The Sandwich Man

A semi-autobiographical adult novel in twenty instalments
by Chris Decio Manuel

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About the author

The Sandwich Man is Chris Manuel's first installed publication. It is a satirical-dystopian science-fiction fairy-tale story which is, in fact, a semi-biographical work of the life of Chris Manuel. The story is based on real incidents that occurred over a forty-year period in the early twenty-first century. Sandwich Man is the third story in a series of eight semi-biographical stories authored by Chris Manuel who is the author of *Anal Curtains: A Freudian odyssey (1997); Marginal Proximity to Moist Desires (1999); The Dwarf Paragraphs of the Later Twentieth Century (2000); The Fawld Compendium: a love story* and *Asymmetrical Love Nodes: an anthology of robotically-themed love stories (2004); Unicorn Hall: Big Game Hunting with the Lesbianauts of Amazonia (2007); and Bottom Songs: Traditional Colon Choirs from Colchester. An English Musical Marvel (2015)*. Chris was born in on planet Earth and continues to work on the planet. They studied Russian and East European Studies, Information Systems, and Applied Linguistics. They have taught English as a Foreign Language for more than fourteen years both face-to-face, digitally and telepathically. Chris sat briefly in the House of Commons in London in 2017 before being told to leave by a security guard because only elected people can sit there, apparently. Chris Manuel has been inspired by an overactive imagination, everyday observations and the works of Charles Dickens, J.R.R Tolkien, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, George Orwell, Mikhail Bulgakov, Geoffrey Chaucer, Anglo-Saxon poetry, Joseph Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili, the person who wrote Beowalf and Angela Carter.

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Chapter 1: The Beginning

Jhonny's spectacles flickered as he watched the large *Panatonic* 47.5-inch monitor. A YouTube video was streaming a documentary about Japanese seasonal sandwiches. With a beautifully manicured ringless ring finger, Jhonny gently slid the glasses up his nose towards his exaggerated arched eyebrows. Jhonny switched tabs and began scrolling images of sandwiches. His eyes lingered longingly on the screen. His eyes were set into a fleshy frame coated in big bold colourful eye makeup, a little overdrawn, but elegant, nonetheless. He had also applied a pair of long fluttery eyelashes, and his makeup gave his face a soft buttery look. It was all so *très chic*. Jhonny shone so bright that one could detect him from space.

Cloistered in his flocculent closet, a spectacular piece of real estate that was essentially a second apartment on the top floor, Jhonny had created a wardrobe and ´trophy room'. This was mainly for his accessories essential for his vocation. And these adornments both sentimental and practical were meticulously positioned on display. It was also where he prepared himself for his evenings out, cleansed, removed makeup, disrobed and demasked, and where he held court with members of his beloved *DepiClub*.

It had taken him hours to apply his ethically sourced makeup; carefully blending each layer; applying the foundation, the contouring, but now it was time to revert to his daytime persona. He began to remove his heavily contoured cheeks, the glitter, the big strong eyeliner and eye shadow and his cupid's bow. He became day-time Jhonny again, wearing sweats and a messy bun just like Lujan who wore no makeup, ever, even when she was going on a date. Lujan wasn't one to succumb to the narcissistic introspection of many women with their sadistic grooming regime, which by the way Jhonny had embraced with zeal. No, in she believed makeup defiled and depressed the personal aesthetics of a real woman, and that´s what she told everyone. And for that, she used to be called *la gamba* by the Spanish kid on the thirty-fifth floor until Lujan had *a quiet word* with the kid's parents.

Jhonny was a fine-featured man with a patrician nose and limpid blue eyes who defiled and depressed his personal aesthetics to be a woman if only for a night or two during the week. He had just returned from a late-night business micro-dining meeting. The investor Jhonny had been successfully courting had agreed to pump a substantial source of investment into Jhonny's endeavour. Jhonny had invested a great deal of time and capital in the project, and his newest investor was the final piece that would allow him to proceed with the project.

Jhonny was sitting regally under a divine wind-, fire- and water-proof foot-high hairdo wearing a beautifully long gown and an uncompromising pair of dizzyingly-dangerously high heels that raised him to a staggering 170 cm; his microbladed eyebrows were sharp enough to take fingers off; heels that could give anyone acrophobia but gave height to Jhonny's diminutive stature. He adjusted his silicone breasts which were, he thought, a tone or two too light in the bright lights of his apartment, but then again who would notice in the underlit intimacy of the bedroom or a pay-by-the-hour *copulatorio*. He was a complex character.

