

UMOC (Ugly Man On Campus)



Pas de Deux (detail), Alex Katz, 1983

“Honestly Red, belonging to that ‘Animal House’ fraternity is bad enough, but volunteering for that stupid and degrading contest will end our relationship.” Bleach-blond Nelly Crown had her hands on her hips as she glared at her boyfriend Jim (Red) Hennessy.

“Nelly, I’m not volunteering. We put our names in a fishbowl and our housemother pulls out a name completely at random. The odds are twenty to one that I won’t be chosen.” Hennessy sighed and ran his fingers through his red hair. “Your father belonged to a fraternity when he was an undergrad. What is your problem?”

Nelly frowned, “You ... you ... are the problem. Most of your fraternity brothers are on the football team, basketball team, or on other athletic scholarships. My daddy checked on Phi Delta Theta and they all come from low class breeding. Their behavior at childish school functions speaks for itself.”

"Oh, come on. Stuffing many guys into a phone booth or a VW Bug is a fad. All colleges are doing it. Those stunts made Time Magazine for God's sake."

"Look, Red, if you're selected as your house's UMOC candidate, it means you have to dress up like some kind of monster for the month of October. If it happens to you, we're done."

Red tried to hold her hand which Nelly withdrew rapidly, "What do you mean monsters?"

"I read the names of some of the candidates from the other frat houses: Quasimodo Jones, Zombie Zeke Zenga, Mummy Mad Madison, and Guillotine Goldberg.

Hennessey was a junior at Boston University (BU) class of 1962. He was a studious friendly guy who, like all the brothers at Phi Delta Theta (PDT) had to reach into the fishbowl and pull out a number. The lowest number on the folded paper scrap would be the winner. In this case, the winner would be PDT's candidate for UMOC. UMOC is a contest for the Ugliest Man On Campus. Nationally, almost all colleges had a UMOC event usually in October, the Halloween month. The candidates weren't ugly. They just wore costumes portraying grotesqueness. It was Saturday night, the end of September, and all PDT brothers had their numbers. Suddenly, a voice moaned, "Oh, no."

Jim "Red" Hennessey had drawn the number "one". Red was PDT's UMOC candidate.

Red had two weeks to come up with a formidable but catchy name for his UMOC persona. He walked across the flagstone path from the Theology College building to the BU Student Union and sat looking into his coffee cup.

"You look gloomy, Red. You should be bright and cheery. I hear

you're PDT's UMOG candidate this year." Theona Findler, a first year sociology grad student raised her eyebrows.

"Yeah, my name was pulled from a fish bowl. That's how I won."

"It doesn't matter how you were selected. It's a campus honor to be a UMOG representative."

"Theona, my UMOG status cost me my girlfriend. She dumped me. She considers Fraternities and their programs as lower class fools' antics."

Theona frowned, "Nelly Crown, the college snob of snobs. I'm amazed at how long it took for her to drop you. She's at my dorm and all she does is talk about her being a debutante and being forced to rub elbows with campus peons." She put her hand on his shoulder. She gave it a few pats, "C'mon Red, this means you have two things to celebrate—freedom and your new image. What's your UMOG character supposed to be?"

"I don't know yet. Most of the other frat houses already have their campus freaks picked out."

"Yes, I read the UMOG item in the BU news. Well, Red, if we put our heads together we can come up with a name and a unique personage." She looked around the lounge at the few students.

Red looked up at her. He had met Theona in one of his sociology classes. They had become friends but never dated. He was about to speak when a student shouted at the food counter.

"This is the raunchiest coffee in the world." The student gave his cup back to the server.

Most of the students chuckled. BU coffee had the reputation of merely being "brown water" containing only a touch of real coffee bean flavor. It was part of a campus-wide anti-caffeine addiction program started this semester.

Red sipped his cup. "It is raunchy. It leaves a sewage after

taste.”

Theona jumped up, “That’s it. Raunchy...that’s our name. It’s perfect.” She sat back down and touched his hand. “You can be Raunchy Red.” She shouted it out loud, “Raunchy Red Hennessy.”

She said ‘our’ name. Red looked at her with a smile. “I like it. Actually, I felt raunchy before you arrived. But now that I’m Raunchy Red Hennessy, I don’t feel raunchy anymore. I feel reborn.”

