

THE DEVIL AND GINGER BAKER

Inside a gated compound in South Africa, one of rock's most legendary drummers is still making enemies

By Jay Bulger



THE EXILE Baker in his living room in South Africa

‘FUCKIN’ HELL!’ GINGER BAKER SHOUTS AT THE South African sunrise. His ritual morning curse complete, the 69-year-old drummer for Cream takes a deep pull on his morphine inhaler and throws his body back into the leather recliner where he spends the majority of his days. As the drug takes effect, his tanned, weather-beaten face contracts and his vivid blue eyes go wide.

His girlfriend, Kudzai, a beautiful 27-year-old from Zimbabwe he met on the Internet, hovers over him counting out his daily handful of antidepressants, stomach pills and painkillers. †“What are you looking at, Yankee!” Baker barks at me, his voice cutting through the silence like an animal shriek. Now that the morphine is running strong, he pops up

out of his chair with the nervous energy of a teenager, but still he walks like a creaky old man. Over the course of his life, during which he’s raced bicycles and played polo, Baker has broken most of his ribs, mangled one of his arms and had his front teeth smashed in. He was recently diagnosed with a degenerative spine condition and the onset of emphysema. “God is punishing me for my past wickedness by keeping me alive and in as much pain as he can,” Baker says bitterly. Then the man who helped invent the rock drum solo stomps over to the door of his ranch house, trailed by his pack of six dogs, and coughs out what sounds like part of a lung onto his front lawn.

Throughout his five-decade career, Baker has been one of rock’s most influential and innovative drummers, combining the raw power of Keith Moon with the subtler rhythms of jazz and African percussion. He has played with everyone from Eric Clapton and Johnny Rotten to Max Roach and Fela Kuti, but he’s just as famous for being one of music’s original junkie madmen, alienating family, friends and band members at every stop. Since 1999, Baker has been living in a self-imposed exile in South Africa, having been forced out of homes in England, Nigeria, Italy and America.

In 2005, when Cream briefly reunited, the New York performances imploded with Baker and bassist Jack Bruce fighting onstage. “It’s a knife-edge thing for me and Ginger,” Bruce said afterward. “Nowadays, we’re happily co-existing in different continents... although I was thinking of asking him to move. He’s still a bit too close.”

Here in the heart of South Africa’s wine country, it would be hard for Baker to be further removed from the rock world he spent his adult life terrorizing. Tulbagh is a racially divided farming town of wealthy white landowners and poor black laborers 80 miles northeast of Cape Town. Baker came here to play polo and live in seclusion: The entrance to his 80-acre spread is marked by a gigantic sign that reads BEWARE MR. BAKER. Yet even in this remote

This is writer JAY BULGER’s first story for RS. He lives in Brooklyn.



THE BRICKLAYER’S SON Baker (here at age 10) grew up in working-class London.

corner of Africa, decades after superstardom and his induction into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, Baker can’t escape controversy. After years of battling both the IRS and British tax collectors, he is at the center of a host of new lawsuits in South Africa, and rumors about him have spread throughout the nearby villages. “Ginger Baker is the biggest local drug dealer,” goes one. “He always has three black women by his side,” runs another. And then there’s the one tale that holds at least a hint of the truth: “He only lives here because he has been chased out of everywhere else.”

Now, after following his morning morphine with a cup of tea, Baker sees something that sets him off on a fresh rant. Kudzai has moved his drum set – the same kit he used onstage at the Cream reunion – and the dark-green tom-toms, giant cymbals and double bass drum that defined his distinctive sound are propped haphazardly in a corner of the guest room.

“DO YOU KNOW HOW LONG IT’S GOING TO TAKE ME TO PUT THAT BACK TOGETHER?” Baker erupts. Kudzai, who had never heard of Baker before they met a year ago, offers to help, but he angrily waves her away. “GET OUT!” he shouts, painfully bending over the kit.

