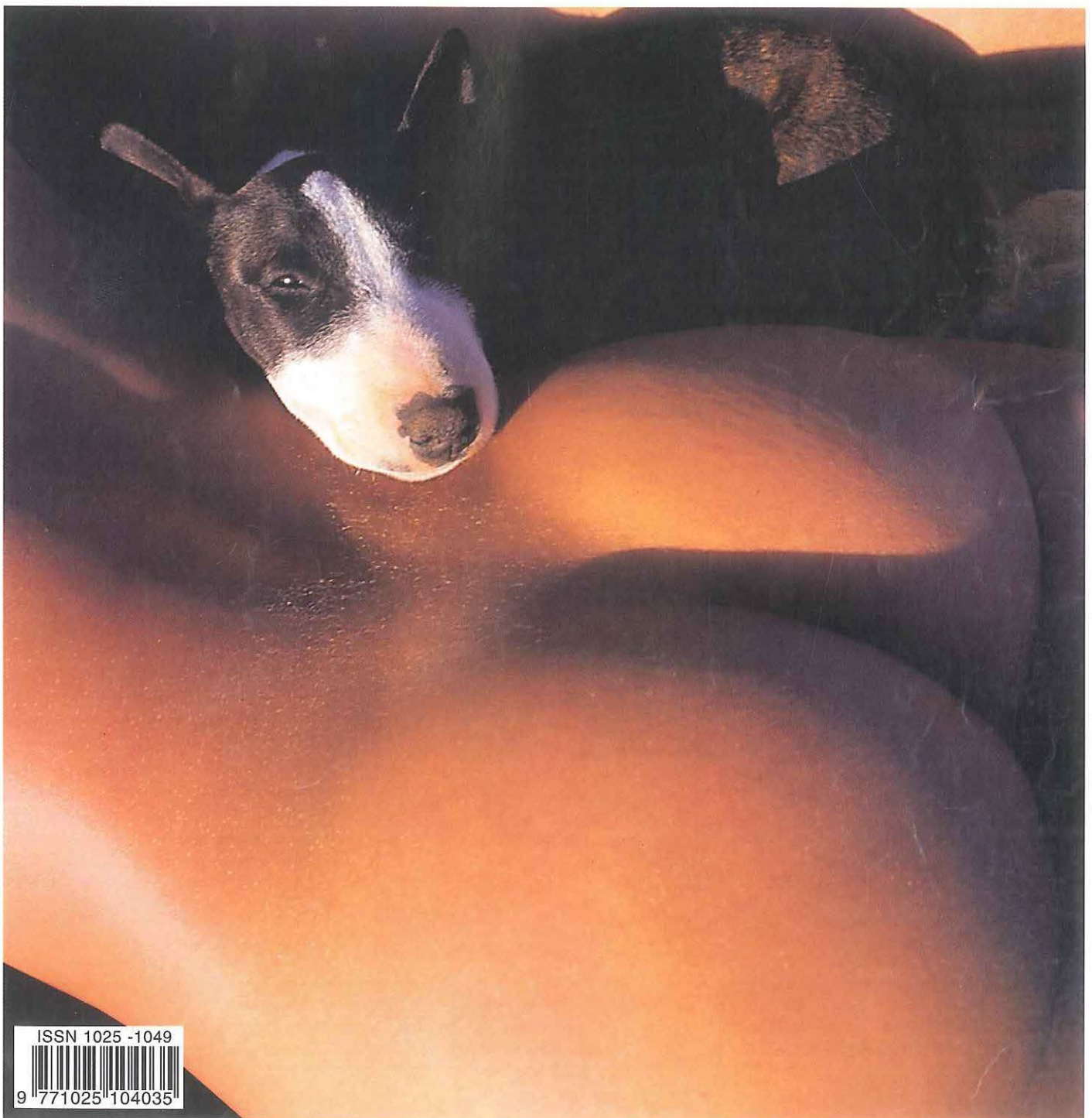


news you are not supposed to know

# nose week

May 1998 Issue 22 R13.50 including vat

**Billiton bosses' bums in Jersey butter • Hofmeyr: Bar Council acts  
Y2K 2U2 • Table Mountain under threat from Big Business  
Another secret Reserve Bank 'lifeboat' • Spooks in the WWF**



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## CHEEKY SANTAM

Dear Sir

On March 13 I was stopped at a yield sign, waiting for a break in the traffic, when I was hit in the rear by a lady driver who caused R8715 worth of damage. The driver, Mrs Lucretia Edwards, works for Santam Insurance and assured me that Santam will pay for my car to be fixed. I immediately got quotations and faxed them to her. Three weeks later, Santam had the cheek to offer me R3500 as full settlement.

I have been seriously inconvenienced. As an estate agent, I need my car seven days a week. Two months have passed and I'm still trying to get payment. What annoys me most is that *her* car is already fixed. *S. Smith, Durban (See page 17. Ed.)*

## HERSCH vs ABSA

Dear Sir

Although I have little time for Hersch and his over-inflated ego – he has hurled many insults at people in the insurance industry – I must say that, once again, ABSA has managed to blot its copybook, and in this case I support the little man. *Member of the Industry, Cape Town*

Dear Sir

The integrity of any company rests on that of its top management. ABSA has proved, once again, to be sadly lacking in that department.

Your report on the Hersch case leaves me speechless. My only hope is that David may yet slay his Goliath.

*R A Kahn, Cape Town  
(See Updates)*

## HOFMEYR vs PRELLER SC

Dear Sir

I attach a copy of a letter of complaint against *noseweek* for your attention.

Yours sincerely

*E H Linington, Press Ombudsman of SA  
Parklands*

Attached letter:

Sir,

Complaint against *noseweek*:

I include a copy of the article complained of. [*The March installment of our Hofmeyr story. Ed.*] The next installment is probably due in the near future, and I fear that it may be equally defamatory of me. I would appreciate it if you could at least bring this complaint to the notice of the publication concerned in order to inhibit a continuation of their conduct.

*F G Preller SC, Pretoria*

*(noseweek inhibited? See page 13. – Ed.)*

## THE GREY SHOE BRIGADE BANKERS YOU CAN RELY UPON

Ben C Linde, MD of ABSA Brokers – the bank's insurance arm – is already known to *noseweek* readers as the CEO of a company that is willing to lie under oath in order to wriggle out of its obligations. [See our report on their grey shoe shuffle with David Hersch in *nose21*.]

We have now been placed in possession of some interesting documents which reveal that, in the past he has personally profited from ABSA's shady style of doing business.

In 1994 Linde was a 50 percent shareholder, with a man called Frans Smit, in a company called Yowavi Asset Holdings. Yowavi banked with TrustBank (account 04009800480) and its overdraft with the bank was almost R320 000. Yowavi also has a term loan with the bank (account 04067370487) whose outstanding balance as at March 1995 was R1.808 million.

Linde's personal bank account is at that other bastion of ABSA probity, Volkskas (Randburg branch). In March 1995 he personally owed Volkskas R3.3 million. A soft loan (loan 170141237) had also been provided to him for ten years, which he was repaying at R30 000 a month – suggesting an apparent interest rate of 9% – or half prime.

In March 1995 Linde's personal account, as well as that of Yowavi, were under intensive care at the ABSA regional office in Johannesburg North.

ABSA's exposure to Linde, both in his personal capacity and as a shareholder in Yowavi, amounted to R5.429 million. ABSA's provisions for possible write-offs against these two accounts totalled only R365759. Interest on the three accounts – at prime rate – would have been in the region of R80 000 per month. Payments totalling only R40 000 a month were recorded in February and March 1995.

Now the really interesting bit: in its records of these accounts, ABSA's senior credit management note how

they thought the problem might be dealt with. "Legal action is to be instituted against Smit, but a soft line is to be taken against Linde. It has been suggested to Linde that he declare a dispute with Smit and then apply for liquidation of the cc [Yowavi]."

Nice people to do business with ... wonder how Mr Smit's doing these days? **n**

## RESERVE BANK: ANOTHER SECRET LIFEBOAT?

In May 1990 Minister of Finance Barend du Plessis gave his approval for the transfer of all the assets and liabilities of two small Afrikaner banks, Santam Bank and Senbank, to TrustBank Ltd – the beginnings of the rationalisation of Sanlam-controlled banks into Bankorp. The Minister's approval was conveyed to Bankorp's attorneys in a confidential letter signed by Dr Hennie van Greuning in his then capacity as Registrar of Banks. (*noseweek* recently obtained a copy.)

In the last paragraph of the letter the good doctor states: "The Department [of Finance] confirms further that the arrangements as set out in our letter dated 20 March 1990, reference 8/4/2/2/9/4G, regarding the loan to Santambank Ltd, remain unchanged." Loan? It seems yet another Broeder bank had secretly been assisted by their friends at the Reserve Bank with a 'lifeboat' – and that the "arrangement" was left in place when Santam Bank's assets and liabilities were transferred to TrustBank/ Bankcorp. Now the question is: how many millions was this one for, where was it hidden in the accounts – and what had since become of it?

Significantly, the only other lifeboat letter that has become public to date (also in secret) to Cape Investment Bank – was also signed by Van Greuning. As the lifeboat controversy broke, Van Greuning took a convenient transfer to the World Bank in Washington and the Reserve Bank has refused to comment as our letter discovers, claiming, once again, that they are prohibited from doing so by the Reserve Bank Act. **n**

see next issue



"WE HAVE A VISION OF A CLEAN, healthy, green future," Nedbank declares in a pamphlet promoting its Nedsave Green savings account, and its "green affinity" cheque accounts.

The booklet explains further: "In 1990 Nedbank and the Southern African Nature Foundation (WWF-SA) joined forces to create The Green Trust. Their aim was to do everything possible to protect the natural environment in southern Africa, threatened as it is by all kinds of destructive human activities."

Indeed. One need only look at the new "executive apartments" and millionaire's mansions spreading ever higher up the slopes of Table Mountain, to know that. But, no, no, that is not what Nedbank have in mind. Their criticism is directed at another sort of people.

In their own words: "South Africa's population is growing fast. A great deal of damage to the environment occurs because poor people in southern Africa tend to use whatever they can find for food and the shelter they need. To them, understandably, conservation might not seem very realistic."

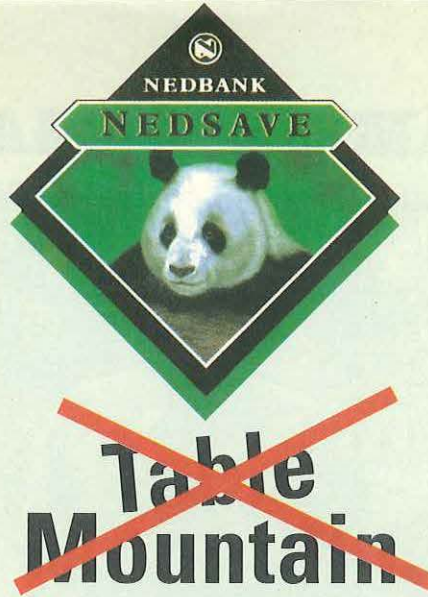
(If the truth be told, conservation does not seem very realistic to Nedbank either. But in their case it is not because of need. It is because of greed.)

