Genuinely Inspired Primitive
(B-Sides & Unreleased Singles, Volume II)
by Cliff Burns
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The author takes this opportunity to state his support for “Freedom to Read Week” and commends those who labor on behalf of freedom of expression in this country and around the world. “I am Salman Rushdie.” So are you. Stay vigilant.
For Sherron:
for ignoring her good sense and loving a genuinely inspired primitive;
for stroking my hair all those years ago;
for “Reds”;
for making the healing process so damned fun
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About the Author

*Note: One side may be slightly longer than the other to preserve thematic continuity.*
Foreword

This is the ultimate limited edition.
This one is for you and you alone.
These words.
These sensations.
Emoting.
Here is your back door to my mind.
Here’s your skeleton key.
Flashlight.
Waterproof matches.
Watch for signs.
Spoor.
Trampled underbrush.
Bones.
Approach the lair with caution.
Burning eyes.
Razor sharp teeth.
Don’t try to run.
It’s me.
It’s me.
And with a single thought, all escape routes are obliterated.
Percy Shelley’s Heart

Their love was like the poet Shelley’s heart, he told her: indefatigable and eternal. Cast into fire, it could be plucked out again intact, its life force immutable, not subject to elemental forces, not held in abeyance by physical laws. Would she but believe in him, the universe was theirs for the taking. A discreet background check conducted at her behest revealed a different story. When taken into custody, he proclaimed his innocence even as other women came forward, indicting him with bitter testimonials, mocking and parroting his tender words. From his dungeon he wrote to her, begging her forgiveness. In two years (less a day) he would be a new man, reinvented for her benefit and hers alone. He reminded her of the story of Percy Shelley’s heart. But instead she found that all she could think about was his contemporary, Byron, the club-footed romantic with the soul of a twisted satyr.
Blue-Eyed and Fucked Up

The writer stumbles from his insomniac bed sweat-stuck sheets wife snoring insensible dreaming of the man she loves early morning breath sitting down to piss head sunk to his chest trailing cigarette smoke through the darkened apartment still pursued under siege the aspirations of his youth the fruit once bitten fetid meaty taste lingering the tree of knowledge the ugly naked truth internal exile fortress of solitude the sun rising on another day futile expectations a crumb of praise to devour feed the fire kick in the seat of the pants whack on the side of the head small press blues readership of six laying his soul open for intimate scrutiny always found wanting falling between the cracks slipstream surreal form rejection letters self-addressed envelopes his own handwriting condemning him wondering if it’s worth it but knowing the die is cast bridges burned no retreat no surrender no prisoners no quarter and tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow he will be thirty years old.
G.I.P.

See the genuinely inspired primitive. Observe the tell-tale markings. Listen: do you hear his distinctive call? Subsequent expeditions will attempt to discern if there is any meaning to all that strange chatter. Personally, I have my doubts. Careful now. Stay upwind. These types are extremely unpredictable. Later we hope to dart a specimen for in-depth analysis. Right now we are seeking an understanding of this highly ritualized behavior. His proclivities, if you will. It has been noted that he tends to remain insular and never strays far from his domicile. What we are seeing now has never been explained and I am open to speculation. He is always alert, quick to take notice of any kind of threat, real or imagined. It seems a pity to have to remove him from his native habitat. One can only imagine the type of trauma he will endure. Let’s withdraw for the time being. Back at base camp we can pool our resources, collate our findings. No, I don’t think that would be wise. In the past, such tactics have led to unfortunate incidents. Don’t let his apparent docility fool you, ladies and gentlemen. He can be quite ferocious, I assure you. If provoked, he is capable of a savage, even lethal attack. Quite so. We will proceed at all times with great caution…
Elephants’ Graveyard

The old men in their ball caps porcelain smiles gruff laughter portable oxygen units
frumpy lumpy-breasted wives suspenders sunken chests empty gazes the world
oblivious to them children tripping into their legs harried parents barely sparing them
a glance this is the end of the line thick armchairs in a local arena family reunion
brittle bones oak canes aches pains paradise just around the corner they do not sing in
their chains they groan the weight of their bodies the disease no pill can cure.
The Perpetuation of the Species

In the doorway a profile a shadow of a man flurry of words an entreaty he wants and you must comply otherwise he will get angry the pain of violation you must comply repercussions the contract undersigned preacher man promising hellfire and damnation your father’s disapproval what’s wrong with you be strong bear his weight his seed his squalling issue his disease after the exchange deflating murmured threats love bites shining ring ritual do you take this man honeymooning in Memphis? the future stretching out before you like a bed of rusted nails the children byproduct of the cold transaction of flesh I told you it would be like this but you wouldn’t listen the alien thing from another world nameless suckling parasite nurture it protect it until it’s strong enough to take its father’s place at the altar with another blushing bride brainwashed by courtship welcome to reality honey a flurry of words the entreaty the violation the disease and around and around and around she goes and where she stops nobody knows.
My wife has these wisps of hair on her lip, soft as down, finer than spun silk. I brush her lips with my fingers; she, not understanding, takes my hand and kisses it.

