



## You Haven't Killed Me Yet

**M**OTHERFUCKERS WON'T LET me sleep. Distant echoes of pistols and shotguns prick my ears. Police choppers' machete propellers flutter past my window. Jaw-rattling lowrider woofers and tweeters skim by outside. Glass crashes. Women scream. Dogs bark. And all those sirens.

In the morning, without any sleep, I see the sunshine lower itself in lethal golden slabs through the blinds in this stifling little bedroom. There are poisonous X-rays in this eye-bleaching sunshine. The wicked light illuminates millions of floating particles in this cramped room. Smogbath. I'm coughing again. Evil carbon-monoxide spirits haunt this sick city, this sun-baked crater. It's a medical fact that if you live here long enough, your lungs will sprout lesions.

My apartment building is named *La Leyenda*. The Legend. This eighty-year-old stuccoed edifice hosts the ruins of smashed dreams, the dust of dead ingénues and failed leading men. A half-block away, a grayish, gummy film of spit and blood and exhaust-pipe ash blankets all the stars along Hollywood Boulevard.

The City of Angels. In all the years I've lived here, I haven't seen one fucking angel. But I've seen a man dressed as Jesus Christ, crown of thorns and all, dragging a huge wooden cross down the street. I've seen a man wearing a Darth Vader helmet and black cape swinging a plastic light saber at no one in particular. I've seen an armless Negro dwarf on a dirty blanket begging for spare change. I've seen a junkie shooting up in my parking lot. I've seen a naked woman running frantically down the Boulevard. I've seen a knife-wielding woman get shot by the LAPD, and while she was lying half-alive on her back, the cops exposed her blood-flecked tits for all to see as detectives milled around her, smoking cigs and laughing.

But no angels.

Dry psycho desert metropolis. Countless sand mites infesting an endless dune. You can drive two hours in any direction, and still you're within the Hydra's clutches. Sixty miles away from my apartment, I'm still stuck on some clogged-artery cement cloverleaf. When some

snarling old biddy cuts me off in traffic, I pull up alongside her, lean out my window, and start smashing her car door with a steel club. When some rich bitch flips us off in traffic, Debbie reaches over and squirts pepper spray in her face.

There are too many people here. Far too many. You can't escape them. Swirling, teeming bacteria. Homeless bodies splayed everywhere like war casualties.

And the Mexicans. Just billions of them. Tooting *marachi* music floats from rusted muscle cars. Oceans of little brown people hope to side-swipe your car so they can collect a big insurance payoff and bring *mamacita* plus the other forty-three members of their immediate family up from Oaxaca.

It would be hard to find a better argument against humanity than Los Angeles. Everyone—not only the actors—is acting, as if the sun has sweated all the sincerity out of them. Everyone has fled here from somewhere else so they can pretend they're somebody else. A city built on cocaine and fantasy and ultraviolet light.

Los Angeles, where nothing is real and everything is deadly.

Hollywood, where there are no Hollywood endings.

Debbie and I moved here from New York to mellow out.

What were we thinking?

We stand atop *La Leyenda's* roof, watching the flames fan out for miles during the Rodney King riots. The flames are so close, we can feel the heat. The human pestilence slithers up our street with the camping equipment and cases of frozen hot dogs they've looted from smashed-open stores. It isn't about oppression—it's about wanting to be like the rich people who hire cops to beat the poor people.

A 6.8 earthquake rips us from sleep and angrily hurls everything in our apartment onto the floor. Cracks in the walls. Cracks in the streets. Giant fault lines running underneath downtown. Giant fault lines running along my brain.

The Big One's coming. Everyone knows it is, and yet they still live here. This town begs for disaster. It's a geographical Shit Magnet. And, truthfully, the city would be much prettier if everyone here was dead. No smog. You could see the mountains for once.

Debbie and I have been living in LA for nearly four years, and we still don't have one friend here. We have painted ourselves into a lonely little corner of the world. We hate just about everything in our lives except each other, and even our love is starting to wear thin. We're hurt and mad and ready to lash out.

Debbie has a college degree in Theater Writing, and I have one in

Journalism. And at night, to escape the brain-flaying imprisonment of our day jobs, we write free-lance articles for whatever magazines will accept them. Debbie writes a string of B-movie character-actor profiles for a handful of low-circulation Hollywood trade rags. I write about rap, death metal, and LA gangs for shitty Tinseltown music publications.

