



**AUGUST 2022**  
**ISSUE NO.2**

**SLAUGHTER AND SPREADSHEETS**  
**CEO MURDERS WORKFORCE FOR PROFIT**

**OFF THE RAILS!**  
**CIRCUS TRAIN WRECK WREAKS HAVOC**

# HOLY SHIT, YOU'RE BACK!

We want to thank everyone for the support we've received since launching our magazine last month. We really appreciate everyone's feedback. If you have suggestions — or gripes — with our magazine, you can reach out to us at [info@americanpulps.com](mailto:info@americanpulps.com). We'd love to hear what you think.

In this issue of American Pulps we have what we've been calling internally, "H.P. Lovecraft meets *Office Space*." It's based on terrible jobs we've done in the past, if those jobs were done in the world of H.P. Lovecraft.

The other story is based on a very real, and tragic life of [Ota Benga](#), who was part of the "Human Zoo" at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904 and the Bronx Zoo in 1906. And while that's all incredibly fucked up, we decided to re-write history a bit for our man Ota. The man in the story is based on a real guy, the events that take place are entirely fictional.

Rounding out the rest of the magazine is a list of books we think you should check out. And if you imbibe, a drink that'll cool you off on these hot summer days.

And with that, let's get to it.

Cheers,

- The Editors  
John Borges & Matt Pagourgis  
August 2022

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**SACRIFICE TO THE BUSINESS GODS**

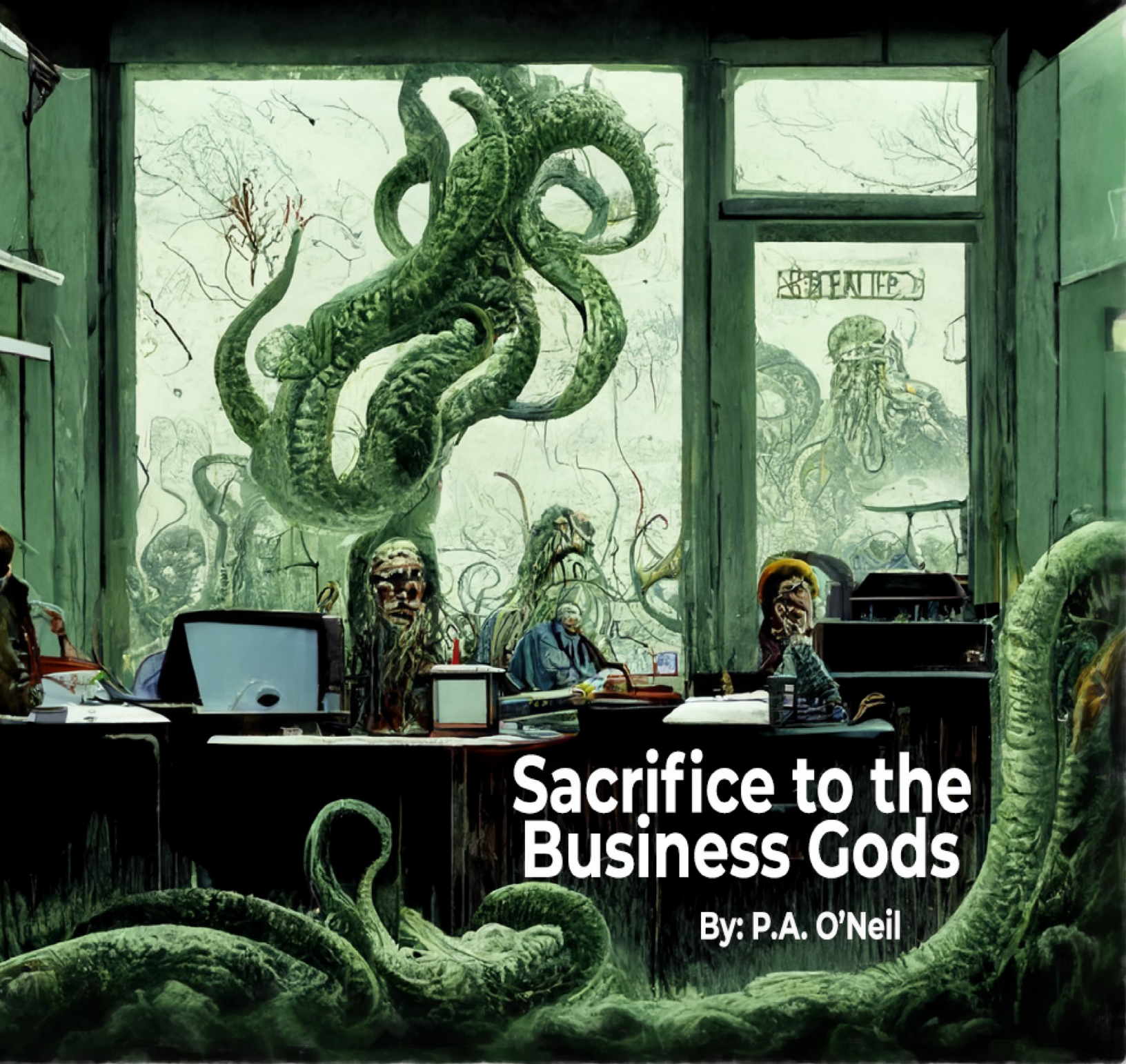
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# Sacrifice to the Business Gods

By: P.A. O'Neil

When Maurice found out Jon got laid off he was shaken up. Not because he liked Jon as a person — Jon actually annoyed the hell out of Maurice — but because Jon was so good at his job. If Jon was on the chopping block, none of them were safe. Little did Maurice know it wasn't just his job that was in jeopardy.

Pete, a jovial guy fresh out of college, was the one who broke the news. When Pete heard Maurice walk to his desk, he popped up like a whack-a-mole, to tell him. Maurice hadn't even started his computer yet.

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"Jon? Why?" Asked Maurice.

"I don't know. Anne walked by his cubicle and the cleaning people were over there clearing out his stuff."

Like Jon, Maurice didn't really like Anne either. She walked around with her shoes off as if the fourth floor was her living room. This disgusted Maurice, not just because it was disrespectful — it was — but because it was very unsanitary.

The fourth floor of the Kirklin and Greenfield building was basically an open floor plan with what looked like an asbestos-laden ceiling. The cubicles for the Service Resource Center (Maurice's department) were all pushed against

the windowed wall on the north side. The opposite side of the building was a hardhat area where crews were constantly banging away, severely hurting the Service Resource Center's ability to field customer service calls. Between the cubicles and the construction area on the south side were offices for SRC management, and exiles from Accounting and Marketing. It was well known that this was where the unwanted's roamed free — Napoleon's Elba.

The office walls were paper thin. So much so, that nobody was allowed to hang any pictures up on their stud-less walls. The result was a desolate room of beige isolation where nobody was comfortable making private phone calls. The SRC people left them alone, as if they had leprosy, and conversing with the exiled doomed you to staying on the fourth floor forever.

Sandwiched between the offices were the restrooms and "kitchen" — a fridge next to an Ikea conference table. Said table had one toaster, a coffee pot, and a microwave — all attached to a single surge protector. It was a sad place.

John stood up in his cubicle, Pete in his, talking as one does in corporate America with their colleagues, awkwardly, with a small divider wall between them.

"Jon must have been upset, he didn't even pack his Funko pops."

"He didn't?" This was strange, Jon had quite a Funko pop collection at his desk. When ever Maurice walked by he positioned the *Black Panther* one just so and talked about how much he loved the movie, *Black Panther*. In fact, that was all Jon talked about with Maurice, it was the only thing Jon thought they had in common. But Maurice wasn't really into comic book movies so he just smiled and said he'd seen it once. He wanted to ask Jon if he assumed he liked *Black Panther* because Maurice was black. But that would have frazzled Jon so he just let him be.

"You think they're doing company-wide layoffs?" Asked Pete, he was new to corporate Machiavellism and nervous but excited in a young soldier fresh out of boot camp kind of way.

"No. Not that I know of."

"You think anyone would mind if I took the Baby Yoda Funko Pop?"