For the next hour, Baker meticulously reassembles the tools of his trade, careful-

ly matching the angle of each cymbal, only to take them off in disgust and hurl them against the wall. “I used to have two roadies do this for me,” he mutters. Five cigarettes later, Baker is breathing heavily and covered in sweat. The drums are back in their rightful position.

“I bet you expect me to play for you now!” Baker shouts, suddenly looking at me. “Persistent cunt!” Since the Cream reunion, Baker has performed in public only a few times, when he has picked up his sticks to play for the crowd after a polo match. The sport has been his all-consuming passion for years: Baker owns 39 polo ponies and regularly sponsors charity matches for orphan kids stricken with HIV.

Grabbing a set of sticks, Baker slams his body into the seat behind the drum kit. As he flails away, it’s as if he’s back at the Fillmore, pounding straight-8th grooves into the double bass drum, creating a rhythmic hypnosis from a dizzying array of rimshots, smashing cymbals and 16-note fills. A master of polyrhythms – multiple time signatures played simultaneously – Baker seems less like a broken-down former drug addict and more a force of nature.

“His playing was revolutionary – extroverted, primal and inventive,” says Rush drummer Neil Peart. “He set the bar for what rock drumming could be. I certainly emulated Ginger’s approaches to rhythm – his hard, flat, percussive sound was very innovative. Everyone who came after built on that foundation. Every rock drummer since has been influenced in some way by Ginger – even if they don’t know it.”

The solo finished, Baker gently places his sticks on the drums and threatens to cut my head off with a sword before storming back to his leather chair in the living room to spend the rest of the evening in silence.

“Ginger’s just a grumpy old man!” Kudzai says. “He yells, but inside he’s a good man.” If so, he hides his endearing qualities well. As he passes his days in South Africa, racked with pain and pumped full of drugs, Baker seems intent on devoting his remaining energy to railing against the world. After the other pioneering drummers of his era, Bonham and Moon and Mitchell, have all passed away, Baker is alive and breathing, albeit in a three-pack-a-day way. He has survived, it seems, through a kind of sheer fowlmouthed perversity, a manic brutality that pervades both his drumming and his life. “If a plane went down and there was one survivor, it would be Ginger,” says his first wife, Elizabeth Ann Baker. “The devil takes care of his own.”

PETER EDWARD BAKER WAS BORN on August 19th, 1939, in a working-class neighborhood of London. The son of a bricklayer, Baker was four years old when his father was killed in World War II. As a kid, Baker had a single dream: to compete in the Tour de France. He rode his bike for mile after



PSYCHEDELIC BLUES
Cream in 1967 (Bruce, Baker and Clapton, from left)

“PEOPLE SAY CREAM GAVE BIRTH TO HEAVY METAL,” SAYS BAKER. “IF THAT’S SO, WE SHOULD HAVE HAD AN ABORTION.”

mile, pushing himself to prepare for the grueling marathon. “I was a good fucking cyclist because of my build – tall and thin,” Baker recalls. But on a rainy day in 1956, as he raced across town, a taxi threw the 16-year-old, crushing his bicycle.

Not long after, at a party, Baker’s friends dared him to sit at the drums. He was a natural. “The high-hat, the bass drum, the cymbals – I don’t know how, but I could do it all,” he says. At that moment, Baker forgot all about a new bicycle – he wanted drums. He also discovered that he could outlast every other musician in the room. “Long-distance cycling conditioned me for playing the drums,” Baker says today.

By age 17, he was earning 16 pounds a week performing in a traditional New Orleans jazz band. He spent hours poring over the science of the beat, learning how to write music and constructing his personalized drum kit. “Time moves differently with Ginger,” says jazz guitarist Bill Frisell, who recorded with Baker in the Nineties. “You could find 100 drummers to play the same tune, and Ginger would find something different to do with it.”

