



BEAT THE DUST

January 2009

Guest Editor, Joseph Ridgwell presents...

The Recession Session - Part I

Writer of the poetry collection 'Where are the Rebels?', Lost Elationist and lead the literary gun-runner, Joseph Ridgwell introduces Part I of his Rebel edition of Beat the Dust.



'The aim of the writer is to transmute experience into art by any means necessary!'

So I shall begin. In today's troublesome times - credit crunch, recession, depression, negative equity, deflation, and whatever other dick-fuck names the powers that be assign to a phenomenon they have absolutely no control over - the artists and writers of the world must stand up and be counted.

'I must create my own system or be enslaved by another man's.' - William Blake

But first things first. It is abundantly clear that the governments, financiers and bankers of the world have no idea how an economy operates. Down the ages many great minds have tried to

understand and control economies; all have failed. As there are no great minds operating in these circles today it stands to reason that nobody knows what the fuck is going on. This is because, essentially, an economy is an organic thing like a flower in spring or a steaming dog turd.

'The long run is a misleading guide to current affairs. In the long run we are all dead.' - John Maynard Keynes.

We are most definitely living in a degenerate age and unconsciously witnessing the decline of Western civilisation as it embarks on a long, slow and inevitable death march. And we are also, in all probability, about to enter a prolonged depression the likes of which has not been witnessed in living memory. This in itself is not a bad thing. In good times the general populace appears to switch off any intellectual capacity it has, and slips into a lethargic, passive state of easy subjugation. This is why we have our current disastrous cultural vacuum. This is why people venerate talentless celebrities. This is why they watch reality TV shows. This is why they read chick-lit and other lame publications that belong in the sewer. But in bad times, when people lose their jobs, homes, wives, children, and any notion of a fat-arsed comfortable existence disappears into the ether, they must surely wake up from their self-induced comas and begin to question things.

'When sitting just sit, when walking just walk, most of all don't wobble.' Lin Chi Zen master.

This is when the revolutionary artists, seers and rebel writers come into their own. Call it Act II, if you like. Any artist or writer worth their salt is continually in a state of flux. The primary purpose of the artist is to question the status quo at all times. They are continually searching for a reason to believe in the banal and terrifying existence that is the lot of all humans. Some will go mad in pursuit of the truth, others will fall by the wayside, destroyed by any number of lifestyle diseases, and others, who maybe the true geniuses of our times, will merely say nothing and just wait around to die.

'What is a rebel? A man who says no.' - Albert Camus.

And this all leads me nicely to the special Rebel editions of Beat the Dust, The Recession Session Parts I and II. One major problem any talented artist faces today is getting their voice heard amongst the million other half-arsed voices screaming for attention. The mainstream is virtually a closed shop, and even if you wanted to, almost impossible to infiltrate. The literary underground

is an equally frustrating place. The internet has spawned thousands of literary sites, zines, and print on demand has seen a proliferation of chapbooks, novels, and short story anthologies. 99% of these sites and books are arid wastelands of nothingness.

'I think that the miracle of our times is that so many people can write down so many words that mean absolutely nothing. Try it sometime. It's almost impossible to write down words that mean absolutely nothing, but they can do it, and they do it continually and relentlessly.'

- Charles Bukowski.

So, for any discerning reader on the look-out for ground-breaking and original rebel prose, it's like looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack. And for any innovative and visionary editor trying to locate good new writing the whole grubby process can be a very soul-sapping, demoralising, and exhaustive experience. So when I was asked to be Guest Editor for the January edition of BTD the remit was simple:

'To create an issue of Beat the Dust that will go down in the annals of litzine history...' - Melissa Mann, Editor of BTD.

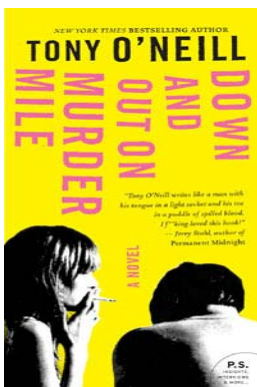
Piece of piss, thought I. And so that's exactly what I set out to do. The line up of writers and artists assembled here will probably never be seen again in one litzine or in my lifetime, and I definitely will not be editing again, so this is what you could call an historic literary one-off. Hopefully the writing stands up and will entertain, illuminate, and explode those comfort zones which some of you still inhabit!

So here it is, The Recession Session – Part I. Be prepared to be electrified, people, for the party is over and the hangover starts here. And if my hunch is correct and things get really bad, in the famed words of Marie Antoinette: *'Qu'ils mangent de la brioche.'*

Load the Literary Guns!



Tony O'Neill is interviewed by Dazed & Confused



The following is an extract of the Tony O'Neill interview that appeared in the December 2008 issue of Dazed & Confused. In true rebel style, it is reproduced without permission from the original source.

D&C: What's it like to have your work published by such a big [publishing] house?

TO'N: Surreal. Nobody would touch *Digging the Vein* with a ten-foot pole, which was difficult because I'd made writing my last shot. My career in music was over. I had never finished my education. I had never held down a job. I had a raging drug habit. I really felt that if I couldn't follow through on this book, I might as well jump out of a window. The only other alternative was to give up and get a straight job and that frightened me more than the idea of death.

D&C: Doesn't signing to Harper conflict with The Brutalists' ideals?

TO'N: Oh no, not at all. I mean, The Brutalists are not working so that their work can remain in the shadows. My agenda as a member of The Brutalists is exactly the same as my agenda as a writer – to get the work out there. No movement should be about preaching to the converted. Our books should be taught in schools. They should be left in hotels instead of the Gideon Bible.

waiting for cj by Tony O'Neill

Walking up the street towards CJ's place with the dope-sweat soaking through my T-shirt and my underwear, breathing ragged and hard under the unforgiving sun. There are no footpaths around here. Los Angeles is not designed for pedestrians. I hear the crunch of gravel as another car approaches from behind, and I step aside. This is considered somewhat of a nice neighborhood. The guy behind the wheel of the black Volkswagen Jetta leans out to spit at me. This happens quite regularly when I travel around LA on foot. Non-car owners are considered the lowest of the low. I live much further down this hill, right off the shitty part of Hollywood

Boulevard. But CJ, for as long as I've known him, lives here. His folks are wealthy and they help him survive by paying the rent on this place, giving him a small allowance, and paying for his regular stints in the hospital to detox.

Last night CJ and I heard that Lilly OD'd. Lilly was a red head we knew from the methadone clinic, a whore and a petty thief. Her regular guy was a crazy Puerto Rican called Gordo, who operated down by Pico-Union. Hearing that he had sold her some shit strong enough to kill her, we immediately set up a buy. My days with CJ have followed a similar pattern ever since we hooked up at the clinic: long, languid Los Angeles afternoons, both of us relentlessly pursuing temporary oblivion. CJ is my only friend in the whole world.

I met him 2 years ago, standing on line for our government-mandated opiates. He was the first one who taught me how to spit back – vomiting on command to rebottle and sell your methadone. Even though it went for less than the going rate for regular methadone, 80mls of spit back was good for 7 dollars – the cost of a bag of dope downtown. The trick was not to eat anything the night before, and to make yourself vomit before attending the clinic. The old Chinese behind the counter made you stick your tongue out and say “ahh”, because they got wise to people just retaining the stuff in their mouths until they left the clinic to resell it. Now the same bottom-feeding junkies who used to buy spat-up methadone from us in the parking lot had to make do with regurgitated methadone. I tried some of my own product once. The aniseed taste of the methadone somewhat masked the bitterness of my stomach acid but not by much. The first guy I ever sold it to looked me up and down and scowled: “you don't got Hep or AIDS, do you?” and I shrugged my shoulders. “I have no clue, man.” I told him, honestly.

He still bought the shit, but tried to haggle me down, unsuccessfully.

CJ was a fountain of useful knowledge like that. He taught me how to cook up crack with ammonia instead of having to fuck around with baking soda. Or how to make a meth pipe with only a butane lighter and one of those glass pipettes they sell in any drug store. You know, useful shit. But some of the other cats at the clinic didn't trust CJ.

“He's a fucking rich kid” Johnny D told me once, his old black face wrinkled in disgust. “As soon as it gets too tough all he has to do is call his pops and he'll be whisked away from all of *this*.”

But it didn't matter none to me. CJ was that rarest of things on the dope scene. A friend. A genuine, won't open up your balloon and steal dope out of it, kind of friend. The rarest kind there is.

