

The Damned United

David Peace

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The Damned Utd

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faber and faber

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I have forsaken mine house, I have left mine heritage;
I have given the dearly beloved of my soul into the hand of her enemies.

Mine heritage is unto me as a lion in the forest;

It crieth out against me, therefore have I hated it.

Mine heritage is unto me as a speckled bird, the birds round about are
against her;

Come ye, assemble all the beasts of the field, come to devour.

Jeremiah, Chapter 12, Verses 7-9

The Argument II

Repetition. Repetition –

Fields of loss and fields of hate, fields of blood and fields of war –
Their sport upon the walls, their sport upon the floor.

Milton! Thou shouldst be living at this hour: England hath need of thee . . .

In her shadow time.

On our terraces, in our cages, from Purgatorio, we watch,
With our wings that cannot fly, our tongues that cannot speak:

'Destroy her politics! Destroy her culture! Destroy her!'

But our wings are thick with tar, tongues heavy with her coin,
On our broken backs, our broken hearts, she'll dine again tonight.

In her shadow place –

We are selfish men: Oh, Blake! Orwell! Raise us up, return to us again.

These civil wars of uncivil hearts, divided and now damned –

The old is dying and the new cannot be born –

By Elland Road, I sat down and wept; D.U.F.C.

THE DAMNED UTD

An English Fairy Story

Wednesday 31 July – Thursday 12 September 1974

THE FIRST RECKONING

First Division Final Positions, 1973-74

	Home					Away					Total					Pts
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	F	A	F	A	
1 Leeds United	42	12	8	1	38	18	12	6	3	28	13	66	31	62		
2 Liverpool	42	18	2	1	34	11	4	11	6	18	20	52	31	57		
3 Derby County	42	13	7	1	40	16	4	7	10	12	26	52	42	48		
4 Ipswich Town	42	10	7	4	38	21	8	4	9	29	37	67	58	47		
5 Stoke City	42	13	6	2	39	15	2	10	9	15	27	54	42	46		
6 Burnley	42	10	9	2	29	16	6	5	10	27	37	56	53	46		
7 Everton	42	12	7	2	29	14	4	5	12	21	34	50	48	44		
8 QPR	42	8	10	3	30	17	5	7	9	26	35	56	52	43		
9 Leicester City	42	10	7	4	35	17	3	9	9	16	24	51	41	42		
10 Arsenal	42	9	7	5	23	16	5	7	9	26	35	49	51	42		
11 Tottenham H	42	9	4	8	26	27	5	10	6	19	23	45	50	42		
12 Wolves	42	11	6	4	30	18	2	9	10	19	31	49	49	41		
13 Sheffield Utd	42	7	7	7	25	22	7	5	9	19	27	44	49	40		
14 Man. City	42	10	7	4	25	17	4	5	12	14	29	39	46	40		
15 Newcastle Utd	42	9	6	6	28	21	4	6	11	21	27	49	48	38		
16 Coventry City	42	10	5	6	25	18	4	5	12	18	36	43	54	38		
17 Chelsea	42	9	4	8	36	29	3	9	9	20	31	56	60	37		
18 West Ham Utd	42	7	7	7	36	32	4	8	9	19	28	55	60	37		
19 Birmingham C	42	10	7	4	30	21	2	6	13	22	43	52	64	37		
20 Southampton	42	8	10	3	30	20	3	4	14	17	48	47	68	36		
21 Man. Utd	42	7	7	7	23	20	3	5	13	15	28	38	48	32		
22 Norwich City	42	6	9	6	25	27	1	6	14	12	35	37	62	29		

Bottom 3 clubs relegated.

I am a Yorkshire Man and I am a Cunning Man –

And I curse you!

First with gift, then with loss –

I curse you!

Loss and then gift, gift and then loss –

Until you lose. Until you leave –

I will curse you!

Day One

I see it from the motorway. Through the windscreen. The kids in the back. Fallen off the top of Beeston Hill. *Are we nearly there yet*, they're saying. *Are we nearly there, Dad?* In a heap up against the railway and the motorway banking. Asking me about Billy Bremner and Johnny Giles. The floodlights and the stands, all fingers and fists up from the sticks and the stones, the flesh and the bones. *There it is*, my eldest is telling my youngest. *There it is*. From the motorway. Through the windscreen –

Hateful, hateful place; spiteful, spiteful place . . .

