



HANUMAN  
BOOKS

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WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS

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*William S. Burroughs*



PAINTING  
& GUNS

ALSO BY  
WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS

*Junky*  
*Naked Lunch*  
*Exterminator w/Brion Gysin*  
*The Soft Machine*  
*The Ticket That Exploded*  
*Dead Fingers Talk*  
*The Yage Letters*  
*The Third Mind*  
*Nova Express*  
*The Job*  
*The Wild Boys*  
*Port of Saints*  
*The Last Words of Dutch Schultz*  
*Cobblestone Gardens*  
*Cities of the Red Night*  
*Letters to Allen Ginsberg 1953-57*  
*The Place of Dead Roads*  
*The Adding Machine*  
*Queer*  
*The Western Lands*  
*Interzone*

# PAINTING & GUNS

William S. Burroughs

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Cover photo of William S. Burroughs, 1984 by Allen Ginsberg. Photo of William S. Burroughs & David Bradshaw, 1990 by Allya Canepa.

## CONTENTS

The Creative Observer	9
The War Universe	53

# **THE CREATIVE OBSERVER**



## The Creative Observer

I'd gotten involved a little bit with painting, working for many years on montages in scrapbooks, dating back to the early sixties. But as for the paintings proper, this work did not start until the 1980s. The early shotgun paintings in 1982 were contemporaneous with my writing of *The Western Lands*, and some of *The Place of Dead Roads*. The painting and writing overlapped. Of course, writing and painting are not the same thing although they were at one



time, in pictographs. Now they are pretty far apart. For one thing, when I come to writing, I cannot help but know exactly what I'm putting on the paper. When I paint, I do not know. In painting I see with my hands, and I do not know what my hands have done until I look at it afterwards. It is when I look at the completed canvas that I know what the painting is about. Very often they turn out to be illustrative of my writing, or what I am thinking about writing. So whatever I'm working on in writing will be reflected in painting.

Because it is read sequentially, there is no way to effectively portray simultaneous events in writing. But that's the whole point of painting: multiple points of view can be simultaneously presented. One expands the area of awareness, and one seeks new frontiers in randomness. A shotgun blast produces explosions of color that approach this basic randomness.

I am trying to get the pictures to move. It almost happens: a face comes into almost miraculously clear focus, smiles, snarls, speaks... Then back into the pic-

ture, there on the paper, the wood. Look outside at the trees and leaves in front of the bedroom window. They move in the wind. The same thing is happening. I see faces, scenes...look at that vista of blackened, swollen corpses. There are green monkeys, a green man, very serene. But it's just like in the pictures, the feeling of strain, of "can't quite make it." Almost there, but something, someone, blocks the final step. Green men, leaf tips moving in the breeze. I don't have to go to outer space for aliens. They are all around me.

When I started the Shotgun Paintings I'd bought a new double-barrel Rossi 12-gauge without a pad on it; it really jars you to shoot it. I picked up a piece of plywood and blasted it. Then I looked at the broken plywood where the shots came out and in these striations I saw all sorts of things—little villages, streets of all kinds. I said, "My God, this is a work of art." That original, which is called "Sore Shoulder," is still one of the better ones. You do something like that and think, "Well I can do it again and again." No you can't. You luck out. Hell yes, I lucked out.

A new technique will suddenly give you a great impetus and then you follow it too far. Do some more and they're terrible, there's nothing there.

The first time I used a can of spray paint, I didn't know what spray paint was. I was out there with Philip Taaffe and Diego Cortez, and someone brought out a can of red spray paint and said, "Explode it." I said, "Great, just stick it in front of this piece of plywood," then POW! There was an explosion of red across the plywood surface, and a hole at the same time, of course. That one was very successful;

it was called "The Red Skull."

The shotgun blast releases the little spirits compacted in the layers of wood, causing the colors of the paints to splash out in unforeseeable, unpredictable images and patterns. After a while I shot two different colors across the plywood—two shots meeting each other. Then all of a sudden you find that you're just not getting it. This is the time to change. As the Scientologists say, "Stop. Change. Start." You just can't use the same technique endlessly. It becomes mechanical, and the life just isn't there anymore. I might



just go back to the original shotgun stuff and try it again, having come so far away from it. You can start one place and then come back around to that place at another point, and you may be able to get something good and new again.

Most of the painting I've been doing now is on paper. It's got to be slick paper, I want the colors to run around. I've done a lot of painting with my hands. Then I did a whole mushroom series. Taking a mushroom, a toadstool, sticking it in color and using it as a paintbrush. I hate the limitation that says,

"You can only do it with a brush." I say, "What's this shit?" There's so many ways: spattering, marbling, strips of paper, rollers, Pollock's drip can device, the Rorschach method...all these randomizing techniques. I got some good mileage out of them mushrooms.

There's no easy way to arrive at where you want to get to in painting. There's no way you can say, "Now I've got it, all I have to do is repeat." As soon as you get to that point—where you say "I've got it"—you haven't got it. I've lost it so many times and I say, "My God, what I'm

doing now is becoming mechanical.”

All techniques fall short of the artist's impossible objective. All serious art attempts the impossible. If art became too precise it could kill, because it could evoke any emotion in the reader or the viewer. All serious and dedicated artists attempt the miraculous: the creation of life.

