

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Internet

by

Eddie Woods

The email arrived out of the blue from someone I'd never heard of, and as it didn't seem to be carrying a virus or anything, I went ahead and opened it. No death threat, either. Indeed, it seemed I had an admirer, or at least my writing did. It was headed 'julius lowland to eddie,' and read:

eddie hi!

my name is julius lowland - i read your literary work in delightful cadaver - i like your work - a lot - i want to include your work in the january issue of the ghost apprentice guild - you can see the g.a.g. at <http://www.ghost-apprentice-guild.com> or view the roster of contributors in this month's issue by going directly to http://www.ghost-apprentice-guild.com/the_writers.html - you can send me as many pieces as you want eddie - please don't forget to send a bio including pertinent links

cheers, julie

Julie seemed a strange nickname for a guy, but what the hell. Probably from California, I mused, one place where fruits and nuts easily grow together. This somewhat flattering come-on was followed by a posting of maybe a dozen related web links, most of which I didn't bother to check out. I did click on the main URL, of course, to see what Julie's publication looked like. I'm choosy as to where I appear. Back in pre-internet days, for instance, I'd almost always decline invitations to publish in mimeographed or even badly laid out offset magazines, no matter what else they might have going for them. But especially the former, simply because I didn't feel like starting off unreadable only to end up falling apart a few months later.

Well, the g.a.g. was amateurish but sort of okay, and definitely a far cry from the virtually unmatched excellence of the knockout journal where Lowland had discovered examples of my poetry & prose. The contributors—too many to spend time scrolling through—were merely listed alphabetically in maybe 7 or 8 point type, without the slightest mention as to what they might be writing about. While the material

itself, once you did take a peek, was in equally small print, colored font set against colored background, running down a narrow column on one side of the page. Clearly this wouldn't do. So I wrote back:

Dear Julie,

Thanks for your email. Apologies for delayed response; been kinda' swamped of late.

Had a good look at yr g.a.g., despite the pop-up saying I needed Explorer 5.5 or higher. I've an iMac with 4.5, but still it worked. Even if it did take a bit of perseverance to navigate.

Anyway, yes, I'm thinking of some fiction for you, possibly one (ca. 5000-word) story for starters. Plus maybe a few poems. Most on the shorter side, but also a long narrative one.

First, however, I have two important stipulations concerning how my work is presented. One, that it goes up as black print on a white background (à la your featured writer's contributions in the current issue). The way you are mainly doing it, purple on yellow or whatever, frankly drives me bananas. The other thing is a readable font size (though I realize you may be somewhat constrained here by overall capacity). In any event, black on white, please! Is this doable?

Glad you asked and that you like my work. Feedback is good. I look forward to your response re presentation. Meanwhile, I'll give further thought to as to what exactly I should send.

All best, EDDIE

ps Here's a btw poem for you, which you may have seen quoted from but not read in its entirety:

THE POEM I AM

If I can write
a poem with a pen,
then why not with a typewriter;
if with a typewriter,
why not a computer?
If I could love as a boy,
then surely as a man
I also can
(I said to myself, way back then,
and it was true).

And all these many things

I have done in my life,
were they not all
(as they still are now)
a part of the growing process?
The drugs, the booze,
the travel, the seclusion...
eventually, the attempted suicide.

Where I am today
is what I was then,
that and beyond it.
Yesterday's doubts
may not quite be
the certainties of today
(as though, especially today,
there even are any certainties),
but surely they incorporate
into my will towards the future.

I am the sun
and the moonlight surrounds me;
the stars feast
on my dreams for tomorrow.
As the universe illumines me,
shadows of self dissolve.
Whither I go, goes all of time.
Time is forever, time is going now:
there, the computer writing;
here, the poem I am.

Julie replied within hours:

eddie hi!

thank you for writing to me and for your interest in the g.a.g.

i read everything in dc that i could find by you

i like a writer who knows what he or she wants and i like giving it to them

would giving the reader the option of reading your work in pdf format be acceptable to you?

send me as many pieces as you want and they can be of any length

the poem i am is just what i am looking for!

i look forward to receiving your material eddie!

cheers, julie

The PDF was fine by me, though that's not what I eventually got. Instead Julie opted for a control window which was as good if not better, even if it couldn't be downloaded to one's desktop. Over the next few days I sent him two short stories and a poem. Upon receiving the first, he emailed saying:

SMUGGLERS TRAIN by Eddie Woods

eddie hi!

thank you for sending me smugglers train - i can't remember the last time i was so completely pulled into a work of fiction - the artfulness of your craft combined with the conversational and chummy style of your writing is a potent mixture for seducing the mind and entertaining the imagination - i am very grateful that i found your work - i want to include smugglers train in the next issue of the ghost apprentice guild - welcome to the g.a.g.!

cheers, julie

As you can see, Julie was big on cheers. My second sending likewise tickled his literary fancy.

