

Abracapocus


By Big Pink

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Summary: Abracapocus, or hocuscadabra? Dean can't keep it straight to save his life, driving Sam to distraction as they deal with a looney Count who thinks he's a vampire. Loosely based on the Bugs Bunny classic, Transylvania 6-5000, which you used to be able to access on Youtube, but now you can't (sorry -- I was going to post a link here, really). Oneshot, complete.

Ratings/warnings: It's based on a children's cartoon, people. It's gen. Sortof. With loads of swearing. Don't you think Bugs Bunny would swear, given half a chance?

Count Suckitup: I don't own these characters, who either legally or culturally belong to CW, Kripke, Mel Blanc, Warner Brothers, or hell, Satan himself for all I know. I just wind them up and let 'em go.

Feliz navithanks:  [lemmypie](#) generated much of the mayhem of this one; I wish I could bottle the crack that flowed from that woman's mouth. These paltry words are only the tip of the iceberg. [jmm001](#), as usual, offered wry observations and pointed out the correct spelling of such difficult words as 'gotcha'. The dead cat's for you, JM.

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The fifth time Dean said it, Sam threw the dead cell phone at his head.

Dean, not even looking, caught it mid-flight and choked he was laughing that hard. "Walla Walla Washington!" he shouted around the wide dorksmile and glottal stoppage. Put some English on it and spun the phone onto the dashboard where it lay like a gutted fish.

"It's not that funny," Sam muttered, slouching in his seat, spreading the mauled Rand McNally across his knees, trying to plot out the best route over seven different states. "Give it back."

"Thought you said it was toast. Shoulda ponied up for the full-meal deal, Sam," Dean returned, eyes flicking from moving road to wipers going frantic, to mutilated atlas, to grumpy brother and back. Didn't disparage Sam's useless wireless plan any more than that.

His lips, though.

His lips pursed and almost made the 'wuh' sound that would have been his last. At that moment Sam had a knife in his jacket pocket and the Glock was in the glovebox and he was more than willing to use either one of them. Walla Walla, like a fucking mantra. An electric cattle prod. If Sam didn't get out of this car, if he didn't get away from his brother, right now, he was going to...turn up the music. Fucking Aerosmith, didn't care, it was better than Walla Walla Washington, Walla Walla Washington over and over and...

Now the words were dancing though his head, not the sound, but the graceful 'Ls' and the slightly ridiculous 'Ws' and there, right by the Oregon border. Their dubious destination, parsed from John Winchester's super-secret coordinates, beamed to Dean's phone more than four hours ago. Maybe to Sam's phone too, but since his had stopped working just about the same time they'd pulled out after lunch at a suburban Scranton strip mall, Sam had no way of knowing.

Dad, telling them something in that oblique, shuttered way. Trust him to never come right out and say something, not unless it was ‘fuck you’.

According to the atlas, Walla Walla Washington was way far away. Three days drive if they went at it hard. The coordinates, however, were just numbers, not signifying degree of threat or alarm. How hard would Dean push it? Over the outlandish theatrics of Joe Perry’s guitar – yeah, dream on, asshole – Sam grabbed Dean’s phone from where it precariously balanced on a half-eaten tube of pizza flavored Pringles. Flipped it open, meaning to dial fucking Acme Wireless, would at least try to find out whether or not it was a service probl –

No light. No signal. No nothing.

Dean reached over, spared a glance at the Pennsylvania adopt-a-highway sign in case it said something stupid – the all-time favorite was the SPCA sign they’d once seen right next to the body of a dead cat – and grabbed his phone out of Sam’s lax grip.

“Who are you trying – “ then his brow rumped mild. “What the fuck?”

Sam sighed. They had different service providers. How both went out at the same time was beyond him. Or, not quite. He bent across the back of the seat, reached a long arm down to the laptop on the floor behind him, suspecting – as always – that Dean was two seconds away from smacking him or throwing him all the way in the back, since he hated it when Sam squirmed around in the car, always had.

Laptop retrieved, he tried to find a signal.

No signal.

They weren’t two hours from Pittsburgh. How could everything suddenly...

“Nuclear war? Tom Cruise and those bitchin’ tripods?” Dean suggested, following Sam’s thoughts, if not his gravity. Hard to be serious when you’d been chanting Walla Walla for the past fifteen miles, ever since Sam had worked out where the coordinates vectored.

They pulled over at a gas station diner, and while Dean filled up the Impala, Sam wandered into the expectant and vacant restaurant, shedding rain and filling his nostrils with the scent of toast and smoke and the sound of anything that wasn’t Dean and alliterative geography.

Two elderly women occupied the space behind the counter, one refilling salt shakers, the other staring at him, a damp cloth in one arthritis-stiff hand, chicken claw pink.

“Ooh,” one of them said. Sam wasn’t sure which, since their lips hadn’t moved. Like a circus trick. He smiled, not with his teeth, and sat at a table. Hoped Dean wouldn’t actually make it in, but was soon joined. Dean threw a smile and a wave to the old biddies and they made murmurings behind the counter, weird unsettled noises like he’d banged a stick against the side of a pigeon cote.

“Coffee?” Dean smarmed, smiling again, and wiped rain from his face. “Maybe a menu?” Dinner already, though Sam wasn’t hungry. Dean drank coffee at any time during the day, made no matter to him.

