

Portrait of a 21st Century Snuff Fighter
G. Wells Taylor

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Dedicated to Jane Goodall

For introducing me to the other apes in the jungle.

PART ONE: The Soldier

Chapter 1

Where to begin? Cassette player in skull crushing hand is on. Flesh ripping teeth, blood drinking mouth and marrow tasting tongue are tuned to the same artistic pitch, working the gentle truce together now, labia peaceful in action—coexisting licking the numbers testing one, two, three...

“That Animan, oh yeah! He sure is a monster. Course, in my own special way, so am I.”

I pause for a scratch and twitch, thinking over many vicious ways that I could tell my story. Starting me the hero fighting in the ring or scrapping in the dustbins back in Ireland. But that wouldn't be true, and truth is the only thing that ever fought me to the final bell and won.

Problem was I rarely remembered my childhood, it being a great boring collection of rubber teat sucking and the like, so many soiled diapers and cradle caps. It was boring to me: all the day in, day out tests for the body and mind.

Oh yeah, I remember all those pasty birds in white coats giving me the IQ quizzes with ink blots and the pressure cuffs and the eyedropper squeezing and the like. It was no place for a young fellow, just a wee boy with nothing but a bouncy ball for protection.

All alone, you might say, with a bunch of featherweight men and women in white, plastic hats and all glaring, staring and pairing—digging into the old cogger box yours truly calls his brain; but, I did all right, I guess.

I grew up calling the doctors and scientists, whitecoats; funny, I still do, when I see some little pigeon-breasted bird with pop bottle lenses and the like, I howl, “Hey, there goes a fucking whitecoat!”

I guess it's hard to shake.

They worked me round the clock, you might say. The boring bastards burning the midnight oil as I dreamed and dreamed—them ciphering like Freud with Jung itch and counting the pitter-pats of my heart and the electrical lightning strokes in my brain. Shit, the times I woke up coughing, spitting wires and duct tape.

I was brought up in a big cinderblock house in the Canadian Rockies. A really big house, just rectangles and long straight halls covered in hard creamy paint I could see my reflection in. There were fifty people there whose lives revolved around me. Little ol' me, little wee ol' me fifty pounds on my first birthday me.

Once I talked to a whitecoat shrink about the whole thing. He said I turned out violent because of unconscious resentment for those who deprived me of love. ‘Those’ in this case being the whitecoats interested in the fibrous and gaseous natures of me more than the parts that the gods might squabble over.

That surprised me, because I always felt it was a conscious choice my taste for blood, and I never laid the blame for my violent nature on my past. I was violent because I was good at it. Damn good. You might say I came out swinging—from whatever pink, fuzzy and unnamed corner of the ring I entered.

I remember at the cinderblock house they used to put me through all sorts of physical training for pumping up the old body, piling on the muscle so to speak. The program I

loved the most was boxing. I loved it. Course, once I took to that, I kind of gave up on the old headwork—in a serious way. I learned anyway, having an aptitude for cogging and setting notions in their proper time and place.

And I mean I really didn't have time for schooling. Oh, they'd sit me down with a book, but all I could think about was the way it felt slugging my fists into something soft and warm, like a man's belly, or that jarring kind of cement feel a jaw can have when you lay into it with a haymaker.

Even the times I did read, I kind of changed the story on my own, so I guess that's headwork in a way, but it never felt like work. I'd imagine, old *Great Expectations* Pip like laying into Miss Havisham, just kind of punching her three ways of Sunday, just pulling her veil down and bang, bang, bang on the cheekbones for all the cockteasing, till she can't remember if she was getting married or what; and Jagers the lawyer fellow with the smile and dirty hands, I could see our hero Pip knocking over his big happy teeth like tombstones.

And Pip's sister, well she needed to be put in line, as simple as that—bent over something and screaming.

Moby Dick was a favorite of mine because of all the spearing and the flesh rendering and the great boiling pots of blubber and the thick black meat smoke in the air—though he yawped our Melville did, sometimes making a sleepfest for the coggerbox with all the extra stuff flowing out of his pen.

But I read that and imagined old Queequeg diving in and going a real violent round with the white whale. Then, he kind of KO's the big bastard by knocking his eyes out and punching through the backs of the bony sockets into the brain. Real bloody shot, you know—the crowds would be screaming.

