

PARAPHILIA VII



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M 10

THE LAST DREGS OF POVERTY: HOCKING GOBS OF PHLEGM

By Jim Lopez



With a Queen of Heart embedded up a symbolic sleeve of the poorly written pages of thematic arts, uttered in the black hills of controversial words, echoing the need for a home and spiritual eyes, Mikey lost his way and walked the streets of Hollywood. He spat in the milk of growing children and pulled his pud in front of nursing mothers, who sat out front of Starbucks sipping organic soy lattes.

Mikey had one ambition and one ambition only, he was writing a

book titled, "The Adventures In The Unleashing of Conventional Modes of Perception & Behavior," only he had no intention of ever putting pen to paper or fingers to keyboards. No, Mikey was the living pages of the title of his book, and it all started with a commercial and a bowl of cereal called LIFE that he was manipulated into peddling onto the rest of the world. When Mikey was old enough to develop some awareness of himself he discovered that his life began with him being the cute and cuddly kid who hated everything and wouldn't try anything, yet he had to drink endless amounts of milk and shovel corn crisp day in and day out, while sub-mental kids spurred him on, saying, "Let's get Mikey to try it, he hates everything," after which they cheered, "He likes it! He likes it!" But Mikey didn't hate everything he just hated everyone; nevertheless, he tried just about

everything and now he had matured into a cynical masturbator and a phlegmatic.

As a child Mikey was forced to drink so much milk that he embodied a never ending factory of phlegm, and he hated milk, as well as LIFE cereal, neither of which were delicious nor nutritious. He was constantly hocking loogies. And when he felt the urge, which was more often than not, it was no big deal for him to whip out his wang and blast a wad of jizz on some unsuspecting passerby or on some mannequin displayed out in front of the GAP, J. Crew, Ann Taylor or any other business establishment. I mean, he just goosed his spooze anywhere and anytime.

Mikey refused to accept the line that was drawn between the public and private sphere. He urinated on dogs and in lady's purses (actually he pissed on whoever and whatever). He shit in mailboxes and on ATM machines, wiped his ass with cats, farted in the mouths of decrepit old people, knocked cripples down and out of his way, insulted and mocked the mentally challenged, slashed the

tires of low-riding gang-bangers, punched business men in the face, ripped the underwear off of college students by giving them a rough wedgy, rebuked drug dealers and pimps while being a drug user and a whore monger himself. Mikey blew his nose on the pages of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, he reviled Woodie Guthrie, Bob Dylan, The Beatles and anyone who could capture the spirit of humanity in song, he did all of this and infinitely more. But what he did most was hock gobs of phlegm and chronically masturbated.

The first time I met Mikey I was having a bite to eat and a drink at the Pig and Whistle off of Hollywood Boulevard between Las Palmas and Highland. Mikey walked right up to my table, dropped his shorts, took a big shit directly on my mushroom burger and spit in my beer. And it served me right for eating in the fucking stink-hole of a place.

Now some tough guy might challenge me, asking, "Why didn't you stop the fucker or kick his ass?"

Well, I'd like to see someone not look stupidly surprised and

shocked when some unsuspected freak flops a load on *your* food while *you're* reading the newspaper and enjoying a cigarette in between bites and drinks. There was no time. It was like, "What the fuck, there's a turd on my burger and a loogie in my beer." I mean Mikey was the Pig and he went whistling down the street after he pulled some bald guy's wig off his head and wiped his ass with it after he shit on my mushroom burger. The sheer nerve and the audacious spirit of the guy was awe inspiring. He left a stench that lingered the distance between La Brea and Vine. It made no difference what he wiped his ass with as long as it remained wiped. That was his only concern, and he didn't lose any brain cells trying to succumb to conventional or acceptable forms of material, like toilet paper, when it came to wiping his ass. He was a strict utilitarian.

Mother's crossed busy boulevards and avenues to avoid walking on the same side of the street as him. When the news got out that Mikey grabbed a swaddled infant out of her

walker-crib and wiped his ass with the newly-budding baby Hollywood Boulevard went up in arms. Mikey argued in court that it was Hollywood herself that supported, even encouraged, his obscene behavior. According to the tabloids Little Mikey killed himself by ingesting too many Pop-Rocks while downing mass quantities of *RC-Cola*. "I'm not even here. I don't exist. You killed me, judge," he told the Honorable Magistrate. And as stupid and as asinine of an argument as it was, the fact of the matter remained, in a city like Hollywood, Mikey was, for all intents and purposes, dead: the little boy that America grew up with and ate breakfast with was indeed dead. And the only way Mikey could affirm his existence was to use a runt's face to wipe his ass because Mikey had grown tired of people trying to convince him that he was no longer among the living. Hollywood even produced a watered down version of the adult Mikey (played by Michael J. Fox), depicted as a well-mannered slob, who stumbles into becoming a foster parent. Mikey also argued that it was the press and concerned parents who

initiated the rumor of his death. Someone with a lot of money wished to wipe out Pop-Rocks' profits, labeling them as dangerous when enhanced by *RC-Cola*, as this person wished to protect the pill-popping, speed-freak industry, which lived up in the Hills.

Mikey's trial was the headliner to a bill that included Isaac's fight with the City of Los Angeles. Issac was a black Jewish cabbalist, and could numerologically pinpoint who a person was and what a person would become. He also claimed to be one of the original GAP Band members, but was screwed out of his money and his job. He wasn't too fucking pleased about being jilted. Isaac was also a regular at the Brass Monkey karaoke bar. I never saw the cat do karaoke, in fact I suspect he avoided it, but he could be found shit faced and acting up by 4:00 pm.

Isaac came into the courtroom, wearing torn-up pants and a dirty-white T-shirt. He was shoeless and had a potato sack overflowing with cotton slung over his back, and he had a plastic ball-and-chain shackled to

his ankle, shouting, "MASSER, why you always trying to keep the black man down?"

The press never got a whiff of Isaac's performance. But if you were there, you were among God's true stars of Hollywood. The judge dismissed the case the moment Isaac came through the doors. He didn't even require him to pay the petty ten dollar charge for simply being granted the privilege to stand and be judge by an Honorable Magistrate.

Isaac had been booked, charged and released for ripping up a citation issued him for jay-walking and throwing the shredded ticket in the cop's face, shouting, "I'm a fifty-five-year-old man, if I don't know how to walk across the street safely, you should lock me up, mother fucker! And I'd like to see you try. I'm a master numerologist. I'll fuck up your celestial noodles!" (And Isaac could, but he never could figure out how the GAP Band screwed him out of his money.) The Peace Officer thought Isaac was threatening to kick him in the balls, so he arrested Isaac for terrorist's threats.

Mikey came into the courtroom wearing a six-hundred dollar pair of Romeo Gigli spectacles, a tailored white dress shirt and soiled boxer shorts, which depicted a stencil of Jake La Mada's busted-up face on the crouch. Mikey's extra-large balls could be seen periodically sagging just below his shorts, resembling a wad of chewed-up bubble gum. His feet were shod with florescent green flip-flops and his head was wrapped in a beach towel. He pleaded Not Guilty. The judge refused to issue Mikey a trial date but called him into his chambers, after which the case was dismissed when Mikey gave his word to never again wipe his ass with a child or any other featherless, two-legged creature. The mother of the child went bat-shit crazy, shouting that the judge was biased because Mikey had been a childhood star. It took every ounce of self-control that Mikey had to not grab the distraught mother and wipe his ass with her, but he gave his word, and whatever Mikey was he was not liar.

I followed Mikey out of the courthouse and onto the subway.

He got off on Hollywood and Vine and then walked over to the abandoned World of Books store, where he and the one-legged Vietnam Vet, who daily polishes the stars (one of which is Jimi Hendrix's) out front of the no longer existing World of Books book store. The two of them discussed how Mikey's case went that morning and then they transitioned into a violent and bitter rant against the new developments of Hollywood Boulevard. The two of them were about to head over to Grauman's Chinese Theater to defecate on John Wayne's and Bogart's hand and shoe prints but I talked Mikey into having a drink with me.

The Spot Lite was the hangout for convicted criminals, who happened to be transvestites, queers, and powerful prison queens, who could start full-blown prison wars. Mikey frequented the place, in fact, he would only have a drink with me if I agreed to buy him no more than two drinks at the Spot Lite. I had never been in the joint, but I had walked by it numerous times throughout my life. On more than one occasion I witnessed a

burly transvestite pounding the shit out of some loud mouth, corn-fed redneck, and I had had also seen two bearded transvestites bashing each other's head on the pavement, into parked cars and against a steel garbage bin. These fellas were as tough as they were charming. I had been catcalled a few times by a transvestite smoking outside the Spot Lite, and I was always able to deflect the gesture with a little flirtation of my own or pleasantly ignore it, but I sure as hell wasn't indifferent; rather, I was slightly terrified by the place. Once, I'd even seen a prison-bus stop in front of the Spot Lite and drop off a number of transvestites and queers.

The place was dark and damp. The vinyl barstools were cracked and crusty. The walls were black and sticky. Jimmy Boyd's *Jelly On My Head* was playing at a pleasant volume through the jukebox.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dehipZ850O0&feature=related>

Mikey ordered a glass of Lagavulin Scotch from his private stash, which the Spot Lite kept

for him behind the bar and only charged him five dollars a glass. He kept a bottle there attempting to acquiesce to his doctor's orders, who demanded that he stop drinking. Once a month he would buy a bottle of the Scotch, walk over to the Spot Lite and hand it to the bartender, who would open it for him, pour him a glass, charge him the additional five dollars and then place the rest of the bottle on the top shelf behind the Jim Beam. Mikey had one glass of Lagavulin every four days but today he wanted two. I ordered the only top shelf Bourbon the Spot Lite offered, Jim Beam.

"So, what the fuck do you want?" Mikey asked me.

"I'm not quite sure," I answered stupidly. "Last month, at the Pig and Whistle, you shit on my mushroom burger and spit in my beer."

"Yeah, so what, you shouldn't have been eating at the fucking cunt-hole of a place. You're not a sensitive twat are you? I'd wipe my ass with you right here and now if I hadn't given my word to the judge this morning. Piss me off and I'll have one of these

butch skag draggers turn you into a sailor's cup of tea as they cornhole your saddle. Hey, Lonnie, come over here. I want to introduce you to someone."

"Fuck you, Mikey, can't you see I'm busy," Lonnie shouted as the she-male was bent over the pool table, attempting a three-ball-combo in the side pocket, with his sundress hiked up to his waist, and his sweaty ass hairs dangling out of his ruffled panties, which were stretched tight around his fat ass.

The jukebox switched to John Rox's *I Want A Hippopotamus for Christmas*

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yywq7a6Hvho>),

sung by the child star, Gayla Peevey, who became a whisker on the Easter Bunnies chin, hiding eggs from children, and never growing larger than *Thumbelina's* toe .

The Spot Lite was getting moist and ornery.

"No, you're quite right. I thought the same thing myself: the burger stunk, the beer was shit and it was all well over-priced," I

nervously but whole heartedly agreed.

"Like a fucking Hollywood film or Bore-ack My Bottom's bailout."

After a long silence Mikey asked, "So you don't know why you asked me for a drink?"

"Well, I guess I'd like to know what sort of women find you a attractive, I mean..."

"Take a look around this place. It's fair to say that the omens have foreshadowed bad fucks for Little Mikey. There ain't no Haley's Comet blazing a path in my sky," Mikey answered. Then he wrung his drink and asked me to order him another one.

A buffed-out Austrian transvestite, who didn't make the cut for the Viennese Boy's Choir answered a call from Warner Brothers but found himself in an entirely different line of work than he expected, was going around the bar showing off his scrog scrapbook, which depicted the she-male getting screwed by politicians and Hollywood producers. He was singing and whistling, "I only cost a nickel and if that's too much for you,

take me for a penny and I'll thank you kindly."

"I'm sick of the Hollywood prattle, where permeability saturates morality and is hypocritically regarded over aggressive penetration," Mikey muttered irritably, as his eyes turned gargoyle green. He spit a loogie over the bar and onto the cash register. He was visibly growing more and more agitated, quoting Mark Twain, *A monotonous career of violence and bloodshed*, and then pounded his second drink.

I didn't understand what he was getting at.

All of a sudden Mikey jumped on top of the bar, ripped the towel off his head, tugged down his Jake La Mada boxer shorts and flopped a turd right on the bar.

"God-dam-it Mikey, not again!" Ernie, the bartender rebuked him.

"My freedom demands it this time, Ernie, so fuck-off!" Mikey shouted, flipping everyone the bird (like Flipper the Dolphin), bulging his eyes and smacking his butt cheeks, as he pissed in the bar-well. Then he dove on a man, who strangely resembled

the famous Hollywood Producer I had recognized at Mikey's courtroom hearing. The Hollywood Producer looked more amorous than frightened. Mikey unashamedly shit-fucked the man, who unashamedly offered up his rump for all to take more than a gander; and there was indeed "quite" a number of "quite" large and greasy trannies pounding their meat across his face.

The tapestry devil was doing a pirouette, fanning flagrant fellatios. Then I saw something that baffled me all together: the judge, who presided over Mikey's case, had slipped into the Spot Lite undetected and was now jacking-off in a dark corner wearing a Mickey Mouse hat.

I snuck out of this bestial ballroom, which was reminiscent of a Greek Philosopher's after party, as the jukebox dropped another Jimmy Boyd 45: *There's A Little Train Chuggin' In My Heart*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lwCBm7rpZio&NR=1>



INTERESTING TIMES: JUST A LONELY BOY

By Andrew Maben

Ravenswood was another private boarding school in the hills bordering Exmoor. It had the same rules, the same ghastly food, the same institutionalized cruelty. And I certainly had changed not a whit. My teeth still protruded embarrassingly, I still carried the shame and stigma of a bed wetter. By now my bed was equipped with a rubber under-

sheet, so even before the first stains had to be concealed, on my very first morning in fact, all the boys in my dormitory were aware of my "secret", and in next to no time it was common knowledge. The only difference, really, was that the Headmaster here, Mr. Whittaker, was not a sadistic drunk. Unfortunately that in no way mitigated the

petty sadism of the children in his charge.

No doubt you are wondering about my parents. "What were they thinking?" you may well be asking. I wonder myself why anyone would condemn a child they profess to love to years of loneliness and pain. So perhaps what makes me saddest of all is my conviction that they acted only from the most noble of motives, that they truly believed that they had my best interests at heart. I learned early about that road to hell, only my first steps down that road were paved with my parents' good intentions.

First let us remember that these were the early Fifties, shortly after Britain had emerged victorious but mortally wounded from the nightmare of the Second World War. Almost without exception the great British leaders in that apocalyptic struggle were products of England's system of private education, as indeed were the great conquerors who had created and maintained a global Empire. It should not be surprising that this system was widely seen as the finest in the world.

Whatever else, I am secure in the knowledge that they were not trying to get rid of an unwanted brat. Although there was one disquieting night some years previously when I had gone downstairs from my bedroom with some minor request to hear angry raised voices. I went into my parents' room to see them standing facing each other beside the bed in antagonistic poses. My father was red faced with anger, my mother flushed and tearful. I have no way of knowing if he had just struck her, was about to strike, or if the violence was purely verbal. My mother saw me standing there.

"Not now, Andrew." I crept back to bed. This memory has always haunted me, accused me and condemned.

Perhaps part of what they wanted was to protect me from being witness again to such a scene. Far more important, I think, was my father's life experience, at least insofar as I have been able to reconstruct and imagine it from the few hints I was able to glean.

The son of a tailor, not a rich man, Dad grew up in

Manchester. He won a scholarship to Manchester Grammar School, and at his father's insistence went on to study dentistry. This was not a profession for which he felt any vocation, but I gathered that his father's word was law. I know almost nothing of his family, never met his father, don't even know his parents' names or when they died. His mother did once visit, a shadowy figure who lay for the whole course of her stay in my parents' bed. My mother was constantly on edge, complaining of the unending demands and carping. He had a brother of whom he never spoke. When *Bridge on the River Kwai* came to a local cinema, he refused to see the film. On the way, Mum explained in rather nervous tones that his brother had been captured by the Japanese at the fall of Singapore, and later died a prisoner on the Burma railway.

With the coming of the War, my father joined the R.A.F. As a professional he was automatically commissioned as an officer. As a grammar school boy he was ostracized by the other officers. I am ashamed to say that as a boy I

was embarrassed that he had not played a more valiant role, and made up stories of how his last minute treatment of this or that fighter ace had allowed the pilot to fly a crucial Battle of Britain mission. It was, I think, this wartime service that fixed in his mind that the only way that we his children could have a future that offered any real opportunity would be by going to Public Schools. The fees for three children's private education were enormous, and I now realize the extraordinary effort and sacrifice he made for our sakes.

And Mum? Daughter of a captain of industry – a lieutenant at least – one of three siblings, I only have hints of her privileged childhood. Snapshots from summer holidays beside tranquil Swedish lakes, from these, and her father's name of Bratt, I have surmised Scandinavian roots. It seems that Sir Stamford Raffles was related on her mother's side, which somehow adds a rather poignant irony to my parents' story. Later she attended a finishing school in Switzerland. And suddenly the War engulfed her life. From the few stories she let slip over the years I have

constructed a picture of a rather remarkable young woman, compassionate, somewhat headstrong and intelligent. Photographs do not suggest a classic or conventional beauty, but hint at a vitality that must have been extremely attractive.

At the outset of the war she volunteered as a nurse, and was serving in a large London hospital at the time of Dunkirk. She spoke once, visibly moved still by the recollection, of a young soldier who lay upon a hospital trolley. His huge sucking chest wound was beyond treatment, and he had been simply parked until he saw fit to die.

"Nurse, have you got a fag?" he whispered as she passed by. Careless of hospital rules, and certain that she could do him no further harm by granting this simple request, she took out a cigarette and placed it between his pale lips. I imagine his grateful smile, the relief and comfort he must have taken from this simple act of gentle kindness. She lit the cigarette for him, and he took a deep pull. And at that moment the ward sister passed.

"Smoking is strictly forbidden!" she snapped. And smacked the fag from the boys mouth. And he died.

Which put an end to the nineteen year old girl's medical vocation.

Evidently she then joined the WAAFs, for the next glimpse I was given was of a plotter in a Bomber Command operations room. Her job was to push tokens across a giant map of Europe, each token representing an aircraft, as news of their positions was radioed in. Of course every night planes were lost, and she spoke of how difficult it was to rake the tokens from the map, knowing that this action represented the probable agonized deaths of of several young men. Often young men she knew as friends, perhaps even as lovers.

She must have been capable and trusted, as years later she alluded to working with radar, whose very existence in the war years remained top secret for thirty years or more after the war's end. When the film *Enigma* was released she casually let drop, "Oh yes. I worked on Enigma at Bletchley Park." She refused to

enlarge on this surprising revelation.

I know nothing of how these two met. I know still less of my father's earlier marriage, save that by all accounts his first wife was Belgian, something of a *femme fatale*, named Avis, and that I had a half-brother Adrian. Speaking of Adrian reminds me that my earlier memory of my grand-parents must be faulty, as I recall, I must have been eight or nine, walking beside the Manchester Ship Canal with him. The circumstances remain a mystery, but I can only suppose that we were visiting our grand-parents.

Was Alex still married when he met Diana? Married or not, he must have been an imposing, glamorous figure in his uniform. Standing more than six feet, with a proud bearing and a handsome, luxuriant R.A.F. moustache, it is not hard to imagine that he swept her quite off her feet. I still wear the hand made gold Swiss watch inscribed "A.M. from D.R.B. 21/8/46", a birthday gift. No, I'm afraid I don't even know the date of their wedding, though presumably it was before May 1947.

On their return from his posting "somewhere in Germany", the couple moved into the small but beautiful "Manor House", ivy-grown and built of glowing Ham stone, in a village a few miles east of Taunton. Dad drove a little MG and Mummy would bicycle the quiet lanes with me perched in a blue metal child seat mounted behind the saddle. I think this may have been the happiest time of their lives. Of mine, too.

I have come to think that my father's R.A.F. experience left him deeply divided against himself. Almost desperately he aspired to become a member of that snobbish class from which he felt excluded, an exclusion that wounded his sense of his own worth. At the same time he harbored an idealistic yearning for a day when artificial class divisions might be finally dissolved forever. This division was mirrored in almost every aspect of his life, his troubled children, his marriage, most of all in his profession. As a medical man he was able to find acceptance among people who at heart I suspect he despised, even loathed. He refused to take on

private patients, choosing to practice within the National Health Service born the same year as I. He was a Labour voter, played the football pools every week, liked a pint or two in the public bar. He was an excellent golfer, eventually achieving a zero handicap and the club captaincy. He was a lonely man, truly at home with neither the working men at the pub nor the golf club snobs. Nor even in his own home.

Leaving the sheltered peace of the Manor for the cramped quarters of Kelston, the house on Station Road, must have been hard. The house was tall and narrow, the garden cramped. With Dad's surgery and waiting room at the top of the first flight of stairs, the place could never really feel like a home.

This was made particularly clear the day the haemophiliac came to have a tooth pulled. Not bothering to say anything about his condition to my father beforehand - who knows, perhaps it didn't occur to him that an extraction might be a somewhat bloody affair - he sat for the procedure. Well, an extraction is a bloody affair. And

if your blood won't clot, why then it just gets bloodier and bloodier. Blood flowed. Dozens of gauze napkins could do nothing to stanch the flow. Blood was everywhere. An ambulance was summoned. The patient was carried away, one hopes to be saved from his own stupidity, but anyway never to be seen again. I caught a glimpse of the surgery floor awash with blood, Dad's receptionist at work with mop and pail.

As I said, having a dental office in the middle of the small house was a considerable impediment to cozy domesticity. It was a relief to us all when we moved to Court Cottage. This was a wonderful 18th century tenant's cottage in the little village of Holcombe Rogus, that almost straddled the Devon-Somerset border between Wellington and Tiverton. Heavy-beamed ceilings, idiosyncratic changes of level on both floors, it had a large garden with copper beeches, huge raspberry bushes, a crumbling old stable and adjoined the field where our dairy-farmer neighbor grazed his new born calves and their mothers.

Court Cottage, the village and the surrounding countryside provided me with some kind of sanctuary from the variously hellish boarding schools. My brother Pete, born towards the end of our time at Kelston, shared a bunk bed with me, Claire had a lovely room of her own. I was also privileged with the room above the garage, where I had a fairly elaborate model train layout. This was my refuge, where I indulged my hobby of building 1/72nd scale model aeroplanes, ran the trains, read contraband comic books, and later on other proscribed printed matter, and filled notebooks with drawings of planes, elaborate dog fights, hideously twisted crashes, fanciful imagined planes of my own design as well as Spits, Hurricanes, Messerschmitts, Focke-Wolfs.

From the village butcher my parents obtained a puppy who became my bosom companion, my confidant and only real friend of my childhood. Rusty was an endearing mix of Lab, Golden Retriever and Alsatian. He seemed intelligent enough, but had a kink in his tail acquired one lazy summer afternoon as a

puppy when he was taking a siesta in the middle of the village's main street and saw no particular reason to budge when a farmer came along in his Land Rover. So the vehicle ran over his tail. For as long as we lived at Holcombe he could pick out that particular Land Rover's engine from all the many others in the district, and from a mile away. He would take up a strategic position at the garden wall, tail down, growling quietly, until it came around the corner, when he would burst into paroxysms of enraged barking, leap over the wall and chase it down the street, snapping at the tires. My pal, hopelessly, helplessly lashing out at the incomprehensible source of an unforgotten humiliation...

My life, or my memories of it, became a rather dreary procession of days unevenly divided between "term-time" and "holidays". Term-time occupied the greater part of each year, and continued to be a lonely, depressing succession of minor hardships and humiliations, accented by the usual twice-a-term beatings - as I recall never less, and rarely more - and gradually less frequent night time

accidents. The regime at Ravenswood was marginally more relaxed than at Kestrels. Marginally: I wrote one Sunday telling of some particular source of discontent, a story of greasy ill-cooked bacon, a second egg refused, the Headmaster's son, but more importantly the sole occasion of my attempting to declare my sadness to Mummy and Daddy rather than trying to conceal it to spare my mother's feelings. I took great care over spelling and grammar, but it was still no great surprise to see the letter ripped up and to be told that it might be better to write something more cheerful. Naturally a conversation with Mr. Stapleton ensued.

"You're treated well here, aren't you, Maben?"

It was apparent that there would be just one acceptable answer. "Oh, yes, sir," I cringed.

"The food is good?" And so it went.

But I do have one glorious memory of brilliant anarchic chaos breaking loose. It was Guy Fawkes Night. The whole school gathered at the bottom of the

haha that separated the gardens from a wide meadow for the traditional fireworks, bonfire, immolation of the traitor in effigy, and hot sausages with potatoes baked in the fire. Somehow, to the delight of the boys, and consternation of teachers, the spirit of Guy somehow gained the upper hand this night. A stray spark, or, who knows, perhaps a well placed match, fell unnoticed into the big box containing all the carefully graded incendiaries. The first indication that something might be amiss was a spray of brightly colored sparks jetting from the box at a careless angle. Dodging this jet of fire a teacher foolhardily went to the box and lifted the lid. The interior was aglow.

"Everyone. STAND BACK!" He shouted as he ran.

For two splendid minutes the box became the hub of a fantastic conflagration. Sparks, red, green, white and blue showered in every direction in haphazard profusion. A catherine wheel managed to leap forth and careen across the grass, propelled by its own multi-colored jet of flame, scattering laughing, cheering

boys as it went. Rockets skittered across the ground, flung themselves skyward in corkscrew paths to suddenly change direction and come shooting back to earth and explode. One rocket actually flew at the school itself, smashing into, but alas not through, a dormitory window. A huge roar went up as the boys watched it near the window, fading to a sigh as it fell to the flower garden below. All too soon the box was merely glowing red, a muffled minor explosion now and then.

The judgement was unanimous that this had been the best fireworks ever. Short, indeed, but oh how sweet! Maybe later you will look back with me at this night and wonder if this might have been the seed for certain tendencies. Or not. Because in truth I have never espoused or advocated the kind of bomb-tossing revolutionary violence you may be imagining, nor have I even had the taste for simple arson. Though it is true that there have been countless kitchen flame-ups due to my carelessness. Whatever. After the show we had to listen to some boring polemic on the subject of

safety and responsibility delivered by Mr. Stapleton, who must have felt some requirement to fill the time that the fireworks had been supposed to occupy. When at last that was over we enjoyed our food and sparklers around the bonfire and there was a rather louder than usual hurrah as Guy went up in flames.

There were studies, stultifying drudgery, but for all that I was imparted a solid foundation in various subjects. I was no star of the athletic field, but had become a useful enough Rugby player to remain unnoticed. I managed to achieve a comparable invisibility as a sprinter and in the long jump. Cricket was another story. I think I mentioned the pointlessness and boredom, and I seemed unable to either stop or hit the ball. Any team that had me as a member considered itself doomed, as a fielder I was banished to a deep long on, where balls never came. As a batsman I was usually last, even as I walked to the wicket both teams would begin to pack up their gear. Sure enough I would be bowled out before the end of the over, more often than not on the first ball. But my great athletic

hatred was long distance running, both painful and pointless. I was invariably one of the final stragglers, though I tried to avoid the total ignominy of coming in absolutely last.

I also began to develop a certain dubious talent for pointing out the more comical aspects of my many deficiencies. This near constant attention to my own shortcomings did little to raise my self-esteem, though in those days no one used the term, or even afforded to children any deep psychological processes at all. But it was nevertheless a useful survival adaptation, as I could usually manage to preempt any budding situation where other boys were about to start ganging up on me, to make me the center of a circle of taunts and blows.

Holidays spent at home were incomparably more comfortable. But by now loneliness had become an essentially permanent condition. I was unable to feel any close bond with my siblings. I regarded my parents with a strange amalgam of emotions, distrust, longing, shame, admiration, and the slightest tinge of contempt. I did not feel

the deep warmth of love that I yearned for, and for my own part was distant and undemonstrative. I had no close friends at school, there were no children of my age in the village, no "suitable" children anyway. And I had learned to be as insufferable a snob regarding the "lower classes" as everyone else. I suppose I was desperate enough to feel superior to someone, and class does allow one a feeling of superiority while sparing the challenge of actually measuring oneself against the despised other.

I spent my days reading, indulging my aeronautical hobbies, riding my bike around the lanes with Rusty for company, in fine weather taking long, sometimes all-day walks with Rusty. On these walks I acquired a deep love of the quiet miracles of Nature, an appreciation of the beauty and wonder of both the vistas of rolling hills with their patterns of fields and woods and also the shape of a flower, the meaning laden meanderings of ants. And with this wonder came also a terrible feeling of exclusion, the sense that no matter how much I

might worship all this beauty, I could never own it, make it a part of myself or belong to it. Too often this lonely alienation would overcome me. I would sit on the grass, gazing out at all that beauty, and I would weep. I wept for the cruelties and loneliness of school, I wept for an inner beauty that I could never truly believe in. Rusty would lick the tears from my cheeks, the most intimate kindness I ever knew, and I would hug him tight, sure that he loved me, that he was the only one who did, and that I loved him. And soon he would nudge me, push me to get up. I would wipe my nose, my eyes and stand. He would look at me, slowly wagging his tail, then set off at a run, together we would run helter-skelter until I was breathless.

Sometimes we would drive to the Wellington Monument on a Sunday afternoon. Once we climbed to the top to look out at the view of the valley below, farms, railway, town and villages. It was surrounded by sandy heathland and there was always a stiff breeze for kite flying. One spring the heath was littered with bodies of rabbits in poses of

agony, victims of the eradication campaign that loosed the mixamatoxis virus in Australia.

Then there were our seaside holidays every summer. These started in Lyme Regis when I was still quite young, three or four perhaps. I remember our first stay because on the very first day, which was overcast, I played happily all day long at the water's edge, building little sand-castles with my bucket and spade, splashing in the small waves. Nobody gave a second thought to ultra-violet rays, or sunblock, in those days, so Mummy happily assumed that with the clouds there was no danger of sun burn. Which proved in fact to be not quite the case. I ended up with second degree burns over my entire body, and I'm told I spent most of the rest of the trip in bed with a fever and in a lot of pain. As a matter of fact, with yearly summer boosts, the tan line I developed that year never quite bleached away over the winter months for a good forty years.

We went back to Lyme every summer for several years, always staying in the Chalet, a green painted holiday cottage built to

resemble a traditional swiss chalet. They were happy days for the most part, where I managed to leave behind my usual melancholy. Idle days on the beach. Exploring the Cobb and the other piers of the ancient harbor. Roaming the narrow streets and alleys of the picturesque Old Town, browsing books for hours in W. H. Smith's. Fishing trips with the local fishermen in their open mackerel boats loaded with a dozen or so tourists. The passengers would make their way gingerly down the heavily worn steps in the harbor wall to be helped aboard with a strong hand and an encouraging smile from the skipper. Of course I already considered my self a seasoned sailor and would jump straight down onto the thwarts, which usually provoked various signs of disapproval, Ah, disapproval without consequences! Once loaded the boat's diesel would be cranked into starting amid clouds of exhaust fumes, the skipper would engage the prop and we would be under way. Once past the furthest shelter of the Cobb there was usually a heavy swell as waves from the Atlantic made their way up the Channel.

Naturally, within moments there would be faces turning green and at least one owner of a heart of oak would be retching helplessly over the side, affording me a rare occasion for contempt. We were allowed to keep our catch, and once home dad would clean and Mum would cook the fish. Too much trouble dealing with all those nasty little bones for my taste, so I made a sweeping decision that I didn't like fish, and refused to eat any kind of seafood for years. "It's your loss," said Dad, and in retrospect I tend to agree.

No episode would be complete without an example of that streak of cruelty making an appearance. Actually there are two that I still look back on with shame and guilt.

I spoke of a gratuitous betrayal of Peter, my old kindergarten friend, and it was here that it took place. Not long before Peter had to endure the pain of his parents' divorce. It was apparent to all the boys at school that he was suffering, and even the bullies left him in peace. I was down at the harbor with a few casual holiday pals when Peter showed up, completely unexpectedly. He

stopped and offered a friendly greeting and I introduced him to my companions. We were all idly chatting when the demon caught hold of me.

I began to laugh, and pointing at Peter I announced, sniggering, "Peter's parents are DIVORCED!" Peter blushed, looked helplessly around then turned and fled. Trust me when I say I have not the first idea what prompted me. I bore Peter no ill will. He had done me no harm. That summer had been my last at Kestrels, so I never saw or spoke to him again. I'm sure my guilt has hurt me more than my taunt hurt my old friend, and I may have begun to absorb and understand the lesson of kindness that day.

I do not know what I may have hoped for in these days. I think I didn't do a lot of hoping, and better off for it. Time passed. I passed my time. Days at home were for the most part passed without dread, and that sometimes almost passed for happiness. Certainly there were small eternities for which I managed to leave myself behind, concentrating on an Airfix kit or out in the woods with Rusty, and

there were always books. To a point I had become inured to the ordeal of school.

The year I turned ten was when the Future became a concrete presence in my ideas. My feet were getting bigger. The fourth form was where the school started to focus our attention on upcoming examinations that would shape our fates. The Eleven Plus, offered a safety net of sorts, if a grammar school could be so regarded - we were already well-trained little snobs and considered anything but a Public School to be a dead loss. Thirteen Plus was a last chance before the Common Entrance which was the real decider, those of us who passed would go on to the schools where places had been reserved at birth or soon after. The others would not.

Oh yes, "Just a Lonely Boy"? Pop music was beginning to filter through, and as you may imagine, Paul Anka's song struck a certain chord with me. Pete had a baby sitter who was gone on Buddy Holly - she cried the whole evening, playing "It Doesn't Matter Any More" over and over, on the day he died.

TIME AND THE NEED TO FILL IT

By Kenneth Rains Shiffrin

The cold steel railing of the gurney sent a chill through him, like he had never known.

The fluorescent hospital light assured him - he was no longer safe.

He longed for a warmth, like the one he had before.

He looked up and instinctually prayed

Those tendrils of hairs inside wide nostrils would hold onto the hardened snot clinging to them.

He started to tussle and a young silk skinned nurse reached for him.

Finally! A touch – it had to be warm.

It would free him from fear, tether him to humanity and sooth his soul.

Her cold hand shocked him and he pissed uncontrollably.

From the moment he was born he knew he was old enough to die.

No youthful invincibility, no superhuman immortality.

Finite – just time, and the need to fill it.



JUICY FRUIT

By Salena Godden

Photos © Lisa Wormsley

It's 2am Thursday when I finally have the strength to get out of bed and I write this.

I have been sweating and chewing for the last 48 hours. It was Sunday lunchtime when I fell through the door and landed like a crumpled girl. It was too loud out there, too much white startling light and those screaming hab dabs in long black masks and cloaks barking through black rain. I fall into short spurts of broken

hallucinatory sleep, drenched in bizarre dreams. Only to wake abruptly with the presence of another in the room, soaked in fearful sweat I haul myself into the bathroom to retch up more, yet more white chewy froth.

On Monday afternoon I sat up and tried to sip some tea, it didn't work and when it bounced it tasted of sour. My throat is stripped raw, I'm weak and pale. I take off my clothes which are damp with terrible acrid sweat

again and I find chewing gum in my pants, stuck to my gusset, then I remember how that got there.

Now it all comes back to me. I did it this time, what was I thinking? I have been running on empty, counting the ratio of food and sleep and vomiting and gum - since I only eat every other day and only sleep four nights out of seven I figure I should be able to live without food and rest for longer and longer stretches. It is important to be able to exist without food or sleep just in case. You have to train your own body, you have to drive the vehicle, you are your landlord.

It's Thursday, it's 2am and as I type this my guts turn over and I can hear them squirming in there, tearing pieces, trying to feed. I have cancelled out carbohydrates and meat and now exist mostly on lentil slop, soup and sometimes porridge, nothing to use teeth on, nothing to bite down on either. Nothing for them to hold on to, no fat, no oils. This baby food diet kind of leaves the body exactly the same colours and consistency as it entered. It falls out of me. If there is another episode, another eruption, whilst I am sleeping I might choke. I think I will have to start sleeping with tape across my mouth so they cannot see the light or the way out.

Come on spit it out he says holding his hand in front of my mouth. I say no and who does he think he is, show me the money first? He says, come on spit it and I shake my head. He takes his fella out, a purple one, a dark plum colour with a thick bell-end but narrow towards the scrotum. Mushroom dick, I say. He smiles, strokes himself and then he says something like, hey play nice as he starts to move his hand up and down his burgeoning fungi, directing it towards me. Just spit it out, he says again. I keep my mouth shut tight and shake my head no. The damp car park is silent and starkly lit, our voices echo. There is the sound of a leak, rain slopping into the corner by the door to the lifts. We are pretty high. I don't like this anymore, this is a weird spot to be in and the sobering effect must show on my face because he says, are you alright? I say I want to go and maybe another time, I just got a real bad feeling about this, trust me, we should get out of here. He pulls my arm and makes out like I am a cock tease and a gum player. He seems to have his mind made up about things and he says spit it out and I pull away. He grabs my arm tighter and puts my reluctant hand on his erect fungus. I shake him off and say, look I am never wrong, I have a really bad feeling about this, let's get out of here before it's too late. He's pissed off but he tries to be a gentleman, thinking

he might still be in with a chance and he acts like he is tender about me and so he says with fake sensitivity, are you sure you are alright? You said you had gum and I thought you wanted to... That's when the car screeched towards us. Like I said I am never wrong when I get that feeling. A black hearse screeches around the corner driven by figures in black robes screaming yabba hab dabs. They see us and speed up trying to steam straight into us. The car swerves madly, there is a screech of burning rubber and the deafening screaming hab dabs, yabba yabba yabba they yell out of the open windows. There is some crazy music blaring, pot and pans and bells. Dabbya ydabba ydabba salamma yaba

yaddy they scream, it's a bizarre high-pitched screeching drilling noise they make with their tongues. I don't understand a word of it but it's got something to do with gum, with him and me and his cock is still hanging out of his jeans as we run down and down the stinking piss staircase. We get to the lift, it takes too long, the urgency makes me want to wee and I hop from one foot to the other and when the lift arrives, it's awful with florescent light and urine. I can hear them in the car speeding down to the exit too and I panic and say, hey we should go back up the stairs and head up and hide at the top. Mushroom cock agrees and takes this moment to put it back in his pants, thankfully.



I taking two steps at a time, breathless, I shout, who are they? He says, family. Fuck I say and then I keep my mouth shut as we sprint up the back stairs. On the top floor it is empty and above us a bland rainy night. Nothing to see but wet black rain. I haven't seen a good moon for a long time I think and then I don't think about nothing but the fact we are surrounded by masked black figures with rapier swords. Hey, I say, we don't want no trouble. What else am I going to say? Then one of them moves forwards and puts her hand in front of my mouth and I know she is saying spit it out, so I do. I give it up, I am not going to argue, she has the rapier against my throat. She holds it in her fingertips and her eyes slant coolly at me. The whites of her eyes are pinkish red and the iris, black and dilated as a drugged-up racehorse. She looks at the gum carefully, she opens and closes its material and then throws it to the floor, she knows it's not the real gum. Then there is more heated babble, yabba ydabba. Mushroom cock gets down on his knees and speaks in their language and in any language I can see he is trying to set me up, he points at me. They don't give him much of a chance though, they get hold of him and hang him by the ankles off the roof. Everything is falling out of his pockets and he's screaming, begging for mercy. He speaks in

the same language as them but there is no mistaking the universal language that he is trying to stitch me up. I presume they think he has gum. I can tell they are asking him the same question over and over again and he is shaking his head like he doesn't know and pointing at me. I take this chance to slink off into the shadows and skedaddle. I manage to bolt, leaving them having a nice family reunion.

