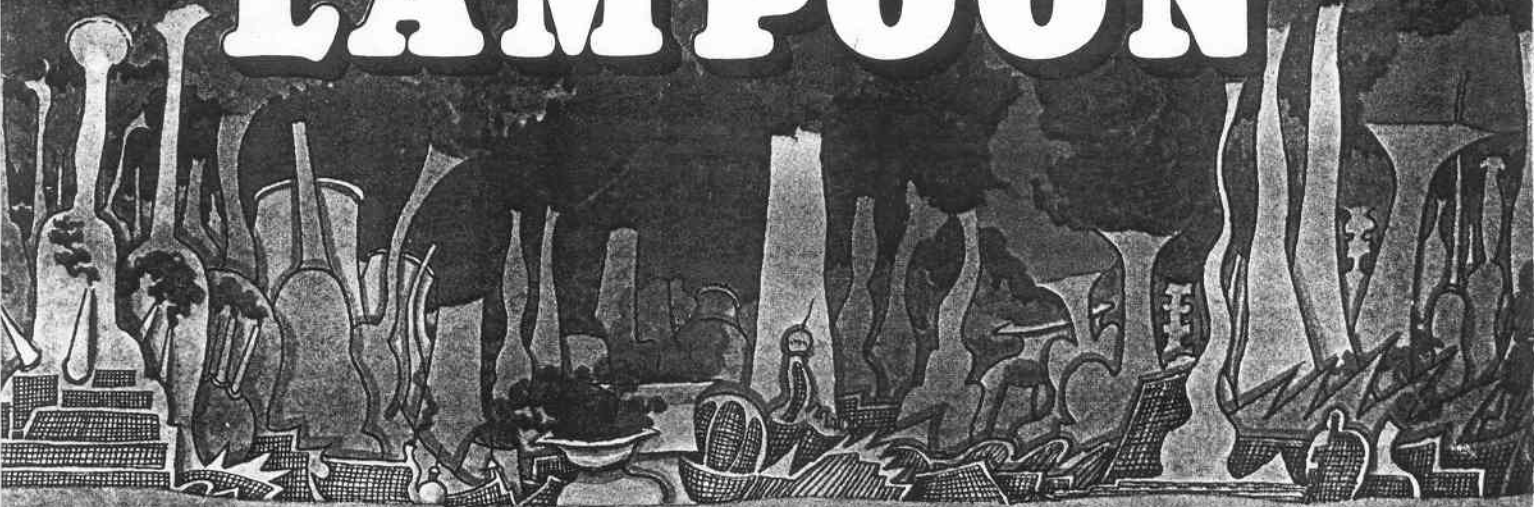


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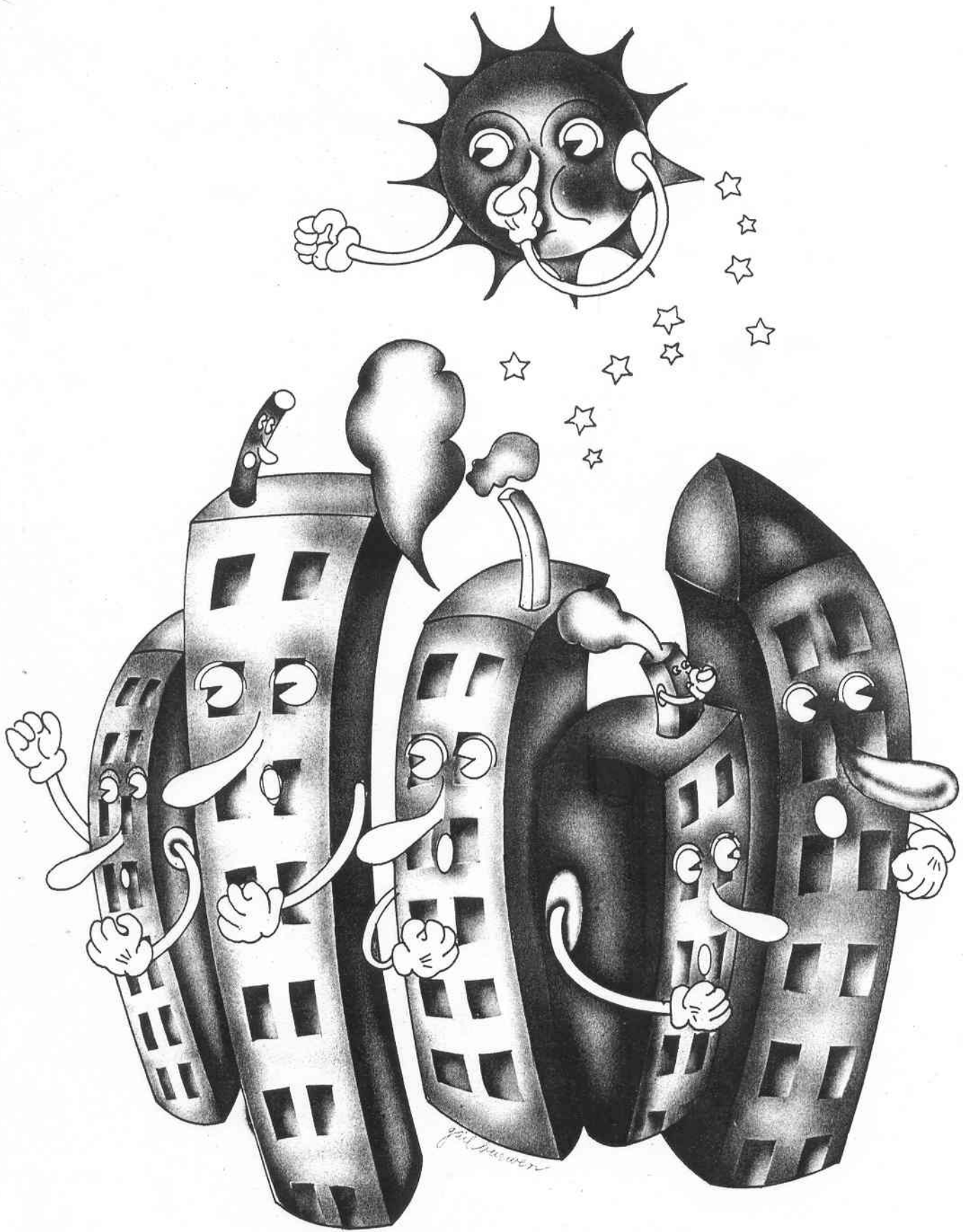
75 CENTS

LAMPOON



BLIGHT

ARNOLD ROSE



S.P.L.A.T.

BY JEAN SHEPHERD

How Much is That Dogma in the Window?

And so concludes part three of NBC's five-part salute to pollution, an in-depth study of environmental pollution starring Glen Campbell, Frank Sinatra, the Supremes, the Smothers Brothers, and M.C.'d by Red Skelton. Next week . . ."

I snapped off the set and yawned as a thought crossed my mind. My God, it sure gets you tired trying to keep up with each major crisis. I remembered the good old days of Ban the Bomb with a faint tinge of mauve nostalgia. Ah, the simple problems of yore. I wonder what the Ban the Bombers are doing now? Probably raising kids and fighting crabgrass. Oh, well.

The current major crisis, the environment, carried along with it the same old inevitable crowd of "experts" who predict, predictably, the imminent end of mankind. For as long as I can remember, some authority or another has stated irrevocably that the end was in sight. A few more years and it would all be over. Oh, well.

I poured myself a little unpolluted bourbon and sipped thoughtfully. I wonder what happened to that guy at Harvard or someplace who maintained stoutly that the astronauts would bring back deadly, unknown bacilli from the moon. Jesus, that one sure petered out. And then the gang of concerned experts who used to sit around on TV panels on Sunday afternoons, jabbering about bomb shelters. Now, there was a great crew of doom-sayers.

