

ALAN PHELPS

# Beware of the creeping enemy

**T**hese days I'm afraid to walk outside my own commune. It's spring again, finally, and that means the return of the Creeping Red Fescue.

It sits out there in front of the house, breathing. Growing. Eating.

Creeping.

Sure, it looks like a type of shade grass, just as the government would have us believe. But what tipped me off early onto the real nature of this green death was the way my landlord, Bill, fawned over that patch between the porch and the sidewalk.

"Creeping Red Fescue," Bill intoned, pointing a bony old finger at the ground. Bill was having trouble getting grass to grow in that particular patch there under the tree and Fescue seemed to fit the bill.

He clearly had been taken in by the bold promises the big Fescue corporations pound into our minds day after day: "Grows in the shade," they say. "Be popular with the ladies."

But even then, a snake snaked through my being.

"Danger here," I thought to myself. "Danger."

Last summer the Fescue wasn't very thick. It was a thin green covering, slowly gaining strength. Bill was always worried about us stepping on it or throwing trash on it, such as two-month-old corn bread. He put up a makeshift fence around the patch, constructed of yarn and stakes.

I used to think these measures were to protect the Fescue from the commune. But I soon came to believe, to my horror, that the yarn in fact protected the commune from the Fescue.

"Horrors," I thought. "O! Grim-looking'd night."

Often I would stare at the Fescue, creeping along in the mischievous way shade grass has, and feel this odd sensation that it was staring back at me — that it wanted so badly to creep right up on the porch and through the



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front door, up into the living room and over Moomchmate Gabe.

I dismissed these thoughts as mere balderdash. It's just a shade grass, I said, falling for the government line. No simple ground growth could hurt a vertebrate!

But then Gherkin, the squirrel whose dead carcass gleamed for so long on our lawn, disappeared. His friendly-but-sad, and, of course, dead eyes no longer gazed at me as I headed off to classes.

The Fescue snickered, creepily creeping 'cross the yard. I froze, then backed slowly up the porch stairs.

To face my fear, I decided to study my foe. It's a common tactic for people who regularly face foes like I do.

Fearfully, I called Earl May Garden Center and asked why, exactly, the Fescue was called "creeping."

Earl told me Fescue doesn't exactly "creep." Instead, the grass uses something called "rhizomes" that "spread" and come up from under the

soil.

I cut through the scientific jargon and demanded Earl tell me if the Fescue could possibly creep over a small animal, such as a dog or squirrel.

"Oh, heavens, no," he tried to reassure me. "It doesn't grow that fast."

But any calm that might have settled over me was shattered when Earl said one little, innocent pound of Fescue seed could "spread" to cover 500 square feet. A whole mess o' squirrels could fit in 500 square feet.

A man at Williams Garden Center explained further the concept of the mysterious "rhizomes" of death.

"That's what makes it spread — little chutes go under the ground. It spreads all the time with rhizomes," he said.

That's right — "all the time." As I mulled that thought over, Garden Man began to get personal.

"You're letting that 'creeping' distort you a little bit," he told me.

I told him to give it to me straight. He had tried to convince me that the Fescue was not actually dangerous, but then I asked him if the stuff could have crept right over Gherkin.

"Oh, God no," he replied, obviously taken aback.

I have interviewed quite a few people in my Daily Nebraskan days, and I could tell that Mr. High-and-Mighty Garden Wizard had not been expecting that question. Had I stumbled onto something?

Could, in fact, this Red Creeping Death creep right over people who might come over to visit me? Could it absorb them, using rhizomes as a kind of brain-sucking mechanism?

"No," he said, quickly hanging up. Meanwhile, the Fescue quietly creeps. But if you dare put your ear near the ground, you can hear a tiny, evil laugh.

Phelps is a junior news-editorial major, the Daily Nebraskan managing editor and a columnist.

RAINBOW ROWELL

# Out of touch with Earth Day

**I**t might have been just another Thursday, another boring Monday, if it weren't for him.

He came out of nowhere, like Michael Landon or the Lone Ranger, and made my day something special, something out of the ordinary.

I was on my way to class, bleary-eyed and sleepy, the taste of skim milk and Crispix still hanging on my breath, when I saw him.

Him.

He was walking — no, waddling — across 17th Street carrying a huge, white vinyl armchair. It wasn't just a chair, not a dining table chair or a fold-up, portable one. It was a giant, yellowed leatherette monstrosity.

I nudged the person I was walking with — "Look at that. Look at that guy."

"So? He's carrying a chair."

I was amazed. She didn't even care. Obviously, my time at the UNL College of Journalism has been time well spent. My powers of observation and my sense of the bizarre are finely honed.

How could she — a pre-nursing student — even attempt to appreciate the absurdity of someone carrying an armchair to class? No, it takes a professional eye and a focused mind to catch these things.

I remember looking out my bedroom window the first time I put on my eyeglasses in the seventh grade. For the first time, I could see the individual leaves on the trees and each brick in the house next door. I couldn't believe all that amazing detail had always been there but I'd been unable to see it.

That must be what life is like for people like my friend — people who can look but cannot see. Poor thing, I hardly noticed when we parted ways at the union.

As I walked by the union, my journalist's spider sense kicked in



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again. Something was afoot, I was sure.

The fountain was surrounded by smiling people. There were tables and bands playing and a loudspeaker. Hmmm... what could it be...?

Of course, I thought, the fountain is on again. My roommate has been complaining that they should turn it on. I can't wait to tell her. She might not notice by herself.

I thought it was pretty neat that people were excited enough to set up booths and a loudspeaker for the fountain. Someone was even giving away popcorn. A closer look revealed T-shirts, too. T-shirts! — what a bunch of fountain-lovers these folks are, I thought.

Or maybe it's not the fountain. Maybe it's something more. And then it came to me.

Earth Day.

Well, it didn't actually come to me; I read it on someone's T-shirt. What am I doing with my life? I'll make a lousy journalist. How could I forget Earth Day?

When I was a junior in high school, Earth Day was a huge deal. As secretary of the Science Club, I spent hours making posters, helping with recycling drives and attending ecology conferences.

I pored over articles about contaminated groundwater and waste incinerators. I was concerned, and rightly so. Everyone seemed to be.

I would like to think the planet is much better off now and that's why I've abandoned the "save the earth" scene. But the truth is, I got busy. And maybe a little bored.

Mostly busy. I stopped paying attention to what was happening in the news. My life had become restricted to my room, my classrooms and the union. Sometimes I venture off campus to visit Super Saver, but that isn't the best place to go to brief yourself on current events. If you're in a really long line, you might have time to see what's up with Drew Barrymore, but I don't even know if they sell real newspapers.

Yesterday I realized that I have lost touch. I was tempted to trudge over to the Administration Building to change my major to something that required no perception or knowledge of the world around me.

But it's hard to keep that sort of attitude in the presence of live music and free popcorn. So, instead of punishing myself, I decided to try harder. Not all journalists are born with a keen eye. It took Lois Lane years to realize Clark Kent was Superman, and even then I think he had to tell her.

I'm not that bad. I did notice that guy with the chair. I'll work on it. Maybe I'll even start reading the newspaper. That's probably a good first step.

Next year, I might even see Earth Day coming.

Rowell is a junior news-editorial, advertising and English major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

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