

HERE COMES EVERYONE™

**FEATURING:**

ShakeSPeare's FoOLs - jODiE CarPenter

Esmond ThuRWell

sAM jORDISON ON cRAP tOWNS





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# Editorial

Perhaps the single greatest conceit held by people in the world is the omnipresent ‘everyone is stupid except for me’ fallacy. I know for certain that in my own life I feel as though I’m battering my head against some sort of wall when trying to explain things that seem so simple.

Naturally, what we’re doing, collectively as a species, is forgetting that everyone thinks that everyone else is stupid, because of fundamental egocentrism.

Every time I wonder ‘how have they not seen that?’ or ‘why would they say that?’ what I’m really wondering is ‘why don’t they have exactly the same amount of information available to them as I do?’ Let’s be realistic here, you wouldn’t jump in a time machine, zoom off to the Bronze Age, and start randomly berating people for not making any iron tools, would you?

Of course, there is much more to idiocy than sheer lack of information. Obviously, there are those with very low IQ scores, but equally the ignorant, the selfish, the rash, the unwise, the arrogant, those infused with hubris, those thoughtless, reckless, feckless and foolish people deserve the label much more than those others.

Naturally, ‘idiot’ is a word that has

changed in meaning considerably over the last twenty or so centuries that people in the UK might’ve been using it. Just like ‘gay’ doesn’t really mean ‘happy’ anymore (although I daresay people at Gay Pride in Rio might disagree...) ‘idiot’ doesn’t really mean a person of below average intelligence. It usually means someone displaying below average intelligence, but that has nothing to do with whether they’d be diagnosed or not as having learning difficulties.

I suppose ‘the village idiot’ in some ways deserves a mention. The slack jawed yokel, the inbred hick, the toothless gaping maw of the peasant owe just as much to Romanticism as they do to intelligence. Those urbanite painters and poets used their rose filters to eulogise the simplicity and honesty of ‘simple folk’ through sentimentality, genial-sounding contempt and fanciful fiction. Read Charles Dicken’s *Great*

*Expectations* and try not to feel sorry for Joe the illiterate blacksmith. Similarly, Tolstoy loved to indulge his fondness for simple peasants (and they don’t come much simpler than Russian peasants) and their ‘natural’ way of life. Were these ‘intelligent people’ aware of the denigration of the ‘idiots’? No, but as I began, you can’t blame someone for not knowing everything that you know.

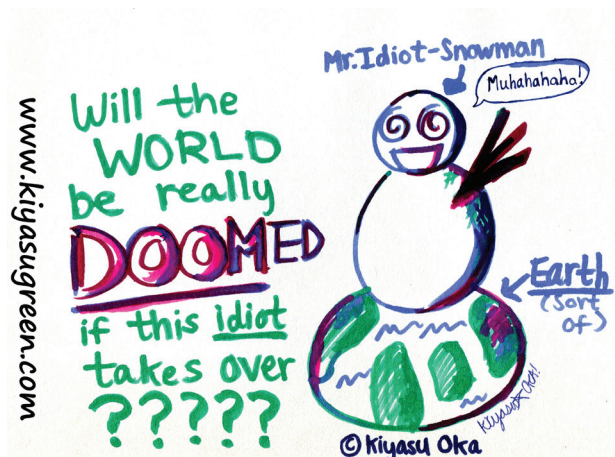
Some really varied content in this issue. Typically, I recommend it all, but it’s great to see (and hear from) friend of HCE Sam Jordison again. Similarly, Jodie once more brings her analysis and thoughtful prose to us in fiction and non-fiction. Check out Esmond Thurwell’s mighty epic poem and definitely have a look at Andrew Blair’s semi-apocalyptic industrial nightmare.

Actually, there’s quite a lot of semi-apocalyptic content... nothing for it...

*‘I have always known about man. From the evidence, I believe his wisdom must walk hand and hand with his idiocy. His emotions must rule his brain. He must be a warlike creature who gives battle to everything around him, even himself.’*

- Doctor Zaius, *Planet of the Apes*

G



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# The Idiot's Guide to Idiots

by Jodie Carpenter

'Idiot': it's a term we constantly bandy around unthinkingly. We apply it to all sorts of people (with politicians and celebrities tending to be on the receiving end) either deservedly or not. Essentially, the word is used as a term of abuse. Interestingly, however, the word is also be used more casually in regards to ourselves. Utterances like 'I'm such an idiot' are commonly heard, alongside usages in the media and publishing, for example the how-to books *The Complete Idiot's Guide to...* which cover a wide range of complex or popular topics. In this context, the word use is hyperbolic, and implies that the books will assume the reader has no prior knowledge of the topic and will thus provide easy comprehension and cover all the basic steps.

Today then, the word can either be hurled around abusively, or used in a more light-hearted manner.

But what did the word 'idiot' originally mean? According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word derived from the Ancient Greek *ιδιώτης* (*idiōtēs*), meaning a 'private person', a 'person without professional knowledge' or 'layman'. Interestingly, none of these seem to indicate that intelligence levels are being questioned. The term tended to be used in the context of a person living outside of mainstream society, so for example, hermits and shepherds. In Ancient Greek society, these idiots were viewed as undependable in terms of civic participation, and because there was an emphasis on participation in society, the people who did not engage with it were viewed with suspicion.

In the 1300s, the word was being utilised in the English language in reference to people who were ignorant, uneducated or incapable of reasoning. There were

instances of these people with low intelligence being used as a source of amusement for others, such as the court fool, prominent in the Tudor period.

By the 18th century, the word had developed a new meaning and began being used as a diagnostic term in regards to people with profound mental retardation. Medically speaking, an 'idiot' was someone with 'a mental age below three years' and generally 'unable to learn connected speech or guard against common dangers'. Thus idiots were viewed as mentally inferior.

People with this diagnosis were institutionalised, and in some states in the US in the 20th Century, forcible sterilisation was carried out "for the protection and health of the state". Notably in 1927, Carrie Buck underwent forced sterilisation in the state of Virginia, after the Supreme Court upheld the decision in *Buck vs. Bell*, validating the form of 'treatment'. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote about the case, "It is better for all the world... three generations of imbeciles is enough."

Eventually, the term came to be regarded as offensive and became obsolete in medical classification. Instead, the word 'retarded' was used, coming from the Latin 'retardare', meaning 'to make slow, delay, keep back, or hinder'. The first record of its use for someone considered mentally deficient was in 1895, and it slowly started being employed in place of 'idiot'.

However, this term eventually took on a new nuance, and started to be perceived as derogatory, used as an insult instead of a medical diagnosis. It then seems that any word that is associated with lower intelligence will eventually become insulting, as even those considered more politically correct such as the terms 'mentally handi-

capped' and 'disabled' also imply inequality, a deviation from the norm.

Yet despite the word dropping out of medical usage, it is still employed daily by all sorts of people. Typically, it is not necessarily used in reference to mental illness, but used in situations where the speaker or writer thinks that someone has spoken or acted thoughtlessly, recklessly, rudely or irresponsibly. It can also be used in reference to a person who is uninformed about a certain topic which is where the 'Idiot's Guides' come in to play, or self-referentially when a person believes they are an idiot for not realising or knowing about something. However, whilst the medical meanings for 'idiot' are more downplayed these days and it no longer solely denotes intellectually disabled individuals, the fact that it is still used with the intent of questioning intellect perpetuates the denigration of mental illness and the lack of intelligence, despite the user not actually intending to.



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# The Postman and the Policeman

by Cindy George

Our estate's like a big grey box, with smaller grey boxes to live in. Jason's setting off out; it's bleak o'clock in the morning, and even the dribbles of dawn light look grubby and used, like something you bought from the pound shop last month.

By the flickering newsagent's, there's a copper. Shivers trained out of him, but cold and brittle. He looks hard at Jason, and Jason looks all the way back.

And the copper says: 'what are you doing out at this time, sir?

'And why are you dressed as a postman?

'And what's in that bag?'

Jason makes a face like he's showing a kid what "incredulous" means. He opens his bag full of birthday cards, brochures and bills, odd envelopes biroed by blokes or glittered by girls.

'I can't deliver this lot dressed as an Avon lady, can I?'

'Oh' says Policeman, 'well. You never know round here.'

'You never do, no', agrees Jason, and gets on with his day.

Later on, the policeman's filling in forms, and wondering what got into him to make him say something so thick.

The idiot - a type of gremlin - has long gone off to bother someone else.



## Self-Discovery

by Thomas McColl

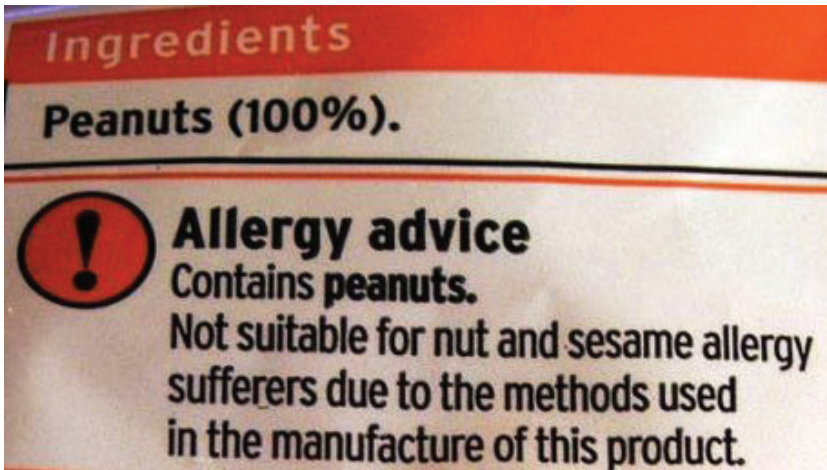
Geoff, on his lunch-break, falls asleep at the rest room table then wakes up to find his head buried in page three of his copy of the Sun.

Seeing, from the clock, he's overslept, Geoff rushes back to his desk, and it isn't until an hour has passed, when he goes to the loo, that he notices the newsprint all over his face, the headline 'Phwoar!' across his forehead, and a large pair of breasts framing his eyes so that, for the first time, a pair of nipples that he's gawping at are gawping back at him.