Nedbank want to stop the "poor" people in "southern" Africa – i.e. those tending to live further to the north of the south, if you know what we mean – from damaging the environment. They definitely don't want to discourage rich (white) yuppies from despoiling the natural slopes of Table Mountain, who are driven by greed. Because that's where Nedbank makes its money.

As *noseweek* has previously revealed, High Cape, the flash new development ascending the slopes above Woodstock – there's a hotel still to come, at the very top – is being financed by Syfrets, a company wholly owned by Nedbank.

Which means that when Nedbank declares in its booklet that its "green affinity" accounts have been "designed for people who care about our natural environment, who don't want to see rivers polluted, indigenous trees cut down" etc. – why, that's a lie.

When Nedbank declares they have: a "special account" designed for young people who want to "help protect our beautiful natural environment from deteriorating further", young people who sign up should be told they've been "had" by a smooth-tongued copy writer. In fact, by supporting Nedbank, you are supporting the irreversible destruction of Table Mountain. A few tribal mud huts, some overgrazing, some veld ploughed for a peasant mielie field – for



those the poor are easily compensated. Nature can be left to recover itself. Concrete high-rises, blasted into the slopes of the mountain at huge cost – those, on the other hand, take 50 years to mellow into slums, where only humans are likely to return to the wild.

## KRITZINGER & CO

Kritzinger and Co, attorneys and conveyancers of 33 Church Street, Cape Town, also take a line on conservation. Like Nedbank, it's the one which profits them best. Senior partner Konrad Kritzinger has been widely assumed to be a "green" lawyer, ever since he accepted the brief to represent the Camps Bay Ratepayers Association in opposing the controversial First Crescent Development on the Camps Bay slopes of Table Mountain. The Ratepayers are currently raising public funds to service his projected fees.

The total onslaught on Table Mountain has begun. Residents have just discovered that Stocks & Stocks, too, are about to develop another nasty, block of flats on two erven, high on Camps Bay Drive. Not only is it a high-rise, high-bulk development where previously there were only low rise houses in gardens; the proposed building will also be sited across a major water-

course, the Valken Stream.

Title deed restrictions (which prohibited subdivision) were allowed to be lifted on one of the erven involved – erf 1178 – some time ago, despite objections from neighbours. In their application to the Provincial Authorities to have the restrictions lifted, the owners declared: "The owners of the north and south of erf 1178 have acquired this property with the intention of subdividing it and to then consolidate the portions so created with their respective properties to enlarge their gardens and to prevent the erection of a possible block of flats or other dwelling thereon (i.e. they wish to reduce the density of buildings)."

This was clearly false – the owners are still the same. And their neighbours are outraged. One of them, Tom Sergeant – an active member of the Ratepayers group – sent an objection to the Manager of Land Use of the Municipality of Cape Town. He also called on Stocks & Stocks to tell them of his displeasure. They offered to buy his property for R1,5 million. He rejected the offer.

Imagine Mr Sergeant's surprise when, next morning, he received a fax from Stocks & Stocks' attorney... Mr Kritzinger... in which Kritzinger described Sergeant's opposition to Stocks' building plans as "malicious" and "without foundation", and as having an "improper motive" to pressure Stocks into buying his property. Kritzinger concluded by threatening to lay criminal charges of extortion against Sergeant should he proceed with his objection against the development.

"I am extremely disappointed with the behaviour of Mr Kritzinger," said Gianni Lovisolo, executive member of the Llandudno Civic Association. "It seems to me more like the behaviour of a Mafiosi – a clear attempt to intimidate Mr Sergeant."

The Ratepayers' Association will meet shortly to reconsider their appointment of Mr Kritzinger as their attorney. ■



How do you know these are *not* Greg Blank's toes?

Answer: They aren't manicured



## Billiton

WHEN BRIAN GILBERTSON WAS still chairman of Gencor, his staff would announce the arrival of his helicopter with a laconic "The ego has landed". Or so, at least, *The Times* wittily assured its readers upon Gilbertson's arrival in London last year to take up his new position as chairman of Billiton plc.

The recent announcement of Billiton's spectacular interim results did bring to mind to what extent that ego has landed with its bum in Jersey butter. And what excellent personal arrangements those fine old Gencor types have managed to make for their difficult "relocation" to London.

Billiton is an Afrikaner business giant gone abroad, dressed in an English mac for protection from the vicissitudes of the new South African political climate. Not only do Billiton and Richemont, together with ever bigger bits of ABSA "International" represent Afrikaner capital gone walkies, the move has also provided a most handy means for a clutch of those once-so-patriotic executives to recast themselves as gentlemen of Knightsbridge, Chelsea and Belgravia.

They've managed to move masses of assets offshore with advice from the Union Bank of Switzerland, those brokers of Nazi gold, friends of Dr Nico Diederichs, and lenders of last resort for 50 years of apartheid rule. They've installed a miracle machine: you put rand assets in the SA end and take tax-free pounds and dollars out offshore! But that's not what we're supposed to say out loud.

The chaps at Billiton and Gencor just love attending Mandela dos – for the children, you know, so parent companies Sanlam and Rembrandt could not possibly have made the move offshore to flee our new multiracial democracy!

On the contrary, Gilbertson and Billiton have cheekily claimed that they were forced offshore to escape the currency constraints of the Old South Africa: all those silly exchange control regulations made business so *difficult*.

But Sanlam and Rembrandt men – Anton Rupert himself – were ensconced on the Reserve Bank Board when those regulations were made. One of the smart new Billiton directors, Derek Keys, was – dare one mention it – we notice that in his London CV *he* doesn't – one of the Nat Ministers of Finance who promulgated and enforced them. Apparently, you forget all that when living in a Belgravia flat.



So we thought we ought to re-introduce some of Billiton's lucky directors to our readers: in June last year, Gilbertson's basic salary was doubled to £525 000. (He should be due for another increase about now.) In addition, according to the Billiton prospectus issued at the time, he gets an annual bonus of up to £272 500, depending on results. Judging by the spectacular interim results, he should be getting the maximum. (Pity *Finance Week* keeps asking all those unnerving questions about why Billiton keeps the source of those profits so secret ...)

Back to the package. To the salary and bonus add a Car Allowance of £15 000, the use of an appropriate flat in London, rent-free (estimated value £100 000), and private medical insurance (about £5 000). Then add "relocation costs" (e.g. renovation of house, new curtains and furnishings, school uniforms for the kids etc. etc.), plus an undisclosed – but no doubt appropriate – amount of disability insurance and pension.

All in, we estimate that Gilbertson's consolation package for the wrench of leaving Gauteng could be equivalent to a gross income of R1,5 million a month. He is officially now a resident of Jersey (contracted to Billiton Services Jersey Ltd), so what he gets is tax-free, remember.

(Who, by the way, are the shareholders of Billiton Services Jersey Ltd? And what is its source of income? Could that be the source of the miracle profits?)

So Gilbertson gets only R1,5 million a month, you say? Of course not! He will, in addition, be "entitled to benefit under" (can you believe the politeness of it?) the "Billiton restricted share scheme". This is, says the prospectus, "a long-term incentive plan principally for Billiton's senior executives, designed to reward and incentivise (sic) senior executives and to align their long-term objectives with the interests of shareholders". (Apparently, if they're paid only a million-a-month salary, Billiton directors can only be expected to spend their time lining their own pockets. They require an extra bonus if they are to look after the interests of shareholders as well.) "It is intended," the prospectus continues, "that this [allocation of shares] not exceed 120% of a participant's annual basic salary".

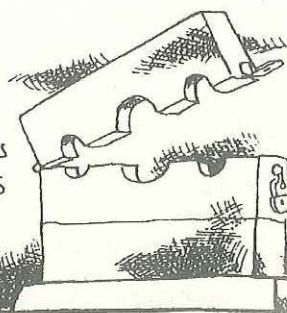
All the executive directors got a good whack of shares to "incentivise" them at the time of Billiton's listing. So it's probably safe to assume that the maximum is up for grabs again this year.

The other three executive directors (all ex-Gencor) get a basic salary in London of a measly £350 000 (compared to Gilbertson's £525 000). The consolation prize: all the other perks and bonuses listed above apply to them too. On that, Michael Davis, Miklos Salamon and David Munro are playing Brit and making do in the Georgian slums behind Buckingham Palace.

The second rank back home – the South African non-executive directors – are only able to put away a little – around R235 000 each – each year towards an offshore nest egg, for when the going gets too rough. That's what they get paid for their less-exacting services to the company: R235 000 a year, offshore. Plus another R100 000 if they serve on a committee. (Plus a first-class airticket to London at least twice a year and 5-star hotel for self and wife to

## shame

There's a new movement to bring a sense of shame back to society, to deter practitioners of pernicious anti-social activities by means of acute personal embarrassment.





# RICH MAN, POOR MAN, BEGGAR MAN ... THIEF

attend board meetings.) This is, of course, in addition to the handsome salaries they are receiving in South Africa for the full-time jobs they have here.

Let's introduce them (you might not recognise them in the prospectus): David Brink: offshore investors were only told that he is the CEO of Sankorp – no mention that he was, until recently, chairman of the much more controversial ABSA, and the disastrous Murray and Roberts. Attie du Plessis: British shareholders would not know that,

besides being a top Sanlam man, he is the brother of former Nat Minister of Finance, Barend (great promulgator of exchange control regulations and these days resident in Switzerland). Derek Lyle Keys: it sounds so English, doesn't it? Old Sanlam man, and not so long ago – sshh – Barend's successor as Nat Minister of Finance.

\*"We had to threaten a general strike to ensure a minimum wage of R1000 per month last year," said National Union for Mineworkers spokesman, George

Malebatse. "Now Billiton pays a minimum wage of R1100 for surface workers, R1300 for underground mineworkers – the extra is for the serious risks to life and health working underground."

Oh, and they, too, get perks: three canteen meals a day and a bunk in an eight-bunk hostel room. Rent-free, just like the directors in London. The only difference: for every plate of food Joe Worker gets to eat, Brian demands the equivalent of what more than 1 000 men eat. *Bon appetit!* ■

## Brainstorm

FOR THE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT) industry, it's playtime on the JSE. Talented and bold entrepreneurs have been making record fortunes in super-quick time. One lot are worth a special mention: they've made R100 million playing about for just five weeks. They are also the ones who found the old-timer in the IT trade intolerable.

Fifteen years ago, Dutch immigrant Piet den Boer founded Q-Data. Ten years later, he took it to the JSE and he and several of the young men he had recruited to join in the enterprise made a more than satisfactory fortune. In 1995, Q-Data was number one on the *Sunday Times's* list of the top 100 companies on the JSE.

Den Boer still had lots of plans for going international. Come March last year, he was still chairman, with several of his founder buddies still on the board. Which made it all the more of a surprise when all those old buddies, who had made such handsome fortunes out of their Q-Data shares, turned on Den Boer when they saw a better payoff for themselves in a buy-out deal with Persetel. He resisted – so they voted him out of office.

