

Chatshow

V. Hammer and The Plignoid

The Blurb

(Revised version)

(Certified as ideologically sound by the Ministry of Information)

ZOOL Social Priority Planet where a racially mixed population of those society has failed, struggle to make some sense of a difficult life-situation amid an atmosphere of deprivation and environmental decay.

ZOOL does, it must be admitted, have a crime problem.

ZOOL Well, at least the nightlife is interesting.

Jane awoke in a vast, desolate desert, lit by a single glowing white globe. The desiccated expanse of sub-tourist-quality sand was broken only by a single cactus, resplendent in its black studded battle-nappies. Jane wasn't sure she should approach the cactus — it had a rather tough expression. But too late! It had seen her.

“Where’s my daddy?” it said.

Jane did not know where its daddy, or indeed her daddy was. Or (indeed) *who* her daddy was.⁶ Or *who she* was. Or (indeedy-doodly-dandy) where, why, or what she was. Confused? So was she. So she gave the only possible answer.

“Dunno,” she said.

“Is one of them my daddy?”

“One of *who* your daddy, O little cactus?”

“One of *them* gesticulating howling savages on the horizon, O about average-sized human.”⁷

“One of *those*. . .” corrected Jane, but trailed off. It was true. A vast horde of gesticulating, howling savages had appeared, brandishing round-headed clubs, gesticulating, and uttering (as savages do) savage cries.

Closer and closer they came! Closer and closer Jane hugged the cactus to her body. This was a mistake; she was picking spines out of her chest for weeks afterwards.

Trundle, trundle, rumble, rumble, TRUNDLE, TRUNDLE. They were upon her! One of them thrust its round-headed weapon right up to her mouth and in a horrible nasal drawl uttered the dreaded words, “Hullo. My name is Alan Whicker and this is Whicker’s World.”

“Oh, so *that’s* where we are!” cried Jane.

“Today we are interviewing a young woman and her cactus,” the Chief Whicker Monster (for it was

⁶This is not meant to cast any doubts on Jane’s legitimacy. This sort of thing is merely an unfortunate result of sub-plot-space.

⁷Cacti are notoriously poor at judging height.

he) went remorselessly on. The subsidiary Whicker Monsters muttered sycophantically into their built-in nose microphones about the social problem of abandoned cacti.

“Take me to your producer,” said Jane — she might have suffered total identity failure, but she hadn’t forgotten the social decencies of space opera.

So the party moved off to CENTRAL television centre. At last the white globe was explained!

Meanwhile on Zool, Death (oops) Social Priority Planet, Prinz Gestetner von Herpes had just finished using a small furry animal to clean the barrel of his Kill-O-Zap.

He was a baddie. You could tell. From the bottom of his sinister (the shop had run out of dexter ones) boots, trendily fastened with velcro thingies instead of laces, up through his zip-festooned combat-wombat jacket, right up to his statutory Big Black Hat, he exuded evil. (The shop had run out of deodorant as well.)

The Smith and Wesson $.44\frac{1}{2}$ ⁸ magnum revolver felt good at his hip. The Kill-O-Zap felt good under his left armpit. The Polaris missile felt good up his trousers, but not when he sat down.

“Soon,” he thought, “soon I will have access to the source of infinite power. . . soon I will have access to cable television! Wufti!”

For this indeed was his dastardly plan. In cahoots with the Mad Alchemist and the Sol-Deneb-Procyon Alliance, he planned to rehabilitate Zool, to break down the impenetrable barriers of force (that bit was easy) that held back the Zoolian hordes from bursting forth into an unsuspecting galaxy. Already the media campaign was under way — tens of millions of ‘I’m backing Zool’ T-shirts were stockpiled at the spaceports, vast piles of ‘Zool Cool’ badges were altering the magnetic balance of the planet and Zool *real* ‘Bikini Atoll’ bikinis were threatening to appear in *Top Entity* shops the galaxy over.

Within an hour a ship would arrive to take Herpes to Whicker’s World where he would discuss what a bad press the media had given Zool on the *Uniwide* programme. The Prinz laughed an evil laugh.

“Neep,” went his armpit.

“Oh, drock,” said Gestetner, and removed the small furry animal from his Kill-O-Zap. “Must be more careful,” he muttered, “horrible mess up the barrel if it went off.” He absently tickled the S.F.A. under the chin.

“DROCK, DROCK, *DROCK!!!*” he screamed, “I’ve gone and done something nice *AGAIN!*” and burst out sobbing. You see, he had his problems too. Not only was he dictator of the spawning hordes of Zool, he was also a closet liberal.

In a sulk he bounded off to see his dear old French teacher who had always understood his troubles. Her old eyes lit up as she opened the door. “Its an élève,” she said, “an élève with a gun. . .”

—*BLAM*—

Gestetner stared relievedly down at the smoking pile of dust. At least he hadn’t *entirely* lost his touch. Twitching his nose in a meditative fashion he went off to catch the ship to Whicker’s World.

⁸The extra $\frac{1}{2}$ was so he could be really *extra* bad and use other people’s ammo up his barrel, whereas his wouldn’t fit up theirs. Also you don’t want the small furry animal to get squashed in there.

IT was a giant, malevolent brain, a pulsating mass of pure evil.

IT ruled Whicker's World with a pseudopod of titanium-reinforced iron.

IT was hosting a chatshow.

The *Terry Vagon Show* to be precise. Special Issue on Zool's problem kids. Prinz Gestetner was sitting in one squishy chair and *IT* was settling down into the other squishy chair the only way a giant brain can, which is reminiscent of a fried egg settling down in the pan. Gestetner was saying in a tone of Deep Concern, "Look, Brain, I *know* these kids."

(The brain was a substitute host. Terry himself was off at the moment attending his granny's funeral. She had briefly starred in a *Best of Butter* advert in which she had been asked to say how much nicer brand *X* butter was than nasty old margarine. Despite careful coaching, she had preferred the margarine. Within minutes she was on trial for offences against the *Consumer Protection (Prevention of) Act*, found guilty and sentenced to be boiled alive in rancid butter and eaten by the jury for lunch. It's not often that a Vagon's grandmother is fed to a plug 'butter, best of' trial.)

Just then Jane and the cactus leapt into the studio...