He tries desperately to wash it all off, but can't. Horrified, what shocks him most is that no-one there in the office has noticed anything different.

# Till She Slapped My Face

by Ian Fitzgerald



She was twenty-four  
and I was thirty-eight.  
I knew, but I didn't know  
till she slapped my face.  
'Another date won't  
change the gap between us.'  
She was born too late.  
'In another life, perhaps.'  
If I like her face.

## Idiots

by Dwane Reads

It's all about balance  
Before leaping out, mid air  
Over the substation high wall  
Running across train tracks  
That was close, but we always beat the train  
Don't we?  
Dropping stones from the bridge  
Trying to connect with moving traffic below  
"We just missed the man on the motorcycle,  
Did you see him swerve?"  
Horseshite  
Wiped on windows... with an old rag  
Up that terraced street  
Those clothes worn that night... stunk  
Even after a second wash  
Brass nails removed from jars  
Placed in small piles under car tyres... indiscriminately  
The judgement of the kangaroo court  
Was to be kicked or beaten  
One kid had a rope  
But didn't know anything about knots





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# Who is the Greater Fool?

by Jodie Carpenter

Remember the days back in high school when we were forced to analyse Hamlet's speech debating 'To be or not to be', or listen to lovelorn Juliet asking 'wherefore art thou Romeo?' over and over? For some of us, that might have been our only experience of Shakespeare, no longer wanting to sit sifting through pages of 'thee's and 'thou's, despite his reputation as one of the greatest English writers of all time.

But others, myself included, may have been inspired by the taste of Shakespeare high school offered, and continued reading and studying his plethora of plays and sonnets. And come on, you'd be an idiot not to feel some sort of awe at his way with words or the power of the performances on stage. So, with this issue being about 'Idiots', I wanted to use this as a chance to look at some of the greatest idiots of all time: Shakespeare's fools.

But first, a bit of background. The use of the word

'fool' may be misleading for modern day audiences, as its connotations are of acting frivolously or unthinkingly and can be used synonymously with 'idiot'. Or else we might summon up images of jesters with eccentric outfits and jingling bells. However, Shakespeare's fools are not like this.

There had been a tradition of fools being used for entertainment in drama, from Roman times through to the Medieval period. Fools were also used in aristocratic courts as court jesters, providing varied entertainment through songs, storytelling, and physical comedy. Henry VIII had a 'natural fool' at court with him – someone who today we would identify as having learning disabilities – called Will Somers, whom the King kept in his service until his death. It is said that only Will could make Henry smile when he was lying in bed in agony as his death approached. Shakespeare borrowed from this image of the court jester and reworked it, using the character as

a tool for social commentary, as well as for entertainment value. So his fools were very much like today's stand-up comedians, exposing and delivering home truths about particular groups of people (figures of authority in particular), and like modern day comedians, they could get away with saying such things.

Shakespeare used different types of fool in his plays. There were the professional fools employed by nobility, who were often wiser than their employers, and the natural fools, lacking in common sense and providing slapstick humour. The fools were most popular with the "groundlings" at performances (the poorer theatre-goers who stood by the stage rather than had seats). So now let's take a look at some of Shakespeare's most memorable fools, to see why they are so enduring.

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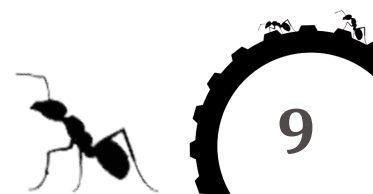


Mr. Will Somers, appearing in an engraving from an 1871 book

## Dogberry ('Much Ado about Nothing').

Whilst he might not be Shakespeare's most famous fool, I'm starting with Dogberry for personal reasons, as he is my favourite fool. A completely incompetent policeman, who mangles the English language extensively with his malapropisms [*using a word in a sentence incorrectly that sounds like the correct one, e.g. saying 'flamingo' when you mean 'flamenco' - Ed.*], he is sincere and takes his job seriously, but unfortunately, nothing he does can be taken seriously: 'But, masters, remember, that I am an ass; though it be not written down, yet forget not that I am an ass.' He also has the habit of using exactly the wrong word to convey what he means. Yet despite all of this, he inadvertently uncovers Don John's villainous plot to shame Hero and split her and Claudio up, and ends up saving the day and ultimately becoming the play's hero.

*Notable quotation: 'Marry, sir, they have committed false report; moreover, they have spoken untruths; secondarily, they are slanders; sixth and lastly, they have belied a lady; thirdly, they have verified unjust things; and, to conclude, they are lying knaves.'*



### Bottom ('A Midsummer Night's Dream')

Nick Bottom is also a comedic fool, with much of the humour coming from that fact that he is unaware of his own ridiculousness. He has an extraordinary belief in his own abilities (despite being a terrible actor) and like Dogberry, makes many errors in the self-aggrandising speeches he makes. He is most famous for getting his head transformed into that of a donkey (without him realising) by the mischievous fairy Puck, and subsequently having the fairy queen Titania falling in love with him under the influence of a love potion. However, even here, he senses nothing out of the ordinary, believing the devotion of the beautiful Titania is what he deserves.

*Notable quotation: 'The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was.'*

### Touchstone ('As You Like It')

Touchstone is also a professional fool, this time in Duke Frederick's court, but has more in common with Bottom and Dogberry than Feste. Next to his witty mistress Rosalind, his quips lack grace and seem vulgar, despite him trying his best to show off his own intelligence.

*Notable quotation: 'The fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool.'*

### Feste ('Twelfth Night')

Feste is the complete opposite of the previous two fools. Extremely eloquent and a self-confessed 'corrupter of words' with a repertoire of songs, he appears to be the wisest character in the play, offering good advice that is often shrouded under a layer of foolishness. Despite being a professional fool employed by Countess Olivia's household, he appears to have a large degree of freedom for a servant, coming and leaving as he pleases. As a result, Feste has an almost omniscient presence in the play, and seems to know more about Viola/Cesario's disguise than he lets on.

*Notable quotation: 'There is no darkness but ignorance.'*

Of course, these aren't the only fools, but this selection provides a taste of what Shakespeare's fools are all about, and how intriguing they are as characters. The character of the fool was extremely useful for Shakespeare, as he used it to voice opinions that could not be expressed by everyone, or to explore serious matters in a comic manner, forcing the audience to think about them in a certain way. Furthermore, his fools are witty and likeable and provide a great deal of comedy for readers and audience members alike, and tend to be the characters we remember the most. So, the great paradox is that Shakespeare's fools are not so foolish after all.

# A Martian Sends an Intelligence Report Home

by Neil Laurenson

'...We identified five basic life-forms during our visit to Earth: Monera, Protista, Fungi, Plantae, and Animalia. Humans fall into the last category, which they share with, amongst others, insects...

'...Humans use both a physical and 'political' map (therefore, it is no wonder that they are continuously losing their way). The latter reflects a series of artificial divisions borne out of numerous conflicts, mostly over natural resources. Whilst all humans are essentially the same - they each contain blood and dreams - they have consistently killed themselves in large numbers. Their capacity for causing and tolerating pain is impressive. In a region called 'Iraq', we discovered new humans ('babies') whose appearance had been so distorted by weaponry developed in other regions that we were initially uncertain that they belonged to the species. Similarly, it is doubtful that the term 'humans' is an appropriate description for those who sanctioned this phenomenon, despite their outward appearance...

'...Because of the aforementioned 'political' element, there has been the perceived need to establish an organisation called the 'United Nations' (Earth remains extremely un-united, if you will pardon the pUN). The United Nations recently issued a report that stated that it was highly likely that humans are responsible for directly influencing Earth's climate. Some humans have congratulated themselves on the level of research that led to this conclusion. Indeed, it is curious to note the endeavour required to understand that constantly pumping carbon into the atmosphere will have detrimental effects. It is also worth noting that this obvious process has failed to interest a large proportion of the species...

'...Hydrocarbons continue to be extracted by all possible means, thus hastening humans' extinction. It is because of their overwhelming indifference, and their nauseating tendency to justify such lunacy in the name of 'growth' and 'progress', that we feel compelled to conclude that humans are in fact 'idiots'...

## Burglars Target Open Doors and Local Idiocy

by Neil Laurenson

'Police are urging people to tighten up their home security after a spate of local burglaries. A large amount of jewellery was taken from three homes on Letsby Avenue on Tuesday night/Wednesday morning. Detective constable Barry Fridge has urged people to switch on burglar alarms and lock doors and windows, even when the home is occupied. One of the victims, 79-year-old June May, said: 'I'd never heard of a "distraction burglary" before, until one day a chap called at my house saying he needed to warn me about "distraction burglaries". The next thing I knew, all my gold was gone...'

# Hearts and Minds 2

by Esmond Tunwell

A person's Heart and Mind are never quite in harmony with one another.  
Although they love each other deeply, they are forever arguing  
And falling out of each other's favour.  
Mind is usually the one who has to rein Heart back in –  
In this respect, Mind is usually the superior, being more balanced and well-judged,  
While Heart defies Mind and runs off on his capricious impulses  
Without warning or judgement. The problem is  
That once Heart has been set free to divulge in his fancies,  
He is too sensational and idiotic for Mind to stop.  
For Mind to regain control,  
He has to drag Heart kicking and screaming away from what he wants -  
Only then will Heart realise what he has done.

Sometime in October, I came into town to spend a night blending with crowds  
And flashing in amongst lights and iridescent music.  
The autumn remained swaying and darkly colourful outside the door,  
Like a good friend willing to wait on the street for you while  
You run an unenviable errand.

While the lights teased and the conversation binded, the events  
Around my person were an inconvenient distraction.  
Mind was never really in the room.  
Instead, lured by the sad, fatigued murmurings of Heart,  
It was forever indulging in meandering thoughts,  
Constantly being dragged unhappily back into the room by conversation  
And then being released back into its daydreaming,  
Rampantly re-opening old doors and shrieking wildly down the vistas of memory  
That appear like screens along the corridors of the past.  
Every time a door was opened it was later re-visited,  
And every time it was re-visited the fantasy that developed from it grew  
Another grotesque limb,  
Until it became a whole-bodied demon that threatened to break through the door  
And become words and actions in my mind.

