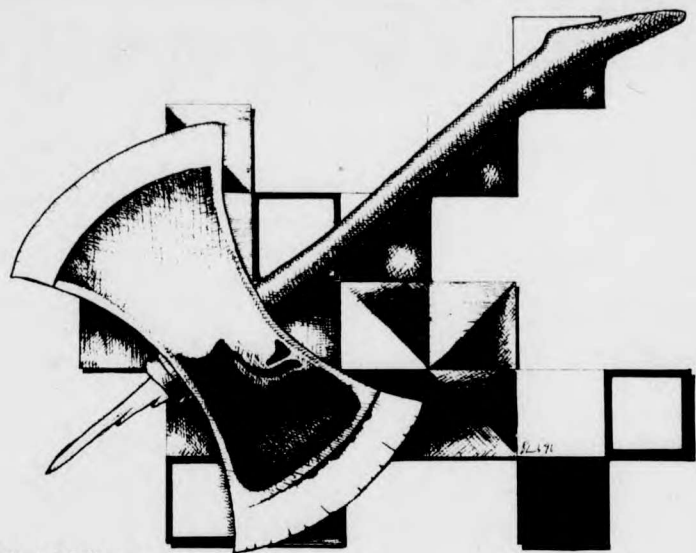


# I WRITE WITH AN AXE



by Bret Gellert

Years ago, I dreamed I would have my own column, one where I could call various members of Parliament boneheads. The years have finally paid off. Now I use world affairs for my own special target practice.

First, I would like to address those of you who think I'm a jerk solely because of my column's title. "I Write With An Axe" was something said by a snooty French author who was probably as annoying as one of those head waiters in an overpriced restaurant. (**Actually it was Jean-Paul Desbiens — ed.**) One with a name like La Fette de Trepoline, literally dead squirrel on a trampoline. I figure any restaurant where food is served on fire is one that doesn't take the preservation of life very seriously.

Anyway, I want to welcome the new students here, especially first year students. I'm sure that most of you will be waking up naked, broke and in another country with a hangover which can pick up ultrasonic frequencies. It's all part of becoming a proud Canadian, standing up for what's right, doing what you believe in, leaving a friend stuck with the bar tab.

So much for the facts. I want to give you some advice. York University is famous for things besides talk show hosts and world class terrorists. I defy anyone to find a longer lineup in the world than the one we have at the York bookstore. The length, which is usually just short of the Great Wall of China, isn't as bad as the length of time it takes to stand there. You could probably finish an entire degree in the time you will stand in this line.

The other advice I have is to stay on top of what's happening around you. Pick up a newspaper once in a while to see how some wacky school politician can decide to allow students to carry firearms to subdue cafeteria food. An interesting point is that meatloaf on this campus is supposed to be green. If you get a different colour, one I assume you don't like, please take it to the closest toxic dump where professionals can dispose of it at the least human cost.

My job is to bring the strange things of the world into our university. Scientific breakthroughs, political decisions, and what the Prime Minister is thinking: "Just where is Meech Lake, anyway?" are all part of what makes this column tick. Anything I don't know I make up, so there is no real problem with facts and figures.

I will follow the public's opinion, yunno, sort of like a politician. I will fight for things the people want, like a complete ban on any singing group that has more than five people without one member who can play a musical instrument. I don't want to mention any names, but these new kids just moved into my block last year.

The title of the column is an attempt to describe my petty attempt at journalism: a sharp contrast to what can be a very dull world. Sometimes I may be funny, sometimes you'll wonder what the hell I'm talking about (like now).

I'm just going to finish my bowl of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle cereal and catch the last few minutes of some professional wrestling. Take it easy . . .

## Writer's Block

by Ira Nayman

Although s/he goes by many names (Raven, Hare, Nanabush, Old Man, among others), The Trickster is a central figure in native mythologies across the continent. The Trickster, sometimes male, sometimes female, sometimes human, sometimes a god, is the embodiment of all that is earthy, full of hungers and passions, a figure full of fun (although her/his practical jokes backfire more often than they succeed).

