

from Braybrook

I pressed the mike and responded, "Braybrook Three-Oh-Seven receiving."

"Roger, Three-Zero-Seven. Have numerous reports of a naked male directing traffic at the intersection of Ballarat Road and Anderson Road, Sunshine. Job to you at zero-eight-forty-six hours."

I acknowledged, gave my number.

"Fucken hell, that's all we need," complained Rash. "A fucken nutter. We'll be tied up at the nut home all friggin day gettin him certified."

With his half-eaten coffee scroll in one hand and his Big M chocolate flavoured milk on the seat between his thighs, Rash pulled the van to the side of the road. He stuffed the rest of the scroll into his mouth and swigged down what was left of his milk. Once he'd wiped his hands on his trousers, he tossed the empty carton and paper bag onto the floor on my side, waited for a break in the traffic, and swung the van into a U-turn.

We didn't go lights and bells this time, but we didn't spare the horses either. I was doing well not spilling the rest of my milk drink. That was until Rash stabbed the brakes abruptly to take a short cut down a side street..

The nutter had a westbound bus held up when we got there, and he was indeed naked. Apart from his greasy dreadlocks and wispy beard, the most noticeable thing about him was his erection.

His stomach was a cavity beneath protruding ribs. He looked as though he hadn't been fed in months. He was standing directly in front of the bus with his arms spread wide, and fingers splayed out like a TV evangelist in crucifixion-pose — the muscles and sinews in his arms taut under grey skin. A wispy beard floated in the breeze. Long, unkempt, reaching to his navel, it could have sprouted in the womb.

The high-school students had their heads and upper bodies out every window they could open, and were having a great time banging the side of the bus, cheering, jeering and yelling loud and lewd suggestions. The driver, an older man of around sixty, was shaking a fist and belting on the air horn. He couldn't go forward unless he ran over the top of the Nutter, and he couldn't back up because a line of vehicles was jam-packed up his backside.

The entire intersection was blocked with traffic. Anarchy ruled. No one was taking any notice of the traffic signals which were blissfully going through their colourful red, green and amber cycle. Drivers had stopped for a better look at the sideshow and had choked the intersection in the process. Others were blowing their horns and trying to force their way through, only making matters worse for themselves and everyone else. Vehicles had converged from all directions into one tight spot.

As soon as he saw us arriving, the Nutter took off and sprinted for the centre traffic island, arms and legs pumping, ropes of hair streaming out behind. Rash fought a path through the mayhem and steered after him. As soon as the Nutter got to the closest traffic-light pole he launched his wiry frame and, with remarkable finesse, began climbing up. I wondered how he didn't slip back down. The pole would have been

smooth enough, even without all the dampness. He must have had suction cups for fingers.

He was stopped a good ten feet up by the time we parked and got out, with his arms and legs wrapped tight around the yellow pole, clinging on like a monkey. It was hard to guess his age, but I reckoned somewhere between twenty-five and a hundred. I thought of the pain he must be in hugging his groin hard against the metal. His head was bobbing back and forth. His hyped-up eyes were as large as saucers, darting about frantically, searching for escape, either from us or whoever (or whatever) he thought was chasing him. He also had very big teeth.

His mouth was stretched wide open and above the din of horns, engines and students, I could hear him screaming over and over again a discordant something which sounded to me like, *Snar loeben! Snar loeben!* Could just as easily have been primitive caveman braying.

Rash shouted for him to come down but all we got was more of the same. *Snar loeben! Snar loeben!*

Rash made a couple of attempts to jump up and grab an ankle, but fell well short each time. Realising that the situation called for a more strategic approach, Rash jerked a thumb at the congested intersection and exhaled heavily.

“See if you can sort that out while I try to get this joker down.”

We were only just getting started and already there was defeat in his words.

“Sure you don't want a hand?”

He waved me off. “No, no, I'll be right. Just get all those clowns outta here.”

“Okay. Good luck,” I said doubtfully.

I left Rash to deal with the lunatic, and to cries of *Snar loeben!*, and wandered into the traffic havoc to the expectant eyes of drivers and passengers, not at all sure how I was going to sort it out.

Ballarat Road was one of the main thoroughfares from the west into the city and at that very moment it looked like the overwhelming majority of west-siders had poured themselves into it, right there and then.

