

ANNOUNCING

*The
Yazoo
Blues*

BY JOHN PRITCHARD

[Spring 2008]

The sequel to the critically
acclaimed novel, *Junior Ray*.*

Now, in *The Yazoo Blues*, our antihero,
Junior Ray Loveblood, leaves law enforcement
and becomes a historian. It's all goddam
curious, if Junior Ray does say so hisself.

*"Something of a miracle," says *The Memphis Flyer*.
Junior Ray made B&N's 2005 Top Ten Sensational Debut
Novels list. (See page 6 for more praise.)

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JOHN PRITCHARD
grew up in the
Mississippi Delta.
He teaches college
English in Memphis,
Tennessee. *Junior Ray*
was his first novel.



Leigh Davidson Fraser

EXCERPT #I FROM *The Yazoo Blues*

Before I go on, there is one thing I do need to mention, and that is that even though Lieutenant-Colonel James Wilson played a large role in that whole expedition, I really sort of lost track of him, probably because he was so straight, and I don't have much time for anybody, historical or otherwise that don't have a few things wrong with 'em. It turns out he had a lot wrong with him but not in the kind of way that gets my attention. Wilson was an ass-hole. And I have a theory. There's a line that separates the straight from the insane. One side of that line proceeds from the goofy to the out-and-out fukkin crazy. The other side goes from what I'd consider just your average eagle sprout right on up to your top-of-the-line, totally intolerable ass-hole, usually the very sumbich you really need to get the job done right, and that's the hell of it. Fortunately, though, there seems to be enough of them other crazy muthafukkas out there to gum up the works and make things interesting. I'd say, when you think about it, that's history in a nutshell. I oughta be a goddam professor.

Anyway, I get nervous around a sumbich who ain't a little bit squirrely — well, that may be for a couple of reasons, one of which is that if a sumbich is *sufficiently* squirrely, I can get over on him, and I'm in the driver's seat; the other reason is somebody that's got a few rips and tears here and there ain't gonna be taking my measurements like some straight-ass, always-do-it-right muthafukka would be doing.

Anyway, apart from James Wilson being the guy that cleared the Yazoo Pass and apart from his hatred of po' ol Watson Smith,

I don't know where James Wilson is most of the time during the expedition. He don't always say what boat he's on; he just names a place on the land, like Moon Lake or Price's plantation or what have you. It's like he's making a point that he ain't in any way connected with the navy. However, I will say this: for a dikkhed, he was a helluva good engineer.

Now, I got Miss Minnie MacDonald to type all this for me, and she said, "Junior Ray, you've just got entirely too much sex here." And I said, "How can there ever be too much sex, Miss Minnie? Except for fight'n and drinking and trying to make a living, that's all there is. *Plus*, ever-body seems to be inter-rested in it."

And she come back at me with, "Well, Junior Ray, I thought this was supposed to be about history." And I said, "Yes'm, it is, and that's why there's so much sex." I went on to try and explain to her that even when there don't appear to be no sex in the shit that historical muthafukkas do, it's always right there, in the middle of it, behind it, underneath it . . . ever-where."

Miss Minnie went on about how she didn't believe it. She said she thought people were much more nicer than that and they didn't just go around thinkin about such things much less doin' 'em. And I told her, "No ma'm, they *do think about them things* all the time, even the nice ones. And they does 'em too. It's just that we, as average citizens, don't normally get to *see* it when they go about it. And that's where I come in, as a historian.

But, besides, I told her, there ain't really that much sex in this piece of writing, mainly because I held it out . . . in case it mighta fell into the hands of a buncha fukkin teenagers or something.



BACKGROUND ON *The Yazoo Blues*

*The character of Junior Ray Loveblood made his first appearance in 2005 in **Junior Ray**, the debut novel by John Pritchard that was banned in some quarters but panned in surprisingly few. The novel was also widely praised by readers and reviewers and was named one of Barnes and Noble's Top Ten Debut Novels for the year.*

