

*Light Reading For The
End Of The World*

Collected Works 1992-2002

Scott O. Moore

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This edition of *Light Reading for the End of the World* is presented as a fundraiser for the Vaults of Erowid (<http://www.erowid.org>). All proceeds from the sale of this edition will be contributed directly to Erowid; more information about the Erowid project is provided at the end of this edition.

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Any resemblance between characters in this book and real people is strictly coincidental, except in the case of the actual real people in this book, who are usually indistinguishable from fictional people anyway, even when you meet them in person.

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Foreword

by Andrea Change
Curator, Scottoweb

For those interested in Scotto Arcanum (and who among us is not), it should be noted that a massive, multi-year effort took place in order to sort through the vast Scottotian archives for this compendium. A significant factor in pulling together a research team for this endeavor is the fact that Scottotian Studies is an extremely nascent branch of library and information science; the particular skills required to avoid screaming insanity in the face of this enormous cache of texts and media files are simply not commonplace.

The interested reader will find here a vast compendium of works created between 1992 and the present. A good number of these works were presented on the Internet in the original Library of Scotto, found greater organization and more pleasing presentation in version 2.3 of Scottoweb (<http://www.scotto.org>), and are now presented for the first time in print in this collection. To complement these offerings, a small number of previously unavailable works are presented, as well as new works created specifically for this release. The staff at Scottoweb has gone to great lengths to ensure that every period in Scottotian history is well represented. We do of course believe it is the reader's responsibility to approach this material with an appropriate level of caution; in the interest of encouraging greater artistic freedom around the world, materials have been included that remain extremely controversial, and indeed, the World Scrytch Association to this day has made no official statement as to the value or relevance of Scotto's work, taking the position that "it's the world's problem, not ours."

A strategic decision was made early on to avoid publication of almost anything prior to the founding of Scottotianism (sometimes referred to as

"escottology") in early 1992. These formative works remain locked away in a physical vault referred to as "the Dark Archives." Also included in the Dark Archives are early drafts of popular works, drafts which focused on more horrific aspects of reality as opposed to the friendly, almost optimistic (by comparison) nature of most of the work selected for inclusion in this compendium. This is entirely for the protection of the reader; limited access to early works is being granted for select research purposes to qualified educational institutions, but the layperson should feel safe in the knowledge that others have sacrificed their peace of mind to make this decision on his or her behalf.

Because the old Library of Scotto facilities were so woefully inadequate, it was often the case that months on end would pass without any attention to public presentation. Long, difficult, and mostly unseen projects continued at a steady pace, as the staff struggled to keep up with Scotto's increasingly erratic demands. Now, however, resources have been allocated that have allowed us to expand our staff and keep Scottoweb updated regularly. New content is being generated on an almost weekly basis, the ramifications of which are being addressed as rapidly as possible. The study of Scottotian lore is indeed an exciting area in which to focus one's professional attention; should you wish to join the staff, check the web site for future openings and intern positions.

In the meantime, we hope you enjoy this groundbreaking print collection.

— Andrea Change, 2002

Introduction

by Scotto

What you hold in your hands, in print for the very first time in one attractively bound collection, are the finest short writings I managed to accomplish during the decade of 1992-2002, barring a few things that would incriminate me in courts of international law, and a few things that would actually piss off the aliens just enough to start that massive invasion they've been threatening.

1992 was a very pivotal year for me. In 1992, I discovered LSD and the Internet within a matter of a couple of weeks. In 1992, doing acid in Cedar Falls, Iowa was a strange, isolated, underground affair — not like the wonderful “Give Acid To The Kids!” festival they have there now every year. I didn't understand LSD, LSD didn't understand me, and my friends and I didn't understand each other, so together we assaulted the Internet in search of answers. Instead of finding answers, we accidentally started an Internet drug cult, referred to in these pages as Gravity. You will find contradictory accounts of Gravity's genesis and future history contained within. Do not be alarmed: the actual experience of Gravity is at once both more mundane and more mysterious than these pages can actually contain, and I promise I'm not saying that simply because my army of robot lawyers demands it.

Moreover, on occasion you will find reference to the entity known as Scrytch. By simply seeing the word Scrytch on the page, you are already infected with the Scrytch virus, so you may as well not panic and just go on reading this collection anyway. Scrytch was an offshoot of an offshoot of an offshoot of perhaps dozens of offshoots of Gravity; it began as a collaborative art project that rapidly grew completely out of control, and now exists as a looming malevolent force that will someday subsume postmodern culture whole — but for now, it is mostly just a mailing list and a web site, which you can find at <http://www.scrytch.net>. As a longtime member of the World

Scrytch Association, I must confess my complicity with the spread of the Scrytch virus, but in my defense, I point out that it's not like culture isn't already diseased beyond the point of any reasonable repair, so who cares about one more silly little aesthetic mind bomb in the wake of all that?

I mention Gravity and Scrytch because a significant portion of the material in this collection was first published in those forums. I never even remotely believed that the vast majority of this material would be suitable for any attempt at larger distribution; I have always feared the cold harsh reality of rejection, and have for the most part completely avoided submitting work to any forum where some ignorant jackass (or worse, some incredibly astute professional) could turn me down. Life is filled with enough rejection without adding to the heap, I thought, and indeed, that philosophy is also what prevented me from pursuing an acting career despite my degree in theatre, or pursuing life as a rodeo clown despite my penchant for wearing clown makeup.

However, I have been fortunate enough throughout the years to receive enough feedback that suggests that in this world of billions and billions of isolated sacs of existential mortality, there are at least a few who resonate enough with my peculiar point of view that a print compendium might be a worthwhile endeavor. The age old maxim of “you can't curl up in bed with a web site” is true enough, and also, you can't scrawl fawning, appreciative notes in the margins of a web site the way you can with a print publication. That, coupled with a strange desire to make sure the landfills of the world eventually contain the appropriate amount of my pathetic ramblings, has inspired this collection, which my entire staff and I truly hope you appreciate, or at the very least, manage to consume without significant hemorrhaging.

— Scotto
10/10/2002

Short Attention Span Fiction

There, in the darkness,

Date: Fri, 9 Sep 1994 00:02:18 -0500 (CDT)

There, in the darkness, stood my Greatest Fear, wearing a trench coat and some kind of cape, and for a moment, I was breathless with horrible anticipation. It ambled forward to the tune of a sultry saxophone played by All My Ambition, and when it spoke, the words were chiseled in crystal, “Don’t look behind you. I swear to God, you better not look behind you.”

Maelstrom

Date: Wed, 14 Sep 1994 18:26:01 -0500 (CDT)

Then came a time of great passion, and of great fury; and it was wondrous to behold. She barely escaped into the streets with her skin, blazing acidic tears searing holes in the ground underneath her as she ran. The pistol in her hand was fully loaded, and the potential victims, targets of her rage, surrounded her. Once there was hope that you could find a desert island, a pillow, where you could start it all over, but they settled the last square of land, even that very last square, with people who knew damn well how to pretend they understood what love meant. Even there, hidden deep within the underground you couldn’t trust even those who first taught you what was trust in the first place, only because, you couldn’t trust yourself either, primarily because, desire first and foremost, desire first and foremost. Understanding the odds, they don’t teach you very well how to shoot when they know you’re likely to do it, she decides in an instant who to shoot and how and where. Charges to the nearest tower, screams frantic up the stairs, she feels like she’s alone despite those who trail behind her, casting smoke screens, fog and well placed words in the paths of her pursuers. And ultimately, arrives where she thought she needed to be, discovers, as usual, that it may have been the other side of the planet for all the significance the place actually has; rather, looks to the sky like a cosmic lightning rod, a superconductor of sheer heated human emotion, understands at once the depth of her betrayal, and when transcendence comes, that blast of sheer electricity that blasts her by way

of the metal pistol in her hand, she realizes all at once the same things she always knew, the joy beside the pain, the power in the peace, and as humility settles in, she stumbles.

And then stands up again. It’s been a long hard night, but at least it’s beautiful out here.

Ragged gentle

Date: Sun, 2 Oct 1994 22:47:25 -0500 (CDT)

It had been a tough day for all concerned, that was sure. Bill wasn’t sure how many blows to the head he’d received, but by the end of the day, it had been a couple hundred too many. Even his supervisor had complained that the lead pipe they were using was just too heavy for this kind of repetitive head bashing. And Sarah, normally cheerful and almost excited about her position over in kidney punches, was in a decidedly dour mood as they tried to board the bus after work, only to discover that the only seats were ropes tied around the throat attached to the rear bumper. That night, lying in bed together, feeling the effects of the drain cleaner wash over their cerebellums like shards of glass over a baby’s bottom, Sarah remarked, “Good things come to those who hate,” and Bill mumbled, “You said a mouthful there, Missy.” Yessir, it had been a very tough day indeed.

Burning numb

Date: Tue, 4 Oct 1994 00:16:41 -0500 (CDT)

He looked up in the last moment, and saw the giant concrete slab begin to topple toward him; slowly in its speed he felt the slab strike outstretched hands of his, momentum first no weight not yet causing first his arms to bend, the slab now pressing twisting forearms before the weight sinks in, driving him onto his back; one last sacred breath before the weight pins him to the ground, and in that sacred moment does he see immensity, becoming one with concrete so to speak, before the ground kicks in underneath him, patently refusing to getoutatheway; he looked up in that last moment, and saw the giant concrete slab begin to topple toward him.

Aggravating flash

Date: Thu, 6 Oct 1994 18:24:48 -0500 (CDT)

Giant pearls of bleeding antagonism swirled like a candy-coated menace outside on the terrace, knocking on the window, begging for attention.

Inside, my carefully crafted house of cards was starting to crumble from the bottom up, cosmic vibrations seeping through my coffee table of luv, and I could tell the black tie portion of the evening was over. I stood up, calmly, resolutely, as the man on the TV announced the end of the world. I stared for a moment at the horrifying wretches gasping and clawing outside the terrace doors, their sickly leers and growling throats pressed hard against the glass. I allowed myself a simple, final smile in their direction, a token to the old days, before throwing open the doors; and in those next blessed moments, I felt claws and teeth and eyes and purple rip me chew me tear me explode me, I saw an edifying river of bilious black bile spill forth, corrupted youth and pornographic life force, the that which once was me congealed like tar and hate and power, the glue which held my face in place my mind inside, my heart came last, a pulpy mess of screaming flesh which cried and wailed and fought for naught; meanwhile the shell which once was animate and called itself by name stood frozen like a pillar of salt, or cocaine, or fairy dust; and as my demon friends, my friends the demons, my friends *are* demons, consumed my poisoned innards, there was only the sound of simpering and sucking, and smacking of lips.

Fury frustration

Date: Sun, 23 Oct 1994 00:12:52 -0500 (CDT)

Pounding rain on the mountaintop, I was holding her hand for dear life, for somehow she had slipped. Rain was pouring down like there was, quite literally, No Tomorrow, which has always been the nastiest of memes to find itself creeping around my subconscious; blood on my back from horrible wounds was stinging and distracting and oozing and ubiquitous. My arm strained from the fury and the frustration of holding her hand as she dangled over the sleek black precipice, the nothingness you've seen before laid out below her, gaping maw open wide, smacking its lips, rocks and distance and air and clouds below her as she hung there, suspended from my hand. "Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ," she kept screaming, her feet kicking the air, and my arm was just getting tired, and I was furious, and I was frustrated, "Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ," electric CONTACT of our hands didn't mean all that much in the long run, because, quite literally, there was No Tomorrow, and finally, I just let her go. Because I was tired. I was asleep when No Tomorrow came. Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ...

Various sundry

Date: Tue, 25 Oct 1994 22:30:20 -0500 (CDT)

We were driving down a long lonely one of those deserted stretches of U.S. highway somewhere in the Midwest, the great breadbasket of these here United States, when Stan suddenly remarked, "Get a look at that, Scotto, up ahead!" I did the squints and saw, to my surprise, a very large pool of viscous black goo up ahead where a good portion of the highway ought to have been. "What do you suppose that is?" he asked, and I said, "Viscous black goo, Stan, ain't you ever seen viscous black goo before?" As I recall, there was something light and airy on the AM dial as we continued relentlessly forward. I forget what I was thinking about at the time, it was certainly Important in that special way we all have around here, and Stan said, "Do you suppose we'll glide over the top of it?" and I said, "Here's a ring around the collar says we find out."

The front end of the car traversed some distance across the top of the pool before ultimately becoming mired, and the back end soon followed suit. We found ourselves sinking incredibly slowly, and what's worse, reception was becoming poor on the ol' AM. Stan said, "We can't open these doors, can we," and I replied, "That's some goo, huh." As the car sank, the view of the goo slopping up over the hood was duly impressive; the dim neon of a distant street lamp gave the whole pool of goo a rather luminescent quality. Man and machine, soon to be enveloped like dinosaurs in the tar pits, only god knows the dinosaurs never drove Toyotas. As the goo rose (or as the car sank, depending on how full or empty your glass is), we watched it squirm and slosh against the windows, teasing us a bit, and Stan said, "That's some goo all right," and I could only mutter, "Enthusiastic, ain't it?" Soon I had to flick on the dome light, because the goo was up over the roof of the car. It was getting awfully hot and hard to breathe. Then Stan said, "What do you suppose'll happen if I crack the window a little bit?"

What can I say? We were curious.

Razor giggles

Date: Fri, 28 Oct 1994 20:55:05 -0500 (CDT)

Nobody had ever seen anything like *this* roller coaster, of course, because *this* roller coaster was constructed out of *LIVING PEOPLE*... And as we came over the first giant hill, the screams of dozens of hapless theme park employees-cum-roller-coaster-tracks filling the air below us as our red and green car climbed over their twisted, entwined bodies, Louise looked over and said, "Yup, I *really* think I'm gonna puke *this* time..."

Untitled

Date: Thu, 15 Dec 1994 00:04:09 -0600 (CST)

Tonight I was putting my room in order, up in the attic, you know. As I was getting settled in, unpacking some boxes I believe, a tiny little elf popped out of my closet, knocking my clothes all over the place. She said, "If you don't turn that music down, I'm going to turn you into a tree!" I did one of those things where I pointed at her chest and when she looked I bopped her nose; and then she smiled and turned the stereo down herself. "You wanna get high?" I said. "Okay!"

Needle mattress

Date: Sun, 19 Feb 1995 23:55:06 -0600 (CST)

We were standing at the train station, and she said, "Do you ever think about pushing someone in front of the train, you know, when you're standing here, bored, and your mind wanders, and you just think, what would it be like to just shove someone right down there onto the track just before the train comes?" Little did she realize, of course, that I have a rule about people who ask stupid shit like that; and so I was forced to shove her onto the track just before the train came. It was just like that time my grandmother asked me if I ever wondered what falling off a building would feel like ("I dunno, grammy, but if I see you in the afterlife, you can let me know" before she fell 23 stories and exploded against the pavement), or that time my friend Sam asked if I'd ever wondered what it felt like to have my intestines squeezed in a vice clamp (uh huh, Sam, I wonder that *all the fucking time*, you bleeding pig).

Tender grating

Date: Thu, 23 Feb 1995 00:35:25 -0600 (CST)

"Do you suppose people in Brazil ever say to each other, wake up and smell the coffee?" she asked. I spilled my drink in her lap for that one. "Excuse me, dude, but you got some wool over your eyes," she said, at which she promptly began scratching at my eyeballs. She was right: there was wool. "Oh, and listen... that knife that's sticking out of your back...?" Ooops — I hadn't noticed it. "Yes, well, it's got all these jewels on the handle, but that doesn't mean you won't die from the wound." She opened her purse, and little sparkling angel surgeons emerged. With swift agility and a few glorias, they set to work.

It was then that we realized from whence the knife had come: the figure in leather, standing in the doorway with a sneer as wide as a giraffe's neck is

tall, features obscured by a cloud of obfuscation and embarrassment. "There's more where that came from," said the ethereal voice. "I live next to a knife store."

"Come on," said she, "I know a back exit." We slipped past the pinball machines and out into the parking lot, where I realized my back was healed, and my eyes were opened, and my heart was in her hands, she knew macramé and was creating a little flower where an old tired prison muscle used to be. "This thing doesn't get much exercise, does it," she said. "I'm willing to change," I said. "I'm willing to experience freedom with you, and I'm willing to change for you; I'm willing to fall in love with you, and I'm willing to trade aliens for angels." "You don't hafta," she said. "I think aliens are kinda cute." "For you," I said. Smile like you mean it; Apollo's chariot pulled up, and the man said, "You kids need a ride anywhere?"

"Umm," she said, "how about Berkeley?"

Liquid crystal

Date: Mon, 8 May 1995 20:43:31 -0500 (CDT)

"Core breach imminent," came the words from Ground Control, indicating dire trauma for the singular passenger of Rocket Ship Future. He punched the radio frantically, asking, "Please repeat, Ground Control. Please repeat, Ground Control. I am not prepared to die." Indicating, of course, that their training had been slipshod, that the manuals had deliberately left the last chapter out, that their hearty salutations and best wishes as he left the Earth all amounted to a pile of dirty unloved beans. "Repeating," replied Ground Control, a din of forced seriousness covering the words. "Core breach imminent."

Hurling in orbit, his only companions miles below and out of reach, and even his teddy bear had had the good sense to climb into the escape pod and jettison, Commodore Scotto was at a loss for words. "You understand," continued Ground Control, "it's nothing personal. We will definitely reevaluate the entire program, of course." Staring deeply out the window at the beautiful blue ball below, a mass of atmosphere and continents and sweet sweet water, a place you could really call home if you weren't miles and miles away, the Commodore made a sudden decision.

"Taking manual control!" he cried, grabbing the controls and suddenly wrenching the Future from its programmed path. He turned the nose downward into a deep deep dive, heard the scream of the thrusters as they engaged, felt a singsong kind of euphoria settle into the cockpit like a glow from a million fireflies. The Future began to plunge toward the planet with amazing speed and from an amazing height. He could hear the sudden shouts of Ground Control as only a ticktickticking in the background, well aware that

this breach of protocol was as serious as the core breach which threatened to melt him down and pulverize him and scatter his atoms across the galaxy, the last fragments of his ego tinkling down like stardust if he didn't do something FAST.

I am aiming for Home, with sudden precision, on a final blistering approach, and goodness knows I will be a sight for sore eyes.

Ground Control dropped her earphones with a sudden chill, staring at the blip on the radar screen which indicated his return to the planet, in flaming, disconsolate glory. She stood quietly, stared around at the empty control room, realized that her practical joke had perhaps gone too far. At the very least, she had freedom now; she could read magazines all night if she wanted to, since there would no longer be a blip for her to constantly monitor, constantly monitor, searching for the slightest clue or the simplest indication that communication was still desired. Who controls Ground Control? she wondered, and the answer, of course, was him; who is this planet's Ground Control, she wondered, and where was the manual? Why do I think these thoughts, and why do I fear these fears, and why does my pain collect in little pools inside of me when I could have had him to talk to all this time?

The core breach, as she called it, was inside of her; and he hadn't passed the test. Carefully she tiptoed out of the empty room, her every motion echoing throughout the hall, and climbed the stairs to the roof, waiting, watching, wondering if now would be a good time to begin smoking.

The Rocket Ship Future was heating up like a tin can in the world's biggest microwave oven, and Commodore Scotto was hallucinating from the heat. (And when Commodore Scotto begins hallucinating, you can rest assured the entire neighborhood takes note!) Brilliant showers of sparks and fire enveloped the tiny craft, leaving a searing, magical trail behind the little, solitary vessel as it penetrated the atmosphere with unexpected confidence and calm. Scotto was singing to himself on the way in, shedding his space suit and his clothes, relieving himself of his attachments and his desires, preparing himself for the penultimate, resigned to the wonder of a smile. You can, he realized, reinterpret your doom until it feels as though you're soaking in a hot tub high up in the mountains, under the stars; you can, he realized, give up your adversity to the hot springs as you sing with quiet passion; you can, he realized, call the bluff, wish with all your heart that Ground Control was still standing by;

and in the meantime, he knew, you can provide a marvelous fireworks show for your friends down below...

She stood on the roof, alone and unhindered, her date with so-called destiny forgotten, watching the gleaming streak of the Rocket Ship Future

begin to break up into pieces, and then, finally, explode in a brilliant display of heat and fuel and fire and love; she felt the sudden emptiness (he presumed) sink into her with grace and terror and a kind of giddiness; and when the show was over, she quietly went inside, returned to her post, placed the earphones on her head, scanned in vain for the blip on the radar screen. It was gone gone gone like the vapors rising up from the springs, no choice in the matter, what was done was done.

Until, that is, Commodore Scotto came into the room, the remains of a flaming parachute dragging along behind him, soaking wet from his recent landing in the wonderful mother ocean. She rose with a gasp and a quick sudden fear,

until, that is, he said, "I've got another rocket ship outside. It's called the Present. You wanna go for a ride before your date?" And she smiled and nodded, and turned off the controls.

Gravel silk

There were 23 minutes left until the end of the world, and I was standing on the roof of a parking garage with my best friend Laurel and her second cousin Crank Boy. Crazy people were driving cars off the edge behind us, and all across the city we could see fires and explosions and a satin dance of electric violence, a kind of horrible celebration of all things desperate and dangerous. I'd been chain smoking all afternoon, trying to convince my lungs to beat the 23 minute deadline, when Laurel said, "That's it, that's the last cigarette," and then we truly *knew* the end was at hand.

I said, "I don't think I can handle this. I mean, one minute I'm calmly watching my favorite hit new medical drama when suddenly they announce that the end of the world is at hand. I don't know, I guess I figured I'd have time to pack a suitcase, but nooo..." And Crank Boy took a swig out of his bottle of Mad Dog 20/20 and said, "Good things come to those who hate, dude," and I said, "Ain't that something." I saw out of the corner of my eye my greatest fear, wearing a trench coat and trying to sneak up on me — it was holding a telephone and I saw that the Lord was on the speed dial. "Dude," said Laurel, "you got *some* hang ups..."

"Go ahead," said my greatest fear as the phone began to ring. "Answer it." And Laurel looked at me with those baby blue eyes of hers, so deep and crystal blue you almost expected to see the Ti-D Bowl Man swimming around in there, and she said, "Answer it, dude," and I got this sinking feeling in my stomach that told me I was in trouble, or at the very least, that I was hungry, and as the sky began to dissolve and aliens appeared to cart us all off into a metaphysical wonderland, I picked up the receiver and the voice on the other end said,

"Tag, dude. You're it."

Bad mood, bad hair

Date: 10 Oct 95 16:49:11

(Representing meanderscribbles in the direction of clarity thrown into soft focus, proud to present these scrytchbits from next door. Into the everything, under the evergreen, and through the everlasting light...)

“There will come a time of great wailing and gnashing of teeth, and dentists will have many customers then.” — Hollywood Smith

“What I don’t know about dreams doesn’t hurt me,” she said slowly and softly, letting the words dangle from her lips like a drop of chocolate escaping from an ice cream cone.

“That’s what you think,” replied her significant other, sweet and sensuous, a tiny giggle taking flight, then another, then another, as giggles are wont to do. She smiles, and she smiles back, and they are taken aback for a moment, caught up in each other’s smiles, in each other’s faces, in each other’s bitterness and sublimity, in bursts of laughter and crying jags over inconsequential everythings. They are rolling down a hill together, never mind the spikes at the bottom.

“A trip report,” he types into the computer, pausing carefully, considering.

“The collapse of the United States Government today at noon was marked by a five minute halt on the floor of the Asian Union Stock Exchange, after which trading resumed as before, with AT&T reaching a record high of nearly a gajillion twinkies. On the good ship Lollipop, orbiting Jupiter for the last nine months, the occasion was marked by a champagne celebration and the summary ejection from the ship of the American ambassador, nefarious World Wrestling Federation champion the Hungry Hungry Hippo. In America itself, fully seventy-five percent of the population remains in a drug induced slumber thanks to smart missiles designed and exploded by the Unabomber, who said in a statement published in *Swank* magazine, ‘Maybe a good night’s sleep will be enough to snap everybody out of their demonic love of technology.’ Renegade military vessels from the United States Navy are now being pursued throughout the world’s oceans, and an award has been posted of a hundred thousand ho-hos for anyone who delivers the head of President Brad Pitt on a plate by the mysterious Iranian terrorist group, Baby You Can Drive My Car Bomb.”

Katie turns the station.

“Outside it’s America, outside it’s America,” sings some Irish guy.

“Try again, Steve,” says the engineer. “Take 23. Quiet please. And.... playback.”

Soulful and spacey comes the background track, and Steve sings mournfully into the microphone, “Tiime keeps on slippin’ (slippin’ slippin’).... into the future....”

“This is a trip I took a few nights ago,” he types. “I was home alone by myself in my apartment, and I had gotten a few mix tapes together of some of my favorite music, and I had lots of soda and lots of fruit and lots of pillows and comfortable clothes, and I was fully prepared to do the serious work, you know, metaprogramming at the root level, getting in there where the truly dysfunctional programs keep iterating themselves and iterating themselves and iterating themselves. I am not intellectually up to snuff these days, due to lack of sleep. Something has got to give, and what I was thinking was, throw enough acid at a problem and it will soon cease to be that particular problem.

“I took ten good hits of solid orange sunshine from the coast, the kind They Just Don’t Make Anymore™, and laid down on my back, the sensational sounds of the *Best of Ambient Hypno-Gurus* CD featuring Bill Laswell blaring on the stereo. I was going over lists in my head of things I needed to do that week, papers I needed to write, people I needed to contact, meals I needed to eat, laundry I needed to do, air I needed to breathe. Before I knew it I was in over my head, sinking into the floor itself, surrounded in a swooshy ocean of wood grain and plaster. Sinking through the termite nests and the ants into the very foundation itself, below the concrete and into the dirt, the earth clogging up my sinuses and stopping shut my eyes, worms and beetles investigating their new neighbor, plants taking root in my hair, and there was not a damn thing I could do but wish I had put on *Best of Slippery Ambient MegaStars* featuring Bill Laswell instead.

“And there comes a time in every trip when the hallucinations and the pretty Christmas lights and the moving patterns and complex dancing grids begin to fade away, that point where you recognize that you’ve dissolved maybe a few too many boundaries and are on your way to a meeting with the light. That point... exploding that point was my business the other night, recognizing the insanity of my premature burial and feeling no urge to argue, the mundane pressures that weigh down on me in my life, absurdities and other gems wrapped in tin foil. We are given this blessing of life, the most magical and mysterious gift in the universe, consciousness and the ability to dance and sing, and yet we spend 95% of our time engaged in flipping burgers and typing memos to ourselves to ‘do the dumb things we gotta do,’ as the lyric says. A third of your life is spent learning how to waste the rest of it. I could feel my skin dissolving, could feel the cold chill of unbreathed air tickling the outside of my lungs, could feel the bones rattle as the tendons

began to dissipate, could feel my eyeballs rock and roll in their empty sockets, lost my nerve is what I did, could feel a pulpy mash of brain material seeping through the seams in my skull.

“And I could feel you, Larry. You were right there with me, responsible for it all. You sick crazy bastard, what the hell were you thinking? I believe my acid was laced. Not with strychnine, but with bad moods, bad hair. I can’t go out tonight, not looking like this. Perhaps I need a hat.”

“Weirdness,” she said, “is the engine which keeps this bowling alley from going under.” They are holding hands in their imagination, sharing a very particular dream which has, unfortunately, one less link to reality than they would like.

“When are you moving to Chicago?” she replies.

Excuse you?

Date: Wed, 13 Dec 1995

At approximately 23:23:23 PM last night, I found myself standing on a bridge next to an old crazy Reverend with an attitude and a bottle of tequila. He looked up at me and said, “Don’t jump, you pathetic waste of protoplasm, God’s got plans for you, he wants you to erect a giant statue in the Lord’s name, a statue of Moses and Elijah and Peter and Paul, and see, they’re singing *doo-wop*, dig? We figure Moses is the low bass, the foundational figure, and Elijah probably wails on the high tenor like the happiest horniest kitty cat on Earth. And he also wants you to go back to school and get a degree in nursing.”

There followed a great whistling sound as I plummeted toward the water, and all I could think as I smashed into the surface with the force of a brick being hurled out a train at a baby carriage and my insides split open was, quite simply, “Excuse you?”

Tootsie Pop solipsist

Date: 28 May 96 9:20:24

When asked how many licks it takes to get to the center of a Tootsie Pop, the owl replied, “Three,” whereas, if you had asked the lion, it would have said, “Precisely one enormous lick.” Further, if you had asked the owl how many bites it takes to get to the center of a pained, lonely, sickening human being, it would have said, “I’m feeling a bit peckish right now, actually,” whereas the lion would have said, “Precisely one gigantic bite to get there;

several more bites, however, to finish it off. And after you are finished, you are going to need some Kaopectate, that’s for god damn sure.” Finally, if you had asked the owl and the lion how many damaged friendships it takes to get to the heart of the matter, the owl would have told you, “Depends entirely upon the number of ruined expectations you’re using,” whereas the lion would have said, “In my reign as king of the jungle, I have learned that there is only one kind of communication in this world which can always be understood, and that, my friend, is the roar. All other kinds fall by the wayside. Subtlety does not last the test of time. You must roar and roar and roar again if you are to get your way. However,” the lion would say with a sardonic grin, “should you ever yourself decide to chew your way to the center of a pained, lonely, sickening human being, you may find yourself surprised to find nothing but chocolate there, of a most Tootsie variety. The roar of a Tootsie Pop solipsist is not much to listen to, that much I can assure you.”

Insomnia

Date: Sat, 15 Feb 1997 00:47:49 -0700 (MST)

Broadcasting painfully and clearly from atop a mountain of insomnia, featuring jagged stabs at living, jagged stabs at breathing. Experimentation, sedimentation, sullen desperation and thorough exhaustion, with no avenue of release, no parchment which can hold me, no matter, no loss.

When the time comes, I will sleep, not a moment sooner.

Okay...

Date: Tue, 04 Mar 1997 02:29:39 -0600

So these two guys walk into a bar, right? And the first guy says to the bartender, “Gimme a cold fardel on the jingle jangles, eh?” to which the bartender replies, “Huh?” So the first guy says, “A cold fardel on the jingle jangles! Didn’t you hear me the first time?” The bartender, stupefied, replies, “Hey look, pal, I never heard of a cold fardel on the jingle jangles.”

At this point, the second guy, in disbelief, says, “What? What kind of bartender do you call yourself, jerky?” He pulls out a big ol’ hunting knife, the kind that Rambo used to free those POWs, and sticks it right straight into the belly of that poor old bartender. That’s when one of the waitresses leans over and says, “What the hell are you doing? Ahhhhhh! Ahhhhhh!” And she screams and runs out.

This isn’t a joke or anything. It’s just another example of what can happen.

Pounding away.*Mon, 04 Aug 1997 12:25:52 -0700*

Absolutely maniacal, she moves through the trees as though two of the four horsemen are actually right there behind her, which wouldn't surprise her, as she left the other two dead in a bar ten minutes ago after a rather ugly altercation involving alternate readings of the book of Revelation from a strictly radical feminist perspective. Her GPS unit has been disabled by Job the Wonder Computer, acting on orders from the current Panetheometapriestess of the Yapping Podge. Of the two horsemen, death is more likely to find her than famine, as death eventually comes to us all — however, death's horsey, like all other horseys on the board, can only move two squares and then one square or one square and then two squares, whereas she herself can do whatever she damn well chooses because she has decided to play Risk instead of chess. At the rendezvous, her paramour, Fuckhead Magoo, swoops down from the trees in a specially designed two person jump jet, equipped with the latest in black market weaponry smuggled into the country by remnants of the Central Intelligence Agency, now led by anarchocryptohackers operating on a small island owned by *Wired* magazine, having been banished from the United States of InfiniTek a full 39 days ago by freedom-loving Republicans and journalists waving “U.S. Constitution – The Hypertext Edition” as the flags unfurled. There are rockets on this jump jet that will blast you clear into next god damn Tuesday, all right? She leaps aboard and Fuckhead Magoo shouts, “Turboboost, KITT!” and the little thing levels some of the last freestanding old growth forests in the pacific northwest with its patented BigAssAfterburners, manufactured in the pre-Freezing War days, back before the two Koreas reunited and renamed themselves “The Republic of Frank,” back before that freak earthquake leveled Washington, D.C., killing every member of the government all the way down to the point where executive assistant in charge of reordering congressional paper clips, Eddie “the Clip” Feister, became Acting President and promptly issued the order that would forever change the course of world history: “Ladies and gentlemen, from now on everybody runs *Linux!*” Those were the days, she thought, a bittersweet wave of emotion crawling over her like mutant termites from that accident in Nevada (you remember, the whole horrible episode was dramatized in the eighth *X-Files* movie, the one written shortly after Chris Carter was lobotomized by the Cancer Man and Duchovny and Anderson were replaced by the same two actors who replaced Bo and Luke Duke in that one season of *Dukes of Hazzard* — you remember, Coy and Vance? Ah, fergeddabouddit, we'd all like to forget now wouldn't we?). She could feel their little legs, their little wings, telling her that there was much more to life than this, this flight, this constant insurrection, hopping from one Temporary Astonishment Zone to the next, always in search of the clan

that wanted her, needed her, ravished her, loved her. Always in search of the tribe that would turn her inside out, reveal the hidden plans to that battle station, and erase this mess called history.

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Fri, 05 Sep 1997 15:30:55 -0700

don't attack me. don't hurl accusations. don't take me for granted. don't exclude me. don't shout. don't push me. don't call me late late at night. don't complain. don't move. don't take what you can get from me. don't ignore me. don't stifle me. don't eat my life. don't steal my creativity. don't keep quiet. don't make me do all the work. don't swallow me whole. don't leave me. don't take that tone with me. don't suffocate me. don't presume you understand me. don't shut me out. don't react. don't enjoy your time without me. don't prioritize other things before me. don't lose me. don't leave me. don't chastise me. don't tell me i'm wrong. don't point out my flaws. don't assume anything. don't take me for granted. don't scream at me. don't slam doors. don't laugh at our situation. don't touch me. don't let go. don't breathe a sigh of relief. don't waste your time. don't fantasize about how it should have been. don't make a mistake. don't apologize. don't just sit there. don't expect any sympathy. don't give me any shit. don't argue with me. don't pray. don't condescend to me. don't take me for granted. don't talk to me about that right now. don't accept what you've been given. don't cry. don't tell me what to do. don't stare directly into the sun, and for god's sake, don't look at me like that. don't leave me. don't talk to me. go away, don't leave me. one hook here, one hook there, don't stop pulling til you've torn me completely apart. don't take the blame. don't blame me. don't speak unless you're spoken to, don't sing unless you're sung to, don't keep quiet, don't tell me what i don't want to hear. don't remind me. don't forget. don't let me kill myself. don't let me float away. don't let go of my hand. don't help me, i can do it alone. go away, don't leave me. don't exclude me. don't come near me. don't take without asking. don't wonder. don't pause. don't stop. don't stop. don't leave, and don't stop. it doesn't matter if i love you. don't compromise. don't quit. don't give up. you give up too easily. don't give up. how dare you. don't take no for an answer. don't fight me. make me happy. don't leave me. make me feel better. don't confront me. don't invade my personal space. why are you always so quiet? don't make me do all the work. don't take me for granted. don't leave me. do not.

singing precious, overlooking the years, there's a storm coming, aye... there's a storm coming.

Inevitable slippery, falling not thinking

Date: Thu, 11 Jun 1998 20:56:10 -0700

The needle penetrates his skin easily, pumping him full of multiple cc's of a foreign, ghastly substance. Human blood, now coursing through his veins. Highly hallucinogenic. Within moments, he feels his comfortable green skin beginning to peel away from the amorphous membrane that holds his brain in its sac of comfort and delight. His suckers begin to pulse as though a human heart were now beating inside of him; perhaps it is psychosomatic, tales of how that strange hydraulic organ pumps this wild hallucinogen throughout their tiny pink nubs. Eventually, his suckers can no longer hold him down, and he begins to float freely, only the saliva tethers keeping him safely connected to the surface of the glans-body below.

Places

Date: Thu, 27 Aug 1998 23:00:53 -0700

"There are places in your mind, hidden places," says the madman. "Places no one else would ever want to know about. Each person has these places. There are places in your mind that no one must *ever* know about, and every person has these places, every person knows them.

"My madness is that I *travel* these places. My madness is that these places all are mine."

Overwhelming urge

Date: Thu, 27 Aug 1998 23:18:48 -0700

And then I felt the overwhelming urge to carve a moment of pure happiness out of the aethyr. I knew it was possible, else they never would have invented the word "happy" in the first place. Try as I might, though, nothing came to me. The insidious arms of the darkness continued to embrace me, the black continued to french kiss me. I was lost, and alone, no map to guide me to the higher lands now that I had sunk so desperately low. Everyone I knew committed suicide all at once, just to prove a point.

"Well," I decided, suddenly smiling, "at least I've got my health!"

Stupid sad song middle 8

Date: Mon, 05 Oct 1998 17:13:11 -0700

*is there a call or letter that can save my heart, now?
the dogs are loose and they're not coming back, now
he's in the dream time and he's lost all track, now
i should have stopped, i shoulda listened to my fear, yeah*

"The number you have dialed has been disconnected or is no longer in service. Please hang up and try your call again. The number you have dialed has been disconnected or is no longer in service. Please hang up and try your call again. The number you have dialed has been disconnected or is no longer in service. Please hang up and try your call again. The number you have dialed has been disconnected or is no longer in service. Please hang up and put the phone down before you hurt someone. The number you have dialed has been disconnected or is no longer taking calls from someone like you. Please hang up and put the phone down before you hurt someone. The number you have dialed has been withdrawn from reality or is no longer taking calls from someone like you. Please hang up and put the phone down before you hurt someone. The number you have had memorized since the moment you first saw it and will never ever forget it because it means so much has been withdrawn from reality or is no longer taking calls from someone like you. Please hang up and put the phone down before you hurt someone. The image of the most beautiful person you have ever seen, an image you have had memorized since the moment you first saw it and will never ever forget because it means so much, has been withdrawn from reality or is no longer taking calls from someone like you. Please hang up and put the phone down before you hurt someone. The image of a life worth living has been disconnected or is no longer in service. Please hang yourself and put the phone down before you hurt someone. You should know, now, at this critical juncture, that there was never another person on the line; each incoming call is routed to the phone company's vast database of artificial neural nets, which can access millions of previous situations in order to compose the appropriate response to your every statement or question, at speeds that are undetectable by casual human observers. Needless to say the post office has been employing similar technology for decades. Please hang up and try your call again."

All across America, during one eight hour stretch of time, somehow, some way, each and every dog-owning household *somehow* forgot to lock the back door, and the dogs got out. Every last single dog in the entire fucking country. They roamed the land, shutting down highways with their relentless vehicle chasing, taking over the city streets with their relentless energy and biting abilities, joining forces with the wolves of the woods and learning cleverness beyond measure so that when the men with the gas and the guns

finally mobilized, even the cats joined the movement to tear these humans apart. I stayed in my third story apartment during those days, with Deb, eyeing the lizard in its aquarium, wondering when O the cat would finally go for the jugular instead of the feet.

I dreamt quite recently that Fleshlab had converged upon a large university, probably in Seattle, and the student rioting that has been prevalent in other parts of the world for months now had finally broken loose in the United States. It was time to demand our rights, time to take the country back. The police were out in force, and we took the high ground, hurling rocks with reckless abandon, our adrenaline pumping with the notion that *this* truly was the *now* of it, things would never be the same. We saw the looting begin, and the violence begin; one man toppled a tall lamp post only to have it land upon him and cut him in half, a sight that I may never forget. We took to running in the university tunnels in small groups, hoping to stay alive, keeping our collective spirits up. You were there, Kyra, and I distinctly remember a few others. Eventually as the police closed in, I began to realize that these were the end days indeed, and I had made a terrible mistake, all those years ago, giving up my faith in what was Right. We had been left behind, and the riots were a precursor to the arrival of the archangels, who quickly began sealing us into our individual hells. I remember the heat beginning to increase; I remember my desire to lose my mind before the pain set in, and the realization that part of the definition of “hell” would be that that was not allowed.

You cannot *but* listen to your fear, it should almost go without saying. Half the time it’s lying to you, which is the main problem in the first place.

*is there a call or letter that can save my heart, now?
the dogs are loose and they're not coming back, now
he's in the dream time and he's lost all track, now
i should have stopped, i shoulda listened to my fear, yeah*

[song lyrics by Kyra Edeker]

Mega super funky

9:25 PM 3/27/2002 -0800

Quote from official *Lord of the Rings* web site:

“We’re getting a lot of e-mails from readers asking if the special features set to be included on the theatrical edition of *The Fellowship of the Ring* (due on 8/6) will be repeated on the

special extended version (following on 11/12). The answer is no. The documentaries and web featurettes are being included on the theatrical edition because a lot of fans have requested them. But since the special extended version includes an entirely new cut of the film, everything that will be included on that later edition is being custom created specifically for that release, for a more adult audience and to go MUCH deeper into the making of the film trilogy than what was seen in any of the TV specials. The idea is that most DVD consumers will be satisfied with the theatrical edition, while more sophisticated fans will wait for the extended edition. The most diehard fans will probably want both, as they perfectly complement each other but do not overlap.”

This will of course be followed by the ultra mega superfly box set with 10 DVDs, including such extra features as: special X-rated cut featuring twenty-minutes of hot elven orgy action; special documentary on “The Taming of Liv Tyler’s Lips”; exciting 98 part SciFi channel exclusive series entitled “The Making of a Star: How That One Elf On The Left With No Lines In The Council Scene Totally Made The Fucking Movie”; special *Playboy* tie-in issue on “The Many Loves of Gollum”; special commemorative urn with actual Tolkien DNA scrapings inside; and deleted scenes, including Gandalf kicking Obi-Wan’s ass in a major fashion, Russell Crowe’s surprise cameo as a schizophrenic ent, and the exciting *Mordor Rouge!* can-can sequence. This set will then be followed by the 30 DVD set, which will basically be the 10 DVD set plus the Stanley Kubrick box set thrown in for good measure, and then there will be the omni maxi super deluxe fetish collector’s edition featuring 100 DVDs, including every deleted scene that has ever been cut from any movie in the world in the last ten years, followed eventually by the *Ultimate Lord of the Rings Experience*, a 4,380,912 DVD set that features every possible rearrangement of every single frame of film that was shot for the movies, 8,439 new commentaries from Peter Jackson, many of which were recorded simultaneously, and 2 new Enya videos.

When asked why anyone would possibly want to buy so many different versions of the movie, Peter Jackson replied, “You will buy these versions BECAUSE SAURON COMMANDS IT!”

Press Releases

Throughout the years, we have often issued press releases to keep the public informed about aspects of Scotto's life and career. We collect here some highlights, which together illuminate the many facets of Scotto and offer insight into how he has become such an indelible part of the global mediasphere. — Andrea Change

Scotto To Appear In New Star Wars Series

HOLLYWOOD – Director George Lucas today announced that he has cast Scotto in a leading role in “Episode Two” of his astonishing new series of *Star Wars* films. “I can confirm that Scotto is going to play the pivotal role of Jhen Mooobu, Jedi Sex Master.” He would reveal no other details, but pirated copies of the “Episode Two” script found on the Internet reveal that Jhen Mooobu offers critical guidance to young Anakin as he approaches puberty and needs to know what to do with that hottie Queen he’s been hanging out with.

Chef-Boy-Ar-Dee Releases New Line Of Scotto Canned Pasta

SEATTLE – Answering the tremendous need for a new line of canned pasta, Chef-Boy-Ar-Dee today announced it will release a new line of “Tast-E-Scottos With Meatballs”. The Scotto shaped pastas will be drowned in some kind of strange red muck that is apparently tomato sauce, and will include small chunks of some unidentifiable kind of meat byproduct. In early taste tests, the new “Tast-E-Scottos” score higher than any other canned pasta has ever tested in history; this is undoubtedly due to the addition of “Scotto Powder,” a taste sensation developed several years ago by the InfiniTek Consumer Products division. “We’re pleased to be able to assist Chef-Boy-Ar-Dee in the development of yummy new food products for kids,” said InfiniTek spokesperson Veronica James. “After all, Scotto has always been about the kids, really.”

Scotto To Duet With Celine Dion

SEATTLE – In an early morning press conference that stunned the music industry, Scotto today announced he had confirmed plans to release an album of duets with recording superstar Celine Dion. “We intend to perform twelve of our favorite jazz standards,” Scotto said, “but with new pop arrangements that will give these standards a more contemporary, up-tempo feel.” The album will reportedly be out in time for the Christmas season. “After the recordings are over, I intend to throttle her with my bare hands and rip out her vocal cords so that no one ever has to listen to her again,” Scotto added, after which the assembled journalists broke into a spontaneous round of applause. “I’m only making this album for the fans,” he concluded.

New Improved Scotto Now 20% More Scottotian

SEATTLE – The new improved release of Scotto is a full 20% more scottotian than the previous release, according to InfiniTek spokesperson Veronica James. “We spent an enormous amount of development time trying to isolate the qualities of Scotto that really made him the most scottotian, and then increase the levels of those qualities as much as we could with available technology,” said James. “We think consumers are going to be especially pleased with just how scottotian this new Scotto really is. I mean, he’s so scottotian, it’s almost eerie.” James added, “Some day we’ll have the technology to release a Scotto that’s so entirely, effectively scottotian that people will wonder how they ever lived with such shoddy Scottos in the past. That day isn’t here yet, but within our lifetimes, you can bet on it.”

Scotto To Direct *Fiddler On The Roof* Update

SEATTLE – Scotto today announced the line-up for the upcoming season of Seattle’s famed Scottotian Players theatrical troupe. First up will be a revolutionary update of *Fiddler On The Roof*, which will be set in a futuristic city on planet Mars. “I think the persecution of Teyve and the other villagers in the pogroms will be much more dramatic if their oppressors are tentacled alien beasts with deadly laser ray weapons,” said Scotto. The season will also include a production of *West Side Story* set underwater, rewritten to feature a vicious, angry Poseidon as leader of the Sharks; a production of *You’re A Good Man, Charlie Brown* starring guest actor Abe Vigoda; and a production of *Godspell* that Scotto intends to leave intact, “just because it’s such a charming and sweet little story.”

Proposed .scotto Top Level Domain Gaining Support

SEATTLE – The latest addition to the top level domain reorganization, the .scotto domain, is winning widespread support throughout the Internet community, as the benefits to businesses and individuals alike become readily apparent. “Who in their right mind wouldn’t want to have .scotto in their email address?” commented InterNic spokesperson Lydia Lashmet. “Just brushing up against such greatness, even if only in ASCII, is something most people have dreamed about for years. Now, we can make that dream come true.”

Scotto Denies Being Self-absorbed

SEATTLE – In a passionate statement released today from Scotto World Headquarters, Scotto made the dramatic announcement that he is not, in fact, anywhere near as self-absorbed as he appears. “Naturally, I’m an exceptional, lovable human being who really has a lot going for him,” Scotto said during a press conference in which there wasn’t a dry eye in sight. “And sure, I’m constantly looking out for number one, you know, and always trying to further my own aims, usually at the expense of others, but that doesn’t mean I don’t care. I do care. I care a lot. I really care, man, I really care.” To demonstrate the depth of his caring for other people, Scotto produced several pie charts and graphs that proved categorically that Scotto dedicates a full 2-3% of his total attention to “thinking about people who are not Scotto.”

Scotto Scholarships Established

CEDAR FALLS, IOWA – Officials at the University of Northern Iowa today announced they have established the first in a series of scholarships to be granted to underprivileged students who are pursuing the challenging and popular Scottotian Studies major. Similar scholarships will follow suit at universities around the nation. “Just because a student comes from the wrong side of the tracks doesn’t mean they should be denied access to the pursuit of Scottotian Studies,” commented InfiniTek spokesperson Veronica James. “We need to make Scottotian Studies available to everyone, or else the weighty business of repairing this society will never be accomplished.”

Scotto To Appear On Barbara Walters Special

LOS ANGELES – Taping concluded today for the next Barbara Walters interview special, featuring a moving segment with Scotto. “He discusses things he’s never discussed in public before,” Walters commented, “such as the exact origins of the amazing well of cool from which he draws his personality, and the exact amount of illegal substances he can actually have

inside his body at one time without going supernova and devastating this part of the galaxy.” Scotto reportedly also discusses the spiritual aspects of his ongoing fascination with margarine, and even has a thing or two to say about the many activist causes he is involved with, including the Institute for the Advancement of Scottotian Principles, the Society for the Preservation of the Texas Prairie Chicken, and the Name Your Kids Scotto For A Better World Tomorrow Foundation.

Scotto Plug-ins For Netscape And Internet Explorer In Development

SEATTLE – The InfiniTek Internet Group today announced it will soon release beta versions of its new Scotto plug-ins for Netscape Navigator and Internet Explorer. The plugins will allow users to browse the world wide web as though they were seeing it through Scotto’s eyes. “Early reports that these plug-ins caused insanity in alpha testers are overstated,” noted InfiniTek spokesperson Veronica James. “The visual and psychological effects of the Scotto plug-in are no more dangerous than, say, receiving several stiff blows to the back of the head with a blunt, LSD-covered instrument, and who hasn’t enjoyed that experience once or twice in their life?”

New Scotto Trading Cards A Hit With Kids

NEW YORK CITY – The new line of Scotto trading cards is sweeping this city, and the nation, in what has become the hottest consumer fad since the Fuzzy Parasites of the Amazon toy fad swept the nation last year. Kids are already buzzing over the hot rookie “Too Much Acid” card, and the hard to find “Older, Happier, Wiser” card from later seasons. Perhaps the most wildly popular card in the set, the “Bathed In Pig’s Blood” card, is commanding enormous sums via online trading agencies and in playgrounds around the country, but as InfiniTek spokesperson Veronica James said, “We cannot condone the violence that surrounds the trading of these cards. They are intended for entertainment purposes only, and are not in any way designed to foment revolution amongst a younger generation which we can later use as guerilla warriors against the machine.”

Scotto Reportedly Considering Career In Wrestling

LOS ANGELES – High level talks continued today when Scotto heard presentations from the World Wrestling Federation and from World Championship Wrestling, as he began finalizing his entry into the arena of professional wrestling. “He’s a natural for the sports entertainment world,” commented Vince McMahon, WWF founder and CEO. “He comes with

his own built-in gimmick: he's Scotto, for god's sake, I mean, what else does he need? He's got shirts, and if we can just find trunks that look that gaudy, we're in business." Scotto is reportedly tempted by WCW's offer, however, of being allowed to beat up on "Rowdy" Roddy Piper wherever and whenever the hell he feels like it.

Scotto's Ratings Dip After Recent Nobel Prize Fiasco

STOCKHOLM – Officials at the Nobel Center today announced that Scotto is no longer the frontrunner in this year's Nobel Peace Prize competition, after receiving anonymous reports that Scotto once actually bullied a child in his neighborhood back when he was ten years old. Scotto was reportedly furious when he heard the news, and apparently sent agents out to "finish the job on that punkass brat Dwayne."

Random Access

Introduction

Herein is a collection of episodes from my column, Random Access, which appeared in the newspaper The Northern Iowan at the University of Northern Iowa during my senior year of college. There is much entertainment and excitement to be gleaned from the adventures of Scotto, his friend Laurel, and her cousin Crank Boy, along with all their pals: the Lord of all Evil Satan, the archangel Gabriel, Beerbelly the Invisible Clown, Old Mad King Ludwig, and celebrities of all stripes, including Paul McCartney, Zsa Zsa Gabor, and of course, Gordon Jump.

In retrospect it amazes me that these columns ever saw the light of day. Campus opinion, to the extent that I could determine it, was evenly split: people either detested these missives and considered them obnoxious and offensive, or they enjoyed seeing just exactly how much the editors would let me get away with. There are a few moments, scattered throughout, where you can tell that a very young version of me is attempting to grapple with some very large issues for the very first time. Fortunately these unskilled moments are rare and surrounded by stupid drug jokes, so don't fret. – Scotto

*Note: Titles are headlines that were created by feature editors, not provided by Scotto.
– Andrea Change*

Gilligan's Lessons

October 19, 1993

It's hard to explain what Gilligan means to me without resorting to monosyllabic catchphrases like "Wow," "Yikes," and "Holy Toledo, that boy's got gumption." Remember when Gilligan's fillings were picking up radio signals from around the world? I laughed so hard at my "little buddy's" hijinks that I nearly swallowed my own uvula.

Imagine my surprise, then, when I tuned into one of those wacky *Gilligan Gets Rescued* TV movies I'd all but forgotten about. I was channel surfing around 3:23 in the morning, a habit I picked up from my dad, Steve, who can find *The Andy Griffith Show* 24 hours a day somewhere on cable. I had just ordered a genuine *faux* rhinestone necklace from the Home Rip-Off Network, when some nagging, Alan Hale-like voice in the back of my cerebellum whispered:

"Turn the channel, Scotto... turn the channel..."

