

Dear Doom: The Erotic Adventures of Batman

Dear Doom,

I guess the first thing I should do is introduce myself.

I don't usually give much thought to decorum—I wouldn't be where I am today if I did.

But, considering the nature of the project I'm about to embark on, it'll be important that you know my name.

Well, one of my names, anyway.

Given my choice of lifestyle, I think you'll understand why I choose to use an alias.

It's not that I'm ashamed—far from it, in fact, as you'll soon read—it's just that I'm a powerful man, and like all powerful men, I have a lot of people to protect; a lot of decent, hardworking folks under my wing (and a few not-so-decent, but I'll get to that later). With that in mind, call me what the night calls me as I prowls it nocturnally, the name I give at all the clubs that peels back the velvet rope and gets

me a free drink ticket if they know what's good for them. The name that echoes in a thousand stairwells and public bathrooms, and over a million dungeons and dives.

The words I always say when I introduce myself to strangers.

The words:

“Hi, I’m Batman.”

At this point, you’re probably wondering why I’m writing this.

It’s a good question.

I am known, after all, as a private man, which is true enough. But too often privacy—a set of attitudes—is mistaken for discretion, a set of behaviors. If privacy means flitting around, trying to conceal my true beliefs, actions or intentions under the cover of night, or beneath the skin-tight veneer of a full-body leather batsuit, then admittedly, I have little patience for such games. While it’s true that I prefer the dark to the light, and the snug, glove-like way a custom-made, full-body leather suit flatters my immaculately sculpted and naturally ample physical “goods,” the simple

fact of the latter should stand as testimony enough that I have nothing to hide by choosing to conduct my business after the sun has set.

Does the wolf take his meals in plain sight of the farmer? Does the bat, for that matter? In the blazing sun when he is tired and cannot see?

The night means sharp relief for me. I can see better in the dark—the things I want to see—and do not sweat my suit as much.

I write with the hope that these notes might serve, if they are ever discovered, as the public voice of a private man; that he might continue to speak for himself to anyone who desires to listen, after he has been swallowed by that final darkness, which he only flirted with in life. I write first for myself—to reveal myself to myself as I go—and second for posterity and the instruction of others. For in time, I too shall go down to the back of the batcave to fold my wings forever and be known to the world of the living no more.

To which you may reply:

“Why should I care? What do I want with the musings of a man who wears around a batsuit? And why does this strange, avowedly private, batsuited man want to share said musings with me?”

Three words:

Powerful. Sexual. Techniques.

I presume no knowledge of you, reader. It may be that you are just starting your journey through life, or that you are no initiate to the ways of love, or even that you have logged enough hours in passion’s perilous embrace to be considered “experienced,” wearing the indelible marks of those burning encounters with all the pomp and pride such warlike badges rightly command. Whoever you are, whatever you’ve done, and whoever you’ve done it with—fine.

You have my blessing, and I don’t care.

What I do care about is passing along the secrets that I have learned over a lifetime exploring the darkest (and deepest) recesses of human sexuality through the use of my unlimited power and resources and skillfully deployed gnostic teachings acquired by me through the friars of a remote Nepalese Luciferian cult.

My point is simply this: I know things that you don't know.

I'm not trying to be a dick about this—just stating a fact. I have seen and done things that would shiver a sailor's timbers, and not in a good way. I have also felt the nourishing bliss of total Ayurvedic surrender.

I've seen the best of humanity, the worst of humanity, and a pretty good smattering of everything between, and I've fucked with all of it, literally.

If you fear God, or have a passing interest in getting off, you're going to want to listen up.

Keep in mind that I don't have to share any of this with you and am doing so at great personal risk, just for the sake of human understanding and my posthumous reputation. I could be killed for talking about some of the things that have gone down on and around me, which is why I've asked my publisher not to release any of this material until after they get to me, I've died of natural causes, or—more likely—in pursuit of the next thrill.

The way I see it, If you're reading this it must be that I'm either long guanoed, or you're one slinky little cat-burglar. In any case, congratulations—and you're welcome. You're holding my legacy—and it's about to get heavy.

Some of you might call this a diary.

Wrong.

Diaries are for little girls and babies to remember what they ate for breakfast. This is an adult book, and my ambition for it is immortality. This is the book that will damn me. Let its name reflect its stature.

Let it be called, my “doom.”

Rough Night

Dear Doom,

Is it just me, or is the club scene in this city as busted as my nuts?

Let me rephrase that—I realize that in begging such a question, and given my reputation as the kind of guy who tends to get what he wants, when he wants it, that you could have taken me to mean that as the sort of rhetorical back-slapping that passes for nightlife reporting in this town.

Yeah, not my MO.

Unlike those meatballs, I wouldn't say anything for love—though I would like to note that I don't consider myself above debasing myself in a kinky way for the right person, or people if that's where the bottle stops. I may be an alpha, but I'm not an a-hole, and I'd be lying if I didn't admit that sometimes the day breaks before the bat bugs out.

I guess what I'm trying to say is—what happened to all the primo trim?

It used to be that all a guy had to do was dress sharp, drop a few bucks on some mid-shelf swill, run a tight floor routine, and he'd be hauling in more sea-life than Paul Hogan. These days, I feel like I'm a g deep before I even get through the door and when I finally am in, the place looks so busted it's like somebody's dad just showed up.

This kind of thing just didn't go down twenty or thirty years ago. It has to make you wonder what the hell happened to Gotham. I mean, I know the place has supposedly cleaned up its act—shit, last time I called Stanley I practically crapped the bat when I heard how much of this urban renewal business was being batrolled by yours truly—but last time I checked it wasn't illegal in the United States of America to pull consensually with a piece or three of smoking talent.

Judging by last night though, I can easily see how someone could come away with that impression.

Things started off promisingly enough. I had concluded the day by signing off on a deal that should spike Batcorp Holdings LLC's quarterly juice to such an insane level that even I might not be able to drink it all away. After a hot workout, an icy shower and a hurried protein crush *a la* half a dozen raw quail eggs and a big hunk of cold Delmonico consumed standing, I was ready to hop into my suit and submit to the will of the night. A quick sidenote to anyone who wants to perform his best, take it

from an old ball player that you can do no finer than the speckled sex-bomb that is the egg of a quail bird. Most guys think one or two is plenty for your average all nighter, but for those of us who shoulder, shall we say, a heavier load, consider upping the dose. I guarantee you nobody's going home disappointed. Just remember that Batman's not your average Joe six-pack—more of a Niner if you're picking up my sticks—and what works for him might mean accelerated heart-rate and hypertension for you.

My first stop was *Le Chauve Nouveau*, a new spot in the heart of downtown that had already earned a reputation for its forward-thinking aesthetic, dizzying array of exotic beverages, and searing hot clientele, despite the fact that it had only been open for a few hours.

I should have known something was off when I rolled up in the batwagon and didn't have a dozen valets swarming my window for the chance to cup my keys. In fact, I was starting to think that the whole thing was some big joke when I noticed this lanky, gangly guy in a loose vest eyeing me with something a little too far from obeisance to fit my tastes.

"How's it going, champ?" I shouted to him, making sure there was enough sandpaper in my tone to whip his nuts a little but still appear basically friendly.

As he slowly sidled over, I marveled at his peculiar combination of a slouching demeanor and smug air of self-satisfaction. It was almost as if he considered the ridiculous excuse for a push-broom mustache scrawled haphazardly across his face a nice compliment to the aforementioned vest, which draped with clown-like slackness over a puffy white blouse that did little to conceal the puffy, white, skinny/fat body underneath from my penetrating batvision.

“Can I help you?” he asked, like it was some sort of sarcastic joke.

I told him that it would be a long time before I needed to ask for help from somebody who looked and dressed like a reject from Circus Smirkus.

Unsurprisingly, he was too lily to take a swing at me. Of course, that would have been the stupidest thing for him to have done, but at least I would have respected him for it. He didn't even try to stare me down, either, just pulled a weasel face and sucked his teeth.

I asked him if he worked with animals because there was obviously a lot of shit in his ears, and what do you know if the bastard didn't start to walk away right there.

I would've gotten out and pounded him but didn't much feel like rumpling my suit before my night had even started, especially for such a pencil-ass like this customer. So, I settled for popping her right into five and tearing back into traffic after a wide

detour over the curb that brought me so close to that pimple-faced brat that the sheer velocity of my car-isma wiped his snide smirk and piddling facial hair clean off.

Turns out I have as much use for *Le Chauve Nouveau* as that valet does for looking his best. Cross my name of the guest list, guys—your loss.

The whole thing had thrown me and my core temperature was way above where it should have been at that hour, so I decided to fight fire with fire and stop in at an old standby where I knew the drinks would be hard and the bodies harder.

Sweatshop is the kind of place you go if you're worked up and ready to work it out the only way its rocksteady regulars and turtlewaxed bar staff know how—through a punishing gauntlet of rushed shots, earsplitting techno-ise and savage, floor-wide grinding. If you're not ready and really pissed off, you better not even step foot through the door because you will get pulled in and you will get pulped by the endless barrage of pistoning butts, pecs, and crotches that is the wall-to-wall, 24/7 all male slamdance we call *Sweatshop*.

Given my expectations, you can imagine how fervently I told myself to go fuck myself when, upon rolling up, I discovered that the place was being fumigated.

Guess somebody in class had a case of the lice.

Shitdamn!

Not knowing exactly what to do, I decided to take a drive through the post-industrial wasteland that is East Gotham. For some reason, I always found that its looming, bombed-out shells of buildings, and general sense of gloomy desolation had a calming effect on me. Guess it goes to show that you can take the batman out of the cave, but you can't take the cave out of the batman.

As I rolled on, vainly hoping that I'd find some appealing place to perch, and maybe a nice streetshark to share it with, I suddenly noticed the intoxicating iridescent gleam of neon lights and heard the familiar pound of a truly rump-shaking beat coming from the upper story of what I had assumed, moments before, to be yet another vacant husk of a warehouse.

I had read numerous articles in *VICE* magazine about the so-called "rave" culture that was slowly but surely transforming these decaying urban spaces into temporary, autonomous "pARTy Zones"—places where the drugs were cheap and the love free. Intrigued, I immediately parked, got out and strode up to the door, only to find that an old bum stood blocking the entrance.

“Hey there, gramps,” I hailed him in a polite but firm tone. “How’s the party?”

He turned to me and for the first time I understood what people meant when they talked about that thousand-yard stare thing. My soul had been penetrated before a few times, so I knew what it felt like, and this was it.

