

THE REFRIGERATOR

SPECIAL
"SOUND
OF
DOOM"
ISSUE!



"DON'T PLAY CHICKEN WITH FATE"

ROCHESTER, NEW YORK



We were sitting around last night, talking and sort of listening to a Van Morrison tape. There were a few people in from New York and when "Gloria" came on one of our friends informed the group

that the song was written by someone from Rochester. I think he actually thought The Invictas or Wilmer Alexander wrote this classic. Some one jokingly said they thought that Gary Trainer from New Math had written it.

It is true, though, that someone from Rochester did sing lead vocals on Alley Oop. We were gathered one night earlier this summer, and in the midst of a rambling conversation with a poet, he told us that he was the former lead singer of the Hollywood Argiles. Well, this was the first single that my wife bought, as a teenager in Detroit, so she went wild. In fact she remembered more of the words than he did. He told us they had cut two 45's before Alley Oop that "sold about forty copies each" and they recorded this one as an "absolute lark, fake British Invasion accents and all, for a promoter who bought the rights, outright, for \$1200. He told us, at the time, "we felt like this was highway robbery (on our part)." He took his share and split. He was on his way to San Francisco when he heard the song on the radio and "shit (his) drawers."



No Sitting Duck
Thousands (at least) of people missed the opportunity to talk personally with me last Sunday, when they failed to

attend or even accidentally pass through a Book Signing by that writer at The Village Green Bookstore. I am a thousand times blessed by fate; my anonymity is a thing the gods must admire, yes the gods (and every other slob self-promoter) degraded by fame in history! When I (whom unseen crowds adore like I could speak their soul) give a Book Signing, yes fate (my lucky mistress) puts a hush on the event, and I am spared your . . . sorry faces, your false handshakes, your calculations. Make me a sitting duck and . . . no hunters will show up, I have escaped the pull and glare of world attention now--I am the truly...unnameable!

Read about it. I published three books ten years ago and they sank into oblivion, which suited me because that's where they came from. So one day my wife got the bright idea of trying to distribute these three forgotten books to local bookstores, so she got on her bicycle and went to The Village Green and they said, sure, let's have a Book Signing.

I agreed to this absurdity, the date was set, and I commenced to pray . . . nobody show up! We got there and sat behind a table with the books stacked in front of us, drinking coffee for an hour and a half and commenting wittily on the behavior of all passersby. It's like this: people walking fast glance at you, then slow their step, meditatively; people walking slow glance at you, then speed up determinedly. I was applauding each one of them, their reticence was truly noble and correct, even the subject of one of my books!

You thousand times blessed idiots with eyes upon the page (I was thinking). You don't know who is your supporter in all difficult hilarity in life, in all the content of your maudlin, half-ecstatic dreams.

No one said a word to us, the books were left unsullied by any inquiring hands. Ah, I thought, being published is only like an ugly crime was suddenly mine to avow. I don't want to be a part of

the culture of vast (so vast!) insignificance.

Even the clerks weren't sure what was happening. I had to borrow a pen from one of them, which then never was used, and I kept saying to my lovely deluded wife, "this is more wonderful than even you

Hello A, This Is X

We were having a sign made for one of our clients so I looked up Ann's number at A Good Sign Com-pany. It was on the first page of listings in the white pages and I noticed how fierce the competition was to be in the front of the book. Like some people feel they would get more calls by being on the first page, as if some callers "read" the phone book and only get so far before they call someone else out of sheer boredom.



The first listing is for someone or something on Mt. Read Boulevard listed simply as A. They probably get more calls than anyone else in the book. I called the number on a Sunday and someone answered the phone with one word, "Insurance." I got scared and hung up.

The second listing was for A AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAABA Carl's Professional Sewer Cleaning & Drain Service. I'll remember where I found his number the next time my sewers back up.



"Restlessness"
We watch the late news. During Sports, you yawn, and say you're going up to bed. "Come with me," you say. "Soon," I

say. I watch the baseball highlights, which almost always end with a bench clearing brawl and the rules in a shambles. And then I find you there, the covers pulled up to your neck, reading a book. The blurb, facing me, says: "After Poe, the greatest master of the macabre."