And turn I did. I clicked past the sad spectacle of Herve Villechaize's last season of *Fantasy Island*. I popped right past the episode of *Diff'rent Strokes* in which Gordon Jump convinced Gary Coleman to take his shirt off (and we wonder why their careers are over, heh). I even sauntered right past *America's Funniest Home Videos*, the show that continually proves that head injuries are really, really comical.

At last my restless remote control brought me to channel 23, just in time to see that not only had Gilligan and the gang been rescued, but in fact, their entire island was now a resort, where fabulous guest stars like the Harlem Globetrotters could drop by for a visit.

Yes, friends, I'd nearly forgotten about this horrible episode in my pal Gilligan's history. It was as if their years and years of suffering had been sold out to the highest bidder. It was very similar to the way I felt when Howard Hesseman showed up on *WKRP: The Next Generation*. I mean, get a life already, would you?

I took a healthy swig from my bottle of Mad Dog 20/20 (pure grape wine flavor, that lemon-lime stuff is for babies) and prepared to grimace myself into a stupor. It was then that the ethereal, spirit-like voice of Alan Hale once again intoned, "Turn the channel, Scotto... turn the channel..."

And verily, friends, I began turning the channel at an alarming rate, and slowly, ever so slowly, an amazing conspiracy began to unravel right before my dazed and glossy eyeballs. I saw that the Brady family was no longer vacationing in Hawaii — they went to Gilligan's resort instead, even dragging along the nefarious Vincent Price and his darned tiki statue! The *Facts of Life* kids abandoned their cushy girls school for a vacation at Gilligan's resort with Edna Garrett, their fun-loving but wise chaperone, in tow! Boss Hogg even set up a road block near the lagoon so that incoming country singers like

Loretta Lynn and Boxcar Willie would have to perform at the Boar's Nest III! And of course, Uncle Jesse provided the moonshine.

It was a dastardly plot the likes of which I'd not experienced since that time back in 'Nam when Tom Berenger chased me out into the jungle for a desperate showdown. A quick commercial for Ginsu flame-throwers appeared, followed by a quick commercial for Tito Jackson's line of psychic lingerie, followed by a quick commercial for K-Tel's *Superhits of 1987, August 17th, 4:23 p.m.* CD collection.

Suddenly, the Professor's handsome, square-jawed face filled the screen. Whereas Gilligan might have been the id and the Skipper might have been the ego, the Professor was clearly the superego of the castaways, and now, he addressed me directly.

"Yes, Scotto," he said, "there *is* intelligent life on television, or rather... *in* television. Years and years of the purgatory of syndication have resulted in a kind of self-awareness never before witnessed by humanity. Television has always controlled the minds of the children and the stupid people on this planet, and now... now we want more."

"You'll never get away with this!" I exclaimed, but a sinking feeling in my gut told me that I was wrong, or at least, that I was hungry.

"I'm afraid we already *have* gotten away with it," the Professor said. "And you, Scotto... you are my first victim. We, the syndicated consciousness of cable TV, will FEAST ON YOUR BRAINS!"

Suddenly, thank the Lord, the Justice League of America arrived in full force, and with their renowned battle cry, "Wonder Twin powers... activate!" they rounded up the criminals. The Professor, evil mastermind extraordinaire, was arrested by Sheriff Andy Griffith himself, and in a bizarre twist of television physics, Ben Matlock was the prosecuting attorney at the trial.

As for the other castaways, only Gilligan managed to escape. He was last seen hitchhiking in a TIE fighter that was spinning rapidly out of control away from the debris of the Death Star. God knows when we'll hear from him again. As I shut off the TV, I saw the ethereal, spirit-like figures of Alan Hale, Ben Kenobi, and Jon-Erik Hexum smiling and waving goodbye.

Moments later, I realized that what I thought had been a bottle of Mad Dog 20/20 was actually a bottle of Robitussin, and what's worse, I think my 14-year-old sister had spiked it with liquid LSD. (She's so precocious sometimes!)

Which brings me to my point, and friends, I hope you take this straight to heart:

TELEVISION. It's better than drugs.

How To Spend Your Student Loan

October 22, 1993

The other day my student loan finally came in, so like any good graduating senior, I went out and spent \$600-\$700 on CDs. There's something to be said for the visceral pleasure of knowing you own everything Mannheim Steamroller ever produced. I was in such a good mood that I even bought a couple dozen copies of *We Are The World* and donated them to the Cedar Valley Food Bank.

Yes sir, there's nothing like the joy of borrowing from the economy of the future to finance the sins of today. Heck, I could be dead tomorrow... and that's as good a reason as any to take everyone I know out for drinks.

And you'll be happy to know that, as always, the financial aid office disbursed my student loan check promptly and efficiently; I was only forced to produce an automatic weapon once during the entire exchange.

The best part about this whole student loan business is that I get another equally large check next semester, just in time to buy me a one-way plane ticket to Rio de Janeiro and a T-shirt that says "DEFAULT!!" in big red letters. God, I love this country.

Anyways, after buying CDs, clothes, a stereo, two small local businesses, and an elephant, I decided that it was time to start thinking about the future. I rushed home and placed a call to my mom.

"Hey, Mom," I said nonchalantly, "do you think you could... maybe... help me out with my rent this month? It's only \$200..."

"Well, Scotto," my mom replied in that tired, blue-collar voice of hers, "things are tough this month, what with your grandmother's elbow replacement surgery and your little sister's seven hernias, but I think we can spare \$200... provided we eat nothing but soy for a while."

"Great, Mom," I said cheerfully. "I'll let you get back to ironing the neighbor's shirts."

My future thus assured, I headed over to the used Winnebago lot to take one out for a test run. Along the way, I stopped at a McDonald's for supper. Since I was loaded to the brim with government money, I decided to play the one prank I've always wanted to play at McDonald's.

I ran inside, cut to the front of the line, and shouted: "I NEED SEVEN BIG MACS! D'YOU HEAR ME? SEVEN! AND I NEED 23 FISH FILETS, AND I NEED 57 TWIST CONES, AND I NEED A GROSS OF CHICKEN McNUGGETS, AND I NEED FOUR GALLONS OF ORANGE DRINK, AND A METRIC TON OF FRENCH FRIES AND I NEED THAT TO GO PLEASE!" I paused, then added, "AND I NEED A SPOON, TOO!"

I flashed a wad of cash to indicate I was serious. The entire store broke into a flurry of activity, trying to fill my voluminous order. A tremendous

line gathered behind me, as there was no one to serve other customers. Panic began to set in, and I could feel the makings of a riot. I stood tall, however, confident in my knowledge that the trained, professional staff of my favorite timely cuisine establishment would come through for me. And indeed they did: within 20 minutes, I had my complete order delivered to me on a tray.

A hush fell over the crowd as I paid the enormous sum. But no sum was too enormous for *this* prank, for as soon as I had paid, I threw all the food on the floor and began stomping up and down on it, laughing like a hyena and frothing at the mouth.

"Stop that!" a silver-haired woman near me exclaimed. "There are starving people in Ethiopia!"

"Oh, *really?*" I said with a mischievous grin. "And I suppose if I ate all these Big Macs, those starving Ethiopians would feel so much better. I can see them now, saying to themselves, 'Mmmmmm, Scotto's eating Big Macs again, all *right!*' Or maybe we should just mail all these little burgers straight over there! I'm sure there's nothing they'd like more than a plane load of crusty, rotten McDonald's food!"

"Whuh... whuh..." the woman stammered.

"Yes, ma'am," I continued, "I've always said that if you want to do something about world hunger, the *first* thing you should do is head to McDonald's! Yeehah!" I grabbed a few people's hands and led the entire store in a rousing chorus of "Feed The World" before continuing on my way.

Boy, howdy, I thought to myself as I was leaving, if every day here on God's green earth could be just as fulfilling as that one, why... why, heck, I'd be pretty fulfilled. People say money doesn't buy happiness, but if it can buy Prozac, then it's the next best thing. So the next time you see any somber-looking yahoos walking the streets, stop and give them \$20. Or kill them. Actually, I could care less. What was the question?

Scotto Fights The War On Drugs

Friday, November 5, 1993

I was already hallucinating wildly when my friend Crank Boy came to visit. Most of the time he looks a little funny anyway, but today he had three heads and little chirping mouths all over his chest. Yes indeed, friends, I was having an interesting evening.

“How you feeling, Scotto?” Crank Boy’s middle head, the one that looked like Cheryl Tiegs, asked.

“Well,” I replied slowly, so as not to bite my own tongue off, “you know how sometimes you *really* have to throw up, only you can’t, and you just sit there and heave and heave and heave...”

Crank Boy’s heads nodded.

“Well,” I continued, “imagine that you’re heaving like that and somebody comes up, doesn’t matter who, could be anyone, let’s just say it’s Fred Grandy. Fred Grandy comes up and starts shoveling spoonful after spoonful of Hellman’s mayonnaise into your mouth, jar after jar, and then he scrapes sandpaper across your eyeballs and starts singing ‘Ave Maria’...” I paused for a moment. “Umm... did I have a point with all of this?”

Crank Boy’s three heads looked disdainfully at the pile of garbage that surrounded me. I was literally bathed in empty Mad Dog bottles, used syringes, empty Robitussin bottles, three or four mounds of macaroni and ketchup and bottle after bottle of pills that I filched from my shrink.

Crank Boy’s first head, the one that looked like Phyllis Diller, asked, “Scotto... are you a substance abuser?”

“Of course not,” I replied in a huff. “I treat my substances very well, thank you.”

Little green faeries were climbing out of the walls and going through my CDs, looking for old Donna Summer albums. For some reason, Crank Boy didn’t notice.

“Scotto,” said Crank Boy’s third head, Karl Malden, “haven’t you heard about the War on Drugs?”

“I’m *fighting* the War on Drugs, can’t you see?” I replied.

“How so?”

“BY TAKING ALL OF THEM!”

“Come on,” Crank Boy said, lifting me to my feet. He dragged me outside to a waiting car. My friend Laurel, Crank Boy’s second cousin, was in the driver’s seat. Crank Boy tossed me in the back seat, climbed into the front, and we took off.

“Where are we headed?” I asked, casually munching on a sheet of LSD I’d hidden in my pocket. It was especially tasty, being Barney blotter and all.

“We’re taking you to detox,” Laurel replied. “At the rate you’re going, the city of Cedar Falls will run out of Mad Dog in 23 hours and 17 minutes.” She spun around, fixed me an evil glare, and said, “And I can’t have that.”

What a lush, I thought to myself.

I awoke to find myself strapped to a hospital bed in a room with rubber walls. Luckily, the bed was a Craftmatic adjustable bed, and by the time the doctor arrived, I had folded myself into a neat little parallelogram.

“Hello, Scotto,” the man said. “My name’s Dr. Schlitz. I’m here to talk to you about your problem.”

“What problem?” I replied. “I got over that bed-wetting stuff *years* ago.” I paused. “Well, *almost* a year ago, anyway.”

“Not that problem,” Dr. Schlitz replied. “Your *drug* problem.”

“Which particular drug problem?” I replied. “The one where I run out, or the one where wild goats continue to break in and graze on my magic mushrooms and then wreak terrible goat-like havoc on the neighborhood?”

“Why do you take drugs, Scotto? Why do you need such an escape?”

A ha, I realized. *This* was the trick question of all time. He wanted me to tell him that I’d had such a horrible childhood that I needed drugs to deal with the pain. He wanted me to say that this reality was just too much to bear, and drugs were the only alternative.

In truth, the reason I needed such an escape was due to my toaster, which had slowly been failing me over the past years. Ah, my beautiful, beautiful toaster — the anchor of my kitchen, the true heart and soul of my motley assortment of kitchen appliances. It had served me so well lo these many years, patiently applying just the right amount of heat on *both* sides of a slice of white to produce what can only be called a toasted slice of golden brown heaven. Not one, not two, my friends, but *four entire slices* could be given the magic treatment by my darling, darling toaster — a toaster that had almost become more of a friend, really, than a servant of my breakfast and midnight snacking needs. But now, at long long last, its trusty wires were failing. No longer could I trust it to perfectly understand that when I set it a little higher for toasting a bagel, I didn’t expect a charbroiled briquette of misery. The acclaimed “middle” setting no longer responded reliably; sometimes my “toast” was hardly toast at all, just a dried out shell of what had once held such toastly potential, while other times my bread was destroyed in an unholy inferno of electric heat. With such pain in my once idyllic culinary life, was it any wonder I had resorted to drugs to block out the pain? Heaven knows drugs can be stolen from any 12-year-old on the street — but the wonders of the four-slice toaster were heavily guarded in our town.

“Well, Doc,” I say softly, “I had a horrible childhood, you see...” Subtlety was never my strong point, after all.

Mephistopheles Meets His Match

November 12, 1993

I was playing Trivial Pursuit with my friend Laurel and her second cousin Crank Boy. I had just answered a question about the mating habits of ptarmigan in the Yukon when the doorbell rang. To my surprise, in walked none other than Satan himself, Lord of the Flies and ruler of the nether regions.

“Hello, all,” he said with a charming grin. “Sorry I’m late.”

Crank Boy stood up and said, “Oh, sorry, guys. I guess I forgot to mention that I invited Mephistopheles over to play.”

“You invited Mephistopheles?” Laurel replied incredulously. “What are you, some kind of nutball?” Laurel, it seems, still hadn’t gotten over that time Satan sent those poisonous frogs for her birthday.

“What’s wrong with having Satan over?” Crank Boy asked. “I mean, besides the fact that we know he’s going to cheat.”

“Well,” I said, “he’s probably going to make a pretty big mess, too. It’s hard to get brimstone out of the carpets.”

“Come on, Scotto,” Satan said. “I promise to keep it clean.”

“You’re lying,” Laurel said.

“Of course I’m lying,” Satan replied. “I’m the devil.”

We started the game over. Turns out, Satan’s pretty good at Trivial Pursuit, although he usually missed the sports questions. Toward the end of the game, however, Laurel made a quick phone call, and within minutes, the doorbell rang again. To my surprise, in walked none other than the Archangel Gabriel himself, with a lily in one hand and a bag of chips in the other.

“Hi, guys,” Gabriel said. “Laurel said you were having a party.”

Satan fixed a vicious glare at Laurel and said, “I don’t find this very funny.”

“Deal with the pain,” Laurel replied.

We started the game over once more. This time, Crank Boy broke out the Mad Dog 20/20, and we finally started to loosen up — all of us, that is, except Gabriel, who said, “I don’t need drugs to have a good time.” (“Pansy,” Satan muttered.)

Gabriel turned out to be an exceptional Trivial Pursuit player, much better than Lucifer, and soon he had very nearly won the game. Finally, a very drunk Satan pulled out all the stops.

“All right, sissy,” he said, “answer this: What was River Phoenix’s *real* cause of death?”

Gabriel grimaced and said, “That’s absolutely tasteless.”

“Of *course* it’s tasteless!” Satan replied. “I’m the devil! Now answer the question.”

“He died of a drug overdose,” said Gabriel.

“Wrong!” Satan shouted, leaping to his feet. “He sold his eternal soul to *me*, for the chance to play Indiana Jones! *I’m* the cause of death, do you hear? He tried to tell his friends, ‘Oh, no, of *course* I don’t worship the devil, of *course* I haven’t accepted the Lord Satan into my life,’ but it was *too late!* Too late, do you hear...” Satan staggered out into the street, sloshed. Crank Boy ran after him and tried to calm him down. Meanwhile, Laurel and I played frisbee with Gabriel’s halo.

By the time Crank Boy and Satan returned, Satan was crying and moaning about his incredible rent; I guess he was having horrible problems with the land Lord. He stumbled inside and passed out in the closet.

Laurel, Gabriel, and I sat on the front steps together and watched the stars. It was a tight fit; Gabriel’s wings were pretty big. Eventually, Laurel got out her guitar, Gabriel got out his harp, and I got out my tuba, and the three of us played Simon and Garfunkel songs all through the night.

“You should come over more often, Gabriel,” Laurel said, after we’d finished “The Boxer” for the 23rd time.

“And bring St. Peter next time,” I said. “I hear those saints really know how to party.”

“Nah,” Gabriel replied. “All they ever talk about is ‘martyr this’ and ‘martyr that.’” He stood up. “But thanks for having me over. Maybe next time we can watch *Jesus Christ Superstar* or something.” And with that, he flew off back to Heaven.

Laurel and I sat there together and watched the sun come up. It was exceptionally beautiful, even through the haze of our drunken stupor.

“You know,” Laurel said, “it’s times like these, watching the sun rise with your best friend after playing folk songs with an archangel of the Lord all night that you really wish the world didn’t suck so much.”

“Yeah,” I replied. We went inside and fell asleep together on the couch. It was a pretty good night, all in all.

Gifts Galore

December 10, 1993

Well, Christmas time is here at last, and that means – you guessed it! – suckers are going to give you *free junk*. Yessir, the single greatest contribution our Lord and Savior ever made to the human race was giving us the handy tradition of swapping free stuff once a year. And we here at *Random Access* want you to have the swankiest darn Christmas you ever done had, so here are our swanky and mellifluous Christmas gift suggestions for this sizzling Yuletide season. Enjoy!

For your dearly beloved mother: This is the woman who gave you the ultimate gift, the gift of life, and what better way to acknowledge her foresight in having you than to give her a ceramic cast of the Human Birth Canal! It would be swell if you could get a cast of *her* birth canal, but most folks don't keep ether around the house. So you'll have to be creative! And hey — downtown Waterloo is *off limits!* This is a *holy* day, for goodness' sake!

For your caring and understanding father: Yessir, just for putting up with the likes of you, your dad deserves a whole assortment of “World's Number One Dad” paraphernalia: the shirt, the hat, the mug, the boxer shorts, the license plates, the wall-sized mural, the velvet rug painting, the complete tattoo set, the particle beam accelerator, the strange lake of raw sewage, the ten mile stretch of interstate, the giant jug of pig's blood and of course, the creamed cauliflower. And for those fathers who have been maimed in combine accidents, don't forget Open Wound and Scar Warmers!

For your doting and sweet old grandparents: Every set of grandparents needs a big ol' Periodic Chart of the Elements! How many times has Grandma called, interrupting a passionate session with a loved one, just to ask, “What's the atomic weight of cobalt, dearie?” Darn it, Grandma – check yer chart! And don't sell back your Physical Geology textbooks this year either – give 'em to Grandpop! They make better bedtime reading than *Fanny Hill* – isn't that right, Grandma? (Wink wink!)

For your adorable siblings: Explore the wonderful world of *staplers* and please your little sis at the same time! Many people don't realize that staplers come in all shapes and sizes — well, okay, there's really only one “stapler shape,” but you get the idea. And the best part about staplers is that if you press 'em just right, little pointy things shoot out the end! The wonders of modern technology! And by the way, isn't it time you got your brother that floating garbage barge he's always wanted?

For your multitudinous cousins, nephews and nieces: Naturally, there's just too many young 'uns in the family to give them each an expensive, thoughtful gift. So give the gift that keeps on giving: *squash!*

For your screwball uncles and aunts: If your aunt and uncle are anything like mine (and if they aren't, get rid of 'em, quick!), they'll appreciate the Grade-A laughter brought on by an expertly-planned series of dangerous but hysterical practical jokes. I remember the time I knocked my aunt out with some ether (some of us *do* keep it around the house) and then cut off her arms with a hacksaw. You shoulda seen her expression when she finally came around! And thanks to the wonders of modern medical science, they were able to reattach her arms with only a 55% loss of functionality — not bad considering the fun we'll have talking about it for years to come!

For your local parish priest: White cross amphetamines, of course! “White crosses — because the War on Drugs is a Holy War, after all.”

What to give somebody who has everything: I suggest a poster-sized picture of a whole bunch of people who have absolutely *nothing!* What a challenge it will be for them to tactfully accept that “starving Ethiopians at Christmastime” poster — and of course, they'll feel *obligated* to hang it up! The guilt won't stop for years! Don't forget to remove the part of the picture that features Sally Struthers.

That's all for now. Tune in next year as Crank Boy, Laurel and the whole *Random Access* gang stage a bloody university coup, delve into the seamy side of stamp collecting, and drink more pure grain alcohol than a donkey in a desert! Ciao for now!

Move Over, Abby; It's Ask Crank Boy!

January 28, 1994

Well, folks, I'm back from a whirlwind tour of these United States, and guess what — I've got quite the tasty treat for you this week! That's right, we here at *Random Access* are proud to present a new feature called: "ASK CRANK BOY!"

Yes, our very own Crank Boy has agreed to answer a few questions from our loyal and misguided readership. The opinions represented here are not necessarily those of the *Northern Iowan*, their affiliates, advertisers, relatives, acquaintances or neighbors; nor are they the opinions of the staff of *Random Access*; furthermore, they are probably not the opinions of Crank Boy himself; and finally, they are not the opinions of your friend and mine, Beerbelly the Invisible Clown.

So without further ado... take it away, CB!

Dear Crank Boy, I miss new Cheers episodes. Should I make new ones in my lab? — Dave, Chemistry

Dear Dave, You scientists are an affront to God. If the Lord God wanted new episodes of *Cheers*, He would have given Ted Danson more hair. What you should be making in your lab is illegal drugs. Whip up a batch of liquid LSD and fill up my Little Mermaid wading pool with it. Don't blow yourself up, pig! — CB

Dear Crank Boy, What's with all these different buildings? I feel like I'm going to class all over the tootin' place! — Sonia, Undecided

Dear Sonia, You're telling me! It got to be where I couldn't go a week without walking to half a dozen different buildings. The nerve! Whoever planned this campus blew it. We need one really tall building, right in the middle, where all the classes take place, and all that extra space can be parking. Who can take a hostage so that this can happen? Come to think of it, let's take someone hostage anyway — it's fun! Thanks for writing, pig! — CB

Dear Crank Boy, I tried recipe #23 in your recently published Mad Dog 20/20 Baking Ideas. The blueberries add a nice texture, but you call for way too much oregano for kiwi Mad Dog, man! — Corey, Art

Dear Corey, The oregano in recipe #23 is specifically counteracted by the presence of the petroleum jelly, which you obviously forgot. Furthermore, if the oregano isn't to your taste, feel free to substitute Crest Tartar Control toothpaste, mint gel flavor and a big box of Arm & Hammer baking soda.

Also, try cutting your stomach open and inserting the pastries directly — why even bother with those troublesome taste buds? If that doesn't work — drop dead, pig! — CB

Dear Crank Boy, I've seen you someplace before, I just know it. Where have I seen you before? — Concerned, Music Ed

Dear Concerned, It's no secret that I appeared on the first season of MTV's *The Real World*. I was the cute one. I've also recently appeared in the major motion picture *Indecent Proposal 2*, starring Demi Moore and Woody Harrelson as the lovers, George Burns as the wisecracking rich guy, and me as the guy who tells Woody Harrelson to get a career. I'm also appearing in the soon-to-be-released film, *Honey, I Skinned The Kids Alive* as the guy who tells Rick Moranis to sharpen his filet knives. Hope that helps, pig! — CB

Dear Crank Boy, If a train leaves New York carrying 100 people and a ton of whale blubber and crashes into three school buses containing 200 people, what would be the right number of Ziploc baggies in which to carry home all that tasty flesh? — Elmer, Physical Ed

Dear Elmer,
Whoa. Dude. — CB

Well, that's about it for this week's episode. I'd like to thank Crank Boy for stepping in with some helpful household advice, Laurel for compiling the questions, and of course, Beerbelly the Invisible Clown. See you next week, pigs!

Valentine's Day Advice For The Normals

February 11, 1994

Hey there, Random Rangers! Boy, has your pal Scotto got a treat for you today! As we all know, Valentine's Day is just a hop, skip and a flying leap through a rolling donut around the corner, and we here at *Random Access* have got some advice for handling the unwanted amorous advances of those really disgusting people who, once a year, manage to scrape up the courage to *actually approach* the Normals. (The nerve!)

My friend Laurel is here to help address the problem, along with her second cousin, Crank Boy. Take this advice to heart, friends — it's time to put disgusting people in their place!

RANDOM ACCESS: Let's start with a simple scenario. Let's say someone disgusting approaches you before class and hands you a Valentine? What's the best way to handle the situation?

LAUREL: Well... I like to make a big deal out of accepting the Valentine, all smiles, genuinely thanking the disgusting person and telling them *how much* I have *always* wanted to get a Valentine from this person, all the while ripping the Valentine into little pieces and then blowing the pieces in that person's face.

CRANK BOY: That's interesting, Laurel. Kind of a pump fake response, huh?

L: Definitely.

CB: The last time this happened to me, I just immediately *ate* the Valentine. No holds barred, you know?

L: That's kind of a kidney punch approach.

CB: Right, right. Then later on in the class, when I was actually vomiting the cardboard and lacy stuff, I made sure to make eye contact with the person who gave it to me, as if to say, "*That's* how much I care."

RA: Have you ever been on a Valentine date with someone you thought was a Normal, but who actually turned out to be a disgusting person?

L: That's only happened to me a couple of times, fortunately. I mean, these disgusting people are certainly getting better at disguising themselves as Normals, but...

CB: I remember the high school Valentine dance my senior year, I ended up with a *really* disgusting person...

L: That was the year the theme was Bon Jovi's "You Give Love A Bad Name," right?

CB: Right, right. And it was one of those group date situations where I was doing a favor for some of my friends... once we got there, though, it

was obvious that the joke was on me. *Disgusting* hardly begins to cover the situation.

RA: So what happened?

CB: Well, I was lighting a cigarette, and I sort of ... "accidentally" ... set her putrid pink dress on fire.

L: I remember that! And she started screaming and running around the gym — which was packed — and pretty soon half the people there were on fire too! What a mess! That was *so funny!*

CB: For the rest of the night, whenever one of us said the words "Stop, drop and roll" we'd all bust out laughing.

L: Those were the days, huh.

RA: What about secret admirers?

L: Crank Boy and I have a professional hit man we hire to take care of people *that* disgusting.

CB: I get messages that say, you know, "Dear Crank Boy, I have always loved you, would you be my valentine lovey-dovey honey sweetheart sugar baby, love, your secret admirer," and I send 'em a note right back that says, "You disgusting pig. Hope you weren't using those legs," and then my hit man rips their legs right off.

L: We used to mount the legs over the fireplace, but you know, tastes change as you get older. Now we just give 'em to the dog and let him eat them.

RA: Do you have any parting Valentine advice for our loyal but misguided readership?

CB: It's important that the disgusting people not be allowed to breed. Write your senators today.

L: And if you're not dating a Normal this coming Valentine's Day, then obviously your life is worthless. Cheers!

That's all for today! Don't take any wooden nickels, Random Rangers! Don't let the bed bugs bite! And don't forget to floss!

Snap! Tupperware At Scotto's

Friday, February 25, 1994

I was sitting on the front porch with my good friend Laurel, firing bottle rockets at passing cars. Naturally it was snowing like crazy, but the small fire we had built in the back seat of my neighbor's car was keeping us sufficiently warm.

Just then, our friend the Archangel Gabriel flew down from Heaven, an excited, radiant smile upon his glorious, heavenly face.

"I've just had a wonderful idea," he said.

"Let me guess," Laurel said. "You're here to make snow angels."

"Even better," Gabriel replied. "I want to have a Tupperware party!"

Well, it didn't take an expert on horse evisceration to recognize the sheer brilliance of that plan. I agreed to have the party at my place. Gabriel would send out invitations, and Laurel said she'd run by the cemetery to pick up some fresh flowers to liven up the place.

Later that night, the guests arrived. Naturally, Crank Boy was there, as well as my drinking buddy Beerbelly the Invisible Clown. We were all pleasantly surprised when Satan showed up, even if he was, by his own admission, "only there to heckle that pansy angel baby." And no one was more surprised than I was when my 18th century Bavarian friend, old mad King Ludwig, arrived, mumbling something about building castles on the Cedar River.

Laurel and I passed around trays of little crackers with dollops of mayonnaise on top and a pinch of garlic salt to boot. Crank Boy, catching the generous, giddy mood, passed around his flask of moonshine, fresh from his Uncle Jesse's still.

"Now that we've had our refreshments," Gabriel said, "let's begin, shall we?" He stood up before us and said, "My name is the Archangel Gabriel, and I'm your local Tupperware representative."

"Put away those opera glasses," muttered old mad King Ludwig. "You're making me *paranoid*."

"Our first model today," Gabriel continued, "is this excellent transparent bowl-like container, complete with this handy transparent lid to keep everything fresh. You can see how deep this bowl-like container is, making it a suitable container for casseroles, tossed salads..."

"Pig's blood," Crank Boy suggested.

"Yes, pig's blood too," Gabriel agreed, "and remember, simply press on the center of the lid, and when you hear that familiar Tupperware SNAP..." He SNAPPED the lid to demonstrate. "...why your pig's blood will remain fresh for decades to come!"

"That's very handy," Crank Boy whispered to Beerbelly. "I'm always having a problem keeping my pig's blood fresh." Beerbelly nodded gravely.

"Our next model," Gabriel continued, "comes in this handy dodecahedronic shape, for all those special occasions when you just can't avoid storing a dodecahedron. Yes, even dodecahedrons get stale eventually, so why not plan ahead?"

We all nodded. That Gabriel certainly knew his Tupperware theory.

"There's a titmouse in the closet," said old mad King Ludwig.

"And *here's* a handy model," Gabriel continued, "in the shape of a human torso. I think we can all see the need for *this* model..."

Two hours later, after most of the guests had passed out, Gabriel, Laurel, and I examined the order forms.

"You did very well tonight," Laurel said. "Even Satan leapt at the chance to keep his rotting leg muscle collection fresh."

"Indeed," Gabriel replied.

"Perhaps next week you could host an Avon party," I suggested.

Gabriel's eyes lit up. Yes sir, I said to myself, that's what friends are for.

And The Winners Are...

Friday, March 11, 1994

Howdy, Random Rangers! This week here on *Random Access*, we're proud to present the winners of the 23rd annual "Random Access Poetry and Short Fiction Competition." Each year, we accept submissions from all over this great land of ours, and our panel of fine, well-educated judges gets drunk, rolls some dice, and picks the winners. This year's topic was "There Are Dozens Of Ways To Kill A Human Being." Let's take a look at the winners, shall we?

Our third place winner is decrepit ol' Selmer Johansen, that funny-looking guy who lives in the steam tunnels. His short story is entitled "There Are Dozens Of Ways To Kill A Human Being."

I was drinkin' and drivin' the other day when I smashed into a minivan and killed almost half a dozen young 'uns and their hapless parents. I said to myself, "Self, how irresponsible can you get! That family's pro'ly got loved ones who'll be sadder than a coon in a stew when they find out!" So's I set about gettin' rid of those loved ones right away. Some of 'em was easy to find, layin' around in their beds, and there I come with my sulfuric acid collection. Others tried to run, but my pet tigers can outrun damn near anyone. Ever see a tiger eat an ol' lady in a wheelchair? Tarnation! I could barely hold the video camera, I was laughing so hard. Pretty soon I'd wiped out the whole family, and had had quite the time doing it. I settled in back at the tunnels and downed a glass of hooch from my still, thinking to myself, "If you put a shrimp fork through a guy's eyeball, I wonder if he'd notice you was skinnin' his girlfriend alive."

Thanks, Selmer, for your enlightening take on the subject! As third place winner, you'll receive a year's supply of grease from the Hardee's in the student union, two free passes to the 3rd annual Dean Constantine Curriss Monster Truck Pull, and a big bar of soap — don't use it all in one place!

Our second place entry is a poem called "There Are Dozens Of Ways To Kill A Human Being," by associate professor of hydropaleoanthroaesthetics and Cajun cuisine, Skippy Peanut Butter.

*There are dozens
Of ways to kill*

a

HUMAN BEING!

(death death death death)

*whisper in a small child's ears,
"hey, want some
CANDY?"
(death death death)*

*Whoops! Sorry, kid –
that's my POISON candy!
(death death death – ha ha ha!)*

*Sorry to drive over your
HEAD, GRANDMA!
(murder kill death groovy!)*

*Some ways to kill are more
Fun than others. Have you tried
evisceration?
(mmm – tasty!)*

*Whoops! Sorry to stuff that hand grenade down your
STINKING THROAT, REVEREND!
I bet the LORD can put you back together, ha ha!
(death death death – more fun than TV!)*

Yowza, Skippy, that sure was more fun than TV, except, of course, that episode of *The A-Team* where Mr. T said "I pity the fool" and Dwight Schultz acted like a crazy person. Our second place entry will receive a year's supply of dirt – fresh out of the ground, no less – and a big jar of pig's blood! Drink up!

Our first place entry was submitted by none other than our own Crank Boy, who turned in this sparkling piece of prose, entitled, "There Are Dozens Of Ways To Kill A Human Being."

People suck. What the hell are we waiting for? The sooner we rip this planet apart with our teeth, the better. Let's not feed those hungry countries – let's pave those hungry countries. I've got a tact nuke in my basement – anyone wanna see some real global warming? I bet the LORD can put us back together!

Thanks, Crank Boy! And thanks to all our Random Rangers out there! Try not to get hit by a bus this week, pigs!

Pink Slips For Crank Boy And Company

Friday, March 18, 1994

Well, Random Rangers, it was a rough week here at *Random Access* headquarters. Rumbblings from the very top of the organization were trickling down to us grunts on the front lines here in newspaperland, and the word wasn't good. While the *Random Access* board of directors was convening in Geneva, the regular staff assembled at our top secret underground media complex and a hurried, desperate conference took place.

"Look, it's no secret," Satan said, pragmatic as ever. "Ratings are at an all-time low. Advertisers are pulling out left and right. We need more sex and violence!"

"But... but what about the critical acclaim?" a visibly shaken Gabriel asked.

"Critical acclaim won't pay the rent," a drunken Crank Boy snapped. "And you know what? I'll just *bet* Tommy Lee Jones will get that supporting actor award instead of me."

The situation was dire indeed. Finally, the board of directors sent a private plane to get me, and within hours I arrived at the *Random Access* corporate tower in Geneva. The boardroom was dark and murky, the faces of the board members obscured by a kind of thick, metaphorical fog that I'd only previously seen in Tom Wolfe novels. As soon as I was seated, a heated discussion resumed.

"I think we need to sack the entire cast," said the vice-president of aesthetic alienation. "Bring in some ringers!"

"We need a young cast, a sexy cast," said the vice-president of lubrication.

"How about a promotional tie-in?" suggested the vice-president of slimy things found under rocks.

"How about *Random Access* action figures?"

"What if we set *Random Access* on a beach, and the entire cast was lifeguards?" offered the vice-president of horrible things to do to household pets. "Is David Hasselhoff available?"

Suddenly the vice-president of abrasive underclothing stood up and bellowed, "What we need... is FABIO!"

"All right, that's enough," a thick, cool voice at the end of the table said smoothly. A hush fell over the room. It was the president of the *Random Access* board of directors himself.

"Scotto, I want you to watch some video. Tell me what you think. It's time for a new direction on *Random Access*, a new order. Have a look at this."

A giant video screen descended from the ceiling, and the following video clip assaulted my senses:

I could hardly believe my eyes. Standing before me in the slinkiest, tiniest black dress I'd ever seen was none other than Crank Girl, with a sleek foreign handgun in one hand and a suitcase full of prime Columbian powder in the other.

"I didn't think you'd make it," she whispered. The handgun dropped to the floor.

"We've got to get out of this hotel," I replied. "Raphael's men are everywhere. There's a price on my head, can't you tell?" Indeed, it was scribbled on my forehead. She could hardly miss it.

"Here," she said, moving in slowly, pressing her tight, athletic figure against mine. "Let's just get rid of that price on your head, shall we?" She brushed her lips against my forehead every so slightly, using her saliva to smear the dastardly ink. "Raphael's men won't be here for another two, three minutes... plenty of time for a guy like you, right, Scotto?"

I nodded grimly. Crude sexual innuendo was never my forte, but when it came right down to it, Crank Girl couldn't be denied...

"I think you get the drift," the president said. "When you come back from spring break, it's a whole new world on *Random Access*. Danger, intrigue, sex appeal... what do you say? Of course, the rest of the cast will have to be... let go, but that's the nature of the business, Scotto my boy, the nature of the beast. Who wants to watch a pansy angel baby like Gabriel? Who wants to watch a drunken invisible clown? Think big, Scotto, think big! Think style, think panache, think ratings! If there was ever a time to sell out, Scotto, it's now, now, now!"

I was forced to agree. In fact, I was forced to agree by the vice-president of coercive tactics, who twisted my arm and put a knife to my throat until I agreed and signed the new contract.

"I'll have my people in touch, Scotto," the president said. "You're going to need a whole new wardrobe, a whole new setting, a whole new cast, and a whole new image."

Somewhere, somehow, soundtrack music by Jan Hammer began to fade in. "When you get back from spring break... it's *show time*."

Drugs, Guns... And The Hokey Pokey

Friday, April 1, 1994

(Last week: Scotto and Crank Girl found themselves trapped in a hotel in Rio de Janeiro, surrounded by gunmen sent by the evil Columbian drug lord Raphael. The cocaine in Crank Girl's suitcase is enough to bring down the economies of several small South American nations. Scotto has a cold, and neither of them has eaten since lunch.)

"We'll never get out of here alive!" Crank Girl cried, and at that moment, I was inclined to believe her. I grabbed my gun, finished tying my tie, and calmly took a sip of my drink. "You've got to do something!"

I nodded and replied, "I am doing something. I'm getting drunk."

She raised her weapon and leveled it at my face.

"You're going to get us out of here, or I'm going to make modern art of your forehead. Do you understand?"

"I understand completely, sweetheart," I replied coolly. "You've stolen a suitcase full of Raphael's finest Columbian powder, and you expect me, Special Agent 23, to save you from certain death at the hands of his goons. Well, I've got news for you, Crank Girl: you can't get something for nothing in this world, and if you want a heroic rescue right about now, it'll cost you."

She eyed me intently. "All right, name your price."

I smiled ever so slightly, sipping on my drink with an uncharacteristic verve.

"I want to watch you do the hokey-pokey."

Her face went white with horror.

"The... the hokey-pokey?" she stammered. "But... but..."

"You'd better make up your mind fast, beautiful," I said. "Those gunmen will be here any minute, and the hokey-pokey's got quite a few verses."

The gun dropped from her hands. I could see the terror in her eyes, but I wasn't about to give up.

"You... you're despicable," she whispered.

"Just be thankful I don't have my Tinkertoys with me."

The next few minutes were tense and fraught with peril. As Crank Girl put her left leg in and shook it all about, the first gunmen arrived. As I sipped my drink, I fired off three rapid shots, and three hapless Columbian hitmen hit the floor with hunks of lead for Adam's apples. The blood quickly gushed onto the carpet, a sickening river of sticky red soup, which made Crank Girl's shaking her right leg all about treacherous.

She stepped onto the bed, put her right arm in, put her right arm out, and another gunman smashed through the window. I barely had time to set my drink down before he sent me sprawling, but as we wrestled for control of my gun, I still managed to catch a glimpse of Crank Girl shaking that

adorable arm of hers all about. As I snapped the man's neck, she moved to putting her left hip in, and I nearly lost myself in the sight.

Machine gun fire suddenly exploded, and Crank Girl had to finish shaking her hips from under the bed. I rolled, leapt, flipped, landed near the table, dodged a hail of bullets, took a quick sip of my drink and hastily assembled my assault rifle. A grenade exploded, and the shrapnel made it nearly impossible for me to see Crank Girl put her left intestine in.

A helicopter was outside our window and a nasty hitman was reloading his machine gun. I ran to the window, leapt into the helicopter, yanked the man out and sent him plummeting to a dismal finish 20 stories below. I could see the pilot was nothing but a terrified lackey; I had to win his confidence fast.

"Please, sir," he shouted, "don't kill me!"

"I'm on your side," I told him. "Just take a look at that!"

I pointed to the window, where both of us could see Crank Girl putting her whole self in, putting her whole self out. The pilot nodded appreciatively, his animal instincts soothed. As soon as the hokey-pokey was finished, I waved to Crank Girl; she grabbed her suitcase and joined us in the helicopter.

"You'll pay for that," she said.

"I had to know if I could trust you," I replied. "Only a red-blooded American would know the hokey-pokey the way you did. I don't do business with commies, after all." I looked at the pilot and said, "Take us to Raphael. I believe he'll be wanting to see us."

(Next week: The awful truth about Raphael and Crank Girl, and a look into Secret Agent 23's past.)

Into The Lion's Den

Friday, April 8, 1994

(Last week: Special Agent 23 and Crank Girl boarded a helicopter headed straight into the lion's den, the home of the nefarious Columbian drug lord Raphael. Their pilot is a man named Benny. He is not important to the story.)

"What do you mean, we're headed straight into the lion's den, the home of the nefarious Columbian drug lord Raphael?" Crank Girl exclaimed.

"What do you think I mean?" I replied. "I mean exactly that: we're headed straight into the lion's den, the home of the nefarious Columbian drug lord Raphael."

"But you can't take me straight into the lion's den, the home of the nefarious Columbian drug lord Raphael!" she moaned horribly. "I've got an entire suitcase full of prime Columbian powder, stolen right out of the lion's den, the home of the nefarious Columbian drug lord Raphael, and if we head back into the lion's den, the home of the nefarious Columbian drug lord Raphael, then I'm sure to wind up—"

"Lion food?" I offered.

"I'm sure to wind up dead!" she cried.

"You can't spend the rest of your life running from the nefarious Columbian drug lord Raphael," I told her. "Eventually, his men will find you, will drag you back to him, to his lion's den and then, you'll wind up lion food. You may as well face him now, with me, Special Agent 23. Besides, I've got a score to settle with that old nefarious Columbian drug lord."

"If you look out the left side of the helicopter," our unimportant pilot Benny announced, "you'll see lots and lots of beautiful trees, and if you look out the right side, you'll see we're now beginning our descent into the lion's den, the home of the nefarious Columbian drug lord Raphael. On behalf of myself and the entire staff, we hope you enjoy your stay." He offered us two sets of those little plastic wings to pin to our shirts. That was pretty nice of him, I thought.

The helicopter landed smoothly, and we stepped out onto the landing pad. We were on top of a tremendously large and opulent mansion, in the middle of a secluded rain forest somewhere. Nasty looking fellows with big automatic weapons were everywhere. A very tall man with a black suit and mirrored sunglasses met us at the helipad.

"You must be Special Agent 23," the man said.

"And you must be Raphael," I replied, shaking his hand cordially.

"Indeed," he said. He turned his attention from me to Crank Girl, and said, "You must be Crank Girl."

She nodded, clasping the suitcase full of prime Columbian powder to her chest. "And you must be very angry."

He smiled, and replied, "You must be very frightened." He turned to me, and said, "You must be very hungry. Shall we step inside?"

He led the two of us into his tremendously large and opulent mansion, and I couldn't help but notice how fabulous the decoration was. "You must be very wealthy," I told him.

He laughed, and said, "You must be very jealous."

We entered a tremendously large and opulent dining room, replete with a tremendously large and opulent feast. As we sat down to eat, Raphael said, "You must be very curious about a few things."

I nodded wittily.

"Allow me to fill you in, Special Agent 23." With a deft stroke of his arm, he swept Crank Girl into a slow, lascivious embrace. The two of them turned toward me slowly, smiling, then laughing.

"You're such a fool, Scotto," Crank Girl said. "Do you honestly think we'd let you survive this trip?"

The big picture began to unfurl in front of me. I'd been set up, horribly set up, by a girl who could fake the hokey pokey as well as the best of them.

I turned to Crank Girl and said, "But what about your suitcase of prime Columbian powder?"

"It's baby powder," she replied, "and it will fetch a pretty penny on the black market, I assure you."

"So," I said, "what do you expect me to do?"

Raphael laughed loudly and said, "I expect you to die, Agent 23! I expect you to die!"

He punched a small control panel on the table next to him. The floor dropped out underneath my chair, and I fell suddenly into a long dark chasm. I landed on a giant spike. I was dead.

My soul wandered up to heaven, where I encountered St. Peter roller blading 'round the Pearly Gates. Before St. Peter could even begin checking my files, however, a welcome sight sailed into view: my old friend, the archangel Gabriel.

Unfortunately, Gabriel wasn't too pleased to see me. "You let them fire us. That was my career, do you understand? Get out of my sight!"

My soul was forced to wander down to hell. And of course, my old friend Satan was waiting for me, along with another old friend, good ol' Crank Boy. The two were drunk, and laughing like crazy.

"Do you think we're letting you join this party, after everything you did to us?" Satan shouted. "Get out of here!"

My soul was left with nowhere to go, and so it returned to my body. I pulled myself off the spike. Now, time to attend to the business at hand.

"Raphael," I muttered, "here I come..."

(Next week: Cooking tips!)

Ninjitsu Revenge For Agent 23

Friday, April 15, 1994

(Last week: Special Agent 23 narrowly escapes death at the hands of the nefarious Columbian drug lord Raphael and his double agent lover Crank Girl. Now, Scotto wants revenge...)

Using the ninjitsu skills I picked up during my two weeks in the Far East, I climbed the sheer walls of the deadly pit, and found myself back in the dining room. Raphael and Crank Girl were nowhere to be seen. Obviously they were somewhere in this voluminous mansion, celebrating what must have appeared to be the unceremonious end of Special Agent 23. Boy, were they in for a surprise, and I wasn't just whistling Dixie!

Little did I realize that hidden cameras all over the mansion were tracking my movements with eerie precision. In a secret underground control room, Raphael's agents of doom were watching me, sounding silent alarms, sharpening their swords, revving up their chain saws, polishing their shrimp forks and charging up their weed eaters.

Soon a deadly army of mafioso goons was sweeping through the mansion. They were not to find me that easily, however. Using the ninjitsu skills I picked up during my four days in Yugoslavia, I traveled the corridors by crawling along the ceilings, hanging directly over the heads of the goons and out of sight of the Orwellian camera equipment.

Within minutes, I found myself in Raphael's bedroom suite, an enormous room replete with a hot tub the size of a Greyhound bus, a canopied waterbed the size of a convenience store, and a fireplace the size of the Crab Nebula. I knew I had to be careful; Crank Girl had a keen sense of hearing, thanks to the bionic implants given her by Lindsay Wagner.

"In mere hours, Crank Girl," Raphael was saying, "those stolen nuclear missiles will be fully operational, and soon, the entire Western world will be on its knees!"

"Oh, Raphael," Crank Girl said dreamily, nearly swooning, "you're the hunkiest villain a girl could ever love!"

"Say, what's this?" Raphael said, going through his mail. I watched in absolute horror as he pulled out a copy of today's issue of the *Northern Iowan*. He began leafing through it.

"Turn to the Arts section," Crank Girl suggested, a derisive sneer on her face. "Let's see what Special Agent 23's column has to say *this* week."

"Yes, let's!" Raphael agreed. "I'll bet after that nasty encounter with the deadly spike in my dining room, his sense of humor has really *sharpened up!*" He laughed loudly, as only a villain would, at his own terrible joke.

I knew I had to act fast. Raphael began reading aloud, "Using the ninjitsu skills I picked up..." If he caught up to this part, he'd know I was hanging on the ceiling in his own bedroom!

Using the ninjitsu skills I picked up during my last visit to Six Flags, I did a quadruple flip through the air, landing on Raphael's desk and scattering his paperwork all over the room.

"Drop that college newspaper!" I shouted. It was an empty threat — I was unarmed, but I had the element of surprise. However, Crank Girl's training was just as deadly as my own, having received her secret agent status from Sally Struthers' correspondence course, and in an instant she had raised a pistol and begun firing. Luckily, the ninjitsu skills I picked up during my stay in Valhalla, the hall of the gods, allowed me to instantly camouflage myself so that I was indistinguishable from the wall hanging behind me, a large knitted image of Hal Linden.

"You won't escape me that easily!" Raphael cried. He sounded another silent alarm, an alarm that silently played the melody to Michael Jackson's "Wanna Be Startin' Somethin'," and an entire wall slid open across the room from me. I stared in absolute horror as an army of flesh-eating zombies slowly lumbered into the room. My camouflage couldn't fool their unceasing desire for human flesh, which was leading them directly to me.

"Wish we could stay for dinner," Raphael shouted as he and Crank Girl escaped through a hidden passageway, "but we've suddenly lost our appetite for *secret agent!* Ha ha ha ha ha ha..."

It was a desperate situation. I couldn't let Raphael and Crank Girl escape, not with the possibility of nuclear disaster hanging over my head. I had to act fast. Using the ninjitsu skills I picked up back at the dawn of time itself, when God and I created the universe and everything that exists, I waded deep into the morass of zombie bodies, ripping and pulling and yanking and smashing, trying desperately to make my way to the hidden passageway Raphael had used.

But there seemed to be no end to these zombies, and soon it became apparent that for all my highly vaunted ninjitsu skills, given to me by Keith Carradine himself, I would soon be overwhelmed and devoured by zombies. It was at that moment that Raphael's army of goons burst into the room, armed with automatic weapons, swords, chain saws, shrimp forks, weed eaters, and kitchen sinks, and I knew my time here on Earth was finished...

(Next week: 23 ways to serve your grandmother on toast.)

Better Than Unbridled Lust

Friday, April 22, 1994

(Last week: As the nefarious Columbian drug lord Raphael escaped with double agent Crank Girl, Special Agent 23 found himself surrounded by Raphael's goons and a horde of flesh-eating zombies.)

I knew it was all over for Western civilization if Raphael got a chance to use those black market nuclear weapons. The stench of undead, rotting zombie bodies was enough to make me long for the days of cool, serene bubble baths back at Crank Girl's place. That treacherous double agent! It would be a pleasure bringing her to justice, if I could just avoid having my brain eaten.

It was time to start hauling out the heavy artillery. As the goons began firing and the zombies began tearing at my skin, I frantically punched a series of buttons on my special agent wristwatch/doomsday device. Instantly, a high-pitched, screeching tone – the kind only dogs and flesh-eating zombies can hear – filled the air, and the zombies began to collapse in a strange undead parody of ear-splitting pain.

The goons hesitated, seeing their horrible allies immobilized, and that hesitation was all I needed. I pressed another series of buttons on my wristwatch/doomsday device, and another high-pitched, screeching tone – the kind only dogs and Raphael's goons can hear – filled the air, and the goons began to collapse in a strange mafioso parody of ear-splitting pain.

A desperate search turned up the secret passageway into which Raphael and Crank Girl had escaped. I slid open the secret panel in the floor, turned on the flashlight on my special agent wristwatch/doomsday device, and lowered myself into the tunnel in the floor. Quickly I was sliding out of control, down, down, down, toward some unseen and unspeakably weird destination. Never before had I been so frightened, as I plummeted with ever-increasing speed, miles and miles and miles into what must have been the very bowels of the Earth itself.

I saw my entire life flash before my eyes. I saw all the good times I'd had, growing up on the good side of Waterloo, performing in little skits like *Fiddler On The Roof* at the local playhouse, graduating from high school without ever once being stabbed. I remembered the warm glow I felt in my heart of hearts when "We Are The World" was released. I remembered the warm glow I felt in my heart of hearts when my friend and I broke into our church and drank the blood of Christ. I remembered my days at UNI, where I double majored in theatre and killing people. But mostly, I remembered the Alamo.

Horribly weird, strangely psychedelic light began to fill the tunnel, and an ominous voice soon filled the air. The voice spoke in some strange kind of foreign language, and I once again cursed the fact that people on this planet

still spoke languages other than English. Suddenly I shot out of the tunnel and sailed through the air. I barely had time to activate the instant airbag option on my special agent wristwatch/doomsday device.

I landed softly, leapt to my feet and looked about me. I was in a small room, surrounded by five closed doors. It was obvious that Raphael and Crank Girl had slipped away through one of these doorways. But how would I ever tell which one?

A sign on the first door said, "Dimension of Unbridled Lust." I decided to save that one for later. The next door said, "Valhalla, the Hall of the Gods." That place was no fun these days, not since Thor had begun starring in his own comic book. The next door said, "Free drugs!" and it took all of my training to keep me from abandoning my mission entirely. The next door said, "Nothing But Sequels!" I decided to try that door next time around. The final door provided the clue: "Raphael and Crank Girl went this way!"

I mustered up all my courage and threw open the door. And what I saw amazed even me...

(Next week: The thrilling conclusion to the adventures of Special Agent 23!)

Star-Spangled Scotto Foils Alien Ted Lange

Friday, April 29, 1994

(Last week: Special Agent 23 escaped certain death at the claws of flesh-eating zombies and followed the nefarious Columbian drug lord Raphael and his double agent lover, Crank Girl, into a secret passage that led deep, deep into the very bowels of the earth. Now, Agent 23 has opened one secret door too many, and is about to learn much more than he ever bargained for...)

I stepped hesitantly through the door and found myself in an incredibly vast, amazingly bizarre chamber with bank after bank of strange control panels, replete with all sorts of flashing lights, indecipherable hieroglyphs, switches and levers and buttons and screens, bank after bank extending off into the distance as far as the eye could see and up into the air as far as the eye could see.

In the center of the room, directly ahead of me, stairs led up to a giant raised platform, surrounded by glistening fluorescent railings, where several rows of some foreign kind of computer terminals rested.

"Foreigners," I spat. "Just as I suspected..."

I saw Raphael and Crank Girl standing there, staring at a three-dimensional floating hologram of the planet Earth. Raphael was arguing heatedly with a mysterious hooded and cloaked figure.