There was a kind of fatalism to CJ. He was in it for life. I didn't think he would run back to his father if things got too tough. Shit, things were already tough. He was losing his teeth, his money. The allowance wasn't enough to support the kind of dope habit CJ had acquired, and he had to do plenty of nasty things to keep the money coming in. CJ was an expert shoplifter, but he was an even better talker. Dealers tripped over themselves to give him credit because everyone on the scene knew he came from money. They all wanted someone like him to be in debt to them. He was tall and skinny, and wore the same clothes day in day out: a now almost-grey black T-shirt, skin-tight black jeans, a pair of scuffed up motorcycle boots and an old pair of ray bans. His hair stuck-up from his head in filthy, mottled angles. He looked like Keith Richards sicker, more fucked up cousin.

I reached the door, panting like a dog in the mid morning heat. On the doorstep was a rotting jack-o-lantern, which had been sitting there for five months. I had watched its snarling, saber-toothed face start to wrinkle and distort over the months, turning from bright orange to the sickly yellow color of a malaria victim, then to shit brown, until finally the face collapsed in on itself. Now it was just a pile of evil smelling sludge, which had become a place for fruit flies and bugs to congregate. I knocked. No answer. I knocked again and held my ear to the door. Nothing.

This wasn't unusual. I lifted up the mat, which bore the legend "Fuck Off" and took out the spare key. CJ began leaving a spare key out here for me, because plenty of times he had left me standing out in the sun for an hour or more while he lay on the bed, nodded out on smack. I slid the key in the lock, turned it and pushed the door open.

As I stepped out of the sun, the sweat that had gummed my T-shirt to my back immediately started to cool. For a moment it felt wonderful. Then I felt something cold and hard press against the side of my face and a voice from behind me snarled:

"Don' move - don' breathe - don' fuckin' say a word, cocksucker."

I froze and did exactly what the voice said. I remained perfectly still. I listened to my breathing. I thought to myself: *Oh Jesus please don't kill me now. I'm dope sick. Please don't let me go out dope sick.*

"You're not CJ." The voice said eventually. I started to turn my head slightly towards the voice, but it screamed "I SAY DON' MOVE ASSHOLE!"

"Sorry. But no... I'm Joe."

"Wha you doin' with the key. You live here?"

"No. I used the spare. Are you a cop? 'Cos really man, I don't know nothin' about anything. I was just stopping by to see if CJ was alright, cause I hadn't heard from him in a little while..."
I felt the gun being removed from my face, and the gunman stepped out of the gloom.

"I ain' no fucking cop, stupid."

With a start I realized that I recognized this guy. He was short, Latino, with a bushy mustache and a Lakers top on. He wore too much yellow-gold jewelry, and a filthy looking cap with a picture of the Virgin de Guadalupe on it. It came to me in a flash. *The cat in the hat*, CJ called him. One of his regular connections who operated out of the projects in Ghost Town, Venice. Fuck, this didn't look good.

"CJ owes you money?"

"Yup. A lotta fuckin' money. I'm here to collect."

"How did you get in?"

"Shit," the cat in the hat laughed, "You seriously asking me that? I broke in, nigga!"

I started thinking that if I could maybe talk my way out of CJ's place, I could get to a phone and warn him.

"Well look, man... this is between you and CJ. I godda split, people to see, you know..."

"Sit your fuckin ass *down*," the cat in the hat commanded, and he cocked the gun at me again. I did what I was told.

"So you don' know where this cocksucker is, huh?"

I raised my palms.

The cat in the hat sat down next to me on CJ's couch and placed the gun right in front of him. He kept his eyes on me.

"Well, I guess we're both waiting right here, huh. What you say your name is?"

"Joe."

"Joe," he whistled. "CJ and Joe. Shit, you motherfuckers are in a lot of trouble."

At that moment, somewhere else in the apartment I heard the toilet flush. The bathroom was hidden away from the main room, off of CJ's bedroom. I stiffened. Was CJ in here the whole time? I looked to the gun, and then to the cat in the hat for a clue, but he just laughed at me.

"Calm down, shit head" he laughed, "That ain' your boyfriend. Seems there's someone else looking for this asshole. Like I say, that cocksucker's in a lot of trouble, man."

I looked to the bedroom door. It swung open and a black shape stepped into the room. With a start, I realized that it was Death. Death. Death, like from tarot cards, or the fucking cartoons... Death, a 6-foot tall walking skeleton in a black fucking robe carrying a scythe.

"You have godda be fucking kidding me," I said to no one in particular.

"*I AM DEATH,*" Death announced.

"Yeah." I said, "No shit!"

I turned to the cat in the hat and mouthed *is this guy for real?* The cat just silently nodded.

"You know" I said, "I didn't expect him to be so..."

I couldn't get the words out so I just waved my hand at Death, to indicate his appearance. I don't know, I'm a child of the MTV generation. I figured Death wouldn't be such a cliché in the

new millennium. Maybe I supposed he'd had a makeover. Maybe I was expecting Brad Pitt to walk out of the fucking bathroom in a black suit, just like in that shit-awful movie I had sat through stoned one night. Even worse was the voice. It didn't resonate with chilling power. It was cold for sure; you could almost visualize icy particles forming on his tongue in-between words. But he sounded more like a politician or a newscaster than an emissary from another plane. And he had an American accent – somehow it surprised me that death was an American. I suppose, in retrospect, it makes perfect sense.

Death joined us at the table. The three of us sat around in silence. Death was a man of few words. He just sat there, breathing. His breath sounded like old dusty air being pushed through a series of cobwebby pipes. I turned to the cat in the hat.

"Hey listen," I said, shooting him an ingratiating smile, "I'm kinda dope sick, man. I was just stopping by here so I could see if I could borrow money off my man CJ... I was meant to meet someone downtown right now... Listen, while we're waiting for CJ to show, I mean, do you think you could front me a little stuff? 'Cos I'm really sick man."

The cat in the hat frowned at me. "You sittin' in between a pissed-off drug dealer with a loaded gun and Death himself, homeboy. I'd keep my goddamn mouth shut if I was you."

I tried to keep quiet. But after a few moments, I couldn't. I was too full of questions.

"Umm, Death?"

"*YES?*"

"So what did CJ do? I mean... why are you here for him?"

"OVERDOSE. ABOUT 20 MINUTES AGO HE SCORED SOME FENTANYL PATCHES AND CUT THEM OPEN TO SWALLOW THE FENTANYL. RESPIRATORY FAILURE IS DUE TO SET IN SOON."

"So you're just gonna wait here for him to show up and then..."

"THEN I TAKE HIM. I HAVE 4 MORE IN HOLLYWOOD TO CLEAR TODAY. YOUR ASSHOLE FRIEND IS LATE."

We sat in silence for a moment.

"Hey man," the cat in the hat sneered, "Like a million motherfuckers die a day, right? How the fuck can you be sittin around this prick's apartment, waiting for him to show up? Don't you got somewhere to be, man?"

"I AM LEGION, ASSHOLE. DEATH IS EVERYWHERE. WE EVEN HAVE A UNION."

"A union? Shit. We don' got a union."

"So wait," I interrupted, "you're saying that CJ already took the Fentanyl? So he's as good as dead, right?"

"RIGHT."

"So what are *you* hanging around for?" I asked the cat in the hat.

"My \$3,000 dollars, homes. That's what I'm waiting for. Sheeit."

"But CJ's already dead, right? I mean Death is right here."

I could see the cat in the hat doing calculations in his head. Then, his face darkening he pushed me aside and addressed Death directly.

"Listen man – I wan' my money first. You ain't taking homeboy until he gives me what he owes me!"

"Shit!" I laughed, "He ain't gonna give you shit! If he knows he's already *dead* for chrissakes! Why the fuck is he gonna pay you what he owes you? That fucking gun ain't gonna scare him, man. Fucking DEATH is sat right here!"

"Well hey," the cat in the hat asked Death, "can you split while I beat the money out of this prick?"

"*NO,*" Death replied, turning towards us so that the cat was looking directly into the void of his shroud, "*DEATH IS NON NEGOTIABLE.*"

"So you know when I'm due to die?" I asked Death.

"*YES*"

"And you know when this guy is about to die?"

"*OF COURSE.*"

"When is it his time?" I asked.

"*2 YEARS AND 17 DAYS FROM NOW. BULLET WOUND TO THE CHEST AND FACE.*"

I looked over to the cat. He had deflated a little. He had lost some of his cockiness.

"Ah well" I sighed, "Goes with the territory. Tough profession, man."