\* \* \*

The whole matter of life is chance. As soon as you look out the window, walk down the street, your consciousness is being cut by random factors. This

stereotype of the artist or writer sitting in a timeless vacuum with nothing coming in from outside—this is not viable. If you cut yourself off from input you're going to have sterile replication. You cannot say, “I'm, going to paint what's out there, in detail...” because what is out there is what you *see* out there, and if you just want that, photographs will do better. There was an exhibition called, “Photography is the End of Painting.” It wasn't at all. But it was the end of a certain kind of representational painting, which is not true to the facts of human perception. Now

an artist is sitting there painting away and while he is painting, the whole scene changes: the light is changing, everything is changing. So what he has here is not a picture of what's in front of him: it's a picture that he has *abstracted* from a time segment of however long it took him to paint the picture. Someone walks around the block and comes back and what has he seen? He's seen jumbled fragments. He's seen a person cut in two by a car, he's seen a face in a car passing, an image on the side of a bus: a jumble of fragments. That was the first reali-

zation that started the montage, which is much closer to the facts of perception than so-called representational painting. And this is true in writing, too. Life does not present itself in clear patterns or chapters. I'm interested in the visual impact of transient images.

\* \* \*

To me the ultimate scientific fabrication or fraud is Cause and Effect. The key is synchronicity rather than cause and effect. For example, I was thinking about New Mexico, came to a corner—this is in New York—and when

I turned the corner, there was a New Mexico license plate: "New Mexico—Land of Enchantment." I didn't think for a minute that I *caused* that to be there. But I was thinking about it because I was going to see it in just a few seconds. There was a synchronicity to what I was thinking about and what was happening around me. That happens all the time. I told my students, "Walk around the block and come back and write what you just saw, particularly in reference to what you were thinking about." And, my gosh, some of 'em went nuts, saying

"Everybody's following me. Everything talks to me." I said, "Of course. Everything means something to you because *you see it*." Yet scientific dogma tells us nothing means anything to anyone! They're trying to push on us their dead thermodynamic universe where there is no meaning at all, and where there can be no possible connection between what I'm thinking and what I see. This is just like people living on the seacoast in the Middle Ages. They knew the goddamned earth was round. They *believed* it was flat because the Church said so. And now science is saying there

cannot be any possible relation between what you think and what you see—between you, my thought, and what I see in so-called reality. Anyone can show, just from observing what they are thinking when they see something, that this theory is as ridiculous as the flat earth! But some scientists cling to it with the same hysteria as Fundamentalists cling to theirs. With *more* hysteria, in fact.

Looking at the painting on a newspaper—"Precognitive Piece." A month it has been on the desk where I paint, under whatever

I am working on, and it got a squirt of spray paint, a brush stroke of gouache or India ink in various colors. Last night I used up some leftover gold paint on it.

Now look: first side, can see a wrecked bicycle. A car. Can you see the dash board and the floor pedals. TURN. Someone in blue is giving mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Probably a cop. Victim lying on back, smooth youngish face. He don't look good. See an animal, looks like a dog, also injured in the wreck. A woman talking to a boy about thirteen. She has long yellow hair. TURN. A tire *very* clear

... a bare foot...and leg...blue car  
 ... woman entering from the right  
 half, face and a pink dress...torn  
 car roof...a man catapulted for-  
 ward. TURN. Steering wheel,  
 wrecked cycle. *Strong déjà vu.*  
 Driver on motorcycle in camou-  
 flage shirt, faces behind him indi-  
 cate speed. Big German shepherd  
 is barking at the cyclist. Several  
 people involved in the accident.  
 Naked foot on brake. Shattered  
 steering wheel. A skull.

And from the *Lawrence Journal-World* the next day: "The bicy-  
 clist, 29, was riding north on  
 Ousdahl when he collided with the  
 southbound 1973 Volkswagen that

was turning left onto 23rd Street  
 at 7:27 p.m. Sunday. His bike  
 hit the car's right front fender,  
 and he fell onto the car's hood  
 and broke the windshield. A wit-  
 ness, 21, told police that the bicycl-  
 ist was going at a high rate of  
 speed down a hill on Ousdahl  
 before entering the intersection."

The paintings write. They tell  
 and foretell the stories.

I have destroyed hundreds of  
 pages of writings. I thought,  
 "This is so bad I'll tear it into  
 very small pieces and dump it  
 into someone else's garbage."  
 Now I'm having the same ex-



perience with painting. There is a tremendous variation in quality, just as there is in writing. But the thing is, it doesn't make any difference how much bad writing I do, I can just white it out, erase it. But boy you do just one thing wrong with your brush in painting, and you pay hell getting it out. This is another very important difference between writing and painting. If you try to get around it, it'll get worse and worse.

The idea a painting has to be painted from one point of view is ridiculous. Move it around, hold it up here, stick it down

there, see what I mean? That's what Cézanne started with these pears. Some of those pears couldn't possibly be at that angle, he had 'em propped up with a coin. It's just giving the viewer the freedom to pick the thing up, move it around, and look at it. The viewer has to contribute.

To view these pictures puts the viewer in the position of the creative observer, who creates *by* observing. There is a distinct sensation when this creation occurs. One is looking at the picture, then a face, a narrow street filled with red mist, a

mineshaft, an area of red huts, swim into view...here is a man pissing against a wall. Behind the wall is a slag heap. Here is a thin, frail man in a suit of powdery gray ash. One can see the surface of the work move and shift and come into focus. The whole picture is ready to soar into space, almost ready. A strain, a slight headache. In the picture white skeletons dance around a red envelope.

There is a way of seeing the paintings of Brion Gysin: you look at the picture, let your gaze drift, and then it happens. You can feel it, a shift in the visual

field, a movement and concentration of attention, and the images take on magical forms—they begin to move and shift. Faces pop out, cats and dogs and human figures, cliff houses and streets, mist and water. There are ports of entry into the pictures that may vary from one viewing to another.

“Well,” says the critic, “so you can see faces and scenes in the clouds. This is infantile.”

Perhaps. And as often the child sees more clearly than the adult, who has already decided what he will see and what he will not see.