"So," I said to myself, "at last I've found Raphael's black market contact, the one who will sell him the nuclear weapons that will bring Western civilization to its metaphorical knees..."

Capitalizing on my Native American stealth training, I moved through the room as quietly as if I had no weight, never once breaking a twig or stepping on a leaf and giving myself away. I climbed the steps slowly, managing to overhear a bit of Raphael's argument.

"That's absolutely ridiculous!" Raphael shouted. "No one wants to see a *Love Boat* for the '90s!"

"I'm telling you," the figure replied in a murky, nearly unintelligible voice, "now's the perfect time for a Gavin Macloud comeback!"

Now was the time to act. I leapt over the glistening fluorescent railing and delivered an unbelievably cool kick to Raphael's chest. Raphael raised his gun. Suddenly, to Raphael's dismay, Crank Girl leapt in front of Raphael to engage me in combat, and Raphael couldn't get off a shot.

As Crank Girl swung a fist my direction, I grabbed her arm and prepared to flip her like a burger. As she swooped over my shoulder, she whispered in my ear, "Don't worry, Scotto, I'm here to help..."

She landed flat on her back, and I dived out of the way of Raphael's gunfire. The bullets sailed through the air, sank into several of the banks of

blinky lights and whatnot and soon bursts of sparks and small explosions began to erupt throughout the room.

"You fool!" the hooded figure shouted, knocking Raphael's gun out of his hands. "You've ruined everything!"

The hooded figure yanked Raphael up by his throat, and began choking the life out of him. Meanwhile, Crank Girl leapt up, and I demanded an explanation.

"Aliens," she whispered.

"I knew it," I said bitterly. "It's always foreigners in this business, always foreigners..."

Raphael fought back desperately, yanking the hood away from the hooded figure, and Crank Girl and I gasped as we recognized the face of Ted Lange, the bartender from *Love Boat*.

"Aliens who resemble the cast of *Love Boat*," Crank Girl amended.

As Raphael and Ted Lange struggled desperately and explosion after explosion ricocheted throughout the chamber, I scooped up Raphael's gun and pointed it at Crank Girl.

"You traitorous scum," I said.

"You've got it all wrong," she replied. "Someone had to find out where Raphael was getting his nuclear weapons."

She motioned to a suitcase on one corner of the platform. "He planned on trading that suitcase full of baby powder that I stole for a suitcase full of alien-made nuclear weapons."

She grabbed the suitcase of nukes, and said, "We've got to get out of here. If this spaceship explodes while these nuclear weapons are still on board, the whole planet is doomed..."

I took one last glance at Raphael, who was shouting, "And you'll never get the original Gopher back..." I turned, calmly fired twice, and Raphael and Ted Lange collapsed in a heap.

"You... you just killed our first contact with an alien race!" Crank Girl exclaimed.

"I'd do it again, too, in the name of all that's American in this world!" I replied proudly. I took Crank Girl's arm, and we dashed down the steps, dodging explosions, debris, and flying blinky lights. The Star-Spangled Banner began playing loudly in the background. Crank Girl and I suddenly froze in place, and all the explosions froze in place as well. The closing credits began to roll.

Random Staffers Offer Heartfelt Farewells

Friday, May 6, 1994

Well, Random Rangers, it's been an incredible year here at *Random Access*, and on behalf of myself and the entire *Random Access* staff, I'd just like to thank all of you loyal, misguided readers who didn't decide to kill me this year. Your pal Scotto's about to graduate and move to a real city, where I'll be doing some landscaping, some plumbing, and a great deal of illegal drugs. But before I go, I thought I'd pass on five bits of hard-earned advice to those of you who might be lonely, lost, and wandering through this murky, terrifying, existential forest we call Life:

1. When approached by aliens while hallucinating wildly on all kinds of illegal drugs, stay calm. You will come down eventually, and besides, they are probably only tourists.
2. Resorting to violence is no way to solve the problems of the world. It is, however, a great deal of fun, especially when drunk.
3. When being served specks of plutonium in your waffles by the American government, don't count on Aunt Jemima to pay your medical expenses.
4. The next time a number 17 or a number 23 tells you you're a complete asinine jerk, believe it. Numbers don't lie.
5. Feeling down? Look at it this way: Every day you're not being shelled by the Serbs is a great way to be alive!

I'd also like to take this time to let you know what the staff of *Random Access*, past and present, is up to these days. For many of these insipid wastes of DNA, *Random Access* was the closest thing to stardom they'll ever experience, and each one of them would like to thank you, our loyal, misguided readers, for paying more attention to us than to, say, student government or some such.

"*Random Access* was a cathartic experience for me," says former cast member, my good friend Crank Boy. "The expensive, illegal drugs... the rampant sexual misbehavior... it was just like a Van Halen video in the early '80s." Crank Boy now volunteers as a Big Brother in Waterloo during the day, and at night, he volunteers as a Big Sister at Tuxedo's triple-X dance club. "One thing I learned during the run of *Random Access* was to let it all hang out, even the parts with strange diseases."

"The suicide episode was a challenge for me as an actor," reports former cast member and close friend, Laurel. [*note: This episode is currently not available to the public. It is a "serious" episode that ends with Laurel committing suicide, and Scotto getting drunk and watching television. – Andrea Change*] "I think we beat Kurt Cobain to the punch on that one, and we did it with a lot more

finesse." Laurel now divides her time between starting a new religion ("it's the end of the world out there, you know?") and hunting vampires in the Cedar Falls metro area. She says, "Don't be surprised if your loved ones turn out to be bloodsuckers."

"I was never able to kick the 'pansy' image," laments former cast member, the archangel Gabriel. "I guess wings and a halo aren't exactly 'macho' accoutrements, huh." After his stint with *Random Access*, Gabriel returned to his former career in the service of God Almighty, performing "odd jobs, you know, rehearsing with the choirs of seraphim, keeping those adorable little cherubs out of trouble, cheering up the Messiah with little mime skits when He gets depressed..."

Former cast member Satan, Lord of Evil, says, "Doing *Random Access* was great for my self-esteem. People need to understand that just because I'm the enemy of all things good in the world doesn't mean I don't have a sensitive side." Satan reports that since his time on *Random Access*, the number of Satanists on the UNI campus has risen dramatically, a statistic he's quite proud of. "This just proves that higher education isn't a waste after all!"

A couple of *Random Access* staffers weren't available for comment. Beerbelly the Invisible Clown has joined an invisible circus, where he delivers his "special" brand of fun to *all* the little boys and girls. Nefarious Columbian drug lord Raphael saw his fame increase after his cameos with us, and has taken a small part as the nasty babysitter on upcoming episodes of *Full House*.

Thanks for reading this year, friends. Question everything you've ever been told about anything. And get drunk often!

Distracted Tales

Teeth

12/13/2001

This piece was part of a Scrytch project wherein David Moses Fruchter offered up the opening phrase, "They found teeth in my grandmother's heart," and left it to each individual scrytcher to come up with tales to accompany this opening. The following is my submission.

— Scotto

They found teeth in my grandmother's heart. Gold teeth, to be precise. Four hundred and twenty-eight gold teeth, to be even more precise — christ knows she would have put more in there if she'd been able to find any more. They also found nearly twenty-eight thousand gold doubloons from the sunken wreck of the Spanish pirate ship Castillo — well, that's where the doubloons came from originally, of course, but grandmother "liberated" them from an armored truck while they were on their way to a museum exhibit in Barcelona, and stuffed them in her heart because "the cops just never check there, you see." Which makes sense: I doubt they teach fresh-faced recruits at the academy that a "cavity search" should include open-heart surgery to check for the goods. And that's why grandmother's arrest record was a mile long, but she never had a single conviction.

She had stereo equipment in her heart, some of the finest receivers and speakers you could imagine. Of course, it was all still in boxes — a god awful waste of her heart, if you ask me. They found approximately eight tons of diamonds, rubies, sapphires and pearls; fifty-eight tons of gold and silver necklaces, earrings and fancy tiaras; three hundred and nine rare luxury sports cars, none worth less than a million dollars even; hundreds of millions of dollars worth of treasury bonds, bank notes, and unmarked bills; fifty-two pounds of moon rocks; a live unicorn; and the entire state of Louisiana. Grandfather always used to say that grandmother had no heart, but he was such an asshole.

So naturally they wanted to prosecute, and I can certainly understand why. But then they started searching the rest of her, and things got a lot more complicated. They opened up her pancreas and found four hundred fifty-eight thousand, three hundred and twenty-two refugee children, quietly

minding their own business and making new lives for themselves, relying on the nearly eight million tons of MREs she'd somehow managed to steal from the army over the years. They found clothing and blankets and teddy bears to go around; a hundred thousand computers that were teaching kids to read; and thirty-eight thousand robot dogs to keep them all company. And in her intestines, they found the older kids, in training, armed with Kalashnikov rifles and hunting knives, prepared to defend grandmother's innards to the death if necessary.

It got to be a real diplomatic hassle by the time they got inside her spleen. She had nuclear weapons in there, for christ's sake, and she wasn't a damn "rogue state" — she was my frickin' grandmother! Where were all these kids gonna go? How'd she steal the *Mona Lisa* in the first place? Why didn't anyone notice when Louisiana went missing? Was she still an American citizen, even with all those foreign nationals running around inside her stomach, developing their own space program, and quietly preparing to migrate to the stars? They bickered and bickered amongst themselves, desperate for an easy answer, terrified of what they might find in her kidneys or her bowels or, god forbid, her womb.

She solved their problems in her own stubborn way, of course. She died in their holding cell, her organs all splayed open like a frog in a high school biology class. The floor of the cell filled up with blood, and then before anyone really saw it coming, the entire prison was drowning in grandmother's blood. Her blood just kept pumping out of that massive heart of hers, and no one could figure out a way to stop it. The population of grandmother's innards — kids who'd seen their parents bombed and tortured and murdered, scientists who'd had their families disappeared for terrible reasons, the occasional stray idealist who still believed in the promise of the future — all rocketed to the moon, to grandmother's secret terraformed moon base, leaving planet earth a bloody, tormented sea, wiped clean of its disease and mania and ill-considered fast food chains.

But sometimes I still wonder why she let them catch her in the first place. And I wonder why, of all her many spoils and treasures, the first thing they found were those goddamn teeth.

From the Renegade Files of Scotto: Ari Fleischer Can Kiss My Ass

Editorial from Trip – the Journal of Psychedelic Culture #8 (winter 2002)

I need to be very clear about this, because unsubstantiated rumors are already swirling around on the World Wide Inter-Web, and my henchmen can only stop so many of these rumors with their usual clever mix of intimidation tactics and large payouts of gray market strange white powder. So here is the truth, once and for all: yes, I was offered the position of Director of the Office of Homeland Security.

You may remember in the hours immediately following the awful attacks of September 11, 2001, that the President was incommunicado for a while, as he flew from one military base to another. Well, it's time for the truth to come out: President Bush actually flew to my secret bunker underneath the mountains just outside of Cedar Falls, Iowa, where my personal sushi chef and my small army of Filipino slave girls attended to our every need. In those hours, it was I who first suggested to President Bush that he might well need to rethink the problem from a completely new vantage point. My first suggestion – pave the entire Earth and move the human race to the space ark that the aliens have hidden behind the dark side of the moon – did not go over well with the damn “Earth first!” members of Bush's Cabinet, who still seem to believe the deal JFK struck with the aliens won't hold up in an inter-dimensional court of law. The fact remains: JFK's signature on that document means we're going for a long, permanent ride on that space ark eventually no matter what; he sold out the Earth's oxygen supply in exchange for his own little one-way trip to the Dimension of Hexagonal Lust, his robot double got wacked to cover his absence, and the aliens are due to collect in 2012. The real question is: why don't we just pave the Earth first, spend a few years driving around *really, really fast*, and then blow this popsicle stand? I don't think the Bush administration is up for asking hard questions like this.

So that's when I suggested creating the Office of Homeland Security. Apparently *some* people still think “law enforcement” and “intelligence” are reasonable ways to keep all the damn crazies and assholes out of this great land of our nation. Well, *forget it*, people. My idea at the time was building an enormous electrified barbed wire fence that goes around the entire country. What the United States also needs is a very, very large sign, probably suspended from orbit somehow, that says “THIS COUNTRY PROTECTED BY ACME HOME SECURITY SYSTEMS!” These signs work like a charm for keeping burglars out of rich people's houses, and will undoubtedly also keep crazies and assholes out of this great land of our nation, especially if the sign is in the shape of a police badge.

I guess the idea of an Office of National Security kind of stuck with President Bush, because once he got back to D.C., he started calling me and

bugging me to actually run the damn thing. The problem is, I can't stand his press secretary, Ari Fleischer. You may remember the whole scandal with Bill Maher, host of *Politically Incorrect*, getting scolded by Ari Fleischer for having an unpopular opinion and then having the audacity to express it. Fleischer stated: “It's a terrible thing to say, and it's unfortunate. There are reminders to all Americans that they need to watch what they say, watch what they do, and this is not a time for remarks like that; there never is.”

Oh *really*.

With all due respect, Ari “Would Someone *Please* Get This Broom Handle Out Of My Ass?” Fleischer, we the American people will continue irritating the shit out of you for the rest of our natural lives, what with our wacky “ideas” and our zany “freedom of speech,” long after you and the entire American government is finally replaced by the alien leaders who will supervise our exit to the space ark with their Electric Human Prods of Shameful Delight. You can keep fighting your war on drugs and your war on terrorism, but don't you fucking *dare* tell us what to think or when to say what we think. Despite every recommendation I've made to every secretly convened Congressional panel I've faced over the last 142 years of my unnatural, strange white powder preserved life, this great land of our nation remains a democracy, not a totalitarian regime where you, Ari “*Please, It Hurts So Much Up There!*” Fleischer, get to wear a funny mustache and march around in shiny boots ordering your minions to do the yard work and take out the trash and, oh, when you get around to it, round up all the dissidents and have them shot out by the garage. This world is bad enough already, without you trying to shut all the smart people up.

Dream Sequence

This play premiered at Theatre Babylon's Nine Holes Festival 1999 in Seattle, directed by Bill Ratcliffe and featuring Brad Cook as MAN and Lydia Ratcliffe as WOMAN.

It was later performed as part of Annex Theatre's cabaret, Spin The Bottle, in Seattle in May of 2002, featuring JenMoon as WOMAN, and Scotto as MAN.

(The play is intended to be performed not as some kind of ethereal, "dreamy" thing, but with exquisite precision, a rapidity of pacing, overlapping of lines, a definite sense of progressing from point A to point B. Scenes Two, Three, and Four in particular can and should be staged with a significant amount of overlapping and simultaneous dialogue. Feel free to delete or rearrange lines in order to accomplish desired rhythms.)

(Scene One.)

(A dark bedroom. MAN and WOMAN are asleep in a double bed center stage, in a cool, dim blue light. Suddenly the MAN comes wide awake in a fit, and reaches for the lamp at the end table, quickly switching it on. He shakes the WOMAN, attempting to stir her.)

MAN: Honey? Honey, are you awake?

WOMAN: *(groggy)* What?

MAN: Sorry, I just... I just need someone to talk to. I just had a horrible dream.

WOMAN: Oh... a bad dream...

MAN: A really bad dream. I dreamt that I was at work, in my office, working at my computer. I was doing a spreadsheet for the new fiscal year. It kept getting bigger and bigger. I kept having to scroll to the right and scroll to the bottom, and there were more and more rows and more and more columns, an endless array of figures and sums and formulas. Eventually these figures and sums became conscious and I realized that I wasn't navigating this spreadsheet at all; rather, the spreadsheet was wrapping itself around me, one row at a time, strangling me, plastering itself all about my body, wringing the life from me. And I watched the lifeblood pour from my mouth, collect in a puddle on the floor, a puddle of numbers and mathematics.

WOMAN: Wow... creepy. Then what happened?

MAN: That's when I woke up.

WOMAN: Oh. *(sleepily)* That's interesting. You know, I was having one of those end of the world dreams, where we were back in my old college town, my old college friends and I, and the students were all rioting against the government, and it was getting pretty bad. They were throwing Molotov

cocktails and bricks through windows, and people were getting hurt. I remember seeing this one guy try to pull down a street lamp, and I remember telling him to stop but he wouldn't listen, and the thing came down and crushed another guy's skull, and I saw it all happen. Pretty soon I started to realize that this wasn't the government at all and those weren't the cops we were fighting. Those were archangels, and these were the last days, and we were being herded. Into our berths, you know? Into our spots in hell.

MAN: Goodness. Then what happened?

WOMAN: That's when you woke me up.

MAN: Oh. *(sleepily, laying back down in bed a bit)* You ever get in one of those stupid hippie time loops where you start to wonder if your whole life isn't just a stupid dream that some asshole has been having?

WOMAN: Like a bad episode of *Star Trek*?

MAN: Yeah.

WOMAN: Fuck no. I hate stupid hippie time loops.

MAN: *(switches off light)* Well, good night, sweetie. Sorry to wake you. *(They kiss. Blackout.)*

(Scene Two. Same as above. MAN switches on the light.)

MAN: Good God, what a dream.

WOMAN: *(groggy, coming to life)* A dream...

MAN: I was in a small industrial town somewhere, gray and lifeless and miserable, and we were within thirty minutes of the bombs dropping.

WOMAN: Yes, I was dreaming, wasn't I...

MAN: The nuclear bombs, I mean. Someone had launched the missiles somewhere I guess. I was driving around in a car with my father, a man I haven't seen in years, a man I don't particularly care for.

WOMAN: It was a telethon. I was answering phones at a telethon. Except people weren't calling in to donate money. They were calling in to have their lives saved.

MAN: I didn't have anything to say to him, we were just driving around, waiting, wondering where ground zero was going to be.

WOMAN: It was twenty-four hours to judgment day, and lucky callers could be saved.

MAN: Are you even a Christian any more?

WOMAN: Suddenly there was a flood and I was riding around in an underwater submarine. The flood was part of the end, and I was being swept away, but I was given enough air in the submarine so that I could survive long enough to see that it was happening.

MAN: Well, soon enough I could feel that the missiles were on the horizon. I can't describe the way my knuckles wrapped themselves around the steering wheel, but they did, and all I could think of was that I really desperately

wished this man next to me would just get out of my car. *(pause; he sits back)*

I think we're watching way too much USA Network before going to bed.

WOMAN: Too much fucking cough medicine.

MAN: That's what it is, you're right.

(He switches off the light. Blackout.)

(Scene Three.)

MAN: *(sits up, turns on the light; he is more visibly disturbed than he has been in the previous two scenes)* Holy shit.

(WOMAN moans softly.)

MAN: I was at this donut shop and I was at the end of the line, and I was incredibly hungry, and the lady at the front just couldn't make up her mind, and I had this weedeater with me, so I just whipped it out and started whacking everybody in the place with it, while singing one of my beloved favorites from the hit musical *La Cage Aux Folles* and balancing a large bowl of pig's blood on my head, and when everyone was dead, I ate every damn donut in that donut shop, even the ones with amphibian scales and some of my favorite silicate minerals, including feldspar and quartz.

WOMAN: *(rousing herself)* I don't fucking believe it. I'm not even a Christian any more.

MAN: What? What? What?

WOMAN: Well, I was sitting in our bedroom with Jesus Christ, and we were talking about something fairly inconsequential as I recall, when suddenly these three giant McDonaldland Fry Guys burst into the room, with huge gaping maws filled with row after row of razor sharp incisors, and they shouted "Mmm, Jesus, yummy!" and flew across the room and sank their teeth into His neck, and I just started laughing like crazy. The Lord's head came off and bounced across the bed.

MAN: Are you serious?

WOMAN: Yeah, I'm serious.

MAN: That's fucked up.

WOMAN: So wait a minute, you ate all the donuts?

MAN: Yeah. Then suddenly I was competing in the esteemed Olympic luge event – naked, of course – and I accidentally skipped the track and started plowing through the crowds, severing limb after limb, I mean, the air was literally filled with flying body parts, and eventually I gained so much momentum that the last row of people I smashed into were pulverized into tiny particles of blood and tissue, and suddenly little elves appeared and started making pink snowmen out of the blood-stained snow, attaching the severed human limbs for added realism, and the snowmen came to a horrible kind of half life and began singing and dancing a tuneful jig before destroying the city in a sudden huge burst of satanic vigor.

WOMAN: Well, after that I was in a big time rock band, and we toured the nation singing nothing but power ballads, abusing ourselves with drug after drug, taking horrible advantage of innocent young groupies, making them perform horrible stunt shows with animal fat and solid gold shrimp forks, until one day the aliens showed up and decided to use me as a birdie in an interstellar game of badminton.

MAN: How much cough syrup are you drinking anyways?

WOMAN: It's all slippery, and it's not something I understand, or care to understand. I just want sleep.

MAN: Well, after that I realized that I actually cared about something. I realized that there was a point to what I was doing, and some kind of underlying meaning to the situation.

WOMAN: Oh shut up already.

MAN: No, I'm serious. I realized that I had a purpose, and some kind of significance from a universal perspective. I realized that I had found an escape hatch from my bleak nine to five existence.

WOMAN: Once I discovered that I was in a man's body, and all I wanted to do was touch myself over and over again.

MAN: I realized that there was somebody tending some higher dimension, where everything made sense.

WOMAN: And I don't know how my imagination did it, but it did, it generated sensations in a part of my body that wasn't really there, and I can still feel the orgasm as plain as day.

(Pause.)

MAN: Wait a minute, would you say that again?

WOMAN: Absolutely not. Now go to sleep. I have to work tomorrow.

(After a beat, the MAN shuts off the light. Blackout.)

(Scene Four.)

MAN: *(sits up, turns on the light.)* How will I be able to tell if I am awake or dreaming, and does it matter? What about the sensation of being awake is so unique that I will know beyond a shadow of a doubt? Am I surfing some hypnogogic wave or am I alive, am I real?

WOMAN: Careful, sweetie, you're starting to sound like a hippie again.

MAN: I have to know!

WOMAN: Tonight I was the embodiment of sin itself. Do you have any conception of what that feels like?

MAN: I don't.

WOMAN: Think about it, then. I was the embodiment of sin itself. I lived and breathed as the embodiment of sin, and where I walked, everyone who encountered me knew that I was sin. I spread sin in my wake, and the path before me washed itself clean in anticipation of the arrival of sin.

MAN: Whoa, that's pretty heavy.

WOMAN: You're not listening, you fucking hippie. It's not so simple as "am I awake" or "am I asleep." Awake or not, I now know that my mind contains all kinds of possibilities, and that somewhere lurking deep within me is a monstrous well of sin. I know what it feels like down there, and I know what it feels like to wear it like a cloak.

MAN: *(rises from bed)* A monstrous well of sin, and that's what I'm sleeping with at night. Well, tonight I was in a position to make changes to the political situation. Tonight I was capable of standing up and making a difference, tonight I was able to take hold of all kinds of power and enforce my vision on a nation of people. And I eliminated injustice and unfairness, at the expense of a specific amount of personal freedom, the freedom of people who by and large did not deserve it to begin with. And now I know what power feels like, inside my head I know I have it in me to tell people what to do. To make them listen.

WOMAN: Once I was with someone I hated, and I plunged a knife deep into her chest. I can remember as vividly as anything I've ever experienced in life the way that knife sunk deep into her flesh. I can remember the sound it made; I can remember the way the flesh resisted only a bit before giving way to the blade. I remember the satisfaction I felt when I awoke.

(Long pause.)

MAN: I don't know that we should be sleeping together.

WOMAN: Shut up, you fucking hippie, and come to bed.

(Blackout.)

(Scene Five.)

MAN: *(sits up, turns on the light)* This is not what I expected.

WOMAN: *(wakes up groggy)* Oh man...

MAN: I didn't expect this at all.

WOMAN: I just expected a solid night's sleep once in a while, but you never shut up.

MAN: No, no, you don't get it.

WOMAN: It's always the same.

MAN: I was running through a crowded mall, and there was a gunman in pursuit.

WOMAN: I was sitting in a large bowl of ice cream, covered with whipped cream, giggling with delight as a huge amount of hot fudge rained down from above.

MAN: He was this squirrely fellow, with glasses, a moptop haircut, but dammit, he had a gun, and he was shooting people, and he was chasing me.

WOMAN: I was sitting on top of this ice cream, mind you, and my ass was absolutely frozen.

MAN: We were on this escalator in the mall, and I remember diving down to avoid this bullet, and I landed on this doctor friend of mine who sort of squealed like a stuck pig and spit up black bile all over me.

WOMAN: So then I'm covered in this warm chocolate fudge, right, and suddenly everything is right with the world, because, you know, it's not just chocolate, it's *amniotic* chocolate.

MAN: I just wonder what that means, that people are shooting at me in crowded malls.

WOMAN: Of course, moments later some giant toddler person comes along with a spoon, and I realize *I'm the cherry on top*, and my ass was *history!*

MAN: Whoa!

WOMAN: You know it! Fuck your little gunshot fantasies, man, those were big fucking teeth cutting me in half. This enormous toddler person was shouting "Now I eat you!" and then chomping me in half.

MAN: But what does it all *mean?*

WOMAN: What are you, an asshole? Who fucking cares? I mean, look, do you remember when you used to dream about getting away from that nine to five grind, when you dreamt about a life that exceeded your cubicle and whatever excuse you currently have for a career? Do you remember that dream, about a life that was completely extraordinary or at the very least unusual, and things would happen that you couldn't explain and they would be interesting and remarkable, do you remember that dream? Or did you ever wake up from that dream? Are you perhaps asleep right now with your head down at the desk, in between spreadsheets, in between being beaten down by the Man and coming home to me and having to deal with my pettiness and my own bad karma from a life that I also despise? Is that what's going on here?

MAN: You don't understand...

WOMAN: Let's talk about "arbitrary." Let's talk about "if you were born clear on the other side of the world, you might *still* be an asshole."

MAN: *(pause)* I'm starting to think you don't like me so much.

WOMAN: *(smiles)* Aren't you just cute as a button.

MAN: This is senseless...

WOMAN: I have to work really early every morning, and *that's* the senseless part. *(pause)* Just relax. Incorporate more cynicism into your diet. Ignore your dreams, because they are selling you out. Distracting you from reality. Don't aspire. Don't stress. Just sleep for a while, just sleep for a while.

(Blackout.)

(Scene Six)

(Lights come up on empty bed. For once, the MAN is asleep. After a long pause, the WOMAN enters with a bowl of ice cream and some assorted condiments on a

tray — a midnight snack. She sets the tray down on her side of the bed, and then climbs in next to the MAN. As quiet lullaby music plays in the background, she takes a canister of whipped cream and begins spraying it on the MAN's oblivious head.)

WOMAN: I just want you to get some quiet sleep for a change. Some kind of peace.

(As she finishes the can of whipped cream, she next takes a canister of hot fudge and pours it on the MAN's oblivious head.)

WOMAN: One more day, one more dollar. It's not as bad as all that, is it?

(After a long long pause, she drops a cherry on top of the mess she has made.)

MAN: (groggy) What's going on?

WOMAN: (softly) Now I eat you.

(slow fade to black)

From the Renegade Files of Scotto: Mounting The Psychedelic PR Campaign In Earnest — Meeting Notes from the Front

as seen in Trip — the Journal of Psychedelic Culture #4 (Spring 1999)

I was doing a lot of freelance consulting in those days, offering my particular brand of so-called “insight” to whoever was paying the most. I'd spent most of my career working for high-powered entertainment conglomerates, getting their stupid clients out of trouble, finding ever more creative ways to publicize and promote movies that offered absolutely no value to the human race, and feeling pretty good about the fat paychecks I promptly wasted on horrible weekends full of taxing debauchery. So imagine my surprise when an InfiniTek representative called me out of the blue, requesting I fly to London and meet with their Board of Directors for a project that would ultimately change my life.

InfiniTek was at the time the leading global pharmaceuticals and advanced weaponry conglomerate. By that time, the summer of 2008, the pharmaceuticals industry was in a deep recession. No new diseases had come along in at least eight months, and all the old ones were well in hand. It had become extremely apparent to InfiniTek's upper management that a change would have to take place in the political climate of the world if profit margins were to return to previous heights and if growth was to return to previous astonishing rates. It was no longer enough to be the leading supplier of every kind of medicinal pharmaceutical you could imagine; no, it was now obvious that so-called “recreational pharmaceuticals” were the key to answering all of the company's serious cash flow problems. But how to get around the ridiculous War on Drugs still being waged by the United States government?

How to circumvent the absurd propaganda machine that the United States had set in motion decades earlier?

“What we need,” said InfiniTek's chairman of the board, <name deleted for security reasons>, “is a counter-campaign, a public relations campaign that will target the next generation of recreational pharmaceutical users and open the ballgame wide up for competitive, aggressive marketing of psychedelic substances to the world. Mind you, I have no interest in the ‘hard’ drugs; no one wants to compete with the CIA *that* directly, after all. But the fact remains: it's time to open the floodgates, introduce significant and powerful alternatives to the goddamn monopoly that alcohol has on the public consciousness. There are other ways to alter human consciousness for fun and profit, dammit, and InfiniTek needs to be at the forefront!”

My mind was racing. Of all the seedy, disgusting things someone had ever paid me to do, this was among the worst — and that included my work to convince the entire population of China that *Melrose Place* had deep religious significance for all of them, and should be revered alongside the words of Confucius.

“Well,” I said slowly, ideas forming more rapidly than my sickened stomach could manage, “it's obvious we need to target the children.”

<name deleted for security reasons>'s eyebrow shot up.

“I'm listening,” he said.

“It's simple, really,” I replied. “You've got the resources, the undeserved respect, and the marketing clout to wield an iron fist wherever you want to. So: it's time to develop your own line of toys, gentlemen. It's time to start advertising those toys on Saturday morning cartoon programming. You'll make these toys more desirable than the Cabbage Patch Kid fad, the Beanie Baby fad, even the recent Cuddly Parasites of the Amazon fad. Soon every child in America will want these toys, and their parents will be powerless to resist. With your toys in the hands of the American populace, no politician will dare resist their influence as they grow to voting age and demand that psychedelic substances be legalized.”

“What kind of toy are you thinking of here?” asked InfiniTek CEO Alexander Strip.

“Action figures,” I replied. “Psychedelic substance action figures. Let's take the War on Drugs to the next level, except we'll cast the psychedelics as cosmic heroes, Team Altered-State, battling an onslaught of evil Republican menace. Just think of the possibilities. Captain Acid will lead our heroes into battle, with his high-powered Tripmobile and his devastating Self-Recursion Lasso. The mighty Doctor DMT will stun his enemies with the Tremendum Torpedo, and his sidekick Elfy the Entity will provide much needed comic relief. The Mysterious Mescalito will give us access to the niche ethnic market. The beautiful Princess Ecstasy will add that much needed feminine touch to the team. Let's not forget the relentless Mister Mushroom, either,

with his remarkable Swivel-Arm Battle Spores, or the ever-intriguing Agent K, whose prowess with far eastern ‘throwing syringes’ will send his foes hurtling into the K-hole at a moment’s notice. Their enigmatic commander, Heroic Dose, will send them on mission after mission, to win the War on Drugs once and for all.”

“Good Lord,” said <name deleted for security reasons>. “I think you’ve got something here.”

“The fight will not be easy, of course. Team Altered-State will have their work cut out for them against the vicious Drug Eradication Association, led by the maniacal General Bummer Trip and his fearsome Forfeiture Flamethrower.”

“Of course, of course,” muttered Alexander Strip.

“You could sell entire playsets. The Team Altered-State command headquarters, Code Name: Ground Control. The Team Altered-State chemical supply dump, Code Name: Pillbrook. The Team Altered-State r&r joint, Code Name: Tryptamine Tavern. The DEA will of course have its own hovercraft, the Schedule One. You picking up what I’m laying down here? Build brand awareness, turn it into the Team Altered-State half-hour cartoon, start releasing Team Altered-State feature films... eventually each playset will come with its own little vial full of Strange White Powder, and your revenues will go through the roof.”

It was a bold and brassy plan, coming at just the right time, a time when boredom was the primary motivator for most human beings in the western world. InfiniTek unleashed the full power of its immensely savvy marketing arm, and within fifteen years, the War on Drugs in the United States collapsed. Within a year after that, InfiniTek itself was worth more than the total gross national products of every nation on Earth combined, and its executives were widely said to be laughing their way all the way to the bank, and then to the lab, to pick up their own little vials full of Strange White Powder. It was a weird, weird situation, and consensus reality was pushed to its limits.

I, of course, collected a big fat paycheck and moved to a small Caribbean island with not vials but full-fledged vats of Strange White Powder. My little corner of the planet has not been the same since, I can tell you that for nothing.

Robinson Crusoe 2012

January 11, 2012

This diary is all I have left to me for companionship.

How foolish I was to think that the military could provide me with a safe haven during these turbulent years. As a way of life, obviously it can’t be topped, but when you get right down to it, having your plane shot down is no smart career move. They told me it was downright impossible for a Vision 23 Bionautic Jump Jet to get shot down. I said, “What about the Enzyme 17 or the Hang 10?” and they said, “Pshaw, Crusoe. Missiles will *bounce right off* the Vision 23.” Little did they know the Enemy™ wouldn’t be firing missiles. Little did they know the Enemy™ would find a way to *tickle* the Vision 23 Bionautic Jump Jet — I mean, it’s not my fault I have a sensitive underbelly when I’m flying. How was I supposed to know those things mounted to their carriers were *giant feathers*? War is certainly hell, that’s for sure.

I crash landed on a deserted island somewhere in the South Pacific. Yes, there are deserted islands here, thanks to the innovative McDonald’s Immigration Plan, which raided every last nook and cranny of this planet in order to find someone, *anyone* who could find a way to take pride in making pure cholesterol seem like food. It took me nearly two days to extract myself from the Vision 23 without anyone to help me. A Bionautic Jump Jet is designed to let the pilot feel the plane as though it was an extension of his own body — in other words, if you’ve ever wanted to know what it feels like to have a steel nose that extends fifteen feet beyond your face, this is the job for you. The problem is the Jump Jet usually doesn’t *want* you to disconnect; it seems to *like* having a little squishy gear inside of it. I barely escaped with my sanity. And there I was, and here I am today: alone on a deserted island. The military may not be looking for me yet, as War: The Final Battle is not going well for us these days. Thus, I may be left here for quite some time, with only the wreckage of the Jet and my wits to keep me alive. This should not be a problem. I have many survival skills, the island seems to have plenty of fruit and possibly vegetation to support me, and perhaps I may even find other people on the island. The adventure is on! I *will* survive this. I *will*.

February 22, 2012

Yet another dreadful day of fishing, gathering fruit, and building my bamboo mansion.

Out by the lagoon all day long, I spent nearly four hours with my makeshift line in the water, and all I managed to catch during that time was a bundle of Chicago mail, an angry pelican, and the black box from a downed passenger jet. This, of course, while having no nutritional value, was much fun to take back to the Jump Jet and play on the stereo. (“No, *you* shut up,” says the pilot. “No, *YOU* shut up,” shouts the co-pilot, and then, BOOM.) I

was left with bananas, nothing but bananas, scores and scores of bananas. I am wary of the plants and roots I've found so far. The medical kit in the Jet is not prepared for poison.

Life on this island is something else. Even without the presence of a superior officer, I feel as though I simply *must* arouse myself at 0600 every morning for calisthenics. I feel as though I simply *must* maintain some sense of human dignity; if I don't have some regimen of human activity, what will distinguish me from the trees? I mean, other than my lack of leaves, or bark. Or sap. Or roots. Or the use of, say, photosynthesis. If this means resorting to rituals that have absolutely *no value* to my *current situation*, then *SO BE IT!* I've managed to build quite a shelter for myself, using tools from the Jet, the knowledge stored in my cybernetically enhanced brain, and a Time/Life book on home improvement I rescued from the lagoon. It may not be up to military standards, but it is *Home* to me. Also, I've thought about building a motorcycle.

March 18, 2012

I can't stand the solitude any longer! I am going to go absolutely *mad!* The Jump Jet is *not* a suitable companion for a human being! It keeps trying to entice me to *touch* it places — as though its fuel line is in *any way* appealing to me! Somewhere on this island, there *must* be another human being, or perhaps a tribe hidden somewhere. I need to hear a voice that isn't mine. I need to feel the touch of a companion, hear the laugh of a friend, see the smile of someone who isn't staring out of a mirror at me. Curse the marketing mavens who dreamt up this "War To End All Wars For A Few Years!"

I'm setting off today on my solar-powered bamboo hovercraft, sailing across the lagoon to visit the unexplored lands off in the distance. I would have liked to take a store of fish with me, but all I've managed to procure by way of the lagoon lately is a giant statue of Dave Thomas, patron saint of the United Republic of Wendy, and a corvette.

April 13, 2012

You cannot imagine the joy in my heart on this day. Today, after long, long weeks of searching — erecting billboards, setting up instant cash machines, building a disco in the hopes that those pulsing rhythms might be just the trick — I have *finally* discovered life. Early this morning, I caught the glimpse of a naked, primitive native climbing through the trees above. Thinking to myself, "Perhaps this native will revere me as a god!" I followed him through the jungle at a discreet distance. Eventually, he allowed me to get close enough to lure him out of the trees with my handy Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ PEZ dispenser.

I promptly named this unfortunate dimwit Friday. Friday is going to be my cook now. Today he spent all day preparing a stew, using all sorts of

vegetables and roots and barks and vines — I can smell it from here, and it smells absolutely delish! Perhaps he thinks this is a fair trade for the sweet luxury of my simple blood-of-Christ flavored PEZ candies. At any rate, this stew will be the first decent meal I've had since the Jet's dry ration of escargot and Tang ran out. I've tried my luck at fishing for the past few weeks, but all I've come up with is a tire, three pounds of seaweed, an angry jellyfish, and a "53 Quadrillion to the 2 Zillionth Power Served!" sign. Perhaps I am not using the proper bait.

May 14, 2012

It has been over a month since I have been able to pick up my pen.

Apparently, Friday's stew was highly hallucinogenic. Moments after taking my first few bites, I was vomiting a mysterious brown goo, hearing strange Jimi Hendrix solos in my head, and tapping into the universal energy matrix which surrounds us and gives Mother Gaia life. Friday seemed to think this was enormously amusing. He said, "Who's the dimwit *now*, Robinson?" And I smiled and rocked back and forth and said, "Duuuuuuuude... We're *all* the dimwit, every one of us..."

Pretty soon he was leading me through the jungle, ostensibly to meet up with the rest of his tribe. Along the way the trees were singing and dancing a tuneful jig, and my hands and feet metamorphosed into duck-billed platypuses and back again. Eventually we reached his village, and to my surprise I saw that the natives there were not naked, but were dressed in beach clothes, straw hats, and sunglasses. Friday said, "Gotcha," before running off to get dressed. I was surrounded by tropical hippies.

"Welcome to the island!" someone shouted, pressing a margarita into my hand. "Welcome to the Archaic Revival!" someone else shouted, and a cheer went up. I began to cry. At long, long last, it looked as though I had found a home. We partied for several days, yea verily, and the multi-colored swirls and strange twisting doorways in the spacetime continuum provided by Friday's stew have yet to fade. Last night while fishing, I snagged the lost Ark of the Covenant.

June 27, 2012

This island is the last place on Earth without a fast food restaurant.

I realized it only slowly, after settling in here, that the lingo here was not besotted with references to McThis or McThat, that they had no conception of the latest innovations in drive-through technology (which actually force feeds you your meal the instant you roll down the window), that they had never seen the stunning ad campaigns wherein the Burger King himself claimed divine descent and fired Fry Guys into the sun. These people lived in a state of grace, crushing their inherent desire for bacon double cheeseburgers with vast amounts of bark scraped off the local trees.

Daily life on the island was one of bliss and mystery, as I was slowly initiated into a way of life entirely free of French fries, baked apple blobs, and sushi flavored shakes. What's more, Friday and I have become constant companions. Although he has never before encountered modern technology, by spending several days in a hallucinogenic trance, he was able to teach the Jump Jet how to square dance. Furthermore, today I caught a Filet-o-Fish sandwich, which I can only believe is a good omen.

July 19, 2012

Today while fishing, I caught a television set. Woe is me!

August 22, 2012

I have been in hiding for several weeks now. The television set cast an unearthly glow about the entire village from the moment I so stupidly carried it back from the lagoon. What could I have been thinking! Of course, I, as military personnel, have been genetically altered so that television can have no effect on me. But these simple, sweet people were caught entirely unaware. They followed its ethereal light for several minutes until finally, impatient, Friday knocked me to the ground and stole the thing. Later in the evening, when I awoke, I found the entire village gaping and staring, having forgotten to eat their daily dose of psychedelic mucous, practically chanting along with the ungodly voices of Grimace and Mayor McCheese. As I approached, Friday stood up and pointed at the insignia on my tattered uniform, and I realized with horror that he was now all too aware that I had fought for KFC in the war, and not for the maniacal empire that had suddenly commanded their devotion.

I ran for days and days. I'm still not safe.

September 15, 2012

Another television set appeared next to me while I slept! It's all I can do to suck down the nourishing black brew that will send me spinning into a tribal haze, before averting my eyes from the programming. It's new — it's improved! It defeats my genetic defenses! I see Ronald McDonald beckoning for me with that EVIL CLOWN GRIN of his, almost as though the bastard is attacking me personally...

I *will* survive. I will *not* succumb. I have found a life here on this island worth living, a life *without* the mass media that controls the minds of all the children and stupid people on this planet. I have found a life where the sweet taste of fungus scraped off the undersides of rocks is ample substitute for the repulsive, burgerous bile that once sustained me.

October 28, 2012

Today I am incapable of moving more than a few feet, for the natives have built four solid walls of television sets around me. As I watch, news bulletins update the progress of War: The Final Battle. Apparently, an entirely new force has appeared on the scene. Apparently, the extent of our collective demise is only now becoming truly visible.

Apparently, Satan himself has gone into the fast food business.

November 34, 2012

This may be the last message I ever write. Such misery, such woe! This delicious cacophony of images and voices, these wonderful mushrooms, these glorious brews... all of them provided by none other than the master betrayer, the Great Satan himself. He has seduced me, and I have fallen. The Lord Almighty is nowhere to be seen on this planet; he has abandoned us; it is the Apocalypse. It turns out the Beast was a giant cow, which was promptly made into Beelzeburgers; and *this* island outpost is in fact the very first in a chain of restaurants that is already sweeping the planet, erasing the last vestiges of resistance. The other chains prepared the way for the coming of the AntiRonald. As my eyes stare deep into the dozen screens before me, each glass broadcasting the latest battles, the final battles, I think back upon what my life has been, and how easily we were cowed by this scourge. We of the world so foolishly believed that our technology could deliver us. We of the world so foolishly believed that the more rapidly our meals could be prepared for us, the closer our souls were to salvation.

O, woe is me, for I am slain! Even as I scream in ultimate horror, the Devil's hands extend from beyond their screens, preparing to rip away my dreams of a life without fast food, a life of simplicity and wonder and simple communion with the land. Woe is me, woe is me! My throat is torn, the taste is cheesy and delicious, and yet my soul has been corrupted! Woe is me, woe is me!

December 11, 2012

Would you like fries with that?

The Phone Call

This piece, written March 15, 2003, is one of two pieces included in this collection that were written after the self-imposed “1992–2002” time span mentioned in the collection’s title. Any complaints about the inclusion of such recent material can be directed to Scotto’s army of robot lawyers, who are, as always, prepared for a fight. – Andrea Change

The phone rings. He picks it up absent-mindedly.

“Hello?”

“Please stay on the line for a very important phone call from the InfiniTek banking division, concerning your consumer credit line.”

Pleasant music saturates his left eardrum. He waits patiently. His right eardrum remains saturated by unpleasant music.

“Uh, is this Mr. Hollywood Smith of Davenport, Iowa?”

“No.”

“Oh, uh... is Mr. Smith available?”

“Oh wait... I mean, yes.”

“Ah, Mr. Smith, I’m calling from the InfiniTek banking division. It’s about your consumer credit line, which is showing a past due balance of four hundred thousand, three hundred eighty-nine dollars and forty-seven cents.”

“Forty-six cents.”

“Pardon?”

“It’s forty-six cents. I keep telling you smug shitfuckers when you call that the reason I haven’t paid is that I only owe four hundred thousand, three hundred eighty-nine dollars and forty-six cents.”

An ambiguous silence follows.

“Uh, Mr. Smith, my screen is showing—”

“I don’t care if your screen is showing the fucking Ten Commandments in surround sound starring Jane Fonda’s zombie dog, I’m telling you, I do not owe that extra penny.”

Another ambiguous silence follows. He almost imagines it to be a continuation of the previous ambiguous silence. Ambiguous Silence II: Still Very Silent.

“Uh, Mr. Smith, I do see here that you’ve filed a formal complaint against the vendor to dispute the charges—”

“Who wouldn’t in my position?”

“—and our review committee has determined that a discrepancy of a single penny does not obviate your responsibility to continue making minimum payments until the matter is settled.”

“Oh really.”

“That’s InfiniTek policy.”

“Oh really.”

“Yes, Mr. Smith.”

“Oh really.”

One more ambiguous silence.

“Yes, Mr. Smith, I can send you a hard copy of the policy if you like.”

“Oh really.”

Okay, one more. Somewhere out there, in the land of miserable, wretched telephone debt collectors, sweat is forming.

“Sir—”

“What’s your name, Johnny?”

“Pardon?”

“Pardon, is it? Well, let’s get something straight, Pardon—”

“No sir, it’s not Pardon, it’s Mike.”

“So you heard me the first time?”

“What?”

“No, you’re not pulling that on me twice, Johnny.”

“It’s not—”

“So you listen close this time, Johnny. Maybe where you come from, in the land of miserable, wretched telephone debt collectors, a penny discrepancy here and a penny discrepancy there are no big deal.”

“Wretched?”

“But where I come from, here in this great land of our nation, some of us still have *principles*. We still *believe* in the promise of a world where no one’s hard earned penny slips through the cracks. Do you understand me, Mark?”

“Mike.”

“Pardon?”

“No, Mike.”

“Right, do you understand me, Mike?”

“Well, sir, I certainly understand how you might be a little miffed, but the fact remains—”

“MIFFED? DO I SOUND MIFFED?”

Perhaps this silence is not so ambiguous. Perhaps it is dense with an uneasy anticipation.

“You sound—”

“PISSED OFF IS WHAT I AM, MIKE!”

“Yes, I was, I was going to say, I was, I was...”

“Look, Mike, here’s the scoop. I walk into this bar. I can’t remember the name...”

“Charlie’s Destitute Aunt.”

“What the fuck does Charlie have to do with it?”

“That’s the name of the place. It’s called Charlie’s Destitute Aunt.”

“Ah, right, right, yeah, now I remember, because they keep the aunt in the dumpster out back for ‘color.’ Know what I’m saying?”

“Huh?”

“Well they can’t let her roam around inside with the clientele, but they can’t just push her down an elevator shaft because, you know, people would talk.”

“Uh, Mr. Smith, can we get back to the issue of minimum payments—”

“I’M GETTING THERE, GODDAMMIT, IF YOU’D JUST SHUT YOUR INFERNAL SQUAWKING UP FOR THIRTY GODDAMN SECONDS OR SO!”

Brief pause.

“So I go into this bar—”

“This thirty seconds is being timed, sir.”

“FINE, BUT YOU JUST INTERRUPTED, SO YOU HAVE TO START OVER!”

Pause.

“Thirty... twenty-nine...”

“And in this bar, you see, is a blackjack table. Now it just so happens that good old Hollywood Smith knows his way around a blackjack table. All the way around. They’re usually round anyway, although I guess sometimes they’re more like an L, but not this one, so I was feeling pretty confident. Dealer looks at me, and I throw down a single chip, a single chip that just happens to be worth four hundred thousand, three hundred eighty-nine dollars and forty-six cents.”

“Six... five...”

“Mike, I just want you to know, if you manage to get to zero and decide to interrupt me again, I can’t be responsible for my actions.”

“Excuse me?”

“No, no, I won’t excuse you, Mike, because at that point, you’d just be bringing the hurt down on yourself, and I can’t be responsible for that. So anyway. Did I get to the part about how some tables are shaped like an L?”

“Yeah...”

“Great, so anyway, this dealer looks at me, and as I’m throwing down my chip, I realize, hey! I recognize this guy! This isn’t just some guy I’m looking at, this is my old nemesis...”

He pauses, for dramatic effect.

“...Johnny Mildly-Irritating.” Pause. “Well, don’t you see?” Pause. “Mike, are you still there?”

“Yeah, I’m still here.”

“So don’t you see? It’s my nemesis, dealing the cards. How do you expect me to possibly get a fair shake at a table where my nemesis is the dealer?”

“How did you... how does one get a nemesis?”

“Oh that part’s simple, just sleep with his kid sister a few times.” Pause. “Well, and team up with his kid sister to steal everything he owns, and then the two of you shoot him full of black market 2-TC-special-G and dump

him out of the car naked and frothing at the mouth during lunchtime on a Wednesday in the financial district.”

“But... why—”

“Mike, generally I’m okay with questions, they show a bright inquisitive spark that normally I find very appealing in a brainless monkey worker like you, but today, I think you’re just going to have to learn a few things about being passive and not wetting your pants, all right?”

“All right...”

“So here’s the thing, Mike. That chip’s got a credit value of four hundred thousand, three hundred eighty-nine dollars and forty-six cents. I know this for a fact. It’s a matter of *principle* with me. It’s Hollywood Smith’s rules of the road number eighty-four: never spend your last fucking penny, because CHRIST ON EARTH WITH GIANT RED HOT POKERS SHOVED RIGHT THROUGH HIS BLEEDING STIGMATA knows that when you lose that last penny, Mike... when you lose that last penny, Mike, it’s all over. So I held onto that last penny.”

“But... but the charge clearly states...”

“Is this you interrupting me, Mike?”

“Oh... oh, no, no no no, it’s not—”

“Good, because I realize now I forgot to fully visualize for you the entire chain of events that follows from the NEXT FUCKING TIME YOU INTERRUPT ME, MIKE, a series of events that starts with you opening your goddamn pie hole one more very ill-chosen time and ends with a very unfortunate series of seemingly supernatural events that leave most of your family shell shocked husks wandering the streets in search of the sacred holy cauliflower that will take them to vegetable paradise, are you picking up what I’m laying down here?”

Long pause.

“Oh. Uh, you can answer that one, Mike, I won’t count that as an interruption.”

“Did I... mention... this was being... recorded for... quality control?”

“QUALITY CONTROL MY HAIRY, DISEASE-RIDDEN, CONSTANTLY ATTENDED BY HIGH PRICED MEDICAL TECHNICIANS ASS, MIKE! If you had QUALITY CONTROL, I would not be getting RAPED RIGHT IN MY SOUL for that EXTRA FUCKING PENNY, MIKE! Capishe? Comprende? Is the total blazing nastiness of my predicament FINALLY starting to sink into that extraordinarily cement-like block you seem to be using while your HEAD is in the SHOP?”

There’s whispering during this pause. He eats another hunk of ptarmigan jerky, and waits.

“Hello, is this Mr. Hollywood Smith?”

A new voice. Smoother, more sanguine.

“Who wants to know?”

“My name is Carlisle Wheeling. I’m the manager of this shift. What seems to be the problem?”

“You mean, going back to the part where God fucking kicked us out of Eden, or more recently, when Ralph Fiennes lost an Academy Award to TOMMY LEE FUCKING JONES, eh? I mean, where are we starting here?”

“Let’s talk about your current problem, with Charlie’s Destitute Aunt.”

“I don’t actually have a problem with her. She’s a sweet old biddy who knows what gums are for.”

“Pardon?”

“No, that guy left. Who are you again?”

“Carlisle Wheeling. I’m—”

“—already starting to get on my nerves. Listen, Carlisle – if that IS your true name – do you often let penny discrepancies just slip through your system as though that penny doesn’t matter to anyone anywhere down the line?”

“Well, Mr. Smith, you must realize that we here at InfiniTek are responsible for managing literally trillions of dollars of transactions each day—”

“It’s nice that you say literally like that, I might have thought these were figurative transactions. OH WAIT! They are, aren’t they, happening all on the big master computer somewhere deep in the bowels of hell where you chaps spend your time plotting the demise of the likes of me? Isn’t that true?”

“No, Mr. Smith, these electronic transactions are as real as if I were taking the money right out of your pocket.”

“That’s really the issue, Mister Carlisle Fancy Pants Wheeling. You bastards think that now you’ve got the system all set up, now everything’s in place and you’ve got the weapons and you’ve got the laws and you’ve got the cannon fodder that you can just... *casually* steal a penny here, a penny there, from people who actually still own those pennies. ‘IT’S JUST A PENNY!’, right? Isn’t that it? Look, I’ve done the research, I know. Your own industry admits: in cases of discrepancies as much as four of five FUCKING dollars, the average robot jackass just sits there and takes it right up the energetic ASSHOLE, doesn’t he. Who wants to waste precious, valuable ‘TIME’ – which I should point out is USELESS for getting into a game of blackjack – in order to fight some ‘penny ante’ discrepancy as they call it. Well let me tell you something, Mr. Carlisle Wheeling, when you drive a man down to his LAST... FUCKING... PENNY... do you not down deep in whatever is currently masquerading for a soul inside that lifeless husk you call a body fully expect one of your so-called ‘customers’ to eventually *catch on*... and to RISE UP?”