I know most men find facial hair on women unattractive. Some women undergo electrolysis, rip the little beauties out by the roots. And their faces burn for days in condemnation of their petty vanity.

I think I would hurt my wife if she did something like that. Because I find those transparent hairs so beautiful…so beautiful that I shave at least twice a day, every day, to keep my face smooth and extra-sensitive. And when I kiss her I drag my lips across hers and imagine I can feel those hairs tickling me, scratching me.

I am kissing her with my eyes closed. I am kissing her stubble (yes), rasping my lips and chin and getting excited. She starts to say something but I stop her.

Don’t ruin it, I whisper, and I take her hand and place it on one of my tiny breasts.
Conundrum

He said: “The trouble with being a writer is that you lose track of what’s real and what’s fiction. Like right now for instance. Is this conversation taking place between two living, breathing people or—”

“—just the product of your fertile imagination?” She finished for him. Then kissed him. “And did I just kiss you—”

“Or did I imagine you kissing me.”

“Exactly.”

They thought about it.

Then he said: “Well, one way of figuring out if this is real or not is if a dragon or a griffin or some imaginary creature suddenly appeared—”

She interrupted. “Yes, but you don’t write about imaginary creatures. Your stories seem like they could be true—”

A dragon suddenly materialized, lashing its tail agitatedly.

“Go away,” she said, “you’re wrecking my hypothesis.”

The dragon nodded once and was gone. Only a whiff of brimstone remained to mark its passing.

He prodded her: “You were saying…”

She continued: “In order for us to know if this conversation is really happening, one of us would have to do something completely out of character. You’re too good a writer to let that happen so then we’d know—”

He pointed out: “Yes, but how do we know that I’m the one writing this or… not writing this? Maybe there’s someone else—”

She frowned. “Don’t get religious on me, dear.”

He shrugged. “Merely making an observation.”

She said: “I, for one, believe that I’m real and you’re real and so is this conversation. So there.” She stuck her tongue out at him to punctuate her point.

He shook his head. “Nope. You’re wrong.”

She smiled. “I guess we’ll never know.”

“Yes, we will. You see, I don’t have a girlfriend.”
She faltered. “But that means—”
He sought to reassure her: “You are my finest creation. I’ll never let you go.”
“How can I be sure? I mean, maybe you’ll get bored with me.”
He nodded understandingly. “I’ll show you.” A gold band appeared on her ring finger and his. “There. Now we’re together.”
She looked up, her eyes over-flowing. “Til death do us part.”
He said: “Darling.”
She came to him and as he held her he made a mental note to change the color of her hair and do something about her nose.
Mental Cruelty

One morning the werewolf came home and found the locks changed and all of his stuff piled on the front lawn. As he gathered everything up he shouted at his family huddled inside. When the police came, he bit and scratched at them until they were forced to use extreme violence to subdue him. After he was hauled off one cop was heard to state confidently: “I wouldn’t worry about it, ma’am, we’ll hold on to him ’til he cools off…”
Jules: 3 Times

The Plague Years

I am taking my son Jules to get his shots. They vaccinate you against everything nowadays, even TB. And there are always new bugs going around, stuff that’s gone AWOL from some hush-hush lab in Virginia or Semipalatinsk. These days people treat the monthly trip to their local health center like a family outing. You see lots of seniors there, people old enough to remember when a regimen of needles wasn’t necessary. The suicide rate among the elderly is appalling. My son screams every time they prick him. I can tell the nurse is quite annoyed with him. I want to smack him myself. But finally the torture session is over and done with and he gets a sucker and a puzzle and we’re on our way. We don’t talk much in the car. It’s my fault his arm hurts. It’s my fault he has to get so many needles. I want to tell him that he’s right, I have to take at least partial responsibility for the shitty shape the world is in…but that would only give him one more reason to hate me.

A Christ On Every Street Corner

My son is pointing at the Messiah and yelling “Look, Daddy, that man is bleeding!” The Redeemer holds out his mangled hands and Jules darts behind me, whimpering and pressing his face against my leg. “Hey, buddy, you’re scaring my kid.” I give Jesus a shove and he falls back, arms flung out on either side of his emaciated body, always so quick to assume the shape of the cross to make a point. “There’s still room at the inn!” He calls after us. Jules is dragging on my arm, trying to turn around and look at Jesus, who is on his bony knees, groveling for our souls.

