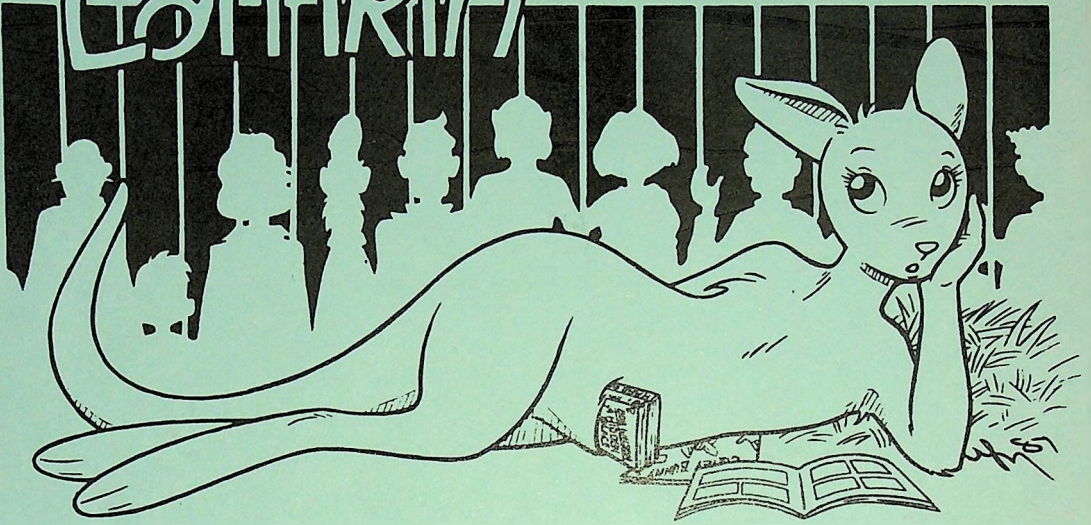


Larrikin



LARRIKIN 18, OCTOBER 1988, (the dipsomaniac's friend) is edited and published by Perry Middlemiss (GPO Box 2708X, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, AUSTRALIA) and Irwin Hirsh (2/416 Dandenong Rd., Caulfield North, Victoria 3161, AUSTRALIA). We urge the governments of Japan and Norway to stop denying the International Whaling Commission's moratorium under the guise of "research" whaling. We won't be fooled into believing that this slaughter can possibly be for "scientific purposes". Without the help of contributors, Pam Welis as British agent (did you know that the novelist Adam Hall calls his fictional British agent a ferret? Oh, sorry I mentioned it.), Marc Ortlieb (still producing mailing labels with arcane codes for the weird and wonderful), and Taral (this page) and Craig Hilton (last page) for artwork - Irwin would still be badgering me to get this thing on the road. All rights revert to contributors after publication. This fanzine is available for written contributions - articles, letters of comment, pootsarcd etc. - fanzines in trade (one to each of us please) or artwork.

PERTH IN '94

JOHN BERRY FOR DUFF

THAT WAS THE WORLDCON THAT WAS

- Judith Hanna -

All a distant blur in the memory. Must be a whole six weeks ago now. First there was the foreign fan invasion that came together in the wild social whirl of the party at the Hansen Carrols new building site a Sunday or so beforehand. Then we acquired Moshe, Lise and a copy of *Spycatcher*. There was an Expedition through the Stucco Wonderland of Pimlico armed with Moshe's guidebook which led us to the Pre-Raphaelite Church of St James the less where Sybil Thorndike's father dropped dead while preaching a sermon. I had seen it there but thought it just a boring red-brick Victorian church. Who would have realised that its ironwork was real William Morris?

Brighton began with setting up lights for Geoff Ryman's *Disappearing Act* plays until 1.30 am, by when Moshe and Lise's party had packed up. Not being able to start setting up in the Wintergarden until 4pm Wednesday was my first encounter with The Hotel Manager. Mark McMenemy and Daniel materialise and do all the work, we improvise a lighting plan while Martin Hoare drifts in and out at high speed still being optimistic. It is dangerous to have an optimist running Ops. What is needed is a deep dyed pessimist who triple checks everything several times, then brings a few extra miles of cable and tape because they know there's never enough, who calculates the time necessary and doubles it because they know something will go wrong. Or rather, everything will go wrong.

