

Harry Hardiner

the man who wrote the world

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QUICK FACTS SHEET

Born 8 August 1962 (Bookbright, Tennessee)

Disappeared December 1999 (Murfreesboro, Tennessee)

current status and whereabouts unknown, declared dead 31 December 2010

Significant Works:

"Johnny Kite and Friend", story

"Center Lake", poem

"Upharsin", poem

Bhujarti, play

Burnt Lace, play

Syrial, play

Aristotle, play cycle

Tsai, novel

Loom, essay collection

Rosewire series

Hunt and Peck (originally published as *Web of Lies*), novel

Lights Low, novel

Halides, novel

Green Stone Story, novel

Election Day, play cycle

Jettison Jemison, novel

the black book, novel

Conquest of Algiers, novel

Rise, novel

*A Bed**, novel

*Rosewire**, novel

*indicates uncertain authorship and inclusion in the series

Theory of Explosionism

—single complex subject ("**wholecloth**")

—broken into components/"icons" ("**burst**")

—viewed from all angles inside and out ("**expansion**")

—reconstitution into new forms ("**mortaring**")

—distillation to purest idea of original subject ("**invitation**" or "**kettle**")

In Harry Hardiner's *Shattered Goblet* interview, he lays out the above terminology, but refers to his imagined movement as Expansionism—in fact, when interviewer Rex Patch suggests "Explosionism" may be more apt, Hardiner denigrates it as too sensational.

Examples of Explosionism in pop culture:

—Marvel Cinematic Universe (particularly *The Avengers* and *The Defenders*)

—Sufjan Stevens's *Illinois* and *Greetings from Michigan*

—*Lost*, TV show

—*Twin Peaks*, TV show

PRIMER

The structure of this primer was a subject of intense debate between myself and the indomitable Dr Rex Patch. I firmly believed that we needed to start with biographical information—what we know, and what we can guess about the man himself—before we got into any discussion of his work or the study it invites. Dr Patch in most things Hardiner is an adept and a sage, but I believe for a first-timer to truly step into the world of Harry Hardiner, we have to touch on the allure of his personal unknowns before we can ever start discussing "foamy prose". So, my apologies to Dr Patch: I've sided with myself and decided to initiate you into the writer before the work... with a caveat.

I myself came to Harry Hardiner first through one of his books, and then only much later through a study of the person who made it. I found a copy of the black book, the untitled seventh entry in the *Rosewire* series, at a beach house when I was truly too young to be reading it, and I devoured it in secret under the covers late at night. In retrospect, it was an intensely profound experience—the strange was made painfully familiar in the black book to the point where I never realized I was missing six prior entries. Yes, *Rosewire* 1-6 fill in enormous gaps and support the decisions of the characters in *Rosewire* 7 beautifully: it's obviously a product of everything that came before. But for little David under the covers with a reading light, the black book felt magically whole. I remember reading stretches of words aloud, nearly expecting to summon Center Lake or the proud wild Stavra myself. Moving from the first page to the last felt purposeful and weighty. It never would have crossed my mind then, but today, the memory of reading the black book that first time feels intensely similar to initiates and devotees walking a labyrinth.

So I begin here with biographical information on the man himself, still firmly believing that when you follow him from Bookbright to reality, you'll get a better hold on what comes after. But with that certainty comes an acknowledgment that nothing can better present Harry Hardiner to you than Harry Hardiner. Though it has become indecently difficult to find first-editions of his work (printed by the original Pinkum Press!), and though reprints and electronic copies have been strictly controlled by the Trust Maghreb, I can wholeheartedly support leaving this page and trolling the depths of eBay for a pop-up auction. A copy of *Lights Low* can go for upwards of a hundred dollars, but perhaps you can go in with some friends—or maybe you'll get lucky, and your local library had the foresight to order Hardiner's works while they were still in more or less ready circulation.

(A quick note on the Trust Maghreb: though there seems to be no familial Hardiner connection within this trust's leadership, it has exercised incredible control over Harry Hardiner's estate, particularly after the author was declared dead in late 2010. They have allowed for no reprints, they have stringently searched the internet for scans of Hardiner's work and sued for millions, and worst of all, they do not allow excerptation on commercial websites. Because you can buy ebooks from our store, DavidSilvester.com could be sued a kajillion dollars [from our lawyers] if we paste quotes from the author himself on this website, and even if we direct you to outside websites. So I would never, ever suggest that you Google Harry Hardiner quotes. You'd be contributing to piracy, and piracy is illegal. The Trust Maghreb is very clear on that. I apologize for this inconvenience, but the law's the law, and the Hardiner estate is off-limits.)

Early Life

What little we say we know about Harry Hardiner's life before 1989 mostly comes from the man himself—and so little has been verified to this day that we can do little but take him at his word.

Harry Hardiner's book jacket biography only changed once: in the few posthumous editions of his work, the original "Harry Hardiner grew up in Bookbright, Tennessee," became, "Harry Hardiner grew up in Bookbright, Tennessee. He is missing, presumed dead." The writer was notoriously tightfisted with his personal information, and besides this biography, most information about his early years comes from his interviews with Rex Patch.

To hear Harry Hardiner tell it, he was born in Bookbright, Tennessee, in 1962, the third son of Morgan and Dove Hardiner. His brothers Buddy and Russ were older, and then there was his younger brother Ronald. Harry Hardiner had very little to say on the subject of his direct family, other than his father being "hard, but honest."

Of more interest to Harry was a family friend, a Judge Ernest Crater (apparently no relation whatsoever to the other Judge Crater), who spent his Tuesday nights in the Hardiner kitchen, eating with the family. Crater was evidently a world traveller: he would regale the Hardiners with stories of Paris and Singapore, tales of revenge and unspoken magic, tales of love and heartbreak, quaint portraits of folk beliefs and the charming locals. These stories sank their teeth in to the young Harry—he describes his time with Judge Crater as the most colorful moments of his childhood, which was otherwise marked with frustrating schooling, fire and brimstone Christianity, and no small amount of hard labor in the fields. Hardiner says Judge Crater was killed in a plane crash when he was 11 years old, and that was the day he decided to become a writer: he was overtaken by a jag of crying when he realized that there would be no more stories, and whatever details the judge had left out could never now be revealed.

This thought would prove to be a recurring one for the writer as he evolved, and especially as he started serious work on his *Rosewire* series: what happens to an event after it's passed?

The haunting philosophies that spun out of this train of thought would inform most of Hardiner's work, and most likely played a large part in his decision to remain out of the limelight. Rex Patch suggests that Harry Hardiner always knew he was writing "at the wrong time." Dr Patch says, "I believe Harry gave himself an out. He was a brave soul, always a brave soul, and very convinced of his work, but he never thought himself unvanquishable. He knew he'd be extinguished. I think if the world knew about him as little as possible, then he could fail, and no one would be any the wiser. I think he always planned on reviving the work later on, later on in life, later into his life, and that's why to this day I don't believe that he would hurt himself. He needed more time, to build his case. In the meantime, he could fizzle without reprisal." If that's true, and I for one am inclined to believe Dr Patch since he spent so much time with the man and his work, well, it's understandable. Harry Hardiner was never a success story. Looking back on his decisions is sometimes confusing and sometimes frustrating, but it's never inconsistent.

This man came out of a very small town, a population under 1000, to a strict religious farming family—and he dreamed for more. He never felt as though he belonged there in Bookbright with Morgan, Dove, Buddy, Russ, and Ron. He did, however, feel as though he belonged behind the blank page, setting down stories in case he ever had his own plane crash, examining details from angles you might find unconventional or even frivolous, slowing down events and dissecting their entrails. Once he's gone, those details will be forever unknown. If you track his thought processes and what could have impacted them as he developed, it does all hang together.

The problem is, none of it's true.

Well, let's give the man the benefit of the doubt: he was born somewhere, to someone, and most likely had some family. He exhibited an intimate knowledge of farm life in his works, and a steady hand with small-town politics (although his urban milieu also seemed pretty spot-on). There's no reason to doubt someone in his childhood told wonderful stories, and perhaps that someone died.

But take a second to check Google Maps for Bookbright, Tennessee. You know what, I'll save you the trouble, because sometimes it takes a really long time to load—you won't find it. There is no Bookbright, Tennessee, there is no King County, there has never been a Tennessee judge by the name of Crater.

In fact, there is no certificate of live birth for a Harry, Harold, Henry, or Harrison Hardiner in the year of 1962. Good luck finding one at all. Better minds have tried.

Other details he shared with Patch and others don't check out. He told Hi and Hattie Kerlin, owners and operators of the original Pinkum Press, that he had gone to summer camp in Pinkum, Georgia. There is no Pinkum in Georgia. He claimed to have run away to New Orleans at the age of 17 to live there with a woman named Rosalyn Clave and her son Piers. Knock yourselves out if you want to track down records of the Claves of New Orleans. He said the suitcase containing all of his work to date, including two novels, was stolen from a Manhattan bus station the day he moved to New York. He never filed any crime report or remarked on its theft until nearly a decade after the fact.

All of this is not to say to not trust the man, or think of him as a con artist. In fact, I think it goes right back to Judge Crater's crater. The smoking remains of a man so dear to him deserve some respect—and so Harry Hardiner changes his name in the retelling, but keeps the details the same. I know I'm making a big leap here and putting a lot of blind faith in a man who created works of fiction for a living, but it seems to be in line with his character... as I understand it.

Bookbright could be any number of small towns along the Appalachian trail, and the same could be said for Pinkum with its "white mountain" that Hardiner claimed to watch from his camp cabin. Judge Crater may not even have been a judge, but perhaps a doctor or a water commissioner—someone of high standing who had travelled in his youth and who shared those stories around a dinner table. In fact, there may have been multiple Judge Craters—this Ernest that Hardiner speaks about may well have been an amalgam. Just... Bear with the man, and his tendency towards obfuscation. I cannot prove it, but I truly believe this comes out of an impulse to protect the truth from imperfect retellings.

At any rate, we are about to cross out of Bookbright and into the readily verifiable.