Some years ago in London,

I asked Jasper Johns what painting was all about—what are the painters really doing? He countered with another question: what is writing about? I did not have an answer then; I have one now. The purpose of writing is to make something happen. What we call *art*—painting, sculpture, writing, dance, music—is magical in origin. That is, it was originally employed for ceremonial purposes to produce very definite effects. In the world of magic nothing happens unless someone wants it to happen, *wills* it to happen, and there are certain magical formulae to channel and

direct the will. The artist is trying to make something happen in the mind of the viewer or reader. In the days of cow-in-the-grass painting, the answer to “What is the purpose of such painting?” was very simple: to make what is depicted happen in the mind of the viewer; to make him smell the cows and the grass, hear the whistling wind. The influence of art is no less potent for being indirect.

Paul Klee said, “The painter who is called will contact the elemental forces of evolution.” When I read Klee, fairly recently after I started painting, I said,

"Jesus he's saying just what I'm talking about." He says the artist's call is trying to create something that has a life of its own apart from the creator, apart from the canvas, one that can even put him in danger. You see, that would be the clearest proof that the work of art was separate from him—if it could endanger him. That is what all art should be about: the heresy of creating life. That is what the writer is doing: trying to create a character who would be able to walk off the pages. I want my painting to literally walk off the goddamned canvas, to become a creature and

a very dangerous creature. I see painting as evocative magic. And there must always be a random factor in magic, one which must be constantly changed and renewed.

\* \* \*

The Stendhal Syndrome is when someone is so moved by a work of art that he often feels that the figures are talking to him. Sometimes he feels ill and awkward. Sometimes he can get dizzy and even sick for a few days. This is called the Stendhal Syndrome because it was identified by the French writer Stendhal in 1820

or so. I immediately say, "My ambition is to evoke the Stendhal Syndrome!" I want everyone who looks at my painting to think they're in there and that everything is talking to them, relating to them. And if they're carted out on stretchers, that's fine.

As a painter you are trying to make the viewer experience something. You're trying to make them realize the reality of art, that it can talk to them, that it can even come off the canvas, as Klee said. This may be dangerous and may even cause disease, if the viewers are rigid

and cannot adjust, but not necessarily. We're not trying to make people sick. Artists are trying to make people aware. Aware of what they know and don't know that they know.

A pleasant vertigo, a feeling of falling into the picture, accompanied by a perception of depth and perspective. A darkening road... a gray dusk... trees ahead. It is on a bridge, I think. Someone standing there, gray, indistinct, looking at something that could be a bundle of leaves or a chewed cigar butt. Winston Churchill comes into focus, cigar and

all—this is some scene from World War II. So what is the mission of this dim, gray agent, looking at the chewed butt of Churchill's cigar? No one will ever know.

You can't tell anyone anything they don't already know on some level, so there are always going to be people who will just never see. You're up against a dead end there. "None so blind as he who will not look!" Or I would say *cannot* look. Not that he cannot see—he can't even look. Every area is blocked off. This is not our public. We're looking for people who

can look. I'm helping them to look, to see, and to experience.

It has been said, "Nothing exists until it is observed." You make something exist by seeing it. Nothing exists until or unless it is observed. An artist is making something exist by observing it. And his hope for other people is that they will also make it exist by observing it. I call it "creative observation." Creative viewing. In other words art demands something of the viewer. That the viewer *create* by observing. I've looked at my own paintings many times, and then suddenly I see something that I'd never



seen before. I specialize in secondary images which are fortuitously created by just a stroke of the brush or an accident of some kind.

Strange creatures never before seen, even in science fiction, rise from the paintings. Here is a Blue Hairy, a creature composed entirely of hair, even the brain is a compacted nucleus of convoluted hairs, instantly in tune with every hair of its body. Versatile creatures, they can spread themselves paper-thin and rise on the wind, carried by the faintest breeze, like a dead leaf.

Looking at "*The Curse of the*

*Red Seal*" (to protest continual seal hunting), and suddenly there at the top of the picture, by the photograph of the first exploded paint-can picture on thin plywood, is an Easter Island statue, reminding me of the silent permeation of Easter Island pictures as *yagé* was taking effect (Putumayo, 1953). Feelings of wonder, recognition, the complete absence of fear. Looking further, I see Mistah Kurtz from my "*Heart of Darkness*" picture.

Looking now at "*Jesus Christ.*" Yellow fish swim in a splintered gray sky. The three-dimensional picture of Christ on the Cross is

obliterated in a flash of silver and a silver-gray passage leading back and in, slanted upwards. To the right, a phantom bullfighter with a thumbtack head. A splash of red, the face of a white harp seal.

Turn over to "*Mink Mutiny*," Easter Sunday 1987: a mink with blood on his muzzle and his little sharp teeth, blood on the model in her mink coat, blood of Malaysia on an evil, desiccated face, a white mask impaled on a splinter of wood.

"*Gold Mine/Ghost Town*"—Wood Pile City, a maze of improvised huts, platforms, perilous

rickety stairs, tunnels, paths, catwalks, ladders... a man stopped by a wood wall. His shadow becomes a door, through which he steps into what looks like an old mineshaft.

I don't possess genius. Nobody possesses it. But when you're lucky, you are possessed by it. When you are very lucky. It works through you, it channels. If you are so lucky as to have a genius channel through you, then you can do something great. You can fight it, or evoke it, or lay yourself open to it, but you cannot command it. The cap-

ricious Muse that animates or inspires the poet or the artist is not his to possess. He can not command it; he can only hope that it will channel through him. Henry Miller said the same thing: "Who writes great books? Not we who have our names on the covers." A writer or artist is simply someone who tunes into certain cosmic currents. He's a medium. The less of his "I," his "me," that gets in there, the better. This is very important.

