

## Vurt

by Jeff Noon

a.b.e-book v3.0 / Notes at EOF

### Synopsis:

(There was no back cover info. . . these are excerpts from a review at Amazon.com):

If you like challenging science fiction, then Jeff Noon is the author for you. *Vurt*, winner of the 1994 Arthur C. Clarke award, is a cyberpunk novel with a difference, a rollicking, dark, yet humorous examination of a future in which the boundaries between reality and virtual reality are as tenuous as the brush of a feather.

But no review can do Noon's writing justice: it's a phantasmagoric combination of the more imaginative science fiction masters, such as Phillip K. Dick, genres such as cyberpunk and pulp fiction, and drug culture.

VURT.

Copyright © 1993 by Jeff Noon.

All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews. For information, address St. Martin's Press, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
Noon, Jeff. *Vurt*/Jeff Noon.

p. cm.

ISBN 0-312-14144-0

1. Brothers and sisters -- England -- Manchester -- Fiction.
2. Manchester (England) -- Fiction. 3. Virtual reality -- Fiction.

[PR6064.045V871996]

823'.914-dc20 95-41014 CIP

First published in Great Britain by Ringpull Press Ltd

First St. Martin's Griffin Edition: February 1996

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For Nick -- totally feathered up, living on the dub side

A young boy puts a feather into his mouth. . .

# Vurt

---

by Jeff Noon

a.b.e-book v3.0 / Notes at EOF

## Synopsis:

(There was no back cover info. . . these are excerpts from a review at Amazon.com): If you like challenging science fiction, then Jeff Noon is the author for you. *Vurt*, winner of the 1994 Arthur C. Clarke award, is a cyberpunk novel with a difference, a rollicking, dark, yet humorous examination of a future in which the boundaries between reality and virtual reality are as tenuous as the brush of a feather.

But no review can do Noon's writing justice: it's a phantasmagoric combination of the more imaginative science fiction masters, such as Phillip K. Dick, genres such as cyberpunk and pulp fiction, and drug culture.

VURT.

Copyright © 1993 by Jeff Noon.

All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews. For information, address St. Martin's Press, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Noon, Jeff. *Vurt*/Jeff Noon.

p. cm.

ISBN 0-312-14144-0

1. Brothers and sisters -- England -- Manchester -- Fiction.
2. Manchester (England) -- Fiction. 3. Virtual reality -- Fiction.

[PR6064.045V871996]

823'.914-dc20 95-41014 CIP

First published in Great Britain by Ringpull Press Ltd

First St. Martin's Griffin Edition: February 1996

For Nick -- totally feathered up, living on the dub side A young boy puts a feather into his mouth. . .

# DAY 1

---

**"Sometimes it feels like the whole  
world is smeared with Vaz."**

# STASH RIDERS

---

Mandy came out of the all-night Vurt-U-Want, clutching a bag of goodies.

Close by was a genuine dog, flesh and blood mix; the kind you don't see much any more.

A real collector's item. It was tethered to the post of a street sign. The sign read NO GO. Slumped under the sign was a robo-crusty. He had a thick headful of droidlocks and a dirty handwritten card -- "hungry n homeless, please help." Mandy, all twitching steps and head-jerks, scurried past him. The crusty raised his sad little message ever so slightly and the thin pet dog whined.

Through the van's window I saw Mandy mouth something at them; "Fuck off, crusties.

Get a life." Something like that.

I was watching all this in the halo of the night lights. We stuck to the dark hours in those days. The Thing was on board and that was a major crime; possession of live drugs, a five year stretch guaranteed.

We were waiting in the van for the new girl. Beetle was up front, ladies' leather gloves pulled tight onto his fingers, smeared with Vaz. He likes to feel a little bit greased when he rides.

I was in the back, perched on the left side wheel housing, Bridget on the other, sleeping. Some thin wisps of smoke were rising from her skin. The Thing-from-Outer-Space lay between us, writhing on the tartan rug. He was leaking oil and wax all over the place, lying in a pool of his own juices.

I caught a movement in the air above the parking space.

*Oh shit!*

Shadowcop! Broadcasting from the store wall, working his mechanisms; flickering lights in smoke. And then the flash of orange; an inpho beam shining out from the shadowcop's eyes. It caught Mandy in its flare-path, gathering knowledge. She ducked down from the beam, banging, hard-core, on the van doors.

The dog was howling at the cop, scared by the lights.

I opened the doors a thin-girl measure. Mandy slipped through.

The dog went for the cop's legs, twin fangs closing on nothing but mist. That dog was confused!

Mandy handed me the bag.

"You got it?" I asked, dragging her inside.

A tangerine flare from outside, a burning light.

"Got some Beauties," her answer, as she stepped over the Thing, into the van.

"You got the one?"

---

Mandy just looked at me.

Something was howling outside. I glanced back and saw the poor dog on fire, the shadowcop moving towards us, reloading.

