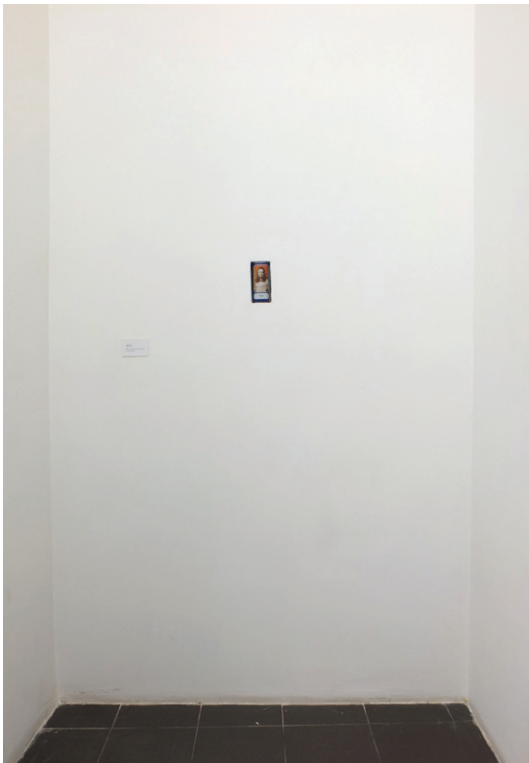


LOU FORD in Brussels





It happened to him from time to time. He assumed it happened to most everybody. Messed up visual perceptions. It's when your eyes play tricks on you, sending messages to your cerebral cortex which are at complete odds with what's right there.

At Lou's house there is a tube of organic hair conditioner featuring an image of some grapes hanging from a vine. The image was obviously taken in the fall because the grapes were fully ripened and the leaves surrounding it had turned a rich golden hue. The conditioner was labeled "Italian Red Grape" so the image made sense. Lou stared at this bottle every morning. There were loads of shampoos, conditioners and scrubs in his bathroom. He barely used any of them. When you're bald, shampoos and conditioners really start to lose their significance. Lou didn't buy any of the bathroom supplies anyhow, that was his wife's turf, so when new things appeared on the shelf it was hardly an unexpected surprise. Anyhow, one morning while he was standing under the shower trying to wake up, he glanced at the conditioner and a weird thing happened - instead of seeing the plump grapes and golden leaves swaying in the gust of an early fall breeze, he saw what looked like... hell. He did a double take. He focused hard. All the pertinent details were there: ragged rocks, spiraling fire, searing gases and tormented figures. Not a camp fire, not a house fire, no... this was the mother of all fires right there on the tube.

Lou liked when this happened. He always savored these misinterpretations for as long as he could. Vision mix-ups like these only lasted for a few seconds... the "wrong" vision always faded away giving itself over to the "real" one. Funny thing was, the terror tube wasn't going anywhere no matter how hard Lou stared.

The great thing about this hell fire image was that Lou was actually seeing it. He knew it was a mix up but it was right there, in front of him, in the flesh. Now there's a big difference between imagining something and actually seeing something... the difference is huge; hallucinations and apparitions are different beasts than these. The hell fires may have been an incorrect interpretation, but they were also real. He was seeing it. Tasting it. Blinking, rubbing his eyes and concentrating hard, he couldn't reset his vision back to the original vineyard setting. The hell fires remained... burning. He stood there motionless, staring for some time as the water pounded the top of his head. A wide grin slowly spread across his face.

It was interesting to think of perception as an on-going sequence of interpretations. It reminded Lou of a Science Fiction story in which an astronaut ends up in a parallel universe where everything looks the same as on Earth, but is slightly different than it should be. For instance, although Politicians in this fictional world are democratically elected, once they achieve power they do almost the exact opposite of what the electorate wants. The funny thing is that the public (who openly admire their leaders) don't seem to mind, and they keep re-electing the same party, over and over. A true horror story if ever there was one. A major chunk of the plot follows the astronaut as he desperately tries to adjust to this strange planet where everything seems familiar but isn't. He eventually comes close to the brink

of insanity until he resigns himself to his fate and gives himself over to the ways of this new world. Ultimately he falls in love and marries a disfigured woman, who shows little or no interest in him. The human species is, if anything, adaptable even in the realm of fiction.

