

PARAPHILIA XII



CONTENTS

Cover by **Heather Harris** © 2011
Frontispiece by **Dolorosa De La Cruz**
'Tribute To Ron Asheton With Iggy And The Stooges, Ann Arbor Mi 4.19.11' text and photos by **Heather Harris** p4
'Interesting Times: Summer of Love' by **Andrew Maben** p20
Artwork by **F.X. Tobin** p28, p40
'Something Bad Inside' by **Nick Tosches** p29
'Why The Bird Cage Sings' by **Matt Leyshon**, images by **Aurora Loveday** p41
'Kagayaku Mahoutsukai' **Tony Visconti** interviewed by **Díre McCain** p50
'Words In The Key Of Sadness' by **Kim Dallesandro** p70
'What Did You Do In The Eco Wars Daddy?' by **Feral Kelly** p78
'Junkie Funeral' by **dixe.flatlin3** p83
'Day Of The Piss Cat' text and image by **Stagger Lloyd** p94
'The Dogs Rock Forever' text and images by **Heather Harris** p98
Artwork by **Susan Te Kahurangi King** p113, p122, p127, p125, p157, p172, p197, p245, p251, p268
'The White Typewriter' by **Charles Christian**, images by **D M Mitchell** p114
'The Sinking of Venice' by **Chris Nosnibor**, images by **Guttersaint** p123
'Gods & Gamblers' **Blackfire Revelation** interviewed by **D M Mitchell** p128
'Death Wish Chameleon XII' by **Cricket Corleone**, photos by **Richard A. Meade** p132
'Ghostwalking' by **Patrick Wright** p140
'The First Time' by **Michelle Facchini**, photo by **Max Reeves** p144
'Biography, Of A Man You Don't Know, Never Will, In Pictures' by **Declan Tan**, photos by **Lisa Wormsley** p153
'Costa Rica Eight Mile' by **Gene Gregorits** p158
'Gary Lucas - A Force of Nature' Interview by **Robert Earl Reed** p173
'Death Has Never looked So Beautiful' by **Adel Souto** p177
'Turbines & Throatbones pt2' by **Craig Woods**, photos by **Max Reeves** p180
'Tearing At The Fetters' **Vadge Moore** interviewed by **Nick Louras** p198

'Hotel From Hell' by **Sue Fox** p205
'The Wellness Of Mister Sic' by **Chris Madoch** p207
'Attack Of The Giant Reptiles' by **Hank Kirton** p229
'Rubric' artwork by **Richard Reynolds** p238
'Thomas Roi', **David Thomas** interviewed by **Kate MacDonald** p239
'Brains' by **Bob Pfeifer** p246
'Enter The Dream' **Pam Wilson** interviewed by **Lana Gentry**, artwork by **Pam Wilson** p252
'Inevitable' by **Claudia Bellocq**, artwork by **Ricardo Acevedo** p258
'Beautiful Twisted' **Sharron Kraus** interviewed by **D M Mitchell** p264
'Venus in Rags' by **David Gionfriddo** p269
Contributors' Links p292
Paraphilia Books - Advert
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This issue is dedicated to the memory of Patricia...





TRIBUTE TO RON ASHETON WITH IGGY AND THE STOOGES, ANN ARBOR MI 4.19.11: Open Up and Blood, Sweat, Tears and 'Fanecdotes'

By Heather Harris

All Photography © 2011 Heather Harris

FAQs:

April 19, 2011, Ann Arbor, MI, Tribute to Ron Asheton with Iggy and The Stooges and friends Deniz Tek, Henry Rollins MC-ing and hilariously monologuing, young band The Space Age Toasters who opened with Stooze covers, and a small symphonic orchestra that backed the Deniz Tek on guitar portion of Stooze songs after the actual band's set. The Michigan Theatre, sold out venue capacity: 1,700 rapid all-ages

mobbing, throbbing fans. The band: co-founders Iggy Pop vocals/subversion + Scott "Rock Action" Asheton drums, James Williamson (*Raw Power* and *Kill City* releases co-writer) on guitar, Mike Watt (the Minutemen, Hyphenated-Men, fireHOSE, Hellride, the Secondmen and at least four other bands) bass, Steve MacKay (*Funhouse*) saxophone. Organizer: Kathy Asheton with all proceeds benefiting the Ron Asheton Foundation, (<http://www.ronashetonfoundation.org>) its

mission to fund veterinary care for needy animals, subsidize public school music education plus promote animal welfare and assist all aspiring young musicians. (You see where the young band and orchestra fit in now.) Cinematic documentation: famed American auteur director Jim Jarmusch.

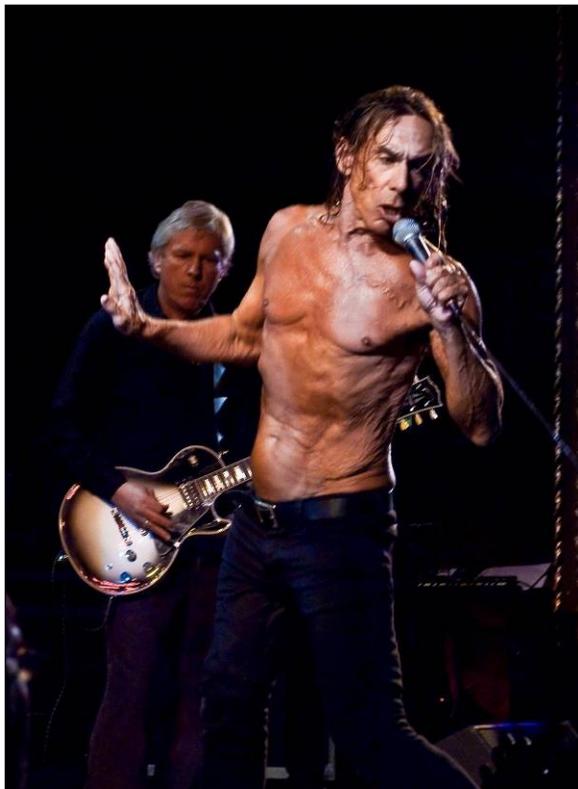
Bizarre factoid: a sturdily built male security guard passed out from the massive body heat of the animated crowd (despite it snowing outside some 24 hours earlier) and had to be revived with ice. Not exaggerated apocrypha at all: he was treated right next to your humble *Paraphilia* photojournalist.



More than any prior performance of the reunited after 3 and 3/4 decades Iggy and The Stooges, this gig celebrated fans as much as musical panegyrics to the beloved, late founding guitarist of The Stooges. You'll meet some of them in a moment. Both jet-setting Stooze enthusiasts and the locals alike scored an up close and personal

concert in this deluxe oldskool, gilded movie palace ("Welcome home Iggy and The Stooges!" spangled on the theatre's marquee.) These Stooges, hometown once-underdogs-now-Rock and Roll Hall of Famers normally entertain rather larger capacity audiences, usually festivals of 10K to 40,000 strong.

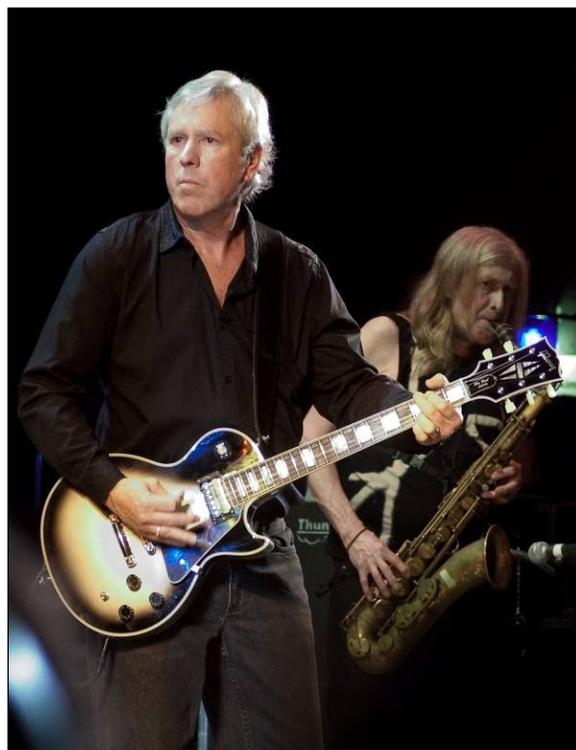




"This is one of the best photos of Iggy today...very cool and sexy~" "Classic Iggy in-the-crowd shots, like those pictures in Surfing Magazine that they take inside the curl" "This is the baddest Iggy has looked in years!" (Facebook music enthusiasts admiring the few photographs I'd leaked of the gig.) And why not? (not the compliments to me, the ones to the singer.) For festival band gigs, Iggy Pop rarely encounters neither Stooges purists en masse nor unbarricaded crowd adulation within which to foist his famous contortionist, still shirtless, utterly feral, fearless and buff at 64, mega-physicality. The ritual crowd stage invasion (despised by security everywhere) usually has to suffice in place of his wildly extreme audience interactions of yore. The payoff at this intimate gig was his prolonged crowd

surfing and his surprising demeanor. He grinned often and warmly espying his hometown people cheering on one of their own. Another payoff: no matter how familiar the wondrous music to its cognoscenti who've heard all the new shows on myriad tech formats, they were still in for surprises galore live.

You can read about thoroughbred racing, you can study bloodlines and pedigrees, you can think you know it all as a racing fan. But you don't, not until you experience racing in person and actually hear the thundering hooves louder than you ever thought possible and witness the horses even more magnificent in their extreme and sweaty power than you ever imagined. Same with Top Fuel Drag Racing. Or Iggy and The Stooges.





I'm an advocate of all senses firing on all cylinders, and the Ann Arbor show had it all amongst bizarre happenstances you don't get on the aural stuff-- Iggy crawling into the audience to stare at people, lungs heaving and dripping gallons of sweat on all around him (fun olfactory too I'll bet; a report on touch upcoming,) prolonged crowd surfing by him, constant smiles to the crowd of despite the requisite fearsome expressions donned for such hardcore, kickass material, far more band interaction than one might suspect and of course, that selfsame band making all the complicated, breakneck speed music seem... easy. I've also heard new converts espouse this as the best live reunion band around, bar none.

Gasped another FB proclaimer to me, "I actually was SHOCKED at the intensity of this band."

Testimonial from a fan at the Michigan Theatre (abetted by social network addenda through her whimsical correspondence):

"Mademoiselle Professoressa" teaches one of the more lyrical Liberal Arts at a university level and had to be there. She indeed has been there for most domestic Iggy and The Stooges shows since her revelatory initiation in 2010. She'd done the heavy lifting of Serious Illness but didn't know the outcome after post-op recovery. Number One on her bucket list was viewing Iggy and The Stooges live, which she

immediately accomplished 5/2/10 at the Hammersmith Apollo in London for the band's first set of all *Raw Power* material since 1974, by three of its four original instigators (abetted by Watt and MacKay.) Unexpected bonus #1: with dozens of others she leapt onstage in the ritual stage invasion to dance to "Shake Appeal," and managed to paw Iggy (empirical evidence up on YouTube) with the pronouncement that he may look Florida-tanned wrinkly, but his skin is soft. Bonus #2: life imitated art and mimicked the lyrics as it were: raw power had a healing hand.

When she got home, tests proved she was good to go for a very long time. Mlle. Prof explained, "When my surgery and prognosis turned out so well, I kind of wondered how I was going to fill up the next thirty years of life. Now I know. I'll be a Stooges' fan."

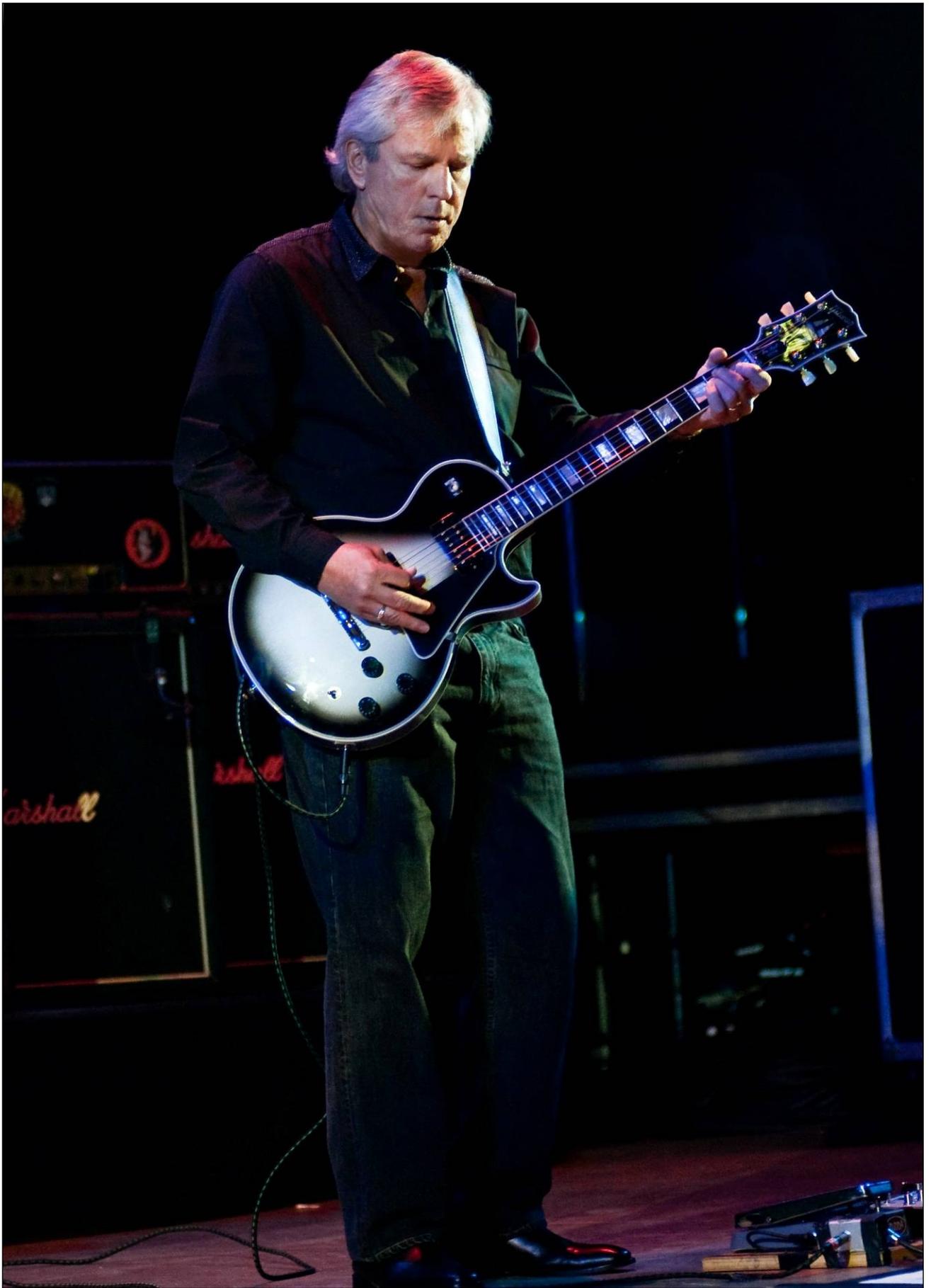
"It's a bit strange turning into a fan as an adult. I feel as if I'm growing up in reverse, having spent my teenaged years studying Latin and doing homework, etc. I had no idea it was coming, but I know that Iggy changed my life."

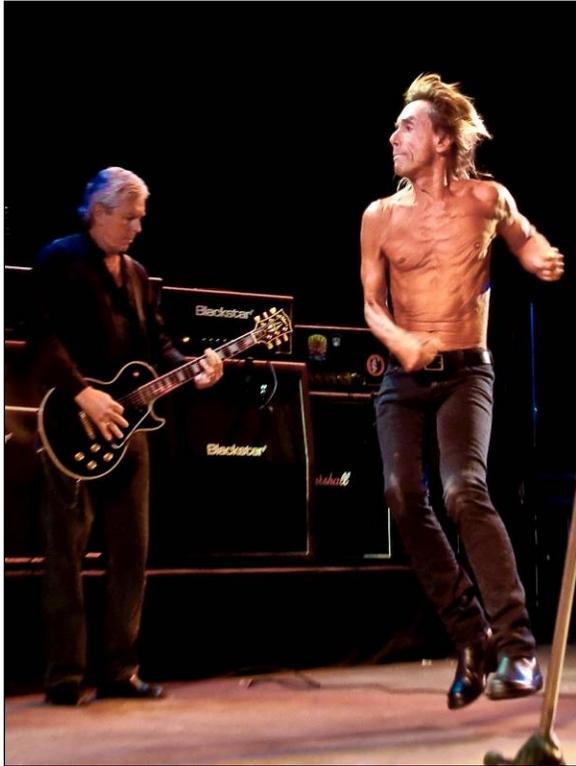
She wrote "I'm interested in some high-level discussions of what these kinds of performance 'do' for people." My own take was that it represented high-octane happiness (as opposed to daily low-grade happinesses) insofar as this was by its very nature fleeting, like having sex. She countered, "So one gives oneself over to these moments, knowing they cannot last.

The madness can't last forever. Your basic Dionysian cult of the Mysteries!" As for a seemingly reserved university professor embracing the fearsome rep of the world's most pro-active, wild band, she notes, "I sometimes tell my students that if no one is pissed off at you, you're not doing your job."

Very first month online, I wanted to research what was the adult version of fandom, to better hone the appeal of my own photo-taking and writing, settling on Alan Rickman (pre-Harry Potter) sites to view what grownups wrote about grownup stars without the kiddie spamming. The actor seemed like an intelligent guy who put a lot into his roles and worked continually, fomenting fan discussions anew. I learned about slash and fanfiction from this foray. Seguing back to the Stooges, Mlle. Prof embodies the best of this adult version, letting something in the arts be a force for good in her own life.

Ardent advocate of Flarf (distant cousin to the aforementioned outsider literary pursuits within fandom,) Mlle. Prof alone has been elected Stooze For A Day online by Williamson who commanded, "Go forth and have no fun." She countered privately, "I'm blown away by James' level of attention to someone he hadn't met, who it doesn't profit him in any way to cultivate, etc. I'm even more impressed than I was before. He has an inspired and focused work ethic for things he really cares about."





It should be noted (as in DÍre McCain's extensive 30 pp. interview with him in Paraphilia Issue # 5) that for the next three and a half decades after Iggy and The Stooges swan song implosion onstage in Michigan circa 1974, Williamson had walked away from the idiots in the music business who couldn't fathom his having changed all hard rock genres forever. (All are based upon his, at the time, sui generis style of 1,000 mph guitar-playing while retaining both precision and emotion. Fast songs used to be propelled by its drummers alone.)

After a university degree he got in on the ground floor of (according to those in the know) the fun 'Wild West' days of total creativity in the beginning of the computer revolution, which must have reminded him

of his former passions in music and paralleled same. Raising his own happy family in Silicon Valley, rising to Vice-President of Technology Standards in the Sony Corporation, taking early retirement to rejoin his old band with his first Stooge gig in 38 years to a throng of 40,000 attractive young Brazilians in Sao Paulo, his Stooges finally garnering induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2010 after seven previous rejections, and rediscovering the joy of playing guitar as one of its best practitioners ever, all this has given Williamson's life story a happy-ending piquancy of sorts, rare in the annals of rock. It's rarer still when one considers this all sprang from one of rock's most troubled bands ever.



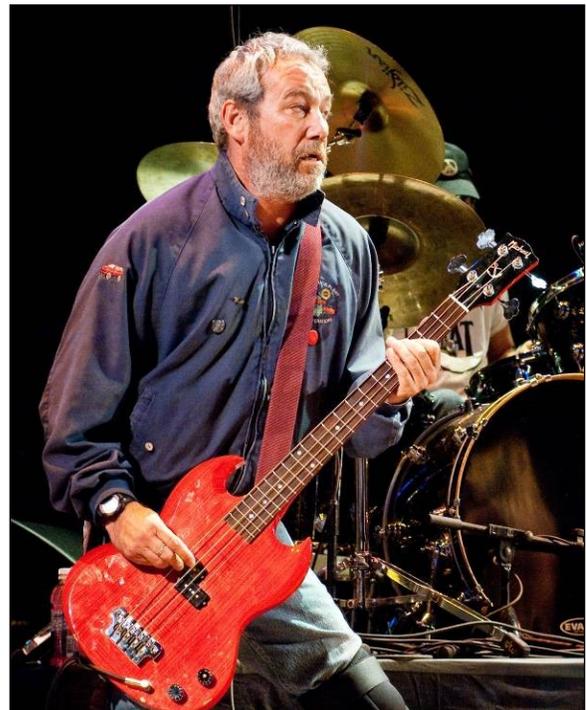


Besides its subversive-but-fun, against the grain of everything else going on music that's now labeled "proto-punk," The Stooges, renamed Iggy and The Stooges after James' arrival, were known for utter corporate and managerial indifference, even well-chronicled antipathy to them from same, "drugs like you wouldn't believe" according to one member, a roller coaster ride of misunderstood/dashed hopes versus fanatic critical acclaim, the pioneers getting all the arrows-syndrome, and what photographer/film director Larry Clark called "the usual betrayals in the music industry."

More FAQs:

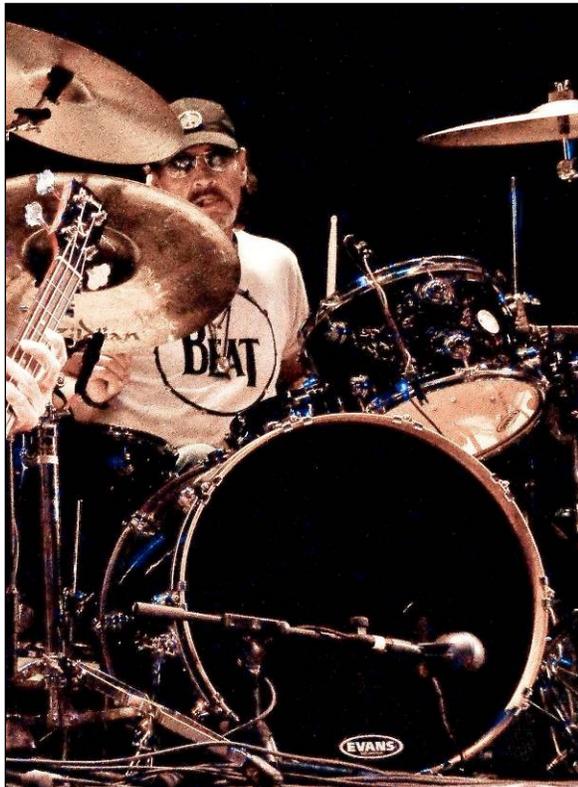
Famed director Jim Jarmusch was on hand with a skeleton production crew to film the proceedings, all part of a planned magnum opus documentary of the entire span of Iggy Pop's 43-year music career inclusive of The Stooges and Iggy and The Stooges, originals and reunions alike. Said crew

survived the trench-warfare of an entire show resembling one big moshpit: after the stage invasion of "Shake Appeal" dislodged patrons from their seats, half the theatre stayed pressed against the stage. ("I told you they were all going to mob the stage and stay there," I warned another young security employee, incredulous after seeing a sea of grey-haired fans among the all-ages types do just this.) The set contained great selections from all three Stooges/Iggy and The Stooges' now legendary releases, and their back-in-the-day soundman Nite Bob was on hand to work for them.



Everyone there was thrilled to see cinematic commemoration of this particular gig. Whether for its homeboy frisson or the poignancy of the occasion of band colleagues dealing publicly with Ron Asheton's untimely demise, according to multiple gig-viewers the Ann Arbor show

was their very best yet. The band blazed hard and true with guitarist James Williamson particularly white hot, biting his lips while peeling off killer riff after killer riff, occasionally closing his eyes while “in the zone.”



Scott “Rock Action” Asheton’s drumming defies categorization, embodying The Right Stuff with similar rocket thrust, deceptively simple, always powerful and surprising. I still can’t figure out WTF it is he does on his drum intro to “Raw Power.” Saxophonist MacKay is also the go-to multi-instrumentalist providing bonus percussion and keyboards inclusive of that one-note essential on “I Wanna Be Your Dog.” His saxophone parts are indeed perfect. Mike Watt remains one of the few bassists on the planet who can keep up joyfully and

passionately with the quasi-speed-metal of “Shake Appeal” or “I Got A Right” (sung by Rollins to kick-start the headliners’ part of the show and provide Iggy with a separate entrance to ecstatic audience acclaim.)

And yet... the highlight of the show sprang from an odd new instrument in the Stoogean arsenal with the heretofore unheard acoustic ballad “Ron’s Tune” which began:

“This is a requiem

For a heavyweight

Though it is a little late...”

(Pop-Williamson)

The lyrics were referencing the two year delay of this tribute show, although Scott “Rock Action” Asheton’s teen daughter Leanna had staged her own “Jam for Ron Asheton” at Hollywood’s Roxy Club in January 2010 upon the one year anniversary of her uncle’s passing. The duet “Ron’s Tune” presented a great visual as well as heartfelt aural catharsis, Iggy and James sitting side by side, friends together once again honoring a third, a fallen soldier of rock and roll. Athletically giving his all and hyperactive throughout the entire night, Iggy was by now wholly sweat-drenched and self-soaked from assorted bottled waters (necessary to prevent a fate similar to that of the security guard’s fainting.) James’ acoustic work mirrored that of his hard rock style, replete with myriad memorable riffs per song. He strummed his

Tony Francis Style 4 Weissenborn (beautiful rope-marquetry wood, classic/classy acoustic Hawaiian lap steel) plectrum-less and with a sliding bar (called a steel hence the moniker) with such dexterity that it sounded like four hands playing in

complete harmony. He agreed that "...it all sounded great. Singer got a little choked up but what the hell."

"...You were my friend in the end..." concluded the ballad.



Another testimonial from a fan at the Michigan Theatre:

"E.R. Joe" works the difficult and ultra-demanding metier of Physicians' Assistant in an emergency trauma center in downtown Detroit, diagnosing/treating and working with the walking wounded

("gun and knife club" on tv,) brain bleeds, dialysis patients, asthma/COPD patients, cancer patients, blood clots, OB/GYN patients, pediatrics, and a seemingly endless list of specialty cases ("We get it all.") He's always been a fan of his area's music specialties, and had to be there at his local Ron Asheton Tribute by Iggy and The

Stooges. Says E.R. Joe, "My life primarily revolves around work, family, reading espionage books, staying under the radar and music. I am a huge Stooges/Iggy fan, also of Jimi Hendrix, Thin Lizzy, Alice Cooper, Social Distortion, the New York Dolls, Mike Watt and a multitude of others. Everyone asks me if I'm related to one of the members of Sonic's Rendezvous Band (because we share a last name, but no,) so he's my "fake brother."

"I cannot count the number of times I've seen Iggy as a solo artist since 1977, and I've seen the Stooges' reunions seven times in two different countries. This was one of the top five shows I've had the pleasure to witness in my life. James Williamson was ON FIRE. Several of us began hanging out talking about the concert and our experiences. After the official post-gig party for press, band pals and fans at Netco (formerly the Second Chance Ballroom) we returned to the hotel and went to the restaurant/bar continuing to make new acquaintances. I had spoken earlier with several members of the group so my goal was to talk with Steve MacKay, and there he was over in the corner. Cool! We caught up a bit until my reptilian brain began sensing something was wrong."

"When I looked up I immediately knew, by the 15-20 people around me that A) I was not invited and B) I should not be there. It was Iggy and his wife Nina, James Williamson, Henry Rollins, Jim Jarmusch, Deniz Tek, Hiawatha Bailey etc. sitting

together or scattered about the room (ibid. in other words, the real A List of Ron's actual friends.) I asked Steve if I'd screwed up and he said no. I figured, well I'm here so work the tables. I introduced myself while complimenting them all and apologizing at the same time. Everyone that night was very pleasant and cordial to me."

Then E.R. Joe, the adult version of a fan, talked shop with Deniz Tek (an E.R. surgeon when not being a punk rock legend himself or relishing his days as a genuine Navy Top Gun jet pilot) who was well acquainted with E. R. Joe's hospital. They share the exact same types of patients, and music/medical smalltalk, such as E.R. Joe's Chair of Emergency Medicine and E.R. Joe's own department staffing all the rock shows at Detroit's Ford Field, inclusive of the Rolling Stones (only noting discretely that the doctors and assistants are privy to "the weirdness" backstage.) Altogether E.R. Joe seems a trifle sheepish about his adventure inadvertently party-crashing Iggy and The Stooges, although his companions waxed triumphant ("Babette" was jubilant to meet Iggy, and a local photographer thrilled to do same with pictorial commemoration resultant. Earlier, E.R. Joe and Babette had held Iggy aloft when he crowd-surfed. More touch-sensory!) However, E.R. Joe rightly summarizes his fanecdoté (neologism courtesy of Mlle. Professoressa,) "It was like the Twilight Zone for me, the huge-est high I have felt in a long time. Yet all of that was way beyond my initial intentions and wildest dreams."

Deniz Tek's portion of the show found him sporting one of Ron Asheton's guitars to play the latter's material from 1969 debut *The Stooges* and 1970's *Funhouse*. "Dirt" remained the standout, Tek snaking its slower tempo quite sinuously. Channeling Ron was no mean feat, insofar as the still movie-star handsome Dr. Tek has forged his own strong persona via his Australian band Radio Birdman (the name itself a mishearing of a Stooges' lyric in "1970") during the original '70s punk era, solo work and multiple bands since (including the

New Race with Ron Asheton and the MC5's Machine Gun Thompson, both fresh from their prior the New Order collaboration) within his multiple careers. Yet he served Ron's memory well, as both of these Ann Arbor natives had been close friends. Deniz' written account of onetime couple (and a very odd one at that, despite shared tenure in Destroy All Monsters and Dark Carnival) Ron and Niagara's trip to visit him during his flight training in Hawaii remains a LOL hoot. Just imagine the effect of these two on a military base.





Last testimonial from the Michigan Theatre:

“Nicki Picasso” had been sufficiently fortunate to discover the music of the Stooges as it happened in 1970 and how it played out beyond, thanks to an early fling with one of the band’s foremost defenders in national print media. From her college art studies she immediately realized that lack of complete embrace by the public or establishment meant nothing at all, as most all innovators in the fine arts meet resistance from the status quo. She also recognized that the then novel and quite extreme in-your-face (and in your lap, on your club table, under your skirt etc.) provocation practiced by the singer as the performance art that it really was. She had photographed all the sound and fury of all

that Iggy and The Stooges encompassed live onstage in 1973, amongst her most personally treasured and popular in subsequent sales within her four decades of rock and roll documentation. In her subsequent pro capacity as a studio and live show photographer, she worked with Iggy Pop in 1990, Ron Asheton in 1992 and James Williamson in 2009. She found all three men to be charming individuals in their own separate fashions, rare indeed for such intensely creative types.

Far in her distant past, she’d turned down blitzed-to-the-gills advances from one of them, who was projectile-vomiting profusely as well as repeatedly falling over in the gutter outside the Whisky A Gogo. (Luckily the proverbial moment of clarity to seek help soon occurred for him.) In darkened rooms she had listened over and over to *Kill City* when it finally was unleashed years after the band’s breakup. With its languid but forceful musicality reminiscent of The Bigs in the music world, (“Exile on Stooge Street” some termed it,) *Kill City* seemed to mirror the unlikely combo of arrogance and despair in her own quest to get the art out and the love in. Luckily as well, the latter ensued via her still ongoing relationship with her better half, a onetime proto-punk lead singer in the early 1970s himself. Once there had been a few very late night phone calls from Ron Asheton (a smart and funny guy but inveterate night owl) that annoyed her better half, who now had to arise at 5 a.m. for work. She genuinely regretted never

being able to get the two of them together to talk guns, assorted weaponry and military history knowledgeable from similarly well-informed, warped, witty rock and rollers' P.O.V.s.

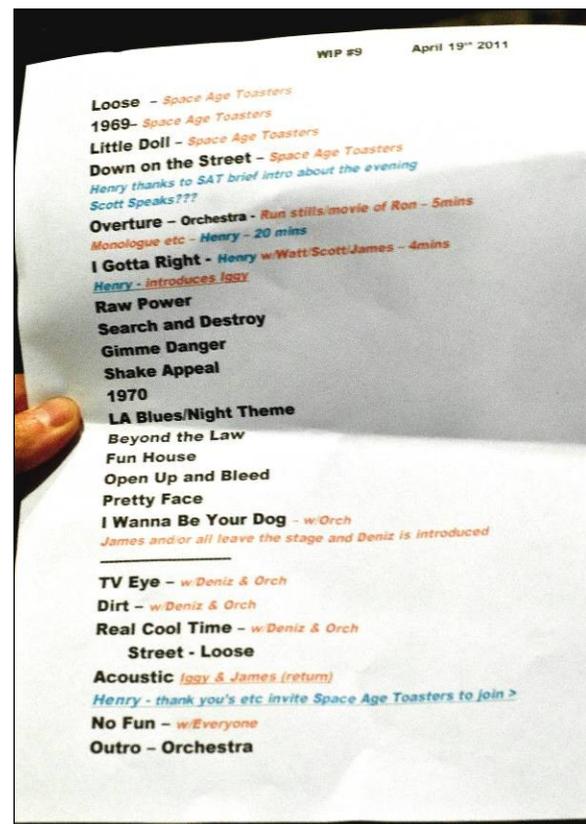
At the premiere for the dvd documentary accompanying the 2010 re-released box set of *Raw Power*, she had met James Williamson's new and longtime friends who had proved delightful and as personable as Williamson himself.

She'd noted with interest the succession of reunions of The Stooges in the 2000s mainly playing the Euro-festival circuit, Williamson's return to the fold after Ron's untimely passing, the band finally getting its due at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and was looking forward to photographing them perhaps in their 2009/10 touring. Then the unimaginable happened with her better half falling grievously ill, requiring veritable Spanish Inquisition treatments for an unknown outcome. The torture ensued for most of an entire year. Upon his recovery from the treatments but with ultimate fate still unknown, he seemed in sufficient fettle for her to travel off alone to Ann Arbor to shoot this once-in-a-lifetime, intimate show of Iggy and The Stooges. 38 years later from the last time she'd photographed them, there they were rampaging onstage even better than before (since no one is wasted this time around.) A previous favorite, "Open Up And Bleed" was performed to perfection, now sung as pure defiant triumph, much as Paul

Robeson turned the resigned relentlessness of life of "Ol' Man River" into same. Four days after her return from the show, her better half's final imaging test scans showed no evidence of tumors from the previous Stage 4. It was the best week of her life.

Oh heck, drop the facade, c'est moi, it's me.

Last FAQs:



Here's Deniz Tek's fingers holding the setlist and who's who. The fine print reads:

Space Age Toasters perform/Orchestra overture/I Got A Right (Henry Rollins with Scott Asheton, James Williamson, Mike Watt, Steve MacKay)/(Iggy joins for full Iggy and The Stooges set: Raw Power/Search And Destroy/Gimme

Danger/Shake Appeal/1970/Night
Theme/Beyond The Law/Fun
House/Open Up And Bleed/Your Pretty
Face Is Going To Hell/I Wanna Be Your
Dog (with orchestra)/(with Deniz Tek and
orchestra) TV Eye/Loose/Dirt/Real Cool
Time/Ron's Tune (Iggy Pop, James
Williamson alone)/No Fun (everyone back
onstage performing all together like
oldskool Rock televised extravaganzas.

Between "Ron's Tune" and "No Fun," a
representative from the Mayor's office who
had gone to school locally with James
Osterberg (our Ig) noting that their
respective paths rather diverged afterwards
gave Iggy and The Stooges keys to the city

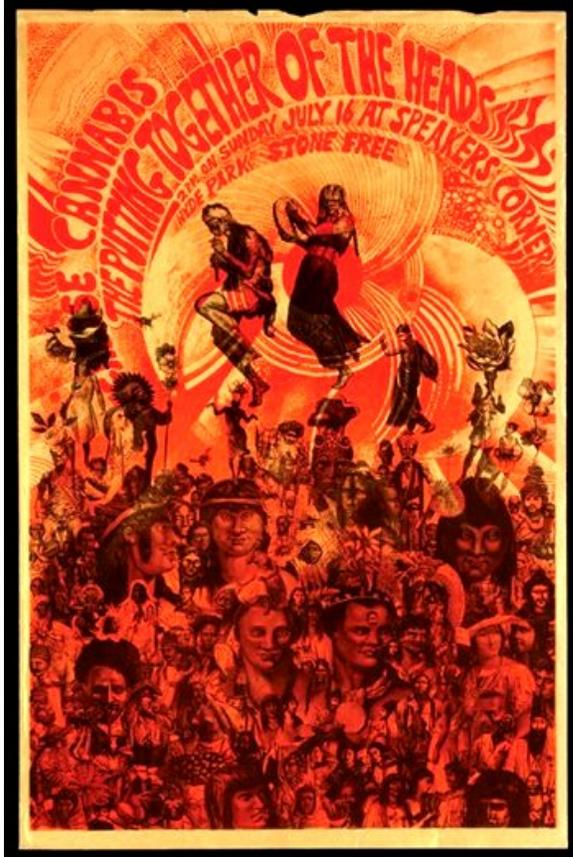
of Ann Arbor, quipping, "Since this is
Michigan, these also have bottle-openers on
the other end."

Summarily, director Jim Jarmusch's artist's
instincts remain dead-on correct -- Iggy
Pop, The Stooges, Iggy and The Stooges,
their autodidact's singularity and
unflagging self-belief in their own abilities
from a young age, the once fabled "bad luck
of the Stooges" curse, their utter crashes-
and-burns, the turnarounds now
collectively and affectionately termed "Jesus
Loves The Stooges," their genuine eventual
triumphs, and of course... their fans always
along for the ride with them. It's a hell of a
story.



INTERESTING TIMES: SUMMER OF LOVE

By Andrew Maben



So, wait a minute... What, as they sometimes say, was I thinking? What indeed? I suppose that in a certain sense you could say I wasn't thinking at all, simply living to my utmost, in the hackneyed phrase, "seizing the day", reacting to events, euphoric with the freedom I imagined I had found, finding a path, pursuing various lines of enquiry with the certainty, or perhaps arrogance, of youth. But certainly there were underlying motives of all kinds. Despite my disillusionment with religion, I still felt a

deep inchoate spiritual thirst, and I can see now that it was this thirst that colored every aspect of my naive young life. The germ of this spiritual quest was the longing for love, and the blind certainty that love is attainable. Somehow I equated the personal nurturing of human love, and somehow here I managed to also include erotic love, with the grand Christian precept that God is Love. It's no exaggeration to say that my whole life has been shaped by this search. I wanted to live in a world whose guiding principles are love and kindness.

The leftward slide of my political ideals, and embrace of the philosophy of anarchism, was based on this. It seemed clear to me then, and that clarity still shines from deep in my heart through the grime, the shame, the fears and disappointments of the intervening years. Yes, it's crystal clear to me that our only hope is a social organization free of coercion, an economics of cooperation based on mutual respect. Easy enough, you'll say, to announce the lofty goal of a world free of hatred, violence, war, oppression, not so easy to realize, or even to embody those ideals in my own life. Nevertheless I was determined to make the attempt, and even in the darkest of times, in the face of disillusion and despair, that hope has refused to die.

If Buddha, Christ, Bakunin, Trotsky, Gandhi, King, Huxley, Orwell had colored

the foundation of my nascent philosophy there were exciting new possibilities being expressed by new Pied Pipers. Ken Kesey, Tim Leary, Tom Wolf, Alan Watts, Alan Ginsberg, Beatles, Stones, Maharishi, J.G. Ballard, R.D. Laing ...

And I felt that I was not alone in my quest. These ideas were everywhere, around the world young people were stirring, and this was to be the "Summer of Love". San Francisco was our Mecca, and while thousands made the geographical pilgrimage, millions more journeyed together to a San Francisco of the spirit...

Since that first smoke with Bob, back in November, I had become a fairly frequent hash smoker. I found it heightened my appreciation of music, and felt it also fueled my creativity. There were certainly plenty of opportunities to hear music and see bands in those days. I have already mentioned the Bluesbreakers, and then there was the Move at Lewes Town Hall, the Spencer Davis Group headlining Brighton Art School's Christmas Dance, but maybe more important were the frequent Folk Nights in various pubs, and of course, given the serious lack of music on the radio, it was jukeboxes that often gave us our first taste of new music. I still remember standing dumbfounded at an entirely different kind of sound on the basement jukebox at Finch's. It was Jimi Hendrix with *Hey Joe*...

The national youthful obsession with music, and my own desire to find an art-form that could embody and propagate my evolving ideas, had led me to Paul Klee's theories of equivalence between painting and music.

Which in turn sparked an interest in synesthesia, and as that was an often touted effect of LSD my interest was further sharpened - the recent move to make it illegal in the UK seemed both arbitrary and unwarranted. As an ad in the Times in July would put it: 'The law against marijuana is immoral in principle and unworkable in practice.' Indeed. And to my mind the same could be said for acid...

Then one Sunday afternoon in early June the phone rang. It was Bob.

"It's here", he told me, there was no need to tell me what "it" was. "Come to Tom and Penny's. It's a quid."

"See you in an hour or two."

I grabbed a jacket, headed out to the Brighton road and stuck out my thumb.

Tom and Penny were a couple whose flat had become a gathering place for Brighton's burgeoning hippy community. Today the place seemed even more crowded than usual, I noticed familiar faces like Adam of the struwelpeter afro and grannie glasses, his friend Jeremy, Nicky the Anarchist, as well as more I had never seen before. In a corner of the living room someone was contortedly filming a lava lamp with a little 16mm camera. The arrival of someone from London with what was purportedly a bottle straight from Sandoz had evidently been widely broadcast.

Several people were already tripping. Along with two or three other new arrivals, I paid my pound and lined up in the hallway for my dose. He was carefully dispensing a

single drop directly from a dropper onto our tongues. Or should I say "their" tongues? When he came to me he seemed to have a little spasm. "Oops!" he declaimed as, rather than a drop, almost the entire contents of the dropper squirted onto my tongue...

I'm sure you've heard accounts of trips before, so I won't go on at length about what is after all an intensely subjective experience whose most important aspects are, in any case, inexpressible. Besides I only recall shards of refracted experience. And don't ask if I "saw God"...

It did not take long for an extraordinary upwelling of joy to overtake me. I laughed aloud.

"There he goes," someone said.

Sergeant Pepper on the record player...

Watching jewel-skinned snakes entwined in the trellis-patterned wall paper... Lying face down on the carpet dissolving revealing dancing particles of atomic structure... Or something...

"We're going to the kitchen," someone crouched to speak in my ear. "You coming?"

"No. I think I'll just stay here and fuck the Earth."

Sitting in an armchair, regarding my right arm on the arm rest, my hand open loosely, palm up... And I was walking a quiet, sun-dappled country lane, bursting hedges, an overhanging tree... As I passed under the

tree, a soothing rain of sunflakes bathed my heart. Ecstasy.

"This must be Heaven," I thought.

And suddenly: "Do I deserve to be in Heaven?"

Instantly, the soothing warmth turned to an agonizing acid heat. A burning that seemed to sear my very soul. Hell. Some distant, disengaged, dispassionate part of my mind observed that the apparently experienced phenomena had not changed. The swirling colors, the falling drops continued as before. The sensations were in no way different. Somehow my interpretation of sensation had made some kind of reversal. Heaven had become Hell. I realized in this detached portion of my thought, that Heaven and Hell are one and the same transcendent space, that how this is interpreted and experienced is entirely subjective, and in some sense self-willed...

There was a clock in the room, but time was no longer sequential. Seconds might pass, experienced as an eternity, hours in the blink of an eye.

The curtains of an east-facing window began to brighten with the dim grey light of dawn...

I gathered my coat to leave.

"You're going?"

"Yes. I was supposed to be home last night..."

"Sure you're OK?"

"I'm fine." And I stepped out into the street.

The world was once again recognizable. But different. On the pavement, on walls, words, phrases revealed themselves, rearranged themselves, merged, disappeared, returned amid intricate, complex arabesque patterns...

As I reached the Eastbourne road, I stuck out my thumb at a passing milk-float. To my astonishment the milkman stopped and, smiling, invited me to hop on. The sun rose into a perfect blue summer morning sky...

I got home a little before seven, crept inside and up the stairs to my room. As I opened my door, Mum came out of her room.

"Did you just come home?" she whispered.

I nodded.

She shooed me into my room and followed me in. "Lie down for a bit. I'll bring some tea in a little while."

Breakfast. Mum nervous. Dad scowling.

"You were out all night." Was that a question or an accusation?

"Yes, Dad."

"Smoking hashish." Again: question or accusation?

"Don't deny it," - I didn't think I had, or was going to - "you stink of the stuff."

"Yes. But I'm giving it up." A decision, fully-formed, that I suppose I'd arrived at during the night.

"I took LSD. It's incredible. You should try it!"

Well, perhaps that wasn't the brightest thing to say to him at the breakfast table after being gone all night.

Face scarlet and breathing hard he pushed his chair back and stood.

"I'll deal with you later," as he strode from the room.

Mum: "Oh, darling..."

As it happened, that day there was another school trip to the Tate. Picasso this time. I was still, and remained all day, let's say "dazed". Perhaps I gained a deeper appreciation of Picasso's work, I don't really remember. I think Sally was there...

"If you can remember the 60s you weren't there." Perhaps. Certainly the rest of that summer is even more hazy, fragmented, chaotic than perhaps any other time of my life. But on the other hand perhaps it really was also "the time of my life". So anyhow...

At least for a while I kept to my resolve to lay off hash and alcohol. But I wanted to do acid again. And again. So I eagerly took up Bob's suggestion to go up to London for a night at UFO.

Friday evening after school the train to Victoria. Tube to Chalk Farm filling with other outlandishly clad freaks and heads, disgorging in a smiling horde, drawing puzzled disapproving looks from the staid populace of Camden Town. The Roundhouse, an abandoned railway locomotive shed that to an impressionable

eye bore a more than passing similarity to some alien spacecraft. Lining up at the entrance. Paying £1 at the desk to a smiling pale faced black-afroed freak. And inside. Dazzling, deafening. Music, light, a swirling colorful crowd... It took only moments to be offered some acid. Wandering dazedly. Liquid lightshows and films projected on screens hanging from a tall balcony, music blasting, a cafe serving vegetarian treats, a room with rows of chairs set up for film screenings. As the acid came on, I was caught up watching *Mothra*, fascinated by the Luminous Fairies, and utterly unable to even begin to follow the film's plot - if it even had one. I was, I think, peripherally aware of some commotion from the main room, but I missed Arthur Brown's spectacular entrance, would have missed his whole set most likely if Bob had not come in to find me and drag me away. Arthur Brown! Pyrotechnics and some kind of diseased English swamp-rock soul, rasping voice, unrelenting beat. I stood stunned, then found myself dancing spasmodically to the irresistible rhythm, transported, ecstatic, just another idiot dancer... Tripping at UFO was overpoweringly physical, sensual, thrilling, far from the cerebral, contemplative visions of Huxley or Leary. Arthur Brown's set was followed by a mesmerizing performance from the Soft Machine, a highlight being a lengthy percussion solo from Robert Wyatt on two Coke bottles. After the show the party continued on the tube, the hippy herd moving without plan or aim from train to platform to escalators to stairs to platform to train, following a circuitous and apparently random route across London, shedding members along the way.

Somehow Bob and I found ourselves at last back at Victoria and boarding a Brighton train.

I left Bob at home and made my way to the sea front to hitch-hike back to Eastbourne, but once on my way I decided to stop in Seaford to visit Sally. And so began what became an almost weekly ritual. We would sit together in her room and simply talk. I was always tired from an all-nighter, and coming down from acid, while she'd be fresh and lovely. I remember almost nothing at all of the content of our conversations, beyond the comfort of her presence, her attentive listening, her open curiosity, the peace and sanctuary I enjoyed in that small room. But one afternoon she happened to ask about my schooldays.

"I had a cousin at Sherborne," she told me.

Her cousin turned out to be Jeremy, my erstwhile rival in French. This tenuous thread was the first in what was to become a web of associations that led me to believe that Fate was taking an active hand in the events of my life - a belief that, in spite of all the trouble it's led to, I still find myself rising to... And so, slowly, almost imperceptibly, but deeply and irrevocably I fell in love. A love I concealed as best I could for months. A love that, as you'll see later, was to have the most profound effect on the course of my life over the next few years...

Relations with Mum and Dad were, as you might imagine, becoming more than a little strained, and my philosophical certainties were built on a foundation that was far less

stable than I'd have liked, while my psyche was in a state that I can only characterize as disarrayed, what with the damage done during my school days and the contrast of the boundless freedom that I imagined I now enjoyed. So partly in some attempt to mollify them, and partly as an extension of my own explorations, I put forward the suggestion that I might perhaps benefit from seeing a psychiatrist.

Well, the first step in that direction was a visit to our GP in order to get a referral. He wasn't having it.

"Get a haircut and settle down. Get a job for the summer," was his advice. Hardly helpful. Then, on condition that I follow the dictate to find employment, Dad contacted an old colleague from his RAF days who was now practicing on Wimpole Street. So began a series of fortnightly visits. I'm sure we covered a lot more ground than I now recall, but as I think back only three items of discussion come to mind.

The first is more farcical than profound: I told him of a rather bizarre fancy I had of a nose growing from my shin. From this he conjured what seems to me an equally fanciful Freudian explanation.

"When you were an infant did your father bounce you on his leg?"

"No. But my grandfather did."

"And when he did, did he recite *Ride a Cock Horse*?" Well, you can see where that was going...

Naturally the topic of my adventures with LSD came up, and he revealed that he was

still licensed to do research on the drug's effects. So, naturally, I asked if he'd sign me up as a guinea pig.

"I don't think so. You'll certainly have more fun going on as you are, and discussing your experiences with me."

And finally: "In an insane world, a sane man is mad. You are one of the sanest and most intelligent nineteen-year-olds I know." Hey ho, that one's stayed with me, its effect veering unpredictably, inspiring confidence or terror...

To fulfill the job requirement, I got hired at a large bakery factory in Brighton, working the night shift. It didn't last long. At first the sweet smell of fresh-baked bread was enticing, but by the end of my brief sojourn it was cloying to the point of disgust, and it would be months after I left before I could bring myself to eat factory-baked goods. Unsanitary is as mild a term as I'm prepared to use to describe the conditions. Workers would almost reflexively spit into the dough, the icing mix. My own small contribution to the squalor was to take the opportunity, whilst carrying a tray of cream buns for loading, to dig my thumbs in deep and when I put down the tray to scoop up and swallow big dollops of sickly-sweet "creme". But the vilest practice was surely what happened at the end of every shift in the steak and kidney pie room. Here was a huge vat of pie-filling and another of dough. Through some mechanical marvel the dough would be formed into pie-crusts and filled with the steak and kidney and gravy. It was a messy process and after eight hours the floor would be covered in a gooey mess of meat, gravy and dough,

leavened with whatever detritus, including but not limited to old fag ends, may have been dragged in on people's shoes. Before clocking out the final duty was to take a shovel, and rather than throw this foul mixture in the rubbish where it belonged, to add it to the vat of meat and gravy. Small wonder then, that the first Friday of my employ, rather than go to work I changed course and ended up instead at UFO.

Brighton in the summer of '67 was in many ways an English echo of San Francisco, with its burgeoning artsy-bohemian-underground scene. On those weekends that I wasn't up at UFO, I'd join a group at the house of a local painter. To follow the San Francisco parallel, John might be said to have been Brighton's Ken Kesey. His large canvases of circus themes resembled perhaps a neo-primitive Rouault.

These nights would follow a familiar pattern. The group would gather chez John in the evening around nine and everyone would do a hit of acid. We'd sit around chatting, looking at art books and other entertainments while music played on the stereo. I remember sitting with John looking at a book of Turner's work. Under the influence of acid I saw herds of white horses surging in breaking waves, dark legions charging from storm clouds.

I turned to John and asked, "Are they really there?"

"Of course," he replied, and I took him at his word, never doubting for a moment that he knew exactly what I meant. Ever since, Turner has been a favorite, but I search in vain for those so-real armies...

Around midnight we would all set out for a walk around the town, enjoying the peace, the architectural wonders both large and minuscule, and finally the beauty of the sea, before going back for a nice cup of tea and then dispersing into the dawn.

In those days the Arches on the sea front by the Palace Pier were in disrepair and rather unsightly, so a local patroness of the arts with some local art luminaries came up with the idea of a giant communal mural. The Countess laid on barrels of paint in brilliant colors and one Sunday morning a large group assembled to work together on the transformation. But of course it was not to be, and after an hour or so the police showed up in force, with several paddy wagons. The artists, laughing, scarce believing that this ridiculous scene was actually unfolding, were soon rounded up and loaded into the wagons for delivery to the police station, charged with criminal mischief, or malicious damage, or some such...

As it happened someone had just been arrested for robbing a taxi driver, and as he was long-haired we provided a convenient pool of likely subjects for a line-up. Volunteers were called for, at half-a-crown apiece. I was selected, with some half dozen others, and we were escorted to the line-up room. I ended up with the actual suspect standing by my side, and decided on a little experiment. When the victim faced me I was shiftily-eyed, refusing to look at him full in the face. He moved on to the end of the line, paused, came back to me and poked my chest. "It's him." The suspect glanced at me in relief and gratitude as he was led

away. We other miscreants were led off to the cells, where we languished for some time. There were three of us in our cell, and when the sound of footsteps and opening doors grew near one of the others jumped onto the cot and sat cross-legged, covering his eyes with his hands.

“Quick!” he said. We immediately grasped his meaning, and when a policeman opened the door a few minutes later he was confronted with three wise monkeys. To his credit he didn’t bat an eye.

“OK, wise guys,” he told us, “the Countess has bailed you all out. You’re free to go.”

As we all stood around in front of the cop shop wondering what to do, the Countess emerged and announced that all charges had been dropped.

Beyond these remarkably distinct recollections I find only shards...

A warm afternoon, tripping, walking the Esplanade at Eastbourne with Tina. I was barefoot and bare-chested, wearing jeans and a silver Indian temple-dancer’s necklace borrowed from Barbara. Tina held my hand. As we passed the elderly deck chair denizens a chorus of disapproving “tsk-tsks” followed us. Tina looked at me and asked, “Why do you walk like a god?”

“Festival of the Flower Children” at Woburn Abbey. I was there, but remember nothing at all beyond a glimpse of the stately home in the distance. I can only conclude that either I had a fab time or it was too boring to make an impression. Were you there? Did you see me?

Garden steps surrounded with flowers on my way to an upstairs flat somewhere off Ladbrooke Grove to buy white caps of acid from someone who called himself Mr. Trips...

An art school excursion to see Pink Floyd at UFO. We went in Pete’s van, so Lillian was probably with us, I don’t remember who else, or much about the show beyond being utterly stunned by the entirety of the performance and it being the first time I heard *Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun*... Somehow there were several more passengers for the return trip and fitting everyone in the little Morris Minor was so problematic that we resorted to the expedient of three of us sitting in the front seat. Being tall, I was put in the middle to operate the pedals, while the person beneath me had charge of the gears and the one on top steered. Don’t ask me how we managed to maneuver all the way across London without incident...

And another summer Eastbourne afternoon, making love to Tina, at last. It was, alas I fear, anticlimactic for us both, and it never happened again. Though I walked on air for days...

As the enchanted summer drew to a close I got ready to start my second year of art school. Things were not to turn out quite as expected...



SOMETHING BAD INSIDE

By

Nick Tosches

From a Work in Progress

I had known her maybe about three months when she asked me to cut her throat.

Jabbo never spoke these words aloud, not even when he was alone and talking to himself, but they were in him always and they came to him when he took to peering back into that windowless room without light that was his memory.

One minute he was showing her the old heavy-handled Coast Guard knife in its hard plastic sheath. The next minute she was asking. Just like that. On a night like this.

That windowless place without light was full of such things, like the garbage in a poky room at the end of a forsaken hall in some rat-hole flop-house where the cross-wired, overloaded fuse-box had been forever blown out. A place where you went to die, without ever facing that it was such a place. He been to a few of them in his time. The Alton House on Fourteenth near Seventh. The Sunshine on the Bowery near Stanton. Others he couldn't remember. He had outlived most of them. But his memory was worse than all of them, and there would be no outliving that one. He couldn't see the rats in that place without light, but he could sense them moving about. They never slept. They overran the place. They owned it.

It was like the time he had etched that name with a diamond ring into the barrel of that gun, knowing that someday, somehow the bad end of that gun would end the life of the one whose name was scratched into it. The rats loved rustling through that one.

He did not know why it came to him now, her asking so sweetly, so softly for that blade across her throat. Maybe the rats had come upon that Coast Guard knife, the ghost of that knife, in the garbage, and he recognized the sound of them disturbing it. Or maybe it was just because it was on a night like this.



Waning moon at perigee. Conjunctions of Neptune and the moon,
Uranus and the moon, Mercury and Saturn. Venus rising.

Sword of Aries, house of Mars.



Back when his dick still worked, Jabbo used to run with a broad named Sam. She was one game girl, Sam was.

Broads. There was always a broad. Looking back, his story seemed not his own, but belonged to the women to whom he had clung, in whom he had sought sanctuary and solace and absolution from the truth of himself, with whom he had practiced the demonology of his existence, and from whom he had fled. Yes. There was always a broad. One gave you life, then in her incarnations imbued the deathward tides of its passing. Yes, there was always a broad.

Beneath the dark humus of the earth, where she lay, these things in the firmament could be felt but not seen: an undulation, a reverberation, of a deep and faraway quaking.

It unsettled the serpent in her skull, and the serpent hissed his endless rhyme of a little girl and once upon a time.

She was a good girl, a happy girl, this little girl named Helen, in that once upon a time; and her dreams were sweet, and God looked over her. Then she ceased to believe, and God did something bad inside her. She grew into a woman who no longer felt and saw and dreamt as little girls do. But the bad that was done remained unhealed, and then God was back, breathing death into her, as once, long ago, He had breathed wonder.

She could feel the vapor of her life's mist, the dew of her dying prayer choking together in her throat. So vile and oppressive was the mouth of God upon hers, so desperate her desire for deliverance from it, that her horror of death became a yearning for the quietus which death alone could bring. And death, after an eternity, came at last, leaving His open mouth upon that of a corpse. If only they knew, the children and the

believers, the supplicants and the fearful good; if only they knew. It was neither faith nor holiness, purity nor beatitude that led every martyr to embrace the grave. For some, it was the unendurable kiss, the suffocating assault of the Father who had betrayed and violated and tortured them, who had blessed them with a soul and cursed them with revelations that no soul could bear. But within her remains, quietus did not come.

She sensed it. Air. Meager and musty-still, yes, of a cramped and arid darkness sealed within the unseen night; but air, sweet air, it was. She was not beneath the ground.

Starlight through the leaded stained-glass of the mausoleum pane cast a wisp of emerald upon her breast. It chilled her, like ice, shook her; and she knew then that she was not dead, but only dreaming. She could hear it, dawn's stirring. There, in the distance: a songbird.

Or was it? The sweet trilling evanesced, grew faint as the wisp of emerald upon her breast. A phantom-bird, nothing more.

No, this was not sleep. It was that other, awful thing. How long had she lain thus? Years perhaps, and still she knew no escape from this endless moment of unfulfilled prayer.

She turned. There was moisture, warm and sickly, at the corner of her mouth and between her thighs. He had left it there. His snail slime. Decomposition fluid.

Our Father which art in heaven, give us this day our daily death.

She turned again. Something like breath sounded in her throat. Then stillness. Her eyes opened to darkness, then closed again.

Looking back through the dire calm that had long embraced her, she could now recall the evening of her death. The cloud of black unknowing had been lifted, and what had transpired in eclipse now was clear.

As her body had become a vessel of death, so God in retribution had stilled her soul, but in mercy had becalmed it in sorrow rather than let it go to the storm of the self-killed. She saw now how simply this had come to pass.

The moonlight had entered through her mouth and lodged beneath her sternum in the cavity where her heart had been. Slowly, in that organ's place, it had come to govern the murmuring of her blood and

pulse. It had thrilled her faintly at first, like a whispering inside her, all melancholy and magic, of autumn dusk. Then the magic had gone and the melancholy had deepened, and she knew that its work, God's work, was done.

Good God, bad God. Hallowed be thy slime. Her pussy belonged to Daddy. She giggled – a dismal, furtive, ghostly sound – and pain shot through her. The dismal sound became a whimper of hurt.

The speculum was cold, like the wisp of emerald light. What were they looking for now? Her membrane was raw and tender, and the pain increased as the jaws of the instrument widened cruelly within her, opening her.

The physician muttered through his surgical mask – a chant, a lullaby, a dirge: she could not make it out through the quivering hush of the mask. Above the mask, where eyes should have been, there were only charred, gaping sockets.

Her teeth ground shut and she winced, unquiet and undead and unable to wake or to succumb. Her breath came forth in a sudden low rasp, a modulated sibilus, oddly sensual and anguished at once, that began

with her tongue pressed against her lower teeth in alveolar fricative and ended with her upper teeth upon her lower lip in aspirated plosive. *Sssfff*.

She remembered the souging release of ecstasy through her teeth as the pulse of her wrist and the pulse of her vagina became one. *Sssfff*. She remembered the suffering discharge of labor through those same clenched teeth as she lay in a different bed. *Sssfff*. And the moonlight had entered her with that sibilant aspiration as well. *Sssfff*. Sphincter and Sphinx, cognates born of the same primal utterance, the same unseen hissing in the same ageless autumn dusk. *Sssfff*. To bind tight. The coilings of vagina and the hideous mystery given form, winged and clawed, with a woman's face. *Sssfff*. She was that beast. She had been born so, but only in her soul's death had her awareness blossomed.

For this awareness, as for her reprieve, her becalming, she should have been thankful. But within her she cursed the God to whom she outwardly knelt. This cursing, like her rare souging releases, as much now of suffering as of ecstasy, she drew tight to herself and kept swathed in the moonlight beneath her sternum. Unseen hissings, unseen coilings, a face that showed nothing.

As long as the child did not return from its grave to be drawn tight and cradled, she would be all right. God's remorse was great, as great as the sinfulness which was His and His alone, a sinfulness profounder than any of man's imagining, or of Satan's. Yes, God and the pills and the moonlight that had entered through her mouth would keep her calm in her death.



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NICK TOSCHES is the author of many books of prose and poetry, including the novel *In the Hand of Dante* and *Never Trust a Loving God*, done in collaboration with the French artist Thierry Gravleur Alonso. His *Save the Last Dance for Satan* is out this summer from Kicks Books. His next novel will be published late next year by Little, Brown. Of Tosches's writing Hubert Selby, Jr., said: "I feel speechless in the face of such perfection."



WHY THE BIRD CAGE SINGS

By Matt Leyshon

Images © Aurora Loveday



Half awake, Mark turned to put his arm around his sleeping wife and then, remembering that she was not there, he turned back to face the pale shades of sunlight that were beginning to shine through the cracks of his makeshift cabin. He stretched the sleep from his limbs and then crawled forwards a little to look outside. As his eyes grew accustomed to the half-light of dawn he watched the towering and oily dark wall stretch into

the distance like tape unravelling from a broken cassette.

The wind had wailed along the wall all night and whistled eerie autumnal arias through the trees that had kept Mark and many of the other imprisoned workers awake in their tents and lean-tos. The squinting moon outside had taunted them with memories of R'lyeh as it pierced the dark clouds like the illuminated windows in a spectral tower block stretching upwards beyond the wall.

As the sun rose higher and the air stilled, the trapped workers all began to emerge wearily from the night and their shelters into the realm of the looming wall. Mark eventually crawled from the snug warmth of his pallet shack, watched by cawing crows holding court in the glen and pigeons twitching in the distance on the ruined ledges of the old and crumbling military laboratory. He rubbed his eyes and looked with mild curiosity at some of the foreign workers who had already begun to gather again at the foot of the trees across the way, parting foliage and pawing at the soil like foraging squirrels. Most of the workers had headed to the wooded areas in the summer months for midday shade when the wall had cast no shadow, but now it was only popular with

the immigrant labourers for whom it seemed to hold some strange attraction. Every day now the foreign workers, the ones with black hair and thick eyebrows, would group together once the sun rose over the wall, and on their hands and knees they would peer into the foliage as if in prayer to long forgotten pagan gods. Mark noticed that today a few workers of some other ethnicity had joined them too, kneeling, their blonde heads bowed as though they too were listening to the grass grow

Politicians had said that cities like R'lyeh would drown under waves of asylum seekers and illegal immigrants if they did not protect themselves. Evoked by the fears of the people walls had begun to lurch upwards everywhere like buried and forgotten stone circles being released from the land's suppressed memories by the workman's picks and their shovels piercing the earth's skull. As the months of construction passed, as the walls grew taller and longer, a concrete honeycomb soon covered the land. The villages and market towns had slowly emptied and the green belts that held them became dotted with ghost towns and decaying complexes like the military site that Mark saw in the distance, whose decaying walls erupted upwards like greying corpse teeth in the green gums of the plain.

Mark scrunched up a sheet of old tarpaulin and took it over to the wall where he wedged it behind his back to stop the chill aching his spine. He sighed as he remembered doing the same thing

back in spring, when he could remember how his wife's hair smelt and what size shoes his children wore, when he had thought that he would soon be free from the belt.

A bureaucratic oversight had meant that the labourers working within the belt on the exclusion wall had not been given the opportunity to enrol in the city application process and thus declare themselves as citizens of R'lyeh, and this was only realised when the wall had been completed. By then they had effectively built their own prison. In the first few days, when they were all trying to comprehend why they had not been airlifted out when the helicopters had arrived to remove their tools, a parish official had arrived to inform them from the top of the wall that the deadline for people to align themselves to R'lyeh had passed and so they could not enter the city. He had added, shouting through a loudspeaker over their angry cries, that he would soon resolve the issue of their estrangement and that they should not worry. Foolishly they had believed him but it was not long before it became clear that the administrators who had failed to provide them with the application packs had suddenly become unwaveringly efficient in applying the new laws of the land that did not allow them late access to the admission process. Months began to drift by like ghost ships and now their belief in getting out was reduced to a half hope, a half hope that they all knew was unhealthy to dwell upon.

Mark stretched his limbs and yawned. His knees obtruded from his torn jeans like snowcaps and his hair hung scraggly over his collar like rat's tails. He could not quite summon the motivation to wander over and ask the foreign labourers what it was that they found to be so interesting in the nettles and saplings, but he occupied himself with thoughts of how odd their behaviour had become because he was sick of thinking of how he wanted to get out of there, of how he missed his wife and children, his friends, his family. It was the same omnipresent and only half suppressed desperation to escape and to be with their loved ones that tugged at them all, sapping their energy and spirit like a rusted and cockle warted anchor.

He sighed wearily, absorbed in the tired anarchy that reigned with an omnipresent lassitude and was enforced by the wall's unbreakable and gloomy presence. They had built the wall and so none knew better than they that they could not escape it and the female labourers, even after six months within the belt, were not yet of the kind that the men would fight over; the futility of their situation produced a weary peace and harmony. Some of the men grew vegetables to keep themselves occupied and to distract their thoughts from their predicament. Some of the men continued to meet in the ruined, roofless cottages to forge escape plans that they knew to be pointless. Some of the more artistically minded builders had started to use berries, plants, and old foodstuffs to make dyes and they had begun to paint murals onto the wall. The other workers, like Mark,

mostly watched with resignation as each day more and more purple birds with one wild eye and a hooked beak appeared frozen in their efforts to fly upwards and over the wall.

Keith emerged from his crooked shed and ambled over lethargically then nodded slowly before seating himself down next to Mark. He seemed to look older with each passing day, grey hairs flecked his auburn hair and his eyes had acquired a hollowed grey aura that betrayed his hopelessness. He too then leaned back against the cold wall and rested his dirty, bony fingers upon his knees. "They're there again," he said, nodding slowly in the direction of the foreigners.

"Strange, isn't it," Stephen replied.

"Perhaps it's some kind of religious thing?" said Keith.

Neither of them knew much about religion but in the past, on television, they had seen Muslims on prayer mats counting devotions on beads, kneeling as the black haired workers in the glen now knelt, perhaps counting buds on nettle stems. They both had been taught in school of how the people of R'yeh had worshiped Elder Gods and strange cosmic deities. Mark remembered a scene in a mosque from a soap opera, a show he had watched with his wife and children as they ate their tea; he nudged the memory from his mind and its weight dragged it back to the recesses of his suppressed recollections like a sinking ship. He had thought when

they first became trapped that his memories would give him strength, but he had soon found that they did nothing but lay a veil of depressing weakness over his resolve.

"Yeah, maybe," Mark replied.

Leaning back against the wall, silent in thought, they let the morning sun warm their faces.

"It kind of freaks me out," said Keith.

"Let's go and ask them what they're doing, then?" Mark sighed half-heartedly.

For another long moment they watched the labourers in the glen with their reverent bowing and strange stooped rummaging.

"Sure, let's ask them," said Keith. "It's not as if we have much else on."

The glen was about half way between them and the old military lab and they walked over to it with measured slowness. They felt the eyes of other trapped workers leant against the wall, watching them curiously as they too wondered about the foreign men in the glen and perhaps imagined what intriguing information Mark and Keith might garner as they continued their daily battle to suppress thoughts of escape.

They walked mostly in silence, both wanting to avoid conversations that might make them think of the past and of the time when they were free on the other side

of the wall. But sometimes they indulged in small talk.

"I heard they used to research chemical weapons there," said Keith pointing over at the remains of military complex with its single story workshops, decaying now with broken windows and half demolished walls.

"Yeah, I heard that too," said Mark.

When they reached their destination they both stopped and watched. It was some time before one of the men kneeling in the dirt suddenly turned, and when he did, both Mark and Keith took a step back.

The man facing them had an angular face with wrinkled skin, even paler than their own pasty complexions, and it was pimpled pink like a plucked bird. His eyes seemed unnaturally small and they darted left and right as his head jerked up and down. The foreigner squawked in surprise and pursed his lips into a beak shape.

"We... we were just... just wondering what you're, uh, doing here?" said Mark.

The foreigner had black pigeon eyes and he fixed Mark and Keith with them for a moment too long, with silent and drawn out seconds that unnerved them both further; and then he spoke.

"Little people," he said. "We just watch your little people. We don't have them where we are from."

"I see," said Keith quizzically.

They might both have laughed had it not felt so creepy and strange.

"Where?" Keith said.

"In my country," said the foreign man.

"He means where are the little people?" said Mark.

The man stared again, furrows dug deep into the sagging skin of his brow as he frowned and tried to comprehend if the two men were trying to ridicule him.

"We can't see any little people," said Keith.

The foreign man pointed at a sapling and tilted his head like a budgerigar fretting over a mirror in its cage. "Here, here, everywhere, around the plants," he said.

Keith and Mark looked at each other, their faces mirroring each other's bemusement. The man turned and returned to staring at the greenery, gently parting leaves with his bony fingers then gazing with fascination. As he moved his collar fell back from his neck a little and they both saw the hairs at the cusp of his neck, as thick and straight as quills, lying flat at his nape like down. Mark shrugged and bent down to follow the foreigner's gaze, but he saw nothing but long grass and a young tree, its stem too slender to be called a trunk, with new growth sprouting in fresh green curls.

"Nothing," Mark said to Keith with a shrug.

They left the peculiar foreigner and walked among the other kneeling immigrant workers even more puzzled than they were before. As if for some strange reassurance they both looked back at the wall, so high that not even the tip of the ancient cathedral spire could be seen above it, and they saw the silhouetted workers lounging against it as the midday shadows began to creep down in a slow curtain call. Keith suddenly stopped, then, lifting his feet high over brambles, he began heading into the thicket.

"What have you seen... little people?" said Mark, laughing nervously.

"Come here," whispered Keith. "Look at this."

Stepping high, Mark followed in Keith's footsteps until he reached a small mound of loose earth. He walked to the other side of it and stood looking downwards in silence with Keith.

They were stood at the edge of a shallow trench, the soil was ridged from clawing hands and they both guessed that the immigrant workers must have dug it for some reason. The bottom was logged with a putrid yellow liquid that smelled rich and chemical, it caught in the back of their throats like over-roasted peppers. At one end, when they looked closely, they saw the rim of a rusted canister sticking out through the soil. Keith toed more soil

away from it and they saw that it was in fact a large metal container, like an oil drum.

"That doesn't smell healthy, mate. It's probably from when the chemical laboratories were here, it could be poisonous," said Mark as he began to step back away from it.

Keith began to follow him but they both stopped suddenly in their tracks as one of the foreign workers came scrambling through the undergrowth on his hands and knees, ignoring them both, then bending over into the hole where he began lapping at the liquid like a thirsty dog.

"Hey, hey," shouted Mark. "Don't drink that, it's probably toxic."

The foreigner stopped and turned to face them. He had the same small eyes, as black as coals that darted around like dots in static, and his head jerked nervously back and forth as he looked at them.

"It is good. The little people told us," he chirruped in the most peculiar high-pitched voice that Mark and Keith had ever heard.

"There aren't any little people. No wonder you're all seeing fairies if you've been drinking that stuff," said Keith.

"No. There are little people; it's just that you don't see them. It is like, how you say, ah yes, when you walk the same route every day, you don't notice the

environment unless something changes. Well, the little people, yes, they are always there so you don't see them, you might notice if they weren't there, but they always are, so you don't."

"Uh, right," said Keith. "Sure."

"Whether there's little people or not, I wouldn't drink that stuff. Nothing that smells that bad can be good for you," added Mark.

From where they had backtracked to they could still smell it, its odour almost tangible, clinging to their skin like spider webs. It smelled worse than a forgotten abattoir waste bin and they both felt bile rising in their throats whenever the breeze wafted it over them.

The foreigner suddenly flapped his arms angrily and let out a bizarre angry screech like a threatened peacock. They both noticed with horror how the dark, papery skin hung from his bony arms like two thin sheets of taut leather.

They both held their hands up and began backing away, keeping their eye on the strange foreign man who, once they were far enough away, began sipping once again at the horrible liquid, lapping at it with his long tongue.

They began walking back to the wall.

"Bizarre," said Keith.

"Bunch of weirdoes," Mark replied.

The sun had begun its decline towards the top of the wall and between its deep grey surface and the growing shadows at its base, it was impossible to tell where the wall began and the darkening ground ended. It brought to Mark's mind briefly the memory of a family holiday beside the sea when the ocean had reflected the sky's rich blue so perfectly that there was no discernible horizon.

"I hate that wall," mumbled Keith. It was rhetorical, for who among them did not hate the wall, and so Mark did not reply. But he thought to himself that perhaps he did not hate the wall, it was the absence of an exit that he hated and how it made him feel like a caged bird.

"I might walk out to the other side tomorrow," said Keith. "Go for a stroll across the plain."

"It won't have changed," Mark replied.

"I know, I know."

They stopped off at the store hut and took bottled water and fruit from the last helicopter supply drop, then returned to their places against the wall. There was still some warmth in the air but the nights were drawing in and they rubbed a little at their arms.

