

## This Man Will Self Destruct In Ten Seconds – Excerpt

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Sultry summer afternoon, July, 1961. Changeling arrives, Trans-Karma Airways, flight 444. No one had the foresight to be at the airport to pick him up.

He crawled and drooled his way to the airport lounge, climbed clumsily onto a barstool and ordered a kamikaze, "up, easy on the triple-sec and time."

"That'll be four-fifty, please..."

He fumbled through his diaper for the money, came up with nothing but some poo-poo and a safety pin. He glanced at the bosomy maternal figure sitting next to him.

"I'll get it, Hank..."

He gave her a wink and ordered another.

"Another hundred years of this," he thought, "and I'll be back in diapers..."

It's not that I didn't want to be born, mind you; it's just that no one, as I recall, had asked my opinion on the matter. Plucked from some non-conscious state which I don't remember as being altogether too unpleasant, to sprout up unexpectedly in the belly of some warm, moist, life-giving maternal creature.

Man was it ever dark. Lonely, too.

Nine months in solitary, taunted by distant indecipherable murmurs, not so much as a deck of cards to pass the time -- and when I finally get out (presumably on good behavior) what do I get for my patience? Blinding white light, no Ray-Bans™, and to add insult to injury (maybe the other way around, in this case) some jerk lifts me up by my feet and whacks me repeatedly on the butt until I'm screaming bloody murder

"Thank you for flying Trans-Karma Airways, and we hope you enjoy your stay..."

So there I was, no cash, no road maps, didn't speak the language -- Christ! -- you'd think they'd at least supply you with a change of clothes, a toothbrush... The first year was probably the worst -- people constantly making faces at me, babbling in primal mono-syllables, trying to make me walk before my atrophied little legs were strong enough to support their own weight, let alone the rest of my body - I mean, if I'd had the where-with-all at the time, I certainly wouldn't have been laying around on my back slobbering on myself, though I must admit I enjoyed barfing on their backs whenever someone chose to pick me up and beat my shoulder-blades to a pulp.

Year two, I learned a really great word: "No." For a word of such brevity and lingual simplicity, it raised quite a ruckus:

"Okay, E., we've had enough fun at the playground, time to go home for your nap." "No."

"Come on now E., we don't have all day" "No." "Okay E., we'll just leave you here then."

"Okey-dokey."

I learned early to use affirmatives to achieve contrary responses, thereby protecting myself from potentially crippling separation-anxiety.

"E., how do you spell parallel?"

"I spell-it p-a-r-a-l-l-e-l. You idiots can spell it any way you like."

(My sixteen-year-old sister, asking me, at age six, to help with her homework.)

The next couple of years are kind of hazy. They must have done something very nasty to me, something involving dictionaries, electro-shock, and board games, because the next thing I knew, I was ranting in polysyllables and beating my eighteen-year-old brother at chess in four moves.

"No E, the barns go with the cows, not with the tables. The tables go with the chairs." (An early concept-association test)

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"Pardon me, Ms. Eierkopf, but the barns and the tables are both composed. of parallelograms, when represented two-dimensionally... "

They must have done something wicked in my early school days as well, because I don't remember them, either. I do remember it was frightfully silly though, laying around listening to Freudian children's stories about choo-choo trains with performance anxiety ("I think I can, I think I can") and the diet -- they must have owned stock in Nabisco or something -- graham crackers and milk. Every day. Graham crackers. And milk. I still tense at the sight of graham crackers. And milk. It was in my fifth year that I began to explore my acting abilities. My infantile experiences with calculated projectile vomiting matured into a sort of anti-academic bulimia, which enabled me to miss so much school that my instructors were more likely to record my days present than my days absent. Somehow, I weathered kindergarten (What does that mean in German, anyway? a small plot of soil where you grow children?) Only to move on to more enlightening experiences in grade one. Being as it is that I grew up in a progressive mid-western college town, with lots of parks and tree-lined streets, experimental educational programs and concerned community groups, they decided to try something a little different on our first grade class -- sex. Sex education that is...

Summer, 1967, in a hayloft somewhere in the mid-west: "You can do anything you want," she said, unbuttoning her blouse. "Some sister," I thought to myself.

I guess my sister was receiving similar training, with more of a focus on practical applications, and a bit of "home-studies". I still wonder if exposing grade-schoolers to breasts, penises, vaginas, and their basic functions is such a healthy idea. I mean, I feel okay about the whole thing, but at the age of seven, I was engaging in activities that my friends later in life - say age eighteen - were still squeamish and giggly about. But enough of sex -- (for now) -- let's talk about time-travel.

"Dammit E., where have you been the past two weeks? We've been worried sick!" I paused, contemplating the spoonful of Spaghettios™ I'd just scooped from my plate. "Twenty-third century, I guess..."

It was around this time that I re-discovered time travel. I say "re" discovered, because when your life is an endless series of time-looping paradoxes and deja vu experiences, you end up "re" doing just about everything. Premise sound familiar? You've probably read this book before. In any case, this was a very unsettling period in my life. I eventually reached the conclusion that I was simply a young clairvoyant. What more logical explanation to comfort an eight-year-old boy genius confronted with a plate full of Spaghettios™, and no distinct memories of the previous two weeks? So, I must hasten to point out that time travel plays a significant role in the telling of my story. It does tend to muck things up, sequence-of-events-wise, but hey -- it does allow for considerable flexibility from the writer's point of view, and eliminates some potentially harrowing editing which might be necessary to maintain continuity.

To the twenty-third century then...

I and my friend Han Borslect had been diddling around with some sort of fractal-field generator in the year twenty-two something -- (doesn't matter much in the ensuing

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chronological flotsam and jetsam) -- in an attempt to create the world's first fractal cocktail. Han had just finished pouring in the carefully selected array of spirits that we thought would do the trick, when "whoo-hoo-hoosh" -- out of God's little martini glass we flew, into a chaotically swirling set of time and space-lines, multiple fractured images of ourselves flying everywhere, like Alice's looking glass smashing.

My first conscious fragment landed haplessly in my high school math class, c. 1977....

The instructor caught me kind of off-guard with some silly question about quadratics, interrupting the lazy fugue state in which I was pondering Jungian concepts of the human manifestation of pneuma as a self-defeating mode of twentieth-century terran life. I shuffled up to the blackboard, and at a loss, decided to fake it. After filling the chalk-streaked slate with pi, accurately progressed to around four thousand digits, he sent me to the principal's office, muttering something about academic terrorism and lack of respect for structured teaming.

Structured learning.

If he had chosen to understand the structure of my learning, he'd have to run in a hand-stand down a life-size Möebius strip, which twisted down into a Mandelbrotian cube.

Stick that on your Bunsen burner ...

"You must -- unh! -- bend to the time-honored -- unh! -- principles of academia -- unh! -- you must bend a little -- unh! -- further at the knees, in fact.."

(Disciplinary dialogue overheard through our high school principal's inner sanctum door.)

So I sat, in the principal's stale-smelling office. Most of the piles of paper lying about were slightly yellowed; leading me to the conclusion that most of his administrative duties pertained to sodomizing young truants as a sort of academic plea-bargaining. The occasional grunts and screams from the next room did a lot to confirm my suspicions.

After twiddling my thumbs and taking inventory of the cobwebs for a bit, I decided to needle the proverbial haystack. I had quite a field-day, pardoning tardy truants, re-programming grades from the desktop (education had little funding in those days) computer, playing darts with a crusty old portrait of Walt Whitman ... intuition told me there was more fun to be had. I gingerly sifted through his (desk) drawers.

Nothing but the usual late-twentieth century snuff/child pornography, some Anais Nin, and Oscar Wildean kid's books, except, praise Allah and bring the mountain to Mohammed, tucked away in the rear of the lower left drawer -- a virgin bottle of "Night Train®."

I cracked the bottle forthwith and took a few gut-rotting chugs.

Thus refreshed, I went about my nosing around, taking a swig, nosing about, taking a swig, nosing about, taking a swig, taking a swig ... before I knew it I was half-toasted and proposing toasts to just about everything in the known universe. It was at this point that the principal walked in, putting on an air of "why no, of course I haven't spent the last hour sodomizing young truants." I stood up, and with great rhetorical gestures slurred something about "dip-o-maddick immoonitee" or "inkimanading ex-a-dench" before politely passing out.

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I drifted in and out of consciousness... A delirious fever as a seven-year-old, skipping school ... A still-drunk morning after in my studio... On an acropolis, beneath endless skies, with one hell of a headache ... In my father's apartment, his alarm clock wailing ...

"Hey E., hand me the duct-tape. "

"Duck tape? Why the hell would someone wanna tape ducks together?"

I seem to remember something about duct-tape being important. It's not the fact that it doesn't hold ducks together. It's something about how it can hold just about anything else together -- like rock bands. But it's not that either.

Oh yeah. If you ever find yourself de-manifesting spontaneously and sort of drifting into an unfamiliar rec room, in which there is (or onto which there is) a door with a sign reading "enter," do. It's the only way out. You'll probably wake up with a screaming mother of a headache on the third moon from Neptune, but it beats the heck out of spending eternity in a strange rec room, perusing ancient back-issues of Reader's Digest, Large Type. Which may all leave you wondering about duct-tape. Well, we once found ourselves in this very rec room, and, seeing the sign, took it at face value, and did.

Enter, that is.

So, to make a long story mid-size, since the door appeared to be one of those doors that automatically locks from both sides if allowed to close, we duct-taped the latch.

