

# thieves jargon



## Locust Fields Forever

By Bobby Oerzen

*Observe:* Death was born in the roadside wreckage and *Dr. E. Roberts* couldn't have felt more apathetic. He sat in traffic. He sat confined. He sat in a shiny new white Ford, purchased because the salesman could tell him, down to the tenth of a gallon, the exact gas mileage of the car. Knowing stats like miles-per-gallon were as important to *Dr. E. Roberts* as the habitual morning silence of his morning commute. However, this morning was different. This morning, an automotive casket presented him a variation. The languid procession of brake lights, flickering two shades of red as if genuflecting, had his finger flirting with the radio dial. He wanted a numeric breakdown of the traffic, but was unsure about committing to the rupture of his silence. Statistics come first, he decided. "...four more die in China by unknown human neural virus. Now let's go to *Buster the Loudmouth Sports Talker* for yesterday's scores..." He flipped the radio back off with a finger propelled by annoyance. First, irked the "human neural virus" was branded "unknown" when he knew that virus down to its very DNA. Second, he loathed sports.

Approaching the recent marriage of car to cement highway divider, his grey eyes analyzed the rubberneck centerpiece. However, the crumpled hood, furrowed like a surprised brow, didn't translate tragedy to *Dr. E. Roberts*. It reminded him to glance at the glaring face of his watch, which consequently reminded him of the lost nine minutes and forty-eight seconds; luckily, once off the highway, he caught a string of green lights.

He pulled into the science center parking lot and found his spot waiting for him. He took his usual thirteen-second detour to admire the research building; a concrete mountain set (by his meticulous count) three hundred and forty seven steps from his car.

A mantra of "No more vivisections!" emitted from a throng of protesters armed with signs. He was comforted by the expected disturbance, but surprised to find the protestors twenty-five steps closer than usual. He walked by head down, as if his skull owed a greater levy to gravity.

Eleven steps through the door, security guard *S. Gibson* asked on cue, "How are we doing today, Doc?"

"Exhibiting traits which would indicate I am a mammal," retorted *Dr. E. Roberts* expectedly; expected because *Dr. E. Roberts's* vernacular consisted of a phrasal canon he termed "controls". Rarely did a "variable" escape his lips.

Up the flights of stairs to his lab, *Dr. E. Roberts* tapped one-hundred-and-seventy-six steps in perfect syncopation. He entered the lab precisely at 8:58am to find his colleague, *Dr. G. Cane*, frantically pinned against the window staring down on the chanters.

"Them! They're going to ruin everything!" *Dr. G. Cane* bellowed in response to the din below. "Sabotage our work! Damn antivivisectionists!"

*Dr. G. Cane* always referred to the chanters as antivivisectionists so he could quickly clarify they were a ballistic group of idiots devoting worthless lives to saving furry little animals.

"Ballistic group of idiots," he began. "They're devoting their worthless lives to saving lab rats." His fingers traced the wrinkles lining his face. Each crevice was like a border from his youth. "Ruin our research for the rest of the world. We're trying to keep people alive, give meaning to the unknown, name the unnamed. Get them out of my life!" he screamed into the window.

"No more vivisections!" responded the chanting antivivisectionists. "No more vivisections!"

"That virus," he segued into one of his most repeated tirades, "is killing people in Asia like – like crazy!"

He turned to face *Dr. E. Roberts*. "Did the impoverished harass Adam Smith over The Invisible Hand? No!" *Dr. G. Cane* exclaimed as if this was the first time *Dr. E. Roberts* was hearing the harangue.

"Theories, viruses," *Dr. G. Cane* bulleted each with a raised finger. "They're not invented, they simply exist. Exist in nature. How can these – these maniacs think about animals?"

"Let Charley get them," hissed *Dr. E. Roberts* nervously; nervous because any deviance from the usual morning greeting of silence was unsettling to *Dr. E. Roberts*. The "Charley" cited was *C. Darwin* (1809-1882), whose coined term "survival of the fittest", clarified that unfit organisms were unfit to survive. By *Dr. E. Roberts's* standards, the aforementioned unfit organisms were at high risk for extinction.