Like the astronaut, Lou too had eventually learned to go with the flow rather than swimming against the current. Cynicism, loneliness and insanity aren't fun lifestyle options when you're starting out, so Lou decided to go for what was behind door number three, rather than two. He did it more out of necessity than anything else. Endlessly re-establishing one's identity in the universe was tough work, plus the stuff he had to read was beyond boring, so in the end he stopped analyzing his situation, laid back, and let the miasma of modern life engulf him... completely. He was surprised how easy and pleasurable it was. He had a lot of things in his favor to help things along, like a wife who was beautiful and loving (a nice contrast to the astronaut's dilemma), wonderful children and steady access to his three biggest vices—junk food, reality TV and cheap magazines. In the end he felt he had made the right decision. Maybe he had gone to the dark side but he was OK with it, although deep down, way down, he knew it would all come back and destroy him, eventually.

Although Lou considered himself something of a sellout, he still refused to accept things at face value. That would never change. It was ingrained into his psyche. It was part of his training as an art student to peek behind the curtain. Back then it wasn't required, it was demanded. Pull it back far enough and you'll get a reward. Accept what's there and you're a limp-less loser. Funny thing is, what's behind the curtain keeps changing. Nowadays everyone's in on the exposé act. It's so common it's mainstream. The folks behind the curtain know this; hell, most of them probably went to art school themselves, so they've developed the skills and tools to maintain a constantly evolving circus back there, more complex and sophisticated than any exposé agent could ever hope to understand.

Anyhow... back to the terror tube. Lou found it hard to imagine that the manufacturers of this conditioner were using the 1970s art of *Subliminal Seduction** to enhance the covert appeal of this product. Lou always found the whole subliminal advertising thesis, as popularized by the media theorist, Wilson Bryan Key, to be heavy on the paranoid side. His books were really out there... crazy rants written by a guy with patches on his elbows, who sees nothing but hard-ons, crucifixes and images of death hidden in ads for Jantzen bathing suits, Crest toothpaste and Liquid Plumber.

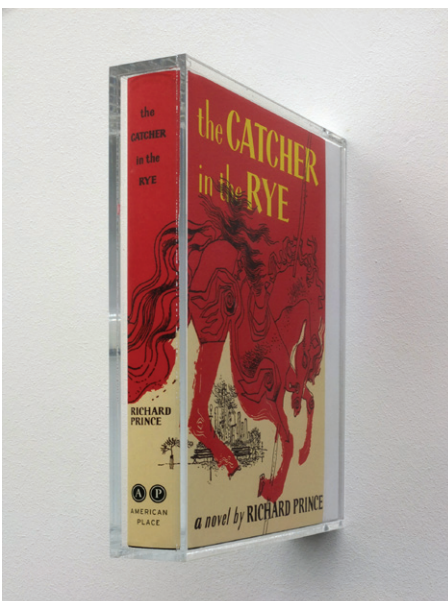
I wonder what brand of conditioner he used? Lou thought.

Key's obsessive crusade against subliminal advertising seemed silly, especially when compared to the colossal manipulative force of "regular" advertising and its relentless hard sell. An almost indiscernible, subliminal image of Christ on the cross hidden inside the curves of an ice cube in a Beefeater gin ad from 1973 seems almost quaint in comparison to the cavalcade of manipulation served up continuously via live feed on any of the thousands of media formats running current-

ly. Yeah, modern marketing today is a different beast, one adept at making you desire something you never knew existed, or wanted. Because of organizations like Google and Facebook, who have been archiving everyone's internet traffic for years, the curtain masters now know everyone's coming and goings... their desires, their dreams, their weaknesses... everything. If Key were alive today and surveyed this current marketing landscape he would surely shit his pants in terror, for it's a million times worse than anything he could have imagined way back in 1973.