Thursday morning I discover how to do Ops. I volunteered after the truly momentous organisational disaster of the END Convention - great con, but thank Goddess sf concerns don't go in for serious politics. Politics makes committees forget all about the trivial practicalities of actually organising and running the event. After the adrenalin surge of being dropped in the deep end of running a con worse planned than your worst nightmare, it seemed to me only natural to ring Jan Huxley and volunteer. I was quite right. The reason I could stay so calm as Operations Base manager was that, compared to ENDcon, running Conspiracy was indeed a picnic.

Early night Thursday. End up sitting in Resident's Lounge with Perry Middlemiss, Andrew Brown and Renee from Kalamazoo, but manage to make a break for bed at 1.30. Every other night it was 4.00 or 4.30 am and we have to ring for the night porter. Every other night it was also sitting around on the verandah outside the resident's lounge with Perry, Renee et al. Except the night we ended up sitting in the Dennis's room at the Perth in '94 party while Perry demonstrated how to play cricket and Ben Yalow demonstrated inscrutability about the site selection result. One night the et al were Leigh Kennedy, John Brosnan, Chris Priest in a truly startling green shirt with yuppie cotton jacket flogging off copies of Last Deadloss Visions, and Leroy Kettle being wonderfully sincere about the delights of nuclear power. Another night they included Bill Gibson who listened politely while I expounded a Theory about his writing, Kathy Gale, Gillie from Geoff's play, Lucy and Dawn Plaskett. People bought drinks, people said things, a good time was had and the details slip my mind.

Every now and then we saw John Berry and Eileen Gunn or Carey Handfield at breakfast. We were all staying in the Norfolk, a brisk trek along the promenade. Our room was magnificent, big window over sea-front, double bed and a single bed as well, bathroom with bubble bath. One afternoon I even managed to get back to have a good long soak and read the latest Westorama in *Lip*. Essential to read these epics while there's an audience around to impress with your instant failure to grasp the sub-text.

Friday 4pm, back into the Wintergarden to finish rigging the lights and give the cast a run-through before the first performance. They get a short break before the show, we techs carry on. Lots of audience. Nasty shock afterwards as people come in to set up for the disco, which should have been in Ambassador Suite which is being painted. Martin Hoare seems to think stage lights can be left in the middle of the floor for drunken fans to bop around. Since light towers are 1) unstable, 2) expensive, 3) connected to cable which though taped down is kickable and could bring heavy towers crashing onto unsuspecting revellers, we act responsibly and dismantle lights. Taking them down is hardly any trouble. It is the prospect of having to rig them up again for the Monday night performance that makes me see red. Martin suggests that after 2 am Sunday night will be the best time to set them up. In the end, Mark McMenamie turns out at 9am Monday. I sleep in, half an hour late. More setting up after 4pm again. It is slightly quicker than the first set-up, but still a long, fiddly process.

Saturday is the day I find the book room, and in it I find Chuck Harris who is looking for the fanroom. So I lead him to the Promised Land where Walt Willis sits amongst acolytes who are plying all and sundry with Hawaiian shirts. Even D West is coaxed into one, all lurid pink. Cameras flash to record the scene for posterity, or at least for display at Novacon. There is ten minutes of Golden Age desperate fun. Which is perhaps as long as any Golden Age can be expected to last except in nostalgia.

Sunday there's a shift on Ops with the invaluable Mark McMenamie. The rumour is that the hotel has broken the contract under twenty-five separate headings. The Hotel Manager is neck and neck with the scientologists for the Unpopularity award. Double-Hugo-winner Dave Langford throws his beer over Fred Harris, thus catharsising resentment of the New Era invasion into slapstick farce. Next morning Langford denies all memory of anything about it and seems happy to accept the version Bill Gibson is telling everyone. The Hotel Manager is clear winner

in the Unpopularity Stakes. Bar staff in the fanroom are rumoured to have given free drinks in exchange for Hotel Manager jokes. Hotel Manager jokes plaster the walls outside the fanroom, and are auctioned to raise funds for a Talking SF Book for the blind.

Rog Peyton, who made lots of money selling lots of books, shouts us to a taxi to the station. At Victoria we lure John Berry and Eileen into a B&B just up the road and round the corner as our temporary neighbours. We decide to go to Corflu in Seattle so we can resume the conversation. The perpetual floating post-worldcon takes a boat upriver to Hampton Court, in the famous British weather. At least most of Hampton Court is out of the rain.

