

Also by Michael Gerber

Barry Trotter and the Shameless Parody
Barry Trotter and the Unnecessary Sequel

Not also by Michael Gerber, but listed here in the hopes that someone will not be paying attention and that royalties will be mistakenly sent to him, by which time it will be *too late!* Hahahaha! Whee-ee!!!

The Bible
The Guinness Book of World Records
Quotations from Chairman Mao Tsetung
Valley of the Dolls

BARRY TROTTER
and the Dead Horse

GOLLANCZ
LONDON
HOGSBLEEDE

As Valumart's writ-shaking ninjas closed in, Barry raised his wand and yelled, "*This book is a work of parody! Any similarities, without satirical intent, to copyrighted characters/material, or individuals living or dead, is purely coincidental! This book has not been endorsed by J.K. Rowling, Bloomsbury Books, Warner Bros., or any of the other entities holding copyright or license to the Harry Potter books or films! No connection is implied or should be inferred!*" And so the ancient lawsuit-dispelling incantation was cast...

The moral right of Michael Gerber to be identified as the author of this book has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act of 1988, but most scholars believe it to be the work of superintelligent yeast.

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To [hole in page eaten away by mouse, with mouse head sticking through it]

A Note From the Author

Many people ask me (God knows, I ask myself), “Why do you keep writing these?” The short answer is: I need money desperately. In fact, I am nearly destitute—I’m writing this on a Big Mac wrapper in a bus station in a town so poor it can’t afford a name. That’s home. Being a writer isn’t all it’s cracked up to be, and it’s not cracked up to be much.

First, let me respond to the rumors. Regardless of what you might’ve read, I did not spend millions trying to woo Madonna. Madonna and I are both happily married (not to each other). Nor did I pour a fortune into building the world’s tallest Lego structure. That seems almost too absurd to refute, but you’d be surprised at how many people ask about it. I did buy a vintage Jaguar to celebrate the completion of *Barry Trotter and the Unnecessary Sequel*, but it is only five inches long and sits on my desk.

My needs are few—give me a roof over my head, the simplest food to eat, and a work of children’s literature to parody, and I am satisfied. After the success of the first two *Barry Trotter* books, I should’ve been able to amble off into the sunset, living off my royalties and creating my dream, a chain of drive-thru wedding chapels. But like so many in show business before me, I trusted the wrong people. “People”—yeah, right. If only.

Several years ago, while doing interviews for the first book, I met a group of mice. Their leader was a very charming brownish-gray individual named Timothy. Timothy claimed to be immortal, but all I knew was that he was funny, and full of fascinating stories about the rich and famous. He and I had many long—and I thought, quite meaningful—conversations; soon we were inseparable.

There were a lot of good times... *Wild* times. I remember one summer Timothy and I bummed around Europe in a VW microbus. (I had gotten it customized so that he could drive.) When Timothy offered to become my agent/accountant/manager, I readily agreed. I am not one to let the fact that someone is two inches tall automatically disqualify them for a management position. I am short myself.

I only found this out later, but within a week everything had been signed over to him; all the proceeds from the first two *Barry Trotter* books had been redirected to the rodent’s numbered Swiss bank account. Whenever I’d ask about checks that never arrived, Timothy would put me off with some excuse. Stupidly, I believed him.

Timothy started getting harder and harder to reach on the telephone. Like a fool, I assumed that he was busy drumming up new projects for me. In reality, he was throwing incredibly lavish parties, getting hooked on designer peanut butter, and running up massive debts with the most expensive cheeseshops in London.

Not only that, but Timothy had begun to appear around the world *posing as me*. It was *he* who was courting Madonna; *he* who had the Lego fetish; and *he* who was involved with “The Muscine Liberation Front”! I have never, and would never, contribute a dime to a group as misguided and hateful as the MLF. I’ve never been to one of their rallies—if you look at the picture, it’s obvious that’s not me. I am not covered with fur, even if I am 1/8th Sicilian.

