

Black Leather & Blue Denim

a 50's novel

Jay Dubya



Black Leather and Blue Denim
A '50's Novel – Sample Chapter

By Jay Dubya

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Chapter XLVIII

"The Blueberry Farm Rematch"

The '42 Ford and the '49 Merc exited the Virginia Avenue parking lot. When Carnie's James Dean Special slowly passed Pacific Avenue, Bo spotted several hookers on the corner and startled them by yelling out, "I'm a visiting District Attorney. Could you tell me where the local *prostitutor's* office is?"

Quinn, followed by Carnie, turned left onto Atlantic Avenue, and after around twenty traffic lights, the cars reached *Route 322*, the *Black Horse Pike*. Soon we were out of Atlantic City and on our way to the Atlantic Blueberry Company's immense farm.

I figured I'd try to hold a decent conversation without Jalonec contributing his very disturbing prattle. "Things have really changed since last *Labor Day*," I said, "because a year ago the D's were afraid of the K's. Now it's hard to tell which gang is the protagonist and which gang is the antagonist."

"You said it," Carnie agreed. "Cummings fooled us good with that friggin' telephone booth scam last *Labor Day*."

"The Kamikazes are still dangerous," Tinker stated, "and if you guys didn't have me on your side, you'd have lost the greaser war ten months ago."

"Carnie's right," Bo declared, ignoring Tinker's opinion. "Those Kamikazes made all you guys stuff yourselves into the Dairy DeLite phonebooth just to see how the D's would stack-up against the K's."

As Carnie drove past Pleasantville on our way to Mays Landing, anxiety and suspense were peaking. Bo came through with a goofy one-liner as a meat delivery truck sped by us in the passing lane. "Now that's what I really call fast food," he remarked.

We all laughed at Jalonec's witty observation, mostly because a giant void existed where nothing was said, and any language would have aided in filling in the vacuum.

Bo then told us about some of his former acquaintances over in West Philly named Monty Zuma, Vic Trolla, Cliff Dweller, Luke Warm, Hans Zoff, Philip Yertanc and Buster Cherry. I had to open the back window on the passenger side to get more ventilation. So much perspiration was rolling down my forehead that I thought it needed a windshield wiper.

I complained to Jalonec that his sick humor was giving me a terrible headache at the base of my neck, and Jokes even had a dumb remark for that. "Hey Words," he answered, "why don't ya' visit a doctor and have your *Medusa oblongata* checked?" And before I could respond, Bo said, "J.W., if ya' don't have a family physician, I know a barkin' veterinarian that will take you as a patient."

Carnie was laughing so wildly that I thought he might get his head stuck in the steering wheel. Mercifully, the '49 Mercury finally reached its destination, and soon it was in the parking lot of the enormous blueberry farm.

Carnie followed Quinn down the entrance road as it snaked around several bends of tall pine trees, and soon we were obscured from anyone that was driving behind us on the busy highway. Seven cars were already waiting at the Atlantic Blueberry Company's main gate. I was happy to see Ace Roberts' '55 Oldsmobile, and Slim Jennings had borrowed Tinker's blue '49 Plymouth. Looking around, I also saw Jim Amari, Al Keller, Gene McCann, Fritz Feldcamp and Slip Carson standing around the Diablo' cars.

Three Kamikaze hotrods were already there too to give Cummings representation, and I saw Jake Mullins, Popeye Messina, Dave Evans, Spits and Worm leaning against the K's cars.

Soon Susie Parker and Patty Van Arsdale showed up in the powder blue and white '55 Ford Crown Victoria, and a minute later, Bubbles Messina's white Ford Thunderbird pulled into the front gate area with Angie Palermo as her passenger.

Tinker swiftly moved to the blueberry plantation's gate, and in ten seconds, he uncorked the lock. Carnie and I pushed open the cantilevered gate on its rollers. "The farm's ours!" Robbie proclaimed, for it was a custom of the Diablos and the Kamikazes to temporarily use private property to serve our own needs.

Cummings designated Popeye Messina "the official flagger," since Bo Jalonec had been the starter at the first dragrace August 3rd on Haines Road.

This is how it should all be settled, just like Quinn had said it should be, I thought. Instead of two gangs fighting out a solution with kids getting maimed and hospitalized, the leaders of both factions should compete, winner take all, title for

title. But could the Kamikazes be trusted if Quinn were to win the contest fair and square?

Carnie, Tinker, Jokes and I briskly walked down the blacktopped road to our observation station. The asphalt strip was barely wide enough to accommodate two automobiles side by side. The four of us stood over a dirt ramp that sloped down from the paved main road, which was really a causeway built above parallel canals twelve feet below on either side. Everyone stood nervously awaiting the cars to be aligned at the starting line.

Susie Parker and Bubbles Messina cautiously drove their autos the half-mile distance down to the plantation's packinghouse. Ace, Robbie, Mullins and Evans were selected to stand at the finish line to determine the true victor should the contest's outcome be too close for comfort.

All in all, twenty-three Diablos and twenty-four Kamikazes showed up for the race. Even Langford had heard about it, and he brought a carload of Renegades over to Jersey to view the contest. About fifteen curious Levittown' chicks had also driven over from Pennsylvania to see the race.

I was so nervous I could feel the pizza, salt-water taffy and the imaginary six mussels churning around in my stomach. Only a two-feet-wide tolerance would separate the speeding steel frames, and any minor error could easily knock both vehicles off the narrow road down into the canals.

The cars were evenly matched in terms of gear'ratio, engine performance, horsepower and speed. The race's conclusion hinged on the skill and the courage of each driver. Neither Quinn nor Cummings had ever lost a drag race.

