

# Laughter of the Sinners

**This anti-novel points a middle finger at any and every preconception regarding reality**

Sunfrog (Andy “Sunfrog” Smith)

2022

a review of

*Lives of the Saints* by Alan Franklin. Black and Red, Detroit, 2022

Alan Franklin dropped his book, *Lives of the Saints*, into a world where the final years of the last century seem like a distant dream. Where our then dramatically dire descriptions of accumulated misery were actually more understated prophecies than the mere screeching wheels of an overblown cerebral car-crash on the freeway of our shared consciousness. That is to say, Chicken Little was right, and so were the angry writers at publications like *Fifth Estate*. As bad as we told you it was then, it is worse now

When I interviewed Alan Franklin for my *Babyfish* fanzine some 34 years ago, he was a singer/songwriter/lead guitar with the ska/rock/punk/world beat band the Layabouts, he talked about how his songs like “I’m Tired,” dealt as much with the problem of everyday life as they did with the “isms” that were wrecking our world, then as now. These points of reference are helpful to the reader as you buckle into the bold and bawdy brain-melt that is this book. Like the few minutes of “I’m Tired,” more than a few chapters wrestle with the insanity and inanity of everyday life, not as dry theory, but as imaginal theater, dripping with dark humor.

*Lives of the Saints* is an amorous anti-novel, a religious tract for the anti-religious, a morning meditation for the people that hate morning meditations, a middle finger wagged with crass sass at any and every preconception regarding reality.

Is it a novel? A novella? A manifesto of meaningless meaning? The flash-fiction of one who is inappropriately flashing us? An antidote to the progressive meanness of civilization? A sinful salvation from the snarky error of original sin? Is it one narrator or many? Which “I” is speaking now? Which “they” or “you” is that, to the narrator we might ask.

You can turn to postmodern literary theory for help with understanding what the theorists call “slippage,” for Franklin’s many narrators appear addicted to such free play.

That’s not to say he isn’t serious, he is, but don’t take him so seriously you miss the many-headed jester that jokes inside these chapters. The laughter of the sinners is what saves the lives of these saints. Inherent indeterminacy, delightful deconstruction, slippery slippage, forever, amen.

Each of the many vignettes could be an intoxicated vision, enjoyed on its own, if by drunk we actually mean the hangover of a million Monday mornings, an endless life shackled under authoritarianism, capitalism, and sexual dysfunction, yet somehow kicking at the mundane with irrepressible and irresponsible smirk. The stories and dialogues in this text work mysteriously and magically as anti-parables, with interlocking and overlapping threads that pierce the reader’s skin, injecting just enough narcotic and drawing just enough blood to get its audience addicted to the book’s fierce yet fruitless pursuit of resolution.

Burroughs, Miller, and Freud are back from the dead with a devious treatise that will live in your head, long after turning the last page.

Having penned work appearing in these pages with a variety of bylines since 1988, Sunfrog is an abolitionist activist, poet, essayist, DJ, teacher, and theologian who lives in “Tenasi,” the traditional land of the Cherokee people. He is the author of *Don't Touch Your Face: poems from a pandemic* and the curator of mixtapes at **teacheronthera-dio.com**.

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