

The Blotter

January 2004

It's Amazing How Much We Have in Common When We Start Admitting Things

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EXPLICIT CONTENT
ADVISORY
THIS ISSUE CONTAINS
BAD LANGUAGE AND
DEPICTS
UNSAVORY EVENTS

Special all-Blotter-staff issue!

***Thrill* to Marty Smith's "Paper Cuts"! *Chill* with a new story by Johnny Pence! *Get stupid ill* with J.P.'s photos of the Boxerworks Collection of wicked wicker motorcycles! *Fetch me my pills* so I can understand the poetry of Jenny Haniver! *Have your fill* of a dumb little piece about Things and Their Drinks!**

plus, the good ol' dream journal

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This magazine may contain typos or bad words

Items Worth Mentioning from the desk of Johnny Pence

Get to Work, You Lazy Sacks

Between the time the December issue came out and the deadline for this issue, we didn't get a single submission of anything longer than a 15-line poem. I can't fill sixteen pages like that. This magazine exists not only to entertain you lazy townie artsy-fartsies, but also to publish your work. Gimme. Or else.

So for this issue, we decided to indulge our own egos and only publish our own stuff. I'd actually have liked another couple of months to let my story ferment; I don't think it's quite ready, but it fills up a couple pages. Marty can always be counted on to read something weird and write about it, and Jenny can cough up a poem like nothing if she has cabbage for lunch, so it's no problem this time. But in the future, I'd appreciate it if you at least sent in submissions.

Or money. Or something. You should be ashamed of yourself, really.

Goodbye, Cruel World

I have dreadful news everybody. My 1968 Ford LTD, my grandmother's car, the one with the 390 cu. inch engine, the one I wrote about in an early issue, finally died. I feel rotten because I had been halfheartedly trying to sell her to someone who had a garage and could take care of her. The fatal problem was frame rust, which I knew about, but never suspected that the ass-end would just break loose one day when I was coming back from the Kroger. Damn it. Breaks my heart. And, I guess, my car.

Filth and Foul

The story that starts on the next page has horrible language in it. I apologize if that offends you, but that's just the way this story had to be told. It also features drug abuse (Because really, is any drug "use" not "abuse"? Make no mistake, the evil marijuana is a killer! And high fructose corn syrup, too!), poverty, insanity, smoking, alcohol use (note the distinction), and poop. Maybe it's best if you just don't even read it and look at the pictures on pp. 8-9 instead. I'd hate for you to get upset.

—ediot@blotterrag.com

Scat

by Johnny Pence

She was the only person I've ever met who made me instantly uncomfortable, right away. It's not as if she did anything or said anything, or even looked at me funny. She just gave me the creeps.

"Yeah, I been collecting for about fifteen years," she said, leaning back in the cracked Naugahyde stool. "It's pretty much what I do." Once upon a time, she was probably a knockout, but any good looks had faded starkly and quickly.

She cracked open a Natural Light and pointed at it. I declined as politely as I could, but my distaste was probably obvious. I was very much ill at ease, and was perhaps mildly awed to be speaking with her. My strange gut feelings, her appearance and reputation, all combined in that foul-smelling and dingy trailer to create an atmosphere of bizarre, stifling tension. It is no figure of speech when I say that I genuinely wondered for a second if I was dreaming.

I was in the presence of MonksNun666, as she's known to Usenet and a half-dozen online jazz bulletin boards, the most authoritative voice on collectible jazz vinyl I've ever come across. In a discussion forum, MonksNun666 ends arguments. She knows every track on every album pressed in Amsterdam or New York or Havana, and she knows them because she owns them.

And here I was, gawking at her library. Perhaps "library" is the wrong word. A library conjures images of

space, of vastness, of retrievability. The albums here were stacked in crates against the end of the trailer, essentially creating a cube of vinyl that reached to the ceiling and spanned the walls. This solid mass reduced the space that the trailer architects had planned to be a living room to barely enough space to stand in the center and begin pulling boxes out of the way. The room smelled like decades of cigarettes and Ben Gay, like pork fat and short-haired dogs, hardly archival conditions for some of these rare and amazingly valuable discs.

I was there because I'm a college-radio jazz DJ. I'm not great, I'm not especially knowledgeable, and I've really only been serious about jazz for a year or two. When I wanted to expand my show, I started poking around online. That's where I found MonksNun666. She's not helpful to newbies, and she's not courteous to anyone. She is a shameless scavenger, always looking to buy more records and to buy them cheap.

"So, you got a radio show, huh?" she mumbled, coaxing a Marlboro Light out of the box, holding it like a dangerous and unfamiliar thing.

"Oh yeah? Well, It's just—"

"*Just?* What's it *just?* Just another clichéd greatest-hits jazz program on another low-wattage, crummy college radio station? Somebody should either educate you pricks or exterminate the lot of you. Makes me want to puke."