He let loose a tight inpho, beaming onto our number-plate, which was just a series of random numbers anyway. *You won't find that in your banks.*

The Vurt-U-Want doors crashed open and a young man came stumbling through, looking scared.

"It's Seb," whispered Mandy.

Two cops followed him out of the doors. Real-life versions. Fleshcops. They chased Seb over toward the wire fence that skimmed one edge of the car park. I turned around to the Beetle.

"It's a bust!" I shouted. "Let's go, Bee! Out of here!"

And we were. Reversing first, away from the bollards. "Watch it!" This from Mandy, nervous as fuck as the van jerked backwards. She was thrown to the floor, landing on the Thing-from-Outer-Space. I was clinging to the straps. Brid was rudely pitched from sleep, pupils in shock from the sudden awakening. The Thing had six tentacles wrapped around Mandy. The girl was screaming.

The van leapt up onto a pavement. I thought the Beetle was trying to dodge the beams, maybe he was but all we felt was the sickening thud and a yowling scream as the left back wheel put the collector's item out of its misery.

The crusty was crying over his dog and pushing his fists through the shadowcop's smoke as we scorched the forecourt. The van made a wild circle, and I saw the whole thing sliding by --

the shadowcop, the crusty, the dead dog, until Beetle got it under control. Mandy was struggling with the Thing-from-Outer-Space, calling it all the names. Over the Beetle's shoulder I could see the wire fence coming up close. Seb was dropping down on the other side, down to the tramlines.

The two fleshcops were struggling with the fence. Beetle turned on the headlights, catching them full beam. He gunned the Stashmobile towards them, total, shouting out, "Awoohhh!!! Kill the cops! Kill the cops!" The cops fell off the fence. Their faces in the headlights were a joy to behold; fleshcops, scared to fuck. They were running now, away from the van's bulk, but Beetle had it; he swung the wheel around like a true star, last moment, taking the Stashmobile all around the parking space, heading for the gateway. The debris of a thousand trips was banging and clattering all over the floor as we took a vicious U-turn onto Albany Road and then left onto Wilbraham Road. One last glimpse over the Vurt-U-Want wall and I could see the shadowcop beaming messages into the air. The robo-crusty was a pile of fused plastic and flesh. A cop siren wailed through the darkness.

"They're onto us, Bee!" I cried. "Hit the jam!"

Beetle took the brow at speed. Oh boy, were we flying! Stash Riders! Riding the feathers back to the pad. The point of impact squelched Mandy deeper into the Thing's embrace.

Mandy screaming at the Thing, "Get the fuck off me!"

---

Keeping firm hold of the strap, I dropped the goody bag, and reached down with the free hand, jabbing at the Thing's belly flesh, tickling him. The one weak spot. How he loved that! His laughter was dredged up from deep inside, from thousands of miles. He was writhing around and Mandy was able to slide free. "Fuck that! Jesus!" She was shaking from the fight.

Through the back windows I saw a cop car's lights flashing. Its siren was loud, piercing.

The Beetle took the corner onto Alexandra Road without slowing. Brid was clinging to the straps, desperate for sleep, her skin full of shadows. The Thing-from-Outer-Space was crying out for a fix. Mandy had a tight hold of herself, and I had the goody bag back in my free hand. The Beetle had the wheel.

*Everybody has to grab hold of something.*

Alexandra Park was a dark jungle shimmering the right side windows. We were skirting Bottletown now and no doubt the park was full of demons; pimps, pros, and dealers -- real, Vurt, or robo.

"Cop car's closing, Beetle!" I shouted.

"Hang on, folks," he replied, cool as ever, twisting the van into a tight right, onto Claremont Road.

"They're still with us," I told him, watching the cop lights following.

Beetle burned all the way down, over the Princess Road, into the Rusholme maze. Cops were following, but they were up against three killer factors: Beetle had lover's knowledge of these streets, all moving engine parts were greased with Vaz, Beetle was hooked on speed. We hung on tight as he took a vicious series of lefts and rights. It was a tough job, hanging on, but we didn't mind. "Do it, Bee!" cried Mandy, loving the adventure. Old-style terraces passed by, each side of us. On one of the walls someone had scrawled the words -- Das Uberdog. And underneath that -- pure is poor. Even I didn't know where we were. That's the Beetle for you. Total knowledge, fuelled by Jam and Vaz. Now he was driving us down a back alley, scraping paint off both sides of the Stashmobile. That's okay. The van could live with that. A quick glance through the back windows; there go the cops, speeding on by, towards some dumbfuck nowhere. Bye, bye, suckers! We came out of the alley, and there we were, the Moss Lane East. Beetle took another right, heading us back home.

"Slow down some, Bee," I said.

"Fuck slowness!" he replied, burning the world with his wheels.

"We're like eggs back here, Beetle," said Mandy. And the guy slowed us down, some.

Well there you go; some things will slow the Beetle down; the chance of a new woman, for instance. Bridget must have had the same feeling; she was looking daggers at the new girl, smoke rising from her skin, as she tried her best to tune into the Beetle's head. I guess she wasn't getting too far.

No matter.

