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Pogy Bobs and the Hyena of Death

by Hugh Cook

The news was all through the little town of Trotter inside of half an hour: West Virginia's population was down by one. Again.

"Did'ya hear?" said Pogy Bobs, a breathless age eleven, bursting into the kitchen, hot to instruct his mother.

"Hear what?" said Vicky Ann, who was cutting bread.

"The Silver Killer, he got another one."

Pogy had already accessed one of the hyena websites and had gotten a hot update of the news-break details. Dug out the eyeballs.

Yeah!

"That's very sad," said Vicky Ann, in a pro forma manner.

"And Horace Whelk," said Pogy, still fizzing. "Splam!"

"What?" said Vicky Ann. "Who?"

"The fat guy. Horace."

A big guy, this big ballooning muscle-and-fat dinosaur of a guy, real old, 14 years old.

"Horace?" said Vicky Ann, looking up. "The Silver Killer killed Horace?"

"No," said Pogy, impatiently. "Some car. Horace, he got hit. Splam blam! Thank you ma'am."

"What did you say?" said Vicky Ann, sounding distant, dazed.

"Just like spaghetti," said Pogy.

"Spaghetti?" said Vicky Ann, not comprehending.

"A mess," said Pogy, always amazed—frustrated, too—when his mother couldn't follow the pith and gist of his quick analogous shorthand. "Spaghetti. A car hit him, then a truck went over him. Hey—are you okay? Wow, that's some cut."

"So it is," said Vicky Ann, realizing she had sliced into the top of her thumb with the bread knife.

"Mom?" said Pogy, uncertainly.

But Vicky Ann just stood there, mesmerized, watching the liquid

ruby stuff come welling up out of her flesh.

"Mom," said Pogy, "you got to get on top of that. If you don't, you could bleed to death in a couple of weeks."

"I guess so," said Vicky Ann, faintly. "I guess so."

Then she walked out of the kitchen, sucking on her thumb. Pogy was worried. Blood can give you Aids—he'd learnt that at school. But how can you say that to your mother?

Later, when he listened at the bedroom door, he heard his mother weeping. He didn't think too much of it. Sometimes, if dad slapped her around a bit, mom went off and cried a little. Usually, however, she snapped out of it pretty quick. But, this time, she was still as bad as ever even three hours later. By now, Pogy was seriously troubled. There was no sign of dinner, and he was getting hungry.

So what do you do when your mom breaks down? Call the cops? Ring the Pentagon? Check the warranty? Phone up the local Loving Mom franchise and ask for a new one? Maybe he could sell the story to TV. My mom hacked at her naked flesh with this huge knife, then staggered into the bedroom, bleeding to death. Yeah.

Or, then again, maybe not....

Finally, Pogy rang directory service.

"I gotta speak to my dad," said Pogy.

Usually, dad went out with the boys to play poker on Friday nights, but this time he was in Pittsburgh for a job interview. The company doing the interview was putting him up in a hotel. After directory service came through with the hotel's number, Pogy phoned.

"We have nobody registered under that name."

"That's Gary. That's G-A-R-Y. Bobs. B-O-B-S."

Not known. Not there. Maybe space aliens had abducted him. Finally, Pogy extracted twenty bucks from his mother's purse and went out, first to McDonald's and then to a movie.



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“So?” said Pogy, at dinner the next day, “where were you then?”

“Pogy,” said Vicky Ann. “You can’t talk to your father like that.”

“But I just did,” said Pogy. “Maybe I watch too much cartoon—too many cartoon shows. Maybe I’m hyperactive. Huh? Maybe we’re living on a toxic waste dump here. What do you think? Huh? Huh?”

Wham! His mother slapped him. Just like that! His face was red, hot, burning. Not the first time she had done it. The first time had been a major shock. But, these days, it didn’t slow him down much. The thing was, she never hit him twice.

“You just,” said Vicky Ann. She sucked at the air, tried to extract oxygen from it. “You just watch your mother. Mouth. When your mother. You’re talking to your mother—you just watch your mouth. Okay?”

“I don’t see what you’re so uptight about,” said Pogy, aggrieved, rubbing his face.

