



THE BRAINIACS

STORY

DENNIS COOPER

"A DISQUIETING GENIUS." — VANITY FAIR

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SHORT STORY

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 HarperCollins e-books

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THE BRAINIACS

It's raining, so a few of us are forced to get stoned. We're famously too intelligent to be a bunch of skateboarders, but that's all we are. Jules lights a joint, and we pass it around until the TV seems deep. We click through everything and compromise on violence. Then we realize it's just some political thing happening in Iraq, but we're too high by now to fight off our intelligence.

"Why don't we do things like that?" Thom asks.

“Do,” Jules says. He always seems the most stoned because he’s the smartest when he’s not.

“Blow ourselves up to kill people,” Thom says. “I don’t mean lowercase us. I mean uppercase us.”

“Because over here we call it suicide bombing,” Jules says. “Over there it’s probably called something that sounds really exciting.”

“Like what?” I ask.

“I don’t know,” Jules says. “We should ask that guy who’s from over there.”

“What guy?” I ask.

“The 7-Eleven guy,” Jules says. “He’s from over there somewhere.”

“You’re racist,” Thom says.

“You’re too stoned to parse out that word,” Jules says. “So I’ll let it pass.”

On our way to the 7-Eleven, we run into Debra and Barb. We’re wet, and they’re dry sitting in one of their cars. Debra’s beauty and serious lack of intelligence fucks with me, but I’m still stoned and can feel a kind of dumbness simulacrum going on.

“Give me head,” I say to her, and the guys go nuts laughing.

“Somebody’s stoned,” Debra says.

“Fuck, dude,” Thom says.

“When it rains, you guys are lost, aren’t you?” she says. “It’s kind of sad.”

“We’re organizing a terrorist cell,” Thom says to them. “You want to join?”

“You guys are spooky,” Debra says.

“I’m serious,” Thom says. “We’re going to get some advice from that Arab guy at the 7-Eleven.”

“You can be our bitches,” I say. “Or we can be your whatever the opposite of bitches would be. Studs.”

“Terrorists against what?” Barb asks. “Us?”

“What’s that thing you’re wearing?” Jules asks. He leans over and studies Barb’s very cool sweatshirt.

“It’s Denny Wear,” she says.

“It’s interesting,” Jules says. “Where’d you get it?”

“On Melrose,” she says.

“That’s very, very cool,” Jules says. “It conforms to your identity with this weird perfection that’s kind of at odds with you.”

“Let’s go with them,” Barb tells Debra. “What the fuck.”

Debra looks from her to me. “You’re serious,” she says. “You’re not just stoned.”

“About what?” I say.

“About being terrorists, obviously,” she says.

“Yeah,” I say. “And about the other thing too. Just remember this because I won’t. You know what I said you should do when I first got here? It’s a legitimate and sincere request that has no expiration date. Even when I’m sober and distant again, the request stands. Don’t be afraid to say, ‘Let’s do that thing you wanted to do when you were stoned.’ I won’t laugh at you or get sarcastic. I’ll want it. I’ll somehow unlock my intelligence and make it happen. This part of me is always there, it’s just scared of rejection. Wow, I’m going on and on. I think this pot is laced with something. Thom?”

“What?” Thom says.

“I think this pot is laced with something,” I say.

Thom shuts his eyes and studies his stonedness. “You’re right,” he says.

I look at Debra again. “Never mind,” I say. “I’m untrustworthy. I want head now or never.”

“Never,” she says.

“You’re being evil,” I say, and hug myself. I feel incredibly laced with something wrong. “Just forget it.”

We had to go sit for a while and let the scary lace inside us fade out. Since we’re close to the stupid half-pipe that the city was forced to build for our skateboarding brethren and us, we end up sitting there watching these younger, less smart, better skateboarders trick around with their boards. I don’t know about my friends, but the whole sham of us as skateboarders is so clear and crisp to me. After a while, I have to ask the younger guys for their opinion. They’ve seen us skate.

“Hey, any of you guys,” I yell. They’ve taken a break and are sitting quietly along the pipe’s edge thinking dumb, sporty thoughts.

“What,” one of them yells back.

“We suck, right?” I yell. “I mean as skateboarders. Don’t worry, we won’t beat you up. We’re too stoned.”

“You seriously do, dude,” the boy yells. His friends are just staring off vacantly like they’re stoned, but I think they’re just stupid and so their eyes are de-energized.

“Why?” I yell.

“In every way,” he yells back.

“You’re not being ironic, right?” I yell.

“Ironic,” he yells in this voice I think is making fun of my voice, which I guess is full of my laughable intelligence.

“Okay, got it,” I yell. “That hurt. Nice one.”

About the Author

DENNIS COOPER is the author of the George Miles Cycle, an interconnected sequence of five novels that includes *Closer*, *Frisk*, *Try*, *Guide*, and *Period*. His post-George Miles Cycle novels include *My Loose Thread*, *The Sluts*, which won France's Prix Sade and the 2005 Lambda Literary Award for Best Men's Fiction, and his most recent work, the highly acclaimed *God, Jr.* He divides his time between Los Angeles and Paris.

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