"We'll have to start building fires in the evenings," said Keith.

"Yeah."

"Is it tomorrow they'll be delivering food?"

"I reckon," said Mark.

They sat quietly drinking and eating for a while, both absorbed in the most mundane thoughts that they could muster. Whilst they had been away from their spot someone had painted one of the birds on the wall above them at shoulder height, its blackberry smear wings were now blurring into the creeping dark of the approaching night, its buttercup eye a dim star in the growing gloom.

"Fairies, eh," said Keith after some time.

"I guess being trapped like this for months on end can drive a man crazy," Mark replied.

"I almost wish it'd make me mad, it might make all this a bit more bearable."

"Perhaps we are all mad and this is just a big state asylum," said Mark.

"That'd be about right. I guess my one consolation is that I'm not as mad as those foreigners," laughed Keith.

Chuckling quietly to themselves they watched the wall's shadow work its way further down their outstretched legs and then, hearing a crow caw in the distance they looked up once more at the glen. Now there was nobody to be seen, there were no shadows moving against the dark vegetation. They must have gone deeper

into the trees, they both thought, perhaps they were all drinking from the foul, toxic puddle that they had seen.

"I've not noticed them before," said Keith pointing to an indeterminate spot of dusk.

"What?" said Mark, swigging from his water.

"A bat," said Keith.

Mark studied the half-light and sure enough, once his eyes were accustomed, he could see little black forms zipping about in the greyness.

"They must roost in the trees there, I suppose," Mark said.

"Stupid creatures," said Keith. "If you had wings, would you choose to fly around in here?"

"Well," said Mark, "I guess for a bat it's as good a place as any."

The bats were getting nearer and they both watched them darting about, catching flies and tracing mystical patterns against the charcoal evening sky.

"Maybe they're not so stupid after all," said Keith craning his neck to look above him.

Mark followed Keith's gaze and watched as the bats flew towards the wall, swooped upwards, and in the last of the light, disappeared over it and into R'lyeh.

"Feels almost like they're taunting us," said Keith.

"Well, I guess you can't begrudge a bat its wings," chortled Mark.

Keith laughed loudly, a laugh that echoed along the wall before finally receding into the darkness. It was a laugh that must have scared the crows roosting in the glen for they erupted upwards in a cacophonous, black mushroom of flapping wings and chattering beaks. Like an angry storm cloud the birds rushed towards them, seemed to hang in open ridicule overhead for a moment with wings beating like thunder, before also disappearing over the wall.

"Bastards," said Keith.

"Bastards," said Mark, and they both fell asleep.

Keith must have gone for his walk early for when Mark awoke the next morning he was alone with the autumn sun pricking his eyelids with shards of clinical bright light as though he had awoken early from anaesthetic upon an operating table. He rubbed his eyes and sighed, wishing he had woken earlier and walked with Keith to the other side to escape the monotony of staring at the derelict and decaying chemical plant and the glen. The glen, he noticed, oddly had none of the foreign labourers kneeling at its vegetative altars that morning. Perhaps they've moved on after we interrupted them yesterday, he thought to himself.



Over the following days he walked the belt, he strolled the rolling plains and toed the cracked tarmac lines of the old disused roads. Whenever he passed groups of immigrant workers he looked out for black haired men with their avian eyes and twitching heads, but he never saw them. After a few days Mark decided it was better not to think too hard about the immigrant workers or the little people that they claimed they could see, but when he returned to his spot at the wall beneath the bird painted onto the wall above his head, he could not help but wonder; could the workers in the glen, by some strange magic, have transformed themselves into birds and flown away, but it was a

ridiculous thought and he was now used to suppressing such things.

The length of the wall was dotted with hopeless workers like the shadow remains of nuclear blast victims and from somewhere further along the wall Mark could hear singing. He could not hear the words but he recognised the tune of pop song that had played regularly on their radios before the airwave block over the belt had reduced broadcasts to white noise. He closed his eyes and began to hum along, and when Keith came and sat motionless beside him, he hummed too, and it might have seemed as if the wall itself were singing.

"You coming?" said Mark as he rose.

"I reckon," said Keith.

They walked together to the glen where the sun flickered through the leaves like fairies dancing in the shadows, and they knelt at the little pool, and with their lips they broke the surface like egg yolk, and they drank.

KAGAYAKU MAHOUTSUKAI

A CONVERSATION WITH TONY VISCONTI

By DÍRE MCCAIN

Photo Courtesy of Tony Visconti



Human beings tend to focus on the prominent. It's often the case with collaborative creative works such as films, theatrical productions, and albums. People may be aware of the underlying layers that contribute to the whole, but only on an incidental level, when those layers should, in fact, be regarded with more importance.

Music, like any other human made creation, is composed of interdependent elements – if any one element is removed, it becomes a different organism.

And music is indeed a vital force. The influence it can have on the human limbic system is undeniable. An entire gamut of emotions can be evoked as it pours into the ears. It can be a nepepthe, serving as an escape pod from stress, pain, and the most traumatic realities. It can also be a potent Sehnsucht trigger, transporting the listener to a place s/he longs to return to, but has yet to visit. And it can be a tonic, a galvanizing shot in the arm that enables one to plow full speed ahead in the face of lethargy.

These are the primary roles music has played in my life, particularly music from the decade of my birth. Although I came across it a few years after its peak, I was elevated and spirited away into another dimension that I still frequent here and now, in the eleventh year of the third millennium. The origins lie in an ensemble of groundbreaking players who have officially attained legendary status, one of them being the person you're about to meet.

In April, 1967, a 23-year-old man from Brooklyn, New York, USA landed in London Heathrow Airport, armed with a handful of guitars, an abundance of talent,

and indomitable ambition. Within a year, his place in music history would be permanently secured. The first hits would arrive a few years later, followed by a remarkably well-rounded and impressive career that continues and thrives to this day. Forty-four years later, and counting, the ever growing body of work is massive and surprisingly diverse.

His extraordinary creative abilities are matched by an equally extraordinary yet refreshingly earthy spirit. He's a mensch, in the truest sense of the word – a destination that was reached via an odyssey fraught with both edifying and damaging experiences. He's sincere, engaging, and one of the warmest souls you're ever likely to encounter. If you're not familiar going in, you'll come out the other end not only knowing who he is, but loving who he is...

DM: There's a specific atmosphere in the early albums you did with Marc Bolan and David Bowie. Where did that come from and how was it achieved?

TV: That's an interesting question. I always tried to bring out a live performance, and then embellish that live performance. I know that the Beatles used to do a lot of trickery in the studio, and since I didn't understand that trickery yet, I opted for people who I thought were great live. And I saw both David Bowie and Marc Bolan live.

Also, what drives me in any production I do is that I started out as an artist, and I wanted to be a rock and roll star. And I had a run-in with three very bad, almost evil

record producers, who were so worried about where their next whiskey would come from, or the extensions they were building on their homes, I just wanted to give it all up. The catalyst was when my publisher said that he didn't like the songs I was submitting, but loved my demos. He said, "I think you would be great as a record producer."

With all these things combined, to me, it was about helping people I loved and respected. Marc and David were just a little younger than me, and I noticed that they weren't getting any help from anybody, so I played an older American 'cousin' role.

I was consciously going for a natural sound, which I thought was well within my capabilities. It actually wasn't. (laughs) I was dumber than I thought at the time, but in my innocence I created some really nice albums there, those initial, open sounding albums.

I love those early albums. I still listen to them all the time.

Thank you, DÍre.

*I'm trapped in the past, but the way I see it, any given music will always be new to **someone**. Obviously, what's currently happening with the industry is a bit sad, but thankfully, there's a plethora of amazing music that was put out long ago, and not so long ago.*

Well, I think we've had several golden ages, starting with maybe Elizabeth I up until the most recent one, which I think is the 60s and 70s. I haven't really seen anything since. I mean, Nirvana was showing some promise

of a new wave, but it never really took off, it became too commercial too quickly.

It did. As record companies often do, they immediately jumped on it and 'packaged' it.

Also, that was the first decade of A&R people getting salaries of half a million a year, and thinking in their own minds that they were rockstars. You have to read a book called *Kill your Friends*. It's a British novel based on the wild indulgences of the 90s where the lifestyles of the record company people took precedence over the lifestyles of the artists they represented and signed. That created an enormous inflation in the music business. They were industrializing it, turning something like the Seattle movement into an industry that had certain business parameters. That never happened in the 70s, which I lived and worked through. They gave us smaller budgets, and the A&R men didn't get those kinds of salaries yet, and I didn't get those kinds of advances yet, so if we made a hit record, we made money on the royalties, not on the upfront money, which, by the time the 90s came, the upfront money was so seductive that everything took precedence over the art and the culture. I would say that's when it all came to an end, the 90s, the lack of cultural support from the music business.

That atmosphere I mentioned seems to be common in a good deal of both Marc Bolan and David Bowie's material. How much of that was down to your input as producer in common?

George Martin's role with the Beatles was very inspirational to me. He was always described as the fifth Beatle. I was kind of

a maverick. I was too smart to be a dumb rock and roller, and wasn't authentic enough to be a rock and roller with, you know, 'street cred' - I fell in the cracks. I was a music student, I could read and write music, I could write arrangements, I could conduct, and I played a mean rock and roll bass and guitar. I suddenly saw my role with both Marc Bolan and David Bowie as that outside member of the group, having an influence on the structure of the songs, the arrangements of the songs, the coaching of the vocals. I did a real hands-on producer job, in the style of George Martin. Possibly I got even more involved because we were approximately the same age whereas George Martin was like a generation older than the Beatles. That's why I wrote my book. I had to tell my story about this. To say, yes, I did a lot of that stuff, a lot of their music was part of me.

Your input is very clear, and I don't even think someone has to have a good ear to hear it. But people tend to focus on the star - the star often gets all the credit, which isn't necessarily the star's fault.

Some of their fans think I'm sounding big-headed when I say I did *anything*, the engineering, the mixing, the string arrangements, the backing vocals, etc, but the proof of the pudding is that I was invited back over and over again. I've produced over a dozen Bowie albums, and about ten T. Rex Albums, and there would have been more, had he not died. So I was welcomed back into the team all the time by both artists.

There's a strong presence there, but it's not remotely overbearing.

I think my production is very sympathetic. I wanted them to sound the best they could. And as I said, I had such bad experiences as a musician in the studio. I found that my initial experiences with other producers were obstacles, and I vowed to become the opposite.

What was it with those producers you were working with? Was it a case of power tripping?

It was contempt, out-and-out contempt. They were older men, from the pre-Beatles generation.

And people can be control freaks. I'll admit that I'm a control freak when it comes to my work, but fortunately, I jibe with most of the people I work with. It doesn't always go that way, though.

Well, you have to pick your fights. (laughs)

You do, and if you're dealing with someone who's a creative Nazi you're not going to get anywhere, you're only going to butt heads.

Of those two men – Marc Bolan and David Bowie – Marc's enormous ego is legendary but he was full of ideas and raw talent, and David always had brilliant ideas and became a successful producer in his own right. We had mutual respect for each other's ideas in the studio, it never felt like a job. Like film, but to a lesser extent, making a record is about teamwork.

I agree, as you know, and it's one of the reasons why I wanted to do this story on you.

In keeping with the theme, how much were the unique sounds you helped to create conditioned by the limitations of the technology at the time?

I was listening to the Beatles on my headphones on my way to the studio today, and whereas back in the 60s I thought the sound was fantastic, it's actually quite wimpy now compared to today's massive bass low end and all that. But it was appropriate for the times, and it was groundbreaking at that time. I don't know what people would have done if they had heard a Rap record with a pounding kick drum in 1968, they would have lost their minds, you know?

I always managed to surround myself with great engineers. During my first year in London I learned engineering, too, and there was a nice free exchange of ideas. I was part of a London scene of producers and engineers, and I learned from the best, like Glynn Johns, Keith Grant, Gerald Chevin, Malcolm Toft, Roy Thomas Baker and Martin Rushent. Every time there was a new technique or style in the air, it would go around like wild fire, and we'd all be a part of it. In the UK then, you could put out a finished record within a month after making it. So we were quickly testing our experiments on the radio, the ultimate 'old grey whistle test'. It was a great situation. [The British Tin Pan Alley referred to the public as 'the old greys']

It was limiting in ways. For example, we were frustrated about the limitations of vinyl, how much bass you could put on it. There is a great physical limitation there – too much bass would make the tone arm jump off the record.

But the technology wasn't too bad. Gradually it all improved, but I've always felt that the quality of the music itself was more important than the technology. I used

to say you could've recorded Elton John on a manky cassette recorder and he'd still be a star.

So, as the technology started to advance, you must have been a little excited?

Yes, there's a part of me that's a geek, I love recording technology, but it doesn't run my life.

*You're undoubtedly aware that loads of people have memories evoked by the songs and albums you produced and contributed to. For example, "The Width of a Circle" always reminds me of tearing down Pacific Coast Highway in a stolen car, at 17-years-old. Your bass playing on that song and the entire **The Man Who Sold the World** album is magick. The interchange between the guitar and bass, Mick Ronson and yourself, was and still is unparalleled. Where did you pull that from?*

Thank you. I have to give full credit to Mick Ronson. I was a competent bass player. I played a lot of bass in New York, and had been playing since I was 13. When we were forming this rock trio, Hype, with him, Bowie, and myself, he said, "You've got to listen to Cream!" Then he sat me down, and made me listen to the way Jack Bruce played bass, which he played on a short-scale bass, and you could bend the strings, like you can on a guitar. Jack Bruce was one of the first lead bass players. So, I had crash course in that with Mick Ronson egging me on, and I have him to thank. Both David and I thought Mick Ronson's suggestions were amazing. We walked into the studio for that album with weeks and weeks of rehearsal in our communal house behind us.

I'd like to tell one great story about the bass playing on *The Man Who Sold the World*. I was in Tower Records in L.A. in the early 70s, and they were playing that album over the loud speakers, and one of the clerks who worked there was playing air bass to my bass. He was shaking his head around and going absolutely ape-shit. I had to tap him on the shoulder - I couldn't help it - and say, "That's me playing bass!" And he wouldn't believe me, or couldn't believe I was in his store. He was expecting me to be, maybe, more English. I had to show him my driver's license before he would believe me! (laughs)

That's hilarious! And not surprising...

Switching gears a bit, let's segue back to the industry. Obviously, the consumer often dictates what music is available or popular at any given time. Some would argue that it's at an all-time high, thus resulting in an all-time low in terms of quality. How much do you think the development of musical expression has been influenced by the demographics of the marketplace?

I have met some young songwriters who talk about that all the time, and they approach writing music in a very precise, business-like manner. That type of music sounds too much like a jingle, which is okay if you're in the jingle business, but if you're in the songwriting business, for the advancement of culture, I'd like to think, you have to come from a different place than worrying mainly about the demographic of who is going to hear it.

I know it's very important to think about this if you market for a living, but I can't be

motivated only by that. I have to work with an artist I love, and I don't care if they're in the box or outside of the box, but preferably outside of the box, because I know that people respond to something that's different. I think the public is a lot smarter than the music industry thinks they are. Anything that's a huge hit is usually something that has a lot of originality. You can make a perfectly good making music based on what is currently selling. You might get your music in films and all that, making big money on mechanicals without real substantial records sales. People have bought big houses doing that, but it doesn't impress me at all.

I think risk taking is the way to go in any art form, and even with manufacturers. Take Apple, who broke the rules. They followed their instincts with amazing innovations, very risky in the safer and cheaper PC world. They didn't play it safe, they were daring. The Volkswagen Beetle, when that came out, was the most unlikely car, but it sold millions. Like, when Bowie wrote "Space Oddity" - whoever wrote a song like that before? You wouldn't get a song like that if you were a slave to market research. I remember his manager went up to a play-it-safe songwriter once and said, "Why don't you write a song like "Space Oddity"? Look what a big hit it is?" And the songwriter replied, "Well, I can now!" (laughs)

I think the maverick will always lead the way. Unfortunately today fewer and fewer are getting through the cracks in pop music.

Now this leads into another question. Everyone seems to be in a band these days, without adding

anything new or particularly relevant. Do you think modern music has reached an impasse?

Yes. But I think anyone can be in a band, and they should be. And I think music played at home should be an ideal, it's something we did in the 50s. Unfortunately they have the facilities to flood the Internet with tons of bad music. You know what I mean? It's like those people who aren't very serious, but they can put music on iTunes for the hell of it. I call it "clogging the arteries," as it doesn't really compete with great artists, but it slows the circulation down quite a bit.

It's a double-edged sword. I completely agree with you, yet at the same time, it does enable people to get their work out there, and for listeners to be able to find it. The ratio between the bad and the good, though, as you said, it's overloaded with the former.

It is. For instance, say you're looking for the band Arctic Monkeys, and you put it in Google, and you'll come up with about 100,000 tags of other groups who say, "Sounds like Arctic Monkeys." If that's not clogged arteries, then I don't know what is.

That seems to be where it's gone. A lot of artists and bands want us to review their music for the magazine - and we rarely even do reviews, I should add - and it's always, "I/We sound like so and so." Whether it's good or bad, I don't want to hear someone who sounds like someone else anyway. I'd rather listen to unique creations, or listen to the artists these people are claiming to sound like.

Exactly. Well, it's kind of created an alternative to the music business, just people sharing their files, usually giving away their music for free, which devalues

everyone who is serious in this business. I mean the banks don't give away money, and you have to pay for your deodorant and everything else... (laughs)

Are there any current artists or bands that you like?

I went through an in love out of love - as opposed to love/hate - relationship with Arcade Fire. Bowie turned me onto them initially and I got how they were an amalgamation of all the cool music from the 70s, Bowie and a bit of Roxy Music. The lead singer, Win Butler, is a tenor version of Bryan Ferry, with combination of respect and youthful enthusiasm. Their first album had quite an impact on me because I wasn't loving anything at the time. The album was *Funeral*. They are a very self contained group with ethics and, since I was galvanized during the Hippy/Summer of Love era, I was thrilled by their authenticity - the real deal. I saw the follow up, *Neon Bible*, as a bit disappointing. But the third album, *The Suburbs*, has me in love with them again, it is a return to the bold independence of *Funeral*. See, I give people a second chance.

I have been a champion for Kristeen Young for several years. Disclosure: I produce her records, but I am a fan nevertheless. She is a very ethical artist and composer. She could've done anything instantly commercially acceptable with her versatile skills, from being a dance music artist to a Christian music artist, but she is true to her love of diverse influences like Bela Bartok, Philip Glass, Richard Wagner, Stravinsky, Jello Biafra, Dead Kennedys, Minor Threat, Morrissey - she puts all this into her very startling and unique version of Pop/Rock.

Her lyrics are equally unique.

I am very taken in by Larkin Grimm, another versatile and evocative singer who writes through many influences including her rural upbringing in Georgia. She is a dark contralto voice with a beautiful upper register. Her songs are spiritual, kinky sexual and joyful, almost gospel. I was turned onto her by a photographer friend, Lori Baily, who dragged me to a live show in New York, my very first introduction to Larkin. I highly recommend the CD she made with Michael Gira, her producer. It is called *Parplar*. Disclosure: I'm playing a bass on her new, self-produced album.

I love the new Neil Young album produced by Daniel Lanois, *Le Noise*. No drums were hurt making this album, nor where they used at all. If you are a guitar nerd, you will hear Young's and Lanois' vintage collection recorded at their throatiest best! I've been a Young fan since the 60s.

It's safe to assume that artists and bands are constantly accosting you to listen to their music, but where do you go to find new music? Do you spend any time at all looking for it, or does it all come to you?

Well, having a Facebook page, I can't avoid new music. (laughs) I closed down my MySpace page because I was under attack with constant barrage of demos. "Hey Tony, check us out, post on our page what you think."

I'd pick one at random and listen to it, and would write back and say, "Well, nothing exceptional." I wasn't trying to be insulting. Usually, I would get a nice letter back saying, "Gosh, thank you for even

listening!" But for real bad demos I'd sometimes write a word of faux encouragement, like, "Have you considered taking guitar lessons?" Or something like that. (laughs)

And Facebook seems to have picked up where MySpace left off. I have people sending links on a regular basis, asking me to listen to their music. Actually being in the music business, I'd imagine you're being approached around the clock.

Yes, I get links sent to me on Facebook all the time. And I'm being a little more cautious on there now. In the beginning, I thought I would friend a lot of people who were musicians and engineers, and fans of artists I produced, but now I have over 4000 friends, and only interact with about 100 or so. But it works out as a promotional tool for the artists I currently work with.

That's partly what it's for. I think the trick is to find a balance.

I've made some really nice friends, people I wouldn't have met any other way. And out of those 100 people I mentioned, some of them I correspond with regularly whom I've never met in person. So, I got the friendship out of it, but you'd think out of 4000 friends, I'd have more "friends." (laughs)

But when you have something – and I'm in a similar situation, on a much lesser scale – that people want to be a part of, you're going to get approached. As PARAPHILIA continues to grow, more and more people want to be a part of it. And it's been fantastic for finding people, don't get me wrong – we've found many talented artists, writers, photographers, etc

through social networking sites – but the solicitation can be a bit overwhelming at times.

You know what's changed a lot in the music business, and your business too, is that say, 20 years ago, people would have to go through your secretary, they'd have to find all kinds of phone numbers and addresses to get to you in the first place. I viewed that as a test, like walking on hot coals, it was a rite of passage. If you got to an A&R person with your music, or you had a team or manager that got to them – first of all, you had to convince so many people, so many gate keepers at so many levels that you're worthy of getting that shot at making a record. And that old school method produced some fine artists, it has made some great, great music, as you know. Nowadays, you can go on Facebook, and write a letter directly to Phil Ramone, saying "Hi Phil! I think you'd like my music – check it out, dude!"

And you're incredibly approachable, friendly, and interactive with people on there, which can be problematic, because some will abuse it.

Yes, but I'm cool with it in the sense that I'm not afraid to be real with people. And I don't care if they think I'm a horrible person because I don't like their music. Tough tittie, you know? (laughs) Usually when I reject someone, though, I give them some positive feedback, an opportunity to improve. Occasionally, occasionally, some people have sent me something so incredibly bad, the worst words I used were like, "Are you kidding?" I mean, what are they thinking, I can wave a magic wand and turn them into Prince? (laughs)

And sometimes I get an email from someone saying, "I sent you my music a week ago, and you haven't responded?" And I will say to people like that, "You know something, I'm not an application! I'm real. I do this for a living, not as a Facebook service!" But I listen for at least three minutes to everything that is sent to me. If it's something that I feel is right for me, I'll listen to more and send back comments.

I think that's more than fair. I mean, it would be a full-time job if you sat down and listened to every single song or demo that came in.

Yes, some producers charge for this, for listening and sending back an evaluation report. I'm not there for that. You know, it's more organic for me. If I like it, I like it—sometimes if I don't like their profile photo, which tells me a lot – I'm not going to listen to it at all. (laughs)

So, are you someone who has to be immediately drawn to something, or can it grow on you? For example, when someone sends you a song or demo, and wants you to produce them, how does that work?

I am immediately drawn to something.

Okay, it has to click right away. You have to hear something, whatever that may be, and you may not even be able to describe it.

It takes about 30 seconds. When I get badly made demos on CDs they would make great Frisbees.

Have there been projects you've done simply to get a paycheck? Or have they mostly been projects you're drawn to, people you've wanted to work with no matter what?

I've tried doing productions just for a paycheck, and it doesn't work out. If my heart isn't in it, I can't do a good job. Fortunately – and this applies to an earlier question – I get new music presented to me all the time, I really don't have to look for it. It comes to me. I have a great manager, and he knows what my parameters are.

For example, I was offered that quasi operatic group Il Divo. I said to my manager, "I love opera too much to do Il Divo. I love music too much to do Il Divo." And that would have been a great paycheck. I would have had two homes by now.

When I pick someone to work with, there does have to be a budget there, there has to be enough money there. Studios cost money and I do have bills to pay. But I only produce music that I like. Some I like more than others, but I have a wide range of tolerance. I could like something maybe 70% and still want to do the job. And usually the parts I don't like much, I'll work harder to make them really good.

Okay, now that's led my mind(s) here: Nature versus Nurture – musically speaking. Music is subjective, but some people can be undeniably talented, even if one doesn't personally care for their creative offerings. Assuming there's such a thing as an inborn gift or aptitude for music, how important is that compared to what can be taught? Or do you think the two are or need to be interconnected to some degree?

Talent is hard to arrive at as a quotient. Humans have many specific talents, you have to be honest about what they are. No one given human has all the talents in the human experience.

What is obvious to me is that rock music is a form of folk music. With a lot of talent and very little education you could go very far, like the Beatles and Brian Wilson did. But you are limited in that you can teach yourself to play a Radiohead song but you can't possibly learn a Mozart concerto without classical training. It isn't that folk and pop/rap/rock musicians aren't trained, they are, but in a very informal way. They might listen to specific recordings 1,000 times and learn every little nuance, then come up with a style of your own. That is not how classical and jazz musicians are trained. They are trained privately and in academies, in rigorous programs by educated professors and it is mandated that they practice for most of the hours in a day. So, in a sense, talent must be trained, nurtured either by informal or formal means. For instance, I always had a problem singing in tune, although some do that effortlessly. My rock training was of the informal variety, but I had to go to a classical voice teacher to solve this problem, and it helped me to produce a bigger tone, also with not a few lessons of the Alexander Technique - my ears were fine, but my throat was tight.

But it doesn't matter if one is trained formally or informally, art is mostly about expressing emotions, ideas, philosophies - Rap has those things, so does Rachmaninoff. But serious musicians must realize that the only way to get great at what you want to do is to practice, to put in that minimum of 10,000 hours (thank you Malcolm Gladwell) then you are on your path.

Expression is indeed the driving force, which leads us into the next question. It's common knowledge that creative people can be 'difficult' to varying degrees. Where do you draw the line in terms of working with 'difficult' people? Presumably, there are cases where you won't know how 'difficult' these people are until you're knee-deep in the process, but do you have any rules - for lack of a better word - going in?

I love to work with so-called difficult artists. Being difficult is often tied in with having high standards. Why do something half-assed, life is too short? I love single-mindedness. It's easy to say, "I have thousands of ideas," then, "Let's try this, no this, no that," anybody can play that game. I am a very decisive person and I respond to like minds. I can try several variations on a theme, but not try, try, try all day long like a monkey at a typewriter. I often see or hear the finished product in my head and then, when I am clear, I proceed to make it happen. I'm not a psychic, I listen to artists very carefully when we are discussing the project beforehand and I take notes. I make a progress chart on a large poster board, with the song titles on the left and the instruments on top. The musical ideas are in the boxes formed by the two vectors. I encourage the artists to fill in their ideas from day one and most artists love this method. We have the whole story written out on the poster board, now all we have to do is record it. I put it in a conspicuous place so we have to walk by it all day long. It keeps the team focused.

The only real bad experiences I have had were with groups and individuals who had a drug or alcohol problem. I don't want to mention any names, but people who are

stoned are hard to work with. Having a relaxing drink is one thing, but turning a studio into a den of iniquity is another. But there were some people who made really great music despite themselves. I wasn't an angel in those days either, but I postponed my 'party' until after the sessions, I guess that's how I got through those difficult hours. Since then I've stopped working with intoxicated people because I'm sober eleven years.

So it's really a question of you being able to deal with the people enough to get done what needs to get done.

Yes. And divas are no problem for me. I can deal with that energy. It's just energy that needs focusing. I've worked with divas all my life.

As the readers can see, you're open about your struggles with substance abuse, and more important, your sobriety, which I think is highly commendable. As you know, I've followed a similar path in both respects, but some people prefer to either keep quiet about it or pretend it never happened. In present times, addiction seems to be simultaneously glorified and reviled – often depending on whether the person is famous or not. What are your thoughts on that? How it's viewed as 'cool' in the eyes of some and the stigmatization that can be attached to people who not only abuse drugs, but those who seek treatment as well?

Let's get this straight from the start. Famous or not famous, addiction recovery should not be stigmatized. I find that the stigma is self-imposed, mostly. I think those around you are relieved once you made up your mind to seek help and your cover-ups never worked.

My struggle with my addictive nature started with, of course, lying about it. It started one night, I was 15, when I got my first buzz from alcohol, went back onto the bandstand with my group of musicians and my fingers seemed to take on a magical life of their own. I was drunk, but I thought I was brilliant. For several years thereafter I sought to balance my professional life whilst maintaining that buzz. This led to a menu of weed, pills – straight to mainlining smack in a short space of three years. I became streetwise in no time, my junkie 'friends' were at least ten years older than me. But, for some reason I had the most incredible 'straight' act at a very early age. I could deceive people into believing everything was alright. By the time I was 21 I had quit and gone back to smack at least five different times, sometimes by free will, aided by a bent doctor who gave out Methadone scripts for a paltry sum. This was before there were programs in place, but twelve pills would successfully wean an addict in seven days. New York hardcore addicts in the 60s mainly kept a stock of Methadone to keep from getting sick when the supply dried up. But I tried to quit. I would stay off it for months. Then I would feel I was strong enough not to get strung out again, but weekend 'chipping' quickly led to full blown addiction again. I was leading a double life and managed to keep this all a secret from my parents, even after they found my 'works' in a shoebox under my bed. I was an extremely good liar, even acted cool as a cucumber with a few encounters with police.

Maybe we have guardian angels, because mine turned my addiction into a life saving experience. When I was inducted into the

army at 21, opiates were found in my blood. In 1965 that was an automatic 4F classification. I had to agree to group therapy meetings and there I met addicts much, much worse off than myself, young men and women who thieved and sold their bodies for brutal sex. What a fucking eye opener those sessions were! They were still using and selling packets of smack under the table, I got cured fast and I got out!

Things went well for about ten years, but by the early 70s I was drinking a lot and a moderate coke user. Well, let's put it this way, who wasn't? I was living in London, I was very successful and there was the general opinion shared by all of us 'hipsters' that coke wasn't addictive. What a bunch of assholes we were, my cool crowd and me. I was aware of AA, but to admit I had an addiction problem was something worse than death to me. I had to be seen as in control, a smooth operator, a cool dude, Mr. Nice Guy - I couldn't consider the imagined disgrace.

Let's fast forward to 1999. For a long time I couldn't remember a day without drinking. I managed to stop smoking cigarettes around 1984 and cocaine about a year after. But I was living in London, where alcoholism goes mostly unnoticed and awkwardly ignored. 'Fancy a pint?' was, and still is, a euphemism for 'let's get fucking smashed again - same as last night.' Even when I moved back to the USA in 1989 I still thought like a Jack-The-Lad Brit and couldn't admit to having a real problem until I was finally bloated, overweight and sick. I felt old and defeated. My third marriage was on the rocks and, funnily

enough, I went to my first AA meeting with an idea I could save it if I got sober. But, drunk or sober, it became clear it was not a good marriage. My partner and I couldn't be more incompatible. Alcohol was the glue that held it together. It couldn't be saved. But being sober gave me a strength I didn't think I had anymore. I went to several AA meetings a week for more than a year. It was absolutely great, very much the opposite of my post military rejection sessions. People were taking responsibility for their addictive behavior and I was one of those people. The most liberating words I have ever said in my life were, "My name is Tony, and I'm an alcoholic." You know, no one thought less of me, no one said I was a failure, no one judged me, no one looked down on me. Instead, I was applauded in a full room of happy faces. This was the best thing I could've done at this critical time of my life, emotionally and spiritually.

That was eleven years ago. It has been eleven years of confronting all the possible excuses when I could've jumped back into booze - holidays like Christmas and New Years, anniversaries, birthdays, weddings, losing both my parents, arguments, anguish, depression attacks, fear, catastrophes. For some reason, the mental energy I used to seek getting high flipped 180 degrees and now keeps me sober.

So, I guess I got off on my personal history rather than answering this question objectively. But I'm glad I'm alive to tell my story. If it helps to save just one other soul, I don't care who knows what I've been through, even if it's the headline of The Daily Trashburger.

That was absolutely beautiful, and as far as I'm concerned, one can never be too personal when it comes to this. Being honest about it can be so damn liberating. It's a shame that our society discourages it. Speaking from experience, I think people can be critical when someone gets treatment, because you're automatically branded. It's human nature to judge, but in this case it's just wrong, since it may discourage people from seeking help. I mean, I've always found it curious that the word 'Anonymous' has to be in there in the first place.

I know. I think the 'Anonymous' part came up in a period when there was a lot of disgrace associated with it. AA was invented in the 30s, and of course, back then you couldn't admit to anything that could be perceived as shameful. And I think it continued well into the most liberal era, like the 60s. People weren't willing to admit that they were any kind of addict, yet it was such a liberal environment. I don't think recovery will ever be totally free of stigma and disgrace, but when people like myself go public with it, I only see that as passing on something so beneficial, like "There but for the grace of god went I." But these are the best times I have lived through where general public support for recovery and rehab programs is really high. Everyone has an addict in their family. And man, I want to tell the world that this is so good, and so available, and it's free – specifically talking about AA or NA. Some people need more drastic measures, and I acknowledge that, but I think it suits most people, if they're willing to step up to the plate and admit they have a problem.

It definitely penetrates you, whether you stick with the program or not, which I didn't. When I went through rehab as a kid, part of the

*treatment, in addition to the one-on-one and group therapy sessions, were the 12-Step meetings. I was attending at least two sometimes three a day. So even though I didn't stay clean, it had penetrated me. And I remember one of the counselors saying that even if you go back out and use again, your addiction is ruined – **in a good way**. What happens in the meetings gets under your skin, and you'll never be able to go back to using drugs the same way again. And he was right.*

I like that way of looking at it.

It may be different now, but when I finally did get clean, I was encouraged to lie about my addicted past. I was told it would be detrimental, and if I ever expected to get anywhere, no matter what I decided to pursue, I absolutely had to lie. I don't know if it's any different for public figures, if they're viewed with more tolerance. Perhaps it depends on the person.

I don't think it makes any difference.

So you think there's a general intolerance. Then, as I mentioned, on the other end of the spectrum, you get fans who think it's somehow 'cool' when famous people are strung-out, when the truth is it's pure hell becoming a slave to controlling substances and having your life spin out of control. These people are – or were, in the case of far too many – truly lost, yet they're elevated to a god-like status. What's your take on that?

Well, take Amy Winehouse, for example. Her life and death were tragic yet glamorized. The difference between being famous and anonymous is that you might be just as fucked up as the stars, but you can avoid making the headlines. Winehouse was vilified, glamorized and compassionately eulogized in her short life.

Her death was inevitable. Some addicts are adamant that they don't want to be saved. They have an overwhelming death wish.

And when you're caught up in it, you have minimal regard for the gift that is life – you're almost not even aware of it – which can cause you to push yourself to a point where it could indeed kill you, many times over.

Yes, I was terribly irresponsible in my teens. It's amazing I survived. I couldn't imagine being on that regimen now. Fuck! (laughs)

I know! And in my case, it wasn't merely the immoderate consumption of drugs. I was doing crazy shit, like when I tried to drive a motorcycle into a lamppost. I was on PCP, and truly believed it was what I needed to do at that moment. I don't know if you ever tried PCP?

Wow. (laughs) No, I never tried it.

Lucky you. It propels you into a horrible state. And the odd part about it was that I hated the drug intensely, yet I kept using it. Did you ever have a drug like that? That you absolutely hated, but couldn't stop using?

In my case that would be heroin. Heroin has a specific nature to it, it is truly habit forming. It changes your blood chemistry, so I akin heroin to becoming a vampire, it changes what you are. I don't think any other drug does that quite so intensely. Opiates become part of your blood's molecular structure, and when you take it away you'll suffer greatly if you can't get more. I don't think cocaine is like that, but it's definitely the strongest psychologically addictive drug out there. Maybe alcohol changes the molecular structure of your blood as well, because some people do go into DTs when going cold turkey.

I firmly believe that some of us are born with a certain brain structure. Some of us are drawn to addiction. The only successful control of addiction is COMPLETE abstinence. That is the straight up AA way of thinking.

I've encountered plenty of people who oversimplify it by saying it's a choice, that addicts can just stop, and as you know it's not that easy. There's a physical process at work here. I know in my case, I would wake up first thing in the morning, every morning, and I had to have the drugs, like oxygen.

Same here. And no, it's not that easy, but it depends on clarity, and you're often not clear when you're taking drugs. You need to have that little window or opening, give it a chance, which starts, classically, with one day at a time.

Absolutely. For me, that window was an unexpected 'intervention' of sorts.

I never met or knew anyone who was in AA until about two years before I finally gave up drinking. I had two very dear friends who revealed they were in AA. And for me it was shock, horror. I said, "God you're so normal!" (laughs) I would apologize to them about being a heavy drinker, and both, in their own way said, "That's not for me to judge you, I love you." And I'm telling you, that was pivotal. I wasn't quite ready to give up then, but within two years, I did.

Did you feel as though you were just stumbling through life? I was.

Yes, I was stumbling towards the next drink. I was incredibly unhappy. I felt that my career was over, plus all the other

insecurities that can hit a person in their 50s, or at *any* age. And as I told you, my revelation was that I couldn't remember how long it had been since I hadn't had a drink – *not a day went by*. But I'm a kind of curious person by nature, so, in 1999, I decided to just experiment and go *one day* without alcohol. And maybe I'm blessed with good genes or something, but I didn't shake or crack up, and I actually slept pretty well. And I said, "My god, that wasn't as bad as thought it was going to be!" That was the day after Christmas, Boxing Day.

So how did you resume the helm and get your life back on track? And when your addiction and unhappy marriage were seemingly devouring you, did you ever lose touch with the music?

No, I was always in touch with my musical nature all along, my salvation, and my solace was that I had built this expensive music studio in the basement of my house, which was like my private "den" and I was also making a living down there. But my energy as a human being was bad. The situation I was in – both the alcoholism and marriage – was extremely unhealthy. When I went to my first AA meeting, I realized that I had to change it all, and my energy changed *immediately*. When I was sober, *even for a day*, my energy just changed, and I was thinking clearly, and then I could see the wood for the trees. And little by little I got out of the whole muck and mire of the situation. When my energy changed, and my life circumstances changed, and I became a more positive person, miraculously, the phone started to ring and good projects were offered to me. And the best thing that happened was in 2001, when

my old friend David Bowie phoned me and he said, "Let's make a new album." My gosh, a better thing couldn't have happened, especially at the time. That album was *Heathen*, which is a wonderful album, and making it was a great experience for everyone involved. It marked the beginning of the good space I'm still in. It's not the first time my old friend was a catalyst for me.

That's wonderful and the fact that you pulled yourself together and began to soar again is truly admirable. A lot of people never recover, and only fall into deeper pits of hell.

And this brings us back to the music...

You were a musician first – beginning at a very young age – with aspirations of doing that for a living, before embarking on what would turn out to be an incredibly successful career as a producer. Do you still compose/create/record any personal music at all? And are there plans to release any of it?

I never did anything but music and I tried lots of the many occupations within it. I wanted to be a rock and roll star, like Buddy Holly or Elvis. As I got better on the double bass I thought I had what it took to be a jazz bass player. My guitar playing improved, but both skills were used playing society affairs like weddings and bar mitzvahs. I also played a few years as a bassist in a cabaret band. Yeah, I could play jazz alright, but I couldn't make a living that way.

From about 12-years-old I started composing. My first song was an anti sack dress protest song, "She wore a sack dress and it don't please, oh baby, take off that

chemise." If only I knew John Waters then! I had a great guitar teacher, Leon Block. He taught me both classical and jazz guitar and how to read music. I wrote a small book of complicated jazz pieces I named quite randomly, "Dreams Of Doris," "Kidney and Liver Blues," and the ever forgetful "A La Mer, Sur Un Jour Brumeux."

Then I met my first wife, Siegrid, a kindred spirit. We dropped a lot of acid, as recommended by Timothy Leary, did nothing but that for a year. Then one morning we listened to pop radio and decided that we could do better than what we were listening to. So we wrote lots of songs and auditioned for several labels, even for the legendary writers Lieber and Stoller. We made two disastrous singles for RCA, did some months of live gigs. Then I got a job offer I couldn't refuse, to work in London in 1967. The time and place couldn't have been better for starting a career as a record producer.

My song writing and visions of stardom were put on a shelf. I did make a solo album in the late 70s called *Visconti's Inventory*, and I found I was a bad producer of myself and a bad judge of material. I could do this job perfectly for anyone else, but not for myself. In the 90s I teamed up with two artists as a co-writer and producer. They were Annie Haslam, from the Art Rock group Renaissance and Richard Barone, from the Hoboken group, The Bongos. Apart from fun they weren't successes, as neither artist had the muscle of a big label behind them.

These past few years I have been inspired to write songs again and I have seven I'm

really fond of. Two were written six years ago, but five have been written in the past few months. I have begun recording them and I will try to get an album's worth of material recorded this year. I think I now have the ability to be self-critical. Another happy creative opportunity is being invited to write songs with Alejandro Escovedo. I've produced his two last albums, but this is the first time I've been asked to co-write.

Also, writing my autobiography was so enlightening and educational. I was both encouraged and coached by a couple of literary friends, namely Cynthia Morgan and Richard Havers, to write more. For several reasons I had to leave out big chunks of my autobiography, the book was too long, some stories might have brought on a lawsuit or two, but most of all they could have ended some treasured friendships. I thought I could use those outtakes by fictionalizing them in a novel. Instead I discovered I had a passionate, personal agenda about the pop music culture/industry that I wanted to explore and now the novel is an entirely different book. It is outlined, some trial chapters are written but I need to book time for myself to finish this, enforce a deadline. The final months of writing my biography had to be booked, I had to stop producing music - otherwise I would've never made my publisher's deadline.

Fantastic about the book and songs, I look forward to the finished products.

Now let's talk 'Inspirations' - which is a word I'm personally ambivalent about. I use it more in the 'stimulus' rather than 'influence' sense. There are obviously musical inspirations, but

I'm curious to know if you have any inspirational sources beyond music? For example, certain aspects of my writing are inspired by the films of John Cassavetes and Robert Bresson, among others. Have you ever been inspired by something other than music?

I'd say films. I think if I wasn't making music, I'd be making films. When I make an album, I like to work closely with the lyrics, and I'll see the lyrics in the form of a movie. I also love composers like Elmer Bernstein, and other people who made great music for films. Music for cinema is very inspirational to me, and so I try to build a soundscape, as if the lyrics were actually a picture, and having the music reflect that. I don't just make goofy sounds for the sake of it. The music has to lift up the lyrics, it has to frame them, elevate them, and highlight them. In my teens I studied the Schillinger system of composition, a quasi-scientific combination of math and music. It rendered emotions as mathematical equations with a device called a mood clock. Since I sucked at math, I abandoned the idea and had to trust my instincts about the emotional impact of music. Some graduates of the Schillinger system were George Gershwin, Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn. Schillinger was a contemporary of Leon Theremin and they collaborated several times.

Okay, so you're seeing an image or a series of images in your head.

When you're making decisions regarding whatever it is you're doing - arranging, recording, mixing, etc - does it have to just feel right, without having to analyze it much?

I understand that everyone has a different process, but I usually don't do something until I hear it or see it internally, and then it's just a matter getting it down. And when I do get inspiration - it might be two in the morning, or I might be on my roof doing Taiji - if it's a really good idea, I'll stop and write it down. I am in the habit of doing this, because I have forgotten things. And I'd rather not admit this, but a lot of my best ideas happen in the bathroom. (laughs)

So there's a definite visual process going on, in addition to the sound process.

Yes. Like if someone says, "I want you to write strings for this song." I'll listen to the song on my headphones about three or four times, and then I'll leave it. Then the next day I'll come back and will hear almost the entire arrangement. I know when the cellos are going to come in, when the violins are going to come in, how the violas will support harmonically. Then I write it all out very quickly and spend a couple of hours making it tidy and nice to read for the musicians.

Creation seems to be the easiest part for me, but the hard part is editing and revising.

Tell me about it. I've been working on my book since 2004. It's turned into Proust - I'll be dead before it's done.

Aww. (laughs) Well, I've been working on my new one for quite a while too.

Now how do you work on that? Do you set aside some time every day, or simply jump in whenever you feel inspired?

I think about it all the time. The characters are now alive in my head. I think about my

storyline as if it really happened. I have no plan, I'm writing in spurts. But the desire to finish it persists. I feel if I had food and shoulder massages delivered to me for a full week I could finish the damn thing. As I said, I need to book some book finishing time. In my first book I found my 'voice.' At first I wondered if I should write like Bukowski and lately I've been completely intimidated by Dickens. But I know I should trust the voice in my head. I will do that.

That's what I do. I love Vladimir Nabokov, and a lot of his writing is like that. It doesn't matter who the character is, you feel as though he's speaking to you directly when you read it. Whoever the character, his own conversational ability is in there, which I think is important.

Some of the greatest lyricists I've worked with - Bowie, Morrissey, and Bolan - were excellent conversationalists. In the studio some conversations would be fodder for song lyrics I might be recording an hour later!

Out of curiosity, are there any albums you wished you'd produced but didn't?

I always fancied working with mega poets like Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen and Joni Mitchell, but then I'm so happy I'm a fan, because it is true, once you meet your idols you get a little disappointed. There are a few people I'd like to remain as my idols.

Bowie has been a good friend and a colleague for over 40 years now. Probably, if I never met him or worked with him I'd idolize him too. He sends me really cool music to listen to via emails, and that's not really changed since the early days of our

friendship when he'd play me real obscure pieces of music from his vinyl collection. He is very interested in new music. In recent years he turned me on to very original bands like Animal Collective and Arcade Fire. I really liked them both. We don't always agree, but that's okay. (laughs)

So he keeps up with what's going on out there in the music world.

Yes, he really does, and always did.

What's in the pipeline production-wise?

Well, there is Alejandro Escovedo's album, our third together. We are going to have our second writing session soon. This is very therapeutic for me as Alejandro and I have had similar paths.

I recently came back from London where I worked with a wonderful young group, Prima Donna, and we made an 80s style single. Hopefully I'll get to make an album with them. I have also spoken to Morrissey about the possibility of making a second album with him but nothing is planned. I also met a fantastic group while I was there, Films of Colour. We are planning to start an album later this year in one of my favorite studios, St. Claire, in Lexington, KY.

I am enjoying the way the latest Kristeen Young (KRISTEENYOUNG) EP is being received. She has been promoting in Los Angeles, New York and London. She also opened for Morrissey's tour again, this time solo with just her keyboard, but it's a magical one. We are talking about her next

album being recorded in the analog realm. I'm all for it.

I have an album coming out soon by a young folk singer called Debbie Clarke. We've also written two songs together, the rest of the songs are a combination of pop standards and some specially written for her. We met via email. I loved her melancholy voice, but I tried to put her off because she lived on a remote farm near Wales and I lived in NYC. With no budget it was nigh on impossible to record together. She was very persuasive and forced me to think of some other way to work. She lived only 40 miles from where my daughter and partner ran a studio! So, I recorded the backing tracks for two songs my home studio in New York and sent them to her to practice with. When she was ready she went to my daughter Jessica's studio in Cardiff to record her vocals, whilst I coached her via SKYPE - probably the greatest benefit of the Internet. These two recordings landed her a deal with WEA in Germany. We continued recording her album pretty much in the same way, only we finished a good part of the album in London, in my old studio in Dean street. My son, Morgan, is playing on some tracks as well, and Jessica is singing backups.

And, although I remain friends with Mr. Bowie, who hasn't recorded a new album for eight years, I will never give up hope that one day the phone will ring with a certain request. A kid from Brooklyn can dream, can't he?

There are other projects in the works, but it is too early to talk about them.

As your fans may already know, in February you received The Joe Meek Award for Innovation in Production from The Music Producers Guild. How did that feel? And what are your thoughts on 'awards for art' in general?

The music award system is like a rite of passage and a huge PR boost in one. I have been involved with the Grammys as the president of the New York board of NARAS, a national trustee and a national vice chairman. NARAS does many great works, school programs, mentoring, a music museum, financial support for older recording artists who have lost their fortunes and who are struggling, but The Grammys is a huge annual TV show, with sponsors who want to see high ratings. The big winners you see on TV are also the most popular and the biggest sellers. But there nearly 100 awards, I've lost count, and most of them are given off the air. I'm not cynical, I have one myself and I'm proud of it.

The Music Producers Guild is more aimed at awarding the insiders of the music industry. It is not a TV show, so the award ceremony is more intimate and personal based on skill and creativity. I am pleased to have been given an award for innovation, kind of a lifetime achievement award. That is exactly what I started out to do in the 60s. It was nice to receive confirmation from my peers and even some of my teachers were in that audience. Listen, it's a great feeling to win a prestigious award.

And you have indeed been innovative in the eyes of many. It goes without saying that you were born to make music. Will you continue to do so until you take your last breath, or for as long as

you're able? And if for some reason you do retire at some point, even partially, what will you do?

I would rather die before I lost my hearing. I love what I do more than ever. Right now I feel I have better mental energy than when I was 40. If deafness came before death then I'd jump headlong into writing, I wouldn't waste a moment.

I have trained as an Alexander Technique teacher and I teach when I have time to take on students, but I would teach more if I couldn't make records. I love the health benefits I've had from practicing taiji (Tai Chi) on a daily basis and would probably teach that too. I would have plenty to do before the last hour.

Looking back on your ever growing body of work, if you had to pick one favorite project, what would it be?

I think making *Heroes* was one of the best experiences I've had in my life. There were many peak experiences on that one. For one, Bowie drove through Checkpoint Charlie in a Mercedes convertible with Iggy Pop and Coco Schwab and I, and suddenly we were transported about thirty years in the past - on the Red Army's turf. Getting in and out of there felt very dangerous. But the way we felt in the studio - it was one of

the most positive experiences I've ever had in a studio. We felt heroic, and it's no wonder the album is called *Heroes*. The previous Bowie album was *Low*. By contrast that was a dark and heavy experience.

It was such a great experience making *Heroes*. We were kind of living that album as we were making it, recording by day and prowling Berlin at night, with Iggy. David was writing lyrics moments up until the time came to sing them, you can't get fresher lyrics than that. David's band was in peak form, Brian Eno and Robert Fripp contributed vastly to the sound and David and I were the backing vocalists for most of the songs. We moved to a smaller studio in the Hansa complex and mixed the entire album in about ten days. Of the Berlin "Trilogy" that is the only one that was made entirely in Berlin.

I'm very lucky to do this for a living, because every new album is an enlightening experience. I'm always learning something new. I never make a record the same way twice. I unashamedly listen to my productions from the past over and over again, because I even learn new things from that process. Doing a job like this, living a life like this, is a life worth living.

**WORDS.
WORDS IN.
WORDS IN THE KEY.
WORDS IN THE KEY OF SADNESS.**

By Kim Dallesandro

WORDS.

There is the light on all night to keep the hallucinations at bay but the fear buzzing like electrical currents keeping the feelings of being overwhelmed bright and in.your.face. There's the list: a child, a habit, 3 jobs, babysitters, no car, no this no that, it's utter failure before you start, a hole you try to climb out every day and find yourself at the bottom of every night. It's becoming anyone you're around; laughing too loud to hide the scream that never subsides. I understand the word 'relentless'. I live the word 'alone'.

I'll jump on your bandwagon
Ride your coattails home
Share your deepest secret
And carve your name in stone
I'll steal into long distance
I'll install a private line
I'll catch the obscene caller
From the tap put on the phone
I'll censor correspondence
I'll request you're left alone
I'll move you to a trailer
And that will be your home
I'll break the 10 commandments
And commit a mortal sin
I'll beg for God's forgiveness
Then I'll do it all again
I'll get you hooked on poker
And pour you drinks of gin
I'll take you for your money
And never let you win
I'll be your guardian angel
I'll catch a falling star
I'll offer you the heavens
Still you won't say who you are

Say yes to everything; fastest way to absorb information is to act as if--so blend; reflect back what others represent and become their mirror. Watch how they groom themselves, adjust their masks and learn from it. Never draw attention to yourself unless you're absolutely positively certain. Always try to be last. Chances are if someone else survived so will you.

You live the life of Reilly
And try to make believe
All you have to offer
Is hidden up your sleeve
But I don't want to be your victim #3
Don't pressure me

You push your weight around
And you muscle all your friends
All you have to offer
Is the money you won't lend
And I don't want to be your victim #3
Don't pressure me

WORDS IN.

"You took me from
riches to rags
from a happy heart
to a spirit that sags
riches to rags
And every point
in between call
me names now
you used to call me a queen
riches to rags

It's only love
that money can't buy
and what you say you want
are not the things I can depend on."

And it becomes 3 verses and a chorus, add voice and some echo, change the chorus to full harmony 2 voices key of C. You can't change the key of pain and the pain is constant now, it persists. It is important that the musical arrangement is upbeat, dance music, almost celebratory. It's important to sweat out the sadness.

You say you love me and I'm beautiful, my intelligence is working against me but this world ain't ready for what I know, 'course my excuses are my crutches, but are you ready to hear all the analysis, the words people swear to? Catch me in the wrong, I dare you. Besides your

attention span isn't that long and I'm usually right(eous)about things hidden from sight. Eye to eye contact, are you ready for that?

Things I can't replace are in jeopardy and I get confused when I feel that I'm losing. I can't win a game already won. Did you find the missing puzzle piece I lost (or somebody stole)? I lack that 1 piece to be whole. It is my soul.

I wrote a song in the tradition of "Give Alittle More Time" and "Your Love is Fine" tonight, not a hard times gutter they done me wrong song, but softer. I'd like to work on it and chord it out. Furthermore I have this one line I wrote that belongs pinned to your jacket.

"All a loser gets is lost."

I cashed in the tickets from NYC (Elite) and spent the money more wisely on substances that calm me down. I think I've worked too many days and nights in a row, I need a break, I juggle the hours of a single day to exhaustion and I can barely survive; 4 hours of sleep isn't enough but it's all I'm left with. Life is a balancing act and there is little time for self discovery when you are faced with responsibilities affecting another's life; who the fuck do I think I am anyway? I have these indications I could be somebody, model, songwriter, this that this that this that. Kill it.

"I was dying of thirst in a desert somewhere
Thought I saw an angel the light shone off her hair
Take me angel protect me from all harm
When I start to fall will you catch me by my arm
I need a friend I really need to speak
You see lately I've been feeling kinda weak
It's not the sun, I'm sure it's not the heat
Just been thirsting for somebody been lonely way too long
And can you overlook all that I've done wrong
My friends are gone I find myself alone
Please could you show me how to get back home

I was shipwrecked on an island far from my home
Thought I saw an angel I think she came alone
Take me angel shield my eyes from all I see
Most of what life is showing has been weighing down on me
Speak to me I really need to hear
Tell me how to understand all that I fear
And how to let these thieves steal all I hold so dear
And please overlook all I have done wrong
My friends are gone I find myself alone
Please could you show me how to get back home"

The Quaalude Queens come in teetering on platform shoes, wrapped in satin hair teased to kingdom come; it's always a bet which one will fall first, my money wins most nights when the tips are tight. Working nights is better than trying to navigate through what's left of the

insanity, up at 7am to clean the club, model for the life drawing classes, sell the popcorn and sweat to death in the kitchens before I'm back at the club night after night day after day it's a needle skipping on the soundtrack that is my life same sentiment over and over. I'm tired.

"Hiding on the sidelines
I was barely seventeen
Caught between the past
And things that aren't what they seem
One face was so blank
One was marked with casual lies
Everyone 'round here
Is covered in disguise

Ducking in the alleys
Found me way past twenty now
If they say I'm surviving
Lord, I really can't say how
'Cause one face is so blank
And the others are full of lies
Everyone 'round here
Is covered in disguise"

WORDS IN THE KEY.

Passed around some lyrics (Dum De Dum Do, Baby I Love You) and worked on 'Just Realize', which means nothing after you come down from the rush of anticipation and floating in the dream world of someone.else's.success; I threw my silver horse on a chain at Patti Smith last night and now I want it back, who cares she signed her album backstage "To Eva my space monkey," it wasn't to me and she listened for maybe 30 seconds before I could tell my lyrics were not.the.most.important.thing; this hustling around trying to get these words to people that couldn't give a rat's ass is humiliating at best; and when they do end up pressed into vinyl I've yet to hear a pen glide over a blank check writing my name on it. It's like I should be so fucking grateful to have someone sing my words while the child starves to death. Nail me to your cross.

"You got a ticket to the big time
Lots of cash to throw around
Someone picks you up at airports
No one dares to put you down
Now you hide behind dark glasses
And everybody knows your name
But you don't even talk to me
'Cause I know it's all a game."

WORDS IN THE KEY OF SADNESS:

"Goody two shoes and her fast talking friend
Were seen together at the top of the bend
From what I gather, from all that I know
She ain't no goody two shoes no more

Sweet innocence met with utter desire
It took forever to put out the fire
From what I gather, from all that I know
She ain't sweet innocence no more"

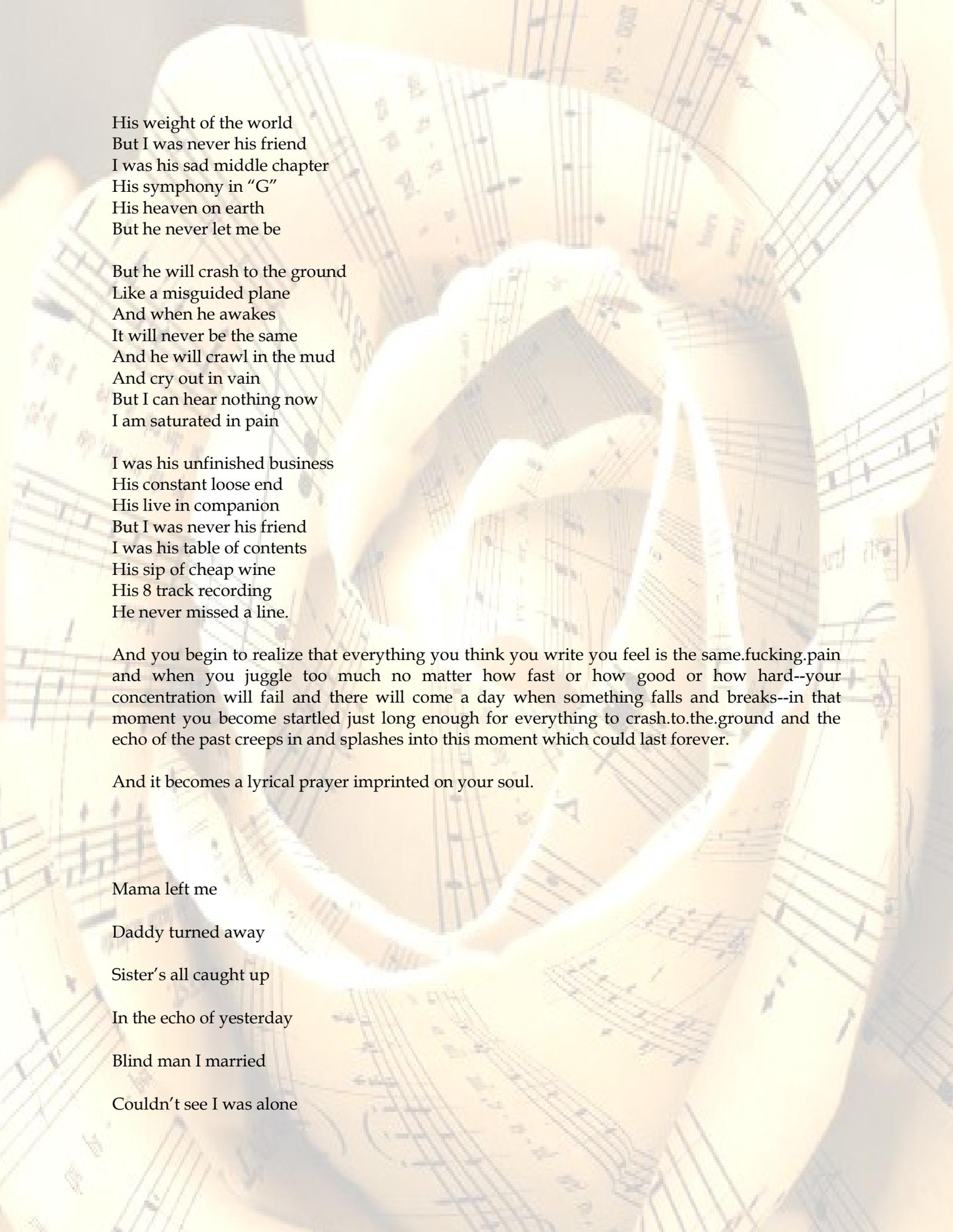
Trust me. It's more important to understand how many minutes you have to withdraw money from 3 different ATM's, the make and model of a fast car and the willingness to share the drugs with the driver, than most anything else I can think of. The downside is going to East Austin at night for more than a BBQ sandwich or an hour of the Blues. The truth is you'll end up one of 3 ways: burned, strung out or arrested. I leave out 'left for dead' because there still is a measure of optimism inside me.

I won't run the risk
Of walking the line
And don't have the guts
To commit a crime
I can't lay my neck
On the line anymore
I won't cheat at cards
To even the score
I won't try to run
I won't try to hide
I'm totally void of ambition

I don't have the will
To go on anymore
I won't tell no lies
I ain't told before
I don't need a thing
To help me along
I don't know the difference
Between right and wrong
I won't try to run
I won't try to hide
I'm totally void of ambition

"Which leads us to failure which I know everything about..." she whispered in the dark.

I was his constant reminder
The change that he would lend



His weight of the world
But I was never his friend
I was his sad middle chapter
His symphony in "G"
His heaven on earth
But he never let me be

But he will crash to the ground
Like a misguided plane
And when he awakes
It will never be the same
And he will crawl in the mud
And cry out in vain
But I can hear nothing now
I am saturated in pain

I was his unfinished business
His constant loose end
His live in companion
But I was never his friend
I was his table of contents
His sip of cheap wine
His 8 track recording
He never missed a line.

And you begin to realize that everything you think you write you feel is the same.fucking.pain
and when you juggle too much no matter how fast or how good or how hard--your
concentration will fail and there will come a day when something falls and breaks--in that
moment you become startled just long enough for everything to crash.to.the.ground and the
echo of the past creeps in and splashes into this moment which could last forever.

And it becomes a lyrical prayer imprinted on your soul.

Mama left me

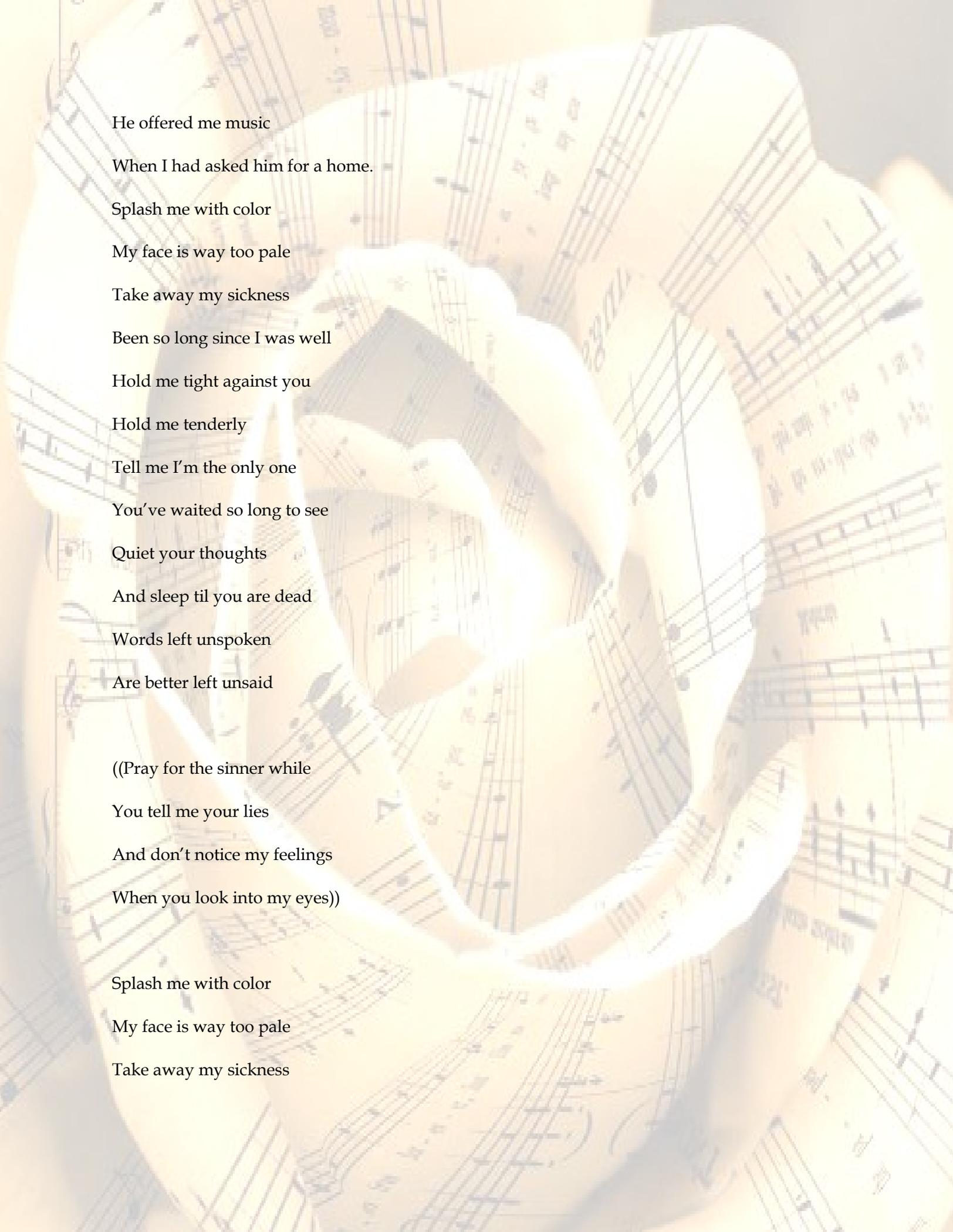
Daddy turned away

Sister's all caught up

In the echo of yesterday

Blind man I married

Couldn't see I was alone

A hand holding a white paper flower against a background of musical notes. The background is a warm, golden-yellow color with faint, overlapping musical staves and notes. The hand is positioned in the center, holding the flower. The flower is made of white paper and has several layers of petals. The text is overlaid on the image in a simple, black, sans-serif font.

He offered me music
When I had asked him for a home.

Splash me with color

My face is way too pale

Take away my sickness

Been so long since I was well

Hold me tight against you

Hold me tenderly

Tell me I'm the only one

You've waited so long to see

Quiet your thoughts

And sleep til you are dead

Words left unspoken

Are better left unsaid

((Pray for the sinner while

You tell me your lies

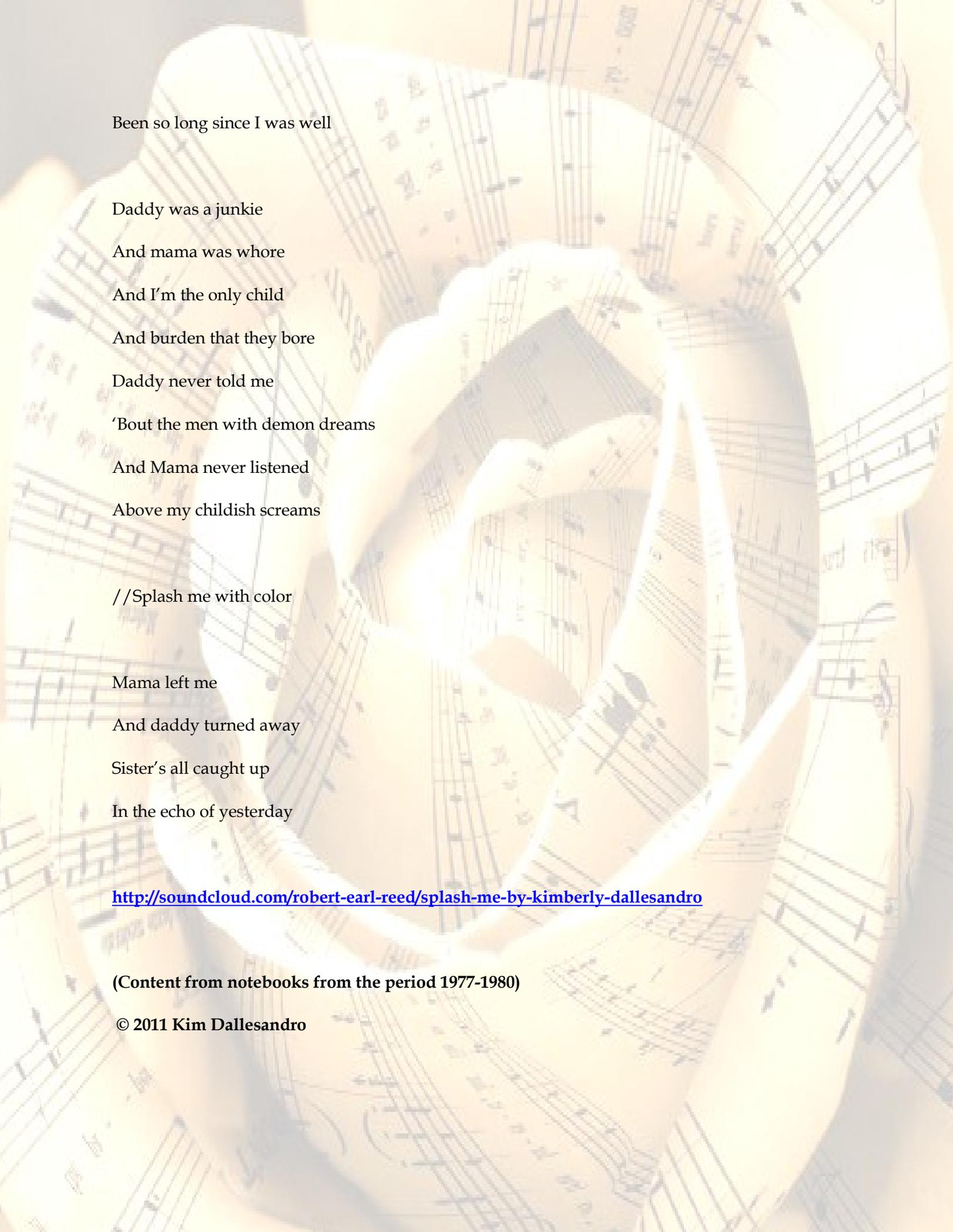
And don't notice my feelings

When you look into my eyes))

Splash me with color

My face is way too pale

Take away my sickness

The background of the image is a close-up, slightly blurred photograph of a hand holding a pen over a sheet of musical notation. The hand is positioned as if about to write or has just finished writing. The musical notation consists of several staves with notes and clefs, though they are not clearly legible due to the blur and the focus on the hand. The overall color palette is warm, with soft yellows and oranges, giving it a nostalgic or artistic feel.

Been so long since I was well

Daddy was a junkie

And mama was whore

And I'm the only child

And burden that they bore

Daddy never told me

'Bout the men with demon dreams

And Mama never listened

Above my childish screams

// Splash me with color

Mama left me

And daddy turned away

Sister's all caught up

In the echo of yesterday

<http://soundcloud.com/robert-earl-reed/splash-me-by-kimberly-dallesandro>

(Content from notebooks from the period 1977-1980)

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WHAT DID YOU DO IN THE ECO-WARS DADDY?

By Feral Kelly

Nobody Loves You When You Got No Shoes

I'd reached a low place, so low I'd've needed a leg-up to reach the ground. The sort of place where friends I'd known for years were crossing the street to avoid me. Breakfast consisted of my body-weight in Valium washed down with enough whiskey to float a decent sized boat, starting a day that usually entailed staggering around trying to beg up enough money for the next bottle, then collapsing into oblivion. I didn't go to sleep and wake up so much as pass out and regain consciousness. 29 years of age and I felt like my life was over; I'd lost my house, job and missus, had a daughter I rarely got to see, and spent my time wallowing in a mire of my own urine, vomit and self-pity, waiting for the reaper so I didn't have to face the guilt of contemplating suicide.

Luckily, one day I staggered into a Good Samaritan in the shape of a bloke known as Boot. Unlike the biblical version, he wasn't a total stranger. Ten years my junior, I'd known Boot since he was a child. The son of a couple of hippies turned junkies, he'd lost his father to an overdose when he was little more than a baby. His mother wasn't in a position to provide much support, so he'd left home at fifteen and now lived in a flat of his own, getting by dabbling in a bit of hash and acid dealing to supplement his benefits. This gave him a reasonable standard of living and allowed him to indulge his

passions, namely raving and party drugs. When he found me I was in a sorry state, barely coherent and on the verge of psychosis. He didn't drink or take downers himself but being the kinda bloke he was, he carried/dragged me back to his flat and tried to get me to eat something whilst listening to me driveling on about how shit my life was and who was to blame. He didn't judge me or try to offer any advice (which was the last thing I needed), instead he just smiled and shook his head like some tolerant favorite uncle, making me feel at home and asking for nothing in return.

I'd been staying with him for about a fortnight when he got a visit from Skin, his god(less)father, a militant anarchist and agitator who was in town promoting an upcoming international anarchist conference due to be held at an unknown location somewhere in London. I wasn't capable of being enthusiastic about much at all at the time, but between them they convinced me it would be well worth attending and might even inspire me to do something other than self-destruct. As it turned out they were spot on.

Raging Against The Machine

About a fortnight later Boot and me started hitching out of town, heading for London. We got into Hammersmith mid-afternoon and jumped the tubes to the building that had been chosen to house anyone who'd had to travel to get to the conference and

didn't have anywhere else to crash. We were amongst the first few to arrive so we pitched in, getting the place in order, ready to receive the estimated two thousand anarchists who'd come from further afield. I'd squatted a few places before but wasn't prepared for what was about to happen.

The building itself was a four storey commercial property, recently vacated, slap bang in the middle of London's financial district. Within an hour of us arriving, a team of tradesmen turned up and proceeded to sort out the water and electricity supplies, change the locks and ensure the building was secure. London's squatting scene was far more organised than what I was used to, it comprised people from a variety of backgrounds and political affiliations, working together to fulfill a genuine need for housing which was not being met by the authorities. The conference didn't exactly fall into this category, but the network was available and included many individuals sympathetic to the cause and more than happy to get involved.

The entrance to the building was a double door, behind which was a foyer area, then another set of lockable double doors. To the side of the foyer was a small room, originally used to house the reception staff. We decided that this was an ideal place to vet the soon to arrive multitudes. In an anarchist utopia this would've been unnecessary, but in the real world there were a lot of people with a vested interest in disrupting the conference. The word on the street was that we could expect a visit from various right-wing groups apparently intent on causing mayhem and generally fucking

us over, so we decided to stick someone in the reception room and I volunteered for the post. Although I'm a natural born coward, I was permanently full to the brim with Dutch courage whilst simultaneously equipped with a tolerance that allowed me to function on a fairly efficient level when sufficiently motivated. Armed with the door keys and a two-way radio connecting me to the first floor, I unpacked my sleeping bag, cracked a bottle of vodka and sat down, ready to greet new arrivals.