We write about other people, not ourselves. About *their* thoughts and feelings, not ours.

And every time I write something, without fail, no turning back, do not pass Go, the editor lops off my favorite passages and lets them crash into the dustbin. It's uncanny. The only sentences of mine that I like are always the ones he *doesn't* like.

It's in poor taste, Mr. Goad.

It's unprofessional.

It's opinion, not fact.

It'll offend the advertisers.

And the readers.

They're steam-cleaning all the life out of my writing.

They're killing the Jim Goad in each article.

Debbie, whose parents never allowed her to show any emotion but fear, has vowed never to reproduce. One day, as a reaction against a nauseating late-1980s wave of mass-media infant-fetishism—*Baby Boom, Three Men and a Baby, Look Who's Talking, et al*—she pens a caustic one-page anti-baby screed. There's a blunt rhythmic economy to this new essay which is wholly different from the pieces she'd intended for publication. And it's the best thing she's ever written. It reads exactly what Debbie sounds like when she complains.

So I decide to start writing exactly what I sound like when I yell.

In school, they taught me to write with the reader in mind.

*Fuck* the reader. The reader is an enemy. An intruder. The reader is placated with whitewashes and lies. The reader wants to be told that things aren't really as bad as they seem. The reader wants to hear that LA is filled with happy angels and healthy sunshine.

Photo "A" shows the world as I see it.

Photo "B" shows the world as *they* write about it.

I will slowly circle everything that's wrong with Photo "B."

I will sign my literary death warrant. Commit career suicide. And call it like I see it.

Unpardonable sins. Incurable diseases. Unstoppable weapons. Inevitable demises. Everything too horrible to consider.

Hopeless causes? What, like human life? Universal brotherhood?

Love that lasts forever? Peace on earth? How about no rain while we're at it, too?

When I was three or four, my mother told me about some debilitating bone disease wherein your skeleton softens and eventually melts inside you, turning your body into a loose sac of rotting organs.

I was fascinated.

Throughout my childhood, government propaganda machines warned us that we'd be blasted to dot-matrix patterns of blood and bone by H-bomb after H-bomb.

I wanted to know more.

In the early 1980s, doctors announced that a virus transmitted through bodily fluids would render your immune system incapable of fighting disease, causing death in every case.

Now *that's* literature in action.

All the Ugly Things, the things people expend so much energy denying, have more permanence than the sweet sucking-candy lies about equality and justice and everlasting happiness.

Ugliness is God.

And I will pay homage to Him with words. I will spread my hatred like Christ multiplied fishes and loaves.

I decide to do a magazine where I tell the world what I really think about it.

I call it *ANSWER Me!*

It is the sound of Jim Goad getting upset. A transcribed temper tantrum. My id trampling my slaughtered superego. Gulliver shaking off all the Lilliputians. A thunderous, Wagnerian opus of symphonic loathing. It's an effort to yank myself out of sullen oblivion. Self-administered literary electroshock therapy. A way of screaming to make sure I'm alive.

But writers aren't violent.

And violent people can't write.

Meet the new breed.

Splitting the atom. Tapping into reptile brain. A force which ten thousand years of civilization hasn't been able to kill. Beyond morality. Beyond the need for justifications. Discarding the Rules of Conduct. Peeling away the layers of decorum. Erasing all the boundaries until all that remains is personal power and slain enemies.

The natural human state.

Halfway through my fucking life, and I still haven't spent one day entirely happy. I expected the world to be fair, and it isn't. I expected people to play fair, and they don't. I'm really a decent guy, but

there's only so much I can take. I'm very polite for the longest time, and then, well, I just explode. I've allowed myself to be nice to you so I can justify slamming your head against the wall.

The anger runs through me so strongly sometimes, I get the shivers. It consumes me until I feel all cracked and dried and peeled and blistered. I will not quietly accept the deadening of my soul.

So what do I do?

I take out a fly swatter and start crushing all the insects.

I'm not going to wallow in pain and heartache anymore. I'm just going to pick up my pen and start stabbing people with it. I've suffered for being different. Suffered for being superior. Now it's the world's turn to suffer. I'm here to make you all as miserable as you've made me.

