a good little donkey will not impress anybody: not the people above you nor the people below you. If you choose to donate your free time to the company when you could be out having a life, the company will not think

any better of you for doing so; it will only realize that here is a poor dumb sap who is willing to give up time out of his life in order to do meaningless donkey work for the company -- and it will respond by giving you MORE meaningless donkey work and asking that you give it MORE time out of your life.

8) If you sacrifice your time to the donkey masters you will not have the time to become an individual. If you sacrifice your individuality to the donkey masters, you will have nothing to show for your life.

9) Question Authority. Authority never has YOUR best interests as an individual in mind.

10) You are not a cell of a Group Mind: you are an individual. Groups can easily be crippled; it takes much more to cripple a strong-willed individual.

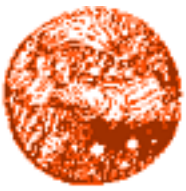
11) Never play their game. Always have a game of your own that you can play behind their backs.

12) Enthusuasm is all well and good -- but too much of it is the mark of a phony person.

13) Develop principles for your own life -- don't just adopt other people's. Don't let others tell you that you are being negative just because your standards are higher than theirs.

14) It's only a job, It's only a job, It's only a job, It's only a job.

15) Death is waiting with a grin on his face -- Death does not care how you spent your life. Death does not care how you justify your existance. Death knows that time is brief: if you give your time to the donkey masters death will just shrug his shoulders and say, "Next."



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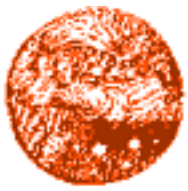

Letters, Editorials and Mud from the editors and readers of MILLENIUM.

'Twas always thus: while small towns go down the drain, and the working class continues to take its hardest beating since the Great Depression, the Senate and House of Representatives busily debate such items of earth-shattering importance as the Balanced Budget Amendment and the so-called desecration of the flag.

Reps and Senators love these issues because it gives people the impression that Congress is actually doing something. They get to make a lot of speeches, rattle their sabers, puff out their chests, all the while winking slyly at each other with the certain knowledge that all this sound and fury will enable them to get through another session without having to put their jobs on the line over anything genuinely important. Issues like social security, welfare, subsidies, grossly bloated military spending, freedom of choice and the poor all get swept neatly under the rug, where they won't cost anyone an election. By this reasoning, the American people are treated like cattle, dumbed-down on a diet of patriotism and principle so abstract as to be meaningless in the real world.

By embodying our flag as an object of political debate, they lower our national values to the level of farce. Those brave men and women who fought, died and were maimed in our wars did not fight to protect a scrap of cloth. They fought for principles. Cloth doesn't mean a god-damned thing. Principles do. One of the principles that they fought for was freedom of speech. And one of the things that speech involves is the use of symbols to convey meaning. The American flag is a symbol, nothing more. As long as it has meaning as symbol, we have to have the right to use it as a means of expression, and sometimes that means using it to express negative things. To abolish so-called desecration of the flag flies in the face of the first amendment. To give such a dictum an amendment of its own is to turn the Constitution into a contradictory, schizophrenic mess. This is a non-issue. It has no place on the House floor. But Congress loves it, because it gets our blood pumping and makes us forget that Big Corporations and the very wealthy are systematically exterminating the working class.

Likewise, the Balanced Budget Amendment. In supporting this, the Republicans lose sight of two important facts: that Republican presidents increased the country's deficit by a greater margin than any other regime in history, and that balancing the budget could be achieved tomorrow with a single vote, if Congress really wanted to do it.

Perish forbid. Far better to vote for an amendment that puts on a good show, looks good on the surface, but accomplishes nothing and disappears when you turn it sideways. Congress will never balance the budget, because it involves dealing with real issues, something they are not prepared to do. It also involves letting the other guy take credit. No matter who is in power, Democrat or Republican, the opposition will never allow an

incumbent president to look good.

-- RICHARD AINLEY

(reprinted from MILLENNIUM print version vol. 1 #2)

Add to the list of meaningless issues: Term Limitations.

A lot of representatives are making themselves look busy with this one, in apparent ignorance of the fact that we live in a democracy and are given the opportunity every two to four years to vote the bastards out of office. We dislike Jesse Helms as much as the next person: but if his constituency is dumb enough to return him to the Senate every six years, who are we to stand in the way? Like it or not, the voice of the people is always heard. Voters get what they deserve. Those in favor of Term Limitations are, in effect, in favor of manipulating the elective process to their own ends. Which is why it should come as no surprise that Term Limitations are a favorite issue of Ross Perot.

•

Studying the different types of personality which make up the management structure of a corporation can be nearly as much harmless fun as classifying ducks. With the notion that the individual is an endangered species in American culture which must be protected from predators, we present this Field Guide to Corporate Management.

Starting at the top, and working our way down, we find that a new strain of Suit is proliferating wildly among corporations which are owned or controlled by second-or-third generation family members, consortiums, or other small groups. This is Axemanicus Androidius, the Hatchet Man, who builds his reputation by creating short-term profits and then moving on quickly before the consequences can take hold. He strives to be terribly honest and terribly realistic, and succeeds to the extent that he is just plain terrible. His most common trait is to mask a tendency for micro-management and interference as friendliness. When he says he is "taking an interest" he is really taking notes. He claims to bring innovation to each business that hires him -- but his repertoire consists mainly of gutting the staff to the point of austerity for those who remain. He is easily recognizable by the cut of his suit, the special furniture that he brings with him, by the $75 haircut that he gets every three weeks, and by the expression of comic-melodrama villainy that he wears whenever a lower level employee displays an ounce of individuality. This species of executive is dangerous only if he does not speak to you; because he wishes to keep layoffs impersonal, he is not likely to seek close association with those whose positions he intends to cut.