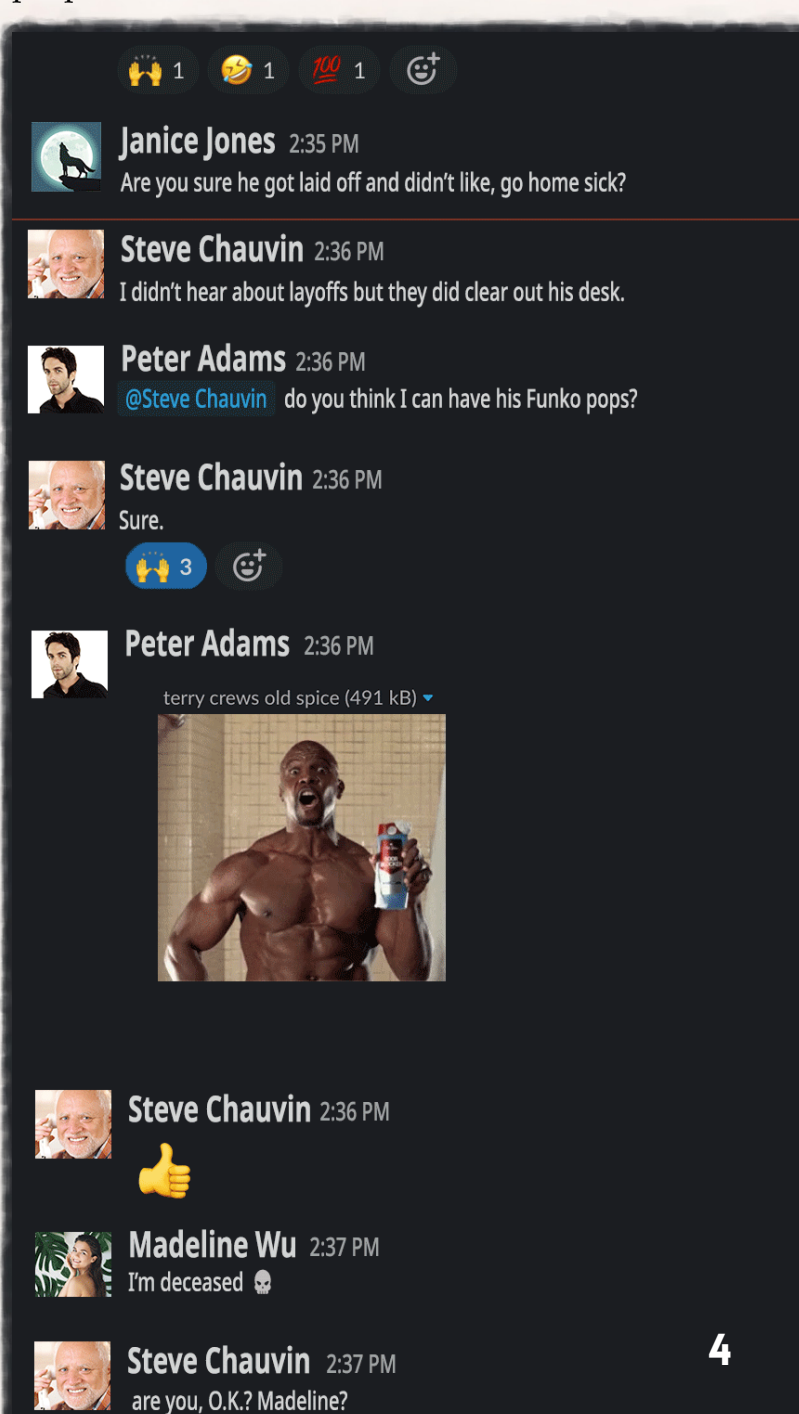
"I don't know man, I'd check with Steve." Steve was the manager, he was pretty useless but if you ran something by him you could at least say you went to management.

"Yeah good call, CYA... Cover your ass."

"Yeah, I know what you meant." Maurice put his headphones on to signal Pete that the conversation was over. He sat at his cubicle, set his task tracker to "Scheduling and Reports" and tried to get some work done. But who was he kidding, his job was probably on the line, so he mostly did a half-assed job search on LinkedIn for the next hour.

The whole morning, the department's Slack channel was blowing up about Jon. Every few seconds he could hear the knock sound from Slack on his computer followed by a Slack alert on his phone in chorus.

The conversation was as mindless as the people:



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Maurice changed his task tracker to “personal time / Restroom,” and walked by Jon’s desk on his way to the men’s room.

People had picked Jon’s cubicle clean like vultures. He’d never seen anyone so excited about a stapler before. It was a red Office Space Swing-line but still, the man just got let go.

Disgusted, Maurice returned to his cubicle and polished his resume until lunchtime.

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Maurice put his computer on “lunch” and the 1-hour countdown commenced. When he first started working at Kirklin and Greenfield, he would rush back to his desk and get back on the phones before the clock was out. But after he realized he wasn’t getting paid for that hour whether he ate at his desk or not, he started taking his sweet ass time. Sometimes in defiance, Maurice would put his task tracker in “Meeting” or “Bathroom” which totally messed with Steve’s tracking metrics.

The cafeteria felt like high school all over again. But the only place nearby to eat was a Dave and Busters and going there at lunchtime was just sad. Maurice spotted the table the people from his department sat at, like high school nobody mixed or mingled with other cliques, and to do so would cause much drama.

“Hey Mo.” It was Brandon, Maurice hated when people called him Mo, his friends called him Reese. Nobody at work called him Reese. “You hear about Jon? I was in the SRC and I got the lowdown from Janice that he was 86’d last night.” Maurice liked Brandon but he never knew what the hell he was talking about.

“You think they’re gonna have another round of layoffs?” That was Madeline, she was new to the company. She came in one week before the hiring freeze and three weeks before they laid off a quarter of the company. She was like a child growing up during wartime, all she knew was danger. Perhaps that was best for a young worker at Kirklin and Greenfield. Best to learn young.

“If they’re having layoffs, why would they get rid of Jon? And why only Jon? He’s one of the best workers we’ve had. He was like, Team Member of the month what? 6 weeks running?”

“They didn’t just lay off Jon. Franklin was let go too.”

Franklin was also fresh out of college, he came in the same time as Madeline. “Maybe he

quit,” said Madeline, hopeful. If Franklin got let go, everyone could tell she was doing the mental math that she’d be next.

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After lunch, Maurice sat at his desk and looked out the window. The Kirklin and Greenfield building was the tallest in the office park; the building adjacent had an HR staffing agency, the one that hooked Maurice up with his job at K&G two years ago. There was a chiropractor, a physical therapist, a tailor, and a medium-sized office space that various companies came and went through like a revolving door. Most of those companies were Ponzi schemes—or at least Ponzi adjacent. They all seemed to have the word “funnel” in the name. Which was fitting, they funneled money out of people’s pockets.

It was now Friday, the typical day to let people go, but no new sacrificial lambs were slaughtered that day. Instead, just a handful of people came in the morning on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, like Jon and Franklin did on Monday, and they were never seen again. As if swallowed by fog and only remembered in stories from oldtimers about “that guy” or when one looked at the puppy wall calendar they swiped from the dearly departed’s desk.

Maurice stared at his task tracker, waiting for it to tell him to go home. When the clock hit 5:30 PM and it was officially the weekend he would go home, take a shower, and meet up with some people at The Tankard. He’d be meeting with co-workers but they all lived by the rule not to talk or think about Kirklin and Greenfield until the following Monday when their alarms went off. It was 4:45 PM when the company-wide email blared from everyone’s desktop. The same stupid sound bellowed from monitor to monitor in chorus. It was from Thom Kirkland, CEO, they were to have an all-hands meeting the following week. Maurice had a feeling they would all be talking about the all-hands at The Tankard.

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Maurice parked his car and debated whether or not to go into The Tankard, a shithole dive bar in Norfolk Square. It was karaoke night. Maurice hated karaoke night and he never understood why they would do it on a Friday, that was mid-week bar shit.

But that wasn’t the problem. He knew everyone was going to talk about work and truth be told if they all got laid off, or the company went

under, he didn't give a shit. A friend of his from college told him about the start-up he worked for that went under; they paid his last checks by giving him a laptop, a nice leather desk chair, and his work phone as severance. And to Maurice, that all sounded pretty nice.

Some guy in a cowboy hat was crucifying a Beatles song when Maurice walked in. The next one sang an Oingo Boingo song and wasn't half bad. Sadly, he was the best performance for the night. Maurice almost left when a guy was murdering (and not in a good way) Raspberry Beret by Prince when Linda from HR showed up.

Linda from HR was an HR nightmare. She wore patchouli oil and hit on the younger men in the company. Once she grabbed Maurice's ass after a sexual harassment lecture and said she was "just testing him." She only hired young attractive people and then would ask them where they were going every Friday. The answer always being either The Tankard or The Ale House. The two bars close by.

"Linda, would you tell us if you knew though. You would be sworn to secrecy or something," said Peter.

Linda's eyes got mischievous, she bit her lip and tilted her head down while looking up at Peter like an innocent schoolgirl, "Rules were meant to be broken. But if I were to tell ya it would cost ya."

Peter looked un-easy and offered to buy another pitcher of Miller Lite. Nobody objected.

"Really though Linda, what's this all-hands thing about?"

"You guys are no fun. We're having a cook-out! It's the first Summer Kickoff Cookout since the board of directors went to prison for embezzlement."

"Oh awesome, that's not bad at all!" Said Peter, placing the pitcher down at the table. "I've never been to a corporate party."

"They get pretty rowdy," said Linda with a wink.

Maurice got up to talk to an old high school friend he recognized at the bar, leaving Peter to try to navigate that minefield alone.



Pete was double fistfing burgers when Maurice finally made it outside to the parking lot where the "Summer Kickoff Cookout" was located. In the distance, he spotted his car and the freedom it symbolized. Pete waved with his half-

eaten burger. Spotted, and with nobody better to talk to, Maurice headed towards Pete and the mound of charred and rubbery burgers.

Roger came up behind them. "This is the lamest summer kickoff I've been to."

"It's better than working." Said Pete with a mouthful of food.

"Please. Before the board of directors went to prison for embezzlement we had catering and free booze. We had entertainment, Foreigner performed one year. Thin Lizzy another."

"Wow," said Maurice, feigning surprise and knowledge of who the hell Thin Lizzy was.

"Now it's hockey puck burgers in a fucking parking lot and that kid from the marketing department 'DJ-ing'." Roger slugged the rest of his Fanta and crushed the can in disgust, walking off to find the nearest trash can.

The kid from marketing started to play Nelly's *Hot in Here*, Maurice took that as his cue to leave. As he walked towards the building, towards spreadsheets and all of the bullshit he did for a meager paycheck, the mechanic whir of a helicopter got louder and louder. Maurice turned around, his chinos billowing from the wind the helicopter spewed on the crowd below.

A plate of plastic cutlery and napkins exploded off the table first. Then the hamburger buns. Followed by the burgers themselves. All cascading down to the ground in a fury of napkins and other debris from the parking lot.

The helicopter parked, the blades wound to a halt, and the CEO of Kirklin and Greenfield, Thom Bradford Kirklin (Paul Greenfield died long ago), disembarked from the helicopter.

Kirklin looked in the direction of the DJ from Marketing, who was still playing *Get Low* by Lil' Jon at a pretty excessive volume. He tried to turn it off, but his computer froze so he just resorted to unplugging the cord from his laptop. Lil Jon played on from his laptop speakers but it was faint.