"You need to keep your mouth shut, dickweed. I might just save this motherfucker a return trip and do you myself, right now."

"*IT IS NOT HIS TIME. HIS TIME WILL COME. SOON.*"

"Oh yeah?" the cat laughed, "and what happens to this faggot?"

"*DO YOU REALLY HAVE TO ASK?*" Death said, shooting a sideways glance. I coughed and self-consciously rubbed the track marks on my forearms protectively. Well, everybody has a time to go, I suppose.

We all fell into silence. Pondering fate, maybe. Then the cat in the hat started up again.

"Listen man," he said, addressing Death, "I was here first. Surely that counts for something? I need the money, man. I got a family to feed here."

"*IT COUNTS FOR NOTHING. AND YOUR FAMILY IS OF NO CONCERN TO ME.*"

"Can I please leave now?" I asked again. I felt my guts unknotting, "I think I'm gonna shit my pants."

"You shut your fucking mouth and stay put!" spat the cat in the hat.

"Why don't you assholes flip a fucking coin or something?" I pleaded, "I'm fucking sick! I need to get the fuck out of here!"

Death turned slightly. *"ARE YOU SUGGESTING A WAGER? FOR THE SOUL OF THE JUNKIE?"*

"Whatever, man!"

"Wha?" the cat demanded, "you'll consider that?"

"A GAME TO DECIDE THE FATE OF CJ?"

"Shit! Let's do it, homie..."

Death reached into his robe and produced a board covered in black and white squares.

"Wass that, man?" the cat in the hat demanded, "Chinese checkers?"

"CHESS."

"I don't know how to play no fucking chess, homie." The cat in the hat laughed, reaching into his pockets. He pulled out something, and shook his fist at death, "Dice homes. That's my game. You wanna shoot craps, D?"

Death turned to me.

"ARE YOU IN?" he asked.

"Me? I dunno."

"YOU CAME HERE FOR CJ ALSO. YOU MAY ALSO PLAY TO DETERMINE HIS FATE."

"Hey fuck that!" the cat yelled, "that's bullshit! This is between you and me, D!"

"IF HE WISHES TO PLAY, HE PLAYS."

I could see the cat going over the odds in his head. He tapped me on the shoulder and whispered: "Why don' you split right now? No fuckin' questions asked."

"But CJ."

"Listen," he hissed reaching into his jacket, "look at this."

He pulled out a large baggie of white powder. He let me take a quick glance before leaning in close.

"This is the real deal. None of that bullshit Mexican tar shit you faggots mess with. China-fuckin'-white! Uncut. Pure as a nun's snatch, homes! There's enough here to kill an army, or at least get a dope fiend stoned for a good long time. Why don' you take this and split, an' leave the game to the big boys, huh?"

So, my decision boiled down to CJ or dope. A chance to save my friend from his fate, or a baggie of pure dope, uncut and undiluted. As far as decisions go... it was no decision at all.

I took the dope, and told Death and the cat in the hat: "I'll see you boys around."

Without looking up, both Death and the cat in the hat waved me out of the room. They intently began shooting dice, as I crept out of the room in quiet amazement. Running to the bathroom and locking the door behind me, I quickly got to work on the window. It jimmied open easily and I jumped out onto the street.

Outside the sky was clear and brilliant, entirely oblivious to the fate of my friend. I wondered absently who would win the game of dice. As I wondered, right there in the middle of the street, I saw an incredible sight. A dog had escaped from one of the houses nearby... it was one of those fruity miniature numbers, so popular around these parts. The skinny, ugly little thing was dry fucking the corpse of a skunk that had obviously been hit by a car. The thing's cranial matter was splattered all over the street, a brilliant explosion of reds and purples, but the dog didn't care. It just fucked and fucked and fucked the bloody corpse, regardless.

Then, out of nowhere, a hungry looking coyote dashed from in between some garbage cans, and pounced on the dog. Picking up the still thrusting animal with one savage snap of jaws on neck, it dragged the spurting, whining thing into the bushes to rip it apart. It all happened in a fraction of a second, and only the agonized yelps of the dog emanating from the bushes as the coyote tore it apart, gave a clue to what I had just witnessed. The skunk lay there impervious, and a fly landed lazily upon its mused head. Jesus, it seemed that Death was everywhere.

I walked on.

Ford Dagenham is interviewed by Melissa Mann (inadvertently, without her knowledge – ha!)



MM: Hiya, I run Beat The Dust . . .

FD: I know it.

MM: Just pulling together the things we need for Joe's edition of the litzine.

FD: Coolio.

MM: Thanks for supporting Joe with this by the way.

FD: Coolio. He wrote Ode To Beer.

MM: Very pleased to have you on board here at BTD.

FD: Developed an allergy to beer this year. No joke. Not coolio. Makes my throat feel like a foot.

MM: To go with your sub we need a pic, a mug-shot or an image relevant to one of your poems.

FD: But it's New Years Eve! I am getting my drink-on. This is happening? Right here? Right now? Happening to me?

MM: You've got till Saturday.

FD: It's Wednesday already! This is off the chart! Only just found this email you know, broken laptop.

MM: I sympathise. I need a punchy Q&A interview with yourself being interviewed by a well known person or a famous character.

FD: That's on your ownself.

MM: Relax, you can check out past examples at BTD for ideas.

FD: OK. Look, I'll see what I can do . . . opening organic vodka right now you know, won't even have a hangover.

MM: Alternatively you can write you own obit.

FD: What! You want me to fake my own death?

MM: Christ no; a *mock* obit. Whichever you choose though keep it short, no more than about 250 words max, ok?

FD: Ok. Be in touch.

high heels in the crescent by Ford Dagenham

I was heading to my bed
on two glasses of wine.

it was fine.
just two glasses of wine.

I lay myself down.

when

out the open window
I hear the sound of high heels
clip clipping on the paving slabs and kerbs.

and I am electrified

must write this story down.
the story
of the high heels in the crescent
tip tapping the tarmac.

I get myself up.
get another bottle of wine from the kitchen.

I am
convinced beyond reason
that it is the heels
of some urban hooker

returning to her sporty Renault.

a low class play story
 of *effort*
 no one looking at the elephant in the room.
 its got a garter on.

ends with the normal slam of a car door
 and she washes her hands with a wipe.

the only high heels I heard
 playing
 like music from a child's piano
 on this
 crescent ground.

animal by Ford Dagenham

animal,
 dirty
 selfish
 unstable.
 paws sweat at the circle,
 at the dark.

animal takes another beer, ignorant of the facts.

red eyes stare into the sun setting under black clouds
 it looks like heaven but wrong . . .

animal
 barks
 howls
 unstable, Supremo

and then night falls like Stalins statue.

animal in a cave
 with a burning fire, a tight drum,
 a cathedral!

gone underground,
 the bass beats demented for the blind.

he's a guide dog, a guided missile,
 he's revolution,
 dangerous in concept

 falling with cameras under the guillotine.

animal asks the dust

how he can be tame and wild too?
 why his suit-half is loyal
 prowling
 crowded corridors with his bad smile

way under anyone's radar.

his trousers and his flesh;
 animal hungry again,
 pouting like a Jagger
 but his teeth so yellow from raw meat
 barbarian after 4pm

always.

animal write a hundred memos
 and leaves them all laying about for the bats to read,

so they got time to *plan* . . .

his control is ice, devastating fire

he's scratching across empty floors now
 lame and
 raging in a whisper.

animals out in the night air
 breathing it in like never before.
 going to the shop for beer
 with his handful of pounds.

its all cold and drug fresh.

animal smiles bad gums
 at anything
 at the safe lights pouring there, down the hill.

he is animal, out.

animals dog eyes stare at the shop girls hot thighs.

she is on her mobile,
 talking
 about
 nothing,
 nothing that could ever matter.

animal is sure, he has to be sure.

her black eyes
 know him from another night
 when he was around a parked car

sharp claws out . . .

. . . indulging his whims on waste ground at midnight.
 theres broken metal ends
 and dirty concrete disgusting
 and the noises stay in his throat
 till horrible dawn
 opens up slowly
 like a glaucoma eye.

and in the morning his
 suit looks at the refinery dawn blankly his
 heels hurrying on the pavement
 sober
 all over.

morning.

 but
 animal still saw the dead walk;
 he saw them when he was man.
 he knows they still shop.

clean weekdays impossible by Ford Dagenham

I was
 trying
 to have
 weekdays
 off the
 weed.

but by
 Wednesday
 I had
 not slept
 for one
 hundred
 nights.

so I
 roll a
 small bomb
 10.30
 pm.

and I'm
 lighting
 it at
 the back

door.

a tree
 full of
 rain in
 my face
 is wet
 judgement.

