



The Incurables

Jon Bassoff

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The year is 1953. Disgraced in the psychiatric hospital where he'd practiced for nearly thirty years, Dr. Walter Freeman has taken to traversing the country and proselytizing about a very new kind of salvation: the transorbital lobotomy. With an ice pick and a hammer, Freeman promises to cure depression and catatonia, delusions and psychosis, with a procedure as simple and safe as curing a toothache. When he enters the backwater Oklahoma town of Burnwood, however, his own sanity will be tested. Around him swirls a degenerate and delusional cast of characters-a preacher who believes his son to be the Messiah, a demented and violent young prostitute, and a trio of machete-wielding brothers-all weaved into a grotesque narrative that reveals how blind faith in anything can lead to destruction.

The Incurables Details

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Author : Jon Bassoff

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From Reader Review The Incurables for online ebook

Frank Errington says

Review copy

Jon Bassoff was born in 1974 in New York City and currently lives with his family in a ghost town somewhere in Colorado. His mountain gothic novel, *Corrosion*, was called "startlingly original and unsettling" by Tom Piccirilli, a four-time winner of the Bram Stoker Award, and won the DarkFuse Reader's Choice Award for best novel. His surrealistic follow-up, *Factory Town*, was called "A hallucinatory descent into an urban hell" by Bram Stoker award-winning author Ramsey Campbell. For his day job, Bassoff teaches high school English where he is known by students and faculty alike as the deranged writer guy.

Bassoff's third novel is filled with characters with few, if any, socially redeeming qualities. *The Incurables* is set in the early 1950s, and Dr. Walter Freeman's nearly thirty years at the same mental institution are about to come to an end. Despite his many successes in treating the most insane of patients through a process he developed called a transorbital lobotomy, the times are changing and the institution's board is eager to move on to more humane treatments using modern medications to modify the behaviors of the asylum's residents.

Instead to changing his ways, Dr. Freeman sets out on his own with his most recent success and travels the country preaching his cure for many mental conditions. At the same time there is a father and son team of a preacher who is convinced his son is the Messiah.

If you like your horror dark and violent, *The Incurables* is most definitely for you. It's a book where once you start reading, you won't want to put it down. There are no heroes in this tale filled with delightfully despicable characters. Personally, I found the work to be a criticism of both science and religion, and whichever you put your faith in, there is no redemption to be found.

The Incurables is published by Darkfuse and is available in both paperback and e-book formats. If you subscribe to Amazon's Kindle Unlimited you can read this work at no additional charge. Plus, if you are an Amazon Prime member you can read this book for FREE as your monthly selection from the Kindle Owners Lending Library.

Recommended.

Kate says

Disclaimer: I received a copy of this book through Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

Disgraced doctor, Walter Freeman, thinks he has perfected the Transorbital Lobotomy, a simple procedure he feels will cure a vast majority of his patients at the psychiatric hospital he has worked at for over thirty years. The other doctors do not agree and he is dismissed but decides to 'liberate' one of his successes, Edgar, a murderer who is now as meek as a kitten thanks to the procedure.

Walter decides to take his 'success' on the road and they tour town after town speaking of the positives of the procedure and how people can be saved. They come to Burnwood and there meet a variety of troubled and

manipulative characters. Durango and his preacher father and Scent, the young prostitute who is desperate to get her hands on money hidden by her mother. Their stories converge into a violent finale where Walter is shown the real cost of his procedure.

The author has again brought together an amazing array of characters for his novel, Walter with his almost blind faith in the power of his procedure. This is mirrored in the story arc of Durango and his father, his father convinced that Durango is the messiah and can perform miracles and raise the dead. Scent's character was complex with the initial set up of her being a sweet girl who is hooking because she has no other options. She is soon revealed as someone violent, calculating and manipulative but her love for Durango seems pure and she is convinced this is what's needed to change her life, along with her mother's money of course.

The novel is set in the 50's and scratches the underbelly of america, showing the violence and poverty that confront people on a daily basis. It's fascinating and disturbing in equal measures but well worth the read.

Recommended.

11811 (Eleven) says

This was a damn fine read. Equating a doctor who performs lobotomy surgery with messiah figures, faith healers and other Saviors was a clever tool and on its own made the story worthwhile. I think this is my second read by this author and I am yet to be disappointed.

