



THE FOUR HORSEMEN

BY

RORY HUGHES

WHY I LIKE IT: *Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes...*

Rory Hughes', "The Four Horseman," is a satiric, apocalyptic, ride into the growing global fascism that is all too easy to account for and dismiss. Complacent in our comfort, these horsemen come as representatives of our self-satisfaction and indignance at having our rights drained from under us with a smile and a cold beer – or whatever bottle your escapism comes in.

The end of the world is nigh, but we've all got TVs to watch it burn while those doing the ruining strip mine what's left of the resources and humanity and tell us to like it as those at the top will be where the grass is greener while we waste away in the dream – because why not, it was all going to be this way anyway. When we buy and sell in lies, the swords of the righteous do not

come to those who have committed wrong but for those who are the weakest – they're easier to strike down and probably cost less to do so.

Hughes' work reminds me of Cormac McCarthy but with an actual sense of wordplay. Dread is concealed in style, irony is peppered throughout the dystopia, and satire infatuates the clear comparisons to modern society.

Stay frosty, reader, our comeuppance will not come from the minority of jack-ass conservatives we rant against, but from ourselves because we let them...or perhaps already have.

Enjoy this story – the metaphor is palpable and the fight is still always the fight.

WHY I LIKE IT: *Senior Editor CHARLES writes...Short but not so sweet. Language as much as content defines this corrosive satire of the current sickness of the American heart. It's a scalding Swiftian take on the pillage of democracy, and with it, everything we live for and watch die around us. Five Stars*

QUALITY QUOTABLE (for the love of language...)

The Shapeshifter entered their homes, whispering gendercide to sleeping children, grabbing their junk and twisting, telling them it was not theirs; that it belonged to Deciders; and their identities were forever under dispute until some great inflammation would grapple them from their own pitiful decisions.

According to the Last Testament, The Four Horsemen were bisected by two heretical notions: he who defied God—this included the Antitheist and the Shapeshifter—and he who played God—comprising the Abortionist and the Alchemist. Those who defied God appeased Satan and those who impersonated God were made in Satan's image—an effigy reversed, for time's arrow infernal quivers and warps as it thrusts away from the heavens. Plasmic stars weighed heavy on their pilgrimage; their steeds, indefatigable; huge beasts, their heads fifteen feet high, broken and subject to the harsh training of Rudiobus. The Plagues had turned the ground to a bed of corpses writhing with homovorous insects; hooves hammered bones into the dirt; bugs bloated with pestilence popped under their footfall in tiny crimson bursts; beads of rain on the twisting topology of equine muscle glittering in the dark; eyes as lidless as their masters': no sleep 'til the Final Solution was complete for the interminable riders, angels of Death with vantablack wings, eyes of pale fire, leprous flesh barely able to house skeletons shrouded in jumentous mist like ammoniac cloaks.

The Antitheist rode a black horse, dressed in robes of black himself; lanterns hung from the saddle of his steed, the Antitheist was a murderer of disciples and evangelicals—a pyromaniac bent on burning to the ground every ecclesiastical structure, every house of God, every place of worship, every dominion that lived under the bent judiciary of some fattened beggarman.

The Shapeshifter rode a horse chameleonic, a polychromatic beast whose colours changed with the seasons of caprice: colours of Earthly rainbows, antihuman hues, some spotted and unwarrantedly copyrighted by the Seal Keepers in a failed attempt to coerce commissions from the Shapeshifter. Under his cloak were scars where there once existed the breasts of a woman. His task was to deforest the garden of Adam and Eve, and call to higher Gods; ancient Gods who scowled and threw vitriol like lightning into Christian heavens,

pulling out the guts of Woman and foie-grasing them down the throat of Man; the disgust of the Gods was an imp in the barbed rosarium of the Shapeshifter's loathing.

The Abortionist rode a horse as red as the blood that coursed through its veins; as for his its master, he was bloodless for it had been sucked dry in utero by the daemon Leyak, his antifather; lifesbloodless and pale himself, it was his steed who pumped the liquids he so loathed; great rusty forceps in one hand, he strove to cut every cord prematurely; ripping bairn from mother before God had granted his blessing.

The Alchemist rode a blue horse; and what hung from the steed's saddle were countless unholy potions, that so often smashed against the ribs of the horse, toxic fumes trailing through dusks of apricot sky and blackened trees; posing as a medic he strove to poison the world; what he posed as antidotes for ills were really that for the Human Condition.

The Four Horsemen sought to rid the world of worldself in their own capacities; drunk on Satan's toast, bacchanalia; stand tall the triptychs of Art Ancien; carnal spirit of a Goat with four eyes, eight legs; arachnoid young of daemons whose milk would choke the good people of the village, the town and the city. They rode in formation of Hades's choreography, Hell on sixteen hooves and eight feet booting ribs; heavy pace towards the Citadel called home by good people, honest people, people with neither duplicity nor malice in their rotting hearts.

Amongst them, under the heat of the incoming disaster they supposed was natural by definition, they assigned the Pure Warrior to protect them from the heresy that bared its rotten teeth. What they didn't know was that the Four Horsemen had planned a suicide mission. Upon entering the Citadel, the Antitheist went to burning all the Houses of Gods, launching his flaming urns at the cathedrals, charring the fortresses, and the people, their shoes stuck Dresdenly to the tarmac, had nowhere to fly but through archways; pews and altars smouldering, spires alight.

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The Abortionist ran wild with his great rusty forceps, storming the houses of women plump with young, maiming the flowers, ripping from cunt to arshole, delivering the balutal stillborns in the same fashion as Caesar had been birthed from Aurelia.

The alchemist wandered the streets, drunk on his own elixirs, goading the people to spend what equalled two loaves of bread and a pot of honey on a poison disguised as an antidote for the Plagues.

The Pure Warrior stood at the entry of the Citadel, steel blade in the sheath on his back.

The Four Horsemen rode towards him at great pace, the Antitheist threw a burning pot before their stride and all five, Warrior and Horsemen, burned for half a day; melting guts of the steeds spilling through their bloated cages of bonework and as they were pulled down into the Underworld, they seized in agony.

It was an accelerationist cause, to confuse and through their demise bring true Apocalypse; babes flooded the Earth and land, sea and skies assumed a dermatose quilt, and all humanity suffered War from those born into it, Conquest, for those descended from Narcissus, Famine for the rations of the Earth were depleted, and of course, Death: for they multiplied and succumbed to more Plagues and those with the most riches left to other Worlds, leaving the masses to suffocate under the flesh of their own multiplicity.

Who was the lamb of God, said the Antitheist. Christian warrior, who broke open four seals, and through his own failures brought the End; but so, our job is done.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *The Four Horsemen' is a bitesize biblical tale about right-wing paranoia. As a side note, Metallica did a great song titled 'The Four Horsemen', and Greek prog rock band Aphrodite's Child did an even better song titled 'The Four Horsemen', from their 1972 conceptual double album 666 (The Apocalypse of John, 13/18). The following is a spoken word section from another track on that album, 'Loud, Loud, Loud'.*

The day the circus horses will stop turning around
Running fast through the green valleys
We'll sing and cry and shout
Loud, loud, loud, loud

AUTHOR BIO: Rory Hughes is a British writer and music journalist. His challenging short stories have appeared in publications such as BlazeVOX, Angel Rust, Fleas on the Dog, A Thin Slice of Anxiety and Squawk Back. His novel, Theseus 34, is to be published in 2024 by Incunabula Media.