THE BULLFIGHTER by Eddie Woods

eddie hi!

thank you for this additional short story - it will be a great pleasure for me to include it in the january issue of the g.a.g.

i am very interested in your work - it is inspiring to me as an editor and writer

please send the narrative poem you have in mind

and if you have any erotica that you want to send me for inclusion in the ghost apprentice guild you are more than welcome

He signed off by cheering yet again. I cheered back by firing off the poem, along with a brief explanatory note:

Dear Julie,

Herewith the narrative poem I mentioned.

I've long wanted to bring out a substantially revised & updated (and in particular a post-AIDS) version of "Ode to the Clap," but until now simply never got round to working on it.

Although I've performed it on numerous occasions, the original's only print appearance was in my book *Sale or Return*. I completed this revision today. (It's also the first time I've ever revised a previously published poem.) I hope you like it.

All best, EDDIE

He liked it, all right:

ODE TO THE CLAP by Eddie Woods

eddie hi!

thank you for this

it is very easy for me to envision you reading this

it reads like it is being spoken

as a narrative poem it emulates classical aesthetics

and i would wager that in classical times more men would be nodding their heads and openly identifying with the subject matter without any political qualms or puritanical shame than men would today

i want to include ode to the clap in the january g.a.g.

i wish you good writing!

cheers, julie

So there I was, a full-fledged cyber ghost in the making...literally, as it later transpired! Just as the closing line of the mini-bio I quickly knocked off for Julie baby would all too soon come back to haunt me. The published paragraph read:

EDDIE WOODS (b. 1940) grew up on the sidewalks of New York. At age 20, faced with conscription and preferring not to get his fingernails dirty, he joined the US Air Force for a 4-year stint, spent mostly in Germany. He subsequently lived & traveled in many parts of Europe, North Africa and both the near & farther East. After residing for two decades in Amsterdam (where he edited *Ins & Outs* magazine and ran a small literary press), he moved to England for the third time, settling in a remote corner of the Devonshire

countryside. A published poet & prose writer since his late teens, Eddie has variously worked as a short-order cook, computer programmer, encyclopedia salesman, restaurant manager, journalist, radio disc jockey and precious gems dealer. He is a firm believer in Murphy's Law.

As a chap named O'Toole pointed out, in his commentary to the pretty much unassailable dictum "If anything can go wrong, it will," Murphy was an optimist. While a certain Mr. Goldberg goes a logical step further, insisting O'Toole was also an optimist. And damned if Julius Lowland didn't manage to prove all three sages correct, at the same time even.

Come that January, the next Ghost was up and running. And yes, I was basically pleased. There were a few minor glitches with my stuff (em dashes gone berserk, vanished indents & such), as sometimes happens transferring attached docs to web pages; but when informed of these, Julie immediately put matters aright. True, my email address wasn't included with my bio nor were any of the requested links that I'd made sure to send—all small potatoes to be sorted out in due course. Most important was that my two stories + poem looked good on the Ghost site = I'd have no hesitation passing the direct URLs for accessing them on to friends & colleagues via email.

'This just might work,' I thought. Any viable launch pad for reaching still more readers is not to be gainsaid. And our young, ambitious editor here could actually be on his way to pulling off a minor yet significant internet coup, all the more so were he to take some friendly advice (I already had a tip or two in mind) on how to spiff up the g.a.g.'s overall appearance and, inevitably, its potential effectiveness.

