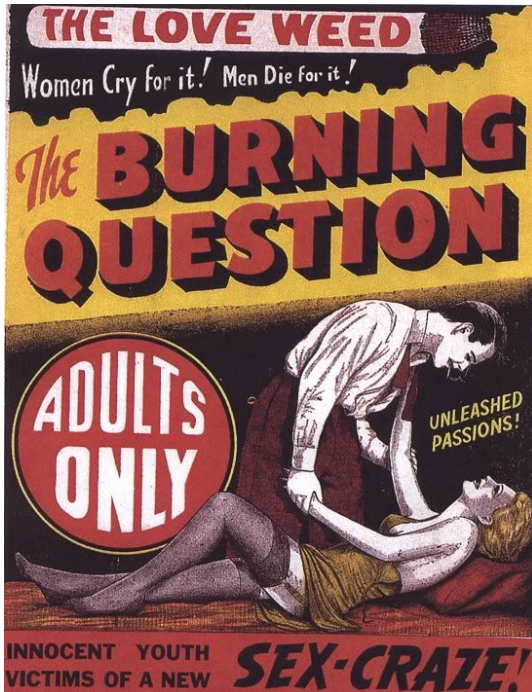


After a little detox time coming off the heels of a long season helping cover the Browns for us, Hiko is back. And so is Moot Points, his popular weekly column that takes a deep dark look inside the mind of a man that is willing to say all the things that you're thinking. And he's back with a bang, talking about his most embarrassing moment as a young Hiko, touching on Britney Spears, and even taking the time out to review some movies for us.



OR

The Burning Question

Blue had asked Hiko the question. The answer was not readily available.

Hiko pondered. The answer could come from so many sources, so many instances of attrition, of error. To pinpoint just one...

His thoughts drifted. Golden hours of his youth came into hazy focus.

A walk up the road, up the hill, down the embankment, across the corn field (avoid the ticks!), over the stream with the exposed tree roots, and up the backyard to Sven's house.

He had spent a great deal of time with Sven in years 6-8. He had written his first story at Sven's house at age 7 - an illustrated tale regarding all of the women of the world going on a cruise together. When a Herculean sea monster attacked the ship, it was up to our hero to boat out to the middle of the Pacific with a giant magnifying glass and burn the creature to insensibility. Sadly, he came too late for half of the world's females, which resulted in many lonely men, depicted in the final frame in the form of a man sitting alone in an alley, crying, drinking straight from a bottle of liquor.

Sven and Hiko had hiked onto the property across the street, despite the knowledge that it was strictly forbidden by the landowner. Despite their sly movements, they were somehow detected, and the old man emerged from his house with a shotgun. They ran, the weapon roared, the leaves of the trees above their heads echoed with shot. Emerging from woods to the road, unscathed but shaken, they were amazed to see Sven's mother standing nearby, holding a wooden spoon. The sounds of Sven's rear getting smacked by wood as he ran down the road towards his home was almost as loud as the shotgun...

Hiking up the creek. Nerf basketball in the basement. Donkey Kong on Coleco. The days ran together... blended... in Hiko's memory it was always late Summer. It was always early Fall.

They had also taken interest in the Mysteries. Ghosts, zombies, werewolves, these weren't just things that they readily believed in - they were things the boys *wanted* to believe in. They wanted the world to be fantastic, unknowable, more than their parents' Card Clubs and Welcome Wagons.

Their investigation led them to the small storage room at the top of the stairs, next to Sven's parents' bedroom. The storage room was piled high with interesting and exotic fare - a random tapestry, a brass figurine, a toga. And a footprint. A dark, perhaps bloody footprint on the wooden ladder that led up to the attic door.

It was clear to the boys that the footprint was not of this world. It wasn't the right size to be that of either of Sven's parents - it was too large. Who could have left it? Certainly not a human. Ghosts floated. Zombies didn't wear shoes. Werewolves had paws. No - this was clearly the footprint of a Vampire. One that clearly lived in the attic, perhaps amongst a whole nest of other Vampires.

With such a daunting enemy inevitably hovered directly above their heads, the boys retired to seek reinforcements. In the movies, families always had large metal crosses hanging somewhere in the house. This, however, did not seem to be the case with Sven's parents. Garlic also seemed to be in short supply. And Holy Water - the boys were mystified about what that even was.

If they'd learned any lesson from television, it was that one should not attack a Vampire Den without weapons. Sven's grandmother had a

large cross at her house. The next time Sven went to visit, he would procure the religious symbol and they would enter the realm of the devil. Until then, they would have to suffice with lying a small pool of baby powder about the base of the ladder and the storage room floor - further proof of these evil footprints was needed, and would warn the household of imminent attack.

