

Quod Erat Demonstratum — 3rd Prize

Of all the entries dealing with student revenge on professors, and there were many, this one takes the cake for sheer inventiveness. Written with a keen ear for witty repartee, the main action of the story centres on a conversation between a student, William O. Cameron and his philosophy prof, the obsessive, pipe-sucking Dr. Fostes (hmmmm...) who takes demonic delight in demoralizing his students with cutting remarks and failing grades. In our hero's case, a minus 25.

Intent on rectifying the situation by whatever means necessary, Cameron confronts "The old windbag" in his richly appointed office, more like a drawing

Third prize — Short stories**Quod erat demonstratum**

by Chris Raye

Most of my friends had asked me just what the hell I had in mind when I signed up for a course in logic at the university. I'm sure that some of them thought that it was a joke, and others must have thought that it was part of some elaborate scheme. The truth is, at moments like this, I seriously began to wonder if I should have heeded the warnings of my shaggy-headed peers. Because I was just about to get back my test, and Dr. Fostes looked *happy*. That meant that we probably all failed.

"You have all failed," said the vindictive old fascist, and several squeals were emitted from around the room. I was not surprised, but some people had clung to a bit of hope — sort of like people falling off the Titanic clinging to toothpicks in hopes of floating to safety.

"Everyone, that is, except—"

What's this, I thought. Perhaps I was going to pass after all. I mean, I'd studied, for at least a solid hour.

"—except for Miss Pert, Mister Werner, and Mister Phong." Oh, great, keeners. As if that was a big surprise. As Dr. Fostes walked by, sucking on his pipe, they held out their hands to get their tests back, and I was reminded of seals barking for little fishes.

"With the exception of these three bright, hard-working, fine young students, you have all let yourselves down. But more importantly than that, you have let me down. This displeases me. Nonetheless, I shall have my opportunity to make you feel some remorse for your great offence against me when you see your final exam."

I was fuming. This crusty old pompous creep was telling us that we had wounded him?

He walked back to his table, sucking on his pipe some more and spitting the smoke in the faces of the front row students. This old coot was the only professor on campus who still wore an old-fashioned professor's gown, like a judge. As he gesticulated, the gown would billow, making him look like some sort of minister, and the table, an altar upon which the exams were to be sacrificed.

"The remaining ninety-seven tests I shall leave here, upon my desk. You may pick them up after class has ended. I cannot bear the thought of soiling my fingers with them again, in order to hand them to you. Marking them was enough of a trial. If any of you has complaints or if you find any discrepancies with the marks—" he smiled thinly, showing the points of his teeth, "—I remind you that all marks are *final*. Class dismissed," he wheezed, and smoke spilled out of his nostrils.

My mind was reeling. I wasn't the only one stunned, though. All around me, people were getting up slowly, confusedly, and moving down the jagged slope of the classroom floor to the teacher's desk. There, they would find their own death-

room, Cameron notes, with its Persian carpets and oil paintings on the wall. There ensues a long philosophical (what else) discussion on the pros and cons of smoking, with Dr. Fostes, ensconced in a smoking jacket, in a leather recliner, taking the position that he's smoked longer "than you've been alive and haven't missed a day of work..." Cameron is delighted to find that bullshit really does baffle brains when the prof finally agrees to let him do a re-test.

Later that same night...well, let's just say Cameron's stance that smoking can be dangerous to your health proves true in an inspired black comedy ending. Dali would have loved it.

warrants, their signatures already upon them. The girl next to me, whose name started with a "B" or something, whispered to me, "That man has no soul." I looked back at her and said, "...or dick." She chuckled, despite herself, and then, by her expression, began to screw her courage to go to retrieve her test.

I walked down behind her. Past me, on either side, shuffled a procession of the dead. Poor souls returned to their seats, either to get their books to leave, or to sit down and decompose. I looked over my shoulder, and saw an old Swedish guy bent over, his face gripped in his hands, and his test paper at his feet. He sobbed freely. Everyone else ignored him. I got closer to the test pile. Standing just a few feet away was the smoky Fostes, talking at "Miss Jody," "Mister Werner," and "Mister Phong."

"...at any rate, when Sartre finally flew from Australia to New Zealand, you know what he'd become? An 'existential Qantas-flier!'" Fostes stood back, chuckling, smoke leaking out between the spaces between his teeth. He was obviously pleased with his statement, which I eventually realised was some sort of *joke* (he made a *joke*?). His little chorus of keeners laughed politely, noses turning up piggishly, and in turn they thanked him yet another time for their test-scores and for his "excellent instruction." I felt my cookies make a scramble for my throat.

I finally got to the desks where the tests lay. I grabbed mine and got ready for a forty-five percent, or a thirty-nine. Hell, I'd braced myself for a twenty-five. I did not, however expect what I got.