We were in some kind of easy travelling by now, so I picked up the goody bag, emptying the contents out on to the tartan rug. Five blue Vurt feathers floated down. I caught a few as they drifted, reading the printed labels.

"Thermo Fish!" I said. "Done it."

"How was I to know?" said Mandy.

I read another. "Honey Suckers! Oh my shit! Where is it!?"

"Next time, Scribble," Mandy said, "you go shopping."

"Where's English Voodoo? You promised me. I thought you had contacts?"

"That's what he had."

I read the other three. "Done it. Done it. Not done it, but it sounds boring anyway." I'd let the feathers go in disgust. Now they were floating around inside the van.

Mandy's eyes were darting from feather to feather, as she spoke; "These are very beautiful."

"And the rest. . ." I said.

"What's that mean?"

"No messing. The whole bit. English Voodoo. Deliver."

A blue feather had landed on the stomach of the Thing-from-Outer-Space. One of his tentacles reached out for it. His spiky fingers took a hold, and a hole opened up in his flesh, a greasy orifice. He turned the feather in his feelers and then stroked it in, direct, to the hole. He started to change. I wasn't sure which feather he'd loaded, but from the way he was moving his feelers I guess he was swimming with the Thermo Fish.

*I sure know that wave.*

The Beetle glanced back at the noise of the waves, shouting; "He's going in alone! No one goes in alone!"

The Beetle had this obsession about doing Vurt alone. That you'd need help in there, friends in there. What he really meant was -- you need me in there.

"Cool it, Bee," I said. "Just drive." Just to spite me he put on a sudden spurt but I was holding tight to the straps. No problems.

I turned back to Mandy; "Give!"

"You want?" said Mandy.

"I want. You found the Voodoo?"

We turned right onto the Wilmslow Road, as Mandy pulled a stash from the inner reaches of her denim jacket. It was a black feather. Totally illegal. "No. But I found this. . ."

"What is it?"

"Seb called it Skull Shit You think he got away?"

"Who gives a fuck! This is all you got?"

"Said it was red-hot. You don't like?"

"Sure. I like. It's just not what I want."

"So make do."

"Mandy!" I was losing it. "I don't think you realise. . ."

Her red hair was catching fire from each passing streetlamp; I had to pull myself away from the flames.

That new girl was getting to me.

Behind the back of Vurt-U-Want, when the time was right, so Mandy said, you could buy a bootleg remix. The mainman was Seb. The supplier, so Mandy said. He worked the legit counter, with a nice little side-sweep in black market dreams. So Mandy said. So we'd sent the new girl after English Voodoo. Girl had come back with five cheap Blues and a vicious Black.

Added all together -- a thousand miles away from the Voodoo. Girl had failed.

The van took a sudden swerve and we were all thrown to the wall. The black feather slipped from Mandy's grip. The Thing made a swipe for it, but he was so wave-deep, pressed against the van side, his feelers were numb and he missed out.

I scooped the outlaw flight up into my palms. The van took another swing, no doubt dodging some dumbfuck pedheads. The Beetle was shouting through his window; "Fucking walkers! Get a car!" He was driving like an insect; not thinking, just reacting. The guy was high.

Cortex Jammers. You know how a fly flies? At the top speed always, and yet dodging obstacles instantaneously?

That was how the Beetle drove. They say don't jam and drive, but we had total belief in the master. He was jammed right out of fear, and that was beautiful.

I twisted the black feather around to read the label. It was handwritten, which always meant a good time.

"Skull Shit. . ."

"It's good?" asked Mandy.

"Is it good!? Oh come on!"

---

"You don't want?" she said.

"I've done it already."

"No good?"

"Sure. It's fine. It's dandy."

"Seb told me it was sweet."

"Sure it's sweet," I said. "It's just not the Voodoo."

The Beetle jam-reacted to the title. "Did she get it, Scribble?"

"She did fuck."

"Well bully!" spat Mandy.

"Yeah. Well fucking bully!" I told her.

"Hey, you two. Keep it quiet," Bridget said, in that smoky voice of hers, the shadowgirl.

"Some of us are trying to get some sleep." Bridget was Beetle's lover, and I guess she was just putting the new girl in her place.

"Sleep is for the dead," replied Mandy. One of her slogans.

"Almost home," announced the Beetle.

We were riding through Rusholme, straight down the curry chute. Mandy hand-cranked a window. She managed a half-inch gap before the mechanism failed, clogged up with rust. But through the tiny gap a rich complex of powder smells was making my tongue wet; coriander, cumin, cinnamon, cardamom—each of them genetically fine-tuned to perfection.

"Christ!" Mandy told the gang, "I could kill a curry! When did we last eat?"

The Beetle answered; "Thursday."

"What day is it now?" slurred Bridget, from the half-lit world of Shadow.

"It's the weekend, sometime," I said. "At least I think it is."

The Thing-from-Outer-Space was by now a blur of feelers and I could almost see the Thermo Fish swimming his veins. It was making me envious.