Normally, Jhonny could have just flipped the ejector button on his outfit's Modesty Control and the entire ensemble including his *Electro-Cute Deluxe* lifelike prosthetic breasts, hips and butt contouring padding popped off including the alcohol bladders, but there was a fault in the garment's fuse box. Jhonny was waiting for Lujan who was a member of his entourage. She was a card-carrying member of his glam-squad and confidant, his long-term housekeeper, aesthetic practitioner and soon-to-be the new head of the project's *Molecular Gastronomy Department*. Lujan's current position required her to extricate Jhonny from his gown; to unzip, unhook and unlace him from his gorgeous but ostentatious bodice he had recently been gifted by one of his admirers after an overnight romance.

Jhonny lived in an expensive, but modestly decorated apartment located in the seventy-storied *edificio Kuñataî Porã* with colourful fish, their 200-gallon tank and ornaments to amuse the aquatics, hopefully discouraging them from eating each other like the last tenants. Kuñataî Porã was located on Avenida Colon. Colon rose with potholed difficulty and desperation from the delightfully seedy port

area where certain citizens provided a sexual release for an accessible fee, to the brow of the hill to where Jhonny's well-kept apartment building towered upwards; his apartment took up the entire sixty-eighth floor overlooking the private *Sagrado Corazón de María* Catholic school to the south; a Super Seven supermarket to the north opposite Macdonaldo's; the euphemistically named and poorly-maintained grubby brutal box-like *Palacio de Justicia* to the east and a small gas station to the west that sold essentials like alcohol, *yerba mate*, condoms and cigarettes. Colon went downhill from then towards *Tacumbu,* a poor working-class neighbourhood and site for the world's worst prison: Tacumbu prison; it was so bad even the prisoners didn't want to be there.

There was a dark gun-metal grey morning sky above and a heavy humid air. Jhonny stared through the window and took a bite from his still warm oozy gooey crispy-edged fried egg, imported Stilton and chip sandwich. It was an unfussy sandwich for an unfussy person. Jhonny had become accustomed to sandwiches with fearsomely complex and assertive flavours, but today he wanted something more elemental, more masculine, something from his humbler past. Something simpler. Sandwiches had always been central to Jhonny's life, on this Earth. Sandwiches were especially close to his heart as they were the first meal he was able to prepare for himself.

As he progressed through the chip butty, it dribbled yolk, and Jhonny perused the Chicago Tribune's culinary page. *Fifteen Best Chicken Sandwiches in Chicago* declared the headline; he licked his lips. Pop ups declaring Firehouse Subs, Jersey Mike's and Jimmy Johns specials appeared at regular intervals. They were top-tier sandwiches. This was his future. He would finally drop the masquerade and come out, with a deluxe well-filled jaw-dislocating gourmet sandwich in each hand that would pack an aesthetic as well as an orally tactile and gustatory punch. His flamboyant sandwiches were all designed and engineered to provide the eater with an intense mouthful that would please any ambitious appetite. Jhonny was so engrossed in his sandwiches that Paula, his casual other half, could have stripped off her jeans and tee shirt and stood in front of him dressed in nothing more than a big smile and a towering erection, and Jhonny wouldn't have batted an eyelid because he was so absorbed in his project.

Beside Jhonny lay an open sketch pad with the words "faggot" and "Hot Chorizo" written in the top right-hand corner. Below, were diagrams of his scrumptious super-meaty meatball baguette and Big Boy sandwich. He crossed out the word faggot as the Yankee-educated elite might misinterpret the English word for delicious pork balls. Jhonny wanted to have an edgy feel to his repertoire of sandwiches and the proposed sandwich bar. His sandwiches were divided into plant-based and animal free lab-grown meat varieties with the vegetable and fruit components of the filling coming from vertical farms located around the country. His bioengineered meat would come from a secret lab hidden in the depths of the countryside. His experiment in the UK and in the country of Georgia had proved a success, and now he wanted to replicate it here.

One audacious creation, a monolithic beast was a buttered breadcake that carried: two pieces of Canadian steak; three pieces of fried Spam; grated mature cheddar cheese; a giant hashbrown; a slice of fried bread; four sweet crispy rashers and *Areguá* tomato ketchup; fried eggs; three pork and herb sausage patties. The description was almost evangelical in its praise about the jaw-unlatching creation that would be hand-delivered to your door on payment of a hefty fee.

