

American Goth

(from Gear Magazine)

Destiny's Child: The Second Coming of Marilyn Manson By Chuck Palahniuk

It's almost midnight in Marilyn Manson's attic. The attic is at the top of a spiral staircase where the skeleton of a seven-foot-tall man, the bones black with age, crouches with his human skull replaced by a ram's skull. He's the altarpiece from an old Satanic church in Britain, Manson says. Next to the skeleton is the artificial leg a man pulled off himself and gave to Manson after a concert. Manson is at the end of 10 years' work. It's a new start. The alpha and the omega for this man who's worked to become the most despised, the most frightening artist in music. As a coping method. A defense mechanism. Or just out of boredom. The walls are red, and as Manson sits on the black carpet, shuffling tarot cards, he says, "It's hard to read yourself." Somewhere, he says, he's got the skeleton of a seven-year-old Chinese boy, disassembled and sealed in plastic bags. "I think I might make a chandelier out of it," he says. Somewhere is the bottle of absinthe he drinks despite the fear of brain damage. Here in the attic are his paintings and the working manuscript for his novel. He brings out the designs for a new deck of tarot cards. It's him on almost every card. Manson as the Emperor, sitting in a wheelchair with prosthetic legs, clutching a rifle, with the American flag hung upside-down behind him. Manson as the headless Fool, stepping off a cliff with grainy images of Jackie O in her pink suit and a JFK campaign poster in the background. "It was a matter of re-interpreting the tarot," he says. "I replaced the swords with guns. And justice is weighing the Bible against the Brain." He says, "Because each card has so many different symbols, there is a real magic, ritual element to it. When you shuffle, you're supposed to transfer your energy to the cards. It sounds kind of hokey. It's not something I do all the time. I like the symbolism much more than the trying to rely on divination. "I think a reasonable question would be, 'What's next?'" he says, about to deal the cards and begin his reading. "More specific, 'What's my next step?'" Manson deals his first card: The Hierophant. "The first card that you put down," Manson says, looking at the upside-down card, "this represents wisdom and forethought, and the fact that I just dealt it upside-down could mean the opposite—like a lack. I could be naïve about something. This card is, right now, my direct influence."

The reading takes place shortly after Rose McGowan's left the house they share in the Hollywood Hills—after Manson and McGowan played with their Boston terriers, Bug and Fester, and examined a catalog with the Halloween costumes she wants to order for the dogs. Her car and driver are outside, waiting. She's catching a red-eye flight to Canada where she's making a movie with Alan Alda. In the kitchen, a monitor shows views from the different security cameras, and McGowan talks about how different Alan Alda looks, how big his nose is. Manson tells her how, as men grow older, their nose and ears and scrotums keep growing. His mom, a nurse, told him about old men whose balls hung halfway down their legs. Manson and McGowan kiss goodbye. "Thanks a lot," she says. "Now when I work with Alan Alda, I'll be wondering how big his scrotum is." In the attic, Manson deals his second card: The Justice. "This could be referring to my judgment," he says, "my ability to discern, possibly with friendships or business dealings. Right now I feel a little naïve or unsure about either friendships or business dealings, which does particularly apply to certain circumstances between me and my record company. So that makes