August 23, 1972 -- Partly cloudy, high 87, low 64. Went to work. August 24, 1972 -- Sunny, high 86, low 62. Went to work. August 25, 1972 -- Partly cloudy, high 84, low 61. 'Worked on the yard. Pat's B-day. August 26, 1972 -- Found E. in the basement dismantling T.V.'s and babbling about time travel.

(Excerpts from my father's diary)

My father was a firm believer in hard work and the Farmer's Almanac, as well as lots of sex and the Catholic prohibition against birth control. The latter belief manifested itself as a family of ten. (Not including my changeling self.) The former manifested itself as an early death.

I came home one night, stoned out of my mind, to find my father feeling nauseous and complaining of chest pains. He asked me to stay up with him in case it was serious. He had ulcers so I assumed he'd be okay and proceeded to sack out with Johnny Carson.

I awoke the next morning to the sound of his alarm clock. I went to his room and called his name –

"Dad?" (Well, not his Christian name...) "Dad?"

No answer.

I walked over to his bed, where he lay face down.

I closed my eyes and touched my hand to his back.

Cold.

Ick.

The ensuing few days were quite a whirlwind, needless to say.

That same year, I tried to wake up two more dead people. Not on purpose, mind you -- just luck I guess. I got the feeling someone was trying to tell me something. Like:

"Hey E., it's not much fun touching corpses, ya know?"

I dropped the habit in a hurry. Unlike some others...

"Okay, I'll give you my T.V., my life's savings, my porn collection, my grandmother, her life

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savings, my first three born, my wife, my lover, their life savings, their porn collections, and my lucky nickel for another half-gram... "

If you could imagine every cup of coffee you've had in your life being ingested in one year, while jamming your finger in a wet light socket, while standing in a shallow pool full of electric eels, you have some idea of my state of mind while "enjoying" my experiences with cocaine, marijuana, amphetamines, Nuludar, and alcohol, often in that order. The damndest thing was, everyone wanted to be my friend, in spite of my spontaneous nosebleeds and conjugal restroom visits.

Yup, there's nothing quite like lying in bed twitching at six a.m., contemplating doing another line. Ah, the many useful functions of the single-edged razor blade.

"Anybody got a band-aid?"

It was around this time that I developed a penchant for making six-inch gashes in my arm, just because. Admittedly silly behavior, even for a drug-abusing, time-traveling novice sorcerer, but hey, they're my arms, right?

One night in particular stands out. I was dating this coke-dealing body-builder with a bad nose job. I don't know exactly what came over me, maybe an instinctual bloodletting urge. Lacking leeches, I perused her medicine cabinet in the solitude of tiled bathroom ambience.

Nothing but some Trac II's™. Oh well, I chewed one open, peeled out one of the blades, and "zip" I was looking at the muscle fibers in my left forearm. "Hmm," I thought to myself, "if that pool on the floor gets much bigger, I'm gonna wake up a dead man... " Never really my intention, as a result of deciding it wasn't much fun waking up with other folks as a dead man. I wrapped one of the pretty maroon and gold bath towels around my arm and went to bed.

The next morning, I woke up refreshed, feeling like a million dollars; a million dollars with a blood-soaked towel wrapped around its arm, but a million dollars nonetheless. The body-builder chick dumped me in short order. I still can't believe someone could get so upset over a bath towel...

The funny thing was, I really felt as if a new life had begun. This aided in the formulation of my "nine-lives theory", which allowed me to be reincarnated as my own cat. I had the little beast for six months before I figured it out. He was always a bit un-cat-like, somehow. Then it dawned on me. It was just me reincarnated as a cat, quite resentful of eating industrial meat by-products and shitting in a box, not to mention the surgical removal of my testicles. This didn't make it any easier taking him to the humane society, regardless of their assurances that they'd find him a good home. I kept remembering Auschwitz.

"But I don't need a shower, dammit!"

Something looked strangely familiar about the Nazi sergeant. "Do as I say, or you'll be turned over to medical research!"

I tried to appeal to the sense of kinship that should exist between parallel incarnations of the same self, but he wouldn't hear of it. He lit a Dunhill™ and looked contemptuously down a nose exactly like mine.

"Nice suit," I offered.

He kicked me in the crotch.

Doubling over, I licked his boot. He kicked me in the mouth.

Now granted, I was no Prince Charming, with my shaven head and sixty pounds underweight, but that was no reason for me to be kicking myself around --

"Spare a square, pal?" He spit in my face.

This doesn't do much for one's spirits, having an identical twin spit in your face. Try

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it sometime. Hold a mirror up and face a gale-force wind. Spit. See what I mean? I asked him where he got his nifty boots.

He mechanically closed the large steel door. "They're probably not even genuine-issue!"

As I slipped into unconsciousness, I dreamt that I was squatting in a little box, defecating.

"Yes, and people have been known to die of boredom," said the monk-like figure, who, from what I could see of it's face, reminded me somehow of Shirley MacLaine. "For instance, a librarian friend of mine was reincarnated as her own cat eight times..."

I had awakened in a dark stone courtyard, staring at an ebony statue that bore a remarkable resemblance to a pet cat I had once. I had a screaming mother of a headache and a flask in my right hand. No, the headache wasn't in my right hand, but, oh forget it. It might as well have been. It felt like it was everywhere. I rubbed my eyes, which felt like they were full of gasoline and salt, and looked around. Then I very much regretted having rubbed my eyes. After the throbbing ebbed a bit, I spotted a really swell-looking gal reclining on a really schmancy sofa, with a bunch of really faggy-looking boys in white skirts fawning over her.

One of them sacheted all ballet-boyishly towards me. He held a bowl of milk out before me. I looked up at his bulging fish-like eyes, then down at the bowl of milk. A four-inch tongue leapt up and pointed accusingly at me. I gazed back into his flounder-eyes, and fell into a swoon.

For some reason, I thought of dolphins...

My body did something unusual at this point. Imagine two people in Topeka, Kansas. Then imagine one of them grabbing your big toe, while the other one grabs your chin, and then imagine them running as quickly as possible to San Clemente and Bar Harbour, Maine, respectively. That would feel like a soothing shoulder massage in comparison. If you should ever experience this sensation, feel free to allow your being to mitocise, allowing your self to replicate all over history and the known universe. It's not altogether too pleasant, but it beats the hell out of the back problems you'll experience if you try to keep yourself in one piece. So there we were, which was just about everywhere, looking, perhaps, a bit dumb struck. I looked around to see if Han was nearby. I then got the odd sensation of being on the "Lawrence Welk Show" next to the bubble machine, with a million reflections of Han swirling about me.

"Tiny bubbles ... tiny bubbles in a-why-eee." I realised at that moment that I was sitting on the lap of a massive figure bearing some resemblance to Don Ho. "Go forth and multiply," he chuckled thunderously, and everything (of course, what else?) went dark.

"I realised, at this point, that it was my destiny to share with others the immense potential of rubbing quartz crystals while visualising dolphins on long silver cords, spreading periwinkle light across the heavens..."

Don't ask me what Shirley MacLaine was doing in a god-forsaken place like this, dressed in a black robe, sipping a martini, and sitting in a hot-tub, while dictating notes to a smarmy little secretarial figure... Trying to keep warm, I guess. Like most things that bug you though, if you ignore them long enough, they go away. I did, and she did. It was, however, pretty hard to ignore the fact that my head was pounding like a blacksmith's anvil, or that I was several hundred million

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miles and several hundred years from home. Fortunately, my friend Han was a liquid nitrogen smuggler, so I could catch the next inbound tanker. (Chrono-teleportation, aside from being a very long compound word, was an interesting experience, but not something you want to do more than once, unless forced to by warps in space-time.) My mind made up, I and my headache made our way to the nearest bar, the "Charred Rock," I sat down and ordered a "vodka frostie." (Everything's frosty on Neptune...) Spotting a pay phone in the corner, I asked the bartender for some change.

"What kinda change ya need?"

"Oh, a couple million credits should do it. Just let me put it on my American Express."

As I reached into my pocket I deftly toppled my drink into his credit terminal, prompting a hail of blue-white sparks and dense gray smoke.

"Aw, jeez, I'm such a klutz sometimes. I'm sooo sorry -- why don't 'cha just charge a new terminal to my card, too."

Hopefully I'd be halfway back to Earth before he realised my card was overdrawn a zillion credits and expired 300 years ago. He obliged, and I shuffled over to the phone, picked up the receiver and dialed "O."

"Thanks for using Solarian Telephone & Teleport. How may we help you?" (As if there were anyone else monopolising solar communications).

"Uh, I'd like to place a person-to-person call. "The number plee-yuz?"

"Well, uh, I don't actually know the number, but the name is 'Han Borslect'."

"Our listings," she droned nasally, "show three thousand, seven hundred sixty-three persons by the name 'Han Borslect.' Do you have an address?"

"Well," I offered, "he's in liquid nitrogen." She paused.

"I'm sorry sir, we have strict orders not to disturb cryogenic patients.

"Not literally in nitrogen, dammit, he transports the shit."

"Oh," she said, trying to sound unimpressed, "one moment, plee-yuz.

After a ten-second stream of speed-tone dialing, a recorded voice came on the line and said, "Please deposit 100,000 credits for the first one minute." I quickly jammed in a hundred one-thousand credit discs (the contemporary equivalent would be silver dollars).