Maxence Lawrence and *The Fledgeling Egg*

"Johnny Kite and Friend" appeared in literary magazine *The Fledgeling Egg* in the Winter Edition, 1989. It marked Harry Hardiner's first (if compromised) publication, his first collaboration with longtime editor Maxence Lawrence, the first appearance of Lawrence's detective character Lord Parker, and the first opportunity critics had to encounter a mind bent on bending yours.

The story was billed as "an experiment in hybrid prose" by the editor of the magazine, Maxence Lawrence, but could more realistically be described as a hijacking. What we have of Hardiner in the story is the relationship between Johnny Kite and the always-unnamed Friend who would come to be fixtures in the future *Rosewire* series. The Lord Parker mystery is shoehorned in, fairly gracelessly, in huge chunks that obviously come from a different hand. The beautiful passage that closes the story, however, that describes Johnny Kite seeing his Friend "beneath different branches"—that is pure Hardiner, and sets up the relationship that drives the beginnings of *Rosewire*.

Contemporary write-ups of the story overwhelmingly pay attention to the Lord Parker mystery, heaping praise on the now-overdone twist (which, to give Lawrence credit, was at the time fairly novel), but one critic took time to appreciate the prose and the titular characters. This critic, Rex Patch, who wrote freelance out of his Village apartment, would go on to develop close ties to the author later in his career, performing three of the four interviews Hardiner gave during his active period.

In one of these interviews, Hardiner describes his first reactions when he saw the edited story in print. He did not seem upset, considering most of his story did make it into the magazine intact, and he even gave Lawrence some faint praise for how fluidly he fit the stories together.

Nevertheless, the professional and personal relationship between the two men that followed is still fraught with rumors of sexual intimacy and psychological and physical abuse—Lawrence edited most of the first *Rosewire* books, but was "fired" (as the mystery writer put it) after turning in changes to the long-form play *Election Day*, only returning to offer his services on the eighth entry, *Conquest of Algiers*. The gap has been variously explained as a disagreement over style and intent, a romantic spat, and the fallout of some traumatic event between the two.

In her fictionalized film *Max Larry, Haunted Fairy*, filmmaker Jazra Jaban portrays the relationship as mutually sadomasochistic. She conjectures that Maxence Lawrence, after one particularly violent encounter with Hardiner and in a fit of passion, put a hit out on his lover. When the contracted killer fails, Hardiner goes into hiding, staging the Murfreesboro disappearance to lower Lawrence's defenses—but our hidden Harry slowly and deliberately wears away at Lawrence's sanity and security from afar, borrowing on tropes from *Gaslight*, *Rebecca*, and *Ten Little Indians*, until finally Lawrence willingly crawls into the refrigerator in which he was found shortly after his own disappearance in 2008.

While there are some serious theories regarding Maxence Lawrence's role in the vanishing of Harry Hardiner (and we'll touch on them more later), Jazra Jaban's is simply a fun bit of fan fiction... that nonetheless taps into the cloud surrounding the two writers in the 90s. Neither writer ever said much about the other in public (which is strange on the part of loquacious Lawrence, who once issued a press release to announce his detective's favorite brand of soap—*Irish Spring*), but those who knew them both have long harbored suspicions that some of the more violent exchanges between Johnny Kite and his Friend throughout the rest of the *Rosewire* books were thinly-veiled autobiographical details that Hardiner added, perhaps even at Lawrence's behest.

Maxence Lawrence disappeared himself in early 2008 after teaching one semester at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. The writer and editor had fallen on financial straits, and accusations of plagiarism began to surface towards the end of 2007. While initially some rumors swirled across the internet that Lawrence had swept himself off the map to join Hardiner in some hidden bungalow, most serious attention was paid to his connections with organized crime in New England and Texas. When Lawrence's body was found in a busted out refrigerator deep in the Alabama woods, some thin attempts were made to tie his death to Hardiner, but most of those fit squarely in the fantasy range. Jaban's film, for instance, suggests that the refrigerator was actually out in the woods of the Hardiner property in Murfreesboro where the museum to his work today resides, and that Hardiner moved the appliance in the bed of a broken down farm truck, dumping it in rural Alabama, and driving back to Bookbright, Tennessee, where he lives peacefully with his family. A lovely if incredibly disturbing thought. But "creative" would be euphemistic.

You'd be hard pressed to find any law enforcement officials or serious Hardiner scholars who think Lawrence's death was anything but retribution for enormous personal debt. Nonetheless, the editor's dark end throws one more wrinkle into the already warped and knotted life of Harry Hardiner.

Rosewire and "Expansionism"

Harry Hardiner never referred to the *Rosewire* works together as a series: instead he called it a "system". That seems as good a place to start as any.

What kind of a system was *Rosewire*, though? Well, Hardiner's thought processes were actually laid bare, for once. In his *Shattered Goblet* interview, Hardiner lays out the tenets of what he calls **Expansionism**, or what we today might call **Explosionism**.

First, an Explosionist work must choose and lay out its subject: Hardiner called this the **wholecloth**.

Once the wholecloth was adequately established, it must be **burst** into its individual constituent moments, "little eventual particles" that Hardiner called **icons**.

These icons must be **expanded**, or moved apart from one another to more readily view all sides of each individual icon—one might imagine this as an exploded view of the wholecloth. (For me, it always reminded me of an old *Star Wars* visual encyclopedia, where the Death Star was seen whole and entire on one side, but the other hemisphere sprawled across the page, each satellite dish, hallway, nut and bolt, taken apart and spaced so that arrows and labels could fit between them more easily, and so that this globe of sinister metal, when taken as a whole, could still be imagined as a vast hive of flawless—ish—engineering.)

After the expansion (or the **explosion**—Rex Patch's term, not Hardiner's, but it's gained more traction), these icons, these constituent parts, must be recombined ("**mortared**") into something "which roughly shares the silhouette" of the wholecloth, or in other words, a new but familiar form containing the same elements.

And lastly, Hardiner describes what he calls the **kettle** as "an invitation", which is why usually people will refer to it as the **invitation** rather than the uncomfortable "kettle". (I had always imagined that "kettle" referred to what you boil water in, to suggest the distillation of the wholecloth into its purest iconic phase, but according to Rex Patch, Hardiner's "kettle" is actually a sewing or bookbinding term to refer to a looping backstitch which connects one signature of folded pages to the next. That actually makes more sense than evaporation in terms of "invitation": the kettle is a little loop that finishes this work but leads you on to more.)

Perhaps most importantly, Hardiner believed that this process happened at all scales—in the spaces between words, as well as across an overarching throughline.

When viewed in these terms, *Rosewire* takes on a firmer shape than its sprawl would first lead you to believe. While you start off in the high school at Rhodes Rush for the first three books, you're suddenly catapulted into fictionalized fiction with the "legend" of Stavra Starvos, and from there to a collection of plays where characters like the Senator, the chorus-like Board, and the Neuron discuss political theory, and from there into "a graphic novel without graphics" (Zachary Osgood in *The Rosewire Companion*) about superheroes without superpowers, then into a fictionalized version of the Middle East that Hardiner calls the Maghreb, and finally into... whatever *Rise* is. Johnny Kite appears in all of these books, with the exception of *Green Stone Story* and the possible exception of *Jettison Jemison*, but otherwise, you'd be hard-pressed to find "the skeleton" of *Rosewire*—

Unless you're thinking Explosionism.

And suddenly you see that 5-fold pattern everywhere.

If you look across the whole series, the Rhodes Rush entries might be considered the wholecloth, *Green Stone Story* the burst, *Election Day* through *Conquest of Algiers* (or at least to its midpoint) would be your expansion, and *Rise* is almost certainly your mortared icons, leaving a gaping hole for *Rosewire 10* and its kettle.

Or how about we look at just the Rhodes Rush entries? The wholecloth is the situation presented by the anonymous online users in *Hunt and Peck* (although the argument could be made the entire book is the burst of "Johnny Kite and Friend"'s wholecloth), the burst coming at the end of the novel where **[spoilers redacted]**. The huge amount of information we get about Rhodes Rush, all the people in it, and the alternate histories and timelines presented by the class projects in *Lights Low* would be our expansion or explosion; the weird stream-of-consciousness of the Friend in *Halides* represents our mortaring of a familiar situation into a very strange and uncomfortable new form—and the last lines of that novel give us a kettle and an invitation to read on. After all, the novel cuts out mid-sentence.

So Harry Hardiner sits himself down to write the Rosewire series—excuse me, "system"—and in so doing identifies or codifies or creates a literary movement that we see repeated all around us, every day, in some form or fashion. Truth be told, as much as some Hardiner fans (myself included) would like to say that Harry thought this up, *wholecloth* (get it?), he was really responding to the culture which surrounded him—comic books, television series, and the advent of the internet and hyperlinking had awakened in him his overwhelming Crater-sized urge to tell as much of a story as he could. And tell he did.

The immense *Rosewire* system sprawls nearly 2.5 million words—the ponderous ninth entry *Rise* by itself comprises 524,288 words. That Hardiner put out these nine books in roughly nine years—and more—is staggering. That's verging on some Stephen King shit. It leads me (and many, many others, so I can claim no originality here) to believe that he had been working on these books his entire life, and when the time came to publish, most of his active work was in polishing first drafts or transcribing the details of notes.

To go into each novel in turn would require additional primers, and perhaps in the future that will be more feasible. As it stands now, *The Rosewire Companion*, edited first by Rex Patch and now in later editions by Zachary Osgood, does a very good job laying out the intricate connections between the books and explaining Hardiner's complex mythology. I advise, if you find your curiosity piqued, you first seek out the books themselves, or, barring a lucky day on the internet, picking up a copy of Osgood's excellent (and beautifully presented) critical work. For now, we'll only touch briefly on each entry in turn:

Hunt and Peck

Originally printed as *Web of Lies* (Hardiner suggests that this was an editorial change, and his editor at the time was Maxence Lawrence), this novel is presented as an exchange between anonymous users on a school's internal messaging system—something like a primitive AIM, which, for younger readers, was what we did before we could snapchat. USER 3 has been positively identified as Johnny Kite, though USERS 1 and 2 consistently misrepresent themselves, claiming different names and characteristics as USER 3 chisels away at their stories. In the background of what looks like typical high school angst and gossip, the beginnings of the Center Lake conspiracy are unfolding "down by the water behind the school". (Center Lake is not referred to by name until the black book.) This is our first introduction to Rhodes Rush characters Good Golly Molly and Plink Shivers, and many other details of setting and situation from *Lights Low* and *Halides* are referenced but not named or addressed outright.

