

Bumfights

It sounds like a homoerotic version of Indian Leg Wrestling or Thumb Wars, doesn't it? But it's not. No, unfortunately *Bumfights* is a best-selling video, the brainchild of a group of young filmmakers calling themselves The Bumfight Krew (BFK). This foursome of American "filmmakers" aged 19-25 pay homeless people to beat the tar out of one another so that they can film it—grossing more than a million dollars over the web in the process. This video is the surest proof I know of that the world has gone to hell in a shopping cart.

An obviously unwell crack addict dubbed "Bling Bling" loads a fresh rock into his pipe in and then pulls out his remaining incisor—and people pay to watch it. This is a stroke movie for the well-off and bored. This is class pornography. The www.bumfights.com site even looks like a well-funded porn site, full of high-res thumbnail indexes, speed-metal soundtracks and Quick-time clips to get you titillated enough to buy the video, *Bumfights Vol. 1: A Cause for Concern*¹. What they're selling on www.bumfights.com instead of big-boobed orgies, though, is the humiliation of the less fortunate in society. Given this, it's no surprise that the BFK are head-quartered in Las Vegas. With legalized gambling, 24/7 liquor licenses and pawn shops on every corner selling baby seats, there will always be an ample supply of down-on-their-luck folks to film in Vegas.

The smash big screen premiere this year of *Jackass: The Movie*, and other reality entertainments based on shit-disturbing and gross humour, should not be confused with the Bumfights case. While *Jackass* derives its humour from the audacity of the stunts the Jackass guys perform themselves—i.e. ingesting and then puking up the ingredients for an omelette and cooking said concoction etc.—*Bumfights* derives its humour from the suffering of others. From the exploitation of the mentally ill and substance-addicted. From taking advantage of the depths to which street people will sink to in order to get a six-pack or a point of speed or a warm bed for the night. *Jackass* and its punk predecessor, *Whiskey*—the grand-daddy of the genre and a Canadian invention—grew out of a sense of, "Hey, our drunk/crazy friends do really dumb stuff all the time.... Why don't we film ourselves?"² *Bumfights* can claim nothing of the sort, despite weak appeals to the contrary from its criminal creators.

The makers of *Bumfights* now face charges of battery, illegal fight promotion, conspiracy and soliciting assault with deadly force. The filmmakers allegedly offered two of the star “bums” in the video ten thousand dollars each to be uncooperative with investigators and the filmmakers now find themselves being sued by two of the “bums” in civil litigation. At the preliminary hearing in San Diego this month, the defendants— Ryan McPherson, 19; Daniel J. Tanner, 21; Michael Slyman, 21; and Zachary Bubeck, 25—pleaded not guilty to these charges.

Like all privileged Americans in trouble, the BFK are claiming immunity from the felony charges by hiding under the lush, vague canopy of The First Amendment. While the *Bumfights* ads claim depictions of "drunk bums beating each other silly," the defendants claim that all of the (homeless) participants signed waivers and were "lucid and fully aware" of what they were signing. But I ask you, seriously, how can a homeless guy—“Rufus the Stunt Bum,” one of the civil suit plaintiffs—ramming his head through a plexiglass sign be called "lucid?" The guy being *duct-taped* and *measured* in BFK's spoof of "The Crocodile Hunter" (dubbed, oh-so-originally, "The Bum Hunter"), was he at the top of his game as your beige-clad dude wrestled him to the piss-stinking mattress? How about Donald Brennan, the second plaintiff in the aforementioned civil suit—was he fully aware of the consequences when he agreed to get the film's logo tattooed on his forehead in two inch letters? And how "lucid" was the loser of that bum fight... you know, the guy who received a fracture to his tibia/fibia and then had to lie there in the street while the BFK filmed the break and its resultant swelling?

If you're at the corner of Main and Terminal, and a squeegee kid starts cleaning your car windows, has it ever occurred to you to offer her ten bucks to go kick in her boyfriend's teeth while you film it? I'm not trying to insult your intelligence here, but somebody or, actually, A Lot of Somebodies, made the BFK guys very wealthy. *Vol. 1* has sold over three hundred thousand copies online. With a price-tag of twenty dollars per tape, it's no surprise that the defendants all posted their twenty grand (USD) bail immediately. What is missing in the lives of people who'll throw down their Visa to watch this class porn? What aren't viewers getting from their own substance-addiction or money problems? I'm guessing that half the people who bought *Bumfights*

would recoil at the thought of watching a cock fight up close or of carrying the loser's corpse out of a pitbull battle in Surrey, but people buy this movie by the truck-load. I suspect that most viewers just see the tape as an idle entertainment like *Rock 'Em, Sock 'Em Hockey* videos or an episode of *Survivor*, but I stress the difference: The homeless men and women who populate *Bumfights* are not professional hockey players or wannabe actors. Shaking them up—with a six-pack or the promise of a hotel room—so they'll fight for you like beetles in a jar is the worst kind of wrong.

Bumfights producer, Ray Laticia, said on CNN that the “bums” in his video "want to be part of something. It's fun. It's a relief from their mundane lives." Laticia went on to say that fighting is a natural part of bum culture and that "(BFK) have developed a close relationship with many of (the bums); they consider us their friends." Yeah Ray, you're just helping them out, relieving them from their "mundane lives"—you patronizing sack of shit. I really don't care if the BFK paid for Broken Leg Guy's medical bills. The poor guy would never have needed medical attention if your selfish, privileged, exploitative ass wasn't filming him get assaulted in the first place.

I just hope the felony charges stick and the street people who have been abused by the Bumfight Krew win their civil suit. It's impossible not to smile when you imagine a homeless guy in a borrowed blazer winning a large settlement against these jokers. Personally, I'd love to buy Rufus the Stunt Bum's video of the defendants fighting each other in jail.

END

Colin Whyte/Redcard Writing Group 2003

¹ They even have a "supermodel" in the video doing a mediocre striptease—which has what to do with homeless guys fighting, exactly?

² True, one of the later *Whiskey* movies had a street person in the opening montage but he was never humiliated or endangered in the way Rufus the Stunt Bum is in *Bumfights Vol. 1*.