"Can anyone tell me why we're carrying this alien shit around?" asked Mandy. "Why don't we just see him? Or eat him?" The van went silent. "I mean, why are we chasing around after feathers? We've got the Thing right here. We don't need feathers!"

"The Thing comes with us," I told her. "Nobody touches him!"

---

"You just want to make the swap," Mandy replied.

"You got a problem with that, Mandy?" I asked.

"Let's just get home." Her voice defiant. "Let's take some stuff."

"We will do." I felt for her all of a sudden. She was new to us, two days old in the gang and full of the will to please.

*It's just that she had a hard act to follow.*

"I know I did bad in the Vurt-U-Want. I didn't know what to look for."

"I told you, didn't I? Precisely?"

"Let's stay up all night playing Vurts," she said. "Let's make a meal from scraps in the fridge. Let's not go to bed."

"We'll do all that," I told her. *Anything to hold back the pain.*

We took a hard right turn into Platt Lane, and then another into the garage space behind the fiat. The van scalded to a sudden halt. "We're home," announced the Beetle. Didn't we know it? Only the Thing was coping, his body full of wave-knowledge, Vurt-knowledge. He just sort of flowed into the doors and then away, loving it.

And then the voice. . .

"Scribble. . . Scribble. . . Scribble. . ."

Words floating upwards, from nowhere, calling my name.

"Scribble. . ."

Desdemona's voice. . .

I looked around to see who was playing the fool.

*Oh shit. Nobody should use that voice. And I got a sudden flash then, of Desdemona falling away from me, through into a yellow blaze. . .*

"Who said that?" I demanded.

"Said what, Scribble?" asked Mandy.

"My name! Who the fuck said it?"

A silence fell over the van.

"It was in. . . it was in Desdemona's voice. . ."

---

"Do we have to keep thinking about her?" asked Mandy.

"Yes."

*Yes we do. Keep thinking about Desdemona. Don't ever let her go. Not until I find her again. And then keep her forever.*

I listened to the van settling its rust deposits.

The Riders were looking at me. Even the Beetle was twisted around, his eyes full of jam;

"Nobody said anything, Scribb." But then I got it again, that voice.

"Scribble. . . Scribble. . ."

And I got where it was coming from; the Thing. A gash had opened in his flesh, a set of black gums peeled back from crumbling teeth, and a tongue of lard moving there, between them.

"Scribble. . ."

But only I could hear. Why was it only me, and why was he using that voice? That beautiful voice. . .

Beetle broke the mood; "Let's do it! Inside!"

I heard an owl calling, from the Platt Fields. Real, Vurt, or robo -- who can tell the difference any more?

No matter.

It had a longing to it.

# GAME CAT

---

This week's safe selection, my kittlings. Status: blue and legal.

THERMO FISH. You went swimming in the Seas of Pitch. But now you're back on Earth and you're feeling slightly queasy. It can only get worse. Because the Thermo Fish of Pitch have invaded your system. Your blood stream is a river home for them. They love those passages.

You're feeling the heat inside, the biting heat. One thing to do; buy yourself some nano-hooks, some pitchworm bait, go fishing for a week. You know the Game Cat doesn't lie.

HONEY SUCKERS are out to get you. They want you for supper. Six legs, four wings, two antennae and a demon sting. They'll cover your body with bites and turn you into a swarm.

Only quork juice will save you. It turns the Honies to pulp. You better find some, and soon, because those bugs are coming. Trouble is, quorks live on the planet jangle. The Cat says squirt those suckers

# FLESH TECHNIQUES

---

We had to drag the Thing-from-Outer-Space out of the van, his fat sack of a body clinging to the tartan rug, glued by the juices.

Beetle opened the van's doors. "Come on, lazy fucks," he shouted, reaching into the back to gather the dropped feathers from the van floor. One of them, the black, he slipped into his baccy box. "I feel like tripping out somewhere." He was walking fast towards the house.

The pad was on the top floor of the Rusholme Gardens. Sure, it was in Rusholme but no trace of a garden. Just an old-style block of flats on the corner of Wilmslow and Platt.

The doorcam reacted to Beetle's image in a loving way, opening its gates in a slow, seductive swing. Brid was back in shadow mode, sleep-walking to the step-light, so that left me and Mandy holding the can. The can was the Thing and he was like Vaz between our fingers. Oh boy, Thing was hot; totally adventurous. Respect to that.

"Let's move it, Big Thing," I said.

The Desdemona calls had stopped. Now he was rambling in his own language. Xa Xa Xa!

Xhasy Xhasy! Stuff like that. Maybe he was travelling the Vurt-waves, looking for a new home.

Maybe I'm some kind of romantic fool, especially when the Manchester rain starts to fall in memory and I'm scribbling this down, chasing the moments. Bridget used to say that the rain around there was special, that something had gone wrong with the city's climate. That you always thought it was just about to start raining, but it always was, anyway. All I know is that looking back I swear I can feel it falling on me, on my skin. That rain means everything to me, all of the past, all that has been lost. I can see big spots of rain on the gravel. Over the road the black trees of Platt Fields Park are whispering and swaying, receiving the gift of water gratefully. The moon is a thin knife, a curved blade. Miles from there, and years and years later, I can still feel that slow struggle towards the flat door.