Jules is pretty shook up by it all. He clutches my hand for consolation as I try to explain to him about religion and fanatics and Doomsday cults. “--and some people, really crazy people, believe that the end is coming.”

“The end of what?” he asks.
“Precisely,” I mutter. Then I change the subject but I can tell that he’s got Armageddon on his mind. The next afternoon I get a call from the boy’s mother telling me that he had a terrible nightmare about angels throwing bolts of lightning, his schoolyard getting swallowed up by a black hole and an old man in a white beard with blazing eyes. She accuses me of feeding Jules foolish ideas. I am screwing with his mind. She won’t stand for it.

I am calm, very agreeable.

She screams in frustration and slams the receiver down. I am so pleased with myself I give my secretary the rest of the day off. And then, fully recognizing the irony involved, I make out a check to a local church. Any church. Only the symbolism is important.

Tithes to Jesus. For a job well done.

The Settlement

Jules watches television while his mother and I argue. They’ve really cleaned up entertainment since I was a kid. Unfortunately, it’s still not safe to walk the streets at night and you take your life in your hands every day on the freeway…and lately it occurs to me that in the end nothing matters anyway.

She’s super-pissed at me. I lied and fucked up her whole weekend. Yes, I know the plan was that I was to take him until Tuesday. Yes, I know that this is inconsiderate of me. Yes, I know how long you’ve been looking forward to this. I’m completely reasonable and apparently sympathetic. And I’m getting this terrific hard-on as I watch her crying and tearing her hair out.

I can hear Jules talking back to the TV. Interacting with it. The television says something and Jules giggles before whispering a reply. He is telling it all of our poisonous little family secrets. Adding a few more bytes of information to its files. Maybe I’ll never get another promotion. Maybe my credit rating will mysteriously slip another notch. They might decide to audit me again.

I use the remote to turn off the TV.
Jules begins to cry, hugging the front of the set protectively and wailing until
his histrionics win the day and I turn it back on.

She asks me how I can be so cruel and the three of them wait expectantly
while I concoct a credible defense.
Surrealistic Pillow Revisited

I wake up and coffee smells like roses.
And when I take a leak, I piss in Technicolor—blue and red and gold and purple stream out of me.
The bathroom mirror is full of faces but none of them is mine.
I eat a bowl of mice crispies for breakfast and listen distractedly to the newspaper babbling about a civil war in Indonesia. When I get bored I flip to the sports section and a baseball flies out and whacks me on the forehead.
Hurrying now, I pull on my straitjacket, buckle myself in and leave the apartment, which is already collapsing in on itself like an ancient star.
That day, a giant squid erupts out of a file folder and devours Mr. Bleeker, the guy in the desk to my right. No one says anything so I shrug it off and go back to work. Then my calculator bites me on the thumb and my telephone emits a blood-curdling scream—
April 26, 1987 (7:56 p.m.)

Sunset.
The dying of the light.
Her.
Me.
“I hate artificial light. Sunlight is different. More…honest.”
Sky: orange-pink
“What about the movie?”
“I don’t know. What do you think?”
The cat folds up neatly on the floor. Licks his furry balls and sprouting cock.

His haunches twitch. Once. Twice.
Me: pen/paper
Her: pencil/sketching pad
“How’s this?”
“Not bad. What d’you think of—”
“Pretty good.”
Hissing pencil.
Spitting pen.
Shadows. Moving until you try and catch them at it.
Cat: asleep, oblivious.
The poised consideration of the pencil.
The barely repressed fury of the pen.
Me: hunched over.
Her: one leg tenting the other
Sky: violent violet
The first star.
“There.”
“What?”
“See?”
“Oh.”
“Good?”
“Yeah.”
Sweaty-sore fingers.
*Cr-rack!* the pencil point breaks and it’s like a gun has gone off.
“Damn!” She leaves and the room seems bigger.
And scarier.
The radiator wheezes.
The cat opens one wary eye.
Sky: purple, like the people eater.
Movement.
Turn.
Just a shadow. *Just.*
Something cold and wet lands on the back of my neck.
“Brought you some water.”
I grab her arm, pull her into the chair with me, cram my tongue into her ear.
She wriggles and giggles.
While the cat looks on in disgust we snuggle/cuddle together.
Meanwhile, I’m watching over her shoulder, making sure the shadows stay where they are.
Temporary Loss of Gravity (A Meditation)

There is no need to panic the captain’s voice drifting in the air around us we will shortly reestablish control in the meantime try to relax go with the flow the weightless state presents many interesting possibilities to those of you with a smattering of imagination I’ll sign off now try not to break the furniture ha ha and for Chrissake don’t sneeze make sure all loose objects are safely stowed and if nauseous try to focus on one spot make it your center of gravity hang on tight there may be some turbulence once we begin atmospheric re-entry roger wilco over and out.
Side Two
Cranes