The character of the doctor was particularly well fleshed out as a firm believer in the righteousness of the controversial service he performed. Well done.

Mark Matthews says

The Incurables is an excellent addition to the Bassoff universe. I say Universe, because there seems to me an unspoken link between Bassoff's books, and the author has become an 'auto-read' for me with his distinct characters, dialogue, and style. The Incurables tackles a subject I deal with everyday in my day job; mental health treatment, and a doctor who's on a mission to cure others with his lobotomy techniques. You want proof the lobotomy works? well, he's brought along a patient to prove it. They run into a small town, where a potentially psychotic man believes his son is the savior. The son, however, falls in love with the town hooker, who has her own plans which include using a lobotomy on her mother for her own scandalous means. A great read, told with incredible skills. The cure may indeed be worse than the disease, and faith and lunacy may indeed be identical twins.

Also, here's an interview with the author from a few months back

Bill says

**As a member of the DarkFuse NetGalley Readers Group, I received an advanced copy of this e-book in*

exchange for an honest review.

Burnwood, Oklahoma is a bit of a sad sack town. Desolate, lonely, poverty stricken. Sinners run amok. Luckily for them - Durango the Messiah and The Ice Pick Savior are coming to town to save them all. Or send them all to hell. I'm betting on the latter.

Jon Bassoff can definitely write a bleak and twisted tale. There aren't any warm and fuzzies going on in this one, that's for sure. It's a very dark story from the start and only gets darker as it progresses.

Benoit Lelièvre says

A guide to reading THE INCURABLES (or any Jon Bassoff novel, really) and enjoying yourself.

- 1) It's a slow novel. One that unfolds moments with great precision and drama. There is a two-year jump at some point, but otherwise the entirety of the events happens over a couple days.
- 2) Embrace the conceptual aspect. THE INCURABLES is about the fight between religion and science for the heart of the American people in the 1950s and the no-win situation it was for everybody. Bassoff thinks beyond his characters and should be read as such.
- 3) It's sometimes bleak for the sake of being bleak. I tried to read it the same way I would read a Southern Gothic novel. It is actually, quite gothic.
- 4) The character of Scent is troublesome, but adds another layer of human desire to the religion vs science angle. I can't say I was too crazy about who she was in particular, but she's a necessity.
- 5) Embrace the inevitable. You will most likely guess the ending 100 pages before it happens, but I saw it as a fatality and not necessarily a twist.

Jon Bassoff writes a bleak and hopeless brand of gothic/horror. It's one of the most unique things we got out there. He deserves to be read!

Ken McKinley says

Every once in a while, a book comes along that has a subject matter that really sticks with you. The Incurables struck that chord with me. I'm kind of a sucker for horror with a historical setting. Bassoff's offering is set in 1953 and uses a real character with a sordid legacy, Dr. Walter Freeman. Dr Freeman created his name in the history books by being the physician noted for the controversial psychiatric procedure, the lobotomy. In fact, he streamlined the surgery by foregoing the traditional methods of exposing the brain with an incision in the skull and developed the trans orbital lobotomy. If you're not familiar with that procedure, it involved an ice pick and inserting it in the tear duct of each eye socket, using a mallet to break through the soft bone behind the eye, and scrambling the patient's gray matter by wiggling the pick around inside the brain. Freeman was a carnival barker-like salesman with his new procedure and would often "advertise" it as a cure-all to whatever ails you. By the early 1950s, Freeman had performed his lobotomy on thousands of patients, including the

infamous Rose Kennedy.

I have to admit, I didn't know much about lobotomies. Oh sure, I'd heard the term and knew it had something to do with messing with the brain and that it turned many people into drooling vegetables. What I didn't know was the history of the procedure and how prevalent it was in society for so many years. I also didn't know anything about Dr. Walter Freeman. While reading *The Incurables*, I found myself looking up all sorts of information on the internet about the subject and I found it chillingly fascinating.

Bassoff uses this sordid character and macabre nugget of American history and weaves a captivating tale involving Freeman being fired from his position and forced to take his carnival act on the road across the United States. He paints a chilling and vibrant tale of horror in a seedy small town in Oklahoma where Freeman preys on the desperation of bleak town rife with mental illness. The writing style is smooth and easy. The characters are well fleshed out and memorable. If there is a down side to the story, it would be that there really isn't a sympathetic character in the whole bunch. They're all various degrees of train wrecks. However, I found *The Incurable* to be an extremely enjoyable read and found that it left a haunting and lasting mark in my psyche.

