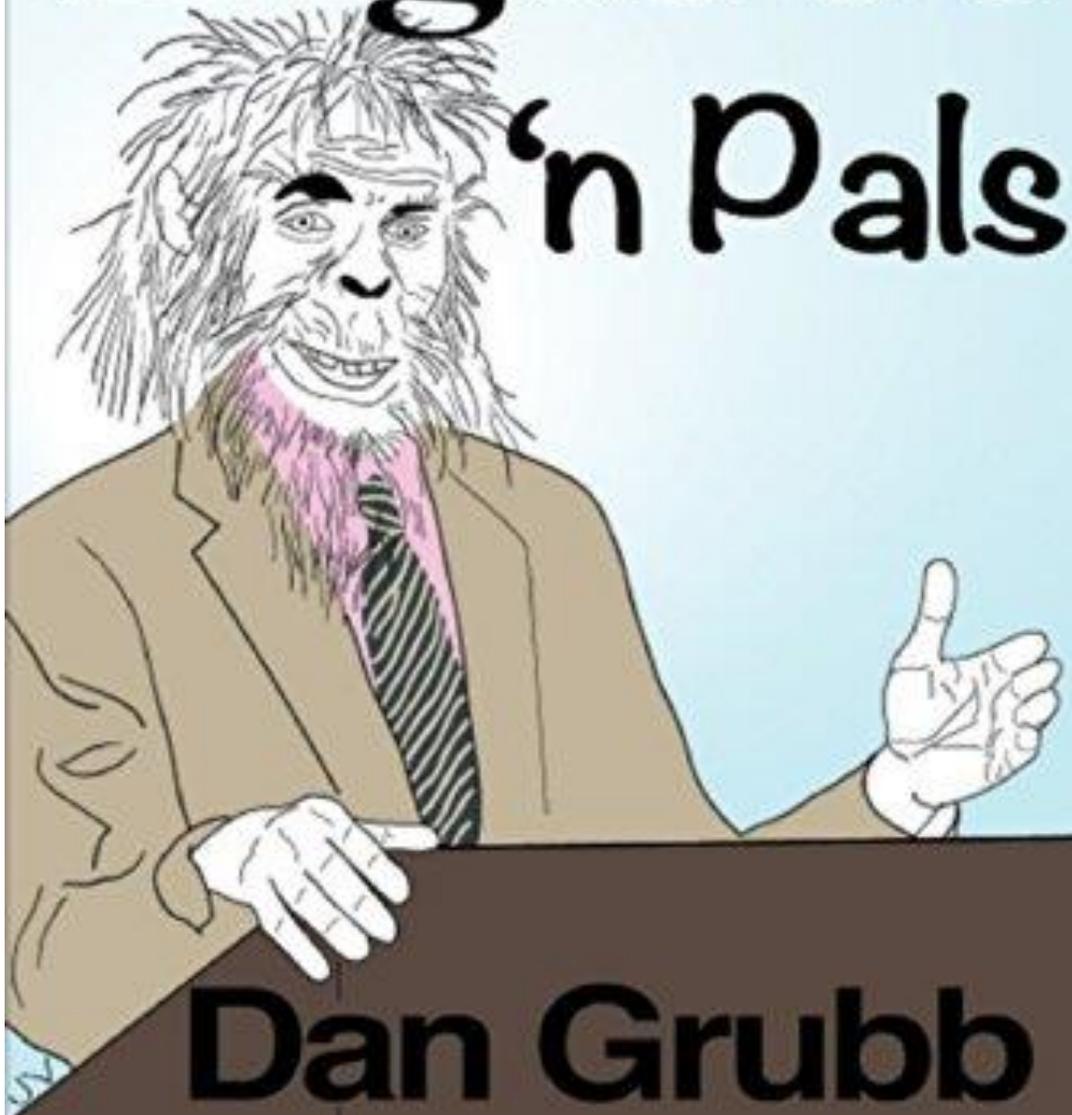


Senator Bigfoot

'n Pals



Senator Bigfoot 'n Pals

Dan Grubb

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Stories

THE NUDE AVENGER

The fog was sweeping in relentlessly from the river. The gray skies over the gray clouds smothering the gray city made surveillance all but impossible. Cold, blustery, and wet were not the ideal conditions for the Nude Avenger, but he had a sworn duty to protect the city.

His doughy arms grasping a gargoyle in Big City's gothic downtown, the Nude Avenger peered through the gloom. Instinctively, his head cocked to one side when he heard the cry for help. He reached for the grappling hook on his belt (the only thing he wore besides a mask and a small cape), lassoed an adjacent gargoyle, and swung down to the ground.

His love handles jiggling, the Nude Avenger arose to face the muggers. The clichéd brutes ceased their attack on the little old lady and turned to take in the sight of a naked man with raised fists who suddenly appeared in the alley. They shrugged at each other and ran to face their new foe.

The Nude Avenger quickly incapacitated one of the men with a kick to the kneecap. His knee dislocated, the man dropped to the ground and rolled in pain. His partner, seeing that the Nude Avenger was indeed a force to be reckoned with, approached the fight more cautiously.

The remaining mugger leapt somewhat reluctantly towards the Avenger and awkwardly tried to grab his arms and neck. Their grappling was intense. The mugger was skittish. The Nude Avenger pushed forward, eliminating the distance between the two combatants. The mugger responded by pushing the Avenger's shoulders, shoving himself away from the fight while trying desperately to not glance down.

The Nude Avenger kept approaching and the mugger kept backing away. They were quickly running out of alley in which to fight when a police siren sounded on the street. The red and blue

light lit up the alley and two officers ran to the scene. The Nude Avenger waved a friendly hello at the police and said, “Good day, gentlemen. This man was—”

The nightstick to his sagging gut made the Nude Avenger drop to the ground. He tried to ask why the officer hit him, but could only gasp for air. While he was getting handcuffed, the other mugger escaped into the labyrinth of backstreets. The little old lady spat on the Nude Avenger as she was escorted away to give a statement. An EMT had arrived and was looking over the mugger for further injuries, pausing only to wonder whether the recent increase in masked vigilantes was for the best.

Later, at the station, the Nude Avenger was explaining his theory of the “un-hero” to the sergeant assigned to his case. “The mask and nudity work together, you see, to make me more generic. I’m not Tiger Man or the Linebacker or the Cleveland Steamer. They’re very specific and easily identifiable. But besides the obvious differences across the gender line, people all look the same naked, so I am a universal hero. If I could be anybody, then anybody can take a stand against crime. It’s a democratization of the very definition of superhero.”

“Uh-huh,” the sergeant replied. “And what about the testimony from the man you injured that you sexually assaulted someone during this fight?”

Despite his best arguments, the Nude Avenger spent the night in jail until he could convince his cousin to post bail. He was sodomized and beaten unconscious. Thus ends another adventure of the Nude Avenger!

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HOW TO MODIFY YOUR BODY

Not a lot of people know how to enter the exciting, constantly growing field of unemployability. With the economy showing signs of life again and the possibility of getting hired growing by the month, many people ask me, “Hey! Dan!

“Grubb!

“How can I make sure that I don’t get any of the jobs I apply for?”

Well, I’m glad you (read: those people) asked. If you have a college degree, a track record of success, and the ability to communicate effectively, the solution to those pesky job offers just might be body modification.

Body modification dates back well before records for such things were kept on Facebook. Some say that among preindustrial cultures, it even dates back as far as 1976. Wow!

So let’s assume you’re interested in modifying your body. How should you do you it? Where do you start?

A lot of people start when they’re teenagers by dying their hair, getting a piercing in their nose, lip, or tongue, or “getting ink.” “Getting ink,” of course, refers to the act of snaring wild octopi, attaching them to the face, and startling them so they produce a cloud of ink-like substance. The effect resembles a Rorschach test if it were printed on paper that had pimples and suction cup marks and was found working behind cash registers.

The problem many dyed, pierced, and/or cephalopodded individuals run into is that they tend to specialize in some form of useful knowledge that eventually gets them decent employment. If that’s not for you, fear not! There are other methods out there.

Perhaps your piercing sends the wrong message. Instead of “I am expressing my individuality,” maybe you’re going more for something like, “I should not be trusted around heavy machinery, children, or electricity.” Maybe a lip plate is more up your alley.

Lip plates were all the rage in the South Pacific until they encountered civilized man and realized the practice was completely unnecessary. The combination of self-alienation and joining a bandwagon that preceded most other bandwagons will surely appeal to many iconoclasts.

“But Dan!

“Grubb!” they say.

“Wouldn’t it be hard to speak with a lip plate?” Good point, sir, madam, or other. It’s hard to give lessons on the history of your modification when the modification impairs your ability to chat. Let me ask you this: how do you feel about surgery?

There are several options for surgery. Many are attracted to pigment alteration for its taboo status and the sudden, newfound credibility. Some prefer getting their teeth pulled out and replaced with permanent “gag” or “meth-mouth” fixtures, giving the allure of outcast status without the danger of blowing oneself up while mixing household chemicals in the garage. Still others favor self-scalping, a combination of existentialism and stereotypical American Indian execution.

But if you’re looking for the absolute apex of body modification, then I recommend a little something called robotic prosthetics. Maybe you want a grappling hook instead of a hand. Or an elbow that doubles as a ham radio. Ever wonder what it would be like to have a tentacle? With a free afternoon and a few hundred thousand dollars from your trust fund, now you can.

As a bonus, you can use the fact that the public is largely unaware such technology is available as a tantalizing background story to the amazing new addition to your body. People love those stories!

I hope you’ll give body modification a try. It worked for me, and I’ve got the barren résumé to prove it.

Capital One Public

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THE LOST DAUPHINE

You know, it's not easy being the Lost Dauphine of France.

Now I know what you're thinking. "But surely, you died in prison at the age of 10 in 1795!"

Haha, no, no. Oh, how many times I've heard that one! No, I was spirited away in the night by a royalist jailor and I went into hiding for more than two hundred years. That may seem like a fantastic claim, but it makes sense when you understand that in addition to being the Lost Dauphine, I am also...the Fantastic Dauphine.

From the age of ten, I learned that absolute secrecy was as necessary to my survival as food and air. So my wise guardians took me where no one knew of Louis XVII or the French Revolution, or had even heard French spoken. They took me to a remote village in the Himalayas, in what is now Nepal. There I learned the ways of the East, including several forms of martial arts.

After my training was complete, I left the mountains and came to America, to the Big City. There I fought crime as a nocturnal vigilante, striking fear into the cowardly, superstitious hearts of evildoers. With the murder of my wealthy parents as my inspiration, I made it my mission to fight liberty, equality, and fraternity. The thrill ran out after a few decades, though. Nearing the age of fifty, I retired from my long career and tried to pitch a speaking tour, only to discover that my life had been retold, parodied, as a book of captioned woodcuttings.

I left the Big City to run a riverboat up and down the Mississippi. That was a marvelous time. I had the freedom of being my own boss and the pleasure of seeing poor people live in shacks amid the mud and filth. Every day was a joy. But the riverboat culture soon began to die. Factories were popping up across the landscape and we all had to adapt. And I, at the ripe old age of ninety, had to begin anew once more, all over, from the start, again.

Capital One Public

It was hard getting used to the industrialized world, but I managed to exploit it and I soon turned the meager millions that I'd hidden away in my youth into billions. My secret? After years of arms manufacturing and war profiteering, I bought the Eighteenth Amendment. I added a barely-noticed clause that gave me a small cut from every bootlegged drink from Boston to San Francisco.

But I got too cocky. I spread my wealth too thin. Shortly after I funded the Mexican Revolution, the counter-revolution, the first Academy Awards, and the Museum of Modern Art, Joseph Stalin expelled my charity case, Leon Trotsky. It was a strong blow that my accountant couldn't swindle his way out of. My fortune destabilized and I went flat broke, singlehandedly causing the Great Depression.

By then I was pushing a hundred and fifty and beginning to experience a mid-life crisis. Maybe, I thought, it isn't all about being wealthy and banging seven thousand women in one's lifetime. So I traveled in boxcars for a while and forgot about being wealthy...and focused on the banging. My exploits took me to the edges of the world and introduced me to many sexual concepts—theories, really—that were previously unimaginable.

I'd like to take this opportunity to apologize for AIDS. I was drunk. After some soul searching and my penis falling off, I've returned to my first love: telling people how amazing I am. And now, I'd like to leave you with a song.

It's not that easy being the Lost Dauphine,
Having to spend each day the son of Louis the Sixteenth.
When I think it could be nicer being a barber, or a caddy or a cook,
Or something much more proletarian like that.

It's not easy being the Lost Dauphine,
It seems you blend in with so many other outdated conspiracies,
And people tend to pass you over cause you're not from recent years like fluoridated water,
Or JFK or Princess Di.

But royalty is genetically superior,

Capital One Public

And royalty can be intriguing and make headlines,
And royalty can fascinate middle class white women, or live off the lower classes,
Or buy and sell your family.

When the Lost Dauphine is all there is to be,
It could make you wonder why, but why wonder? Why wonder?
I am the Lost Dauphine and it'll do fine. It's glamorous.
And I think it's what I want to be.

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CHRYSALIS

Chapter XXI

Chloe left the principal's office filled with anger. Yes, she had delayed everyone's return from the field trip while a search party went to find her. Yes, that was unfair to the others. But there in the science museum, surrounded by the beauty and splendor of hundreds of species of insect, how could she not slip away from the group to ponder her newfound, still strange desire for Dylan?

With her anger, Chloe also felt confusion. How was it possible for a typical, nice, normal girl like her to suddenly be so attracted – no, attracted was not a strong enough word – how could she be so captivated, so enraptured by a six-foot insect? Perhaps it was his pheromones, but whenever Dylan flittered into the room, Chloe found herself intoxicated.

After dinner that night, she excused herself to her room and lay in bed, wrestling with her opposing urges. Should she make friends at her new school by fitting in, or to follow her heart and go out with Dylan?

That night she had another dream about flying. This time, she soared over Genericsburg with Dylan, his hundred eyes smoldering in the crimson sunset. They landed near a Denny's and he embraced her in his barbed upper legs, kissing her gently with his proboscis. She glanced at the diner's window and was surprised, but not frightened, to see her reflection had antennae, extra eyes, and the beginnings of new limbs sprouting from her body. "Soon," her reflection said. "Soon."

Chloe awoke with a start. It was raining outside. She heard an old movie playing in another room. Curious, she tip-toed down the stairs to see her father asleep on the couch with the television on. The flickering image was that of a fly with a man's head caught in a spider's web, crying, "Help me!"

The next morning, Mrs. Angstrom announced that there was a new student in Chloe's biology class. "Noah," she said, "will you come in, please?" The new boy was monstrously tall, with slightly decomposing skin, platform shoes, and bolts sticking out of his neck. There was something about him that Chloe found alluring.

"Hi, everyone. I'm Noah," the new boy said. "I just moved to town and don't really know anyone yet. Maybe one of you can show me around, just the two of us. Oh, and if anyone is interested in starting a band, I play guitar and sing a little."

"Uh oh," Chloe thought. "Here we go again!"

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PITY THESE MONSTERS!

It was the story of the decade, confirming an underground rumor that had persisted for years. Acting on evidence gathered over months of intense investigation, a federal sting operation uncovered secret laboratories at an undisclosed desert location that, with disregard to all ethics and professional morality, created a race of monsters.

Though the misguided scientists used the latest gene-splicing technology to create their quasi-human subspecies, they lacked the advanced resources required to begin their projects from scratch. The team thus had to start with cloned humans and work backwards, lopping off anything that wasn't absolutely necessary to life.

The result of these reckless experiments was a group of what can generously be described as "creatures" that fulfilled the basic requirements of life, but their gracelessness and, in the end, lack of viability betrayed their unnatural origins.

With so many otherwise vital parts missing from their bodies, the creatures' skin sagged grotesquely, often revealing the empty cavities that once held the organs and tissues we so take for granted. All that remained inside the "meat sacks," as one of the ruder federal agents called the creatures' torsos, were their lungs, large intestine, and spleen. Their limbs, the muscles starved of nutrients, had mostly shriveled away, leaving bony, atrophied arms and legs dangling and bending at outrageous angles, the hands bearing a swollen finger forever gnarled into a hideous point.

