

★ RISING STARS ★

I T was a very peaceful and quite night, having finished all my post-dinner snacks, I went to my room at half-past ten. I finished all the pre-bedtime formalities, such as brushing my teeth, even though I could finish them off in the morning (Always leave what you can do today to be done tomorrow, that's my motto). Within a few minutes, I sank down into my bed.

I think it was at least two hours later when I was awakened by a very unusual noise. It sounded a bit like the roar of a jet engine but was far more high-pitched. It was coming from outside. I stood up in bed and rubbed my eyes. Out of curiosity, I dragged myself to the window. The moon had been completely hidden by what I first thought was a cloud. After a few seconds my eyes got accustomed to the darkness. It was then that I realized that it was not a cloud which had hidden the moon. In the darkness, I made out a gleaming metallic object, the shape of a pyramid, silhouetted against the night sky. It was probably a few miles away. From that distance, I could not judge its size. The object was moving at an unimaginable velocity. It appeared to be heading somewhere near our neighbourhood. It didn't look like a normal aircraft and did not have anything which looked like wings. I stood there for a while, wondering what it was. It might be a helicopter, I said to myself. But the object was moving far more quickly than any helicopter would. It was also quite different in shape. I peered out of the window for a few minutes, wondering what it was.

The thing landed on my friend Asaf's lawn and stayed there for about fifteen minutes without moving. I started getting impatient and thought about going back to bed and forgetting the whole business. Maybe washing those dishes was too much work for one day and it was taking its toll on me. Things would be fine in the morning. With this thought in mind, I turned back to go to bed. But I froze in my tracks when I noticed something out of a corner of my eye.

Something which looked like

Close Encounters of the 2nd kind

by Mushfeq A. Khan

a big, shining, metallic tentacle had emerged from within the pyramid and entered Asaf's room through his window! I tried pinching myself but to no result. My heart started pounding and adrenaline rushed through my veins. I saw the tentacle moving, its metal surface glinting in the moonlight. A few seconds later, it emerged from Asaf's window. This time it was coiled around something. In the moonlight I made out the figure of a boy struggling to break free from the tentacle's grip. A figure just the size and shape of Asaf! The tentacle was slowly dragging the boy towards the pyramid. I watched as the centre of the pyramid split open and the figure was slowly engulfed by it.

Instinctively, I turned around, rushed towards the bed and took refuge under the bed-cover, my pulse racing. Breathing heavily, I lay there for perhaps half an hour.

I heard a faint thud outside and the noise ceased. For a few moments, there was complete silence. I got out of bed and carefully edged towards the window. When I was about halfway, with a gleam of metal the glass suddenly cracked and fell to the ground. I scrambled back towards the west wall of the room and tried to scream but my voice failed me. My clothes were wet with perspiration. My heart was beating faster and faster. I tried to calm myself. The wind had probably caused the windows to smash against the wall. But my mind refused to accept such an explanation. I scrambled around and felt for the doorknob but failed to find it in the darkness.

I had a sudden impulse to stand up, run to the light switch, find the doorknob and run for it, but my feet were frozen to the ground. Where were the Ghostbusters? They were never there when you really needed them!

All I could do was to sit there and wait. I waited for a few minutes my clothes soaked in sweat (Yyuck!) Then I realized that something cold, strong and

metallic was slowly wrapping around my left leg. One of its tentacles had got me! I didn't panic a bit (yeah! sure!). All I did was let out the most high-pitched scream of my life (where had it been all this time?). The thing had tightened its grip and had now started tugging at my leg and dragging me towards the window. I had to do something! Otherwise what had happened to poor Asaf would happen to me! (Not very nice, of

course) So I mustered up all my strength, lifted my bat head-high and struck the most unorthodox shot I had hit in my life. There was a crack as my bat split into two and another dull clank. All of a sudden I felt the grip around my leg loosen and slump. This was too good to be true!

I breathed a sigh of relief. But my relief ended a few seconds later when I felt the tentacles tighten around my legs

again, this time even more painfully. I managed to get hold of the two splintered pieces of my bat in one last effort to break free. Once more I raised it above my head. I had to put this thing out of commission for good (only if I could!). With every ounce of my energy (except one teeny weeny bit which I saved for having my post-post-dinner snack) I brought down what was left of my bat. There was another clank, and immediately I felt the grip on my left leg loosen. Not wasting a second this time, slipped out of the tentacle's grip, picked up the remains of my bat and kept on striking the metal tentacle with it. About



half a minute later, the tentacle started to withdraw. I struck a few finishing blows and watched it withdraw. I didn't go near the window, in case the tentacle should appear again. I stood there shaking, my hand still clutching the broken bat. I remained like that for about fifteen minutes after which I heard that strange sound again. I looked out of the window and saw the pyramid shaped object shoot across the sky. In a few seconds, it was out of sight. At the end of the duel, I had come out on top.

