

Contestant One— Vladimir Giger

[From the upcoming novel *Fossil Punk*]

Asheg Brom

The crowd was deafening.

Fine, you'd expect an audience of seventeen million people to be noisy, but it seemed to Vladimir Giger that he could hear every adoring screech . . . from the panty-throwing human sardines of the first layers of the moshpit, to the grog-soaked, twelve-armed bogans several kilometers away . . . he could feel the love, the adoration, the undying artistic respect, the unconditional reverence from every body, every mouth, every cell, every atom of the gargantuan mass of meat outside, every one of them wet in anticipation of even the tiniest sight of Their Hero.

A deep sigh . . . *Fuck*, he whispered. *Fuck, fuck, fuck.*

He couldn't take much more of this. Then again, he'd said that to himself thirty-two years ago, after the release of his fifteenth album, *More Shit for you Plebs, PS Get a Fuckin' Life*. He really thought even just the name of that album would have gotten them off him, not to mention the songs themselves, which alternated between pathetically juvenile and confusingly acidic, with twenty-minute spurts of brain-numbing muzak in between, but 'twas not to be . . . in fact, their wild misinterpretation of that album's message left him utterly flummoxed, as five-star review after five-star review flooded in, and website hits soared through several stratospheres.

In a nutshell, Vladimir Giger was an artist who could do no wrong. Absolutely no music he could ever produce would be taken as anything less than the most definitive musical statement of the current generation, and adored across any and every galaxy. He was worshipped across every corner of the universe. He was responsible for the second-biggest selling album in intergalactic history, *Bronze Banana Ain't my Dildo* (this is,

of course, several trillion copies short of the best-selling album of all time, Mr Bungle's *Disco Volante*). He wasn't even good-looking—average at best, with Nordic nose, pedestrian physique and intense eyes—but, regardless, he was regarded as Mozart, Beethoven, Patton, Da Vinci, Waters, Bowie, Morrison, Lynch, Gilliam, Cronenberg, Lennon, and Cave rolled into one, then timed by several thousand. His looks were irrelevant—he might as well have been a thirty-ton blob of snot. It was his *music*. His music was the defining voice of not just his generation, but all of them, past, present and future. Quite simply, he was everything that every musician in history has tried to achieve and failed.

And he *hated* it. He tried, album after album, to get these bastards off his back, and produce anything, *anything*, he thought they'd hate. All he wanted in life, desperately, was to disappear into the overcrowded realm of obscurity, to float off into a boring job and be forgotten forever. To become *nobody*, to feel the beauty of total anonymity. He thought he'd managed it after his forty-seventh and latest album, *Flatulence in G Major*, but it backfired . . . and backfired bad. All the reviews were orgasmic with praise, calling the seventy-two hours of recorded farts “the ultimate, most perfect metaphor on the beauties and complexities of existence” (from starvibe.com.xpfa). Not only that, he was currently living with the ironic reality of needing a diet of baked beans, prunes and curry so that he could perform the tracks live on the *Flatulence Tour*. *Shit*, he thought, *I've been farting like a bastard for eight months*.

Tonight will be different, he thought. *Tonight, I'll fuck 'em all. I know exactly what I'll do . . .*

He looked vaguely across the stage, across its menagerie of genetically-grown instruments and stage props. Since one of his distant ancestors was some kind of artist who designed twisted kind of biomechanical, well, *things*, Vladimir's stage was basically a living piece of his ancestor's art. Bones, tightly strung flesh and skin, and breathing machines moulded the stage into a pulsating, living creature, itself inhabited by a myriad of living things, some of which happened to be the instruments. His stage show was a major part of Vladimir's success, and he was sure that his ancestor, whoever it was, would be proud of what he'd done with his art. This thought made him happy now and then.

Although the stage was ninety percent alive, he didn't use the creatures as much as he used to, back when his music was

more guitar-oriented. Having all the instruments as living things often produced spectacularly unpredictable results—seven times on the *Aren't You Sick of this Crap Yet* tour, the show ended with the drum kit unfolding into its six-metre tall insectoid form, and eating whichever guitar didn't run fast enough. Now that Vladimir's music was more minimalist and experimental, most of the live props just wandered around the stage doing anything they wanted for most of the set, which, of course, sometimes included copulating. Seeing guitars rooting is kind of normal, in a dog root dog kind of way, but seeing a huge insect drum kit trying to screw a lumbering beetle-like church organ was always a strange sight. It happened six times last tour, to tinnitus-promoting cheers. On one particularly memorable night, the human drummer mistook the kick pedal for the drum kit's testicles—it instantly unfolded itself with a piercing shriek, and tore the drummer's head off with such force that it flew over a kilometer into the audience (the rest of his limbs and organs decorated the stage soon after). The crowd was euphoric.

The rest of that night was acoustic.

Tonight he wanted to give them something similarly memorable, but for all the wrong reasons. He wanted to show these mindless sheep, once and for all, what he thought of them, in a single, unambiguous display of contempt.