Elland Road, *Leeds, Leeds, Leeds*.

I've seen it before. Been here before. Played and managed here, six or seven times in six or seven years. Always a visitor, always away –

Hateful, spiteful place, flecked in their phlegm . . .

But not today; Wednesday 31 July 1974 –

Arthur Seaton. Colin Smith. Arthur Machin and Joe Lampton . . .

Today I'm no longer a visitor. No longer away –

No more zombies, they whisper. No more bloody zombies, Brian . . .

Today I'm on my way to work there.

★ ★ ★

The worst winter of the twentieth century begins on Boxing Day 1962. The Big Freeze. Postponements. The birth of the Pools Panel. The Cup Final put back three weeks. People will die in this weather today. But not at Roker Park, Sunderland. Not versus Bury. The referee walks the pitch at half past one. Middlesbrough have called their game off. But not your referee. Your referee decides your game can go ahead –

'Well done, ref,' you tell him. 'That lot down the road call off anything.'

Half an hour before kick-off, you stand in the mouth of the tunnel in your

*The smell of blood. The smell of sweat. The smell of tears. The smell of
Algipan. You want to smell these smells for the rest of your life.*

'He needs the hospital,' says Johnny Watters. 'Needs it quick and all.'

'But don't you take his fucking boots off,' says the Boss again.

*You are lifted off the plinth. Off the bloodstained sheet. Onto another
stretcher. Down another tunnel –*

Into the ambulance. To the hospital. To the knife.

*There is an operation and your leg is set in plaster from your ankle to your
groin. Stitches in your head. No visitors. No family or friends –*

Just doctors and nurses. Johnny Watters and the Boss –

But no one tells you anything, anything you don't already know –

That this is bloody bad. This is very fucking bad –

The worst day of your life.

★ ★ ★

Off the motorway; the South West Urban Motorway. Round the
bends. The corners. To the junction with Lowfields Road. Onto
Elland Road. Sharp right and through the gates. Into the ground. The
West Stand car park. The kids hopping up and down on the back seat.
No place to park. No place reserved. The press. The cameras and the
lights. The fans. The autograph books and the pens. I open the door. I
do up my cuffs. The rain in our hair. I get my jacket out of the back. I
put it on. My eldest and my youngest hiding behind me. The rain in
our faces. The hills behind us. The houses and the flats. The ground in
front of us. The stands and the lights. Across the car park. The potholes
and the puddles. This one big bloke pushing his way through the press.
The cameras and the lights. The fans –

The black hair and the white skin. The red eyes and the sharpened teeth . . .

'You're bloody late,' he shouts. Finger in my face.

I look at the press. The cameras and the lights. The fans. The auto-
graph books and the pens. My boys behind me. The rain in our hair.
In all our faces –

Our faces sunned and tanned, their faces pallid and wan . . .

I look this one big bloke in his eye. I move his finger out of my face

and tell him, 'It's got nowt to do with you whether I'm bloody late or not.'

They love me for what I'm not. They hate me for what I am.

Up the steps and through the doors. Out of the rain and out of the press. The cameras and the lights. The fans. Their books and their pens. Into the foyer and the club. The receptionists and the secretaries. The photographs on the walls. The trophies in the cabinets. The ghosts of Elland Road. Down the corridor and round the corner. Syd Owen, chief coach here for the last fifteen years, leading out the apprentices –

I put out my hand. I give him a wink. 'Morning, Syd.'

'Good afternoon, Mr Clough,' he replies, without shaking my hand.

I put my hands on the heads of my sons. I ask him, 'You think you could spare one of your young lads here to watch these two of mine while I make myself known?'

'You're already known,' says Syd Owen. 'And these apprentices are here to develop their capabilities as professional footballers. Not to entertain your children.'

I take my hands off the heads of my sons. I put them on their shoulders. My youngest flinches, my grip too tight –

'I won't keep you any longer then,' I tell this loyal servant, left behind.

Syd Owen nods. Syd says again, 'Not here to entertain your children.'

There's a clock ticking somewhere, laughter from another room. Down the corridor, round the corner. The sound of studs stomping off, marching on together.

My eldest looks up at me. He smiles. He says, 'Who was that, Dad?'

I ruffle his hair. I smile back. I tell him, 'Your wicked Uncle Syd.'