Sometime in the next century random chance or perhaps synchronicity dictates that two people for the sake of argument let’s say they are TWO MEN will meet in the street around dusk for that is when there is less of a risk from ULTRAVIOLET RADIATION and they will have decided rashly one supposes that now would be a good time for a stroll this taking place just before CURFEW so they needn’t be concerned about POLICE although at the same time they must keep an eye out for STREET GANGS VICIOUS THUGS and MINORITY EXTREMISTS but after all this is a pretty good neighborhood not too many UNDESIRABLES have taken up residence in the empty houses where good people USED to live back when living WITHIN YOUR MEANS wasn’t the punch line to a bad joke and these two GENTLEMEN both of median age and social caste forsaking their cocooned existences for just a few minutes the bare minimum come around the corner at the EXACT same time so they nearly bump heads backpedal from each other hands raised an unconscious defense mechanism except their muscles have ATROPHIED because after all they only punch keyboards recall data collate formulate synthesize these two GENTLEMEN dressed in comfortable leisure suits concealing little paunches and postures only a kangaroo could love open their mouths to utter abject apologies only instead of words their unpracticed vocal chords produce SQUAWKS the two of them flapping their arms and SQUAWKING at each other like a couple of extinct CRANES circling in this ritualized mating dance eyes bulging heads bobbing turning from one another and fleeing back to their COMFORTABLE homes on IDENTICAL streets while the ancient moon rises begins its precipitous ascent through a sky clogged with CHEMICALS the night the city the global village peopled by functional idiots and still half the world STARVES.
The Minister of Hate

This is it the complete and unvarnished truth suppressed all these years by the Illuminati or maybe it was the Zionists or Henry Kissinger I’m not sure which SIX MILLION SCREAMING JEWS CAN’T BE WRONG the real story about the Holocaust in two thousand words or less a pamphlet seized at the border in thirteen countries scrawled in six snazzy Crayola colors take it it’s free I expect no compensation and am willing to go to jail to protect the integrity of my small mind squashed into this hardhat smile for the cameras sir my fat pink face gaining a national audience I am not an egotist but this is my best side hullo Canada hullo world you’ve been sleeping too long this is your wake up call and you can censor me sentence me deport me it won’t matter and may in fact further my aims extra extra read all about it Christ really a blue-eyed blond-haired brown-shirted Aryan hey little boy would you like a chocolate?
The Keynote Speaker

Without further ado let me briefly elaborate on this growing phenomenon which in my opinion threatens the very moral fiber of this country although not as much as the hordes of refugees i.e. foreign scumbags pummeling at the gates of freedom demanding admittance and then ending up on the welfare rolls but I digress from my original topic which after all is the reason we’re all gathered here tonight clutching our wallets as if they’re going to sprout legs and slip out of our pockets provoking titters from our neighbors who will nudge each other and point but say nothing so it is with some small knowledge in this area that I propose a grand and even sweeping solution to our woes not by burying our heads in the sand like the proverbial ostrich although scientists in their infinite wisdom discount this once firmly held belief but by confronting the problem head on chest out nipples sharpened to pencil points drawing on our strengths rather than our weaknesses drowning out the siren call of naysayers who like the harpies in the tale of Odysseus wish to lead us to our doom no and again I say no this is not what we were put here for our fates lie not in the stars but somewhere else although where I’m not certain but hope to nail that down in my own mind very soon but struggle we must and overcome we shall with effort and resolve never giving up the side stiff upper lip good body language excellent posture no need to shrink from our responsibilities like craven faggots for we have a date with destiny and shall not be denied by the common rabble who want nothing more than food on their plates and a roof over their heads poor huddled masses bah put a shovel in their hands and let them eat cake while we dine at the rich tables of Mammon.

Thank you.
Revelations

You live in a hermetically sealed world, twist ties of your bedrock faith keeping out unpleasant odors, decadent decay.

You could give a shit about ozone depletion, crack babies, rich and poor, North and South. It has no bearing on you if some homicidal maniac mows down a dozen women with semi-automatic misogyny. There is nothing to be gained by dwelling on such matters. Only through a direct and personal relationship with the Almighty can you achieve true enlightenment. To that end you are prepared to turn your back on those who, for whatever the reason—racial, socioeconomic or otherwise—do not conform to your belief system. Brothers kill sisters, wives their husbands, men their manufactured enemies. All in the name of the vain, internecine.

It is not up to you to make them listen. They, too, could have seen the light had they but chosen to do so.