I realized what was happening much too late. My only solace has been discovering that many of the famous people who Timothy talked about—people like Benjamin Disraeli, Sonja Henje, Maria Callas, and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan—were also scammed by this miniscule miscreant. At least I’m in good company.

My editor has graciously allowed me to write this book, in the hopes that the proceeds will allow me to fight this mouse in the courts. But it's not going to be easy: Every night, around 3 a.m., the phone rings; when I pick it up, I hear a squeaky voice telling me all the terrible things that will happen to me if I publish this book. I'm sure it's a hit mouse, some of Timothy's hired muscle. "Hey buddy" (he always calls me 'buddy,' which I hate) "if you publish Barry 3, we're gonna chew up all the pages...Then, we're going to tell all our people in bookstores to knock 'em onto the floor—they'll get scuffed up and have to be returned. Your publisher will lose millions!"

Sure I'm scared—who wouldn't be? But Orion assures me that they will spare no expense when it comes to security, and I'm determined to do what's right. Please consider buying this book, if only to keep me from writing others. With your help (actually, money) I can win the fight to clear my name.

Thanks for reading this, and I hope you enjoy the book.

*M. G.
Town-With-No-Name, 2004*

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Questions for Reading Groups

Chapter One — The Focus Group

Trivet Row shimmered in the summer heat. For weeks, the sun had been stuck on reverse, its strangely heavy rays sucking energy rather than giving it. Activity under this celestial interrogator's lamp was half-speed, half-hearted, and almost incomprehensibly sweaty. Even the street's insects, always plentiful, had given up biting and stinging as too much effort. Each crispy blade of grass wanted to stretch itself out against the earth and nap, at least until England got a little farther away from the sun.

On this Tuesday afternoon, all was quiet, save for the drip, drip, drip of perspiration oozing off frightened homeowners. School was letting out; whole families peered worriedly out of un-airconditioned homes, their doors and windows locked tight. Will my child make it past the zombies today? Or will they make her eat dirt—again?

Outside, two figures moved. Blank-faced and stiff, Vermin and Pecunia Dimsley staggered to and fro, doing the bidding of their obnoxious young ward, the 15-year-old wizard Barry Trotter. Insensible to the heat, the pair reeled up and down Trivet Row, letting the air out of the tires on all the cars, gnawing open plastic bags filled with grass clippings and dumping them out, scooping up kids and putting them face-first into rubbish bins.

At the end of the street, a local eight-year-old named Howard appeared. Howard, an imaginative child, meandered along lost in thought, not noticing the zombies converging on him.

Using an action-figure, Howard pushed up his glasses, which were forever sliding down his nose. "You fools," he said aloud, "no one can stop my magnetometer!" This was a major plot-point in the story he was making up as he walked.

"That's what you think," Howard said in a slightly different voice, indicating the other action-figure was speaking. "I am going to hit you!" He brought the two action figures together with a little crashy sound-effect.

Fifty feet away, Howard's mother opened the window a crack. Attracting the zombies' attention might bring fifty pounds of grass clippings through the mail slot, but that was a risk she had to take.

“Howard!” she yelled, pointing a frantic finger through the tiny crack. “The Dimsleys! Run, Howard, run!”

Howard looked up, saw the neighbors-turned-zombies, and made a dash for his door. He didn’t make it.

“Arrghh,” Pecunia said, as she stuffed the struggling Howard into a bin for the third time this week.

“Arrghh,” Vermin concurred supportively.

Howard’s mother had finally reached her limit. Broom in hand, she charged down her front steps, and made a beeline for the Dimsleys.

“Bleedin’ undead!” she said, swinging wildly. “Get out of here!”

As the Dimsleys retreated, pawing at the air and gnarring, Howard’s mother helped him out of the litter bin. “You two should be ashamed of yourselves!” she yelled. “And that freaky Trotter boy, too!”

Emboldened by this show of defiance (and already pretty cranky from the heat), Trivet Row struck back. Windows and doors flew open, and objects of all sorts began to rain down on the retreating zombies, hurled by sweat-stained residents pushed too far.