Well now. I'd heard through some

The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

i don't hate anybody but nazis

I am in Berlin on the morning after the Night of the Long Knives, when Hitler's followers killed off their opponents (some of whom were gay) and seized control of the Nazi party. As I walk down a street, I note the bodies of murdered Nazi homosexuals falling out of upstairs windows, and think "Ah ha: the Night of Long Knives has just happened, Hitler has taken power, I should leave the country pronto." So I go to the Bahnhof to book a Wagons-Lits sleeper to Paris. But the girl behind the ticket window says I have to fill out this survey before I can leave the country. It's a multiple-choice questionnaire, with illustrations like old 19th-century engravings, slightly greenish in color. One shows a group of people, white and Negro, naked and squabbling around a palm tree, with questions like "Is this an appropriate thing for a white person to be doing? for a Negro? an appropriate position for a white to be in relative to a Negro?" Another shows a row of noses of different shapes, presumably ranging from "Aryan" to "Jewish," and asks "Which are more appropriate for a person to have?" I realize with dismay that this survey is to find out where I stand on race issues. If I answer the questions the way they want, I'll be betraying my deepest convictions; but if I answer according to my convictions, they might not let me leave the country.

—M.S., Durham

Please send excerpts from your dream journals to Jenny at mermaid@blotterrag.com. If nothing else, we love to read them. We won't publish your whole name.

friends at the radio station that MonksNun666 lived out in Cloverdale, which is only twenty minutes from my house, and I felt a compulsion to meet her. I wasn't looking for a guru or a mentor—I actually disliked her fairly strongly from her posts. It was just an irresistible pull. That much vinyl, that much *historic* vinyl, all in one place—I just had to see it. I can't explain it any better than that. So, rather than show up empty-handed, I had a gift: a CD burned from the soundboard tape of Dave Brubeck playing a little club in Paris. It's really smoking, and as far as I know, damn close to unique. I burned the CD from an old girlfriend who stole the only copy of the soundboard tape from her ex when they broke up.

But MonksNun666 didn't have a CD player.

So I was left in the exceptionally awkward position of having shown

up at an unfriendly stranger's house with a useless gift, with nothing to say but a few feeble compliments about the record collection I was too ashamed to approach.

"What's that?" she asked when the gravel in the driveway outside crunched? I heard an engine cut off and a door shut.

She squinted and stared at her cigarette, "FedEx? FedEx."

Then another car door slammed and there was some commotion outside.

"No, damn it. It ain't FedEx."

My skin was crawling. I wondered if I could say anything to shift the conversation—well, not so much shift it as create it. Or was this some kind of Master/Disciple test where she was putting me in an uncomfortable silence to see how I reacted, to see just how much I was willing to put up with before she let me look through her records? But did I even

have the stomach to touch them? I was at the edge of fear. I wanted to flee. My stomach was nervous and starting to cramp. I looked at the stacks and wondered, and the trailer door opened.

A tall, thin, dangerous-looking man came in, wiping GoJo off his hands with a shop towel. I was stunned; was this a jealous husband? That would be appropriate. Would I die here? Based only on the feeling in my stomach, it felt like I could. Someone should die in a crime of passion in this trailer.

"Hey Francie"—ah, her name is Francie—"last time you drove the Taurus, did you notice any problem with get-up-and-get?"

"Hey, hey. Hi. I'm—" I started.

"I didn't notice nothing," Francie said to her beer.

"When did you drive it?" the man asked.

"God, I don't know! This morning? What the fuck? Leave me alone!"

"No problem accelerating? No smells?" he asked, angry, impatient.

I smelled something. There was gas, but there was also something rotten, something fecal.

"Lookit, Francie, that damn Ford was just squirting gas onto the engine from the fuel line. You gotta let me know when you feel stuff go wrong like that. It had to be just about dead on the road; you won't getting no gas to the injectors. It ain't safe to drive around squirting gas on a hot engine. I smelled it when I was walking in and I fixed it in just a second. It was real easy—

"This bitch ain't got no manners neither," the man said, interrupting himself, offering a hand that had been wiped, but was still greasy and

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Terminally Curious

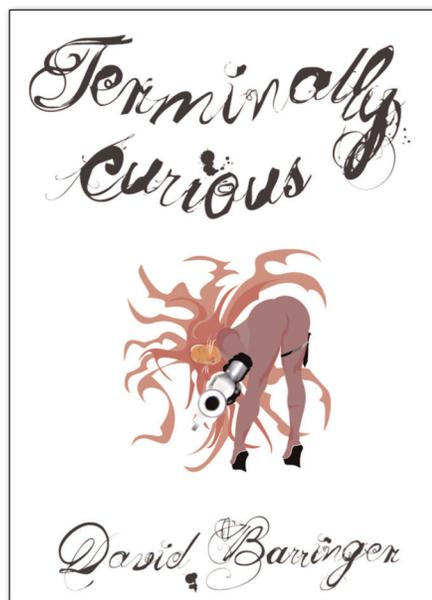
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GoJoey. "I'm Dave." I took his hand out of fear.