Sam waved away the proffered cup, polited around for iced tea instead, was handed a laminated vintage menu with all the prices covered over in a series of stickers. If he peeled away one stack, he was sure he'd find out that a grilled cheese sandwich had once cost a quarter. Now a deluxe platter was five-fifty.

"What a delicious young pair of creatures you are!" their waitress burred, claws spasmodically drawing together the halves of her worn cardigan.

Dean might know how to respond to that. Sam would leave it to him. It was nominally female, wasn't it?

The Smile. Aw-shucks, just came back from a ball game, ma'am, got any grub? That smile. Worked to a point.

"Scuse me," Dean called after his order of ham steak and gravy. The ladies turned in unison, magpie interest bright. "Do you have a phone? I didn't see one outside. My brother needs to make a call."

"Oooh," one of them said, and again Sam couldn't tell which one had said it. Then the one behind the counter moved, pushed the bag of salt under the counter, a precautionary measure. Against what? Sam asked himself, recognizing the twinned concepts of 'salt' and 'protection'.

"No," said the other one, though how Sam knew it was the other one was pure instinct. "Not for long distance calls." The one was talking to the other; the Winchester brothers might as well not have been in the room at all.

"But it works, your phone?" Sam asked, not really caring how demented that sounded. They were a little past demented as a barrier to conversation.

The ladies looked at each other, as though to decide on the best answer, like a pair of contestants on a game show. Can I phone my lifeline? One nodded. "Yes."

"Oh, Emily," the other said, and Sam decided that they were sisters, just by the tone of her voice. "Can't they? Please?"

Dean was making faces across the table from Sam, where the sisters couldn't see him. Sam bit the inside of his mouth and wouldn't look at him.

"Oh, no, Aggie." And wagged her head slowly back and forth, a sawing motion meant to comfort as much as anything else. "Remember the last one? She called her boyfriend in Philadelphia. Cost us almost five dollars when the bill came in."

Sam cleared his throat, kicked Dean savagely under the table. A grunt, and then Dean kicked back. Sam jumped and the ladies looked expectantly at him. Pain flared up his shin where Dean's stupid Australian boot had connected. "Any other phone around here?"

Again with the long pause. Into which Dean said, "Or dinner? I'd settle for dinner." Thought he felt like it, Sam refrained from kicking him again.

"The hotel," one of them said. Aggie, maybe. "Counting House Castle. They'll have a phone." What was this? Rural Pennsylvania in the 1930s?

Emily shrugged and shuffled off into the kitchen, maybe a result of Dean's mildly belligerent grouse about food. Aggie, swathed in a combination of rainbow polka dots encased in pink lambswool, edged

closer. Intrigued by dangerous animals, perhaps. She had a Halloween pin on her cardigan; if you pulled the skeleton's leg, his head would light up. Sam had seen them before, usually at pharmacy checkout counters in October. It was late April.

"The hotel is very fancy. Rooms set you back some."

Dean shrugged, eyed the coffee decanter in her hand. Surely he hasn't finished his coffee – but he had, and Aggie smiled as she refilled his mug. "Won't be needing a room," Dean grinned, nodding his thanks and bringing the cup to his mouth.

"Oh, yes you will," Aggie jollied back, and Sam saw some of Dean's shiny confidence slip a little. "Once you see the place, you won't want to leave." She fussed with the cardigan buttons, shaped like open umbrellas. "He's a very proper innkeeper, Mr. Sanger, has all the modcons." She leaned forward and Sam smelled lavender. "Very handsome. Even Emily says so."

A bell dinged on the kitchen pass-through, Aggie's sister proficiently and unnecessarily calling out 'order up!' chipper as a Pentecostal camp leader. Aggie bustled over and Sam overheard a tepid argument about whether or not the ham should have a side of green beans with it. Don't bother, he felt like telling them. Double the fucking potatoes and Dean'll lick the pattern off the plate.

"How bad you want to use a phone?" Dean slurped around the coffee, knocking some into the saucer. He'd kept his leather coat on; it was cold in the diner, though warm enough to cause the large plate glass window to fog up. It was getting dark outside, and not just from the rain.

"I don't need to use a phone."

"Seem awful keen."

"I'm not keen." The iced tea was too sweet, cloying. And too cold. He suddenly didn't want it.

"You're keen. You're always keen." Green stare glancing up, gunshot smooth and back out the window, grin pulling the lips, lupine. "Keener." Dean hadn't said Walla Walla once since they'd come in, but Sam had thought it a hundred times. Goddamn Dean.

Sam shrugged, capitulating, leaned elbows on the table, all angles and edge. "Mr. Sanger has all the modcons, Dean. And he's very handsome. Just your type. Wouldn't want to disappoint your fans," and smiled up as Aggie placed a surprisingly robust grilled cheese sandwich on his paper placemat. Dean must have half a pig on his plate. Jesus. No wonder they'd raised their prices.

Dean grinned Christmas big and Aggie nodded. Job well done.

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Over the years, Dean had seen a fair amount of false advertising: the Rest E-Z Motel, situated right beside the railroad tracks outside Kalispell, Montana. The Fountain of Youth Inn, which backed onto a cemetery so haunted Dean had slept with earplugs just to ignore the wailings of the elderly ghosts from the retirement home that had burned to the ground years earlier. The Shady Nook Motor Hotel, smack dab in the middle of Death fucking Valley, which had added a truly punitive insult by providing broken a/c units in every room. Even the cactus out front had perished from the heat.