In fact, the determined Mr. Lowland was so ambitious that I should have felt forewarned even then against expecting criticisms-cum-suggestions to be greeted with anything resembling open arms. In no time flat, along with soliciting submissions for the Spring edition (plus asking those of us already 'on board' to send more writers his hungry way), he was announcing that:

one:

the g.a.g. is now showing up on the syllabi of professors teaching modern fiction and new media communications

two:

i am now being invited by professors to be a guest speaker in their classes to talk about the g.a.g.

three:

the university of ***** is sponsoring its first literary festival - the participants in this festival are exclusively contributors to the g.a.g. - this event will be streamed live on the internet - there will be g.a.g. writers and poets reading their work at the event and g.a.g. writers and poets reading their work online which will be streamed to the live audience - this event is scheduled for the coming november

four:

the g.a.g. now has bureaus in 10 countries where i have co-editors gathering work from all over the world which i am publishing in both the original language and english translation

five:

i am getting interns now to help me so don't worry eddie about inundating me with your work and the work of your literary friends

(Not being a computer nerd, despite having programmed the mothers back when a small IBM installation filled the space of a large garage, I haven't a clue how you get personalized names—"so don't worry **eddie** about inundating me"—to appear in the body of mass e-mailings. *Obviously Lowland do.*)

The bulletin was signed, as would be many others to follow, not with the customary 'cheers' but rather 'infinite blessings, julius lowland.' See, I knew he was California!

The barrage of 'good news' continued unabated. One briefing, which arrived shortly after I'd begged off from contributing anything more grand than two short anti-war poems for the next number (so inundated with other endeavors was I, plus emotionally overwhelmed by the Iraq situation), announced:

1. a lawyer friend has offered to turn the ghost apprentice guild into a non-profit organization and to apply for grants from institutions!
2. there are now 16 international g.a.g. liaisons helping me to present literary work from all over the world!
3. the spring issue will feature close to 600 writers!
4. the poet HP is allowing me to publish his 550-page cantos titled "Crow" and the writer SP-M is allowing me to publish his 300-page novel titled "Lost on the Farm"!
5. the french writer EV is allowing me to publish 5 of his novels in french!

6. the argentinean writer DM is allowing me to publish 3 of his books in spanish!

7. i have published a new g.a.g. special edition devoted to the italian underground artist CP including an interview with C in english and italian and featuring 60 of his artworks!!

these are just some of the highlights!!

"Just *some*"?! *Six hundred* writers. A 550-page poem + a 300-page novel + (whaddisay?) five novels in French, three in Spanish, 60 bloody artworks. All on one fucking website! At one time? And these are just *some*? When it comes to ambition, move over Caesar, 'cause another Julius has just baked himself a really big cake. And here's me with my two piddling poems (duly accepted, of course). Whoa! To quote Lou Reed, "Something's happening here." But did Eddie Woods twig to it? Like hell he did.

Foolishly responding to his call for new blood (blood to be spilled, as it turned out), I fed him a slew of victims, both willing and ultimately not so. With one, the falling out was almost immediate. Although Guglielmo Leary should have come top of the pops in light of Julie's express call for "writers whose work resists categorization," his submission instantly threw Lowland into a frenzy of head-scratching— simply because, you got it, he couldn't figure out how to *label* it. Then, after settling on 'essay,' he threw one spanner after another by a) failing to byline the piece with Guglielmo's proper full name; b) going ahead with other than the mutually-agreed format; and c) publishing a meaningless mini-bio. The ensuing email exchange was of the coffin & nails variety.

Dear Julius,

Mainly, I have been totally unable to access my "essay" in the new issue of your cyber-zine. Has any one else mentioned this? Also surprised you didn't use the name I use for publication. And, that after sending you three different texts to use for my bio, you used something completely different, and deeply inappropriate.

Spring Manhattan spring / William Blake is on the wing.

As ever,

Guglielmo Leary

gugi hi!

what was deeply inappropriate? - explain please!

cheers,
julie

Followed *two minutes later* by:

gugi hi!

on second thought, nothing i ever do is deeply inappropriate - what a thing to assume! - you are out of the g.a.g.

cheers,
julie

And gone he was. My read on the altercation, emailed to Julie (with a Bcc to Guglielmo), went in part:

I hesitated before introducing you guys, but eventually opted for connecting the g.a.g. with a solid and much-respected literary terrorist. What unfortunately occurred was, a strongly-worded diplomatic query mistaken for a Cruise missile attack resulted in a failed suicide bombing. Gugi will more than survive (let Nietzsche be my witness), the g.a.g. probably as well. But the web-reading world is vastly worse off for this minor fiasco.

