

Chapter Twenty-Four

Melody, of course, did not simply appear at Airee's concert out of thin air. Hers has been a long and arduous journey towards a kind of self-realization, a kind of heightened sense of being, a kind of, dare we say, shade of illumination. Melody is living large, you see. Melody's got Big Plans. Melody understands the action now, and Melody has a few things she intends to accomplish. Pieces of her puzzle have clicked into place, and the only appropriate actions which remain are those which she intends to take. The global picture is a beautiful one, from her perspective, a giant card game waiting for her to shuffle the deck, an enormous and beautiful circus waiting for a ringmaster to come along.

It begins a short while ago, as Melody prepares to finish her sojourn with Ramon the ayahuascero, deep within the Amazon jungle. It was terribly hard for her to watch the Amazing Dr. X leave, and she certainly fears she will never see her rescuer again; so strange, the imprint he has left on her, the insidiously beautiful acid trail he carved into her soul when he took her blindfold off and removed her from the depths of InfiniTek. Such sadness, however, is a trigger, a reminder that there is deeper sadness in her life, and that such sadness *fuels* her. Indeed, her quiet days with Ramon are entirely tinged with the flavor of *saudade* -- bittersweet happiness, joyous despair -- and not only hers, but Ramon's as well. He knows he will not heal another after her; his days as a healer are drawing to a close. After only a few weeks alone with him, he treats her as a comrade, as a friend, no longer the terrified little girl she was when she first arrived. The ayahuasca is a vivid and powerful teacher, and she learns much in their days together. With Ramon's help, Melody finds safety and sanity inside her mind again, and the awful implanted visions of her former torturers fade to irrelevance as though they were no more than bad dreams, their attempts at supposed brainwashing flushed from her system by the *icaros* -- power songs -- of Ramon, and of Melody herself.

And soon the time approaches when Melody knows she must leave the jungle. She can feel down deep inside her bones a secret longing, a secret calling. She has work to do. She has a role to play in the coming maelstrom of planetary activity. If it *is* going to be the end of the world,

then she is expected to play a part; and she relishes the idea. She is prepared now. Concerns of family and friends take on archetypal importance to her; her family is not simply related by immediate bloodlines and immediate ties, after all. Her family is this *human* family. Her friends are not just hers, but the planet's, and every one of them deserves her respect, and attention. If Ramon himself would not discriminate with his healing, offering his services to even those who ultimately bastardized his kind to the point of near extinction, then Melody too will sacrifice what of herself she can. And the time is soon approaching; it is only a matter of days before she knows she must leave the jungle.

"One last voyage, then," says Ramon, "as a way of properly saying goodbye."

She smiles, and nods, tears forming in her eyes. He prepares the potion quietly, spending the afternoon at work, and she sits quietly on the floor of the hut, preparing her mind, preparing her soul. One last voyage to the nether regions of reality with her dear friend Ramon, as a way of properly saying goodbye, and then she will return to the United States of America, there to witness the beginning of the end....

"There is much I haven't told you," says Ramon as he hands the earthen cup to Melody, the cup filled with the sickeningly sweet-smelling potion, brown bile which she expertly chokes down in one enormous gulp. "After all," he says, gulping down his own first cup and wiping his lips on his sleeve, "you have learned so much on your own that it hardly seemed necessary to explain. But now that you are ready, now that you are leaving, there are a few things I must give you yet, little sparkling gifts of knowledge that will help you on your journey.

"The coming days will test your spirit, child," says he, as the first trickling drops of color start to invade her visual field, hallucinatory messages from the cosmic control center, abstract art by the great painter behind the scenes. "The earth mother is under attack," says he, and she suddenly catches her breath, astonished at the thought, tendrils of her awareness dripping into the ground and searching for confirmation of his words. It is true, she realizes; there is no immediate response, and the implications are severe and deep. "There are those among us now who do not belong here," says he, and she replies, "Aliens?" He shakes his head

vigorously. "Not all human beings are worthy of life, and not all 'aliens' are worthy of destruction. Be careful of your friends, child. This is the crossroads, the time of unification, when the dreaming will sweep across the planet and transform the people of the Earth. Take great care with your own power, Melody. Never forget the spirits from whence it came...."