"Ha. Ha. Hey. Thanks, I—" what was that smell?

"Give it a fucking rest, Dave," she said to her cigarette butt as she smashed it out. "What am I *supposed* to feel when I'm driving that heap of shit?"

"Whatever, you dumb cunt. You never feel nothing," Dave said with the practiced fearlessness that comes from speaking horribly to someone for years.

"So," he turned to me, "you here to see the records? We get college-boys like you around here every now and then. Has she showed you any? Played any for you?" His eyes were huge behind strong glasses.

"Uh—"

"Don't expect her to show you nothin'. I don't know the last time she—"

"Shut the fuck up, Dave," she

hissed, and Dave shut the fuck up. He collected a long lock-blade knife from a pocket and began working the crud out from under his nails. When he was done with that, he tapped the knife on the Formica and looked at me, unblinking.

After an uncomfortable silence that could have been ten seconds or three years, I put my hands on the Formica, stood up and stammered, "Well, I guess I better—"

"Come on outside and let me show you something, buddy," Dave said, grabbing my arm. I tried to swallow, but my throat was packed with cotton. What was going on? Okay, so it really was possible that I could die here. I tried to say something, but my voice cracked like a thirteen-year-old's. At this point, I realized that it was *Dave's smell* that I'd been catching whiffs of for the past few minutes. I thought it might have been a rancid cat box, or maybe something fetid in the refrigerator, but it was him.

Good God, what *was* that smell?

I was pulled up and out the door, down the steps of the trailer, all in the slow-motion anxiety of the moments before a car crash or an ass-kicking. I noticed the blurring tattoos on his forearms: an indistinct dagger-through-the-skin on one and a classic prison cross-on-Golgotha on the other. I noticed a couple dead plants in terra cotta pots. I saw the clothes on the line. I saw large dog paw prints in greasy red clay. What was happening? Where was I being taken?

We reached the Taurus; a chipping, formerly red paint job yielded to primer gray on the hood and fenders. It reeked of gas, and the Dave-smell was stronger out here. It

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was about lunchtime, July, maybe 90 degrees and on the way up, dry as my mouth. Dave still had my arm, but reached inside the car, grabbed something, and dragged us both behind the trailer.

Still in slow-motion, I remember seeing that the living-room end of the trailer bent and now drooped precipitously off the jackstand. The weight of all those records had buckled the frame.

Dave spun me around to face him. I still couldn't swallow or speak. I thought I might pass out in the heat and anxiety. I still expected to be murdered for some reason, or no reason, and it hurt me that I wasn't facing it more bravely. At least if I could have spoken I could have said something noble. But then again, I could have much more easily been reduced to begging for my life.

Dave produced a pint bottle of Jim Beam and a half-burnt joint. He offered me the bottle, which I eagerly took. I pulled a couple times while he lit the half-joint with a little Bic lighter that kept petering out in the hot breeze.

"Most important thing, bud: don't listen to that bitch. Don't respect her. Don't care about those records. They all she has to tell the world who she is, and without them she ain't dick. If you don't give in and act like she's hot shit for having all them records, maybe she'll take a look at herself—"

"So that's what you brought me out here for? To tell me that?"

"No, she don't let me get high in the house. Says the smoke's bad for the records. You see how much *she* smokes in there? Bitch. No, I'da told you all this right in front of her fuck-

ing stupid face...." He handed me the little joint and I took it, my throat feeling a lot better after a whiskey treatment. I gave the joint a once-over to make sure I wasn't smoking love boat or putting my fingers on Dave's slobber or anything, and I almost missed the expression on his face. Behind the terribly distorting glasses, he almost had a tear welling up.

"... What kills me is that she used to be really great. Pretty, smart, good dancer, funny, and she had a *heart* inside her, a soul. Now she's just hollow and stupid, and it's them damn records that made her that way.

"I used to think she was something special—ain't nobody around here listen to anything that ain't on KIX Country. Them records is what got me interested in her—well that and she was *alive* back then."

"Damn," I coughed to him, about her, about the joint, about his situation. I handed it back.

"It didn't happen all at once, but it happened. She started buying records that she wouldn't never listen to. She still ain't even heard most of what's in there. She started getting phone calls in the middle of the night from people in Romania or Goddamn Luxembourg, wanting to buy something from her, for a lot of money too, but she wouldn't sell nothing. She stopped working, but she kept wanting to buy more. That's why I took the job at the diaper service ..." Ah-ha! That was the smell.

"... it pays pretty good if you can put up with baby shit all day in the heat—and at least babies are alive. Mommas come out to drop off this week's bag of shit, and the little monkey's on her hip laughing or crying or

doing something. I don't want to sound like a sissy, but I love babies."

"Damn."