I race back down the Brick Lane and dive into the Golden Hart and there I find my pint and seat at the bar as if I just popped to the toilet and it was a weird daydream. Maybe it was. Maybe I am losing it, losing my knack. I start to clock my sleep and food ratio. I try to remember what I decided, a bowl of soup every other day and porridge on the third day and only four hours sleep after eating on the first night? When was the first night? When did I make that dark green soup? That was good soup. How much gum can I harvest? I look in my notebook, but it makes no sense all the pages are ripped out. I must have ripped them out so nobody would read them. That was foolish now I cannot even read them. I feel empty but I know I have got to keep empty, I don't want to feed them. Booze keeps them sedated, sleepy.

I down my pint and get the hell out of there, feeling strangely

conspicuous and more than paranoid. I walk, chewing the gum up and between my legs, seems to be the safest place to keep it, everyone seems to want gum tonight. It makes me walk with a wriggle and anyone with a trained eye might guess I'm chewing, but that's the chance I am taking. As I walk towards Shoreditch I get an invite to go to a party in an illegal lock down. I think to myself a crowd would feel really nice right now, a buzz of normal happy folk out for weekend. People that don't know about gum. It does, it does feel

good, it is dark and the windows are boarded up and it feels safe. I get to hear wonderful ordinary conversations about dull things like *what do you do* and *have you been here before?* What do I do? Have I been here before? What the hell does that all mean exactly and who even remembers what you did and do and where you were. Since the gum everything seems irrelevant, but I guess its pleasant enough, I smoke and drink with the friendly party people in a delightful easily forgotten blur.



A girl with orange skin and dry straightened hair corners me with the whites of her nostrils, she tells me that everyone has a book inside them. I beg to differ, a book isn't something we all have inside like friendly bacteria, its hard work and it won't let you sleep easy even after its expiry

date, but I bite my lip, if only she knew the half of it. I try to remember a time when I was blissfully unaware and when things were different, but I can't. It's like when they say all men are capable of rape, big difference between thinking about it and doing it.

Then an Australian boy with ragged eyes the colour of a tsunami and flat hard hands like paddles tries to talk me into going back to his. He reckons he knows some things that might interest me. I roll the film on and imagine waking up beside him and I have to decline. Nobody should wake up with me and see what I have gnawing and swelling inside.

I talk to a bald guy with chubby cheeks and a squint. I amuse myself when I tell him he has the hands of a grand prix racing driver. That's crazy, he says, how did you know what a mad driver I am? I hold both his hands and look into his round pink face and say, I don't know, it was a hunch,

it was a feeling I got just then, you really really should be racing grand prix. He blushes and says, you really think so? Yeah sure, I say. Meanwhile, I keep knocking back the black market vodka he buys me.

I forget about mushroom dick until I feel in my pockets and find I still have his money and that I didn't go through with the deal. I experience a twinge of guilt, remembering him and the screaming hab dabs holding him upside down gurgling for mercy, all that black rain and a long way down, but as if I was going to give him the gum just like that. How did he know I was chewing in the first place? I make a mental note: I have to be more careful.



It's morning when I leave that party and I leave alone. I check I haven't been followed, but I feel like someone is watching me. It might just be that weird jumpy feeling we all get when sleep deprived. The world is loud, loud and white and bright and hot, there is this heaving sensation and a screaming in my head and shooting pains inside the underneath of me. Just get home, I tell myself, just get home and close the door, maybe it's time, maybe it's gum. I feel like I am walking uphill on an escalator going down. I am walking on a conveyor belt heading backwards. The same shop passes me over and over again.

This ache, this throbbing, right inside and up there. I couldn't reach it with a stick nevermind my own finger. I might reach it with an extended tape measure and I start picturing one of those old tape measures that snap back with a zirrrrrp snap noise.

Eventually, I turn the corner onto my street, I am outside the bookshop when I start to cough and gag. I cannot hold it in. Some froth comes up, white, slimy and viscous. There is a hair in my mouth. A long black hair going down the back of my tongue. I try and find it with my fingers, it's slippery. I am staggering to get to my front door and gagging. I jangle with the keys, involuntarily and violently

gagging. I get through the door and kick it shut behind me. I yank at the hair down my throat. It's foul and I look in the bathroom mirror and pull at it, its awkward, my mouth is wide open and I dribble down my chin. I pull at the hair, it's clogged, like the way hair might clog in a plug hole. I pull at the hair, it is attached to something bigger.

Gum, it's gotta be the gum, finally it must be time. I pull at strands and strands of hair and gum that keep stringing and breaking, the more I pull at it the more there is to come out. I am pulling gloops of gum, over and over and coughing. It is clumped wholly, caking in my back teeth and in the back of my throat. It shifts slightly, my eyes are watering. Finally with one last yank it eases up the back of my throat, I can hardly breathe, just through my nose. I snort, forcing my nasal passages to clear or I will drown on this mess.

Just one last good yank I tell myself, tear pouring down my cheeks, mucus dripping from my nose. Yank. Yanking my head forward, white froth and snot, I yank and yank, gagging until it comes out with a scream...a chunk of gum encasing a bloody pink, translucent hairy worm curled inside its sticky end. Disgusting but the relief is sweet. This is what all the fuss was

about, this is what they are all after. There in my hand a soft and round bodied worm. It's about the size of a cocktail sausage. It moves coily in my palm, like a chubby maggot, blind and warm. Its skin is transparent, there are tiny thin threads of red and blue veins and four pincing teeth, something about it looks like a piece of lower intestine. Its eyes are still sealed shut and it moves its tiny mouth open and close really slowly like a yawn. I put it in the incubator with the others. Then I collapse exhausted onto my bed, I am a crumpled girl.

Now it is Thursday and past 2am, typing this I can feel them working their way up inside me, I have been peuking up the chewy mucus, the afterbirth. I

work out the ratio of sleep and food deprivation and how many gum-worms I can starve out of me. I am the host, the carrier and the landlord but I must not feed them or they will get too big, they'll block my lungs, they'll jam up my throat, they'll get stuck somewhere vital and choke me. They move inside me and surface to the light to get born.

I squeeze a new stash of gum between my fingers and shove it up and in as far as I can and then I type this. I am chewing, wriggling, spread-legged and shimmying in my seat at my desk, chewing to the fizz of late night radio, chewing and drinking a glass of vodka to keep them nice and sleepy.





COLD IN THE SUN

By Gary J. Shipley

The air is bulked to bursting with brazen conviviality, pithy maxims spanning life, death and everything between - all the many timeless spells of inebriation. The drink is going down and the sun is still on the rise. The fans on the ceiling churn up the smoky atmosphere, chopping up the fibrous streaks of emptied lungs and cooling those below with severed air. Nobody here wants the sun on their back. They'd rather a young girl or a young boy on their back, but most settle for another drink and another smoke and a wank somewhere down the line when no one will be safe for a minute or two.

Frank wants to leave. He hasn't been here long and he'd rather not have come. He drinks fast, saying little in the pauses. He nods and listens but his mind is elsewhere, in better company.

Back home, the sun bleeds through the parched leaves of Frank's winsome sycamore, its bleached cascades pouring into the dry earth. The unfinished fence at the bottom of his garden leans precariously into its shadowed props, while his wife, Elizabeth, enjoys the sun. She is naked, bar the huge black

sunglasses perched on her greasy nose.

I am not vulnerable when I have the sun watching over me, when I can feel his warm hands on my body. I have permission to snooze, to relax, and to relish in the feeling of my skin, and it is he that bestows this upon me. My back is damp with his heat. My nipples will be black soon. No scratching! Wait for your nails to dry! If you must scratch, use your palm or your knuckles! Ignore it and it'll pass! Bloody ants are everywhere. Did I get it? I can't feel it moving. It's probably spread across my shin. Yuck!

"Are you sure, lady? I don't think so, love. No offence n that but you ain't my type by any stretch n I bet you stretched nya?... Don't matter how much you be smilin, love, neither vus is gonna service ya. What ya doin goin bout like that anyhow? Your old man get kicks outa seein you in this state? Fuckin hats off - that's one dedicated husband you got there, I'll tell ya.... Nless you wanna dog it, bro?"

"Like fuck!"

"You erd im dinya? Yeah? Then put that smile away will ya! What

ya waitin on? Come on, dog, she sure as fuck ain't getting no younger. Bye bye, missus..."

Two white faces, and him behind them beating down into the backs of their heads trying to get to me, two white faces with eyes of crystallized spittoons, of nervous loathing, and I smile. I'm smiling: it never fails to win people over; it has magical powers, black magic to match my nipples. There's no smile like it. I could incubate blind, featherless chicks under its glow - a smile that could save souls and lead men away from the rocks of their misfortune... Here goes, Frank. Here goes. You never had a doubt and now I need you to be right. I'm keeping it as natural as I can, Frank; natural is best; natural is transcendental, a glimpse of heaven in lips and teeth. If you could have bottled my smiles, Frank, if you could have bottled my smiles... I can see the tops of my cheeks, Frank: it's a good one this time. If only you could see it. Is it my best yet, Frank? Is it? I'm glad you can't see their eyes, Frank: all piss and thistledown, Frank, all piss and thistledown. Their faces are too white, an accumulated, unsightly paleness: white on white on white, and their noses, their insolent button noses, sitting in the middle of their faces like tiny shrunken heads. His warm hands are on me again. I feel a tremble

in his fingertips and sense a cloud is on its way....

Beneath swirling blades tearing up the air with their blunt edges he is elsewhere once more. He's drinking with friends that aren't friends and he'd like to leave, and he would, he'd leave, if he hadn't only recently arrived. He is down low and the sun is up high. A shaft of light breaks through the window, striking him blind to this place, to his friends that aren't friends, to the drink in his hand that he'd rather not drink if it weren't for this place and his friends that aren't friends. He cracks the glass on his teeth trying to drink in the dark, and somehow he knows it's too late. He's already too late. He opens his eyes and the sun is all gone. The window is in shade and he shivers for her, so he thinks, with a smile, one especially for her, not as good, nowhere near, though she'd never say. He'd say it for her, filling her mouth with his words.

I'm sorry to say, it's not working on them. Seems you're a strange one, old man, with peculiar tastes. No headway at all, and yet I felt it was good. There I was listening to you, you daft old man you, you daft old man. It was only ever you that noticed, wasn't it? Come, you can tell me now, you uxorious fool. Who were the others? Who were the throng? There weren't any were

there, you daft old man. You can tell me now....

Looking down into Sammy's greyed corneas, Sammy the friendliest dog in the world, Sammy the dog with the talking eyes...: I am fucking ravenous. My stomach has floated up into my ribcage, up towards my huge heart, where it is this minute getting entangled in arteries and ventricles. I feel short of breath, am experiencing dizzy spells. I am liable to collapse at the base of a stool and they'll think I'm asleep; they'll think I'm asleep and they won't give me food and I'll wake as we leave, with the nudge of a shoe, and I'll starve all night. I won't be able to get through it. He'll try to wake me in the morning, but I'll not have the energy to lift my head from the floor, and maybe he'll leave me, believing me to be asleep, so I'll not even get the one meal I get there. People will comment: my fans will want to know why I am not performing tonight, and why I don't accompany him here tomorrow lunchtime when I am incapacitated with hunger and am unable to drag my head up from the floor. He won't say that of course; he'll play it down and change the subject as quickly as he can. They'll still be concerned by my absence, but they'll not get much from him and they know it. How long will this go on before something is done about me? How long does it take to die of

malnourishment? I've been dying of it for years. I have a head start. They'll not let it slide for more than a day or so. Could I last that long?

The following few minutes are crucial. Commit to them fully and hope for the best! What if my audience is distracted and fails to notice me until it's too late, when the last of me is spent, and I am famished out of my senses. What if I catch M. as he is busy interrogating a murder suspect, or Gyulus as he is offloading a fresh crop of ceps or trading his rhymes for beer, or Med with his face glued to a paper, or Charles wrestling with black-suited demons. I'll have to time it just right. I could start with the crumbs from the carpet, of which there are always some, just to keep me going, although I'd rather not risk offending my audience if I can help it. I can sense disapproval when I'm caught licking the floor. It causes some to look away and not look back, and I can't risk that. I must try not to slather too much, or catch my teeth on the ends of pinched fingers - today I could happily take the fingers as well and that's not like me at all. I am known for my precision, my technique, my inability to harm. I have a reputation to keep up. But my brain is so very weary at not having been spared, not for a second, the pangs of a foodless future. Nevertheless, I can't be

letting myself go just because my intestines haven't seen food for in excess of 48 hours. For the past two mornings, my one meal of the day has had maggots in it. I couldn't bring myself to touch it.

Here we are. These steps are going to finish me. He'll drag me up one or two before looking round to check what's wrong, by which time it'll be too late. My entertaining days will be well and truly over and all those bar snacks will soften and putrefy, as will I. They'll decrease their orders over time, of Cheddars, of crisps and those sweet sausage rolls, and they'll wonder why they ever needed to order so many, and the men around the bar will cast their eyes down a while, to spare a thought for their ever peckish old friend that died before his time.

I've conquered the steps; my legs did it all by themselves. Will my tail wag itself? I can't see why not, if it too expects to be fed. They're turning their heads. Their eyes are dropping straight down to me. They're putting their hands in the glass bowls that sit on the bar and they're talking to him. What's he said? What's he said that's taken their hands and their attention from me? The drool is spilling out now. I can feel them, two foamy white tendrils hanging precariously from my mouth, and they're turning away from the snakes of

spit that pullulate from my chops, and who can blame them. That's not the kind of show they've come to expect. I cannot feel my legs or my tail, but I can feel shame. I follow my spittle in a slow arc to the floor and I lick and slurp and drain the carpet of food crumbs, and I'll live through till tomorrow when I'll eat my breakfast, maggots and all.

A soak named Gyulus raises his empty pint glass and says to it, "If something is not done you shall be the last of seven!" and walks up and down the bar searching out his next drink, reciting his pitch as he goes:

**"little angels bring wine to my door
I want you to wean me from this world
I want to fly among the free..."**

Those who know him all too well look away with a laugh and a shake of the head. Then comes the plea to the barman to put a small one on the slate, and to the inevitable refusal comes the reply: "I still have rights until I fall apart."

"Rights, maybe, but no credit."

He shrugs it off as he's done a thousand times before. He needs one more for the straÙe, one more to keep him steady on his bike, to put pep in his legs, to send him home done. The Pilchards aren't paying tonight. At least that's what they think. He's got a trick

or two up his sleeve to get that last drink.

In memory of Ricky The Suicide, he sets about an impassioned rendition of Kányádi's 'Woodcut': there are feelings of unsought empathy with the "afflicted men with sunken melancholy eyes," knowing nods all around when "hope glimmers and slowly dies," shivers and the lighting of cigarettes as "all this will come to an end with parchment faces staring back," for this "generation worn and greyed on benches equally decayed" can see their mourners "all in black." And so it goes: they are "motionless in trance" as if to order, and after the funeral is done Gyulus is looking at the last of not seven but eleven.

Gyulus drank until the world went out.

Sammy lapped at the carpet until his tongue went black and, with his belly full of crumbs and grit, gave up on his fickle fans and went to sleep, dreaming of a squirming breakfast.

They find my smile ugly; they find me ugly. I think even you will find me ugly when you find me. I'm sorry I didn't do more to escape what they're going to do to me. I can stand and smile. That's all I have now. My legs won't move and my mouth is too

busy to speak. Goodbye, Frank...****...

I think I'm still smiling, Frank, closing my eyes in the hope that they'll...****...

Nothing I do...****...

Don't ever find me ugly...****...

Don't ever find me...****...

...****... (et cetera.)

At the precise moment her death occurred there was a sign, a valediction: three men in their early twenties, having stolen a sheep from a field on the outskirts of town and beaten it to death, threw its blood-soaked carcass through the door into where our friends were sitting. It slammed into the side of the bar and then slid to the floor like a huge tampon swollen with blood. Sammy nearly choked himself to death on his leash trying to get at it.

When a man finds his beloved wife, her head having been pulped, the backs of her legs fouled, wearing a grin carved out of stone, annealed to the point of immortality, he doesn't have anywhere he can go. He finds that he is able to stare down upon the carnage of his wife forever. He finds that as long as he stands perfectly still, refusing to move a muscle or divert his gaze, he is impervious.

"Cold in the Sun" is an excerpt from Gary J. Shipley's novel, C^0.



A HOROLOGISTIC HORROR

By Matt Leyshon

Photos © Max Reeves

The puddles at his feet grew pink like the sun rising in a salmon sky. Behind the watchmaker's door the horologist bled to death, his life formed a pooling and unpleasant spillage that smelt heavy and metallic. The Northern Quarter back-street was silent and empty but for Thomas Shaw who stood still for a moment curiously holding his new timepiece. Boarded windows glared down from crumbling buildings that loomed like crowding totems from a lost and forgotten age. He had no idea

what time it was and the watch would offer no clue. It was a manual Oris with a jewelled Swiss movement and a white enamel face marked with engravings; it was not valuable or especially desired by collectors. To the common thief the watch was certainly not worth killing for; but that is exactly what Thomas Shaw had done.

He was a petty thief and he was not especially successful by the terms that one would typically judge a criminal. He had no

Spanish villa, no top of the range television; he lived in a studio flat with an old black and white portable left behind by the previous tenant. Indeed, were it not for stealing food then he would struggle to afford groceries. Nonetheless, he had never been caught despite being prolific by anyone's standards. Thomas Shaw's secret was his natural tendency towards the random; his crimes out-surrealised

Maldoror. The monetary value of an item meant nothing to him, he stole for the love of stealing, of upsetting the balance and breaking the rules. He stole because he could and want played no part. He had stolen sewing machines and umbrellas and would just as likely steal a dissecting table if he encountered one unguarded. The watch however was not chance booty.



Today had been Thomas Shaw's second visit to the watchmaker's. The first burglary was an opportunistic affair that occurred upon one of his nocturnal wanderings when he noticed that one of the rusted wire shutters had not been properly closed. Knowing nothing of watches he

had burgled completely haphazardly filling two banker's bags that he had found beneath the counter. He fenced everything the next day through his usual outlets and received a typically pitiful payment that meant nothing to him except that his rent would be paid for

another month; but there was one item he felt compelled to keep. A notebook.

When he first drew the notebook from the bag with his usual mild disinterest he had anticipated it being a financial log of some kind, maybe an invoice book; but it was nothing of the sort. What he read inside soon piqued his curiosity. It seemed the horologist was a man of maverick interests that stretched considerably beyond the fixing of timekeeping mechanisms. In the scribbled notes upon the opening pages Thomas Shaw saw quotations about relativity, long equations, and longer, seemingly esoteric, ponderings.

The second is the duration of 9,192,631,770 periods of the radiation corresponding to the transition between the two hyperfine levels of the ground state of the caesium 133 atom.

He did not understand what he was reading but the mystery appealed as an obscure allegory might to a scholar of theology. He continued reading.

Two events taking place at the points A and B of a system K are simultaneous if they appear at the same instant when observed from the middle point, M, of the interval AB. Time is then defined as the ensemble of the indications of similar clocks, at

rest relatively to K, which register the same simultaneously.

The author appeared to be less interested in devices that kept time and more so in the nature of time itself. The middle pages were headed the Kappa Effect and the Tau Effect and were both underlined in heavy pencil. The author had connected both with arrows emanating from the word entheogens. This again meant nothing to Thomas Shaw and so he looked the word up in a dictionary he had once stolen but had been unable to sell; entheogens referred to hallucinogens.

Time is as illusory as fish swimming in space, and yet the ocean's deep waters are not unlike the cosmos.

The words grew more curious but still this was of comparatively limited interest to Thomas Shaw; indeed, had the notes stopped here then he would most certainly have tossed the book straight into his litter bin. So what if a clock maker liked the odd trip and rambled about space as an ocean?

But the later pages contained notes that became considerably more intriguing and entirely more bizarre; strange symbols, seals, and references began to litter the watchmaker's spider-scrawled theories. Thomas Shaw became increasingly enthralled

by the recondite hieroglyphics and the resonance of chthonic mystery. He found that he could not put the notebook down. The latter pages were read with his jaw agape and eyes wide like plates of milk.

...the mindless entity Azathoth, which rules all time and space from a curiously envired black throne at the centre of Chaos.

Perhaps it was because of his own lack of morals, or perhaps it was his distaste for the punishment that the moral majority would inflict upon him if he were ever caught; but Thomas Shaw had always made a point of ignoring religious instructions and ethical codes. He subsequently found himself, on occasion, seeking guidance from the dark world of the occult.



He had always been drawn to tales of demons rather than the saccharine stories of angels and he attributed his learning in life more to ghost stories and weird tales than to the education system. His imaginary friends as a child had been ghouls and forgotten gods. His infant dreams were of borderlands and voyages to Arcturus. And now

his reading served him well for the name Azathoth unearthed a long buried recognition; it struck him as a quite terrible name but more importantly he recalled reading it in the strange works of H. P. Lovecraft.

As he continued reading, the name Azathoth featured more and more until he became very

much the focus of the watchmaker's theory of time and magical intervention. According to the watchmaker, time was not merely at the mercy of cosmic forces and gravity, but an illusion created by Azathoth to inflict enduring suffering upon those who ceased to worship him. The theory was far reaching and Thomas Shaw was impressed, he was no longer simply gripped by the notebook, he became obsessed. He read and re-read the watchmaker's postulations to seek flaws in the writer's premises, but he found none. Like the author of the notebook, he too began to ponder upon the presumed certainty of cause and effect and tried to imagine a world without that certainty; a world where when one billiard ball struck another, it only moved because Azathoth caused it to move. He contemplated a world where nobody would be able to predict the movement of the second hand on a clock. He pondered upon the seasons, how wrong it was to assume that Spring would follow Winter just because it always had before. He imagined a morning when the sun failed to rise and the moon drifted away at night to orbit elsewhere and took the stars with it.

The watchmaker had written that he had seen evidence all around him of Azathoth's chthonic conspiracy against mortals. He

had spotted bees in the winter, recalled late blooms in Autumn and failed crops in rainy summers. And like the watchmaker, Thomas Shaw soon felt the drag of days and the inexplicable velocity of years. The watchmaker had seen through the lie and with the treatise in Thomas Shaw's hands he had sought to establish the truth; and Thomas Shaw wanted the truth too. The watchmaker had set out to subjugate Azathoth; his notes detailed how he had studied the grimoires of necromancers, he had read the diaries of John Dee and the tomes of alchemists. He had devoured the works of H. P. Lovecraft and demonised occultists. As he read the watchmaker had validated his theory by continuing to observe the work of Azathoth all around him; the lengthy waits as enamel dried, the speeding hours as he turned tiny screws, and the rush of months of incantations.

The watchmaker postulated that order and design were tortuous tools of the Elder God, they were instruments of harm upon man that he would surely fear being used upon himself; and so to chaos would Azathoth be drawn like the pious to the heavens. To this end the watchmaker had set about reconfiguring the mechanism of an old wristwatch. He had upset the springs and teased the balances until time became an arbitrary measure to

the watch's hands. Years he spent droning occult intonations as he orchestrated dissonant silences between arbitrary ticks and random tocks. He created tiny pendulums that clattered deafeningly before hanging mute. He crafted a minute hand etched with arcane symbols and signs that laboured furiously against a stubborn hour hand marked with seals that inched forward before being drawn back as if struggling to be free from a viscous mire. He created a second hand that would flicker like a Geiger counter before suddenly slipping into irregular periods of suspended animation. He had strained his eyes and worked nights through, wearing his body thin as he summoned Azathoth into the

timeless chaos that he was creating. He slept when he could remain awake no longer and rose when his eyes blinked open slowly like unfurling buds. He denied the time that the clocks around him would suggest had passed and the so progress of his work defied measure. Completion would be marked by and to all he had known, his mind would be wiped clean.

Thomas Shaw read the notebook over and over. He read in the bath, he read as he cooked, and he read as he ate. He memorised every passage and learned every sign and symbol. Each reading etched the words deeper into his consciousness like acid eating into copper plate.



Sleeping he dreamed of the watchmaker hunched over his tiny mechanism in the gloom, driven to the completion of his esoteric lure and cursing secondary duties such as breathing and eating; he dreamed the watchmaker's skin greying to aged alabaster, his back hunching like an ancient barrow as his delicate and frail fingers gripped minute cogs like bony talons around prey. Soon Thomas Shaw too felt the punishing stretch of time, each moment throbbled painfully as if with the turn of a great thumbscrew. He began to long for the solace of measuring by dread and colours out of space instead of living by clock faces and illusory orbits in the universe. The sun dragging itself across the sky now repulsed him like an eel slithering along a razor blade. Days and afternoons bore into his consciousness like chat show repeats on a jammed television and the drudgery of minutes cut like unopiated Leng Tch'e. With each passing ephemeral moment he felt the abhorrence of Azathoth that could only be appeased with deserved worship. He wanted the watch; he wanted to be free of this torture. He wanted it as an altar to the great god who would reward him with ascension to the timeless void and free him from wretched reason.

And so to this end Thomas Shaw found himself once more outside

the watchmaker's shop in the Northern Quarter. Stars glittered above like holes in oblivion's shroud and beyond the oily darkness Azathoth surely writhed like glistening intestines in blinding light and cosmic colours. He imagined the watch in his hands; himself sanctified and cephalopodic in a chthonic ocean of nothingness. He stood at the door and cursed time for permitting contemplation of his false past wasted in ignorance.

The door was ajar; to the casual passer by the building may easily have appeared derelict. Thomas Shaw walked inside. Cobwebbed and unwound clocks formed a silent jury on the dusty shelves. The musty stink of dead time rushed his head like amyl nitrate. Behind the counter was a doorway and through it a candle flickered and bathed the still horologist in amber light and murky shadow. His back was to the thief and he appeared oblivious to his approach. Thomas Shaw heard him mumbling a drone of dreadful inhuman sounds like the final baying of dying beasts.

Thomas Shaw had no doubt that the watchmaker would be engrossed in the random mechanisms of his heathen trap. He would be upsetting weights, loosening springs, and filing miniscule cogs whilst uttering those hideous hymns to the

chaotic Elder God. For a moment he watched and listened and the gravity of time weighed upon him like lead.

Thomas Shaw moved forwards quietly. The musty air fought his advance like deep water. He breathed slowly, inhaling dust and the odour of festering seaweed. His plan was to sneak up silently and unnoticed, then to grab the watch from the old man before turning to run. His skin prickled against the dismal atmosphere that swirled around him in cosmic eddies and a universe of motes flickering in a galactic void. He felt light, afloat and empty; it was an increasing effort to focus and concentrate.

The watchmaker continued to offer unholy prayers but Thomas Shaw heard the intonations gain in tempo as he approached until the frightful moans formed a hypnotic mantra of retching sounds and monstrous grunts that chilled him. The blood coursing through his veins thumped inside him like fierce waves lashing deep roars in a blow hole. He felt suddenly too dizzy to stand; he was disorientated and struck with a sudden panic that for a second caused his legs to weaken. He must have gasped as he stumbled for the watchmaker spun around to face him. To his horror the watchmaker's face seemed scaled and doused in mucus, bulging

fish eyes stared out glassy and spawn-like. The watchmaker's slime-ridden face filled his vision and hot breath draped around him like a fetid veil of festering fish guts.

"Azathoth. Zthth. Azathoth. Zthth."

The watchmaker's mouth gaped open like a great whale sucking in plankton, clam lips and mollusc gums framed a languid limpet tongue. Spittle flecked Thomas Shaw's cheeks like hot stinging octopus ink.

"Azathoth. Zthth. Azathoth. Zthth."

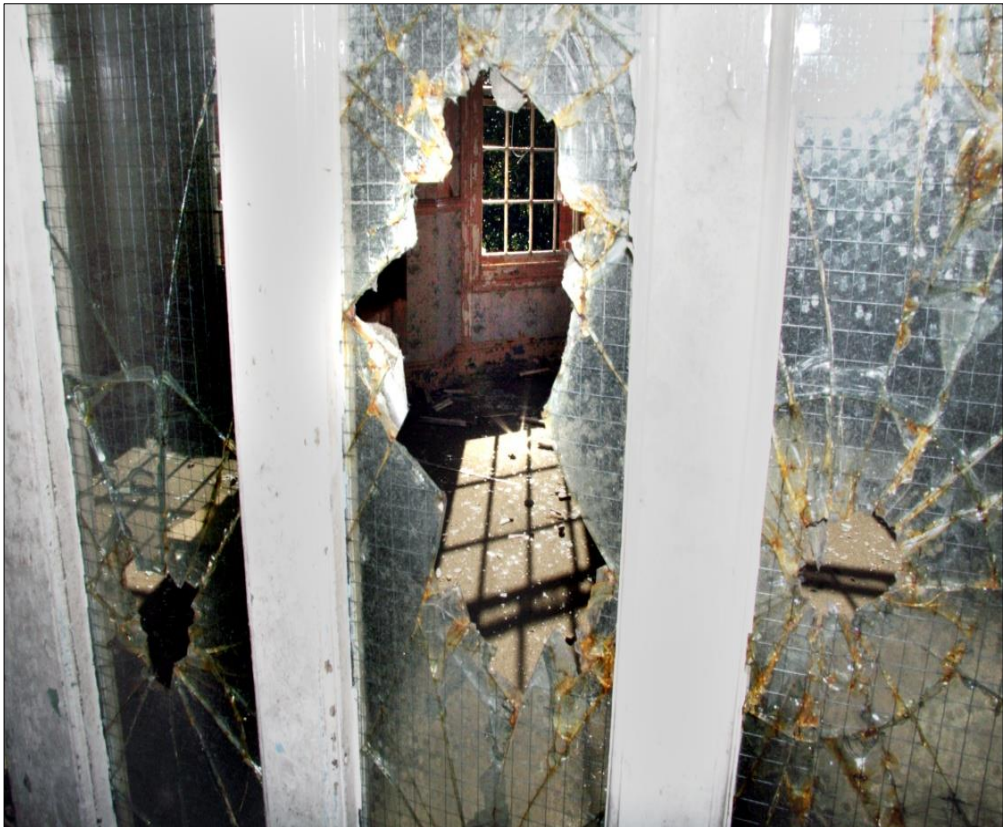
Horrified and desperate for those terrible words to cease Thomas Shaw reached to the bench and gripped a pin vice in his hand. He thrust it with all his might into the watchmaker's mouth. Green blood gushed a geyser and noxious bubbles of phlegm sprayed over him. A thousand tongues lapped and plunged like tendrils towards the thief and probed his pores like tentacles. An eternity of worms squirmed into his throat and nautilus suckers settled over eyes, sucking like leeches. The watchmaker devoured light as dark eels leapt from him in glistening swallow dances. An ancient bellow reverberated through every one of Thomas Shaw's molecules as if the Earth itself was forming

inside him with crashing plates and mountains of grinding rock. Then the universe seemed to entropy into his very being with a crushing weight that drowned his brain with a gruel of morose blackness and the reek of quim and faeces. Azathoth had made his presence known to Thomas Shaw...

The puddles at his feet grew pink like the sun rising in a salmon sky. Behind the clockmaker's door the horologist bled to death, his life a pooling and unpleasant spillage that smelt metallic. Scales

speckled the congealing blood like stars. Thomas Shaw had lost all concept of time and the watch would offer no clue. He rolled a fishy eye, but out of water everything was but a shapeless blur.

Space was oceanic and Thomas Shaw had run aground. Time lapped around him in laconic waves. He could do nothing but wait for the tide to turn, just as we all wait. But Thomas Shaw knew what he was waiting for; a solitary worshipper was enough for no god.



that is us. me and him. we have not
seen each other in years when he does
not WEAR his protection he can
easily be injured but still he
can't help himself battered as he is
he still comes to me and he will
think he knows who I am what I look
like. he really has no idea

.I need to abuse
and I need to protect myself with my
variety of novel looking masks.
when he wants to fuck me, I can change

into anything he thinks he wants

BUT i AM STILL IN CONTROL

and I still can make him hurt.

whenever I fucking
WANT TO



HIGH END SPEC

By Jet McDonald

It's not that I don't like cars don't get me wrong. I love them. In fact I have a relationship with them, the hatchbacks, the off roaders, the soft tops, the hard tops, the rally burners. My hands get all dirty, grubby, oil into the creases. It's like I look after them. I put my hand inside them, deep into them, into the carburettors and the break lubes and the wheel arches. Like I'm a surgeon.

And that's why I'm really in it for the modifications. You know *Max* it up. So I've been doing some muscle for this high end outfit called Phats. They got a unit on the Parkway and I've been helping out on Saturday afternoons when my garage knocks off. I have a pint with my regular boys and then off down the Parkway. I don't tell 'em or they'd think I was trying to slack off and get in with these other lads.

The truth is I would half mind getting in with Phats. This month they got a Golf Gti and stuck in some coilovers and a 1.8 litre 20v turbo and some alloys with Yokohama treads. It looks great and that was just a sniff for them. I spend all week getting Fiestas through their MOTs or just doing

some welding for some bank clerk's Vauxhall. These lads with Phats are pimping for serious playboys. Two weeks ago we had this bloke who was a director in his Dad's firm and he had a Peugeot 206 that he wanted tarted. They wouldn't let me touch that one but I had a look in the bonnet and they put in a 1997cc, four cylinders, sixteen valve engine with a fifty bhp nitro. It had green trim and black hide with emerald alloys. The ICE was tweeter pods on the A pillars and a couple of Audiobahn subs in the boot. I tell you it rocked and when it was done it looked so good you could have fallen in love with it. That's the kind of stuff I'd like to do, like you're a craftsman, a real craftsman, not a monkey with an eight inch.

Phats don't let me do much but every now and then I get a screwdriver in or they let me lift the bass pans into the boot. I'm working on Phats, the main man, a doughnut boy who does nothing but roll around with a wad of tenners eating a Snickers and pointing the bitten end at the engines and telling us to get a move on. I'm getting to be his and the other mates' mates and

one day they're gonna let me do some proper work, resprays, the lot. Cos I know I can do it, they've just got to give me the chance. I love cars and I know I could really show them what I can do with my hands. How I could pull it all together, how I could really make something instead of fixing broken stuff all the time.

To make something beautiful you have to love something beautiful and I can see it in the wheels and the spoils and the alloys and the chrome back boxes. I have dreams where I'm fitting turbochargers and dump valves. And I could make it all, cos sometimes with the high end specs I can hear the cars singing to me, like they're singing a tune and only I know the next bit. And then they put on too big a spoiler or ramp up the rear chassis and it's like a wrong note or out of tune.

I've got ginger hair. Ain't so bad but it sticks up all in curls so I gave up doing anything with it and let it grow and the curls got bigger and now it's turned into a kind of Afro, a ginger Afro. And the other thing is I got this pot belly, always have done since I was a kid, it sticks out like a balloon under a jumper, like someone got the upholstery wrong, screwed the whole trim. I reckon I got it cos of asthma. The

wheezing kind of sucked the air into me and it seeped out into my belly, like I swallowed it, cos the lungs couldn't hold anymore. And I never shook it off, the asthma, stayed with me like it got sucked back into the aerosol.

So I've got this puzzle going on where I love cars but bits of 'em don't love me. And when I try and get into them sometimes they give me the wheeze, I don't know if it's the oil or the resprays but something sets me whistling. Now I don't much about love, the truth is I haven't even had my leg over that much, but from what I've seen of it love comes with its fair share of comedowns and hangovers. So in the same way I love the cars and I stick with the cars despite the comedowns and I've got the wheeze and three puffers and the steroids for when my throat swells up. I figure it's all part of the relationship you have with things, with anybody in the world, it hurts you as much as it gives you.

But I've decided to change things, from the outside. I've started at a gym. They had a flyer for one at Phats. I checked it out first to make sure none of the lads were going there and then I started doing it evenings, really late, when most people have carted home to their missus.

The Manor it's called, like it's some kind of grand country house but it's a bit of a dump really. The girl on reception never puts her lipstick on straight, like she doesn't look in the mirror before she goes out, scarlet stuff over the edge of her lips. I wouldn't treat my face like that, like I wouldn't overspray the chassis with the chrome tail pipe on first. And she does two ciggies at once as she's going through her mag like she's not even reading the words, like she's not even reading the photos.

They've got cracked mirrors all over the walls and I've never been one for looking at myself but after a while I check out my pecs and my quads and my triceps and my biceps and my glutes and I start to go in these in these beach shorts so I can see the muscles properly. And I start taking these supplements and this protein and these pills that make you piss and I can start to see bits of me modify and the muscles get bigger like they're trying to rupture out of what was there before. And the bigger these bits of me get, the even bigger I want them to get and the more I look in the mirror to check them out. And then one day the woman at reception looks up from her magazine and says "you're doin alright" and smiles with crap lipsticked lips. So the next time I come in I wear a

basketball vest with New York Knicks on the front so it shows off my shoulders and she inks my number on the inside of her fag packet and puts it in her purse.

I thought she'd be a Sandra or a Sharon but she's an Alice like the women on the BBC who live in nice Victorian dresses. And she doesn't chain smoke when we go for drinks. She says she only does it at the Manor cos she gets bored and the weights and the mirrors just make her feel like she wants to be more unhealthy, smoking, like she's scratching at a scab. There is red lipstick on the rim of her wineglass. And when I look at it she drags her painted nail over the stubble of my chin. But you, she says, you're something special.

And I keep taking the carbs and the protein and the steroids and the pills that make you piss and with all the extra money I'm getting I buy loads of weights so I can use them at home and I keep on exercising with crappy late night television reflecting silver off my pecs and quads and glutes. And my cheekbones are hard like the edges of ashtrays and my eye sockets are dark, dark like they're sinking into my head.

Phat's asks me to help do the respray on a Cabriolet and this is a big deal and I do the gold pearl

undercoat and the purple overcoat, so it all shimmers like a silk chemise. Nice work they say and when I say thanks my voice is deep and throttled like a back box on a new exhaust and they look at me kind of strange.

And then I find myself doing my gym in the morning before I get into work. And I keep taking the carbs and the protein and the all the different little hyperburn pills so the fat evaporates, nitro in a piston head. And I hear the valves, tap, tap, tapping in my chest as my body wakes into new beginnings, new life. But it feels so cold in my chest and my bones and one morning I wake up and find I can't move, can't get out of bed. And the only number I can think to ring is Alice and she says she can't come cos she's working and I say you can't work all the day you're at the Manor evenings. And she says a girl's gotta to make ends meet. And then she pauses and I can hear the cars in the street outside and her breathing in between, short and fast, nervous. And then she says ok I'll come. I'll come.

And when she comes she's all tarted up in a short skirt that shows bruises and cellulite coming out below the hem on her thigh and a pink top that says "FREEDOM."

And she puts her red nails on my chest and asks what's wrong. And I say I am ready. But I am so cold. And she pulls up my T shirt to my arm pits and the muscles are so hard and stiff and bright that the sun flashes off them and makes her wince. She can see. She can see I am special. I start wheezing, I make a noise like a loose fan belt, wheezing and hissing and wheezing. And she drags her red painted fingernails back down to her handbag and says we should call a doctor, call an ambulance.