The book's general sense is one of creeping conspiracy. Behind the green bars of text, sex and murder vie and claw, and something sinister and unnatural creaks in the distant circuits connecting USER 3 to the liars (or liar) on the other end. The story is told only through the exchanges of the USERS and the few status lines Hardiner chucks in (USER 1 is now online, USER 1 is now offline). There is a suggestion that this, the shortest of the *Rosewire* novels, happens more or less in real time: USER 3 does not sign off until the end of the book, and there are no jarring discontinuities in terms of the events related. (Little David had a field day with this format: my most successful attempt at appropriating it can be found in the collection *Upstart Crow* in the store.)

We start to see a few hairline fractures in the relationship between Johnny Kite and his Friend (we learn for certain that USER 3 is Johnny Kite in *Halides*, so we read USER 3's "fella" as Johnny Kite's Friend), particularly towards the end of the book when USER 3 begins to realize just how little he knows about who's on the other end of the computer. His misgivings about his Friend lead him to believe both users on the other end are one and the same person—someone close to him, who has seen him "vulnerable" (read: naked), who would use tender gifts to manipulate and torture to no apparent end. It's important to note that Johnny Kite's habit of identifying what he fears in himself and then externalizing those features into those around him starts this early in the series. It's hamartia revealed in slo-mo, and nothing's more exciting than to watch a fall go on forever. Just ask Vince Gilligan.

Lights Low

Following the script-like quality of *Hunt and Peck*, *Lights Low* is far more what you'd consider to be a novel. As a point of fact, Zachary Osgood typically refers to *Lights Low* as "the first novel of the *Rosewire* system", as opposed to *Hunt and Peck* which he calls "the first entry". He's got a point. Here we are in 3rd-person omniscient (and HOW), throwing down the shutters and revealing Rhodes Rush High School behind those black screens.

It's a deep roar of a book, grinding with a sort of eternal despair even as it confronts some pretty silly issues: for instance, in a smaller subplot, we learn that Timber Wilkins can't stand up in English class without something else standing up with him—something that at first glance belongs in that Spelling Bee musical more than a *Rosewire* book. But of course, Timber's classmates and teacher learn about his uncontrolled talents, find themselves fascinated and amused by it, and very soon a classroom joke becomes something horrifying, casually abusive, and everyone is profoundly changed by their role in it. When we meet Timber again in the black book, the handsome, confident, funny, brilliant quarterback has become a weedy shallow boring libertine, diseased and traumatized and addicted to more vices than it's comfortable to even consider. You can feel it coming after his Final Presentation, too, and the litany of

profane things that Hardiner hints at happening behind the closed doors of Room 404. No one in that classroom comes through unscathed.

Of course, this is one smaller thread in a larger story about Johnny Kite confronting the Board: he is set up to climb the student body government in return for his obedience to a strange panel of men and women who meet Saturday nights at 11pm in the school building. We learn much more about this Board, its superiors, and the plan it is putting in motion over the course of the series—excuse me again, system—but it's here, in this book, that we realize there is a larger Board that seems to not only span great stretches of space, but also time. It is not just the ruling body of the Rhodes Rush district: their scope is far greater than this school system and its students, though it's not until the black book we ever get any good idea of what they've been plotting. Johnny Kite maneuvers his way into their inner circle and apparently [spoilers redacted], but we know the Board has not disbanded even as early as *Halides*.

Of course, given the structure of the book (it's laced from top to bottom with illusory sequences, little essays and vignettes and even full chapters laying out alternate versions of events to what later books prove to be true), it's very difficult to say which details that are unverified or unrefuted by future volumes are trustworthy. That means that most of Johnny Kite's actions, as well as most of the scenes including his Friend and the Board, are practically hearsay—there is an unreliable narrator at work, only that narrator is omniscient and lacks apparent bias in its dissimulation.

Ugh.

You know that something horrible happened in Room 404 because of the events with Timber and all of his [spoilers redacted] in the black book and because of certain fleeting catches of thought in *Rise*; you know Trueblood the native starts his curse at the lake because of *Halides* and the black book and everything that happens after—but did Burnzlandt the Oilman jump out the window of the Boardroom? Did Suellen Swaylon whisper a prayer at the start of every class because she thought it was the only thing giving her good grades? Did Johnny Kite ever carve—Well. We'll get to that. There is a lot that bears out. There is a lot that doesn't. Max Larry didn't binge drink with Assistant Principal Poighen and skinny dip in "the water behind the school"—Max Larry has an alcohol sensitivity and has never had but one sip of anything boozy in his life.

Still... There's just so much we can't know... Nothing said about it later. Only appearing here. No ramifications stretching forward. Could be true. Could be false. After a while, it becomes easier to just believe everything. Even the things that contradict the other things. Even the things later books prove are wrong. Just choose to believe everything. That's what Johnny Kite does. And it takes him down to the water behind the school that later we learn is Center Lake.

As Johnny Kite creeps up out of the student world, out of the faculty world, and into a sort of magical reality approaching *Twin Peaks* (a subject for another day is comparing and contrasting the mythologies of the two series...), his relationship with his Friend deteriorates in profound, often horrifying ways. The most-discussed episode in the book, perhaps the most-discussed episode of Harry Hardiner's entire oeuvre, is the violent sexual encounter between the two the night after the election.

Profanity abounds, explicit descriptions of questionable activities interchange with suggestive but unquestionably horrifying passages of dream-like verse, and it climaxes with Johnny Kite carving something into the small of his Friend's back. You can imagine that after this two-page ordeal, libraries across the country weren't exactly clamoring to get their hands on Hardiner books. There are some Hardiner scholars who even suggest that was the desired result: Harry Hardiner didn't *want* his books in

ready circulation. It would fit in neatly with Rex Patch's interpretation that Hardiner never felt he was writing at the right time—he laced in this unfortunate moment in order to keep the *Rosewire* conversation tabled for another day. Of course, other rodonymatologists will say that this scene was ripped right from the lives of Harry Hardiner and Maxence Lawrence (minus, we assume, the "signing"). One way or another, it stands out... and sets the stage for the abrupt and disconcerting ending of the next book.

Halides

Rex Patch says that Harry Hardiner himself referred to the first three books in the *Rosewire* system as "the Rhodes Rush trilogy"—although not in any recorded interviews. I tend to believe Dr Patch in all things, and I don't believe anyone would benefit from fabricating such a detail, so I accept and wholeheartedly support the idea that *Halides* wraps up the first "chapter" of the system and prepares us for all the horror and wonder that is yet to explode outwards from Center Lake.

In a lot of ways, the first three books, *Hunt and Peck*, *Lights Low*, and *Halides*, have a strong structural parallel to books 7-9, the black book, *Conquest of Algiers*, and *Rise*. If both *Hunt and Peck* and the black book set up new characters, a conspiracy, a set of power struggles, love themes, the seeds of revenge, and deep-rooted suspicions—and *Lights Low* and *Conquest of Algiers* both head from conceptual structure to more "straightforward" narrative, building on the stories and characters of the books which immediately precede them in new or broader settings—then both *Halides* and *Rise* might be considered the absolute unravelling, both in form and content, of their lead-ups. Both *Halides* and *Rise* are heavily stream-of-consciousness (though that's a little like comparing *Ulysses* to *Finnegan's Wake*), both center around the collapse of social structure and relationships and plans and preestablished narratives, and both end with wholly unsatisfying and rather leading unfinished sentences. At least *Halides* doesn't end mid-word... like *Rise* might.

Although the third *Rosewire* book has been pretty positively ascribed to the Friend's point of view, and his point of view alone, a little debate has persisted over the years—perhaps what we're getting are Johnny Kite's imagined version of his Friend's running internal narrative, or perhaps there is plenty to recommend a reading in which the stream-of-consciousness does not belong to any one character, but bounces back and forth between the minds of individuals and groups as they encounter the tail-ends of stories summoned up in *Lights Low*. But certainly, the Friend is a constant, and as always unnamed, presence—if it's not his thoughts, it involves his thoughts. This is his book. Not that we don't see a lot of our Rhodes Rush cast...

Plink Shivers's blackmail plot finally turns in on itself, and the assistant principal "skins him alive" (uh, literally or metaphorically, I must confess, I cannot say). Good Golly Molly escapes her abusive relationship and runs from Rhodes Rush into the woods behind the school, never to be seen again—until the black book. Trueblood the Native finishes enacting his curse, Donneta Dumas and her twin brother Dibleet manage to switch places after all, and the last stragglers of the Rhodes Rush Board flee to Center Lake to regroup. We learn exactly how the events of *Hunt and Peck* fold into the more straightforward narrative of *Lights Low*, we get a better feeling for how many of the story threads in *Lights Low* were imagined and how many were "real", and keen-eyed viewers can pick out suggestions of characters and settings to come, including a discussion of "the Maghreb" in the Friend's geography class and a flitting image of a "bright green tome" which must be *Green Stone Story*.

The less said about *Halides* the better: in a lot of ways, it's its own conclusion, and it certainly feels as though it closes an entire storyline without going out of its way to set up a next step forward. I'll admit

that when I first read it, I didn't quite know how books 4, 5, and 6 could possibly connect *Halides* with the masterful black book—and, as we'll discuss a little bit in a moment, those intervening entries in *Rosewire* system are less concerned with filling in the gaps of the lives of these now-familiar characters and much more concerned with filling out the ideas and stakes that animate them. Explosionism in a nutshell. At the end of *Halides* you feel like the circle's closed, even if you already realize that there are deeper circles spiralling inwards yet to come.