The still-teenage Baker became a fixture in the Soho jazz scene – then the center of European beatnik culture. He learned about African rhythms from his hero, the English jazz drummer Phil Seamen. “Ginger was the first drummer to understand the importance of world rhythms and turn them into something commercial,” says Chip Stern, who produced one of Baker’s later jazz albums. Seamen also introduced Baker to injecting heroin. “Ginger was a loner,” says Cream songwriter Pete Brown. “It helped him escape. It also went with the perception of the tortured artist. He was following in the footsteps of Charlie Parker.”

But by 1962, jazz was giving way in popularity to rhythm & blues in England. Instead of joining a modern-jazz quintet, Baker replaced a young Charlie Watts in blues pioneer Alexis Korner’s Blues Incorporated drum kit. “Time moved alongside with Ginger,” says jazz guitarist Graham Bond, saxophonist Dick Heckstall-Smith and bassist Jack Bruce. One day, a singer named Mick Jagger stopped by to perform with the group. “This effeminate little kid showed up, and

I hated him,” Baker recalls. “He was a musical moron! Alexis asked me to give Jagger a chance to sing during the interval. But the interval was when I would go and have my fix!” Baker and Bruce picked out the newcomer, throwing in complicated jazz licks to confuse the young Jagger.

Growing tired of playing for little money, Baker says, he “decided to go commercial and play music that appealed to the public.” So he, Bruce and Bond formed the Graham Bond Organization, an R&B group that quickly became one of London’s most influential bands. “What the Beatles were to the public, the Graham Bond Organization was to musicians,” says Brown. Bruce and Baker also became infamous for their onstage feuding: One night, after Baker hit Bruce in the back of the head with a drumstick, a violent fight broke out in the middle of a set. Later, when Bond became too addicted to heroin to lead the band, Baker took over the group and fired Bruce.

By that time, Baker was deep in the grips of his own heroin addiction. One night, his first wife needed to find a jazz club in Brighton where the band was per-

Photograph by JIM MARSHALL



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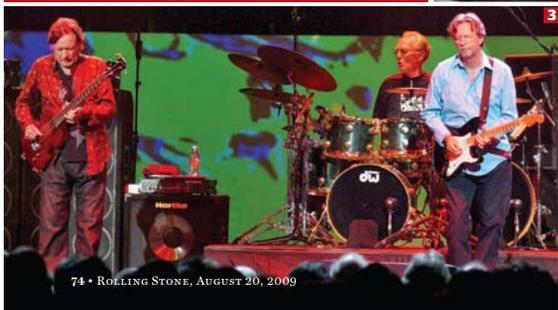


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Beware Mr. Baker
Baker's life has been marked by adventure, excess and long-standing feuds. (1) Exercising his horses last year. (2) Baker in 1970, after Cream and Blind Faith imploded in part because of his drug habit. (3) During the 2005 Cream reunion, Baker and Bruce renewed their rivalry. (4) In 1971, Baker drove across Africa to study the drum. (5) In Nigeria, Baker befriended Afrobeat star Fela Kuti and was known as the White Drummer.



3



2

forming. "So I followed the intervals of Ginger's vomit all the way to the club," she recalls. "And I found him."

In 1966, after sitting in with Eric Clapton, Baker proposed that he and the guitarist start a band together. Clapton, who already had a cult following, immediately agreed. But to Baker's dismay, he suggested that Jack Bruce be the third member of the band. Clapton had seen Baker and Bruce play together, and he considered them "a well-oiled machine."

Baker and Bruce put their problems aside to form Cream, and the combination of Clapton's blues riffs and Baker's monstrous beats made them the first supergroup of rock. Cream created a new rock format: a power trio that emphasized in-

Baker recalls it differently. "My habit had nothing whatsoever to do with the end of Blind Faith!" he insists. "I was straight for most of that period. I only got fucked up at the end of the U.S. tour!" He pauses. "I was an evil person back then," he acknowledges. "I think Eric just wanted to get away from me."