“You’re messing in something which is not your business,” said his father, a little drunk but speaking evenly. “You really want to know? Okay, Pogy. I was in Pittsburgh. Just like I said.”

“That’s not what the hotel says.”

“You attribute papal infallibility to the front desk?”

Two downsizings back, dad had had intellectual pretensions. It still showed, sometimes. This out-of-level stuff which came out of his mouth. Papal infallibility. But, hey—even Pogy knew what that was. Had read a lot, even that stuff about Martin Luther and the nails—wham! blam! Pogy had the kind of mind that chewed up entire curriculums. But this was dad playing dad, pretending he was the Omniscient One, not a loser on the skid road down. When dad plays dad, you play kid. A kid can’t even find Canada on the map.

“Papal staple,” said Pogy, playing age eleven, hamming it up a bit. The enthusiasm was sincere. The big fat bully: dead. No more Horace Whelk. Long live Providence, master of the timely bulls eye. “Hit him with a truck. Splam! Blam! Hot pasta! Wow! Great

stuff!"

"Shut up," said Pogy's father.

"Good shot—right, dad?"

"Shut up."

But Pogy kept on, irrepressible age eleven. That was his role, that was what they wanted—a baseball-kid, not an IQ freak.

"Splam!" said Pogy.

And was down on the floor. A splinter of identity in a fractured universe. Overhead, his father. Breathing heavily. Pogy had no memory of anyone hitting him. His father had no eyes. Instead of eyes, darkness. Blobs of whirling red darkness. The darkness expanded, eclipsing the world. Then Pogy was in his mother's arms.

Reality had suffered a continuity glitch: his father had vanished, and the sun had moved to midday.

"Are you all right?" said Vicky Ann.

"My face hurts," said Pogy.

It was really sore. Throbbing. As if someone had hit him.

"Pogy," said Vicky Ann, nursing him. "Pogy. There's a decorum of silence. A certain propriety of speech you must master if you are to find your place in civilized society."

And, from the elaborate mannered intricacies of her speech, Pogy knew she was drunk, again. But there was no alcohol on her breath. Just the sour ketones of anorexia—she hadn't eaten. Oh, and another smell. Faint but detectable: the bruised perfume of her body. And that was when Pogy realized her face was marked. You could make out the smudged discolorations underneath the pantomime makeup.

As his mother observed the decorum of silence, Pogy made the necessary logical connections, putting two and two together to make four. The Silver Killer struck again, and dad was not in Pittsburgh at the time.

So dad beat her. Right? Yeah. Dad beat her because she knew, and she didn't like it. She knew that dad wasn't chasing a better job, no sir. Instead, he was creeping out to kill people. Because he was the

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Silver Killer, that's why.

My dad, the Silver Killer.

A kind of power in this, knowing that your father was the Silver Killer, and that it would take only one phone call to send him to the frying machine. Eyes boiling-blue eggs, sunny side up. Smoke coming out of his ears. Or have we started using that lethal injection stuff? You want the spike, dad? Or shall we fry you?

But, for the moment, Pogy did nothing.

I mean. He is your dad-right? And the dead women were-well, mom called them cheap. And maybe the hotel got it wrong. Maybe dad was in Pittsburgh after all. The hotel screwed up. Wrote his name as Bob Gary instead of Gary Bobs. Or maybe he checked in as John Smith or something. With, like, a girlfriend. And maybe that's why mom was throwing up in the bathroom this morning.



Things stood that way, delicately poised between knowledge and denial, for a week. That was when their new neighbor moved in next door and the underlying structure of the family's world started to totter.

"She's a Hyena of Death," said Pogy's father, studying their new neighbor through the scope of his sniper rifle.

And she was, too. No doubt about it. From where he was placed, kneeling on the sofa by the window, Pogy Bobs could make out her Hyena of Death T-shirt. He was fascinated. Of course, she had to wear the Hyena of Death emblem, as mandated by law. But to have it splashed with such unnecessary bravado right across her T-shirt-well, that was brazen!

Pogy's breath fogged the window. His stubby eleven-year-old nose touched the glass. He knew, right then and there, that he was going to meet her. He would knock on her door. He would walk right in. Commit an irrevocable act-like Martin Luther with the

nails. And would he tell on his dad? Well, maybe. Telling was an option. But the meeting came first. Do at least that, Pogy. Yeah. Meet her. I dare myself.