It was a bit troubling for Lou to know that while most people saw positive Christian apparitions in everyday objects, like Jesus, the Virgin Mary, etc., he was seeing the flip-side of the scenario on the conditioner... but then again he was always something of a half-empty kind of guy anyhow, so it sort of made sense. Lou pondered this as he lathered the area above his gut. However by the time he rinsed himself off, he noticed the hell-fires were gone and the grapes had returned. Too bad. If he squinted really hard he could still make out a flicker of fire here and there, but it was fleeting at best. He realized it was over; his brain had re-analyzed the visual data and deleted the apparition upon re-entry. It was the one running the show; he was just along for the ride. Besides, it was for his own protection. Flickers of an alternative reality are fun, but a 24/7 hell horror show wasn't what Lou was after.

**Subliminal Seduction* (1973) was of a series of books written by Wilson Bryan Key (January 31, 1925 – October 8, 2008) on the subject of subliminal advertising and subliminal messages in contemporary media. Controversial from the start, Key's books were widely read, particularly at universities, where he would often lecture. Key claimed that advertisers embedded images of sex, death, and bestiality in their ads to manipulate people into buying their products. Claims like these quickly gave birth to cottage industries of consumer education programs, marketing consultancies and subliminal self-help tapes. However, the idea of subliminal advertising for the most part eventually joined the garbage heap upon which are piled fears about satanic messages being played backwards in Led Zeppelin songs, and sightings of the Virgin Mary on cheese sandwiches. As time went on, public paranoia about advertising practices abated, and in scientific circles, a professed interest in subliminal advertising came to be about as respectable as wearing a tuxedo t-shirt to an academic conference.



It didn't look too promising from the outside, the house was pretty beat up and it was located in a sketchy area of town. Lou had driven too far and too long to back out now so he went up and knocked on the door. The stoop smelled like cat piss and there was a sign in the window which said "NO FLYERS PLEASE I'M ALREADY ENOUGH IN DEBT". He had set up the appointment through an ad placed on Craigslist. The seller, whose name was simply listed as "Pete" was selling a 1966 Williams A-Go-Go pinball machine which was listed as "All original. Running, but probably needed some servicing". The images posted were standard Craigslist fair—low res, slightly out-of-focus, phone pics. You could see that the condition of the machine was so-so, however there wasn't any good detail shots to check out so it was hard to tell. It didn't matter though, there was enough information on the screen for Lou to see what he was after. It wasn't the pinball machine itself which interested him so much, but the artwork on it. One didn't come across an original A-Go-Go very often, especially in North America. Most of these machines ended up in Europe, so to discover one here in the north end of Buffalo, NY was something of a find. Lou was excited, he was about to see a machine which was created by the one of the least written about, but most enigmatic artists from the pinball world... Jerry Kelley.

Pinball artwork had become a recent obsession for Lou. He spent a good a good chunk of time scouring the internet for pinball data. One barely came across pinball machines these days so it was odd that he became interested now? Something set this whole thing off and he wasn't sure what it was. Maybe it was the inventive designs, or the seedy heritage, or the flashing lights, or the nostalgia factor... who knows? Who cares. Whatever it was it was working overtime, pulling him in, and eating him whole. Compulsive, detail-oriented guys like Lou were easy game for the Pinball curse. Anyone with a preference for data and lists, and like checking through catalogues were done for. He was now what Pinball geeks would call a "pinhead", which isn't a good moniker for someone looking to score with the ladies.

It was interesting for Lou to note the changes in the medium over time. Back in the 60s and 70s pinball was commonly associated with guys outside the system... guys who dealt weed, smoked cigarettes, cut class, and hung out in arcades. Guys who wore bell bottoms and leather vests, had long hair and puffed Malboros while they worked *Rockmakers* (Bally 1968) to get an extra game. Today pinball machines are mostly associated with older guys who hold down responsible day jobs, post blogs, and belong to organized pinball clubs. These guys don't smoke and they don't cut class. They mostly hang out in their basement, drink beer, and fuck around

with their machines all weekend. Pinball is no longer the active medium it once was. With the demise of almost all the pinball manufactures in the late 90s pinball morphed from the public to the private. It's still alive today, however, it's based almost exclusively within the confines of collectors homes and pinball clubs.