2007 destroyed by Ford Dagenham

the unspecial summer
 stunted
 is already gone
 and though
 I am
 dramatically forsaken
 and my
 derangement is high and raging
 I wont
 kill anyone today.

some maelstrom in nadir
 I am
 delicate as children
 and
 likely to sob into
 anyones lap.
 anyway
 its her plan
 playing out the years
 that
 kills my needy heart dead.

summers
 burnt off its brief light
 that shone a watchmans torch on me,
 so sad,
 taking photos of my shadow
 on a sepia beach.
 I was
 a walking lobotomy
 memories a frieze
 in fading beige.

Niven Govinden writes his own mock obituary



Niven Govinden either did a Mama Cass or disco'd til he dropped. In the afterlife he continues to plug his novels 'We Are The New Romantics' and 'Graffiti My Soul.'

beard boy fashionista by Niven Govinden

You have a beard because it makes them uncomfortable, unless it's small children, who think that you're some sort of pirate. Actually, you have a beard because you can't be chumped to shave, and because it's how the boys are wearing their faces in this month's L'Uomo Vogue, a reference that seems to be lost on everybody.

You're in your mid-twenties and full of it. You can't stop thinking about fashion just because world leaders and dictators are pursuing their symbiotic death wishes. Fashion transcends all that crap. You don't have a badge of honour, if you did it would be Nicolas Ghesquiere, but since you are no longer welcome in most of the luxury stores now that managers are canny to your hokey plastic, you have to cajole tourists from behind trees to go into said shops to buy the gear on your behalf. In lieu of any medallion you wear your beard with pride.

It gives your fight credence, because there is always a fight: Spring/Summer vs. Autumn/Winter, Savile Row vs. Milan, cluster bombs vs. suicide bombers. Anyone who doesn't realise that is delusional.

Your youth was selfish, you admit. You never wore a beard until you saw how it suited a duel purpose – fashion catwalk and political dogfight in the same gesture. You still have juvenile tendencies. It tickles you to confuse people, and if it makes you look hotter, all the better.

The perks can be enormous. The beard, getting you a significant amount of extra play in the early months, until girls were warned by their parents to stay away from you.

Keep your beard nice and thick, and you get your choice of seats on the tram, and served the moment you enter any local shops. Stay unshaven as a constant reminder that the

trouble-maker is always in their midst; illogical fears that even the liberal apologists can't prevent from discretely entering their minds and then never leaving.

You get with the Robinson Crusoe look to show your stubbornness, that you aren't going to leave any fancy restaurant. Your face is furry, spiky, cuddly, and sharp enough to slit someone's throat. What's not to like about beards?

The beard may set the tone for your look, but it isn't everything. It's simply the keynote; the garlic clove, citrus peel or herb expressed through clothes. But no one listens or wants to listen about your eccentricities. Folk look at the beard and get the wrong idea about the clobber, putting 2 + 2 together and getting 10.

They pay scant attention to the details: your bespoke cotton trousers from Italy, with their two front pleats, and gently rolled at the ankles, are mistaken for Shalwar Kamiz; your electric blue espadrilles with their hand-stitching, for Mosque sandals; your beret, spells trouble in any country.

You find yourself spending more time at your club where you can shield yourself from this regular stream of ignorance. Although you wouldn't term it thus, you virtually take refuge there, because you can barely get out of the house without some comedian passing comment (which wouldn't matter so much if you were really pulling out the big guns, but all you're rocking are jeans and a mid-length cape).

'They wouldn't know high fashion if it came and bit them on the ass' was your usual refrain, but that doesn't come close to brushing aside the increased levels of hostility. You have yet to find a phrase that does.

Your club has nothing to do with sexual preference or choice of holy book. It is only about beards and brown skin. There are more of you than you thought, a half-score in a city a quarter the size of New York, and initially you feel a sense of camaraderie. It feels good to get some of this stuff off your chest. (Most of it you've never even shared with your girlfriend lest she believes you to be chip chip chippy about your Bisto skin tone.) Backs are slapped, palms high-fived, lo-fived, and every other way'd to show your connection, complicity, *brotherhood*.

Until, one of the brothers turns up one night in a pair of Dries Van Noten silver wing-tipped brogues with elevated heels that haven't even left Milan fashion week yet, and y'all start hating. You stop worrying about being punched in the street and start wondering who has the better beard, often holding this discussion behind the back of that particular wearer. There are so many of these discussions, behind so many backs, they are timetabled and sent to all members in advance as if at a summit; though politics is too crass a description. This is bitching as ballet, starched and precise, fine-tuned to the nth degree yet still beautifully and bitterly fluid. Some of your brothers buckle under the pressure and look to start fights, needing the gratification of

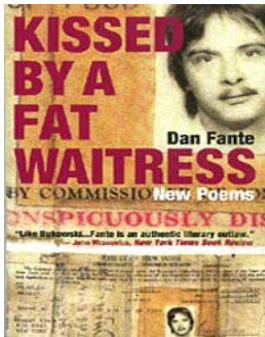
physical contact where a punch can sort out any grievance, until they remember that fur cuffs are impossible to dry clean.

You start putting rumours around about glue and fake beard wearers who only want to infiltrate the club to gain better access to the menswear shows. With that amount of individuality in one room, everyone killing themselves to be beyond fashion - metros matching suits with black boas, queens with turbans to really mess with minds, and you staying up until the silly hours wondering whether you can mohawk your beard without it turning into a goatee, drawing several diagrams before you abandon the idea- you are starting to resemble a cult.

Worse than a cult, a faction, with your arguing, chanting, and recent habit of sitting in a circle. When the security services break up a meeting one night, no one is surprised.

Next season, you will shave your head and your face, bring back the black bomber jacket and sixteen-hole Doctor Martens, and see what happens.

Dan Fante's 'Kissed by a Fat Waitress' reviewed by Joseph Ridgwell



Dan Fante began his writing career in his mid-forties after many years as a drunk. "I went to a Christmas party in 1964 and sobered up sometime in the first week of January, 1986," says Fante. He writes poetry, plays, short stories and novels, and is currently at work on a cable television adaptation on his book of short stories 'Short Dog'. Fante vows never to return to the city of Los Angeles except at gunpoint or for the purpose of cremation. To listen to an exclusive interview with Dan Fante check out Rob and Jack America on Blog Talk Radio here: <http://www.blogtalkradio.com/robjack-america/2008/10/12/two-siamese-desperate-to-split>

kissed by a fat waitress – Dan Fante, published by Sun Dog Press, reviewed by Joseph Ridgwell

Kissed by a Fat Waitress is the latest collection of poetry by renowned cult author and authentic literary outlaw, Dan Fante. Fante's latest collection is published by the independent small publisher, Sun Dog Press, and is one of the best books of poetry I've read this year, and believe me I've read a great deal, most of which I wouldn't even wipe my arse with.

Anyhow, Dan Fante first came to my attention as a writer with his excellent Bruno Dante trilogy, Moch, Chump Change and Spitting off Tall Buildings. Back then I was already aware that DF was the son of the late great L.A writer John Fante, and was initially suspicious of buying books written by someone who I, inaccurately perceived as some rich kid Malibu surfer boy cashing in on his Old Man's recently resurrected fame. To say this was a wholly unjustified and unreasonable prejudice would be like asking a brass to go out on a date after paying her for a BJ, the deluded and somewhat deranged behaviour of an imbecile.

Well, I did both, but luckily for me I managed to see the error and stupidity of my ways and ditched the prostie as girlfriend idea, and went out and bought all Dan Fante's books instead. It was probably one of my more inspired and intelligent decisions as Fante proved to be one hell of an author, his writing entertaining, life-affirming, brutal, bleak, dark, but always written from the heart and from the soul.

And so is Kissed by a Fat Waitress, which is easily comparable in quality to another of Fante's collections of poetry, A Gin Pissing, Raw Meat Dual Carburettor V-8 Son-of-a-bitch from Los Angeles. Okay that title is a bit of a mouthful, but it probably sums up Mr Fante himself, for his writing can be powerful, disagreeable, alcohol-soaked, illuminating, and sometimes just downright unsettling. But these qualities, of course, are what make his work an all the more enjoyable and rewarding reading experience.

