

The Ball Washer

Lance Manion

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Smashwords Edition

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ALSO BY LANCE MANION

Merciful Flush

Results May Vary

- Introduction -

You cheap bastard. Chances are pretty good you've never read one of my books before but, as soon as I release one that is free, here you sit reading away on my dime. You almost deserve the stupidity that follows.

What you don't realize is that you've walked into a trap. You see if you're one of those people who look at the magazines populating the little racks above the candy while checking out at the grocery store and get the feeling that you crash landed on this planet then you might actually enjoy some of the stories in this book. If you get the urge to hoist the trembling fist at the seemingly innocent publications dedicated to showcasing winning smiles and vapid dramas then you'll probably enjoy a lot of them. If you are constantly filled with the urge to drive your thumbs into the eye sockets of the empty-headed whore-of-the-month featured on the cover ... now we're talking.

Don't get me wrong though, I am not looking to assemble an audience of purely outcasts and misfits. Generally those people are creepy and have dubious personal hygiene. I'm looking for the almost-normal out there. The goal being to stimulate their inner-weirdness so I can feel better about the dumb stuff going on between my own ears.

So I can feel like it's not just me.

Plus, the trap I mentioned earlier is to get you interested in my writing so you'll cough up for my other books. To do that it helps if you have the ability to get a job and blend in with the rest of the glossy-magazine-buying population.

Sorry for all the hyphenated words.

I included a few more stories in this book than usual but as it's free you can't really complain too much if you have to slosh through a few boring and/or stupid ones. Whatever happens from here on out, you're getting your money's worth.

the ball washer

Travel always seems to leave me feeling a bit out of sorts. Checking into a hotel that had the word 'value' in the name didn't help. On the way to my room I walked through an odor that reminded me somehow of the final apocalyptic throwdown between good and evil if, instead of the battle taking place between the forces of good and evil, it was the smell of urine and disinfectant facing off. The stink was quite formidable. The room, of course, had the requisite amount of mold and peeling wallpaper but the cherry on top was when I went to brush my teeth I found a pubic hair in the sink.

The sink.

From the moment I entered the room I had braced myself for pubic hairs to be coating the tub and toilet seat but the sink? There was only one inescapable conclusion to be reached: the previous occupant of the room had been a ball washer.

Reeling a little from that realization I went out to grab some lunch. After spending fruitless minutes holding up the beef 'n cheddar that was handed to me and comparing it to the picture of the beef 'n cheddar as presented in the picture only a few feet over the head of the disinterested cashier at the nearby Arby's, I became aware that nobody save myself was interested in the striking difference between the two sandwiches. However much I raised my voice or presented my beef 'n cheddar for closer inspection the only thing that greeted me was the apathy of both the Arby's managerial team and the customers waiting behind me. Where was the pride in their product? Where was the outrage from the consumer?

I retreated to the men's room to splash a little water on my face and regain my composure. Even though my beef 'n cheddar looked nothing like the Arby's marketing department promised I was still hungry and remained a sucker for their zesty signature sandwich.

That's when I saw it.

In the sink.

A black n curly.

I had once again stumbled upon evidence of a ball washer. In the men's room of a fast food establishment no less. Have people no shame at all? My face unsplashed, I was forced to backpedal out of the very place I had backpedalled into and out to my waiting meal. I ate uncomposed.

Which brings me to dinner. And although there were many hours between dinner and my misadventure at lunch I was still noticeably uncomposed as I walked into the Kentucky F Chicken. I say F because I think the folks at Kentucky F Chicken believe that if the American chicken-buying public hear the word *fried* these days they will flee terrified into the streets never to return.

Am I the only person who's noticed that over the years the size of the chicken legs have continued to shrink? When I was a kid I distinctly remember holding up a leg that would

have looked more at home on a turkey and feasting like a miniature Henry VIII. It was all I could do to finish 2 of them before collapsing back stuffed and satisfied into the booth.

Have you seen the legs they give you these days? I honestly wonder if the chickens are able to walk around under their own power anymore. I picture a great field with all the chickens lying on their side unable to stand up on their tiny, weak, pathetic, meatless legs.

Once again, despite the airtight logic of my presentation, the cashier stood unfazed. No amount of passion was able to sway him and he seemed to be willing to wait forever for me to wind down my criticism and complete my order. I was left standing to wait for my meal with a sense of hopelessness regarding the size of the legs that would soon be making their way from the oven to my tray. Feeling I couldn't stand there a moment longer I ducked into the bathroom for a quick pee before my food was presented.

The bathroom was filthy. The little checklist hanging on the back of the door letting the customer know the last time it was cleaned showed Billy had been in there to tidy things up in February of 2008. I relieved myself and headed over to the sink to wash my hands.

And saw it.

Another pubic hair.

My head swam and I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror. Except it was me in the hotel. My pants down.

I closed my eyes tight and tried to clear my head. When I opened them I saw myself shirtless and laughing in the Arby's mirror.

"Nooooooooooooooooo."

The first rule of ball washing is you don't talk about ball washing.

It couldn't be. I grabbed the sink to hold myself up. I felt the cold tile under my bare feet.

I look like you wanna look, I fuck like you wanna fuck, I am smart, capable, and most importantly, I'm free in all the ways that you are not.

I was hearing this from the man in the mirror. The man with his pants down and his balls in the sink.

The second rule of ball washing is you don't talk about ball washing.

I was the ball washer.

Life After Crest

Up north you don't see tumbleweeds as much as you'd think. Apparently they are a plant that is only found in desert areas so the image of them tumbling through abandoned cities and towns is only accurate if those cities and towns are hot and don't get much rain. I guess that's what makes them tumble, they are rolling around looking for water. Wide open abandoned cities ripe to be tumbled in or not, the plants up north just throw out a few seeds and are done with it.

Can't blame them really.

Does ruin the whole abandoned city experience though for those of us stuck living through it. I have half a mind to gravitate down to some Old West town just to get the tumbleweed effect but I guess it's just not worth the effort. I still have the giant empty city with no power and only the sound of the wind and the occasional window falling from one of the big buildings scene going. I use to like to watch *Life After People*, I think it was on the History Channel, so a lot of what's going on isn't surprising to me. Problem is that the TV show would move at a clip of 25 years at a time but here in real life it's all one day at a time so I'll never see the buildings disappear entirely and the whole place return to a big forest.

Oh well. It will happen whether there is an audience or not, the History Channel wouldn't air something that wasn't true.

There I go again, trusting something just because it was said with a straight face on TV. You'd think I would have learned. Maybe the buildings will never go away and the History Channel was full of it.

Here's the thing. Back when toothpaste was doing a good job fighting cavities none of us were any the wiser. We watched the ads for Crest and Colgate and felt pretty damn safe and secure. Like these companies had our back. When the first whispers of tartar and plague started nobody took much notice.

Near the end I distinctly remember *Life After People* being sponsored by Colgate Advanced Whitening toothpaste. How's that for irony? Like we should have been worried about discolored teeth. There are no coincidences; somebody somewhere had a weird sense of humor.

You see, by that time it was already starting to come out that the fluoride introduced into the water supply wasn't just there to make everyone feel better about the whole plague thing. The government had put it there to sedate the masses, to take the edge off. They already knew what was coming and the longer they could put off everybody else knowing the more time they thought they had to figure it out.