Needless to say, the Friend makes his last, uh, major appearance in this book, although his presence continues to be felt as strongly (or more strongly) than most other recurring characters all the way through the end of *Rise*. We also find in *Halides* the last fluidly connected entry in *Rosewire*: think about *The Chronicles of Narnia* for a moment, and how *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* moves directly towards *Prince Caspian* and thence to *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, *The Silver Chair*, *The Last Battle*. And then you have *A Boy and his Horse*. In many ways, we're about to get into *Boy and his Horse* territory and linger there longer than C.S. Lewis would have found tenable. It's lovely, tangential, but integral—so let's hop in without further

Green Stone Story

This book. Ya'll, this book. It's my favorite. Rex Patch can have *Conquest of Algiers*. Zachary Osgood can keep *Rise* all to himself. Maxence Lawrence once wrote in one of his more vindictive moments that the only *Rosewire* book worth reading was *Lights Low*—well, I must politely but thoroughly disagree. *Green Stone Story* is where it's at, and what it's all about.

...Literally.

Okay—so there are some classical Chinese novels that incorporate a little opening trill of establishing information, and a close-tied conclusion of very few chapters right at the end, but in between? There are dozens of chapters of adventures, battles, clever maneuvering, love stories, philosophy, exploration of strange lands and alien psyches, demons and deities and fancifully high stakes... You could practically flip back and forth between them and read them out of sequence, like the episodes of *The Simpsons*, only with dragons and destiny and war and mischievous immortal monkeys. Read *Journey to the West*, or *Water Margin*, or even *Dream of the Red Chamber* and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, and you will know exactly what I mean. Or... Pick up *Green Stone Story*.

Hardiner appropriates the form and tone of these great Chinese classics and applies the sprawling concept to a land called Candlewood (and its "capital", Candletree), its people, and the subtly devastating force that is our sort-of protagonist Stavra Starvos. Most simply put, Stavra begins the novel in the "wholecloth" first seven chapters as a wanderer, "washed out in a streambed" after some cataclysm we're never given any details on—and her first action is to see a "shockgreen stone" beside her as she wakes, pick it up, and pocket it. She apparently belonged somewhere else, but has been transported here to Candlewood, where she meets many of the woodland figures before making her way into Candletree. In Candletree, she meets Nuthatch (who of course runs the Nuthatchery), Wojhid Wijohid, the Kindly Chopper, and dozens of other townspeople who want nothing more than to recover this lost soul.

Adventure ensues.

And, needless to say for a Hardiner book, everything goes straight to hell.

Despite all her charming attributes, Stavra seems addicted to destruction and chaos, drawn towards flames and gouts of rain and violent people, sowing discord casually and without apparent reflection or reason. She reminds me a bit of Hedda Gabler, both in her characterization and in the clear suggestion that SOMETHING rational has made her this way... even if we never explicitly told what.

The first seven chapters are Stavra wandering in the woods. The last seven chapters are Stavra wandering in the woods. The 93 chapters in between are Stavra and the townspeople in all manner of mishaps and hijinks, running the gamut from the absurdly hilarious (like "Nuthatch Does Inventory" or "The Bumblegum Contest") to the abjectly terrifying ("The Other Choppers", "Green Stone Song", "Colubra Culubre Says It's So", "Last Night Party", "Treasure Pond")—these chapters may serve the overarching story ("Stavra and Sturna", "Nuthatch's Claim", "Chop Me Kindly") and others seem to be there only to expand the world and make it more colorful, more real, and more mysteriously unwhole ("Legend of the Green Star", "Candlebark", "Pinner's Lament", "Tarpon Loves You More Now", "Green Wheat", "Glass Branches", "Single Finger Lake", "Garden of Dried Things", "Poonkin Wants Blood", "Service Trail", and so, so many more). It's the whole of Explosionism in a single book. And, even cooler, it's the whole of *Rosewire* in a single book.

I have to get a big head here and say that I noticed the pattern before I read about it in *The Rosewire Companion*, but it's actually pretty obvious once you see it and I probably shouldn't be all too proud of recognizing it in the first place. That's the whole point of the book, after all. A stranger is brought into a collective, dissolves it from the inside for unknown reasons, the collective lashes back out with some long-churning plan, and eventually there's a conflagration that only the stranger walks away from... straight into a new story, possibly with a new collective and a new plan to burn...

Not only does Stavra's story mimic Johnny Kite's: Stavra's arc *Green Stone Story*, or at least congruent arcs, appear over and over and over again. Then you learn that *Green Stone Story* is apparently a classic novel in the world of *Rosewire*, as it's the favorite book of the Senator's Daughter in *Election Day*, and its characters (and their preternatural powers) sit right in the middle of the Board's Center Lake plot. Again I have to say that any attempt at describing *Green Stone Story* further would diminish its power—please do yourself a favor, and if you only read one *Rosewire* book, or only one piece written by Harry Hardiner (first of all, crazy decision, but to each his own)... choose *Green Stone Story*. You may not thank me, but maybe, like me, you'll find yourself picking it up again and again, finding new connections, new motivations for the whole round characters, new angles in the lush Candlewood environment, so often that it seems like the book never—actually—ends. It jumps out of nowhere coming right after three books situated in Rhodes Rush and its high school... but damn if it's not a pleasure to pick your way through, and holy shit, what beautiful language. #teamsturna!

Election Day

Okay, well, after *Green Stone Story*, readers might expect Hardiner to keep hopping around both in form and content, and, you know what, those readers would be right. *Election Day* is a sequence of ten plays (or "a long-form play", as its subtitle proclaims) about a single day (an election day, go figure) and a huge list of people who are put in dire straits that day across a vast amount of space and on a variety of scales.

Over the course of all ten plays, which, to be honest, are far more successful on the page than on the stage (I dare you, directors, to mount the 9th play, "Neuron's Ballot", for a paying audience: I DARE you), we are exposed to a huge array of political theories, played out on an interpersonal scale as well as an international one. It's especially timely now as I'm writing this: Donald Trump could stand to read a

couple of the monologues put in the mouth of The Vocal Minority, and Hillary Clinton might find many of the dire straits threaded by the Senator very familiar—sorry to date this document so egregiously, but I'd be remiss if I didn't at least quietly suggest that *Election Day* be required reading before anyone hits the booths in November.

In an effort to avoid spoilers, from here on out, these descriptions are by necessity going to become shorter and more elliptical. It's for your own good, I promise: there is nothing I can say about these last five books that will do anything but diminish their own power. They speak for themselves in very major ways. I understand, yes, that they may be hard to come by, but I would do you a disservice if I tried to synopsise them—the stories cease to be the point, and the experience of reading these books takes primacy over even the intricate ideas presented within them. If you can't find these books and you're the kind of person who desperately needs a plot summary, head by Wikipedia or pick up a copy of *The Rosewire Companion*: these last few especially would take several pdf pages to sum up properly, so let better minds distill down what Hardiner wrote. I'll just continue to pontificate.

Jettison Jemison

Rex Patch calls this "a graphic novel without graphics", and I get it: its layout, its arrangement of details, its characters, its stakes—they are all intensely visual and spectacular, summoning to mind noir-soaked halftone illustrations of its "superheroes without superpowers" and their race to save the new President Jemison from the ghastly team of Hunters. Really, for me, it feels like someone turned the illustrations from any Alan Moore work into text.

A lot of readers discount this sixth entry altogether, and I get why they're tempted to do so. None of these characters appear in any of the previous books (although there is a brief computer interlude with a "USER 3" that may be Johnny Kite), and none ever appear again until *Rise* (which isn't saying much, since every single name ever mentioned in the *Rosewire* system comes into play in some way or another in that last massive missive). There seems to be a general dearth of depth and focus, as we range back and forth across a divided America, following a loose team of people who are treated like the X-Men but who have no discernible "powers" and their struggle with Hunters 1-13.

It is shorter than most of the other novels (only *Hunt and Peck* comes up shorter by about 10,000 words, and that was mostly dialogue of sorts), and even President Jemison is never mentioned as a candidate in *Election Day*, which immediately preceded it. Not to put too fine a point on it, but... *Jettison Jemison* is fluff. Pulp. And that's A-OK with me, because it's pulp, *Rosewire* style.

A lot of people will suggest you skip this book if you're in a hurry. I don't necessarily think I can recommend that, but again, I understand the impulse to say that, particularly to people who may have expressed some frustration with *Green Stone Story* and *Election Day* and an interest to return directly to Johnny Kite and his quest to lead/destroy the Board. I'll say when you do read it, keep in mind that it's serving much the same purpose that *Halides* did for *Hunt and Peck* and *Rise* does for the black book: it ties ideas up rather than storylines and characters, and gets us ready to step back into a much wider "real" world with much higher stakes in the final section of the system.

Also, I'll admit that I actually developed my first literary crush on Miles, the charming leader of the Dependents. It's probably important to note that Miles's "power" is that "everyone likes him". Nope: it's a magic trick, I don't know how Hardiner managed that one. But somehow, even just reading the descriptions of that character and how he presents himself to the people around him makes me just

quiver inside. I think even now I might be in love with Miles, which, admittedly, does make me a little bitter. Harry Hardiner created my perfect man, and, barring our own Center Lake conspiracy, I'll never, ever, ever get to know him... or get to go to town on him. To this day, every other man I meet in real life comes up short. Thanks, Harry. Way to ruin my love life at the ripe old age of 16...

the black book

Okay, so this book returns us to Johnny Kite, returns us to Rhodes Rush and to Center Lake and the Board plot, blah blah blah. Let's talk about the cover.

It was the cover that first pulled me to it, I will TOTALLY admit it. The black book was my first Harry Hardiner book. It was sitting in the top floor of a rented beach house, a little widow's walk of a floor really, only accessible by a ship's ladder, and all around windows and books. The black book had a broad screamingly black spine sticking out between an orange plastic and a yellowed cloth-bound book. There was no writing on the spine. Jet tar blackhole black. It sucked in the light around it. My eyes went straight to it. And I scoured the first couple of pages for a title.

