

Issues

—Paul Fijn

Looking at the empty plates on the table makes you realise that you haven't had lunch yet; just in case you hadn't received the message, your stomach starts to rumble as well. You feel around in your empty pockets in disappointment, but fortunately, university being what it is, you remember that there are free barbecues on Tuesdays, and board a plastic-scented tram back up Swanston Street.

When it starts to roll forward, your thoughts roll back to Eddie and Germaine at the restaurant. Why do Eddie and Germaine hate cricket so much? What's the deal with the legion of scientists hovering about? And who was that cloaked character who seemed to have a completely different agenda?

Your attempts to piece the puzzle together are put on hold as the tram driver announces that you've reached the last stop. Stopping at the red lights, you notice the Big Issue guy across the road. Digging into the recesses of your bag, four dollars that would have proven useful last night are magically uncovered; you figure fate must want you to spend it.

"Hello there. How are you today?"

"I'm great, Les. And you?"

"Just terrific."

"Well, here's four dollars."

"Thank you. Thank you very much. You're most kind."

You watch as his awkward, freckled hands put the coins into his waist pack. You nearly walk off before an idea hits you.

"Hey Les, umm Have you noticed a lot of guys in white coats just walking around the place?"

"Oh them. Sure, I think that they're all professors from other countries."

"Oh, really? Do you know if there's a conference or something?"

"No, I don't think so. I think one of my regulars this morning mentioned something about them coming here to get a special something. But I wasn't very clear on the details."

"Oh, okay. Well, thanks for the magazine."

"No no, thank you for buying it."

Your mind begins to dart all over the place trying to process this new information as you stroll towards your sausages, guided by your keen nose for free food. However, you are unable to make any sense out of it, and with the flow of ideas drying up fast, you look to your Big Issue for inspiration. It appears to be the commemorative 250th edition, and the collage of vendor photos grinning at you beckons you to check out the actual contents. You flip it open, only to find a page with many letters missing.

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