"Thank you for using ST&T... " (You too, bitch)

The line rang through, was picked up, and after a few seconds of gum smacking, a voice said, "Thanks for calling Borslect Enterprises, please hold." Great -- 100,000 credits a minute to sit picking my nose while some helium-head secretary gabs with her boyfriend on another line. After feeding ST&T another half million credits, I decided on a strategy. I re-dialed, she answered, I said, "Candy, this is Han -- I need to speak to myself immediately!"

"Uh, sure boss, uh, just a sec." Works every time.

I explained my predicament to Han, he said there'd be a tanker coming through in three days. At my current rate of consumption, I figured that would be about 3,763 vodka frosties. (I was on my fourth, and I was allowing for 14 hours sleep a night.) One thing still troubled me, though.

"By the way," I added, "how is it I'm on the third moon from Neptune, and you're back in your corporate office?"

"Well," he sighed, "there was this rec-room... "

"And don't forget, life's a big bowl of milk. With a tongue... " <BEEEEEEEEEP>

Why can't my friends leave simple answer-machine messages like, "sorry, we're not here right now"?

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Arty Karma was always more like a psychic appendage than a friend, and had a bad habit of turning up in stone courtyards, offering bowls of milk, with a tongue. Or in this case, in the twenty-third century, peddling replicas of Martian tongue-art, which, contrary to what the name suggest, is not produced by Martians dipping their tongues in paint and licking a canvas, but is, rather, produced by just about anyone vacationing on Mars who cares to do so by dunking their head in a bowl of milk and projecting their tongue through the surface. Being a kinetic art form, it's hard to imagine producing replicas, but there it was in the ST&T Yellow Pages...

It was my third day on the third moon from Neptune. I was getting mighty bored. Somewhere around my twelve-hundredth vodka slushie, I had started looking up old friends, billing the call to Walt Disney's cryogenic tank.

"Listen, you fat fuck, I know you're home! Just pick it –" <Click>

"Why, hullo," he said, with a voice that groaned like the floorboards in a bordello, "it seems like years since we've had the pleasure of conversing... "

"Three or four thousand, give or take a paradox." At this point a figure in flowing black robes walked through the bar. As they passed, I asked them if they could spare some change.

"Change comes from within," they wheezed, in a voice that sounded uncannily like Shirley MacLaine's. As they exited, trailing a frayed silvery cord, the bartender said, "Ignore her. She's always kinda loopy right after she gets out that weird hot tub."

"Hey, look," I said, continuing, "this place is running perilously low on vodka right about now, some drag queen doing a bad Shirley MacLaine keeps following me, and I need a place to crash for a week or so. My ride is gonna be swinging by your neighbourhood in a day or two -- what say?" I didn't mention that my "ride" was a bootleg liquid nitrogen tanker, or that we'd probably need a few well-shaded acres of Martian tundra to hide it, but hey, what are friends for?

"Sure," he groaned, "meet me at the Wet-Spot Cafe, day after tomorrow, 11:00 A.M. sharp." At this point the operator cut in.

"The cryogenic tank to which this call is being billed is a code three unit. The party placing this call has committed a solar felony. Please remain seated while --"

I leapt out of the seat just in time to have tungsten bars descend rapidly from the ceiling and through my pant-leg. Wearing nothing but a metal-mesh jacket and some rather risqué jockey shorts, I hurled headlong through the front door of the bar, and into what strangely resembled an empty solar-class liquid nitrogen tanker hold. With a roar I was thrust to the floor, and the curved walls seemed to curve even more as someone (of course) cut the lights.

My head hurt. Again. I'll spare you the descriptive phrases. Well, I was in some kind of ship, all right, but the hardwood floors hinted that it wasn't a nitrogen tanker on its way to Mars. The cases of rum stacked to the ceiling contra-indicated liquid nitrogen, also. I made my way topside, snagging a bottle on the way. The hull slapped the waves gently, rhythmically. Bahama blue skies and light whitecaps for miles. I closed my eyes and tipped back for a chug of some smooth Puerto Rican bootleg. Like a mother's milk after the past few days (or millennia, in this case). I opened my eyes, and, squinting against the sunlight, spotted a craft on the horizon. Great. Busted for a hold full of contraband booze that I didn't realise existed until ten minutes ago.

As the craft pulled alongside and the cop boarded, a smile crawled cleverly across my face. "Officer O'Leary" read his nametag. Only I could have the good fortune to run into an Irish incarnation of myself at a time like this. Before he could tug his hat brim and open his alcoholic mouth, I held out the bottle.

"Have a swig?" Boy did his alcoholic mouth open then.

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"Nice little boat ye got yerself there, son." He took another chug. The sight of myself in a vintage '26 cop outfit, talking with an Irish accent, caused an uncontrollable fit of manic laughter, which in turn propelled me overboard and well on my way to a lungful of manic, uncontrollable water. A small dolphin swam up to me, nose to nose and said, "Don't forget, life's a big bowl of..." He didn't get to finish his sentence, as I promptly clobbered him a good one on the (bottle) nose. It suddenly occurred to me that I didn't recall ever learning to swim. As things grew deeper and darker, I could've sworn I saw a small school of dolphins drifting by, pulling behind them, on fine silvery cords, a robed figure bearing a strange resemblance to -- naw, it couldn't be.

"Could I have another bloody Mary, please?" "But honey, you hardly touched your breakfast."

I was sitting in some 24-hour dive near the Martian polar cap trying to shake off some reality while banging out notes on my autobiography. My friend Arty Karma was supposed to meet me any minute, which, the way things had been going, could mean ten years ago on a different planet. I had just gotten rolling (with a little help from my 8th, 9th, or 10th bloody Mary) when Arty walked in and sat across from me.

"You look a bit frazzled, my friend."

I thought I was doing pretty well for someone who had hopped across the space-time continuum a dozen times in 24-hours with only ten cocktails for a chaser.

"Too much coffee, I guess," I offered.

He pulled my plate to his side of the table, absentmindedly forked around with the rubbery scrambled eggs.

"I've been thinking about this Marsh & Tundra art," he said. Something vague slithered through my thoughts about Martians and tongues. I ignored it. He continued:

"I think it's all a bit too Georgia O'Keefe-ish."

The frozen desert-scape of the third moon from Neptune flashed through my mind.

"I've been courting the idea of temporally projected holograms." Courting.

Something about a courtyard nibbled at my brain.

"I believe we could do a great deal to restore history to the sequence recorded in the Great Book." The "great book" happens to be T.T. Heindseitz Comprehensive History of Anthro-Linguistical Indeces of Civilised (clearly a misnomer) Entities, the most comprehensive anthro-linguistical history textbook in print as of 1980, which by some bizarre twist of fate, happened to be in Han Borslect's hand at the time of his and my hyper-reality-field accident. It is now enshrined in an elaborately guarded beach house in a location revealed to only a select few. So we're not about to tell you.

"If we project the appropriate holograms," he continued, "at the appropriate times," he paused, licking his lips, "we could alter the collective human-pneuma-as-manifestation-of-belief-system," he took a deep breath, "thereby correcting history, perhaps even at a reasonable price." Great. A temporally distorted art dealer (re-) re-shaping history...

"Uh, I dunno, " I said, gulped another bloody Mary, and passed out face-down in my hash browns. Images from my childhood passed through my head. My brothers engaging in a circle jerk; my mother kissing a strange man we were visiting; the smell of hay as, eyes closed, I rested my head on my sister's bare breasts..."

"Will you marry me?"

Now, it's one thing to engage in a little hanky-panky with a sibling, but marriage is out of the question.

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I opened my eyes intending to respond, to find a raven-haired beauty wearing a jeweled tiara gazing back at me. I eyed Arty Karma behind her, pouring more milk into the small bathing pool in which we lay. I could have sworn I saw something pinkish slide out of the bowl as well. Oddly, I didn't have a screaming mother of a headache. I looked into the woman's eyes, thoughtfully. "What?" I said, with great conviction.

"I said," she sighed, "will you marry me?"

Marriage, you must understand, is a concept I've never fully grasped -- even with a babe like Cleopatra. This was, in any case, an unusual turn of events. I must have done something quite impressive (something that was, at present, not springing to mind...) to have engendered a request that had such a ring of finality ...

I was about to excuse myself, babbling something about having a train to catch, when a small bottle-nosed dolphin poked its head up from the milk and said, "Look before you leap." I carefully considered his advice, and promptly leapt up to find my cranium embracing what felt like a large steel anvil. As interesting little points of light began to swirl before me, I looked up to see my friend Art smiling impishly, and, as if he thought this were an Ingmar Bergman film, he proceeded to fade to black.

The end of the dock swayed back and forth beneath my terrified eyes.

"One, two, three! "

Four full-grown men throwing a seven-year old into fifteen feet of water was my father's idea of a swim lesson. Oddly, I don't recall seeing him in a pair of swim trunks in the entire sixteen years I knew him. I do recall, however, that shortly after he died, my mother took me aside and told me some unsavoury tidbits about how she hated being banged up and making nine babies, and about how he had this strange thing growing in a rather private place. None of which was on my mind as I was propelled all helter-skelter into fifteen feet of beautiful blue, icy water. Good god, what kind of self-respecting being with a shred of survival instinct wouldn't figure out how to swim their way out of such a mess? Take a guess.

As my being drifted above the four full-grown men pounding my lifeless chest, it became apparent that I had taken on a rather dolphin-like form, and had a fine silvery cord around my snout. A blonde fellow holding a bottle of rum floundered by and punched me a good one, right in the blowhole.