Down the corridor. Past the photographs. Round the corner. Past the plaques. Into the dressing room. The home dressing room. *Keep on fighting* above the door. They have left out an away kit for me; yellow shirt, yellow shorts and yellow socks. The kids watch me change. I pull on my own blue tracksuit top. They follow me down the corridor. Round the corner. Through reception and out into the rain. The car park. The cameras and the lights. The autograph books and the pens. I jog through the potholes and the puddles. Past the huts on stilts. Up the banking. Onto the training ground –

The press shout. The fans cheer. The camera lights flash and my own kids duck.

‘Morning, lads,’ I shout over at them –

Them stood in their groups. In their purple tracksuits. There are stains on their knees, stains on their arses. *Dirty Leeds*. Their hair long, their names on their backs –

Bastards. Bastards. Bastards . . .

Hunter. The Gray brothers. Lorimer. Giles. Bates. Clarke. Bremner. McQueen. Jordan. Reaney. Cooper. Madeley. Cherry. Yorath. Harvey and Stewart –

All his sons, his bastard sons. Their daddy dead, their daddy gone . . .

In their groups and their tracksuits. In their stains with their names on their backs. Their eyes on mine –

Screw them. Bugger them. Fuck the bloody lot of them.

I do the rounds for the press. For the cameras and the lights. For the fans. For the autograph books and the pens. A handshake here and an introduction there. Nothing more. *Hold your tongue, Brian. Hold your tongue.* Watch and learn. Watch and wait –

Don’t let the bastards grind you down, they whisper.

The rounds done, I stand apart. The sun comes out but the rain stays put. No rainbows today. Not here. Hands on my hips. Rain in my face. Sun on my neck. The clouds move fast round here. I look away. My eldest in the car park. A ball on his foot. His knee. His head. In the potholes and the puddles, the rain and the sun, there he is –

A boy with a ball. A boy with a dream.

★ ★ ★

It started that first morning in the hospital, the day after Boxing Day, and it’s never stopped, not for a single day since. You wake up and for those first few seconds, minutes, you forget; forget you are injured; forget you are finished –

Forget you will never smell the dressing room again. Never put on a clean new kit. Tie on those shining boots and hear the roar of the crowd –

The roar when the ball hits the back of the net; the roar when you score –

The applause. The adoration. The love.

*You wish you could see your wife. You haven't seen her in days –
Not since Boxing Day. Not since they brought you here.
No one is telling you anything. Not a bloody thing –
You'd get up and go find her yourself, except you can't.
Then on the fifth day, the door opens and there's your wife –
'I've been in bed,' she says. 'I've had a miscarriage.'*

★ ★ ★

They take us on a tour, me and my kids and the press. Down more corridors. Round more corners. Past the lounges and the boxes. The suites and the clubs. The treatment rooms and the dressing rooms. Then they take us all out onto the pitch itself –

They stand me out there, out there in the centre circle –
The green blades of grass. The white chalk lines . . .
My arms raised aloft, a scarf in my hands –
I hate this place, this spiteful place.

Up this corridor. Round this corner. Down the next corridor. The next corner. The boys at my heels. To the office. The empty desk. The empty chair. *Don's office. Don's desk. Don's chair.* Four walls with no windows and one door, these four walls between which he etched his schemes and his dreams, his hopes and his fears. In his black books. His secret dossiers. His enemy lists –

Don didn't trust people. Didn't like people. He dwelled on people. Hated people. He put them in his black books. His secret dossiers –

His enemy lists. Brian Clough on that list.
Me. Top of that list –

This the office. The desk. The chair. In which he schemed and in which he dreamed, with his hopes and with his fears. In his books. His dossiers. His lists. *To exorcise the doubts.* The codes and the road maps. To obsession. To madness. To here –

Here in this office, where they sat upon his knee.

Mrs Jean Reid stands in the doorway. My boys looking at their feet.
'Any chance of a cup of tea, love?' I ask her.

Mrs Jean Reid says, 'The directors are waiting for you upstairs.'

‘For me?’ I ask. ‘Why?’

‘For the board meeting.’

I take off my jacket. I take out my handkerchief. I place it on the seat of the chair. *His chair.* I sit down in the chair behind the desk. *His desk.* I put my feet up on the desk –

His chair. His desk. His office. His secretary –

‘They are waiting for you,’ says Mrs Jean Reid again.