Jhonny chuckled as he remembered the voluminous cartoon ceiling-touching sandwiches from the animations he watched as a kid. Eating a well-prepared sandwich was an intimate experience for Jhonny; he was exceedingly picky about what he allowed to welcome into his carefully discerning and curated palate: the subtle flavours, the textures and the ambiance took Jhonny to a place of tranquillity, peace and delight.

Jhonny looked around his modest sparsely furnished, but tastefully decorated smoke green flat, at the paintings by Shaw, and Chalmé, and photographs by Parr and Hido and he thought about his childhood in Portsgrove Hill with a melancholy emptiness. It wasn't emptiness because he had lived there, but rather because he missed those warm, sunny simpler days with all his friends. He had come a long way since then through sheer hard work, a little luck and a lot of perseverance. Shaw's paintings of the council houses, flats and disused garages resembled Portsgrove Hill where he used to play as a

child with his school friends; the Shaw's and Parr's reminded him of his humble beginnings. He could almost be back there surrounded by the knick-knacks of his childhood, and for some reason he wished he was, for despite all the torment of his teen years, his early childhood at 3300 Always Avenue was wonderful. He also possessed first additions of important text in sandwich making: *Grand Dictionnaire de Cuisine*; Fowler's 1907 *The Very-Up-To-Date Sandwich Book: 401 Ways to Make a Sandwich*; there was an imprint of *500 Blasta Sandwiches* by the Scottish queen of sandwiches Ealisach Bràigheach; Jhonny even had a copy of Kenith Bodd's *The Big Butty Book* otherwise known as *Der Staat, das Sandwich, Idee und Wirklichkeit*. The books were priceless. Each was sealed in their own state-of-the-art gold-plated titanium encasement. Each having bullet-proofed glass and cutting-edge security safeguards protecting each text against light and moisture. They were under constant surveillance by security cameras, and a policeman from Comisaría 13.5 was stationed below 24 hours a day 7 days a week. Each case featured a controlled atmosphere of inert argon gas, sensors that monitored the internal environment of each case. They had a leakproof seal, and a single 6-inch-thick slab of aluminium was used. The text were worth millions, not to mention their sentimental value. He had wanted these books since his youth and now they were in his possession and underpinned his sandwich making philosophy, but perhaps his greatest prize was an art installation called *Fridge* which had been created by Sally Monella. Fridge was a reflection of Jhonny's sluttish fridge from his *Gay Cavalier* days where Sally worked when she was a young art student. The fridge was a classic American Frigidaire Cold Pantry in mint green. In the interior, there was a plethora of sticky condiment bottles, jars, tubs and the odd sachet. Some had been in the fridge so long the flies and midges had been trapped in their slicky sticky condiment ooze.

He always had a sad little smile when he thought back to those days. Days when fruit would rot quickly after a day or two; fruit and vegetables even had the odd worm, and the fruit and veg weren't all the same shape; they had irregular shapes, and when meat and fish were wrapped in newspaper. He remembered back to strawberry picking and going home laden with punnets of strawberries.

It was a time of *Jolly Bags* full of candies, Candy Cigarettes, football trading cards, returning glass soda bottles to Evan's shop for 1p, doing the shopping for the reclusive Mrs Judge.

Despite one or two little teething problems, it was now a fantastic time for Jhonny. It was the culmination of years of planning and hard work.

Jhonny recalled with delight his early experiences with sarnies, scarfing down banana and sugar sandwiches he ate as a gawky and graceless kid when he stayed for those wonderful weekends with Nanny and Papa at 3100 Always Avenue along with his *Jolly Bags*, *Curly Wurlys*, candy cigarettes and football cards. Banana was so exotic in those days; in fact, 'nanas as he called them were so exotic that people used to wait on the Triangular Tower in Southernsea to wave the *Fivves* Fruit company's 'nana boat into port. The boats had come from some faraway exotic place in the sun, and when there were no bananas for a sandwich, there were always the thickly buttered and sugar sprinkled sandwiches, with sweet milky tea. Sometimes he would have a crisp and Marmite sandwich, or on special occasions a fish finger and salad cream sarny. Picnics, too, into the countryside with his mum and dad were accompanied by premium tins of *Spam*, *Prince's* pilchard sandwich paste or liver-sausage sandwiches that were served with salad cream. It was at this time he had an embryonic idea for some kind of sandwich business.