So the name ‘Counting House Castle’ didn’t exactly raise expectations, despite reportedly having all the modcons. Whatever the fuck those were. He eased the Impala up the hill, dutifully following the signs from the highway up the rocky scree, full dark now, belly full of ham so salty three beers and a bottle of Mountain Dew wouldn’t be enough to quench it. He hoped the Counting House Castle had a vending machine. Or a bar. He knew that this wasn’t going to be another Bright Stop Traveler’s Rest in Peoria Illinois, where cockroaches bigger and faster than Hot Wheels had made off with his Big Mac.

This was a quality place and way beyond their means. Knew that from the delicately painted signs, discreetly encouraging them in the right direction. Nobody went to that kind of trouble for a shithole.

They were between towns, between counties, between jobs. Just between and goddamnit if he didn’t feel like driving all night, straight through to...grinned hugely, just about said it again, swallowed it, didn’t want to whip Sam into one of those fucking frenzies that Dean was sometimes obliged to bring him to, just to prove that Sam wasn’t all that smart and logical. Be nice, be nice, be nice. However, his smile grew until it hurt his face and he knew Sam was looking.

Not going to. Just...not. Find a phone, figure out this service area glitch and then just hoof it, Sam can sleep in the back, I’ve had enough coffee to fuel a space shuttle launch.

Then, out of the slashing rain, up on the hillside, far steeper than Dean had credited, lights shining from an honest-to-god castle. A goddamn castle, with turrets and crenellations and shit. Glowing colored glass and parking spaces on the barbican, the main -- what the hell was that? A drawbridge? -- gate closed, but a little postern gate still open with a tasteful sign that said ‘lobby’ hanging above it.

Well, yeah, that shuts me up, Dean thought.

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Mr. Sanger was seventeen different types of weird, starting with his bushy black hair, extending down to his frighteningly pale face and seaglass blue eyes trapped behind a pair of glasses so thick Sam thought that maybe they’d been purchased from the trick and joke store, that Mr. Sanger would take off the frames and his nose would come with them. High forehead, long tapering hands fit for Carnegie Hall concerts and the shiniest, blackest shoes Sam had ever seen in his life.

Sam knew weird from weird. Their demon-hunting father had hauled his kids across the country countless times, had sidelined in ghosts and every other supernatural creature that ever took shaky breath or equivalent thereof. This Mr. Sanger? Oh, yeah, all kinds of strange.

The handsome he didn’t see, but reasoned – as Sanger ushered them in, asking them about the weather, where they’d eaten, where on earth did you find such a wonderful car? – that an elderly pair of myopic sisters trapped in a gas station diner since the Eisenhower administration wouldn’t be putting too fine a point on traditional concepts of male beauty.

Sanger looked like a British glam rocker gone vaguely to seed, money all spent, but with a lingering taste for baroque chandeliers and trompe l’oeil ceiling frescos. And gin martinis, which were offered almost immediately. Sam slid a glance to Dean, who stood in the middle of the darkened lobby, gazing up into the lofty blackness, an expression of stunned bewilderment on his face. Gin. Right.

“Ah, really, a phone, that’s all – “ Sam whispered. It was a whispering sort of place.

Sanger waved one hand in the air dismissively. "It's low season. Humor me. Visitors are so rare." Oh and that was bound to make them feel right at home.

Dean roused himself out of his flummox, gathered his wits as though they'd fallen out a hole in his pocket. "Yeah, a phone."

Ooh, brilliant recovery, Dean.

"It's past seven o'clock," Sanger suggested and Sam knew where this was going.

"We can still make it to Pittsburgh," Sam returned, looking to Dean for confirmation, agreement, support – c'mon Dean, anything – and instead got –

"Nice place you have here," and Dean blinked hard. Ah, no, Sam knew that look, that blink. Dean was thinking. Dean was suspicious. Dean wasn't going to go anywhere until he figured out what was wrong here. Dean wasn't going to pull an all-nighter and floor it to...shit, Sam couldn't even say it.

"I have plenty of rooms. Why don't you stay here for the night? I'll give you a favorable rate, same as any Motel 6."

Fuck, and Dean was nodding and Sam could see the bounce in his brother's step as he followed Sanger into the deep darkness of the vaulted lobby. Happy enough, spoiling for a rumble. Let's get to the bottom of this particular box of Froot Loops, Sam, find the prize.

On the way to their rooms, they were shown the dining room (original satin wallpaper), the ballroom (cornices and carved plaster ceiling gilded in 14 carat gold), the library (many volumes first editions from the seventeenth and eighteenth century), and a room that Sanger suggested was a former 'convalescent ward' but Sam didn't exactly know what he meant by it and certainly didn't want to find out.

"You inherit this place?" Dean asked into the gloom and the dust, Sanger's back bobbing unerringly up the flagstone staircase, finally finding a toggle switch at the top, which flared sconce lamps all the way down the third floor corridor. Oak and stone and velvet and old cracked portraits of faces no reasonable person would want to claim as an ancestor. The lamp funnels were crizzled greenglass, worn and old and remarkably intact.

Sanger turned, smiled, folding only the far edges of his mouth like a piece of burning paper, insubstantial and vaguely harmful. "Not really. I brought it over from Romania, stone by stone."