"So you understand why I hate it when people want to respect her. She's nothing but those records. People come here on goddamn pilgrimages, bringing her gifts and shit. She don't deserve none of it. Maybe she did when she was just Francie, and I loved Francie. But now that she's MonksNun666, that's all she is. I don't even know, she's like a ghost or something ... no, a ghost is a soul without a body; she's a body without a soul. It leaves me here all alone, but worse. If I was alone, I would take care of my own shit. She just messes it up," he said, pouring some turpentine into a little empty coffee can and dropping a ruined paint brush in it. "Trifling. Everything here is ruined, and it's all mine. She just leaves shit half-done and walks away, back to the computer."

It worked out that I got the last little hit off the joint and tossed it absently at the foundation of the trailer. I looked up, newly stoned, trying to get my bearings, trying to get my head around where I was and what I was doing there. I wondered about whether I could drive home. Sure as shit, I was going to drive out of there, and soon. Dave punched me playfully in the arm and pointed to the main road of the trailer park where the FedEx truck was kicking up dust, fishtailing in the gravel. Every dog in a wide radius around us went apeshit.

"Here it comes. You know what she's got today?"

"She said something about FedEx."

"Today we're getting a studio

pressing of the Chick Webb Orchestra with Ella God-Damn Fitzgerald singing 'A-Tisket, A-Tasket' in 1937. You know what that means?"

I was stoned. I might've known, but I was just smiling and nodding at that point.

"That song was Ella's first big break, what made her famous. She was just riding on Chick Webb's coat-tails back then. He was a bigshot band leader—not to mention a *little hunchbacked dwarf!*" Dave said this last hunching over and making a gruesome face. "But he was sickly and he died. Everybody knows who Ella is. Hardly anybody ever heard of Chick Webb."

"Yeah? Wow."

"No, that ain't the 'wow.' The 'wow' is that 'A-Tisket' was released in 1938. This recording in the truck is something from the studio; apparently Chick Webb was sick and fucked up the drums and didn't like Ella's voice on this recording and scrapped it. They released the real deal the next year. The feller who sold it to Francie said you can hear Chick Webb cussing at the end."

"Cool."

"And that ain't even the 'cool' part! The 'cool' is that Ella forgot the words—this is the first recording of her scatting! But Chick Webb was such a hardass he only wanted the lyrics. She started that doodly-oot shit and Chick went nuts! It made him so mad he had to go to the hospital for a couple weeks after this session."

"Wow."

"You said it, brother."

"So you like this music?" I asked, forgetting myself.

"Me? Shit no. Skynyrd. But I figure if all this junk is bleeding me dry, I ought to know a little bit about it. Maybe once the bitch dies of lung cancer or malnutrition I can sell some of it."

"Not to mention what it's doing to your house." I joked, pointing at the bent trailer frame. He looked at me hard and cold, then laughed a little.

"This ain't no house. It's a trailer."

The FedEx guy got the package—which looked like something you'd transport human eyes or plutonium in—and walked up to the door. Dave waved. The FedEx guy nodded, left the package on the doorstep, and left.

"Watch this," Dave said as he tried to get a couple more drops out of the empty pint bottle.

The FedEx guy drove away, the dogs quieted, and still nothing stirred from inside the trailer. I wondered what I was watching for. I kicked a big, dry turd in the dust, almost too big to have come from a dog, and I pondered this. After a couple minutes, Francie opened the door, looked all around like a prairie dog, and snatched the package greedily. Dave laughed, "Better get back inside bitch, before the sun burns your skin off!"

She flipped us both off and screamed "Fuck YOU!" way too loud, shaking her head violently.

I felt the car keys in my pocket and started walking to my car. I couldn't wait to leave, and leave quickly. It was time to scam. I looked down at the dry turd I'd been kicking, maybe wishing it farewell, and breathed in the air of gasoline, diaper-methane, and burning grass—

Burning grass?

The roach from that joint had smoldered up into a little smoking smudge, about the size of a half-dollar. I walked over to stomp it out, and as I approached, the smudge met up with a greasy pool of discarded motor oil soaking into more dried grass.

"Shit," I giggled, "now that's a fire!"

I began stomping that fire, and it spread to the turpentine, then to the gas. Time for giggling was over. Time for leaving had been delayed.

"Francie! Get the fire extinguisher!" Dave called, trying to beat the fire out with his shirt.

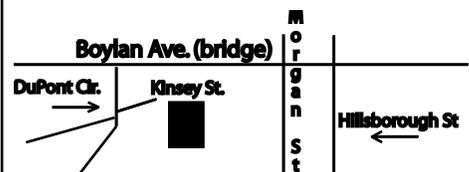
"Fuck you!" she yelled from inside.

"I'm serious, you dumb bitch! Get the fucking fire extinguisher!"