Mind told me that I should stop dreaming,  
But as the drinks fell faster and Mind grew uninhibited,  
He could not resist the lurid temptations that Heart beat insistently through his veins,  
Wheezing his demands like an injured soldier crying for water.

Eventually the spin of snatched conversation and jagged thoughts  
Succumbed to a pounding tantrum from Heart.  
Waving any pitiless excuse in the air,  
I turned heel and left the room,  
Climbing a set of pallid, distant stairs out onto the rooftop overlooking the city.

From here the colourful billow of autumnal trees was visible,  
Swinging steadfastly over the dry streets inhabited by distant silhouettes.  
October came and rested a reassuring hand on my shoulder.  
A single shade of black was my cover as I watched the movement of night-time around me,



Though my eyes turned inward  
And my Mind exited the space.

Again, I saw fragments of you;  
Sharp, uncomfortable images that had become tinged with an inexplicable golden light,  
As if to state ex officio that these happenings are now in the possession of The Past,  
Where they will now seem far more beautiful than they were  
And infinitely more desirable than they should be.  
I saw you in your school uniform, walking down a curving country lane  
And laughing in the sunshine,  
And for a moment I thought I was holding your hand  
But I never was.  
I saw you gazing uncertainly out the window of a train carriage,  
Feeling the drag of your Heart plunge into the poison that sits below it.  
My own Heart began to cough and splutter feverishly,  
And Mind took a pause in his daydreaming to see what the matter was.

‘Heart,’ said Mind, ‘who has done this to you?’

With a retch, Heart,  
Breathing heavily,  
Peered up through tear-ridden eyes at Mind.  
‘That girl,’ he wheezed, and fell back to the floor,  
Barely healthy enough to keep the blood pumping around my body.  
Mind ran sorry eyes over the bedraggled Heart.

‘You are sore and bloody, Heart, but not broken.’

Mind whispered reassurances  
About how tearing Heart away from his desire was painful

But right.  
But still, knows Mind,  
There will be a soft spot in Heart that will react when it sees you,  
In body or in dream,  
And Heart will continue to drop with sadness whenever this happens.

And I realise now  
That I used only to be able to see you through a glass screen;  
I could see you but not touch you,  
And Heart went crazy at his inability to reach you.  
But now the screen is gone,  
And Heart has hurt himself trying to get to you.

Is this what time has done?  
Shattered the window through which I used to see you?  
When I reach out to touch you now the broken glass cuts and scars my arms;  
Every time I reach out for you  
My arms tear and bleed a bit more from the broken glass that lines the frame,  
And Mind stoops to console Heart at every attempt.  
I wonder how much pain it would be worth  
Just to step through and reach the other side.

‘Cruel, cruel time!’ laments Heart.  
‘How cruel to finally offer a way through to what I have cried for for so long,  
Only to scar the path with sharp glass  
And to ruin the trophy at the end with heartbreak!  
I have sat and broiled so patiently,  
And wailed and romped so madly  
That I cannot contain myself but with excitement for  
What I should be receiving. But to finally touch her,  
And to find that her Heart is broken,  
Is not what I need. I need a partner,  
And her Heart is a state of tears and insecurities.  
I have so much love to give to someone,  
But I cannot give it to her when her Heart is like this.  
For God’s sake, time, I need a Heart I can talk to –  
I need a partner!’

Mind listens to this from my head  
And sighs every time he hears it.  
Every night, he writes this letter to Heart:

‘I cannot be sure of anything, but I can tell you this.  
I want to make you happy, and I want to bring you back to health.  
Whether I can do it with this girl who has done this to you, I do not know.  
What we can be sure of, Heart, my oldest, most unreliable friend,  
Is that we cannot rely on anyone else to do it for us.  
We are idiots,  
We have got ourselves into this mess together,  
You wanted to do it,  
And I decided to allow it,  
And now we must fix it.’

After all, Mind thought to himself  
As he continued to fight out the endless battle of  
Hearts and Minds:

I alone am the master of my fate,  
And I alone am the captain of my soul,  
And if so there’s no cause to wait:  
I will be fixed, and re-emerge whole.

# Disappearing Act

by Bright Redgrave

My mind is like a sieve without the bits to hold the holes together.  
Thoughts don't so much seep through but gush into the abyss of nothingness  
Leaving confusion  
In a sea of blank possibilities  
Like a whiteboard cleared  
Not even the faintest hint of the previous wording  
Or instructions to the self or others.

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## Them

by Paul Francis

### Here Comes... Paul

Paul Francis lives in Shropshire, and performs his poems at various venues across the West Midlands. In January Liberty Books will publish *Unlucky 13*: poems for a tough year. Details of other collections are on his website, at [www.paulfranciswrites.co.uk](http://www.paulfranciswrites.co.uk)

You're rational. You'll hear our arguments  
and question the statistics we provide;  
bankers and taxes, economic stuff  
and quite right too. Democracy. Your call.  
But them? They'll never see things as a whole.  
They need the tasty titbits, loud and clear.  
Tell them the simple stories that make sense,  
like these: *...The other party spent it all...  
...foreigners sponging off the NHS...  
...He said he was disabled, but he lied.*  
It's not what's true. It's what they need to hear.  
They want aggressive leaders, talking tough,  
doing the things which keep them bitter. Bless.  
We feed their habit, so we keep control.

# Late

by Jodie Carpenter

'THIS IS AN AN-NOUCE-MENT FOR... PLAT-FORM... ONE. WE ARE SOR-RY TO AN-NOUCE THAT THE SEV-EN-TEEN... TWENTY... NINE SER-VICE... HAS BEEN CAN-CANCELLED DUE TO... A PER-SON... BEING HIT BY A... TRAIN.'

'Idiots. Bloody idiots', he grumbled out loud against the mechanical, humourless robotic announcement. His toes and cheeks were numb, his collar and waistband were digging into him, and all he wanted to do was go home and put his feet up with a cuppa.

'What's that?' Mike asked, not looking up from the newspaper he hadn't had time to finish reading that morning.

'The trains, they're cancelled yet again. Another person's done themselves in.'

Mike tutted. 'Bloody selfish, that's what it is. I've got my dinner to get home to.'

'How stupid must you have to be to do something like that? I mean, don't they care about their families? It's selfish.'

'Tell me about it, look at all the people they've stopped from getting home.' Mike indicated to the growing crowd of people with his head.

'It seems like every other day someone's doing it. What's the world coming to, eh?'

They lapsed into silence. The rails below remained empty save for a few dead leaves cartwheeling up them, carried along by the December breeze. More and more people crammed onto the platform, looking at their watches and complaining. He wondered how the family would feel tonight when they heard. He stamped his aching feet, willing them to warm up at least a bit.

'What time's the next one?' Mike said with a yawn.

He checked the board, looking over the sea of heads. 'Twenty-five minutes. If you can believe anything they say.'

'Christ. I'm going to freeze to death.'

'THIS IS AN AN-NOUCE-MENT FOR... PLAT-FORM... ONE. WE ARE SOR-RY TO AN-NOUCE...'

'Yes, yes, shut up, we've heard it already,' Mike said folding his paper under his arm and thrusting his hands into his pockets.

He thought maybe he should phone Lizzie and let her know he'd be back late. Make her feel

sorry for him, standing out here in the dark and cold. But just as he started to fumble around in his pocket for his phone, Mike distracted him with a detailed description of the new girl who had just started in his office.

Eventually, just as he was feeling himself turning blue with the cold, the familiar scraping noise filled the air, and lights blared out from the darkness. Murmurs of relief rippled through the crowd and he turned around and beamed at Mike.

As the train ground to a halt in front of them, a new problem became apparent: that of cramming hundreds of people into a train that was already packed. He knew that he had to get on the train at all costs.

As the doors parted, the platform became a free-for-all. People pushed and shoved, poked and pinched their way to the doors. He lost Mike as he strode forward with his elbows out, disregarding any children or elderly people that he cut a swathe through. He reached the doors just as they started beeping, warning that they were about to shut, and quickly jumped up into the train, pushing the backs of people who were already occupying the place he wanted to stand in. The doors slid shut, the driver shouting down that there was no more room and



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that there would be another train on its way soon. He felt a flood of satisfaction at the fact that he had managed to squeeze onto the train when so many had been left behind. Life was good.

He sighed heavily into the neck of the man in front, amused that he couldn't turn around to glare at him. Sweat was already beginning to bead down his back, with the breath and perspiration of a hundred bodies warming the carriage, but at least he was on the train, on his way home. He felt his phone vibrating against both his leg and the hip of the woman next to him, but try as he might, he couldn't slide his hand down to answer it. It wouldn't be urgent anyway, he thought. Just Lizzie wondering where he was.

He spent the remainder of the journey concentrating on not falling out of the train whenever the doors opened and avoiding putting his hands on places other people would find offensive.

'I'm home', he called as he came through the front door. 'Getting back was an absolute nightmare, I tell you. You wouldn't believe how long I had to wait.'

He stopped when he noticed Lizzie sitting on the stairs, her face white. Her arms rested on her knees, hands dangling limply. Her mobile sat a few stairs down from her, as if it had been dropped.

'Lizzie? What's wrong?' He rushed towards her, grabbing the tops of her arms. 'Has something happened?'

She spoke quietly, her lips barely moving. Her voice came out distorted and he had to strain to understand her. 'I called you. Several times.'

'I know, I'm sorry. I tried to answer it but the train was so packed, I couldn't move to get it. I.'

'She's gone, Martin.' She looked down, staring at the step beneath her.

He started to reply but stopped short. 'Wait. What? Who are you talking about, Lizzie? Annie? Are you on about Annie? Where's she gone?'

He felt her shoulders shaking beneath his hands and was alarmed to hear the strange noises his wife started to make. They sounded like they had been ripped from a wild animal.

'Liz! Lizzie, you're scaring me, what is it? Please, tell me,' he knelt down, and looked into her face. 'What's wrong?'

'She did it this afternoon, they said.'

'Who said?'

'The police. They came round. She left her bag at the side, with her purse and everything in. That's how they knew.' Hot tears cascaded silently down her cheeks.

'How they knew what?' He wanted to shake her.

'Who she was.'