Then, he opened his mouth.

“I’ve been standing here for years,” he said, “a lifetime. I could stand a lifetime more before they opened the door. And then, still, I would have to ride the freight elevator up six levels before I reached the threshold of your “party.” All I think of is your “party”—and still, I do not know the meaning of your “party.”

He smiled.

His teeth were magnificent.

I fled.

The night was done. My nuts were busted.

Relationships: Part One

Dear Doom,

Relationships, man. Sometimes it's like, where do I start, you know?

These days, it seems like it's impossible for people to tell for sure whether or not they're even in one.

It's always like:

"Yeah, we've been seeing each other a lot but I'm not sure what our official status is."

Or:

"Yeah, we've been living together off and on for a few months but we're not interested in labeling ourselves just to fit some bougie corporate mold and blah, blah, blah."

My response to all this is usually to ask a simple question:

“Hey, nutstrap—who in the shit do you think you’re fooling?”

All this pretend sophistication and new age insight is a plain old case of beating off around the bush. You may have dressed your insecurities up in drag but you’re so worried about looking authentic that you forgot to have fun. Can I just ask, when did relationships become such a big deal that you have to make it seem like they’re no big deal?

Can we please just cut the shit loaf and move on to the main course?

Relationships. More like Relationships if you ask me.

Ballpark estimate, I’d say I’ve been in a thousand relationships. If I actually took the time to count (which I’m not going to do because I actually don’t have the time and don’t care about this crap as much as everybody else does) it’d probably end up being way more. What is a relationship, literally? Let’s break down the word. Relation—a connection between two or more people. Ship—a hulled vessel used to carry people where they want to go. Put them together and “boing”—there you go. Is it really any more complicated than that? Seems like a whole generation has been wasting their time overthinking the concept, trying to justify their overpriced educations by trying to reinvent the most basic and fundamental building block of human society. A part of me kind of wants to pity them, but then I remember that while this whole thing

may be their fault, they're also making it my problem. As if I didn't have enough to worry about in the first place with a business to run and a long-ass list my libido wants crossing-off on a daily basis.

It's times like these that I'm glad the only chapters I ever pledged to were from the *Book of The Dead* and Budokai-do.

Normally, I'm able to isolate my anger and mainline it back into constructive channels like sexual mastery or business acumen, but this whole relationshit mindfuck has had me so thrown the last few days that half the time I don't know if I'm signing checks with "little" Wayne or my fountain penis.

See? There I go again!

I guess it all started on Wednesday. Normally the fulcrum of any average week, I had no reason to expect the fucked up see-saw that was about to ensue as I went through my typical morning routine of a hastily pounded breakfast shake followed by a forty-five minute groin stretch while zenning out with some *Sesame Street* and *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood* on the local PBS station.

I like to watch *Sesame Street* because it's the only authentically Luciferian show on television in that it promotes the worship of numbers and letters—two things which are obviously really important to me and the absolute basis for the life of Promethean man. *Mr. Rogers'* I watch for the killer songs, soothing tone and because—let's face it—he's a babe, though I tend to skip the puppetry parts if I ripped the bong such as I had that morning.

I was just finishing up and about to start reading the tea leaves from the overnight markets over a strong cup of my own signature blend of smoky houqua when my pager started whistling its own unmistakable tune.

“What the?”

It could only be one person.

DA was one of the few guys I knew who still owned a pager and the only one who actually used it, convinced that it was safer and less traceable than cell phones or electronic mail servers. I always joked with him that if he wanted to run a modern drug empire he should toss the old alphanumeric and try burners like in *The Wire*, but I guess he just prefers to do things the old-fashioned way. Also, he would never sling junk.

DA and I had known each other since the early nineteen-eighties when I brought him on to do some consulting for Batcorp on the recommendation of a mutual friend at the Phoenix Foundation, a big Washington think tank that also had straws in some clandestine international punch bowls that, at the time, I was interested in sipping from.

I had been immediately impressed by his positive attitude, genius for problem-solving and rugged, Plains-State good looks, including a blonde mullet haircut. Our professional relationship quickly developed into a strong male friendship, as vital and platonic today as it was when it first began, which I honestly do believe is for the best, even though I can't help but feel a little devastated whenever his denim-clad form strides strappingly back into my life. Yeah, he's fucking cute.

Although we saw each other less recently ever since he had gone into semi-retirement in Ojai while I continued to expand the old enterprise from the renovated basement of my palatial, hereditary East Coast manor, I could always count on DA for fresh and funny takes on everything from insider industry gossip to where to cruise for the best new burgers.

That day's page fell into the latter category, concerning burgers of a very particular variety.

Fur-burgers to be exact.

“BTMN—” the page began, in DA’s trademark, truncated pager patois. “CHK OUT
HLNG RTS HNDS ON RKE MSSG AND BODY BLISS SALON—SRSLY!”

“Healing Roots Hands-on Reiki Massage and Body Bliss Salon, eh?”

I clicked into my web browser and input the name into the search portal, then hit the carriage return key and waited for my results.

I didn’t have to wait long. There was indeed a business of that name listed in Gotham, though it didn’t have a page of its own or any reviews posted. Maybe it was new.

I scribbled down the address and picked up the pager to thank DA for the tip, marveling at how he could be three thousand miles away and still be more keyed in to what was going on in my own neighborhood than me.

“Thanks, DA!” I typed. “You’re a good guy. If you ever consider switch hitting, I’d love to have you on the team again.”

“HAHA,” he replied. “GET FCKD.”

I chuckled to myself and grabbed the keys from their place on the hook and arranged with Alfred to have my calls forwarded to my financial advisors at Sizemore Associates.

Get fucked. It was a good idea. I had been working too hard lately and needed to blow off a little steam. This Body Bliss Salon thing sounded like a good place to start and DA had never steered me wrong before.

Get fucked... Little did I know just how fucked I was about to get.

Relationships: Part 2

My first rule of thumb for casing out some new joint is that I always bring along my Bat-Bat.

To the naked eye, the Bat-Bat has the appearance of any other rugged-looking wooden bat, except for the fact that it's jet-black in color, much like the more popular aluminum bats favored by players of today.

Let me go on record saying that I have nothing against aluminum bats. They're a cheap, effective way to get the ball where it needs to go, namely across the field and preferably out of the gloved hands of the opposing team. If I were to take Stanley's advice to purchase the Orioles and rename them Batman's Baltimore Bats, I would definitely buy all the guys bats made out of aluminum, or at least an aluminum alloy. Shit, I would probably use one myself because, let's be honest, if I were to go through all the trouble of buying a baseball team, I would be playing on that fucker, in addition to managing it and being captain. That would be my right as owner. Also, my clubhouse would be called The Belfry and players would be allowed to smoke in it if they wanted to and act all crazy. I would also install a bunch of gear on the rafters in there so that they guys could strap in and hang upside down, which helps to keep the blood out of the game down there and in the game up here.

But I'm not talking about a game.

I'm talking about real-life.

And in real life, sometimes you find yourself knee deep in you-know-what. When that happens, you need a way to paddle out. For me, that paddle is my Bat-Bat, and the Bat-Bat is made of wood. Not any old wood, but a beautiful dark-hued Indian rosewood as hard as nails but with the added bonus of having once been a living thing and therefore possessing residual power of an occult, spiritual variety. It's the ideal brawling weapon for a guy like me and I like to slip it in my back pocket whenever I'm about to head into uncharted territory. Most of the time, just the sight of the thing is enough to scare off any dickbag dumb enough to consider messing with me in the first place. But the few times I have had to use it it has come through and then some. Swinging that thing, I feel a little bit like Buford Pusser from *Walking Tall* or Chris Vaughn from the remake, *Walking Tall*, only more handsome than Joe-Don Baker, less of a bro-ham than The Rock, and with a less shitty name than either, plus a better piece of wood.

Did I mention that the Bat-Bat is absolutely obsidian shit-jet?

It is.

The bat's original rosewood looked pretty if we're talking about a piece of furniture, but I wanted the warlike thing to match my non-nonsense suit, so I colored it black

with an expensive German magic marker that Alfred bought me online a couple of years ago for my birthday.

Since I didn't know what I was about to get in to with this "holding-hands rootless reiki" business, I figured I had better bring Old Trusty along, which is where the trouble started. Old Trusty is the nickname I gave my Bat-Bat, by the way. An ironic choice on my part it turns out, as you'll soon read.

I found the place easy enough since it's right in the heart of this hipster-nice part of South Gotham with trees and avenues and row houses with window boxes full of pansies, nosegays and other soft, fragrant flowers of the like. My destination was a rare, freestanding house of obscure time period and design—sort of a grotto, in the vague shape of a squat tree or toadstool—that looked like it could have been built around the salvaged husk of a giant firkin. Judging by the fact that the whole upper part of it was shrouded in tree limbs, vines and various mosses and lichens, I deduced that there must have been some kind of rooftop garden thing going on up there.

"Must really like trees at this place," I thought to myself as I sauntered up and rapped on the door. "Wonder what they'll think of Old Trusty," I continued thinking, with a mental smirk.

Finally, after about five ass-scratching minutes in which I was left scratching my head about how these dirks could possibly expect to run a successful business if they

couldn't even promptly answer their own door (and who makes customers wait at the door anyway? Ever heard of a waiting room, smart guy?) the thing opened and I was face to face with this dirty-haired, back-to-the earth-looking lady.

"Hi," she said with a smile, extending her hand.

"Hey," I muttered, taking it.

Her hand was warm, soft and covered in a fine layer of dust. Even through my leather-clad talon, I felt the kind of electric charge that you only get when there's an intense and innate psycho-sexual connection with someone.

"So, this is your place, huh?" I drawled coolly, even as I felt anything but.

"Yeah, pretty great, right? I love the location and the building itself—I mean, come on, I couldn't have asked for anything more amazing!"

"It's alright" I grunted, trying to keep my enthusiasm dialed down so as not to appear too eager, despite the fact that I was. "You do all this yourself, or...?"

"Actually, yeah—took me two years of my life and a lot more money than I actually had to spend, but it was worth it. I may be broke, but I'm surrounded by real green things all day long and doing what I love. What could be better than that?"

“To each his own,” I said. Then saved it hastily by adding, “or hers.”

She made a clucking sound with her tongue. I think it was meant to be a sort of gentle rebuke, or a mild spell. Whatever it was, it worked and I felt my face turning the color of Old Trusty before I'd modified it.