IN THE END, IT WAS ANOTHER musician's death that pushed Baker to change his life. "The night Jimi Hendrix died, we were out looking for him," Baker recalls. It was September 1970, and Baker was sitting on the toilet at a London airport hotel, injecting heroin as Sly Stone, in town on tour, watched. Baker also had two bottles of cocaine in his pos-

He has this 'fuck it, I'm going to do it, nobody can stop me' attitude."

Arriving in Lagos, Nigeria, Baker set up west Africa's first 16-track recording studio and formed a lifelong friendship with Afrobeat star Fela Kuti. Performing with the musical icon for crowds of 150,000, Baker became famous throughout Nigeria as the "Oyinbo" (White) Drummer. "If Ginger wants to play jazz, he plays jazz," says the Nigerian drummer Tony Allen. "If he wants to play rock, he starts Cream. If he wants to play Afrobeat, he moves to Nigeria. Whatever he plays, he brings his own pulse and sound. He understands the African beat more than any other Westerner."

Unlike his revolutionary friend Fela, Baker was invited to join the Lagos Polo

"REMEMBER I'VE GOT THIS," BAKER SAYS, PULLING OUT A STUN GUN. "IT'S FOR PEOPLE WHO TRY TO ASSASSINATE ME."

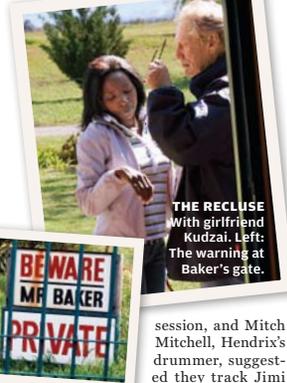
struments over vocals. Over the next two years, Cream sold 15 million albums, with hits like "White Room," "Strange Brew" and "Sunshine of Your Love" opening the door for a generation of heavy-metal and prog-rock excess.

"My brother and I used to listen to those Cream records, trying to emulate them," says Alex Van Halen. "Those musical extravaganzas set the stage for Led Zeppelin and Van Halen." It's not a legacy that Baker is proud of. "People try to say that Cream gave birth to heavy metal," he says. "If that's the case, we should have had an abortion."

But what began as Baker's creation soon turned into something beyond his reach. Cream made Clapton into a rock icon, and Bruce and Brown received the majority of writing credits — and royalty fees — for Cream's music. "Cream was doomed three months after it started," Baker says bitterly. "It was my band, and Jack tried to fire me! I didn't get any of the writing credits. It will piss me off for the rest of my life."

In 1968, Cream performed two farewell concerts at the Royal Albert Hall. The following year, Clapton joined forces with Steve Winwood and Baker and formed the supergroup Blind Faith. "Ginger kind of messed his way in," recalls Bad Company's Simon Kirke, who toured with the band. "But fair play to Ginger — he's a powerhouse on drums. Still, if a person is disliked, the writing appears on the walls."

Blind Faith lasted less than a year before Clapton — spurred in part by Baker's addiction — quit. "I took one look at his eyes and was sure he was back on it," Clapton wrote in his autobiography. "I felt that I was stepping back into the nightmare that had been part of Cream."



THE RECLUSE
With girlfriend Kudzai. Left: The warning at Baker's gate.

Hendrix and Baker had grown close and planned to record together. Mitchell and Baker spent the night searching in vain for Hendrix all over town; then, tired and out of heroin, Baker injected the coke and suffered one of his near-fatal overdoses. While Baker survived the night, Hendrix died choking on his own vomit.

Shattered by the death of his friend and desperate to get clean, Baker left the music scene. "I had to get the fuck out of London," he says. "I had the money and the time, so I went to Africa." In 1971, he set out to drive from London to Nigeria in a Range Rover to immerse himself in African drumming. "I told him there was an ocean and a desert in the way," says Tony Palmer, who filmed the trek for his documentary *Ginger Baker in Africa*. "And Ginger said, 'Great!' He drove through the desert like he played the drums: He just put his foot down and hoped for the best.