Their heads fared better, though their mouths had somehow grown considerably larger. (Subsequent tests revealed the creatures were prone to oral infection, leaving their mouths engorged with pus.) Their eyes bore back into their sockets, leaving the misshapen beings

hopelessly myopic. Huge swaths of brain were cut away, leaving only those parts which controlled breathing, some speech, and gesturing. Upon further investigation, officials were astonished to find much of the frontal lobe had been recreated using spare pieces of lower intestine.

Among other inhumane experiments this warped group conducted, one involved a variation on Pavlov's famous study with dogs' automatic response to bells. A number of famous books had their contents removed—Atlas Shrugged, the Bible, and Huck Finn, among many others—and replaced arbitrarily with either the creatures' favorite snacks or salt crackers infused with ipecac syrup. The creatures quickly memorized which titles satisfied hunger and which induced immediate, violent vomiting. After months of this cruel manipulation, the creatures associated each title with either virtue or disdain, but, lacking the power of reason, could offer no detailed reason why.

After these horrific experiments were discovered, the labs were shut down and the creatures taken into federal custody. After a top-secret conference with the Supreme Court ruled out euthanasia as cruel and unusual, the creatures were released into society. Failing to acquire reputable jobs, most were forced to accept work as cable news pundits. The more fortunate ones, once discovered by the public, were taken pity upon and elected into office as a way to humanely remove them from society.

Today, these unfortunates spend their days spewing their bile and putting their heartbreaking, purely reactionary behavior based in the lower "reptile" brain on national display, genuinely believing that they are providing a public service. Their feeble minds propped up with spare pieces of inadequately washed bowels, they literally have shit for brains.

Pity these monsters, dear reader, lest we forget our own humanity.

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A MESSAGE FROM SENATOR BIGFOOT (R – Ore.)

Hello, friends. I'd like to talk to you tonight about the past and the future. I like to see the past as a sort of artifact. Like a fossil or ancient pottery. It's interesting, it's fun to look at, but in the end it's just a dusty relic that doesn't have any relevance in the world today. What's done is done, so there's no point in looking back and obsessing over the past or bringing up some silly, old footage from the 70s that's so grainy and blurry that it could be of anyone. That sort of thing has no place in our current political situation. I've moved on, my family has moved on, and I believe the fine citizens of Oregon have moved on. It's in the past, where it belongs.

And when we speak of the past, there are always some—an unfortunate few—who insist on perpetuating long-disproven, hurtful, unfounded rumors. For instance, there are still some out there that say I'm a myth! Like the boogie man or leprechauns or socialist public assistance programs solving the problem of poverty in America. Well, ladies and gentlemen, I'm here to tell you tonight that I'm no myth. I'm as real as they come, and I plan on continuing to be your very real senator come Election Day.

You know, speaking of the upcoming election, these campaigns have a way of, well, bringing out the ugliness in people. Folks get so wildly political that they seem to be just itching for a fight. Now, I'm all for rigorous public debate, but sometimes the discourse turns sour. And when it does, we start hearing tales and stories that have been debunked for years about public indecency or acting under the influence of hallucinogens that were pretty widely used in those days, so it's not even worth mentioning. When this innuendo starts floating around about one pseudo-person or another it's disruptive to the whole election process.

Now, we could drudge up old tales that lack concrete eyewitness testimony, or we can think about the future. Our hopes and dreams. I dream of a future where the people are hard-working

and proud, where the children are prepared for the future, and where the great state of Oregon is not represented by a supposedly reformed meth addict who claims he never sold his own child into prostitution to stay high. Now I'm not naming any names. I won't play that game. I won't dredge up old rumors about someone's personal life and politicize them. I just hope you share my vision of staying the course and protecting our freedoms and liberties like the right to bear arms and practice your religion and roam naked in the woods. And together, I believe we can continue to protect these vital freedoms and preserve our vision of this great nation.

Thank you for your time. God bless you all, and God bless the great state of Oregon!

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HOW TO WRITE A BLOG

Not a lot of people know it, but it can be rough out there in the competitive world of the blogosphere. Not as rough as it was in the ancient blogopyramids or as intense as in the blogocominatorial triangles polygonalization, but still not a place for the timid or the meek. That is, unless your blog is snivelingcrybaby.wordpress.org.

Maybe you have some amateur experience. Maybe you were on your school's varsity blogging team. Heck, maybe you went All-State. If so, then skip ahead to part 8 of this series, "How to Intone the Sacred Destructive Words of the Ancients on Your Blog."

The rest of you are probably wondering, "How do I make an impression on the web?" It's simple, really. Just invent a social networking tool so popular that businesses invest hundreds of millions of dollars in it in exchange for the right to mine the data your users so eagerly publish.

If you're not the top hat-wearing, cigar-smoking, mustachioed robber-baron type, you'll probably want to eschew internetovation and stick to what you know. Take me. I'm a trivia-laden blowhard, so I write about everything on my website, dangrubbisbrilliantandsexyandagreatdancertoboot.com. You, on the other hand, should start off with something easier, like identifying the colors of things.

Now that you've got ePalette.net up and running, you're going to need some content. What is content, you ask? Traditionally, content is a thoughtful, carefully crafted artistic or intellectual endeavor, only possible after one spends years studying one's field and honing one's abilities. On the internet, I dunno, copy some stuff from Wikipedia, add some folksy sayings your mom forwarded you, and stick it on your webthing. Try to make it relate to whatever it is you're always mumbling about over there.

Once you've got a blog and some content, it's time to Get The Word Out! TM There are two basic ways to do this. The first is to post phony reviews of your blog anywhere you can under various pseudonyms and artificially increase the site's hitcount by going there from every library, FedEx Office, and Best Buy computer you can get your hands on. This is called "fraud."

The other way is to pester your friends and co-workers to check it out (unless it's yourname.com/peteinofficeandopsisacreepydude/) and hope they like it enough to recommend it to their non-you friends.

Depending on the value people place in what you have to say, you'll either be rewarded with admiring attention or condemned to a dismal downward spiral of self-loathing, substance abuse, and, inevitably, your overly gory suicide.

Once word spreads about your totally adequate blog, there's nothing left to do but constantly update and moderate it, spending more time fretting over your miniscule opinions about nothing that's at all relevant to life in any sense of the word and increasingly less time with your work and loved ones. Your social life will evaporate and your spouse will cheat on you in a last-ditch effort to win you back from the yawning abyss that is the internet. Then just sell some ad space and watch all that internet money come rolling in!

Good luck and Happy Blogging! TM

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THE SHAKESPEARE CODE

Frank took a sip of water to give his mouth something to do besides stutter. His dissertation defense was getting off to a slow start. That morning, his years of research decided to pack up and vacate his memory. Now he was standing in the spotlight, being interrogated by faceless voices from the dark auditorium.

The soon-to-be Doctor Frank Neville was trying to remember his dissertation on family squabbles in Shakespeare's tragedies and how they fall into a pattern that is found throughout Western literature of the past 1000 years. "Could you repeat the question, please?"

"The question was, what about the historical plays such as *Richard III* or *Henry V*? Doesn't the fact that these are based on true events seem to undermine your assertion that Shakespeare was working with centuries-old templates?"

"Ah. Yes. THAT IS, ah, no, actually. Heh. Yes, well, the historical plays are actually, uh, good examples for Shakespeare's use of these, ah, templates because the historical figures Shakespeare recreates were not nearly as, uh, treacherous and, oh...disturbed as he portrays them to be."

Frank saw a small red dot in the last row of seats periodically flash. He thought of buoys and the lapping of waves before returning his attention to the panel. "I'm sorry, what?"

"Your sources, Mr. Neville?"

"Right. Sources. As you know, medieval royals didn't have swarms of, ah, paparazzi and biographers following them around like they do now. So sources are hard to come by." He looked to the last row again but the red beacon no longer flashed. He caught a glimpse of a man

in a dark suit dropping his cigarette in the ashbin on his way out to the lobby, then remembered where he was.

“In recent years, however, personal writings of several minor nobles have been discovered that shed some light on the true natures of these, ah, characters....”

Frank stepped outside into the brisk March air. His dissertation defended successfully, if not gracefully, he seemed to float towards the bus stop. A voice behind him brought him crashing back to Earth. “Congratulations, Dr. Neville. I presume your defense went well.”

Frank wheeled around and recognized the dark suit from the auditorium as the man wearing it continued, “If you don’t mind, may I ask you a few questions about your research? It’s a subject I’m deeply interested in.”

“I guess, sure.”

“Where exactly did you find your sources? Are they in private collections? Libraries? Monasteries?”

“Mostly private collections.”

“Mm-hmm, and did you know the people who oversaw these collections?”

“Not really, no. I found them through the usual scholarly channels. Someone knows someone who’s heard of someone. Are you from the university?”

“Let’s just say I’m deeply interested in the subject. Now, these scholars...”

“Hey, I’ve got to go. My bus is coming. But if you want to talk about it, I can give you my office hours.”

“There’s no time for office hours, Dr. Neville!”

He grabbed Frank’s shoulder, but Frank snatched the hand away. “I don’t know who you are, but I’m willing to bet you’re a lunatic. So if you’ll excuse me, I—”

A shot rang out. Frank felt an arm on his chest as he fell to ground. As the second and third shots were fired, the stranger was lying on top of him and wiggling a hand around his belt. At first, Frank was relieved to see the hand resurface with a pistol. But then he remembered what guns do.

The shots were deafening and came faster as Frank was pulled up onto his feet. “Run! My car is around the corner!”

They raced to the end of the block. Frank glanced back and swore he recognized the tanned, gently wrinkled faces behind them. The stranger bundled him into the car and slid into the driver’s seat. They sped off. It was only then that Frank felt safe enough to ask the peculiar question that was burning in his mind. “Was that Maury Povich?”

“And Jerry Springer, yes. They must have followed me here.”

“Sorry if I’m being naïve, but why would Maury Povich and Jerry Springer be shooting at me?”

“Because you got too close, son. You just got too close.”

Frank slumped into a bewildered heap as the car spun around the corner. His equally peculiar follow-up question was answered before he could ask it.

“Did you ever wonder why all those stories, from the Middle Ages to soap operas, followed the same patterns? Why we keep hearing the same old plots?”

Frank gulped. “I thought they were just Jungian archetypes following Campbell’s monomyth cycles?”

“Jungian arche—? No! Dr. Neville, you’ve tapped into the greatest conspiracy of recorded civilization. There are powerful forces at hand that have reshaped history. For centuries we’ve been fed these, as you say, ‘disturbed’ alterations of reality in order to brainwash the population and influence the course of future events. And now you’ve found hard evidence of this conspiracy, which places you in a dangerous position.”

Frank looked back. The daytime talk celebrities were nowhere in sight.

“That’s very interesting. You know, you can just drop me off here.”

“Listen!” The car took another hard turn. “Richard III didn’t have his brother killed. Macbeth talked sense into his wife and they remained quite content with their humble domain! For god’s sake, Hamlet was the life of the party! Is it coming clear yet?”

“I’m afraid it isn’t.”

“Fine. We’re here, anyway.”

He slammed on the brakes, hurling Frank into the dashboard. They exited onto a dark street in front of a shabby old apartment building.

“Who are you?” Frank demanded.

“Oh, I beg your pardon. I’m Professor Edwin Dorset. I used to be the leading expert on medieval papal history. Then I came across the same sort of clues as you, clues that indicated things weren’t as they seemed. I faked my death and have been hiding out for years, but when I heard about your presentation I knew it would mean your peril. I was forced to resurface. If I hadn’t intervened, you would certainly be dead.”

“Huh. Well, in that case, I guess we’d better get inside where it’s less bullet-y.”

Dorset’s apartment was sparse but cluttered. Yellowed books and purloined ancient manuscripts littered the modest table, decrepit shelves, and grimy floor. As he handed Frank an ice-cold cup of coffee, Dorset began the story of his great conspiracy.

“Beginning in the middle ages, models of social dysfunction have been purposefully flooded into the media—from sagas, chivalrous tales, and plays all the way to novels, movies, and television—in order to create a false sense of discord. This perception was encouraged and perpetuated by a powerful, secretive group who at various times controlled the Illuminati, the stonemasons, the Rosicrucians, the Catholic Church, the Knights Templar, and Skull and Bones.

Their goal is to gain influence over the general population and steer them toward an artificial, insidiously coordinated Judgment Day. It is now culminating on television with daytime talk shows and so-called reality shows. While the hedonism and primitive behavior exhibited on these programs could never be found in real life, the public believes them to be the actions of actual people pulled off the streets.

“This despicable cabal continuously injects into the cultural subconscious the notion that the world is getting progressively more psychotic and destructive. The public maintain an unhealthy level of paranoia and outrage at what they perceive to be an invasion of mutant subhumans into their culture, which appears to be increasingly widespread. The frightened population begins to lash out at the perceived threat, resulting in a self-fulfilling apocalyptic prophecy that has led to mass shootings, protested funerals, perpetual discrimination and global terrorism. It is just the continuation of a plot that began centuries ago with an astounding act of disinformation and fraud on the grandest of scales that caused the Crusades.

“Nine hundred years later, this group is beginning preparations for the millennial event: an unfathomable civil war. By whipping those prone to overreaction into a frenzy, they hope to cause a massive, self-inflicted holocaust that will destroy all the zealous and self-righteous people in the civilized world, leaving only the logical moderates to inherit the Earth. Science will flourish, war will cease, and there will finally be a sustainable population. That’s their theory, anyway.”

“And this all has to do with KKK midgets who watch their wives sleep with other men?”

“They-are-called-little-people!” Dorset said through clenched teeth. “And morality is not universally consistent!”

“That’s an awfully reasoned response for someone who wants to stop a Rationalist plot.”

Dorset paused. He stared through Frank, back into his own past. “It is, yes.” He paused, taking a drag off his cigarette. “I used to be quite reasonable. Quite logical. I could even rationalize this grotesque scheme when I first became aware of it. Imagine the utopia that could exist if only the majority of superstitious fools were eliminated. It’s a disturbingly attractive notion.”

“So if they succeed, then billions will die, but that will be followed by sustainable peace and prosperity?”

“Well...yes.”

“Huh. I can't say I approve of the means, but the end is—”

The windows were then shattered by a rain of bullets.

“My god! They've found me! After all these years, they've found me!”

[Editor's note: When we contacted Mr. Grubb asking for the conclusion of his story, the authenticity of the submitted material came into question. The ending we received consisted entirely of a scene in which Frank and Professor Dorset disembowel a homeless man and have graphic sex while rolling around in his entrails. After numerous failed attempts to reach him by phone, Mr. Grubb assured us via email that this was the logical conclusion to the story, bringing the stylistic elements together in an entertaining yet symbolic way. We upheld our contractual obligation in reproducing the majority of his submission, but reserve the right not to publish the ending. We look forward to continuing our professional relationship with Mr. Grubb, if we're ever able to locate him.]

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COFFEENALIA

From: Ted Hendricksson

To: [mailinglist: Board of Directors]

Subject: Re: Corporate Investigation of So-Called "Bizarre Cult"

Gentlemen:

I am sorry to convey this disturbing news. A team of anthropologists on loan from the head office has recently reported the discovery of a "bizarre pagan cult" that has been kept secret for decades in the wilds of the Accounting department. Intent on investigating the matter further, the team split in two groups, one of which disappeared almost immediately. Team lead Jack Darby was found unconscious in Reception yesterday morning. What follows are Darby's field notes and an internal email transcribing his recorded chronicle of their observation of the "cult."

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From: Colin Davison

To: Edward Hendricksson, CRE VP

CC: HR

Capital One Public

Subject: RE: Jack Darby found in Reception

Ted – as requested, I've attached a copy of Jack's journal and recorded notes from the ritual in the old AP office. (I omitted his three days of searching.) He finally woke up a moment ago after almost 20 hours of sleep, but he's still pretty shaken up.

Terrence Williams' body has been recovered. The head office has asked about some other team members. Do you know who they might mean? I thought there were only the two.