Oh yeah, I remember, then Queequeg comes out of the water like a fisherman king, and that crippled bastard Ahab goes at him with a harpoon because he's been cheated of his prize, and then doesn't Queequeg pick him up and sit him down hard on his ivory leg. Just, bang, in a kind of wrestler's flying mare proctology thing. And me seeing and laughing at the look on old Ahab's face as the ivory slides home.

I knew that wasn't the kind of thing a schoolboy should think about, but it got me reading.

So you might think yours truly was being a little short of sight by abandoning the mind for the body, especially after the great mechanization that took place at the final count for the twentieth: just digital machines and no one working like. You might say it was kind of stupid to go out into a world equipped with only a strong body and limited skills.

You might think I'm a kind of a retard for giving up all that high and mighty headwork for a life using my body. Well, fuck you anyway. I'd like to hear you say that to my face.

An average man would probably splash his brains to the four winds at this point with a heavy handgun. Not me, though. I always had violence to fall back on. Now, I wasn't always hurting someone. It was the video movie library we had there, at the Cinderblock house that got me going.

Grainy black Sonny Liston honest fights on the tapes and Blu-rays and young Cassius Clay beating on Joe Frazier's head made me think of the punch and jab as a method of

expressing my emotional subtext. I used to be content just banging around my coach a little bit or punching the heavy bag until the sawdust poured.

But there came a day that I drew first blood, and it was beautiful. Like your first lay, or one of those really rare magic sunrises when the air's all misty and the dew shines like diamonds on the leaves. It was beautiful, and I never looked back. The scene was this:

I was about sixteen, and sick and tired of the cinderblock house in the mountains, I mean, what am I going to do up there anyway? I used to headwork a joke that I would just settle down with a nice mountain goat for the fast and furious and raise a big-balled and bearded family of billy boys.

Anyway, I asked them if I could go into the city for a movie or something. They showed me movies up there, but I always had a whitecoat with me, monitoring a wire in my dick, or something. Anyway, they say no—and that's enough for me. I wait for night and then I beat the shit out of the four big guys that were there to handle me, and the closest thing I had to equals, or friends for that matter.

Then something came over me when they tried to push me back into my room because I just started swinging and kicking and breaking. I killed each and every one of them with my bare fists. I couldn't help it once I got started, it was like hitting putty, and when they screamed it only made me smile and hit them harder. And they screamed—oh they didn't like that at all.

Anyway, by sheer luck and violence, yours truly escaped even though they have all kinds of electric crap that could track me down or fry my ass: me running and headworking that they'd kill me now that I've whacked four of their whitecoat musclemen. I got away, quick-like by jumping into a big roaring river and splashing away like a salmon.

There were times when I was lost in this monster frothy cloud that I thought I was done for, like my bill was paid; but, somehow I washed clear past the sharp and nasty rocks that wanted my flesh and blood.

I went to a big city. It was some place with a real sissy name, something royal and you could just see the guy in pantyhose, but I was so pumped I barely remember it, and from there I went to the states, then, Mexico; and before you know it, there I was living in Argentina.

Why Argentina? Well, it wasn't from fright or any great hatched egg from the coggerbox. You see, when I was traveling through Mexico, which was somewhere I had planned to stay, I looked for a job that didn't require too much headwork. You see, in Mexico they still have lots of human machines who require less care and money to run than real machines, and they're cheaper to replace. The fuckers!

So, I'm roaming those dusty streets. It's a real nice night, and this little guy comes up.

I guess I look like a fighter. I got a big square jaw, broad nose like a tuna can, and heavy low forehead. I keep my hair cut in a stiff brush and I make sure my big body is in tiptop shape, being an early bloomer with all the veins and muscles bulging.

So this guy asks me if I like fights.

“Señor,” he called me, can you believe it? I kind of chuckled. I tell him of course I do, and he asks me to follow him. I get this little voice in my skull saying maybe he's a fag and he wants me, so I size him up and think if he is, he'll be a dead fag soon.

We go, and end up at this real seedy looking hotel that smelled like rosehips and whores, me knowing this since at this point in my adventures I had become acquainted with both fragrances. He leads me into the basement of the place.

One hundred pesos he whined at me, and I gave it to him, having got some money in a kind of dishonest fashion that I'd rather not tell you about.

In through this door we go, and there's a dark room full of seats, all pointed at a screen. He drops into a chair and waits for me. I figured it was going to be fuck flicks, plenty of drooling fun that I don't go in for much. I'm there and pumping up just about to clobber the living shit out of this Mexican when the movie starts. I had my wide back to it, but swung around when I heard a bell.

