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READING IMPROVEMENT CENTRE

Comic culture

Mike Fisher

Last weekend, Founder's College was the scene of **Cosmic Con '79**, a comic book collector's paradise of posters, gum cards and, of course, comic books. For the uninitiated, the convention was a walk on the wild side of comic book cultures.

There is an important distinction made in comic book circles between the serious comic book collector and the mere dilettante who thumbs his way unknowingly through the comic book buyer's guide. The serious fan begins his collection early, usually in grade school. Later, in high school, he realizes that he is spending all his money on comic books. If he is truly a hardcore fan, he becomes a dealer. The dilettante sells his comic books and buys a Ford.

Jack, 29 years old, is a systems analyst from New York who is admittedly hardcore. He has a wife and a child, and he has been dealing at conventions

since he was a young man.

When asked how valuable his comic book collection is to him, Jack smiles nervously and looks out over the shifting sea of peaked caps, bum buttons and posters. "I guess," says Jack, "if it came down to either selling my collection or watching my family starve, I'd sell out. But I know some guys who would tell their wives, 'C'mon honey, we can go without food for a few days longer...'"

York students Paul Kennedy and Richard Delisle organized a great show, which included everything from being able to see Mr. Spock break down and sob in the film **Star Trek Bloopers** to seeing some kid no taller than my kneecaps actually pay a hundred dollars for a comic book.

With the incredibly hulky success of this year's **Cosmic Con**, we can expect it to become an annual event.

The boy who smiled

Stuart Ross

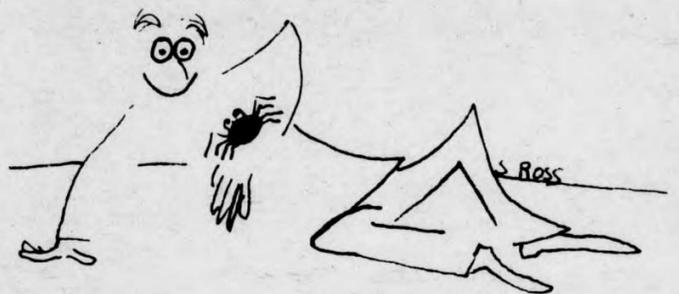
He just never seemed to smile anymore. Even when he was given the new bicycle for his 13th birthday he remained stonefaced. They were very worried. What could possibly be wrong?

Each of his friends were called up and questioned but nothing new was discovered. So they decided to have him committed. It was a big decision and it took a long time to pack his things, but it was decided that it was his only chance. "Besides, it will give him a little holiday," one friend of the family commented.

He was checked into the hospital in February and was released in May. He had undergone numerous shock-treatment sessions and parts of his brain were tampered with. He met some new friends in the hospital, with whom he listened to music and discussed the different doctors. He liked all the music he heard. He wasn't picky about what was played on the radio. "I nod my head to the rhythm," he was quoted as saying at one of his couch sessions.

And he smiled now. By God, he smiled. His smile shone like a neon light and made everyone happy.

When he got back home he rode his bicycle every day. He rode his bicycle all summer and



all autumn. He rode it while his old friends were in school. He was happy that his parents had forgotten to enrol him. Now he had more time to himself. So he smiled and rode his bicycle.

For a few weeks in December he noticed that his parents were very quiet and spent most of their time watching the television or listening to the radio. They didn't listen to music, though, they listened to talking. He smiled at them to cheer them up but they seemed sad.

Then, late at night, there would be the sirens. They were long and loud and hurt his ears. His parents would run into his room and lead him quickly into the cellar and

into a small metal room his father had built. He smiled at his father. When the siren ended, they would go back upstairs.

One night, while they were

down in the metal room, he discovered a small spider on the floor. He got so involved in playing with it that when his parents went up, he stayed there, sitting on the cold floor.

He played with the spider for hours, until he became bored. Just as he was about to step on it, there was a loud roar and the ground began shaking. The door slammed shut and he rolled to the wall, where he hit his head and fell unconscious.

Outside, the sky turned to bright orange and entire buildings fell down.

Two days later he woke up. His stomach hurt and he wanted to eat. He pushed open the door and saw ashes all around. He wondered where his bicycle had gone. If he couldn't find his bicycle, he might have to go back to school. He smiled anyhow and looked up into the sky.

The Service with a smile

Stuart Ross

The Service by Paul Quarrington, Coach House Press, 1979, 182 pp., \$5.50.

"Hey, Quarrington! Liked your book! Lotsa tits!" Toronto writer and jazz musician Paul Quarrington grins slothily (like a sloth) and shuffles out of the bar, out onto Queen St., where atmospheric aberrations turn hyper-realism into absurdity. Or is it the

other way around?

With his debut novel, beautifully produced by Coach House, Paul Quarrington has created a major work of comic fiction. Few novelists have achieved such consistently funny narrative and dialogue. **The Service** is the story of the seedy existence of Horace "Hoggy" Hodgkins, a pathetic, kicked-about little man with more than

his share of bad luck. Shoved down some steps one day, Horace finds himself at the office of the mysterious Watford Hennessey Argyle, who promises to solve all of his problems for \$50.

The book is populated by wonderfully original grotesques and degenerates, the likes of which have not been seen since the works of the Irish writer, Flann O'Brien. Quarrington has a natural eye for the bizarre.

Finely structured and virtually flawless, **The Service** is fantastic reading straight through to its mad, unexpected ending. And as the boundaries become obscured, the reader becomes less real.

Coming...

Jim Morrison looks
back on the 70's