Colin

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Day Four: After 29 business hours tracking the mysterious employee or employees, we picked up the trail in a seldom-used corridor. The corridor is in a floor which has for years gone unused as workspace and is now treated as a landfill for old, outdated equipment. We found a track near some ancient carbon paper that matches the size 11 boat shoe seen by the freight elevator on 8.

My God – these laptops are over two inches thick! We must investigate these relics further.

Later: A frightening ordeal! Williams didn't make it. As we were fleeing, they dragged him back to their lair. I don't know what they did to him, but I will surely hear his screams in my nightmares for years to come. We recorded what can only technically be called a ceremony. It was more accurately a frenzied bloodbath. I feel queasy just thinking of it. I will try to make my report in the morning, but for now I must rest, having reached the safety of Reception.

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Capital One Public

FIELD RECORDING TRANSCRIBED BY SHEILA MOLLETT (scm619)

**Darby [whispered]:** Test...test....This is Jack Darby. I'm here with Terrence Williams. We're crouched behind the front desk in the old Accounts Payable office. There is a group of about 20 people – mostly temps and interns from the looks of it – short sleeves, cheap ties...some of their clothes don't fit right, suggesting they're second- or even third-hand. They're standing in a circle...chanting something I can't quite make out. It's too quiet. They're kneeling down now and there's a man standing in the middle wearing...are those binder...? He's fashioned a headdress out of binder clips. How astonishing! This must be their priest. Oh, he's saying something now. Let's try to get closer.

[Rustling sounds]

**Priest:** ...us warmth when there is only cold; strength when there is weakness; mental prowess when all seems in a fog. You are the Resurrection, reviving us when we fade. Every morning we are dead, and every morning you bring rebirth, O Giver of Life.

**Crowd:** O-o-o-o-o-o-oh!

**Darby:** They're all bowing down now. The priest is reaching down...he's raising something. He's got something in his hand.

**Priest:** Who among us has yet to become a child of the bean? Rise, my son, and accept the bean into your soul.

**Darby:** My God, that's Nathan, from the mail room. The priest is rubbing something onto his face. Dirt or...not toner...hmm, "the bean"... Are they worshiping coffee?

**Priest:** Are you prepared, my child?

**Nathan:** I am.

**Priest:** What is the true name of the Giver of Life?

**Nathan:** *Coffea canephora*.

**Priest:** And what is the secret name of the Power of the Bean?

**Nathan:** C8H10N4O2.

**Priest:** And how is life created?

**Nathan:** Through a slow drip brew.

**Priest:** And what do we offer the Bean?

**Nathan:** We offer our steady heart, our restful night, and our eternal devotion.

**Priest:** You may now take of the Bean.

**Darby:** Okay, he's giving Nathan a cup of coffee now.

**Williams:** Sir, I think that's cappuccino.

**Darby:** Right you are, Williams.

**Priest:** May the bean percolate us all!

**Darby:** Okay, ah, they're, they're all gathering in the middle now and picking up mugs. They're dipping their mugs in some enormous pots or barrels or something of that sort. They're drinking the coffee, they're drinking...they keep drinking. They keep getting more coffee. They're gulping down cup after cup of it. Oh my.

[A woman screams.]

**Williams:** Get down, sir!

Capital One Public

**Darby:** It's okay, Williams, I don't think they saw us.

[More screams.]

**Darby:** This is remarkable. They're all howling like mad chimps now. The men are removing their ties and the women their shoes. Shirts are being torn off and they're all...goodness.... It looks like the beginnings of an all-out orgy. I, ah, I feel a bit awkward watching, but I suppose we must carry on describing these goings-on.

They're mostly down to their undergarments now. A few are completely bare. It's, hmm, yes, quite fascinating. But I—what's this? Two men are wheeling in a small cage now.

**Priest:** THE ESPRESSO!!!

**Darby:** My...God. It's hideous. They've opened the cage and released a young...he must be an intern. He's shaking and twitching so much. I've never seen someone jitter like that. They're all very quiet now. They've stopped their, ah, activities to watch this so-called "espresso." He's being laid down in the middle and—

**Priest:** NOW WE FEAST, O BEAN!!!

[Screams.]

**Darby:** Oh my God! They're [heaving sound], they're ripping him apart and devouring him. Williams, let's go. This is...my God.

**Man:** Intruder!

**Darby:** Damn! Run, Williams!

[Shouts, rustling.]

**Darby:** Faster, Terrence! Come on!

[Shouts.]

Capital One Public

**Darby: TERRENCE!!!**

[At this point, all that was recorded was several minutes of shouting, banging and other indeterminate noises. It gradually died down until there were several minutes of silence with quiet breathing in the background. Mr. Darby then spoke incoherently. All I could make out was “Williams,” “no,” and “the horror” before the tape ran out. -Sheila]

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In his report Darby suggested sealing off the entire 14th floor and canceling all scheduled coffee delivery to the company until this cult can be fully studied and all its members identified. It is my duty to inform you that Darby was found dead last night after falling from his window at the hospital. We told the investigators how depressed he seemed following Williams’ death. His notes from the investigation are being reported missing.

May the Bean percolate us all.

Ted Hendricksson

Vice President

Corporate Real Estate

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TED WEIBACH: A Carefree Romp through History and Astrophysics Class

~ I ~

Ted Weibach bristled. He did this quite often. He probably wouldn't do it as much if he were still out in the OpenSharedOrgSpace with the rest of his colleagues in the Operations High Five! department at Complicat-O-Corps Lab. Since his promotion to Lead Buddy and his new role as liaison between Operations High Five! and Woo Internal Accounts Yeah!, he'd gotten a private office. This meant he could get away with a lot more bristling.

The cause of this most recent bristle was yet another email with yet another question with the same obvious answer as all the other emails. He'd repeatedly shown all the New Pals how to populate any report they'd need in the system, but they still flooded his inbox with questions. Ted considered breaking with tradition and answering one of them, but quickly dismissed the idea. "It'd only encourage them," he said to himself. Now that he'd broken the ice with himself, he continued. "Do they have any idea the amount of work I've got? I don't have time to deal with their miniscule problems on top of mine!" Ted was pleased with the way his monologue was going and looked around the room for a new distraction to keep him from working. To his surprise, then relief, distraction came in the form of a face that appeared in his doorway. An arm came around the corner and knocked on his inside wall.

"Knock, knock! Hi, we're from downstairs." The weedy man with the face let himself in and was followed by another weedy, more acne-scarred man. They were hopelessly dressed and could barely contain their glee that they found someone who lacked the instinct to immediately hide behind important-looking paperwork and shoo them away.

Complicat-O-Corp officially kept their research labs downstairs so the accountants, materials

requesters, and marketers who worked in the upper floors could look in on the people that developed the Miraculous New Products their jobs depended on. In actuality, they put them downstairs so everyone else could take the elevators by the front entrance and avoid all contact with them. The other departments didn't care about the elasticity of proteins or quantum tastiness. Like Ted, they just wanted to look busy and get paid.

The first weedy man continued: "Can we borrow you for a minute? We'll bring you right back. We're trying something." Ted knew better than to go with them, but he was caught off-guard and couldn't think of an excuse fast enough. They took him by the arm and led him out the door. As they walked down the hallway and into the elevator, Ted was mentally kicking himself for failing to unvolunteer himself from this little field trip, so he didn't hear his captors gibbering on about dark energy and holes in the universe and burrowing through gravitational hills in spacetime. If he did he would have been, to understate things, bewildered.

They walked through the double doors of a downstairs lab and were greeted by four more researchers wearing party hats under a banner that read "Happy Zap Day!" Ted instinctively turned to leave, but his escorts were able to grab him and turn him back around so he faced the mysterious device in the center of the room. "Congratulations!" said the one who seemed to be in charge. "You're going to be the first person to travel through time!" Ted looked at him blankly. He recognized all of those words, but the meaning of the sentence eluded him.

"I can see you're very excited. Great! Let's take a few things and put them in this drawer. We'll need your keys, phone, and wallet. (I'd hate to demagnetize your credit cards.) And do you have any piercings? If so, you can keep them in, but they might get a little hot." Ted felt hands dig into his pockets but couldn't wrap his head around what was happening quickly enough to react. The Weedy Man in Chief looked through his wallet to find his identification. "Okay...ah, Ted. Ted, we're going to have you step into this chamber and then seal you up. Don't worry about anything; we've tested it on a wide array of organic materials, heh-heh, right, Toby?" This elicited some snorts and chortles from the group. "So what's going to happen is you'll hear a loud bang, then find yourself somewhere else, then hear another bang, and then you'll be right back here. Okay?"

Ted looked from one face to another as he was led into the chamber. He struggled to condense his sprawling landscape of confusion into a question. All he managed to get out was “Bang?” The transparent door closed with a hiss and two quite dramatically large locks spun into place. The head researcher waved from the other side of the door. Ted could barely make out him saying, “Okay, we’ll see you in a second!” followed by howls of laughter from the group, who consisted entirely of neo-quantum-temporalists. Ted felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand up and sensed a rumble that raised in pitch up to the lower audible range of sound. He had just regained enough nerve to squeak out “What are-” when he heard the bang.

~ II ~

There is a problem with our ideas about time travel, one that doesn’t get much recognition. That problem is the fact that everything in the universe is in constant motion. Besides the rotation and orbit of the Earth, there is also the movement of the solar system as it zips around the outer boroughs of the Milky Way, orbiting the center at an alarmingly fast pace. And then the Milky Way is moving farther and farther away from the other galaxies in our neighborhood as the universe expands faster than the speed of light (the physics behind which we haven’t quite nailed down yet).

All this movement is a problem for time travel because, as is often left unsaid, the object is not so much time travel as spacetime travel. If you reel backwards in time just a second or two, but remain in the same spot of the universe, then everything else will be in a different location, leaving you to asphyxiate in the vacuum of space. (You could also vaporize inside a star, be instantly crushed by a planet’s interior, or look down and find a meteorite where your thigh should be, but the chances of these happening are pretty insignificant.)

One solution to the problem of time versus spacetime is that the impossible method of time travel that a character comes up with takes place within a closed system where everything continues moving at the same velocities in the first three dimensions, no matter what happens in the fourth, so it really is merely time travel and everything will work out fine.

To refute this solution, as well as to stick out my tongue and say “nyah-nyah”, I offer an analogy. If you’re driving at highway speeds and try to throw a ball to the exact spot where you were ten seconds prior, you are in a closed system (the car moving at highway speeds), but the ball being thrown backwards is not. Once it leaves the closed system of the car, it relinquishes its acceleratory allegiance to the car and becomes a citizen of the outside world, subject to all laws of physics therein. In such a case, the difference in velocity between the car and the outside world, rather than negating the change in position on the x-, y- and z-axes, would in fact increase the difficulty of making the ball land in that exact spot in space. When you factor in another dimension and go from space to spacetime, this difficulty increases exponentially. So there.

~ III ~

“We lost him!”

Panic swept the room as the researchers frantically checked their screens and the device for any sign of Ted. “If he’s lucky, he made it onto the planet. He could be stuck in space.”

See? Told ya.

“Well we know he was headed for the Yucatan Peninsula in 986. Reset the coordinates and send a team back. And this time, let’s round to two more digits and save them.” They drew straws to decide which two would go back to find Ted. They then started work on a portable version of the device for the team to take with them to 986 in order to return Ted—and themselves—back to their own time. Fortunately, since they now had the spacetime coordinates on record, there was no rush to finish the portable device anytime soon.

Over the months that followed, each of them pointed out at some point or another how their mangling of the basic concept of time really put things in perspective. Remarks like these, as well as their newfound lax attitude toward deadlines, led to Complicat-O-Corp instituting mandatory drug tests for all lab employees.

Meanwhile, in 986....

~ IV ~

As most of us now know, Christopher Columbus was not the first European to reach the New World. As many of us know, before Columbus came Lief Erikson, who landed in Newfoundland c. 1004 and established a settlement that didn't really work out in the long term. Or the short term, for that matter.

What relatively few of us know is that Erikson only set sail in the first place because he heard about a new land spotted by a young man named Barney. Or, in the native tongue, Bjarni.

According to the world's most reputable source, Wikipedia, Bjarni Herjólfsson left Norway one summer day to pay his yearly visit to his father in Iceland. When he got there, he was told his father had left with real estate mogul Erik Thorvaldsson to live in a new ice-themed planned community called Greenland. Bjarni and his crew had never been to Greenland, it having just begun leasing, but they decided to give the trip a whirl.

Along the way their ship was caught in a storm and blown off course. With neither map nor compass, the crew was lost on the turbulent Atlantic. They eventually found their way again and proceeded on to Greenland, but not before spying distant, forest-covered hills to the west. The crew begged Bjarni to pull over so they could have a look around and take a bathroom break, but they were running late and Bjarni wanted to get to Greenland before dark, or as we now call it, autumn.

Once they reached the barren ice sheets of Greenland, Bjarni and his crew told everyone about their discovery. None of the Greenlanders were very interested in Bjarni's tales except for the astute (and expertly aforementioned) Erik Thorvaldsson. Embarrassed of his hundreds of condos sitting empty in Greenland, Erik was trying to change his epithet from Erik the Bad at Naming Countries to Erik the Foresighted and Wise, so he was intrigued by the idea of founding a new settlement that wasn't covered in goddamn ice. He was so intrigued, in fact, that he initiated a

preliminary committee to investigate the drawing up of high-level preparations for an exploratory undertaking as soon as possible. A mere eighteen years later, Erik's son, Lief, bought Bjarni's boat and sailed off to explore the new world.

Wikipedia goes on to say that, in addition to noticing America, Bjarni also invented the pasteurization process and was responsible for the popularization of Dixieland music. His story inspired the film "Beverly Hills Cop II". As for Erik, his wasteful bureaucracy and the resulting expense became so legendary, he is still remembered as Erik the Red-Tape-Loving Bastard, or Erik the Red for short.

One morning, while finishing what would become his historic journey of discovery, Bjarni heard a loud bang. A strange-looking man suddenly appeared in his boat. The man didn't wear fur or boots, and he seemed to be unarmed. His clothes looked thin and stuck close to his body. Being an explorer, not a fighter, Bjarni's instinct was to scream like a small child. He decided, however, that this would be an untoward reaction for the leader of an expedition. Instead, he screamed like a fearsome warrior and drew his axe. This brought the intruder to the attention of his crew, still startled from the bang. The crew then joined in the screaming and lunged towards the strange little man. This was fortunate since Bjarni knew a lot more about celestial navigation than attacking someone on a wobbly boat. (It was for just this sort of managerial skill that Jens Forbesson named Bjarni one of the most powerful non-berserkers in Midgard.)

Being well versed in the art of a group of large men ganging up on a single scrawny guy who is already in a state of surprise, Bjarni's crew subdued the stranger within moments. Three of the crew held the man down while a fourth, an especially large man named Snorri, raised his axe over his head. Snorri had just begun to bring the axe down when the stranger let out a high-pitched squeal. Snorri halted his swing and looked at the man curiously. He experimentally raised the axe again and brought it down a few inches. The man squealed again. Snorri began to chuckle and the rest of the crew joined him. As laughter spread among the crew, the tension in the air eased and the crew loosened their grip on the stranger. The stranger, in turn, began to relax. He smiled and let out a single nervous "heh". The mirth in the air evaporated abruptly and the three pairs of hands resumed their places on the man's body. Snorri looked down grimly and began to raise his axe for the last time. As Snorri's arms went up, the stranger looked around

frantically. In desperation, he forced out a half-hearted squeal. The crew burst out in howls of laughter. The boat rocked violently from the men bending over, slapping their knees, and convulsing with glee. Snorri put his axe down and offered his hand to the stranger. Snorri raised him up and slapped him on the back. The stranger's shoulders dropped as he let out a sigh of relief. He was then bound and tied to the boat's mast.

~ V ~

As the sun went down, Ted reckoned he had been tied to the mast for about a day and a half. After the shock of suddenly appearing on a boat and being attacked and captured by psychotic foreign weirdoes had worn off, he tried to piece together where exactly he was.