"E. is a dolphin-head dolphin-head dolphin-head."

(From a favourite children's song of Arty Karma)

No, this ain't no regular blow hole. You can't imagine what it's like growing up with alabaster skin, a massive cranium, and eyes better suited to a fair-skinned cow. I became aware of my strange appearance at the age of twelve, when I began to attract strange nicknames like "Casper" and "Oreo-guts." I also seemed to have a knack for having my path intersect with high-speed ice balls, which seemed to manifest spontaneously next to my head, traveling at a speed of sixty-three point seven-four MPH. These were often accompanied by distant laughter, which I usually assumed to be auditory hallucinations, as the sound went quite nicely with the swirling patterns of colour and points of light I enjoyed upon impact. Large, hormonal adolescent males seemed to take quite an interest in me, also. They spent quite a bit of time realising their sadistic fantasies through my body, without so much as a masochistic wink as encouragement. I later realised this was a result of my then embryonic "star-quality," coupled with the symptoms, on the part of said

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males, of what I call the "Jodie Foster Syndrome." You know, that guy that tried to kill Ronny because he loved Jodie.

"Anybody ever tell ya look like..."

Choose one:

Rod Stewart ?

David Bowie ?

Gary Numan ?

Rudi Valentino ?

(The young) Fred Astaire ?

The lead singer from Oingo Boingo ?

At the age of sixteen I discovered mascara. It was love at first sight. After spending a couple of days fanning the flames of vanity before my mirror, I decided to try my new, and for once, intentional, social stigma on the general public. The reactions were as diverse as they were sexually stimulating. I spent the next several years in a sort of gender-blending bohemia, cafe-hopping and wondering, along with everyone else, what the hell I was all about, anyway...

Which reminds me of a girl I once knew. "Amazonian," though almost an apt description, doesn't quite cut the custard, in this case. If they have Amazon women on other planets, they probably know this chick.

We spent a lot of time doing drugs and crashing automobiles, as well as pushing the limits of tantric sexual experience. It was after an evening of this sort of relaxation that I seem to have dozed off watching videos of the evening's sensual (a euphemism) exploits. I awakened the following afternoon, nervous system throbbing, and shuffled my way to the loo. It was some time before I realised that the feeling that "something-doesn't-look-quite-right-about-me-today" was a result of the fact that someone had shaved my brow ridges, freeing them of all that annoying eyebrow hair. Somewhat disoriented, I made my way to the sleeping form of the most likely culprit. I called her name from the doorway.

"Charisse..."

No answer.

I made my way through the clutter to the bed.

"Chari-eeese."

Nothing.

I put my hand on her shoulder. Cold. Ick.

I fainted.

"Please extinguish all phlegmable materials, clear your throats and place them in an upchuck position, we are preparing to crash. Thank you for flying Trans Karma Airways, flight #444. "

I awakened in a cold sweat, with a vague sensation of having missed a connecting flight after a twelve-year layover. I looked at the clock. It was four-forty-four. I lay in the cool comfort of the waterbed, pondering its possible location. After a number of minutes of careful consideration and deliberate deductive reasoning, I came to a definitive answer -- I had no idea. I looked at the clock again. Four-forty-four. I must be dead. That's it! I woke up dead! Maybe I was dreaming. I hoped and prayed I was dreaming. Things were very still and quiet. And dark. Bordering on squishy. Oozy. Maternal.

Great.

I hadn't been born yet.

Did this mean I had another chance? To do things right? I doubted it. A rerun.

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As I prepared to erupt with a fetal scream, a small dolphin poked its head out of the waterbed. It opened its snout to speak.

"Don't forget --"

I raised an embryonic hand to clobber it a good one.

It ducked, said, "Gimme a chance to finish a sentence, for Chrissake!" I lowered my hand.

"Life's a bowl of milk! With a tongue!" it blurted, and swam into the sunset, laughing. As an afterthought, it looked back over its dorsal and said, "And time's an illusion." His last remark gave me an idea.

I located the digital clock next to the waterbed. It still read four-forty-four.

I pressed the "set" button. Things began to stir a bit. In fact, as the numbers progressed rapidly round and round, the bed began to alternate, all Murphy-like, from a vertical to a horizontal position. I was also growing larger by the minutes or day, as the case may be. Before I knew it, I was propelled down a slimy, narrow cavity into bright light. A hand slapped my butt. Things were moving at a stroboscopic pace. I suddenly realised I was still clutching the alarm clock, my finger on the "set" button. I released the button. By some stroke of infantile luck, I found myself, in normal time, fact-to-face with a massive bare breast.

"This must be my biological Mum," I thought to myself. I'd always wondered what she looked like. I tilted my head back for a look.

Wow.

What a beautiful piece of Jewry.

Kind of like a cross between Cleopatra and Nastasia Kinsky with a bit stronger nose. No wonder I'm such a looker. It occurred to me that there was perhaps something a bit unhealthy about clinging to your Mum's breast (biological or adoptive) thinking about what a babe she was. I pressed the "set" button again. The numbers began rolling; exponentially faster by the minute (subjectively, that is). It was like being in a galactic nightclub, only with each flash of the strobe lights, you were on a different planet. As things moved more and more quickly, everything coalesced into a steady golden light. I was hurling down what appeared to be an infinite tubular shaft of reality. A low hum began increasing in pitch, concurrent to a change in the light. First deepest blood red, through fiery orange, on through the spectrum, finally violet. The only sound, a barely audible, high-pitched "Eeeeeee." The tunnel ahead spread into a vaguely funnel-like shape as the light and sounds progressed to the ultra-sensory.

"Is this the funnel for God's flask of gin?" I thought to myself.

Then I was surrounded by blackest silence. I was certain that I was still moving; yet there were no reference points. Einstein would love it. A non-relative space.

After some non-time, I spotted a distant point of light. It was increasing in size. (Or was I shrinking?) It grew to a pale blue disk. Closer, larger, or was it just growing larger? No way to tell. As it filled my field of vision, it began to resemble Earth. I felt little wisps of breeze, the air growing more and more dense, until there was a gale force wind streaming by. Was it just growing larger and blowing wind at me, or was I falling toward it? I now appeared to be falling over a large body of water toward a beach on which there appeared to be a massive Greco-Roman temple. Was it simply growing larger? Or was I falling toward it? All doubt was erased, along with all consciousness, with a dull, sandy thud.

There once was a nuclear bomb that dreamed of being a bullet. "Why," said the other bombs, "would you want to be a bullet, when with your awesome power, you can kill millions at once?"

"I miss," said the bomb, "the personal touch."

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I awakened on a small wombat-skin rug. This I gathered from the presence of all the little wombat heads interspersed amidst the fur that comprised the bulk of the rug. It was a perfectly sunny, perfectly spring-like day, save for the echo of a dull, sandy thud rolling around inside my head. As my eyes gained some focus, I noticed an Einstein-esque sort of scientist-looking fellow across the room, sitting on a stone bench, with a very large book on his lap. Beyond him I could make out two figures framed by the columns of the Greco-Roman temple, which appeared to be where I chose to take a nap. Squinting a bit, I realised the two figures were my dear friends, Han Borslect and Arty Karma. I hadn't seen the two of them together in the same time and place in ages. Quite ecstatic to be amongst such fine company, I managed a cheerful "Ugh. "

The brainy fellow looked up from his book and over his spectacles.

"Our young friend appears to haff avakened," he offered over his shoulder. Art and Han paused in their chat and strolled leisurely in.

"E., so lovely to see you, and in such fine form I might add. " Art was always a real charmer. "Sorry I don't have a bowl of milk to offer," he added chuckling. "I see you've brought your alarm clock," Han said.

I looked down and, sure enough, in my right hand was an alarm clock. Although I was no longer holding the "set" button, the numbers were whirring around at a dizzying pace.

"My apologies, we seem to be forgetting our social graces," Han continued, "This is our esteemed scientist-friend, Dr. William M. Adambaum."

The good doctor took his hand from his teacup to offer a hearty handshake. "Pleese to meet you," he said.

"Dr. Adarnbaum," Han went on, "thinks he may have the solution to our little problem with time and the universe in general."

It was then that I noticed that Dr. "A-baum" was clutching the only copy of T.T. Heindseit' Comprehensive History of Anthro-Linguistical Indeces of Civilised Entities. "It hass somethink too doo, I tink," the doctor began, "witt der invention off der digital clock, coupled wit der fact dat der hyooman grace failt to exshterninate itself wit nuclear veppins. "

"Well,ain't that just the bee's knees,"I thought to myself. "The human race maintains some semblance of sanity while figuring out a nifty way to count the hours it lasts, and I wake up with a screaming mother of a headache on a new planet twice a day." I looked up to catch Dr. Adambaum removing his index finger from his right nostril. Wonderful. The fate of the universe rests on the shoulders (or wherever else he flicks it) of some nose-picking, myopic, atomic gearhead... As I began to sit up to voice some of these thoughts, I was knocked flat by the thundering echo of a dull sandy thud, which I had, until now, entirely forgotten was rolling around my head. I drifted into unconsciousness staring into the beautiful brown eyes of a wombat.

"If a sarcastic dolphin ever offers advice, take it."

"Very little is known about us dolphins, except we're a lot smarter than you, we're better swimmers, we love the smell of fish, and girls love us in a milk bath..."