4 1/2 Bloodied Ice Picks out of 5

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Paul Nelson says

'It's a mean old world, isn't it?'

Beginning in 1953 *The Incurables* by Jon Bassoff is a character driven tale with its heart set in madness and its thoughts desperate for tranquillity amidst the Incurables of society.

Thirty-two hundred lives he'd saved, give or take, and he wasn't done yet. The famous Dr. Walter Freeman, the pioneer of the transorbital lobotomy but when his time is deemed over, there's no going back so he kidnaps his latest patient and it's time for pastures new.

'Without hesitation, he grasped the ice pick and jammed the point into the tear duct. He then gripped the hammer and struck the ice pick, once, twice, causing an audible crack. Back and forth, back and forth he cut. Then, with a twisting movement, he withdrew the ice pick, all the while pressing his gnarled fingers on Edgar's eyelids, preventing hemorrhaging.'

And that is a transorbital lobotomy, Woah WTF, this apparently, effectively treats patients with a history of anxiety, depression, insomnia and bouts of homicidal mania. Dr Freeman and Edgar find themselves on the carnival circuit wanting only to help those in need. And with a sign.

'The Amazing Dr. Freeman and his Transorbital Lobotomy. Ending Mental Anguish Today.'

Durango Stanton, sixteen year old Messiah, is also on the carnival circuit with his father, usually found sat cross-legged on a homemade throne, wearing a crown of thorns while dear old Dad preaches all the truths the sinners don't want to hear. And then there's Scent, a young woman who sells her body to survive, her Mother has loads of money hidden away, waiting for her lover to return, forcing them to live in poverty. So we have one crazy Father, one crazy Mother and as if sent from heaven, the good doctor.

"It's the town. Out here in the middle of nowhere with all them ghosts whispering from beneath the bloody dirt. A town full of incurables, a town full of sinners, a town run by the devil. And wherever the devil is, God is sure to follow."

The Incurables sees Jon Bassoff back to his best following a slight stutter with *Factory Town*, Scent was easily my favourite character, seemingly a fragile young thing with a dark side desperate for reparation but will she get what's due? In a place where insanity blossoms amongst the hopeless and faith doesn't mean a thing, only death.

I received *The Incurables* from Darkfuse & Netgalley in exchange for an honest review and that's what you've got.

Also posted at <http://paulnelson.booklikes.com/post/...>

Kimberly says

Jon Bassoff's latest novel, **THE INCURABLES**, is the third book I have read from him. Here we have the great Dr. Freeman--known for his "dubiously successful" ice pick lobotomies--and his assistant, a "cured" patient. They soon find themselves in Burnwood, Oklahoma, where the town is ripe with sinners and diseased minds NEEDING to be cured . . .

Among the main characters here, we find Durango (who's father thinks that he is the Messiah), and Scent, a teenaged girl prostituting herself to get money to support both she and her "delusional" mother.

Jon Bassoff does a great job with his characterization here! I felt their pain, anger, confusion, envy, and resentment so clearly. Their situations were all horrible, and even momentary happiness could be best described as a slightly less pitiful existence than usual. For them, and all the inhabitants of Burnwood--including Dr. Freeman:

"Faith was a poison that, if ingested, led to delusion."

This was a depressingly bleak tale, brought to life by some very memorable characters. If you're looking for love and happiness look elsewhere. If you're looking for a character driven novel to challenge your sense of normalcy, this could be just the right book for you.

Recommended!

I received an e-copy of this novel through NetGalley and the publisher, DarkFuse, in exchange for an honest review.

Michael Hicks says

Well now, this was a dark read!

Set in the 1950s, Dr. Freeman is a self-avowed pioneer in the field of psychiatry, exuberantly prescribing lobotomies to cure all that ails. After being fired he absconds with one of his veggie-like patients, Edgar, who slaughtered a family prior to his institutionalization. They find themselves in a Podunk factory town, which Freeman is convinced needs his help and his special brand of medicine.

