

## The Reactor

Paul Azevedo



### Chop Pampas grass!

I suppose there are worse problems than Pampas grass. Pet bears might have escaped and lunched on Pacifica children. Or rabbits could have become a proliferating nuisance, as they became in Australia. Within its own limits, however, Pampas grass will do. This Argentine import has acclimatized in Pacifica with a vengeance. Rare 30 years ago. Today? Common. In the fall thousands of fronds blow in the wind. In some ways Pampas grass is beautiful. That's why some people planted it in their yards. I did.

Dumb! It grew. Then it grew some more. When the day came that is inevitable with Pampas grass I discovered I had set myself up for a lot of hard work. Each small piece, jammed together with its fellow, must be taken out separately. The root system is tenacious. It took work over many weeks before I finally got the entire

plant out. Don't let those decorative fronds fool you. The plant is pretty from a distance, but a real weed. A weed is a plant out of place, according to my college botany teacher. Pampas grass has learned a valuable lesson. It knows how to grow in disturbed habitat, where we humans have made life difficult for the native plants.

On the side of Montara mountain there are thousands of clumps of Pampas grass. Invariably where they wave you will discover an old road, or a place where a bulldozer has left its mark, or some other scar. Pampas grass turns out to be a scab on the body of the earth. It grows where we have hurt the land. When the Pacifica Sportsman's Club created an ugly, barren, sterile spot on the side of Montara Mountain, it remained that way for more than a decade, but when plant life began a slow return,

what grew turned out to be blackberry vine and Pampas grass. Along old Pedro Mountain Road, abandoned in the late '30s, the roadside plant life is mostly Pampas grass. Wherever we cut deep into the hills for road cuts, Pampas grass proliferates.

How do we get rid of it? Perhaps on your next trip to Argentina, you might check out the bugs and diseases that control it there. The trouble with Pampas grass here? It has no enemies. Cows don't eat it. Deer certainly don't. It grows unchecked. On second thought, however, don't bring in the bugs. That's how Hawaii got some of its worst pests. They accidentally imported the rat. That was bad. So somebody brought in the mongoose. The mongoose does eat a rat from time to time, but it discovered unique native birds were easier to catch.

Chemicals like Roundup might reduce Pampas grass, but it would not only be expensive, putting that much of such a powerful chemical into the environment might backfire big time. Perhaps we could help out San Francisco and get rid of our weeds. Import able-bodied unemployed, the men who carry signs that say "Will work for food." Hand them hoes and shovels. Let them chop out Pampas grass. Feed them.