“Honestly, though, the money's not too bad,” she winked. “In a few years, I might break even.”

I felt like it was an appropriate time to ask the question that had been troubling me ever since I had heard the strange name of this esoteric business.

“What is it you do here, exactly?”

She smiled, a mischievous, elfin smile and I immediately felt myself go to 75%.

“Oh, you'll see... What is your name?”

“Batman,” I said hoarsely.

“Well, Batman, you can call me The Dryad. This way please.”

She took my hand again and I followed her inside, down a long, curving hallway that kind of reminded me of the inside of the midget's house from *The Lord of the Rings* franchise. At the tail end was a cool, candlelit room with terracotta floors, a low, sloping ceiling, and tiny alcoves with censurs of burning incense. In the middle stood some kind of ergonomic table, presumably for therapeutic or medical applications.

"Lie down," the Dryad said "make yourself comfortable."

"What should I do with the bat?" I asked, remembering that I literally still had Old Trusty sticking out of my back pocket.

"Leave the bat to me, man," she said.

I wasn't sure what she meant, so I figured I'd just go with it and lay down on the table like she'd told me.

After I got down there, there was this uncomfortable silence where nothing happened until she cleared her throat.

"Yeah?" I asked.

"Um, are you going to take the suit off, or...?"

“Oh, yeah, right.” I mumbled. So this was it, I thought, it’s really happening.

I stood up and peeled my suit off, slowly and sensually, standing right in front of her, making sure she didn’t miss a single, rippling detail. I could tell by the way her green eyes popped and sparkled like a glass of Dom that she was enjoying the show as much as I was. Finished, I turned dramatically, tossed Old Trusty onto the floor and lay face down on the table, flexing and stretching my muscular triceps and delts as I settled in.

I felt her light but athletic frame touch down gently astride my massive lower back in the form of her toned, straddling thighs, firm cushion of buttocks and soft tuft of pubic hair. Bending forward, she kneaded up and down my aching spine with sure and subtle hands. I felt the nipples of her turgid breasts graze the space between my powerful shoulder blades, electricity surging through my chakras and supercharging the raging hard-on already well under way, as she bent to whisper in my ear:

“What’ll it be for you today, Batman?” she cooed.

“Take the bat,” I gasped, so heated up I had to think about Batman’s Baltimore Bats to even be able to speak. “Take the bat to the back of the cave.”

Evidently, she took this to mean something very different than what I had intended.

Suffice it to say that what followed was undoubtedly the best massage I, or any man, woman, or beast on this earth has ever had. Perfect. 10 stars. Then, she attempted to insert Old Trusty into... Well, into the batcave.

I can see now where she might have gotten the idea that that's what I wanted—I guess from her perspective it made sense that this was the reason I brought the Bat-Bat—but at the time I was... Surprised. So surprised that I left in something of a huff. Probably turned the table over, said some things I regret. I guess I didn't pay either, come to think of it.

The thing is though, we had a great time together, and I'd love to do it again. It was a simple misunderstanding and, as you can imagine, its not like it got too far before she realized that we were working from different definitions of the same metaphor. I hadn't felt a personal connection that strong in years and I never thought I'd say it, but it felt good to be with a chick again. I've tried calling her a bunch of times since it happened and even taken a couple passes by overhead in the Batwing, but we haven't been able to reconnect.

So, for now, it looks like I'm still flying solo. Not much has changed, I guess. I can't look at Bat-Bat the same way and no longer refer to it as Old Trusty, but the company's doing fine and Alfred's holding down the fort at home. Meanwhile, I'm left wondering if this thing with The Dryad—this crazy connection—is ever going to

develop into something more, or whether I'm wasting my time even trying to step back into the minefield of relationships.

“My Man Randy”

The thing a lot of people don't get is that just because you're down, it doesn't mean you're out.

Let me ask you this—what do you do when you know you've pissed down your own leg?

You rebrand—the pants, the piss—whatever works, whatever you have to do. When you start thinking in terms of opportunity costs and business theory, that's when the world starts buttering your bread. Trust me. I used to be a lot like you—drinking and dreaming, working for the weekend, running on the wheel and getting fatter by the day. Occasionally, the universe would pity me and I'd get to trot around the bases, but otherwise I was striking out my every at bat and swallowing my sorrows with a cocktail of pills. At 33 I hit bottom and almost went up on a martyr's cross of my own making like Jesus before me, another sorry story of a good life drowned stiff because I couldn't hustle with the flow.

All that changed when I met Randy.

Randy Shovelback, or Shovelback to those followers of his who aren't on a first name basis with him, is a flinty, leathery, timberwolf of a man from a frozen piss-popsicle of a town deep in the Minnesota sticks. A childhood spent in chilly shithouses and

barns, taking care of the stock for his frequently drunk father and shy, permissive mother, impressed upon Randy (nee Rudolph Skovgaard) from a young age the value of self-reliance and self-improvement. He knew that if he were to have any chance of making it in this world, he had to get out and get ahead, no matter the odds, no matter the cost.

By the age of fourteen, Randy was already developing and implementing techniques that would become the basis of his flagship product, the seminal, bestselling self-improvement guide and CD-ROM course, “The Psychological Advantage.”

Experimenting and honing his now patented system, a young Randy had, at sixteen, earned enough money to buy a beat up Trans-Am and leave home to enroll in a semester at Quest College (now Kaplan University) in Rockford, Illinois, where, through a combination of street-smarts, mail-fraud, COD businesses, elbow-grease, and good old fashioned American cheating, he earned his AD in a little over five years time.

After graduation, he, his roommate and partner in cain raising, Tom Schneider, and their on-again, off-again, alternating current of a girlfriend, Tammy, lit out for Pensacola, Florida with an idea to strike it rich in swampland real estate. Nobody but the three of them knows exactly what happened next, but suffice it to say that things got murky, and relations between Tom, Tammy and Randy got messy. Randy changed his name to Shuvelback, supposedly in reference to a phrase his cousin Gustav used to throw around during the summers when he would drive over from Fort Totten to

lend a hand at the Skovgaard homestead, and flew out to the greater Los Angeles area where he moved into an apartment in Sun Valley. There he completed the first draft of “The Psychological Advantage” book between motivational speaking gigs and part-time work as a phone scammer.

It was a result of his forays into the former that I first met this man who would change the way I looked at the world and my place in it.

Overweight, depressed and addicted to painkillers, I was awed by Shovelback’s combination of lean muscularity, manly vigor, no bullshit personality and philosophical outlook, and will never forget the way he commanded the stage when I flew out to Costa Mesa to attend one of his lectures. When I later purchased “The Psychological Advantage” from Shovelback’s website (among other things, he was an early advocate of the internet as a form of direct connection and sales) I recognized the same wisdomatic, aphoristic style at work in his writing as he had so aptly showcased in person. Koans of Randy’s coining like: “Shit or get off the pot” and “it takes one to know one” became personal mantras of mine, and networking events through “The Psychological Advantage” community led me to my fruitful partnership with my current money manager, Stanley Sizemore and his associates at Sizemore & Associates, to whom I give enormous credit in helping me to turn my company around, even after I was able to turn my life around through the help of Randy’s advantage method.

To say that I owed Randy a debt of gratitude is an understatement. To say that I owed Randy my life would be getting there, but since Batcorp is Gotham's third largest employer, I'd be doing Shovelback a disservice to stop the buck there. Before I met Randy, I didn't know the meaning of masculinity or business practices. But while I don't think I flatter myself to say that I'm a bona fide business *man* now, part of being that sort of a man means knowing when you're whipped and knowing who to bring on to help you out.

I won't mince words and I won't brick up the shit before we hose it off the lawn: the thing with the Dryad—it put the zap on me. Basically, it raised a lot of old questions and forced me to rehash some personal issues I thought I'd buried in the past, not to mention the fact that ever since my liason with her, I've noticed some odd bumps on my inside thigh and buttocks area that have me slightly spooked. Alfred thinks they're just ingrown hairs that I never noticed before, but I'm my own biggest critic and I don't think I would've missed them in the bat-room mirror. I've been googling about it on WebMD and uncovered some disturbing results. Anyway, the whole thing rocked my confidence so much that I even turned back to an old flame for comfort and things have started to get complicated again with the old relationship train revving up again. To top it all off, Batcorp's stocks are threatening to plateau at 2% this quarter, which to put it in English is “nicht so gut.”

Like I said though, a business man doesn't panic and above all he knows who and when to ask for help.

Enter R. Shovelback, life-coach.

A New Beginning

Dear Doom,

“I don’t have time for this shit!”

They were the first words that escaped Randy’s lips as he stormed into the conference room. No “hello,” no “how’s your mother?” no “it’s great to be here!”

I smiled, narrowed my eyes and nodded. I knew already that I had made the right choice in bringing Shovelback in.

Randy Shovelback cut an impressive figure. His light blue pinstriped shirt bunched at the belt and elbow areas, revealing a gamey build that was exaggerated by a combination of formidable height, thin sea-life themed suspenders, a short, thick, newsprint themed tie and a generally spastic demeanor.

My man’s effect on the others was predictable. I saw disbelief on Stanley Sizemore’s lean face, indignation on Alfred’s jowly one and flat out scat terror combined with a hint of physical attraction on my friend Rob’s. These were my closest friends and advisors, the men that—apart from Rob, my ex-boyfriend who I’m still on pretty good terms with but doesn’t actually do anything business related—made Batcorp

tick, and it was important to me that they get to know the guru who had turned my life around and was about to do the same for my business.

Stanley, an old-school Wall Street guy with the easy confidence and hairstyle of Michael Douglas and usually the first to speak at these gatherings, stood up and started to open his mouth, but before his jaw was even halfway cracked, Randy—striding briskly across the room, not even looking at us—held up a hand to silence him.

He made straight for the coffee service I had had the foresight to make Alfred order, lifted the stainless steel pot off the sideboard with one hand, brought it to his lips and started putting it down in big, thirsty gulps while holding up his other hand to indicate to Stanley and anyone else who might have wanted to talk that right then was not the time. The others continued to stare, dumbstruck, as Randy tilted the pot and his own head back farther and farther while he sucked greedily at the expensive, double-brewed Ethiopian coffee inside. When his head was as far back as it would go, he lifted the pot into the air and shook it, both to get out the last few drops and show us all that he had finished the whole thing by himself.