Maybe I'm fixated on tumbleweeds because they remind me so much of myself and all the other little bands of survivors. Scurrying seemingly aimlessly around, but there was always some pressing need that drove us to move from Point A to Point B. Food, water, shelter, companionship. Something got us out of our hiding spots and back, however briefly, into the elements. While the winds push our Salsola tragus buddies in whatever directions they happen to be going we listen to them whisper and howl and hope they bring us some good news.

Which they never do. They just whisper and howl the obvious.

Colgate and Crest knew they were losing the war, fluoride or not, but they couldn't start a panic. Few people saw the writing on the wall, we all thought we had plenty of time. I guess you always think you have more time.

Then came gingivitis. Nobody was ready for it.

It started like these things always do. Rumors. Always from 'over there,' someplace else. Someplace far away. Then it was down the street. Somebody you knew.

Then it was everywhere.

I haven't seen anyone in almost a week. Maybe it's time to head south after all. I really would like to see a tumbleweed tumbling. I know it's looking for somewhere to disperse its seeds but I imagine it looking so carefree.

That alone seems worth the trip.

There's a boat that is leaving soon for New York

Sometimes you're asked to do a favor for someone and it ends up not only being no big deal but you end up enjoying yourself. This is not one of those cases. So it was that I found myself seated in a suburban high school auditorium to watch an all-white all-teen cast put on Porgy and Bess. If I were to tell you right now that later on in this story I will be using the term disaster to describe the performance I bet you're going to leap to the conclusion that it somehow involves their singing or lack of cultural sensitivity.

You couldn't be further from the truth. I actually enjoyed their renditions of Porgy and Bess classics such as "It Isn't Necessarily So" and "Bess, You Are My Woman Now". I didn't find the casting to be any less believable than when I watched The Cosby Show growing up.

So what was the problem? Well the whole time I'm watching the show my eye keeps getting pulled over to this trashcan they had set up in Catfish Row. In order to add a little realism to the set they had long strands of red, orange and yellow cellophane obviously being blown up by a fan inside the trash can to give the look of a fire. Now as I sat there I realized that this was far less dangerous than having a real fire but at the same time I thought they were being awfully cavalier about it. A fake fire is still a fake fire after all.

Sure enough in Act 3 while Sporting Life (who, because of the location of the production, doesn't sell drugs but is instead a local distributor of energy drinks), played with the kind of grit you rarely see in a handsome blonde affluent teenager, is trying to convince Bess to run off to New York City with him, I see a yellow strand of cellophane break loose from the trash can and float off unnoticed and land on the rickety wood stairs in the back of the stage. While Bess does her best to resist his seductions I suddenly see a few more colorful strands of cellophane appear on the stairs. Soon the entire staircase erupts into strands of cellophane!

Panic ensues as adults rush in from each of the stage with fake-fire extinguishers but by that time the cellophane had quickly spread to the surrounding backdrops and even the curtains had long strands of red, orange and yellow cellophane covering them.

Poor Porgy (portrayed with conviction by Brad Silverman) hadn't even been given the chance to begin singing "Oh, Lord, I am on my way" when he was engulfed in cellophane. By now shock and dismay had swept through the crowd and we began to empty the auditorium and make our way down the front steps of the high school and into the parking lot as the fake-fire alarm rang. We stood outside in the brisk night air and waited for the fake-fire department to come roaring up in their fake-fire engines to put out the fake-fire that was threatening to make it appear as if the whole building was burning to the ground.

This is as good a time as any to mention the play was a disaster.

Doug complex

Both scientists and philosophers have wondered how the universe will end. Will it be a bang or a whimper? Fire or ice? Expanding forever or a big crunch?

It would of great interest to both parties to know that the answer to that very question would soon be decided by Doug Casseber, a 17 year old living near Phoenix, Arizona.

It all started when Doug was 11 and developed an interest in astronomy. Doug was not a normal 11 year old, he was a very gifted student and his attention to detail was savant-like. When he was 12 he decided to put the night sky on the ceiling of his room. Unlike most stoners who had a similar idea and went out and bought a few Day-Glo stickers to throw up over their bed he divided his ceiling into hundreds of quadrants and then painstakingly recreated the visible night sky in each, capturing every perceptible star within 100 million miles of Earth. When he explained to his parents why it was taking him weeks of around-the-clock work to complete, he explained the stellar parameters he was using as the cut-off point of luminosity but they simply stared at him. Trying again, he started by explaining in ergs per second but they didn't know what an erg was; so he told them. "An erg is the unit of energy and mechanical work in the centimetre-gram-second system of units, i.e. the amount of work done by a force of one dyne exerted for a distance of one centimeter. In the CGS base units, it is equal to one gram centimeter-squared per second-squared ... $\text{g}\cdot\text{cm}^2/\text{s}^2$. It is thus equal to 10^{-7} joules or 100 nanojoules in SI units." They turned and silently walked back downstairs to the living room to resume watching TV.

As he grew older he waited patiently for a girl to share his ceiling with but a girl did not materialize. His intellect did not seem to be high on the list of features high school girls were looking for in a date. Despite his best efforts he still fell for a girl anyway. He would lie under his false sky at night and look up at the heavenly bodies and think about hers until one day he mustered the courage to tell her that he had paid to name a star after her. A real beauty in the Perseus constellation. He couldn't imagine a more romantic gesture so when she reacted with confusion and disdain he was crushed.

He retreated to his room and there he sat looking up at Perseus and tried to pretend it wasn't the end of the world. Later that night he stood on his bed and covered up the star he had named after that ungrateful, unworthy girl with a black magic marker.

The funny thing was the next night while looking up into sky he looked for 'her' star without thinking but couldn't find it. He ran into the house and came back out with his telescope.

It wasn't there. It had disappeared.

An entire star. Something that was almost a million miles across only a few days ago had suddenly vanished. It couldn't be because of his black magic marker could it? The "magic" in magic marker is just a brand name right?

So he did what any angst-filled 17 year old would have done. He got out a paint roller and blacked out an entire section of his sky, one star for every girl that had rejected him and then went to sleep.

He awoke in the morning to find the internet buzzing, television news programs in a state

of stunned disbelief and astrophysicists worldwide having a complete meltdown.

He went back into his room.

Could he get grounded for this?

Later that day while the implications of this amazing event were debated by the greatest minds and the most delusional celebrities he decided to ask another girl out. If she said no he would take out his roller and paint his ceiling black. Every inch. He wondered what it would be like to then walk outside and see nothing but blackness all around. No light anywhere. Alone in the universe.

If she said no then everyone on Earth would know how he felt.

dwarfs, midgets and blores

If you look at the history of dwarfs in literature and folklore you'll see what began in Germanic mythology as hearty creatures that dwelled in mountains and were associated with mining has continued to this day with them being portrayed as a rugged, strong and willful race. Nowhere in any mythos have I seen them depicted as big-headed, gnarly-handed, bowed legged humanoids who can't run for more than 2 feet before they either fall over or have everyone wondering when the fuck they are going to fall over.

Why do I bring this up? Well it appears that The Little People of America, a non-profit group that apparently isn't satisfied by the fact that we no longer hurl baby midgets off cliffs as soon as we see they aren't going to end up taller than 3 feet, are upset because the movie *Snow White and the Huntsman* decided to use normal-sized actors to play dwarfs instead of 'little people'. Are you kidding me? Isn't it up to the director how he wants to portray dwarfs? You don't see fat people getting all upset that there aren't any chubby elves or blacks getting pissed about the lack of black orcs (blores?). No you don't. Why? Because dwarfs and elves and orcs are all fantasy! It's up to the interpretation of the creator of the movie as to how they will appear.

