

COMPLETE PERFORMANCE WORK 1996-2004

GAD Publishing Company Chicago USA

08 OF 13

THE HEATSEEKER

A LONG-FORM PERFORMANCE PROJECT

JASON PETTUS

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INTRODUCTION TO THE 2007 EDITION

Since 1996 I have owned and operated a basement press in Chicago called GAD, dedicated mostly to the self-publishing of my own work (and with a brief detour in 2001, publishing a dozen books by my friends, before giving up the pursuit again for lack of community interest). As of 2004 GAD had ended up publishing over forty books, both full-length and miniature in nature, dealing with everything from poetry to prose, essays, interviews, science-fiction, erotica and travel. Being the sole employee of GAD, of course, especially while continuing to write new material on a regular basis, unfortunately meant that many of these books ended up being published on a less-than-professional basis, with dozens of typos and grammatical errors found in each. It was something that always slightly bothered me about the GAD catalog; as long as I was an active writer, though, this worry was always trumped by the stronger desire to keep writing new material, and to devote the majority of my energy to these new projects instead of cleaning up the old ones.

In late 2004, however, I made the decision to put this literary career on indefinite hold, in order to open and operate an arts center here in Chicago instead. Given the chance for the first time to take a detailed look at the existing GAD catalog, I decided at that point to dedicate the next few years of my life to going through these old books, giving each of them the thorough editing they deserved, and republishing them in electronic form, standard-

izing not only the look of each publication but also the options for downloading and viewing them. This was complicated enough when it came to the nonfiction and prose projects, but especially tricky in the case of my performance poetry and monologues, of which I had never attempted to publish a pervasive, chronological record. Since the 2007 edition of these poetry/monologue books makes certain older titles now obsolete, as well as introduces several new titles, I thought I'd take a moment and explain the entire process, for committed readers who wish to own the complete, definitive collection.

Prior to 2002, the vast majority of GAD poetry/monologue books available were of special projects, including: *Psycho Poets* (1997), a collection of poems about women I slept with in 1997, when I was a member of the Chicago poetry-slam team; *Jasonettes* (1998), *The Heatseeker* (1999), *Notes From My Grandmother's Funeral* (2000) and *Celibate* (2001), all of them written transcripts of special half-hour themed performances I gave over the years, all of them for the old "Mental Graffiti" poetry show here in Chicago; *[Andi.]* (1999), a collection of poetry about a specific ex-girlfriend; and *The Tao of Now* (2000), a literary experiment of sorts, combining the length and structure of traditional short stories with the language and rhythm of slam poetry. The only exceptions were GAD's oldest two books, *The Sweet Alice Sessions* and *Kathie Lee Gifford Likes to Fuck!*, both from 1996, both collecting not special themed

work but merely the general pieces I was writing and performing for the open mics that year. In addition there was a “greatest hits” collection also available, called *The Jason Pettus Portable Reader* (2001) and consisting of around twenty of my audience’s absolute favorite pieces over the years, published exclusively to sell at live shows. These ten books reprinted approximately 100 of the poems and monologues I had written over the years; the vast majority of the 300 others I had written were simply unavailable in published form, save for those found on individual HTML pages at my website.

In 2002, the first year after “retiring” from the poetry community, I decided to make my first attempt at publishing a comprehensive series of these pieces; the result was the four-book series *Chicago Stories 1997-2000*, as well as a new “greatest hits” book, *More Poems about Blowjob*s, collecting my favorite sexually-explicit poems and monologues from over the years. These five new books went a long way towards getting more of my old performance work out to the public, but with still a number of inconsistencies: for example, technically the contents of both *Sweet Alice* and *Kathie Lee Gifford* should’ve been included in the “Chicago Stories” series, not as their own stand-alone books; the series was still missing the poems I wrote in 2001 and 2002, important for posterity’s sake but not a large enough collection to publish as their own book; and of course even the current “Chicago Stories” series was missing several pieces that had become audience favorites over the years.