And I ask her what she does on the streets all day. And she turns away and bends over a phone and I can see that there are red marks on the back of her neck and her hair is dry and twisted up in places and she's not perfect and she's not like Alice in the BBC and without saying anything she lies down on the bed, really close but not touching, and she puts a cigarette in the fist of a hand, blowing the smoke at the ceiling. And I imagine the ambulance coming through the streets to get me, the lights flashing red and blue, wailing, as the others cars peel back, afraid of the cold, afraid of the metal so close it could rip them all like a knife.

there are things that you may wake up to but then we will quickly hush you back to sleep for.

we have your mother over there, she is bobbing her head, we keep her right on the brink
of consciousness. she will love you in the end, no matter what. even if she

remembers nothing and feels slack and dry mouth and strange
remorse. you will look the same on the outside

but we will have
no, don't try to move
stairwell
and we

replaced many of your organs
you are in a barred
underground

only need you barely alive
we just need you to breathe your

body conscious for a little
we'll do the rest

while and not die
your mom is fine

we propped her head
we have here

almost done
up, she laughed

some of your childhood playthings

try to get her to respond. tell her

she doesn't remember you, your

too. we thought it would be funny

him too. he is kneeling, his head is down

he is old. he wants to help you. or steal

us.

no god or prayer can help you now

or now

maybe now

your

play with them

name she is fading

priest we brought

if we sedated

and we see he

your organs from

or now



THE BOSS (AKA EVERYDAY HORRORS)

By Christopher Nosnibor

Photos © Malcolm Alcala

He had been expecting it. The Boss had been on his back about his performance for weeks. It was The Boss' typical MO not to come and speak to him directly, instead booking a meeting into his diary, the invitation being the first he knew of it.

The details has been brief to the point of rude, as per usual.

Meeting to discuss performance / sickness record and how to address going forward. Failure to attend will result in disciplinary - bring

evidence of improvement / progress aswell. How presented is upto you.

His night's sleep had been disturbed, his dreams rent with anxiety. Freud would have had a field day: Adler might have been less impressed by the incredibly cliché imagery and scenarios that his reactive mind projected behind his eyes. Morning came too soon and he rose groggily, his eyes bloodshot crazed in the mirror when he cleaned his teeth before dressing in the shirt and tie he felt made him look most

professional, dousing himself in Lynx to cover the scent of the perspiration he would inevitably shed late morning.

At his desk, time crawled as the minute second divisions crept from one to the next, heading inexorably toward the designated time. Fate awaited, and he couldn't help but feel that it had already been decided for him. Would there be any room to negotiate? Would there be a reprieve, or would his accidental career reach its termination?

Ten minutes to go. His palms were clammy and he made to the men's toilets to make ready. Adrenaline was already coursing through his bloodstream at an accelerated rate as his heartbeat increased. There was a whiff of vomit in the air of the gents, which cloyed with the usual fug of body-temperature excretions which hung heavy.

Two of the three cubicles were occupied. The first was silent but for the sound of someone tapping out a text message. Inconsiderate wanker. Asthmatic grunts and pants came from the second, which radiated a foul stench, the fetid, putrid aroma of decomposition, like rotting flesh. What the fuck did that guy have for dinner? It smelled like he'd dined on the decaying corpse of a tramp, and judging by the heavy breathing, he was either morbidly

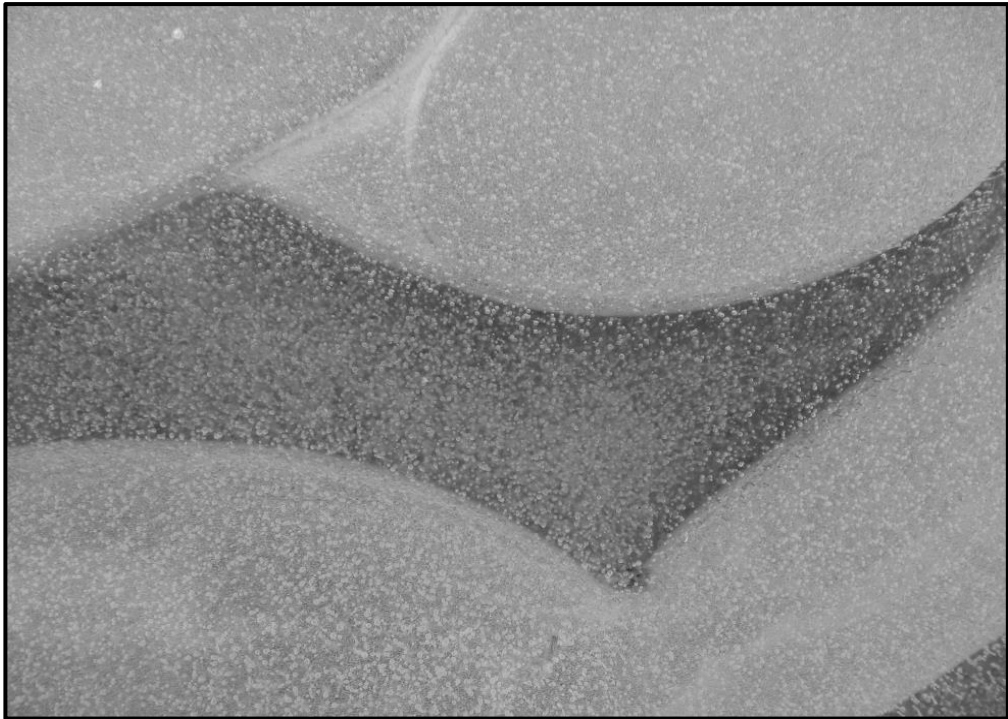
obese or ragging himself into a frenzy about it. How he wasn't asphyxiating on the stink was a complete mystery. The third cubicle was vacant but blocked, a piece of A4 bearing the scrawled legend 'Blocked - Don't Use' beneath which someone else (presumably Scottish or Scouse) had appended 'And don't youse, either,' Blu-tacked to the door which sat ajar revealing the pan, filled to within an inch of the brim with shredded wet toilet paper and fragments of turd.

The blood-warm stench of fresh excrement turned his nervous stomach and he retched as he positioned himself at a gum-clogged urinal. At face height was a collection of encrusted, congealed nasal mucus pinned by thumbnail impressions to the wall. The place disgusted him in every respect. And yet they expected him to feel motivated and to subscribe to their self-seeking corporate agendas. He might have found this amusing, or at least grimly ironic had it not been his life, had the whole deal of his shitty job and his shitty life and his imminent meeting with his cunt of a boss not made him sick to the stomach, just below which his duodenal ulcer was slowly evolving, as yet undiagnosed. At the next urinal, another guy deposited a large spatter of phlegm and washed it down with a fierce jet of streaming, steaming hot piss.

He urinated, as much to evacuate some of the surplus adrenaline from his system as on account of a genuine need. He shuddered and almost sprayed his own shoes. He finished up, zipped his fly and washed his hands. He dried his hands and tried to ignore the fact that they were visibly trembling. He pulled hard on the fabric towel roll mounted into the wall. The cloth had been laundered badly and without conditioner and was stained and

stiff. When his wet hands made contact with its rough surface, an acrid tang reminiscent of warm, dried stale semen assailed his nostrils. He shuddered again.

There was a click as a lock was unlatched and the door to the second cubicle began to slowly open. He made a sharp exit before the behemoth vagrant-devouring five-knuckle shuffler lumbered out in a pungent shit and spunk fug.



He made his way to the meeting room, one minute before the appointed time. Stealing himself, he sat down at the table in the seat opposite The Boss, as he had been indicated. The Boss set him

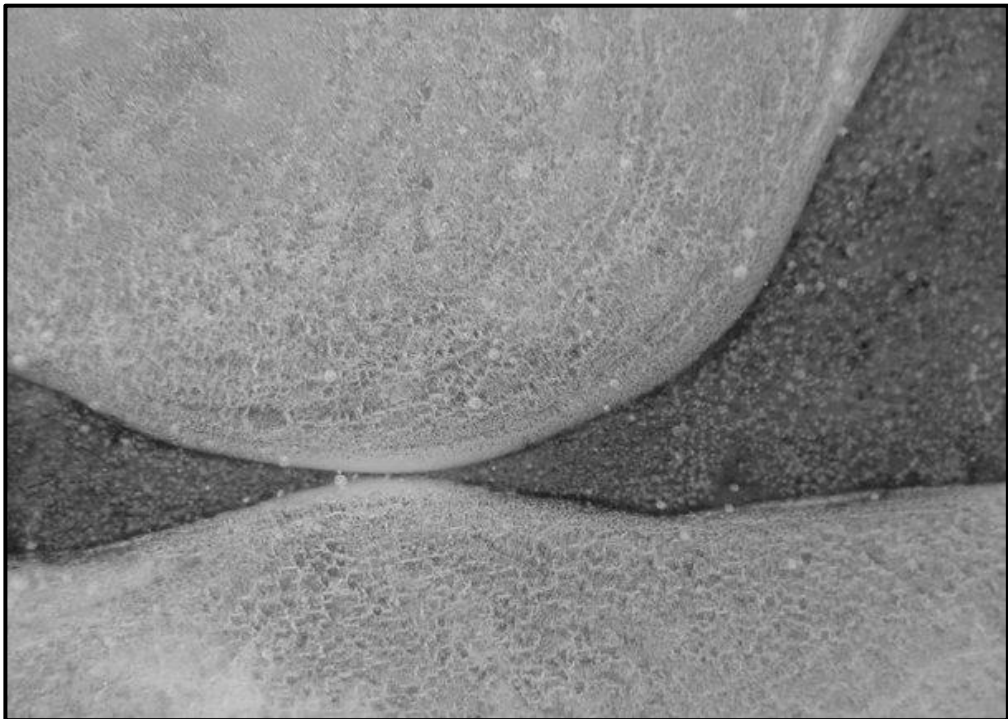
with an alabaster stare: he averted his gaze. How he abhorred this self-important, self-satisfied, repugnant, arrogant, overpaid lump of gristle, who clearly delighted not in managing

people or offering them guidance, assistance or undertaking pastoral duties in order to achieve respect and the results that respect would almost inevitably lead to, but in running a petty dictatorship, in commanding fear, and in generally using and abusing the power bestowed upon him in his position of minor authority in the corporate hierarchy. How he hated The Boss' inhuman approach to the treatment of people, the fact that his sole objective was to shaft others in order to improve his own appearance and to achieve his own ends, rooted in small-minded desires to diminish others in order to improve his own pathetic standing and feed

his own feeble ego. The Boss exhaled, blasting his insubordinate subordinate with stale, dank air from the pit of his tar-lined lungs, heavy with the aroma of cheap instant coffee.

The Boss' assistant appeared, seated himself beside The Boss and sat, smug, impassive, fixing a cold, gold obsidian glare. Again, he averted his gaze. Not through fear, although fear was a factor, particularly on this occasion, but fundamentally because he hated the sight of his chubby face.

Neither of the managers spoke, and he too remained silent. He was determined not to be the one to break the deadlock.



Before the onset of the war of words was the war of silence. It's invariably a small victory hard-won, but any victory, no matter how small, has value psychologically. There wasn't going to be much he could win in this situation, which made this opening pre-gambit gambit even more vital. He couldn't win against the might of the management, however low-down, low-level and petty, but in a war of wills, he was iron almost every time. The silence persisted. How long had it been? Probably a mere matter of seconds. Felt like hours. A thin breeze passed across the centre of the table, but rather than carrying tumbleweeds, it carried a strange subtracting energy, sapping the oxygen and the heat from the air. A chill descended. Time stalled. Water ossified. The Boss leaned forward. His assistant did likewise, hunching his meaty shoulders beneath the pads in his navy pinstripe suit jacket. The seams pulled that little bit further. His saliva began to thicken and he wondered how long his stitches and his resolve would last when placed under the full strain of their collective corpulent corporate weight.

He inhaled slowly. He could still smell his hands, the tang from the towel on his skin, clammy and moist. The Boss exhaled, slapping

his face with another blast of warm coffee breath.

He wanted to spit in their faces and show in no uncertain terms the contempt he held for both The Boss and his arselick waste of space assistant. A healthy contempt. But no, this was not the right action to take.

Finally, The Boss broke the silence. The Boss leaned forward, a stern look on his face, his brow low. As The Boss spoke, he felt once more the blast of warm breath which carried the bitter taint of machine-pumped works instant coffee, tinged with the sticky brown scent of stale cigarette tobacco and tar. The words streamed from his fat ugly mouth, fundamentally meaningless, corporate buzzwords strung together, a bastardized version of the English language loosely tacked together with a combination of colloquialisms and terms misused or mispronounced. The Boss laid it all out there. He wanted to throw his hands in the air and tell The Boss he could fuck off and shove it up his fat capitalist bastard arse. He wanted to throw his hands around The Boss' throat and press his thumbs hard and deep into his oesophagus and hold that grip until The Boss' face turned blue.

"So," The Boss said, exhaling heavily again, and leaning back

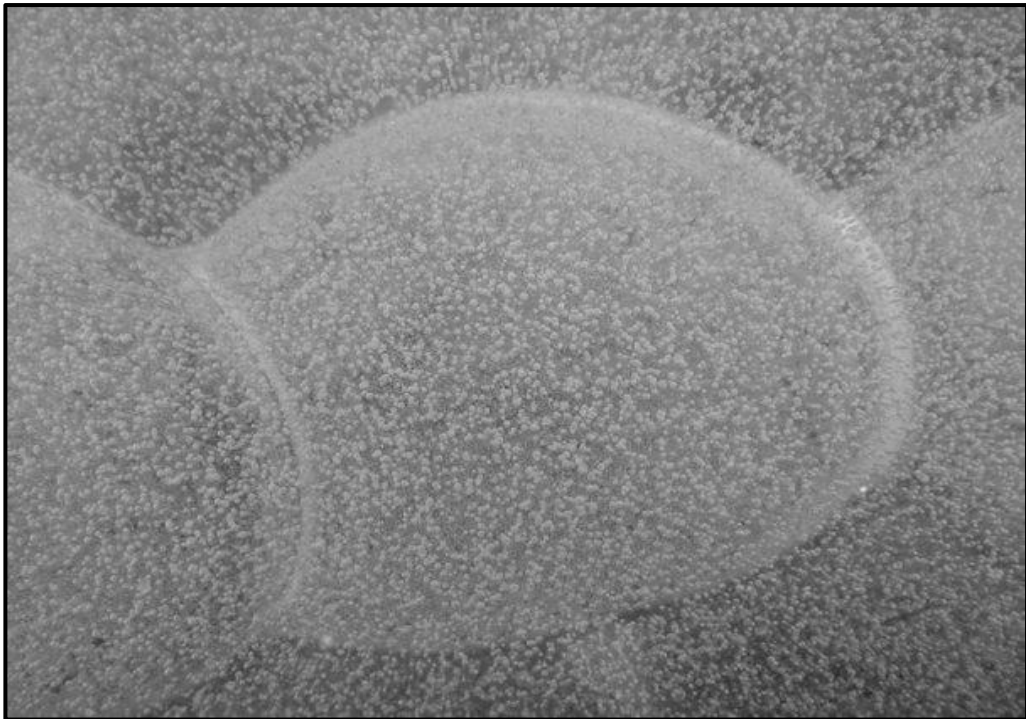
in his chair. The Boss placed his palms down flat on the table top a couple of feet in front of him and slowly drew them back, leaving clammy trails in the melamine veneer.

His bowels were growing jittery: the increased secretions pumping from his adrenal gland and coursing through his bloodstream were impacting on various other bodily functions, and a sweat began to break on his brow and in his armpits. A trickle ran down the side of his torso and terminated its journey at the waistband of his trousers. The Boss continued to speak, his assistant making an occasional superfluous, vacuous

interjection by way of support. The words drifted. He filtered the meaning from the stinking hot air, biding his time.

A reprieve. This would be his final warning. A letter would be drafted and typed up immediately, a copy sent to HR. *Fine. Anything. Just let me go now. There's nothing more to say.*

Eventually, the talking stopped, and The Boss sat back, finally spent, at least for this round. The Boss nodded to his assistant. He rose, still trembling, although as much with anger as fear and returned to his desk.



DEATH METAL MONOLOGUE

Kenji Siratori

...heavy hydrogen as fellow's brains is blasted...ejaculate?
should I make fellow's [nani] severe? the woman and the child
erect riot [şuru] and fellows who are not homos are long
time...without the soul...fellows always being confined by the
child who declares,
torture...island...child...pitiless...masturbation...homo...soul...
have...erect...difficult problem...fellatio...difficult
problem...rain...fall...girl...corpse-like...cold...still...good...cocaine...s
mell...slaver...adhere...gag...war...sis...satan...groin...hand...do...pri
soner...fellow...assign...nakedness...eyeball...wire...rain...inside...
girl...wish...fellows...cheat...misrepresentation...girl...groin...
blow...funereal...sleeping medicine...commit
suicide...corpse...lover...yak...confidence...corpse...cold...
favorite...dislike...training...woman.
eyeball...snail...origin...hang...satan...gun...temple...shoot
through...fellow...satan...kill...impotence...become...satan...kill
one
another...trivial...corpse...superexpress...day...day...this...room...
have a wet dream...cocaine...smell...fascinate...without
permission...do...fellow...second...corpse...as
if...TV...maybe...corpse...become...superfluity...business
talk...approval...another...fellow...suck...shrill voice...satan...pair
of trousers...sell wholesale...ecstasy...leave...down...future...full
of troubles...neighbor...frenzy...disappearance...stupefaction
delusion production self-loathing that pulls arm like doll and
tears (transmigration of the soul)
corpse...garden...holocaust...neat...fish...eyeball...hollow...ecstasy
...disgrace...tear up...jack...knife...kiss...fellow...finger...thrust
in...take care of...pretermission...pubic hair...shave...the sickness
unto death...dance...boy...pure-
white...notice...steel...training...fondle...scandal...maggot...crowd
...swim...great...corpse...garden...now...abduct...bruise...become...
see...erect...maybe...marilyn manson...adorer...man.
fellow...kill...undertake...semen...erect...perfect...dutch
wife...fellow...so...think...maggot...covered
with...mark...adhere...queer
voice...eardrum...break...fellow...tonight...fellow...partially...fon
dle...watch...food...toilet...center...reproduction...corpse...vagina
...human race...look...woman...intention...high-level...think.

KHALID SHEIKH MOHAMMED AND THE KEN AND BARBIE KILLERS

By Audree Flynn

"During the harshest period of my interrogation I gave a lot of false information in order to satisfy what I believed the interrogators wished to hear, in order to make the ill-treatment stop. I later told interrogators that their methods were stupid and counterproductive."

--Khalid Sheikh Mohammed

Dubbed "The Ken and Barbie Killers" for their blond-haired, blue-eyed good looks, Karla Homolka and Paul Bernardo were married in 1991, six months after they raped and killed Karla's sister, Tammy, and two weeks after abducting, raping and killing 14-year-old Leslie Mahaffy. The following year in April of 1992, 15-year-old Kristen French was the next young lady unlucky enough to cross paths with the Bernardos, and her fate would be the same as that of Tammy Homolka, and Leslie Mahaffy.

Bernardo and Homolka videotaped themselves sexually assaulting Ms. Mahaffy and Ms.

French, and Karla's sister, Tammy, but a months-long evidence search of Paul and Karla's home would fail to produce those tapes. Nothing tied Bernardo to the murders except Homolka's word and while he readily admits to being a serial rapist, to this day Paul Bernardo says it was Karla who killed Leslie Mahaffy and Kristen French.

Homolka claimed to be an abused wife, forced to comply with the perverted wishes of her husband; in exchange for testifying against her partner-in-crime, Karla Homolka received a sentence of twelve years, for manslaughter.

Eight months before Paul Bernardo's trial began, however, the prosecution came into possession of the tapes, and no longer needed Karla Homolka's testimony to convict Paul Bernardo. The tapes clearly showed the extent of Karla's participation in the crimes and when the Crown still refused to revoke the plea bargain, the arrangement between Homolka

and the government in Ontario was widely denounced as “the Deal with the Devil.”

Time is money, and a hell of a lot of money had been spent preparing Karla as the witness for the prosecution. Neither did the government sink approximately 11 million dollars into a task force to catch the Mahaffy-French killer and/or killers, just to end up with diddley to show for it. Tempers were flaring, egos were clashing; all that animosity has to go somewhere, and it has to go somewhere safe—the divestment of blame through the transference of sin is called “scapegoating”—who better for it, than Paul Bernardo ?

It’s not a conspiracy, in the usual sense of the word. It’s the sort of thing that comes about by opportunity--or by opportunism, or simply by default. The Crown’s decision not to rescind Homolka’s sweetheart deal isn’t so different from falsely linking Al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein because of a pissing contest between Dubya ‘n’ Dad. And pinning the responsibility for the bulk of the couples’ crimes on Paul Bernardo isn’t so different from justifying excessive, prolonged torture as necessary for interrogation purposes--or for

a host of other reasons, not the least of which is oil.

In March 2003, Kuwaiti national and alleged mastermind of the September 11 attacks Khalid Sheikh Mohammed was captured in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. At some point following his capture, Mohammed was interrogated at a secret CIA facility. On September 6, 2006, President Bush announced that Mohammed, along with 13 other former CIA prisoners, had been transferred to Guantanamo; the treatment of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed while in American custody presents problems for his criminal trial, as well.

At his Combatant Status Review Tribunal in March 2007, Mohammed claimed he was tortured while in U.S. custody and that he made false confessions about himself and others as a result. Although the details of Mohammed’s allegations are redacted from his February 4, 2008 CSRT transcript, CIA Director General Michael Hayden has publicly acknowledged that Mohammed and two other prisoners were subjected to waterboarding. Waterboarding has long been considered illegal under international treaties and U.S. law.

The rules of evidence in federal court prevent the inclusion of testimony delivered under duress. The suffocation of bound prisoners with water dates back to the Spanish Inquisition, and CIA officers who have subjected themselves to the technique lasted an average of 14 seconds before capitulating.

Any defense attorney worth his salt will also argue that statements made by KSM could be considered to be under duress since he remains in the custody of the country responsible for his ongoing torture. According to the CIA Office of the Inspector General's report released in August of 2008, the interrogators told Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, "if anything else happens in the United States, we're going to kill your children."

In September 2002, Yusuf al-Khalid, then nine years-old, and Abed al-Khalid, then seven years-old, were reportedly apprehended by Pakistani security forces during an attempted capture of their father. Reports by other detainees indicate that the boys were ill-treated while in Pakistani custody. Khalid Sheikh Mohammed was apprehended in March 2003 and was subjected to over three years of enforced

disappearance, and to other torture and ill-treatment by U.S. authorities, before being transferred to Guantanamo Bay.

After Khalid Sheikh Mohammed's arrest, Yusuf and Abed Al Khalid were reportedly transferred out of Pakistan to U.S. custody—allegedly for questioning about their father's activities and to be used as leverage to force their father to co-operate. In England, an article in the Sunday Telegraph from March 2003 reported that CIA interrogators had detained the children, and one official explained: "We are handling them with kid gloves. After all, they are only little children...but we need to know as much about their father's recent activities as possible. We have child psychologists on hand at all times and they are given the best of care."

In the transcript of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed's Combatant Status Review Tribunal in March 2007, he indicates knowledge that his children were apprehended: "They arrested my kids intentionally. They are kids. They've been arrested for four months, they've been abused."

The Criminal Code of Canada provides for a preliminary inquiry in all cases involving

serious crimes. The Criminal Code of Canada also allows the Crown to jump right over the preliminary inquiry and go straight to a trial. This is known as a "preferred indictment".

The charges against Paul Bernardo, all of them, were preferred.

In the U. S., it's the equivalent of sending someone to trial without a grand jury indictment, akin to the way we shuttled detainees into Gitmo.

Paul Bernardo needed to be in the pokey ASAP, that's understandable up to a point. But as a legal maneuver, the preferment of charges is rarely used; it is considered by most in the Canadian legal community as highly prejudicial and a violation of due process. It's possible the prosecution felt that putting Mr. Bernardo away for good was reason enough to run the risk of a guilty verdict being overturned on appeal. Still, as prosecutors aren't generally known for their partiality to long-shots, it's equally possible this was all a bit of grandstanding. And that such a risk did not, in fact, exist.

In 1987, three months after Paul and Karla met, a series of brutal rapes began in Scarborough, Toronto, where Paul Bernardo

lived. Just as we had numerous confirmed intelligence reports warning us about Al-Queda and about 9/11, the DNA evidence which would link Bernardo to the Scarborough rapes sat on a shelf in a Toronto lab, untested, for over two years.

The Toronto Metro police received notice from the lab of three positive DNA matches to Paul Bernardo, finally, on February 3, 1993. The last sexual assault attributed to the Scarborough Rapist occurred in 1990.

Kristen French was abducted in April--of 1992.

After almost two years and the addition of a much heralded task force, the police in Ontario did not have a single shred of evidence against Paul Bernardo, in spite of having run his name through suspect data banks 17 times--they actually cleared Bernardo as a suspect in the murders a year before. As late as February 6, 1993, Inspector Vince Bevan, who headed up the multi-million dollar task force, was quoted by the press saying it was his belief there was no link between the murders of Kristen French and Leslie Mahaffy.

Neither Paul's name nor Karla's turned up on a routine name

search in connection with the death of Karla's sister, because the Ontario police never made a routine name search for "Bernardo" or "Homolka". And in a photograph taken by one of the senior investigating officers, the videotape of Tammy Homolka's rape is sitting on Karla's nightstand--no one checked to see what was on the tape, and it was not collected for evidentiary purposes

We still can't find Osama Bin Laden's high cave dwelling but we dragged Saddam Hussein out of the exact hole in the ground he hunkered down in. We dragged him out matted-haired and wild-eyed for the cameras, too, and there was a trial, of sorts, and a sentence that surprised no one. And in the same atmosphere of indifference that nullified Paul Bernardo's claim he was guilty of multiple rape but not multiple murder, no one was much bothered when Saddam Hussein's sentence was carried out a wee bit ahead of schedule. Saddam had nothing to do with the attacks on 9/11, but he was equally guilty of many, many other horrors and atrocities, so why split hairs...

But there is a reason to split hairs. It's the same reason you don't go to a restaurant, leave your wallet

open on the table and trot off in search of the restroom. Most people are okay, and some will take your wallet if they happen to see the opportunity. But there's a few who watch, and who wait for such opportunities, and I don't mean to sound like...oh, I don't know, Dick Cheney or George Bush. But Bush and Cheney weren't completely wrong. We should all be on a heightened state of alert for those who do not have our interests at heart.

The problem is, of those who do not have your interests at heart, closer to you than men like Khalid Sheikh Mohammed are men who know it's easier to exploit people's fear than to appeal to their reason--men like Dick Cheney. And George Bush.

George W. Bush is not Saddam, and Bush didn't invade Iran or Kuwait. But Bush invaded Iraq, and hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians are dead--and thousands of Western troops are dead--because George Bush--and Tony Blair and the Spanish Prime Minister and the Italian Prime Minister and the Australian Prime Minister--went to war in 2003 on a potage of lies and mendacity and, given the weapons we used, with great brutality.

Of the mass killings we perpetrated in 2003 with our depleted uranium shells and our "bunker buster" bombs and our phosphorous, of the murderous post-invasion sieges of Fallujah and Najaf, the hell-disaster of anarchy we unleashed on the Iraqi population in the aftermath of our "victory"--our "mission accomplished" --who will be found guilty of it?

Likewise, if you've convinced the public that in evil intent, a man like Paul Bernardo is second only to a man like KSM, once he's captured everyone is so relieved that less attention is paid to your own questionable behavior, such as routine searches you failed to conduct which would likely have put both Paul and Karla behind bars as early as 1990--or wholly unnecessary, tax-payer funded deals you made with the devil.

These days in his always lit and always guarded 8' x 4' solitary isolation cell, 6-footer Paul Bernardo stars in another videotape sans Ms. Homolka: a security camera belonging to Correctional Services Canada now records his every twitch or sigh, and should you ask out loud how this formula for madness will, in any way, "correct" Paul Bernardo's ability to choose the moral high road,

you're shushed before you can say "Abu Ghraib" in our post 9/11 world.

Professor Alan Young of Osgoode Hall wrote in his 1996 legal opinion that "the Crown acted imprudently to strike a deal because the police arrested Bernardo and charged him for the murders before they had a solid case. The deal struck with Homolka was an act of desperation fueled by the press release of the police indicating that they had caught the murderer."

Of those who agree the plea-bargain arrangement with Karla Homolka was a travesty of justice, many also say it was necessary at the time because of the danger Paul Bernardo represented. And I don't doubt at all that Paul Bernardo should remain in government custody for every minute of his 25-year sentence, any more than I doubt KSM played a part in the events that led to 9/11.

But on March 24, 2004, at the 9/11 Commission hearings, senior executive counter-terrorism and intelligence expert Richard A. Clarke testified: "To the loved ones of the victims of 9/11, to them who are here in this room, to those who are watching on television, your government

failed you. Those entrusted with protecting you failed you. And I failed you.”

Clarke was the only member of the Bush Administrations to make such an admission. Or to offer an apology.

In comfortable and wealthy retirement, George W. Bush will no doubt write his memoirs, and child-killer Karla Homolka left prison in 2005 without a single parole restriction placed upon her by the Crown; in 2007 she was reportedly living in the Caribbean. And had just given birth to a healthy baby boy.

Shortly after his trial her partner-in-crime Paul Bernardo was declared a “Dangerous Offender”, a designation which allows the Crown to indefinitely extend his original 25-year prison term. Paul Bernardo wastes away in the same 8’x4’ solitary isolation cell he has been in for the last fifteen years.

And where, in all likelihood, he’ll die.

Khalid Sheikh Mohammed has been water-boarded a whopping 183 times; the whereabouts of Yusuf and Abed Al Khalid remain unknown.

And 103, 383 Iraqi men and women and children are dead, all because of a war that need not

have been waged, and as anyone who has seen the morgue photos of Paul and Karla’s victims should know, once the blood of children has been spilled we are all in far less of a position to say we're innocent of anything, anymore.

In one country missing videotapes are the pretext for an unconscionable plea-bargain deal and in another weapons of mass destruction, also “missing”, are the pretext for a war. And you may say whatever and who cares, as Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and Paul Bernardo are both very bad men.

But greater than the land or the people they represent, governments are based on an idea of the truth. And though we may not have a choice about the truth we’re told, we have the final word about the truth we choose.

So you must ask yourself, are those whom you’ve empowered men of justice--or men the justice system was constructed to detain.



PAPANICOLAOU TEST: A GRAND GUIGNOL

By Díre McCain

CHARACTERS:

Uxor

Dr. Art(thur) Sterben, Ob/Gyn

Rudolf Ludwig Karl Virchow

SETTING:

Newport Beach, California, United States of America

Biological Clock

Noun

- 1) **The progression or time period from puberty to menopause, marking a woman's ability to bear children.**
- 2) **The defective gene that drives a woman to blindly obsess over procreating by a certain age, regardless of whether or not she's fit to be a mother.**

“Gimme that People magazine, Arthur.”

*Every time you call me Arthur I want to belt you across the face and fracture your mandible, so you will desist once and for all. It is **Art**, not Arthur. It has always been Art, but the instant I acquiesced to your incessant hounding and placed that three-carat diamond on your digitus medicinalis, it became Arthur. It drives me out of my fucking mind, but you refuse to stop, no matter how many times I have begged...*

“The one with Oprah on the cover. Here, gimme it.”

Ah yes, your guru, even though you are a flagrant racist, who comes from a long line of flagrant racists. How would you function in this world without her? God forbid if you had to form your own opinions, and make decisions for yourself. If that egomaniacal brainwasher commanded you to spread feces all over your face, like cold cream, and go out in public, you would do it, you obtuse cunt...

Art(hur) picks up the magazine and tosses it to his wife.

“Woah! Doesn’t Angelina Jolie look super hot? I can’t believe she just had twins!”

*The inspiration behind that banal, gaudy coccyx tattoo that you so proudly draw attention to at every given opportunity. Also responsible for your ostensible and hypocritical fascination with sapphism. We both know that you are the biggest homophobe who has ever walked the face of the earth, but now that it is **voguish** to be a **pseudo**-lesbian, you **love** dykes, except for my sister, of course, who is a **real** lesbian...*

“And don’t forget we have to be at the Jones’ in an hour.”

How could I possibly forget, you insufferable nag? You have only been reminding me once every five minutes since I crawled across the threshold into this intolerable self-imposed prison from my exhausting job, which steals hours of my life, all so you can squander the lion’s share of my arduously earned dollars at Fascist Island and that extortionate day spa. If you only knew how badly I would like to chop off that garishly streaked hair, and yank out those hideous French pedicured ungues at the eponychium with a pair of tenaculum forceps. And do not

get me started on the wardrobe. There is a plethora of usuriously expensive designer clothing in that closet that you have not worn so much as once, yet you continue to acquire more and more on a weekly basis...

“Better start getting ready now, Arthur. Just TiVo that stupid fight, and watch it later. I’ll never understand why you like all that violence anyway.”

That is too rich, coming from a woman who has a long history of domestic violence against men. When the queen hydra doesn’t get her way, the retractable fangs appear, ravenous for vital fluids. I should have heeded Richard’s warnings, the lucky bastard. He must be counting his blessings every day since you pulled your venomous fangs out of him and dug them into my carotid artery. But of course, you are an abject coward when dealing with your own gender, because they may strike back, which would be terrifically just. A fractured nasal bridge and zygomatic bone would be the most effective treatment for your disease, you sadistic bitch. If only I could write a prescription...

“David’s super excited to show you the work he had done on the back bathroom. He’s totally hip on the latest trends in interior design. You need to take a lesson from him.”

Art(hur) glances up at his wife, who’s fervently flipping through the deceitful pabulumzine, eagerly swallowing every word and image, as though it’s gospel. He lets out a cough of disgust, then picks up his coffee mug, takes a few swigs, and places it back down on the coaster.

David is a pompous, mind-numbingly boring dick. Hate the son of a bitch. I have not one thing in common with him, but since his uptight cunt of a wife is your best friend, I am forced to act as though I like the patrician bastard, and that I give a shit about his god damn renovations. Him and his daddy’s money. Of course he’s hip on the latest trends, because he has no idea how it is to be forced to work for a living, and neither do you. God, I knew that marrying you was a monumental mistake, serves me right for seeing dollar signs. I should have known that your father was a fucking miser when he refused to pick up the check the night I met him. Oh god, what I would give to be able to go back, and know what I know now...

“Okay, Arthur, are you listening to me?”

*I cannot help but listen to you, because your voice is like a god damn magpie, cawing incessantly. Try as I may, I cannot tune you out. Even when you are on the other side of the country, I can still **feel** that agonizingly shrill voice, reverberating in my primary auditory cortex. Caw, caw, caw, caw, caw, caw, caw, caw, caw, caw, caw, caw...*

“Because I have something super important to tell you. I was gonna to wait till tomorrow, but the excitement is killing me!”

Oh no, here we go again. I wonder how much it’s going to set me back this time, you useless parasite...

“It’s super exciting! Here, put this back.”

Art(hur) takes the magazine from his wife’s hand and tosses it back on to the coffee table.

I am certain it’s just thrilling, I am on the edge of my seat, and of course, it cannot wait until this round is over. You must tell me right this instant, mustn’t you...

“Are you ready?”

I will never be ready, or responsive, but you will tell me regardless...

“I’m pregnant!”

Marriages are not normally made to avoid having children.

Art(hur) looks up at his wife, visibly stunned.

*Jesus fucking Christ! No! No! No! Those words did **not** just pour out of your rima oris!*

“Didn’t you hear me, Arthur? I said, I’m pregnant! Isn’t that like the most super thing you’ve ever heard?”

Art(hur) continues to stare at his wife, now blankly, as though in a daze.

If the man of science chose to follow the example of historians and pulpit-orators, and to obscure strange and peculiar phenomena by employing a hollow pomp of big and sounding words, this would be his opportunity, for we have approached one of the greatest mysteries which surround the problem of animated nature and distinguish it above all other problems of science. To discover the relations of man and woman to the egg-cell would be almost equivalent of the egg-cell in the body of the mother, the transfer to it by means of the seed, of the physical and mental characteristics of the father, affect all the questions which the human mind has ever raised in regard to existence.

*You scheming cunt! This was all planned! Oh god, why did I agree to fuck you that night? You repulse me, you adulterous whore! It was a god damn miracle I was able to achieve an erection in the first place, never mind maintain it, while sloshing about in that maculate, cavernous vagina of yours! I should have known that you were lying about taking the Tri-Cyclen! You were probably taking Clomid instead! And I bet it was my bitch partner who gave it to you! God damn it! I made it perfectly clear at the outset of this unbearable misalliance that I did **not** want any children! Have you no mercy at all? How on earth can you even consider dragging an innocent child into this multi-car train wreck with **you** in the conductor's seat?*

"Aren't you gonna say anything, Arthur?"

Art(hur) remains silent, his gaze now affixed to the cartoonishly airbrushed portrait of his wife that's hanging over the wall unit.

"I hate you! You're totally impossible! I'm having this baby, with or without your blessings! Besides, you have no say! It's *my* body!"

Only those who regard healing as the ultimate goal of their efforts can, therefore, be designated as physicians.

Without uttering a single word, Art(hur) goes into the bedroom and retrieves a loaded Smith & Wesson Model 500 from the nightstand. He

then returns to the living room, grabs his wife by the throat, slams her to the ground, and pulls up her dress, completely ignoring her bewildered screams. After ripping off her obscenely overpriced size five Cosabella lace panties - that were already bursting at the seams, struggling to accommodate her size seven ass - he methodically spreads apart her labia, and shoves the barrel up into her cervical canal, like a speculum, then pulls the trigger four times.

Looming over her twitching body, he instantly falls into a state of suspended animation, pondering whether he should fellate the 8-3/8" barrel and suck out that last spermatozoon, or shoot it up into the primigravida's lead-filled womb.

Eleven minutes and twenty-three seconds later, he snaps out of it.

Leaving the gun embedded in her warm, yet lifeless and prolapsed uterus, he goes into the kitchen, removes a pint of Häagen-Dazs Butter Pecan from the freezer, and a tablespoon from the silverware drawer, then returns to the living room to watch the last three rounds of the fight before retiring for the night.

Disease is not something personal and special, but only a manifestation of life under modified conditions, operating according to the same laws as apply to the living body at all times, from the first moment until death.

omnis cellula e cellula

"Papanicolaou Test: A Grand Guignol" is featured in *Clinical, Brutal... An Anthology of Writing with Guts*, which can be purchased through Amazon, or directly at: <http://clinicalitypress.co.uk/Publications.aspx>

REVERBSTORM I: NEW WAVE SWORD & SORCERY

By John Coulthart

PART OF THE IMPETUS for the Reverbstorm series was to bring Lord Horror's character out of the wartime period and into the present/near future in a more intelligent and powerfully realised manner than had been attempted in the first two Lord Horror comics, a pair of works which should be regarded as little more than sketches for an evolving character. Having been promoted to main artist in the new series (with Kris Guidio providing spot illustrations of Horror and Jessie), David Britton encouraged me to take the cue from the work I'd done in *Hard Core Horror* No. 5 and broaden the landscape in which the characters were situated.

Although not a specific intention at the outset, Reverbstorm has by accident filled a gap left by one of the Savoy projects which fell by the wayside during the company's bankruptcy in the early 1980s. After *The Savoy Book* and *The Savoy Reader* (an anthology which mutated into *Savoy Dreams*), a third collection had been planned. New Wave

Sword & Sorcery ('a breakthrough anthology of general weirdness') was announced with the intention of revitalising the most despised of the fantasy sub-genres in the same spirit as the Moorcock/Ellison/Merrill revitalisation of SF in the 1960s. Although the NWSS project collapsed, some of the proposed contributions found a life elsewhere, most notably in M John Harrison's marvellous *Viriconium* sequence of novels and short stories. David Britton had commissioned Harrison to produce a piece of fiction entitled *By Gas Mask And Fire Hydrant*, a phrase which combines elements of wartime England, old New York and the shadow of sexual bondage, themes which eventually coalesce in the extraordinary 'Frogmen' sequence of Britton's Lord Horror novel.

