

LINT

THE INCREDIBLE CAREER OF
CULT AUTHOR JEFF LINT

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steve Aylett is the author of *Slaughtermatic*, *Atom*, *Toxicology*, *The Crime Studio*, *Shamanspace*, *Only an Alligator*, *The Velocity Gospel*, *Dummyland*, *Karloff's Circus*, *Bigot Hall*, the *Tao Te Jinx*, *The Inflatable Volunteer* and *Fain the Sorcerer*.

‘When the abyss gazes into you, bill it.’
Jeff Lint



THE BURST SOFA OF PULP

Pulp science fiction author Jeff Lint has loomed large as an influence on my own work since I found a scarred copy of *I Blame Ferns* in a Charing Cross basement, an apparently baffled chef staring from the cover. After that I hunted down all the Lint stuff I could find and became a connoisseur of the subtly varying blank stares of booksellers throughout the world.

Born in Chicago in 1928, Jeff (or Jack) Lint submitted his first story to the pulps during a childhood spent in Santa Fe. His first published effort appeared in a wartime edition of *Amazing Stories* because he submitted it under the name 'Isaac Asimov'. 'And Your Point Is?' tells the story of an unpopularly calm tramp who is pelted every day with rocks, from which he slowly builds a fine house. The story already reflected the notion of 'effortless incitement' that Lint would practice as an adult. 'Jack was fantastic,' says friend Tony Fleece. 'Went around

blessing people—knew it was the most annoying thing he could do. A dozen times, strangers just beat the hell out of him.’ Lint perfected the technique when he stumbled upon the notion of telling people he would pray for them.

Lint’s first novel was published by Dean Rodence’s Never Never company in New York. The relationship between Rodence and Lint was one of complete mistrust, rage and bloody violence. When submitting work in person, Lint insisted on appearing dressed as some kind of majorette. ‘He was a large man and clearly wasn’t happy at having to do this,’ explains Fleece. ‘He blamed Rodence, was resentful. I still don’t know where he got the idea he had to dress that way when handing his stuff in.’

The first novel with Never Never was *One Less Person Lying*, in which Billy Stem must tell the truth or be transformed into the average man. Rodence persuaded Lint to change the title word ‘Person’ to ‘Bastard’. On a night of pre-press jitters, Rodence then partially re-wrote the final sections of the book so that Stem puts on a space suit and goes berserk, killing an innocent stranger with a rock. The book was published as simply *One Less Bastard*. In the several years of their association Lint never forgave Rodence for the incident, and often alluded to it by repeated use of the word ‘bastard’ when speaking to him.

Around the time of his second published novel *Jelly Result*, Lint met his first wife Madeline, who was attracted to him by a knife scar that led from below his left eye to his mouth. This was in fact a sleep crease and Lint managed to maintain the mistake by napping through most of the marriage. But after five months a bout of insomnia put paid to the relationship and left Lint with nothing to occupy his time but his writing—luckily for the world of literature, as he produced some of his best work at this time, including *Nose Furnace* and *I Eat Fog*, which both appeared on Rodence’s new Furtive Labors imprint, and *Slogan Love* with Ace. *Turn Me Into a Parrot* took issue with the fundamentalist

notion that the world was only a few thousand years old and that dinosaur bones had been planted by god to test man's faith. Lint asserted that the world was only fifty years old and that the mischievous god had buried sewers, unexploded bombs and billions of people. In my own book *Shamanspace* I make it clear that humanity arrived eons ago but, like a man standing in front of an open fridge, has forgotten why.

By the sixties Lint's reputation was established firmly enough for several feuds to develop with other equally unknown authors, the main one being Cameo Herzog, creator of the *Empty Trumpet* books, who once conspired with Rodence to kill Lint with a truck. (The story is unclear, but it seems that after an unsuccessful try at Lint, they killed or injured the wrong man and had to make reparation to the mob.) The levels to which this feud imploded were difficult for outsiders to understand. Lint and Herzog were once seen glaring silently at each other for seven hours in a freezing lot, each holding a differently coloured swatch of velvet.

In 1966 Lint published a series of essays under the ominous collective title *Prepare to Learn*. This included 'Running Bent Double—The Poor Man's Protest', 'Debate This, You Mother' and 'My Beauty Will Blind You', in which he stated: 'Some animals have a life span of only a few days. I suspect they eat food only through habit. Why has nature never bred a creature which eats nothing for its few days of life? Such hordes would have a distinct advantage over other species.' He then suggests that humanity was meant to be such a species but wrecked everything by stuffing its face the moment it entered the world.

