

# THE GREAT HAMBURGER ARTIST

*By Jon Fain*

**WHY WE LIKE IT:** *Whoooooaaaa! Six dudes fell off their chairs when we read this one! Like, put wonky idea, inspiration overload, strato-style (as in stratosphere), voice to kill for, into a litro-blender (or prose grinder if you're old fashioned) and you won't believe the fucken HAMBURGER you get. This guy is bardo-butcher and abbatoir artist rolled up into one big beef-fisted rissole that he shoves in your face. We thinks, we thinks also a devastatingly not so straight-faced javelin thrust at the contemporary art scene and maybe a certain apex gaga wearing a meat dress. Expansive concept, lean, hard, aerobic prose. Five stars.*

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He'd started small. Paramecium. Then tried worms, mollusks, cephalopods. Worked up to cats and dogs. Feeling dead-ended, he borrowed a neighbor's corgi to eat that bull mess.

Then he got human. He got good at facial features: sharp-edged noses and heavy brows. He molded the meat, found form in the fat, learned the limits of the lean. The best ones he lacquered and gave an appropriate name.

His muse, always so positive, post-facto began to challenge his choices. Before this, she didn't mock, she believed in him back when.

Now, each day, arriving with his coffee, she percolated with negative space.

*Sitting Bull? Are you serious?*

Still, he persisted, one might say evolved! High-def, fat-focused videos of patties on the flattop, bubbling in their own juice. A series of chopped meat murals that admittedly took a few people off their feed, but was otherwise copacetic. Then back to good old ground chuck, this time with a nautical theme: bovine bosuns, Her Majesty's Herefords on the high seas, life-sized, full-uniformed, sitting, some standing in back, like for a formal portrait? Nobody got it.

He broke this last rejection down, lopped off their heads, made them walk the plank like chickens. He clumped and packed USDA Choice into plastic bags, drove out of the city and tossed them at the back door of a suburban chain restaurant that specialized in the Hum Burger with Secret Sauce. He peeled out, wipers streaking grease across the glass. The next day, flummoxed, needing closure, he called them up for a takeout HBSS, but by the time he did, the kitchen was closed, and he cried into his phone.

So, he did what he had to do, tried to moo on. Listened to his muse. Punched in every day with landscape, seascape, treescape: the usual diddle.

But he wasn't happy. He'd whetted his edge. Muse schmooze!

She did not take it well. He responded in kind.

When the guy delivering heirloom groats at the bodega next door hauled him off, she was anointed with his latest raw material, only a cowgirl portion of what he'd hand-ground to create what would have been his masterpiece. And maybe, as she ran out the door, he had.

Before the smart phones snapped, before the police carted him away, she promised he would never forget her.

The rest of us sure didn't. First, jaypegs of this chick covered in grass-fed, on the sidewalk like a downer cow, flew into every device. Then with the subsequent trial, you couldn't escape her as she poured of out of every media hole, firm grip of Herr Zeitgeist's sack.

The tabloids used their best court cartoonist to sketch his shame. Headline-focused as ever, they dubbed him, as they do with all the losers, and the rest of us served it mockingly back and forth until it stuck.

But really?

Bullish, like most fools, he became convinced he knew what he was doing. That he was one of the lucky ones. And maybe he was right; critics, historians and the rest of us be damned. He'd worked his desperate magic, and at the end, at least, acquired a name.

He was branded, but good.

END

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** *I wrote this originally for a contest with a 500 word limit. After a no show in the contest I tried it at a few other places that seemed like they might not mind a little wise-assery, then put it aside. When I eventually pulled it back up, I went even more "meaty" than its original version. As the saying goes, "You can go hog... or you can go whole hog." (Apologies for the mixed meat metaphor.)*

*Influences on me for this type of approach: T. Coraghessan Boyle, Hunter S. Thompson, and Bukowski. They bring attitude, precise language, word play, and sense of humor, things I strive for in many of the things I write.*

**BIO:** *Jon Fain has published dozens of stories over the years, in literary, commercial and web-based magazines. Some of his fiction can still be found lurking in the archives of Menda City Review, Word Riot, anderbo, Pequin, DiddleDog, and others. Awards and recognition include honorable mention in the Winning Writers Sports Fiction/Non-Fiction contest; finalist for the Sandstone Short Fiction Prize (collection); and winner VerbSap Burning Books contest. He lies low in Massachusetts.*