

Exit Laughing

(From "Field and Stream")

BY ED ZERN

Ralf Coykendall, whose new book, *Guide to Decoy Collecting* (\$12 ppd., signed soft-cover edition, The Sporting Connection, Londonderry, Vt. 05148), has just been published, sent me a copy of the January 1932 issue of *Reader's Digest* containing an article by the late Lowell Thomas called "The Great American Whopper," a collection of tall stories and bare-faced lies. Not surprisingly, eight of the ten stories in the piece were submitted several times in the recent Munchausen Memorial Contest held here, because most of us are skimpily endowed with creativity, and content ourselves with swiping stories that were well-worn and moth-munched half a century ago. Two of our three prize-winners were versions of yarns in the Thomas article. Here are the ones that hadn't showed up in the Munchausen entries:

When several ferocious mosquitos invaded the bedroom of a West Virginian, he lit a candle and succeeded in burning all but one particularly large and aggressive critter. He finally cornered it and held the flame under it, but it merely sneered and blew out the candle.

A Pennsylvanian went out on a very cold night with a kerosene lantern, to walk a mile to the grange hall. On arriving there and going inside, he tried to turn down the wick of the lantern, but couldn't. Then he realized that the flame had frozen solid, and it was 5 minutes before he could thaw it on the stove and blow it out.

Professor Hobart M. Smith of the University of Colorado has kindly sent a copy of an article entitled *The Mexican Axolotl; Some Misconceptions and Problems*, with a note explaining that in 1971 he published a book called "Synopsis of the Herpetofauna of Mexico, Volume One, Analysis of the Literature on the Mexican Axolotl," containing 3,311 items about axolotls; he offered to send me a copy, and I'm still thinking it over. Professor Smith added that there's an annual "Axolotl Newsletter" put out by Dr. George Malacinski, a biology professor at Indiana University at Bloomington, and that the true Mexican axolotls are one of the most widely utilized experimental animals in the world, although much slimmer and less cuddly than guinea pigs or white mice. This made me wonder whether members of the Axolotl Society might also be utilized in experiments, and I have sent this suggestion on to Bill Miller, the more or less spiritual leader of the Society, who will probably claim that members of the group are no slimmer than members of any other fish-oriented cabal.

Before departing from the groves of academe let me cite a letter from Edwin Wuehle, President of Bay de Noc Com-



munity College in Escanaba, Michigan. Mr. Wuehle, who under the alias Scotty Barclay is also the founder and president of the International Home and Private Poker Players' Association, writes to find out what's with the version of 5-card stud called (by me, who stole the game and name from its inventor David Bascom, a.k.a. Milford Poltroon) Hi-Lo-Moose or sometimes Hi-Lo-Middle-Moose or, if played in a mooseless milieu that may harbor some other make of ungulate, Hi-Lo-Middle-Lord Derby's Eland, or whatever. Mr. Wuehle enclosed a clipping from a recent issue of *The Milwaukee Journal* which reveals that "he edits a tabloid for poker players called *Poker Chips* and has written two books on poker." If I knew any poker players called *Poker Chips* I'd ask one of them to order me his book on 7-card stud (\$2.95 a copy, from Scotty Barclay Poker Products, 1401 First Avenue South, Escanaba, Mich. 49829), but I don't. If I can find a copy of the "How To Call Moose" column I'll send it to him.

Burk Roberts of Harker Heights, Texas, writes to offer several fishing alibis that aren't yet worn to a frazzle, including these:

1. Mars and Jupiter were in juxtapositional orbits.
2. The black hole Cygnus X-1 was emitting massive quantities of X-rays.
3. The second law of thermodynamics declares that through the processes of block transfer computation and transcendental stimulation I will lose the fish if a gravity bubble forms around the core of the causal nexus; this situation can only be reversed by means of temporal inversion isometry using synchronized

time-code converters, and I had forgot to put new batteries in my time-code converter.

4. My friend Blake Richardson dropped the most recent issue of *FIELD & STREAM* (and therein the *Solunar Tables*) overboard, which brought the Universe to a screeching, shuddering halt; as is usual with such disasters, the Universe seemed to lurch sickeningly while bursts of primal light exploded around me, splattering space-time like so many globs of poorly coagulated Jell-O, a condition inimical to proper hook-setting.

And finally, to strike a more serious note, the most amazing letter I have ever received from any man or woman, and one most people wouldn't believe on a stack of bibles (but which I do believe, for reasons I'll go into later). It's from Joshua White Bear, a Cree Indian medicine man or shaman who is now in his late nineties and still getting around, living in the woods near Iriquois Falls, Ontario, whom I met about 1956 or '57 while fishing for lake trout and small-mouth bass. It reads (with some corrected spelling):

"Mr. Zern: Maybe remember me. Your guide long ago. Now I see your name in *Field and Stream* in Hudson Bay store. Remember talk to you about secret my grandfather tell me for catch big fish and beautiful woman that work like miracle always. Now I nearly 100 years and not good health but still fish and woman. In dream I see you two times with white bear and know this mean I must tell you miracle secret. Now for first time white man or red man ever. This is secret. First make fire with twigs. Then take large (continued next month).