Because he understands that the only way any conquering army can be successful is to kill or deport the natives, he will quickly replace existing management with tools of his own choosing. These "Body Snatcher" mid-level managers also fall into distinct categories:

• The Evil H.R. Director (Satannus Servius). This species has been accurately classified by "Dilbert" creator Scott Adams as having a bland, warm and fuzzy outward appearance which conceals the personality of Vlad the Impaler. Left to her own devices, she will create the sort of business atmosphere that leaves lower level employees feeling uncomfortably as if they have died and been condemned to spend Eternity as a freshman in High School. She prefers to remain invisible most of the time, appearing only to administer punishment to Square Pegs and to make announcements, usually delivered with a benign smile on her lips, that one or

more of your benefits are about to be cut.

• The Mid-level Weasel (Sloberous Droolicus); a strange combination of over-zealous whacko and bouncing, bounding, drooling puppy dog, ready with pep speeches and illusory programs, long on talk but very short on intelligent content. Marked by bland suits and the wearing of raincoats in sunny weather, the mid-level weasel believes strongly in sneak attacks and frequent unannounced appearances to keep his employees in line. Like those above him, he will not tolerate dissension; but his notion of dissension is often much more broadly defined, up to and including your refusal to work unpaid overtime. The epitome of what Eric Hoffer described when he coined the term "True Believer," this type frequently wears his religion on his sleeve, though his True God is more likely to be Tom Peters than one of the more established saviors. He will make promises that he has no intention of keeping, and will attempt to manipulate events both above and below his natural level. Though married, he will pursue his female employees with impunity, even when they are married or partnered with other employees. He thinks of himself as a wonderful person, and accusations of untrustworthiness will wound him deeply, without causing him to improve his behavior to any notable degree. He believes that the lives of his employees are his to control -- and because of the power that he wields, he is very often correct.

• The Gladhander In Over His Head (Smilicus Prettius), most often a salesman risen from the ranks merely on the strength of his ability to talk the talk while sliding the knife in from another angle. Notable primarily for having no discernible personality of his own, for his ability to mimic what he considers to be higher forms of life, and for his eagerness to report any sort of irregularity, no matter how insignificant, to his superiors. Far from being the sharpest blade, he is most likely to blame his own mistakes on others. He possesses a keen understanding of those above him on the corporate ladder, but is inclined to lump all those below him into a single category: which, potentially, can be the source of his downfall.

The Harmless Good Fun of all this classification is somewhat dimmed by the realization that It's All True. It is disturbing to think that millions of Americans are reading Dilbert each day and thinking, "Oh my God! That's my boss! Those are the people I work with! This is my life!"

What's more disturbing is that I expressed that thought to my boss, and he agreed.

-- RICHARD AINLEY

•

We heard a story the other day about a device attached to power meters by which the power company can limit the amount of electricity available to their customers; in this case, an elderly customer who had fallen behind in her bills was having her power rationed on a day-to-day basis; the minute her power limit for the day was exceeded, the regulator cut in and shut her down cold.

That same day, we learned that the Kremlin once controlled Russian media by the same means: limiting the available power.

And we sit here at our computer, with our radio playing softly behind, reading lamp burning on the desk at our side, warm in the winter night thanks to the oil burner in our

basement that runs on electricity, and suddenly we realize how vulnerable we are. A generator in the barn would provide us with enough electricity to power our heat and a single lamp; barely enough to live by -- not nearly enough to prosper by.

Now, we pay our bills on time so it isn't likely that the power company will come and shut us down. And we're not members of any extremist groups -- we don't see conspiracies or space aliens in every shadowy corner. But without power, all of the things by which we make our living and entertain ourselves suddenly become overpriced paperweights.

Not everyone is Roy Underhill. Mr. Underhill, who for the last decade or more has been hosting a PBS television show called The Woodwright's Shop, is the philosophical opposite of Norm Peterson, also a PBS broadcasting woodworker with two weekly shows (The Yankee Workshop and This Old House). Where Mr. Peterson doesn't do anything if it can't be done with a power tool (more as a result of the healthy support grants his show draws from power tool manufacturers than from laziness, we suspect), Mr. Underhill does absolutely everything by hand, using exhausting hand and arm and leg-powered tools frequently made by himself. By the end of his half-hour program, he is often huffing and puffing from the exertion; the image he cultivates is that of a man who has never so much as laid eyes on anything with a plug attached to it.

We admire Mr. Underhill, and wish that we had his patience. But in the end, even Roy Underhill needs electricity to get his message out. Without power, his television show fades to black; the books that have emerged from his series would cease to be printed or distributed.

Our point is, of course we can survive and be comfortable without electricity. If the power companies shut us down tomorrow, we could probably find other means of getting our message out. But it would be a long dark night in the meantime.

-- RICHARD AINLEY.

•

Dear MILLENNIUM;

I'm convinced that my boss is Satan. What should I do?

-- TERRIFIED IN TOLEDO.

A) Get in line. B) Read "Resume With Monsters," by William Browning Spencer. C) Remember that you can't kill Satan with a stake through the heart. D) DO NOT let Satan know you suspect him. E) Adopt a blank work expression that is neither happy nor sad, and spend as much work time as possible on projects of your own.

•

In December 1996 the following letter turned up in our local newspaper. We tracked down the original copy, and are reprinting it here without alteration or revision of any

kind. Get out your violins. We'll meet you on the other side and explain why we're doing this.

Eugene P. McConville
President, International Union,
UNITED PLANT GUARD WORKERS OF AMERICA (UPGWA)
International Headquarters: 25510 Kelly Road,
Roseville, MI 48066

December 4, 1996

Dear Brothers and Sisters;

It appears that big business, namely Kimberly Clark, still does not get it. When you terminate employees without notice nor compassion, as was done to our Brothers at the Kimberly Clark facility in Winslow, Maine, it is insensitive, unfeeling and downright unconscionable.

For Kimberly Clark to order their puppet, Protection Technology, to call people at 5 AM to terminate their employment is downright shameless. Certainly, PTI was only doing what they were told to do by Kimberly Clark because they lost their contract due to the fact that Kimberly Clark wanted to rid themselves of eight dedicated Security Officers.