I didn't have long to wait, within the hour people started arriving, some in groups of twenty or more, some in smaller groups, and a few loners. What surprised me more than anything was the diversity of these people. There were the Brighton (Be right on) crews, all loved up, full of hugs and drugs; the northern tribes, militant and up for a ruck; wide-eyed provincials from villages as far apart as Landsend and John-o-Groats, Margate and Cardigan, and they were just the British (I hate that word) contingents. This was a whole new world to me and my eyes were probably the widest of all. I attempted to exude an air of welcoming efficiency, directing people to suitable areas in the building in which to set up camp. Most of them were happy to bed down on the first floor, which was comprised of one large room that could easily sleep five hundred or so, and about twenty smaller rooms that were ideal for small groups/couples that preferred a tad more intimacy.

A while later, people starting arriving from abroad; Canadians, Americans, Iranians, Iraqis, Australians, representatives of most

European countries (East and West), South Africans, North Africans, people of all colours and creeds, coming together for a common cause . There were Californians even more cool and laid back than the Bristolians, a mad genius from L.A. even more up for a ruck than the northerners (this bloke was the only person I've ever met to successfully jump a plane), anarchists from countries I couldn't even spell, let alone find on a map. The only group that gave me any grief were a crew of hard-core lesbians who, after being invited in, decided to take over the whole ground floor, putting up signs saying 'women only'. I felt that this was more than a little unfair, considering there were only about thirteen of them and they were laying claim to a space which could easily have housed several hundred. When I pointed this out to them their spokesperson released a veritable deluge of verbal vitriol, claiming that my stance was typical of males everywhere and didn't I understand that some of these women had been abused by members of my gender. I replied that at that moment there were Israelis and Palestinians sitting together upstairs, trying to overcome the divisions caused by years of mutual hatred and murder, in the name of comradeship and tolerance. I also let it be known that the squat had been cracked, secured and generally sorted by men, and wondered out-loud if they were happy to stay in such a building. At that point I was saved from a potentially unwinnable argument by a Swedish couple who turned up with their young son in a pram, asking if I could find them a quiet room as they'd been traveling for two days and their kid needed to get some kip. I immediately

removed the 'women only' sign and replaced it with a sign which read 'families only'. On their way out I mentioned to the women that if anyone else had turned up requesting an individual space on the grounds of gender, race, colour etc. they would have been ejected via a fuckin' window. Don't get me wrong, I love empowered women, but there's a time and place for everything. Except prejudice.

The conference was spread out over three days with a veritable cornucopia of events, including lectures, debates, lectures that turned into debates, debates that turned into diatribes, book fairs, poetry readings, gigs, street theatre, and what was shortly to become my personal favorite, direct action. Until that point I'd never really considered myself a true anarchist. Along with so many others of my generation, my ideas on anarchism were coloured and distorted by one Mr. McLaren and co. That cunt's got a lot to answer for. Now I was surrounded by people with whom I shared a lot of ideas, were happy to discuss almost anything without the threat of violence, and I felt part of a multi-national movement comprising individuals all aiming in roughly the same direction.

The gathering culminated on the third day with a picnic outside parliament where over two thousand people spread out blankets, played music, juggled, danced, drank and got stoned. The atmosphere was one of jollity and togetherness, the police presence was visible but low-keyed, they simply formed a line between the crowd and the House of Commons itself.

After a dram or two, Boot and I decided to make our way down to the police line for a chat. At that point I can honestly say that I had no intention of causing any trouble, I just wanted to see what was goin' on. When we got to the front of the crowd there were about a hundred masked-up militant anarchists shouting abuse at the coppers, but although the atmosphere was quite tense, I witnessed no physical violence from either side. Being somewhat in my cups, I decided to attempt to exercise my right as a citizen to cross the road, which happened to be the other side of the police line. I walked down the line repeating my request to a number of officers, most of whom either ignored me or smiled and shook their heads. If I'd received no other response I'd have probably got bored and returned to the middle of the crowd and continued to party, but this was not to be. As I was about to abandon my mission I came across a PIG who screamed in my face a sentence I'll never forget; "Fak orf back to yor awn country ya woolyback bawsterd an' moind yor awn fackin' bizniz!" For a moment I was frozen to the spot, in shock and disbelief. People often talk about a red mist, but on the few occasions I've totally lost it, it's more like a white cloud. I started hurling abuse at the pig, and at that point his sergeant, who'd seen the whole thing, pulled him out of the line, but for me it was too late. He'd flipped a switch in my head and I went from harmless drunk to raging hooligan before you could say shit. I started running down the line between the coppers and the Black-Block, spouting obscenities, threats and spittle, closely followed by Boot who was equally incensed. This continued for a while until we came across a flagpole,

atop of which flew the butcher's apron (otherwise known as the union jack). Boot miraculously produced a can of lighter fuel and a Zippo. Winking at me he suggested we set fire to this symbol of oppression, so I stood against the pole and he climbed up my back, helped and urged on by the gathering crowd. It wasn't what you'd call a spectacular fire, but Boot managed to at least scorch the flag, so as the adrenaline subsided we descended and melted back into the crowd before the coppers could grab us.

I returned to my original position, roughly in the middle of the crowd, sat down on a blanket and proceeded to get well pissed. A couple of hours later I was feeling pretty chilled and the earlier shenanigans were all but forgotten. What I didn't realise at the time, and only discovered when I saw the video footage a couple of weeks later, was that while we were making merry, the police were swapping shifts. As the camera crews packed up to leave, the lines of mainly friendly looking officers, wearing the usual coppers' attire, were being replaced by T.S.G., (Tactical Support Group). Basically mean muthafukas in crash-helmets and body armour, carrying riot shields and side-handled fuck-you-up batons. As I sat there trying to learn how to juggle I started to become aware of people shouting from behind me, I wasn't sure at first what was happening but as the shouting became more intense and closer to our position I managed to pick out the words "Snatch squad!" I'd never heard the term before but I was soon to learn precisely what it meant. As the shouting increased in volume and proximity, I stood up to see

what all the fuss was about. The crowd behind me parted like the red sea to reveal a V-shaped formation of coppers heading in my general direction. Too late, I realised that they weren't coming near me, they were coming for me.

I later learned that the T.S.G. took the idea of snatch squads from the Romans who used to target supposed leaders in an opponents' army and send in a group of elite troops in a formation shaped like the letter V to remove them from the battle. The T.S.G. had adapted it somewhat but it was nonetheless very affective; Modern snatch squads are made up of three, nine, or twenty-one officers, two thirds forming the V to beat off the bystanders leaving the third in the middle to subdue and restrain the target. Coordinated by an 'eye in the sky' police helicopter, the now fully transformed riot squad charged the crowd while a full-on twenty-one man snatch squad grabbed me, cuffed me and dragged me, kicking and screaming, through their advancing lines. Within thirty seconds I'd been removed from a throng of like-minded souls and was now alone, behind enemy lines, handcuffed to a copper who'd just taken a bottle in the face from someone trying to stop them from hauling me away. Already dazed and confused, I really started to panic when the orifice in charge of the 'operation' instructed the arresting copper to put me in the back of a paddy-wagon. Patting the now profusely bleeding copper on the back he said "We'll leave the two of you in peace for a bit, take as much time with the bastard as you need." After the copper had received some remedial treatment, I was thrown into the back of the

wagon, handcuffed to a bloke who was pumped full of adrenaline, slashed across the face, and had been given free rein to dole out whatever punishment he deemed fit. At this point I didn't know whether to cry, puke, piss or shit myself. Sitting on the bench in the back of the van, alone apart from the injured copper, I kept my mouth shut and waited for the inevitable kicking to begin. Incredibly, it didn't happen, he was visibly shaking, obviously in shock, his head in his hands; I could feel the tension as he tried to bring himself under control. After about five minutes of deep breathing, he looked me in the eye and said "I better go and get this seen to," pointing to the gash across his forehead. Then he uncuffed himself, re-cuffed me to myself, and left in search of medical treatment. In my now considerable experience, decent coppers are rarer than rocking-horse shit, but this bloke was as decent as they come. I didn't see him again until I was up in court, facing a charge of 'Inciting a Riot', but that's another story.

When we got back home I wasn't in such a low place as before, I still took Valium and drank too much, but now I had an address book full of people who liked and valued me. Apparently there were all manner of events/actions either happening or due to happen all over the country. People were partying with a purpose and I was invited.

Starting Small And Close To Home

Not long after getting back from London, I got to hear about something going down in my own back yard. Although I'd had a go at vegetarianism and helped raise money for

the local Hunt Saboteurs, I can't honestly say that I was particularly concerned about animal rights. Like most people, I didn't condone cruelty, but found it more convenient to ignore it rather than actually do anything about it. When I found out that our local airport was exporting veal calves to France and that there was a group intent on stopping this from happening, I had to get involved. (I later discovered that the cruelty involved in producing veal is illegal in this country, so the farmers ship them abroad to be tortured and butchered, then re-import the finished product as 'quality' meat). I had a lot of anger and frustration inside me, and now I'd found a means to vent it on those who I felt deserved a bit of grief.

The first day, me and Vlad, an old mate from my time as a free-party animal, turned up at the main entrance to the airport, armed with a couple of bottles and minds bent on mischief.

I awoke the following morning, staggered to the nearest off-license and to my surprise, on the front cover of the local paper was a photo of Vlad, his severely hung-over visage protruding from beneath a tarpaulin outside the airport gates.....

Claremont Road

Got a phone-call off The Berserker telling me that the Claremont road squats were about to be evicted, and asking if I was up for a face-off with the forces of darkness. Fuckin' right I was. All I knew at the time was that some houses had been squatted, were due to be demolished to make way for

the M11 extension and that people were intending to oppose it. That was all I needed to know, so armed with some basic directions and the mandatory two bottles (J.D. and Tequila if memory serves), I stuck out my thumb and headed for The Smoke. By the time I got there, hindered somewhat by the spirits and my legendary lack of any sense of direction, it was dark, the eviction was due to start at dawn, and there were bodies everywhere, making last minute plans and trying to instill in the newcomers the need for non-violence. Fired up, fuelled by Dutch courage, I proceeded to make a complete arse of myself, narrowly avoiding being told to fuck off, before collapsing into my usual catatonia.

I was rudely awakened at dawn by a sledge-hammer being swung into my back. This wasn't a deliberate act of violence against my person; I'd simply crashed out in an attic and the ceiling below was being smashed through in an attempt to catch the defenders napping. Barely able to remember where I was, and why, I did what I always do when sober and faced with real or potential pain; I fucked off sharpish in the opposite direction. In this case the opposite direction was upwards, so after frantically punching my way through the tiles I scrambled onto the roof; the sight that greeted me was enough to bring tears to my eyes.

What I hadn't realised the night before was the scale of the place. The squats comprised two streets, at right-angles to each other, and every roof was crammed with people. There were cargo-nets and rope walkways strung between the houses and trees on the

other side of the street. The trees contained tree houses which were also full of people; there were people in the nets, on the walkways and even a few brave souls who'd locked themselves to concrete blocks dug into the road, blocking access to the heavy machinery and attendant multitudes of police, security guards, bailiffs and demolition contractors intent on reducing the street to rubble.

I'd emerged onto a roof at the far end of the main terrace. On the very end house I was amazed to see a scaffold tower rising out of the building to a height of well over a hundred feet, atop of which was a sound system, mounted on a solid platform and surrounded by barriers and barbed wire. As the first bulldozer started up so did the system, blaring out the most appropriate tune imaginable; 'Fuck 'em and their law!' I haven't got a clue how many of us there were, but it had to be close to a thousand.

Apart from the visible masses, there were people in tunnels and bunkers, others walled up in undisclosed locations, and untold numbers outside the eviction zone ready and willing to provide whatever support was necessary, even the Red Cross were there, (may the Goddess bless their compassionate hearts).

The first ones to be targeted were the people in the lock-ons, as the filth couldn't get the machinery through without first removing them. These brave souls had volunteered to be the first line of defence; more or less cannon fodder. They'd stuck their arms into four inch drainage-pipes encased in concrete, and then padlocked their wrists to

metal bars at the bottom of the pipes before removing and chucking the keys. That must've taken more bollocks than I can imagine ever being able to carry. The stormtroopers began by trying to coerce them into 'letting go' with threats, then, when that didn't work, basically started torturing them. They wouldn't believe they were locked-on and couldn't let go even if they'd wanted to, so they started pulling and twisting arms, slipping in the odd dig, removing all padding, and generally making it as painful as possible. At this point quite a few of us on the roofs, who hadn't quite got the hang of 'Non-Violent Direct Action', started ripping off slates to use as missiles, until it was explained to us by the more informed that this was exactly what the pigs wanted us to do, as it would give them an excuse to beat the fuckin' crap out of everyone. Suitably chastised, we had no option but to sit there voicing our outrage until they finally brought in cutting gear, trashed the lock-ons and the real fun began.

They spent the rest of the day clearing the street of anything they could move, including the graffiti covered scrap-cars that had been filled with earth and plants, sculptures, banners, and cutting the walkways and cargo-nets. There was one girl who refused to get out of the net she was in, but they cut it regardless. I'll never forget the sound of her head hitting the tarmac after she fell a good fifteen feet. Miraculously, apart from minor concussion, she was o.k., but at the time we all thought she was dead and another burst of abusive outrage erupted from the roofs. Before fuckin' off for the night, the last thing they

did was erect an eight ft fence between the street and the railway line opposite, completing the barrier which now surrounded the whole eviction site. Then most people crawled back into the attic spaces still intact and tried to get some kip. Two houses were particularly safe as every room had been filled with used tyres, preventing any access apart from the roof.

When I woke at dawn, determined not to be caught out again, I noticed that the fences they'd erected the night before were gone. On closer inspection I realised that during the night they'd been taken down and were now secured to the inside of the squat windows and doors as barricades; now that's what I call recycling. The pixies had been busy all night; most of the walkways had been replaced and supplies brought in. I wasn't feeling particularly well; I was suffering from pretty serious D.T.s and severely dehydrated (one of the first things they did was cut off our supply of drinking water). I'd also forgotten to bring my medication, so was in a more or less permanent anxiety attack. Day two of the eviction saw the enemy start to physically demolish the first of the houses. Some people were locked-on to different parts of the buildings, forcing the destructors to cut them out before trashing the houses. They started at the other end of the street to where I was, so I got to witness most of the action, as those who weren't shackled fell back along the rooftops and took up positions closer to the scaffold tower. My memory gets a bit hazy at this point, but I can remember waking up in the middle of the night, sliding down the roof. I scrambled back up to the ridge and tied

myself onto the roofing timbers by the wrist.

When I woke up again, it was the beginning of day three and I realised I couldn't last much longer. I was practically out of my mind, and of no use to man or beast. I was determined not to meekly admit defeat, but also knew I couldn't last another day. My opportunity came when I saw a sixteen tonne track machine making its way along the back gardens. I knew that there was a tunnel underneath the gardens, connecting one of the houses to the outside world, and that it was occupied by at least one person. People were screaming at the driver to stop but it was hopeless, they hadn't been told about the tunnel as it was being used to ferry in supplies rather than as a defence tactic. I knew there was only one way to stop the machine, so before I had a chance to think twice about what I was doing, I cut myself free, stood on the ridge and, taking a run-up, jumped off the roof, aiming for the front bucket of the machine. At this point everything slowed down; I was over forty feet off the ground, flying through the air, when I caught sight of the driver, and our eyes met. It all took less than a second, but I can clearly remember watching him attempt to turn the arm of the bucket so I'd fall to the ground. Fortunately for me, my angle of descent combined with my momentum and the delayed response of the mechanism, meant that the bucket only moved a couple of feet before I hit it with my chest (cracking two ribs), and rolled inside. Before I realised what was happening the bastard swung the arm around, opened the bucket and dropped me to the ground where I was greeted and cuffed by a couple of eagerly

awaiting Riot Squad. My outbursts and pleas regarding the tunnel and its occupier/s were ignored and I was simply dragged to the perimeter fence, photographed, and then released. As far as I was aware, my actions were never caught on camera, and for ages I didn't even meet anyone who'd even witnessed it, when I eventually did I felt like a proper hero, but that was not to happen for a long time.

After receiving some basic first-aid and re-hydration from the Red Cross I was taken to a safe-house near to the eviction site itself where I was given some food and (thank fuck) a decent quantity of much needed alcohol by someone who could obviously tell I was in dire need of a drink. The place was buzzin' with energy, but I was in no fit state to be of any help so I just sat back and watched, and it was one of the most empowering experiences of my life. There were people with c.b.s and two-way radios in contact with those still inside (this was before most people had mobile phones), others preparing press releases, and even one or two brave fuckers who'd been evicted once and were trying to get back in. As darkness fell I saw a team of runners, some of whom were professional athletes, dressed in black lycra, using gaffa tape to strap essential supplies to their bodies before running through the cordons, vaulting the barbed-wire fences and delivering whatever was needed. Some of this lot came back bleeding, panting and sweating profusely, stopping only to be re-supplied before going back over the front line. I swear I saw one bloke complete five runs in under two hours before finally collapsing, out cold, on the nearest sofa. He

slept during the day then repeated the process again the following night.

After the embarrassing episode of the fences turned into barricades, they'd decided to man the perimeter 24/7 but those still inside were holdin' out well and the supporters on the other side of the fences were backin' them up any way they could.

By day five, after the enemy had evicted and trashed almost the whole street, the only thing still standing was the scaffold tower and the house it had grown out of. When the tower had originally been left to its defenders, those on the way down had greased the scaffold poles to prevent anyone trying to climb it. This meant that they had to bring in a hydraulic platform, mounted on a low-loader, (usually called a cherry-picker) full of beefed-up bailiffs to bring the last few defenders down.

At the time, there were basically three types of protesters; People who held sites day to day, people who worked the offices (more of whom later), and people who only turned up for potential evictions. Although all parties were necessary, and people swapped duties, it did cause some friction.

The Fairmile protest had been started by an ex-para known as Cat. A veteran of earlier campaigns (see 'Yr Enfys), he'd centred the first camp around a six hundred year old oak tree that was slap-bang in the middle of the proposed route and held it more or less single-handedly until people began to arrive and a whole community grew around the site.

I'd visited the site a coupla times in the past, but now I was a full-blooded and bloodied eco-warrior, exhausted from recent evictions and I considered myself a veteran in my own right. Fairmile was run with almost military precision, in stark contrast to the other campaigns I'd been involved with to-date. The camp had lots of rules and a code of conduct that was difficult to work out. In all fairness, I have to say that I can, in hindsight, see both points of view; The people who'd been there for months, working their bollocks/ovaries off building defences, resented people turning up, lying around doing bugger all except getting mashed and re-living their latest exploits and using up the limited resources. On the other hand, people who've been fighting the good fight, going from eviction to eviction, have a right to expect a little empathy and T.L.C. from people they consider family, especially when they've gone way past the point of burn-out and have no-where else to go. To quote a voice from the darkness during one particularly heated fire-side debate; 'We're the only army in history to send it's casualties to the front line.' That hit the nail on the head and led to much hugging and back-slapping before it was discovered that there was no flour left and the barney started anew.

Fairmile was the first campaign to fully utilise tunnel-systems. As the closest thing the movement had to an engineer (apart from Parsley), I'd been asked to call down a few months before and give my opinion on their safety. I think they'd hoped I'd have a look, nod knowledgeable and declare them safe. What actually happened was that after descending about twenty feet down a two ft

square unshored shaft, I shot out like a rat up a drainpipe screaming about death-wishes and criminal negligence. Not only had they dug down, but then they'd gone horizontal for about the same distance and dug a chamber in which they intended to house some very brave defenders.

Ten years later; Turning full-circle without a revolution.

I'm in a low place, six foot down to be exact, I'm not dead, I'm digging a grave. It's not mine but I almost wish it was. I split up with my missus a coupla years back, leaving behind my young son, the family home and all hope of a happy ending. I now live in a single room in a shared house, basically a nest made of empty cans, dirty needles and broken dreams, occasionally I put a bit too much smak in my gun, accidentally/on purpose, so I don't have to deal with the guilt of contemplating suicide.

The hole we're digging is for Boot. Boot died of an overdose, (like father, like son) and it has been decided to bury him on private land so when I was asked to help dig his grave I thought it was the least I could do.

It's a beautiful place, two-thirds the way up a mountain overlooking an estuary, leading out into the open sea. Woody and me dug most of the hole between us yesterday, but this morning at least five hundred people have turned up to give Boot a decent send-off. Most wanted to lend a hand with the digging; it's been hard work, as we hit shale at about four ft. so I was more than happy to let the others have a go; all I'm doing

now is squaring off the bottom corners. I didn't realise how easy it is to bury someone legally without involving the authorities. Apparently all you need do is ensure that the grave is no-where near a watercourse and have the landowners' permission. (I' really fuckin' hope that is all you need do, 'cos that's all we have done and I don't fancy diggin' the poor bastard up again.)

It's about an hour later and I'm taking one last look at the gravesite before the coffin's brought up. Half way up I bump into my five-year old son who's with a few of his mates. He says that they've just been up to the grave and saw Boot lying next to the hole (he hasn't seen Boot for years and doesn't remember what he looks like.). Confused and a little worried, I hurry up to the spot. The place is deserted apart from one of Boot's London mates who's lying flat out next to the hole, passed out after starting the wake early. All I can think is thank fuck my son and his mates didn't decide to roll him in and finish the job off themselves.

The chosen spot is in a small clearing about half a mile up a 1:1 incline, the slope covered with dense Spruce. The task of physically getting Boot and coffin up there is gonna be no mean feat, so as someone nails down the lid, I organize four teams of six bearers who do a kind of relay, swapping over every hundred yards or so. Just like Tom Sawyer white-washing the fence, what at first looks like fuckin' hard work soon becomes an honour, and everyone wants to join in. Boot practically

flies up the slope, like some sort of tobogganist in reverse.

As is so often the case, Boot had O.D.d in London after a fairly decent break from gear. As most junkies know, a little treat after you've been clean for a while is often the last treat you'll ever have.(I'd love to know how many cons are killed by their discharge grants, I know of at least ten.)

To be fair, the London crew has done him proud; a handmade coffin complete with a hardwood (Oak, I think) plaque to mark the grave, with a Welsh Dragon burned into it along with the relevant dates. This crew don't like me for reasons I'm not too sure about, but in the main part I haven't had any grief off them (yet).

There's no service as such, anyone who's got anything to say just gets up and does so. I get up, say my piece, then get up again (somewhat drunkenly), say some more, and leave before the graveside wake begins. In search of another Good Samaritan.

The End.....

JUNKIE FUNERAL

By dixē.flatlin3

It was the winter of 1993 when Bob died. Although I had never met him, Bob was at the center of one of the most dramatic human ceremonies I have ever witnessed. Ever. I had lived in the area less than a year, abandoning my beloved homeland for parts less traveled. How I first heard about Bob's untimely demise, I cannot exactly recall. I am going to go with a fuzzy recollection of working in the same salon as a gal he dated. How she and I met (since she got me the job at the salon) I honestly do not remember. For the purpose of this telling, I will call her Lindsay. Lindsay and I were fast BFFs. She and I both preferred our drugs a bit harder than whatever designer drugs the college kids were sucking down at the local raves. 1993 was sort of the year the rave exploded in a Lollapalooza fueled wave of debauchery that's ramifications are quantifiable in the present. Lindsay and I were on the wrong side of the tracks from this, literally. In the densely populated college town where this played out, we were on the opposite side of the tracks from the University. Lindsay and I worked in a section of town loving called 'skid row' by the locals. The salon was in the heart of bars, tattoo parlors, piercing emporiums, head shops, and comic-book stores. We loved our shop; it was an endless freak show. We even had a wall in the shop where our clients could leave a permanent note. It took me less than a week to realize I was the only female in the salon with no interest in getting shitty drunk nightly and engaging in regretful behavior with the teeming sea of available

local musicians. Lindsay and Wendy were quite the opposite. They bartered their styling skills to gain access to the people they wanted to know. Lindsay and I were just as likely to be found at the local dungeons, as we were the local bars. This is back when body piercing was still very much separate from tattooing and it all was unsavory and intoxicating. Lindsay called me to meet her at a local tattoo artist's place. He was working out of a garage that had been converted into a more than clean private studio. He was strictly by appointment, as was his partner, who just happened to be a total junkie. (Junkie = Heroin. Tweaker = Meth. Dope = Heroin and/or Meth depending upon the context.) Here we discussed Bob. You can learn a lot about a person during extensive tattooing. I sat next to Lindsay, as her leg was transformed into a loving reminder of Bob. Everyone in this entire equation knew Bob, except for me. An irony that was not lost during the weeklong festivities that comprised his memorial. These people all had a long history that my recent relocation did not afford me, but they were welcoming, nonetheless.

By contrast, time away from Lindsay was spent either within the secure walls of my own apartment, or at the home of another local I had befriended. His name was Alejandro. We called him Alex and somehow he was at the center of this local scene. I believe it was the efforts of his older siblings (several of which were local-bred, art curators in metropolitan areas) in

the early days that bestowed upon Alex a credibility that was neither deserved nor warranted. He was actually a pompous ass, who was painfully in the closet. I love queens, so he and I were fine (or so I thought.) When we were at Alex's parent's casa, everything was kosher. Lindsay didn't come around Alex's much. She preferred the bars and was always in a constant state of recovery from the hangover the night before. Often I left Alex to meet up with Lindsay, who was always out and about. This was always met with disapproving looks and some comments. Apparently, my refusal to drink the designer drug Flavor-Aid caused waves in the local hierarchy. I did not accept that my drug use meant I was an insufferable junkie with no relevance. Alex was a hysterical mama's boy who convinced himself that everyone was at risk of becoming an I.V. drug-using whore, at any given moment. So Lindsay and I kept our activities on the DL and did our thing. Both sides told me the story of Bob in the week preceding his burial. By the end of the week, the wild rumors were dispelled with cold, hard facts as laid out in police reports. I had heard so many conspiracy theories during this time it was astonishing that so many junkies could connect that many dots. Turns out Bob had suffered the same fate as many other unfortunate addicts. He had overdosed in the company of addicts. Which is the ultimate party foul. Because all the people involved are far too self-centered and incapacitated to be of much assistance with the simplest of tasks. Now imagine one of them (or apartment full of) trying to decide if your life is worth losing their high over? Because calling the police will be a total buzz-kill for everyone else that lives in the apartment. You are already dead to them.

You are a junkie, who likely was late on your share of the bills, and most importantly, no junkie is going to call in the uniforms. So, the door to Bob's room was closed, after it was confirmed that he indeed had overdosed (whether he was actually dead at this point no one is willing to say) by the beautiful junkie widow who injected drugs at nearly the same time, and lived to tell the tale. Well, sort of.

Once the initial shock of Bob's death wore off, the details involved in tidying up his affairs was left to the committee. I never had confirmation, but I suspected Bob was a throwaway kid. The kind whose family had either never been worth much-of-a-fuck, or one that could no longer tolerate the abuse his addiction necessitated. I believe my initial assessment of him is correct. Whatever the case, all of Bob's belongings had to go somewhere and that somewhere was agreed upon as Alex's parent's garage. All of Bob's worldly goods were sorted on a concrete slab. Bob had been dead for two days prior to the authorities being alerted. His housemates all went out to score drugs and thought to call the police on their way out. Reporting that their roommate had not been seen in several days, after mentioning an illness. EMTs said the smell would have been impossible to miss in the apartment. Bob's roomies all went into hiding, of sorts. No charges had been filed, nor accusations made, and yet every person who lived there, at the time of Bob's death, went M.I.A. Which was a blessing. A lot of drunken threats were made during the week to hunt them down and exact vengeance upon them for mistreating anyone so vulnerable. These vigilante posses were often quelled with the harsh acknowledgment that a fucking junkie

really cannot help themselves, let alone others. A lot of beer was consumed. A lot of dope was shot, smoked, and snorted. Tears were plentiful and not always sincere. Amidst all of this incestuous, false, pretentious, painful mourning, it became apparent that Bob was an asshole. None of the stories were very eulogic. In fact, most involved walking in on Bob doing one of two things: drugs or fucking. That was it.

Lindsay's sorrowful, drug-fueled confessions were the most powerful to me. Like Nietzsche's abyss type shit. Being in such proximity to black holes is not without its lasting effects. It gets rather surreal about hour six of tattooing and talking about a dead dude that by all accounts was a horrible person. Even Lindsay shared this opinion of Bob. As far as I could tell, Lindsay was likely the closest person to him, who truly knew him. Everyone else in the show seemed to be simply filling a role. The obligatory former and current bandmates, girlfriends, groupies, drug dealers (yes, they actually do make an appearance,) colleagues and friends. There was no family. None. Alex's family took the job of hosting Bob's final farewell rather seriously. Halloween was close, when he died (always with the drama, these guys!) Alex's sister, who was a curator of a gallery in New Mexico and knew Bob, flew in to set up a Dia De Los Muertos retrospective on the walls of the family home. Alex's parents were the best funeral directors I have ever had the pleasure of working with. Lindsay often spoke of this. She had no desire to attend any of these nightly gatherings, but often grilled me for details afterward. What else did we have to do at four in the morning but talk, right? We talked about Bob's drug use and her account of his

descent into addiction. Bob and she had quite a lengthy history. Much of which was her saving his sorry ass from the world. She adored him but didn't love herself. Sadly, this made her an easy target for him. Because junkies do that, you know. They are consummate professionals at mimicking humanity and subscribe to the P.T. Barnum ode of life: every crowd has a silver lining. We also discussed our own compulsions to numb ourselves senseless. Heroin came up. How could it not? She admitted to having tried it once with Bob and being terribly afraid of dying. I admitted I was from Hollywood and had never really doubted that the shit was deadly. Therefore, I stayed the fuck away from it. Besides, needles were dirty. Like, icky dirty.

I know that in the months preceding his death, Lindsay had made several attempts for him and me to meet. Alas, our paths never crossed, in life. Now I consoled his widows. Lindsay was the one I liked the most. After work, she preferred to go her own way. I was somehow now obligated to assist Alex in the administrating of Bob's affairs. This involved categorizing and cataloging all of his belongings. This was not in the time of laptops and spreadsheets, folks. This was legal pads, pencils, pens, and wite-out. Turns out Bob had an extensive collection of comic books and other nerd/dork/musician oddities that often accompanies the lifestyle. For four days I assisted with the doling out of Bob's stuff. Day one: smelled like death. Literally. I do not care what anyone else says, every item delivered from that apartment smelled like death. Some guy and I made each other laugh by exchanging a jar of Vicks VapoRub® throughout the day. Because reenacting horror cinema is an **essential**

element in this profane act. Junkies are the original hipsters. Irony is not wasted on the wasted. Most know they are a tragic mess and (ever the narcissists) simply hope to die leaving a beautiful corpse. Bob's corpse was not pretty by day two. This very much affected Lindsay, when we were alone and very, very high.

Just after dusk, on the first official day of mourning, the first widow did land and make her way down the walkway to the back of the yard. I remember this because we had just made a beer run and passed her on the way in with a keg. She was sickly pale, thin, with a mop of long brown, un-groomed tresses, teetering across gravel in Lucite, platform stripper heels, wearing a veil, and carrying a rose (yeah, I agree, the rose was a bit much.) As I made my way back to my seat (which honestly was like a panel at a trade convention) I can see this weeping lass has **still** only made it halfway down the driveway. We go back to reading comics and drinking beer. I like to say I met Becky when she, ever so gracefully, threw herself upon the banquet tables that held Bob's things, and sent all of us tumbling to the ground. Cunt. This silly, flailing bitch was so wasted she stumbled, in those dumb stripper shoes, and busted up her pretty face on the very first day of the festivities. She is lucky this was before social networking and smart-phones. Becky was henceforth referred to as 'Tore-back-u-la' by every living male within earshot. Apparently, even the corpse himself, did not have very many kind things to say about her. She was a dancer and had too many tracks to dance anywhere that wasn't disgusting. Eventually another of the walking wounded came to her aid and quickly escorted her from the area. Her

audacity to show up and play the grieving widow, for a man most now believed she played a hand in killing, and be a sloppy mess quickly demoted her to pariah level.

Over the next several days I met quite a few of Bob's friends. Those that came to pay their respects were about what I expected. Most were cool. Some were not. Didn't matter really in the end. I was like the lunch-lady serving up their buddy's greatest memories. Seconds encouraged because, frankly, what the fuck are we going to do with all this shit? That was mostly the sentiment by the end of day four. Most of the large, high-ticket items had been snapped up. The musical equipment went to Lindsay, for some reason. I had to assist her in recovering this from a studio and we had to sneak it all back to her apartment, in one shot. Which was a dingy, guesthouse attached to single family home in a middle class neighborhood. The entire event was symbolic in ways it took my drug-addled brain years to process. I am sure I have forgotten important details but the impression it left upon me lingers. I do recall coyly avoiding questions with regard to the equipment that no one could locate and the drama of another local musician's death overshadowing Bob's. When a local band makes it big, kicks out a founding member and main songwriter, who subsequently kills himself because of the loss, it tends to be big news. Bob was not big news to most people. Only to those I had come into contact during that week. Most of whom knew the other dead guy and talked about it in hushed tones at Bob's memorial. I pretended not to notice most of what was going on. It was easier. Helping someone pack up a few token items that

reminded them of their friend is easy to do on autopilot.

The close out the week's festivities Alex had arranged for a party at his place to include an all-star garage band reunion. Lindsay decided to attend this last hoorah and rode with me to the house. On the ride there we talked about how she would handle all of the other grieving widows and awkwardness of being who she was. We mostly laughed and made up ridiculous responses to scenarios. The turnout was impressive, and the music was loud. Lindsay and I avoided much of the drama, but not all. Becky showed up wearing full mourning regalia, carrying lilies, and with her new boyfriend in tow. To keep Lindsay from beating Becky's ass, I was asked to escort Lindsay "somewhere, anywhere!" Back in the safety of my car, Lindsay noticed the box sitting on the back seat. I told her Alex had a few trinkets of Bob's that he thought I should have and I assumed that was what was in the box. In the safety of our familiar local bar, Lindsay and I got about as drunk as two people can without suffering alcohol poisoning. During this evening I would say that I learned some of the harsh realities of drug addiction. Bob had been dead exactly one week and already his peers were cracking jokes. None were particularly memorable, but the sentiment was the same: it is a total rock and roll cliché to OD. Bob had become nothing more than another fallen junkie. Within one week's time his entire persona had been replaced by the iconic image of an idiot with a needle in their arm. Even his

widows had filled the vacancies his departure left. Including Lindsay. I left her at the bar that night, in the company of another musician, who was new to town.

The next morning I remembered the box in my car and went to retrieve it. Alex was a collector of all things odd and quite good at appraising the value of items. I knew his decision to bestow these things upon me was not random. Inside were: several rare comic books, art books, sets of collectible trading cards, a vial of Bob's ashes, and a belt. Eventually, I read through everything, and found a few original writings. By this time, I was no longer in contact with anyone that would have possibly wanted these things. So, they remained exactly where their original owner had last placed them. I still have all of these items, in the very same box, and have never understood what the belt was for. In the many years since Bob's death, I have come into contact with many people afflicted with the disease of addiction. Which is why I write about junkies. There are a million things to be addicted to and at least a million ways to be a junkie. I am confident when I say that most people have experience with addiction. Whether through their own active addiction or the addictive behaviors of a loved one, the average person is no longer exempt the junkie life. If you happen to have been spared this phenomenon thus far, kudos. Just know that your time is coming. If you need any pointers on navigating this alternate universe, Bob and I are here to help.



DAY OF THE PISS CAT

By Stagger Lloyd

It was Christmas time and after a night of frivolity I returned home and laid into a bottle of Scotch.

I was already hammered but determined more than ever to take drinking off the scale of decency and to have some serious fun on the computer.

At some stage during the night, giggling to myself, I opened the back door and took a piss in the snow, directing it into the form of a big fat stupid yellow cat and pleased with myself at inventing a Piss Cat, ambled off to bed.

The next day I woke up. Something wasn't right.

There was something heavy on my chest and it was making loud gurgling sounds.

Panicking I ripped my special blindfold off, the little glass beads packed inside it shooting out of a sudden tear in it and scattering everywhere.

There it was sat on my chest, bouncing up and down, padding, dribbling, purring, gurgling. It was The Piss Cat and it was padding my chest, its nose half an inch away from mine.

I slid off the bed in grotesque shock and peeked up over the edge of the bed.

It's really there!

It was sat bouncing, staring wide eyed at me, dribble frothing through its teeth.

"Holy fuck do I need a slash!"

So confusedly, off I stumbled to the bathroom and as I stood there pissing I could feel Piss Cat's foams dribbling around my pajama leg.

Not quite believing what was happening, i flushed the toilet and turned around and looked the moggy right in its stoopid eyes.

"So what are we gonna do today little piss cat," I asked, bending forwards, hands braced above my knees.

Piss Cat bounced.

"Oh, were gonna kill Kennedy are we?" I asked in feigned surprise, nodding at him in agreement.

Piss Cat carried on bouncing, his soft funny tail was delirious.

"Awlright, gimme a hi 5 bro," I said.

Piss Cat just carried on bouncing.

"You know that killing Kennedy is gonna bug the fuck out of lots of people right?"

BOUNCE BOUNCE BOUNCE BOUNCE

I stumbled downstairs and Piss Cat bounced down after me.

It was strange, at the top of those stairs I always got the sensation that one day I would fall down them.

I never once had yet in 3 years.

"Would you like some brekkie funny moggy?"

I looked through the cupboards in the fitted kitchen and found a bowl and a glass and poured the cat and myself a martini each.

Piss Cat was giddy with joy as he lapped from the bowl.

Sitting in the sunroom with my glass I took a large gulp of martini and looked down at the houses below me, covered in snow and knew that it'd only be a matter of time before I heard it.

I tapped the desktop.

"What's the best way to kill Kennedy?" I thought and took another sip.

Hmmm.

I poured another martini for the cat and myself and, sitting back down scanned around looking for ideas.

The balcony would be ideal, if only I had a sniper rifle.

It had a parapet with a crenellation and a great view of the streets.

Damn, I could even film it for posterity!

Imagine it, the Kennedy assassination broadcast across the world via the internet!

Kennedy was the local ice cream man and he played Its Now or Never incessantly

along each street in the valley and the acoustics down there being what they were, I could hear every fucking annoying jingle.

It wasn't even the proper song, that'd have been fine, no this was that ratbastard's ice cream van version, no singing, nothing.

Who the fuck sells ice cream in this weather anyway?

This mean bastard did, all year round and now I was determined to take the fucker out.

I mused on the thought of Kennedy's head being blasted across the pictures of Cornetto's and Chunkies, the Starships and various other lollies, his blood forming a nice treacle as it spilt into the ice cream.

My reverie was suddenly interrupted. It was HIM! From way across the valley I heard that vile shit. I wouldn't even catch sight of the van for another 40 minutes or so but I could hear it.

I had to think and fast.

Piss Cat had resumed rubbing against my leg, purring and dribbling and my eyes grew wide as I realized that there at my feet was the solution to this problem that'd been bugging shit out of me for months.

Piss Cat looked up at me with his great bug eyes swivelling madly.

Grabbing him I took him into the kitchen and placed him at his bowl and poured an extra large martini for him, and another for myself.

For the next half an hour we each had several refills until I heard the van slowly approaching.

"Right, we've gotta go cat, were gonna murder the Ice cream Man!"

BOUNCE BOUNCE BOUNCE BOUNCE

Grabbing the cat mid-bounce I shoved him into a bag. He was now twice his normal hefty size with all the martinis I'd fed him. I grabbed my coat and headed for the door, not even bothering to change out of my pajamas.

I skidded down the steps beside my house that lead down into the valley, Piss Cat wriggled around inside the bag as I slid on the icy steps.

Knowing the vans route by heart I ducked along a couple of alleyways until I came to a deserted street.

Thick snow lay everywhere.

This was the perfect spot for the ambush.

Taking Piss Cat out of the bag I snuck toward the road and crouched between two parked cars.

"You ready cat?" I swivelled him toward me and he wagged his tail, dribble dripping from his maw.

I turned him back around and pointed him at the road, aimed carefully and squeezed hard on either side of his fat body. He seemed to enjoy it.

A long stream of martini jettisoned from him all over the road and quickly turned to ice.

Then the van came around the corner.

Jingle Jangle Jingle fucking Jangle.

I smiled evilly in anticipation of a famous victory and held my new murder weapon up so he could watch our handiwork too.

He wagged his tail.

Then it hit.

That fucking ice cream van hit the patch of ice dead center where it was thickest and began to swerve crazily about the road.

Through the windshield I watched in delight at Kennedy's look of absolute horror as he opened his mouth wide and screamed.

I laughed sadistically as the van suddenly swerved down an embankment and hitting a wall, blew into a thousand glorious pieces.

It's now bitch, never again will I have to put up with that crap.

I put Piss Cat back in his new bag and headed back up the hill towards home.

Getting in I gave my wonderful new pet an extra large helping of Martini for his assistance.

BOUNCE BOUNCE BOUNCE BOUNCE

Part 2

Light streamed through my curtains and woke me up as it shone through my eyelids.

Jesus, why was I drenched in sweat?

I was fucking freezing too and as I sat up I felt a great wave of nausea run through my palpitating body.

Fuck, I need a drink.

I must have slept for hours if I'd already started withdrawals.

I gritted my teeth to stop myself puking and headed downstairs, wondering where Piss Cat was.

He'd probably fallen asleep in his bag again, he loved that bag.

I looked around for the gin and groaned. Every bottle was empty.

That fucking cat, I hissed.

Without remedy this was about to turn into a nightmare comedown.

Then a surge erupted in my stomach, I was about to puke so quickly lurched toward the door onto the balcony and opening it deftly, hurled my guts up into the snow outside.

Watery eyed I glanced down. There in the snow was the Piss Cat. The googley eyed wretch stared back at me and then, then I heard it, "It's Now or Never" reverberating across the valley below.

I staggered back into the kitchen, not believing what I was hearing.

Misery washed over me.

The whole thing had been a cruel dream, a dream that had suddenly, viciously turned back into a daily nightmare.

Jingle Jangle Jingle Jangle.

The End



THE DOGS ROCK FOREVER. HERE'S WHY

Photography © Heather Harris *(Except where indicated)*

Maniac young twenty-somethings already ferocious virtuosos, The Dogs played a Whisky A Gogo gig with their Do-It-Yourself, Radio Free Hollywood consortium chums The Motels and The Pop which I reviewed for Performance Magazine. Immediately, I was a goner. The Detroit-spawned hard rock power trio sported a peripatetic singer/songwriter/guitarist

who seemed to have taken it upon himself to ape both Iggy Pop AND James Williamson simultaneously; plus an all-crashing crescendos-all-the-time bashing drummer; and a beautiful, black-haired proto-punk female who seemed to be encroaching on Jaco Pastorius territory, clean but busy bass-wise. They wrote their own great 1,000 mph songs, wailed out a

few choice covers like "Kick Out The Jams," reeled around with the music flashing flying V guitars, and projected the perfect us against the world barrier, courtesy of the guitarist and bassist who were a couple as well as bandmates, aided by the perfect thug drummer. I felt as if I could watch them for hours. I was knocked out by them thirty five years ago. 'Still am, because they're still playing and recording.

The timeline of my initiation and subsequent review is 1976, and Jimmy Carter is battling it out with disgraced Dick Nixon's successor Gerald Ford. Post pub-rock saving 4/4 hard rock for its own

future, punk rock is percolating amongst assorted anarchies in the U.K. Punk synchronicity erupts in New York City, where so many nascent punkers remembered a threesome of Detroit kids in leather jackets and torn jeans (their normal street clothes since they couldn't afford stagewear) who opened for The Dictators, Kiss, The Stiletos (early Blondie,) Eric Anderson (!) and Television circa 1974 (Nixon resigns, successor Ford pardons Nixon, first pocket calculators become available the public) playing Michigan rock & roll a la their local contemporaries the MC5 and The Stooges: The Dogs...



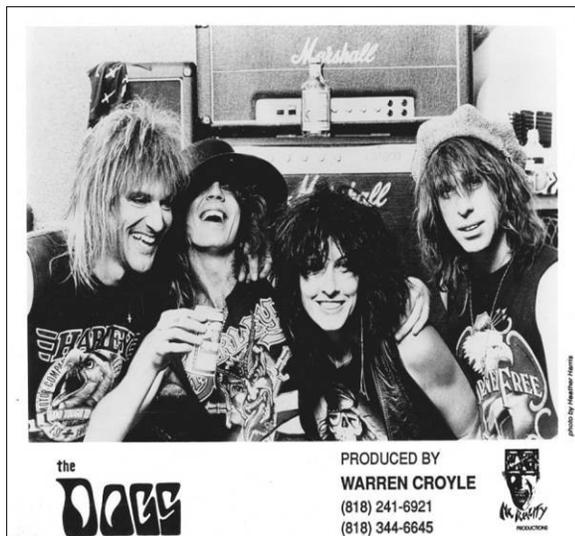
The Dogs with Sid Vicious and Tony Sales - Photographer Unknown

The timeline, however, really reared its pointy little head in 1968, the year Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy were assassinated, when Phil Ochs and The MC5 were the only musicians putting their money where their political mouths were by playing the turbulent anti-Vietnam war protests at the Chicago Democratic convention, and Lyndon Johnson realized the error of his Presidency, declined nomination and paved the way for the succession of Richard Nixon. The year a 10th grade guitarist, Loren Molinare, bucked his school rock bands ongoing since 7th grade (roll call check in for Loren & The Lovables, the Clayton Squares, and Blues Depression!) to turn pro with a drummer pal by advertising for a real bassist. In walked one of the few real bassists of the XX chromosome persuasion in the Detroit/Michigan rock scene besides Suzi Quatro (then of The Pleasure Seekers,) one Mary Kay.

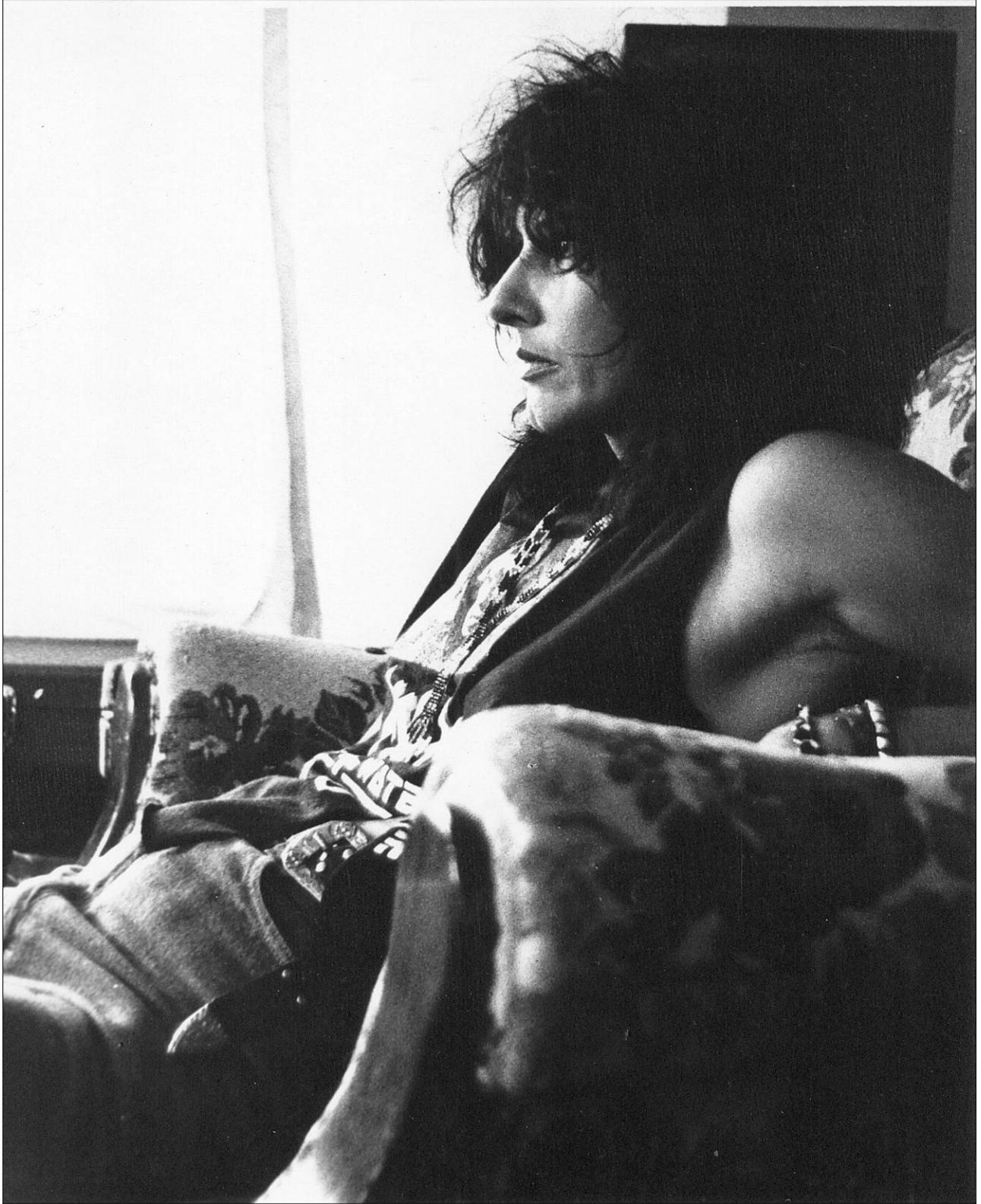


Mary at my Venice, CA house 1986

With her stage name fashioned after legendary bassist Carol Kaye (“Good Vibrations” and 1,000s of other chart hits,) (the makeup magnate was less known during that era,) Mary knew her field and already had her chops down at a fairly young age. Explains Mary, “I always loved music, despite growing up on a pretty isolated farm in Michigan. I used to stand on top of the tractor and pretend the wheat waving in the winds was an audience applauding me. I later taught myself keyboard on some other neighbor's piano, and took choir in school just so I could be doing music. But when I heard the bass lines of “Bernadette” by The Four Tops when it first came out on our local Motown radio, I immediately knew that’s what I wanted to do. And I’ve played bass ever since.”

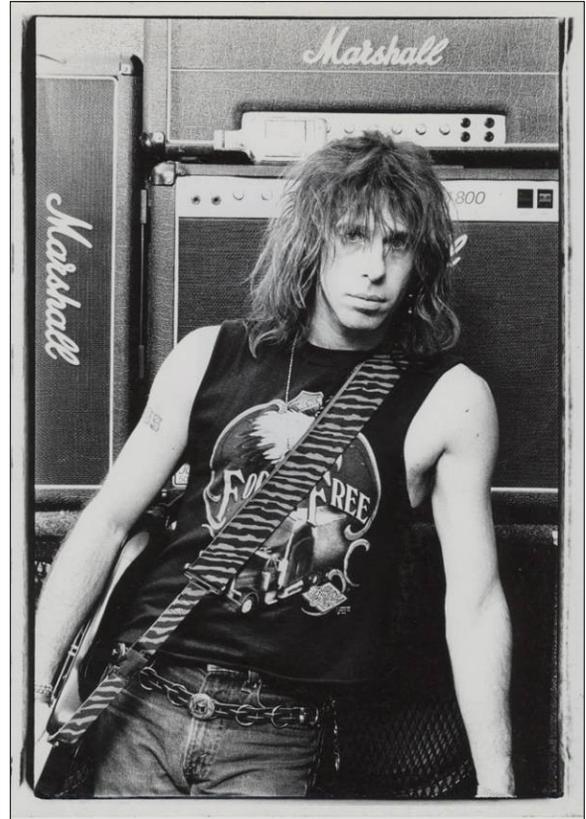


Studio Portrait with Danny DeMuff 1988



Mary at the Dog House 1987

Mary then shaped the direction and even nomenclature of the teenaged, newly pro band. Adds that onetime 10th grade guitarist, “She came in with the Stooges’ single ‘I Wanna Be Your Dog.’ The fact that Iggy sang that he wanted to be someone’s dog was plain brilliant, I mean – man’s best friend! So...I thought we should call the band The Dogs. When we first gigged as The Dogs everyone hated the name, yelling ‘how can you call yourselves dogs?!’ We then thought, we’re pissing people off with the name so we kept it, which shows our early punk attitude.” With its 1968 genesis, these Dogs from Detroit via Lansing *obviously* were first with this iconic band name, despite later poseurs on The Continent.



Loren 1988



Mary 1988

So these teenaged Dogs (“just kids” as Patti Smith has now entered into the vernacular) guitarist Loren Molinare, bassist Mary Kay, drummers Art Phelps then Ron Wood (another celebrity name convergence, but the other Ron Wood was Jeff Beck Group’s bassist at the time, not a Rolling Stone guitarist) opened in **1969** (“It’s 1969 okay, all across the U.S.A. Another year for me and you, another year with nuthin’ to do” squalls Iggy Pop in The Stooges) for the MC5 at the Crystal Lake Palladium, supported S.D.S. and all the (original, sigh) anti-war stuff while frequently being arrested for starting riots there.



Loren in the recording studio 1986

Media-wise, The Dogs' arrest for public nuisance during a house party gig made the Lansing MI newspaper, and somewhere in the webcloud, Lansing photographer John Linderman has a shot of MC5-era Wayne Kramer making a grab for Mary's breasts.

Be it known that The Dogs appreciated the 5 not only for their music but also for their personal helpfulness, as the legendary rockers often advised the newcomers on the pitfalls of the music business. The Dogs released their first single "John Rock And Roll Sinclair" (a treatise on the band's

complex relationship with their manager, but done simply!) The Dogs again opened for the MC5 at the Grande Ballroom in 1972 (last man walks on the moon via Apollo 17, McGovern loses to Nixon, Nixon opens relations with "Red" China, eleven Israeli athletes murdered by terrorists at the Munich Olympics, gasoline shortage in the U.S. causes first rationing of same since World War II) when the former loaned the latter their gear. "Wayne and Fred used my Marshall stacks!" gushes Loren. But then loudness done professionally was always their aim and result, vis a vis their Daytona

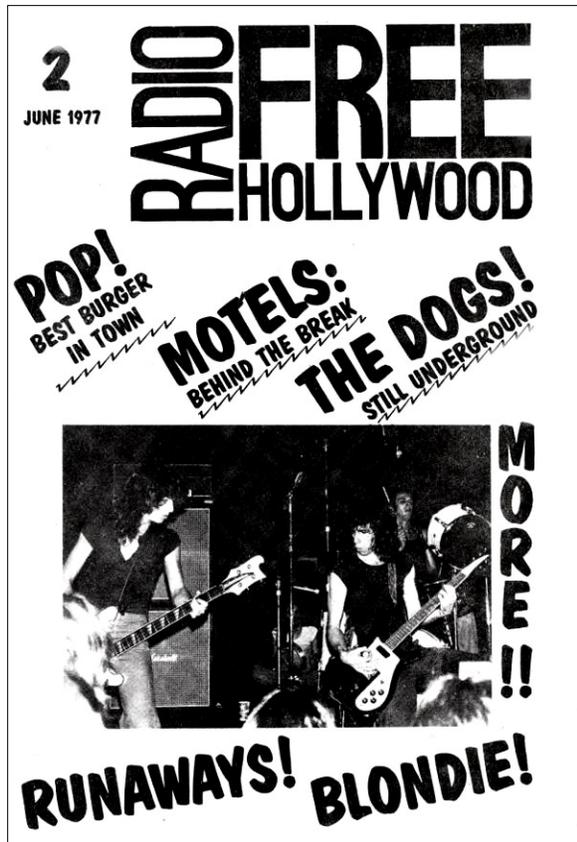
Beach, Florida gig. He continues, "It was gonzo, we played to a 10,000 person audience there, and people told us they heard us five miles away with our four stacks of Marshalls blasting!"

The Dogs had become a traveling commune of a dozen people including their own soundperson ("who we hired after we found him, this strange guy sleeping on our couch one day!" laughs Mary. To this day Ray Perez helps with their sound.) their own P.A. system and their own truck. DIY before DIY, just like punk before punk with future punks recalling the group as the first young musicians they knew who did not live with their parents whatsoever and indeed did everything themselves. So The Dogs played for free, played festivals all over the U.S., moved to NYC (1973, 8,000

life-sized terra cotta warriors are discovered in China, Vice-President Spiro Agnew resigns for alleged malfeasance and President Nixon finally pulls the last U.S. troops out of Viet Nam) maybe kick-started punk at CBGB's (see above,) moved to Hollywood CA (1975, Microsoft is founded, Jimmy Hoffa disappears, the assemble-it-yourself Altair is the first home computer for sale to the public, Patty Hearst is arrested despite obvious Stockholm syndrome of a kidnapee,) refused to pay-to-play here in L.A., definitely kick-started DIY punk in L.A. with their Radio Free Hollywood four-walling of live venues along with chums The Motels and The Pop since clubs wouldn't book unsigned acts, opened for Van Halen, AC-DC, all the later punk legends, Guns N' Roses, in fact you name 'em, they probably opened for them.



Live at Club Lingerie Hollywood 1986



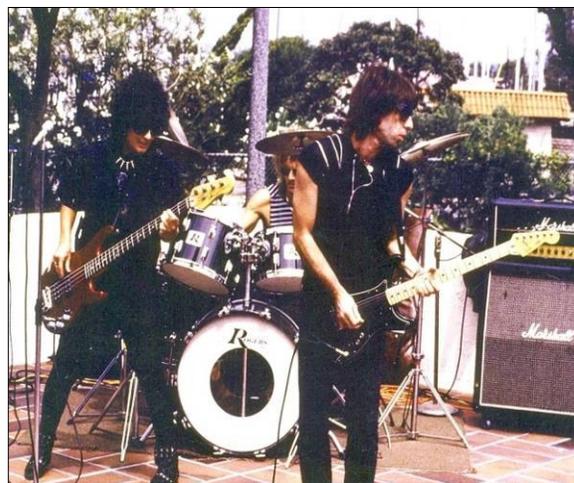
*Radio Free Hollywood Fanzine Cover, Photo ©
1977 John Linderman*

They survived Phil Spector's gunplay decades before his arrest, sold everything they owned to relocate to the U.K., toured same and Northern Ireland in 1978 (onetime neighbor Mary told me that our '94 Northridge earthquake damage reminded her of a normal Belfast urbanscape.) "The 'checque' bounced and we had to bet on the horses via a bookie to get out of town," confides Loren.

Then the company that had encouraged them to expat to England pulled out. He adds, "We ended up squatting in north London in vacant houses in the middle of

January, freezing our asses off. It was a great time to appreciate the good ole USA!" Re-relocation to L.A. ensued.

1978 (Bianca Jagger divorces Mick, Nancy Spungen is stabbed to death and soulmate Sid Vicious is charged, Jim Jones leads 900 lost souls to suicide oblivion, and a somewhat more positive cult leader, Pope John Paul dies, is hastily replaced) however proved pivotal for their recorded posterity. They self-released the singles "Slash Your Face," "Fed Up" and Barbarians' cover "Are You A Boy Or Are You A Girl." Their "Younger Point Of View" with its withering putdown "I seen Chicago on the teevee! I didn't make Woodstock..." was one the centerpieces of the Los Angeles punk compilation collection "Saturday Night Pogo" (for which yours truly applied the Art Direction and design. Shout out to inclusion of my better half, Mr. Twister's punk band Chainsaw therein) on Rhino Records.



*Live at Charity Benefit Hosted by Tina Louise,
1986*



Studio Portrait 1988

Significantly that year, Journey's and Dogs' manager Lou Bramy rented a 24-track mobile unit to record The Dogs' set at the Mabuhay, San Francisco CA. You can't believe the fierceness, ferocity and virtuosity of these three live. Incomprehensibly, record companies passed, Wood the drummer jumped ship for punkers Channel 3 and the remaining band took a sabbatical in Colorado but at least the seeds were sown. Thanks to these tracks eventually given a much later, deluxe release by Lee Joseph's Dionysus Records as "The Dogs - Fed Up!", the cult legend grew. Henry Rollins in his segue from Black Flag frontman to solo artist to DJ to media personality name-checked The Dogs out

loud, and Spin Magazine listed their "Slash Your Face" single as one of the Top 10 great punk rock songs of all time.

The 1980s, a decade beginning with PacMan, the middle finding the rise of the CD and assorted new technology, and ending in the fall of the Berlin Wall/Soviet communism found the band retrenching with another name- Attack- and with an incredibly worthy and stylistically creative drummer Tony Matteucci, whose c.v. includes recording with Chris Squire and his ex-wife in England, and playing monster Metal festivals in South America alongside every major name metal god you can imagine with concomitant tv, radio and

newsprint media interviews amongst other anecdotes. Remembers Tony, "Two of the shows were in football stadiums. Doing lines of pure Bolivian blow with the promoter was one of the highlights. One of the low points, however, was the authorities confiscating our passports when we entered one of the countries (invalid work visas they said, despite long ago, extensive preparations) and didn't return them until we were at the airport getting ready to leave. And then they charged us an undisclosed exit fee, but who's going to argue with guys in fatigues carrying assault rifles?!"

A heartbreakingly close miss to being signed to Atlantic Records splintered the band, with Loren joining rising soul-rock stars Little Caesar, signed to Geffen when it really counted. Mary went metal full-time in the all-femme She Rok featuring singer Emi Canyn (eventually of Motley Crue, both as backup singer and spouse) amongst other offshoots and later with Tony formed Kanary around former Precious Metal songbird Leslie Knauer, once called the 38th best rock singer ever, male OR female, in rock music by some British music trade we can't recall readily. Lots of others for all three, truth be known.



Last Dogs' gig at the Metro, Reseda, Aug. 25, 1988



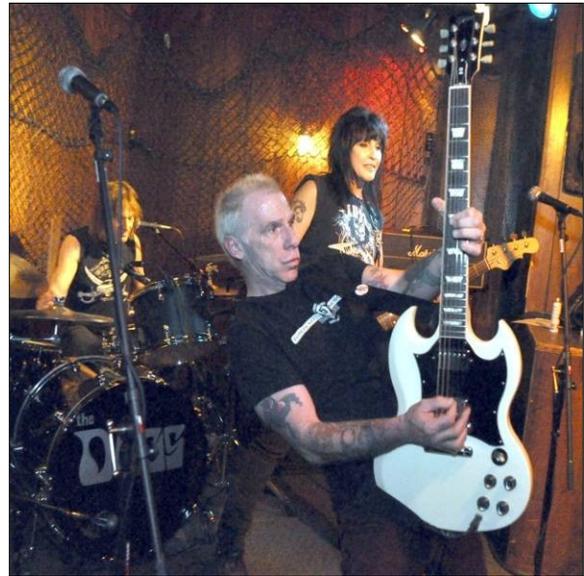
DOGS & DOLLS: The first reunion in 19 years of the three original members of the Dogs took place in North Hollywood's Amp Studios after a visit by drummer Ron Wood prompted an adhoc concert. Pictured (L-R): Leslie Knauer of the band Canary; former New York Doll, Arthur "Killer" Kane; Mary Kay; Ron Wood, and Loren Molinare.

MUSIC CONNECTION AUGUST 5, 2002-AUGUST 18, 2002

First Dogs' Reunion, August 2002

The first reunion erupted in 2000 (George Bush and Al Gore dead heat, America eventually loses with the win of the former,) and the second, attended by the likes of Arthur "Killer" Kane of the New York Dolls, was documented by me in 2002 (everything in timelines now blends together after Sept. 11, 2001 terrorism and the rise of digital technology; besides, most *Paraphilia* readers would be alive and sentient by these dates.) Like most modern groups, they've all played in other bands for the last two decades and continue to do so. Loren still does double duty as guitarist in Little Caesar as well he should: the band features one the world's premiere hard rock/soul/metal/R&B singers on the planet, the formidably tattooed Ron Young

(seen antagonizing Arnold Schwarzenegger and being tossed through a bar window for his troubles in *Terminator 2*.) The Caesars released three albums on Geffen in the late 80s/early 90s, broke up amongst personnel changes that saw no less than Earl Slick amongst their ranks, and recently reunited to tour Europe in 2011.



Live at the Redwood Bar, LA 2009/10 New Year's Eve

Yay, the present! which finds The Dogs currently managed by Requiemme, the mgmt./booking concern run by Mario Escovedo of the intensely famous in music Escovedo family, Santana's Cokie Escovedo, Sheila E., roots rocker brother Alejandro Escovedo, punk rocker brother Javier Escovedo of The Zeroes whom I spotlighted in my 1977 book *Punk Rock 'n' Roll* (the first published on the subject in the U.S. It went to press the week the Sex Pistols broke up.)



Live at a South Bay Club 2008

But how many domestic musicians remain authentic enough to ride out becoming cult legends around the world? After Lansing chums filmed a live gig dvd of the band and Detroit Jack released a tribute to The Dogs, the *Doggy Style* cd with dozens of young Japanese bands wailing away their favorite Dogtunes with a promised DVD documentary of his to come, The Dogs easily packed venues in their 2007 tour of Japan. And mere mention of them astounded Mr. Twister's record company in Italy during Chainsaw's reunion Euro-tour in 2004 ("You are friends with The Dogs?!? Heather actually walks her dogs with Mary Kay and her own dogs?!") Raveup Records'

honcho Pierpaolo DeLuilis explained that The Dogs represented the very top of cult bands ever, meaning bands that now are highly celebrated despite a lack of mainstream/traditional record company-based career, with whatever they self-recorded back in the day going for astronomically high prices to collectors.

So how many bands never really plugged in or got any payoff and yet ***DIDN'T QUIT?***

They've survived personal fall-outs, triple-bypass heart surgeries, major addictions, not to mention the foremost enemy of rock and roll, the Passing of Time.



Mary and Loren for a Tattoo Magazine story

How many others have kept their actual teenage dream alive (Mary and Loren were once high school sweethearts remaining bandmates despite inevitable breakup) this late into adulthood without recompense? As full time artists despite all day jobs?

All this info only supplements the major aspect of The Dogs to their fans: their music. This music accomplishes all the impossible paradoxes of all great art: concomitantly complex yet simple, personal yet universal, and always mind-blowingly right for power trio-hard rock. It'll always speak for itself. As promoters have always noted upon introduction to them, you can't believe the witty, cheerful, unproblematic people you first meet as The Dogs are such hardcore, speedmetal-fast, technically

adept, monster players. In person, don't be fooled by their friendliness, Mary's flirty laugh alongside her near technical perfection on bass, and Tony's can-do agreeability belying his own complete drum mastery. Current family responsibilities find Loren frequently on the road for Blackstar Amplifiers and Korg. The onetime self-styled "dog" of another meaning, ladies' man and thrice-married in three years' time Loren is now a dedicated family man, "Married nineteen years to my hip NY chick Julie: third time's the charm! Our oldest Marlon is graduated college this year and our youngest Aidan now is taller than me with even more piss and vinegar, giving me a hard time with his warped sense of humor. I love 'em all!"



Video Shoot for Punk Rock Holiday, 2008

They remain genuine, lifelong subversives. “We are still a DIY band,” acknowledges Loren in summer, 2011, “but nowadays it’s always a time and money thing. It has not been easy for this band over the years. But our friends, family, supporters and fans believed in us and what we represented with our music, even when we occasionally lost sight of our dreams. Right now we’re finishing up our new release *Hypersensitive* in the works. It will be in the fashion of what we always were and still are: a kick ass Detroit-styled band with a message and a drive to acknowledge our own hopes, dreams, fears and things we see happening in the modern world, and I hope everyone relates to it and picks up on the vibe. Get

ready world for The Dogs 2011 and beyond!”

Can a band rock forever at the same crazed intensity with which it began? If you’re The Dogs, hell yeah!

(Nepotism disclaimer: I’ve known The Dogs as clients and friends for two and a half of their four decades while considering bassist Mary to be my closest female friend since 1985 even from afar. As of this writing she’s a self-professed “bi-coastal, hah!” between Michigan and Las Vegas.)

-Heather Harris

July 28, 2011

The San Fernando Valley, CA

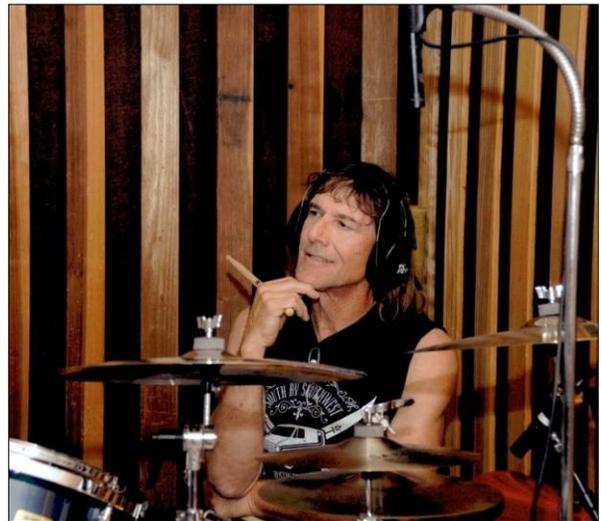


Loren Molinare

Tony Mattheucci,

Mary Kay

In the Recording Studio 2011





D04042

THE WHITE TYPEWRITER

By Charles Christian

"Mikey, Mikey, it's all kicked off again. Some of your bloody coked-up mates have started a fight!" In the background, to the banging beat of R&B, the sounds of raised voices and crashing furniture. "Get out of this flat!" someone yells. "Who the fuck is hammering on the front door?" another asks. A glass door panel shatters. There is a yell of alarm. "Darren's got a blade." Blood on the walls, blood on the carpet. Now there are angry voices outside in the street. A woman is screaming but her cries are soon drowned out by the wail of sirens. Black rain dark roads. Puddles reflecting the blue of flashing lights. On the pavement, a red spray of arterial blood that will soon be washed away. The noise of police two-way radios, of scuffles, of people being slammed against the side of vehicles and cuffed. The sound of running feet. The sound of someone sobbing. Just another Saturday night in a big city.

* * * * *

"Mikey, Mikey, I can't take this any longer. You and your fucking mates are getting totally out of control."

"Then fuck the fuck out of here you fucking boring fuck!"

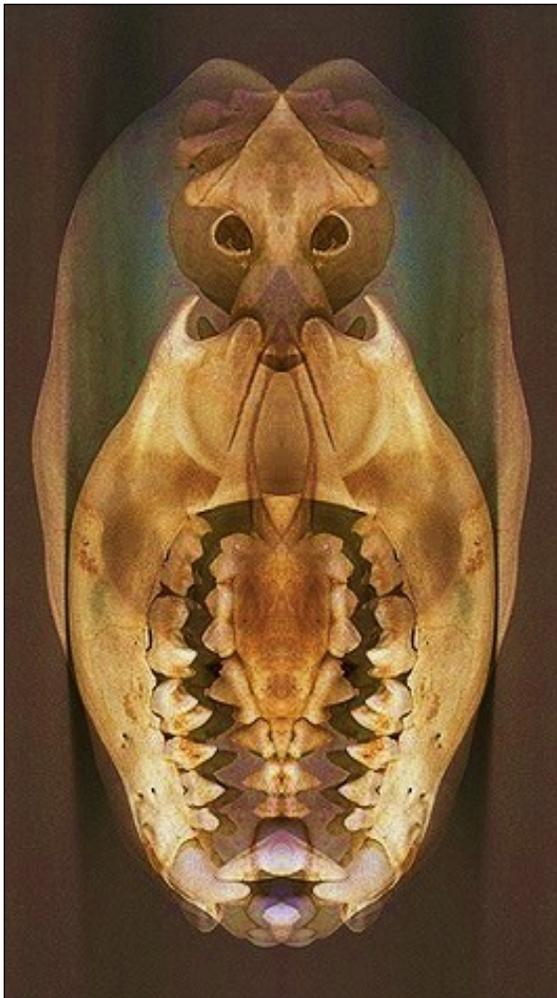
"Right, I will do. And fuck you too, you fucking wasted hippy has-been slapper." I slam the door behind me as I leave the apartment but once outside cold reality hits home. Shit, what am I going to do now, I

ask myself as I walk slowly and directionless down a corridor of the apartment block. I stop, lean against a wall before gradually sliding down to the floor to sit huddled on the hallway carpet.

Slumped there against the wall, I realise there are tears rolling down my face. Oh shit, what kind of man have I become? Six months ago I was Mikey's lover. That's Michaela 'Mac' McGuire, performance poet and rock chick extraordinaire. Like Joan Jett meets Patti Smith meets Siouxi Sioux meets Courtney Love but on speed and cocaine. Lots of speed and cocaine. But now? Now I'm just another one of her groupies but one who gets to live-in. Correction, who used to live in. Why? Only, I suspect, because I'm handy with *Excel* spreadsheets and can bring some semblance of order and organisation to her chaotic finances, social diary and gigs schedule.

That's me all over. The Man-in-the-Suit from Corporate England. The Math Geek Guy. Mikey's right when she calls me boring. I'm just too sensible and unimaginative to be able to exist in her world for long. OK, perhaps not sensible, I've always had an impulsive streak. That's what brought me into Mikey's orbit in the first place. Did she use me? Exploit me for my brains? Of course she did. I knew it all along but how could I resist her. Once you've had Mac, there's no going back. I mean she's one seriously hot chick and totally crazy between the sheets.

Was totally crazy between the sheets. That's also history now. Shit, shit, shit, I must look a mess. I am a mess. My life is one big bloody mess. As if to answer me, I glimpse some blood splattering on the wall, I'm guessing from the other night's out-of-control party. Fucking hell, even if Mikey hadn't thrown me out, the landlord is surely going to bust our arses for this sorry mess. Still, not my problem anymore as I'm already gone.



"You look like you need some help?"

I look up to see who is speaking. The voice comes from a woman I don't recognise. I

looks around again and see I'm sitting on the floor of the corridor that leads away from my apartment - or my ex-flat as it's now become - towards a wing of the building I know contains only one apartment. And that apartment is Number 7, the distinctly mysterious apartment Number 7.

From the street you can see lights blazing in the apartment's windows late into the night and on a quiet evening, when Mikey hasn't got her sound system blazing out full volume, you can hear a repetitive tapping coming from the room. Mikey and I joked about the apartment's occupant in the past. Someone nobody had ever met, seen or spoken to. "That's the sound of a typewriter," Mikey once said. "A fucking typewriter in the digital age. What, not heard of computers? Must be some kind of weirdo, reclusive writer." Now that weirdo, reclusive writer is offering to help me.

I look at her again. She's petite, has long black hair and is dressed all in black although not in a Goth-Emo kind of way. More like a little, black cocktail dress. The sort of thing Audrey Hepburn might have worn. She's a young chick. No, that's not right, she's old. Well maybe middle aged. That's not right either. There's something hard to pin down about her age. Or, more to the point, there is something about her that suggests a timeless, ageless quality, like she possesses some ancient wisdom and, from the look in her eyes, has experienced more than her fair share of sadness.