All of a sudden, some weeks later, life is back to abnormal again. I have a new job, gale force winds nicknamed Hurricane Oscar blow down many trees while I sleep through it all, and it's almost time for Novacon. Which seems deady quiet by comparison.

And all of a sudden it's a year later when I discover these notes in a corner of a neglected disc, and hasten to print them out. Time-binding, what? Yeah, RSN, man...

JOHN FOYSTER SEZ I am very pleased to see the resurrection of Larrikin after all this time, but I want to assure you absolutely that it is not necessary to include my name so often. You always spell my name correctly, so I can't complain on that score, but surely your readers deserve to be referred occasionally to other ogres in Australian fandom? Perhaps one an issue?

I can just see it now - "Larrikin, the litigant's fanzine". With Robyn Mills as staff solicitor, Justin Ackroyd as hit man, and Irwin and I as bagmen. In fact, I've always thought that Leigh Edmonds was an easy mark for this sort of thing - I just can't seem to find anyone willing enough to go for it boots and all.

THE FLY It's not that I don't know any lousy pubs you understand, it's just that every pub has some redeeming feature. Often
- Martin Tudor - the dirtiest smelly old holes will serve astoundingly good beer. Or one of those tastefully renovated 'family pubs' will serve excellent cheap food. Even pubs where both beer and food are terrible frequently have the attraction of cheerful staff and/or a friendly atmosphere.

You see I LOVE pubs. Not just the beer but... I suppose the word is the 'ambience'. I feel more comfortable in a half-way decent pub that I do anywhere else in the world. There is something about pubs that set you at your ease, US style bars and European cafes are okay in their way but they do lack the style of a good British pub.

Unfortunately a recent remark started me thinking about the worst pub I'd ever encountered. I started racking my brains (slime and goo all over the place) to try to remember a pub, any pub, which had no redeeming qualities whatsoever. Eventually I did. I now wish I hadn't.

Several years ago my father set up home in Tamworth with his second wife (he's on his fourth now, wife not home, but that's a different story). They had a council house in the middle of a new council housing estate called 'Glascote Heath'.

The Glascote Heath housing estate consisted, as do most council estates, of several thousand identical box-like houses. These were situated on hundreds of identical avenues, with almost identical one word names; such as 'Dunedin',

'Bancroft', 'Cambrian', and 'Caradoc'. Obviously one of the planners had been on a Scottish kick at the time.

The only shops for miles in any direction were of course in the middle of this maze of identical streets. In the middle of the, almost, identical shops, was, of course, the only pub for several miles in any direction - 'The Flying Scotsman'.

'The Flying Scotsman' was better known as 'The Fly', due to the fact that within days of it opening someone stole the rest of the letters from its sign ... they were never replaced. It was a slightly larger box than the houses and shops that surrounded it - but otherwise identical. It had one large, square room, which served us as the combination lounge and bar. It had no redeeming qualities whatsoever.

I don't know how I managed to forget this monstrosity, put it down to mental self-preservation. The first evening I was forced to drink there I made the mistake of trying a pint of their mild. 'Mild', for the uninformed amongst you, is, as the name suggests, a delicate beer. Although usually black, or at least very dark in colour, it is probably - even in keg rather than draught form - the easiest beer of all to destroy. It is also, because of its flat nature (ie no bubbles!) the beer used by most unscrupulous landlords to dump their dregs in. I'm not sure what the landlord of the Fly did to the mild. At the very least he put the spillage in, probably the dregs from peoples' unfinished beers (of which there was vast amounts - I for one never finished a pint there), and then, by some strange means, he had managed to inject 'fizz' into it! Foul is too kind a word to describe the taste of the resultant abomination.

But even at that tender age I was convinced that every pub had something good about it so I didn't give up. The bitter fared no better. Despite being a fairly robust beer, the Ansells bitter was totally unrecognisable. At this time Ansells still brewed their beer in Aston, Birmingham, and although keg rather than real beer, I had always found it a reasonable pint. Not this stuff.

One of the characteristics of keg beer, indeed one of the reasons the Big Six British Breweries started the almost universally loathsome product, is the fact that keg, permeated as it is with chemicals and gas, is almost indestructible. It takes a special kind of stupidity to destroy the meagre flavour of a keg beer. The Fly's landlord managed to do it - and in style! I stuck with the bitter the rest of the first night and on my next few involuntary visits, invariably it had no head, no flavour and the strangest colouring I've ever seen in a beer. An almost greenish tinge.