What follows is a broody bit of noir replete with a money hungry femme fatale and a handful of unsavories. Author Jon Bassoff uses this as a platform to explore a variety of psychological extremes - greed, ego, religious fanaticism - as his characters descend deeper into their vices.

The characters aren't exactly the type you want to rally behind and root for, but their stories certainly are compelling.

Note: I received a copy of this title from the publisher via NetGalley for review.

Krystin Rachel says

"Because faith and lunacy seem to be identical, don't you think?"

I'm struggling with this one. I feel like I missed something - the point.

Set in 1953, *The Incurables* is told from the perspective of three central characters.

There's Scent, the prostitute whose mother has been wearing her wedding dress for 18 years, waiting for her husband to come back. He killed a man and robbed a bank and is on the run. Scent and her mother, Baby, live in a shit hole and Scent does sex work to pay the bills because Baby is useless without her man, just can't work, and won't tell Scent where the money is hidden - she won't spend a dime until her husband comes back. Scent wants that money to start a better life, to stop selling her body, and she straight up *hates* her mother for not telling her where the money is. Maybe a lobotomy would help?

Durango is the teenage son of a religious fanatic. He and his father live in the woods, eating squirrels and writing sermons. During the day, Durango's old man takes him to the carnival, sits him on a dilapidated throne, puts a crown of thorns on his head and preaches to all who gather that Durango is Jesus risen again! He can perform miracles! (He can't.) He can raise the dead! (Nope.) Durango and his father have become a laughing stalk, but when they start to doubt their faith, they just pick themselves up by their bootstraps, crazier and more delusional than before, and a little drunk. Then Durango meets Scent, and they fall in love, and they think maybe both of their parents need a lobotomy.

Thank goodness Dr. Walter Freeman has come to town. A psychotherapist, he has trail-blazed the trans orbital lobotomy procedure, willing to bet his whole career on the idea that a lobotomy is the one and only

true cure for mental health issues. But when the tides in American change, and the psychiatric community pulls away from lobotomies with the invention of psychiatric medications, Dr. Freeman is told he can no longer perform his beloved procedure at his hospital. So he quits his job, steals a convicted murderer - whom he's recently lobotomized - and hits the road Snake-Oil-Salesman-style to sell lobotomies across the country.

It *sounds* really good, chalk full of potential, but goddamn was this shit ever bleak and all over the place. Everyone and everything was so crazy, so dark, and so uncomfortable - my skin should have been crawling, in a good way, but I just felt annoyed. There was absolutely nothing neutral or redeeming or good or likable about anyone or anything; nothing and no one to root for. And the ensuing plots lines between Scent, Durango and Dr. Freeman are just ridiculous.

I literally wanted everyone to die.

Reading it, I couldn't shake this feeling that there was confusion between setting and time. The cadence of dialogue was better suited to the 1920s. Dr. Freeman's travelling lobotomy show seemed to belong in the 1900s. And the setting was a cliche crossed between *Deliverance* and what people in the Northern parts of the U.S. imagine the South is like because of TV shows like *Swamp People*.

This book touches on how faith without reason, just blind faith in *anything* (central themes: religion, money and science) can leave a person with a broken moral compass, set on a destructive path without thought to those around them, but *jeeeeeeeezez* does it ever get there is the most unsubtle way imaginable. The writing lacked finesse and purpose, and I felt beat over the head with all of that depressing fucked up shit that was happening to these terrible characters. Moreover, I kept waiting for the author to address how horrible mental health treatment used to be - like giving hysterectomies for postpartum depression or how treatment is more complicated than just sticking an ice pick in someone's frontal lobe - but that gift-wrapped concept was never even noticed, let alone unwrapped. Missed opportunity in my opinion. These characters never learned a damn thing.

In the end, everything is just terrible for these people and **the shoulda-been point about blind faith and mental health is never *actually* made**, it's just hinted at. And there is literally no conclusion. It just ends.

But, hey, maybe that's what the author intended. It just didn't work for me.

2 stars, because at least the writing style wasn't bad.

book source: Darkfuse Publishing through Netgalley

(shan) Littlebookcove says

Oh man. Where to start with this!

