

The Moray Eels Eat The Space Needle

by Chris Okum



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George W. Bush paints a landscape of downtown Waco. When he's finished the picture, he sees that he has forgotten to paint the ALICO building, which stood as the tallest building west of the Mississippi River and south of the Mason-Dixon line until 1929, which is owned and operated by the American-Amicable Life Insurance Company of Texas, and, at 282 feet tall, is currently the

tallest building in Waco. Bush makes a phone call and has the building taken down immediately.

Who Loves The Sun

Lou Reed never liked the Beatles. He never liked any British group. He didn't think the British should play rock and roll. What did he think they should play? "I don't think they should play anything," said Reed.

Anvil Of Crom

He liked to talk to Holocaust deniers. "Hear them out," as he would say to them. He would ask them why they didn't believe the Holocaust happened. He would listen. And when he was done listening to them he would say, "You are wrong. The Holocaust took place, there is plenty of evidence, historical evidence, written and filmed at the time of the event, books and movies, oral testimony, photographs, letters, etc., etc., etc. But I understand why you think the way you do. Because history doesn't matter anymore. People don't live in history, they live in real time, moment to moment. And nothing can be proved in the moment. You ask me, 'Can you, right now, without pointing me to a bunch of documents that you think will prove you're right, can you prove that the Holocaust happened? No. What you want me to do is take your word for it. No way. I don't take anyone's word for anything. I only take my own.' So if you haven't seen the tons of evidence that you're asking for, then as far as you're concerned, it didn't happen, even if I and millions of other people say it did? I'm not trying to argue with you. It seems, however, they you're living in another plane of existence than I am, where objectivity is a myth, where subjectivity is all that matters, where reality itself is what comes from within you, not from outside you. To you there's no past, there's no future, and I don't know, it might be possible that there's no present as well. It seems to me like what you're saying is that all events are just rumors at best and

fictions at worst, including the testimony of those who lived through the event. I could show you some images of what happened, but that's all they'll be to you, right? Just images. And the moment you stop looking at the images is the moment the images will cease to exist. And I understand that you're being honest with me, that you really don't believe the Holocaust happened. I mean, I want to believe that you believe that. But maybe I also believe that you just don't care that it happened. But I'm not going to press you about the facts or the evidence, because the more I do the more the facts and the evidence will seem like an absurdity to you. Which I think is the point, right? What you're doing when you say that the Holocaust is a fiction, just a bunch of stories other people tell each other, nothing more than a string of unverifiable anecdotes, is you're declaring the righteousness of brute force and elimination. You're participating in an event you sincerely believe never happened. This is your Final Solution. This is your way of helping the Nazis finish the job they started." This was his standard speech. And it never failed to go unpunished. But it was all he could do. Meet the negation with a dose of his own.

The Future of What

She knew that he husband considered her a liar because she had a tendency. She lied about what she ate for lunch. She lied about what she watched on television. She lied about how much specific items cost at the supermarket. But she also knew that her husband loved her and couldn't live without her because of her beauty, which was abundant and obvious from every angle, at every distance, and from a great height. So when she told him she was going out to with some friends to eat some moderately-priced Italian she expected a sour look on his face, which is exactly what she got. She didn't let her husband's expression ruin her night, though. And what a night it was. During the middle of dinner she was approached by a very handsome and very famous young British actor known for his stellar work in not only period dramas, but big-budget action films. She and

the actor left the restaurant and drove to the actor's hotel, passing a billboard with the actor's face on it along the way. They made love for hours. It was not the best sex she had ever had in her life, but it would do. When she got home much later than she said she would, her husband asked her where she was and what she had been doing. "I met [name of famous British actor redacted for legal purposes]," she said. "We went back to his hotel. We had sex two times, then I took a shower, and then we had sex again." Her husband's patented sour look spread across his flushed face. "Why do you lie to me," her husband said. "I know when you're lying to me. I know you went and spent too much on sushi again. I know what you did. I can see it on your face. Seriously, don't ever play poker, okay?" She told her husband she was sorry. Then she told him she was going to go upstairs and take a shower. "For real this time," she said. Her husband grimaced and apologized for getting mad at her. He made her promise him she would try and stop lying. She said she would. She gave her husband a kiss on his cheek. She climbed the stairs, her quads burning, knees still knocking. She could feel her husband staring, his love spinning around her like a sad, slack web.

War Inside My Head

William T. Vollmann returns from the Ukraine (and writes a lengthy essay about his experience there), alive, of course (duh), and without a single scratch, because no matter how hard Vollmann tries to put himself into situations where the world will finally take revenge on him for what happened to his little sister in 1968 (she drowned in the pool while Vollmann, then 9 years old, was supposed to be watching her while his parents were out, but who, instead, opted to sit in his room with the door shut, reading, oblivious), the world will just not seem to accomodate him, sending him the same message it has been sending him for over 45 years now (since he first went to Afghanistan during the height of their war with the Soviet Union), which is, "Do it yourself."