Thom Kirkland cleared his throat.

"As you all know, we have been going through a lot of legal difficulties over the past few months."

This got some nods from the older people in the crowd. Some murmured about the rounds of layoffs and pay freezes the minions at Kirklin and Greenfield had felt over the past three years, since the entire board of directors went to prison and somehow Thom Kirkland came out on the **6**

other side cleaner than a bottle of bleach.

"I want to thank you personally for all you had to put up with during this trying time. The pay freezes, the lack of bonuses, the hiring freezes, doing more than one person's job, and not getting so much as a title bump. You've put up with a lot." This was it. Maurice was actually excited to hear what was going to be said at this particular "all hands" meeting. He was setting them up for good news! The rich bastard was finally going to extend an olive branch to his underpaid underlings. Kirkland continued, "That's what makes what I'm about to say so, so, hard."

*Sonofabitch!* Thought Maurice, along with everyone else present. Bull market. Bear market. I didn't matter, the little guy was getting short-changed. At least at K&G.

"After today, we are going to be laying off a majority of you. Essential workers will stay on, but, unfortunately, many of you will be let go. I wish you all the very best of luck. You're gonna need it." And with that, Thom Kirkland boarded the helicopter and flew off in the direction of Boca Raton where he spent his winters and a good chunk of summer with his mistress.

In the excitement, amongst the angry workers, cuss words, and loud helicopter motor; no one realized that the gate to the parking lot was raised. Nobody was going to go home tonight.

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Back in the Service Resource Center, the people were losing it. It was as close to mayhem as a corporate environment could get. Bedlam in beige.

Anne was running around like a Hobbit on Mordor, shoeless and ready to pounce. "They can't fire us! We're the service resource center, we service the customers! Without us, what will they do?"

"We mostly just schedule the technicians Anne, they'll probably have some automated AI system take care of that," countered Madeline.

"That's bullshit! Machines can't take our jobs!"

"That's what the Luddites said." That was Bill, Maurice always thought he was too smart for the SRC. Everyone stared at Bill for a second and then resumed shouting. Maurice and Peter were going around quietly putting office supplies and snacks from the "kitchen" in their bags. They were getting severance one way or another.

Steve tried to maintain order. He stood by the window between the cubicles and the meeting room inexplicably named "Dunwich." A name nobody knew exactly how to pronounce. Whenever they were supposed to have meetings with the work from home people on Zoom or one-on-ones with managers, Steve would mumble the pronunciation to "We have a meeting-n-done-itch." He stood there next to the room he could not pronounce, in front of people he hardly knew, trying to channel his inner William Wallace and inspire the crowd.

"QUIET! We all have to calm down. Kirkland never said we were going to get laid off. This may be good for us. You see in most corporate layoffs, the lowest paid... usually stays and takes on more responsibility. This could be beneficial for all of us."

"So that means you'll get fired and we'll all stay."

"Now, I didn't say that. I was merely saying that—"

"Computers are gonna take our jobs!" Interrupted Anne.

"It's the internet's fault!" Roger blamed the internet, politicians, and young people for most of society's ills. This was the second time Maurice had heard Roger blame the internet for something that week, and it was only a Tuesday.

Steve took a deep breath, he was rearing back and ready to give them some sound advice. Leaders are born in times of strife and dammit, this was Steven Presley Chauvin's time to shine. He didn't get his Six Sigma Certification or spend all that money on those Dale Carnegie courses for nothing.

"I want you all to realize that—"

**SMASH**

Glass shattered.

Maurice stood like a deer in the headlights looking on as what looked like a green giant squid's tentacles crashed into the SRC and grabbed Steve like an elephant snatching a peanut with its trunk. The tentacles gave Steve a squeeze and he exploded like a rotten tomato.

Blood splattered across the glass walls to Dunwich like a tween's vomit off a tilt-a-whirl. It was then that Maurice wished he took them up on that work-from-home offer.

People were running around but Maurice just stood there. It wasn't until a gust of wind blowing through the now broken window hit



Maurice on the face and snapped him out of it. He looked

Anne was running shoeless across broken glass, like Bruce Willis in *Die Hard*.

A trail of blood followed her as she zig-zagged in no particular direction or sense of purpose. Her arms were rigid, by her side while she ran, making her look like an out-of-step Irish step dancer.

Peter paced the room, with both hands in his hair he kept saying "fuck" rapid-fire as if he was trying to say it the most times in a minute for a Guinness World Record.

Suddenly the tentacle re-appeared. It dipped its tip in Anne's blood trail and followed the blood right to her, she turned around right before the hideous arms of whatever the hell this monster was grabbed her. She tried to fight it, but it was no use. She was sucked out of the same window Steve had exited.

"We've got to get the fuck out of here!" Shouted Maurice. "Everybody, run to the stairs!" "Fuh-fuh-fuh-fuh" Peter was pacing, he looked up at Maurice, they locked eyes. In a flash of green, Peter was out the window leaving only his footprints in Anne's blood.

The only time anybody used the stairs was in January when the company had the "Biggest Loser" competition and gave cash prizes to the top employees who had lost weight. Maurice never participated in that bullshit, but he had a vague understanding of where the stairs were. They were where the construction people were working on the other half of the floor. He grabbed Madeline

and followed Brandon to the stairs when Roger walked into their path as calm as a college professor on sabbatical.

"Oh, no, you don't. I'm to make sure everyone stays right where they are." He pulled out a gun and cocked it, "You're squid food, fuckers."

"What are you talking about?" Cried Madeline.

"Old Man Kirkland himself told me to keep an eye on this floor, make sure nobody leaves, and then I will survive this round of layoffs."

"Layoffs? People are getting killed!" He leveled the gun in Maurice's direction. "You know it's attracted to blood? Whatever it is, it has a taste for blood. If I—"

Brandon punched Roger in the face, his nose exploded like a strawberry in a microwave. Brandon straddled Roger and beat his face in, really letting out his aggression. Before Maurice could tell him to stop a tentacle came in and took them both away in a flash. Too bad, Maurice liked Brandon.

Maurice and Madeline stood there amongst the power tools and saw horses, in a daze. Maurice said, "Alright, let's dip."

They took the stairs to the lobby. Streaks of blood on the floor and walls, broken glass, and splintered office furniture told them all they needed to know — it wasn't just the fourth floor getting executed today. They quietly went through the front door, formerly glass, now just a shattered throughway.

The parking lot was a mass of upturned cars and carnage. The only thing left from the Summer Kickoff BBQ unscathed was the DJ booth, which was still playing that kid from Marketing's "Summer Trax" mix. As if this were some cosmic joke and the beast only spared the unholy.

It wasn't until they got to the gates that Maurice dared look back. What he saw was an incredible sight. Roger called it a squid, he wasn't far off. Except squid bodies are long cylinders, this thing's body — if you'd call it that — was a blob. Like a fatty mass or a giant amoeba. The beast's body would latch onto the building like a barnacle. Instead of eight tentacles like a squid, this thing had at least fifty, from what Maurice could tell. But they wouldn't stay fixed, they would come in and out of the blob and odd places all over its body, making it impossible to know for sure just how many tentacles there were.

The tentacles would leap out of the thing's body like a solar flare coming off the sun, grab a person and pull them screaming into the blob. From there, Maurice didn't want to know what happened to them.

*(Editors note. What happened to them is this: Upon entry of the beast, they would break through the outer exoskeleton like a finger going through a Jell-o mold. Inside this Jell-o-mold-like body was acid much like that of a human's stomach. If the people were still alive they would slowly dissolve at an excruciatingly slow rate. Electricity generated by these "feedings" would render the dissolving people paralyzed. So, there was no escape. It was a slow and painful death).*

The gates were closed but there was a part of the fence that was crushed after the beast got a little overzealous with a Nissan Maxima. The Maxima lay on its back like an upturned turtle with the crushed fence beneath it. Maurice helped Madeline over the fence first. One leg went over the fence's crushed cross-bar, but when she put her other leg over it got cut on some twisted steel. Her pants tore, but that wasn't the problem. The problem was the cut on her leg, blood glistening in the moonlight.

The sound from behind them grew quiet, the beast stopped wreaking havoc on the K&G building and bounded across the parking lot at astounding speed.

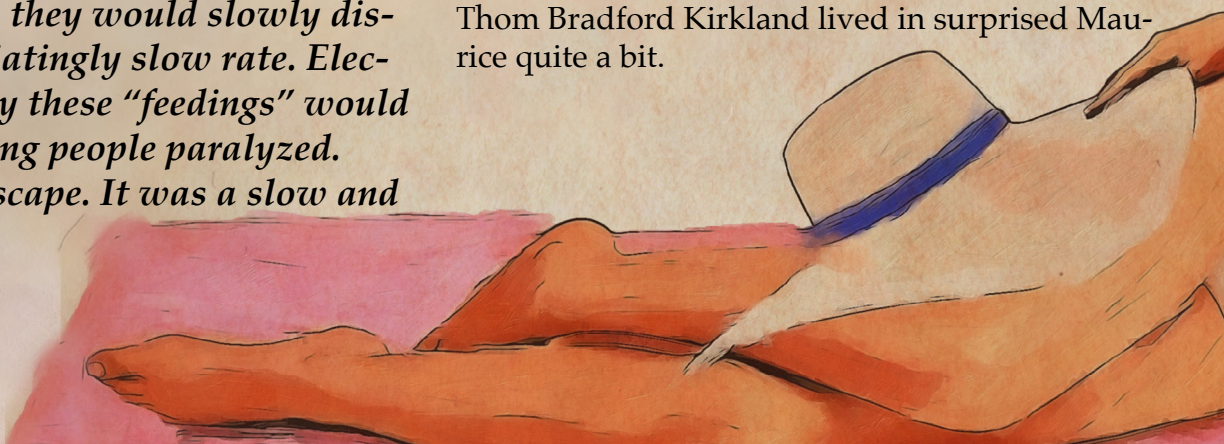
Maurice hopped the fence and grabbed Madeline by her sportcoat. They ran down the street toward the now empty office space that formerly housed UpClick Funnel Inc.