That assumption provided *Dr. G. Cane* enough relief to assume his position

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at his lab bench. He sat down and dusted off the cover to *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, which still remained completely unread aside from the cover. He leaned over to X another day off his *Great Men of Science* calendar. This month was Max Planck, who *Dr. G. Cane* liked because he had left the world a constant bearing his name. *Dr. E. Roberts* also liked Planck's constant, but liked even more that Planck saw his own death as a redemption; finally, another mammal that understood death meant progress! *Dr. E. Roberts* had heard about Planck's redemptive views on human demise from *Dr. G. Cane*, like how he also emphatically told him the modern calendar was a Julian calendar, named for Julius Caesar. "The Caesar," *Dr. G. Cane* had gone on to explain with a finger pointed heavenward, "also famous for a delectable salad."

*Dr. E. Roberts* wondered if he was going to hear a new fun-fact or a compliant about how *Dr. G. Cane's* hair was falling out (since he usually voiced one of the two at this hour). Instead, *Dr. G. Cane* looked over some information on Einsteinium, not because the element had anything to do with their research. He just liked the name.

Then the persistence of routine quickly triumphed, filling the day with the culturing of cell cultures, rotating of centrifuge rotators, extracting of the extractable and other tasks concerned with the mindless tasks in the pursuit of knowledge. The mindless pursuit was a carbon copy of the day before, which was a carbon copy of the day before that, which was a carbon copy of what was becoming the existence of *Dr. E. Roberts* and *Dr. G. Cane*. While daily compulsion was a catharsis to *Dr. E. Roberts*, he knew his partner felt otherwise.

After a short career in artificial insemination that proved fruitless, *Dr. G. Cane* had come to hate science. The culmination of *Dr. E. Roberts's* endeavors provided *Dr. G. Cane* with fluorescent Rorschach inkblots to decipher. His eyes found little difference between micrographic imaging of lethal viral multitudes and the finger painting of children. He saw himself as a critic of modern art, inserting seminal meaning into composite chaos.

Meeting this task with a motivated aptitude, he was quick to classify and characterize their unknown human neuropath: a virus transmitted through bodily fluids causing latent cerebral atrophy resulting in cognitive failure. Which *Dr. G. Cane* was always sure to drag such jargon down to the common man's level, clarifying, "Quite simply, you become a vegetable: someone too dumb to even commit suicide."

Every afternoon, at a time *Dr. E. Roberts* regrettably could not set his watch to, a conversation ensued beginning with *Dr. G. Cane* stating, "Let's publish."

"We need another week to run variables."

"Edward, you've run every variable that could possibly vary. Let's publish."

"One more week, to be sure there will be no dispute about our data."

This always seemed a logical enough explanation for *Dr. G. Cane*, for having disputable data could mean his work would not be accepted, which was not acceptable.

The day ended with a pang of uncertainty for *Dr. E. Roberts* when it ended with a hobo. As *Dr. E. Roberts* and *Dr. G. Cane* walked across the parking lot, an obese, flannel-clad vagrant waddled up to the two scientists, squawking "Sirs!" between each successive waddle.

"Sirs!, sirs! – could either of you spare a few dollars?" the hobo blurted as he came to a halt. His desperate lungs transformed the frigid air into a steamy, white composition of halitosis.

*Dr. G. Cane* looked personally offended by the fiscal proposition. His face contorted to a shape implying the lowest levels of disgust, examining the hobo organism as if he were no more than the Ebola virus.

"Disease receptacle!" he roared. "Go back to siphoning alcohol out of gutters and let me do my work! Let me do my work, damn it!"

*Dr. G. Cane* slammed a car door in the hobo's fat, flabbergasted face. He clawed a door lock. The velocity at which his dilapidated Cadillac left the parking lot indicated that sightseeing was not a priority for *Dr. G. Cane*.

*Predict:* The next morning routine was neither a priority nor a consideration, as *Dr. E. Roberts* soon learned from the ambush which awaited him. Precisely unexpected at 8:58am, *Dr. G. Cane* met his colleague with a torrent of tumult.

"Publish! We must!" *Dr. G. Cane* barked at the unknowing scientist. "Today! Now!"

"W-We need another week...variables!" *Dr. E. Roberts* pleaded frantically, in an attempt to adhere to the lines they had been rehearsing for the past eight months.