Several of Lint's early books were also being re-published by Doubleday and New English Library, and the startled Lint rushed to exploit his raised profile, pulling on a skirt and bursting into the offices of Random House with a proposal he dreamed up on the spot. *Banish m'Colleagues* would tell the story of a bull

elephant on its way to the elephant's graveyard, only to find it full of ambulances. The ivory-white confusion of the landscape is a classic Lint image, as is that of Lint being ejected from Random House by twelve security guards. In 1973 Lint instead batted out the trash novel *Sadly Disappointed* about a child who is not possessed by the devil. Published under his Asimov pen name, it is a minor work redeemed only by the parents' laughable attempts at activism. These seem mainly to involve the placing of ignorable gonks on people's driveways—the baffled press is then alerted when the toy is backed over by a car. Lint was at a low, beaten down by a stint in Hollywood that saw his screenplays repeatedly diluted by studio hacks. He felt justly proud of his scripts for *Kiss Me, Mister Patton* (eventually filmed as *Patton*) and *Despair and the Human Condition* (eventually filmed as *Funny Girl*).

The mid-seventies also saw Lint's incredible foray into the world of action comics with his creation of *The Caterer*. This unfathomable title lasted nine issues, during which the hero was never seen to cook or prepare food in any way. The Caterer's wordless shooting spree in Disneyland in the final issue was as ill-judged as it was relentless, and its blithe use of certain copyrighted characters sank the publishers in legal defense costs.

Lint was by now a Hemingwayesque figure and had developed the ability to speak out of a different part of his beard each time. 'Keep 'em guessing,' he rumbled. A few observers began to shakily attribute to him some occult transactionary power and a Mrs Paterson-like ability to project mental images into visual form, if only briefly.

After a second marriage, the Felix Arkwitch trilogy, and short stints in London, Paris and Mexico, Lint returned to the New Mexico of his childhood and produced the first book of his Easy Prophecy series, *Die Miami*, which many say was a decoy for more interesting work as yet unearthed. He lived there until his

death in 1994, since when Lint scholars have hunted for the gold-dust of lost stories, endlessly analysing the last novel *Clowns and Locusts*, his thankfully incomplete attempt at autobiography, *The Man Who Gave Birth to His Arse*, and his whispered final words, which seem to have been ‘There’s no marrying a cat.’

Jeff Lint is buried in a Taos graveyard, his headstone bearing the epitaph: ‘Don’t think of it as a problem, but as a challenge which has defeated you.’

This book follows Lint from cradle to grave like an undying mother. I examine his major works in depth, plus many of those that are more obscure, discuss his little-known scrapes with the worlds of movies and comics, and describe my own meeting with the man in 1992. It is a story of disregard, failure, strangely vacant staring and vindication. And it ends in florid dissension as only a truly creative endeavor can.



WEIRD TALES

Opening joke · Santa Fe · hit by a planet · Astounding · Mars attacks · 'Wall Swordfish Still Alive' · light on the surface · crappy story

'From the instant he was born,' said his mother, 'that moron was unprofitable.'

Lint supposedly rocketed from the womb just as the attending doctor turned aside to share a joke with a nurse. 'It was something about penguins,' Carol Lint later remarked. 'I wasn't too upset when Jeffrey flew out and broke the silly man's jaw. And much too exhausted to laugh, of course.' Jeff Lint himself claimed to recall the incident, though he remembered the doctor as a huge white bear and the joke as 'an absolute load of garbage'. It was July 6, 1928.

Lint's father, Howard, was a middle-of-the-range stockbroker whose motto 'All men are created legal' seems to have been designed to be equally useless to all. Lint's only memory of him was a brandy-coloured lampshade, a cigar case like a chrome

sandwich and a man whose face had grown to no coherent plan. Jeff and his mother were about to move from Chicago to join Howard in New York when peer pressure and the Wall Street Crash propelled Howard through a twelfth floor window. Howard Lint became a major player in one of the all-time great suicide dives when another man leapt from the eighth floor directly below him, and beneath the pair a third man rocketed from the fifth. The three dealers stacked up screaming in mid-air and when this despair sandwich hit the sidewalk on Puce Friday, Lint's childhood was set. He and his mother moved in with her parents in Santa Fe, New Mexico. She kept the Lint name.

Grandpa Ashe was an admirer of George Washington who made a yearly pilgrimage to the Mount Vernon site of the great man's whiskey still. The Ashes were described as 'good traitor stock.' Lint recalls his grandpa saying 'If we didn't have marked men, people would rise or fall by mere ability.' Grandma Ashe carved dolls from pegs and allowed them to crowd the Devant Street house. She said that 'carved dolls stick to the rules'. There was also a dog with no spark of life in him at all.

Childhood was meant to be gold dust that collects on the window sill; summer electrons caught in a jar. 'But how did I feel when I was a child?' Lint later wrote. 'Like I'd been hit by a planet.' Lint would dig for hours trying to find a new colour, but Carol could always name the colours he found. Jeff became frustrated that there were no gaps between the labels—apparently everything had been filled in before he arrived. 'All the fates are spoken for,' he thought. 'What new thing shall I do with *my* time?'

Sent to the College of St Seere, Lint kept seeing gaps in answers. He decided early that exasperation professors weren't worth the trouble. They were a bunch of feeble frauds who couldn't keep their abstracts from flapping in the wind. 'I was never class clown in school,' said Lint in 1971. 'But I did have one of those

“downward mouths”.’ He escaped through a window, ran across a yard and collided with a standpipe. ‘I also burned my leg on an iron bar. I was very spry back then.’