I flipped on the stereo and idly riffled the smudgy pages of *Copulation*, an underground journal of the sexual revolution edited by a defrocked Benedictine monk. Like all underground papers, it was available at every Times Square newsstand. My attention was caught briefly by an article describing the moving intellectual experiences of a 17-year-old female heroin addict at an orgy on 9th Street which somehow involved, among other creatures, a gelded chimpanzee. My mind just wasn't on it. Maybe it was the turgid prose. I glanced over the want ads, noting that sadomasochist lonely hearts clubs had apparently become one of the major industries of Manhattan, along with underground homosexual film festivals.

I flung the miserable rag aside. If a paper could have acne, that one had it. I was restless. It was one of those milky Sunday afternoons that you get from time to time in New York in August; temperature in the 90's, heat rising in shimmering waves from the tops of dented, filthy yellow cabs. I usually try to get out of town on a weekend like this, but I had missed connections. Here I was, alone, pacing my apartment like Captain Ahab stumping around the quarterdeck of the *Pequod*.

I tossed off another bourbon, which instantly produced an overwhelming sleepiness. My air conditioner was out, so the room was hot and muggy. I struggled with a window trying to get a little air. A breath of New York atmosphere oozed in.

I sniffed. A familiar New York aroma filled my lungs, made dank by too much city living. God, how I hated that smell! Every summer it rose from the lush neighbor-

hoods of New York's East Side like a great cloud of swamp gas from the Dismal Swamp. It somehow was the other side of the coin in the lives of the Beautiful People. My breath came in shallow gasps as I tottered over to my zebra-skin Castro convertible. I flung myself headlong among the ravaged pile of old *New Yorkers* and soon my fevered soul drifted off to sleep, greased on its way by Jack Daniels.

A few brief, fitful dreams of a chaotic nature and suddenly, without warning, I found myself in a sea of bright lights; cameras with blinking red eyes peered at me; Steve Allen, looking deeply concerned, was asking me a question. He was flanked by David Susskind and Malcolm Boyd, the showbiz priest.

"You say you represent S.P.L.A.T.? An organization devoted to combating environmental pollution?" Allen's brow furrowed as he turned on his best Involved Citizen look.

"That is correct," I found myself saying.

"Well, Mr. Shepherd, and just what does S.P.L.A.T. stand for?" David Susskind asked this one, his fingertips pressing together making a tiny pyramid. He nodded knowingly in his best Liberal manner. Malcolm Boyd waved at the camera and pointed to the dust jacket of another book he had just written.

"I'd rather not say, if you don't mind," I answered, conscious of a murmur out in the darkness where the studio audience had assembled.

"Come now, it must stand for something. After all, you have over 12 million members."

"It certainly does," I replied, my confidence rising as I noticed that Susskind had a bit of dried chicken soup on his lapel. "It's not that I want to hide anything, you understand. It's just that there are probably women and children watching today."

"Yes, Jesus said to me the other day, when we were out jogging together, 'Blessed are the little children . . .'" Malcolm Boyd was off and running with the Lord again. "... in fact, I just cut an LP on this very subject. It's called . . ."

Allen raised his hand casually. "Easy, Malc. We'll plug the record at the end of the show."

Boyd frantically held up the record jacket and looked disappointed that the camera had winked out and was now pointing at Susskind. "... it's in stereo!" he squeaked.

"We don't expect to come up with all the answers today. After all, the environmental pollution crisis is very complex, but we concerned people feel that the liberal establishment particularly, relating itself to the suppressed minorities, the first victim of smog, recognizes that the certain amount of sacrifice and painful reevaluation plus cooperation among the more favored elements of the society . . ."

Susskind had the bit in his teeth and in his inimitable fashion was charging off into the wild blue yonder



spraying clichés recklessly in all directions. I found myself nodding as he droned on.

Luckily, a commercial cut him off in mid-platitude. The commercial seemed to be about a lady who found blue water in her john, and a 3-inch tall man in a rubber rowboat as well.

"C'mon, Shepherd, what do you mean, you can't tell us what S.P.L.A.T. stands for? This is an adult panel. After all, it's Sunday afternoon, when the serious shows are on. You can come right out and say it on this show. Right, boys?"