The fire was underneath the hood of the Taurus and the rubber belts



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the boxerworks collection



bottom picture, the lineup (left to right):
a **wicker boxer-type** (that is, horizontally opposed twin-cylinder) engine w/ sidecar rig; a real **1951 BMW R67**; a **wicker older-American-looking V-twin**, w/ telescopic forks, rear suspension; **1973 BMW R75/5**, "not exactly stock," not for sale; **wicker American-looking V-twin** w/ saddlebags, light bar, tach, and springer forks.

this page, top row:

left: detail of wicker V-twin engine, clutch cable, gearbox.

right: front to back: the older-looking wicker V-twin; the '51 R67, the weird wicker boxer w/ sidecar.

everything shown here (except Nathan's '73 R75/5) is for sale.

www.boxerworks.com

nathan@boxerworks.com





In the countryside outside of Athens, GA, there's a fairly renowned establishment specializing in the service, repair, and restoration of older "boxer"-engine motorcycles: BMWs, Urals, and whatever the Chinese government makes (a little pre-war espionage and reverse-engineering at Stalin's behest landed the blueprints for Nazi BMWs in Russian and Chinese factories, where they're still built pretty much to WWII specs).

This little bike shop, known to BMW and Ural enthusiasts all over as Boxerworks, is also home to about 38.7 million restorations, used bikes, project bikes, and heaps and basket cases in various stages of assembly. One day this fall, I happened to be poking around in the welding shop and stumbled across a half-dozen bizarre wicker bikes piled up in the corner.

These wicker models were amazingly detailed, and genuinely strange. I asked Nathan Mende, the owner of Boxerworks, about them, and he said they were shipped back from China by one of his buddies who was on a scavenging expedition, looking for commie bike parts.

How does the production of model wicker motorcycles benefit the Chinese state or its workers? Why so much detail? They're certainly not meant for the average Chinese farmer; are they for tourists? Can you fit one of them on the plane? In general, what the hell? Why? Huh?

Nathan had no answers, but let me photograph these amazing straw oxymorons. He even rolled out a couple real steel bikes for us to enjoy.



and hoses caught. Maybe the battery blew up, but something blew the hood up and off. Flaming pieces of plastic and rubber rained down and started new little fires in the dry grass.

“Call 911, you dumb cunt!”

“Go to hell!”

“Francie!”

“Shut UP! I hate you!”

Neighbors ran out of their trailers and hurled insults at us. Dogs resumed their barking. I felt the anxiety again, much more intensely. The edges of my vision grew pale and indistinct; voices were faraway.

I felt tugging at my shirt and a sting on my face, then another, and I realized it was a slap, a hard one. I heard Dave, “Hey man, snap out of it, we got to get the fuck out of here!” I think we ran. Then we were knocked down.

I must have only been out for a few seconds, but it was like waking up from a full night’s sleep. Flaming diapers were still falling, some wafting gently as they burned, some streaking to earth like wet, poopy meteors. I have no idea what happened, but the diaper truck was completely blown apart. Diapers were everywhere, stuck to trailers, trees, cars, me and Dave, falling, falling from the sky. I was on my stomach with a mouthful of dirt, my elbows skinned and bleeding a little.

And there was something else falling. Paper drifted down. I rolled over and saw “Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass” as I sat up and looked at my legs. “Coun ... Bassie” flamed away into ash off to my right. I got up onto my knees and struggled to my feet. Marks in the dust told the story; we’d been blown off our feet and slid for about two yards. Dave was already

standing, looking at his trailer.

The sagging living-room end had completely fallen off from the concussion, and a great number of the records were now energetically blazing and melting, flames twenty feet high, now thirty, capped by a vicious, toxic black smear that stretched to the sky.

Francie stood inside the cracked trailer, clutching a nondescript sepia-colored envelope. A cigarette was stuck to her lower lip, her mouth gaping.

“Well shit.” She said, and turned around, retreating out of sight.

“Poor dumb bitch. She’s going for my pistol, I bet, going to kill herself.” Dave said, shaking his head sadly, turning away. “Who knows, maybe it’s better this way.”

I looked, horrified by his nonchalance, and saw her tearing through a pile of magazines and empty cigarette packs on a corner of the kitchen cabinet.

Nothing I could have said would have been any more appropriate, but I admit that what I did say was horrible and callous. I’m not proud.

“Huh? You keep your pistol in the kitchen?”

“No. I keep it in the bedr— in the kitchen?” Dave whirled back around and saw what Francie was up to.

“Dude! She’s getting out the turntable!”

Francie tossed the magazines and trash into the fire burning below her and lifted the smoke-colored plastic lid of an old Realistic turntable. She put the disc on it and set the needle down. At first we could tell she had the stereo on, but couldn’t hear anything over the fire. Then she pointed

the speakers out of the gaping trailer-hole and turned the volume all the way up:

A-tisket a-tasket

A green-and-yellow basket

I bought a basket for my mommie

And on the way I dropped it

I dropped it, I dropped it

Yes, on the way I dropped it

A little doo-doot-doo-do picked it up

A-scoodly-oot-doot do-dot dweee-dot

Francie sat down and dangled her legs over the edge of the trailer. She tossed the FedEx packaging in to the fire and laughed.