In the middle of that night, lying on the floor of Sven's bedroom, Hiko was awakened by a noise. It was coming from upstairs, almost directly above his head. There was no voice, just a steady creaking, disembodied, malevolent. *The Vampire*, Hiko thought, mentally shuffling through his options. He could just lay there, afraid, waiting, until the half-opened door swung completely open, and a shape, a black hole in the present darkness, stood there, regarding him calmly, before he entered, and the boys fell into eternal torment.

Or he could go on up.

Logic that seems impractical to us in adulthood is completely understandable in our youth. Hiko grabbed a Wiffle Ball bat and a drum stick from corners of Sven's room, perfect for forming an impromptu cross. Mustering his courage, he walked softly into the hallway, past the living room, to the base of the staircase. Looking up, all he could see was blackness. Nothing moved. The sound persisted - it was somewhat louder now. But whatever creature was creating the noise lurked in the shadows - waiting.

Slowly, silently, step-by-step, up went Hiko, the makeshift cross held in

front of him like a shield. Each step brought him closer to the dense black, yet nothing could be seen. The sound was certainly louder now - it seemed to indeed be coming from the storage room door. The thing must still be inside, perpetrating some evil. Hiko would know what it was up to. Curiosity had overcome his fear. He would not go back to sleep without confronting the thing above.

Finally, he was at the top of the stairs. The storage room door was directly in front of him, but, now that he had reached it, it was clear that the sound was not emanating from there. It was coming from Hiko's left, from the darkness of Sven's parents' bedroom, with its half-opened door and forbidden repute. A terrible creaking, a steady soft squeal of - was it? - metal.

The creature was in the bedroom.

Hiko approached the door, holding the cross unsteadily ahead of him. He further propped the door open with his toe, but the dim moonlight from the nearby windows did nothing to penetrate the black. The sound was near now - louder than ever before. Hiko stared into the inkiness, wary to make a further move. This was, after all, Sven's parents' room, and, at this time of night, they were certainly in there, sleeping. If they had been killed, surely there would have been a scream? Why did they not wake? Had the creature subdued them? Did they themselves make this noise, and, if so, for what purpose?

He stood in the doorway for a long time, weighing his options. His logic told him to turn and go back to bed. But his curiosity was piqued - it

burned in his brain like acid. He knew it was most likely a mistake, but he HAD to know. Slowly, carefully, he reached out his hand and flipped the light switch.

The sudden illumination brought great surprise to all involved. Hiko suddenly understood what the noise was - it all made perfect sense now. He was only 7, but he knew all about human reproduction and the acts that took place to initiate it - some of the older boys at school had sneaked some magazines onto the grounds for outdoor recess, and the photos contained within left very little to the imagination. It was just that - foolishly - that explanation had never occurred to him as a possible option for the source of the sound. And that two seconds of light had made it clear that he was wrong - oh so wrong.

Sven's parents were also, understandably, surprised. The sound ceased immediately. For long moments, Hiko and Sven's parents just stared at each other, trying to summarize the situation. Nothing moved. The silence was oppressive. Try as he might, Hiko could formulate no more coherent thought than *OH NO*.

Finally, trying to maintain a calm that perhaps wasn't there, Sven's father said, "*Hiko - turn off the light, close the door, and go to bed.*"

Yes, Hiko thought to himself. *That was a good idea.* Nodding his head mutely, his mouth still agape from the horror of his actions, he fumbled for the light switch, put it out, shut the door, and trudged down the stairs in the dark. Thoughts flitted across his mind - the need to escape, to

crawl out the window and spend the night in some field, thus avoiding the incredibly uncomfortable inevitable morning discussion with his friend's parents.

Reasoning that he had made enough bad judgments on that night, Hiko just crawled back into his sleeping bag and shut his eyes tight, wishing desperately that - like on TV - it had all been a dream. Sleep was far off as he re-lived the moment over and over in his head, and it did not help his situation that the sound from above continued shortly thereafter.

"And that is the answer to your question," Hiko concluded to Blue, who was beside himself with mirth. *"*
That was my most embarrassing moment
."

***Britney Spears.

You can take the girl out of the trailer park, but you can't take the trailer park out of the girl.

Her life would've been so much easier had the trailer park used a condom.

***I shall now review a couple movies that I've recently seen.

Mitch is the film critic in these here parts, and I have no intentions of muscling in on his territory in the least. As many of you know, I went to Film School in my youth. Part of the standard course for Film/TV Production majors (such as myself) was to take some film criticism courses. At NYU, there were a plethora of film criticism courses. Hell, you could even major in it if you wanted to - you could walk away from college with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Cinema Studies, which was probably as spectacularly useful as a BFA in Aardvark Literature or Philosophy of Ancient Antarctica.

In my hell, I am forever trapped in a Cinema Studies course, subjected to the inane ramblings of some under-sexed sociopath regarding the innate homosexual content of *Robocop*.