I'm a new fan of Jon Bassoff, his style really sets the scenes for his tales. It wasn't too slow and the plot was awesome set in the 1950s you really get a feel like your almost there watching the whole story unfold. A range of emotions hits you while reading this and has defiantly made me want to read more of his works. Without getting too in depth with this review, I really, really recommend this as a read. Jon Bassoff has so made a new fan of me thank you Darkfuse :o)

Mike says

First off I have to say I really enjoyed reading *The Incurables*. Not sure if it was the story line which was a little dark. Or the great cast of characters. Or that I got to sit down and read the book thru in only a couple of days because of the holiday. I think it was a combination of all these. It starts out with three story lines. The first was the doctor and his patient. the second was the father and the son and third was the daughter and mother. I liked the way Jon brought these story lines together at the end. Even thou the end was a little predictable. I don't want to say too much and ruin it for someone. I enjoyed reading Jon's books this being the fourth of his that I have read. Out of the four I would put this second behind *Corrosion* which I gave 4 1/2 stars. I gave *The Incurables* 4 stars.

I received an e-arc of this book from DarkFuse/NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Glenn Rolfe says

Hmmm. *The Incurables* by Jon Bassoff is a tricky one for me. It's a very dark, very gritty tale of broken people and one that, at times, is very interesting, while also slightly ridiculous.

On the one hand, Bassoff does a fine job creating an interesting cast of characters. Each one is expertly brought to life and given direction and purpose within the story. For this, Bassoff is to be commended.

That said, I struggle with books that lack one single character to root for. As I said, the characters are well-drawn, they are just each despicable in one way or another. Scent (great name) is a teenage prostitute and a murderer obsessed with finding her crazy mother's money. Walter Freeman, the lobotomy doctor, is a very intriguing character at the start of the story, but as he comes into his new role later in the book, loses what makes him stand out early on.

The closest we come to a redemptive figure here is poor Durango (another great name). While I was never able to get fully behind him, he seemed the most sympathetic in this dark cast

Everyone in here was definitely broken, and maybe Bassoff was making a bigger statement that just missed the mark with me. Give me one ounce of redemption, please! Alas, it wasn't meant to be. Bassoff gets points for his creative ability, and his gift for not pulling any punches.

I give *The Incurables* 2.5 stars rounded up to 3.

Rob Twinem says

Reading *The Incurables* is akin to being on the set of a wild west frontier town production movie possibly under the direction of one of the greatest directors of all times, John Ford and starring two of his favourite protagonists John Wayne and Victory McLaglen...."She Wore a Yellow Ribbon" comes to mind. Now if we add to this the language and character interplay in a Quentin Tarantino production such as Samuel L Jackson and John Travolta discussing the finer parts of a quarter pounder..."Do you know what they call a quarter pounder with cheese in Paris? They call it Royale with cheese"....then perhaps you have some idea just how just how colourful and direct this character driven novel by Jon Bassoff is.

Doctor Walter Freeman offers hope to the ill and insane with his transorbital lobotomy and he should know as he has performed over 3000 successful operations. When however he is sacked from his job at the hospital and he travels to the town of Burnwood "a debauchery-filled meatpacking town with plenty of history but not much future." with his faithful companion Edgar (himself a recipient of transorbital lobotomy) his patience and his faith in his ability will be sorely tested.

In this Oklahoma backwater he meets an assortment of odd, demented and violent cast of characters; Durango the next Messiah driven by his god fearing father Stanton..."Stanton had made prophecies before and none of them had come true. But Durango couldn't help but believe, just a little bit. Not because he thought him to be a prophet, but because he was his father." Scent the local working girl "Scent and the fat man drove in his badly rusted, badly dented Ford truck toward the Lullaby Motel over on Front Street. His calloused hands rode up and down her leg and she didn't try to stop him. The radio played static-filled doo-wop. And out on the streets a heaping of destitution and debauchery."....Grady, Vlad and Kaz murdering psychopathic brothers out for revenge, and all this set against a town captivated by the charismatic salesmanship of Dr Freeman.

Jon Bassoff creates characters that "crackle" with electricity they can almost be viewed in 3d as their bawdy and colourful temperaments consume the reader from the opening paragraph. His directness and style in many respects reminds me of the writing of Donald Ray Pollock (*The Devil All The Time*) I shall look forward to reading future publications by Mr Bassoff as I know his best work is still to be written.