Great. One of these old European families inbred until everyone ended up either albino or drooling. This one probably had enough recessive genetic material to keep the human Genome project going for decades. Sam prodded Dean in the spine with one finger and Dean took a step back, pressing a heel down on the tip of Sam's big toe. Do not mess with my groove, Sam, that meant. Funny how 'trust me' was telegraphed through mashing appendages.

"Musta cost a fortune," Dean continued, keeping the conversation going, face arranged to bland interest, a face that usually fooled no one.

Maybe even with glasses an inch thick, Sanger couldn't make out facial expressions all that well. Maybe he was buying it.

Maybe he just didn't care that Dean was conman smooth.

Uh-oh, Sam thought, distinctly.

“Oh, fortunes are easy to come by.” Sanger opened one door, held the key out to Dean before snapping on the lights. “Blood. Blood is not.”

“Hard to keep up the family name, huh?” Dean snatched the old-fashioned key and walked right past him. Sam, on the other hand, was practically diving for the floor, wondering where Dean kept the crucifixes in the trunk, maybe he’d seen one under the half-eaten package of communion wafers that Dean had broken open and spread Cheez Whiz on when he’d run out of Ritz crackers.

Sanger shrugged and chuckled under his breath, friendly in the extreme. Then Sam took a good look at the room.

Two four-poster beds draped in dark velvet, narrow strips of hardwood forming Victorian geometry on the floor, a large stone fireplace big enough to roast a horse in, a whole sitting area beyond a kitchen bigger than Sam’s first Stanford apartment.

If Dean was impressed, he hid it remarkably well, wandering in, hands jammed in coat pockets, eyes roaming the fabric-covered walls. Sat on the nearest bed heavily, like he was testing it out. Like he was an advance scout for Fodor’s or something. Smiled incandescently at Sanger, ignored Sam’s scowl with practiced ease.

“This’ll do just fine, Mister...Sanger, was it?” He stretched, finally took off his coat. “I’m really fatigued.” Pronounced the ten dollar word like a moron, grinned again, this time at Sam, who kept from rolling his eyes, but only barely.

“Count Sanger, actually,” and his smile was kindling to something bigger. “Not that it matters in the New World.”

“Yep, here in America, all the sinners saints,” Dean fired back. Was he trying to antagonize every person he met? With classic rock lyrics? If it bothered their host, Sam couldn’t recognize it, and Sanger wished them well, bowed out the room like it was a stage set, kept a steady stare on Dean. “Have a good sleep. Rest is good for the blood.”

As the door snicked shut, Sam leaned against it, crossed his arms, raised his eyebrows. “You finished? Or do you want to kill some troubadours before they reach Bombay?”

Dean bounced himself off the high mattress, sauntered over to the kitchen, jiggled a switch on the toaster oven. Frowned. “Doesn’t work.” Crossed over to the bed, searched through his jacket and pulled his cell phone out. Experimentally stabbed a few numbers, then shook his head.

“There’s no phone in here, Dean,” Sam observed. “What are you thinking?” Always a dangerous question.

Dean shrugged, kept walking the perimeter of the room. “Dunno. Something’s not right, though. I mean,” and he touched one cut glass crystal dangling from the elaborate table lamp, set it swinging, “there’s no TV in here. What kind of hotel doesn’t have freakin’ TV? Modfuckingcons my ass. Let’s take a look around.”

“Shouldn’t we be heading for...” stopped, met Dean’s dancing eyes, “...for the coordinates Dad gave us?”

“Dad wouldn’t want us to fall asleep at the wheel, Sam,” and he picked at an edge of the fabric wallpaper.

“No sense in getting fatigued,” which drew Dean’s attention along with a warm smile.

“You just don’t know how to have any fun on the job, Sam.”

Was he serious? This job was many things, had its perks, but fun? Fun wasn’t one of them. “C’mon,” Sam said, “we should get the gear from the car, just in case.”

And Dean looked as though ‘just in case’ was the best part of ‘fun on the job’.

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Like an overeager Scout on the first day of camp, Sam brought in the holy water, several crucifixes (Dean had three that he was aware of) and the handgun that went along with the most recently thrown silver bullets. Just in case.

Yee-haw, Dean loved the unplanned scenario. He didn’t know what kind of freak Count Sanger was, not yet, but he was going to find out. Walla Walla could wait awhile. Sam was on the bed, which was long enough to actually accommodate his NBA size, and every so often Dean sniped a glance at him, watching what he was going to do. Actually, forget the unplanned scenario. He loved winding Sam up and seeing which way he’d spring, fully-loaded.

And this Count Suckula? So not a threat. Probably wanted to get into his pants was all. Dean was picky, not stupid. Smiling inanely was not the worst thing he’d done for a cheap bed, not by a long shot. And Sam, stuck between saying ‘I want to go to Walla Walla’ and having to hang out with Count Bangagong, had opted for the latter. Chicken.

“He probably thinks he’s a vampire,” Sam said flatly, which was how Dean knew he was still mad. This was the sort of thing that ought to have made Sam curious, which he’d get to eventually.

Dean didn’t look at him, just stripped down to his skivvies and a white t-shirt. Stood for a minute, then shrugged, knowing that it would make Sam mental as anything. “Maybe he is.”

Sam snorted through his nose. “There’s no such thing as vampires.”