He put the pot back on the sideboard and his eyes bugged out a little as he noticed the tray of butter cookies sitting beside what had seconds before been a full carafe of coffee. He picked the tray up, closed his eyes and smelled the cookies while shaking

and swirling the tray gently as if it was a fine wine. Stanley, who had sat back down, looked to me for guidance, but I just grinned and kept watching Randy work.

Holding the big, expensive glass tray in one hand as if it was nothing more than a paper plate at a barbecue, Randy grasped a cookie in the other and brought it to his lips slowly. As the cookie made its way to his mouth, Randy's lips drew back, revealing an impressive set of short, sharp teeth, which chattered involuntarily like an excited dog. He nibbled the first cookie, gently at first, then faster and faster until, within a few seconds, it was gone. He groaned in animal satisfaction, lifted the tray with both hands and let the remaining cookies, of which there were probably a dozen, flood into his mouth. The ones that made it in were crunched savagely in a single bite, one after the other and the rest just fell onto the floor. The display was in direct opposition to the spirit that the civilized-looking carafe, tray and thin, crisp chessmen butter cookies were supposed to invoke and seemed to offend and disturb my friends to their core.

Me?

I stood up and applauded.

Everything that I had seen so far had validated my decision to hire Randy, and I was impressed. I knew that, on top of all of his accumulated wisdom and experience, Randy was a showman—a leader who led by example and used emotion as a tool as

much as research and rock-solid common sense. His was a brain big with ideas, so swollen sometimes that it was hard for the blood that would normally route to his speech centers to make its way there in time for him to express himself as quickly as he would have liked or needed. When this happened, he tapped into his lower brain—the part at the base of the skull right above where it fits on to the neck—the part that we still hold in common with reptiles, responsible for instincts such as fight, flight and basic *ur*-level signification: eyes, teeth, non-verbal sounds, and fast-twitch reflexes. I could tell that Randy was so excited to be with us that he had had to lean hard on these most primal resources in order to get that point across. It was a good sign, and I couldn't wait to see what he had in store once the sugar and caffeine had brought him back to a state close enough to homeostasis for him to speak.

I didn't have to wait long.

Randy replaced the tray and removed his dark blue blazer, which he then folded and laid over the back of the chair at the head of the table. His next move was to unknot his tie with his long, bony, trembling fingers, fumbling around for some time and cursing under his breath until he finally just started tearing and yanking at it until he got the knot down to about his second button, making it appear even shorter and him even taller and pointier by comparison.

I grinned to myself again. The old wolf was still hungry.

Shovelback leaned in, placed his hands on the conference table and stared at each of us one by one, never breaking eye-contact or blinking before the other person did. He came to me last and I could practically feel the sparks shooting off as the twin twin-sawblades of our eyes clashed against each other in an ultimate masculine sparring of the wills.

“Jesus,” I could hear Rob sob beside me. “They’re going to tear each other apart!”

Randy and I both looked at Rob, who wilted under the dual assault of our gaze, then back at one another. In a double independent miracle, we both chose that exact moment to wink at one another, me with my left eye (the closer to Satan) and he with his right (in honor of his Presbyterian faith). We laughed and the tension broke like a thunderclap, allowing the onlookers to breathe a sigh of relief and be invited into the conversation. We had both gained a psychological advantage.

Randy spoke first.

“When I said that I didn’t have time for this shit, what do you think I meant?”

He looked around the table.

“Anybody?”

Stanley raised his hand.

Randy continued to look around.

“Anyone at all?”

Stanley looked around again, confused, not realizing that this was part of Randy’s teachings. Amused, I kept quiet and watched.

“We’ve got all the time in the world,” Randy soothed, then added drily “if you don’t care about wasting money.”

I laughed boomingly and Randy caught my eye and smirked.

Stanley stood up.

“Look, I don’t know who you think you are, but I’ve been trying to answer your question. If you want to ignore me and talk about wasting money, that’s your business but I think we all know who’s wasting what in this business and it sure as shit isn’t any of these folks,” he shouted, gesturing at the boys and I.

Randy turned a fatherly look on Stanley.

“Your name?” he asked flatly.

Stanley scowled and looked at me for guidance but I just stared back impassively, not giving him anything to go on.

“Stanley,” he grumbled. “Stanley Sizemore... Of Sizemore and Associates.”

“Congratulations, Stan,” said Randy extending his hand.

Sizemore reached for it somewhat reluctantly, but just before their hands were about to grasp one another in reconciliation, Shovelback withdrew his rapidly and ran it through his slick coif of thin, raven colored hair, which was combed back to reveal an acute and barbaric looking widow’s peak.

Alfred and Rob gasped and my hand flew instinctively toward the katana I kept scabbarded at my hip throughout every board meeting.

Randy grinned wickedly and Stanley slumped back in his chair, shocked by the snide savagery of the extremely curt gesture.

“Remember Stan,” Randy said, taking on the tone of a professor “a hand is just a fist with fingers. Be careful about which ones you grab.”

I relaxed my grip on the deadly blade. Stanley had suffered a shock to his ego, but ultimately he would be fine. He was an old warhorse and with Randy's help he would continue to serve us well in battle.

All eyes were on Shovelback as he continued.

“Your boss brought me here because he's smart enough and bold enough, and believes in this company enough, to know that it can succeed.”

He stood up and took a pen out of his breast pocket and clicked it on to emphasize his next point.

“The problem is, it's not succeeding. Not by half, not even by a quarter of its potential if Sam here's numbers aren't as limp as his dick was before I jizzed it up by walking in.”

At this, the guys joined me in a chuckle. Even Stanley, no stranger to the kind of chauvinistic humor that dominated these boardroom affairs, managed a wry smile and light shake of the noggin.

“So, what can I do for you?” Randy asked. “That's probably what you want to know. What special knowledge do I have that you don't that's going to allow us to dip our wicks in the diamond fountain?”

He looked around.

Rob started to say something but Randy cut him off.

“Nothing. I repeat: I. Have. Nothing... I’ve got the same shitty gym body, the same knob haircut, the same taste in booze and broads that every other guy has—that is, as much as I can get and as little as I can get by on, respectively.”

The guys laughed in spite of themselves.

“I got a jack leg, some grey hairs, a couple ulcer or three, and a fuckin’ bee in my bonnet for helping struggling business and individuals discover the tools they need so that they can help themselves.”

He looked around.

“And above all, I have the most important thing anybody on this planet can have. Do you know what that is?”

Nobody answered but everybody looked on, rapt.

“Ears, boys. I got ears and I listen. I put my ear to the ground or out in the wind, or down in the fucking ocean. Wherever it has to go. And I remember what I hear. And you will too.”

The guys looked impressed. I couldn't help but smile again.

“So, my little listeners” Randy went on. “Who here has heard of the word *prosthetics*?”

A New Beginning: Part 2

Previously on The Erotic Adventures of Batman, Batman and the gang had assembled in Batman's well-appointed conference room to discuss the future of Batcorp Enterprises with Batman's new management consultant, Randy Shovelback. Things got off to a rough start when the charismatic Shovelback, a veteran of the new-age movement and creator of the self-help technique known as "The Psychological Advantage," offended Batman's friends with his animalistic manners and unorthodox presentation style, but also piqued their interest with his no-bullshit attitude and mention of the word "prosthetics." Will Shovelback's ideas about prosthetics prove to be the shot in the arm that Batman and his company need, or is Shovelback just blowing smoke up everybody's ass? Is Batman really over this Dryad thing? Is there something going on between Shovelback and Rob? Just what are prosthetics? Read on and find out.

Silence once again filled the room.

I looked around, trying to get a read on my friends.

Stanley seemed perplexed, his brow furrowed deeply and his hand going back and forth across his chin like there was a stain on it that he was trying to buff out.

Alfred was clearly disgusted, his nostrils flaring and thin lips pulled back in a mask of British revulsion.

Rob, for his part, looked intrigued and even a little turned on—a tanned, well-manicured hand framing his face between his thumb and forefinger as he swiveled rhythmically in his chair, regarding Randy with renewed interest and respect.

I decided to ask the question that I knew was on everybody's mind.

“What are prosthetics?”

The guys sort of stared at me but fuck it, this isn't some piss-contest grade school bullshit. I learned the hard way a long time ago that if you want to have an adversarial thing with your sensei, he's just going to come back at you with an ass-kicking every time and the only thing you're going home with is a sore butt. My attitude is, you might as well chug your pride-shake and get back to work. Besides, it's not like the fellas were exactly clamoring to prove that they knew what the fuck he was talking about.

Randy, to his credit, didn't miss a beat.

“I'm glad you asked, Batman,” he said. “It takes balls and a backbone to ask questions, and you just proved what I already suspected: that you've got 'em both and aren't afraid to use 'em. Unlike some people...” He smirked.

Catching his meaning, I smirked back, then looked at the others sternly.

Randy strode to the whiteboard and picked up a green marker, then turned his back to us and started drawing. I craned my neck a little and tried to peer around him to get a sneak peek at whatever it was, but I couldn't make anything out.

"Just what is that old wolf up to this time?" I wondered to myself.

Randy capped his marker and turned around, clasping his hands behind his back and rocking on the balls of his feet.

"When I step away, I want you to tell me what's missing from this picture."

Hm. A game, I thought. I could get into this.

"Everybody ready?" asked Randy.

We all nodded. "Alright," said Rob. "Show us your stuff."

Randy stepped aside and we studied the picture.

It was a crude, stick-figure style drawing of a human figure, with one important difference.

“It’s a man,” I pointed out. “But you didn’t finish drawing him. He only has one leg.”

Randy unclasped his hands and pointed at me with the marker.

“Precisely,” he said. “A man with one leg. A man who is missing his leg. A tragedy, certainly, but also, if you’ll pardon me, an opportunity.”

I considered this, for a moment, trying to weigh both sides of it. It was hard to get over the tragedy part, but I thought I could see where Randy was going with the opportunity bit.

“So,” I began, “you’re saying that it’s an opportunity cost for the man. Like, he made an investment in losing his leg so that he could learn how to do without it. Efficiency. Cutting out the dead weight.”

I looked at Stanley and pantomimed a scribbling motion on an imaginary pad of paper to indicate that he should be writing all this down.

Randy did one of those sideways head tilt things, first to one shoulder and then the next. I think it might have been part of his routine, stretching or popping his neck muscles. Then, he clapped his hands, bent his knees and did a little jump of excitement.

“Would you listen to this guy? It’s ninety degrees outside, he’s wearing sixty pounds of military grade latex and he’s still running circles around us brainwise. Always six steps ahead, Batman, that’s why I fuckin’ love you.”