One down, more to go. Mea culpa! Next in line was my dear friend Maria Goldman, who enthusiastically jumped in with a couple of poems. At first Julie was ecstatic.

dear maria,
this is exactly what i am looking for - it's perfect g.a.g. material
you are the real thing
i want to make you a writer-in-residence
this places no obligations on you
it is my way of highlighting your work so readers don't miss it
thank you again for sending me your work
i am very happy that eddy [*sic*] introduced us
infinite blessings,
julius

Alas, the venerable Julius was shortly afterward struck by great pangs of editorial conscience, resulting in Maria's banishment to the main holding pen with practically everyone else. (For some strange reason, I was still being given my very own control windows.) He now felt he'd been contradicting himself by establishing preferential categories like

'writer-in-residence' because, ah, "the g.a.g. is designed to engender a collectively supportive and unifying writers' community and creating preferential status puts up barriers to this - so I've decided to remove all hierarchical categories." Whew, the contortions some people put themselves through! Nor was this the only time we were treated to a Julius Lowland self-therapy session.

After initially informing us that "the 'mature audience' department will not be continued in the summer issue because organizations that contribute to non-profits are conservative and we need these funds to produce more valuable contributions to the literary world and educational institutions like a print anthology," Julie's heart & groin later did an admirable about face. "i reversed a decision," he wrote, "to expunge literary work containing explicit sexual or violent material - i am including literary work with these elements after all - i made my initial decision to remove this content out of fear that the g.a.g. would not receive funding - but i couldn't live with myself knowing i had made a compromise which is antithetical to the underlying principles of the ghost apprentice guild." Three cheers for seeing the light of day. Not that this great awakening helped the American poet Red Thompson, who simultaneously thanked me for connecting him with the ghost machine and yelped, "the cowards left out the risqué ones!"

As for Maria's sudden demotion, once the Spring number was up, she wrote me:

After Julie's initial wild enthusiasm about my work, I was rather surprised to find it buried among 600 other poets of widely varying quality - nobody would ever find it there, but does it matter anyway? I haven't got round to investigating the voluminous offerings in the latest g.a.g. yet, so am saving my comments for him till then - please don't pass this on, we're not bloggers! It seems to me he is over-ambitious & catering to an audience I can't quite envisage (I certainly don't have time to plough through reams of computer print in search of poetic gems...). In this context I feel tempted to paraphrase E.M. Forster from "Only connect!..." to *Only select!*

Less than two months later, the g.a.g.'s jokes got even less funny where she was concerned. Her submission for the Summer issue was met by:

dear maria,
thank you for the comment about my work - i personally like the poem you sent but it is a bit too traditional for the g.a.g. which edges closer to the experimental end of the spectrum - please send other material that is not

based on a rhyme formula - i personally love rhyme but the g.a.g. readership
(over two million annually) are a more experimental audience
sincerely,
julius lowland

Her reaction?

I'm aghast! (Maybe that's an old-fashioned word not in julius lowland's
vocabulary either.) Experimental = censorship. I'm gonna forget him - fast!!!

luv, Goldilocks (still in shock)... ooops, that's dangerously close to rhyming
again!

And our beloved editor's own 'work,' on which Maria apparently
commented? I long to be brief here, but that would hardly be in
keeping with what Julius attempted in the so-called poem he sent
round (doubtless to all of his *two million* readers). For openers, we
received a 188-line ramble entitled "Please God I Want To Be a Martyr
in a Suicide Bomb Attack to Crush the Infidel or Please God I Want the
UN to Pass a Resolution to Crush International Terrorist Organizations
or Dear God I Don't Know What the Perfect Solution is," containing
such memorable riffs as

to get a room at a
We left the Art

they got from the
receive cow God led
Francesco pregnant
they got from the
serving leave
serving leave
receive cow God led...

and

hitch in the port
and has a short
utterance female
hitch in the port
sort of man
sort of man
and has a short
pseudepigrapha -foster greater
pseudepigrapha -foster greater
all against know
last while peoples

mathematician carry
pseudepigrapha -foster greater
exceedingly needed...

et cetera and so forth. Truly riveting stuff. Puts me in mind of a remark the writer Mel Clay made during a San Francisco poetry reading we attended together, where one performer's unfathomable stanzas made the worst imitations of William Burroughs' least successful cut-ups attain, by comparison, the crisp clarity of Raymond Chandler's terse prose. Mel said, "I'm from the old school, I like poems I can understand." Yes, sir, motion seconded. (While I'm at it, and with all due respect to both WSB and his cut-ups colleague Brion Gysin, for my money it is the poet Harold Norse who truly perfected this potentially rewarding technique. To experience the living proof firsthand, just read his novel *Beat Hotel*.)