"No more variables," *Dr. G. Cane* began with crude disregard to these lines. "Last night, I realized...they're going to kill me...trying to – all of them! The hobos, the cars, the hobos in cars!"

"The transportation society is ludicrous! Can you believe the investment of confidence in bums operating *death chariots*? They're only inches away...at such speeds! Have you ever seen what sixty miles per hour can do to a person? Eh? Have you?"

*Dr. G. Cane* paced briefly, running a hand through what was left of his flustered hair. "It's a damn army of maniacs! What if some licensed gorilla had plowed into me last night? What then? I'd be a statistic, that's what. A life translated into numbers – momentum of collision, force of impact, elapsed time preceding airbag inflation."

His hands grasped *Dr. E. Roberts*'s bleached white lab coat. "Who would know my name? Who would read about the research I did? Who would care enough to wonder what song was playing on the fucking radio when my sternum cracked like the splintering of a lobster claw?"

"But our data is premature, one more week," *Dr. E. Roberts* pleaded as he shied away from the human contact. "To ensure we'll be taken seriously."

"Lennon," *Dr. G. Cane* responded.

"What?"

"Lennon," *Dr. G. Cane* repeated. "John Lennon was playing on the radio."

"Oh, the musician?"

"The *dead* musician, you know him!" the articulated emphasis on 'dead' suggested this might have been the musician's paramount exploit. "We're publishing."

The moment was inevitable. *Dr. E. Roberts* knew their experimental epoch eventually would be eclipsed by publication. Sure, there would be new unknown pathogens. Sure, there would be new experiments with new mundane conversations and parameters; though right now he grasped to the niche he knew best.

"But we need another week to run variables," *Dr. E. Roberts* whispered in a final attempt to cue his partner back in.

"That's it for you and your scientific dogmas, Edward," *Dr. G. Cane*'s voice picked up momentum, "I'm not going to sit around thumbing my ass, while some lab in Germany beats us to this making our research worth rat shit. We're going public."

*Dr. E. Roberts* realized this was why people always assumed he was an Edward and never an Eddie or Ed, but he wanted what he wanted. Who didn't these days? He perched himself over the window and looked down upon the frost-bitten earth. But even the jaws of frost weren't bitter enough to keep the antivivisectionists silent. Their voices were a subdued murmur through the glass window.

"Gal, think about what you're saying. You need to take a holiday; let's go to a pub, consume some ethanol," *Dr. E. Roberts* awkwardly suggested. The idea came as if transmitted via pirate radio waves reminding him ethanol was a chemical that made people act chronically silly.

As his words lingered, *Dr. E. Roberts* realized the antivivisectionists were chanting, "Rights for mice."

"Edward, I know you're a stickler for scientific method, but seriously, join the human race. We're publishing today. And another thing – we're naming the virus after me."

"What? Why does this mean so much to you?" *Dr. E. Roberts* squeaked.

While the words fell from the mouth of *Dr. E. Roberts*, two docile testicles hung between the legs of *Dr. G. Cane*. Like ornaments on a Christmas tree, their function was simply decorative. The ornaments had about the same odds for fertilization as the testicles.

Lost in the moment, *Dr. E. Roberts* had forgotten the infertility of *Dr. G. Cane*'s genital ornaments. *Dr. G. Cane* quickly reminded him by slamming his furious fist onto *Dr. E. Roberts*'s lab bench. The impact resonated like a gavel deciding *Dr. E. Roberts*' fate as it scattered *Dr. E. Roberts*'s strict pencil arrangement.

"I. Get. The virus," *Dr. G. Cane* demanded vehemently.

*Hypothesis*: Thus the Cane Virus was born; or more appropriately the Cane Virus was named, since it had invisibly existed in air droplets and brain matter for quite some time. The nomenclature just made it memorable.

And that virus sure made a name for *Dr. G. Cane*. Within the first week after their findings were published, the virus killed three hundred and fifty seven people. It seemed his name was on the lips and in the brains of almost everyone: physicians, newscasters, vegetables. Dead humans translated eternal life to *Dr. G. Cane* and his eponymous life form.

*Dr. G. Cane* finally felt a relief that tingled down to his testicles. He found

solace in his divorce from science, and science's personification: Dr. Edward Roberts. He retired to live off the Cane virus mortality pension. However, the Cane virus had other plans. It got out of control. Deadly pathogens have a tendency to do that.

