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GAY REPORTER

**BRITAIN'S
BIGGEST
GAY
NEWSMAG**

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90p

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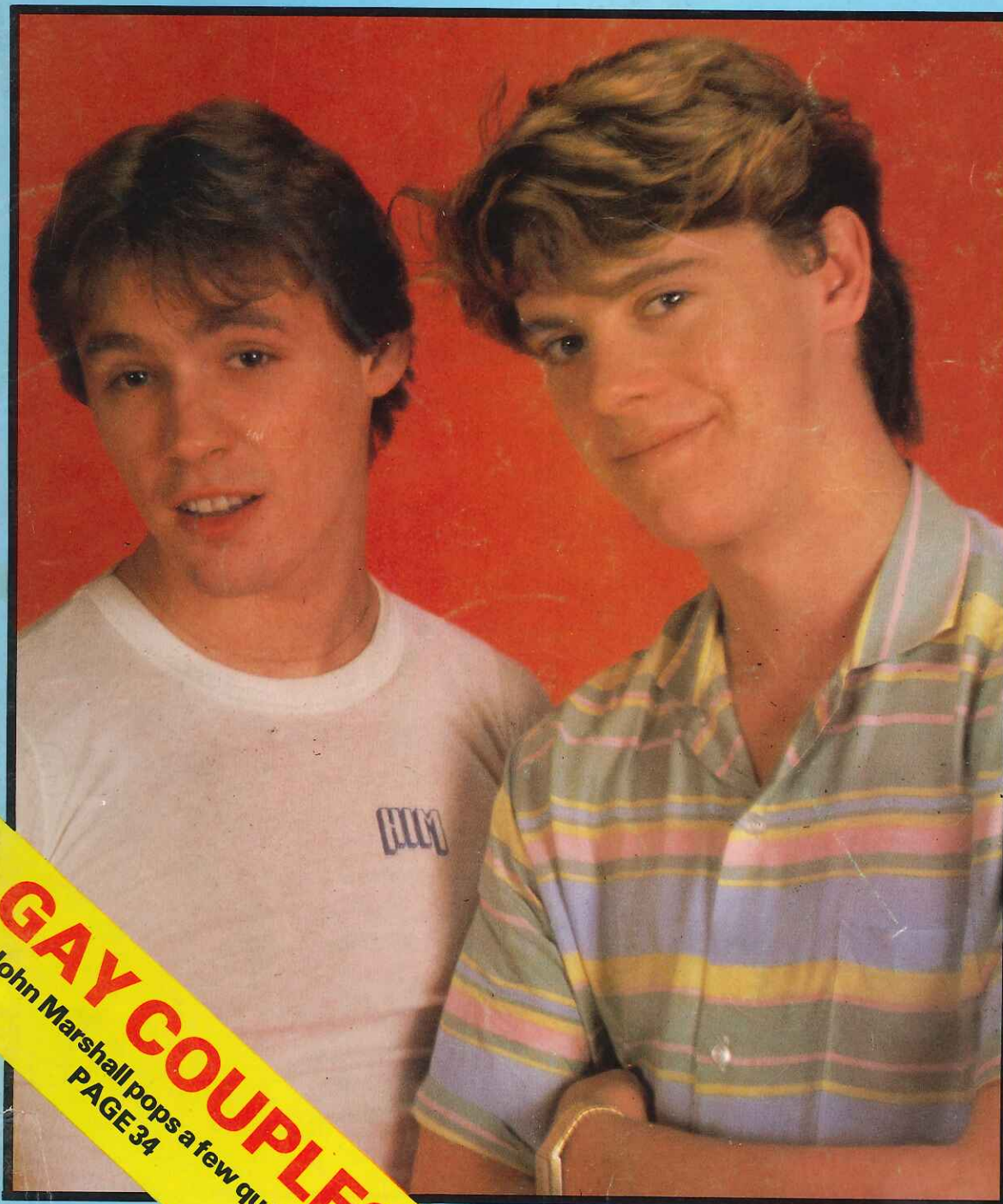
**GAYS AND
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FEATURE

It's 1972 and after two years as a student in Liverpool, I still didn't know any other gay people. In a university of 7,000 I figured there must be more than me. "It pays to advertise" so advertise I did and took to wearing a Gay Liberation Front badge and cruising round the Students' Union, to give everyone a good look - quite daring in such a right-wing institution, I thought. But after several weeks, still no results.