Throughout the period my father lived in Tamworth I tried almost every drink the Fly had to offer - fortunately there wasn't much of a selection. The spirits were watered down, beer that should be dead was fizzy, beer that should've had a head was flat, the draught cider was vinegar. Thankfully the food, though always advertised, was always non-existent - I somehow doubt it had sold out each time I was there because it was so good...

What of ambience? The pub always smelt of boiled cabbage. The sole room was always packed solid with underage drinkers and bawling kids. The juke box only had one volume LOUD, and distorted. The tunes were a mixture of Dolly Parton, Kenny Rogers and the top ten. There was a halfway decent pinball machine in the hallway - but that was invariably vandalised. Frayed carpet and torn seating, peeling flock wall-paper and dirty paintwork. Shit, even the ice had a tang of cabbage to it...

I've no doubt it will take me at least another ten years to forget The Fly.

LUCK'S A FORTUNE This is a sad story. It is the story of one poor lad's decline from happiness to despair, from having a savings account to going into overdraft, from normality to paranoia. - Robyn Mills - This is a warning to all to avoid black cats, to sidestep ladders and to never, ever drop a mirror. It is the story of my brother Ian.

Ian, when taken at face-value, is a tall blond athletic 26-year-old Production Manager at Carlton United Breweries. He has the all-Australian career, being practically responsible for the alcoholic problems of most of the Western world, and proud of it. He is also studying for his Chartered Accounting qualifications and plays football every Saturday with the local team. All in all he is the typical red-blooded Australian male.

That is at face-value. Then he flushed his contact lenses (both lenses of course) down the bathroom sink. Could happen to anyone right? Well he took it like a real Mills and after we cleaned the shit from the fan he put on his glasses and went out to get a banl loan to purchase a new pair. Cost \$120.

My brother is clever and realises that mishaps of this kind always come in threes. Consequently he was not surprised to find out a few days later that he had gone through the seat of his best suit trousers and had been baring his all at work. He, of course, hadn't noticed anything, still being blinded by the loss of his contacts. Another trip to the credit card, and \$300 later he could at least walk around with some degree of modesty.

On the way down to the bank manager's he dropped off his car for what he considered would be a routine service. Lady luck was really on a roll by this time, however, and on his return to the garage he was informed of his car's dire need of a new clutch. Cost \$800. A red-blooded Australian can't be without his Commodore naturally, so he pays over the loot.

By this time no amount of consoling on my part will do any good and depression has started to set in and he is forced to drown his sorrows with Perry over a few quiet beers; though an invitation to a free feed at our favourite Vietnamese restaurant is turned down - seems he's just a little wary of food poisoning.

Despite all this trauma Ian has not forgotten his family and decides as a favour to collect my dry-cleaning. It was a fatal mistake. During the time he was away from his car in the shop some turkey on wheels managed to smash in one side of it causing approximately \$1000 worth of damage. Naturally the culprit doesn't leave a clue.

Undeterred (a degree of fatalism had set in by this time) Ian goes off to footy. Now Ian is a fit bloke and his position of ruck-rover requires him to be everywhere at once. Ian, like the good team-player that he is, does exactly that, including (at no extra charge) the casualty department of the Austin Hospital. Diving into packs after the ball doesn't always go according to plan and on this occasion Ian ended up with a broken knuckle, a lovely piece of plaster and the prospect of six weeks out of the game.

By this time you are probably thinking that little else can go wrong. Right? Wrong - wait for this. As his left hand is in plaster up to and including the wrist Ian is forced to wear his watch on his right. Unfortunately that wrist is slightly larger than the left and consequently too big for the watch band so he put it in a safe place - his top shirt pocket. A little later he has to go out to his car to put some money into the parking meter by his car and is swooped by a magpie on the way. He ducks out of the way and continues on only to realise when he gets to his car that he watch is missing. Immediately deducing that it must have fallen out in his confrontation with the bird he hurries back to the spot only to arrive just as a car is running over his watch. The repair man took one look at it, shook his head and said forget it. Replacement cost \$100, and, needless to say, my brother is back at the Bank Manager's.