"*Five minutes, Mr Giger,*" someone in his aural periphery said. In his clouded mind, he couldn't even tell which gender it was; just some androgynous noise vaguely forming syllables and throwing them towards him, where they hit his mind and instantly disappeared, like a pebble thrown in rapids.

But somewhere in his subconscious, maybe just because tonight was his 800,000th show, he knew he was up soon. He was vaguely aware of the house lights dimming, of the cheers shaking the bolts out of the stage, and of the thunderous opening riff of one of the segue tracks they'd used as an opener for the last seven shows. The crunching bass. The atonal piano. The living violins, the gulping triple-headed emus, the locust swarms—they all combined to form a soundscape like no other, an aural river as deep as it was fast. It ran over you, through you, invaded your every cell and massaged meaning into them.

But he was soooooo over it. He gazed at the stage, spotted the mic sitting about a foot off the stage, ready for him to squat in front of it and begin farting out some tracks from his latest alleged 'masterpiece'.

He looked across the vast ocean of people, sixty-storey high screens and speakers spattered amongst them, and he had his usual momentary gasp at the sheer alien beauty of it all—millions of artificial stars, stretched far beyond the blue-tinged horizon, inversely blanketed by a truly three-dimensional sea of real stars, all spinning off in static parallax as far as your imagination could stretch them. It was the kind of sight that the word “awe” was invented for. It was simple as that. Its beauty never failed to hit him, even just for a second. Like tonight.

As the last distorted chord rang through the crowd and dissipated, the crowd erupted with the ecstasy of a million orgasms at once . . . it came as a surprise that the cheers were actually for him, because somehow he’d gone on autopilot without realising, and he was half way to the mic before he woke up and remembered where he was. That happens about once every hundred shows, he quietly thought to himself as a useless footnote.

Snap, snap, get it together. Wake up, it’s gunna be a real short show, strrrrrraight to the encore . . .

Thirty-nine pairs of genetically mutated eyes followed him across the stage. Vladimir made it to the mic, stood in front of it. His tailored black suit and tastefully flamboyant tie blazed across an estimated 37, 600 billion screens. In front of the moshpit, forty-eight of the security guards fainted at the sight of him, and every female within the first two kilometers instantly came.

He stood there momentarily, took it all in. He didn’t know why; he’d seen it all before. But tonight, he wanted to give them something new. Something special. There was just one thing he could think of . . .

He turned his back on the audience, as he’d done a hundred and thirty-seven times this tour. But he did something different this time.

He pulled his pants down.

Squatted.

And offered unto the crowd what scatologists would label a full-bodied, triple-shaded, minimally aerated, partially undigested sample of faecal matter.

. . . If that’s just too many syllables for you to sort through, the short version is that he hung a shit. But not just any shit. It was the kind of shit that sits there, stares back at you and starts talking. A truly impressive shit, a shit with considerably more personality-based nuances than some people. The kind of shit you write home to Mum about. The kind of shit you feel three

kilos lighter after laying. The kind of shit that you look back at and wonder how something so huge could come out of you.

The sound was like a soft cone ice-cream dispenser handing out a fresh cowpat. The wet guggy sound floated through millions of satellites into billions of homes, followed by moist splatting sounds as the contents of his bowels greeted its new home.

After squeezing out this positively gargantuan turd, he pulled up his pants, turned to the now silent audience, spat at them, threw them the most aggressive middle finger he could muster, and calmly walked off stage.

A sigh of triumph from him.

Silence from them.

More silence.

Even more silence.

He'd made it backstage and was throwing back a quadruple scotch when the applause started.

The word "deafening" doesn't even come close. It was the sound of seventeen million people who had all seen the most perfectly incredible thing they had ever seen, and they needed to tell this to not just the entire universe, but also beyond, if anyone was listening. All those backstage with him—his managers, accountants, make-up artists, runners—were all now crying in pools of uncontrollable, undyingly grateful euphoria . . . and those who weren't in such a state were staring wide-eyed into an untouchable distance, knowing that they had just witnessed something so utterly Godlike that their senses simply couldn't take it. Some simply fainted with an enormous grin on their faces.

Vladimir looked incredulously at the Review Monitor, which was now a blur with reviews of the gig—reviews from all corners of the surrounding seventy-three systems. Vladimir never liked the fact that you read the reviews of a show within minutes of finishing it (in fact, you could read it before you finished) but this time, he hated it a billionfold. Every review was creamy with praise . . . absurd adjectives zoomed past his consciousness . . . revolutionary . . . stunning . . . grandiose . . . unparalleled . . . incomparable . . .

He stared into the monitor . . . but he wasn't taking anything in anymore. It was just too much. This was the absurd leading the absurd.

He went through his five senses . . . he saw nothing but a blur of flickering light . . . he heard the pulsating sounds of millions

upon millions of people coming en masse, trapped in throes of sensory disbelief . . . he tasted a sour cocktail of perplexity and scotch . . . he smelled the beginnings of the usual vast cloud of sweat, semen and vaginal juices that enters the atmosphere during all of his concerts, raising the host planet's temperature for months.

And he felt like crap.

Shit, I don't believe it, he thought. I just don't believe it.

I've fuckin' done it again. I've fuckin' gone and done it again.