For this 2007 edition, therefore, I have declared both *Sweet Alice* and *Kathie Lee Gifford* as “out-of-print” titles, neither of which will ever be printed in their original forms again; instead, they have been consolidated and are now known collectively as *Chicago Stories 1996*, fitting better into the overall theme of the entire series. I’ve also compiled a short *Chicago Stories 2001-2004* book, including the smattering of poems I wrote after retiring from the

literary community. The new six-book “Chicago Stories” collection (including expanded editions of the four volumes that had previously existed) now reprints all of the general work from my years as an active performer; the seven special themed books already mentioned have also been reedited and republished, meaning that owning this thirteen-book series now gives you access to nearly every poem and monologue I wrote between 1996 and 2004. The two “greatest hits” compilations have also been republished, along with two new ones; one’s called *Love Blender*, a collection of pieces about relationships, compiled originally as a feature for the electronic magazine *LoveBlender.com*, and the other’s simply entitled *Personal Favorites*, along with a new introduction concerning why they are. And finally, a new omnibus edition has been published for 2007 as well, called *Complete Performance Work 1996-2004*, collecting the content of all thirteen previously-mentioned books into one volume (and in fact, owning that volume makes owning the thirteen individual books unnecessary).

Those who enjoyed this book may also want to check out the following related volumes, all currently available through GAD: *How to Win a Poetry Slam* (2000), a half-humorous, half-critical look at this unique literary genre; *Smells Like Sweat* (1997), a memoir of the 1997 National Poetry Slam, written entirely as a series of haikus (from an original concept by Jerry Quickley); and *The Tunnel Rat Sessions* (2002), a collection of long-form interviews with other slam poets that I originally conducted for the Chicago-based poetry newsletter *Tunnel Rat* in the mid-1990s. Of course, I also encourage you to check out the other books in the GAD catalog; as of this writing there are 55 books altogether, with more being added each year, covering almost every literary genre and style imaginable. As always, I urge you to drop me a line if you wish to discuss these pieces further; my latest contact information can always be found at my website, itself found at jasonpettus.com.

I. THE HEATSEEKER

There is a
horrible haughty little monster that
eats and shits inside of me
Heat Seeker is what I call it; it doesn't
enjoy this name. Then again, it hates me.
And I hate it.

The Heat Seeker escapes its jail every so often
Sucks people bone-dry
Eggs them on
Examines them for their weaknesses
Kicks an open can of kerosene
eagerly onto splashing knees, lights a match, watches the
red essence of life licking skyward, reaches
in, opens its mouth,
swallows it whole and creeps back into its jail

Battles have been fought
inside my insides
Glowing red flares in stomachs
Artillery shells in my bloody urine
Now the battle is twenty five years old, still
deeply raging, collecting its corpses and counting the
ruined in its wake.

Eagerly the Heat Seeker plots its course of revenge
dimly aware of the
thousand points of
heat left in its wake
Entrenched in its singular goal of

harboring all energy of all people with an eerie
efficiency you will not realize until too late
After the first burns
Two seconds after the wooden match is lit
Scales falling from your
eyes, suddenly knowing

Everyone attempts to analyze the
killing machine inside; I try to
escape the big jail it has built for me
Round and round we dance and we are
wrapped in a sexual position
inherently perverse, a pornographic infinite dance around
the
lips of rusty cans,
large lips licking
kabuki rhythms on my brain,
inching ever closer to my heart.

Lapping miles a yard long, the Heat Seeker is
looking to take the big jail, to stuff
your hero into the
offensively small one inside me, to squeeze me in
utterly, finally, for good.

Darkness threatens me
early, so I now speak
about the Heat Seeker, so that
damage will be minimized. So that you will know.