“I don’t know. Romanian Count? Jesus, how much more vampirey do you want?”

“‘Vampirey’ is not a word, Dean.” Look up, look up, c’mon. Brown eyes up, locked with his. Grin. Gotcha. Put on some sweats, swung the key around his finger.

Big sigh and Sam came off the bed. “So what are you going to do? Sweet-talk him into telling you all his vampirey stories while you poke a wooden pencil through his heart? Cause I’m pretty sure offing a hotel owner for questionable taste in fast-mouthed boys is still an indictable offense.”

Dean was going to get whiplash from following Sam’s shoddy logic. “Get some sleep, Sam, I’m going to the…” let it hang like a lobbed rocket, “library.”

“It isn’t even nine o’clock, Dean! I’m not a three-year-old!” Sam grabbed his notebook, a pencil – excellent, so they were prepared in case Count Dragqueenla really was a vampire – and stood beside him. “No TV,” Sam pointed out, a petulant challenge.

Not so smart, not so logical after all, right Sammy? My work here is done. Dean opened the door for Sam and they retraced their steps through the darkened hallways until they reached the library door.

A fire burned in the grate, which was a lucky thing since the lights flickered once, then went out. Outside, the wind howled, splattering rain against the window hard as thrown pebbles. By firelight, the brothers looked at each other, Sam’s jaw working back and forth.

“Aren’t you glad you weren’t in the middle of a really great TV show?” Dean just couldn’t help himself, wondered if he’d get Sam so mad he’d swing a punch. Or leave, which was worse, of course. Took all the fun out of it.

Sam raised his eyebrows so they disappeared into that god-awful hair, which Dean just couldn’t comment on, even he didn’t have the nerve, and turned his back, fingers brushing along the spines of hardback bound volumes. The light was so dim there’s no way he would be able to read anything, was just wanted to let Dean know he was being a jerk.

The candelabra on the mantelpiece was unlit, so Dean dipped one candle into the fire’s flame, lit the rest, brought it over as a peace offering. Holding it up, they could both read: Phantasmagoria of Hell. Heksen en werktijden. Le streghe ed ortografa. Bannbuch. Libro del encanto. Selected one called Buch von magie buchsabeirt, just because it had a death’s head on the spine.

The book was white and heavy, might have been bound in rawhide it was so unyielding. The paper’s edges were gilded and the typeface bled darkly onto the thick handmade paper. Dean pushed the candelabra into his brother’s hands, flipped through the pages. Lots of woodcuts of the sort John Winchester would clip and save in his journal.

Dean put the book back onto the shelf. “Likes his demonology,” he said softly, scanning the shelves. Sam might know what to make of the Latin titles, and maybe the Spanish ones, probably knew enough German and Dutch to figure out they weren’t Harlequin romances. Selected another one, this time with a naked woman on the spine, grinned fiercely at Sam, who was so stunned by the sheer selection, he wasn’t mad anymore.

Must be losing my touch.

Kirjalta taika. Something like that. So old the letters had worn away. Flipped inside. An introduction in the weirdest English he’d come across since he’d spent that night at the Ozark Circle Dancers and Fiddlers Society charity supper, looking for a lead on a headless accordion player.

“The Sami are a damned people, given to witchcraft and evilness of the worst kynde.” Looked up. “Hmmm. Sounds promising.” He took the book over to the fireside chair, leaving Sam to peruse the walls. Dean had seen books like this before, precursors to modern day anthropologists and folklorists, righteous academics recording a culture even as they eradicated it. And the stuff they loved best? Oh, yeah, sexual deviancy.

Dean hoped there were pictures.

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Not many were in English, and Sam's eyes, accustomed to language he didn't have to spell out to understand, immediately gravitated towards the few volumes: A Primer on Hecubus, Twelve Tales of Daemons Moste Fowle, and a slender red book called simply, Spells. He used one finger to pull it out in exactly the manner a rare book antiquarian had once warned him damaged spines. Screw Count Sanger. Sam had never liked old dirty men who looked at his brother that way, even though Dean sometimes – shit, often – invited it. Dean would flirt with Jesus on the cross.

Got stuck on one woodcut, a picture of a bat, thin lines radiating from it, covering medieval townsfolk underneath, scythes and stooks of hay in disarray. Peered closer, but couldn't make it out. He rearranged himself at the table, brought the candelabra closer, wondering what Sanger would do if he set the book on fire.

“Hey,” he called out softly, barely above the rain, trying to get his brother's attention from the book he had open on his lap. Dean had that half-smile he sometimes wore when he stumbled across a porn channel that he didn't have to pay for. “Hey.”

Attention, but only barely. Brows quirked – what?

“You ever hear of a werebat?”

A little snort of amusement. “You shittin' me?”

“Well, werewolves, we know about.” Oh yeah, all about. No point even thinking about it, because they'd just passed a full moon and the Count wasn't exactly displaying any of the signs that he'd been through an episode. “But this says there are other kinds of transformations, ones that don't rely on the moon cycle.”

Dean reluctantly left his book face down over the chair's arm – another blasphemy, according to the antiquarian – and came to look over Sam's shoulder. Werebats. Hostile, aggressive, stupid. “What's the worst an angry bat could do?” Dean asked the obvious. “I mean, besides getting stuck in your hair?” Glanced at Sam's hair knowingly, but didn't say anything else.