Then lo and behold if less than 48 hours afterward Julie hadn't donned his therapeutic hair shirt again, telling all & sundry that he'd "inadvertently offended some writers whom i respect with the title of my last poem." Huh? By way of making amends for the grievous psychic injuries he'd caused, the culprit offered up "a new poem [hmmm] with a title that will not offend." Called "the imager the imaged the image and the breath #0001," it went in part:

processing time days
goats Raguil, who
elaboration cragin
processing time days
Norhala centaurs
Norhala centaurs
goats Raguil, who
creature time
creature time
possible for
call first-
her own
creature time...

Monsieur Lowland refers to this invigorating literary form as "metapoetics theatre." To each their own. If, as Julie has assured us, 50,000 pages of the g.a.g. are read *every day* (though I reckon God would be hard pressed to verify that mind-boggling calculation), I can only wonder how many adoring readers are regularly going gaga over Julie's twaddle. Informed sources tell me that his bizarre approach to

versifying might well derive from a kind of cut & paste internet foraging known as 'flaffing.' Sounds about right.

Meanwhile, other 'introduced by Eddie' g.a.g. contributors came & went with dizzying regularity. The Irish poetess Wendy Knoll, after herself being enticed with the offer of featured-writer status, also awoke of an internet morning to find she'd been dumped (without prior notification) into the main hodgepodge arena. 'Whatever did I get you people into?' I'd think aloud as each next name tumbled from penthouse to janitor's broom closet, or worse.

"I feel sad for your writer friends, this was a great opportunity they missed," reproved Julie when informed that a group of respected poets Wendy had considered anthologizing for him pretty much backed out en masse once they'd carefully scrutinized the guild and its myriad ghosts. Accepting criticism was not Lowland's forte. Nevertheless,...

I thought I'd try my hand at it, and at around the same time as he reminded me that the deadline was drawing nigh for Anniversary Issue submissions. I mean, why not, eh? On the one hand, Hope (which daffy Pandora shoulda' let fly from the box, too!) does spring eternal; while on the other, my work looked okay with them control windows 'n all + it was kinda' groovy having those links to send around. So I hit him with a story and shortly thereafter a well-intended critique. The latter went thus:

Dear Julie,

Though I've not yet heard whether you'll be using the story I sent you, I thought I'd already make some of those suggestions I sort of promised a while ago. Even if you agree with the main one (in fact, I'll keep it to only a couple for now), I doubt you'd be able to put that into effect till after the August anniversary issue, as the change I'm proposing is definitely major.

It's your cover page, Julie. For me, as well as for several writers and readers I've discussed this with, it does absolutely nothing. A seemingly endless list of names, in small type, with no real indication of what it is they're contributing. Yes, you categorize as to whether it's poetry, fiction, essays, etc. [then quick like a bunny he stopped doing even this]. But that's hardly being in any way explicit. Why should I click on any of the names, especially since (to my way of thinking) there are far too many in the first place?

Truth is, other than the names I know, I don't click on them. Even a title might get me in there, although a descriptive sentence or three in addition would be better still. You know what I'm talking about: the way Delightful Cadaver presents itself is an excellent example. Their cover pages alone are

at once exciting and a joy to behold. But more importantly, they give you a clear idea of what you can likely expect should you decide to go further, into the issue itself - by clicking on the various names, poems, stories, what have you. The g.a.g. doesn't do that, at all.

Take the last issue. Apart from my own, what names did I click on? Maria Goldman and Janice Sturgeon (because I know them, know their work, and introduced you to them), plus maybe a few (?) others that I happened to recognize (Basinski, Brownstein...). And those last two caught my eye purely by chance. As said, the lists are too long, too small, too much of a pain to scroll through.

No, Julie, you need a cover page that jumps out at you, that DEMANDS you take notice, makes you WANT to click on names and read what's on offer. You claim that "the annual g.a.g. readership is now over two million readers and over 50,000 pages are read every day..." Well, I know what that means but I also don't know what it means - if you know what I mean. You've got a high-tech site, so I suppose you can keep track of precisely how many hits it gets and how often. But who's doing the hitting? Certainly not any of the people I've communicated with about the g.a.g.; and believe me, these are all quality readers.