“First the crack house then the whores,” said his mother. “And now this! There goes the neighborhood.”

They saw her on TV that night. She was reporting from the site of the latest Silver Killer slaying. Once again, the Silver Killer had done the eyeball thing. Hot metal glistening, trembling, sucked down by gravity. They were always alive when the stuff splashed home. So how come the Silver Killer didn’t get burnt when they convulsed, making the molten silver splash? Or maybe he did get burnt, now and then.

These days, his last desk job ancient history, Gary Bobs was a welder once again.

Heat and hot metal.

An expert, but he still might get the occasional incidental burn. “...the standard rape and mutilation. The killer has now killed six times in six months, terrorizing West Virginia. Police have again repeated their call for members of the public to report possible suspects. This is Eleanor Mavis Glavergail, Hyena of Death, reporting from the scene of the crime for Voyeur Vision.”

Close up. Their new neighbor. Yes, that was her. And what did you expect to see, Pogy? Come on, truth it up.

Fact was, he had expected to see the saliva of hysterical joy dripping down her face. Had expected to see a big hyena tongue licking at the exudates of its own unclean excitement. Now he felt embarrassed, realizing that his Einstein brain had made a dumb eleven year-old error. Too much method acting. You act like a kid, you start thinking like a kid.

Eleanor Mavis Glavergail’s face betrayed no hint of slaverling animal. Instead, her face was intent, serious. A locus of significance. Here, in the glare of the TV lights, something austere and terrible was being brought to life. Fascinated, Pogy watched. He was starting

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to understand. We hate her because—

“Pogy,” said Vicky Ann. “We have something to tell you.”

Oh boy. Here it comes. Your father’s the Silver Killer, but you mustn’t tell anyone.

“I won’t tell,” said Pogy.

“What?” said Gary.

“It’s not a secret,” said Vicky Ann. “Pogy, you’re going to have a little brother.”

“You’re, like... adopting a kid? Like... you know, the ads?”

“Ads?” said his father.

“Whatever,” said Pogy.

It was so obvious. The ads. Adopt a kid, a dollar a month and you can keep this kid alive. But his father couldn’t understand that kind of shorthand. Needed to have everything spelt out, letter by letter. C-A-T spells “cat”. Gary Bobs, that’s Bobs spelt B-O-B-S. Nobody here by that name.

“I’m pregnant,” said Vicky Ann.

“What?” said Pogy.

He heard and yet didn’t hear. Felt dizzy. Had this obscene vision—strands of DNA tearing themselves apart with this really gross squelching sound. Replication. Soft soggy kisses. Pregnant. A girl’s word. Giggling girls. Made him want to think of boy stuff. Footballs and baseball bats and rifles converted to full automatic fire.

“Pregnant,” said Gary. Then, explaining: “That means she’s going to have a baby.”

“She is?” said Pogy.

Playing dumb and stupid, playing age eleven to give himself time to think, only he didn’t know what to think. Pregnant, yeah, he understood pregnant, you do what you do to get Aids, no condom, it comes spitting out, rocketship heaven, the big fat egg sitting there, a screwworm docking procedure, then—

“How do you feel, Pogy?” said Vicky Ann.

“Uh,” said Pogy.

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“He’s confused,” said Gary indulgently, tousling the head of his eleven-year-old son.

And Pogy was. He could feel the impatient anger in his father’s hand—could feel that the gesture of tenderness was just a moment away from murder. His father’s emotions were tight, stressed, conflicted. His father was a real mess. A big emotional toxic waste dump. And then there was the business of the operation. Which Pogy wasn’t supposed to know about, but did. The vasectomy. A roadblock for sperm. The screwworms can’t escape. You can do it for sport, but not for production.

“How do you feel?” said Vicky Ann.

“Uh,” said Pogy, mastering a happy eleven-year-old smile onto his face, “uh, a little brother—wow! Great!”

And, as soon as he could, he logged onto the best of the hyena web sites, the one with all the secret autopsy details. No sperm in the Silver Killer’s fluids. Expert opinion: the Silver Killer was vasectomized. So. If dad’s little brother’s father, he can’t be the Silver Killer. Or am I missing something?