I opened my eyes to find myself adrift on what appeared to be a vast ocean of milk. In the distance, I could make out large rose-tipped mountains on the shore. I looked at the sky to find a strange anvil-shaped object suspended above me. As I came to my senses, I realised I was up to my nostrils in a milk bath with a bare-breasted

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Cleopatra, and some jerk was holding an anvil over my head. The only thing missing was a tongue. I felt something strange slithering between my legs. I leapt up, this time heeding the dolphin's advice and dodging the anvil. I landed in the bath with a splash, face-to-face with Cleo. I couldn't help thinking of my meeting with my biological Mum. I looked down at her breasts. Yup. Spittin' image.

"I asked you a question!" she growled.

Oh yeah. The old "ball and chain" bit. For some reason the name "Tony" sprang to mind. What happened between Tony and Cleo, anyway? I damned myself for not paying more attention in history class. Oh, well. It's not very often that one has a chance to marry both Cleopatra and one's long-lost bio-Mum in one shot, so, what the heck -- roll with it.

I looked up from her breasts, gazed deeply into her eyes and said, "Sure."

I don't remember much after that, except some bizarre orgiastic bits with lots of milk-soaked bodies and dolphins, because at that point she summoned some schmuck named Artimus Karmabus, who brought us lots of booze and hooka pipes. I do vaguely remember drifting off with my face buried between Cleo's ample breasts, mumbling "Mommy, Mommy."

"Did I ever tell you I'm a witch from Mars?"

I looked up at my sister, past her open blouse and training bra.

Not hard to believe, considering I was seven and she was fourteen. I mean, what kind of Earthling sister would be seducing their brother, given the age spread? My siblings tried to convince me a lot of strange things. I pondered some of them as lay in the sweetly musty-smelling hay: When I was five, they made me bury some marbles, insisting that they would grow into beautiful marble trees. The next day, they took me out to show me some pathetic-looking branches stuck in the ground with marbles scotch-taped to kite twine dangling from the twigs. What pathetic imaginations. I went back up to my room to figure out the coefficient drag factors of each sibling, first as individual bodies, then as one mass duct-taped together. After determining that they would fall more slowly as individuals, I decided I would drop them from the World Trade Center, one by one, the first chance I got. Of course, this would be somewhat difficult -- it hadn't been built yet. Marble trees. Gimme a break. I believe this one of the first times. The math involved was a bit fatiguing, so I sleepily switched on the TV. "Flipper." A sickly, feverish discomfort came over me as the camera zoomed in on Flipper, who was saying something about life being a bowl of milk. I pressed the remote, but rather than the channel changing, the room changed. Flipper had taken on a sinister appearance, and was rambling about silver cords, and periwinkle light. I looked around. I appeared to be in a vaguely familiar rec-room. Ugh. I changed the channel. A dark stone courtyard. Again. A concentration camp. FLICK. A milk bath. FLICK. The Wet Spot. FLICK. An acropolis on a beautiful spring-like day. Art, Han, and Dr. A-baum were a freeze-frame. Flipper was still on the tube, smiling impishly, looking from one edge of the screen to the other.

"This is the place," he said. "Now plug in the alarm clock."

I looked at the clock. It read 4:44. Before listening to a suspicious Hollywood dolphin again, I decided to try something. I manually changed the channel on the TV. -- suddenly, I was a Nazi sergeant. FLICK. An emaciated Jew. FLICK. A baby. FLICK. A 1920s cop. I was getting nowhere, so I turned the channel back. Me again wearing a metal-mesh jacket and risqué jockey shorts, sitting on a wombat-skin rug. All right, already. I plugged in the alarm clock, abruptly ending the still quiet. Han, Art, and the doctor were all staring dumb struck, as if I had reappeared from nowhere. In fact, they seemed to be staring right through me. Looking behind me, I realised they

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were. Cleo was standing in her birthday suit, dripping milk. She hurled a bowl at them to break the spell -- causing them to suddenly acknowledge my and Flipper's existence. About to extend a "fine howdy-do," I was interrupted by the sensation of the rug beneath me being suddenly jerked away. I came to rest on my back staring up at Cleo wrapped in wombat.

Some people look good in anything.

I was about to comment on this as well, when a woman in a black robe stormed in from nowhere, a dolphin tucked under each arm, carrying a copy of Shirley MacLaine's *Out On A Limb* in her left hand and a martini shaker in her right, which brought to mind a period in my life which was all at once the most entertaining, and most detrimental time for me....

I somehow ended up bartending and playing doorman at a nightclub, which for legal reasons I will refer to as the "Bactine Buttrroom." Never have so few slept with so many in so short a period of time. I recall wallpapering my room with cocktail napkins and matchbooks that had girl's phone numbers' on them, girls with names like Suzi, and Muffy, and Roxanne -- why do all girls that hang out in bars have names like that? Is it some kind of complex self-esteem problem? I spent my days cocktailing with neurotic clubbies, smelling like lipstick, booze and leather. I learned the true meaning of the word "barfly." I came to understand people who have Bloody Marys for breakfast. I learned how to make a drink called a "screaming bloody orgasm." I experienced a lot of "screaming bloody orgasms." I had a lot of conversations over the bar which went something like:

GIRL: I'm not usually like this, but, E: But what?

GIRL: But will you kiss me?

(Big wet tonguing kiss)

GIRL: Wow, I thought you were gay.

E: Then why'd you ask me to kiss you? GIRL: Just to find out. E: So now what?

GIRL: You get off at two?

E: Looks like it, doesn't it?

My daydream ended with the dribbling sound of Shirley straining martinis. "Olives?" "Three please." I hadn't eaten since the two bites of egg at the Wet Spot. I tossed one down, just because. Just because there's no such thing as Tylenol X, and on top of a dull, sandy thud echoing around my head, I had one screaming mother of a headache.

"Another?"

"Yes, another fucking bloody screaming mother of a damn nasty, dull sandy thud echoing fucking headache," I blurted before I realised that Shirley was offering me another martini.

"Two, please," I offered apologetically. "Olives?"

"Three please."

"Shaken or stirred?"

"Actually, I'm a bit of both at the moment." "No, silly. The martini..." "Got a syringe?" "Unh-unh."

"Shaken, I guess."

The sharpest edges of my condition having softened a bit, I realised I had a few questions like, "Where are we?" and "Why Shirley?" and "Why Flipper?" and, just in general, "Why?" We at that point entered a lengthy, boring discussion about particles vs. waves, the impact the observer has on any given phenomena and that sort of

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thing. Aside from reaching the conclusion that we'd all come off the hinges a bit, bringing reality with us, I concluded also that I was very sleepy. I drifted off into dreams of pendulums and soothing voices.

"You are becoming more and more relaxed ... you are at peace and part of you is going to sleep ... you are going back in time, to infancy.... remember?"

Remember!?! Boy, did I remember! After going through the whole experience an infinite number of times, I was really hoping to shake the whole thing off. As luck would have it though, I went to a hypnotist when I was twenty-eight or so, and I could therefore live certain parts of my life sideways, forwards and backwards, as well as multi-temporally. All of which is really ginchy if you lived a full and happy life, but shit, if you lived in some nightmarish kind of karma hotel, where all your siblings were characters from your tortured unconscious, placed in your drama only for effect, well, it was no picnic on the fucking bloody Seine, was it?

"Do you remember your brother, Israfel?" Did I remember my brother Israfel...! Images of an impossibly high-flying kite filled my mind's eye. We had taken a conventional paper kite on a cool, windy gray fall day, and rendered it invisible by simply feeding it spool after spool of twine. After admiring our simple, yet phenomenal feat with dreamy unthinking eyes for some immeasurable period of time, it snapped. Not just the twine, but the moment as well. We traced its umbilicus across country fields, and never found it. With an odd absence of frustration, and a certain satisfaction with the lost and unfathomable, we went for a beer. (Well, I was seven, so I had a coke.)

Israfel died, perhaps suicidally, by driving a spanky new '69 Mustang in front of a couple hundred tons of freight- train a year later. My mother often said I reminded her of him... is that a good thing or a bad thing? I always figured we were just badly manifested fragments of the same self.

"Did you love him?" Did I love him...

We had a very large house, with nine bedrooms, two stair- cases, and lots of dark nooks and crannies. Israfel's favorite game was an interesting variant of "hide-and- seek", in which he would hide, but the only real seeking going on was my seeking a syringe of adrenaline to restart my heart each time he leapt screaming, from some suspicious corner, and ran away. Did I love him?

"Do you remember the dark? The long, warm dark?"

I think he was trying to remind of the womb, but I kept recalling a long string of sleepless nights as an eight- year-old, when I listened, on a very cheap stereo, to the soundtracks from the movies "2001, a Space Odyssey", and "Born Free".

What a weird childhood...Born Free--give me a break

"The dark, the long warm dark..."

Look, I'll tell ya about something long, warm, and dark, but I think our session's over, pal." Some part of me remembered that I was back on the acropolis

While the martinis were having a little soiree in my digestive tract, I was busy falling back on the wombat-skin rug, with a dull, furry thud. "What's your problem?" Shirley had stopped shaking her martinis to express what seemed more curiosity, than concern. After enjoying a heartfelt, well-intoned and enunciated groan, I managed to open an eye to stare her down while I offered an explanation:

"For the past seventy-two hours, I've traveled three-thousand years, an infinite number of non-light years, been just about every historical or fictional character that's ever existed, excepting, perhaps, Billy pilgrim and Kilgore Trout--- I think I've

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a right to be just a li-ttle bit grumpy..."