Thing-from-Outer-Space wasn't really from Outer Space. Mandy just called him that, and we'd all latched onto it. Well then, what would you call a shapeless blob that didn't speak any known language and that had come into your world by a bad accident? Tough one, huh?

"Stop dropping him!" hissed Mandy, her voice heavy from the exertion. The rain had plastered her hair flat to her brow.

"Does it look like I'm dropping him?"

"His head's on the floor!"

"Is that his head? I thought it was his tail."

Mandy was getting angry at me, as though I should enjoy carrying aliens over wet gravel, in the dark in the rain. As though I should know all the various techniques of carrying aliens.

"Keep a hold of him!" she screamed.

---

"Keep a hold of what? He's all slippery."

Just then a shadowcop flickered into life, broadcasting from the Platt Fields' aerial. He moved like a fog, the starry lights of his mechanisms going on and off, on and off, as he drifted through the trees. I told Mandy to get a move on.

"Look who's talking about speed," she replied.

We had to bend the Thing into a strange shape to get him through the house doors, a kind of Mobius knot variant. The Thing didn't mind; his body was super-fluid anyway, from the embrace of Vurt. A quick glance over the shoulder told me that the shadowcop was out of the park and heading towards the flats. I slammed the door on the sight. Silence. Pause. A catch of breath. The look of despair in Mandy's eyes, naked eyes under the hall lights, her arms straining to hold the weight of alien meat. "Shit!" I said. "We forgot the rug." The Thing was naked in our hands.

"How did we get here?" Mandy asked.

"What?"

"Why is it always like this?"

"Never mind that. Keep going."

Above us, on the next landing, Brid was drifting with the shadows, trailing smoke.

"Follow her," I said.

It was like carrying a bad dream up a flight of greasy collapsing stairs.

*Sometimes it feels like the whole world is smeared with Vaz.*

"Are you after the Beetle?" I asked, halfway up the first flight

"Beetle? Don't be daft."

"Oh good. Because Bridget would kill you."

"Seb told me something."

"Oh yeah?" I managed, between panting breaths.

"There's a new delivery, tomorrow."

"Of what?"

"New stuff. Good stuff, he said. Bootlegs. Well black."

"Voodoo's not black. I told you that."

"Yes, English Voodoo. Seb --"

---

"He's got it!? Mandy!"

"Not yet. Coming in tomorrow --"

"Mandy! This is --"

"Watch out! The Thing! He's. . ."

I was dropping the alien. My hands were too sweaty. I was losing the world. A feather was floating in my mind. A beautiful multicoloured specimen. I almost had it! Just reach out!

"Scribble!" Mandy's voice calling me back down. "What's wrong with you?"

"I need it, Mandy! No messing. We've got to find Seb again."

"Not him. He gave me the contact name. Said that Icarus was getting a new delivery."

"Icarus?"

"Icarus Wing. That's his source. Seb's supplier. You know him?"

I'd never heard of him. "Mandy, why didn't you say this before?"

"Would have done. Just the cops. . . and all that. . . the shadow-cop. . . the dog. Scribble, I got confused. I. . . I'm sorry. . ."

I looked at her then, her greasy scarlet hair a mess from the rain, a last smudge of paint on her bottom lip. Oh sure, no great beauty under the harsh light of a stairwell, face creased from the carrying of the lump of alien flesh, but my heart was calling out a song, a kind of love song, I guess. Christ knows, it had been a long time without singing.

"Do you think Seb will be alright?" she asked.

"Find him, Mandy. Ask him about English Voodoo --"

"I don't think he'll be working that Vurt-U-Want counter any more."

"Don't you know where he lives?"

"No. He's very secretive. . . Scribb!" Mandy's eyes in shock mode.

"What? What is it?"

"Over there! The corner --"

We'd reached the first landing by now. There was a store cupboard set into the wall. It was marked N GO. In the dark space between it and the wall lay a coil of rope, a violet and green rope. It moved. Sudden like.

"It's a snake!" screamed Mandy. *Oh fuck!* Just then the lights went out.

---

Bastard landlord had them on a strict timer and the next switch was some two feet away, down the landing. Two feet's a long way to go when you're carrying an alien and it's dark and there's a dreamsnake on the loose.

"Don't panic!" I said to her, in the dark.

"Turn on the fucking light!"

"Don't move!"

Mandy dropped the Thing. I still had my hands under one end, and I felt the weight jerk as the bulk hit the floor. Mandy was running to the next switch. Snakes can see in the dark, but we can't. *So hit that switch, new girl!* I was sweating with the fear and the Thing was starting to slip from my fingers. The lights came back on but it wasn't Mandy who'd hit the switch. The woman from 210 had come out to see the noise and she'd got to the switch first. This is what she saw: Mandy, frozen, two inches from the control, me holding on for dear life to a pulsating mess of feelers and grease, a whip-fast coil of violet and green slithering to the nearest shadow.