Holiday On The Moon

He sat on the dais at the First Annual Humboldt County David Lynch Symposium, held over the course of two days in a very large conference room at The Best Western Plus in Eureka, California. He was the Chair of the Department of Art + Film at Cal Poly Humboldt, and so he was not surprised to have been invited to be a keynote speaker and read from his still unpublished, extremely brief paper, *The Futility of Interpretation, Semantic Indeterminacy, and Non-Meaning in the Films of David Lynch*. He was surprised, however, to learn that one of the other keynote speakers would be the actress Charlie Spradling, also known as Irma and Swabbie, from Lynch's *Wild at Heart* and *Twin Peaks*, respectively. He had been a huge "fan" of Spradling's during the late 1980s and early 1990s, when she worked regularly, starring in movies such as *Ski Patrol*, *Kiss of the Beast*, *Mirror Mirror*, *Puppet Master II*, *Caged Fear*, and *The Doors*. It would be the first time in his entire life he would be in the same room as an actress he had seen naked on multiple occasions. Also on the dais were two obese film bloggers, the movie reviewer for the dying local newspaper, and a four amateur researchers of varying ages and sexes, all of whom dressed and styled their hair exactly like David Lynch. While he sat and waited for the symposium to begin he read the program. The titles for some of the talks the other keynote speakers would be giving were *The Blue Box and the Key: the Secrets of Mulholland Drive as They Relate to the Inconsistency of the Chinese Yuan as a Possible Alternative to the Current Global Hegemony of the U.S. Dollar*, *Finding the Owl Cave Ring: David Lynch's White Trash Paradise*, and *I'm There Right Now: The Mystery Man as Robert Blake's Foreshadowed Admission of Guilt*. He listened with mounting frustration and acute boredom as the other people spoke, no, explained, every aspect of Lynch's work, decoded every object, and shoe-horned their own ideology into one overdetermined hypothesis after another. He opened a bottle of water and drank from it and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. He scratched the back of

his head. He could not stop scratching the back of his head. He bit the inside of his cheek. Finally, it was his turn to speak. He was the last person to speak on the second day of the symposium, and as he walked towards the lectern holding his paper in one hand and the bottle of water in the other, he decided to scrap his prepared speech and speak off the cuff and without a filter. "Look, Lynch's films are not supposed to be 'interpreted,'" he said. "They are about the act of interpretation. The characters are the ones who are trying to interpret their surroundings. All you as a viewer are supposed to do is observe this. If Lynch wants his characters befuddled, what makes you think you shouldn't be as well? That's why whenever anyone asked him what his films were 'about' he would shrug the question off or just laugh. His films are about the inability to answer questions like 'what is this about?' How do you people still not understand this?" He took a sip of water. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. He scratched the back of his head. He bit the inside of his cheek. "Why do you people continue to insist that Lynch's films need to be interpreted when the films themselves are about the futility of interpretation? 'The film is the explanation,' is what David Lynch himself said, I forget when and where, but he said this. And he wasn't trying to obfuscate, okay? He was giving it to you straight. And this seems to be a concept that most of you cannot wrap your heads around. Because all of you want answers. And you know why you're so obsessed with answers? Because none of you can live with questions. And that's all life is, you know? One unanswered question after the next. Lynch's films hit so deep because they aren't about women in trouble, or who killed who, or what is happening; they're about life itself, about the inability to make meaning out of existence. David Lynch was quite possibly the most prominent existentialist in American cultural history. He's our Kierkegaard, our Sartre, our Camus. And yet all any of you want from his work is to know what the glowing green ring means, or what the black and white zig-zag pattern on the floor in the Black Lodge means. You know what it means? That none of you understand the difference between shit and shinola. That's what it means. Congratulations.

Give yourself a hand." He backed away from the lectern. No one clapped at first, and then there was a short, sloppy burst of sarcastic applause from some inconclusive vector in the back. After the closing remarks he was supposed to attend a group dinner at the Brick & Fire Bistro, but he opted out, choosing to order a cheeseburger and key lime pie from room service instead. He ate his food and watched *Inland Empire* on his computer. It was the fifteenth or sixteenth time he had seen the film, and he was still perfectly fine with not understanding a single thing that was happening. The next morning, while drinking his coffee and eating his complimentary breakfast in the lobby of the Best Western, he ran into one of the independent researchers (he thought maybe it was the gentleman who read from a paper titled *The Gaping Maw: Sadism and the Female Form in Blue Velvet*), who told him he had missed quite the time at the Bistro. "During the middle of dinner," said the independent researcher, "Ms. Spradling made her hand talk, you know, like a hand puppet, you know, like Senor Wences. You know Senor Wences?" He confirmed that he did indeed know who Senor Wences was. "Well," said the independent researcher, "she told us a story with her hand. She told us about a car accident. She was in a really bad car accident. She told us all about it. With her hand. In a voice. It wasn't her voice. I don't know whose voice she was doing, but it sounded familiar. I know the voice, I just can't put a name to it. It's on the tip of my tongue. I'll figure it out, though. When she was done we didn't know what to say. I think we were all trying to process it. But it was very moving. I cried. You would've cried too." He nodded in agreement. He bit the inside of his cheek. "You ever see *Mirror Mirror*? The one with Ms. Spradling? The one with the shower scene?" Again, he nodded in agreement and bit the inside of his cheek. "I swear to God," said the independent researcher, "that movie is an allegory for the end of the Cold War, right?" He nodded in agreement and bit the inside of his cheek, biting it so hard that he drew blood. He did this when he couldn't stand someone but didn't want them to know. He'd been doing this since he was a child. He didn't know why he did this, why he chose

to harm himself for how other people made him feel, and he accepted that he never would.