Susskind nodded gravely. Malcolm Boyd said, "I'll buy that."

"Well, it has to do with pollution, all right, I can tell you that. We're really getting militant, to boot. You bet!"

"I presume your organization . . ." Susskind crinkled his brow thoughtfully "... deals with problems of an environmental nature."

"You bet!" I interrupted. "And how!"

"... one that concerns all the peoples?" Susskind had used one of his favorite words. He's at his best when dealing with peoples.

"Everybody I know!"

"Folks," Allen beamed at the studio audience out in the darkness, "Shepherd here can come right out and say it, can't he? We're all grown-ups here."

The audience applauded, with a few whistles and foot stamps thrown in.

"You see, like I said, they're grown up. Well, how about it? What does S.P.L.A.T. stand for?"

"Don't blame me if you get outraged letters," I fenced for time.

"Our unseen television audience is mature," Allen smiled benignly at me.

"Well, okay. It stands for Society for the Prevention and Limitation of Animal Turds."

A great roar of applause. More whistles and catcalls from the audience. I thought I detected a few screams.

"Eh? What was that?" Susskind, who was not in the habit of listening, appeared confused.

"Society for the Prevention and Limitation of Animal Turds," I repeated.

Susskind disappeared briefly under the desk.

"The other day I had a talk with the Lord on that very subject. The humble creatures of the field are blessed unto . . ."

"Hold it, Boyd," Allen silenced him.

"Let's get this straight, Shepherd. Are you anti-animal? If so . . ."

"No! Heavens no!" I broke in "it's just that here in New York every summer, you're knee-deep in . . ."

"Easy, Shepherd! This is television!" Allen glowered sternly at me.

"... what my Aunt Emily called Doggie Dirties, and I can tell you . . ."

Susskind, who seemed to have recovered, waded in: "Our poor, dumb brethren, an oppressed minority which, under this sick system, should at least be given the vote, and . . ."

"Militant? You say your group is getting militant, eh?" Allen had alertly picked up a key word that is necessary in any intellectual discussion of our day.

"Yes, militant. That is correct." I ran my hand through the Afro wig I had recently purchased at a shop in the Village with my American Express card. "We sure are getting militant. No telling where it will lead."

"How do you mean — militant?"

Boyd chimed in, his face wreathed in a beatific smile, "Ah, it is blessed to forgive and those who wield the mighty sword . . ."

"Cut it out, Boyd. Save that for your show at the Bitter End tonight. We only got half an hour." Allen, a firm-handed M.C., guided the show steadfastly.

"I say, when a system of popular democracy, based on mutual trust, fails the little peoples, militancy is the inevitable . . ."

Susskind, like Old Man River, rolled on, his words rich and sonorous with the singsong beat of phrases used over and over.

"Save it for your own show, Dave." Allen nodded in my direction, indicating that I should continue.

"We tried reason, even the courts. All that's left now is confrontation!" I peered at them through my jet-black shades. They quailed before me, recognizing, as all good liberals do, that militant confrontation is the hallmark of the righteous.

"Just what form does your militancy take?" Allen asked, leaning forward over his microphone.

"Well, we picket the ASPCA, for one."

"Why?" Susskind gasped in humane horror.

"Well, we're for cruelty to animals. They're plenty cruel to us. It's time the worm turned!"

"I am deeply shocked. As a reasonable citizen of good will, I must say, and I wish to make this clear, that I can scarcely believe that in this enlightened age anyone could be as depraved . . ." Susskind wrung his hands as he spoke, great tears rolling down his cheeks.

"Yes," I went on, "we're tired of having puppy poo-poo, as our lady members call it, all over our sandals, not to mention our bare feet. We got a slogan: 'Kick a Squatting Dog in the Ass Today.' You probably saw our buttons."

"Say, I like that —" Allen interrupted himself to lead the audience in a brief cheer — "it would make a nice song title." He turned to his piano and sang in a quavery voice:

"Kick a squatting dog in the aaaass today.

Yeah, yeah, yeah,

Booot him in the rump, I saaaay,

Yeah, baby!