Frankly this whole acropolis scene wasn't doing much for me. Having spent a major portion of my refracted lives wandering around a variety-of ruins, ancient and personal, I was, well, a bit beyond bored to tears with the whole thing. Indeed, I daresay I couldn't give a flying fuck at a rolling Stonehenge about solving this silly dissolution of the space-time continuum--I mean the whole situation was the result of someone else's actions, wasn't it? If Han hadn't connected that one little wire at that one little point in time, I'd still be sitting peacefully in the twenty-third century, picking my nose and pondering fracktails, or cocktails or whatever. Which is a bit of a mind-fuck in itself--mired in your relatively inconsequential thoughts as you hurl through the cosmos at tens of thousands of miles an hour, with your experience of it all as an "end-user" being that of sitting on the flat earth, feeling a bit lonely somehow.

As I sat there on the wombat-skin rug, on the floor of that cold stone temple, it occurred to me that when I killed myself, I should do it with a gun so that if there were a god, my ghost would have something to track him down and shoot him with. What a cruel fuck.

Right between the eyes... I swear to bullets, won't he look like a Hindu when I'm done.

I'll get him, and ...

Scene: A large flat expanse of grass in a small college town in the Midwest ...

"Gee, E., I wonder who put that lonely little daisy in the middle of all this grass?"

"God did, mommy."

My mum always wanted me to be a priest. Little did she know that at the age of three, I already felt like I was living life backwards, no big surprises, least of all how to acknowledge the cosmic consciousness--most religions already gave me the creeps. Even as a three-year-old, I seemed to recognise them as the perverse contrivances they are. I mean c'mon-a being expansive enough to create a universe like this isn't going to care if you eat fish on Fridays ...

So regardless of having been "born with the things that I know", my mother tried to expose me to a lot of "culture" -- "culture" being, as we all know, something that you do with bacteria and cottage cheese. So here I am, some kind of would-be poison priest with no disciples, large curd. Which reminds me of an ancient parable:

"What is the sound of a priest with no disciples?" "My cocktail tinkling."

I must have talked to myself a lot as a kid. I had no audience then, either, even when my siblings were around. That was solitude of a different kind, being surrounded by nine uncomprehending dolts who were supposed to be playing "support unit" But seriously, I grew up on what had previously been a farm. Empty barns, big, big house, one hundred acres with a stream and woods...

And forty acres of lawn.

Naturally, I developed an intense allergy to grass. C'mon-FORTY ACRES???

I was definitely not lawn care material - sex in the barns with sis, routine psychological warfare with my brothers, fine - but LAWN CARE??

I don't think so.

"How'd ya like the business enda this thing stickin' outa your back?" (My sister having a chat with me over a butcher knife.)

Now granted, your husband leaving you, your best friend offing themselves and

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losing your job are all good reasons to be upset, but waving a knife at your kid brother is a bit drastic, don'tcha think? I put up with a lot of this kind of crap for a long time. I think my siblings were all just jealous because they knew, on some level, that they were all just Catholic accidents, whereas I was an intentionally procured treasure from the adopt-shop. Which might go a long way towards explaining my mum's propensity for sharing her deepest, darkest secrets with me ... To this day, those little glass-enclosed snow scenes that you shake up to watch the snow swirl will give me a vague, queasy sort of feeling. You see, one day, when I was about three, my mum took me along while she visited some man she was having an affair with. She bought me one (a snow scene, not a man) on the way home. I remember playing with it as we drove through a down-river suburb of Detroit. The Girl from Ipanema was on the radio as we passed the touristy totem pole that marked the center of town. Twenty years later, I attended a wedding in this same suburb with a friend. It was snowing as we passed the totem pole. My friend, who bore a striking resemblance to my mother, just happened to be humming "The Girl from Ipanema". I looked up at her red hair (my mum's hair was red) and with a dizzy, swirling feeling of being trapped inside a massive snow-scene with my three-year-old eyes peering in, I passed out.

"It was a nasty habit I picked up at 'Second- to-Nuns', a clerical garment re-sale shop in downtown Bangkok." (E., responding to queries regarding his spontaneous flights over the acropolis wearing black robes and floppy white hats.)

I opened my eyes. I appeared to be suspended in a yellow void. I detected a rubbery, slightly slimy substance against my face. Blinking, my eyelashes moved very slowly, as if they were dragging through egg-yolk. I licked my parched lips. Hash browns. I I could swear I tasted hash-browns... I realised as I lifted my head that I'd been sleeping face down in my breakfast. Artie Karma was nowhere in sight, though this was definitely the "Wet Spot Café". As my world swirled dizzily about me, I reached out to snag a passing Bloody Mary that was orbiting just beyond my breakfast plate. This put the brakes on a bit. "Excuse me..." A gangly, balding blond fellow in tattered army fatigues and a woman's fur-fringed jacket was standing over me, looking a bit perplexed.

"Excuse me," he repeated, falteringly; "are you E., the notorious alcoholic time traveler and autobiographer?"

I pondered his question for a moment. Was I? If I were, was he with some government agency? I decided to take a chance. If I were a wanted man, the worst that could happen would be temporary incarceration as a Martian diamond-mining slave - nothing any worse than waking up half-dressed on some distant frigid planet with a screaming mother of a headache and no real understanding of how I got there ...

"Uh, I guess so." I offered, and ordered another Bloody Mary. He clumsily slid into the chair opposite me.

"Hi. I'm Billy Pilgrim, I think, but even if I'm not, Kurt Vonnegut sent me to ask you what happened to your storyline, and whether or not you'd like to borrow a couple of characters to set things back on track..."

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath, considering the offer. I hadn't even figured out what Shirley was up to yet. I opened my eyes. In my peripheral vision, I could've sworn on a stack of Korans that I saw a figure with two heads gulping martinis and sitting with a slovenly looking fellow wearing a tattered bathrobe. I turned to look. They disappeared. Not my problem, I guess.

"Do you think he could spare Slartibartfast for a quick chapter or two? He makes lots

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of unthinkable things quite acceptable, and could probably wrap up all the loose ends in a paragraph or so."

Billy furrowed his brow and pulled a small, weathered memo pad from his fatigues. He riffled through the pages for a moment.

"Uh, gee," he said, relaxing his perplexed brows into a sort of 'gosh, gee-whiz' look.

"I'm afraid", he continued, "that he's a Frederick Adams character. If you're interested, though, I think I just saw Arthur Dent and Zaphod Beeblebrox out of the corner of my eye, but they were being 'Someone Else's Problem', so I wouldn't look at them too directly. I could still see them in the corner of my eye, but decided to leave them there.

"Never mind, I'll fix things up myself," I said.

"So how are things in Dresden? Seen Kilgore lately?" Billy shifted uncomfortably in his seat.

"Oh, the place always seems in a shambles when I'm there, and Kilgore, well, Kurt never let me meet him. I did get a bit-part in some second-rate novella called 'This Man will Self- Destruct in Ten Seconds', though." "That was mine."

"And some would-be pop-star used my name for his stage-persona." "That would be me."

"Oh." Billy said, dejectedly, and de-manifested slightly faster than his tri-focals, which disappeared with a subdued 'pop'.

"How many angels, can fit on the head of a pin?" "Depends on how big the pin is, stupid ... " (Frank and Shirley, chatting on the grassy knoll by the acropolis.)

Dr. Adambaum was picking his nose thoughtfully in the corner as he pored over T.T. Heinseit'z' "Comprehensive History of Anthro-Linguistic Indices of Conscious Entities". The fruits of his excavations he flicked into the three-foot pile over his left shoulder.

"So let me get this straight," Han asked, with vague unease - "Light is neither waves nor particles? It's metaphysical excrement?"

"A sort of photo-fecal residue?" Artie offered.

"I wonder what they use for toilet paper?" I managed, between headache throbs.

"Kodak Tri-X, 36 Exposure," Shirley interjected, "more martinis, anyone?"

What a dumb question.

After a couple of hearty chugs from the martini pitcher

I was ready to grapple with just about any absurd concept this nose-picking, neural nightmare was ready to dish out (or flick out, as the case may be.)

"Somehow, I can't imagine angels shitting," I said.

I closed my eyes, trying to picture it. Images of radiant winged figures, swathed in golden light, squatting and plopping turds on the fleecy white clouds. It just didn't click. High above me, I heard a whistling, roaring sound, growing in intensity. A flailing winged figure was hurling rapidly toward our quiet acropolis. With a noise something like "spluck", he landed in the fruits of Dr. Adambaum's proboscal pursuits. His impact was followed immediately by that of several irregular brown blobs. They went something like "splock-splock-splock."

It was my friend Frank James, looking somehow all fallen-angelish. He stood up, brushing himself of the boogies and doo-doo, shaking his crumpled wings.

"Ahem," he said, presently, "Anybody got a martini?"

Shirley went to work. As Frank gathered his wits, he spotted me sitting on the wombat skin rug.

"Well, well, if it isn't my delightfully deviant dear friend, Dr. Gray..."

He extended a feces-encrusted hand.

"Uh, sorry Frank, I've got olive juice all over my hands just now, but, hey! How the heck are ya? I don't think we've crossed paths since that brawl at the 'Homodome',

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back in '21"

I considered giving him an ol' buddy kind of hug, thought better of it.

"So dang, you ol' diamond-dog, what ever did happen to you that night?"