Below the scrawled word "shameful" were three characters. *Minus* twenty-five percent.

My jaw sprung out of its socket and hit the floor, drool dribbling down my beer-shirt and jeans. My eyeballs just sort of gave up and plopped onto the ground. I bent down to pick them up. No one noticed.

I groped my way to the corner to refit my jaw and eyeballs. My vision came back into focus. There it was again: "-25%." Three lousy, stinking, meaningless, ugly, putrid, festering, deranged little figures on a page. How was it that something so meaningless as a meaningless scribble on a meaningless paper in a meaningless course with a meaningless prof could have so much damn meaning for me?

I went back up to my seat. The "B" girl (Becky? Betty?) was putting her coat on. Her expression was grave.

"How did you do, Beth?" I asked.

"Bev." She looked up.

"Sorry."

"I..." she sighed. "I didn't do very well. In fact, I did horribly." I began to get my hopes up. Perhaps I wasn't the only one to get a negative mark. Perhaps we'd all be scaled. Perhaps I wasn't going to fail.

"I got forty-one percent."

Ah, hell.

She continued: "Can you believe it? Forty-one! I studied days for that exam! And we only have ten days of classes left. Not even enough time for a make-up. Not that *he'd* give us one, anyway." She threw a book in her bag. "How'd you do?"

"Oh, you know, not great or anything."

"Yeah. But jeez, I know I did badly, but I glanced at one guy's test down there, and you know what he got? Twenty-eight percent! Can you imagine?" she said, indignant. "I mean, forty-one is terrible, but twenty-eight! Hell, if I got a mark less than thirty I'd be so ashamed I'd probably commit suicide."

"Yeah. Heh heh." I suddenly imagined my hands closing about her chicken-bone-like neck.

She left. I left.

After checking with one of the other professors ("Doctor who? Fostes?" — "The guy with the cape." "Oh! Room 415.") I managed to find Fostes' office. The rooms on either side of his were vacant, and the lights overhead were faltering. On the door to room 415 were four pieces of information. One was a plaque with the name, "Dr. John Fostes." Above that was tacked a photocopied article on *Firing Line* and William F. Buckley. Underneath the plaque was the room number. And beneath that, a bumper-sticker was stuck to the door, that read "I BRAKE FOR THE ANCIENTS."

Moron.

I knocked.

After one second, no one answered and figuring no one was inside, I turned to leave. From within, though, a voice called out that said, "Don't just stand outside like an idiot." I gambled I wasn't going to get a sweeter invitation than that, so I went in.

I was not prepared for what I saw. Sitting behind the desk was Fostes, no longer in his gown but in a smoking jacket. He reclined in a huge leather-bound chair, with a pipe in one hand. He breathed out exhaust fumes. The bookshelves, in addition to having hundreds upon hundreds of volumes, also had row after row of huge jars. Inside each of these jars were what appeared to be coins.

I looked down to see what I guessed was maybe a Persian rug. On his desk were two

fancy lamps with brass bases, and on the walls were several oil paintings and the heads of a few dead animals. The whole room was composed of browns and golds and deep reds — not an office at all, but a miniature *drawing room* for someone's mansion away from home.

My gaze returned to the arrogant old wind-bag's face. His eyes shone like jewels, and I felt like I had just been canned. Behind his head, very oddly, a decal was plastered onto the window. It read "Designated Smoking Area" and it had a little fuming cigarette inside a green circle.

"Well if you're going to leave a package, why not do it and be gone? I haven't all day. And don't beg for a tip, either, boy. By the looks of you, you'd just squander it on crack or something of that nature."

I couldn't believe I was hearing this. I gestured to my school books so he could see that I belonged here, and his demeanor grew less forgiving.

"Oh. You're a student." He looked up to the ceiling in disgust, and mumbled, "This is what happens when they reduce the entrance requirements." He returned his sneer to me. "Well, what do you want?"

"I, uh... I'm in your Introductory Logic class. I, uh... the test... I wanted to..." I hoped he might take pity on me and fill in the words "give you some help" or "give you a make-up test." He said nothing. Why the hell had I come at all? What did I expect from this evil old fossil, anyway?

"I, uh... I failed and I was hoping you might see to... uh, maybe, giving me a make-up?"

He blinked, slowly, like a crocodile. "Make-up," he spat, "is for *women* and *corpses*. Are you one of those?" He smiled, thinly. "I assume that what you want is a re-test."

I thought that he was going to continue, but he didn't, so I nodded.

"Ah, well, why didn't you just say so?"

Hey, maybe the guy wasn't so bad after all. I kind of felt bad for saying all of those things about him. Maybe he's just a...

"I do not give re-tests, either. You should have applied yourself. Your failure is your own responsibility."

...just a stinking old creep who deserves the most painful death possible.

Inverting his pipe, he tapped it on his ashtray. He refilled and then re-lit it, all