This substantial collection is accompanied by some neat little drawings and from the first page onwards, the poems start hitting home hard and fast. Here is a writer operating at the peak of his powers, comfortable with the fact he is an internationally published author, but still bewildered at how the fuck he managed to end up there.

As in a good deal of his previous work the twin peaks of alcoholism and familial ties hang heavy over the poetry. Poems like Mum at Eighty-Nine, Saying Goodbye, and Here's One for You Pop, are affectionate portraits of the writer's parents with a sniff of sentimentality, but then there are shocking poems such as Anniversary, which tell of a more sinister and tragic side to the convoluted Fante family history.

There are also poems celebrating 28 years of sobriety, perseverance, fatherhood, and a grudging acceptance that he is, after 45 years of uncertainty and self-destruction, a writer of some repute. Added to this are ruminations on love, sex, happiness, and the little annoyances and irritations that are part and parcel of everyday life.

I have to say I enjoyed this collection immensely and whole-heartedly recommend it to any lover of literature. And if I were to pick a favourite amongst a whole host of poetical gems, it would be, Dear Editor, a poem every aspiring and established writer will recognise immediately. It's the editor who rejects your masterpiece with a casual glibness bordering on arrogance. Are these clueless editors unaware of Fante's genius? Of course they are, but most of them wouldn't recognise genius if it walked on water right before their very, very, dull eyes.

dear editor by Dan Fante

You complete idiot moron asshole dufus--
do you actually believe that what writers do--what I do--is some sort
of disposable-quick-trick slight-of-hand mechanical keyboard
flim-flam
like the shuffling of a deck of cards or lip-syncing my novel into a
computer program or punching a goddamn GPS address into the
dashboard of your powder blue ninety-thousand-dollar 4-door BMW

Next time--
dear subhuman thoughtless editor--
when we meet
when I submit something I've written to you
maybe
I'll simply stand on your desk and press a gun barrel between your
wide-set eyes
so we can have a real conversation called
what I do as an artist is cut away pieces of myself and smear those
dripping chunks of flesh
across a page so that anyone willing enough-tuned-in enough-
to connect their mind with mine
can see inside
my

heart

Believe it or not dear editor-

I do not give a rat's dick whether my rejected new book of stories

fits into your projections for next year's publication list

or

not

You may trust this:

I will continue to do as I have always done--

to open myself up as much as I can-to tear away at my own

self-importance and delusion

a layer at a time

and to seek and speak my deepest

and closest truth

until

the day my wife

and kid

pack my body in dry ice

sew my lips and eyes closed

and file my stinking remains

in the breakwater off Santa Monica pier

And one last thing Dear Editor:

thanks

again

for

taking

your

time

to

consider

my

work

Alan Kelly writes his own mock obituary



The remains of 25 year old Alan Kelly were discovered last weekend in his mother's house in the small village of Rathnew. Alan worked as a film/arts journalist for a number of magazines - GCN, Butcherqueers, Penny Blood, 3:AM, Bookslut - as well as having a number of stories published with underground literary magazines. Gardai have not ruled out arson and are still searching for another young man who was believed to be with Mr Kelly at the time of the explosion... He also appeared in the gay romantic comedy Fur Coat and No Knickers and played Brian Jones...

that boy from santa monica by Alan Kelly

I was always weary of every night. Any night, I knew, if given the chance it would take you in its arms and carry you away. That boy from Santa Monica.

I know that now all of this is/was just an operative fiction; our lives, the birds on wildlife documentaries, bodies pulled from the Liffey, the daily tragedy, that soundtrack we devised together, the Japanese markings on the back of your neck. None of this has ever been real enough. It was that "I thought I knew you, like we'd met before" sort of thing.

I dragged myself out of a narcotic grave, not feeling you against my skin. When I looked up at you from under the duvet you were checking your emails at the bottom of my bed. That boy from Santa Monica.

I liked the smell of sex on my fingers afterwards; it used to make me nauseous before I met you. I sat on the toilet seat after being sick and held my hand to my face. Savouring the smell of your cum, your sweat.

Spending a weekend with two of the apostles (Luke in an eckie state and Jon suggesting we play Scrabble), straight vodka, MDMA and slices of cold Apache pizza. Our photo shoot in Dublin Castle and you saying I drank too much in The George after. That Boy from Santa Monica

When you left I had a dream and I was ok for those first few seconds that follow waking before I had to be sick again. You used to say I needed to be more dispassionate. My bed is cold, I need a warm body.

I am writing about you. And I find myself on this strange road again. That memory or is it an echo of some weird haunted place. You're not close to my body now; my skin feels your distance. No longer playing the parts of chivalrous suitors, romanticizing and exaggerating everything (or was that just me?)

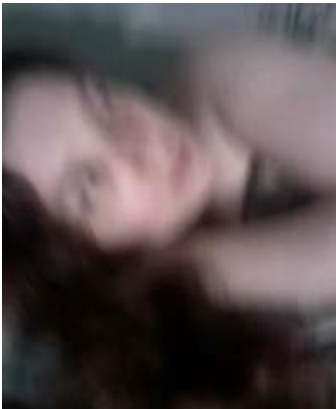
I was just a grim sideline, a grey watercolour on an unfinished landscape and you washed me off your canvass. I saw it in your face, heard it in the slight antagonism in your voice and when you stopped me after a long walk, on a street corner and announced "things can't, things won't work. You're a bit clingy," I slumped against a wall, ripping at my hair. I wanted to hold my hand on your throat, extract your breath. That Boy from Santa Monica.

I am drinking myself numb with the vodka you bought for us on South William Street and reading the lyrics from that Morrissey song "I've finally caught something to be ashamed of" - are those even the right words...

I wonder if what I do next will hurt and I no longer care...The hammer is waiting under the kitchen sink, just for you...

That boy from Santa Monica

Erin Reardon writes her own mock obituary



Erin Reardon suffocated inside of a cake she was supposed to jump out of last Thursday. She was best known for her Apples to Apples and flip-cup playing abilities, as well as her notorious predilection for amputee fetish pornography. We ask that in lieu of flowers, guests send sharpened number two pencils and half pints of Sailor Jerry rum. She will be greatly missed in homeless shelters and dive bars throughout the state of Massachusetts. We ask that everyone purchase a copy of her chapbook "The Tightrope" from <http://www.covertpress.com> so that she may live in glorious infamy forever.

unanswered by Erin Reardon

There's some unanswered prayers to attend to
 Loose ends to tie up
 A gangling green noose
 Leftovers from a holiday
 New year's pride
 New beers
 How you crowned me an epic poet
 And how I drowned from the weight of those compliments

Oh your grace
 A fistful of fury
 There was a power in words that came before
 Before I became apologetic
 You never promised me a kingdom
 I never promised you a burial
 In my lily garden

Pieces of a shattered mirror
 Dress up these plain walls
 A spider web of glass
 That I can't look away from
 I said I'd give my liver a rest
 If you would put that pen down
 And stop judging me

You were without sin
 When you first lay eyes on
 The girl with the American Beauty rose
 Tied in her hair

And she stoned you
 Leaving me to pray by your bedside
 Knowing all too well
 That God never listens
 To a girl like me

I'm not your virtue
 Not your harpy philosophy
 I'm teetering somewhere in between
 Have always been here waiting

It's easy to validate your negativity
 At my expense
 Because I'm just a loose end
 Leftovers from a holiday
 That never sobered up
 Never got tangled up
 In that gangling green noose
 Though maybe I should have been

I could have been the girl

With the American Beauty tied in her hair
 Or the silk stockings
 With holes
 Scratched up in that shattered mirror
 Then I wouldn't be so apologetic

Praying for you
 Instead of stoning you
 For judging me
 The epic poet
 Praises I didn't live up to in the end

Oh your grace
 Was enough to tear me away
 From my dirty martini
 Olive in my teeth
 Your silly words have made a mockery of me
 Turned me out into the street
 Backwards
 Until I became a prayer
 Without an answer
 A poet
 Without a pen
 A demon
 Without sin.

somebody to me by Erin Reardon

Lucinda's familiar warble on the radio
 A Schlitz tall boy in the red glow of sunset
 It's five o'clock somewhere as they say
 And the nightmare in my gut clings to my ribs
 I'm feeling like a honkytonk widow
 Alone and staring out the kitchen window

What man has broken me this time?
 Was I ever complete?
 Did I die as a child
 Beaten, molested and ashamed?

Or was it the first time that I fell in love with a nobody?
 At least he was somebody to me...