"Well," he began, adjusting his panty hose, "this post-industrial neo-nazi boytoy invited me back to enjoy the reamifications of a ride in his ramjet, and just as we were entering the stratosphere, both meteorologically and metasexually, I had a sort of religious experience."

"Not atypical," I offered.

"Well, this was highly unusual, actually. Just at the point of orgasm, I found myself hurled down this shaft of progressing bands of coloured lights, not unlike the dance-floor at he Homodome, in fact. Then everything went black. For a moment I thought maybe- I'd passed out on the receiving end of a 'glory hole' at the 'dome. Then I realised I was falling toward this place."

"Where'd ya get the ginchy wings?"

"Uh, perhaps a side-effect of the whole phenomena?" "Maybe. You haven't seen my kite, have you?" "Huh?"

"Never mind."

I lay back on wombat to ponder things a bit. I had this eerie feeling that the stage was being set for some momentous dialogue or something. All these people from my Twentieth-century memories ... Frank was always quite a character: concert pianist, master chef, walking encyclopedia, flaming-gay guru; sort of like a Bhudda-gone-bad. He could've been anything, but wasn't. I always thought of him as a swirling mass of karmic debris. A page from William Burroughs' scrapbook. And here he was. Shirley handed him a martini.

"Anybody got, a roll of Kodak Tri-X, 36-Exposure?"

Artie conjured one from his folio. Frank pulled some film from the cartridge. In a blaze of white light, he made the fecal matter covering his body disappear. Hmm... Dr. Adambaum gave me one of those "I-hate-to-say-I-told-you-so" looks over his spectacles. Behind him, on the T.V., I eyed a commercial for the 'Wet Spot' cafe:

"Fridays and Sundays at the Wet-Spot, groove to the astro-lounge nod-bop, Gaia-Now interspecies communication riffs of none other than Artie Karma! Free women and cheap drinks from seven a.m. to eleven p.m., cheap women and free drinks eleven p.m. to seven a.m., and always more under-cooked hash browns than any self-respecting Martian could bear to eat..."

As the camera panned the restaurant, I noticed a gangly blonde fellow in a woman's fur fringed coat, sitting with some disheveled drunk, the back of whose head bore a strange resemblance to my own-

"I see the back of your fucking head on film more often than I see the front of Dan Rather's."

Artie was drinking a glass of milk. He wiped the milk- moustache from his upper lip, sniffled.

"Who in the name of Isis is "Dan Rather'?"

Cleo tugged at her share of the wombat-skin rug, covering an exposed left breast.

"A twentieth-century newscaster." I explained.

"Twenty centuries after what? What's a rotting 'newscaster, anyway?"

People that look good in anything often look better when they're angry. Cleo was looking pretty tasty right about now. "Would someone turn off that blasted T.V.?"

Han's temporal lobes were pulsing slightly. Before I could stop her, Shirley had nudged the 'off' button with the nose of one of her dolphins.

In a pulsating rainbow vortex, we were whirled away into a collective non-conscious

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state. I could feel our individual minds superimposed on each other. Dr. Adambaum's baroque intricacy of mathematical thought; Artie's cash register changing, Shirley's vague metaphysical meandering; Cleo's anger at being treated like something less than royalty; Han's images of breasts... wait, those breasts look familiar-hey! Those are Cleo's breasts! - Before I could voice my dismay, everything stopped swirling rainbow-ly. We were at the Wet-Spot, in the cocktail lounge, our drinks already before us.

"You can pick your friends, and you can pick your nose, but you can't pick your friend's nose."  
(Dr. Bill N. Adambaum, in response to queries regarding his compulsive nose picking.)

Dr. Adambaum's occasionally (whenever his finger was blocking a nostril) nasal voice droned on as I sipped my cocktail. I was drinking a 'Big Blue'- a delicious blend of blue Curacao, blueberry juice, and rocket fuel, kept well-mixed by the tiny genetically-engineered dolphins swimming lazily amongst the ice cubes.

"Zo, eet seems dat dare iss a cone-ekshun between der tellur-vishuns, der alarm clock, and E.'s cone-sump-shun off der booze. He paused, staring thoughtfully into his Martian beer.

"Een un hyper-thetty-cool re-allurty, all iss posser-bull, und dare-for must be."

Han stopped drooling over the waitresses long enough to speak: "You mean E. has to quit drinking to straighten this mess out?" This perked my ears right up too. I flicked my cocktail straw from my drink, downed the rest of it, and stormed out of the cafe, dragging Cleo and a wombat-skin rug. "Where are we going?" she shrieked.

"Clothes shopping!", I muttered, as I proceeded to walk through the plate-glass of the front door.

"This is one confrontation you cannot escape..." (Shirley M., at the 'Wet-Spot', either referring to birth, or the conversation at hand- it was not clear in the transcript)

I opened my eyes. Far below, I could see a beautiful swirling ocean. A dolphin leapt out of the water, paused in mid-air to give me a Bronx cheer, and fell back to the water with a splash. I then became aware of the cocktail straw in my mouth. I took a slurp.

Thus refreshed, I sat up and entered a lengthy discourse regarding how little my liver gave a shit about the shape of things, talking dolphins, multiple orgasms, the gross interplanetary product, Artie Karma's cholesterol level, concentration camps, mass-murder, the cost of oil in Arabia, waves versus particles, the dualistic nature of the universe, the colour of your hair, what you think of my writing style, the rain-forests, the problem of evil, the smell of my breath, how many angels fit on the head of a pin ---I paused somewhere around angels and pins for a couple of chugs from my 'Big Blue' ---Martian tongue-art, graham-crackers, and milk, every day, graham-crackers. And milk, sex-ed, time-travel, childhood trauma, adoption, T.T. Heinseitz, the excessive consumption of alcohol ...

Here, I paused, realising I was due for another 'Big Blue'. I concluded with:

"I just wanna go clothes shopping."

I'd been wearing the same damn metal-mesh jacket and risqué jockey shorts for ninety-six hours, give or take a time warp. Yup, some fresh skivvies, a hot bath, and I'd be right as rain. I looked down at the genetically engineered dolphins, which were supposed to be garnishing my drink. They weren't so much garnishing, as flailing. Or floundering. Wallowing.

A sad state of affairs ...

It all reminded me of some other sad state of affairs regarding dolphins and flailing. I

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stirred the ice. In my current sad state of affairs, this was a mistake. The swirling drew me hypnotically downward. Falling, falling.

Endless blue. Light whitecaps for miles... Down, down.

I have a vague recollection of a dull, wet, furry thud. I opened my eyes to find a fellow with a Roman-bust hairdo extending a hand to help me up. I hesitated.

"What?" I said, feeling him out.

"You don't look well, my friend," he said. "My name's Tony." He smiled. "Come, have a glass of boar-bladder wine with my friend and me."

What's to lose? He helped me up.

We trudged across the furry, squishy island. Where the hell were we? A geyser spouted lazily in the distance. As we approached his soggy, scraggy-haired friend, he offered some insight:

"This is my friend, Jonah. He's kind of quiet, and when he does talk, says rather silly things. Just ignore it."

Jonah clarified:

"Hi. Ever been intimate with blubber?"

I could tell Jonah was a real social mover. Tony grabbed me by the elbow-

"You haven't seen a raven-haired beeyoot with bazoombas about like so, have you?"

He held his cupped hands out to indicate size and shape.

"Hmm," I said, buying time. I wasn't about to tell him we were back at the 'Wet-Spot', sharing a wombat-skin rug. Tony and Cleo. What happened between them, anyway? I hated history. No small wonder. Out of the corner of my eye, I spied a red and white-striped pole extending into the heavens. I made my break, splush-splush-splushingly. I nearly skinned myself alive on the small icebergs surrounding the island, but made it to the pole and shimmied myself into consciousness and back to the 'Wet-Spot'.

Nineteen-ninety. Liquor sales were brisk, antacid sales were brisk, suicide prevention was a booming, if only marginally successful business. The pace of twentieth century technological developments was by far out-stripping the race's ability to integrate them into everyday life. No, the twentieth century wasn't going out with a bang- it was going out with a burp and an anxiety attack--So much for the 'Industrial Age'--make way for the 'Pharmaceutical Age'.

I was biding my time 'til my next time-hop by dispensing government-controlled poisons (cocktails) in a Chinese restaurant. ("You rike nuzzer stawbelly dakilly?") It was a quiet Sunday night. I'd been working at the place for about six months, so I pretty much knew the routine. I was distractedly flipping channels on the T.V.-the usual fare- "Flipper reruns, Shirley MacLaine movies and whatnot, when I heard a ruckus approaching from the kitchen. Ruckus, hell- it was a veritable melee- twenty Chinese chefs burst from the kitchen and chased a robed figure through the bar, waving meat clevers and yelling "Fluck you-fluck you-fluckyou!"

One of them stopped at the bar, gave me a perplexed look and said:

"So solly! long nahvoo!"

I had just about had it up to my larynx with all these characters from other novels creeping into my storyline. I leaned forward with great intent, elbows on the bar, staring down the chef:

"Singapore sling' sushi-breath?" He gave me a perplexed look. "No munny, no hunny!"

He smiled a toothless grin, obviously proud of his extensive vocabulary and command of the English language. "You want some fortune cookie nookie?"

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He nodded eagerly. "Okay!Okay!What I do?" I suavely examined my fingernails.

"You walk up to woman..." I began, "Yeah-yeah?"