II. SYNCHRONICITY

Ice cold box

was at my back when
answers from a higher calling flooded
swirly curlie que into my silver plane of being

You have a gift, boss man scream-shouts
over my left shoulder

Use it for good, not for evil, boss man says
not realizing the horrible
groundwork being laid

At that moment, Heat Seeker
nills its ugly wart through the
dark brown earth of its home planet to come
under my chalk-caked fingernails and burrow under
skin to build its
europa jailhouse with tiny chocolate bars and salsa blood

Dick hard at four
Meet the sweet beat

young flesh dances to daily
Hothouse flowers on teacher's drooping desk
Effort wasted at chalkboard, imbeciles shitting their own pants
All around me, bodies waiting to get torched
Doused in my gasoline

You have a gift, the future cadaver tells me
Own up to it
Use it for
right and not the wrong

Embassy of first grade now shattered

Agents of the seven year old army surround me
Guts churning, lunch spewing, footballs kicked, ponytails pulled
Each to a fault

never living to Heat Seeker's expectations overgrown with
weeds

It's a gift — they

ushered my punishment
steaming hot into my crotch
thusly — it's a gift and don't
hang your head, don't slouch, don't not read this

And Heat Seeker lifted its mighty head, roared
terrifically at the small
scared children who were deaf and couldn't hear him

Wait just a moment.

Hear that sound?

Anvils smashing little kids' fingers
Terror striking into mass mediocre hearts
Torches blazing loudly silent in the conditioned September air
Heat Seeker is on the loose — cover your
eyes or lose them

Yonder that quality steakhouse buffet line, avast ye mateys
Sail for Narnia tonight!

Aye aye sir

Ignorant masses are waiting to
die with screams caught in throats!

III. UNABOMBER

Hiccups greeted me
early on a Saturday morning
when I heard he had been
apprehended, a wall-less fortress in Montana stuck and
snuck under tar paper and Grizzly Adams beard

Nearer my God to

Universities can drive anyone to terrorist acts, believe you me
Television eyes stare and
suddenly I see
Heat Seeker staring back with
itty bitty inside eyes burning bright
Starving after all these years, suddenly sucking nearby heat

Nearer my God to thee, o Lord, nearer

All the kiddies yell
mommy but some are so crafty and sneakily sly
Early on Saturday I
was witness to
apprehensive eyes seeking out flame
Stupid masses thinking the nightmare over

There is every reason to kill, believe you me
Every excuse not to has been used up
down in my little
tiny jail inside my little tiny dark inside spot

Heat Seeker laughs and
echoes the raw
haunting look I saw in
eyes in the man in Montana
Abandoned by everything he thought he could count on
Ted, I understand. More than anyone can believe.

Sweaty hiccups greet me
early Saturday morning, the monster punching, kicking
my stomach
Each of us smelling
kerosene, smelling rotten
eggs, smelling Montana gunpowder air

Reach in, Ted, go grab that
wiley alien and wring its scrawny neck until its
asphyxiated, crushed windpipe can scream no more lies

Snuff it and I
will also attempt the same, control the Heat Seeker
Hone its power until
you and I
heal, until we can see
earthling morons and not throw up
full bellies bruised by our evil little space friends

Liquor hiccups greet me when I greet you
early on Saturday morning
Down and down we fall into the safe earth

IV. 1982

Sunlight filters down
cathode rays to burn my
honey of a bear, oh Honey
oh Lord forgive me for this sin I now commit
Oh say can you see by this dark
land behind iron bars
I gotsa I gotsa kill these weak children that
teem the planet's surface
Fill them with
iodine lollipops, kerosene red balloons
Lovely, lovely Michelle, you first shall
lick the lovely lap of flame when I shall
equate you with nothingness, make you a nonperson
Down and down you
meet your maker's mark splat into nothingness you
echo through the vast
utter well I
plastered to the side of
white walled jail cells I constructed
Ingots, rare jewels of science books I have built
to destroy in meaningless ritual boom bang I
hate to leave this
dinner party but I have souls to catch on
red fire you see
Every last one
All dogs go to heaven
Deep I plunge hands into ribcage

It's a beautiful thing, the snap of bone and
walls come tumblin' down, down, into the black
ocean from whence you
unruly hiccups first screamed your first scream and laid
large fingers on rocky
depths of shit

Nadir approaching, sir, should we
tangle its limbs to ours and
fling it to the icy bottomless depth below? No,
officer, let it swim in its own filth

Let it bask in
legal limbo, let it bask in swine therapy and
or is it real?