You and I together . . .

Yeah, yeah, yeah . . ."

Allen hunched over the piano, caught up in the surge of creativity. Susskind dabbed at his eyes with a handkerchief that bore the embroidered insignia of the ACLU. Boyd crossed himself briefly and held up his LP to let the audience know where *he* stood on good and evil.

"We also..." I plunged ahead doggedly amid the hubbub, "organized nose-rubbing action squads."

Allen stopped dead in mid-note. Boyd flushed slightly and appeared to be fingering a crucifix. Susskind nodded his patriarchal gray head in disbelief, indicating sorrow at the depravity to which man can fall.

"Yesireebob, that's one of our most effective counter measures!"

"You mean..." Susskind was in full cry again, "... you mean those poor, innocent, oppressed little doggies are attacked by your Fascist thugs — and I feel justified in calling them that — are so outraged and set upon by the sick establishment, which you represent, as to have their sensitive little noses come into contact with..."

He blew *his* sensitive nose emotionally into his ACLU handkerchief.

"Now, wait a minute, Dave. You don't mind if I call you Dave? After all, this is television. Anyway, you got it all wrong." I hitched up my *dashiki*, which was itching me between the shoulder blades.

"Well, I should hope so!" Malcolm Boyd, his brow furrowed with concern, took the stand. "To turn the other cheek and, to coin a phrase, to *suffer* doggie doo-doo is the Christian way to forgive, and..."

Allen cut in sharply at this point, his eye on the studio clock. "Explain yourself, Shepherd." He was not smiling.

"You see, we rub *owners'* noses in the doggie doo-doo. Every time we catch an Airedale or a beagle letting it go in the middle of the sidewalk, we grab the owner by the neck and..."

"Watch it, Shepherd!" Allen's tone had become menacing.

"You oughta hear 'em holler. The other day, the squad gave the treatment to a couple of fags that had these nine Afghans on a leash, and you never heard such shrieking and whooping in your life! They learned a lesson they won't soon forget. Then there was this old lady with a bulldog..."

"That certainly answers our questions about militancy. Now, let's move on into other areas." Allen was back to smiling.

"It's getting to the point where a new breed of connoisseurs..."

"Connoisseurs?" Allen seemed relieved to be on a safe subject. "Connoisseurs? You mean, *art* connoisseurs?"

I answered: "A true Manhattanite, by the merest whiff, can tell you whether the little bundle of joy was left by a Pekingese, a Dalmation, a Great Dane or an Airedale."

"Oh, come on." Susskind wore his skeptical face, "Surely you're not telling us of liberal persuasion that..."

"Not to mention Yorkshires, dachshunds, Labrador retrievers, bullterriers and springer spaniels."

"You mean..." Allen sounded interested, "... just by the aroma, you can..."

"Yes, right! St. Bernards, chows, rat terriers, blue tick hounds — the whole smelly lot. It's a new hobby. You might as well make a game of it if you have to live with it. We of S.P.L.A.T. have published a booklet on how to identify 234 varieties of puppy poop, and we'd be glad to send it to anyone who..."

"I'm sorry, but that old clock on the wall tells us that we've run out of time." Allen smiled at the audience. "Our guests today have been Malcolm Boyd, whose new record *Malcolm Boyd Wrestles with the Devil Accompanied by the Harmonicats*, recorded live at the Hollywood Brown Derby, has just been released on Pious Pelf Records, David Susskind, whose program *Open End* is seen over 9,000 television stations and digs deeply into today's vital problems, and Jean Shepherd, the dynamic, militant president of S.P.L.A.T., the Society for the Prevention and Limitation of Animal Turds. It's been a good show, hasn't it, folks?"

The crowd roared.

"Next week, we take up the problem of drug addiction among prenatal infants, and..."

I awoke in a cold sweat. It had grown dark. The apartment was deep in gloom. A fetid breath of air drifted in from the street. I sniffed appreciatively.

"Ah, there's a rare one for New York. A springer spaniel!" I arose to pour myself another drink. □