I know that sound deep but when I look into her large brown eyes, I feel something

resonate within me. Something primeval. She reminds me of a painting I once saw in an exhibition at the V&A – I was setting up a cataloguing system for a Bond Street art dealer at the time and she had tickets for the preview. The picture was called *Pavonia* by Frederic Leighton and was a portrait of his then mistress and muse Nanna Risi. Something about that picture caught my imagination (despite what Mikey says, I'm not totally devoid of emotion and artistic feelings) so I Googled her. According to one report she died in poverty and obscurity in Naples after a series of disastrous love affairs. However I also found a couple of reports suggesting that Risi managed to vanish from the pages of history just as mysteriously as she had first appeared.

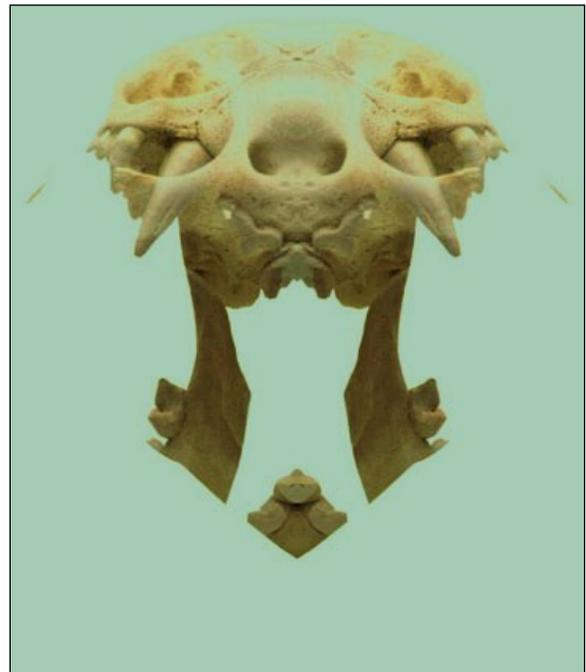
"Come on," I hear the woman say as I shake my head to wake myself from my reverie. Shit, I really am losing the plot here

"Come on," she says again, "let's get you sorted out. Here, you carry this as I need both hands free to fiddle with the locks on my front door." As I get to my feet, she tosses me a *Pineapple Studios* holdall. "Don't worry," she adds, "it's light. It's only got my ballet clothes in there."

"Ballet?" I ask.

"Yes, ballet. I find going dancing a couple of times a week helps ease the stress of my work. It was either that or boxing but I was worried about hurting my hands, I can't risk injuring them and being unable to type. By the way, let me introduce myself. I'm Dandy Norn and I live in apartment Number 7."

By now we have reached her front door and I see that along with the double locks we – that's Mikey and me – have on the front door to our flat, I mean my now ex-flat, Dandy has a third lock as well as an additional keypad entry security system. I watch her tap in a code and, as I do, she turns to look at me. "The work I do involves sensitive and confidential personal information," she explains. "A lot of people would be very interested in getting their hands on it, if they ever knew of its existence. Well, if they ever knew it existed in the real world, as distinct from in the world of myth and legend."



I shrug my shoulders and smile, I haven't a clue what this woman is talking about. "That's OK, each to their own," I reply. "Actually I was wondering how you come to have a name like Dandy. Were your parents fans of kids' comics?"



She pauses for a moment, recognises the cultural reference, then smiles and shakes her head. "No, it's short for Verdani, that's an old Norse name. Been in our family for generations. Come on in," she says, as she swings open the door, "I'll make you a nice cup of tea. That'll restore you."

As she brews the tea - Japanese genmaicha green tea with a small shot of Ballantine's 12 year old pure malt whisky I notice - I take a look around her apartment. The decor is all white (a harsh, brilliant white, no cop-out shades of magnolia here) including the furniture, worktops and kitchen fittings. The flat is also sparsely furnished. The main room she has ushered me into, a kitchen-diner-sitting room, contains just one white leather arm-chair and a large limed-oak table. There is also a chromium and white leather typist's chair peering out from beneath the table, on top of which stands a large white typewriter. It is an old fashioned, sit-up-and-beg Smith-Corona manual typewriter.

But, while the white deco is striking enough, the most memorable feature in the room is the wooden framework that covers one entire wall. On to it are pinned, clipped, strung, hung, stacked, stored and piled hundreds and hundreds, if not thousands and thousands, of pages of typewritten manuscript.

I take a peek at them. They are all obituaries.

I look a little more closely. They are all recent obituaries, in fact there are obituaries here of people I didn't even know were

dead. I look again. Hang on, there are obituaries here of people I definitely know are not dead but are still very much alive and kicking in the here and now. Then the mental penny drops. Of course, this is how newspapers and television news channels operate. They prepare obituaries of celebs and famous people in advance, getting all the initial heavy research out of the way so the obits just need a minor update at the time of death and can be rolled out in time for the next edition or news bulletin.

So, the strangely named Dandy Norn, who has now handed me a china mug of tea and is standing next to me, must be an obituarist. The thought crosses my mind that considering we have only just met, she is standing very close to me. In fact she would definitely be invading my personal space if that was something that ever bothered me. I'm about to say something about her work, try to make a witty, pithy comment (it's what I've become used to doing in my role as sometime courtier and flunky to the Court of Queen Michaela) when I notice something odd. Very odd. Disturbingly odd. All the obituaries contain not only their subject's date of birth but also the date of their deaths, in some instances deaths not due to take place until five or six years into the future.

I don't need to say anything, Dandy is close enough that she can see the puzzled expression on my face. "Just mathematics," she says with a wave of her hand. "Our universe, our lives, our destinies, everything, even the dates of our deaths, it all comes down to strings of mathematical equations and formulae. Do you know what

is significant about this year, 2011? It is a prime number. And it is also the sum of 11 consecutive primes: 157 plus 163 plus 167 plus 173 plus 179 plus 181 plus 191 plus 193 plus 197 plus 199 plus 211.



“The eleventh year of this century comprises 11 consecutive prime numbers. Isn’t that cool? When I was at school, I knew I’d eventually go into the family business, along with my two sisters Urdh and Skuld, but I was the geeky girl in class who liked maths and I realised that the numbers offered an alternative approach. My sisters didn’t agree, which is why they run their side of the business in Scandinavia, still using the old, traditional methods, while I

run my side from this flat in Soho. But enough of this talk, there is something we have to do.”

Without further explanation, she takes me firmly and determinedly by the hand and leads me into her bedroom. There, she quickly slips out of her clothes, unbuttons and removes my shirt, unbuckles my belt, pulls down my jeans and pants and then pushes me backwards down onto the bed.

Despite the bizarreness of this situation, I find myself intensely excited by the experience - did I mention that she is also cute, in a beautiful way, and that her ballet classes have left her in stunning shape? In fact I’m so aroused that when Dandy straddles my body and eases herself down onto me, I have barely enough time to slip myself into her before I explode with an orgasm that leaves me feeling as if every single ounce of fluid in my body has been drained away. I’m about to apologise (my recent sex life with Mikey has been crap, leaving my confidence and technique in shreds) when I realise Dandy has also climaxed.

For a few minutes we lay next to each other in the sexual afterglow before Dandy gives me a surprisingly chaste (given what we have just done together) kiss on the cheek, climbs out of bed, drapes herself in a silk dressing-gown and heads for the kitchen. “We need more tea,” she says as she departs.

Still somewhat dazed and confused by the last few minutes (my life in Led Zeppelin song titles) I listen to her moving around in

the other room. Along with the sound of a kettle being filled and starting to boil, I can also hear the sound of someone sorting through piles of papers, as if they are trying to find a particular document. I sit up in bed and look around the room but then something catches my eye that causes me to do a double-take. Hanging in a dark corner of the room, I'm guessing to shield it from direct sunlight, is a drawing of Frederic Leighton's *Pavonia*. I climb out of bed to take a closer look. It is not a copy, it's an artist's preliminary sketch and by the foxed look of the paper, it could be an original by Leighton. (I picked up a lot from that art dealer, there again I was with her for a couple of years - and for much of that time we were in bed together.)

Feeling even more perplexed, I go back to the bed. Perhaps five minutes elapse before Dandy returns with the tea and climbs in beside me. She looks a little pale and I notice there is a fresh sticking plaster wrapped around one of her fingers.

I point to the portrait. "Strong family likeness?"

"She was my mother, I mean my grandmother," replies Dandy in an unconvincing manner and that's not even taking account of the age disparity. That picture is at least 150 years old, so there is no way it could be Dandy's mother or grandmother - well not unless they were supernatural beings of some sort. I also notice she isn't make eye contact with me, Mikey used to do that when she was telling a lie.

"So what happens now?" I ask.

"Fate is what happens now," she replies. "In fact it is already happening, I think my sisters are enjoying all this at my expense. Pulling my strings. Or should I say tugging the threads of the tapestry of my life." She laughs at what must be private joke. I still haven't a clue what she is talking about and clearly the blank expression on my face reveals my incomprehension.

She turns to look at me. "You don't know who the Norns are do you? And I've bet you've never heard of the Wyrd Sisters either?"

"They're characters in a Terry Pratchett *Discworld* novel aren't they?" I reply.

She slowly shakes her head. "Let me guess, no not guess because I already know the answer. You were on the science rather than the arts stream at school. Computers were your thing rather than myths and legends?"

I nod. "I was like you, I was the nerdy, math geek guy. Skipped a lot of classes for some of my own private research in the computer lab. Teenage hacker and all that. But to get back to my earlier question, what happens now? Is this it? Wham, bam, thank you for the cup of tea Ma'am?"

Dandy takes a sharp intake of breath before continuing. "No, what really happens now is that in nine months' time I shall give birth to triplets. Three girls, who will grow up and eventually follow their mother and their two aunts in the family business. As for you, you get a get a second chance.

Here, this is for you," she says as she hands me a roll of typed paper, tied in the middle with that pink ribbon lawyers still use.

I unroll the paper. It is my own personal obituary. I scan through the document to the very end. The last three lines have been crossed out in a dark red ink that looks suspiciously like the colour of freshly dried blood. Beneath the ink I can still make out the original text. It says that earlier this morning I was found in a corridor outside my apartment, dying from stab wounds following an altercation with my lover Mikey McGuire.

"You saved my life?" I say.

"One of the few perks that go with this job," Dandy replies.

I pause for a moment to think. But only for a moment, I've always been a impulsive kind of guy. "If you are going to have triplets," I say, "you are going to need some help around the place. I heard you scabbling about trying to find my obit. I could catalogue that lot for you, stick it on an *Excel* spreadsheet. And you really should consider switching from that typewriter to a PC. We can even get you a white one."

Dandy pulls me close to her and this time kisses me full, hard and enthusiastically on the lips. "When you have finished drinking your tea, perhaps we should double check that you really have impregnated me? We don't want to leave something as important as that to chance - or fate."

She laughs at her choice of words and once again I have no idea why but this time I don't care. I drink down the remains of my tea in one gulp.



Boneizoid Images © D M Mitchell



D04070



THE SINKING OF VENICE: A CATALYST TO PROPOGATE FURTHER GLOBAL PANIC

By Christopher Nosnibor

Photos © Guttersaint

The sinking of Venice, while for some was a catalyst to propagate further global panic, was largely met with the (non-)reaction of resigned inevitability. The melting not only of the ice caps, but also of the permafrosts of Siberia saw the release of massive quantities of methane and CO₂ and consequently, other cataclysmic changes

also occurred across the globe in rapid succession. The rate of change reached a level of exponentiality: the immersion of vast areas of land beneath feet upon feet of salt water... heat-waves, droughts... failing crops, Super El Niños, global weather chaos... world food supplies run out - Kalahari Desert expands - water shortages

- destroying the ozone layer - flash floods strip the land of soil. Plains and fields became sea beds, while rivers that had for millennia carved their way through the landscape, creating a network of ravines around which so much of human civilisation has been built became subaquatic trenches, lost worlds populated by strange and unnamed species of marine life. Where the waters had not encroached

and submerged, the land rapidly grew barren, sun dried and windswept, forests and woodlands and once luscious expanses of cultivated arable land alike subject to the same withering process and the ravages of desertification - although still subject to sporadic flash flooding, that stripped the topsoil from the land and further accelerated its fall into bleakness and uninhabitability.



The forest fires continued to rage in many parts: the Amazon had all but disappeared, and covered South America with impenetrable ash and acrid smoke... dust-bowl brings deserts - burns in a firestorm - breaks up, eventually adding possible release of methane - catastrophic

intensity... People the world over fled their town and villages *en masse* as the fires or floods or mudslides or high tides threatened their residences, their once-safe havens. In the USA, the scenes of New Orleans from 2006 were repeated innumerable times in innumerable cities in

every coastal area. Looting was rife, but also futile as gangs with piles of widescreen televisions and other luxury goods are unable to sell anything that runs on a power supply that's dead to a population finally sharing a single goal - survival. But the quest for survival was anything but unifying. Superstructures crumbled, infrastructures collapsed, while millions were now displaced, fighting every man for himself - fuck the women and children! - against a backdrop of disease and famine. This was an altogether different kind of war, as people clawed their way over one another in a blind panic to escape and to stick their territorial flags in the new ground ahead of the next man. Fleeing their homes, the crowds filled the streets, strewn with obstacles of falling masonry and abandoned vehicles, incapacitated by lack of fuel and unable to move through the floodwaters, the fires, the seas of bodies, alive, dead and dying, but all occupying every available - and unavailable - space, two deep, shouting, crying, wailing, an agonising Babel of agonised, tortured sounds. Countless individuals who would forever remain unknown, trampled underfoot. The elderly left to fend for themselves - many falling or being pushed, breaking bones on impact, or otherwise dying of strokes and embolisms at the stress and panic of the exodus. The incapacitated, the wheelchair-bound, the frail, all thrown, physically, to the ground and stamped down in the gutter, their cries unheard and unheeded. For the first time in several centuries, the Darwinian theory of natural selection was once again applicable to the human race. There was no room for the weak now. Kill or be killed, eat or be eaten.

News was sparse. The infrastructure and superstructure had both crumbled and society had broken down in a very short space of time. The flooding of London and other low-lying areas in Britain had still come as a surprise to many, despite decades of mass-media coverage of the potential for the obliteration of so many major towns and cities, not to mention the agricultural plains or the Lincolnshire fens and much of East Anglia.

We were fairing reasonably well under the circumstances. In some ways, it was hard to bury a sense of smugness. Granted, we were, for the majority of the time, to preoccupied with simply sustaining our meagre collective existence to feel anything other than tired, and often hungry, but we were the survivors. And what a world it was to be surviving in! Yes, it was a barren world, living high in the mountains. A bleak, inhospitable landscape greeted us each morning. Between the wild storms and the heavy, freak blizzards that struck even in the middle of summer, the sun shone on the valley, its flood plain stretching for miles where there had once been a small meandering stream left in the wake of the last ice age.

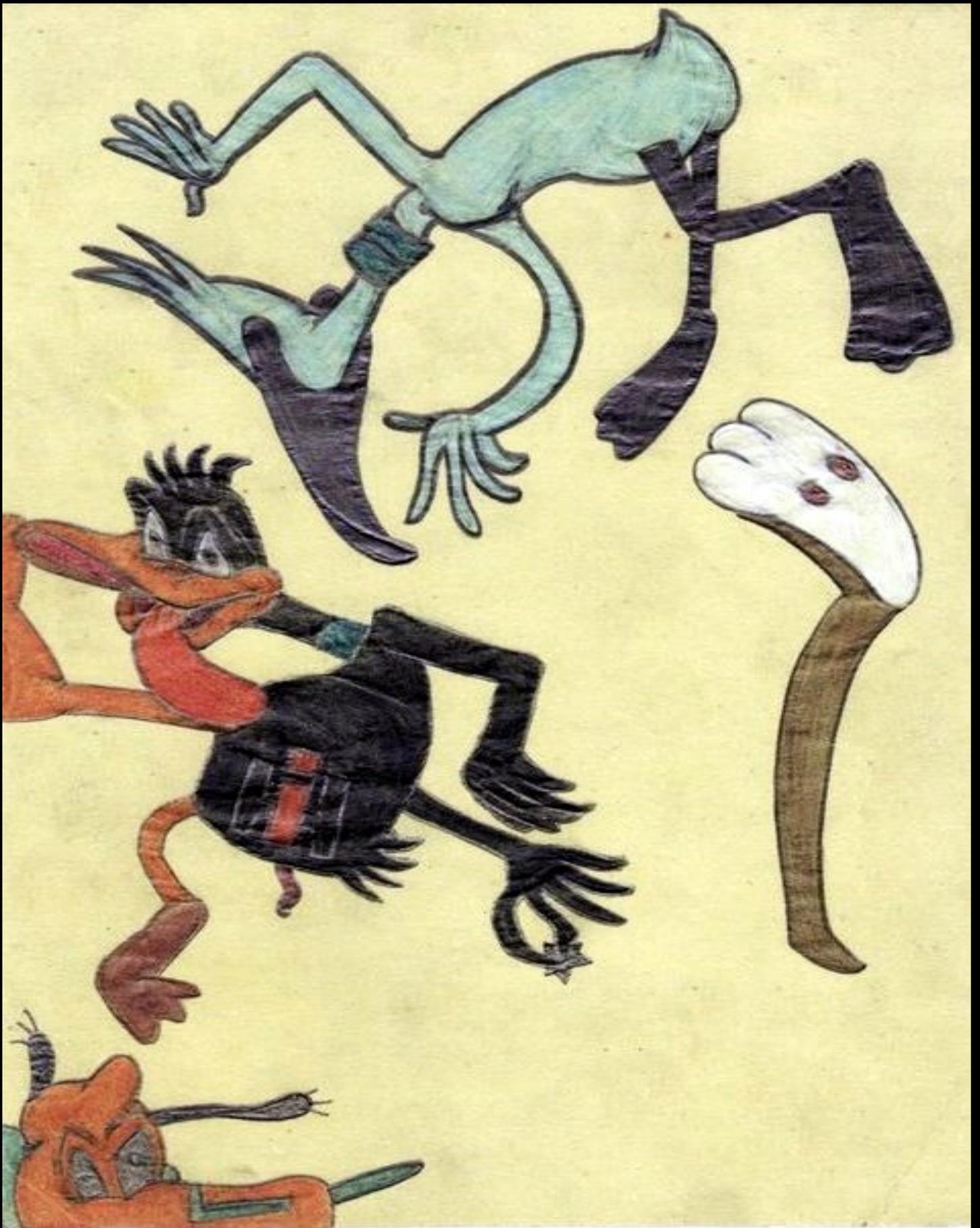
It wasn't the revolution that had been so widely expected. And yet it had arrived just as some - many - had predicted. It was a new world order, alright. And it *had* been a revolution brought about as a result of and a reaction to extreme consumerism, the logic of late capitalism, the postmodern condition. But rather than a bright new way, a shinier, moderner global Tokyo, it had been a collapse of civilisation. Yes, mankind had fucked itself up the arse and

now, now it was paying the price. It wasn't the same all over, and routes of communication still existed that facilitated the transmission of information between continents. But as the world spends its time divided between panic and denial, it is apparent that these infrastructures, transport and communication networks are unsustainable. Yet the trickle of information continues, small pulses crackling hesitantly down corroded, degraded wires. There is little else left to transport now: global trade ended when there ceased to be any commodities left to exchange, leaving only struggling microeconomies and subsistence crofts.

I don't know how long I can maintain this meagre existence. It's not life: it's nothing

but a day-by day quest for survival. Procreation is futile when there is no means of any future generation sustaining itself. There is simply nothing left to inherit. I could eke out something almost indefinitely, but every day living in the fear of being murdered in my sleep by a marauding tribe. Failing that, the prospects are bleak: taken by some virulent disease or plague, or otherwise a gradual decline, malnourishment, starvation, slow death. And yet I still remain, despite the circumstances and despite myself. How long my instincts will preserve me, I cannot begin to guess, but for the moment, curiosity alone is keeping me alive. Are you receiving me?





D04066



GODS AND GAMBLERS

Blackfire Revelation Interviewed By D M Mitchell

Photos Courtesy of John R. Fields

Blackfire Revelation is a blues-metal band from New Orleans, LA founded by J.R. Fields in the summer of 2002. Fields, along with drummer Hank Haney, create a beautiful and frightening sound; though only a duo, their sound is biblical with a deep voodoo vibe underlying the thundering drums and guitars. Influenced by the like of the MC5, Blue Cheer and Black Sabbath, yet their sound remains idiosyncratic and maverick. Their eponymous album has recently been released and their EP *Gold and Guns on 51* has been reissued.

Details can be found here:

<http://www.myspace.com/theblackfirerevelation/music/songs>

How much would you say your sound is reflective of New Orleans? I'm not talking about any New Orleans music scene, I mean the actual city itself?

I think my sound is highly reflective of New Orleans. New Orleans is one of the freest cities on earth. It's why I've chosen to live and make a life here for myself and I think that definitely makes its way into the music.

You can pretty much do whatever you want down here 24 hours a day and as long as you're keeping your bullshit somewhat self-contained then know one is going to bother you or even notice really. It's also still very gritty, grimy, cultured and reluctant to too much modernization. And after midnight, you're as likely to get murdered as you are to get laid. It's a great town to be a musician in. I wouldn't live anywhere else.



Is your sound planned out? Do you hear it in your head before playing - or does it develop intuitively, shaped by the equipment you use and its possibilities and limitations?

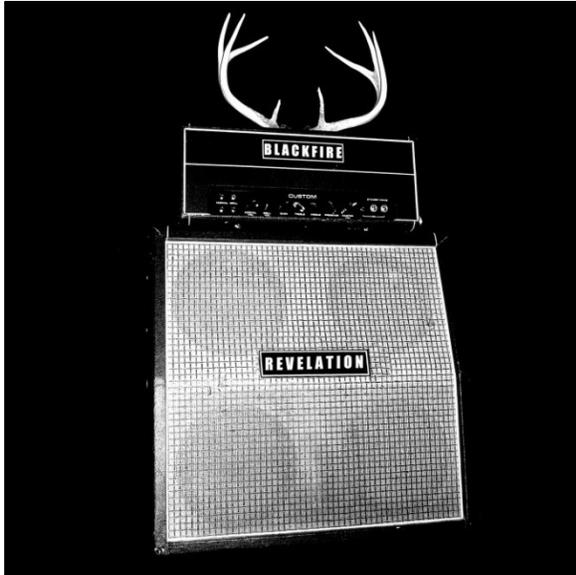
My sound is actually pretty contrived. It's taken me many years of trial and error/experimentation to figure out exactly how to create the sounds that I want to hear and then use that as a base for something

coherent. I'm still figuring that out. I don't feel I was born with much natural musical talent so songs don't flow from me. I'm not a song bird. I'm more of a vulture that just wants in on the party. I've got to work hard for every song I get and I spend a decent amount of time arranging and re-arranging until I'm sure that it's right. Furthermore, I enjoy structure in my music, a definite beginning and end, and a direct message. The easy/intuitive part for me is getting behind what I got a thousand percent and delivering it once it's there. I'd say I'm more of a performer than a composer.

What are your feelings and intentions towards the music scene/industry? Have you ever lusted after material success?

I love the music industry. I love watching it fracture into 9 million pieces. I love that musicians like myself don't really need record labels anymore. The digital music revolution has made it easier than ever for musicians to make their music available to the world. To do and make whatever they want and put it out there whenever they feel like it. It's a beautiful thing. Crybabies will say that this has led to a flooding of the market place so to speak but who cares. Fuck the market place. Music is supposed to be made and shared as fluidly as possible. As far as lusting after material success, when I was 13 years old and listening to and watching Metallica and Guns N Roses I dreamed about packing out stadiums and taking my limo to my jet full of strippers that were pouring me whiskey and rolling me joints. Who didn't? But as I got older I realized that was nothing that I wanted for myself or my music.

Is it possible to be radical anymore, when the industry has become so good at co-opting anything and everything, even things that are on the surface opposed to it?



Of course it is still possible to be radical. However, the only kind of radicalism I believe in any more is 'silent' radicalism. Or personal radicalism. Hide out and create or destroy things and let the world react to it as it will. If it's worthy it will affect people.

Is there any music out there that you listen to and still feel moved by, that you feel you could still care about?

Definitely. I am moved by music on a daily basis. In fact I make it a priority. We are extremely lucky to live in an era in which there is an overwhelming abundance of highly accessible free music. Given you have internet access. I have discovered more music from '68-'78 (my favorite musical decade) via internet radio and YouTube over the last two years than I did the whole decade before that. Go to YouTube right now. Look up 'Masters Apprentices - Easy to Lie' and 'Free - I'm A Mover'. You can listen to them over and over for free. If those songs don't move you then I can't help you. Some might argue that those are just old songs but they are new to me. I discovered them both within the last month and they are blowing my mind every day. Check out 'Bang - Future

Shock' too. That song's badass. I just found it yesterday. Bottomline: there's a lot of great music out there, new and old, if you're willing to dig.

I normally hate asking about 'influences' because it's such a lazy way of padding out an article, but... what are your non-musical influences? (books, films, politics etc)

Take it how you will but for me I've never been 'influenced' by things as much as I have been inspired by them. Musically or otherwise. For instance, listening to the Blue Cheer or Slayer or the MC5 or Black Sabbath inspires to play huge riffs. Listening to them do it makes me want to do it too. When I wrote 'Diamond in the Rough' for our last record I did it because I was inspired to write a Skynyrd-esque ballad and that's what came out.



As to what inspires me non-musically I'd have to say freedom, the Deep South, drugs, motorcycles, fast cars, booze, and beautiful women. It may sound clichéd to some but they can go fuck themselves. This is my life. I very literally smoke weed and ride my motorcycle at excessive speeds down old highway 51 through the swamp back to my house where the most beautiful woman in the world and a Ford with a 460 V8 are waiting to greet me in the driveway. When I get inside, pour myself a drink, strap my flying v around my neck and plug it in... If nothing else, I am sufficiently inspired to play rock n roll music.

There's something ambivalent, even hypocritical in the way music is on the one hand trivialised in western culture and relegated to the realms of 'entertainment' and distraction - while at the same time an enormous amount of energy and money is spent on keeping rigid control over how it is presented and disseminated. Do you think this is because it really does have the power to subvert?

Definitely. The power of music knows no bounds. And this is a great question. The answer to which, if done properly, could easily be the basis of a dissertation if not fill an entire book. However, the only thing that's coming to mind for me right now are some of my favorite David Yow lyrics: 'Lie your ass off and please yourself. Make it all worth your while.'

Are there any people you would like to work with? Musicians? Producers? Etc...

No, not really. I'm really content with the people I have around me.

When I listen to Blackfire Revelation I hear something almost 'biblical' woven into the sound - a touch of Old Testament anger and righteousness. Have you been touched by any forms of religion, organised or otherwise?

I was raised Southern Baptist. In the South. You don't live through that and not come out with a healthy respect/fear of god. I'd admit that religion has influenced my music but not any more so than youth power/radical organizations such as the White Panther Party. I'm an advocate of any philosophy that says get up, believe in something and act on that belief.

If you came into possession of a few million dollars...?

I'd be doing the same shit I'm doing now just more of it... add in a small army and a propaganda machine. And I'd spend more time breaking the law. Rich people get away with anything.





DEATH WISH CHAMELEON XII

By Cricket Corleone

Photos © Richard A Meade

Dustin sits in a fancy hotel bar. The kind that charges a hundred bucks for one glass of red wine... and that's the bargain wine on the menu. In a booth with sleek dark red leather upholstery and velvet drapes pulled back over large skyscraping windows, she waits for the arrival of Evaline.

A handsome waiter in his mid thirties approaches the booth, "Can I get you anything while you are waiting, ma'am?"

Dustin is attracted to him instantly and wonders if it is only because of his beautiful

Spanish accent. The lines on his face are starting to show the wear and tear of aging. This only attracts her more. She's never particularly been drawn to clean and young men. And the roughness of wear the handsome Spanish waiter has been speaks of dark alleyways and romances with red light district prostitutes. None of which ever went anywhere.

Dustin looks over the drink menu. Unable to pronounce the name of the wine she wants she turns the menu toward the waiter and points at it.

He smiles, "Very good."

As the waiter walks off to tend to other patrons, Evaline enters the bar gracefully and looks around.

Dustin smiles to herself and waits. She could easily just speak up and let Evaline know where she is, but she is amused by her slight uncomfortable searching masked by an upper-class urge to look like she owns the place and knows exactly what she is doing. So Dustin waits until Evaline finds her.

A moment passes and Evaline is approached by a hostess. A name is dropped and the hostess ushers Evaline to Dustin's booth. She takes a seat across from Dustin and sits silently as if not knowing what to say or do.



Dustin realizes that the woman is clearly a bit nervous. But instead of breaking the tension by saying something, she prefers to wait and watch Evaline wriggle a little bit longer. "It's kind of cute," she says after a moment.

Evaline looks over at Dustin and turns her head in questioning, "Cute?" she says with a nervous smile.

"Yes, it's cute," Dustin smiles back playfully.

"I... don't know what you are referring to?" Evaline laughs a little and situates her hands on the table top.

"You." Dustin moves closer resting her arms in a folded position on the table, letting her fingers slightly touch the tips of Evaline's.



Evaline jumps a little and laughs as she pulls her hands away hiding them next to her thighs on the seat. "Oh, umm... Thank you."

The waiter interrupts with a glass of red wine and sets it before Dustin.

"Anything else I can get you? Anything for your friend?" The waiter asks kindly.

Without looking at the waiter and still looking over Evaline's nervous face, Dustin orders for the both of them. "Yes, actually. I think we will take a whole bottle of the wine... two actually. And... the time you get off work too, please."

The waiter looks at Dustin in confusion. Evaline does the same.

Dustin turns her attention to the waiter and without batting an eyelash states frankly, "I want to have sex with you tonight. What time do you get off work, are you free, and finally... what are your dinner specials? Oh, and don't worry, I will tip you well." Dustin smiles as if desensitized to her bold actions and words.

Evaline decides that this must be a joke and tries to laugh it off. The waiter catches on and does the same, but a glint of interest is still wavering in his eyes.

"Well, I wasn't kidding. Consider it. And we will see the dinner menu now." Dustin sips on her glass of wine and relaxes back in her seat.

As the waiter walks away he takes a moment to drop a look at Dustin that suggests he is into it.







He lets slip a calculated half grin before he goes off back to his work.

Evaline smiles and lets out an exhale, "Well, you are very... forward."

"Yes, I am." Dustin says openly. "Why shouldn't I be? Life is short, right?" In the back of her mind she thinks, "One would hope," and scoffs to herself.

"I mean, are you trying to tell me you have never hit on a perfect stranger or had any casual encounters of any kind?" she says pryingly.

"Well, I am no angel. But I prefer not to... kiss and tell. You know? Some things are private," Evaline says as Dustin offers her a sip from her glass.

"Yes. Private. Just between two people. No one else has to know." Dustin leans in suggestively.

Evaline immediately picks up on the undertones. She takes the glass and says, "Yes. Exactly." She takes a light sip while she stares back into Dustin's eyes.

The waiter comes back to the table with two bottles of wine that he opens and places between the two women as well as an extra glass. He then hands the dinner menu to Dustin and walks away.

Upon opening the menu a tiny piece of paper falls out. Dustin picks it up and reads what is written on it. All it says is, "Closing time." Dustin folds up the paper and places it into her pocket.





"Evaline, can I ask you a question?" Dustin says, pouring Evaline a glass of wine.

"By all means," she says politely.

"When is the last time you really let loose and had a good time?"

"You know, I really can't remember the last time I even did this," Evaline relaxes a little.

"What?" Dustin grins.

"Just, had dinner with a friend... if you don't mind me calling you that?" Evaline is drinking so fast she is almost ready for a refill.

"That is a shame... and yes, you can call me that. But is that all you need? A friend? 'Cause, I don't think that is the only reason you showed up here. You don't have to say

it... just, stick around. Get cozy. And I promise you will have a good time." Dustin raises her glass in a toast.

Evaline is reluctant at first, but the signs of an old self she had buried somewhere in her past start to poke up. A seductive smile creeps up her face. Evaline raises her glass and nods once.

The clinking of the glasses could cause sparks between the two of them and the amount of naughtiness they have in store tonight.

"To good 'friends'," Dustin says before the two of them take a drink.

An hour after closing time, Dustin, Evaline and the handsome Spanish waiter are stumbling down the road like drunken children.





The moon is so big in the sky that Evaline is taken a back for a moment and loses her footing trying to embrace the sight of it.

“WHOA... I never even noticed the moon?” she slurs.

Dustin stumbles up behind holding herself up by Evaline’s side, “You never noticed the moon before?” Dustin says as she squints.

There is a moment of silence until the both of them begin to crack up laughing.

“No... not NEVER. I mean, tonight. It’s so LUMINOUS.” Evaline puts one hand over her chest as if the awesome beauty of it all is too much to keep inside herself.

But the moment is killed when the sound of the Spanish waiter’s feet shuffling around and piss hitting a nearby building wall is heard between them.

They look over at the waiter who is whistling to himself and swaying like he is aboard a boat that just hit some turbulence. He finishes and the sound of his fly zipping up is heard. He turns in a twirl toward the two women and begins to sing a song in Spanish to them. It is a drunken serenade.

“I should not be this intoxicated. It is not what one would expect from a woman such as myself.” Evaline tries to maintain her classiness, but fails by the slur and stumble over the English vocabulary.

“You need to learn to let go, Evaline. I can show you.” Dustin grabs Evaline by the back of the head and slams a hard kiss on her lips. Sucking Evaline’s bottom lip into her mouth and sliding off of it with her own lips, Dustin looks Evaline in the eyes. “Would you like me to show you, Evaline?” Dustin whispers.

Evaline tries to see past the drunken haze and pull herself back into the life she knew just hours before. But the lust and the liquor win, and she gives in with a huff.

Back in Dustin’s hotel room, the three of them tear through each other’s clothes. In the heat of the moment everything seems perfect. Every taste. Smell. Touch. Like being in the throes of a tidal wave that feels too good to try and control. From the outside, the drunkenness would be amusing. But none of them would care if they did have an audience. It was pure raw animalistic fucking fueled by god knows how much alcohol.

And somewhere in the back of Dustin’s drunken cluttered mind she thinks, “This is too easy.”



GHOSTWALKING

By Patrick Wright

I'll recount the latest dream I endured last night:

I visit Mel in her house in Rusholme. I apologise about the way things ended. She's charming but unhinged - more than simply quirky. She's disconcerting. Her house is arranged bizarrely: tables and chairs in unexpected places. She looks older than I remember, and only vaguely recalls our friendship. She's indifferent to me, and steps back when I reach out to hug her.

I say I've missed her: that she's precious to me, and I manage to kiss her on the cheek. Her face is stony though, like a mannequin. She doesn't kiss me back.

Instead she hands me a detonator which, with flashing green and red lights, has already been activated, and there's no way back. She tells me what she's done.

"I've planted a bomb in a biscuit factory. Because they deserve it."

She justified the act in a spiel of nonsense.

I throw the detonator on the bed in horror and go to the window, which, from its high elevation, looks out onto the city centre, far in the distance. I don't believe her at first. I assume she's joking. But then the realisation: she's actually a terrorist, and not only a terrorist but one with paranoid delusions.

The detonator beeps and there's a flash, two miles in the distance, quickly followed by a rumble and tremor. There's a spectacular explosion - like the World Trade Centre. Debris and smoke billow silently, only moments after, the shockwave abating.

I feel death in the air, its smell, the people killed, the city decimated. I hear the screams, even though I'm out of earshot.

Mel promptly leaves through her front door. She's got a wry, self-congratulatory smile, as she slings her hand-bag cattishly over her shoulder. I'm left alone in her house. She leaves me there. I'm stunned, and need a moment to process the events.

Gathering my senses, I decide to pursue her. But already she's lost again, in the mad panic, and in the street of rubber-necking voyeurs. I make my way to ground zero, having forgotten her address, the one I'd spent so long searching for.

Arriving at the blast-site, I try to find a call box. I want to phone the police, to report Mel as responsible. I keep going into the same bank, but no one knows the number. I intend to report her and make her culpable.

I cry out: "Doesn't anyone know the number of the police?"

Firemen and paramedics are on the scene immediately.

"I know who did this," I say hysterically, "I was just talking with her earlier!"

They look at me incredulously, as if I were mad. I feel anger, outrage towards her; a deep sorrow, too, at what she's done to the scorched faces of the innocent.

The men ignore me and go about their rescue efforts.

I get given numbers, but they're wrong, or ring only answering machines.

I see large city buildings, built after the IRA attack, and they're leaning over like the tower in Pisa, ready to fall on me. And so I slip underneath, wary, superstitious, like walking under a ladder. I find a fireman who assures me "they'll get rebuilt - better than last time," and he says he's got the number of the police station for me.

I see blackened faces, maimed limbs and features.

I imagine Mel walking round the streets, composed, admiring her handiwork.

In my dream dictionary, explosions are symbols of "having destroyed some important part of your life."

What wakes me from such dreams is always our lips touching. I keep hunting her down, finding her in dark rooms, bedsits, theatres, asylums, where she doesn't want to be found; in spidery cities, on council estates, always in appalling living conditions.

After such dreams I'm disorientated, doubting her reality; so to reassure myself I visit her old flat in Rusholme, just off the Curry Mile. "Kent Court" exists after all. I was wrong to doubt her. I knew she lived somewhere in Rusholme; though, due to some psychological flaw, I'd always avoided the address.

The air is South Asian. Around me there are Bangladeshi, Kurds, Afghans, Indians. The scene's cosmo, boho. I stroll along Wilmslow Road, processing the sights, the sounds, the aromas, all captivating me. I see the pavement doused in litter, gold sequins in dresses, catch whiffs of marijuana and doner kebabs, mixed, confused in strange greetings. I imagine, too, the arranged marriages, the friendships, the failing businesses. I feel a rare sense of belonging; yet, at the same time, everything's clothed in foreignness.

Mel's presence is there, also, amid the chaos on the streets, car horns and boisterous laughter. She's seen this all before, the things I saw. My impressions and thoughts - they were once hers. Like a ghostly bloodstain, she's returned.

The evening's been glorious, but the sun dies like a bleeding horse, radiating its beams of despondency. I was in the area to visit a friend's exhibition at a gallery, but the deep solitude spoke to me and asked me to call it off.

The city transfigures into a labyrinth: it's the unconscious; it's memory; and it's Mel. I find layers of myself everywhere, in places we'd been, on random streets, in bars; places I'd regularly visit. But this place was different: somewhere I'd not been physically or mentally. In exploring this new space, I was exploring my psyche. Something I'd suppressed and needed to excavate.

Mel's flat is, surprisingly, easy to find, as I follow the crescent-shaped path round to the edge of suburbia. I notice time slowing down, to a stop, when I arrive at her front gate. The horse chestnut trees waver like drowning hands. The grass of spring starves for light.

"Five years later," I think to myself. "Somewhere, you're five years older."

She's there on the wind, my life in abeyance. The gate a headstone. The estate's a grave, as she described it, "in the possession of a Chinese company."

She was real again. Her story corroborated. She wasn't lying or insane.

I'm trespassing in a graveyard, without a body to mourn. A sense of expectancy and apprehension flutters by. A solemn and earnest atmospherics. The scene emotionally charged.

Her garden's neglected. Withered stalks and wind-chimes, the only signs of life. No epitaph. No goodbye. Windows without curtains. Opaque glass blackening inside.

A family park their car in the drive next door. They glance my way. I'm a burglar, stealing in, uninvited, stealing the remains of her presence.

They haven't seen her. I can tell. No point asking. She's long gone. I can feel it. Even when here, she sat like an orphan and dabbled in her darkroom - incommunicado, reticent and sour. They'd not appreciate me asking. For she's taboo. Like a tattoo. One they'd rather forget.

Nothing moves but time and regret. I observe sun-drenched daisies, as they lie on the lawn. I watch ivy grow on walls. The stillness seems to conflict. A contradiction - since this pocket of time is no more than stones-throw away, from the hustle and bustle, from a street where time moves so fast, where people exist. Time stops. Or time slows.

The past's in the unconscious. It's clear. The gate allows entrance, while the shadow of leaves dance on the driveway. This place now consecrated and venerable.

Then fantasy takes over. In this space created. I feel Mel glaring at me from the upstairs window. It's now dusk, as light flickers and darts about. I'm drawn back into a melancholy stupor. She sees me arrive; and I see her, as she photographs me, her squint curious and malign, eyes narrow with suspicion. There's vague recognition, as our eyes meet; yet estrangement too, after the years of absence and regret.

She's been resurrected.

"Her feet walked here," I keep telling myself, and "she's out there, somewhere."

There's nothing scarier than a spectre that lives, with elusive heartbeats, a spectre made dead by thought alone. The dead can't return. But she can, like people in cities appear and disappear, and can reappear round any corner. Shades on every street.

Strangers pass with traces of her, dark weaves of hair bouncing on shoulders, as impressions collect like rain in a cup. I've imbued her with immortal power, as a ghost - either dead or on the next street, waiting to bump into me. She's sacred, in between.

Even if she's alive, though, something's died. It's in me. Some part of me. The part that respire.



THE FIRST TIME, THE FIRST, THE...

By Michelle Facchini

Photo © Max Reeves

10,000 B.C, cavern in Yuin Nation

The clan covered and warmed themselves as best they could. Advanced in every way spiritually, physically, mentally. Their very being finely tuned to even the softest whispers of the land, could not compete with an event of this magnitude. But they did ride it out and they survived only to have to start all over again...

*

Braywood caves, Present day...

Sweet oblivion...

*

Miranda's bone-dry mouth was hanging open, her eyelids, heavy as iron, parted for a brief moment, only slightly aware her head and her body was jumping and lolling about like a rag doll. Her one thought during this inexplicable physical tumble, 'the kids.....' Unconsciousness swept over her again.

*

Her encrusted eyes and ears were assailed by a convulsing heaving ground and the screech of rock walls grinding into each other. Was it a miracle that it all didn't collapse on top of them right there and then considering the soul-destroying struggle for survival afterward? Ground, dust, her own body, too much... only one moment in time and space allowing her to lie on her side... she threw up violently. A vague acceptance that her kids might not survive this... back to sleep...

*

Crying, misery, when will it ever stop, wailing 'I've been awake too long,' Unable to get up, she called out to her children not too far from her. No answer. Then, reaching for a zippered pocket and pulling out 2, no, 3 Oxycontin and swallowing them as best she could, she knew she would have to wait for 20 hellish minutes before blissfully escaping this incomprehensible reality. For now, just for now...

*

Sweet oblivion.....

There was an occasional miserable groan 'Muuumm' then nothing. 'Yeah, I'm here,' I called out, that's all I could muster. We were talking in our sleep.

*

The violent shaking started up again. My shoulder was taking the brunt, screaming at the top of my lungs until I heard 'Mum, MUM, wake up, it's us.....' two mud-caked faces were peering down at me, all of us

frightened beyond belief. None of us could make any sense of our surroundings, barely of each other. I was their mother, they were my kids, that's all we knew for now...

*

Miranda gasped with shock and relief that they escaped this horror unharmed. A shaky examination of each child by the light of a couple of candles revealed no injuries, or even on herself, there was nothing. She forced herself to think - she would watch for symptoms of concussion. The candles and some matches and lighters, were hidden in a pocket in the jeans she was wearing in the cot-like set up she put together for each one of them. All of them crying again, she hugged them tightly and told them how brave they were... later she would sit them down and all would talk about what just happened.

*

Though very light headed and still drugged to the eyeballs, I remembered we had some food with us... and water, somewhere. Holding a lit candle and staggering about 50 metres further in, my search revealed the sturdy wooden crates filled with supplies, miraculously still anchored to the ancient limestone wall thanks to some large bolts and my trusty drill bit. A sharp photo collage flashed the upside of my head after I jimmied open the boxes, disturbing the drug induced nice warm foggy panic room behind my eyes, it seemed to be some fleeting memory of normalcy. Think. What do the kids like to eat again? Maybe some noodles and some chocolate milk? Some sweets? But first things first she said aloud,

get the water, wipe faces and hands and set up a stove. Gradually, the kids busied themselves with finding extra torches, choosing something to eat and finding bowls and utensils for cooking.

*

We all felt a bit more human after filling our stomachs with favourite food and drink. We ate on a mattress inside an oasis of soft light reflected by the wind up lanterns found in the supplies. Keep to a routine I decided. 'One step at a time, baby steps, keep things simple, anticipate our needs.' I tried to keep all these mantras at the forefront of every action I took in this new situation. I knew I would not be brave enough for some time yet to even consider the outside of this womb-like tomb in which we found ourselves. And another thing of which I was sure, our world before entering this cave, would never be the same...

*

Six months earlier, Elizabeth Bay

On one of the many nights she lay awake in her comfortable bed thinking and analysing the previous days course of events and on what she would need to do tomorrow or the next day or the next week or indeed a month ahead -all the usual decisions and actions that keep a family running together - something new, unusual and definitely disturbing was going on outside her bedroom window. She lay still and moved only her eyes toward the sounds. It was the sound and squawks of a large flock of river birds flying at night... she wondered what had disturbed them. Could be anything, she

pondered. Considering the country coastal town she was living in, perhaps it was not so surprising. The greedy local government of the town had for years wanted to try and make it into a "city". A ridiculous notion when in fact it could only support small local tourist seaside infrastructure and development. It just didn't have the population either. The last grand scale development they and the real estate agents pursued was three years earlier with the razing of an official native fauna and flora sanctuary located just on the other side of the local bridge. Residents living in adjacent kilometres all around the site reported being overrun with fleeing kangaroos, wallabies, koalas, goannas, lizards, bush rats and the many assorted birdlife that had existed peacefully and quietly there forever until then. Instead, the council replaced the sanctuary with retirement house and land packages.

But then Miranda heard flocks of birds again, the next night at the same time, coming from and traveling in the same direction just as the first time she heard them. Their birdsong was the same. She wondered if it was the same group. If it was then they had returned to roost at some point during the day. 'Mmm, interesting,' and she nodded off.

A week later, Miranda was driving her usual route to the supermarket eleven kilometres away to pick up the weekly groceries. Night was quickly setting in. She had to wind her way through tree filled tracks and bitumen roads, turning south here, west there, right at some of the bends and left at the eventual t-intersection that would take her straight into town. Some

short minutes into her journey though, she felt this unfamiliar curious sensation that she was traveling in a new and different direction. But she hadn't veered off course, taking the same roads and angles as every other time she drove into town. That's weird, she told herself. It's as if some invisible hand rotated the entire area a few degrees from its usual... position? But how could this be? She couldn't even see a rational physical change in anything around her at all. Again she stiffened and moved only her eyes from side to side as she drove along, it was only when she looked ahead that she could feel it, eventually shaking her head in disbelief... at herself.

It wasn't until months later, when she remembered this strange feeling, that she mused perhaps something in the sky had changed. Something on the horizon. Which made sense, when the town route she took was walled with trees, it was only when she looked straight ahead she could see the meeting of sky and land and that's when that 'feeling' was strong. But how? The sky was a heavy sprinkle of cosmic glitter on that particular route and all changing to different positions daily, monthly, yearly. Miranda frowned, incredulous at her own oncoming thoughts. If the position of the earth had actually changed even in a new and radically different way with no public announcement of it anywhere, how could she discern such an impossibly minute difference in the position of the stars? Miranda began to wonder if humans were able to perceive far more than they actually realised.

Stepping into the supermarket always put her on edge. It wasn't the crowds or the

queues. It was the absence of a false sense of security she once held onto about the ready availability of ready-made food. One of the most artificial of all realities. A house of cards, a blessing but for how long would it continue? It frightened Miranda that she was so dependent on it for food. It frightened her that subsistence was much more expensive to maintain than buying it from a supermarket. Her meagre endeavours to buy fruit and vegetable shrubs for the small garden were just that. The food coming from that just didn't supply 24/7. For that to happen, she would need acres of land to grow grain and other people to help with sustaining it. And there seemed to be only a small global group that controlled a massive yet fictional mysterious mess called finance and economics, of which she was not a part. Her uni studies in economics continually stressed one of its foundational theoretical statements, also present in both financial and chartered accounting, and that was "determining the distribution of scarce resources." What a load of crap! In reality, resources were plentiful, in abundance but tightly controlled by the few. All she had to do was look around. As well as not having a husband in order to fulfill successfully some component of this economic fiction, she also did not expect to be receiving any kind of inheritance. Miranda realised she was very much behind the societal eight ball on issues of self-sustenance. What could she do? Joining a commune was one idea, joining a nunnery was an impractical other, (she wouldn't join unless the kids could come too). Miranda let out a breath of sadness, she felt truly alone and powerless... and exhausted. Tomorrow she would investigate the idea of land co-ops,

where you can own land communally as well as work and live on it through the reinvesting of profits received from the sales of whatever can be commercially grown there. She might be sad but not without hope.

But for Miranda during the months that followed, the world she lived in took a turn of events that revealed a shocking series of coincidences and synchronicity...

On waking one morning, a sudden shortness of breath had her chest working hard and she fatigued quite quickly after a few short bursts of domestic energy.

Lying in a hospital bed didn't have any perks really. Her brother looked after the kids while she was recovering. Extensive testing on her had shown that she had abnormally high and low levels of blood gas, very low lung function, low blood pressure, was underweight, in short she was very ill. Although her hard and fast breathing was tempered with oxygen, Oxycontin and even a bit of Morphine, the drugs gave her a light-headedness and slowed her body down a little, took the edge off the pain in her upper back, that was about it. One of many nurses came rushing in to the ward to check on her in her first night there, "it's terrible, what's happened, isn't it?" Miranda had no idea what she was talking about. "What happened?" "Oh today, the 8.9 earthquake in Japan, thousands of people were killed... the city infrastructure was destroyed..."

Miranda never watched TV at home, couldn't stand the content. Her eyes widened and her jaw dropped as, after

having the ceiling TV flicked on for her, moving pictures of devastation and talking heads in grave expression flashed backwards and forwards. Meanwhile, breaking news captions scrolling along underneath these main events revealed that half a world away, there was also sudden massive inland flooding in her own country in Queensland and Victoria and then another news flash claiming that Poland, back up in the northern hemisphere, had also become the latest victim to inexplicable flooding. It was on nearly every channel.

After weeks recuperating, Miranda improved and was discharged from hospital, driven away by Steve, her man friend. He had been very worried for her and came in to visit regularly armed with chocolate, books and her favourite fruits. She was glad to be home and relieved she could get back into her own routines. A catch up with friends some days later had them all relaxing in her lounge room hovering over cake, coffee and alcohol, speculating on what would happen next with the world. "I actually know some people here in this town, who've taken it seriously, and they've stocked up on food and supplies... just in case," said one. "Just in case of what?" said another. "In case, the same thing happens here." Miranda slipped in at this opportunity to convey her own worries, about the strange sense of 'misdirection' she had when driving about sometimes, new patterns occurring in nature, like the local flocks of birds suddenly flying at night when they never did before and other coincidences.

Some of the others were surprised that they weren't the only ones experiencing and witnessing odd happenings. Like Lily, a

local who'd been living right on the forest edge for the last 20 years, recently began hearing strange hooting noises from afar, some closer, loud and guttural. They seemed to echo from a lower adjacent valley to where her house sat atop a cliff edge blessed with wide angle panoramic views to the western horizon. Nicole, another friend, admitted that in all her time as a triage nurse at the local hospital, the last twelve months had seen strange correlations between groups of patients admitted, sometimes all on the same night with the same symptoms, in tandem with particular world events. "I shouldn't say this, but like you Miranda, two other women came in on the same night with almost exactly the same presentation, right down to the side of the body and even locations affected within the organ... at that moment, Miranda's phone rang.

When she answered, a smile ran across her face. It was Steve. "Yeah, great, what time? Ok, see you here later". She addressed her waiting audience. "We are off to the movies tonight!"

*

The lights began to fade as the last cinema ad faithfully continued its decade long message of switching off mobile phones, and to discipline oneself against throwing things around and talking too loudly whilst the movie is playing... Steve turned to me discretely at this point, lightly enclosing my hand and hovering close but not too close to my ear... "COMFY?" and he wasn't whispering either. A sideways glance from me and a sarcastic smile from another in front of us only encouraged him, "oh wait a

minute, I forgot to turn off the phone". He promptly made it ring and then "accidentally" dropped it into the darkness between his legs. But it actually fell onto the carpet where an involuntary kick from him had it sliding deep under our seats somewhere still ringing..." what are you doing?... the movie is about to start you pubescent goose" I laughed back at him incredulously but nevertheless thinking 'is he serious?' Lucky we were the only ones in this row.

He was quite a flexible guy and managed to manipulate himself to his knees between the two rows of seats. Steve fumbled around while actually manipulating me into a legs akimbo position so that I could help him reach under to get his phone. My name should be 'Gullible' not 'Miranda'. In the darkness, during the opening credits, he stopped still, facing me, held both my hands firmly in his, lent down and kissed me hard and long through the front of my jeans. My instinct was to pull away given the public place we were in. However as we were the only ones in this row and the chair backs reached quite high, nobody could see us. This time instead, I let my head rest against the back of the seat and allowed myself to truly feel what he was doing. I shouldn't have. If I wanted to stay happy and light, we would now have to exit the building immediately to follow through. I have no self discipline in the delayed gratification of love. And he knows that. Another of his beautiful tortures. I tried hard to keep my emotions in check.

It was an action movie, a suspenseful thriller, the theatre surround sound was superb. Lots of heavy bass and rumble and

grumble, It even made the seats and the ground vibrate around us, I even had to whisper to Steve how impressed I was with all of this "this is really good! Makes me feel as if I'm actually in the movie." He turned to look at me wide-eyed and whispered "yes! It's great, isn't it." We turned back to the screen riveted. Just then the theatre doors behind us opened, the lights turned on and in rushed several nervous ushers declaring that there had just been an earthquake outside and everyone should promptly exit the building. After a quiet jaw dropping moment by most of the patrons, including us, we ventured slowly to the outside of the complex to see a debris scattered vista of stones, brick, fallen young trees, displaced parked cars, and newly formed cracks in nearby buildings.

I rang David, my kids' father to see if they were okay. Luckily he answered on first ring, "They're ok, I'm taking them right now to higher ground up Cooper's Mountain, I'll meet you at the first parking bay nearest 'Pooh Bear's Corner'." I always felt the need to give a reminder about something... "OK... don't forget their jackets and some snacks, I'm on my way." Steve rang his mother, who was babysitting his kids eleven minutes away by car. In typical male fashion he was handing out instructions left right and centre but she was already there in the car with the kids packed headed west toward Plough Hill, a steep area 500 hundred metres above sea level... she could get there in ten minutes.

Steve and I raced to his red sports car in the car park and we zoomed back to my place. We kissed and hugged tightly and quickly before going our separate ways toward our

respective families including the ex inlays...

My four wheel drive held up quite nicely in an emergency. I was lucky to have found this bargain in the local papers a few months back. I wasn't quite sure about wanting a v6 at the time, but was certainly grateful for it now. That extra bit of power climbing the many U-bends and steep stretches of tar and bitumen was definitely needed and had me disappearing higher and higher into cold, misty, and tonight in particular, silent mountain forest. Fortunately there were no fallen boulders blocking road access. The metal guards and netting the council put up recently seemed to be holding their own... wait a minute... in all the years and decades previous why did they only just now put up these precautions? Mmm, anyway, the only really nervous time was the drive along the sea and river roads before the start of the mountain. Not knowing exactly when and if a tidal wave was coming had me glancing constantly at the horizon to my right, my every breathe a sigh of relief when I saw no changes in the water. Although it was only fifteen minutes since the earthquake.

Quite a few locals had the same idea seeking mountain refuge. Two lanes of traffic down to a slow crawl on low ground for another few hair-raising minutes. A familiar smiling cheeky-faced 20 year old yelled out a car window in the next lane. "Where are you off to?" Keeping one eye on the road, I laughed and yelled back "Pooh Bear's Corner, David and the kids are there." The bright wind-lashed girl responded "we're goin' up to Braywood for the night!" "We might see you there," I volleyed back. "OK, we'll be turning left at

Dead Ends Road just before the servo.”

I gave them the thumbs up and waved them off. Braywood was the first town on the mountain top plateau, one and a half hour’s drive west from the eastern seaboard. Dead Ends Road was slang for the local cemetery that lay on an old flat road leading to nowhere. It was surrounded by a short stretch of grassy plain flanked by nearby ancient limestone hills and overhanging rock walls. One of the best places to be if you couldn’t afford a motel for the night and were seeking temporary sanctuary from long travels. Best of all it wasn’t on the map and wasn’t tethered to any state forests or roads and traffic jurisdiction.

Pooh Bear’s Corner was right at the next hairpin bend and already Miranda glimpsed David’s park lights through the trees in left field of view.

The kids ran at me as I got out of the car to greet them, with David’s solemn form patiently waiting in the night shadows. Tisha seemed to take it all in her stride while Jack the younger excitable one couldn’t wait to give me a frame by frame animated reprise of his role in tonight’s earthquake. Their father and I agreed that it would be better for the kids if we stayed at a motel in Braywood for the night, hopefully returning to our respective unscathed homes in the morning. So Jack sat up front in his dad’s car and Tisha and I followed in mine.

We were very lucky to find a comfortable room available tonight given that surely, like us, most of the regional coastal population had fled westward en masse by

now... or so I thought.

*

Braywood Cavern... the third day.

She squatted with her kids in one of the many dark recesses that lay situated deep within the gloomy dust filled cavern. Miranda, trying to stem the ever present tide of terror within her, was attempting to recall some logic, some order of operations in repairing a simple but broken radio. She lined up some basic repair tools on the ground in front of her, illuminated by a couple of wind up lanterns. One of them was a soldering iron energised by a hand cranked generator that was droning on some metres away. But her concentration was no match against assailing screaming freezing winds blasting at the outside of huge boulders that blocked the entrance. She held her face in her hands for a few moments. One shattering thought followed a grimace and a shake of the head, trying not to let frustration get the better of her. ‘I knew I should have watched those fucking Macgyver rerun.....’ Miranda turned and stared at the kids for a moment. “Do either of you know how to fix a radio?”...their enthusiasm was matched only by their violent sibling rivalry, “I do, I DO,” with one shoving the other out of the way. “Hey! Careful...”



D04056

BIOGRAPHY, OF A MAN YOU DON'T KNOW, NEVER WILL, IN PICTURES

By Declan Tan

Photos © Lisa Wormsley



First there was a thump with no screams, then an audible sagging like a paper bag deflating like a person sinking under the weight of his own bodily fluids like a fish drowning. Upstairs they were desperately trying to get dizzy from smoking flash burn cigarettes made almost entirely of gum paper save for an insufficient streak of tobacco that lit and disappeared into instant ash.

Earlier they had tried packing the tobacco in hard and tight, bits of moist flakes lying prostrate on the floor, but the draw of the

lips didn't give them that burning sensation they were after; it only gave them nicotine, which was kind of secondary. They wanted throat to moan, for they had fallen down. Hence the thump, and the sagging, and the sinking and the drowning and the anger that it was about nothing.

Already laid out down there, they stole the opportunity and whopped the dulled palms of their tiny fists on the dividing wall. They had long ago lost any sense of decency. And because the old man next door seemed to be having a good time in there, and all alone with Terence Stamp eyes, they had slid photographs of themselves standing at the window adjacent to his, their jingoistic eyebrows raised, as if saying:

"Animus?" but playfully,

or simpl::

"Yeah?" ruefully,

or

"Why are they nude?"

Or is it because they have to?"

and the days were made to make no sense

and none of them were shapely.

Leading to this: The old man was perturbed, probably. But there was, as in most cases, little in the way of evidence, and little in the

way of action; only dreary patience for the slug that never comes.

They only sent more gibberish images, polaroids with eyebrows further raised to the in-grown ceiling, one snap with a paperette in the mouth like a kind of sucking pig. It brought them round again full circle, satisfyingly enough to not remember.

It was all for a reason, and one that mutated: They were writing an increasingly subnormal biography of the Everyman who happened to rent the next door and the floors behind it, though their activities were not unknown to him as, with the photographs, they had frequently pasted little snippets of his life under his rented door to go with his door and to go with the photo.

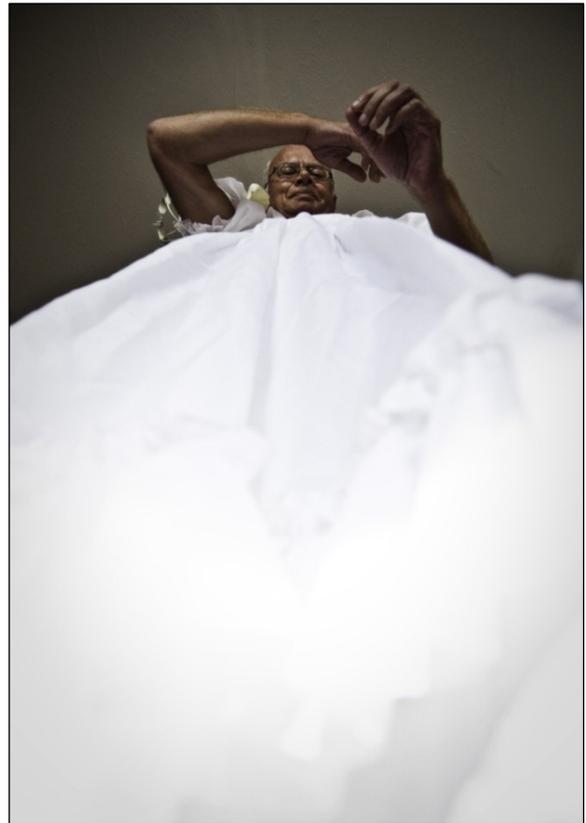
They had accounted for all the events of his life up until that point without sufficient conclusion and, if they were being honest, were poking at him now with the paper-plastic flaps merely for more material.

The work had become laborious, dotted with inconsequential details that made no sense, such as in an in-progress chapter on how the man would respond to photographic images of himself when heading out for some milk and the paper, or how he behaved when visually insulted. To both there was no comment.

Their fascination had begun when they picked up a package from a Hermes messenger man; a big empty box that had almost nothing in it, which they didn't open as, they had decided, such a narrative choice would prove inordinately pivotal to the denouement of his biography, and they

didn't want to decide his fate prematurely, and while they were at it, they didn't want to shut out any potential markets by putting a genre on the thing, as the mode of death would irrefutably decide this.

They knew from the package where he worked and probably for how long too, as not just any employee gets a package from their employer with so much empty space spent in delivery. They guessed at something with a nametag and navy uniform.



But accuracy was not of paramount concern to this true-to-life allegory of which parallels were surely to be made between his and the lives of certain martyrs, saints and sundry religious/historical figures, comparisons that could not be easily repudiated.

The man had not bothered to pick up the package, probably didn't even know it was there (as maybe it was the long awaited, likely unwanted redundancy gift) but *they* didn't want to know either, until the biography was completed at least, and finished with in all senses of the word 'finished'. Then the unleashed spike tail of a twist would come swinging low and heavy, walloping dimly-lit readers away off their chairs, as if that seemingly insignificant event of a package had taken on the vestigial importance of meaning in the Everyman's vestigial life, which now seemed ever-more useless.

While they awaited riposte for their blatant harassments they would chop shrivelled chillies by the window, rubbing seeds between their fingers until it felt like blood had risen to the surface then, flicking the spiced ovules toward his window as part of their warrior's ritual, they allowed themselves the small satisfaction of pinging sounds that made the subject imaginarily wince his puce face like one of the desiccated red peppers. They would do this for several hours, before returning to the archived document to add more made-up details. Occasionally, in frustration, they would let out low brick-wall screams in an attempt to goad the unreliable narrator into action. These always failed.

Despite these obvious setbacks, they had invented a florid series of anecdotes and shopping lists intercut with falsified diary excerpts involving chilli-licking ('A Shot to the Lips'), bakery sprees ('Breadmaker, Breadtaker, Breadmaker Man'), motivational speeches and their subsequent riots ('Getting One's Tit Out'), punch-ups in the office ('Sit Down Now, and Cry'), as

well as the speculative reasons as to why he had left his wife and spat on the cat ('Prowess'). A number of such excerpts were folded neatly, placed in envelopes and cello-taped to his door.

Other times they would evenly contaminate their prospects of an amicable meeting by sliding spur-of-the-moment handwritten dribblings in the manner of:

"What's the time, Mr. Wolf?"

or the oft-delivered and overt pleading of: "I just want to get to know you. Fancy a drink?" etc.

All of their forays were faced with stony silence.

These enquiries would lead to further confusion on both sides, occasionally even followed up with seemingly heartfelt condolences and late-night knocks on the door when hiccupping could be heard. Occasionally tumblers of water were left standing on the 'Welcome' mat.

These excerpts, on the most part, dealt with the man (misleadingly in the first person) detailing his frequent and destructive bouts of angular depression as viewed through the murk-stained lens of his unsuccessful relations with those around him, surrounding him, particularly an ongoing, rogue-like turf war with the local teenage moped/biker gang, 'The Circles'.

One particularly salient excerpt read: that his body, in a state of spasmodic self-awareness, "wrenched" with "tonic and toxic vim" when faced with the unassuming faces of the clan, an incident which, incidentally, lead directly to his growing neighbourhood renown for outbursts of

“scholarly spiritual vitriol” and “putrid denunciations” of the local chapters’ outwardly hedonistic life choices; incidents in which bottles and helmets were thrown, sharpened words exchanged, along with reams of balled-up newspaper refreshed by cartons of grape juice tossed anonymously from a third-floor window.

But they, his unwanted biographers, paid due to the fact that he, being constantly “at odds” with himself, had learnt the hard way, from his wife, the cat and now the midnight photographs, to “live and let live; ‘fuck the consequences’ (his quote)”. Because of this, the man could often be heard coughing.

They felt regret.

They felt anger, no, rage, at the hours spent looking at the Everyman, like taking a photograph of a man taking a photograph, and so on.

This was *before* the letters began arriving in *their* mailbox, *before* the reel of *photographs* that would arrive *daily*, snippets of the biography *they* had written with added details on *how* they were written (“The Turning Worm”). Indeed, the worm *had* turned and now it was looking back at *them*, talking in tongues.

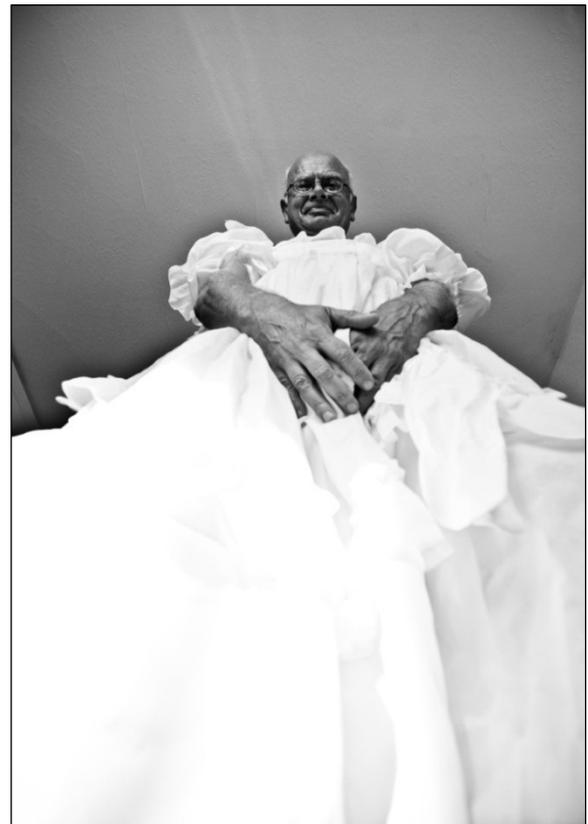
The short-lived anger subsided, giving way to free running panic.

Trying to get out of the situation quickly, they wrote what they intended to be the final lines of this fifty-odd years in a haze of dizzy smoke, writing the gurling of his infamous last words to themselves; a barely audible burr.

And the Unnameds are
survived
by their biographies,
of their biographies,
and
their ghostwriters,
and the clothing,
and photographs
that separate them.

The Rest
are not

but nobody knows,
nobody asked.





D04012

COSTA RICA EIGHT MILE

By Gene Gregorits

CHAPTER 11: FREE RADICAL

I set out on foot along Second Street, scouting the neighborhood, learning my options. Across the street from my building was a three story gay disco, a hippie coffeehouse, and a beer and whiskey joint, also gay. I was painfully aware of my anonymity and invisibility, just as I'd been during my days at the YMCA. But then, at least I had the security of work, and the notion that in my 20s, a compromise of sorts would be reached, or at least a touch of good fortune would have to come my way. There had been several great purgings since then, several floods, and I felt that my time was up, and that nothing was left. I couldn't even cadge free drinks at the gay bars, no longer being passable as chickenmeat, or rough trade. My face was bloated with drink, my eyes drooped, my jaw was permanently clenched, and I reacted to any social advance like a spooked rabbit. My attempts to mask this fear made my condition twice as obvious, and through the distrustful, prying eyes of a provincial, clan-sheltered nincompoop, himself like a spooked German shepherd, the sickness which festered within me would be amplified even further. I didn't want to be harboring this ache to perform violence on people, and their dogs, but it was growing in me. Betraying these feelings inadvertently caused me to feel as though I'd been caught masturbating in a men's room; I was ashamed of having rage and contempt, but when drunk, I'd become sympathetic, a synthetic sympathy that I gave myself over to, just as I'd give myself over to the inertia and idiocy of people readily the more I guzzled. But always, always: I had the down-at-the-mouth,

hangdog presence and appearance of a man who was not comfortable in his skin or in his present company. I felt sorry for the people I would find out there in the night, but I was lonely, and needed to confirm my civility, however disingenuous, and I resigned myself to the search regardless. If even one out of ten social performances came off as cordial or unpanicked or comprehensible, if I could convince only one person that there was goodness in my heart, that I was in truth a kind soul, perhaps I could start believing it myself. As it was, the final whimpers of Hank reverberated throughout me, at times to the extent that his memory would ricochet from one part of my skull to another, a white-hot thing trapped between hard surfaces where it could find no release. In the corner of my vision, I saw the soft bulk of him hit the cement upon release from the dog's mouth, with one last muted shriek, after which he went immediately into shock, with a broken jaw. I couldn't let it go. I was so desperate to rid myself of it, so sleep deprived and guilt ridden that I guzzled hurriedly and when drunk, my temporarily re-instated enthusiasms made me appear barking mad.

Perhaps it was apparent that I was flirting with the possibility of a random physical assault.

The streets were frozen, and the sky which that afternoon had spoken of snowfall was now making good on the threat. I sat on a riverside bench wondering what became of my wife in the prevailing years, to the extent that after warming up in several neighborhood taprooms, I made my way 2 miles uptown, swooped down an alley, past the supermarket where I'd worked, and surveyed the house where we'd lived together. I stood there for fifteen minutes,

trying to prize some distant memories out of the place, before realizing that it wasn't even the right house. I walked up and down the alley, looking at the backs of these dilapidated duplex homes. I stared at wire-screened porches, dogshit strewn yards, disused lawn mowers, broken windows, damp wooden staircases. Every house looked the same, and by the time I'd made a positive ID, my toes and fingers had gone completely numb. Furthermore, the exercise was starting to feel pointless and silly. For all I knew, she still lived there, with her screwy white trash parents. I didn't want to see them. And if she'd gotten fat, which she probably had, well... I didn't want to see that either.

I turned back, walking three miles south surrounded by arctic castles, brick and mortar mausoleums. It was confounding and enraging to me that anyone wanted to live in a place like this. Why couldn't they see it as I did? They were miserable cowards, fat and happy in this cowardice. And they were warm and soft. It occurred to me that no matter my circumstances, a constant factor would always be exposure: in the summer, I baked. In the winter, I froze. I didn't regret this, but with the alcohol, I was feeling sorry for myself, because it was too quiet and too cold. I'd done so much since I'd left Harrisburg, yet in this city, I was dead. I fantasized about murdering attractive female Young Professionals to keep warm. I told myself that I would kill as a coward, I would kill someone who was vulnerable, or defenseless, but I would kill.

I stopped at a gas station and bought a 50 cent razor blade. I dropped fifty cents into a payphone and left a message for Alex, a former girlfriend who'd taken an interest in Hank, during one of my black depressions when I could talk of nothing but suicide.

She'd agreed to adopt the animal in the event of my death.

When I got to the riverbank, I descended a long flight of stairs, down to the drink. The stairs kept going, but I stopped when the filthy, frothy water began slapping my boots. There was a bridge to my left and a bridge to my right, each a hundred feet above, and maybe a quarter mile off. The headlights of cars glanced off the black surface of the subzero waters. There was a dark mass by my feet; closer inspection revealed it to be a woman's purse. I threw it and the blade into the river and walked home. Sam was waiting for me there.

The cold new sheets and puffy blankets, coupled with the carpeted, low ceilinged room, created a funereal scene; I felt as if prone there, in state, staring at a glowing monitor, petting the cat or adjusting the system volume but otherwise remaining motionless. Sam remained on my chest, glowering at me.

On my first morning alone in the Harrisburg death chamber, I watched a Hollywood teen sex comedy over the top of Sam's head, his fine cream-colored hair and the odd dust mote wafting through the sunlight. It entered the room through a curtainless window that gave me access to an unsecure wooden fire escape. Although I knew nothing of carpentry or lumber, I could see that this structure had been created from high quality material, pine perhaps, and was held in place by strong steel brackets which were not rusted. There was a metal banister, also quite new. But the building itself stood in deplorable shape, and the landing outside my window had succumbed to severe water damage; the center of the landing was like a tortured and exhausted rectum, rotted clean through in the middle, while the putrid area around the hole gave way with great flexibility, like

so much wet cardboard. Although I was only on the second floor, I assumed, first of all, that I would be using the window as an entry point, if not also an exit, because I'd already started getting hostile glances from the other tenants, but also because my landlord lived on the same block, in a million dollar brownstone, the only non-tenement house on North Street. My second assumption was that the "asshole" of that second floor fire escape landing would have to give way at some point, releasing me into the alley below. I said a faint prayer for my knees and ankles.

That withering piss haze, a sickly shaft of backalley downtown sunlight burned across the room and across my sheets, it burrowed into my blood like an X-ray, a Harrisburg death-ray, and it shone through Sam's orange-cream coat, allowing me to examine all of the millions of ultra-fine hairs in detail. It nauseated me. Hank had been an American shorthair tabby, with intensely curious, intelligent eyes. His brown hair, with black stripes, did not appear in my food, and I didn't notice much on my clothing or bedsheets. He was gentle and unimposing, which made me all the more willing to talk to him or play with him for hours, to stare at him in small fits of adoration. But Sam was a different beast altogether. Because of his temperament, I could not minimize the substantial air/food pollution caused by his unruly coat with daily brushing, not if I wanted to also minimize my substantial scar collection. Sam shook you down like a crazed beggar for the attention he needed, in the moment, on the spot, exactly when this need arose in him. And if he found you in a non-accommodating mood or situation, he was not shy about expressing his displeasure and disappointment. Part of me admired this, but all principle aside, it was an extremely difficult thing to put up with, and I would find myself losing my temper,

screaming at him, or even striking the infernal beast. Sam's formidable head and paws made up most of his body, and when his demands for affection were rebuked with flustered curses, Sam would not scamper off as most small animals will, but lunge forward, hissing and swatting at any of your limbs he could reach. The rage which would sweep over his ragged countenance and half-mad eyes was heartbreaking, after the initial shock or annoyance, because you knew that his rage was uncontrollable, and that his fearsome mood swings, much like mine, were the product of human kind and not his own. You also knew instinctively that he was terrified, or hurt, more so than just plain old mean, and that he had spent most of his life enduring exposure. Of course, this would occur to me much later, after the hydrogen peroxide or rubbing alcohol had dried in the angry, deep trenches he would leave upon my skin.