I felt a nagging pain in my left leg, just where I'd been bitten. But that was over four years ago. So why the *pain*? Memory can be a right bitch sometimes.

The woman just stared at us for two seconds and then started to scream;

"Argghhh!!!!!!!!!!!!!!" It was a knife-hot screeching, high and loud. The noise shot down the corridors, threatening a mass stepping-out.

Mandy hit the woman.

I'd never seen her violence until then. Only thought about it.

The woman was knocked into silence. I could imagine all of the occupants quaking in their beds from the scream, and then its sudden termination. Hopefully they would stay scared.

"What is it?" the woman said at last.

Mandy looked at me. I looked at Mandy, then at the Thing in my weakening hands, then at the woman.

"It's a prop," I said.

She looked at me.

"We're part of an avant garde theatre company. We're called Drip Feed Theatre. Soy what." We're doing a new piece entitled English Voodoo. . ."

"That's right," said Mandy, coming out of shock.

"We're very experimental and wild. We've had this. . . uh. . . this. . . thing. . . made for us by a mad

artist. He made it out of old tyres and a ton of animal fat. We're just taking delivery."

---

"Do you like it?" chipped in Mandy.

The woman just kept on looking, maybe building up to another screaming session.

"We live in 315," I said. "Say, do you want to come up? We're having some friends round. We're going to rehearse the play. Fancy it?"

"Oh my God, how gross!" the woman said, before slipping back inside of her flat, slamming the door.

Mandy and I smiled.

We smiled. And something passed between us.

Don't ask what.

"Has the snake gone?" Mandy asked.

Dreamsnakes came out of a bad feather called Takshaka. Any time something small and worthless was lost to the Vurt, one of these snakes crept through in exchange. Those snakes were taking over, I swear. You couldn't move for them.

"It's gone. Hit the switch one more time. Let's finish this."

So we climbed the stairs together. Two humans, one alien strung heavy between them, and we managed to get to the second landing before the lights went out again. We clattered down the corridor. Mandy going for the switch with one hand, the other desperately trying to hold onto the slippery flesh. No luck. *There's never any luck!* The Thing hit the floor like a sack of meat pulp. The darkness was thick, and full of breathings.

"Do the lights, new girl."

"I can't --"

"Do it."

"I can't find it."

"Get out of the way --"

Just then her fingers found the switch.

The light came on for an instant, then was gone, with a flat pop of burn-out. Bulb gone. In the brief flare we both saw the rapid flicking of violet and green.

"Snake!" I was screaming. "Move it! Move it!"

We hauled the Thing up and dragged him along, as best we could, which wasn't that good, and more o

less manhandled that meat towards the haven of flat 315. I smashed into the door, expecting hard response, but the way was open, well open, as we fell through, all three of us; male, female, alien. Mandy kicked the door shut with a neat back-heel and we collapsed into one shivering heap on the ha carpet.

The snake's head was trapped in the door and the Beetle walked through from the kitchen, carrying a breadknife.

He cut that fucker off.

# GAME CAT

---

## **This week's black selection:**

SKULL SHIT is one heavy fuck. Don't try it alone, kittlings. This Vurt is going to blast you. You'll be travelling the paths of your own mind, and that's some maze in there. There's a beast at the centre and it's angry. Only the chosen know what the beast looks like, because only the chosen get that far.

The Cat's been there, of course, and lived to write the review, but I wouldn't wish the sight on my children (if I had any). Unless they're ultra-brats, in which case. . . feed them this. Skull Shit aka The Synapse Murders, Head Fuck, Temple Vomit, Id Slayer. Call it what you like, do what you like; remember the rule: Be careful. Be very, very careful. Not for the weak.

Note: possession of this beauty can land you a two year stretch. That's a load of game-time to be missing, so stay cool. Keep it close. This Cat has warned you.

**(SOME SERIOUS)**

# SKULL SHIT

---

Brid was slumped on the settee, slow-gazing at a two-week-old copy of the Game Cat.

Beetle was standing by the window, leafing through the feather stash. He had the snake head pinned to his jacket lapel. I had the right side of my face laid out on the dining table, my left eye fixed on a small lump of apple jam. I was getting my gear back together. That was a hard ride.

The Thing-from-Outer-Space was lying on the floor, waving for a fix, his grease dripping onto Bridget's Turkish rug. Mandy was in the kitchen, eating bread and honey.

*Yeah, sure!* And the King was in his counting house, counting out his money. *No doubt.*

Except that we'd just trashed a week's dripfeed on five lousy Blues and a single done-it-already Black Sure, the Beetle could sell some low-level Vurt to a robo-crusty. Or maybe I could persuade Brid to sing some smoky songs in one of the locals, me on keyboards and decks, but the shadowcops were everywhere. Most pubs had one, broadcasting from above the Vurtbox, shining inpho all over undesirables. Those inphobeams could match a face up to the Cop Banks in half a nanosec.