What's that sound?
I think the rosie has
high time the ring has so
Adam can swing there too, rot for all I'm
damned to believe, damned to learn, damned to

Nadir approaching, sir, should

This too shall pass, private, this too shall pass
Livvy up the spoils?
Ethanol smells but
damn how fun it is

V. PRINCESS

The story begins,
Half a long time ago
 existed a beautiful princess slash biologist.
Her skin was fair and her test tubes were
 easily the cleanest in the entire green kingdom.

And one day the
 tempest beauty befriended a boy who smelled of
 silver and nicotine, and
 each day the
 eager small boy would go
 kidnap the princess and bite her
 earlobe to keep her locked in the ivory tower.

Round the earth the moon passed many times
 while the princess watched
 over the ear-biting boy and fell in love.

Never did she expect
 this horrible calamity.

Lust was all she had
 expected, but eventually the ear was
 torn right away from her head and she
 met the boy in the stairwell and said,

‘Exit this ivory tower,
 won’t you? Run with me where the moon never
 ever sets but instead
 drowns in the
 inky haze of our love.’

The boy didn’t know how to
 cope with this sudden change in the princess, so
 under his shirt he unlocked the door where
 terrible little monsters roamed.

‘Make me understand,’ the boy said. ‘Why is the
 earless princess dancing and
 calling my name,
 longing to run away and
 elope where the moon never sets
 and act as if she and I are in love?’

‘Never mind her,’ the monster said. ‘She’ll only
 impeach your soaring heart.’

‘Burn her,’ the monster said. ‘Burn and let me
 lick up the flames.’

Eight years you
 damned yourself to this tower
 and it is high time you
 never look back, so set the princess on fire.
Douse her in kerosene and never look back.’

But the boy hesitated,
 longing to let the princess escape the tower. And
 escape she did. And never
 did she look back.

VI. THE GIRL WITH THE GERMAN THIGHS

Love you, Kiki,

I love to watch legs

kicking soccer goals through German posts

Each three by five card flung stabbing my chest

Chalk up my nose, early eighties songs blaring
into my tiny head

Though the ramparts we watch are so hardly bleeding

I still watch you.

Zoot suits ring

early under caps and gowns

Newly hosed calves sneak there, too.

Kiki, how I long to wrap slender soccer legs

around my petulant chalk-sniffing Monty Python thighs.

Now the Heat Seeker

erminely reminds me of that which can not be

and pulls out the

naked gas to

douse the German legs, to

heat up the fever dream vision.

I cannot, cannot, cannot, cannot, cannot come near her

so she will be saved fate worse than

red fiery hot death

Equilibrium of those German thighs walking down the hallway,

down the hallway, down

So what? Heatseeker

laughs at me, tiny sneer

edging out of corner of mouth

Don't even think of it, boy, my child

There's too much work for us

here, too many books

each screaming for us to finish them, write and

read and hide away

Each screaming for

soldiers to fight the good

cattlecall of the 99 red balloons

Each screaming for blood, for sacrifice, for bright bulbous

red balloons of flame, O Building on fire,

that'll show them! he

announces so loudly no one else can hear except

I, who hears all

Newly formed gray

stains dampen the burning building

Eggs and fish still don't swim

corollary in the same pool, yet snuff out the

red balloons hiding in the corner, in his

egg-white jail cell

That'll show you! I whisper so softly everyone hears

So softly that everyone

inches slowly away

No more, I scream tersely.

My imprisonment ends today, you understand?

Yes, I understand, Heatseeker says, and laughs even louder

Bon Voyage! And the laughter threatens to consume,

echoing off my ribcage

Dinging and bouncing off of slender, German, soccer thighs

VII. THE TUNNEL

Talk, talk, talk

Heatseeker says from the stage
Elaborate encyclopedias and esoteric ejaculate ensue
Hard candy rips through the roof of my mouth
Eclipsed by the empty egotistical education I received
and is there more?

There's a tiny light at the end of the
smoky, flame-filled tunnel

Eagerly blows the
engine which may save me

Kitchen lightbulb burned out yet again
Entrails and blood dragging along behind it, yet it
reminds me that life is worth keepin' on,
I'm keepin' on, I'm
tryin' to tie the monster to the tiny rails

Gonna let that train
attack me and
veins explode in my wrists

Escape seems hopeless and always has
my train been there? Tooting along and dragging with
effort all the monsters in all our hearts
behind red plastic caboose?