I manoeuvred around a small truck with “St. Albans Fish And Poultry” stencilled down the side, which had been attempting to execute a right turn, and was now blocked by our van. The driver didn't seem too worried, though. He had our Nutter to keep him entertained. The kids on the bus were still yahooping, and I could hear the occasional remark directed at me, Rash and the police force in general.

I had to pick my way around a number of vehicles locked in the middle, and nearly got sandwiched between two bumper bars when a car with misty windows tried reversing. A smack on the boot lid put the brakes on. I reached the centre of the intersection with a nose full of burnt fossil fuels and was able to survey the scene from a better vantage point.

Everyone was either stuck haphazardly across the main intersection, or banked up further down the road. Gridlocked and going nowhere.

There was a commotion of some sort going on over towards McIntyre Road where it looked like someone had lost a load of furniture off the back of a trailer. A man in overalls and a woman in a torn parka and baggy tracksuit-bottoms tucked into high-rise gumboots were trying to manhandle an ancient couch back onto the trailer while irate motorists yelled at them. A chest of drawers lay smashed on the road nearby.

Some frustrated commuters were standing by their cars craning their necks for a better assessment of the blockade ahead. These people were either not aware of, or didn't care less about, the nude nutcase up the pole. But others were balancing on the door sills of their opened cars pointing and laughing at the comedy show.

The situation looked impossible and I had real doubts about how I was going to solve this conundrum on my own. A light drizzle was falling and the road surface was black with moisture. I was amazed that no one had skidded and crashed.

I decided the only thing to do would be to halt the traffic altogether in one direction, hopefully long enough to let the other clear. I made my way closer to the south side of the crossroads and stretched myself taller onto the balls of my feet. I didn't have any of those big white gloves that went all the way up your forearm like the City Traffic members had for directing traffic in the CBD. I hoped my skin colour would be enough. Luckily, I had remembered to bring my cap — with its nice white lustrous top, shiny black peak and its blue-and-white checked band — to help me stand out in the congestion.

Facing the northbound lanes out of Anderson, I held the palm of my right hand up as high as I could in the signal for "stop". To my utter surprise, those motorists seemed to take notice of me and gave up making futile attempts to fight their way forward. It must have been the magical power of the uniform.

Satisfied they were going to stay put, I turned and walked the few paces back to repeat the exercise with the southbound traffic coming out of McIntyre.

Having successfully halted the north and southbound invasions, I moved to counter the attacks on the eastern and western fronts. Advancing to where the biggest collection of cars had dug in, I snatched a quick glimpse of Rash's progress.

He had brought the divisional van up onto the traffic island as close as he could get it to the traffic-light pole, and was now climbing up the bonnet and onto the roof. I could see that he had his heavy, steel Maglite torch in his hand — a formidable baton. The target was still clinging to the pole, his bare white buttocks only a few feet above the top of the van, his arms and legs locked tight. From where I was, I could see his head thrashing from side to side, his dreadlocks flapping back and forth, his mouth wide open. Although I couldn't hear him amidst the horns and engines, I knew what he would be screaming.

Formulating a battle plan, I decided to first clear those who had been northbound from Anderson. I wouldn't be able to let them continue into McIntyre Road. They simply wouldn't fit. Picking out a white Toyota Hi-Ace to lead the charge, I indicated with a twirling finger for the driver to lock his wheel to the left and, with a belch of oily smoke from his exhaust, sent him west along Ballarat Road. I then waved on the Ford Cortina that had almost T-boned him, and allowed two cars behind that to follow in formation. Keeping up this strategy, I was able to clear one northbound and two or three westies at a time. When at last I waved the bus through and it slowly rumbled away, I was shocked to see an adolescent student with a cheeky grin on his face waving his penis at me through the back window. Next to him stood a classmate, her shirt pulled up, her exposed breasts pressed against the receding glass.

When I turned back, I saw that Rash was now standing on the roof of the van with the crackpot's backside suspended just above his head. He was reaching around with one hand and had a firm hold on the Nutter's left ankle, trying to tug the leg free. At the same time, he was whacking him on the right hip and thigh area with the baton torch. The crank was not going to come quietly, and kept his body hugged tight against the pole, with his arms and legs locked fast around it.

Just as Rash swatted him for a consecutive time, I saw a dark shadow fall from between the Nutter's buttock cheeks. Rash must have seen it too because he instantly sidestepped, but moved too quickly on the damp and slippery roof. He danced awkwardly for a moment, the soles of his shoes fighting for grip, his arms rotating wildly for balance, before his feet went out from underneath him. He let go of the Maglite and it went flying through the air, bouncing once off the top of St. Albans Fish And Poultry before disappearing somewhere behind.

