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Falcon Follows The Fox

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Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

A DOWNSTATE IDEOLOGICAL cousin of the famous Fox of northern Illinois has risen to torment polluters in Alton and surrounding Madison County. It calls itself the Falcon.

The Fox is the nom de guerre of a Robin Hood type who operates, usually under cover of darkness, stopping up industrial sewer outfalls and smokestacks in the Chicago area and who once invaded the offices of a steel company to pour fluid pollutants on the executive carpet.

The Fox has been pursued in vain by police and plant security forces and his identity remains a mystery. He has become a national legend.

THE FALCON, though no less shadowy, is somewhat less militant. So far he (or she) has confined his activities to awarding certificates of achievement, tastefully embellished and suitable for framing, to environmental offenders.

"Eco-Conservation of America," says a typical certificate, "takes pleasure in awarding this certificate of accomplishment to the management of Alton's industrial complex in recognition of a significant contribution to the environmental crisis."

An accompanying note explained that the award was a tribute to the stinking black lagoon on the east shore of the Mississippi River. The lagoon is used for dumping by Alton Boxboard Co., Laclede Steel Co. and Owens Illinois Glass Co.

OTHERS HONORED with Falcon certificates:

Union Electric Co., for dumping sulfatic acid and caustic solutions from its Portages des Sioux plant in St. Charles County into Alton Lake.

The Redwood Motel in Godfrey for polluting a Boy Scout camp lake. (Scout executives have since closed the lake to swimmers).

Hercules Chemical Co. at Louisiana, Mo., for dumping fish-killing chemicals into the Mississippi.

Monsanto Co. for producing polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB), a chemical used in plastics. The chemical has been blamed for contaminating food and milk.

Six Republican members of the Illinois House of Representatives for their sponsorship of a bill giving utility companies a measure of freedom from state antipollution laws. The dirty half-dozen, as the Falcon called them, are Thomas C. Ross, Jacksonville; Allan L. Schoeberlein, Aurora; Lester Cunningham, Belvidere; J. David Jones, Springfield; William J. Cunningham, Pinkneyville, and John E. Friedland, Elgin. The bill is awaiting the Governor's signature.

INSTEAD of delivering the awards personally to the recipients, the Falcon mails them to Arther J. Thomason and Ande Yakstis, reporters for the Alton Evening Telegraph, and asks them to make the presentations.

Most of the achievements cited by the Falcon were reported earlier by Thomason and Yakstis.

So far there have been no clues to the Falcon's identity. The bird's communications bear an Alton postmark. The certificates are pasted up, like ransom notes, with print cut from other material. The Falcon's signature is a single, upward pen stroke resembling the shorthand symbol for the syllable "tam."

Yakstis and Thomason interpret it as the single mocking scratch of a talon.

ALL THE CERTIFICATES but one are still sitting in the city room of the Alton Telegraph. Yakstis and Thomason called the honorees and asked them to come and pick them up, but so far none have.

Told of the award, a spokesman for Monsanto said, "We regard this kind of letter in the same manner as the Post-Dispatch would regard an anonymous letter to the editor."

The reporters did deliver the Union Electric award to the company's Alton office. The local manager, Ed Fodler, had nothing to say, but later James Lumpp, Union Electric's public relations man said:

"I have no comment on this silly thing. I don't know who the Falcon is and I don't care. This is high school stuff."

He called back a few minutes later to report that the sulfatic acid discharge was caused by [illegible]

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