Theona squeezed his hand. “Now we need to design who and what Raunchy Red is going to be.”

Red felt a warm sensation at her hand’s pressure. “How come we never dated, Theona?”

She clasped her hands together and replied, “Because your were smitten by that ivory tower Nelly Crown, that’s why.”

He looked at her as if for the first time. “I must have been nuts. Tomorrow’s Friday, how about dinner and a movie. Oh, and are you free this weekend. Maybe we can think of an image for Raunchy Red and a unique costume.”

“I really enjoyed the Red Fez restaurant. I love Middle East food.” Theona pointed to their destination.

“ Yeah, the Red Fez. Theona you’re getting me thinking ‘Red’ all the time. Why are we going to the Museum of Science and Natural History instead of a movie?” Red pulled into the museum’s parking lot and found a space right away.

Theona laughed, “That’s the whole idea of our campaign–‘Think Red’.”

Red scanned the entrance and looked at the map of the museum and its exhibits. “Where do you want to start, Theona?”

“Well, first I want to put you in the mood for what we see here.”

His brow wrinkled, “Mood?”

“Well, not mood really, but attitude. I want us to focus and concentrate on the exhibits on the second floor.”

Red looked at the handout. “Early man and mammals?”

“Red, I’m a sociologist, well someday, but my thesis for my Masters is *Pithecanthropus erectus* and his environment.”

“A prehistoric caveman?”

“Yes, Red, put yourself back into an age when man first stood up and walked on two feet. First let’s look at where he lived, what he ate, and how he shopped for food.”

Theona read each of the brass plate summaries of the exhibits starting with the animals and ending with the vegetation. She pointed to the last exhibit, which showed a hairy man in a shaggy fur torso outfit with one strap over his right shoulder. “See, Red, the caveman looked like that, maybe, but he was a social being. In order to capture a woolly mammoth, the whole tribe dug a huge pit and lured the giant elephant to fall into it. It took half the members to kill it and almost all to parcel out the edible parts.”

Red laughed, “I see it now, Theona. The other frats are highlighting monsters like vampires, zombies, serial killers, and other antisocial stereotypes.” He stopped and stared into the glassy eyes of the museum’s *Pithecanthropus erectus*. “You’re a genius Theona. I’ll be Raunchy Red Hennessy, champion of my tribe, or rather, my fraternity.” He turned to her and held her hand.

“I need a costume like his.” He pointed to *Pithecanthropus*. “I won’t shave for UMOG month. I need to develop a following.”

"I've already started the campaign. My entire dorm is going to proclaim you as their hero. We're having a "Vote for Raunchy Red Hennessy" rally at Marsh Plaza Tuesday evening."

He let go of her hand. "Your entire dormitory? Theona, that's not possible."

"It was easy. The President of the dorm is hated by everyone. She was so vehemently against you that everyone wanted to pin a hero badge on you."

"Don't tell me, the President is Nelly Crown."

"One hundred percent correct. I have a few of the girls designing your torso fur covering as we speak."

Marsh Chapel Plaza was located directly in front of Marsh Chapel itself right across from a Commonwealth Ave trolley stop. Theona was at the top of the granite stairs of the chapel facing the crowd with a bullhorn. She finished her Raunchy Red Hennessy remarks with, "Remember what UMOC's mission is. BU's fraternity row will donate all money collected as votes for the UMOC winner to educational scholarships."

The crowd roared affirmatives.

Theona raised the bullhorn to her face again, "And the most social, academic, and humane symbol is that of the first man to walk the earth, Pithecanthropus erectus. And here he is today as Raunchy Red Hennessy."

After the applause died down she added, "Ladies and gentlemen please put your spare change into the circulating canisters—a penny a vote. Raunchy red started his campaign speechless, just like the early caveman. With every dollar collected, Red adds a word to his vocabulary. What do you have to say to our people, Red?"

Theona thrust the bullhorn to his face.
“Aarrgghhphleebisgibble.”

“Red needs words. Red needs your votes. I’m putting some change in now.” The bullhorn transmitted clinking of the coins. “Now what do you have to say, Red?”

Red, dressed in a one piece red fur torso pelvis to shoulder outfit spoke again, “Red ... I ... Phi Delta ... Aarrgghhphleebisgibble.”

