

The First Two Pages:
“Most Evil” by Peter DiChellis

I was crazy-happy (still am) when I learned the editors at Level Best Books accepted my supernatural mystery story “Most Evil” for their anthology of law enforcement tales, *BUSTED! Arresting Stories from the Beat* (released in April). It’s a pleasure to give a peek behind the curtain at *The First Two Pages*.

For “Most Evil” I followed the counsel that writers ought to write what they would enjoy reading. And I enjoy story openings that entice me with implicit promises; openings that don’t merely grab me by the collar to get my attention but that pull me close, press wet lips against my ear, and say in a throaty voice: “If you stay with me, I promise I’ll do something special for you . . .”

You can read the opening paragraphs of “Most Evil” below, followed by brief ramblings on what the heck I was trying to promise when I wrote it.

A maintenance gardener found the stout Russian gangster Dimitri Korov sprawled on dewy grass in a city park at sunrise, butt down in black gabardine slacks and a tan leather jacket, with a nine-inch ice pick slammed into his forehead and his eyes bugged open like a gargoyle’s.

One look at the corpse and every cop called to the scene pondered the same questions. Who the hell could have stepped in close enough to kill a tough, streetwise thug like Korov face-to-face, hand-to-hand? How could anybody get that kind of drop on Dimitri Korov, catch him flatfooted for one clean stroke with long, shiny steel? Must have been somebody special, the cops figured. Somebody brutal and fearless.

Somebody exactly like rival mobster Goat Head Jimmy, the ferocious Haitian gang leader whose fingerprints crime scene techs found in congealed blood on the ice pick's wooden handle. But would a shrewd gangbanger like Goat Head really leave behind the murder weapon with his bloody prints on it?

A day later, Detective Janessa Ann Harley stood next to her desk at Robbery-Homicide Division, weighing the odd fingerprint evidence with her young partner, Detective Brennan Druckett. Harley, a fortyish woman, tall and solid with ebony hair and a caramel complexion, enjoyed riffing with Druckett, a freckled, redheaded man built as burly as a beer keg.

"Maybe the pick was left as a message or warning," Harley offered.

"Maybe Korov's goon buddies were nearby and gave chase," Druckett said.

Harley winked. "Maybe Goat Head was tripped out from smokin' *ganja*."

Or maybe, like they said on the street, the notorious Haiti-to-Jamaica guns-for-*ganja* dope dealer and supreme *ganja* warlord Goat Head Jimmy could summon voodoo sorcery so potent the law could never touch him, no prison could ever hold him. So it wouldn't trouble Goat Head to be sought for a killing. Not a bit.

"Goat Head Jimmy conjure evil *Petro* voodoo," a chubby Haitian *Mambo* had whispered once to the detectives. "Goat Head Jimmy voodoo *Bizango Petro*, most evil. Voodoo this evil make killin' easy. Make a man a mesmerizer who slip through the shadows and do what he please. *Bizango Petro*. Most evil voodoo."

Sure, Harley thought. That probably solves it.

Okay, what was that all about? First, I wanted the story opening to promise a baffling whodunit-howdunit. So I plopped a dead body into the first paragraph and

then peppered the reader with questions:

Who the hell could have stepped in close enough to kill a tough, streetwise thug like Korov face-to-face, hand-to-hand? How could anybody get that kind of drop on Dimitri Korov, catch him flatfooted for one clean stroke with long, shiny steel?

And even when we think police have identified a slam-dunk suspect, the ferocious rival mobster *Goat Head Jimmy*, the questions don't stop:

But would a shrewd gangbanger like Goat Head really leave behind the murder weapon with his bloody prints on it?

(Later in the story, evidence incriminates Goat Head Jimmy in yet another murder, while conflicting evidence suggests Goat Head himself was dead before the two murders occurred. Baffling! Whodunit? Howdunit!)

My second goal for the opening was to promise a dangerous and outlandish adventure: We're chasing a suspected killer who can *summon voodoo sorcery so potent the law could never touch him, no prison could ever hold him*, a drug-dealing warlord who conjures voodoo so evil it can *make killin' easy. Make a man a mesmerizer who slip through the shadows and do what he please*. I even changed the Korov murder weapon to an ice pick to signal a strange story was looming. (In my early drafts, Korov's murderer killed him with a knife.)

Finally, I wanted to promise a story populated with offbeat characters and tinged with dark humor. So *the stout Russian gangster Dimitri Korov* isn't simply dead, he's *butt down in black gabardine slacks and a tan leather jacket, with nine-inch ice pick slammed into his forehead and his eyes bugged open like a gargoyle's*.

Meanwhile, our murder suspect is the brutal voodoo dooper *Goat Head*

Jimmy and we have a visually striking pair of detectives comfortably trading quips about the evidence that incriminates him:

Harley, a fortyish woman, tall and solid, with ebony hair and a caramel complexion, enjoyed riffing with Druckett, a freckled, redheaded man built as burly as a beer keg.

“Maybe the pick was left as a message or warning,” Harley offered.

“Maybe Korov’s goon buddies were nearby and gave chase,” Druckett said. Harley winked. “Maybe Goat Head was tripped out from smokin’ ganja.”

In the end, did my story keep the promises I wanted the opening to make? I hope so, but I also hope you’ll get a chance to read it and find out for yourself.

Author’s note: Voodoo is a popular and officially recognized religion in Haiti. *Bizango Petro* is an extreme form of the Voodoo religion, roughly analogous to anti-Christ devil worship, and is not representative of mainstream Voodoo religious practices.



Peter DiChellis concocts sinister and sometimes comedic tales for anthologies, ezines, and magazines. He is a member of the Short Mystery Fiction Society and an Active (published author) member of the Mystery Writers of America, Private Eye Writers of America, and International Thriller Writers. For more, visit his site *Murder and Fries* at <http://murderandfries.wordpress.com/>

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