

"How'd You Get That Nickname, Anyways?"

No. 8

BARRACUDA PLINTHPROSPERITY-HALL is perched across from us in the lush greenhouse, and he holds our gazes for a long time before he responds.

"It's a long story," he says.

We check our watches.

He coughs.

We put our heads together and say, "Yes, we've got time, we think."

Barracuda says, "All right. From 1977 through the fall of 2008, I was employed as the COO of Tele-Phyt—you may not be familiar with it—it was a pay-per-call company. Pay-per-view, but worse—for WWF, which of course became WWE, UFC, et cetera. Like expensive radio. It's bankrupt these days, of course."



Above: An advertisement for the Tele-Phyt™ corded phone.

He laughs. "The logo was a backwards fist, which probably didn't help us very much. Metaphorically pretty apt, though."

"Well, anyway," he says, "2008 rolls around. Tele-Phyt's botched, and I'm looking for a change. Right around this time—and you already know exactly where this is going, don't you, you sly little motherfuckers?—yes sirs, the 2008 Kent poisoning up in Ceburina. They pumped pure nutrients into all the drinking water in the whole county. Forty or so of the local fuckers beefed it. So the municipality—Gritch County—was up to their assholes in paperwork and lawsuits, and oh! what's this? oh, there's an industry in town! A little something-something by the name of Mhunck Chemical. And they're slurping up shit from the EPA, from the CPCA, from every greedy, grubbly Tom, Dick and Harry who lives within a billion miles of the place and who wants a little bit of money."



Above: Barracuda Plinthprosperity-Hall in-greenhouse. He's smoking.

"So I shuffle in," he says, "and throw 'em a bone. 'Hey, fellas, I'll come run this ratshit joint for you. But I want CEO and 10 percent.' They leave to discuss and they're shaking my hand and giving me the keys in less than an hour. One of the C-suite says to me, he says, 'You're a god damn blessing. Manna from heaven. A hot kiss upon the lips.' So I kissed him, right there."

He pauses. "Do you mind if I smoke?"

"We don't—" we say. "Um, give us a second."

We put our heads together again.

We aren't sure.

It should be fine, right?

It's his house anyways. He can, we guess? Sure? We won't.

We decide to say 'We don't know' and we turn to him, but he's been smoking since we looked away. Oh well. Barracuda continues.

"At the time they had one plant—they operated primarily in the agricultural industry at the time, producing fertilizers and such—and I said, 'Well, god damn, this just won't do. Boys, we're switching to the future—computers.'"

'The 2008 Kent poisoning... was... a god damn blessing. Manna from heaven. A hot kiss upon the lips.'

So we do this and that—there's a naughty word the puppies like throwing around: 'restructuring.' Yes, okay, fine. We restructured. Renamed to Mhunck Digital. You know the name, you know the brand, you love our products. Not a kid in the world doesn't know the Mhunck Digital Pan-Oculite®. Suffice it to say we're doing okay now. But at the time, it was hot water there. And so after a while they started to—"

"We're so sorry," we say. "That's actually all the time we have." ■