

Who Do I Have To Kill To Get A Little Respect Up In Here?

By Brian Murphy

Alajuala, Costa Rica.

Oh man, just to get some respect around here.

After too long and too many encounters out of the ordinary, you start to wonder just what it's going to take, anyways? It's not like you're a tourist. You start to wonder if maybe it's just too much to hope for – respect. Sometimes you wonder, “Who do I have to kill?”

Still, you stay loose, you roll away from punches, then you beat a few heads. Bar Sin Problemas. Your idea. The bar and the name.

A rock ‘n roll bar without problems, in a dangerous barrio somewhere in Costa Rica? Bar of no problems? You must have been out of your mind. It's a crash and burn bar for the locals unless you get a little respect around here.

Like Ziggy Stardust sang, baby, “It's a rock n roll suicide.”

Weeks ago, when the beer distributor for the two national brands - Pilsen and Imperial - still hadn't taken away the old neon beer sign outside with the old name, some kids drove their panel truck underneath the sign and you got up there with a can of oil-base black spray paint.

As quick as you sprayed “Bar Sin Problemas” up onto the plastic, it ran - the words melting in black angst, running down the front of the sign. Barely legible. Spooky though. At night, the sign on, it cast a pale yellow silhouette down onto the parking lot in front of your place.

The black lettering, spiked and wicked-looking, sometimes make you lose your bearings. Take you back in time. When you drive up on your Harley, it looks like a punk bar on Wells Street in Chicago – 1979. Maybe that's why you did the sign up in the first place.

Your kid at the bar took potshots at you that night – the day you did the sign. Yeah, it was Sunday. Yeah, the joint was closed. Yeah, maybe he didn't hear that it was you outside, screaming, “Mario, it's me Sal. I locked myself out!” Maybe he didn't hear you pounding on that front door.

But you figured he would have had to hear you once you climbed onto the roof and kept screaming that it was you. You thought he'd wake up and walk out, see it was you, wave, and go through the bar to open the front door.

After that didn't happen, you figured he might hear you on the roof, banging and crashing like a storm without rain. And if he didn't hear any of that, then for sure he'd hear the dog, Iggy, barking right in front of the door to the bunker he slept in.

Maybe it was the dog's barking that finally caught his attention. You were practically at the end of the building. When he did come out, waving the pistol like a drunk Pancho Villa, he then ripped off four shots right at you.

All you'd wanted was for him to let you in with his keys, not show you what a maniac you'd hired to manage your bar. You dove for a drain pipe, and a portion of the roof came off and somehow wrapped itself around you like armor as you fell.

You wondered if he didn't know it was you all the long. Costa Rican humor. Some such shit. Or maybe he was showing you how tough he'd be on intruders.

You fired his ass, chased him the fuck out, hitting him with his mattress all the way through the bar – a long one, like, as long as a bowling alley.

Now, your language deficiency – poor Spanish, is probably digging you a big enough hole that maybe you and the bar, will fall through it any minute. Hell, maybe you'll end up in China if you fall far enough.

You may as well have been in China. Your customers? They may as well be speaking Chinese. For all you know, they are. No one talks behind your back after you fired Mario. With as much Spanish as you know, they just say it to your face. Then smile so you buy them a drink.

Rock n roll suicide.

So you need another guy – a manager. Bi-lingual. The city you're in, this is a need that sorely screams to the locals, "*Gringo. Ready to be fucked.*"

That's what you're thinking tonight, while you drive down to The Infernero, Alajuala's "Little Hell," to buy some coke. You're thinking that you have definitely got a problem at the bar of no problems. So what else is new?

When you hit the road into the barrio San Jose, you give your bike a little gas, then glide past the sleeping neighborhood.

Past that, just down the road, silhouettes dance by an old wooden bus stop, under the lone street light. That's where you're going.

Like always, whenever you see a dope supermarket on the street, you automatically feel a breeze charged with electricity blowing onto your forehead. Winter or summer, no matter where you are, you feel the heat of commerce.

New York, Rio, or Chicago, it's all the same. Dangerous business - the 24 hour variety. Everyone is welcome. It's how you grew up. You just always believed there had to be places like this. You're in second gear. Puttering.

The houses have disappeared. There's just decaying brick shacks – crash pads. For laughter. For tears. For quick sex. Anything where harm of some sort can be done in private.

At the bottom of the first hill, Barrio San Jose, the Zamora street crews are out in force. Laughing and dancing to Limp Bizkit throbbing out of a boom box someone has set on the hood of a car, parked in front of the first shack at the bottom of the hill.