But no. That's not good enough for the midgets. Not content to have every other show on TV having a midget come crashing into every other scene and take away from what the fuck is going on they now want to try and muscle in on dwarfs and ruin them for us too. Dwarfs are mighty warriors for fuck's sake! Can you imagine a midget trying to swing a 2-handed battle axe? Picture that in your head. Picture it! You're going to sit there with a straight face and try and tell me that Warwick Davis or Peter Dinklage could have played Grimli in *The Lord of the Rings*? Do you have any idea how excruciating it would have been to watch that movie with one of those two hobbling around trying to act like a bad-ass warrior? In that one scene where they have to run for hours at a stretch to pursue the fleeing Uraki it would have taken Warwick Davis a week just to make it up the first hill in heavy armor. J.R.R. Tolkien painted a very clear image of the dwarfs in Middle Earth and they had nothing to do with the midgets that seem to be procreating at a breakneck pace these days. There's more to dwarfs than being short and you'd think midgets would be the first to recognize that.

I'm just sick to death of the political correctness that allows midgets to get up in (stubby) arms over something so stupid. Why can't they be happy that *The Wizard of Oz* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* are always on the lookout for small 'actors'? How

soon until they are pissed off that there isn't a pint-sized Tin Man crashing/loping (how would you describe it?) down the Yellow Brick Road? Get that orange paint on you uppity Oompa Loopa and shut your cakehole.

Now I might be coming off as somewhat anti-midget when that couldn't be further from the truth. I'm just defensive when it comes to people trying to hijack something as close to my heart as dwarfs. I use to play Dungeons & Dragons and let me tell you nobody would have played a dwarf character if they had the characteristics of Peter Dinklage. I think our party would have spent every adventure raiding dwarf towns due to the complete lack of risk in doing so.

Me. "I hit the dwarf with a stick."

Dungeon Master. "You do 1 point of damage. You kill him."

There. I think that got it out of my system.

And yes, midgets would make shitty hobbits as well so they better stay the fuck out of Peter Jackson's face.

The (tiny) balls on those guys!

ready to start

If it weren't for all the blurred vision and buzzing ears and whatnot I'm sure John Sampilgremson would have appreciated the irony to a much greater extent. What with him being a bit *up* a tree in the metaphysical sense and at the same time being at least partially *on* a tree in the he'll-be-needing-a-tow-very-shortly sense and all. I'll give you the proverbial heads up that this tale is headed nowhere good and if you're of questionable mental constitution or just plain having a bad day you might want to give this one a miss.

It would be misleading to state that this adventure started off innocently enough because at the root of it all the innocent part isn't quite as innocent as the word innocent would lead you to believe. Tricky word innocent. It started off with John driving down a road at high speed bellowing a song. Not any song, mind you, but a song seemingly designed for bringing Johns to rest on top of trees. It featured lines engineered to have the listener not only bellowing them but doing so with their eyes shut for extended periods of time. This formula rarely works out for the listener if said listener is hurling themselves down a windy patch of road at breakneck speeds. You can see that the endeavor is fraught with peril from the start. So you can now see where the innocent part is called into question.

The eye-closing, foot-still-pressed-firmly-on-the-accelerator thing happened to go down during the verse "the businessman will drink my blood ... like the kids in art school said they would" followed quickly by the road taking a rather brisk left while the minivan he was piloting chose to stay on a more straight ahead course.

Anyone can see how irresponsible it is to be writing and singing verses like that when the possibility exists that one of your listeners might be operating heavy machinery. What else is there to do during such a verse other than lean back with your eyes closed for business and sway your head back and forth? Particularly if you are John Sampilgremson.

You see, John was nearing 50 and had three children and a mortgage and had recently decided to chuck it all in and begin again as an actor in California. He was actually on his way to a used car place to turn in the minivan in the hopes of getting a vehicle that would better express his new outlook. At that point he would throw the luggage from the former into the trunk of the latter and make his escape with nobody the wiser. Lurking somewhere out there, he believed, was a dinner theater one man short of a successful production.

During college he strode the boards, or however those creative types say it, and would breathe in the smell of sawdust and fresh paint the same way a florist buries her nose into a particularly attractive nicotiana rustica. He was theater through and through, the very picture of a card-carrying, flag-waving thespian.

After college he was unable to launch himself directly into a full time acting gig so he got a real job and pursued his theatrical yearnings after hours.

I'll stop here and let's just assume you're three steps ahead of me and you've already digested the pertinent details concerning his successful rise in business. The wife. The three kids. The minivan.

Which now sat perched on top of what remained of a tree. Should the tree have been a bit further along in years the collision would have worked itself out decidedly less in favor of the vehicle, but suggesting to John at this juncture that he was in any regards lucky might have gotten you a thick ear.

"The businessman will drink my blood ... like the kids in art school said they would".

He was the kid in art school and now he was the businessman who seems to have a cannibalistic leaning if you are to take the singer at his word.

You know, the whole 'path not taken' syndrome, the slow boil. His happiness like the perspiration clinging to the warming kettle.

The airbag didn't even deploy. He sat there and started the song over again. Nobody saw him go off the road so he had a few minutes to himself. He would never be an art school kid again and he felt pretty resolute in thinking he was also no longer able to carry on with the part of a businessman. Or even a man. And clearly this minivan wasn't going anywhere. California seemed a long way off but his home seemed even further and much less realistic.

He turned off the engine, stepped out of the minivan and into the dark ... even though it was early afternoon.

Favorite Facebook Status updates:

2 Aolan AZL50-LC32A 3-phase Air Circulators walk into a room and see Bruce Springsteen standing there. One of them walks over and says "We're really big fans."

"Paraprosdokian" comes from Greek "παρά ", meaning "against" and "προσδοκία ", meaning "expectation". Canadian linguist and etymology author Theodore Gorman argues that, while the word is now in wide circulation, "paraprosdokian" (or "paraprosdokia") is not a term of classical (or medieval) Greek or Latin rhetoric, but just

another way to say "gorilla jizz".

When the fire department arrived they found the church fully engulfed. A spokesperson for police say they have not determined the cause of the blaze but at this time have not ruled out God's will.

After a year of unsuccessfully trying to breed the female leopard the zookeepers finally agreed to try bringing in a male leopard.

It's like when I'm on the shitter and suddenly the shower head, hours after someone has had the last shower, gurgles out a big wad of water out of nowhere. I look up at it and say "yeah ... I know how you feel." I have no idea what that means but I say it sincerely and I really do feel some sort of connection with it.

Watching the amount of effort it took a baby to climb up on a chair it occurred to me how much better shape we'd all be in if we had enormous furniture.

Coasting

(first appeared on www.whiskeypaper.com webpage 8/19/12)

I wonder sometimes where art is headed. Since the first paintings were thrown up on a cave wall there have been artists, critics, and audience; and those three have been involved in a dance ever since. Do the fast-forwarding from stick figures to print to movies yourself. Every leap and advancement is a story in itself and frankly I don't have the time or interest to do it for you. I'm just dying to get to the part where I tell you about my new play.

