



REFLECTIONS

The Mouse Still Roars

BY JAMES PATTERSON

The Mouse That Roared by Leonard Wibberley was originally serialized in *The Saturday Evening Post* from December 1954 through January 1955 as *The Day New York Was Invaded*, before being published as a novel in 1955. But it is probably best known today as the 1959 screen adaptation starring Peter Sellers in three roles.

From reading the book in the 1960s, I learned even serious subjects like foreign policy could be successfully mined for humor. I suspect many *Journal* readers are already big fans of the work. But for those few unfortunates who have never encountered it, here's a quick plot synopsis.

Despite being famed for its wine, the European Duchy of Grand Fenwick, "five miles long and three miles wide," is in dire economic straits. The two political parties, the Dilutionists and the Anti-Dilutionists (named for their respective positions on watering down the wine to increase sales), propose asking the U.S. for aid to save the duchy from communism. But they are unable to find anyone who'll pretend to be a communist. Instead, the duchy takes another tack: "We declare war on Monday, are vanquished Tuesday,

James Patterson, a retired Foreign Service officer, is Grand Fenwick's ambassador to the U.S. The stamp is courtesy of Mikkela Thompson, noted Fenwickian philatelist.

*Back in the U.S.,
meanwhile, eccentric
Dr. Kokintz,
"a mouse of a man,"
has developed the
Q-bomb for
the Pentagon.*

and rehabilitated beyond our wildest dreams by Friday night."

Duchess Gloriana XII (Sellers) duly sends a declaration of war to the State Department, citing evidence a California winery is pirating Pinot Grand Fenwick. But desk officer Chet Beston, attracted to the Foreign Service because he "didn't have to work very hard or know too much" to work there, assumes the document is a joke. After weeks of silence, Grand Fenwick sends an expeditionary force of 23 men, armed only with longbows, to attack New York City.

Back in the U.S., meanwhile, eccentric Dr. Kokintz, "a mouse of a man," has developed the Q-bomb for the Pentagon. It will incinerate two million square miles when detonated, he tells the president. News of the bomb panics New York City, where Kokintz lives, so a civil defense drill is authorized and nervous New Yorkers

take shelter underground.

Just then the Fenwickians arrive, ready to declare war and surrender, but find only deserted streets and buildings. After reading about the Q-bomb in a newspaper, they march to Kokintz's Columbia University lab and take him, his beautiful daughter and the weapon back to Grand Fenwick. There the duchy declares victory in its war with the U.S., prompting Russia to dispatch troops to "protect" Grand Fenwick and the weapon. That leads to an international peace conference and a happy ending (for most of the characters, anyway).

Irishman Leonard Wibberley (1915–1983), a prolific author and journalist with over 50 children's books and other publications to his credit, lived most of his life in California. He dedicated *The Mouse That Roared*, his most famous work, "To all the little nations who over the centuries have done what they could to attain and preserve their freedom. It is from one of them I am sprung."

The message of *The Mouse That Roared*, a classic tale of mice and men, is as sharp today as it was 50 years ago. Wibberley's world was panicked over weapons of mass destruction. We need look only at Iraq to see the WMD panic is still with us.

Memo to all State Department desk officers: That unopened envelope on your desk could be of Fenwickian importance! ■