I remember how we watched TV together the night the air war began in the Gulf; how unbearably excited we both were, both wanting to change the channel and afraid to change the channel. "Oh my God," you said. "Oh my God," I said, a moment later, just as though it had never been said, or had to be said twice. Do you remember how hopeful we both were when what's-his-name said the Iraqi Republican Guard had been decimated? I've been thinking about that lately. Maybe "decimation" was accidentally the right word. Roman commanders used to kill one in every ten men to punish a division, 50 men at a go. One wonders what passed for small talk then.

I remember how some of my friends, when they got computers, would sit around in the evening drinking beer and talking about how much memory they had. And you, after listening to that, through an interminable tropical night, said "whatever happened to the days when men used to talk about killing?"

Well, a long time ago there was Ed Gein, Anthony Perkin's role model; he killed two women, only two, but he was before his time. Then there was the Boston Strangler, and then the Hillside Stranger, both of whom aroused public interest before their identities were

known, hence their nicknames. The first, Albert DeSalvo, killed 13 women, the second Angel Buono, with the help of his cousin, ex-Rochesterian Kenneth Bianchi, nine. Later of course there was Son of Sam, ushering in the modern serial killer era, and he was famous before his real name was known, that is, before he was captured. He only had time to kill six women, though he tried to kill seven more. He raised the bar: "Clown Killer," John Wayne Gacy accessorized it, and bumped it up another notch.

If today one has to be Jeffrey Dahmer, to get known as a killer, imagine what you'll have to do after Dahmer. I have to force myself to read about

LAST LAUGH AMERICA



Everyone in American has heard that to get a good job you should stay in school. Everyone in American also knows that the American tradition prefers cool nerve, native ingenuity and when needed fast fists over academic credentials. From cowboys to crooks, singers to sports heroes, movie stars to millionaires, we admire uneducated people rocketing to prominence on pure self-reliance. Sorry, but that is The American Way. There's a good reason why our school teaches have traditionally been poorly paid. The road they point to works well enough, but there's no glamour in it. Michael Jackson was just signed up for a billion dollar contract and if he had dropped out of kindergarten who would care? Even in the world of business the Wall Street crowd uses techniques of maneuvering that would be too scandalous to ever be made public, much less taught.

It is very historically ingrained in America to hate rules and regulations. Yet, what is formal education if it isn't rules and regulations? In a country where we are all considered equal, who is a teacher to grade a student? The dilemma in America is that while we push kids to stay in school every hero around shows them the opposite. In fact, last year Barbara Bush announced that George was getting her a Spell-Check for her computer because she can't spell very well. The announcement was made with no apologies or explanations. The newscaster that reported it couldn't help but smile. It definitely made Barbara even more lovable.

We've had two centuries of maintaining our ambivalent attitude toward education. Why all the sudden hubub? Our problem is that the rest of the world isn't playing fair. Take the Japanese for instance, they have a really serious love of education. They can't seem to get enough of it. The result is that in the sophisticated and highly complicated modern world they are pulling ahead. The Europeans are going to be forming a common market in 1992, and they don't share our frontier view of education either. It just isn't fair. If America is forced to change its traditional view of education *it will stand to lose its philosophy of life as well.* No more Roseanne Barr or frisbee or Rocky VIII or Ninja Turtles. Things could really get out of control.

However there is a way out. We can sub-contract all activities that require educated, intellectual types to make them work. There's a precedent to this approach. Right after World War II we acquired most of our top scientists straight out of the collapsed Nazi empire. They were the core of the scientists that created our space program. If NASA was comfortable with hiring ex-Nazi's, why not contract out our foreign diplomacy to, say, the French? Russia seems to be having a bumper crop of politicians all of whom are really thinking hard about democracy. How about Yeltsin against Gorbachev for president? There is no doubt that Israel could run a much more cost/effective military than the Pentagon. The days of \$500 hammers would be gone forever. As for our automobile industry, the choice is easy: the Japanese--though, in that case I think we've already turned it over to them.

The beauty of this plan is that it is totally American. It frees us up to do what we're good at by letting others do what they're good at. What America really wants is the last laugh, and this could be the way to get it!

think." When the time came for my dismissal from this non-event, I just went and sat in the car. I thought, my car . . . it's never running, it just sits and waits for me to decide where to drive it. How did I get the books I wrote? Ah yes, it was by your complete lack of attention--great populace!