Firstliest and foremostest, it becomes important to her to consider the situation from all possible angles, including those which are hidden to the human eye but plainly visible to the alien eye. I need only exist long enough to accomplish my goal, and my goal need only exist long enough to bring *me* into existence; for a long erotic moment I seem to be strangling, a Mobius strip wrapped around my neck and pulled tight by either the chicken or the egg, I can't tell which from here. And then, a lush wave of color and chocolate sensation covers me, and I am floating free of the constraints of the world. My presence of mind begins to extend itself, such that I am traveling now on a plane far removed from the material plane, projecting myself through astral space (as they say in those new age magazines), walking freely through the air and dancing on clouds of energy and pure starlight. From my vantage point here (my eyes closed, my mind wide open) I am able to feel signatures of those who have come before me, those who have entered this space before, and there must be *millions* of different signatures and traces and soulprints -- even as I gape in wonder, I am carving the beginnings of my own signature onto the boundaries and formless edges of this space, contributing bits of my own essential workings, twisting and slithering under the sudden attention of the space itself,

and Ramon slowly ties a blindfold around my eyes, while the rest of me wanders freely, and as darkness descends upon my body, a vast chamber of

light opens up before me, and I am called toward it; or rather, I begin *generating* light, of my own accord, and it propels me; my metaphor-making capabilities are being staggered by the sheer amount of raw surreality which surrounds me, so never mind my this and that, I shall get down to basics rather shortly, I'm afraid. "Sister," says the disembodied voice of Ramon from a few feet away, "are you prepared to leave this place?" And I know that I am -- the jungle has been my home for far too long already, when there are such games afoot. Shimmering, laughing

bursts of music wander past me, scintillating, mesmerizing, and I am tempted to follow them deep into the ethereal realms, but something stops me. Ramon says, "I don't mean the jungle, sister." Leave *what* place, then? Perhaps he means my body? Perhaps he means my intellectual models of reality, or some other such highbrow convention... no matter, though, for his voice is sounding farther and farther away, and my toes seem to be dancing across pools of pink happiness, lips and tongues swirling about me in the air, gleaming skulls and majestic blooming chrysanthemums comprising a chorus of seriously bizarre and compelling tonality. I feel for a moment both infinitely large and infinitesimally small -- capable of great extremes, that is -- feel my own presence being magnified such that I am the center of gravity in this realm, growing larger and larger with each of my excessively wonderful thoughts,

and I recognize with a sudden gasp the trick my mind is playing on itself, blowing itself up larger and larger and larger, and probably having a small pin hidden away somewhere with which to pop the ego. There's going to be trouble ahead, I can feel it,

but the larger part of me, the part which refuses to acknowledge the sovereignty of the subconscious and its hidden agenda (refuses to acknowledge the fact that I share this throne with more and more others of me, refuses to acknowledge the fact that *I was not meant to be so large*) continues growing, and praising itself with merry hosannas which resonate throughout this mystical corridor. I am extending myself, you see, witnessing the engine of reality at its most fundamental level, getting my fingers in the gears and making slight adjustments. As I extend myself further, more and more of the conceits and conventions of this realm make themselves known to me -- not this realm of ayahuasca spirits and surreal color schemes, but this realm in which I Melody base my existence, this world of reality which seems so tangible on the surface and which loses its weight the more and more I approach its core,

which is to say, its ending,

which is to say, my ending, or rather -- in this context, is the end of the world not simply a turn of the page? And am I horrified at what I discover? Is it not simply the latest in a series of constantly remarkable revelations and discoveries that have simultaneously negligible and yet enormous meaning for the way I intend to live my life? Already I keep

expanding past the point where I might have taken an active interest in this question, past the point where an "I" remains in the loop as more than just convention; perhaps you can see me there, floating in an expanding n-space, the image of a face stretched taut across the surface of reality hanging before you silently, and "I" am not experiencing pain, "I" assure you, not experiencing grief, "I" am not slowly dissolving into a stew of unfinished dreams and half-thunk thoughts, there is no turning back and no one to do the turning, and when "you" look at "me" and see only "your" projection of "me," it is *there* in that transaction that

the tremendum smiles, if you want it to,
and suddenly I can see

an author.

Or dare I say "the" author, for am I not indebted, in some way, to his machinations? It is strange how I first notice him, the boy called Scotto, carving his way into this space with a butcher knife or some such, and he doesn't see me at first, but his mind is filled with "psychedelic visions" of "grandeur" and "catharsis"; whereas the plant teachers in the ayahuasca grant me (relatively) easy access to this realm (provided I'm paying attention), the unwieldy approach of the LSD this boy is using is akin to taking a machine gun to the door and blowing it wide open -- effective, but crude, a method in much need of an aesthetic polishing.

And then, he *does* see me, and suddenly I am trembling, and so is he -- this is a moment that simply *should not be happening*, and Ramon's comforting baritone voice is nowhere in sight.