First thing I notice in the movie is this big cage maybe twenty-five feet tall. There's a couple of guys in it, both of them about the same size. One looks Chinese, and the other's a black brother of African ancestry. I let the little Mexican's collar drop and sat down beside him. I noticed the black guy has big steel knuckles on one fist and I see the Chinaman moving like a karate expert-type: slinking and underhanded. Well, they square off as I watch, and I begin to feel a little homesick.

They always had popcorn at the cinderblock house.

The battle was fast and furious. It reminded me of Ultimate Fighting, a fun form of entertainment from the 20th Century that I'd bumped shoulders with on the way south—but this was better. This filled in all the blanks. The Chinaman kicked the shit out to the black guy. He had all his karate tricks to throw at him, and the black guy wasn't nearly violent enough.

I always figured karate was a way of letting your body do what it wanted to do. We always screw it up by headworking our way around it—spoiling the mood for blood and sport and worrying about getting kicked in the nuts.

Or other people do... I have no problem getting natural, and even as I watched the guy I felt my muscles begin to twitch and jump as I think how I would react, just boom, boom, boom—sayonara!

Soon, anyway, I hear one of the black guy's legs snap wet and sappy as a green tree branch, and one of his arms hangs crooked. So the crowd on the film goes wild when the Chinaman comes in for the knockout and then, while the crowds howling like dogs for his blood, doesn't the black guy get a lucky swing with his good arm and knock the Chinaman down.

The crowd just shrieks at that point, as the black guy drags himself over and with many heavy smacks of his steel knuckles, the Chinaman's head is a red puddle. And I'm watching and I can't believe it. They went right for it, no holding back, killed him. I even think I got a bit of wood I was so excited.

The film ended quickly without credits or anything. I just remember the look on the black guy's face as he staggered to his feet and raised his arm in victory. I turned to the Mexican and asked him where the hell that fight took place, because I had this nagging suspicion that it would not wash with the black-skirted ministers of fate in the US of A.

He tells me Argentina, and then damned if he doesn't give me an address and telephone number. An Argentine phone number, that is.

Anyway, I couldn't let an opportunity like that slip by.

I got the cash together quickly in a way that I will not yet divulge and traveled on down to Argentina in an airplane that had a wonky engine on its left wing that kept

cutting in out like some old guy snoring. It got me really choppy inside when it started sawing logs as we went whizzing over some of those Andes Mountains.

There's nothing walking or creeping on the planet that scares me, but I copped that gravity would win in a toe to toe death match, especially him swinging at me with granite peaks and valleys.

Anyway, I get there, and call the number then arrange to meet this guy. This puny greased-back Argentinean that spoke good English, looks me over and says if I'd like, I could fight that very weekend. The prize is a thousand American dollars, he tells me. Great! I said, almost kind of laughing inside cause this guy was going to let me compete and he didn't even know if I was a good fighter or not.

I guess he had nothing to lose.

I pause and look out the window of the penthouse, then snap off the little cassette recorder I have been yawping my life's story into. The clock on the wall shows me in no uncertain terms that I am out of time for the leisurely rosy ruminations of the way I was, and that I am due at the Metrodome.

The limousine will be outside, I am sure, with some scotch-assed monkey shining up the hubcaps and sneaking quick drinks out of the bar in back. I can see his precious little face already, headworked into existence, on the temporal movie screen in my skull. He has dainty white hands, and lily petal cheeks.

I growl incomprehensibly, but make my point with three sharp nasty smacks of fist against palm. I have to go to the Metrodome. I pitch the cassette recorder on the couch where the writer-type individual can do his thing with it.

Chapter 2

Animan was about seven, seven and a half feet tall, and his body was made of great tangles of chromium tubing. It was kind of pretty the way the light glittered off him. Then I chuckle like cause all he needs is a fat guy blowing on one of his arms and he looks like a tuba.

Anyway, he's—I call him a 'he' cause it feels better for me—I don't mean he had a little brass spigot between his legs or a faucet, but I'll feel better knocking the living shit out of him if I see him as a *him*. I mean, I still could go real violent on a woman, real angry boy stuff like you're not my mother, but that always leaves a sour taste in my mouth, and I prefer my violent moments with women in bed.

So, he's ugly when you look past the gleam, Animan, which might be another reason I call him a him. He's got this big steam iron head, just a big chunk of smooth iron with a pair of beady bloodshot eyes glaring out. I guess they were lights, but they had the look of real eyes the way the face was shaped. That's why the hair on yours truly's thick scalp prickled just a little bit.