“Take that, you bastards,” one homeowner yelled from his step. “I know you ate my dog!”

Inside, Barry Trotter watched the tumult with deep, deep satisfaction. He finally understood what witch doctors were on about—having zombies was great! Sending away for that kit was the best idea he’d had in years.

And yet...The strangest feeling came over him. Was he actually looking forward to going back to school? He *had* become a bit of a deity at Hogwash, now that J.G. Rollins’ heavily fictionalized *Barry Trotter and the Philosopher’s Scone* was flying out of bookstores. Really, when it came to books, people would buy anything.¹ But actually making him anxious for school to begin? Nah, couldn’t be. Barry closed the drapes and the room was dark again.

Sprawled across his unmade bed, staring blankly at the football on the television, boredom enveloped Barry like last month’s newspaper. Making newscasters belch was only fun the first five hundred times...And reversing football goals only mattered if one

¹ But I don’t need to tell *you* that.

had a bet on the game. Maybe if he did it enough times in a row, he could get France and Honduras to go to war, Barry thought with a smirk.

The puzzling feeling came back again. No, it wasn't enthusiasm for school exactly; Hogwash simply couldn't arouse that much of a reaction, positively or negatively. Giddiness, dread, fascination and an urge to flee...If he weren't in Trivet Row, he'd swear there were marketors about.

Hearing a noise, Barry walked into the bathroom. Standing on the toilet, he peered out the window. What he saw stirred nausea tangled with utter delight: Fifteen feet below, in the backyard, a cadre of suited marketors were surrounding Dirty Dimsley. Dirty, being a Muddle (and a powerfully dim one, at that) couldn't know that marketors were the scourge of the wizarding world and that no one—perhaps not even Barry—could escape a “focus group,” a collection of marketors training their awesome evil on one hapless test subject.

“Mum! Dad! There's some weirdoes in the...garden...” Dirty yelled, already falling under the marketors' stupefying, extremely expensive cologne.

“Argggh,” Vermin emoted dumbly from the front porch, where they had been driven. He and his wife were engrossed in a family bucket of week-old fried chicken.

“Don't run, young man...We'd like you to answer some questions,” a marketor said, smoothness belying his menace. “In exchange, we'll give you this ten-pound note.”

“All...right.” Dirty, quite groggy now, snatched at the bill clumsily.

“Not so fast.” The marketor cleared his throat and said loudly, “By taking the proffered payment, you are agreeing to participate in our study, and agree to hold this firm and our clients harmless in the event of your injury and/or death.” The boilerplate over, he handed the bill to Dirty, who tried to stuff it into his pocket, but missed.

As the bill fluttered to the ground, the marketors gathered like jackals. There was no hope for Dirty now—the “focus group” had begun. “Which sports star do you like most?” a marketor demanded.

“Only ones with criminal records, now!” another added.

“Cheese-flavored milk,” said a third, clipboard at the ready. “Yes or no?”

“Would you buy a toothpaste that made your spit look like blood?” the second chimed in.

“Inflatable pants?” a jostling fourth asked. “Collapsible thigh zones, automatic basket extension, emergency buttock-cushioning action— sound good?”

The first grabbed Dirty by his collar and barked, “Would you eat feathers? How about with a non-dairy topping?”

Dirty struggled to form words. “Are they... crunchy?” He was pale and his eyes were glassy.

“They can be! Surrounded by nougat, perhaps!” the marketor said ravenously. “And covered in delicious, hypoallergenic caramel!” The marketor let go of Dirty, and the boy dropped to the ground in a heap.

Another marketor picked him up. Dirty wobbled unsteadily as the marketor asked, “How do you feel when I say this: ‘deep-fried cigarette’?”

“I think—I think—I think I’m gonna be sick!” The ring of marketors stepped back, and Dirty vomited beneficially into the flower bed. He then collapsed. Dirty was motionless but not dead; they had sucked him dry in record time. Above, unnoticed, Barry watched in fascinated schadenfraude.