‘Let them wait,’ I tell her. ‘Now how about that cup of tea, duck?’

Mrs Jean Reid just stands and stares at the soles of my shoes.

I knock on the desk. *Don’s desk.* I ask, ‘Whose is this desk, love?’

‘It’s yours now,’ whispers Mrs Jean Reid.

‘Whose was this desk?’

‘Mr Revie’s.’

‘I want it burnt then.’

‘Pardon?’ exclaims Mrs Jean Reid.

‘I want this desk burnt,’ I tell her again. ‘The chairs and all. The whole bloody lot.’

‘But . . .’

‘Whose secretary are you, duck?’

‘Yours now, Mr Clough.’

‘Whose secretary were you?’

Mrs Jean Reid bites her nails and stems her tears, inside her resignation already penned, just waiting to be typed up and signed. On my desk by Monday –

He hates me and I hate him, but I hate him more, more and more –

‘Change the locks as well,’ I tell her on our way out, the boys with their eyes on the floor and their hands in their pockets. ‘Don’t want the ghost of troubled Don popping in now, do we? Rattling his chains, scaring my young ones.’

★ ★ ★

The scenery changes. The pain remains. Stagehands bring on the furniture in boxes. Bring you home in an ambulance. In on a stretcher. You have suffered a complete tear of the cruciate and medial ligaments. More serious than a broken

leg. There is no satisfactory operation. For three months you lie at home on your red G-Plan settee with your knee bent in plaster and your leg up on the cushions, smoking and drinking, shouting and crying –

You are afraid, afraid of your dreams; your dreams which were once your friends, your best friends, are now your enemies, your worst enemies –

This is where they find you, in your dreams. This is where they catch you –

The birds and the badgers. The foxes and the ferrets. The dogs and the demons.

Now you are frightened. Now you run –

Laps of the pitch, up and down the steps of the Spion Kop. The fifty-seven steps. Thirty times. Seven days a week from nine in the morning. But you keep your distance from the dressing room. The fifty-seven steps. You prefer the beach at Seaburn. Thirty times. The beach and the bar. Seven days a week from nine in the morning. Running –

Scared. Frightened –

Scared of the shadows. The figures without faces. Without names –

Frightened of the future. Your future. No future.

But day by day you find your feet again. You cannot play, not yet. You cannot play, so you coach. For now. The Sunderland youth team. It keeps you out of the pubs and the clubs, out of bed and off the settee. Keeps your temper too. Coaching. Teaching. Five-a-sides. Six-a-sides. Crossing and shooting. You love it and they love you. They respect you. The likes of John O'Hare and Colin Todd. Young lads who hang on your every word, every one of them, every single word. You take the Sunderland youth team to the semi-finals of the FA Youth Cup. You pass the FA coaching examination. You bloody love it –

But it's no substitute. It's still second best –

Your future. Still second best.

★ ★ ★

Round the corner. Down the corridor. Up the stairs. To the board-room. The battlefield. The wooden double doors. There are windows here, behind these doors, but only here. Matching curtains and carpets. Matching blazers and brass:

Manny Cussins. Sam Bolton. Bob Roberts. Sydney Simon. Percy Woodward; Alderman Percy Woodward, the vice-chairman –

Half Gentile, half Jew; a last, lost tribe of self-made Yorkshiremen and Israelites. In search of the promised land; of public recognition, of acceptance and of gratitude. The doffed cap, the bended knee, and the taste of their arses on the lips of the crowd –

The unwashed, applauding them – not the team, only them – them and their brass.

Keith Archer, the club secretary, is hopping from foot to foot, clapping his hands. Patting my lads on their heads, ruffling their hair.

Cussins and Roberts, smiles and cigars, and would you like a drink?

‘Bloody murder one,’ I tell them and plonk myself down at the head of the table, the top table.

Sam Bolton sits down across from me. Bolton is an FA councillor and vice-president of the Football League. Plain-speaking and self-made, proud of it too –

‘You’ve probably been wondering where your trainer is?’

‘Les Cocker?’ I ask and shake my head. ‘Bad pennies always turn up.’

‘Not this one,’ says Bolton. ‘He’ll be joining Mr Revie and England.’

‘Good riddance to bad rubbish,’ I tell him.

‘Why do you say that, Mr Clough?’

‘He’s a nasty, aggressive little bugger and you’ve still got plenty to go round.’