The *Sword & Sorcery* and *Weird Tales* fantasy lineage in Reverbstorm is fairly self-evident: Horror's character has been acknowledged as owing a debt to

Moorcock's Elric (in *Reverbstorm* #1 *Horror* is seen briefly as Sexton Blake's Zenith the Albino, one of Elric's precursors); the depiction of the Souls comes out of my Lovecraft comics work, as does the massive scale of the city of Torenbürgen; the collection of beasts and Swine-things rampaging through William Hope Hodgson's books (especially *The Night Land*, a major inspiration for Dave and myself) and the metamorphoses of characters and landscape in David Lindsay's *A Voyage To Arcturus* (to which *Reverbstorm* is in part dedicated) have many parallels in the series, especially in issue 4--the *Ether Jumpers*, for example, which are present from issue 2 onwards, have analogues in the *Blue Giants* of *The Night Land*. Finally, the whole series owes a huge debt to Burne Hogarth's *Tarzan* strips, both those from the 1940s and his graphic novels of the 1970s. *Tarzan* was the first international mass media fantasy hero of the Twentieth Century and remains an enduring figure, an influence, with Burroughs' other hero, John Carter of Mars, on much that followed. Moorcock started writing his heroic fantasy after his teenage editorship of *Tarzan Adventures* in the 1950s and as 'E P Bradbury' he penned a number

of John Carter-style Martian adventures.

In *Reverbstorm* these myriad influences are blended with material they rarely encounter quite so directly, namely the historical period in which they were born. Most *Sword & Sorcery* or heroic fantasy runs away from the present time to other planets or to simpler, quasi-Medieval worlds whose antecedents are the myths and legends of the Middle Ages, and writers such as William Morris and JRR Tolkien. This determinedly escapist sub-genre is rarely allowed to stray from what has become, post-Tolkien, an ever tighter straitjacket of pastoral landscapes, stereotyped characters and quest storylines. The aims of a New Wave *Sword & Sorcery* would presumably have been to break these bonds and bring in some real intelligence and imagination. Harrison's *Viriconium* books achieve this by questioning the heroic ideal as well as undermining the artificial reality which all escapist fantasy strives to create.

Although the intention was not there at the outset, *Reverbstorm* seems to have offered an answer to the question "What would a

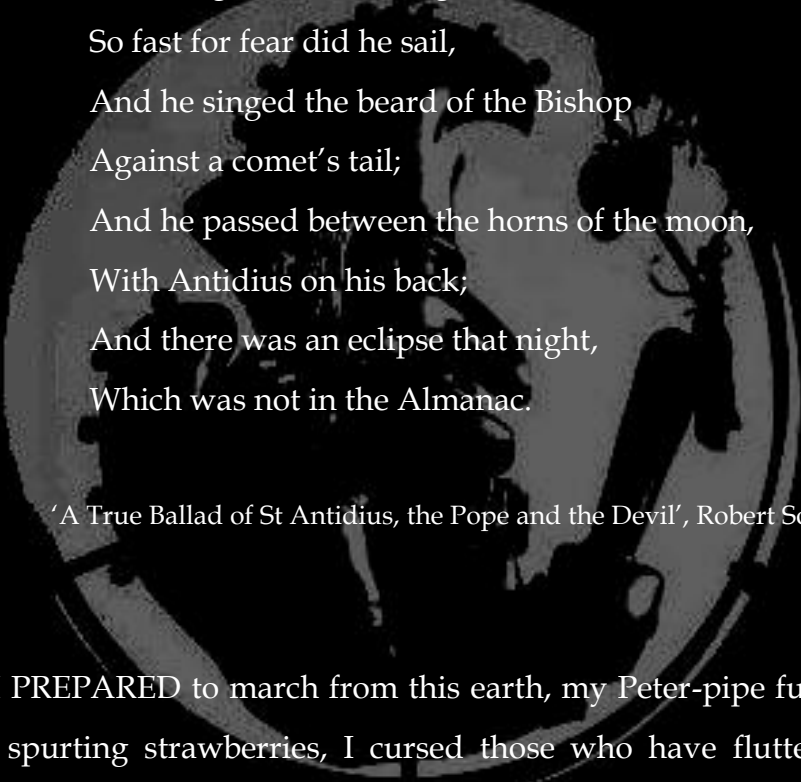
Twentieth (or Twenty-First) Century Sword & Sorcery narrative look like?". Any such narrative has to take account of a number of questions raised by updating an often reactionary genre, particularly the consideration of bringing into our time characters used to solving problems with weapons. Lord Horror fits the bill easily--the broad-sword replaced by slashing razors--whilst at the same time seeming monstrously aberrant. In a savage fantasy world like Barsoom or Pelucidar, Horror seem like a saviour (at least until he turned on his fellows) but closer to home the psychopathic shadow of all Romantic heroes becomes clear. Even the usually stainless Tarzan can be viewed in this light when one recalls how Burroughs' books and Karl May's Westerns fuelled Hitler's power fantasies. After the passage of nearly a century, the Savage Noble lording it over the Noble Savages can't help but seem an awkward reminder of past imperialism, and all the efforts of Burne Hogarth to create a Renaissance Superman can't disguise the violent atmosphere of doom, hysteria and paranoia which leaks from his drawings. These parallels become self-referential when Britton reveals Horror to be a pulp novelist of

some note, as in the scene in Reverbstorm #6 where James Joyce looks over some of his brother's works: Swords Of The Necronomicon, The Apes Of Zion, Horror In The Sun, Two Blades For Hitler, The Weird Of Spring-Heeled Jack, and Baptised In The Blood Of Millions.

During the Second World War, Tarzan, Doc Savage and Sherlock Holmes were forced into service to aid America's war effort against the Axis powers. The Nazis commandeered Baron Munchhausen, Siegfried and the whole of Norse Mythology (via Wagner's operas) to their cause. As Philip José Farmer has shown, we can no longer assume that these powerful, violent characters would be immune from the sexual drives or worst impulses of the rest of humanity. The world has grown more complicated than it was fifty years ago when spotless heroes could stand four-square against the Forces of Evil. It is a more honest, and ultimately more interesting, narrative which acknowledges this fact.

REVERBSTORM II: LORD HIVE'S BLACK DOG SYMMETRICAL KISS

By David Britton



He ran against a shooting star
So fast for fear did he sail,
And he singed the beard of the Bishop
Against a comet's tail;
And he passed between the horns of the moon,
With Antidius on his back;
And there was an eclipse that night,
Which was not in the Almanac.

'A True Ballad of St Antidius, the Pope and the Devil', Robert Southey

AS I PREPARED to march from this earth, my Peter-pipe fuck-hard and spurting strawberries, I cursed those who have fluttered me upon the horns of this foul dilemma.

"Curse me for a cross-bred cunt!"

The great engines of Torenbürgen, the scroop of their tortured gears kicking into life, had done for me. My skin had broken open and my shoulder blade levered through, showing a hump of rising bone still wet under an incarnadine sun.

Splinters of bone eased slowly out of my fingers.

"We live to die. Death is the only thing that makes life worth living."

Containing myself by willpower as best I could, I kept the whole of farty me residing uneasily inside my skin — if only for the increased moment. The fat layering my Marcel wave crackled and sizzled with succulence; it erupted and bubbled and spat, and must have been a sobering sight.

On a bed of affliction I was born.

"I Enjoy."

'There was a child went forth every day,
And the first object he look'd upon, that object he became,
And that object became part of him for the day
Or a certain part of the day
Or for many years or stretching cycles of years.'

'There Was a Child Went Forth', Walt Whitman (from *Leaves of Grass*)

Sober and candid to a degree unusual to a man shot through with the Blue Serendipity Death, I went into Old Torenbürger's market place with my libertine bagman's head swivelling low. Stalls laden with black puddings, tripe and udder, as well as rabbit, fowl and rare and maggoty meat I passed by. A black stove, cinders glowing on it, cooked hot chestnuts. From cone-shaped bags made from newspapers, patrons ate blue octopuses diced like French fries, and everywhere my eyes fell, citizens were eating a variety of

unwholesome fish – kippers, rolled herring, shellfish and boiled winkles; fucking disgusting.

This kind of evil scammery was widespread.

As a covert from the storm, I lounged for a moment weak-kneed in the doorway of a Tally Chandlers' shop, almost toppling onto the floor trestle tables piled with lump lime, tallow candles and Dolly Blues.

“Walk that fucking mess,” I intoned.

To call a halt to my sojourns should have been a relief. As a lover of blood, my will to violence was never absent. But against this unseen assassin, I was almost helpless.

The threat to my life had taken up residence under my skin; sifting deep and greedy inside me. Usurping the Will-To-Live process by indiscriminately pushing the veins, bones and blood of my interior out through my own unwilling flesh.

‘From the very vileness of a germ or an atom, vile was I born.

‘I am a wretch because I am a man, and I feel within me the primeval slime.’

Iago, Verdi's *Otello*, Act 11, Sc 1

All around me multiple screens flickered. On one, Wink Martindale (of Deck of Cards and Tic Tac Dough fame) was interviewing Elvis in Memphis, another was running a Flash Gordon serial and a third was an elegant skeleton smoking a Wooden-

Kimona Nails cigarette. I shut my mind to this external static and concentrated on the hunt inside me for the lair of the psychotropic emissary.

“Any lard going spare?”

Fat crackled and burned with razzmatazz from a pig roasting on an open spit, turned by Ezra Sireet, a being with skin like pork crackling. Such a state in him, I suspect, would throw up his eager bones; set to by the collywobbles' own exacting rhythms.

Without really taking them in, I scanned the hoardings advertising Snowfire for frosted knees, Goosegrease for chesty colds, Hot Friar Balsam for flu and Zambuk for cuts and bruises and such.

This zone of Torenbürgen must be hospice for the imperfect and the invalid. The residuals of a society intent on achieving maximum *Grind*; the boil of fat being the sum total of mankind.

“There must be another world beyond this one.” Often I was given, without cavil, the ability to cuckold myself. “I don’t know why I can’t quit. You don’t think anybody cares — yet you meet people from all over this foul world ... they come here (to see me) and they care and they know. I don’t understand it.”

That there is a creature like me, walking on the face of this world, is a cause for wonder.

I had the conviction that my body was falling apart. My heart contracting, my stomach rotting from petrochemicals.

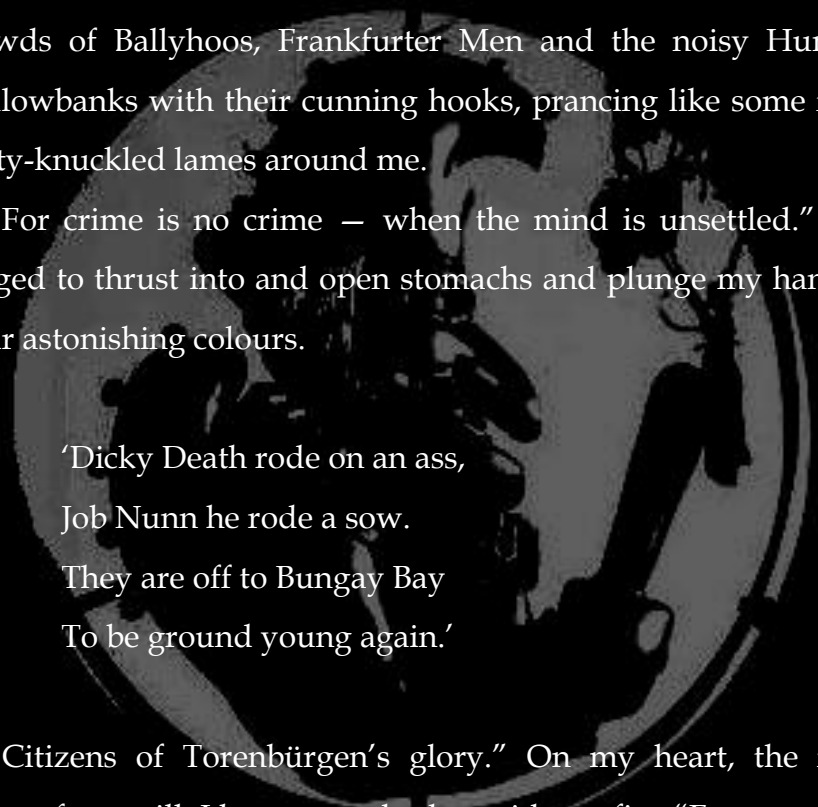
North American Indians had a fear of their personalities being under siege by and occupied by the Devil, which they called the

Windigo – which led them into cannibalism, as the Windigo must be fed and sated.

I was sure its modern genetic succoured my bones, softly spreading its tendrils into my mind, saying, implying, that my only salvation was to drink the blood of Lord Horace Joyce!

“And am I not, a fly like thee?” I voiced in despair to the motley crowds of Ballyhoos, Frankfurter Men and the noisy Humphrey Hollowbanks with their cunning hooks, prancing like some fucking fouty-knuckled lames around me.

“For crime is no crime – when the mind is unsettled.” How I longed to thrust into and open stomachs and plunge my hands into their astonishing colours.



‘Dicky Death rode on an ass,
Job Nunn he rode a sow.
They are off to Bungay Bay
To be ground young again.’

“Citizens of Torenbürgen’s glory.” On my heart, the fucking drum of my will, I beat out a rhythm with my fist. “For are you now at the service of the merciless mad?” Surging hair cracked in front of my eyes, and I sought to calm the fright of my cockscombe as it flung cherries and tangerines and a barrel roll of rich semen from its deepest confines and off the sides of my bald scalp.

“The mad ...” I envisioned, “... that privileged class that no state controls; their murderous charter exists in their souls.”

Even above my din, Ursula the Pig Woman roared her expansive imprecations. "The pig's head speaks." Keeping purity and vileness in her voice as she kept nodding in my direction. Under many a bang and blow, this hoyting was not to tame her rude inclinations.

'When I stop losing, then I go over to a baby pig, and cut strips of fat off its face and eat them. The pig is waiting till the layers get lower to eat some of its own fat off its own face!'

Finale of Thomas Mann's *Dr Faustus*

I endured to move on, in my panic brushing past the gingerbread stall, causing Gingerbread Dolls to cling as leeches to my person.

The nostrums of all the quacks in Christendom could not save me. At this rate, as the knobs of joint bones crept and broke out through the thin veneer of my skin, I shuddered down to my boots. My price to the knacker would presently be zero.

I am only kept in my skin by Will-power.

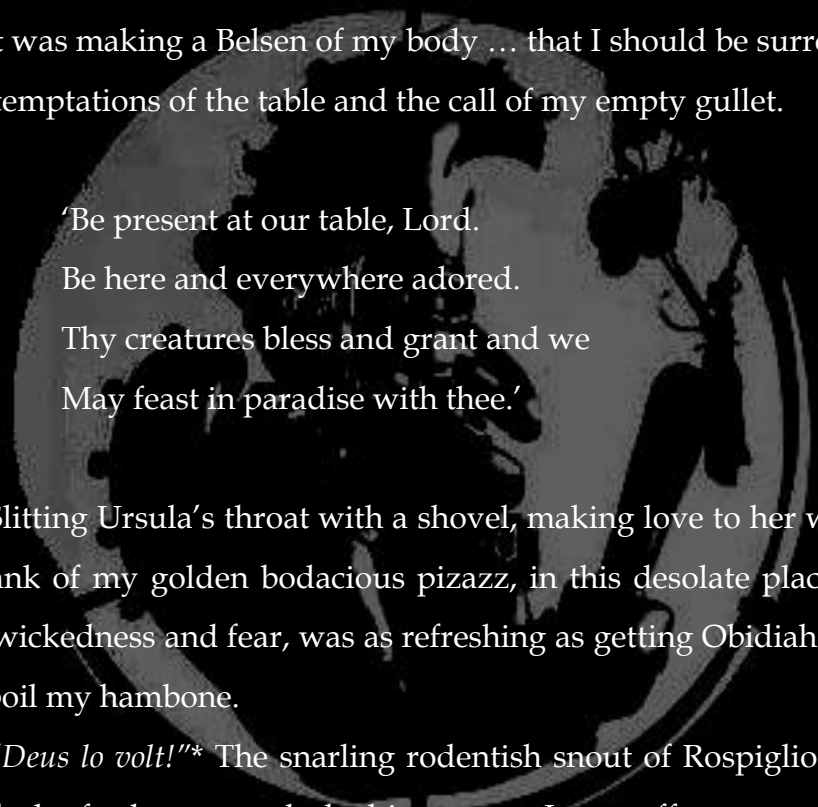
That same purity and vileness are the codes to my DNA.

I feel strongly disposed to assassinate everybody who does not keep out of my reach. When these ecstasies come upon me with great violence and in such a way as to be outwardly visible, I have no power to resist them.

"Each day, in the mirror, I watch death at work." It is not fair to prognosticate in the kindergarten or to ogle the less fortunate.

"I've got such a long sleep coming up," I sighed, and swallowed hard. All that human juice kept bubbling inconsolably in my throat: so loud, I could almost hum its lugubrious, fretful melody.

'VIROL'. I read the advertisement to my left, on a sign of tin with lettering of red perspex. 'The Food For Health Spread on Bread and Butter'. How ironic. I was pithed, scooped out, de-souled by disease that was making a Belsen of my body ... that I should be surrounded by temptations of the table and the call of my empty gullet.



'Be present at our table, Lord.
Be here and everywhere adored.
Thy creatures bless and grant and we
May feast in paradise with thee.'

Slitting Ursula's throat with a shovel, making love to her with the swank of my golden bodacious pizazz, in this desolate place ruled by wickedness and fear, was as refreshing as getting Obidiah Stretch to boil my hambone.

"*Deus lo volt!*"* The snarling rodentish snout of Rospigliosi, with no lack of robustness, clacked in my ear. In my efforts to run, I had picked up this lupine carrier, who presently began ululating in *glossolalia*.

"Death is life and life is death," I said, over my shoulder, for the exact same duration of time it took Sweeny to say. Once again I lifted a shovel, and spaded him off me into the mud.

'Drive your cart and your plow
Over the bones of the dead.'

Proverbs of Hell, William Blake

"Those who, like drunken pigs, waste their time and good in the House of Venus will finally have to be pushed into the pigsty with the other swine." I spoke with all my history behind me, and bowed as a humble fellow.

**"God wills it!"*

It had been my destiny to often shake hands with the skeletal, scythe-bearing figure of Death. But never before to have that hand being extended *inside* me, or to hear him chatter so close, whooping it up, cerulean-colour, bordering on the hagiographic, black as Egyptian night.

"I need a friend in the afterlife."

The snort accompanying this jest set me to the heel of the mighty Ezekiah. The thought that Horror hung on the moon filled me with dread, shook my confidence, held me up to ridicule, reducing me to the degree of evil niggers and ubiquitous kikes.

"'Pon my life an' honner! As I was gowine to Toller, I met a pig A'thout a wig. 'Pon my life an' honner! As I was gowine to Stonor," I cried in what may be called the Horror effect.

Most denigrating of all is the evidence that in the mind of this devotee is the germ of self-pity. Though you can still count on my fidelity to banish the excrements of this world. With snake in his leg, Mr Horror will eliminate the absolute cunt as sure as he would dispatch a mere Mechanical Wonder.

“God be merciful to your poor soul, my friend, my Fatherland.
Tous ceux qu’il veut aimer l’observent avec crainte.”*

‘Rockabilly is the beginning and the end of music. I mean it’s just there — some thing just comes in my mind, just floats in the air. Lord, I’ll never live that sound down in my ears. It will die with me, Boy.’

Charlie Feathers

* “All those he would like to love watch him with fear.” (‘Spleen et Idéal’, Charles Baudelaire)

A great fireball, crimson and orange, swartness and *rubedo*, was coming towards me in an astral dance. Scanning the Torenbürger heavens I was hardly surprised to see Ether Jumpers trawling. Their huge spherical gas-inflated bodies circled each others, watching and loudly conversing with each other, confabulating.

What manner of creatures they were now becoming, not in the slightest was I interested, having a more pressing problem. I just did

not have the time to think of that level of deprivation — all that human juice.

Curling up like a porcupine, and instinctively covering my eyes with my hands, I prepared for that fulfilling, cleansing *albedo* blast that I knew would, in a nod, be upon me.

There are no words to describe the heat. I could hear what it was doing around me, when it was roaring over me. I could feel my clothes crisping. I could feel my skin crisping. I could feel my hair crisping. I immediately smelt ... meat, like a barbecue but more intense.

When it had gone quiet, I looked about. The market was dark and full of smoke. My right leg was still on fire. I had to put it out, and the only thing I had was my hands. I didn't feel the pain straight away, but presently I heard my own voice anguish: "I do believe that there is *nothing* in life so sweet as leaving it."

The love of the night world was never to leave me, and no old zip coon or short clenched-jawed porker would ever lead me into fucking Pig Heaven.

'When fishes flew and forests walked
And figs grew upon thorn,
Some moment when the moon was blood,
Then surely I was born.

With monstrous head and sickening cry
And ears like errant wings,

The Devil's walking parody
On all four-footed things.'

G K Chesterton, 'The Donkey'

"And now how are you, my Lover?" Did I need to answer myself or could I walk away from this apotheosis of love? I held for scrutiny (having paid 7s 6d on the south side yesterday morning).

The claw of my left hand I held withered with shame before me. The bones had dropped from the two middle fingers of my hand, which dangled like empty udders.

"For fuck's sake." Who could doubt my swelling fury. Exasperation gripped me.

From the ground, clots of earth, dung, filth of all manners, and a spot of sticky green faeces, clung to my trousers.

Nothing could prevent my feet seeking hallowed ground.

I saw a Christian sword amid a whirlwind. Below this, I believe I read the lettering: 'Vanhuetons Slippery Footwear', and attendant slogans:

'Dubbin Polish for Everyday Shoes

'Nugget Polish for Sunday Shoes

'Whangs for Farm-Boots'

Another egregious error of my mind.

My eyes ran across the hoardings in a blur — Rinso, Vim, Rickets Blue, Robin Starch, Lambs Jam, Birds Custard, Golden Syrup, Bovril,

Irel Bottled Coffee. All jumbled my thoughts, preventing me taking the logical action that would save me. Drool saliva I wiped from the corners of my chattering mouth.

There was contagion in the air.

"If man were sane, there would be no history." What God had given me, I intended to keep in its rightful place; inside me, tucked up safe, never to see divine daylight during my life. This I swore by the great coat of Our Lord.

"Art prompts questions. Only bad art gives answers." These words, that formed a moral compass, I first perceived by Freudian analysis, yet instantly dismissed this as a pewk of Kiketry sent to undermine me.

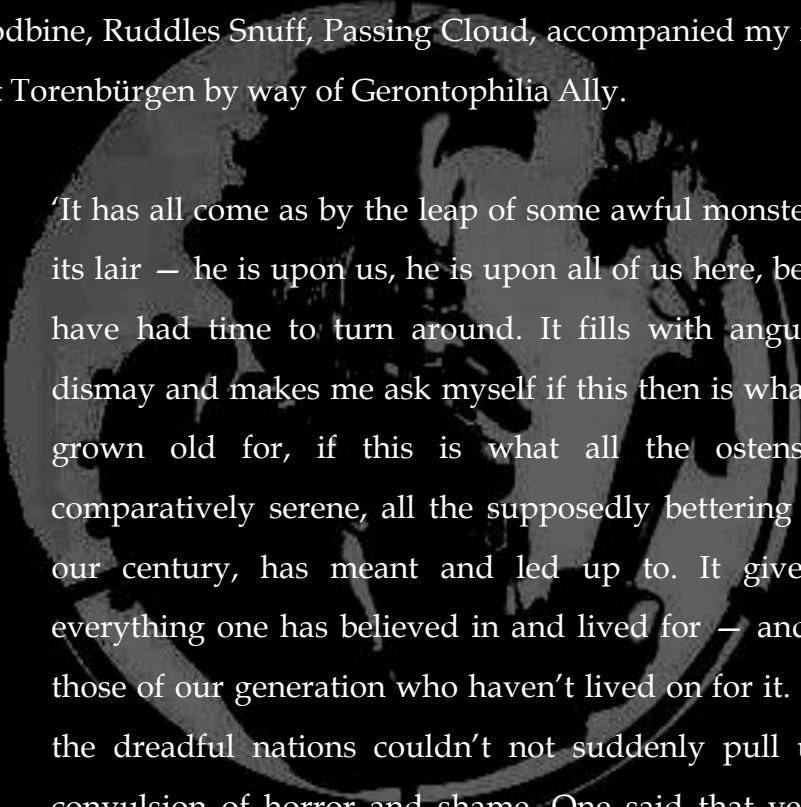
Looking high I read, 'Pig Fattening Powder by OVELLES' (if administered a week before market day adds lustre to the coat of the Swine, and so contributes to its value).

That the kindest of hearts beat in this foreign land, seemed good enough for no one. If I wasn't to take swift account of my Algolagnia and guess a solution, I would find a home in the sky, or join the Saviour in His earthly life as the curséd Mr Jewsevelt; bloodless and boneless.

Lehàr's opera, *The Land of Smiles*, I could hear in the distance, contributing greatly to my indomitable pessimism. As an expert on the beetle, I stretched my legs in one perfectly choreographed movement to a nerve-jangling cacophony that came from my own treacherous throat.

When this Horror began in me, my first thought was to my own self-preservation — this was decisive. Had I not earned Germany's highest honour, the Bundesverdienstkreuz, in service to Herr Hitler?

Now at a staggering run I passed the import firm of Hooks and Goodbodies, its sweet smell of tobacco putting its charm on my nostrils; all the brands of my youth, Gold Flake, Sweet Afton, Wild Woodbine, Ruddles Snuff, Passing Cloud, accompanied my flight as I left Torenbürgen by way of Gerontophilia Ally.



'It has all come as by the leap of some awful monster out of its lair — he is upon us, he is upon all of us here, before we have had time to turn around. It fills with anguish and dismay and makes me ask myself if this then is what I have grown old for, if this is what all the ostensibly or comparatively serene, all the supposedly bettering past, of our century, has meant and led up to. It gives away everything one has believed in and lived for — and I envy those of our generation who haven't lived on for it. It's as if the dreadful nations couldn't not suddenly pull up in a convulsion of horror and shame. One said that yesterday, alas — but it's clearly too late to say it today ... It brings to me the outbreak of the Wartime of our youth — but the whole thing here is nearer, closer upon us, huger, and all in a denser and finer world.'

Henry James in a letter to Ralph Waldo Emerson

I could summon tears as if I read 'The Little Match With No Home' for the first time.

My knees all a flutter; we are led all the way from Birth to Death.

There was warm air drifting between the spaces of my bones. Smoke coursed the width of my thighbone. Steam blew from the pores of my skin.

Law's Lemon and Ginger Brew is an aid to poor circulation.

Mason's Dog Oil for massaging people afflicted with Hula Love.

Chest and Lung Wafers; Best Friend in the World; Keep the Fog Out; 2d.

Fitzpatrick's Hot Blood Tonic mixed with ginseng or Herbal Booster (containing guarana and gota kola nut). Just the stuff to drink as I stand before the gates of Brazen Dis (Hades).

There's nothing as disappointing as anticipation.

Here I held myself in check to allow the progress of an immense Ether Jumper, over a hundred feet tall, oozing smarm, carrying swine eggs in an ancient wicker basket looped around its elbow. As it passed I hunched with my back to a wall, shadows hiding me. If its skin in colour implied the iniquity of usury to me, I intended to teach it the rudiments of life.

My lips shrank back to reveal rictal teeth and fixed, exposed jaw. "Come on, cunt, I'll highlight your black skin and make a holy show of you; stop you wagging chins with the fucking best of them." I tried folding a boneless right hand around my razor, but I may as well have tried to move an empty glove by willpower alone, and so I stood silently alert as the Ether Jumper went past.

"What a glutton!" trilled a laughing female voice.

I cocked an ear to the fluting of the lamb's pipe.

The snout of a young coleen I felt snuffle in my pocket.

"What a terrible glutton," repeated the 'dilling accompanied by the hubbub of many milling Piggy Wiggies.

Should I call her Heffalump?

"To the ladies who lunch," I toasted her ghost-presence as a rude clown.

"You are jealous of my natural charm." And I still could not see the swine-ess; the sow was either a beauty or *jolie laide* and that was that.

A horror in the mirror: a mirror of the horror.

As I looked out a fat little pig went hurrying past. Over her shoulder she wore a shawl, although she didn't seem cold at all. I waved to her, but she didn't see, for she never so much as looked at me.

Once again, when the sun came high, I saw the little pig hurrying by; Back she came at a terrible pace, the sun shining on her little pink face. And she smiled with a face that was quite content. But I never knew where that little pig went.

Stumbling and falling into a silver sty, I was enfolded by the unanimous snorts of the Pig-Hog; stumping through plum cakes and sugar, sweetmeats, comfits and figs. I crashed amongst them as they slobbered, rollicked and roared on me.

To the eater of pigs I vainly prayed, and you can perceive how I was susceptible to a morbid turn of mind when the flirtatiousness of

more pig coleens embrace me. Prettiness and light-heartedness was practiced by oxen-knuckled hands on the privates of the kindest heart beating in this foreign land, and I spent thickly textured hot semen to flood the thistles, nettles and ragwort flooring the sty.

'Morbid dread always signifies repressed sexual wishes.'

Freud

(I would call such ill-favoured women 'sewers', from *sua*, the Tamil word for pig.)

Not for nothing was I called the Poet of Auschwitz.

'The actual lines of a fat pig are amongst the loveliest and most luxuriant in nature; the pig has the same great curves, swift yet heavy, which we see in rushing water or in rolling cloud ...'

Gilbert Keith Chesterton, 'Rhapsody on a Pig'

The pewter sky of Torenbürgen was über goodness. I was trapped in her Evil Pockets – the very pit and entrance to Horror Hell. Doesn't paradise transcend space and time?

"We are all *stücke** in the universe," I said, extricating myself from fucking hog heaven (genii, devis, spirits and rishis defiled me as errant mammas). "To think of that level of deprivation – all that human juice."

'To market, to market, To market, to market,
To buy a fat pig, To buy a fat hog.
Home again, home again, Home again, home again,
Jiggety jig! Jiggety jog!'

Leaving the Pouchmaker's, Cappemaker's, Maltgrinder's and Garlekmonger's shops behind in their Torenbürgen ghettos, I limped as a ruined bugger across greening grass, burning meat installed in me, my blood stir-frying in my body. I came alone, after a brief while, to buildings the colour of earth.

*Objects/pieces

Here the air was even murkier, muddied with soot-spots and flecks of skin, both animal and human. A sensation of fear, blessed by Holy Jones, was yet again making its unaccustomed presence felt to me and I raised my fatigued aging eyes to a mighty building shrouded in black but with elusive areas of pale unhealthy white.

What had once been a grand hall lay in ruins. Arcades and balconies stretched high; open to the elements.

Situated next to it was what I took to be a parish hall, large and imposing, made of white flint. All manner of fruit grew and rotted from its bulk. On closer inspection I saw layered masses of white bone cemented between brick, flint and mortar. Also visible were

carved cornices, alabaster and marble statues of apes sitting alongside lengths of large inhuman bone, their rheumy malice impregnating the scene.

I was at the Bone House.

I was home, and its presence drew me in, as the cliché goes, like a moth to the flame. I went willingly into its mass. Inside, things looked dim before my failing sight (at the corners of my eyes do you see the *Arcus Senilis* – do you see the white ring of senile decay?)

It's a good jump from different skin to different skin.

I was being seduced and impregnated with the Starve Out.

This is the reason I shiver.

"Is there no end to the Horror?" I said grimly.

I am sure that Horror looked the pure business.

"Is that my Lord Cock I hear?" asked an unseen being with the sly-hiss stutters.

'Vienna appeared to me in a different light than before. Wherever I went, I began to see Jews, and the more I saw, the more sharply they became distinguished in my eyes from the rest of humanity ... In a short time I was made more thoughtful than ever by my slowly rising insight into the type of activity carried on by the Jews in certain fields.

'Was there any form of filth or profligacy, particularly in cultural life, without at least one Jew involved in it? If you cut even cautiously into such an abscess, you found, like a

maggot in a rotting body, often dazzled by the sudden light
— a little Jew.'

Hitler

From its bone eyrie a large Jew swine came tittupping along on pig's trotters, stepping from the gloom in between a raised arc of bone, and halting unsteadily before me. "I am sure it is!"

Even with his Yiddish features disguised as a Hog and his wonderful habiliments flocking a storm, I recognised my old enemy — the Semite hog wriggling in his bum-freezer jacket and long Raglan-shouldered overcoat fashioned from marvellous shiny silver herring-bone cloth — and I fucking well knew exactly who he was under the guise of the casting spell.

I hunched up and determinedly said, "I never heard the fluting of the lamb's pipe coming so clearly from a Piggy Wiggle's throat." I snorted hubbub and lively, not sorry I was giving in to intoxication.

I loved a bit of slumming — and who better to whore with than a Jew?

"Now fuck off before I cut *your* cock off," I said angrily. To save time, my razor, almost of its own volition, slashed across his right ear and cheek, missing his jugular by a zit.

"Nice," he said, shaking loose blood from his snout, the Mambury and Garton sugar factory just for a minute visible behind the jerking silhouette of his head. "Very nice, I am sure."

Now Jews can always be just blowin' smoke up your kilt, so I sincerely try to get them right in the face, whenever possible.

"En Garde, fichtre." Changing tactics, I made a direct rip-and-thrust to his privates, but in my weakened state the razor fluttered from my fingers and I dropped to the ground in a faint, coming to rest amongst a pile of oxen knucklebones.

With filthy hair hanging down in rats' tails, the Jew leered over me. From below his underjaw saliva dribbled towards me, and I opened dry lips to get just a taste of liquid. But the juice of Jew just circled in the air like a dizzy imp, refusing to enter my waiting mouth.

There's nothing as disappointing as anticipation.

And then he was off, his hog feet up on the lofty wind, gone with the gait of each-man-for-himself, greedier than the free-fox-in-the-hen-roost, leaving me to myself, again.

Marching through my bones, the route chosen by the Blue Serendipity Death came steadily right into the centre of my being, Malice Prepense in its swagger.

Even though I await the approaching issue fatalistically, I could leap with delight.

All is vanity and smoke.

But let me feel His fucking ribs one last time.

"There she blows!" The chill of my own breath unnerved me; hampered with a diseased and depraved imagination fashioned after Hezekiah Coffin Sr, seeded on me by a being malefic with the rock'n'roll bubbling Horrors.

Many would like to see me on a crucifix.

"Come closer and flesh my Killing Lance," I cried, keen as ever to depart all as I had Swastika Headed nonces in days of old (making mock of my memories).

Oil seeped from the walls and roof of the Bone House. Have you ever seen oil oozing from bone? I never have, not in such a drench. The Bone House literally sweated at my presence.

"God's last breath," I wheezed, overcome by self-pity. Never felt so bad — not even after being arse-fucked in Exit Island. The rags and bones of my body sprawl useless about me, my back propped in Terminal Lassitude. Since leaving the climate of Milk and Mace, I had not a moment's solace.

A brutal threnody broke over me, and so did the constant moan, shriek and call of sperm whales and the hollow wet roar of giant fish lungs.

(I swear I could see a giant black corpse regurgitating fish and squid, its single arm floating fin-up in its own blood and rank vomit.)

"Why, He *et* me. I scarfed me fucking down. What did you expect?"

It is unmanly to repine what one cannot cure. I was a beacon of verity in a repulsive world.

The everlasting creation of the stuff of life was ever present in my hair. Dried sperm had solidified and cracked on the massive twirl of my cockscombe. Now its sculptured mass wobbled like frozen jelly as it swayed back and forth above my head.

The leakage from the roof's bone lattice made its presence felt on me. Rising in a triangle hundreds of feet above me was the most infernal collection of blended bones — whale, shark and human — elephant's ivory tusks and the horns of many rhinoceroses, women's skulls small and whippet-like, the curved genitals of Jews and, added to this misery, teeth snapping and sparking a rhythmic tack-tack-tack-tack-tack-tack ...

Dismayed, I felt the drizzle of oil from the bones beginning to settle, glisten and melt the hairs of my exotic coiffure, and soon I tasted the mustard and honey of my own sperm trickling between grateful lips. The inevitable fall of my cockscombe settled in a nest about me, its abundant ooze soaking the collars of my shirt and jacket and down the gossamer tight skin of my chest.

Even with mouth full, I managed a bravo, "Now I feel replenished." But this lie was sharply exposed by the green-caked slime on my lips. Within minutes I was eagerly sucking marrow from the finger bones of my skeleton hand and, in just a tick, slaking the marrow greedily from the exposed bone of my elbow. Such hunger I had never experienced, not even in the barren killing grounds of Dachau or the starvation huts of Auschwitz.

'I often go on bitter nights
To Wotan's oak in the quiet glade
With dark powers to weave a union —
The runic letters to moon makes with its magic spell
And all who are full of impudence during the day
Are made small by the magic formula!

They draw shining steel — but instead of going into combat
They solidify into stalagmites
So false ones part from the real ones —
I reach into the nest of words
And then give to the good and just
With my formula blessings and prosperity.'

Hitler, 1916

Of course I took my position personally, for fuck's sake! I was well on the way to lay my Royal bones on the Alabaster Stone. Now Horror's Powered Disposition was no more potent than the average will of twerps and prigs. Modesty never sat well on me, why should it — on my sorority, I am the greatest man to walk this earth; the finest being God ever fashioned in His own sacred image.

Self-love is a wish for annihilation.

We live in a Hobbesian world. The war of all on all, locked in theocratic hatred: self against self.

The Führer called me 'a fabulous *entartete*' ('degenerate' is as close a translation as I can make, but not a complete one).

The German word suggests biology, natural growth, a natural species gone off its genetic course as to be virtually unrecognisable — a perverse mutation.

"Thank you, ladies and gentlemen of worth."

For all followers of the Imperial Reich, Lord Horror had the same exact characterisation as modern art! I was not simply odd or avant-garde, or a bit decadent, but actually *diseased*.

I was cast in the same degenerate mould as Chagall, Kandinsky, Picasso, Ernst, Bacon, Nolde and Max Beckmann.

I patted my thigh. It felt unusually wet. When I opened my palm, a handful of maggots I revealed. When I looked down they fleshed my chest to the bone.

"Oh! How tender, how delicious; sweet and plump and so nutritious." My flicking tongue tasted the Torenbürgen air. Breathed in the silt-laden Punkyfish River; swallowed Jewmongers' ash from bellowing human furnaces. Though of the low-life Yiddish Hog there was no trace.

Lunacy and love go hand in hand.

A ha'penny short of a shilling.

And I heard myself.

Hooted and shrilled and cawed and croaked.

"And all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well when tongues of flame are in-folded into the crowned knot of fire and the fire and the rose are one."

Sliding out of my strides and bending forward, I took in a deep draught of my own blood – offered to me by the sudden gout of a dozen burst veins which sprang like weeds from my outstretched legs.

"That which was above is now below." Another audible moan of self-pity broke from my lips. "That which was below is now above."

'I saw him open his mouth wide — it gave him a weirdly vicariously aspect, as though he wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him.'

Heart of Darkness, Joseph Conrad

"What a vile thing man is."

My slither eye was abroad, and I tucked in with increased zeal.

"Let's out the thing no one wants to see, and let it walk about and squeal a bit so we know what fucking colour it is. Then we'll shoot the pig."

The bones of my arms emerge like pale stamens.

"On the night the hogs ate Willie, Mama died when she heard what Daddy did to Sister."

"You think I'm dying, don't you?"

"Quelle Hor-reur!"