The reason is very simple. These eight professional Security Officers who did a commendable job for Scott Paper Co. for years, would not march to the Kimberly Clark beat and would not bow to their wishes. Kimberly Clark Management took over the facility without totally comprehending the interworkings of the Security Department. Instead of working with our long-term Security Officers to learn the operation so they would better understand the situation, Kimberly Clark Managers, decided to get rid of the only employees who fully understood the operation. Sad, but certainly true. Instead of finding common ground, as any reasonable employer would do, they chose what they perceived as the easy way out. They chose to dedicate these dedicated and professional employees and bring in their own robots who would march to Kimberly Clark's beat and bow to their every wish. In order to accomplish their goal, they hid in the darkness of night and had PTI do their dirty work.

Well, I have this message for Kimberly Clark. "You can run but you can't hide." The UPGWA will do everything within its power to expose you for what you are -- an anti-union, union-busting, vindictive employer. You didn't think twice when you forced the termination of our Security Officers and took their livelihoods away from both them and their families. Yes, let's not forget their families. No health benefits, no income, no advanced education for the employee or his family.

I hope that all who had a hand in this dastardly deed will think of our members and their families during the Holidays. As you and your family are opening your Christmas presents this year, just pause a minute to consider where you and your family would be without any income, health insurance or the opportunity for advanced education.

We will never forget this unwarranted and unforgiving action against our members, their families and the labor movement.

Sincerely and fraternally,

(signed)
Eugene P. McConville
International President

Hello, it's us again. This letter had us rolling our eyes and wrinkling our noses in disgust, though not in the manner its author intended. The cause it discusses is one that we could sympathize with, if not one that we could necessarily get behind in any activist sense. But we believe that Mr. McConville has shot himself in the foot. His letter is filled with melodrama and cliché, illiteracy and Neanderthal chest-thumping. We can't imagine that anyone, much less Kimberly Clark, would take Mr. McConville seriously.

If you want to beat the enemy, you have to play the game as well as they do. Preferably better. You have to be able to communicate, to dominate the press, to sway public opinion. You have to be able to predict their moves, outmaneuver them, and conquer them on their own terms. We do not believe that Kimberly Clark is losing any sleep over this puffed-up rooster-crow of a letter. Quite the opposite; we believe that they are reading it aloud in their boardroom and having a merry old laugh.

-- RICHARD AINLEY.

Slings and Arrows is open to your contributions! Send us your thoughts, hopes, dreams and brickbats. You'll find our address elsewhere in this issue.


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Next Section

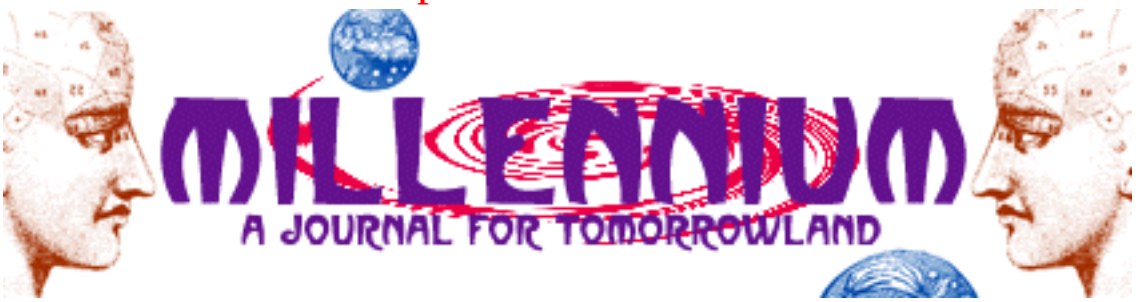

-- Guerilla publishing that stirs things up!

RR1 Box 1990, Albion ME 04910

If you missed issue #1 of the MILLENNIUM E-Zine, send us a blank disk and a self-addressed, stamped envelope, specify issue #1, and we'll send it post haste. Or send $2 to cover disk & mailing costs. Click on the for a list of contents.

The E-zine isn't all! Check below for our full line of printed magazines!

Back issues of the print version are still available!



Quantities are limited. Each issue is 16 - 20 pages of top-notch writing with a nod and a wink. 5.5" x 8.5" on quality paper with bright covers. 75¢ the copy to cover mailing costs. Click on the cover of each issue to view its contents.

A JOURNAL FOR TOMORROWLAND

COMIC BOOKS

QUIRK travels throughout the multiverse with his pals CARPY, SMITH and SLUDGE. Trouble follows them EVERYWHERE, and SO CAN YOU -- with these LIMITED EDITION COMICS from DUCK SOUP PRODUCTIONS! You'll witness Quirk's

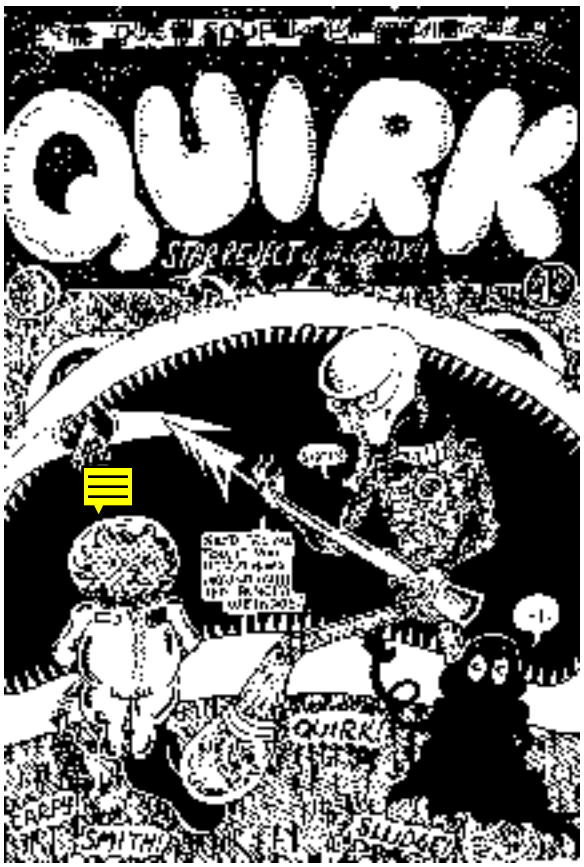
hardboiled struggle with the forces of solemnity in "THE HUMOR AGENCY" (Quirk #2), as well as his encounter with the last of the great STAR-WHALES in "ISLAND IN THE SKY" (Quirk #1). And don't forget to follow Quirk's adventures in every issue of the print MILLENNIUM (above)!