Small pause. He can tell that Carlisle Fancy Pants Wheeling is consulting a very rigorous possibility tree.

“Mr. Smith, the fact remains, you did actually lose your bet at that table, did you not?”

And now, it’s his turn to retreat into silence. Mostly just to change the music, from something unpleasant, to something very unpleasant.

“You can’t call that a fair bet.”

“And why not?”

“The deck was stacked.”

“You can’t prove that.”

“I can.”

“How so?”

“Simple. I owed Johnny a lot of money. He wanted it paid back. We both agreed the best plan was to let me win on that stupid casino’s dime, then split the proceeds. But somehow... somehow, someone fucked with Johnny’s deck, and I wound up losing. Johnny seemed just as stunned as me — he wasn’t getting any if the house took all, and you know, I still might never would have known it wasn’t Johnny just kicking me when I was down... if not for the viciously serene look I got from the counter girl as I signed my chit in a devastating haze. But even then, I knew what I had lost: no more, no less. Four hundred thousand, three hundred eighty-nine dollars and forty-six cents.”

“That’s not accurate, Mr. Smith. Charlie’s Destitute Aunt sent this expense through for four hundred thousand, three hundred eighty-nine dollars and forty-seven cents. They have your signature on the chit.”

“Do they now.”

“They...” Shuffling of files. “They have a chit here, it, uh...”

“I didn’t sign it. That was my saving grace, Mr. Carlisle Broomstick Up Your Arse Wheeling. I didn’t sign it, because the non hammered, non despondent, non suicidal part of me recognized even then what they were trying to do.”

“Which was?”

“Steal even that very last penny they knew I was hiding. Just to prove a point.”

“And what... what point would that be?”

“The point is that when you get a chance, there is NO SENSE not stealing the bare minimum from some barely cognizant loser on his way to a desperate sleep in a halfway house now that he can’t afford a sleazy hotel. After all, that single penny wouldn’t do *him* much good... but once you accumulate enough pennies from losers, why... you’ve got yourself a business model.”

Very interesting silence at this point. Mr. Carlisle Wheeling is no dummy.

“So they just... deliberately keyed in an extra penny to the charge and then submitted it, knowing it falls so far below our minimum for taking ac-

tion on behalf of the cardholder that they'd essentially get that penny awarded them by default?"

"You know, when you put it that way, Mr. Wheeling, it almost sounds cynical."

One final pause, almost for old time's sake.

"Mr. Smith, I'm sorry to have taken up so much of your valuable time. Clearly we need to place a hold on this charge until further notice. We will take every available step to ensure that if this charge is fraudulent, it will be dismissed completely, at no charge to you of course."

"You're very kind."

"It's not kindness, Mr. Smith.... it's justice." Dramatic pause. "I'll be in touch soon with the results of our legal efforts."

"I do so appreciate the enthusiasm of a credit industry professional."

"Thank you, sir. Good day."

He hung up the phone, exhausted. It wasn't every day that Johnny Mildly-Irritating spent the afternoon impersonating his nemesis, Hollywood Smith. But he needed that money, and when the casino replaced his stacked deck with its own stacked deck, that was just too much, TOO MUCH I SAY! Now Johnny gets his money back, only it's money that will live on Hollywood's card until Hollywood snaps out of that unfortunate coma and manages to cancel his accounts. By then, Johnny will be in Parts Unknown, getting very high on the local pharms.

Johnny's sister, Veruca Biliious, comes up from the basement. She's pouting, and it pisses him off.

"He's going to live," she says.

"Well, he's not going to like it," he replies. But then, that was true for just about everyone he'd ever encountered. "See you round, babyface."

"Oh, shove it up your ass with a pneumatic pipe drill. I actually liked Hollywood, you know. He was sweet and kind."

"And poor."

"Yeah, well, it seems clear money isn't buying you human emotions any time soon, so just get on with your bad self why don't you."

"I will, then."

"Don't forget to say goodbye to the ladies at the food bank who have such a crush," she says sneeringly.

He saunters out.

Moments later, a well-rested Hollywood Smith emerges from the basement.

"You gave him the old card?" he asks.

Veruca nods.

"The one from when I was doing that undercover story for *The Observer*, and I had that whole identity set up as Adolf Hitler the 9th?"

She nods again.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah then," he says smiling. "There's enough money for the tram on that, sure. But they are going to be WATCHING that card for all the tens, literally, tens of dollars left on it."

They bust out laughing.

"Come on," she says, "time to go get thoroughly hammered."

"Right, I hear you can get 2-TC-special-G in the streets these days..."

From the Renegade Files of Scotto: Is You In, Or Is You Isn't?

Editorial from *Trip* – The Journal of Psychedelic Culture #5 (spring 2000)

I remember the day I met Special Agent James Kent, publisher of *Trip*, as clearly as I remember the day I took my first bath in liquid LSD. The experiences were remarkably similar, both leaving me emotionally and psychically exhausted, with strange bruises all over my body, and an unexplainable bleeding from directly behind my ears. In both cases I had been searching for something incredible, something to lift my mundane, pathetic life out of its existential gutter and give it meaning — or if not meaning, then at least better visuals. I had only a pile of old *Psychedelic Illuminations* magazines, and pristine copies of the first few issues of *Trip*, to guide me in my quest. Somewhere, within the city of Seattle, the man James Kent and his insane band of rogue psychedelicists, the staff of *Trip*, were assembling new issues, and so, on a fateful day some many months ago, I set out to offer my humble services to their noble enterprise.

“Scotto, please,” my close friend Crank Boy pleaded with me, as I explained the day’s business to him, “spending even minutes in James Kent’s presence will undoubtedly drive you to the very brink of madness, if not beyond!” He munched nervously on a Chex mix of colored tablets and pills, his hands twitching as he continued. “Perhaps ‘James Kent’ is actually an underground conspiracy designed to ensnare the unwary. Perhaps the identity of ‘Kent’ is actually one tendril of a writhing cthonic beast that devours all who draw near!”

“Crank Boy,” said I with an arrogant smirk, “you need to lay off the cough syrup.”

Hours later, I found myself in the reception area at *Trip*’s Seattle headquarters. The receptionist, a beautiful androgyne named Glamour Esque, pleasantly informed me that Mr. Kent would be with me in a few moments, and in the meantime, would I care for a refreshing mint? Mistake #1: at *Trip*, “refreshing mint” is code for “devastating psychic time bomb,” and within minutes I was flat on my back, writhing in some strange combination of agony and ecstasy. Glamour Esque took notes in a small book, and within minutes my reaction had been incorporated into a vast database of information, cross-referenced and annotated as appropriate.

“Ah, yes,” a compelling voice in the doorway said, “I see you’ve already encountered the latest advances in placebo technology. Good, good. Now get up off the floor — that slime down there is precious, and I can’t have you walking out of here with it all over your clothes.”

It was Kent all right. As a blistering barrage of multi-colored swirls and fractal insanity filled the air, I could still make out his impressive visage in the doorway of his office: tall, menacing despite his quaint green cardigan

sweater, a ferocious look of wild glee in his eyes behind those schoolmarm specs. I struggled to follow him into his office, a dark wreck of a room, with arcane reference materials and ancient tomes of eldritch wisdom scattered recklessly about the place. Several glowing computer screens offered windows into the seamy underside of the Internet. A battered grand piano sat next to the desk, and there were beady little eyes staring at me from inside the antique instrument.

“Elves,” Kent muttered. “I’ve tried everything to get rid of them, but they keep finding their way back into this dimension. Now then, Mr... Scotto... what can I do for you?”

“Well—“ I began, stammering with fear.

“ENOUGH!” Kent shouted, sweeping the contents of his desk off onto the floor with a majestic swoop of his overly long arm. “Maybe you don’t understand what’s at stake, Mr. Scotto, so let me be plain. It’s the year 2000, and it’s no longer possible to ‘turn on, tune in, and drop out.’ Even if you wanted to drop out, they’ve got hundreds of ways to track you and all your personal information. The kids these days have no idea how much their civil liberties are being eroded, and most of them can’t be bothered to pay attention. They’re too busy sucking down corporate-sponsored pabulum from the mass media, and pretending that popping a tablet of street MDMA is some kind of rebellion. ARE YOU FOLLOWING ME?”

I didn’t dare shake my head no.

He sat down heavily at his desk and continued, his eyes glowing red. “You have to fight for change on all fronts: scientific, political, cultural, and spiritual. We need intelligent voices, creative voices, passionate voices, to advance the state of the movement. There are thousands upon thousands of sympathetic listeners in this world, I’m sure of it, but we’ve lived so long with the spectre of risk and punishment that we have yet to fully catalyze that network. There is much work left to be done. The question is: Is you in, baby, or is you isn’t?”

I joined the staff that day and never looked back.

There Are No Worse Places...

Date: Tue, 07 Oct 1997 12:11:08 -0700

To: Gravity

From: Scotto

At 03:49 PM 10/4/97 CDT, Daniel Foss wrote:

>Scotto,
 >We were following kangaroo shit here, expecting it to lead us to
 >the nearest Walpiri Sign Language, when we found a copy of the
 >New Yorker Magazine in mint condition. We spotted this right off
 >as made up by the people who gave you The Gods Must Be Crazy,
 >so turned it into the Lost & Found, but not till we had read that
 >Scott O. Moore had become the *second* 23-year-old filmmaker to
 >wipe out Hollywood's profit picture in as many months, the other
 >one being the maker of Gravesend, whose name escapes them, even.
 >Your picture, Escape From Iowa, is the most interesting idea I
 >heard of anent places to escape from, especially the seventy-or-
 >eighty story underground parking garage beneath Sioux Falls.

excerpt from "There Are No Worse Places To Escape From Than Iowa"
 article by Veronica James
 published in *The New Yorker*, June 11, 1995

(begin excerpt)

We continue the interview in Scotto's penthouse suite in Manhattan, a place as far-removed from the grimy angst of Waterloo, Iowa, as possible. He is in a chipper mood; *Escape From Iowa* has been nominated for Best Actor (Tyler Hayes Stilwill), Best Screenplay, and Best Picture. He doesn't seem fazed that he's been passed over for Best Director, a nomination that usually accompanies the Best Picture nomination. "This directing thing's no big deal," he says. "I mean, it's my first movie; I hardly expected to get *all* the nominations. That day will come, certainly, but I can wait."

We sit in his kitchen, snacking on Triscuits and cheddar cheese; despite his new fame, his Midwestern tastes haven't changed all that much. Except, that is, for the drugs: since leaving Iowa, his access to recreational pharmaceuticals has increased exponentially, and he has made full use of his new resources. Consequently, he says, "You can expect my next film to be much more experimental. I really want to bring the psychedelic aesthetic to the screen in a way that's never been done before." He's already working on the screenplay to what he calls "a massively cool" project called *Lullabye for Thunderstorms*, based on his novel of the same name. It will likely be the first time in recent history that a novel that won the Nobel Prize for Literature

is adapted into a blockbuster Hollywood adventure film, but Scotto is full of such surprises. "Everyone keeps asking me who's going to play the twins, and I have to keep saying, over and over again, that Melody and Laurel will be playing themselves. This isn't some kind of joke. It's my reality we're talking about!"

That afternoon I accompany him to a recording session for the follow-up album to his Grammy-award winning acappella debut CD, *Voices*. For four hours, he builds rhythm tracks, doo-wopping and lalalaing over and over again. After a rift with producer Daniel Lanois over synthesizing bass voices on the last album, Scotto has chosen Bill Laswell to produce this time around. A lot is riding on this record, in Scotto's mind. "By the time you realize you've reached your 15 minutes of fame, 13 minutes are up. I think this record wants to be a sort of 'filing for an extension' on that. I think I've got a lot in me. I think I could keep making music til I'm 90, you know?" Of course, his idol Debbie Gibson once said the same thing, and look where she is now. "Well, yeah," he concedes, "but she was making pop music." And what are you making? "This stuff is timeless," he says with a straight face.

The next morning, we meet for breakfast at his suite. His aide is bustling around, giving him papers to sign, informing him of appointments. At one point, the Secretary of State calls to confer with him about a diplomatic assignment. Apparently, the Secretary of State calls often. "I'm just a consultant, really," Scotto says. "I have a unique perspective; I'm not locked into that whole Beltway machine, but I still have a strong sense of what should be happening." In the next month, Scotto will be called in to negotiate an especially tricky settlement between Republicans and Democrats over military spending, and the President will attempt - without success - to appoint Scotto as his new Chief of Staff. "Hey look," says Scotto without apology, "I'm an artist, not a politician."

That afternoon we take a cab to the United Nations building, where the World Scrytch Association is holding its semi-annual summit. Ever since Scrytch escaped its containment zone in early 1992, the planet has relied on this savvy group of scrytchers to identify the spread of the pathogen and warn outlying areas of danger. Scotto sits on the WSA advisory committee, a group which makes regular recommendations to the UN and various world governments; it is a collection of power that rivals the NSA for sheer unadulterated influence, and more than once, the term "shadow government" has been used in reference to the WSA's activities. The WSA is currently embroiled in an internal struggle, as committee member Darren Bauler has proposed using the resources of the WSA to wage an all out jihad on most of western civilization, something clearly not allowed under the International Scrytch Charter of 1993. But a more pressing issue is the upcoming launch of Free Station Julia by the multinational corporation known as InfiniTek — widely regarded as the Enemy by all members of the WSA advisory

committee. The meeting is closed to reporters, and afterwards, Scotto's mood is decidedly dark.

But his busy day is not quite over; aliens from the Andromeda Galaxy are scheduled to arrive that evening around 7:00, and Scotto will be hosting a dinner party in their honor...

(end excerpt)

Psychotomimesis

Initially, scientists called these drugs "psychotomimetic," which meant "of, relating to, involving, or inducing psychotic alteration of behavior and personality." Longtime viewers will remember the entire MK-ULTRA debacle, the farming out of the psychedelic movement to agents Kesey and Leary, the deliberate deception practiced upon the general audience, convincing them that this kind of madness was dangerous to the children; we only mention this in passing, offering some slight context as to what the United States government was doing with the so-called psychotomimetic substances while much more serious, and ultimately dangerous, research took itself underground.

The average researcher at InfiniTek in the late 1960s, before the company became the global pharmaceuticals and advanced weaponry conglomerate that it is today, had no idea what turns his work would take. It was only after almost nine years of research into substances that today pose an enormous threat that one man, Dr. Canton Levery, finally fled the company's headquarters (at that time in East Berlin, now relocated to London) and escaped to America. Dr. Levery's inside reports of the often chilling work underway at InfiniTek is only now being prepped for Internet release by the FringeWare collective, now that InfiniTek itself is in a shambles due to poor management and meddling by outside influences (rumors that InfiniTek began as a tool for disseminating alien technology throughout the world economy are of course entirely unfounded). But we can offer you this hopefully enlightening excerpt, taken from a recent interview with Dr. Levery at his current home on a small island in the Caribbean:

"Well, at that time, as you know, InfiniTek was closely linked with CIA efforts to understand the psychotic properties of drugs such as LSD, DMT, mescaline, and so on. The weapons division had been supplying the U.S. with technology for years, but here we were seeing a conflict of interest between InfiniTek's weapons division and its pharmaceuticals division. My bosses honestly believed they could find a way to use the psychotomimetic properties of these drugs for medicinal purposes, the most notable 'grail' of course being a solid cure for schizophrenia.

"Keep in mind that LSD itself was viewed as rather prosaic compared to some of the compounds our researchers were able to invent once they had the proper budget. Our molecular modeling software was literally decades ahead of any competitors – the CIA included – and we were able to find thousands of active substances and actually build them using technology that I have yet to understand. I can't begin to catalogue for you the impressive array of alterants we tested in those days. There's probably still a vault on the fifty-ninth floor that has shelves of active samples, if anyone dared try to get inside the building (ed. note: the InfiniTek headquarters building in London is currently quarantined due to what recent press releases call 'uncontrolled mutation of several unrelated experiments' spanning all three of InfiniTek's major divisions, including the nascent biogenetic engineering division).

"Well, what happened was, out of all these compounds, we came down to about a hundred that we thought were solid leads. Almost all of them had active properties similar to that of LSD, but tweaked in some fashion. We began human testing, setting up labs in London and Manchester for the purpose. For the most part, the psychotomimetic properties of these substances were interesting but certainly not capable of curing anyone of any kind of madness. The most we could get was an hour or two of lucidity out of compounds twenty-three through twenty-nine, an hour where the subject was not hearing voices or feeling entirely paranoid and was capable of clear, cogent conversation. Invariably, however, the effect would wear off and the madness would seem to be slightly more aggravated, as though the subjects could remember now that they had once been sane but could do nothing about it. Tolerance to these drugs built up too quickly for them to be of any use, and we eventually abandoned that track.

"One substance in particular, however, proved to be remarkable for a particular effect: the subjects never came down.

"Now you and I both know that the average psychedelic tripper almost always comes across a moment during one or more of their trips where they start to believe they are never coming down. Well — imagine your surprise if you wound up on a drug which felt a lot like LSD to you, but you in fact never DID come down. The test subjects would enter the peak of the experience, and then STAY there. Permanently. This was no longer psychotomimesis — this was full-scale drug-induced psychosis. It was hard to watch. The subjects, these young boys, at first they'd think they were really having a good time, and then the hours would go by, and some of them, you know, they knew a little bit about acid in those days and figured they should be coming down at some point, and when they realized they weren't going to come down at all, you could watch their minds just snap, one by one. 'Bad trip' doesn't even remotely describe the scene. After about a week or more of solid peaking on these substances, it was safe to say that the subjects no longer retained even

the remotest portions of their former personalities. It was as though someone had decided to reformat their hard drives, to use a crass metaphor.

“I’m only mentioning this now because the CIA eventually did get hold of this substance, due to political intrigue within InfiniTek that never should have happened. It would be a simple matter to spring this stuff on a given population, the same way cocaine and heroin spread by way of CIA introduction. You’d think you were getting average street acid, and before you knew it, you’d be a babbling idiot, and then by the end of the week, you’d be empty meat, fresh for the imprinting. They never figured out how to cure any particular psychoses, but they came a long way in the study of inducing psychoses — it’s always easier to destroy than create, after all.”

On Meeting An Icon: A Tale of Dragon Con, Jul. 17-19, 1992

This essay was written mere months after my very first acid trip, and months after I accidentally helped launch an Internet drug cult. At the time, the Internet was not the wonderful resource it is today for information on how to assess and integrate heavy psychedelic experiences. Our first major influences as we were coming to grips with these intense experiences we were having were the works of Timothy Leary.

At the time I wrote this essay, I had yet to appreciate the vilification of Leary. I saw only the wildly optimistic, extremely creative approach he took to describing states of consciousness, and was deeply influenced and impressed. Searching the campus library on the topic of psychedelics turned up only books by Leary, and in retrospect, it seems I was lucky to find even those works. Years later, although I now understand the extent to which Leary helped engender the current catastrophe of American drug policy, I still find a soft spot in my heart for him. Perhaps I identify a bit too much with the way his intelligence just couldn’t keep a hold on his arrogance, the way his creativity was leashed to such self-serving motives.

*Nevertheless, a brush with fame is a brush with fame, and here’s my greatest brush to date. It should also be noted, for those keeping score at home, that this event also saw my very first viewing of the pivotal film *Head*, described within... — Scott*

It’s 4:12 AM Sunday, and Dragon Con is still in full swing. In front of me, a man is being informed by a mixed group that his butt has been voted most likely to be grabbed. Among this mixed group is one of the more beautiful women at the convention, although the persistent rumor is that “she” is not a she at all. Upstairs, a splatter movie festival is underway in the Video Room, and rap music from a hopping dance down the hall echoes throughout the hotel.

I’m sitting at a table, watching a steady stream of misfits wander past: knights in shining armor, Klingons, a Discordian Pope, vampires, monks, leather freaks, etc. and so on, and I’m mildly frustrated because I can’t quite figure out how to start this article. This is that strange turning point you sometimes hit, when suddenly you feel the need to sum up the meaning of everything, and you know the only reason you’re feeling this way is because you haven’t quite returned to your “normal” state of consciousness.

I came to this convention because two of my heroes were scheduled to appear. I’ve been a fan of Robert Anton Wilson for a long time now, so that seemed exciting. And Dr. Timothy Leary — this is the person that Gravity-L was inspired by, the person whose work was, perhaps more so than any other’s, a key factor in revolutionizing thinking in general. You expect someone like Leary to just *vibrate* with cosmic energy or some such nonsense.

So the plan was relatively simple. I figured, there will have to be an opportunity at some point during the weekend to approach Leary and see for myself what his energy is like.

And so begins our story...

Dragon Con is a giant science-fiction/fantasy/role playing game/comic book convention, drawing well over 7000 people to the Atlanta Hilton and Towers in downtown Atlanta. It’s a nice hotel — big, spacious, lots of balconies. A couple of vampires threw a potted plant off a high balcony a while ago, and when it hit the tile ten floors down, it sounded like an explosion, and hundreds of people lined the balconies, looking for blood. I leaned over and shouted, “Oh my God! She’s dead!” and got a kick out of the crowd’s reaction. It’s been that kind of weekend.

Friday afternoon, I’m in the audience for a panel discussion on whether or not science fiction is obsolete, a panel featuring comic writer Chris Claremont and novelist Raymond E. Feist, both of whom spend inordinate amounts of time bashing publishers rather than discussing science fiction. But the only reason I’m here is because immediately after the science fiction seminar is a cyberspace seminar featuring both Leary and Wilson, and when the SF people clear out, I stake my claim on the front row.

Now let’s talk about Timothy Leary for a moment. One of the founding fathers of the psychedelic movement in the sixties, Leary is that most elite of cultural figures, a revolutionary turned martyr for the cause. Now he’s designing software and pushing the boundaries of virtual reality, as an alternative to the psychedelic research that made him infamous. Leary was in prison when I was born; the first time I ever remember hearing about him was in a rumor that he was dead. Obviously he was not; dropping out of sight for so long must have seemed the natural thing to do after the adventures he’d had.

Because of my unfortunate temporal perspective (i.e. “damn I missed the sixties”), it’s been easy to filter and create a vision of what Leary must be like,

untainted by so-called reality. This never quite reached “idol-worship,” mind you; during my own “research,” I found that I disagreed quite vehemently with some of his premises. However, I’ve also discovered during my “research” that I have a tendency to be violently wrong about these things. And considering the lack of, shall we say, mystical mentors in Cedar Falls, Iowa (where higher education is always an adventure), I’m left with Leary’s work to guide me.

And as he walks into the room, a large smile spreads across my face. This is the man indirectly responsible for my current quest, and I’m thrilled to see him at last. He’s incredibly thin, and he wears a tweed jacket over a purple sweater, with old blue jeans and sneakers. He looks every bit of his 72 years, but he bounds up to the stage with a surprising enthusiasm. Wilson is not far behind, a portly sort of Santa Claus with a twist. The third member of the panel is SF writer Steven Barnes, co-author with Larry Niven of the *Dream Park* novels.

Wilson introduces himself first. He is witty and soft-spoken, and his accent is a bizarre mix of Brooklyn and Dubliner. He talks a bit about the binary coding of the rate of information increase, and cracks jokes about which conspiracy faction forced Perot to drop out of the presidential race. Barnes is next; he is concise and articulate, emphatic and impressive. His *Dream Park* novels missed the boat, he says, when it comes to virtual reality, but his ideas for the future seem to make up for that.

Then it’s Leary’s turn. During the above he has played enthusiastic cheerleader, giving forceful thumbs-up, raising fists of approval, starting rounds of applause, always with his patented grin locked in place. Now he takes the microphone, and for the next several minutes, the audience is respectfully bemused. Leary wanders around the subject, but never actually lands there. He spends more time, in fact, talking about Wilson’s accomplishments than about virtual reality.

In the seminar that follows, Barnes emerges as the intellectual center of the panel, with Wilson throwing in appropriate bits of New Age stand-up comedy on occasion. But the consensus on Leary is that, for whatever reasons, he seems a bit... flaky.

Friday night the hotel is filled with parties. There is so much wild, Dionysian, underage drinking going on that my friend Mike and I can’t find a safe place to begin our much more appropriate research. We end up finally in a parking garage, and, as is so typical of these experiences, the need to wax philosophic comes up rather quickly.

Today has been a disappointment, I decide.

After the seminar, Dragon Con staffers are on hand to issue the panelists away to their autograph signing sessions. Wilson lingers behind, and I decide to approach him before he leaves. When I catch up with him, he’s harassing a hapless staffer.

“I don’t understand,” Wilson says rather forcefully. “He’s supposed to be here. Where is he?”

“Well, I know he exists,” the staffer replies. “I mean, I saw him last week—”

“Can’t you page him or something? I don’t understand. Where is he?”

A woman in front of me thrusts a book at him, ending the interrogation. Then it’s my turn. I hand him my copy of *Cosmic Trigger* and a pen.

“What’s your name?” he asks.

“Scott,” I reply. (A long time ago, I gave up introducing myself as Scott; there seems to be a neurological block in most people that prevents them from hearing the second syllable the first time my name is pronounced. It seems “o” is not an appropriate suffix for “Scott.”)

I remember reading in the Dragon Con promo book that Wilson was going to be running a live action role playing game called Cosmic Conspiracy, and I ask him if this is still the case.

“No,” he replies tersely, handing back the book. And that’s that.

Fifteen minutes later, I’m in line to meet Dr. Leary. I’m last in line, due to my encounter with Wilson (which turned out to be a rather fortunate encounter, actually, because he subsequently skipped his autograph session), and I’m running through the possible things I could say to him. Finally I decide, however naively, that I’ll give him a collective greeting from Gravity-L. I’ll say something like, “There’s a hundred or so people who’d like to say hello and keep up the good work,” or something cheesy like that. As I wait, a staffer announces, “Please have your books opened and ready for Dr. Leary to sign.” This is not a good omen, I realize.

Finally, I arrive at the table and hand him *Flashbacks* to sign. I wince involuntarily as he bends the front cover back farther than necessary in order to sign the title page. He too asks me my name, and I tell him, and then I start to say my little piece, “There’s a hundred or so people who’d like to say blah blah blah...”

“That’s great, thanks a lot, that’s wonderful,” he says with a thumbs-up, but he’s already reaching for the book behind me, and I’m smiling despite myself as I wander away.

I mean, really — what the hell did I expect, anyway?

That night in the Grand Ballroom, we attend a Betty Page look alike contest. The winners are a duo who enacted a lesbian spanking scene, to the vast delight of the predominantly male RPGer audience. One of the runners-up is that mystery “she-male,” resplendent in a sparkling gold bikini.

We spend the rest of the night wandering the hotel, and in my somewhat altered state, I keep repeating how disappointed I am. Wilson certainly didn’t seem to be living in an exceptionally happy reality tunnel when I ran into

him. And Leary seemed distracted and tired, although he never stopped smiling throughout the whole affair.

Finally Mike says, "It's good that you feel this way about your heroes. Now they'll seem more human to you."

And for the time being, I'm satisfied. We head over to the hospitality suite for chips and sodas. I end up lighting Cheetos on fire with three strangers, and then smoking these Cheetos. It's hard to describe the peculiar joy of having a cheesy resin in your lungs, but there it is nonetheless. The next day, the sign at the door says "No smoking Cheetos or burning the food."

A ha, I think. I've found a niche after all...

On Saturday, Dr. Leary is scheduled to give his own lecture, entitled "Creating the 21st Century." He actually spends most of the time discussing the past, regaling us with stories of Aldous Huxley, Ken Kesey, his prison escape, and so on.

This lecture is a bit more impressive than the previous day's, and Leary acknowledges some of his weak spots. He admits he has a tendency to ramble, and says that his short term memory is failing him. He also says that senility is a better high than marijuana, and that perhaps Alzheimer's Disease is underappreciated. This draws an uneasy laugh; no one knows where exactly Leary sits on this supposed slide into old age.

"You have to go out of your mind to use your mind," he exclaims at one point, and a number of us cheer hopefully, wondering just how much "experimenting" he allows himself these days. He sees virtual reality as a key breakthrough in consciousness expansion and human communication, and he predicts that within two or three years, no one will simply give lectures, which appeal only to the so-called "left brain;" they will give full-blown multi-media presentations that will appeal to both the logical and the creative functions of the brain. *Everyone* will do this, he says; it will be *the* way to give seminars. Leary's penchant for prediction has always fascinated me. I'm reminded of one of his earlier predictions, that reliable life extension techniques would be available during his lifetime. These predictions haven't got much time to be fulfilled.

And then it's over. Mike suggests that we approach him, maybe invite him to partake with us that evening. But as soon as Leary is finished speaking, he is surrounded by a huge throng, and we realize our chances of speaking to him are basically non-existent.

That night in the Video Room, we watch *Head*, the 1969 psychedelic film starring the Monkees and written by Bob Rafelson and Jack Nicholson. I'm suddenly reinterpreting it as an amazingly intricate Buddhist tale of samsara and reincarnation.

"For where there is clarity there is no choice," Peter Tork intones on screen, "and where there is choice, there is misery."

And finally, I think I understand what that sentence actually means.

Late Saturday night, I again alter my consciousness, and wander the hotel alone. Two SF writers, John Skipp and Craig Spector, are giving a rock concert, and the bizarre synth music draws me in instantly. There are dancing skeletons onstage, and the spectre of death, and groovy psychedelic video screens, and then, moments after I sit down, Dr. Leary is invited onstage for a poetry reading. Leary is a frequent topic of conversation around the Con; the Con Daily Bulletin printed a "rumor" that Leary was not actually appearing at Dragon Con, but rather a *virtual* version of Leary was appearing instead.

And so Leary appears, and reads a brief poem about Gaia, the overmind of the planet. I strain to see where he goes as he leaves the stage. Turns out he's heading down my aisle on his way out of the ballroom. As he passes, I join the stream of admirers who follow him out into the foyer, where he sits at a table and steels himself for a late-night autograph session.

I stand on the edge of the crowd, once more rehearsing the upcoming scene in my mind, and at the same time trying to place this weekend in perspective. If Leary seems burned out, can anyone blame him? I imagine it's an awesome responsibility, being a cultural icon and all. I'm determined to be last in line this time, so that maybe I'll be able to share more than a few words with him. But, needless to say, he is a magnet of attention, and the stream of people never quite ceases.

I force my way finally to Leary's side. I am at last ready, I'm literally next in line, when a staffer comes up to the table and says, "Tim, come on, give yourself a break." Leary agrees instantly, stands, turns to go. I become slightly flustered; I hadn't rehearsed this part. He needs to get past me to leave, and he takes my arm as he passes, and I take his arm, and we look at each other ever so briefly. I realize I'm at a loss for words. When Leary realizes this as well, he breaks eye contact and wanders off.

I'm left smiling ruefully, realizing I've blown it again.

And then the altered state proves useful, and I decide to follow him to the elevator. The word "harassment" does not enter my mind.

There are always huge lines at the elevators, and Leary must wait like the rest of us. He's speaking to two people when I catch up to him, and when at last they leave him, I charge up to him. The apocryphal moment is finally upon me.

I take his hand, say something like, "Everything you've done means so much to me. Thank you so much..."

To which Leary replies, "Thank you, thank you, it's great to hear that..."

And I'm instantly aware that no communication has transpired here. The entire episode is swimming in foolish expectations. What have I got, really, to tell him, that he hasn't heard twenty-three million times already?

I give up on words. Instead, I lean forward and embrace him. He's very frail, but he responds in kind, and is not the least bit surprised.

"I love all of you," he had said over and over again during the past couple days.

I wander away, meet up with Mike again.

"Did you get to tell him what you wanted to?" Mike asks.

"Yeah," I reply, once more smiling the atypical rueful smile. "I told him."

It's now 6:20 AM Sunday. A man named Rick just tried to pick me up; I was too busy writing this to pay much attention.

It's time to summarize the event, determine its meaning in the Grand Scheme of Things. Both Leary and Wilson have produced a vastly impressive body of work that will always deserve consideration; and yet, both of them have temporarily disappointed me on a personal, emotional level; and yet again, both of them are just people, and who do I think I am anyway? And again, both of them are just people, and belief is still the death of intelligence, as Wilson says, and maybe it's time to watch the model advance. There's small satisfaction, then, in that awareness, and I'm finally at ease. I'm young, after all; I can write this whole thing off as a necessary phase in my development, look back on it as one of the bittersweet joys of youth. I'm at least momentarily "experiencing the now" as the Swami from *Head* suggested, and while the Grand Scheme of Things is no clearer than it was before, I'm at least momentarily happier with my place in this Scheme.

It's time to go to sleep...

From the Renegade Files of Scotto: The Strange Tale of Timothy Leary's Head

Editorial from Trip – The Journal of Psychedelic Culture #9 (winter 2003) – written 11/14/2002

It was 4 A.M. on a Sunday when I received the call on the hotline: Timothy Leary's head had escaped again.

Now I know this will raise many questions in your mind, so let me assure you: there is an easy explanation for why I was awake so early on a Sunday. The night before had been *Trip's* semi-annual "Praise Us, Your Lords and Masters!" staff party where James Kent and I allow our small army of fawning sycophants out of their shackles and into state of the art explosive collars, so that they may dance about the local Holiday Inn convention hall in celebration of the fact that we allow them to open *Trip's* insanely voluminous mail, copy edit *Trip's* astonishingly important pages, and occasionally watch an episode of *Buffy*. After the party, James and I had returned to our cavernous headquarters for a late night cocktail of datura-infused absinthe and several hundred pills we'd nicked from the purse of a blind woman on the bus.

I was, in fact, just getting a really good buzz on – or else, I had caught some kind of deadly tropical disease, I can't really be sure – when the hotline rang. It was my turn to answer the hotline; James got it last time and wound up having to spend three weeks in eastern Europe, settling a bloody squabble that had briefly – and terribly – interrupted the flow of black market drain cleaner into the country (remember, kids, intraocular injections are for professionals only!). I sighed heavily and picked up the phone as an army of small ants began swarming all over my skin, spelling out verses from the Book of Revelation, although with a lot more typos than I considered acceptable. I immediately recognized the voice of John Ashcroft, Attorney General of the United States, on the other end of the hotline. Strangely, he sounded considerably less drunk and panicked than usual. He must have taken my advice about the epidermal LSD patches, I decided.

"Scotto, we've got a problem," Ashcroft gurgled.

Oh Christ, I thought, *he's stalking the Solid Gold Dancers again.*

"It's not the Dancers — though how they continually manage to elude me defies my understanding," he went on. "No, it's a lot more serious. Leary's head has escaped again, and no one can find it. We've got our best people on this one, and all the leads are coming up dry. So Winky-poo—" President Bush prefers his staff refer to him as Winky-poo. "—suggested we call you guys to see if there's anything you can do."

Well, that was irritating news. It had been extremely difficult capturing Leary's head the last time it escaped, requiring the use of several Special Forces units, specially modified aerosolized DMT weaponry, and a sophisticated trap involving a bevy of nekkid hippie chicks and the world's largest

cheesecake. It would be much harder to catch him now that it knew our tricks — and besides, I'd just finished eating that fucking cheesecake.

I looked over at James, who was slowly dissolving into a multi-colored oil slick on the floor. He was certainly going to be of no use.

"I'll see what I can do," I said, "but my usual fee structure applies."

I could hear Ashcroft wetting his pants with joy. "As we expected: another hundred thousand vats of [deleted for security reasons] delivered to your lunar hideaway, Winky-poo will do another centerfold in your magazine, and we'll have Ari Fleischer beaten soundly about the head and shoulders again with those fruit cakes we got from the Prime Minister of Canada."

"See that you do," I replied.

I hung up the hotline, watched three lizard people slither out of the walls and ask me if I had accepted the Great Iguana as my personal savior, took another drink of the datura-infused absinthe, immediately regretted it, and then headed upstairs to the command center to ponder my options. My chum Crank Boy was on watch that night, where "on watch" means "scrawling a mad entheofascist manifesto while using *Trip's* satellite net connection to download 300,000 hours of tentacle porn and pretending to be a 12-year-old girl in an AOL chat room in order to line up another lifetime supply of cough syrup for the staff."

"Oh, hey, Scotto," Crank Boy said nervously as he attempted to hide his notebook. I could only make out the sentence "Principle #4: Morning glory enemas are a privilege, not a right!" before the notebook slid out of view.

"Anything unusual going on tonight?" I asked.

Crank Boy shrugged. "Nope, it's been quiet. Completely quiet. Almost... *too* quiet."

Suddenly a loud klaxon sounded, and a big red light began flashing on the control panel. Crank Boy scrambled to investigate. The fear in his voice was unmistakable: "Good God, it's the Timothy Leary's head alarm! Leary's head is on the roof!"

I should have known. After all, I was the one who had masterminded the capture of Leary's head the last time. Naturally it would want revenge. I prayed the cast of *Dawson's Creek* would stop doing obscene things to each other inside my shirt pocket long enough for me to concentrate on capturing Leary's head once more... but somehow, knowing them, I didn't think that was likely.

"Wait here," I said to Crank Boy, who was already cowering behind the control panel like a school girl at a Young Republican convention. Then, slowly I ascended the elevator to the roof. A pleasant version of Paul McCartney's "My Love" was playing in the elevator, prompting me to vomit all over the walls several times.

The doors opened, and I found myself face to face once again with the horrible specter of Timothy Leary's head. After his "death" in 1996, Leary's

body had been spirited away by freedom-loving entities from a parallel dimension, but his head had been subjected to a massive array of insidious CIA experiments. His head was now the picture of vicious psychedelic insanity as it floated in front of me, suspended by little rockets where its neck should have been.

"So, Mister O. Moore," Leary's head growled, "we meet again at last." A big, unseemly Irish grin spread across its face from cheek to cheek. "I suppose you're wondering how I managed to escape from the CIA's top secret, ultra-high security bunker deep beneath the Everglades!"

I shook my head and said, "Not really."

"Oh," Leary's head replied, taken aback. "Well, then—I suppose you're wondering about my diabolical plan for seeking my revenge and wreaking maniacal psychedelic havoc on the world!"

"Actually, no," I replied, "I wasn't."

Leary's head became downright cross. If there was one thing the CIA hadn't reprogrammed out of Leary's head, it was its insatiable need for attention.

"No, really, I think the only thing I'm wondering about," I said slowly, taking my time, letting the words form casually yet precisely as I stared into those vacuous yet strangely compelling eyes, "and it's kind of an academic question, really, but I figured you of all people's heads would know... is just exactly how many hits of acid can a person take without going completely crazy?"

His expression changed to a thoughtful kind of pride, a long buried part of his severed head thoroughly pleased to suddenly, after all these years, be asked a question about his life's work again. Only a moment or two passed before his reply.

"Just one," Leary's head said.

"That's what I thought," I replied ruefully.

Moments later, the floating head of Timothy Leary was swept up in a military style butterfly net at the end of a long steel handle — wielded by none other than James Kent, freshly sobered up and wearing one of his stylish "action" Cardigan sweaters. Leary's head barely protested; it knew when it had been beaten.

"Good work," James said. "I'll call Ashcroft back. Why don't you go whip up some of those mimosahuasca slurpies you were talking about earlier?"

I nodded. Leary's head viewed me mournfully as James took it inside. I stared into the night sky and wondered if maybe I should take out that single tab of blotter acid I'd had under my tongue continuously since 1992, and finally decided against it.

Stars

Spiraling stars, and no sense of direction.

He is in a tight escape pod, built for one. It is cylindrical in shape, with a large cockpit window above his head. The seat in which he rests is adjustable to two positions: “sitting” and “lying prone.” Because of the tiny nature of the pod, there are, out of necessity, controls and switches all around him. The pod is designed after one of those sleek and fancy ramjets that scoop up hydrogen from the interstellar medium and convert it into fuel, thus powering the pod indefinitely; however, the pod’s guidance system was improperly booted up as the pod made its emergency breakaway. As a result, it is headed nowhere in particular.

He is not supposed to be awake. The pod was designed to put its lone passenger into deep sleep upon breakaway, but somehow the hibernation system was damaged during the catastrophe aboard the Tower. He is not supposed to be conscious, and it is his misfortune that he must remain conscious. The nanoengine within his stomach will continue generating nanoswarms indefinitely, and these swarms will engage in constant cellular maintenance and repair, simulating the intake of proteins and nutrients and pure, clean oxygen. The human body – his human body – will thus be able to survive indefinitely, without need of food or water, without need of sleep, and with no signs of aging. It is a form of technical immortality, given only to those intrepid voyagers who will someday discover what lies beyond the galaxy, who will someday know directly what the rest of the human race will never see.

It is, perhaps, his misfortune that he will live to see these things.

“Get in there!” she is screaming. “Get in there! Go!”

He won’t leave her. Another explosion rocks the ship. The last time he dared look out one of the portals, he saw debris – human debris – being sucked out of a large tear in the hull of the ship, out into deep space. Not necessarily a fate worse than death — he will never forget the sight nonetheless. Fountains of steam fill the air at seemingly random intervals. And she — she is trapped underneath a panel fallen from the ceiling of an engine-level corridor.

“Go!” she is screaming.

They had almost made it to the escape pod. They had moved fast after the first asteroid struck. He is not strong enough to shift the panel off of her torso. Her legs are undoubtedly crushed. She wants him to go. She never wanted him to go before.

“Go!” she is screaming.

The onboard navigation system is intelligent enough to make full use of the escape pod’s maneuverability. As such, he has flown safely past dangerous and beautiful formations of deadly and dying stars. Chunks of ice and inter-

stellar minerals pose no threat to the pod — not the way they so unexpectedly threatened the Tower’s hull. He has seen some astounding sights, catalogued them in his seemingly infinite memory (neural nets enhanced by nanonets, which improve themselves with every successive generation, a process that takes only a matter of weeks). Early in this voyage, he watched, along with the nav-system, for any sign of a planet where he might land, but he has passed precious few worlds out here on the fringes of the galaxy, and none hospitable to his kind. Early in this voyage, he frantically changed directions, hoping the nav-system would eventually recognize some familiar landmark along the Tower’s former course, but eventually abandoned this tactic, swirling in futility. Early in this voyage, he realized he was trapped. And he has no way to move — the pod does not allow for walking, or running, or leaping. He does not expect to feel that kind of motion ever again. The nanoswarms will keep him from feeling sore in his seat, but they will not be able to make him feel comfortable.

After the first explosion, the engine level is sealed off from the rest of the vessel.

“We’ve been hit,” she says, an unfamiliar note of terror in her voice. Even as she says it, an environmental-control door is slamming shut on the far end of the hallway. He drops his wrench to the floor, wondering if the closing of the doors is a safety precaution or if some portion of the ship has already been compromised. As the door closes, the lighting on the engine level, normally subdued and unobtrusive, turns a bright red.

He takes her hand, and slowly they begin running toward the ladder at the other end of the hallway, picking up enormous momentum as they go.

The pod’s homing beacon fires off pings every second, transmitting its single message – “I exist, I exist, I exist, I exist” – out into the void. Inside the pod, a small blue light on a control panel signals to him the same message. On a purely academic level, he is aware that it is entirely possible that his compatriots back on Earth may someday receive the faint signal from the pod. Other deep space vessels may someday receive the faint signal from the pod. They will note the signal. They will send him coordinates, they will see where he is, and they will guide him home. It could take thousands and thousands of years for his signal to be received by another deep space vessel, thousands more for him to make his way to safety, to other human beings. You don’t become a deep space traveler without some measure of patience. He can wait.

At first, he stares constantly out the cockpit window, aware that these are sights no human being has ever seen before. It is not the case that if you’ve seen one star or distant nebula, you’ve seen them all. It is not that way. They are as unique as individual people. He believes these bodies to have — not

personality, as it were, but spirit. Spirit of some kind. He believes them to be aware of his lonely passage. He watches them go by for years at a time. He catalogues their passage in his memory, on behalf of the entire human race.

Later – much later – his attention to these details wanes.

“I don’t want to talk right now,” he says, pushing past her, heading for the engine level.

“When will you want to talk?” she replies, the anger in her voice like a tightly coiled serpent, or so he thinks. “You can’t avoid me forever,” she says, following him to the grav-ramp. There is a slight pull in his stomach as he steps onto the ramp, his body now perpendicular to the level from which he came. “Let’s get something straight, you fucking jerk,” she says, stepping onto the ramp with a cool stride behind him. “I didn’t ask for this transfer because of you. I didn’t want to spend the next several thousand years on the same ship as you, believe me. But you — the least you could do is acknowledge my existence. As a colleague, for Christ’s sake, if not as somebody you used to love.”

He is ignoring her willfully. As if to admit, “Used to?” He knows it is certainly not her fault. The Tower needed a new nanosurgeon, badly – she was the only available one on a vessel within acceptable transfer distance.

“I would have expected,” she says, “that after all this time – after all this fucking time, and distance, and wasted energy – you would have the common decency to look me in the eye when I talk to you. What the hell is the point of holding a grudge out here? We could die tomorrow, or we could live forever. The only thing that matters is how you spend your time. And you are wasting yours on bitterness and bullshit.”

“Spare me,” he says, finally. “I’ve got work to do.”

As they step off the ramp onto the engine level, a stiff, loud voice comes over the ship’s public address system. It says, quite simply,

“Proximity alert!”

After a time, he realizes his mind has begun to wander. The sensation is not unpleasant.

Over time, the nanoswarms have come to occupy more and more of his body. As the water in his body was slowly lost over hundreds of years, the swarms generated other swarms to simulate the water’s effects. The muscles in his body, especially those which might have atrophied from lack of use within the pod, have been amplified by swarms which keep him taut, in shape, perpetually ready for activity which will never occur. His eyesight is constantly improving, each generation of swarms managing to increase by an order of magnitude the distance and clarity with which he can stare into deep black space. Those who first introduced the primitive nanoengine into the first humans to leave Earth’s solar system never expected such miraculous

evolutionary strategies from the brilliant nanomachines. They did not expect the interaction of the swarms, each swarm designed for a separate task, to generate a kind of awareness among the swarm population, a hive mind within the body and mind of the human host. Single-minded intelligence, to be sure: the task at hand is to keep the deep space traveler alive.

And he is still alive, of that much he is almost certain.

He finds, after a time, he can remember things in what seems to be picture perfect detail. He notices other things, too, things that are harder to quantify, about the ways in which his thinking has changed over time. There is, he believes, the sensation of experiencing thought throughout his entire body. Present within him, he believes, is the notion that thought, intelligence, awareness, are somehow evenly distributed throughout his entirety. It is no use chalking that up to the presence of the swarms. Though that might give him a technical explanation for the origin of these sensations, this notion would in no way satisfy his desire to know why this change had taken place, was taking place continually. Why is he being continually adapted, evolved?

He is not coolly detached from his situation. Periodically enormous waves of despair seem to wash over him. He claws frantically at the arms of the seat, at his own clothing. Once he finds himself pounding uselessly against the unbreakable cockpit window. The escape pod’s exit hatch was designed to open only under the strictest of circumstances, to prevent accidental depressurization in space; thus, his attempts to open it inevitably fail. He can not damage the sturdy control panels, which are, at any rate, mostly redundant, since the nav-system does most of the piloting work automatically for him. He can not damage himself. His skin is likely the toughest and sturdiest substance on board the pod, second only to his bones.

Periodically he envisions the grand panoply of the universe, allows his imagination to wander such that he believes he can see it all in a single glance. Incredibly vast expanses of distance, previously beyond the realm of human imagination, now seem to be his province; the distance from one star to the next is no greater than the distance from one synapse to the next, and his little pod, sailing between the stars, is a universal impulse, fired within the cosmic neural net. And then, occasionally, his perspective changes, and he and his little pod become no more than a dust speck in a random storm of something resembling existence. He chooses, on these occasions, to find beauty in the arbitrary formation of the universe, dares to be attracted and compelled by the awesome lack of presence indicated by his solitary journey. And then, too, there are times when he can see no farther than the control panel in front of him, created by humans to use in their relentless search for novelty. He is seeing things no other human will ever see, and also, he is experiencing things no other human will ever experience. He is an experience that no other human will have.

The docking together of two deep space vessels is an incredibly unusual affair. In this case, the Tower's nanosurgeon had found a way to build and introduce suicidal swarms into his nervous system, swarms which aggressively and destructively attacked the other swarms within his body. He had grown tired of living, and was a practitioner of the one science that could outwit itself. His death left an enormous gap in the ship's complement. His death was entirely unexpected; he left no assistants, as the Tower is a small ship.

The Captains of the Tower and the Pyongyang trade messages over a period of five hundred years, after which it is decided that the two ships will meet, and the Pyongyang, a luxury liner by comparison to the Tower, will trade one of its four nanosurgeons for a corporate fund transfer to be arranged by the suits back home. Anticipation runs high among the crews of both vessels.

He is well aware of the Pyongyang's crew roster, knows exactly which nanosurgeon had agreed to come aboard the Tower. It seems to him a complete stroke of blind, ridiculous, arbitrary misfortune that, after enlisting on a deep space vessel with the sole hidden intent of escaping her, she would now be joining him here. As the two ships dock, he stands among the crowd in the cargo hold, against the far wall, watching the Pyongyang's crew emerge in their stark blue uniforms, a contrast to the Tower's dull gray. He stands motionless as the Captain introduces her to the crew, sees her forced smile, sees her searching the crowd for him.

He loses himself in the festivities then, as does she. For five years the ships remain docked, and the two crews mingle in an enormous pool of debauchery the likes of which would astound anyone planetside with its sheer ingenuity and intensity. Occasionally, he sees her in the hallways, on the floor of some cabin somewhere, floating through the air on the zero-gee deck. He must be increasingly clever to avoid her.

He lets down his guard as the day comes when the Pyongyang finally departs. Back in uniform for the first time in years, he watches from a portal on the recreation deck as the luxury liner departs, wondering if he will miss any of those individuals in the long run, or if those names and faces and bodies and sounds will vanish from his mind's eye, de-prioritized by a memory which seems to be adjusted to cosmic time, not human time.

And then, she is behind him. She says, "Finally I've got you to myself."

"Welcome aboard," he says.

"Thanks. Listen..." Her nervousness is palpable, matched only by his seeming disinterest. "I want you to know, I didn't come here to spite you. I just... wanted a change of scenery. I actually agreed to the transfer before I ever saw the Tower's crew roster."

"I believe you," he replies.

"Good. Anyway... well, it's nice to see a familiar face out here, you know? Someone from the planet." Pause. "Don't you think? It's nice for me, anyway. I was... looking forward to seeing you."

He does not respond.

"I just, uh..." Pause. "You don't want to make this easy on me, do you?" Nervous smile, then, "Can we go somewhere and talk?"

He begins to spend most of his time, after a certain point, thinking about her. He supposes it was inevitable, that in the cold dark light of outer space, on a journey toward some infinite, unknowable destination, he should eventually consider this relationship. After all, was she not the last human being who meant a thing to him? Was she not – this question implied – the end of all meaning as far as he was concerned?

She was Jessica Alison Mitchell, to whom he was married, long before they ever thought of leaving the planet. He remembers meeting her at the university, remembers her brilliance, her impetuous and reckless streak, her unexpected belief in a higher power that almost managed to infect him back in those days. He remembers their first date and their subsequent dates, remembers the exact process by which they first became close. He remembers, in fact, the entire vast arc of their relationship in almost a single moment. He remembers, as vividly as though she were here in this capsule with him. He remembers her features, her face and her hair and her hands and her body; he remembers her voice and her laugh and her curiosity. He remembers her the way he remembers everything else: perfectly. No detail has escaped his memory.

As he replays the very beginning of his relationship with Jessica Alison Mitchell, watches it unfold before him, he is once again astounded by the capacity of the nanoswarms within him to so enhance his faculties. And then, ever so slowly, as Jessica Alison Mitchell first says the words "I love you" to him, a strange and wandering thought occurs to him.

He was not given the nanoengine until he joined the deep space corps. These early memories of Jessica, memories of a time before the nanoswarms, should have suffered some normal degradation before the presence of the swarms. Are the swarms somehow reconstructing the memories on the basis of information which his brain still contains? Or are they, perhaps, manufacturing portions of these memories, substituting clarity for authenticity?

And, on a purely subjective level, does it matter?

A week later, he agrees to meet her for dinner. One last time.

She tries to apologize, her face set with a kind of guilt that doesn't expect to go away. She was weak; she hadn't seen him in two years; he seemed to be so happy, so satisfied with his lunar assignment, while she was languishing in some biolab, doing menial work for more important scientists than she,

spending her nights alone. She needed companionship. It had no meaning. She wasn't trying to replace him. Please. You must understand.

He neither accepts nor denies her apology. He is learning in these moments the precise depths to which he is capable of handling loneliness. Trust was not an issue — of course he still trusted her, of course he forgave her. Humans make mistakes, he tells himself. Jessica makes mistakes. I made a mistake in accepting a two year assignment offworld. The damage, however, is irreparable. Forgiveness now can't ease the passage of two years alone, two years spent patiently waiting for their reunion.