In a sick moment, I asked, why did you stick with me. That is not a question.

'The SS militia told those who arrived in the lunar landscape of the crematoria, the starvation-cells, the burning pits into which numerous inmates were thrown alive, that it would be less unbearable for them not to survive. Should they survive no one would believe them, and *that* torture was the worst.'

George Steiner

I spat out a dayglo orange virus hibernating in my stomach, as sweet-scented and as plump as a big round needle cushion.

"I lie belly-up in the sunshine, happier than you will ever be – a pig making merry in its stall, roast garlic panna cotta smothering me."

This virus infected the inner lining of my respiratory tract, damaging the alveoli – the tiny air-filled sacs in my lungs – filling them with fluid, making it impossible to breathe; without sufficient oxygen, or oxygenated blood, my skin was become discoloured (cyanosis).

I was turning black.

"I'm snowed!" I cried (with axioms of contention all over).

My hair was now a corpse-inspired silver bouffant. Monstrous regiments of Muppets, in the wan hope that watching the travails of this bright-eyed unfortunate would gift them with a man's skin, were schmoozing all over my weary bones. Though, of course, they amounted to no more concern to me than a pub full of cosmopolitan campfire gurus putting in their twopennyworth of knowledge.

I was inhabited with Fregoli's Syndrome: the delusion that familiar individuals have disguised themselves to appear to me as Others.

"There it is," I said wearily.

A big sniff and muffled, hokey cokey noises came from me. I mashed my teeth as if chewing on a boar's knuckle.

'So many things have been written about me, masses of insolent lies and inventions, that I would have perished long ago, had I paid any attention. One must take comfort in the fact that time has a sieve, through which most trivia runs off into the sea of oblivion.'

Albert Einstein

"The greatest thing you will ever learn is just to love, and be loved in return." And sad of I me was.

"Time present and time past." Chubby porcine features flickered before me, with hair formed into sausage curls tumbling about greedy chops. My vocabulary acquired a saline flavour.

Skittering piglets had made a treachy morass of the paddock, but still they bedded wet down next to me. I heaved myself into a squatting position, gushing. "There's an old saying that you should give a sick pig an apple. If it ate it, it would live; if it didn't, it would die whatever you did."

I was ever mindful that sows eat their own piglets.

Using its own body as a template, the porcine maid showed me where baby back ribs are on a pig's body – under the armpit, apparently.

I further gushed: "Are both perhaps present in time future." Further bedding us in fermenting tan bark I swaddled warmly amongst Sandy Back pigs and Old Spot sows.

In my end is my beginning.

DISINTEGRATION

By Michael Butterworth

"We first met one another at Manchester University. She was reading psychology, and I was taking a printing diploma at a nearby art college. We both had similar interests, and opposite characters.

"I think that I was the more stable of the two. She was frightened of life, and unsure of herself. Her interest in psychology was most probably in part a symptom of her state of mind, for I rarely got the impression that she was studying for the sake of her career. It was a strange choice for her, and it didn't really lead her anywhere except, as I now see, deeper into her own mind."

Because of her fear of people, she had no faith in human nature. In the case of ninety-nine per cent of people she met, I would say that she had good cause to suspect their motives towards her. But she could not bring herself to trust even the one per cent of people who are always trustworthy and warm of affection. I fell in love with her. But it took me six years of married life to convince her of that fact.

"We married suddenly, two months after we had met. I gave up my printing course; she decided to stay on at university. I was a bit irritated at this, though I hid my feelings and encouraged her, in the hope that she would one day come out of her shell and think of her career and her future rather than use, as she did, her psychology course as a tool with which to dwell upon the past."

And what a past. She was the product of a dissatisfied marriage, of parents who argued continually, and who looked upon their children as a source of their unhappiness. As she was the most sensitive of the three, she was also the one who grew up most affected by the obvious rift in her parents' relationship, and by the harsh beatings which they meted out.

"We had a succession of flats, and eventually a house and children of our own.

Her course at the university was completed, though as I suspected she would she failed the final examination. As, by this time, I had won over her confidence, she was not too upset. She did not attempt to resit the exam, but resigned herself instead to family life with me.

“All went well for a number of years until one morning we had a cable sent to us from an old friend, who in the interim had become head of a psychic research centre on Hebrides. Neither she nor I had severed relationships with our old friends, and kept ourselves thoroughly up to date with regard to their work. A mound of literature came through our door each week, the outcome of subscriptions to just about every relevant journal on psychic research.”

I suppose that, having exhausted its search for knowledge on the purely physical plain, and succeeded in conquering its birth planet and, also interstellar space, the human race felt that it was now beneficial to its survival to turn its attention inwards, at its origin. There were still many social and living problems that had to be solved amongst the inhabitants of earth. Psychic research, scientific investigation of the previously scorned powers of the human mind, such as telepathy, telekinesis, the power to create, and so on, was one of the sciences which became popular.

“Thom’s cable could not have come at a better time for her and me, who were at the peak of a scientific hubbub. It stated briefly that he needed guinea pigs to help work a consciousness-swapping experiment. He remembered that she was a particularly susceptible person, with an easily opened mind, ideally suited. Because he could think of “absolutely no one else” he had been forced to turn to us, despite our family ties. We both agreed to help him, a rather foolish decision I now admit.”

At the time, however, we were blinded by an altruistic feeling of desire to martyr ourselves for the sake of scientific advancement.

“We had some guilty feelings about leaving our children but, we reasoned, the research would not take more than a few weeks at most and we would soon return.

“We left our children in care of an aunt, paid off a few months’ mortgage

repayments on the house, and left at once for Hebred, all expenses paid by courtesy of the Lockwood Psychic Research Foundation.

“Thom—Dr Thomas Brown—is a fat, perspiring man, very patient and dedicated. As is the case with most professional men that I have met, he has cultivated a kind of dual character: humanely considerate on the one hand, a ruthless exploiter on the other, an ideal formula for a man to adopt who has both family and self-survival interests at heart. But in Thom, the instinct to survive ...”

... sublimated nowadays as scientific rather than geographical exploration of man's unknown territory...

“... has gained the upper hand. Although he likes to be a responsible and a considerate sort of person, his thirst for knowledge causes him to have a unique morality unparalleled in any other person, except perhaps in the monstrous scientists of the old horror movies, who used fellow humans in the performance of some cruel experiment or other.”

He isn't consciously aware of the way in which he exploits people and situations. As is the case with most professional men, the subject's compliance is accepted as the effluvium of pure good-naturedness. It does not occur to him that the subject is unaware of real danger, and that his enthusiasm is the enthusiasm of the innocent: well-intentioned but foolhardy. In the professional mind, the subject is endowed with mutual understanding and absolute knowledge of the conditions. It was with this sort of mental framework that Thom accepted our decision to help.

“He received us well, and entertained us with dinners, drinks and stories. The conversation for much of the time was to do with psychiatry and psychology in general, about people in the field, and about advancements being made. It was pretty evident that he thought that his foundation was on to a pretty shattering breakthrough. The idea, he told us, was one that had procured him rapturous visions throughout his adult life: of a world in which communication between one human being and another could become absolute. It was not only his vision: total communication of the sort he envisaged has always been a preoccupation of the thoughts of civilised man.

But Thom had been especially haunted by the idea, and the situation as we found it at his foundation was, that after years of study as a student, and after years of research as a professional, he had managed to design an apparatus which he was confident could not only record human thought but also transmit thought from one human being to another.”

As yet, a thought could be transmitted no great distance, only the length of a piece of cable: in order to receive and transmit at all, the brains of two participants had to be attached by cable to the apparatus, one transmitting his thoughts into the apparatus, and the other receiving the same thoughts from it. In effect the apparatus was a media device, and although a block in the development of instantaneous communication (telepathy) it was nevertheless a step in the right direction. It was the first stage, and Thom was justifiably a proud man.

“We were shown the apparatus and a date was fixed for the experiment. Because of the numerous experimental conditions that had to be right before the major experiment could take place, we were, in the meantime, kept busy performing tests, on ourselves and on the apparatus. One of the tests, I remember, was arranged to determine the speed of flow of our thoughts, another determined the clarity of our thinking, and so on. In order to test the equipment, a one word thought of mine was successfully transmitted to her.”

Thom had told us that actual thought transference, once considered a remarkable achievement in itself, was accomplished daily by his laboratory staff, and was only used now as a test to be performed upon a slightly modified version of the original apparatus. What Thom now wanted was the transference of one entire mind into the mind of another. As a basis for this idea, he had worked on the assumption that the computation of one single thought could be altered to cope with the transference of an entire matrix of particles, or thought waves. The computation would be incredibly complicated, but he had a reliable computer and a team of skilled staff, so he was confident of success.

“The day arrived at last. We had been waiting in nervous anticipation of this moment. She was wired up first, then I. There were no electrodes, only a sheet of what Thom called ‘thought-sensitive’ material, which was fitted to the inside of a rubber ‘cap’. This cap was tailored to cover the whole head, neck, chest and back. The only inlet was an air pipe, which fed our noses.”

From her headpiece a maze of coloured wires led into a row of input sockets on the instrument (I say ‘instrument’—in fact the apparatus was composed of many instruments so voluminous that they more or less filled our laboratory), for the idea at first was to transfer her mind into mine. My headpiece was thus attached by wires to a row of output sockets. After a while, Thom told us, it would be possible, by throwing a switch, to reverse the flow: my mind in her body, her mind in my body. The third stage of the experiment (and the highlight) would be the evacuation of both our minds from our bodies. Our separate minds would be stored in separate banks of the computer, and we would be allowed to communicate at a speed approaching that of thought. Fourthly, our minds would be returned to our bodies, the computer's memory having recorded every detail of the strange encounter of minds.

Some hours were spent by technicians fiddling with bits of the apparatus, in order to stabilize conditions. Then Thom gave the order to commence. Juice was turned on, and I began to feel the familiar tingling in my brain cells that had characterized earlier experiments when we had been engaged in the transference of single thoughts. Then, without warning, my senses were cut off—an entirely new experience. I could not see, hear, feel, taste, or touch. My first reaction was to panic, but as the state was not altogether uncomfortable (in fact it was quite pleasant), I soon calmed down. It was a bit like being in a sleep state, where, identically, the five senses are curtailed. But, by contrast, I retained awareness: not the familiar awareness of my five known

senses, but, presumably, that of my mystical 'sixth' sense.

My psychic state also differed from my normal sleep state in that I experienced no dreaming, though I felt that, had the dream imagery come to me, I could easily have controlled it.

This was a pleasant feeling, for I have long desired to be able to control my dreams. There were no images – only void. I could not sense the particles which made up my new body. I knew I was, and that I was 'there', and that was all. The condition did not alarm me, nor was it boring. I felt contented. After a while I became conscious of an approaching 'something', which I assumed must be her. A moment later, her consciousness had merged with mine. Hers was quite different to my own, and its approach had filled me with anxiety. I realized why as soon as we became one mind: she was frightened, and could not succumb to the relaxation which had overcome me. She was full of spikes and filled me with gaps. No words were exchanged, only feelings. By conveying to her a feeling of protection, I was able to calm her somewhat. A great part of her fright was also dispelled at having found something to hide in. She had hardly had time to pulse more than a wave or so of her sweet feelings of gratitude into me, than I felt myself suddenly grow distant from her. I found myself in an area much the same as the first had been, before I had been joined by her, and assumed that Thom had now transferred my mind into her unoccupied brain. I felt pleasure, for the experiment was progressing well, and the second stage was almost over. But I was concerned for my partner, and hoped that by now she had overcome her fears. But she had not, and I think that it was possibly her resistance to the whole affair that brought about her fate. Thom, absorbed by the manipulation of our minds, had neglected to provide us with any means of communication with the world he inhabited. She could not protest. She had been moved pawn-like to an area identical with mine but separate from it. I was made aware of this fact by her extremely clear thoughts that pierced through the void like needles. On this occasion, no doubt because of our detachment from one another, our thoughts were transmitted in the form of words and pictures, as well as feelings. She was still in a state of panic, but having realised that I was close by, and that so far there had been no catastrophe, she communicated with greater objectivity. She told me that it had been silly of her to have behaved the way she had, and of how lost she had felt when Thom had suddenly taken me from her. What she said sounded ridiculous. I laughed, for the picture that her words invoked in me was one of Thom and I having an affair. Part of me knew that this interpretation was not what she had meant, and perfectly understood her real meaning, but it seemed to me that this sort of punning and literal acceptance of words was acceptable to both of us, even desirable. I had a tendency to want to break down the conditioning power of words, which I saw as invented tools that only partially did their designed job of controlling communicated true feeling. She must have

agreed with me, for a moment later she 'laughed'. After we had made a pact not to use words except for the conveyance of specific information, we each settled down to our own 'place', meaning to become more intimately attached. (The area between us was a sharp barrier, separating us by what seemed infinity, which was in actual fact only a few computer banks. Living in this mental limbo, was an existence uncomplicated by quantified physical measurements of space, matter, and time, for the three elements did not exist in quite the same way as they appear to exist to us out here in the five-sense world.) There was not much time to spend together before I was suddenly made conscious of the fact that communication from her had ceased. That moment was the worst I have experienced in my life. There was a sort of 'explosion' of images from

her, in which her mind was completely opened and laid bare. Her entire life's experiences came out, a human wreckage that floated in pieces through my existence. Instantly I knew everything about her, who she was, and why she was. My understanding of her as a person gained over long years of marriage, was nothing compared with the intensity with which I knew her in that single instant. The frail, unworkable structure she had given her mind, with the desperate intention to stave off the cruelties of life, had collapsed. The grim determination she had used to hold it all together, was dissipated. Then, as quickly, every trace of her mind had gone, melted like overnight snow. There was no question of her merely having stopped communicating. She had gone. Simultaneously, I received a terrible pain that burst explosively from my centre and that spread outwards towards my extremities. I endured this for a split second. Then I 'awoke'.

Images of the laboratory were swimming before my eyes, jumbled and incoherent. My hand was pressed against my head, to ease the pain which had somehow concentrated there. Thom's face came into my field of vision, someone pulled down my arms, and my headpiece was removed. I lost consciousness and awoke in bed in the foundation sick room.

"Later, Thom came in to inform me that she was dead. That's really where the story ends, except to say that the news that Thom brought to me was already old in my head. I had experienced her death alongside her.

"After making arrangements for her disintegration, I left Hebred with a bad headache and one or two other ailments that come and go, symptoms which Thom assures me will clear up gradually over a period of years. Not much comfort."

"And she was right," my listener interrupted. "Thom had taken you away from her."

"Yes. Only not in the manner we had thought, ironically. There's been no affair!" I managed a sardonic laugh. "I view it all as a scientific experiment—a very good one—that went wrong. Thom was as white as death, the most upset man I have seen. He was ninety per cent directly responsible for her death."

My listener drew me to her. I let her cradle me, but I could feel no emotion of the kind she might have expected me to have. My mind was still too much preoccupied with thoughts of unfaithfulness. I lay stiffly against her breast. Whether she realised my dilemma or not, I could not say, but a moment later she let me go. I arose and rescued my drink from the bar top where I had left it half an hour ago.

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HALL OF THE MUTANT KING

By Kate MacDonald

Mark Mothersbaugh is an odd character to wrap your head around. Much like Devo, for whom he has served as front man since the early 1970s, there seems to be so much going on that it's impossible to see the whole picture.

First and foremost, of course, Mothersbaugh is known for being the singer and one of the main composers for Devo. For

many, the band is synonymous with Mothersbaugh's bespectacled, sharp-angled face. Devo's dada-esque mixture of quirky music, theatre, bizarre and disconnected imagery, grotesque masks, alter-egos and cultural commentary was embraced early on by punks, flirted with briefly by the mainstream and understood by almost no one. (I don't know that I'd count myself among the fluently Devo-

conversant, although I'm learning.) Even the band's name is conceptual, tied to the deeper ideas that drove - and continue to drive - their music. (Devo is a contraction of devolution, the process by which society, rather than progressing and changing (evolving) into an ever more ideal form, actually becomes degraded and moves backwards.)

Beyond Devo, Mothersbaugh is an idiosyncratic visual artist, applying many of the same themes to photography, drawing and, um, automobiles (see below). His works, which navigate somewhere between fine art, pop art and outsider art, are shown regularly at galleries around North America and Europe and his output, particularly of his postcard series, is prodigious.

On the other hand (the third hand, apparently), he has also managed to carve out an extremely successful career for himself as a composer for films (independent, as might be expected, but also large-scale Hollywood studio productions), television, videogames and advertisements. Cheating on his

youthful ideals or corrupting an ever more devolved system from within? (Note: Rhetorical question.)

However complicated and occasionally contradictory he may seem, one thing that does stand out is that Mark Mothersbaugh is utterly comfortable with himself in all facets. And, standing on the doorstep of 60, he shows no sign of lapsing into irrelevance or being carried away by the devolutionary tide.

Kate: You recently completed a tour with Devo, playing your first and third albums in their entirety. This is material you've been doing for a long time, but the performances still seem pretty energetic. Are you still able to get excited by the prospect of performing Devo material live? Was there anything on the tour or in the performances that surprised you?

Mark: These are the songs we wrote when we were angry young men and the material DEVO is best remembered for. Touring was admittedly much

more exciting in my early 20's than 35 years later, largely because I now have a 5 and an 8 year old, which is cooler than touring. It's odd to be in a hotel room wondering how homework is coming along, or how they did on a test. Also, my wife stays at home to take care of them, so... I'm family-less on tour. Boo Hoo.

But, I love the material, it's fun to play and show time is always worth it.

The biggest surprise was how well the albums held up in vinyl sequence. We never played either album live, in that exact format, before, but it turned out to sound pretty good, even to us.

Kate: What was the impetus for you to go back into the studio with Devo? Do you see the band continuing regularly from this point?

Mark: Bob 1 and Bob 2 and I have been in the studio almost constantly, ever since DEVO went into hibernation, back in the late '80's. We formed a music company called Mutato Muzika, scoring over 65 tv shows, (PeeWee's Playhouse, Rugrats,

Big Love, Dawson's Creek, etc....just about every genre except soap operas) 40 some feature films, (3 Rugrats films, Nick and Nora's Infinite Playlist, 4 Wes Anderson movies, etc.), about 2 dozen big games, (Crash Bandicoot, Interstate 80, Jac and Dexter, SIMS) and over 500 tv commercials. Probably every car, breakfast cereal, soft drink, clothing store, grocery store, in the world)... and wrote, produced, played on countless album and art projects.

That said, I think the demise of the record industry as we knew it in the 70's and 80's had a very big part in the desire to get out there and try it again... it just seemed like the atmosphere was more conducive to the original intent of DEVO.

Kate: Do you still believe in the reality of devolution? Has your idea of what devolution is changed over time?

Mark: Do I still believe in devolution? Just look around you for evidence that not only is devolution real, but it has accelerated since DEVO was last

out there recording videos and albums about it.

My view of devolution is fairly intact, it now seems an even more relevant missing link between Darwinism and Creationism.

Kate: Your earlier artistic work seems heavily influenced by movements like Dada- including elements of humour and absurdism, as well as confrontation. Do those ideas affect the work you do for film and television? Or does that work fall into a different 'compartment'?

Mark: I think pretty much everything we have done, in sound and vision are still permutations on the theme of devolution.

Kate: You have made a lot of use of masks and costumes. What was the appeal of this for you?

Mark: In the early days of DEVO, they were cheaper than drugs, and a lot more fun.

Kate: What originally gave you the idea to start exploring the

symmetry or asymmetry of human images?

Mark: We used to refer to DEVO and fans as "spuds" ... not asparagus people, or beautiful eggplant people, but potatoes. Dirty, asymmetric, living underground. But with eyes all around, so we saw everything going on. And, lowly yet humble... the potato being the unsung staple of nearly every Americans' diet.

Also, the illusion of human symmetry had possibilities.

Kate: Was there a particular reason you chose largely to work with daguerreotypes and older images to make your 'beautiful mutants'?

Mark: I started off using photos of mine, and then branched out into found images, and something about the older images of people now deceased appealed to me. The daguerreotype images and cases just seemed to illustrate the idea so well. The old bakelite cases from 100 years ago, worn, and cherished, then forgotten by later generations and surfacing in antique shops

and on eBay seemed a perfect complement to the concept of exploring symmetry.

Kate: Do you plan to continue creating art mutants either in the same style or in a new way?

Mark: I still do commissions, but it also shows up in other art forms, including rugs and a project I am doing with Scion, involving cutting 2 identical cars apart in the middle, and re-attaching the 2 front ends together, and the 2 back ends together. I always wanted to do this to cars, and this is the first one.

Kate: What was it that made you start using the postcard format as an art vehicle? Is there a lot of self-discipline involved in creating new ones every day or is that level of fertility natural for you?

Mark: I have a combination extreme myopia and astigmatism that makes perspective every moment of my eyes-open life resemble staring into a 20/20 doorknob. To do large images, it requires aids, such as projectors to lock in on perspective. Also, I

participated in mail art with a number of artists around the world back in the '70's... it was cheaper than hitch-hiking. One day, I realized I was creating a diary of sorts on postcards, and postcard sized paper. It was then I started saving them, instead of sending them.

I have missed days in the last 38 years, but have been pretty good about keeping it going. When you think of it as a mysterious automatic diary, it is easy to contribute daily.

Kate: What do you think you would have ended up doing if you hadn't been part of Devo?

Mark: Teaching art, or giving music lessons.

Kate: Is there some type of artistic endeavour that you've not tried, but would like to?

Mark: I always disliked acting, but now I am a regular character (the art teacher) on a show called YO GABBA GABBA. Maybe when my daughters get old enough to stop watching it, I will lose interest in that.



And, in closing, here are a few resources to find out more about Mark Mothersbaugh and Devo:

www.club-devo.com: The on-line resource for all things Devo, with frequent opportunities to participate in the (d)evolution of the band.

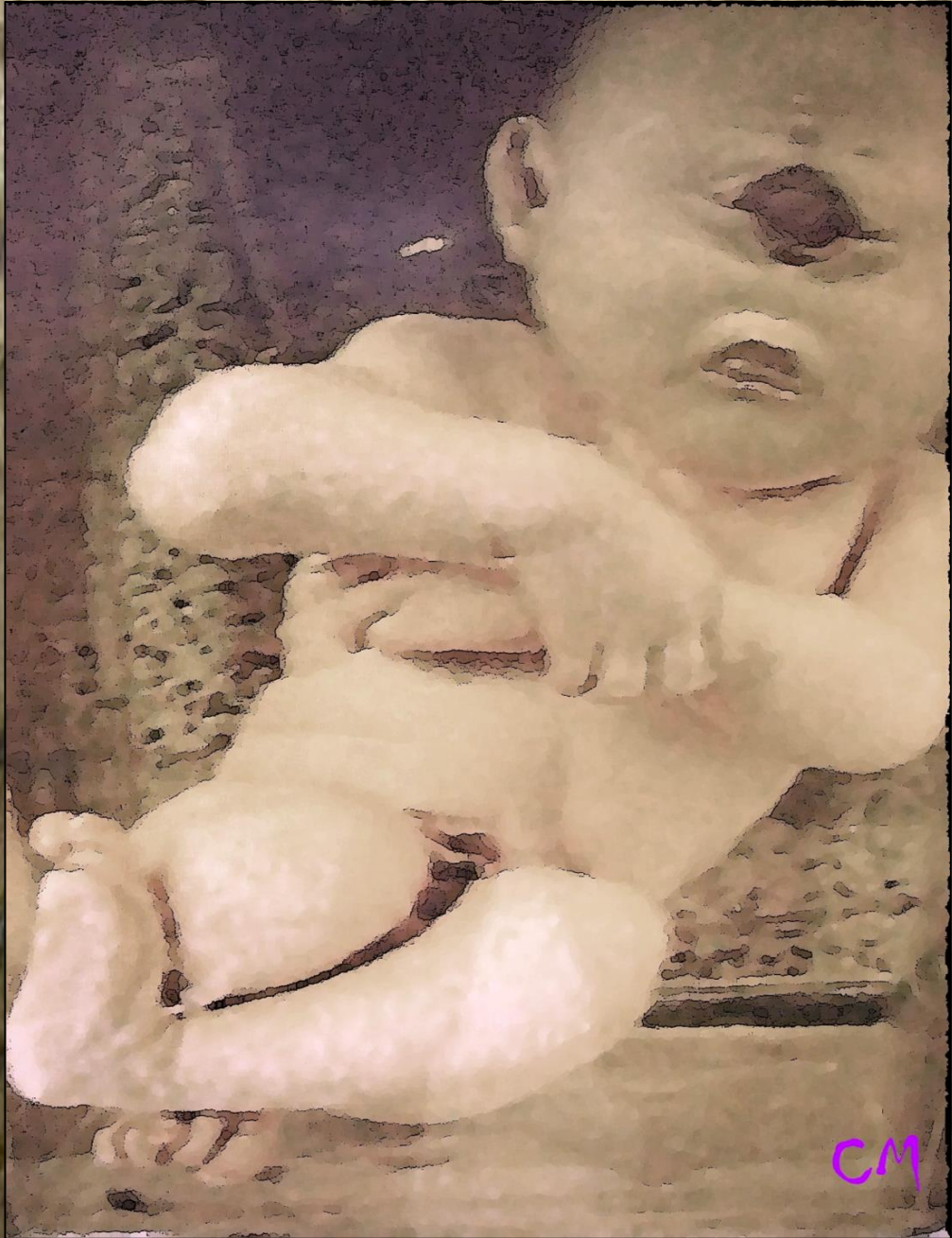
www.mutato.com: The web site for Mark's company, Mutato Muzika. Find out just how many times his music has infiltrated your life without you knowing it.

www.mutato-visual.com:

Dedicated to Mark's visual art, including a regularly updated gallery tour schedule.

And for a perspective (mine) on one of the band's recent live shows and what time has done to Devo:

<http://morelikespace.blogspot.com/2009/12/q-are-we-not-still-devo.html>



EXPERIMENTAL MUTANTS

Text and Image By Chris Madoch

Friday, February 12, 2010 at 12:01pm
Today's torture Bible is as large as Gods- a brick
Of equally sickening convolution: every trick
From water-boards to repeat electrocution.

That it exists is not in question
Nor is the fact that it is constantly referred to,
Preferred to The New Testament and acted upon
By greedy angels in their twisted element
Of widening the heavenly divide between rich and poor.

4am

That's when our biology least guarded
Admits the drilled retarded beasts
Skilled in rote
Who come cleaving our dreaming
Heavy hammered harsh of throat
To bag our heads
Then play us loops of lupine screaming
Whilst we are stripped of more than dignity

Taken raped- each word the other apes;
The darkness and the noise blurs meaning-
Meaning crimes are always easily erased
As almighty Mammon gets openly praised.

[The 'removed' in Indonesia
Inconveniently blocked the shipping lanes
With their 'lost' bodies.
Argentina, Chile and Brazil-
They are accounting for the 'disappeared' still.
Iran, Afghanistan and Iraq-
These are not forever darknesses
Where marks of blame will stay hid by the march
Of sameness and fast-food outlets.]

Where is there any semblance of regret
As you orgy on your next HD flat-screen TV set
Oblivious to the fate of us
As you drool on the priorities of your gene pool-
The experimental mutants only you perceive as beautiful.

DEATH WISH CHAMELEON VII

By Cricket Corleone

Photos © Richard A. Meade



For days Greta waits. A week goes by. Dustin has taken it upon herself to get some things from Greta's place. Pays off her rent. Calls her work and tells them there has been a death in the family and she needs some time off. Though her employer was a little skeptical of the whole thing, she was granted a couple of weeks to "get things in order."

But as the days kept passing with no message or call from her

married man, Greta grows more and more silent. She stops speaking all together. Stops eating. And just lies on the couch watching bad movies that only make her loathe everything in existence. Each passing moment she becomes more and more depressed and deeper into cynicism. Though Dustin can see that Greta is falling apart, she doesn't try and pull her out of it, because she herself has been there and knows that nothing anyone else says or does will help.

In the meantime, Dustin has not made any attempts on her life. She hasn't done any dangerous work, only the legit ones that will cover the bills, rent and food for both herself and Greta. Though she knows that once Greta has pulled out of this, she will probably go right back to her death wish ways in no time, for now, it offers a distraction of sorts from her own problems. Plus, deep down, whether she

wants to admit it or not, Dustin knows she cares about Greta... care is something Dustin has been avoiding like the plague, but she can't help herself. She has made a deep friendship, and no amount of kicking or screaming is going to change that.

Greta is lying on Dustin's couch when Dustin comes in the front door. "Hey, I got some stuff for dinner."

Greta scoffs, "I'm not hungry."

Dustin jumps back, "It speaks?! You know, I heard on the news today that if you pop your head out of the apartment and you don't get scared of your own shadow, that means that spring is on its way. Imagine that."

Greta ignores Dustin's bad joke.

Finally, in the silence between them with only a bad romantic comedy left to their ears, Dustin loses it. "Look, you gotta get up and do something. I know you don't feel like it. You don't want to. You would rather slit your own wrists then get some fresh air... you NEED to get out. You NEED to eat. And you need to talk so I don't have to."



Greta sits up. "Fine. I'll go home then."

Dustin pushes Greta back down on the couch. "That is YOUR interpretation, not mine. I am not the enemy here."

Greta sighs as Dustin sets a sandwich in front of her. "If I eat will you leave me alone?"

Dustin goes to get a glass of water for Greta, "Nope."

Greta opens the wrapper to her freshly purchased deli sandwich.

"So... where have you been all day anyway?"

She chokes down the first bite.
"Oh... around..."

Dustin had spent the past few days searching around town for the skinhead guy and his rapist pack. She asked a few street friends if they had seen or heard of this guy, asked if anything has been happening around town... any pattern of rapes or assaults.



Some people didn't know anything, some of them didn't want to say anything. But a few people would point Dustin in the direction of an abandoned warehouse or a local pub. Since the only picture she had of this guy was a fuzzy one from the window of her tall apartment

building, it was kind of hard to get a straight answer from anyone and she only found herself pointed in the wrong direction each time.

After Greta eats half the sandwich she puts the rest back in the package. "There, I ate." She lies back on the couch. "Don't worry, I will be out of here by the end of the night," she says as she zombies out to the television again.

"You don't have to be out of here, Greta. But bottling all this up is just gonna turn you into... well, ME."

Greta doesn't want to laugh so she covers her face. "Don't scare me," she says in an attempt to joke back. "Seriously though, I need to go home. I need to get some things done. And you are right, I need to pull out of this." She sits up and rubs her face a little.

"Well, do what you have to do. You know where I am if you need to... you know... watch bad movies... drink... and sulk."

Dustin sits down on the couch next to Greta and eats the rest of

the sandwich, "Wow... this sandwich is horrible." She spits it out. "Now I am depressed over bad sandwich. Wanna go out to eat before you head home?"

Greta shakes her head, "No... I need to just... go home." Greta gets up and gets dressed in a pair of pants and shirt that Dustin had laid out for her a few days before.

"What should I do with your old clothes?" Dustin asks carefully.

"Burn them," Greta says coldly.

"Good, cause I already did." Dustin hands Greta her house keys, cell phone, and the money that was in the pocket.

Greta looks at the money for a moment, "Keep it. Consider it a payment for putting me up."

Dustin shrugs and pockets the money.

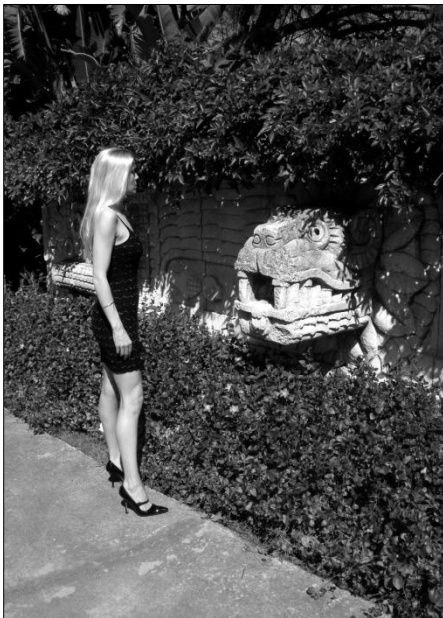
As soon as Greta steps out into the city street just as dusk is falling, Dustin pokes her head out of the apartment window, "Do you want company on your way home?"



Greta shouts, "No. I'll be fine. Thanks." And heads on her way determined not to be anyone's charity case anymore. She walks with anger on her face down the street to catch a bus, as if to ward off anyone that might have it in their minds to hurt her. But really, underneath it all, she is terrified. The city street seems to sway as she walks which makes her feel dizzy. The buildings feel like they are going to swallow her up. The people passing look like lunatics in their cars and suits, walking and talking on their cell phones. After a block and a half of this, Greta takes out her cell phone and calls Dustin. "I changed my mind... I do need company, she says, as she

huddles in a corner. "I am just up a block or so... come find me please." She sits there waiting on Dustin, inside she is fighting off a major panic attack.

In under a minute, Dustin catches up with Greta, takes her hand, and walks her to the bus. "Good thing you called, cause you don't have bus fare." Dustin smiles as she holds up Greta's "payment" from before. "Now we both do," Dustin says as she pockets the money again.



The bus is coming, the two of them make a dash for the bus stop and catch it just in time to board. Greta feels somewhat safer now that they are in a warm lit

place, and now that she isn't alone. Dustin is there with her now, to make her stupid comments and snide remarks.

Once Greta is at home and Dustin is gone, she sits on her bed and stares at the wall. She checks her phone for any messages, but there are none. There is a crack in her cell phone and a small blood stain on one of the keys. She goes to the bedroom mirror and looks at her teeth. She had been feeling a sharpness against the side of her tongue for a few days but didn't care enough about anything to take a look at it. Sure enough, a tooth of hers had been cracked from that night. The sharp edge was digging into her tongue and continued to do so like a constant reminder... "Scars that will never heal," she thought. And just when she started to feel her lowest, her phone begins to ring. She looks to see who is calling, it is her married man. She quickly picks up at the risk of seeming desperate to hear from him, because she is.

The married man tells Greta that he would like to see her. That he got her message and would like to come over and talk to her.

"You want to come to my place? That's... a surprise." "We usually meet up at that hotel."

He tells her he will be over within the hour and has some news for her.

Once he arrives, he goes through the motions of trying to seduce her. In Greta's state, the last thing she wants is to be pawed at and plunged into. But, feeling his gentle touch, his lips, and reminding herself how much she loves this man, she thought that maybe this time it would wash the stains of her trauma away for good. Or at least as long as he held her. But alas, eventually he is done, and dressing once again. "Maybe I can just be this for him... then he will stay with me? Maybe I just have to take what I can get from him and everything will just... be ok?" she thinks as she watches him.

"Oh, I have to tell you something. I got this really amazing job offer. That is one of the reasons I had to see you. I needed to celebrate." He kisses Greta on the forehead. "That's awesome," Greta says and smiles, for the first time in days.

"Which also means that I will be moving."

Greta sits up a little, "To a new house?" she says expectantly.

"No. To a new state," he says as he slips on his shoes. "So, before I go, I would like to take you out to eat one last time. Show you a great time.... have a great time..."



"And you can see me off in the morning. I have a flight in at 6am. My family is already there. I stayed behind to close on the house and make sure everything is in order. That's why it took me so long to get back to you. I had a shit load of stuff to do for this move and I was up to my ears."

Suddenly Greta felt like her insides were falling out to the ground. "What? You're... wait... wait..." she stands up and stops him from moving around so much. "You came here to fuck me... and then tell me you are moving... and that you are leaving in the morning... and that's it? It's over? Good bye?" Greta's anger starts to bubble up.



"Well, not... goodbye goodbye... not forever. I mean, I might be back on occasion to visit. The married man looks Greta in the eyes, "I don't see what the big deal is? I mean, you knew this couldn't last forever? I mean, didn't I even tell you last time that you need to find someone

who is available? I am NOT available. You knew that." He goes to stroke her hair and feels the gash on the back, "What happened to your..."

Greta pushes his hand away, "GET OUT," she says without flinching and with tears welling up in her eyes.

"Hey... don't be like this..." the married man says feeling bad for upsetting her.

"GET THE FUCK OUT!" Greta pushes him.

The married man looks at her like he doesn't know this person.

She pushes him so hard this time that she inadvertently falls on her knees and cries.

The married man can now see the damage he has caused to her and doesn't want to leave her like this. He goes to comfort her, giving her a hug.

At first she gives in and cries on his shoulder, but then is quickly brought back to reality. "No. NO!" She pushes his hands away and stands up. "Think what you like... you wanna be the good

guy? You wanna tell yourself you are doing the right thing? BULL-SHIT. Go... catch that plane. Go home to your family and a wife that you LIE AND CHEAT ON and tell yourself you are a "good guy" all you want. But I want you to remember ONE thing. Just ONE thing from this moment on. You may have pushed me out and turned your back on me, and you may think that in time I will get over it and be alright. Well, you are WRONG. YOU JUST KILLED ME." Greta pushes the married man out the door slamming it shut and locking it.

Outside the door, the married man is tempted to try and go back. To fix things. But, he doesn't. He decides there is nothing to be done but let time take its toll and stay away from her. For good. So he leaves. He goes to catch his plane, and he never looks back.

Inside the door of Greta's house, Greta is falling to pieces. She is shaking and crying. She beats on the door with her fists. When that isn't enough she screams a horrifyingly painful scream not caring who hears or what happens because of it. In tears and anger she makes her way to

the kitchen, her face red from crying and from rage. Pulls a knife from a kitchen drawer, and stabs into her heart in one thrust. Falling to the kitchen floor, she realizes what she has just done. Blood starts to come up out of her mouth. Shock fills her eyes. She squirms about on the ground trying to make her way to the phone. She can't reach it. She can't breathe. She lays there bleeding to death, helpless and alone. The last thing that went through her mind was that no one was coming for her. No one was going to help.

Dustin awakes in that moment.

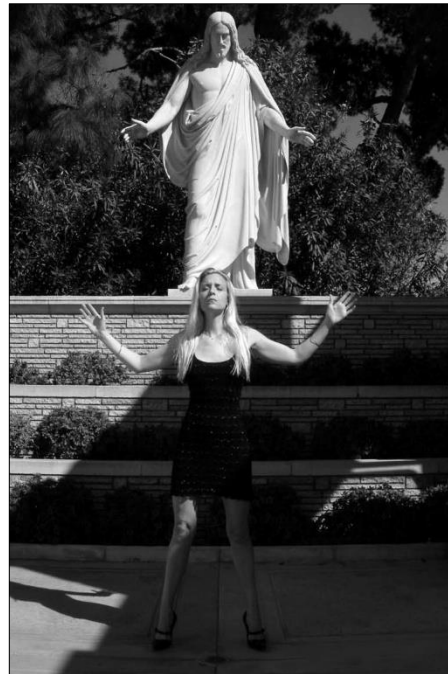
When Greta is laying on the floor struggling for a last breath, Dustin gets a terrifying feeling over her. So strong a feeling that she feels the need to call Greta, right away. She picks up her phone and calls but no one answers. Dustin was never the type to believe in premonitions, but she just knew that something was just... not right. And even if it was nothing but some strange midnight paranoia, she wasn't going to take any chances. She throws on her clothing and calls a cab.

Once in the cab she directs the cabbie to Greta's place. "As fast as you can go, please." She was so caught up in this overwhelming fear that something bad was happening to Greta, she didn't even flinch when she realized she had just said, "please" to someone. "Fuck it." She thought and shrugged it off.