Before I do that though, let me say that for years I have been torn between trying to impress my peers, gain the respect of the critics and win over the masses. I fully realize that most people have a splash of each within them, but I think you're smart enough to know that the masses only think that way because they are dumb as dirt. Don't think that because I find the lack of refinement in common folks detestable that I enjoy the company of artists and critics though. Far from it. When I read a theatrical review of some off-off-Broadway crap that has critics raving simply because it gives them an opportunity to show off their vocabulary and they know in their heart of hearts that nobody will actually take the time to go see the play, it makes my blood boil. I wish the whole pretentious lot of them would simply disappear or, even better, be forced to get real jobs.

So where does this leave me and what is my new play about?

I'm glad you asked.

It cost me several million dollars to build the theater that holds it but it was the only way to stage it. When you walk in you'll see why. The entire play takes place on a rollercoaster, a 3 story rollercoaster that both encircles the audience and plunges in and out of them. No loops but plenty of plunging.

The play is just under 2 hours long and for the entire time the rollercoaster is hurling around the audience, save the very first minute where it is climbing up and the cast members riding it are introducing themselves with a bit of dialogue. There are also a few

parts where the rollercoaster slows down to mimic the slow-motion effect of the storyline at that juncture but other than that it is going full speed the entire time.

Casting took forever as finding 19 actors who are impervious to motion sickness was not easy. Even with such careful screening it is rare that we get through an entire production without at least a few of them throwing up at some point. This might also be because they are only allowed to eat corn dogs and cotton candy as the pre-show meal to get them into character. Turnover continues to be a problem but in New York there is never a shortage of actors and actresses willing to have the safety harness pulled down over them

What is the play about?

Seems a reasonable question but not one that is asked as often as you'd think. In fact, we are entering our fifth month of sold-out shows and I have yet to actually answer it. I mean, I *have* answered it but I use the language of the critics so at no point do I tell anyone what it is actually about.

Even with the microphone that each actor has it is almost impossible to hear what they are saying over the roar of the rollercoaster itself and the various screaming of the cast. Doesn't seem to matter, the audiences seem to love it. Particularly when someone throws up. We had an actress come in from a popular TV sitcom and while she only lasted three shows she was wildly popular because she threw up almost the entire time she was on 'stage.' Midgets are upset of course because we have a sign with a hand sticking out in front of the theater saying that you must be "this tall" to appear in the play.

The critics love it. They love me actually. I would repeat all the great adjectives they've used to describe me but I'm not sure what most of them mean and I would hate for a negative one to sneak in there and tarnish my image.

And my peers? All but one of them have been silent, obviously stewing in their jealousy. But *that* writer, that thieving bastard, is only two weeks away from the opening of his latest Broadway effort.

The Flume.

Bastard.

wrestling my conscience ... and a special kid

I'm not sure what they call it these days but I know it's a complicated issue. I know because I was forced to live through something that troubles me to this day and I'm afraid that if I tell you about it, and I'm completely honest, that I might come off a bit insensitive. I'm a pretty open-minded guy, I don't consider myself biased to any great degree and if you were to have an empathetic Hall of Fame I'd nominate myself as the first inductee. Having said that ...

I think they call it 'mainstreaming' now but back when I was in school we called it having a retarded kid in gym class. Now before you mount your high horse and gallop off to Offendedville hear me out. When I was in high school, we didn't use bullshit terms like handicapable. Retarded kids were called retarded kids and everyone was fine with that. It wasn't meant to be disrespectful, it was simply the classification.

I was a skinny kid.

And a nerd.

Calling me cool-deprived wouldn't have changed anything.

So what was it about having gym class with a 'special' kid that traumatized me? Ok, here goes. Prepare to judge me and think horrible things.

He looked like a caveman. His head did anyway. I swear, his noggin looked like it was stolen off a Neanderthal exhibit. We had another 'special' kid in the school but he looked more like a normal kid that took a fastball to the cranium. The kid in my gym class looked like the first one in his family without a tail. Now be clear, I'm in no way making fun of people with low IQs here. I'm making fun of people who look like they were just thawed out of a block of ice fresh from the Arctic shelf. He was like a short white Patrick Ewing. The fact that he was retarded just put the cherry on top.

So anyway, we shared a gym class and believe me as bad as this kid might have had it we were pretty much on the same rung of the social ladder. I had just moved to the school and due to my sparkling personality had yet to find much success with my fellow students. I would have literally been happy to have been friends with the 'kid' except he only spoke in one word sentences and every time he smiled he looked like he was going to kill someone.

Then came the day, the terrible day that scarred me forever. It was time for the wrestling portion of the semester. Bad enough to scar most people in and of itself but fate had a special treat in store for me. And I do mean special.

The 'kid' was in my weight class.

So it passed that eventually it was my turn to wrestle someone and the sadistic teacher decided that he would pair me up with the retarded kid. It was at this point that we both stepped to the middle of the mat while our peers crowded around us and began to cheer. And by cheer I mean that some of the larger more demented males began beating their chests and throwing handfuls of their own feces.

Here is where the real fun began. The 'kid' had no idea what he supposed to do at this juncture. He just kept smiling at me and saying "I'm not scared of you". I pointed out that while I appreciated both his candor and courage that now would be a good time to commence with the wrestling.

"I'm not scared of you".

Terrifying smile.

I launched myself at him in the same ferocious manner that children will hug a relative they are not fond of. He wouldn't budge. He had the strength of ten men. Ten very dumb men. I hung off him for a few moments before he collapsed onto his stomach with a final "I'm not scared of you". And there we sat for a few moments as I tried unsuccessfully to flip him over and avoid seeing those giant glistening square-as-fuck teeth protruding from his larger-than-average jaw line. Attempts at a half-nelson were going poorly when I made eye contact with one of my most feared antagonists from the class. He was making it abundantly clear through slashing gestures across his throat that I'd better give serious

consideration to letting the 'kid' pin me or else expect a savage beating soon after class came to its inevitable end. This apparently would differ from the typical beating I usually received at the end of gym class in both duration and intensity.

Weighing my options I decided to forgo my attempts at rolling the 'kid' onto his back and securing my first and only victory on the mat and instead change strategies and attempt to deposit the 'kid' on top of me. This proved even a more difficult task than flipping Captain Caveman over on his back.

I tried to calmly explain the plan to him, how I was going to let him win and all he needed to was let me slide underneath him for 3 or 4 seconds and the entire endeavor would come to a successful conclusion, but he once again assured me that he was in fact not scared of me and to drive his point home he once again flashed his winning grin.

As you can imagine, my classmates were in various stages of asphyxiation from screaming insults and laughing so hard. In their minds this was the Godzilla vs. Megalon of the bullied outcast's faction. Had there been cell phones with the ability to capture video this would easily be the most played clip ever to grace YouTube.

I realize that many of you will assume I'm making this up but there will be some tiny minority of you that suddenly remember this spectacle and say to yourself "Holy shit, that was Lance Manion who got pinned by the retard?!"

That's why the issue of 'mainstreaming' special kids into normal schools is more complicated than just letting good intentions guide every decision. The truth is that for every action there is an equal and completely unintended reaction. If that 'kid' had actually somehow understood what the gym teacher wanted I have no doubt that he would have killed me with his bare hands before any of the other boys could have rushed to my aid. Which they wouldn't have but even if they had tried he would have probably killed a few of them before escaping and eventually being subdued on the top of the building by enough tranquilizer darts to fell an African Elephant.

For the record, no mentally handicapped people were harmed in the telling of this story. Skinny kids in baggy leotards did not get off so lightly.

They never do.