Club, where members of Nigeria's military dictatorship held court. The members took bets to see how long the white man could stay on the back of a wild pony. Baker never let go, and he began what would become a deep passion for the sport. "I said, 'Where's the brakes!'" Baker recalls of his first ride. "But that was it. Ten days later, I was playing polo." Off the field, however, Baker continued to get into trouble. Before long he was at war with his business partners, who used their connections in the police force to threaten him at gunpoint. Pushed out of Nigeria, Baker sold his studio for a fraction of what it cost and fled to London.

Flat broke, Baker started delivering drugs to support his habit. Now, instead of playing with Clapton, Baker sold cocaine at the studio where Clapton was recording. "It was not a very pleasant situation," Baker says. "Keith Moon died around then. His manager came up to me and said, 'You've got to help Moony. You're the only person he'll listen to.' But I had my own problems." Estranged from his first wife and behind on his taxes, Baker fled England in 1982 with a 22-year-old girlfriend and settled in central Italy to try his hand at olive farming.

In Tuscany, Baker suffered through terrible crops and another failed marriage until avant-garde music producer Bill Laswell recruited him to play with Johnny Rotten. "He lived on top of this mountain and drove us up there drunk as hell in this old jeep," Laswell remembers. "The farm was a disaster. There was no electricity, and he had this tiny bed he would sleep in with his dogs. It's a miracle that he was still alive." Laswell succeeded in getting Baker into the studio again, eventually recording a pair of experimental albums, *Horses & Trees* and *Middle Passage* that merged jazz and world music. But local farmers in Tuscany falsely accused [Cont. on 92]

PREVIOUS PAGE: CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: JAY BILGER; MIRRORBOX/EVERETT COLLECTION; DOUG PETERS/ALLACTION/RETNA; LINDA NEE/ALAMY; GINGER BAKER; LEOHNS/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES; THIS PAGE: JAY BILGER, 2

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GINGER BAKER

[Cont. from 75] Baker of peddling drugs, and he got into a dispute with the local mafia. Shortly after someone killed one of his dogs, he decided to move to Los Angeles in 1988 and become an actor.

"Living in L.A. was quite hard for a former heroin addict," Baker says. "It's the smack capital of the world!" But he remained clean and met Karen Loucks, a college student who became his third wife. Then, in 1993, after settling a lawsuit with his record company over royalties, he moved to a ranch in Parker, Colorado, where he could raise his polo ponies.

Baker, now playing at an elite level, was drawn to the sport in part because of the status it seemed to confer on those who played it. "He's always wanted to be part of the aristocracy," says Loucks. Polo replaced heroin as Baker's costly new habit. "As soon as the royalty checks started coming in, the money was gone," Loucks says. "He's like a little kid with his money, since he never had it growing up."

Baker played polo like he did the drums: all out. "We were really wondering if he was going to be OK," says trumpet player Ron Miles, who performed with Baker. "He was really killing it on the field, and then he would just jump off the horse and play a drum solo." But Baker was soon in financial trouble again. In the late 1990s, as the IRS hounded him for income taxes, Baker was divorced by Loucks and in trouble with Immigration. Baker sold his Colorado spread, loaded up his horses and moved to KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, where he bought a farm.

Once again, it didn't take him long to make enemies. Baker paid his staff more than other South African employers, and he allowed locals to squat on his farm – a policy that attracted criminals and transients. When a white militia offered him protection, Baker rebuffed them. "They said I needed them to protect me from 'the black devils' who were going to kill me," he says. "I told them, 'Fuck off!'"

He also ran afoul of the local all-white polo club by fielding a team of black polo players from Nigeria – who promptly beat the whites. Baker found himself unwelcome in town. "They forced me out!" he says. "They wouldn't sell me supplies." Before he could sell his new farm, a riot took place among the squatters, who refused to vacate the premises, and Baker was forced to settle for a fraction of its value. He took his horses and moved to his current home in Tulbagh.

