

RISING STARS

THIS article is written in reference to last week's 'Just Friends' by Frishta.

While I agree with many of the writer's views, there are some misconceptions that I would like to clear up.

No, the article did not kill my interest mid-way. Instead it rekindled whatever interest I had prior to reading it. This was not due to the overwhelming degree of excellence of the contents but the blatant way the writer chose to insult readers belonging to the so-called anti-free-mixing group.

Free-mixing is a relatively new and bold concept for a conservative society like ours. Misinterpretation of religion had made it conventional for males and females to stay apart during the previous generations.

Women, physically weaker and less rebellious by nature, were placed in purdah. It was hammered into their heads that it is unchaste to look at members of the opposite sex (except grandfathers, fathers, uncles and brothers). Let alone speak or mix with them. Such nonsensical ideas were stuffed into the minds of our great-grandparents who then stuffed them into our grandparents' heads who in turn stuffed them into our parents' heads.

Parents, being preachers at heart, would obviously want to teach their children what they have been taught so thoroughly. Despite the strong urge to cling on to old customs and conventions it must be admitted that most 'social' laws and thoughts have changed over the course of time. Maybe not a lot, but they have developed. Society is not as stringent as it used to be during our forefathers' era.

Approximately half of our society has accepted free-mixing. Give them another couple of decades and the other half will also accept it too. It is alteral, an enormous cultural change: one cannot expect it to happen

Just Friends?

by Gulnaz Alam



within a few days or weeks.

It might be easier for the conservatives to regard free-mixing more favourably if the present younger generation did not go overboard trying to convince themselves and others how liberated and broadminded they are.

It has come to my notice that many such over-zealous youngsters tend to paw one another just to prove how modern and 'free' they are. Touching friends of the opposite sex without any reason seems to be in vogue nowadays. Girls are often seen running their fingers through their male friends' hair; boys are seen violently pulling female friends' arms to draw their attention, and everyone seems to be patting everyone else on the back and hugging in public over the slightest matter regardless of sex.

Such physical gestures can be very offensive not only in the eyes of Bangladeshi society but many other societies as well. How can people who have not yet fully accepted

friendship between a male and a female smile upon such meaningless actions?

The writer of 'Just Friends' said that even her good ol' pals did not hesitate to call her by names she would hate to call her enemies when they found out about her friendship with some male(s). Obviously her friends must have similar viewpoints as her concerning mixing with boys since they could not be such 'good ol' pals' without agreeing on such an important issue. So why did they feel such contempt towards her? Did she do something wrong or did they suspect her without any justification? If it is the previous case, the writer deserves everything she got. But if it is the latter, I sympathize with her for having lousy friends who do not even know the kind of person she is.

There are many young girls whose families do not like their male friends telephoning them. In such predicaments, the young men

the opposite sex? Were they not mentioned because they did not suit the purpose of the article but contradicted it? Or was it because the writer was so busy criticizing the narrowmindedness of our society that she forgot we do have quite a number of liberated and enlightened people living among us?

I agree with the writer when she accuses many parents of supporting sexism by allowing their sons to have female friends but not permitting their daughters to have male friends. But isn't the writer herself a sexist when she asked the father of two young sons how would he react if she had been 'cursed' with daughters (cursed being the operative word)? The last person interviewed (the nineteen year old girl) seemed a little melodramatic. She painted her mother and two brothers as if they were glad to involve her in some sort of scandalous affair.

What sort of a family would be mean-minded enough to want their daughter's reputation tainted? Even if they were as shameless as described we can thank God that there are not many households with such conspirators. By the way, why did the girl's father get left out of the plot to frame her?

It is highly unlikely that a parent would throw away the newspaper and start spying on his daughter. Even if he did and discovered her guilty of chatting with a male friend, I doubt very much if he would 'beat her till she was half dead'. As soon as I finished reading 'Just Friends', I did not think of the writer of the trash as a spoiled brat with many male friends but a concerned young citizen with the illusion that the world should be a happy and friendly place.

My only advice is grow up, be mature and accept that society will not instantly adapt to our wishes, instead we have to adjust to its conventions and in time make it a more adoptive one too.