Anyhow, that's what Lou discovered. It didn't take long to realize that hard-core pinball types favored Gottlieb machines from the 50s, 60s and 70s, especially single player units bearing designs by Roy Parker, Art Stenholm and Gordon Morrison. Parker, in particular was considered something of a legend within the pinball world. He created the artwork for every Gottlieb game produced between 1930 to 1966, a period which is considered by many as the glory years of pinball art and design, and considering Gottlieb's market dominance over competitors such as Williams, Bally and Chicago Coin it isn't hard to see why he is still held in high regard within the pinball industry. Today games bearing his artwork can sell in the thousands of dollars, and really rare ones, like *Mermaid* (Gottlieb 1951), can go for much more.

Lou liked Parker's games but for him they were a bit too predictable. They looked a bit too much like what you'd expect to see on a pinball machine. Too much apple pie with extra cream on top. Too many saucy babes winking at you to come hither from behind the rickety back fence. Too many Polookas bearing toothless grins and saggy boxing shorts. Parker was Norman Rockwell in zoot suit... a zoot suit made by his mom. Once you've seen a few you've seen them all. "Don't get me wrong" said Lou, "I've got a soft spot for riverboat gamblers, honestly I do, thing is, I'm looking for something else... something different."

Serious collectors are always on the lookout for a hook, an angle, or an area of specialty. They desire something which sets their collections apart from the pack. The unique, the undiscovered and the overlooked are favored subjects for investigation in any collecting community. Unearthing that diamond in the rough is the drug that fuels this addiction. Lou was no exception. He craved something beyond the usual cast of characters. Something beyond Parker and his crew. The subject before him was so vast he had to zero in or else he'd get buried. He needed to refine his criteria.

Pretty soon he had it down to a handful of potential subjects, but just then, out of the blue, this guy's machine comes across his radar, and next thing you know Lou's found what he was looking for. Why bother with anything else? This guy blew everything else away. This guy was Jerry Kelley.

Excited by his recent discovery Lou dug around searching for anything he could uncover. Unfortunately there wasn't much to find. His online career synopsis consisted of only a few sentences ...

"...a veteran of World War II Jerry Kelley's first job in the coin-op industry was doing art for a company named United who made ball bowlers back in the 50s. For the next couple of years he bounced back and forth working for various companies within the arcade trade. He eventually ended up doing freelance artwork for the Advertising Posters Co. who did all the silk-screening for the top pinball manufacturers in Chicago. It was during this time that Kelley began his short, 4 year run within the pinball industry, creating artwork on 12 games for Bally and Williams from 1965 to 1969. Recognized for inventive and unconventional artwork featuring his trademark, "pointy people".

This short blurb was accompanied by a grainy picture of Kelley taken at a pinball show in the 80s. This image was better than anything Lou could have imagined. It was perfect. Check out that crazy tie/shirt combo. Check out the hunched posture. The guy looks incredible... a cross between Weegee and Willy Lowman, enlightening the assembled with a lecture about his artwork. If Lou had any doubts before, they were gone once he laid eyes on this pic.

For him, Kelley was where it was at. His work orchestrated the perfect collision of creative ability, modernist art references and pulp subject matter. Imagine a pinball machine that looks right but wrong at the same time. Imagine an electromechanical relic which bridges the gap between high and low. Imagine Hugo Ball at the Cabaret Voltaire in his tin man get-up, only instead of his face there's a kick-out hole. Imagine a Giorgio de Chirico reproduction drawn by a guy with a short deadline and a head full of mescaline. Imagine Georges Braque combined with Max Ernst, Hanna Barbara and limited artistic ability. Mix it all together and you've got Jerry Kelley. Simultaneously sublime and dumb right there before your eyes. Like *Nude descending a staircase?* Who doesn't? Then check out Kelley's *Capersville* (Bally 1966)... it's the *Les Dames d'Avignon* of pinball art.