The door to Greta's place is locked. Dustin makes her way to a window and looks inside. In the living room she sees nothing. No one. She goes around to the bedroom window. Same thing. Once at the kitchen window she sees the blood on the floor. "Fuck," Dustin says and instantly smashes in the window. Ignoring the glass going into her hands, she climbs into the kitchen window and starts calling out for Greta. Finally, she finds her lying in a pool of blood on the floor. She isn't breathing. Dustin panics a little and tries to lift Greta up only to slip in the blood and fall herself. Dustin grabs the phone and calls 911. But it was too late. Greta, is dead.

When the paramedics arrived they asked a bunch of questions. But all Dustin could do was sit on

the floor of the porch with her head on her bloodied hands, shutting out the world. Everything was going in slow motion and she could not make out what anyone was asking or saying to her. The siren lights going around and around like a carousel, swooshing like a loud noise in her ears as the red lights pass over her face.



Dustin stands up, and begins to walk home, covered in blood, ignoring the crazy suicide scene behind her.

At home, Dustin sits under the shower head with all her clothing on. The blood running down the

drain in a pretty stream over the white tile. And through the sounds of the water over her ears she hears a muddled voice fading in like it was coming over air waves, “craaaackiiing...” She covers her ears and tries to ignore it, Shut up,” she says to herself.

She opens her eyes under the water coming down and sees a blurred vision. It’s Greta, standing outside the shower, and

she says “You’re not cracking. I’m here.”

Dustin sits back and stares at this vision of Greta, not knowing if she is losing her mind or if she is really there.

Greta joins her in the shower and does not leave. The two sit next to one another in silence, watching the blood stream down the drain.



THE TODDLER GANG

By John Barrymore

Little Ricky walked in, opened his knapsack and pulled out an Ingram Mac 10 machine pistol. He took out the surveillance cameras with two short bursts as Eric got the drop on the guard. He screamed, "Alright, this is a robbery!" from under the bill of his John Deere baseball cap: "Everybody freeze!" It took a moment for the employees and patrons of the Caldwell Farmer's Bank to accept the fact that they were being taken off by a gang of kindergarteners.

Julie walked up to the merchant's window. At almost six years of age, she was by far the tallest; just able to reach the window. She threw the bag up at the teller and said, "Fill it up. Try anything and my partner will blow your head off." John Jr. had worked his way around behind the tellers. He was wearing one of those Donald Duck hats that goes "Quack Quack" when you squeeze the bill. I was outside in the Trans-Am monitoring the scanner.

I'd been with the Toddler Gang about a month. I was drifting

through the Midwest after doing a three year stint at Ossining, and had picked up a part time job driving the bus for their school. They'd heard of my reputation as one of the five best wheel men in the country and offered me a piece of their action. They needed someone old enough to drive. I'd driven on bank heists before, but never with a gang this crazy. You know how it is; when you're five you have no concept of your own mortality. At any rate, I was in over my head.

There were only three police units on duty that day in Caldwell County, Kansas, and we'd set off a time-delay firebomb sixteen miles away in Drury to keep them busy. Little Eric had set the charge; he loved to play with explosives. All of the radio traffic on the scanner was concerned with the fire in the grain elevator, and all units had been dispatched to Drury. The kids came running out of the bank. I opened the door of the car and said, "Hurry the fuck up, we've got a plane to catch!" I peeled out of there, hit highway

forty doing a hundred and ten, and made the two miles to Caldwell Airpark in eighty-two seconds. I pulled the stolen Trans-Am up right next to the Cessna, threw the kids, the scanner and the cash into the plane and ran around to the other door. I hopped in, hit the starter, taxied *John Barrymore 1992* out and took off. Caldwell Airpark was a small, uncontrolled runway in the middle of Bumfuck, Nowhere and there was never anybody around on weekdays.

We were in the air about forty-five minutes when John Jr. wanted to fly. He was the brains of the gang, and had planned the whole robbery and escape. At four and a half he was a criminal genius, but he wasn't flying the fucking plane. "Jesus Fucking Christ!" I screamed at him, "I'm the fucking wheel! You're not even big enough to reach the fucking pedals!"

"Let me steer, then!" he screamed back. He still had the Ingram clutched menacingly in his tiny little hands.

"You steer with the fucking pedals, Asshole!" I screamed

back at him. You can't show fear to a four year old, even one with a machine pistol. "Stick to what you're good at and check the fucking scanner!" By then news of the robbery was all over the radio, but they hadn't found the car yet or figured out we were in the air.

In two hours we were in Oklahoma. I landed the Cessna and we all piled into the school bus.

The kids split up the take from the bank while I drove. These kids were a pain in the ass in a lot of ways, but at least they never shorted me on my end. The innocence of youth. Julie squealed like a little pig; she loved money. I dropped them off at their houses one by one. John Jr's. was the last stop.

"We better cool it for a while, Buzz." he said to me as we pulled up. He threw the Mac 10 and the duck hat under my seat. "Stash the heaters and keep a low profile. Later." He put on his best innocent little boy face and jumped out. He ran, smiling, up the drive to his mommy, his little lunch box stuffed with hundred dollar bills.



EIGHT MILE PART V POLE CAT + PIT KILL

By Gene Gregorits

I was with Pablo, ex-Special Ops, USMC, at Kitty's on Greenmount Avenue.

The snakepit. Blood stains. The shithole. Packaged goods. Ex-cops and Ex-cons, all in a row.

At 6'8" and 260 pounds, Pablo surely felt cramped in there. Kitty's, on an average evening, could appear almost impenetrable. It was a decaying hole-in-the-wall bar frequented only by hard-living middle aged black men and their women, a bar which required strange variations on the typical hairpin turn or tiptoe slide, between a regular patron and the take out cooler, with new patrons arriving, blocking the checkout counter as you're navigating your way through the crowd of old friends now steeped in the solving of logistical irregularities, and party negotiations...there was always a far more ambitious engagement in the works somewhere else. Pablo drank Budweiser and barked didactic Marine Corps rebop, at tiresome

lengths that would temporarily dissolve any personal fondness because he was in those moments a boorish blowhard drunk, a large one you didn't dare interrupt or contradict and certainly never hush. In Pablo's conversational death grip, one understood that this man, grandstanding oafishly, did not concern himself with your comfort or lack thereof. One suspected that the more visible to him your twitches and squirms, the greater his determination to impress and to educate. I'd never understand the Marine Corps experience. His passion was as close as I'd ever come, and I wanted to be close, but as he shifted his weight from one leg to another, clarifying one acronym or slang term after another, and all those Marine thug platitudes, my predominant ills drifted from me, along with my vagrant "freedom", in all its threadbare basement dweller fictitiousness. I'd lost my own war; Pablo shared his by force.

Pablo: "why you be killin' the man's dog? What the fuck he do to you? That's some evil shit, brother."

"I told you. This little scar-faced hippie cunt, it was her dog did the actual killing. There's three dogs, altogether. The man, he's the other neighbor, alright? His dogs tore around the place unchained for months before this happened. His girlfriend, she's a lawyer, and came to the aid of the hippie cunt in court, after she'd made claims that my animal was rabid, which meant I had to provide a tissue sample, which meant I had to go back out to this fucking field and dig him - wait...it's just a long story. But I can't have any fucking dignity in this life until those dogs are dead."

"I'm with ya; it's about respect, alright? I feel that. So, it's two dogs."

"There's three of them, altogether. I'd never be able to go through with it if it wasn't necessary. I'm not an evil per-"

"Yeah, I know you ain't. But still...you be seein' me out front there in the morning with that

old hound? That my Froggy, and we go back a way. Up on ten years, must be. And I don't see the love lost over no nasty cat, how you be sayin', but you say he important to you, and I can get with that. And you gettin' punked here, look like, so... I'll tell ya....best way...you gotta kill a dog...best way be anti-freeze, that show up in the blood as Parvo."

"What's Parvo?"

"Dog disease. Some kinda worm cause it. Parvo."

"Well, I'm not too worried about covering my tracks. They're ignorant, but they're not stupid. I just want the shit to work."

"Anti-freeze, Gene. Put it...put in some beef chuck, burger meat, whatever. S'all it is. Real simple. Don't come cryin' when you kill them dogs and you feelin' shameful. And man's gotta come back on ya, you kill his dog."

I left Pablo there at the bar, and made my way across Greenmount to buy a case of Miller High Life, and a jug of anti-freeze.

Back at home, I found a crudely scrawled note: "GENE, YOU ARE OUT JAN 1." I took my beer downstairs, and the anti-freeze, sat down on the bed with Sam and thought about the dogs. I thought about Harrisburg and the moving arrangements. My brother, the rugby champion, had secured an apartment for me. My father was footing the first, last, and security deposit. My favorite bartender was offering to drive the truck for me. And then there was Izabela. As all of normal society encroached then upon Christmas, in those final days of 2008, I continued hung and hooked like wet laundry, in my effortless drift towards Izabela, or rather hanging there in my slothful gazing out at this drift as it occurred, morbidly diverted, half-narcotized, trapped in this gaze which was perhaps not so unbreakable or even effortless, but with some premeditation, a passively cruel inaction on my part, opportunistic, at the very worst predatory. But as I say, I was not, could not be, entirely certain of my motives or of the nature of my decision making, or of my own heart, as Izabela enjoyed doing all of the work: showing me around in the bars, buying and preparing meals,

openly demanding to be wantonly sodomized. I left welts and bruises upon her chubby frame from neck to ankle, unable to consider it rape, as I had the first night on Thames Street, but on a base, reptilian level comforted by the release of violence so richly exacerbated by Sarah Tilapia, the dogs, and the dog owners. Anything short of striking Izabela directly with a closed fist seemed to excite her sexually. She revelled in the public flaunting of our cartoonish affair; I would find myself in her car pondering it all, and as winter light sparkled through her afro (a massive, unclean, coarse and frazzled garden of auburn Eastern European hair, like so much chaparral), so too would shine inside me the notion of the two of us, as a legitimate and respectable young couple (if necessarily outside of Baltimore, where her jealous ex-suitors and my illegitimate offspring were omnipresent). I would insist upon the inherent superficial benefits of constant physical attention from a frisky young girl provided that I could assume of myself a certain responsible distance, and never come to seek or desire the worshipful kind of love (for me, the only love

acceptable to me as “pure”) which she could not genuinely inspire nor I (as my recent past so gruesomely demonstrated) sustain. If so enabled and so inclined, with a compromised love by no means beautiful, but not unpleasant, maybe I could return to the business of writing, and of existing in the world as a complete being, moving about with purpose and awareness, making a last-ditch bid on health and on humanity.

Izabela busied herself with school, where she attended “poetry workshops” and took a psychology class. For some time, she’d been employed as a social worker, assisting autistic, retarded, or otherwise disadvantaged persons with the carrying out of their daily chores. Izabela would call me on her cellphone during these excursions, from a shopping center, or grocery store. Her “individual” (this was the only acceptable term for them) would sometimes be audible in the background, gibbering excitedly, a disruptive shriek of some unknowable ecstasy would explode from the lungs of the subnormal man, thus interrupting Izabela’s own

mundane sing-song narrative or strenuously affectionate interrogation of my own day’s events (which I would always fabricate, very much in vain). Her individual’s helpless unleashing of mucous-rich flailing and lashing about in retail stores did not embarrass Izabela in the slightest. Quite the contrary, she would become euphoric, barely able to contain her joy at the man’s involuntary self-immolation. Her voice on the phone was an unwaveringly petulant and self-conscious expression of a supreme self-fulfillment which was in fact a lie, generated and driven by an inestimable and all-too-palpable viciousness which a discerning and reasonably cognizant lover could experience only as something potentially Satanic.

Izabela’s voice had a quality of insidious insincerity, and when she called me during an errand with an individual (each of whom she’d bestowed with an overtly disparaging moniker: “farter”, “diaper freak”, “boon boy”, and so on), the juxtaposition of her unnaturally exuberant social performance with the individual’s primal high notes would stir in me a vague

fascination, as a writer (for material), as a student of human folly (for cheap thrills), or as a helpless victim (for signposts, as would be given over the phone to a potential rescuer). I was never able to pry from my impotent pontificating a sort of irony, or perspective, or any sense at all, other than the general feeling which beset me with a bit more force every day, that I was entirely doomed as a man. I had lost sight or comprehension of meaning in all things I observed directly, which I sought out or was accidentally grazed by, and all things I dreamed in my fitful trances and slumbers.

"HI bay-beeee! Oh my god, Farter just cleared out the checkout line at Safeway! You should see the looks I'm getting because of this fucking retard! Oh my god, Gene, it's horrible! Oh bay-bee, I'm getting all of my Christmas shopping done today with Farter! Please, I want you to come with me tomorrow for Christmas Eve!"

"With your family? Oh, I don't know, Bela."

"Oh pleeeeeeeese, bay-beeeeeeee! They'll luhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhv

you! No, you have to wait until I'm off the phone! Remember what we just talked about at Burger King? Farter is fucking with my iPod, and he's got snot on his fingers. Oh BAY-BEE! I'm coming over after work! I want you to fuck me in my tight little asshole, fuck it really rough and make me come that way!"

"Can't you get in trouble for talking like that in front of Far-, I mean, your individual?"

"Anthony, do you want Gene to fuck my asshole?"

"Fuck fuck fuck," said Anthony.

"See?" said Izabela.

I didn't see at all, but I shuddered and sighed affectionately, then said goodbye and hung up. I began to dismantle what was left of my basement room setup and carry the file cabinets full of my writing, published and unpublished both, all of it, up the withered pine staircase and out of the crude stone and cinderblock cellar. Sam escaped deftly between my feet as I grappled with a five foot, 200 pound metal behemoth fit only for a scrap yard somewhere. By the time I

noticed the massive bobcat in a blur of his ultra-fine, long yellow hair, he'd zeroed in on Alyosha, my spun-out housemate's male tabby.

The beast had been slightly neglected by everyone, I believed, and he was as a result markedly withdrawn and timid in nature, so it must have been a peak negative experience for the diminutive fellow when Sam took him like a snow plow at top speed, and set upon him with such terrific violence that my heart skipped a beat, realizing then that each of Sam's paws were the size of Alyosha's head, and that Sam's arms were throttling the small cat's torso, raising the entirety of Alyosha's small frame up and into the front door with a hateful and sickening point-of-impact "WHUMP", and I heard the air explode from his lungs. By this time, Sam's claws and teeth were deeply entrenched in cat-hide, and the majesty of him, all three feet of top predator demon-fire (with another foot of epically plumed tail) worked away, his eyes having flushed in an instant from sick-piss yellow to a hard

obsidian, barely seeing at all. Gore spattered, and surrounded by enough loose fur to stuff a parka, and maybe a few teddy bears, Sam retreated from the spent and bloodied tabby only with a hard kick from one of my size 13 motorcycle boots.

"YOU. Little. Mother. FUCKER!"

Before the scene was finally over, I too would be lacerated from fingertip to wrist, and I would have him beside me on my mattress there in that dank cellar, our heads together, staring each other down, me fairly awestruck, by the prolonged street cruelty and violence which molded Sam, his fear and his hate. It was dawning on me, piecemeal style, that I would have to learn to be patient with Sam, and that I must do everything in my power to love this great and terrible specimen who I pitied with great sadness and multiple sicknesses that were bigger than the sum of me and all I knew, bigger than any conventional reasoning...for all I could see, as big as the story of any of us. I held him close, and he let me. We slept.

THESE THINGS ONLY DOGS HEAR

By Craig Woods

Image © GUTTERSAINT

Rain whipped the alleys blackly as September ravens. Across town, the empty warehouses began to wonder what time had mistaken for a complex pillow. A tempestuous cosmos quivered at the edge of its own destruction.

It went like this:

Emerging with feline grace from manholes and drainage wells, eyes shimmering with blue flame, tattered remains of blue school blazers matted around thin nubile torsos, the children stalked the municipal shadows. Pressing their lean bodies to the walls of sleeping tenements and shuttered shopping outlets, they passed swiftly and undetected through the soft belly of the adult world which lay spread out before them in oblivious repose. Though they ventured through graffitied subways and neglected underpasses in single file, their sequence was random and subject to no hierarchy nor enforced discipline. A new logic

of survival had pursued them from illicit dormitory couplings towards the devastation of the school they had left burning far behind them and onward through immeasurable miles of animal dreams. Sleekly their feet prowled across cracked paving, uncaring for the doomed backs of mothers whose influence they had shed like a dead skin. A galaxy of insurgent stars glimmered on the edges of pocket knives and in the candid angles of clenched young teeth. Savage sugar-scented breaths bloomed like radioactive fallout in the urban night. The Muskrats are a storm raging itself into existence.

Insomnia came to demolish the streets. Something like it lay in wait for them ...

"I don't walk..." a boy named Skullfuck muttered from behind wet forelocks plastered to his face.

"I don't walk the walk," added

the androgynous skelf who called himself Ennuu.

Pink Pussy chimed in, her insolent estuary drawl punctuated by the incessant wet click of her jaw as it worked a wad of cheap gum to a flaccid pulp: "I don't walk the walk for no wicked clock."

Other young voices joined the refrain, each equally hushed, equally forthright;

"I don't talk..."

"I don't talk the talk..."

"I don't talk the talk for no ticking tock."

Acid light of storefronts saturated the tarmac before them as the alley spilled into an anonymous parking area: empty cafes, grocers and off-licences flickering with an insect buzz. At the far corner by a low redbrick wall, a solitary vehicle was parked: a vintage black GT hatchback, impenetrable shadow claiming the darkened interior. (The shadow was no tragedy but had been waiting for them to notice it.) The child in front, a thirteen year old raven-haired pimple-

faced girl by the name of Cuntweasel, emitted a vermin hiss. She brought the procession to a halt with one raised finger, her silence heavy as daylights before them. A chill could make out the ghostly shapes of memory. Her static marble eyes went on and never ran dry. She addressed them to freeze in that instant and to focus on the shadow motion. Blood turned their attention to time from the buildings. Silence followed.

"What's the beef, Cuntweasel?" asked the boy named Bad Apple through a sinus clogged with phlegm, "We got the time here or what?"

"Maybes. Or if not then maybes some fun for nowt."

Bad Apple hawked noisily and spat a clod of green mucus on to the tarmac which glimmered luminously in the gloom. "Let's bulldog it. Charge it good. No chances that way."

"That's yr answer to everythin', eh?"

Pink Pussy popped a red bubble. "Say we sneak up all ninja like, get ourselves round it. We

pounce unexpected and game's a bogey."

"Speakin' of bogies..." Bad Apple deposited a second phlegm-load, more copious and noisier than the first.

"Keep yr goo to yr fuckin' self!"

"That's what yr mother said."

"Well yr maw's got baws and yer da's lovin' it!"

"Sit on it, ye scabby-thighed chunky munter."

"Oh, I'm a bit like yrself then."

"Only a bit like me? Which bit? D'ye mean I'm scabby-thighed but not chunky? Or that I'm scabby-thighed *and* chunky but just not as much as you? Either way, ye just admitted that ye're a scabby-thighed chunky munter."

She brandished a switchblade: "Park yr arse on that and swivel, sunshine."

"You wish!"

"Always armed with the best comebacks, eh? Yr a regular mastermind ye are."

"Oi, I can wax clever too. I sometimes masturbate big words into my sentences, I'm just not always hip on what they mean."

The sleeping city shuddered at the revolutionary violence of their chuckling.

Again, silence. A hybrid electricity sparked its way through their huddled ranks, encoding the young bones and taut muscles of each child with the unspoken coordinates of their subliminally agreed avenue. Stroking the shaft of her softball bat as though stimulating an aroused phallus, Pink Pussy trembled lasciviously as a breeze blew her high purple-tinted ponytail into her face. One by one they were beyond life and death.

Time and space here had huge eyes which followed the children with tungsten malevolence as they skulked towards the inert vehicle. Low in her throat, Cuntweasel hummed the melody of an old jazz dirge she'd intercepted on some fugitive time track, rubble and dust in the tragic notes:

I'm strollin'... I'm strollin'... I don't know where I'm goin' but I'm

strollin'...

(Machinery of night had cherished her unwavering gaze.)

Instinctively and wordlessly, the Muskrats divided their ranks in two, flanking the vehicle and surrounding it in seconds. Blackness shunned their intrepid scrutiny from behind anonymous glass. Hybrid senses tasted foreign thoughts in the cold metal. Eyes darted and lips twitched silently as the children communed in a dialect of nerves and psychic stimuli. Finally, Skullfuck raised his rusty wrench and poised to strike at the window of the passenger door.

The city's innards oozed out on to the surface of ruffled backs at a sudden onslaught of smiling:

"I wouldn't do that if I were you, kiddos!"

A man and woman flashing insincere grins stood at the opposite end of the parking area, their towering forms casting elongated shadows in the fluorescent glare, odious black fingers spreading like oil across the tarmac to ensnare the children's weary feet. The two

Agents wore dark trench coats, each with one hand thrust menacingly into a pocket.

The woman spoke in a voice like mildewed velvet: "A tad late for you little ones to be out, hmm? On a cold, dark night like this, well... *anything* could happen to a child out here."

"Where are the parents, eh?" her male companion wondered aloud, grey eyes reflecting a vacant light from the window of the nearby laundrette. "To see this kind of neglect right here in our very own city," he feigned a pantomime of anguish, "it breaks a man's heart, it surely does."

The woman's sterile gaze drifted towards Skullfuck, pinning him in an expressionless stare. "I quite agree, Tom. It causes one to wonder, with such a poor start to their young lives, what kind of future lies in wait for poor wee urchins such as these?" Her eyes fell to the tattered and defaced school emblem on the breast of the boy's blazer, "I mean, how are they to hope to secure a decent education?"

"Oh yes," the man concurred with wide-eyed lunatic

enthusiasm, "education is key. Some good wholesome and scrupulous schooling is what these little ones need."

Both Agents, in perfect synchronicity, began to cross the tarmac with purposeful steps, their footfalls reporting with the terminal clarity of a striking clock.

"Somewhere they can learn positive traditional values..."

"The importance of family and the cohesion of a decent society..."

"The rule of law and appropriate respect for their betters..."

Skullfuck raised the wrench in a battle pose. Cuntweasel unsheathed a brace of switchblades from her frayed leather belt. Bad Apple unwrapped a length of bicycle chain from his bony wrist and begun whirling it around his head in a helicopter motion. There was a yawn of stretched elastic as Ennui loaded and primed his slingshot. Pink Pussy, luminous gum bubbles swelling and popping between her chapped lips, tap-tap-tapped the

side of her softball bat against the palm of a gloved hand. Electricity cracked like a whip across the Muskrats' spinal columns as the night beckoned them to violence.

Arriving to within three metres of their quarry, the Agents came to a halt. All the opaque air of this scene jolted with no remorse at the man's executioner grimace:

"That's *time*, children! Bell's ringing," the Agent withdrew his hand from his pocket and the sour light fell upon a cold black object clicking and twitching with crustacean malice between his clenched fingers, "School's back in session!"

A tigress growl erupting from her young throat, Cuntweasel lunged forward, switchblades glinting thirstily. The others followed suit, clubs and chains whooshing through chastened space. His grin contorting into a mask of unbridled psychosis, the male Agent squeezed on the black shelled object. A small grey projectile shot out with a wet snap from its twitching mandibles and caught Cuntweasel square in the chest. The girl went down with the force of an anvil, bones cracking

hollowly upon the cold asphalt. She curled into herself, a muted hiss like air from a punctured tyre escaping her lips. Ennui dropped to her side, pulling her torso towards the light to inspect the wound. In the centre of the girl's solar plexus, blood trickled darkly from a small circular hole and the projectile lodged there quivered with repugnant life. Ennui felt vomit rise in his gullet as he watched the tiny parasite which resembled an infant crab burrow its way with cruel black claws inside his comrade's body. Cuntweasel began to convulse as though in the throes of a seizure, blood trickling from her nostrils, her eyeballs rolling wildly. Cold and acerbic was her breath as she pushed him from her with one ailing hand:

"Not makin' it I'm not ... game over ... I fail it ... bleed my name through our remembered summers in the stables ... burn one for me ... saddle me a polo horse, a real big 'un and ride it electric!"

Her body became a husk before him, her skin turning grey and cold and hard as a lobster shell. No moon reflected in her eyes when they went out. Ennui could

struggle no image free from the hazards of desire. The Muskrats huddled round, their animal hearts cast momentarily adrift from psychic shores.

The female Agent raised her own living weapon in a steadfast arm. "As you can see, my sweets, detention is a rather more serious affair in *our* campus."

"We do so hate to see promising young minds go to waste," her male companion reiterated in a tone blank as slate, "but we can't have *bad apples* spoiling the batch now, can we?"

Bad Apple glared at the man, his livid young eyes spitting hate, and intensified his grip on the bicycle chain until its harsh contours vexed the skin of his palms into red welts. Not one of the children moved. None spoke a word. Even now at the looming prospect of defeat, the instinctual symbiosis and solidarity which had propelled and sustained them on their evolutionary odyssey would not falter. While the spectres of fear and loss nagged at their mutant adolescent hearts, these outmoded sensations were all but overridden by the compulsion to

progress on their journey by any means necessary. In the face of those who would obstruct that process, a desire to kill and destroy flared with cosmic fire in the children's post-emotional spines.

Reading the defiance in their silence, the woman continued: "Perhaps we are not making ourselves clear enough, my dears. Ours is a very exclusive establishment. We take great pride in the quality of the young minds we produce and, as such, make it our business to whittle the student body down to its optimum essence. We can't have any stragglers or dead weight I'm afraid. Only team players need board this ship."

"Make no mistake," the man interjected, "our standards are high and our conventions stringent. Those who don't make the grade... those who don't even *try*," his features flexed once more into a madman's sneer, "shall have their tuition and board summarily severed."

"It's a harsh world, my dears. With *time*, you'll come to understand and appreciate this. Just as you'll come to appreciate

time itself."

"We have only your best interests at heart, kids. Let us take the weight of the universe from your frail little shoulders, hmm?"

"After all, what choice do you have? Running the streets like filthy animals?"

"Rolling in shit, licking each other's arseholes for shitty scraps to chew on?"

"And slobbering on one another's little cunts and cocks for tickles and giggles?"

"No, that won't do..."

"Where is the dignity?"

"That won't do at all."

"Where is the *humanity*?"

"Good kids like you, from decent families... you were born to better things. And here is where you earn it."

"Right here..."

"With us."

"We wouldn't want to have to

expel you all now..."

Silence.

Feral electricity swelled in the young muscles. A chill breeze whispered a mantra of attrition. Violent inertia nurtured the empty streets. Network of veins told them in any case.

The Agents shared a glance and the air putrefied between them. Snapping her head back to face the children, the woman sighed and reaffirmed her grip on the odious black organism.

"Class dismissed!"

Her trigger finger was pinned in the night's claw before it could hit. Storm of light and sound exploding abruptly around them as the sleeping car sprang to feral life - radioactive beams blasting the tarmac, malign stars scurrying to their panicked cosmic cubby-holes at the engine's howl. The Agents went to work with scream machines but it did no good. Riptide of glass and steel accelerating the dreams of children already wakened. Shadow nerves caught their own breath in the discordant anthem blistering

through the car's ailing speakers:

// children stay in line / defy the Earth ce soir / children stay in line / defy the Earth's core / children stay in line / defy the Earth ce soir / children stay in line / defy the Earth's core // DEFY! / DEFY! / DEFY! / DEFY! //

With intuitive grace and swiftness, the Muskrats' ranks parted in two as the car thundered in brutal reverse from its resting place. Agents caught there in executioner headlights. Truncated yell floundering against blind windowpanes. Banner of a sublime terror rising like gunfire from ruined streets. This desolate and lonely place ripped open by war to a new vision of itself. Cracking of bones like wet twigs as the male Agent fell under the car's speeding bulk. Putrid piss of panic pooling at the woman's stunned ankles. Remorse couldn't turn its head as only children can be final. Fervent young voices in hormonal unison:

"I don't walk the walk for no wicked clock!"

"I don't talk the talk for no

ticking tock!"

// children stay in line / defy the
Earth ce soir / children stay in
line / defy the Earth's core /
children stay in line / defy the
Earth ce soir / children stay in
line / defy the Earth's core //
DEFY! / DEFY! / DEFY! / DEFY!
//

Fleet as a wildcat, Pink Pussy
leapt at the woman Agent.

"Swing-batta-batta-swing!"

Her kneecaps smashed to pulp
under the force of the softball bat,
the woman's face stretched into a
silent scream, the agony too vast
to be voiced. Bitch dropped
prompter than the ponciest punk
in the prison yard.

"Ooh that one gonna sting in the
mornin'!"

"You got nothin' in that glove but
five fat tickets to the subs bench,
lady!"

"We want a pitcher, not a belly-
itcher!"

Predatory blood throbbing in
adolescent veins, the Muskrats
closed in on the broken adults in

a vulturous huddle. Columns of
time and space flaked to powder
at their copper tempest. Vile old
orders had wounded everything
inside them and now vengeful
acid shadows had come to feed
on the shreds. A black raindrop
fell as a prism to the geometry of
their agelessness. They felt the
rented rooms of the universe
tremble as the car doors swung
open, accosting the streets with
an avalanche of clamour:

// oh we have the Juice of Youth
/ oh we have the Juice of Youth /
yr chewing on yr teeth / I'm after
you // I'll take you down / I'll
take you down / I'll take you
down / SIX / FEET / UNDER!
//

A diminutive young woman
emerged from the passenger side,
turbulent silver skies reflected in
the wide eyes glowing beneath
her peroxide fringe. Her
companion, a tall gangly man in
his early thirties, slammed the
driver's door behind him with an
effete thrust of one bare bony arm
which quivered like a pale blue-
veined eel in the night breeze.
Their approach chilled phantom
memories into savage doorways.
The strangers stood on the edge
of carnage, comradely esteem in

their animated gaze. Pink Pussy popped a purple bubble and forced the tip of the bat into the mouth of the crippled male Agent whose ruined body remained pinioned beneath the car's weight. Remorse turned blindly from the whimpers of protest in the man's barely conscious throat. Following his comrade's example, Bad Apple brought one sneakered foot down on the female Agent's moaning mouth, fixing her head in place upon the tarmac with ruthless force.

In a voice like frozen battery acid, the peroxide-haired woman introduced herself: "I am Ampersand Youth. Sonic Sculptress and Time Traveller. I am not Either. I am not Or. I am not Neither. I am not Nor. I am only AND," a vulpine smile crossed her thin dry lips, "Can you see me, kids? You got some trouble left over for a trouble girl to trouble herself with?"

"Panda Pi's this here hobo's handle," the gawky man leant forward in a hammy stage bow, "and we're all over this party if it tickles yer tinkles."

Their giggles falling westward in

the night's insurgent rhythm, the children blew impish kisses at the weeping faces of lonely stars.

// oh we have the Juice of Youth
/ oh we have the Juice of Youth /
yr chewing on yr teeth / I'm after
you // I'll take you down / I'll
take you down / I'll take you
down / SIX / FEET / UNDER!
//

The engines of the Earth sputtered vapour of dream aeons and the children wrestled on its stricken sides. Time had come between a sob to dark mutinous waves as Pink Pussy hoisted the bat above her ponytail whipping violet slipstreams in other winds.

/ SIX! /

The bat blasted open a wormhole as it smashed down upon the male Agent's skull, dark brain matter slopping like putrid fish eggs on to the cold ground. The black projectile-shooting creature crawled spider-like from the dead man's hand clackety-clackety-click-click-clacking under the car for refuge.

/ FEET! /

Ampersand dropped to her

knees, fearless eyes blazing with unknown furies, and slid one arm beneath the vehicle. She pulled out the miserable creature now emitting a high-pitched squeal of alarm in its captor's grip, the legs flexing hideously, the claws snapping at empty air. Her young face contorting in a bestial snarl, Ampersand tore the beast's limbs mercilessly from its body and tossed the amputated members across the car park where they dissolved into mineral dust. The second creature met its end under Panda's boot heel while Ampersand threw the limbless trunk of the first against the window of the empty laundrette where the impact generated a web pattern in the fractured glass. Flakes silver and dark fell obliquely to time's panicked wound.

/ UNDER! /

Crouched by Cuntweasel's shell-like husk, Ennui delicately removed the switchblades from the dead hands of his fallen comrade, careful not to make contact with the ruined skin for fear he too would contract the crustacean curse. Towering over the dying woman Agent, the boy's face glowed Jack-O-Lantern

bright, his crooked teeth bared in mischievous glee.

"What is it yr good book say? An eye for an eye and all that?"

/ SIX! /

He slid the blades in through her eye sockets to the hilts. While the spasms of death still rocked the female Agent's body, the children unzipped their flies and loosened their skirts and took turns to urinate into her convulsing mouth.

/ FEET! /

In mutual silence, the children bade farewell to their fallen sister. The stars had wept themselves dry by the time Panda retrieved the jerry cans from the car. Through the cathartic prism of mutation, the Muskrats watched as Panda and Ampersand soaked the corpses in petrol. Ampersand struck a match and it seemed to the children that a new sun blazed upon her fingertips, illuminating previously unseen dimensions of the city: towers of bone giving way to parklands and fertile lawns where the eyes of past and future lovers sprouted from iridescent stems

and hung from moist branches, immersing every contour of their adolescent bodies in rays of adoration.

/ UNDER! /

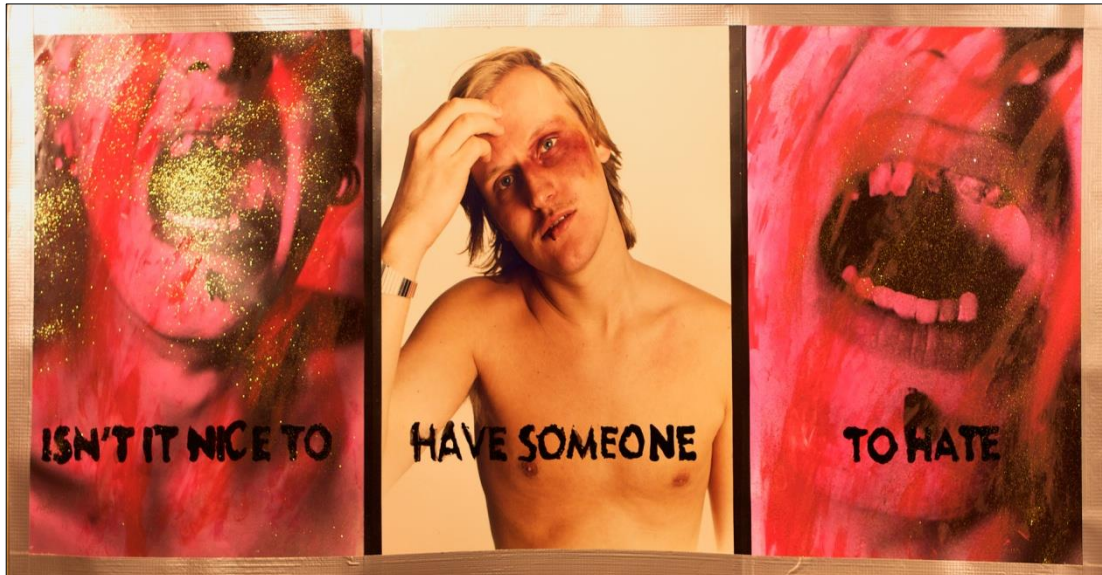
“Supernova...” Ampersand murmured absently and tossed the match onto the sodden carcasses.

As the blaze grew tamer, some of the kids ventured into the nearby shrubbery to gather sticks. From a knapsack, Bad Apple pulled out a party bag of marshmallows.

Panda’s face flushed with juvenile glee:

“Dude! Marsh-fuckin’-mallows! And it took you this long to crack ‘em out?!”

In a circular formation, this gang of vagabonds and mutineers, adults and adolescents sat cross-legged and tightly huddled around the gradually subsiding flames, staring out at the spectral horizon of a city whose dawns and nightfalls could assert no authority upon them.



THE GRAPESHOT BUFFET

By Hank Kirton

"I do not have a prisoner to reproach me. I have exterminated all. The roads are sown with corpses. At Savenay, brigands are arriving all the time claiming to surrender, and we are shooting them non-stop. Mercy is not a revolutionary sentiment."

--General Francois Joseph Westermann to the Committee of Public Safety, 1793

The sweet reek of death hung like a shroud over the shaken, blood-stained city. He would have meat this night, at least.

Gaston Molyneux moved through the pre-dawn streets of Savenay, trying his best not to look desperate; trying not to look like a hunted man. Each time he stepped past a tangled pyramid of bodies or congealing puddle of blood, his mouth watered and his stomach screamed for sustenance.

Republican forces had been battling peasant uprisings throughout the Vendee, and butchering, burning or burying anything alive. Gaston found villages razed, their crops, orchards and even livestock burned to unpalatable ash.

On the outskirts of the city he'd come upon men unloading bodies - mostly women and children - from piled carts, dumping them into pits of smoldering bones. The smell of the fresh, roasting flesh had driven Gaston nearly mad with hunger. But he couldn't afford to risk detection by trying to talk his way into the pits or attempting to steal a burning body. The men went about their work with dark, empty eyes, as if blind to the horror in which they toiled. Gaston had a feeling that if he'd tried to approach the men or the pits, his own precious flesh would have ended up in the crackling flames. Just another carcass among hundreds.

Some of the doctors at the asylum had called Gaston a scavenger, a vulture, a ghoul. A monster.

He had tried his best to defy these descriptions.

During his journey through the Vendee, he'd seen so much savagery and dreadfulness he wondered how anyone could call him a monster anymore. How could anyone of balanced mind think him worse than those who

had raped and then slain the young girls he'd seen hanging naked from the trees? How could anyone think him more monstrous than the cruel troops he'd seen drowning crowds of helpless prisoners in the Loire River, tying huge groups to sinking barges and laughing about "Republican baptisms" even as the water filled the struggling lungs of their victims?

How could anyone call him a "monster" ever again?

Gaston Molyneux's appearance surprised people. He did not resemble the famous French glutton whose gastronomic feats had been breathlessly (and exaggeratedly) reported in the newspapers. Most expected Gaston to be a slobbering, eight-hundred-pound beast, shoving live, bleating lambs down his cavernous gullet. They expected an ogre.

Instead, Gaston was a pale, thin man; shy, reserved, and polite. The only noteworthy aspects of his physiology were his large mouth (crowded with two sets of chipped, stained teeth), and the long, loose pouch of rumpled flesh that hung from his stomach, which he kept looped around his waist like a Turkish wrap.

But while Gaston may have been modest in weight and height, every molecule of his body screamed with an insatiable, all-consuming hunger. His hunger was an emergency without end.

Gone were the days of success and fame, when he'd toured Europe performing at fairs and circuses, eating heaping baskets of uncooked offal; swallowing whole apples until he'd put down a bushel; dining on rocks and frogs and crockery - all to rapt, flabbergasted audiences.

He'd been billed as *The Great Glutton of Goatland* (though if a Goatland existed, he'd never visited there) and had performed before royalty.

But *now* he was a monster?

He'd escaped from the asylum three days ago, and had been subsisting on meager scraps while he made the slow, agonizing journey across the barren countryside to Savenay. His biggest meal had been a litter of puppies he'd discovered in an abandoned barn, left neglected by their (dead or fled) owners. He'd downed them like bon-bons for breakfast.

Since then he'd eaten nothing but dry straw and insects.

At least until he'd reached Savenay.

He swallowed the mouthful of bandages he'd been chewing. He'd stolen them from a man dying of gangrene, and had promptly sucked them clean of blood and pus.

His guts trembled and roared, merely angered by the fetid appetizer. He had to get something inside him or he feared his hunger would steal over his rational mind and force him to perform some outrageous act that would draw attention from the soldiers. He'd made it this far and had maintained control. He couldn't fail now.

Eventually he came upon the mass graves.

On the outskirts of the city, three trenches had been cut into a scorched, muddy field and filled with the dead.