He was on a boat. He was sure of that. It was long, thin, and wooden, and seemed to be manned by a football team: ten burly giants and one smaller man who occasionally gave an order. He was hungry. His pants were full of urine and feces, but he wasn't sure whether that was a result of being unable to go somewhere private and relieve himself or of the enormous man who tried to chop his face in half. Either way, it wasn't pleasant. Finally, he knew that the only reason he was still alive was that the crew found his terrified scream hilarious. Like a three-year-old, they wanted him to make the same sound again and again for their amusement. And, also like a three-year-old, if they didn't get the sound they wanted, they would kill him. Fortunately, they no longer threatened his life every time they wanted a chuckle. One of them would simply gesture towards him and he knew it was time to squeal. He tried asking them who they were and what was going on, but that just made them hit him until he squealed.

He also remembered the last few moments back in the lab, before he was zapped. They said he was going to be the first person to travel through time. If that was the case, as impossible as that may seem, then he would have to piece together exactly when he was, too. He was truly lost and would have to build his understanding of his situation from a blank slate. So he observed and he pondered. Boat. Sea. Tied to a mast. Hungry. Urine. Feces. That was as far as Ted had gotten in two days. It was a tad discouraging.

Ted knew nothing about naval navigation or how people dressed through the ages, either of which would be of great help at the moment, but he did know a lot about discouragement, so he spend the better part of those two days ruminating on being discouraged, his history of discouragement, and what discouragement meant to humanity in a cosmic sense. He was in this state of meditation when the smallest of his captors, the one who seemed to be the leader, opened a pack containing food so the crew could eat. Ted's focus went from a more universal discouragement to the very specific discouragement one feels when there is food nearby that others are enjoying but you can't eat because you don't know their language. He noticed the men repeating the same word: megin-grimmr. He realized this must be the name of that food, so he tried to say it. "Meegan gremmer." The men stopped eating. The small leader walked towards Ted with a quizzical look and stared at him for a minute. He then poked Ted in the chest. When Ted didn't respond, he poked again. Ted repeated, "Miggin grimmer?" This elicited even more laughter than his squeals. They cheered for him with the surprise and enthusiasm one would have when applauding a dog who one day sat down at a piano and played a sonata.

The crew all yelled at Ted at once, bombarding him with their guttural, loopy language. Ted shook his head, trying to indicate that he couldn't make out what the individual men were saying. Snorri put his arm around a crew member's neck and pointed at him, saying, "Bacraut! Bacraut!" Ted repeated, "Bo-krut?" They cheered. They took turns, each man pointing at someone else and providing Ted with a name for him. Every time Ted repeated the name, the crew shouted and laughed. Ted was pleased with the sudden change in the crew's temperament, but was even more pleased when they cut the ropes that bound him to the mast and sat him down with a large piece of salted fish.

It was only a few more hours before they spotted land to the north. When they pulled their boat ashore, Ted saw a small village of single-story houses—not much more than shacks, really. There were more boats similar to the one he was on lined up along the shore. It was when he spotted one with a stem in the form of a dragon's head that it dawned on Ted where and when he might be. Either he was with the most irritatingly accurate LARPer in the world or he had been kidnapped by Vikings.

Bjarni indicated to Ted that he should follow him. The two of them, accompanied by Snorri,

headed towards the largest of the houses, located in the center of the circular village. They entered the house and Bjarni was greeted by an older man. After they chatted for a minute, the older man gestured towards Ted with a quizzical tone in his voice. Bjarni pulled Ted by the arm and presented him like a carnival attraction. Ted felt newfound empathy for all of those poor slideshows he had shown to management. When the meeting was over, Bjarni and Snorri headed for the door. Ted followed, but was stopped by the old man, who had put his hand on Ted's shoulder. The old man spoke to Ted like someone who was used to people fawning over his words. His face sank, though, when Ted responded with a blank stare. The old man put a hand to his chest and said, "Erik." He repeated, "Erik." He paused expectantly. Recalling many a bad movie, Ted put a hand on his chest and said, "Ted." Erik was delighted with the simple fact that they both had names. He called a scrawny man—apparently some sort of servant—and gave him an order, presumably having to do with Ted. He turned to Ted and mimed the act of putting on clothes. Ted was never very good at charades, so by the time he figured out what was being communicated, the servant returned with an appalling outfit: a red tunic-style shirt, a fur whose shape was halfway between shorts and a mini-skirt, and a pair of moccasins made out of squirrel hide. He knew this because each shoe had a squirrel's head on the toes and a tail at the back. He wasn't pleased with the style of the clothes, but when he looked at Erik to protest, he saw quite a large axe in his hand. Ted reconsidered the clothes and decided they were quite smart.

~ VI ~

It had been two months since Ted had mysteriously found himself in a boat. The former Lead Buddy at Complicat-O-Corp was now a combination court jester and sound effects record. The Norsemen had taught him a few rudimentary words for everyday necessities such as asking for food and begging not to be killed. But he mostly stood near Erik, who apparently led the village, and waited for his cue to say something or make a funny sound, often one of terror. He found it odd that they wanted him to say the names of some of the crew, but Ted chalked that up to their making the most of his limited vocabulary.

With little else to do, Ted tried to listen in on the conversations that took place between Erik and

his people. Over time, he began to piece together the meanings of words. By now he could follow the general flow of most conversations. Most were about what one would expect from a sea-faring and agricultural people—food, money, land, travel, praise for Erik—but there was a regular stream of meetings whose topic Ted could not put his finger on. It almost seemed like haggling over the terms of a lease.

One day, Bjarni came to see Erik, along with his crew. Ted was happy to see the familiar faces and called out some of their names. “Bokrut!” he said. “Bokrut!” The Norsemen broke out in laughter. One of the crew pointed at the one called Bacraut and shouted, “Já, etha smár bqlr!” Ted approached the crew, shaking his head. “No, no,” he said. He pointed at Bacraut and said, “No Smarbuqueller. Bokrut.” He pointed at Erik, then himself, then Bacraut, listing, “Erik, Ted, Bokrut.” The crew again burst into laughter. One of them seemed to understand Ted’s predicament. He pointed to the middle of his rear end and said, “Bacraut.” It dawned on Ted that bacraut was not the man’s name, but an insult. He wondered what other profanity he had been shouting to crowds over the last two months.

Hoping to save some face, Ted pointed at Bjarni and, with the linguistic skill of a toddler, asked the Norse translation of “Bjarni goodbye in boat?” They were surprised to see Ted put words together in some understandable combination. It took six tries, but Bjarni finally responded simply enough for Ted to understand that he was heading back to Norway. Bjarni then turned to Erik and began the conversation that had brought him there in the first place. After overhearing so many real estate deals, Ted was able to pick out the words for “new”, “land”, “travel”, “sea”, “far”, and “west”. Erik was intrigued by Bjarni’s excited speech and seemed to keep pressing him for more detail. Ted gathered that Bjarni was talking about a land far off to the west that he saw while at sea. A light bulb switched on in Ted’s brain. He thought for a moment about how nice it was to live somewhere that had light bulbs, then shook it off and stepped towards the two men.

“Where’s a map? A map? You...you don’t use maps. Um...” Ted struggled to think of the words. “Skrifa?” He mimed the act of writing. Erik understood and handed him a knife and pointed at the ground. Ted thought for a second and drew a simplistic map of Europe, Africa, and the Americas. He handed the knife to Bjarni and said, “Skrifa ykkarr vegr”, or “Write your journey.”

Bjarni and Erik looked at the map, puzzled. Erik waved a hand over the Americas and asked Ted, in a slow, loud voice one reserves for foreigners, “Hvat sási land?” or “What this land?”

He asked Bjarni “Hvar vegr?”, or “Where journey?”, and shook with anticipation as Bjarni looked at the map. He thought for a minute, bent down, and drew a line with his finger from Norway to Iceland to Newfoundland before turning his finger around and settling on Greenland.

Ted couldn't control himself. He jumped up and shouted, “America! Oh my god! America! You discovered America! Will someone please tell me what the hell year it is?!?!?”

~ VII ~

Ted sat in his carriage, looked across the valley, and thought. A very eventful five years had passed. Once Ted showed the extent of his knowledge of the New World, he soon found himself a chief cartographical advisor to Erik the Red. To his pleasure, his new role required him to be taught the Norse language properly, which eventually led to Ted understanding where and when he was. Once it was clear that he was in Greenland in the late 10th century, Ted had three reactions in quick succession. The first was that he was stranded in time and would likely never go home. The second was that he had a millennium's worth of knowledge that could revolutionize this era and change history. The third was that he could leverage this knowledge to make a lot of money.

Ted spoke with Erik whenever he could and told him about anything he could think of that would interest someone from a thousand years in the past. Erik was already impressed with Ted's geographical prowess, so the new information from Ted further cemented his value to the village. Ted's influence on Erik was so strong that Erik decided to get out of the real estate business altogether and give progress rooted in secular humanism, the scientific method, and classical philosophy a try. Using his influence to guide Erik, Ted worked to give the Middle Ages a crash course in mankind's discoveries and inventions from the Renaissance through the Industrial Revolution.

Ted met with the village leaders and taught them everything he could remember about the discovery of ancient Roman and Greek texts, the return of Humanism, the rise of the Enlightenment, the preparation and functionality of vaccines and penicillin, how a condom works, assembly line production, crop rotation, steam power, global trade, and the existence of gunpowder in China. They took this knowledge back to Norway, where it was well received by all levels of leadership. King Haakon was so inspired that, in a landmark reversal, he called for the immediate cancellation of the longstanding “Destroy Anything with Words Written on It” policy. As a result, much more ancient knowledge was preserved. Besides preventing the destruction of ancient records, the Norse used their naval power to spread the Renaissance throughout Europe 500 years ahead of schedule, effectively cutting the Dark Ages in half.

While the simultaneous conquest and enlightenment of Europe was occurring, Ted had his eye on America. His incomparable aid to the new empire allowed Ted his choice of positions, so he requested to be put in charge of the empire’s American expansion. When he arrived at the colony in what Ted knew as Massachusetts, Ted met with the colonial leaders to inform them that he’d be taking over. They knew Ted was behind the recent developments, so they didn’t mind listening to him. It was Ted’s suggestions, after all, that brought them to land covered in significantly less ice and greatly reduced the omnipresent stench of feces. They were disappointed, though, when Ted made a very firm resolution that they not base their new land’s success on slavery or the slaughter of the indigenous people. They wondered if Ted had ever expanded an empire before, as he didn’t seem to know the first thing about it.

With slavery and slaughter ruled out, the Norsemen found their heritage as tradesmen helped their relationship with the native peoples. They set up trade arrangements with the surrounding tribes and word was spreading about the Chantokemsaw, or “pale people with cool gear”. They did bring smallpox with them, unfortunately, but since medicine was one of the fastest growing fields in the empire, the early colonists knew how to handle an outbreak and vaccinate the population. That unpleasantness aside, the Norse and the Americans got along quite well, and the Norse were able to negotiate an expansion down the east coast and then inland over the Appalachians with minimal disruption to the locals.

It was on the frontier of this expansion, five years after he had arrived on the boat, that Ted

looked over a valley somewhere in what would in his native time be central Tennessee. He thought about all that had happened and how it was all because he happened to appear in someone's boat and be lucky enough to not be killed. It made him feel both vastly important and mind-bogglingly small. These feelings were amplified as he gazed across the valley at an army amassed on the opposite side. He was thinking about the ramifications of this army when a cannonball whizzed by him and exploded thirty yards away. Ted was startled, but when the initial shock wore off, he bristled. It felt good. It felt familiar.

Ted's empire had brought gunpowder west from China and they had used it to develop guns and cannons, but outside of hunting, they hadn't needed to fire a weapon for years. The heavy arms were kept in storage, so they were too far away to bring to the front line and retaliate. Ted bristled again as he realized they would have to wave a white flag and meet their attackers for a parley.

The flag was waved and the other army responded in kind. Representatives from both sides lined up in the middle of the valley. From a distance, Ted could see the other army wore what looked like white coats flamboyantly decorated with feathers. Three of the leaders walked towards the Norsemen. Ted and two of his generals followed suit. As the two sides neared, one of the whitecoats stopped dead in his tracks. He stared at Ted, raised his glasses, and called, "Weibach? Is that you?"

~ VIII ~

Ted sat at a fire with three of the Complicat-O-Corp scientists who sent him through time on Zap Day. He had told his men to return to camp after the scientists greeted him warmly and apologized for almost blowing him up. They reminisced on the good old days that wouldn't occur for over a thousand years and compared their empires. While Ted had based his on hindsight, pluralistic sensitivity, and postmodern guilt, the scientists went a simpler route.

"Oh, we conquered. It was easy."

After recalibrating the settings and sensors, Complicat-O-Corp Labs sent scientist after scientist to the Yucatan Peninsula in the summer of 986, as they thought that's where they had sent Ted. After a while, they realized they must have made an error and had no way of finding him without zapping people all over the planet, including the ocean and atmosphere. They declared Ted dead, but kept sending people to the original destination in what would later be Mexico.

The original mission was to settle into the local culture and observe Quetzalcoatl's conquest of Chichen Itza in 987, the event that combined the Aztec and Mayan civilizations and made Quetzalcoatl a legendary figure in Mayan culture. When he died, Quetzalcoatl prophesized that he would return in 1519, which happened to be when Cortez arrived, a coincidence that made getting the initial Spanish foothold in Mexico much easier. They chose Quetzalcoatl's conquest because it was both an interesting historical event whose details are not well known and not vital enough that if something went wrong, it wouldn't change the course of world history. They didn't want to accidentally kill a young, pre-imperial Julius Caesar or anything.

Once they got to 986 and gave up on searching for Ted, they said to hell with it and decided to conquer the Americas. Since the first thing every freshman majoring in a hard science learns is how to make drugs and explosives, it was simple to devise weapons to conquer the Mayans in the area. After taking over Chichen Itza, the scientists built more weapons, recruited locals into their army, and headed west to surprise Quetzalcoatl's army as they were in the middle of a very successful run of conquering city after city. After defeating Quetzalcoatl, killing thousands of Mayan men, and making the rest swear loyalty to them, the scientists were able to conquer the rest of the Mayan world on reputation alone. They drove out the priests and ran the empire on science. They were glad they went to Mexico, as they used the local bounty of oil to fuel the war machines they built and the local bounty of coffee to fuel themselves. They also introduced factories to produce food, not because they wanted to revolutionize a culture, but because they missed Cheetos and soda. Ted started to object to this brash rerouting of history, but then realized he had done the same thing, just with less murder.

~ IX ~

As the armies faced each other in preparation for battle, Ted took a moment to look around at the bizarre spectacle around him. Such a mismatched grab bag of people, dress, and technology had never been seen.

On one side, Ted led a mixture of Norse and American warriors. Their faces painted and their chests covered with bone armor and furs, they would be indistinguishable if the hulking Vikings didn't tower over the smaller, thinner Americans. The front line was broken at regular intervals by cannons shaped like dragons, made possible through Ted's advancement of assembly line production and expanding trade into Asia. On the Mayan side, one scientist leaned to another, gestured towards the cannons, and whispered, "I wish I'd thought of that."

The scientist then straightened up in his chariot and gripped the handle of his hose. Surrounded by athletic sun worshippers, he scanned his feather-clad army. After four continuous years of conquering Central and South America, he felt invincible. He felt like Alexander the Great or Genghis Khan, except he had the advantage of living over an ocean of oil that he prepared to shoot through his hose and ignite all over his enemies. Greek fire might not have been as advanced or impressive as Ted's cannons, but he was sure it would be more satisfying. He lit a small burst of oil as a signal for his army to get ready. The Mayans shouted, the cacophony audible for miles. On the other side of the battlefield, Ted saw the fiery display and realized what sort of weapon he was dealing with. He muttered, "I wish I'd thought of that."

The berserkers, starved for battle after five long years of peace, worked themselves up into a frenzy. The Vikings met the Mayans' shouts with deafening roars. The gunners fired their cannons and the berserkers charged into the valley. The Mayans followed suit, the Greek fire chariots leading the way, spewing death at anything in their way. When they met, the berserkers' ecstatic madness seemed only to grow once they were consumed in flame. Now they were screaming nightmares, flaming men who impossibly fought on. Though most of them died in the first minutes of the battle, they served their part by striking fear throughout the Mayan ranks.