Q-Data is no longer listed on the JSE and it is anyone's guess whether

Den Boer's old pals went on to realise still further undreamed-of fortunes, or not. What is clear is that Piet den Boer does have a certain talent. Less than three months after finding himself out of a job, he had a new IT company up and running. The name he gave it was as crassly literal as his own: Brainware. Within no time he had recruited some young IT men to join him. An old-style, no-holds-barred entrepreneur himself, he apparently assumed that his young new recruits would all share his commitment and enthusiasm. He gave them bundles of shares in his new company, at one-tenth of a cent per share, so that they should have a stake in its future success. (Not shy, he had allotted himself 100 million shares.)

In January, Brainware was listed on the JSE. Shares allotted to subscribers for R1 a share, were being sold for R2,70 on the first day of trading. Ever since, the share has hovered at around R3 – which put the value of Den Boer's stake at about R300 million.

Den Boer had given Evert Nel, his new MD, 21,8 million shares. Which meant that only six months after joining the company, 35 year old Nel was worth a staggering R59 million. In just one month more, his fortune grew to R65 million.

Garth Williams had been given

11,9 million shares at par – which meant that at the launch, what he had bought for R11 900 was suddenly worth R32 million, rapidly rising to R36 million. A third young director, Jaap van der Merwe, was given a modest 3,9 million shares, which were now worth R10,5 million, rising to R12 million.

On 9 March this year – just five weeks after the JSE launch, Nel, Williams and Van der Merwe declared that they had developed a dislike for Den Boer's "management style". With a day's notice, they left the company. Den Boer had omitted to bind them in any way. He must be old-fashioned – or very careless: it had apparently not occurred to him that anyone would accept a stake worth millions in the company, without tendering at least the value of their presence in return.

Clearly though, he was not too put out. By the next day the hard-arsed Hollander had filled the gaps and reconstituted his board. At Brainware it's megabucks business as usual. (Which does rather raise the point: the three renegades' value in shares could not have related to the scarcity of their skills. It certainly did not relate to their loyalty to the company. So what was the basis for the allocation of shares which significantly diluted the value of shares that investors actually paid for?) The real question, of course, is: who of the original directors might already have cashed in their shares? Nel, Williams and Van der Merwe haven't been seen around for a while. Could it be that they are looking for another IT company willing to offer them a quick R100 million in-and-out? Dr Bill Venter's Altech has just issued a cautionary statement to shareholders, saying he is planning to list some of his IT interests on the JSE "with the help of impartial role players in the IT industry". Might they be role "players" we know? Watch this space. ■

...Well, one can always hope.



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Councillor Brian Watkyns,  
Cape Metropolitan Council  
Isobel Edelstein,  
Deputy Mayor

Green  
for  
TOP SECRET



Council goes green on an  
off-colour deal with all-white union

DP COUNCILLOR BRIAN WATKYNs has lately been tackling a couple of intriguing issues in the Cape Town City Council. Many are familiar with one of them: the well-reported story of Keith Nicol, the town clerk who is being paid approximately R35 000 per month not to come to work. But Councillor Watkyns has also been asking questions on another matter, no less intriguing, where information has been even less forthcoming. Some answers to these questions were provided during Council meetings held behind closed doors, and are recorded in that part of its minutes printed on green paper to denote their classification as "top secret". We're clearly "not supposed to know" what it's all about. Try us.

The story begins with the financial aspirations of the old municipal trade union with the rather appealing acronym SAAME – the South African Association of Municipal Employees. SAAME was, until 1991, restricted by law to Whites only and, in the nature of things at the time, comprised most of the skilled workers of city and town councils across the country.

In the early 1980's, at the dawn of the Age of Uncertainty, the SAAME national executive's response to the cry "adapt or die" was to look for ways to become less dependent on members' contributions. In the spirit of private

enterprise, the Union leadership embarked on various entrepreneurial undertakings. One of the projects was to develop a South Coast holiday resort, for the use of union members at special rates. With about 45 000 loyal members countrywide – a good proportion being either Vaalies or Vrystaaters – the Union was confident that the resort would be in high demand. To further demonstrate their entrepreneurial

“ It was later to  
be described in a  
City Council memorandum  
as a “prima facie  
case of fraud”.

sophistication, the Union leadership financed the development by borrowing offshore. Unfortunately, they neglected to cover forward – as with so many SA businesses at the time, this was on the advice of their Pretoria bankers. When, as a confidential Union memorandum rather quaintly puts it, the “unforeseen happened” and the rand

exchange rate plummeted, SAAME took a financial caning. Another unfortunate venture, a savings and loan scheme for members, saw the hapless Union incurring yet more losses after running into trouble with both the Receiver of Revenue and the Registrar of Banks.

By 1991, far from having attained financial independence, after liquidating its assets, the Union was left with debts of approximately R11 million – enough to threaten its continued existence.

Cape Chairman Fred Hoffman, Vice-Chairman Derrick Windrum, Secretary Jack Bondietti and his Deputy, Gawie Beukman quickly grasped the gravity of their situation: they stood to lose their jobs, pensions and benefits in a rapidly shrinking market for ex-officials of Whites-only unions.

What made their predicament even more poignant was that their own branch was, in fact, financially thriving. It was under threat because it was jointly liable for the debts of the national union.

For the Cape Town City Council the Union's difficulties represented a threat to the “sweetheart relationship” they had established by assiduously wooing Union representatives over many years. So sweet was their relationship, that the Council enforced a so-called closed-shop agreement, in terms of which all white municipal employees had to join SAAME and were not permitted to resign from the Union while employed by the Council. (Employees of colour were similarly obliged to join another union, SAMWU, also part of the closed shop deal.) In return, the unions were compli-



ant and cooperative, and hardly ever went on strike. A bizarre aspect of this cosy set-up – probably unprecedented in industrial relations – was that Council officials responsible for negotiating with the unions, were themselves members of those unions.

But for ordinary union members, SAAME's financial predicament wasn't much of a crisis. At worst, if SAAME went bankrupt, they could simply form another union. So they adamantly resisted the SAAME leadership's attempts to increase levies on members. The leadership of the Cape branch then struck on an alternative plan to save their own necks. For many years, SAAME-CT had been running a Group Life Assurance Scheme for its members, independently of the national union. The City Council assisted by automatically deducting the appropriate premiums from all employees' salaries. The Council also added a subsidy before passing each month's total to SAAME's management. The SAAME management were allowed to deduct a small administration fee, before, in turn, passing the balance to the broker who had devised the scheme – Fairheads Trust – who deducted their fee before passing the remaining amount to the underwriter, Momentum Life.

In 1986, Momentum Life – an assurer whose elite Broederbond affiliations were the sort likely to find favour with an all-white municipal union [As McGregor more politely puts it: “controlling shareholder – Rembrandt via Volkskas”] – took the extraordinary step of offering the Union a 22% discount on their premiums. Anyone who expected the union bosses to use this windfall either to increase their members' insurance cover, or to offer their members a reduced premium, was being touchingly naive.

In fact, members weren't told about it. Nor, apparently, was the City Council, who continued to pay a subsidy based on the higher premium amount.

The union bosses had other, ostensibly equally public-spirited, plans for the money: assisted by Fairheads, they used the money to create a so-called “Stabilisation Fund” – from which, they said, they could make grants – at their discretion and as the need arose – to members who had suffered any form of disability not otherwise provided for. The negligible payout rate to such victims arouses suspicions that their true purpose may have been something else. Indeed, such was the discrepancy between the money coming in, and that being paid out that, by 1991, the balance in the Stabilisation Fund had grown to approximately R1 million.

Now, in 1991, at the height of the

Union's financial crisis, SAAME-CT's leaders decided to stop messing around with legal niceties. They did consult Fairheads' director Ian Phillips. On 23 September 1991, Phillips wrote to Gawie Beukman: “Following your committee decision not to continue with contributions to your [Stabilisation] Fund, but rather to adjust your [administration] fee structure so as not to have to increase your membership fees ... I have pleasure in setting out my proposal ...”

The union bosses now simply diverted the substantial “discount” on the life assurance premiums that for five years had been flowing into the “Stabilisation Fund”, directly into the Union's coffers, in the guise of an “administration fee”. The result was a dramatic improvement in their financial position: whereas in the early 1990's the Union was earning approximately R300 000 p.a. in administration fees, by 1993 the figure had increased to R872 000 p.a.

It was later to be described in a City Council memorandum as a “prima facie case of fraud”.

Instead of helping incapacitated members, SAAME's Cape leadership were now in a position to help a seriously incapacitated Afrikaner financial institution – Pretoria Bank – which was suffering a form of disability for which even their Broeder friends in the Reserve Bank had not “otherwise provided for”. Not only was Pretoria Bank involved in the darkest corners of Afrikaner intrigue – its activities included fronting for Masterbond's illegal activities and providing finance for the sinister activities of Military Intelligence's Civilian Co-operation Bureau – it had also backed the failing all-white union with a desperate R11 million loan.

The extra R600 000 p.a. which was now being “re-allocated” from SAAME's Cape members' insurance contributions, corresponds almost exactly to the repayments the Union leadership was having to make to service the R11 million loan from Pretoria Bank – enabling both bank and union to delay their day of bankruptcy.

So desperate was the situation that, in August 1991, Hoffman and Beukman of SAAME approached Attorneys Findlay & Tait to assist them in finding a legal way to gain access not only to the monthly amount being ‘kicked back’ from the insurer, but also to the R1.2 million which had already been accumulated in the Stabilisation Fund. Based on the attorneys' advice, they decided to use the money in the Stabilisation Fund to operate a savings and loan scheme – as a source of interest, administration fees and commissions for the Union.

“ So tell me what you think is going on,”  
noseweek asked.

“It sounds complicated but it's actually pretty simple.

You've got this happening all over the world. These so-called consultants arrive. They tell the bosses ‘we can save you millions, all you have to do is give us ten per cent of what you save.’ They've got a whole lot of tricks – you've heard of

‘re-engineering’, ‘downsizing’, ‘macro design’ and ‘micro-design’ etc. – which all really mean laying off staff which is a relatively simple thing to do once you've had a lot of practice. And they put on all these wonderful parties and trips and bosberaads – who knows what else.

So they get their contract and proceed to get rid of people left, right and centre. Next year costs are way down and profits are way up, so the consultants make their huge fee and move on – to the next Council. In the long run things get stuffed up, but nobody really cares about the long run.

That's somebody else's problem.”

”



One immediate implication of the Union's actions was that the families of those members who died during the period between 1986 and 1993 received far less in life assurance than they had in fact paid for. For example, the spouse of a member who received a payout from the fund of R100 000, would have received at least R20 000 more had the member's full contribution been applied to securing life insurance. As yet, no one has come forward to claim the difference from the Union.

The diversion of members' insurance contributions was publicly revealed for the first time in 1993, when a competing union – the Professional Staff Association (PSA) – exposed the fraud in a widely-publicised Industrial Court battle. The PSA had successfully petitioned the Industrial Court to set aside the closed shop agreement between the Council and SAAME. This was followed, in June 1994, by a pious City Council memorandum to staff, informing them that allegations of fraud and overcharging against SAAME had been referred to the police and Attorney General. In November of that year, SAAME members were told the Council had instituted a civil action to recover the stolen money, and had promised also to recover that portion stolen from the union members themselves, if the case was successful. The amounts involved were R941 166 of Council funds, and R1 882 332 of members' funds.