• Each issue of QUIRK is magazine-sized, with single-color covers, 24 or 32 pages printed on quality paper. Click on the covers for a description of contents.
$2 @ postpaid from the above address.

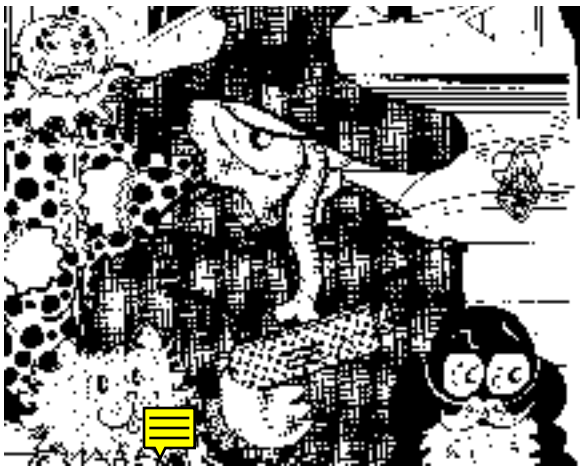
Order Form

Contents Page

Print



Goodbye.



Order Form

Please circle the items you wish to order.

MILLENNIUM E-ZINES: $2 @ postpaid or FREE with disk and S.A.S.E:

#1 #2

MILLENNIUM PRINT ZINES: 75 cents each postpaid.

#3 #4 #5 #6

QUIRK COMIC BOOKS: $2 each postpaid.

#1 #2

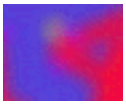
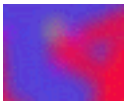
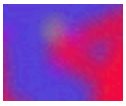
Name:_____

Address:_____

City:_____ State:_____Zip:_____

Where I found out about Millennium:_____

Mail To: DUCK SOUP PRODUCTIONS, RR1 Box 1990, Albion, ME 04910. Overseas orders add $1 shipping. Allow 4 weeks for delivery.

 Print. Page  One Quit. 

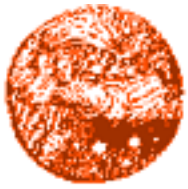
COMICS

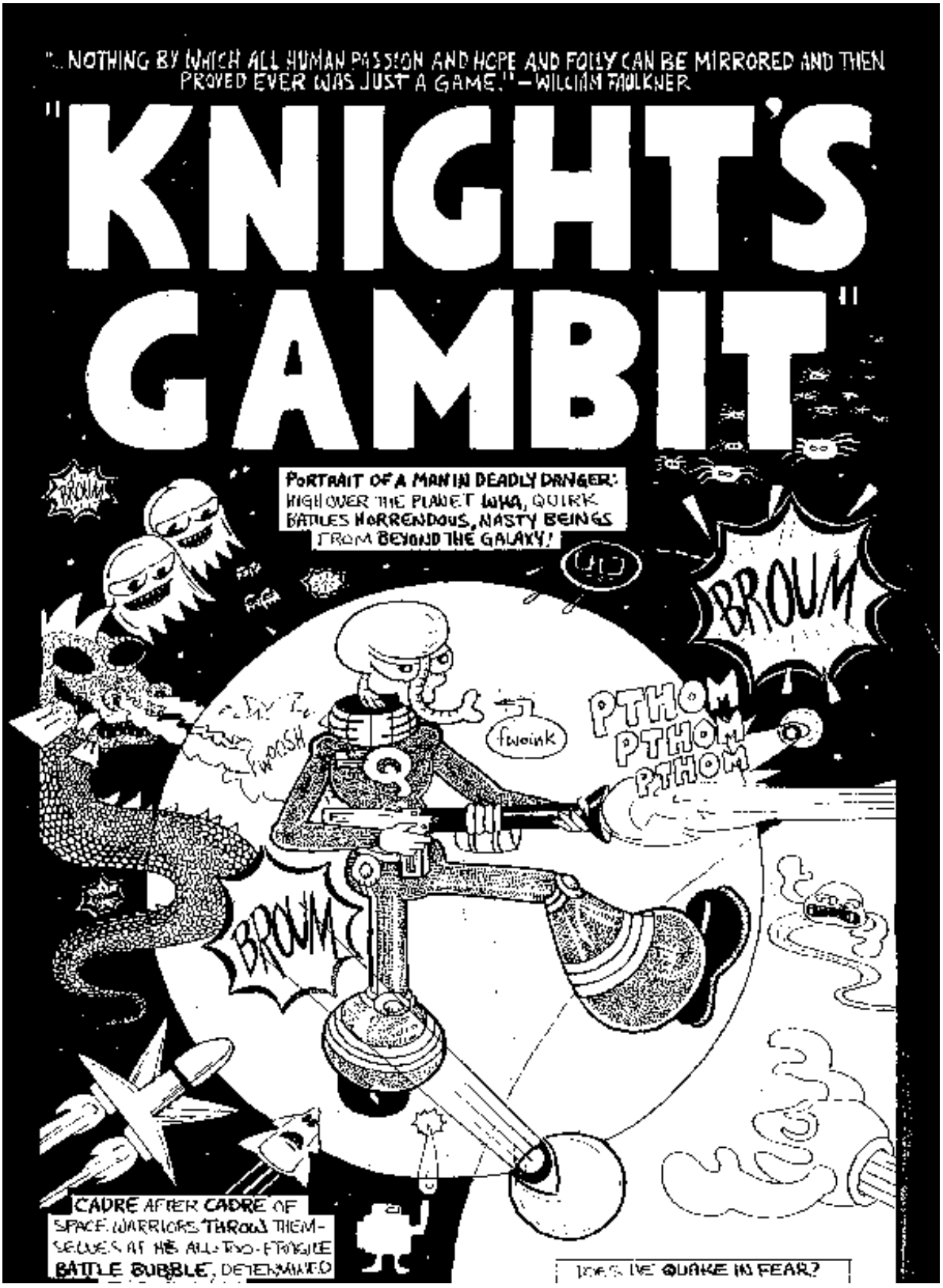
TINSEL TOWN, the comics feature slated to premiere in this issue, has been postponed. In its place we offer part one of an all-new story of QUIRK and the crew of the starhopping FRIGID. A click on any comic panel will move you to the next page. For background info on Quirk and his pals, turn to the DSP page of this issue.