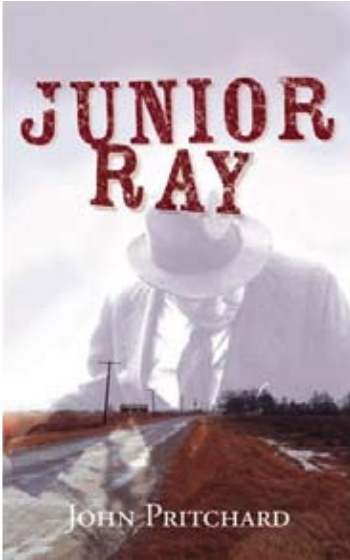
Loveblood is one of the most outrageous and original fictional personalities to appear in American literature in many years. Equally profane and unintentionally profound, he lives in the complex stew of evolving race relations, failed economies, and corrupt politics that define much of the post-civil rights rural Deep South—in Junior Ray's case, specifically in the Mississippi Delta.

*Author Pritchard had placed the racist white deputy sheriff inside a much longer work exploring Delta history and culture, but then Junior Ray began to take over the book. So Pritchard gave the character his own first-person voice in a shorter book carved from the larger work. That was **Junior Ray**, the account of how Loveblood and his sidekick, Voyd, pursued and tried to kill a shell-shocked war veteran.*

*Now, in a setting some years later, Loveblood is semi-retired and working as a security guard in one of the floating casinos that have replaced cotton as the cash crop in the Mississippi Delta. And in his spare time, Junior Ray has become an amateur historian, fascinated with the ill-fated Yazoo Pass expedition by a Union armada up the Mississippi River in 1863. He shares his findings in the forthcoming **The Yazoo Blues**. Here as in **Junior Ray** he speaks entirely in first person through a transcriber/interviewer.*

PRAISE FOR *Junior Ray* (2005)

“Mississippi tourist officials won’t be handing this book out anytime soon, though they might be surprised by its effectiveness if they did . . . Not for the squeamish, but its irreverent humor will win over most.” — *Publishers Weekly*



“The Mississippi Delta is a nation unto itself, and in this promising debut novel John Pritchard proves he knows the language and customs of its natives as well as any writer to come along in quite some time . . . pitch perfect.” — *Mobile Register*

“This writer knows the country whereof he speaks, its dialect, its mores and folkways. But this is not sociology. It is primitive fiction of the sort one rarely sees. More’s the pity. Underneath this violent language and narrative, there is a sweet truth. It deserves to be read.” — HARRY CREWS

“*Junior Ray* runs on a belly laugh per page. When Junior Ray, a deputy sheriff who makes Flem Snopes sound cultured, sets out to track down a ‘maniac’ loose in the Mississippi Delta he proves to be more demented than his prey. Like his protagonist, John Pritchard’s novella is outrageous and ribald, a revolt against the literary school of manners and a ride that takes Southern Gothic to new extremes.” — CURTIS WILKIE, *Dixie: A Personal Odyssey Through Events That Shaped the Modern South*

“Junior Ray is an unforgettable narrator: hilarious, rowdy, and

stubbornly his own. In life you'd cross the street to avoid him; in Pritchard's delightful fictional debut, you'll turn the pages to see what that rascal does next." — LOUISE REDD, *Hangover Soup*

"Junior Ray Loveblood has taken profanity and made a new language of it, which he uses to tell the often hilarious, often scary, story of life as a poor white in the Mississippi Delta, down its lonely roads and through its dark forests. This book is massively profane and massively politically incorrect. Not for the squeamish or pure at heart." — JOHN FERGUS RYAN, *White River Kid* and *The Redneck Bride*

"A whizbang of a book—funny, eccentric in that great Southern tradition, pitch-perfect, and beautifully paced. Junior's voice, while repugnant, is also beguiling, sorrowful—though he doesn't know it—and rich in cracker surrealism. Every page fairly crackles with perverse wit. Finally, what is really palpable in Junior Ray is a sense of place. The book drips with Delta air and brings alive its peculiar, specific population." — BURKE'S BOOKSTORE

"Allow us the awkward pleasure of introducing Junior Ray Loveblood, the most profane, most despicable, and funniest protagonist you are likely to encounter this year. John Pritchard's slyly profound creation, a former redneck deputy sheriff in the Mississippi Delta, is an awful man with a sickening obsession. But as Junior Ray . . . spews forth a nonstop stream of foul-mouthed, misanthropic bile and personal history—readers will find themselves laughing out loud. . . . For all Junior Ray's ugly talk, the writing here is beautifully crafted. . . . [Junior Ray] deserves shelf space beside the best southern literature—even if it makes its neighbors blush." — BARNES & NOBLE 2005 TOP TEN SENSATIONAL DEBUT NOVELS