Things really start to hot up now, literally. As I said earlier, my brother is studying for his Chartered Accountant's Certificate, so he has to study. It is the middle of winter and cold. He uses a heater to warm his room in the flat to allow for a more conducive atmosphere for the digestion of boring figures and endless nonsense. On this occasion the room is being nicely warmed and Ian is watching television in the next room. I'm in the kitchen brewing up dinner. After a while I start to smell something worse than the food I'm working on and it's coming from the bedroom. On investigation the room is full of smoke and sparks are flying everywhere. The heater has blown up, shorting the electricity socket and melting the power board. When I discovered it it was attempting to burn down the flat but fortunately had only got as far as scorching the wall. Of course all this happens out of business hours and we spend the next 45 minutes in the cold and dark waiting for the electrician to arrive for his whirl-wind blood-sucking visit. The cold disappeared very rapidly when we got his bill - \$135. The room is yet to be repainted.

Oddly enough, all this happened over a three week period. Even odder is that nothing bad seems to have happened since; other than the bomb scare that is.

MIKE GLICKSOHN ASKS I did wonder why my mailing label starts with #0009 though? Surely there aren't just 8 other people on the Larrikin mailing list with names beginning with A-Gi? If that's the case though, I like the confidence shown by your anticipation of eventually having ten thousand fans on your mailing list!

You're not the only one who's pondered on the peculiar little numbers on their mailing label Mike, so, before Irwin and I get accused of trying to rate fans on a sliding numbered scale, let it be known that it's all Marc Ortlieb's fault. God knows what it all means - maybe the garlic's finally starting to get at him.

HOW DEGENERATE WERE YOUR ANCESTORS?

- Lucy Sussex -

HOW DEGENERATE WERE YOUR ANCESTORS? I think the first time it struck me that there might be more to one's ancestors than met the eye (what met the eye, notably, was a blurry daguerreotype of great-grandma buttoned to the neck, her bosom by the miracle of corsetry elevated almost to the level of her double chins, and great-grandpa bearded to half-way down his waistcoat), was while researching a tutorial paper on Coleridge. This topic led me to a book called, as I recollect, *Drug Use Among the Romantic Poets*, which via the mysteries of cataloguing was languishing in the Biomedical Library.

It was absolutely fascinating, not only for revelations about Coleridge's drug muse and abuse, but also for the extent of drug addiction in the period, which coincided with the early white settlement of Australia. Opium was genuinely the opium of the people, for after a hard day at t'mill, the workers would trail down t'Apothecary and stone themselves senseless on tincture of laudanum, which could be obtained over the counter. Other uses of laudanum/opium included pacifying babies and curing priapism. "Er, what's that?" said the nice nun in my tutorial, and the tutor gleefully replied, "Pathological and persistent erection of the male organ."

Some ten years after the great Drug Abuse tutorial, for my own nefarious reasons I began to read goldfields memoirs, and discovered that the early European settlers had imbibed some curious chemicals. Alpha, the Pioneer Prospector (a dinkum pseudonym) reported that gin and cayenne pepper was an excellent cure for a hangover. Conversely, the Reverend Arthur Polehampton (another name I definitely did not invent) stated that when the grog ran out on his emigrant ship, cayenne pepper and water was the substitute. More abstentious than Alpha, he did not test its efficacy.

Those aficionados of Australia's national drink, beer, might be surprised to hear that in the roaring days brandy was the favoured booze. William Kelly, perhaps the most entertaining of the goldfields writers, described it as "that great colonial elixir efficacious alike for healing enmities or ripening friendships, that Victorian panacea for all the 'ills that flesh is heir to'". He was not averse to a drop himself, although not to the extent of a gentleman he met in his travels, who remarked that "neat brandy was such an old enemy of his family, whenever he laid his hands on it he showed no mercy."

Brandy and ginger beer was the last meal of a man whose inquest was reported in the Mount Alexander Mail of 1855. It comprised his breakfast, every day, which is probably why the coroner handed down a verdict of death due to delirium tremens. Another interesting breakfast was reported by Kelly at Ballan, Victoria. The landlord burst into his room after a night of heavy drinking, carrying a bowl crowned with milky froth. "Only your shavin' water, to be sure, he remarked, presenting Kelly with whiskey 'Mass Hill style'. Alcohol was poured into a bucket and a cow or goat milked over it - in Mass Hill (Ireland) itself, this operation took place before the drinker's very eyes, the cow and the milkmaid going from bedroom to bedroom. The result was a milkshake like a thunderbolt.