Randy sure knew how to sweet talk a guy, but I could tell I hadn’t exactly nailed the point.

“Alright, enough with the rim work, Randy. I can tell when I’m on the bullseye, and judging by the level of your correction, I’d say I damn near shot in Rob’s eye.”

I winked at Rob, who gave me a look.

Randy chuckled and raised his hands to regain control of the room.

“Ok, bigshots, other than Alfred’s sense of humor, what’s missing here? What’s wrong with this picture? Think simple. Batman, I promise after I get the answer I’m looking for I’ll pivot back to your original question.”

Clearing his throat, Alfred drily commented: “The man, if, with all due respect, that’s what you call him, Mr. Shovelback, is missing a leg, that at least has been pretty well established.”

“Correct-a-mundo,” said Randy. “And now, leaving the man’s private life out of it, what kind of opportunity does his lack of a leg present us with, as a business—a manufacturer?”

This time, Stanley chimed in.

“The opportunity to provide him with a leg.”

Randy pointed to Stanley and shook his marker.

“What kind of leg is that Stanley? A chicken leg? A leg of lamb, maybe?”

Stanley sighed.

“A human leg. A prosthetic one.”

Randy snapped his fingers.

“Thank you Stanley, now we’re getting somewhere.”

Randy turned to me.

“Prosthetics, Batman, is the science of replacing lost or worn-out body parts with new and better ones. It’s a cutting edge, largely untapped field that’s projected to grow at a phenomenal rate, and with your company’s capital and profile, I’m confident that we can convert some of your existing capacities from dead wood to gold ingots.”

Randy was salivating a little bit as he spoke and a small amount of drool escaped the side of his mouth and plopped on the marble floor when he said the word “ingots” but he didn’t seem to notice or care. I respected him for that.

I was excited to see Randy so excited, but I had a few reservations.

“I’m impressed Randy, it’s not a direction that I would have considered taking but I’m intrigued. Before I agree to anything though, I’d like to know a little bit more about prosthetics. I’m surprised that almost nobody’s heard of them—can this really be the kind of cash cow you claim it is if it’s such an underground thing? I mean, I’m all about playing the long game, but just how long would I have to wait to see a return? Batcorp needs help now.”

“Actually, Batman,” Stanley chimed in, “prosthetics have been around for quite a while and there are a handful of companies that pretty much have the business locked down. There are a lot of government regulations and red tape, international laws, medical supply firms that would need to be lobbied for contracts. We might

have some capacity that could hack it, but ultimately we're looking at a major facilities overhaul and big capital investment if we want to make this a competitive division, not to mention poaching a lot expertise from rivals, and training costs... Frankly, I'm not sure now's the time."

I looked at Randy, my head already starting to throb with the gibbering pulse of Stanley's words.

Randy had his head down and was shaking it slowly. When he raised it, his eyes were burning with intensity. He stalked slowly towards Stanley, his back hunched and his head and neck thrust forward, his tie dangling under his chin. He was growling—growling, and occasionally yipping out and snapping his teeth. I could see the hair on the back of his neck standing up. Stanley was sliding back in his chair in fear.

"Batman, this guy's rabid!"

I quickly got up and with a few lightning quick movements placed my own body between those of my two advisors.

"Randy," I soothed, "easy, boy. Easy, big fella."

I raised my arms and met Randy's eyes, trying to communicate to him telepathically that I meant no harm but still demanded his submission the way I'd been taught in the wolf encounter class that I'd taken the previous summer in Basel.

The fire faded from Randy's gaze under mine and, after a tense moment, he resumed his hominid posture.

"My apologies gentlemen," Randy breathed. "I have an... Animal side that comes out when I feel like my ideas aren't being heard."

I patted Randy on the head and tousled his slick shock of jet black hair to let him know that all was well.

"Because you," Randy pointed to Stanley around my significant bulk, "didn't let me finish."

Stanley started to speak, but I silenced him with a dagger-like glance.

"Go on, Randy," I said kindly, "finish explaining your idea."

Randy snapped his suspenders.

“My definition of prosthetics is a little bit wider than Stanley’s, although, to be fair, he was correct under the limited terms in which he chooses to look at the business. My definition actually has more to do with what Batman said earlier.”

I looked at Randy, puzzled.

“But Randy, until a few minutes ago I didn’t even know what prosthetics are. How could what I said be relevant?”

Randy’s eyes regained their familiar—somewhat feral, but not balls-out crazy—twinkle.

“It’s your instinct, Batman, your killer instinct that cuts through bullshit like that oriental blade of yours. You didn’t have to know what a prosthetic was to realize that what that man lacked in a leg, he could more than compensate for with ingenuity and will.”

I saw his point. We were right.

Randy put his hands on my shoulders. “Batman, can I ask you a personal question?”

I put my hands on his shoulders in return.

“Of course. Anything.”

“You’ve been hurt Batman, haven’t you? Hurt not just in your wallet, but in your heart, too?”

I furrowed my brow and made a scoffing, dismissive sound as if to say “yeah right, buddy” but my throat caught and I knew that it was all over. My eyes started to sting and tickle—moisture welling up in them like they were getting horny or something, only it didn’t feel like that. Not a shitting bit.

Shovelback drew closer, his beady eyes practically spinning in his angular head as they tried to get a read on my notoriously guarded body language.

I tried to mask my feelings by punching up an emergency face-rigidity setting on my Bat-ex wrist command module, which would constrict and freeze the expression evinced by my leather Batface, but it was too late.

I looked away, my cheeks burning as I thought of the Dryad.

“Yeah,” I said. “Got cock-burned a few times...”

Randy shook my shoulders. “Look at me,” he said. “I know there’s pain, but I need you to look at me and tell me about it.”

“Well,” I began, not knowing where to start. “This girl, she...”

“What did she look like?”

“I don’t know. Pretty. Blonde hair, I think... Yeah, blonde.”

“What did she like to do? Hobbies, interests?”

I thought about it.

“Well, she was some kind of masseuse or whore or something. I don’t know. My buddy DA suggested I see her.”

“Interesting” said Randy, “tell me more.”

“Oh, yeah, she lived in this like, big tree-house thing. She was really into it. Really into wood. God, if I could of gotten my wood into that sweet honeycluster...”

Randy laughed and slapped me lightly on the cheek, which under normal circumstances I would’ve responded to with a quick left rejoinder but which this time I let slide because I knew his heart was in the right place.

“I’ve got it,” he whispered. “I’ve got the perfect product. Something that will take both you and Batcorp out of this slump and will prove to the world that you and every other man in this or any country doesn’t need some woman to get their wood wet.”

I grasped Randy’s hand. Behind me, Rob, Alfred and even Stanley looked on, eager to hear what Randy had in store.

“It’s cheap, it’s low cost, it’s classic, it’s not a medical product per se, though it may have medicinal or therapeutic effects... Gentleman, it’s a new kind of prosthetic—a revolutionary new product for males everywhere; frustrated, downtrodden, beaten and dejected males, tired of lining up to rent it from termite ridden dens of iniquity..”

“Gentlemen...” he continued, going to the board and quickly sketching something on it.

He drew back.

“I give you...”

I rubbed my eyes and looked again. Was that an old train whistle he had drawn?

Wait... Was it a..?

“The wooden pussy!”

I blinked, brought my leather gauntleted hands to my eyes, rubbed them and looked again.

I could sort of see it.

I looked at Shuvelback.

He looked back at us proudly.

“That’s a pussy, gentlemen—one that’s made out of wood. And you can call it your own.”

A Modern Highwayman?

Dear Doom,

What can I say? Randy was right.

I won't bore you with the gory details. Let's just say that high-quality, handcrafted designer wooden men's dildonics are the new face of Batcorp enterprises.

Am I loving it?

Am I DTF and do I like to party?

Rhetorical questions.

It took a lot of hard, sweaty hours at the negotiating table—a lot of long nights staring at price sheets and asset reports and boring ass pictures of shitty looking bars and pies, all grey and gloomy without any fruits or nuts or chocolate chunks or anything that you would actually want.

I don't know, they said it was important.

I mean, I get that the honcho is supposed to look like he actually gives a crap about the whole ritual aspect of business—it's a sort of religion for guys like Stanley and the investors—and even though I personally believe that fate bends to the will of Lucifer and his maverick angels (among whom I count myself), I respect their freedom to dress the beefsteaks of their lives with whatever weak sauce they see fit. But seriously buddy, it's like grow some sack, you know what I mean?

Believe in the product and the product that you produce will be the product of your dreams.

Randy said that, I think.

Or maybe I made it up. Who knows anymore?

Personally, I don't care about attributions. If the shit fits, wear it. That's how I live my life anyway, and look at me:

Rich.

Handsome.

Lot of talent, upstairs and down.

Pretty young still, too, if you take the long view of history like I do and examine the world through the lens of geologic time. Long term planning. Legacy and shit. A lot of guys will tell you: “Oh, whatevs, it’ll all be same in a million years,” but fuck that. You gotta think bigger. A million years... Psh. What about a million and one? Where you going to be then? Dead? Retired? Not this guy. He’s going to be out there, riding down the road on some sick futuristic chopper: leaner, meaner and ready to either kick some tail, or lift some—whatever comes first or seems like the best option at the time.

A modern highwayman, if you will.

The ethos of such a modern highwayman is one that has intrigued me for some time now. It’s a concept that I attribute to my dark lord, Lucifer, the prince of space—who was, in his first incarnation of the original badass, the prototypical highwayman of which I consider myself simply a contemporary version. In a way, I always was a highwayman in terms of my deeds and mentality, but it took hearing the song “Highwayman” by the outlaw country supergroup The Highwaymen for the idea to coalesce as such into the kernel of thought in my mind, which has since flowered into the powerplant of my whole identity and the source of my company’s commercial renaissance. While I don’t typically listen to country music, preferring trance, trip-hop, drum and bass, and the slick, programmed beats that Alfred mixes down for me to vibe off to the land of nod to every night, I made a chance exception for the Highwayman the first time I heard it because the strains of the hollow, synth pad

intro at first tricked me into thinking it was Toto's "Africa"—a perennial favorite which I have been known to crank.

As I cruised the streets of Gotham, suddenly uninterested in its fleshy parade of normally irresistible whores and concubines of every gender and hue, I listened to the four horsemen of outlaw country—Willie, Waylon, Kristofferson and Cash—weave their wicked tale of a man who would not quit the road of life, even though his pursuit of its spoils should murder him, as they wisely sing "again and again and again and again," (etc, thru a sick fadeout). There was so much truth in what I heard that I had to pull over and think about it as I drained my main vein into some roadside bush.

