

The First Two Pages of “A Trailer on the Outskirts of Town” by J.B. Stevens
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An Essay by J.B. Stevens

I’m the father of a five-year-old girl. As a result, glitter is a constant presence in my life. My daughter has glitter glue, a Princess Elsa glitter backpack, Hello Kitty glitter garments, and Barbie glitter shoes. As a younger man, I had no idea how prevalent glitter was in little girl’s fashion. I could’ve never predicted what a large place glitter would hold in my life.

Glitter is the height of kindergarten couture.

So, one day I was thinking about glitter while driving by a trailer park, as one does. Later in the week, I noticed glitter on my bathrobe. I tried, and failed, to brush it off. I Googled “how to get glitter out of clothing” and there were no good answers. Glitter remains until it is ready to go. Glitter gets everywhere and is impossible to fully clean up.

Glitter has staying power.

A few days later, my wife and I were watching *Dexter*. (I read all the Jeff Lindsay books when I was in Iraq with the military, but I enjoy the show more than the novels.) We watched the scene where Joey Quinn goes to The Fox Hole Gentlemen’s Club and speaks with Nadia the exotic dancer. Nadia was wearing a green outfit with some type of glitter. (I couldn’t remember the exact outfit, so I

just googled “Nadia Dexter” on my work computer. This was a poor choice! Do not do this! I’m sure the IT guy will be calling me soon.) Anyway, if you read my character Destiny, she is a clear call back to Nadia.

If you read a touch deeper into my first page you come to Jim—the over-lotioned club owner. Here is my presentation:

Jim was shiny. His skin, suit, hair: it all sparkled.

Jim is a direct call back to Carl Hiaasen’s novel *Striptease* and the character David Dillbeck. I love Hiaasen. This novel came to mind due to Nadia. (I don’t know what it says about me that exotic dancers and gentlemen’s clubs make me think of books and nothing else, but it says something.)

So, during this time frame, all these things are swirling in the back of my mind. A few days later my brother, Doug, called and everything snapped together. A gentlemen’s club, a janitor named Doug who wants more out of life but is lazy, his brother Andy, their mom’s trailer—this is a situation ripe for crime. (My real brother is neither a janitor nor lazy.)

For character development I went a bit deeper. My brothers Doug and Andy are both beer drinkers who love Bigfoot. I realized that the details of my family, combined with this situation in the back of my head, created a fun setup. If the fictional Doug and Andy need money, but are lazy and messy, it made sense.

And now the bones of the story are locked in my mind. This is where we come to the actual work. To quote Robert J. Randisi, “the first line of the story, you realize what he is up against.” My first line makes it clear what shall be Doug’s undoing:

Glitter fell out of his hair and covered the job application. Doug thought about a sparkling future. Then he felt like an idiot for daydreaming in puns. He brushed the specks away.

Doug thinks he brushes away the glitter, but it sticks to his hands. He is lazy—as demonstrated by his lack of creative thinking. He dreams in puns, not original thoughts. The story’s ending is in the first line, but the reader doesn’t know that.

A few lines later we come do Doug acknowledging glitter’s staying power, another hint as to the ending:

The problem with cleaning Emperor’s is the glitter; it sticks to everything. He didn’t mind. The sparkle was a nice addition to the daily slog.

Next, we learn of Destiny and Jim, and again Doug is aware of an aspect of his own undoing, Jim’s observant nature. Doug doesn’t pay attention:

Doug heard Jim, the owner, and Destiny, the entertainer, in booth two. Destiny was tall and lean and from Russia. Jim was shiny. His skin, suit, hair: it all sparkled. He never missed anything.

A bit further down we come to the problem, the brothers are lazy, but they must pay property taxes:

“What’s this?”
“Tax bill,” Andy said.
“I work for cash, you’re on disability. What taxes?”
“County says we got to pay for the land.”
“But we own the trailer and the lot.”
“If we want to keep em’, we need...” Andy looked at the bill.
“\$7,323.36.”
“Crap.”
They watched pro wrestling and tried not to think about money.
Things played out for a while. They got another tax bill. This one had red ink.

With that, our first two pages end.

To again quote Robert J. Randisi, “the first two pages must be informative.”

My goal in the first two pages was to present a believable situation, with real-feeling characters. I know exotic dancers, bigfoot, and South Georgia trailer parks aren’t everyone’s cup of tea. These are not the calling cards of highbrow literature. However, given the anthology’s theme of hard living southern rockers, these details felt, and feel, correct.

I wanted to combine this feeling with propulsive entertainment. Also, with my opening line, I hoped to tell the reader what was going to be the story’s fulcrum: stripper glitter. To bring the work home, I endeavored to make the opening line aggressively tie into the ending.

If you read the story, and I hope you do, let me know if I pulled it off.

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J.B. Stevens lives in the Southeastern United States with his wife and daughter. His short story collection *A Therapeutic Death* is a 2022 release from

Shotgun Honey. His pop poetry collection *The Best of America Cannot Be Seen* is available from Alien Buddha Press.

Stevens was a finalist for the Claymore award for crime fiction and the Colonel Darron L. Wright award for poetry. He was nominated for the Pushcart prize for poetry. He won *Mystery Tribune*'s inaugural micro-fiction contest.

Before his writing career, Stevens was a United States Army Infantry Officer. He served in Iraq and earned a Bronze Star. He is an undefeated Mixed Martial Arts Fighter and a Black Belt in Brazilian Jujitsu. He graduated from The Citadel.

To keep up with his writing, join his newsletter at JB-Stevens.com.