All I saw on the title page was,

Harry Hardiner

So of course for a while I thought that was the name of the book I'd picked up and couldn't put down. A mysteriously unconnected name I kept trying to make connections to as I floated through the overlapping stories of 7 people. It never occurred to me as I read that I was seven books deep into a series. Absolutely, there are a lot of blanks filled in by the first six books. But there are a lot of blanks that aren't.

It became clear reading it that there was something going on, something one person alone couldn't fully describe. It just seemed natural that if one person alone couldn't fully describe the events at Center Lake, then seven people together isn't really all that different—of course they'll still leave gaps. And of course in a story about a man named Johnny Kite and his unnamed friend, the name Harry Hardiner is important enough to title a book after but not nearly important enough to explain. There are still times when I think of the Friend as "Harry" because of 12-year-old David. It's hard to shake that kind of excited misconception off, even when you put down the black book and pick up the hot pink one a little ways back in the line and realize that's the author block and THERE IS NO TITLE.

I've written before about my first Hardiner experience and I'm sure I will somewhere again, but the black book will always hold a very special place close to my heart that only *Green Stone Story* can edge out... barely. The characters mean a lot to me (anyone who appears in the Rhodes Rush sequence but not the black book always seems ancillary to me, and a little quaint), the story seems the most immediate and vibrant, the stakes seem the highest, and every single feels infallible.

The untitled black book, with its blank cover (later editions added seven charcoal-grey rectangles to the spine to indicate its placement in the series, and probably its seven protagonists as well), does bring us back around to Center Lake—and it's only here that we learn the Board's insidious plans to invite [spoilers redacted] to end the world, through the eyes of our seven narrators:

Johnny Kite has evidently become one of their most trusted commanders. Good Golly Molly, who's been practicing medicine, identifies a "disease of the word" that is spreading like wildfire in her community. Max Larry has come under Johnny Kite's protection, as the two seem to deal drugs (or are they drugs?) to set the stage for the invitation. The curse that Trueblood the native spins in the last two Rhodes Rush books is in full play as the man himself tries to "shut down the lake". [spoilers redacted] finds a way to Center Lake that isn't strictly, geographically, physically possible. Dear wounded, victimized Sturna crawls out of the pages of *Green Stone Story* along with [spoilers redacted] when [spoilers redacted] and does her best to stop [spoilers redacted]. And the last two narrators I can't even bring up without exposing a literary device that is really better left experienced on your own.

It's a beautiful adventure novel—every section tells an individual story, not in sequence, but overlapping and interweaving, as the Board tears out its intended page and drops it in the open lake. The unravelling that begins at the end of this novel (and *Conquest of Algiers*, AND *Rise*) is a culmination in style as well as content: once [spoilers redacted] steps out of Center Lake to burn the world, we feel the end is near. (Well, nearly a million words later...)

By the end of each section, we have come to the shores of Center Lake—and at the very tail end of the novel, we begin to see exactly how much dismantling of this world is possible, and it's existentially and textually horrifying. If the black book is *Hunt and Peck* for the last third of the system, as Harry Hardiner suggested, then the crazy amount of story detail is just the tip of the iceberg—what is happening behind the lines is far, far more important, if slightly less spectacular and personal. And that's exactly the impression we get when...

Conquest of Algiers

We are suddenly in North Africa. Or the Middle East. Or Hollywood? You know what—it doesn't matter. The Maghreb of *Conquest of Algiers* is an amalgamation of Western interpretations of a lot of arid, "exotic" locales. If anyone ever tried to make a movie out of the book, they could NEVER film "on location"—everything, the desert, the casbahs, the pyramids and temple complexes, the oases: EVERYTHING would have to be on a soundstage. The Maghreb in this book feels like the landscape of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, or *Casablanca*... Or *Ishtar*. And boy, is that intentional.

You see, we only understand this Maghreb (whose landmarks and set pieces are a mishmash of everything from Morocco to Afghanistan) through the eyes of exchange students Barnady and St.-Pierre: this interesting and funny little dyad gives us a love story, a spy yarn, a travelogue, a series of archaeological revelations, and very nearly as much adventure as the whole of *Green Stone Story*... all crammed into its first half. Once they uncover the stela-sarcophagi at Uix, however, and that's no spoiler because one of the chapters is titled, "In Which Barnady and St.-Pierre Uncover the Stela-Sarcophagi at Uix"—after they've sifted the sand off of these powerful artifacts, a race begins, going counterclockwise around the rim of the Mediterranean, sprinting against a powerful and unnamed enemy (could it be Hunter 9 from *Jettison Jemison*, brought through [spoilers redacted] by the will of the Board?) as they rush "towards the end of the world" together.

Again, without giving too much away, the final chapter in *Conquest of Algiers* serves as sort of the eighth section of the black book: we see the events that bring Barnady and St.-Pierre to Center Lake (and perhaps most significantly how they overlap with Good Golly Molly and Trueblood's stories) in a very long chapter oh-so-cleverly titled, "The Eighth Part".

Conquest of Algiers is Rex Patch's favorite novel in the *Rosewire* system—and, even though I'll always place *Green Stone Story* and the black book ahead of it... it's not that hard to see why. *Conquest* has the muscular adventure of *Green Stone Story*, the intrigue of the Rhodes Rush books, and a brightness and humor that sets it apart from very nearly everything else Hardiner ever wrote. It's a sunny book. An oddly sunny book, to be sure, considering the subject matter and where it falls in the sequence of *Rosewire* works, but sunny nonetheless, and warm. Love is weighed against lust and is found to be the greater force. Violence is tested against pacifism, and pacifism seems to come out on top. Its tone is lovely. It's a welcome change, to be sure, after a long, long slog through despair and devastation. No, of course it doesn't exactly "end well", but, well, that's because of what happened at Center Lake, not because of Barnady or St.-Pierre.

Rex Patch once said, "You get the distinct impression that *Conquest* is an apology of sorts, and a consolation prize for those of us who truly believe in the good of this world. That sense of apology is especially strong once you look back on the eighth book from any dismal vantage point in *Rise*."

There are some people who will tell you to stop reading *Rosewire* now, before it drives you insane. Well, those people are boring. So let's go on and hit the last book Hardiner published before his disappearance in 1999.

Rise

Oh, *Rise*. Ohhhh *Rise*. It's... something.

Harry Hardiner once called the contents of this book "foamy prose". Nope, I don't know. It played into a metaphor he was making in an interview with Rex Patch (published as *The Shattered Goblet*): you are building a "goblet" in some strange and new fashion. The sides go up so far that maybe they eventually meet and you have created a bubble. Well, hopefully you've got enough space or some different means to fill that goblet. But once you've filled it... if you keep trying... you can only end up with an overflow or, if your goblet is closed, a shattering.

And that's the best explanation you're going to get about this book.

What happens in the half-a-million words of *Rise*?

Exactly.

There are very few, uh, cursive moments in *Rise*. Points of view, timelines, trains of thought, events, narrators, *language*—they can all shift mid-sentence. Mid-WORD. There is good reason the book has been compared to *Finnegan's Wake*. But, to be fair, it had a reason, it followed a schematic (even if it's been lost: Rex Patch got to look over it on the day he had his last interview with Hardiner, but the document seems to have up and vanished with the author), and it represented exactly what happens when [spoilers redacted] is finally summoned out of the depths of Center Lake. "Story" isn't important anymore: the narrative of the universe has been scrambled. The desires and intentions and characteristics and individual "icons": they're still floating in space (or, you know, unspace), bouncing off one another, bobbling around like molecules in a shaken soda.

Hardiner said in the *Shattered Goblet* interview that the prose—"foamy prose", I should restate, just to drive that image home—was NOT random, and that every shift and bounce and bobble is a reaction to what's around it.

Rex Patch says that *Rise* "performs the integral function on the *Rosewire* system." When I asked Dr Patch to explain that comment a little more, he politely refused, with the most impossible smile on his face. Dr Patch, thank you for all of your help, but damn, throw a brother a bone. Stephen King in his *Entertainment Weekly* review, on the other hand, said in reaction that *Rise* "in fact performs a full frontal lobotomy". I don't know that I can disagree with either of them.

I will full-throatedly admit that *Rise* frustrates the hell out of me. I can tell that there is enormous movement and intention and that there is a struggle to regain some semblance of order (I mean, that's probably the clearest conflict presented in the book: the war between design and chaos)... I can identify certain characters based on their characterizations (and diction) from earlier books (especially the narratives of the black book: particular turns of phrase rise out of the foam to help identify that, say, it's Good Golly Molly now and Trueblood here and Stavra Starvos saying that); I can pick out settings from descriptions and reactions that were familiar from the earlier books... I cannot say, though, with any certainty, what "happens", or what the ending of the book (several pages of seemingly random letters!!! WHAT!?) could POSSIBLY mean.

Which is one of the many, many, many, many, MANY reasons I want to find Harry Hardiner and just throttle him.

The implication is, at some point in the tenth and final book of the system (he'd been saying since *Hunt and Peck* this was a decalogue), everything from *Rise* would be explained. Of course, we didn't get Hardiner's tenth book (or did we? More on that in a second...) and so we readers are left at the end of what we have of *Rosewire* waiting to find out if the genie can be put back in the bottle, so to speak. Or, rather, back in the goblet.

Ugh.

Okay. Well. Uh. I don't know how much else I can write about *Rise* without stealing wholesale from others, or looking like a moron, or both.

I can say, however, that the experience is worth the attempt. I don't know that every person who does attempt it will finish it (quite the opposite, actually), and I don't know that any person who finishes it will understand it, and I don't know if I'd ever want to sit down in the same room with someone who DOES understand it. It's a book that's been shattered and re-fused—exploded and mortared—on so many different scales that it's better just to let it happen to you, rather than trying to find the internal logic. This is what happens when the world ends in *Rosewire*: narrative ceases to be an issue.

Okay.

Okay.

Okay...