Junior Ray — ISBN 1-58838-111-0; \$23.95
For more info, see www.newsouthbooks.com/juniorryay

EXCERPT #2 FROM *The Yazoo Blues*

I began my life with the best of intentions. Only I never knowed what they were. Things just happened, or they simply popped up, and I done whatever it was I done according to whatever I thought I could do and get away with at the time. And now I still have the best of intentions; only that's about it: they's just intentions, and I couldn really say about what in particular. I guess by now it's just kind of a principle, if you know what I mean — namely, it don't mean nothin'.

Anyway, it is possible that one of the best things I ever got into was this business about the Yazoo Pass. I really do think if I had gotten some more education when I was younger, instead of me goin' into law enforcement, I might just gone into history—but not like that silly coksukka over at the univer'sty who wouldn come over to see Ottis. The thing is, I have figured out why the Yazoo Pass expedition took such a hold on me.

It's the same thing I feel, in a different way, when I see all these casinos lined up here. They're the outsiders. And, in a sense, they're they fukkin Yankees, no matter if some of 'em do come from out west, cause, you see, that's where the Yankees all went after they got through with the war. Most of the Rebs stayed here where they was. What the fuk did we want with two deserts? We was too busy trying to clean up the one them Yankees left us with after they got finished beat'n the shit out of us. I was out West once. It looked like a fukkin' gravel pit to me. But, hell, that's Arkansas for you.

Anyway, it's this thing about the outsider coming in here, particularly to the Delta. It all just seems other-worldly somehow. And now with these lit-up four-lane parkways snakin' out 'cross the cotton fields and a fukkin-thirty-story hotel rising up over behind the levee, it's just like it was when them 6,000 Yankee soldiers and sailors was steaming through the Delta on the Cold-water and the Tallahatchie in 1863. It's the same goddam thing exactly, in terms of amazement.

Granted, a huge amount of the clientele is semi-local — Memphis, Arkansas, west Tennessee, the hills of Mississippi over to the east and the like — but the real direction of this thing is global, like Lost-fukkin-Vegas, which is what it is becoming.

Anyhow, at least, there was some bit of goddam nobility to the reason them Blue Suits come here in 1863; whereas, now, these ugly lookin', if you'll excuse the expression, common-lookin', paycheck-blowin' muthafukkas — from wherever they come from — seem like they are about the lowest form of white man I ever laid my fukkin' eyes on — and that's sayin' a lot, 'cause, as you know, I come from some of the roughest they is.

Well, I say that, but the truth is, inside, I think, Damn . . . Don't let me be like that muthafukka! Let me stay just as I am. And I guess you could say more or less I have.

But here's the nut: Like them Yankee blueboys back in the War of the Fukkin Rebellion, these present-day invaders are on water, too, more or less. Don't ast me why, but, as you know, in Miss'ssippi the law here says that gambling has got to go on on a navigable stream, which in this case means the Miss'ssippi River and not none of them other little piss-trickles, like the Tallahatchie or, way down there, the Big Black or the Pearl and such, and especially not on no ditches or bye-ohs and sloughs, the way — at first — every frog-sukkin, greed-hog, foamin'-at-the-mouth, desperate-ass sumbich you could think of thought he and his family was gon' get theyse'vs a casino in their front yard.

I say “more or less” because though these casinos is on the Mississippi, they really ain’t. They’re set’ up on dry land in a dug-out pond, tee-totally manmade and which you can’t really see unless you know about it and make it a point to notice it. The way it is is that the foundation of the gambling part is built on a big-ass steel barge several of ’em hooked together, which they brought in from the river through a canal they dug, and then they closed up the canal and the whole thing looks like it’s just set’n there on dry land, which it is . . . but it ain’t.

Now, only the goddam gambling part has to be built on water — which in this case is not no more navigable than your fukkin bathtub — and all the other parts of the operation, like the hotel, the restaurant, the day-care center, and all the other convenient crap these ass’oles go for, can be built anywhere—right smack-ass on the ground. And they are, and on both sides of the levee, too, which the gambling part cannot be; it’s got to be on the wet side of the levee, between it and the river.