"Nothing by which all human passion and hope and folly can be mirrored and then proved ever was just a game."

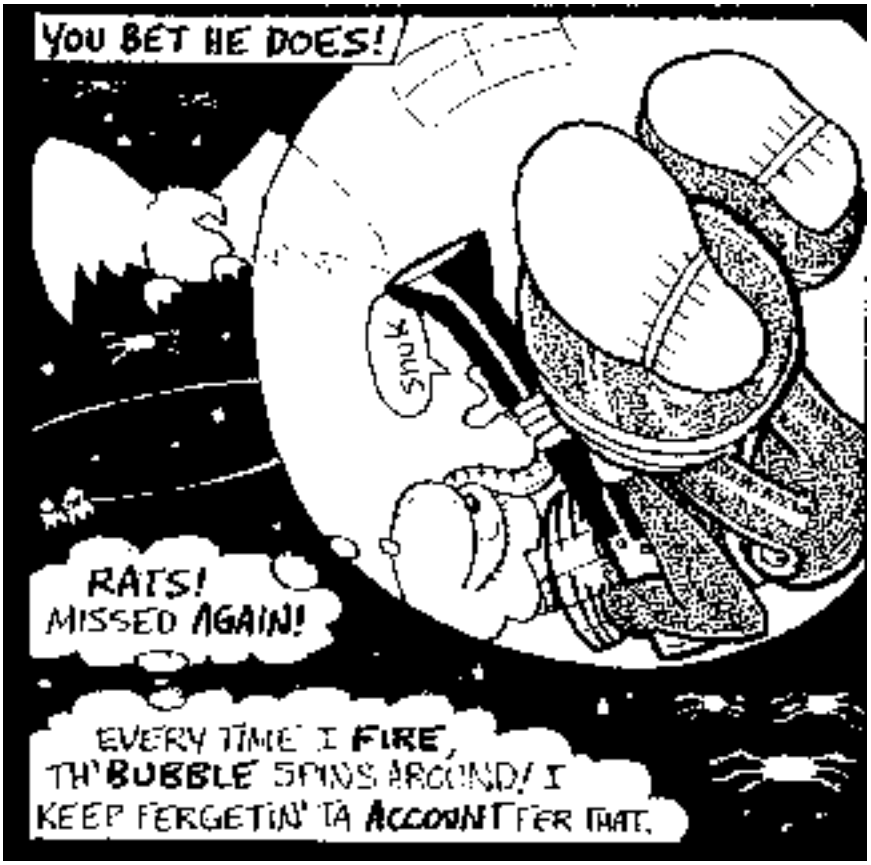
-- William Faulkner.

BEGIN.