Last word here: many people have taken *Rise* to be a sure signal of Hardiner's failing mental facilities. A genius on the cusp of (or in the middle of) a breakdown. Other people have taken it, and so therefore

the whole of *Rosewire*, as a coded map to his current location (or eventual end). So many attempts have been made to squeeze some Harry Hunting truths out of this last book, and, to my knowledge, none of those attempts has actually turned up anything concrete.

But does that mean it's not worth trying?

It's totally within the realm of possibility that Hardiner meant *Rosewire* to be a series of clues and pointers, and that *Rise* is his last hint. And even if he snapped and threw himself in the ocean, perhaps *Rise* and its contents could guide us towards an understanding of his last days. It's worth considering, it's exciting to flay apart, and fist-whitening through it might be, there are some absolutely lovely passages throughout. Even if I can't immediately tell you what any of them mean.

So here we are, at the end of what Hardiner gave us for *Rosewire*. Supposedly, he was in the middle of the last book, the tenth book, in December 1999. We've found a couple of potential "endings" in the years since (I'll leave them out of this section, as there's no way of knowing who wrote them, and if Hardiner did, whether they rightly belonged to the *Rosewire* system), but for all intents and purposes, this is it. *Rise* is the last stop. *Rosewire* is over.

But, let's remember, *Rosewire* is not all the man wrote!

Other Works

Here are just a few of Hardiner's more significant works, in brief.

Syrial, play (1993)

Hardiner's earliest play (or at least the earliest we know of) was published through Pinkum Press in 1993; there was a run of 500 copies, and it was never performed during the author's lifetime. ...It feels weird typing that: while the author was active. This play follows a plane full of people discussing conspiracy theories. It is quite a strange play. A passenger accumulates "companion plants" until the fuselage looks like a jungle, and the plane may or may not be in the air, and they are almost definitely not going to Syria. The Professor character goes on and on about the Law of Conservation of Information. The play either restarts somewhere in the middle and takes a slightly different direction, or the characters don't notice that they repeat themselves wholecloth. Of course, it's subtitled "a still-life with movement". In a conversation I had with Rex Patch, Dr Patch made the observation that it's "Harry Hardiner's 9/11 play": after that, I can't ever read it the same way again.

Burnt Lace, play (1995)

In a similarly miniscule run two years later, Hardiner published another unproduced play, *Burnt Lace*. The southern plantation home of the Burnish family is on fire. This play is the story of 60 seconds in that fire, played out over 60 minutes or more. One production in Atlanta had a runtime of over 3 hours. Over that time, characters deliver lengthy speeches that range from the heat to their histories to theories on heaven and far beyond, there are songs, there are dances, there is the stage direction "they dance because they smell delicious", and it's possible that the entire story is a murder mystery. What's not to like?

Tsai, novel (1997)

This novel about a "created intelligence" (the eponymous Tsai says at one point, "There is nothing artificial about my intelligence," which might be the core message of the book) seems to have come from an earlier story called *Mindflight*. As Tsai becomes capable of arming itself and altering its physical surroundings, scientist Dr Paul uploads his own mind into the cortex to attempt to stop the force's reign of terror. Their struggle through circuits and soft organic loops makes up the last third of the book, and it's in lovely poetry and harsh technical prose.

Bhujarti, play (post.)

The rumor is, the manuscript of *Bhujarti* was found on Hardiner's desk the night the police were called to his Murfreesboro complex, left unfinished except in scenario form after the first scene: the Baron and his court, including Casey Jones, Madame Sosostris, Billy Man, and Rumsfeld, claim to know the world is slowing to a stop. In iambic pentameter, all of them come to an uneasy agreement that it was time to summon *Bhujarti* (no, it's never concretely explained) which will unravel this universe but rekindle the engines of time for the possibility of a new one. Suffice it to say, after this first scene and the infamous "invitation" (see also, Explosionism) which concludes it, things get a little weird. Think Kokoschka weird. Artaud ain't seen shit. Needless to say, staging is difficult. The few times it's been attempted, terrible things have happened to the actors on- and off-stage. So of course, we say the play is cursed. ...The play isn't cursed. There's no such thing as curses. It's what happens when people who are interested in Hardiner AND theatre AND horror put on a play soaked in slippery blood and off-brand hanging

harnesses. The stage fires, the murder-suicides, the bankruptcies, and the romantic failures are pretty easy to understand. And the meningitis outbreak at that one performance in Minnesota was unusually fast-burning but hardly supernatural. Still, I can't wholeheartedly recommend that you try to stage it. I think it's stronger as a closet drama.

Aristotle, play cycle (post.)

The eight plays that make up *Aristotle* were also discovered at Hardiner Hollow (then The Maghreb). The shadowy Aristotle in the title is only rarely directly encountered in these individual plays, but his presence is very directly felt. In this contemporized Ancient Athens, we track Kronos as he dips in and around legendary and mythological histories of the Mediterranean.

(1) *Janus* – Kronos visits five first-day festivals from the days before Göbleki Tëpe's temple was carved to some point potentially past our own. (The fourth act seems to be a New Year's Eve during WWI, and the fifth is full of familiar phrases used in unfamiliar ways, and some new standard of measuring morals or ethics or values.)

This play is notable for Hardiner's only known treatment of Christianity—and one that's not likely to gain him all too many fans in the church. In the third act, Kronos travels to Bethlehem, where he finds the young (unnamed) Jesus, a spoiled brat using impossible powers indiscriminately. After the boy spoils the celebration by turning all the wine into blood, Kronos scolds the boy and gathers together great texts from across time for him to read: the Mahabharata and the Vedas, the works of Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle (see what he did there?), the precepts of Ptah-Hotep, the Dao De Jing, Mayan and Aztec codices, and the Old and, yes, the New Testament of the Bible. The boy seems profoundly moved by the gift, and asks Kronos if he's his father. Kronos panics, truly unsure whether he can answer that question given his time-jumping lifestyle, and hops on to 1918 to try to avoid the issue altogether.

(2) *Heads Up* – Kronos decides to get a leg up in the next century by skipping across it to learn what disasters loom and what windfalls will blow in. He climbs Mount Olympus to observe from among the company of his fellow gods, only to learn that the century he's chosen will all but clear out his decadent company. This play skips across 20 scenes, beginning with Kronos climbing Olympus and ending with his descent at the end of the century; in between, the scenes jump in time, following Kronos as he flits back and forth within the century trying to fix the problems that brought his family so low. Hardiner doesn't specify exactly which century this is, but some of the scenes that Kronos observes on earth suggests that Hardiner placed the play around the time of Alexander's conquest: Kronos tries to "corrupt the flesh of this general, this horseback Oleander".

(3) *Roots* – A very sad Kronos travels back to shop the orchards of Demeter for his favorite fruit, the astraphallus (yes, Demeter calls it a starcock, but Kronos blushes when she does), before it goes extinct. When he's there, he meets a young titan named Prometheus, who is deeply frustrated with the vermin which have recently begun to stalk around the arcades to steal fruit. Kronos promises that any creature may be tamed if it is given the right gifts. Prometheus thinks he'll bring cooked food to the animals, but Kronos suggests that he cook the food in front of them so they can smell it in the air as they watch him tame the wild flame. The animals, of course, love the cooked food, but are more enamored of the fire—and before long, they've torched the gardens ("cooked them") and have armed themselves against the gentle gathered gods. (Naturally, the play again ends with the victorious humans coming to a flustered Kronos and asking if he is their father—and, naturally again, Kronos freaks out and pinks out of there before he gives any kind of straight answer.)

(4) *Zas* – This strange little Pinteresque piece asks for the actor playing Kronos to all of a sudden switch roles and play a character known as "Zas", whose action seems to be following after Kronos and erasing all mention of the god—obfuscating, lying, killing, and generally whitewashing all proofs of the divine out of history. This play deviates from the norm (we assume—unless this IS actually Kronos taking on a different guise and travelling across events that have and have not happened, yet, and

when he returns to his identity as Kronos in the next play he forgets his own actions), and it is also significant for being Hardiner's only known attempt to put his theories about "functional verse" into practice. I will admit I'm the last person to try to explain functional verse, but consider the mathematical function and its transformative abilities: Hardiner's meter and rhyme schemes are constantly self-inflecting and shifting over the entirety of the piece. It's truly an astonishing effect when spoken aloud: the words take on the feeling in your mouth of a flashing school of fish, or birds changing direction as a flock mid-flight.

(5) *The Harp* – This time-hopping love story introduces Kronos to Rhea and is perhaps the most fluid of the plays. It has been staged on its own more than the other entries in *Aristotle* and gives us the only actual appearance of the philosopher. Kronos goes to Aristotle to ask for dating advice (apparently Aristotle got around, particularly with his students), and Aristotle sends him to collect Orpheus's harp. The adventure results in the death of Eurydice and Orpheus's voyage to the underworld, but Kronos pinks several centuries ahead in time (again, to avoid confrontation) to collect Orpheus's enchanted harp from the banks of a woodland stream. Rhea loves the gift of music, but when she learns the story of the harp, centuries later when the events happen in real-time for her, she leaves Kronos forever.

(6) *Fatherhood* – One of Kronos's quirkiest characteristics is more or less explained here, as we learn that he's actually talking to the children he fathered with Rhea: in his stomach, his first daughter Hera asks to understand how her father experiences the world, so Kronos invents the book to represent his ability to flip back and forth through time. It's a kind of bedtime story in which we learn that Kronos can't remember his youth and can't seem to visit himself. At the end of the play, Rhea tells Kronos that she's pregnant again.

(7) *Omphalos* – The play begins with Kronos swallowing a stone he believes is his newborn son and... well... it gets almost as weird as *Bhujarti*. Kronos vomits up the Greek pantheon across time, also spitting up Buddhas and Hindu and Mayan deities and alien gods we know nothing about. There is a lot that's supposed to happen on the stage that might be considered unstageable, but a very lovely animated version by Rana Suveti has made the film festival circuit and is currently showing at the Hardiner museum at Hardiner Hollow. Oh: and where does Kronos puke up his offspring? A little place called Center Lake. One of his daughters calls herself the Wanderer. Strata Starvos from Candlewood...?