In July 1996, Cape Attorney General Frank Kahn apparently notified Council officials that he had insufficient evidence to prosecute and invited the Council to submit further evidence. As yet, no further evidence has been forthcoming from the Council.

Three years later, that (officially) is where matters still stand – except for those annoying questions from Councillor Watkyns that the Council insists on answering on secret “double green paper”. There is good reason to believe that in recent months there have been a number of significant developments behind the scenes, and that some Council politicians and officials have their own reasons for wanting to keep these secret.

Well-informed sources tell us that the union leadership responsible for the fraud has offered the Council a secret cash settlement. While the amount offered does not even equal the Council's portion of the misappropriated funds, the Council appears inclined to accept the offer – regardless of its obligation to ordinary union members who lost money as well.

There are a myriad reasons why both Union and Council want to keep the deal

secret. The Union leadership's offer – no matter how small – amounts to an admission of guilt which union members could use in support of their own claims and charges. Such exposure would, almost inevitably, force the resignation of the union leadership. This, ironically, might not suit the plans of the current City Council executive, who surely appreciate the advantages of having a weak and compromised Union leadership.

In the meantime, SAAME-CT has merged with other municipal unions around the country to form the new Independent and Allied Municipal Trade Union (IMATU). But, in tune with the

“ There is good reason to believe that in recent months there have been a number of significant developments behind the scenes, and that some Council politicians and officials have their own reasons for wanting to keep these secret ”

rest of the new SA, the more change, the less change. The new IMATU leadership in Cape Town is identical to the old SAAME leadership who were involved in the life assurance fraud. All except Fred Hoffman, who is now a Nat councillor in the South Peninsula Municipality! Derrick Windrum – ex-Vice-Chairman of SAAME – is now Chairman of IMATU; Gawie Beukman, ex-Secretary, and Chris Hagen, ex-Deputy Secretary of SAAME, are now Secretary and Deputy Secretary, respectively, of IMATU.

The money in the Stabilisation Fund remains under the control of SAAME/IMATU. In fact, IMATU has recently told ex-SAAME members who tried to claim their share of the fund that the new union will oppose their claims. The money that went into the administration fees account is still, officially, the subject of a civil court action by the Council, but no attempt has been made by the Council to advance the case over the past year.

Even after the disclosure of the fraud,

Council officials have maintained an unusually close and protective attitude towards the Union leadership. For example, in June 1995 the deputy director of human resources, Mr. Ernie Thorne, perjured himself in a statement to the Industrial Court by insisting that no closed-shop agreement between the Council and SAAME was being enforced. In fact, evidence presented – in the form of correspondence from Mr Thorne's department – showed that his department was still enforcing the closed-shop arrangement with SAAME, in contempt of an earlier Industrial Court judgment.

The Council continues to aid the SAAME leadership – now in their IMATU guise – by providing them with rent-free offices in the Civic Centre, where they share a floor with Thorne's department.

Four years after the fraud charges were laid against the Union leadership, potential key witnesses, such as those former members of the SAAME executive known to have opposed the fraud, have still not been interviewed by the police.

Union members fear City Council officials are holding a sword of Damocles over the heads of their leaders – in the form of evidence withheld from the Attorney General – while pushing through major changes and a “restructuring” programme which the Union would otherwise certainly have opposed. Council officials, they say, have been trying to maintain the closed shop because it suits them to keep the skilled workforce within one impotent group. If they destroy the old SAAME structure, they risk the formation of a new union, with a fresh, more vigorous leadership who have nothing to hide or fear.

A number of senior Council Executives and their hired consultants are known to favour the proposed merger of the City Council into a larger metropolitan structure. A powerful and united trade union could be a major obstacle to such plans, particularly since large-scale retrenchments are envisaged in the new municipal order. Under terms of employment still current, it would be very expensive to lay off large numbers of skilled staff. Some union members fear that a secretly compromised Union leadership might easily be forced to make concessions at their expense.

Skilled Council employees, given the opportunity by a more active union, would likely be amongst the best-informed critics of the Council management's plans for “restructuring” the city. Apart from the theft of their money, these employees say, the SAAME fraud will have been just a convenient stepping stone on the “great leap forward” to the mega-city. ■





# 3. The featherheads go for bigger game

WAS IT MERE COINCIDENCE THAT the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) was launched in 1961 – the same year that British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan declared in his famous “Winds of Change” speech that the drive to independence by Europe’s colonies in Africa was unstoppable?

Was it mere coincidence that in the same year, another wildlife fund, the African Wildlife Foundation, was established in America, with at least half its founding trustees having links to the US intelligence services?

Or that, when the British branch of the World Wildlife Fund was established (six months after the American AWF), at least half of its founding trustees, too, had links to British Intelligence?

Coincidence or not, what influence might these professional spooks and political propagandists have had on the character, management style and objectives of the developing international conservation movement?

Conservation is so universally believed to be “a good thing”, that until very recently, few have thought to question the methods and motives of the WWF and the policy-making body, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), with which it is closely related.

This reinforces the point: conservation could provide perfect cover for spies or others with hostile political agendas. It is not only the animals which can migrate freely across trans-national Peace Parks.

The subject is no mere curiosity. Consider the scale of it. Today, national parks and other “strictly protected areas” have spread across more than two million square kilometres of Africa.

Together, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Afghanistan, Iran and Burma contain less land than the IUCN’s 8 million square kilometre World Conservation Estate. Spread across 169 territories, it is bigger than Australia.

A further forty thousand lesser-protected sites double the territory across which practically all productive human industry is banned.

It is the world’s first virtually real empire: the creation of a dominant cultural consensus rather than a military power.

Those who rule this Empire may never have set foot in the territories they

rule. They do not answer to the public; they answer only to a small self-elected elite, while operating within a culture of secrecy less easily penetrated than that of the CIA.

It is these startling facts and figures which prompted me to re-examine the origins, history and dismal conservation record of the WWF.

As the Sixties approached, Britain needed to devise new ways to maintain its influence and control over its colonies once they were declared independent.

Faced with this brief, Britain’s Foreign Office and secret services drew, quite naturally, on the experience they had acquired in the run-up to the Second World War. In those days, Britain’s spies had found that an interest in bird-watching could be a great asset.

Amateur birdwatcher Max Nicholson and popular biologist Julian Huxley had worked closely together ever since Huxley joined the “Z Network”, a “shadow” organisation set up between the wars by MI6, the foreign division of Britain’s national intelligence service.

The MI6 front company, London Films, helped Huxley produce *The Private Life of the Gannet*, the only Oscar-winning nature documentary so far known to have been financed from secret funds. The film helped the scientist-spy secure – in 1934 – the post of Secretary of London Zoo, and gave him excellent cover for trips to Germany and central Europe.

Perhaps inspired by the advantages derived from Huxley’s interest in bird-watching, Nicholson himself shortly thereafter led what became known as “the revolt of the Young Turks” at the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). A baying clique of country gentlemen, shipped in for the occasion, unseated its Secretary, an elderly widow called Mrs. Lemon, after accusing her of a variety of crimes – the gravest of which consisted of being old and being a woman.

Shortly afterwards, the RSPB’s Robert Lockley – the leaseholder on Skokholm, the remote Welsh island where *The Private Life of the Gannet* was filmed – was sent on the first of his espionage expeditions to Heligoland, home of the German submarine fleet and a favourite way station for migratory birds.

Lockley’s controller was the London Zoological Society’s Maxwell Knight, a founder of the British Fascisti, and head

of B1(b), the counter-intelligence arm of the security service, MI5.

A whole clutch of British spies, it now emerged, were passionate bird-watchers. They became known as “featherheads”.

At the time, Nicholson headed the Political and Economic Planning unit of the Royal Institute of International Affairs. The Institute, a private think tank funded largely by the Rothschild family and various South African mining houses, is more often referred to simply as “Chatham House”, after the building in which it is housed. Founded in 1918 by Lord Milner, it has been extremely influential in shaping British foreign policy.

Huxley was director of research in Nicholson’s unit when it produced the first National Plan for Britain, a plan that still included the Empire in its scope. In 1939, the Institute sponsored publication of *Hailey’s Africa Survey*. The definitive tome on imperial administration, it sought to update Lugard’s system of indirect rule through chieftains, suggesting even more indirect methods of imperial control. (This line of thought would later find ready application in the WWF’s approach to conservation in Africa.) Huxley contributed to the chapter on colonial education.

As many had done before him, Nicholson moved on from Chatham House to join the Foreign Office, where he became private secretary to five successive post-war Lords President of the

Featherhead spies Max Nicholson and Julian Huxley together in Spain





Council (the title accorded the minister second in rank to the Prime Minister - traditionally the Foreign Secretary).

Another famous featherhead was wildlife artist and author, Peter Scott (son of the Antarctic explorer) who, as a naval officer, did some of his wartime service in Combined Operations, the "dirty tricks department" headed by Prince Philip's uncle, Lord Mountbatten. Scott's wife, Lady Philippa - no mean bird-watcher herself - was one of the code-

the Barclays Bank family) had served under Alanbrooke as head of Deception and had become known in Whitehall as "the Lord High Executioner". Major Michael Bratby, who had served as Bevan's representative in Washington, became the Wildfowl Trust's secretary.

Alanbrooke's frequent appearances in films made by the BBC's Natural History Unit ensured that he was better known to the public as an avid birdwatcher, than as a soldier or secret service boss. This process was, no doubt, facilitated by the head of the unit, Malcolm Frost, who represented the BBC on the Security Executive, the body which oversaw all Britain's intelligence agencies.

Frost was also responsible for making that other spy from the zoo, Maxwell Knight, a media celebrity - despite his fascist sympathies. Thanks to Frost, Knight was able to continue his career as a secret policeman, while being celebrated as "Uncle Max", popular presenter of nature programmes for children on BBC radio. Knight also co-presented the pioneering TV show *Look*, which, in 1961 - as part of the build-up to the foundation of the WWF - predicted the extinction of the black rhino by 1991 "if nothing is done".

(On his death, WWF-UK launched a national appeal to commemorate "the gay cavalier of conservation" - Knight was homosexual - and spent the money on the Maxwell Knight Memorial Library for Children at the British Museum of Natural History.)

Another of the birdwatcher spies for whom the BBC helped create a human face was Huxley himself. He got the prestigious job of chairing *The Brains Trust*, one of wartime radio's most popular programmes. Here, too, connections played a role: the BBC's Controller of Operations was a cousin.

## SECRET SERVICE

When it came to the war effort, Huxley was in with the best of them. He sat on the MI6 committee that explored methods of foreign propaganda. He also used his zoological skills to design landmine casings to look like elephant turds (for use in the jungle war) and - more successful - mini-mines cast to look like sheep droppings.