1 degree of separation

Perhaps it was some dormant insecurity that had slowly made its way up to the surface or maybe it was just as simple as her red hair. Brian had never trusted redheads but had given Sara a shot anyway and, on the surface, everything had been great. In fact, much better than great. The word love started to slosh around inside his head for the first time since those heady college days where the word seemed to leap to mind almost every other weekend. Sara was prettier than he was handsome though and this always caused him some concern.

After a year of dating this concern had manifest itself in a very odd behavior. He had contacted her through Facebook posing as another man. Sam. Very innocently at first, as if by some random chance he'd stumbled on her pictures. After all, he had said, we are all separated by less than 6 people. She had been very honest about being in a serious

relationship, with him, which relieved him to no small degree. As the months passed however they began to flirt back and forth in very subtle ways.

All this time their 'real' relationship continued to progress and develop and all the other words that are used to describe a relationship that was inching forward carefully to avoid any further commitments.

Sara began to get more curious about his online persona and finally came right out and asked about what he looked like and where he lived. He was vague about the former and specific about the latter. He lived only a few blocks from her. A coincidence right out of a movie. She wanted to meet.

He was overjoyed. His suspicions were confirmed about redheads. He did have to admit though that a part of him had enjoyed getting to know her all over again online.

He agreed to meet

They arranged a time at a local Irish pub. A get-together he knew he would not be attending.

The day after this meeting he went to her and accused her of wanting to see other men. It was his big moment. Would she confess? She laughed and admitted everything. The whole thing from Day One. Every conversation. Cruelly she described the man she had met ... all the way down to his sexy mustache. He wondered how this could be? It was impossible, wasn't it? The room swam briefly and he wondered how she could be so callous about this rendezvous. So unapologetic. As she explained that she typically didn't enjoy pina colodas but had had three of them and even getting caught in the rain didn't dampen the evening, he saw that she was actually relishing telling him about her little date.

He ran from the room before she saw the how red his cheeks were getting.

He didn't understand how she could have met this man that didn't exist. This wasn't supposed to have been how it went. She was supposed to have been stood up. Embarrassed, humiliated and then busted by her loving boyfriend. He tried to breathe deeply as his trembling hand put the key in his front door. He closed the door behind him and threw the keys on the side table in the narrow hallway.

That's when he saw it.

The BMG04 Flynn Style 100% Human Hair glue-on mustache.

- EPILOGUE -

Sara never talked to Brian again. He disappeared entirely and if it weren't for Sam she didn't know what she would have done with herself. He stepped up just when she needed a shoulder to cry on. He had arrived at the perfect time.

Still, this new mustachioed man was a bit of a mystery. She felt a tiny feeling of inadequacy stirring somewhere in her.

She wondered what she would look like as a blonde.

She signed on and created Lauren.

It was time that Lauren found a reason to introduce herself to Sam.

rain of consciousness or stream of terror?

Here's why I hate the rain. Because, because, because, because, because ... because of all the horrible things it does. Forgive me for that start, I'm not sure why I would start off with a *Wizard of Oz* reference, the story has absolutely nothing to do with witches, lions or yellow brick roads and personally I find that particular verse of that horribly annoying song particularly horribly annoying. If it weren't for the fact I needed to get something off my chest I would just stop right here and call the whole story a bad job and be done with it. But because, because, because, because, because, because ... I want to get something off my chest on I shall go but I will promise not to type the word because anymore. Well, I promise to try to avoid typing it. If I promise not to type it then my subconscious will have it popping up every two sentences. Of course, I could just replace it with the phrase 'for the reason that' but you have to agree that it doesn't have quite the panache of ... well, you know the word I'm thinking of. Probably explains why the writers of the song went with it over "for the reason that, for the reason that, for the reason that, for the reason that, for the reason that, for the reason thaaaaaaaaaat".

Ok, enough of thaaat. Here's why I hate the rain: it makes me stare at my windshield wipers. I can't help it. Typically I have no problem seeing through the rain as I drive and it doesn't even cause me to stop reading whatever eBook I'm engrossed in on my Kindle or stop me from texting a lengthy reply to whomever I'm texting as I drive but as soon as the wipers start in I'm distracted and let me tell you why. Brace yourself, it's about to get all economics up in here.

There is a finite amount of times that wipers can make their journey across the windshield and back before they wear out, correct? So it follows that if they wipers cost a certain amount then with every pass they are that much closer to being in need of replacement. I am literally watching my investment depreciate right before my eyes. Back and forth, back and forth, each time my total net worth continues to sink. That's bad enough, right? The real issue I have is with my inability to ignore this reality. No matter how hard I try, I sit there fuming about every drop of rain that falls onto my windshield and is in need of being wiped away. Can you see where I'm headed with this?

It's called opportunity cost. All of the various brilliant and wonderful things I could be doing and thoughts I could be having if I wasn't sitting there with my hands clenching the steering wheel with a white-hot rage as Mother Nature continues her assault on my checkbook.

"Fucking stop raining" I bellow impotently at the dark clouds above, as my retirement fund continues to hemorrhage. It's this bellowing no doubt that stops me from making an amusing metaphor out of the rain, my money and the word liquidity.

But that's not why I *really* hate the rain. Don't get me wrong, I hate the rain for the whole windshield wipers thing but that always leads to why I *really* hate the rain. I'm not sure the italics on "really" are really communicating what I'm trying to say here. I do hate the windshield wiper thing. Left to itself there would be enough there to hate the rain and any psychologist would nod in agreement that there is something terribly wrong with me. But what follows makes me hate the rain even more. Perhaps that's how I should have phrased it. By using the italics you might have been led to believe that I didn't really hate the rain *until* the second thing when in fact what I meant was that I hated the windshield

wiper thing and then *on top* of that hate there was something I hated even more. Either way I got to use italics so it's all good.

Except, you might point out if you're still reading this, I haven't delivered the thing that really makes me hate the rain. My apologies, I will get to it this instant.

As I rage skyward, invariably I will glare and catch my reflection. It reminds me why after somebody screws you over you can never actually be friends with them again and if you try it's just wasted effort. It's not that you can't forgive them; it's quite possible that you can. It's the fact that from that moment on they will be reminded of what a dirtbag they were and, by extrapolation, the dirtbag that they could still be in any given situation. Who wants to hang out with someone that reminds them of the dickhole that lurks within them? The relationship is doomed no matter how sincere both parties are. Just walk away.

But I can't walk away from the face I see reflected in the windshield.

Shit, at this point I might as well try to tie this up with a reference to ignoring the man behind the curtain right?

Why not?

Because.

Ted

Ted had a full plate. He sat in bed with his glass of warm milk watching late night TV and tried to relax. "Keep it all in perspective" he reminded himself. He knew he wasn't the first man with financial concerns or problems at work. Nevertheless, sleep eluded him as he turned off the TV and sank back into his pillow. On the positive side, Fall was here with its chill in the air and Ted had just recently brought out the comforter. No better sleeping weather than leaving the window open a crack and having to nestle down deep in the covers for warmth. Unfortunately for Ted every time he had almost drifted off he would suddenly think of one of his many pressing concerns and his eyes would snap back open and the knot in his stomach would reappear. It was around midnight when the first fart came.

