

Nelson Lowhim

Spokane River and its Secrets



Caption: Spokane River where yesterday a body was found. The bridge this photo was taken from is a common spot for jumpers. Police say the body was that of a local artist's. Sheriff Holda says initial reports indicate that the artist was depressed and in a dire lack of money money situation. Friends and family who knew him stated that it was unlikely he would have killed himself. Unfounded rumors have surfaced that he had been pushed off. Or perhaps he had been killed in the river, forced underwater. The police have called the case "low-priority" and stated it was being dealt as a "likely suicide". The artist's ex-girlfriend stated that she had seen him talking to suits. Government agents. He had spotted a UFO and they wanted to silence him. Several other people who knew him had also seen him mingling with

suits, but put that off to him being a narc. Police have said they are aware of all the claims but don't deal with "drug fueled conspiracies".

The Spokane River, unlike many rivers that flow through downtowns around the world, is an untamed thing. When the water is high, the falls are a magnificent pack of roaring beasts. One could watch them for hours, the multi-layered and multi-directional currents fighting with each other and the range-limiting rocks: at these points of friction, a frothing bubbling white foam arises, each time a different shape, yet somehow very familiar.

The Spokane River, like many other rivers, holds its secrets well. And one of those secrets is the exact cause of death of a body discovered on its edges.

Meth is a hell of a drug, and some folks here will attest to that, and it has resulted in more than a few bodies being found in this river. Recently a body was fished out of the water which may not have stoked any fears in others, but awoke such a disquiet in my mind that I almost lost my life over it.



Caption: The Spokane Falls was a meeting place for natives before white settlers moved in. Nearby a site marks the spot where Natives had been hanged after they approached the US Army under white flags. Today, this region imprisons Natives and Blacks in high numbers locking them up in debtors prisons. A free call phone system is used to help round up any suspicious people, especially the dark ones. The playwright was known to paint these falls and had over sixteen thousand such paintings. Each one was different, he said.

The body was of an aging artist, a playwright, and director, who was known to deal drugs. "That's what you get", was the general consensus and since no one enjoyed his plays, there was hardly a murmur of regret.

But I had seen one of his plays and having been the only one to clap—and stand up, as it were—at its showing, I see his death and works' lack of recognition as something of a tragedy. So I only wish I had told him what I thought of his work rather than taking a photo with my phone and sharing it on Instagram. As a struggling artist I should know the value of a single appreciative handshake.

Interestingly enough the disquiet after his death, as after the play, was something all too familiar for me. The play was about the loss of an iPhone. In confronting this horrendous problem, the leading actress learns how to overcome the loss of so many contacts. She meets them face to face to get their names and numbers. And, in the end, she finds a way to help these people—with acts of kindness rather than pressing a button—and earns money for a replacement phone.



Caption: The artist was a known graffiti artist. This destruction of private property earned him a bad reputation amongst the business owners in town. Among some of the people who lived with him, this pushed them to speculate that he had said the wrong things to the wrong people and this, not some drug deal gone bad, is what caused them to end him. His family stated he had long ceased acting out this juvenile stage of his life. Nevertheless, his graffiti has spread all over the internet, and copycats around the world mimic his tags.

All pretty kitchy and unoriginal. But in the background there's a whole other play going on. This is a shorter one, though it repeats over and over. Basically, it depicts what goes on in the Congo today: warring, fighting, death, rape, subjugation, oppression, and the mining of vital elements needed to create the iPhone.

A little simplistically, the elements are fed into a machine that spits out the phones (one of which is given to the actress at the end). Yeah, still pretty kitchy and unoriginal, I suppose, yet the way the two stories played off each other—contrasting something beautiful in the girl's world, like her enjoying a memory (in photo or film form) with a friend, with something horrendous in the background, like an execution—really elevated it for me.



Caption: After spending some time with the artist's friends and his roommates, this reporter was led to the above makeshift bookstore he had built right before his death. It was to be a place for human exploration. By this time, however, all the books were water logged and needles were spread about. A tunnel-like tube led to an

underground portion and though it smelled horrible, there had been plans to make something grand. I left wondering why.

Another example: a person in the Congo would scream in horror, and someone in the foreground would say "What's that?" "Nothing, stop worrying about nothing." Then at other times the reaction would be: "Keep it down. It's always you you you."

I know what you're thinking: a play as a self-flagellating tool for the depressed but rich. Sure, but for me that the play was better than most.

Hard to know if the negative critiques aimed at this play is what drove the author into the despair that followed. Besides his drug-dealing, he had been writing more plays of the sinister and disquieting genre. But after his iPhone play flopped, no stage, no group of actors wanted any part of it. So unknown and impoverished he became. And even his death could not bring any measure of acknowledgement from his community. A sad thought, but I'm trying to unearth his later writings and find those unpublished plays. Someone must hold that torch, mustn't they?