Everybody was afraid of the shadowcops. There was this rumour going around that they could beam right into your brains, reading your thoughts there, just like a shadowgirl could do.

Not true. They were just roboshads; taking in only what their beams could see, which was only the everyday surfaces. Don't believe the hype; shadowcops ain't got soul.

DEAR SIR, WE HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE THAT YOU ARE CURRENTLY

RECEIVING BASIC NEEDS ALLOWANCE. *Who the fuck doesn't take dripfeed these days?*

WE HOPE YOU ARE NOT RECEIVING PAYMENT FOR TONIGHT'S PERFORMANCE. I would look over to the bar, seeking assistance from the landlady. She would be hiding her face in a jar of Fetish. THIS WOULD BE IN DIRECT VIOLATION OF DECREE 729. PLEASE

DISCLOSE.

Of course, officer. Straight away. *I think not.*

That apple jam sure looked tasty. Boy, we were hungry!

Mandy came back out of the kitchen, clutching a doorstopper sandwich. She plumped herself down on a scatter cushion. We were all there, all five of us, the Stash Riders, in some form of life or other. The Beetle turned to face us, the five blue feathers clutched in one hand. He took each Blue into his other hand, saying their names out loud, each in turn, and then let them fall to the carpet. Thermo Fish. Crack Flowers. Venus Dust. Thunderwings. Honey Suckers. . ."

We watched the feathers drift. Beetle turned directly to Mandy; "Cheap Blues," he said. "We don't do cheap Blues --"

"I had to buy something," cried Mandy. "You can't just go in the shop, ask for black feathers! Seb would've laughed --"

---

"You got the hots for this shop guy?" Beetle asked. Mandy just turned away. The Beetle opened his baccy box, took out the black feather. He moved towards us, waving that Vurt like a dream ticket. "S For tonight's entertainment. . . Skull Shit." His lips were smiling. It was a wicked smile.

Mandy turned back to face him; "Christ, if I'd known it was going to be like this --"

"You want this, don't you, Scribble?" The Beetle asked, totally cutting her out.

"It's not the Voodoo, Bee," I said.

"I don't believe you guys!" Mandy butting in.

"No, it's not the Voodoo," the Beetle drawled. "But it's all we've got. And the Beetle needs succour. Let's take some feather!"

Mandy opened her mouth immediately, like she had something to prove. The Beetle pushed the feather into her mouth, until he could stroke it against the back of her throat. New girl took it all the way, like a Pornovurt star, and her eyes started to glaze. "See how she takes it?"

said the Beetle. "Smooth and easy. That's my baby." Beetle pulled the feather out, and then turned to Bridget.

Brid was lying on the couch, face covered by the copy of Game Cat. "Can I miss this one?" she asked in that smoky voice. "I'm not up to it, Bee. I'd like to just settle down with Co-operation Street."

Co-op Street was a real low-level blue Soapvurt. You bought it every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. It took you to a small Northern terrace, gave you a house to live in, gave you a home and a husband or a wife, and you got to interact with all the famous characters as their epic stories unfolded. Seemed like the whole world was hooked up to it. Except for the Dodos of course; those few poor flightless birds, who could take feathers down to the stomach, and still not feel a flutter. Officially they were known as the Virtually Immune, but the kids called them Dodos, and it stuck. I had met one years ago and the look of despair in his eyes would never leave me.

"Nobody misses nothing," Beetle said, scrunching the paper from Brid's face, and then forcing the feather into her mouth. *Shit! That was face rape!* But I was too weak to do anything.

Next he turned to the Thing, feeding the feather into the nearest orifice. The Thing was rolling all over the carpet; I swear I could almost hear him cheering. Then he turned to me.

"Scribble. . ." The Beetle's voice calling to me, over the years.

"I'm not into it, Bee," I said. "I just want to find Voodoo --"

"Nobody misses out," he replied.

"Desdemona. . ."

"We'll find her." :

---

"There's some Voodoo coming in, tomorrow. . . Mandy told me. Let's wait --"

"Fuck waiting! Take it!"

He forced my mouth wide open; the fingers of one hand squeezing my cheeks, the other hand pushing the feather home, deep, to the back of the throat. I could feel it there, tickling, making me want to gag. And then the Vurt kicked in. And then I was gone. I felt the opening advurts roll, and then the credits. The pad went morphic and my last thoughts were; *Why are we doing this? Skull Shit? It's so low-level it's even got advurts in it. We should be going higher, searching for lost love.* Instead we were just playing, just playing at --

Screaming down tunnels of brain flesh, putting thoughts together, building words and cries, cries from the heart. Electric impulses, leading me on, the room wallpapered in reds and pinks, blood all flowing down from the ceiling. Brid hiding behind the settee. The Beetle taking Mandy from behind on the Turkish rug. A Thing-from-Outer-Space floating in the air, gently landing on the dining table. Me walking through a swamp of flesh towards the kitchen door, in search of breakfast cereal. Stepping over Beetle and Mandy, finding the kitchen door locked and barred, looking just like a wall of beef. Blood pulsing from the keyhole. Brid coming out from behind the settee, clutching a breadknife. The Thing finding a lump of jam on the table top.