Johnny Pence is the editor in chief of the *Blotter*, a stay-home daddy, a homesick Virginian in Georgia, and can catch 100 pennies off his elbow. He is the author of a novel called *Waking Up*, which was supposed to be released this month, but who knows when it’ll actually be in print.

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Paper Cuts

Books You Might Not Have Read

by Martin K. Smith

Supernatural Horror in Literature Howard Phillips Lovecraft, Dover Publications, 1973

H. P. Lovecraft, together with Scholastic Book Services, scared the living shit out of me when I was nine.

Lovecraft is maybe the most famous horror writer of the prewar golden age of pulp magazines, like *Weird Tales*. He's best known for the Cthulu mythos which backgrounds many of his stories. (Cthulu was a staggeringly ancient, nasty, other-dimensional god/alien/entity with absolutely no use for the human species.) Those stupid enough to summon Cthulu usually did so with the *Necronomicon*, a "forbidden book" by "the mad Arab, Abdul Al-Hazred". This tome only existed in Lovecraft's stories*, but he described it with such conviction that new Lovecraft groupies still appear in used bookstores seeking copies. H. P. also has a reputation for what we book-worm types like to call Purple Prose: ornately carpentered sentences and words like "necropolis" and "eldritch" and "phantasm". In this prose he preferred to drop dark, ominous hints about his monsters, rather than describe them down to the last fang and claw, letting readers fill in the details from the personal twists of

their own psyches. "The phantasm I beheld within that eldritch necropolis was So Horrible that even describing it would shatter the last shards of my sanity"—that sort of thing.

So anyway, I'd bought through Scholastic a paperback of Lovecraft's *The Dunwich Horror* (in which a huge invisible blob-monster, spawn of Cthulu probably, roams the Massachusetts hills crushing houses, and devouring not only the bodies but the souls of anybody inside.) Something about the back cover blurb, the way Scholastic's hack writers phrased it, coupled with H. P.'s empurpled prosody, convinced me the book was not fiction but actual fact. I freaked. I was convinced that our Maryland suburb would be the critter's next target; and for weeks scanned the *Washington Post* for news of further attacks.

I was an extremely credulous child.

I am pleased to report that *Supernatural Horror in Literature* did not have the same deleterious effect. It is Lovecraft in, of all things, a sunny mood—quite a change from his usual atmosphere of gloom, doom and nightmares from beyond the

tomb. Here he's an amiable and well-informed guide for a stroll through the history of scary fiction and a revue of its practitioners, as of the mid-1930's. (The book was originally an essay in a short-lived 1927 magazine; Lovecraft revised it several times before his own death in '37.)

Our concept of and affinity for horror, he begins, evolved right along with human consciousness. "The unknown, being likewise the unpredictable, became for our primitive forefathers a terrible and omnipotent source of boons and calamities visited upon mankind for cryptic and wholly extraterrestrial reasons, and thus clearly belonging to spheres of existence whereof we know nothing.... Cosmic terror appears as an ingredient of the earliest folklore of all races, and is crystallized in the most archaic ballads, chronicles and sacred writings." The Middle Ages—plagues, alchemists, gargoyles, witch-burnings—expanded the potential material for weird tales, but not until Horace Walpole published *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764 did the form take off. *Otranto*, though "tedious, artificial and melodramatic" (says H. P.), provided in one convenient package all the genre's needful parts:

...the Gothic castle, with its awesome antiquity, vast distances and ramblings, deserted or ruined wings, damp corridors, unwholesome hidden catacombs, and galaxy of ghosts and appalling legends...the saintly, long-persecuted and generally insipid

*Well, maybe that's what *they* want you to think, but I personally owned a copy of the *Necronomicon* when I was a kid, probably still have it in a box somewhere. The publisher claimed it was the real deal that Lovecraft had written *about*, but any discerning reader would say it is almost certainly inauthentic and kinda reads like Lovecraft wrote it himself (or more likely, a devoted Lovecraft nerd). For what it's worth.

——— ed., a devoted Lovecraft nerd.

heroine who undergoes the major terrors...the valourous and immaculate hero, always of high birth but often in humble disguise...and the infinite array of stage properties which includes strange lights, damp trap-doors, extinguished lamps, mouldy hidden manuscripts, creaking hinges, shaking arras, and the like.

(Even after horror fiction evolved to higher things, this template remained behind in the mystery/romance realm—the kind with Fabio on the cover barely clad in buccaneer drag.)

Otranto was a huge success, and in the manner of huge successes was soon followed by a wave of imitations. Not everyone was impressed, again in the manner of huge popular successes; and not all the imitations

were skilled. “Most of them were merely ridiculous in the light of mature taste, and Miss Austen’s famous satire *Northanger Abbey* was by no means an unmerited rebuke to a school which had sunk far toward absurdity.” The tales still continued to appear and evolve, as German writers mixed in old Teutonic legends, and the French added Middle Eastern color inspired by the first *Arabian Nights* translations. We even had a few authors on our side of the pond: Charles Brockden Brown, whose *Wieland; or, the Transformation* came out in 1789—the same year, incidentally, that the Revolutionary War ended.