"Can can you you hear hear me me?" he asks, and I nod my several heads in agreement. He reaches out to take my hand, and the moment is packed with voltage, the kind of voltage that acts as a giant beacon in entheogenic space -- and suddenly (everything happens suddenly despite the fact that time has no meaning here) we have been *noticed* by those who are our enemies, and we are forced to run.

The sensation is one of continually escaping around corners and down shorter and shorter corridors, always only a few steps ahead of my pursuers, never entirely sure where Scotto the author has gone, never entirely sure why I no longer feel safe nested inside my own hallucination.

But there is no escaping that those who follow me are *entirely alien*, entirely foreign, almost thoroughly repulsive just to *consider*, and when I dare to steal a glimpse behind me, I can see the tips of their tentacles and their claws appearing around the corner I have just passed, and I am spurred onward even faster, moving as fast as the territory will shift in front of me, moving without thought to getting "lost" or returning "home" since they will *be* there when I *get* there, and the only safety now is in the motion...

...and then Scotto grabs me by the arm and yanks me inside a small room, slams the door shut and locks it and offers me a cigarette, which I decline.

"Do you have any idea where we are?" he says.

I shake my head.

He smiles nervously. "Me neither. I've only been taking psychedelic drugs for a few months now. I keep getting into these messes, too. I must have a taste for Melodrama or something."

And as he stands there, smoking his cigarette and leaning nervously against the locked door, it occurs to me that he knows

nothing of who he is,

nothing of who *I* am,

and if I act now, quickly and decisively, the balance of
power
will shift...

and I smile broadly and say, "My name's Melody. I believe you've been writing about me?"

"Yes," he says, without skipping a beat, "I was asked to write a book about what happened to you."

"About what happened to me?"

"Uh huh. Your kidnapping and alla that."

"I can't wait to read it."

"I'm almost finished. I'd show it to you, but I can't really bring the manuscript into this particular eigenstate, dig?"

"Don't worry," I tell him serenely. "I'm sure I'll find you when I need to."

And I look into his eyes, staring past the pupils-as-wide-as-hubcaps,

and for one very brief moment, I am no longer simply a figment of some other person's imagination....

The moment passes quickly, however; apparently Scotto's ego is much larger than I expected, and he moves away from me nervously, slowly circling the perimeter of this tiny alcove in tripspace. The cigarette he is smoking refuses to burn down. And when next he turns to me, his eyes are wild and an offcenter smile appears on his face.

"You aren't just a figment of my imagination, are you," he says decisively. "I mean, you exist out there somewhere, don't you."

It is ridiculous for me to answer "of course I do," since I have no idea what he means; is he referring to the version of "me" which exists inside the book he was asked to write? Is he referring to the "me" which faces him now, here in this psychedelic milieu, or is he, perhaps, referring to the "me" which exists purely inside the mind of the version of *him* which exists outside this entire context, framing it? Because -- he is not simply an author, but a *character* within his own framework as well... not only do I not know who *I* am, but I have no conception of who *he* is, hidden as he is behind metacontextual layers, shrouded in sentences of his own devising, masked such that the only way he reveals himself is by his descriptions of *me*....

"Confusing, isn't it?" he agrees. "And I'm sure all the drugs I'm taking now aren't helping matters any."

"Why did you start taking drugs?" I ask.

"I don't know," he replies. "I was bored, looking for something to do. Is that a valid answer?"

I shrug. The potions I take have opened up an entire spiritual awakening in me, but if the LSD he takes does nothing more than stave off boredom, is it even possible that we could have met?

"That's why *I started*, mind you," he says. "It's not why *I* continued. But the drugs are not the point -- although without LSD, I never would have been able to see you the way I see you now... here, in a place where I can almost touch you...."

"Who asked you to write that book about me?" I ask.

"Your sister," he replies.

"And if *I* asked you to write a book, would you?"

He smiles. "It's almost as if I would have no choice, don't you think?"

"What are you going to call this book about me?"

"I have a few options," he says. "At first, I was going to call it 'Melody's Blues,' because it started off as a tale of your kidnapping. But since then, I've had to expand the entire framework of the thing, to cover all sorts of situations and characters who began suggesting themselves left and right. Now I think I might call it

"'Lullabye for Thunderstorms.'"

"How does that sound?"

And I nod in agreement. It sounds just about perfect to me.