Kelly himself stated that his main motivation was to make pinball design "contemporary". He achieved this goal, in fact, his creations marked a paradigm shift in pinball artwork. Straight up illustrations were out and abstract formalism was in. Much like the modernist painters of the 20s Kelley's desire was to break the surface down. If the true goal of an artist is to reflect the world in which they inhabit then Kelley succeeds beautifully. His machines look like they belonged in the 60s. They refract the energy of that era right back at you. Elongated, futurist-in-

spired "pointy people" predominate (imagine Mister Fantastic from the Fantastic Four drawn with a T-square). Subject matter varied... music and dancing themes come up often in games like *MiniZag* (Bally 1968), *A-Go-Go* (Williams 1966) and *Beat Time* (Williams 1967, a game which features a non-too-subtle reference the *The Beatles*). Others like *Alligator* (Bally 1969), *Dogies* (Bally 1968), and *Pot-O-Gold* (Williams 1965) explore subjects as far reaching as of swamp exploration, cattle wrangling and treasure hunting.

Lou's favorites were *Wiggler* (Bally 1967) and *Joker* (Bally 1968)... what these were about was anyone's guess. The backglass on *Joker* is especially impressive. A wash in a lurid palette of red, green and blue, the glass features a fantastical carnival setting. The ubiquitous "Joker" of the title is a grotesque, anthropomorphic fun house in the form of a man's head. Spilling into the foreground is a crowd waiting to enter, two women at the front of the line clench their teeth in delight as a gush of air blasts their dresses skyward, all to the delight of a leering attendant. Another woman in the lower right covers her boyfriend's eyes preventing his view of the show. A bemused clown holding some balloons and a stogie stands nearby, he's not interested in the ladies, he's staring straight ahead, waving to us the viewers. Rumor has it that the "Joker" pavilion was modeled after Kelley's boss at the time. A boss he wasn't so crazy about. A boss who didn't share his creative vision. Of all the Jerry Kelley games out there this is the one that's the rarest. It's the one all the Pinheads want. Only 110 copies were made... production was stopped once the boss found out who the "Joker" was.

Lou heard this story from a guy in Switzerland who collects Kelley's machines. He's got all 12. Turns out most of his machines ended up in Europe which is strange because there's hardly a copy to be found anywhere near where Lou lives, which is less than 250 miles from the original factory. He quickly discovers there's something of a cult over there for Jerry Kelley. The Euro Pinheads have the goods. They dig the Kelley vibe. Next thing you know Lou's messaging with guys in places like Nuremberg, Karlsruhe and Bern, who not only know all about Jerry Kelley but collect and preserve his work. A new connection is made and another gifted artist is saved from obscurity. This makes Lou happy... but not quite as happy as getting his first machine in the north end of Buffalo. Turns out Pete was a decent guy looking to lighten his load. Now Lou has his own Jerry Kelley sitting in his living room. It's right between the Jack Pierson photo and the Sophie Nys leaf bags.





The official name was "Crystal Mart" but most people in town called the place "Crystal Meth Mart". This is the place where Lou went to rent videos and buy junk food. It was the only place in the town of Crystal Beach one could walk to; hell it was pretty much the only store in town that was still in business. Anyone with access to a car avoided it. They did all their shopping at the Walmart, twenty kilometers away in Fort Erie. The Crystal Mart catered to people without cars and with a passion for low-cost, life-depleting consumables. Basically it was for welfare cases, dopers, low-lives and losers. The place was run by the town's only Korean family, who lived upstairs. They worked the counter in shifts. Lou marveled at how well the family kept their cool, dealing with the cavalcade of misfits who came into their shop each day. I mean Jesus... does it take ten minutes to decide which scratch-and-win lotto card to buy? Or how about waiting in line while Roger (the local drug dealer) pays his entire bill with nickels and dimes? The place was a magnet for every freak in town, it was also Lou's favorite place.