Rash fell hard onto his hands and knees, but luckily stayed on the roof. A couple of feet either side and he could have easily crashed onto the road, two metres below. In almost the same instant, the Nutter let go of the pole, twisted acrobatically in midair and, using his hard-on as a direction finder, landed face down, dead onto Rash's back. Then, just as he had done with the traffic-light pole, he immediately locked his arms around Rash's neck, and his heels around his torso.

Rash struggled to get free. He was frantically arching his back up and down, and swaying from side to side, but couldn't get much momentum up under the full weight of his rider.

The Nutter was latched on securely. Rash's attempts to buck him off only made it look like the nudist was humping him, and that Rash was responding to the affection.

The spattering of onlookers certainly thought so, because there was immediate clapping, cheering, wolf-whistling and horn-blowing. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw someone taking photos.

I couldn't see Rash's face because the Nutter's dreadlocks were draped over his head, but I knew he would be desperate for me to help. I left the traffic to fend for itself and hurried over.

St. Albans Fish And Poultry was heaving with laughter in the cabin of his truck. The Nutter was strangling Rash in a headlock, screeching unintelligible, deranged animal noises. Rash was cursing between gulps for air.

"Get the fuck off!" *Gasp. Pant.* "Get the..." *gulp* "...fuck off me!" *Cough.* "Ya fucken mad..." *hack* "...prick!" *Growl. Cough. Wheeze*

I had to stifle a laugh. "Hang on, I'm here! Hang on, Rash!"

Rash was losing energy fast. His bucking and thrashing was becoming less intense. The Nutter was like some sort of parasitic growth on Rash's back that would have to be surgically removed.

I put a foot on a corner of the rear bumper and pulled myself up to reach over the back of the van. With my fingertips wedged into the sill above the back doors, I found myself looking straight into the eye of a hairy bum crack. A nasty red boil on one buttock stared back angrily. Steadying myself, I stretched out with one hand to try to grab the Nutter's lower leg, but got collected on the chin with the side of Rash's floundering GP boot. That was enough to make me lose my hold on the

sill. I dropped off the bumper and stumbled back a few steps before regaining my balance. Rash's cries were becoming weaker.

“...off...” *hack, gasp* “...get...”

If I was going to be of any use at all, I would have to get up there with them. I dashed around to the front of the van, passing St Albans Fish And Poultry who was nodding feverishly while laughing his head off. I climbed onto the bonnet and it buckled under my weight. But I wasn't going to worry about that now. As I readied to launch myself onto the roof, with one toe on the top of the windscreen and the other carefully avoiding the wiper arms, Rash and rider suddenly tumbled to one side and went clean over the edge. All I could do was watch helplessly as they separated in mid-flight, arms and legs clawing at the air as they went into free-fall. With a distinct thud, and a loud grunt from Rash, they both hit the road almost simultaneously.

Rash lay on his back with his arms out to the sides, stunned, his eyes staring at nothing in the sky. The Nutter had fared better. He'd managed to land in the crawl position — much like Rash had been in only seconds before — and was now executing a skilful barrel roll.

I quickly scrambled back off the van. Free of my weight, the bonnet popped back with a clunk. The Nutter was on his feet and weaving a mad dash to safety through the lanes of traffic, his erection leading the way. I gave a moment of thought to giving chase, but at the speed he was going he looked as if he could outrun a cheetah. I watched him as he cleared Ballarat Road, and the last I saw of him was his naked backside and flapping dreadlocks retreating up a narrow alleyway between a furniture showroom and a plumbing supply outlet.

Rash had rolled to one side when I went over to him and was trying to push himself up on one elbow, his face twisted in pain. His gun had fallen out of its holster and lay threateningly a few feet away. I was glad it hadn't gone off. That could have been messy. I quickly picked it up, holding it by the butt, muzzle pointing down, careful to avoid touching the trigger.

"Didya get the cunt?" he croaked through clenched teeth, his eyes squeezed shut.

"Nah. Too quick for me. Got away."

I went to help him up but he pushed me away with a groan. "I'm right."