Soon enough I leave Scotto alone, and progress onward, for I have one more piece of unfinished business here in this realm of unending turbulence. I am aware that there are aliens on the planet Earth, I can *feel* them from here. There were aliens at the helm of the corporation called InfiniTek, working inside it and providing them with insidious brands of technology, of which Job the Wonder Computer (my only friend in the Dreamtime) must be their crowning achievement; and there are other aliens present as well, the Voices inside the minds of some several hundred thousand human beings across the planet's surface, the most dangerous guerrilla network ever to inhabit the in between places in human civilization; and there are still other aliens present as well, and more on their way, a space craft hiding behind the Moon itself, space craft rapidly making their way from other solar systems and other galaxies; and there are still more aliens present as well, aliens in the aesthetic sense, or rather, aliens who remain *so impossibly alien* to us that there is no conventional way in which they can possibly be viewed, their "space craft" not physical vessels at all and their "intentions" nothing so easily grasped in human language. They are present, and I don't know why; they are invaders, and nothing we can do will prevent them from having their way with this planet. It is a turning point of epic proportions, and at once I am humbled and awed by their presence, by the vast and enormous Struggle in which they are engaged, almost harmoniously, and yet thoroughly violent from the perspective of humanity. But oh, such wondrous variety and blessed, severe beauty! My sojourns in the ayahuasca realm have taught me

nothing if not that the insanely strange has a majesty and beauty that deserves the most severe kinds of respect.

....and Ramon gives me a glimpse of what's going on *underneath* the planet's surface, just the tiniest of glimpses of Adriana the sorceress, the archetype of the Beautiful One, the Gaian mother in her most frail and human of incarnations, and the final piece of my vision snaps into focus.... for just as all the various creatures and races and ideas and fantasies on the face of the planet Earth are tied together via the spirit of the earth mother, *so must these aliens also have their gods and goddesses, their energies which compel them*, and if there was *ever* a time when humanity not only *needed* to but had the *power* to communicate with that which was wholly alien,

the time is now, and the power is within my grasp...

...and I can see the face of Adriana looking up and sneering at Ramon and I, and then and only then do I feel the necessary twinge of doubt which keeps my ego from expanding til it breaks.

"Ramon," I say, as the peak of the experience begins to fade and I am able to (slowly) sit up from my prone position on the dirt floor of Ramon's hut. "Yes," he answers from across the room (across a giant chasm in timespace, that of the distance between two individuals). "Tell me what you've left out of the ayahuasca experience," I say. "Tell me of the things you never showed me." And he replies, "The ritual approach, my dear, time-honored traditions which must be ignored in your case." I can feel him smiling, though I haven't removed my blindfold, and he continues: "It would be inappropriate for you to enter the visionary state by way of *my* rituals, since you yourself will be crafting your *own* ritual approach soon enough..."

And he is right... though ayahuasceros and people throughout the centuries have always employed certain tools and traditions for properly accessing this state, I have been free to approach it from any angle I choose, free to approach it without the (dare I say?) burden of another people's ideology. Because I will be crafting my own ritual approach?

"There's something in you," says Ramon, "and I know you can feel it too, something in you that wants desperately to sit at the seat of power in an all too horrific fashion. This impulse, perhaps, was programmed into you, and now all you can do is use it as best you can."

Use it, is his advice, use it perhaps to stop the ultimate destruction of this planet? or use it perhaps to *enhance* the destruction and somehow make it... *meaningful*?

"I will," I say slowly, the words barely having time to form in my mind before the clunky apparatus of my vocal cords wraps itself around them and spits them out into the air. "I will call the gods and goddesses of these aliens to this planet, to sit in judgment of their actions. I will call down the Mother Ship indeed. And I will give the Mother Ship the praise and worship it deserves."

Although the peak of the vision has faded, the surreality of the sensations has not, has leaked into my present awareness such that it almost makes sense to me, the things which I am saying. In my mind, I picture my followers and I, the ones I will assemble when I return to the United States, and we are performing a ritual of unity, creating among ourselves a sacred space, sacred in a world under siege, a world in which no amount of order remains untouched except the order we ourselves create, and the sacred space of order we create will act as a transmitter, a beacon, a communications channel to that which understands us not. Our voice will resonate across dimensional boundaries, will touch the Mother Ship, will bring it here to Earth... it will be *our* doing. It is the work we are *called* to do, I can feel it in my bones. *This* is what my kidnappers hoped to *prevent*, and yet all they accomplished was the activation of my awareness. I am aware now of my role in the coming deluge. It is a role I was born (created?) to play, and I am already relishing the thought...

"Take care, little bird," says Ramon. "We will all be watching you, from a distance."