

**P-L-E-A-S-E !**

Do Not



the  
Ordinary Man

OUCH!

By

Matthew F. Amati

**WHY I LIKE IT:** *Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes... Matthew Amati's, "Please Do Not Poke the Ordinary Man," is dystopia, and I enjoy that. Dystopia is a lovely conceit, an amalgam of metaphor and lie that reveals truth. In Amati's story, ordinary works as a referential idea to what normalcy is and we've the likes of Orwell, Huxley, Bradbury, Vonnegut, McCarthy, Atwood, or Dick and more to prove that it's a genre well suited for satire, anxiety, and further examination of our present. I think that's why dystopia is so disturbing, it's all too easy to superimpose a fiction upon reality. In this story, an ordinary man is treated no better than a carnival sideshow, and our protagonist goes to take a look, is neither impressed nor let down, and goes home (here too is one of Amati's greatest strengths, the tone of the piece goes all the way down into the character's bones). The definition setting or time isn't relevant in the sense that the plot could happen, has happened, probably did happen, at all points in a possible timeline. The depth of this world that is created is bountiful. I like "Please Do Not Poke the Ordinary Man" because it is thought provoking, clever, and adds some more weight to a long standing discipline. Well done*

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

I recalled the instructional film. When confronted by an Ordinary Man... I shielded my navel with a terse gesture of the left palm. I quivered. I forgot everything I'd ever known about the *Bhagavad Gita*. They can smell *Bhagavad Gita* knowledge, and when they do, they will pounce.

#### Please Do Not Poke The Ordinary Man

"An Ordinary Man!" Fiona squeaked, and my neck tingled. We couldn't pay the nine cents fast enough. Would he loom, would he swoon, would he sway like a saltimbanque, or prance like Pulcinella? With what sinister undulations would he consume a plate of peas?

We were utterly disappointed. Far less ordinary than we'd expected, the Ordinary Man slumped in his director's chair and tossed rocks into an oil drum. Fiona poked him with a stick, which made me nervous because a large sign forbade this. At the third poke, the Ordinary Man snarled and turned his body in circles. He turned his body four times. Then he did what the florid posters had promised -- he recited the names of some groceries. "Pineapples," the Ordinary Man said, "soup. Frozen shrimp, a toilet brush."

"Hooray," we said, wholly without verve.

"John," Fiona said to me, "do you think we'll be allowed to feed him?"

"I don't think so. They have a specialist come in and do it." If we'd waited, we might have seen the Ordinary Man dine on mashed potatoes and a chop, but we didn't stick around.

A few nights later, we heard the Ordinary Man had escaped. Reports were confused and varied. It was clearly a case of serious negligence. The Ordinary Man's imaginary boundary had been left unchalked, or a keeper had read him works of a Chinese philosopher that were not to his liking. Librarians were called out to search the environs. Their winsome hearse with its pulsating klieg lights screeched up and down our neighborhood. We were advised to remain outdoors, because, in a similar incident in Orlando, an

Ordinary Man had hidden in a family's ashtray and emerged while they were all watching Gilligan's Island in naked sweaty ecstasy. The carnage had been horrific. So we couldn't enter our own home! On a Tuesday, no less! Were we supposed to drink from the birdbath? Who would monitor the Beverly Hillbillies and keep them out of trouble?

We made the best of it, but after the sun had chased the moon around Ursa Major a few times, Fiona grew restless, and said she was just going indoors to paint the light switches. I waited by the artillery depot. Fiona hadn't been gone five minutes when I heard screams.

Fiona! All our doors were locked! So I went in through a neighbor's door. Fiona was perched on the side of our lava-filled borehole, wearing nothing but a foil bodysuit. The Ordinary Man stood on the armchair, as casually as if he'd been waiting for the mail!

I recalled the instructional film. When confronted by an Ordinary Man... I shielded my navel with a terse gesture of the left palm. I quivered. I forgot everything I'd ever known about the Bhagavad Gita. They can smell Bhagavad Gita knowledge, and when they do, they will pounce.

The librarians arrived to fetch the Ordinary Man. They entered our house through the electrical sockets. They wore blue coveralls. The largest librarian, whom I suspected of being my father, seized me with a pair of tongs and began dragging me to a wheeled cage. "I am not the Ordinary Man," I said. "You are fetching the wrong construct."

The librarian only said "How soft upon the ear falls the long sonata of the dead!"

They put me in the Ordinary Man's enclosure. ("A mistake, I'm telling you!") They said I should perform the sort of tricks an Ordinary Man would do, to please the visitors. I stalked the enclosure, foaming at the eye and throwing opinions at the citizenry. "Film is the raincoat of a satisfied aesthetic," I said, "a Briton prefers other foods to rice."

I tried more Ordinary Man tricks. I developed cancer of the foot, and then cancer of someone else's foot. I made an extravagant film about the lives of five thousand individual cowboys, but it flopped with the Danish public. Other tricks failed, embarrassingly. For example, I couldn't get a nail through a martyr's wrist and I had to resort to Crazy Glue. "It's all right," the holy man said, "everything is possible, but also nothing is."

I hear Fiona married the real Ordinary Man. She always did want somebody more ordinary. So be it. Someday the old shack we call the world will fall apart. Mother of all accidental fires! I'd give anything to feel the pulse in a saint's skinny arm, to get properly lost at sea, to stalk the dollar store with flashing eyes and floating hair, and to sink my teeth into childless men's thighs! I'm surrounded by criminals, paupers, maniacs, but it's not fair, not fair, they have all the best tattoos and I only have the words "PLEASE DO NOT" stippled across my neck in fading purple.

END

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** *Things like "Ordinary Man" come about when I'm trying to work from insipid writing prompts. I think this one was inspired by "A famous shoe designer asks you to quit your job and be his latest model. Write him a letter." For better material in this vein, I recommend E.M. Cioran, Ubu Roi, John Ashbery, Flann O'Brien, Charles Simic, S. Clay Wilson, Angela Carter, Jean Arp, Tom O'Bedlam, Donald Barthelme, William Langland, Lucian, John Ashbery, and the Batraxomyomachia.*

**AUTHOR BIO:** Matthew F. Amati arose from primordial slime, damp with Creation's generative humors, eyeless as the lamprey, ravenous as the barramundi, inscrutable as the Giant Squid. He lives in

a quiet suburb and plays the banjo. His fiction has appeared in more than 50 print and online publications including *Flash Fiction Online*, *Daily Science Fiction*, *Cosmic Roots & Eldritch Shores*, *The Café Irreal*, and others. You can find his diffidently-updated website here: [www.mattamati.com](http://www.mattamati.com)