Your book — Your Fantasy

by Susmita Roy

DULL, monotonous, adventureless — some of our lives may indeed be described as such. Do we read books to acquire pleasure and pass time, to escape from real life temporarily and plunge into fantasy, adventure or unrealistic romanticism?

May it be fantasy, thriller or just a simple real-life story, readers are inevitably transported into the scene

You can be in total control of your adventure and therefore the story itself. All you are required to do is to obtain a fantasy — game book, two dice, a pencil and eraser and off you go.

You are then ready to embark on your perilous quest. You will need all your wits about you, your courage, determination and a certain amount of luck to go where no man has ever dared to go.

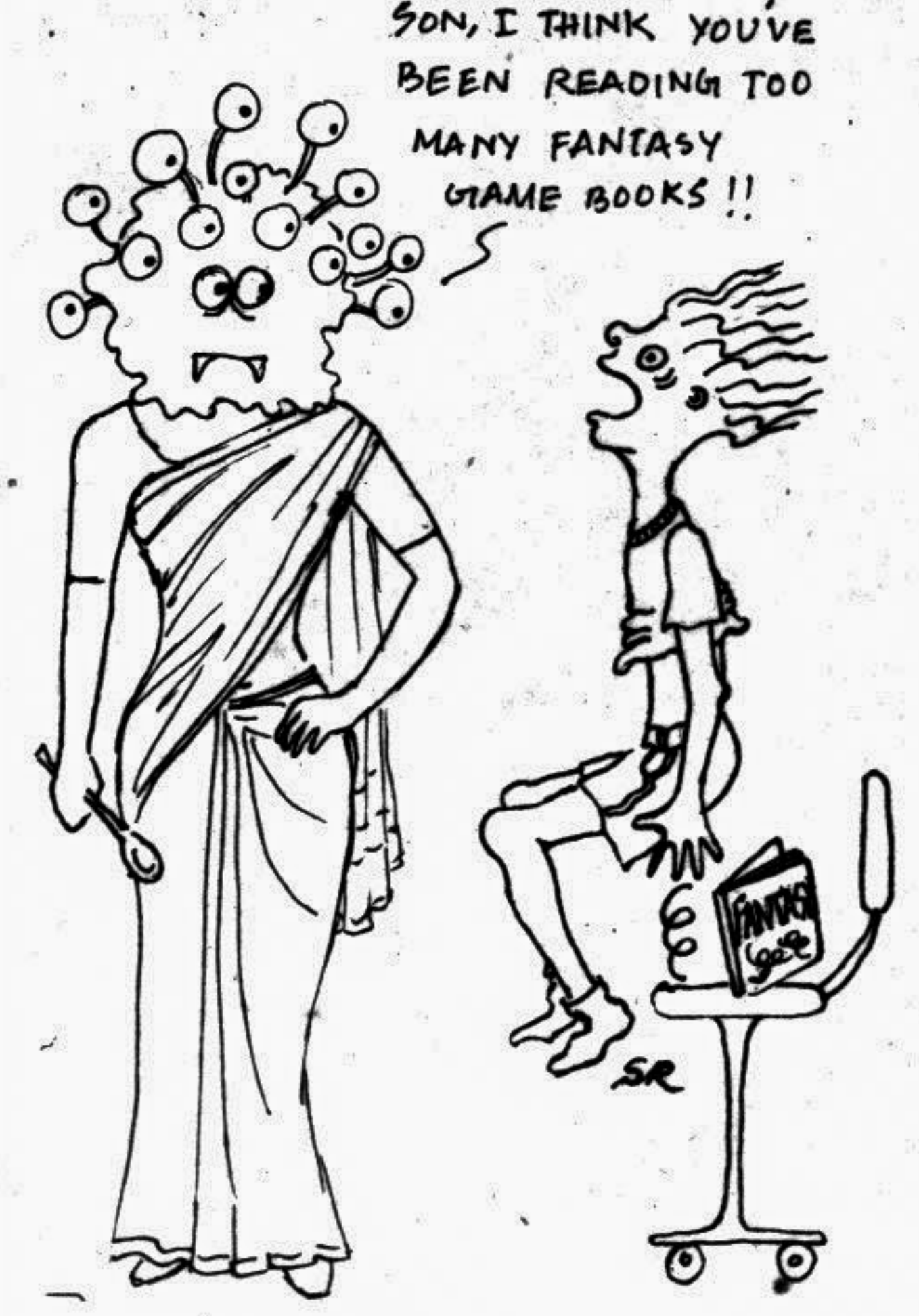
Before you start off on your quest your dice with your skill, stamina and luck, the value of which will vary throughout your journey. You will be given certain equipments, provisions and a portion more of which you may find during your travels.