Breathing heavily, I searched for the light switch. I found it and switched on the light. My room was in a mess. The shelf had been toppled and all the books had fallen out. The fragments of my bat were all over the floor. I was feeling very weak. I made an effort to walk to the bed. I didn't manage to reach it before blackness engulfed me and I lost my senses.

I regained consciousness in the morning. My mother had found me sprawled across the floor when she came to call me for breakfast. She thought I had fallen off my bed and shook me awake. She was quite surprised to see the mess. She asked me what had happened. I just remained quiet. I knew she wouldn't believe me. I washed and went down for breakfast.

All through breakfast I wondered: What did it want? I asked my mother if she had heard a scream. She hadn't. No one had heard the noise of a jet engine either. They just stared at me blankly when I asked them. I asked my mother about the window. She said there had been a severe storm the night before which was probably the cause of its breakage. That didn't explain anything.

"I called up Asaf's mother this morning. She's very upset. Asaf is missing. His name is on the missing person's list," my mother told me. I was very close to having a fit. I looked at the missing person's list. Asaf's name was there with a whole lot of others. They had all disappeared sometime last night. I felt a cold chill run down my spine. My name would have been on that list if that 'thing' had got me that night.

I'm Getting Older

by Rashaad Shabab



I don't believe in werewolves, I don't believe in goons, I don't believe in vampires, or dracula in full-moon.

I don't believe in mummies, from an old Egyptian tomb, who've come up to engulf, The corner of my room.

I don't believe in witches, riding on brooms, I don't believe in ghosts, Howling hoo oo oom.

I don't believe in lot of things, for now I'm getting older, But I do believe a skeleton, Just tapped me on my shoulder!

Laments of a ninth grader

by Mahruba Sameen Hossain

I N our country most students of English medium schools start giving their O'level exams in tenth grade. The apprehension and worry begins with the commencement of night grade. "You have got only one year left so you'd better study hard" your parents tell you. Give up socializing, music and movies now so that you can concentrate on your studies. You'll have plenty of time for that later. At present, all you have to do is study, study and study!! The message is pretty clear. Get Physics, Chemistry, Economics, Maths, Biology, Commerce, English and all the other subjects down your throat till you suffocate. Stuff everything inside your brain till it gets clogged. But smile and say life's great when someone asks how everything is going.

Yeah, its easy to say but when it comes to doing the real thing, it is tough. Most ninth graders range from 15 to 17 years of age. These years are supposed to be some of the best

in a person's life so how is he/she supposed to enjoy it if he/she is memorizing equations or doing maths? As soon as you sit down to study, your mind starts wandering. You want to catch up on the latest movies which have arrived or the latest music albums or even the latest fads! When are you supposed to make time for all that...? For girls it is even worse. The latest design of clothes, jewellery and gossip about popular film stars and musicians. Otherwise you are thought to be very old fashioned and back dated.

Ninth and tenth grades are the last years of a person's school life. A life which is cherished and to be remembered.

I guess I am complaining too much. But then I am a ninth grader and I feel obliged to make my readers realize and appreciate the sacrifice that we ninth graders are making.

Someone once said "only fools complain and must do." Does that make me a fool? I wonder. It's for you to decide.

Music Corner

What's new in the musical world? Let's take a look!

This week's TOP 10 ALBUMS

1. Ten Summoner's Tales—Sting.
2. Fate of nations—Robert Plant.
3. The Vanishing Race—Air Supply.
4. UN plugged and seated—Rod Stewart.
5. Promises and lies—UB 40.
6. The Future—Leonard Cohen.
7. San Francisco Days—Chris Tsak.
8. World falling down—Peter Cetera.
9. On the Night—Dire Straits.
10. Janet—Janet Jackson.

TOP—10 Singles

1. Somebody to love—George Michael & Queen.
2. Come undone—Duran Duran.
3. 29 palms—Robert Plant.
4. Fields of Gold—Sting.
5. Living on the edge—Aerosmith.
6. Goodbye—Air Supply.
7. That's the way love goes—Janet Jackson.
8. Can't help falling in love—UB 40.
9. Bed of roses—Bon Jovi.
10. Big Gun—AC/DC.