He grabbed one of their swag bandanas and tied her leg tight. Then he found some bubble wrap and cellophane and tied them around the bandage. The Beast never visited the empty Office Space that night. It was too busy with the poor souls in the K&G office tower but that didn't stop Maurice and Madeline from having a sleepless night.

It wasn't just fear that kept Maurice awake all night. He was wide awake with rage. Kirkland put a goofy necklace on Roger and who knows who else on the other floors and told them to make sure nobody escaped. It was Thom Kirkland who brought this on everyone. The CEO had just murdered his entire workforce, and Maurice was ready to exact revenge.

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Maurice had never been to Florida and from what he had surmised from social media it was just a bunch of rednecks drinking Budweiser, wearing red hats, and shooting off fireworks in their bare hands. So it goes without saying that the opulence of this neighborhood in Boca Raton that Thom Bradford Kirkland lived in surprised Maurice quite a bit.



This was the kind of neighborhood where a Tesla was the poor family's car. Every driveway had at least one polished Rolls Royce or Bentley and a beat-up Toyota Tacoma in the service entrance filled with landscaping gear. Every house in the gated cul-de-sac had at least one golf cart and riding privileges onto the thirty-six hole links-style golf course where the dress code stated that all men's shirts must have collars with one exception, mock turtlenecks may be worn at lunch during golf season (April 13 - October 5). Every home had at least five bathrooms and one elevator. There wasn't a Dale Earnhardt number three in sight.

Kirkland's mansion was styled like a Tuscan villa. Brick-red Spanish tile roofing popped in contrast with the pale yellow stucco walls. The main house was from the 1920s but the left and right wings of the house were add-ons from the opulent 80s, paid for with cocaine money. The two new wings stretched outward like a goalpost; with a pool, garden, tennis, and basketball courts in the courtyard.

Maurice walked the perimeter figuring it was best to go through the back. The security so far was surprisingly lax. Truth be told, security saw Maurice, but figured he was just one of the landscapers and let him be.

As he walked past the pool there was a bronzed woman in a white one-piece swimsuit, wide-brimmed hat, and sunglasses — sipping a rosé getting toasted in more ways than one. It wasn't even noon yet and she was soaking in her breakfast of vitamin D and wine.

Maurice saw her and froze. He assumed this was Kirkland's wife (but, he assumed wrong — it was his mistress, Lexi). He also assumed that she would freak out upon seeing a strange black man in her backyard. White women tended to do that. He stood there in an athletic stance, ready to spring forward and run away once she started screaming. But he was again wrong, she

simply raised her glass to him like she was making a toast at a party and took a sip of her rosé. So he kept walking and went inside.

Once inside the temperature plunged. There was no air conditioning on but the tile floors and incredible cross breeze made the house an enviable habitat to escape the humidity that was Florida in June. The sudden change in temperature made Maurice sweat more, his brows were dripping and his shirt clung to his back.

Thom Bradford Kirkland stood in the living room at the bar cart. He had a Collins glass with a vodka screwdriver in his hand, white polo, and navy blue shorts on. He had just come off the back nine and finished the day two under par. He was feeling really good about himself and half in the bag when he saw Maurice.

"Oh hello. Is it already time to pay you guys for the month? Time flies huh?"

"What?"

"You work for Jose?"

It was then that realized this guy and his wife must have thought Maurice was one of the help, why else would he be in the living room? Since he came to Florida with no plan besides the plan to wing it, he decided to play along. "Oh, yeah. Uh. Si, señor. Uh, dinero time."

"Dinero time. I like that." Kirkland turned to head out of the room, presumably to get some dinero. As soon as he turned, Maurice grabbed the bottle of Titos off the bar cart and clocked him in the back of the head. The bottle didn't shatter so he calmly put it back on the bar cart, wiped off his prints on the handle with his shirt, and picked up Thom Kirkland. Maurice had him over his shoulder like a fireman when Kirkland's mistress walked in. She dropped her wine glass on the tile floor. Maurice looked up at her and said, "I think you should go."

She didn't need to hear anything else, all she said was "I'll pack my bags." Twenty minutes later Kirkland was awake, sweating through his Lacoste polo. He was tied up and gagged on the couch while Maurice helped Lexi with the last of her bags. She had filled up the trunk and back seats of her Tesla Model X, Maurice figured most of that stuff was not hers, but he didn't care.



Maurice went back to Kirkland, whose eyes darted back and forth like he was watching a furious ping pong match. "I know you sicked that giant squid thing on us at K-an-G so don't fuckin' deny it. All I want to know is how and why."

He ripped off the duct tape covering his mouth and Kirkland let out a pathetic wounded wail. The sound bounced through the living room, off the marble walls and the tile floor as if they were in a cave.

Maurice put the duct tape back on his mouth, "That's not the fuckin' answer I was looking for. If you scream, I will knock you out and when you wake up you'll be short a nutsac. Do you understand me?"

Kirkland nodded, sweat was dripping down his face like he just played one-on-one against Jordan. The faint sound of weed whackers and leafblowers were in the distance, otherwise, it was just the quiet of a very large mansion. Maurice removed the tape a second time.

"Listen, I have money. I can pay yuh—" Maurice put the tape over his mouth again.

"I don't give a *fuck*. About money. I just want to know what that fucking thing was and why you murdered everyone in your company. OK?"

Kirkland nodded again, this time faster than before. Maurice removed the tape a third time. It was losing its stickiness and he figured if this guy didn't give him a proper answer this time he would have to tear off a new piece. Luckily, Kirkland got the assignment this time around.

"It's a secret society. Certain elite people, executive types like me, meet and have a purge of sorts every quarter. We need to sacrifice workers for our bottom line."

"Bottom line? Jesus Christ."

"Usually its just a few people here and there, but with inflation, and the need from our board members to continue to show growth, we had to get drastic."

"We? Who's we?"

"Well, just look at the Dow, or FAANG — really most major corporations have one person on the board of the Sons of Arkham."

"This like a Batman thing?"

"No! We don't dress up in goofy costumes."

"We'll let's see, I think you need to summon them for a last-minute board meeting."

They left his house under the cover of darkness. Just Maurice and Thom Kirkland in an emp-

ty rental car. Maurice didn't rob him, he wasn't a thief.

••••

They showed up at the Sons of Arkham board meeting, the other members were wearing funny costumes. The room had square foot tiles radiating off a circular tile the size of a manhole in the center of the room. Above the manhole was a glass ceiling, with glass and steel like a victorian greenhouse. The whole place seemed like it came out of the Gilded Age right down to the altar on the far side of the room. The hooded figures all looked at Maurice and Thom as they entered, their footsteps echoing on the hard tiled floor.

"Ah, Maurice we were expecting you." The men (and one woman) were all wearing hoods but he could recognize most, they were all well-known CEOs of major corporations around the world. Some had flown to outer space on private rockets, others made half-hearted attempts to run for public office in the past.

"How did you know I was coming?"

"The Oracle told us, she can see the future. She's also the only one who can speak with Gwarloth when it's in its Godlike state." The man motioned towards a woman in a sheer dress. She looked like a hippie goddess, sitting like a yogi in the lotus pose with a pack of tarot cards in front of her.

"There's always one sacrificial lamb that proves worthy. Proves they are a wolf and not a sheep."

"So this was a test?"

"No. This was for profit, we need to keep Gwarloth happy with human sacrifices. But this right here, what we're offering you, is a business proposition."

"I come here with a gun and you want to conduct business with me?"

"That gun wouldn't do you any good. Bullets have no effect on a god, like Gwarloth. Your gun is impotent in his presence. That is our security."

This was when Thom Kirkland piped up, "As you know K&G is in a state of transformation," he said this with a smile. "You witnessed our layoffs to make us look more manageable for a merger with America First International." He pointed to the man he assumed was CEO of America First International. Maurice thought the name was a bit of an oxymoron but kept quiet. The Oracle hippie giggled, he had a feeling she was

reading his mind. The others took his silence as a sign he was intrigued, which he was.

"We'll make you one of us, you start out as COO of AFI and if you play your cards right, you'll be CEO of one of our conglomerates someday."

"Whoa, whoa, I thought I was gonna be COO after the merger, Bob. That was the deal," interrupted Kirkland. He was no longer worried about Maurice's gun and now in boss man mode.

"And then Mo arrived and proved himself stronger than you. No, Thom. You're retiring."

Suddenly a giant tentacle ripped through the glass ceiling and grabbed Kirkland. There was a crunch, a squishy sound, and then he was gone. A decent pool of blood was all Thom Kirkland left behind. His blood flowed into the grout between the tile on the floor and onto the circular tile at the center. The blood seemed to defy gravity and friction as it flowed to the circular tile at a fast rate.

"So, are you on board Mo?"

"I guess I don't have much of a choice."

"You won't regret it, you'll be richer and more powerful than you can imagine. And nerds will defend your honor on Twitter, no matter what you do or say."

"But first you must pass the initiation."

"What do I have to do?"

"You have to make love to Gwarloth."

"How am I supposed to do that?" Maurice was thinking of the amorphous blob latched onto the K&G building. He'd rather fuck Gwarloth's mouthpiece in the see-through sundress. "How can I fuck that thing?"

"Oh no, no, no. You don't fuck Gwarloth. It fucks you."