Check.

Look for evidence.

And find what there is to be found about Vicky Ann Bobs and her husband Gary.



Vicky Ann Bobs and her husband Gary were out at the ballgame when the credit card statement came. Pogy touched it, then withdrew his hand. Didn’t dare.

“Come on. Imagine you’re a hyena. What would a hyena do?”

Hyenas lie, cheat, steal, bluff. They’re natural cowards. Sneaky. They’re the bad guys, so they have all the best moves.

“And his face changed,” chanted Pogy. “And he became—Hyena Man! Ta dah!!”

Once transfigured into Hyena Man, Pogy found the next step easy. He steamed open the envelope, took out the evidence, and read it. The day of the Silver Killer's last killing, there was no charge for any hotel room in Pittsburgh. But it seemed his father had used his credit card that day. To buy gas at a place just outside of Trotter.

Pogy made a copy of the credit card stuff using the copy facility of the family's fax machine. Then he stashed it under the loose bit of carpet in the south-east corner of his room, where there was still a faint sour lingering smell from the milkshake he had spilt a month back.



And now?

Now wait.

"I'm giving you a chance, dad," said Pogy, talking it through with himself. "Don't do it again, okay? Just one chance, you hearing me? You do it again, I'm calling the cops."

Or something.

But, come the monthly date, the Silver Killer struck again. Got into the hospital, this time. Into the maternity ward. Did not just the mother but the newborn. Ms Glavergill stole the filthy details from a morgue attendant and broadcast them to the world live on TV.

"Oh god!" said Vicky Ann, weeping.

Crooning and weeping, crooning and weeping, while Eleanor Mavis Glavergail, Hyena of Death, inflicted the details on the defenseless world.

"Filthy vulture," said Gary Bobs. "She's to blame."

"To blame?" said Pogy, not quite understanding. "I don't get it."

"That's because you're eleven," said his father.

But Pogy sensed a logical problem which had nothing to do with his being eleven.

"I mean...." said Pogy, pursuing the subject, for once actually

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hoping that his parents could enlighten him. “I mean, she doesn’t, you know, chop people up, hack people’s eyeballs out. She just says what happened, right?”

At that, his father went very quiet. And, for a moment, Pogy thought one of Those Times was coming. One of Those Times which sometimes followed his father’s all-night poker sessions “with Harry and the boys”, those monthly indulgences which brought him home at dawn, freshly showered, his mouth smelling of mint-flavored mouth wash, fatigue making his eyes look bruised and sullen in his relaxed, expended flesh. On those occasions, Gary Bobs just wanted to sleep, and, irritated by interruptions, would lash out quickly, and without valid justification.

“Pogy,” said Vicky Ann, speaking quickly, as if prompt intervention could cover Pogy’s indiscretion and save him from another beating, “I think we’ve heard enough of this. Just let it go—okay?”

“No,” said Gary, slowly. “The boy has to know how things are. The thing is, Pogy, she makes him do it. The Silver Killer. It’s the publicity, he’s hot for it, she’s making him a hero, if she wasn’t there he wouldn’t do it.”

“I get it,” said Pogy. “I understand.”



So. Is that why you do it, dad? Because the hyena turns you on? But she isn’t even pretty.

Thinking that, Pogy fell asleep, and had a confused dream in which he was beating his father bloody with a baseball bat. Like Al Capone. Splam! And then the dream changed, and Horace Whelk was hurting him. The big fat slob of a bully was digging into Pogy’s bicep, pinching the nerve. Torture without marks. Splam! Someone shoved Horace out of a car, and an oncoming vehicle hit him, and the truck coming up behind went right over the top of him.

Blood.

Hugh Cook

The dream shifted, and showed him a lingering trace of blood floating in clean water. In his dream, his mother held him close and squeezed. Anorexic breath, spoiled perfume.

“Change the channel, mom,” said Pogy, speaking in his sleep.

He was himself yet not himself. Her fingers were in his underpants. He endured a partial knowledge of a weird kind of blunt, angry ugliness which he could not quite bring into focus. Like something in math. Like the square root of minus one—you’re told it’s there, but you can’t quite imagine what it is, or what it would be if you were ever to actually see it.