A sweaty forehead swathed in soggy pillowcases
 A long and purple bruise runs up the leg
 And into my stomach
 Raw mouth like the end of what is termed a good weekend
 Cat-claw tongue takes delicate swipes
 Across aluminum beer can lips
 I am only alone when sobriety hits
 I am only alone when they can't pick apart my sickness
 Here is my heart, lover
 Now leave...

What man has broken me this time?
 Was I ever complete?
 Did I die when my Icarus fell from the sky?
 Realizing like me he had no feathered wings
 Only faith that strips away in time...

What soul has broken me this time?
 Was I ever complete?
 Or was it the last time that I fell in love with a nobody?
 At least he was somebody to me.

brown bottle blues by Erin Reardon

Caffeine frenzied fingers
 Jivin' across the keys
 I make ready for the evening
 Kiss kiss
 My lipstick bliss
 I know just how to shake my weight around

I can see it now
 In the lobby
 Restless waiting
 Panties warm
 I melt

And you will be my devilment
 My sinister little monkey
 A Wagner's in your hand
 The roar of the band
 Among all the freakum girls
 With their cleavage
 And artificial tans

This is nightclubbing
 I'll start the dance of romance
 Hypnotize lottery boys
 With my drunken eyes
 Kiss kiss
 I'll make pretty
 With the beasts in the streets
 Shag off
 With my brown bottle blues

I'll see you
 The centipede
 Make your hundred legs quake
 Crush you with my broken egg sacs
 Get you drunk
 Make you say things you'll regret
 Like "I forgive you"

We'll part ways
 Shortly after our tongues become entangled
 And I suck your ineptitude
 Still tasting the tar from your cigarettes

This is nightclubbing
 In my depraved corner of the city
 And I'll make pretty
 Kiss kisses to someone

I'll find my precious refuge
 In the heat
 The beat
 The blood-dripping meat

Just me
 In my shoes
 My illusions of you
 Just me
 Just me

And those brown bottle blues.

Steve Hussy writes his own mock obituary



Steve Hussy died in 1962. After his death, he found success in zombie movie classics such as 'Night of the Living Dead', 'Grapes of Death', 'Zombie Flesh Eaters', 'Dawn of the Dead', 'Return of the Living Dead', 'The Omega Man' and 'Day of the Dead'. After a downturn of roles during the early '90s, Hussy turned to writing stories and publishing. An upsurge in work caused by 'Ghost of Mars', the new 'Dawn of the Dead' and 'I Am Legend' allowed Hussy to fully devote his energies towards Murder Slim Press. He continues to write, design and co-edit.

Steve Hussy, writer, editor and founder of Murder Slim Publications and The Savage Kick Literary Magazine, is interviewed by Joseph Ridgwell.

Joseph Ridgwell: When and why did you decide to go into the publishing business?

Steve Hussy: Myself and Richard White had been talking about the state of online literary sites and magazines for a few years. Almost without exception, we were appalled by it. Awful writers in badly designed magazines and websites. Zero quality control, but plenty of backslapping. The one or two brilliant gems were lost in an ocean of shit. A number of established, great writers were even struggling to get into print. Why wasn't Dan Fante getting more attention? Who was talking about Joe R. Lansdale? Why weren't people recognising Joe Matt and underground comics? Had anyone even *heard* of Tommy Trantino? We thought that instead of just bitching about it, we'd try to do something positive.

JR: Do you publish books to make money or produce great art?

SH: The key is to release great books. If something is great enough, people will catch up eventually. We're small enough, we're not losing thousands. The key is to pay the author from the first book sold. Without the writer, a publisher is nothing. Back them with money and time. We realise we have to build from the bottom up. We'd never print or release anything we didn't love. So don't expect *English Drug Yarns* by Harry Miller or *Larry Trotter, The Adventures of a Pig Wizard*. As a result, we don't release many books or issues of *The Savage Kick*. But we are proud of everything we do put out there. MSP books need to be distinctive and, above all, well written. People will catch up... and we can always eat bread and cheese until that happens.

JR: I've been told that Murder Slim and *The Savage Kick* are completely independent and receive no government funding or any other sort of funding. Is this true, and if so why is this important?

SH: Yes, we are completely independent and we receive no funding. Wrecking Ball are with the Arts Council, right? I don't know how important it is. We have no-one dictating what we do, and no-one requesting we print a certain number of English writers. I have packer's forearm from stuffing envelopes and labelling packages, but it's a good pain... I work part-time and Richard is unemployed, so we work on a very low budget. But if you're smart with things, you can make it work. On some levels, you can piss on bigger companies because you have smaller overheads

and better friends. We've met some great people in Canada, the USA and the UK via *The Savage Kick*.

Advice? Proof-read your book as many times as possible. Care about design to a psychotic level. Don't run a car – catch buses and trains – and recycle envelopes. Fuck, I have more hints but I'd go on forever... Ultimately, find a great book and back it with time and effort. Like I said, things will work out eventually. Just WORK.

JR: What do you think about the current online literary scene?

SH: Disgust on most levels. My main bugbear is quality control. Many websites publish ANYTHING. Here's a quote from one of the extraordinarily shit writers out there:

"From the open mouth of Grunfeld an obstreperous belch was ejaculated. Grunfeld directed the belch in the direction of Satogata. A deleterious swirl of reek, of sour cabbages, damp socks, sour saccharine wine, putrid phlegm was vacuumed up by Satogata's hairy mucus encrusted nostrils. Satogata jumped pugnaciously, fatuously to his feet and danced with fist clenched like an old time boxer. A pantomime of doggy braggadolio."

Quality control expert Laura Hird has endorsed this bilge by including it on her website. You know, what irritates me most is wordiness and fucking metaphors. Phrases which mean nothing except arty games. SAY what you mean. Stop hiding behind words. Stop writing fucking "poetry"... which seems an excuse-me term for writing "guess what I mean because I'm too scared to tell you" shit.

I've debated this issue with a number of writers – one of which is now heavily lauded by the online scene – after they've submitted to (and been refused by) *The Savage Kick*. When asked why they hide behind a mass of convoluted words, they've responded "that was the intention." The intention should be to COMMUNICATE. To tell a page-turning story and/or open up yourself. The rest is masturbatory shit – telling stories to feed your ego – or to feed intellectual bullshit artists who sit and decode this garbage. A clear translation can get arty shit down to a few words... showing how little the intellectual writer has to say.

JR: Why do you think the online literary scene has gone down this route?

SH: My nasty side thinks the online "accept-all" policy is self-promotion. Witness LauraHird.com. Why reject writers when they might buy her books? More acceptances = more allies = more sales. My cheery side thinks it's maybe some liberal vision of "everyone having a voice". That people will find their audience, everyone should be given a chance. "*Let the readers make up their mind...*"

JR: But what's wrong with that?

SH: Three BIG reasons... and reasons that people should acknowledge.

1. The writers don't get paid, and the readers don't have to pay to consume. The writers starve, and the readers feel they can get stuff for free. Fine, download fucking *Metallica*... but screw over underground writers? The literary sites get *tens of thousands* of hits, but underground books sell in their *tens*? Something's fucking wrong there.

2. A young writer often needs guidance to improve. We had one writer submit to *The Savage Kick*... and he was an all-around good guy. He said he'd put his rejection slips on a nail hammered into his bedsit wall, until he had a story accepted. If the nail was filled up with rejections, he'd stick his head through it. But that nail could have taken two hundred rejections... and the paper probably would have cushioned the impact. We turned down his story. It wasn't good enough, but it had a lot of promise. Next week LauraHird.com accepts the story. Nail is pulled out of the wall. Within fifty stories maximum, he would have been really something great. He had something in him. Now? Who knows. Do you see the problem? Why improve when you're already accepted? Receiving intelligent criticism is enormously useful.

3. PRINT something. How many writers say they're PUBLISHED because they're online? It's meaningless, and it can stop writers from having to craft their work. Why go to the effort of proof-reading and honing your stuff when some piece of shit website will "publish" you regardless? Again, it stops good writing. If you're so great, get your fucking thing in print. If it dies belly-up, work on improving.

JR: How did your print magazine *The Savage Kick* come about?

SH: We had a mixture of skills that seemed to fit together. I could do graphic design and write. R White knew a massive amount about literature, music and movies. R Watts was a great artist. Initially, *The Savage Kick* was a mixture of articles and stories. There was more art, more reviews, and more comedy pieces. Then Dan Fante agreed to be in *SK#1*, and we realised we

could attract big-name writers to the magazine. After that we decided *The Savage Kick* could go purely down the literary route.