Ted peed himself.

As the front lines dove into war, the rear began driving forward as well. Ted jogged as well as his wet, shaking legs could carry him. As he reached the battle, the man next to him fell back as

a spear smashed into his face. Ted quite suddenly realized his true cowardly nature and screamed accordingly. He turned and tried to retreat. Hundreds of Ajaxes and Achilleses were in his way, fighting the valiant and savage battle for world supremacy that Ted had haphazardly caused.

He tripped over a fallen Norseman and fell to the ground. He looked at the man's face and recognized him from the boat he had landed in five years prior. A leg with a feathered anklet stomped the ground between Ted and his former shipmate. Ted threw himself back, just missing the Mayan's spear. He crawled backwards as the Mayan advanced. Meekly, pathetically, he got to his knees and begged for his life. "Please. Please. I'm not a fighter. Please don't kill me."

The Mayan smirked at first, then his face fell in disgust. He raised his spear, then lowered it slightly. He looked past Ted confusedly. The light behind Ted seemed to bend. Out of nowhere, a large hand appeared. It grabbed Ted by the collar of his shirt and pulled him into the impossibly bent light. There was a small flash and then everything seemed normal again.

The Mayan looked around. He was still in the middle of a battle, but the man he was about to kill was gone. He wanted to continue fighting the Vikings, but felt like he should go sit down for a minute first.

Ted found himself in a tastefully minimalist lobby. As he slowly wrapped his mind around the sudden change in scenery, he felt himself being lowered onto his feet. He alit and felt his shirt loosen as if it were being released from a set of large fingers. He turned around to see what had been holding him up, confident that whatever it was he was about to encounter, it couldn't be any more shocking than his previous experiences of being sucked through spacetime, landing in a Viking ship, and fighting a war against the technocratic Mayan empire.

It would thus be difficult to overstate his surprise when he beheld what appeared to be an eight-foot tall, beige slug that had been rinsed off and given humanoid arms. It would be fairer to say the creature resembled a pile of lumpy flesh—fairer to slugs, that is. It had sparse patches of thin, dark hair and sat atop a hovering platform. Near the top of this formless hulk, Ted found a face that seemed in danger of being swallowed up by the fat that surrounded it. In the friendliest of voices, the face said, "Hi! You must be Ted."

Ted fainted. And was still covered in pee.

~ X ~

Ted sat in a chair in the office of the entity who pulled Ted through the portal. The slug-man had introduced himself to Ted and patiently explained to him several times that they were in the headquarters of the pandimensional beings in charge of timestream maintenance. “I have a name, but if I say it out loud, your ears bleed and you lose the rest of your sanity. You can call me Larry.”

“I’m sorry, Larry, but I’m not quite getting it. Can you explain it one more time?”

“Absolutely. This time you understand it.” Larry began again, not so much with the solemn air of an advanced alien race as with the testy air of a bureaucrat who is answering the same question for the thousandth time. “I am one of the beings who maintains the timestream. Your comprehension of pandimensional phenomena is insufficient for me to go into any further detail, but suffice to say it’s tricky. The men from Complicat-O-Corp who invent the time travel device accidentally send you to the correct time, but the wrong place. They send people to the correct time and correct place to look for you, but since you aren’t there, they give up and decide to conquer the past instead. It’s what we know as a 43-P. I answer your questions.”

“Pandimensional...that means across dimensions, right? Like first is a line, second is a plane, and third is...is, the world, right? Oh, and the fourth, that’s time. Right?”

“Right. Because your species can generally only go forward in time, you live in three and a half dimensions.”

“What happened to the scientists who did this? The Zap Team? Did they win or did the Vikings?”

“We deal with the Zap Team. We pull them out of the battle as we pull you out. Your participation in this timestream disruption is accidental, so we treat you as an innocent. The

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scientists are not as fortunate.”

“Why do you talk like that? Do you have a past tense?”

“We exist in all times. We have no past, present, or future. If we speak conditionally according to the fourth dimension, we must speak conditionally according to the fifth, sixth, et cetera. You cannot understand such speech.”

“How many dimensions are there total?”

“Oh, shut up.”

“I suppose you get asked that a lot.”

“They all ask that. They all ask a lot of boring questions that children can answer.”

“So you get a lot of traffic through here? A lot of offenders?”

“It’s typical for a mad scientist to disrupt the timestream when their species reaches the appropriate stage of technological advancement, yes. Our job is to pull them out, clean up their mess, and return them to their time in such a state that they do not recreate their device.”

“What, like you erase their memories?”

“Or rip off their heads or drive them mad. It depends on the circumstances. If we rip the head of a prominent leader, their species notices.”

“So what are you going to do with me? And the Zap Team?”

“The Zap Team creates quite a headache for us. They are not dealt with kindly.”

He pointed to a window. Ted walked across the office and looked through. He saw a member of the Zap Team strapped to a table, screaming. It looked like he was copied and the copies were being shuffled over and through each other, occupying the same space. Ted stared, bewildered.

“He wants to know about existing across dimensions. We show him.”

“Wow, you really hate those questions, don’t you? So what are you going to do with me? And the Mayans and Vikings? And that world? Do we split off like an alternative timeline? Are we Earth Two?”

“We’re not in the business of creating universes or alternate timestreams. Besides being unbelievably expensive, even given the extraordinary things you now witness, it’s pure foolfaraw. Spectacle. It’s much easier to give people selective amnesia or fake an alien abduction.”

As he returned to his seat, Ted asked, “So this is something you do regularly? How often do people go around messing up the timestream?”

“Often? Well, you see, ‘often’ doesn’t exactly apply here. Things happen as many times as they must for event optimization, even exact moments. Let me find an analogy.”

Larry opened a file and flipped through some cards. “We keep analogies sorted by stage of development, filtered by various cultural and species-specific characteristics. Here is Early Industrial Age, subgroup Pacifist Cephalopods. Here is Class II Galactic Imperial, subgroup Hive-Minded Gaseous Anomalies. Ah! Here we are. Primordial Space Age, Semi-artistic Simians. It’s like counting the iterations of genome randomization performed during the initial gestation process.”

“What?”

“Oh, you’re not there. How about rerecording a track on a song to get the levels right?”

“Oh! I get it! So you rewind time, fiddle with it, and then let it play to make sure it happens correctly.”

“Close enough, except the rewinding part. It’s more like...let me see here...tracing single threads in a vast tapestry. You can follow one line of thread throughout the whole production if you’re into that sort of thing, but all the threads are always there and always continue to be there.”

He leaned in towards Ted and whispered, “You’re the thread.”

Ted appreciated the hint, though he suspected he should feel insulted.

“So on Earth we have this paradox about what if I go back in time and kill my past self? What would happen?”

“Oh yeah, like Ktruuugh. He does that.”

“What happened to him?”

“The system freezes and we have to reboot. Everything just goes back to how it is before he kills himself. Lots of people do stupid stuff like that. We grab them and figure out some excuse for their experience—alien abduction, coma, drunken stupor, whatever—and repair the stream the long way, kind of like we are with you.”

“Wait a minute.” Ted winced at the temporal faux pas. “If I understand this correctly, then you could have snatched us from any point of time you wanted. Why did you wait until we conquered half the planet?”

Larry sighed. “Time travel is kind of an exact science, with lots of complexity and nuance. Unfortunately, the guys who send you through aren’t very good at it. Their signal is so noisy and their calibration so loose that they send feedback all over the fourth through eighth dimensions. So instead of just tracing your personal thread back through the tapestry, it’s more like—” He glanced down at his cheat sheet. “—trying to find a plane’s flight path on a radar screen that someone dumps spaghetti onto and you can only remove one noodle at a time. We find you, but not necessarily at the most opportune moment. It takes a lot of work to correct this.”

“But you live outside of time, so that shouldn’t matter, right?”

“Technically, we live across time, not outside of it,” Larry huffed. “But to your point, we still experience pains in the ass. And this one is legendary.”

A dozen proctologist jokes ran through Ted’s mind. He settled on the one with the bowling pin, but before he could speak, he was being ushered along to a new piece of unimaginable machinery.

“What does that do?” Ted asked in awe.

“This is the professional model of that piece of junk the Zap Team invents. We use this to install a loop that grabs you at the moment they send you to and return you right back to the lab in the next millisecond. To the Zap Team, it appears that it didn’t work. The instrument readings say it is a wild success, but it’s dismissed as a technical error. They tell you that you are free to go. You report to the board of directors that some lunatics in the basement blast you with radiation and threaten to sue the company. The board shuts down the department and as far as your native time knows, the whole incident never happens.”

“Wow. That is...um.... I think all I can say right now is ‘wow’.”

“Because you, Ted, are considered innocent of breaking the timestream, I make you an offer. We normally clean up the timestream, which includes eliminating your temporal pit stop with the Norsemen and your trip here. If we do this, the Ted of Record returns to his boring life in the normal timestream with no memory of the trip. That Ted, the functioning cog in the multiversal machine, remains, and the thinking, feeling Ted standing next to me with memories of the whole story is destroyed. But if you choose to remain here, outside of the normal timestream, you are not erased.”

“I’ll stay here! I’ll stay here!”

Larry pouted. “No one chooses destruction.”

Ted lived out his days doing menial tasks for the temporal cleanup crew. They occasionally let him play innocent pranks, such as the time he suggested to Stephen Hawking that if time travel existed, “surely we’d have seen tourists from the future!” They had a good laugh about that one.

~ EPILOGUE ~

“I can see you’re very excited. Great! Let’s take a few things and put them in this drawer. We’ll need your keys, phone, and wallet. (I’d hate to demagnetize your credit cards.) And do you have

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any piercings? If so, you can keep them in, but they might get a little hot.” Ted felt hands dig into his pockets but couldn’t wrap his head around what was happening quickly enough to react. The Weedy Man in Chief looked through his wallet to find his identification. “Okay...ah, Ted. Ted, we’re going to have you step into this chamber and then seal you up. Don’t worry about anything; we’ve tested it on a wide array of organic materials, heh-heh, right, Toby?” This elicited some snorts and chortles from the group. “So what’s going to happen is you’ll hear a loud bang, then find yourself somewhere else, then hear another bang, and then you’ll be right back here. Okay?”

Ted looked from one face to another as he was led into the chamber. He struggled to condense his sprawling landscape of confusion into a question. All he managed to get out was “Bang?” The transparent door closed with a hiss and two quite dramatically large locks spun into place. The head researcher waved from the other side of the door. Ted could barely make out him saying, “Okay, we’ll see you in a second!” followed by howls of laughter from the group, who consisted entirely of neo-quantum-temporalists. Ted felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand up and sensed a rumble that raised in pitch up to the lower audible range of sound. He had just regained enough nerve to squeak out “What are-” when he heard the bang.

Ted found himself in a tastefully minimalist lobby. What looked like a huge, beige slug with patchy hair and a human face was waving his humanoid arms and saying, in a warbly voice, “OooOOOOOOoooh! This is alllllll a dreeeeeeam! It’s a side effeeeeeeect from the radiaaaaaatoinnnnn. You should probably suuuuuuuue!”

Behind the slug, Ted saw a Mayan warrior playing an advanced form of chess with a Viking and what appeared to be his own identical twin. The Viking waved and said, “Hiya, Ted!”

Ted had just enough time to consider his sanity before he heard another bang and found himself back in the lab, being told the experiment was a failure.

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Sketches

ONE DAY, IN HEAVEN

Dramatis Personae:

God: Orson Welles

Jesus: Billy Crystal

Gabriel: Michael Palin

Lucifer: Dennis Hopper

INT: GOD'S OFFICE

GOD: Okay, Son, who's next? Let's keep this rolling. We've got a whole world to create and only six days to do it in!

JESUS: Next is Gabriel, from the, let's see...the Vegetation department.

GOD: Oh, good. I'm anxious to see how they handled the phosphorus issue.

[GABRIEL enters]

GABRIEL: Good morning, Sir. How are You today?

GOD: I'm infallible as always and mornings are on hold until we can push these last few projects through the queue. I'd advise you to forsake the pleasantries and get on with your presentation.

GABRIEL: Of course, Sir. Well, we're very excited about plants, Sir. We think there's a big
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future in them! We've completely changed the intake/output cycle, so I'll just give You the high-level specs.

First, they take in carbon dioxide – You'll remember that's the gas the Blue team's "animals" emit. So they take in carbon dioxide and release oxygen, which the animals need, anyway, so it's a win-win. That's the general routing system we've put in place. Now, for nutrients—You'll love this—they get nutrients from dung.

GOD: Dung???

JESUS: That's the sloppy, stinky stuff that kept falling out of the animals. Some kind of factory defect.

GABRIEL: Ha ha, yes, but now we've found a use for it. It contains just enough of the chemicals which—

GOD: Yes, yes, I understand. I AM omniscient, you know.

GABRIEL: Right. So the whole thing, all of it, the whole thing runs on solar power. Very green.

JESUS: Really? Wow, now that's good. That'll look good on Us.

GOD: Ye-e-es, excellent work, Gabriel. Keep this up and you'll be an archangel in no time.

GABRIEL: *gasp* Well! Thank You, Sir! And may I just add what a pleasure—

GOD: Yes, yes, thank you. Would you please send Lucifer in?

[GABRIEL exits]

INT: HALLWAY OUTSIDE GOD'S OFFICE.

[LUCIFER ducks back from the door, where he's been eavesdropping.]

LUCIFER: Oh, come on, ma-a-a-an! Gabe's gonna make archangel now? Jesus! Of course Dr.

Sunshine gets something easy like plants! Try making people sometime! They're so touchy!

[GABRIEL enters]

GABRIEL: He said to send you in.

LUCIFER: Yeah, okay. Hey, I know you figured out photosynthesis and all. Big deal. That's kid stuff. Watch how a real Genesitician operates!

GABRIEL: Okay, well...good luck!

[LUCIFER bangs the door open and marches confidently into GOD's office]

LUCIFER: Sir, You're about to crap a rainbow! You won't believe what we've done with people!

INT: GOD'S OFFICE

GOD: Ah, Lucifer. What do you have for me?

LUCIFER: Sir, You're gonna make me Light Bearer when You see this! Now, if You'll just take a look at this video, it's lab footage of humans in action. I think You'll be pleased.

[LUCIFER plays the video and narrates]

LUCIFER: Okay, now we enlarged their brain's frontal lobe, which enhanced their thinking capacity. That led to self-awareness and higher emotions. And then all these side effects came pouring out. Small units based on genetic similarity and larger units based on geography. We're calling them families and communities. Very cool, very much what You were looking for with the Best of All Worlds thing. And here they—

GOD: Excuse me, Lucifer. Did that one just beat that other one with a large stick?

LUCIFER: Ahhh, yeah. Yeah, but most of them—

GOD: He killed him. That one killed that other one. Why?

LUCIFER: We think it's got something to do with the property and territory they acquired during the beta tests. We're checking on it.

GOD: Property? Territory? Don't they know that all Creation is Mine?

LUCIFER: Yeah, they—they did, but then they got free will and they started—

[Fires suddenly climb the walls as GOD stands up.]

GOD: They got WHAT???

LUCIFER: It's fine, it's fine, Sir. We gave them some free will, they took right to it. They take care of themselves and it all works out!

GOD [very imposing]: Since I created time itself, I have been the sole engine of the will that is to be imposed on the universe.

LUCIFER: Yeah, but, it—

GOD: Lucy, you've got some 'splainin' to do!!!

LUCIFER: Waaaaaaaaaaaah!!!!

[Camera iris closes]

[**Audio:** horn vamp]

THE END

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MOLDMAN

INT: Public bathroom.

[MAN enters stall, lowers his pants, and sits down. After a few seconds, he releases a small fart with a sigh of relief. MOLDMAN enters and knocks on the stall door.]

MOLDMAN [knocking]: Moldman.

[MAN is confused and slightly terrified.]

MOLDMAN [knocking again]: Excuse me, sir. Moldman.