Courtesy Rainbow

Running Away

by Farhana Karim

T HE desperate feelings started disturbing me. I really could not help to stop thinking about the argument I had had with any folks. It seemed they were sick of me. All they cared about was their precious son. He could have anything he wished, he could throw big parties in the house, talks on the home alone as long as he liked and go out on date with his girlfriends. But for me these are taboo. Not to mention going out on date! Being a boy made him superior to them. All their attention were on him and all their objections were on one.

I tried hard to keep the feelings inside me—but some dangerous thoughts lingered in my mind. I wanted to concentrate in studies but couldn't. I needed someone to talk to, to understand me and to give one coverage—but there was none at home. I could not bear anymore after that day when a boy from my class rang me up for some notes and my parents refused to let me talk, meanwhile my brother brought his "brilliant" girl-friend and my Mum became busy in the kitchen to cook delicious food for her. I had enough of this life, I thought. The idea that had been bothering my unconscious mind hit one all of a sudden. I grabbed some clothes from my closet, out on my bed and took all my money I had saved from my monthly allowances. I tiptoed through the room and out of the house while every body were asleep.

It was midnight and I found myself running in the deserted road which was full of sleeping miserable bodies. There were no

particular destinations. I was not sure where to go, which way to choose. The road seemed never-ending. At last I stopped at a park for my feet were too tired to go any longer. I stared at the lake beaming in the moon. Tears rolled down my cheek, I was unable to stop them.

I did not know when I had



fallen asleep. The rays of the sun woke me up. Instantly, I wanted to go back home. I ran out of the park and headed for home.

When I slowed down a little, a familiar car stopped beside me. I did not want to look at it but I found face-to-face with my folks. They opened the car door and said they were sorry. The next moment, I found myself in their arms and burst out crying. Actually parents always love us but sometimes we just don't realize how much.

Flunked with Dignity

by Ahsan S. Kabir

C ONSIDER, if you will, an exam! An exam is greenish, yellowish, boringish, teacherish, heart-attackish, and most of all, dumb. Exams and I have a rather tempestuous relationship. Simply put, I hate them, they flunk me. Once, I had taken exams at a rate of one set every three months; but now it's been one year, seven months, three days, eighteen hours and twelve minutes (as I write this) since I last deigned to take an examination of major importance. And I must say, I prefer it this way. What joy! Pressure-free living.

Lately, after an extended hiatus, I took up French again—why, I don't know, except that it seemed a good idea at the time of registration. Sure. Unfortunately, like many good ideas, it came to nothing. The classes were snail's pace boring and the language seemed all Greek to me. If I attended classes, call it lack of initiative or lack of interest or a diversion of interests to other fields. Small wonder, I guess that my French was as bad on day 117 as it was on day 1. Come exam-time, (the teacher called it a test, but it was not) I's totally unprepared for it. Two days before the exam, I promised to myself to start studying that very after night, after working on a transcription. The day before the exam, I promised to start soon. The day of the exam, I promised, and then I said to myself aloud, "Hey man, if I'm going to flunk this exam, I am going to flunk it well... with dignity!"

Besides which, I'd some plans before the exam which did not include any scope for a language.

Sooner or later, I got to the classroom, took the question paper with a muttered thanks, and stared. "Oh my God! I can't remember anything!" I cried. "Neither can we," replied my classmates.

For an hour, I laboured on that paper, writing what I could—not much at any rate. The questions seemed so utterly meaningless and then something came over, I don't know what, that I wrote some bogus answers like, "I don't know," "I don't know," "What's it to you?", "If I could remember, I'd be king of the world and pass this exam." Say, did you know that Bishop Berkeley said that everything is an illusion? That means, this exam is not for

real! Unfortunately it was. All my responses were, of course, in mediocre French.

Worst of all was the twenty mark composition (Twenty whole marks). Normally I don't have any problems with these type of questions because I used to be terrific at writing, though of late I've been suffering a writer's block the size of Madagascar. However, the question asked was: "Who's your favourite actor/actress? Write about his or her career and life, and why he/she is your favourite. No less than 15 lines, no more than 20."