Then of course came Edgar Allan Poe, to whom Lovecraft gives high admiration and a whole chapter. “Our most illustrious and unfortunate fellow-countryman,” he says,

was a catalyst and innovator who really set the bar, and not just for horror fiction:

Before Poe the bulk of weird writers had worked largely in the dark; without an understanding of the psychological basis of the horror appeal, and hampered by more or less conformity to certain empty literary conventions such as the happy ending, virtue rewarded, and in general a hollow moral didacticism, acceptance of popular standards and values, and striving of the author to obtrude his own emotions into the story and take sides with the partisans of the majority’s artificial ideas. Poe, on the other hand, perceived the essential impersonality of the real artist; and knew that the function of creative fiction is

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merely to express and interpret events and sensations as they are, regardless of how they tend or what they prove....Poe's spectres thus acquired a convincing malignity possessed by none of their predecessors, and established a new standard of realism in the annals of literary horror. The impersonal and artistic intent, moreover, was aided by a scientific attitude not often found before; whereby Poe studied the human mind rather than the usages of Gothic fiction, and worked with an analytical knowledge of terror's true sources which doubled the force of his narratives and emancipated him from all the absurdities inherent in merely conventional shudder-coining. This example having been set, later authors were naturally forced to conform to it in order to compete at all; so that in this way a definite change began to affect the main stream of macabre writing....Truly it may be said that Poe invented the short story in its present form.

(This may be a good place to digress a bit onto Lovecraft's own writing style, via a further quote on Edgar: "Penetrating to every festering horror in the gaily painted mockery called existence, and in the solemn masquerade called human thought and feeling, [his] vision had power to project itself in blackly magical crystallizations and transmutations; till there bloomed in the sterile America of the thirties and forties such a moon-nourished garden of gorgeous poison fungi as not even the nether slopes of Saturn might boast." That's what we mean by "purple prose"—H.

P. packed a large, ornate vocabulary and was not afraid to use it.)

The book interested me for its broadness, and broad-mindedness. Lovecraft obviously read a lot in preparation. Everyone you'd expect to find is here: Bram Stoker, Algernon Blackwood, M.R. James, Lord Dunsany; *Frankenstein*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dickens's *The Signalman*; the horror stories of Ambrose Bierce, Rudyard Kipling, Conan Doyle. (Oops—he does leave out Edith Wharton's ghost stories.) There's also an unexpected visitor or two: Emily Bronte and *Wuthering Heights*, "with its mad vista of bleak, windswept Yorkshire moors and the violent, distorted lives they foster. Though primarily a tale of ... human passions in agony and conflict, its epically cosmic setting affords room for horror of the most spiritual sort.... Miss Bronte's eerie terror is no mere Gothic echo, but a tense expression of man's shuddering reaction to the unknown." He's not harshly critical of anyone; he mentions authors' failings only in passing, as he focuses on their successes and how they influenced the form. Thus *Frankenstein* is "one of the horror-classics of all time ... somewhat tinged but scarcely marred by moral didacticism ... it has the true touch of cosmic fear, no matter how much the movement may lag in places." And in *The Turn of the Screw*, Henry James (another unexpected visitor) "triumphs over his inevitable pomposity and prolixity sufficiently well to create a truly potent air of sinister menace, depicting the hideous influence of two dead and evil servants, Peter Quint and the governess, Miss Jessel."

He also makes no judgment calls on whether horror fiction qualifies as

Literature. I got the sense that in his mind, the answer's such a no-brainer "Yes" that the question needn't even be thought, let alone asked. This at a time, the 1920s, when the only place you'd find horror fiction was in cheap pulps like *Weird Tales*; and if you told literary critics and profs that in sixty years their successors would be making serious academic careers out of said pulps, they'd either laugh in your face or clobber you with a bust of Shakespeare. (At which you could say, when you came to, "What about Hamlet's dad's ghost? Or Macbeth's witches? Or *Titus Andronicus*, where people get their hands and tongues forcibly detached? Is that not Horror in Literature?" Then they'd get you with the bust of Wordsworth. But I digress again.)

I have worked through my childhood issues with Scholastic Books and their Dunwich Horror, though I still wouldn't want to re-read it. (I'd recommend instead Lovecraft's *The Curious Case of Charles Dexter Ward*.) I'd also recommend *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, to both horror fans and the horror-challenged (like myself), for its breadth, balance, and of course the entertainment value of that purple prose—"moon-nourished poison fungi" and all. It's a pity H. P.'s name still isn't universally known, as the following eldritch occurrence, which befell author Paul Theroux, may attest. On one of his train journeys he was reading a book by Lovecraft. His fellow passengers thought it was a sex manual.

Marty Smith is the publisher of the *Blotter*. He's also a DJ on WXDU Duke University radio and an expert in the husbandry and breeding of Scottish Highland cattle.