Crystal Mart was a one-stop shop. You could get whatever you needed there. Batteries? No problem. Econo-sized BBQ briquettes? Yup. Toilet plunger? Over there. Harley Davidson Zippo lighter? In the display case. Jack Lind teriyaki beef jerky? Right here. They had everything.

Lou's neighbor, who had lived in town his entire life, told him the store used to be one of the seediest bars back when the amusement park was in town. The park was famous for the Crystal Beach Cyclone, which was built in 1927. The Cyclone was an intense roller coaster with a full time nurse on-hand to revive passengers who had passed out during the ride. The amusement park was long gone now and like a lot of other things in this region the place had seen better times. For most of its existence the amusement park relied on visitors from nearby Buffalo, and when that town boomed so did the park. Unfortunately when Buffalo started to do the deep six in the 1970s, the park also followed suit. It closed in 1989 after one hundred years of continuous operation and was bulldozed to make way for a gated community. The store and the town were located in the southern area of Canada where the US rust belt had crept northward, nuking every factory in its path. Tough times. The only thing keeping this town alive was the presence of summer cottagers from Toronto, who flocked to the place from May until September. The rest of the year the area was dead.

It seemed insane that anyone would want to relocate into this sad little town full time, but that just

what Lou and his family did. They moved in three years ago. Before they became "full-timers," they were like all the other cottagers who came down on weekends. They had rented an empty storefront a couple of streets over back then—there were loads to choose from. It was always a drag to head back to the city each Sunday, so they decided to move to the town, treating themselves to the country laid-back lifestyle 24/7. Why not? Both he and his wife were looking for something different. They were done with the city. This place was different. It was barely on the grid. It offered zero economic opportunities. The schools were borderline at best. Gas was 10 cents more a litre than anywhere else. No Starbucks. No shawarma huts. No Vietnamese soup. No bookstores. Nothing... just the Crystal Meth Mart.

Back when Lou rented videos (he watched movies on Netflix now) Crystal Mart was the place to go. They always had a nice combination of Hollywood blockbusters and straight-to-video schlock to choose from. He rented both. The counter at Crystal Mart was a bit of a fortress. It functioned like a balustrade keeping the hordes at bay. It was elevated, ran the full length of one wall, and had lots of space to feature selected goods. The owners took full advantage of this marketing opportunity, placing a wide variety of impulse items flanking the register to complement their core merchandise, mostly lottery tickets and cigarettes. The funny thing about the Crystal Mart was their idea of what constituted "impulse items". It was a bizarre collection of shoddy knick-knacks: Rough-hewn Rastafarian figurines offering up giant spliffs; miniature metal helicopters made from soldered bullet casings; glass-blown hash pipes and WWF key chains. However, it was what the owners had behind the counter, out of reach, high up, that caught Lou's attention when he was waiting in line to pay.

Behind the register, right above the massive cigarette rack, were knives, and these weren't the regular hunting and fishing knives one would expect to find in a country store. No, no... these knives were large sinister blades one might see in the hands of a Frank Frazetta death lord emerging from the darkness of the underworld. These were large "fantasy knives," bearing the marks of their makers engraved on the polished steel of their long twisting shanks. Each was more nasty and intricate than the next, featuring toxic combinations of razor-sharp blades, brass knuckles and spikes. There were five harbingers of death above the Marlboros, Players and du Mauriers, and each one had a different spike/blade/knuckle configuration. As true works of dark beauty these knives were designed to do one thing perfectly and that

was to inflict the most carnage humanly possible on soft flesh.

To say they were extreme would be putting it mildly. Lou wondered what type of person would buy these brutal knives. Did he have to worry about some country crack-head walking up to him with a Gil Hibben Double Shadow Knife with Handle Claw thinking he was a Goblin from the house of Beorn? Seriously, is that a possibility? Does each knife come with a sheath for your belt so you can carry them around... outside? Mental note: Discontinue eye contact with anyone on the street. What else would they be used for? Display? An accessory for mirror posing? Goth stuff?