It will be advised to you to make notes and draw a map as you explore and a general adventure sheet will be provided for your benefit. It usually takes several attempts to reach the ultimate target which may for example be treasure. The one true way involves a minimum of risk and any player, no matter how weak on initial dice rolls, is capable of getting through fairly easily.

Each page of the book consists of several short paragraphs which are numbered. The reader is to read the first paragraph carefully and then decide his/her next course of action by choosing (and later turning to) any of the paragraph numbers listed at the end of the first paragraph. Following the same procedure in each step, the reader (in this case the hero of the book) will come across different paragraphs containing fresh information and instructions. And this is how the story proceeds — your decisions leading to variations in the story itself.

Many of the popular game books are written by Steve Jackson and Ian Livingstone, who are the co-founders of the hugely successful Games Workshop chain. Besides 'Fighting Fantasy', the introductory role-playing game, there are over twenty four game books including 'The Warlock of Firetop Mountain', 'Caverns of the Snow Witch', 'The Shamant's Hills' etc. (by Puffin Books).

These types of fantasy-game books are loved by young and old alike, the proof of which lies in the fact that millions and millions of copies of such books are sold worldwide every year. Of course many of you out there are already aware of these wonderful books but for those who are new to this: each of these books really promise to keep you spell bound for hours on end!



that writers so painstakingly create in their books. Often a good reader will find himself to be a part of the family of characters and of the plot of the book.

It is not unlikely that many of you have at certain times felt like meeting a particular character or even wished to have been the character himself!

And believe it or not you can be the hero of a fantasy story if you only wish for it.

Part novel, with its exciting story and combat game, with its elaborate combat system, each fantasy game-book holds many adventures in store for the reader. Each page presents different challenges, and the choices you make will send you on different paths. Wrong or unwise decisions or even lack of luck, skill or stamina may be fatal and your adventure may unfortunately end before you reach your goal.

SON, I THINK YOU'VE BEEN READING TOO MANY FANTASY GAME BOOKS!!

"Hush, They can Hear You"

by Tarannum Laila

DO NOT you just get tired of extremes? Speaking or rather writing about extremes is quite easy in Dhaka. There is a neat way of categorising the residents of Dhaka. 1) The absolute fundamentalists. e.g. 'I never miss a prayer but I don't mind taking bribes'. 2) The very very rich. e.g. 'I can't speak Bangla, I don't want to. What is a saree?' 3) The very poor 'I barely have enough to eat'.

Oh, I nearly forgot to mention. There is a rare group of people who are actually sensible i.e. they won't put a price on your head if you don't wear a burkha. They are both educated and sophisticated but won't have gallons of scotch or vodka to show people. I am smart (?) There is so much hypocrisy around. Just talk to some of the people and you will find, that the expression 'Be yourself' is unheard of.

Most of the people try to impersonate others. They are usually out to copy things. For example, kids who can speak English only know one way of describing things — 'Man! This is cool'. You try to explain to them that, a mugger is not cool, a traffic jam isn't cool. They are either awful or interesting.

Another deplorable thing nowadays is you will notice a bunch of wild guys (who think they are cool, but are

actually revolting) roaming around the roads of Dhaka in classy Pajeroes. Some of them actually dangle from the windows like monkeys. They are actually rather disillusioned. They have so much, that they do not know what they want. In wanting to be noticed they grab alcohol from an early age. Now this, might not happen in large scale, but if we don't face and solve such social problems, pretty soon this growing nightmare will become catastrophic. This group of young people actually need proper guidance. They don't want to be regarded as Bengali and they are quite ashamed of the fact that they are. Their ultimate goal is — the land of the free.