Maybe there are folks out there who have nothing better to do with their time than sit at computers all day clicking randomly on names that pop up on various internet sites. I'm not one of those and never will be, neither are any of my many friends & associates. Me, I prefer to spend my time writing or making love or cooking pasta sauces. But this I do know: if I'm in a magazine, and in particular a web-based publication (print is a whole other ballgame, its very nature demands leafing through)...when my work appears in a mag, I like to feel it stands a reasonable chance of getting read. Does mine in the ghost apprentice guild, with nothing there to 'entice' beyond the name Eddie Woods?

Or tell me this if you can: for the last two issues, how many times did my name get clicked on? You see, Julie, I don't receive any feedback from there, for the simple reason that you've still not included my email address anywhere, not to mention links to my other online work.

I like the way you've presented my work, Julie. Neat, clean, highly readable = perfect formatting. And I greatly appreciate the fact that you've always made any necessary changes once that work has appeared, quickly & efficiently. You've got a potentially great thing going, and I'm pleased for your sake that you apparently have a substantial following. But none of this means there isn't room for improvement. Take it from me (I am also an experienced editor, don't forget), a radically new cover page along the lines I suggest will put the g.a.g. in an entirely different league. And if you've got to cut down on the number of contributors per issue, then do it. How many do

you have now? 600? That's over the top, bro'. Get me to want to READ the g.a.g., not just check to see how my stuff looks in it.

Think about this, eh? And let me know what you decide. Also whether you'll be publishing "A Good Friend."

All the best, EDDIE

No sooner was this sent than Julie accepted my short story. I was anything but over the moon.

dear eddie,

thank you for sending this new work which i admire very much and want to include in the first anniversary issue of the ghost apprentice guild - one thing you are not going to be amenable to however is that i cannot present your work in the usual manner - we are tightening up the format of the g.a.g. and presenting all work consistently - no work will appear in a separate window - i know how important it is to you to have your work presented in a particular fashion - if this is unsuitable to you i will understand

sincerely,
julius lowland

My reply was instantaneous.

Ah, Julius,

Though I'm pleased to hear that you like my story, you're right: I am not amenable to seeing it presented other than in the previously agreed format. I've certain standards in this regard and I'm not about to abandon them now. Therefore, albeit with regret, I hereby withdraw the submission. Not to worry, someone else will take it.

This "tightening up the format" you refer to only highlights much of what I said in my latest eddie to julie email. You've got too much stuff in there, man, and to me this indicates that (for whatever reasons, you must have some) you are fully prepared to sacrifice quality for quantity. But hey, it's your mag, so it's your call.

Should you ever decide to implement the improvements I suggested, let me know and I'll again consider submitting to the g.a.g. Till then, continued good luck.

Oh yes... I assume that all my previously published work WILL remain in their original control window formats, and that all the access links will likewise stay as they are. Should any of this ever change, please let me know.

Best regards, EDDIE

Julie's measured responses were indicative of the careful thought he'd given to all I had said. Re my critical comments he wrote, "thank you for writing eddie - take care!" While the withdrawal of my story (perhaps viewed by him as an act of literary onanism) elicited the significantly more elaborate:

dear eddie,

thank you for having allowed me to present your work in the ghost apprentice guild

sincerely,
julius lowland

So, apart from what I already had in there, that was it for me and the g.a.g., right? Wrong, on both counts. Up went the much heralded Anniversary Issue; and because I was apprised of this and had a few minutes to spare (plus was curious about the current g.a.g. status of various 'Eddie presentees'), I clicked on the link for what I thought would be a cursory look-see. Whaaaaat?!

Scrolling lickety-split down the contributors sidebar, "what to my wondering eyes should appear"—with it still a good four months till Christmas!—but the name Eddie Woods. Really? And why is that? pray tell. Oh, no kidding...with his yanked short story, that's bloody why!

'Take a deep breath. And then another. Maybe even a "Hail, Mary" will help. Calm's the word and the way to proceed.' I took my own advice.

Dear Julie,

First of all, congratulations on your First Anniversary Issue.