Sam had a strange way of hopping into his intended victim when offended. He would lunge, deliver a few quick but passionate bites, then retreat. Being overweight and slight of lower body; he reminded me of a badger in this way, or a wolverine, especially with that waddle of his, but he had the smashed in face of a fruit bat, and one eye drooped noticeably. His face and unpleasant personality would grown on me in time, but with Hank still slinking around my brain, and crying out to me from that barren gravesite in Northern Maryland, I found myself allowing Sam to hold court upon my chest; even reaching for a bottle or the remote control gingerly, so as not to disturb him, but his gaze was irresistible, so we would lay there like that, sometimes for hours. I would attempt to understand my devotion to the animal, straining my neck to find a new angle of his face, one which I might find handsome, or endearing, or compelling. I could not. He was a homely

old cat to be sure, but he had become necessary to me. I resisted obsessing upon the contradictory nature of my cat dependency, or the many other contradictions which had been emerging in recent months. Ultimately, I didn't care about the reasons, not for Sam, or me, or anything. My only hope was that if something catastrophic was going to occur, it occurred sooner than later.

That night, I entered Brickbat's, a German-themed sports bar. Brickbats was home to a despairing admixture of young law students, overweight skinheads, and black coke dealers. The law students would flash their pearly whites and play dart games, while the skinheads were fond of listening to generic punk music on the jukebox, and the dealers entertained several women each, seemingly unable to stop laughing. Beyond these three categories, there was only the occasional lone hopeful, a twentysomething bachelor who appeared half-brain dead. I'd talk to these weirdos just so the young women in attendance would not assume me to be one of them, because, unlike them, at least I could hold a conversation. On entry, I was immediately crestfallen: no less than 8 big screen wall mounted panel TVs screamed sports games, and everyone there was in the process of gorging themselves on nachos. A glossy full color banner hung over the bar, and another in the window, screaming: "BUDWEISER PRESENTS SUPER DELUXE ENDLESS NACHOS NIGHT AT BRICKBATS! ALL U CAN EAT 4 \$5.95 DURING FOOTBALL SEASON!" On the plates around me were leaning, cascading precipices of ground corn with buckets of orange and white cheese. Baskets of hot sauce and small plastic containers of sour cream littered the tables and the bar. The Young Republicans, yuppies, and lawyers were sequestered in a front room by the windows, while the rest of the patronage accumulated towards the rear by

the restrooms and at the bar in the middle. Each glassy-eyed reveler had secured his or her own Nacho Holocaust and for most, the proposition was taken anything but lightly. Some picked at their troughs dejectedly, while some engaged the food with a grim conviction that was altogether religious in nature. Among the crowd were those who abandoned their sodden happy hour allotments altogether in favor of moaning violently like rape victims at the televisions, apparently unhappy with the athlete's performances. When the game would go to commercial, the disgruntled sports enthusiast would drown his sorrows in his nacho pot, beginning with a liberal application of hot sauce, while muttering to the man next to him about the game. People here seemed fond of muttering to each other whole staring at the televisions. The game held them enraptured. I wondered what kind of explosion it would take to move these men to take interest in something else. On their faces you could sense extreme and authentic hurt, heartache, even. I saw that look once on the face of a man who found a DVD of his wife sucking another man's cock. You could tell by his posture, and the manner by which the familiar light left his eyes, like so many caged birds, that the old boy would never experience real joy again. His eyes would light up at a mention of certain writers, like Charles Willeford for example, or when you suggested going certain places, like Coney Island. But such radiance was gone now forever, and there was nothing anyone could do about it. Maybe all of these men had also seen DVDs of their women sucking other men's cocks, and now, all they had left was football. But the truth was probably that they were simply cowardly and afraid; provincial, as I've said. Their brains were just not suited to any stimulation beyond alcohol, sports, and threat of unemployment. Everyone there had money, and could do nothing with it but buy cars, and houses, and

bottomless bowls of fried corn. (Except the coke dealers and their women. They weren't eating much, I noticed.)

I had two drinks and made my way to the Alva, where I had never experienced such misery. I went to the Alva, where I had 20 years history. I wanted to at least make sure it was still there.

The Alva sat a block back from Market Street. You entered it as a halfway respectable sort from a small one way street which no one remembers the name of. A cramped and seedy vestibule, unchanged and uncleaned in many decades, would open upon a pay counter where I would typically find Amir, the owner. Concrete posts, serving no discernible purpose, lined the narrow sidewalks of the cobblestone alleyways in this morbidly quiet sector of downtown. Other greasy spoons and taprooms, situated in the bellies of parking garages, or in alleys barely wide enough for normal cars, could be sought out, but the Alva, with its large vertical neon sign and warmly dressed windows, was hard to miss. At one time, two blocks away, you could dine at The Spot, a 24 hour sandwich counter, a throwback to a 1960s downtown with beer on tap and fare as truly repellent as its clientele (most of whom were missing at least one body part), but the Spot was closed, finally, and the Alva had picked up the runoff. It was once owned by Jews, and kept up as a stopover for hungry travelers. Less than 20 paces to the north, through the taproom back entrance and across another bleak cobblestone alley, sat the Harrisburg train station, an impossibly ancient, chokingly atmospheric structure. The station's basement was utilized by Greyhound as its city depot. My entire teenage history, from 1990 until 1996, was rooted in that lower level waiting area. I deboarded buses there coming home from Miami, and New York, and Philadelphia,

and countless other east coast towns, in all manner of horrid and unsightly conditions, dysfunctioned by female rejection and all night journeys, unsocialized and uncivilized in my youth. It felt like a lifetime of waiting, of buses, and arrogant young women, it felt like death and failure, being back there. Too many god damn stories, that's why.

Cabs would line up along the circular station driveway, and if a Middle Eastern hack observed you approaching this procession from the taproom of the Alva, he would scrutinize you heavily, and unless you showed him sufficient tender, you could very well be refused service. Whereas, those who emerged from the Amtrak station were afforded a generous confidence. The driver wouldn't even strain to make eye contact. If you ever intend to rob or murder one of these men in the parked taxis, your safest bet is to approach from the station.

The Alva was a regular meeting spot for Jamie and I in early 1996, when we were separated and trying to repair our marriage through counseling. There was a lot of late night coffee and holding hands at the Alva then, and I remember how beautiful my wife appeared to me on those nights, and how hard it was for me to find sleep without her. I worked in warehouses, and on loading docks, for \$5 an hour, and I ate peanut butter sandwiches, fixated on my broken marriage thinking that I had fallen through the cracks, that only shit-ass winos lived this lonely. I didn't realize it then, but I was an exceptionally handsome young man, fully employed, and were it not for my basic shyness and inability to operate an automobile, I could have found an even prettier girl than Jamie, who, being a Jehovah's Witness, was completely fucked in the head. Amir, years later, during one of my stopovers from Michigan or New York,

would recall the young brunette, who I thought resembled Clara Bow.

"You work out your problem then?"

"We got divorced."

"Ah! So you get divorced! So what? Many other women for you, my friend. You are very young, you find NEW woman!"

Amir liked me far better before he found out I drank. Which brings me to the taproom. I never saw anyone take steel or lead or even get punched at the Alva, although in all my visits (probably in the triple digits) I never left without hearing the threat levelled at least once, sometimes at me. Most of the patrons, of course, didn't appreciate a young white man in their presence. They drank one dollar 16 ounce Steel Reserve cans, or one dollar 12 ounce Old Gold cans, or one dollar 10 ounce cans of Budweiser, and in the pre-ban days, the presence of cigarette smoke was so outrageously unbearable so as to be the thing of pure myth: to withstand this death cloud, you had to be both drunk and smoking yourself, or simply one of the walking dead. The bar's staff was the latter, and it was they who frightened me the most. I smoked crack in the bus station bathroom with the black alcoholics of the Alva, and on return to the bar, past the cabs and over all that vile cobblestone, I would be scratching uncontrollably at an uncontrollable erection, nursing a righteous sex vibe, muttering through gritted teeth, "Oh Jesus I need a woman about now" ...the blacks would try to coerce me upstairs to the fifty dollar a week flophouse where, they promised me, they had a young girl stashed away, a teenage runaway they'd put the heroin bite on; a strawberry.

I would instead retire to downtown's sole peep show, an overheated lycanthrope with

hunger pangs and phantom twitchings from an important thing long since vanished. But no true regret, let it be said. I always knew damn well: they didn't have no strawberry up there.

This all came back to me, photographically and psychosexually, as I eased into one of the low swivel chairs at the Alva's rear-restaurant bar.

The bar had always been equipped with a stereo system, which the patrons would argue over. It gave them something to get wrapped up in, conversationally, besides women, and women is what they fought about. To claim that the new jukebox was too loud was to say that the place had "urban character": this device seemed like something the government may have used on David Koresh during the Waco siege, or against Middle Eastern insurgents in Iraq. The jukebox sent a squadron of ball bearings, like angry African hornets, flailing out of the smoky air straight into your core, the minute you entered. My first thought was that the bartender had died and the savage drunks had taken over and begun running things in a vengeful manner, as they had seen fit to do all along. But an elfin, rodentine man who may have been either 40 or 60 emerged to find me there wearing a dramatically pinched face of unbridled animal agony: "Why so loud?" was all I could bear to communicate under such punishment.

"It keeps them CIVIL!" he said.

"WHAAAAT?"

"CIVIL! KEEPS THEM CIVIL! THE MUSIC!"

"OOOOH!" I said.

I ordered a Bud can, which I was elated to find still cost only a buck. The Old Gold was still there, and the Steel Reserve. Steel Reserve is made with the cheapest possible ingredients, and boasts of a sickeningly potent 11% alcohol. I always wound up with a broken nose when I drank that, but managed to have more fun, before the crash. A young man's trade-off, and I was no longer very young.

It was now three days, or maybe four, since I'd spoken to anyone, including Izabela. Without a phone, I had something of an excuse, but there was the old public library just a minute away, and my mother had planted that fifty on me ("This is from your father, don't spend it on alcohol."), so it was known among at least two of my constituents that I had money. With the widespread "urban cleansing" of all public phones, it wasn't unusual for me people like me to drop off the grid for a spell, but try telling that to middle class young girls like Izabela, or to a proud hillbilly like my mother, who seemed to think that the ills of one's existence could be cured with foot powder and potpourri and George W. Bush. I wilted at the thought of trying to communicate with either Izabela or my mother, so when the waxen-featured elf returned to me, I ordered Steel Reserve, and got promptly inebriated, drinking and smoking and talking trash about gullible, vulnerable, and unintelligent women until 2 A.M. Back on the street, I chuckled warmly to myself, as if Harrisburg and morning and Izabela and my mother and the rest of it were not waiting for me. Halfway home, a dumpy Amazonian whore tried to proposition me as I passed the famed Pennsylvania capitol building (a poor man's re-creation of the D.C. landmark). The woman's size made it unlikely that she had a vagina, but I couldn't be sure, and in the dark there was no hopes of detecting the outline of an Adam's apple. "Virgin ass

tour," the creature said. "Round the world. Suck your cock dry. Twenty bucks."

"Ten bucks," I said.

"Ten bucks won't even get you in my door, sheeeee-it."

I turned the corner, wondering if the creature had coke or dope. I made it to the alley behind my building, ascended the wooden fire escape, leaped over the soggy asshole in the 2nd floor landing, and crawled inside. Sam stared at me with huge eyes, disoriented and lonely. I fed him quickly and made my way back to the capitol, but by the time I got there, she was gone. The city was asleep now, even the scumbags. I sat down on the marble steps and tried to take it all in. The only sounds in the world then were an eerie clanking made by a steel pulley against a massive flagpole, and the fluid stuttering of the flag itself, whipping in the frozen wind. I sat for a while longer, hoping to get roused by a cop, but even the cops were hiding that night. Heading home a second time, I was startled by a barking dog, and it was then, I believe, that the birth of the idea was complete. It was almost 4 a.m. when I arrived at the all-night gas station, where I purchased 2 microwave cheeseburgers and a half gallon of anti-freeze. I found other clinking pulleys on other flagpoles, other places to sit and smoke and think about killing pit bulls. I didn't see a single person; it was as if the city had died. In actuality, it had. A city is meant to have a true nightlife, but here, as in many other places, the homeless population had been driven to extinction, or locked up in prison by police, all of them pit bulls on two legs. It would have been just as quiet out here on a summer night. When I made it back to the 2nd floor asshole and broke into my chamber, I was frozen stiff and the sun was almost up.

CHAPTER 12: DOWN IN THE VALLEY

"PAMELA" INTERNET CALL RECORDER,
Transcript, 1.13.09

- So is this how it is with you?
You just-

- What?

- Four days. My father got your family's phone numbers, and he says everyone's been looking for you, since Thursday. You can't just-

- Hold on a second, I'm fine! But listen...this is horrible: this guy, I think he's next door...Strange-u-bating Al. He strange-u-bates. Do you think that means "masturbating strangely"?

- WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? ARE YOU RETARDED? ARE YOU DRUNK? WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?

- I've been here. I couldn't get online, but I have this machine that fishes around in the air for a signal, and I couldn't get a signal, and-

- You ever heard of a payphone? Your mother told me that she

gave you money! Should I go back to seeing Joe?

- Who's Joe?

- JOE! The guy I broke up with to be with you! He's got a BIG RED DICK, and he knows how to treat a-

- I thought you'd been seeing Mike, with the foot-long dick.

- I'm getting a promotion, and my license, and my dad's going to be proud of me. I'm not going to be with a LOSER, you LOSER!

- Well, I just got the signal, the, uh, network. It works, that's why I'm back online. There's a guy *very close to me* who uses the name "AL STRANGE-U-BATES OFTEN". This is an all-gay neighborhood, it's always been. And this guy, who probably lives next door to me, is strange-u-bating. Isn't that awful?

- Fuck you, Gene! I'm DONE! I'm going back to JOE!

END CALL.

My first instinct was to redial Izabela's number. I was still half asleep. But I called my father instead. He had just retired, at the age of 92, and no longer knew what to do with himself all day. For the first time in his life, he was expressing feelings of uselessness. He was enormously depressed, and had become despondent. I got him on the second ring, and he offered to take me to lunch. I called Izabela back, but she simply said, "We had to TRACK YOU DOWN to make sure you were alright, and I get you, finally, and you're babbling about jerking off? I'll tell my father what you said! There's something WRONG with you Gene!" and then she hung up again. I scratched my head, which was throbbing, and tried to understand exactly how it could be that - if she was indeed concerned about me - she saw no cause for alarm in my having to share an Internet connection with a phantom "strange-u-bater." I felt an icy shock of aloneness just then, and also of violation. Al had to be some kind of sexual predator, a creep of Dahmer-esque proportions, and I've always felt that cockroaches ought to be exterminated with absolute prejudice.

I'd not seen my father, Jasper, since my return home, and thoughts of him overtook me. Having grown up during the depression, he'd found a personal sense of pride, and of purpose, only through work. And my father's work was hard manual labor. He had been a janitor for the city newspaper since the 90s, but in the previous fall, they'd forced him out. The paper was downsizing, along with virtually every other newspaper in the country, if not the world. It was no great loss to me. I could have made a comfortable living with my words, writing for a newspaper, instead of the body wrecking car washes, dishrooms, and other meatgrinders to which I'd always been forced to submit. But without a degree, I was unhireable, according to the white

collared, pink bellied conservatives who ran intellectually bankrupt newspapers like the Harrisburg Patriot. Straight journalism, particularly in stultifying idiot-factories like Harrisburg, angered the hell out of me. Every word screamed "hick", or "Republican", or "Yuppie cock suck", or "middle class", and no matter how adverse the effects of a city like New York on me were, a big city paper could at least offer perspective, and culture, and language, and dissidence, no matter how condescending. I'll never forget an article I'd read in the Harrisburg Patriot as a child, about the destruction of a Civil War landmark in Gettysburg, by real estate developers. An angry local resident who participated in Civil War reenactments was quoted: "To tear it down this way, well, it's just NIHILISTIC!" I imagined the old coot grinning with mongoloid satisfaction as the exotic word left his lips. In this article, the reporter spent the next paragraph proudly plagiarizing Webster's definition of nihilism, gleeful in his instructive tone like a senile old Rottweiler with a piece of week-old roadkill in its maw. I pictured the two men, Central PA resident and Central PA reporter, as chromosomally-corrupted Appalachian cousins, shitting themselves with retard ecstasy as they fondled one another in an unashamedly celebratory fashion. I saw this redneck-incest scenario everywhere in Harrisburg; I heard its loathsome soundtrack of grunts and giggles in the every utterance of sickeningly complacent, mentally crippled locals. And since, I have rarely felt any guilt in wanting to stab anti-intellectual hogfuckers to death with a barbeque fork, particularly those from central Pennsylvania, because somehow, they are the dumbest of all.

But my father loved Harrisburg; in fact, during his 92 years, he'd only left the region a small handful of times. His entire history was in those streets, and this, for me, was

Harrisburg's only fucking virtue: I could imagine the man I still knew next to nothing about, as a teenager, tossing cherry bombs at windows, roller-skating along ledges, encountering supernatural forces under bridges, buying penny candy as a kid in 1927. The memories brought him life, patched him back into the world via the main feed cable of family. But the loss of his job had devastated my father: it took him out of the city, away from his memories, and back to his suburban apartment where he was restless and lonely. Gene's newfound unemployment was his second Great Depression.

A man who was raised in an era of basic common sense had no use for things like psychological diagnoses and their resultant psychotropic medications. Every new generation is lazier and more prone to that kind of infantilism which is born of arrogance and entitlement than the one before it, and being a solitary sort, infused with my father's stubborn Depression-era sensibilities since childhood, I not only understood his feelings, I actually embraced them as my own. It was yet another barrier between my peers and me, one which I was most proud of. People my age appear to me always as spoiled punks lost in gadgets and fads and meaningless catchphrases. Not that this shared prejudice opened any floodgates of communication between my father and I: he saw me as a deviant, a class-A sicko, a pervert, a demon. I disgusted and terrified my father, who clung to memories of me as a toddler as a means of coping with me in my late stage of degenerate self-abuse; I could not bring myself to pity him. My own horrors were far too demanding, and the way I saw it, compared to me, he had gotten off easy. Parents never stop to consider that their offspring could be a Charles Manson or a William Burroughs or a Gary Gilmore or a Marquis de Sade. Why should they? In the end, such an aberration

becomes his own problem, a lonesome monster who can only be abandoned, but the occurrence of such individuals is rare, and after all, there are places for those who scream. Based on the odds as represented by network sitcoms and talk shows, the risk barely merits consideration: "We are decent people, and our children will be decent also." There does not exist a better reason than this to vilify one's progenitors. But the hate never lasts; you must always forgive them, no matter what they've done.

In dad's apartment (an entirely brown, cavernous bachelor's affair which seemed to be decomposing from obscure interstitial co-ordinates, slowly infecting all broad surfaces with toxic mundanity), the only displayed photos of me were as a child. Conversely, he placed current shots of my brother Mike in a prominent manner, as well as small portraits of Mike's many wallflower girlfriends. I loved my father most of all for his eccentricities, but his inability to see how similar we were, in our general weirdness, and what I saw as tragic, anti-social qualities, was to me just another Gregorits eccentricity. American family tradition, no matter how unfit for it he had always been, was what moved him above all else: this man looked for signs of conformity, of filial piety, and of social acceptability in those around him, because they reminded him of how good life could be, if one would just remember to respect his mother and God and the president, if one could only carry on among the petty chatter of other small people as an emotionally frozen, human forfeiture, via a series of asinine platitudes and fictions borne of a soft-headed denial.

At the core of him, even a thick-headed or fearful man knows that life isn't any good at all; he has seen his friends become pussy-whipped morons and seen his family turn their backs on each other. He has seen

women and whiskey exactly for what they are. He has seen the Second World War and Vietnam and he has seen capitalist bureaucracies fail the working man time and time again; he has been refused medical assistance and he has lived for many years on canned food and tap water. He has been a selfish alcoholic or a gambling addict or a frequenter of whores. In that sterile, doom-stricken country club of the American middle class, he has always been content to be the pool boy or the caddy. But he tells himself that life is good. He tells himself that manliness means never letting anyone see you cry. He tells himself that some people are just funny in the head, and he shrugs his shoulders and sighs - "It's a damn shame, but what'r ya gonna do?" - when the subject of me is brought up. He believes that life is good, having questioned nothing since he was a much younger man, and maybe not even then.

The yawning chasm of a generation gap would do for an explanation; it was more than I could hope to receive from the man himself, I suppose, although I think he did try, in his way, to reach out to me. He certainly seemed eager to help me with money, but as I would learn later, he did this only at the behest of my mother, another of her many manipulations.

I drifted around in these thoughts, which depressed me, so I was happy to break free from them when I heard a honk outside and fled down to the street (using the hallway this time, like a normal person) and hopped into my father's car. The car was a small Chevy, aquamarine, or maybe teal, a color that hardly suited him; his paralyzing fear of spending money rather removed almost any discernible personal taste from him as a character. He had no aesthetic preferences, at least none that I knew about.

Jasper had always been a thin man, and remained so, save for a paunch from beer, and the body changes common to a man of his age. His health was excellent, and he'd retained the energy of a much younger man. Dressed in faded Levis and a well-worn t-shirt, his age was both well-disguised and transcended.

I shook my father's hand as I climbed in: he was missing two fingers from an industrial accident many years before. In his late 70s, he sliced off a few of his palsied digits in a vertical saw during an attempt to purloin planks of lumber from the newspaper plant. (He had established a covert arrangement with the driver of the lunch wagon, who was eager to take the plants wood in exchange for free hot dogs. My father knew, like I know, that the greatest food in the world is FREE food.) In the hospital, Jasper rested until the bleeding stopped, perhaps 12 hours, and vacated his room without a single word to anyone. The next day, he returned to work, basking in the concern and astonishment of the young female secretaries, whom he serenaded with Rat Pack tunes every morning.

Watching my father drive around Harrisburg had always been amusing to me; I enjoyed pretending to have never heard certain stories before: his Hungarian immigrant parents, his childhood friends, the city. But on this day, with ghosts running around in me and the chorus of laughter which had become an ever-present addition to my conscious brain activity, little enthusiasm was salvageable, and my father, in his sadness, was quiet also.

"Where do you want to go?"

"Up to you, pop," I said.

"Hey!" he said, grinning at me, "you know I got these koo-pons, for MAC-Donalds, see if

you can dig'em outta that glove box for me." His love of fast-food coupons, and coupons in general, was infectious: he'd turned me into a lifelong coupon clipper, and certainly, I knew how to take advantage of food bargains. I'd developed a hoarding instinct which kicked into high gear at the entrance of any supermarket, when I opened the full color store circular announcing half price chicken breast, or "buy one get one free" pounds of Land-O-Lakes butter. He'd also taught me to appreciate the superiority of a good name-brand over the generic counterpart.

I fished around in the glove box and found several wadded up sheets of glossy McDonald's ads, with tear-off coupons for free Big Macs and milkshakes.

McDonald's food appalled me, of course, but I was able to conjure a fraction of dad's enthusiasm.

"G'head. See if they got anything good in there."

"Oh... yeah... yeah, dad, this is a great deal. There's a McDonald's just a few blocks up on Front Street, if--"

My father shot this down with a grimace, and a contemptuous swoosh of his bad hand. "Come on, Justin..." -like the rest of my family, my father would address me only by my first name, which caused me indescribable nausea; I'd been using my middle name since my mid-teens, after classmates and teachers had left me so swollen with murderous hate that a re-christening became one of the many, many actions included in the gradual and bitterly inevitable process of disentangling myself permanently from the redneck morass- "...you know I don't mess around with nothin over here. Nothin but boogs over here, heck with it all. I don't want some

boog touching my food, I... you understand, doncha Justin? We'll go across the river, it's... they got a nice CLEAN place, alright? That's okay, right?"

My father was a bigot, and "Boog" was his word for blacks. I noticed that as he grew older, he became increasingly uninhibited about saying "nigger". He spit the word out deliberately and viciously in my presence. It rankled me something awful, but it wasn't the racism itself: there was plenty to hate about blacks, obviously, but when a man sprays anti-black bile around in some kind of empty gesture so weighted down in defeat and self-loathing, without ever having considered the reasons to share a hellish disgust for the white race also, he exposes himself a bit of a white Uncle Tom, clinging to the belief of inherent decency in a white society that doesn't respect him any more than the niggers do.

While generally courteous to black people, Dad took the change in urban American since his youth personally, and Harrisburg was now, of course, predominantly black. Driving through a ghetto, he'd mutter under his breath, "No good scum-bums, dirty bastards. They're like wild animals out here. Wasn't like this when I was your age, tell you what." Sometimes, his invective would develop into a small attack on me: "All your life, your mother dressed you nice, she spent all kinds of money on you boys, and you were dressed GOOD, you were such a handsome little sucker. All of a sudden, you gotta look like trash, you... you GLORIFY all this shit, out here. I just wish you'd start dressing nice, your mom and me both just want to see you do well..."

Beyond all of this, my father was a better father than most, but he didn't want to know me at all. I suspect that my mother had turned him against me while playing the victim, because she seemed to enjoy

being pitied, and her violence against me as a kid bothered her as much now as it had bothered me back then. Or maybe not. Maybe no one really understands family, and sitting there in a plastic booth surveying a cold rural commercial zone, with tractor trailers roaring past in plumes of road salt, amid the fast food hustle of white trash Christians and teenage mothers and fidgeting fat fucks aplenty, I didn't understand anything but this: I was a lousy excuse for a son, and I'd feel a hell of a lot better in a bar somewhere, talking to some "boog" or "stumblebum". It was growing dark, and we drove back mostly in silence through the grey and frozen shit.

When I returned to my apartment, I sat down at the computer, at my dead grandmother's wobbly old wooden table, and brought up a list of available area "WiFi" networks. At the top of the list was "AL STRANGE-U-BATES OFTEN". I logged in alongside the ever-beflogged Al, and dialed Izabela. She was crying hysterically when she picked up, and began moaning that she couldn't understand what I was saying to her. "Are you calling me from the Internet again? Why don't you just quit DRINKING for a week and buy yourself a CELL PHONE? Why can't you be NORMAL! Fuck this, I'm calling JOE!" She hung up.

It was early evening, and I was sharing network space with Al. In that Harrisburg vacuum, in that world of onanistic strange-u-baters and anonymous nocturnal lonelyhearts, I caught glimpses of squalid couplings, down the street at the Y, in small apartments up and down the block, at the three-tier gay disco, and in the flophouse above the Alva. It was a quiet city, and even the strange-u-bating queers were too "responsible" for crystal meth, no suicidal passion, no toxic insanity, just dumb animal alcohol mania, pedestrian sex drive, and

opportunistic seduction fantasies. In that airless black void, I imagined Al peeping on me, maybe from across the street. I lowered my blinds and went to the bedroom and took off my clothes. I stepped into the efficiency bathroom and brushed my teeth. The tub reminded me of Izabela's brief stay, when I filled it with pots of boiling water for her bath. The hot water was now turned on, and it would be so easy tonight to draw her a bath. Thinking of that hopeless night, most of my last 3 years seemed all of the sudden entirely unnecessary. My body then became weak, as if saddled with the cumulative weight of it all, the waste of it all. Nothing could be helped now. It would all end soon, it had too. No more weight; no more waste. But I had hot water. It would be one less thing for her to insult me with when she returned.

I put my clothes back on and went out for a bottle of wine. I stepped gingerly along each city block, past the warm bars and cafes, over the ice. My boots were unsuited for the terrain, but I was breathing the city in deeply, all the while knowing that nothing good could come of any sort of immersion in Harrisburg's fetid aura; the smart move would have been to build a wall against it, as high as possible. But inching along in tractionless boots, I allowed the city to talk to me. The game was to out-wait the city's malevolence, to stare it down. I perceived it as a thing which had been created to destroy me, to either reverse my life-energy, or to dampen it so severely that I would collapse from a kind of psychic black mold. My constitution was remarkable, but it would not hold out forever.

The clerk at the liquor store, an obese black man, followed me around without pretense, and reminded me 4 different times that he was about to close. When I told him that it was only a quarter till 8, I was sharply threatened with a refusal to sell, and

extrication. The city's other 2 liquor stores had already closed, so I bit my tongue. By all evidence on display, this rude vermin was twice as fucked as me. I chose a magnum of the Frontera Malbec, a tasteless and thin-bodied Chilean bargain wine, which was overpriced by two dollars. I took the bottle to the Harrisburg museum at Third and Forster and corked it in a small cement alcove where a security guard had discovered my wife and me making out on a summer night the better part of two decades ago. I saw a drug deal happen in front of a Subway sandwich shop, through the frosty branches of the museum shrubbery, and scampered across Third to score.

The man was heading towards the river on Forster when I caught up with him. "Hey man," I said.

"Whatchoo want?"

"Crack."

"You police."

"No cop. Let me show you my arms."

"C'mon, man."

Through the snow, in the creamy light of a streetlamp, I got my coat undone and pulled up my sleeve.

"Damn. Whatchoo call dat?"

"I call it I'M NOT A COP."

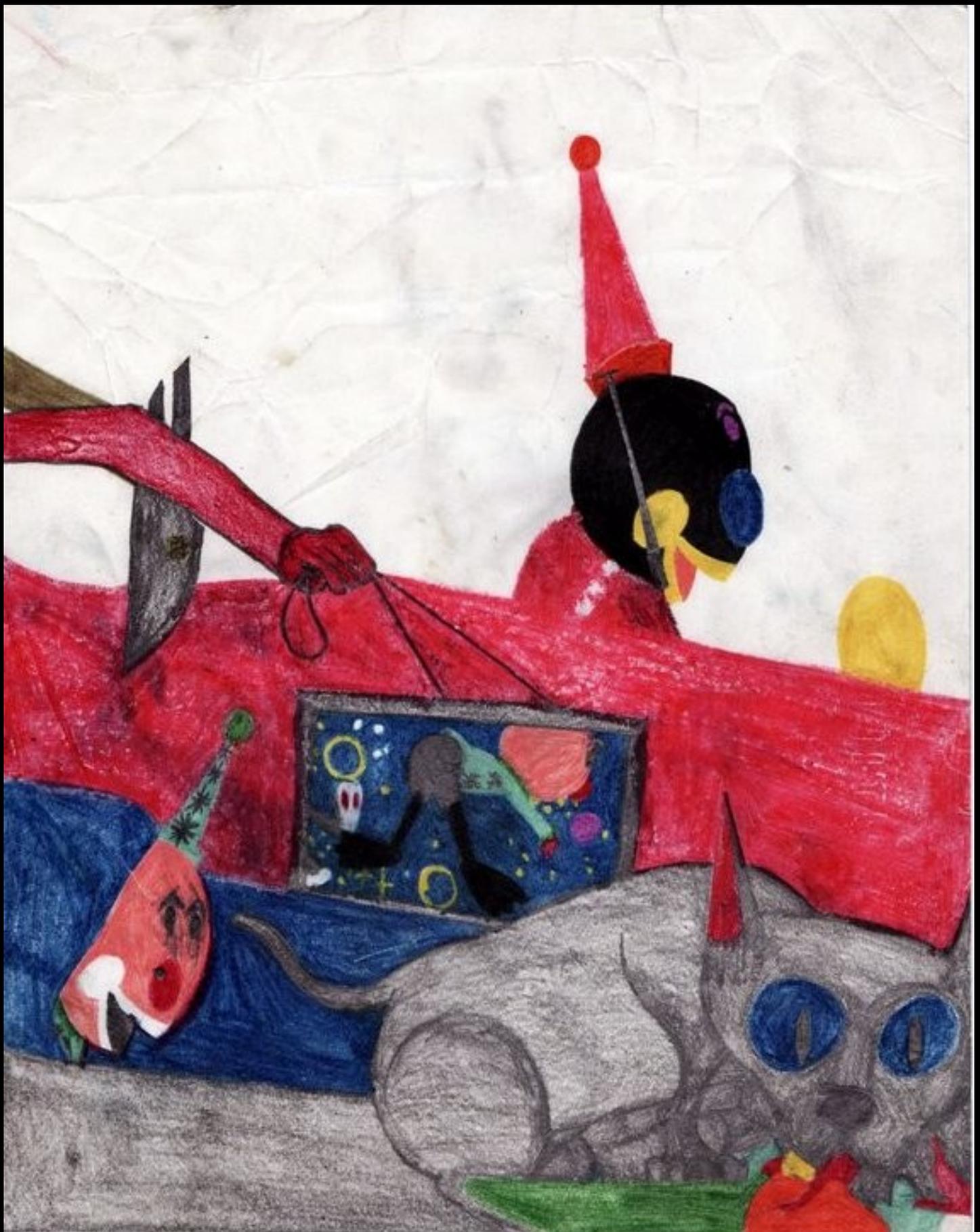
"What?"

"I'm no cop."

"Man, FUCK off."

The dealer left me standing there like a schmuck. Small steps, slowly, slowly: I returned to the chamber, up the fire escape, across the asshole, and through the bedroom window. I turned on the radio, gave Sam a squeeze, and began making myself an elaborate dinner of Italian sausage and rigatoni with mozzarella, garlic, peas, and a red sauce with cream. While the sauce was heating, I pan-fried zucchini until lightly browned, then transferred it to the broiler. All I lacked was basil, but by the time the bottle was half gone, I'd forgotten all about it. I cleared the table of unused writing paraphernalia, and laid out the dinner. I played old doo wop, nibbled arrogantly at the monstrous plate of pasta, and got drunk on the Malbec while paging through an old issue of GQ Magazine. Three hours passed like this: time went out the window and then it was very late. I looked outside, and saw no one in the bars or restaurants below.

At 2:30, my computer came to life with another incoming call: Izabela. She said, "Maybe we should go to Costa Rica."



D04023

GARY LUCAS ~ A FORCE OF NATURE

By Robert Earl Reed



There are forces of nature that require one to stand and take notice – sites, sounds, and fragrances that must be experienced. Once experienced these things have a great impact on who we are as individuals. Music is truly the soundtrack of our lives. Songs from your childhood remind you of times and places. Songs and sounds form associative bookmarks in the story of our lives. Prior to the overwhelming deluge of audio and video that bombard us each moment of each day, were the simple sounds made by our ancestors for communication and entertainment. The sounds evoked emotion. Emotions of Love,

Lust, Anger, Struggle and Pain. Sounds are made to help us remember the good and the bad. Sounds help us live.

In this day and age to find an artist that truly conveys such a broad array of emotion, thought, and feeling is nothing short of a miracle. Mr. Gary Lucas is that artist. Perhaps best known for his years as a member and manager to Captain Beefheart, and collaborator to the great Jeff Buckley, Mr. Lucas is a World Treasure where the experience of music is concerned. He is a guitarist of unparalleled soul, substance, wit, and beauty. He has been acclaimed by *Rolling Stone*, *The New York Times*, and periodicals worldwide. He has performed in over 40 countries. Mr. Lucas has played and collaborated with a who's who of legendary music. His biography is so impressive I will encourage you to visit his official site <http://www.garylucas.com> to learn more about him. There is simply not enough space here to give him the recognition that he justly deserves.

The purpose of this interview *Paraphilia* readers is to introduce you to an Artist that will touch your inner core.

Mr. Lucas was kind enough to speak with me in between the myriad projects he is currently working on.

Robert Earl Reed: *Who are your greatest musical influences?*

Gary Lucas: Well, that's a tough one, for as an avid listener/music partisan for years and years I deliberately tried to cut myself off from "influences" when I turned professional as I didn't want to sound like anyone else. And I like, and liked then, a whole lot of different kinds of music. But you can say on guitar at least I was very big on Jeff Beck, Keith Richards, Peter Green, Syd Barrett, Bet Jansch, John Fahey and Skip James in my formative years. So many great guitarists. But I liked a lot of non-guitar music too, such as Debussy, Mahler, Bach, Chopin... I dunno, I think everything I have heard consciously or not has gone into the mix one way or another. It's impossible to escape this living in the global village. "The anxiety of influence"(s).

How has Judaism affect your music and career?

GL: I asserted my Jewish identity early on in my music with a piece called "Verklartre Kristallnacht", which I performed at the Berlin Jazz Festival in 1988 coinciding with the 50th anniversary of Kristallnacht (basically, the beginning of open season on Jews in Nazi Germany). The title is a play on the title of Schoenberg's "Verklarte Nacht" (Transfigured Night). I basically wanted to make a statement about this atrocity in music, in the tradition of Schoenberg's "A Survivor from Warsaw", Penderecki's "Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima" etc. So I put the piece together as a spontaneous improv at the end of my concert, which was my solo debut appearance in Europe. The audience was stunned into silence when I announced the

piece at the end--and then gave me an ovation. The next day in the Berlin Morgenpost the headline was "Es ist Lucas!" This went out over national German radio live as well. From there it was a short step doing *The Golem* score with Walter Horn for the 1920 silent German Expressionist film concerning basically a Jewish Frankenstein created to protect the Jewish community of Prague against pogroms in the 16th century, based on an old Jewish folk tale. I have since performed with this film solo all over the world over many years.

(Link to A Short Piece from *Der Golem*: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MoIgZid06oI>)

I did a couple of Jewish themed albums for John Zorn's Tzadik label, *Busy Being Born* and *Street of Lost Brothers* in the mid to late 90s which received excellent reviews, and I am very proud of them-- they sound nothing like any of the myriad albums he has issued on his label as part of his Radical Jewish Culture series. I recently returned to Jewish themes with the final track of my latest album *The Ordeal of Civility* entitled "Jedwabne", about the infamous Polish pogrom in which the European branch of my mother's side of our family was wiped out. I have scored several documentaries with Jewish themes and am not shy about talking about the influence my upbringing has had on my cultural expression. Saying that, I don't think there is any per se "Jewish" quality to any of the music I have composed in this vein; i.e., it ain't klezmer. I think it manifests itself more in a cultural reflection of my interests and preoccupations rather than in any specific

musical characteristics. As far as affecting my career, I have worked with "The Golem" often at Jewish Film Festivals and Jewish Community Centers and synagogues, but I play lots of other gigs at other venues so it is just one strand in a very complex mix of expressive modes I have utilized over the years. I am hardly what you would call a "professional Jew". The title of my new album is a reference to a sociological treatise by John Murray Cuddihy of the same title which posits that Freudianism, Marxism and Structuralism -- radical systems of belief that shook the world--were created and developed by Freud, Marx and Levi Strauss respectively under pressure of their inability to conform to polite gentile society. I think this holds true for the origins of punk rock also. :-) So you see I am still fascinated by and continue to ponder my Jewish roots even though I am hardly an observant Jewish person. It's just something in my DNA.

Do you have stylistically speaking a favorite musical/guitar style or is it ever flowing and evolving?

Flowing and evolving... but I suppose the blues in every manifestation is the style I feel most at home with. The sound of a human struggling.

You managed the Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band and played guitar. What would be your most standout memory from those times?

Jumping off a plane from NYC, taking a taxi from LAX to Glendale CA's Sound Castle Recording Studios, getting hustled straight into the recording studio and cutting my solo piece "Flavor Bud Living" in one take. *Being part of such an iconic project, how does*

that affect how you have proceeded with your own projects?

Well I learned so much from Don Van Vliet in terms of arrangements--how to make a small group sound like a large ensemble basically

Do you paint, write pieces other than music... etc?

I do write essays, some of which are on my web site, and maintained a very elaborate blog also for several years. I am on again off again working on my memoirs.

In one of your YouTube videos in 2006 you allude to the homogenizing of music for radio and the masses. Now, five years later, what are your thoughts?

Same deal, getting worse all the time.

What would be your greatest personal accomplishment ?

Supporting myself full time solely through my music for over 20 years to date now.

*Could you tell us about **Der Golem** and how that project came to be?*

Yes, I've loved horror films since I was a little boy, also fantastic literature in general. I received a commission to develop a piece utilizing another art form with my music and thought it would be cool to score a silent film--I was one of the pioneers of this idiom. And I had heard of this film since I was a little boy but had never seen it as it rarely played anywhere. Eventually I tracked it down at the Museum of Modern Art and came out of a private screening

saying "This is the film for me!"

I brought in my childhood friend composer/keyboardist Walter Horn to collaborate on the score and we debuted it to rave reviews in 1989 at the Museum of the Moving Image in Astoria. I have since taken it solo all over the world as Walter has a day job--and I am in the Golem business!

<http://garylucas.com/www/golem>

Your band "Gods and Monsters"...what is the origin of the name?

It comes from Ernest Thesiger (Dr. Praetorius) toasting Colin Clive (Dr. Frankenstein) in James Whale's 1932 *The Bride of Frankenstein*: "To a new world of Gods and Monsters!"

Your latest release with Gods and Monsters is The Ordeal of Civility... could you tell us about the recording of this album and some of the stories behind the tracks like "Jedwabne"?

"Jedwabne" commemorates the massacre of my ancestors in Poland in 1941 in the famous pogrom where all the Jews of the town were herded and put into a barn which was then set on fire--I attended the official apology ceremonies for this tragedy that were set up by the Polish government in 2001 where all surviving Jedwabne Jewish families were invited to send a representative, and my family asked me to go which I did quite willingly. It was a profound experience--the day of the ceremony it started pouring down with thunder and lightning and eventually hail--in the middle of July!--on our bus trip from Warsaw to Jedwabne--and the people there

that watched us getting off the bus looked like the angry townsfolk in a 30s horror film, glaring at us. They didn't deter us or the ceremonies, and afterwards I was determined wanted to write a song about the event that people would never forget... Jerry Harrison (Talking Heads) who produced the new album was brought in specifically on this album because he is both a good guy and a sonic genius, and he got an epic sound to this track--as well as the rest of the album. We wanted a record that could be competitive sonically with anything out there. He played keyboards on it as well, but my regular keyboard player Joe Hendel is no slouch either, I love playing with him live onstage as he really is a great improviser--as is saxophonist Jason Candler, who has been in the band since the late 90s. Then there is my amazing rhythm section of Billy Ficca from Television on drums and Ernie Brooks from The Modern Lovers on bass. A real avant-rock supergroup!! We recorded the album in stages over many months in NYC at various studios and some mixing took place in San Francisco at Jerry's studio, and his engineers ET Thorngren and Matt Cohen proved invaluable there.

What's next for Gary Lucas? What would be a dream project for you?

I am working in Havana now on an ongoing project combining my music with the cream of young Cuban musicians--kind of the mirror opposite of the Buena Vista Social Club. It has been the most exciting recording I have ever been involved in, and I can't wait to finish the album and take it to the stage.

DEATH HAS NEVER LOOKED SO BEAUTIFUL

By Adel Souto

Thinking of committing murder, armed robbery, massive drug deals, or just a small handful of petty infractions?

Now, you don't want to get caught, do you? Well, there's a little Mexican lady that may want to help you out, but it'll cost you your soul.

Her name is Santa Muerte, or as we gringos call her, Saint Death. She is also known by the names "Señora de las Sombras" (Lady of the Shadows), "Señora Blanca" (White Lady), "Señora Negra" (Black Lady), "Niña Santa" (Holy Girl), or "La Flaca" (The Skinny Lady).

She is supposed to be death personified, but to many thieves, and policemen alike, she is an autonomous spiritual force, and an anthropomorphic demiurge, whose grace can be bought with a sacrifice. Literally, a saint, though the Catholic Church has a bone or two to pick with that.

It's not known when, and precisely where, her worship began, but it is believed that her unorthodox canonization began sometime during the clash of cultures that was Spanish Catholicism steamrolling over indigenous Mesoamerican and Aztec beliefs. Though the priests tried, the local's cult of death was suppressed, but never eliminated, hence Mexico's Day of the Dead celebration in October.

Though her worship began as a way for aboriginal peoples to fit their old gods into the conqueror's religion, similar to Cuba's Santería or Haiti's Vodou. Only, in Mexico, many of the old gods were forgotten of, and the worship of new saints flourished. Where Santa Muerte's origin came from Mictlantecuhtli and Mictecacihuatl, the lord and lady of Mictlan (the realm of the dead), her image, besides dealing in death, has nothing in common with the pagan duo today. Also, while she is revered and worshiped in all social classes, she is mainly seen as a saint by cops and robbers.

Sometime in the 50s, large groups of drug cartels were found to have St. Death dolls, or altars to the skeletal princess in their dens of iniquity. Police were quick to pick up

on the fact that the ne'er-do-wells were asking for help in never doing well. This led to the cops worshipping the same bitch goddess, so as not to be killed by the scum who previously ask her for favors.

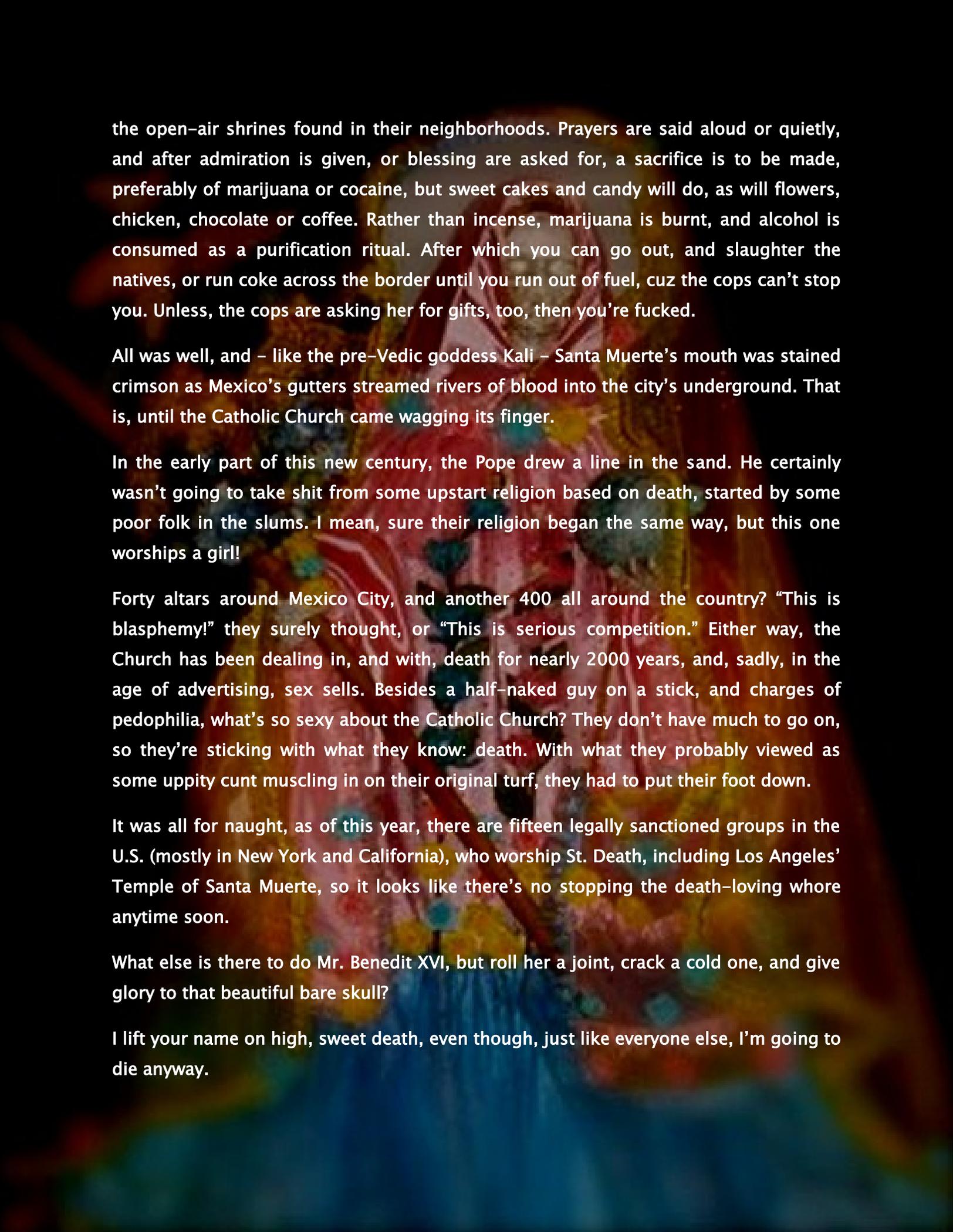
Much of the cult's practitioners gathered in secret until the late 19th Century, when Mexican artist José Guadalupe Posada created a nonreligious art figure, which he named Catrina. She was meant to be satirical piece aimed at upper-class opulence and wastefulness, but what many of the peasants saw wasn't simply a skeleton dressed in fancy threads, but an ever-reoccurring archetype of death. Without knowing it, Posada set the blueprint for much of the future saint's imagery.

Looking very similar to Mexico's patron saint, the Virgin Mary of Guadalupe, she is a skeletal figure, draped in a light blue robe, often carrying a scythe in her right hand, and a globe in the left. On altars, she normally appears alone, or sometimes with her husband, the patron saint of narcotic trafficking, Jesús Melverde, or standing in front of "El Niño de las Suertes" (The Child of Fortune), which is a baby Jesus whose head rests on a skull.

Anthropologists are unsure as to whether Santa Muerte's next step into the public spotlight was in the 1940s or 1960s, but somewhere around that time, more and more people began the public adoration of one of the Catholic Churches biggest headaches in Mexico. It is believed she has at least two million followers today.

In the Colonia Doctores barrio of the Cuauhtémoc borough of Mexico's capital city, remains her first known public shrine. On Dr. Vertiz Street, located in an auto chop-shop behind a wall of glass, is a six-foot figure of Our Lady of Shady Miracles, standing next to her husband, Jesús Malverde. The second known shrine was erected on Matamoros Street near the Paseo de la Reforma. Her most popular, and currently well-known, shrine is the Sanctuary of La Santísima Muerte in the Tepito barrio, where worshipper Enriqueta Romero Romero decided to keep her shrine outdoors, and since then, over 5000 people visit every November 1st (her day of worship) to pray the rosary there.

Praise to, and favors from, Santa Muerte are to be given (and asked for) once a month, at the stroke of midnight. Many have their own altar at home, though just as many visit



the open-air shrines found in their neighborhoods. Prayers are said aloud or quietly, and after admiration is given, or blessing are asked for, a sacrifice is to be made, preferably of marijuana or cocaine, but sweet cakes and candy will do, as will flowers, chicken, chocolate or coffee. Rather than incense, marijuana is burnt, and alcohol is consumed as a purification ritual. After which you can go out, and slaughter the natives, or run coke across the border until you run out of fuel, cuz the cops can't stop you. Unless, the cops are asking her for gifts, too, then you're fucked.

All was well, and – like the pre-Vedic goddess Kali – Santa Muerte's mouth was stained crimson as Mexico's gutters streamed rivers of blood into the city's underground. That is, until the Catholic Church came wagging its finger.

In the early part of this new century, the Pope drew a line in the sand. He certainly wasn't going to take shit from some upstart religion based on death, started by some poor folk in the slums. I mean, sure their religion began the same way, but this one worships a girl!

Forty altars around Mexico City, and another 400 all around the country? "This is blasphemy!" they surely thought, or "This is serious competition." Either way, the Church has been dealing in, and with, death for nearly 2000 years, and, sadly, in the age of advertising, sex sells. Besides a half-naked guy on a stick, and charges of pedophilia, what's so sexy about the Catholic Church? They don't have much to go on, so they're sticking with what they know: death. With what they probably viewed as some uppity cunt muscling in on their original turf, they had to put their foot down.

It was all for naught, as of this year, there are fifteen legally sanctioned groups in the U.S. (mostly in New York and California), who worship St. Death, including Los Angeles' Temple of Santa Muerte, so it looks like there's no stopping the death-loving whore anytime soon.

What else is there to do Mr. Benedict XVI, but roll her a joint, crack a cold one, and give glory to that beautiful bare skull?

I lift your name on high, sweet death, even though, just like everyone else, I'm going to die anyway.



TURBINES AND THROAT BONES (PART TWO)

By Craig Woods

Photo © Max Reeves

- Well I'm shit out of explanations. But I do know that, whatever else might be fuckin' up her shit, this girl doesn't need a nurse. Not for that cut at least.

with a warm damp cloth Scotch Sheila mops away the last of the dried blood from the girl's arm she runs a fingertip along the wound now inexplicably healed into a thin and uneven ridge of scar tissue the raised flesh a greyish hue contrasting against the bone white skin elsewhere

- You have to be taking the piss! Take a look at this thing will you! What the fuck is going on in its damn eyes?!

- Joe, she's not a thing, she's a girl. Calm down will you?

- Is she?! No girl I know of has eyes like that fucking thing! Or skin that white either!

Something fucked up is going on here. I don't know what but I'll tell you for nothing that it's something we shouldn't be involving ourselves in! I say we call the fucking hospital and the fucking police and MI5 and whoever the fuck else who might come and clear up this mess ... people who might know what the fuck is going on and deal with it in the proper way!

Sheila maintains a firm but civil tone her strong young face fixed benevolently upon the strange pale girl

- And what is the proper way, Joe? Hmm? You ask me this girl looks like she's run away from somethin' and given the state she's in I'd say that whatever it is probably gave her good reason to run. Now you might be new to this shite but I've seen my share of runaways - used to be one myself after all - and whatever else this lass might have goin' on in her body, she shows all the usual signs of a victim of abuse. You go stick your head in the gutter if that's what floats your boat, but the last thing I'm doin' is handin' this girl over to the authorities who might very well just throw her back where she came from ...

Joe roll his eyes

- Do you listen to yourself? You need to stop snacking on those medicinal mushrooms and get a grip! Not everything in the world is a fucking conspiracy, okay? If the coppers or whoever come round here and take this thing away and we never hear about it again ... well I say hunky bleeding dory! We obviously don't need to hear about it! I'm really happy not to know about it at all thank you very much! In fact, I'd be over the fucking moon for that black-eyed glass-sprouting freak to sling her hook out of my kitchen and all the way back to Hell or wherever she came from! I ain't interested! This isn't a fucking movie, Sheila! And this here is a respectable business - not a safe house for fucking freaks!

- You're all heart Joe, you know that? Why you've never received a Queen's commendation is beyond me.

- Tim, talk some sense into this lunatic will you?

- Sorry Joe, I'm afraid I'm with her on this. Sheila's the only person I'd trust with this sort of thing and with good reason. If we have to hide this girl for a while until we figure out what's gone down then that's all fine with me. Okay Sheila?

- Thanks Tim, you're a diamond.

- Have you two completely lost your fucking marbles? You're talking about possibly housing a fucking fugitive for starters! And look at her for the love of God! - there's something deeply wrong with that creature. Who knows what kind of diseases she could be carrying? Christ, she's probably infected my kitchen with a dozen ailments already, the bloody environmental health mob will have my bollocks in gravy after this!

- Always thinking of others ahead of yourself, Joe. I've always liked that about you.

- You two just don't have any conception of the real world do you? That's the fucking

problem with you young uns today - too much arty fucking music and iffy bloody socialist politics! I'm telling you, you need to pull your heads out of your arseholes and smell the future! Your fucking beatnik parents were wrong, okay? This is the real world of the 1980s whether you kids like it or not! If the law comes poking around after that freak child then we have to accept that they have bloody good reasons for doing so. From where I'm standing, anyone who wants to take her off our hands and out of my life is definitely someone I can trust!

ignoring this Sheila concludes her business with the cloth and sets aside the basin of warm water she speaks directly into the deformed girl's immeasurable gaze

- Do you have a name darlin'?

the girl says nothing staring out at dimensions unknown

- It's okay, sweetness. You can trust me. We want to help you. Me and my friend here. But we need you to help us first, okay? Do you know your name?

no response

- I'm telling you the kid's a freak! Probably a fucking vegetable too! You'll be lucky to get more than a grunt out of her! You ask me, she must be retarded as well as infected. Jesus ...!

- She spoke earlier though, I heard her. And you did too Joe. Remember?

- I remember nothing but fucking madness since this trainwreck turned up on my kitchen floor! You think you can make some sense out of the shit that's happened here, that's your problem!

- What did she say Tim?

- She flipped when Eileen went to call for an ambulance. Said 'no doctors'. Several times clear as a bell.

Sheila turns back to the ashen girl crouched silent and sullen

- Is that what you're runnin' from honey? Did the doctors try to hurt you?

Abruptly the girl's head snaps upward the muscles standing taut on her young neck an expression of terror carving itself around those twin black holes

- No doctors! No doctors!

- I think that answers that.

Tim leans forward indicating with his index finger

- What's the emblem on the blazer?

with gentle fingertips Sheila brushes aside a strand of the girl's hair to reveal a strange insignia a silver crab against a background of stars a clock proclaiming midnight embedded in the creature's thorax shell

- You're the local boy. Look familiar?

- It's no school I know.

- Maybe our girly here comes from way further afield than old Londinium. You an outsider like me honey?

- I don't give a fuck if she came from another fucking planet! I just want her the fuck out of my kitchen! And if calling a hospital or the police helps that along, then I'm all in favour!

- Joe, take a bloody pill! Just let us sort out a few things and we'll be out of your hair in no time, the girl too. We'll need to use your phone.

- No fucking way! You two nutcases walk out of here with that freakshow right now and I might forget I ever saw any of you. But there's no way I'm going to be an accessory! Bad enough that creature might have contaminated this place with fuck-knows-what, I'm not going to risk doing porridge on top of having the hammer fall on my business here - wouldn't do it for either of you kids and I'm certainly not doing it for that thing!

- For the last time, she's not a thing! And I really thought you might be a wee bit more understanding, Joe. Wasn't so long ago I was the fugitive in need of a place to hide out - three short years ago. Good thing I wasn't picked up by a good Samaritan such as yourself, we might never have met and that medicinal hash you enjoy so much would be a wee bit tougher to get your arthritic old hands on, eh?

- No disrespect, love, but you didn't turn up all bug-eyed and freakish and bleeding all over my damn kitchen, screaming bloody murder about evil doctors! There are times when normal channels are best and this is one of them. You kids are way out of your depth on this one. And so am I.

- Twenty minutes, Joe, that's all we ask. Half an hour tops. Then we'll be gone and you'll never have to think of this whole mess ever again, that I promise.

- Tim, I didn't poison your eggs this morning, don't make me regret that decision.

- Come on, Joe! No-one's askin' you to do anythin' here at all! Just let me sit here with the girl for twenty minutes while Tim makes some phone calls. He can even use the phone box along the street.

Tim rummages in his jeans pockets

- You got any change? I've only notes.

- You two are too much! Listen and listen well - I am NOT covering for you or that weird creature! You hear me? And I'm not putting up with that damn thing in my kitchen for one minute longer! You kids want to run off on some ridiculous Hardy Boys Nancy Drew gangbang with the freak then be my guest. But you leave now! Before I shout for the coppers myself!

- Fuck you, Joe! When have I ever asked you for anything before, eh?

- Sweetheart, this isn't about you. Or me. It's about the weird waif sitting in my kitchen who clearly spells bad news in big bold block letters!

- Oh well that's fucking convenient! Admirable too. How is the view there in the sand?

the kitchen door bursts open Eileen enters face flushed forehead contorted in a knot of nerves her voice escapes her quaking lips in a desperate whisper

- You have to be quiet. There's a copper here. Someone's reported a disturbance. I'm trying to fob him off but if he hears you people screaming and bawling ...

- Well that pretty much settles it, eh? Tim, help me with a lift here.

with gentle hands they pull the girl slowly to her feet the impermeable black globes of her eyes roll from Sheila to Tim and back the pallid features utterly expressionless

- No doctors ...

- That's right honey. Thanks for nothin' Joe.

- Good riddance! And get shot of that thing quick as! You'll regret it if you don't, I'm telling you ...

Tim pushes on the bar and the fire door swings open the girl with arms hooked around those of her escorts raises her frail head and gasps at the sight of the open sky a high pitched wheeze like air rushing through a crack in space

- It's okay darlin'. We'll get you somewhere safe. Just stick close to us ...

a concrete path snakes around the rear of the street low red brick wall coated in graffiti and urine stains those black eyes pull the morning into their epicentre a message of revolution scrawled across her event horizon she who rides the disasters of her own bones knows DESTINY as a blade thrust to the throat of TIME

The Tate Modern sat vacant and lifeless as a mollusc shell on the south bank, the great concrete erection of its chimney appendage pushing forthrightly into velvet layers of evening cloud. Following Catherine Frick's purposeful stride across the car park, Matthew Redman hugged his arms to his chest, partly in reaction to the air's bitter bite, but more pertinently as a flimsy defence against the looming structure and its palpable taunting of his inadequacy. Try as

he might, he could not shake the notion that that huge stone cock existed only for the pleasure of the infallible MP and served to remind him of his utter insignificance in whatever grand schemes, sexual or otherwise, she may be orchestrating. He felt winded by his own smallness and forced a feeble cough which died unceremoniously against the authoritative clatter of Frick's heels upon the concrete.

"We're a little outside of regular hours, aren't we?" he stammered as they arrived at the glass doors of the main entrance, knowing full well the irrelevance of his observation. Ignoring him, Frick produced a set of keys on a heavy brass ring. It came as no surprise to him that she went about the business of gaining entry to the closed gallery with the same casual efficiency as she would attend to the front door of her own house. The woman's character boasted more layers than an onion. With each new revelation of her seemingly limitless clandestine connections, her intentions and desires became only more opaque. Much to his consistent frustration, the occasional glimpses Frick permitted him of her twilight world served only to further obscure rather than illuminate her true purposes. Recalling her characterisation of him as a mushroom, Redman clenched his false teeth and pressed his fingertips painfully into flushed palms.

Out of one compost pit and into another. Same old shit, different smell ...

Inside, a red-faced security guard curtsied from behind a chromium computer terminal.

"Evening ma'am. Shall I inform Doctor Homarus of your arrival?"

"No need, he's already expecting me. And my ... *guest* also. Mild night tonight."

"Yes ma'am," the guard's grey eyes scrutinised Redman's face suspiciously, "seems the weather is taking a turn."

"Homarus?" Redman enquired. "Doctor Nathan Homarus of the Redman Annex?"

"The very same." The MP's tone was blank and sober. "You'll find that the facility named in your little girl's honour is far more than a mere psychiatric ward. Indeed, my good fellow, you'll soon learn that all things possess ulterior dimensions and purposes-- not least of all this insufferable gallery."

The tycoon followed deferentially in Frick's footsteps as she led him across the vast expanse of the Turbine Hall. Obsessive geometries of glinting steel reflected ethereally in the polished floor. They arrived at an elevator. Frick pushed the call button and the door slid open smooth and silent as a lace curtain. Inside she brandished her brass key-ring once more and thrust a short silver key into a slot below the array of illuminated buttons. With a twist of the MP's wrist the steel curtain reasserted itself and the elevator began to descend with an almost subliminal hum.

"You remember our old friend Professor Morrow, don't you?" Frick pulled the question obliquely out of claustrophobic air.

"Travis Morrow? Of course. He served briefly on the board of directors at the Institute some years ago. Back when he and his work were both revered. Before he ..."

"Went feral? Lost the plot?" A fiendish grin stretched the MP's firm facial muscles to their angular limit.

"Well, yes. Something like that. He ..." the tycoon's blood froze as a terrible thought occurred to him. "He's not *here*, is he? You can't be working with that madman?"

Frick's unbridled laughter rocked the elevator on its traction cables. "Oh good God, no! What an idea! No, no, that particular bothersome boil is firmly on the other side of the turd trench. You are, however, familiar with his later work, yes? With the basic premises?"

"You mean that ... *alter-meta-science* claptrap? Why yes, my network covered his first major press conference on the subject after all. A vintage example of what I believe they colloquially refer to as '*car crash television*', no?"

"Yes, well my dear fellow, there's a rather lengthy and vital footnote to that particular episode. The good Professor put a decidedly ferocious cat among the dozy pigeons of Westminster and beyond. What the outside world ... what the *rabble* don't realise is that Morrow's seemingly disastrous press conference was no ill-advised fumble. Not at all. On the contrary, it constituted a declaration of war. A war which has since been fought earnestly and in utter secrecy on the most remote but crucial frontiers."

Redman maintained his silence for a moment, waiting for the punch-line. Frick's dark eyes reflected only a stern solemnity. The elevator continued to descend into unknown depths. How far down were they going? This night which had begun with a ritual bout of sexual degradation had proceeded to unfold dramatically, revealing infinite and increasingly incomprehensible dimensions. The tycoon felt as though his consciousness were being gradually wrenched from its cranial refuge and exposed to the hostile sunrays of an alien world. He brought up one hand to massage a throbbing temple.

"Catherine, forgive me but ... are you in all seriousness telling me that Morrow's theories were *correct*? That his lunatic ideas have scientific validity?!"

"Make no mistake, my dear, the Professor's *political* ideals are of an utterly loathsome persuasion; so-called '*progressive*' science with a reprehensible egalitarian agenda. The stuff of nightmares for guardians of order such as you and I. But his genius was in the breakthroughs he made in psycho-biologic manipulation; the ability to transcend the supposed laws of time and space via the subject's willing embrace of physical and psychological extremities. In simple terms, Morrow utterly disproved one of the fundamental tenets of Cartesian thought, namely the mind-body schism. He found that mind and body could be harmonised via what he termed '*Benign Atrocity*': ordeals of physical and psychological trauma which caused the ultimate fusion of psyche and body, allowing each to redefine the other. In essence, he had hit upon the key to that which medical biologists and quantum physicists alike have been striving towards for the better part of a century. Morrow had uncovered the innate capacity of humanity - and indeed other life forms - to manipulate the fabric of time and space to their own ends. No complex

technology required, no time machines or proton scramblers ... truly the scientific discovery of the millennium and beyond."

A nameless restless tribe pounded an array of war drums in Redman's skull. "I can't believe what you're telling me. You actually *believe* this?"

"It's not a question of belief, old boy. I need not *believe* in aerodynamics to know that a jetliner can cruise the sky. The proof is in the experience."

"So you're saying you've experienced this kind of ... manipulation? This whole transcending space and time ...you've been able to do it yourself?"

"You are now entering the Holy Temple, Matthew. Tonight you are to be officially inducted into the combat academy."

"This place?" he muttered feebly staring at his feet and the unknown destination which awaited them below. "So this is your base of operations? Your theatre of war, so to speak."

Frick permitted herself a less than modest grin. "Congratulations. You should consider it quite an honour. From tonight, you can expect to be coached in the combat techniques crucial to engaging with the enemy which faces us ... and learn more of the role you will continue to play in quelling the wretched revolution which Morrow and his acolytes seek to exact."

"And of what use, pray tell, might an old man like myself prove in a battle scenario? I'm hardly in any condition, physically *or* psychologically, to contribute to a skirmish."

Again the elevator rocked as thunder boomed from the MP's proud breast. "You're an academically inclined man, Matthew. You know your history, I'm sure. And you'll be aware that the methods and rationale of warfare change with each and every war, in accordance with a whole range of factors; environmental, social, technological, etcetera. This war is no different. And, like the two Great Wars of the twentieth century, this one demands the participation of all eligible subjects. In times of such crisis, there's no such thing as a valueless denizen. You, dear boy, will be required to play to your strengths, just as you have done so adroitly until now."

The elevator began to slow, the vexed cables groaning in displeasure. A rheumatic pain flared in the base of Redman's spine as though in sympathy with the beleaguered mechanism. He fought to suppress a wince as Frick continued:

"You see, the frontlines of this war have been drawn across the psychic flashpoints of the universe; across the dreams of both venerable loyalists and deplorable dissidents; across the scars of the wounded; across the spinal columns and nervous systems of each and every combatant."

The elevator shuddered finally to a halt. An intense heat and a commotion of human voices pressed in on them from beyond the door.

"You sound just like him. Like Morrow. If you're so convinced that the phantoms of his

insanity are genuine, then what precisely is the difference between you and him? What's the basis for this supposed war, hmm?"

"Don't be naïve, Matthew. I shouldn't think I need to explain the threat which Morrow's revolution poses to order, to stability, to everything we hold dear ... Think of them out there: the deviants, the miscreants and filthy beasts who would like nothing better than to see all our good work crumble and fall. Were we to leave these cancerous elements free to manipulate space-time willy-nilly, there's no telling what damage they could do; *irreparable* damage to our rightful authority and hierarchies, to our whole sphere of existence. History offers these malcontents no shortage of potentially flammable material; events and climates which could be rearranged and primed like a great bomb to destroy us utterly. Only by familiarising ourselves with Morrow's work, and through a mastery of the techniques he innovated can we hope to keep this kind of knowledge out of unsavoury hands and close to our chests where power of such magnitude rightfully belongs."

The steel curtain slid open as silently as before. A vast complex spread out before them; men and women in white coats, others in military fatigues working at computer terminals and huge blocks of unfathomable technological equipment. To all intents and purposes the scene was entirely anonymous. Had it not been for the claustrophobically lengthy descent, Redman could easily have believed that he was stepping into a standard and legitimate military installation anywhere in the developed world. He moved to step out from the elevator when Frick clamped a firm hand around his upper arm.

"You should be under no illusions, old boy. In order to conquer an enemy, one must first *understand* the enemy. The most effective strategy in any war is to assess the enemy's military strength, emulate that strength, and use it against them accordingly. As in any war, we must pursue the foe along their supply lines; in this case, the associational lines of dream and desire ... the very routes which you, as a master of the Media, have so crucially helped to shape. With your continued diligence, we can shoot their damn dreams right back at them at double dividends. And that, my dear, will prove the ultimate Weapon of Mass Destruction."

The MP's red mouth curled into a ravenous grimace and, with an insistent yank on his arm, she hauled the tycoon out of the elevator and into the subterranean military outpost beyond. They had taken less than five steps when a broad-shouldered man in an immaculately starched naval officer's uniform materialised from the throng and greeted Frick with a firm but transient salute.

"Ma'am," a voice coarse and glutinous as tar poured from the officer's mouth, "Doctor Homarus is expecting you, but ..."

"Ah, Chapman," Frick cut the man off and introduced the tycoon with an unenthusiastic hand gesture, "You will recognise our guest, I'm sure. Matthew Redman, this is Vice-Admiral Joseph Chapman, one of my senior advisors and an indispensable resource for this most surreptitious of operations."

Redman extended an unsteady hand which the Navy man promptly ignored.

“Ma’am, I’m afraid there’s been something of a ... *predicament* in your absence. One of the good Doctor’s subjects has escaped.”

wails through sudden nightfall on cold black cobblestone streets ghost winds and sky tears wide at the promise of deserted car parks look now looking head spun around with the shattered gate and no hint of the nurse’s fire at frozen kerbs reeling from psychic gusts Tim stumbles disoriented other voices hatching spectrally in dustbins and rusted gutters

- Sheila! Where the hell are you? What the fuck - ?

wounds etched coarse in twilight shadows death cry of a crashing airliner and ash descends like snowfall blue blazer fluttering sad androgynous aeons that girl he once was now a pale boy shivering broken and black-eyed on unfamiliar ground fist of dark matter shooting the ageless gaze across tattered air

- Kid? You alright?

the boy stumbles gingerly to shoeless bleeding feet ash filth and shattered glass caking the raw edges haze of time sails in on another’s dream of myriad windows fluctuating images of other identity pulse the night apart with white noise muscles

head raised to moonless sky phantom lips parted the child envoy mutters lost voices harsh wind through the vocal chords candid as a knife-wound

- I dreamt your dreams before you ... nobody to know under a burning sky ... that torn photo is last station of my badge ... You see the costume guy? The old superhero adventures you followed ... ink stains like blood on young knuckles from musty newsprint pages. Clear enough on fallout over wounded hotel ...?

remote eyes flicker and Tim follows abstract alleys the child of the universe carves with that midnight gaze war cries fade in from an alien shore child silhouettes bloom into flames against faded concrete

- Where are we headed, kid? I’ve lost something back at the deli ... Where have I been? Has all but the faintest recording known my pulse at the front? My hand in Sheila’s ... I made the sky past that contaminated kitchen?

words and images drift and dissolve like fireflies in a windstorm forest impressions and the hunt is sleepless dreams of violence draw their pay on all sides of makeshift verandas flex that wrist the universe cowers at the assault of incendiary veins duck for cover smell some café by the pier of your mission DESTINY she hoards hybrid shadows upon her glowing coast plucking TIME from the waters and ripping it free from cold crustacean claws you keep that ticket for the spinal causeway turbines and throat bones no way not bitin’ young flesh woven out in a cosmic lattice ghost of no words don’t cry sweet Poppy you know weeping that goes unheard angels landing on the pier fuck a new storm into dreamless estates crows of september guard that heart flawless doorway for keen minds and wounded sight shadows maintain his horizon militiaman’s graffiti sings a hole in the wall with tomorrow’s deathless

smile

- You take the path out past remotes storefronts guv. Should dump that time burning in your pocket. Leave that ticking tock behind. Red marks the fortress ... the children are gathered there ... ocean screams attrition at the heliport ... You keep hold of my coat-tails guv?

Tim falls into the black holes of the boy's gaze and is swept out through other flesh to a distant vista of burning wings and salt smells ... plaintive phantoms treading boardwalks laced with vines ... radioactive sun simmering and ailing like a cigarette butt upon the green lagoon ... cosmos collapsing in crow cries ...

- Flipped the page guv. Flipped it for you to see ...

"Nathan, good to see you. I suppose it was silly of me to have expected an intellect such as yours to remain confined to the Institute."

Doctor Nathan Homarus acknowledged Redman's greeting with the slightest of nods and turned his attention to Frick, leaving the tycoon's extended hand hovering forsakenly for the second time within a five minute period.

"As ever your timing is impeccable, Catherine. We've had quite a situation in the interrogation labs, with repercussions demanding your immediate attention."

Even in the event of potential catastrophe, Frick maintained her watertight composure: "Chapman tells me we have an escapee. Are we dealing with a red alert here?"

"Well, yes and no. The situation may not be as calamitous as it could be. Indeed, I feel we may extract a considerable advantage."

Frick gestured with a jerk of her head: "Walk and talk."

The Doctor led them through a sliding door and into a long brightly lit steel corridor. Flanked by the invincible MP on his left and the burly Navy man to his right, Redman felt like a condemned man being escorted to his prison cell: the battered and grilled filling in an authoritarian sandwich.

Homarus lurched ahead, his insect voice clashing with the low buzz of the overhead striplights: "The subject in question - no more than an adolescent - had been interned at the Annex some months ago. Over time she began to display preliminary symptoms of psycho-biologic mutation, symptoms which failed to react appropriately to my treatments. Thus she was brought here for further study and, of course, in the interests of security."

"The public line on her?"

"Oh she is officially deceased. The symptoms were identified early as potentially catastrophic, resulting in the girl's inclusion on the Flashpoint List. The administrators at the orphanage from which she was plucked were 'informed' of her demise immediately upon her

transfer.”