I Love You by Jenny Haniver

I love you

I will cook you something
hormone-free
cage-free
something that was never farmed.
A wild mushroom perhaps. Perhaps cattails.
perhaps mayapples or crawfish—
persimmons or trout.

I'll cook it using the waste heat
of industrial processes

I'll pick it up in a biodiesel
pickup, and use paper bags because loblollies suck carbon from the air,
but paper mills make poisons,
but tree farms are better than cattle,
but virgin forest is a richer biocommunity,
perhaps i'll use no bag at all
to get those groceries.

We can drive the biodiesel pickup out beyond
the light pollution to see the rare display
of the Milky Way

Don't shower, my dear.
It's not right
to waste hot water, to encourage industry to make soap, to clog your
pores with deodorant.
Perhaps meteors will shower us.
I will shower your oniony musk with kisses.

I feel guilt. It is new.
I feel it because I stomp so heavily through the world.
I feel it because you make me want to procreate.
I'd hate to waste that feeling.

Jenny Haniver is a pseudonym and is not to be taken seriously.



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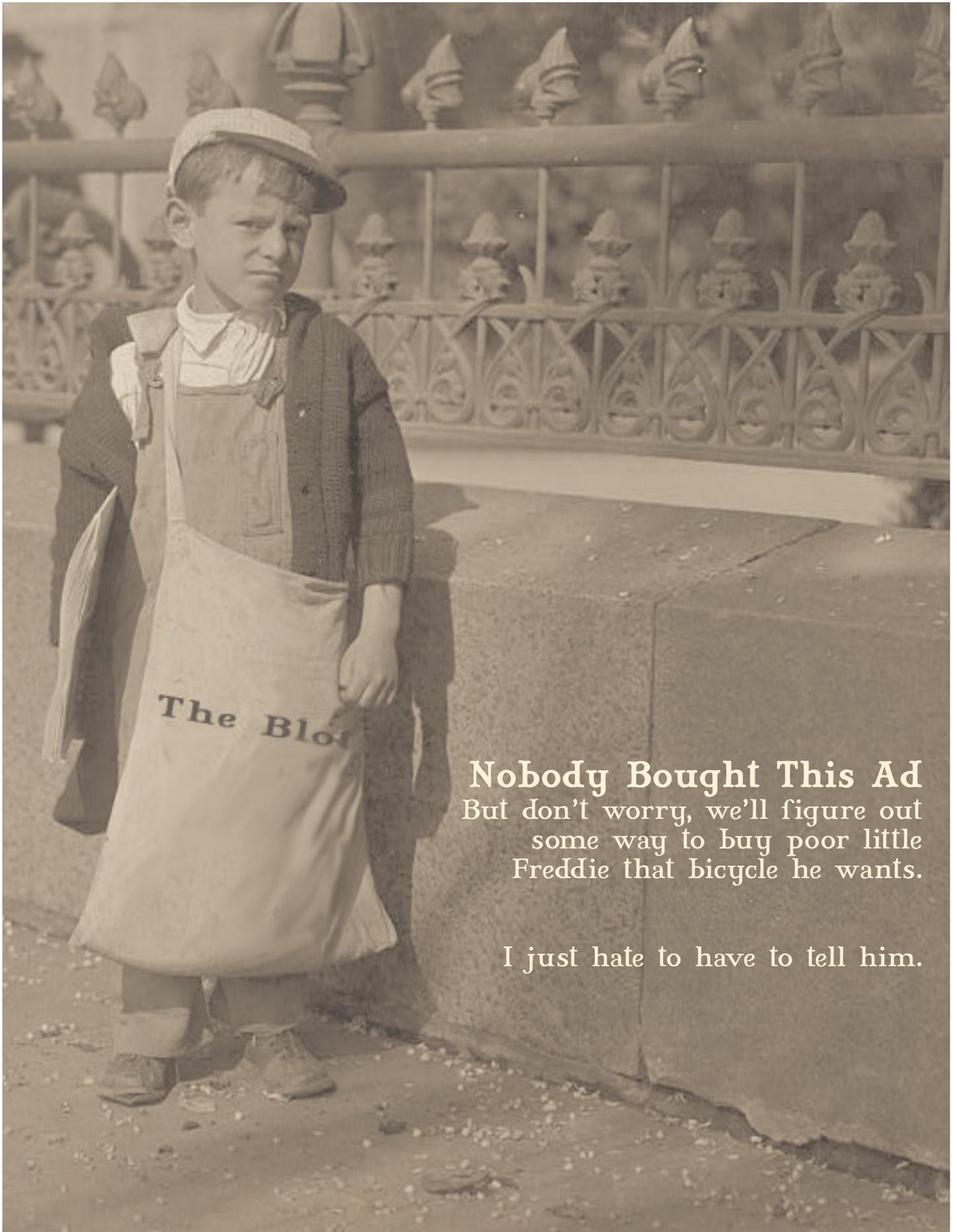
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Things and Their Drinks by The Blotter Staff

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