But now I have a little problem. On July 15th I wrote you to say:

> Though I'm pleased to hear that you like my story, you're right: I am not
> amenable to seeing it presented other than in the previously agreed
> format. I've certain standards in this regard and I'm not about to abandon
> them now. Therefore, albeit with regret, I hereby withdraw the
> submission...

Your reply, 10 days later read:

> dear eddie,
>
> thank you for having allowed me to present your work in the ghost
> apprentice guild
> sincerely, julius lowland

by which I assumed that the story had indeed been withdrawn. Now I find that it's in the issue nonetheless.

I would let it go (despite the format), except for the fact that I subsequently submitted "A Good Friend" to a print magazine in India, which immediately accepted it. Nor did I advise them that it was a simultaneous submission, for the simple reason that it wasn't.

Well, India may be a long ways from both Devonshire & California, but cyber reaches everywhere. And I'm afraid there might be a conflict.

For this reason, Julie, and in all fairness to the Indian publication, I must ask that you pull "A Good Friend" from the current issue of the g.a.g. I trust this will in no way affect any of my previously published work, which I am still pleased to have available in the archived issues.

All best, EDDIE

Not surprisingly, I didn't hear back. Fair enough, especially since the very concept of 'fair' is, for the most part, wishful thinking. Life isn't like that, pure & simple. So I waited a few days and then checked. The story, my name...both gone. Goody! And my other stuff? Still hanging in there with those lovely full-screen control windows? *Click*. I beg your pardon. *Click*. CLICK CLICK CLICK!!!

THE GHOST APPRENTICE GUILD BROKEN OR EXPIRED LINKS

Either you have typed in the incorrect address or the page you are looking for is no longer active....

Oh yeah! Forget deep breaths; this is war, buddy.

Dear Julius,

I'm not exactly shocked or anything, but I certainly am disappointed. You acceded to my polite and perfectly valid request to pull "A Good Friend" from the current issue, but simultaneously removed all my previously published work from the last two issues. In other words, and in true Stalinist fashion, you've rewritten history. It's not just a case of 'he was there and now he isn't,' but rather 'he was there and now he wasn't.' God the Editor with a

short fuse and a computer mouse, eh? I'm sorry to have to say this, but it was a very tacky move. Hardly worthy of someone who is overseeing a publication with...two million readers, is it? Tut-tut.

You ought to apologize or at least explain, but I'm reasonably certain you won't. I mean, you did tell Guglielmo Leary (before unceremoniously kicking him out of the g.a.g.), "nothing i ever do is deeply inappropriate." The ancient Greeks had a word for that, starting with the letter h.

It was you who solicited my work to begin with, saying first how much you liked it and immediately afterwards adding: "i can't remember the last time i was so completely pulled into a work of fiction - the artfulness of your craft combined with the conversational and chummy style of your writing is a potent mixture for seducing the mind and entertaining the imagination - i am very grateful that i found your work." Followed soonly thereafter by, "i am very interested in your work - it is inspiring to me as an editor and writer."

Nice words, short memory. But what the hell - screw all g.a.g. newcomers who, thanks to Julie's ire, will never get a chance to experience 'the artfulness of Eddie Woods' craft.' Tja!

Best regards,

Eddie Woods
The Gangster Poet

That night I had a dream. I was sitting at my computer. After downloading my email, I went on the internet, typed in the g.a.g.'s URL and hit ENTER. Once the Ghost's site appeared, I played around a bit and somehow made the whole caboodle disappear. 'That's nice,' I thought. So I tried finding it again. This time **Page Not Found** came up. Then I did a Google search. Nada. Okay, let's try Julius Lowland. There was a single news item headed *Web editor vanishes*. The brief story that followed told how police were alerted by neighbors when the publishing editor of a recently-defunct online magazine hadn't been seen or heard from in several days. Upon breaking into his apartment, they found it almost entirely empty—no furniture, no clothing—nothing apart from a lone desk on which sat the remnants of a computer which had transformed into a mound of ashes. Oh, and a scrap of notepaper on which someone had scrawled, "Save the last gag for me." It was unsigned.

I awoke with a broad grin on my face, acutely aware that my toast & coffee would somehow be tasting better than ever that morning. Maybe one of these days I'll go looking for real to see if Julie and the

g.a.g. did go up in cyber smoke. Could be. It's all in the mind, anyway.
So yes, they're definitely `hasta la vista'-ed. *Click!*

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