

Cartoons from the twilight zone

by Zane Harker

We are entering the strange and ill-defined realm of comics, a world without sense or coherency. Such comics are more likely to raise an eyebrow, produce an uncomprehending snort rather than a bellylaugh.

Some readers are likely to dismiss these comic strips as simply "not funny," but those with sufficient brain cells can appreciate the intended absurdity and often layered humour of the situations.

"Weird comic strips" have a loose set of requirements. First and foremost, they must be entirely improbable; they are rarely political; and most often they are drawn with simple lines.

An exception to the last rule is Edward Gorey. Gorey's Victorian, meticulous drawing style belies his obvious madness. Having made his living illustrating children's books, Gorey has openly admitted that he doesn't much like children. This is apparent in such works as "The Beastly Baby", where a loathsome, obese infant, after committing several vile acts, is abandoned on a ledge.



A few minutes later, a passing eagle noticed it there.



The eagle, having never before been presented with this classic opportunity, carried it off.



The eagle found keeping hold of it more difficult than he had expected.



He attempted to get a further grip on it with his beak.



There was a wet sort of explosion, audible for several miles.



And that, thank heavens! was the end of the Beastly Baby.

Moving right along to another madness meister: Kliban. What can one say of this mysterious man? Does anyone out there know his full name? If so, you are a true aficionado of this important genre in...our Comic Strip Heritage.

Kliban has the exquisite talent of being able to reduce his cartoon characters to the stupidest people imaginable. This would not be so funny in itself but that he grafts these characters to an appropriately ridiculous set of circumstances, the result:



"Well, OK... but if you ask me, fourteen thousand dollars is a lot of money for pie and coffee!"

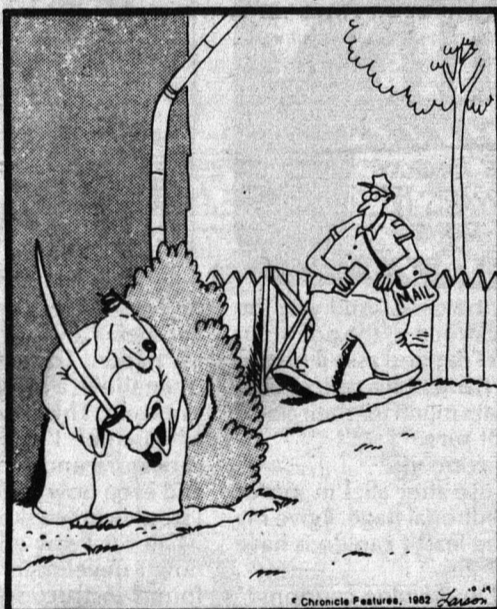


"No, that's not him!"

As with these other artists, Mary Kay Brown's work requires a methodical and often multiple reading for the humour to sink in. Brown's work has appeared in National Lampoon, and in keeping with that fine magazine's policy of "That's not funny, that's sick!" may I present Bill and Russ....(*brief fanfare*).

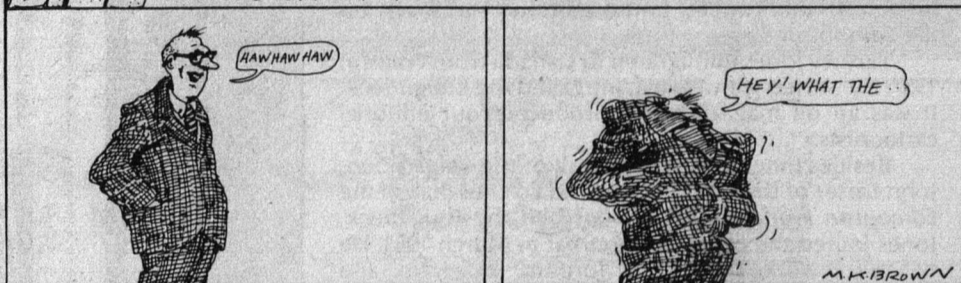
And finally, Gary Larson. You all know and love him for his regular *Edmonton Journal* strip "The Far Side." No doubt the product of a tragic and twisted past, Larson can masterfully portray total lunacy in a single frame, and often without captions:

THE FAR SIDE By GARY LARSON

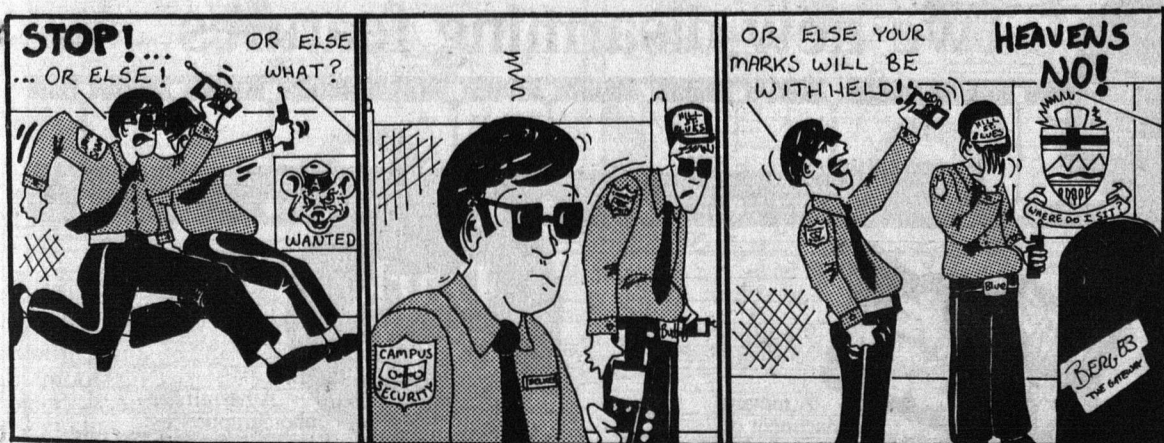
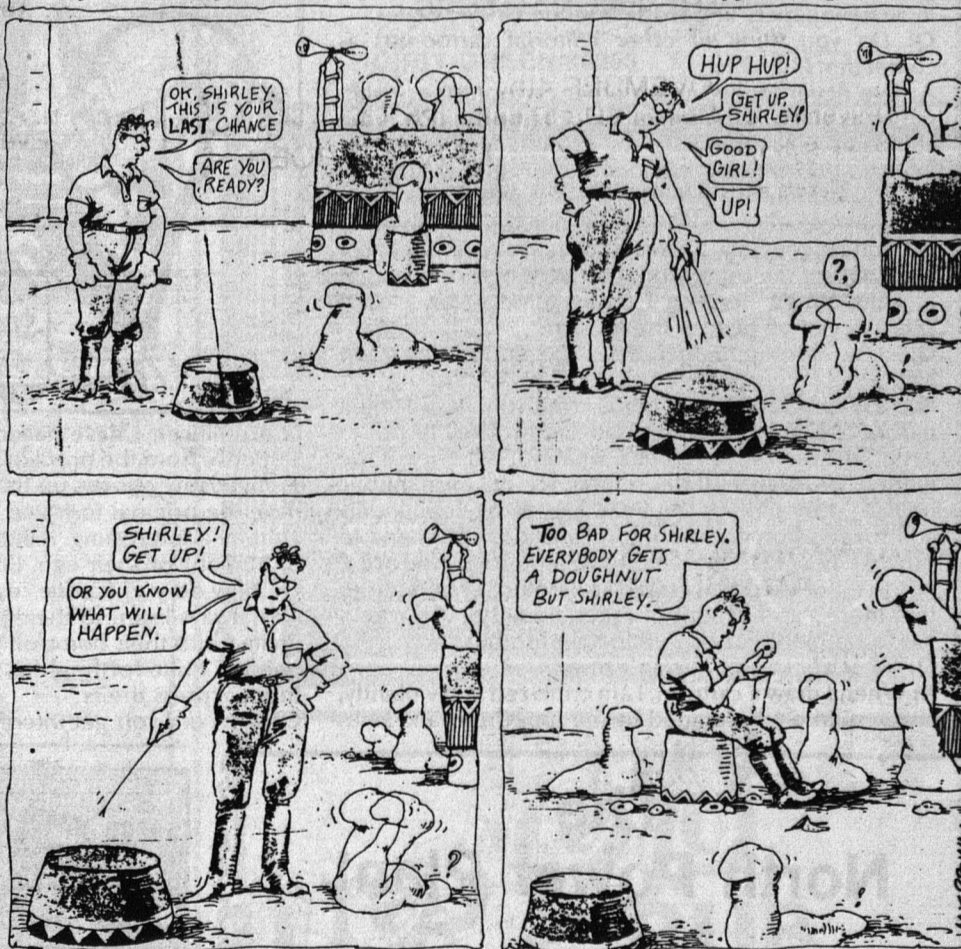


The above drawings are among my personal favourites, and while certainly only a skeletal indication of the vast weirdness in the comic cosmos, perhaps they can serve to bring a little more appreciation to this superficially tacky, but ultimately hilarious comic form.

THE STORY OF A NEWT WHO WAS EATEN BY HIS SUIT



Russ de la Rocca - Worm Trainer of the Americas



SUPER STAFF

Zip...Zap...Zoom, as Batman bashes local U of A Gilbertologists, Superman X-Rays cuties in Quad. Then Martin Shug, Brenda Waddle and Aquaman search the six and one half seas for Wonder Woman, last seen giving mouth to mouth to Gunnar Blodgett and Rich Watts. Unknown to the JLA, the Teen Titans are ransacking the co-op house shared by Suzette Chan, Jim Moore and Ninette Gironella, who've been rumoured to have bought stolen Star Laboratory secrets from the Joker and his two prize loonies Zane "Chuckles" Harker (with the mauve streaks in his hair) and Wes "Rumble Fish" Oglinski (with mauve hair in his streaks).

Crash...Bang...Boom, The Fantastic Four rescue Shane Berg, Jordan Peterson, and Ian Ferguson from sure death, while back at the Avengers Mansion, Bob Gardner, and Doug Harvey, obvious mutants, still aren't allowed into the X-Men. Or as Galactus said, "I can't believe I ate the whole thing!"

Those who can't do, teach. Or at least posture and pontificate. Therefore, a special thanx to our Gateway cartoonists, the people who "can do". Shane Berg, Sarah Hickson, and Jim Moore did their best work this year. Extra special thanx to Ian Ferguson who gave up his chance for a full-size Bunky Sawchuk to produce the Captain Gateway cover masterpiece.