Like I said, at first, every coksukka in the county who had even a drainage ditch running through his land thought he was gonna have a casino on his property and that he’d be rich. Hell, whole families fell out about it. It was like the Devil had done come to town and th’owed a party.

Plus, there’s something wild about it all. No matter what goes on down here, I’m convinced it will always have something to do with water and with insanity. I wonder would somebody say the same thing about some place like Wis-fukkin-consin? Maybe everybody thinks their part of the world is like the Delta here — intimately involved with craziness and high water. I mean, I don’t want to think that I believe something that is just a fukkin generality all over the place, but I readily admit the possibility. And, well, it probably is. I’m coming to believe ain’t nothin’ just itse’f no more and I don’t guess nothin’ ever was. Hell, I don’t know. I ain’t ever been nowhere but here, and the Guffa –fukkin-mexico.

I bet, though, don't nobody much up the country think about those old times and all that shooting and fear and sickness and death, and love it like we do down here. Hell, I bet they don't know the Civil War from the civil-dadgum-service. Whereas here . . . you can see it. It makes your skin jump and puts your hackles up.

Just knowing about people like po' old Watson Smith and Mr. Foster and Lieutenant-Colonel James Wilson and the paymaster's boat and all that stuff can take up a large part of what goes on inside a sumbich down here, without, I might add, him even realizing the half of it. But all of us are always chasing something or running from something we don't never find and maybe don't even never get to see, but we know it's here, and it's in the meat of our bones. It's always up the road in the distance and behind us in the fukkin dust, and it's in the darkness of them sloughs and in the slug-ass slowness of these coksukkin little rivers. You look down in the water, and it's looking back. You might think it's just a catfish, but it ain't. It's fukkin history.



EXCERPT #3 FROM *The Yazoo Blues*

Somehow the glamour of hangin' out at the deer camp done wore off a long fukkin time ago, mainly 'cause I could see what was happening to those old farts. Just about all of em had give up on women, and all they wanted to do was sit around inside an over-heated tar-paper shack, drink and gamble and call theyse'fs hunters. Fuk that noise. The only thing those fat-ass old buttheads have hunted for lately — and can't find — is their dicks when they go to piss, and I 'spec most of 'em wind up empty-handed. I'm telling you, their stomachs is so stuck out they ain't seen their own toes in forty years.

I had a goddam spiritual awakening. That don't mean I seen Jesus out on Highway 61, but here's what happened to me: It was like all of a sudden I had a fukkin vision, and I saw them, and I saw me, and I was one of them, and I hollered, "Not today, muthafukka! I ain't like you coksukkas! I ain't some old fart that's give up on life—no sir, I said, in the vision of course—no sir—you sumbiches can take every buck in these woods and stick 'em up your wo'-out, smoke-soaked asses!" Why, I thought, would a muthafukka think more about some dumb, four-footed, half-ass antelope than he would about the real, so-nuff little "dears" up in Meffis at the Magic Pussy? It didn't make no sense.

I didn't know what that meant at the time, but I started thinking about it, and I realized I had to make some mighty big changes. For one thing I wuddn gonna keep just coming home and watching TV and then spending the weekends, mostly, over there near Sledge with Dyna Flo McKeever, eating my ass off and fall-

ing asleep most of the time. Shit. I seen the fukkin light. And I saw how death comes without knocking on the door and just lays down on the sofa beside you. And then after a hunnuhd thousand bags of Cheetohs and no telling how many cases of beer and buckets of chicken, your ass is planted outside of town in Oak Wood Cemetery.

I don't know. And right here I am tempted to ask what's it all mean, but the truth is I don't care about that. I just like what I'm doing while I'm doing it. And here's the deal: The Magic Pussy Caberet & Club is like dope. A muthafukka can get hooked on it because going there gives him something ordinary daily life cannot provide. And that's the feeling that he can have it all, that somehow there is a point to everything—and, of course, that's pussy. That's it. And, look'a here. An old, ugly sumbich like me can come into that dark room in the afternoons and have young beautiful women come up to him and want to tweek his dick just like he was Clarke Gable or Lash LaRue or something.