JR: How did you first start working with Mark SaFranko?

SH: We asked Dan Fante if he knew any writers he thought would be suitable for *The Savage Kick*. It had been a shock to find how difficult it was to find great new writers in the confessional and crime genres. Fante recommended Mark SaFranko. We contacted Mark and he sent us *Role of a Lifetime*. We loved it... and it's in *SK#1*. Things snowballed from there.

JR: You seem to have published a lot of SaFranko's work. Why did that come about?

SH: Wrecking Ball Press had accepted *Hating Olivia*, but they weren't pushing the book into print. They'd sat on it for over a year. We read *Hating Olivia* in a couple of nights and we were blown away by it. Truly eye-opening, page-turning writing. The next day, we offered Mark a deal to publish the book, basing the contract on paying the author from the first book sold... fucking rare in the publishing world. Mark accepted... and suddenly we were publishing books. I have nothing but praise for Mark. I love all his books currently in print... and that's just scratching the surface of his output. *Loners* only touches on the range of great stories he's written. Mark is an absolute pleasure to work with and – file this away in the brainhole – he *will* be recognised with the great underground writers. The Zajack novels will be regarded with the Dantes, Bandinis and Chinaskis.

JR: I've noticed that there seems to be a good deal of self-publishing going on these days. Do you have any views on self-publishing?

SH: I'm wary of printing my own stuff. Is it self-aggrandising? The best thing to do is run it past good – and honest – writers. And proof-check and hone it over a good year or so. In the grand scheme of things, it's great people are willing to put their money behind publishing. Just to get something in print takes a lot of work, and to get it to readers can take even more. But quality control can suffer hugely. It's 99% shit, but at least the bad writers will have a 498 unsold copies in their bathroom... a surefire nudge to improve. However, I do think the quality is higher than websites... which seem a free-for-all purely because it's free to produce.

JR: There also appears to be a lot of back-slapping and self-congratulatory bullshit occurring on the underground lit scene. Why is it, do you think, that people are afraid to give someone a bad review?

SH: We're back to the acceptance = more allies = more sales aspect of the scene. There's also a disturbing aspect of underground writers and readers wanting to be part of a club. I've heard Bukowski fans called "Bukowski-ites", where they fall behind Bukowski as some deity. Appreciate Bukowski, yes, but spread your net wider. There's a huge contradiction between being an outsider and yet wanting to belong somewhere. We can go through all the silly, exclusive clubs – goth, Bowie stuff, drug writers, boozy writers, Bukowski, the Russians, anarchism, brutalism etc. The end result just feeds off some need to belong, whereas honesty will exclude you from all clubs.

JR: What surprises me is the staggering amount of people who think they have a divine right to be a published writer, even if they possess zero talent. What do you think can explain this delusional and irrepressible aspiring writing fetish?

SH: Fuck, that's a real thinker. Great question, Joe. Maybe writing itself is arrogant. You think your ideas are worth something. A passionate writer will invest a lot of their thoughts into their work. To be rejected is like your *personality* being rejected. You've poured all this out... and you're *shit*? WHY? So you get angry, you go elsewhere, or you try to improve. Even someone terrible will keep trying until someone tells them they're writing garbage. The frustrating thing is that a lot of writers aren't miles away. They have great life stories but zero ability to express them... or they have good style and nothing to write about. They need to work, but they have no push/anger/passion to do so.

We're one blob in seven billion blobs in the end. We die and there's nothing left. Writing gives a little sense of immortality. I believe in no afterlife or god, but I'd like to leave something worthwhile out there. During the death rattle, I'd like to think I fucking tried. It's a buzz. Just to hold a copy of a book you helped publish... That's something. So people try. Good luck to them, to us all. Just work hard at it and stop thinking websites are the way to go.

JR: There also appears to be more writers than readers. What, if anything, can be done to reverse this disturbing trend?

SH: People no longer trying to impress their literary friends. Publishers/website owners exercising strict quality control on everything they distribute. Writers constantly criticising themselves. Great writing takes a lot of work. The shit writers will fall by the wayside quicker once they are faced with the long struggle ahead.

JR: When my first chapbook of poetry was published, *Where are the Rebels?* it seemed that everyone expected to receive a free copy, but were reluctant to actually put their hand in their pocket and purchase a copy. When it comes to buying books why do you think people are so tight?

SH: We've had ten times more submissions to *The Savage Kick* than people buying the magazine, so I know the feeling. Why submit to something you wouldn't buy? Maybe we're back to the online thing again. People expect books for free. For people so "outside" they seem very unwilling to back it up with cash. Maybe people are scared of buying something not endorsed by the mainstream. I feel an extreme affection towards people that buy *Murder Slim Press* stuff. They have the balls to buy something different and take a chance. More power to people who back their hunches with their wallets. Fuck, Joe, smear some shit on their free copies of *Where Are The Rebels?* That'll learn 'em.

JR: Do you think *Murder Slim* and *The Savage Kick* will be affected by the current recessive economic climate? Do you think sales might be affected?

SH: I hope not. I hope people search for something different when they feel like shit. What's better than watching *'The Quiet Earth'* when you feel down? Why not read *Journey to the End of the Night* when civilisation's going down the toilet? Maybe the downturn will mean people will turn towards stuff that will make them feel good about hating mainstream society.

JR: Finally, I have a hunch that we are witnessing the accelerated decline of western civilisation, as predicted by Oswald Spengler in his two volume opus *The Decline of the West*. Do you share similar sentiments, or do you think I'm overreacting?

SH: I think you're overreacting. But by overreacting you're being incredibly positive about humanity. I can't see an uprising or a death of capitalism. I think we're out of the age of revolutions or societal collapse. There's too many people outside of manual labour, farming, industrial jobs. It's mostly a service economy these days. Sadly, people will drift along and suffer rather than change, rise up or fight. As always, I think a lot of the wrong people will suffer.

People in human resources won't lose their jobs, but true workers will. This decline just feels like a resetting of society to a few years ago. We'll be back in same shit in a couple of years' time, just with fewer brand names. If anything, maybe the world is turning into *Repo Man* or *They Live*. The small will try to survive by becoming more like the mainstream companies, but eventually the big companies will buy out the small. Rebel Inc becomes Canongate... Black Sparrow Press becomes Harper Collins... Corner shops become Tescos and Wal-Marts... The small fight is a great fight... "beating long odds". So while I'm hugely pessimistic about humanity, you can fight tooth and nail. As long as you survive, you've got a chance. Only the belligerent ones who obsess over quality control will remain....

12x12 (an excerpt from the novel "Steps") by Steve Hussy

I climbed those stairs with the thinning carpet, went into the toilet.

"Oh!" came out of me.

Emma was riding some fat dick in the tub. He looked astonished, monged out... all wide eyes and bland flabby features. My eyes found Emma's pimply ass peeking out from under a shiny black top... all these bright red pimples on a big duck ass. I couldn't see any other forbidden skin, just that ass, that ass she jutted out and wobbled when she walked.

"Want me to shut the door?" I asked.

They nodded quickly and I shut it.

I pissed in the toilet, desperately needing to let out that night's booze.

Halfway through I heard them starting to fuck again. It sounded dry... desperate.

I looked up and concentrated. Life wasn't so bad. Ms. Devgan cleaned the shared toilet facilities... she did it almost psychotically. You might catch a stray pubic hair early in the morning but mostly you were fine. And I usually pissed in my room anyway...

The room is still there, stored in my head. 12 by 12 of detail. The cheapest I could find in the area but plenty good enough... a decent bed, no rats, only the odd cockroach. Burn mark riding up the right-hand wall, stains on the shit brown carpet - all offset by having that sink... good enough to piss and jerk off in. I liked it... my own cave.

I'd lay down in my bed and feel it, feel something different. I didn't know what. I'd draw up the whisky to my mouth and let it slide down. "Why did I say that?" I'd ask myself over something trivial at the bar. "What if you did this?" I'd analyse it until my stomach churned.

I reached over and took some of the ginger from Ms. Devgan's baggie. The thoughts would speed, and then race again. Nothing could keep them quiet.

The bats started to crawl above from the roof space and I'd hear them talking to each other chitterchitterchitter crawling over each other chitterchitterchitter probably fucking away but

still chitterchitterchitterchitter. They'd keep going until five, six... I didn't know how many were up there, but it felt like thousands. I'd open the shit brown curtains and watch them, these dark angular forms flying erratically, lurching up down around while the rest still chattered away, above, sometimes just in my head.

