

Gobstopper

People either love or hate Blue Smut and the Bloodstock Open Air Festival can only improve after the opening set. Hutton bounds on stage, tattered but glam in blue rags and black leather. Near the blinding edge where his rabid fans cavort, he falls suddenly to his knees. He scrunches over the mic, slashes it at his narrow face with a mad grimace. His deep startling growl fuels the clamor of snarling guitars and the primal howl of adolescent and post-adolescent angst multiplied by 10k.

A plastic bottle with cola still in it sails through the air and tumbles in slow motion against the stage, amber-brown droplets arcing out in a shimmering fan. Hutton howls again. Fans and detractors alike howl back. The lyrics of “Trash What You Got” reverberate loud enough to reach the entire universe. When Hutton reaches the bridge in a fever pitch of frenzied drumming and high-pitched guitar chops, a bevy of water and soda bottles of all sizes begin to rain down. Some hit stage and some fall into the front of the crowd, who re-lob them at the target. Hutton smirks, weaves, and dodges as bottles bounce around him.

Hutton’s chest heaves with the final refrain, howling right into a statement he shouts like an angry headmaster from hell. *If you gotta throw stuff, at least BE ACCURATE, MAN!*

His taunt launches a second wave of bottles and rubbish. A lacy black thong weighted by a big blue lolly lands on the keyboard player’s head. It’s hard to tell if Blue Smut’s detractors or supporters are the instigators. I look around.

Dudes and chicks, I mean, blokes and birds with blue smears painted on their faces and bodies are tossing as much stuff as the other fans in black and gray, who are probably aiming to get Blue Smut off the stage. They look feral, impatient to hear the day’s headliners, Sorry Shades and Big Cherry Pop.

When the bottles hit stage, Hutton flashes the crowd a British two-finger salute. The crowd salutes back, some in the same two-finger V and others with the good old Yankee

middle finger. Tossing his head back, Hutton vomits the trademark scream that opens “Hell Yeah.”

Hell yeah, hell yeah, hell yeah, hell yeah, his supporters chant. The thundering response either intimidates or calms the rubbish tossers. A mosh pit forms in the center of the crowd. The groping, punching, leaping, butting, and hormonal writhing ritual sweeps across the field, a symptom of the metal tune’s invisible virus. As though directed, the rumbling pit parts, pulls back into two groups that dash together in a monstrous body slam. *Hell yeah, hell yeah*, they chant again, jumping up and down like those east African tribesmen who drink blood. If there were cows on the field, I’d half-expect Blue Smutters to do the same. From my safe vantage point in the rear, I see a spate of bloody noses and some girls clutching their blue shaved heads. The two sides part and then rush each other once more, then groan and gloat and leap again.

Hutton drips with sweat and literally rips his shirt off. He tosses it into the crowd as his band changes key, soars from “Hell Yeah” right into “Baby Be Damned.”

This brings a high feminine howl of approval from the Smutter chicks. They raise their painted arms above their heads and give their hips the nasty twist. Hutton invites a few onstage, pulls them up by their arms. They prance like raggedy butterflies in the whirling beams of stage light. Their holey stockings and barely there skirts and blue glittered cleavage beckons the mosh pit of horny males, who swell toward the stage.

Hutton grabs one bird and gives her some mock pelvic thrusts, fingering one of his own nipples. *Oh baby*. He passes her to the bass player, who thrusts the neck of his instrument between her legs, his blurred fingers picking the frenzied bass line just below her crotch. The lead guitarist digs into his chops, strums his way across the stage, miming a spurned lover. When the keyboardist and drummer ram into response, he grabs the bird by her long color-streaked hair, pulls her bum into his Stratocaster, sticks out a very long tongue and rams it into her ear. She grins.

The crowd starts to lob a few more plastic bottles and assorted stuff like glow sticks and lighters at the stage again. I gnaw on a giant rainbow gobstopper, a jawbreaker nearly the size of a UK cricket ball. I stare at it in my sticky fingers, thinking why not? Most people are in front of me and won’t see who did it.

I let it fly, waiting for the big thump to echo from the stage. I wince when it narrowly misses Hutton’s head and lands with a thud against the lead guitarist’s back just as he suddenly turns sideways and bends over a smokin’ riff. He falls to his knees as the gobstopper clatters to the stage.

Oh shit.

The music trails into silence.

Hutton and the other musicians rush around him. Forgotten, the bird and her cohorts drop back into the crowd. Big beefy security guards in yellow reflective helmets and vests ooze from the shadows and surround the stage.

A giant question mark forms in the air above the festival. I pull back into the shadows cast by trees at the rear of the field. The clouds overhead draw close, sucking the sunlight away. The sky darkens, threatening rain.

Everyone but me turns to someone else to ask what's happening. The comments fly around: *Maybe the bird's boyfriend had a problem with Hutton's act. What a clod. Unbelievable. Blue Smut always does stuff like this. Doesn't mean anything.*

No one seems to suspect me.

The seconds tick into minutes. A promoter in a tight, expensive suit and shiny boots tears the mic from Hutton's hand, dishes out his disappointment. *This is completely unacceptable, ladies and gentlemen. What are you thinking? Someone could've been killed by that thing. Didn't you buy a ticket to see these musicians? Buy their CDs? Their t-shirts? Have some respect! When security figures this out, we'll ban the offender from the festival, that is, if we continue at all . . . Can we do this without further violence, people?*

In answer, a few more bottles, empty and full, arc over the heads of the security dudes, who twist their faces and rush forward.

Laughter patters through the crowd like an assembly of unruly public school brats taunting a substitute teacher. *Music, mu-sic, MU-SIC*, they chant.

I hold my breath. I cross my arms over my new UK Yankee t-shirt and look at my feet, trying not to stand out. It cost a shit ton of money to fly across the pond from California – took me a whole year to save up. The festival cost thirty quid, twice as much as I've ever paid for one, over fifty bucks. Will the promoter really cancel?

A goofy-looking bloke with a grey and black striped Cat-in-the-Hat top hat and Sorry Shades T-shirt somehow sneaks past security, climbs some stage scaffolding, and dodges behind the still ranting promoter to pick up my gobstopper. He holds it over his head like a trophy.

A soft snicker issues from the crowd.

The promoter thinks they're mocking him and he launches into a fresh rant. *All those who think this is amusing need to consider the consequences of your actions.* He motions

security forward, his flying monkeys baring their teeth and clenching their fists, looking as if they'd relish a good row.

At the back of the stage, the roly-poly fan imitates the Blue Smut guitarist's big ear lick on the gobstopper, satisfaction smeared all over his fat face. Security pounces and drags him away.

Hutton stalks over, tears the mic from the promoter's soft, manicured hand, and sing-screams like a gorilla on a jungle bender as the lead guitarist picks up his axe and thrashes some thunderous chords.

ALL RIGHT NOW. . .