There was a fair amount of black goo in his hair, but he didn't seem to be aware of it, and I didn't want to bring it to his attention. He got to his feet but clutched at the small of his back, staggered, and almost fell again. This time he let me take him under the arm and help him to the van. More people had got out of their cars and were watching with glee. More clapping. I noticed a different camera was out and clicking away. This one had a telephoto lens. St. Albans Fish And Poultry was killing himself laughing. Rash ignored them all. I pushed his .38 back into his holster and clipped it over for him.

Supporting his arm with one hand, I used the other to get his door open but he balked and said, "You drive."

"But I haven't got a van permit yet."

"Don't worry about it. You'll be right. It's just a friggin panel van. No different to a normal car. Just get me outta here."

He tore his arm away from me and shuffled gingerly sideways around to the passenger side, eyes fixed on the bonnet, his hands inching

along for support. I ran over and retrieved his Maglite, giving me time to think, then came back protesting.

“Well, what if we get D24 to send someone down? They could take you and the van, and I can get a lift some other way.”

“Fuck that. Just drive the fucken thing.”

He got to the other side, opened the door, and eased himself into the seat. I stood staring at the open driver's area, where the keys rocked gently in the ignition switch, and thought of the consequences of what I was about to do.

Rash yelled, “Will ya just get in the fucken car!”

Sitting there gripping the steering wheel, I had a good stalling idea, “What about the traffic jam?”

“Fuck 'em.” He pointed a finger dead ahead. “Go.”

I looked out the side window and saw the guy with the telephoto lens climbing into a station wagon with *The Truth* in large red letters splashed down the side.

I dropped the Maglite into the leather kitbag between us and pulled the seat forward on its ratchet, changed my mind, let it slide back. I took a moment to familiarise myself with the controls, then kicked the engine over and bounced the van off the traffic island. As we pulled away, I took one last look at St Albans Fish And Poultry. He gave us the thumbs-up sign through his windscreen glass.

I found the one and only route available through the traffic-jam stragglers, which put us on a course back towards the city.

I glanced over at Rash, trying to think of a nice way to break the news about the poo in his hair. More, diarrhoea, really. The sludge had matted his hair, flattening the ginger locks against his skull. Part of it had

started to ooze down the side of his face, but he still didn't seem to sense it. With the windows up and the heater on, he stank to high heaven.

There was no easy way. "He shat on you, you know."

Rash winced as he pushed down, lifting himself higher in the seat to get comfortable. Suddenly, he comprehended what I'd said. He looked at me, mystified, ran his fingers through his hair, brought them to his nostrils, sniffed.

"Ah, fuck!" Sniffed again to get a second opinion. "The dirty cunt shat on me!"

"Yep."

"Ah, fucken hell!"

I wound down my window and got a blast of cold, damp, wonderfully refreshing air. Rash fished around behind the seat, pulled out a plastic raincoat, rubbed it against his face, but really only managed to smear it all further. I kept one hand on the wheel, pulled a handkerchief from my pants pocket, handed it to him. He took it, wiped vigorously, turned it over, swabbed again.

Light rain peppered the windscreen, crystallising my view. I found the wiper control arm and moved it to 'int'. We were sitting in the centre lane, travelling below the speed limit. Without the necessary permit in place, I didn't want to defy the odds and chance an accident.

"VKC to Braybrook three-zero-seven."

Rash's hand came over to me with the crumpled-up handkerchief, now stained black. I shook my head. He wound down his window, jettisoned it, got attacked by frigid air from both sides, wound the window back up. I left mine down.

“Braybrook Three-Oh-Seven,” replied Rash, reaching for the mike, wincing with the effort.

“You clear of the last, Three-Zero-Seven?”

“Roger.”

“We’ve had a number of calls on that one. Reply, please?”

“G.O.A., N.O.D.” (Gone on arrival. No offence detected.).

That was an outright lie, but I gathered Rash didn’t want to have to fill out a complicated report on the matter. Nor did he want to admit failure.

Rash thought for a second then thumbed the button, adding, “One member en route to the Western General with minor injuries.”

“Nature of the injuries, Three-Zero-Seven?”

“Sore back. Slipped over in the wet.”

“Roger Three-Zero-Seven.”

Then the network came alive with “whoops”, “ooh-la-lahs”, clicking buttons, and a variety of sordid comments from unidentified units using disguised voices. The truth was out.

Rash plonked the mike in its cradle, fell back in his seat, grimaced, sighed, fixed his eyes straight ahead and said, “Ah, fuck.” Then he farted.