Anyway Animan just stands there where he stopped after climbing onto the stage like his batteries had gone quits on him. I'm across from him on a wooden stool that's got my backside screaming for some kind action. I figure I'd like to scrap with him there and then, just to get my blood flowing again.

I had other problems though, and maybe that's why I don't walk over and start pounding. My brains were all awash around headwork since I saw that guy before the

show. He was one of the pressed suit daisies with skin like milk and nuts the size of buttonholes. He's got big lips and wide staring eyes, anyway.

Doesn't he come up and say he knows me. I kind of go all chin-dropped and saggy, but manage to maintain my poise: all self-confident and carnivorous. He says he worked for Gemco and then he says some stuff about my past that only someone who knows me could know. I can't place his face, being one of any in a puddle of pasty mugs, but he seems to know me.

I just about let him have it right there since I had the sudden feeling he was a United Nations man or something and that he was wanting to bust yours truly and throw away the key like. Anyway he says nothing more than congratulations on the films, says he's seen them, and I've proven a few of his theories.

Again, I'm tempted to bust him up like a chair, but hold back. He kind of smiles then says it would be worth my while to beat Animan when it came time to do all the violence and machine taking apart.

So he suddenly sounds like he doesn't know me because I can't imagine me letting anyone but me win. Then he says he's looking forward to the fight, and he leaves the room. My brain must have been smoking like old wires because I should have lifted him out of his shoes, but I let him walk—while I cogged over that one.

That's an hour past say, and now I'm sitting, anyway, with my brain all frazzled by the headwork, and kind of putting together some big story like Mechano, and he's gone before any good questions come leaking out.

So I'm sitting there with my head full, and I shake it kind of, so I can get a few real good focused glares at my opponent. The robot-thing just stands there staring. A couple of whitecoats go buzzing around him with tiny blinking gadgets in their little bee-wing hands.

I get a kick when they look at me, and I give them a face like you wouldn't believe and I think they shit their pants. They turn all pale and sweaty anyway.

I look at Animan and he just stands there staring back, but I figure to call him a fuckface would be like doing the same thing to a can opener or a laptop computer and I cog that I'm above that, so I look into the crowd and start making goo-goo eyes at this tall blonde with mighty tits and a short skirt that's letting me see her sheer silk panties—kind of dark in the middle, you know, the way we like it: snip, snip, trim, trim, yum, yum.

I mouth something else about fucking, then mug a little letting the bravado of a killer work for me. I give the Animan the finger and kind of wink at the blonde.

The Animan doesn't blink an eye. What an asshole.

Soon a guy comes up on stage. He's a seedy little Italian bastard with a nose like a fishhook that I know as the fight promoter: Juan Matisse. I try to stay clear of him since any snuff fights he arranges are usually like against my grandfather or something. The blood flows fast, but it isn't fierce. Easy money, but I'm past that point in my career.

Where Matisse got the Animan, I don't know, but it sure doesn't conjure up any pretty picture, and it inspires no confidence in me. I think for a minute that this fight might be like me wrestling a refrigerator or something, but the idea sort of fades away like gas. There's something about Animan that looks legit.

Matisse smiles with his golden teeth all around at the press, and they respond by wasting gigabytes of memory cards on him. He tap-taps the mike then starts on with his banjo voice heavily accented.

“Gracias, Gracias,” he says though with more of an accent. “I am Juan Matisse. As you know after years of wrangling and months of deal making, I personally have arranged to bring to you the match of the century. Animan, mountain of steel and technology versus Nuke, 13 Time World Champion Snuff Fighter.”

I growl at the little porkpie son of a bitch for my second billing. The hackles around my ears stand up. That fuck! He goes on and on then, as much as I would have liked to end it with so many bone-crunching whacks.

“The kind builders of Animan, Gemco—a division of Specific Electric, have brought their tremendous creation to Santa Rosa for what is being billed the battle of the twenty-first century. It is hoped that Animan will lead a vanguard of advances in robotics and electronics. Specific Electric sees this rumble on the pampas as the final test for their creation. In just four nights this terrifying creation of the digital world will undergo its final option.

“Animan will battle Nuke, world champion snuff fighter. Santa Rosa will be the grounds for the world’s greatest battle, where man will combat technology. Is it possible for a mere machine to overcome its creators? Is it possible for a weak creature of flesh and blood to overpower five hundred pounds of circuits, steel and hydraulics? Is this the end for mankind?”

