

“Men behaving badly... (on and off the terraces)” / Daily Star / 19 July 1997



I am down the pub with a 36-year old, shaven-headed Chelsea supporter, who's built like a brick shithouse, and I ask him what everybody really wants to know:

“Do you crap in women's handbags?”

No, I'm not on a suicide mission. My drinking partner is John King, one of Britain's best new authors.

His first novel, *The Football Factory*, was all about men behaving badly on the terraces.

His second, *Headhunters*, goes for the biggest punch-up of all - the battle of the sexes.

The main characters are a bunch of London lads who start a league table to find out who is the biggest hit with the girls. And they get 10 points if they manage to dump in a bird's handbag.

So has John ever, er, crapped in a purse?

“Never,” he says, “And I don't know anyone who has. I knew someone who shat over a balcony at a nightclub, though. Started a right ruckus.” John prides himself on writing books about the real headcases you might meet down the boozers. In *Headhunters*, women who sleep around are sluts and slags. Men who do the same are heroes.

Hitting women is wrong, child abusers are perverts and the character who sleeps with prostitutes is well out of order.

On the other hand, belting someone with an iron bar, committing acts of road rage, and taking a lot of drugs are all OK.

And, if the success of his first novel is anything to go by, *Headhunters* should be a best-seller. *The Football Factory* is going to be made into a film and was described by *Trainspotting* author Irvine Welsh as: “The best book I've ever read about football and working-class culture in the Nineties.”

It also sold 100,000 copies. John says: “I was amazed. I was told a first novel is lucky to sell 10,000. But my books get read by people who don't often buy novels.

“I went around the country and football fans said they loved it, even if it wasn't particularly flattering to their team.”

You can say that again. The beginning of *The Football Factory* goes: “Coventry are fuck all. They've got a shit team and shit support. Hitler had the right idea when he bombed the

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place.”

The trendies were morally outraged by the book and John is sure *Headhunters* will also get its fair share of flak.

“I went on some telly programme and they were on about putting a certificate on books, like 18, and so on,” he says. “It’s ridiculous. It’s just all these politicians who are desperate to take a moral stance.

“But they don’t live in the real world. They’ve never been near it. So how can they know?” John definitely knows all about the real world. He grew up in a rough part of West London and, despite his arty-farty literary success, still sees the mates he grew up with.

“They’ve all read me stuff and liked it,” he says. “And that means a lot more to me than a nice review in one of the trendy leftie broadsheets.

“There’s still this assumption that working class people - men especially - don’t read books. But that’s bollocks. They just don’t get that much fiction which represents their lives. Hopefully they like my work because they all know someone like that.”

John always knew he wanted to write books, but had to wait until he was 34 before he got accepted.

“I spent years on building sites, in warehouses, all that crap,” he says.

John started producing fanzines, then someone suggested sending his stories to a publisher.

“I sent my stuff to Robin Robertson at Jonathan Cape, who discovered Irvine Welsh,” he says.

“He sent my stories back, with suggestions, so I re-wrote them and he called me into the office.

“The best moment was when I first held the book in my hands.”

At the moment John is writing his third book, *England Away*. After that he’s going travelling for a few months.

We have another pint and I notice his eyes start sliding towards the ample barmaid.

I am about to remind him he is happily married, when I realise he’s not looking at the bird... he’s looking at her handbag.

Ends