On the count of three, Popeye flicked on his flashlight and the two black chariots' back wheels squealed, and the hotrods sped down the straight, long, perilous road. Both cars wound out first gear, and almost simultaneously, their back wheels screeched when second had been achieved. As the souped-up engines whined, third gears were at seventy miles per hour.

The racers had to be vigilant. Soon sharp right and left turns had to be made onto the farm's airstrip, where during the harvest season crop-dusting planes took off and landed to spray the blueberry bushes. The '42 and '52 Fords kicked up clouds of dust as they rounded their respective turns onto the airstrip, which also led to narrow dirt' causeways elevated twelve feet above treacherous canals.

Quinn and Cummings appeared dead even as they sped ahead on similar elevated dirt and gravel roads on opposite sides of the farm. Suddenly, a police siren was heard coming from near the guard's trailer located at the race's starting line.

A few seconds later a New Jersey State Trooper drove his cruiser through the opened entrance' gate onto the asphalt road. The trooper was in desperate pursuit of the two greaser chieftains. His car was going at least eighty miles per hour on the narrow elevated blacktopped road, and as he zoomed by us, he seemed focused on his objectives and oblivious to the presence of greaser bystanders. When the state cop arrived at the airstrip fork, he decided to chase the car that had originally started in the left-hand lane, which happened to be Quinn's black '42 coupe.

The racing Fords entered the elevated dirt causeways. Their speeds had not diminished one iota. The trooper's car chasing Quinn looked like a cloud of dust in pursuit of another cloud of dust. The elevated causeways dangerously serpentine

through the eastern and western sections of the five-hundred-acre plantation, and a single mental error by either Quinn or Cummings could result in serious injury or even death.

The cars reached the blacktop road again, completing their forward and backward figure nines. Upon re-entering the smooth surface, the vehicles switched lanes and then again sped off toward the airstrip. The police car's siren wailed a thousand feet behind Quinn, but with the honor and prestige of the Diablos on the line, there was no way that our leader was going to stop for any stubborn state trooper. Dust and dirt billowed up from the three speeding cars into the twilight sky, and all three drivers appeared very determined to complete their individual missions.

The sixty or so spectators at the finish line began leaping up and down, cheering in sheer excitement, and the fuzz's presence added a new dimension of sensationalism to the spectacle. The dirt causeway's second laps led back to the blacktopped road and the drivers would have to again safely and swiftly negotiate their turns, switch lanes, and then accelerate across the airstrip to the finish line. The victor's gang would earn honor at every Levittown teen hangout. The Diablos and the Kamikazes both knew that our gangs' reputations were on the line.

Cummings and Quinn simultaneously reached the asphalt road from opposite directions. Quinn expertly rotated his steering wheel, and Cummings, anticipating a head-on collision, panicked and applied his brakes. The Diablo leader successfully skidded back onto the blacktopped road, and Cummings' '52 Ford spun around and crashed into the trailing police cruiser's left front fender. The cars caromed off one another, each flipping over three times into separate irrigation ditches twelve feet below. Quinn continued onward toward the finish line.

The terrible accident momentarily stunned us all. The ricochet of metallic objects and their tumbling down the slopes into parallel canals froze everyone in their tracks. When the closest spectators finally sprinted to the accident's scene, they found that the trooper was in far worse shape than Cummings was. The cop's car had landed roof-down in the canal.

The trooper's head was partially submerged under murky, brown canal water. Tinker and Carnie slid down the steep embankment, hopped up onto the inverted chassis, and then the lame Diabo leaped into the irrigation ditch's waist-deep water. Tink managed to partially pry open the door on the driver's side.

Reaching inside the patrol car, Tink and a now wet Carnie grabbed the trooper's blue jacket and leather holster strap, and the pair managed to pull the man's head above water. Robbie and Ace rendered their assistance, and the four Diablos tugged the trooper out of the smashed-up inverted vehicle. The officer was laid on his back on top of the upside-down chassis.

Tinker, who had been performing some primitive artificial respiration on the cop's chest, soon was able to revive the trooper. The cop coughed out three gushes of swamp water before finally opening his eyelids.

Marcus Spellman, Dave Evans, Jake Mullins, Bo and I got to Cummings' '52 Ford, which was tilted facedown in the opposite canal's ditch. Cummings was in shock. Cuts, bruises and lacerations were all over his face. Blood was dripping from his forehead, mouth and nose.

Sugar Ray compromised his own safety to rescue Cummings. Spellman and Mullins splashed and waded through the canal, reached the '52 Ford, and successfully yanked the Kamikaze King from the wrecked car.

Before Cummings went unconscious, he stared blankly at Marcus Spellman's chocolate brown' face. The racist' K leader took a deep breath and then lapsed off into insensibility.

After Cummings had been extricated from his car, the '52 Ford gradually slid at its steep angle sideways down the remaining five feet of the soft muddy embankment. The driver's door was soon submerged beneath lily pads in five-foot-deep brackish canal water. The state trooper and Cummings would have drowned if alert and courageous greasers had not salvaged the two lucky accident victims.

Quinn raced back to the accident scene in his victorious '42 Ford. "We have to get Cummings and the trooper to a hospital quick!" the Diablo leader insisted.

A second state trooper arrived on the scene, and he radioed for emergency vehicles. Two ambulances, one from Hammonton and the other from Hamilton Township arrived fifteen minutes later. The dazed survivors were taken to Atlantic City Hospital for treatment and observation. Police citations were written-up by the second trooper, and a New Jersey court appearance was scheduled for the evening of October 6th.

Quinn had won the second drag race fair and square, no doubt about it. But since Cummings' '52 Ford had been totalled in the impact with the trooper's car, the auto's title was valueless. Quinn's satisfaction came from the honor he had earned from defeating his awesome archrival honestly. That's what I really admired most about Quinn. Abstractions and virtues meant more to him than mere material property.