MAN: Um...I, uh...I'm, I'm not Mold Man.

MOLDMAN: Yes, I know, sir. I'm standing out here. Can I come in please?

MAN: What? No! Eff off! I'm...busy!

MOLDMAN: I'll try to be quick, sir. Just a scheduled touch-up.

MAN: Hey! I'll do the touch-ups down there, thank you! Now why don't you screw off?

MOLDMAN: Alright, I tried to be polite. Cover up if you want.

[MOLDMAN starts crawling under the door, into the stall.]

MAN: HEY! Hey you psycho!

[MAN kicks at MOLDMAN as well as he can.]

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MOLDMAN: Ow! Hey!

MAN: HELP! THIS GUY'S NUTS! HE'S TRYING TO KILL ME! HELLLLLLP!!!

[After another kick, MOLDMAN gives up and gets out of the stall. He stands up outside the stall again.]

MOLDMAN: Sir, I am NOT nuts and I am NOT trying to kill anyone! I'm the moldman and I'm just trying to touch up this mold.

[MAN stops kicking. He just sits, confused]

MAN: To touch up the mold. Right. Obviously.

MOLDMAN: I swear, that's all I want to do. Now, I have a very busy schedule, sir, so if you'd please open the door...?

MAN: Mold doesn't get touched up! You clean it off!

MOLDMAN: Sir, we have an agreement with the custodial staff that they are neither to clean nor in any way alter any mold they find in these bathrooms without consulting us directly. This is designer mold, made exclusively for this client.

MAN: You...made this mold?

MOLDMAN: Well, I installed it, yes. I won't be MAKING mold for a while. I'm only an ME2.

MAN: What's an ME2?

MOLDMAN: Can I come in, please?

MAN: No! What's an ME2?

MOLDMAN: *sigh!* Mold Engineer, Level 2. Level 1 is entry, mostly paperwork. 2s do installation and touch-ups, *VIS!* 3s make it in the lab, and 4s design the stuff. I am a 2 and I'm

here to do a scheduled touch-up on the mold that you refuse to let me work on.

MAN: Why do you work on mold? Yech.

MOLDMAN: Why do you do whatever you do? Personally, I find answering phones and going to meetings repugnant, and I've been into mold since college. Now, sir—

MAN: Wait, you went to college?

MOLDMAN: YeSSSSS.

MAN: And you clean bathroom floors?

MOLDMAN [calmly yet homicidally angrily]: Sir. I do not “clean bathroom floors.” That’s what janitors do. I ensure that our product is maintaining the quality that our clients expect from MoldoMetrics. It involves pH tests, highly specialized instruments, a comprehensive knowledge of various schools of aesthetics, and a general expertise in things mold.

MAN: Wow, I had no idea.

MOLDMAN: Few do, sir.

MAN: Well, I’m, ah...I’m sorry. Here, I’m about done, anyway. I’ll just finish up really quick and be out of your way, alright?

MOLDMAN: Thank you, sir.

[MAN gets up, flushes, adjusts belt, etc., and comes out.]

MAN: Sorry about the whole...well...just, sorry.

MOLDMAN: No problem, sir. I get it all the time.

[MAN leaves and MOLDMAN gets to work. Shortly, another man barges into the open stall and sticks his finger in MOLDMAN’s butt crack.]

BUTT CRACK INSPECTOR: Butt crack inspector!

MOLDMAN: GyyyYAAGH!

THE END

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A DEBATE

MOD: Good evening. I'm your moderator, Phil Hillard, and tonight we're proud to present the first in a series of debates between the four main political parties. Starting on my left, from the Democratic Party, is Harold Donahue...

DEM: Hello.

MOD: Judith Layton-Hughes of the Republican Party...

REP: Good evening

MOD: The Immaculate Party's Mike, uh, VeeOllent...

IMM: That's Violent!

[IMM kicks REP in the groin]

MOD: [pause] And finally, Dr. Charles Antwerp of the Fat Party.

FAT: Um, no, it's the Party of Renewed Conscience. And I'm not fat.

MOD: Excuse me, that's Dr. Charles Antwerp of the Interrupting Virgin Fatass Party. Must've been some mistake with the TelePrompTer. Mr. Donahue, we'll begin with you. In the post-9/11 world, considering the power of the internet and the globalized economy, how should we approach the ever-cumbersome albatross of defense? Is it truly a different world than that of a generation ago?

DEM: Well, Phil, first I'd like to say good evening to you and thank you for allowing me to

come to this debate on behalf of the Democratic Party. The safety of every American is and always has been a salient cornerstone of the Democratic philosophy. Our budgetary and regulatory proposals have consistently pressed forward on behalf of this and other bedrock values embedded in the core of this great nation's most valuable resource, its people. And we will not allow those efforts to be sidetracked or undone by any malevolent forces acting from within the sacred seat governing the greatest country in the world, the United States of America. Thank you.

MOD: And Judith, would you care to respond?

REP: Thank you, Phil. It's easy to say you care about the American people when you need them to pay for your socialist pet programs. But I know that what Joe American cares about isn't governing and programs. It's freedom, liberty, the Constitution. Individuals who work hard. Not paying taxes. Did I mention liberty? And that's how I'd update our national security policy.

MOD: Okay. Moving on to the subject of capital punishment, Mr. Violent, how would—

IMM: Kill 'em!

MOD: Yes, but if I can finish—

IMM: Kill the bastards! NO! Round them up and strap them onto gynecological exam tables. Then hose them down with liposuctioned fat, open up the vats of boiling oil, and fry them up to the waist! Then we bring in the fire ants!

MOD: Okay, we're going to move on now.

IMM: But the ants are the best part! They EAT THE EYES!

MOD: Thank you, yes. Now, Dr. Antwerp, how would you explain to the average taxpayer the discovery that when we apply quantum field theory to an event horizon's curved spacetime, we can see a form of thermal radiation emitted by black holes?

FAT: I, um. I would be happy to consult with some theoretical physicists and go over that

question later, but I'm afraid that's not my field of expertise.

DEM: Aw, is the question too hard for the Fat Party? Is it not his expertise?

FAT: Shut up. I'm not fat.

REP: Come on, fattie, answer the question.

FAT: But it's not in my...

DEM: Aren't you gonna answer?

REP: C'mon! I REALLY wanna hear your proPOSals.

FAT: I'm not fat. You guys are dicks!

MOD: Come on, fattie! Answer!

[Meanwhile, Mike Violent has found a small animal that he's beating on his podium]

[Antwerp starts crying]

FAT: You guys suck!

DEM: Ha ha, crybaby. "Wah-hah. I think a flat tax is a good idea! Oh, boo hoo!"

MOD: [chuckles] "I propose an extra three billion in the budget to cover my Kentucky Fried Chicken!"

REP: Yeah, haha. "I hate you daddy! You did this to me! Why'd you put on cabaret shows in my underwear? Now I'll never have a normal relationship with a man!"

[The laughter dies down]

REP: Um.

MOD: At this point, we will shift to an open forum style of debate. Questions will be taken from...er...has anyone seen Dr. Antwerp?

IMM [pointing offstage]: HA! He's making himself throw up! Look!

[Violent pulls back the stage curtain to reveal Dr. Antwerp vomiting into a bucket]

IMM: See? HA HA! Virgin! Silly fat virgin!

[Antwerp is pulled down to the floor and kicked in the side by Violent]

FAT: I'm not fat! HWARRRF! GUUUHHHHH! Wuhhhh huhhhhhhhhh, I'm not a fat....

MOD: Well, this concludes the first of seventeen scheduled debates. Join us next week, live from Diamond Bill's Gentleman's Room in Corn Row, Arkansas.

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YU'S ON FIRST

HR: So, are you excited to start here?

NEW GUY: Well, it's gotta be better than my last job.

HR: Oh? Where was that?

NEW GUY: I worked at the zoo, cleaning up after the elephants.

HR: Ooh, you were a zookeeper?

NEW GUY: No, a broom.

HR: Ah ha. Ba dum bum. Well, this will be your new office, complete with your personal assistant, Ida, eagerly waiting outside. Welcome to the family. The alcoholic uncle should be in soon, and he'll start you on your paperwork. Any questions?

NEW GUY: Uh, yeah.

HR: Shoot.

NEW GUY: So I'm the Content Analyst, right?

HR: Right.

NEW GUY: So whose content am I analyzing?

HR: That would be the Content Manager.

NEW GUY: And who's that?

HR: Yu.

NEW GUY: But I thought I was the Content Analyst.

HR: Right.

NEW GUY: But you just said I was the Content Manager.

HR: No, sorry, I mean David Yu.

NEW GUY: Ah, so I'm the Content Analyst and the Manager is... Yu?

HR: Wright.

NEW GUY: Okay, so Yu is the Manager.

HR: No, Wright.

NEW GUY: Well, make up your mind.

HR: What? I said Wright.

NEW GUY: Right, so Yu is the Manager.

HR: No, no, no. Wright. Ted Wright. He's the Manager. The boss. Okay?

NEW GUY: Ah, I see.

HR: Okay, so Wright? Manager. Yu? Content Manager.

NEW GUY: Then who's the Analyst?

HR: You.

NEW GUY: Yu?

Capital One Public

HR: No, I'm with HR. YOU'RE the Analyst.

NEW GUY: [small pause] So what do you do?

HR: Me or Yu?

NEW GUY: [points] You.

HR: I explain things to new recruits and make sure you're happy. I don't have a title.

NEW GUY: Why not?

HR: I found it just confused new hires.

NEW GUY: But you did once have a title.

HR: Yes, but it was confusing.

NEW GUY: What was it?

HR: Executive Associate Managing Administrator.

NEW GUY: Wow. What does that mean?

HR: Absolutely nothing. It was just the only combination left. So if you ever hear someone talking about an EAMA, that's me.

NEW GUY [slightly confused]: Rrrright.

HR: Is all this making sense so far?

NEW GUY: I dunno.

IDA [on speaker]: <bzzz> Yes?

NEW GUY: What?

IDA: Do you need something?

NEW GUY: No, I was just—never mind. No.

HR: Look, I'm going to make this as plain as I can. [Counting on his fingers instead of pointing]
The Content Analyst is you. The Content Manager is Yu. The Manager is Wright.

NEW GUY: Well, which am I? I thought I was the Analyst!

HR: Right.

NEW GUY: Wright?

[WRIGHT enters]

WRIGHT: Is everything alright in here?

HR: New Guy here doesn't know what he was hired for.

WRIGHT: What's the problem, New Guy? This position is pretty straightforward.

NEW GUY: I thought so, but Yu is making all this trouble.

WRIGHT: First of all, it's "You ARE making all this trouble." Second of all, I just got here!
You've got an attitude problem. [To HR] I don't know how he's gonna last.

HR: No, it's Howie SkonalastOV. From the Belgrade team. And you met him at the last Winter
Retreat.

WRIGHT: What? What's he talking about?

NEW GUY: I dunno.

IDA: <bzzz> Yes?

NEW GUY: What?

Capital One Public

IDA: Need something?

NEW GUY: No! I'm FINE!

IDA: Fine, god.

[TOM FEINGOLD enters]

TOM FEINGOLD: Tom Feingold, here. What's up?

HR: NOTHING!!!!

WRIGHT: What's wrong with you?

HR: Is something wrong with Yu?

WRIGHT: Not Yu, him!

NEW GUY: What?

WRIGHT: You.

NEW GUY: Yu?

WRIGHT: You. What's wrong with you?

NEW GUY: I dunno.

IDA: <bzzz> This is getting old, sir...

HR: PLEASE leave us alone! And check on Yu. I think something's wrong with him.

WRIGHT [to HR]: Are you sure about this guy? He seems disoriented. [To NEW GUY] Are you on something, kid?

NEW GUY: I wasn't when I came in.

Capital One Public

WRIGHT [to HR]: See? Attitude problem. Disoriented. He's a troublemaker and I don't see how he's gonna last long.

HR: No, listen. It's Howie SkonalastOV. And of course you don't see him; he's in Belgrade!

WRIGHT: You seem out of it, too. What kind of monkey show am I running here?

NEW GUY: You run it? Maybe you can help me.

WRIGHT: Of course I can, I'm the Manager!

NEW GUY: You're Yu?

WRIGHT: Of COURSE I'm me!

NEW GUY: No, I mean...you're Yu. YOU are YU. The man, Yu.

WRIGHT: ...Look, newbie. Is this some kind of hippie crap?

NEW GUY: No, I'm just asking if you're Yu or someone else.

WRIGHT: Well, who else would I be?

NEW GUY: Wright.

WRIGHT: Okay, so we're on the same page.

NEW GUY: Yeah, you're Yu.

WRIGHT: Right.

NEW GUY: You're Wright?

WRIGHT: Always.

NEW GUY: So you're Always.

WRIGHT: What? No, Always is down on six. I'm Wright.

NEW GUY: Are you Yu or Wright?

WRIGHT: Both.

NEW GUY: Always?

WRIGHT: Always.

NEW GUY [to HR]: How many people is he?

HR: Just one.

NEW GUY: So he's Juan?

[HR slaps NEW GUY. NEW GUY spins 180 degrees. WRIGHT spins him back with another slap. HR stops him with a third slap]

HR [growing irate]: Look, new guy. I dunno what kind of—

IDA: <bzzz> Yes?

HR: NOT YOOUU!!

[YU pokes his head around the corner]

YU: Did someone call me forty times?

HR, NEW GUY, and WRIGHT: NO!!

HR: Look. I don't think this is gonna work out.

NEW GUY: No, I don't think it will.

WRIGHT: Here's the number of a clinic. Special types. You know. Come back when you get it

sorted out.

[NEW GUY leaves]

WRIGHT: Well, I guess we'd better bring in the standby.

HR: Sure thing. [Picks up phone, gets out paper scrap, and dials from it] ... Hello, is this miss
[reads from paper] Ima ... ah ... FraidyoovgottheBLONGnumber? ... Oh, I'm sorry. Excuse me.

[Hangs up]

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THE NEW TEMPLE OF THE HIGHER FUNDAMENT, INC.

[A vaguely European man, ADRIAN, is in an obviously fake office, the kind used in infomercials.]

ADRIAN: Hello. Do you have questions about what's out there? What it all means? If there's a bigger picture? No? Then the New Temple of the Higher Fundament is right for you!

Hi, I'm Adrian Knobsonn, founder of The New Temple of the Higher Fundament, Inc. Here at NTHF, we take the hassle out of religion. You see, we don't subscribe to outdated theories like sin, purity, and life after death. This allows us to streamline our entire system of operations and pass the savings on to you.

Let's talk to a random follower of another faith.

[ADRIAN walks a few feet to a WOMAN sitting at a table in the studio]

ADRIAN: Excuse me, ma'am. Are you enjoying your current religious experience?

WOMAN [looking up from her generic-looking holy book]: Wow! Adrian Knobsonn! Gee, Mr. Knobsonn, I don't know. I thought I found my true faith, but it's so-o-o-o complicated! All these morals and parables...and why is everyone in the desert?!?! There's got to be a better way!

ADRIAN: Well, I've got news for you! There IS a better way! The New Temple of the Higher Fundament!

WOMAN: New Temple of the Higher Fundament? But how does it work?

ADRIAN: Listen! Other religious texts have war, murder, sex, and betrayal, but then they talk

about ethics and right and wrong. They make it so confusing! Well we've done away with all the messy ethics and pushy morals of those OTHER guys and kept all the action! And we explicitly tell you when the good guys win. No Philistines, no Hittites, no Canaanites! Just us and them! We've created a religion for people who want to believe in something smarter, not harder!

WOMAN: But what about values? Does your religion have any of those?

ADRIAN: Let me talk to you about value! The New Temple of the Higher Fundament is one of the fastest growing new religions in the country! How do we do it? Value!

Let's say you're a Baptist. It's okay, there are millions just like you! Hey, I'm just teasing. But after you buy a Bible, nice clothes, and all that gas driving to and from church every Sunday? That can cost you up to \$300,000 a year!

[CAPTION: Figure is based on an average weekly commute of 1442 miles.]

WOMAN: Wow, I had no idea!