And then the ugliness was on top of him, jumping, throwing him backwards, weighing him down, his mother’s face all mixed up with the smell of a dog, with the shock of a frog. His mother’s creamy brassiere melting down the shining shaft of his baseball bat, tense and greased. Bra. Brassiere. English. French. French lips web site. We want you, dude. Her thigh opening with a gasp, smiling upwards, spilling, wet and milky.

Waking from that nightmare, Pogy Freudened his dream. Basic Oedipus. You want to kill your father, rape your mother. So do it. Kill your father. All it takes is a phone call.

But, one glass of milk later, he felt saner. Truth was, he was too young for Oedipus. That stuff comes later—doesn’t it? And. Besides. I like it here. The State of West Virginia microwaves your dad, what happens to you?

“I’m going to pray,” said Pogy.

He didn’t believe in God—just a phase, or so his mother said—so he prayed to the Statue of Liberty instead. The very act of being down on his knees made him feel younger, simpler. And something else. An odd emotion. Unfamiliar. Maybe ... nostalgia? Yeah. Nostalgia. So that’s what nostalgia is.

After prayer, Pogy Bobs felt cleaner. Purged, in fact. That kind of dirty sex stuff just wasn’t him, wasn’t the real Pogy Bobs. Just vagrant web site images, that’s all.

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And, when Pogy Bobs finally got back to sleep, he had no more turbulent Deep Freud nightmares. Instead, he had a strangely lucid dream of a candyfloss cheerleader, as sexless as the Spirit of Hygiene. When she came to him in his dreams, she was wearing a white T-shirt and white panties. The pink lettering on her white T-shirt bore a simple message:-

GOOD GIRLS SAY NO.
I'M A GOOD GIRL.

This visionary Spirit of Baseball (or whoever she was) had a big white smile and a clean healthy body, and Pogy was vaguely aware (somehow) of the fact that each of her internal organs was hygienically wrapped in tissue paper.

"Hi," said the candyfloss cheerleader. "I'm Hillary Clinton. I'm you're Good Angel."

"Your," said Pogy, correcting her grammar—though, even in his dream, he was puzzled as to how she could err in differentiating "your" from "you're" when speaking.

"My your and thou art," said the Good Angel. "It's not on the menu, but we can order it. And how are you today?"

"We will be landing shortly," said Pogy, meaning that he was feeling just fine, thank you.

"That's great," said the Good Angel, understanding him perfectly. "Oh, and this is a golf ball."

A big dog nosed the golf ball, then ate it. Pogy was deep underwater by now, swimming through mists of lime green icecream in the company of a school of carnivorous baseball cards. The Good Angel swam beside him in the shape of an ashtray.

"Your parents are right, you know," said the Good Angel. "She is a Hyena of Death. She creates war, death, famine, ruin, chaos, earthquake."

"Who?" said Pogy, uncertainly.

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“You know who. Eleanor Mavis Glavergail—the Hyena of Death.”

Then the world grinned open, and Pogy was standing on raw volcanic rock. The sky was hot and blue and smelt of stale beer. Railroad cars rumbled by in the background. And there was the Mean Dude, standing there in raw denim and black combat boots, smelling of cordite and cigarette smoke, a flask of whisky on his hip, a bullfighting poster rolled up in his left hand.

“You know me,” said the Mean Dude.

“Yeah,” said Pogy Bobs.

Sort of. He had never seen the Mean Dude before, not in his entire life, but he knew immediately that the Mean Dude was a figure of power.

“Sardines and Mexico,” said the Mean Dude.

Hearing this, Pogy knew it was an offer of power and destiny. He was being given an opportunity to become, in his own right, a living version of the Mean Dude himself. To walk across the killing fields and leave the bloody tracks of his boots in the cellars of the slaughterhouse. To watch as Cain does Abel—to watch as Cain picks up that chunk of rock and smashes Abel over the head. To report, live on TV, as God burns Sodom and Gomorrah.

“Yes, the walls have fallen, and we can hear the injured screaming beneath the masonry as the invaders attack. This is Pogy Bobs, live from Jericho.”

