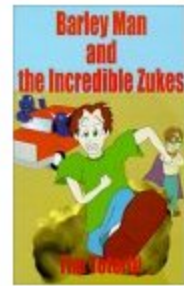


Barley Man and the Incredible Zukes

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PROLOGUE

Okay, here's the deal. My name is Tad, but you can call me The Amazing and Somewhat Sarcastic Tad. Nobody else does, but since this is going to be pretty much of a one-sided conversation, I figure I can get away with almost anything.

At first I thought I would totally abuse the power of authorship by spouting a mindless string of controversial obscenities, like: religion is a bunch of crap. The greater majority of politicians suck the sweat off a dead gorilla's balls. And, some of the more stringent mandatory qualifications of a lunchroom monitor are that they be fat, ugly, and highly homosexual.

Such statements would indubitably get me noticed, laid, and loved, while at the same time, royally piss off the part of the population that likes to be soundly sleeping by 9:30 in the p.m. Now, I love controversy as much as the next guy on the talk show stage. Unfortunately however, controversy leads to hate mail. And though I enjoy receiving creative literature from the straight and narrow folk, I can't stand the guilt arising from leaving such correspondence unanswered. So, in the spirit of the Do Nothing Generation, I'll play nice and subsequently spare myself some poetic obscenities from the mostly miserable masses.

Just so you know, this book is so incredibly cool that once you finish you're probably gonna want to buy me lunch and ask me over to meet your mother. I realize this is a fairly bold thing to say considering this is only the two hundred and forty-fifth word and all. But hey, if you don't have the balls to take a stand, you deserve to get spanked. It's a fairly simple world. If you want it, you get it. If you don't, you stick your thumb firmly up your ass and let life pass you by.

Anyway, because this book is so monumentally cool, I don't want just any "Rent-a-Nerd" reading it. Therefore, I have prepared a "Yo, you can't read this book because you are a loser and I don't like you" list. The list runs as follows:

If you're a Yuppie, you can't read this book. If you wear a suit every day or don't own a pair of sneakers, you can't read this book. If you sell anything door to door or pass out religious literature at five o'clock in the morning, you can't read this book. If you're mentally over thirty, go grab a copy of War and Peace. If you're illiterate, you can't read this book.

Wait a minute. That was cold. I take it back. Let's continue.

If you're a pain in the ass, and you know who you are, then forget it. If you're one of those girls who spreads it all over town that you're the easiest thing since Madonna in heat and then you make a guy wait four months before he gets any, you can't read this book. If you're the kind of guy who waited for that girl, then ah . . . beat it. If you're into politics, religion, social Save the Whales bullshit, or any other system-oriented affair, scram. If you constantly bitch about racism, sexism, ageism, or any other "ism," calm down and go have a cream soda. If you're one of those immoral individuals on late-night TV who tell the

moronic masses they can buy the world for no money down, you're a dildo with ears. If you're a sex-craved preacher, a crooked cop, or a crime figure of any sort, you should be shot and killed several times, and no, you can't read this book. Finally, if you're a stupid person, you know, the kind of person who drives forty-five miles per hour in the left lane of a highway with his right turn signal on, you should die slowly and there is no way in hell you can read my amazing book.

Ah! I feel much better now. Don't you? So let's embark on this wonderful, mostly true, incredibly funny, somewhat sarcastic, slightly sad, but all in all fantastic story. I realize it's going to be a small audience now that I've asked over half the world to return their books and go back to their pitiful bend over and take it in the ass kind of lives. But I assure you that it will be much more fun this way. I mean, who needs a bunch of, "Oh, you really shouldn't say that sort of thing because it might be politically, emotional, spiritually, or culturally improper and thereby offset someone's delicate view of the really good and really bad. So be quiet, you silly young man, before the world gets itself cast into turmoil. I mean it's not like we are capable of actually dealing with all the horrible situations in the world, even though these same horrible situations have been around for years and need to be dealt with really, really fast," saying individuals.

So I invite you few dreamers and idealists to share your lives with me as we journey from the land of bureaucratic bullshit and screwed-up philosophy, to a magical place where we can view the world through the eyes of the child. Our destination is distant, but also so very near. It will seem strange upon arrival, and yet oddly familiar, as if you met it in a dream or in the reality of a past life. It is the place you loved, laughed, played, pondered, and slept through the night without waking up in a cold sweat wondering if your parents lied to you when they said that everything was going to be all right.

This is the place I want to show you. This is the place I hope we find as we travel through this mental monstrosity I've created. But before we pump up our overpriced sneakers (that's tennis shoes to those in the Southeast), I would like to give you a brief description of the utopia that may await us. I say "may," because I'm directionally impaired and will probably get lost.

Friends and neighbors, we are all born blind, but as we grow our eyes begin to open and take in all the stimuli the world has to offer. We see its wonders, its magic, and an endless stream of possibilities. For a few years, we actually believe that everything is within our reach. We are looking through the eyes of a child and those eyes see nothing evil, nothing impossible. Through these eyes there's no prejudice, no hatred, no countries, and no war. Evil is something that lives under the bed and can be destroyed with the flick of a light switch. When we look at the world this way we are filled with hope and are proud of what we see.

Unfortunately, as we grow older our eyes begin to open further. We are now able to see all the negativity and hatred in the world. We see the pain and suffering people go through during their day-to-day and suddenly our dreams become much harder to fulfill. We become so overwhelmed with the negative stimuli presented to us that we lose sight of our childhood dreams and begin to give them up one by one until finally we become part of the negative force that stole our dreams in the first place.

Once we allow ourselves to be ruled by our new-found knowledge, our eyes begin to close again. We grow older. Our minds get weaker. And our range of vision becomes narrower until one day we can view only the negative aspects of life. At this point we realize we have

come full circle. Our perception is just as limited as it was when we were children, but now failures and regrets have replaced the hopes and dreams.

As our final days approach our sight grows increasingly weak and when we die we are blind once again. The sad thing is that the last thing we remember seeing is all the hopelessness in the world and the negativity within ourselves.

Well, I refuse to sit around and let this disease take over all the would-be poetic types of the universe. No. It's time for action. It's time for adventure. It's time for an ice-cold Diet Pepsi.

Our guides to this golden place will be six recent high school graduates who have no idea they are even on this quest, much less that they are being followed by a bunch of philosophical dudes and dudettes. We will deviously track them through a week's worth of happiness, hardships, and wonder. We will help them overcome conflicts with themselves, each other, Mother Nature, and a bunch of double-crossing mobsters.

I know that you're probably asking yourself what mobsters have to do with a story about growing up and the development of your personal philosophy? Well, the truth is, nothing at all. But damn it, this is my book and I happen to love mobsters. So if I want to bullshit about a guy named Vito Devito for a while, I'm gonna do it. As long as I reach my point I don't see the big deal so just relax and get ready for the world's greatest, almost-true story.

In the end, if we actually get that far, we will see who chooses to use the knowledge presented to them when they return to the realm of the child.

Oh, by the way, the reason I know so much about the whole thing is because I am one of the six teenagers. It's just lucky for you that, with sex, drugs, and smoking out of style, I've got nothing better to do than sit here, munch on some pathetically processed fast-food beef, and type. So buckle up, folks. It's time for The Amazing and Somewhat Sarcastic Tad to get rolling.

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