He told his biographer that, as a reward, he was promised a job in "reconstruction" after the war. His reward came in 1946 when he was elected (on Britain's nomination) as the first Director General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

(A sign of things to come: the US nom-

inee for the UNESCO post - was drawn in Huxley's favour - was Archibald MacLeish, head of Research and Analysis at the OSS, the wartime forerunner of the CIA.)

Featherhead Nicholson, too, was still active after the war. In 1947, he set up the MI6-sponsored Information Research Department of the Foreign Office. But his interest in nature was to give him a still greater role.

The Swiss had long been campaigning for an international supervisory body to look after the global environment. In 1947, their proposal was at last ratified at an international conference. The Swiss League for the Protection of Nature was approved as agent to revive a long-dormant international conservation trust, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), for this purpose.

But the move did not suit the British at all. Nicholson, in particular, was appalled. Bankrupted by the war, the British were engaged in looting the natural resources of their empire - Gervase Huxley, Julian's cousin, called it "the industrial production unit on which the sun never sets" - in a desperate attempt to close the "dollar gap".

To deal with the threat, the old Bodyguard of Lies swung into action against the Swiss League. Hurt by accusations of "Swiss Imperialism" and even of incompetence and dishonesty, the Swiss environmentalists were persuaded to meet Huxley and hand over control of the IUCN to UNESCO. Nicholson immediately arranged for the Foreign Office to draft a new constitution for the IUCN, which would ensure it a unique autonomy. It was to be in, but not of, the new United Nations system, immune from peer review by the Association of Scientific Unions, and to be governed by a self-perpetuating Board of insiders. That done, the IUCN was promptly returned to its dormancy for another ten years.

It was therefore perfectly natural for Britain's secret service men, when, in 1960, they were called upon to develop a strategy for maintaining Britain's influence in Africa, to expand their long-established interest in bird-watching to wildlife in general - and Africa's big game in particular.

The Empire of Nature could replace the British Empire.

In the best traditions of their craft, they prepared their cover with meticulous care. In 1960, old friend Huxley was hauled out of doddering retirement and sent on a mission to ten African countries to investigate the state of nature there.

continued on page 12



Peter Scott: WWF founder, eminent author of books on nature - and spook

breakers at Bletchley Park who succeeded in breaking the Germans' Ultra code.

Scott remained an important member of the Mountbatten circle, whose "kitchen cabinet" effectively ran the British Ministry of Defence. Another leading member - and a Huxley successor at London Zoo - was South African-born Solly Zuckerman [See noses20&21].

After the war, Peter Scott established the Wildfowl Trust. As a Trust whose trustees appointed their own successors, it could undoubtedly offer a safer haven for spies than the RSPB. Several of the "featherheads" immediately became members of Scott's Trust. Field Marshall Lord Alanbrooke became President of the Trust. Besides being a keen amateur birdwatcher and President of the Zoological Society, he had been wartime head of Forward Operational Planning which ran the deception system later popularly known as Churchill's "Bodyguard of Lies". The Treasurer of Scott's Trust, stockbroker John Bevan (of







The Wildfowl Trust's Scott, too, went on a tour of East Africa. The long-dormant IUCN was brought to life to organise and sponsor a conference in Tanganyika, in June 1961, to discuss Huxley's report. [See nose20.]

Those who believe that it was merely curious coincidence that so many British Intelligence and Special Forces men developed an interest in bird-watching in the Thirties; in the preservation of China's pandas in the Cold War Fifties; and in saving Africa's rhino and ele-

phants in the Sixties will, no doubt, be astonished to discover that the CIA's interests were remarkably similar.



President Theodore Roosevelt with his big game hunter son, Kermit, on a trip to Africa in 1910. Kermit would later become one of the CIA men on the WWF executive.

phants in the Sixties will, no doubt, be astonished to discover that the CIA's interests were remarkably similar.

Early in 1961, while Nicholson and Huxley were still establishing a justification for European interest in African wildlife, and were preparing public opinion – and funding – for their move into nature conservation, the Americans rushed ahead and established their own African Wildlife Foundation (AWF).

Five of the AWF's first ten-man board were senior officers in the wartime Office of Strategic Services (OSS), predecessor to the CIA. Unlike the British spies, they tended to be big game hunters, rather than bird-watchers and zookeepers.

Most famous of the hunters amongst the new trustees of conservation in Africa was President Theodore Roosevelt's second son, Kermit. He had succeeded,

single-handedly, in shooting a third of Africa's white rhino population. [His panda shoot is recorded in nose20.] Kermit was an early covert operations man in the CIA, and became one of the agency's most celebrated agents.

In 1952, he acted as adviser and funder of the military coup which brought Colonel Nasser to power in Egypt. In 1953 he engineered the downfall of the government of Iran, helping to restore British control of Iran's oil industry – and doubling the stake of American oil interests in Iran's national oil company in the process. (His success in Iran inspired the CIA promptly to overthrow the legitimately elected government of Guatemala – in order to restore the monopoly previously held in that impoverished country by the United Fruit Company of America.)

Kermit remained the CIA's main man in Egypt, where, in 1956, he successfully frustrated Anglo-French imperial efforts to cling to their control of the Suez canal.

Bribery on a massive scale was a hallmark of the CIA's activities in the Middle East. In a gesture of defiance, Nasser would later seize the \$12 million bribe paid by Kermit to one of his colleagues, and use it to build the Cairo Tower, which he thereafter mockingly referred to as "Roosevelt's erection".

The other spooks amongst the AWF's trustees included Arthur "Nick" Arundel, fresh from his service in a psychological warfare team in Vietnam, and Philip Crowe, US Ambassador to South Africa (he had spied on the British in wartime India).

Hal Coolidge, the only zoologist among them, was an old OSS China hand, while AWF founder Russell Train had been one of Coolidge's junior officers.

Another trustee, James Sweeney, was a member of the Subversive Activities Control Board, closely linked to both the

CIA and the FBI. A seventh was Maurice Stans, later named (but not convicted) as a Watergate conspirator.

In September, six months after the establishment of the AWF, Nicholson and friends established the World Wildlife Fund. (It has since been renamed the World Wide Fund for Nature.) The WWF was to be a Swiss-based collection of money-gathering agencies. It would develop strategies for spending the money in association with "competent organisations".

One of these would be the IUCN, over which, by all appearances, the secret service men had already established control. Peter Scott became both first Chairman

of the WWF, and a Vice-President of the IUCN.

Guy Mountford – another prominent birdwatcher and an MI6 man of long standing – became the WWF's first Treasurer. Besides being a spy, Mountford was the author of *The Field Guide to the Birds of Europe*. Intriguingly, Ian Fleming's fictional spy hero, James Bond, was named after the real life author of *The Field Guide to the Birds of the West Indies* – a private joke between Fleming and his old featherhead pals at MI6, maybe?

Featherhead spy, Mountford was also an employee of ad agency Ogilvy Mather, where his boss, David Ogilvy, had equally impressive intelligence connections. Ogilvy had written the SOE's [Special Operations Executive of the Ministry of Economic Warfare's] definitive wartime study on how to influence public opinion, prepare people for unexpected events and rig elections. He, too, would become active in WWF affairs.

In addition to Mountford, the WWF's first trustees included Kenneth Keith of MI6, and veteran spy Rex Benson, first cousin to the head of MI6, Stewart Menzies.

Gavin Maxwell, who became WWF-UK's first Youth Leader, had been an SOE instructor in unconventional warfare. He wrote nostalgic books about otters, while simultaneously destroying the basking shark population of the Irish Sea through a bloody and ill-judged whaling venture.

At the IUCN, which would now determine international conservation policy, Peter Scott was joined by the former Director General of the British Ministry of War Transport (and Nicholson's old boss), Lord Cyril Hurcomb, who was installed as Vice President. Hurcomb, too, was a featherhead: he had for some years been President of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds!

It soon became apparent that the British and American spooks had decided to co-ordinate their activities on the conservation front. All the CIA men amongst the founding trustees of the African Wildlife Foundation, had, before the year was out, become directors of WWF's US chapter.

And when Hurcomb came to retire as Vice-President of the IUCN, the American former OSS man, Coolidge, was elected its President. ■

*Next issue:* At the Duke of Edinburgh's suggestion, Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands is made first President of WWF International. There is much that is unaccountable and mysterious about the choice.



**MEMBERS OF THE PRESS ATTENDING** a disciplinary hearing involving one of the most senior advocates at the Pretoria Bar, were instructed not to name any of the parties involved until the tribunal has reached a verdict. Tribunal Chairman, Appellate Judge Andre Botha, issued the instruction at the request of the Bar Council.

The public hearing, held in the Bar Council's boardroom in Pretoria, lasted for three days before it was adjourned to a later date. Day after day, *The Pretoria News* dutifully refrained from naming names. Apart from naming Judge Botha, who is from Bloemfontein (he is a past member of the Pretoria Bar Council), the newspaper even refrained from naming the other two members of the tribunal. They are Advocate Malcolm Wallace SC, a member of the Natal Bar Council, and Advocate Louis Vorster SC, of the Pretoria Bar.

Our readers have, of course, for many months already known the story of Chris Hofmeyr's sorry experiences with the Pretoria legal profession. [see *noses20 & 21*].

This hearing, in a nutshell, is to discover whether Advocate Ferdi Preller SC, who was ostensibly acting for Hofmeyr, failed to serve the interests of his client. Preller was briefed to represent Chris Hofmeyr in 1996 in a Supreme Court case in which Hofmeyr was suing his famous father, Professor Beyers Hofmeyr and prominent attorneys Rooth and Wessels, amongst others, for restitution of his estate. He alleged they had conspired to defraud him of his estate, said to have been worth R3.2 million, while he was incapacitated in a State Mental Hospital.

The really touchy bit, as far as the Bar is concerned is the tawdry role played by Preller SC, in scuppering Hofmeyr's case the day before it was to be heard in the Supreme Court. Preller telephoned a mate on the Legal Aid Board on a Sunday afternoon to formally advise him that he no longer believed his client's case had any merit – a precondition for legal aid. His mate took the cue – and immediately, on that Sunday afternoon, cancelled any further legal aid for Hofmeyr's case. Come Monday morning, no money – and no lawyers. (Naturally the legal aid stood to pay Preller's fee up to that point.) As anticipated, without legal assistance Hofmeyr's case collapsed within no time.

The judge hearing the matter had expressed some surprise at Preller and Legal Aid's withdrawal, but apparently did not consider the incident worth reporting. The result was that last year Preller completed a lucrative stint – actually endorsed by his Pretoria colleagues –

as an acting judge in the Transkei.

Now the Bar has appointed Advocate Nick Pretorius SC – he counts amongst his clients Eugene Terreblanche, Magnus Malan and Barend "Wit Wolf" Strydom – to present Hofmeyr's complaint before a disciplinary tribunal.

Amongst the first group of witnesses called in support of Hofmeyr's charges against Preller was journalist Amanda

## Hofmeyr Inquiry begins Blame the messenger

Hughes. She testified that in an interview she had conducted with Preller at the time of the Supreme Court case, he had told her that Hofmeyr's father, Professor Beyers Hofmeyr, was "a very pleasant person". Attorneys Rooth and Wessels he described as "the most eminent Afrikaans firm in Pretoria, if not in the country". His own client, however, he had described to Hughes as a "malletjie" ("loony"). Ms Hughes, a reporter on the newspaper, Rapport at the time, testified that she had telephoned Preller for comment on the case – and that he had threatened to "sue the hell out of her and Rapport" if he was quoted. (Rapport did not carry a report on the case.)