Sadly, yes, that happened.

When I first got to NYU, I was excited about taking these film criticism courses. I surmised that these classes and subsequent discussion would broaden my enjoyment of the medium. Ah, how wrong I was!

The first film criticism class I took was called Language of Film, which sounded innocuous enough. The class title was pompous, but harmless. It could mean anything. Besides, half my classes had trumped-up fancy titles, as if students had any choice but to take them anyway - they were mandatory.

The professor of Language of Film was a man whose name I cannot

recall, but he always wore green. Lots of green. Nothing but green. Green pants, green shirt, green sweater, green shoes. I'm not sure what he did in real life - I heard he had some role in the production of *Friends*

, which should be indictment enough on his character. But I knew nothing of him or the course - just that 300 or so Film Students were to gather in a theater, watch a movie, and then enjoy the discourse of our faithful leader.

The first couple classes were rather drab. The films were good - and I was glad to see them, as they were underground classics, and rather interesting in their own way. But the lecture afterwards was... useless. The professor would just inject conjecture in to every juncture of his analysis. Most of it resulted in me staring at him with a raised eyebrow of incredulity. Then the more sycophantic, servile, fawning parasites would eagerly raise their hands and spew even more ridiculous speculation in an effort to win the damnable praise of the Green One.

Like using Tobasco as a sexual lubricant, Language of Film was not nearly as much fun as I had anticipated.

My breaking point was finally reached when we watched a French black and white film whose name I do not remember at this time. The film centered upon a family and their home. Almost all scenes took place at the house - a nice little home with a pleasant yard and a fountain. It was a decent film - I don't mind subtitles at all - but rather unremarkable.

However, Professor Green did not feel so. He kept talking on and on about the house, questioning people in a leading way, trying to direct them towards some realization, without success. Finally, frustrated, he blurted out "*Don't you see it? The fountain is the house's penis!*"

No, I can honestly say I DIDN'T see it. I was SO FAR from gleaning THAT from the film that we just watched that I closed my notebook, grabbed my backpack, and left the theater, never to return. I had the course syllabus - for the rest of the semester, when everyone else went to class, I went to the school library and watched the films on video, leaving me that extra hour after the end of the film to head to the deli and start on my 40 of Old E whilst the rest of my classmates were subjected to psychological torture.

After that experience, cinema studies had forever lost its intrigue. So please be aware that this is in no way any attempt at actual film criticism. I just want to protect you, my dear readers, from poor filmmaking.

Not all of these are new, as 99% of the movies I watch are rentals.

The Simpson's Movie - I stopped watching the show about 10 years ago, after Conan O'Brien left and it started to get stale and mournfully unfunny. The few recent episodes I have seen have not changed my mind. But perhaps - I told myself - the writers, having the time and topical freedom of a feature-length script, had managed to piece together a work which would be comparable to

T

he Simpson's
of old.

Nay.

Not only was this movie not funny, but it was a rehash of several episodes I've seen before - a couple times. I barely made it all the way through. Save your time and energy.

3:10 To Yuma - I was excited to see this. I love Westerns, and this was touted as the "Best Western since *Unforgiven*" which isn't saying much, since there haven't been many good Westerns since *Unforgiven*. Just the excellent *Dead Man* starring Johnny Depp rushes to mind.

And... blah. Uninteresting, underdeveloped, unremarkable, unbelievable (in the not-believable sense). I forgot about the movie the second the credits started rolling. Not bad - just not good.

Adaptation - I rented this because I'd heard it was good and I liked *Being John Malkovich*, a film by the same director, Spike Jonze. As I was watching it, I became aware that it seemed very familiar. Perhaps it was much like a movie I'd seen before, I reasoned. Whiny self-absorbed screenwriter...

prose-reliant obsessive novelist... earthy wise everyman horticulturist... the whole plot tied together with a flower... who hasn't seen that before?

It soon became apparent that I had more than seen a movie *like* that before. I'd seen

that

actual movie before. That has never happened to me - completely forgetting ever having watched the movie until I watched it again, and still not realizing for sure until the movie was more than half over, at which point I turned it off.

That's just how good it was.

Bee Movie - not complete crap, but crap, nonetheless. It really doesn't warrant any more analysis than that.

Beowulf - interesting. Gory - and if all's you got is gore, at least you got somethin'. But it has more than that. The Beowulf character was a little hard to like, but I've never minded unlikable heroes. And it's hard not to sympathize with his choice to bed the water demonness, played by Angelina Jolie. I mean, sure, she's a demon, but she's really really hot and naked and gold. And she's not asking for anything other than to procure your seed and then have you go away.

You know what they say - once you've had demon...