There's a soccer ball in play. Taxies and cars stop briefly. Tattooed boys run up to the open windows with large plastic bags filled with grams of coke. Transactions are quick, but rarely mirthless. This is Central America. Everyone knows how to laugh. Even when they're dying.

These guys, the boys you call the "Down, Down Boys"- Zamora's crew, they all come to your bar. These guys are for the most part, your best customers.

They have the first post that you drive by, down at the bottom of the hill.

"Down, down. Boys." They liked that. They know you've been down, down before – maybe will again, someday. One night at your bar, you played the Zamora boss and some of the kids, Iggy Pop's "Dum Dum Boys."

When you translated the lyrics while Iggy mourned the passing of all his boys, they all went nuts. They all wanted to be "Dum-dum boys" – fearless and peerless.

Their own revolution against all the ills and poverty that did its level best to keep them on the street. They loved that too.

Mi Cumpa. Mi Cumpa. Screams go up when you rev down into first gear, then drop your feet. Sometimes you stay and try a conversation. There's ten or eleven guys out tonight. They run to shake your hand. You're a humble celebrity. You've been tough enough down here. It's one of those places in the world where guts and a proven nut-case streak get you even further than money. Money ain't shit down here. Anyone can have it. It's just paper.

You'd flogged some kilos of reefer to Beto Zamora - the boss, before the tax people arrested him, his mother, his lawyer and half his family. This is a place where you've always been treated well.

The Zamora without tattoos - the eldest brother, the straight business man - was out on the street the very next morning after the bust, peddling coke. Zamora balls, tattoos or not.

He was there to let the city know that the show was going on without Beto. Sin Problemas. You drove down that morning also. With a bottle of tequila and a rose for the mother. He understood.

Finally workers drifted back - the tattoo boys. But the main tattoo, Beto Zamora, he was locked up tight. You miss him. He at least had advice.

Another night at the bar, he'd made a very small space between two fingers, then howled, "You're only this far from fucked, Gringo." Slamming down his shot, he came over and gave you a bear hug. Pointing to his chest, he said, "*Igual, Gringo, Igual.*" Same as me.

You dropped by the prison at San Sebastian and hung out with Beto for a while after his arrest. He had everything in there. Still, you'd already been in one five years. No matter how much you have inside, you still can't come and go. Not even Beto Zamora. Any freedom you got - it's got to have something to do with who you are to begin with. How strong. How patient. How content or how angry. So far, Beto seemed pretty free.

Riding home from San Sebastian that day, helmet hanging from the handlebar, feeling the wind catch your hair, you dodged the few traffic cops that cared enough to chase you for driving without a helmet. As you smoked the first cop car, you realized just how similar you really were to Beto Zamora. It was a game you played.

Driving away from the boys after buying eight grams, your hog wants to decide what to think of the rotten petrol you filled up with earlier. It decides. It sputters and you barely keep it running. Then, after a righteous backfire, that bitch wants to fly.

You shotgun some coke and kick into third gear and build speed, up towards where there's nothing but dark, winding road and coffee plants. The only sound in the world, you and the hell you are raising.

Getting back now, it's close to five. Too lazy to open up the big doors, you chain up your Harley outside. Just as you click the padlock closed, a taxi pulls up. There's three girls inside. You don't need a Berlitz course to know that this is a good thing.

They're friends of a dollie you spent a few hours with a while back. She'd come to your bar with a group, and while they were drinking, you left for her place, then brought her back an hour or so later. That was when Mario was still there, before he tried to kill you.

She lived in the row of cottages behind the huge meat processing plant, Cinta Azul. You'd always heard that it was a dangerous place. Poverty brings dangerous to desperate, wherever the poor live. This was such a place. Rooms out in back of the front cottages rented daily, weekly, monthly. Whatever. Very little asked. Just stay alive to pay tomorrow.

Pulling up, you chained your bike to the one tree out in the parking lot – really just dirt and stones. She told you not to worry about the bike.

To get to the rooms, you followed her though a concrete hallway with dim moonbeams coming through from the roofless top to light your way. There was a common shower and latrine on one side off the hallway. You thought how interesting a place like that could be in this dark. Then you thought about your bike. Maybe you would have been worried, except that you couldn't take your eyes off the girl walking in front of you, her ass swishing and swinging.

She whispered that she'd wet her pants. She didn't mean with urine, by the way. She told you they were spotted with fluids she claimed she couldn't stop.