Hughes was cross-examined on her evidence by Preller's counsel, Advocate Lampie Lampbrechts. (He counts P W Botha amongst his clients.) Lampbrechts treated the reporter with the contempt which the South African legal fraternity commonly reserves for members of the Press and, in Pretoria, particularly for female Press persons who should "know their place".

Referring to her interpretation of the notes she had taken during her investigation into the Hofmeyr case, he asked: "Do you always take notes to confuse yourself?" He then asked her whether she realised how serious defamation of character was, adding "I assume you read a newspaper". This witty touch was greeted with much mirth in the legal gallery.

Throughout her testimony, Preller played the clown, laughed and jeered. At

one stage Ms Hughes was so distracted that she stopped her evidence in mid-sentence. When Judge Botha asked her why she had stopped, she asked if Preller could refrain from laughing while she was testifying.

One might expect testimony under oath to be heard with a measure of decorum, but ordinary members of the public must, apparently, expect no respect or



common courtesy from the legal profession. In response to her request, Judge Botha instructed Ms Hughes to concentrate on Adv Lampbrechts's questions and not on Mr Preller. Mr Preller laughed on, undisturbed.

Lampbrechts put it to Hughes once more that she had lied. His client, he declared with emphasis, would deny having spoken to her about Professor Hofmeyr. In fact, said Lampbrechts, Adv. Preller would deny *ever* having spoken to Professor Hofmeyr, either in person or on the telephone; he would say he had never in his life set eyes on the professor!

Lampbrechts' parting shot was to offer Hughes the choice: either she was a blatant liar, or she had a very bad memory. If it was her memory which was at fault, he said, he could offer her sympathy.

Thanks, said the spirited Ms Hughes, but she'd rather leave it to the judgment of "someone more reputable than you".

When Preller was called, it took him only minutes to contradict his own advocate. Yes, he admitted, he had spoken to Professor Beyers at the time of his interview with Hughes. "The professor telephoned me to apologise for his son's behaviour," he declared with obvious satisfaction.

The hearing is due to resume when all five members of the legal profession involved can spare the time from their heavy and lucrative schedules. Meanwhile, Chris Hofmeyr's life as a bankrupt is still on hold, after four years of waiting. – *Maureen Barnes* 11



# YOU'RE NERVOUS, PARANOID AND OBSESSIVE ABOUT COMPUTERS - AND THE MILLENNIUM? CLICK HERE FOR HELP...

BY ARNOLD KALK

**MONDAY.** The end of the millennium is approaching when my computer will cease to function. The stress it's causing me! Do I buy a replacement (for the computer)? A septium? How many terabytes of memory? A centi-speed or ducenti speed? CD ROM-drive? With video? Can I, South Africa, the World, afford it? Suicide is a possibility, but it's so messy.

The thought crossed my mind: is this really all necessary? Dare we ignore the frightening headlines - even CNN news was headlined "The Millennium Bug"?

There is a whole IT (information technology) industry tied to the 2000 problem - The Year 2000 Consultancy etc. - not to speak of an astrology industry and a pyramid scheme industry. A recent Century Date Change Conference charged a R1500 attendance fee. I did not attend.

So why hasn't Boeing said anything about their jets falling out of the sky come midnight? And Old Mutual about my pension which is set to disappear from all records in a flash? Has nobody bothered to tell Telkom that their accounts system is finally about to crash totally?

An alternative explanation of the big guys' silence is that the real experts do not think the awful warnings worthy of rebuttal. If you see a man carrying a sandwich board bearing the slogan "The end of the world is nigh", do you argue with him?

What Microsoft have said, is that their software is a hundred percent "2000 compliant". But then they also added that all users would be "wise" to upgrade to software written in 1997 or later. That, of course, is the commercial: if a few million neurotics upgrade their computers to avoid a much-hyped debacle, there will be more computers, more programs sold, more Intels inside.

**TUESDAY.** I decided to investigate, first to see whether I'm going to be involved in considerable involuntary expense; and then whether this will apply to every PC owner, causing expenditure of trillions of dollars and the collapse of the world economy as we know it.

I have a somewhat nondescript, maybe four-year-old system, which has been upgraded from time to time. I have

DOS 6.2; Windows 95; Perfect Office (installed before Windows 95); and sundry goodies. I decided to experiment:

I first tried Quattro Pro 6.1 and changed the date to 2002. No protest from the system. I did some calculations with the dates - it worked fine.

I tried Windows via control panel - and surfed into the new century. Next to the DOS prompt ... into the year 2002, no problem. In QBASIC, one can also enter dates in the 21st Century without problems. Even with the venerable Sidekick I.

Using MS-DOS, one may use dates in the 21st Century - so it assured me when I clicked on Help. Turbo-Pascal - I don't have it loaded, but the manual says it picks up dates from DOS. WordPerfect: works fine - but not for too long - only to the year 65493. (What's the old curse?)

I phoned an expert; he said (to prove a point): switch to DOS; change the date to the 21st Century; switch off, then on again - the screen will show the new current date. I changed the date to 7-10-2002; switched off, then switched on; the date displayed was still 7-10-2002!

**WEDNESDAY.** Had a sleepless night. My programs are relatively recent. So now I've fired up my old Olivetti, which, I discovered, is an 8086, dating back to 1984, although it runs on DOS 5.00. I changed the date to 2-2-2002. No problem - it will be a Saturday.

**THURSDAY.** This was supposed to be a quick test, but as I've scanned the manuals and clicked for help, I've turned up some passages of interest:

>From Jeff Duntemann's *Turbo Pascal Solutions*: "Ordinarily, Century years are not leap years....but every 400 years a Century year is a leap year.... 2000 may be treated as an ordinary leap year." This is useful information, although why may not immediately be clear. At least we know that in Turbo Pascal, the year 2000 definitely exists.

>From Doug Hergert's *Introduction to Turbo Basic*: "This library of (date) routines is designed to work...from January 1901 through December 1999. (However, with a few revisions the package could be extended to handle non-twentieth century dates.)" Had an anxious moment there.



**FRIDAY.** While you are consciously thinking of it, you know that the computer does not think, but even in expert discourses, one sees descriptions of the computer not "knowing" whether the year is 2001, or 1991, or any other year.

All is explained in *Quattro Pro User Guide* (1993/4): "Dates are represented by serial numbers. The serial numbers range from -109 571 (for January 1, 1600) to 474 816 (for December 31, 3199); 0 is December 30, 1899."

From 1-2-3 *The Complete Reference* by Mary Campbell, 1986: "1-2-3 can handle dates between January 1, 1900, and December 31, 2099." (Hooray!)

*Word Perfect User Guide* (1994): "Every date from Jan 1, 1900, to Oct19, 65493, is given a consecutive number."

Even the *User Guide* issued with the Olivetti PC in 1984 states: "dates appear as: mm-dd-yy ... If the year is specified by the use of only one digit (y), GWBasic assumes the year to be 200y." So, if you

## The bug that could put you back 100 years

If your business or your equipment are not compliant for the year 2000, you're in for a comedy of errors, or worse

**A**IRCRAFT will fly out of control. Defence systems will cease to function. Traffic lights will black out. Computers used to run multi-million rand businesses will start crashing. These are some of the more disastrous effects predicted to follow the year 2000 computer glitch - or the millennium bug. At the best of times, but even if you have mastered the art, you may find yourself recording a horror movie instead of football. A VCR that does not accept 2000 as a date can be reset to the year 1972 - which was also a leap year. Like 2000, and shares the same days of the week. Problems with your VCR are hardly life-threatening, but an insurance company failing to send renewal notice because its



type in only the figure "1" in the space yy (for year), the computer program will assume you mean the year 2001!

**MONDAY.** I think the only cases where trouble could arise involve (older) mainframes and maybe minis where the date function was stored in their BIOS. Storage space in such old computers may not have been sufficient to store enough numbers to reach the year 2000 and beyond. But how many of them are still in use in the world? Five?

In several treatises it is implied that, because it is difficult to change the BIOS, problems will arise. Now I've discovered that an Australian group has a system for testing your computer, to establish what adjustments are required to get it into the 21st Century. This could reduce the global cost, they say, from trillions to just billions of dollars. But their first step is to identify your BIOS. I find this very worrying. What might the BIOS have to do with my computer's ability to deal with the millennium? [What is a BIOS? - Ed.]

This calls for some history: When IBM decided to build and market the PC, they needed an appropriate operating system. A company with their highly-skilled personnel should have developed their own - but they did not. They settled on Bill Gates. He did not have anything suitable either, so he adapted a system called QDOS, which he had bought from Seattle Computer Products for \$50,000, and called it MS-DOS.

The IBM PC was supplied with only part of MS-DOS installed. The rest was provided on a floppy. Here I quote from the magazine BYTE, January 1982: "All software interacts with the hardware through part of the DOS called the BIOS (the ready installed bit)...a programmer

with sufficient skill can extend the behaviour of the IBM PC by modifying the BIOS." (So that's where the experts reckoned they were going to make their billion - if only there were enough 1982-model computers still around!)

As I've said, I have a nondescript system; programs dating back for 10 years. I do not know the pedigree of my BIOS, or how to get into it - but then I don't appear to need to know, since it does not affect even my 13-year-old Olivetti's ability to welcome the new millennium. The odds are millions to one against my being a lonely winner. I know.

**TUESDAY.** To summarise: Nothing I've read, no experiment with programmes, runs contrary to the view that: 1. The date is controlled by DOS (rather than the computer's built-in bit of programming, or BIOS). 2. The majority of computers are PCs - IBM or IBM clones - and use a DOS operating system. 3. Since DOS has no problem with the millennium, 90% of computer owners can be sure that their machine will effortlessly survive the end of the century.

**WEDNESDAY.** OK, so I'm still nervous about the BIOS aspect. I tried surfing the net. Using one search engine with the words "end century date" I got no hits. A new search, with slightly different key words, produced 123 500 hits. I read a few; almost every one mentioned the BIOS. Searched through *PC Magazine DOS Power Tools*, a massive tome published ten years ago.

It states, on Page 1174: "...DOS won't let you enter a year earlier than 1980 or later than 2079. You may enter two numbers for the year from (19)80 through (19)99 but you'll need four digits and DOS 3.0 or later to go from 2000 to 2079."

So it's entirely PC to say that Millennium Day will be a damp squib rather than a time bomb. BIOS has got nothing to do with it. Don't pay excessive fees to "experts" who will apply elaborate tests to the most elementary systems, particularly when these are only used for word-processing, spreadsheets and the like.

**THURSDAY.** The best way to check if a program will survive Y2K is to run it, using dates from the 21st Century.

I am prepared to produce a suitable test pack for \$2m (very negotiable)

To sum up: The Brute Force solution (i.e. checking every computer exhaustively): cost \$5 trillion;

The Australian solution (simple tests and testing the BIOS): cost \$1 trillion;

My solution: cost \$10 billion (very negotiable).