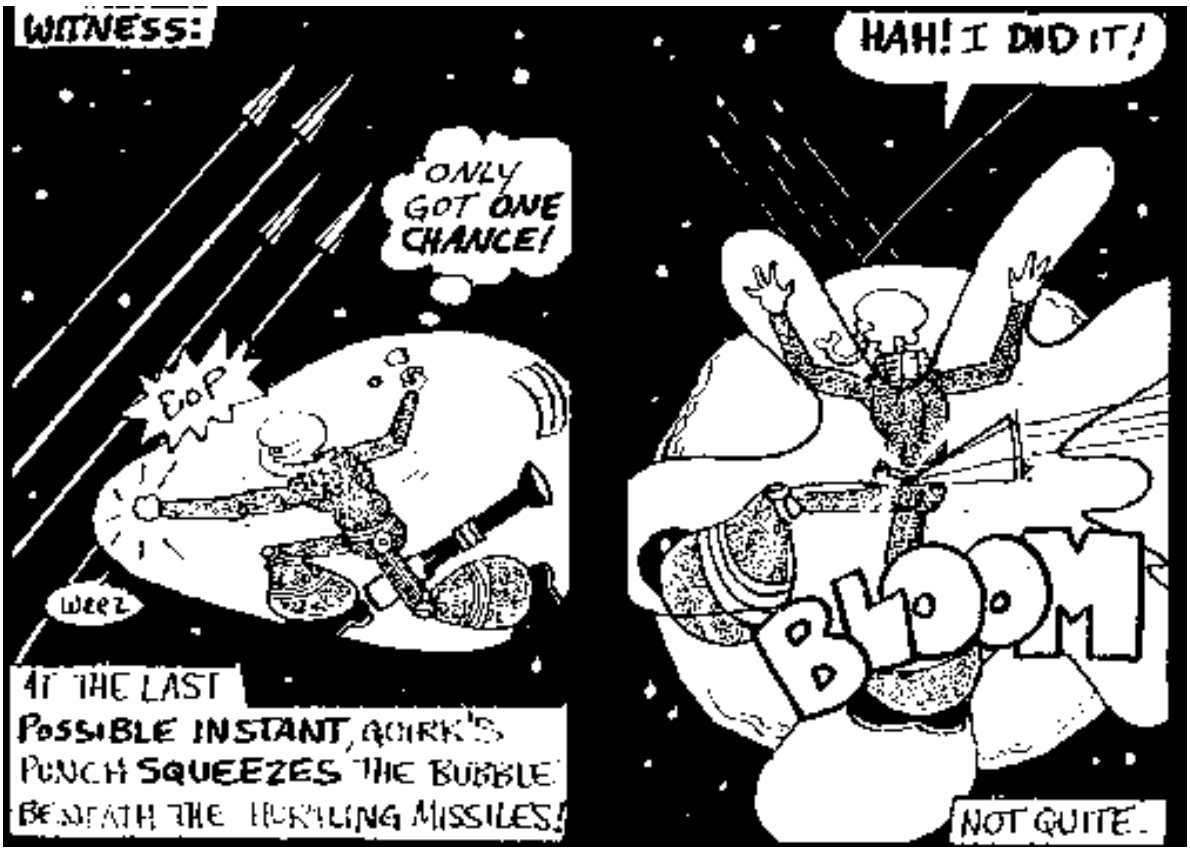

"...NOTHING BY WHICH ALL HUMAN PASSION AND HOPE AND FOLLY CAN BE MIRRORED AND THEN PROVED EVER WAS JUST A GAME." —WILLIAM FAULKNER
"KNIGHT'S GAMBIT"
PORTRAIT OF A MAN IN DEADLY DANGER: HIGH OVER THE PLANET WHA, QUIRK BATTLES HORRENDOUS, NASTY BEINGS FROM BEYOND THE GALAXY!
BROUM
fweink
PTHOM PTHOM PTHOM
BROUM
CADRE AFTER CADRE OF SPACE WARRIORS THROW THEMSELVES AT HIS ALL-TOO-ETHEREAL BATTLE BUBBLE, DETERMINED
DOES HE QUAKE IN FEAR?

Quirk part one



Quirk part one

Quirk part one



Quirk part one

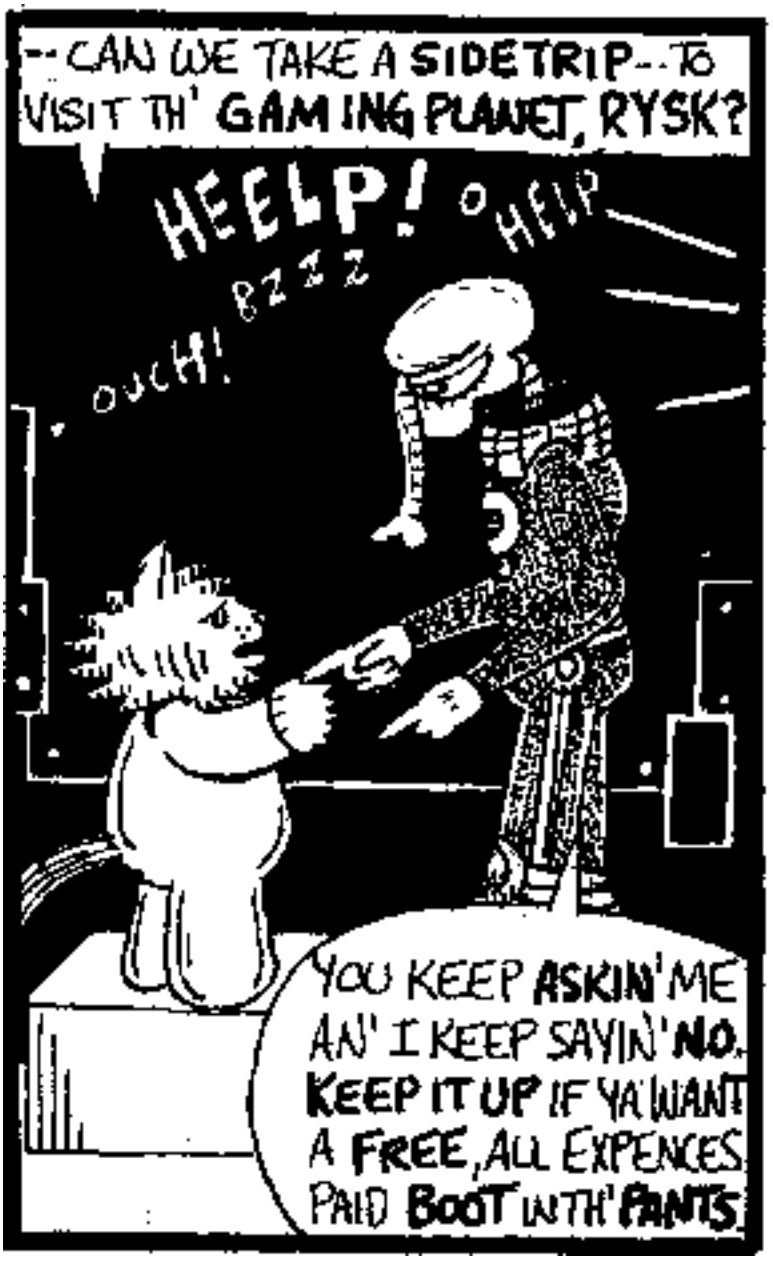
Quirk part one

Quirk part one

Quirk Part One


I LIKE IT! IT'S RELAXING!
YAH, IF YA LIKE BEIN' WORKED OVER BY LIGHT-EMITTING DIODES.
SWISH
BRAHAAP
YEEK
SMITH
UM... QUIRK.. I KNOW HOW YOU FEEL... ABOUT GAMES AN' ALL, BUT...