Licking at it. I wanted that jam for myself. Jam turning into spunk, apple spunk. Thing licking at it. Me turning to the lovemakers. Brid taking slices out of the Thing's backside, trying to feed them to me. Me turning my face away from the pink flesh. Didn't know why. Flower clock reading twenty petals to eleven. Beetle shooting apple cum. It splattered over my poster of Interactive Madonna at Woodstock Seven. Mandy coming with him. Brid turning the blade into Beetle's neck. Blood flowing from Beetle's neck. Me licking up the blood. Tasted like apple jam.

Tasted like Vurt. Just like a dream. Tasted like a dream. That means. . . *oh shit!*

Sudden scream.

*Shit! I was getting Haunted! That means. . . that means we're in the Vurt!*

Now it was the alien making love to Mandy. And the Beetle was on the table covered, head to toe, in that apple jam. Acid jam. Jam was burning him. He was shrieking. I was just watching. Brid was turning the blade inside her wrist. And it was getting to me. Like this is all too much. It can't be real. Those kind of feelings. The Haunting! There's another life somewhere.

*This isn't the only one!*

"This isn't real, Bee!" I think I was shouting. The Beetle just looking at me, his lips covered with apple jam, that smirk on his face --

"Beetle! Listen to me! We're in the Vurt! I'm getting the Haunting!"

The Haunting was the feeling you got sometimes, in the Vurt; the real world calling you home. *There's more to life than this.* This is just a game.

~~The Beetle just kept on tasting the jam, rolling it on his tongue. He reached out to stroke Mandy's arm~~ as she plunged the knife into her veins. The blood was spraying over Interactive Madonna, mixing with the spunk already plastered there.

*I guess that dead star was really interacting now.*

And then Mandy had Desdemona's face, and it was Desdemona doing the screaming. The blood pouring out of her beautiful mouth. It was too much for me. I had to get out of there.

Sudden jerk! Backwards!

Ghost grabbing me, under the armpits, jerking me into reality and then the real world breaking open. A locked door being axed open. Me screaming backwards, into the clock-face.

Two fingers of time grabbing me, the hour and the minute hands. . .

The chair receiving my body like a corpse. Blood seeping back into the closing wounds on the wall. The room a scream of pain. A glass vase, containing flowers picked by Brid, in shatters, broken by the jerk. A voice calling from the mirror on the wall. . .

"Who the fuck!"

Beetle's voice.

"Who the fuck? Who the fuck jerked out?"

No answers.

Beetle was wide-screening us all, his eyes still covered with layers of flesh, of game-flesh.

He had a raging full-on and he was waving it like a flag.

"Who the fuck! Any answers?"

Nothing.

Brid on the settee, Game Cat torn into shreds. Mandy on the floor, beside the scatter cushion. Two vicious gashes had torn it apart. Feathers floating.

"I was having a good time in there!" the Beetle said.

I was trapped in the chair. Through a haze of feathers and flesh, the desperate shapes of Vurt still clinging on to life, I could just about make out the Thing-from-Outer-Space. He was screaming and shaking, watching the cushion feathers fall, waving his feelers in a mad dance, thinking them Vurt feathers. He stuffed a dozen or so into various holes that had opened up in his flesh. Then spat them out. Man, he was suffering, and I could see the holes in his flesh where the knife had cut. The Thing was always affected badly by Vurt. But the wounds were healing over, regenerating. This was the Thing's special skill; total flesh replacement. But still he was suffering. Everything goes wrong.

---

sample content of Vurt

- [Heartbreak Ranch.pdf, azw \(kindle\)](#)
- [read online As Dead as it Gets \(Bad Girls Don't Die Series, Book 3\).pdf](#)
- [click General Aviation Aircraft Design: Applied Methods and Procedures](#)
- **Migraine book**
- [read online Grain Brain: The Surprising Truth about Wheat, Carbs, and Sugar – Your Brain's Silent Killers](#)
- [download Fine Art Tips with Lori McNee: Painting Techniques and Professional Advice here](#)
  
- <http://musor.ruspb.info/?library/Be-Yourself--Everyone-Else-is-Already-Taken--Transform-Your-Life-with-the-Power-of-Authenticity.pdf>
- <http://monkeybubblemedia.com/lib/As-Dead-as-it-Gets--Bad-Girls-Don-t-Die-Series--Book-3-.pdf>
- <http://paulczajak.com/?library/Understanding-Statistics-Using-R.pdf>
- <http://damianfoster.com/books/Out-of-Whack.pdf>
- <http://korplast.gr/lib/The-Metaphysics-of-Perfect-Beings.pdf>
- <http://aseasonedman.com/ebooks/The-Existentialists--Critical-Essays-on-Kierkegaard--Nietzsche--Heidegger--and-Sartre--Critical-Essays-on-the-CI>