Plan B. Two or three nights a week I'd set out, immaculate and all in black, a dead-ringer for Morticia of The Adams Family when I look back, to sit in hotel bars round central Liverpool, drinking gin and tonic, smoking Sobranie Black Russian to match my outfit, waiting for Mrs Right (who, by sheer chance, would be a Shirley MacLaine look-alike) to swan in, swan over and sweep me away to the realms of good conversation and good sex: bliss in aeternum. How silly can you get!

A couple of months of that caper only brought too many hangovers, a badly depleted grant and a huge backlog of essay writing. I had, however, learned how to handle men who propositioned me.

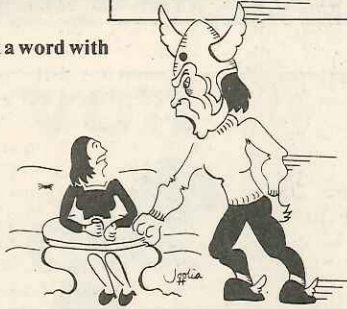
Desperation made me determined. I almost had to hire a Private Dick to find out whether



Julia Reid recalls her first experience of

Virgin Territory

"I'm Sam, I want a word with you."



there were any gay pubs or clubs in town. Tenacity won the day and £5 worth of phone calls later I was finally though reticently directed to John's (now Sadie's) Bar Royal in Wood Street.

After some initial difficulty in getting past the doorman, who assumed I was straight because I was wearing a dress and had long hair, came the second hurdle: Name and address, please...

Visions of a raid - Police seize Visitor's Book - contents published in *News of the World* - mother sees my name - gnashing of teeth and tearing of hair (probably mine). Momentary panic, false name and in I go to meet all those good looking, fas-

cinating women.

I sat for an hour, apprehensively ready for a good time, alone in a corner. By 11.30 there was me and sixty gay men - naturally I felt like a hologram. If it hadn't been for the barman assuring me that droves of women would arrive very soon, I'd have given it up as a bad job and put in for Aversion Therapy the following day.

Presently they did arrive and a group of six took the table next to mine. From what they were wearing, I guessed they'd just returned from an Outdoor Pursuits week in North Wales. They weighed me up and of one accord, closed ranks.

Much muttering and stealing of sideward glances and the chosen delegate, a Valkyrie of a woman, bounced over: "I'm Sam. I want a word with you (I smile obligingly, which Sam ignores). Are you collecting rent?" Fancy thinking I'm a landlady, hounding down some poor tenant in arrears - no wonder they weren't very friendly. I felt hurt and insulted: "Of course not." Sam nearly relaxes: "Are you straight, then?" Here we go again: "No." Sam visibly thaws: "S okay, it's just that we've never seen you before; you must be Femme, come over and join us." Femme who? She'd obviously mistaken me for someone else but I didn't want to point that out just yet, for fear of being relegated to the corner again. I hoped Femme wasn't going to arrive for a while.

Fortunately, before making a fool of myself in confessing my mistaken identity I deduced from snippets of conversation and gossip that "femme" was the

antithesis of "butch", which was what Mo was and she, rumour had it, wore Y-fronts and banded her chest flat! Butch was butch but that was going too far, they all agreed and eager to join in the conversation, I added that I didn't see why you had to be one or the other; a reasonable comment?

Blank looks... and cue for Bev, my self-appointed chaperone, to whisk me into the lounge and impart the facts of gay life, in a patronising, kindergarten school-teacher manner. I wasn't daft enough to tell her I thought she was talking nonsense - I didn't want her to think I was an uppity Know-All and besides, with phrases like, "Varda the eek on that polone", which had me utterly miffed, I felt more of a bimbo than a Smart Alec.

As the evening's brand-new, shiny lesbian, I was much in demand for dancing, all prospective partners kindly vetted by Bev. Nonetheless, I was enjoying myself and how nice to see so many women being openly affectionate with each other. But as the night wore on and the empty glasses mounted, demonstrations of affection moved to a far corner of the

crowded dance floor or simply, under the table and anxious glances ousted casual chatter.

A scrap erupted two tables down, which momentarily interrupted Jo telling Lynne to keep her hands off Pat, or else. Pat got me up to dance, "away from the trouble" and we ended up in a ten minute clinch, which perturbed me. Not only had I let her kiss me but I'd returned the kiss: did that mean I was "easy", had Jo, Pat's lover, clocked us? Not to worry: Nikki's red-eyed return from the toilets gave everyone a channel for speculation and curiosity and resolved pockets of anguish into, ostensibly, concern.

Two o'clock came quickly and within ten bars of 'Moon River', traditionally the Bar Royal's Last Dance and panacea, everyone loved each other madly, again. Time to go home.

What a strange evening. Not at all as I'd imagined but I was already looking forward to tomorrow night.