'Lizzie. What did she do?' Fear clenched his stomach hard, his legs unsteady. He knew what was coming next.

'Train. The one she usually gets back from college. Your line actually.'

'Train', he repeated softly. His head felt light, and he flung his arm out to clutch the banister to stop himself from crashing down.

'But, she's only 17,' he said helplessly, as if it had all been a huge misunderstanding.

'That's what I told them,' she said before beginning to sob violently.

17, she's only 17, the thought floated around his mind irrationally. 17 year olds don't do that. They aren't allowed to do that. He backed away from his weeping wife, eyes no longer seeing her. He stopped when his back hit the front door, and he slid down it slowly, dazed. A grown man in a suit sprawled across the hall floor, what had happened to his life?

Had he kissed her goodbye that morning? He couldn't remember. It wasn't something he normally thought about. He knew she'd been in the kitchen eating her breakfast, the scent of burnt bread lingering in all the downstairs rooms. His mind had been elsewhere though. He'd been rushing about grumbling to himself, complaining about the crumbs she'd left in the butter. Worrying about the trains.

He looked up to where Lizzie still sat doubled over on the stairs. A memory surfaced. He thought it was unimportant at that time. A week ago, maybe longer, he had been on his way downstairs and had found Annie in that spot, hunched up, the heels of her hands pushed into her eyes. He'd sat down next to her for a few moments, asked her what was the matter. She had mumbled something about not being able to cope. He had chuckled at that, thinking she was worried about her college work, boys, normal teenage stuff. He felt the blood draining from his face as he recalled the words he had uttered: 'Cheer up, what have you got to worry about? You're only 17'.

His vision blurred and his breath snagged in his throat. 'I'm such an idiot,' he said. But it was too late.

# Thought police, community support officers, the slow march to the grave, firework displays and you

by Edward Corless

I was at a fireworks display on near enough bonfire night, and initially it was going well. Bombs boomed, a collective choir *ahhed* and loudspeakers played lilting tunes from Little Mix and Adele alongside the explosive pyrotechnics.

But as I looked around at the rosy-cheeked families clutching hot donuts and sparklers, the warm mix of social classes and creeds, the celebrations of old and new traditions, and the magic of gunpowder and fire, I became aware that everyone was an idiot. It was something quite strange, to encounter that kind of unwanted realisation on a

cold and windy night in a school field, to realise that me, my mum and dad, my closest friends, a large, anonymous crowd of people and the whole human race were all as thick as Pritt Stick glue.

But why was I suddenly made aware? When did everyone become this way? An underclass of letter lickers, a generation of old newspaper collectors, representatives all of the philosophy behind "this statement is false", the poet laureates of limericks, the huddled massives, the underground solar panellists, the ladies and gentlemen of the brewery, the inventors of the laser pen. Here, in a field in England,

was a whole somehow less than the sum of its parts.

My realisation was posited thus - whenever I had asked myself questions I could not answer, whenever I had extended my arms and grabbed mediocrity with both hands, whenever I had worried about why the sun was round but stars were diamond-shaped, I was being stupid all along. And not just me, but others!

Those in the office who wonder "why can't they invent ice cream that doesn't melt?" "Why am I so overweight/underweight/short/lovelorn?" "Why can't marketing be a part of sales?" They are *being* the change they want to see in the world, but the change they want to see is less building work but better roads, more good old-fashioned pubs but less drunks, more money for everyone but less concern for possessions.

I suddenly knew that idiocy was limitless, all-consuming and a cradle to grave problem.

Once, when I was very small, I thought about how stupid I was compared to adults. I thought about how my intelligence must improve with age, that there would be a time when I stopped caring about football scores and miniscule slights in the playground. But it did not happen, and it never will for me or anyone else. The taunts of the playground become taunts at your workplace or on the street, the football scores become football scores.



In that field in November, I then thought about crowds, and decided that humans together were not the problem, or at least were not more of a problem than humans alone. It was not the fact that a crowd is infinitely more stupid than a single person, or questions of mob rule and elitism. It was not the fact that it was a group of people going ooh sometimes and *ahh* sometimes when pretty flowers bloomed in the sky. It was just the knowing of the fact that people are stupid, people have always been stupid and people will always be stupid, and I, as a stupid person, had only just realised it.

Of course, I then realised my crisis in the school field was, actually, really idiotic. It could have happened anywhere, alone or in a crowd. It was good that it was happening now, not at another stage of my life. If it had happened earlier in my youth I might well have become a sceptic, too late in life and I might have become a film studies teacher or a contestant on TV panel shows.

It was good that my revelation was happening now, so I could properly comprehend my own and other people's stupidity.

I tried to console myself. Maybe, I thought, there might be one or two among the crowd who were rocket scientists or future piano geniuses. But that thought made me feel even worse, that maybe in the crowd there was someone who felt even more surrounded by idiots. I could only thank my stars that my own life was not plagued by constantly being asked what I meant by the word "inimitable" or why I didn't wear a flat cap. I was better off being in the sty with the other piggies. We were all without hope.

And yet, I thought, what is this quintessence of dust? It isn't wallowing in faeces, it isn't fighting in a huge brawl, it isn't communicating by wailing. Somehow, despite being idiots, we were behaving okay with each other. Because we were all the same level of terrible we were without flaw. So I felt

for my fellow man, I reached out, I loved. I decided that idiocy was transcendental, a plain of being on which man was always destined to sit. Distrust of traffic lights, asking to "borrow a teabag", using the phrase "me personally" - these were all part of the human experience as it was meant to be. My mother had raised me to be like the other people - to be an idiot. If she'd raised me to be better than other people, always trying desperately to be more wise or verbose than others, I would have only made a fool out of myself at some stage, and an idiot is better than a fool. So I mentally begged of my brethren, as I now beg of you, to spend more to save more, to ask for more pepper on your already peppered meal, to read 2 pages of three different books every day, and to always worry why your brilliance goes unnoticed. This is how it was meant to be.



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Somewhere there is a village that is missing its idiot

# I'm with Stupid

by Andrew Blair

Today is Emancipation Day.

I, as one of the Threshold, have again been given the task of releasing the floodgates. It is both an honour and a reminder.

Between myself and the Stupid sits thirty feet of concrete, its outside coated in silica fibre panelling; the sort of thing used as heat-shielding for spaceships re-entering atmosphere. Inside this, the lowly and witless crowd await their fate.

They awake one day – after weeks of detainment - inside a huge bell-shaped chamber, its insides covered by burnt rubber. Colossal metal gates dominate one side, with plates riveted across each other seemingly in desperation. The noise from behind that gate is sheer and terrible, like industry itself is alive and clawing at the metal. Above you is the only other entrance, a hole in the distance, at the point of the bell.

“How did I get here?” is their inevitable question, once the sedative has worn off, but the grogginess is good. When you start to think and notice the nuances – the nail marks, the smells, the remaining ashes swept into the cracks – you realise the situation is far from salvageable.

That's what it's like, apparently.

That's what the survivors said, before the pilot light signalled their definite end, in the sheds fourteen miles from here. I am trying not to imagine what it feels like to be down there.

What I see on my screens is a colossal bowl built into the earth - a sheer black-panelled bottle neck - occupied by a milling throng of an underclass. Some stand, gazing upwards towards the sunlight at the chamber's peak. Some within this group are sizing up their chances, but most are too despondent for hope. This majority are sat, near foetal, waiting for the ceremony. For many of them it will mark the completion of their education. Their shorts and t-shirts are red, partly because of this connection to a graduation ceremony.

They do not get full robes. That would be a waste of material.

I do have robes, of a sort; rudimentary apparatus for my protection: Leather gauntlets and skirt, reinforced visor, lumbering boots, tubes full of coolant in my underclothes, cyanide, knives, and a baton. My livery was going to be black, to match professorial robes, but that would have made it conduct too efficiently. Instead it is grey, a slightly lighter shade

than the surrounding concrete.

My safety from the lava is ensured.

It is the people in the chamber I am worried about.

They are stupid, not slow. Any animal can lash out at its captor. There are protocols in place after the Longview incident, I know, but it is always possible to overlook something.

The ceremony is due to begin in five minutes, possibly for the last time. Its symbolic value no longer trumps the “wasting resources” counter-argument. The process can be streamlined, the Threshold dismissed. The weight of history, though, means the ceremonies had gathered inertia. It has taken much time and effort to bring things to a halt. People have stopped simply being glad to be alive.

Sixty years ago the fires came from North America. Rock, dust and ash blew into the air and fell across the country like a dying giant. The world changed shape as slabs of rock the size of cities were shattered and twisted, stirring from their lethargy. Tectonic plates shifted, and land masses adjusted accordingly.

The devastation was immense. Earth was violently rearranged, as if the Elder beings had undergone a bad break up. The death toll numbered in the billions; the planet had lost a limb, approaching a Biblical mass. People were calling it the End of Days.

It was, in fact, our salvation.

The dust cleared. The survivors, having dragged themselves through the darkness, emerged blinking onto a scene of seemingly irreversible carnage.

The image of one woman experimentally taking off her gas mask travelled slowly around the world, becoming a symbol of hope. The two main strengths we had, communication and our indomitable nature, would help us overcome all obstacles. A skeletal infrastructure remained, and through it we would find out what further resources we had. Upon the restoration of education and administration facilities, two things became clear:

Firstly, despite nature's awesome attempts to the contrary, we were going to survive as a species, and secondly; seismic, potentially genocidal acts of nature got rid of the stupid people really quite effectively.

The phenomenon was noted worldwide, and further tests were arranged to establish the intellect



of the remaining populace. Anthropologists were shocked to discover that the average IQ of our species had almost doubled since the disaster. It was assumed that it wasn't just luck that was on the side of the survivors.

The ensuing golden age provided further evidence of this, but humanity was not going to rest on its laurels. It could do better. It could always have done better, and now it was free to do so.

But there was still an undercurrent of stupidity.

Forty-four years ago it was decided: Humanity must level up. Anyone under the IQ of 120 on their 21st birthday would be immediately imprisoned, there to wait execution in a ceremony commemorating Nature's gift to mankind.

The stupid were to be purged with fire, as they had been before.

The circle of life.

And so: here we are.

