

# THE THRONE ROOM (BACK TO THE CAN) EXTENDED REMIX

(from THE MANUSCRIPT)

by Michael Stephen Fuchs

"Throne room my ass," said the shotgun-hurling policeman.

Now, he sat in the bathroom itself – just about the most horrifying forty square feet of porcelain and bathroom fixtures one could envision. Most of the surfaces were brown with dried blood or blood spatter; a few thick pools, on the floor, in the shower stall, maintained a reddish hue. Much of the porcelain that was still white was actually black and grey with bullet holes. Insulation, stained concrete, and indeterminate building materials poked through everywhere. The section of tiling under the window had given way completely, and lay on the floor in ragged chunks, soaking up blood.

Some sorry asshole had earlier tried to draw chalk lines around the bodies. Substitution of a grease pencil had made it possible to mark the one in the shower stall – though the poor, bullet-riddled, and glass shard-lacerated fellow, doubled over in the tiny space, hadn't produced anything remotely reminiscent of a human figure, in silhouette. The corpse in the main area of the bathroom had been lying on too much debris for its resting place to be marked. They took pictures instead.

This man, sitting on the toilet, did not look horrified when he said, "Throne room my ass." He didn't even look tired. He didn't look anything. From his expression, he might have been sitting in a swivel chair at a conference-room table, waiting to begin an important meeting that would probably go long. He didn't even wear a poker face,

because he had nothing to conceal behind it. With the toe of his black leather shoe, he nudged a hunk of bloody drywall away from him, so that he could stretch out his leg.

Almost a hundred cops swarmed in and around the building now. A hundred living cops, and until a few minutes earlier, seven dead ones, too. Interestingly, no one had been wounded in the botched raid. The survivors had not even started trying to account for this fact. But that was because it was a secondary question – and not even a very interesting one, compared to the issue of how the guy had gotten out of the building.

The guy was so completely gone. He couldn't conceivably be any less there.

They had hoped that the wreckage, and carnage, that remained in the dingy apartment would yield some clues as to where the guy might have gone. But many of the officers on the scene – in particular the ones from the original stakeout – were having difficulty breaking free of the fog of shock that surrounded them, and everything, on that early morning, in that place.

It wasn't so much that they didn't know what had happened. In a nutshell, their suspect turned out to be the kind of extreme motherfucker who went to the can armed – heavily armed – and he had killed half the team that went in to get him, driven off the other half, and escaped.

They knew what had happened. They just didn't believe it. It was a little like watching a martial arts master wade through a dozen surrounding attackers. Yeah, you can see how he did it – but beforehand you would have bet the ranch that it wouldn't happen that way.

It was all so unthinkable that it shook everyone's faith that the NYPD more or less had control of things. Certainly, it played hell with their familiar assumption that they

could always bring overwhelming force to bear, given time to get it assembled. It was just really jarring, this going in strong with almost twenty heavily armed and armored professionals – and getting their asses kicked into next month by a guy with his drawers around his ankles. It left them looking over their shoulders; jumping at loud noises.

If the guys who had been there all morning, some since 3AM, were still fighting groggily through various stages of shock, the new officers on the scene exhibited livelier emotions. Most of them had responded to a call for "all available units – shots fired, officers down." They had arrived to find seven fallen comrades, no one to rescue – and the action long over. Moreover, they had found no one to shoot. All of this resulted in a serious surfeit of adrenaline, galloping heart rates, and a lot of seething bad attitude that would only get worse until the opportunity was had to make somebody pay.

The blank-faced man now sitting on The Throne was an fortyish-looking detective in an unremarkable suit, with graying auburn hair and deep lines in his sagging face. He had bushy eyebrows and his last shave had started to get a ways off. He was dealing with his numbness by relating an idea – one which, while understandably inspired by the setting, really did not pertain to issues at hand.

"Yeah, this in one fucked up Throne Room," agreed his companion – a younger cop, unjacketed, mustachioed, and slightly more on edge. He leaned on the inside of the splintered door jam, chewing on an unlit cigarette. He peered over his shoulder into the main room, where a lot of fingerprinting, picture snapping, and drawer emptying was going on. The gathering of evidence had begun in the bathroom, and was finished there for now. These two had occupied the bathroom possibly to get out of the way, possibly out of some gruesome fascination.

"No, that's not what I meant. Not this particular bathroom." The older man stared at the roll of toilet paper now. It was miraculously untouched. You could wipe with it, right now.

"I just meant bathrooms in general. It's the most disgusting room in any home. It's like a repository of all the foul bodily things you do in your whole life. Just consider for a moment what goes on in the bathroom: Wash off dirt and sweat. Then you deodorize. Okay, that's not so bad. Scrape food scum off your teeth. Gargle; to kill the germs that cause bad breath. And gingivitis."

The younger cop started to squirm a bit, which was an odd thing to start doing at this juncture, in a small room full of gore. The older man continued methodically, rattling them off:

"Clip your nails, dig the dirt out from underneath. Trim your nose hair. Blow phlegm and mucous out of your sinuses. Raze off your facial hair, once a day. Defecate, once a day. Urinate, maybe six times a day. Masturbate, most of adolescence. Pop zits in the mirror; maybe some boils on your ass. Expel gas. Swab wax out of your ears."

His one-man audience stood transfixed, lips slightly parted and eyes squinting into the middle distance – looking, no doubt, around his bathroom at home.

"I *swear*, it's a *goddamn* Shop of Bodily Horrors in there."

There two shared the silence, staring off in orthogonal directions.

"I never thought of it like that."

They snapped from their reverie when a patrolman, leading a young black man with his arm in a sling, stuck his head into the bathroom. "This guy wants to talk to you, Boss."