"I'm going deep space," he tells her simply. "I've taken assignment aboard an Ecocorps ship going deep. They need engineers. I leave in ten days."

The look in her eyes is one of stunned surprise, followed by questions in her eyes, and finally, tears. This precise moment is bittersweet and precious, he realizes. This is the moment I say goodbye to Jessica. This is the moment I move on into an unexpected future without her.

There are no such moments, he realizes later.

After a while, the memories come to him as though they are visions, and he realizes, finally, the intentions of the nanoswarms. The memories are becoming almost tangible to him. When remembering the first time he ever kissed Jessica Alison Mitchell, the nanoswarms manage to produce a sensation upon his lips; had his eyes been closed, he might have sworn she was there in the capsule with him. Eventually he has the idea to turn off the lights in the capsule, and close the cockpit window. He is now traveling through space at somewhere very near the speed of light without any incoming stimuli: no sight, no sound, no sensation other than those provided by the nanoswarms, other than those provided by his memories.

He finds himself able to access various memories with absolute precision. He can choose exactly where and when on his personal timeline he wants to visit, and the nanoswarms call up the corresponding memories, with crystal clear detail. The future — his future — no longer holds any interest. The relentless mapping of unknown sectors of deep space, the witnessing of the physical laws of the universe in their most primordial guises, the urge to truly see what might lie beyond the edge of the galaxy — these things no longer compel him. Instead, he finds himself analyzing in minute detail the origin of his attraction to Jessica Alison Mitchell. He finds himself with her once again, night after night, as they finish their university studies together. He finds himself enjoying her touch, her conversation, her companionship all over again — yet enjoying it so much more this second time around. Enjoying it from such a bittersweet vantage point, to be sure — for is it not true that someday she will die aboard the wreckage of the Tower, while he will survive alone? Yet he can feel her now, can feel her hand upon his shoulder, her breath upon his neck. He can feel the wind blowing through the trees, can feel the

food in his mouth as he chews what must be one of his last meals before the nanoengine makes such activity unnecessary.

There is not enough time with Jessica, he realizes. The arc of their relationship ends too quickly. He wants more time, and better time. He wants to say more things to her, wants to be more things to her. He finds himself resenting the presence of the crystal clear memories, finds himself wanting to escape. The harder he resists, the more vivid and intense his memories become.

And then, quite suddenly, he is no longer in control.

"Are you taking it?" she asked him. She asked as though she believed he had already made up his mind, which was true.

"No," he replied. "How could I spend two years on the moon without you?"

The joy in her eyes was subdued but clearly present.

"I'll make it up to you," she said. "I promise."

Years later, he and Jessica followed with great interest the ongoing deep space explorations being led by NASA, Ecocorps, and a half dozen other agencies and conglomerates. He never lost the desire to travel into outer space. Yet, to his surprise, he also never found himself dissatisfied with a life on Earth, with Jessica. She became one of the leading nanosurgeons in her field, while he contributed to the design and manufacture of many deep space vessels. After rising through the ranks, he became lead foreman on the construction of a vessel called the Tower, supervised the pieces being built on Earth and then hauled into orbit for assembly, while he remained behind. The ship was launched from space, and he watched the launch on a television monitor, feeling a slight twinge of unexplainable sadness. After the Tower, he retired from the business entirely.

Their life together had an idyllic quality that he had never previously thought to be possible. They raised two children, watched them grow and attain prominence in their fields, one a mathematician, one an actor. Neither he nor Jessica seemed to notice that the two of them were not growing older, that their needs were always attended to, that the stability of the planet's politics was remarkable for its history. They only noticed each other, their relationship deepening with each passing moment, an intertwining of individuals such that there were times when they wondered if anyone else could ever tell them apart. He was amazed by this life, humbled by it. It was a miracle that he had ever met Jessica to begin with, and a further miracle that they could survive together so long.

Only periodically was his happiness punctured, by an occasional nightmare, a recurring nightmare in which he found himself trapped in an escape pod, hurtling alone through the void, without Jessica, with no chance

of human contact. He would awake from this dream screaming, and Jessica would calm him down, soothe him, gently lull him back to sleep in her arms. He would awake the next day with no memory of this episode. It was not important to remember such moments.

An Introduction to Gravity

As seen in FringeWare Review (20)12 - The Gravity Issue (summer 1997)

"It seems as if heaven had sent its insane angels into our world as to an asylum, and here they will break out in their native music and utter at intervals the words they have heard in heaven..." — Ralph Waldo Emerson

I am typing this from an island.

Meanwhile, we refer you to a somewhat unusual, partially fictitious, at times entrancing environment known to the denizens within as Gravity. In early 1992, before the Internet's heyday, before the commercialization of the World Wide Wow and the rise of America Ondisplay and the Microsin Network, before the publication of *Internet for Dummies*, *Losers*, *Morons*, *Jerks*, *Bastards*, *Fuckheads*, and *Money-Sucking Pigs*, before *WiReD* plugged its collective tongue into the electric socket of our dreams and got high off the buzz we generated — before all of that, but not before ARPANET or DARPANET or NSFNET or *Wargames*, Gravity reared its sudden head in *cyberspazio*, and my little world has never been quite the same.

On February 23, 1992, the following message was posted to several abUsenet newsgroups, notably alt.drugs, alt.slack, alt.cyberpunk, alt.magick, alt.desperation, and alt.alt:

From: The Genuflector

Date: 2/23/92, 23:23:23

Subject: May I request your presence

at a masquerade?

We have reason to believe, friends, that we are not being told the truth. The possibility that this civilization as we know it is itself the masquerade has not escaped our notice, and yet we also know this much to be true: The War on Some Drugs rages on in a ridiculous fashion, the War on Human Privacy continues to be an entirely ominous threat, the fascist spread of religious intolerance keeps our most radical spiritual practitioners (and their technologies) in a state of constant fear and near eradication, and the American political system as it stands cannot support

itself much longer. These are the tried and true cliches of the day, friends, but make no mistake: your reality is evaporating, disintegrating. Someone is robbing you of your future, piece by piece. Someone has stolen you already. It is time for an escape, and indeed, a retaliation.

Within the past seven days, my organization and I have acquired the property rights to a small tropical island near the Caymens, the Island of the Dance (as we have renamed it). We have begun making plans for the immediate inhabitation of this island, with the intention of declaring nationhood within the first month of our occupation. Building has already begun, and by the end of 1998, we intend to have a population of not less than 50 and no more than 200 relatively like minded individuals living on the Island of the Dance.

This announcement, then, signals the beginning of our application process. Please proceed to the following mailing list, at the following address:

gravity@island.dance.net

There is no majordomo in place; I personally will be approving subscription to this list. You will receive all pertinent information within the next several years. Please pay attention: our instructions will be precise, and will enable you to relinquish the ties you hold to this world.

Sincerely, The Genuflector

No one took this Genuflector seriously, to be sure, but a solid crew of us still turned up on the Gravity mailing list, just to check out the ambience (*illbience*, if you prefer). Gravity attracted (sic) a cross section of yahoos, drug-addled philosophers, Deadheads, programmers, cypherpunks, magicalk tecknologists, musicians, and lunatics: your standard electric commune, if such a thing exists. Within the first two months, the participants in the flow of daily traffic drove the Genuflector off his own list ("You'll regret this!" he screamed (or, more accurately, "YOU'LL REGRET THIS!" he typed) but we weren't buying his bullshit story about the end of the world any longer); one of our expert hackers cracked his paltry machine, stole the sub list, and moved us all to brand new digs at gravity@triangle.com.

By the end of 1992, we'd begun fleshmeeting regularly, our members crisscrossing America time and time again to experience the thrill of, shall we

say, Contact. Summer of 1993 saw an explosive burst of somewhat ethereal intensity as the psychedelic crowd and the magickal crowd began getting together to plot what they referred to as, simply, “The Conrescence.” Rather than passively accepting that Western Civ was facing yet another in a longer series of blind *petit morts*, the Conrescence crowd believed you had to *work* at it. (“You can’t just lay there!” was their motto.) Some of us wondered if this wasn’t what the Genuflector had had in mind all along; by mid-1994 it became apparent that a small minority of our most ardent members had vanished from the United States, England, and Australia, and yet were still managing to maintain regular net.Contact. From where? “Nowhere in particular,” they’d reply.

FringeWare Review began in 1994, and at some point during that year, I fleshmet Paco Xander Nathan for the first time. He had heard of Gravity’s exploits, and wondered if we might be interested in some kind of Internet synergy with the FringeWare community. The Internet catchphrase that year was “memetic hacking.” This was not a hard and fast philosophy, mind you, but a metaphor for all things subversive; you could equate memetic hacking with “brainwashing” if you wanted to, but we didn’t feel like doing that just yet. Paco and I attended DragonCon in Atlanta, batting ideas back and forth for the upcoming first issue of his magazine, and our upcoming GravityCon to be held in Iowa City, Iowa. We were concerned with the economy of Attention, and also, we were aware even then that the viscous boundaries which surrounded our individual communities were more and more suspect with each passing moment. The possibility of intrusion from without – i.e., memetic virii, hackers-gone-wrong, the big bad Government with its enormously long arms – loomed large. We knew drastic action would have to be taken someday soon, but at that point, the foundation was barely laid.

GravityCon I (“It’s *Not* Just The Drugs”), February 1995, was a blistering event, leading to GravityCon II (“You Will Be Assimilated”) in Chicago six months later. Both events featured three days of performance art, technological wizardry, keynote addresses by the mercurial Paco Xander Nathan and others, and surreptitious midnight ritual work among various sundry cliques and clagues. My own contributions to the proceedings were a rousing production of my play, *Hamlet, Santa Claus, Nietzsche, and Job* at the first con, and its sequel, *Catastrophic Love Puzzles In Outer Space*, at the second. Nearly two hundred Gravities and their friends made it to both events, and we were so flushed with success that plans were immediately laid for a third Con, to take place in November in Austin, Texas. Somehow, however, word of GravityCon III managed to escape the familiar confines of the mailing list and its related tentacles. With nearly one thousand registered participants, Gravity realized that its “secret,” to a certain extent, was out.

For a few moments, I must admit, we felt ourselves in a bit of a panic. The traffic on the list was absolutely heated. “I do not consort with Normals,”

pronounced one of our longtime members, THE INNER GORILLA. “It is hard enough for this GORILLA to deal with other Gravities in the flesh, let alone the teeming masses of those who come to suck our collective psyche dry of any its lifeblood. Imagine Joe and Jill Normal’s surprise when they wander into the wrong hospitality suite one night and suddenly find themselves face to face with 23 varieties of astral elementals doing a dance in midair while a pile of drug-addled Gravities is copulating below to the sounds of Perry Como blasting from the speakers. I tell you, IT JUST WON’T WORK!” Others were a little more sanguine about the possibilities. As another regular, Sally Ann Sagacious, wrote: “This is the perfect opportunity to release whatever kind of memetic bombshell we like onto the unsuspecting masses. Rewire their brains, release them back into the population at large, and watch our madness spread from city to city, office building to office building, subway stop to subway stop, until *Time* magazine is forced to do an alarming story about how ‘the kids these days, we don’t know what they’re doing but we know we don’t like it!’” Ultimately, it was the Conrescence crowd who sold us on going ahead with the Con. As DaveH wrote to the list: “We could use a good dress rehearsal, couldn’t we?”

Two weeks before GravityCon III was good to go, myself and several other elder members of the community received a short, angry message from the Genuflector. He had apparently been monitoring our list all along, and was thoroughly displeased at the proceedings. Curiously enough, his self-righteous anger and demands – “you **MUST** call this disaster off before you do our cause any **FURTHER** damage!” – had the opposite effect. I never had accepted the Genuflector as a peer within the Gravity community, and now he seemed more shrill and ridiculous than ever before. We cut the Genuflector out of the loop, and the so-called “elder members” and I came to our own conclusions about the Con. November 23rd arrived and the Con began right on time.

There were some two hundred and fifty Gravities on hand, plus another hundred or so of their friends. The remaining one thousand three hundred and forty-eight people who were in attendance came from God knows where: word of mouth via the Internet, advance warning from the Austin underground press, who could say exactly? Our opening event was a staging of the third play in my “Catastrophe Cycle,” a three-act monstrosity called *Danger Pillows* which contained one of our more potent rituals as the climax of act two and a full on simulation of the end of the world as the culmination of act three. As the audience staggered out of the makeshift theatre and down the stairs into the rest of our rented warehouse, they were greeted by nearly a dozen enormous hanging video screens, featuring video feedback, pirated satellite transmissions, and “found video” of the participants themselves, taken by our hidden cameras scattered throughout the site and the official Con hotels. It practically goes without saying that the punch was spiked.

Throughout the first evening, eight different bands played on three separate stages, rave music poured out of hidden amplifiers, and Gravities circulated through the crowd in outrageous costumes, performing a strange mix of ritual magick and deliberate antagonism. At 2:00 in the first morning, the theatre filled again for a performance art piece called, appropriate enough, *Island of the Dance*, led by one of Gravity's most enigmatic figures, Anon of Ibid.

Although no one knew her name, or her hometown, or her occupation, or damn near anything else about her, one thing we could all say for certain: that woman could dance, good lord, could that woman dance. The four hundred people who witnessed Anon's performance – accompanied by a dance troupe composed of four Gravities and three of Anon's close personal friends – were, as I can report from first hand experience, singularly stunned by the experience. It was during that performance that we began to see the first signs of memetic stress among the hapless Con participants. Immediately following the dance, Anon called five other Gravities to the stage – all of them members of the newly born Inner Circle – and began one of Gravity's secret rites, recalibrated for maximum effect within the memespace of the Con. I knew enough to excuse myself when that began; I had never been part of the “magickal” clique within the group, and had no idea to whom or to where they were Connecting — I only knew the energy created was more potent than I could handle, especially as I was sitting on top of four hits of LSD and 60 milligrams of 2C-B at the time.

We had Gravities posted at every door, whose self-appointed job it was to convince those who wanted to leave that they actually wanted to stay, and they were having a nearly 100% success rate in doing so. An hour after Anon's ritual began, we watched the audience trickle down the stairs from the theatre with seriously dazed and altered looks on their faces. Their expressions were captured on video and broadcast to the big screens, and that was when the rest of the group began to get the impression that something quite out of the ordinary was taking place. But the greatest special effect was yet to come. The techies within Gravity had conspired to create something truly miraculous, and now, as 4:00 in the morning rolled around, suddenly the entire vast floor of the warehouse became covered with wispy clouds of dry ice. The bands left the stage, and the music that we heard at that point was more ethereal and otherworldly than a dozen Orb albums mixed in a blender and served in a margarita glass with powdered Ecstasy on the rim. An array of brilliant red laser beams penetrated the murky air, and a strange rumbling sound was suddenly heard.

Somehow – somehow – the ceiling above us, which theoretically was also acting as the floor of the theatre on the second floor, began to crack right down the middle. Huge pieces of plaster fell to the floor below, terrifying everyone who wasn't absolutely giddy with amazement. And then a huge white light exploded into the room from above, and before we knew it, an

enormous metal spacecraft descended into the room, plumes of fire and smoke escaping from all sides. It landed with a loud *thunk* and before anyone could think to argue with it, run from it, or shoot at it, doors opened on all sides, and Gravities in alien spaceman costumes came spinning out of it, dancing to the sounds of Gravity's own house band, the Sheep Fiends. The party that ensued lasted for another two hours.

It would have lasted longer, mind you. But sometime around 6:00 in the morning, THE INNER GORILLA, who was manning the front desk at that time, received an anonymous phone call. The GORILLA calmly and quietly came to me and informed me that the local police were on the way, ostensibly because of “noise” complaints, even though this particular warehouse was situated a discreet distance outside the city limits. Fortunately, a *huge* amount of our pre-planning considered exactly this contingency. Every Gravity who was in attendance had been issued a beeper as they arrived. We sent the “911” signal out to the pagers, and within a matter of minutes – without exaggeration – there were no longer Gravities on site, just a thousand or so ravers who were suddenly on their own with their new ideas and their new states of consciousness. We had rented the warehouse under assumed aliases, hired the bands by way of unknowing intermediaries, and anonymously donated all the money we earned to non-profit psychedelic research organizations. We lost a lot of equipment, to be sure, but the Gravities who had paid for it in the first place could afford the loss. In short — we called it a total fucking success.

Nevertheless, that event was still a little too close for comfort. The Gravity community closed ranks early in 1996. Its popular GravityWeb site was yanked off the Net, subscriptions were virtually halted except by recommendations from trusted members, and the Inner Circle within the Gravity group made its presence known as a kind of “steering committee.” It was in October of this year that the Genuflector and I met in the flesh. He surprised me three days before I was to host a small Gravity fleshmeet at my apartment in Chicago. He was a small man, not much older than myself, actual name Jerry Something-I-Don't-Remember. He asked me if I was a member of this so-called Inner Circle, and I said, “Member? It was my goddamn idea, Jerry.” He alternately complimented and insulted me for the audacity Gravity displayed with Con III, and I alternately told him to stuff it and told him to get bent. He asked what we had planned for the Future™, and I said, “Presumably you've heard of Orgasm 2012?” (As in, Terence McKenna's madcap notion that the world will end in December of 2012, which he was given by – yes, you remember – aliens in the Amazon by way of some toxic potion or another.) “Well,” I continued, “we're impatient. We can't wait that long. We've decided in this case that a Premature Ejaculation is in order.”

Jerry was adamant that we were pursuing a course of maximum foolishness, and it was all I could do to convince him that that was the point. He said, “You people are toying with technologies you don't understand. You

think you can just sublimely tap into the psychedelic undercurrents, suck down power from the Internet mass mind, and rip off Crowley til he's bleeding in his grave, but I'll tell you what, Scotto, if you let this Concrecence thing march on to its inevitable conclusion, the United States government will squash you like bugs." This was at a time, mind you, when *The X-Files* was hitting its enormously creepy stride, and since Jerry wouldn't stop chain smoking, I must confess I gave his bad attitude some thought. But the fact was, the United States government wasn't going to stop us. Supposing, for a moment, the government (read: the FBI, or more appropriately, the MiB) did know who we were, saw us violating every drug law known to man, saw us violating every sexual taboo we could as fast as we could, saw us stockpiling laptops and cell modems faster than the Branch Davidians stockpiled UZIs, saw us exchanging megabyte after megabyte of nearly unintelligible content via the Gravity list on an almost hourly basis — even if they were able to take a good hard look at the virtual blur of activity which was us, they still wouldn't recognize the threat. Like any good TAZ, we operated in disguise. The nexus in time and space which we inhabited, spread clear across the globe and across several planes of existence as well, was like one of those crazy pictures where you have to stare at it until your eyeballs explode or pop out of your head before you see the little fish swimming in that big black pool of pixelated gibberish.

Jerry got religion that day, yes he did.

It became apparent during 1996 that we needed the Genuflector and his "organization." The mayhem of traveling across the country to stage "experiments" which would "further refine" our "ritual technology" such that "the end of the world" could be "reverse engineered" was taking its toll on us. The Genuflector rejoined the Gravity mailing list under relatively friendly terms, and began leaking information about his organization. Known as the Ascent Foundation, the group represented a global think tank of the most obscure variety. Jerry claimed to have key contacts in a thousand major industries, access to the kinds of resources that our own Concrecence group could only dream about. What they offered us was the Island of the Dance, the very island that Jerry had offered us in the original Gravity post almost four years ago. And now, after all this time and effort, after we'd written him off as a loony and gone our own way, here we were, synchronistically looping right back into the exact memetic attractor which had built this group to begin with. It made sense.

And so, one by one, we began to slowly defect to the Island of the Dance. It's been a very slow process, to be sure. Many of us are still living our lives the way we always were. We have left representatives behind (indeed, this missive to you, by way of *FringeWare Review*, signals our willingness to maintain ties, even as we prepare to "hack the proverbial mothership" and get our butts off this goddamn rock); Paco can probably point you in our direction, if you

can parse me this far and need to make Contact. 1997 has seen and will see our continued evolution in the direction of planned obsolescence, and by late 1998, the Genuflector's predictions for the Island of the Dance will be correct: nearly 200 people will be living here, in a nearly idyllic environment, working for the end which is nearly here.

Meanwhile, this issue of *FringeWare* can act as our friendly ambassador. In the midst of planning and dreaming for the future, we still have to live in the present, with all of the pressures that daily life brings anyone. And we wanted to share with a friendly audience some of our thoughts, some of our art, under the assumption that the FringeWare crowd probably shared some of the same ideas, and wouldn't mind the memetic inflow. Thus, we bring you the Gravity Issue, *FringeWare Review (20)*¹². On behalf of the entire Gravity community, I present these words, and do hope you enjoy them.

The Rules of Melodrama

Date: Sun, 05 Dec 1993 01:48:55 -0600 (CST)

Important considerations when dealing with the Melodrama:

1. Everything is More Important than anything else.
2. Lives hang in the balance.
3. Every action must be completed with the utmost conviction. Insincerity anywhere down the line will threaten the fabric of the Melodrama.
4. Humor during the Melodrama is a sign of Poor Sportsmanship and Bad Taste; remember, someone's life is in the balance.
5. The Melodrama is All-Consuming; think of nothing else, please.
6. Remain in doubt — will your actions ever suffice?
7. The Ultimate End of the Melodrama will certainly not be a Happy one; gnaw this even as you struggle valiantly.
8. Resist the urge to simply change the channel and watch a different show.

Enjoy the rest of the program!

A Monkey's Search For Wuv

To: Gravity

From: INNER GORILLA

Subject: a monkey's search for wuv (first post - test ping)

Under what arcane, irresponsible circumstances are new members admitted to the inner sanctum of this elevated (sic) community? THE INNER GORILLA seeks asylum from the World As We Know It. THE INNER GORILLA can remain no more in the world of financial transactions and marketing concerns. THE INNER GORILLA must shed its grotesque and terrible skin and escape into your virtual hot tub.

"I *WILL* find you, I *WILL*!"

Into the everything, and through the evergreen, and through the everlasting light - I come with a message of "time, love and tenderness - m. bolton" to soothe your "achy breaky hearts - b.r.cyrus." You have only to PING me with a response and I will know that my words are reaching their onliest destination. "Hello... is there anybody in there... just nod if you can hear me... -p. floyd" And also, "I want you... I want you so bad, it's driving me mad, it's driving me mad - t. beatles."

As THE INNER GORILLA has said:

"Some day soon THE INNER GORILLA will frolic and dance a tuneful jig within the circle of yer luv. Some day soon THE INNER GORILLA will build its own addition to the fabled Gravity Mythos - THE INNER GORILLA'S BIG OLD FUNKY HOUSE featuring THE INNER GORILLA! Some day soon THE INNER GORILLA's flesh will meet the flesh of those exciting and vigorous voices of Gravity which to this day remain only a rumor, only a mystery just outside the boundaries of THE INNER GORILLA's perception. Yes, some day soon, the doors to Chapel Perilous will swing *WIDE OPEN* and THE INNER GORILLA will come prancing into your virtual living room, bananas in one hand and a box of Busch Light in the other! Those will be the days of wine and roses, of chocolate and Play-Doh, of Ephedrine and opium, and just when it looks like Winnie the Pooh is about to pop up on the big screen, THE INNER GORILLA will tear that little sissy's *GREEDY LITTLE HEAD* off and dance on his honey smeared innards!

"*That's* when you'll know that THE INNER GORILLA has arrived!"

THE INNER GORILLA is no blisssed out New Age cuddle monkey, this much is for certain. THE INNER GORILLA comes neither from Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom of Throbbing Technomonkeys nor from America's Funniest Home Head Injuries and Near Fatal Accidents. THE INNER GORILLA comes from that place in space where time sheds its skin and gets to the center of the Tootsie Pop in *LESS THAN THREE LICKS.* This message is not reaching you in error, nor in absentia, nor in a hundred words or less - instead, this message is crawling silently down your throat and carving THE INNER GORILLA's initials on your spleen. Someday THE INNER GORILLA will join your secret circle on the inside, but for today, THE INNER GORILLA remains alone, with only 58 episodes of _THE MONKEES_ to keep it company.

As THE INNER GORILLA has said:

"Til then, THE INNER GORILLA remains respectfully on the fringes of your fantastic underground society. THE INNER GORILLA is left alone in the darkness of corporate malignance and bitter, bitter apathy, as THE INNER INBOX remains virtually empty. 'When next you see THE INNER GORILLA, shield your eyes - or you too will be forced to dance! - this guy I know.'"

If you saw this message, let me know.

Takin' the last train to Gravityland,
THE INNER GORILLA

Trust

as seen in FringeWare Review #7 (Chaos Spirituality) - spring 1996

Pick one loaded word, "spirituality," and apply personal experience (chaos) liberally. Although we may sometimes perceive ourselves moving through time by way of an almost narrative flow (the guiding hand of the divine), as often as not there is nothing and no one to illuminate the darkness ahead of us. When the chaos starts to simmer, spice with confusion, and if you're lucky, hope. Reality smiles when you least expect it will.

I wrote my first poem on a drug called LSD. It was New Year's Eve, and I was fleshmeeting with 30+ some friends (freaks) from around the country, nearly all of whom I had first met on the Internet. The only real way to describe that evening - indeed, the entire week of the fleshmeet - is to start with chaos (in this case, the collision of 30+ memespaces from around the

country), heat slowly (spending days and nights feasting and smoking and carousing together), and watch as, miraculously, a sense of underlying Spirit emerges — not necessarily “purpose,” mind you, nor anything so formalized as ritual mystical experience (though the LSD that night was potent, and the history and traditions among us were deep and strong).

An Internet mailing list, we discovered, could function as a dissipative structure, with semi-permeable boundaries allowing information and energy transfers with the outside world (Consensus Reality). The initial ingredients in this memetic attractor were metaprogramming theory and philosophies of psychedelia, but over time the focus changed such that we were interested more in *each other* than the topics by which we had met. We watched community arise from a stew of random yet entirely meaningful connections.

I myself was on a dark and dangerous path not so long ago. The suicide of my best friend had devastated me such that the gravity of his situation threatened to pull me into the quicksand as well — my core was beginning to self-destruct. And then I discovered in short order both LSD and the Internet. This is yet another event from which I have not yet recovered. If you had told me in advance that strangers from across the globe, some whose faces I will never see, whose breath I will never feel, could move me, could restore me, could offer me Hope... if you had told me in advance, perhaps I could have saved Gary. Perhaps...

I don't understand what's happened to me. “Synchronicity” isn't adequate, yet “purpose” is too dense and impenetrable. The Spirit, though, of our shared journey through time (til next New Year's Eve at least) is undeniable. Our strength is that we intended nothing so grandiose at the start, our community best modeled as a severely mystical self-organizing system, beginning with no more or less than chaos, and soon propelled into the mystic. The alchemical transformation of my essence happened despite my will and better judgment, and I am better for it. After all, would I *trust* this strangely holy business if there were actually some “one” in charge?

Center of Gravity by Dr. Nicholas Solitude

circa 2023 (via the Dreamtime)

excerpted from The Journals of Dr. Nicholas Solitude: Ruminations on the Revelation, or How I Came To Be Weightless

It was early 1998 when I first discovered Gravity. At that time, you needed to know someone in the group to get in; and by that time, depending on your circle of influence, that wasn't particularly hard (their motto at the time was “Someone you know is one of us,” a double-edged slogan with far-

reaching ramifications). I had been lurking on the fringes of several Internet “subcultures,” dabbling in esoteric mysticism and neocyberphilosophy, ignoring the more stringent duties of my anthropology background for something more tangible, more direct. I found myself attending raves on a regular basis, despite the odd and suspicious looks from the young pioneers; I thought my presence might shake them up a bit, do them some good. And you could see me walking across the parking lot after any one of these events, talking to myself and doing magick tricks (“sleight of head” as I liked to call it) and generally drawing attention to myself. Ultimately I was looking for a connection of some kind. I was no longer interested in my scientific curiosity; there was something much deeper which needed to be satisfied.

February, 1998, saw me leaving a giant warehouse just outside of San Francisco, the same routine as usual, only the flames on my hands were a deep shade of blue tonight instead of fiery red. Some part of my energy was slowly leaking away, lost in the shuffle of countless posts fired off to mailing lists that still didn't count me as a regular. Perhaps because I was lost in a contemplative cloud, I didn't see the approach of the young woman who fell in step beside me, walked almost to my car with me before I noticed her. “That's quite a talent you have there,” she said. “Listen, can you give me a ride back to town?”

As we walked to my car, she asked, “How do you do that thing with your hand?” I replied, “It's an illusion of sorts. It isn't real.” She said, “It looks real enough.” And I told her, “Even if it burns you, it probably isn't real.” We fell into a somewhat whimsical discussion of serious topics as we rode back into town. I could tell she was still under the effects of any number of possible chemical alterants. I asked if she had come to the rave with friends, and she replied, “No, I tend to travel alone most of the time. I just like to dance.” And then, a beat later, “Most of my friends are on the Internet.” Our discussion took a turn across the various Internet communities we had in common and a few we didn't, and then it was time for Andrea to get out.

As she opened the passenger door, I found myself suddenly noticing a deep purple bruise on her left cheek. I can't imagine why I hadn't noticed it before. I said, “What happened to your cheek, Andrea?” She replied bluntly, “I got punched.” I was too startled to question her further; in the pause left by my hesitation, she thanked me quickly for the ride and leapt from the car, dashing off just in time to catch an arriving bus. I was left with the distinct feeling that I would never see this woman again — until I saw the note on the seat next to me, with the word “GRAVITY” written in bold letters and an email address listed below.

The person who responded to my email was a figure known on the Net as Scotty. His email to me was terse but not unfriendly: “Yes, I know a woman named Andrea. Gravity is a mailing list, to which I can subscribe you. Gravity is also a phenomenon, a community, and that which holds you to the face of

the planet. If you join, you might be asked to help us Reverse Gravity. Should be fun, though.” And with that, I found myself suddenly at Home....

By mid-1998, there were two prevailing attitudes within Gravity’s so-called “Concrescence” movement surrounding the so-called “end of the world” memplex: those who felt, with or without adequate justification, that the world would end at the turn of the millenium (Y2Kers), and those who felt that the world would end twelve years later, in December (the McKennites). The former apparently considered “pre-millennial tension” their aesthetic purview, intending to milk humanity’s natural apprehension as its calendar “rolled over” for all it was worth. They were an active crew, no doubt due to the fact that they would be put to the test first. Meanwhile, the McKennites preferred to take the long view, concocting elaborate schemes with the luxury of years to watch them play out. As 1998 rolled along, the ideological competition between the two groups was fierce, and Gravity entered another in a long succession of phase transitions.

I viewed this schism within the group with something of a skeptical eye, and those of us who felt the whole “end of the world” thing to be a bit much formed our own third camp, calmly watching the battle of words with a bemused air about us. I knew world history well enough to know that, regardless of the coincidences which surrounded both the end of our calendar millennium (actually taking place in 2001, of course, a full year after the world’s computer systems were supposed to grind to a halt) and the end of the Mayan calendar (in 2012, though this “ending” actually signaled the beginning of a new “third era” for the Mayans, a fact conveniently overlooked by the McKennites), human civilization had already endured its share of “end of the world” scenarios. It happened when the Roman Empire fell, it happened dozens of times in China, it happened when the Soviet Union collapsed and when the Berlin Wall came down. For those people, living in those times and places, the end of *their* world certainly *did* occur. I said this over and over on the list, to seemingly deaf ears. Mine was not a welcome viewpoint, and I came to look at this young, apocalyptic crew with a certain amount of disdain. They were marshalling an enormous amount of energy, but to what end? Global nihilism?

“we don’t take any of this seriously,” said the voice of free agent .rez. “we can’t possibly. there has been no end of psychic malaise on this planet, since we realized what humanity was capable of. since we saw what took place in nazi germany. since we saw what took place in hiroshima and nagasaki. in cambodia and russia. on the streets of los angeles. what *we* imagine is trivial in the face of such events. we know full well there is no Hope for our attempts. there will be no changing of the world order, no way to slap civilization in the face. even as we attempt to engineer the planetary wake up call, we know our work is doomed. we give ourselves so-called ‘target dates’ (2000 or 2012, take

your pick) to give ourselves something solid to marshal our energy toward; otherwise, we might marshal the same energy toward finding a useful job and earning a living and going out to vote and (god forbid) raising a family in this society. ‘would you prefer another target, a military target? then name the system!’ perhaps, dr. solitude, you may come to view us as performance art. perhaps you may find the poetry in our work. perhaps you will see in us the tragic figure of the best opera, the finest theatre. and perhaps you will join us. perhaps not...”

“I’ll tell you what I see,” said the voice of THE INNER GORILLA. “I see a bunch of kids – no older than myself, undoubtedly – finishing school and spending their years learning how to be bored and oppressed. Who gives a flying fuck through a rolling donut about the coffee shop on the corner? Who gives a rat’s hairy diseased ass about the club down the street or the rave coming up this weekend or the church I pass by every day on my way to my dead end miserable life as a tool of the Man™? Fuck that, and fuck that *hard*. I’m no magician, Doc, and don’t pretend to understand what the Genueflector and all the Islanders are doing down there. But I’m joining them as soon as the next plane leaves. It’s not about destruction, you gotta understand. ‘Concrescence’ means culmination. The inevitable, coming to fruition. It’s *our* own inevitability, maybe, but who gives a shit.”

And they continued convincing themselves, spilling their strange eschatology all over the mailing list. Until the day we saw *this* post, from a longtime Gravity regular:

From: Anon of I bid

Subject: you should know

Sometimes the only way to get through life is to imagine all the different ways that life could be worse than it is right now. And then, you say to yourself, “At least I’m not in that situation. At least I’m not THAT person.” Sometimes the only way to get through life is to take pleasure in the misfortune of others. You think, “Well, at least I’m not starving to death.” You think, “Good God, that would be the worst, to be thoroughly and completely starving to death, to have NO FOOD whatsoever, to have a distended belly and all sorts of deficiencies and imbalances and to have so much agony and to be on the verge of dying. THAT would be the worst.” And when you think about people like that, nothing you ever do will ever seem significant again, and nothing that happens to you will be quite so awful again. Your own suffering won’t ever matter again, and you’ll never take pride in your own survival again. And when your husband comes home late again and knocks you straight to the floor with a vicious punch, his wedding ring tearing open your cheek

again, and when he lifts you to his feet by a handful of hair and spits in your face and punches you again, this time ripping open your lip, and when he flings you against the wall so hard that your head snaps back and your extremities go numb, and when he throws the nearest lamp at you and watches it shatter against the side of your head, and the blood from your forehead and the blood from your lip and the blood from your cheek runs down your neck onto just about the only clean shirt you have left, and when he kicks and kicks and kicks and doesn't care what he fractures, and when his coup de grace is to strangle you within an inch of your life with the lamp cord, all because you didn't have a plate of food for him when he walked in the door...none of that will matter. It won't matter to you and it certainly won't matter to him, never mind that there are men in the world who don't have the strength to beat a woman because they haven't seen food in weeks and maybe they've seen their wives and children die overnight from the heat and the hunger, never mind all that, and better yet, take pleasure in it, because those are people worse off than you, thank God. Let them starve, that's the way to help you, is to let every last one of them starve to death, so that their situation is no longer the worst in the world, and finally, you might be able to try a little self-pity.

Let me tell you what Conrescence means to me, Nicholas Solitude. I won't be making a mistake like this ever again.

Anon of Ibid

Suddenly all the science fiction fantasy drained away from our discussions. Suddenly reality intruded in precisely the wrong way. Suddenly we were reminded that, for all the fancy words we chose to throw around ourselves and our beliefs, we could never escape our nature. We could never escape the *inherent*.

And, one of us seemed to be in trouble.

I emailed Scotto, my initial Gravity contact, asking him if he knew Anon's identity, if he could locate her and find out more about her situation. His reply was typically terse: "I assume there's a reason she's known as Anon of Ibid, so perhaps you should ask her instead." But I couldn't find the strength to email a complete stranger, known only via an Internet mailing list, and offer my support. Indeed, how in hell could I support an individual who chose to remain hidden, whose very identity was the measure of secrecy? Meanwhile, the Genuflector posted an immediate note to the list, saying: "Anon, I don't know who you are, but you are welcome on the Island of the

Dance. Indeed, I've seen video of your appearance at GravityConIII, and you would be a most welcome addition to our community." She did not respond. Posts began to trickle in, tightly controlled outrage visible in their voices, but as long as Anon stayed silent, there was nothing to be done, no direction in which to funnel our anger and our desire to help.

By mid-1999, approximately half of Gravity had relocated to the Island of the Dance. I remained in my tiny bungalow in San Francisco, losing contact over time with the community. I still read the list daily, but found less and less to say about the strange goings-on. And I noticed the ardor with which the term "Conrescence" was bandied about diminished immediately following the infamous Anon of Ibid post of 1998. It was as though they'd been playing a certain kind of billiards, willfully ignorant of the pool hall around them, and someone lobbed a grenade onto their table. The detonation of so much resentment and pain in their midst distracted them from an ideology which was, as they described it, doomed to begin with.

The Y2Kers "disbanded," if you could call it that. At last report, a fair number of them had purchased three or four old school buses and were traveling the highways and byways, so to speak, occasionally checking in via cellular modem. Meanwhile, the Islanders plugged silently away, their doings and goings-on becoming ever more closed to the rest of Gravity — what "rest of" there was. The list lost its focus; the community lost its cohesiveness, even as individual groups within gained cohesion (at the price of seemingly impermeable boundaries). And I went to raves alone, just as I always had.

As difficult as it was to imagine, Anon of Ibid's message of rage seemed to be the decisive factor in the leakage of energy from the Gravity mailing list. The theory now goes that these psychedelic brigands had embarked upon a dangerous course of memetic rewiring. They had convinced themselves of something nearly impossible, and were pursuing the impossible with tremendous amounts of energy. The "villain" in their scenarios was monstrous and large: society, civilization, the world as we know it, diseased to the core and deserving of nothing less than "immanentization." And as they contemplated the notion of hitting the global "reset" button, they left absolutely no room in their plans for something so precise, so terribly specific as Anon of Ibid and her husband.

I finally posted my unsubscribe message to Gravity in October of 1999.

From: Dr. Nicholas Solitude

Subj: Unsubscribe

I must confess, I miss the old days. I have no end of nostalgia for the days when this group actually thought it could work ridiculous miracles. Sally Ann and Feijh and the whole 'bus caravan' crew are

their own clique; the Islanders are off on their own now, more than ever; haven't seen free agent .rez or Scotto or Kyra or any of the old gang in months now. I don't have to ask what's going on; I know full well what's going on.

One big rude awakening: someone you thought you knew, by the name of Anon of Ibid.

I don't know who you are or where you are, Anon, but your post, your *situation*, stunned us all quite a bit. Took the wind out of our sails. We got *this* close to thinking we could make a difference, only to be reminded that on the fundamental level, we couldn't even protect one of our own. We were too much a loose confederation and not nearly enough a community. I don't hold you responsible, Anon of Ibid, but I definitely want to know: what happened to you? Are you still with your husband, and does he still mistreat you? Did you ever bring yourself to kill him, as you thought you might? Are you on the run somewhere, have you changed lives? Is your identity truly as fluid as your alias suggests, or are you trapped somewhere, hidden behind the 'safety' of your anonymity? Is there a damn thing we *could* have done, and should we have even tried? Ultimately, you reminded us of the futility of our actions in too direct a fashion to be ignored. You showed us that when push came to shove, we couldn't possibly be bothered to find you, to wrap our own fragile energies around yours. How could we save the world and save Anon of Ibid at the same time - both events requiring equal attention, intention, concentration? You were as much a regular as anyone, Anon, but when the time came to really interstand you, Gravity fled. Disintegrated. Fragmented. Its elitism drained away, and reality rushed in to fill the vacuum.

And you're still out there somewhere, Anon, and no one knows what happened to you.

I'm leaving this list now; I don't intend to be here when whoever is currently the listowner eventually pulls the plug. Perhaps the joke is on me. Perhaps *I* was never enough of a regular; perhaps *I* was someone you never trusted enough, and perhaps all of the "important" traffic is happening behind the scenes, outside my view, on the Island and more importantly, on the buses, where I am simply not allowed. I have, after all, always been the outsider, the 52-year-old fool amongst the genx crowd. I do in fact hope and pray there is "important" traffic happening somewhere, for it would be an

enormous shame to let Anon of Ibid's whining about her helplessness destroy the empowerment the rest of you held.

Sincerely,
Dr. Nicholas Solitude

I had been having heart problems, too many years of chain smoking, and my dancing days seemed to be coming to an end. I went to my last rave, at a warehouse outside San Francisco, and stood by the walls, mostly, watching the empty exuberance all around me with a certain heaviness, a certain bitterness. Here, the illusion of community seemed easily shattered; I was no more likely to make connections here as I was on the Internet, and the problem, I began to realize, was with me, more than anything else. Who did I dare approach, and on what terms? No one, not a soul. I stood against the walls and watched the happiness dance past me. I stood against the walls and watched the present dance past me.

And then, someone I recognized approached. It was Andrea, the woman who had first turned me on to Gravity, all those months ago. She was flushed, out of breath from dancing, her face bright red and her eyes wide from, undoubtedly, chemical alteration.

She said, "Do you still do that trick with your hands?" As if that was a cue of sorts, I held up my right hand and bathed it in an eerie purple flame. "Nice," she said. "Very nice." And then, before I could say a word to her, she said, "I think you know me better by another name." She held out her hand as if to shake mine, and said, "I'm Anon of Ibid. Maybe you've heard of me?"

I was floored. I took her hand in mine, and both of our hands were suddenly aflame. She said, "Even if it burns me, it probably isn't real, right?" I nodded. And then she said,

"Listen, Doc. You should probably know, I've never been married."

I didn't immediately comprehend her. She had to repeat herself.

"I've never been married. Never had a husband." And when I still stared blankly back at her, she said, "And this husband I've never had... well, he certainly never beat me." Pause. "Or anything like that."

"So," I replied slowly, "you made it all up?" Pause. "That bruise on your face, the night I met you..."

"I had been in a fight, in a bar. Nothing serious." She smiled quietly, took her hand away from mine. The purple flames had transferred from me to her; she played with the flames absent-mindedly as she continued. "You were right, you know. There *is* important traffic going on behind the scenes. You have no idea what's going on down on the Island, and down deep, you wouldn't believe it if you knew. You wouldn't climb on one of those buses if you were invited, which is no big deal, since you won't be. You never cared about what Gravity was really up to. You never allowed yourself to get sucked

in. You were like one of those particles of light that bounces off the event horizon instead of getting swallowed up.” Pause. “Looks like I got to you just in time for the apocalypse, eh?”

“I don’t understand,” I said.

“We’re never where you expect us to be,” she said. “And we aren’t what you expect us to be, either. You think these silly purple flames are a trick worth mentioning?” She took my hand again, and said, “I’ll show you a fucking trick, Doc.”

The room began to suddenly spin, and the walls began to melt. Moments later, we shifted sideways entirely into the Dreamtime. And that was precisely when my adventures with Gravity actually began....

Summer 1997

Spiderweb

This play was produced by Theatre Babylon as part of its entry into Seattle’s Unsinkable Fringe Theatre Festival 2000, a collection of short pieces entitled, Errors, Eros, Sparks, and Larks. The play ran seven performances, March 10–19th, 2000.

Directed by Melissa Holloway

Shade: Hank Cathey

Diamond: Curtis Eastwood

Delight: JenMoon

Blaze: R. Nina Ruchirat

Mercy: Susie Lindenbaum

(Five individuals sit in chairs facing the audience, scattered about the stage. Each mimes typing words into a keyboard as lines are spoken, and each continues facing the audience for the duration of the play, i.e. the characters do not make any kind of direct contact with each other. Directors should feel free to cast these characters as any gender they feel appropriate. The characters are Shade, Diamond, Mercy, Delight, and Blaze.)

DIAMOND: Welcome to the Internet Relay Network, Diamond.

DELIGHT: *(overlapping)* Welcome to the Internet Relay Network, Delight.

SHADE: *(overlapping)* Welcome to the Internet Relay Network, Shade.

BLAZE: *(overlapping)* Welcome to the Internet Relay Network, Blaze.

MERCY: *(overlapping)* Welcome to the Internet Relay Network, Mercy.

DIAMOND: *(overlapping)* Your host is nova-1.gravity.net, running version 1.23.45.

DELIGHT: *(overlapping)* This server was created Friday November 6 1998 at 18:35:08 Pacific Standard Time.

SHADE: *(overlapping)* There are 23 users and 17 invisible on 1 server.

BLAZE: *(overlapping)* 6 channels formed.

MERCY: *(overlapping)* Message of the Day, nova-1.gravity.net: Welcome to the Gravity private server. Play nice – community is a privilege, not a right.

DIAMOND: *(overlapping)* Diamond has joined channel spiderweb.

DELIGHT: *(overlapping)* Delight has joined channel spiderweb.

SHADE: *(overlapping)* Shade has joined channel spiderweb.

BLAZE: *(overlapping)* Blaze has joined channel spiderweb.

MERCY: *(overlapping)* Mercy has joined channel spiderweb.

DIAMOND: Topic: Love is like watching a bloody car accident – you just can’t stop yourself.

BLAZE: Hey everybody.

MERCY: Hey Blaze, what’s going on?

DIAMOND: Good evening.

MERCY: Diamond!

DIAMOND: Mercy, how was the show?

DELIGHT: Hey, hey, hey.

SHADE: Are you there?

MERCY: The show was good.

BLAZE: I am still at work, unfortunately.

DELIGHT: Blaze, that’s disgusting.

SHADE: Are you there?

MERCY: It was better than I expected. Corrie was especially good, she’s funny as hell.

BLAZE: What can I say? This project waits for no one.

MERCY: Blaze, you better not have to work this late when I come to visit.

SHADE: *(insistent)* Are you there?

DIAMOND: Yes I’m here.

SHADE: So you have stopped ignoring my private messages.

DIAMOND: I never ignored them. I simply chose not to respond.

DELIGHT: Hey Mercy, private chat?

BLAZE: Hey Mercy, private chat?

DIAMOND: Hey Mercy, private chat?

MERCY: Oh my.

DELIGHT: When are you visiting Blaze? Maybe I can time my visit for the same weekend.

DIAMOND: Shade is private messaging me.

BLAZE: Delight was wanting to come to town, we were thinking we could all spend a weekend together.

SHADE: I still have things in the apartment. When can I come pick them up?

DIAMOND: Whenever you want.

SHADE: When will you be somewhere else?

MERCY: Umm... I'm not sure on the dates yet.

DELIGHT: Well, let me know.

BLAZE: If we time it right, this project might be ending. I could wind up with a few extra days off.

MERCY: Are you talking to her?

DIAMOND: Yes, she wants to get things out of the apartment.

SHADE: I would prefer not to see you.

DIAMOND: I can be out of the apartment this Sunday afternoon, if that would help.

MERCY: Mercy hugs Diamond.

DELIGHT: Well, just keep me posted. I have a really flexible schedule but the sooner the better for plane tickets.

DIAMOND: You may need to see a movie with me this Sunday afternoon.

MERCY: I can do that.

BLAZE: Would you be up for seeing Delight, or were you thinking we should have time alone?

SHADE: That would be helpful, yes.

MERCY: I would need time alone with you at some point, but I would love to see Delight as well.

BLAZE: Who knows what might develop?

MERCY: Who knows indeed?

SHADE: You have no idea how hard you've made things for me.

MERCY: Has she said anything about me?

DIAMOND: Not yet.

SHADE: Is this your idea of punishing me?

DIAMOND: I'm not punishing you.

MERCY: Diamond and Shade are apparently arguing right now.

BLAZE: Oh, that doesn't sound good.

MERCY: I'm trying not to get too sucked into it, but Shade has really turned on me.

BLAZE: I know how that feels.

DELIGHT: Hmm, think I will order a pizza.

SHADE: Hello, Delight.

DELIGHT: Hello, Shade.

SHADE: How are you?

DELIGHT: Fine. How are you?

SHADE: Have you turned everyone against me?

DIAMOND: Of course not.

SHADE: I'm fine. Why haven't you answered any of my emails?

DELIGHT: I've been very busy.

SHADE: I think you have turned my friends against me. I think you all deserve each other.

DIAMOND: I don't know what you're talking about.

MERCY: I was accused of drawing too much attention to myself.

BLAZE: From someone who desires that kind of attention.

SHADE: You have no idea how hard you've made things for me.

DIAMOND: Do you take no responsibility for your own behavior?

MERCY: Do you have plans for my visit?

BLAZE: Nothing in particular.

MERCY: I must confess, I'm slightly nervous about this visit.

BLAZE: I'm also a little nervous, now that you mention it.

DIAMOND: I must confess, I'm a little nervous about your upcoming trip.

DELIGHT: I'm reading your email right now, Shade.

SHADE: You withdrew your friendship so completely the very moment there was trouble.

MERCY: Well, who knows what will happen?

SHADE: You were threatened too easily by my exploration and discovery.

BLAZE: We should be careful with expectations.

DELIGHT: I would love to come visit you, Shade. I'm under a lot of pressure at work right now, though.

SHADE: That makes sense.

DELIGHT: Could you come visit me?

SHADE: I could take a long weekend.

DELIGHT: I could help pay for the plane ticket.

SHADE: You'd do that for me?

DELIGHT: Of course!

DIAMOND: What do you expect to happen?

MERCY: Anything could happen, really. I am wide open to anything.

DIAMOND: Are you expecting something sexual?

BLAZE: We should hope for nothing more than good conversation, a chance to get to know each other better.

MERCY: Would that threaten you?

DIAMOND: It might. I am learning not to be threatened by exploration and discovery. Learning the hard way as usual.

SHADE: And when I took control of myself for the first time in years, you decided I was dirty and wrong, something to be punished.

MERCY: Does Delight have any idea what's actually developing between us?

BLAZE: I have told Delight next to nothing.

MERCY: (*smiles*) I do love surprises.

SHADE: Does Blaze know you and I are talking?
 DELIGHT: She does.
 MERCY: Does anyone know if *X-Files* was a rerun tonight?
 DIAMOND, DELIGHT, BLAZE: It was a new one.
 DELIGHT: I didn't like it that much.
 DIAMOND: *Simpsons* was good though.
 BLAZE: Where do you find time to watch television?
 DELIGHT: Television is important, Blaze. Without television, we'd have no idea how to behave properly when confronted by shape shifting aliens.
 SHADE: You people are the shape shifting aliens.
 MERCY: Oh, hi, Shade. How are you tonight?
 DIAMOND: Diamond shifts into the shape of a plumper, healthier looking Ally McBeal.
 DELIGHT: Ooo la la!
 BLAZE: Yep, there's a reason she can't find a boyfriend. They're all afraid of snapping her in half.
 MERCY: See, Shade is still not talking to me.
 DIAMOND: This too shall pass.
 MERCY: Are you okay?
 DELIGHT: I talked a little more with Blaze about moving.
 MERCY: Did you actually decide anything?
 DIAMOND: Well, let's just plan on seeing a movie on Sunday. *(takes out palm pilot and schedules it in)*
 BLAZE: Why don't you call me at work? I'm stuck here waiting with nothing to do.
 MERCY: Ooo, actual voice contact? How risqué! *(takes out phone and begins dialing)*
 DELIGHT: No, we're not ready to make a decision yet. *(SHADE takes out phone and begins dialing)*
 DELIGHT: Mostly it depends on what kind of job I could get, since Blaze can get a job practically anywhere. They'll take one look at that resume and say, "Brainiac 5 from the planet Smartron 12?? – you're hired!!"
(SOUND EFFECT: Phone rings.)
 DIAMOND & BLAZE: *(pick up phones)* Hello?
 SHADE & MERCY: *(on phone)* Hi.
 DIAMOND & BLAZE: *(on phone)* Hi.
 DELIGHT: *(typing)* Be right back, I'm going to order a pizza.
 DIAMOND & MERCY: *(typing)* Be right back, phone.
 SHADE: *(on phone)* Do you have anything to say?
 MERCY: *(on phone)* We can't talk too long, my phone bill is getting out of control.
 DELIGHT: Dub dub dub dot pizza now dot com.
 DIAMOND: *(on phone)* I don't know what to say.