You told her to keep the juice flowing. She shuddered as if a cool breeze had suddenly swept down from the hog farm behind the cottages and along the river. You remembered fragrances. Her perfume, then the hog farm and finally, the baking smells of alcohol from the still they worked day and night over at the farm. Pigs and drunk Costa Ricans – 24 hour lunacy.

Down here, every Costa Rican you meet, tells you, "*Pura Vida.*" Pure life. As you reach for baby love's naked shoulders once she drops her blouse, you laugh, thinking about the hog farm.

Baby, now *that's* pura vida.

Sure enough, when you pulled her pants down, there was a dull white froth and more juice smeared onto her underwear. You ripped her panties off and her cunt began to squirt like a fountain. For a minute you felt like Superman. Then you dragged your finger against her dark, purple lips and juice was all over your arm – an explosion of desire.

Definitely that was your feeling when you went back there on your own, days later – four in the morning. You gambled your bike for flesh. It's not like you could drive up quietly. Everyone in the whole joint, rooms and cottages, knew you'd just driven up. Gringo loco. Looking for that "Good Thang."

That's what need can do. Needing dope, a woman – anything. Need means taking a chance.

But oh, lookee here. It's her three friends. So you let them in and put the dog out in the back. He's pissed. He'd gotten into one of the ladies purses and when you saw him running around with a tampon in his mouth like a cigar, you realized he'd steal the show.

You get everyone a drink. Then put on some New York Dolls and sit back to view the scene. Warm soft light, no noise outside, and three semi-to-very hot pros sitting close and showing a lot of leg and chest.

There's nothing sexier in the whole world than being with a woman in a closed bar. Alright, maybe only to you. But multiply one woman times three and you'd hardly get an argument from too many men.

If the girl you'd slept with out there by the factory was nasty good, her friends this morning remained as yet, un-quantified. They were an unknown pleasure. Or maybe?

That's alright. You know that there's nothing they can steal. You serve them beer. That's cheap. Their company suddenly is ludicrous. No one seems to want to see your office, or to check the plumbing out with you in the woman's washroom.

Still, you strut like the little red rooster. It's the Sal Palermo show, all the way live, at the bar of no problems.

Except that they want to smoke some reefer. You got coke – cocaine that is, forget about Coca-Cola – you got that too. You got every brand name and variety of booze they allow in the country. You figure you're fairly easy to look at. In other words, in such a poor place, you have pretty much everything.

Everything you got here, except reefer. You just sold fifty kilos. Not that the girls would have known that. Now, all you wish for is a joint. Like, "Lord, is that too much to ask for?"

Invariably, someone will have to roust a taxi, take them "Down, down" and buy some pot. It's light out – after six, when the taxi pulls off. Now there's two dollies. Now you're tired. It's a wash. Fuck it. But, not only that, you'll be up till next winter if you keep falling for this shit. Your eyes hide under raccoon circles of black.

Just as invariably as the one is leaving in the taxi – divide and conquer - the other two have suddenly found so many things to talk about that now they practically ignore you. That's fine. You want them gone. Maybe you will sleep a little if you can.

But every time you write the girls off and return to the study of the tequila bottle you are slowly emptying along with too many beers to count, the girls chat away and you can't help but hear the word, "*Moto*" repeatedly.

David Johanson wails "Lonely Tenement" while you start to put one and one together. *Moto*. That's motorcycle in Spanish. And as far as you know, you're the only one present with one.

You start to doubt seriously that they're talking about what a good find you are because you're charming, handsome and you have this extraordinary motorcycle. They play-fake when you look their way. Sometimes, although you'd barely seemed to notice, you catch them whispering. You know a set-up. This one is a cartoon of poor subtlety.

When the taxi returns and everyone is reunited, they all decide that what would really be swell is for all of you to go back to their place – the surreal dump – "cottage nightmare row," where who-the-fuck-knows-what can happen to a gringo in that labyrinth at seven a.m.

What a great idea. Why stay here where there's every amenity imaginable, and now, even some pot to smoke?

No, they won't hear of it. Promises start to circulate about blowjobs given by all three. Crazier sex than you've ever had. Well, sure, they couldn't know about the girl and the snake. You laugh. They all are telling you at once to follow them on your *moto*.

You say, "Right, right, The Moto. Sure. Why stay here where it's cool and safe and we have booze, coke, places to fuck, when I can drive my Harley over to a sweltering shit box and risk my life?"

All three girls laugh and nod, yes, of course. Still, they add *moto* enough times that you begin to get the picture. They are very hopeful to see you at the cottages.