There are innumerable ways to let the Muse through: meditation, magic circles, etc. But I feel a little embarrassed with all that

New Age stuff. I'm not saying you might not evoke something. It's just not my style. It's nothing I see as productive. Nor have I gotten very far sitting around meditating, although, actually, I use their techniques. If I'm working on something, I keep my attention on it all the time. That's a form of meditation, but I don't have to call it that. It's just that I'm working on something and that's where my mind is, where my attention is; not just one part of my mind but the whole of my mind, directed in that area.

Dreams are of course one of our lines to the Muse—the one I use most frequently. Scientists have found that dreams are a biological necessity. If you deprive someone of the dream state for more than two months they will die, no matter how much dreamless sleep they are allowed. People hunger for dreams, they need them. Dreams are not some kind of elite luxury.

What do artists do? They dream for other people. We dream for these people who have no dreams of their own to keep them alive.

You see, and everything you see is alive, and everything you see means something special to you because *you* see it. If it meant nothing to you, you wouldn't see it. If you can see these paintings, then they will come alive for you, move and change, shift and range.

These paintings introduce a new way of seeing. They are not designed just to be put in frames on the wall. They are designed to be turned this way and that way, to be placed in juxtaposition with other paintings.

Now look out the window, and you will see faces and scenes, just as you can see them in the paint-

ings. They are there, waiting to be observed.

What emerges from these creations is the testament that everything is alive.

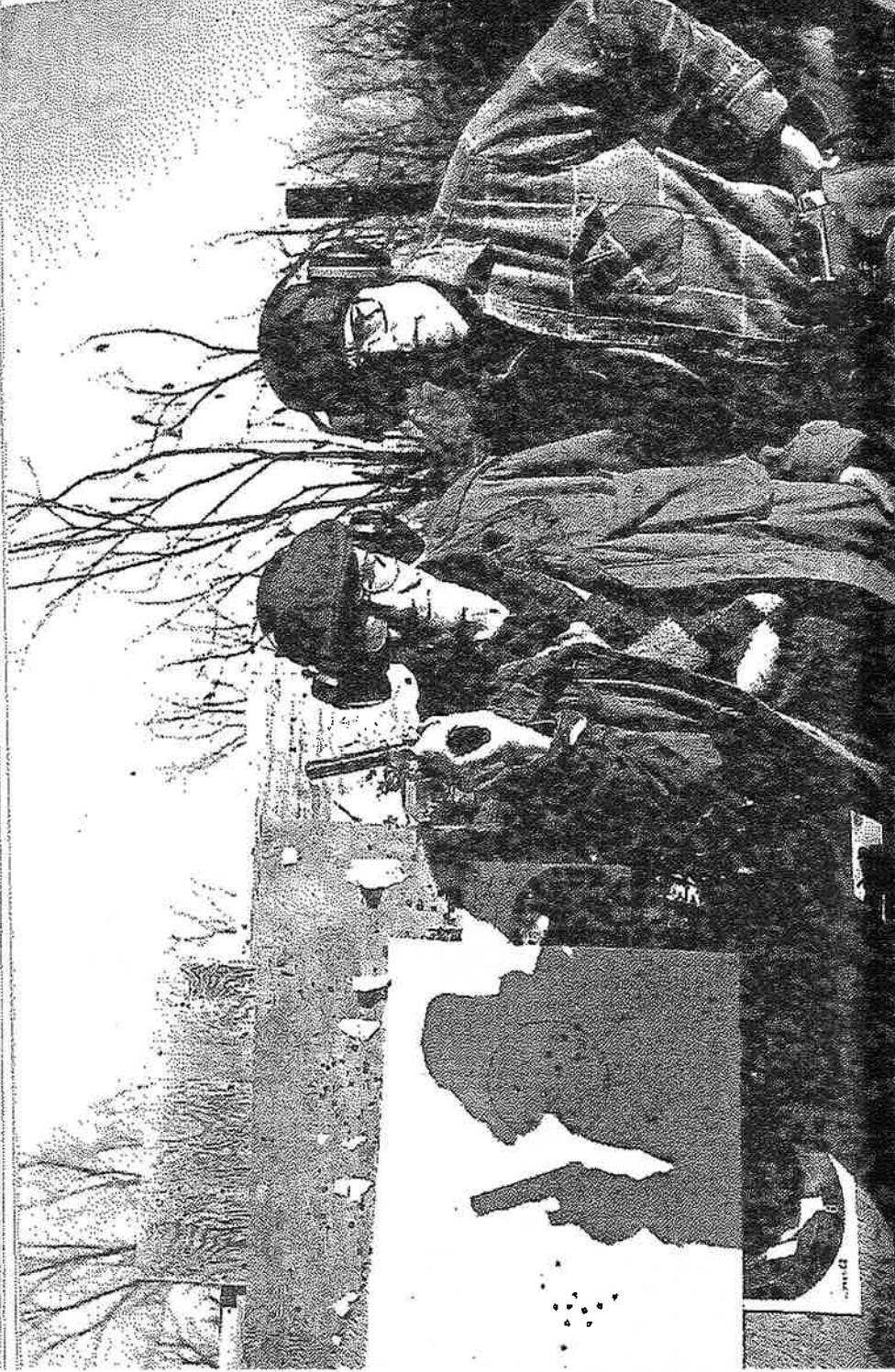
I don't think that any kind of painter projects any particular virtues other than doing the best job of writing or painting that he or she can do. It has nothing to do with holding a virtue. But there is a certain virtue in honestly doing your work. Virtue is simply happiness, and happiness is a by-product of function. You are happy when you are functioning. Function—Functioning means

you are completely engaged in what you're doing, that everything you have is going into painting, writing, whatever. If, as Don Juan said, "The whole secret is intent," and you have the intent, the total intent to paint, write, fight...If you fight with intent to kill, the other man may be better armed, but if your intent is stronger than his, you win. Intent, intent, intent.

