

ALAN PHELPS

# Mail carrier links two universes

**B**uford Pusser is in a whole mess o' trouble.

Columbia House Record Club, the scourge of college students everywhere, is coming down on my roommate Buford, along with his friends Jack Crow and Tuhg Maikok. I'm not sure how Columbia is going to collect, because none of these people exist in what we think of as "reality."

But then, reality is so fleeting, after all. One minute, everything seems so simple — but then the next, you can't understand anybieth aisd ligke aiei9vn.

You see, although I live with Pusser, Crow and Maikok according to official Columbia House records, I've never actually seen any of them. But they always order more and more CDs and tapes — coincidentally, the ones my roommates and I like to listen to.

So when Buford was turned in to a collection agency, I was upset, and, yes, full of sexual anxiety. What is my role in this society, I wondered. Then I went for a long walk, like the one Ringo goes on in "A Hard Day's Night."

Unfortunately for Columbia House, Buford is never going to pay up on his debt, because as a non-person, he cannot hold a job or open a checking account or even buy a money order.

He can't even keep me warm at night like my moochmate Gabe does oh-so-well.

However, Buford can and has joined a dating service. A lady from Des Moines called just the other day, inquiring about Mr. Pusser, who, according to the information we sent in, is a UNL professor. He holds a doctorate and makes all kinds of money, but he is nervous about the budget cuts.

"He's out of town for a few days," my commune-mate Greg told the lady. I hope she finds a soul mate in life. They say there's someone for everyone, but in her case, someone is a no one.



**My grand theory is that all of these people — the mail people and the Columbia House members — exist in another plane, slightly out of phase with our own.**

Another set of no ones at the Isle Broddick are the mysterious entities who receive more mail than we do. John Schofield tops the list. All sorts of interesting mail shows up at our door for John, who evidently left no forwarding address. Not that we open his mail or anything. That would be wrong.

Kevin Howell, Rick Somebody, Resident At and Khiev Bun Chum are just a few of the apparently former renters of the House of Old Man Bill. Many are the times I have pondered about where these people are now. Perhaps they are all together, renting a house somewhere else, with Schofield as the ringleader.

"Resident, Khiev, go buy some groceries!" Schofield yells. "And where is all my mail! Damn it, Rick, get a move on."

My grand theory is that all of these people — the mail people and the Columbia House members — exist in another plane, slightly out of phase

with our own. They actually do live in our commune, but not in the same universe as my Islematics and me.

Occasionally, the most powerful force in the two universes, the U.S. Postal Service, is able to "bend" space — in a sense, "curving" our existence — and link momentarily our universe with the Schofield Realm INSIDE OUR MAILBOX.

This temporary "sharing" of continuums happens every day — except Sundays, of course — at around two in the afternoon, when our postman activates the gate regardless of rain, sleet or snow. I have, on occasion, heard a strange crackling and a brief-but-intense flash of light when the postman drops mail in the box.

Greg usually brings in the mail. I asked him if he had ever seen any evidence — residue, anti-matter or whatever — of my theoretical gate.

"There's some kind of weird rock and dust at the bottom of our mailbox," he said. But he added that he could not say if the dust was from our universe or not.

I wanted to travel back through the gate to try to meet Buford or John, but my mailbox was too small for me to fit in.

So I suppose that until the day when we discover the secrets of the strange powers commanded by the U.S. Postal Service, my ethereal friends will simply exist in nonexistence, trapped between hither and tither, lounging in a netherworld of which we cannot even conceive.

Our puny minds might strive to comprehend how a being can be and not be at once, how Buford can belong to a record club in our universe, or why people listen to Rush Limbaugh. But these things are not for us mortals to know.

Bam,

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

RAINBOW ROWELL

# Home better place to face phlegm

**I** should have just moved out the first time she sniffled. It never fails. Whenever my roommate catches anything, be it virus, bug or disabling tropical disease, I always catch it.

This time she caught it — a nasty cold — from her boyfriend. Figures. I was so careful. I washed my hands promptly each time I talked to her, and I opened the door to our room with a paper towel.

But I just wasn't careful enough. I know the exact moment I lost the battle. Last Thursday at 11:02. The phone rang, and my roommate answered it. "Just a minute," she said with a tremendous hack. "I'll get her." I took the phone from her outstretched hand and held the wet receiver to my mouth.

That was it. The beginning of the end. Here I sit, a week later — a living, barely breathing mucus machine.

I've shifted into sick mode. I'm dropping vitamin C like acid and drinking my Triaminic straight from the bottle I carry with me every where in a brown paper sack.

Actually, Triaminic is always a bright spot in my sick experience. As a college student I rarely enjoy good, thick, can't-wake-the-dead sleep. I appreciate just about anything that makes me sleepy, especially if it's catatonic cherry-flavored.

I've never understood those commercials for cold medicine that doesn't induce drowsiness. Who would buy that? Apparently just high-rise construction workers.

I understand that 200 stories up is no place to take a nap; but I live on the third floor, so who cares? I'm sick. Why would I want to be awake?

Unfortunately, cold medicine always seems to make me pleasantly dazed all day, and then abruptly stops



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working when I'm ready to go to bed. So I lie there for hours shifting sides and feeling the sludge in my head heeding gravity's call, filling one nostril and then the other.

About 3 a.m., I can't take it anymore, but I'm too confused and achy to find a Kleenex. In a state of drugged ineptness, panic and shame, I blow my nose in an obscure section of my pillowcase, hoping I won't find that spot again before I wake.

And, my glands! At least I think that's what's swollen and sore beneath my chin, making me resemble Theodore Chipmunk.

It wouldn't be so bad if I were still at home. I could sit on our couch, swaddled in afghans, and watch Fat Albert reruns until I felt better. My mom might even buy me a fresh coloring book to help pass the time. And then when I got better, I could

lie around for two or three days just pretending to still be sick and inhaling popsicles.

But now when I get sick, what do I do? Take drugs and hope I don't die until AFTER I turn in my economics paper.

Now I have to take finals? I don't think so. I'm tired. I'm phlegmy. I'm burned out. Get away from me with your number-two pencils and Scan Trons. I'm not having any this semester, thank you very much.

Stay back — I'll cough on you. I should be able to just stay in bed for the next week, and bring a note to my professors from my indulgent mother. "Please excuse Rainbow Rowell from her finals. She didn't feel good."

I just want to go home. I miss my mom. I miss Omaha, my hometown. If I have to be sick, I want to be sick in a city with at least two or three people who don't own Birkenstocks. I may be too sick to drive, but I want to know I'm in city with a legitimate freeway and gas stations with free car washes. I want to know I'm in a city, even a small one.

I want to go to my doctor. I want to sleep in my bed. I want to throw all my snotty Kleenexes on my floor, and I don't want to pick them up until I feel better.

With my raspy, not-quite-Bonnie Raitt voice, I try to sing myself to sleep with the Omaha song.

Omaha, Omaha, finest place you ever saw. Come along, join the throng, because you simply can't go wrong. (They say it's great in . . .) Omaha, Omaha, boost your hometown all day long. And at night when you lie sleeping, dream of Omaha.

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

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