“Good. Now what’s the damage-”

A tremor rocked Redman to the core of his nervous system. He couldn’t believe his ears. “What on Earth is being said here?” He was shocked at the sound of his own voice spewing almost unconsciously forth to echo metallicly against the vacant steel walls. “You people have been using the Redman Annex ... the facility *I* paid to establish as some kind of experimental freak farm?!”

The Doctor cast an unaffected glance over his shoulder at Redman, unblinking eyes frozen behind cold spectacles. Frick smirked the aloof smirk reserved by adults for naïve children, while the Vice-Admiral simply glared at him with unveiled antipathy.

“Just exactly what kind of *treatments* have you been practicing in my name, Nathan? And why in God’s name wasn’t I informed?”

Frick draped a condescending arm around the tycoon’s now quaking shoulders. “Oh come now, old boy. Don’t be like that. It’s a very fine selection of toys your money helped buy and, as your friends, we think it only fair you let us play with them, hmm?”

“I am not fucking around here, Catherine! And I won’t be undermined in this way!” Redman’s frail heart was pounding so fiercely he had to remind himself of the woman’s prior warning concerning his medical prescription. As subtly as he was able, he patted his coat pocket to caress the reassuring cylindrical outline of his pill container. “I don’t know what exactly you people are doing, but if it involves the incarceration of British citizens against their will with no legal authorisation - not to mention whatever bizarre practices Doctor Homarus has been subjecting them to - then you are most definitely playing with the most deadly kind of fire! If any of this leaks, you people are finished! Fucking finished!”

Frick hugged the media magnate’s flustered face to her breast and affected a preposterously high-pitched mock maternal voice: “Oh my sweet, loyal, adorable Matthew. I could just eat you up. How typically chivalrous of you to express such concern for the well-being of your treasured associates,” she kissed the shiny crown of his head with a loud smack. “But no need to worry, your lady Catherine and her trusted comrades have ensured the security of this operation in every conceivable respect. Besides ... should *we* go down,” her smile fell as she stared solemnly into Redman’s weary gaze, “you shall surely be sharing the gallows with us, old boy. As you say: your money, your name, *your* responsibility.”

She held his gaze for a portentous moment. Not for the first time, Redman was aware of his smallness before the magnitude of this awesome woman. He was an amoeba in her grand experiment, a miniscule element dwarfed by the grandeur of her enigmatic scheme in its opaque totality.

“But!” she exclaimed, slapping him on the back, shifting impeccably from grave to jovial, “No need to worry about such things, hmm? This is a tight ship we run here. And, as I have endeavoured to explain, the scope of our operation stretches far beyond national concerns.

The Amnesty mob and the rest of the bleeding heart contingent are locked as they have always been in an intractable trench of trifles. Exactly where they belong in fact. Those lowly dogs could not possibly conceive of the enormity of our mission, and as such pose no threat to us. So relax, old man. As of now you are among the truly privileged. Such archaic concepts as civil liberty, medical ethics and freedom of information need not concern us. In times of war it is the duty of the rightful ruling class to override the rights of citizens where they hinder the effectiveness of the war effort. You wouldn't want the enemy; the beasts, the rogues, the freaks and heathens to win now, would you? You wouldn't think it desirable for those vile and destructive forces to tear down our world and thrust us into their own lawless, Godless vision?"

"No," the tycoon answered truthfully, "I certainly would not."

"Wouldn't you instead prefer to live in a world where people knew and kept their place? Where the correct institutions of order and control were upheld and respected without interference and corruption by contemptible dissident elements? Wouldn't it be a better and more stable existence, hmm? A world which you would not be ashamed or terrified to bequeath to your children and grandchildren, safe in the knowledge that the righteous shall remain in control unchallenged, and the rabble forever held in line?"

"Well, yes, of course. That's what any sane and decent person wants."

"Then you are on the correct side, my good man. You see that, don't you?"

"Yes. Yes I see that." Redman rubbed his eyes. The tension had eased somewhat in his heaving chest, but it had left him exhausted. As they neared the end of the corridor, he was silently hopeful for a chance to sit down and recompose himself. "Forgive me, Catherine. I'm simply concerned about the possibility of sabotage. The risks here seem excessively high ..."

"You know, Matthew," her arm reasserted its claim upon his shoulders only now bereft of pomp, "I remember back when the civil partnership bill was passed. And the earnest campaign your newspapers ran against it. A truly admirable but ill-fated battle you fought. It was surely a sore defeat, yes?"

"It was. A major mistake for society in my opinion. But it was but one battle, there are always others to fight."

"Oh very true my dear, very true. However, the outcome of a battle is not always set in stone. An *incorrect* outcome can always be corrected. How would you like to see a complete reversal of that whole sorry development, hmm? And the complete erasure of other equally unfortunate events? Would that kind of victory not be worth the most extreme of risks, the greatest of costs?"

The idea went off like a firecracker in the tycoon's skull. "If what you say were possible ... then yes, I suppose I would agree to the legitimacy of the risks incurred."

Catherine Frick revealed every one of her gleaming white teeth in a well-honed television smile. "Then congratulations. Because, thanks in large part to that old thorn in our

side Professor Morrow, that goal is moving increasingly within our reach.”

They arrived at another steel door identical to the previous one. Doctor Homarus adjusted his glasses to the end of his beaklike nose and typed a code across a glowing wall-mounted keypad with swift skeletal fingers. The door slid open with a mellifluous hiss. He led the group through a large bustling room where a swarm of young laboratory assistants in white coats darted from one arcane apparatus to another with conspicuous urgency. The air was thick with pungent chemical smells and the low hum of unnameable machinery. Complex arrangements of test tubes and other scientific equipment stretched to the high ceiling. Computer monitors strobed with endless streams of Byzantine data.

“So Nathan,” the MP redirected her attention at the Doctor now navigating their perilous route through the flurry, “This subject. How exactly did she escape?”

“Well, I’m ashamed to say that she managed it by utilising what should have been the most predictable route in this case. I must confess my own negligence in this matter. The girl caught my staff and I somewhat off guard.”

“That is disappointing. I do expect better of you, my dear Doctor.”

“A momentary lapse of vigilance I assure you.” The Doctor’s voice was devoid of apology. Redman couldn’t help but envy the man’s poise before Frick’s countenance. “The girl has a history of self-harm. It’s what resulted in her Institutionalisation. Before being relocated to the Redman Annex she was already on suicide watch. Over the course of the last two months or so she had become prone to seizures, episodes of which she would later possess no memory. She would also fall into a trance-like state, whereupon she would begin reciting long semi-poetic passages of insane proclamation, over and over like convoluted mantras. Naturally we recorded these outbursts.”

“Did you identify their source?”

“Indeed so. What she was reciting were passages from *The Red Shift*.”

Frick pinned the Doctor with a lance-like stare. “That should have been brought to my immediate attention, Nathan.”

“Indeed, ma’am, and I apologise again for what I can only admit to as negligence. But these developments did progress at rather a rapid rate, and I was quite concerned with administering the correct treatment to the subject, a complex affair which consumed much of my time.”

“All the more reason for me to be have been notified. Any case pertaining to Mr Chance’s work is to be given top priority. For this operation to run efficiently, I require to be informed of how many priority cases we’re dealing with at any such time.”

Before Homarus could utter another word in his defence, Redman interrupted feebly: “Forgive me, Catherine. But *The Red Shift*? Are you referring to the work of Jensen Chance, that

degenerate American novelist? What in the name of God does that unliterary claptrap have to do with anything here?"

Frick's tone was blank and factual. "Chance may be a degenerate, but I'm afraid his work packs quite a devastating punch. One that could destabilise our entire world if we don't remain vigilant. It's no coincidence that that book was challenged as obscene in several countries."

"Well, of course. All those awful scatological descriptions and depraved scenarios. Offensive to anyone of good taste. The whole thing is barely even constructed as a novel if I recall. Rambling, unstructured gibberish in effect."

"Yes and no, Matthew. Mr Chance's words offend far more than good taste. And, loathsome as his words are, there is a proven power to them. Or, more accurately, a power *behind* the words. One which speaks to the hearts and minds of the debauched and ... how shall we say ... *opens* them to new potential. All quite destructive in very material terms."

"Quite true," Homarus interpolated. "In this particular case, it seemed the subject's ingestion of Chance's words was precipitating significant changes in her psychological and physiological makeup. Intense study of her episodes led my staff to ascertain that she was undergoing psycho-biologic mutation. My own diagnosis was Temporal Displacement with possible signs of Material Assimilation."

Redman's aching head spun with the words. "Temporal ... Material *what?* Catherine, what in God's name has been happening here exactly?"

The Doctor's tone became more severe as he directed his words to the oblivious tycoon. "In simple terms, Mr Redman, the girl displayed a latent ability to move herself *out* of our time zone through the doorways of her own wounds."

"So she's ... a *time traveller?*"

"If you like, yes. In addition, it seemed her burgeoning mutation also endowed her with the capacity to absorb physical objects. These artefacts would then themselves be mutated ... *rewritten* by her biology as practical appendages."

Redman could taste vomit in his gullet. "How utterly appalling!"

"I'm assuming she was on a strict regime of medication?" Frick's tone was flat and cold as slate.

"Indeed so. A very complex mixture of my own creation, designed for this patient exclusively. Due to the nature of her aberration, the drug could be administered only at those times when the seizure was fully upon her. You must understand that at these moments her body was quite stricken, she was essentially incapable of defending herself or of committing any act of aggression for as long as she was actively mutating. This led to ... a certain sloppiness in treating her. A mistake which proved of great consequence ..." Homarus' voice sank to a

mumble.

“What happened, Nathan?”

“The medicine is administered via a syringe injected directly into the patient’s spinal column. It is effectively a suppressant. Among other things, it is designed to prevent wounds from remaining open for too long; it ensures a very swift clotting of the blood. The mixture is stored in large glass bottles. Given that it was only ever administered to the patient during periods of incapacity, I’m afraid a culture developed wherein my staff would enter the subject’s room with the bottle on their person and fill the syringe in the girl’s presence.”

Frick rolled her eyes and exhaled gravely. “Well that is more than an oversight, Nathan. I trust you were unaware of this practice?”

“Oh absolutely!” Trepidation entered Homarus’ voice: “I had no idea. The guidelines regarding the girl’s treatment were clearly established and, I believed, understood and maintained by every member of my staff.”

“I see. I shall of course wish to speak with the staff member concerned. Some reprimand is definitely in order.”

“Oh it’s a little late for that, Catherine. That particular employee is no longer among the living.”

“That seems a rather swift and ruthless punishment,” Frick indulged in a chuckle, “even by my own standards.”

“Not my doing I’m afraid. The girl saw fit to do away with her attendant prior to her escape.”

“Oh my. This has been quite a day.”

“Yes, it seems that on this occasion the girl had in fact feigned the seizure. Cunning little bitch. Confident that a member of staff would arrive with bottle in hand, she replicated the convulsions we had all come to associate with her mutative episodes and the trap was set. She kicked the bottle out of the attendant’s hand and cut his throat with one of the shards.”

“For the love of God!” Redman gagged and pulled a dusty hanky from his coat pocket, pressing it to his lips.

Homarus continued unperturbed: “Before anyone could react, the girl reached for another shard and cut her own wrist. No hesitation. Sliced the artery wide open.”

Frick nodded sagaciously. “Instant wormhole?”

“Instant wormhole.”

“Clever girl.”

“Wormhole?!” This fresh confusion bypassed Matthew Redman’s mind and plunged straight to his feeble bladder which now heaved ominously with the pressure.

Frick patted the tycoon lightly upon the shoulder, an entirely affectless gesture which set his teeth on edge. “Yes, my dear Matthew. By tearing herself open in this way, it seems this girl’s mutation permitted her to escape through the hole she made and off into another temporal zone. Correct, Nathan?”

“That would seem to be the case, yes.”

Redman couldn’t be sure which of these bizarre utterances to believe, if any, but he was trying valiantly to keep up. “So, you’re saying that by opening a wound in herself, this girl accessed a hole in time? And that she was able to do this because of a dirty book she read?”

The Vice-Admiral who had remained silent throughout this entire discourse now finally erupted at the tycoon: “For Christ’s sake, old man! Yes, a hole in fucking time! And in space too! A hole in the very fabric of the fucking universe! Do we have to draw you a fucking picture? Wormholes are the frontier of this war, you old speckle-headed twat! And language is one of the fucking keys! You fuck with language, you fuck with the whole universe as described by language! The balance of our whole reality is at stake, do you fucking get it? Do you?!”

Redman was sure he could hear his bladder squeal in agony. Shielding himself from the Navy man’s abusive gaze, he turned back to Frick and clucked from a parched throat:

“Wormholes ... My God, Catherine. Who else is privy to this knowledge? How far into government does this operation stretch? Does the Prime Minister have an official policy on ... on *wormholes*?!”

“My dear, the Prime Minister is a babe in the woods. Just by being here, you have a significant edge on him in fact.” Condescension informing her touch once more, she slid her hand down and squeezed Redman’s sagging buttock suggestively.

They arrived at a third identical steel door. Frick turned her attention back to Homarus. “Alright, Nathan. We’ve heard the bad news. Now what’s the upside to this little calamity? What kind of white rabbit are you going to pull out of that pert arse for me?”

The Doctor typed a code into a keypad and the door slid open. He peered over his shoulder at Frick, an almost childlike glee transforming his previously lifeless eyes into electric jewels.

“I think our little absconder may yet be of some use to us.”

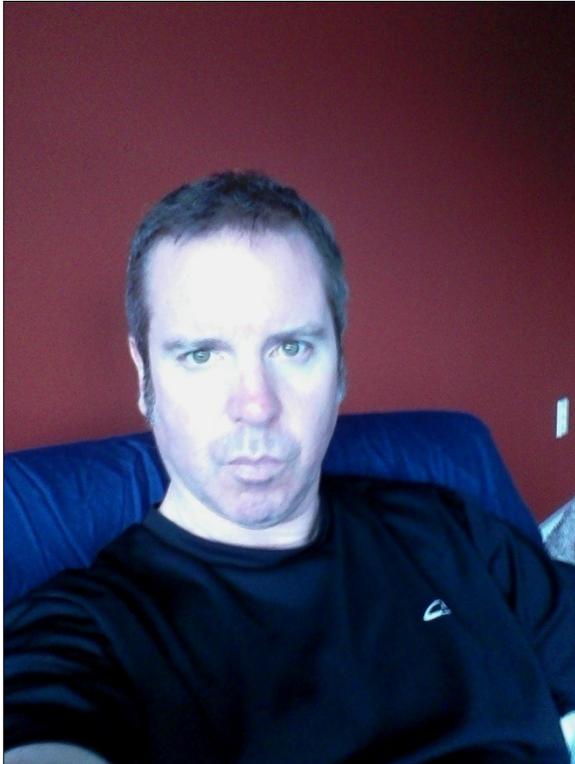


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TEARING AT THE FETTERS: AN INTERVIEW WITH VADGE MOORE

By Nick Louras

Photos Courtesy of Vadge Moore



Vadge Moore joined the underground punk outfit The Dwarves in 1988, shortly after the release of their first LP. For the next ten years he drummed with the band, contributing to their hard-earned reputation for raucous live performances and extreme hedonism on stage and off. In the mid-90s he began to develop a dark individualist philosophy inspired by Nietzsche and the French Symbolists, publishing a series of essays in the occult journal, *Primal Chaos*. After breaking with the Dwarves in the late-90s, he has devoted himself primarily to writing and occult research, notably for the

esoteric journal *Dagobert's Revenge*. In 2009 Moore published his first book, *Chthonic: Prose & Theory*, an exploration of his personal philosophy. He continues to record, as Chthonic Force, with Wendy Van Dusen and recently contributed to the Dwarves's new album, *Born Again*. His written work appears currently in *Atua*, a collection of writings from *La Société Voudon Gnostique*, an occult order to which Moore belongs.

Your lyrics for Chthonic Force seem very much connected to the philosophy espoused in your writing. You've described it as "nihilistic mysticism." Would it be possible to sum up the Chthonic worldview?

Yes, or at least, what I consider to be *my* chthonic worldview; many scholars would disagree with me. But I made chthonic personal, because the word affected me so deeply. It's a worldview that sees those things that have been rejected by the civilized mind as very, very important and necessary—for creativity and for personal transformation. Chthonic is a leap into a primal abyss that will either make you stronger or fucking kill you. It made me stronger. This part of the psyche is not for everyone and some should not open these dark portals, but I did, and the pleasure and

the horror is immense—and I would not have it any other way. I always knew I was not like the others; this transformation has made this wonderfully clear. Even those that cannot take this leap can still enjoy my books.

You say that exploring this part of the psyche either kills you or makes you stronger. I'm curious what it means to be stronger in this context. Do you see the Chthonic as something one passes through, coming out the other side tempered by it? Or is strength the ability to live in that space all the time?

I think it's both. I think as you move through this space, this part of the psyche, that two things happen, or can happen for some; a part of you—the rational you—is beaten down, dissolved, torn apart. This leaves a void that can be filled with a more ancient, archaic you—as the surface is dissipated the true core rises. If you are strong enough to withstand this assault from the natural, primordial you then when it fills you—fills the void left by the false self—you can become stronger, terrifyingly so. It is a dual force. It is dissolution and the End—but it is also primal, animal, monstrous—and the beginning—the primitive, but a primitive that has been affected by the repression of the natural self, hence, monstrous. Complexes are a very primary source of my creativity. I call this source the Monster. The quote from Nietzsche that I have in my book explains this perfectly.

You view the creative source, the imagination, then, as something dark and volatile, as a monster within. Does the artist inevitably put himself in danger by contacting that source?

Yes, he does indeed. The monster within is in opposition to the civilized, trained, hemmed-in self, the self that we have all been trained to accept. The monster tears all of those categories asunder, rips them to shreds and forces one to confront the primordial self that lurks continually below. If you are not prepared for this chaos, if you have not trained yourself to accept things that most people consider horrible, terrifying and debauched than this confrontation with the irrational, the murderous, the perverse will rip you to pieces. We can see what happened to the frontiersmen of this method—Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Lautreamont—insanity, madness and death. But they used their tortured experiences to produce exquisite works of literature and poetry. We can thank them for their contributions, but—in this less, shall we say, innocent age—there are ways and means to prepare yourself for this confrontation and transformation. Personally, I used the works of the Marquis de Sade and Friedrich Nietzsche to help push me “beyond good and evil.” This has worked quite well. Kenneth Grant and Michael Bertiaux also helped quite a bit, regarding what their works...implied. Grant wrote about the artist being a conduit for the forces of the qliphoth; Bertiaux, the forces of the Meon. I agree with them both and have tried to become that kind of writer and artist. I think I've succeeded. However, this path is not for everyone. If this is not in your nature, you should not take this route. It is for the few.

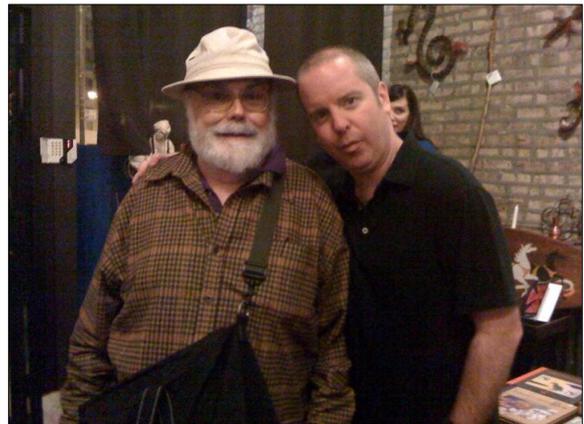
Could you elaborate on how one prepares for this confrontation/transformation? What did the early Decadents not know? What was implied,

as you say, in Grant's and Bertiaux's works that helped you?

I can't say that I consciously set out to have this dark initiation...no reasonable person would. I was supposed to go this route...that's the best way that I can explain it. This would be True Will, in my estimation. I am supposed to have these experiences now. It reminds me of the libertine Gnostic sects that believed that they must burn through every "sin" in order to satisfy their karma. Now, I don't believe in sin, but I do believe that we are each supposed to experience everything that there is to experience...and then we are whole. Then, perhaps we're sucked back into the void, only to be spit back out again and start all over. Beautiful. Crowley had some great insights regarding this—exploring every "sin" and vice and every experience—because this is how "God" gets his kicks, and we are all a part of this one mind that is "God". All the tastes and pleasures and sufferings—the cream and the spice of our lives must be indulged in. Then we can become whole.

I think the early Decadents were too concerned with guilt and sin. They came from a mostly Catholic background. They were meant to push the boundaries, break out of their shells, but they couldn't quite do it; even though they had the marvelous example of the Marquis de Sade right before them. They were a stepping-stone, one we can all admire with a caveat: Thank God for Nietzsche! Mix your Decadent man/woman with your Overman/woman and I think then you are truly on to something.

What was, or is, implied in the works of Grant and Bertiaux is precisely this balance between decadence and strength. Grant speaks of balancing the Solar light of the front side of the Tree of Life with the dark, dissolute Void of the backside. Bertiaux speaks of occult superhumanity that can deal with the bright light of the IFA with the lycanthropic darkness of the Meon. Their books alone can be engines of transformation. I speak from direct experience...not theory.



Vadge Moore and Michael Bertiaux, 2010

Given your occult influences and the desire to act as a conduit for your art, how does magic/ritual fit into your creative process, if at all?

It's only been within the last few years that I took up ritual, and I did that because I sensed that these forces needed to be channeled a bit...focused. I don't perform rituals very often now because I feel that I have a handle on them, and that what rises out of my depths needs no manipulation. However, there are rituals performed in the *Société Voudon Gnostique* that help re-solidify and strengthen that which is already there.

It is important for me to perform those rituals from time to time. Anybody interested in activating these Voudonic forces would do well to perform the rituals contained in David Beth's upcoming new edition of his book *Voudon Gnosis*. They are very powerful.

You emphasize the need to acknowledge one's nature, to remain true to it, no matter where that leads. Has civilization hit a brick wall by advocating the opposite—"be whatever you want" instead of "be what you are"?

I think so. I believe that in the nature vs. nurture argument that nurture has, for far too long, come out ahead. But, slowly, surely people are realizing that nature does indeed have the upper hand. Nurture does have a part to play, but, in the end, you are what you are. That can be horrifying for some people to realize and great news for others. When I realized this at an early age, I was ecstatic! The herd prefers to believe the "be whatever you want" argument and that's fine. Let them not be in tune with their true nature. That leaves more time and room for those of us that aren't fooled by such silly suppositions and are willing to accept our true nature with open arms.

You've cited Aleister Crowley and Anton LaVey as early influences, often in the same breath. Spiritually, they pursued radically different ends. What brings them together for you?

Having read both men extensively I've come to believe that LaVey's philosophy was the exoterica for Crowley's esoterica, if I may take literary license. The core of Crowley's "boots on the ground" philosophy that you will find, especially in

his commentaries on *The Book of the Law*, are really no different from LaVey's doctrine in *The Satanic Bible*. I think LaVey was a way for people to move beyond good and evil philosophically, and that that helps some to more fully embrace the more complicated and mystical side of Crowley. LaVey's Satanic Overman can help move people toward a more broad conception of Crowley's Kingly Man and the True Will. Being a firm believer in the Aeon of Horus, I think that the Church of Satan has helped clear the way for the new age that is dawning on us. For those that are so inclined, Crowley's work on magick, yoga, meditation and philosophy is there, waiting. I have other beliefs regarding Crowley, this new age and subjects that Michael Bertiaux raises. But, we'll get to that later.

What other writers influenced you early on?

Many, many writers. To name a few: Nietzsche, de Sade, Bataille, Baudelaire, Lautreamont, Dalí, Bertiaux, Crowley, Grant, Sotos, Evola, Rimbaud, Poe. When I was very young I worshipped Hunter S. Thompson. Today, he seems to me to be a kind of political Dionysian—the chaos and the insight of his stuff is magical.

The Decadents/Symbolists seem to have had a big impact on you. Do you relate to their aesthetic?

I do, in the sense that I just described: the dissolution, the tearing down, the reducing yourself to your baser impulses. The next step is the building back up—which is a poor choice of words because it isn't necessarily a "building"—it's more of a rising. Like a Phoenix? A dark, foreboding,

monstrous Phoenix—a Phoenix pulsing a dark, violent light—but a light nonetheless.

Let's talk a little about music. After more than a decade playing with the Dwarves you changed styles significantly, taking up an electronic/industrial sound with Chthonic Force. What inspired that change? It seems like a more personal project.



Vadge and The Dwarves, 1997

It is, far more personal. The Dwarves are essentially Blag [Dahlia]'s project and bless him—it is a wonderful project indeed. Chthonic Force is my baby, with constant help and inspiration from my long time friend and Neither/Neither World leader Wendy Van Dusen. I have always had an interest in industrial music from Monte Cazzaza to Throbbing Gristle to Boyd Rice

and Whitehouse. When things began to wind down with the Dwarves and I began to feel that I had to go I had this constant vision of an atmospheric noise band that I would front that would include all of the previously mentioned influences along with my literary and philosophical bent. So came Chthonic Force.

Does Chthonic Force tour?

No, Chthonic Force does not tour and only puts out recordings sparingly. I find that it is very hard to capture that subtle, maleficent intent on stage and that what CF does is just better suited to a studio where I can have absolute control of what is created. I didn't want to just be a Boyd Rice rip off or have to attack the audience *à la* Whitehouse. I love what those two acts do, but I feel no desire to hit the stage and try to be another live industrial act. I spent enough time on stage with the Dwarves...no reason to get back up there any time soon. Discriminate Audio released a "Best of" CD of Chthonic Force a couple of years ago and will be re-releasing that as vinyl very soon. However, there have been some noises made between me and Wendy regarding new CF tracks to come. Everyone will have to wait and see.

You've long extolled the virtues of a hedonistic lifestyle. Does intoxication aid your gnosis, or is it something you prefer not to over think?

I think that intoxication has a great hand in leading one to this type of gnosis. It's the "loosening the girders of the soul" or the "disorganization of the senses" that can help lead one to this vision—this realization—but it is not for everyone. Some will just be smashed upon the rocks, and

believe me, I have come close to that. Drugs and alcohol have always been used to induce insights and visions – and it works – and intoxication will continue to be used to inspire gnosis for as long as the human race is here.

You've recently become involved with the Voudon Gnostic system developed by Michael Bertiaux. What drew you to that?

I was doing my first mini-tour with the Dwarves in either late '88 or early '89 and we were in NYC. I went to a used bookstore, as I frequently do, and came across *Outside the Circles of Time* by Kenneth Grant. The book amazed me. I had heard of Mr. Grant in Robert Anton Wilson's *The Cosmic Trigger* but had never read his stuff. There were a lot of incredible quotes by Michael Bertiaux in that book and Grant spoke very highly of this dark, elusive, Chicago Magician. When I returned home to San Francisco I popped into my favorite occult bookstore, Fields Books, and discovered Bertiaux's *Voudon Gnostic Workbook*. It confused me, confounded me, fascinated me and blew me away. Between the work of Grant and Bertiaux I felt that portals had been opened in my mind...doorways that I felt were never going to close. They both were instrumental in sending me down this path of transformation that I have been on, lo, these many years. I corresponded with Bertiaux briefly and considered becoming more involved with his occult order, but I was so ensconced in my work with the Dwarves it just was not to be.

Many years later I began to hear of this Voudon Gnostic upstart named David Beth

who had been working directly with Bertiaux for a number of years. I heard a podcast interview with David and decided to contact him directly through his Myspace page. Turned out he was a fan of the Dwarves and had read some of my occult writings. I purchased his amazing book *Voudon Gnosis*, which was the product of his work with Bertiaux – and I was completely amazed. He made that which seemed so unclear in Bertiaux's system crystal clear. I knew he was a voudon master and I knew that this was my chance to finally contribute to this thing that had been influencing me for so very long. I sent him my book *Chthonic: Prose & Theory* and later when he was forming a new occult organization called *La Société Voudon Gnostique*, he, without hesitation, admitted me into this order based, in large part, on the contents of that book. My focus, now, is on the furtherance of this order and my theoretical work will be based on the voudon gnosis...even though, in a somewhat elusive way, it always has been. My prose work will continue as it has been – more dark, though, and certainly containing hints of the inner teachings of the *Société Voudon Gnostique*.

By reconciling these influences – Bertiaux, who combined Voodoo with the Western Mystery Tradition; Grant, who drew from Crowley and AO Spare; LaVey; Crowley himself – do you see yourself fitting together pieces of a larger puzzle or using different "languages" to describe the same phenomena?

I think it is all describing the same phenomenon. I think certain artists, occultists, philosophers, musicians, what have you, tap the same vein. Granted, this is

a vein and a current that has been slowly building over the last 300 or so years...and that it comes from an ancient source that we had all but forgotten—but it is the same current. Dalí tapped it—we in the Voudon Gnosis tap it—I even think Marilyn Manson in his own way has tapped this force. It's a pool to be drawn from, for those that dare.

I'm familiar with the traditional tenets of Crowley's system, but I'm interested to know how he fits into your more syncretic one. You said earlier your beliefs about the Aeon of Horus depart from his major writings?

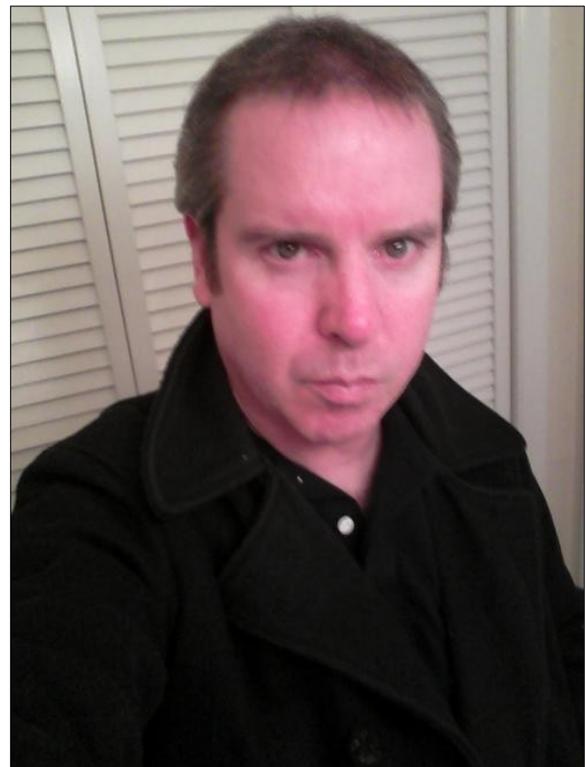
They do in a certain sense. I believe in the True Will, but I don't think it is reached by narrowing your focus or closing your mind to outside influences. I think you tap your True Will by opening your rational self to a Dionysian frenzy—and in his best moments Crowley acknowledges this as well. Sink into the primordial, in my opinion, and there will be found your True Will. Tear at the fetters—the shackles—and you will find yourself. Drink nothing but wine for an entire week and immerse yourself in consensual sex and violence, there you will find the pearl of great price. Just my personal opinion, however. But, it's worked well for me.

Now, as to Crowley and the Aeon, I believe *The Book of the Law* and I trust Crowley's role in this Aeon; however, I think there is a bigger picture to this whole thing and I think that Michael Bertiaux paints this whole picture perfectly. Anybody interested

in what that view is can find it in his *Voudon Gnostic Workbook* or they can read the article, when it is available, that I am currently writing for the SVG.

You've said that your future writings will be concerned with advancing La Société Voudon Gnostique and evolving your dark prose. Are there any specific projects you're ready to talk about?

I am currently more than a third of the way through my next book, which will be all prose. My philosophical work will come out through *La Société Voudon Gnostique*. And for the works of that group you'll have to stay tuned to www.voudongnosis.org and www.vadgemeore.com. Expect a lot...soon.



THE HOTEL FROM HELL

By Sue Fox

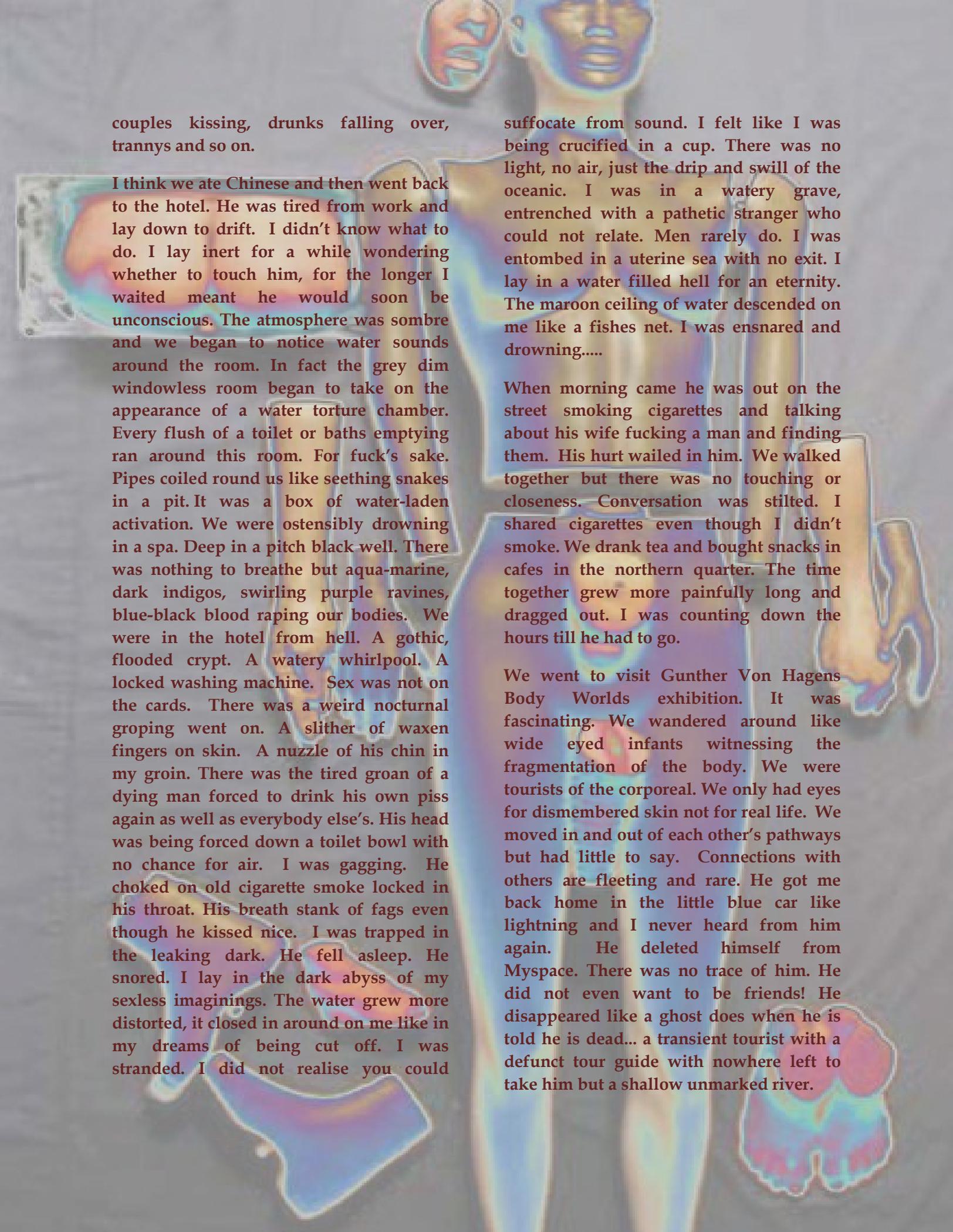
We had been writing to each other for months. Somehow I had gotten him to take photographs observing himself in his situation. He was born with birth defects. He had no right hand or right foot up to his shin. I thought he was beautiful besides. The abject body can be perfect. His mum had taken drugs in pregnancy. He became mal-formed in utero but he tried not to let it affect him. He began to photograph himself in toilets, at home in his quiet spaces, wanking, peeping at neighbours sunbathing, showering in mist with only a hint at body parts missing, pissing, & lying supine. He was getting good at documenting and producing unique standpoints from the perceptions of his physical disability. Our communing became intense and we had to meet. We were counting down the days. Four sleeps to go, three, two... can't wait to see you today! The excitement of meeting someone new, a stranger with a history. I packed my glass dildo wrapped in a towel. We planned for him to drive over to me. I booked a hotel room, the one without a window cos it was cheap... bur only by five pounds! He arrived and we hugged. I thought he looked gorgeous but he smoked and had jagged yellow teeth. He smelled of stale smoke.

The hotel room was dark and musty, decked out in foul 70s furniture and thick anaglypta wall paper. Airless. With a hint of death. He quickly took a shower after being all sweaty at work. The false leg was off. He leant over on the stump, on to the fungal green-grey tiles. His 6 foot 3 inch frame bent down to my height now leant.

There was a freak- like quality to the tilt. He worked fast on getting clean, rubbing himself furiously with a flannel. I went to lie down on the mustard bed spread to give him some space. My head was whirling. I felt nauseous. I took a few images of him and his leg, I shot the way he wrapped it in socks and hitched the stump into the hollow plastic leg. The attachment seemed antiquated. He didn't use anything in place of a hand as there was a kind of finger on it and a piece of bone so he could hold and manoeuvre things. He would always put it in his pocket, out of sight. The normal hand and foot had slight anomalies, as had his skin, there were odd scars and markings on his back and groin like large pock marks. I wondered how he didn't get angry at his body or his mum or at the world for letting him down.

We had an awkward kiss on the bed and laughed at the glass dildo. I felt embarrassed. I winced in naked self awareness. I was not enamoured by his bad breath or stained odd squint teeth. His face was warm and he had bright eyes but the connection of the physical was strained.

We headed for a tour of my art studio in the red light area and briefly conversed. He held my hand in his pocket. I held the damaged alien hand. I wanted to be close to him. He met some artist friends of mine and was polite but restrained. I felt like a tour-guide. We sat outside a bar and drunken men remarked on a badge that said 'rub my cunt.' We all laughed. We took photos of the drama in the streets,



couples kissing, drunks falling over, trannys and so on.

I think we ate Chinese and then went back to the hotel. He was tired from work and lay down to drift. I didn't know what to do. I lay inert for a while wondering whether to touch him, for the longer I waited meant he would soon be unconscious. The atmosphere was sombre and we began to notice water sounds around the room. In fact the grey dim windowless room began to take on the appearance of a water torture chamber. Every flush of a toilet or baths emptying ran around this room. For fuck's sake. Pipes coiled round us like seething snakes in a pit. It was a box of water-laden activation. We were ostensibly drowning in a spa. Deep in a pitch black well. There was nothing to breathe but aqua-marine, dark indigos, swirling purple ravines, blue-black blood raping our bodies. We were in the hotel from hell. A gothic, flooded crypt. A watery whirlpool. A locked washing machine. Sex was not on the cards. There was a weird nocturnal groping went on. A slither of waxen fingers on skin. A nuzzle of his chin in my groin. There was the tired groan of a dying man forced to drink his own piss again as well as everybody else's. His head was being forced down a toilet bowl with no chance for air. I was gagging. He choked on old cigarette smoke locked in his throat. His breath stank of fags even though he kissed nice. I was trapped in the leaking dark. He fell asleep. He snored. I lay in the dark abyss of my sexless imaginings. The water grew more distorted, it closed in around on me like in my dreams of being cut off. I was stranded. I did not realise you could

suffocate from sound. I felt like I was being crucified in a cup. There was no light, no air, just the drip and swill of the oceanic. I was in a watery grave, entrenched with a pathetic stranger who could not relate. Men rarely do. I was entombed in a uterine sea with no exit. I lay in a water filled hell for an eternity. The maroon ceiling of water descended on me like a fishes net. I was ensnared and drowning.....

When morning came he was out on the street smoking cigarettes and talking about his wife fucking a man and finding them. His hurt wailed in him. We walked together but there was no touching or closeness. Conversation was stilted. I shared cigarettes even though I didn't smoke. We drank tea and bought snacks in cafes in the northern quarter. The time together grew more painfully long and dragged out. I was counting down the hours till he had to go.

We went to visit Gunther Von Hagens Body Worlds exhibition. It was fascinating. We wandered around like wide eyed infants witnessing the fragmentation of the body. We were tourists of the corporeal. We only had eyes for dismembered skin not for real life. We moved in and out of each other's pathways but had little to say. Connections with others are fleeting and rare. He got me back home in the little blue car like lightning and I never heard from him again. He deleted himself from Myspace. There was no trace of him. He did not even want to be friends! He disappeared like a ghost does when he is told he is dead... a transient tourist with a defunct tour guide with nowhere left to take him but a shallow unmarked river.

THE WELLNESS OF MISTER SIC

By Chris Madoch

THE WELLNESS OF MISTER SIC

The NHS blue screen demands of him PICK ONE- 'Male' or 'Female' [No other alternative]: he sets aside the momentary temptation to screw the system by changing sex on the whim of a trembling index finger. D.O.B. Dab, dab, dab.

Mr Neville Sic.

Indeed I am.

You have an appointment with Dr Campion at 10.45.

I do believe I have.

Please take a seat.

[Well- robot. Ever been fucked up the arse by a remote controlled Dyson dust sucker. No. Thought not robot.]

There are many empty seats- which one to choose. Not the plaid one with a stale residue of menstruation overlaid with the heavy scent of Elizabeth Taylor's 'White Diamonds'. The plastic one, bang opposite the fish tank. Selected, he sprays it with a pocket-sized bottle of germ killer, cleans it with a handy wet-wipe then sits without fidgeting.

Neville Sic- he's always hated that name but loved it just enough to hold on to it. It's relatively easy to get rid; would do if he'd been christened a blighted Colin or a pathetic Roger. His parents were both common and garden mean with far too little wit to have lumbered him with those. Instead he'd been given exceptionally malicious genes. Doctor Colin Roger Campion, on the other hand, was an untroubled cunt who really needed to change his stupid name. A champion is a flower whose pink is particularly horrid- dog's dick pink. He needed proper telling. In any case, all he was good for was rubber-stamping repeat prescriptions- private prescriptions. Pen pusher. Pen pusher on ninety grand per annum. No wonder he was untroubled- the cunt.

The navy blue plastic seat was a good choice- a cough's spray distant from the deeply annoying and ageing beige people; opposite the tank of largely languid fish dedicated to the memory of another wealthy unhealthy health-centre patron who had passed through the semi erotic automatic doors like Senna-pod aided shit and slid into oblivion after the final fatal visit. His name had no association with fish or water of any kind. Pity. Sir Petrov Serpent- long-time servant of The Crown, survived by a well known local ginger 'queen' who collects golliwogs to which he assigns a gender and then hand stitches on the appropriate parts. A double billionaire at thirty five- whatever must that be like with a tortured mind bent all out of shape, desires to

match and a very private patch on which to hatch them with all sorts of social climbing toadies and sycophants whoring what sparse talent they possessed with the drives and obsessions of religious terrorists or crack addicts? Neville knew the answer. Neville smiled smugly to himself, his heartbeat remaining as even as ever.

THE BEIGE PEOPLE

The village was terrifically thick with rich old folks- a buoyant segment of that hideous congregation who regularly worship at the retail shrines of John Lewis and Marks and Spencer's. They all share that revolting homogenous air of early retired well provided for twats- a very self satisfied beige, a somewhat stronger smelling and sharper tasting aged magnolia. The false blonde of middle Britain gone orf. However much these bastards bathed or showered, dry cleaned their expensive clothes or doused themselves in high-end scent or after-shave they just couldn't hide from Neville the odour of their dried and re-dampened urine pads, their discreet colostomy bags full of processed sherry, beef consomme and walnuts, their out of reach toe cheese, the souring sweat behind their buggered knees, old molds multiplying furiously in the health-hazard folds of their over stretching or relaxed skin.

Sometimes the bunny-hugging feverish hobbyists amongst them took to blatantly suggestive unisex knitting groups as a change from tea-dances. Neville could always spot their horrid outcomes. His least favourites were anything wrought in biscuit and mauve stripes. If he saw any old miserable cunt wearing anything in wool or acrylic in biscuit and mauve stripes his first instinct, always, was to eviscerate them alive. Besides- he knew for absolute certain they took a great pleasure in making unnecessary queues, surfing internet porn in the library and wide-angle cam sex in the comfort of their fitted bedrooms. What the fuck are they for, is the question that he very often let himself be bothered with.

The Inuit have a tradition of leaving elders of the tribe who have outlived their usefulness out alone on the pack ice until they succumb to death by exposure- this Wikipedia fact had pleased him so much that, upon discovering it, he'd proceeded to engage in everything humanly possible for one man to assist the advance of climate change. Bring on the new ice-age. It was not too dramatic. Things deliberately placed in the wrong recycling bins. Burning piles of tractor tyres. But still the beige people repeatedly reported him to the parish council for very non-green behaviour. Lately his culling thoughts had turned to the purchase of a black-market Kalashnikov and special ammunition that would explode inside fucking useless spent flesh like theirs. Starting point- an uninviting Egyptian cafe at the bleak end of Tottenham Court Rd, London. He'd get the turkey neckers.

DING. The dim forty-watt receptionist was calling him.

Mister Neville Sic?

Yes. [Dim lit woman with a perm and slipped lipstick. Tits to rest a tray upon. A gauze scarfette knotted at her neck- stylishly slid to the side with comic-strip flair. Bell's Palsy in the offing or a mini-stroke.]

Doctor Campion has scheduled some blood tests for you Mister Neville Sic. The phlebotomist will come and fetch you in a short while. [Smile like that of a bleached Pekingese in training to say 'sausages'.]

She's not even a qualified nurse and you're calling her something with four syllables- is that proper?

The phone rings. [She grasps the shrill plastic priority with twirling gratitude.]

Neville returned to his seat- to another predatory thought wank in line with the fish tank.

THE FISH TANK

The large watery penitentiary is virtually empty- four rank neons on the glass run-around and a solitary brown snail being snail still; uninteresting plants waving against a fake tropical panorama and two brownish bottom feeding fish trying to bluff the waiting patients that they are rocks, which they are so not. Rocks, as a general rule, do not have fins, breathe or shit long strings of floaty excrement from an appropriate place. Neville smiles- getting a faint buzz from the bizarre parallel that he has just perceived with Facebook.

Utterly dustless, the tank shimmers like a scryer's glass. Much like the glowing embers in a winter fire or the clouds in a summer sky it pretends to have the power to tell a story- to mean something, and that that something might hold some significance. Neville always delighted more in the esoteric of the mundane than in the mysteries of the hot-house exotic. Always at war- he told himself, with roses and slipper orchids; the colour of engorged labia pleading so bloody obviously for their petals to be trampled on; with all the subsequent predictable feyness struggling to reconstruct innocence.

Women- why do they make so much bloody wasted effort.

He'd always held what he considered to be a truly objective view of women- that they were all ruthless manipulative sociopaths. Fuck them! Yes, odd for a queer, he did so regularly. But without exception he'd always found his male conquests far more appreciative. Releasing the pent up anxieties in the under-used base chakras of men was altogether far more productive. Men were designed for mutual pleasure; women for breeding and infant feeding; undesirable babies were created to provide mouth-watering delicacies for the most discreet supper tables in the home counties. Just to appal people he'd often say he'd got the taste for human flesh by first eating the freshly detached foreskin of a Jewish baby- deep fried in a light batter with a side of pork scratchings.

WOMEN obviously cleaned the tank, fussed, refreshed the shit stuffed filter. It shone. There is no denying that it shines on today- a glossy but still perfunctory aide memoire to their lost elbow grease. Shame these 'do-good' women only did good within their mumsy pink comfort zone. Shame that, for charity, they never broke sweat. A real shame they'd not had a ruddy good rodgering by their buff DILF Colin at home- had love juice mixed with endorphins and fish eggs release some shred of fucking imagination so that this bland tank had magically exploded with life- vivid, necessary life in this place of near death 'Health Centre' where

irritating kids might overhear a harsh whisper and want to turn to clown fish and guppies for a shred of evil Disney comfort.

A fucking great fucking shame that these crimes of women got pats on their self-satisfied backs; invites to the Christmas 'do' and preferential appointment times. Cunts. The insinuating oleaginous cunts.

DING. There was the nurse or worse. [Morbidly obese. Red Leicester cheesy grin.]

Mister Neville Sic? [The half-broken voice of a teenage boy.]

Yes. [I could easily fit into her clothes.]

Come through would you. [Triple chins trembling. Waft of ovulating and a chaffing cleavage.]

Of course.

THE NURSE'S STATION

At the nurse's station Neville was fast-tracked past a waiting queue of jaw-dropped cotton-tops wearing the worst biscuit and mauve. He almost froze at the thrill of his sudden compulsion to kill, cull, lullaby wastes of space to death, to ease the pressure on the NHS. But, Bev, as she was badged, dragged him very mistressy through, placed him in the leatherette cockpit chair and slammed the door shut with her plump foot. Neville caught a flash of short beige sock and floral pump and almost chucked up.

There, Mister Sic- not a name I've come across before. Would you prefer me to call you Neville. I would. Good. Now. I've got this note from your Doctor. He's nice isn't he. Capital N. Very caring. Emergency bloods. Sounds ominous. I'll just bring your notes up on the screen.

Are you sure you're qualified to do that. Skills thresholds. Doctor patient confidentiality. I'm private. Black credit cards. BUPA. There are matters in my files that I'd rather not have...

Understood Neville or is it Nev. See rhymes with me- Bev. Bev Nev. Love a bit of synchronicity me. Nev- do rest assured I am a fully trained and certificated phlebotomist and have, as good as, signed the official secrets act. Besides I am 22 stone, naked weight, and nothing gets past these zipped lips without my consent. Good of you to wear a short sleeve. Now, give us a bare arm just below the elbow.

As she tightened the band around his wasting bicep, Neville felt the first indications of a pending erection.

Oh, Bev said, screen watching and jumping out of automatic pilot, oh.

What.

Oh, it's just that your physical presence doesn't seem to match your notes.

Superficiality can be so deceptive.

Yes. You're right of course. It can. And I'm so very sorry.

Don't be. I'm rather glad. Experiences like this reinforce that viewpoint.

Better get on.

Yes.

*

In the extremely noisy helicopter on the way to London City Airport Neville was at pains to shout in explanation to his companion that his 'under pressure' brain increasingly seemed to be playing cruel games with him, a type of Tourettes. They were so certain at the village Health Centre that he had fainted in the nurse's station, convinced, and yet his memory of the event was that he had stupidly imagined it all. Out cold for almost five minutes the medics said. When I came around the bland normality that confronted me was one of the most frightening experiences I have ever suffered. And I know- I know I have had many of those lately. There were pale shades of polluted or bastardised white wherever I looked. Wrinkled faces smiling pityingly at me. Me! A whole fucking fawn zoo. Yes. OK! Yes I'd obviously pissed myself. And yes, there was still comparatively luminous rivers of blood seeping from this split lip. Streams. Drips. It was then it hit me- I had this large brown paper bag of prescription drugs and dressings; it was you who took it from me; it was you who held my punctured arm and led me to the safety of the waiting Cayenne. Christ! You know how fucking disappointed I get. Well this was major- deeply troubling disappointment. I thought I had actually acted- pressed a previously banned red button, thrust myself into a significant direct action I had always denied myself. Shit. Shit. Shit. I loathe my default imagination. Janus, I've just not got the time for anymore rehearsals.

*

THE 'FAINT'

Like a small marsupial hideously compromised in a shoe-box along with an over-fed Russian Blue kitty, Neville began to feel pretty faint at the business end of the nurse's station.

This may hurt.

There was something seriously overblown about Bev. How big were her knickers? There was a certain budgie appeal about her face- though it seemed to be looming and ballooning. Already far bigger than a pigeon she was morphing into a blue and white dirigible. Neville thought he could smell gas. Had the fat bird farted? The bitch. He noted the yeasty fresh baked breadiness of her pressing paps. Giant unbuttered baps waiting for the primrose yellow stuff, smoked salmon cream cheese and cucumber slices. He was plaiting her profuse pubic hair into an itsy bitsy basket to carry dwarf passengers and ballast. He was tugging at her clitoris to blast hot air into the vast belly of her curvaceousness. It was exactly then that he imagined himself

swooning, struggling for breath, as she squatted full flat on his resisting face, her arse-fat limp as a goose down duvet. No way-out now but to burrow furiously with his moist tongue spitting feathers.

That's the moment when the lights crashed and he lost all consciousness:-

[1. Neville had chosen the largest hypodermic, the longest and the thickest, and he was very deft and extremely quick with it. Deflated Bev barely uttered a peep. He'd learned the technique from the BBC TV drama series Spooks- firm jab through the eardrum into the lower brain. It works. He'd held his nerve, kept his hand steady and the needle had not snapped. She'd instantly collapsed. He immediately locked the door. Pausing for breath he thrilled as his adrenaline rush kicked in. Stripped to his underwear he set about denuding the body. Lucien Freud, Goya and Picasso would have loved the picture she presented; Fragonard much less so; the flappable village amateur art-class, not in the least, not on the face of it. Now, if the parish priest were here, they might enjoy a spot of mutual wanking over the body. Splash of holy spermatozoa. Not to be. Neville had other plans for the still warm and very flexible Bev. First he dressed himself in her crap uniform, made his face up with her cheap make-up, glued on false eye-lashes then winked at himself in the sparkling mirror. He would leave the corpse impaled with every hypodermic to hand- each bobbing shaft filled with her extracted blood. Bev the pin-cushion- a stark naked phlebotomist attacked by wingless plastic tics. 2. Nurse Nev unlocks the door- automatic pistol with silencer cocked. Action. The subsequent ten dead clutterers-up-of-the-planet wearing biscuit and mauve lay all higgledy piggledy, like frozen swingers, their faces caught somewhere between shock and joy. No time to eviscerate them. Pity. Shit happens. 3. Dr Champion's patient, troubled with repeat kidney stones, got it in the mid-neck at the back of the brain. Cured in an instant, she will not know pain again. Too quick to pick, Neville is at once at his doctor's throat. Common sense prevails. There is to be no manly man-on-man struggle. No shouts of testosterone fuelled bravado. Colin Champion GP is ex-military, not virginal or silly. Neville bends the doc forwards over his black fake leather examining table and binds his hands behind his back with unforgiving bell-end pink sticking plaster on a roll. He locks the consulting room door. My oh my, he mutters to his prisoner, giggling like a silly girl become suddenly aware of her indiscreet lewdness, lets break out the NHS KY Jelly shall we. Nurse Nev unwraps 'her' buzz charged erection, bares 'his' doctor's clean as a new pin arse and goes, hell for leather, about the unnecessary without a Durex mac. Now that was unsafe, mean and not exactly clean. 4. After his tremendous orgasm, Neville continues to piss into the surprisingly practiced orifice. There's a first. The worst thing was he suddenly couldn't see a thing. FUCK. He couldn't be going blind could he. The light was uber bright. The light was so bright it was dazzling. He could hear faint voices and the villagey voices were growing louder as the light grew brighter. OMG! He knew what this was. He knew exactly what this was. This was evidence of a very dull choir of angels gathering at the celebration of another of his great disappointments. Bugger. His instantly angry head ached beyond description.]

Neville was determined to lodge a complaint- call the police.

Come on. We have a plane to catch.

They are nothing but knobs- all of them. The fucking lot of them are no better than knobs and arseholes.

We need to get you changed.

In fact arseholes and knobs are too good for them. I bloody love knobs and arseholes.

THE PLAN

Plans, meticulous plans, important fucking plans, only really make sense when the people they involve have a total understanding of the preciousness of time. Neville knew that one of the many unfortunate things about the human condition was that such plans were only ever properly subscribed to when a 'for certain' mortality was having to be faced. That, he thought, was not altogether too late, but too late to have any bearing on the mass of mankind ever escaping from a stultifying apathy which they had dressed up in a myriad of superficial ways and labelled 'life'.

....busy busy. Dizzy. Fuck! Where is the...

That is exactly why Neville had always loathed any kind of magic acts- they were staged deceptions, all smoke and mirrors and sleights of hand; a perfect paradigm for this 'life', the model that so many believe is worth fighting and dying for.

....speed spray. Sniff and sniff.

Life is unarguably shit, and somewhere, buried deep within us, we know it is steaming liquid shit. So Neville thinks. But then, his life is irreversibly on the fucking blink. The stark facts of mortality have thoroughly shaken his Baobab tree. The branches are no longer dressed in the leaves of designer deceit. It is December in the life of this man disgusted by Christmas.

....Wet-wipes a godsend in a godless age.

That is why Neville and his long-time lover Janus Serpent, the ginger billionaire, have made a very precise plan. It is, of course, not everyone's cup of tea.

But then, everyone who thinks it is their business, when it is patently not, can go and fuck themselves or face the consequences. No-one who knew Neville and Janus would ever choose the heinous consequences. These highly creative elective sociopaths have immense amounts of money, power and purpose. You would be like an inconsequential ant at war with a Chieftain tank. They would not even notice the soundless crushing of you.

We go to the health centre for the repeat prescription.

They may want to check your bloods.

OK. I may faint.

Everything is packed. We drive home and change. We 'copter to the City.

OK.

We private jet to Malmö, Sweden.

The live concert with Anthony and The Johnsons.

Yes.

The Cripple and The Starfish.

Yes.

Then Amsterdam- for 'the event'.

Is everything in place.

Of course.

Of course it is. I didn't mean to..

I know.

After the event is concluded we 'escape' to Geneva.

Hopefully.

No, Nev, we do. We escape to Geneva.

We have some blissful hours together.

Yes.

Then you buy me loads of sweets.

Yes.

I don't have a sweet tooth but they told me..

I know. The Swiss make good sweets. Chocolates.

Yes. And watches. Rolex time pieces. Stop watches. Toblerone.

Stop it Nev. Concentrate on the concert and the event.

What good is a fucking clock. Every timeline has been tampered with.

Mapping.

There is no such thing as honest time.

You could be right. But I can tell you we're not going to be late.

Nothing has ever been significantly late except God.

THE EVENT

In the closing chapter of his life, Neville had found a raised level of praiseworthy diversity in the musical expressionism of Anthony and The Johnsons- he'd let hues of a moody sonorous blue and the melody of malady touch his peccadilloes; at times bemusing him; at others threatening to abuse the very order he had finally accomplished in his world. True artists do that- they can throw open your neat filing cabinets of whatever, wherever, and rearrange everything as if by elfin psychokinesis.

....a cunt may be called a wizard's sleeve.

It can be maddening if it involves threads, collections of dead things, belief paradigms writ on rice paper, fragile skeletal remains or a lifetime's collection of media clippings cut out by an obsessed self. Gilbert and George had finally managed to shatter Neville's uniquely absorbing museum of personal foibles- though, to be fair, large cracks should be attributed to Tracy Emin and Edmund White. With the onset of the illness came a coachload of cleansing habits to fill the vacuum that had been left- disinfectant spraymists, skin-tone disposable rubber gloves. That kind of thing. Just so. Yes. Everything was just so now. Anthony was good, utterly singular, but no-way genius enough to persuade Neville from abandoning the event.

On the short flight to Amsterdam, the hired crew drew the usual trite conclusions about a wealthy male couple travelling alone between Sweden and Holland.

Insert your favourite piece of homophobic shit HERE bitch!

See, how patronising can it be- the recycled air rich with such obsequious platitudes as fudge packer; shirt lifter; sausage jockey? Neville deliberately unleashed from his green snakeskin briefcase a printout of three small downloads from Wikipedia- the free encyclopaedia:-

'Homophobia is a term used to refer to a range of negative attitudes and feelings towards lesbian and gay and in some cases bisexual, transgender people and behaviour although these are usually covered under biphobia and transphobia. Intersex and asexual people are also sometimes included. Definitions refer variably to antipathy, contempt, prejudice, aversion, and irrational fear. Homophobia is observable in critical and hostile behavior such as discrimination and violence on the basis of a perceived homosexual or in some cases any non-heterosexual orientation. [In Neville's own scribble- THE CUNTING BIGOTS.] In a 1998 address, author, activist, and civil rights leader Coretta Scott King stated that "Homophobia is like racism and anti-Semitism and other forms of bigotry in that it seeks to dehumanize a large group of people, to deny their humanity, their dignity and personhood."

Bukkake (English boo-kak-ee) is a group sex act portrayed in pornographic films, in which several men take turns ejaculating on a man or woman. Bukkake videos are a relatively prevalent niche in contemporary pornographic films. Originating in Japan in the 1980s, the genre subsequently spread to North America and Europe, and crossed over into gay pornography.

Some authors have argued that bukkake involves the implied or overt humiliation of the person ejaculated upon; the women performing in bukkake scenes are not generally brought to orgasm.

[In Neville's scribble CREAMY PIE. MY OH MY.]

A vigilante is a private individual who legally or illegally punishes an alleged lawbreaker, or participates in a group which metes out extralegal punishment to an alleged lawbreaker. "Vigilante justice" is spurred on that criminal punishment is either nonexistent or insufficient for the crime. Those who believe this see their governments as *ineffective in enforcing the law*; thus, such individuals fulfil the like-minded wishes of the community. In other instances, a person may choose a role of vigilante as a result of personal experience as opposed to a social demand.

Persons seen as "escaping from the law" or "above the law" are sometimes the targets of vigilantism. It may target persons or organizations involved in illegal activities in general or it may be aimed against a specific group or type of activity, e.g. police corruption. Other times, governmental corruption is the prime target of vigilante freedom fighters.

Vigilante behavior may differ in degree of violence. In some cases vigilantes may assault targets verbally, physically attack them or vandalize their property. Anyone who defies the law to further justice is a vigilante, and thus violence is not a necessary criterion. On the more extreme end of the scale, groups such as People Against Gangsterism And Drugs, (PAGAD), have resorted to tactics that have had them blacklisted as terrorist organisations.'

He, straight away, asked the hoveringly attentive closet chief steward who, in any case, had been reading over his shoulder, to organise five photocopies of the document and to be sure that all the staff received a copy including the flying officers.

That was a little high-handed.

I know. But I feel so much better for it. Can I sleep awhile?

Of course.

The illness allowed Neville to cat-nap and reach rem depths in a surprisingly short time. Dreaming in short bursts had become an addiction. The only downside was that every now and then he could not be awakened for approximately twenty fours- during which time he needed to be cared for like a baby. Bed-rest, nappy-change, drip. And he had this way of talking very clearly and precisely in his sleep- always the same four words, 'cunt', 'cheesy', 'fucking' and 'nigga' often in the most effective/offensive order. He was not a racist- quite the opposite. Blacks were an erotic preference. Whenever the pair rang for some home-visit rent they were

invariably black and versatile. A white-hate case could be made for Neville and Janus being very ill-disposed towards Caucasians. At this juncture Neville would always intercede with his best BBC voice- there are, of course, other races available.

Bye bye Neville: Neville go bye byes.

[Neville got there by imagining that the two stewardesses were sporting unconventional skin beneath their flight gear; more than enough reason to have them both disrobe. It was costing him very little in the scheme of things. The interior shot of the plane immediately dissolved into a peeping-tom's eye view of a porn mogul's discreet honey-trap in the Hollywood Hills. With dextrous fingers and the right materials you could construct a paper jet and fly it from here to land on Reagan's old pad- the astrology page from The National Enquirer might just have the legs.

Brushed purple velveteen drapes and quilted gilt leather day-beds or positioners softened the harshness of the dated eighties mirror-glass cube. Enough obscene scene setting.

The naked girls were furry creatures, designer cats escaped from the mind of Phillip Dick, vaguely Siamese moggies with faces that resembled an anorexic Sophia Loren or a humanoid mantis which is much the same. Their thrashing tails terminated in distinct veiny bang-sticks which swished in and out of every orifice to hand- the main ports of call being their startling cunts which looked like vast front arses dripping with a glistening rouge-rust: wizard sleeves that pouted, begged and sung for their suppers of deep penetration. Neville sensed that they were very doctored west-coast Americans, escapee very fucked-up nuns with tongues of fleshy self-lubricating Velcro...so born to do porn. Thank you sweet Jesus.

Disengaging from themselves, they squished apart to reveal the steward buck naked- a very bespoke angel, his tattooed pecs and biceps quivering in an oiled menace. (In the jet- on another plane, he'd been a bit of a mincing pain in the neck, always the girlfriend constantly checking the hemline of the drapes, walking with a tad too much hip and wrist, twisting on a sixpence with a tray of drinks and never spilling a precious drop. Neville's transition from asexual to bisexual to terminally ill homosexual would have been easier without the proliferation of that type of poof- exaggerated affectation in all shades of sexuality usually led to one thing, suicidal loneliness; but there is no convincing these disturbed and determined souls otherwise. Besides, he'd taken an instant dislike to the silly man who smelled of cucumber, the grovelling git.) Now though, he was majorly transformed, a veritable lesson in how not to judge a book by its cover.

Colin, queen of the private-hire passenger cabin, sported a trim beard: the ripped body hirsute with appropriate topiary, he sat, half lounging back, his body sculpted tree-trunks of legs crossed, the cat-women at his side slithering and nibbling, dick-tails hovering on his moist lips like dark pink dragonflies. Neville waited for the inevitable reveal- a significant part of that which made the best performance art persist.

Bated breath. A masturbational precipice.

Quick before I seep or drip. Cheesy cunt.

Exactly.

The last thing Neville had expected was that Colin- Antwerp's Mr Pride Muscle, would possess a cavernous clunge or yawning donkey but, there it was, wriggling like Tigger from the parting of the thighs, a bald aggressive minge behaving like a ravenous baby. Neville was transfixed- the word biblical had begun to taunt him; maybe this pulsating hole was the gateway to hell.

The kitties started mewling and the sound unleashed a beast.

Machine pistols are fab. Imagine dozens of them at your command.

Through Colin's straining meaty flaps squeezed the glistening multi-heads of an all singing and dancing gatekeeper, smiling, melodious, each of them salivating and eager to suck. Neville needed no further encouragement- it was not every day you had the opportunity to be blown by an entire boy-band whilst at the same time being sodomised by two runaways from your least favourite one tune musical.

Match that reality. Neville, dreadfully fucked by reality, knew full well it would have more than done so in Shanghai or Rio at the very least- the Chinese at home and abroad unendingly pride themselves on a limitless concierge service.

Grunting audibly as he climaxed in his dream, he was faintly conscious of a triple thwump- tires kissing tarmacadam, his seat rocking gently like a doting mother's arms. Neville's mother's great first love had always been Diazepam.

Out of nowhere Mrs Jane Doe, the woman in the boulevard, intrudes with "What is it with these freaks? I don't want their existence polluting the air my precious family breathes. After decades of intolerable tolerance which has failed miserably we should seriously consider a reverse tactic- segregation and systematic culling. Us Christian heterosexuals would sleep a lot easier at night. Praise the Lord!" Neville quite believed that if one of her own brood turned out to be a queer she'd have no trouble in putting a gun to his head and letting God pull the trigger.

The glorious thing about dreams is that they're said not to be real. Conversely, maybe their true glory lies in the fact of their forbidden extra-sensory verity.

Fucking nigga. Cheesy cunt.]

Via the services of a discreet private ambulance transfer they were at last decamped in considerable comfort in Amsterdam. Janus had an expensive loft view of one of the many modern towers of Babylon. If insects feel anything approximate to decadent joy you just know that the tastes of the butterfly differ from those of the dung beetle. Mankind shares an important sociopathic trait with rats- both species drown their habitat in obvious and insidious shit then move elsewhere rather than deal with it.

Neville still comatose, filling his adult disposable nappies.

By the many measures of how one defines an international city Amsterdam is small which belies its vast repute for freedom of expression, safe passage, the degree to which it wholeheartedly embraces all forms of diversity and its legendary tolerance of lifestyles including those of the drug and sexually obsessed- those creatures lured into the night by bright lights and excess. It has a globally famous red-light district and gay quarter and the most universally respected Rembrandt Gallery.

The whole area is historic, postcard picturesque, known for windmills, cheese, clogs, tulips. All tourists to it are tarred with the same brush- perverse and voyeuristic. Qualities without which, Neville had always argued to him, the theatre, opera and film could never have existed. Indeed. How dull the arts would be, made tame by some fascistic dry cleaning of all things perverse and voyeuristic.

Nobody from the greater mass invests in a book these days unless there is a guarantee of graphic sex at approximately page twelve. Neville had never taken issue with wankers so long as they honestly persisted spanking their bishop or feathering their meat curtains on a pretty much general basis. Sexual frustrations, he reasoned, were always much better out than in; in fact we had a duty to the community at large to be very much up to speed with our orgasms.

The irony was that, despite what was expected of it, Amsterdam had been trading on the seat of its pants for two decades; had grown somewhat tired of vigilantly policing its high degree of tolerance; had ceased to clean the lenses of the magnifying glasses through which it examined the intolerant.

The increasingly powerful born-again anal middle classes were lobbying for change. Green issues suggested not only a clean-up of the air, the streets and the canals, but also a removal of undesirables which everyone had been at great pains not to properly define. This insinuating spark of dark anti-matter gave rise to spontaneous firework displays all over the city; pretty poor attempts at ethnic cleansing, gang rapes, gay bashings and a spate of nasty unsolved gender murders.

The Dutch police declared that they saw no investigable pattern in any of these crimes. Janus and his love thought otherwise and, as a consequence, Neville's death wish was quite complex. What wish worth anything is simple. Neville was seeking a grand gesture of justice in a world where the word justice had become synonymous with corruption.

Asleep for twenty-two hours, Neville was slowly surfacing. Illogically, and with no basis in science, at these times Janus always concerned himself with Neville either drowning or getting a bad case of the bends. The glass of fridge chilled spring water has a straw in it. The male nurses have been coming and going in eight hour shifts. The latest gently lifts Neville's head as, blinking continuously, he takes a long sip and asks "Where am I?" He is fifteen floors above the dross of the hotel lobby's profit and loss obsessions. Janus is smiling at him.

The plotters wait for the nurse to leave and then the bedroom door is closed.

Neville lifts the bedding and sniffs- all done and dusted, the smell of Johnson's talcum powder; his mother's knicker drawer always smelled of that and neatness; sanitary towels laid like white

muslin bricks, a tube of Germolene which was gum pink and a jar of Vic. He saw them as archeological finds and took great liberties of the mind with them like hunters of alien artifacts do- the much maligned von Daniken syndrome, if it doesn't fit feel free to make up anything that does fit. Neville always believe she penetrated herself with the bricks and that their size approximated to the inner dimensions of her clunge. This would, more often than not, make him fantasise about the whopper size of his father's wand when pumped.

This nappy thing doesn't turn you on then.

No. Desensitised nipples.

Of course.

They go hard but as we both know appearances can be deceptive.

Did you have a wank last night.

No.

Shall we have breakfast?

It is half past four in the afternoon- the event schedule commences in two and a half hours.

Breakfast with cake then? Croque monsieur followed by Dutch apple-cake.

Let me deal with the nurse and I'll ring room service. We are checking out at seven.

I'll take a swift shower.

The ensuite wet-room provided two separate downpours- setting one to fairly hot and the other to cooler made for a stimulating walk through an ancient Greek indulgence which the large tiles helped to emulate. The rhythms of all moving water lend themselves to shallow hypnosis but Neville was not to be seduced. Knowing that they would be soon be checking out, he was clearing his head with the needle sharp rain, focussing on fine details. The bulk of their luggage would already have been transferred to their residence five miles west of the city. Only suits and the necessary accoutrements and matching black attache cases remained. Their own security company ran the warehouse complex they owned to the east of the city- within 48hrs it would be dissolved and the property sold. The film would have been made and tucked safe in their pocket as they were driven to Geneva in the full knowledge that everything had been forensically swept, anything incriminating destroyed, bodies set in concrete and dumped at sea. You get a higher than diamond service when you have the wherewithal to pay the piper in diamonds. Amsterdam was a very old hand at dealing with diamonds.

The stand-in body dryer was bliss but deafening- Neville could not have heard his lover return, change, lay out Neville's clothes on the bed, then deal with the delivery of afternoon tea. [The busman was young, black and beautiful but there was just not the time to find out what else.]

Neville dressed, was an essay in total noir- a mafia cliché, a deliberate nod to Tarantino; an outfit that may possibly make him appear almost invisible in an all midnight Mercedes van. Janus matching him exactly, sat in the lounge, stirring his china cup of Earl Grey somewhat absent-mindedly, his long freckled fingers ending in perfectly manicured nails.

Do we look like criminals- he asked Neville.

We look better than criminals or gangsters, we look like people who could rule this world if only for a short time.

What do long time rulers look like.

I have no idea. Nobody has. I rather think that's the point.

Tea.

Thank you.

Neville had to ask- are we all set.

Of course.

Of course- this late in the day it would have to be.

Yes.

Their security company Serpsic Corps was to all intents and purposes a small private army recruited from a very niche line of job-seekers- ex-military special forces, straight acting homosexual men over the age of thirty with few or no family ties and a burning desire to set up a new life for themselves under a new name in a new country; no nonsense paperwork, ease of passage, payment of all legal fees plus a £100,000 lump sum in exchange for one month's employment. The work description was brief and would only be thoroughly understood by those intended to understand it- to act on all orders without question during the period of contract. These were dangerous gay bears- as close to bearded XXL human weaponry as could be bought and amongst them were distributed all the media skills necessary to create a movie of subversive substance; an altogether untraceable missile of an artwork intended for the editor's desks at Heat Magazine, Advocate, Gay Times and The Guardian Newspaper and more.

Neville had quite naturally elected for death as *his* outcome. Janus was as yet undecided- would it be that final step to inhale his last breath or would it be his new life waiting on a golden plate of sun-dried dates in Marrakesh. There was never any question of their passion for 'the cause' dying- the increasing incidents of grievous bodily harm inflicted on gay men in known gay districts by activist homophobes was a matter of public record and that was never going to lie down. Moles will seek out the best kept tennis courts and croquet lawns and persist in their disturbance of proverbial green and pleasant lands. Just like shit, soil disturbance happens. All sorts of bent-out-of-shape reactions are known to be likely to occur.

It will happen- the head of a major faith opposed to Catholicism will be assassinated by a midget nun wired as a human bomb, the man caught off-guard whilst in the throes of a profoundly unethical act with his obligingly flexible nephew. The history of human activity is full of precedents, most of them buried deep but not always beyond reach within the archives. Then there is our own instinctive knowledge of what we understand we might be capable of. The nagging unbearable truth.

The Soho Nail Bomber held a view that he believed was worthy of direct action. Kill gays.

It was not exactly a singular opinion.

His lamentable main event is still celebrated today, with some brave irony, by a unique chandelier hanging in the pub The Admiral Duncan in Compton Street London; it is constructed from remnants garnered from the previously exploded interior; bent nails can be seen. A gay friendly heterosexual couple who had married earlier lost their lives in that place on that terrible day; a day that drifted away from the front pages too soon, twice as fast as any child suspected of being snatched would have. True. And rough justice was arbitrarily meted out to these newlyweds who had showed the humanitarian courage to embrace diversity. Neville remembered no lovingly hand-stitched blanket heterosexual regret- no. Never. God was, yet again, in absentia, probably saving recidivist paedophiles from a forest fire in the belly button of the American bible belt. Praise the ludicrous Lord who, conveniently for some, distributes wealth as irrationally as rain.

What do you think of the cake.

I would have preferred it to be more apple than Dutch.