Addendum 1. As rule of thumb, computers are comprehensively upgraded every three years. This will further reduce the number of old machines around at the end of the century.

Addendum 2. The scenario painted in some articles of everything coming to a standstill is ludicrous. A train with an electric traction unit is moving at 200 km/hr at the dreaded time. Will it suddenly stop? My watch? Planes in midair?

Power stations will fail! Locks will not unlock, they say.

I say: As they were programmed, so they can be re-programmed.

PS How many people do you know with a computerised time-lock on their front doors - who face lifelong captivity in their own homes the minute the clock strikes midnight on 31 December 1999?

In view of the massive savings which will result if my assessment is correct, a few extra paragraphs will not be a burden.

When Gates wrote his MS-DOS, the PC had a memory capacity of only some 4K! So it might not have been considered clever to fill its limited memory space with enough numbers to reach beyond 2000. But that was long, long ago.

Let me repeat the extract from *Quattro Pro User Guide*: "For dates, the serial number ranges from minus 109 571 (for January 1, 1600) to plus 474 816 (for December 31, 3199)." They provide dates for the next 1200 years! So where's the panic?

# Can the bomb be defused before time runs out?

The advent of the year 2000 could bring the world to a standstill, writes GREG GORDON

Millennium date change affects only mainframe computers. PCs are just as much at risk. There are about 250-million PCs in active use and between 90% and 100% of them do not roll over to the year 2000 properly. In most cases, with stand-alone PCs

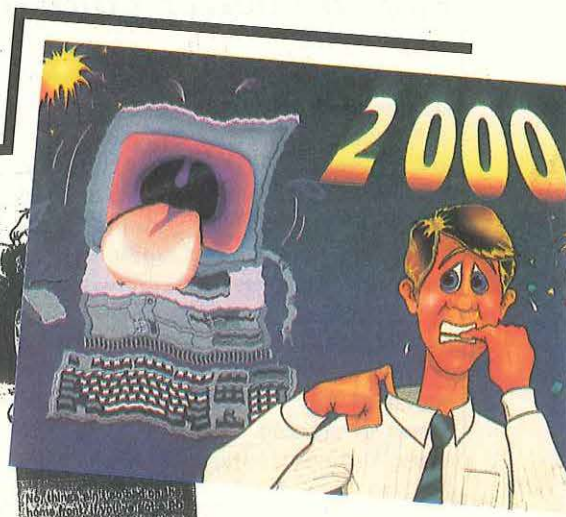
Elmar Roberg, general manager of Project 2000, a division of Stocks Systems Technology, says the year 2000 problem has up to now been largely understated. "Most companies that have started impact studies have found the potential

Computers

## Panic in the Streets!

Have you got plans to cope with the Year 2000 bug? Or are you going to wake up too late? (Warning: this copy could be dangerous to people suffering from anxiety disorders.)

- So this is the prediction: we'll wake up on the first bright morning of the new millennium, 01/01/00, and the s--- will hit the fan. Not only will there be people locked out of work (that serves 'em right for going to work on New Year's Day), there'll be aircraft blundering around over airports, unable to make a landing, which saved codes of space in the dinosaur brains of the computers of the day. Nobody in those days seems to have believed we as a race would outlast the century, because they never gave a thought to the time mess that would result when the clock ticked over and the computers registered 00 (or nothing) at the date. And the double digit thing habit has continued, so that now, everyone is having to take at least some precautions against their computers waking up with the Y2K
  - identify the programmes
  - find the date references - all the date references
  - re-write the lines containing the date
  - test the re-written programmes.
- How much could it cost? Upwards of \$600 billion in the States alone. In one gloomy guessimate, that dozens of large corporations, government and military institutions, hospitals and so on are already engaged in this





This should have been a simple, three-page essay, but additional issues have kept arising. I also don't want my research to be rejected as unsophisticated. The result is this, somewhat rambling, assessment.

Epilogue: I will not be able to get this published – it is too long for a magazine or technical periodical. It does not have wide appeal – in fact, it is infinitely less appealing than the opposite view, describing the melt-down.

**MONDAY.** Sorry, but on Sunday night the subject was broached again on TV. They brought a small old computer to the

stage; it looked as if it would have DOS 1 inside, except I don't think there was a DOS 1; they set the date to Dec. 31, 1999 and the time to 23,59. After a wait, the date read Jan 1st, 1980. Is everything I have written meaningless, or just plain wrong? I switched on my computer, and, using windows settings, changed the date to December 31, 1999 and a time near midnight, as the demonstrator had done on TV. I waited a minute, and asked the date – it came up January 1st, 2000.

*Good night! n*

## ONLY 555 SHOPPING DAYS LEFT BEFORE Y2K!

**Read these quotes from a recent press release by the Usko Software Group and you'll see the hype tide is up ...**

**... to rush you to your nearest IT salesman ...**

*"If you are on the phone at midnight on 31 December 1999, you may land up with a 100-year phone bill – from 1/1/00 to 31/12/99 – because the computer cannot distinguish between the '00' that indicates '1900' and the '00' that indicates '2000'."*

**... sooner ...**

*"More frighteningly, computer systems will start running into trouble at the end of their 1998 financial year. We have no way of knowing how computer systems will behave when companies open their books for the 1999/2000 financial year."*

**... and faster ...**

*"The problem is estimated to cost the South African economy R12 million to repair. Of this, 20% will be spent in assessing the extent of the problem. [i.e. they may find no problem. – Ed.] The closer we get to 2000, the more money corporates will have to pay ...*

**... and faster.**

*"By 2002 you will have either fixed the problem or gone out of business trying."*

**The punchline:**

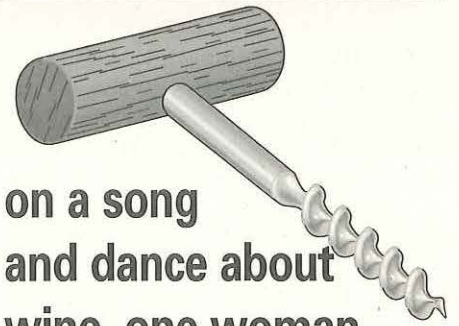
Usko director Paul Wootten says his company has a whole department "dedicated to helping users over the hurdle of converting two-digit dates in time."

*"It is an ill wind that blows no good,"* says Wootten, tongue in cheek. *"The Y2k hurricane might also have something to offer business."* Mainly, of course, the IT business. Imagine if they can persuade/panic every householder into calling in an IT technician to check every computerised gadget in the house. And then try to remember what it cost when you last called out an electrician to check the washing machine. (You had forgotten to plug it in.)

**The bottom line:**

Where the predators go, the scavengers can't be far behind: *"Local law firms such as Werksmans and Denys Reitz have set up special task teams to look at Y2k litigation ..."* n

## maureen barnes



### on a song and dance about wine, one woman and getting screwed

**WHEN A READER THREATENS ANY** restaurateur with *noseweek*, we are naturally curious. Was his lamb not pink enough? His sole left unturned? Were his snails perhaps still breathing?

Actually, having always thought of ourselves as being in the gourmand rather than the gourmet category (we'll have the BIG plate of chips, maestro) we were rather flattered to be used thus.

And when the restaurant complained of was Parks – whose restaurateur is none other than our own winewriter, Michael Olivier – we were even more intrigued. Tell us more, Michael, we begged.

The problem arose one evening when a Peter Veit brought with him to the restaurant his wife, two German guests and a bottle of wine, Laborie 1983, which he regarded as special – the wine, that is. (Parks, incidentally, is fully licensed.) The wine was opened and left, as is customary at Parks, on a nearby serving table. Unfortunately, a waitress accidentally served Veit's wine to the neighbouring table which was occupied by eight, very elderly English visitors. Inevitably, in due course, Mr Veit called for his wine which had by then, in a manner of speaking, gone into the U.K. Veit went, as they say, ballistic.

The duty manager, Sandy Joubert, was called to the table. She apologised to the apoplectic, loud and hectoring Mr Veit and produced a replacement bottle of wine, a Rust-en-Vrede 1989.

This wine was accepted and drunk, whereupon Ms Joubert offered Mr Veit the gift of a bottle of dessert wine which, she told him, he might wish to take home with him. "We don't drink sweet wine," snarled Veit.

Before leaving, Veit called the waitress to the table and asked her to make a written statement of what had happened and to supply him with the names and addresses of the people at the next

### Get the better connection ...

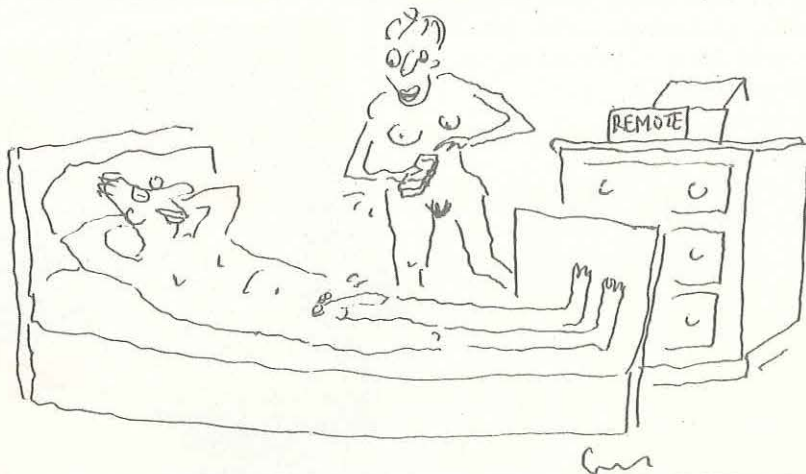




table who had "deliberately stolen" his wine. Fortunately, these guests, oblivious to the furor, had by then gathered up their walking sticks and tottered off homewards, having had a lovely evening. Ms Joubert refused to allow the waitress to make such a statement which, Veit said, he intended to take immediately to the police to lay a charge of theft.

He insisted, also, that restaurateur, Michael Olivier (who was not on duty that evening) telephone him to discuss the matter. Unsurprisingly, Olivier, after hearing the story the next morning, commended his manager on her handling of the difficult matter, declined to take the matter further. Such an error, says Olivier "is a restaurateur's nightmare".

An unappealed Veit telephoned Olivier three days later demanding the names of the hapless guests so that he might lay a charge of theft. He also wanted R400 from the guests, to be paid – he generously suggested – to a charity of his choosing. It was when Olivier refused that Veit threatened him with .... *noseweek*.

Indeed, Veit did telephone one of our journalists who, ignorant until then of the matter, resisted the lure of such an investigation, even though it could mean him being forced to travel overseas to track down the eight ancient miscreants and bring them back to face justice. In the handcuffs we are sure Mr Veit would demand.

Undeterred, Veit turned to a more culturally aware publication, *Wine magazine*, which printed his lengthy diatribe in their March 1998 issue under the somewhat reckless headline "Mistaken Identity or Blatant Opportunism".

For the benefit of readers like ourselves, who when having a lovely party, are more inclined to say: "Pass the bottle", than "Hand me my Chateau Petrus xxx", we checked how Platter rates the two wines.

