

Fever Pitch

Characterisation

The Narrator

1. Read the following extracts from the text and then answer the **True** or **False** questions that follow.

1 1968 was, I suppose, the most traumatic year of my life. After my parents' separation we moved into a smaller house, but for a time, because of some sort of chain, we were homeless and had to stay with our neighbours; I became seriously ill with jaundice; and I started at the local grammar school. I would have to be extraordinarily literal to believe that the Arsenal fever about to grip me had nothing to do with all this mess.

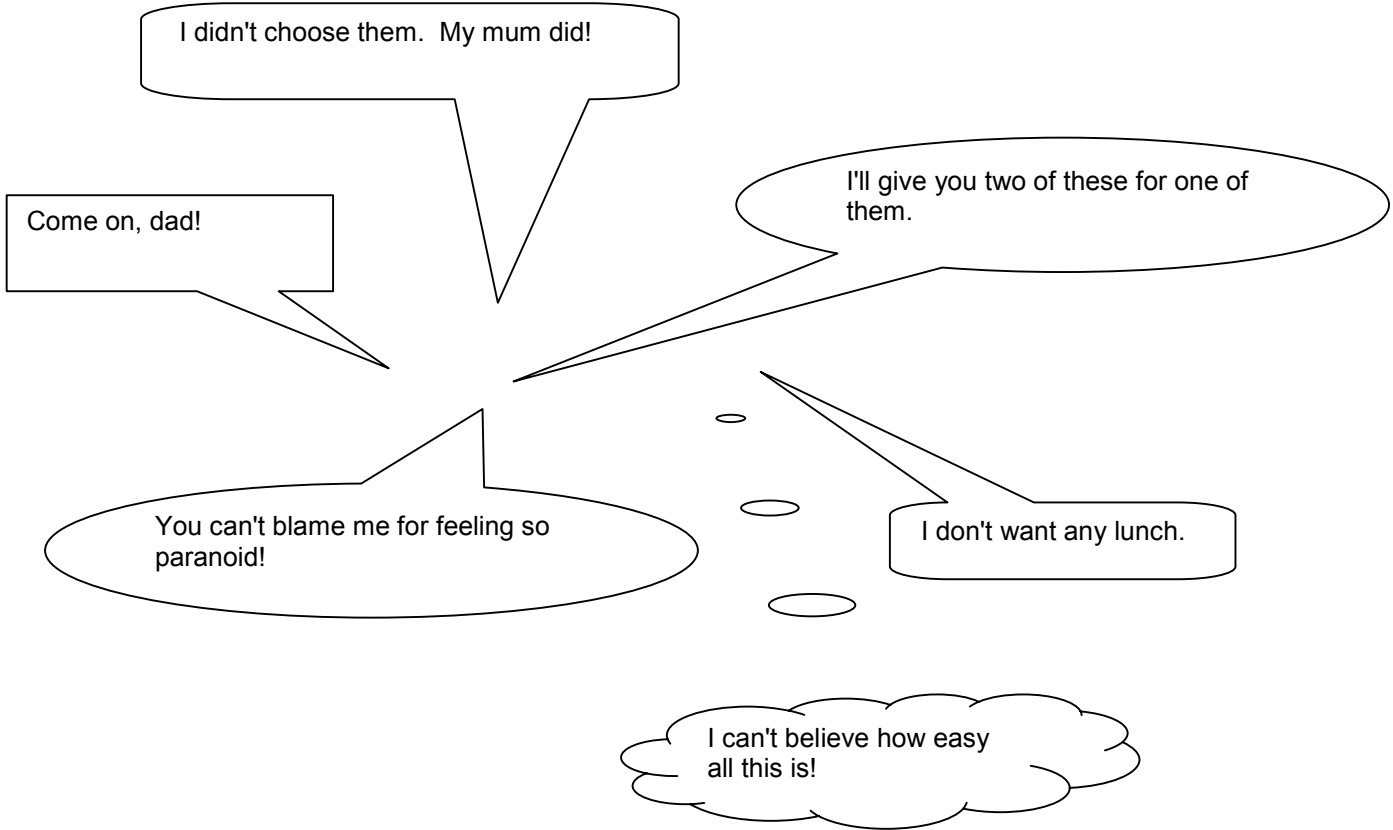
2 In our dormitory town no club had a monopoly on support and, in any case, my new best friend, a Derby County fan like his father and uncle, was similarly isolated. The main thing was that you were a believer. Before school, at break time and at lunchtime, we played football on the tennis courts with a tennis ball, and in between lessons we swapped Soccer Star stickers - Ian Ure for Geoff Hurst (extraordinarily, the stickers were of equal value), Terry Venables for Ian St John, Tony Hatley for Andy Lochhead.