Given this devout alcoholism, it is a wonder that the many babies of the period were not all born with hangovers. Some must have been, especially if their mothers sent the midwife "for a pint of burnt brandy and make me drink it whether I will or not" (Kelly). Gin, on the other hand, was used to cure wind and convulsions. One hopes not the convulsions of infantile DTs.

By now, you should have some useful ideas for your Bicentennial cocktail party. I shall conclude this paper with some recipes. I regret not being able to give more than the names of 'Liquor a la Polka' and 'Creme a la Mazurka', both once served in the bar of the Victoria Hotel, Castlemaine. However, I can supply the recipe for probably the most bizarre concoction ever drunk on the Victorian goldfields. Known as 'Blowmyskulloff', it composed: cocculus indicus (a berry which fortified alcohol, although its legal use was to stun fish), spirits of wine, Turkey opium, cayenne pepper and rum, mixed one part to five of water. In case of trouble with the ingredients - opium and cocculus indicus are probably not even available from your friendly local pusher - substitute 'Blowhisskulloff'. This was less illegal, but probably just as lethal a mixture, and was supposedly the work of an unnamed colonial governor. It consisted of: brandy, rum, ale, stout and lime juice. Do remember to take out some life insurance and have a nice party.

DOWN AMONG THE DEAD MEN

- Perry -

Marc Ortlieb recently lamented the fact that the only beer he could stomach was Tooheys Old and that he hadn't been able to find any pubs that sold it in Melbourne. I was taken aback. Firstly, because I had forgotten that Marc ever let a drop of the amber nectar pass his lips. Secondly, because he obviously didn't realise that he lived in an area that boasts the only Federal electorate in Australia without a pub. And lastly (and most importantly) because I couldn't think of any either. After a bit of muttering and stroking of the beard I told him of a place in South Melbourne and another in the city. He didn't appear impressed. "What about Richmond?" "Er, don't know really." "What? I come to the only person I know who could possibly give me the answer I want and all he says is "don't know". Stokes and McPharlin will die of shame." With that he wandered off shaking his head and leaving me to stare at the floor covered with my shattered reputation.

But I can take up a challenge as well as the next, so when John Basevi (a visiting Brit of the thirsty persuasion) twisted my arm one Sunday afternoon I decided the time was ripe for a tour of the local Richmond hosteleries - in other, less salubrious, publications what is commonly called a pub crawl. This was not an attempt to end up face-down in some disgusting gutter you understand, just a desire to further my education by checking out some of the local wares.

Our first stop, The Royal Oak, was simply yuppie heaven; or at least aspired to be. No Coopers on tap, nor in bottles, which gave the lie to its outward appearance. We agreed on a description of "all flash and no substance" and left after the first beer and before the end of the first playing of "Hotel California".

The second warranted at least two rounds, if only to take in the atmosphere completely: lots of smoke, watered beer, about a dozen blokes standing around who looked as if they would have slept there given the opportunity, and, to top it all, an old codger sitting in the corner yelling abuse in French to the pool players. I came away wondering what some people did when their brains actually clicked into gear. Exactly what I had just seen, I suspect.

Which brought us to the Earl of Lincoln just a block or so away from my flat. Decor: mid-century toilet, complete with tiles halfway up the walls; beer average; customers mind-boggling.

A sign out the front said "Topless Waitress 4:00 pm - 6:00 pm." It was ten to six when we arrived and we contemplated waiting it out but the taste got to us and we went in with eyes lowered. It appeared that the topless waitress was restricted to weekdays or Saturdays as the place was just about empty and I had the feeling that I could look anywhere without undue embarrassment. As it turned out this was not such a good thing.

We positioned ourselves at the bar and noticed that a television in the corner was showing the recent film version of "The Untouchables". The slight tinge of illegality surrounding the public showing of a pre-recorded film intended for private use didn't seem entirely out of place there. Unfortunately watching the film in the corner forced John and I to look through the group of the other three customers - two men and a woman, all of whom were drinking Kahlua and milks like there was no tomorrow. In various establishments this concoction is known as a "brown cow" - I just think of it as disgusting.