ADRIAN: But with the NTHF, you can have all the God you want for a one-time payment of just \$19.95! That's right! For less than one fifteen-thousandth of the price of the leading competitor, you get the NTHF handbook, your own personalized, certified membership card, and—if you act in the next 12 minutes—a free KnobCo Egg Slicer! Never slice your hard-boiled eggs the same way again! It's a time-saving miracle product, as cited in the Book of Tonya, Chapter Nine, Verse Four!

WOMAN: Wow! I never knew how much time I was wasting with my dumb old religion! Thanks, NTHF!

ADRIAN: The New Temple of the Higher Fundament. It's the King of Kings of kings!

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Runts

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'd like to take a moment here and pay tribute to some of the works that inspired me and made me want to become the published eAuthor that I am today. It's quite an exclusive club to join, with almost impossibly high standards, and I can hardly put into words how much I owe these men and women for giving me the drive to get here. I wouldn't be available for download (quite affordably!) without you.

Thank you.

Freud's Butt Plug: The Secret Smithsonian Archives by RJ Levinson

To Kill a Mockingbird and Plant PCP on its Body by the Los Angeles Police Department

The Norton Anthology of Modern Literature: All Happy Endings Edition edited by Phil Lomaskowitz

The Egg, Paprika, and Laxative Diet by Anton Sorsenson

The Unbearable Lightness of Helium by Georgia Mungo

Atlas Shrugged When He Heard His Economic Policies Ruined Millions of Lives by Rebekah Talbot

25 Years of Hustler: Braille Edition by Hustler

Of Mice and Men and Other Men: A Textual Analysis of Bestiality in Literature by Dr. Edwin Phipps

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Lies My Camp Counselor Told Me to Tell by Dwayne Medallion

Love in the Time of Cannibalism by Gabriel Garcia Maneater

The Great Gatsby Strikes Back: Revenge of the West Egg by George Lucas

Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of Creative Vulgarity by Merriam-Webster

Hamlet is 30 and Other Great Cultural Punch Lines by Lee Yi Smee

The Kama Sutra: Special "Japanese Girls Vomiting on Each Other" Edition by Al Gore

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A LOVE NOTE

Sent: Mon 3/18/13 14:49:32

From: Me

To: Lumps, Sugar

CC: HR Mailbox

Subject: RE: just wanted to say hi! =)

Honey—

Regarding your recent communication, I agree that our ongoing fellowship has achieved a satisfactory quality ranking. Having merited approval from a preliminary, high level perspective, I'd like to schedule time for a deep dive exploration of a potential partnership. Going forward, to facilitate this transition, I suggest we implement a status upgrade from “dating” to “boyfriend & girlfriend.”

Before we fully commit, I believe a continuing, multi-tiered analysis over the coming weeks would be suitable for this venture in order to ensure all critical issues are handled effectively.

You can contact me at my home number with any requests or concerns in this regard.

Dan Grubb

Content Administrator

Creative Resources

Capital One Public

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SURVEY

Okay, you know the drill. Answer the questions and BE HONEST! :)

Name?

Dan

Hometown?

Herndon, Va.

Pet name plus street where you grew up?

Noodle Monaghan

Favorite food?

Potatoes!

Biggest fear?

Bananas. It's weird.

Last 4 digits of your SSN?

35...wait a minute.

Sexual fantasy?

Um, I don't really want to answer that.

Seriously, what nasty stuff do you think about when you...you know?

Gross! My brother and sister are gonna see this!

The stuff you'd never tell your significant other?

Capital One Public

What? Move ON, sicko!

Alright, alright. Job?

Instructor

Day or night shift?

Night

Commute time?

30 minutes, give or take.

Do you lock your doors?

Uh...sometimes.

Security system code?

I don't have one.

Interesting.... Are you home now?

Yeah

Where in your house are you?

Living room

What are your wearing?

T-shirt and shorts

Oh, that's hot. How would you take that off?

Excuse me?

Would you mind moving that plant in front of the window?

Where are you?

Are you the type to kill home invaders in self-defense?

I'm calling the police.

Capital One Public

Do you have a cell phone? Because the landline is cut.
I'm warning you, I know kickboxing and stab-creepy-dudes-jitsu.

You smell good.

You freak!

Ow! My leg! You stabbed me in the leg!

Oh shit! Eric?

Yes, Eric! What the fuck? It was a fucking joke!

Oh shit! I'm sorry! Are you okay?

AAUGH! I think—I think I need an ambulance

Oh shit oh shit oh shit! Hang on. I'll call 911.

You might have trouble getting through. I really did cut the line.

Why would you do that?

Well, I didn't think you'd stab me!

Serves you right.

Do you have anything to tie off this artery?

Yeah, hang on. I'll grab something.

Ow! Damn! Well, since I'm here...favorite movie?

Gone in 60 Seconds! Wanna watch it?

Oh, fuck it. Just let me bleed to death!

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DISCIPLOR

[A MAN is in the park with his DOG. He tosses a ball and the DOG runs off. The MAN turns to the camera.]

MAN: My folks were tough. If you forgot to wash the dishes, it'd be "Boy, fetch me my keys" and we'd have to stand outside so dad could hit us with the car.

Lightly, you know. It was discipline, not abuse. He hit us just enough to knock us down.

My folks were big wrestling fans, too. So sometimes they'd reach under the couch and pull out a folding chair or a two by four. Mom was the worst because she liked to put barbed wire around the floor and pile drive us into it.

I don't do that with my kids, though. Modern times call for modern methods.

[He holds up a bottle of DISCIPLOR.]

MAN (cont.): That's why I use Disciplor.

[Cut to a diagram of a human brain. The lower and frontal regions glow purple.]

MAN (V/O): Disciplor targets the guilt and confusion sectors of the brain while immobilizing part of the frontal lobe. That way, my kids are left feeling disorientated, ashamed, and, as far as I'm concerned, obedient.

[Cut to the MAN in park, rubbing his dog's head affectionately.]

In clinical studies, some non-placebo users experienced sluggishness, mild to moderate sudden

onset psychosis, weight loss, and the bends. Find a doctor who will prescribe your kids Disciplor today.

[Camera follow the MAN as he turns to the right and rubs his SON on the head affectionately.]

Disciplor: Let your kid shine, for all intents and purposes.

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Silly Little Poems

SUSIE HAD A RACEHORSE

(For bass, fiddle and banjo, about 240bpm)

Susie had a racehorse. Racehorse had a mane.
Horsie went to Preakness. Susie went insane.
Susie's in the hospital. Horsie's in there, too.
Susie's in the mental ward. Horsie's in the glue.

Eight-Foot James was a lumberjack, the biggest man you've seen.
Loved his axe like it was gold, kept it sharp and clean.
Didn't watch his swing one day, and cut off the wrong limb.
So Eight-Foot James is now known as One-Foot Jim.

Now I like 'bout all types of folks. All types of folks like me.
But I've a hard time going out with certain company.
When people bring work home with them, it always irks me so.
Why I keep on dating hookers, guess I'll never know.

Never give a Pixie Stick to a hypoglycemic.
Never get in a food fight with a bulimic.
Never fish at midnight. Never bowl at dawn.
And always know when it's time to stop singing a song.

(Banjo: shave and a haircut, shave and a haircut, shave and a haircut, two bits)

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LANDFILL LARRY

Landfill Larry, shabby and hairy,
Likes taking his trash to the bin.
But while you and I take ours outside,
Larry likes bringing his in.

Busted old fryers and lintballs from dryers,
Rotten, green, fuzzy meatballs,
Whether out of a can or excreted by man,
Larry likes hoarding it all.

Now Larry's partic'lar, sort of a stickler.
He likes everything in its place.
The kitchen's for scraps; the den, bottle caps.
The bathroom contains toxic waste.

The chimney's a zoo, rats and birds in the flue.
The closet is full of inflatables.
But Larry's PC with his residency.
The basement's all biodegradable.

The homeowners' assoc., they don't like stuff that's gross,
And that's just how they saw our man.
They got wind of Lare, stuck their nose in the air
And kicked him right out on his can.

Now Larry's a bum, 'bout as low as they come,

Capital One Public

And nobody likes him at all.

But he's living large out on a trash barge

And Larry is having a ball.

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TREE HUGGER

There are days of sad remembrance,
Like 9/11 and Pearl Harbor Day.
But for me, the gloomiest time of year,
Always comes with Arbor Day.

It reminds me of my long-lost love,
As sweet as sweet can be,
For when I was a younger man,
I had an affair with a tree.

So elegant were her leaves of green,
So graceful were her boughs,
I went and bought a diamond,
And began to write my vows.

I returned to our glen smiling,
But it became a trembling frown,
For, you see, while I was absent,
Someone chopped my lover down.

In grief, I sobbed and wailed,
My heart so filled with strings,
I put my diamond on her trunk,
But it wouldn't fit her rings.

I was so full of sadness.

Capital One Public

Boy, I was just so blue, mac.

I had nothing to remember her by,

But a case of poison sumac.

I'm better now, thanks to my shrink,

And my specialist neurol'gic,

But I still sniff Pine-Sol sometimes,

When I get all nostalgic.

I am seeing a garden now,

With a lovely little toosh.

But she's so vain—twice a week,

The gardener trims her bush.

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LITTLE JOHNNY

Little Johnny was very bored,
So he pretended to be a dinosaur.
He drew his arms in tight and stomped,
And anything low enough, he chomped.

He chewed right through his table leg.
And bit his older brother, Greg.
He nibbled on his mother's chair.
He bit the kitty's derrier!

Johnny's father had enough,
And engaged the boy in fisticuffs.
But father had had too much to drink,
And little Johnny went extinct.

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MOCKINGBIRDS

Do you ever wonder if the mockingbirds,
Are aware of what they're mocking?
Despite the fact they have no words,
There's something they are knocking.

Perhaps it is my dressing gown,
Or maybe my toupee.
They might make fun of the doleful frown,
I give to them each day.

Those wing-ed creeps with barb-ed cheeps,
They batter my worn feelings,
They think no less to then oppress,
Me during my appealings.

They might not think themselves so great,
If they knew what I plan to do,
For I found a recipe of late,
For savory mockingbird stew.

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INTERNET GIRLFRIEND

I had an internet girlfriend.
I thought our love was endless.
So I was shocked to find myself
Deleted from her friends list.

O how we doted on each other.
I'd buy her memory cards.
She'd send my sexy jpegs,
And make my software hard.

She said that I was nice enough,
But our sex life was a sham,
And that she'd found another guy
Who packed a bit more RAM.

I wish I could upload myself,
And monitor her slyly.
And when she's not expecting it,
I'd shower her with smilies.

But I'm kidding myself. That ship has sailed.
Our relationship was a bomb.
I'll have to find another love,
On easychicks.com.

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High Drama

ROCK STARS TO BE

INT. OWEN'S LIVING ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

[There is a TV facing away from the audience and towards the couch. OWEN enters from the bathroom in a diaper and t-shirt. He is about 30, lives with his parents, and has an excitable personality that makes it clear he was a punk ten years ago. His long, black, dirty hair accentuates his tattoos. He works as a product tester, currently testing the diaper and a video game. He is also the drummer in a local rock band. OWEN sits down on the couch and unpauses his game. The game's heavy metal soundtrack starts blaring.]

[There is a knock on the front door. After a few seconds there is a bang on the door, followed by immense booms on door.]

OWEN: Come i-i-in!

[We hear a thud as someone tries to open the locked door.]

OWEN: Key's in the stone groundhog!

[After a slight pause, the door unlocks. ROB and LINCOLN enter. They are the guitarist and bassist in the band, respectively. They are in their mid-20s. ROB is tall and thin, with the gravity of one who is serious about his work. This band means everything to him. He is wearing an item from his seemingly endless collection of band t-shirts. LINCOLN is of average height and a little plump. He is the most conservatively mannered of the trio. This is reflected in his career choice: economist.]

ROB: What are you doing? Get dressed, we're on in an hour!

OWEN: That's just typical. You *would* let me keep working right up until showtime, wouldn't

you?

LINCOLN: We're late. Can we pretend you work and drive at the same time?

OWEN: Sure, hang on. [shouts to air] MO-O-OM! I'M GOING TO THE SHOW WITH ROB AND LINCOLN! NEED ANYTHING?

MOM [offscreen, from upstairs]: YEAH, GIMME A BOTTLE OF ABSINTHE AND THE NEW COPY OF MIDWESTERN BONDAGE! HAVE FUN!

OWEN: ALRIGHT, BYE! [to ROB and LINCOLN] Let's go!

INT. LOCAL BAR – EVENING

[ROB, OWEN, and LINCOLN are finishing their set at the local club. They're onstage in front of 10 people. We catch the last few bars of their last song. A few of the 10 audience members applaud.]

ROB: Thanks a lot. We're Bananafest Destiny.

GUY IN CROWD: You suck!

ROB: And thank you, mom.

[They set their stuff down and head for the bar. Their friend, CHARLOTTE, is bartending. She is the awkwardly cool indie chick that ROB harbors a crush on. Her wardrobe combinations shouldn't work, but do in an expertly stylish manner.]

CHARLOTTE: Hey guys, nice set. What can I getcha?

ROB: Beer please?

LINCOLN: Beer.

OWEN: Cryogenic Walt Disney, please. Double.

ROB: And put it on the band tab?

CHARLOTTE: No band tab.

ROB: Then I guess we'll start a regular, unappreciated artist tab. Thanks.

[CHARLOTTE gets their drinks and turns to check on the other customers. A friend of the band approaches.]

FRIEND: That was awesome! "Incandescent Jumpsuit," was that a new one?

LINCOLN: Yeah, we're trying a new direction. Kind of lo-fi folk rap.

FRIEND: Really? I thought that was kinda played out. White Latex and all those guys. Well, hey, good luck on the tour. [Exits.]

ROB: Damn!

OWEN: What?

ROB: The tour! I forgot to ask off from work for the tour!

LINCOLN: Again? Dude, you've known about it for a month!

ROB: Whatever, you haven't taken off, either.

LINCOLN: Yeah, I did. A long time ago!

INT. LINCOLN'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

[LINCOLN and his boss, TORI, are in her office. They work for a financial investment firm, so the setting is drably professional. There is a banner visible with a motivational slogan, like "Reach for the Stars – You're with Universal!"]

[CAPTION: Three hours earlier...]

LINCOLN: It'd be at least the end of this week, with travel and all.

TORI [gently]: Sure, I understand. And of course you have our deepest sympathies. How old WAS your grandmother?

LINCOLN: Oh, she was...ah... [starts pretending to cry] Oh, it's so hard to think about right now. I'm sorry.

TORI: Oh no, I'm sorry. [Voice fades out]

INT. LOCAL BAR

ROB: You told your boss that your grandmother died. That's the oldest excuse in the book.

LINCOLN: She did die...eleven years ago.

OWEN: Don't sweat it, Rob. I haven't taken off work, either, and I'm not worried.

ROB: Yeah, but I have an actual job.

OWEN: Product testing is an actual job.

ROB: You test video games and adult diapers.

OWEN: Yeah, so?

ROB: You work from home!

OWEN: Some of us can't go in front of people. I get stage fright. What?

LINCOLN: ANYWAY...just ask off tomorrow, okay? Oh hey! Stacie!

[LINCOLN'S girlfriend, STACIE, enters. A young professional, she clearly does not belong with OWEN and ROB. Her still-new relationship with LINCOLN is awkward at best. She looks bored and apathetic.]

STACIE: Hey...baby. Nice show.

LINCOLN: Hey, sweetie!

[LINCOLN aims a kiss at her mouth. She turns her head and he kisses her cheek instead. Throughout the conversation she is uninterested and aloof.]

LINCOLN: We were just talking about the tour. Did you take off work?

OWEN [pointedly]: Um, why would she do that?

LINCOLN: You're coming, right?

OWEN: What? No! [Makes buzzer sounds] Wrong! No. No girlfriends!

LINCOLN: Come on!

OWEN ["no offenses" are directed at STACIE]: No way. Girlfriends are the deaths of bands. (No offense.) The band's rocking out, kicking some ass, then some walking piece of crap (no offense) comes along and any balls in the music dies! Band girlfriends are a combination of cancer, garbage, and vomit (no offense), and should be put to death.