You see, Ted was lactose intolerant and that glass of milk was starting to kick in. His usual glass of milk before bedtime ritual never bothered him before as he was usually sound asleep before the fireworks began but now as he lay in his bed he realized that the comforter that he so treasured was about to turn into the top of a down-filled Dutch Oven. He tried in vain to start waving the sheet and comforter vigorously in the opposite direction but traveling 10 feet a second the fart was on him before he could even get a clean breath of air. Now came the hardest part for Ted. Alone in the night, sitting in that dark room he had no alternative than to admit to himself that he actually liked the smell of his farts. He told himself that with the exception of the rogue fart that smells nothing like a person expects their typical fart to smell, most people secretly enjoyed the smell of their own farts. "I can't allow myself to feel bad about this" he told himself ... he already had enough on his emotional plate without feeling guilty about enjoying a little flatulence. With that he lifted his ass a little and let fly another.

While I don't think anyone will ever confuse the smell of sulfides with that of a hot apple

pie just being taken out of the oven there is a certain familiarity to it. I guess some will refer to this as 'your own brand.' It can take you back to childhood or have you waxing poetically about a particularly pungent offender. Whatever it was, it was just what Ted needed. He brought his legs up and issued forth a complete glossary of farts, from gusts of wind to the sound of the last Rice Krispie expiring in the bowl. He let rip a Cockney Cheer while singing 'Knees Up Mother Brown.' There was a knicker ripper, a toxic steamer and a supersonic. If the average person farted 14 times a day then somewhere in China there were 100 people not farting at all that evening to keep the books even. He passed a snicker blast, a freep, a rumbler, a scooter and a rhino stopper. And still sleep did not come. "Fire in the hole," he exclaimed to no one and launched into a floorboard lifter followed closely by a soup cooler, a crop duster and a trouser trumpet. The room began to smell like the septic tank in a slaughterhouse in August at noon somewhere in a third world country. Ted was aglow.

At one point, somewhere around 3:00 am the farts began to be more difficult to come by and he was forced to go downstairs and have himself another tall glass of milk. Within minutes he was back to work...unleashing a scutter, a salsa and a Rabbi rattler in short order. He was now working in rarified air...so to speak. After completing a difficult series of sphincter gyrations he was able to land a perfect pocket frog and before he knew it, hands clutching the side of the bed, he released the mythical pyroclastic flow. No one at work would believe him, but as the sun began to creep up in the morning sky he sat on soiled sheets refreshed. Revived! It was as if he had slept like a baby all night. With a final nut knocker, a quick musty turnip and an almost wistful mmmBop he arose to face the new day.

This is a story of hope and the human condition. I know some of you will question why I didn't include an air biscuit. Or a low rider. What about the bum blower or the piffle you might ask. I just didn't feel they were right for this particular piece. Don't think I didn't grapple with the chuff, the quiffer, the dribbly, the country cough or the eggburter! It's just as some point I have to think about the final product and make the tough decisions. Maybe at some other time I can revisit the spoofy, the fog horn or the zump. You never know.

withdrawn

Mary tried to time her visits to the bank at odd hours to avoid the drama that was now unfolding. For some reason there was a stampede to get in front of a teller so she sat at least four back in the line awaiting her turn. The person currently occupying the bank employee's attention seemed to be questioning some discrepancy that occurred in 1979 and was not going to be satisfied until he had seen the records of every transaction the branch had made since that time.

Mary often wondered if everyone felt like she did when sitting in line at the bank. That feeling that seems to flood you after a certain amount of time stranded between the faux-velvet ropes, where your eyes go from wandering aimlessly to casing the joint. The bank slowly morphs into a joint and your eyes transform into the cool stare of a hardened bank robber.

And she knew the security cameras were eating it all up. Somewhere in the back there

was a security guy with his hand hovering over the panic button that would send the reinforced steel bars crashing down over every exit and the police all over town dropping their donuts in a mad dash to arrive at the scene in time to gun her down. Now obviously Mary had never robbed a bank, in fact her police record was spotless, but there was no way to tell the bank that. No way to lie to the security camera that had seemingly stopped its gentle back and forth motion and instead settled on her. It was soaking her in.

It knew.

She couldn't help it. It passed the time.

Wally, the ancient guard who had recently celebrated his 95th year on the job, leaned against a nearby desk in a casual manner that made it appear to all observers that he was, in fact, stuffed and mounted on the spot. She looked at his gun.

There it was. Now she'd done it. She waited for the sirens to start wailing. The cameras had to have seen that look. The way her eyes fogged briefly at the sight of the loaded firearm resting gently in the holster on Wally's hip.

Someone came into the bank, she could hear the door slowly groan shut. A quick look confirmed it was a highly trained U.S. Marshall, that training exclusively focused on subduing and executing bank robbers, disguised as an elderly lady in jeans, a t-shirt and a hat three sizes too large for her apparently shrinking head.

"Very sneaky," she thought to herself. Wally suddenly sprang to life with a slight nod in the federal agent's direction before returning to his frozen state.

The man at the counter had apparently grown bored with his makeshift audit of the bank as he departed and Mary was allowed to take two steps closer. "The noose tightens," she thought to herself, her heart racing. It was just a matter of time now. She no longer even tried to disguise it; she looked at the vault with unbridled avarice. First she would spin around and grab Wally's pistol. For a brief moment she felt the cold metal resting in her hand. Her finger imagined sliding over the trigger and squeezing it just enough to send a single bullet deep into the cranium of Wally. In her mind's eye she saw him fall and crumple on the bad checkered carpeting.

She inhaled deeply and one eyelid fluttered ever so briefly.

The next person in line had just been there to drop off a check and suddenly, unexpectedly the line moved again. Mary snapped back into the here and now with a jolt. It took her two more steps away from Wally.

With 5 bullets left she couldn't just blaze away. She'd have to jump over the counter and hope that the bank employees played ball. If she needed to make an example of one of them to get the rest of their attention then so be it. She sort of hoped the cow in the pink frock occupying the desk of assistant manager started trouble.

The woman in front of her suddenly realized she hadn't filled out her deposit slip and left the line to use one of the pens that were firmly tethered to the little shelf as if ink were a scarce commodity.

Mary was next.

This was it. A cloud passed over the sun outside and the light in the room dimmed.

Somewhere behind her a baby fussed. A single bead of sweat clung to her brow, threatening to slide down her cheek and start the fireworks. The camera wouldn't miss a bead of sweat, once it began its wet trek downward there would be no choice. It would be go time.

"May I help you ma'am?" the teller inquired of Mary. The man in front of her shuffled off, his transaction having reached a quick and satisfactory conclusion.

Mary slowly took a look back at Wally. Then up at the security camera...then a long lusty look at the vault.

"A withdrawal please," Mary said as she pushed her slip of paper forward. "All twenties if you could."

The teller typed with practiced efficiency and soon was counting aloud and placing twenties into Mary's damp palm.

"Will there be anything else today?" she offered when the necessary amount of currency had changed hands.

"Maybe next time," Mary said with a nervous smile and made her escape.

friggin parallel universe

I like the idea of parallel universes because it allows me to write a story with a moral that won't offend anyone. You see, I have this great metaphor about a sinking ship and immigration but if I use it to describe what is going on in the United States these days I will piss off all sort of people, but if I can use some science fiction premise then nobody can argue that I'm a horrible human being. Perhaps a horrible science fiction writer but not a horrible human being. Maybe even a horrible writer in general but not ... well, you get the idea.

Let's say that despite all the scientific evidence to the contrary a wormhole opens up between our reality and another universe. Well, a different universe but one that is strikingly similar to ours with only a few small differences. These differences are all economic. The people themselves look and act the same, culturally there are few differences and even most of the government officials and celebrities are the same.

