

Barker was in the air raid shelter. Every sense in his 9-year-old body concentrated on the sound of the buzz bomb overhead. "Barker", a voice called but he didn't answer, the buzzing had stopped. "Barker". An eternity of seconds oozed past, fear punctuated his heartbeats, then the explosion. Rubble and rocks bulged down on him and just before he shut his eyes he heard the voice again, "Barker", and his mother threw her body across his. She died instantly.

As he was led out by the rescuers the first thing Barker saw was the face of a burning building, window eyes lit by flames and a ruptured mattress tongue dangled from a centre balcony. He came to associate this as his only memory of his mother's dead face. "Barker". There was the soft voice again. From that day he severed himself from the world of emotion and adopted a detachment towards all consequences.

"Barker, wake up."
He opened his eyes.

We're playing a game of truth and dare and it's your turn.

"I must have been dreaming. Funny, I thought I was a child . . .", mused Barker.

— "All you have to do is throw the dice. If you get a six take a piece of paper out of the hat and see what it says."

Barker obliged with a casual yawn directed at everything around him and to everyone's delight he threw a six.

"What does it say?" Everyone held their breaths.

"It says, 'You Must Go Out Of Your Mind' ", read Barker.
"Oh well", he added, "I've got nothing to lose."

Later that night Barker went home and took out his diary. "If I were to go out of my mind successfully I'd need to find a tool to investigate it", Barker wrote, "I will consider the use of three alternatives: — writing; painting and Philosophy. The latter I dismiss because although I am philosophically inclined I am not academically trained in the formalities of letters and the politics of Science. It would be more natural for me to employ one or both of the other two devices."

Over the following weeks Barker made this entry: "I have discovered the answer to why I will write. It is an accurate expression for my emotions and mental processes. I will combine it with

painting as a mathematical means to measuring my progress. I will call this combination 'emotionism' "

Some time later Barker noted: "I have become aware of an order, a large black spot in the centre of a canvas. This spot is encircled by deep purple and this in turn is encircled by gleaming green. The entire canvas is white and covered with these spots which are equidistant and become smaller and smaller to the point of being infinitesimal as they recede into the lateral and vertical horizons. Where these two horizons meet is the point of infinity and this is white because the spots are so small they are no longer visible to the eye. This painting represents my understanding of the energy which has transmuted me into life. I recognise that I am the centre of aeons of energy directed towards me and my state of conscious awareness, my 'present' which has no time or dimension. Everything beyond me has achieved the purity of spirit (or lack of it) which I can be because it supports and defines me. The spots represent a pinpoint of these energy sources, the central spot being the total consciousness of me. However, I am no different or distinct from the other spots. I will call this painting 'Map 1' "

On the night of the equinox Barker designed Map 2.

"I have repeated 'Map 1' and substituted Cheops triangles for spots. Each triangle has its centre on diagonally intersecting lines drawn across the canvas. This painting is derived from a combination of knowledge — the myth of religion, the magic of medicine and the mysteries of today's science. It represents my theories of positive and negative forces. I am in the 'Here' simply to transcend it. Then why should I bother to be 'Here'? — Exactly. That's why I'm not somewhere else. However, this is a continuing state of temporary flashes which diminish as I progress to infinity and going out of my mind. I am still too much 'Here' and conscious of taking from out 'There'. 'There' is the same as 'Here' except 'Here' is where my mind verifies the positive and physical. For instance, take a flower. It is a living example of some of the positive energies supporting me. It has achieved a purity of spirit because in itself it is a flower. It is experiencing the 'Here' and 'There' simultaneously. From hereon I will regard it as a reminder of the forces of energy which nudge me onwards. — Maybe this is why sick people need flowers"

Having drawn up his maps Barker experimented until he designed a vehicle to travel out of his mind. Over a period of time he isolated his body's natural energy and harnessed it into a regenerative 'crystal'.

"I have discovered a method of converting my body's energy into a source of physical power", Barker wrote, "It involves the use of magnets, a crystal and a mirror. However I am experiencing

difficulty in overcoming forces of gravity which hold back my mind. These forces are physical manifestations of my fear. The worse my fear the more real the negative becomes".

It was around this time that Barker suffered a very real negative. One morning on his way to the office a man stepped in front of Barker and proceeded to remove his clothes and fold them on the footpath. To Barker's amazement no one seemed to notice. A young girl appeared to blush and avert her head but Barker later wondered if in fact the incident had occurred. He considered this a very good omen, "At last," he thought, "I am losing my sense of reality". The sight of an official looking envelope on his desk confirmed his importance and he tested his psychic powers by predicting its contents, "a message from God", he told a terrified secretary as he opened it.

He was startled to read, "As from the week ending 1st your services will no longer be required by this company".

It appeared that a number of complaints had been received regarding his habit of addressing occupants of the crowded lifts in the morning. It amused Barker that people did not acknowledge others even though their bodies were jammed against each other. Every morning, Barker, who prided himself on his oratory gift, would give them a short speech dealing with the progress of his going out of his mind.

That night he wrote, "I am now free to devote myself entirely to going out of my mind."

Deprived of his income Barker turned his backyard into a vegetable garden and while he waited for his first autumn harvest he dined on tender young grass shoots, flowers and leaves. He was surprised to find he felt better than ever. "My skin and hair reflect my serenity", he told a dinner guest. She was not impressed when Barker placed a plate of sauteed weeds and a salad of dandelions in front of her. She put on her coat and left amidst gales of what she later described as 'lunatic laughter from Barker'.

About this time Barker wrote a letter to the newspaper entitled 'the Protein Hoax'. It was never published and this confirmed Barker's suspicion that newspapers were agents of industrial and political tycoons who deliberately kept consumers in a state of ignorance regarding nutritional sources.

Some time later Barker sold therapeutic potions behind the local supermarket.

"Potions Nos. 1 to 38, distilled from the dew of flowers, guaranteed to cure everything from piles to mouth ulcers," he told a breathless customer. He also developed a range of 'weed' cigarettes

which he claimed induced an 'all pervading sense of unreality' and an intoxicant liquor the properties of which 'transport you to ecstatic heights of awareness.'

It wasn't long before Barker was arrested for breaking the laws of The Trading Act and making unsubstantiated claims. In court Barker represented himself and during the course of the trial it was found he was in need of psychiatric treatment and unfit to plead. He was sent to a public psychiatric hospital where he devoted the 6 months of what he later called his 'national service' to painting and writing.

He was last seen on Anzac Day leaving a pub in a state of drunken hilarity in the company of the controversial radio astronomer Dr. Peter Szekely, the only player of the game of truth and dare who had been sufficiently interested to see how it would end.

- Berwyn Lewis

This is the first issue of SCOP to include short stories but it will not be the last. The centre section of each issue may feature poetry or prose fiction.

The Saturday Centre Series includes books by women:

'Ratz'-poems by Joanne Burns (out now - not many left);
'By All the Clocks'-poems by Justina Williams (out soon);
'Songs of the Lyrebird', a memorial selection of poems with foreword by Marie Monypenny & introduction by Marjorie Barnard (out soon).

Other books planned are:

Two books of short stories for children by Valerie Helps (illustrated by Tom Muir);
A book of short stories for children by Joanne Burns (illustrated by Maisie Duloy & Tom Muir)
A book of short stories by Berwyn Lewis
A new volume of poetry by Joanne Burns.

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