Quirk part one



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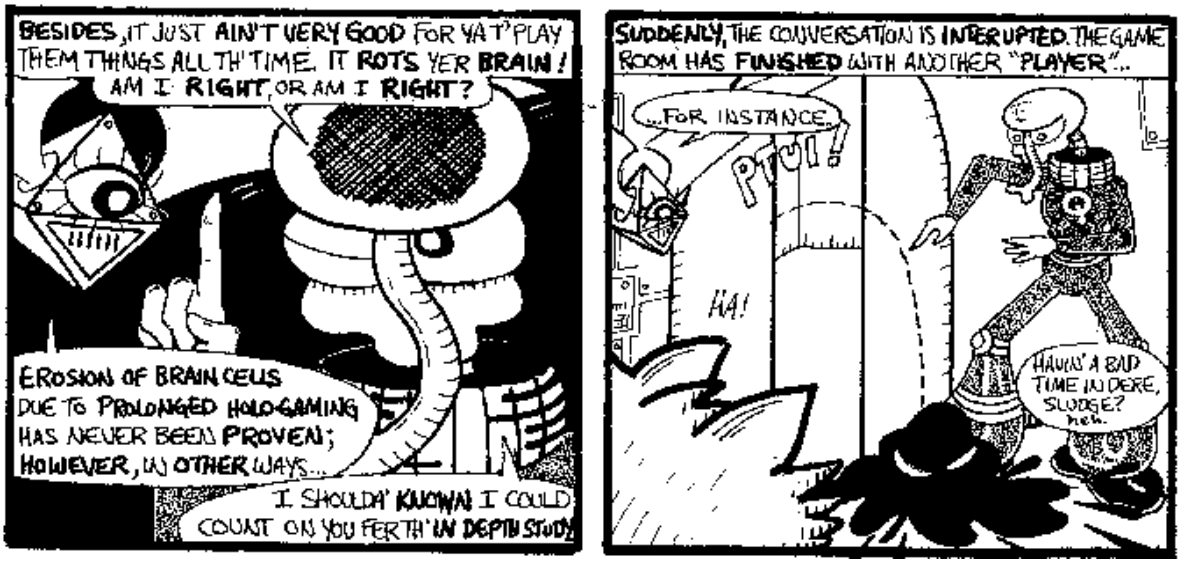

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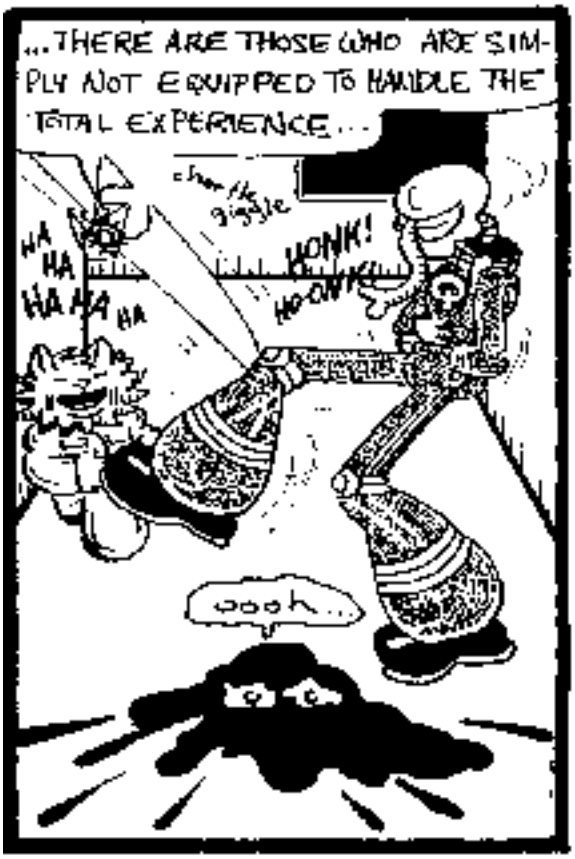

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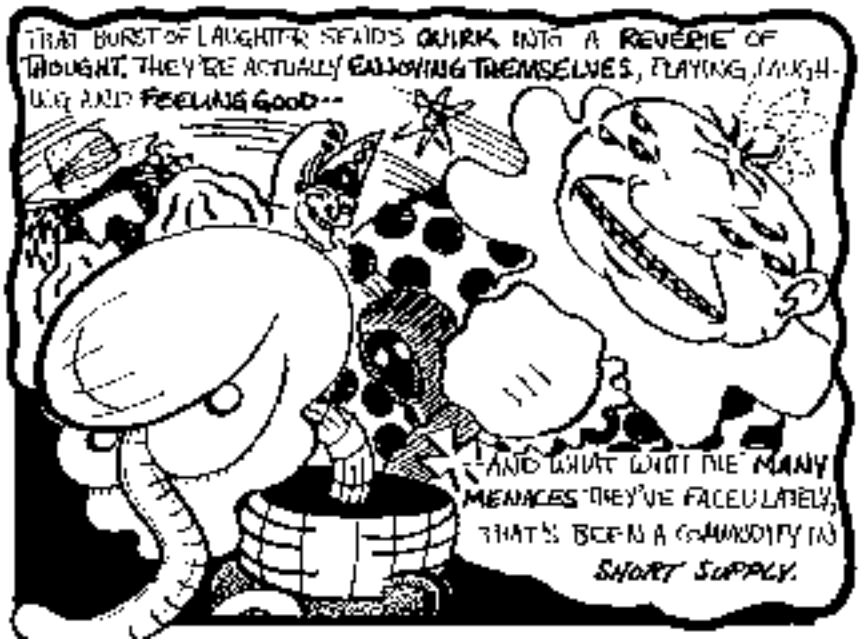

Quirk part one

Quirk part one

Quirk part one

Quirk part one

NEXT ISSUE: RYSK!

Are the boys in for a FREE RIDE -- or a GAME of DEATH?

Our

Man of the Millennium:

PHINEAS T. BARNUM.

P.T. BARNUM

Starting in this issue, MILLENNIUM will present the complete original autobiography of Mr. Phineas Taylor Barnum. We believe that no single

man, not even Walter Disney, so well represents America as it was, as it became, and as it will become as does Mr. Barnum. Though many biographies have been written and filmed about the man, his own official autobiography has been out of print for years. To the modern reader, it is long-winded and archaic; but we believe that these are not necessarily bad qualities, and that Barnum's autobiography will reward careful attention. Herewith we offer Chapter one, part one. Clicking the button at the bottom of the page will return you to the Nécrologie page.

•

STRUGGLES AND TRIUMPHS;

or,

FORTY YEARS' RECOLLECTIONS

of

P.T. BARNUM.

WRITTEN BY HIMSELF

•

CHAPTER I

EARLY LIFE

I was born in the town of Bethel, in the state of Connecticut, July 5, 1810. My name, Phineas Taylor, is derived from my maternal grandfather, who was a great wag in his way, and who, as I was his first grandchild, handed over to his daughter Irena, my mother, at my christening, a gift-deed, in my behalf, of five acres of land, called "Ivy Island," situated in that part of the parish of Bethel known as the "Plum Trees."