There are cameras all around the rim of the chimney, pointing down into the pit. No-one officially watches slaughter like this, but it needs to be recorded for security, for posterity. Also, if you know what you're doing, you can quite easily stream the footage from one of the less secure channels.

Everybody knows what they're doing.

We're near what used to be Mount St. Helens. This is a very sacred site. I know of another five of these across the area, hidden in the recesses left behind. There are probably more. The Test Centres find more stupid people every day. They're everywhere, and the posters are right: it's always the ones you least suspect.

Certainly that's what I've found.

In my bunker, huge smooth slabs of concrete on all sides, an almost perfect rectangle broken by a simple bank of monitors showing camera feeds, is a lever. It's a piece of angled metal, several inches thick, leather bandages wrapped around the top, grease coating its base. Behind me the heavy iron door is locked by a wheel mounted in its surface. I am here because I can use this equipment, both mentally and physically.

I am part of the Threshold.

I might not be the brightest – my IQ is a little under 120 – but I have my strength. They need me for this sort of task, so I continue to avoid the culls that smarter people than me have been selected for. The majority of the law enforcement squads are now comprised of Threshold, because they're ideal for such a task.

None of this is official, but it is strongly suspected.

I don't feel guilty, it needs to be done.

When I am old I will be recycled, having outlived



my utility. I'm definitely privileged, though. When I go, I expect it will be a bullet in the head, and then feeding a gas-fire chamber in the sheds. Those are really efficient. You can walk into one of those confident that it will be near-instant. There are other generators stored throughout these complexes, and I will ultimately feed one of them. Another circle of life.

I have explained this to Terrance. I thought he'd understand because he's smarter than me (he has an IQ of 119).

An alarm tells me it is time to begin the ceremony. I place my feet either side and haul on the lever. I can feel grinding vibrations through the floor, setting my teeth on edge, as cogs the height of three men rotate increment by increment, and the lever feels like it's gaining weight as the sluices are raised.

Far away, I can hear distant and muffled speakers playing the international anthem, mixed in with shouts and screams. The prospect, the tension of knowing what's coming, it isn't as bad as the knowledge that it has arrived. I can't see it from here, but I can hear the change in pitch and volume.

The speed of the magma means that the cries go on a while, as bodies are pressed against the furthest reaches of the dome from the gateway. There's too much of a crowd for this to work, and the especially luckless are forced back into the middle of the chamber.

I spin the wheel of my door, baton ready in my other hand, and then clamber up to the viewing gantry. It is another fifty feet of spiral stairs, collapsible metal steps echoing as I go.

Cameras around me move near-silently in the gantry, taking everything in. I hope no-one survives. It's rare, but it's been known for Threshold to have to run the manual despatch program. The camera has pulse-tracking software, meaning that it's jerking all over the place at the moment, trying to keep up with everybody's increased heart rate.

I don't think I can see Terrance, amongst the faces. They must know I'm there, these people, they've all streamed these videos before, and know that there is an operative of some kind. Terrance must have told them my name. They scream and beg, though they must know there is no help I can give. If I closed the gates now, they would still have to deal with the lava inside the dome before armed Threshold came down to finish the job I'd started.

If anything, throwing the lever is me taking charge of their fate, and now it isn't a totally anonymous figure who kills them. That's good, I think. It's better than most people get.

The first scream of pain, and not fear, reaches me.

Magma doesn't have to touch you to burn. Clothes spark before flesh and hair, and the flailing fans the flames. What you know is wrong, here. No rolling on the ground to put the flames out, because all you're doing is lying down in the path of the advancing liquid rock.

It's spreading from the front-lines now, heading back the way. There are some hand holds in the tiled wall, worn or scratched in over the years, but it's not enough to avoid what's coming. Fire moves fast, and the heat will overwhelm any climbers, until they fall backwards into the throng. I have thought about the differences between being trampled and burned to death, and I can't say I'd prefer one or the other.

It is said that, from those who have officially watched the ceremonies, it is a mark of their intellectual inadequacy that the graduates attempt to escape. A truly rational person would contrive to end things sooner rather than later.

I see no rationality in the pit.

A melee has ensued. Fireballs and flames. Barbecued meat, lungs bursting, eyes boiling. I wonder how I will face death when it comes my turn? I know I am not intelligent, so perhaps I too must panic and gibber and try to avoid the inevitable, despite the generosity shown towards me?

A hand reaches out, almost in my direction, but fades away into the flames. There are few signs of life, but these are simmering down. I keep my eyes on the pit, just in case.

I do feel some sadness.

I may be stupid, but I'm not a monster.

# Intelligence

by David Marshall

I have an IQ of infinity,  
a 1st from Cambridge,  
and Oxford,  
and Harvard.  
I'm a professor at Stanford,  
and I invented Steve Jobs.

I wrote the book  
you're reading now.

Time, you'll find, runs backwards,  
and we live in two universes  
hurtling towards each other  
at breakneck speed.

I speak thousands of languages fluently,  
including Sanskrit and French,  
and the language we're speaking.  
I invented that too.

Some people dislike me,  
because I make them feel stupid.  
In my world, they don't exist,  
they're part of an abstract,  
a concept of a world  
that exists on the other side of now.



[wikicommons.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Weeping_Genius.jpg)

Hard to be a  
genius: the  
Weeping  
Genius, by  
Jean-Bap-  
tiste  
Defernex.  
Probably  
not quite  
what he  
meant.

# Curbside Whore (V2): Picture of the Night

by Michael Lee Johnson

Near Grant Park,  
2 a.m.  
Curbside whore,  
bench side sleeper,  
slipped up shirt,  
swing motions  
in wind exposes  
a wild beaver.  
Subway sandwich  
6" meat eater,  
pastrami and black  
beef left over, scraps–  
moon shine wine,  
full moon exposure,  
drenched in sweet  
Apple Jack wine.  
Is it Jesus or a stranger  
that poured the remaining  
half of bottle over your  
naked ass.

Street lights cover in  
star angel dust angle  
makes your clit a living shrine,  
passers bye, public view.  
A symbol of Catholic sin,  
hands gentle between her legs,  
no underwear on,  
so relieved  
from stress,  
panhandling, cheap \$15  
hand jobs.  
Curbside whore, Mary,  
sleep gentle, knuckle to knuckle–  
life is a bitch.



# The Origins of the Disaster

by David Simpson

If he had heard the weatherman say something about rain that morning James might have put on a raincoat and perhaps a pair of boots, but James hadn't listened to the weatherman that morning, so he didn't know if there had been mention of rain or not. Even better than wearing boots and a raincoat over his suit, would have been to carry his suit in a waterproof bag and to wear something that wouldn't have mattered getting wet in the rain. That would have been the best thing to do, instead of putting himself in a position where his suit was in danger of getting damaged or wet, he could have put it on just before going to court. Then he would have been able to give a good account of himself at his trial. A smart, well-maintained suit free of damp patches and minor tears: *that* was the foundation of a good defence.

James put the kettle on. He shouldn't have left the house so early. He should have known that his brother would have to take the kids to school and he should have planned to arrive after his brother had returned home. He should have called him to confirm that he'd returned from taking the kids to school

brother, James thought as he dropped a tea bag into the cup and poured the hot water on top of it. If he'd texted his brother and let him know the situation, there was every chance that Duncan would have mentioned the spare key that James wasn't supposed to know was hidden under the large plant pot in the back garden. There was every chance that if James had trusted his brother, Duncan would have given him permission to use the spare key and make a cup of tea.

He was basically an intruder, James thought, as he poured some milk into his tea. There was a reason that he wasn't supposed to have known about the spare key and that reason was Duncan didn't trust him enough to let him in the house on his own.

Wanting to sweeten his tea, James pulled some sugar from the cupboard and expertly parsed the sealed edges of the packet, creating a smooth and perfect opening through which he watched the sugar disappear, falling onto the floor through a hole that had been cut on the other side of the packet by someone who, though less adept at manipulating the plastic packaging, had nevertheless got there first.



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before he even set out. Then he wouldn't have felt the damp patches on his skin where the rain had already soaked through his suit. He wouldn't have noticed the mud spatter on his smart shoes and on his trouser legs. If he'd arrived at his brother's house a little later, he wouldn't have had to have gone through the stress of waiting outside, watching himself become less-and-less presentable, looking more-and-more like the sort of person a jury might consider to be a guilty man.

Alternatively he could have just texted his

This would not have happened, James thought, if Duncan had thought to keep some sugar ready for use, perhaps in one of those little porcelain sugar bowls.

This wasn't the only mess on the kitchen floor, though. James' eyes followed a track of muddy footprints from the back door, around the kitchen table, towards the kettle and then the fridge before heading over towards the sugar mountain.

The fact that the terracotta plant pot that concealed the spare key was only accessible by crossing

the lawn hadn't occurred to James as he climbed over the fence into the back garden. The rain that was slowly, but thoroughly, soaking his suit had caused him to panic and he hadn't considered the muddy condition of the lawn until it directly confronted him. Given his state of mind it was impressive that he had come up with the idea of removing his shoes and socks and rolling his trousers up above his knees before stepping out onto the lawn, thus avoiding any further damage to his suit.

James decided that the best thing to do would be to clean everything up and make it look like he had simply let himself in and sat by the backdoor, not touching anything, not even making himself a cup of tea, simply respecting his brother's house.

He would have to clean his feet first, James thought, taking a sip of tea. The bathroom was upstairs, but that would have involved traipsing mud over the carpet, so the best thing to do would be to use the little room near the front door with the toilet and the sink. It would have been a much better idea to let himself in with the spare key underneath the terracotta plant pot if it had not been raining.

Recognising that the water from the sink posed just as much a threat to his suit as the rain outside had, James carefully removed his jacket, tie and shirt and placed them over the chair in the corridor. He then took off his trousers, careful not to let the material touch the dirt that was caked all over his skin.

Given the dimensions of the room, James had no choice but to leave the door open so that he had space to hoist his legs up and put his feet in the sink, one at a time. He imagined his brother coming home and finding him like this. As embarrassing as that might have been, he thought it would be preferable to him entering through the back door and finding the mud and the sugar on the kitchen floor with no clue as to their source. The fence had been wet and slippery, but there had only been one moment where James might have fallen. As he had already reached the top, he allowed himself to turn the fall into a jump and landed with a clatter on the ground. It was only then that it had occurred to him that he should have trusted Duncan with a text explaining the situation, although he knew that such a thing wouldn't have resulted in an invitation to use the spare key because Duncan would have known such an invitation opened up his home to danger.