(8) *Birthday* – In this play, Kronos decides to kill himself, and he seeks the help of his brother Ophelion (or Apophis) in summoning a force that can actually put him down. I think this play is overlapping somewhat with *Bhujarti* here, because although that force is never named, it "crinkles all the seconds" of the aging god of time "into a point"—and causes the birth of Kronos, a crying baby that Apophis is supposed to "carry into the next room"... where, according to the stage directions, a new performance of *Janus* has begun with a new cast.

Needless to say, full productions of *Aristotle* are very rare, but director Robert Wilson has released a "sketchbook" of his production designs for his dream version of the cycle. The Robert Wilson version has not been staged.

Disappearance

I'm sure half of you skipped right to this chapter, and that's more than fair—so let's briskly begin.

In early 1996, after brief stints in New York, Omaha, Denver, New Orleans, Seattle, Atlanta, Taos, rural Montana, and some time that's still unaccounted for, Harry Hardiner purchased a piece of property in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, and called it The Maghreb. The property, now called Hardiner Hollow, is girdled by thick woodlands that cast dark shadows over the house and the dug pond and the long twisting drive. It was over those trees that neighbors reported lights on December 31, 1999, and which others later reported to have mistaken for fireworks.

A 911 call from that night between [privacy issues] and the operator reported, "Sounds like a firing squad. No ma'am, it's not a

It was along that twisting drive that an empty noose was found hanging from a black cedar. It was in that deep dug pond that a sunken safe was dredged up. It was in that gladed house the pots were discovered boiling over and seven letters were found burned into the wall:

M-E-S-H-A-R-E.

No sign of the author. Absolute radio silence.

The man was little seen in public after he published *Tsai*, and those who had seen or otherwise interacted with him in the preceding months said he was "strange and sad, but not unordinary" (Patch). Maxence Lawrence spoke out against those who claimed the author had a breakdown, saying, "Harry was a man on a mission, but he was happy, not stressed. He loved his work more than anything—he would never leave it unfinished." He was paying his bills on time and in advance, he accepted a job with Nashville-based Basin Gazetteer that was to start in February 2000, and he had written to Hi and Hattie Kerlin of the original Pinkum Press to prepare for a very special manuscript that he would be delivering in "no less than two weeks".

We know that Harry Hardiner told Maxence Lawrence he was writing a book on the "Music Row Mafia". We know that Harry Hardiner visited Oak Ridge earlier in the month. We know that Harry Hardiner was seen at the Granny Smith Market sometime between 5 and 8pm on the evening of December 29: he bought apricot fruit leather and some produce. We know bright lights were seen over The Maghreb very early in the morning of the last day of the millennium and that police were called before sunrise. We know the noose was in the Hanging Cedar, the safe was in Treasure Pond, food was steaming but not burning on the stove, and MESHARE was on the wall. We know that after that, there has been neither hide nor hair of Harry. He is up and gone.

Probably.

Theories

So... what happened to Harry Hardiner? Good fucking question.

Music Row Mafia

Some people assume that Hardiner's comment to Maxence Lawrence that he was working on a book about "the Music Row Mafia" was meant to refer to a literal organized crime syndicate in Nashville, and they think that he might have uncovered some information that earned him a swift whacking. This theory seems to have the most traction among Hardiner devotees, although I'm not sure I could believe that Hardiner and Lawrence were on such close speaking terms after being slighted over *Rise*. Maxence Lawrence was never the most trustworthy person, as far as I can see, and everything about this theory (including the questionable existence of any Music Row Mafia) relies on his word.

Oak Ridge

Visitor logs to the secure facility at Oak Ridge prove that Harry Hardiner was signed in and escorted around. Although details have never been publicly verified, close sources have said that Hardiner was writing about nuclear power and had asked to be better-educated in the subject. There are no surviving documents relating to nuclear science in the papers found at Hardiner's Maghreb estate. Some conspiracy theorists have suggested that Hardiner was abducted by the military and these papers destroyed to prevent sensitive materials from being leaked. Obviously, no government agency responds to this line of questioning.

Secret Debt

Hardiner did not seem to have been in financial straits when he disappeared, but in more recent years, certain documents have come to light which suggest he had borrowed extensively from Maxence Lawrence to cover the costs of his property's upkeep and the publication of the last few *Rosewire* books. There is speculation that increased pressures on Hardiner to repay these loans may have resulted in some sort of adverse action against him which may have gotten out of hand—or that the author fled before that kind of reprisal could come his way. To me, this doesn't explain the flamboyance of his disappearance (the noose, the lights, the MESHARE), but it certainly points up the uneasy relationship he kept with Maxence Lawrence throughout the 90s.

Lovers' Feud

Which brings us most directly to the only person ever officially investigated as a subject in Hardiner's disappearance, Lawrence himself. The editor and mystery writer of course denied any and all involvement up until his *own* disappearance (and death) in 2008—to me, it brings to mind the whole Natalie Wood scandal, and like that drowning, I am not quite certain I can have an opinion about what may have happened. There is little doubt that there were very strained interactions between the two writers over the course of the decade, and very high passions in play behind closed doors. Jazra Jaban, in her film *Max Larry, Haunted Fairy* suggests that the assault in *Lights Low* was taken from an episode in real life, which cemented the dooms of both authors. In the movie, a scarred Maxence hires a hitman who fails to kill Harry, but who drives the *Rosewire* author into hiding, plotting his revenge. This revenge entails driving Lawrence crazy, feeding an obsession to know the truth about that night, which ends in Lawrence's death in that refrigerator in rural West Alabama. Of course, the movie places the refrigerator in the woods at Hardiner Hollow...

Family

Harry Hardiner apparently went out of his way to obscure his past, perhaps even adopting a fake name, and almost certainly manufacturing wholecloth the stories of his childhood in nonexistent Bookbright. However, some Harry Hunters believe that the last book in the *Rosewire* series would reveal Hardiner's true past—and that it may have cast a poor light on his true family, who either "called him home" to prevent the publication of this last book or, more in line with the way Hardiner talked about "filial piety" in his books, who killed him to silence their ungracious son. Although it's no longer considered a serious possibility, this theory is the basis of Rupert Smythe-Pryce's book *Harry Hunters* and has endured in the public mind as perhaps the "Hardinest" theory around.

Fraud

Of course, there is the very distinct possibility that the whole disappearance was staged by Hardiner himself in connection with any of these other theories, or perhaps for publicity, or perhaps in a dramatic suicidal burst. Even if this is the case, dedicated Harry Hunters still look for clues that would explain the strange events of that night. One off-shoot of this theory: Harry Hunter did NOT leave *Rosewire* unfinished—after a lifetime of experimenting with form, his last *Rosewire* "book" WAS the disappearance. ...I can't say that seems totally out of line with everything that came before, but, like many Hardiner fans, I tend to believe this is a cop-out.

The Fringe

And then we get into the just plain old weird, wacky, and malicious.

Ascension – Harry Hardiner "rose" (get it? *Rise*?) out of The Maghreb and into some higher plane of existence, explaining the lights—the noose on the Hanging Cedar slipped through from the other universe and changed places with the author.

Neo Nazi Numerology – First proposed by youtube commenter hesteryouth, Harry Hardiner chose his own name (more specifically his first initials) to coincide with the Neo Nazi rallying cry "Heil Hitler", or HH, or 88. I do not see ANYTHING in Hardiner's work to suggest he had any connection with the Aryan Brotherhood or any other hate groups, and, in fact, his own ethnicity is very much in question. What's more, Hardiner did seem to have an obsession with the number 8: but this obsession seemed to have been fed by the Far East as opposed to Berlin.

The Yi Jing – There is, actually, an incredibly convoluted theory that I will not go wholly into here involving the Yi Jing, the true name of YHWH, and the sequence of chapters in *Green Stone Story* strongly featuring evidence of Hardiner's obsession with the number 8, numerology, and gematria. Again, there is the general thought of "Hardiner unveiled something dangerous", which is probably more telling than any of the arcane details of this theory.

The Safe – The safe that was dredged up from the silty bottom of the deep Treasure Pond in March 2000 was never publicly opened: it was, in fact, the first duty of the Trust Maghreb to seize the safe and protect its contents from public scrutiny. Law enforcement officials tried to reclaim the safe as evidence in the short-lived investigation, but legal barriers were too high. Some Harry Hunters point out that the safe was large enough to contain dismembered remains, and that possibly Harry Hardiner's body was found on the property after all. The Trust Maghreb put out a press release "cataloguing" the supposed contents of the safe—some bearer bonds, a few "undiscovered manuscripts" which have yet to be described or released, a collection of personal photographs, a personal computer, and some personal belongings including a watch and an antique rifle. We have not seen these contents. Like some online commenters have said before me, maybe it's easier here to just "trust Maghreb".

Where do you stand?

Me? Oh, you want to know what I think happened to Harry Hardiner? I could not begin to tell you. And, truth be told, I wouldn't be terribly upset if we never learn. The mystery has given me a lot of opportunity to look very closely at Hardiner's work both as artistic creations and as possible statements about this world, and that investigation has changed the way I think of just about everything. The beauty of Harry Hardiner's disappearance is that it feels so solvable, and yet it's never been remotely solved. It's 2016, and a man with an invented past achieved great tasks in a short time and just evaporated into thin air. We know everything about *everyone* now; but Harry Hardiner is still one big question mark from top to bottom.

But really, what do you think happened?

Okay, you're going to force me into this? Well, I'll admit I think he's probably dead. Suicide doesn't seem out of character for the man, although it makes me very sad to say that, and very angry with him if he did it. I mean, come on, Harry. You want to kill yourself? Then just keep living—time will take care of that nicely for you. I also think he had put too much work in to just leave *Rosewire* unfinished. I believe he was working on his last book, and something happened. I don't know what. I don't presume to guess. But I think he wound up dead, and the people around him covered it up. Rex Patch vociferously disagrees with me—he's one of the very loud camp that still thinks, even the better part of two decades later, that Hardiner is in hiding somewhere, perhaps on the beaches of Zihuatanejo or in a cabin in the foothills of Nepal, hoarding his last book until he feels it's time to release it.