Again, unlike most science fiction where people are not allowed to interact with themselves in another universe otherwise there will be dire consequences, in my story people can walk back and forth through the wormhole and do whatever they want and the space/time continuum doesn't seem to give a rat's red ass.

Now here is the real meat of the story. In one universe unemployment is like 50% and crime is rampant and in the other reality it's not. I could give you an exact statistics but I'm obviously just winging it so there is no reason to insult your intelligence and come up with some arbitrary number like 4.5% unemployment. I will be insulting your intelligence a little later on and I don't want to push it. Knowing the boundaries of your reader is one of the ways you know you're a top-notch writer, science fiction or otherwise. How much insulting will they take in stride? You might want to write that down if you ever aspire to write.

Anyway (also avoid starting sentences with "Anyway", very amateurish), because of this unique set of circumstances where there is no reason for someone in a shitty universe not to jump through a wormhole to a cooler universe, the people in the shitty universe do just that. Soon the people in the formerly-cooler-but-now-not-as-cool universe start to worry. Although their robust economy can afford to take in some new citizenry, eventually there is going to be a problem if they don't slow down the number of people streaming through the wormhole. Don't get me wrong, they are compassionate and all, but let's say there is a sinking ship and a compassionate ship decides to start taking people aboard. At a certain point the compassionate ship is going to sink under the weight of all the rescued people. Then they *all* drown. The path to hell being paved with good intentions and all. Do you get that subtle point about how by doing something that appears good *everybody* suffers?

Here is the part where I start to insult your intelligence by making the wormhole sound exactly like the border between the US and Mexico without actually coming right out and saying it. We both know what I'm getting at but I don't want to insult anyone so I can't point out what a shithole Mexico has become. Or how everybody in the US, except for those who have already snuck into the country from Mexico, wishes we could somehow build a wormhole that takes all the illegal aliens crossing our border and hurls them into a parallel country on the bad side of the universe or, barring that, the center of an active volcano. You can imagine the backlash if I were dumb enough to come out and write something like that.

That's why the whole parallel universe idea is such gold. I can say things without saying them. I can even use the term "aliens" and have it make sense. Some sense anyway. Let me just point out again how compassionate the people in the low-unemployment universe are, lest you think they are bad people for 'accidentally' blowing up the wormhole. In my story I swear it was just a crazy accident.

It goes without saying that the story ends happily ever after for the one universe and the other universe ends up like friggin' Mexico. See what I did there? You can't claim that I'm anti-Mexico because I didn't actually say what happened to the other universe. I simply stated it ended up "like Mexico" so if you are pro-Mexico then the story must have a happy ending, right?

I do agree the "friggin" was unnecessary.

my own personal Waterloo

When C.M. Coolidge was commissioned by the advertising firm of Brown & Bigelow in 1903 to create a series of paintings depicting anthropomorphized dogs engaged in a variety of human activities I don't think anyone could have predicted the firestorm of controversy that would follow. In particular the many conspiracy theories centered on his 1906 work *Waterloo*, better known to the world as *Dogs Playing Poker*.

From the time of its release there were those that accused Coolidge of placing hidden messages in the painting but it wasn't until his death in 1934 that scholars began to take some of these speculations seriously. The painting depicts 5 dogs playing poker, an innocent enough premise, but when examined closely there are more questions than answers. Why is the glass tipped over in front of the angry Bulldog? Could there be another dog under the table and if so could it be a Wiener Dog? Why do none of the

cigars appear to give off smoke and, most troubling, why does the effeminate Collie not have a chair?

A new wave of interest in the painting occurred in the 1970s when transplanted Georgia farmboy Doyle Harden began to crank out depictions of the painting from his Mexican factory on a novel type of canvas: velvet. Originating in Kashmir, velvet painting is an ancient technique embraced by early religious leaders and to this day many early works hang in the Vatican. The renewed popularity of the piece as well as the newfound association with velvet did little to quell the rumors that somewhere in this painting lay a message from its creator.

Recently it was revealed that if you superimpose the painting with its mirror image and both are made partially transparent, the composite picture clearly shows the Retriever clutching what appears to be a young puppy. It also appears to transform the Sheep Dog into a mix breed. These revelations immediately caused an uproar and many websites promoting various explanations crashed due to heavy traffic.

What was C.M. Coolidge trying to say?

And how could a dog with no opposable thumbs even hold cards let alone drink out of a glass?

Maybe the answer lay in the name. *Waterloo*. After being declared an 'outlaw' by the Congress of Vienna, the Battle of Waterloo signified the end of Napoleon's rule as Emperor. Defeated by the combined might of an Anglo-Allied army led by the Duke of Wellington and a Prussian force commanded by Gebhard von Blucher, Napoleon was forced to surrender to the British and was later exiled to Saint Helena.

What could any of that have to do with a painting of dogs playing poker?

Exactly.

The mystery only deepened on February 15, 2005 when the original was sold by Doyle New York at auction for \$590,400 despite the fact that it had been appraised for between \$30,000 and \$50,000 and no other 'legitimate' work from Coolidge had ever sold for more than \$74,000. Sold to an 'undisclosed' buyer no less.

Perhaps unrelated, but perhaps not, Coolidge was also the inventor of the 'comic foreground', the large cut-outs where people stick their heads through to be photographed as an amusing character, that enjoys widespread popularity at carnivals and fairgrounds. How did someone born to abolitionist Quaker farmers in 1844 ever come up with *that* idea?

I'm trying to present this as unbiased as I can but holy shit, I'm getting goosebumps here. I smell summer blockbuster with Ryan Reynolds as the plucky yet irascible academic trying to get to the bottom of things.

The bottom line is this ... how cool would it be to find a giant cut-out of *Waterloo* and get four of your friends to stick their heads through with you and get a picture?

That would be totally cool.

come with me

Unlike my usual offerings this time I am offering you the reader an opportunity to go on a journey with me. For those who wanted just a quick read before returning to your empty and meaningless lives I would suggest you wrap it up here and move on. This will require some work but I promise you will find it very rewarding. I invite you into my masturbation ritual.

First of all let me say this. I am not a fan of the typical male masturbation session. Hunched over a magazine or clicking websites furiously is not my idea of a good time. My routine has been refined over years and years of careful post-ejaculation reviews to the point that I think I can now offer this formula up to any male who feels they are not getting everything they deserve from their special time alone. My newest wrinkle has been starting the entire session by tying on a hachimaki headband, a traditional Japanese symbol of mental resolve. Plus the red dot makes me feel sexier.

A critical part of the process is to make the soundtrack that will be playing in the background beforehand so you don't have to switch CDs when your hands might be otherwise engaged.

Like so many of my gangsta friends, I like to acknowledge females who are no longer 'with me.' They choose to show their respect by tipping out the first few swallows of the malt liquor. Same with me, except in this case it's my pre-seminal fluid (or Cowper's fluid). To get the party started right you'll need a National Geographic magazine (preferably pre-1985) and your high school yearbook. This is your cue to start up your musical soundtrack and the first song I recommend is *Same Old Lang Syne* by Dan Fogelberg. It's a little slow but remember, gentlemen, this is a marathon, not a sprint. You'll want to keep your strokes gentle and nostalgic. Tip out the first few 'swallows' and feel free to let your mind wander a bit over past encounters. You shouldn't feel the need to be anywhere close to full attention.