In God you trust and in God you find haven from all temptations.

This is the end time. Plagues decimate the ranks of unbelievers and darkness consumes those who pretend that all is well. The words of the wise men have proven prophetic indeed. Lambs are consumed by lions, the meek devoured by the strong. The cheeks of the righteous are flayed and torn and the underprivileged and disadvantaged die in hovels while carrion birds wheel and turn overhead.

Daily there are reports of miraculous events: the dead risen, assuming positions of power in multinational corporations that sunder the earth and seed the skies with poison. False messiahs come and go and the Beast is seen everywhere, in the seats of power, in your local K-Mart, behind the wheel of a taxi, cursing you for not tipping.

You pray and your prayers are always answered for God loves you and you alone. And He promises that you will be spared. As long as you remain devout in your faith even if it is at the expense of others. This you solemnly vow.

And you go about strengthening your fortress of rectitude so that none may enter and corrupt it. Yours is a devotional built for one. Rapture suffuses and sustains you.
God is coming, descending from the heavens, choosing the one and true path to your door. Where you are waiting.

And when you see Him, He is perfect.

No. Not quite.

And you ponder that as you bid Him enter and instead He stands on the threshold, appearing uncertain, diminished, humbled.
Somatic Dysfunction:

Extremely weird “band” that achieved some measure of fame (how much is debatable) amidst the appalling decay that was the popular music scene in the Nineties. While radio programmers stuck with stale, safe formats—cover tunes, dance music, golden oldies—this Baltimore-based trio literally crashed and burned their way to notoriety.

Eschewing rhythm, cadence and propriety, Somatic Dysfunction somehow garnered enough of a following to warrant a record deal, which resulted in three discs of marginalia. Their “music” was a frenzied concoction of punk, blues, rap, speed metal and free form jazz. What it amounted to was a hellish soundtrack for the depraved ravings of their “vocalist”, Vasili (aka Ian David Baxter). The only credited lyricist for the band, Vasili’s “act” consisted of him standing at stage center and alternately screeching and whispering disjointed proems (prose poems) into his microphone while his band-mates scalded the air around him.

Compared by some to the Doors (!), SD might have been relegated to curio status...had not the three of them contrived to commit suicide onstage while performing the title track from their last studio album (“Hiroshima Requiem”). The gory aftermath left scores of concert-goers dead, mainly from the riotous scenes that followed and not, as has been reported, as a result of the explosion that obliterated the stage and the musicians. In spite of—or because of—the band’s brief stint in the limelight it continues to enjoy at least limited popularity and, perhaps most unfortunate of all, has inspired a bevy of imitators who have taken its tactics (and nihilistic philosophy) to even greater extremes.

Somewhere down there, Vasili (“I’m a prophet, a pagan, a gob of phlegm, a boot in the face...in short, the savior of mankind”) must be smiling.

See: Equivalent to Two Hundred Sticks of Dynamite: The Totally Unauthorized Biography of Somatic Dysfunction by Mark Miller (Shattered Glass Press)
By Divine Right

They call themselves the wise men “they” being an amorphous faceless assemblage of gunmetal greyhaired auto/techno/pluto –crats with delusions of manifest destiny and pie charts to prove it; the globe is their playpen armies mere game pieces thrust and parried on a board overlaid on a map of the world is this going too fast for you I hope not because it’s important that you understand your status what’s at stake who’s behind that transparent smile fixed into place each morning by sycophantic aides cum advisors on temporary leave from their corporate penthouses six figure expense accounts to serve an administration that has reduced us to digging our dinners out of dumpsters living in Beirut-style ’burbs drowned by numbers in perpetual petrochemical pall…the days flowing past like consecutive alliterations.
Our Glorious Leader

Our Glorious Leader tells us that he is proud and humbled by his lopsided victory and upon taking power claims to have the solutions to the problems plaguing our land.

Our Glorious Leader says that due to circumstances beyond his control he will be unable to keep many of the promises made during his election campaign.

Our Glorious Leader enacts harsh new laws to halt the rampant lawlessness and hooliganism threatening the common good.

Our Glorious Leader denounces the accusations and slanders disseminated by demagogues, liars and thieves bent on bringing down his lawfully elected government.

Our Glorious Leader declares martial law to stamp out those who would foment revolution.

Our Glorious Leader announces enforced conscription in order to do battle with the foes of democracy.

Our Glorious Leader denies that atrocities are being committed by soldiers loyal to the government.

Our Glorious Leader makes it known that he is willing to compromise with rebellious factions.

Our Glorious Leader changes his mind.

Our Glorious Leader calls on the military to prevent any mass demonstrations, using lethal force if necessary.