..."jump on leg and say: 'me pin-dick! me pin-dick!'"

He smiled knowingly.

"Make chicky hot, no?"

"You bet not."

"Bet! Me like bet!"

At this point Cleo walks in, dressed in wombat. The eager-to-breed Chinese munchkin straddles her leg and starts humping, yelling "Me pin-dick! Me pin-dick!" Cleo looks down, disdainfully. "Undoubtedly."

She backhands him across the bar, and into unconsciousness. Now it was my turn.

"How in Hades could you leave me in a dive bar on Mars in the twenty-third century with a bunch of aphysical misfits, wearing nothing but a wombat-skin rug?" I pondered her question. Did I somehow give the impression that I was in control of the events at hand? Was the 'Wet-Spot' really such a dive? If so, why did so many cool people hang out there? Should I tell her about Tony and Jonah in the cocktail glass? Was this all really happening? I snapped out of my fugue-state, looked up at her tentatively.

"Did I ever tell you that you remind me of my biological mum?"

She softened a bit at this. The timing of the delivery of my next phrase was essential, I paused perfectly.

"Let's just go shopping and forget the whole thing."

Before she could muster an argument, I grabbed her by the wombat and headed for the door. Just as we were making our exit, a matching pair of very substantial woks clobbered us over the head. As things went dark, I dreamt I was falling down an infinite corridor of doors to different chinese hells: The hell of quadrapalegics with itchy crotches ... The hell of buggers in your nose at formal dinners ... The hell of turnpikes with no rest-stops ...

Let's see,door number one? Door number two? I decided to try door number 444--an interminably long walk, but I thought it might be worth it. Reaching the door, I gently grasped the knob, and with a flick of the wrist, pushed and peered inside. A writhing mass of sweat-gleaming bodies. The aroma of sex, uric acid, longing ... no one noticed my presence. I gently closed the door. The corridor stretched forever in either direction- a spotless, gleaming, institutional avenue of doors for days. Door number 447 ... I flipped it open, letting it bounce on its hinges. Millions of lost souls, gluttonously munching on everything in sight. All manner of hors d'oeuvres, party snacks, trailmixes, pupus ... A beautiful young girl with a smile-lined face dripping with cracker-crumbs and spinach-dip paused mid-munch with a fistful of Oreo™ cookies:

"Hungry?"

I allowed a pregnant pause.

"Thanks, I drank lunch an hour ago."

I didn't bother closing the door.

The hell of "Those Who Hunger, and for What, They Know Not."

On a golden-fringed, fleecy cloud:

Sam and Izzy are bent genuflectually over a very micro-soft computer ...

Izzy: "Yup, I've gott it, I've gott it..." Sam: "Sorry, early twentieth century

Freudian pun there-you've gott it?" Izzy: "Yeah, that line that used to read "What are you hungry for, when you don't what you're hungry for? Now it peeks at line 117,604,600, where it says: 'Somethin' sittin' on a ritz'."

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"Could I interest you in a pupu?"

My dear friend Frank James has a way of turning up in the oddest places, politely.

"Well, after an interminably long walk through Chinese hells, ya know-what the heck-got any California rolls?"

Frank tussled his wings a bit, cleared his throat, and grew a third arm, bearing a tray of sushi.

"Thanks, Jimmy. Hey. Two questions: Have you been up to door number 447?"

He rolled his eyes thoughtfully to the left.

"Yes. In fact, I prepared a delightful tibeeshun hors d'oeuvre tray, goat bits and the works."

"Yeah, well, they're eatin' Oreos™ now, and, question-wise, number two..."

"Mmm-hmm...?"

"Two-ay: Do you realise they're talkin' trash about you back at galactic central? And,

Two-bee: How the fuck do I get out of here and back to the 'Wet-Spot'?"

Black. Fetid slithery oily body black. I would've felt desperate and alone, save for the four breasts, two buttocks, three penises, and two-and-a-half faces pressing against my asphyxiated flesh. Oh Calcutta ...

I had asked Frank how to get back to the 'Wet-Spot', and he had related to me some Tibetan chant requiring wild finger gesticulations and a rather silly dance, hopping on one foot. And here I was, in Calcutta. I reversed the finger motions and the chant, which, sung backward, sounded something like "Good Vibrations". (Beach Boys, c.1965.)

Three weeks later, with 'Flipper', in a bare white room somewhere...

"E., what's the problem? You're always complaining that you'd like a little more time to yourself..."

"Yeah, but this is a bit extreme, don'tcha think?" Flipper backstroked a bit, thinking.

"Perhaps, E., but you have done some of your best writing here..."

"Listen, dick-nose, three weeks alone with you in a bare white room kinda stimulates the imagination, ya know? But who gives a dolphin shit-I can't incorporate it into the story-"

"How come?"

"This last paragraph I wrote on the wall says so..." "Oh."

I put down my pen, so we could talk, man to dolphin.

"Ya see, that's the real problem-you actualise one paradox, and they start popping up all over the bloody place." Flipper emitted what appeared to be a sneeze from his blow-hole.

"What we've gotta do", I continued, "is figure out where it all began to unravel."

I slipped into one of my dramatically useful fugue states, imagining god sitting high on a throne of light, wearing a cardigan which was slowly unraveling at the bottom.

"I think you and Han have something to discuss." Flipper interrupted my reverie.

"E., pick up the remote, press 'rewind', and don't release the button until the digital display on the monitor reads 1997."

I had learned by now to heed dolphin wisdom.

I did as he said, and the rhythmic whirring-by of the digits lulled me into a dreamy state. After three weeks in a bare white room with a dolphin, I was especially susceptible to these. Images of the Acropolis, Cleo, the 'Wet-Spot', Artie, Frank James, a bowl of milk (with a tongue); all echoed through my head. None of them

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with a 'thud', dull or otherwise. When I came to, I was sitting in a very sparse, very Japanese-looking apartment. It probably looked this way because it was very Japanese, being as it was that it was in Japan. Outside the very Japanese-looking window, I could see the very Japanese-looking neon-night skyline of Yokohama. A very Japanese-looking woman shuffled very Japanese through the room, apparently unaware of my existence. Or maybe she always averted her eyes at the sight of blonde boys wearing nothing but metal-mesh jockey shorts and weathered leather jackets- who knows?

Presently, Han walked in, looking a bit silly in a black silk kimono get-up.

He dropped his teacup.

The little woman shuffled back in and began mechanically cleaning up the black and red Mikasa shards. His hand still appearing to encircle the teacup, which was no longer there, Han managed a syllable:

'E?"

"Numero ichi, in the flesh-let's have a chat, eh? Maybe some tea, or Suntory, or both..."

"The rain-forests are dead, Nagasaki fills my head,  
All the bombs you store in Guam Should be green things instead..."

The Japanese are not noted for their ability to create rhymes in English.

A crowd of "Green-Decade" protesters had amassed outside the flat, fifteen stories below, waving banners and passing out flyers printed on un-recycled paper, presumably to interrupt our conversation. We pressed our noses greasily to the very tiny, very Japanese window to witness the scene far below. Soon the police came, and the protesters hopped into their late-model BMW's and Mercedes, sign-less, godless, and meaningless.

I had intended to turn to say something to Han when I realised that perhaps I had been "Mickey-Finned" by the Suntory, or tea, or both.

I watched the neon-night of Yokohama blurring through my nose-grease trail as I slid down the glass to a cold, black, ceramic, decidedly un-thud-like rendezvous of face and floor.

Bangkok, City of Lice. I made my way through the throng of twelve-year-old Vietnamese boy-toy/walking glory holes to the dream-club of my temporally distorted, time-ripped mind ...

Of course she was there.

A slightly reduced Amazonian, capable of castrating with her privates only, no scalpel, several men, while entertaining hundreds undulously, keeping several legal matters in litigation forever, contemplating the nature of reality, and all the while keeping a warm spot in her heart for me.

Fuck you, Cleo.

The opium haze swirled about my head, not unlike time-space vortexes, of which we've all, I'm sure, heard enough. I looked down at the baggage tag attached to my shoulder bag, never mind the trunk I was sitting on, the trunk which Han had apparently bogged me down with as he stuck me on a plane, quaintly checking me in as "Finn, Mickey".

I just needed some reassurance as to where I was. The tag read "BKK". Oh yeah. I was in Bangkok. Watching my "Most-Favoured-Nation-Status" girlfriend exposing orifices even I hadn't seen to a bunch of "I wish I were not of this world" tourists. They had nothing to worry about on that count.

Just as I'd settled back on my trunk, contents unknown, resigned to the fact that I was, in fact, in Thailand, c.1990, some piece of pink-faced, flatulent trailer-park

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scum stood up at a nearby table and offered:

"Those er sum reeely swell jah-kee shorts yer warin!" I pondered his pustulence for a moment and replied. "Thanks."

I still had this incredible urge to shop.

Try to imagine wearing the same metal-mesh knickers for three thousand years.

I was going shopping.

As I rose, toting my trunk and shoulder-bag, so did Mr. Pillsbury-trailer-park-doughboy. He followed me through the mess of tables toward the exit. Aside from "hotel-room, need to sleep", the only thought going through my head was: "Did this guy really travel ten-thousand miles for white ass?" So I decked him. Didn't take much effort. He went down easily, sprawling across a table of opiated Singaporean tourists.

You know, Bangkok bouncers, though not ineffective, are not indiscreet, either.

Slight of size; maybe mind as well, they do their job unnoticed.