“Not much there, you know?” one said to the other.

“These kids today...” the other replied. “It’s like they don’t even *care*.”

“Splash water on him and we’ll start again,” a third said.

“Not *water*,” another answered. “There’s a drought on.” He mimed peeing on the supine knucklehead.

“Nah, forget it, he’s tapped out,” the fourth marketor said, picking up the bill that Dirty had dropped. “Let’s go to lunch.”

The marketors snapped their briefcases shut. Barry could hear them plainly; they talked loudly, like people used to being accommodated.

“You know, I had an idea for a joint-venture,” one said, turning his cel phone back on.

“I’m listening,” the marketor next to him replied. The marketors all knelt by Dirty, administering their grisly *coup de grace*. Barry couldn’t wait to see it.

“If your company introduces a deep-fried cigarette, my company will introduce toilet paper impregnated with nicotine.”

“We hook ‘em, and you help ‘em quit?” the second marketor said, getting up. “I like it. Send me a memo.”

The first marketor pushed a button on his phone. “Done.”

The second marketor pushed a button on his phone. “I’ve just agreed.”

Another button. “Now I’ve floated an initial public offering,” the first said.

And another. “And I’ve taken a few million of that money and bribed the right government officials,” the second marketor said. “It’s already been approved. Should be on the shelves by Monday, Tuesday at the latest.”

“Super!” the first marketor exclaimed, then hit another button on his phone. “Stock’s for sale...Price is going up...Bingo, we’re billionaires!”

“Brilliant!” the second marketor said. “Hey, lads! Drinks are on me!”

As the cheering marketors shuffled out the back gate, Barry could see what they had wrought: Dirty was covered in the latest trends. Garish and absurd, they had moronic catchphrases and slogans plastered all over them. Dirty would no doubt be delighted. Some might say that he was his own punishment, but Barry didn’t agree. He considered punishing the Dimsleys to be his job.²

Out in the hall, Earwig gave a hacking cough. Barry looked at the clock—he was running late, as usual. He wore a wrist-glass, but it was useless; the sand shifted whenever you moved your hand. Barry had just missed the “Hogwash Depress,” his ramshackle ride to the next term at Hogwash School for Wizardry and Witchcrap.

Luckily Barry didn’t need to pack much; most essentials he could cajole from other students (by persuasion or force, it didn’t matter to him). Most would give willingly, now that Barry was famous—he positively basked in his newfound pirate-y

² Barry had every right to despise the Dimsleys, who (among countless other things) had trained wolf spiders to nest in his hair. However, this was not simple meanness on their part, but the result of secret cooperation between the Ministry of Magicosity and the Muddle spy agency MI-6. The infant Barry Trotter was selected out of a national pool of magical orphans to participate in Project TANTRUM. The Project’s goal was to create a magical person so annoying that he or she would attract all the free-floating animosity felt by Muddles towards wizards. The Dimsleys’ role—which they performed with great relish—was to torment Barry constantly until magical Puberty. By doing this, it was hoped that Barry would develop a massive persecution complex and, once magical, be completely irresponsible. As we know, this portion of the plan worked to perfection. Whether or not Project TANTRUM succeeded in its largest goal—preventing conflict between the Muddles and magical people—is yet to be seen. But a case could be made that the Dimsleys, far from being Muddle villains, are three of the wizarding world’s greatest heroes. This case would probably be wrong, but it could be made.

popularity.³ Barry had gone from garden-variety arsehole to internationally renowned bad-boy in under a month. God bless that writer, and that book!

Twelve months ago, Barry had been approached by a Muddle journalist, J.G. Rollins. Ms. Rollins told him that she was looking to write a book drawing attention to the nihilistic existence of today's magical teens.

“I want to rip the lid off,” she had said, all earnestness and pens.

“Okay,” Barry said, not sure whether he was the ripper or the lid.