Our Glorious Leader orders troops to shoot other troops who disobey this directive.

Our Glorious Leader promises show trials and a speedy meting out of justice.

Our Glorious Leader tells us that we must place our loyalties with him and above all others, including God.

Our Glorious Leader informs us all is well, that reports of an attempted coup are the products of insurrectionists and warns foreign correspondents to use only official government sources in their reports.
Our Glorious Leader says that we must prepare for a baptism of fire and blood.

Our Glorious Leader announces yet another high level purge to weed out conspirators and parasites.

Our Glorious Leader tells us to strike at his enemies with the fury of beasts and promises the rewards of heaven and earth to his allies and the fires of hell to those who would stand against him.

Our Glorious Leader admits that mistakes have been made but pleads with us not to forsake him in his hour of need.

Our Glorious Leader babbles incoherently about outside agitators and international intrigues hatched by hostile powers.

Our Glorious Leader vows never to be taken alive.

The spokesman for the provisional government announces that a new era has begun but first we must search out and destroy any remnants of the previous regime.

The spokesman for the provisional government asks for our support and requests that we remain calm during this difficult time…
Something in the Air (Tonight)

Is this war really necessary?

The diplomats think so. They have been unable to wring concessions from their counterparts, facing the brazen cameras with glum expressions and venting their disappointment from approved texts.

The mobilization has begin, the mechanical men in their motorized sarcophagi are on the move. Telemetry is good, optimism high.

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A SMART BOMB. THEY ARE RATHER STUPID, SINGLE-MINDED DEVICES ACTUALLY. DEVIous AND PREJUDICED.

A precision attack is programmed.
Outcome calculated to the nth degree.
Jam their radar, baffle their defenders, terrify their leaders.
Pincer movements, end sweeps.
We cannot lose, the god of technology is on our side.
Tank killers, bunker killers, essential industries killers.
Let the world know: we are still a force to be reckoned with.
Ruhr steel, Japanese electronics, Swiss optics, Detroit engines, Pentagon savvy.
We have become death, our camouflaged faces set in grim rictus.
No mercy for the merciless.

COLLATERAL DAMAGE CAN BE EXPECTED BUT IS NOT DESIROUS.

We do not rape women or bayonet children. This is not that “Vietnam thing”.
Pinpoint. Measured. Justifiable. And that is not a factory for making baby formula, their propaganda machine is trying to one-up ours.
We will only cheat if they do.
Our cause is just, our resolve strong.

THE RATINGS ARE GOING THROUGH THE ROOF. YELLOW RIBBONS EVERYWHERE. THE POLLS HAVE NEVER BEEN BETTER.

Peter Arnett is a traitor. Shwartzkopf cries as he kills.

This Way to the Cradle of Civilization!
Next stop: Moscow!
Better Dead Than Devalued!

or (maybe):

Give Peace a Chance!
Imagine There’s No Countries!
Instant Karma’s Gonna Get You!
Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!
The Ultimate Jay Gatsby

You are under surveillance from the moment you come to a stop before the heavy iron gates. If you’re fortunate enough to be admitted you are monitored by cameras mounted on poles all along the laneway that swivel to keep pace with your car. An electric eye scrutinizes you as you hand your coat to the houseboy who seems to dematerialize once you turn away. You pass from room to room and there are more cameras, placed well out of reach of curious hands; they indulge every whim of their unseen operator, panning and tracking and zooming and pulling back...

Few of the guests paid them any mind. Most of these people were associated with show business in one way or another and took to the limelight naturally, like fish to water. After some obligatory mugging the cameras were forgotten and the party began in earnest.

Champagne flowed and bubbled and the guests mingled and a short time later a small ensemble took to the stage and began to play, their repertoire as vast as it was varied. The beautiful people danced divinely, passionlessly, never once forsaking their adopted personas.

The food was brought in and, oh, it was exquisite. It was piled high on long tables, arranged with no semblance of order. Pastries vied for lebensraum with salads and gut-busting main courses clashed with delicate appetizers. There was some grumbling as the more staid among them noted that their host had failed to provide utensils. Most got into the spirit of the thing, grabbing fistfuls of food and splattering it onto their plates, shoveling it into their mouths with undisguised relish.

And the cameras saw it all.

They recorded the first salvo of the Great Food Fight, a blob of mousse that landed in a debutante’s carefully coiffed hair. She retaliated by throwing a badly aimed gougere puff which provoked a hail of lime tarts and pineapple bits and then food was flying thick and fast, sticking to the walls and ceiling and floor. When some whipped cream splattered across a camera lens a striking Filipino boy popped out of a nearby wall and carefully wiped it clean before disappearing in a puff of smoke.
Finally an uneasy truce was observed and the fusillade of food subsided. Drinks were served, insane concoctions of scotch and orange juice, cognac and 7-Up, sherry with sprigs of parsley floating on top. The guests guzzled these weird cocktails and took turns telling each other what great fun this was.