Another interesting detail about these knives was their high sticker price. Entry level death selection started at \$150 and moved rapidly upwards. These knives were easily the most expensive things in the store. It was hard imagining anyone in town shelling out this kind of coin to enhance a mirror take down of a Bairo. However, it seemed the owners had a different perspective regarding the purchasing preferences of the typical Crystal Beach shopper. They were confident enough in this knowledge to invest some serious cash in this collection of pricey skewers.

Lou prided himself on having a decent knowledge of both high and low art forms, but these knives were something else. They were beyond his comfort range. The fact that he differentiated between "high" and "low" culture at all tells you something about where he was coming from. Blame it on art school. He was sure whoever made these things had a list of devoted fans, most likely guys with a taste for darkness. Fantasy, goth and heavy metal scenes had always remained outside Lou's spectrum of interests. They weren't his bag. He wasn't crazy for the music and the people it attracted crept him out. He also never really got the whole obsession with evil and death, I mean, how many Grim Reaper and Slipknot tattoos can one take? He knew that the three scenes were very different from the next—surely any self-respecting goth would be disgusted to be considered on par with a metal head—but for Lou it didn't matter. For him it was all a mélange of skulls, sorcerers and eye liner.

Anyway, getting back to the knives... they were really making his mind swim. They represented a new level of weirdness never seen before at the Crystal Mart, and that was really saying something. Decorative items for the demented. The personification of evil on the one hand, but so over the top on the other that they looked almost like gag

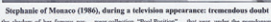


novelties. Was that the attraction? This evil/satiric combo? He doubted it was anything that sophisticated. Satire didn't seem to figure that prominently in these scenes. This was serious. They were serious. When you're working the darkness angle you don't tap your buddy's shoulder and go "Knock, Knock."

People collected everything... why not knives? He knew Lemmy from Motörhead had a collection of Nazi daggers; he had seen it first-hand in a documentary film about the bassist a few weeks back. That made sense. He imagined Lemmy as the type of fella these knives would attract. Like tattoos or piercing these knives were talismans of a different cloth. They ward off good vibrations with a quick jab to the gut. Nowadays everyone had a tattoo or two to symbolize their wild side but he had never seen anything like these daggers at any house he visited. But then again he didn't go out much, and the folks he knew certainly weren't into this kind of stuff. No, these knives were for serious nerds and nasty motherfuckers. Light sabers and bone breakers. He doubted anyone used these things for battle, but then again who knew? He found it hard to believe the nice Korean family could sell these things—over the counter, to anyone, no questions asked. Remember now, these were actual knives with multiple puncture protrusions, so it was possible for some deranged nut-job to inflict massive damage should they wish to do so. Really? Had it ever happened? He had never seen any story featuring knives like these. It seemed both comical and terrifying, the thought of someone wielding one of these things in a serious fight. Just imagining the wound one of these knives could inflict made Lou's stomach tighten.

No, these blades were display items only (he kept telling himself this for reassurance). They were best suited for display on a wall... or, better yet, these blades were best suited to be stabbed into a wall, displayed with the grip projecting outwards, to amplify their wicked flavor for all to see.

daughter of Grace Kelly and Prince Rainier who struggled with life in the media spotlight

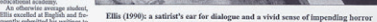


Stephanie of Monaco is survived by her two children. In 2002 Prince Rainier changed the Monegasque constitution so as to allow succession by those conceived out of wedlock whose parents subsequently marry. Accordingly, Princess Stephanie's elder son and daughter stand at present seventh and eight in line to the throne respectively.

Controversial author of *American Psycho* whose depiction of consumerism and violence defined an era

The novel's combination of deadpan comedy (as in endless lists of designer brand names) and prolonged scenes of graphic violence lend it a lasting and almost surreal sense of horror.

"I was writing about a society in which the surface became the

[illegible]