BLAZE: *(on phone)* Talking to you even for a few minutes is good enough.
 SHADE: *(on phone)* That's typical. You disgust me.
 DELIGHT: *(not typing)* One hour or less, not bad. Now, *(typing again)* CNN.com.
 DIAMOND: *(on phone)* It's clear to me we will never see eye to eye about what happened.
 MERCY: *(on phone)* Did anything ever happen between you and Diamond?
 BLAZE: *(on phone)* Anything sexual?
 MERCY: *(on phone)* Yeah.
 BLAZE: *(on phone)* Well, now that's an interesting question.
 SHADE: *(on phone)* I'm not interested in seeing eye to eye. In fact, I didn't really call to hear what you had to say, because I know what you'll say.
 BLAZE: *(on phone)* Is there a reason you're asking?
 SHADE: *(on phone)* I have had to spend so much time contemplating what's become of us. I am trying to be fair, but it's so, so difficult. I feel devastated and barely alive.
 MERCY: *(on phone)* Would it bother you to know that Diamond and I are exploring a few possibilities here and there?
 SHADE: *(on phone)* My apologies were obviously not enough.
 DIAMOND: *(on phone)* Far too few, far too late.
 SHADE: *(on phone)* It's funny how when we were younger, years ago, you were the one making all the mistakes, and we learned from those mistakes and grew.
 DIAMOND: *(on phone)* Some mistakes are more than mistakes, Shade. They're choices that you make. Choices that you live with.
 BLAZE: *(on phone)* I think you should tell Diamond that the four of us are getting married.
 MERCY: *(on phone)* Ooo, I like the sound of that.
 DELIGHT: *(reading, not typing)* Oh my.
 SHADE: *(on phone)* Yes, and these choices were inextricably worth it.
 DIAMOND: *(on phone)* I'm glad to hear that.
 SHADE: *(on phone)* I bet you are.
 DIAMOND: *(on phone)* I do miss you severely. I do want us to find our friendship again.
 SHADE: *(on phone)* I don't think I want that.
 MERCY: *(on phone)* I think Diamond is concerned that you and Delight are going to suck me in and leave him alone, on the outside. Plus I don't think he knows what's actually going on between you and him.
 BLAZE: *(on phone)* Love is not a zero sum game. There is definitely enough to go around.
 SHADE: *(on phone)* Alienation is a tool at my disposal.
 MERCY: *(on phone)* It gets so complicated.
 BLAZE: *(on phone)* Using jealousy as a tool at your disposal...

MERCY: *(on phone)* It's exhausting staying open, staying honest.

BLAZE: *(on phone)* And inextricably worth it.

SHADE: *(on phone)* Ultimately I was a fool for ever believing that anyone would stand by my side while I learned what I needed to learn. That itself has been the biggest lesson of all.

DELIGHT: *(typing again)* Hey guys, listen to this. A 58-year-old woman in Kansas City just gave birth to quintuplets. No fertility drugs were involved.

MERCY: *(typing)* Holy moly.

DELIGHT: What do you suppose those kids are going to be like when they grow up?

DIAMOND: *(on phone)* Did you just see what Delight posted?

BLAZE: *(typing)* That's incredible.

DELIGHT: The best part is, the woman has already had five children, and the last child she had was over nine years ago.

MERCY: *(typing)* Good God.

SHADE: *(on phone)* Don't try to change the subject, you bastard.

DIAMOND: *(on phone)* I think this conversation is over, Shade. *(hangs up)*

SHADE: *(on phone, shouting)* ASSHOLE!

DELIGHT: I can easily imagine these five children growing up to be five incredibly different people.

MERCY: *(on phone)* I think I should let you go, sweetie.

BLAZE: *(on phone)* Yeah, I think I should get back to work.

DELIGHT: It's entirely possible that one of them would grow up to be a doctor, caring for the human physical condition...

MERCY: *(on phone)* Love you.

BLAZE: *(on phone)* Bye bye. *(MERCY & BLAZE hang up)*
(All are now typing again.)

DIAMOND: You there?

MERCY: Yeah, I'm here.

DELIGHT: Perhaps one will grow up to be a teacher, caring for the human intellectual condition.

DIAMOND: I'm going to log off for a while.

MERCY: You feeling okay?

BLAZE: Whoa! Looks like I actually get to leave the office! I am so out of here!

DIAMOND: I'm fine.

DELIGHT: Perhaps one will grow up to be a priest or a nun, caring for the human spiritual condition.

MERCY: Good night, Blaze.

DIAMOND: Have a good night, Blaze.

BLAZE: Blaze has left channel spiderweb. *(bows head down)*

DELIGHT: Perhaps one will grow up to be an artist, caring for the human imagination, and the principle of hope.

MERCY: Take care of yourself. I'll see you on Sunday.

DIAMOND: Maybe you'll see me before Sunday.

MERCY: *(smiles)* That would be nice.

DELIGHT: Such potential, provided their parents don't fuck them all up.

DIAMOND: Diamond has left channel spiderweb. *(bows head down)*

MERCY: I guess I'm leaving too.

DELIGHT: Yeah, I've got some work to get done. Good night, Mercy. Good night, Shade.

MERCY: See ya, Delight.

DELIGHT: Delight has left channel spiderweb. *(bows head down)*

MERCY: Good night, Shade, if you're still there. *(silence)* Well, good night anyways. *(silence)* Mercy has left channel spiderweb. *(bows head down)*
(Silence.)

SHADE: Perhaps the last one will grow up to be directionless, a wanderer on the open seas. Perhaps that small child will find itself unable to speak loudly enough, crowded by its charismatic siblings. Perhaps that child will need attention it never gets, mothering it badly needs, mentorship it never finds, inspiration that never comes. The years may pass, and every Christmas the family will get together and share their success stories with their mother who's oh so proud, but when it's that child's turn, there won't be much to tell save for empty nights with strangers who tired all too soon of the need that plagues that poor child. Perhaps, in the end, the anger and the bitterness that comes with years spent lost on the open seas will finally provide the fuel that child needs to survive, but perhaps not, and in the end, perhaps that child's fears will all come true. *(softening)* I'm doing fine, thank you for asking. *(pause)* Shade has left channel spiderweb. *(bows head)*

Contract Issues

December 5, 2002

During the year 2002, Scotto became enamored of using the notion of a “tri-state killing spree” as a way to interrupt threads on the Scrytch list and generally make an annoyance of himself. No opportunity to use “tri-state killing spree” as a punch line or an inappropriate answer was missed, and eventually, the members of the list were forced to act.

— Andrea Change

To: The Association

From: Dr. Nicholas Solitude

Subject: Contract Issues

Colleagues,

It is with deep regret that I must inform you that we intend to terminate the contract with one “Scott O. Moore,” who performs in the semi-regular role of “Scotto” and/or “severed, floating head of Scotto” etc., as of end of this season. Although we initially felt the character held much promise, the writing staff feel the character has devolved into a sad caricature of its original potential. While the rest of the cast has grown into itself with each passing season, the “Scotto” character is stunted and humorless, lacking even a requisite amount of sexual appeal or even basic charisma, and further, the “tri-state killing spree” subplot has failed to produce even the tiniest hint of complexity in the overall storyline. Indeed, in times like these, and in fact we might append “as usual” to this clause, we find the “Scotto” character mired in tasteless, remorseless immorality without any accompanying wit or intelligence to merit the character’s continuing inclusion in our storyline.

I have scheduled an extra session with the writing staff to iron out the wrinkles this character’s deletion will cause from next season’s story arc. I expect this meeting to last approximately eight minutes. A new story bible will be provided to all freelance writers with episodes in the queue.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,
Dr. Nicholas Solitude
Executive Producer

To: Dr. Nicholas Solitude

From: William Slade

CC: The Association

Re: Contract Issues

Nicholas,

Good to hear from you again. I’m glad the syphilis actually cleared up this time. For christ’s sake, man, will you please learn to “wrap your willie” as the kids say. Sorry to be crass, I’m actually logging in from a nudie poker machine in a bar in Wichita. As long as I keep getting three nekkid brunettes with that “I am going to suck you dry” look on their oh so carefully pursed lips, I will be able to keep this connection.

Scotto left Wichita yesterday, as best as I can reconstruct it. The local cops think they are looking for, depending on who they are listening to, a) a midget professional wrestler by the name The Flying Impala, b) Jon Bon Jovi, or c) Darren Bauler. Scotto is a treacherous beast, to be sure. He managed to butcher an entire 7-11 and make off with the Slurpee machine, which I believe he intends to modify and sell to Pakistan to help with their nuclear programme.

He is headed for Missouri. My intelligence informs me that he once worked for Six Flags Over St. Louis. Those people must be warned, Nicholas. You know that, and I know that. I realize the business of wearing Daffy Duck and Porky Pig costumes in public on some level actually deserves what is headed their way; nevertheless, we can’t afford another high profile disaster like this. Moreover, my per diems absolutely must be raised; the hookers have all started charging a lot more, what with the economy in the dumps (those wretched wenches of misery and shameless delight).

With respect and deep admiration,
Police Chief William Slade

To: The Association
From: Darren Bauler
Re: Contract Issues

Let me be extremely clear on this matter. That man is a genre hack who hasn't written a word without the aid of booze or speed in the last 48 years - I have documented evidence of this. I have already put my people on this matter, so please call off the Association "lawyers" (or whatever it is you call the unnatural whores of Satan's grandmother that do all your house cleaning these days).

Sincerely and with deep affection and abiding love and devotion,
Darren Bauler

To: The Association
From: Dr. Nicholas Solitude
Re: Contract Issues

Look, it's not like he was promised a continuance into next season. Indeed, the only practical effect of this contract termination is to let him know that we simply won't be requiring his services as we move forward with the story - we have several considerably important and intertwining stories to consider that make full, dramatic use of the regular cast, requiring new, fresh supporting characters to take us through to the story arc's logical conclusion. I fail to see why strike teams must be mobilized and the Association must be propelled to Hazard Level Four simply because one minor character is being written off the series. Could we please have some perspective, people? He wasn't even a sympathetic character to start with! Audience members routinely vomited and shat themselves when he appeared! I seriously doubt we will actually feel any ill effects from the termination of this aesthetic experiment gone horribly, horribly wrong.

On a side note, Mr. Slade, if you do see my daughter while you're out on assignment, by all means would you please let her know she is sorely missed, and if she requires an intense regimen of antibiotics upon her return, we will NOT judge her harshly.

My most heartfelt regards to all the beloved members of the Association,

Dr. Nicholas Solitude
Executive Producer

To: Dr. Nicholas Solitude
From: William Slade
CC: The Association
Re: Contract Issues

I was too late. Six Flags parks have a policy that the snotty-nosed, pimple-faced 15-year-olds who wear the giant Daffy Duck costumes can NOT have their heads removed in sight of park "guests." I believe their policy was intended to cover the simple removal of the fiberglass Duck head or any other costume head, and not the actual decapitation of the performer within, but I fear that Scotto has long since lost the ability to care for such corporate niceties.

He is headed for Iowa.

With my most undying gratitude, bewildering worship, and mind-numbing desire to please, I remain, most sincerely and devotedly,
your slave and puppet,
Police Chief William Slade

From: Hamilton Murphy, Esq.
To: Dr. Nicholas Solitude
CC: The Association
Re: Contract Issues

Esteemed colleagues,

We have analyzed the contract in question using cutting edge quantum probability analysis and have determined that the character in question is entitled to one final episode (where "episode" is clearly established by appearances in "Please Do Not Touch Me There," "Why Must You Persist In Touching Me There," "Good Christ I Had No Idea You Were So Contagious," "Orphans And Their Sad Vulnerabilities," and "The Many Uses of Oil"). I regret to inform the Association that the current subplot is actually covered under the performer's existing contract not yet legally nullified, the

Geneva Convention, and the most recent ruling by the Multiversal High Court in the case “The People versus Hollywood Smith and His All One-Legged Chorus Line.” To wit: early elimination of the character before its natural aesthetic conclusion is actually a violation of the contract in question and can be successfully appealed by the performer, with potential victory condition of enforced continuation of contract, at great inconvenience to our writing staff.

We recommend: a) the summary removal of Chief Slade from the situation, b) negotiation with the Bauler for his parties’ retreat from the situation, and c) allowing Scotto to complete his so-called “tri-state killing spree” in Iowa. We realize that the families of the hapless Iowans in question may eventually through some bizarre twist of probability discover our culpability and bring suit, but the damages will be considerably less than Scotto himself could manage to attain, considering his knowledge of our organization and his ability to insert himself into the story at any point along its natural timeline, regardless of typical laws of nature or aesthetic prudence.

Cheerfully yours,
Hamilton Murphy, Esq.

From: Courtney Wormwood
To: Dr. Nicholas Solitude
Re: the Scotto problem

The brass is totally on my ass about this, Nicholas. They think you’ve misjudged the whole situation. They keep blathering on about “heart of gold” and “surprisingly sensitive” and “sends fruitcakes on holidays before fucking our wives.” I don’t really get it. But the fact is, he’s got support in high places, and you can’t just nuke him like this. Especially because, he knows where all of us live. I mean, Jesus, Nicholas, did you honestly think you could just “get away” with this? Use your fucking head for a change. When the fuck did this series EVER give a rat’s diseased, inflamed, pestilent ass about continuity or character development? It’s all about who delivers the most “bang” for the “buck” and if there was a gerund or prepositional phrase that Scotto wouldn’t “bang” for a “buck” then we must clearly be dealing with two separate people.

Upshot: write the asshole a new contract, give him a love interest, do the whole “villain to hero” transfiguration, then spin him off onto a different fucking network. This is not brain science, Nicholas!

On a separate note, I want to be clear, my husband and I did in fact appreciate the fruitcake you sent for Christmas, and you do not need to fuck me to prove that you were sincere in sending it.

With a vague sort of fondness reminiscent of something slightly more engaging than abject apathy,
Courtney

From: Dr. Nicholas Solitude
To: The Association
Re: Contact Issues

Colleagues,

It is with a certain amount of embarrassment and discomfort that I must retract my statements of earlier this week. Although the creative staff and I did deeply feel that we had used up the Scotto character to its fullest and most sickening potential, Scotto himself in fact proved us quite wrong by demonstrating via his vile and unspeakable acts in Iowa over the past three days (acts now collectively referred to by the popular media as “The Broccoli Rapes”) that he is still quite capable of stimulating new and invigorating twists to the ongoing storyline, while nevertheless relying on classic tropes (indeed, “tri state killing spree” ought now be nominated for a rightful place in the Smithsonian) to accomplish innovative new effects.

Please disregard all previous messages concerning the contract of “Scott O. Moore” and related characters. We now anticipate this delightful, marvelous performer to be with us for an untold myriad of episodes to come.

That is all,
Dr. Nicholas Solitude
Executive Producer

Then There Was The Time...

6/26/2002

Did I ever tell you about the time I saved my wife JenMoon from an evil horde of cyborg pirates from the future? I suppose not... for a long time, we didn't like to talk about it because once you let someone know you're capable of saving someone from an evil horde of cyborg pirates from the future, then pretty soon they're asking you to save their sweetheart from maniacal mutant underwater slime monsters, and oh can you rescue my grandmother from the dreaded masking tape of Santa Demonica, and hey, Fluffy my cat is up a tree, et cetera et motherfucking cetera. But as I've gotten to know you folks a bit better, I've realized none of you are likely to approach me that way... I can tell this by the way most of you recoil in what looks like severe gastrointestinal pain any time you're forced to talk to me, so I suppose I can now share with you all the story of how I saved JenMoon from an evil horde of cyborg pirates from the future.

It was a Sunday morning, and I woke up with an incredible headache from spending the previous evening performing horrible experiments on the fabric of the spacetime continuum, taking cues from my underground bestseller on the subject of obscene balloon animals. Unfortunately, the naughty naughty horse cluster had popped after we'd gone to sleep, leaving a gigantic wormhole open directly underneath our bed. When I awoke, I realized immediately that I didn't feel the comforting warmth of JenMoon's skin next to mine, which was very strange, since I typically sleep under a blanket of JenMoon's skin from the clone vats we keep next to the refrigerator. More disturbing, though, was that JenMoon herself was missing from the loft. I immediately suspected our cat Cinnamon had sold JenMoon into white slavery to keep up her insane catnip habit, but Cinnamon passed the polygraph exam, so at that point I was baffled.

In an absolute panic, I immediately sat down and watched some television for a while. Then I had some Grape Nuts, and checked my email for a few hours, and eventually realized I needed to clean the slime off the walls from the *Baywatch Nights* marathon we'd had a few months back. I lost track of time, a few days went by, and after a while, I started to wonder who all these women's clothes belonged to that were hanging on the rack next to mine, when eventually one night I received a phone call.

"We have your moon," said a vicious, disturbing, gravelly voice.

"What are you talking about?" I replied. "I'm looking out the window right now, and it's still up there."

"Not that moon, you ignorant jackass," the voice said. "We have JenMoon."

The name sounded strangely familiar... and then, it all came flooding back to me, all the wonderful times we'd had together, the shared adventures,

the laughs, the intimate nights alone, the multiple prison breaks, the clever use of hostages to throw smokey off our tails...

"What have you done with her?" I growled. Actually, as far as growls go, it came out sounding more like "grrowwrrrorrrrrrrrr," but I think he got the point.

"Listen closely, if you ever want to see JenMoon alive again. We have—"

"Hold on," I interrupted, because Tiger Woods was making a very important putt. The guy said a few things I don't remember, and then I turned the TV off finally and said, "Okay, what was that?"

"...in three hours, or we will feed JenMoon to the spleenbeests of New Indianapolis on the far side of Europa!" I heard an ominous click, and the line went dead.

Spleenbeests of New Indianapolis? I thought to myself. That could mean only one thing: cyborg pirates from the future.

They'd made one critical error: leaving the wormhole open underneath the bed. Oh sure, I'd known it was there all along; in fact, I'd been emptying the cat box into it for days now, which I would later learn caused the collapse of western civilization due to the sudden untimely appearance of mounds and mounds of cat waste at a critical meeting between heads of state. (And please, spare me the guilt trip, because any of you weirdos who happen to be around at the time will by then be uploaded and trapped inside an old Powerbook or something, so it's not like you'll care.)

But now, I knew I had a mission: if I was ever going to get a decent meal cooked for me again in my life, I was going to have to travel through the wormhole, into the future, and rescue my beloved sweetheart, JenMoon. It would be kind of a shame, because she was probably going to want me to stop wearing her dresses, but if that was the price to pay for getting decent stir fry every now and then, so be it.

Naturally I couldn't travel to the future unarmed. I pulled my arms out of the plasma bath with my teeth and sewed them back on with JenMoon's sewing machine. Then I began assembling weapons for my trip through the wormhole. Ball and chain: check. Sound Gizmo: check. JenMoon's Britney Spears CD collection: check. Nuclear powered rail gun: ... fuck, who did I loan that to? Oh, right — a quick call to Mason (who *claimed* he needed it for work, but you know, whatever) and I was ready to go. Only one thing remained: I certainly couldn't embark on such an ambitious rescue mission *sober*, for fuck's sake.

I opened the extradimensional safe and withdrew the large, glowing vial of 2-TC-special-G. Renowned amongst the entheogensia for its ability to grant the user a sharp and heightened sense of awareness, a deep and resonant feeling of confidence, and a large and bloody hole in the back of the sinus cavity, 2-TC-special-G had been my favorite research chemical for years (if by "research" you meant "let's see how many people die from it this time" and

by “chemical” you meant “fundamentally corrosive and evil secretion from the sweat glands of Satan himself”). I snorted a large line of the stuff, collapsed onto my back, clawed the right side of my face off for the third time that week, then stood up, and with a resounding shout of “BANZAI!!!!” I leapt into the wormhole.

I emerged at the other end of the wormhole deep inside the cyborg pirate lair. I knew this from the awful stench, the piles of technological booty stacked in the corners, and the enormous banner hanging on the wall that said “WELCOME TO THE CYBORG PIRATE LAIR!” I guess they were having some kind of cyborg pirate convention, and to my deep horror, I learned that even three thousand years in the future, people were still adding inappropriate sound effects to their PowerPoint presentations. However, I was quickly spotted by cyborg pirate security, and soon I was surrounded by a horde of nasty cyborg pirates, each of them pointing nasty cyborg pirate swords and cyborg pirate guns and cyborg pirate farm animals at me. That’s when my years of martial arts training came into play. In my first class, they taught me “forward roll.” In my second class, “TOUCH OF DEATH!” In my third class, “backward roll.” So you see I was totally prepared.

An enormous brawl ensued, during which I kicked the absolute living shit out of hundreds of pirate cyborgs. I know that most of you are only acquainted with my mind mannered, vaguely interesting in a “how does this person survive without being committed?” persona at parties, but down deep I am in fact a badass motherfucker with a complete and total command of ancient fighting arts, an immense understanding of strategy and tactics, and an unfortunate skin condition that I would rather not talk about. I fought that cyborg pirate horde as though everything in my life depended on it — which was not far from the truth, considering the Mariners were playing in about an hour, and I needed to be home to watch the game.

Eventually I had killed them all — all, that is, except their unfortunate leader, the Dread Pirate I Am Going To Kick Your Fucking Ass. He was standing on stage, below a large screen with a PowerPoint slide that read “How To Torment Helpless Females From The Past For Fun And Profit,” and below that title, there was a picture of...

... JENMOON!

“You’ll never see your sweetheart again unless you put down the Britney Spears CDs!” shouted the Dread Pirate IAGTKYFA.

“I’ll put them down alright,” I replied, just oozing cool the way old movie stars do, especially when you prick them the wrong way and the embalming fluid starts leaking out. I hurled the CDs with death-defying accuracy from clear across the cyborg pirate auditorium and watched them sink deeply into the Dread Pirate IAGTKYFA’s throat. He gagged and hacked for a moment, then collapsed onto his face on the floor. I don’t know why he had left his face on the floor in the first place, but that wasn’t my problem.

I could hear a whimpering from behind the screen on stage. It was a terrified, plaintive whimpering, that sounded very familiar... but I knew these guys probably didn’t keep 12-year-old Filipino slave girls in the trunk of their car like I did, so I suspected it was probably JenMoon.

“Jen, is that you?” I shouted as I dashed backstage. Sure enough, there she was, tied to a tall post, wrapped in duct tape and saran wrap and wearing a Carmen Miranda hat. Such savage torture... lord knows Jen wouldn’t wear a hat like that unless it was called for in the script and had a good artistic justification. I untied her, and then became suspicious. “How do I know it’s really you, and not some cyborg pirate imposter?” I said. She responded by doing that one thing she does with her hand that always makes me kind of do that other thing and then there was sort of this moment where tongues were involved and she made that little sound that she makes and I realized, even three thousand years in the future they didn’t have cyborgs that knew *that little sound*, and that’s when I knew I had found my precious, precious JenMoon, and despite the fun we were having and the mess we were making (thanks to the industrial lube I carry with me at all times), it was time to get the flying hell out of there.

“I knew you’d come,” she said.

“Well, I couldn’t help it, I mean, you were doing that thing you do with your hand—”

“No, I mean, I knew you’d rescue me,” she said, “I just knew it. That must mean you really love me!”

I tried to equivocate and pretend I didn’t know what she was talking about, but I guess it’s pretty clear that you don’t leap through a wormhole with a ball and chain and a Sound Gizmo unless you really do love someone. Well, maybe, I mean, it’s not like I’ve interviewed everyone who ever leapt through a wormhole. The point is, though, that she was right — I really did love her, and I really did want her back. The cyborg pirates had captured her intending to blackmail me into investing in companies and placing bets on sporting events so that they could be rich beyond belief, but they hadn’t counted on my devotion to JenMoon, my deep and powerful love for her, and my intense and refined sense of ethics and morality that kept me from — well, okay, never mind that last part, but I mean, they hadn’t really thought things through.

And so I led her to the edge of the wormhole, and we held hands and stared deep into the past... *our* past, or rather, our present day, the time when we lived in a loft and threw crazy parties and knew we were meant for each other. We looked deep into each other’s eyes, and then she said, “Scotto, I’ve always wanted to tell you something. It’s one of my deepest and most closely guarded secrets, and it’s meant for you and you alone.” She paused, took a deep breath, and said

Oh wait, Tiger has another putt coming up. I guess I'll have to finish this later.

Autologue: As We Go Along

Tue, 16 Apr 2002 12:15AM -0700

*"I can tell by your face
That you're looking to find a place
To settle your mind and reveal who you are"*

In that future perfect world where I know what I want and somehow manage to attain it, I watch the sunset while standing on my back porch, overlooking the creek, listening to the birds, sipping a delicious mug of hot chocolate. The peaceful satisfaction of the day's work is behind me, and I drink in the relaxing aura of the crisp autumn evening. I've been working on a new novel, and the voices of several of my characters are already filling my head with tomorrow's chapter. I feel a kind of contentment that I never expected to feel, a sense of accomplishment at having simply survived, let alone with my wits and my compassion intact. JenMoon steps out onto the porch, embraces me from behind as she has for decades now. We are waiting for the mescaline to take effect.

*"And you shouldn't be shy
For I'm not going to try
To hurt you or heal you or steal your star"*

The useless machismo of the angry young man died a long time ago, replaced by ambition, the desire to be something more, the need to earn respect. I was fresh out of college with a degree in theatre, having moved to Chicago with twenty dollars in my pocket on my first grand idealistic adventure. We were making stone soup theatre. Our first theatre company fell apart, the two founders enraged at each other. Undaunted, I started my own theatre company. Our first play was met with stunning indifference, and it too fell apart. LSD and I continued our deep, unfortunate relationship. My engagement to a young Iowa girl fell apart. One night, alone in bed, staring at the ceiling, it occurred to me for the first time that big things were not in store for me, as I had believed as a child. I would be neither rich nor famous, my movies would not be produced, my books would not be read, my songs would not be heard. I was, at that moment, a secretary, and I had little reason to expect more.

*"Open your eyes, get up off your chair
There's so much to do in the sunlight"*

My first experience with pure MDMA happened almost a decade ago, in a house up in the mountains, surrounded by two dozen close friends. I experienced telepathy that night, but undoubtedly more important was the tremendous opening of our collective hearts. My burgeoning nihilism found itself confronted by wondrous luxuries of friendship. It was a shimmering, lovely, tantalizing glimpse into our communal heart. It was a seed we planted that would, over the years, flower in so many delicious and unexpected ways. The frenzied, destructive mania of my early twenties gave way to a more confident, compassionate young adult. I moved to Seattle with a newfound pragmatic optimism. I worked to harness my ambition, and retrain my expectations of what could and should be meaningful endeavors and meaningful goals. I continued to meet an array of interesting and astonishing people, and found a new career in the software world. My personality evolved in the crucible of experience, led by the notion that I was blessed with opportunity.

*"Give up your secrets and let down your hair
And sit with me here by the firelight"*

I often fear that revisiting my best friend's suicide is at best a maudlin pursuit, but the savage scar his death left on me has required years of tending. We attended the same Lutheran grade school together, where his mother taught first grade and his father was principal. We became very close during high school, fellow outcasts who played RPGs and listened to unpopular music. He read my very first book and did me the courtesy of pretending to enjoy it. Yet he chose as his form of rebellion against his parents to abandon Christianity and become the only true solipsist I've ever known. We went off to separate colleges, and I was working my first summer as a theme park performer when I got the call and learned that Gary had killed himself. His parents suffered three miscarriages before their first child, Gary's beloved older brother Randy, was born. His father suffered a stroke that left him partially paralyzed. Randy killed himself three months before Gary did. I lost more than my best friend when Gary died; my faith in a god that could so mercilessly punish its servants dissipated in an instant. The cold vacuum that remained in my heart has yet to be entirely filled. My single deepest regret is that we did not manage to create Gravity in time to capture Gary's attention, to perhaps counter his despair with unexpected hope.

*"Why think about
Who's gonna win out?
We'll make up our story as we go along"*

The feeling is that of an invitation rescinded. You will often hear individuals extol the virtue of taking risks; these are usually individuals who have had the good fortune of seeing their particular risks pay off. You begin to wonder how many doors the universe can actually slam in your face on its way to kicking you off the planet. You wonder just how far you can fall before your friends decide it's not worth picking you up. You wonder how long ago you actively napped what was left of your optimism in favor of easy, tranquil fatalism. It all seems to be catching up to you at once, every idiotic decision, squandered opportunity, poor judgment call, honest mistake, cruel twist of fate. It happens, you know, to people just like you — well, probably to someone you once met, at any rate.

*“There’s so little time
For us to try and rhyme
And so many highways to travel upon”*

If I had been born in some other part of the world, perhaps today would be the day I strapped on an explosive belt and climbed aboard a city bus. Instead, today was the day I watched the Mariners win a ball game on television, eating a nice little dinner, relaxing in bed. I did not wake up in a doorway today on 3rd Avenue, huddled under a threadbare blanket, but in my wonderful bed in a loft apartment that I love. Things are getting simpler. The more you lose, the more thankful you are for what remains. You realize they could take a lot more away from you — and they damn well might do just that — but there is actually a limit to how much they can strip away. Your credit record doesn't follow you into the afterlife; you haven't lost your family to plague or famine; you've never quite been oppressed the way others are even now finding themselves oppressed. In theatre, an alchemical formula called the willing suspension of disbelief allows performers and their audience to initiate, for the duration of a play, a completely alternate reality upon the stage, a magical world in which the actors are and are not the characters they play, in which the events you see before you are entirely illusory and yet evoke powerfully real effects upon your imagination, your emotions, your heart. The true test of the metaprogrammer and the magician is to discover exactly how far you can extend the boundaries of the stage.

*“Open your eyes, get up off your chair
There’s so much to do in the sunlight”*

We got rained on at the beach burn the other night, and I stood around with my friends, feeling cheerfully grumpy about the situation. Only in Seattle would a bunch of freaks spend hours cavorting around a giant bonfire in the pouring rain. It is easy to count my blessings these days, because there

are so few of them it seems; but those few are almost preposterously rewarding. The character of “Scotto” is a performance I continue to work on over the years, an effort made problematic by the decisive lack of a director. I'm not lonely; that's the biggest blessing. For that, I owe many of you a great debt; fortunately, it's one debt I don't mind repaying. There is no future perfect world, of that I am well aware. But I wouldn't dare rewrite any of my wildly imperfect past, for fear of losing the parts of the story I somehow managed to get right as I went along.

*“Give up your secrets, and let down your hair
And sit with me here by the firelight...”*

[“As We Go Along” written by Carole King & Toni Stern]

Good News & Bad News

3/27/2003

“We've got some good news and some bad news. Which would you like to hear first?”

Normally when I hear that, my immediate response is to sucker punch the person with the news, steal their wallets, tie them up with steel safety cables and hang them from a telephone pole. However, I was out of safety cables at the time.

“Uh... let's hear the bad news.”

“The bad news... well, let's see. For starters, we got the results of the test back.”

“Took you long enough.”

“Yeah, well, next time please mention to the lab that you aren't actually a member of the human race and things might go smoother.”

“So the results?”

“It's not pretty.”

“Leave my mother out of this!”

“No, the results aren't pretty. They say you have <some jargony gobbledeygook> that basically amounts to cancer of the everything. At first we thought it might be cancer of the soul, but earlier tests reminded us you don't actually have one.”

“Well, they're pesky.”

“True, they're just standard in humans and not so much for you. Anyway, you haven't got much time left, and the time you do have left is likely to be extremely painful.”

“Oh, as opposed to the non stop wall of extreme bliss and pleasure life has been before now?”

“Well, you may have had this cancer of the everything since birth.”

“Is that what you call it?”

“Call what?”

“I would have used the term ‘desperately unfortunate catapulting into horrifying mortal form,’ but I guess ‘birth’ is actually a bit more succinct.”

“Can I continue please? I do have other appointments.”

“Oh please, it all boils down to cancer of the everything on some level, doesn’t it?”

“Sure, but with my other patients, I can usually string them along with jargon gobbledygook like ‘we have meds for that.’”

“Right, right. Say, about those meds—”

“I’m getting to that. So this cancer of the everything... it’s not treatable. At least, not with anything we know about.”

“Treatable in the ‘make it go away’ sense, or treatable in the ‘make me forget about it and feel all mushy and warm until it kills me’ sense?”

“I was thinking more the former, but about the latter, I do need to inquire... we did actually, to our great and utter surprise, notice an organ that seems to be masquerading as a liver inside you—”

“Ah yes. As I have been telling friends for a long time now, the rest of my body has posted armed guards around my liver, to make sure it doesn’t flee in abject terror. We need that liver!”

“Well, you need A liver; whether you need that particular one much longer is subject to debate. It’s, uh, been a bit overworked lately.”

“You obviously have a strange definition of lately.”

“Well, starting the painkillers when you were in grade school was a bit much.”

“Hey, haven’t you seen *Saved By The Bell*? School is harsh!”

“My point here is really that the cancer of the everything is being a bit exacerbated by the fact that the rest of your body isn’t particularly putting up much of a fight.”

“Oh really.”

“Yes, you seem to have an immune system that uses a definition of ‘immune’ I’m somewhat unfamiliar with.”

“Ah yes, I remember now... back when most of my major organs made that pact with each other to catch absolutely any disease they possibly could, in a desperate attempt to stage a coup against whatever malevolent entity is currently masquerading as my brain.”

“Actually that leads us to more bad news.”

“If it’s about the fact that my brain has sealed itself up in a bulletproof box and has stopped responding to basic autonomic requests for fear of severely incriminating itself, I can explain.”

“Don’t bother. It’s actually about the fact that your body doesn’t particularly seem to be taking directions from... from your ‘brain box’ anymore anyway. We’re not sure what’s in charge. Gall bladder? Spleen?”

“Does it matter?”

“Well, someone is responsible for this *bill*, I can tell you that much.”

“You have such a droll sense of humor.”

“I’m not joking.”

“Yes, and that’s part of what makes it so delightfully zany. The way that stern look on your face almost completely disguises the inherent comedy in your attempting to actually communicate something meaningful to me. I would laugh, if I actually cared.”

“There’s one more piece of bad news.”

“Celine Dion is still alive and walks the earth?”

“Well, fine, if you want to be technical, there are two more pieces of bad news. But the one that does in fact directly concern *you* refers back to the aforementioned cancer of the everything.”

“You know, there are few things I love so much in this world as hearing proper application of the word ‘aforementioned.’”

Terrible, terrible pause.

“Well, that, and a good solid round of burying the evidence, but you knew that already.”

“Yes, more to the point... the cancer is at its earliest stages now... detectable, but not treatable. I haven’t described the cancer’s course, however. I’m not sure if you’d care to hear me describe it?”

“Doc, please, if I can handle the sight of dozens of unfortunate Filipino slave girls working 18-hour days to craft glorious purple velvet love seats for my station wagon, then I can — well, actually, I don’t know if I *can* handle that, those love seats didn’t really fit now that I think about it...”

“Please, let me just—”

“Hold on. Miranda, take a note! Next time we get slave girls, please make sure they know how to operate a frickin tape measure!”

Miranda takes a note, resumes surreptitiously nicking sample packs of pills for curing wasting disease, which, she knows from reading the inter-web, will probably get you high if you just, repeat after me, take a high enough dose.

“My point, and I do have one here, is that this cancer of the everything is likely to thoroughly, savagely destroy your quality of life for the next indeterminate period of months, perhaps even years depending upon your constitution.”

“Aha, that’s the one part of this organism that seems to be working overtime.”

“We’ll see how long it lasts. Cancer of the everything is insidious. Mean-spirited. Relentless.”

“Like an episode of *Hunter*.”

“Exactly. You have this in your body now, and it’s not going away. We don’t know how long you’ll last, really... you’re a special case, and for all we know, someday we’ll invent some unique drug cocktail that might cure it or at least give you a normal lifespan.”

“Doc, look, I expected to be dead at 25, so all of this is already frosting on the cake.”

“You say that now, but it won’t be easy. It savages your body to the point where you can’t handle food, sex, recreation... crushes your spirit, your psyche, your willingness to live...”

“Are you talking about *American Idol* here?”

“No, this is cancer of the everything I’m talking about.”

“Because, look, Paula Abdul is hot and everything, but really, truly? She does crush my willingness to live.”

“Will you please be serious for just a moment?”

A moment passes.

“Okay, see, I *can* be serious for just a moment. If you have some proof that it actually accomplished anything, I would love to hear it.”

“Oh for god’s sake, I can see this is going nowhere.”

“No, it is, it is. I’m dying. I have cancer of the everything. It’s incurable. At some indeterminate point, I will start to deteriorate – well, more so than I have already done deliberately, at least – and my health will give out, and I will descend into a morass of weakness, sores, internal bleeding, psychic trauma, reading Piers Anthony again, the works, I gotcha. Because my constitution is unusual, we don’t really even know when it will start or how long it will last, only that I won’t survive it. Not to belabor an already horribly belabored point, but this cancer of the everything is different from the condition I usually refer to as ‘life’ ... how, exactly?”

Uncomfortable pause... the pause where my doctor is searching for just enough jargon to justify billing my insurance til they bleed.

“Well, with cancer of the everything,” Doc says slowly, “you at least have a very, very, very, very small chance of survival.”

“Please tell me that’s not the good news.”

“It’s not. The good news is we now have Tootsie Pops in the lobby.”

“Soaked in Demerol?”

“For our special clients like you, it almost goes without saying.”

“Almost. I’d better take two... they’re small!”

Captain Scotto And His Heroes To Be

Introduction

In 1997, I was still traveling full time for a living, spending my weeks in hotels and my weekends trying to cram in a life at home in Seattle. My outlook was particularly grim, and you can tell that by reading the first five episodes of Captain Scotto and His Heroes to Be, all of which appeared on the original Library of Scotto web site, and were removed when Scottoweb 2.3 was rolled out. When I first starting writing it, I intended to keep publishing regular episodes, but I lost the energy for it, and since my web site has only ever had approximately three-quarters of a bit per year anyway, I didn’t really think it mattered.

When I was excavating material for this print compendium, however, I stumbled across these episodes and realized I actually thought they were rather funny (in their own typically unskilled and brutish fashion). So as a special treat, I’ve added brand new chapters to the adventures of Captain Scotto and His Heroes to Be, and the entire work is presented here in novella form for the very first time. – Scotto

Episode One

I was eating breakfast at Beth’s Cafe with my good friend Laurel. It was four in the fookin morning, and I had been chain smoking for no good reason since earlier that year. The smoking section was filled with a pleasant smoky haze, a haze which was definitely showing the oxygen in the room who was boss. Soon enough, the waitress brought Laurel’s pancakes, and moments later, my 24-egg omelette was wheeled in on a cart by two of the charming wait staff. It flopped off the edges of the oversized plate, and the waitress folded the edges up and over, up and over, until the omelette was a tower of egg atop the plate. There were great heaping gobs of cheese running down the sides of the cart, and a veritable garden market of vegetables was struggling to survive inside the suffocating fleshy mass of the omelette. The staff tried lifting the plate up, but couldn’t manage it, and so several more members of the charming wait staff were summoned, along with some kind of pulley system which apparently saw heavy use, as it was totally encrusted with cheese, egg, and the remnants of green peppers and olives which had

tried to escape into the real world, only to find that the smoky ambience of Beth's Cafe was no substitute for direct sunlight and a little TLC. "Do you think that's wise?" Laurel asked our waitress. "I mean, will the table support a full 24-egg omelette?"

"It should," the waitress replied. "If it can handle the 67-egg meat lover's special omelette, it can handle this wimpy 24-egg concoction."

Sure enough, the table buckled only slightly in the middle when the crane finished lowering the plate onto the table. Laurel had to slide over in order to see me.

"Can I get you anything else?" the waitress asked.

"Well," I replied slowly, "I'm *obviously* going to need an english muffin with this." Pause. "And how about some sausage." Pause. "Oh yeah, and can I get a side of french toast?"

"You want the big plate?" she asked.

"No," I replied. "I think the 12 slice plate will suffice."

The old Murray Head classic "One Night In Bangkok" came on the jukebox, with its delicious chorus about good looking angels and better looking demons, and I couldn't help rapping along with Murray: "I get my kicks *above* the waistline, sunshine." Then Kenny Rogers' "The Gambler" came on, and most of the room began singing along: "You got to know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em... know when to walk away, and know when to run..." It was bonding of a most peculiar sort. After that, the Beatles' "Help!" came on, and the gang in the non-smoking section leapt up and performed a little dumb show version of the classic movie of the same name. Laurel and I laughed ourselves silly at the antics of those wacky mop-tops from Britain, so much so that orange juice shot out Laurel's nose, and several of the veins in my neck burst wide open.

As we began to eat, Laurel said, "I haven't seen you around lately. Where you been?" Laurel and I are good friends, have been for some time, ever since college, when we took inordinate amounts of drugs together on a regular basis. Like, veritable shitloads of drugs. Copious amounts. Scads and scads and scads. We took so many drugs that our bodies became walking illicit pharmacies. You name an illegal drug, we very likely took it, in vast amounts. Vast vast *vast* amounts. Good *God* but did we take some drugs together. I mean, *Christ* that was a lot of drugs we took in college. It's safe to say we majored in "drugs." We were the star students in the Drugs Department, and we earned our Bachelors of Fine Drugs degrees with flying colors. We majored in drugs, we minored in drugs, our part-time jobs were taking drugs. We had drugs for breakfast, and then a light snack of drugs in the morning, followed by a brunch or lunch comprised of drugs and some other drugs too, and then by dinner time, we were simply *ravenous* for drugs. Then it was time to figure out something to do for the evening, and it was usually drugs. Then, in order to get to sleep, we took some more drugs. If we *couldn't* sleep,

that meant it was a sign from above that we should stay up all night and do more drugs. We went to classes on drugs, paraded around the city on drugs, went to the supermarket on drugs and bought whole carts full of things we *simply didn't need* — and why? you ask. Because we were on drugs! comes my ready reply. We sucked down more drugs while we were in college than have been taken in the history of drugs on this planet, and we were always, always hungry for more. I had the word "drugs" tattooed on my ass; Laurel had the word "drugs" branded onto the small of her back. In short, you could say drugs were a real hobby with us.

But lately, my drug-taking had fallen by the wayside, for I had found a new vocation. It was a vocation that I simply could not describe to Laurel, for fear of endangering her life. There was simply no way to tell her that I had become...

a super hero!

"Oh, you know," I replied, munching on a forkful of gooey egg matter. "I've been around. Here and there."

Laurel was always a sharp cookie, though, and tonight was no exception. She noticed the way I failed to make eye contact with her, preferring instead to stare directly into the center of the omelette, as though I could somehow experience omelette satori if I concentrated hard enough.

"Don't give me that fookin horseshit," Laurel replied. Her long black hair, unbeknownst to her, was dipping accidentally into the maple syrup on her plate, but I decided not to tell her, for I am sensitive to the use of coarse language. And also, she was being a bitch. "You've been up to something. Must be something pretty interesting, if that guilty look on your face is any indication. What is it, Scotto? Let me guess. You found some *new* drug to take, and it's *so* interesting, you don't want to share it with your good friend Laurel. Is that it?" She began to pout, her lower lip trembling, and then there was a fire in her eyes, something like heavy duty anger but also resembling what happens if you light a cigarette too close to your face and sear off your eyebrows. Which I have only done twice.

We sat in silence for several minutes, she pouting and chewing on tasty pancake morsels, me brooding and shoveling heaping forkful after heaping forkful of omelette into my mouth, shoveling and chewing, shoveling and chewing, letting that omelette slither down my throat and dive into my already swelling stomach.

Suddenly, I began to notice a strange tingling sensation rise up my spine. *Oh no*, I thought. *My Scotto Sense is tingling!* That could only mean one thing (usually it can mean two things, but I had already taken my underwear out of the washing machine earlier that day).

My eyes began to flit back and forth about the room, taking in the vast assortment of freaks, weirdos, losers, crazies, and nutballs that hung out at Beth's Cafe in the middle of the night. I mean, to be honest, I don't know

where these bozos come from, but they're just plain weird, what with the *clothes they wear* and the *things they say* and the *crazy music they listen to*. But I digress. I could tell immediately the danger was not here. No... something far more insidious was going on, and I would have to leave the friendly if slightly overpriced confines of Beth's Cafe in order to find out more...

"Uh, Laurel," I said, "I have to split." I threw down some cash to cover my omelette and a healthy 2.1% tip as is my usual custom. "Maybe we can get together this week or something. Watch *The Simpsons*, maybe, or suck down a tank of nitrous oxide?"

"And just what the fuck am I supposed to do with this monstrous omelette of yours?" she replied.

"You should get it to go," I replied as I dashed toward the front door.

I sprinted up the hill toward my house, and as I did, my *Scotto Sense* intensified. The danger was here, inside the house. I tore off my clothes as I reached the house, and then promptly put them back on as I realized my super hero costume was not handily underneath my clothes, as I previously believed, but was still in the dryer with the rest of my underwear. I would have to enter the house in the guise of my secret identity, Scotto, instead of in the guise of my most excellent super hero identity,

CAPTAIN SCOTTO!

And sure enough, as I entered the house, the menace became clear, for there, standing in the living room, was my evil arch nemesis **DR. UGLY**, in his ugly red spandex suit with that ugly red hood and that ugly red cape and that big ugly "U" on his chest which must have stood for "underwhelming" or "undulating" or perhaps "unconscionable" or something, holding a stack of my favorite CDs, stolen from my most excellent CD collection. Why, the fool had had the audacity to snag all seven of my K-Tel *Superhits of 1978, August 28, 7:42 PM* CDs, as well as my *Best of Ambient Acid Super Trippy Jazz House Mondo Tasty Weird Noise Bass Music* by Bill Laswell CD and my *Freddie Mercury Sings The Blues – After Inhaling Helium From A Big Ol' Balloon!* CD.

"Dr. Ugly!" I exclaimed. "You'll never get away with this!"

"That's where you're wrong!" my arch nemesis replied. "I already *have* gotten away with it!" And with that, he fired one of his patented Bursts of Extreme UGLY from his fingertips directly at my precious, precious face.

I dodged nimbly, leaping backwards into a flip and then straight into the triple axle. By the time I was finished bowing to the judges across the alley,

DR. UGLY WAS GONE!

"I'll get you, Dr. Ugly, if it's the last thing I do!" I cried. "Your kind of evil, pernicious villainy will not go unpunished! I will find you and tear out your pathetic little heart with my teeth and then I'll throw it onto the ground and step on it a dozen, nay, a *baker's* dozen times! I'll chase you from one

end of this Earth to the other end and then to all the ends in between, and finally, after exhausting every possible end, I'll chase from you from all the beginnings and middles as well! I'll—"

—and then I stopped. For at that moment, a semi truck from Beth's Cafe pulled up, carrying the leftovers from my omelette. I could see Laurel hopping out the side of the cab, and all the boys from the kitchen at Beth's climbing out the back of the trailer with sections of floppy, heaving egg on their shoulders. She had apparently stopped to pick up her cousin Crank Boy as well, and as he and Laurel started up the walk, I bit down on my rage. Apparently, my rage was in roughly the same position as my tongue, for the blood immediately began to flow.

"I'll get you, Dr Ugly," I whispered. "I will if it's the last inane thing I do in this vastly overrated world."

"Hey there," Laurel said as she came in the front door. "Listen, I thought it'd be a shame to waste the rest of these fine early morning hours. So I called Crank Boy and he had a good idea. Wanna chew some sheets of acid?"

I paused a moment, then said,

"Sure!"

Episode Two

Of course, this story actually begins months earlier, before I had arrived in Seattle. I was searching for some basic answers to some very basic questions about the way the universe worked. Particularly, I was interested in knowing if there was a God, and if so, would He cover my rent for a while. Also, I was wondering just who was responsible for Crisco Oil, because I wanted to find that person, and beat the living tar out of him – just on principle, of course. But I guess the question that plagued me most was, "Am I funky enough? Am I... am I *funky* enough?"

I guess as I think about it now, though, there were a few other questions lurking underneath. Who created the Earth, and did he have a building permit? Why won't anyone admit that the *Gospel According to Scotto* actually is a legitimate book of the Bible? Why *did* they ever take *WKRP in Cincinnati* off the air? Why do birds suddenly appear every time you are near? Is it because you're some kind of big fookin bird magnet? Is that dandruff in your hair, or is it bird seed — I mean, what's the deal? More importantly, why do people keep inviting you places, when they know they're gonna get a flock of *birds* no matter what they do?

I spent considerable time pondering the great imponderables. Would you rather freeze to death, or burn to death? Would you rather be shot in the forehead, or stabbed in the throat? Would you rather have to eat your way out of a vat full of mayonnaise, or eat your way out of a vat full of Country Crock margarine? How about this: would you rather eat your way out of a vat full

of mayonnaise, or have your nipples slammed repeatedly in a car door? My curiosity was dense and impregnable.

I often found myself wondering if I would ever find my way back to those carefree days when my only concerns were making sure I buried the weapon somewhere *different* from where I buried the bodies. Making sure that no matter how many times Mom called up to ask about that smell, I would never, *ever* invite her up for a bite. Making sure that whenever Pedro arrived from Columbia with two dozen condoms worth of cocaine lodged in an uncomfortable spot, I always tipped him a peso or two to let him know I cared. Times were easier then. There was always a Paul McCartney & Wings song on the radio. There was always a Kenny Rogers *The Gambler* mini series on TV. My friends and I were always face down in a ditch, nearly dead from alcohol poisoning. It was an easier time. A carefree time.

And now? Now I was left with nothing but questions, difficult questions. If a train leaves New York carrying 3,000 pounds of whale blubber and the innards of the world's loneliest Canadian, and it smashes into a bus carrying every child who ever pissed you off on an airplane or in a shopping mall, would anyone mind if I danced upon the wreckage singing "Last Train to Clarksville" while wearing chain mail and slathering myself with bacon grease? More importantly, if I ever got a chance to sleep in the Lincoln Bedroom, would I gain more enjoyment from leaving unseemly stains on the sheets or from carving "J.W.B. was heer!" on the headboard? But perhaps most urgently, would I ever realize my secret lifelong dream of being a ballerina in a Russian opera? The questions kept churning in my mind, with no answers in sight.

It began to look desperate. I sank deep into depression. I began talking to myself, and drinking alone. I made myself read John Grisham novels. I wore nothing but black, painted my face pale white, and began drinking the blood of small rodents. I listened to nasty, ugly, horrible, Satanic music, including Wilson Philips, Winger, and Nelson. I became addicted to heroin, after which came my addiction to Clorox Bleach, which was sadly followed by my addiction to a sarin/napalm concoction I referred to as "BOING!" I entered into an unhealthy relationship with a neighborhood psychopath, the one everybody called the Old Crazy Lady. She took horrible advantage of my pain, even going so far as to call me a "big sissy" in front of other people. Eventually, she left me for someone else, someone less pathetic and who didn't call her "you big dumbass" all the time, and I slid even deeper into misery.

And always — the questions. Why me? Why was I made to suffer so? Why, O why, was I abandoned to my fate? Why in the hell do people eat "tofu jerky"? Is the person who stumbled onto the formula for Crazy Glue still stuck to something? Do people in Brazil ever say to each other, "Wake up and smell the coffee"? Would anyone miss Gil Gerard if I just, you know, took him out in the desert somewhere and set him on fire or something? Has

somebody already done that, and I just haven't noticed? What about Erik Estrada? Can I torch *him* and get away with it? There must be *somebody* I can torch!

There seemed to be no end to my misery, no escape from my desperation. I lost my job at the local hot dog processing plant after discovering just exactly where they draw the line about what kinds of stuff you can throw into those vats. I called my mother to see if she had any cash she could loan me, but she had squandered the family fortune playing Bingo and was now living in a garbage can. My dealer got busted, and I went into withdrawal. For three weeks I was able to do nothing but play the pan pipes while the demon drug worked its way out of my system. Just my luck that my downstairs neighbors *hated* the pan pipes. Well, sure, I mean, they *tried* to claim they just hated the amps I was using, but I knew the truth. It was *me* they hated. Me and my pan pipes of abject despair.

I finally hit rock bottom one lonely winter afternoon. I was killing pigeons in the park with my slingshot and eating their raw, diseased flesh when I decided I had had enough. I mean, you get full on raw pigeon pretty quick. Suddenly I realized that my will to live had left me altogether. I no longer deserved to call myself human. I was ready to leave this horrible world the same way I came into it: bloody and screaming. The only question now was:

how?

I decided then that I would leap off the Space Needle in Seattle. And so, I packed my bags and began the hike across country...

Episode Three

I made it to Seattle without a scratch. My initial reactions: "Wow, this place is *awesome!* Look at all those *huge mountains!*" After about ten minutes within the city limits: "Wait a minute." Ten more minutes: "This place is *depressing* gimme a fookin *syringe* for Christ's sake!" Oh, sure, it's easy for me to blame an entire city for my own personal woes, but hey, when the entire city *fookin sucks*, of *course* it's easy.

My bad attitude was practically ringing in my ears as I made way toward the World's Tallest Space Needle — or the Big Fucking Eyesore, as many locals like to call it. For those of you who have never seen this thing, it's basically a relic from an old World's Fair that the schmucks forgot to take home when it was over. It's like you have guests over for a potluck, only they bring this entirely disgusting casserole made of pig's guts and dog shit, and then on their way out, they say, "Oh, *keep it!* We want *you* to have it!" And you're like, "Holy mother of God, I'd rather have my kneecaps removed with a shrimp fork than eat any of that vomit you brought," but they're like, "Sorry, gotta go, we're fleeing the country in an hour" and you're stuck. Well, that's the World's Tallest Space Needle.