3 I was probably the smallest boy in the first year, but my size didn't matter, although my friendship with the Derby fan, the tallest by several feet, was pretty handy; and though my performance as a student was undistinguished (I was bunged into the 'B' stream at the end of the year and stayed there throughout my entire grammar school career), the lessons were a breeze. Even the fact that I was one of only three boys wearing shorts wasn't as traumatic as it should have been. As long as you knew the name of the Burnley manager, nobody much cared that you were an eleven-year-old dressed as a six-year-old.

4 By the middle of March 1969, I had gone way beyond fandom. On matchdays I awoke with a nervous churning in the stomach, a feeling that would continue to intensify until Arsenal had taken a two-goal lead, when I would begin to relax: I had only relaxed once, when we beat Everton 3-1 just before Christmas. Such was my Saturday sickness that I insisted on being inside the stadium shortly after one o'clock, some two hours before the kick-off; this quirk my father bore with patience and good humour, even though it was frequently cold and from 2.15 onwards my distraction was such that all communication was impossible.

1. The writer tells us of five incidents that make up his 'most traumatic year.'
2. The writer thinks that the events of 1968 and his Arsenal 'fever' were connected.
3. At school, football occupied most of the time out side classes.
4. The writer's height was a problem when he started school.
5. The writer was embarrassed because most of the other boys wore long trousers while he had to wear short trousers.
6. By early 1969, the writer had exceeded normal behaviour for a fan.
7. The writer used to become so ill that he couldn't attend matches.
8. The writer's father used to get annoyed with him for wanting to go early to matches.

2. Below are some imaginary comments by Nick, the author. Which comments fit which extracts?



I didn't choose them. My mum did!

Come on, dad!

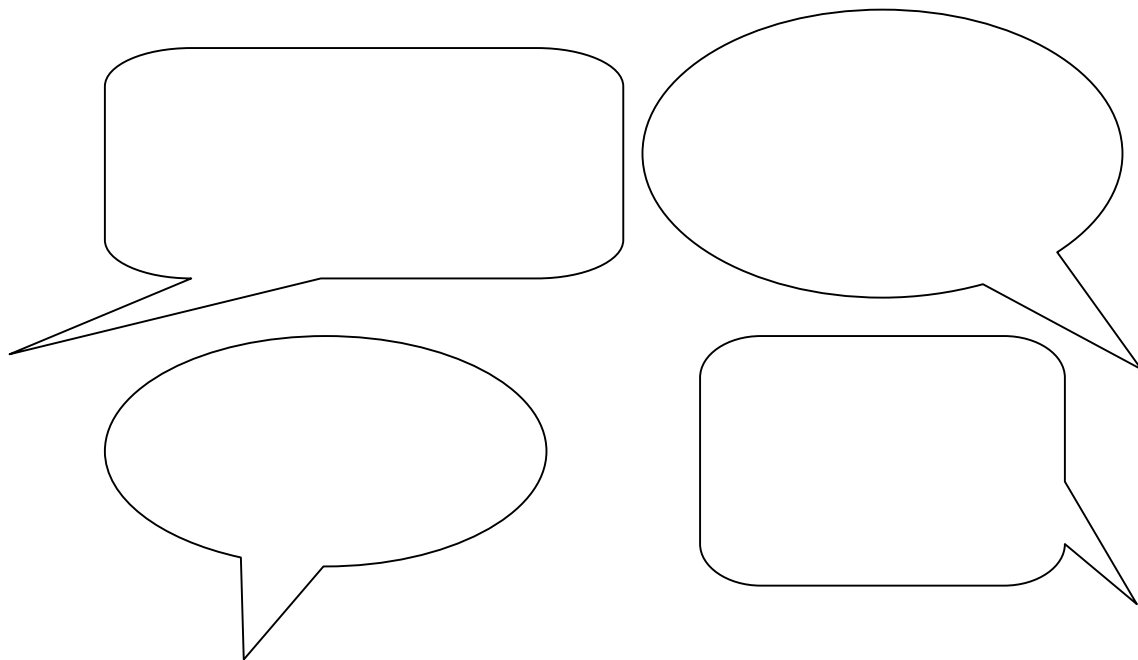
I'll give you two of these for one of them.

