

Four Clowns of the Apocalypse

by Jay Lake

"Forty brass ducats a day!" Bubbles, the Red Clown of War, was in rare form as the concrete floor under him began to crack and steam. "I don't bother to *fart* beneath the fucking sheets for forty brass ducats! I'm a God-damned Force of Nature, laying waste to cities and tearing people's colons out through their noses. Governor or not, the Demon Malathion can go roast his weenie for forty God-damned ducats a day. Somebody's killing mimes, for Christ's sake. *Mimes!* Give that bastard a medal, I say. I'm not going to track them down."

Iggy, the Weedy Clown of Famine, took a deep draft off his cigar. "Now that *that's* out of the way, can we consider some constructive suggestions for finding out who murdered Marcel Emmaus? Let me remind you that we need the rent money. Even Forces of Nature have to sleep somewhere." The clowns leased the otherwise abandoned premises of Bailey Gum and Novelty at a steep discount, but the terms were cash only, due at the first of every month.

Mungo, the Green Clown of Pestilence, spat a blob of lumpy green tissue into his hand, glanced at it briefly, then tossed it over his shoulder. "Coroner's report. I'll go get it. I get *great* service down there."

"I'll bet," muttered Iggy. More loudly, "You need a ride?"

Mungo pushed back his chair. "I'll take my Kawasaki."

Jojo, the Pale Clown of Death, tapped his temple. "Wear a helmet this time. I'm not Silly Puttying you back together again."

Mungo limped out of the room. Iggy looked at the other two clowns, the Red and the Pale. "Fine. Coroner's report will help. Probably not much point in getting a police report, since the cops are already stonewalling the governor. What else?"

"Our original note from the mimes said Emmaus was murdered at his mansion on Mount Kelly," said Jojo. "We should go look, before the souvenir hunters drag everything away."

Bubbles jumped up. "I'll go bust some heads."

Iggy raised his hand, palm out. "Whose heads? How will that help?"

"Does it matter? Busting them makes me feel better."

Jojo stepped around the table, placing chrome claws on Bubbles' shoulder. "You're coming with us, fat boy. I'm sure there'll be something you can destroy at the mansion."

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Every time Iggy found a good deal on a Cadillac or an old school bus, it always fell through. Every time Bubbles laid waste to one of their Yugos in a fit of pique, another one turned up. And even without Mungo, the Yugo was crowded. Bubbles had to squat sideways to fit in the back, while riding shotgun Jojo's knees rubbed against his chin. The shocks creaked like a trap door. The duct-taped plywood patch on the roof above the driver's seat leaked like a trick corsage -- insurance companies had lost no time in finding policy exclusions to keep from paying out to repair Rapture damaged roofs.

The little Yugo strained up Auguste Way. Mount Kelly loomed just west of downtown Barnum, a round-shouldered mesa sprinkled with pines, elms, maples and dozens of expensive, misbegotten

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