The words "it fucks you" hung in the air like a fart with serious hang time. Just wafting there while Maurice processed. Thinking, *with those giant tentacles?*

"Not with the tentacles." Said the hippie girl. "It takes the human form to perform this act. But after, the mouthpiece in the sundress is all yours." She said the last part with a smile to the bewilderment of all others present except Maurice, who simply blushed.



Gwarloth's head came out of the blood tile first, a goatee'd face with a sinister smile. His eyebrows were thick and formed a perfect V in the center of his head, bringing your attention down to a body built like Conan the Barbarian. He

looked like a caricature of the devil, minus the horns and tail.

When Maurice saw below the waist he let out a groan and everyone laughed. Maurice had seen girls whose thighs had less girth than this appendage about to fuck Maurice. This, man, god, whatever's, dick was standing at attention. As he made his way up through the manhole, it hit the lip of the hole and let out a noise like a gong. The tile that it hit cracked a little. Maurice kept thinking about the prospect of not having to worry about paying rent. They said he was going to be rich but that's all he could comprehend being rich was, not worrying about rent on his one-bedroom apartment.

The rest was kind of a blur for Maurice, there was an altar, he assumed he would be bent over. Next to the altar were two candles about 2 feet tall on top of four-foot candle holders.

The room got dark, clouds suddenly appeared above the glass ceiling and a torrent of rain and lightning came down through the hole the tentacle ripped Kirkland out of.

The others got in a circle around the altar and kneeled; swaying and chanting some incoherent words of worship. Their robes soaking wet. Gwarloth disrobed Maurice and the chanting got louder and faster, as if they were on the verge of climax themselves.

Maurice thought of something, and heard the hippie girl cry out "No!" She had read his mind and came to the conclusion before he did, but her reaction told him all he needed to know: If this thing was now a man, he could kill it.

The chanting stopped, Maurice grabbed the base of the candle holder, hit it against the stone altar, splintering it into two very sharp pieces of wood, and stabbed the man in the abdomen with the part he was holding.

The man looked at Maurice in disbelief, never in the thousands of years Gwarloth had been in contact with humans — from ancient Egypt and Rome to the British empire, to this moment in America — had he ever encountered a man not take the money. He was experiencing feelings he had never felt, confusion and pain clouded his thoughts as he stood there bleeding from his stomach.

Maurice put his thoughts to rest, he stabbed the man in the neck. The God of Commerce died choking on his own blood.

That's when the recession started.

# FRIENDS OF THE PULPS

The American Pulps community is filled with tons of talented people. One of the reasons we wanted to start the magazine was to shine a little light on other artists, writers, podcasters, and publishers in the pulp community. This will be the first of an ongoing series highlighting members of the American Pulps community.

*If you want to purchase these books, click on the title or the book cover and it'll take you to a storefront.*



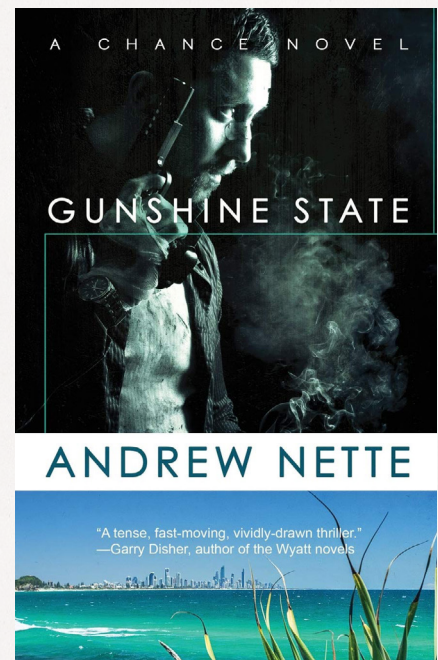
## [Men's Adventure Quarterly #5](#) by Bob Deis and Bill Cunningham

The Men's Adventure Library Bob Deis has put together is a constant source of entertainment and inspiration for the American Pulps team. If you listen to the SuitUp! Podcast interview we were in (link below) you'll hear us talk about our origin story, and that origin story involves the books from the Men's Adventure Library. If you're one of the many people who have messaged us in the past saying "I wish they made magazines like this today" when we post a sweat mag, here's your buddy.

## [Gunshine State](#) by Andrew Nette

We're big fans of Andrew Nette (aka Pulp Curry) here at the Pulps. He's like the more put together and successful Australian version of us. He has a great collection of non-fiction pulp-history books that we've written about in the past. As well as some fun short stories, that we've again, written about in the past. Like I said, we're fans. This novel, Gunshine State, features Gary Chance a former Australian army driver, ex-bouncer, and thief. If you're into the Richard Stark Parker books, this one's up your alley.

And if you're into Pulp History and 1960s and 70s Crime cinema, he's your man.

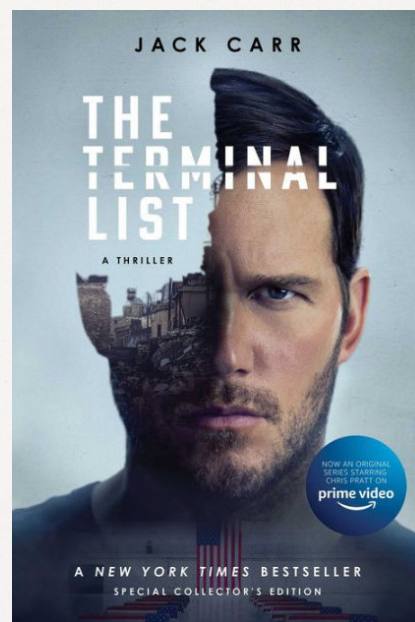


## The Terminal List Series

by Jack Carr

A longtime friend of the Pulp, Jack Carr's Terminal List series is about SEAL Lieutenant Commander James Reese and is now streaming on Amazon Prime. If you're like me and prefer to read the books before watching the adaptation, start with *The Terminal List*.

Jack Carr, himself a former Navy SEAL has written an awesome series in the same vein as Vince Flynn or David Morrell with flashes of Tom Clancy. I say Clancy because Carr, a self-proclaimed "tech guy" goes deep into the real-world spycraft tech and arsenal Reese uses throughout the book much akin to Tom Clancy. And when I say "real world spycraft" I mean the DOJ redacted the pages in his books, which annoys him but I think it's cool. I feel like I'm reading a top-secret document and not just a kickass novel (which these are).



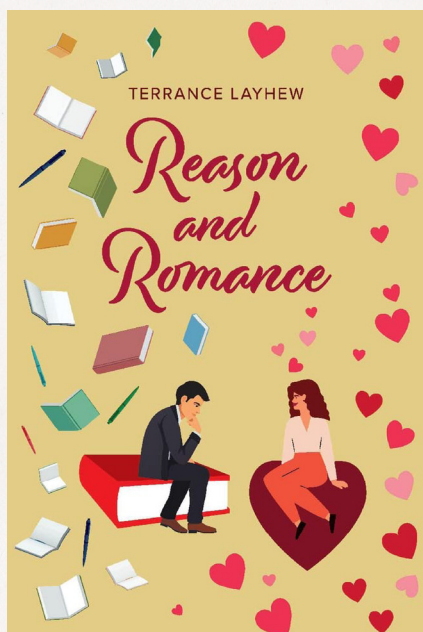
## Reason and Romance

by Terrance Layhew

OK, with this being a romance novel, it's a bit of a departure from pulp fiction but hear me out.

- 1.) Terrance Layhew is a good friend of the pulps and has actually had us on his SuitUp! Podcast where we talked about writing, James Bond, and John's job at Playboy.
- 2.) This book's great! Layhew took a Jane Austen story and flipped it, making the man the story's main protagonist. It's a fun, quick read. And with the main character being an author, it's got lots of great Easter eggs for bibliophiles as well as a good amount of story centered around this guy George Austen, writing a book.

[Link to the SuitUp! episode with the American Pulp Team.](#)

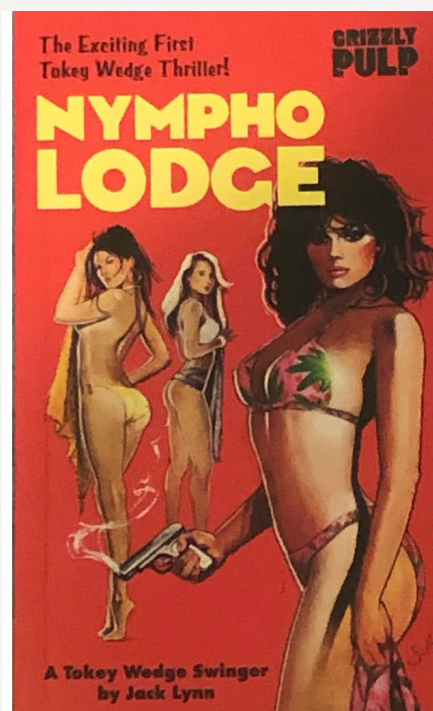


## Nympho Lodge

by Jack Lynn

When we first met Mike from Grizzly Pulp, we knew we were kindred spirits right off the bat. A great guy with a great Indie publishing company, Nympho Lodge is the first installment of the Tokey Wedge series. Originally published in 1959. Tokey is a short, hardboiled Private Investigator who gets hired as a bodyguard for a wealthy woman going through an ugly divorce. It has a whole lot of murder and sex. If you like the Shell Scott novels you'll love Tokey.

I have to add, I love how Grizzly Pulp packages the books with a removable book jacket — hiding the provocative cover art (illustrated by the great, Jim Silke) so you can read it on public transit in polite company. They have two Tokey books out, with more on the way.