My takeaway from the song was this: we are all on this road, this highway—whether that be a literal road as in *Convoy*, (which, coincidence, stars Kristofferson himself) or an "information superhighway" of the as yet virtual future. That highway, like a racetrack, is a Moby Strip (Moby Dick?) of endless, eternal "recurrence" and "return," to quote a phrase from nineteenth century German nihilist Jack Nietzsche, where our lives are but a single lap. A life may end, but the track (the song) remains the same; the cars (consciousness) ride on, only there's a new driver behind the wheel. The thing is, whether the car is a horse, such as the one Willie Nelson's character rides in the song, or a starship, such as the one piloted by Mr. Cash, it doesn't matter. The important part is that in my metaphor these "cars" are the spirits and the people that are driving them merely the vessels. A highwayman is someone who, like me and

Lucifer before me, understands this dynamic—understands that even though we may seem to perish from one life we may, perhaps, as Cash sings, “become a highwayman again,” or even if we were to “simply be a single drop of rain” we would, nevertheless, “still remain,” driving, as it were, into an endless and forever opening and expanding frontier of possibility, the crest of whose wave I aim to ride into futurity.

That’s where my head’s at at the moment, anyway. And while it remains to be seen whether or not my investment in prosthetic wooden vulvas for independent men will pay off in the short term, I know that my future in the long term is secure because the path of risk is the path of reward—Lucifer’s path; aka The Frontier.

And appropriately enough, in honor of my obsession with The Frontier, I’m naming the new division of Batcorp devoted to marketing the wooden pussy, “Frontier Solutions.” And I’m naming Randy Shovelback, who is my new best friend, to be in charge of it.

Good luck, Randy. I know you’re not reading this, but I just wanted to say it to somebody. You’re a highwayman if ever I saw one. I’m counting on you, old buddy.

Don’t let Batman down.

The Crapmaster Cycle: Part 1

Dear Doom,

It's over.

The bat might as well be let out of the bag.

The wooden pussy thing? It tanked.

Don't get me wrong. It was a great idea and could have been a great product. That is if it weren't for the fact that my ex-friend Randy is actually a liar and a cheat.

And a douchebag.

And to think to that I once considered him a highwayman...

Yeah, right—maybe if a highwayman robbed the shit out of people. A dickweed is more like it.

Frontier Solutions...Ha!

More like Front-Butt Ablutions.

I don't fuckin' know...

Gah—it's just like, *shit-nuts!*

Ok, ok. Hold it together, Batman. Let's just back up the old re-hab cab and start from the beginning of the part where we left off.

Actually, I first just want to share a poem that I wrote about my current emotional state:

Dark, dark, dark
A dark, lonesome place
Not like, a cool cave
Like a shitty, stupid dark
Feeling inside of my heart
Shitweed, betrayer-man
Asshole's got me down
The dumbass march of time
Who am I, indeed?

So, that's pretty much the basic tone that we're dealing with here. It's where I'm coming from at the moment. Not exactly a ray of sunshine, obviously, but what am I supposed to say? "Oh, everything's fine. No, no big deal. Yeah, whatever, so I'm down to ONLY \$20 MILLION IN LIQUID ASSETS, OH WELL!"

You've got to be fucking kidding me.

When I get my hands on that Midwestern turd-weasel, the SHIT IS GOING TO HIT THE PROVERBIAL PAN. THAT'S RIGHT SHITBIRD, YOU HEARD IT HERE FIRST! YOUR GOOSE IS FUCKED AND I AM THE GANDER!

THE BATGANDER! I mean the batmander. Fuck. The strong, male Bat... The batma...

Fuck, I need a drink...

Hold on a sec.

OK, I'm back. Feel better.

But still. Fuck. I feel like Mr. Bucket here, bout to blow my goddamn top with the amount I'm getting dunked on and tea-bagged.

It all started a few months ago when *you know who* was all like: “Batman, Batman! We’ve got a great product in the wooden pussy thing! All the research shows that men love pussy and wood! People want to buy it! We’ve got to go public with this shit!” And what can I say, the numbers were compelling.

I remember a lot of sixes and sevens and a whole lot of eights, which are positive indicators of chaotic, neutral and lawful alignments, which means that all of our bases were pretty much covered. I would have liked to have seen more runes, glyphs and zodiac shit in the mix but whatever, you learn to take what you can get and the let me tell you, the getting was good (or so it seemed).

And FYI, let me just back up for a minute because I didn’t finish before, but I just wanted to say that I was into witchcraft and sorcery and all that shit before it became mainstream but just because I don’t have the copyright it’s like, no, you can’t start a school for hardbodied young warlocks even though it would be tits and I would be a great role-model for the students. In a word, expect a lawsuit, or something. You know who you are. No, not you, Randy, although I’m not done with you either. Not by a long shot!

So, naturally my next step was to take up the matter with Stanley. Now, obviously, Stanley and Randy are not the biggest fans of one another to put it mildly and I was expecting a shit show on the order of Poison at the Palladium, with maybe Ratt opening. Stanley hadn’t been the most enthusiastic supporter of the WP project

from the start, but I chalked that up mostly to his personal beef with Randy and was therefore double surprised when he not only endorsed the concept of going public, but insisted that Randy's IPO estimate was way lowball. Like hot fucking day in Dubai low.

As you might imagine, this gave me quite a hard one and I was so pumped on it that I pretty much gifted Stanley, like, a lot of pre-trade shares of Frontier, or however it works, and instructed him to allocate a shit-ton more to Randy, who was riding high in my book at that point, and to make sure that Batcorp bought enough to continue to run the show once we went public and to rush all the paperwork and the prospectus and shit and pay as much as we needed to ram it through so we could start making our inevitable billions. And all the while, Stanley is just nodding and smiling and rubbing his hands and bowing and saying things like "Yes, master, yes! Of course! With great haste!" I should have known something was up but could see nothing through the gauzy haze of wooden sex prostheses, save the endless green elysiums of cash I thought awaited me following the Initial Public Offering.

I tried to get a hold of Randy after my meeting with Stanley but it kept going to voicemail. No biggie, I thought, my man Randy's a busy dude—probably just in a high powered meeting with an important client to push those wooden prostheses to as many truck stops as possible. I didn't have reason to suspect anything. A man like Randy should be hard to reach, I reasoned; after all, I had granted him unilateral authority over the management of Frontier Solutions and you can't expect the Czar

of the world's largest manufacturer/distributor of high-quality wooden adult toys for on-the-go men to be accessible around the clock, even if his company is a wholly owned subsidiary of one that you inherited from your father. I had just wanted to congratulate him on the soon-to-be blow-out-success of our venture anyway, but there would be plenty of time to celebrate with him later and I was ready to tear it up right then and there.

I had Alfred try Rob, but no dice with him either. That was a little weird, considering how Rob was usually the one barking up my tree and tended to pick up before the first ring, but I ultimately didn't give a shit because that's ancient history despite being a decent off-night hay lay. Then I remembered how he had recently been serving as Randy's personal assistant and chuckled to myself. Poor bastard's ass was probably getting ridden hard enough at work!

Oh well, I thought, I'd just do the usual and have Alfred write me up a quick craigslist ad. I instructed my long suffering manservant to use the "Man seeking Man for Tub and Drinks" template, and soon enough I was sorting through dozens of replies from Gotham's hottest A-listers—the same boring stable of washboard Mr. Cleans and faux scruffy sailorboys. I sighed, just about ready to pop in my \$500k bluray of *The Cremaster Cycle* and call it a night when an unfamiliar address popped up in my AOL.

Tom Schneider?

The name seemed oddly familiar.

I clicked his email and read through it a few times. I was impressed by the guy's polite, heartland demeanor and DILFy good looks.

"Looks like we have a weiner," I smiled.

Then I clicked reply.

The Crapmaster Cycle: Part 2

Previously on The Erotic Adventures of Batman, Batman had begun to tell us about the series of events which would come to be known as “The Crapmaster Cycle.” Unable to locate his best friend Randy Shovelback, or his ex Rob (with whom he is still on pretty good terms) and wanting to celebrate on the eve of his new company “Frontier Solutions” going public, Batman turns to the high-end Gotham singles site “Craiglist” in search of a date. Intrigued by the familiar sounding name of Tom Schneider and perked by Schneider’s “DILFy good looks” Batman invites the strange man over to his palatial home for “Tub and drinks.” We rejoin him now in medias res.

Dear Doom,

It was love at first sight.

As I monitored the lanky, Midwestern frame of Tom Schneider striding up to my door on the feed from my network of HD home security cams, I knew I had hit a homerun in choosing him out of all the rest to share in the hot fruits of my invaluable hang-time. Previously, I had described Tom as a “DILF,” but I’m pleased to say that the word “DILF” doesn’t do him justice. Not by a long ball.

By this point, it’s probably obvious enough that I have a thing for rugged, Middle-Americans; D.A, Shovelback, the list goes on. But whereas D.A’s Kansan / Nebraskan

golden boy shtick and Randy's savage Minnesotan / Dakotan born-in-a-barnisms could often be titillating, they could also wear pretty fucking thin after a while. Oddly enough, for somebody as "out there" as myself, what really primes my pump is just regular old average joe six-pack bullshit: sensible haircuts, New Balance sneakers, jeans and crop-sleeve, checkered collared shirt combos in, like, blue and grey; in short, stability—the straight middle-est of the middle of the road.

When I gazed at Tom, loping along the path to my door, six-pack of Michelob light in hand, I nearly creamed my corn.

He looked like he lived in Terra-Haute Indiana, drove a Ford F-150, listened to Bruce Hornsby cassette tapes, managed a hardware store, had a slightly overweight wife and two middle-school aged kids, coached rec. league baseball, and lived on a steady diet of Kroeger's flank steak and steamed frozen broccoli. To sum it up: the perfect man. A mild-mannered, local hero type with all the kinks and rough edges smoothed out by the inexorable pounding of the great American tide. It was rare on the coasts, or in the extreme northern and southern parts of the country. You could see flashes of it on the great plains and in prairie and piedmont country, but it took a life in the true breadbasket to yield the sort of increasingly rare inland pearl that I constantly sought and yet so seldom attained.