‘You’ll be needing a trainer though,’ says Bolton.

‘Jimmy Gordon will do me.’

‘Derby will let him go, will they?’

‘They will if I ask for him.’

‘Well, you’d better bloody ask them then, hadn’t you?’

‘I already have,’ I tell him.

‘Have you now?’ asks Bolton. ‘What else you been up to this morning?’

‘Just looking and listening,’ I tell him. ‘Looking, listening and learning.’

‘Well, Clough, you’ve also got eight contracts to look at.’

‘You what?’ I ask him. ‘Revie’s left me eight bloody contracts?’

‘He has that,’ smiles Bolton. ‘And one of them is for Mr John Giles.’

They all sit down now; Cussins, Roberts, Simon and Woodward.

Woodward leans forward. 'Something you should know about Giles ...'

'What about him?' I ask.

'He wanted your job,' says Woodward. 'And Revie told him it was his.'

'Did he now?'

'Too big for his boots,' nods Woodward. 'The pair of them; him *and* Revie.'

'Why didn't you give it to him?' I ask them. 'Done a good job with the Irish.'

'It wouldn't have gone down well with Bremner,' says Cussins.

'I thought they were mates?' I ask them. 'Thick as thieves and all that.'

They all shake their heads; Cussins, Roberts, Simon and Woodward –

'Well, you know what they say about honour and thieves?' laughs Bolton.

'Bremner's the club captain,' says Cussins. 'Ambitions of his own, no doubt.'

I help myself to another brandy. I turn back to the table –

I clear my throat. I raise my glass and I say –

'To happy bloody families then.'

★ ★ ★

This is the last goal you will ever score. September 1964. Eighteen months since your last. Sunderland are now in the First Division. Home to Leeds United. You put the ball through the legs of Jackie Charlton and you score –

The only First Division goal of your career –

The last goal you will ever score.

Your sharpness gone. You cannot turn. It's over. The curtain down. You are twenty-nine years old and have scored 251 league goals in 274 games for Middlesbrough and Sunderland. A record. A bloody record in the Second Division. Two England caps. In the fucking Second Division –

But it's over. It's over and you know it –

No League Championships. No FA Cups. No European Cups –

The roar and the whistle. The applause and the adoration –

Finished for ever. Second best. For ever.

Sunderland Football Club get £40,000 in insurance as compensation for your injury. You get £1,500, the sack from coaching the youth team, and an education that will last you a lifetime –

You have a wife. Two sons. No trade. No brass –

That's what you got for Christmas in 1962. You got done –

Finished off and washed up, before your time –

But you will never run a pub. You will never own a newsagent's shop –

Instead, you will have your revenge –

That is how you shall live –

In place of a life, revenge.



These are the studios of Yorkshire TV. Of *Calendar*. Of their Special –
Clough Comes to Leeds.

Austin Mitchell is in a blue suit. I'm still wearing my grey suit but I've changed into a purple shirt and a different tie; always pack a spare shirt, your own Brylcreem and some toothpaste. Television has taught me these things.

Austin looks into the camera and says, 'This week we welcome Brian Clough as manager of Leeds United. How will his outspoken personality fit in with Leeds, and what can he do for this team, this team that has won just about everything?'

'Leeds United have been Champions,' I tell him and every household in Yorkshire. 'But they've not been good Champions, in the sense of wearing the crown well. I think they could have been a little bit more loved, a little bit more liked, and I want to change that. I want to bring a little bit more warmth and a little bit more honesty and a little bit more of me into the set-up.'

'So we can expect a bit more warmth, a bit more honesty and a bit more Brian Clough from the League Champions,' repeats Mitchell.

'A lot more Brian Clough actually,' I tell him. 'A lot more.'

'And hopefully win a lot more cups and another title?'

'And win it better, Austin,' I tell him. 'I can win it better. You just watch me.'

‘And the Leeds set-up? The legendary back-room staff? The legacy of the Don?’

‘Well, I’ll tell you one thing: I had great fears of that lucky bloody suit of his, in the office when I walked in. You know, the one he’s had for thirteen years? I thought, if that’s there, that’s going straight in the bin because not only will it be old, it’ll smell . . .’

‘You’re not a superstitious man then, Brian?’

‘No, Austin, I’m not,’ I tell him. ‘I’m a socialist.’