“Well, don't you think that's a little freaky? Someone changing into a bat?”

Dean scowled. “Freaky isn't an indictable offense.” Grinned. “Or something like that.”

Sam read the rest of the section. “Wait. Right here. They infect cattle.”

Dean threw up his hands. “Oh, dear lord, now we're saving cattle. Can I go back to my book? Because the Sami apparently can fuck for, like, days, according to this priest.”

“No, they infect cattle so that they....”

“Turn into bats? Call the USDA, Sam.”

“No, that's not the problem, Dean. The cattle eventually die, either from blood loss or tainted blood. And then people start dying. But werebats aren't people who turn into bats. They're bats who turn into people.” He looked up, couldn't quite tell if Dean was serious yet. The lure of horny Sami sexploits was still strong.

“So? “

Almost there. “They have very bad eyesight. Good hearing. Live for a helluva long time.”

Dean looked past Sam, mouth falling open a little as the wheels turned. Focused incrementally, gaze came back to Sam. Cocked one eyebrow like a gun. “Why should we be worried?”

“Feeds exclusively on human or cattle blood,” Sam glanced down at the book, “and neutral spirits –“

“Like vodka.”

“Try gin. And Tanqueray aside, I think we top the menu.” Had his own sly grin. “Well, Rocky, I think you top Dr. Frank-n-Furter’s menu, not me.”

Dean grimaced and rubbed one elbow, maybe a little cold. He was barefoot and the library floor was stone. He looked thoughtful, of all things. “How d’you kill a werebat? Other than shooting it, smashing its head in or sticking it through the heart with a pencil?”

Sam shook his head. “You don’t. You seal it in its original bat form.”

“In the bat cave? At the same bat time, same bat channel?” Sam must have had some look on his face at that, because Dean took a step back. “Sorry. Jesus, touchy, aren’t you?”

Sam would have patiently explained why he was touchy, but that would have involved actually having patience, and saying that place name that he wasn’t going to say. Instead, he tapped the book. “Pretty straightforward, really. Just incant the spell and the werebat reverts to its true shape. Say it three times and the bat’s locked in place.” and he read the words out, cadences very tight and musical, almost deceptively simple, the first three lines repeating, the fourth longer and more complex.

Dean tried it, mangled it badly for all its simplicity. Sam shook his head. “That’s not it. Try again. No telling what’ll happen if you don’t get it right.”

Dean shifted from foot to foot, visibly irritated. “I don’t need to know it. You’re gonna be standing there with the book, saying the words Sam. Relax.” He picked up the treatise on the sexual habits of the Sami and closed it regretfully. “If we waste this sucker, whaddaya say to mining some of these books?”

Normally Sam would have been happy that Dean was showing any interest in books, but this time he shook his head. “Maybe just this one. These others?” Gestured to the hundred or so volumes lining the walls. “Might be valuable to a rare book dealer, but for us?” Shrugged. “Fairy tales.”

They drifted out the library and down the hallway, Sam with the candelabra, mostly so they could see where they were going but also because Sam didn’t quite trust himself to remember the spell exactly and wanted to be ready. Dean started humming under his breath.

He could carry a tune when he put his mind to it, especially if it wasn’t some incomprehensibly-lyriced thrash-metal screamfest, and so Sam recognized the melody immediately. Incongruous as Aggie’s light-up skeleton pin.

“Feliz navidad,” Dean hummed, picked up the rhythm as he went, “Feliz Navidad. Feliz Navidad, Prospero año y felicidad.”

Dear god, Sam had to stop him before he got to the English chorus, because Dean always sung that at the top of his fucking lungs -- “Dean!” Sam hissed, and Dean’s head whipped around, actually alarmed. Sam stared at him. “What the fuck are you doing?”

“Singing. Got that stupid song in my head.”

Why? Didn’t even need to say it, whole face must have been one huge outraged question mark. And Dean sighed, maybe a little chagrined. Started singing again, but inserted new words, Latin. An incantation. “Novo mutatio, novo mutatio. Novo mutatio chiropterus commoror.” And that was so fucking wrong that Sam was momentarily stunned, utterly speechless.

After a long moment, he asked, “How did you get through high school? Didn’t you ever have to remember all the state capitals? Periodic table of elements? A Shakespearean sonnet?” Dean might be able to remember the phone number of just about every girl he’d ever slept with, could rattle off the Royals starting line-up 1967 through to today and their RBIs, but he had always been awful at languages.

“What?”

Sam shook his head. “Just let me say the words, okay? No more mnemonic tricks. God only knows what you’ll fuck up.” Shook his head. “Feliz navifuckingdad.”

Dean smiled tightly, his fuck-you smile, and gestured for Sam and his candelabra to carry on. Sanger had intimated that he’d be in the kitchen – just in case either of you get hungry – which was on the first floor.

It wasn’t fair, really, Sam thought, holding the light high, momentarily worried that he’d miss his step in the gloom. The stairs were steep and stone, unforgiving. It wasn’t fair to throw that language thing in Dean’s face. He was pretty sure that Dean probably had some undiagnosed learning disability, some dyslexic miswiring, which led to his massive disinclination to learn even the littlest bit of Latin, to always be drawn to the pictures not the letters. It was one explanation, certainly, and one that Sam had always sort of liked, since it meant that Dean couldn’t help himself. Better that than thinking Dean did it on purpose.