Someone has to pay for that unhappy childhood of mine. Those unhappy teen years of mine. This bitterly unhappy adulthood of mine.

Everyone with happy families. Everyone born with money. Everyone who had it easier than I did. Everyone who breezed through life without ever feeling the pain I've felt.

Everyone.

Everyone who's ever told me what's best for me has been wrong. Everyone who's ever had authority over me wasn't even fit to lick my ass.

My parents. My teachers. The bosses who laughed at my quaint little "writing" career. The editors who tried to file down my teeth. Everyone who ever beat me up. Or kept me down. Or insulted me. Or thought they understood me but weren't even close.

Cell by cell, vein by vein, my flesh tells me I'm better than you are. So I will build a cathedral to my hatred. I will throw myself into it with the single-minded dedication of a religious lunatic. It only takes one zealot to fuck up a million compromisers.

Debbie contributes a few short rants for *ANSWER Me!*, but mostly it's my show. I do most of the writing and all of the production work.

Conceiving. Outlining. Researching. Writing. Editing. Rewriting. Re-editing. Typesetting. Proofreading. Correcting. Proofreading again. Correcting again. Laying out. Proofreading. Proofreading. Proofreading. Blowing it up on 11 x 17 Xeroxes. Proofreading again, this time with a magnifying glass.

Slaving over it. Tweaking and twisting and torquing it. Not one letter can be out of place. Picking every nit until it's perfect. Why don't you understand it has to be perfect?

Because you're sloppy even at things you value, like love. But I strain toward perfection in a world satisfied with bovine flatulence.

I sit at a hacked-up art table, ankle-deep in crumpled proofs and empty Styrofoam coffee cups. Melted wax and an Ex-Acto knife. Ancient typesetting equipment and a blurry old halftoning camera. These are my weapons.

This hatred keeps me working all night under a bare light bulb. Writing until dawn because I can't stop myself. A disciplined automaton. Losing sleep. Losing money. Losing years of my life, but I have to wrestle these primal emotions and pin them down on paper.

So there it is, plastered onto a page—the childhood abuse, the disdain, the arrogance, the screaming fits, the hate, the hate, the hate. All the violence, all the way back to my conception, captured in ink.

*ANSWER Me! #1* is released in 1991....*#2* comes in '92....*#3* in '93....*#4* in '94.

And that's all we write.

That's all we needed to write.

*ANSWER Me!* sucker-punches the world. It strafes the landscape with massive ordnance.

The Great Unwashed were apparently starving for real, raw, animal emotion. At a time when we have no friends where we live, mail pours in from all fifty states and a dozen foreign countries. Many letter-writers give *ANSWER Me!* the best compliment possible: "I've never seen anything like it before." One says that it's "not just a breath of fresh air—[it's] a fucking hurricane!" Reviewers call it "the greatest zine in the history of print" and "the hottest zine in America." A Belgian scribe predicts that "it will change the face of alternative publishing."

The magazine gets banned in England. Customs officials seize it in Canada and Australia. And the harder they try to squash it, the bigger it grows. Bootlegged artwork from *ANSWER Me!* surfaces on T-shirts and punk-rock flyers in Israel, Spain, and Greece.

Zinesters stand in line to interview us. We have saturated zinedom. You can't get away from us. Every zine you open, there we are, hoisting our guns and scowling.

Debbie and I challenged the world to a staring contest, and the world blinked. A pair of Hate Messiahs have arrived. They call us "The Dynamic Duo of Misanthropy" and "The Motorcyclists of the Apocalypse." Seemingly overnight, we become the Exterminating Angels of the Literary Netherworld. People see us as something larger than life. Something mythic.

*La Leyenda.*

Alone in our apartment, we're an underground sensation.

But I'm not looking for love 'n' cuddles. I seek what's familiar to me:

Conflict. Critics. Enemies.

A few brave soldiers are scoffing that I can't possibly be serious about all the hate and violence.

Excuse me?

I expected people to dislike ANSWER Me!—and I'm not bothered if people hate it or think it's shitty done—but it never occurred to me that anyone would think I'm only kidding.

My anger is a survival mechanism. It protects the core of my being. To say it isn't real is to infer I don't exist. To deny my anger is to kill me. When people say it's all a joke, I feel I'm being teased like my parents used to tease me. I feel as if they're laughing in my face while I cry, like my mother used to do.