“Great!” she said, and whipped out a notebook. “In an average week, how often do you see your parents?” she asked. “Occasionally, seldom, or never?”

“Never,” Barry answered honestly, not telling her they were dead.

“Excellent! I mean, how sad,” she said. “So they're not there for you at all, are they?”

“No.” Barry squeezed out a fake tear.

“There, there—it's okay. We'll find you a nice home, I promise.”

Barry stiffened; J.G. noticed. “Or not. You're a big lad—you can probably survive on your own.” She scribbled some more; Barry deciphered the words “resists domestication; semi-feral.” She looked up again. “Starved for guidance and direction, bored by school, and abandoned by the older generation, are your days filled with illicit drug use and casual sex?”

If only, Barry thought. Apart from whatever expired potion ingredients they could swipe from Snipe's cupboard, drugs were unknown at school. Hogwash's caretaker, Angus Filth, confiscated everything and re-sold it in Hogsbleede at a handsome profit. The centaurs did a smashing business selling oregano, much to the delight of students unfamiliar with the placebo effect. And as far as sex was concerned, male braggadocio aside, Barry was currently hung up somewhere between second and third base. But the writer was so hopeful—and there seemed to be money in it.

“I couldn't have said it better myself,” Barry lied.

³ Colin Creepy, writing in *The Hogwash Haunt*, the school's student newspaper, had called Barry “mean, moody, and magnificent.”

Barry met with Rollins regularly throughout his fourth year, and three months ago, in May, *Barry Trotter and the Philosopher's Scone* had rolled off the presses. It sold well, especially among adults; no one has ever lost money by telling the older generation that its darkest suspicions about teenagers are right. Within weeks, Barry's name became synonymous with delinquency; naturally, he felt obligated to live up to it. With the Measly twins' encouragement, Barry went wild. He created a spell to magically wrap cling film around every toilet in the school. Pieces of hard candy appeared inside every showerhead. And Barry spent a large portion of each day in various closets, "getting to know" his fellow students.

"Our fear for the future," *The Daily Profit's* editorial page bellowed (magical papers did that), "now has a name: Barry Trotter." The *Stun's* cover simply had Barry's picture on it, with a single word: "Git."

With notices like this—along with the boy's triumphantly incoherent appearances on television and radio—the book sold even better. Barry soon strode the dank halls of Hogwash like a god. Albeit one with occasional Acne of Fire and still-patchy facial hair.

Scone was almost fact-free, but in J.G.'s defense, Barry had started off fudging and only gathered speed. He thought J.G. suspected something after a particularly graphic story about subduing and bugging "the biggest dragon ever" in front of the entire cheering, chanting, rioting school. But she didn't question Barry, not once. Not even after she'd spent enough time with him to know just how deep the mendacity ran in Barry.

Factual or not, it had worked out well for both of them: J.G. was constructing a wee bit o' the Caribbean in Scotland, and Barry was looking forward to exercising his first full term's worth of fame. Honesty may be the best policy, but when it came to *Barry Trotter and the Philosopher's Scone*, dishonesty had done swimmingly.

Thinking of this cheered Barry up as he locked the house. The Dimsleys were still outside, but they would eventually find their way into Mrs. Kegg's cellar (she kept it unlocked, because she could never find the key). There, the zombies could guard her massive stores of cheap plonk from the Muddle teens that roved about the neighborhood in search of drink. Mrs. Kegg had been one of those teens, a long time ago. Now perpetually drunk, Mrs. Kegg probably wouldn't even notice Vermin and Pecunia

shuffling about, gnarring and eating bugs. All summer, she had thought they were coattrees.⁴

Barry stepped into the fireplace, and took out a tiny paper umbrella. He'd gotten it at a tiki bar down in Hogsbleede, during an illegal end-of-term dance. This soiree, which had ended with the time-honored tradition of Hogwash's gamekeeper Hafwid trudging down from school and fishing several students out of jail, had been organized by Ermine Cringer to impress her new beau, Victor Crumb. Normally, Ermine was a goody two-shoes—or three, or as many as possible—but Barry had noticed that her judgment seemed to worsen markedly whenever certain boys were involved.