To create it all, *ex nihilo*, from the blank vacuum of the TV tube: the barefoot girl running screaming down the road between the paddy fields as the napalm burns her, the pale faces looking upwards from the impossible abyss of the ditch, the bloated flesh floating belly-up in the swollen river.

To take the world—the clean, orderly world of school curriculums and retirement funds—and turn it into a capering carnival of torture, starvation, persecution, crucifixion, expulsion and death.

To see. To know. And to say.

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“Pogy!” cried Hillary Clinton in alarm, arriving in the guise of a bunch of yellow roses. “Pogy! Pogy! You are in danger of your mortal soul!”

“Yeah,” mumbled Pogy Bobs. “I know.”

Then a wind made of boot polish swept away the roses. The Good Angel was gone. And Pogy Bobs was alone again with the Mean Dude. Who was lighting two cigarettes and offering one to Pogy. Even though Pogy knew it was wrong, he accepted one of the cigarettes, and sucked on it deeply. The cigarette tasted of sulfur. And Pogy realized that they were standing together on a high place—the Mean Dude and Pogy Bobs—and that the Mean Dude was showing him the kingdom which could be his.

“This,” said the Mean Dude, pointing, “this is the prison where they beat me up. Kicked me in the kidneys. I was pissing blood for a week.”

Pissing blood for a week. For Pogy Bobs, age eleven, there was a genuine shock in those words. The shock of authenticity. This is where the real action is.

“And that,” said the Mean Dude, with a wolf-wet smile, “that’s just the start, Pogy, that’s just the start.”



The next day, Pogy Bobs came to his decision. There is a price for everything. The Mean Dude hadn’t said so—hadn’t even hinted at the subject—but Pogy knew. The Mean Dude was offering Pogy a new life, but there was an entrance price to be paid.

“So let’s pay it,” said Pogy.

And walked down the street and knocked on the door.

She answered.

“Hi,” she said. “I’m Eleanor Glavergail, Hyena of Death.”

The law forced her to announce herself like that. The whole world hated these parasites, these vampires who preyed on the suffer-

Hugh Cook

ing of others, and, one day, they would probably be swept out of existence, their offices burnt, their bodies broken, their web sites scrubbed out of existence to make room for more stuff about downtown restaurants and Parisian fashion shows. But, for the moment, here she was, alive and breathing.

“Hi,” said Pogy Bobs.

So far, so good. But then he began blurting. His words rushed out like a herd of swine stampeding over a cliff. Panicked, a mad rush, everything happening too quickly, the edges of the world losing focus, the world becoming a tunnel.

“I’m Pogy Bobs, and my daddy is the siller, silver, Silver Killer, you know, he’s a weld, a welder, he, he’s killed, six, seven, how many women, I think I have to sit down, can I use your bathroom?”

Soon he was confronting the void of white porcelain. Drooling. Abruptly, his lunch came blurping up. But that was not enough. His stomach kept purging itself until the painful green stuff came. This was his punishment. He should have listened to the Good Angel. But it was too late for that. He was already inside the lair of a Hyena of Death, and something dreadful was sure to happen next.

“Come this way,” said the Hyena of Death, when Pogy reemerged.

She stumbled as she led him into the living room, and Pogy Bobs realized she was drunk, drunk and reeling in the middle of the afternoon, an alcoholic, as drunk as his mother, and he was disgusted and excited at the same time, and she sat with her legs apart, and her panties were black, and they smelt of lions, and that was shocking and impossible and had nothing to do with baseball, and once again he was realizing there were forces in the world more potent than video games, and it was the wrong time for this to happen, he knew it, he was way too young, it was happening too soon, he was not ready, but that was how it was.

“So,” said the Hyena of Death. “You’re Pogy Bobs.”

Even drunk, she had committed his name to memory. Already.

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Names were her stock in trade. She bought people and sold them. She was a slave trader, trading human souls. He was not going to escape her.

"Yeah," said Pogy Bobs, eyeing the tape recorder, which had magically manifested itself on the coffee table, next to a big, serious book entitled "Exegesis: An Analysis of the Socio-Philosophical Implications of the Metaphysical Discourses of Dan Quayle", and the latest copy of Vogue magazine. The tape recorder was already running. "Yeah, I'm Pogy Bobs. The Mean Dude sent me."