END

# THE WAR UNIVERSE





## The War Universe

*Many considerations and no conclusions.*

William S. Burroughs

This is a war universe. War all the time. That is its nature. There may be other universes based on all sorts of other principles, but ours seems to be based on war and games. All games are basically hostile. Winners and losers. We see them all around us: the winners and the losers. The losers can oftentimes become winners, and the

winners can very easily become losers.

I recently completed a libretto called *The Black Rider*. It is based on a story by Thomas De Quincey that is a retelling of an old German folktale, also used by Karl Maria von Weber in his opera *Der Freischütz*. Our protagonist is a clerk, and he is in love with the forester's daughter, but the forester only wants a huntsman for a son-in-law. So our clerk goes out and tries to shoot but can't hit anything. Deep in the woods, he is approached by Peg Leg the Devil, who tells him, "You gotta have

the right kind of bullet." So he gives him the right kind of bullet. Naturally. *The first one is always free*. Our clerk doesn't realize it, but he's made his pact with the Devil as soon as he picks up and uses the bullets. The first thing you know, he's hooked, heavy as lead. Before long he can't hit anything without 'em. He is completely dependent on the bullets.

Soon the wedding day arrives and he must prove his marksmanship, but he's run out of magic bullets. When he fires at a wooden dove bobbing on a perch, the bullet whistles around

and kills his betrothed. The moral is, the Devil's bargain is always a fool's bargain, because you're trying to get something for nothing, and you end up giving everything for nothing.

Now, Georg was a good straight boy to begin with, but there was bad blood in him some way. He got into the magic bullets, and that leads straight to Devil's work, just like marijuana leads to heroin.

You think you can take them bullets or leave 'em, do you? Just save a few for your bad days? Well now, we all have those bad

days when you can't hit for shit. And the more of them magics you use, the more bad days you have without them. So it comes down finally to all your days being bad without the bullets. It's magic or nothing. Time to stop chippy-ing around and kidding yourself, Kid. You're hooked, heavy as lead.

And that's where old Georg found himself, out there at the crossroads, molding the Devil's bullets.... Now a man figures it's his bullet, so it will hit what he wants it to hit. But it don't always work out that way. You see, some bullets is special for a certain target. A certain stag, or a

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certain person. And no matter where you aim, that's where the bullet will end up.

I guess old Georg didn't rightly know what he was getting himself into—but the fit was on him, and it carried him straight to the crossroads.

If the bullet's got my mark on it, I've had it. A special bullet for a special person. But if you know what your fate is, just by knowing it you have avoided it. They will have to change it.

\* \* \*

As children we all started out

with BB guns, of course. You shot pump. That was the Daisy. Then we had slightly more sophisticated air rifles, ones you could pump up. I think it was a Benjamin. It had quite a lot of power in a single shot; it was a lever action. The pump was the best all-around standard BB gun. Then I had a Webley air pistol. It's a stroke cock, a powerful spring and a dangerous action. I nearly broke my finger on that one. They didn't have CO<sub>2</sub> models back then, but if you pump you can get much more power than you can with a CO<sub>2</sub> cartridge.



As a child I also had a collection of little gold knives. Once I swallowed one. I had it in the back of my mouth, sucking it, sort of a nice taste of steel. And all of a sudden it went down. I said, "Mother, I've swallowed my gold knife." She said, "That's impossible." But I insisted and they took an X-ray and gave me all these bulks. I passed it two or three days later.

My father was not much interested in guns. He had a handgun and belonged to a duck club. I went shooting duck with him a couple of times. Wild duck is certainly much more tasty than

tame duck. But I never went much for hunting. I've shot quail—they're good food. But I'd never want to shoot a deer. I've shot squirrel—they're good eating. I much prefer them to rabbit. I don't like rabbit at all. Squirrel is much better—it's all dark meat and has a sweet, nutty flavor. You cut it up and boil it for about fifteen minutes, then you brown it in bacon fat on both sides until it's really brown and cooked through. If you don't boil it, it's too tough, but you shouldn't boil it for too long.

The gun is a very simple mech-

anism. There are designs for guns that can be made with a pipe and a few odds and ends you can pick up from the hardware store. It's not to compare with a nice revolver or automatic, but it can certainly kill someone at close range with one shot.

You can apply the whole Zen principle to firearms. Once you know where to point, all you have to do is get out of the way and let this thing happen. And then you can hit the target in the dark. It's all a matter of getting out of the way of yourself, or you're dead. Standing out of the way and letting what you

really know take over.

To separate gun and hand and  
eye,  
until they do it on their own:  
Draw, aim, shoot, fire—  
like a finely tuned machine.  
Both my hands should be  
unlinked,  
hand on trigger and hand on gun;  
and still as close as twins they  
think,  
both eyes open...now just one....  
My hand and eyes know how  
to shoot,  
and I have only to stand aside  
and free the shot, and freely  
shoot,

to see the bullet... in the bull's-eye.

Some weapons hit you right away, other weapons may take five hundred years to hit. It's like that old joke: "Well, you missed me that time." "Oh yeah? Just try and move your head." Well, just try and shake your head five hundred years from now. You won't even know you were hit. Viruses and germs are very potent weapons and very important historical factors. I was recently reading a book on epidemics and their economic reverberations. The Great Plague

wiped out two-thirds of the population of Europe, and small-pox did the same. Such a plague today would have its advantages...