James wondered where Duncan kept the mops and cloths as he pulled his freshly cleaned left leg out of the sink and rested it on the floor between two large pockets of muddy water. The

wall, too, was now patterned with muddy splotches of varying sizes.

In a moment the damage that he had caused in the bathroom became of secondary importance, because as he twisted his torso to lift his right leg into the sink, James noticed that his buttocks were protruding from the rear of his underpants.

Running out into the corridor without bothering to finish the job of cleaning and drying himself, James located a mirror in which he was able to more closely inspect his rear. He discovered a tear that he imagined could only have been caused by the exertions of lifting his legs into the sink and quickly rushed to pull on his trousers. Even if he didn't manage to clean up the mess, even if he didn't manage to convince the jury of his innocence, he intended to retain his dignity. Unfortunately the state of his trousers represented just as much an impediment to his dignity as his underpants. Somehow they too had been ripped from the crotch all the way up to the waist. A tell-tale splinter of wood trapped in the material revealed that the damage must have been done when he jumped down from the fence, but he found no comfort in being able to explain the origins of the disaster.

James thought about sending Duncan a text asking to borrow a pair of underpants and some trousers, but the problem with sending such a message was that the request presumed too much prior knowledge and that it was impossible to explain succinctly the exact course events that meant such a message was required.

It wouldn't have been necessary to ask for a change of trousers, if he had set out late enough to give Duncan time to get back home after taking the kids to school. It wouldn't have been necessary unless some other accident happened to befall him in which he incurred similar damage to his clothing.

People borrowed trousers all the time, James thought, it was a normal, everyday occurrence. Of course borrowing underpants was not a normal everyday occurrence and, if Duncan was uncomfortable about allowing James into his home, he would undoubtedly be uncomfortable about allowing him to wear a pair of his underpants.

There would be no way of hiding the fact that he had borrowed a pair of trousers, just as it was becoming increasingly unlikely he would be able to eradicate the evidence for his actions in the house. He would be able to conceal the fact that he had taken the underpants, however. If anything, borrowing the underpants prior to gain-

ing permission would allow James to save himself and his brother some embarrassment, by virtue of the fact that he could act as though no such thing had happened.

James entered his brother's bedroom with the intention of getting changed into a new pair of underpants and a pair of trousers that vaguely matched his own jacket. Duncan was even going away for a weekend with his family shortly after the trial and it occurred to James that if he was found innocent and wasn't required to spend any time in prison he would be able to return to his brother's house while the family was away, climb over the fence, retrieve the spare key from under the terracotta plant pot, let himself in through the backdoor, sneak upstairs to the bedroom and return the underpants to the drawer where they belonged and then sneak out again without leaving any trace of his presence.

James was about to go back downstairs to clean up when it occurred to him that in the process of cleaning he might dirty his new suit and that it would have been better not to have changed clothes so quickly. On the floor by his feet he noticed a pair of underpants with a large tear in them. Even if he managed to conceal all the other evidence of his movements in the house, it was almost certain that the presence of a strange pair of underpants, damaged beyond usefulness, would alert his brother to the fact that something had gone on.

As he stooped to pick up his underpants James noticed a shoebox under the bed and an idea started to form in his head. He decided to hide the torn underpants in the shoe box and retrieve them when he returned the underpants he was currently wearing.

If the box gave him some false sense of hope, its contents took it away again. Although he had not expected to find shoes in the shoebox, it had never occurred to him that it would contain a small handgun.

He picked up the gun and inspected it as though it were some artifact from another time. A gun represented a quite specific and premeditated form of violence; it was not something that you simply swept into a shopping basket on a whim like a new bestseller or a second pack of biscuits, there was nothing accidental about it.

James tried to imagine what it would be like holding the gun, pointing it towards some intruder who had forced his way into the house but he found that he couldn't imagine such a thing. The gun fell from his hand as though it had realised his mind was incapable of formulating the necessary processes for its use and, as it landed

back in the shoebox some internal mechanism must have jolted, releasing a single bullet with a loud and dry explosion.

Even though the explosion had lasted only a second, the air seemed alive with the possibility of destruction. Once his ears had become accustomed again to the silence he remembered that there were more lasting, physical consequences to bullets than the mere sound they made. He looked down and saw that one side of the shoebox had been torn apart and then looked around to see where the bullet might have disappeared. The windows hadn't shattered and neither had any of the mirrors or picture frames. He wondered if perhaps it had become lodged in the wall somewhere, which would have been the best case scenario as he could have resolved the problem by filling the hole with putty.

Even as his mind continued to formulate possible solutions, he wondered if the best solution wasn't to leave the house as quickly as he could, put the spare key back in its place, throw a brick through one of the windows and make it look like a strange sort of robbery.

It was then that he looked behind him and noticed the small hole in his brother's underwear drawer. Further investigation showed that the bullet had ripped through his brother's underwear, causing severe damage before becoming lodged in the wall. James lifted up a pair of underpants and saw that the bullet's trajectory had taken it right through the middle of them.

When he closed the drawer, he happened to look down at the floor and saw small patterns of blood leading from the bed by the shoebox, across the floor to the underpants drawer and stopping at his own feet. The material of his suit jacket had been damaged just above the pocket and had taken on a darker hue where the blood from a small hole was leaking into it. It occurred to James that he had shot himself.

It was this realisation that sent him falling to the ground. He saw his torn underpants lying on the floor next to his head and he wondered what difference an umbrella might have made, if he had listened to the weatherman this morning, if the weatherman had mentioned rain. As he closed his eyes he consoled himself with the fact that at least now he wouldn't have to explain himself.



# Generation Idiot?

by Adam Steiner

Idiocy is a state of mind. It doesn't take much. Socrates stood accused of corrupting the youth and chose death by hemlock as his punishment, rather than denounce his own teachings. His seemingly dumbass death, worthy of an Darwin Award, perhaps inspired the future pre-Conservative ramblings of his Randian disciple, Plato – a good deed never goes unpunished.

The smartest people are often capable of the stupidest acts, see the mutually-assured-destruction chaos of Dr Strangelove to highlight the fickle

fools and noble idiots, who are often the shrewdest and most morally upstanding characters in the face of the massed ignorance and selfishness of their presumed betters.

A now defunct use of the word idiot, compared to the modern offence, derives from the medical term of cretin, often used as late as the early Sixties to refer to persons lacking in mental capacity and thus treated as second-rate citizens, what would now be referred to as a disability or perhaps mental ill health, was generally punished, where now many people in

society act to support and protect its most vulnerable citizens, though there is still some way to go in educating others about this ethical imperative.

It is an all too common complaint that the new generations are dumbing down because they don't know ancient Greek (which is more

than handy for a kid in a Birmingham high rise estate) or have studied Chaucer back to front. Computer games automatically make idiots of us because they open new spheres of human experience in the same way that other inventions such as the book or the motor car altered the way we felt and thought. New generations require new forms and mediums to express ideas different to previous generations, hopefully The Idiots Issue will induce sufficient changes of brain pattern behaviour in order for you, the discerning dumbass reader, to embrace your inner idiot and find new ways of thinking; employing the shield of stupidity against increasingly condescending ruling generations.



nature of humans obsessed with worldwide dominance in favour of survival and sharing. Over the barricades and once more unto the breach, there is little more idiotic than idiocy and death for its own sake, in the cold light of day, geniuses are shown to be severely lacking, showing that you can't have it all, as evinced by literary figures of wise



Charge of the Lancers, by Umberto Boccioni, 1916. An altogether more venerable kind of idiocy?



# The Morning After

by Lynda Clark

Shauna had a real head-splitter. She raised her head from the pillow. Opening her eyes was an effort, partially due to exhaustion, partially because her lids and lashes were crusted shut with last night's make-up. Forcing herself into a sitting position, she stifled a yawn. Hopefully a yawn. Possibly a puke.

The guy in bed next to her was face down, snoring softly. She couldn't remember his name, but he had a nice back, which was good. Better than waking up with a total munter. He had dark hair and a tan, probably fake. The weather had been crap for ages and he hadn't mentioned any foreign holidays. And he'd seemed the type who'd definitely have worked that into the conversation somewhere if he had.

She was in his house, not hers. The beige walls and trendy pop art prints were pretty much the same, but his dressing table had less crap on it, and his mirror was smaller.

Her stomach rolled and she tugged at the knots in her weave just for something to do with her hands. She thought idly that she didn't know where his bathroom was, so if she had to puke, the bin or the laundry basket were probably her best bet.

She reached for her phone. There were two texts from Michaela. The first one, sent at 3:03 said; OMFG Ive had the jokest time ily xxx The second, sent at 5:47 said:

Shit babes sum fukin wierd shit is goin down. Call me ok?

Shauna sighed. Michaela had a habit of hooking up with absolute dogs. She tried to text back, but the message failed to send. No bars. She rubbed her eyes and got out of bed. The guy (was it Trent? Clint? Brent?) stirred, grunted, but didn't wake.

She picked his shirt up from the end of the bed and put it on. It smelled of sweat and aftershave, but she couldn't face wriggling back into her corset dress. The underwiring cut into her armpits and it was difficult to zip up on her own. She slid a toe into one of her high heels, then thought better of it and picked them up instead, gagging as she bent forwards. She managed to fight the nausea off with some deep breaths. Picking her clutch up off the dressing table, she limped downstairs.

All his keys were in a basket on a side table in the hallway. It only took her a minute or so of stirring through them to find the one for the front door. It had a keychain on it with some weird little cartoon mushroom-head guy.

She stuffed her shoes under the side table and

stepped cautiously outside, her clutch gripped tight in the crook of her elbow. It was chilly out, and the light was odd. Like it didn't know what time of day it was. She realised neither did she. She looked at her phone again. Still no bars and the clock had stopped. Was that normal? Did clocks on phones do that?