"The Mean Dude?"

"A guy I know," said Pogy, remembering that she was a woman, and maybe women are different from men.

If women really are different from men—and, at age eleven, Pogy Bobs was aware of quite a bit of evidence suggesting that this is, in fact, the case—then maybe they don't get to meet the Mean Dude. Maybe something else happens. Yeah, probably. Girls just aren't going to go for the napalm thing, the killing fields vision. Girls want—but, hey, who understands women?

"This Mean Dude," persisted Eleanor.

"A kind of counselor guy," said Pogy. "I can't go into that, that's, uh, kind of personal, private and confidential, a kid and his counselor—okay? But he told me. To come here. And tell you. About my father."

"And your father..?"

Pogy told her all about it. His father missing, absent on a monthly schedule. The killings happening, monthly. The alleged trip to Pittsburgh which never happened. The gas bought outside of Trotter at the time when the Silver Killer was on the hunt.

Pogy Bobs told Eleanor Mavis Glavergail. And Eleanor Mavis Glavergail, the Hyena of Death, told the police. And the police gave her a privileged position: in on the surveillance operation, in on the kill. The result was local news only:

"Police Bust Gambling Ring."

Hugh Cook

Not just poker but blackjack as well. And a roulette wheel. A miniature casino, totally illegal.

The results? Well, to start with, Pete lost his job. Joel was indicted after the crack was found in his car. Stuart went home and blew his brains out with his .45. Gavin moved to San Francisco, and his parents never spoke of him again. Harry went to jail for statutory rape: his girl (like Stuart's) was only fourteen. And Pogy's father? Well, he got probation, but he lost his job, too. "You surely understand the company's position...."

And, after her necessary beating—it was somehow all her fault—Pogy's mother had first a miscarriage and then another relapse, and had to be taken away to the sanatorium again, possibly for the last time. After which Pogy's father went on an all-time drunk, and ended up in hospital with alcoholic poisoning.



Home alone, Pogy prowled the house, prying into the wreckage of his parents' life. The empty prescription packets. His father's HIV test—negative. In amongst his mother's lingerie, a box, rather bulky. Inside the box, nestled in mauve tissue paper, baseball mitt tattooed with the name of Horace Whelk.

"Horace Whelk," said Pogy, puzzling over it. Then, invoking the name of the Great Thinker, asked, "What would Dan Quayle make of this?"

As Pogy was not Dan Quayle, he had no way to solve the conundrum. The baseball mitt remained an unsolved aberration, a random piece of detritus from an alternate universe. No way to link it to this one.

That night, when Pogy fell asleep, the Good Angel and the Mean Dude came to him in tandem.

"You see what you've done?" said the Good Angel, shaking with wrathful fury. "You've destroyed your parents' marriage. One of

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your father's best friends is dead, another's in jail. Your father was a hard-working, stable family man, the salt of the earth. Was. And now look!"

"Yeah," said the Mean Dude. "True. See how it is? You can break generals, presidents, bank managers, you name it. Did you really earn those combat medals, general? Do you have a gun at home? That's how it is, Pogy. We can take them and break them."

"But you don't have to!" said the Good Angel. "You have a choice! You could live in a cleaner world, a better world! Brighter, happier, more cheerful!"

Pogy was confused, and not just because he was up to his waist in dead monkeys. What did he really want? He was on the cusp of a decision.

"I'm on the cusp of a decision," said Pogy.

He was good with words: it was, unfortunately, one of the sure marks of a latent tendency to Hyena-type behavior. Pogy knew as much. He had read about Hyena Syndrome in a psychology textbook. "I am a latent Hyena," he said, announcing it to himself. A latent Hyena, and too smart for his own good. He knew that, too.

"So, hey," said the Mean Dude, chewing on a dead gingerbread person. "Don't sweat it. You've got plenty of time to make a decision. Sit back, watch and wait. See what happens. Let reality shape you as it will."

"No!" said the Good Angel, furiously, hitting the Mean Dude on the head with a wet balloon. "You've got to get a grip on your moral destiny! You've got to fight this thing, Pogy! You can still be a Good Citizen, an Honest John! You must resist the Inner Hyena!"