I mean, look here, muthafukka, I wuddn about to get me one nem blow-up dolls, nor a stack of magazines, and I damn sho ain't buyin' one nem sponge-rubber, good-as-the-real-fukkin-thing, fake pussies they sell up yonder in Meffis at the Adult SuperStore—Voyd had been tryin' to persuade me to get one, but I said, "Fukkew, Voyd, I ain't gon' get caught dead with my dick on one of them things, besides which, the last time I looked, all they had was black."

And he said, "Well, at least it won't talk back to your ass." I started to tell the sumbich them days was over, but I let it go.

"But," he went on, "You wouldn't have to do all that drivin' over to Sledge all the time."

Fuk that, I thought. Distance wuddn really what bothered me, but destination did. And that's when I realized the Magic Pussy Cabaret & Club . . . was for me.

And, yes, it can have a down side. Shitchyeah. I was up there

at the MP one Saturday night when the golfers were so fukkin thick you couldn't stir the muthafukkas with a stick. That's what I call them sumbiches that come there, golfers, because whenever there's a big golf tournament in Meffis, the Magic Pussy is the hole they all seem to want to put their balls in.

And if it ain't them, then, lordgod, it's fulla Ole Miss boys and dental students from UT in Meffis and sometimes they'll all three be there, wavin' dollars in the air, crowded up around the center stage like hogs at a trough, watchin' two of the most good looking fukkin girls you'll ever see in your goddam life nekkid as jaybirds, eat'n each others' shaved pussy like there wuddn nobody else around, and money is piling up around 'em, th'own in there by all them horny muthafukkas strainin' to get a look.

Then, the next day, them coksukkas'll go be golfers again; the Ole Miss boys'll sleep late and go on back to Oxford, the dental students'll look for wisdom in a tooth, and things will all get back to abnormal, which is what I think everyday life is anyhow.

That's probably what Moses didn't understand when he come down off that mountain and found all the Hebrews jumping and singing and dancing around that gold cow—you know the story; it's in the fukkin Bible—but Moses just didn't get the picture. He thought the Hebrews ought to be behavin' theysefs, doing a lot of quiet stuff, praying and weaving and finding lost lambs and all such boring-ass shit as that. And he thought they were acting awful and were sinful and shouldn't be jumping around the gold cow, whooping and hollering and having a good time. And that's where he fukked up. What the Children of Israel was doing was normal; they was doing what human beings were meant to do, and the other way is really the true picture of hell, which ain't full of sin at all, not one bit, and that, of course, is why it's called hell.

So there I was, in the smoke and the goddam music and the crowd of men—and some of their girlfriends and wives—and the nekkid dancers, on the stage, and semi-nekkid girls prancin' around

all over the place, moving all through the gang of good ol'boys, looking for some sumbich to take back in the "VIP" lounge and give him a lap dance.

And that's what I was looking for, too. So while I'm straining with the best of the golfers and the college boys to see the two buck-nekkid blondes up on the stage, some cute li'l thing come up behind me and reached around and grabbed me by the balls and whispered some of the goddamdest shit in my ear you ever heard some sumbich lie to you about, so I, without paying no whole lot of attention, let her haul me off into the back where I plunked down in the dark on the couch, and she commenced to take off everything except for her teeny-ass little g-string.

Then she stood up on the couch, straddling my legs, reached down with one hand and pulled that g-string way over to the side, and th'owed the cutest little pussy I ever saw—and I've seen a lot of 'em since I started going up to the MP—right smack in my face, I flicked out my tongue like I was a big-ass lizard and just ever so softly licked her lillo whatchamacallit, you know, the love-button thing; then I raised my head and looked up at her eyeball to eyeball, and she was there standing right there over me looking straight down into mine, and then she said, "UNCLE JUNIOR!"

And I hollered back, "LITTLE PETUNIA!"

It was one of Voyd and Sunflower's granddaughters. So I said, "Goddam, Little Petunia, what the fuk are you doing up here!"

And, smartmouthed just like her grandmamma, she said, "I'm givin' you a lap dance, you old dumb sunnavabitch. What the fuk are YOU doin' up here?"

"I come up here to get a lap dance," I told her, "but I didn't know it was gonna be from you."

And she come back with, "Well, then, I guess you could say this is just your lucky fukkin day." And, by God, it was.



The Yazoo Blues

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