Victor Crumb was a grunting, odiferous, semi-literate Quiddit stud from a rival school. At first, Barry disliked him simply because of that; then, Barry moved on to other, sounder reasons. During matches, Crumb's favorite trick was to sneak up in mid-air, and doodle all over you in felt-tip pen. His on-the-spot illustrations were often extremely sexual, scatological and funny, as long as they happened to somebody else.

Ermine agreed. "He's a teenage Bruegel," she said.

"Teenage barmpot, more like," Barry said, angrily scrubbing the back of his neck with a towel.

Victor's scribbles awakened something in Ermine, something new and exciting and not entirely appropriate for younger readers of this book. Ever since she had seen the obscene little drawing Victor had done on the back of Barry's neck, Ermine had been convinced that Crumb was a genius. Furthermore, she just knew that she was *the* woman to warm up the sullen and uncommunicative sociopath.

Good luck with that, Barry thought, looking at the umbrella. This little wood-and-paper geegaw was magically endowed with the power of "homing." Once unfurled, it would whoosh whoever was holding it back to The Tiki Shack, the dark and sticky Hawaiian-themed dive where the party had taken place. The bar handed them out as promotional items to patrons (who often didn't know about the "homing" power until it was too late). It was damned effective—how else to explain the commercial persistence of such a sore on the landscape? The décor was dingy, the service snotty, and the

⁴ Mrs. Kegg, a dipsomaniac, was so constantly and emphatically squiffy that she believed herself to be magical. Which was true, but only if "magical" is another word for "brain-damaged."

entertainment—a weatherbeaten she-male impersonator named “Dawn Ho”—frankly painful to look at.

So the Shack was shabby, even by Hogsbleede’s snake-belly standards. But after four years, Barry was sick of the decrepit Hogwash Express, all mildew, chipping paint, and sentient sick-making sandwiches. A good stiff mai tai would be just what he needed to get through the soporific Picking ceremonies. He could almost taste it.

Barry unfurled the umbrella, raised his arm, and intoned the magic word: “*Comoniwanaleiya!*”

Nothing happened.

“Must be a dud,” Barry said. Not surprising for a place where the worms in the tequila were worm-flavored plastic replicas.

As he opened and closed the party favor a few times, Barry heard someone pounding on the front door. He leaned down and took several steps into the bedroom—then the umbrella activated. Barry was dragged effortlessly through layers of plaster, lathe, and shingles, bruising freely as he flew.

“Aieeee!” Barry shrieked as he rocketed into the air, narrowly missing a duck. Screaming more deeply now, sphincter slammed shut, the boy wizard held on to the umbrella with every available fingertip.

Amazing how powerful this little umbrella is, Barry thought, watching loose change fall from his pockets and plummet to earth at lethal speeds. Oh well, I suppose I should relax and enjoy the...

At that moment, the umbrella shot a massive spark, and Barry’s ascent ended. With a cough and a wheeze, it promptly crapped out. Now the *real* screaming began.

Sometimes, they say, it is better to be lucky than competent; by sheer chance Barry landed in a shrub in the Dimsley’s back garden. Dirty, briefly stirred by the crash, raised his addled head for a moment. Then he passed out again.

Barry sat in the hedge, resting. All his major organs—the ones he knew about, anyway—seemed intact. Any broken bones? No, but what he saw next made him suspect concussion: Hafwid, kitted out in a French maid’s uniform.

“Hay B’rry,” Hogwash’s gamekeeper rumbled alcoholically. “I’ve come t’take yeh to scuhl. B’mmlmore sint a car for yeh.”

“Are you real?” Barry asked.

“P’raps,” Hafwid said, then turned thoughtful. “Butt thin agin, p’raps not. After ul, whut is real’ty? Kin anny one uv us relly—”

“Oh, shut up. I knew you shouldn’t have taken those extension classes,” Barry said with exasperation. “A little knowledge is a dangerous thing, especially when you have nowhere to put it. Help me out of this, would you?”