Then the Silver Killer was caught. He turned out to be none other than Meekam Spleet, Pogy's school counselor. Live on TV, he confessed. He had done it all for the publicity. The glare of the TV

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lights: he was hot for it. It turned him on. If it hadn't been for the TV, he wouldn't have done it at all.

"It was that Glavergail slut," said Meekam Spleet. "The way her lips parted when she read the news. The tip of her tongue would come out, real pink, you could see it all wet, she was hot for it, I wanted to turn her on. She was asking me, begging me, that's why I did it."

The lynching of Eleanor Mavis Glavergail took place that very same day, starting at 3.17 pm precisely. They caught the Hyena of Death and they strung her up on high, kicking. Eleanor Mavis Glavergail, Pulitzer Prize winner, strangled slowly until dead. It was the perfect crime. There were no witnesses. Nobody saw anything. Someone doused the body with petrol and set it alight to destroy the forensic evidence—you watch enough TV, you learn about that kind of stuff.



The perfect crime? Well, it would have been, but for Pogy Bobs. He saw it happen, and he took pictures.

By 7 pm that very same day, Pogy Bobs was on a bus to Washington, D.C. He had three rolls of film sitting uncomfortably in a plastic bag which he had tucked inside his underpants. An agent who handled such products was going to meet Pogy at the bus terminal in Washington, and the agent was very, very interested.

Fatigued, Pogy Bobs nodded off to sleep.

"There's a price, you know," said the Mean Dude.

"Yeah," said Pogy. "Yeah."

Those whom Pogy had caught on film included his very own father.

"You're only eleven. They'll make you go live with your Uncle Hank. In North Dakota."

"Yeah," said Pogy, feeling flat, exhausted.

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Pogy Bobs and the Hyena of Death

"I mean, this is North Dakota I'm talking about! They don't even have electricity up there!"

"Yeah, I know that," said Pogy. "I've been there."

"Oh, sure, for Thanksgiving. But what would it be like to live there for a week? Or even longer?"

"I can handle it," said Pogy.

"You sure of that?" said the Mean Dude.

"You sell your soul to the Devil, there's a price to pay," said Pogy Bobs. Then, to stress his maturity, and his command of worldly wisdom: "I am eleven years old, you know. I know about stuff like that."

"You're confused," said the Mean Dude. "I'm not the Devil, I'm an aspect of the Evolved Interactive Consciousness, which is a big step up from the old-fashioned collective unconscious you've heard so much about. The Evolved Interactive Consciousness—okay? It's like the Internet, only you don't have to pay service provider fees."

But Pogy Bobs was no longer listening. He had slipped into a deeper level of the world of dreams. He was dreaming of the throne room of the empire—the Old Empire, upstream from the sea. The King sat on the Peacock Throne. Liquid gold trembled in the waiting retort. The air above the retort wavered and buckled, giving evidence of the heat within. The Executioner waited, stolid and impassive.

And Pogy knew: this is how it is.

You are the Messenger. If you deliver the Message, the King will have you killed. Your mouth will be filled with liquid gold. Your scream will be silent. You will perish because of your offence against the Hierarchy of Order.

The Hierarchy of Order is plain. The Father instructs the Child. The King instructs the People. The President instructs the Nation. You are usurping the natural order of things, and, for that reason, you must die.

But there is one more thing you have to know.

The King cannot deny the Message.

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That is a rule of the Game.

The King does not want to receive the message, but he must listen. And, while he listens, the power is yours. It is you who calls into existence the defeat of the King's armies, the famine in the northern province, the revolt in the eastern seaport. You call into existence his mother's sickness and his sister's death. You create things which never existed before. The rats in the granaries. The breach in the treasury. The barbarians at the gate.

And your power is such that what you create cannot be destroyed. You may die, but what you create persists, and it persists forever.



Pogy Bobs steps forward. He has made a decision. He stands in front of the King. He is wearing his hieratic mask: the mask of a Hyena of Death. And he speaks the Words Which Cannot Be Resisted.

"I am the Messenger," he says. "And I have a Message."

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