

Pitch Meeting

by Smiley McGrouchpants Jr.

"I've got a great — a *really* great idea for a novel."

"Tell me."

They were the only two people in the coffee shop.

"It's like *Against the Day* meets *Underworld* meets *IQ84* — really really long, lots of ideas."

"Okay."

It started to rain.

"You ever take shop class in 7th grade?"

"I'm listening."

The cash register chimed a sale — *ca-ching!*

"Remember the glaze you'd put on the pottery you'd put in the kiln?"

"Who doesn't?"

It started to pour.

"Turns out, the story is, the supplier comes from Athens, GA and has this really long family history."

"Sort of like Yoknapatawpha County."

People started flocking in the door.

"Right! But the thread of the narrative is — not that there aren't *many*, but the *main* thread — all along, they're run by this mad genius in some back room who's afraid of people."

"They're run?"

People started fighting over tables.

"The *family's* run. They're all bossed around — and there's all these employees, some of them are family, some aren't, there's this big socially-incestuous thing going on with a lot of overlap, managers 'marry in' and that sort of thing — but, the thing is, he's running them all, and most of them aren't even sure he's *alive*."

"Go on."

People started fistfighting over tables.

"They think maybe — who knows? — he's just a portrait on the wall. But the job keeps them all busy, so they don't have to think

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about it.”

“Afraid of *people*?”

Someone shoved over a table. A little girl started crying.

“Of human *contact*. Afraid, yes.”

“Uh-huh.”

The police showed up at the door.

“But this intrepid college student — she's been listening to R.E.M.'s *Murmur*, it's 1983 — she puts two and two together, and she starts to connect more dots . . . ”

“You're mixing your metaphors.”

The police started thwacking someone in the head with a nightstick — for a change, it wasn't a Negro.

“But this isn't the novel.”

“I see.”

Blood splattered a chair nearby. A waitperson picked up a rag with all the alacrity of habit and started wiping it down, taking steps to avoid the scuffle happening at the floor nearby.

“I'll give you a \$50,000 cash advance, and 8% of the royalties.”

“Deal.”

The rain stopped.