Round yon virgin the Heatseeker holds and clings to
epidemics brought by his

acid bath, his

down-filled pillows of despair,
insane mumblings while in solitary confinement

Heatseeker will never leave, no, but maybe there is
a medication that will sedate him, a tiny
teal pill that will
eradicate his fire, take his kerosene away. I really
don't know. But yet

I see a
tunnel, and at its end
a light shines. And that really
never can be bad, can it? Here, take my
daggers, take these matches. I don't need them.

Yet I'll keep my
elite little friend. You see, I can't leave him.

The Heatseeker is me.

I ignite the
flash and smell burning flesh
each time I open this notebook.
Damned to hell I am. I know my fate.

TECHNICAL NOTES

The Heatseeker is written in a formal style of poetry of my own invention, called the Jasonette. Its rules consist of the following:

Begin by writing a two-line, rhyming mini-poem about the Jasonette in question. For example, from part 1 of this book:

*The Heatseeker is big and red
The Heatseeker will strike you dead*

String this mini-poem, one letter at a time, down a sheet of paper vertically, like so:

t
h
e
h
e
a
t
s
e
etc.

Next, take your birthdate (in my case, March 5, 1969) and a date of personal significance to your life (in my case, the day I moved to Chicago, August 4, 1994) and convert them to numerical format (35698494). Omit any 0s and 1s, then string the numbers down the page as well, repeating until you have reached the end.

t3
h5
e6

h9
e8
a4
t9
s4
e3
etc.

The finished Jasonette is based on this graph you have just constructed—each line must contain the exact number of words the number indicates, and the line must start with a word that begins with the letter indicated. Stanzas may be any length, and blank lines may be inserted at any point desired, but your finished poem must be the exact length indicated by the graph.

In the specific case of *The Heatseeker*, I also added a variety of other rules. Each of the seven mini-poems, for example, rhyme not just with themselves but with each other. Each odd-numbered poem deals with a subject from my present-day life, while each even-numbered poem deals with an event from my childhood. In addition, each odd-numbered poem was written in the morning while sober, while each even-numbered poem was written at night while on sleeping pills.

In case you're curious, *The Heatseeker* concerns my experiences growing up as a gifted child in suburban Missouri. The concept behind its narrative metaphor was partially inspired by William S. Burroughs' novel *Naked Lunch*.

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THE JASON PETTUS PORTABLE READER: audience favorites
MORE POEMS ABOUT BLOWJOBS: best erotic stories and poems
LOVE BLENDER: best romantic stories and poems
JASON PETTUS: FAVORITE PERFORMANCE WORK
COMPLETE PERFORMANCE WORK, 1996-2004

For the first time ever, a comprehensive and chronological set of books is now available from GAD, publishing nearly all of the 400 slam poems, monologues and dialogues Jason Pettus wrote between 1996 and 2004. This new collection starts with the six-book series **Chicago Stories 1996-2004**, gathering all the unthemed work Pettus performed at open mics and special events in those years, now with an expanded series of notes concerning not only each piece, but what was happening in the Chicago arts in that period to influence the work. Move on to the four reprints of special commissioned **half-hour performance projects** Pettus created over the years; and then to the three other **special themed books** he wrote during his time as a performer as well (*Psycho Poets*, about various real Chicago female artists; *[Andi.]*, stories about an ex-girlfriend; and *The Tao of Now*, an attempt at combining the rhythm and energy of slam poetry with longer, more narrative stories).

For those interested in just a sampling of Pettus' old performance work, **four compilations** are also available: *The Jason Pettus Portable Reader*, audience favorites; *More Poems About Blowjobs*, the best of the erotic stories and poems; *Love Blender*, the best romantic stories from over the years; and *Favorite Performance Work*, compiled by the author from a variety of sources, with a new introduction. And finally, for the truly dedicated, the entire collection of work can be found in a **800-page single download edition** as well, entitled *Complete Performance Work, 1996-2004*.