"One of the best things about not being married to him is that I don't have to be involved in the drama," Loucks says. "He's not evil. He has great intentions. They just go wrong."

WHAT? BAKER shouts at me as he places dog bowls around the kitchen. It's his reply to every question: "What?"

"How are you?" I ask again.

Baker blames his hearing loss on years of listening to Jack Bruce's amplification, but it was further compromised by an incident last year. When Baker cut off a local Afrikaner farmer on the road, the man followed him to a gas station and punched Baker so hard that he blacked out and damaged an eardrum. When Baker came to, the man was trying to break his middle finger. "Who the fuck are you!" Baker screamed. The man left Baker his business card and drove off.

This morning, after the morphine kicks in, Baker heads to the two stables that house his 39 polo ponies. The doctors have warned him to stop riding, but without the horses, Baker says, he has no reason to live. "It's therapeutic," he insists. On the verge of entering his eighth decade of life, Baker can still play at a professional level.

The stable workers scurry into position as Baker visits every one of the horses, patting each on the head and calling them by name. He pauses when he gets to Gold Finder, a horse whose tendons were cut in the middle of the night last year by what Baker calls "as-

sassins" – unnamed local enemies bent on retribution. Baker massages the horse's damaged leg and apologizes for the pain. The beast should be put down, but Baker has decided to keep Gold Finder, no matter the cost.

Ready for his morning ride, Baker mounts an aging horse, takes the reins of two more horses and begins to canter around the estate, trailed by a dozen polo players. Steam rises from his head as the morning rain hits his poncho. He surges into a gallop, mud flying off the crashing hooves as 10 men herd 30 horses between them.

After exercising the horses, Baker soaks in a tub and lets Kudzai bathe him. Then he retreats to his living room and lies back in his leather recliner for his daily dose of the History Channel. Dressed in Prada loafers, Prada jeans and a pink Dolce & Gabbana button-down shirt, he jabs the remote. His loafers hang off the recliner's footrest, kicking the air in rhythmic spasms, as if he is still smashing the double bass drums before a crowd of 150,000 screaming Nigerians.

A soccer match between Chelsea and Arsenal is about to begin. "You feel like talking?" I ask.

"You see that! Yankee! The television!"

"The soccer game?"

"Fucking Americans! It's football! 'World Series' of baseball! You're the only ones who play the stupid game! No talking during football, Yankee!"

For the next hour, Baker threatens the lives of the players while inhaling cigarettes. Then, suddenly, the estate's front buzzer goes off. Baker looks up at a monitor that's hooked up to four cameras around the property. A police car sits at the gate. "Kudzai!" he screams. She comes running and opens the entrance gate.

"Fuck!" Baker roars, storming off to confront the officer – who, it turns out, has come to investigate the death of Baker's dog. Two weeks ago, Turbo 1 was found dead in the front yard, poisoned with a chemical used by local farmers to kill jackals and baboons.

The police officer tells him that they have discovered nothing new – but Baker is sure the attack is related to his ongoing lawsuit against Lindiwe Noko, a teller at his local bank whom he hired to serve as his accountant. According to Baker, Noko stole about \$50,000 from him. (Noko claims that she was romantically involved with Baker and that he gave her permission to remove the funds.) When the case went to trial, Baker offered to drop his trousers and show his penis to the court. "I've got a scar down there that only a woman who has been with me could describe," he says. The judge declined the offer.

"Unfortunately, he is generous to the people he should trust the least," says his son Kofi Baker, a drummer who lives in L.A. (In addition to Kofi, Baker has two

daughters, all from his first marriage.) "They see his soft side, and they milk him for it. He never learns from mistakes."