# The Killer Beasts Of Devil's Gullet

By: Joachim Forman



If there was such a thing as a compassionate American, Augustin “Gus” Mbuyu had never met one. According to U.S. law, Gus was not a slave. After all, slavery had been illegal for forty years, and The Majestic Big Top Circus maintained that he was always free to go.

Lured by promises of a New England boarding school, Gus left the Belgian Congo at age twelve. The nice priest didn’t bring him to an elite academy. Instead, Gus became the latest attraction in one of Western society’s many shameful legacies: The Human Zoo.



For years, he toured the United States as a "Savage From The Dark Continent." His assigned stage name was the nonsensical "Oogah Batu-kee." His captors dressed him in a leopard skin loincloth and made him hold a spear. He was kept in a cage with monkeys during showtime, and fed scraps at night. He traveled in a wooden freight car while the other performers lounged in sleeper cabins. One would think Gus' treatment would appall decent people, thus relegating human zoos to the much maligned "high grass" carnivals. But, this was not the case. Gus' dark body and "primitive ways" had been ogled in the nation's finest venues, including the 1904 World's Fair.

At the turn of the century, every town treated the circus' arrival like a holiday. Brightly painted trains and horse-drawn convoys brought the wonders of the world to everyday people. An uncanny potpourri of peanuts, manure, and sweat hypnotized the crowd. Performers stretched the limits of human ability. The animals were exotic and terrifying. If Gus had been free, he would have loved it. Instead, the smell of wood shavings and cotton candy was the odor of a prison, a prison he would labor for years to escape.

Gus contemplated freedom every day, but he was endowed with an analytic mind. Having learned about Americans through their most heinous behavior, he understood the things he would need for a permanent escape. First, he needed to learn English. Being Congolese, he spoke perfect French and Lingala, but mastering the yankees' tongue required much effort. It was difficult to study while being gawked at in a cage. Gus slowly learned the language despite being kept separate from the other performers. Edgar Rowe, the circus' owner, made a point to isolate Gus in order to keep him from "getting civilized."

Secondly, Gus knew he had to flee while in the correct American city, wherever that was. There was no point in running from the circus, only to end up in jail for being an unchaperoned black man. From his cloistered vantage point, Gus made no distinction between "Northern states and Southern states." He had witnessed several lynchings while touring what he called "the hot parts" of the country, and he saw vicious racial attacks while touring what he called "the cold parts." Frankly, Gus couldn't tell if it was the law to hunt black men, or just good sport.

Finally, at age seventeen, Gus felt he was ready to make a break for it. He planned to slip away the next time they stopped in New York City. He chose New York for its dense population, which would aid in his disappearance. From there, he would take the first steam ship that was crossing the Atlantic. After that, he would have to improvise. It was a rough hewn, but doable plan. He only needed one more thing to execute it...money. Alas, being treated like livestock was not a profitable venture. And, if a man is broke in America, he might as well be in a cage.

When Gus pondered this reality, it was easy for him to get depressed. But, on July seventeenth, 1907 at nine P.M., he had the dubious luxury of forgetting these concerns. At that instant, Augustin "Gus" Mbuyu was hanging upside down, dangling precariously over a mountain gorge.



An orange inferno was ravaging the cliff-side. The Goliath flames blazed a trail hundreds of feet to the whitewater rapids below. The only thing keeping Gus from plunging to his death was a frayed cargo net, which was wrapped around his right leg. The net was bolted to a mangled rail car, which was held in place by a cluster of burning trees. Blood fell from a gash on his face. The grape-sized droplets hurtled toward the kaleidoscope of destruction below. He swayed in the net's grasp like a forgotten fish.

The crash had twisted the Majestic Big Top's train so thoroughly, it was as if the steel had been braided by a giant. At the bottom of the gorge, less than a quarter mile from the wreckage, was a waterfall. Dozens of corpses floated to the edge of the deluge and vanished into oblivion. Boulders and body parts dotted the rushing water like a sentence written in Braille. That sentence stated, "You are fucked."

In a feat of adrenaline-fueled strength, Gus pulled himself right side up. He got his bearings as the blood left his head. He untangled himself from the spaghetti-like tethers. It was painstaking work that felt more like disarming a bomb. Gus surveyed the forest hellscape. He didn't know what part of America this was, but it was mountainous with infinite trees.

A god that had largely ignored Gus suddenly threw him a bone. He spotted a pine tree that was roughly twenty feet below him. It had a thick trunk that protruded at a forty five degree angle. If Gus could gain enough momentum, he could

hit the side of the gorge and use the trunk of that tree to stop his descent. Once stopped, he could scramble up the cliffside by gripping the dense foliage. His confidence was growing.

Gus lowered himself to the bottom of the net and held the ends. He kicked his legs out repeatedly until he was swinging like a Bantu trapeze act. Once he had gained maximum momentum, he released his grip, tumbled down the rock side, and slammed to a stop at the base of his targeted tree. It was the kind of brilliant maneuver he'd wished the folks back home had witnessed. His relief was short-lived, however. Now that he was relatively safe, he could digest the true horror that surrounded him.

Gus hadn't seen carnage like this since the "Rubber Terror." Human bodies, animal carcasses, and shattered rail cars were strewn about like a child's toys. Roustabouts, clowns and acrobats were splayed ribbon-like across tree branches. Everything from monkeys to zebras peppered the terrain. An elephant named Rosie was torn asunder by a falling locomotive. Her mate, Fredrik, had panicked and drowned himself in the river. All that remained of Artie, the beloved chimpanzee, was a severed hand and some teeth. Scattered bloody sequins reflected the dancing flames. Out of four hundred circus personnel, Gus had yet to spot a survivor.

Like most "perfect storm" disasters, the Majestic Big Top crash was a mixture of terrible luck and preventable tragedy. The circus normally traveled on two trains, but budget cuts and contract disputes had reduced their traveling amenities to one. As a result, they packed every car well beyond capacity. The engineer initially protested the unsafe conditions, but when Elmer Rowe threatened to blackball him, he acquiesced. The train wended its way through hairpin turns in the Appalachian mountains. Heavy rains brought sporadic flash flooding, which gave the railway a slick, deadly texture. The overtaxed locomotive was screeching down a steep mountain grade when its brakes finally failed.

The runaway train reached speeds in excess of eighty miles per hour—far beyond its design limits—and came upon a mountain pass known locally as The Devil's Gullet. Passengers and animals were tossed from the train as twenty four of its carriages jumped off the track into the side of the mountain. The kerosene lamps ruptured, causing the wreck to erupt into a grisly pyre.

Gus had awakened to blinding light and the stench of fire-split steel. Flames ate through the wooden walls of his quarters. The hay he'd used for a bed ignited. As Gus fought to escape, he envisioned The Almighty's hand reaching down and plucking him from certain death. His prayers were answered with cruel irony. A twenty car freight train was traveling on the same track at sixty miles per hour. The engineer was fast asleep and never woke up.

The Freight's engine skewered the Majestic Big Top's wooden sleeper cars, splattering untold performers across the mountainside. The impact sent both trains plummeting into the rapids below. Survivors climbed out of the submerged railcars only to be swept away and tossed over the waterfall. Stampeding livestock broke through their flaming pens, trampling people and plunging to their own deaths. The birds flew off to freedom. The reptiles wandered off with complete lack of interest.

Only one car besides Gus' remained cradled in the trees. That car had contained Sadie, the circus' crown jewel. Sadie was a living, twelve foot long, five hundred pound bull shark. Not even PT Barnum had successfully toured with a live shark. Sure, Barnum had been able to exhibit Whales in his New York aquarium, but nobody had been able to pull off a live shark show.

The Majestic Big Top featured an enormous glass tank that stagehands wheeled into the center ring. Rowe himself would feed Sadie, transfixing local crowds with his control over "the prehistoric man eater." He even devised a routine where the acrobats would do tricks over the shark's tank...without a net, of course. By keeping Sadie alive, Rowe's ingenuity had put him on the path to be bigger than Barnum, or even the Ringlings.

Sadie's transport tank was an engineering marvel. It was a fully functional glass aquarium stored inside a custom railway car. Rowe had devised a steam-powered air pump/water circulation system. Since sharks could only breathe by moving forward, Rowe pumped oxygenated water through the shark's gills, allowing her to remain breathing normally while in transit. The other brilliant innovation was Rowe's choice of a Bull Shark. Not only were they impressive "man eaters," they could survive in both fresh and saltwater. That meant

Rowe could fill up a tank with local water sources and have his shark exhibit function all over the country. Using local water meant that he didn't have to transport sea water. It was truly astounding. Of course, none of that mattered now. As far as Gus knew, Sadie had either been boiled in the fire, or was dead somewhere down in The Devil's Gullet.

Underneath his threadbare coat, Gus was still clad in his obscene "traditional" garb of loincloth and animal skin. While searching for survivors, he cherry-picked clothing from the deceased. A dead roustabout was roughly his size and thankfully covered in minimal gore. Gus removed the man's duck cloth jacket and pants. He found a crushed elephant trainer with boots that fit. He grabbed an acrobat's collarless shirt and found a set of suspenders on an eviscerated clown. Gus also found an olive green fedora in pristine condition. He considered its presence a sign and placed it on his head. A headless wild-life wrangler had a bowie knife secured to his belt, and a .375 Remington rifle slung around his chest. As Gus grasped the wood of the Remington's stock, the feel and smell of it gave him hope. A firearm has a funny way of reassuring a man, even in the most hopeless of situations. He looped its sling around his shoulder and continued to search for survivors. Due to the remote location of the disaster site, no rescue team would arrive until morning at the earliest. If anyone was alive, their only hope was "Oogah Batukey."