I would have moved in order to meet more men like that, but let's face it—the place is dogshit. I mean, yeah, the people are jewels, but something about living amongst

them, staring into the flat green nothing that passes for the scenery day in and day out just seems like it would kind of blow, am I right? Better to meet them outside their natural habitat and thereby preserve the exotic thrill of the rare out-of-context encounter such as that which was about to occur.

Alfred moved to answer the door when we heard the ring of the bat-bell, but I stayed him with a wave of my gloved hand. I wanted to greet Tom myself—it would put him at ease and show him that, despite my wealth, power and high-toned lifestyle, that we could still meet eye-to-eye as men in a good old-fashioned American front door setting—equals in, if nothing else, our respect for the traditional neighborhood value of shaking the man of the house's hand on his stoop before coming inside.

When I opened the door, my assumptions were confirmed. Tom was the genuine article alright; from the wiry bristles of his none-too recent salt and pepper crew-cut to the tips of his white, size 11 New Balance 990s, he was authenticity personified; lightning in a bottle; elemental sexuality in the guise of a man. He extended a hand, and I noted with approval the silver wedding band on his workmanlike ring finger.

“Tom,” he smiled, with a friendly, mild twang.

“Batman,” I growled appreciatively, accepting the proffered appendage and squeezing it firmly in my own. “Welcome to my home. I’m glad you could make it.”

“Well, thank you kindly for having me,” Tom drawled. “Strange as it seems with all the folks around, it can sure get lonely in the big city and I do appreciate the company of another man in the evenings—reminds me of just shooting the crap with my buddies back in the den at the old homestead.”

“And where did you say you were...?” I began.

“Peoria,” he smiled. “Born and raised.”

My dick did a little somersault of excitement. *Jackpot*, I thought.

I stepped aside and beckoned my guest inside.

“You’re a long way from home, Tom. Come on in and make yourself comfortable. It’s no Peoria, but I think you’ll find my little slice of Gotham is not without its charms.”

Tom flashed me a big heartland grin and for a hot moment I got to admire his straight, white, brushed-twice-daily teeth before they disappeared again behind his thin, practical lips and standard issue dad-style mustache.

He raised up the sixer of Michelob and shook it from side to side as though to draw attention to its enticing presence. “Got a place we can cool these puppies off?”

I threw my head back and laughed boomingly.

“Oh, I’ve got just the thing, Tom. Just the thing.”

Flash forward ten minutes and I am exactly where I want to be: chilling with Tom in the jacuzzi, thermal-cozied cold ones in hand; me in my mask and a hot, European style g-string bathing suit, and my guest in a fun, flirty, fish-print pair of neon-green basketball short length swim trunks that barely conceal his hairy, sunburnt knees.

Tom took a long pull from his longneck, smacked his lips and let out a satisfied sigh.

“Well, Batman, I am impressed—ya sure know how to treat a fella so he feels at home. I could get used to this, I must admit.”

Hearing this, I immediately sprang some serious swell, but luckily it’s concealed by the tub’s foaming jets. You can’t come on too strong with these types or they bolt like the very deer that frequent their suburban backyards. Better to take it slow, share a few brews, a few laughs and just let the night and whatever latent feelings that might lie dormant in their hearts take you where they will.

“So, Tom” I asked, leaning back and allowing my delts, lats and pecs to do their inimitable ‘thing,’ “what brings you to my neck of the woods. Business, or just flat out pleasure?”

Tom chuckled and the old flag-pole went full-mast.

“Wish I could say it was the latter,” he grinned ruefully, “but unfortunately, it’s a pretty darn serious case of the former.”

Intrigued, I pressed him for more detail.

“Well, it’s a long story, Batman, but let’s just say that I’m looking for my partner. Leastways, the man that I used to call by that name.”

“Trouble in paradise?” I volunteered.

Again, that stoic smile and a long, appreciative, apple-bobbing sip. Damn, I thought—look at the size of that goiter. Now that sir, is a man.

“Mister,” he said deliberately, looking me straight in the eye, “you don’t know the half of it.”

I gave an all-purpose grunt in reply, which he seemed to understand intuitively as a sign of respect for the hardship he had evidently endured.

“Try me,” I went on. “You may not be able to tell, judging by all this,” I said, gesturing at the opulence around us, “but I’ve waded through my fair share of shit and then some to get here.”

Tom’s intelligent brown eyes twinkled.

“Alright, Batman—you seem like a straight shooter. I guess it wouldn’t hurt to tell you about my little problem.”

“I’m all ears,” I said, pointing to the pointed bat-ear hearing enhancers mounted to the side of my batface-mask.

He smiled, sighed, and then he said the words that practically made me crap myself.

“Well, It all started with a guy named Randy Shovelback.”

Crapmaster 3: The Crappening

Dear Doom,

Randy's name hit me like a Bat to the ass.

What should have been bliss—my new friend Tom and I enjoying a soak in the hottub—had turned suddenly sour.

Just what in the sweet fuck was crappening?

My head spun and I clutched at my Batfacemask. It felt like I had taken a Bat to the face.

I was reeling—the epicenters of both my upper and lower bodies throbbing as though they had each had a bat taken to them. In effect, they had. And I don't say that lightly. But fuck it (and the situation). This was too big a load to bear with my usual bat-like stoicism... This was monster-load shit...

Shuvelback. Schneider. All of the pieces were coming together.

But everything had fallen apart.

I felt betrayed. Even more so than the time with my formerly trusty Bat-Bat and she-who-must-not-be-named (I'm talking about the Dryad, FYI). Which, need I remind myself, is the whole reason I reconnected with Randy in the first place!

Ah, the clusterfucks of fate...

When would peace be mine, I wondered?

I gazed around my dominion like a king of old, my weathered brow furrowed in perpetual contemplation of a thousand crappy, batcares.

Hello Z-track riding bat lawnmower.

Hello Tikki-bat Hawaiin'-style firepit.

Hello old battire swing.

Hello batfruit tree.

Hello battree house, where I dreamed a thousand dreams, a thousand lazy afternoons.

Hello shitty old battree root, which I fucking tripped over and ate it because of one day.

Were they really mine, I pondered? These material things?

I sighed. Then, as man has done since the beginning of time immemorial, I looked to the heavens for guidance, for some kind of bat signal, perhaps.

I stared into the impassive sky above. It glowed a sinister, starless red, probably due to the outsize arc-lights I use to illuminate my gigantic compound.

“Master of crap,” I bellowed, “hear my plea!”

Then, incapable of further words, I beat my chest, tore at my batvision tub goggles and yanked piteously at the empty space where, had I possessed a wispy, careworn beard, that beard would have been.

It was terrifying for me to imagine what seeing such a spectacle unfold would appear like to your average joe. Imagine the hottest man you know, in his prime, at the height of his masculinity, just going to town on himself with anger and self-loathing and sheer, unabashed pissed-offedness, and tell me you wouldn't either be in tears, or on the next train out of there, buddy.

Lucky for me, it wasn't just some average joe beside me that night. At least not in any way that mattered.

Through the bleary haze of my grunt-filled raging, I felt, as though from some other plane, the warm and friendly touch of a gentle-strong male hand upon my surging forearm.

"Batman" a calm voice soothed. "Come back to me, slugger."

Tom?

Of course... I had nearly forgotten!

I clutched at my new friend's hand like a life-preserver.

"Help me, Tom," I pleaded. "Help me to understand what happened."

Tom held my hand firmly and squeezed my shoulder with his other, easing me down from the heights of my delirium into a sitting position. The jets of the tub soothed my anguished lumbar, heavy with the weight of the impending doom that I felt like a mill-wheel 'round my corded, bulging neck.

I realized I didn't actually know anything and had allowed my redoubtable powers of speculation to set me adrift amidst a sea of enraged paranoia.

I must have still looked kind of out of it because Tom gave me a light slap on the cheek. It stung, and under normal circumstances I would have slammed him with a quick head-butt in reply—but these were hardly normal circumstances, and it did, in fact, help.

He made a fork with the index and middle fingers of his free hand (the other still firmly grasped my shoulder) and pointed with them, first at my eyes (though he didn't poke them as might be expected) then his own.

It was a hypnotic sort of gesture and I quickly read the meaning of the spell, a meaning that was reinforced by Tom's subsequent words of "eyes on me, alright big guy?"

I nodded my assent.

"Judging by your reaction, I'd guess that you have some prior knowledge of Mr. Randy Shovelback?"

The words fell like hammers onto my nuts.

I felt the red rage rise inside me again.

“Prior knowledge!” I burst out “I would fucking hope so. Randy Shovelback is my business partner!!”

Tom whitened—his ruddy, tub-toasted complexion blanching like a piece of searing tunafish.

“P-Partner?” he stuttered. “No, that... There must be some mistake. Randy is *my* business partner...”

I shook my hoary head, grizzled now beyond its years with the addition of this new stress dump-trucking down on top of it.

“Impossible!” I croaked, almost to myself, unable to comprehend what I was hearing.

“Randy had an exclusive agreement with me on the Wooden Pussy project... We shook on it!”

Tom’s eyes flashed, he gripped my shoulder harder, almost as if out of fear.

“Did you say, ‘Wooden Pussy?’”

“Yes,” I replied “the Wooden Pussy—a new generation of self-pleasure toy for maverick men who don’t have the time or the patience to pull the old fashioned way. It’s made out of real, unvarnished wood to accommodate men of any size and since it’s made out of wood, it conceals easily, or can be the focal point in a mantelpiece setting depending on your taste. But, what does that have to do with Randy? I mean, it was partly his idea—well, mostly I guess—though my shitty experience with the Dryad and my Bat-Bat did pretty much lead directly to the inspiration for the project in that it created a subconscious desire in my psyche to reclaim wood as a site of sexual mastery. I mean, Randy just sort of gave me a push in the right direction—we were totally on the same wavelength about this, which is why I paid him billions of dollars and made him the president of Frontier Solutions, the Batcorp subsidiary I created specifically to promote, manufacture and distribute the Wooden Pussy. And let me tell you, he did a fine job! Those pussies were ready to ship in days—I’ve never seen anything like it!”

Now it was Tom’s turn to cover his eyes and groan. The groan started low and then sort of twanged up into the middle registers before erupting in a sudden wheezing, high-pitched chuckle. It didn’t seem like any time for laughing, but it was kind of hot all the same.

“Batman,” he snorted through half-sobs, half-guffaws, “I hate to say it, boy, but we done goofed.”

“Goofed?” I bellowed.

“Yessir,” Tom went on. “You and me, we done got ourselves hosed.”