And my mind would crawl with them as someone in the room below would start fucking away. Fucking in the bed or fucking against the door, some poster rustling away... stroke, rustle, stroke, rustle. Erg Erg Erg Oooo Erg Erg Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh... Quick, desperate fucks. Quick, desperate people.

I knew I had to keep going. Had to keep going to sleep and try to wake the next morning... try to knock down that chattering in my head with booze, with porn, with anything.

I wanted to hug, to fuck, to have anything so they would be close to me. I felt lost, swimming in the shit, confused, with that need, that fucking need... That voice inside, loneliness, that voice that was tired of my right hand, that voice. I disliked my feelings, they twisted my cynicism, the truth I'd created, but they were there... they SCREAMED.

Concentrate chitter-ahhh concentrate chitter-erg CONCENTRATE chitter-aaaaah
mmmmmmmmmm FUCK IT FUCK IT FUCK IT.

* * * * *

I heard Brad first through the wall. He was jerking off, talking to his cock:

"Come on, COME ON."

The walls were thin, thin enough to smell the cum if my senses didn't stop me.

"Yeah yeah that's it, YEAH!"

I tried to block myself off. I listened to music through a personal stereo, tried to use the shared kitchen and the shared toilet as little as possible. But it was impossible. I needed human contact, even in some tiny sense. I'd beaten it down but it was bred into me. A social animal.

I met him in the kitchen, cooking pasta. My microwave couldn't manage that. It was 12.30, I'd got back from work and felt the hunger pangs. A bottle of red wine was already open.

"Hi," I said, feeling myself shrink, wanting to get away.

"Hey there... Brad..." American accent.

Brad extended a hand. He was big, tall, muscular. Grey-blue fixed eyes... Scary.

I shook the hand: "Err... you want a drink?" I motioned at the bottle.

I'd drink two or three bottles of wine a day. Or a half-bottle of spirits. Far from heroic, trust me. It was mostly whisky... seemed better than the paint-stripper gin or cheap vodka that reeked like nail varnish remover.

"Sure... Merlot?" he said. I liked that.

We went back to his room. Same box as mine... cleaner though. A few books on the shelves, a tapestry on the wall, incense burning. Huge army-style kit bag in the corner.

"What do you do?" he asked... the question everyone wants to know.

"I'm training to be a teacher. Errr... You?"

"I'm travelling... Through Europe."

We talked a while. He had a half-bottle of whisky himself and shared it happily.

"What'd you do... before now?"

"I was a Marine," he said.

"Yeah? You were in the Gulf?"

"Yeah."

"What'd you do... Err... There, I mean."

"Everyone asks that... I worked comms. Behind shit. Keeping stuff together. Nothing much, no fighting."

"You see anything?"

"Yeah... everyone asks that..."

"Yeah?"

"Ok..." His dead eyes looked to one side then stared through me. "Look, we worked clean-up. Bodybagging, that shit. So yeah I saw stuff... Shit... One guy in a cab, the top half of him. The other half was laying in the road. We had to fucking shovel 'em up... had these little fold-out shovels... stick 'em in the same bag, you know?"

I sat. I wasn't much good with conversation, sometimes words would catch in my throat so I'd end up just sitting there. So I tried to listen more than talk, but then words raised up anyway and I'd think I'd said the wrong thing. I sensed people's feelings. Put them on myself.

"You want another drink?" he asked.

"Errr, yeah... ok."

He poured it.

* * * * *

He was Ms. Devgan's nephew - staying a while. He screamed "OH HELP ME PLEASE I AM DYING!" from the corridor as Brad walked through it and locked it behind him.

Brad poured another slammer for me. Tequila from a litre bottle... no lime so we had slices of lemon. They fizzed in my head, my brain, but not my voice.

"Shouldn't we go and help him?"

"He's just drunk... leave it..."

"OH HELP ME PLEASE!" the Indian screamed again.

"She's not about?"

"Nope... I checked her room. I guess she's with her son... fuck knows."

I said: "She told me he was a doctor..." as he wailed some more outside.

"Yeah... I think they don't drink... Sikhs..." He laughed: "Guess he's been a bad boy!"

The Indian said "Oh help me please!" a little softer. And we took another drink and listened to Emma out there now, cajoling him a while. Then she left too after he didn't respond.

"So you're looking forward to teaching?" Brad asked.

"I need a career I suppose, and I think I can do it."

He took another slammer then filled my glass. "You sound as sure as ever." There was sarcasm in that.

I wet between my thumb and forefinger, he poured the salt over, I drank. It fizzed again.

"I suppose I'll see how things go." I didn't have many answers, I felt slightly dizzy in conversations... confused. The booze helped but they'd still churn my brain, my stomach.

There was a pause as we drank and thought. The Indian started to whisper, still walking up and down, but now slower... much slower... "oh help me please."

"Err... Where are you gonna travel to?"

"Here... then Europe, Japan... Shit, wherever. The Marines... it wasn't enough."

"You miss home?"

"Fuck no... My father is crazy, he's nuts. Religious. I needed to get away. That's why I joined the Marines. To see stuff... I didn't even FUCK at home you know? I did it first in the Philippines, paid ten dollars to a whore, she did my cleaning too... for a week... Shit!"

I laughed, thinking the Philippines sounded good...

"Man... He got crazy once, over the Armageddon, and I mean he got *convinced* over it. He went into the garage and boarded it up... stocked it up with canned goods, all that... kool-aid for fuck's sake! My mom wasn't into any of it. Shit! His face the day it was supposed to come... looking out of there..." He smiled, but there was a pang of something else to it.

There was quiet again as the Indian whispered outside "I am dying... oh help me..."

"Listen to this," Brad said. He passed me his Walkman and I stuck in an earphone.

I heard: "Baby, I think of you a lot you know? Like today, like I was listening to Pat Metheny and I thought of you." It went along much the same for a while, about her day... she worked in a vet's, she lived on her own but had hung out with friends, she listened to music...

"Cassie," he said as those dead grey-blue eyes glazed a little.

"She sounds nice," I said, feeling the weight of expectation. I felt little except a tiny voice whispering "average" and I beat it down. "You with her?"

"We split before I left. I guess it's complicated... She's *beautiful* man... Mexican, she's 18, maybe she's too young. I dunno... she's *smart* too you know... She's grown up now."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah..." he thought a little. "Yeah, she has... Man, she's fucking beautiful, you know?"

Then the Indian was directly out the door... whispering... "oh I am dying..."

Then the Indian started: "HOOOOOOOOROARGH! HOOROARGH!"

"Shit!" said Brad.

The puke pounded against the door and then the Indian must have wheeled round... "HWAAAARGH," he heaved, "HOOOOURAAAG. HOO-HOO-HORRRRRRRRRRRRG."

Brad started laughing but I was transfixed, looking at the closed door.

"He's really fucking going for it!" Brad said loudly over it.

"HUH-HUH-HUH-HUH..." He was hacking, coughing out there.

"Shit... I better go... Wait here."

He got up and opened the door and a mound of thick puke greeted him... He stepped over it... walked towards the exit. The stench hit me and I stood up. I reeled and veered towards the wall, bounced towards the door off one arm...

I looked left and saw Brad leading the Indian through a door, veered to the right, just avoiding some puke outside my door... I fumbled with my key in the lock feeling it build inside. Spinning... I got the key around, went in, turned on the light... locked the fucking door even...

Then spun round to the sink and it hammered out.

"HARGOUGH," I coughed... trying to keep it quiet but it hacking out anyway. The puke flew out, brown, thick. It rose up at me, filling the sink...

"HOROUGH." Another load of acrid brown shit from my mouth. And even in the fucked thoughts, the mayhem in my head, I thought "Why's it not going down?"

"HUH-HOROUGH," another load. No, no, no, it lurched up at me again, two thirds full now... That fucking chocolate pudding earlier! I vomited again at the stench of it.

I reached down into it with my right hand... it was warm, wetter on top, thicker further down... I got my fingers into the plughole... started pushing the bits through... I heaved at that too... but came up emptier each time. It went on for only 10 minutes, felt longer.

I dry heaved there, whispering "fuck, fuck, fuck" in caught breaths. But something...

I brushed my teeth to try to calm it down but I hacked that up too, the juice of it.

And then I started to laugh. A big gut laugh wheezed out through the bile-burned throat.

Then I thought "What the hell?" and told myself to feel bad and so I did.

Steps is available here: www.murderslim.com/steps.html