Veit's bottle, which was uncritically consumed by his neighbours, Platter awards three stars, which indicates "Good (to very good) in its class".

**\*\*\*Laborie (Red)**  
 "Similar grapes in blend as for Roodeberg with '83 pleasantly rich on palate but bereft of oak maturation that might add more dash."

*John Platter's South African Wine Guide 1990, p 151*

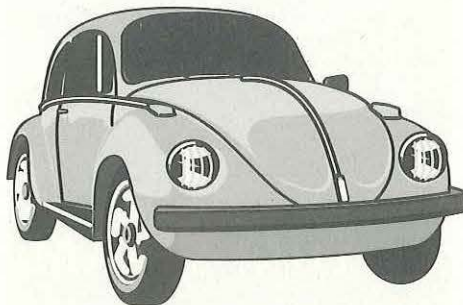
Parks' replacement, which Veit grudgingly consumed while feeding his appetite for revenge, Platter gives 4.5 stars, which indicates "Outstanding. Fine international standard."

**\*\*\*\*(\*) Rust-en-Vrede**

**Estate Wine 1989:**

"Among handful of Cape's top international league reds, specially since '89.....'89 particularly magnificent, powerful, with long reach; cinnamon, spices, youngberries."

*John Platter's New South African Wine Guide 1995, p 220*



ONE WARM AFTERNOON IN January, a young freelance photographer was sitting in a parking spot on Beach Road, Sea Point, in an old VW Beetle – borrowed. His car was stationary with the engine off. Suddenly the car in the space in front of him reversed and smacked into the Beetle. No problem, said the young male driver, one Malcolm O'Donnell, surveying the Beetle's newly-buckled bonnet and weirdly distorted numberplate. He admitted that the accident was all his fault, and cheerfully signed a short, handwritten statement to that effect. No panic. He'd fix up the damage – in fact he'd find a repairer himself and would phone the photographer. No problem. Stay cool.

The photographer reported the accident to the police. After a week of silence from young Malcolm, he tried phoning him. No luck. Malcolm must get about a bit, because for the next few weeks, the photographer was unable to get him on the phone. Malcolm's brother took messages, his mother took messages and an answering machine took messages, lots of them. Once, when the photographer tried to explain the problem to Malcolm's Mom, she said that her son was now an adult and must deal with the matter himself. Stern stuff here. A month passed, by which time the photographer had got two quotes for the damage – the lesser of which was R1300. He still phoned repeatedly and then, exasperated, left a message saying that he intended to get the money owed to him by way of the Small Claims Court. Malcolm returned that call.

He was rather vague. Unfortunately,

like... you know... he had no cash at the moment – last month he'd had around, um, R4000 but, like well, you know, there were so many birthdays that he'd had to buy gifts for and.... well, basically, the photographer would just have to wait for his money until, well....

The photographer gave Malcolm yet another week and then started phoning again. One day, however, the phone was picked up again by Mrs O'Donnell. Obviously a passionate woman, she was more aggressive than her son and pointed out that she was "having a relationship with an advocate" and therefore there was no point in the photographer trying a legal solution.

In other words, "I'm screwing a lawyer, so he'll happily screw you."

And so it came to pass. The advocate, Peter Berthold, eventually contacted the photographer and offered him R1000 cash, "without prejudice" or, if the photographer insisted on the full amount, R150 a month otherwise, he said, the complainant could "take his chances" in court, where he wouldn't get anything "because Malcolm is a student and doesn't have any money".

"But that's not very moral" said the photographer.

"I'm not a moralist, I'm a lawyer," replied the smug Mr Berthold.

An axiom if ever I heard one.

Obviously, the photographer was obliged to take the money which Mr Berthold kindly offered to deliver. One small problem, instead of delivering his little envelope of cash to a grateful young photographer, he found himself handing it over to the owner of the damaged vehicle – Martin Welz, editor of *noseweek*.

Instantly the legal heavy was transformed into an embarrassed apologist. Adopting a sophisticated man-of-the-world approach (not helped by his colourful shirt and shorts) he was, he told Welz, "just a facilitator". Ho Ho. (Wasn't that the name of the famous Louis Prima song? No, sorry that was "Just a Gigolo".)

Now some people, particularly some lawyers, fortunately not all, thank heavens, think that this sort of negotiation is reasonable. But it's not. It is plain extortion. "I might be in the wrong but I'm going to cause you more grief, time and money unless I get a discount."

This sort of tacky transaction would generally have taken place in secret. What's a poor freelance photographer in a borrowed car to do against a boy's determined Mom, especially when her boyfriend's an advocate? But this time the battered old car belongs to *noseweek* where pens are pitted against pricks every day of the week. ■



## DOUBLE EXPOSURE

by Carol Smith

*Little, Brown & Company*

It beats me how a publisher could accept another manuscript after the author's last effort – the dreadful *Kensington Court*. But somebody over there likes Carol Smith, for here it comes again. This time the idiotic plot is set in the Bahamas, and Holland and New York and Savannah and London and Bath. It ends, not a moment before time, up in the dome of the Albert Hall like some sort of Kensington King Kong.

It's a daft story full of "characters" described in such detail that you'd think they'd have some life in them. The author doesn't understand the thriller genre and kills off the wrong people. And as for her editor – I'd love an explanation as to how someone who'd just finished Christmas Day luncheon in Savannah, USA, could ring a chum in Amsterdam, Holland, as he was setting the table for his Christmas lunch. Give this turkey a miss.

## AN ISOLATED INCIDENT

by Susan R Sloan

*Little, Brown & Company*

From the same publisher comes a very good thriller set on an island off the coast of Washington State.

Seward Island had air that was the "cleanest in the Puget Sound area, the crime rate was among the lowest in the entire state, and the population was ninety-three percent Anglo-Saxon, Celtic, Teutonic, and Scandinavian, with a sprinkling of other Europeans, a handful of Middle Easterners, and a small community of Asian-Americans making up the remaining seven percent".

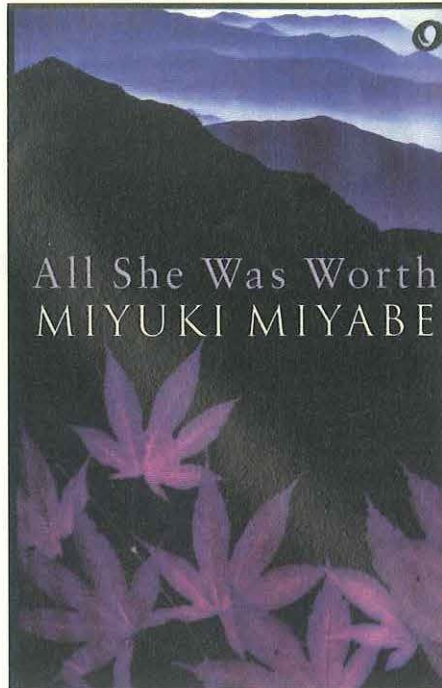
The town's Chief of Police, Ruben Martinez, is an exception to this comfortable racial mix. He is Mexican, clever and competent. He ended up on the island after a successful career in Los Angeles, after being wounded on duty.

Life is peaceful on Seward Island which welcomes visitors with the sign "A good place to visit – a great place to raise a family". That is until the murder, the first homicide in living memory, of the lovely teenage daughter of the town's most influential family. Suspicion falls on an "outsider", Jerry Frankel, the talented history teacher at the local high school.

As Martinez gathers evidence, harassed by the local officials who appointed him, the latent racial and

religious prejudice which lies just beneath the surface of the community comes to the boil. The story becomes both dark and disturbing as hitherto kind and often charming people reveal aspects of themselves which probably even they never knew they had.

An excellent thriller with enough suspense and substance to make it decidedly more than run-of-the-mill.



## ALL SHE WAS WORTH

by Miyuki Miyabe

*Oriel*

The best is last. A mystery set in Japan by a young Japanese author. Ms Miyabe has, apparently, written other successful mystery novels as well as historical fiction. Ten films based on her work have been produced. As far as I know, this is the first of her works to be translated into English and I enjoyed it thoroughly.

In spite of sometimes pedestrian translation, the atmosphere of modern Tokyo comes through strongly in this absorbing tale. Police Inspector Honma, on sick leave after an injury, is asked by the son of his late wife's cousin, Jun Kurisaka, to trace his fiancée, the alluring Shoko Sekine. Shortly after being refused a credit card because she was an unredeemed bankrupt, Shoko disappeared, leaving her affluent fiancé bewildered and hurt.

Reluctantly taking on the task of finding the girl, Honma delves into a phenomenon that is definitely of modern Japan – the magnetic attraction of consumer goods to young people, and the easy availability of credit with which to acquire them. And when, as

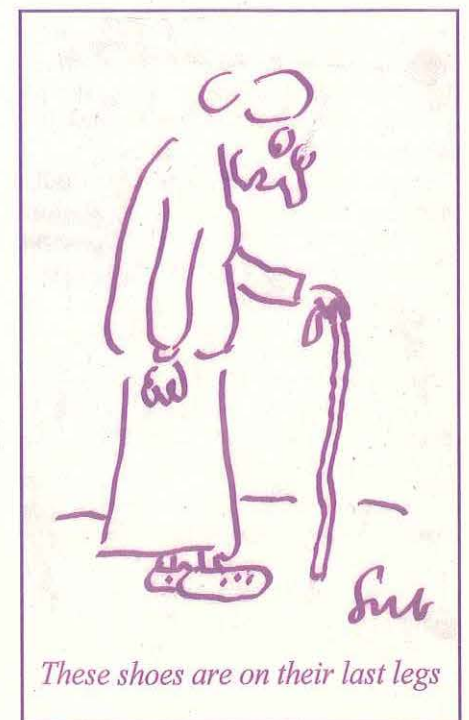
they often do, they get in debt over their heads, there's more credit available, and more, until they are in desperate straits and turn to loan sharks. That's often when the heavies of the Yakuza – the Japanese Mafia – get sent in to deal severely with the debtor.

Disappearing is not easy in Japan where, in place of our birth certificates, they have Family Registers, which by a complicated and detailed system trace every person from birth to grave.

This is one of the many exotic elements in this unusual thriller which takes place in a community so different from anything we, in the west, can comprehend. But the surprise lies not in the dissimilarities between us and the characters, but the similarities – which shine through in a strangely encouraging way – they think, feel and react just the way good people might in Johannesburg, London or Rome.

Honma still grieves over the loss of his beloved wife. Left with a young son, Makoto, to care for, he depends on the help of neighbours, particularly Tsuneo Isaka, the caretaker of his block and his wife Hisae. She's a successful businesswoman who drives a bright red Audi and generates "enough income to support a secretary and three designers". Tsuneo is happy to be the house-husband, does all the cooking – and joins with Honma in trying to solve the mystery of Shoko's disappearance. Together with a boyfriend of Shoko's from her schooldays, this unlikely little gang finds traces of another girl who too has disappeared.

The solution to the mystery is satisfying and ingenious. An oriental gem of a thriller. **n**



*These shoes are on their last legs*



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