“Hosed?!” I roared.

What was this fuckin’ shit?

Then it clicked.

“Tom Schneider...” I started. “I knew I knew that name from somewhere. Are you telling me you’re...?”

“The very same Tom Schneider who used to run with Rudolph—a mixed-up kid from the upper Midwest who came to Quest College with nothin’ but a beat up Trans-Am, the Molly Hatchet shirt on his back and a head full of ideas about how to bang cash out the traps of this great nation? Yeah, that’d be me... It’s been a long time since Rudy started calling himself Randy but ain’t nothin’ changed. I guess I thought I could change him—thought success would cool him—but Batman, that Randy rod’s hot, and ain’t nothin’ going to chill the flow a’ magma, a wellin’ up from within until the fire of his charred heart flickers out on its own. And Batman, lemme tell ya, he’s got crude to burn.”

I felt dizzy. I reeled and retched, but I held it together. Tom continued:

“This Wooden Pussy idea of yours, that ain’t nothing but Randy trying to unload some damaged merch on your butt, and if he gets away with it—like it sounds like he done—it’s gonna turn around and bite ya.”

Tom took a long swig from his Michelob and smacked his lips. He was getting pretty worked up and that twang of his was coming out something fierce. Despite the fuckedupedness of the situation, I couldn’t help but feel another swell of attraction. What can I say; I can’t resist a man with an accent, whether that be your classic bippity-boppity style British, or a good old down-home one like Tom’s.

“Just one thing, Tom,” I broke in, “how do you know so much about the Wooden Pussy, anyway? It was supposed to be top-secret, and I clicked around online and shit before we decided on doing it and there’s definitely never been anything like it on the market before.”

Tom laughed again, flashing me those fluoridated chiclets of his.

“Aint’ been done before ‘cus there ain’t nothin’ to it, Batman. Dollars to dicks says those Wooden Pussies of yours is just a box a’ old hollered out train whistles.”

Train whistles!? Hadn't I thought that very thought when I first saw Randy's concept drawing?!

"I don't understand, Tom."

Tom took another pull on his longneck, his eyes gleaming.

"That's Randy for you, Batman—you can't understand the mind of a lunatic. Or is the right word genius? Sometimes, I don't even know. But what I do know is that Randy has been trying to unload a couple three shipping containers worth a' train whistles since the time when Bush one were in office. He done bought up the lot, discount like, from an insurance company when the train carrying the train whistles done derailed itself down in Pensacola. It's how come Randy and I and my then girlfriend Tammy headed down Florida way after finishing out school."

Of course, I thought, the fabled tale of Randy's trip to Florida with Tom and Tammy!

"Tom," I interrupted, "just what happened down there in Pensacola between the three of you? I thought there was supposed to have been some big real-estate deal that went sour and/or intrigue involving some sweaty love triangle?"

Now it was Tom's turn to sigh.

“You ever hear the expression: a little from column A, a little from column B?”

I shook my head but Tom didn't seem to notice. He was lost in the murk of the story, and I was lost in his eyes.

“Randy, he has this way of telling people what they want to hear—of knowing what to say and when to say it to get folks to go along with him. For me at that time, the magic words were ‘wetland easement buyups,’ and for Tam, well, it was straight-up ‘I love you.’ We was charmed like snakes, the two of us... Little did we know that the charmer was a snake himself.. We ponied up all the cash we had in the world for what promised to be the deal of the century; partnerships in business—and perhaps in life—as owners of the biggest swampland redevelopment project in sunshine state history..

“And what did Randy do? He bought a trainwreck full of train-whistles and hoofed it to California.”

I was stunned. How could Randy have done such a thing? It just didn't fit.

“Why train-whistles, Tom? What about that particular item held such fascination for him?”

Tom stared into space for a long time.

“I believe that even then he was formulatin’ an idea. Or, should I say, reformulatin’ one. He and I, well—it was college Batman—we were roommates, see, and as such were inclined to talk often and frankly as young men will do, about matters of a sexual nature.”

Sexual? I liked where this was going.

“I recall making a certain joke to him one day, after he had expressed some of his sexual frustrations—inability to pull as frequently as he might have liked with the female cohort at the town tap and whatnot—and I believe I said something to the effect of: ‘well, you could always do as my uncle Terry Schneider done and whittle yourself a little woman out of wood.’ There was an apocryphal story see, of my uncle having engaged in some such nonsense, but the way I seen it, there warn’t no sense to it.”

I laughed. The idea did seem ridiculous.

“But Randy,” Tom continued, “soon as I said it, his eyes started in to shinin’ and his lips they started in to droolin’ and he got that sorta scheming, doggin’, wolfin’ look he get about him when he’s hashing up a real granddaddy of a sandbaggin’ for someone. And Batman, I think in that moment, the idea of the wooden pussy was born. And you and me—we both been sandbagged by it.”

What could I say? Tom was right.

I had been sandbagged, and now Randy was gone.

All I knew is that Rob and Stanley had gone with him, along with a metric crapton of my father's hard earned cash.

And there I sat, a fifty nine year old man, with nothing to show for my troubles but twenty mil in the bank, a diverse and innovative company with "extensive" capital holdings and a private estate with a designated British manservant.

I felt a tear roll down my cheek.

"What's this...?" I said to myself, in disbelief.

Nevermind, I thought. Let it fall. Let it all come down. This was the fall of the house of Batman...

For the umpteenth time that evening, Tom placed his hand on my shoulder. This time though, it like, really did mean something.

“This is you,” said Tom. “This is my new buddy, Batman. And Batman,” he said, looking into my tear-streaked eyes, “it’s ok to hurt, buddy. Old Tom? He been there, too.”

I smiled, in spite of myself. I must have had a piece of swordfish in my craw from earlier, because my voice broke slightly as I said:

“Thanks, Tom.”

Tom’s eyes twinkled, his sly old grin returning to replace the more serious ‘heart-to-heart’ face he had affected in my moment of weakness.

“You know Batman,” he drawled “I think this is the beginning of a real beaut of a long old friendship.”

And goddamnit if he wasn’t right.

Although it should be pretty obvious at this point, I’ll go ahead and say it: I’m not a man who gives up easily. Not the type to take the easy route in favor of the right one.

Tom and I? We talked awhile and decided that, on top of wanting to give that rascal Randy a pretty good non-sexual pounding (ie, we wanted to fight him and win) we had a pretty good legal argument against him, too. In fact, Tom had come to

Gotham in the first place to plead his case against Shuvelnick to some hotshot lawyer he'd seen on *Dateline*. The guy wanted a fat fee, but I didn't much care for his haircut, so I did old Tom one better and bought a whole ball team's worth of counsel—even bought 'em uniforms with the words "Batman's Bats" embroidered across the chest and butt areas. Hey, next best thing right?

Anyway, my Bats got to work right away, hiring private investigators and bounty hunters to track down Randy and his goons and building a rock-solid bodyslam of a suit against them—I even paged D.A. and told him I'd give him like a million bucks if he just kept that sexy ear of his to the ground for me (a proposition he immediately accepted).

It all got to be pretty expensive, as you might imagine, so, in order to save money, Alfred and I moved in with Tom and his family in Peoria.

It was hard at first—for one thing, Tom's wife Tammy (yes, that Tammy, they ended up getting hitched after all!) wasn't the biggest fan of the idea—but after Alfred started helping out around the house and I started to tutor the kids in hapkido and other esoteric eastern teachings, as well as some of the ancient gnostic wisdom of our own storied western canon, we pretty much made ourselves indispensable. Through it all, Tom acquitted himself admirably as a leader—a smile forever in his eyes and with words of wisdom from the Schneider tradition always ready at his lips. Although he is twelve years my junior, it's hard not to think of him as a sort of father figure, and it

seems like these days I'm as likely to call him "dad" as "buddy." Tom, to his credit, takes it in stride.

For their part, the little brats ain't bad either. I can't remember their names at the moment, but they're little blonde kids, you know—one boy, one girl. Pretty cool, I got to admit. Sometimes, (and I know it sounds like a load of horse, but hear me out) I think they teach me as much as I teach them. Pokey-man, angry bird, and whatnot.

I don't know... Crazy times.

Sometimes it's hard to keep up, but I do what I can. And, if my newfound in touch-ness with contemporary pop-culture has taught me just one thing, it'd be this: Do not go chasing waterfalls. And, if life with Tom and the other people in our family is any indication, sticking to the rivers and the lakes of scenic Peoria is not as shitty as it might sound. At least until I get my hands on that rat Randy.

But who knows—it's like those hot mods always said: "you can't always get what you want, but if you try sometimes, you just might find, you get what you need."

;~)

Dear Doom: The Erotic Adventures of Batman, was a monthly-ish column I wrote between 2013-2014 for the online literary magazine *Trop*, which I was heavily involved with as a contributor and editor since shortly after it launched in 2012 until its first iteration petered out in, I believe, early 2015. *Trop* was founded by my good friend Tom Dibblee and was, for the few years of its initial run, a really special little magazine that published primarily short fiction (often of a humorous or experimental bent) and personal essays at a prolific rate (the production schedule ran 5 days a week — pretty much unheard of for a 100% volunteer operation and a real credit to Tom’s vision and commitment as an editor and publisher).

The inspiration for the Batman column arose primarily from many hours of joking around with my friends Nick Flessa and Keith Belmont (who invented the Randy Shovelback, Stanley Sizemore and Tom Schneider characters) and would never have existed without their input, or Tom’s willingness to indulge a very silly idea and let me see where I could take it. Much credit is also due to the column’s first editor, Sam Friehtlich, who helped tame some of the gnarlier prose, and Jake DeGrazia, a friend of Tom’s and producer of *Trop’s Life Advice* podcast, who took a real interest and encouraged me to continue the Batman storyline through the prequel novelette, which you can also find here on my site. The novelette would not have come about at all without the incredible design and illustration skills of Thea Lorentzen, who also laid out and arranged a beautiful limited print run.

As silly and sometimes over the top as some of the Batman material is, I have a very soft spot in my heart for it, particularly because of the opportunities it gave me to collaborate with some absolutely lovely and often much more talented people than myself. The exhilaration of being given basically carte blanche to publish a serialized work of fiction when I was just out of grad school and in my twenties, really unaware and unbothered by the possibility of flouting any rules, and to do this with my friends, is something I will always treasure. It was so special then and it's only grown more so in retrospect as I've come to realize what a miracle our little scene was. Most importantly, it was so much goddamn fun.