People demand answers. Answers *Dr. E. Roberts* was unable to give, even with his variables. People get answers. They stalked *Dr. G. Cane* until he agreed to hold a press conference, making him empathize with parents called into school principals' offices to atone for delinquent children.

As the date for the press conference drew near, *Dr. G. Cane* actually began anticipating the event. He envisioned throngs of reporters, grasping for his words like stenographers recording Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. On the eve of *Dr. G. Cane* and his virus's big day, a freak March snowstorm almost ruined everything. Luckily for *Dr. G. Cane*, a fleet of snowplows worked overtime to ensure citizens could operate their death chariots safely. When the plows had finished, *Dr. E. Roberts* noted the research building resembled an archeological dig of an ancient temple buried beneath white rock.

*Experiment:* That morning, when *Dr. G. Cane* emerged from his parked car with charts and graphs of his virus cradled against his chest like a bundled newborn, an irate man was there to meet him. As if spiteful of the cold, the man wore only a T-shirt that proclaimed he still remembered 1969. He marched up to *Dr. G. Cane* with a message, asserting, "You killed my daddy."

"What the hell are you talking about?" *Dr. G. Cane* whimsically dismissed.

The man's arm shot forward with an accusing finger, pointed like a bayonet. "The Cane virus killed my daddy!" he boomed. Sound waves reverberated to the fourth-story lab where *Dr. E. Roberts* was investigating some variables. The words bounced with the hysterics of a desperate shriek underwater.

The daddyless man's acquisition also reached a group of antivivisectionists a few hundred feet away. Their necks craned in unison. Loud noises warranted their investigation.

Recognition of *Dr. Gallows Cane* registered immediately. His picture had been plastered in the newspaper. *Dr. G. Cane* once hailed as a hero of pathology, now stood as a monstrous slayer of animals and daddies, alike. Despite differing motives, the bastard and the animal lovers struck up an alliance immediately against the murderer.

The animal lovers found solace in chant. The bastard only seemed capable of repeating: "You killed my daddy." Meeting half way their mantra was conceived:

*You killed his daddy. You killed his daddy. You. Killed. His daddy.*

Every chant formed a link in a chain binding *Dr. G. Cane* to his destiny. A deadly circle formed around *Dr. G. Cane* and his car as an encompassing ring of fire. The crackle of the seething cipher reached the fourth-story lab like a rhythmic trail of smoke.

*Dr. E. Roberts* pressed himself against the window, as if the glass were a monkey cage separating *H. Sapien* from *M. cynomolgus*. The detached disposition with which *Dr. E. Roberts* observed the scene clearly indicated he was the spectator and not the spectacle.

You.

Killed.

His daddy.

*Dr. G. Cane* slivered into the sanctity of his car. *Dr. E. Roberts* noted he was certainly displaying traits that indicated he was a mammal. The herd rocked the car. The perspective of the lab made the car look like a carcass, which the hyena-like protestors converged on. A rock hit the windshield. A maze of zigzags formed, like a textbook evolution hierarchy chart.

You.

Killed.

His daddy.

*Dr. E. Roberts* realized words evolve similar to organisms. The archaic is naturally selected out of dictionaries and gene pools. Meaning and life is transferred to more fit combinations of letters, whether those letters are an alphabet of 26 characters or 4 nucleotides. Subsequently, an antonym will evolve for every word as every predator has its prey, as every life has its death. Science gives death a name people can chant. In the case below, Death's name was "You," which evolved as the antithesis of "his daddy."

When the windshield shattered in a shower of deadly diamonds, *Dr. E. Roberts* thought he heard John Lennon on the radio. As John Lennon sang his elegy, *Dr. E. Roberts*'s remembered the name Mark David Chapman, as if his brain was tuning into pirate radio waves.

*Repeat:* Then his brain lost the frequency. He recalled Charlie's standards: ensuring life meant securing death. That was a constant of the universe, which reminded him he still had a day of variables to run.

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#### **About the Author:**

Bobby is a 22-year-old writer finishing his Bachelor of Science degree in Biology at Siena College in Albany, New York. He is from the New York City area and hopes to pursue an MFA degree in fiction writing next fall. He is currently listening to the Velvet Underground and wearing argyle.

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