Unfortunately, the search was proving to be futile. There might have been other survivors besides Gus, but with the destruction he was seeing, it was doubtful. Hell, he was only alive because of where he had been forced to sleep. Gus did find something almost as welcome as a breathing body. He had stumbled upon a cloud of paper money that was fluttering along the steep sides of the gorge. The train's ticket car had split open during the initial crash, leaving much of the circus' payroll to float away from the flames. Gus stuffed his pockets with all the bills he could find. It must have been a few thousand dollars, which was more than enough to finance his trip home.

As the night wore on, the hopelessness of the crash convinced Gus to abort his search. He was hiking back to the train tracks when he heard gurgling cries of anguish.

## **ALL THAT REMAINED OF ARTIE, THE BELOVED CHIMPANZEE, WAS A SEVERED HAND AND SOME TEETH.**

He didn't spot Elmer Rowe at first, because the man was pinned under a bisected reptile car. Mr. Rowe couldn't see beneath his waist, which was fortunate for him. He also couldn't feel his legs. That was understandable, because Mr. Rowe's lower body was lost somewhere in the rapids below. His entrails were flapping like old tournament pendants. The weight of the reptile car was the only thing keeping blood in his half-body. Gus readied his rifle and drew a bead on Mr. Rowe, whose dime-eyed confusion reminded Gus of the animals he'd hunted as a boy. Gus fired, and Mr. Rowe's head was mist. It was a mercy killing, a favor. Although, if Hell existed, that man already had a bright red pitchfork up his ass.

Gus followed the charred train tracks, and it became clear that not everyone had been killed by the crash. Several of them had been killed with big claws and sharp teeth. One of the men, whom Gus only knew as "The Sad Clown" lay with his face crushed by powerful jaws. The bird husbandry expert was shredded worse than leftover birthday cake. Gus knew what had done this. The circus' two lions had escaped, and they were very upset. They didn't kill these men for food either. They had murdered these men in an act of vengeance. Gus knew from his youth that lions killed for spite when provoked. He also felt a sick pang of empathy with the cats.

The train conductor fell victim to the lions as well. They had removed the front of his rib cage and gobbled his organs for a quick energy boost. These lions, a male named Kodjo and a female named Amra, were now running loose in the forest. Every fiber of Gus' survival instinct told him to run and never look back, yet he was preparing to hunt. Gus knew lions in a way these townsfolk wouldn't...couldn't. Having grown up in a Bantu herding family, lions were a familiar threat. He'd been part of several hunts. He understood just how deadly an angry lion could be. He also knew what it took to kill one.

With this knowledge, Gus had gained a moral responsibility. The only right thing to do was dispatch them himself. He knew the next child those cats saw would become a meal. To make matters worse, lions that big and that scared would hunt everything in sight just to cheer themselves up. His conscience demanded he take action. Despite how he'd been treated in this savage land, he was still a man, and he would act as such. An inopportune nostalgia warned him. He was going hunting for the first time since the innocent days spent with his father.

Kodjo's distinctive roar echoed in the distance. He was marking territory. Gus trekked through the woods for hours. He eventually found an illuminated cluster of wagons and tents in the distance. The spectacle was too small to be a circus. It was a "high grass" carnival. It was a crowded place full of potential lion prey.

Judging by how empty the streets were, Gus could only assume that the roaring lions had scared the attendants into a panic. The discarded bags of snacks and abandoned game prizes confirmed his suspicions. There was no time for tact. He approached the nicest looking wagon, intent on speaking to the boss man. The instant he made it to the door, he could sense a presence behind him. Gus turned around to find two men pointing shotguns.

He shouldered his rifle and put his hands up. He was hyper aware that he was an armed black man in a hostile nation. Gus made the split second decision to act as "African" as he could. Perhaps he could convince them that he was an exotic prince, an expert lion hunter sent to save them. Before the men could utter their first slur, Kodjo roared again, prompting a cacophony of screams from inside the "Rose Larue's International Girly Show" tent. The armed men, who'd just seemed so intent on questioning Gus, abandoned their mission and fled into the night. Apparently pants-pissing terror was the one thing that trumped racism.

Gus sprinted into the tent and found utter bedlam. Kodjo and Amra rampaged as the crowd parted like startled geese. Scantily clad women hid behind muslin flats and climbed up tent poles to avoid the killer cats.

Men stampeded to the exits, shirking all pretense of chivalry. Not even the sight of an African man with a gun startled them into shifting course. Gus had to dive out of the way to avoid getting trampled. Amra seized a slow-moving man by his neck. Kodjo sunk his teeth into the man's chest. Without the burden of thought, Gus fired two shots into Amra, putting her down right at the foot of the striptease stage.

Kodjo saw his beloved killed and lunged at Gus in retaliation. Gus fired three rapid shots. The third hit Kodjo in his leg, exploding the muscle and rupturing his lower intestine. The force of the slug sent him flopping to the ground. The lion struggled to regain his footing, but his damaged leg slithered behind him like an unruly snake. Kodjo ripped through the tent and retreated to the solace of the forest. Gus grabbed a kerosene lamp, followed the fresh blood trail, and pursued Kodjo into the night.

By two in the morning, Gus had tracked Kodjo to a cave that was teeming with rats. He found Kodjo cowering inside, reduced to a puddle of bewildered misery. The lion's moans were human-like in their despair. Gus winced as he realized the rats had burrowed into Kodjo's bullet wound and were eating him from the inside out. Kodjo was trying in vain to bite and claw the rats, but they were too wily and too numerous. The lion was so completely covered in rodents, it looked like he was under a blanket that had spontaneously come to life. Gus exhaled slowly and fired two rifle shots into the lion's heart, temporarily deafening himself in the process. The rats continued to feast unabated. Gus felt indignant rage. How dare they desecrate such a fabulous beast? He smashed the kerosene lamp and covered the rodents in liquid flame. Kodjo received a Viking funeral, and the offending rats were burned alive.

Gus returned to the carnival shortly before dawn. The horse drawn wagons were packed and ready to move on to the next city. Gus had experienced these load-outs hundreds of times, but he'd never witnessed one from the outside. He knocked on the girlie show's wagon. He assumed he would have the best luck asking them for safe passage to New York City.

Delphine Pourciau answered the door. She was tall, olive skinned, and radiated gravitas. She was not necessarily beautiful, but exceedingly striking. Gus knew she was the boss because

her dark eyes were ringed with responsibility. He spoke his best English and made the kind of niceties a desperate man really doesn't have time for. Delphine heard his accent and responded in friendly creole French.

"You saved my girls last night. Not to mention the rubes."

Gus had to appreciate the irony. He'd spent years honing his English only to end up asking a French speaker for help. He spoke with unaffected humility.

"I know lions from my boyhood." His face grew serious. He began the painful process of explaining who he was, but Delphine stopped him.

"Every kinker and bally broad knows who you are."

"I need a safe ride to New York, and I need someone of status to arrange my passage on a steam ship."

"Someone of status?" Delphine laughed at the idea that she fit the description.

"I want someone white to do it. I've been through too much with these Americans to take chances."

Delphine was unphased by Gus' desperation. "I respect your pain, but I cannot help you."

Gus' face tensed as he said, "Perhaps I haven't made myself clear."

He reached in his jacket pocket and produced the money he'd collected from the train wreck. He handed it to her, knowing that having the money in her hand would make the proposal real.

Delphine counted the bills. Gus knew he had her.

"You're paying me, but I am taking a risk. We go through many towns that would punish us for helping a man like you." Delphine winced at her own obviousness, then continued, "You will stay hidden when I tell you."

Gus nodded his agreement.

Delphine's eyes lit up with a sudden flash of showbiz inspiration. "You know, I could use you in my show. You'd play a Mandingo chief seducing my girls with your savage charm. I could even make a deal with each town's local cops. We could have them break up the show every night before the girls 'violate their honor.' The rubes would

love it"

Gus took great pains to keep his voice steady. "I am not doing that."

"I'd make it worth your while. Top billing. You'd make a mint. Once the show has run its course, I'll put you on a steamer back to the dark continent. I'll send you first class so you don't get shanghaied again.

"Absolutely not." Gus was showing his anger now. He reached to take the money back. Delphine stuffed the bills in her bra.

"I understand. Although even you must admit, the act would do gangbusters, despite being a tad bit gauche." Delphine sighed. "I don't control what sells tickets."

Delphine handed Gus a cigarette. She lit his before lighting her own.

"We have a deal. Are you hungry?"

"Very much so."

"Wait inside the wagon. I'll find you something decent to eat." Delphine offered a nurturing smile. "What is your name?"

"Augustine."

"Ah, that is much nicer than Bookah Bunga or whatever they were calling you."

Delphine left the wagon. Gus smoked, inhaling Turkish blend and exhaling cautious relief. His respite was short lived. He heard commotion outside. He saw the acetylene headlights of several cars approaching. Flanking the cars were men on horseback. Gus knew what that group was. He had seen this type of thing in places called Alabama and Mississippi. That cluster of light and dust was carrying a lynch mob.

Gus caught fragments of shouted conversation. The men who had fled the lions earlier were now drunk. They'd decided to teach Gus a lesson for bringing his "African pets" to their good clean town. Now that the lions had been dispatched, these men sought to redeem their sullied honor. Gus' hide would be an ointment on their scraped egos.

Instinct took control. Gus sprinted out of the doorway and untied the nearest horse from its wagon. He leapt on the horse's back and kicked it into action. Within seconds, Gus had it in a full sprint. These men were ashamed they had acted like cowards, but Gus certainly didn't blame them for running. Running was the only sensible thing to do when Lions were in the area.

But, Gus had conquered the king and queen of the jungle. That very act threatened these men, because it meant that such a display of courage was possible by an "inferior" being. These men would not, could not, allow such an insult to their superiority go unchecked. Gus was apparently reaping a punishment whose severity was commensurate with the size of his good deed.