The drinks removed carefully maintained inhibitions. There were overtures, some of them rebuffed, most accepted with alacrity. Many sought the privacy of one of the dozens of bedrooms for their trysts; there they were observed less obtrusively by cameras placed behind one-way mirrors. The rich and famous fucked like the rich and famous do: with restraint.

--make sure you don’t muss my hair
--c’mom, crack one under your nose, it’ll make you crazy
--don’t tear my blouse!
--well, I’m not doing it unless you put one on
--watch those fucking nails, all right?

And the cameras saw it all.

Once sated, the lovers drifted back into the main hall where another, livelier band had started to play. Screaming guitars and pounding drums got the juices flowing again and that’s when more tables were wheeled in, this time laden with silver trays containing a veritable pharmacopeia of tasty narcotic confections. The guests fell upon the drugs eagerly, snorting and gobbling and shooting and smoking until they stumbled away, glassy-eyed and insensible. Some found their new realities hard to take. They squawked like prehistoric birds, fell to the floor, writhed and contorted and kicked and screamed until the dutiful houseboys appeared with syringes filled with Thorazine.

And the cameras saw it all.

The band played one last number then began to pack up their instruments and equipment.

The help came in and started clearing away the debris.

The guests dutifully arranged their clothing and psyches, made their way to the coat room and collected their things.
One by one they turned and waved to the camera fixed over the front door, mouthing their thanks, bidding their host farewell.

Once they were gone the cameras ceased their endless sweeps, the red lights winked off, the welcome mats rolled up like thick, hairy tongues, the automatic door locks snapped into place and the house went to sleep.

And dreamed closed circuit dreams.
A Most Evil Man

The man with the swept back hair and pale, dour, ascetic face, burning eyes, thick lips, sober brow, peculiar walk.

Exiting his house with a flourish, heavy door closing on a cloistered, solitary existence.

Into the night, nocturnal creatures stretching their wings, clicking their mandibles, preparing for the hunt, the kill, the feeding.

Down the street, cape swirling, head cowled, always alert for muggers.

The ground shuddering as a car passes. Dimlit shapes, hand fondling a thigh, high-pitched laughter. Young sinners, acolytes enacting age-old rituals. Giving no credence to the atavistic commandments of the pious.

Do what thou wilt.

Not walking down the street, receding. Floating on a cushion of air. The neighbors and their drawn curtains, television smiles, taped laughter.

Fashionably late. The restaurant almost empty. A booth by the window. Not asking its sole occupant if her name by any chance is—

Startled expression, limp handshake, flurry of activity, a tape recorder, microphone, battery test.

Two glasses of Dubonnet materializing before them, as if by magick.

Checking her notes, frowning. Beginning the interview.

Some background? Why not?

“I am not the Black Pope, the Devil incarnate, the AntiChrist, Damien, Cujo. I am…” eyes glittering, “like you, only more so.”

Interview concluded. Hot coffee, littered tabletop.

She is thanking him, yet again. Not necessary. Past midnight, shadows thickening, darkness spreading over the land, sowing moral dilemmas, the spirit weak, the flesh susceptible.

Inviting her to return with him to his home. Anxiety, uncertainty. His steady gaze offering no respite.
“For your story. An interesting companion piece. What does Satan’s bathroom look like?” Laughing as he says it but she is not reassured.

She seems to shrink a little with each step. At his door almost balking, reason deserting her, fear soaking her armpits, scratching her throat.

Tsk, tsk, still a prisoner of silly superstitions.

Regrettable.

Waiting while she regains her composure.

Door opening soundlessly, no squeaking hinges and instead of the stench of brimstone, mildew and dogshit.

Sitting in a highbacked chair, waving her toward the lumpy sofa. Old hound padding over to him, slobbering on his pantleg.

Wall to wall bookcases, a crystal ball and riding crop. Family snapshots, dog biscuits and a well-thumbed *Reader’s Digest*.

Rubbing his eyes, settling back, drumming his long, cigarette-stained fingers on the arm of the chair, dog settling down, nuzzling his slippered feet.

Apologizing, asking if he might watch the news. Events in eastern Europe, diplomatic breakthroughs, freedom exploding everywhere. Nodding, intent. Turning to her during a commercial break, smiling; prominent, pointed teeth.

“My Master seems to be in retreat of late.”

And the old dog snuffling, as if in agreement.
Not a Window, Only an Aperture

I am slumped on the couch, stoned out of my gourd, it is four o’clock on a mid-week afternoon and I am thirty years old.