The sad thing is we are picking out the disadvantages of western life and choosing them for ourselves. Americans and Europeans, work like crazy and for that reason, their after working hours are strictly enjoying themselves at the pubs and etc. But we, youngsters don't have that kind of heavy work well, not so much. So, there is no question of refreshing yourself with a pint of beer. The Westerns are highly developed and so, they do have some disadvantages of modern life. But us? I can hardly call Bangladesh one of the most affluent nations in the world, although I might want

We Never Played Football Again

by Jamal Ahmed

IT was July afternoon. The weather was damp and wet. Our football field was muddy, yet all my friends loved to play football under these circumstances.

So a group from the neighbourhood gathered at the field, to play our favourite sport. We divided ourselves in two groups, each containing six players.

At 3 pm we started our game in the muddy field. Both the teams were equally strong and the ball kept rolling on this or that "D-box". The match became very interesting.

Suddenly we got a chance to score a goal and Mahboob did that for our team. We all hugged Mahboob for his goal. In the mean time a lot of spectators gathered around the field to watch us play. They occasionally clapped, that showed that the match was really competitive.

After the half — time an opposition player, Aswad dribbled past three of our players and scored an equalizer. Now the spectators really cheered and clapped. We were clad in mud. But all of us felt very happy.

But our joy did not last long. Five young men in their late teens, suddenly ventured into the ground. I felt a little worried by looking at them. Something in my mind told me that those boys meant business.

All of them were wearing expensive trainers, jeans and T-Shirts. But still they looked very rough.

For sometime we ignored them and continued our thrilling game. Soon the intruders stood in the middle of the field and asked us to stop the game and "Buzz off".

The spectators went silent and kept watching with more curiosity. We approached the gang of five and clearly told them that we were in the middle of a match and that we would finish in half an hour.

The boys who looked more like 'maastans' started swearing at us, and again told us to give them our ball and leave the field.

For us, we never played football again.

boys and moreover we had the spectators on our side. After all they were enjoying our game. So we did not think that we were weak in front of the hooligans.

We shouted back asking them to let us play for another half an hour. An argument broke out.

My friend Mahboob, scorer of the first goal and also physically very strong, took the lead for us and was trying to convince the 'maastans' to leave the field. By then the 'maastans' took out their weapons — flick knives, sick and even a pistol.

I looked around. To my surprise the spectators had vanished.

Mahboob was now surrounded by the thugs. For a minute we felt really helpless. All we could do for Mahboob was to shout as loudly as we could. Nobody came forward to give their hand for help.

One of the thugs brandishing a huge knife just plunged on our friend Mahboob while another pointed his gun at us.

In a minute, Mahboob was lying on the muddy field with blood pouring out on to the mud.

The 'maastans' walked off the field as easily as they came warning us with their weapons. We ran to help Mahboob who was now moaning on the ground. There was blood all over. He was stabbed on his thigh.

We immediately transported him to a nearby clinic. Some of us ran to inform Mahboob's parents. The doctor of the clinic told us that Mahboob would survive but he was not sure whether Mahboob would walk normally again.

Six months have passed by Mahboob is now a physically handicapped boy. His right leg has been paralysed.

Although a case had been filed against the mindless 'maastans' with the police station, but the culprits were never caught. I often see them hanging around by the Lalmatia Girls School and College nearby.

For us, we never played football again.

Pinky's Day Out

by Sonia Hossain

"GOOD Morning, Mrs Colour"

"Meow" replied Mrs Colour, she hated being called so and everybody knew it, but still Bante Black liked calling her so.

"Can you lend me some money please? I just ran short," said Bante.

"Oh! Mrs Black another night with your husband then?" she asked.

"What utter nonsense, what a thing to say!" she retorted.

"Come, come everybody knows your drunken man hits you, just few days back you had an ugly scar!" said Crison Colour.

"Meow, meow", protested Bante.

"Children, please finish washing", shouting at her two little adorable kittens.

"Here's your money Mrs Black, bye now", said Crison.

"Meow", replied Bante.