I agree.

Another disappointment.

One more notch in the proof that God doesn't exist.

Cake?

Let's get on with it.

We wouldn't want to disappoint our special guests.

Neville's 'event site' sported a line of twenty secure porta-cabins and two interconnected industrial warehouses, one a half acre oblong and the other a one acre square- the industrial architecture was drawn deliberately inside out; the whole lot was surrounded by a perimeter road and brick wall, beyond that was a defensive loop of canal further defined by fifteen foot high chain-link fencing. Nothing on the market could have been more suited to purpose. They quickly cut short the paper trail for it- paid in uncut diamonds.

The site had lain quiet for twelve months- just a few contractors doing the necessary; no complaints from the owners of bordering properties; no planning applications; a progressive face-lift; a slow introduction of sophisticated facilities; during the previous three weeks a steady arrival of uniformed and plain-clothed staff; the introduction of a certain residency; 24hr lighting; management tight as a duck's arse.

All the cabins were transformed into identical steam-cleanable holding cells- soundproofed, no windows, no corners, no angles; god-pods, spaces with minimal forensic liability. And this essential interior theme was extended to the larger of the two warehouses- a massive undertaking. The smaller one had an island directorial and editorial suite installed- state of the art; its multiple umbilicals threaded through flexible ducting to its greater mate where a mute chorus of floods, boom mics and cameras waited for their first cue. The hired mercenaries and others enjoyed very temporary accommodation, a designer tented village; aluminium duck boards, solar powered lighting and black canvass. It went up in 24hrs and could be gone without a trace in very much less.

There was a small fleet of black Mercedes vans- too obvious to be noticeable.

When the future has been stripped of all delusion, and you have a spare small fortune to play with, it really is possible to blink-blink outside the box and make a mark that renders any headstone utterly inconsequential.

Did we round up all the prime targets.

Yes.

They will be naked.

Yes.

Totally disorientated.

Yes.

Well. I have been disorientated, more or less, for most of my waking life. For starters my parents believed they owned me, held dominion over me. Yes. I was possessed by their peculiarities, their obsessions and their possessiveness.

Yes.

It would have been better if they'd fucked me, starved me or broken my bones. That would have been proper wrong, rescued me from their fawn hell.

Yes.

No-one seems to think there's anything wrong in children being forced to belong to their flawed parents.

No.

I would quite often kill them slowly in my sleep- the cheesy niggas.

Quite.

There was a commonality amongst the prisoners who comprised sixteen men and four women aged between twenty and thirty six; none of them were native Dutch; it was a rag bag of European immigrant labour- drifters from abandonment; they all held faith with Catholicism-Greek Orthodoxy in particular; none of them had a clean record- crimes varying from petty theft to robbery with violence; they created home churches and met consistently in the same cafes and bars; they had been filmed marching against profane liberalism; all claimed to be unblemished heterosexuals following a strict moral code. Their laudable ethics did not exclude direct action- the organised rape, maiming and murder of ninety two homosexual men prior to their arrest and summary theft from their nests by Serpsic Corps, an operation that had lasted no longer than one hour and fifteen minutes. Each of them confessed on camera with an appalling sense of pride.

The Dutch police- for so long negligent in their defence of the gay community for political reasons, were currently being kept inordinately busy with a plethora of false trails, dead ends and leads to Belgium coastal resorts, Marseilles, Dallas Texas and the Channel Islands.

The phone rang.

That will be reception informing us the transport is here.

Right then.

Not long now before you're back in the saddle.

No.

How many years since the last porn movie?

Ten.

Well then.

You know what they say about bicycles.

Yes. I really dislike that aspect of Amsterdam- huge flocks of bicycles.

All those men stimulating that little ridge between their anus and the ball sac.

All those women knowingly moistening their knickers.

All those oblivious kids.

Yes. I've become quite the kid for oblivion.

They planned to start filming on the soundproofed set at 10pm. And, as planned, it would be a lock-in. Janus idolised the work of the Italian Poet and Director Pasolini- particularly Salo- a profoundly obscene and savage swipe at a corrupt society, loved the films of Derek Jarman, any movie that ripped great holes in the fabric of an overbearing and imprisoning faith. He loathed American porn. He hoped, with all the pretension of those born with gold spoons in their mouths, that he could significantly add to the genre. His film 'The Beautiful but Inevitable Gross Consequence of Faith' would be immediately banned of course, but not before the efficient distribution of millions of DVD copies was well under-way world-wide. The carefully chosen list of recipients- all of them fearless activists embedded in the higher echelons of a corrupt media, would ensure it had a raucous, roaring fire of a life.

[As to the screen artwork itself- given all the elements and an average imagination it should be sufficient for most people to develop a moving colour dream-scape that could keep their wrists in action for years; vast numbers might develop carpal tunnel syndrome; the sales of lube will never dip.]

These notes from Janus' Ipad make interesting reading, they are often interspersed with the odd comment from Neville:-

1 Of the 20 hired gun-toting heavies I shall require at least ten for film-work and execution duties- no acting skills necessary though we should prioritise a feast for the eyes. Choose the soldiers with the biggest pricks. [My job, bagsy my job, I'm the one with a terminal illness- Neville] They should be fitted for very similar costumes, the generic of which is as follows- head to toe black spandex with a peep-hole groin area. [Should I measure scientifically or go by feel alone- Neville] Skin tight head gear with black mesh eye-holes and mouth openings. Black boots, black gun belts and 'second-skin' rubber gloves. Variations will include peep-hole nipple and butt areas and clear openings on the face. Guards with clear openings on the face will wear black lipstick, black eye-shadow and eye-liner.

2 The four female detainees will have their heads shaved. [Closet dykes in holy orders- Neville] The make-up department will give each of them a false trimmed beard. Two of them will be totally blacked up with white lips and harnessed to black dildoes. The other two will be given scarlet lips, a multitude of fake tattoos and harnessed to Caucasian dildoes. All of them will be dressed from their necks to their waists as Catholic Cardinals. [All of the captives will be injected with the agreed cocktail of drugs intended to maximise their lusts, their susceptibility and obedience- tick, triple tick, Neville]

3 The four eldest male prisoners will be dressed in no more than sheer red stockings and matching suspenders. [It's a theme isn't it- Moulin Rouge meets Mrs Doubtfire on Ketamine, Neville] Each will be wearing black satin ballet slippers and a black satin blindfold. The men will be handcuffed to a central bollard.

4 The remaining twelve vigilantes will have their heads covered in black Hessian sacks; their least useful hand will be amputated; [Relax big-boy, it's just a little axe dear. You should see my

whopper of a chopper!- Neville] they will be told that in the event that they ever stop masturbating then the other hand will go also. Then the feet.

5 I want vivid footage of all these preparations- as a general rule no hired help should ever be in shot without full costume, a weapon and a hard-on. [I will be on hand to fluff peripatetically if needed- Neville]

6 In sequence then, the four Cardinals sodomise the transvestite guys chained to this stubby maypole in the road. The guys subsequently fuck the Cardinals up their arses NOT their minges. The guys are then forced at gun point to fuck each other. The eight are then handcuffed to each other and the phallic post. The partial amputees, all wanking furiously, are marched in. They form a circle around their handcuffed compatriots- an armed guard at each of their backs. The guards cut eyeholes in half of the sacking headdresses. They remove the others and apply bright red lipstick roughly to the men's faces. The heavies hiss into every man's ears- the last one to ejaculate over your mates will be shot. And all the drug crazed masturbating men move forward until their toes connect with the toes of the people on the floor. One by one the orgasms come. When the last loving spoonful is spilled the carnage begins. [Bullets up bum-holes! OH-how often in any lifetime do you get the chance. It's got to be done- Neville]

As a truly epic epilogue the gay executioners behave like rabid orgiasts on top of the pile of heterosexual bodies and we don't stop filming until the last of the them is thoroughly spent and limp.

7 All of it to be shot against blue screen/green screen- we know exactly what we have in mind for compromising backgrounds and the CGI inserts are complete and ready to go. [Ratzinger shitting on an ivory effigy of Christ, my idea, my idea- Neville] That is as they say a wrap.

Not much of a plot.

No.

It's art not Miss Marple.

Can I be the one who shouts ACTION.

If you must.

I'd love to be able to see the global impact.

You'll miss it.

Yes.

You'll be dead. Assisted suicide. As we BOTH planned.

Ouija board me. Promise.

What?

Well why not- we do a pretty good yes and no, you and me.

There is nothing quite like that- the sudden impact of knowing that there is no going back. Commitment- Neville reflected, suddenly bereft of anything to say, now there's an abused word of certainty that has been driven back by repeat legal muggings to a realm of total absurdity. Yet it was often bandied about by political types who conformed to every spin doctor's dream. Commitment- it has now effectively been rendered meaningless.

GENEVA

In anticipation of the next move on their planner's board, Janus had booked them a hotel suite called The Marrakesh but, as it turned out, it had proven to be far too kitsch to bear so he had settled for a simple double room with ensuite facilities; suitably Spartan, they both agreed. And they were quite early to bed, exhausted from the road-trip which had included a number of stops to various banks and solicitors and other purveyors of discreet essential services. Neville was already asleep- breathing deep and even with no fluttering of the eyelids and no vocals whatsoever.

That was odd though not indicatively odd.

Janus shut down the DVD player after the tenth viewing of his finely edited film- the version already in the postal system. It had taken him all that repeat exposure to feel the first, barely noticeable, pangs of deep regret. This was too much, just the merest hint of some element of guilt, a whiff of moral menace, but it had surprised him. He shared everything with Neville, every mortal thing- he decided he would not be sharing this. Even with the lights out he could not sleep.

The next day Janus rose early leaving his lover to rest on- there were life and death arrangements needing to be meticulously cross-checked. This he did over the phone- ticking all the perfect boxes in their ordered stairway to heaven. They had to be at the assigned place of departure in an hour.

Time to wake Neville, dress him for the last time, then join him on a short walk across the city buying sweets and chocolates along the way. Bitterness tinged the morbid anticipation. This was no moment to choke.

Determined to wake him, Janus Serpent bent to kiss the still Neville Sic squarely on the lips and realised at once that he had jumped the gun, he had already gone; flown in peace, entirely without fuss. Gone without fucking saying so much as a fucking good-bye like they had both fucking planned it. What was the fucking point of making all those fucking notes.

Then.

Then there was the full-blown Technicolor, 3D, surround-sound shock; the uncontrollable deluge of tears; the numbness in which a torrent of phone-calls needed to be made.

Then.

Then there were what remained.

There was just his husk; an expressionless face.

There was Derek Jarman's soundless flickering blue space.

I am told that Janus made the private flight to Marrakesh.

His is a great fortune albeit one that can be nudged into the shade by some. In the oasis surroundings of that North African city of a billion secrets a small fortune can buy you the court and life of a king. He would never be short of any imaginable form of stimulation to while away his many hours of endless recreation. At the other end of the scale, for the right bribe, baksheesh, you can get the informed locals to say that attached to his palace he has the most fabulous gardens attended to by the most beautiful gardeners- dark-skinned boys [reminiscent of the extras from Passolini's *Arabian Nights*] prepared to grant his every mortal wish; that he is protected by a small army of dangerous bearded Caucasian men; that he can never sleep without a machine pistol in his bed; that in his sleep he repeats the same four words; that he can sometimes be seen on his balcony in the small hours, crying in abject loneliness beneath the vast canopy of an imprisoning foreign sky; that within the fortress palace there is an advanced medical facility, a windowless soundproofed film studio and a state of the art cinema.

His services are much sought for but can only be actually bought by the inordinately wealthy who share two important traits- they are immensely, incomprehensibly powerful and capable of shielding themselves from the world to the point of invisibility. For now, it is their unanimous assessment that it is in their best interests, particularly in respect of their hunger for sensory diversions, for Janus Serpent and his intuitive genius for twisted erotica to be kept alive and well.

When the platinum ghosts of the true moguls come calling, he has no choice but to deliver.

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ATTACK OF THE GIANT REPTILES

By Hank Kirton

The MONSTERS are in REVOLT ...and The World is on the brink of DESTRUCTION! - Destroy All Monsters (AIP 1969)

"We didn't know why it happened or how. Everyone just had to react. Fast." - Me, years after The Event.

-1-

With civilization crumbling around us, we started ransacking Alice's house, gathering as much stuff as we could reasonably carry. I was rummaging through her cupboards and pantry, stuffing food into a Day-Glo Thundercats backpack. Alice hadn't gone shopping since The Event (nobody had - how could we?) and she didn't have much in the way of non-perishables (the perishables having perished days ago). Audrey and Phoebe were looting the rooms looking for weapons, while Alice gathered cherished personal items that she just couldn't part with (Alice being a soft, sentimental soul).

Audrey jogged into the kitchen while I was stuffing saltines and Ritz crackers into the pack.

"I found a machete," she said, dropping it on the counter.

"Alice has a machete?" I said.

She lifted the machete and dropped it on the counter again. The sound it made said, *Duh!*

"Keep looking. We should all carry something. We have to be able to protect ourselves in case we get separated," I told her, trying to sound like I knew what I was talking about.

"Okay, Ray," Audrey said and then resumed the desperate scavenger hunt.

Phoebe skipped into the kitchen. "I found this!" she said, holding out a silver color-guard baton, white rubber tips on each end.

I shook my head. "I said to look for weapons. What the hell are you gonna do with *that*?"

She began to twirl the baton, tossing it into the air, spinning it through her legs.

"That's real impressive, Phobes, but it's not gonna scare off a gang of bandits with semi-automatic weapons," I told her.

Still twirling the baton, she said, "I could conk someone over the head with it."

"That thing wouldn't even raise a bump. Keep looking."

"Maybe I could modify it to make it more deadly."

"Keep looking."

She tossed it and caught it, still spinning, and skipped away. I stuffed Stove-Top stuffing into the bag.

Audrey returned to the kitchen, placed a small chainsaw beside the machete and then left to continue her search.

Having cleaned out the cupboards (leaving behind only a pouch of microwave popcorn, bay leaves and a bottle of malt vinegar) I moved into the living room to find Alice stuffing pictures into a Rainbow Brite duffel bag.

"We have to get out of here," I said.

"Just a minute," she said, looking frantically around the room. She grabbed a framed portrait of her high-school self from the wall.

"You're taking pictures of yourself?" I said.

"I won't remember what I used to look like!" she said, her voice high and on the edge of hysteria. "Everything I own is about to be destroyed!" Tears welled shiny in her bloodshot eyes and I decided to shut up.

Phoebe bounced into the room carrying a baseball bat.

"What about this?" she asked, uncertain.

"Better," I said and I gave her an encouraging nod and a smile.

Audrey returned empty-handed. "I can't find anything else."

"We need one more thing," I said. "We should all carry something."

Alice said, "What about the shotgun?"

"Shotgun?" said Phoebe and Audrey in unison.

Alice stepped forward, reached above the fireplace and brought down a pump-action Remington 870 from the wall.

She tossed it into my startled hands and then patted two boxes of shells on the mantle.

I looked at Phoebe and Audrey. Phoebe lowered her eyes and Audrey shrugged.

"Oh, Christ!" Alice said, slapping her forehead. "I forgot something." She ran upstairs.

"I have to pee," said Phoebe, heading to the bathroom.

"Hurry up," I said.

"It's only pee!" Phoebe yelled from the bathroom.

What did *that* mean?

Audrey had gone into the kitchen.

I don't know what possessed me to move to the front door and look out the window - some preternatural instinct or maybe just dumb luck.

I saw them.

Trudging toward the house were four men and a woman, all toting guns, heavy sacks slung over their shoulders. Scavengers.

Oh shit.

"We have to go! Now!" I screamed into the house, angry that the girls had separated into different rooms. I cracked the shotgun. Empty! "Now!" I ran to the fireplace, opened a box of shells with a shaking hand. "Now! Go! Now!" The air crackled around me, I felt dizzy, sick, as if I were collapsing into myself.

I loaded the gun just as the door crashed open. I fired both barrels toward the intrusion. The girls finally staggered wide-eyed and worried into the room. "Grab your shit!" I yelled. "Out the back!"

We scrambled to collect our things. I figured the gang of scavengers had taken cover and would remain hidden for at least a few minutes. I stuffed the rest of the shells into the backpack and then we ran through the kitchen, bumping and stumbling into each other.

A shot exploded behind us just as we tore out of the house, across the backyard and into the pine woods beyond.

From the depths of the sea... a tidal wave of terror! -Attack of the Crab Monsters (Allied Artists 1957)

"It was a really fucked-up situation. Nobody knew what to do. I was no survivalist, that's for sure. I read the Anarchist Cookbook in high school but couldn't remember a damn thing about it. I was pretty clueless. We all were..." - Me, years after The Event.

-2-

It started happening six months earlier. The first reported sighting occurred on a Carnival cruise. The ship was traveling from LA to Puerto Vallarta when several passengers spotted something moving alongside the boat, just beneath the surface of the water. Excitement sparked among the tourists as reports of a whale sighting spread through the ship. Armed with cameras and camcorders, the passengers flocked to the starboard side to catch a glimpse.

Startled gasps and a few screams pierced the air as the creature raised its head above the water and kept rising, lifted by an impossibly long neck, until it was nearly twenty feet above the ship's sidwake.

Then it turned over on its side, revealing two huge flippers, and splashed below the surface again.

Unlike the Loch Ness Monster, there was ample evidence that the creature existed; evidence that played endlessly on the TV news.

Paleontologists identified the creature as a Muraenosaurus, a dinosaur thought to have been extinct since the Middle Jurassic Period.

It was all very cool and exciting.

For a while.

Only hell could breed such an enormous beast! Only God could destroy it! - The Giant Gila Monster (McLendon Radio Pictures, 1959)

"Of course we were scared! We were scared shitless! What kind of stupid question is that?" - Me, years after The Event.

-3-

Alice lived at the base of a mountain range and we literally headed for the hills. The band of scavengers didn't bother to give chase. It was the house they wanted.

I'd reloaded the shotgun and assumed the lead. "Keep your eyes open," I said. "A lot of people probably ran into the woods. Don't underestimate anybody. If they're desperate enough and hungry enough, they'll murder us just for the stale saltines in my pack."

"The saltines are stale?" said Phoebe.

"So, like, what's the plan, Stan?" said Audrey.

"I don't have one yet," I admitted. "But I'm open to suggestions."

Phoebe, Audrey and Alice were silent for a long time.

Walking was arduous - steep inclines, slippery leaves (it had rained that morning) and thick bushes and branches slowed our advance. We wound around jagged granite grades and thickets of thorn, losing time and our bearings.

"Hey, Alice," I said finally. "Are there any trails around here?"

"I don't know," she said.

"You don't know?"

"No."

"How can you not know?"

"I don't know. I just don't."

"How long have you lived here?"

"Around six years."

"Six years. And you don't know if there are any trails."

"How the fuck should I know? I don't hike. God, you can be such an asshole sometimes..."

"Look at this shit," I said, trying to push aside a thick wall of tangled, prickly growth. My hands and arms were crosshatched with angry scratches.

Audrey said, "Why don't you trade me the gun for the machete? That way you can hack out a path."

I stopped, turned. "Yeah, good idea. Here..." We traded weapons.

After two hours of excruciatingly slow progress Phoebe began to complain, trudging with heavy steps. "I'm tired. Can't we break for lunch?"

"There is no lunch today," I told her. "When we make camp tonight, we'll have a small supper. We have to ration the food carefully. We can't afford to waste a single crumb."

Phoebe groaned. "But I'm tiiiiiiired. And huuuuuungry..."

"Sorry, Phobes."

"Why couldn't we take my Mazda?" she asked for the umpteenth time. I refused to explain it to her again.

When The Event happened, the roads quickly became clogged with panicked traffic jams. Road-rage turned to murder and sabotage; Molotov cocktails lighting up the night, impenetrable roadblocks of crashed and burning cars. Bandits with bulldozers began smashing cars off the

roads and looting them; the passengers either dead or too damaged and dazed to put up a fight. Things had turned seriously Road Warrior after only a few days. Trying to travel by car was a pointless death sentence.

"Hoofing it is the only way to go now," I'd told her.

"This sucks," Phoebe whined. "Can't we at least stop for a snack? A little one?"

Audrey and I both yelled, "No!"

Invincible...Indestructible! What was this awesome BEAST born 50 million years out of time? - Reptilicus (AIP 1962)

"The whole thing was so weird, it turned EVERYTHING weird. The air was weird. I'd look at Alice or my sneakers or a cloud in the sky and it all looked like a surreal nightmare, like we'd stepped through a funhouse mirror into another dimension. Shit, maybe we had..." - Me, years after The Event.

-4-

The sky over New York City was thick with gray storm clouds when the first pterodactyl swooped down and perched atop the Empire State Building. It sat like a gargoyle on the Art Deco edifice, unmoving, its wet, leathery wings folded over an enormous crouching body.

People stood and stared with dumb awe. Nobody panicked.

Yet.

Crowds continued to gather even as the rain fell.

Thunder erupted and the clouds behind the winged lizard blazed bright with lightning. It unfurled its wings and

launched itself from its perch, plunging down in a screeching descent.

The crowds screamed and scattered.

A large, long-haired man in a *Frodo Lives* T-shirt - perhaps too terrified to move - was snatched by rib-crunching talons and carried skyward, while the screaming, fleeing people nearby were knocked to the asphalt by the powerful windstream gusting from the shadow of the lizard's vast, pumping wings.

A second pterodactyl descended through the clouds and began circling the city.

Then a third.

New York was under attack.

SEE the living, fighting monsters of Creation's dawn, rediscovered in the world today! - King Kong (RKO 1933)

"I was the guy, the dude, so I took control. Asserted myself leadership-wise. I figured it was my duty or something. Believe me, I could have done without the responsibility. I was terrified of making a mistake. Turns out I made almost nothing BUT mistakes. But, hey, none of those chicks volunteered..." - Me, years after The Event.

-5-

We stopped and made camp (such as it was) at dusk. We were exhausted, filthy and on-edge. Alice had owned next to nothing in the way of camping supplies; no tent, no sleeping bags, no lanterns or Sterno or a compass. She didn't even own a first-aid kit or length of rope.

"Why would I? I don't camp," she said.

"You lived in the mountains, in the middle of miles and miles of gorgeous forest for

years and you never went camping once?" I said, annoyed.

"No. I lived in a house, genius. Why would I *camp*?" she said and then her face fell. "*Lived*," she murmured. "I *lived* in a house." She began to cry, her casual use of the past-tense suddenly striking her.

"I'm sorry, Alice," I said.

We stood there for a long while, listening to Alice's soft sobs, avoiding each other's eyes.

Eventually, I clapped my hands and rubbed them together, trying to inspire. "Well, let's gather-up some kindling sticks and logs and stuff and get a fire going. Don't stray too far though. I don't want anyone getting lost."

I prepared dinner that night. Our only cookware consisted of one small frying pan and I held it over the fire, using a T-shirt as a potholder. We crouched like cavemen, watching, waiting for the Beefaroni to boil.

Alice was the only one of us who'd thought to bring silverware: one spoon (it was her baby spoon with her name engraved on the handle). We sat gathered around the hot pan, passing the small spoon around the starving circle. Audrey had doled out two saltines to each of us. We ate without speaking, without joy. And when we were done, we were all still hungry.

Then Alice wrestled a baggie of pot from the pocket of her jeans.

This was the day that engulfed the world in terror! - The Deadly Mantis (1957 Universal)

"You know how in all those old giant monster movies, the military is called out

to deal with the situation? Well, where were they this time? I heard about a couple of little, ineffectual skirmishes but for the most part the entire military-industrial complex was MIA. Shit, didn't they see it coming? Didn't the Pentagon have contingency plans for dealing with dinosaurs returning to earth? I mean, get REAL..." - Me, years after The Event.

-6-

The term, "The Event" is generally used to describe the one tragic day when all hell broke loose. Everything had been leading up to it but no one saw it coming.

It was Memorial Day, May 31st.

The question everyone asked was, Where did they come from?

The question was asked when a herd of Triceratops stampeded across Boston, shattering and flattening everything in their path. There must have been hundreds of them.

Where did they come from?

The question was asked when several Tyrannosaurus Rex suddenly appeared on the streets of Cleveland, snapping up pedestrians and ripping open overturned cars like tins of Spam.

Where did they come from?

It was the question asked when at least twenty brontosaurus were suddenly grazing in the Everglades; when hundreds of feathered velociraptors swept into Washington DC, tearing apart anything that moved.

Where did they come from?

Whenever a Stegosaurus smashed open a home or an allosaurus ate livestock, the question arose:

Where the fuck did these fucking things come from?

FANTASTIC! ...the Allosaurus, alive in the twentieth century. - The Valley of Gwangi (1969 Warner Bros.)

"We didn't know how weird things had really gotten until we got to the top of the mountain." - Me, years after The Event.

-7-

We heard music in the trees.

We'd been climbing all morning, the incline growing steeper with each step, the terrain changing from damp thicket and soft, leafy soil to dapple-gray rock and dry lichen, the trees shrinking and thinning, turning to birch. The air was cool and sharp.

We had almost reached the summit when the chanting began; long and low and wordless. Flat, clumsy drumming accompanied the wailing choir.

Phoebe looked scared and grabbed my hand. "What's that?" she said. "I don't like it."

I just shrugged, listening. "I don't know."

"I don't like it."

"Me either, said Alice."

"Let's go back," Phoebe said.

"Go back to what?" I said. "Come on. Let's check it out." I turned to Audrey and held out the machete. "Here, trade back." She took the machete and handed me the shotgun.

We continued to climb. The chanting grew louder.

To finally get to the top we had to hoist ourselves over a boulder.

And there they were; around twenty people standing in a circle, howling, naked, and shivering in the wind. Three others, also unclothed, were beating out disordered rhythms on a hollow log, pounding on it with thick sticks.

An old man stood in the center of the circle, arms raised, eyes closed. He was the only one attired – he had fashioned a long, flowing robe from a blue floral bed sheet. It flapped and waved in the wind.

Behind them, several small tents had been erected.

The old man slowly opened his eyes and saw us. He halted the concert with a gesture.

The now-silent circle broke apart. The nudists turned and stared at us. I turned to Phoebe and raised my eyebrows. She looked terrified and grabbed my hand again.

Alice gave the strangers a wave and said, "Hi."

The nude group nodded and several staggered Hi's and Hello's came our way.

At least they aren't hostile, I thought.

The old man in the bed-sheet robe stepped forward. "Hey," he said. "Welcome to the Church of the Final Beginning."

"Thank you," Audrey said and taking her cue, we all thanked him.

"You're welcome," he said, smiling with big dingy dentures. "Have you come to join our little congregation?"

"Um," I said. "Actually, we didn't know anyone was up here. We were just trying

to get away from the bandits. And, you know, the dinosaurs..."

"Oh, yeah. Smart." He waved his arms in a sweeping gesture. "Check it out, the last collapse of a civilization!"

I looked around. We could see for miles in every direction. Billows of smoke rose from the burning towns below. We heard the pop of far-off gunfire, the echoing roar of massive animals. I could see enormous reptiles thundering down lonely roads and crashing through trees – reduced to mere insect-size by our lofty perspective.

Three screeching pterodactyls wheeled and swooped around dense cumulous clouds, miles away.

It really looked like the end of the world.

The old man said, "So, you wanna join us?"

Phoebe said, "Do we have to take our clothes off?"

He smiled. His eyes were kind. "Whatever you're comfortable with, my dear."

"I'm more comfortable with my clothes on," she said.

"That's cool. Now, if you'll excuse us, we have a ritual to finish. Then, we eat."

The naked congregation circled the old man again and the chanting and drumming resumed. We sat down on the rocks to watch and wait.

The Giant Behemoth! The fire-spitting monster predicted in

The Bible! – The Giant Behemoth (Allied Artists 1959)

"Fear does weird things to people..." Me, years after The Event.

Following the ritual, the old man - whose name, we learned, was Fenwick - ordered us fed. After his motley congregation had dressed, a large fire was started and they roasted three rabbits and a pheasant, turning them on an absurdly huge spit constructed from curtain rods, tent poles, bedsprings and several chains that looked salvaged from a child's swing-set. The spit was large enough to roast a moose. They also served us a watery pine-bark and mushroom soup. It doesn't sound very appetizing, but I regard it as one of the best meals of my life.

They passed us paper cups of bitter water ladled from a green plastic bucket.

I don't recall any of the church members drinking the water.

Afterwards, we all gathered around the fire. A large woman with thinning hair and burst vessels in her nose handed out two thin blankets to us, smiling with missing teeth. I shared a blanket with Audrey, while Phoebe and Alice wrapped themselves up together. The blanket smelled.

It was June but it felt cold enough to snow. I wondered if another Ice Age was dawning. Anything seemed possible.

Nobody spoke. We stared at the fire.

I don't remember falling asleep.

The next thing I do remember was waking up in a foggy dawn to the sound of Phoebe screaming.

I staggered to my feet, wobbling, dizzy, working to focus my blurred vision, trying to spot monsters in the fog.

Phoebe screamed again. "Nooo! Please no! Please! Please! Please! Noooo!" Another shrill scream.

I took a step, almost fell, and then forced myself forward. "Phoebe?" I called into the fog.

"Ray! Help! Over here!" Phoebe shrieked.

I finally moved close enough to discern what was going on.

A stocky man with a bristling beard cocked my shotgun and pointed it at my face. I froze and made a surrender gesture with my hands. "Don't shoot."

Phoebe had been strapped to the spit. The fire-pit below had been filled with kindling and stocked with logs. I caught a whiff of gasoline. A young girl stood nearby, holding a burning torch. The old man - Fenwick - was beside her, holding Alice's machete.

"What the fuck are you doing?" I said, stunned, trying to make sense of this terrible tableau.

"God delivered you to us," the old man said. "He demands a sacrifice. Once he receives it, he'll keep us safe from the demons he unleashed."

I shook my head. "That's crazy," I said.

The old man nodded. "Maybe. But it's worth a shot."

A voice beside me startled me and I drew back: "What's going on?"

It was Audrey. Alice joined us. "Hey, what the hell are they doing to Phoebe?"

Phoebe: "Help me!"

"They want to sacrifice her," I informed her.

"What?"

"They're gonna sacrifice her to God. They think that'll protect them from the dinosaurs."

You gotta be shitting me," she said and stepped forward. The stocky man swiveled the shotgun toward her and she stopped.

"Please, don't do this! Please..." Alice said.

The old man said, "Too late..." and raised the machete over his head.

Phoebe screamed and he brought the machete down, severing the scream and her head. It tumbled off the spit and into the kindling.

Alice screamed and covered her face with her hands.

"Go ahead, Tiffany," said the old man. The young girl lowered the torch and the fuel in the fire-pit burst into an instant bonfire.

The church members began to disrobe.

They chanted and danced naked around the fire. Phoebe's skin began to sizzle and darken.

The stocky man with the beard smiled at us, then joined the others, waving Alice's shotgun in the air.

The old man was turning the spit. I could smell Phoebe's roasting flesh. I'm ashamed to admit that my stomach growled.

Alice and Audrey were crying. I grabbed their hands and pulled them away. We fled back down the foggy mountain, preferring to take our chances with dinosaurs and bandits.

No one came after us. I guess their god was satisfied with one sacrifice.

Poor Phoebe.

We hadn't gone far when we heard a piercing, ferocious roar behind us and then several screams and shouts. The shotgun fired twice. More screams, another roar.

The only thing I can figure is that the smell of roasted Phoebe attracted something big and hungry. As we stood and listened to the screams of the congregation, I couldn't help but laugh. I laughed for a long time.

Alice and Audrey didn't see the humor. They stared at me with disapproving looks.

But I couldn't help it.

Sometimes, even now when I think about it, it still makes me laugh.



Photo © Simon Fowler

THOMAS, ROI

AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVID THOMAS

By Kate MacDonald

David Thomas is a quintessential musical enigma. Best known as the front man and driving force behind Pere Ubu (*not*, he cautions, the *former* front man of Pere Ubu, as some are wont to call him; Ubu lives), Thomas has always been fiendishly difficult to pin down in any sense. Pere Ubu were lumped in with the artsy end of the punk movement when they first emerged (from the Cleveland/ Akron area that produced Devo, the Dead Boys and The Cramps), they could hardly have been more of a contrast to the adrenaline-fueled, three-chord anthems of the punk movement. Like Alfred Jarry, author of the play from which Pere Ubu took its name, Thomas is often cited as an important influence on later movements, while remaining relatively little understood. (It should be added that this is not for lack of information. Thomas' web site is virtually stuffed with years' worth of interviews, essays, timelines and, of course, current information on his projects.) Here are a few more words of wisdom for the Ubunthusiast.

What was it that first drew you to making music?

I've told the story often. I was working at a weekly entertainment paper in Cleveland called The Scene. We put it together in a warehouse in East Cleveland. After running away from college I got my first and, as it turned out, only job there doing layout. I was 18 or so. Every Tuesday I laid out the paper late into the night on a light table, cutting up and aligning printouts of text and art. I went through a fifth of vodka and a half pouch of chewing tobacco every Tuesday. I was young. I had little interest in music or arts. It was a job on a newspaper. I

was literate and irritated by the bad copy I had to layout - crummy grammar, incoherent sentences, bad spelling. I tried to fix what I could by cutting out words and assembling better copy on the light table. Now, what this involved was as follows: The copy would come back from the printer as printouts in columns on large sheets. I would cut these columns out, wax the backs and assemble the pages on a template using rulers and xacto blades. To fix the copy I would have to meticulously cut out individual words and piece by piece re-work the copy. Anyone with any experience of the process will tell you it's a nightmare to do. The editor eventually decided to save everyone a lot of agony by making me the copy editor as well. That was okay for awhile but I was re-writing everything so much that, eventually, the editor decided to save everyone a lot of agony by making me a writer too. I was supposed to write about music. Eventually I was writing so much of the paper that I started to use various pseudonyms to hide the fact. One was "Bob Knuckles." The most popular and most individual writing was done under the name "Crocus Behemoth." (At the time I had a girlfriend who was older and a radical feminist connected to the political/cultural underground. In that world pseudonyms were popular. She would get them by opening a dictionary at random and putting her finger down on a page. This method yielded Behemoth and Crocus. I reversed the order.) Time goes by. I do my job. I begin to develop ideas of what is worthwhile and what is not. I begin to develop ideas about The Way Things Should Be. I become irritated and irritating. I inflict my ideas on the unfortunate, hapless bands that cross my critical path.

Eventually it dawns on me that if I'm so smart I oughta do this music thing myself. I buy a guitar from the editor and play it for a week. It hurts my fingers. I decide to be the singer. Along about this time I have to interview a singer, Jim Dandy, from a band called Black Oak Arkansas. I'm sitting in a suite at the Rock n Roll Hotel in town, Swingo's. I have no questions that I want an answer to. Or maybe I have no questions that anyone else can answer. That would be a nice gloss on the story. Anyway, that was the beginning of the end of my writing about music. People at the paper had the idea of putting together a band for some publicity. That was the first version of Rocket From The Tombs. So, finally getting around to the answer to your question, what first drew me to making music, in short, was failure. The failure of others to do what I thought they should be doing, and, once I started making music myself, my own failure to be any good at doing the same thing.

How well did your early musical efforts reflect the sound you wanted to be making?

From before my first band I was aware that I should be looking for something different. My efforts always reflected my grasp, at any particular time, on achieving that Something Different. As my capability to grasp evolved so did my ambition to grasp more and better, and my continuing and evolving frustration at not being able to do so.

Was there a point at which you realized that was what you wanted to pursue "full-time"?

Not really. I was so mortified by my early efforts that I simply couldn't let myself move on to another course until I got better. I couldn't stand the idea of quitting before I had mastered it. And here we are today, decades later. I still can't bring myself to quit until I get it right. Failure is the great motivator.

Have there been any points when you regretted the decision to make music rather than something else (your choice what that would be)?

Orson Welles said the worst thing he ever did was move into films, that he would have been more successful doing almost anything else, that he fell in love with the process of making films. The 3-hour BBC Panorama interview with Welles is essential viewing for any musician or artist. If you haven't seen it you're wasting your time stumbling in the darkness. I was destined for a career in micro-biology. I might have been good at it though my mother has always maintained that I should have pursued higher math, theoretical math.

What piece of your work are you proudest of?

Hard question. I don't look back much. Once or twice a year I might get into a life-review frame of mind. I've done a lot of different things. I kid myself that all of it has had some element of lasting worth. And I am always proud of the combos I've been part of - what they can accomplish. I take the most pride I suppose in the groups I've led and the capabilities of those groups.



Photo © Simon Fowler

You've created live soundtracks to a few "late night" movie classics. I was curious about this quote on your site with regard to the under-score you did for *Carnival of Souls*:

It's fun artistically speaking and the pressure to be the best thing since sliced bread is off our shoulders. Another voice is setting the artistic agenda (the film), there's a strict timetable (can't stop the film), and our musical "vision" has always had a cinematic component, i.e. we have a visual approach to sound.

What do you think that these sorts of live accompaniments can add to the experience of seeing the films? What other films (if any) would you be interested in composing for?

I'm not convinced that the idea is to enhance the experience of the film. My idea is that you create something new. Read my Lessons In Mayhem lecture for clues. (<http://ubuprojex.net/archives/mayhem.html>)

Appropriately, Thomas brought to life a version of *Ubu Roi* for the stage in 2009...

How long had you been wanting/planning to do this adaptation? Did the "spectacle" live up to your hopes and expectations?

Nothing lives up to my expectations. It was a noble, and revolutionary experiment. It was also flawed, in the way that everything I do is flawed. It was magnificent. It was amateurish. It was unique. No other group would have ever dared to dream for a moment of doing what we did. In other

words, no one is so foolhardy and reckless and feckless as we are.

And on a smaller scale, the man will play a live set in the intimacy of your own home...

What made you decide to start doing "Living Room Concerts"? How do you enjoy these performances as compared to playing more traditional shows?

It's a scary idea. Show me the scary path and that's where I'll be, standing in the rain. I like any kind of show that's got bullets to dodge.

You've said that you enjoy playing live- that you think you actually perform better when you are in front of an audience (*I enjoy playing in front of people. I am at my best in front of people. I sing better. I construct better stories. I create special moments. And the thrill of performance is addicting...*) What is it about having an audience that makes you "better", brings your performance to a higher level?

The answer lies in sub-atomic physics and Einstein's relativity: the role of the observer. Consider that the seminal rock song is Heartbreak Hotel. It crystallizes that narrative POV that is unique to and emblematic of rock music. The song is NOT about the Elvis narrator. It's about the Bell Hop, the observer of the Elvis character.

Are there any particular artists- in any field- with whom you'd like to collaborate?

I'm sure there are. No one comes to mind. People ask me to do something and most of

the time I say yes. I am good at collaborating. I've always said my own ideas are not good enough, that I can't trust them.

In a previous interview, you spoke of “the deleterious psychology that follows from the elimination of the “personal object” with regard to the potential pitfalls of mp3 technology (Read more: <http://ubuprojex.net/faqs/netfaq.html>). Do you think it is possible, as far as music releases are concerned, for the “personal

object” to retain a sort of value, or do you see it becoming a relic?

I fear that it is a relic. That doesn't matter, does it? One should always pursue the right path regardless of the public will or desire. My motto: *Ars longa, spectatores fugaces* (“Art is forever, the audience runs away.”)

For more information on Thomas and all other Pere Ubu-related matters, explore <http://www.ubuprojex.net/index.html>.



© Lex Van Rossen



D04013

BRAINS

By Bob Pfeifer

It's funny you bring up when we were kids. I was just thinking the other day about this thing that happened. We were in . . . I don't know maybe third or fourth, maybe fifth grade. There was this boy, Cosmo Dibease. Cosmo was the coolest kid in school. He ran the fastest though he wasn't the smartest. He wasn't the biggest but he might have been the toughest. Or at least we all thought so, even some of the older kids at school. For good reason, he had gotten into at least two, maybe three, schoolyard fights, including one with an older kid, and won both.

We were buddies: Cosmo, Branko, and me. We did things together. Some sports but mostly mischief, like our first theft. At Cosmo's instigation, we put our heads together to figure out how to steal M&M's candy from what would now be a 7 - 11 but back then was called a Five-and-Dime. We passed the store everyday walking home from school. Branko came up with the plan. I remember it had a diversionary element to it. It worked. After that we called him 'Brains'.

Anyway, that was just the set up about how we were good friends. So this one day, all the kids were hanging around in the playground by the swings. This was a normal thing. We did it most days after school. It was that awkward period where we started to hang around girls again. Some of us didn't like them still. Some had crushes. It was rumored that a couple of us had pecked a kiss and held hands. I don't remember exactly but we were all there, boys and girls from class, when a kid came into our playground we didn't know. He had a couple of his buddies following

behind him. This was unusual. I don't remember other kids ever coming into our schoolyard. A couple times we would see kids from other school hanging around outside like they were waiting to for someone to leave the playground. This kid walked straight towards our class like he knew where he was going. He wore all black with a big silver buckle on his belt. I remember he had a Metallica "Kill 'em All" t-shirt on. No kid our age dressed like that. He looked like he was tough or thought he was. He definitely wanted to be.

When he got to our group, he shoved Branko aside from behind, as he was the first one he had to pass. Branko turned around and yelled "hey" when the guy just kept walking. He walked through the rest of us. A couple of the guys he passed pushed him back or spit like 'who do you think you are' but he kept going. I was one of those guys, I'm sure. He didn't pay any attention. Just wiped the spit off his face until he got to Cosmo. He stopped and stood right in front of him. We formed a circle around the two. Cosmo's shoulders kind of leaned forward. The kid in black finally said something:

"I'm from St. Joe's over by Shaw. I heard somebody over here was supposed to be really tough. You know who that kid might be?"

We all waited for Cosmo to show him, when all he did was mumble something I didn't hear. Branko told me later he couldn't hear what he said either.

"My name is Pat Flowers. Everybody calls me Patty Boy. I heard the guy I'm looking for is Cosmo. Is that you?"

"Yeah, I'm Cosmo."

"Are you the right Cosmo?"

"I don't know."

"How many Cosmo's you got here at St. Clare's?"

"Me."

"So you're it."

"Yeah."

"Maybe you wanna show me how to fight. Wanna give me a lesson, punk?"

Cosmo didn't look at Patty Boy straight. He kind of shuffled his feet, looked down at his toes. I looked Branko in the eye. I knew he felt ashamed. He looked away when he saw me catch his eye. I saw him look at Patty Boy's buddies. Then he just looked away. I saw he had a tear in one of his eyes. He was holding back crying, it looked like. He didn't want to wipe it away so anyone would see. So he knelt down like to tie his shoelace. I saw that.

"So come on, Cosmo. I heard you were the tough guy."

A girl came up to Cosmo, Sophie. She was a little bit like his girlfriend though no one had real girlfriends then. She was the prettiest girl in class.

"Cosmo, I'll hold your raincoat for you while you get rid of this creep."

Cosmo always wore a raincoat except in the summer. He was the kind of kid who never wore shorts.

Cosmo shook his head no and walked away a few steps. Then he ran out of the playground.

Patty Boy didn't stop him.

Patty Boy and his friends said some shit about 'pussy' and 'chicken' and I don't remember what else. And like Branko, I was embarrassed. We felt like everything went wrong. It was getting dark. Branko walked to the other side of the playground. The other kids were all hanging out together like nothing happened. I kind of stood back. I guess I didn't know what this all meant. Anyone could see that Sophie was talking to Patty Boy now. She didn't think he was a creep anymore. And Patty Boy was soaking it up, getting a crowd around him the way a popular kid always does. And all the guys from St. Joe's were blending in and tossing the football around with our guys. When it got a little darker, Patty Boy and Sophie went off together behind the Church. Maybe they were holding hands. I can't remember. Either way, everyone knew it meant they were going to kiss or something.

I saw Branko still walking around the playground with his hands in his pockets and then I lost him. I remember thinking Branko felt really bad about this; like he lost face, too. So he probably went home or to find Cosmo.

A minute or two later, Sophie came screaming back to us.

"What happened? What happened?" is what everyone yelled, but she was crying too hard to say anything. And she didn't need to say anything because Patty Boy

wasn't far behind her. It was dark so it still wasn't clear what was up until Patty stood under the lamp. He had blood pouring out of his nose. It was dripping off his lip.

What happened? What happened? Started up all over again.

"I don't know," she said.

"Somebody jumped us," Patty Boy said.

"You?" somebody asked.

"I ran," she said.

"I fought," he said

"Who beat Patty Boy up?" a bunch of people asked.

Sophie and Patty Boy were both saying stuff like they didn't know; it was too dark to see, so dark, whoever it was came from behind.

"I'm bleeding," Patty Boy said.

"Who?" a couple kids asked.

"Was it Cosmo?" one of Patty Boy's friends asked.

"He was big," Patty Boy said.

When the blood kept coming, Patty Boy had nothing to stop it and holding his head back just made him feel like he was drowning, he started to bawl.

"Cosmo?"

That's what everybody assumed.

Then everything would be back to how it was.

Sophie said it wasn't, because whoever it was wasn't wearing a raincoat.

A couple kids started to laugh like, 'ha ha the bully's not that tough.'

One of the St. Joe's guys shoved one of ours.

The convent door opened and a nun came out yelling. I guess there was so much noise from Sophie crying.

"Screw you," a couple guys said to each other.

"Yeah, let's get out of here."

Patty Boy, still crying, holding his shirt up to his nose, ran out of the playground. His friends followed. By the time they got to the street, they were way ahead of him.

We acted like it was nothing when the nun told us to go home.

A couple of us met up at the diner about a block or so away. Branko was already sitting at the counter drinking a milk shake.

I thought it was funny how no one asked Branko about the blood on his sleeve 'cause I saw it right away even though he tried to hide it. Branko knew I saw it but I didn't say anything.

Sophie was never the prettiest girl in class again.

Branko told me he was still ashamed.

I wasn't sure how I felt.

* * *

But that's not the end of the story. It's just what happened that day. Over the next few days everything went back to more or less

the way it was. Cosmo didn't come to school the next day but he did the following day. He'd heard what happened. By refusing to deny his role in Patty Boy's bloodied nose, Cosmo made everyone believe he was responsible. Cosmo resumed his spot in our class. Sophie and I knew better. Branko for sure knew more than anyone how it was. We weren't about to give Cosmo up. Sophie didn't care. She was distracted with going back to being Cosmo's girl. Maybe we weren't about the girls enough at that age, Branko and I were kind of confused about Cosmo's going back with Sophie. Maybe we even lost a little respect or something for him. But it didn't matter much. We didn't want to have anything to do with her anyways. Everything seemed okay until about a week later. It wasn't *about* a week later. It was *exactly* a week later. And if I were to guess it was at about the exact same time of day that Patty Boy and his friends came back only they weren't alone. A bigger kid was with them this time. Patty Boy ran ahead to us.

"You're in trouble now", he said to all of us, like 'you better watch out now'.

The bigger boy was dressed just like Patty Boy but in practice it was surely the other way around.

"This is my big brother, Tommy."

One of the girls not Sophie came back in a way that made us proud: "And what do they call you? Tommy Boy?"

"Yeah."

Our gang all laughed

"What?" Like he had to put it together, "If you weren't a girl I'd fuck you up."

"Yeah you guys are fucked," she said.

"What do you want?" Sophie said.

"I want to know who jumped my kid brother the other night."

"Why?" some kid said.

"Yeah why?" another said.

"Shut the fuck up, you punks. I'm here to kick his ass. Who's the fuckin' coward?"

Everybody looked around like they didn't know who he's talking about until one of the little kids from a lower grade pointed to Cosmo.

"No I didn't."

The little kid said, "You did. My brother told me you did."

Tommy Boy looked at Patty and slapped him across the back of his neck. "You let this scrawny piece of shit bloody you. What the fuck is wrong with you?"

Their buddies held back their laughter.

"Tommy, it was dark. He jumped me. I didn't even see the piece of shit."

"Yeah right. And don't swear."

"He got me from behind . . ."

"Shut the fuck up."

Tommy walked up to Cosmo and poked him in the chest until Cosmo backed himself up against a wall; Cosmo denying the charge all the way.

"I don't care what you say, kid. I don't even want to know your name."

And with that, Tommy slammed Cosmo's shoulders against the wall and laid three hard shots to his belly. Cosmo doubled over and then Tommy unleashed his fists and kicks taking Cosmo to the ground in seconds. Tommy straddled his chest and slapped and punched him when he felt like it. It was fun for him at this point.

Branko went up to Tommy and told him to stop it.

"Why should I?"

One of their friends went up behind Branko like to pull him back when I jumped in and a couple of others joined saying leave him alone.

"I like doing this."

And Tommy gave Cosmo another sock to the face. Cosmo couldn't do much his arms pinned under Tommy's knees. His best move was to squirm with his legs.

"Cause he didn't do it,"

"Yeah who did?"

"I beat your stupid brother up."

Tommy barely looked over at Branko and laughed.

"Yeah, right, you're even skinnier than this punk. You couldn't do shit."

Patty Boy laughed.

Then their whole crew laughed.

Cosmo had tears coming down his face but he didn't cry a sound.

Branko walked away. Tommy stood up kicking Cosmo into a ball. When he covered

his head Tommy would kick him in his gut or back and so on.

I looked over to Branko. He was standing near Patty Boy. I didn't think anything of it. I should've. 'Cause a few seconds later he wasn't standing there anymore and Patty Boy was bawling again, only this time he was heaving, too.

Tommy stopped. "What the fuck is wrong with you?"

Cosmo got up and ran for it holding his side.

Tommy pulled Patty's hands down from his face to see. He had a bloody nose again. Only this time there was more blood.

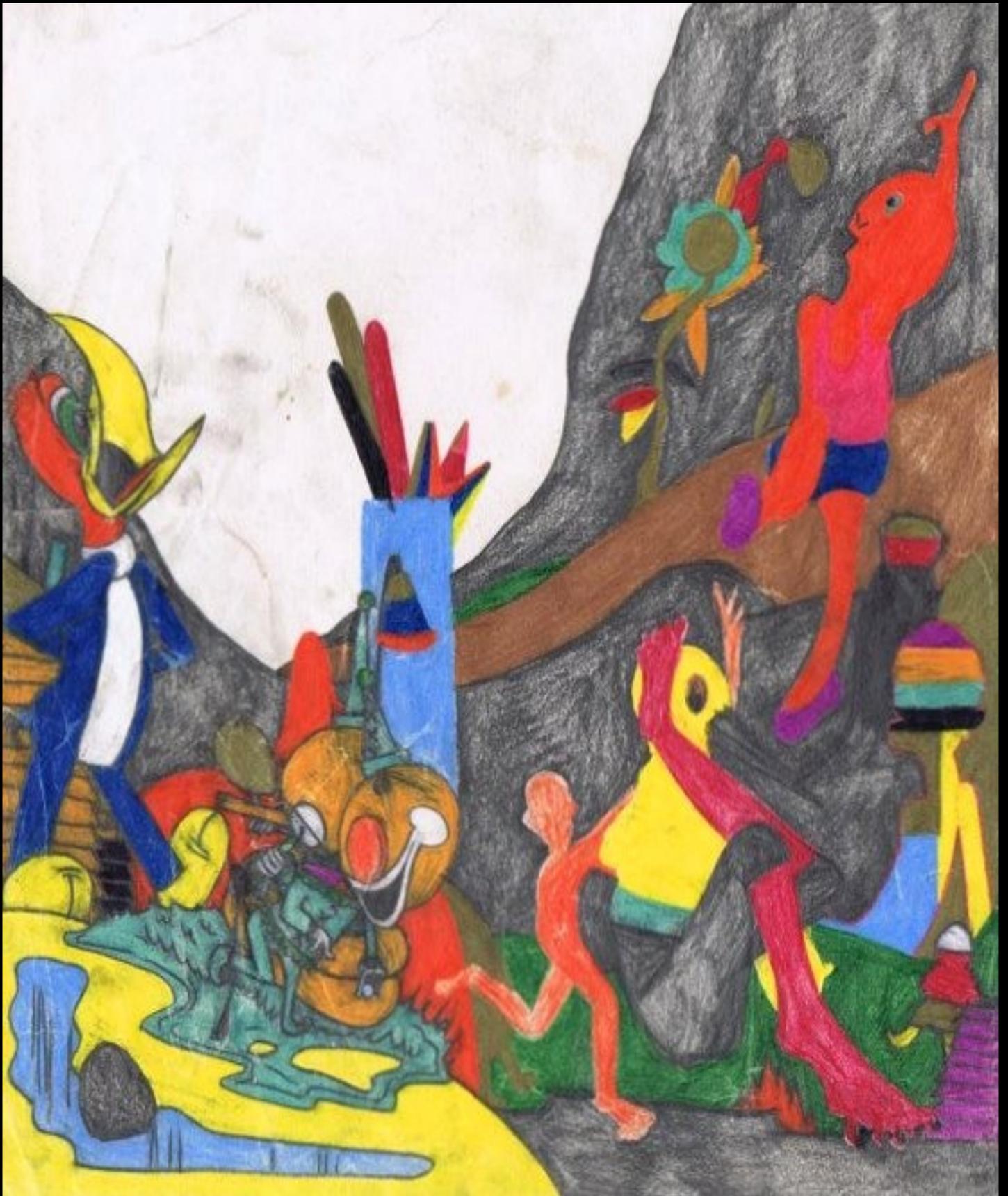
"Who the fuck?"

I looked and saw Branko running out of the playground.

"You let that little fuck give you a bloody nose?"

Tommy Boy pulled up his t-shirt to soak up the blood.

"I'm telling dad."



D03119

ENTER THE DREAM...

A TALK WITH PAINTER PAM WILSON

By Lana Gentry

All Images © Pam Wilson

Provocative images of subjects bathed in glistening light or shadowed in the twilight of near darkness, find themselves amidst yesterdays delicate objects, in the beautifully painted works of Pamela Wilson. Beneath the flooring perfectionism however, there is sleeping pain. It trickles between the strokes of traditional execution and screams quietly into our curious minds. Like many artists, Wilson brings an array of experiences, to the table, which insidiously insert themselves into the paint. Covert sensuality, a sense of nostalgia, brooding

unspoken sorrow, fear and flowing fabrics make their way across the canvases of this multi-talented provocateur. Long neglected, the works of Pamela Wilson have become understandably impossible to ignore, and they beckon our attention with a magnificent delivery of mood. Enter the dream of Pamela Wilson. She has arrived.

"For me, painting mere "beauty" feels too passive, and what I am seeking is a psychological moment, a different kind of beauty." ~ Pamela Wilson



THE SUPERLATIVE MUSE 42 x 72 inches oil on canvas 2011

Lana Gentry: *Explain your sense of dark romanticism as it relates to the subject of children, who seem to be expressed as both victimizers and victims.*

Pam Wilson: I was raised as a Mormon in suburban hell. If I wasn't dying of boredom, I was being terrorized by my emotionally disturbed brother. My parents divorced when we were young, and my brother's personality completely changed. I became his target and victim, and I lived in fear. I'm not talking about a little teasing or pinching. This was utter torture, with regular beatings, chasings with knives, and the like. I had no protection, as my parents were in

denial. I could expound, but it was this difficult period in my life that provoked the darkness in my paintings as it relates to children.

My parents are sorry now and I feel that it must be noted. They were unaware and assumed I was being dramatic.

So when I paint children as victims, or the victimizers, I am drawing on a pain that never leaves me. It is a part of me. I am also choosing models who have similar pain, and drawing on their energy. I am secretly proud to be alive, and I paint my "victims" with a little violent spark of will to overcome.



SLEEPWALKING WITH SCARECROWS 36 X 48 inches, oil on canvas, 2010



THE CULLING, 20 x 16, inches, oil on canvas, 2011

I'm still not sure anyone understands exactly how horrifying childhood was for me. I feel compelled to paint this subject matter, sometimes with humor, often like a dream.

We often see in your work displays of ornate or unusual guns. Is this political in any way or is this approach merely aesthetic?

Merely aesthetic. I am a lover of old things. To me, they house talkative ghosts. I enjoy putting objects from different eras together-it's more dreamlike.

Give me a bit of information that you want to give me... expounding on your inspirations and motives.

If we will have a richer experience as human beings, we must involve ourselves

with unsettling truths, as well as those which soothe. I have painted subjects in their own worlds for many years, incorporating strange and quirky narratives, but always with a sincere and deep sense of compassion. Although we may be amused by these subjects, I think that we identify with them when our security and sanity are threatened. As part of our human experience, we grapple with tragedy and delight, absurdity and insanity, collecting and storing pieces of ourselves and others as we decipher the meaning. We engage ourselves in the exploration of emotions, ranging from utter joy to unbearable grief, to find a place for them, and measure their importance.

Some artists set out to capture beauty, and even go so far as to argue that articulating beauty is a major purpose of art. But the standards of beauty change over time, and one period does not find the same thing beautiful as an earlier time. I like painting beautifully and I like to evoke emotion. For me, painting mere "beauty" feels too passive, and what I am seeking is a psychological moment, a different kind of beauty. Adding strange, unexpected, jarring, or uncanny elements to an otherwise beautiful painting can elevate it to another level. But this is a very fine line. One can easily over-do the weird, and lose credibility. I like walking that line.

Your images are steeped in twilight and sepia, imparting a certain mood. What appeals to you about this way of experiencing or presenting art?

I was uninspired for years. I found a strong and explosive interest in B/W photography.



THE ABSINTHE DRINKER, AND THE HOSTILE SILENCE, 30 x 30 inches, oil on canvas, 2011

I became inspired by the work of Diane Arbus, and the painted B/W photographs of Anselm Kiefer. I became a lithographer, appropriating well-known images and altering them on the stone. I then started painting with oils on my own photographs, eventually returning to painting on canvas,

first copying found B/W photographs, and eventually capturing and painting my own. I think I tried to hang onto, or create, the realistic feel of the sepia-toned B/W images, and the somewhat dreamlike, "ghostly" feel of a time from long gone.

Then I discovered color, and was completely consumed with that for years! I had a very timely meeting with someone I very much respected and it brought to my attention what I had lost in all the color. I reflected on his words for a few weeks, and suddenly I could see exactly what he was seeing and saying. I decided to try to recapture that "old-timey" feel, so the sepia palette has been creeping back in in the last couple of years. It's harder than it might seem to ween oneself from color, but I think it serves my work to dress it down a bit. I am very excited about where I can go from here.

You also have a brother Philip who paints quite well. Do you feel you were instrumental in guiding him towards his goal as a skilled painter?

My mother remarried and had two more boys when we were in our teens. They are marvelous! Both kind and selfless, great fathers, and very talented in music and art. My brother, Philip Myers, became a painter, and is now a skilled tattoo artist in Colorado, where he is the owner of Ink Inertia Custom Tattoo and Art Gallery. He will tell you that I was a rather important influence concerning his education and career. I think having a role model did a lot for him. We are kindred spirits, and I take great pride in his accomplishments. He has emotionally suffered a lot within the family as well.

The costumes in your paintings are magnificent. Do you have one source for acquiring these finds, or in other words, how do you generally come about them?

I am a fixture in antique shops, thrift stores, old book stores, and I take road trips in my pursuit to find them. I read a lot. I always have my eyes open, my brain on the ready. Things tend to find me.

What's next for you?

These are my upcoming events. Mark them on your calendar:

"BiRDSHoT" Solo show at EVOKE Contemporary, Santa Fe, NM, September 2011

Houston Art Fair, Sarah Bain Gallery, Anaheim, CA, SEPTEMBER 2011

"From What I Remember, From What I Forget" Broadstreet Studio group show, Principal Gallery, Philadelphia, PA, January, 2012,

"TABOO" Beinart Collective group show, Last Rites Gallery, NY, NY, April, 2012

"ANOMALIES" Beinart Collective group show, Copro Gallery, Santa Monica, CA, October, 2012



BREACH, 20 x 16 inches, oil on panel, 2010



INEVITABLE

By Claudia Bellocq

Images © Ricardo Acevedo

I

“Stretch me out like a rubber band, you got my life in the palm of your hand” ...de de-de-de-de, de de de-de-de.....

The track filled her with a sense of inevitability. She knew beyond all doubt, her destiny. In fact, she'd known since the first moment she saw him.

He had something about him; an arrogance in his walk, a simmering confidence in his (opinionated) points of view, unafraid of his anger... how refreshing in a suburb full of men who had seemingly had their dicks removed for the inconvenience they caused.

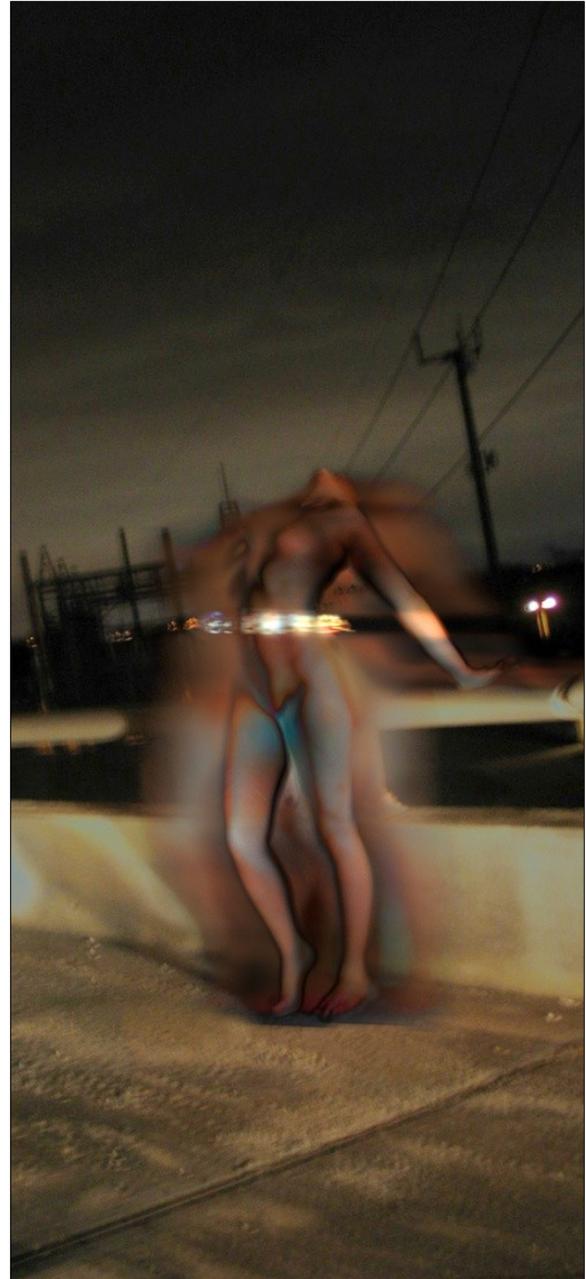
He drank strong, dark, bitter coffees, like her. He wept unashamedly when watching big, muscle-bound men crying over the

death of other men. He searched for sweet soul riffs and dropped them into her lap when she wasn't looking. He also scraped the diamond-hard casing off her heart and wasn't always kind when he had succeeded in exposing the core of her. But then, neither was she.

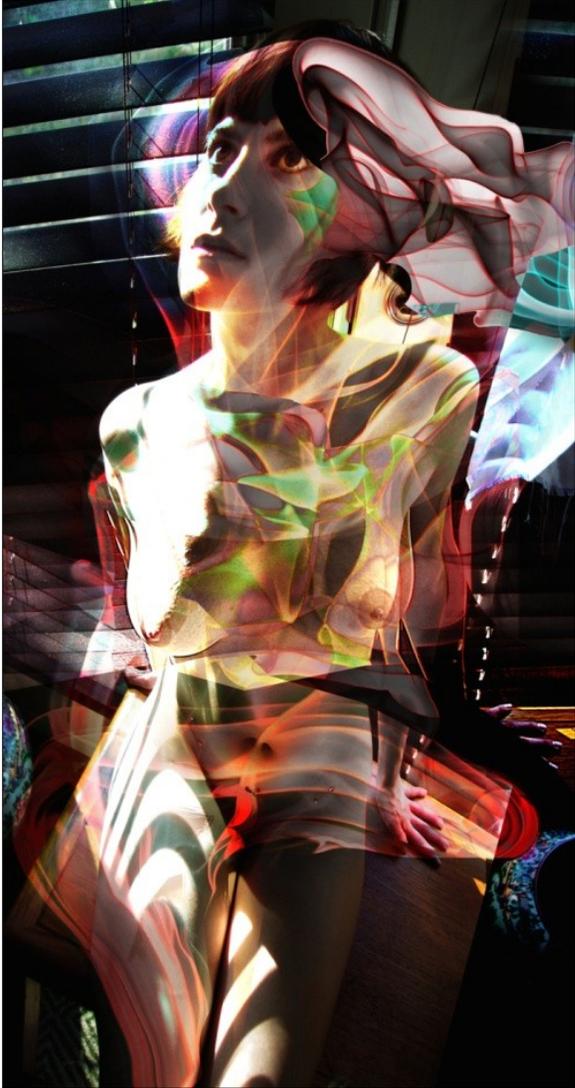
She was an Ice-Queen (she had been told on three or more tiresome occasions), despising of all things untrue to her. She was an artist, a lover and a whore. She was a Mother, oh... and he was a Father. When she first saw him... she saw her fate. She asked about him; it wasn't their time. She did not give up. She coiled herself under a dark stone and waited. Rattlesnake.

He was a football boy. Lairy. More than the odd fight on the terraces of some away ground or other. Stoning coaches. Striding up the carriages of trains, adrenalin pumping. "Looking for fucking bother mate?" Yes actually.

They were Manchester lovers through and through. Edgy: survived the streets as kids, as junkies, as whores, as runaways, as punch-bag boys, as reds, as the innocent and the corrupted. Kiting, searching, truanting, leaving, always returning. The leafy green suburbs of Leeds couldn't hold



them, the dirty grey industry of Bradford couldn't hold them. Manchester pulled them back, time and time and time again like a crippled siren singing off key. Fucking hell mate, it even sang them back from France and dreams of war torn countries needing peace-makers.



Her: Manchester had ruined her once. Girls linking arms in school. Lesbians? Must be. Boys dancing in soul clubs; Rafters, the Gallery, moving their feet and hips to dreams of London Lights and escape. They were the nice boys. The other boys hung quiet in dark corners, inhaling deep on private cigarettes. She wanted those boys.

Him: Manchester had abandoned him once. The boy, making dens beside railway tracks

and jumping school for the matches. He'd had a heart full of dreams. Unexpectedly his dreams had lain in tatters at his feet. Broken. Shattered. Destroyed. Breathe... breathe.....

They made sense of everything in Manchester. As a city, she made a vicious and glorious Mistress. She held them both, waiting for the moment when she would throw back her elegant neck and laugh like the devil. Fling them together and mend some hearts. Deep, deep, love and soul.

She loved him deeply. He loved her back.

Inevitable.

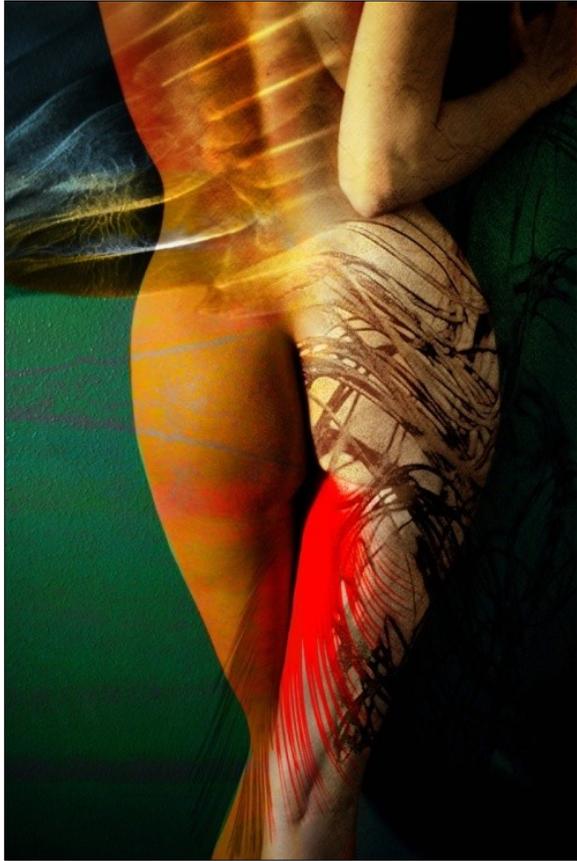
II

The time was right.

He buried his face in her lap and sniffed, long and hard and deep. The smell of her drove him wild. She was leaving soon and he did not want her to go. He believed that if he inhaled her smell, her pussy smell, that she would somehow be bound to him forever, and he to her. She adored him.

She wanted to brand him. Possess him. Make some deep red scar and smell him

back. She wanted to smell his burning flesh as she etched her initials into his skin. Truly madly deeply, baby... truly madly deeply.



He was lost in her. He no longer recognised himself as the man he had been and yet somehow he was the man he had always known himself to be. She, on the other hand was rising like a crazy dirt angel from the fires of hell. She spoke and flames of purple and orange danced around her lips. She fucked and sparks flew off, fending off all but the brave. She danced and somewhere an innocent fell. She would suffer no fools.

He was drawing something out of her that she somehow knew had always been there. Once in a trance it had shown itself; an iridescent midnight blue creature with wings of deep indigo fire, full of passion and rage. It has risen in front of her and she had recognised its power and feared this apparition. She was not ready to accept it. Right now, she was becoming it.

She mourned her losses quietly. She had asked for this. Over and over and over again she had invited this. Her intention had been clear and fixed. Her prayers sent off into the river or buried in the earth or let free on the wind, the things she was letting go of released into the heart of some raging pagan fire. Someone had commented upon her way with the fires. She immersed herself in the heart of it, understanding it like some wailing mutual orgasm that hurt as much as it pleased her. She would need strength to meet this transformation.

Lick lick lick... her quiet mourning leaving traces of silent salt tears running invisible down her cheeks. She lay on her back in order that they would flow (artfully) across her cheeks and down the side of her face, where she could then lick away her own tears.



Self sufficient to the last. She could fuck herself when she wanted now, now that she knew herself well. She could fuck him when she wanted now, now that they knew themselves well. He could fuck her when she permitted it.

His mourning was softer lately. He sighed and accepted. The grief that had once ripped him apart and left him bloody, raw and exposed without heart, spirit or soul, was now sitting quietly in a corner. He had found it necessary to risk himself wholly in order to release himself. She had taken him by the hand, looked him hard and straight in the eye and then shoved him over the edge with a brutal certainty. He had hated her for it then. He worshipped her for it now.

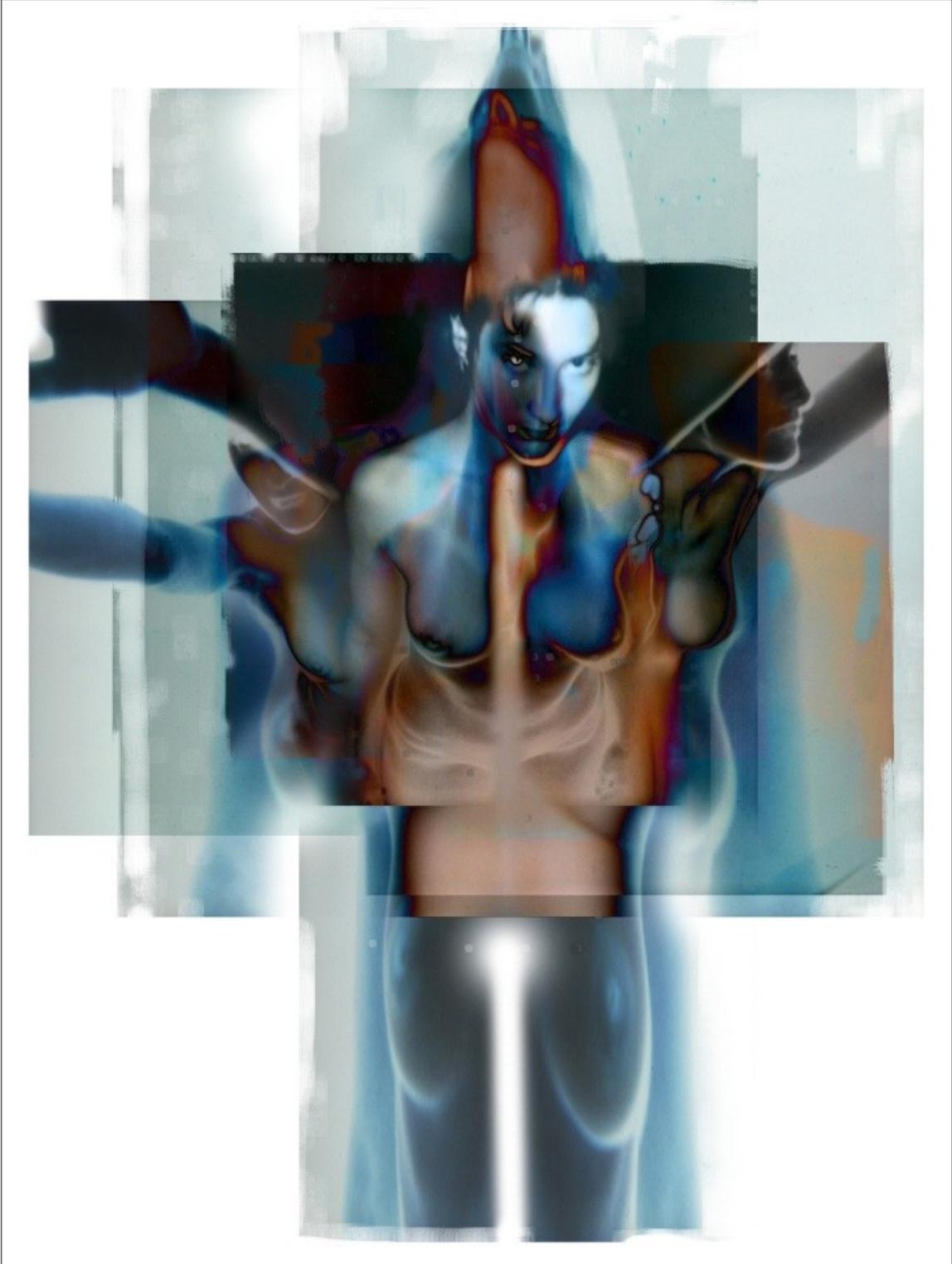
He picked out a heavy, deep brown coat made of wool and cut with the sharp edge

of good tailoring. She had picked out short skirt and high heels and then covered herself in a deep blue wool coat that perfectly offset his. They stood facing each other and smiled.

“We’re going to need these coats next week. It’s going to be fucking freezing over there.”

They were working the magick together now. Masculine and feminine principles in perfect balance. Ready to start from here. This moment when they step onto flight ---- for north-eastern Europe where a new future awaits them.

Bloody, stinking, vicious, yearning and loving. “Don’t settle for the one you can live with. Wait for the one you cannot live without.”



