



“There is only one plot — things are not as they seem.”
— Jim Thompson

Dear Faithful Reader,

The moment I read this line, its truth struck me like a bullet. *There is only one plot: things are not as they seem.*

What is a story but the gradual revelation of truths not seen at the start?

When I was ten I read the Narnia books, and I was so moved by the concluding story, *The Last Battle*, that I cried for days. My mom kept me out of school because I couldn't function; I was too blown away. It was the moment in my young life that I first realized there is a whole invisible world there, beyond our senses. That there is more going on than meets the eye. A greater reality. “Its inside is bigger than its outside,” was how C.S. Lewis put it.

Forty-five years later, as part of research for a writing commissions I was working on (*The Answer*, about the “law of attraction”), I read another book, *Science and the Akashic Field*, which opened my eyes to a curious truth gleaned from quantum physics: The deeper you go into matter, the smaller the scale of interaction, the more energy you release.

The inside is bigger than the outside.

Physical bulk: a hammer smashes a stone, energy is released. Molecular: TNT explodes, more energy is released. Atomic: still more energy escapes. Nuclear: even more. And into the world of the smallest subatomic “particles”? The trapped energy there is so vast it approaches the state of what the author calls “pure information.” Call it *spirit*.

What is science but the gradual revelation of truths not seen at the start?

I remember a day once as a kid, a summer at a Massachusetts music camp with my parents (my dad was guest conducting there), sitting in our cabin in the woods, playing recorder duets with my mother. All we'd found to drink in the cabin were some old packets of Lipton's pre-sweetened instant iced tea, and the only thing to drink them in was a set of scratched-up plastic glasses.

I discovered that I *loved* Lipton's pre-sweetened instant iced tea in a scratched-up plastic glass.

I still remember the smell of the cherrywood alto recorders and the feeling of the two of us playing these complex Baroque pieces, perfectly in tune, perfectly in sync, being literally on the same page with my mom.

At the time, it was a good day. It's only now, half a century later, that I realize it was far more than that. It was a sparkling, shimmering treasure chest of memory. It was a million times more precious than I knew in the moment.

Far greater on the inside than on the outside.

These past few weeks, I've been on a book tour for *Blind Fear*, Ana's been overseas, and our dog Phin is boarding at the groomer's. I've been remembering a walk we took last month, the three of us, Ana and me talking and laughing, Phin loving the smell of the outdoors and trotting between us. At the time, it was a lovely walk. For the past two weeks, though, I've been cherishing it, the same way I cherish that memory of playing duets with my mom over instant iced tea.

I suppose my point is this: these moments we have, the mundane moments of our everyday lives . . . they are bigger on the inside than they are on the outside. There is more going on than meets the eye.

What are our lives but the gradual revelation of truths not seen at the start?

Jim Thompson wrote the toughest, most hardboiled novels ever to earn the title "noir." I am pretty sure that all of the above is *not* what he meant by that brilliant line of his. But he said it, and sometimes — often, really — we say more than we mean. The things we say, too, are bigger on the inside.

My August wish for you: that you spend a little time every day looking for those moments that are bigger on the inside than they appear on the outside, and savor each one.



#

*** ABOUT THE WRITER**

If you had challenged me to identify the single most unlikely writer to pair up with C.S. Lewis, I can't imagine coming up with a better answer than Jim Thompson, a crime writer so stark he makes Raymond Chandler seem like Jane Austen.

Born in the Oklahoma Territory in 1906 and growing up in Burwell, Nebraska, the skinny, shy young man lived a life as colorful as one of his characters, in the process becoming

one of the most disturbing and influential voices of twentieth-century American literature. Stanley Kubrick hailed his seminal 1952 novel *The Killer Inside Me* as “probably the most chilling and believable first-person story of a criminally warped mind I have ever encountered.” (And this is Kubrick talking, a dude who knew a thing or two about chillingly warped minds.)

Here is how Stephen King describes it in his foreword to the novel’s latest reissue:

“The Killer Inside Me is an American classic, no less, a novel that deserves space on the same shelf with Moby-Dick, Huckleberry Finn, The Sun Also Rises and As I Lay Dying.”

Thompson was investigated by the FBI as a communist sympathizer, spent a few Prohibition years in his youth pimping and procuring for guests at a posh Fort Worth hotel, toiled in aircraft factories and on oil fields (teaming up with his father to start their own oil drilling operation, which failed), worked as a tabloid reporter . . . and he wrote and wrote and wrote.

Thompson greatly admired Dostoevsky, earning him the nickname “Dimstore Dostoevsky.” He sold his first story at the age of fourteen, and went on to churn out novels, short stories, poetry, television episodes, and film scripts. At times he produced at a dizzying pace typical of hardboiled pulp novelists of that era. During a two-year stretch in the early 1950s he put out a dozen novels, including *The Killer Inside Me*, the story of Lou Ford, a small-town Texas deputy sheriff who spouts saccharine platitudes and dispenses violence with equal nonchalance.

During his lifetime (he died in 1977) Thompson was championed by such diverse figures as Woodie Guthrie, Kubrick, and Robert Redford. Yet when he died in LA, at 77 pounds and 70 years old, an alcoholic who smoked Pall Malls to the bitter end, none of his books were in still print. The *Los Angeles Times* didn’t even bother to run an obit.

Still, his influence is enormous. Brent Spencer, an award-winning crime novelist and creative writing professor from Thompson’s native Nebraska, writes:

He saw the darkness here, saw past the veneer of niceness, and while it makes us uncomfortable to see through his eyes, I’m glad for it. He’s our Virgil.

The full epigraphic quote, reported by Thompson biographer Robert Polito in his book *Savage Art* (1995), goes like this:

There are thirty-two ways to write a story, and I’ve used every one, but there is only one plot – things are not as they seem.

Amen, Jim.