LINCOLN: Jeez, Owen, don't hold anything back. Tell us how you really feel.

ROB: Look, he's a jackass, but he's got a point. Look at the Beatles. They're the best band ever, then four relationships later, you've got Yoko's art crap and Wings.

LINCOLN [getting flustered]: This is crazy! You can't expect me to be without my soul mate for the entire tour! [to STACIE] You don't mind if I call you my soul mate, do you?

[STACIE shrugs.]

OWEN: Okay, one, you've been together for six weeks.

LINCOLN: Seven!

OWEN: And two, the tour's only two weeks long.

LINCOLN: Two weeks of hell! It's—

STACIE [cutting him off]: Hey, hey, it's alright. I'll stay home.

LINCOLN: But...is it.... Are you sure?

STACIE: It's fine. I could use some alone time, anyway.

ROB: Then it's settled. We go, she stays. I'm gonna go get our money.

[ROB goes to the corner of the room to see ALAN, an obvious cokefiend and sleazeball. 45ish and clinging desperately to his hipness, he books the bands in addition to running the bar. He wears shades indoors and looks like he was strung out back when his retro jacket was originally in style.]

ROB: Hey, Alan! What's up, man?

ALAN: Hey, Rob! Robbie! Robert! Roberto!

ROB: Please stop vandalizing my name.

ALAN: Great show tonight. Place was packed!

ROB: [Looks around at the almost empty bar]: You're kidding, right?

ALAN: Hey, BACK OFF, MAN! 'Scuze me for trying to MAKE something in this town!

[Sniffs] You'll see, this town is gonna BLOW UP!

ROB: Right, your exploding Omaha cultural revolution. Look, I just came over to get our money from the door.

ALAN: Door money? [Sniffs] Oh, uh, nah, not enough tonight. Sorry, bud.

ROB: What? What about this place being packed? We brought in at least fifty bucks!

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ALAN: Nah, nah, uh, well, see, there's the fee for the bar's space [sniff], the band's bar tab, uh, the sound guy's cut—

ROB: Dammit, Alan! This is your bar and you're the sound guy!

ALAN: This economy, man. Dog eat dog. Gotta consolidate.

ROB: And we didn't even get a band tab.

ALAN: Huh. Miscommunication. [Sniffs] Degenerates. Sorry, brother. What can you do?

ROB: I'm sick of this. Every time we play here, you rip us off! Well I'm done. I'm gonna tell the cops how the door money for every band in this area code goes up your nose.

ALAN: Heyheyheyhey...brother! Buddy! You know what? I just fired the sound guy! He was taking from me under the table anyway. You can have his share, okay?

[ALAN gives ROB money.]

ROB: Fifteen bucks? You're a criminal and a bastard.

ALAN: Wanna play again after the tour? Headline at Alan the Bastard's House of Crime? How's that Tuesday night work for you?

ROB: Sure, we'll do it.

[ROB goes back to the bar.]

LINCOLN: How'd we do?

ROB: [Slaps money down on the bar] Fifteen bucks.

CHARLOTTE [taking the money]: Thanks, guys. G'night!

ROB: Good...night.

[Love music fades up in the background as she walks away. The camera changes to slow motion. She helps another customer, out of earshot, while ROB continues.]

ROB [CONT.]: Yes, I'd love to grab a drink sometime!

[CHARLOTTE says something to the customer and laughs. She is oblivious to ROB's imaginary conversation with her.]

ROB [CONT.]: Really? I hate French cinema, too! We have so much in common. We should get together and discuss it over sex!

OWEN: Not gonna happen, dude.

[The music stops abruptly and the camera goes back to normal.]

OWEN [CONT.]: You see, she's got a brainstem and is, thus, out of your league. Stick to pond scum and the dumber species of mollusk.

ROB: Eat my ass.

OWEN: Yes! That's the kind of poetry that makes algae swoon. But as for Charlotte, give it up. Focus on the tour. And with that sage wisdom, I'm going home. Gotta rest up for the tour. [With bravado, like a pompous actor's exit] The tour!

ROB: Ass.

[OWEN exits.]

LINCOLN: I'm going, too. We've got a Molly Ringwald marathon waiting at home. See ya tomorrow. And take off work!

INT. FOOD COURT - DAY

ROB is working at a pretzel stand with CHRIS, his boss. CHRIS sounds like he has half a donut in his cheeks and half a brain in his skull. ROB wears a humiliating food service uniform and a

name tag that says “Vijay.”

ROB: It’ll only be two weeks and it’ll really help my band. So is it alright if I take off?

CHRIS: No, I really can’t let you do that there, Ron. So you’ll work instead. Okay.

ROB: Come on, you don’t need me here all the time. Look, there’s two of us working and zero customers.

CHRIS: Nope, nuh uh, I don’t like those thoughts I’m hearing. That negativity, Ron, it’s no good. I need you to stick around. We really need the extra help. Busy season is coming up.

ROB: Pretzel stands don’t have a busy season.

CHRIS: You see? That’s just the kind of blatant negativity that keeps customers away and that the Nice Time Soft Pretzel mission statement discourages. We’re NICE TIME, not...Mean...Un-Nice Time. Tell you what, how about you—We’re not Negative Time! So how about you go start Negative Time Soft Pretzels, if that’s your negative attitude?

ROB: As soon as I kill those last few pesky brain cells, I’ll do that. But for now, this tour means a lot. My band needs to make it. It’s our dream.

CHRIS: Dreams? Let me tell you something about dreams. I had a dream about a business. An industry. Something people need every day.

ROB: Chris, it’s just pretzels.

CHRIS: AND PEOPLE LOVE SOFT, SALTY SNACKS! They LIKE them and they like people who GIVE them to them! You like PEOPLE, don’t you?

ROB: Well, yeah, I like people. Which is—

CHRIS [shouting and manic]: Which is why you give them the salty nice times they want with a Nice Times Soft Salt Pretzel Salty Snack Soft!

ROB: Maybe you should sit down. I think you're taking this a little hard.

CHRIS: You're the one taking hard! Hard...guy...taker! Take hard!

ROB: What?

CHRIS: Home! Out! Go! You're fired!

ROB: You're inbred!

[ROB walks to the door.]

ROB [CONT.]: Jesus!

INT. ROB AND LINCOLN'S APARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON

[ROB and LINCOLN's apartment is sparsely furnished. The walls are institutional gray and the posters and flyers on the wall are worn and peeling. OWEN and ROB are waiting for LINCOLN to get home from work.]

OWEN: Fired?

ROB: I know!

OWEN: What'd you do?

ROB: I called him inbred.

OWEN: Haha, that's awesome!

ROB: No! That's not awesome! I got fired again!

OWEN: Great! Now there's nothing holding you back! Now we can go on tour and just think about [his voice grows in intensity] conquering the land with our infinite rock power!

ROB: [sighs] Idiot. But speaking of the tour, where's Lincoln? We should've left by now.

OWEN: I called him earlier. Said he was going to say goodbye to Stacie.

ROB: God. Alright, I'll call him.

[ROB picks up the phone, dials and waits for answer.]

ROB [CONT.]: Lincoln, what's up?

INT. STACIE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

[LINCOLN and STACIE are sitting on the couch in her apartment. He's holding the phone and sobbing. She's rolling her eyes.]

INT. ROB AND LINCOLN'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

[ROB hangs up the phone.]

ROB: He needs picking up. Is all our stuff loaded up?

OWEN: Everything but your fuzzbox. I think you left it at the bar.

ROB: Guuuuh! Okay, we'll collect Lincoln, go to the bar, grab the pedal, and get on the road.

OWEN: Kickass!

EXT. INSIDE VAN - EVENING

[ROB drives the van with LINCOLN riding shotgun and OWEN in the back with the instruments. LINCOLN is finishing up his sobbing.]

ROB: Dude, it's two weeks. Man up!

LINCOLN: (unintelligible sobs)

ROB: I know, but it'll be good for you. Get your brain out of smoochie mode for a while.

LINCOLN: (more sobs)

OWEN: No, I think he's right. You need this. If she came, she'd just squirt bitch all over the place.

LINCOLN: (angry but unintelligible sobs)

OWEN: I do NOT hate women! Just that one. She's taken your boys and made a charm bracelet out of them, for God's sake!

LINCOLN: (some more sobs)

ROB: Okay, well...

[ROB parks the van.]

ROB [CONT.]: Here, hang on. I'll be right back.

[ROB exits the van.]

INT. LOCAL BAR - EVENING

[ROB enters and approaches CHARLOTTE.]

CHARLOTTE: Hey, looking for some fuzzy box?

ROB [stammering]: Uh, I, er, if you—

CHARLOTTE: Fuzzbox? Get it? Your pedal?

ROB: Oh! Ha! Yeah! I...it's gotten. Gotten to...be...heh.

CHARLOTTE: Okay. Wow. You're the only guy I know who makes more sense after he drinks.

ROB: Yeah, sense. Ha. Well I, uh. Big tour. See ya.

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CHARLOTTE: Good luck! Play one for me.

ROB: Sure thing.

[Love music fades in. The camera again changes to slow motion. The scene then switches from slo-mo back to normal. The music stops.]

CHARLOTTE [after a second]: Okay, then. [pauses again] Bye.

ROB: Bye.

[ROB waits a second, leaves. He comes back, grabs the pedal he left, and opens the door to leave.]

OWEN [from outside]: Didja put it in her?

ROB: Shut up!

[ROB slams the door shut.]

EXT. INSIDE VAN - NIGHT

[The van pulls up to a normal looking house in a slightly rundown neighborhood.]

OWEN: Is this it?

ROB: Uh...The Soy House, 1306 Cleveland St. Yeah, this is it.

LINCOLN [calmed down by now]: We're playing at someone's house?

ROB: They said they get tons of bands. Besides, it's...punk. C'mon.

INT. SOY HOUSE - NIGHT

[The Soy House is the nearest thing to a concert hall or club for this crowd. The basement has a single naked bulb hanging from the ceiling, a band playing in the corner, and thirty or so

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teenagers and 20-somethings, all obviously artists, liberal arts majors, musicians, and other indie types. The band, Penelope's Parapet, is two white guys with dreadlocks. They are dressed in overalls and play a mix of jam music and alt-country. ROB, OWEN, and LINCOLN wander in and are approached by the resident who books shows.]

BOOKER: Hey, are you Bananafest Destiny?

ROB: Yeah, but we changed the name. Now we're Leech Lust Lebanon.

BOOKER: Cool, sounds like swamp rock! I dig it. Do you have gear or do you need to borrow?

OWEN: We're good man. Thanks. Hey, you got a keg or something?

BOOKER: Not officially. County laws forbid. But there's a case in the corner you're welcome to. Thanks for playing!

ROB: Sure, thanks!

[BOOKER exits.]

ROB: Well, at least we get a band tab tonight.

[Penelope's Parapet finishes playing. Most of the audience applauds, but as the guitarist, CECIL, speaks, OWEN stares at him with a cartoonishly angry face.]

CECIL: Alright, thanks, guys and empowered women! We've got CDs for five bucks in the corner. I know it's capitalist and all, but the cost of biodeisel's going up, too. We're Penelope's Parapet. Thanks!

OWEN [teeth clenched]: Hippies.

[Penelope's Parapet set their instruments down and approach ROB, OWEN, and LINCOLN.]

CECIL: Hey! You must be Bananafest Destiny. I like the subversive undertone. Nice. Well, hey, I'm Cecil. This is Barry.

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BARRY: How's it going, dude?

LINCOLN: Nice to meet you.

[LINCOLN and ROB shake hands with them. Owen pulls his hand back and waves instead.]

CECIL: Well, hey, do you wanna set up or we've got some homebrew?

[CECIL indicates his plastic soda bottle with apparently some form of beer in it.]

ROB: Uh, no thanks, we just got some burritos at the Stop n Shop, so—

BARRY: Dude, you shouldn't eat that crap! Those microwaves inject radiation into your food. It's not natural, man.

LINCOLN: Actually, I think it just boils the water in the—

BARRY: Alright, fine, just believe what you hear on TV! Sorry, I didn't realize I was talking to a sheep!

LINCOLN: What? I—

ROB: LET'S just...set up, huh?

OWEN: Yeah, you guys get the amps, I'll get the pro-life stickers and ground beef.

BARRY: YOU BASTARDS!

[BARRY jumps at OWEN. CECIL holds BARRY back.]

CECIL: Alright, he was just kidding. Be mellow, man, be mellow.

BARRY: That's not funny, man. Animals have FACES!

OWEN: You're right. Very astute observation. I'll chant that to myself during my next patchouli bath.

[CECIL and BARRY walk away. ROB and OWEN talk to LINCOLN, who is looking blue.]

ROB [to LINCOLN]: You alright?

OWEN: Is it because they called you a sheep and your girlfriend a bitch? Dude, you're not a sheep.

LINCOLN: OWEN! I— [calms down] No, it's Stacie. I just miss her. A lot.

ROB: Okay, you do understand that it's only been five hours?

LINCOLN: I know, but...you don't get it.

ROB: Clearly, I don't. But instead of explaining it to me and ruining the ending, why don't you just call her while we load in?

LINCOLN: Yeah, you're right.

[LINCOLN wanders off with his phone. ROB and OWEN exit towards the van.]

EXT. SOY HOUSE – CONTINUOUS

[While ROB and OWEN talk, they unload amps and carry them inside the house.]

ROB: God, what a baby.

OWEN: Yeah, and she's got a fat ass, too. We're talking about Stacie, right?

ROB: You know, I don't like her that much either, but you don't have to be such a douche about it.

OWEN: Hey, there's something wrong with that lady and I don't want to see Link get hurt.

ROB: You think a hundred little snarky comments are better than a lady with [wiggles his fingers and speaks in a falsely spooky voice] something wrong?

OWEN: Hey, I'm just preparing him for the big hurt. Something's wrong with that chick. I can feel it.

INT. SOY HOUSE – CONTINUOUS

[ROB and OWEN re-enter the house. LINCOLN approaches, hanging up his phone].

LINCOLN: God, it was so nice to talk to Stacie again! I feel a lot better.

[OWEN exits towards the van for more gear.]

LINCOLN [CONT.]: This two weeks is gonna be fine. I just...I dunno, I feel like a million bucks all the sudden, like a weight's been lifted off my shoulders.

[OWEN enters, carrying drums. He is jumped by BARRY, who hits OWEN with a bicycle wheel. OWEN falls to the ground.]

OWEN: Guys!

[BARRY hits OWEN with the wheel again.]

LINCOLN: I think everything's going to be great from here on out.

BARRY [to OWEN]: Don't mess with Gaia!

[BARRY performs an elbow drop on OWEN.]

LINCOLN: I'm in a great relationship. I'm spending the next two weeks playing in my band with my two best friends.

[OWEN struggles to get up off the floor.]

OWEN: This hippie's crazy!

[BARRY drags him down again.]

LINCOLN: Well, one of my best friends and one guy who needs to be hit in the face with a city bus sometimes. But this tour's really gonna help us take off!

OWEN: HELP!

INT. STACIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

[STACIE is in bed. She hangs up the phone and leans back down into bed. The camera pulls out to reveal she's in bed with another man.]

MAN: Who was that?

STACIE: Just my loser boyfriend. He's on tour with his lame band.

MAN: So I don't have to sneak out tonight?

STACIE [seductively]: No, he'll be gone for two whole weeks.

MAN: Two weeks? Interesting...

[They slide under the sheets.]

INT. SOY HOUSE - NIGHT - WIDER SHOT

[Police lights flash in the windows. Two officers are pulling BARRY off of OWEN.]

LINCOLN: Yeah, things are really looking up!

BLACK OUT

THE END

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About the Author

Dan Grubb is a former usher in Richmond, Va. He has been in 14 bands (three of them serious) and written for and starred in the wrestling-themed satirical radio comedy *Radical Recorded 'Rasslin'* on WUVT-FM. *Senator Bigfoot 'n Pals* is his third book, the first he didn't delete upon completion.

Follow Dan on Facebook and Twitter.