He sighed, but didn’t look back, concentrated on the shadowy steps. “I’m sorry, dude,” he said softly. “I shouldn’t make fun. Setting it to music is probably just as valid as anything else.” When Dean didn’t answer, Sam was sure he’d hit a nerve. Great. “So what I’m saying is that just because memorizing how words go together is completely easy for me doesn’t mean it should be easy for you. You’re not dumb, Dean,” no matter what that tenth grade English Composition teacher had written in one scathing report card, “No, you’re just--“ tripped over ‘differently abled’ to settle on, “special. You have your strengths. I wouldn’t worry that you have to repeat some things over and over,” like certain town names. “You know, they call that ‘stimming’ in some of the literature, like when autistic kids draw circles for eight hours straight --“ This probably wasn’t coming out right.

He chanced a glance back into the gloom, worried that he’d see Dean’s stricken face, or worse, completely pissed off at his little brother’s patronizing tone. Sam saw neither. Saw neither because he couldn’t see Dean, not anywhere. He retraced his steps, back up the stone stairs to the third floor.

“Dean?” he called out softly, but didn’t hear anything in return.

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Those tricky Victorians, Dean thought, fingering the brass lightswitch plate. Always had to make everything sexual, those repressed motherfuckers. The full roundness of the plate, the nub in the centre, press it, squeeze it, flick it to the side and it would turn on the light.

Sam's candelabra was bobbing away as he descended the stairs, mumbling something about 'memorizing' and 'literature' and Dean was so not going to pay any attention to that Stanford shit. Not when there was thinly-disguised breast-shaped switches to flip.

Couldn't resist.

Had to grab onto the dead wall sconce as the whole floor shifted, turned, and pivoted in a sharp circle, whirling him into whatever space was on the other side of the wall. It all happened so fast that he didn't have time to open his mouth, could only hang on and hope for the best.

He'd give those Romanian engineers their props; the mechanism was sudden and silent. Dean blinked into the absolute blackness. Goddamn goofy Eurotrash and their pretentious haunted castles with asinine hidden passages.

Knew that Sam wouldn't be able to hear him through a few feet of solid rock, which meant he had to find a door. That wasn't the easiest thing in the world, considering he couldn't even see his hand in front of his face.

"There you are," a voice suddenly slid into the space, helping Dean to visual the room's dimensions: probably no more than twenty feet by ten, ceilings probably nine feet. A carpet, fabric walls. Sound didn't travel too far. If there was a window it was shuttered. And he couldn't hear the rain, which meant it had stopped or the window was facing into a sheltered area. Facing south, into the quadrangle, maybe.

Then, of course, had to face the fact that he was alone unarmed in a pitch black room with a horny werebat that wanted to jump his bones and probably suck his blood. Or something. Tried very hard not to laugh.

"Right here," he said and immediately tried to flick the switch again. Nothing happened, and he took one step away from where he'd heard Sanger's voice, keeping his back to the wall. Don't bend down in the showers, Winchester.

Ah, jeez, stop it, annoying even himself.

Felt the shift of air as something moved, just to his left, a sweep of fabric maybe.

"Could use a light, Mr. Sanger," he suggested mildly.

"Lights go out all the time up here," Sanger whispered, right in Dean's ear and he jumped about three feet to the side. Now the wall wasn't anywhere near him. He balanced on the balls of his bare feet, wished he'd brought something – anything – for protection.

Almost could have predicted when he'd feel the hand on his shoulder.

"Such a young thing," Sanger hissed.

That was enough. "Noviz mutatio, noviz mutatio. Noviz mutatio chiropterus comoridad."

A rush of noise and air and a horrid gargling and the hand fell away from Dean's shoulder in a slither than made his stomach turn around the solid cannonball that was ham and potatoes deep into the digestive process. Oh, god. That hadn't come out right.

"Schnurr," Sanger said.

"Pardon?" It only seemed polite to ask.

Something grabbed his ankle, something on the floor and Dean snatched his foot away, wished for his fucking zippo, but it was in the pocket of his leather coat.

"Bene universchuushush revertisch," sounded a bit garbled too.

The rush of air again and Dean stumbled back from it, held his arms wide. Without warning, a strong arm snaked around his neck, and Dean moved fast, but not quite fast enough. This thing was freakishly strong and unreasonably quick.

And the only thing going through his head was that goddamn tune. "Ovum nutella, Ovum nutella, Ovum nutella, Ovum nuttela chiropodist gomorrah," and that was definitely not what Sam had told him to say.

It did something though. The hand, the body pressed against his, the mouth that had latched onto the side of his neck, slid away in a sudden decompression, a softening, like Sanger had suddenly turned into a giant invertebrate, a huge slug. A squelchy noise as Sanger hit the floor and Dean stumbled backwards, hit a low cot, or an ottoman, or some piece of furniture topped by a poofy cushion and went ass over teakettle onto the floor. Banging his head against something hard and sharp and loud, Dean lay stunned for a moment, saw a sheet of light. Not good, considering there was no goddamn...oh, wait, there was. He'd hit his head against the window shutter and it had clattered to the floor beside him, letting in some light from the rainy night outside. Not much. But a little.

Enough to see the dark shape against the marginally lighter stone wall, rising to a very tall form, not human at all. The slug has found its backbone, he thought, almost laughing again. Fuck, this was getting out of hand.