The horse galloped up the mountain path. Gus was annoyed that Delphine had all of his money, but he couldn't dwell on that. Those bills wouldn't stop a bullet.

Although late night had become early morning, the trees on the mountain path kept the terrain quite dark. The lynch mob was gaining on him. Gus could hear the car's engines and horses' hooves. He soon saw that acetylene light beam slicing through the trees. Gus made the fatal error of looking back to see if the men had a clear shot on him. They didn't, but the low hanging tree branch approaching him certainly did. Gus turned just in time for the branch to connect with his chest and send him flying. Gus tumbled down to the whitewater river bank. He climbed a maple tree and found shelter in the lowest branch, which jutted over the rushing water. The densely packed leaves provided a decent hiding spot. Gus readied his rifle, aiming at the road he was just on. The lynch mob would be arriving momentarily.

The hunters passed through Gus' rifle sights. They stopped when they saw Gus' abandoned horse. Gus saw the men fan out in formation. He contemplated his options. If he fired, he could pick a few off, but there seemed to be at least a dozen of them. They were armed to the teeth. Gus couldn't have had more than a few shells in his rifle. Gus could try his luck in the river, but the speed of the water and the jagged rocks looked as deadly as a bullet. The men were approaching. Gus shouted, "Stay back! Stay back, or I'll shoot!"

His warning was strong, but the men were full of liquid courage and gravitated toward their prey. They conspired to fan out around the tree. Even if Gus had a hundred rounds, he would have been in trouble. Rage boiled inside him. He hadn't been free for

twenty four hours, and he was once again trapped like a scared animal. Gus wouldn't go back into a cage, and he wouldn't allow another American to make a spectacle of his body.

Gus clutched his rifle. He would fire his remaining bullets. He would then unsheath his hunting knife and cut the closest man to ribbons while they gunned him down.

He had lived for years planning to escape squalor. His "good sense" had told him to bide his time. His "good sense" had told him for years that he would find the perfect opportunity and the perfect ally for escape. His good sense told him to be patient. Gus checked in with his good sense, but this time the good sense was gone. In its place was a singular desire to die with dignity, dignity in the form of devastating violence. He was going to take as many of those bastards with him as he could. He would punish them for the cowardice they displayed when they decided to lynch a good man.

Gus looked down to reassure himself that he still had the knife. That was when he spotted a shadow approaching from under the water. In the time it took for his eye to register the shape, Gus saw Sadie, the twelve foot bull shark, jump out from the river rapids and bite down on the branch that held him. The branch snapped under the shark's weight. Before Gus could fully appreciate what was happening, he emptied the contents of his bowels and plunged into the water. The class five rapids took him into a slalom of sharp rocks. Sadie's dorsal fin rose and dipped above and below the surface. Gus gripped the branch and held on, throttling down the river rapids with a killer shark pursuing him. Sadie breached the surface. Gus flipped the rifle around and fired at Sadie's flank. The bullet punched into her hide and she temporarily wriggled away in pain.

Gus slammed into a submerged boulder. He was forced to drop the rifle as he struggled to maintain his grip on the branch. He resembled a small child clinging to a wild horse. The side of his torso opened. His blood made a slick in the water surface. Rocks bounced him back and forth like a cat does a struggling beetle. Sadie was behind him in hot pursuit. The sharks chomping jaws once again emerged from the water. Gus used this knife to stab Sadie's nose, keeping her at bay. Their high speed chase came to an abrupt end as the river collided with the Majestic Big

Top train wreck. The mangled cars formed an ad-hoc dam, pausing the river's breakneck pace. Gus squeezed into a smashed railcar. He climbed behind pieces of wreckage in a pitiful attempt to shield himself from Sadie's razor mouth. He avoided looking at the dozens of pale, bloated corpses scattered around him. His blood in the water gave Sadie a hard, lipless grin.

Gus squeezed further behind the tangled debris. Sadie wriggled towards him. The smell of Gus' blood pulled her like a hooked fishing line. With his back against the rail car corner, Gus cowered. Sadie's snout grazed his chest. He could feel the cold sandpaper skin. Sadie sniffed him like a curious dog. Gus fought the realization that he would leave the earth through a prehistoric beast's asshole.

The two of them lay in the punishing rapids, locked in an interspecies stalemate. Sadie's thrashing deteriorated from primal blood lust, to panicked writhing, to a listless series of tremors. Gus realized what was happening. The water was rushing over her gills from behind. It was flowing in the wrong direction for her breathing. The whitewater was suffocating her. Sadie tried to find her way out of her predicament, but sharks cannot swim backwards. Gus had unwittingly led her into the perfect trap. Sadie's onyx eyes quivered in panic. She was as good as dead, but she was still alive enough to be very afraid. In a final attempt to free herself, she slammed her body against the iron teeth that had claimed her. She was tearing herself to ribbons. It was pathetic. Gus studied the scene with a mix of pity and grim satisfaction. All Sadie had to do was back up, but she couldn't do it. Gus watched the queen prisoner expire. Her body went limp and she joined the menagerie of circus cadavers.

Gus made the agonizing climb up to the top of the train. He took a deep breath and fought for control over his shaking limbs. Before he could get his bearings, a bullet ripped through the flesh of his right shoulder. Gus fell off the train car and plunged back into the water. If he hadn't fallen forward, he would have drifted down to the waterfall. For a moment, he found himself staring into Sadie's tranquil, deceased eyes. Gus swam beneath another submerged train car to make himself a harder target. He took breaths from a sliver of air that existed between the water's surface and the car's floorboards.

Gus was able to peek through a crack in the car and spot where the bullet had come from. The lynch mob was at the river bank and taking pot shots at him. Those vile sons of bitches were actually laughing and back slapping. One would think they were shooting clay pigeons. . The men hooted as they fired another volley of shots. They missed Gus, but peppered the car with holes and unintentionally blew off a piece of a giraffe's head. Thank god their aim was as drunk as they were. Gus clutched his knife. A hell of a lot of good that would do now.

Gus needed to make a quick and decisive exit. If he didn't get to a doctor, he would bleed out. If the men saw him, they would kill him. There was also a waterfall less than a quarter of a mile away. With the whitewater's speed, Gus wagered it would take him just over a minute to reach the waterfall, which was his only conceivable escape route.

He dipped back under the water and surveyed Sadie's corpse. Now that the shark was dead, he had to see how stuck she really was. If he could somehow dislodge her and use her thick body as a shield, he could avoid getting shot and use her as a shock absorber while plunging down the waterfall. People had survived going down Niagara falls in a barrel. Perhaps he could exit The Devil's Throat in the belly of a shark.

While pausing occasionally to take breaths, Gus cut open Sadie's belly, and pulled out her viscera. Once the shark was gutted, Gus sucked in a final lungful of air, dove under, and backed into the cavity. The shark now fit him like a five hundred pound cartilage suit. He pushed his legs against the train wreckage, and moved the shark corpse backward just enough to dislodge it. After that, the current of the rapids worked as a force multiplier, pushing him and Sadie into the rushing water. The shark's body bobbed slightly above the surface. Lynch mob bullets whizzed into the grey flesh, but the thick hide protected Gus. Within a minute, Gus found himself in free fall. He was able to see through the open dead jaws as he tumbled down the waterfall and crashed against rocks. Sadie absorbed the impact, but Gus banged his scalp against her back teeth.







The waterfall spit Gus out, and he struggled to surface. His ripped torso and shattered shoulder aided in keeping him under the swirling water. Suffocation tempted him to accept a watery grave. He was out of air and floating in the no man's land beneath the surface.

That was when a long, hooked pole dipped under the surface and pulled Gus by his jacket. Two burly men fished him out of the water. Gus' first sub-sentient thought was "They caught me. They are going to hang me." But, as he vomited water onto the riverbank, he saw the hook that dragged him out. He recognized the type. It was a vaudeville hook, the kind used to drag shitty performers from the stage. Holding that hook was Delphine, who was flanked by two musclebound carnies. Delphine spoke with her now familiar lack of pretense.

"We're leaving now. I know a doctor two towns over."

Gus blinked in disbelief. "You came for me?"

Delphine lit a smoke and shook her head. "No. This is the road out of town. Your timing was fortunate."

Gus stuttered his gratitude. He suspected she was lying about the coincidence to preserve her hard mystique.

Delphine patted her bra, where several thousand dollars safely rested. "Don't thank me. We had a deal, and I honor my deals."

Delphine's muscle men picked up Gus. That morning, he slept in the bed for the first time in years.

# Drink Like A Character:

## Gin Rickey, *The Great Gatsby* (1925)

**"Tom came back, preceding four gin rickeys that clicked full of ice. Gatsby took up his drink.**

**'They certainly look cool, he said, with visible tension. We drank in long, greedy swallows.'**

**– F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby***



Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald loved to imbibe, in the 1920s he would introduce himself to party guests as "F. Scott Fitzgerald, the well-known alcoholic." According to Hemingway he was also a bit of a lightweight. Saying in *A Moveable Feast*, "... it was hard to accept him as a drunkard, since he was affected by such small quantities of alcohol." But Hemingway could also drink a rhino under the table so, there's that too.

This is great and refreshing drink to have in the summer. It's as simple to make as a Gin and Tonic but not as popular. Here's how to make it:

- 2 parts Gin
- ¾ oz. fresh lime juice
- Top with Club Soda (I have a soda stream and almost always just use the seltzer water from that—just as good).

Stir it up a bit and enjoy.



A279

A dark, atmospheric illustration of a woman with long dark hair, wearing a red dress and a necklace, holding a large knife high above her head. She is standing in a room with a grid pattern, possibly a window or a wall. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows.

She dreamed of  
being Hollywood's  
leading lady

# UNDER THE KNIFE

She ended up  
becoming the  
world's greatest  
Nazi Hunter.

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