

Boswell Meets The Subterrans

by j. h. woodyatt

Boswell levitates out to the street. He looks down. There, carved into the sidewalk, are the words "Cosmo Donahue." Everything begins falling into place.

Trouble though... he still has the bloodhound to worry about. Wilco the Panhead, control said. No clue.

He bounds like a lunar explorer into the Edinburgh Castle, the goofy porcelain busts glaring at him with contempt. The customers seem oblivious to his state, but the bartender is plainly electrified. He pulls up a stool.

"Gimme a shot of Laphroaig. The works."

The portly man seems to understand what "the works" means.

What to do what to do what to do. Cosmo Donahue. The Max Factor Twinings. It all made sense, but plans had to change. *Bottle of Smoke* on the jukebox. Hmmmm. What's this. Everclear Peach Passion? Made with grape wine, peach and grape substandard wines, "real" (as opposed to ersatz) Everclear™ brand grain alcohol, and natural flavors.

"What savage hell is this?" He can hear the words slip out of his mouth uncontrolled.

"This is America," said the bartender, "There's no bottom to this pit."

True fact.

"You're Cosmo Donahue."

"On good days," he says. "On slow days, I'm just Ralph."

"Evensong is at 3:30, and I've gotta see Wilco the Panhead about a bloodhound."

Ralph nods, and the truth goes unspoken between them. Time is short and enemies are everywhere. Ralph clocks out and changes

from his uniform. Boswell drinks down the shot and they leave together out the basement.

The muck on the walls is pretty odious, but at least the house band practiced the night before. Cosmo leads the way through the underground club, with Boswell following, rapidly running out of useful synapses as his neurons squirm under the myterious scrutiny of the Candyflip Taskmaster's orgone scope.

He is slowly immanentizing under the strain, but there is still hope of escape-- hope that hinges on opening the doors to the pylon in his attic. Slim chance, but better than eating egg shells.

The band goes into a nasty heavy-metal rendition of Finnegan's Wake and Boswell feels soothed. It won't last.

"Yo, Cosmo!" shouts one of the leathermen from behind them. "Who's the geek?" Cosmo apparently doesn't have guest privileges.

"Don't know. Says he's gotta see Wilco the Panhead."

"Wilco the Who?"

"No, Wilco the *Panhead*. Evensong's at 3:30-- look we ain't got time to go through the drill, so put it on my tab."

"Not so fast, Cosmo," comes a voice from 180 degrees the other way. "That there mule belongs to me, and you'd be well advised to relinquish control of it immediamente."

Boswell knows the voice. It's the Sandman. Who knows how many of his berserkers are down here? Boswell hopes Cosmo has a plan.

"Possession is nine tenths of the Law, Sandman."

Boswell hears a shot. Cosmo goes prone. So does Boswell. Automatic rifle fire. Screams. Thin mist of blood. Sharp pain on both sides of the head. Boswell blanks out.