“Sher,” Hafwid said, He yanked Barry to his feet, splintered branches flying everywhere.

On the ground again, Barry had never appreciated it so much. People didn’t think about how useful it was, until they were thirty stories up, about to become guacamole.

“What’s with the getup?”

“Thuh whut?”

“The clothes, the uniform!” Barry said, tugging at a sleeve.

“Hay! Watch thuh threds—it’s renned! B’mmlmore wanned me tuh dress to blen intuh thuh Mud’le worl’,” Hafwid said. “But ull thuh stor had in my size wuz this, or a sexy nurse’s otfit.”

“Well, in that case, I think you made the right choice,” Barry said. As they left the backyard, Barry heard Dirty rousing himself, softly slur-singing a jingle. He couldn’t just leave him here, could he? Maybe it would start to rain...or hail! Really forcefully! With the drought on, hail was unlikely—Barry couldn’t just assume that things would go badly for Dirty; he had to *make sure*.

“Hold on,” he said.

“Barrie, B’mmlmore wants tuh see yeh first thing—”

“It’ll just take a second,” Barry said. The enthusiastically vindictive young wizard walked back, pulling out his wand.

Dirty was sitting crosslegged in the scraggly grass, mumbling happily to himself.

“*Adestefidelis*,” Barry intoned, and a bolt of red-and-green energy shot from his wand, hitting Dirty squarely in his thick neanderthal forehead.

“Jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle all the way,” Dirty sang lustily, rocking back and forth. “Oh, what fun it is to ride in a one-horse, open sleigh!”

“Won’t be fun for long, sucker,” Barry said. “That was for all the chocolate swirlies you gave me when I was little.” Death came swiftly from the spell, usually from the singer’s own hand, as he did whatever it took to stop “Jingle Bells” from playing in his head. The thought of Dirty in psychic torment made Barry very happy. Spirits light, he skipped back to where Hafwid was standing.

“Yeh look like sum sorta d’ment’d elve,” Hafwid said, regarding him with suspicion. “Now kin we goh?”

“Yes, *si, oui, jawo-o-ohl!*” Barry sang. He suddenly grabbed Hafwid’s hands, and began swinging around the giant in triumph. Barry swung round and round Hafwid, round and round, round and round—until he lost his grip and flew...

...Barry’s head hit the carpeted floor painfully, waking him up. “Ow! Mother—”

“Here, let me help you,” a rangy, balding man in an somewhat-decayed tweed jacket reached down. “You fell off the couch.”

“Painless, my arse! You ought to put a guardrail up!” Barry said woozily. He sat on the couch’s edge, rubbing his head, trying to get his bearings. It all seemed ridiculous somehow, like he was a character in some cheesy book. “I think I have a bloody concussion.”

“We can find out simply enough: How old are you?”

“39,” Barry said.

“What’s your wife’s name?”

“Headmistress Ermine Cringer,” Barry said. “She’s the one making me do this.”

“Right. And who am I?” the man asked.

“You’re Dr. Ritalin, the nutbar who hypnotized me, the school’s new shrink!”

“Correct,” Ritalin said. “You don’t seem concussed. Want to continue?”

Barry’s annoyance momentarily overwhelmed his fear of his wife. “This’ll never work,” he said crossly. “You’re an idiot, and I’m going to look nine years old for the rest of my life.”

“Barry, the human brain is immensely powerful. Furthermore, it has a fucked-up sense of humor,” Dr. Ritalin said. “As you know, I believe something in your

past—something in your mind—is keeping you from aging normally. Hypnotic regression is the only way to find out.”

“Oh, what the hell...” Barry said, lying back down. “I paid for the whole fifty minutes’ worth.”

“Just relax.” In moments, Barry had returned to fifth-year, picking up the story several hours later, as he steeled himself to face his eternal enemy, the deadly arch-cretin Headmister Alpo Bumblemore.