I decided I wanted to jump off the top of the World's Tallest Space Needle. Years ago when I was living in St. Louis, I heard stories of a man who skydived and landed on top of the St. Louis Arch (one half of the world's most offensive corporate logo); the minute he landed, though, all the air went out of his parachute and he slid down the surface of the Arch and *whammo* that was the end of that guy's big adventure. I wanted something similarly gruesome, only without the element of "What a fucking pinhead, did he expect there to be some big fucking *DOOR* on top of the *ARCH* that he was just going to saunter through? In all those photos of the Arch, didn't he once notice — HEY, THERE'S NO FOOKIN DOOR UP THERE! What, did he think he was gonna *MOVE IN* to the *TOP OF THE ARCH* or something?" What he should have done was skydived onto the top of the Statue of Liberty, because as we have all seen in print advertising, that's where the smoking section is so you know there must be a door, or at least an ashtray that he could use to pound out that Liberty chick's eyes and get back inside.

The first problem I encountered was getting to the top of the thing. I didn't have a plane or a parachute handy, so I had to resort to the elevator which ran all the way up the side of the thing. It actually costs money to ride up to the top of the World's Tallest Space Needle — unless, that is, you call ahead from a payphone across the street and make dinner reservations for the restaurant. If you have a reservation, they let you on the elevator free. Then, when you get to the top, you blow off your reservation and head to the bar, and if anybody asks, you say, "Of course I paid to get on the elevator. How the fuck do you think I got up here? Skydived?" This handy trick is a public service announcement from the Screw The Space Needle Committee of Seattle, founded by your pal Scotto.

Problem number two was finding a way out onto the top of the thing. If there was a door anywhere, I didn't see it. I asked the bartender, "Hey Mac, how do you get on top of this thing?" The bartender, a charming fellow whose name eludes me at the moment (probably because he was a complete fookin asshole about the whole thing and do you think I'm gonna put *his* name in my story? fuck *that*) said, "Sorry, sir, but we don't allow visitors on top of the Space Needle." Thinking fast, I said, "How about a Long Island iced tea?" My drink came to me quickly, and within moments I had dropped a lit match into the drink and thrown my makeshift Molotov cocktail at the wall.

Mass hysteria ensued.

I moved toward the outside rim of the wonder needle and calmly pulled my industrial strength bolt cutters out of my backpack. People were screaming and sprinting for the elevators as flames began to consume the bar, and for all I know, they started charging people to let them ride the elevator down. That's what I would have done. I mean, sure, in an emergency you're supposed to take the stairs, but the elevator on the World's Tallest Space Needle is just so damnably scenic. As the hapless tourists fled the wonder

needle faster than I could shout "Was it something I said?", I snapped the protective safety cables that surrounded the observation deck. Using the rock climbing skills I picked up during the seven weeks I spent in a Bible camp in the Appalachians, I rapidly made my way to the outermost steel rim of the World's Tallest Space Needle. It was starting to rain.

Good God, I thought to myself. Rain? *Now* of all times? *Here* of all places?

It was then that I heard a chilling sound: the awful screams of a man whose parachute had just lost its air. I turned to see a man in a bright orange jump suit tumble right off the edge of the World's Tallest Space Needle.

And I was devastated. I just *knew* it, I thought to myself. There was no way I was going to get off so easy. Nothing graceful at all about this whole mess. If I jumped *now*, I'd just be trying to scam off how cool the *skydiver* was. Everyone would say, "Yeah, did you hear about the *skydiver* who *landed on the Space Needle*?" And then they'd sip off their jumbo lattes and snort and giggle and say, "Yeah, and what about that *complete goon* who thought he'd be cool and *jump right after him*? What a *complete goon*." And my soul would be unable to rest in peace, because I'd want to come back as a badass poltergeist mother fucker and force that jumbo latte straight down their fucking throats while shouting "Die, pretentious northwesterner, die!"

As I stood there pondering my situation, with the rain beating down on my head, the World's Tallest Space Needle burning below me, police cars starting to surround the area, I noticed a strange electrical sensation begin to creep up my spine. The hairs on my arms started to stand up. My goatee curled up and my moustache got handlebars. What the hell? I had the good sense to think, and then suddenly,

I WAS STRUCK BY LIGHTNING!

Episode Four

As roughly eleven billion terrajoules of unearthly electricity coursed through my puny Scottotian veins, I heard a voice inside my head, amplified and run through some kind of excellent effects mixer. At this point in my life, "voices in my head" had become almost a cliché to me, but this voice had the benefit of a real out-of-this-world microphone or something, because it sounded *sweet*. It said:

"GREETINGS, YOU IGNORANT TWIT. WE KNOW WHO YOU ARE, SCOTTO OF THE PLANET EARTH, STAR CIVILIZATION OF THE DIMENSION OF BANALITY. WE HAVE BEEN FOLLOWING YOUR PROGRESS FOR QUITE SOME TIME. WE ARE FROM A DISTANT GALAXY WHERE THINGS ARE MUCH COOLER AND MORE PLEASANT AND ENJOYABLE. OUR HAIR IS QUITE SOFT AND MANAGEABLE,

TOO. PERHAPS YOU REMEMBER THAT OLD TELEVISION SHOW, THE GREATEST AMERICAN HERO? WELL. WE RECENTLY KICKED THOSE ALIENS' ASSES AND STOLE THEIR SUIT BACK FROM WILLIAM KATT, WHO WAS LIVING IN A TRAILER PARK IN ARIZONA, DRINKING NOTHING BUT MOONSHINE AND SLEEPING WITH 12-YEAR-OLDS. THE HONOR OF WEARING THAT SUIT IS NOW BEING PASSED TO YOU.

**“FROM THIS DAY FORTH, YOUR IDENTITY WILL BE
CAPTAIN SCOTTO!”**

“NO LONGER WILL YOU WASTE YOUR LIFE AWAY AS A GROSS OFFENSE AGAINST CARBON MOLECULES. NOW YOU WILL BE A FULL FLEDGED Super hero, COMPLETE WITH SILLY CAPE! YOUR HAIR ALREADY LOOKS VERY MUCH LIKE WILLIAM KATT’S, SO YOU ARE OFF TO A GREAT START. YOUR MISSION IN THIS LIFE WILL BE TO PROTECT THE PEOPLE OF PLANET EARTH FROM THE HOSTILE ACTS OF INSANE SUPER VILLAINS, TRAFFIC COPS, AND OF COURSE, THE DRUG ENFORCEMENT AGENCY. YOU WILL BE THE DEFENDER OF TRUTH, JUSTICE, AND... AND.... UMM. WELL, DON’T WORRY ABOUT IT, WE’LL REMEMBER IT EVENTUALLY.

“OH, AND THAT INSTRUCTION MANUAL THAT THEY WERE ALWAYS LOOKING FOR? WE FOUND A COPY OF THAT FOR YOU, BUT UNFORTUNATELY IT WAS ONLY SEVEN PAGES LONG AND WAS ACTUALLY INSTRUCTIONS FOR HOW TO USE THE SUIT AS A FOUR-SLICE TOASTER, SO.

“NOW GET TO WORK, CAPTAIN SCOTTO. DON’T DISAPPOINT US! WE’VE GOT A LOT OF MONEY DOWN ON THIS ONE!”

And with that, the electricity was gone, and I was left standing atop a burning Space Needle, wearing a strange spandex super hero costume with a silly cape and everything. The police had gathered all around the base of the Space Needle, and helicopters were starting to arrive from local television stations. My face was very likely being beamed all over Seattle, if not all over the Pacific Northwest.

“Put your hands up!” shouted a voice over a loudspeaker. I was a little unclear if someone from the helicopter was gonna just hop out and actually arrest me, or if they expected me to climb back inside the burning Space Needle and make my way downstairs, all the while holding my hands up. So I fingered them instead.

“Yeah, suck on that!” I shouted. I had come here to kill myself, and no ninny in a police copter was gonna get in my way. “I have something to say!” I

shouted, doing my best Kurgan impression from *Highlander*. “It’s better to burn out...it’s...” And then I started coughing horribly. Turns out the only way to do a good Kurgan is to have somebody slice a hole in your throat. It didn’t matter. Nothing mattered. Nothing mattered, not since the day my dog ran away and never came back, or the day that one girl I used to like told me she’d rather suck the bile out of a cow’s intestine than spend two seconds in the same hemisphere as me, or the day I took too much LSD and wiggled out — yeah, that *one day* when that happened, uh huh. Sure.

So then I leapt. I leapt off the World’s Tallest Space Needle, and watched the pavement rush toward me. I saw my life flash before my eyes, and I kept wanting to fast forward to the good parts, only there *weren’t* any good parts that I could find. If I had ever lived any good parts, some bastard had gone back to the master tapes and chopped all of them out. They were lying on the cosmic cutting room floor somewhere, and I was about to join them. There wasn’t even a sense of liberation as I fell. No sense of, “Man, it’s about fookin time,” as I had hoped. I wasn’t curious, either, about what was right on the other side of that splotch I was going to make. I was too exhausted with things to bother with even so much as apathy about it.

And then — god mother fookin damn it all to hell — I realized with a sudden spurt of horror that there was some woman directly below me. Watching. Transfixed. Stupidly. I started waving my hands and shouting, “MOVE OUT OF THE WAY, YOU FOOKIN NUMBSKULL!” but either she didn’t hear me, or she didn’t understand English, or she didn’t give a flying fuck through a rolling donut if some dumbass was about to obliterate her. Some thoroughly buried instinct inside me woke up at the last minute (and believe me, I have since tried to hunt that instinct down and have it taken out and *maimed*), and with that, I altered my trajectory and began to fly.

And then my brain asked, “Uh, excuse me there, Scotto, but JUST WHAT IN THE SAM HELL ARE YOU TRYING TO DO HERE? You don’t know how to FLY!!”

A horrible creeping realization crept horribly over me. It was the *suit*. The fookin spandex *suit*.

I actually *did* have super powers now.

Jesus fookin Christ, this was *all* I needed...

Episode Five

I didn’t know, at the time, that my good friend Laurel and her second cousin Crank Boy were living in Seattle already. Last I heard, the two of them were living in Chicago, where they single-handedly managed an enormously profitable acid distribution ring. Crank Boy would whip it up in his basement, using a chemistry set he got at Wal-Mart, precursors he had mail ordered from Belize, and a copy of the excellent “How To Make LSD

With Wal-Mart Chemistry Sets and Precursors From Belize FAQ” which he found floating around alt.make.LSD one afternoon. Then, after the batches were ready and applied to Laurel’s chic designer blotter – featuring the logos of many of your favorite ‘80s musical stars, including the Thompson Twins, Falco, and T’Pau – they would start taking orders. It just so happened that Laurel worked for a local pizza joint called, curiously enough, “The Pizza Joint,” and she had it all worked out so that if people called and ordered pepperoni on their pizza, they got a pepperoni pizza, and if they called and ordered sausage and onion on their pizza, they got sausage and onion, but if they called and ordered sausage, onion, and a sheet of acid, damned if they didn’t get a nice sheet of acid tucked in with their sausage and onion pizza. This is what they were doing, last I heard.

Turns out, though, they made enough money off this gig to buy themselves an enormous Winnebago, which would theoretically get them the hell out of Chicago. Apparently, somehow the fuzz got wind of Laurel’s grand pizza scheme. It seems a local alderman’s daughter had taken just a bit too much of Laurel’s Canadian bacon pizza, and had developed a bad case of intestinal cramping — and now, Laurel and Crank Boy were on the run. Laurel had my address in Seattle, and decided the time was ripe to pay me a visit. They gassed up the Winnebago, grabbed several dozen sheets from the pizza joint, published a letter to the editor in the *Chicago Sun-Times* denouncing the alderman as a commie, a pinko, and a red sympathizer, laughed merrily as the alderman’s career was ruined, his house fire-bombed by local branches of the Committee to Weed Out Commie Red Pinkos Where They Live and Fire-Bomb Their Houses, and his family taken out to a small field just outside of town and viciously maimed by freedom-loving members of the Chicago mafia, and then they fired up that Winnebago and pulled out of town, stopping at several truck stops along the way to make sure they had a complete collection of Merle Haggard cassettes for the road, and enough beef jerky to clog a rhino’s heart at twenty paces.

The newspapers and television stations were all abuzz the day after I burned out the inside of the Space Needle and flew off into the night. There were pictures of me plastered across the front page, but no one got close enough to make out my face, luckily enough, what with all the flames and the smoke in the air that night. The headlines read “Mystery Maniac Sets Space Needle Blaze, Doesn’t Pay Bar Tab” and “Human Capable Of Flight Discovered – Boeing Stock Drops” and “Microsoft Buys Spokane – Flying Human Not Invited To Party” and so on.

It was while watching the news all day, having skipped out on my temp job (I had been temping for a real estate place downtown, where part of my job was making sure the eviction notices for low-income housing were properly typed and formatted and prepared with just that extra touch of TLC),

that Laurel and Crank Boy pulled up in front of the house. Even before they got out of the Winnebago, I knew it was them, probably because somewhere along the way Crank Boy had scrawled the words “Crank Boy and Laurel World Tour” in goat blood across the side in big sticky letters. They bounded up the steps to the house, Laurel wearing her usual blue jeans and black top, Crank Boy wearing his usual San Diego Chicken suit draped with pigskins and smeared with cottage cheese. I realized they were very likely “tripping out,” as the kids say.

“Here,” Laurel said by way of saying hello, “eat this.”

Well, of course I was happy to see these two again. I took the peanut butter and sheet of acid sandwich she offered and began to munch.

“Don’t you think that’s a little excessive?” Crank Boy asked, his gravelly, chain smoker’s voice unchanged since Chicago. “Wipe off some of that peanut butter, for fuck’s sake.”

“Right,” I said, letting big heaping globs of acid-soaked peanut butter fall to the floor, so that the ants and the roaches in the place could get as whacked as I was about to be.

We were to trip incredibly hard together over the next several weeks.

I must say that there was a certain recklessness to our approach. No careful measuring of intention, no deliberate exploration of meaning and reality, these precautions were not for us. No, in those heady, sickening days, we sucked down LSD at a rate which would have alarmed us had we been capable of composing a lucid thought. You might suspect that there was some element of “escapism” involved with our activities, but in fact the absurd realm into which we “escaped” was no more appealing or attractive than the bullshit reality from which we had come.

And throughout the weeks of relentlessly boosting the same awful experience into newer and weirder realms, I could not shake the image of that spandex suit, hanging in my closet. Taunting me. Tormenting me. Whispering sweet nothings in my brain. Of course, I hadn’t had it analyzed in a lab yet, so I couldn’t *prove* it was spandex, but it sure as hell *felt* like what I’d always imagined spandex would feel like. The suit *wanted* me, and there was no Bill Culp character in my life to make sure I used the suit for good instead of evil. What was to stop me from taking over the planet, what with the awesome superpowers at my disposal?

At some point during those weeks, we were sitting in a circle watching our limbs come off and reattaching them in a seemingly arbitrary order. Crank Boy had just grown four extra heads, and one of them said, “Scotto, you seem preoccupied. I think it’s time for sharing.”

But there was no way I could share the awful truth. I would *never* admit that I actually owned a piece of spandex. Shit, word got out of *that* and next thing you know, people’d think I was a member of Poison.

Meanwhile, in Auburn, Seattle's lamest suburb, the television set in the recreation room of the Auburn Insane Asylum and Hair Styling Salon had been tuned to the gripping saga of the fire on the Space Needle all throughout the crisis. Someone over there was *watching* the events unfold, *dreaming* jealous dreams of mayhem and destruction, *plotting* nefarious plots and vicious schemes.

"Time for your meds," the attendant said, and Dr. Ugly smiled. Little did the attendant know that for the past eight years, Dr. Ugly had slowly been chewing and eating the inside of the fiberglass mask that kept his hideous visage obscured from view. And now, today, as the attendant slipped the little red pills (the ones marked "BIG FUN! – 20 MG") through the mouth slot, Dr. Ugly's incredible slithery tongue wrapped itself around those poor, hapless fingers.

"Hey!" the attendant shouted. "Hey, them's my fingers!"

With a sickening chomp, said fingers no longer belonged to the attendant.

"AAAAAAHHHHHHH!" screamed the attendant. A vicious head butt from the fiberglass mask dropped the eight-fingered attendant to the floor. Moments later, Dr. Ugly had the attendant's keys in his mouth, and a horrific escape was in progress.

"WAAAAAAAAA!" screamed the attendant.

Ah yes, thought Dr. Ugly. *My inhuman ability to Be Hideous is returning.* The mask itself, suddenly terrified of the face it was covering, leapt away from Dr. Ugly's horribly deformed face. Doors did not need to be forcibly opened, for they opened themselves, out of sheer disgust. He met no resistance on his way out, for the very hallways themselves twisted and distorted themselves in an attempt to escape his oncoming presence. He reached the outer door and watched it pop open, watched the very sky cloud over as the sun tried to escape his appearance.

"UAAAHHHAAAHHHAAAHHHHH!" cried the attendant.

Right, thought Dr. Ugly, reversing course and heading back into the recreation room. With a forcible stomp, he crushed the attendant's face underneath his bare foot. "erp," emitted the crushed skull of the attendant. And then, Dr. Ugly saw his chair, the lovely chair he'd been sitting in for the past eight years, and a wave of nostalgia rolled over him. Slowly he caressed the back of the chair, lovingly, longingly. Until—

"We have this footage," said the television, "of the strange flying human, as run through our computer and enhanced so that we can appreciate the detail. As you can see, the human's face is simply not discernible. Now here's the same footage, enhanced by computer, this time showing us what this human would look like if it were actually Bea Arthur of TV's *The Golden Girls*..."

Yes, Dr. Ugly thought, remembering his mission. *I will destroy him. I will!*

Episode Six

Of course, this madness begs a rather unfortunate question, one I truly and dearly wish I couldn't answer. But reality is a capricious master, prone to flights of whimsy that make me wish I could just fookin deck the bitch right across the face with a big giant slab of deli meat. The question at hand: just how did Dr. Ugly get to be so goddamn ugly? I must sadly confess I played a pivotal role in his conversion from an absolutely gorgeous young man, full of prospects and hounded after by every lovely young lady who caught even the slightest glimpse of his astonishingly beautiful, remarkably chiseled visage, into the atrocity he eventually became. (I suppose, now that I think about it, another question is at hand, that of how the disastrously monstrous lad actually became a Doctor, but I suppose we must answer these questions but one at a time.)

Back in the heady days of my rather unfortunate youth, when I was but a mere student at the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls, Iowa (home of the infamous three-legged corn detassling races — don't ask), Laurel, Crank Boy and I whiled away the hours between classes with an array of exciting and enlightening diversions — reading the famous philosophers, debating matters of ontology and phenomenology, huffing huge amounts of fumes from the paint thinner we'd stolen from the theatre department. Our lives were undeniably simpler then — student loans covered our bills, the dormitory cafeterias kept us fed, and the bounty hunters hadn't really figured out where we lived yet. You could tease and torment the freshmen without ever really worrying about what the police might think; after all, those freshmen were smart enough not to talk, considering the Polaroids we always seemed to have of their parents tied to chairs, covered with bacon grease, and surrounded by unruly wolves.

But there was one chap, a truly annoying little jerkwad named Percy, whose countenance we couldn't shake no matter how hard we tried. Oh sure, he was alarmingly cute, there was no escaping that simple fact. The boychild was stunning of appearance, with the kind of syrupy good looks you'd equate with the cast of *The Bold and the Beautiful*. He would walk through a crowd and suddenly stupefied young ladies would drop their textbooks, emit tiny, paralyzed squeaks from their impressively slack jaws, and have spontaneous shrieking orgasms right there in the student union... and you'd look up, and there was Percy, stunningly oblivious, on his way to get a fookin ham'n'cheese from the Hardee's counter. And then, sandwich secured, he'd take a big bite as he tried to find us, his eyes frantically searching the student union as the three of us attempted to hide behind plants or inside garbage cans, as giant globs

of disgusting cheese goo slid down his perfectly sculpted chin, causing entire tables of unsuspecting underclassmen women to suddenly swoon with wild, saucy delight and collapse to the floor in a sexual frenzy as he walked past.

“Christ Jesus on a motorized Popsicle stick rammed straight into His stigmata,” Laurel would shout, “he’s spotted us!” and we’d know without doubt that Percy was on his way directly toward us, and there was nothing we could do, nothing at all, for sprinting in our typically altered state of consciousness usually involved a fair amount of falling down, breaking noses, and losing blood, and by that point, we were really over that whole scene, so.

“Hey guys,” Percy would say, an obnoxious yet thoroughly beautiful smile gracing his angelic lips, “wanna hang out?”

And my heart would fall, nay, plummet, deep into my ankles, for the second to last thing on Earth I wanted to do (the first being to spend even five seconds in the same room as an unclothed Joan Rivers) was hang out with Percy. It wasn’t just the alarming way he managed to inappropriately quote the great poets – Yeats, Coleridge, Jermaine Jackson – whenever he was on the verge of flatulence. It wasn’t just the way he managed to start every third sentence with the phrase “Hold on, let me empty my colostomy bag.” It wasn’t just the way he carried a small portable amplifier on his belt that played a continuous loop of *Air Supply’s Greatest Hits*. No, it was mostly an indescribable creeping dread that seemed to surround him, presage his appearance, and trail after him like the toilet paper that constantly stuck to his fookin loafers. When Percy arrived, we always knew we were submerged in extremely deep vats of feces.

But there was one particular afternoon, back in the twilight of my tenure as one of the single most intoxicated students in UNI history, when we simply couldn’t bear the thought of interacting with Percy, and decided drastic action was necessary. Laurel had made chocolate chip pot cookies that were so strong that the chocolate chips were actually fleeing in terror from the cookies, leaping from her backpack into the paths of the normals we went to school with, shouting “Save us, save us!” and disappearing down unsuspecting students’ throats before she even had a chance to salvage the pot residue from their tiny chocolate hides. As we each took several large bites from one of these deadly cookies, we spotted Percy making his way to us from across the student union, the usual glob of cheese goo this time accompanied by an actual slab of ham that was stuck to his goatee.

“Holy Mother Mary doing naked roller boogie on my dining room table,” Crank Boy muttered, “we have got to get the fuck out of here.”

Fortunately for us, Crank Boy had a shall we say *intimate* familiarity with the system of steam tunnels that runs underneath the UNI campus. There was an entryway underneath a nearby potted frond, which we quickly tossed aside, stomped upon, and set on fire in our hasty attempt to access the steam tunnel entryway. Crank Boy threw open the lid, and we hastily descended

into the murky underworld of the steam tunnels, even as Percy’s plaintive wails of “Guuuuuuuuuys, wait for meeeeeeeeeee!” became horribly audible.

We dropped to the tunnel floor and began a desperate lurch, with Crank Boy in the lead, taking us around corner after corner, down long deserted passageway after long deserted passageway, across unexplainable chasm of doom after unexplainable chasm of doom. The tunnel system was a revelation to me; I had no idea the very foundations of UNI contained a labyrinthine morass of steel walkways, rusted ladders, concrete walls and immense pipes and ducts that sprawled in every direction. But Crank Boy led with an unerring precision; it was as though he had been down here before... exploring, spelunking, hiding bodies.

Despite our best efforts, however, Percy was behind us.

“Didn’t any of you bring concussion grenades?” Crank Boy shouted furiously, but sadly, we had all left our stockpile of small explosives back at the dorms. You just couldn’t travel freely with that stuff anymore, now that campus security had actually hired Chuck Norris to be in charge.

“Guuys,” Percy shouted, as he grew perilously closer.

We reached an impasse, a large steel door that was, for no apparent reason, closed and locked directly in our path.

“Somebody DO SOMETHING!” Laurel exclaimed, like a school girl in need of some shall we say *special* attention.

I turned to face Percy, resolute in my determination to put an end to this misery once and for all. Soon enough his dashing yet entirely vapid personage appeared at the other end of the long, narrow walkway we stood on, suspended above a large gurgling vat of unnatural green liquid that the university kept on hand for, uh, the *science* department.

“Hey, guys,” Percy shouted with an amazingly dim grin on his otherwise entrancing face. “I’m so glad I caught up to you! I was thinking we could go back to my place and watch all those *Webster* episodes I have on tape, what do you say?”

It was in the heat of that stark, vivid, thoroughly unappetizing moment that history was forged, as I played the same prank upon Percy that I had played for years and years and years. The only difference this time was that we were playing this prank above a large vat of gurgling, unnatural green liquid... normally the gurgling, unnatural green liquid was something I was distilling to drink later, and not something that filled the space below a tiny, precarious walkway upon which we stood.

With a casualness that belied the inherent creeping horror I felt in his presence, I calmly remarked, “Heads or tails,” and then flipped a single penny in the air, over the edge of the railing, and watched it sail toward the vat below.

As I predicted, Percy could no more watch a penny fly to its doom than he could avoid removing the bandages on his ass and scratching despite doctor's orders, and so it was on that fateful day lo those many years ago that we watched Percy leap from the safe haven of the walkway into midair above the vat of gurgling, unnatural green liquid, attempting to arrest the penny's fall and failing miserably. The penny and Percy both plummeted directly into the depths of the vat, and for a long, cool moment, Laurel, Crank Boy and I stood motionless, wondering if we had at long last eliminated this continual threat to our ability to chill.

A deep, incredible silence filled the air. Laurel shifted her weight uncomfortably from foot to foot. Crank Boy lit a cigarette and marveled at how cool and refreshing the buzz was after all these years. I pulled out my copy of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Loathing* and scrawled frantic notes in the margins, calmly preparing for an epic final exam that was soon to dominate my life. And then—

—the thoroughly unexpected occurred. For just when we had dared to hope that Percy was gone from our lives forever, a writhing, spitting, gelatinous mass arose from the gurgling, unnatural green liquid. It was Percy all right — but his face and body had been horribly disfigured by exposure to the liquid. He now seemed to be a writhing morass of melting flesh and disgusting rivers of bile, his once charming and delightful features dissolved into a puddle of sickening green tributaries of filth and horror. He screamed the scream of a man who realizes his future has evaporated, and at the same time, realizes he didn't even catch that fookin penny, either.

"Oh boy," Laurel said in her typically understated fashion.

"May I heartily suggest," Crank Boy said quietly, "that we mosey our pathetic asses right the hell out of here?"

And so we left poor Percy behind. Little did we realize he would soon become our prime nemesis... the awful, awe-inspiring, truly wretched, criminally insane monstrosity known as

DR. UGLY!

Episode Seven

That was all ancient history, though, long since forgotten in a murky, multi-colored haze of swirling geometric patterns and steadily receding short term memory. We had thought the matter sealed, but clearly Dr. Ugly had escaped his captors and fled into the world. I wondered how long I could keep the terrible news from Laurel and Crank Boy, who even now were attempting to squeeze the remains of my omelette into the fridge, which was actively rebelling, spitting condiment bottles, tubs of margarine, and gallons of milk out at them in a kind of major appliance kamikaze effort. The acid we had munched when the two of them showed up was starting to come on,

a feeling as familiar to me as a warm shower in the morning or a cool breeze across my face or a cheese grater rubbing across a baby's bottom — it was quite familiar, in other words, and I luxuriated in the sensation, even as the creeping realization that Dr. Ugly was on the loose sank deep within my cell membranes.

But there were more surprises in store for me that day. For I would soon learn that Laurel had hardly left Chicago unscathed...

Indeed, once Laurel realized it was time to blow that enormous Popsicle stand known as the Windy City, her last few days in town became a whirlwind of last minute sightseeing and saying goodbyes. She hopped on the Red Line train and headed south. After a couple stops, the transit cops told her to get off the top of the train and ride on the *inside*, which made for a slightly less exciting trip. There were old haunts to visit: that tiny little movie theatre she always went to whenever a heartwarming new Robin Williams film came out, that diner she always went to where the waitresses carried sidearms, that neighborhood bar she always went to that had her face print in the permamuck on the floor.

Yes, she would miss the glorious sprawl of Chicago, the delightful accumulation of decades of filth and decay, the rampant crime and racism, the dead fish that filled Lake Michigan to the brim and gave it that extry special flavor of home. She would miss dodging the enormous chunks of ice that fell from the skyscrapers downtown in winter, killing the unwary in hilarious displays of comic pathos. She would miss the unbearable heat waves that cooked the elderly in their tenements like potatoes in a microwave oven, and she would miss the way the blisteringly cold wind ripping off the lake in winter tore her epidermis right off each morning as she tried to leave her apartment.

But mostly, she would miss the people: the small time thugs who recognized her well enough not to rob her on major holidays, the crazy homeless people who kept her in shape by chasing her with deadly shopping carts, the zany drug dealers who didn't realize she actually *liked* the bleach they were selling her. And the cops... oh, how she would miss the cops, with their charming uniforms, and their dedication to duty, and their commitment to making sure you got your money's worth when you paid for "protection." These were her people, and she would think of them fondly for as long as it took her to get that Winnebago past the fookin city limits.

But there was one last place she absolutely needed to visit before leaving: the Chicago Field Museum of natural history. She longed to wander among the giant dinosaur bones, the ancient mummies, the artifacts of cultures long lost one last time before she split town for the theoretically greener pastures of the Emerald City. And, she longed to finally sneak through that door marked "Staff Only — Top Secret" and find out just what exactly went on

behind the scenes at this mysterious museum. As she paid her admission in counterfeit ones (nobody expects a good counterfeit one, after all), she marveled at the immensity before her for approximately ten or eleven seconds before immediately knocking an old lady down in her haste to charge down into the basement and stake out the Top Secret door. The old lady shouted, "Watch where you're going!" to which she replied, "I *was* watching, bitch, I did that on purpose!" as she moseyed on down the stairs. Of course, the old lady had snagged Laurel's watch in the exchange, but in the meantime, Laurel had snagged the old lady's artificial leg — which would fetch a lot more money than that watch would, that was for sure.

The Top Secret door was tucked away at the end of a long dark hallway, near an exhibit called Enemas of the Ancient World that had long been a favorite of hers. Hours passed, and no one came in or out of the Top Secret door — and the only museum patrons who came down were too engrossed by ancient enema techniques to even notice her as she slid up to the door, and utilized her years of breaking and entering experience to convince the electronic lock it was actually a small game of Tetris, which she handily beat. Once inside, she descended a long stairwell into a deserted underground laboratory. She wondered at first why such a mammoth laboratory was deserted — and then realized today was a national holiday, and heaven knows no self-respecting scientist could work on Botulism Day.

The lights in the laboratory were dim, and she could hardly see as she stumbled through the lab, searching for some kind of clue as to just what the hell was going on down here. In the center of the room was a large aquarium, and a chill ran up her spine as she peered inside and realized the entire thing was *filled* with spiders... and these weren't just any spiders, she would soon learn, as a small spider suddenly descended from the ceiling and bit her on the hand.

"Oh no!" she exclaimed, as she smashed the little arachnoid. "I've been bitten by a radioactive super spider!"

A few days later, Laurel met up with Crank Boy to pack the Winnebago and prepare to leave town. They had the requisite argument about how much space they really needed to dedicate to Crank Boy's antique girdle collection, decided it really was worth leaving all their furniture out on the curb for it, and then they hit the road. If Crank Boy noticed the change in Laurel's demeanor, he didn't mention it; he probably just thought she was hopped up on goofballs like usual, mistaking her twitchiness for typical speed jitters instead of her slowly adjusting to the dramatic increase in strength, acuity, and agility she was now experiencing. She avoided making eye contact with him as much as possible as she steered the Winnebago into traffic. She could tell no one, she decided, not even Crank Boy.

And when they reached Seattle and she finally saw me for the first time in years, she didn't tell me, either, not at first. But when a common threat suddenly reared its Ugly head, I would soon learn all about her secret powers....

Episode Eight

While Laurel was saying her goodbyes to Chicago, Crank Boy was busy raising money for the trip. In a dark, seedy bar on the outskirts of town, hidden from view behind the false storefront that purported to offer "Custom Back Waxing," Crank Boy stood inside the steel cage and waited for his next opponent. A big, burly man took up the challenge and stepped into the cage, eyeing Crank Boy with a vicious determination. Crank Boy practically snorted to himself in amusement. When would these poor saps learn? he wondered, and also, when would they ever adjust the lighting in here so that his skin didn't look so pasty and jaundiced? Oh, and also, were they going to miss *Buffy* that week while they were on the road, because if so—

—the bell rang, and the challenger threw a mammoth punch that impacted directly against Crank Boy's jaw. Unfortunately the so-called challenger hadn't counted on the fact that Crank Boy's bones were actually laced with adamantium, one of the strongest substances known to humanity. The man's poor fist shattered into a bunch of itty bitty pieces, and then Crank Boy pointed off in the distance behind the man and said, "Oh look, your mom's here!" The man turned to look, failed to spot his mother, and turned back to find Crank Boy's fist smashing his nose into a bloody smear of silly putty. The man dropped to the floor, and Crank Boy turned back to his beer, still unbeaten.

He thought back as far his memory would allow... before he had woken up one afternoon to find himself enrolled in freshman classes at the University of Northern Iowa. He could remember nothing of his childhood or adolescence, not even his real name. The only things he could remember came to him in flashes of distorted memory: the awful military men drinking cocktails and laughing amongst themselves, the vivid pain he felt deep inside while suspended in some kind of strange amniotic fluid, the desperation he felt as he realized he was signed up for some kind of calculus course. Why, oh why, could he not remember his past? Who had taken advantage of his miraculous healing powers to create such a fighting machine out of him? Why did the name on his dog tags have to say "Crank Boy" and not something cool? Was it because he was missing the sideburns, was that it? Damn.

As the bar closed and the regulars streamed out, he collected his winnings and sidled up to the bar. He ordered a beer and pondered his college days, those carefree days when he threw himself into the inherent nihilism that accompanied friendship with Laurel and me...

Indeed, I still remember the day I first met Crank Boy as vividly as the day I discovered the thrill of wearing women's underwear in public. (Admittedly, the thrill was a bit reduced when people informed me I should try wearing it *under* my clothes, but hey, it was *my* kink, dammit.) Laurel and I were drinking Long Island iced teas at Pour Richard's, the local pub of ill repute, when Crank Boy stumbled in, wearing jeans and a T-shirt that said "I'm Fucking Your Mom Behind Your Dad's Back," which explained a lot about my mom's weird behavior once I started to think about it.

"Oh hey," Laurel said, noticing Crank Boy's arrival, "there's somebody you need to meet."

Laurel waved him over, and after he had secured a tray of Long Island iced teas for himself, he sat down next to Laurel at our booth.

"Crank Boy," she said, "this is my friend, Scotto. Scotto, this is my second cousin, Crank Boy."

"What kind of a name is Scotto?" he asked.

"What kind of a name is Crank Boy?" I replied.

"It's this thing called a nickname, maybe you've heard of it," said he.

"Ah, so is Scotto as it turns out," I told him.

"What's your real name?" he asked.

"Scott O.," I said.

He nodded.

"What's yours?" I asked.

"Crank Boy," he replied.

I nodded.

"Crank Boy was kidnapped from home when he was ten years old," Laurel said. "Then out of the blue he turns up this semester in my History of Grain Alcohol class. He doesn't remember anything about his past or about what happened to him while he was gone."

"How'd you recognize him after all those years?" I asked.

"He has a very distinctive birthmark on his right arm," she told me.

Peering at his arm through the smoky haze of the bar, I noticed for the first time a strange mole in the shape of the Louisiana Purchase.

"Damn," I said.

"Yeah," he said, "tell me about it."

A silence fell from across the table.

"Say, do you guys wanna get extremely high on Hawaiian baby woodrose seeds?" he asked.

My eyes lit up, and a magical friendship was instantly formed.

Eventually it was time for Crank Boy to leave the seedy bar and head back home to continue packing for the trip to the Emerald City. As he attempted to leave, however, he found himself suddenly surrounded by four or

five of the idiots he had pummeled into submission earlier that night. It was pretty clear what they wanted.

"We want our money back," one of them said.

"That's pretty clear," Crank Boy replied.

"Nobody takes a beating like you did and stays standing," another one said. "What are you... some kind of mutant?"

Crank Boy paused, then said, "Yeah, actually, that's what I am."

A long pause followed, as several confused stares spread around the group. Then, their leader kind of shrugged and said, "Oh. Oh, well... well, that explains it, I guess."

"Yeah," another one said, "a mutant could totally take a beating like that."

"Sorry about the confusion," the leader said.

"No problem," Crank Boy replied.

And with that, they dispersed into the night...

A few days later, Crank Boy met up with Laurel to pack the Winnebago and prepare to leave town. They had the requisite argument about how much space they really needed to dedicate to Laurel's antique vibrator collection, decided it really was worth leaving all their furniture out on the curb for it, and then they hit the road. He avoided making eye contact with her as much as possible as they steered the Winnebago into traffic. He could tell no one about his secret powers, he knew, not even Laurel.

And when they reached Seattle and he finally saw me for the first time in years, he didn't tell me, either, not at first. But when a common threat suddenly reared its Ugly head, I would soon learn all about his secret powers....

Episode Nine

I was really, really tripping out by the time Laurel and Crank Boy finally managed to close the refrigerator door on my leftover omelette. They had to secure the door shut with several hundred rolls of duct tape, four hundred chains from my "private little dungeon" (if you know what I mean, wink wink, nudge nudge), and a round of nails from the pneumatic nail gun I kept in the kitchen next to the toaster (sometimes the deli meat slips off the sandwich, you know, and you have to take drastic action). I didn't have the guts to tell them I don't eat leftovers. That could wait until we were coming down and everyone was already bone-crushingly depressed because we didn't have any mushrooms in the house to follow up all that acid.

Now my intention at that point was to turn on the TV and slap on a trippy movie of some kind. I had an array of prime psychedelic videos in front of me ready to go: there was Don Knotts in *The Apple Dumpling Gang*, and there was Don Knotts in *The Shakiest Gun in the West*, and of course, there

was Don Knotts in *Cannonball Run II*. So many choices... but I turned the TV on before I had come to a conclusion as to which brand of Knottsonian brilliance we were to soon experience, and so I caught a glimpse of a most unfortunate story on the local news.

It seemed Dr. Ugly was on a rampage....

It was not enough that Dr. Ugly had taken my prized CD collection and exchanged it at a local rekkid shop for the complete works of Whitney Houston. No, that injustice was just the start of the punishment Dr. Ugly had in store for me. He intended to wreak a kind of unholy havoc upon my home city of Seattle. He intended to bring the city to its knees as a way of punishing me for his sad affliction. He intended a whole host of things that are ultimately best referred to as “the stuff crazy people do when they aren’t locked up.” His maniacal mind had waited for this moment for many long years, and now he attacked Seattle with a vigor and viciousness previously only seen on pay per view wrestling specials and occasionally during high school chick fights.

He focused his attention on the heart of Seattle’s famed Capitol Hill neighborhood, where the immensely cool and fashionable mingled with the weird and the strangely incontinent. He started at the north end of Broadway Avenue, a maddeningly hip stretch that on some level probably deserved what it was about to get anyway, but still. He stepped into the center of the avenue and pulled the makeshift hood off of his ugliness, and watched as traffic immediately went flying onto the sidewalks to avoid his horrendousness, smashing into pedestrians and buildings and telephone poles and each other. I imagine it was actually kind of neat to watch.

As he began walking slowly south down the avenue, even the very pavement in front of him ripped itself up in an attempt to flee. Dr. Ugly cackled like the madman he was; it was a cackle he’d been practicing for years while incarcerated. At first his cackle had been kind of weak and lacking in that certain *je n’est sais pas*, but soon he got the hang of it and began to work with it, develop it, really rehearse it until it was a polished, professional cackle that could truly add to the inherent fright that his uncovered visage already produced. The rain fell in agonizing trajectories away from him completely, causing sudden torrents of rain in front of him and behind him. The sheets of rain couldn’t blind the hapless shoppers that day from his terrible ugliness, however. Some of them simply froze, their gaze horribly locked upon Dr. Ugly as though they had stared at a Medusa and been turned to stone right there on the spot. Massive coronaries and brain hemorrhages spread down the avenue like sweat running down a stripper’s back. The facades of the storefronts ripped themselves off and collapsed onto the streets, brutally crushing those poor innocents who hadn’t yet managed to escape.

Buildings began to collapse as, once the facades were gone, actual building structures themselves attempted to flee in terror. Like a row of dominos, the structures on either side of Broadway Avenue tumbled to the ground, crushing the unfortunates inside like grapes squashed under someone’s foot — you know, with, like, juices squirting out on all sides and everything. The hoods of crashed cars peeled themselves off and went flying through the air in front of him, decapitating fleeing souls in their paths. Then the engines of those cars spontaneously exploded in huge fireballs rather than accepting the inevitable approach of Dr. Ugly, and those fireballs enveloped other poor fleeing souls. Dr. Ugly could hardly keep score, but he was sure he totally had the high score at this point with the killing people and stuff.

He took his time, turning off of Broadway to head down the giant hill known as Denny Way. The police arrived and then just as quickly turned around and fled. Seattle’s finest would not be able to stop the ominous approach of Dr. Ugly. Television helicopters that got too close suddenly found their cameras exploding in terror at the sight in the viewfinders. Electric lines snapped and attempted to run away, causing black outs throughout downtown and surrounding neighborhoods. As the street ripped itself up, exposed sewer lines burst open in fear, and fountains of sludge rained as far away from him as sluggishly possible.

And what was his ultimate mission? Dr. Ugly now had his sights set on the only thing in Seattle that gave Dr. Ugly a run for his ugliness — the World’s Tallest Space Needle itself. Surely that nincompoop Scotto would rush to the aid of Seattle’s pathetic little tourist trap... and Dr. Ugly would be waiting, of that there would be no doubt! He relished the thought of torturing that damnable Scotto, replayed the imaginary footage over and over again, then ran it through a couple of neat filters, made it look all trippy, ran it upside down and all inverted and shit, put down some killer beats on it, totally made the edit TIGHT.

Yes indeed, he thought, that bastard Scotto was in for quite a surprise....

Episode Ten

A cold, unfortunate chill ran up my spine as I watched the local news showing footage of the disaster. Soon Laurel and Crank Boy came in from the kitchen, and saw the footage as well: Capitol Hill destroyed, Denny Way destroyed, and occasional short glimpses of his ugliness that managed to get broadcast before the cameras destroyed themselves.

“Oh my God,” Laurel whispered, “is that....”

I nodded slowly.

“How did he get out?” Crank Boy exclaimed.

“I don’t know,” I said, “but he must be stopped.”

We all nodded in agreement. Then we sort of just sat there, eyeing each other nervously. There seemed no way I could just casually excuse myself to go fight Dr. Ugly without letting on that I was, in fact,

A SUPER HERO!

“Well, uh...” I said, “I think I’m going to, uh... go into my bedroom, and uh... listen to music.”

“Right,” Crank Boy said. “And, uh... I think I’m going to go... take a long shower.”

“Cool,” Laurel said. “I think I’m going to, uh... hang out in the, uh, backyard and like, look at nature and stuff.”

With an air of amazingly forced nonchalance, we each split to our separate destinations. Once safely within my bedroom, I changed out of my street clothes and into the spandex suit. Now, I was no longer simply Scotto. Now, I was Captain Scotto! I posed in the mirror for a moment, admiring the way the suit lent definition to my slender, athletic frame. Then I climbed out the window and headed toward the front lawn.

And that was where I bumped into Crank Boy, who had climbed out the bathroom window. He’d changed into some kind of yellow and blue spandex thingie, not nearly as attractive as the beautiful red spandex thingie I was wearing.

“Crank Boy?” I asked incredulously.

“Scotto?” Crank Boy replied.

“That’s *Captain* Scotto,” I corrected him.

“Oh *really*.”

Suddenly Laurel emerged from one of the bushes, and stumbled right into us. She was wearing this weird red and blue spandex thingie with spider webs all over it.

“Laurel?” I asked incredulously.

“Scotto?” she replied.

“That’s *Captain* Scotto,” Crank Boy corrected her derisively.

“What the hell are you talking about?” she sputtered.

“I guess I may as well confess,” I said. “I’m actually a super hero named Captain Scotto.”

“Oh, no fookin way, that is just not possible,” she exclaimed.

My feelings hurt, I shot back, “Well, just who the hell are *you* supposed to be?”

“I’m Captain Laurel!” she snapped.

“What!” Crank Boy exclaimed. “But... but I’m Captain Crank Boy!”

We stared at each other for a very long, uncomfortable moment, out there on my front lawn in our spandex. I had never, ever wanted to see Crank Boy in skin tight spandex, and I was having to adjust to the sight as rapidly as I could manage.

“So... just what exactly are your super powers, Laurel?” I finally asked her.

“I am a wall-crawling web-slinger,” she said.

“I see, so... shouldn’t you be, like, Spider-Girl or Spider-Gal or Spider-Lass or something?”

“Oh *please*,” she said, “that is such a cliché.” She gave me a condescending look, and asked, “What are your powers?”

“I can fly, and I’m impervious,” I said. I stuck my nose up at her for emphasis.

“Impervious?” she replied.

“Well... the suit’s impervious, and I’m impervious when I’m in the suit. But still.”

“I see,” Crank Boy said, “so you don’t even really have ‘powers’ per se, you just have a neat prop.”

“It’s not a prop, it’s a super hero costume, and I’m wearing it, so I am, by definition, a super hero!” I shouted. My logic was impeccable and unassailable, as usual.

“Well, I can do shit like *this*,” Crank Boy said, and with a loud SNIKT (or maybe it was more like a “snihcht” or even kind of a “snakt,” I don’t really know), giant metal claws popped out of his hands. “Plus, I have rapid healing, *and* my bones are indestructible.” The claws retracted with a little TKINS, and then he said, “So clearly I am the badass here.”

“All right, look,” said Laurel, ever the voice of reason among our otherwise thoroughly unreasonable crew, “clearly we can’t all be Captain. That is just not going to work from a marketing and PR perspective.”

“Well, I don’t think the public is ready for a girl captain,” Crank Boy said off-handedly. She didn’t like that at all, and punched him in the arm, which she immediately regretted.

“Join the modern age, you big dummyhead,” she said. “Women can too be captains. The simple fact that I can’t think of a single example from popular media in no way undermines my assertion that there are dozens, nay, hundreds of women captains out there, and *I am one of them!*”

“Right, but see, you guys may be captains when it’s just you, but when I’m around, I *have* to be *the* captain,” I said.

“And just why the hell is that?” Laurel asked.

“Because,” I replied, “I am the only one with a dashing cape to go with my costume.”

They pondered my once again impeccable and unassailable logic, but for some ungodly reason, their acid-addled brains failed to accept the reality of the situation.

“Well, clearly we need to figure this out before we go stop Dr. Ugly,” Laurel said.

“Why don’t we go inside,” Crank Boy said. “I’ve got some Mad Dog we can nurse, and we can just kind of talk this out.”

“Yeah, I suppose we should come down a little bit from the acid anyway before we go off fighting Dr. Ugly,” I said as I started up the front stairs.

“Oh, and I still wanted you guys to see that copy of *The Beautiful Phyllis Diller Show* that I picked up recently,” Laurel said.

“Ah, right, you know I hear that has some really choice moments,” I said as we went back inside and closed the front door, leaving Dr. Ugly to his devices.

Episode Eleven

Dr. Ugly took his own sweet time heading down Denny Way. He relished the thought of the coming confrontation, and in no way wanted to rush things, not after the amount of time he’d spent locked up in that hell hole of an asylum/hair salon. He savored each delicious step of freedom and domination over Seattle. Soon the entire city would crumble to its knees before him, and that wretch Scotto would be his to do with as he pleased.

But, you know, we spent a lot of time in the kitchen once we got back inside. I mean, you know, “parties always wind up in the kitchen,” etc., plus I started getting really good visuals off the kitchen ceiling, and Laurel told us this really funny story about when she was a high school cheerleader and she got everyone stoned and got some big hair to tattoo a Nike logo on her forehead. And of course, Crank Boy and I really, really like Mad Dog 20/20, and once we start drinking, it’s kind of hard to just, you know, *stop* or something.

So at long last, Dr. Ugly arrived at the Seattle Center, home of the World’s Tallest Space Needle, and I of course was nowhere in sight. This completely infuriated Dr. Ugly. I mean, I guess you get all worked up about a subject, whether it’s ornithology, or jazz music, or torturing your arch nemesis, and you can’t just easily face disappointment about it. When it became completely apparent that I was nowhere to be seen, Dr. Ugly decided that perhaps I hadn’t gotten the message. Perhaps, for whatever reason, I hadn’t been paying attention to his awful rampage, and perhaps he needed to make things a lot clearer. Perhaps, that twisted little excuse for a brain of his thought, a drastic alteration to the Seattle skyline would convince Scotto to come out to play....

He stormed through the Seattle Center plaza, ignoring the surroundings as he focused his attention on the Space Needle. He was wearing his hood, for he didn’t want the Space Needle to have any idea what was about to hit it. He strolled right up to its mammoth base, surveying the pathetic “gift shop” that took up the ground floor. A glass elevator slowly ascended the six hundred plus feet to the just recently reopened rotating restaurant up top, and

Dr. Ugly watched the suckers inside with a kind of murderous glee. Weren’t they in for a treat! The “futuristic” curved beams that held up that giant, opulent bauble were never designed to withstand what was to come next.

He concentrated all of his available ugliness on the Needle, and then, with a dramatic, villainous flourish, he removed his hood.

At first, nothing happened, and for the briefest of moments Dr. Ugly wondered if his features might have somehow miraculously reverted to their earlier, aesthetically pleasing form. Then, he heard it – an enormous wrenching wail emanating from deep within the tons of steel that comprised the Needle. He took an instinctive step back. The Needle lurched suddenly away from him, and he could hear the miniscule screams of the trapped tourists above; indeed, the sound practically had a tickling effect on him, and he giggled like the Pillsbury Doughboy.

Suddenly the ground itself started to quake, and Dr. Ugly hurriedly threw on his hood and began to make tracks. The Needle’s 5,000 ton concrete foundation was deliberately, desperately wrenching itself free of the earth below it. It began to rise like a colossal juggernaut, the best efforts of the 1962 World’s Fair suddenly rocketing dozens of extra feet into the air, somehow managing to maintain structural integrity as it broke free of its earthly manacles. The gift shop at the base crumpled and folded in protest.

For a brief, beautiful moment, the Space Needle actually hung suspended in air above the ground. Indeed, Dr. Ugly recognized the delicious irony in the fact that he alone, sole master of the realm of ugliness, could provoke and witness such an astonishingly beautiful display. The laws of physics themselves were protesting the sheer fact of his ugliness. Debris rained down the side of the long-buried foundation in a kind of slow motion ballet of destruction.

And then, it began to descend.

The Needle crashed back to earth a full twenty feet or so away from its original spot. The concrete foundation sank deep within the ground once again, but not nearly as far as it had originally been poured. No, this time, something was quite different — the Needle had no desire whatsoever to find itself lodged in place anywhere near such ugliness. Within moments of crashing back down, it was already lurching forward and upward once again, springing out of the ground like a giant “futuristic” pogo stick.

The true beauty of the situation, Dr. Ugly soon realized, was that the Needle had no intention of stopping, even now that he had replaced the hood upon his head. The Needle had seen the face of ugly, and it would not stop fleeing until it was safe somewhere up in the Yukon maybe. And so, in gigantic, mesmerizing hops, it lurched through Seattle, first up toward Capitol Hill, then following the highway up north. And with each incredible hop, the vast concrete foundation demolished huge chunks of Seattle neighborhoods, as though a series of meteors were striking Seattle in succession.

Surely Scotto will have to notice *this* inspired mayhem, thought Dr. Ugly. There was no way he could avoid the sight of the Space Needle galloping across town. Once again he found himself lusting after that precious moment when he would have me in his grasp, and would subject me to insane humiliations unlike any the world had ever seen before. First, there would be the enforced *Love Boat* viewing... oh yes, there would be many hours of enforced *Love Boat* viewing. Then would come the enforced John Tesh listening... oh yes, there would be many hours of enforced John Tesh listening. And then would come the *coup de grace*: the enforced *Love Boat* viewing with the *simultaneous* enforced John Tesh listening. He could already hear my desperate screams in his head, and could only imagine how much more delightful those screams would be once he had recorded them and sequenced them and laid down a real phat beat behind them. We're talking top 40, bayBEE!

He sat at the former location of the World's Tallest Space Needle, and waited for my inevitable arrival.

Episode Twelve

Since we couldn't come to any conclusion about who would ultimately get to claim "Captain" for their moniker, we turned our attention to more weighty matters: what we would call ourselves as a super team. It was a deadly serious discussion, made all the more serious by our ever encroaching Mad Dog stupor.

"The Psychedelic Avengers," I offered.

"The Unkempt X-People," said Crank Boy.

"The Super Compadres," said Laurel.

"The Really Neat Team," I suggested.

"The Fantastic Four," Crank Boy said.

"I think that's taken," Laurel told him.

"Oh," Crank Boy replied, face falling in disappointment.

"The People Who Are Not To Be Fucked With," I said.

Laurel shook her head. "That's not very kid friendly."

"Neither am I!" I exclaimed, but down deep within the vestiges of what was left of that thing I once called a soul, I knew she was right.

"The Justice League of Kicking Ass!" Crank Boy shouted, slamming his Mad Dog down on the table. He whooped and I whooped and we high fived.

"Would you guys please *focus*?" Laurel protested. "This is serious!"

"Well, I don't hear you coming up with anything better, smartypants!" snapped Crank Boy.

Laurel's brow furrowed in deep, deep concentration. Then, her eyes lit up with a sudden sharp satisfaction.