You tell them with enough "Cynical Hall" wisecracks to let them know there is no chance you are going to stay here alone when you can go hang out with three women in a shithole

One of the little bombshells with the circus tits is on your phone. "*Moto*" is heard over and over again. Obviously your bike is part of some grand agenda amongst quite a few early risers, or late going to bed gals and pals.

When you hear her on the phone, you go out in front of the bar and unchain your hog. Coming back into the bar, you start to swing the heavy link chain with fast and cutting kung-fu moves.

The girls have already called a taxi. Now it seems as if they are all in a hurry to get out into the heat and go back to their slum.

You don't mind getting rid of them. They want you to drive up there on the bike. Each girl has managed a promise that you will never forget the sex this morning.

First, you ask, "What sex?"

Finally, to get them all out, you let them know you'll be following shortly on the bike after you have taken all the tampons away from the dog, then feed him his three double-sized cans of tuna.

Another taxi shows up and everyone kisses you on lips and cheeks and all try for an excuse that might force you to get a better look at the six sets of darkly tanned breasts. A nipple here and there. They want to do you harm.

In this city, even one tough bitch can be every bit as dangerous as a man. In this fucking world, you always keep reminding yourself, you will always be a visitor. Not a tourist, but never exactly ever really one of them. And these bitches here? They suddenly don't seem human. Just flesh and long sharp nails. Harpies to rip you apart. Leave your bones to rot. Not the future Mrs. Palermo here, you say to yourself and laugh.

They leave and you're laughing again. The coke is your blood now. The river inside of you has turned the corner and gets whitewater status. You almost growl. Your blood, it's telling you that you aren't tired at all. It's telling you to go over there and tempt fate. Have some fun.

So you go with your loose chain – the one you've become an expert knocking the shit out of street punks with, spinning it and twisting it and lashing out. Already, it's claimed an eyeball in San Jose one night when you stumbled too far from the Bar Dominica. You'd been attacked. Dangerous little shits that come at you in packs.

You go visit the ladies. In a taxi.

Pink cottages. All of them in a row, and at the end, a hallway that takes you to the sweatboxes out back. Right about now, the hot sun starts to bake those corrugated roofs. If anyone is trying to sleep, they must be real tired. Or already dead.

The only relief from the heat might be in the cool cement walls of the hallway or into the communal shower.

But this morning, there's a few doors open. Especially, you see with a tinge of respect for the ace-consistency of a moron, the door to the dollie you visited. You say out loud with a laugh. "Oh what a coincidence. It's you-know-who. And she wants me to come into her room. Not a fucking chance."

And she's standing there. It's such a poor trap, you think. And still, you hear, "*Moto.*" No moto.

They don't know you've taken a taxi. They want this so bad, they forgot to even listen. When you walked in, their minds started to race. No one thought it strange that they didn't hear the bike.

All they are thinking is that they must now find a way to get you in a room. Obviously, they thought it was a sure thing – that you'd go into the old girl's room. Why shit, you think - after all, you two are practically married now. Why wouldn't you go in there?

That's what the ladies are bugging out trying to answer. Not why they didn't hear you come up.

Now, like out on the highway, driving without a helmet, you want to play cat-and-mouse for bigger stakes. Maybe this morning, it's your life you'll be gambling with.

Here comes another woman – older, so absolutely a first pick of yours for 'Most Insidious. Most Dangerous. The Boss.' When you learn that she's the landlord, you smile. Instincts. Working.

This one? She's mean. That's what age has done for her. It's replaced her beauty with meanness and a fragile wisdom of the world. She wants her girls here to toss you on a scrap heap, and she is furious with them for not pulling this off like clockwork. That's when you really laugh. In her face.

You're thinking about Costa Rican clockwork. It's an oxymoron. Everyone is late. Just like you're making yourself late right now – late for your own funeral.

She must be wailing at them, you think. You hear her say: "*Estupido, tonto*" enough times to appreciate that their airtight plan has unraveled. And the boss, she's not going to let her girls forget so easily. Besides, if they hadn't come out to your place, they could have earned her some real money right here on their backs.

You also hear, "*Moto.*" She has obviously just arrived from the entrance, maybe just drove up for the ceremony - the celebration of a Gringo locked up like a rat in a cage, locked in a fucking oven-backed tin can.

That would have been the second thing she had expected to see, not you alive and well and swinging enough chain in arcs and wide loops in front of your chest to seriously maim anyone who rushes you.

The last thing she expected to see was you alive and out in that courtyard, swinging your chain and matching evil look for evil look.

But what's really got her going is that the first thing she did expect to see, your Harley, doesn't even seem to be out there.

