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The Wild West Meets Kurt Vonnegut in new YA novel “Skunks Dance” by St John Karp

SAN FRANCISCO – A classic treasure hunt story for the modern teen, St John Karp’s quirky YA novel **“Skunks Dance”** is a combination of the Wild West and Kurt Vonnegut-esque humor. Two present-day 17-year-olds go on a search for long-lost treasure, but an exploded car and an attack with a candy cake-topper lead them to make a gruesome discovery. Part murder mystery, part humor, “Skunks Dance” will keep you laughing to the finish with its unexpected twists and fast-paced wit.



Karp’s writing is quick, detailed and hilarious. His 2013 release “Radium Baby” was critically well-received, achieving a starred review from Kirkus.

“Throughout this adventure novel, Karp’s madcap imagination keeps readers hungering for the final outcome, and his prose sparkles with his flair for the absurd ... A devilishly rich, satisfying scientific confection.”—Kirkus Reviews for “Radium Baby”

SKUNKS DANCE—Spivey Spillane’s grandmammy always said there were only two good reasons to kill a man — for cheating on a woman, and for serving drinks to a Yankee. She may have had a hand in winning the Revolutionary War, but even she never met the likes of Alabama Sam. Sam robs a bank under Spillane’s name, casts him in an obscene one-man play wearing only a pink tutu, and starts a betting pool on how many wieners he has. Despite the indignities Spillane suffers, he chases Sam across Gold-Rush-era California because Sam is the only one who knows the location of a hidden fortune buried somewhere in the hills.

Meanwhile in the present, 17-year-olds Amanda and Jet have rekindled an old childhood rivalry. Amanda is obsessed with finding the treasure of her infamous ancestor Spivey Spillane. Jet and Amanda’s feud comes to a head over an extended incident involving a broken window, an exploded car, and a charge of sexual assault with a candy Batman. Jet vows that he is going to find to Spillane’s gold before Amanda does, but it doesn’t take them long to realize that someone may have come this way already — someone who wants the past to stay buried.

San Francisco writer ST JOHN KARP is an ornamental hermit who likes to live near exciting things so he cannot go to them. He has an undying love for the unusual, the Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band and toast. His debut novel, RADIUM BABY, released in 2013. SKUNKS DANCE, Karp’s second novel, releases Jan. 24, 2017. For more information, visit <https://www.fuzzjunket.com/>.

About the Book



SKUNKS DANCE

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YA Adventure

An Interview With **St John Karp**



What authors have influenced your writing the most and why?

People say I have a bit of Vonnegut in me, which is very flattering but only true in a figurative sense — I haven't stolen his false teeth or anything. Of course I was addicted to Vonnegut growing up, but then I also love John Kennedy Toole, who wrote *A Confederacy of Dunces*. It's one of the funniest novels of all time, and helpless indignation still cracks me up to this day. I'd also have to mention James Kennedy, whose novel *The Order of Odd-Fish* showed me that you can still write dazzling, hilarious, clever novels for teenagers. Somehow I'd got the idea that had gone out with hydrogen dirigibles and asbestos underpants.

Why did you choose to start writing YA novels? What about your voice really caters to that audience?

I got into YA novels when I realized you can get away with pretty much anything except being boring. If you write for adults you instantly get shelved as one genre or another, but YA is kind of its own genre. No one bats an eyelid when you write about radium-obsessed teenagers in antique flying machines, or Old West vamps with guns that shoot round corners, or accidentally assaulting people with candy cake-toppers. The only thing you're not allowed to do is be boring, which suits me fine. When a book spends ten pages telling me how the protagonist cooks dinner and how everyone's hair smells, I'm halfway ready to drop-kick the thing into the street.

SKUNKS DANCE has very unique and endearing characters. Do those characters come to you first or do they just flow out of your writing?

I like to let them flow. Some people have fantastic brains and can see everything in advance, but I prefer to put a bunch of nascent characters in a room together and see how they interact. I'll happily change the whole book to suit the characters. The entire Old West half of SKUNKS DANCE was never meant to happen — I just liked the characters so much I wanted to find out what happened to them next.

Writing effective humor is often difficult. What do you find to be the most effective way you create humor in your writing?

You'll never make everyone laugh, and if you do then it won't be interesting writing. There are never any hard rules for writing jokes, but I love wit and I think it's important to take the reader by surprise. If the reader can guess the punch-line before it's delivered, the joke is probably going to fall flat. Look at something like *Rick and Morty* — it refers heavily to popular science fiction, but even in plots we've seen before, we never know what the hell's going to happen next. Or what Rick's going to say. Or even the correct use of the dinglebop end of a plumbus.

1960s Westerns really inspired SKUNKS DANCE. What movies in particular most influenced your writing?

Well, 1960s *British-made* Westerns — the bad ones. I know nothing about the real Old West and I'm not especially interested in it. I don't even like most Westerns. But comedy Westerns? Those things are brilliant, especially if it's full of British actors who sound like they've never even heard an American accent. I can watch *Carry On Cowboy* (1965) or the *Doctor Who* serial *The Gunfighters* (1966) all day long. And have you seen the Hulu series *Quick Draw* (2013)? Amazing stuff. Let's leave accuracy to the historians. Tell me a good joke and I'm anyone's.

Who is your favorite character in SKUNKS DANCE? Who was the most fun to write?

My favorite character (and the most fun to write) is Spivey Spillane, our protagonist in the Old West. He wrote himself — I'd never intended to involve him in a complex plot, so for a long time I just let him fall into more and more elaborate and humiliating traps. He's like us — not stupid or incompetent, but somehow surrounded by people who are either crazier or smarter than him so he can never win. Plus, he's a cross-dressing cowboy, and if you saw him in that pink tutu I think you'd understand.

Both RADIUM BABY and SKUNKS DANCE involve an adventurous search. What is it that you love about the classic adventure search with a twist?

You have to be able to bring together characters who don't like each other — that's where you get your drama. There are lots of ways of doing that, but I like a search because it lets you take your characters to the moon and back, as long as you bring it round to the MacGuffin in the end. It also gives the novel a clear goal, even if you never get there or if the goal was illusory all along. Having done two of them now I'll probably do something different for the next novel. A torrid love story between an ostrich and a potato. Or something.