In his autobiography Lint scoffed at what is formally registered as the simplicity and innocence of childhood. He believed that the relentless horror of youth, when looked back upon from the fiercer and terminal hell of adulthood, merely seems carefree and simple. ‘In fact, my dignity went under the lawnmower and that was the last I saw of that.’

Lint’s mother decided she should educate him at home and Lint began to read voraciously. He was fascinated by Pierre Menard’s *Looting of Heaven* and its notion of a ‘sea-deep book of stirring life’. Most men pursue a profession because they stumbled upon it so clumsily it ran away. In Lint’s case he was scared shitless in 1937 by an issue of *Weird Tales* which had come with them from Chicago as packing material. The story was about furniture coming to life—tables waken everywhere, their spider nature swelling, and humanity finds itself surrounded. A year later all is utterly silent, screamfaces immobile in the grain of cupboard wood. The cover of that issue showed an oriental magician beckoning some sort of horned kangaroo from a sewage outlet. Jeff also obtained old copies of *Astounding*, *Amazing* and the Vimana-crazy *Air Wonder Stories*, and after he had shared the magazines with his friend Tony Fleece, the craze spread like an infection. The science fiction pulps concerned themselves with sour-faced gillmen, fossilized Martian railroads and the gee-whiz injuries of alien attack. Jeff enjoyed scaring the timid Amy Beleth with renditions of the stories, which he would elaborate with vague allusions to ‘the chickens of hell’ and ‘snot bandits’. The tomboyish Gabby Janus would not be fazed, however, and told him about a few ‘guttty goblins’ that lived at the bottom of a well. Lint started acting goofy around her and then gave her a poem he had written:

*I will give you everything
Without regret
Pants and underpants*

Janus has since called him a ‘tar-eyed romantic’.

Amid the frenzy of pulp consumption among the town kids, Lint dreamed one night in 1938 that Martians had landed, red-eyed and in no mood to talk. Then Carol shook him awake and told him that the radio report he had heard through half-sleep was real and that Earth was under attack. Lint did not respond as he should. ‘He was eagerness incarnate, really,’ Tony Fleece laughed years later. ‘We all were. I for one had been boning up on mutants for months and couldn’t wait to see an alien, with all that implied in the way of antennae and so forth.’ But the next day it was revealed as a Halloween prank by Orson Welles. Lint would admire chubby magicians for the rest of his life.

Lint sat down, picked sap from his nose and started a story for *Weird Tales*. ‘For ages I was fooling around with words that were clearly bewildered at what I was trying to do with them—there was no cooperation at all.’ Lint wrote ‘Wall Swordfish Still Alive’ and other creepy concepts like ‘The Ghosts of a Zillion Slaughtered Cows’, but *Weird* didn’t bite. In 1940 he sent them ‘The Glory Key’. In this story, gods try to seem mighty though sardined together, packed away by history. They boast at each other like the corpses in Dostoevsky’s ‘Bobok’. ‘Avoid notice and be free’ seems to be the message—one that scandalized this small corner of a nation in which it was already becoming a suspicious act to mind one’s own business. ‘When I showed people the story, several competed with one another in acting shocked, or disapproving, self-effacing, or something like that,’ Lint explained later, still unsure of motivation. ‘Being stunned seemed to be the only game in town.’ Throughout his life Lint experienced

phases that he himself barely noticed but that seemed designed to cause anger and regret in those around him. He experimented with addressing people as ‘my liege’ and growling ‘aye’ instead of ‘yes’. During 1970 he addressed everyone as ‘Petal’. In 1983 he began quick-drawing the peace sign like a six-shooter, an act so startling that people would flinch and forget what they were saying. Caul Pin has described Lint’s blank expression upon seeing people’s reactions to his behaviour, and opines that far from being a studied indifference, it was the look of a man so unworldly that he didn’t recognise disgrace when it was heaped upon him from a truck. In fact accusatory disapproval was one of the methods listed in ‘The Glory Key’ of avoiding notice—by hiding in plain sight. This was not a method Lint ever practiced. His face was exactly the sort favoured by the onrushing fist.

Around the time of these rejections Lint read a story called ‘The Plank’ in *Amazing Stories*—this was about John Derasha, who judged people by how wide they could stare. Those who submitted themselves for his approval were automatically dismissed as insecure wastes of space. The others must be startled into a spontaneous display of eye-stretching. After an entire story following this idiot around as he jumps out at people and gauges their reactions, he gets pounded to the floor by a thug who doesn’t like him, and as Derasha lays bleeding in a dark alley we are told he has failed to detect the widest eyes of all—his own during the brutal attack. It was undoubtedly the crappiest story Lint had ever read.

‘I knew I could do better than that,’ he said in his autobiography. ‘For Christ’s sake, an eel could.’ But Lint’s hypothetical eel would be sorely tested in the coming years.