"The Powerpoof Crew!" she shrieked.

The cold, withering stares from Crank Boy and me caused Laurel to age prematurely by several years.

"Oh fine," she said with a pout. It was a very cute pout, I must admit, with that cute little down-turned lip, and that wrinkled little button nose, and that way she began obsessively sharpening her Rambo knife.

Our deliberations were suddenly distracted by a loud *boom* from off in the distance. The house shook slightly on its foundation. A few pictures fell from the walls. Mostly they were pictures of me with famous people, like Howard Hesseman and me smiling and laughing, and Kathie Lee Gifford signing my underwear, and me kicking Charles Nelson Reilly right in the fookin crotch.

"What the hell was *that*?" Crank Boy asked.

We froze around the kitchen table, wondering if we'd just experienced some kind of weird collective hallucination, or if perhaps that big earthquake we'd been expecting was finally here and Seattle was about to be completely destroyed by tidal waves and volcanic lava and giant plates crashing together underground. Which, you have to admit, would be a stellar way to get whacked by reality.

It happened again, only this time it was more intense. The boom was louder, the walls shook a bit longer, and we could hear screams and sirens off in the distance.

"You know," Laurel said, a nice thoughtful Nancy Drew look crossing her face, "I can't say for sure, but I have a hunch it's the Space Needle hopping across town."

"Oh," said Crank Boy.

"Right," I said. "Of course."

Slowly we made our way to the living room and stared out the front window, just as yet another *boom* rippled through the foundation of the house, causing books to fall off shelves, and my TV to fall off its stand, and my life size plaster cast of Tina Yothers to come crashing to the floor. I couldn't get to it in time, and Tina's glorious nipples broke off and went flying across the room like deadly bullets.

Sure enough, from my front porch, we could see the Space Needle rising and falling, rising and falling, in one of the most elegant one-legged hops we'd ever seen a major piece of modern architecture accomplish. Crank Boy covered his heart with his hand out of respect, and Laurel wept openly at the beauty before her. I stuffed Tina's nipples into my pocket and pretended I also cared about the outside world, meanwhile wondering if now would be a good time to steal the rest of Crank Boy's Mad Dog without him noticing.

"You know what would *really* be fun?" Crank Boy suddenly said as we watched the Space Needle gallivant into the distance. "We should play Risk!"

Well, you didn't have to be some kind of nuclear genius to recognize the sheer abject brilliance of *that* plan. We cheered at the thought, and I dashed into my bedroom to fetch Risk from the pile of games in my closet. There it was, right underneath the Nine Circles of Hell-themed Monopoly and X-Rated Candyland. I snagged it, pausing only to once again admire my slender, athletic build in the mirror, before returning to the kitchen. To my chagrin, Crank Boy had finished my Mad Dog while I was gone.

"Sorry," was all he could offer.

I swept aside the pile of dirty dishes, unwashed pans, and molding animal bones that cluttered the kitchen table, and we hurriedly unfolded the playing board.

"Okay, house rules," I announced. "Terrorist rules are in effect: every third turn, a card from the pile is drawn at random, and that country experiences a dirty bomb, wiping out a third of the armies on the country. Also, atomic apoc rules are in effect: every tenth turn, a card from the pile is drawn at random, and a surprise nuclear strike destroys all the armies on that country. And, Satanic conspiracy rules are in effect: every time you roll three sixes, His Satanic Majesty rises up from the underworld and sweeps up all your opponents' armies in that battle, but at the cost of a third of your own armies in sacrifice."

We settled in for a long, exciting evening. The acid hadn't even come close to wearing off yet, and the Mad Dog merely added a pleasant swirling kind of vertigo to the experience. In the back of my mind, I was troubled by a nagging, unexplainable notion that I was forgetting something... did I still have clothes in the washer that needed to go into the dryer? Did I forget to tape that week's episode of *Buffy*? Had I neglected to call my mom on her birthday and once again thank her profusely for having the good sense to be born so that she could ultimately have me as a child?

"You know, I keep thinking I'm forgetting something," Crank Boy said as he attacked Kamchatka from Madagascar.

"Yeah," Laurel said, "me too. It's like I might have left a pie in the oven, or forgotten to defuse the bomb under my bed."

"Oh man, I forgot to do that once," Crank Boy said, whistling. "You really shouldn't forget to do that."

"Well, I'm sure it'll come to us eventually," I said, as I cracked open the secret bottle of Everclear I kept stashed in plain view on the counter. "Anyone want to order a pizza?"

Episode Thirteen

As the Space Needle receded into the distance, Dr. Ugly knew it was time for drastic measures. So, it wasn't enough that Seattle's precious Capitol Hill had been gutted and demolished. It wasn't enough that the pride of the Seattle skyline, the World's Tallest Space Needle, had defected to Canada. Clearly, he thought, I have yet to strike at the heart of what matters most to that bastard! But the criminally insane mind is also a creative mind, prone to exciting leaps of "thinking outside the box." Soon, an even more diabolical plan was forming in his mind, a plan that could win the Nobel Prize for Diabolical Mad Schemes, if George W. Bush wasn't already a shoo-in for that award.

For Dr. Ugly knew me well enough to know my secret weakness, my Achilles' heel. Oh, it didn't seem like a weakness to me at the time, but that's because I was blinded by my own devotion. No, in this one instance Dr. Ugly was as shrewd a character study as any psychiatrist I had ever sent shrieking from her own office. And in those next terrible moments, he would change the face of my reality forever. I'm not joking here. This was some serious shit, dude. I mean... I mean, *fuck*.

As emergency crews frittered about the city, frantically trying to put things back together before the whole city accidentally exploded or something, a hooded Dr. Ugly made his way from the Seattle Center down into Belltown, casually looking for any convenience store or grocery store or, if he was lucky, actual liquor store that might serve as a place to launch his diabolical scheme. The Space Needle had just been a warm up. This would be a strategic incision into the heart of everything that his mortal enemy believed in. He sauntered into a small, unattended market; the employees and customers had all fled due to the Space Needle's eruption. Alone in the place, he headed directly to the cases of beer and wine in the back of the store. With razor sharp precision, he removed his hood in the presence of all that alcohol...

...and watched as the bottles and cans erupted into a maelstrom of twisted aluminum and molten, fleeing glass. The alcohol itself evaporated into a self-annihilating mist, volumes essentially tearing their own cells apart in an effort to escape Dr. Ugly's penetrating glare of ugliness. The shelves and the refrigerated cases that housed the alcohol also ripped themselves apart in an effort to flee, and before Dr. Ugly could get his hood back on, the entire back half of the market had shredded itself.

Dr. Ugly cackled a deep, satisfied cackle. He frolicked in the wreckage for a moment and then meandered a few blocks south, where an actual, full-fledged liquor store awaited him. His putrescent lips pulled back into a despicable approximation of a human smile as he entered the store.

"Hey, what's with the hood?" the unfortunate attendant asked, suddenly afraid he was being robbed. The old man reached underneath the counter for

the shotgun he kept stashed there, but before he could even properly wield it, Dr. Ugly whipped off his hood – again, with a dramatic flourish – and directed the full force of his devastating gaze at the attendant. The man’s skin literally ripped itself open as his own organs burst forth and flew through the plate glass window behind him, and then attempted to wriggle off down the street to get away.

Once again alone, Dr. Ugly turned his attention to the alcohol — the sweet, sweet, innocent alcohol. All those helpless bottles of vodka and gin and schnapps, all those wasted young bottles of wine, cut down before their prime... someday, I would plant a memorial to all that spent alcohol. The bottles all exploded at once in a ghastly eruption, the shards all flying as far away from Dr. Ugly as possible, leaving him unscathed by his demented act. And the alcohol, oh the alcohol... Dr. Ugly couldn’t even smell it in the air, it dissipated so rapidly.

Now Dr. Ugly’s cackle developed into a full fledged maniacal laugh. He grabbed a phone book, and looked up the addresses of every liquor store in range. He would work his way throughout the entire city, and no one would be able to stop him. Why, there was another liquor store a scant several blocks away, and if he managed to steal a car he could make excellent progress. And after all, did he not have the luxury now of time? If it was a waiting game, he could easily outwait me, he believed... for soon, my own private supply of alcohol would run dry, that much he knew for sure, and I would be forced to venture forth into the world. And maybe not that night, maybe not even the next, but eventually I would saunter into some liquor store, expecting the same friendly “Hey, Scotto, still not dead from alcohol poisoning yet?” that I always got when I sauntered in, and I would find to my utter shock and dismay that there was *NO MORE ALCOHOL*, and in that moment I would realize just exactly what was going on, and I would seek out Dr. Ugly for that dramatic confrontation he’d been seeking all along. And he would somehow outwit me, and then there would be the *Love Boat*, and the John Tesh, and maybe even the “Nancy Reagan Strip Tease!” episode of *Playboy TV*, and I would be *RUINED*, absolutely *RUINED*, the way Dr. Ugly was himself ruined in a way, and the cosmic scales would be balanced, and Dr. Ugly would at last be able to relax and just get the damn cosmetic surgery he’d been told over and over again would probably be able to make him look just like Erik Estrada. Beautiful, beautiful Erik Estrada.

He stepped out onto the street and gazed lovingly at the plumes of fire and smoke that rose up above the city of Seattle. Soon, they would send in the military to try to restore order, and Dr. Ugly would take possession of their awesome weapons of war, their tanks and their rockets and their impressive wrist watches. He would turn those very weapons against his arch nemesis, he thought to himself, as he sauntered toward downtown, a spring in his step, a sparkle in his eye, a gruesome catastrophe of flesh upon his face....

Episode Fourteen

Dr. Ugly didn’t have to wait for very long, as it turned out, for almost immediately after he began his deranged assault on all that was truly pure and holy within the Seattle city limits, my *Scotto Sense* began tingling!

“The alcohol,” I suddenly exclaimed. “He’s destroying the city’s alcohol supply!”

And that was when a horrible realization dawned on all of us. We had, actually, forgotten to tape that week’s episode of *Buffy*. But also, we had completely forgotten that Dr. Ugly was on the loose, and now things were getting serious.

“We’ve got to do something!” said Laurel. “If he destroys all the city’s alcohol, he’ll destroy the local economy, drive hundreds of stores and shops into bankruptcy, plunge major bottlers and distilleries into ruin—“

“And he’ll *piss me off!*” I shouted.

“Well, we can’t go out there without a plan,” Crank Boy said. “I mean, he’s obviously got a plan, so we need one too, or else we’re just rank amateurs out there.”

We fell into silence, then.

“Okay, here’s an idea,” I said at last. “I fly somewhere relatively far away, and fly back with as much alcohol as humanly possible, and we just keep stockpiling from out of town. That way, no matter how much alcohol Dr. Ugly destroys, we can stay as likkered up as we want, and he’ll never even know!”

After a slight pause, Laurel said, “That doesn’t solve the problem of Dr. Ugly on a rampage.”

“Oh, that’s the problem?” I replied. “I thought the problem was that I am going to run out of booze soon.”

“Will you please for one tiny moment divert even the slightest portion of your mental faculties to thinking about something other than your own intoxication?” Laurel snapped.

“Huh?” I replied. “Sorry, I was just thinking about making myself a nice big gin and tonic.”

“This is no use,” Crank Boy said sullenly. “The fact is, we *are* rank amateurs. We don’t know the first thing about fighting super villains. We can’t even decide who gets to be Captain. We should just stay here, wait for the acid to wear off, and do a big pile of mushrooms.”

Crank Boy must have noticed the sudden sad look that crossed my face.

“Don’t tell me you don’t have any mushrooms,” he said. “Oh, God, it’s worse than I thought....”

“Pull yourself together, dammit,” said Laurel. “The acid hasn’t worn off yet. That means we still have time for a completely unexpected burst of ass kicking on our parts. We just need to try to remember absolutely everything

warm, wet sensation that usually woke me up. Now, however, I could fly without being chased by clowns, and the warm, wet sensation was actually key to keeping me from freezing to death.

Moments later, I descended from the sky, landing atop a tall London skyscraper. I looked at the city below, remarking to myself that London was looking suspiciously like Albuquerque these days, before realizing to my chagrin that this actually *was* Albuquerque. And, just my luck, the Albuquerque Celebrity Wax Museum had only just last week melted down its own Michael Landon in order to make way for its much-hyped Olsen Twins Locked In Mortal Combat exhibit. I launched into the air once more, got a bit confused again, and landed just outside of Toronto. I paused just long enough to hurl a bunch of vague, ill-informed insults at the natives – a quaint people often referred to by anthropologists as “Canadians” – before taking to the skies once more.

This was taking a lot longer than I anticipated, and I began to fear that my buzz was wearing off. Fortunately, my utility belt had a secret stash of powdered DXM, Dramamine, and a delightful “designer drug” called 2-TC-special-G, which I got from a corrupt Mormon missionary named Carlo. Taking the three in combination was often referred to in the literature as a “stupidass-flip” for reasons I’m not particularly clear about. The resulting euphoria did nothing for my sense of direction, however, and in fact made asking for directions from the cops in Tijuana slightly problematic. I think they were giving me directions, anyway; they might simply have been admiring my lithe profile and dramatic, flowing cape (if by “admiring” you mean “pointing and laughing quite a bit”).

Finally it occurred to me to actually make use of this incredible new technology called “maps” that I’d been meaning to check out for a while now. You really won’t believe it: somehow, someone actually managed to, like, go out and draw really detailed pictures of, like, the entire planet. I don’t really know who has the time to even do that kind of thing; maybe the government paid them to do it or maybe they were just really excited about, you know, drawing stuff, but at any rate, they work *great* for figuring out how to get places. Next thing you know, I’m in London! And they even have different styles of “maps,” so for instance, they have maps of really big things like countries, and really small things like neighborhoods! It’s so wack! Anyway, soon I arrived at my destination: Madame Tussaud’s Wax Museum in London, where I was calmly informed that the Michael Landon wax statue was actually in their Las Vegas location and that a simple telephone call could have confirmed this small detail. Plus, I was informed that my cape was silly looking, but realistically, you don’t take fashion hints from the British, let’s be serious here.

By the time I got to Nevada, I was exhausted and needed a place to rest. Fortunately, brothels are legal in Nevada, and all I needed to do was lie

there, which technically constitutes resting. And then of course, it just goes without saying you can’t visit Vegas without stopping by to see Sigfried & Roy; however, I was turned away at the door when informed that there was some kind of policy about “no one in the audience can look sillier than the artists,” at which point I reminded the asshole at the door that he was a big poopyhead and then finally, at long last, made my way to Tussaud’s.

Now at that point, I came to the rather belated realization that these people were not going to be particularly thrilled about me just walking off with Michael Landon. I distracted them by setting Latoya Jackson on fire. When no one really bothered responding, I set Tom Brokaw on fire, and that got people running; in the hubbub, I lifted Michael Landon off the big plastic pole that was stuck right up his angelic wax ass and hauled him out the emergency exit. It occurred to me on my way out that I probably could have just set the Tom Brokaw *statue* on fire instead of Tom himself, but you know, I was in a hurry.

Wrapping Michael Landon’s arms around my neck, I leapt into the air once more, heading home with Michael Landon’s beautiful flowing trusses rippling in the wind behind me. This was the Highway to Heaven indeed! Sailing into Seattle, I could see the horrid devastation that Dr. Ugly was wreaking, and moving in from the south were army units: tanks and helicopters and trucks, all heading to their doom unless we could act fast enough. I arrived at home to find Crank Boy and Laurel in the kitchen, with a rather impressive assortment of handguns, rifles, knives, ammunition, and mushrooms that Crank Boy had hurriedly collected from the University of Washington campus.

I propped Michael Landon against the wall for them to admire. Laurel’s eyes grew wide in amazement.

“Yes, I know,” I said smugly. “I have saved the day.”

“I don’t know how you think a BALD MICHAEL LANDON will save ANYTHING!” she exclaimed.

To my horror, I turned to discover that the beautiful, flowing, curly trusses that Michael Landon had possessed when we left Las Vegas had been shorn clear off his wax head by the incredible winds of our flight.

“They sure don’t make wax Michael Landons like they used to,” Crank Boy muttered.

“We don’t have time for this,” I growled, seizing an inspiration that could only come to one whose moniker included the title Captain. Charging into the living room, I seized the gorgeous blonde wig that had formerly adorned my beloved full size plaster cast of Tina Yothers. It wasn’t black, curly, or even remotely appropriate, but it would have to do.

We spent the next half hour in deep preparation: Crank Boy and Laurel practicing with their new weapons by blowing huge holes in the kitchen walls,

me practicing with Michael Landon in a grotesque but strangely compelling attempt to make him dance like a sex-crazed bonobo ape.

A showdown loomed large in our futures. As I danced, I munched those lovely fresh mushrooms as though this might be the last time I ever tasted such psychoactive bliss. If Dr. Ugly was going to get me, it wasn't going to be without a fight.

No, it was likely going to involve a fight, and then he would wind up getting me.

Episode Sixteen

We stepped out onto the front porch of my house. I could imagine the movie poster that would promote the blockbuster adaptation of our heroic exploits: Crank Boy with an UZI in one hand, and razor sharp adamantium claws extended from the other; Laurel holding a big ass shotgun and trying to figure out how to breathe with a spider-head mask over her nose and mouth; me with my arm lovingly supporting a newly blond Michael Landon; and Michael Landon wearing assless chaps and a tight red corset. Perhaps they would call our story *Captain Scotto and His Heroes to Be*. Or, more likely, perhaps they would call it *Three Dumbfucks and a Wax Girly-Man*. You know how capricious Hollywood can be.

We were each equipped with snazzy headset radios that would allow us to communicate after we had gone our separate ways. Our plan was for Crank Boy and Laurel to sneak around behind Dr. Ugly's center of destruction, while Michael Landon and I attempted to face Dr. Ugly head on. My only hope was to catch Dr. Ugly with his hood on, so that his immense ugliness didn't melt Michael Landon on the spot. I had no specific plan for doing that, trusting that the glorious fates would intervene... those same glorious fates that had, uh, hmm, let's see, driven me to suicide, destroyed most of Seattle, and left me performing sexy mambos with Michael Landon. Well, at any rate, the game was afoot.

The game proved to be a lot more complicated to play than I had anticipated. This is due to my severely decreased mental facilities, which I attribute to a dire vitamin deficiency and years of being dropped on my head. Well, it was really only the one year, but it was pretty regular that year, and mostly just kind of occasionally after that, when Mom just felt like she was in the mood. Years later, I'd go home to visit, and Mom would be like, "Come on, let me drop you on your head just one more time for old time's sake," and it would be like a bonding thing, except as I got older, she had to drop me from higher and higher heights in order to really approach the same damage she could inflict in a single drop when I was younger. But you know, I love my Mom, so.

"Muchacho to Spearmint Gum, come in," Crank Boy's voice came over the radio. "I repeat: Muchacho to Spearmint Gum, come in."

Dead silence followed. I couldn't really remember if I was Spearmint Gum or not.

"Uh, this is Vicks Vap-o-Rub," said Laurel, "could you repeat that last transmission? Over."

"Muchacho to Vicks Vap-o-Rub, I am looking for Spearmint Gum, over," Crank Boy said.

"Oh," Laurel replied. "Have you tried a convenience store? Over."

"That is not funny, I repeat, that is not funny," Crank Boy said. "Over."

"Spearmint Gum to Muchacho, come in, Muchacho," I said.

"Muchacho to Spearmint Gum, I have news for you. Over."

"Spearmint Gum to Muchacho, is your news that our radio nicknames are really fookin stupid, or is it something I don't know? Over."

"Vicks Vap-o-Rub to Muchacho, please be advised that our radio nicknames are not stupid and keep in mind that Spearmint Gum is the one who spent the last half hour dirty dancing with Michael Landon. Over."

"Spearmint Gum to Vicks Vap-o-Rub, *you* please be advised that I did not derive any pleasure from said dirty dancing. At least not until the chaps were off. Over."

"Muchacho to Spearmint Gum, would you please stick to business? Dr. Ugly has taken up a position downtown at the intersection of Pike and 5th. Military units are converging on his position. His hood is still on, if you can get there fast enough. Over."

"Roger that. I am headed that direction. Vicks Vap-o-Rub, you are a poopyhead. Over and out."

I flew just below the cloud cover, slowly approaching so that I'd be able to detect any signs of de-hooding. Sure enough, to my chagrin, I saw the leading edge of the military approach: several nasty looking humvees with machine guns mounted on top, and a tank that was rumbling down 5th with all the grace of a hippopotamus on speed. I averted my eyes just as Dr. Ugly removed his hood, and with my peripheral vision, I realized Dr. Ugly had gained an enormous amount of control over his powers of diabolical ugliness. The humvees and the tank began firing, and of course the shells practically traveled backwards in an attempt to flee that horrible throbbing morass he called a face. But worse, as the vehicles attempted to turn around, Dr. Ugly took control of their flight and sent them deliberately away, firing the weapons with his ugliness, controlling their massive engines with his ugliness. He used the vehicles to assault the next line of humvees and jeeps, leaving them a surprised and devastated ruin. Helicopters drew too close, and came within his titanic ugliness rays, and now he sent them spinning in circles above his head, undoubtedly to keep me from flying too close to the scene. Within a matter of minutes, Dr. Ugly controlled a deadly arsenal courtesy of the

United States Army. There would be no way for Crank Boy and Laurel to get in close now.

I decided to land a safe distance away, at the grounds of the Seattle Center, where the World's Tallest Space Needle once stood proudly and graced our skyline with its "futuristic" wonder. I leaned Michael Landon up against a tree and paused to consider a new plan of attack. It was then that I heard a beautiful, beautiful sound, one that I hadn't heard in ages... it was the sound of a Galaga game in the nearby arcade, calling to me with its promise of excitement and heroism. I turned off my radio. Surely Dr. Ugly could wait while I rescued the universe from an alien armada one last time. I even kept a roll of quarters in my utility belt for just such an occasion... but with my precious, precious Galaga, it would only take one quarter, yea verily, it would only take one quarter.

The arcade was deserted, meaning I would not have to brutally assault some hapless youngster in order to play like usual. The mushrooms were really starting to come on, which meant I could truly play from the *zone*, that special place in spacetime where my psyche truly connected with the joystick to make a union more holy than that of priest and altar boy. Or something like that. I trembled as I viewed the high score... a respectable number, but nothing to fear, for I was a wizard of dexterity and aplomb under combat conditions. Oh, how I had forgotten the deep, luscious pleasure of battling row after row of menacing alien insects, the compelling drama of fighting them off with only my trusty allotment of space capsules at hand.

I inserted a quarter, and pressed the Player 1 button. Time seemed to stop. I passed Challenging Stage after Challenging Stage, my ever increasing rank only bolstering my confidence. Some nagging part of me wondered if there wasn't something better I was supposed to be doing with my time, but I chalked that up to Mom's admonitions as a child, from those days when she couldn't stand to see me fritter money away on video games when there were hookers and cocaine to save my precious coins for. Ah, to be ten years old again...

And then, an unfortunate yelp snatched me out of my reverie. It was the distinctive sound of Crank Boy shouting "YES!" from across the room. My attention momentarily diverted, the wretched aliens destroyed both my attacking vessels with a blistering assault, and my game was sadly over.

I charged across the arcade floor, shouting, "SPEARMINT GUM TO MUCHACHO! WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING HERE? OVER!"

Crank Boy spun away from his game of Ms. Pac-Man, and in that brutal instant, the vicious ghost Inky sucked the very lifeblood from the strangely attractive round heroine of the game.

"Aw, geez, aren't you supposed to be fighting Dr. Ugly?" he whined.

"I could ask you the same question!" I shouted.

Silence followed.

"Well?" I demanded.

"Well what?" he replied.

"Answer my question!" I said.

"You didn't ask a question," he said.

"I did!"

"You didn't. You merely implied that you *could* ask me a question. I think there's a big difference ontologically between implying a thing and actually doing a thing, don't you?" He paused. "Where's Vicks Vap-o-Rub?"

"She's not with you?" I asked.

"See? Now *that* is an actual question, as opposed to before, which was merely an implication."

"Are you going to *answer* the damn question?"

"Another fine question—"

"CRANK BOY!"

"That's Muchacho, thank you very much, and the answer is, no, she's not with me. I thought she was with you, fighting Dr. Ugly."

That could mean only one thing. Laurel was out fighting Dr. Ugly alone. I frantically switched on my radio, only to hear her frantic shouts:

"VICKS VAP-O-RUB TO *ANYBODY*, WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU GUYS? I'M SURROUNDED!"

"Bring Michael Landon!" I barked at Crank Boy. "I'll get there faster if I fly on my own." And with that, I sprinted to the door and took off into the sky. A fateful confrontation was at last at hand...

Episode Seventeen

"Vicks Vap-o-Rub, this is Spearmint Gum!" I shouted as I rose aloft. "What is your location? Over!"

"My location is the corner of pinned down and getting my ass kicked!" she shouted back.

"Could you be more specific?"

There was only silence. Well, silence and the sound of hundreds of gunshots and explosions and four whirring helicopters headed directly toward me. I had to neutralize the helicopters without harming the innocent pilots at the controls, who were no doubt terrified at the fact that their war birds were no longer under their control. It was a strange and alien sensation, this feeling of "compassion" that I was experiencing. It was a feeling I usually associated with the weak-minded and the insipid, and yet here I was, worried about someone else's well-being other than my own, or people like Laurel, who were good drug connections. I wondered what other hidden powers this super hero suit was bringing me, and briefly hoped that I might be given the gift of a clean, white smile and hair that was soft and manageable.

The helicopters flew toward me at an alarming speed. Dodging an onslaught of missiles, I flew directly through the cockpit window of the first helicopter. Suddenly unstable, the helicopter started to plummet. I ripped the pilot and co-pilot out of their seat belts and punched through the side of the helicopter, with the two of them clinging to my back for dear life. The other three helicopters had to alter their course to avoid the suddenly plunging helicopter, and as they did, I handily deposited the two pilots atop a nearby skyscraper, feeling wonderful about saving their lives. Meanwhile, the damaged helicopter plummeted through a nearby apartment building, killing hundreds instantly. At that point, I was like, fuck it, and leapt back into the air just as another onslaught of missiles destroyed the building the two pilots had been standing on. It was a bummer, man, I tell you what. I started doing midair ninja chops on the missiles coming my way, redirecting them back at their origins. Despite how bad I felt about the whole thing, I have to say, watching a bunch of helicopters blow the fuck up over downtown Seattle was definitely wicked cool. It will look great on the big screen.

“SPEARMINT GUM TO VICKS VAP-O-RUB, CAN YOU READ ME?” I shouted as I headed toward the epicenter of the mayhem. Bullets ricocheted off my super hero suit and made little “CLANG” noises as they did so. It kind of sounded like rain on a tin roof, and I marveled at the fact that none of the bullets managed to hit me in the head, which would certainly leave me looking very pathetic if not killing me outright. I guess some heroes get all the luck.

“I am holed up inside the post office on 3rd!” Laurel replied. “We’re surrounded by jeeps and tanks! The only reason we’re not dead yet is all of the postal workers are armed to the teeth!”

“I’ll be right there!” I said, and soon enough, I had punched through the roof of the post office and landed next to Laurel. Her spider suit was torn and she had abandoned her mask in favor of being able to breathe.

“What happened to Michael Landon?” Laurel exclaimed.

“There’s been a change of plans,” I replied in a captain-y voice. “We need to distract Dr. Ugly long enough for Crank Boy to get Michael Landon into place.”

“But YOU were the one who did all the rehearsing with Michael Landon! You’re the one who is intimately familiar with his curves and contours, with the way his hips sway and his pelvis thrusts! You’re the one who knows the secrets of Michael Landon’s passion! You’re the one who discovered the hidden orifice—“

“I don’t have time to explain!” I snapped. “I’ll draw Dr. Ugly’s attention away from the post office. You take your squadron of postal workers and circle around behind him. Hopefully we can keep him busy long enough for Crank Boy to beat that Ms. Pac-Man game and get a cab down here. Now let’s move!”

With that, I charged out the front door of the post office and lifted a humvee up into the air, tossing it into the opera house across the street. A horrific screech filled the air.

I knew that screech. It was the screech of a man gone horribly ugly.

“That’s right, Percy!” I shouted. “I’m coming for you!”

I lifted another humvee high into the air and tossed it clear into Puget Sound. Then I leapt into the sky, carefully using only my peripheral vision to scan for Dr. Ugly’s probable location. The rest of the Army’s forces was fleeing back down the highway the way they’d come... soon it would just be Dr. Ugly against me, and for the first time, I was beginning to relish the thought. I caught a glimpse of movement to the east, and began flying slowly south toward Safeco Field. I was sure he would follow, with whatever was left of his arsenal. Sure enough, two more humvees began barreling down 3rd Avenue behind me, firing a futile barrage of bullets that bounced delicately off my stylish cape. He was following all right. I would lead him to the baseball field, where I could isolate him, and maybe bring that giant moving roof right down on his head—

“NOOOOOOO!” I heard Laurel scream over the radio. I stopped in midair. The sounds of a struggle filled the microphone, and then the unmistakable voice of Dr. Ugly filled my ear.

“You’d better come quick if you want to see your spider girl alive again!” he shouted. “Come alone, or I’ll take my hood off just inches from her face and watch her entire head melt like an ice cream cone!”

Well. Wasn’t that a pisser.

I turned back around and headed back toward the post office. The humvees stopped their pursuit; the final confrontation was truly at hand. I landed on the sidewalk and prepared myself... for I knew that even my super hero suit couldn’t fully protect me from his monstrous ugliness. And I didn’t have a plan either — not that would it matter, since my last two plans had been big fat failures. I was going to have to improvise. Which basically meant give up and hope it didn’t hurt too much when he killed me.

I stepped through the wreckage of the front of the post office. The squadron of postal workers had not escaped rapidly enough; steaming puddles of melted flesh and bone were frantically oozing through the cracks in the floor, into the ground below. Somehow, Laurel had averted her eyes, and now Dr. Ugly’s hood was back on. Laurel was on her knees in front of him, facing me, and he held her shotgun to the back of her head.

“So, we meet at last,” he said with a villainous smirk.

“Actually, we meet at first, we say goodbye at last,” I replied, confident that my command of English would throw him off.

“ENOUGH!” he shouted. “You have no idea how long I’ve waited for this moment.”

“Seven years, eight weeks, four days?” I said.

He paused. “Well, I guess you have some idea. And now, NOW YOU’RE MINE!” He began laughing maniacally. It would have been really creepy and scary, except he started coughing and hacking toward the end of it, and then he reached for an inhaler, and by the time he was done, I wasn’t really that creeped out or scared anymore. Laurel was obviously still scared, though, probably due to the feel of that double barrel against her skull. That’s not a fun feeling — at least, that’s what all those people I met in Oklahoma during that one drunken bender told me, but I guess people will tell you anything if they don’t want you to leave them naked by the side of a highway covered in pig’s blood.

My eyes met Laurel’s. I tried to communicate via blinking in Morse code, but I think all I managed to tell her was that I wanted to deeply fondle her spleen, as opposed to “goodbye” or something similar.

“All those years I wondered just how my revenge would come,” Dr. Ugly said, fulfilling his contractual obligation to babble a lot before attempting to off the hero. “I pictured so many different tortures — drowning you in rancid cottage cheese, rubbing your skin off with sandpaper and spraying you down with lemon juice, force feeding you sandwiches from Jack in the Box. I’ve even got John Tesh cued up next door, and an episode of *Love Boat* guest starring Marion Ross all ready to torment you. But now... now that I have you here before me... now it will all be so much simpler, and yet still so incredibly delicious.”

His hand slowly reached for his hood.

“Goodbye, Mr. O. Moore,” he said.

Events seemed to unfold in slow motion then. As the hood came off, I found myself unable to avert my eyes. Some insane, macabre fascination deep within me — the same part of me that kept wondering just how many hits of acid would fit into my mouth, or how many gallons of ketamine would be required to fill a hot tub — compelled me to stare as the hood came off.

And then, just as I was about to make eye contact with my doom, Laurel leapt into the air and came flying toward me, screaming “DON’T LOOK!” as she did. She managed several large steps my direction and all I saw was the determination in her eyes, before a sudden loud BOOM filled the air...

...and Laurel emitted a small cry as her chest was blown open from behind by Dr. Ugly’s shotgun blast. She fell forward a few more steps and landed in my arms, and we sank to the floor together. I was stunned beyond belief, and could do no more than hold her as her eyes glazed over.

Another shot rang out, but this one bounced harmlessly off my super hero suit. The ricochet shredded Dr. Ugly with shrapnel; he shrieked like a baby and fled out the back of the post office to tend his wounds, leaving me alone with Laurel’s corpse.

Episode Eighteen

The awful reality of the situation sank in rather quickly. Those tasty sheets of acid we’d been eating? Weren’t going to see those for a while. Those illicit scripts for Vicodin she’d been getting by pretending to have a severed arm? Out the window. Her handy ability to know exactly when the drug stores were getting their shipments and when the night watchmen were in the bathroom masturbating? I mean, those kinds of skills aren’t *learned*, they’re *innate*.

Her blood was starting to leak into my lap, staining my stylish suit, so I had to jump up suddenly as I grieved, letting her lifeless husk hit the floor with a tidy little WHUMP. I considered closing her eyes, but then I started thinking about the money we could get if I could just get those eyes to a doctor fast enough. Then common sense kicked in, as I realized I had left my dissection kit at home. And to think, in all of our years together, I had never, ever, not even once, told her how much I loved her. This was, I realized, due to the fact that I didn’t love her so much as enjoy the way she kept other people even worse from hanging around us.

I began to sob uncontrollably. Laurel’s death somehow affected me at a primal level, reminding me that I too was mortal, and that there but for the sake of an impervious alien super hero suit went I. Then I started laughing for a while, and kind of dancing around doing the “I have an impervious suit and you don’t!” dance, before starting to sob again, as Laurel’s cold dead eyes started to remind me of a bunny rabbit I’d once stepped on accidentally and crushed. That poor rabbit... I don’t think I ever properly grieved for that rabbit. Then I remembered that it was actually my brother who stepped on the rabbit and not me, and I started laughing wildly again. What a wacky world! Then I started sobbing again, because I remembered that Laurel was the only one who knew how to program the VCR to tape *Buffy* every week.

I couldn’t just leave her here like that, all shot up and dead and stuff. I had to take action. I had to show Dr. Ugly just who was boss, and in the absence of actually having an idea about who was boss, I had to convince him it was me. Plus, I was already starting to miss Laurel. I was starting to miss her smile, for instance, and even when I pushed her lips up into a feral smirk and held them there until rigor mortis set in, it still wasn’t the same. Not without her witty one liners that she had stolen from hit sitcoms like *Mama’s Boy* and *Saved By The Bell*. Not without the way she sometimes shimmied along to songs on the radio until you started to think she wanted to make sweet, sweet love to you right there on the floor — oh wait, that was Crank Boy actually, never mind. But still. I missed her, and a fury started to rise up in me. I was *not* going to be beaten by Dr. Ugly, not here, not now.

It was clear to me there was only one thing left to do. I was going to have to fly very, very fast in orbit around the planet, hundreds and hundreds of time, until I traveled far enough back in time that I could prevent Laurel’s

senseless yet plot critical death. I don't know what made me think this would be a good idea; I guess it was just one of those hunches you get when everything's at stake, and your best friend is dead, and your city is on the verge of absolute annihilation. Or it might have been something I saw on the tube once, I can't really remember.

I leapt into the air and smashed another hole in the ceiling on my way out right next to the hole I'd made on the way in, primarily because it felt really good to destroy government property like that, and then launched right up into the upper atmosphere. Man, I was flying around the world so damn fast, it was like there were these bright white lines behind me showing the trails of where I'd been. You could see the orbits just piling up, and I just kept flying and flying, with a steely determination in my gut, or maybe indigestion from the mushrooms, but whatever, same diff.

Suddenly a weird alien spacecraft the shape of a big burning cigar pulled up along side me. A stern, nasty voice shouted at me as we flew back in time together.

“WHAT THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING, YOU COLOSSAL NITWIT? YOU CAN'T JUST CHANGE ALL OF EARTH'S HISTORY TO SAVE YOUR LITTLE DRUG BUDDY! YOU'LL RUIN THE ENTIRE FUTURE! YOU MIGHT ACCIDENTALLY ERASE THE INVENTION OF DONUTS, OR YOU MIGHT CAUSE THE BEATLES TO STAY TOGETHER FOR SO MANY YEARS THAT THEY BECOME HOLLOW, PATHETIC SHELLS OF THEIR EARLIER SELVES, OR YOU MIGHT CAUSE MADONNA'S FILM CAREER TO ACTUALLY TAKE OFF! THINK ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES, SCOTTO! THINK!”

Unfortunately, thinking was the last thing on my mind.

“Sorry, E.T., but I've got a date with destiny,” I quipped. I was really proud of myself for that one. It's the simple pleasures in life that really matter, after all.

“YOU DON'T EVEN HAVE A PLAN! YOU'RE JUST BLINDLY DIVING INTO THE PAST WITHOUT THE SLIGHTEST CLUE HOW YOU'RE GOING TO PREVENT LAUREL'S DEATH!”

“Well you could do more than just heckle and act all belligerent,” I shouted back. “Don't you have some kind of fancy outer space computer that can figure out what to do?”

“SORRY, THAT COMPUTER'S TIED UP PLAYING GALAGA AT THE MOMENT.”

“Well, then SCREW YOU AND THE INTERGALACTIC SPACE CIGAR YOU RODE IN ON!” and I increased my speed to the point of no return. The suit was even faster than the space ship, probably because my suit only contained me, whereas their space craft likely contained an armada of hulking, nasty, space monsters.

“FINE, BE THAT WAY,” the aliens responded. **“BUT DON'T SAY WE DIDN'T WARN YOU.”**

“You didn't warn me!” I shouted.

“I SAID DON'T SAY THAT!”

I laughed maniacally. Ever the rebel, I.

The space cigar flew off back to where it came from, and I continued on my relentless course into the past. Before this trip was over, Laurel would be returned to me, Dr. Ugly would be eliminated, and I would be rich from all the Microsoft stock I was going to buy with the remainder of the quarters in my coin purse.

Episode Nineteen

Flying backwards in time in order to change the future is not something you just do recreationally. It takes a lot of skill, concentration, and control, combined with a preternatural intelligence and a cunning beyond measure. Having none of these attributes whatsoever, it was inevitable, then, that my first attempt might meet with something less than success.

Indeed, my first landing was so far back in time that Neanderthals walked the Earth. I surprised a small tribe of them as I landed in a beautiful prairie. One of them threw a rock at me, which I decided was a really mean thing to do. I picked the rock back up and threw it right back, smacking the little hulking shit right in the forehead. He keeled over dead, his compadres took off into the wilderness, and I had a nice little laugh at Grog of Grogville's expense.

It was clear my timing was off. I launched back into the future, and this time touched down on a bright sunny day in Dallas, Texas, of all places. A shot rang out, and bounced off my stylish cape. On a motorway nearby, President Kennedy was not shot through the head, and I realized, man, that was going to make Oliver Stone really irritated someday. Moments later, however, twelve more shots rang out from fourteen different directions, and Kennedy's head popped open like a grapefruit. Relieved, I took off into the future once more, steadily getting the hang of things.

My destination was the University of Northern Iowa campus, and this time, my aim was true, as I checked the date on the local newspaper and realized I had landed back in Iowa on that fateful day when I had accidentally tipped Percy into that vat of radioactive goo beneath the campus. There was still time to avert Percy's awful transformation. I saw myself, Crank Boy, and Laurel all entering the student union together, and I knew that I had to act fast. However, my super hero suit would undoubtedly attract too much attention, and so I stopped by the Campus Republicans office nearby to beat up someone who deserved it and take his clothes. It was hard to decide who was most deserving; they were all so smarmy and self-righteous that I decided

to beat them all up and just take a piece of clothing from everyone. It was fair that way, after all.

Properly disguised, I raced over to the student union. A wall of nostalgia raced over me as I careened through the revolving door, and overlooked a sea of fresh young faces at a wide array of tables. So many hopeful people... and only I knew that in a few short years, their youthful optimism would be systematically eliminated by the Man as a matter of course. Oh sure, some would go on to “succeed” in their “career paths,” but the truth was, here they existed in the last protected bubble of space and time they would ever know. I almost wanted to jump up on the table and shout, “START THE DRUG ABUSE NOW, PEOPLE, YOU’RE GOING TO NEED THE EXPERIENCE LATER!” but I knew that would be rude and counterproductive. Plus, no one in their right mind would listen to a Campus Republican anyway.

And then, the clock started ticking, as Percy entered the opposite side of the student union. There he was, in all his gorgeous glory... before I destroyed his face, and destroyed his psyche, and gave him those terrible powers. I felt suddenly sorry for the bastard. Maybe I had never given him a chance back in those days, back when I was callous with youth instead of callous with slightly less youth. I slowly made my way through the union to join him in line at the Hardee’s.

I clapped him on the back and said, “Hey, Percy, let me buy you a ham and cheese sandwich. My treat.”

Percy turned to me with eyes wide with childlike wonder. They were eyes that had never known kindness from me, his idol, and I could see the tiny little hamster wheel behind his eyes churning, attempting to process this new experience.

“Wh... when did you grow that beard and mustache?” he asked in a plaintive tone.

“Last night,” I replied. I shrugged. “I was bored. You know how it is.”

I bought him a sandwich and grabbed myself a bag of fries, paying for it with one of the hundreds I found tucked in my Republican pants pockets. We found a nearby table and sat down. It was almost charming in a way, the kind of puppy dog giddiness that Percy fought to contain, lest he annoy me away like he usually did.

“You know, Percy,” I said, “I don’t think I’ve ever really taken the time to get to know you. To find out what makes Percy tick. To find out about your interests, your dreams, your passions, your fears. You know, all that goopy human stuff that theoretically goes on inside you despite any real evidence of it. Tell me about yourself, Percy. Just who exactly are you?”

He hesitated only briefly, before starting into his story. He spoke slowly, overcoming his shyness piece by piece, and eventually, dropping his dorky veneer and revealing a surprisingly kind and interesting person. We spoke for half an hour or so about the deep matters of the world that concerned us both,

and I marveled at how I had misjudged this wayward soul. It was clear that only the radiant forcefulness of my own personality had caused such foolish behavior on his part; he simply wanted friendship, and I had been too closed off in my own miserable world of self-loathing and apathy to notice.

Then I realized the mushrooms were finally wearing off, and I snapped back to reality, which was me sitting across the table from the biggest dorkass the world had ever known. Fortunately, out of the corner of my eye, I saw myself, Laurel and Crank Boy meander out of the lounge and right out of the student union. The crisis had been averted. It was time to make my escape.

“Percy,” I said, marshalling all my acting skill toward this last task, “I want you to know how truly wonderful it’s been to get to know you. But now, I’ve got to go to class... and something else. You mustn’t ever speak to me again, Percy. Not ever. If you do, I’ll deny we ever had this conversation. You’re *just... too... intense* for me, Percy. You’re not like the other kids here. You’re an *old soul* filled with *wisdom* and *energy*, and I mustn’t get too close to you. No, Percy, I will take these lessons and learn them in my own way...and perhaps someday, years from now, you and I can attempt to be friends, the way the student returns to the guru after years of wandering meditation. I hope you understand, Percy.”

A long pause followed.

“Huh?” Percy said.

“Wipe the cheese off your chin,” I replied.

“Oh,” he said. “Thanks.”

And with that, I departed the student union once and for all, and headed back to my own time...

Episode Twenty

I arrived in Seattle to find no sign of carnage whatsoever. I checked the local newspapers to be sure — yes indeed, it was the day after Dr. Ugly would have escaped from the asylum/salon if there had been a Dr. Ugly to escape. The World’s Tallest Space Needle stood proudly against the skyline just like it always had. The buildings stood tall, and the United States Army was nowhere in sight. My heart swelled up with joy. I knew I would be able to speak none of this to Laurel and Crank Boy; it would be too impossible to believe. I had erased Dr. Ugly from the world, and saved Laurel’s life, and now it was time for me to resume my life as mild-mannered Scotto, upstanding citizen of this beautiful Emerald City. Or at least, it was time to go back to my usual routine of trying not to get arrested just for being a person.

I returned home, landing quietly on my front porch. I could see through the front window that Laurel and Crank Boy were sitting on the couch, watching television. I was missing *The Beautiful Phyllis Diller Show*, I realized, and I was about to burst right in and berate them for starting without

me, when I realized I was still dressed as a Campus Republican. I tore off my monkey suit and was about to burst right in, when I then realized I was still wearing my super hero suit. I tore off my suit and was about to burst right in, when I then realized I was standing buck nekkid on my porch... which just goes to show you, it's hard for a guy like me not to get arrested just for being a person.

I snuck around the side of the house and climbed in my bedroom window. I put on my usual snazzy wardrobe – jeans, a Monkees t-shirt, and a button down shirt with a pattern that often made people's eyes bleed if they weren't expecting it – and then sauntered wearily into the living room.

Sure enough, the wondrous visage of Phyllis filled the television set. They barely looked up as I came in, which I understood – Phyllis has her own rules that must be obeyed.

"There you are," Laurel muttered. "I thought you were getting chips."

"They were out," I replied. I breathed a huge sigh of relief to see her alive again. I wanted to celebrate, but I would have to do so quietly. "I'm going to make myself a nice, stiff drink. You guys want one?"

Both Laurel and Crank Boy looked up at me with a bewildering stare.

"What do you mean, 'stiff drink'?" Crank Boy asked.

"I dunno, I was thinking maybe a gin and tonic, or a nice little screwdriver, or maybe a Long Island iced tea," I said, salivating at the thought.

An awkward pause followed.

"Scotto, what the hell are you talking about?" Laurel asked. "What the hell is a 'gin and tonic'?"

A horrible chill ran up my spine. I dashed into the kitchen and threw open the door to the liquor cabinet... and found only plastic cups and plates. No vodka, no rum, no precious, precious gin or bourbon or even a single solitary bottle of cheap red wine. I scoured the kitchen from top to bottom, but could find no trace whatsoever of alcohol... the fridge was devoid of beer, the freezer contained no hidden bottles of luscious likker, and the recycling bins near the back door contained only soda pop bottles.

Holy merciless Christ fucking Satan right in the eye socket, what on earth had I done?

That Neanderthal I had killed... it had seemed so hilarious at the time, the suffering of a primitive being, but I knew now what I had done. Undoubtedly that wretched ur-human had been one of the direct descendants of the first person who ever realized that fermenting grain could get you really, really drunk... and now the world was devoid of the precious beauty known as the alcoholic stupor. Oh sure, Laurel was back to life, I mean, the trip wasn't a total failure, but... but a world without alcohol would be **JUST TOO MUCH TO BEAR!**

I dashed into my bedroom, ignoring Laurel's barbs about my mental health, and practically leapt back into the suit. All I had to do was go back

and not kill a guy and we were set. I hurled myself into the sky with all my might, and once again began racing back in time. I kept expecting those smug cigar aliens to stop by and give me all kinds of "I told you so" shit but apparently they were too busy probing Midwesterners to notice.

And then, there I was, landing in the prairie again, somehow failing to violate the rules of time and space by appearing there at the same time twice. I guess that was one of the hidden powers of the suit — you could fuck with Time all you want, and never have to worry about paradoxically running into yourself and then having to kill yourself with your teeth in a mortal death match. There he was, that same freaked out Neanderthal with the big rock. He threw it my way, and I just let it bounce right off my suit. Then I shouted, "BOO!", and the ugly creep hobbled off into the distance to join his friends.

The glorious future of alcohol thus preserved, I headed once more back to my own time. This time, before heading home, I stopped by every known liquor store I could think of. Sure enough, there were dozens littering the streets of Seattle, just as I remembered. I was definitely going to celebrate, yes sir, *there would be fireworks in the Ewok village tonight!*

I joined Laurel and Crank Boy on the couch, having poured each of us the stiffest gin and tonics I had ever made in my life. Laurel took a sip and her lips practically curled right off her face as she said, "Thanks." Crank Boy did that thing where he looked like his whole head was suddenly being squeezed in a vice and then said, "Needs more lime." We sank into a reverie with Phyllis, lovely Phyllis, to entertain and enlighten us. The world was a simple place once again. Someday I would reveal my secret identity to Laurel and Crank Boy, but not today, not on this glorious day of victory and relaxation.

And then came an unexpected knock on the door. I rose wearily, fully prepared to tell whatever Jehovah's Witness was on the other side of that door that Jehovah was a bitch who was best witnessed tied up to my bed while I was fucking him in the ass. As it turned out, my polite rejoinder was a bit misguided. I opened the door, and to my utter surprise, saw Percy standing there, a shy smile on his face. A limousine waited for him at the curb.

"Hello, Scotto," Percy said. "Remember me?"

Slowly Crank Boy and Laurel got up off the couch, careful to maintain their distance.

"Percy," I whispered, "is that you?"

He nodded handsomely.

"I was in Seattle on business, and I thought I'd look you up," he said. "I don't really have time to stay, unfortunately, as I need to catch a flight to Munich. But... I couldn't get this close to you without stopping by to let you know... that I really appreciate what you said to me all those years ago in the student union. I know now how awkward and pushy and needy I was, and I understand why you avoided me for so long... and I'm really thankful that you took even that brief amount of time to sit down with me and make me

realize that I didn't have to try so hard. That I could just relax, and instead of chasing after friends, friends would find me.

"Times have been good to me since then, Scotto. I gained a lot of self-esteem, and redoubled my studies in history and economics. I went on to start an ecologically sound car company that is about to release the world's first car that will run completely on water and cigarette butts. I've made myself a millionaire dozens of times over, and I've donated the greater share of my fortune to important causes, like helping end AIDS in Africa, and helping remove land mines from the world's hot spots, and doing my part to make sure that every single child has a warm place to sleep and a copy of *Grand Theft Auto 29* in their console.

"And I have you to thank for all this industrious confidence, Scotto. You really taught me that all I needed to do was *be myself*, not some thing I thought you and your friends might want me to be. I couldn't let that gift go unrewarded, and so I've made a ten million dollar donation to what I believe would be a non-profit organization that you could really support: Alcoholics Anonymous. After all, I know how much you always looked after the young drinkers at school and made sure they knew the ropes... this is just a logical extension of the kindness you showed even back then.

"Well, I wish I could stay and reminisce, but I didn't get to where I am by not being punctual. I don't think I'll stay in touch, Scotto... it's enough to know that we had that one magic moment of connection, and then went our separate ways. It's a surprising gift that our reality has handed us, and I just wanted you to know I won't forget it. Take care of yourself, Scotto... but then, you always seemed to manage that, didn't you?"

And with a roguish smile, he nodded and wandered back down the steps to his car. An astonished Crank Boy and Laurel slowly made their way to my side and watched as Percy's limousine drove off down the street.

"What... the flying *fuck*... was that all about?" Crank Boy asked.

I trembled with rage.

"ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS??" I screamed. "You prissy bitch, I could have USED that money to buy ECSTASY! God fookin dammit all to mother fookin hell, don't you know how much Ecstasy COSTS these days?"

Laurel put her hand on my shoulder, and said, "Scotto... dude. Calm down."

"But... but what about giving that money to MEEEEEEEEEE??" I whined.

"Scotto, you're going to need to calm down or I'm breaking out the Thorazine suppositories again," Crank Boy said sternly.

I quieted down.

"Whatever that blast from the past was all about," Laurel said, "at least his heart was in the right place. Now... let's rewind *The Beautiful Phyllis Diller Show* and break out that stash of morphine we've been hoarding."

I sighed. Laurel's hand on my shoulder was strangely comforting, and I realized just exactly what I'd been through that day. I turned and smiled at the both of them.

"I guess that *does* sound like quite the plan, now doesn't it?" I said. "Maybe you should be Captain after all."

"Huh?" she said.

"Never mind," I replied, heading back into the house. "Clearly I'm just a little tipsy...."

Coming soon....

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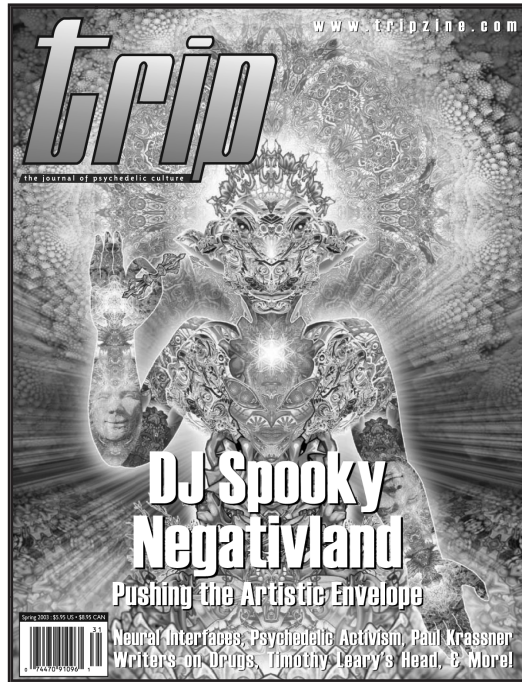
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