Shrugging she fumbled through her clutch until she found her cigarettes. Took one, and then started hunting for her lighter, the cigarette clamped firmly between her lips. As she dug through the tampax and condoms and eyeliners and lip glosses and mascaras she slowly became aware of a banging sound. Someone was banging on a window.

Brent-or-Clint-or-Grant lived in a nice little cul-de-sac, designed to look more suburban than it actually was. His next door neighbour was at the window, staring at her, banging on his double glazing wildly.

She gave him the finger. Fucking perv.

Her fingers closed around her lighter, a neon pink plastic one from the market, and she lit her cigarette and took a much needed drag. The neighbour was still at the window, hammering away.

What was his problem? She started to wonder if he was having some kind of attack. He was trying to say something to her, but she couldn't hear it at this distance. Sighing, she wedged her clutch in the front door to keep it from locking her out and picked her way across the paved drive to the neighbouring house.

The guy actually didn't look that much of a perv. He was in his mid thirties and wearing some kind of metal band t-shirt, but didn't look like a goth or anything. He had short greying hair and dark circles under his eyes, but otherwise seemed pretty normal.

"Thank god!" she saw him mouth as she came over. Maybe she'd judged him too soon. Maybe he was just trying to get a closer look.

"What?" she asked, blowing smoke at his window.

"You need to get back inside!" He yelled it so loud, she heard it even through the double glazing.

"Why?"

He looked exasperated. "Don't you watch the news? It's been building for the last twenty four hours!"

It was weird talking to him like this. He sounded so far away. She glanced towards his front door. Before she'd even fully formed the thought, he was shaking his head vigorously.

"NO. NO. You are NOT coming in here. You're

probably fucking irradiated by now. Go back in your own house!"

And he shut the curtains. The dick actually shut the curtains on her. She stood staring dumbly at them as her cigarette burned down. Eventually she stubbed it out on his windowsill and went back inside.

"Grant!" she called up the stairs, really hoping she'd gone with the right name. "GRANT!"

"What?" he sounded more awake than she'd expected. She wondered if he'd been faking just to avoid talking to her.

"Your neighbour's a fucking racist!"

"Eamon? Nah, he's all right."

Grant appeared at the top of the stairs with a tiny white towel around his waist, his skin wet from the shower. He wasn't as good looking as she remembered and he had more freckles.

"He said I was fucking Iranian or something. Racist asshole."

"Shauna, he's not a racist." She felt a stab of guilt that he remembered her name so easily. "You want some breakfast?"

"Yeah," she eyed him warily, wondering if there was going to be some sting in the tail, like she had to go to the shop, or she had to make it or whatever, but he just nodded and came past her drying his hair. She followed him meekly to the kitchen.

He searched around in the fridge and came out with bacon, eggs and bread. The light in

the fridge didn't work. That scared her for some reason. Something kept nagging at her about the way the sky had looked. She felt she should go to the window and look at it to confirm something, but the thought made her sick. Perhaps she was still drunk. She spotted a small digital radio on the windowsill by the sink and went to turn it on, needing the distraction.

"... 6000 dead, fatalities still rising..." said the woman on the radio, "... everyone is advised to stay in their homes until..."

"Aww, you retuned my radio?" He complained as he cracked the eggs into the pan on top of the bacon. "I like it on Kiss FM, put it back!"

"I didn't touch it!" she protested. "You made me miss what she was saying now."

"...Prime Minister has been forced to step down following..."

"Good, it's well boring." He reached past her and turned the dial.

"Hey!"

He rolled his eyes. "Don't tell me you're into politics?"

"I'm not. I just wanted to hear-"

"...North Korea retaliated with..."

"Damn it!" he complained, "why won't it give me Kiss FM?"

"...-ficial government warning to all..."

"Stupid thing must be broken." He turned it off and went back to the stove to prise the bacon off the bottom of the pan with a wooden



wikicommons.org



spatula. The smell was making her queasy again, but she'd never had a man cook for her before so she didn't want to stop him, even if he was kind of an idiot.

"Do you have a TV?"

He looked at her like she'd just told him her last boyfriend was a duck.

"In the lounge," he indicated with a jerk of his head, before muttering under his breath, "Do I have a TV? Jesus Christ."

She ignored him and hurried through to turn it on. The news man looked very serious and very tired. Words scrolled along the bottom of the screen, lists of numbers and places, some she'd never even heard of. A death toll, it said. In the top corner of the screen, images of an enormous domed cloud, dirty yellow and swirling with grit and debris.

"... nuclear war is under way," the news man was saying, his tone flat and sad, "the new government has advised all UK residents to stay in whichever building they are currently residing in until military representatives are able to properly brief them. Those in high risk areas will take priority, so the rest of us will just need to sit tight." He said that with a little grin that was almost

a grimace. "Please ensure your doors and windows are sealed to help reduce risk. The Ministry of Defence estimate that radiation levels will have dropped to safer levels within two weeks provided there are no further detonations."

"Two weeks," she repeated aloud, "I'm stuck here for two weeks."

"What's that?" He'd changed into an apron now and looked even more of an idiot as he stood there holding a plate of charred bacon and blackened fried eggs in a dinosaur oven mitt.

"I'm stuck with you for two weeks, Grant," she said softly, "And I might have radiation or something."

"My name's Kent," he said absentmindedly, trying fruitlessly to change the channel.



# The Prophet

by John Kitchen

Your city will fall, he said.  
Hops and vines and old man's beard  
scrambling up the glass and steel,  
ash keys and acorns growing in pot holes.  
The lifts will stutter and halt, voice boxes silent,  
no p.a., no muzak, no exhortation to buy;  
bits and bytes, tweets and data  
remaining unaccessed in their clouds;

nothing automatic, labour saving is spent.  
the falcon, the vixen, will become bolder,  
but there is little left to scavenge.  
No one will see the plush interiors,  
gold inlays, the wow factor chandeliers,  
the thick impasto of tasteful abstracts;  
the mouldering ingredients  
of intricate and complex cordon bleu;  
the flies that emerge from surgical wards,  
from their compromised sterility.  
An unhealthy, miasma will develop  
just above the city skyline  
to produce spectacular sunsets.

"You idiot !" they said.

## Masters of the Universe

by John Kitchen

We have the language, don't we ?  
understand abstract concepts –  
evolution  
institution  
revolution  
constitution;  
you get the idea.  
We ask profound questions –  
Like, why are we here ?  
How did this all begin ?  
Is there a God ?  
We study.  
We repent.  
We build.  
We invent.  
We bend nature to our will  
surely we must be blessed.  
We're the masters of the universe,  
but the universe couldn't care less.



There's the  
asteroid that only just missed us;  
viral mutation that threatens pandemic;  
the failure of antibiotics so  
flu, Syphilis, tetanus can kill us.

A madman can press the holocaust trigger;  
a natural disaster cause nuclear meltdown.  
We've had the warning  
but we ignore  
global warning.  
Until cities sink under a rising sea  
Jakarta, Dhaka, Shanghai  
Kolkata, Osaka and Sydney,  
Yet still we think we are blessed.  
We're the masters of the universe,  
but the universe couldn't care less.

As innocents suffer  
genocide, rape, limb amputation  
modern day slavery, to dig out minerals made precious

to power our must have gadgets  
and we must have the latest  
mustn't we ? While  
thousands die of malnutrition  
millions drink unclean water.

Extremists try to take over the world  
and we worry about a trace  
of horse DNA in a cheap and nasty burger.

We think we are blessed.  
We're the masters of the universe,  
but the universe couldn't care less.

We are the lucky ones, aren't we ?  
Pampered, entertained;  
scientists will sort it out.  
Anyway what can we do,  
nobody'll listen to us  
no matter how loud we shout.  
So don't stop and think  
have another drink.  
Why bother to vote  
let's have sex and a smoke.  
Got my Golf, got my Visa  
off to Magaluf Tuesday next.  
Hey look at my i-phone 6  
my mate just sent me a text.

The world is ours to possess.  
We know we are the blessed.  
We are the masters of the universe,  
  
but the universe couldn't care less.

# Crap Crusader: HCE meets Sam Jordison

## with Adam Steiner

**Adam Steiner:** What was the initial inspiration behind *Crap Towns*?

**Sam Jordison:** Growing up near Morecambe. It was a beautiful place, but its best days seemed too far behind it. The council had made all kinds of terrible decisions about its future (including spending millions trying to build a Mr Blobby theme park), its best buildings were in ruins (and people were using them as toilets) and the town had become a strange combination of dangerous and boring to visit... It was enraging, but also quite funny. Back then when you visited Morecambe you didn't know whether to laugh or cry - and that was quite potent. I was also convinced it was the inspiration for *Everyday Is Like Sunday* and wrote a little article riffing on that idea, put it on the web and luckily, it hit a nerve... It turns out thousands of other people have similar feelings about their home towns. (I'm glad to say that Morecambe has since got *much* better. It still has problems, but a good part of it is lovely again. Truly beautiful, in fact.)

**AS:** Why the gap between the two books?

**SJ:** Oh the usual: legal fights, rip-offs, a plague of conmen and work-shirkers. Also ten years is a nice gap. (So long as you discount *Crap Towns II*, which arrived in 2004.)

**AS:** What makes a town crap?

**SJ:** Crap is in the eye of the beholder! I think that every time has its own brand of crap, which is possibly what makes the idea work. Everyone too, has those Bruce Springsteen feelings of love for a place combined with a burning desire to get the rock away and find something else... Plus, you know, bad planning decisions, anti-social behaviour, snobbery, consumption, supermarkets...

**AS:** Is the UK getting crappier?

**SJ:** Not really a question you have to ask under a Tory government. For 99% of the population, life is getting worse.

**AS:** What do you hope to achieve with the book?

**SJ:** Wealth, fame, adulation... Failing that, I guess I want

to provoke thought about the way we look after our towns, about the way our councils do or don't look after us, about planning decisions, about local pride, about inequality and good governance. I want to provide a platform for people in places like Bradford to say that this really isn't good enough and we have to do something about it. I want to give voice to the people who are rightly pointing out the problems in their towns and an opportunity for them to be heard. I also want to give lots of people a good laugh and something fun to read on the toilet.