Today, in a bargain bin, I found a video compilation of old “Gumby” cartoons. That’s what I’m watching as I sit here, parboiling my brain.

When I was a little kid I used to find some of Gumby’s exploits kind of scary. One time he discovered a secret world in his oven and almost met his doom at the hands of evil baked goods. The blockheads always bothered me too. They could come at you from anywhere—through the walls, the ceiling, the floor.

Nobody watches “Gumby” any more. Kids are more into “Tiny Toons” and “Mutant Midget Turtles” or whatever the fuck those things are called.

There’s been more talk again lately about legislating television programming to get rid of the violence. The ideologues are honing their rhetoric, politicians polling their constituents and discovering that most average, hard-working, over-taxed and under-serviced people don’t give a fuck.

My wife told me yesterday that she thought she was pregnant. This came as a shock. We took the home test and she passed with flying (pink) colors. So now I have to think about the kind of stuff kids are exposed to through the media. I used to bitch about how they cut all the gory stuff out of “Bugs Bunny” cartoons, effectively bowdlerizing them. How do I feel about that now? Well, I don’t like the guns Elmer and Yosemite Sam are always waving around. And they shouldn’t poke each other in the eye like that. Suppose my child thinks s/he can do that too?

What sort of message will my son or daughter (now the size of a grain of rice) get from watching these “Gumby” cartoons? Beware of blockheads? Witches are people too? Never turn your back on a croissant?

“Children,” dad intones, nodding sagely, the dope making his eyes twinkle, “life is one, long ‘Gumby’ cartoon full of ice cream eating monsters. Never forget that.”

“Yeah, right, pop. Tell us another one.” The boy picks at one of the designer drug patches stippling his scrawny, scarred forearms.
At this age the texts tell you it’s normal for them to be sullen and resentful. Vicious arguments break out over nothing. Lots of saber-rattling and hormone flexing.

Dad is forty-seven years old and almost as stoned as his son is. He’s watching ’toons on a high def screen with digital sound. His kids are from Mars, his wife a reaction machine and he wishes he was six inches tall and made of green clay so that he could slip through the cover of a book and live a whole other life.
“By the time you read this it will already be too late…”

Let’s assume for a moment that you have an open mind that these words aren’t going to just fly off the page out the window into the dirty street below not that there is an implicit/explicit message philosophy political viewpoint being imparted just a desire for you to step out of your preconceptions/assumptions and into mine which are not necessarily bounded by these two margins rather an infinite array of possibilities dogs are not dogs clouds are conspiring against you strangers alien life forms I wish I could tell you that none of this is true that you’ll be able to slide back into your safe comfortable existence once you return this book to the shelf but I’m afraid it’s not that simple because they’re closing in on you they’ve traced this call they’re outside your door quasi-sentient beasts with the cold eyes of a serial rapist stay seated don’t make a sound only I should tell you that in my world they never lose the scent and always, always get their man.
About the Author

Mostly I live inside myself. Internalized.

I carry on long conversations, debates really, that only I can hear. Some of them can get quite heated...though few are what you would call profound. Mainly, they’re tests of character. I take myself to task for this or that shortcoming: pride, avarice, insensitivity, all the deadly sins.

Around others I can be quite funny, although when I’m nervous I often go too far. Scatological, tasteless references pop out of my mouth with no warning. Inappropriate cuss words, ill-conceived turns of phrase. I keep telling Sherron “never put me in a situation where I have to meet Strangers, New People—especially if you want to make a good impression.” First impressions are not my forte. I come across as a boor. Or arrogant. Or self-absorbed. Subsequent encounters are better. The person becomes familiar to me and some of the walls come down. I seem almost likeable and this confuses them. Some of my best friends hated me on sight. It’s true. Unfortunate but true.

Really, I’m most content when I’m alone. Pacing around the apartment, listening to strange music, reading a strange book. I despise interruptions, resent intrusions into my personal space. My home is my castle. I sometimes wish I had a vat of boiling oil to pour on people who “drop by for a quick visit” or call “to see what you’re up to”.

“I’m working,” I tell them, but this is usually a lie. What I’m probably doing is just...thinking. About everything in general and nothing in particular. Letting my mind wander, giving it free rein with no set boundaries. I follow it into the wildest, most surreal places. And when I come back, I report what I’ve seen in as much detail as my talent allows. With no apologies and a straight face I declare myself to be:

--an explorer of uncharted realms
--a crackpot philosopher
--a hair-brained theologian

Inspired by overcast skies, state funerals, FloydZepCureVanMorrisonJoyDivisionKateBushWilliam BurroughsBallard, fallen idols, random acts and grey areas.

C.B. (January, 1994)