The upper limit didn't worry me. The lower limit freaked me out. Most people would have trouble with this type of essay, but I, he who knew jack about movies, who once thought Mel Gibson was the original creator of the guitar with the same name, was in deeper trouble than before. What could I write? People have often commented (not often favourably) over my ignorance about movies in general, actors (Dustin Hoffman who?), actresses (I still think River Phoenix is the name of an actress.) I guess I'm not a very visual person.

But I needed as many marks as I could get. So I wrote. What follows is a rough translation of what I can remember writing:

"My favourite actor is Eddie Murphy. (No relation to the guy who created the law: Anything that can go wrong will.) I don't know anything about him because the lives of film stars does not interest me at all. He did star in such movies as '48 Hours', 'Beverly Hills Cop', 'Coming to America' and I haven't seen a single one of them. Actually, he started out as a comedian, then became an actor, but I like him as a comic. I listened to his concerts Raw and Delirious, which were pretty funny and entertaining. He makes fun of people and their ways." Then I was stuck with only ten lines written.

Then I shrugged. "I know I haven't answered this question properly, but what can I do? I haven't seen a movie in two years, and I just don't have a favourite actor/actress/whatever."

After the exam, I dragged myself home, a spent force, regretting all ever done and all that would ever come to pass.

Oh, by the way, I passed that exam. By 1 mark.

(Actually, I flunked. But hey, I flunked with dignity!)

The Green Gem that Spins your Head

R AY Falavo is a farmhouse, — In front of which, lies the endless green fields, the Andes faraway, drawn like a picture on the beautiful blue sky, where white horses, with their manes flowing in the breeze, races as it with the wind.

The entrance to this particulars farmhouse is restricted Ray, the chief of the world's biggest emerald mine... Mujo! comes here quite often on



a vacation. Seventeen bodyguards armed with machine guns always surrounds him. There are closed-circuit televisions all scattered here and there, so that everything can be monitored and until full identification is given the main entrance stays closed for outsiders.

Is the whole thing a story of some Hollywood's mystery movie? No. Incidents in real life are sometimes more mysterious than that of the movies. But despite of all these arrangements, three courageous men came down on a helicopter and destroyed Ray Falavo as well as his seventeen bodyguards. War has spread everywhere in America, Colombia and Brazil where no one is agreeing to give up their rights on this priceless green emerald, even for a minute.

History signifies, that in 1537 fighters and warriors from Spain had come to Colombia for 7,000 emeralds which were more valuable than diamonds. They looted all of it and returned home safely.

Sultan Nadir Shah, a Moghul Emperor, had looted loads of treasure from the capital of India, Delhi. And those looted treasure consisted of a gold ball, with a radius of 18 inches. The ball looked similar to a modern globe. The princes and princesses enjoyed playing with this precious ball which had emeralds, topaz, diamonds, sapphire and more than 51,000 stones studded on it. Specialists have proved that these stones also belonged to the Mujo-mine.

What is the condition of the biggest emerald mine? It is risky and dangerous to go there by road. Equipped, armed men hide themselves by the road-side, intending to loot anyone who goes to the Mujo-mine. They know that people carry lot of money as they go to buy emeralds.

The present manager of the Mujo-mine is Nidel Triarar. He informed, now conditions aren't bad. Everyday one or two people are getting killed. "It is good in the sense that before seven or eight used to get killed daily."

These mines look like very large holes, and there's the constant with the loud sound of bulldozers and dynamites. The world's largest emerald is hiding behind layer of caliste stone. According to the rule of Colombia, whoever can dig out emerald from the mine, is the owner of it.

"In Colombia, Brazil and America 70% of the world's emerald is available. It is more expensive in Colombia than in Brazil. Experienced stone businessmen claim that the emerald in Brazil is of better quality compared to Colombia's. Those emeralds are green, but there instead of natural Beryl with chromium, they have mixed vanadium. Brazil's largest emerald-mine is in Sarta Terestinha City. The world's oldest emerald mine is in Mysoro. It was known as "Cleopatra mine" decades ago. The Princesses never wore any other emeralds than the one from here.

Now it has been decided that green beryl is emerald, it doesn't matter if chromium or vanadium is mixed, the green beryl is emerald.

Every year several hundreds dollar worth emeralds are mined throughout the year. Till now the weight of the world's heaviest emerald is 86, 136 carat. It was dug out from Brazil's Carnaiba mine in the year 1974. 15% of the



A 1622 emerald studded gold cross.



Shashed Chaudhuri

Translated by Trishna from Ananda Mela