When she came out, people were walking down Monroe Avenue like . . . another day at the flea market. I said, "you know, I'm obscure, but my words are famous."

I am the thief in the night who steals your thoughts and broadcasts all your illusions, and I am the sitting duck for no one.

this, and I'm doing it, and skipping quickly over the grisly litany. I want to know why people seem to be fascinated by it. I want to know why you like to read about this . . . it's your pleasure, not his, I'm concerned with.

It's as though one all-time mass murderer lies at the end of the contest, one person, who at last can be seen to be responsible for all the killing that ever happened. He's the root of all evil. What you really want, I think, is one loner (one lonely mirror) to wash away our sins. You need a superlative, no-frills, boy-next-door killer, a violent invisible man.

But I have no experience to match this. The things that I can best speak about are . . . Cheez Doodles, which for me hold the key to the mysteries of adultery. Or sex and single-malt scotch, anyway, and Christmas in the Hudson Valley. I even know something about skeletal remains, and drunken gravediggers. But I have no idea how someone could kill from pleasure . . . instead of duty.

And it hurts me, because I want to write about sweeping things that make you laugh and think there's a whole other world out there, one you hadn't thought about before. But you won't read that, you'll get to page 30, or 40, and then fall asleep, in the early evening. When you wake, in that odd hour before midnight and see the spot on the page where a bit of your saliva escaped onto the page, you feel guilty.

How many lead guitarists does it take to screw in a lightbulb? Five. One to actually screw it in and four more to stand around and say, "I could do that".



Summer Dusk

The backyard is still full of twigs and branches stockpiled from the Ice Storm, and the barbecue grill I renovated again for this summer, raising it up on cement blocks and adding tiles from the ripped-up patio. We've been cooking out in the backyard nearly every evening, it's just at the first sign of dusk, like with the wind from the playing field or a stray cloud making shadows in the yard, that then I come out the backdoor and crumple up the newspaper joyously for a bed of fast flames, collect the twigs and lay them crosswise, dump a quantity of charcoal briquets atop all that, and, with the ceremonial blaze of orange flames next to the rose bushes, visible through many yards, I rally the family again for dinner.

I always think, as I kneel with the matches: "light the fire in four places." A voice says that to me, every time, like a maxim I somewhere learned to always hear. This phrase takes on symbolic value, humorously to be applied it seems to . . . other situations.

If someone is standing there with me I say aloud, "always light a fire in four places." They are bound to think, "why yes, that's a good maxim." So now, we reflect on this awhile; to what does this apply, we muse, to what does this apply, "light the fire in four places," this maxim issued so assuredly by the man with the spatula, before the setting sun.

I light the paper stuffed under the twigs and charcoal. First I light the righthand front corner, then the left, then I don't have much time to get the back corners before there are flames and smoke trying to engulf the whole carefully laid . . . masterpiece. Ah yes, this is the drama, lighting these fires in the brick barbecue stand I built from the remains of a church that was levelled down the street.

It was bricks I stole from that church, that first gave me these ideas, this backyard home to watch the smoke cathedrals ascend into the trees. And the maxim I think of, "always light the fire in four places," this sounds biblical, it's quiet but maybe paradoxical, like "if they don't receive you in any town, shake the dust from your feet and go on." This was issued to the disciples who were going to spread the gospel through the countryside.

Yes, if the fire is properly laid and lit in all four corners the resulting fire is spectacular indeed,

engulfing the sticks and charcoal, containing memories of a storm of ice, in a controlled inferno for several minutes, as we crack open a beer and sit at the picnic table, relaxing utterly in the mystery, set now a course that is high irreversible



A Sense of Eternity

The fact is, I was saying to her (the mistress of all my comical sorrows), I love these boring committee meetings. I like being on committees and even can look forward to the meetings that are stifling and claustrophobic, full of airy statements by people visibly bored and agitated by the lack of reality in the room, the sight of everybody's idle hands on the table, the silent chairs and the awkwardness of keeping the coffee supplied. But I like it, I told her, this suspension of being, when virtually nothing is required of me, and I could fall asleep and they would forgive me, or if I am addressed, well the whole topic is so abstract and I think so quickly the first thing to come to mind will be regarded with great looks of intrigue, like it were maybe desired, what I had just said, and interest in what I said will dawn, like a new plate of donuts, on everyone's forehead, like I'd prepared long and hard for the meeting and with a sudden comment made everyone sit up and feel useful.