You can't blame me for feeling so paranoid!

I don't want any lunch.

I can't believe how easy all this is!

Now make some imaginary replies to some of the comments above. Get your partner to guess who says them.



Fever Pitch

Characterisation

My Father & Me

Read the following extracts from the text and answer the questions that follow.

My parents were separated by 1968. My father had met someone else and moved out, and I lived with my mother and my sister in a small detached house in the Home Counties.

There were, inevitably, a number of difficulties that arose from this new phase of family life, although the most crucial in this context was probably the most banal: the commonplace but nevertheless intractable one-parent Saturday-afternoon-at the zoo problem. Often Dad was only able to visit us midweek; no one really wanted to stay in and watch TV, for obvious reasons, but on the other hand there wasn't really anywhere else a man could take two children under twelve. Usually the three of us drove to a neighbouring town, or up to one of the airport hotels, where we sat in a cold and early-evening deserted restaurant, and where Gill and I ate steak or chicken, one or the other, in more or less complete silence (children are not great dinner conversationalists, as a rule, and in any case we were used to eating with the TV on), while Dad watched. He must have been desperate to find something else to do with us, but the options in a commuter-belt town between 6.30 and 9.00 on a Monday night were limited.

My father and I were about to come up with the perfect English equivalent. Saturday afternoons in north London gave us a context in which we could be together. We could talk when we wanted, the football gave us something to talk about (and anyway the silences weren't oppressive), and the days had a structure, a routine.

Just this one afternoon started the whole thing off - there was no prolonged courtship - and I can see now that if I'd gone to White Hart Lane or Stamford Bridge the same thing would have happened, so overwhelming was the experience the first time. In a desperate and percipient attempt to stop the inevitable, Dad quickly took me to Spurs to see Jimmy Greaves score four against Sunderland in a 5-1 win, but the damage had been done, and the six goals and all the great players left me cold: I'd already fallen for the team that beat Stoke 1-0 from a penalty rebound.

What I really wanted was reassurance from an adult, a parent, my father, that what I was about to witness wasn't going to scar me for life. 'Look,' I should have said to him, 'when they're playing at home, in an ordinary League game, I'm so frightened they'll lose that I can't think or speak or even breathe, sometimes. If you think Swindon have any kind of chance at all, even a chance in a million, it's best if you take me home now, because I don't think I'd be able to cope.'

If I had come out with that, then it would have been unreasonable of my father to make me go inside the stadium. But I simply asked him, in an assumed spirit of idle curiosity, who he thought would win the game, and he said he thought Arsenal would, three or four nothing, the same as everyone else did, and so I got the reassurance I was looking for; but I was scarred for life anyway. Like my mother's exclamation mark, my father's blithe confidence later seemed like a betrayal.

1. Find words or phrases that mean

(First part)

1. left home
2. another thing to consider
3. nearby

(Third part)

4. preliminary part of a relationship
5. uninterested

(Fourth part)

6. permanent damage
7. deal with
8. pretending to be only a little interested

2. Answer the following questions in your own words.

1. What is the relationship between the writer's father and mother?
2. What was the problem with Saturday afternoon?
3. What did the children do with their father?
4. What became the alternative to (3) above?
5. Who was excluded in (4) above?
6. Why did the writer's father take him to a Spurs game?
7. Why did the writer look for reassurance from his father?
8. What two acts of betrayal are mentioned?