I get kind of pissed off at this point. I figure he’s going at my reputation a bit here, what with the lie about me being one of Animan’s creators, and the crack about weak flesh and blood. I stand up quick and smash my stool into little pieces. I throw what’s left of it at the press and make my way to the mike. Juan Matisse beat a hasty and lily-livered retreat.

“I’ll push that frying pan he calls a face into the last century!” I kind of get crowded now, all the press moving in like a bunch of oiled faggots. But I get kind of carried away. “I’ll make him wish he’d been made into hubcaps, or bathroom fixtures!”

Now, the crowd starts moving around and kind of oohing a lot about something, and not taking any more pictures or listening to me or anything. I see a couple of Matisse’s bodyguards giving me the cruel eye and the pouty lips and iron chins. I reach out and tear an ear off one of them. That bastard goes into his coat for a big heavy gun. I easily take the gun and bust his cheekbones with it.

Well, the whole show goes wild at this point. I keep punching and punching and punching. Always it felt good, the hard fist cracks on the jaws and the warm putty punches in the bellies. I guess I’m a real showman at heart, because soon the cameras are on me again. I fold a bodyguard in two and pitch him onto the howling horde of media fuckers and they go back as a mass into a plate glass window. It’s one of those big heavy convention center jobs so it goes *BANG* and comes down in a bloodthirsty curtain.

Well, before you know it a platoon of soldiers comes in, and after about an hour of real violence and a half hour at the police station, I’m walking home to my penthouse having just paid my bail to the sergeant. There’s blood all over me at this point.

My jacket’s been torn to smithereens and my ass is hanging out of my jeans. I feel a tender spot on my skull and my eyes jump wince-like with the skin around them wrinkling like prunes. Someone has knocked a patch of fur off my head with a table leg but I think I put him in a coma for his trouble.

As I’m walking and kind of reliving the whole violent episode in my head, I remember that when the fight was going strong, I started looking around for that Animan

to see if I can spar a little. Seems he chickenshit disappeared just after the fight started which gives me a pleasing squirt in the guts because I figured he didn't have the belly for the close work.

Anyway, I walk into the lobby of my apartment building and ask the sleepy little gook bastard behind the counter for any mail. There was a postcard from Warren McVicars, an Irish cop I met from New York City. He paid big money to meet me and have a little spar. I even broke his forearm for him. The postcard was from a whorehouse in Singapore, so I guessed he made good on his promise to go to the Vatican.

He's my buddy now—like I need a buddy.

Just then someone taps me light on the shoulder. I come around quick with a fist cocked being still full of the swinging hot blood. It's the blonde I saw at the press conference. Her tits are parked under my pecks as I give here eyes the once over. Nice and bright and blue, like morning sky through a dewdrop.

"I hope you don't mind, Mr. Nuke." She smiled with tall white cocksucking teeth. "I asked around and one of the promoters gave me your address." Then she gave me a little Bambi frown, looking at my wounded hide. "Oh, dear, you're hurt."

"Shit no, this is nothing, baby—er, what will I call you?" I'm figuring from her eyes that she won't let me go on calling her 'baby.'

"Veronica," she said and smiled again. "Veronica Ramsey."

I just go quiet a minute listening to the pretty sound the name made inside my head. "Veronica..." I listen to it again.

"That's pretty." I hear myself saying, like I'm Don Juan or Johnny Depp or some shit.

"Thank you, Mr. Nuke. Do you have a first name?" Her eyes batted long lashes at me.

"Nuke's fine." I smile now, starting to get a major nose full of this broad's hormones. "Nuke." I look down and notice she has a hand out like she wants me to shake it. I grab it as gently as I can and she only winces a little.

"Pleased to meet you, Nuke."

"Pleased to meet you, Veroncia." I smile again, and really feel like action. "How about fucking, Veronica. Do you like it or what?"

Well, doesn't she just haul off and smack me. I almost decked her, being still somewhat full of heat from the battle, and now a little horny. She turns away and walks out of the hotel. I watch her round ass go. It's one of those ones that was big without being flabby—a dancer's ass, like liquid steel. I almost fetched her back and gave her a spanking, but my arrows of vengeance misfire and something inside tells me no.

Maybe it was her name that kept me back. *Veronica.*

I was all lit up now though, so instead of going right to my room I decided to pop into a bar and pick up a whore or something. That slap had made me a little too angry for any more Noel Coward dialogue. I wanted to dip the wick and I wasn't going to be picky—so long as I could be very rough.

###

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