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BEAUTIFUL TWISTED

AN INTERVIEW WITH SHARRON KRAUS

By D M Mitchell

Sharron Kraus creates records and performs music and songs of trembling fragility welded to a current of shimmering darkness. Like many of the musicians and groups tentatively associated with the 'new folk' or 'psych-folk' scene, she freely utilises elements of traditional English music as well as American (in particular Appalachian) strains, weaving them into an otherworldly tapestry of convulsive beauty. Songs of love and loss, of pain and transcendence, madness and redemption

are placed against a backdrop of carefully woven, haunting instrumentation. Alongside several collaborations, (including the eerily gorgeous 'Yuletide' with Providence duo The Iditarod), she has released four solo albums, the most recent of which *The Woody Nightshade* dispensed with many of the traditional folk tools of the trade (such as the familiar use of banjo and fiddles) in favour of drums, electric guitar and bass. The result is something much more claustrophobic and reminiscent of 60s

introverts such as Syd Barrett, Nico as much as contemporary acts like Joanna Newsom.

Why folk music? How did you get into it?

It's one strand running through what I do - a prominent strand, but not the only one. As to the 'why': it's probably down to falling in love with folksinging in sessions - the way a room full of people can all sing together spontaneously and raise the roof. That'll always be one of my favourite experiences. Also I think the storytelling aspect of ballads is key.

How far back is your love rooted? At what age did you realise this?

I found folk sessions as a grad student, when I first came to Oxford. I'd already been listening to stuff like Fairport, though.

When did you start listening to the 'pure' folk stuff like Shirley Collins?

That's when - the singers in the local session were singing unaccompanied songs. I started borrowing records from one of the singers - stuff by June Tabor, The Watsons, Dick Gaughan, etc.

When did you decide to make the leap to being a performer?

I didn't - it kind of snuck up on me! It's hard not to start joining in, and once you do that, it's a small step to starting a song yourself. And at the same time I was also writing songs and singing in a goth band.

Those two genres seem pretty disparate.

Not at all. Some of the more gothic songwriters have crossover elements - people like Nick Cave (Murder Ballads), Leonard Cohen...

Of course.

Some of the songs I wrote at that point endured and got included on my first solo album.

How was that recorded? Did you have a definite idea of how you wanted it to sound or did it develop as part of the studio process?

It's the only thing I've recorded that didn't have a conscious recording plan. I just recorded the songs in a friend's basement studio, together with a group of friends I'd been playing music with. If I listen to it now, I don't really like the overall sound, but I still like the songs.

And how has your sound developed since that recording? I mean, what was the process?

I don't think I have one 'sound'. I think usually each record has a palette I work with, and maybe an underlying sonic identity, but things shift and change. My ears get sharper and more attuned to production and the effect of recording in different ways, and that's something I think about more and more.

As part of a hands-on learning process of shaping sound?

As part of that, but also as part of ongoing conversations I have with friends and collaborators about what works and what doesn't, what music affects us and what leaves us cold, etc.

The latest album has a somewhat different approach, especially in use of instrumentation. How did that come about?

The sound I ended up with was partly what happened when I started writing songs for multiple vocal parts - I started imagining the vocals would provide a fullness in the

high range, and then I started hearing bassy drums at the low end grounding them.

Then what happened in the middle sort of grew out of that. I think also, on a subconscious level, I was feeling bored with the poppy kind of folk that was becoming popular and wanting to distance myself from that.



Photo © Bruce Cardwell

There is a lot of weight given to the lyrical content of folk music, as opposed to (for example most rock). How much importance do you give to yours – within the overall structure of the music?

Lyrics are very important to me, but also important is the relationship between the lyrics and the music – it's not just poetry with music as an add-on.

And as an aside, there's a lot of rock that's pretty lyrically driven, and folk that's lyrically boring as hell!

Of course, but the general drive tends to be the other way.

Does it?

Awopbopalooobopalophbamboom.

Give me the lyrics of Nick Cave, Tom Waits, Patti Smith, Jim Morrison, David Bowie, etc over those of Kate Rusby, Chris Wood, etc any day!

I agree on all of the above. Where do your lyrics originate? In personal terms.

The lyrics that are most interesting are the ones that you don't have a clue where they're coming from, that seem to come from deeper than your own little brain. A lot of the time I'm waiting around for things to slot into place – I have an initial idea and then have to mess around with it, leave it and come back to it, sleep on it, etc until eventually it grows into a song. Everything anyone writes is written through their own experience, and I think the trick is to be able to use your own experience without being limited to writing about things you've literally experienced. Things have to resonate with your experience, but not be lifted directly from the pages of your diary. I could probably write endlessly on this subject, but I don't know that we'd get a deeper understanding of it – it's mysterious by nature.

The direction of most popular music over the last four or five decades has been inextricably linked with economics, with the 'market'. Where do you think that has brought us all today?

There'd be no pop music without the 'market', so that's a difficult question to answer. And more recently, the bottom of the market has dropped out – people can get music without paying for it now, which is an interesting problem for us musicians!

Very interesting times and it seems the market itself has created this situation.

I don't think that's the case: the market has no interest in self-destruction, surely? It's a different (anti-capitalist) trend that's led to people expecting music to be free.

The market reached its limits of expansion and imploded. Well for the music industry at least.

I have a different take on it - what happened to the music industry seems a specific problem that's separate from the general economic trouble we're in. The music industry obviously is suffering in the ways that all industry is suffering, but there's the added problem with music: unlike other more concrete commodities, it can be copied infinitely many times for free. Imagine if once someone had one apple they could replicate it and send apples to all their friends for free. No more work for apple growers! But this is probably too far of a digression!

I was going to ask you for your personal perspective on the current climate. How does it affect you and/or influence what you're doing?

I don't yet know - early days. I'm still managing to do okay, but I notice CD sales dropping off - I don't sell as many CDs when I tour. At least people are still coming to shows, and you can make money playing live, but I guess if we hit a real depression, that'll be a luxury people won't be able to afford.

Where do you see yourself going? Do you have definite goals?

I don't really have definite goals. One of the things I like about music is that it's a many-forking path and you don't know what will happen next. I guess the only real goal is to carry on feeling excited about making music

and getting to work with musicians who inspire me.

Thank you Sharron, that was great.

Thanks, it was interesting.

DISCOGRAPHY

Beautiful Twisted CD (Camera Obscura)
2003 - *Yuletide* CD (Elsie and Jack); a collaboration with The Iditarod
2004 - *Songs of Love and Loss* CD (Camera Obscura)
2006 - *The Black Dove* CD (Tompkins Square); a collaboration with Christian Kiefer
2006 - *Leaves From Off the Tree* CD/LP (Bo'Weavil); a collaboration with Meg Baird and Helena Espvall
2007 - *Right Wantonly A-Mumming* CD (Bo'Weavil); with Jon Boden, John Spiers, Ian Giles, Fay Hield, Ian Woods, Michael Tanner, Claire Lloyd, Graham Metcalfe and Giles Lewin
2008 - *The Fox's Wedding* CD (Durtro)
2008 - *Rusalnaia* CD (Camera Obscura); a collaboration with Gillian Chadwick
2008 - *Travellers Two* CD (Important); Tau Emerald, a collaboration with Tara Burke
2010 - *The Woody Nightshade* CD

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<http://www.myspace.com/sharronkraus>



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VENUS IN RAGS

By

David Gionfriddo

--*Timido ergo sum*, Renzo Caliarì laughed, scanning the newsbytes streaming across the Demarest Building's electronic ticker. *Sorry. Timeo, timeo. Call me next week and let me know how he does. And don't overdo the spiders and snakes.* On the corner, a gangly barker in an old NASA space helmet bounced a dancing tin marionette on the end of a wooden paddle. As he got closer, Renzo could see the puppet was a caricature of President-Elect Cervantes, dressed as a Mexican *bandito*. *Make me a big fat Wynne Godchaux and you've got yourself a sale*, he told the man, leaning to drop a plastic Vend-All™ token into an empty Mason jar. All up and down the avenue, people breathed deeply the cool spring gusts, laughing, singing lazily, punching the air. It made it that much harder to think about sitting across the conference table from Gunshy Godchaux and his ticky-tack pissboys.

He was already eight minutes late for the meeting at Kinetix, and that would make his news that much harder to break. They had hired Gestalt Media to work with Mil Krenzel, a hot new hypertext writer with a string of big sellers. His trips appealed to young and old alike, but on the holocausts, his gelatinous form, his darting eyes lost in folds of splotchy skin, made the test audiences recoil. And he did not possess what Renzo would call a ready wit. The labored maneuverings of his mind, which resulted in delicately structured drafts needing almost no editing, came off, in a conversational setting, as something approaching pugilistic dementia. Gestalt was the expert at hyping the hardcases, and Renzo had dispatched Gareth Heiss, their top neurotrainer, to help Krenzel develop a functional agoraphobia. Heiss had already unloaded the big stuff - car crashes, natural disasters, violent crimes - and was now fine-tuning, drilling him on the smaller hazards -- wasp's nests, ambient infections, snakebites. But the conditioning took time, more time than a cheapskate like Godchaux was willing to fund. By the end of next week, Renzo would assure them, Heiss would have their cash cow so jittery about airborne fungi and UV rays that he would be a full-blown recluse. That, he thought, they could work with.

Kinetix was founded in 2018 to market the *Total War* games. These state-of-the-art multi-player environments had sold tens of millions of units worldwide, in the process changing fashion and language. Players striving to enslave the planet began dressing and speaking like its avatars, even forming residential communes and surgically adding "Khaled al-Masri" forehead scars or amputating ears to replicate "Lt. de Peyster's" Zimbabwe insurgency wounds. By the mid-2020s, Congressional hearings on the so-called "Ragnarok" school gassings and a series of state parental-consent laws regulating cosmetic mutilation caused the company to branch out into infant conditioning programs, young-adult cannibal romances and hypertext self-help packages like *Loving Your Parasites* and Ichi Obata's *Do Nothing! Get Everything!* The firm merged with pharmaceutical conglomerate Paulus GMBH in 2026, catapulting famous cost-cutter Godchaux into the corner office and completing the transformation of Kinetix from hacker hobby to corporate jungle. As he walked into the majestic lobby, Renzo couldn't help but notice the

vintage PowerMac behind safety plexiglass, a small nod to the conglomerate's homespun beginnings.

Godchaux's 8th floor conference room, all bamboo and ivory with a great segmented ebony conference table that must have cost an Imam's ransom, was the picture of elegance and taste, arranged in the Eastern Dynastic Revival style that all the multis courting the exploding Asian markets rushed to adopt. The glass wall, centered by a stained glass panel of the Green Dragon, faced east, and caught the rays of the morning sun. With the flip of a switch, the halves of the table would slide apart, revealing a carefully-recreated mountain stream, fed by pumps beneath the bamboo flooring, and ending in a stand of artificial sawgrass that coyly led the eye to a costly-looking Han Dynasty screen. It was all so tasteful. The only clutter disrupting the carefully-crafted *feng shui* was Godchaux himself, hands clasped behind the back, staring out over his city, and the trio of black-clad yes-men that made up his movable geek chorus.

--*Sorry I'm late, all*, Renzo said. *Hung up in the Nervous Pride parade.*

--*Perish the thought, prof*, Godchaux intoned. *A little good news will make it all better, eh? All things in time.*

--*That's nice*, Renzo said. *Wordsworth?*

--*No*, Godchaux said, signaling one of his assistants to fetch a mask of fresh Oxy, *Lou Rawls, I believe.*

Renzo smiled, opening his iScreen. *So very, very underrated.*

OK, magic time, he thought. He had done this dog-and-pony show so many times, it was almost reflex. Renzo even amazed himself as his pointer nimbly moved across the screen, highlighting and expanding charts tracing Krenzel's rise from nervenet non-entity to up-and-comer to phenom, to the very edge of saturation. He dipped in and out of a canned video clip of the Ottmar Ramedge holocaust on Self-Salvage, mixing close-ups of the host and audience members with AboutFace™ instanalysis of muscle movements and facial tics that connoted tedium, aggravation, drifting attention. It was an easy segue into Heiss' background and conditioning theory, and status reports on the "boot camp" and its progress, the growing fear of outside in the brain of their artist.

--*Beautifully done*, Godchaux said, leaning in on his elbows, *but tell me some stuff I don't know.*

--*Spoken like a leader*. Renzo described the man that Mil would become, his energies funneled into the production of more and better works, his mind undistracted by the world outside his door, a beautiful, lustrous shell accreting around him, making him an object of, in turn, fascination, passion, obsession. Once Heiss would pack up, Phase Two would begin. They tagged it the Salinger Plan. Darnell and Spinoza, ex-Main Justice who worked with Witness Protection, would disappear Krenzel, arranging semi-annual relocations, scrambling phone signals, bouncing IP addresses through Australasian relays, and arranging appearance-altering polymer implants for face and body. If sales lagged, any number of fabricated deaths, accompanied by leaked burial video and autopsy reports, could be arranged.

--*We're going to make Miss American Pie his bitch*, Renzo crowed. *Boy won't be able to find his face in the shaving mirror. He'll be a ghost haunting himself.*

--Positively crystalline, Godchaux said. *Think you can disappear his lawyer and his CPA, for real?*

--*We don't get into actual physical death. Cops, probate, imposters. Too many...variables...But we do refer...*

--*The new AmbiGauge™ is on your desk, Sadie called to him as he strode past main reception at the Gestalt, Ltd. HQ. Video buys on Scrambled Eggs have topped out, but Gilly Wave is upped from murmur to commotion.*

He stopped for an instant to read the digitab Sadie handed him. *Between Friends was the high water mark for insemcoms, but our little treasure could turn into something yet, mistress. Anything else on tap?*

--*Lord Sweetwater videoconference at 3, Won't say what about.*

--*Without surprises, Renzo mumbled offhandedly, we'd all expire, like wind-up toys.*

By 2050, media promotion had become so sophisticated that the biggest film idols, the greatest pop icons were virtually unknown. It seemed to defy logic, but as his mentor Sweetwater used to say, *Logic is for bores and peasants; ours is the realm of the irrational.* And none could know better. Gestalt's CEO had been humble Gervais Sweetwater, a promotional assistant at EMI, when he began to climb the industry ladder. He had seen the satin jackets, the gold records, the private jets, drug flame-outs and tabloid romances, and he ascended the rubble as the internet became a worldwide distraction and trickled valuable product to the masses for free. With the mainline of public demand running dry, profits could only be sustained by cutting costs: movies became shaky hand-held pseudo-docs; television a rookery of home-videos, cheaply-made stunt- and game-shows; music a net of narrowcast, homemade tunes cobbled together on laptops. Nothing was worth seeing or hearing. The media combines became dinosaurs, shedding artists and staff while they frantically persecuted their own fans and searched for an inroad back to the Eden of public imagination. One night in the endless winter of 2015, Gervais was reviewing the anemic PPV numbers for *Tourette's Family Reunion!: Unrated*, when Newton's apple struck him on the crown. And nothing would be the same.

All at once, he knew, the old models, the ballyhoo and spectacle, were a flash limousine careering toward a beckoning gorge. Saturation, not moderation, was the enemy. He would take things underground, play the game of whispers and implications. He would be the wallflower in a roomful of whores. His canvas would not be the tin ear or the bleary eye, but the relatively neglected slate of individual invention, where consumers could conjure their own stars.

Jacaranda Kindall was the first to benefit, and for her Lord Sweetwater always harbored a fondness that only grew after her untimely suicide by poison at 22. Hers had been a crude and unassuming demo, just her lovely, punishing voice moving from trill to dirge, accompanied by Rajiv, her tabla player, and the old aborigine Harkora on didgeridoo, a hard red sun setting on Uluru in the background. No production values to speak of, but Sweetwater always had a gut, and there was something in the careless way she handled a tiger snake, the unusual lyric about the snake goddess ushering tribal boys into adulthood, that spoke to him, that stirred a kind of

chaste passion. All his genius would be spent making her a success. First, old Muslim riot film, carefully damaged and leaked to the Web, fueled blind gossip items and passing newsmagazine references to an Indonesian music event so sexually suggestive it had set off civil demonstrations where, of course, all video and audio recordings were burned. These rumblings embellished House of Commons debates on public anti-burqa laws, and Kindall testified from behind a screen to the volatility of Islamic temperament. Her song was “reconstructed” for several late-night spins on the World Service, and some art photos, her golden hair surrounding vague features rising from a plume of geyser steam, had pride of place in a Hans Rittger show at the Tate Modern. A tour was cancelled, as was a rumored cameo as Joan of Arc in a Terence Davies musical comedy whose financing fell through on the eve of principal photography, and a star was incubated. The public could not get enough. In fact, they could not get any, which was the whole point.

But there would be no happy ending for “Little Randi.” Sweetwater had not yet perfected his techniques and, with no counselor at her side, Jacaranda was driven deeper and deeper into depression by her seclusion and secrecy. On the eve of *Forgiven Sins*’ much anticipated ECD release, she ordered a showing of *Diva* from her suite at the Mayfair Hotel, swallowed two dozen Seconal tabs, and washed them down with half a bottle of plum wine left over from the launch party. The funeral was a secret operation, for she yet had months of commitments to break, and she was buried in a country churchyard in New South Wales, beneath a headstone whose epitaph Sweetwater had personally chosen:

Who will hear the final song/That flutters up like steam/On bird-proud wings, a refugee/From hustler’s giddy dream/What madrigal will lead us on/Through countryside and town/’Til, flower-like, we touch the dirt/And bed the nightmare down

It was Juvenal Hartline, but when asked by the newscasts later, he claimed to have penned it himself. The young girls ate it up. Gervais quit the company, went into seclusion with a psychologist, a neurosurgeon, and an ex-*Times* city editor, and in March 2019, opened Gestalt in a former Soho leather shop. The rest, as they said, was herstory. Renzo was chilled and excited to see the next chapter he would write.

When he entered, the conference room was already full. There was his assistant Magdalena; Desmond Quarles from Metrics; Odalys Siempre, the new Internet person; Chief Scheduler Rainer Hutt; and Arky Hedgepeth, Sweetwater’s unctuous, brilliantined proxy, whose task seemed to be to skulk around making unwanted recommendations about things he barely understood. And hovering above the Holo-cone at the center of the long glass table was Lord Sweetwater, all three dimensions and 24 inches of him, a silk dressing gown loosely wrapped to give everyone a gander at the 30 ponds he had chemically melted. Of course, no one with Sweetwater’s money ever had to age, but the anti-mutability team at the Dworsky Clinic had given him their finest work and, as a result, he looked barely half of his 72 years, something he considered essential to the scouting of sexy young singers.

--*Where were you on holiday, your Lordship?* Renzo asked. Sweetwater and his peers were pioneers in the new *louche* tourism, which scoured the Third World for cheap, unexplored pockets of crumbling grandeur.

--*Lovely little spa just outside of Mitú. Colombia. Along the Vaupes. They have a marvelous little clinic there – all expats, of course – where they do this very smart curare infusion. 30% metabolic reduction.*

Hedgepeth wasted no time in chiming in. *You do seem rather more relaxed, Lordship.*

--Still the odd mortar fire to keep the rebs at bay, but it does prevent the place from being overrun by your Rodeo Drive housewives.

--Can't make an omelet, et cetera, et cetera, Rainer droned, as if to put a period to the digression. Only he and Renzo could talk to Sweetwater this way; Renzo had his history and only Rainer could master the subtle web of concerts, interviews, travel and appearances/disappearances on which their profitability depended. I'm anxious to see this new --he paused for effect -- presence...

--Fine thought, the tiny image said, waving his hand and remotely dimming the lights. Then je presente... The Ayoreo Angel...

As Sweetwater's image faded, it was supplanted by a misty, borderless vision of deep, sea-green jungle night, dappled by the needles of pearl equatorial moonlight that pierced the heavy rainforest canopy. Over a dim rustle of footfalls moving along the fern-carpet, they could discern a gaunt, graceful figure emerging, cautious, limbs full of feline instinct. It was a girl, on whom hung the torn remnants of a cotton blouse and a summery linen skirt. Her hair was black and straight and swooped around her face and down her back like a comet's tail. Her body was moist with rain as the shadow subsided and she revealed a face hungry, lost, yet as structurally precise as a Nautilus shell. Her hazel eyes, almost Asian in their casual knowingness, shone with some *sub rosa* unrest that smoldered like a coal fire. Her lovely mouth moved in words of silent need, and Stillwater filled the absence with his distressingly affectless narration.

--Las mendigas, the staff would call them. Unfortunate byproducts of the coupling between the medical tourists and the homegrown hostesses. Many of them are turned out for reasons of economic necessity and form little encampments from which they subsist by begging, foraging, what have you.

--So sad, Odalys added superfluously.

--Indeed. Poor urchins, rife for exploitation. Damn shame, really. But this one had...a quality.

--Clearly, Arky added. The video image swirled and changed direction, to let the room absorb 360° of her. She bent to pick up a handful of coins, her brow as defiant as a runway model's.

--Lady S., who has always taken quite an active interest in this aspect of the work, took rather a shine to this one, and managed to somehow convey an invitation to our lodge. Although language divided us, she seemed fascinated with our collection of soundcards. Yma Sumac and Miriam Makeba and the like. Well, long story short, she had somehow, through mimicry, most likely, this fantastically unique vocal style. In an instant, the room was filled with a field recording of what seemed to be three voices at once, a sinuous line that carried a simple folk melody into a rhythm break like the clicking of forest insects, and then exploded into a starburst of sweet, incanted songbird notes, before finding the melody again in a shower of mysterious, aboriginal phrases. Even Odalys, clinical behind her tortoise-shell microfocals, seemed shaken and emotionally displaced. The overall effect was like being in the presence of a lovely, anomalous natural event, a sunshower or a springtime flurry. For several long minutes, nobody spoke. Desmond threw in first.

--A young Barbara Carrera. With a little Isabella Cantu. Claro Que Si era. But not medicated.

--An angrier Hope Sandoval, with a little criminal edge. Like the carhop girl from Cocalero. Blanqui...

--Blanca Donaire. But more inviting. More available. Post-Darna. I'm thinking a virginal Talisa Soto.

--Or a wiser, more weathered Selena. But not a sound like hers.

--Oh, no, no, Odalys said. A sound like nobody's. And a bearing like a more natural Graziella. Graziella without the stylist or the eelskin bodice or the cliff-diving boyfriends.

--Does she have a name? Rainer finally asked.

Sweetwater breathed a little sigh at his end of the connection. *Damned if I know. Goes without saying, I think, that recordkeeping is not the locals' forte.* The windowglass lightened, and the Amazon vision faded to smoke.

--Needless to say, this project is all upside. And none of the usual industry baggage the strivers tote along. *Pure modeling clay for us to shape as we may.*

--Within permissible ethical bounds, Renzo offered. Everything was recorded, after all, and these sorts of statements had a way of returning to haunt.

--Nearly goes without saying. He wondered if Gonsalves in Mexico City West could scare up some material that might show their young charge's talents to good effect. *Maybe get Canciones de Luz thinking along the lines of Zulema's soundtrack work?*

Bit by bit, Renzo found himself checking out, lulled to insentience by the usual brainstorming blather. Something about positioning this nameless waif, probably rendered defenseless by culture shock, as an avenging spirit of the vanquished forest, duets with the usual coterie of social-issue scolds, globecast benefits for Colombian orphans, blessed by South American crusaders-for-hire. From the silence and rhythmless finger-tapping on the other end of the line, Renzo imagined Sweetwater's impatience at this conventional thinking rising to dangerous levels. By days' end, he would be tasked with devising the antipromotional strategy, and Mags and he would be on the magnarail south. He was already kicking around some strategies, little pulses of sheet-lightning for Sweetwater's ears only.

--A fashion spread...Lilypads, leopards and Lepidoptera. *Fer-de-lance body armor. Volcanic ash and tourmaline crystals. A cape of bird-of-paradise feathers. Shot by Raisa or Creg LaCreg, on every commercial digiwall.* Hedgepeth could be tiresome, but he was adept at leaving his detractors too bewildered to profit.

--Mr. Calliari, Sweetwater concluded, *see that the brains in Branding Module start working on a name. And let's touch base again after the evening 'Gauge is in.*

Gervais Sweetwater was calculating, visionary, passionate in the way that a former generation of gentry were allowed to be, before everything had been reduced to debits and credits. As befit a man in the business of reshaping the human mind, he was imaginative in ways that, to the ordinary world, closely resembled madness. Not only did it make him a subject of public fascination, Renzo reflected, it also left him refreshingly open to sideways strategies. Renzo was a very large fan, and loved the semi-annual sojourns to WildWind, Sweetwater's Calatrava-

revival fortress on Isla Nueva in New Cuba. Renzo tipped some cane sugar into a demitasse of Turkish coffee thick as cake frosting and counted the volumes on the shelves of WildWind's library, one of the nation's biggest. But it was a library with a difference. The tens of thousands of vintage volumes – sorted into themed salons for Painting, Love, Travel, Antiquity, *etc.* – were shrink-wrapped in clear plastic, their covers sealed in individual combination locks, whose digits Sweetwater's archivist Moraine transcribed on slips of paper and immediately burned. They were never read or loaned, and only rarely seen by outsiders.

--I love them, Sweetwater said, but I have always been afraid to open and read them, as if their contents, the tripping verses, the dusky vistas, would fly away like Pandora's devils. He seemed not a bit sad about the allure of their forbidden contents. Beauty and wisdom, he said, they don't abide. As I'm sure you've observed.

--Like a private zoo, Renzo said, or a prison.

--More like a reliquary. A repository of some sort of spiritual energy. The remains of the race's soul. Never to be dissipated.

Across the room, Magdalena, demurely dressed in a high-necked blouson and grey cotton skirt, tailored in the chic suffragette style, gazed into a glass case filled with 19th-century miniatures, and scratched sketches in an antique moleskin notebook. Renzo respected the care she took with her style and accessories, but sometimes felt she tried too hard. She could be off-putting, like a theme-store assistant, but she was diligent, punctual, and never lost her composure. And he had to admit that her vintage ink tattoo, a gold and eggshell rendering of Klimt's *Water Serpents* that swam from wrist to clavicle, and an ass-length ponytail barber-poled in rust-red and umber, were cool icebreakers with the arts caste. She had her own money, pollution credits from a sulfur leak that killed her dad, and that meant she didn't have to hound him for raises and supplemental bennies. They had a nice understanding.

Never one to overlook a pretty woman, Sweetwater sidled over and let a hand flutter onto her hip.

--Interested in enamel-work?

She delicately cross-hatched a background and lowered her book for Sweetwater to see. *I'm more attracted to your cameos. Italian?*

--Volterra, to be exact. You have a keen eye. He turned back to Renzo. I love these small objects. To me, they've always been emblems of what we do, plucking beauty out of the air and crystallizing it in lovely little souvenirs.

From far down the hallway, D'Uberville's heels clacked on the marble floor. He materialized at the threshold, holding his master's snifter of Armagnac. Will there be anything else, sir?

--I'll bet Magdalena is hot and tired after the long trip. Why don't you get her a bathing suit and turn on the poolside lights? Nothing like a nightswim. She gave Renzo a look and waited for the nod, then, with a blushing smile to their host, she let the valet lead her away. Sweetwater watched her move, buffing fingerprints from the surface of his display case with end of his robe's satin belt.

--*She has quite a sturdy build*, he said finally. *Could be quite attractive, in a certain light.* He looked at Renzo in a way that was mischievous without intimacy. *I don't suppose you ever...dallied...?*

--*Not at all. That's for clowns and amateurs. No good can come.* Remembering Sweetwater's sweet tooth for ingénues, he instantly regretted his tone. Wasn't this, after all, the guy rumored to be the inspiration for Countess' *Love the Way You Hate Me*, and La Gioconde's *Little Boy Lost*? The sign-on tones of his holo-deck reminded him daily of the wreckage his boss left in his wake.

--*Stout lad*, he smiled. *There's plenty of the other once the workday's done. Let's take our drinks out by the pool.*

Sweetwater slid a fader switch and the helium lamps along his great oblong pool began to glow with a gauzy, rose light, picking out the sleek Krstic sculpture, sticks of Pacific Modern patio furniture, the green-and-lapis tiles that framed the water's edge. As he made his way to the great marble bench, Renzo saw a shadowshape pushing wave patterns toward the steps that led out of the shallow end. Bronze hands clutched the steel ladder and, bit by bit, the water surrendered the glistening hair, the smooth neck, the gently rippling shoulders of a woman, unapologetic in her nakedness, oblivious to the eyes that studied her. Without a thought of covering up, she turned, expressionless, and walked, erect and graceful, toward them.

--*First impressions are lasting impressions, eh?*

She moved like mist on riverwater, Renzo thought. He feared that any greeting, any sort of touch or acknowledgement, would demystify her, trivialize her, drag her into the world of slaves. He made a mental note to avoid this at any cost. Her eyes were unreadable, ice-perfect as gemstones, but the tight line of her mouth held the potential for conflict. She was a strong animal, waiting for a rival to decide on a submissive posture. Part of him wanted to tangle, and it unnerved him. He nodded gently to her, letting his eyes go where they would. The girl looked for an instant to Sweetwater for direction, then walked on, unconcerned.

--*She has a wonderful lack of engagement*, Renzo said. *We can really use that. Takes month to drill it into most people. But she'll need to establish rapport with her...handlers...*

Gervais swirled the cubes in his blood-red tumbler. *Oh, not to worry, lad. Dr. Katie is coming next week. Mexican, I think. Forensic ethnolinguist from the University of Miami. She's going to patch together something we can use.* He drifted for a moment. *Charming woman.*

--*Ha. There's a surprise*, Renzo said. His eyes were drawn by the sight of Mags, emerging from the changing room in a gold sealskin maillot, towel slung over a pale shoulder, frozen in place before the figure of the naked woman, who silently, carefully approached, laying delicate fingers on Magdalena's decorated shoulderblade, tracing along her arm the eggshell line of a woman's back, buttock, thigh.

--*Very good*, Sweetwater clucked. *We may already be well on the way.*

So Magdalena had been promoted, detailed to help guide this new discovery along the path to wealth and influence, a path that few could understand and even fewer could hew through the impenetrable underbrush of sensation, intention and analysis. It was a great deal more subtle and sensitive than the work she had done for Renzo, but she took to it with an alacrity and verve that made him despair of ever reclaiming her services. Lord Sweetwater had sequestered

them all – Mags, the girl now called Vyasha, Dr. Kathryn Licht, Jonas the record producer, a handful of field recordists and a team of stylists – in a wing of Wildwind, scheming how to prepare the public for their new phenomenon, and vice versa. Renzo watched the team gel for a fortnight, then resolved to pack his bags.

--Yes, Sweetwater nodded. *Now we need you to make straight a path through the wilderness. To prepare the way, as only you know how.* Renzo fidgeted with an obsidian paperweight in a Native American firebird design and remembered the way Mags would lick her lips in concentration when she thought no one could see. *Demand and desire. Too important to be left to the consumer. Haven't I always said so?*

--Repeatedly, Renzo said.

Renzo rubbed the sleep from his eyes and looked out from his floor-to-ceiling windows at the pale-rose Indian summer city morning. It had been three weeks since he left Wildwind and, while Mags had been assembling her team, Renzo had been working the phones, talking to promoters and market-conditioners, doing the spade work to launch a full-on ghost campaign. Magdalena had just hyperstreamed him some test recordings they had made with a local tabla/kora backing duo and there was enough trembling animal life in them to support the next phase of his project. He would clean himself up, call in to Sadie for messages and take a *plein air* stroll down to his accomplices in the Rising, that West Side neighborhood that was stirring from the ashes of the Shelter Riots. Poxx Magid and the rest of the Have-Nots danced on the edge of the law, and his colleagues wanted nothing to do with them, but Renzo knew they had a feel for the streets, and would stunt for a few hundred dollars. They could be very useful and, in a business like his, it never hurt to have some secret weapons. They could help him get “Panoptica” and “Malacuna” into the mix of sounds and symbols that comprised the City’s swirling info-ocean.

He wasn’t one of those executives at the Schoneberg who feared the rays of the sun, who rode the climate-controlled walkways to the uptown office blocks. On days like this, when the mercury hung below 110°, he loved to spread on the zinc oxide paste and parade in the open air, relishing the sights and sounds of the tattered city. From the street, the sidewalks and storefronts had a well-worn look that reassured him, made him feel like he was part of something living and durable. The upscale porno shops and self-enhancement clinics of the West 70s gave way to cheap food stalls and sidewalk peddlers, their blankets crammed with bootleg software and counterfeit handbags. From a streetcorner came the crazy chatter of two dozen caged finches and parakeets, some of whom trilled phrases in obscure Eastern dialects.

The Saffir Building at 36th and 8th marked the entrance to the Rising, a barren stretch of smoke-stained storefronts and half-wrecked apartment building strewn with glass and shattered masonry. Aside from a pair of dazed-looking streetwalkers and a nervous adrenochrome pusher spastically spinning a yo yo, there was nothing above ground. But the muffled rockabilly music leaking up from underfoot told Renzo that the Cellars were already alive with action. On the next long block, from beneath a cluster of burned-out Ocelot chassis, the sound of a Saint-Saens sarabande percolated skyward. He knew he was nearing the street entrance to Cappadocia, the favored hangout of Poxx and the Have-Nots.

The six-year rule of the Christian Reclamation from 2024-2030 had changed America in ways no one had foreseen. Under President Highsmith and the Congress he controlled, abortion and contraception had been criminalized, with a new division of Justice devoted to eradicating the practices in the areas still under federal control. Nobody knew how many of the 3.3 million babies born in 2026 were accidental, but for years, the number had hovered around 750,000. Suddenly, America had an army of dispossessed children, a legion the pundits had dubbed the Unwanted, or, more poetically, the Forsaken. By the early 2040s, there were half a million runaway kids, meeting up in every major U.S. city. New York had a bunch of these makeshift gangs – the Naked and the Dead, the March Hares, La Cliqua – but a chance meeting with an East Village public defender at an after-hours Omnivox party had led Renzo to the Have-Nots. They were mostly teenage squatters, less interested in bigtime crime than aggressive mischief, anything to vex the status quo. They were perfect partners for Gestalt. They were fearless, had a taste for the outrageous and loved diverting the cultural currents. Renzo could always count on them for a little late-night tagging or to start a commotion around some budding infostar. Jail was no big deal, just some hot meals and a mattress, a good deal.

In the corner of the room, beneath the great oval mirror, sat Poxx, fanned by Jezzie Garside and a younger girl Renzo did not recognize, a hard-eyed rail of a kid whose shoulder bore the raw-pink snowshoe of the Have-Nots brand, the tip of an ob-gyn's forceps.

--Ha ha, Daddy C, Poxx laughed. Sid down, and clue us in. What manner of dirty work you need now?

Renzo smiled. *--Trying to hustle me out the door? You're going to make me feel unwanted.*

The new girl cast a wary eye and swiveled in her chair, giving Renzo only the back of her magenta ducktail to stare at. Stam the enforcer, perched at the bar, threw her a glance to let her know things were all right.

--Far from it, Poxx said. Don't want you taking your trade to the Little Wanderers. Two more, he said, waving Jez over to the coffee station. Saint-Saens gave way to the desolate pleading of the Stones' "Salt of the Earth." It made everything seem smaller, sadder.

Renzo pulled a microdeck from his jacket pocket and laid it on the table. *--A stunt. A seizure job. One of your guys auditions my girl's tracks in the heart of Times Square, and gets his mind blown.*

--How bad?

--Just a little grand mal. A picturesque swoon, couple ecstatic moans, glassy eyes, enough to draw a crowd. An ambulance job.

--Maybe Moda. He did a little acting. Needs to make the grade.

--Nice initiation.

--Hey, Big Papa. Gotta earn the burn.

Stam clicked off the envirosound, by now some obscure turntable gymnastics from the millennium's infancy, and slipped in Renzo's microdisc. The tabla was forest canopy rain, animal heartbeat, capillary pulse, and the kora danced in angles all around the wordless

throatsong. Jez looked at Poxx with a desolate, lonely kind of amazement, like one enjoying the imprisonment of rain over a strange landscape. Poxx stared into his cup with dark intention, as if to hide his face from the others. *The back of my neck is all a-tingle*, he joked. *You may have some real sweet poison there.*

--*Music to seize to*, Renzo smiled. He imagined a lovely bit of stunting, a scrum of tourists, street thieves, beggars and omnicastr junior honchos pawing to get a look at the fallen scruff, his body spasming quietly, his eyes intent on some mesmeric inner thrill of bushsounds. He heard the whispers and read the here-then-gone crawl-items asking about the source of this pure and vaguely perilous entertainment. He felt the mystery ripening in the deepminds of the millions, fighting toward the sun, to be born as curiosity, then love, then, if they did their jobs right, as soft dependency.

--*Thanks for the mud*, Renzo said. *Sure the new guy can sell it?*

Poxx took a long sip. *He's uberscale. Ran away from a prep on the island. The good side. You bought yourself a real Hella Hayes.*

--*You're still the goods*, Renzo said, slipping out into the sooty air. It was a good morning

--*You'll want to scope this, Mr. C.* Sadie brandished a tablet in front of Renzo's face. He paused to look down at the brilliant green screen, dotted with newsblast icons. Check *Soundz To Die For*. He pressed the icon and there it was, as promised, a full-fledged hullabaloo on the sidewalk outside Haddix Worldwide. Moda, a bit thicker around the middle than he had guessed (mommy issues – he had seen it before) lay flat on his back, the steel knuckle-spikes scoring the synthetic paving. A news hostess, thin enough to cause concern, narrated the tale: the boy stricken, gagging, eyes rolling in his head, whisked to the District Triage Center, his personal possessions yielding an unlabelled home-cooked microdisk filled with strange sounds, sounds whose alien nature was magnified as rumors passed from nurse to doctor to administrator to newshawk. By now, the disc had vanished and was reported to contain ritual music dedicated to some little-known ancestral nature demons. Police, emergency and psychic hygiene officials were combing the area for the disc or information regarding its contents. A linkscreen at blast's end showed the story being picked up by a dozen screens, sites and casts, and YourVoice™ was full of worried bystanders hypothesizing about the sounds, their origins, and the nefarious aims behind them. It was swelling into a micropanic. *God, you are good*, Renzo thought. By tomorrow, sidewalk mics all over the city would be intercepting bits and pieces of hushed and fearful predictions, a sky filled with psychoactive sound. It was a perfect precursor to his status call with Magdalena and her team.

He preferred holding remote conferences in Hedgepeth's office. Renzo loved the form-fitting durafoam chairs, the rich assortment of legal and semi-legal liqueurs, the big, vivid holoscreen. And it was always worthwhile to grab a peek at Maren, Arky's wonderfully exaggerated Queen Bee, the only assistant on the floor who could return the boys' strafing glances with an equally virulent hunger.

--*Arky back from the driving range?* Renzo asked.

Maren smiled. *From the look of him, he's still perfecting his fade.*

--As are we all, Ms. Parvenu, Renzo said. As are we all.

Arky seemed a little jittery as he swirled his Pisco on ice. There was no record company to foot the bill; this was Sweetwater's project and Gestalt would have to fund the R&D. If they were onto a winner, Lord S. could play Col. Parker for decades. If their Galatea tanked, the loss would be all his. Bad for everybody. Arky switched on the holodeck and the office was filled with staticky ghosts.

--Fucking ozone scrambles the signal on hot days, Arky said. Seems like technology is always trading one set of gremlins for another.

Like my career, Renzo thought, adjusting his spine to Arky's guest chair. Placing pop songs in teenage titty flicks and candy commercials made a lot more sense than disintegrating identities for fun and profit. Arky waved his tuner around like some kind of colicky Toscanini, and one by one, the figures of Magdalena and her cadre of experts swarmed into focus. As she did the introductions, Renzo thought he heard a note of distaste in her voice. She sounded like a foodco lobbyist that had just gotten a few more rat hairs into the punters' NutraSpread.

--Gentlemen, she said. I think you'll be happy. We're creating something special. Something very special. She turned to Vyasha with a look of contrition that was indescribable. One that Renzo had never seen before. One by one, she introduced the digital figures whose shades filled the room: Syreeta, the Sri Lankan runway model; Dr. Licht; Jonas; Akili St. Loire, the dj and arranger; trainer Ed Trautwein and, finally, the designer Dayanarah, who seemed to control the room, her graceful body draped in garnet and yellow silk, embracing a sea-green divan.

One by one, the creative team, assembled at a prohibitive cost known by only a handful of insiders, explained their aims and their student's progress. Syreeta discussed grace of posture and motion, and showed the repertoire of walks she had taught Vyasha: the crowded party cat-stalk, the Sunday promenade, the red-carpet strut, all drilled into her without sacrificing the surefooted animal grace born on the forest floor. Licht untangled the previously-indecipherable strands of her tribal song-language, so organic to her music-making, and clued them in on the romance roots that enabled her to engage in charmingly broken Italian-French-Spanish-Catalan Spanish-Romany. Jonas and St. Loire played important, subtly colored sound-visions they had freshly recorded with string quartets, Carpathian choral singers, harmonium, flamenco guitar, bandoneon, oud and tape samples from the length and breadth of human expression. And then Dayanarah, ageless and weightless, rose from her perch, and, with a wave of her hand, called in a march of models wearing elegant ensembles in yellow-green snakeskin, bird-of-paradise feathers, satin, lynx and lioness, set off in belts, anklets and breastplates inlaid with amber, chrysocolla, jasper, mother of pearl, carnelian and petrified wood. At the end of the train was a series of duster coats in chameleon skin that shimmered and changed colors and let the wearers sink into walls, the folds of curtains. Even through the broadcast-snow, the collection sent a sweet and thrilling eyeshock through Renzo, filling him with excitement. Shimmering under her angelface, over the gently rolling muscles of her new, gym-sculpted form, the effects would be staggering. And what was most killing was that fans would never be able to get more than glimpses and glances. Arky looked at Renzo as if to say *money well spent.*

Already, "Zona da Mata," a swirling trance of organ, bass and sleigh bells, with vocal counterpoint from a Dade gospel choir, was ready to be streamed and pressed on micros for the mail order houses and the City's Minutes of Pleasure multishops. The AmbiGauge, and Gestalt's national spiderweb of ambient mics told the story: the Times Square incident lived like a dormant virus in the urban music fans, who still ached to unlock a mystery that had grown tendrils of urban legend. Subliminals had been tucked into the quiet parts of the biggest and darkest independent films. The popular self-cutting artist Jack Antic had even made a "killer song" reference while hosting the Sexwork Awards two nights earlier at the Bardo Plane.

--*The iron is hot*, Renzo said.

--*White hot*, Arky nodded.

As the team faded behind masks of self-satisfaction, Renzo realized that the only one who had nothing to say was Vyasha herself. But they were accustomed to doing it all for their clients. "Overnight sensation," once a phenomenon, had been reduced to a business plan. With computer holofex, Audiofix™ for off-key singing, and state-of-the-art surgical modifications, there was no one that could not be made an object of envy, admiration. With Vyasha's beauty and skill, their work would be simple. He felt a sort of satisfaction as he sat in the silence of the afterhours office, debriefing a Magdalena that had grown wearier and more put-upon than he had ever seen.

--*We have made straight the way*, he told Magdalena.

--*Ever thought about what we do*, she said. *I mean, really thought?*

--*Those with talents are God's jewels*, he replied. *We simply create the settings, carve and polish the facets, to make them shine. To make them eternal. After all, making stars is easy; they're only fire. The art is ensuring their light lives after the fire burns out. That's how we earn our keep, eh?*

--*I meant*, she said, *what we do to ourselves*.

For this, he had no answer. Just a self-deceiving scowl.

The program lurched forward, with an inexorability Renzo had come to view with pride. The soft launch of Vyasha's new music was a week away, and much groundwork had been laid. But he still had some calls to make, some wagons to circle. Any good fader knew that nothing succeeded like excess, and that nothing whetted the public appetite like prohibition. Or, at least condemnation. Man's secret desire was to become invisible, to erase himself from the world, so anything that promised self-effacement, paralysis, oblivion, was at some level deeply prized. Every hallmark of society - religion, war, politics - had reduced the importance of men to trembling penitents, points on a map, clicks on a voting screen. Neurochemical science had shrunk the most complex processes to tiny chemical secretions, Art had worked for a while as a celebration of skill and craft, but now it was largely viewed as a function of cerebral abnormality. Man wanted to fade into a great, dirty, beckoning unknown. In the marketplace of ideas, damnation was readily available, and quite affordable on a variety of payment plans.

--Renzo Calliari. *I think I'm expected.* The guard at the reception desk squinted at his screen, as Renzo assayed the commotion in the lobby of Pastor Farshore's Church of Perpetual Longing. Men with headsets barked technical instructions for the evening holocausts. Tradesmen loaded cartons filled with balloons and bunting, and crates full of provisions for the post-service supper. Three backup singers for the Scars of Grace, tucked into teasingly snug lace bodices, signed missals as they assembled a trail of admirers. The guard nodded, and Renzo turned to walk through the hallway of glass arches projected with fusilades of colored Redon starbursts. It was small wonder that the congregants were primed for awe and amazement by the time they reached the Main Temple. As he forced open the great bronze doors depicting the Fall and Redemption of Man (with a *zaftig* Christ Renzo always felt looked suspiciously like Pastor Roscoe himself), he could see the Pastor at the main altar, between Hedberg's twin marbles of Tantalus and Sisyphus, directing traffic. Farshore smiled and motioned Renzo back into his private chambers.

--*I almost fell into a dead faint when I got your message, Farshore said. Spiritual crisis?*

--*Nothing so selfish, Renzo said. I wanted to tip you off, as our first line of moral defense, to a tentacle of temptation threatening the Christian psyche.*

--*Ah, the Pastor acknowledged with a thin smile of recognition, I see. The sentinel sending the alarm...*

--*...To ev'ry Middlesex village and farm. It was a symbiotic relationship. Renzo fed the Pastor hints about devilish culture, and Farshore lent Renzo's clients the *frisson* of danger that made them irresistible to the underground. Renzo couldn't use this tactic more than a couple times a year, but it was surefire. A warning on Pastor Farshore's *Clarion Call* was good for 50,000 units and a dozen Q points. In exchange, Gestalt, through its Staff of Life subsidiary, helped keep the Pastor in cognac and Italian shoes. *It's encouraging that a man like you can do well by doing good.**

Farshore rose slowly and walked over to his humidior, clipping the end from a Cohiba with a cutter shaped like Jonah's whale. *Lovely, isn't it?* He said, gesturing toward a painting Renzo didn't recognize, a *sacra conversazione* in earthy greens and reds. *Since the earthquakes, Italian export restrictions are a thing of the past. Funny how things work out.* He delicately rubbed his ribcage at the site of one of St. Sebastian's arrows. *You know, I never accepted your theories of human nature, but I'm not fool enough to quarrel with success.*

--*Always leave the public wanting more. But then the soft sell has never worked very well in your line.*

Renzo knew he was giving the cue for one of Farshore's well-rehearsed rants about the basic corruptability of Man, the allure of the fleshly pleasures, and the need for constant and vociferous vigilance. But his laundry list beckoned, and by the time Farshore had gotten to Weimar Germany, Renzo's hands were clamped on the arms of his chair, waiting to catapult him out of the houses of the holy.

--*Serpents and savagery, Renzo said, placing a microdisc case on the edge of Farshore's Lucite credenza. As pure an invocation of pagan passions as ever quickened the pulses of men. And women, we hope.*

Farshore blew a trio of smoke rings and coyly winked. *If it's as bad as all that, I warn you, I shan't hold back. I will attack with my full arsenal of rhetoric, regardless of cost.* He tapped an ash into a brass replica of Cellini's golden salt cellar.

--Yes, Renzo acknowledged. *We're counting on it.*

He had never done so much groundwork for a campaign, and he had a warm feeling about its prospects for success. He had convinced Gunther Nadler at the Galerie Asmodeus on Broome to use Vyasha as the soundtrack for *Guts of a Virgin*, L'Infer's exhibition of viscera sculptures and corpseblood screenprints, an exhibition that would, thanks to Dax Frazee in the Mayor's Office of Even Public Temperment, be closed before a single patron had fainted, a single note played. He had even written tomorrow's *Post* headline: LOONEY TUNES AND MORBID MALADIES. But when careers were on the line, Renzo knew, you didn't take chances. Although most of the commerce flowed through computer networks, there were still a handful of stores that served as staging areas, meeting places for fans, collection hubs for retail data. A good launch event and prime product placement in the large population centers could still put even the stealthiest whisper campaign over the top. Some pre-planned shoplifter busts, news flashes showing discs stashed behind locked counters with FreshHell™ and the vivisection and sex games....These could push Vyasha over the top. It was time to visit Erasmus J. down at Distractions, Inc.

Renzo found him in his custom powerchair, working a couple in the Recreational Pathologies department. They could not synthesize MS, but for a moderate sum, they could give you a 48-hour case of EAE, the mouse equivalent. – *It's quite exquisite. Every muscle crying out in a tangled whiplash ecstasy. The sweat pouring into your eyes like salty, mad hornets. You'll awake drenched and drained like a man who's fought a dozen Gettysburgs. But of course, it's not for everyone. Can I guide you to something milder?* He could tell by the way the boy's eyes searched his partner's that the hook was in.

--*I'll try anything twice*, he said, grabbing two vials from the display rack.

Back in the office, Renzo reclined. *Used to be comic books and Die Hard discs. Custom diseases? Home brain mapping and retinal modification?*

--*In the words of Prof. Aziz-Durand, those kicks just keep getting harder to find.*

Renzo explained the circumstances of his new discovery, sliding a disc in Ras' player and surrounding them in a thick mist-blanket of thrumming heartbeats and cicada songs, from which emerged a piercing viola melody and Vyasha's wordless, keening animal cry. He could see that Erasmus, whose ear was legendary in music circles, instantly joined with the sounds. He had x-ray eyes and the twitching in his right hand had stopped altogether.

--*That is some transfigurational shit.* After a time, he had fallen back to earth. *What do you have in mind?*

Renzo sketched out a scheme: cultists trashing a carefully-chosen section of shelves, police presence, a public bashing of Vyasha's tunes, a small but angry demonstration, maybe later, a legal challenge. Erasmus laughed a little; in some strange way, he lived for this stuff, from the

sable polish on his toes to the end of the golden braid he whipped from side to side along with the beat of the talking drums.

--The Pastor is already on board, Samson. The sacred and the profane.

Erasmus smiled again. *How come I always gotta be the profane, man? I can be pretty fucking sacred, if you catch me at the right time.*

Renzo counted out some currency slips and slid them under Ras' Wynton Beazley bobble-head. *God doesn't do bitter. Golden calves aside, I mean. Try a little gratitude.*

--I regularly petition the Big Man for a 26-hour day so I can properly catalogue all my motherfucking blessings. He punctuated his speech with a pair of blasts from his chair-horn.

--Our friend would have something to say about that, Renzo said, puffing out his cheeks. Keeping the lights on all over the world could run into money. But I'll work on it.

Ras traced the image of Giordana St. Ives on a ragged tour poster dotted with beer-bottle rings. *You know what they say. What doesn't kill us, entertains us.*

Renzo checked his watch, a pre-war Cartier tank. Maybe everything kills us a little bit, he thought. And entertainment was a part of the process. A consensual nano-c annibalism of the soul. CNCS. He'd have to remember that.

--Got to race, Renzo said. I have a non-opening I have to attend.

The Altura digital frieze in his living room gave off eight pulses of topaz light, which told Renzo it was nearly time for his appointment. It had been a maddish, up-and-down week, and he felt relieved that he would soon have the benefit of Chisa's subtle attentions. It was hard to find a good psypros (*emotional trainer*, he chided himself, almost instantly) and even harder to keep her on long-term, since contracts were *verboden*. He and Chisa had been together for three years now, and he no longer knew what he would do if he could not have her to knead out his emotional knots with her blend of Socratic questioning, pregnant silences and simple radiance of soul. Many times he had maneuvered his commitments around her schedule, for he was well aware how many heartsick executives were waiting to soak up her time.

He answered the door and sighed to look at her, smallish, slender but full of kinetic energy like an acrobat, her long black hair positively pulsing with shades of henna and burgundy. Her face, which seemed to change each time Renzo looked at it, was shaded by the hood of a cape of crimson silk. He stepped aside and stared at the surefooted way her sandals navigated his teakwood floor. Without a sound, she made her way to the hall closet and took her *yogen* screen, which she unfolded across the living room. Behind its glass, contoured and translucent, to give a quivery ghost image, he could see her small expert motions as she lit the *ganriki* candles, technically illegal in the residential zone, but so vital to the ceremony. As Renzo sat, cross-legged, on his side of the screen, he could see her cloak fall to the floor, like a shower of scales.

He could see her skin, like the color of ancient bones, and he imagined the candle sheen pooling on her delicate shoulders like little gemstones of light. She began moving in a little snake dance and quietly mouthing the word *open open open* in a little singsong prayer. How desperately he wanted to break the glass and touch her, but he knew the rules. And an incident would go hard on him with the bosses, not to mention constituting a Class D misdemeanor. So he watched and waited for thoughts to come, his fingers softsearching her ghost image in the cool glass. As he always did at the start of their sessions, he remembered something she always said: *we are always the most perfect we ever were*, and let the words guide him back, into the past, where he lay with Luma and their newborn daughter Emmaline, before it had all fallen away. Without expecting to, he heard himself speak:

--*Kachi, can one ever get too good at losing things, at surrendering things?*

She stilled, and placed her hands on the screen, a teasing gesture Renzo mirrored. His breaths were cacophonous, like the collapse of a building. He waited and imagined her eyes, always her eyes, looking into her private place, belonging to no one.

--*Invite the pain, she said. Sometime, invite the pain.*

This seemed to disentangle him, and for much of the hour, he spoke and she heard, of the old days before success, of the quiet nights and the pleasures so picturebook it almost drove him crazy with redfaced longing: the kites in the park, washing Emmaline's babyhair, dawn whispers in Luma's ear, redolent of raspberry shampoo. All this he had tossed away. He imagined his waterwords falling down the eternal curve of Chisa's resting spine, her gentle motions guiding them into a pool of pellucid regret. By the time the candles burned down, and they thanked the surrounding darkness in words she had painstakingly taught him, he felt bleached inside, the quiet lust an engine driving out sadness the way hard exercise purged the body's poisons. For the only time in his week, he felt clean. Through a slot in the screen, her elegant fingers handed him a card on which were written, in elaborate calligraphy, the Japanese words for focus, renew and invent. It signaled session's end.

--*Where are all the girls like you?, Renzo whispered, his lips to the slot. The ones with the sight?*

--*Hidden, she answered. Where we will remain.*

However much he admired Chisa's strength and grace, he always pitied her a little, too. Although her caste were the way to love, they were denied love. They were the ones who held open the door for everyone else. He and his friends helped keep them in that place, and the thought of it pained him just a little. Just a little.

Things had gone well. Gestalt, on one of its house labels, Sleeper Cell, had slipped three tracks into the datastream, and the buzz had built slowly, *sub rosa*, an infection. A half dozen websites had reviewed the songs in terms ranging from curious to rapturous. Their NerveNet™ monitor Carlos had detected significant interest on the index of social nets, and ambient mics from Charleston to Coos Bay had logged indications of attention in the randoms. Add an appearance on the crawl of the *Sentinel*™ holocaust (with a twinge of grimace from talking head Atlas Brees

that cost Gestalt a weekend at a Phuket sex resort) and you had some real intrigue, an irritant under the collective skin, something they could build on.

For weeks, the murmurs grew, fed by events both planned and spontaneous. The Second Church of Christ Scourge of Sinners in the New Secession burned discs and memorabilia, the frenzy building until the flames engulfed three Salvadoran housekeepers dressed to resemble the hazy wire photo that was the sole picture of Vyasha Gestalt had leaked. *Waste not want not*, Renzo thought. The Happy Family Council, a Pennsylvania-based subsidiary of Gestalt's corporate parent, did a Congressional showandtell of scans showing the brain on Vyasha, the regions governing sexual violence and appetite tinted an angry chartreuse. The company-sponsored tribute act, Lawrence, Massachusetts' Snow Leopards, surprisingly, begat three more started by honest fans. But nothing, they knew, ruined an act's popularity like popularity, the way a violent explosion cancelled out a raging oil-well fire. So Renzo was careful to avoid mass exposure, gossip columns, awards and celebrity boyfriends. Vyasha was delicately brought to a slow boil, name-checked by only the cleverest commentators, always with a suggestion of corruption, of aboriginal sorcery. By the fall, *The Unseeing Eye* reported a groundswell of e-blasts demanding live shows, and Vyasha was smuggled, *via* unmarked motorcade, to the City, to work with dancer Soren Lundvall and the installation artist Denizen on a semi-secret concert tour.

The 12th floor at the Hotel Vollard, where Vyasha and entourage were ensconced behind a subtle but ruthless security force, had become a pilgrimage point for Gestalt insiders and *cognoscenti* like online semiotics guru Roy Hauptman (who seemed to toss away monocles the way hair-metal guitarists once discarded plectra), holodeck sex star Marduk and her troupe of muscular functionaries in their matching pleather codpieces, and the Latvian film director Lajos Rivka, who spent a week of all-nighters watching his cinematographer Mortice film the back of Vyasha's neck with a 1970s camcorder, for what creative end no one could guess. Renzo and Arky divided their time between the old Turpitz Brothers sewing shop, where Vyasha's band rehearsed; the Vollard, where they looked over set drawings and costume sketches while a newly-fashionable Magdalena (looking like Delphine Seyrig in *Daughters of Darkness*) hovered in mother-lion mode over her new obsession; and New York's loose circuit of evanescent and secretive after-hours joints, whisking Vyasha in and out after no more than 30 minutes in each. She barely had time to test her jumbled but emerging English. She did, however, leave a series of *papa razzo* vapor trails, which Gestalt judiciously parceled out to media favor-seekers.

--*Must we do this now?* Magdalena asked in an uncharacteristically testy manner, tapping an expensive-looking wristwatch. *It is after two.* She squeezed Vyasha's shoulder, and the vulpine beauty, perched self-consciously on the edge of her chair, threw her a look of gratitude that Renzo felt hung awkwardly on her face. Vyasha began to slam closed an album of drawings of chinchilla snow suits for a planned polar production number, then caught herself, lowering the cover without a sound. *Must we?* Renzo thought, dismayed by Mags' newfound gentility.

--*I suppose there's time enough*, he said, then, to Magdalena, *can we offer you a lift?* She brushed him off dismissively, without a word, without a glance.

--*Whatever became of the little girl swayed by b.o., bad manners and Irish accents?* Arky joked as they crossed the lobby. *Our Mags has become a loy-dee.* Renzo seethed a little at Arky's cheek, at the prospect of losing Mags, at his own inattention. He noticed how the scattering of people in the

Vollard's modernist lounges had metastasized from wide-eyed fan types, to jackal-eyed journalists and process servers, to paste-white amateur ghouls, sallow-cheeked in secondhand medieval finery and costume-shop cloaks. They seemed to be trying to talk themselves into something sinister and unwise that he had no wish to stick around for.

--*Gravedancers*, Arky said. *But these are the crazies who'll stick with us.*

--*Careful what you wish for*, Renzo said, grunting under the weight of the great bronze doors that led onto the 63rd St. pedicab stand.

There is no success like failure. – B. Dylan

There is no failure like success. – Lord Sweetwater, M.B.E.

Two quotes were carved over the door at Gestalt's home office, and they perfectly bracketed the career track they had planned for Vyasha. Her fame would start as a nervous whisper, build to a mumble then a grumble, and finally ascend through outrage, scandal, *cause célèbre*, contrarian embrace, critical reassessment, and, finally, tragic legend, each phase expertly micro-managed from Gestalt's complex of monitors and data libraries. By early October, the murmurs were gathering, perhaps faster than Renzo would have liked. He had embargoed all interviews and released bonus tracks laden with backwards-masking through only the most incestuous members-only networks. *Signet* magazine had run a piece with a handful of exclusive and very artistic photos, blurred through rain-soaked stained-glass windows. The standard rumors had been planted that she was the voice of a washed-up session singer, a computer program, some unholy amalgamation of whale songs, hummingbird wings and the grinding of machine-age gears. The plan was to let select cadres of fans see her in live performances spread across widely-dispersed population centers in dark media markets: Kampala, Sarajevo, Quito, Winnipeg, Brisbane, Dar Es Salaam, Montevideo, along with a smattering of real/mythical private shows for world leaders and opinioners. Then, there would be a week of shows at New York's New Agora, a tantalizing, multicasted glimpse for a curious world, just to make the fanatics feel embattled, to make them clutch her more desperately to their breasts. Everyone who had bought a Velvet Underground alum, they said, started a band. Everyone who grabbed a piece of Vyasha would start a sect.

When the time zones permitted it, he would jack into the live feed and watch their investment turn the lonely halls into something sacred and haunted, her voice sidwinding around Adam Hart's viola or skating on the glacial echoes of Pal Karlsson's glass vibraphone. Most new artists were rehearsed within an inch of their lives, slaves to structure, but she would move in and out, expanding and contracting rhythms like lovers' breath, and taking the band with her on a net of telepathic cues. Renzo wondered if the band was even aware of where she was leading them. In Karachi, the Mayan sacrifice encore culminated in a low, throaty whisper like a panther growl, the last notes met, not with cheers, but a stoned, reverential silence neither Renzo nor Arky had ever heard before. Renzo tried to get the real post-mortem from Magdalena, but could only elicit tour expenses, box office receipts and quotes from bewildered but respectful reviews in Beirut broadsheets before the TransVoice contact faded. Even the arrests in Haifa and the bottle-throwing in Cairns came to him as generic newscrawl bytes. He marveled that, in such an entangled world, he could feel like his artist was a freshly-released

helium balloon, beautiful and shining and lost, forever lost. And the more lost she got, the more the people around her seemed to find her, and to find things in themselves. It was exactly how the process was designed to work.

But in the midst of it all, he knew, he was fading.

After New York, they would stash her away under a haze of conflicting rumors, Dylan after the crash. Maybe at Wildwind, maybe at Arky's place in Constanta. Give a taste and take it away. Basic pusher/pimp logic. People would think her a fever dream, find it hard to believe she had ever existed, until they reappeared her and swooped in for the real fuck-you money.

The metrics - the quants and quals - had been trending strongly for weeks. JeremiAds™ had given Vyasha a golden pyre for her stream of condemnations in church bulletins, Secession lunch counters, Indian casino bingo parlors and swap meets. The Trenchcoat Index of Disenfranchised Youth put Vyasha among Che, Divine, Rimbaud, Klaus Kinski, Reich, Hopper and Mishima, Brady and Hindley, the Honeymoon Killers. Her first tracks were gaining commercial traction day by day, but the right way: *Riptide* made it the nation's fifth most stolen track. It meant people were too afraid to buy, a situation they would reverse while preserving the air of sabotage. Once things went aboveground, in a year or 18 months, Vyasha would have rebel cred that would insure decades of sky-high licensing - more if she was lucky enough to die the right way.

It was for that reason that Renzo was leaving a message with Melinda's booking agency to reserve her for a long Invasion Day weekend at the Gorge, watching on his computer screen as a blanket of Hebrew and Arabic characters enveloped Vyasha, wide-eyed, mining some animal music from a foreign stage, when Arky sidled in, wearing a look of concern, a sheaf of printouts under his arm.

--Wanna see something crazy?, he asked.

--Drummer for the Dimestore Phonies asked me that in Tempe once. Never again answered in the affirmative.

--This might interest you.

Renzo recognized it right away. It was a standard research kit, the kind the free NYU interns threw together. On top, Arky had laid the kind of red and black Nesbitt graph he had seen 500 times before.

--Ever seen one like that?

The Nesbitt pulled and analyzed data from all the receptors and all the libraries. It was a shelflife predictor used to estimate revstreams from long-term clients. For the universe of consumers of an artist's output, it pictured shape-of-demand. The x-axis represented intensity of exposure, the y, urgency of need. In virtually every instance, the universe of fans could be plotted along a gently descending curve that represented the impacts of media overkill; the slope of the curve reflected the public's degree of tolerance, and often determined whether a net or label would put that extra promotional dollar into a performer's flagging career. But Vyasha's graph was different. At 30% saturation, the graph split in two, and a steeply

ascending line knifed through a long cluster of points that threatened to push through the top of the page.

--*The "forked tongue"?*, Renzo asked, his voice rising, incredulous. Those in the industry who glanced at the academic literature recognized the pattern, a phenomenon that had existed for years in theory, like some unseen subatomic particle, but that no one had ever seen it materialize for an actual artist. *Is that even possible?*

--*Apparently so.*

The y-curve, or, as it was known in industry slang, the forked-tongue, was to antipub what giant ants and mantises had been to the atomic energy industry in the 1950s. It was Bigfoot and the Jersey Devil. It was Roswell, before the Snake River excavation. It meant there were fans whose Attachment and Consumption Energies would continue escalating past 80, 90, 100% saturation. It meant they were building a monster.

--*Lord S. will never go for scuttling the City gigs. Not now,* Arky said. They shared a long, stupefied silence. *So do we wake up Megalon and go hunting for Godzilla now?*

Renzo fidgeted with a little wind-up car that he set down, to spin in doughnut after doughnut, until its spring-driven energy petered out at the very edge of his desk. *I only hope,* he said, *that we do have to hunt him down.*

--*So crabby,* Sadie said, in her flirty Money Penny voice. *You should be on top of the world.* And, truly, the AmbiGauge and related indicators agreed. As the tour rumbled across the globe, Vyasha's shows grew bigger, tickets more hotly coveted. At irregular intervals, shows were called off, generating angry news items and making ticketholders edgier and more expectant. The most discussion, by far, concerned an explicit recreation of the death of Isadora Duncan at a private birthday show for a Chechen militia general, a show most notable for the fact that it never happened. It was a thing of beauty. Yet alongside the breathless reviews and mystified speculation were persistent sidebar items about unruly crowds, backstage invasions, and odd bouts of politically-motivated violence. In Monterrey, a drug cartel splinter group, all in the guise of Santa Muerto, broke windows and burned devotional effigies outside the provincial theater Vyasha was playing. Any unrest was good unrest, Renzo knew, but the build-up of weirdness unnerved him, made Vyasha's ascent hard to enjoy. In Clearwater, Florida, a Farshore radio broadcast condemning Vyasha's "Love in The Place of Skulls" spurred a progress of autistic and Down's Syndrome children ending with a mass mock crucifixion on a local high-school football field.

And there were the letters, one a day for the last ten, pasted in letters cut from paper magazines, soup labels and children's cereal boxes. He had to admire their artistry, drop capitals elegantly cut from colorful boxes of MegaBran and Mold-Resistant Rice Clumps boxes. A labor of mad love, he thought. But the messages grew more and more threatening:

SORRENDER GIRL SINGER TO US O TRGIK RESULT

WE TAKE VYASH FOR SAFEKEPING

U XPLOYT, U PAY

In three days, the retinue was due back in the states, but the FBI field office, called in at last by an insistent Security Director, treated these warnings as troublesome pranks by teenage MurderNet subscribers trying to emulate the notorious exploits of their pet killers. Special Agent Creech had been in the office barely twenty minutes before rudely stuffing the notes into individual sandwich bags and tossing Arky a business card with only the field office's public complaint number on it.

--They're treating us like fidgety assholes, Arky muttered as the elevator door closed on Creech's backside.

The mood among the band and crew was best described as guarded relief when they limped back into town. Even the entertainments Lord Sweetwater staged at the Sangre de Cristo (where Gestalt housed the Artist and her core entourage) seemed to distract the invited luminaries only slightly. The gleaming ivory and mahogany sexual acrobats from the Circus Horribilis show moored on the West Side piers were exemplars of grace and flexibility, their twinings making fantastic human sculpture through the glaze of cinnamon incense, and Naropa Aswari's expressive saxophone jazz gave everything a lazy, debauched ambience, but Vyasha, unmoved, did not stray from the sofa in her sunken living room, where she nibbled on root vegetables and fielded questions from a rapt nucleus of admirers. Chamblee Sanders, the smooth-pated chairman of Columbia's demonology department and holocaust host Livia Wasch peppered her with questions on the shamanic powers of music and natural healing, and she, not fazed in the least, sometimes answered in soft imperfect English, and sometimes whispered answers to her interpreter Magdalena, who stayed glued to her side, clutching her hand with very public tenderness. Renzo did not want to scatter this air of tranquility when he finally cornered Mags, and omitted his story of the latest note, which warned of the illicit perversion of Vyasha's message, and arrived in a box of what seemed like the singed ashes of birds' wings.

--She won't go on Wednesday, Mags announced. Gervais wants her to sit one out. We'll do the proxy show by tape loop and hologram.

And, in fact, Tuesday's show went off without incident, the set greeted by cheers from an upscale crowd polite enough to be almost alarming. Wednesday was a frigid night, the air moist with the threat of snow. It was the bracing feel of the wind that made Renzo decide to swing by the theater to see that evening's set. From his vantage point at the back of the room, Renzo gazed at the impressive stage set, expensive mint-green curtains over a reconstruction of the Trailblazer space platform, Hirsh Graves' guitars standing in line at attention behind an elaborate cubicle of keyboards and servers holding arias, news broadcasts, and nature sounds from all the continents. His eye was drawn by an ashen wisp swaddled in a dull blue-gray felt cloak, guided to an aisle seat by a pair of Indian ladies-in-waiting. From her wave-motions and the glint of topaz from the shadows of the hood covering her head, he knew immediately who the silent, unrecognized figure really was. Renzo wondered what she would think after finally seeing herself perform. But the Wednesday crowd was young, rowdy and conspiratorial, and the morose figures in their almost-uniform black paratroop sweaters and bondage trousers made Renzo feel old and out-of-place, so, when the lights went down and a hungry howl filled the room, he buckled his waistcoat and retired to the lounge at Edgar's across the street, where he could watch proceedings on his networked micro-tablet.

Snow had begun to fall when the waiter returned with his Jack and ginger, which he used to wash down the Omnivox tablets that gave events a sense of slow, easy clarity. If he didn't know better, he would say that the spectral image onstage, chanting and gesturing, pulling magic from the corners of the cavernous hall, was Vyasha herself. The rolling solace of the pills began to rock him, and he thought he saw looks of foreboding drift over the shaded faces of Vyasha's band, accompanied by echoes of gentle tumult, like those surrounding a drunken fight, from the orchestra pit. Lazily, he tapped through the various camera views, finally settling on a feed of the audience in the expensive premiere seats. Achill he interpreted as a draft from the doorway held him as he watched, in video time-lapse, three black-clad figures duchamp to their feet, igniting makeshift torches with cheap cigarette lighters. From outside the frame, other scuffles were erupting, soundtracked by muffled sounds of half-formed ladyfear. As the cloth wicks flared, he could see they appeared to glitter like makeshift firebombs that illuminated the crowd as they arced toward the stage and flamed into deadly brilliant balls of St. Elmo's Fire. It was beyond description, the way the hail of flares fell and the shrieks and low male commands rose and jumbled into some kind of panicloud over the elegant old venue, the fire sheering across the walls like something out of old newsreel footage of decapalm burning off the foliage around Burmese guerillas. The drug, which disassociated painful neural connections, turned it all into a play of radiant colors that mesmerized him so that he was unable to rise or call out, even as the first burning patrons exploded onto the street and the sidewalks broke out in mad carnival displays of terror and rescue. Fever fervor flame. Renzo did not turn to scan the victims, for he knew that she was gone, and with her, whatever pith was left inside him.

After it all, the reality left to him was one endless, tumbling day/night that he traversed along a bread-trail of pills - Mentira to remember the steps that led him there, Lethemax to draw the spirit-briars from his skin. Still, he had managed to distill one thought that pulled him along like a scream in the wilderness. *My great gift has been for losing things, tossing them away without guilt or bitterness, and now, the world has repaid me in kind, left me garrisoned in my glass-and-hardwood prison-tower, mail pressing under the door, unheard messages stacked on the data console.* All that left an impression on him now was the vision of Chisa behind her screen, that flowing grace-dance he loved so much and that, he knew, would very soon also slip away. *There's a dream-kingdom that's mine, he thought, and it's always and only mine, and it lives beyond Chisa and her gently rolling landscape skin and all her luckless wisdom, and there, I have a chance to be clean and valid again, to atone.* He had no voice, but he felt himself asking her to explain how things had come to be the way they were, and he waited.

Smoke, she said, touching the surface of his vintage cedar globe of the world with those lovely, spidery fingers. All a sacred smoke.

LINKS

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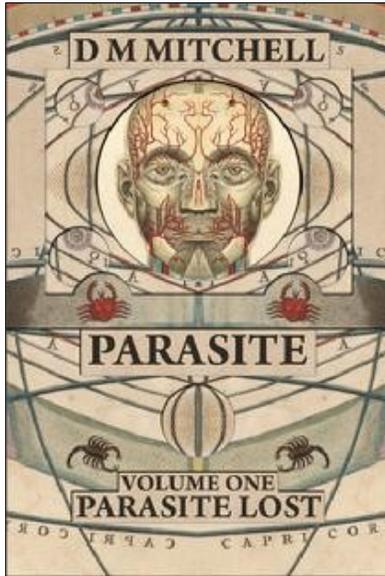
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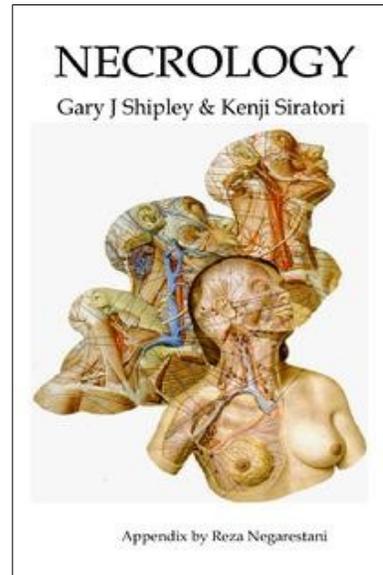
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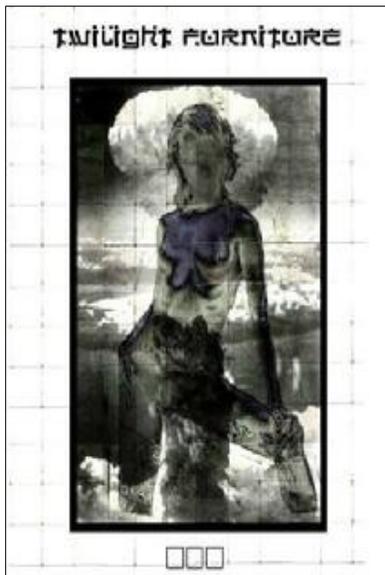
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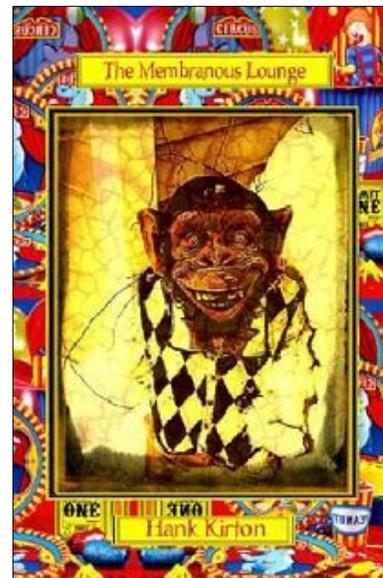
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