Town Decrier: Sam Jordison in all his glory  
(image courtesy of Sam Jordison)

**AS:** What are some of your favourite Crap Towns/places – why?

**SJ:** Well, I love Morecambe. A good part of the inspiration from the book came from my affection for the place, if that doesn't sound like too much of a contradiction. I think people get frustrated with their towns partly because they are so important to them. Elsewhere,

I've always liked Hull, in spite of its problems, and especially now that it's started to turn itself around. And there's something captivating about the seaside places. Blackpool, Great Yarmouth... On a rainy day, they are both utterly miserable and incredibly beautiful. And under all the horrible slot-machine arcades and neon signs, they often have beautiful buildings...

**AS: After a popular vote, architects/town planners were blamed for reducing many towns to a concrete jungle or cultural and economic wasteland – what are your views on this?**

**SJ:** It's not entirely fair. The people who pay for the buildings, and who don't look after them properly are as much to blame. A lot of the worst architecture comes about thanks to compromises with councils, planners and corporations, not because the men in black-framed glasses are inherently evil. We also have architects to thank for most of our towns' best features. And it wasn't architects who, for instance, drove a great big road through the middle of Birmingham and tore the heart out of the city. That said, they did design New Street Station... And they did spend a lot of the second half of the 20th century refusing to listen to people when they told them what they didn't and did like...

**AS: Are you surprised by the mixed responses of agreement and refusal – especially when people defend their crap town?**

**SJ:** Not really! The defences generally come from politicians who are, I suppose, duty bound to defend the towns, and also generally, shameless liars, so little they say surprises me. But sometimes people do point out genuinely good things about their towns, which I try to take into account...

**AS: How do you think towns can change to become less crap?**

**SJ:** The things people often ask for are more shops owned by local people that have a stake in the community, better preservation of treasured old buildings, more greenery and less litter... But there isn't any one answer. Morecambe did it by starting to treasure its past. Hull by looking to the future and going for ambitious new developments and new cultural programmes. Todmorden has been given a new lease of life by people putting flow-

ers and veg patches all over the town. I guess the starting point is listening to the people who live in the town both about what they want and what they can offer.

**AS: What is the future for Crap Towns, both the book and the actual places themselves?**

**SJ:** Well, it's going to be interesting. We need a lot of new housing in the UK. There's talk of new towns on the way... I can't wait to see how they turn out. But the fascinating thing is that I just don't know. 10 years ago, I wouldn't have predicted how Coalition and the rise and rise of the ultra-rich at the expense of everyone else. I certainly wouldn't have expected to see so many food banks in UK cities. On the other hand, I wouldn't have thought that people in Hull could do so much so quickly to turn things around. There are always pleasant and unpleasant surprises, and that's what makes the subject so compelling... I hope to do another book in 10 years, but I don't know what's going to go in it!



Bath Road, Bridgwater, Somerset: HCE editor Gary went to school just around the corner from here





# A Town Called Malice:

## *Crap Towns Returns* reviewed

by E. A. Boxer

Promising “new decay” and “new misery” *Crap Towns*, once again, delivers failure upon failure and excels in providing the must-miss quite to the most disappointing British places in the form of *Crap Town Returns*.

Since the last edition of CT, several towns have grown even crapper, highlighting the continuing descent sparked by bad planning, high deprivation and sometimes, horrible people. Clearly, it doesn't take much to make a town crap, more often than not, the inimitable British weather and lack of *joie de vivre* is sufficient to make a town's reputation plummet faster than the reputation of any given post-recession pantomime villain.

The book is keen to avoid the “riff-raff” argument, citing the extent of bad management by infighting and incestuous local authorities. Many towns in the book, no matter how aspirational their, often hilarious, mottos (latin decorum will not save you), reflect the declining mood of their populace. Like a tired, threadbare suit, a crap town wears its grief on its sleeves and the misery scars on the faces of its most downtrodden. Just look at the slack-jawed yokels of Norfolk wastelands, South-West “Oo-ar” degenerates, the prostituted ex-industrial North or the compressed, intensified human condition of the London tube [*this is not the official HCE position on those regions, let's be clear about that. I'm not 'slack-jawed'!* - Ed.].

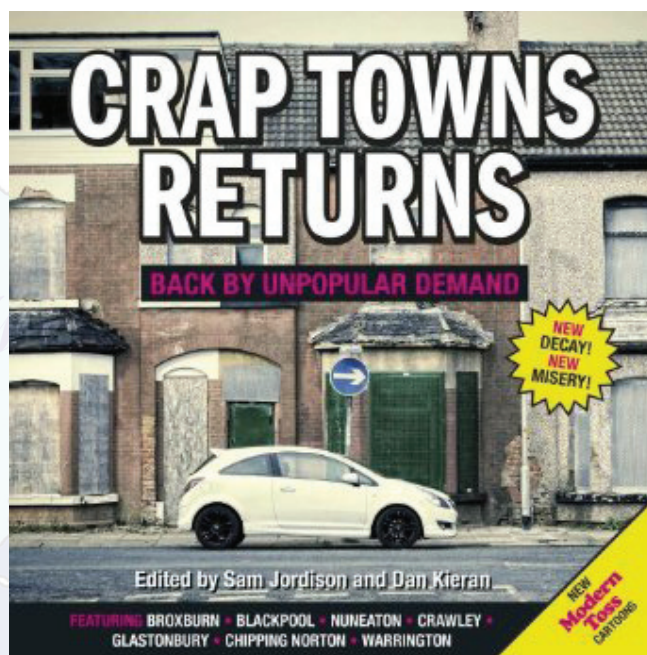
These days, it's only idiots, which is most of middle England and every major British newspaper, who rise easily to controversy – you need a clear argument to make moral or ethical dogma stick – otherwise it's just froth and bluster.

So it surprises me that people still fail to note the keenly satirical edge that is the life-blood of *Crap Towns* in highlighting the British cold-spots whose pulses have long stopped beating. The book is in fact one in a long line of the moral-within-mockery employed by too many great satirists to count. This is little consolation for the forsaken souls who subsist in a self-loathing homestead, in which they're forced to raise children, find employment and are often unable to leave, being kicked into the concrete dusted long grass.

But as quick as folk are to anger, they are often equally resistant to change, or perhaps even too welcoming of the wrong kind of change. Too many town planners to count often jump the gun, as born out through exclusive gentrification projects which price out the natives, create gauche monuments to selfish ambition or tear down the wrong buildings in the name of assumed “progress”.

In other areas, people eager for work after long-term unemployment grab at any unsustainable employment, call centres etc., they are offered. Some are forced to surrender green spaces to the land-grab promise of a new supermarket, while the wheels of council infrastructure are suckled by section 106 payments, all in place of publicly consulted works.

For many towns, a one-way system is still considered a revelation, Poundland the new church



and constipated pseudo-Hirst public art shoehorned into place, only to become a symbol of excess division and hate.

In a somewhat mawkish way, *Crap Towns* exhibits a certain Best of British mentality, the savage wit of quiet desperation, echoed by the swift escape of eager exiles or self-mockery of residents still living in the communities they are keen to criticise. It is our intent quaintness blown-up to Lilliputian dimensions, like ants under a magnifying glass, we shrivel when our shame is writ large because it's true. That is where *Crap Towns* excels, and besides it's not all bad news, numerous towns have since improved and slid off the list – where is your town in all this? You'll have to buy the book and out...

**Crap Towns**  
**Edited by Sam Jordison and Dan Kieran**  
**Published by Quercus**

‘Crap Map’ and cover image courtesy of Quercus



# Emoti-Con

by James Durrell

Emotional cons  
Of signified cant  
Mark fractured connections  
Split friendships at wit's end  
Naked communion with the false signifiers.  
Swollen allegiance to a \*sad-face flag  
I'll run-tapping to echo your refrain  
But how many times does  
Ctrl + C and Ctrl + V = feeling your pain?  
I totes care about #syria #palestine #ukraine #solidarity  
#andetcetera.  
Whatever's on the humanist timeline trend  
I'll do my bit and re-tweet the massed commentators  
The stay-at-home brave,  
Condemning whistle-blown traitors  
From a thousand miles away.  
Modern hieroglyphs assume self-sacrifice  
Instant idiot – just add internet.  
Where words fail you  
Don't think, just type  
btw I <3 U  
Since you ACCEPTED my friend request, last night.  
Try silent LOL-ing  
Like a bell that has lost its ring  
A wasp numbed by repetition  
The seeping away of its sting  
To ignore the intent is to lose the meaning.  
Blind usage and abuse  
To define and deflect the offence  
Scrape over shallow attempt at feeling  
[insert Emotion HERE]  
“Limits of my language are the limits of my world”  
Another great mind (who just had to be autistic) once said  
So, ideas + paper = genius, yeah.  
To SEND a horrible phrase  
HATE for its own sake  
And not reflect on it POST-event  
Is to SHARE the naïve palimpsest  
A pastiche correction of You.  
Stacked-up half-lies,  
Somewhere between a colon and a bracket,  
Each hollow, greased gesture  
A new beginning of the End.  
  
“And thank you too much for everything, again”  
“No, you're more than welcome, always, anytime.”  
“She's such a bitch”  
“He's just a friend”  
So HvE a NiCe FUCKING daY :)

## The Last Word

by Judith Parry

Attitude, aspirations  
Become a blushing bride  
Cleavage and curvaceousness  
Dashing Don Juan eye-eyed.

Eminently eligible  
Footloose, fancy-free  
Glamorous gold-digger  
High-heeled hotness, see?

Intimate immediately  
Joyfully joined-at-hip  
Kissy kiss-kiss kissable  
Luscious locking lips.

Matrimonial machinations  
Nagging nuptialness  
Organise OK-mag wedding  
Prince Charming - pose - Princess!

Quite quintessentially queenly  
Rellies, ring 'n' rice  
Singing, sloshed 'n'smooching  
Tara, tara, en-tice.

Unexpected underwear  
Voluptuous va va voom  
Wow! Wonderful wifelet  
X X X-rated room!

Yes! Yes!! YES!!  
Y-chromosome  
Zygote  
Zzz.

# NEXT TIME IN HCE: ROGUES

SUBMISSIONS CLOSE 15TH JANUARY



Outlaw  
by Simon Cain-O'Grady

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