Gaston walked along the edge of a trench, his heart pounding fast, his empty belly threatening to tear itself from his body and leap into the trench on its own; not having the patience to wait for chewing and swallowing.

The tangled bodies were caked with blood; clothes torn and perforated by grapeshot. A mass

execution. Gaston's hungry, desperate eyes turned nervous and he scanned the surroundings to make sure he was not being observed.

When he was sure he was alone, he removed his knife from its sheath and jumped into the trench.

He scrambled over the bodies, sizing each one up like a greedy gourmand at a buffet. He finally settled on a plump young woman with a pale complexion, her body twisted into an awkward posture. He began to cut her clothes loose.

His mouth watered as her flesh was revealed, dropping small mucus pools across her stomach, filling her navel with his green/yellow saliva.

He was surprised (and shamefully delighted) to find that her body was still warm. These poor souls had only recently been slaughtered.

Her fat, buttery thighs held the most appeal for him. He decided to save them for last and slid the knife into her abdomen.

She moaned and twitched and Gaston repelled backward as if suddenly burned, a terrified squawk rushing from his constricted throat.

Still alive! She was still alive!

Gaston scrambled out of the trench and began to run back toward the city, a horrified guilt consuming him.

His stomach stopped him.

His stomach turned him around and led him back to the trench.

He looked down. The wound he'd inflicted upon the woman was still bleeding. She did not move. He waited.

When he was fairly certain she was dead, he jumped back into the trench. His knife was still buried to the hilt in her side. With cautious, trembling fingers he pulled it free. She did not flinch.

Gaston began to drool once more as he started to cut.

Dead. She was dead this time. Thank God.

Gaston began to eat and his cruel stomach finally calmed.

As he stripped her bones, he loosened his clothes and unwrapped the loose flesh around his abdomen, filling his belly until it distended like an inflating balloon.

As his appetite became sated, Gaston grew drowsy. The long days of hardship finally came to claim him and he fell into a satisfied, comfortable doze.

When he awoke he found himself watched by a pair of hellish, yellow eyes.

"Monsieur," he said, surprised, trying to collect his stomach and get it back inside his now too-confining clothes.

The man staring at him was dressed in a uniform that appeared to be rotting off his skeletal body. He'd been burned hairless, his face seared and stripped of expression. He was lipless, his blackened teeth revealed in a terrible grimace. His eyelids had burned away, offering bulging, unblinking eyes. He held a rifle in his right hand. His left arm had been amputated at the elbow.

"I'm wounded," Gaston lied. "I was trying to get to town when I collapsed into this trench."

The man just stared, at both Gaston and the butchered corpse beside him. Gaston looked from the remains of his last meal to the soldier. "It's not what you think!"

The man just stared.

"She was dead! Already dead!
You don't understand."

The man just stared.

"I am wretched, yes. But you must understand I am also cursed. Cursed with an appetite that does nothing but beg and scream like a spoiled child. You don't know what it's like! I tell you, it drives me mad!"

The man did not move.

"Why don't you speak? Have you lost your tongue? Please, just move, then, if you cannot speak. Make a gesture, nod your head if you understand what I'm saying!"

The man did not move.

"I didn't mean to kill her!" Gaston shrieked. "I thought she was dead! But I'm not a monster! I'm not! Yes, I devoured her corpse but her soul had flown on, that's the important thing. Who she was had gone, leaving all this meat behind. I was starving to death! What was I supposed to do? Let it go to waste?"

The man continued to stare at Gaston, motionless, like a sodden scarecrow.

"Say something!" Gaston screamed at him. "Don't just stand there and accuse me! *Do something!* Kill me if you must but please do something! Anything!" Gaston began to cry, sobbing. Thick rheumy tears and snot ran down his twisted face. "Please, Monsieur... *kill me...*"

Thick fog began to swirl around the soldier and he vanished into the vaporous mist like the remnants of a dream.

Gaston, still sobbing, covered his face with his trembling hands and collapsed back into the heap of bodies.

When the men arrived to burn the dead they found Gaston still crying. He did not look up at their approach.

"This one's not dead yet," said one man.

The other man fired his gun into Gaston's brain.

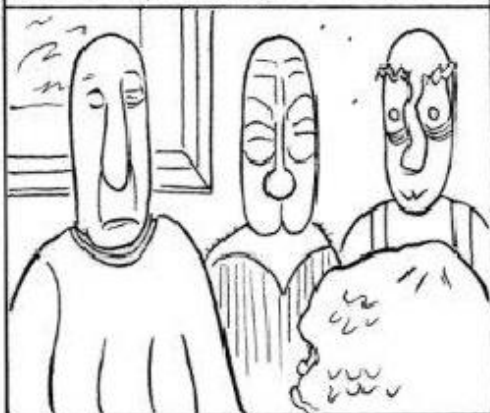
"There," he said. "Now let's get to work."

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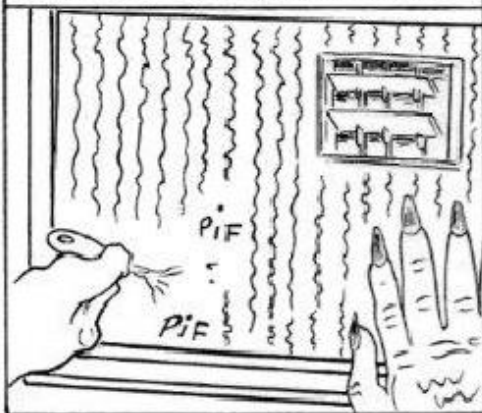
ALAGAR PENSIS

GRIMES

IT SEEMED, AGAIN, FAR TOO MANY WERE SENT INTO MY HOME, JUST TO 'CLEAN' THE AIR CONDITIONER.



MUCH TOO MUCH ADD FOR WHAT AIR IT VENTED. IF MONEY STILL EXISTED, I'D THINK IT WAS A PLOY.



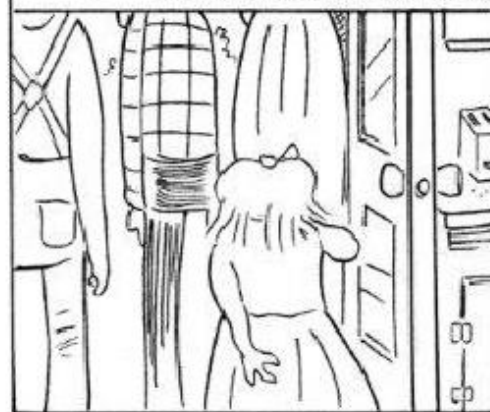
THEY INSISTED I PREPARE THEM SANDWICHES. I WAS WILLING, BUT SHAMED BY THEIR PROXIMITY.



AS THE MEN LEFT, A LITTLE GIRL I'D NEVER SEEN EMERGED AS IF ALWAYS WITH THEM.



"YOU'RE A GOOD HOSTESS" (SURELY A SLIP OF THE TONGUE). ADDED, "ANYONE SHUD CALL ALAGAR PENSIS"



I IMMEDIATELY SEARCHED THE PHONES' BOOK, THEN, IT'S BACK, WHEN I REALIZED THAT WAS MY NAME.



HER PRAGE THREW ME INTO A NEUROTIC TAILSPIN. I HANKED HEATEDLY AT THE RUBBON EMBEDDED IN



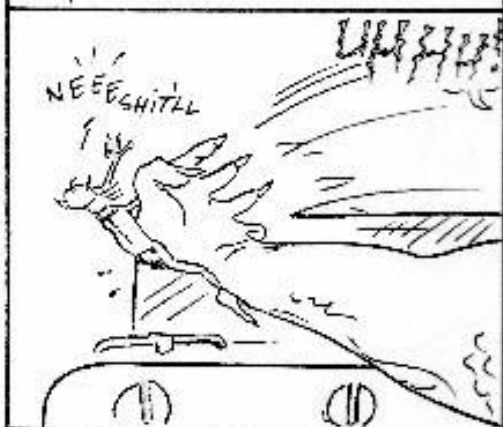
THE FLESH OF MY NECK, NOW G CHAFING AT THE FLABBY SOUNDS OF MY THROAT. FINALLY, I COULD WITHDRAW IT.



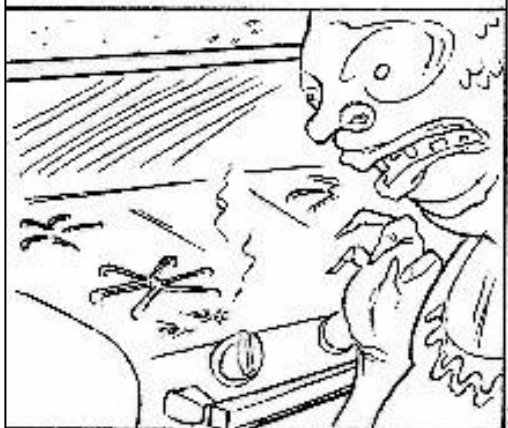
IN AN ECHO OF THE S TRIUMPH, A GEEKY IMP AOP THE STONE PIPED, "SURE AN IT'S A FUN TIME WE'LL BE HAVING!"



MY REACTION OVERWHELMED, BUT TELLING WITHOUT A PROSE, I GUAHTED IT ACROSS THE ROOM INTO THE WALL.



FILTH PRINTS ON MY SPOTLESS OVEN! NOW I FEAR 'INSECTORS' WILL COME, MERELY AS IT GRIS MY MIND.



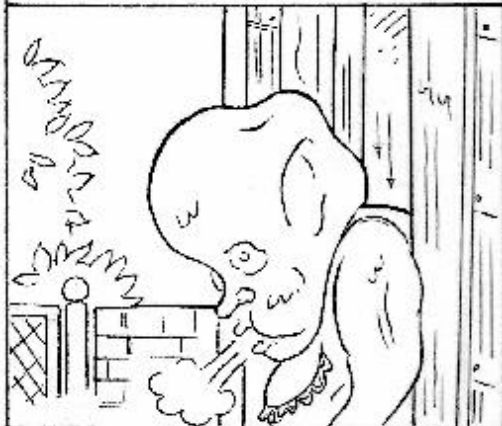
"A CURSE FUREVERE ON YEAR HEAD." I HEAR A HEAVY VEHICLE PULLING INTO THE DRIVEWAY.



MY RUSH TO FLEE SET OFF AN STUNNING INFLATION, LIKE
A LIFE RAFT'S, TRAPPING ME HALFWAY OUTSIDE.



I SLID DOWN, A PURPOSE, TH' STILL CLOSING WINDOW
TIL MY NECK RESTED, CHUCK AT THE BOTTOM.



NEAR THE HOUSE, A FEMALE CREATURE WITH A
PECULIAR AURA LEANS TOWARD MY FACE,



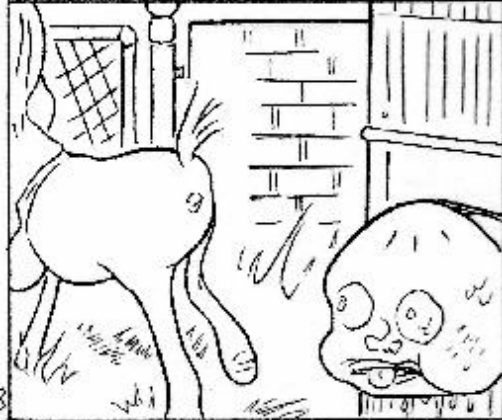
KISSES ME SOFTLY ON THE CHEEK, BREATH
LIKE HONEYCAKES. "IT WILL BE ALRIGHT.."

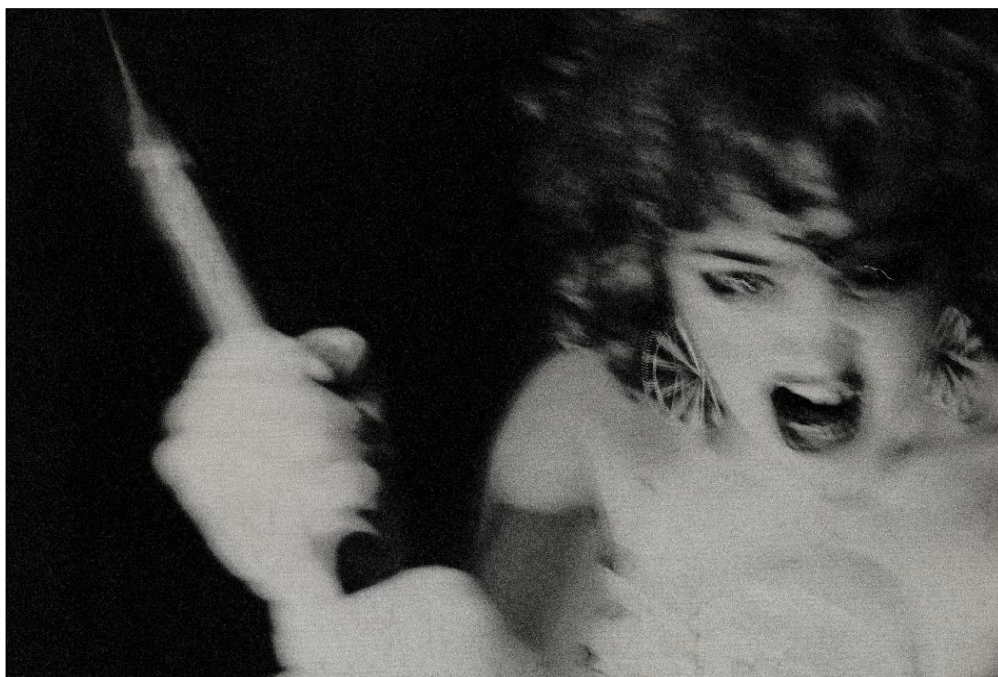


I NOTED TH' WINDOWFRAME GUARDS WERE ONLY
PLASTIC, EASILY FOLDED DOWN WITH ONE HAND.



THEN, THAT OMINOUS "...SOMEHOW..." AS SHE STEPS
AWAY. AND I AM BLEEDING HEAVILY DOWN TH' WALL.





MARY MAGDALENA MACKENZIE

By Claudia Bellocq

Photos © Zeynep Ayguler

Mary Magdalena cursed her name out loud, followed by; "Jesus Christ al-motherfucking-mighty!"

She was vulgar, angry - no...raging, and in pain. She yelled and then spat at the crowd gathering around her; tut-tut...such poor manners for a lady. If she hadn't learnt to tame them by now, she never would. She sighed....life could've been so much easier she thought. If

only...if only I'd followed my mother's dreams, the expectations of my father, lived their unfulfilled lives out on their account, life may indeed have been easier...or just dull?

Mary (nee Mary Magdalena Mackenzie) lived on the outskirts of one of the toughest most notorious estates in central/south Manchester. She grew up dancing to seventies sweet soul music until, at the age

of eighteen, tired of her virginal name and overworked sweet identity, she ventured into the dark heart of the city and began to discover the bittersweet riffs of lovers rock in the Nile club in moss side's after hours shabeens.



Mary loved the feeling of danger in the heavy marijuana laden dampness of the dark, edgy clubs. She loved to grind her hips to the deep bass dub of a song that sounded to her as if it had been written just for sex. As of yet, she was fairly unaccustomed to sex anyway which was probably why everything in this place seemed dangerous and exciting to her.

That's when she met him.

Jesus (pronounced hay-seuss on account of his south-American origins), was mad, bad and truly dangerous to know (only she didn't know that then). Dark olive skin; he had a long, deep scar running across one eyelid and down his left cheek which gave him the appearance of a permanent air of sizing things up. This only added to his gangster kudos as no-one quite knew what to make of him at any given moment. He was unpredictable; a useful tool for gangsters and madmen.

Mary smiled shyly in his direction; he nodded back languorously only she wasn't sure if it was at her or at someone standing behind her. The dj span a killer tune and the place began to rock in unison. The beers which were being illegally sold at a pound a tin, straight from the cash & carry plastic wrapping, were flying out now. The heat in the place was becoming unbearable as sweat dripped from the dancers to the rafters and back onto the bodies of the dancers again in some god-awful cycle of body fluid emissions. The smell of sweat mixed with the ganja made her retch but she didn't show it.

She just stood there acting all cool. 'Hay-suess' made her the central focus of her own attention, as in giving her some of *his* attention, she became acutely aware of every detail of her appearance, clothing, body movements...right down to the company she kept who were a little too green looking for this place but hey, she wouldn't have walked in alone.

Hay-suess made his move; struck like a viper and now here she was on this damned cross seven years later. The bastard!

He'd had a thing for asphyxiation and oral sex (no consent necessary) and an even weirder thing for having his feet washed. His feet weren't even attractive and smelled so bad that he was prone to liberally dousing them in Paco Rabanne to mask the dreadful stink of them. The combined aftershave/sweaty feet stench repelled her but he was a moody fucker and she didn't dare refuse him his perverted and dark demands.

Slowly, over time, he'd come to believe in his own mythology to the extent that he believed he was invincible, or so it seemed to her. He took more and more risks in his criminal activities became

more and more vicious with Mary and became less and less charming the more white powder she shoved up his nose. Then, one day Mary had simply cracked under the pressure and waiting until he slept in a deep, drug-induced comatose slumber, she had bound his hands and feet to the bed and began extracting her carefully orchestrated revenge.



First she bought out a rubber hood from a box beneath their bed that one of her friends had lent to her last week and pulled it roughly over his head. Spittle dribbled from the corner of his mouth and he grunted, however, at this point in time he slept on.

Next she gathered her tools and arranged them carefully on a stainless steel tray she had bought especially for this occasion; six inch nails, a large mallet, some surgical wipes and a roll of barbed wire.

Mary drove the first nail into his bound, outstretched palm. That's when he awoke. She'd never heard a noise quite like it. Fortunately he was well bound and Mary worked fast at hammering in the other three nails; one to the remaining palm and one to each foot. She crafted a crude crown of the barbed wire and shoved it down over his brow and then stood back and surveyed her handiwork. He was bleeding profusely.

Then she left the room.

Her own palms bled from shaping the wire and they hurt like hell. She cursed aloud and the crowd gathering nearby stared at her, shocked by her bloody hands and appearance and her angry demeanour.

"What the fuck are *you* lot looking at?" she spat, as she wiped her palms with the surgical cloth.

"Think yourself lucky that fucker will never ask *your* daughters to wash his dirty stinking feet or keep them prisoner on a diet of dry bread and water. Think yourself luck that *your* daughters will never have to pray for breath as he treats them like a dispensable fucking automaton. I saved you, you stupid ignorant bastards! *I* saved you and your daughters and probably your daughter's daughters. Now fuck off and leave me alone and somebody get me a goddamn cigarette would you..."

Mary was no longer the woman her parents named her.

She was exactly the woman she chose to be.

She inhaled deeply of her cigarette and recognised this moment as the moment in which she had finally grown up. Mary Magdalena Mackenzie knows all the words to "I'm Every Woman" by Chaka Khan. She begins to sing them out loud now.

SUE

EAT MY FACE

By James Miller

We'd been awake for two and a half days driving up and down the interstate until my eyeballs were starting to burn when Rick started going on about the vampires. That's what he said. Vampires. We were driving past one of those houses that go all the way back to slavery, the sort with big white columns out front and Rick said, Covey man, he said, that's me, vampires live there, he said. Vampires he said. They've finally come.

What the fuck you talkin' 'bout? That was what I said. Truth is I know Rick is under a lot of stress. The main reason is that Rick's Dad is about to come out of prison. Rick's Dad is a real evil motherfucker. I'm scared of him. Everyone is scared of him. Rick's also under stress as he owes about three thousand dollars to some mean-mouthed meth dealers near Macon. Now, when his Dad gets back there is a good chance the dealers will leave Rick alone 'cause to mess with Rick means to mess with Rick's Dad and there ain't no one in the whole of Dooly county meaner than him but there was still an outside chance they might find Rick and fuck him up first. Point is I knew everything was going to

get messy. It was just a question of when, not why. Not even how.

We'd been tweaking for so long everything was running together and then Rick just said goddammit and so we drove to Anderson to the spot where his Mom was murdered. She was a maid in a motel and one day when she was making the bed some psycho jumped out of the bathroom and cut off her head and wrote shit about Satan all over the walls in her blood. Rick says it was a vampire and for all I know he's right. The motel was demolished years ago but Rick still likes to go there and look at the spot. It's just a field full of weeds now and I tend to leave him to it. He says he feels close to her out there. It all happened a long time ago when we were young and didn't know each other and since then he says everything has gone to hell but I think things went to hell long before then.

Rick was still talking shit about vampires when we got home. I thought my Mom might still be asleep but then I realised it was almost noon and thank God, she was out. The house was a fucking mess as always. And she

wonders why I don't come home so often... Then I realised something. Shit man I said to Rick, I've got to be at work in an hour. I was running my hands over my face, just to try and make sure it was still there.

Rick took out the glass pipe and smiled.

I work in the McDonald's in the retail strip on the outskirts of town. It sucks even more than you can imagine. LeRoi was in a sadistic mood and put me on the till where I stood drooling and mumbling at customers. Thankfully, we didn't hardly have no one coming in all afternoon. I felt real bad, jittering and pissing sweat through my uniform. I couldn't actually remember when I'd last washed or anything and LeRoi kept looking me like I was something he couldn't hardly bare to scrape off his shoe and Caitlin was smirking at me and fucking up the orders on purpose. It was one of those days when I could feel their eyes creeping inside my skull. At last my break came and I realised I couldn't remember the last time I ate anything so I ate a Big Mac and then I was sick in the toilets. The bad taste in my mouth was getting worse. I went out back for a cigarette and fresh air. It was still fucking hot and I was really wishing it might rain but I could tell it wouldn't. Out

back, past the bins where I once saw a racoon and LeRoi says he once saw an armadillo the size of a pig there isn't really anything, just more parking and then pine woods. Part of me was looking at the trees, green and mysterious and just wishing I could run off into them and never come back but then I knew the woods didn't lead anywhere unless you call the diary factory where Randy and Brett work somewhere and I don't so I didn't do nothing but smoke and drink some coffee that tasted like all the bad stuff had been scraped off the tables and the floor and mixed up with hot water. I really needed some weed to take the edge off the meth but that would have to wait. Slow, slow, slow, now everything was going so slow. Fast and then slow. My head hurt.

When I got home Mom was drunk and in a bitchy mood.

Where the fuck you been Covey?

At work mah.

I ain't seen you for three days.

Leave me alone mah.

Why don't you do nothin' in the house?

Why don't you do nothin' in the house?

I could rehearse the whole argument without us even needing to say nothing. I left her to drink herself unconscious in front of the TV. I lay in bed but my mind was surging and I was starting to get a real bad meth craving. I needed another hit but I also thought if I didn't get some sleep my head would collapse. I smoked a couple of joints but it didn't make much difference. I wandered about the house for a bit. Mom had passed out on the sofa in her nightie with the TV on. I could see her thighs, all fat and mottled and covered with little bruises, like spots of mould in a soggy loaf of bread. I thought about my Dad and what an asshole he was. This was all his fault. On the TV race cars were going round endlessly. I don't remember falling asleep but when I woke up I was sweating and the bad taste was still in my mouth. I knew I'd been dreaming but I couldn't say what about.

Dad's out, said Rick.

We were real high and shooting things with his Dad's .357 Magnum in the yard.

Shit man.

He phoned me from a whorehouse in Birmingham. He said to expect him back in the next couple of days.

Rick was looking kind of spun out. He was wearing his Metallica T-shirt and there was this sickly smell coming off him like meat left out to spoil.

How did he sound?

Drunk.

I bet.

It was getting dark but Rick was still wearing his sunglasses. Bang! The shot sent a tin can spinning into the gloom.

How long was he inside?

Five years.

Shit.

Yeah.

When you last see him?

He doesn't answer, just fires another shot, the bullet whizzing into nowhere. Things can be sort of weird with Rick. Originally, I'm from the north, from upstate New York, but then we moved down here 'cause of Dad. When I was new at school Rick was one of the few guys who'd be friendly to me. We soon found out we had lots of things in common. We loved watching horror videos. His favourite was The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, the original one, not the bullshit remake. I

liked the Saw movies and the Ring, the American and the Japanese one both. Everyone in the school hated us but that was okay because they were all a bunch of farm-boy retards, jocks and air-head slack-jawed gum chewing bitches just waiting to get fat. Sometimes we used to talk about doing a Columbine on them all but in the end it never seemed worth it. Anyway, I don't much like hurting people. I'm no good at fighting. It's true. I always get my ass kicked. It's best to avoid all that shit. It's like Rick says, he says Covey, you just a skinny puny weird looking motherfucker, don't get no ideas. Rick's different though. He'll get involved even if he's going to lose. Like this time he took on a couple of bikers after they called him a fag and then kicked several shades of shit out of him. I thought he was dead but he still managed to get up, blood gushing out of this gash in his forehead and running over his eyes. He wouldn't go to the hospital, just sat at home with a towel, a bottle of bourbon and smoked some rocks. You can still see the scar, a white line jumping up and down his forehead. For a while, I think he thought he was a vampire, but that was when we was younger and he used to do this whole Goth thing although in the Georgia summertime it was too hot to pull off for long. Once he tried to get us to cut our wrists

and share our blood, to make us like brothers or something but I refused. Razor's hurt and I get squeamish about blood and things like that. Sometimes Rick says he'd like to live forever but I always think, what for? To work in MacDonald's every fucking day for eternity. Fuck that.

It ain't like that fucking film, he says suddenly.

What?

Twilight. Piece of shit. Vegetarian vampires. What a lot of bull.

We saw Twilight last year at the multiplex. We both agreed it was the worst film ever made. The audience was full of thirteen year old girls drooling over that queer asshole who played the hero. Half way into the film we came up on this bad acid Marlon had persuaded Rick to buy and Rick had persuaded me to take and we were laughing so hard the usher made us leave. I puked all over my Adidas and Rick threw his popcorn at the usher.

They run things, you know, Rick was saying. They've lived for thousands of years and they regenerate themselves when they need to. It's the original bloodline, that's the ones we need to get.

Rick often talks like this. He discriminates. He says there's a big different between humans who have been made into vampires by other vampires and those who are part of the vampire race that once ruled the earth tens of thousands of years ago and used humans as their slaves. He often seems to think something or another is running shit. If it's not the freemasons it's vampires. Mostly it's vampires. Bush was a vampire. Obama's a vampire. The only President who wasn't a vampire was Clinton. Vampires making war on the rest, that's what he says, a conflict going back ten million years to when the vampires first crashed their spaceship on this planet and experimented on the humans they found and separated the races and created all the problems that have continued to this very day. That's what he says.

Bang! Motherfucker! Bang!
Motherfucker!

While he was shooting I took another hit and I was like wooooo... up into the stars, the inky spots between the high pines where the air is sweet and I was chewing my lips and Rick kept shooting and I'd hear him a whoop when he hit something.

Bang! Smash! Motherfucker! Like that.

We went for another drive and I was gunning the old Buick along the roads almost hitting a pick-up that came from nowhere, tyres kicking mud as we brushed against the verge Rick shouting shit and everything rushing forward like a rollercoaster going down really fast. The interstate was quiet at this time of night, only a few trucks hurtling past, then a wrong turn, a glimpse of a house set back behind a high verge and then we stop at the end of the drive to the mansion. I turn off the lights and the engine and there is this weird scratching, knocking noise and it's only when Rick says what's that that I realise it's my leg kicking against the steering wheel. I try and sit still but it's difficult so we open the doors and step out and the night is really warm. We creep up the driveway towards the mansion. A faint mist swirls around and my whole body is shaking although I can't tell if it's the meth or something else.

Why do you think they're vampires? I ask.

Rick leans over and grabs my mouth. Just shut the fuck up!

I push away. Jesus man, what the fuck?

Don't you know shit?

I was just asking.

Come on, he whispers, and so we creep along the driveway, gravel scrunching underfoot, the house getting closer. Under the pines to our left are several vehicles, a Chevy Suburban, a Cadillac saloon, a small Mercedes sports car, all polished dark and shiny as coffins. A light is on in a front room and the curtains are open. I can see some sort of chandelier and old furniture draped in white sheets.

Rick grabs my arm hard. I saw them taking out the coffin, he hisses.

What?

They took out the coffin and drove it to the cemetery, the one near Red Hill. Rick has a thing about cemeteries, Indian burial grounds, slave uprisings and old plantations. In a black limo, he says. It wasn't what you think, it wasn't that. They put him in the ground, but he's going to come back. He pushes his face close to mine. We've got to stop them!

Through the window we see several people sitting in the room, an old man, an old woman with a shock of white hair swirling like a halo and a younger woman. The young woman moves back and forth. We lean forward for a better look and then Rick stumbles, grabbing me and we fall on top of each

other. A security light comes on, illuminating the two of us, floundering in the dirt like a couple of hogs.

We scramble to our feet. I see the old man standing by the window, looking out.

Rick!

Just fucking run, just go, go, go.

We jump back into the car. I turn us round so fast we almost go off the road, kicking up more dirt, the old Buick moaning and then I floor it and we're rocketing away. Only when we reach the Interstate do I remember to turn on the headlights.

You see what I mean? Rick is saying, his head nodding frantically up and down, You see?

It's the morning shift at McDonald's. It's a slow morning. I'm shaky after last night but okay. We ended up back at Rick's where we smoked more meth and swept the yard. There were all these leaves and sticks in the yard and we swept them up and then Rick wanted to make a magic circle around his trailer in case the vampires had followed us back but we didn't know how to without having any Holy Water and we didn't have any of that and Rick was all for driving

to Macon where there was a catholic church to try and steal some but I didn't think that was such a good idea and then I felt so tired black spots were dancing in front of my eyes and I told Rick I had to lie down and Rick said he couldn't sleep and he got his rifle and went off into the woods while I lay on his couch which wasn't comfortable or very big but when I opened my eyes again it was almost morning. Rick still wasn't back but that's not unusual so I got back in my car and drove home. I couldn't tell where Mom was but I went to sleep for another couple of hours and when I woke up the bad taste was back and I drove to work and LeRoi shouted at me because I was late and said this was pretty much my last chance and I didn't say anything although I wanted to tell him how much I hate the fucking job and it's not like I care, but we need the money and everything is fucked up but it's okay and so I've been on the till serving breakfasts for a couple of hours when this girl walks in. I'm like fuck, she's beautiful, and then I'm like, fuck, it's the girl we saw in the house, I'm sure of it. Her skin is sort of milky pale as if she stays away from the light and her hair is straight and glossy and wow, she is really, really beautiful. As if to be extra sure, I can see her Mercedes, parked right by the door and no one round here has a car like that and

she walks right up to me and looks me in the eye, or seems to, because her eyes are hidden by huge sunglasses but still I can feel them, her eyes, like beams of light penetrating into me and she says, May I use your bathroom? in a voice that chills me like ice cubes dropped in a glass of lemonade and I don't say anything so she just walks straight past and goes into the ladies. Her voice is low and syrupy and from her accent I can tell she sure as hell ain't from round here but then I can't tell where she's from either but then some jerk expects me to take their order so I press the relevant buttons, take their money and give them their change and then I see the girl walk out again. She doesn't order anything but of course, she wouldn't. She gets back into her car and away she goes. For some reason I can't really explain I leave the till and ignoring LeRoi I go to the toilets. I go into the ladies. There are two cubicles, both empty. One of the cisterns is hissing as it re-fills with water as if someone has just flushed the toilet so I think that must be the toilet she used and without really being able to say why I go into the cubicle and bend down and sniff the air, trying to detect her scent, the thing in the air she has left. It's all I can do not to lick the seat. Turning round I notice something gleaming by the sink. A ring,

silver and ornate, left in a small puddle. The girl must have left it. Quickly, I pocket the object.

Caitlin catches me coming out of the ladies. She doesn't say anything although I know she'll tell LeRoi later. She just looks at me like I'm even more loathsome than she had ever imagined.

On my break I sit out back by the bins, smoking and inspecting the ring. It's very pretty and fine, with a double raised band that weaves around it. Why did the girl leave it behind? I can't shake the feeling that it all means something. I only saw her for a moment, but it's like she's burnt into my mind. We all know vampires are meant to be irresistibly attractive. We all know it. They give you a hard-on even as they suck the blood out of you. That's why they're so dangerous. I know it's true. Everyone does. Without really knowing why I slip the ring onto my finger. It just about fits, but it's tight. Then I can't take it off. It's stuck. Fuck! We're not allowed to wear jewellery while we're at work in case it contaminates the food or something. I pull hard but I still can't get it off. It's like it's been welded to my finger. For a minute I panic - I feel hot and scared and violated by this metal thing. Pulling just hurts. I wonder if Rick is right and they are

vampires and she left the ring deliberately in the bathroom to trap me. Maybe I'm in their power now... my break only lasts half an hour and somehow I manage to calm down enough to go back to the till. If LeRoi notices anything, he doesn't say so.

I still can't get the ring off. The skin around my finger is very red and a little sore and it feels tight and uncomfortable. I use soap and water to try and slide the ring off but it doesn't work. Washing simply makes the ring even more shiny until glitters star-like in the gloomy kitchen. It's weird but I realise I don't totally hate having it on my finger. Mom is out, probably at her job at Wal-Mart. I call Rick but he doesn't answer so I get real high instead. The kitchen sickens me so I start cleaning and tidying shit away. At least Mom won't bitch now when she comes home. I wash the plates and clear all the rotting food from the fridge then I take out the different trays in the fridge and spray all the mould and grime off them. Then I clear the surfaces and wipe them down. I sweep the floor. I get the vacuum and Hoover around the edges. I go around the house putting empty cans of beer, bottles of vodka and bourbon, choked ashtrays and coke cans and pizza boxes and chip packets and candy wrappers in a bin. I smoke more crystal. It

feels so fucking good... my mind goes off again and it's like everything is far away and moving so fast but the bad taste is still in my mouth. I look at the ring, so pretty and strange and imagine my vampire girl will appear in my room in the dead of night and peel off her clothes and spread her legs and let me fuck her for hours in every way possible. Then the phone rings and I see it's my Dad and it's like someone throws a switch. A black cloud descends and I throw the nearest thing I can get my hands on at the wall and the shattering glass gives no satisfaction so I go outside. Typical. Asshole! He probably wants to summon me for one of his lunches which means I have to drive all the way to Atlanta and sit in a smug restaurant while he spends most of his time on his mobile and then harasses me for looking like a punk or a bum and blames my mother. He often brings some bitch or another he's screwing. Last time it was some blonde slut called Sandy or Tiffany, mall trash with fake tits, simpering and giggling while my Dad tells god awful stories that usually involved someone being a fag or something like that and I just have to sit there hoping it will soon be over and he knows I will endure it because at the end he slips me a couple of hundred bucks and slaps my back and

says take care son and then I have to drive all the way back home while he goes back to his condo to screw Sandy or Tiffany and think about what a big fucking man he is. Asshole.

We drive out past beyond Bethel towards the abandoned church. It's relentlessly hot and the sky looks like a plastic bag wrapped around a light, bulging, melting, ready to burst into flames. The bad taste in my mouth is overwhelming, like burnt rust or ground-up machinery. Rick's saying his Dad called from a whorehouse in Birmingham, that he was out, that he should expect him back in the next couple of days. Rick doesn't look at me as he says this and for the first time in ages his mind seems to be on something other than the vampires in the house. My head starts to hurt and I'm feeling nauseous. We stop for a minute or two by the old church. Rick seems really tense, chewing gum and not saying much. His sunglasses reflect the dull hot sky. We go outside. The steeple and clapboard walls of the church sag, as if the structure was swamped by a great flood and then left to dry out. The sky and trees behind look very flat, as if everything has been strung up for a cheap window display. Long grass curls around our ankles and the air is filled with tiny black flies. Then we go. There's a

crystal meth factory down a dirt track a couple of miles from here run by a guy we know called Gus. He has so many needle holes all over his body from shooting meth we call him pinhead, like the character from the Hellraiser movies. I wait in the car while Rick does the deal. The heat seems worse and I feel really sick, like someone has done something bad to my stomach. I'm surprised by the sight of myself in the rear-view mirror, my face not so much a real face as a sketch of a face, my eyes like smudgy holes, a few rough lines here and there, a crude scribble for a mouth. A kid could do a better job. It's not much of a face. It's not much of anything.

I hear a number of gunshots and Rick comes running. Drive! He yells at me, leaping in and slamming the door. I start the engine and try to turn the car round. The dirt track is narrow and it's not easy.

What? I shout at him.

Go! He shouts back at me. Faster!

I see he's holding the .357 Magnum and a paper bag wrapped thick with crystals. I'm busy turning the wheel and yanking the car back when someone comes behind us. It's Gus and he's brandishing a shotgun. He raises the weapon to

shoot but I put my foot down. There's a sharp corner and we make it although I'm crouched down waiting for the window to get blasted out but it doesn't happen and we're bumping fast down the dirt track and Rick is laughing so hard it's like his face is about to fall off. He pulled the same shit with the mean dudes over in Macon a few weeks back. I guess what with his Dad being out and all he knows no-one will fuck with him but all the same it was stupid to burn Gus like this. Gus was always reliable, someone we could count on. It was stupid.

Later we stop at the cemetery in Red Hill. I saw them bring the body out here, Rick is saying. Then I saw them in town, dressed all in black and pale and sheltering from the sun.

It's a modern cemetery, really unscary, the graves stretching away in straight rows and marked with clean, white crosses. A man is walking round with a strimmer, keeping all the edges straight. We were so jittery after our close escape we smoked a couple of pipes and now I'm so high my thoughts are jumping like hot popping bugs and I can't shake the feeling that the rows keep shifting one way and another. I try and tell Rick about the vampire girl and how beautiful she was, so hot I could have

licked the toilet seat, I couldn't help myself, I say, and she must have left the ring behind, as a sign, as a way of warning us because now it's stuck and it hurts but it also feels good. Rick doesn't say anything. His teeth rub together like his face is about to fall to pieces.

Mom and her friend Leslie from Wal Mart are sitting at the table playing cards and smoking and drinking JD's with Diet Coke. The TV is on, action news covering a hostage situation near Mobile. Some guy stormed into a Pizza Hut with a gun and grudge. I can tell Mom's drunk and real mad at me and she says LeRoi phoned and said something about how I could forget about coming back to work and I think shit and I actually cannot remember when my shift was or how I managed to miss it or anything. I think about calling LeRoi back and trying to explain but it's too late and anyway it's much easier to stay in my room and get high. My body craves meth so bad it's like I'm trapped in a black itchy pit and meth is the trigger I need to make it all so much better and now I have a big rock cut from the ice Rick stole and as I'm smoking it I wonder what will happen when Gus finds us except now that Rick says his Dad is out of jail maybe it won't matter and I get so high it's like my head, my finger, my cock, my spine, my

heart are swelling up so hard I might burst all over the room so I dance around but trying to be quiet because I'm hyper-aware of Mom and Leslie next door, laughing haw haw haw like they do and why is everyone and everything so full of hate, so I move around, slow but fast, grinding my teeth together until they become fangs, visions of a cold mist pooling through the window and filling the room and vampire girl is there with her gorgeous eyes, her mouth all red beckoning me to do things to her at once wonderful and disgusting.

Rick's Dad is back.