It took a wet breath. "Uhchm," it said.

Dean prodded the side of his temple, which felt hot and expansive. Ow. Now he was mad. "Listen..." he began.

"Uhchm oon umpeer." It seemed quite emphatic.

"What?"

"Uhm," and it raised one armlike thing and gestured to its middle. "Umpeer."

"You're an umpire?" Dean got to his feet again, almost too annoyed to engage with the thing.

"Umpeer. UMPEER." Shit, it was getting worked up, bounced a little.

"Umpire?" Dean put both hands on his hips. "Umpire," he muttered to himself. "Vampire?" he guessed.

The creature came closer, vaguely menacing. As menacing as a giant slug could be in a pitch black room. “Vumpeer!” It announced triumphantly.

Dean screwed up his face. “You’re not a vampire, you fucking moronic shitforbrains. You’re a...werebat.” And he couldn’t say that without cracking up, because it sounded like something a Dungeonmaster would dream up in his parent’s basement.

Which was, it turned out, a mistake. While Dean was laughing, the thing managed to mumble out other words, and suddenly it was more human again, with the same agility and strength as before. It flew across the room at Dean, who was unprepared, knocking him to the floor, on top of him and heavy. Dean couldn’t draw air. And if he couldn’t take a breath, he couldn’t say anything, not a word of Latin, or a curse, or even a Spanish Christmas song.

He’d never live this down. What a fucking way to go. A werebat. And despite everything, still couldn’t stop laughing. Except he really wasn’t laughing because he couldn’t force air in or out of his chest. Gary fucking Glitter on top of him, about to take a big bite out of him, god alone knew what else, and all he could think of was –

And the door – Jesus Christ, that’s where the door was, way over there – flew open, Sam standing there like the goddamn cavalry, all Captain Latin, what with the, “Novo mutatio, novo mutatio. Novo mutatio chiropterus commoror!” Like one of those little stupid English wizards. All he needed was a goddamn wand.

He didn’t say it just once, either, but three times, fast, as staccato as Keith Moon on amphetamines.

Sanger didn’t just disappear, or melt or do anything as elegant as transform. He made an enormous sucking sound, like an enormous wind tunnel, and for one sickening moment, Dean wondered if he’d get caught up in it, just get somehow mashed together, like the fly and that stupid scientist in the transporter – Help me! Help me! – but then there was the tiniest flurry of wings, one pissed off bat flapping around – hey Sammy, watch out for your hair – but Sam was faster than that and had already opened the window.

Sanger, the bat, flew out into the night, dodging raindrops.

Sam was breathing hard, looking at Dean lying on the floor, the candelabra still clutched in one hand, the slender red book in the other. He hadn’t needed to crack it open. Had memorized the fucking spell, of course.

“So,” Sam said.

“Yeah,” Dean agreed.

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Unbelievably, they both slept well and in the morning, their phones worked. Both tried calling to explain, but their father didn’t pick up and they’d now lost a day’s drive. Whatever was waiting for them in Washington State, Sam hoped it wasn’t burn-the-midnight-oil important, because Dean had a huge bump on the side of his head and Sam wasn’t going to let him drive for three days straight.

Time enough for breakfast, anyway.

Since the only thing in the Counting House Castle freezer was a bottle of vodka – which Dean took and Sam didn't comment about – they headed down the hill to the gas bar diner. At least they had coffee and huge portions, even if the service wasn't exactly forthcoming.

As before, Aggie buzzed excitedly around and Emily hung back watchfully, peering over the edge of the service pass-through like they were going to rob the place.

“Boys!” Aggie greeted them, giving them the same table, the same menus. Maybe even the same cups, though Sam insisted on coffee this time. Dean seemed chipper enough, admiring Aggie's brooch so much she let him pull the bunny's tail. The ears waggled back and forth.

“Cute,” Dean insisted, smiling at Aggie meaningfully. Dean would put moves on a fucking potted plant, Sam thought, tightening his grip on the menu. Then thought of the song, of Dean's rendition of it. Grinned like a maniac.

“So, was Mr. Sanger to your liking?” Aggie asked, taking their menus along with their order.

Sam shook his head. “Wasn't there. Place seemed abandoned.”

“Ooooh,” Aggie said. Might have been Aggie. Could have been Emily, who had ventured out from the back. Sam's attention volleyed back and forth.

“Unfortunate,” one of them said. Both nodded at the other. Again, Sam felt like he and Dean weren't in the room.

“Maybe,” one started.

“Oh yes,” the other replied.

Aggie came back to their table, filled Dean's cup again. “Our dream is to have a nice little B&B. Mr. Sanger put a bit of a crimp in our plans.”

“Well, I doubt he'll be doing much more crimping,” Sam smiled back, unsure. Had they been...played? By two old women?

“Yep, Countchocudrag won't be coming back,” Dean muttered. Sam kicked him under the table. “I don't think.” Dean added, blowing over the mug.

Later, after a helping of bacon and eggs that would clog arteries as far away as Pittsburgh, Aggie bustled back, stacked their plates and refilled their mugs. She seemed demonically happy. “So, where are you boys off to?”

Sam glanced at Dean, but Dean didn't say anything. Didn't need to. Just smiled.

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Discussion Question for SPN Book Clubs: If Dean is Bugs Bunny, who is Sam?