My father, Philo Barnum, was the son of Ephraim Barnum, of Bethel, who was a captain in the revolutionary war. My father was a tailor, a farmer, and sometimes a tavern-keeper, and my advantages and disadvantages were such as fall to the general run of farmers' boys. I drove cows to and from the pasture, shelled corn, weeded the garden; as I grew larger I rode horse for ploughing, turned and raked hay; in due time I handled the shovel and the hoe, and when I could do so I went to school.

I was six years old when I began to go to school, and the first date I remember inscribing upon my writing-book was 1818. The ferule, in those days, was the assistant school-master. I was a willing, and, I think, a pretty apt scholar. In arithmetic I was unusually ready and accurate, and I remember, at the age of ten years, being called out of bed one night by my teacher, who had wagered with a neighbor that I could calculate the correct number of feet in a load of wood in five minutes. The dimensions given, I figured out the result in less than two minutes, to the great delight of my teacher and to the equal astonishment of my neighbor.

My organ of "acquisitiveness" was manifest at an early age. Before I was five years of age I began to accumulate pennies and "four-pences," and when I was six years old my capital amounted to a sum sufficient to exchange for a silver dollar, the possession of which made me feel far richer than I have ever since felt in the world.

Nor did my dollar long remain alone. As I grew older I earned ten cents a day for riding the horse which led the ox-team in ploughing, and on holidays and "training days," instead of spending money, I earned it. I was a small peddler of molasses candy (of home make), ginger-bread, cookies and cherry rum, and I generally found myself a dollar or two richer at the end of a holiday than I was at the beginning. By the time I was twelve years old, besides other property, I was the owner of a sheep and a calf, and should soon, no doubt, have become a small Croesus, had not my father kindly permitted me to purchase my own clothing, which somewhat reduced my little store.

When I was nearly twelve years old I made my first visit to the metropolis. It happened in this wise: Late one afternoon in January, 1822, Mr. Daniel Brown, of Southbury, Connecticut, arrived at my father's tavern, in Bethel, with some fat cattle he was driving to New York to sell, and put up for the night. After supper hearing Mr. Brown say to my father that he intended to buy more cattle, and that he would be glad to hire a boy to assist in driving them, I immediately besought my father to secure the situation for me, and he did so. My mother's consent was gained, and at daylight next morning I started on foot in the midst of a heavy snow storm to help drive the cattle. Before reaching Ridgefield I was sent on horseback after a stray ox, and, in galloping, the horse fell and my ankle was sprained. I suffered severely, but did not complain lest my employer should send me back. We arrived at New York in three or four days, and put up at the Bull's Head Tavern, where we were to stay a week while the drover disposed of his cattle. It was an eventful week for me. Before I left home my mother had given me a dollar which I supposed would supply every want that heart could wish. My first outlay was for oranges which I was told were four pence apiece, and as "four pence" in Connecticut was six cents I offered ten cents for two oranges, which was of course readily taken; and thus, instead of saving two cents, as I thought, I actually paid two cents more than the price demanded. I then bought two more oranges, reducing my capital to eighty cents. Thirty-one cents was the "charge" for a small gun which would "go off" and send a stick some little distance, and this gun I bought. Amusing myself with this toy in the bar-room of the Bull's Head, the arrow happened to hit the bar-keeper, who forthwith came from behind the counter and shook me, and soundly boxed my ears, telling me to put that gun out of the way or he would put it into the fire. I sneaked to my room, put my treasure under the pillow, and went out for another visit to the toy shop.

There I invested six cents in "torpedoes," with which I intended to astonish my schoolmates in Bethel. I could not refrain, however, from experimenting upon the guests of

the hotel, which I did when they were going in to dinner. I threw two of the torpedoes against the wall of the hotel through which the guests were passing, and the immediate results were as follows: two loud reports, -- atonished guests, -- irate landlord, -- discovery of the culprit, and summary punishment -- for the landlord immediately floored me with a single blow with his open hand, and said:

"There, you little greenhorn, see if that will teach you better than to explode your infernal fire-crackers in my house again."

The lesson was sufficient if not entirely satisfactory. I deposited the balance of the torpedoes with my gun, and as a solace for my wounded feelings I again visited the toy shop, where I bought a watch, breastpin and top, leaving but eleven cents of my original dollar.

The following morning found me again at the fascinating toy shop, where I saw a beautiful knife with two blades, a gimlet, and a corkscrew, -- a whole carpenter shop in miniature, and all for thirty-one cents. But, alas! I had only eleven cents. Have that knife I must, however, and so I proposed to the shop woman to take back the top and breastpin at a slight deduction, and with my eleven cents to let me have the knife. The kind creature consented, and this makes memorable my first "swap." Some fine and nearly white molasses candy then caught my eye, and I proposed to trade the watch for its equivalent in candy. The transaction was made and the candy was so delicious that before night my gun was absorned in the same way. The next morning the torpedoes "went off" in the same direction, and before night even my beloved knife was similarly exchanged. My money and goods all gone, I traded two pocket handkerchiefs and an extra pair of stockings I was sure I should not want for nine more rolls of molasses candy, and then wandered about the city disconsolate, because there was no more molasses candy to conquer.

I doubt not that in these first wanderings about the city I often passed the corner of Broadway and Ann street -- never dreaming of the stir I was destined at a future day to make in that locality as proprietor and manager of the American Museum.

After wandering, gazing and wondering for a week, Mr. Brown took me in his sleigh and on the evening of the following day we arrived in Bethel. I had a thousand questions to answer, and for a long time I was quite a lion among my mates because I had seen the great metropolis. My brothers and sisters, however, were much disappointed at my not bringing them something from my dollar, and when my mother examined my wardrobe and found two pocket handkerchiefs and one pair of stockings missing she whipped me and sent me to bed. Thus ingloriously terminated my first visit to New York.

Next Issue: Ivy Island