After that, you've got 18 years until your angry half-demon son returns in the form of an ogre or a dragon to wreak havoc upon your people. So have at it, enjoy king-ship for about 15 years, then go away on a permanent tropical cruise.

Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back - my girlfriend thought it might be funny, and I feel Kevin Smith is hit-or-miss, so we thought we'd take a chance that this might be one of his hits. Smith also directed films such as *Clerks* (which I love), *Chasing Amy* (which had its moments), and *Dogma* (which is one of the worst movies I've ever seen).

Right away, it became apparent that *Jay and Silent Bob* was going to be a lot more like

Dogma

than

Clerks

. Smith's direction has gone straight to shit ever since he fell completely and hopelessly in love with his own dialogue, for reasons unknown. His writing is along the lines of what is being put out by the guys that did

Super Bad

and

Knocked Up

- except those movies are actually funny.

And a whole movie of Jay and Silent Bob? Way too much. They're bit characters. Jay got on my nerves after about 10 minutes, and Silent Bob only exists so that Kevin Smith can get himself on the screen. So,

after about a half hour, we agreed to do ourselves a favor and turn it off.

Death at a Funeral - funny. Really funny. It's been a long time since I've laughed that hard at a movie. It might not be nearly as entertaining on a second viewing - the gags, once revealed, would lose their bite - but certainly worth one watch.

And there it is. I actually recommended a movie. I must be getting soft in my old age.

No Country For Old Men - I had wanted badly to see this for quite some time, so I was overjoyed to find it finally on video. It was quite a good movie, very engrossing, until the end, which was anticlimactic. Now I realize that maybe the message at the end was that - in struggles of this nature - there are no winners. Good guy gets shot by gangsters, the Bad guy gets hit by a car, and neither gets the money. As good as the movie was, I don't see myself watching it again anytime soon, because the payoff was somewhat dissatisfying. All it really did was instill in me the desire to watch a couple of other Coen Brothers movies, like *Miller's Crossing* (one of my favorites of all time), *The Big Lebowski*, or *Fargo*, or *argo* - all movies that I find, as a whole, better than *No Country*.

Still, that makes two recommendations.

Into The Wild - I rented this because I've read the book, and it's a freakin' great book. The movie stays pretty faithful to the story, and despite a melodramatic moment or two, and some possibly unwarranted hero worship of the main character (whom I find interesting, but in the end, just an overly idealistic kid that had the luxury of his simple idealisms due to his comfortable upbringing - essentially, he was me, and that's why I extend him no pity), it works really well. And who knew that in a film starring talents such as William Hurt, Vince Vaughn, and Catherine Keener that ancient Hal Holbrook would steal the show?

My girlfriend was haunted... thought about it for two days afterwards. Definitely worth a watch.

30 Days of Night - the concept is good: in the winter of northern Alaska, the sun is not seen for 30 days in a row. So why not introduce a nice vampire attack? I love vampires and I love horror films, so I went into this with some hopes. That's them falling off a cliff.

Not only is this movie plain stupid, but it's not scary, not gory enough, not interesting, and you have to watch pathetic Josh Hartnett fumble about the screen for almost 2 hours. I knew the movie was on a fast track to Sucktown when they injected the useless romantic interest subplot into existence early on, and it really went nowhere from there. Only recommended to people too cheap to pay for an actual lobotomy.

The Ten - what is this movie, you ask? Yes, most of you haven't heard of it. I have to assume that it was a straight-to-video masterpiece, as I hadn't heard of it either. It comes from the makers of *Wet Hot American Summer*

, a movie which wasn't that great, but had some laughs. My girlfriend liked the cover, because she liked a couple of the actors, so she chose it out. I shrugged and said "

What the hell

."

It's not the worst movie I've ever seen... oh, wait, actually, it might be. This movie is so totally and completely awful that it's almost entertaining. Everyone should have to watch it to marvel at how terrible it is. They should just stand there, agape, in wonderment that the movie could get made, that such decent and recognizable actors should have fallen into it. It's basically ten short films, each about a specific Commandment. Maybe one or two are mildly clever. Another three may or may not be sometimes funny due to sheer stupidity. The rest remind you of skits that you and your friends might make when you're 12 and you're borrowing your dad's video camera and it seems really funny to say the word "boob" a lot.

It was so bad that my girlfriend refused to keep watching it after the 3rd segment. "

You chose this disaster!

" I informed her. "

Yeah

," she replied, "

I thought it was going to be more like Dogma or something.

"

Which, as you know, is hardly a selling point for me. But - hark!
- this movie is *even worse* than *Dogma*, which is an incredible
accomplishment. It really deserves to be on an episode of
Mystery Science Theater 3000
. A train wreck of this proportion should not go unmolested.

Now, if you take the director of *The Ten* and have him do *30
Days of Night*
... then you've got something.

What it is, I don't know. A lawsuit, probably.