every bit of sense." The day before, in the offices of his record label on Santa Monica Boulevard, Manson sits on a black leather sofa, wearing black leather pants, and whenever he shifts, the leather-on-leather makes a deep, growl sound, amazingly similar to his voice. "I tried to swim when I was a kid, but I could never deal with the water in my nose. I have a fear of water. I don't like the ocean. There's something too infinite about it that I find dangerous." The walls are dark blue and there are no lights on. Manson sits in the dark with the air conditioning blasting, drinking cola and wearing sunglasses. "I love pranking people and causing traumas in their life," he says. "I love to get an answering machine where I can just really go to town. It'll say, 'Sue and Jim aren't home. Please leave a message,' and I'll start in: 'Jim, you've got to level with her about this. I can't live a lie anymore. I love you.' And I just can't imagine what kind of fucking trauma this causes, because you know—even if you're not guilty—you know you sound guilty if you try and get your way in a relationship. You always sound guilty." At home, in the attic of his five-story house, drinking a glass of red wine, Manson deals his third card: The Fool. "The third card is to represent my goals," he says. "The Fool is about to walk off of a cliff, and it's a good card. It represents embarking on a journey, or taking a big step forward. That could represent the campaign of the record of it. "If you don't like my music, I don't care. It doesn't really matter to me. If you don't like what I look like, if you don't like what I have to say, it's all part of what I'm asking for. You're giving me just what I want." Manson deals his fourth card: Death. "The fourth card is your distant past," he says. "And the Death card most represents transition, and it's part of what has got you to this, how you are right now. This makes a good deal of sense, regarding the fact that I've just gone through such a grand transition that's taken place over the course of the last 10 years." Sitting in the dark blue room at his record label, he says, "I think that my mom has in some ways that Munchausen Syndrome, when people try and convince you that you're ill so they can hang on to you longer. Because when I was young, my mom used to always tell me I was allergic to different things that I'm not allergic to. She used to tell me I'm allergic to eggs and fabric softener and all kinds of weird things." His black leather pants flare to cover thick-soled black shoes. He says, "I remember that my urethra had grown closed, and they had to put a drill in my dick and drill it out. It was the worst thing that could ever happen to a kid. They told me that after I went through puberty I had to come back and go through it again, but I said 'No chance. I don't care what my urine stream is like now. I'm not going back. "His mother still keeps his foreskin in a vial. "When I was growing up, my dad and I didn't get along. He was never around, and that's why I didn't really talk about him, because I never saw him. He worked all the time. I don't consider what I do to be work, but I think I've inherited his workaholic determinism. I don't think until I was in my 20s did my dad ever speak to me about being in the Vietnam War. Then he started telling me about people that he'd killed and things that he was involved in with Agent Orange. "He says, "My father and I both have some sort of heart disorder, a heart murmur. I was really sick when I was a kid. I had pneumonia four or five times and was always in the hospital, always underweight, scrawny, primed for a beating." Phones ring in the other offices. Four lanes of traffic go by outside. "When I was writing the book [his autobiography]," Manson says, "I hadn't really gotten to the conclusion of how similar I was to my grandfather. Until I got to the end of the book, that hadn't dawned on me. That, as a kid, I'm looking at him as a monster because he's got women's clothing and dildos, and by the end of the story I've become far worse than my grandfather was. "I don't think I've told anyone this," he says, "but what I found out over the last year is that my father and my grandfather never got along. My father came back from the Vietnam War and was kind of tossed out on the street and told he had to pay rent. There's something

really dark about that which I never liked. And my father told me last year that he'd found out that that's not his real father. Which was the strangest thing I'd ever heard, because it started to make sense that maybe he was treated poorly and had this weird relationship. It's really weird to think that he wasn't really my grandfather." He says, "I suspect that there's so much death imagery because as a kid I was always sick and always had sick relatives. There was always a fear of death. There was a fear of the Devil. A fear of the end of the world. The Rapture—which is a Christian myth that doesn't even exist in the Bible. All of that, I just ended up becoming. I ended up becoming what I was afraid of. That was my way of dealing with it."

In the attic, Manson deals his fifth card: The Hanged Man. "The fifth card is more of your recent past," he says. "It also is meant to mean some sort of change has taken place, in this case it could mean the fact that I've become extremely focused and maybe in some ways have neglected friendships and relationships." He says, "I was born in '69, and that year's become such a focus for a lot of things, especially this record. Because '69 was the end of so many things. Everything in culture just changed so much, and I think it was real important that I was born then, too. The fact that Huxley and Kennedy died on the same day. Tome, that opened up some kind of schism or gateway to what was going to happen. It all started to show parallels for me. Altamonte was like Woodstock '99." "The house I live in, The Stones lived there when they wrote "Let It Bleed." I found Cocksucker Blues, an obscure film that they made, and it shows them in my living room writing "Gimme Shelter." And "Gimme Shelter" waste song that was emblematic of the whole Altamonte tragedy. And then the Manson murders were something I've always obsessed over since I was a child. That to me had the same media coverage as Columbine. "The thing that always bothered me was," he says, "this is the exact same thing. Nixon came out and said Charles Manson was guilty during the trial, because Nixon was being blamed for everything that was wrong about the culture." Then the same thing happened with Clinton saying, 'Why are these kids acting so violent? It must be Marilyn Manson. It must be this movie. It must be this game.' Then he turns the cheek and sends some bombs overseas to kill a bunch of people. And he's wondering why kids have bombs and they're killing people." Manson brings out watercolor paintings he's done, bright and dark colorful Rorschach-test portraits of McGowan. Paintings he does with, not so much the paints as the murky rinse water he uses to clean his brushes. One shows the grinning heads of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold impaled on the raised fingers of a peace sign. "It turns out that they weren't fans," he says. "One Denver reporter did enough research to prove they disliked me because I was too commercial. They were into more underground stuff. It pissed me off that the media took one thing and it just kept snowballing. And it was because I'm an easy target. I look guilty. And I was on tour at the time." He says, "People always ask me, 'What would you have said to them if you could talk to them?' and my answer is, 'Nothing. I would've listened.' That's the problem. Nobody listened to what they were saying. If you'd listened, you'd have known what was going on." He says, "Strangely, although music is something to listen to, I think music listens back because there's no judgments. A kid can find something he identifies with. Or an adult. Here's a place you can go to where there's no judgments." Manson deals his sixth card: The Star. "This card is the future," he says. "The Star. This means great success." He says, "For a long time, I never saw myself getting to this point. I never looked beyond this because I thought I was either going to destroy myself or someone was going to kill me in the process. So in some ways I have beaten my dream. And it is scary. It is like starting over, but that's good because that's what I needed."