The fact is, if you'll let me go on, I was regaling her (propped up on the pillows in the room with white curtains, in the morning that had not yet started), boring meetings are a sideways gift of time, I like being there, it gives me an important clue of what's in eternity--the supply-side, I mean the mirrored view of . . . what's left out of life.

I think God has left town. It's purely a whim if, say, when such unsupervised doldrums have caused the very color schemes on the walls to merely demonstrate the varieties of non-whites, if anybody bothers to wipe the plastic mat under the row of coffee cups in the corporate kitchen. I mean, I don't have to put any time in for thought (about what I am always potentially thinking about: the mystery of existence), in these boring meetings, nobody would notice if I reiterate my constant claims.

Right, I'm not sure the conference room would get noticeably colder, I mean the fans are going like imported from oblivion, and the meeting is lasting forever, it's all reverse of the way it should be in life, I mean the way I thought it was before. But like I'm saying now, it gives me a sense of eternity in a way I don't get elsewhere--like a surefire concept.

I know when I am alone, I confess to her, I am delegated to think, then I feel the responsibility of my position in the universe. But in meetings I just get quietly giddy, thinking about how pale the scene is, how flimsy the arena, how improbable these other people are citizens of heaven. What! Though I'd take everyone of them with me, yes . . . it almost seems like we'll all make the crossover together, we'll be fainting out of the sheer concept of passion for life, life not in evidence anywhere.

Do you understand me, I was saying to my faithful listener. Can I go on this way?



A business associate of ours (whose favorite part of The Refrigerator is the Musical Jokes section) gave us these red tickets that say "THANK YOU for taking two parking spaces, you inconsiderate bastard. Thanks to you I had to park two blocks away." We didn't know quite

what to do with these things and they sat in our car for quite a while.

We were driving out to

Computerland on Saturday and stopped at Beers Of The World. We ran into another business associate in there and when we got back to the car we decided to put one these tickets on his car. We stuck the rest under peoples wipers in the sparsely populated parking lot, where the whole idea didn't make any sense at all and laughed.



The Last Red Plate

When there was only one red glass plate left I told her to put it in the museum. "Good," she said, "where is the museum?"

"All around you," I said, "just prop it up somewhere, or let's use it for a change dish or something. Take the red plate we got from my grandmother out of circulation, it's not a plate anymore, but a memento."

But it was already too late. She heard me, but she failed to heed my advice that night. I found the plate broken in half and laid on the stove, it dropped through the dishwashing foam and broke right in her hands I guess.

"I broke the last red plate," she said; "I can't believe it." I said.

Then I took the two pieces upstairs and laid them on the desk-size calendar on the worktable in my office. I glued them back together, using a huge silver tankard and an encyclopedia for a makeshift clasp (precariously).

Then I took the red plate up in the attic and put it on my worktable where I organize slides and also fix lamps, frame pictures, take apart three-ring binders, things like that.

I use the red plate for nails, small nails, nails which I can never throw away.



Dear Refrigerator

I have always suspected (also) a more sinister purpose to the malls, than simple wanton consumerism.

About Gloria in "Life Among the Dead": her predicament reminds me of

the Tibetan Book of the Dead, where for 49 days dead Tibetans must wander the aether as half-ghosts, meeting up with a succession of increasingly sinister ghouls, I suspect not unlike the types of people who spend long periods of time in bars. If they show fear, as Gloria surely did, they must go around life yet again, until they get the damn thing right.

Also, there are no coincidences around Dan Quayle. Too many puzzling events happen in his proximity. I suspect he is not really human, but some sort of complex energy form that can take the form of a Republican or other "intelligent" being. I remember something like this happening in one of the original Star Trek Episodes. However, the solution to the problem involved dilithium crystals, which unfortunately have not been invented yet.

Yours truly, C. Thomas, Berwick Rd, Rochester

Look For The Refrigerator at Village Green, Pyramid, The Old Toad, Kinkos, Jazzberry's, Godivas, Writers & Books, Aladdins, Sweet Stuff, The Bop Shop, Borders Books, The Bug Jar, Hungerford's etc.

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