I think that's a rather pie-in-the-sky fantasy myself, but it's given a lot of Harry Hunters gas for their tanks, fueling a search that has truly crawled the earth after the author and that even now, in its own diminished way, maintains a stranglehold over some people's obsessions. I personally choose to read the *Rosewire* books (and the rest of Hardiner's work) for the pleasure of reading them, and choose to "Harry Hunt" within their pages not in hopes of finding the author to shake his hand or slap his face, but in order to better understand the hand that put them down. We may never know where Harry Hardiner was born, or to what family—but it's my fervent belief that we cannot help but write what we know, and that trying to find Harry's face behind his pages might help me grow as a writer and as a human being.

Rosewire 10

We said earlier that it's possible *Rosewire* was completed after all—and I'm not talking about the theory that the author's disappearance was actually the last entry in the system-series. No—in the years after Hardiner's vanishing, several supposed "tenth books" have been "discovered" or outright ghostwritten (including one by yours truly that is currently under contract with the Society of Algiers).

The first, *A Bed*, was released 2001 as the final entry in *Rosewire*'s vast sprawling network, but it doesn't quite make sense as a conclusion. This fable on the power of love traces two men as they share a bed (but not a room or a time period), and though it encounters characters from the *Rosewire* series, they only ever appear in dreams. After intense scrutiny (and a mathematical survey of the text and its construction), this book was more or less debunked as being wholly Hardiner's work in 2011: although many paragraphs and vignettes hold up, much of the text was found to be more consistent with the *Lord Parker* mysteries of Maxence Lawrence. The current prevailing theory is that Lawrence collected some of Hardiner's unpublished writings and reshaped them into a rough narrative—it's hard to know what he gained out of all that effort, as the proceeds from the book went straight to the inchoate Trust Maghreb, but computer algorithms don't lie.

In 2010, another book was released through the Trust Maghreb—this one was simply titled *Rosewire*, and it dealt with a small town in the Old West called *Rosewire* and its miniature civil war. The same study that determined *A Bed* was not entirely Hardiner's did not find the same to be true with *Rosewire*: in fact, the computer's results claimed that there is a 99% certainty of Hardiner's authorship, and of course, computer algorithms don't lie. Whether this book was meant to be the actual conclusion of the series is again under question, however, because regardless of the title and its titular setting, none of the characters from earlier *Rosewire* books appear—at least in recognizable form.

Rex Patch, Zachary Osgood, Nory Lantham, Neil Gaiman, and Heather Pess contributed essays to *The Rosewire Companion* which suggest thematic crossovers between certain characters in the series, and lays out quite a convincing argument that *Rosewire* is the beginnings of a new cycle of events that will again lead to an unravelling of the world like the end of the black book and *Conquest of Algiers*. If that's the case, then the "Navel" mineshaft may serve the same purpose as Center Lake, and the Sheriff's posse may represent a new Board in the making, and Daniel Stone might be a new Johnny Kite (or Friend).

Harry Hardiner loved his cycles, especially when the next rotation didn't quite match the last. I tend to buy into this argument, and I'm quite convinced at this point that *Rosewire* is actually the last book in the *Rosewire* system—but I also believe it is not presented to us the way that Harry Hardiner would have liked. Whether it would have undergone further revisions or restructuring, none of us can say for sure, but it's worth remembering as you read it that it's probably NOT the end of *Rosewire*, or we would have gotten it years prior to its actual release.

And, of course, there are many better minds who have come to that conclusion and other conclusions that more or less take any legitimacy away from this posthumous publication. That means that lots of Hardiner fans have taken it upon themselves, before and after *Rosewire* was published, to finish the system their own way, or as they think Hardiner intended. This lovely tradition has spawned the Society of Algier's Tenth Book Competition, which is given once every two years to a writer who writes the best conclusion to Hardiner's series. In the past, I've won (bitches!), and so has Jazra Jaban, Zachary Osgood, and, of course, Rupert Smythe-Pryce for the book that started it all: *Harry Hunters*.

Harry Hunters

In 2004, British TV personality Rupert Smythe-Pryce released a book about Hardiner's disappearance and a group of people who gathered together to track the writer down. In this "unfiction novel", Rup and his girlfriend Petra round up 11 others to hunt for Bookbright—and they find it. In section headings like "Hunt and Peck" and "Election Day", Smythe-Pryce collects episodes from the group's time in Bookbright by theme rather than chronology, and over the course of these chapters, the group cobbles together their variety of theories on Harry Hardiner's whereabouts into a sort of "megatheory": Hardiner's family abducted him through magical means to prevent Harry Hardiner from showing Bookbright to the world. The book ends with a disclaimer that everything it presents actually happened, but the names had to be changed to protect the innocent—namely, the group that Rup and Petra got together.

In interviews after publication, Rupert Smythe-Pryce maintained his story: he had discovered Bookbright with his team, they had changed certain details to conceal its location and true identity, and yes, several of his group members had died before his eyes. Of course none of this has ever been verified—least of all the true identities of the other 11 in the original supposed group of Harry Hunters—but it sparked Smythe-Pryce's occultist career, including giving him the cachet to produce his show *Stronger than Fiction*.

In 2011, Rupert Smythe-Pryce, his girlfriend Petra, and his single *Stronger than Fiction* cameraman were found asphyxiated in a hotel room in downtown Nashville. Their deaths were put down to carbon monoxide poisoning—but rumors persist that they were in Tennessee to shoot an episode of his literary myth show in "the real Bookbright", and that someone (or something!) had to stop them. Again, it's a bit of a shame that such a tragic accident can become fodder for more conspiracy theories revolving around Hardiner—and yet, somehow entirely appropriate.

Still, since 2004, Hardiner fanatics who choose to investigate Hardiner's whereabouts or true identity through his works (either solely in the page, or out in the field) have been known as Harry Hunters.

I myself became a Harry Hunter soon after reading Rupert's excellent little page-turner. And yes, there were a few years there where I thought I was going to find Bookbright myself and track the author down. However, after meeting with the late Smythe-Pryce at a Society of Algiers conference (he was giving the Me Share Talk), I'm pretty firmly convinced that that brilliant little Brit found himself a whole lot of nothing—but a great deal of inspiration for a great novel that greatly inspired a great number of people to look more closely at a swiftly-forgotten author. So these days, instead of travelling the backroads of Tennessee, I stick to my home and scour the pages Hardiner left us for some better idea of who the man was.

Why do people still care? Why do I devote myself to this man I know I'll never meet? Is it what he said? Is it how he said it? Is it the mystery itself? Is it the frustration of having to go on without that perfect intended ending? I can really only take stabs at it—all I can truly say is that Harry Hunting quickly becomes a lifestyle, a philosophy, a higher calling. There seems to be something vast behind Hardiner's works, some truths that he tried to chisel away at, and to my mind, any efforts to peel back the layers can only bring us closer to understanding the universe around us. Why bother to do that? Well... You'll have to find your own reasons.

Legacy

So what did Harry Hardiner leave us?

A staggering amount of text: 26 discovered short stories, more than 200 poems, 15 or more novels, 17 or more short and full-length plays, and about 40 essays written for magazines and his own personal edification.

An enduring mystery: his origins, his writing methods, his philosophies, and his baffling blip out of existence, not to mention the subcultural phenomenon born to detect the truths he buried.

A theory of modern culture and the obsession with data and "expansion" that we now call Explosionism: that endless repetition of wholecloth, burst, explosion, mortaring, and the kettle that takes us into the next wholecloth to start the cycle over again, evident in *Lost* and the plays of Martin McDonagh and the music of the Flaming Lips and everything in between.

A fingerprint on the throat of the world:

Hardiner references suddenly appear everywhere around you when you look.

Sufjan Steven's sprawling songscape "Onward Ho, Across the Maghreb, Into the Plot Device, Go!" borrows heavily from *Conquest of Algiers* and *Harry Hunters*.

The Sesame Street skit "The Shattered Muppet" about logarithmic growth and overpopulation mimics the "foam" of *Rise*.

The Simpsons reference *Lights Low* (Al Brooks has said publicly that it's his favorite of the *Rosewire* novels) in very nearly every episode produced after the novel's publication.

Even President Obama in his first inaugural address quoted President Jemison's Hunter 3 speech wholecloth: "We will not apologize for our way of life, nor will we waver in its defense, and for those who seek to advance their aims by inducing terror and slaughtering innocents, we say to you now that our spirit is stronger and cannot be broken; you cannot outlast us, and we will defeat you."

Harry Hardiner is all around you. If you haven't stopped to pay him any notice before, maybe now you will. He might be dead. For all we know, he *did* "rise up" out of this universe and into some other one. But if you look around, you'll still find him here. He's gone, but he's everywhere.

You can't escape him.

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Short Fiction

"Johnny Kite and Friend"
 "Grails"
 "More than the Fields"
 "The Bull Field"
 "Strong Branches"
 "Apple Pastures"
 "Hidden Hollow"
 "Treasure Purse"
 +18 untitled

Novels

Tsai
An Overabundance of Pencithin Moustaches
North (unfinished)
 1 *Hunt and Peck/Web of Lies*
 2 *Lights Low*
 3 *Halides*
 4 *Green Stone Story*
 6 *Jettison Jemison*
 7 *the black book* (untitled)
 8 *Conquest of Algiers*
 9 *Rise*
 ?10 *A Bed*
 ?10 *Rosewire*
 +4 untitled

Poetry

Pogrom Program, verse novel
 "Center Lake"
 "Upharsin"
Yeah Chemistry, collection
 +81 untitled

Drama

"Telicity"
 "Park Man"
 5 *Election Day*
Bhujarti
Burnt Lace
Syrial
Aristotle, play cycle
A Great Ringing of Bells, screenplay
 +9 untitled

Other

Loom, essay collection
The Shattered Goblet, interview