Here's a book I bought through the mail called *The Poor Man's James Bond*. It's just full of all sorts of useful information. The author is an antifuoride nut. Just who he is and what he is doing is weird beyond belief. But he can tell you how to make a 12-gauge shotgun out of a piece of pipe, how to make homemade gunpowder, chemicals, and missiles, all types of explosives and incendiary devices. The directions are very practical and very

deadly. Pow! Instant enlightenment. And all the poisons he's got in here. Oleander, just a few leaves in the salad. Nicotine—a very deadly poison if used in concentrated form. You scoop up a handful of cigarette butts and cook them down to a fine syrupy resin that could kill within a few seconds. It doesn't have much taste. If the victim were drunk enough, put it in his drink, and "bottoms up"—then it's bottoms down. He'd be conked out on the floor before he could even draw his gun. Why, three drops of poison on a small blowgun dart and you'd

be dead within three minutes. I happen to have one handy... [*Burroughs stands up and demonstrates a blowgun, firing a dart across the room, embedding it several inches into a wooden door.*] A collapsible model of one of these would be excellent for urban warfare. Yep, I really feel like I got my money's worth with this book.

A gun should never be used for intimidation purposes, because there is always the risk that the person you've just pulled it on isn't going to be intimidated. So you pull the hammer back thinking that's going to impress

him, and he's still not impressed. Then you're forced to fire on him, or else you've got to put the gun away, which can be very embarrassing. But once you pull a revolver you cannot let anyone take it away from you.

I generally prefer a hip holster to a shoulder holster. It's less bulky and easier to draw. Let's say you're in a bar and you get into an argument. You're wearing a shoulder holster and you begin to draw. Well, it's pretty obvious as soon as you put your hand inside your coat what your intentions are. All the fella has to do is grab your arm and hold

it against your chest and you can't draw the weapon from the holster. Also very embarrassing. But if you're really worried about concealment, use an inside belt holster. Those are much used in Mexico.

In a serious confrontation I'd take a shotgun, any day. It's a much more formidable and effective weapon than the handgun, unless it's a hand shotgun. I'd like to see more of those. But there's nothing that would get me to turn in my old Colt .45. *Any* gun must be ready for instant use. Instant use. Hell, I wouldn't carry a gun cocked and locked but I

would carry it half-cocked with the cartridge in the chamber. What's wrong with that? You pull it out, you cock it, you fire.

All this uproar about these so-called assault weapons is absurd. *Any* weapon is an assault weapon depending on how it's used. So you have these so-called assault rifles. They're not full automatics, in other words you have to pull the trigger each time. They hold up to thirty rounds, in 9mm but sometimes in other cartridges as well. They're not designed for accuracy, they're designed for rather short-range work, up to a hundred yards

maximum. But the point is that as an assault weapon the shotgun is far more effective than one of those semi-automatics, and a shotgun is recognized as a so-called sporting gun. So they're not making any sense when they hold up one of these semi-autos and say, "They don't use these to hunt geese with." Well, I can tell you, what they do shoot geese with, if used by that guy in a playground, would have brought down a lot more children. There's no doubt about it, the deadliest weapon is a shotgun.

They say the military is always learning the lessons of the last

war. Napoleon took positions by mass charges of relatively undisciplined civilian drafted troops. But then that tactic was shown to be completely invalidated by automatic weapons. The Germans piled up five hundred thousand dead at Verdun; you cannot take a fortified position, no matter how many people you throw in there, if the other side has automatic weapons. Anyway, the rules are always changing. Military people are so stupid.

The U.S. Army recently switched from a .45 to a 9mm to conform to the rest of the NATO forces. They had to, because

the ammo must be interchangeable. If you're out there using a .45 and everybody else has a 9mm—see what I mean? Ok, there are more shots in the 9mm, and most soldiers are gonna be lousy shots anyway, so if they've got fourteen shots in a pistol they're gonna have a better chance of hitting someone than if they've got seven. That's their theory at least: if you have more shots you'll hit something. I would imagine there was a lot of private negotiating when it came to switching the Army and NATO contracts. And the reasons why the other arms manufacturers



were disqualified were not always convincing. Back in 1911, when the semi-automatic pistol became standard, there were several manufacturers other than Colt. It isn't always the best model that gets chosen for all-out mass production. Actually, on the semi-auto there's no reason why the whole frame has to slide back and forth when the gun is fired. But once a gun is in mass production they've got all the molds set up, and they don't want to hear about a simpler or better design, any more than the internal-combustion engine wanted to hear about turbines.

Here's a little .22 I keep handy. It fires a .22 long rifle—that's the bullet that killed Bobby Kennedy. It's an adequate bullet. The .22 is a very accurate cartridge for short-range work. In a rifle it could easily kill at fifty yards. This kind of weapon is for close defense—ten or twelve feet—and for that it is very effective. Five shots. I use four, actually, because I prefer to leave the hammer on an empty chamber. Any one of 'em could kill. But close-range shooting is a bad idea. If someone has a gun up against your stomach, he hasn't got a chance of firing before you

can turn sideways and take the gun away from him in one quick motion. Just turn sideways, shove the gun away with your right hand, and grab it with your left. I tried this with friends using a cap pistol. There was no way they could fire in time before I could take the gun away. The reaction time is not quick enough. So if you're any good at this kind of maneuver—and it's not hard to learn—there is no way your opponent can even get off his shot in time. So only a rank amateur would ever get in that close. The whole point of having a gun is to keep

out of close range of your opponent. If you're holding a pistol on somebody, the range should be about eight to ten feet. Then there's nothing he can do.

More and more police departments are using automatic weapons. It used to be the only police officer's weapon was the 38-caliber revolver, the .38 special, with a four-inch barrel, a Colt or Smith & Wesson. Then they started bringing in more potent, high power loads. Of course, in 1935 the .357 Magnum came in, and although it's the same diameter—you can use a .38-special cartridge in any .357 Magnum

chamber—it's a more powerful load. In fact it has one of the best records of a one-shot man-stopper of any gun. I used to have one of those, but it was stolen from the house we had on 13th Street. There was talk that the same revolver was used to shoot an alleged informer named Jimmy Rose, but there was no confirmation on that.