Theona brought the bullhorn up again, “See how it works. Get Red talking words. We’ll meet again next Tuesday. Every penny counts. Every vote counts. Every vote gives Red the power to go from a caveman to a BU philanthropist.”

The crowd roared. Raunchy Red Hennessy roared,
“Aarrgghhphleebisgibble.”

Each Tuesday rally met with Raunchy Red espousing of how Pithecanthropus developed into each of them. His verbosity increased. He stood before a microphone on the Plaza steps. “It took many centuries of learning by trial and error. Language was the major factor in the creation of progress. Next Tuesday is the UMOC parade of Fraternity candidates and the final votes for each entry.”

Theona faced the microphone, “So we see how Raunchy Red went from grunts to articulate college English. A vote for Red is a vote for all of you academics and future BU graduates.”

The student body roared and coins began filling the tubular containers.

The last Tuesday began with a parade starting with BU’s marching band moving down the right lane of Commonwealth

Avenue . The Boston Police Department managed both the traffic change and the crowds lining the sidewalk extending from Kenmore Square to BU's Marsh Plaza. Heading the parade was fanged, green-faced Dracula Minster sitting up in an open coffin supported by eight fanged, green-faced pall bearers from his fraternity. Mummy Mad Madison was having bandages added to his wraps by uniformed nurses in Cleopatra costume. Zombie Zeke Zenga and his zombie staff threw over-ripe red tomatoes at Zombie Zenga while Zenga moved forward groaning with each unsteady step. From a red Pontiac convertible, Raunchy Red Hennessy waved his caveman club while Theona in a Wilma Rubble red leopard-pattern bikini waved holding Red's other hand. Quasimodo Jones was led with a link-chain leash by a nubile coed. Guillotine Goldberg stumbled headless with his paper maché head on a platter held high by a mini-skirted waitress. The others entrants followed with their displays and antics appropriate for their favored monster theme.

At last, all fraternity UMOC candidates and a huge entourage of BU students stood before the Marsh Chapel steps with spillover attendees several blocks up and down the sidewalks. Loud speakers were placed for those out of vision UMOC supporters to hear the proceedings.

Last year's winner, the Creature from the Black Lagoon, was the host. He was in his Hollywood creature rental costume and opened the ceremony.

"Ladies and gentlemen of this year's UMOC academic scholarship drive ..." He paused as a hole in the top of his face mask blew a stream of soap bubbles. After the applause, he continued. "... the number of total votes has eclipsed all prior UMOC contests. The sum of thirty-three thousand dollars will be parceled to several scholarship funds here at BU. And now for the lineage of entries leading up to the top three contenders."

More applause, shouts, and hoots were emitted as the entries

were recognized. Finally, the third runner up was declared and headless Guillotine Goldberg raised his severed head with both hands from its silver platter. Zombie Zeke Zenga, as number two, produced a grotesque smile with pieces of red tomato dripping from his face. A loud drum roll led to the declaration of the winner followed by the bubble-blowing Black Lagoon host saying, "Will Theona Findler do the honors? Behind every first place winner is a woman." The crowd roared approval.

Theona looked stunning in her red leopard-spotted mini-fur-pieced bikini. Her smile was infectious. Cheers, whistles, and shouts ensued as she faced the microphone. Theona raised the UMOC trophy, which was a black marble-based, white Ionic Greek column supporting a golden Greek runner holding a gold laurel crown with an up-stretched hand. "This year's winner is the Phi Delta Theta house with Raunchy Red Hennessy as 1961's Ugly Man On Campus champion."

The crowd slowly dispersed. Red and Theona walked holding hands. Red's free hand held the UMOC trophy. She held the club over a shoulder. Two coeds stopped in front of them.

"Well, look here, a cave man and his mate. Red Hennessy, that is probably the only award a plebeian like you could ever aspire to." Nelly Crown grimaced, "And you Theona, only losers major in archeology and participate in UMOC idiocy."

Zombie Zeke Zenga and his tomato throwers overheard Nelly. "Nelly Crown you stuck up bitch, here's the kind of award you deserve." Zombie Zenga and his entourage barraged Nelly and her friend with over a dozen dripping, fragmenting, sticky, rotting red tomatoes."

All the UMOC entrants proceeded to the Student Union for celebration. Nelly Crown glared at them shouting only one word, "Aarrgghphleebisgibble."