So you want to test me? You want to provoke me, is that it? Everything is a joke to you, isn't it? Violence is the only thing you'll understand.

One by one, those who question whether I'm for real will get their answer.

You are now on my enemy list. And you will remain on that list until I cross you off.

I draw a stick figure of one critic. In childish handwriting I scrawl, "Little Mikey McP. was a jealous boy—jealous boys get MURDERED." I slice my leg open with a razor blade and wipe my blood—there's a lot of it flowing—all over the page. I send him the letter via Certified Mail. He calls me up, voice quavering, saying he's sorry.

I call up another critic and tell her I'm going to chop her to pieces and piss all over the chunks of her corpse.

I call up another critic and tell him I'll be at his office in ten minutes. When I get there, he's gone.

I call up another one, cock my shotgun, and hang up.

I call up another one, laugh maniacally for two minutes straight, and hang up.

I call up another one, play a re-looped snippet of a rap song that says, "Life is a gamble when you fuck with a psycho," and hang up.

I don't care where you live. No place is safe.

I'll fly to Kentucky and fuck you up.

I'll fly to Brooklyn and fuck you up.

I'll fly to Portland and fuck you up.

I'll fly to San Francisco and fuck you up.

I don't care if you have kids or a girlfriend—I'll fuck them up, too.

We WILL meet one day.

Better yet, this is my home address...why don't you stop by and see

whether my anger's for real?

Car alarms are wailing outside and my curtains are on fire and machine-gun bullets are piercing holes in my walls, and I really don't feel like being nice right now.

You see, I have a headache. And I don't like loud noises. And your endless chatter is REALLY starting to bother me. And you're too stupid to keep quiet.

Go ahead, asshole. Make me a legend. Turn me into a cult leader. Imbue me with sinister divinity.

You will choke on my words someday. You will be forgotten because you strove to be normal. But I will keep coming. In your dreams, I will keep coming. Just when you think you're finally rid of me, I will keep coming and coming and coming.

Pounding. Pounding. Pounding.

Pounding back.

See the look in my eyes? See how I look straight through you? I can focus my eyes on a speck of dust a hundred yards away and stare at it for hours.

You don't understand—I surround and develop and devour you. I will wear you out. Believe that.

Lone wolf. Solo cowboy. One-man army. Two-legged demolition squad. Wound up like a tin soldier.

From snowballs to avalanches.

From butterflies to Stealth fighters.

From pubic hairs to rain forests.

From a grapefruit to the planet Jupiter.

It's all so small, so very simple, yet you blow it out of proportion every fucking time.

Why?

WHY?!?

ANSWER Me!

ANSWER Me, motherfucker!

ANSWER Me, or I'll shove your nose up into your brain!

Streaks of beautiful flame shoot in ten-thousand-mile arcs across the sun's surface. My anger is the sun. My will is the magnifying glass. And you are the pitiful ant that I burn to a crisp on the sidewalk.

Bring down the hatred. Bring it down. Let it fall like napalm all over the world tonight. Let it burn, burn, burn through the lies until everyone's dead.

All that's left is force. And power. And me rolling over you.

My hammer to your head. My dick in your mouth. My bullet to your

brain. My finger up your ass, dirty fingernail scratching into your rectal membrane.

These are my words, the words that will outlast everything. Densely packed matter. Unalloyed. Deadly.

So much power in this psychotic mind of mine. Words and thoughts which burn laserlike through glass, steel, and cement.

My words will find you. They will slip through your fingertips and hit their target.

A brain tumor? A blood clot? A bone splinter pressing in against my aggression center?

Doesn't matter.

I will die for these words. Kill for these words. And you aren't nearly as dedicated about anything.

There's nothing ironic about the way you're sprawled out on the floor. But still I find it funny.

Try to bury me, and I'll dig myself up through the dirt and rocks and roots and worms. I will rise, rise, rise.

Break my nose. Smash my teeth. Crack my ribs, and still I come up swinging.

I will not bend. Or break. Or flinch. I *will* win. You *will* lose. No equivocation. No gradations. No shades or subtleties or nuances.

I am not easily killed. In fact, you may die trying to kill me.

You haven't killed me yet, mother.

You haven't killed me yet, father.

You haven't killed me yet, world.

Not yet.