Crison Colour was the local cat, she worked at the local newspaper gossip column, The Cat's Eye, she was multicoloured cat with blue eyes, you could sail on. She was kind and compassionate, a lovable cat. Always there when somebody was in need. Her two children were Pinky and Brownie. She was just getting her curlers out when Baily Black & White came in. Baily was the local school teacher, last year she did her Ph D's on mouse, she never married, and neither wants too. She goes to everybody's house encouraging them to send their children to school.

"Hello, everybody!" she sang out.

"Oh! it's you, hello, Pinky can't go to school today, that big bully Silver seems to be after her, she can't go out," said Crison.

"Meow, just ignore him, come on, you can't be serious!", said Baily.

"No, no, no, he could do almost anything to her, so no!" combing her fur.

Baily said nothing, it was

useless arguing with Crison, she slipped a history book to Pinky, and left.

"Pinky now don't be naughty, you know what I heard last night? Mr Grey had a fight with Silver something to do with gambling. Silver owed him money, and Silvia has broken her engagement! And it seems like Mr Black has run off with Whitney White, but I'm not sure of that. And rumour says that Thomas Black, has gone to be a film star! Maybe we should invite him, are you still friends with him?" said Crison almost in one breath.

Pinky wasn't paying much attention to her mother, she was munching some fish from yesterday's meal, and listening to *Take That's* songs.

"Goodbye now dear, come a long Brownie" sang Crison.

Brownie didn't want to go to school, he wanted to play cricket with the other gang but his mother almost dragged him there with her mouth. Pinky watched them leave, she got her mother's make-up kit and a crystal necklace, she put on high heels and left. She'll probably go watch a movie or go shopping with Silvia. It seemed that her mother knew what everybody did, except for what she did. Silvia introduced her to many tom cats, especially those with big, big homes, pets as they are known. They are the most gentle and kind and always bring some gifts or something. Other times Silvia would take her to different alleys she would never dream of going by herself. Pinky was ambivalent about Silvia, she liked her a lot, but to what extent she didn't know. Today they went to watch a movie. They went to watch *Babrian*. Pinky was sitting besides Silver without even knowing it.

"Oh! hi there Pinky" said Silver, smelling foul mouth as

ever.

Pinky moving away from the fetid smell, surprised to see him there didn't reply him. "Boy are we non-talkative today!" he said sarcastically.

"Mr Silver stop talking nonsense. I can't imagine where you get the money to watch movies when you have debt to pay," said Pinky.

"Ah! so your noisy mother has been telling you dirty lies again has she," Silver hissed back.

"You are a no good cat and a disgrace to our race!" Pinky screamed at him and left the hall. Damn the guy can't let you enjoy anything. She suddenly realized that Silvia wasn't there, and was frightened, she has never been by herself. A dark brown cat started whistling and following her. She wanted her mother, she wanted to go home. She was never going out with that Silvia again. She didn't know where she was and everything. Now there was a big black dangerous looking dog, hanging his tongue out was looking at her with acid eyes, as if he had a vendetta with the cat race.

She screamed and screamed, when just he was about to put his teeth into her fragile body, another ferocious looking dog came and those two started fighting. The fight of the century. Pinky ran and ran with her eyes shut. She'll never forget what she had seen. She crushed into somebody, opened her eyes, thank god it was only Baily B&W! Oh! what a relief, she started crying. Baily took her home, made her some hot chocolate and left her there. "Oh! hi Pinky, had a nice day did you?" Crison Colour said singingly. "You'll never guess what happened, Silvia married Silver, just as they finished exchanging vows, Silver was arrested.

What a soap opera it would make, don't you think?" Crison Colour went on and on. Pinky kept her eyes shut wanting to forget what happened today, forever.

My Dream

by Manwar Islam Khan (Rumi)

All around a tranquil atmosphere prevails, Just like a pin drop silent, I observed an shade Standing at the stair, Her rippling hair Swinging in the air, Where everything is engulfed by darkness, I saw her visage, Though all were overcast with fog, Nonetheless I felt its delicacy and grace, Which was innocent like the Petals of just blooming rose, I heard the dulcet sound of her voice That conquered the lyric of cuckoo, Her innocent smiling remove All the distress of this annihilated earth, Her stare stopped the throbbing of my heart, Consistency of her deer like eye Snatched my conscience; Whenever I returned to concrete I am staggered! All those were my dream.