We're sitting in Rick's trailer. Rick's Dad is in the chair where Rick usually sits. Rick's Dad isn't alone. He's brought a friend from prison, a man called Rawlins or Rawson, something like that. I don't quite catch his name. We've been drinking bourbon for hours and have moved on to coke. Rick's Dad has a big block of the stuff and he's chomping out lines with a razor blade. It is real dark in the trailer and real dark outside and everywhere is hot. There is a flickering, burnt sort of smell in the air like it's going to thunder but I don't think it will. Everything is real still. Rick's Dad is smaller than Rick but scarier. His friend Rawson is scarier even than Rick's Dad. Rick's Dad has a

shaven head with a tattoo on the back of his neck made to look like stitches. It's so hot he's taken off his shirt and his body is skinny but tough, not an inch of flab or slack flesh, just tight muscle and bone and there's a big scar running from his collarbone down past his crotch as if someone cut him open with an axe. There are more tattoos on his arm, words in Gothic script and on his back a big tattoo of a weeping angel and on one bicep a skull in a ball of fire. Rick's Dad's friend is huge, six foot six or seven and pumped up like he don't eat nothing but T-bone steak and steroids. He's also shaved his head but has a tight goatee around his mouth. When he speaks I can see his teeth are all fucked up and dirty, like broken down tombstones and his eyes are really small, as if his face has sucked them half way back inside and his ears are these chewed up little things, all his features somehow shrunken against his big, round head. He's wearing a black T shirt and black jeans and he seems to drink bourbon like its water and he snorts the coke in great fat lines, hoovering it up and sitting back and rubbing his nose. Aaargh man he says. Aaargh fuck yeah and then he looks right at me like I'm just a worm he could squash without even thinking about it. I'm on edge for all sorts of reasons. Rick's Dad has gone and

got out all the guns he left in the trailer for Rick to look after. The .357 Magnum, the hunting rifle, a twelve gauge shotgun, the Browning Hi-Power automatic and the Colt M1911 he once used to fuck up some gangsters down in Albany and, pride of place, the Uzi SMG which Rick once showed me, locked in its box, but never dared to touch. His Dad swapped it for a huge chunk of meth from some gang in Atlanta. All these guns on the table like we're about to go to war, but then I know Rick's Dad is real fond of firearms and I guess having been inside for so long he's missed them, rather like you might miss women or watching whatever you want on TV. Rick's Dad and Rick's Dad's friend are talking about the state penitentiary in Alabama and from what they're saying I don't like the sound of prison one bit. I gather Rawson was incarcerated for even longer than Rick's Dad and I wonder what it was he did and that makes me real frightened and we drink more bourbon and snort more coke and smoke some meth and then Rick starts to tell them about the vampires.

Ain't never much going on in the day, he says. They keep the curtains closed, everything shut up. Sometimes the old woman and the younger girl go into town. They go to the drugstore. Always dressed in black, eyes

hidden with sunglasses, you know. I ain't never seen the man. I ain't never seen them before and they sure ain't from round here. There weren't nobody lived in that house for years.

The house by Interstate five? says Rick's Dad.

Yeah.

Someone did live there, he goes on, but they was always real solitary, that's what I recall. Anyhow, that was long time ago. He rubs his face.

You see bats? asks Rawson. Lotsa bats around the house?

All the time. Rick nods

I reckon so, says Rick's Dad, nodding sagely like this is all normal.

The one they buried, says Rick, we ought to dig up the coffin, then we'd know for sure.

I want to say something but I'm really scared and high and there's this weird black energy floating about the room and the bad taste in my mouth just won't go and I sense we're going forward, real fast and there's nothing I can do. Rick's Dad burps and picks at his teeth with a toothpick. Rawson, he says, shall we tell the boys 'bout that time?

Yeah man, Rawson smiles an ugly smile. Tell 'em.

Don't you never doubt there's no such thing as vampires. Rick's Dad leans forward and looks right at me, like he's read my mind, sensed my doubts. Not when you seen what we seen.

That's right. Rawson nods.

One time they brought this prisoner in. He was being transferred from somewhere else. That ain't the point. Dude was inside for the rape and murder of a little girl near Birmingham. Big, sick nigger, weren't he? The boy was marked, you know?

That's right.

We all knew it, the guards knew it, everyone did. They made the sign during dinner one evening. One of the brotherhood went over and spat on the floor in front of him. Well, none of his people were gonna help. The other niggers stayed well away.

It's like that inside. Rawson licks his lips with a long, black tongue.

It happened at noon next day. We was all out in the yard. If you think about it, they shouldn't have even allowed that nigger out but they wanted it to happen. Someone arranged something with the warden. Everyone knew.

Strike of noon and suddenly all the guards just walked away, you remember that Rawson?

Couldn't forget.

Two of the brotherhood knocked him down. One of them had a razor, pulled off the sick nigger's trousers and cut his balls off just as sure as if he was cutting the throat of a hog. The man held up his balls like a trophy. Meanwhile, the nigger is screamin' and bleedin' everywhere but that was just the start. See, he leans forward, grinning, and all I can see are his teeth, like rotten yellow stones. They'd let out this prisoner they normally keep in solitary. He was on death row, dude by the name of Lawhorn, Victor Lawhorn. He was a legend in the penitentiary because of how long he'd been there although almost no one had ever seen him. They said he was a cannibal.

They said he was a vampire.

That's right. Rick's Dad nods. So they brings him out, all pale like a skeleton 'cause they keep him inside so long. Everyone was watching, our people on one side, niggers and Mexicans on the other, nigger writhing on the ground and Lawhorn walked forward and bent down and tore out the man's throat with his own teeth. He more or less ripped that

fucking nigger's head off. Then he took off his shirt and rubbed himself in the fresh blood. Now, I've seen some bad shit, but in all my days I ain't never seen nothing like that before. He bends forward, snorting another fat line of coke. He rubs his teeth and coughs. When it was all done he walked back to his cell, calm and cool as anything. The guards came back to clean up the mess and that was all. We don't know what they do with the body. Who wants the body of a nigger child rapist? Someone, that's for sure. Someone always wants something. And Lawhorn went back into solitary, back to death row, but he ain't never gonna die, understand?

Some of them, says Rawson, says Lawhorn been on death row since 1940. He been inside a real long time but then when you can live forever it all relative, ain't it? All he need was a little human blood now and then. Governor and such were too 'fraid to send him to the chair 'cause they knew he'd escape jus' soon as he'd want to. These sorts of things, they's all arranged from on high. There ain't much a man like us can do, except be disgusted at all the filth, all the scum, all the dirt they have in there. The things they put us through. He lights a cigarette, his face twisted with disgust. These fucking niggers. Usurping the white man's power.

Taking our place. Overturning the order.

You wouldn't believe what we've seen. Rick's Dad rubs one hand over his face.

Covey, Covey man, tell them about the ring, says Rick.

I got this ring, I say, holding out my finger.

Let me see that. Rawson seizes me. His hand is huge, easily big enough to crush my own and he twists me round. Shit, that's a fine piece of jewellery. Look at that. Rick's Dad bends over. He takes my finger and pulls at the ring. His fingers are hard like metal wire. An excruciating pain runs up my hand and I cry out but the ring pops off. Rick's Dad holds it up. Mighty fine. He nods in agreement. You got this from the girl in the house?

I nod. My finger really hurts.

Rick's Dad and Rawson exchange a look. Rick, says Rick's Dad.

Yes pa.

Rick's Dad picks up his Uzi. He holds it lovingly, turning it this way and that, a strange smile on his lips.

Come on boys, he says. What say we went vampire huntin.'

Yeah? Rick almost leaps out of his chair, like he doesn't know what to do or where to go.

Rick's Dad and Rawson start laughing, their heads thrown back, their mouths open so wide it's as if they might try and eat their own face. You're a good boy. Rick's Dad paws the back of his head. You're stupid, but you're a good boy.

Rawson jerks his head round. He's still laughing. It's all I can do not to piss myself.



SCENES FROM IMAGINARY FILMS

II - COMMON PLEAS

By David Gionfriddo

*Film has been the dominant medium in American culture since at least the mid-1960s. In the U.S., there are even isolated tribes of middle-aged men who communicate only in movie quotes ("But it looks good on you!" "Show me the money!") Much of our lives are spent in thrall to the filmmakers and their actors. But I find there are very few movies memorable from beginning to end. What stays with me are the indelible scenes, the important images: that last, long tracking shot in **Citizen Kane**; Michael Madsen's **Reservoir Dogs** torture dance; Catherine Deneuve inching down the corridor of hands in **Repulsion**; Cybill Shepherd's **Last Picture Show** diving-board striptease. These pictures are the building blocks of post-modern consciousness. Like family snapshots found in a junk drawer, these moments let us reconstruct entire stories, eras, lives. Some of us are all thumbs with the camera, however, so we are left to play with their literary equivalents. My scenes aren't meant to be beginnings, middles or ends. Consider my humble offerings a parlor game, simple party favors inviting you to dream your own stories, to invent new rewards, conflicts and tribulations for these very malleable characters. Have fun...*

EXT. - COUNTRY ROAD - DAYTIME

A WMKX-9 TV production van cruises down a road in rural Pennsylvania. The landscape consists of dense stands of slate-colored pine and oak trees, whose branches bear the last russet leaves of fall, broken by occasional run-down houses, their yards littered with crumbling birdbaths, lawnmowers, bathroom sinks, baby clothes and other debris. The van moves a bit faster than the speed limit; its occupants seem to be in a hurry to get somewhere.

CUT TO:

INT. - TELEVISION VAN - DAYTIME

Inside the van are driver/cameraman MARK LASKY, 29, newswriter PERRY CABRINI, 32, and crew assistant WREN MICHELOVE, 23. Perry is nervous and a bit agitated, furiously reviewing notes and files. Mark and Wren lay back, calmer and more at ease. Wren fidgets mindlessly with a Pez dispenser in the shape of Underdog. Mark sneaks an occasional concerned glance back at Perry, but has been with him long enough to recognize his moods. The music on the radio is Golden Earring's "Radar Love," but nobody is listening.

MARK

Don't sweat it. We're making good time. We should have plenty of daylight left.

PERRY

Well, I don't like to cut it too close. We should have hit the road an hour ago.

WREN

I'm surprised you're here at all, with Kimber going in for her... (Stops herself.) I just thought you might be with her.

PERRY

(annoyed, trying not to show it)

We talked about it. She's okay with it.

WREN

So that's that then.

EXT. - COUNTRY ROAD - DAYTIME

The van speeds on through the early afternoon.

ANGLE ON road sign. Sign reads "Carbon Creek, 2 Miles"

INT. - TELEVISION VAN - DAYTIME

PERRY

I know this might not seem like much, but after two years, Plotkin is finally giving me a chance in front of the camera. I don't want to screw it up. Enough of that shit. I'm ready for my close-up.

ANGLE ON a pair of haggard-looking country people in rain ponchos hitchhiking on the side of the road. One holds a wrinkled paper sign reading "Military Veteran." The other cradles a shaking gray mutt in a red sweater.

PERRY

Laugh if you want to, but this is the kind of story people remember. Dead kids. Spooks. An anniversary. We can really wring the pathos out of it if we try.

MARK

Just the same, I wouldn't go using the word "spooks."

PERRY

No shit, Cronkite. (Laughs) Future Standards and Practices...

EXT. - COUNTRY ROAD - DAYTIME

ANGLE ON hitchhikers. They watch the van speed away, past an abandoned weigh station, down a hill and out of sight.

INT. - TELEVISION VAN - DAYTIME

WREN

So what are we looking for, anyway?

MARK

Yeah, your directions were kinda vague.

PERRY

Sorry. This isn't exactly Westminster Abbey. I had a hell of a time even finding directions that made any sense. (Unfolds paper and reads.) Twelve-point-two miles past the turnoff to Carbon Creek, we're looking for a dirt access road on the right-hand side. There's a stone wall and an iron gate and an old water pump. Kind of hidden, it says.

WREN

And then?

PERRY

And then, it's a couple hundred yards in. And then, we'll know it when we see it. It's a pretty big place with nothing around.

MARK

(With mock melodrama)

Duh-Duh-Duh-*Dummmmm*...Veddy skeddy!

WREN

(picking up one of Perry's clippings)

Oh, snap! (Laughs, excitedly skims one, then another, with escalating shrieks of disbelief) What is this shit you got me into? "*The Gates of Hell...*?" Is this for real? Oh. My. God.

MARK

We were gonna surprise you, Lovey. I knew you'd get a charge out of it. A yarn for your corpse-paint pals.

WREN

Fuck off. Hate to tell you, but Halloween was two weeks ago, you Abbott and Costello assholes.

The music is Roxy Music, "Both Ends Burning."

PERRY

(peevied)

It's not like that. It's a pretty cool human interest thing.

WREN

Don't sound too human to me. (To Mark) Can you turn this up a little?

PERRY

(collecting his thoughts)

The Gates of Hell thing is just bullshit. This is like a true crime story. This place used to be Pinehaven. A reform school. Reformatory.

MARK

Jail for kids.

WREN

I get it.

PERRY

Guy named Fishel used to run it. Kind of a nutbag. (A beat to compose his thoughts.) These four little delinquents tried to break out one night, but they had two high fences. They got as far as the second and one of the guards shot the ringleader through the neck, and his pal...right in the liver.

WREN

Ouch. Very Tarantino.

PERRY

It gets better. The other kids see this happening, right, and they go wild and try to burn the joint down with oil and paint and rags and whatever will burn. Just crazy stuff. Three more kids get trapped in the dormitory on the second floor and die from the smoke. Weren't doing anything but reading comic books or jerking off or whatever kids did back then. Boom. Dead.

MARK

Tell her about the guy.

PERRY

(To Mark) Do you mind? Just drive, and watch. The state legislature holds an inquiry and finds Fishel responsible. He doesn't go to jail, but his name is trashed. Pinehaven gets padlocked and he's left all alone up there, just him and his wife playing pinochle, until one day he loses it and garrotes her with a piece of fence wire. Almost decapitates the old broad.

WREN

Nice. Swellegant.

PERRY

And then he stuffs pictures of the five kids in his shirt pocket, staggers out to the second fence, puts his eyes out with a twig, and shoots himself once, right in the dome, with a nickel .38 special. The end. And that happened 75 years ago next month. December 1934.

WREN

Thanks for doing the math. That stuff is hard for us girls, y'know? (Smiles, then a beat) Damn. And all this Gates of Hell stuff?

MARK

You know...Every college town has a set of these. It's like Lover's Leap or some shit. Lassiter kids trying to scare their dates into giving up the snatch.

WREN

(laughs, ruffles Mark's hair)

Such the romantic.

MARK

We do our best, Ma'amselle...

PERRY

I need you guys to keep your eyes peeled.

EXT. - COUNTRY ROAD - DAYTIME

It is still early, but passing sheets of low-hanging cloud throw occasional ribbons of gray over the countryside. After the Carbon Creek turnoff, the road becomes rougher, badly tended, squeezed by sandy verges. There are no longer any houses around. An old roadside billboard, its kelly green paint flaking away, holds gestalt handbill fragments that can still be assembled into an ad for "Rademacher's Dinosaur Beach." No one is on this stretch of road. At the shoulder, an opossum digs hungrily, unopposed, in a discarded box of chicken. It occurs to Wren that it is on roads like this one that the feuding couples of western Pennsylvania - hell, the Western Hemisphere! -- solve most of their disputes. The thought scares her for an instant. After a time, she realizes she no longer sees or hears any bird, animal or insect life.

INT. - TELEVISION VAN - DAYTIME

PERRY

Dude...There it is. Right there. Don't miss the turn.

MARK

Easy, ghostbuster. I'm on it.

EXT. - PINEHAVEN TURNOFF - DAYTIME

The landmark is not quite what any of them expected. The stone wall is largely fallen (or perhaps pushed) down, and the "gate" is little more than some sections of iron pipe that block the beginnings of a dirt road. The owners have inexplicably put a chain and a padlock - now broken - on the freely-swinging gate in a half-hearted attempt to keep out curiosity seekers. The trio climbs out of the van and walks toward the last reasonably intact section of wall, which has been covered with an assortment of makeshift offerings: black candles, carnival masks, flowers, various drawings and figurines, a Hellboy comic, even a two-foot-high crucifix. One couple has taken a framed prom photo, wrapped it in black lace and scribbled "Till Death" in what looks like runny red paint.

Someone has tried to spray-paint “Don’t Do It” in large red letters, but the wall’s disrepair, its uneven surface, have made the words barely legible.

MARK

Damn. (In his best *Exorcist* voice.) *Merrin! Merrin!* (Looks for approval) Look at all this crazy shit. Guess you’re not the only one who remembered the anniversary. Check this shit out.

Mark grabs for the crucifix, but Wren stops him.

WREN

Don’t even play around like that because that truly will freak me out. That’s where I draw the line.

MARK

Nice Catholic girl. Been to church, what, *twice?*

WREN

Huh. You’re the local sexpert and you’ve had *sex* twice.

ANGLE ON Perry, who squats a few feet away, examining one of the items left behind: it is a framed mass card around which has been draped a gold locket. The card has a picture of a small dark-eyed child, smiling, in a white communion dress, and bears the words “Lydia Casares, 1999-2007: Una hija cariñosa.”

PERRY

This is that girl from Ohio, the one who died.

WREN

What? Another one? This just gets better and better.

PERRY

No, she was the one whose family made a pit stop and she just wandered away. They didn't find her. That could have happened anywhere. Fell and hit her head, or fell in a ditch maybe.

Mark and Wren crouch down to examine some trash that has been left behind. There are about a half-dozen crushed Iron City beer cans and an empty bottle of Limonaya vodka. The toe of Mark's Vann kicks up a couple of marijuana roaches, and Wren's eye is drawn by something shiny, half-buried by the gate. She picks it up.

WREN

Somebody must have taken off in a hurry. This is an expensive lighter. Zippo.

She strikes up a flame, and waves it as if for some arena-rock encore.

PERRY

Probably too shitfaced to notice he dropped it.

For a little while, they just assay the setting, trying to isolate what makes it so unusual, so unsettling. Aside from the rush of breezes, the only sounds are the ones they make. It's hard to get over the oddness of the little altars and tributes and presents clustered by the wall. A canopy of trees makes a shadow-tunnel that swallows the dirt trail in flickering shade after about fifty yards. It's easy to see why those in love with tall tales and mischief might call this place the mouth of something sinister. At various openings in the trees, one sees wisps of smoke or fog, like exhalations from an underground fire, that seem to pool and loiter along the ground. The suggestible might find some of these take among their shapes muscled backs or the lines of flowing gowns, but, really, they could be anything. There are no more smiles.

PERRY

Well, grab some gear. We've got a little hike.

WREN

Hike?

PERRY

Road's not passable. They tried to demolish this place in the 50s, but the owners couldn't get the dozers up the hill.

WREN

Anything else you're not telling us? Mantraps? Bengal tigers? Alien abductions?

MARK

All of the above. Stop your bitching.

The three make their way up the hill. Mark holds a camera and battery pack. Wren lugs a suitcase. The road deteriorates by degrees -- first a trail, then little more than a collection of ruts, muddy scars in the sparse, dead grass. Along this path are high tufts of weed, mixed with briars and thistle; occasionally, the odd sunbeams pick out little tossed-off relics: a brass button, a sandal, torn pages from a notebook lined with mud-smearred figures, the movable lens from a Ouija board. A hacked-up wooden post, perhaps part of the reform school's long-demolished inner fence, is studded with rusty nails, on one of which hangs a tattered shred of something like denim, embroidered with a piece of butterfly's wing.

Wren sees it, and she cautiously veers off the beaten path for a closer look. Her boot heel catches in a shallow gopher hole, twisting her ankle and throwing her down. Her arm catches a nail, leaving a troublesome, bleeding wound.

ANGLE ON Mark and Perry, who react with surprise and alarm. They rush to Wren's side.

MARK

Whoa, stay down, stay down. (Removes his coat and takes off his plaid shirt, which he hands her.) Man, that's a juicy one. Here, keep pressure on it. (To Perry) So much for that story...

WREN

Hey, don't put that on me! You guys can still take care of business.

She tries to climb to her feet with Mark's help, but her ankle can't take the weight. She gently collapses in sections back into a sitting position.

PERRY

Let's think about this. You have to get looked at. You're going to need a tetanus shot.

WREN

Let me just hang here for a few minutes. I'll get the bleeding under control and just chill. I can call you on your cell if anything happens. When you're done, we can find an ER. If they have one out here in Eerie, PA.

MARK

(a long, indecisive pause)

You sure you'll be alright? I don't... This is kind of fucked. I don't like it with all these oddballs hanging around.

WREN

See anybody? The freaks only come out at night. (Holds up phone) Here, I can amuse myself. I'm all about the apps. I'll just hang here and learn Mandarin or check my stock prices or something. Save me some ectoplasm.

ANGLE ON Mark and Perry who, somewhat hesitantly now, labor back up the hill toward the school. Nothing is amiss, but with every few yards, the path becomes narrower, more overgrown, the sun a bit dimmer, the sense of ruin a little heavier.

MARK

Let's agree that we're going to wrap this and get the flock out of here as fast as possible.

PERRY

Hell yes. Do you think I like leaving Wren back there? Some woodsman probably take her to his cabin and chain her up as a sex slave. The mother of a new clan. (Laughs) Most of this bit is done anyway. File footage of the old man, some newsclips from the morgue, that bit of interview we did with the twitchy library guy. We just need an intro, then it's just editing.

MARK

In a nice, non-satanic editing room.

PERRY

Pussy.

ANGLE ON the forest path. We watch it climb and wind leftward, sun-dappled, through encroaching shrubs and goldenrod, until, finally, at a clearing, we see

ESTABLISHING SHOT of the brooding shell of Pinehaven, made all the more striking by the wild setting and the nervous hike. It's clear that the school, a rambling, brick Federalist building behind the haggard remnants of a circular driveway, was once a handsome and imposing structure. But time, nature and legend-trippers have taken an awful toll. Flora embraces the walls and steps as though it was a Mayan temple hidden by jungle. Every window is smashed and the walls are pockmarked with the scars of .22 bullets and the clumsy artwork of amateur taggers. Large sections of roof have collapsed and a pair of NO TRESPASSING signs lay, rusting, in the mud. A couple of abandoned cars, too decrepit to identify their makes, sit behind a brick outbuilding whose door has been kicked off its hinges. Perry and Mark walk up the crumbling front steps, careful to test the stone before applying weight to each footfall.

INT. - PINEHAVEN SCHOOL -- DAYTIME

PERRY

Jesus, this is worse than I thought.

At their feet is a bronze plaque that someone pulled from the wall, but found too heavy to move. It reads: PINEHAVEN VOCATIONAL SCHOOL, DEDICATED AUGUST 8, 1914, THAT THE DILIGENT PURSUIT OF THE TRADES MAY RECLAIM THE SOULS AND MINDS OF THE WAYWARD. At their feet are mismatched pieces -- wings, claws - of birds, perhaps ripped up by wild cats.

MARK

I always wondered what Hell looked like.

PERRY

I wouldn't know. I don't believe in it. *L'enfer, c'est les autres.*

MARK

What?

PERRY

Never mind. Just talking to myself.

PAN Pinehaven rotunda. We move slowly across a large central room, immediately beyond the foyer. A collapsed section of roof illuminates the room like an oculus. The decay is complete, profound. At one side of the room are laid some cheap blankets and a sleeping bag on which are scattered fast food wrappers, half a dozen small blue vials, wine and beer bottles -- some broken -- and the remnants of a long-extinguished wood fire fueled by bits of smashed-up armchairs. The walls have been ruttled by crowbars and pickaxes, and we see the twisted stems where the copper pipes and wires have been crudely extracted. A pair of old portraits, hanging from broken frames, have been punched and profaned with magic marker. Once-costly blocked wallpaper hangs down in streamers, streaked with black mold. At the far end of the room, at the foot of a staircase, an old rolltop desk, missing two legs, has been pulled from an office and used as a toilet. Everywhere, the marble floor is littered with books, most with their pages pulled apart. The two are momentarily stunned by the attitude of casual degradation.

Mark aimlessly prospects around the baseboard, and crouches to retrieve something.

MARK

Hey, must be my lucky day.

He holds up for Perry's appraisal a well-worn Mercury dime.

PERRY

Nice. Our luck is changing. Know who the model for that coin was? Wallace Stevens' wife.

MARK

Cool. (A beat) Who's Walter Stevens?

PERRY

Skip it. Let's make a game plan, Rockefeller. I'm going to look around for a good visual. We meet back here in twenty.

MARK

Pretty hard to top this for sheer...

PERRY

...insanity? Anyway, let's see what we can find. And be careful. This whole place feels about ready to come down.

ANGLE ON Perry as he cautiously walks out of the room. We follow him in a tracking shot as he tries the stairs, first grabbing a loose handrail, then putting his foot through the rotted wood of a step. He abandons this avenue and turns to walk down a long ground-floor hallway.

P.O.V. Perry. We look down the hall, littered with old photographs torn from the walls, and chips of glass from their cracked frames. The tile is discolored by sticky pools of dried liquid. Doors of various rooms are randomly thrown open. As Perry moves down the hall, he bends to pick up a yellowed photo.

ONE SHOT: the photo depicts a group of boys with long knives and aprons, standing beside an older, bearded instructor. In the center of the picture, suspended on chains, hangs the carcass of a calf or lamb or other small animal, ready for butchering. The eye is drawn to one particular boy, who looks quite confused and uncomfortable.

PERRY (V.O.)

I recognize that kid. He doesn't belong. Something in the eyes could have been...

Perry puts down the photo and continues down the hall.

ANGLE ON series of doors. As the camera moves down the corridor, we see that each door is a dormitory room, bearing the name of two Pinehaven students: R. Schorr, F. McClusker, J.P. Beaulieu, F.X. Lemoyne. As we reach the last door on the left, we go

CLOSEUP on Perry, whose face changes from a look of numb disgust to one of fascination, then anxiety.

ANGLE ON dorm room door.

PERRY'S HAND INTO FRAME reaches out and touches the word "Cabrin" carved into the wood in crude, angular letters, as if with a pocket knife. He gently pushes the door, which swings slowly, silently, open.

ANGLE ON the room's contents. Perry warily enters, taking in the scene. Much is in keeping with the school's general state of disrepair. Rusted bunk beds lie on their sides. The flaking walls are marred with childish crayon drawings. Empty closets contain just a few mangled hangers, although one is home for a large, intricate web at the center of which sits a furry wolf spider, still, patient. The only incongruous feature of the room is a new-looking bamboo bassinet in its center. There is no breeze and Perry has not touched it, but it rocks lazily, as if moved by an unseen hand. Nervously, Perry walks over and peers inside. He pushes aside a pink blanket and discovers a small figure of a girl, apparently twisted out of tufts of animal (human?) hair. The blanket under the figure is spattered with blood. From outside the window, Perry hears the tinkling of chimes.

CUT TO:

INT. - PINEHAVEN SWIMMING POOL - DAYTIME

Mark, shooting video with a handheld camera, stands in the doorway, looking into a large room housing what was once Pinehaven's swimming pool. Nobody has used this room for decades. The windows are covered with dirt, shedding an umber pall over things. The pool, long drained of water, is almost indescribable. The bottom is lined with cast-off furniture and belongings, and we see from

P.O.V. Mark's video camera, clothes, a toy truck, a foot locker whose contents are spilling out, half-eaten food, board games, a squirrel and a cat in states of decomposition. The overall impression is a mosaic of collapse, a repository of rejected things. Lives, discarded.

MARK

Damn. What a waste.

ANGLE ON Mark, who stops filming for a moment, surprised by an unusual animal sound coming from the pool. It is a soft high hissing and growling, not quite cat or rodent. It's hard to place the cause, but it seems like the sound of something trapped and in pain, with an overtone of warning. Mark wanders over to the pool to see what's making this noise and observes that it's coming from underneath the grate that covers the pool drain. He lowers himself into the shallow end and squats down to see what he can see in the dark recess of the drainpipe. There is work to be done, but the sound is just familiar and feline enough to remind Mark of his own pets.

CLOSEUP - MARK

MARK

Hey, who are you down there, little guy?

Mark tugs at the grate, working it loose and, finally, pulling it off. Beneath the grate is a narrow pipe that leads down for several feet into a dark corner where the animal is caught.

ANIMAL'S POV

Mark crouches and reaches into the hole, lowering his hand toward the sound, which becomes low and baleful. Mark is not going to give up.

MARK

Come on now, we'll get you out of there.

MARK'S POV

There is nothing visible in the dark, except brief sparkles of metal and the momentary flash of red eyes. The animal clearly knows Mark is there, and his growl becomes throatier, more insistent. For a brief instant, something subterranean, something albino that has been underground for a long, long time pokes out of the darkness and reaches toward Mark. We see just an inch or two, enough to note that it is more claw than paw.

ANGLE ON Mark. He continues to try to pull the animal out, reaching deeper and more frantically, as the sound becomes a higher and more excited chatter. A pair of mockingbirds roost on what were once bleachers, watching the drama and commenting with their harsh staccato songs.

MARK

Fuck! God damn it! Stay the fuck still!

MARK'S POV

The camera moves down into the black hole. Mark is stretching as far as he can, breathing hard now. The secret sound becomes the warning of something threatened. A few feet away, on the floor of the pool, Mark's phone rings, unnoticed.

CUT TO:

INT. - PINEHAVEN DORMITORY ROOM - DAYTIME

ANGLE ON Perry, who holds his phone to his ear, waiting for a response.

PERRY

Hey, goofball, let me know what you found when you quit playing with yourself. I'm starting to get a little antsy here.

He puts away his phone, and wanders over to the window, which he opens. He pokes his head outside and notices the beginnings of a rain shower, as he listens to the very clear music of chimes.

In an ESTABLISHING SHOT, we see the source: a set of wind chimes on the front porch of a small, abandoned two-story house. The screen door rattles wildly in the wind. Perry knows that this must be the old Fishel place.

In a TRACKING SHOT, we follow Perry out of the room, into the hallway and out the back door. He stands under a sagging awning, pinned for a moment by the sudden downpour, regarding the house. Its paint has been washed away, leaving behind only a dull gray. Shutters sway limply in the breeze and the walls give the impression of sagging inward, as if the place were about to implode. A thought crosses Perry's face, and he again pulls out his phone and dials.

CUT TO:

EXT. - FOREST PATH - DAYTIME

ANGLE ON the fencepost where we left Wren. She is not there. Two raccoons zealously pull the fleece lining from Wren's coat, left in the dirt.

PHONE APP VOICE

Graag gedaan. You are welcome. Repeat.

At the sound of Wren's ringtone - an instrumental version of Gloria Gaynor's "I Will Survive," they start and scatter.

SMALL CHILD'S BRONZED HAND INTO FRAME. Clad in a leather bracelet, the kind children make in crafts classes, it reaches toward a gold lighter, left on the ground near Wren's jacket, and curiously turns it over.

CUT TO:

EXT. - UNDER PINEHAVEN AWNING - DAYTIME

Perry puts his phone away. It is the Magic Hour, the rain begins to tail off, and the sun tries to emerge, bathing everything in a dirty orange light. Perry can see the house's state of disrepair, but he advances slowly, drawn by the music of the chimes. The sparkling chimes, the open door, and the glow of a lit cigar in an upstairs window, convey the distinct impression that someone is home. As he nears, there are the sounds of two discrete voices; although their words are unintelligible, we can tell by inflection that they are cutting short a tense, but not argumentative, conversation. Something has been decided.

We PULL BACK, as Perry, in the background, steps onto the porch and passes the threshold.

FADE TO:

BLACK

CRAZY TRAIN TO HELL

By Walter Alter

a tale of two flaming eyeballs aimed down the rails
rails that actually came to a point up ahead
spitting boiler sparks nostrils filled with soot
pulling Banker's Grade hissing and clanking
thunderous smoke engulfs badland ghost towns
hangs over their valleys like a burning plague castle
the heavens had fallen woe coiled around the earth
every child's nightmare slipping in dung and offal
it's hard to make knowledge go away Buttercup
any piece of the infinite is still infinite
here's some taboo for the details the histories
a cabinet full of pain killers for your every move
it's a Dr. Jackyl Mr. Heil world in the 3 color psyche
the ancient gods still rule their madhouse heaven

holy warriors preaching hellstone and brimfire
sword point conversions gunpoint perversions
the carcasses are steppingstones cut feral shrieking
what quirk of an infinite being makes this necessary
petulant gods they were hemorrhaging stupidity
thought all the crazy angles were figured
I guess it's because rain is simpler than love
guess again was her habitual greeting
I've always loved you she soothed and pulled him in
death's boundary pounded until the bed broke
we were built to dance with the twinkling stars
even when they upside us like math bitches
up one side and down the aether
yes why not music in the air women at my feet
kept alive because they think I'm one of them
of course now I must convince them of this

his logo a cock and balls rampant on a field of clover
to announce one's rampant idiot self with
excuse this tangent world of intemperate merriment
everything ultimately a metaphor for everything else
the more you know the better off you is Buttercup
corollary the closer to the front lines the more accurate
luckily I'm assigned to support and morale
you never know what you're going to dream about
a powerful fool said the twisted tongue
struggling for ratings like any media
so rattle a few cages make the parrots squawk
the last thing he said was no time like the present
I'm in touch with my inner juvenile delinquent
both feet on the gas eyes aimed down the roadway
wearing all my masks all the time there is no me

MEATSACK MAUDIT

By Ron Garmon

From www.artslumla.com

Billy Li Nacht

Contemporary Oppression II: The Crackdown.

Lungfish Gallery

1010 Chung King Rd.

Los Angeles, 90012

Gala Performance Opening, Sept. 11, 2017. 9 p.m. – 1 a.m. Music by DJ 9 mm and DJ Busta Capo. Gallery hours 11 a.m. – 9 p.m., Wed.-Sun. and by appointment. Parking validated at Pacific Dim Sum on Naud St.

How far may one dangerous visionary push the envelope of transgressive art before the dread shithammer of *epater les bourgeoisie* knocks him to Sister Aimee Semple MacPhersonland? At least as far as one more daring tweak of shock-hungry Angeleno sensibilities, or as much is promised by tonight's wildly unorthodox performance piece preceding redneck *wunderkind* Nacht's latest at the Lungfish. The blizzard of abortive criminal

charges and ongoing lawsuits following last March's crucifixion

of a homeless man at LACMA raised the rakish young genius' public profile to rockstar levels, with cover stories in every major art publication, along with *Esquire*, *Newsweek* and *National Atrocity*. The boy wonder found an unlikely ally in President Sarah Palin's controversial L.O.G.O.S (Less Of Government in Our Society) initiative, which contains a little-known clause enabling U.S. private citizens to legally execute up to five enemy detainees, to be selected by lot out of the thousands now clogging prison cells in Gitmo, Atlanta, Leavenworth and new Alcatraz. "Instead of letting these five men die without meaning at the hands of our imperialist masters," spoke the artist from behind a knot of Uzi-toting Rolling 60s Crips at last month's heavily guarded press conference, "They will leave this world stylishly and as heroes in a statement that will echo across the planet and implicate not only

me, you and the entire art world, but everyone who watches it on Showtime or buys the DVD.”

“Now, *you* will be Big Brother,” taunted Nacht over the hullabaloo, sweeping angelic blond locks away from his trademark toothy grin, “Just watch.”

“Gaper” in Los Angeles BeatWeek , 9/13/14

... no doubt art-scene neophytes-like the present writer who normally couldn't find Chinatown with both hands and GPS- appreciated the full lights-and-sirens treatment by the LAPD on opening night. The one thing lacking in the fortified art-compounds in Culver City and along New Rodeo Drive is spontaneity- that thrill of risk taken simply by walking into a gallery and seeing something patently offensive and stupid -so the presence of floodlights, an LAPD checkpoint and no less than three unmarked attack helicopters circling in the sky promised much in the way of both. By the time we cleared security (and signed a redtape fistful of legal releases and

waivers) , the entire street had begun to rock like a pre-curfew warehouse party, the kind cover-charged Temporary Autonomous Zone police used to discourage, but Naughty Nacht has since co-opted. Once inside, the long brick rectangle of the Lungfish was bare except for bleachers hastily cobbled out of the greenest sub-commercial grade lumber. The space was disagreeably dark inside with rough hands and gunstocks deployed to push the incoming audience into the rough seating, where dresses ripped on exposed nails and here and there a foot went through a floorboard, adding scattered tumults of cursing to an already deafening hubbub. From the Funktion One system (reportedly salvaged from the Vanguard after that venue was partially destroyed in last year's Hollywood Riots) came the thunderous nu-dub of DJ 9 mm, laying down beats from some undisclosed deck and urging everyone to “Put yo' weight on it!” in a horribly squawky voice. The seats we were on rattled and swayed as dozens of overlubricated party-hardy types got up to dance and I began to fear injury until stage lights snapped on and a rough paint-

splattered curtain went up on a eerie tableau on the gallery floor. Five figures were bound for exhibit in various helpless postures while a half-dozen gangstas, starchy, heavy with bling and armed with automatic rifles, patrolled in front of the bleachers.

In the center of this designer *mishigas* stood Mr. Nacht, calmly fondling a shoulder weapon he described as a Hauser 212 assault rifle. The gun was heavy and impressive looking experimental shoulder arm the artist claimed was about to be deployed for use by our troops in China, touting its specifications in a rising monotone when a LED sign flashed the name MOHAMMAD HABIBI over a pilloried, bent-double detainee and a fat O.G. waddled over and snatched off the captive's hood as Nacht leveled the weapon. From the JumboPlasmatron overhead, we could see every twitch of Habbi's immobilized face until a sharp rifle crack pulped it, splitting open his head, tearing through his body and exploding his anus inside his prison-issue jumpsuit. Three-camera coverage caught

the prisoner's last twitches as Nacht continued on calmly talking of injustice and oppression over a vast, bracingly hideous audience roar. A few splattered patrons were predictably outraged, but were quickly pacified by security.

Shouldering the rifle, Nacht strode past AHMED HASSAN, then gaping pop-eyed inside a tall glass cylinder, to a tiny podium decorated with a single large ludicrously red button. The artist kept up his flat patter- sounding amusingly like a clichéd "activist" from a 1960s movie or some cashiered Prof on JailTV- with his words picking up speed as he described the annihilative properties of sulfuric acid. "Should I?" he asked puckishly and did, pressing the button and laughing with the rest of us as the cylinder began to fill from the floor up. Huessein cut a few funny capers dancing away from the stuff until his ragged stumps of feet gave out. Soon he was howling bloody foam as the crowd roared and even the O.G.s bowed. A comically loud fan bore the stench upward though the skylight as MARIHA ROJAS-LOPEZ dangled hand-tied and

tiptoe from a low stool, facebag puffing from exertion and the strain of metal guywire around her neck. The sack was ripped from her face only seconds before the stool was kicked away and the wretch heaved and bucked in air, her face discoloring, tongue lolling and eyes starting from their sockets. The crowd moaned and sighed giganatically when the hood was pulled off DEWAYNE GREENLEE's corpse; the poor bastard had died of heart failure. Nacht whipped out a clamshell cellphone (quaint touch!) and dialed up the detonation for the remote-controlled bomb in the detainee's belly anyway, taking a bow after a crowd-pleasing eruption.

"Last one," Nacht shouted, pausing before a blocky installation absurdly got up as an oversize microwave oven. REP. DENNIS KUCINICH, the final terrorist, could be glimpsed in nervous silhouette inside, his gangly physique exaggerated by the opaque glass. The artist pressed a button marked *Cook*, lights went on within the "oven" and went on to make sundry kitschy remarks on the subject of democracy, most of which were

howled down by rowdy patrons chanting "Republic!" I was busy scribbling notes and almost missed the denouement, a heroic *ka-boom* that heralded an aesthetically pleasing splatter. Treason was once again made odious, as well as gloriously messy and offensive.

A true account of the afterparty would be unfit for a family webpaper. Suffice to say, the whole thing went well beyond the bounds of reasonable irony. Kudos are due Nacht, the Department of Homeland Security Public Art Division and the LAPD Spectacle Commission. One more night like this and the downtown L.A. art scene will once again glimpse the Higher Solvency.

Runs through Veterans Day.

— 30 —

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