SOUTH AFRICANS ARE THE MOST inconsiderate drivers in the world!" Baker says, maneuvering his Range Rover down a steep mountain pass at 110 miles per hour. Overtaking a tractor-trailer, he swerves to the left, passing over the double line of the no-passing zone. He cranks up the volume on a Cream reunion CD and passes a Volkswagen that's in his way. Visibility is minimal, but Baker turns around in his seat to taunt the defeated VW. "Wanker!" he yells at the driver, a cigarette dangling from his mouth.

As we enter town, several locals wave from outside the Tulbagh Animal Hospital, where Baker donated \$25,000 to build a horse clinic. At a nearby restaurant, Baker sits down for lunch with his polo team. Rain pelts the grass behind us, filling the awkward silence as the players wait for an opportune moment to discuss the dismal state of his polo field. The ground is flooding, and it will most likely

"The world is coming to an end for you Yankees," Baker says about the financial crisis. "I'll be here watching."

not be ready for the season opener.

Baker has just received word that Jack Bruce wants to do another Cream reunion, a gig that would provide them with several million dollars. But despite a vast list of expenditures – new horses, 20-plus employees, a Range Rover, a Land Rover, six dogs, a young girlfriend, not to mention flying in Chilean polo players for the season opener – Baker isn't interested. "There is no way!" he says. "The reunion was 1968 all over again. Jack was playing so fucking loud. And he's shouting at me, saying that I'm playing too loud. On-stage – in front of everybody! And Eric got pissed at both of us. I think Eric now knows who the culprit was."

Lunch over, Baker throws his checkbook on the table and pays for the group with a sigh. Without a goodbye, he marches to the car. As we get into the Range Rover, Baker pulls out a stun gun. "If you think about getting super-stroppy with me," he says menacingly, "remember I've got this." The stun gun emits a loud crackle. "It's a people zapper!" he says. "It's for people who try to assassinate me. One day it might happen. I've already had enough threats to last me a fucking lifetime."

At home, Baker settles in his recliner after another dose of morphine and pills. With his Oakley sunglasses resting on the end of his nose and Kudzai on his lap, he watches a Beyoncé video on MTV. (He can bear pop music, he says, because of his hatred for current rock & roll.) Holding Kudzai by her waist, Baker begins to tickle her. "Gin-ja!" she squirms. "Stop tickling!" For the first time in days, he looks content.

"Tea!" he commands, sending Kudzai running. Switching to the National Geographic Channel, he watches a show on the big-bang theory. "You know, one day they're going to take all the best humans, go to Mars, leave us behind, and that's going to be it!" he says. "But death is the final great adventure! When I die, put me in a lead coffin and throw me out to sea!"

Baker lights a cigarette and turns his attention to CNN and the financial crisis in the United States. "The world is coming to an end for you Yankees," he says gloatingly. "And I'll be sitting here watching."

Later that night, I awake to the sound of dogs barking. "Who's there?" Baker screams. He stomps outside to investigate, the dogs running into the darkness ahead of him, Kudzai timidly following. Baker heads to the stables, ready for whatever awaits. Out of breath, his eyes wide in alarm, he looks down at the wet grass. The backyard is flooding.

"The water main exploded," he says. No enemies or assassins have come for him tonight. I tell him I'll fix the pipe.

Back in his living room, Baker tries to watch television and drink his tea, but he seems preoccupied. He keeps glancing over at the security cameras, which show nothing but the trees blowing in the high wind. He chain-smokes, his hands shaking as he pats the dogs that surround him. His sunglasses have been replaced by spectacles, and he can no longer hide his paranoia.

"Ginger, we fixed the pipe," I tell him.

He surveys my wet clothes. "Thank you very much. Good job." Then Baker catches himself. He points at the television. "Yankee – you see that?" The replay of the Chelsea soccer game has come on.

"No talking during football?" I answer.

Baker nods his head and grins, struggling to keep a straight face. Then, for the first time, we laugh together. **PS**

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