My big Smith & Wesson .45 revolver is a gun everyone does well with. That's the gun that won the West. It's heavy enough that the recoil is minimal. My other mainstay is the old 1911 Army Colt automatic. I put a

great deal of reliance on that gun. A lot of people say it's the best handgun ever made. You can throw it in mud, sand, water—I've never seen it malfunction. It's a hard-hitting gun, it doesn't kick too much, and it always shoots well. It's not too heavy to carry—it only weighs about thirty-six ounces. The Smith & Wesson is just too goddamn heavy to lug around. It's a fine thing for a captain to have in his cabin, or someone to keep out by their bedside, but no, that Colt .45 is not so heavy that you can't carry it around all day.

My god, the market is drenched

with these new 10mms, and the 41 Action Express. I'm quite content with the caliber I use. I don't need a 10mm. I'm very happy with the guns I have. I do most of my shooting at targets out at Fred's place. I have a cabin on a lake, but there's a Christian Children's Home right across the lake, and we don't like to kill Christian children unless we absolutely have to.

\* \* \*

Well now, a hunter has to keep his eyes open, and if you keep your eyes open you see a lot that other folks don't see, especially

city folks that only see the newspapers—not that I *can't* read, mind you. But why should I read books, when I can read the clouds and the sky, or the stars, or the trees, or even the animals.... I just walk around, and the stories walk through me.

Now then, we've got a problem. Well, just let the problem solve itself, one way or another.... Never had enemies, I turn them all into friends, one way or another. Why, I've seen fish, frozen solid in ice, thaw out and swim away in the spring! You ever seen a dog roll in carrion? Well now, a city boy see that and

he might get tempted to join the dog, 'cause it's new and exciting and it gets his blood up...but if he's smart he'll do a double-sniff and he'll figure he may just pay Hell gettin' the carrion stink off him.

See what I mean? It's not all hearts and flowers out here in the forest, there's death and fear and madness out here, and a man has to keep a tight rein on himself. Well, you can't tell anybody anything he don't know already. Maybe Wilhelm can add up figures, but when it comes to payin' the price, he don't rightly know what things cost out here. Every time

I shoot a stag, that costs, see? It's chalked up to my account, and a clerk should know what can happen when a man overdraws his account: he can wind up rolling in carrion like a dog, only he don't know it's his *own* carrion he's wallowing around in....

He's dead and he don't know it, till the Devil taps him on his bones...when he thought he owned those bones, but he was walking around in *rented* bones the whole time....He looks at the forest like a Big Store, everything got a price-tag on it—only a city boy can't always read the price-tags, too busy grabbing things

he can't pay for...and when a man can't pay for what he buys—

\* \* \*

*Fred Aldrich's place: Burroughs unloads a large canvas satchel from the Range Rover, unpacks his guns and ammo on a wooden table, and begins to load. Several paper targets are taped to a plywood stand next to the garage, approximately thirty feet away. During the next hour, between firing rounds, Burroughs, David Brandshaw, George Kaull, and Aldrich discuss some of the principles of shooting.*

**DB:** In shooting, the front and rear sights must be seen clearly. The target itself becomes a blur at that point because you're focusing on the sights themselves.

**WSB:** The hand follows the eye.

**DB:** If the shot is too risky or won't successfully bring down the game, or if there is a house nearby, you automatically cancel any ideas of shooting.

**WSB:** Knowing when not to shoot is as important as knowing when to shoot.

**DB:** You proceed from the as-



sumption that a firearm is a tool. It's the holder's responsibility to maintain it, to keep it in good working condition, and to keep it at all times pointed in a safe direction so as not to endanger people. Shooting is a solace. A meditative concentration of your own quietness that is focused to release energy with finite accuracy.

**WSB:** Well, I got my old Colt loaded and ready for action. [*Fires.*]

**DB:** Six out of six, Bill. Not a bad start.

**WSB:** Have you seen Colt has a new .45 double action called the Double Eagle? I read an article about that the other day.

**DB:** Yeah, it's a piece of junk.

**WSB:** Well, nothing's gonna make me part with my old Colt.

**DB:** Bill, why don't you ventilate that target with a load of buck-shot?

**WSB:** Sure, sure. Ok. [*Fires.*]  
Bull's-eye! [*Examines target.*]  
Well, he's got enough in there to take care of him.

**DB:** Your coach gun patterns



that buckshot a lot tighter than it does bird shot.

**WSB:** Much tighter, yep. That's what it's for—buckshot. [*Hefting a Rossi double-barrel shotgun.*] This gun will stop a lion. Why, if a lion breaks through, this is the gun we'll rely on. No one would think of going after a wild beast with anything except a shotgun. What have you got there, David?

**DB:** This is a Colt .45 Officer's Model. It's a light, short, chopped, standard government model. It's a good little carry gun. Aluminum frame. I've altered

the sights a bit on this. The way they come out of the factory, the sights just aren't sharp enough. If you can't see your sights clearly, forget about the target.

**WSB:** That's one thing about a stainless barrel, when the sun's out it's hard to see the sights.

**DB:** Let me put up another target and you can whip out that .45.

**WSB:** Ok, will do. [*Fires, then examines the target. Five out of six bull's-eyes. George loads and fires: six out of six.*]

**DB:** Is that an aluminum frame?

**GK:** Naw, steel. Everybody's making these little five-shot pistols. The Smith & Wesson .38 special I had took a piece of my finger with it. Your finger gets up in that damn trigger. I couldn't hardly get loose from it. Now, this trigger is rounded off the way it should be. You'd think Smith & Wesson would have thought of that, wouldn't you?