My favourite Trickster story tells of the time he, hungry as always, came upon a stream in the woods. He couldn't believe what he saw! Dozens of apples floated on the surface just waiting to be picked up and eaten! The Trickster eagerly bent over to grab up the nearest apple, but they all immediately disappeared. Off balance, he fell into the stream, getting soaked.

The next day, The Trickster came upon the same stream, and found that the apples had returned. Not quite believing his good fortune, he tried once more to pluck one out of the water. Once more, the apples vanished, and all The Trickster got for his efforts was wet.

The third day, The Trickster came upon the same scene. Not having learned anything from his previous experiences, he tried the same action, getting the same results.

The Trickster's wife, who had been looking for him all this time, found him sitting in the stream, soaking wet. Surprised, she asked, "What do you think you're doing?"

"I reached for the apples on the water," The Trickster explained, "but, they disappeared just as I was about to get one!"

"Stupid Trickster!" his wife chastised him, "Can you not see that the apples are in the trees, and that what you have been reaching for is their reflection on the surface of the water?"

I often feel that The Trickster's situation is a

perfect metaphor for writers. We want so badly to capture reality, and keep trying no matter how often we fail. But, of course, writers can only really create the illusion of reality — even the best writers cannot capture the totality of human experience.

In the final analysis, we all end up wet.

I am by no means a great writer, nor am I ever likely to be; but, I have had a lot of experience writing for various newspapers and magazines, television shows and radio programmes. I even keep returning to the CBC every so often, although, like a typical spurned suitor, I do so more out of a sense of nostalgia than any real hope.

I started "Writer's Block" last year in order to relate some of my experience, both for people who might be interested in such things and as an attempt to make some sense of it for myself. It also gave me the opportunity to comment on the state of the arts.

Some of the early columns were — how shall I put this? — not quite as brilliant as some of the later ones. Experience taught what would work and what wouldn't. Unfortunately, just as I seemed to be getting into a good groove, somebody ended the school year on me.

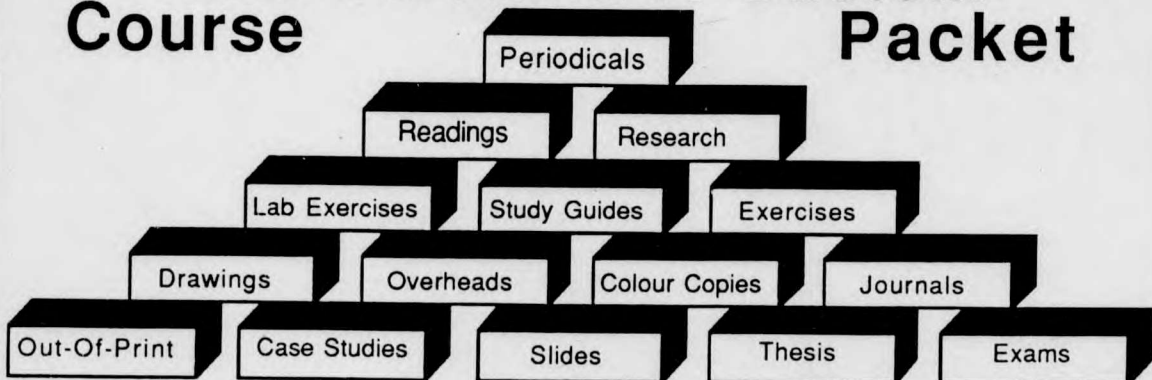
Isn't that always the way?

I decided to continue writing the column because I felt I had a lot left to say, although I'm not totally convinced of the wisdom of it. I estimate I wrote 17,000 words for the column alone last year — enough for a short novel. Obviously, that takes a lot of commitment, and I may not have the time to do it with my other duties (as Assistant Editor) at *Excalibur*.

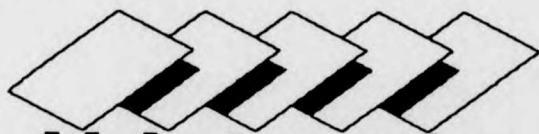
We'll see how it goes. I like to think that The Trickster went back to the stream the next day, knowing that the apples were an illusion, and tried to pick them off the water anyway. To be a writer, almost by definition, you have to have a little romance in you.

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