I've gone back in time in a way, but now I have more ammunition, more knowledge to face the world." He says, "The natural thing for me to do is to be involved in movies, but it really has to be on my terms. I think I feel more suited as a director than an actor, although I like to act. I'm talking to Jodorowsky, the guy who did *El Topo* and *The Holy Mountain*. He's a Chilean director who worked with Dali. He wrote a script called *Able Cain*, and it's a fantastic thing. He's had it for about 15 years, and he hasn't wanted to do it, but he contacted me because I was the only person he wanted to work with. And the character is very different from what people know of me, and that's the only reason I'm interested. Because most people who approach me want me to do different versions of myself. It's not really a challenge of any sort." Next spring, Manson will publish his first novel, *Holy Wood*, a narrative covering his first three records. In the attic, he sits on the floor, leaning into the blue light from his laptop and reads the first chapter out loud, a magical, surreal, poetic story, crammed with detail and cut loose from traditional boring fiction. He deals his seventh card: *The High Priestess*. "This," he says, "I'm not sure about." He deals his eighth card: *The World*. "The world," he says, "placed appropriately here represents the environmental or outside things that can prevent you." He says, "I had a great, interesting experience in Dublin. Because it's very Catholic, I did this performance on the European tour. I had this cross made of TVs that burst into flames, and I came out—I basically was just nude except for leather underwear. I'd painted myself all charred. I came onstage, the cross was on fire, and I saw people in the front row turn around and face the other direction. It was unbelievable. It was the greatest compliment in a performance. They were so offended—and it's unbelievable to me that someone could be that offended—that they turned around and looked the other way. Hundreds of people." Manson deals his ninth card: *The Tower*. "The Tower is a very bad card," he says. "It means destruction, but in the way that this is read, it comes across like I'm going to have to go against pretty much everyone—in a revolutionary way, and there's going to be some sort of destruction. It will probably be the people who try to get in my way." About his novel, he says, "The whole story, if you take it from the beginning, is parallel to my own, but just told in metaphors and different symbols that I thought other people could draw from. It's about being innocent and naïve, much like Adam was in Paradise before the fall from grace. And seeing something like Hollywood, which I used as a metaphor to represent what people think is the perfect world, and it's about wanting—your whole life—to fit into this world that doesn't think you belong, that doesn't like you, that beats you down every step of the way, fighting and fighting and fighting, and finally getting there and realizing that now that you're there, everyone around you are the same people who kept you down in the first place. So you automatically hate everyone around you. You resent them for making you become part of this game you didn't realize you were buying into. You trade one prison cell for another in some ways. "That becomes that revolution," he says, "to be idealistic enough that you think you can change the world, and what you find is you can't change anything but yourself." McGowan calls from the airport and promises to call again when her plane lands. In a week Manson will leave for Japan. In a month, he'll start a world tour in Minneapolis. Next spring, his novel will complete the past decade of his life. And after that, he'll start again. "In some ways it feels like, not a burden, but a weight has been lifted by putting to rest long-term project," he says. "It gives me the freedom to go anywhere. I feel a lot like I did when I started the band. I feel that same drive and inspiration, and that same disdain for the world that makes me want to do something that makes people think. "The only fear I have left is the fear of not being able to create, of not having inspiration," Manson says.

"I may fail, and this may not work, but at least I'm choosing to do it. It's not something that I'm choosing to do it. It's not something I'm doing because I'm stuck with it." Manson deals his tenth card: The Sun. The two Boston terriers are curled up, asleep on a black velvet chair. He says, "This is the final outcome, the Sun, which represents happiness and accomplishing a great deal."