**DB:** Yeah, but if they weren't doing it ninety years ago they wonder why they oughta be doing it today. Some guns work well for you, others don't.

**FA:** Bill, where's that big air gun you had?

**DB:** What's all this about?

**FA:** Mr. B. had a compressed air gun, a great big pipe like a bazooka, fabricated out of PVC. It was something he ordered out of the back of one of those gun magazines. We pumped it up with an air compressor.

**WSB:** Oh, that. It fell far short of its expectation.

**DB:** What did it fire?

**FA:** It was a two-piece Styrofoam thing that enclosed the projectile

in order to maintain the gas seal. Then when the thing left the barrel, the two pieces fell away like a discarding sabot.

**WSB:** That was the concept. It was supposed to be tremendously powerful and go through three-quarter-inch plywood, but it just bounced off, it didn't do a goddamn thing. I never saw any performance from that gun. Where do you suppose the idea for rifling came from?

**DB:** Well, probably every society that shot arrows with fletching had the fletching set at an angle to make the arrow rotate—cer-

tainly every American Indian tribe had this kind of application long before the white man came, so that's where the ballistic principle of rifling may have come from.

**FA:** But rifling may not have originally been to spin the bullet. Maybe it was intended to try and control powder fouling, to give the powder somewhere to go so you could get another shot down the barrel.

**DB:** Lincoln wanted to adopt some repeating rifles for the Union Army in the Civil War, but his ordnance people told

him that the average soldier was too stupid to work a cartridge mechanism. But the other way was a lot more dangerous—in the adrenal heat of battle, a soldier may run a charge down the barrel, put a bullet over it, then forget to put a percussion cap on the nipple of his rifle and dry-fire the gun and never know the thing didn't go off. And finally, after three or four times of that, he might put a cap on it and fire it with about five charges in the barrel, and the whole thing detonates in his face. Or else he leaves the ramrod in the barrel because somebody's

coming at him with a bayonet. All the best laid plans...

**FA:** In those days, with all that black powder, after the first volley was fired on the battlefield the whole place was a vast sheet of white smoke. Nobody could see anything, especially if it was a humid day with no wind; the smoke just sits there and nobody sees anything.

**WSB:** If they'd had automatic weapons in those days it would have been a *real* massacre. Oddly enough, there were designs for revolving flintlocks—weird-looking things. I don't know whether

they worked or not. At first they had the pepperbox—six different barrels that would rotate. Then they said, why not have the chambers rotate and have just one barrel?

**DB:** What they're making again is the Le Mat—it's a French weapon, a caplock revolver made famous by the Confederate cavalry commander Jeb Stuart. It has all the bullet chambers lined up around the cylinder in the center. The cylinder rotates around a shotgun barrel. So you have a .44 revolver with about nine chambers and a shotgun barrel in the middle.

**WSB:** That's great. A gun I would like to see made is a six- or perhaps seven-and-a-half-inch-barrel 410 shotgun, smooth bore, but as a revolver. Now, that would stop almost anything at close range. I wouldn't be afraid of shit if I had one of those in my hand. Of course, it's an illegal weapon.

**DB:** For some reason the U.S. government doesn't like the idea of a smooth-bore pistol. The Canadian government some years ago wanted to outlaw Winchester .22-long-rifle ammunition because they said it was untraceable

and therefore was the perfect "hit" bullet. And so instantly anyone who was slated for a hit in Canada was being shot with Winchester .22-long-rifle bullets, thanks to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's publicity. But you know Mafia guys, they just take a rat-tail file and run it down the barrel after they shoot somebody and throw the gun off a bridge. The professionals always throw their guns away. Of course, the guns are stolen in the first place; they'd never buy one, never obtain one legally.

**WSB:** Sounds sensible to me.

**DB:** There've been twenty thousand gun laws passed in the U.S. in the past twenty years, and every year murder goes up and up.

**WSB:** After a shooting spree they always wanna take the guns away from the people who *didn't* do it. I sure as hell wouldn't want to live in a society where the only people allowed guns are the police and the military.

**DB:** Flintlock rifles used to kill squirrels but later used to kill British redcoats would fit the definition of assault rifles in a previous era.



**WSB:** If there wasn't any crime, they'd have to go out and create it. The one thing that would bring the whole police situation to its knees, and I've been advocating it for a long time now, is a criminal strike. Every criminal agrees not to commit any crime for one day. Wouldn't that really paralyze the whole system? After four days of that, they'd say about the police, "Why do we need these people?"

**DB:** During the last patrolmen's strike in New York City, there was a great fight at City Hall because the commanding officers

wanted to end the strike and the rank and file did not—because the Policemen's Benevolent Association had not secured the points they wanted in their contract. But the leadership of the PBA told their members, "Look, you guys have been off work for four days and there's been no crime in this city, so get back to work."

**WSB:** And the next thing you see is three or four patrol cars packed with cops cruising down the street looking to create some trouble. The minute people start feeling secure without cops



around, that's bad for the cops. I feel quite secure without any cops around. Hell, what do I need cops for? I got guns. *[Burroughs fires both barrels of his shotgun into a target across the yard.]* I'll finish him off with this. *[He fires a round from his Smith & Wesson revolver.]* You know, more and more I'm becoming an animal-rights activist. Why, I was reading an article about all the genetic manipulation they're performing on cows these days. Entire species of cows are now endangered and facing extinction because of biological tampering,

just to provide McDonald's with cheaper hamburgers. I think it's terrible. If that guy who killed all those people in McDonald's had got his priorities straight, he would have issued a statement beforehand saying he was doing this to protest the atrocious food, and all this bovine adulteration.

Well, I'm going in and have a victory drink.

END