Like, "Where is this fucking Harley?" Only she doesn't say Harley. Because she thinks, like they all did, that you'd recognize the word, "Harley," but that you might not understand the Spanish word for motorcycle. They may as well have asked you to stamp, 'Stuck on stupid' all over your ass and forehead.

No, she is starting to rethink this one. In fact, she just fucking leaves.

It's just that you won't let your feet take you all the way into ole girl's room. You laugh and manage in Spanish that you've been there already. Then, out in the courtyard, you let them circle. There's another room. They pretend there's a lady inside. Only she won't open her door.

This must be plan two, you think. Like, if you're not going into a room with a girl you know, why in the fuck you going to go into a room with someone you don't know? You stay clear of that room, still swinging your chain. None of the girls want to come near you. Plan two has also proved to be a poor one.

You ask them if they figured it would be nice for you to stay in a locked, 112 degree hellhole while they steal your *moto*.

But there is no moto.

That's what dude is asking now.

Oh good, you think. The guns have arrived. And he'll have to be a real quick draw before losing a cheek or an eye to the chain. So you get in close. Keep smiling.

He just showed up. Out of nowhere, so to speak, once the boss left. You're starting to enjoy yourself more and more and decide all at once that this is worth missing a few hours sleep. What also intrigues you is that you aren't even a mile away from your bar. You wonder; *What in the fuck are these people thinking?*

But you already know the answer to that. They aren't.

This guy - you've never seen him in town, so you can expect he doesn't know that you are certified. You will kill this punk if you have to. But all he wants to talk about is the *moto*. The one he came to steal.

No one can tell him fast enough that they need him to help get you into that room. While they're jabbering, you also jabber - you go Chicago, pure street on him, your back constantly against the wall, the chain spinning nunchacku-style in front of you, a blur of steel. He can't come any closer and he can't make a move quick enough if he does have a gun - there's just not enough room in the courtyard.

He also can't stop smiling. It must be the only way to hide his surprise.

Someone, the boss maybe, or these women, have gotten him out of bed to come over for a kill - to roast a duck.

But all he can see is a mad gringo, also smiling and talking Spanglish a mile a minute. All he can really see is a world of hurt coming from an older, and obviously wiser bird of prey. He gets it. He gets that you get it. Still, you can tell that he can't believe it.

He keeps asking, "*No fucking moto? Verdad?*" It is true?

By this time, you have gotten back some of that rooster from earlier in the morning when at the bar, when you were the barnyard boss.

And so that's how you leave there, feeling better and better. Laughing. Bare-chested, feeling that beautiful heat from the sun once you're out in the front lot.

Big bad rooster.

He follows at a distance, but he already must have known he'd get his ass kicked, plain and simple. And down below, on the road from Cinta Azul to the Roble, a horn honks and screams can be heard.

Suddenly gunshots from that car. Arms waved out the window, one still with a pistol in its hand. Tattooed arms. Zamora's boys coming back from a morning delivery at the plant.

The kid behind you slows down. He recognizes the Zamoras, and for the first time since he arrived to strong-arm you into one of those empty shacks, he hears your name called.

Maybe leaving the trap, he was figuring, you win some, you lose some. Now, he stops and you wonder just what he's thinking now.

"Hey Sal! Gringo Loca! Mi Cumpa!"

They stop and you run down for a ride to your bar. You can't say what the punk behind you is thinking, but after you jump into the car, after you fired a shot at the ground by his feet and he about jumped into that only gnarled tree in the lot, you sure know that he is definitely thinking something.

Even from that distance, you could see that his face had gone completely white.

You hand Oscar, the shift leader, his pistol. It's new. He wanted to get your attention and thought he'd also test out the Sig Sauer nine-millimeter. Everyone has already slapped your back, complimenting on making the muscular Nicaraguan dance out in that empty lot where your motorcycle was supposed to be.

When you'd jumped into the car, you'd asked Oscar quickly to lend you the gun.

He proudly handed it over to you and clicked off the safety. A bag of coke was already going around in the car and the music stayed loud. Once you ripped that round, Oscar smirked, then asked what you wanted done.

You just said, "Respect."

He nodded, muttered, "*Con respecto*," and sped toward the lone figure on the empty parking lot in front of the pink cottages.

Although Brian hates bio's, being anonymous has only limited charm and seems finally, a dead end, as far as helping him get laid...it hasn't. Or he hasn't. So ladies, find his twisted fiction at Pulp Pusher... and on walls.

The legendary founder of "Drunks Against Mom's, you can make a date with him personally, at iggyopcb3@yahoo.com.