The film was progressing reasonably well with the usual mixture of murder, blood and mayhem when the largest member of the group of three caught us looking in his direction. He obviously hadn't done so hot in his school geometry lessons as he couldn't pick that he was in our direct line of sight with the television. The next thing I knew I was being included (shanghaied would be a better word) in a conversation I hadn't realised even existed.

"So what do you think of Lindy Chamberlain?"

"Sorry?" It wasn't that I was hard of hearing or didn't understand the question, it just threw me for a moment and I needed time to recover.

"You know who Lindy Chamberlain is don't you?" Even John, who had only been in the country for a few months, was nodding his head.

"So do you think she was guilty or what?" Straight away I could tell where this conversation was headed but for some reason I couldn't seem to refuse the bait.

"Well, at first I thought she was innocent. Then when she was put on trial and then found guilty I changed my mind. Now I'm not so sure. I can't tell one way or the other."

"What made you think she was guilty?"

"What I saw on TV and what I read in the papers."

"You mean you actually believe what you read in the papers? I feel very sorry for you." The first statement he'd made and it was derogatory. John and I both answered along the lines of "if it's backed up by other information then why not?" But he ignored us and kept on going down his single-minded track to a place I would have preferred to avoid.

"What did you read in the papers that made you think she was guilty?"

"Well, details of the trials, the forensic evidence and so on."

"Oh, so you believed all that stuff that so-called expert came up with. Discredited later wasn't it. And a woman of course." There was obviously a tight connection between the two points in his mind. I looked at his companions, and especially the woman, to see if there was any reaction. I expected and got none. John ordered another drink.

"Her being a woman has nothing to do with it. It could have been anyone. It just happened to be a woman, but it still made no difference."

He didn't seem to take too kindly with someone arguing with him. Maybe, for a guy his size, it didn't happen too often. "Just typical though isn't it?" I didn't bother to answer him. Over his right shoulder Robert de Niro seemed to be re-arranging someone's haircut with a baseball bat.

"So what do you think of shovelheads?"

"I don't know what you're talking about." I looked at John and he shook his head. The other two at the bar appeared to be smiling, of all things.

"You know shovelheads". Articulate too.

"Sorry, I've never head the expression before." Although I was rapidly getting an idea of where he was headed.

"The Asians. You know shovelheads." This bloke just didn't seem to want to stop.

"What about them?" It was starting to get fascinating now, in a masochistic sort of way.

"Well they're bloody everywhere." Sweeping his arm across his chest as if to signify all he had ever seen. What followed was five to ten minutes of standard racist rhetoric, as implatable as it was predictable. He just kept rolling along ignoring any interjections or non-verbal responses until he finally ran out of steam.

"I've never had any trouble with them." It might have been better for me to remain silent but I had the urge to bring this thing to a reasonably acceptable end somehow.

"Let me tell you, I jsed to be a policeman around here and I know what I'm talking about." And it all fell into place - the encroaching beer-gut, the blue baseball cap, the weathered face (not quite that of a farmer's but beyond an office worker's) and the all-encompassing bigotry. "Obviously you don't live around here or you'd know all about it."

"Actaually I live in Kent Street, about two blocks away." It suddenly struck me that the film playing in the background mirrored the conversation we'd been having - prejudice against stereotyped Italians in the film component and against Asians and women in the verbal.

The ex-cop had run out of vitriol and I'd run out of patience so we finished our beers and left. In the car on the way home John said, "I couldn't help thinking in there that 'there but for the grace of God go I'."

"No you're too smart for that. Just think, if you don't meet these guys every now and then you wouldn't have anything to compare things to."

"True." Unfortunate but true.

Just a quick note at the end of this issue to remind you that a number of you will find little red Xs on your mailing labels. This is not to be taken as a criticism of your political affiliations but rather as a gentle, yet firm, reminder that what we really do all this for is reponse. And, I'm sorry to say, if we don't hear from you then you won't hear from us. That is, if you have been Xed of course.

WINE DRINKING TIP OF THE MONTH: "Buy on fruit, sell on cheese." Yes, I know that cheese goes well with various styles of wines but it does have a tendency to deaden the palate when you're visiting wineries and trying the wares with an intention of buying. So, between stops, revitalise the tastebuds with some crisp fresh fruit like an apple or an orange, or, if you're desperate, try a cold beer. It does just as well and tastes a helluva lot better.

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