*"The beer was empty and our tongues were tired
And running out of things to say
She gave a kiss to me as I got out and I watched her drive away
Just for a moment I was back at school
And felt that old familiar pain
And as I turned to make my way back home
The snow turned in to rain..."*

OK...as the last strains of Dan fade out we're ready to move forward. I always like to light a candle at this point, before the 'heavy lifting' begins. Might I suggest Lemon Verbena or a nice Mountain Laurel? Cilantro will just make you think of that slut who cheated on you in college and if you want to suddenly remember that incident in Jamaica with that crazy stoned hooker then by all means feel free to light up a little Coconut Lime. Otherwise I'd stick in the melon family. Some of you might ask if some sort of fragrance diffuser is required. Absolutely not! We're looking for ambiance here, not the overpowering scents of a whorehouse.

Hmmm, where were we? Oh yes ... song 2. Time to switch gears and put the past behind us, right guys? We're no longer that guy who was known for disappointing his partner. Now we're a man! In keeping with that spirit, by now *Crazy Bitch* by Buckcherry should be blasting out of your speakers. Now of course this song is exploitive in nature and does

not show much tenderness in talking about the act of making love. Exactly.

Now is a good time to apply whatever lubricants you feel are necessary. Myself, I'm old school and like the feel of a handful of Manglide but I'm not opposed to K-Y or even a little Sliquid Sizzle in a pinch. Personally I've found that Vaseline starts strong but fades fast and might leave your dick looking as red as a baboon's ass when you're finished. I know some of you swear by spit, olive oil, pie filling (what male didn't get curious after watching *American Pie*? I should have waited myself until I had a pie in the fridge other than pecan), or butter, but I value my junk too much to risk irritating it.

Now that friction concerns are behind me I'm usually having at it by the first chorus. It's usually at this point that I remember to either sit down or move away from the bay window. Be careful what you're looking at during this phase of masturbating as whatever it is will immediately be whisked away and placed deep into your sexual subconscious. I don't care if it's a crime drama on TV, a box of donuts sitting on a nearby table or the neighbor's parrot suddenly squawking, it will forever make you somehow horny down the line. I'm not trying to explain it, I'm just warning you. Don't believe me? Just ask the girl behind the counter at Dunkin Donuts. I'm telling you, you never know how strange your brain is wired until something happens to remind you that we're all just a bunch of chemicals sloshing around in our head. To prove my point, next time you're in the shower let the water hit your teeth. I started doing this as a way to make them extra pearly white (no, it doesn't help) but found out that when I do it somehow makes me feel like a vampire. lol Really. Laugh if you will but I defy you to try it and NOT want to bite someone. Anyway ...

If you're anything like me, by now you're ready to bring this baby home. Now that I've embraced the truth of sexuality thanks to my friends in Buckcherry, it's time to go even more primal. The next song is in all respects the money shot and you must not deviate from it. The artist is Stewart Copeland. The song is off the album *The Rhythmist*. I like to start with the first song, *Koteja (Oh Bolilla)*, because if I'm feeling particularly strong I can then rush headlong into *Brazaville* and even, on the rare occasion, last as long as *Liberte* (yes, I see the irony there). It's not unusual that I get so worked up that I'm forced to peel off my sweater or even remove my shoes at this point. I'm talking getting into it! I like to have both a box of Kleenex and a few 1" pine breaking boards handy as I get closer to finishing as it seems equally likely that at some point I will either fly into a crying jag or feel the urge to punch through wood. I like to be covered both ways, and no, neither of these activities in any way take away from the total enjoyment of the experience.

Liftoff. All that remains is the question of how to catch this salty discharge. I think I spent more time deciding which word to put in front of discharge than I did writing the whole damn blog. Originally I went manly, then stuck in creamy, then gooey, and then even toyed with magnificent. I even switched discharge to payload once. Anyway, to answer the question, I'm a throwback. I go tissue. I have a friend that tells me I'm crazy and that an old sock is the way to go. Nah. You can keep your moist towelettes as well. You think at a time like this, my forehead damp with sweat and my legs twitching involuntarily, that I'm really concerned with the benefits of an antibacterial wipe? I just spent 15 minutes wrestling with my own baloney bayonet, give me the tried and true tissue to collect my payload (there ... I got it in anyway) and be done with it.

So there it is. My little ritual. I have thrown open a little window into my life for you all to peer into. Your feedback is strongly discouraged.

reality check please

If swearing to yourself was something people did, then Steve would swear to himself that he didn't even know hemorrhoids could burst. For the three days after the hemorrhoid had popped out of his ass and sat there like a purple raisin clinging to his anus he had tried his best to ignore it. Ignore the itching and aching as it slowly swelled up until it felt like a walnut between his ass cheeks. It had kept him up the previous two nights and all the Preparation H in the world didn't seem to have any effect. Still, when he was sitting there and all of a sudden he felt his pants get wet he would have sworn, if swearing to yourself was something people did, that he had shit himself. He was totally puzzled though, he had sharted before but never without some warning or feeling of his bowels loosening.

He ran for the toilet to see how bad the damage was.

He grabbed a handful of toilet paper and dragged it tentatively through the DMZ to see the extent of the shitting and looked down to find the paper soaked and his hand bright red.

He awoke a few minutes later with two clear realizations. The first being that he did not handle the sight of blood very well. The second was he understood why when someone was threatening to jump off a building the police and firemen don't scramble to make sure that they land on a toilet. If he had to describe porcelain in one word it would be unforgiving.

His underpants looked like one of those dye packs they put in with the money when they want to screw up a good bank robbery had gone off in his ass. Underpants ruined. Jeans ruined. Chair he was sitting on ruined.

And his ass was still bleeding. He crouched in front of his computer with toilet paper shoved up his ass like some anal tampon trying to find out what was going on in his ass. There was all sorts of advice on what he should have done to prevent the hemorrhoid from bursting in the first place but very little on what to do post-burst other than go to his doctor and he would be damned if he was going to take this little show over to the ER.

So he lay on his couch and shoved more toilet paper in his ass all day and wondered if someone could really bleed out from a hole in their rectum. "So this is rock bottom," he thought to himself.

Eventually the bleeding started to slow down, which was when he got the heads-up from his body that he needed to take a crap.

Panic swept through him. Panic and the four-egg crab and asparagus with apricot marmalade omelet he'd had for breakfast that was hurtling down the pipes like a runaway freight train. Beads of sweat formed on his brow as he felt the coolness of the seat when he lowered himself onto the toilet. He might as well have been putting his feet in cold metal stirrups because he was about to deliver a half pound bouncing baby turd. His hemorrhoid opened up again. He didn't even know how to begin to start wiping.

There was going to be shit in his open wound. People worry about a little dirt getting into

a cut or scrape and here he was with shit in a giant bleeding hole in his body! Shit! If during an operation a disgruntled orderly snuck in and took a crap into the open chest cavity of a patient they wouldn't even try to save the poor bastard. They'd hustle him off to the basement incinerator before anyone could find out what had happened. Steve could only imagine his poor white blood cells standing guard over his cut only to see the forces of shit come pouring through bringing every known disease and virus known to mankind. His head swam.

He half-heartedly tried to wipe, shoved another handful of toilet paper back into his ass and made for the couch.

Hemorrhoids do burst and once they do, they never heal because every time you take a dump it rips the scab off and the whole thing starts again until finally you stop eating and die on your couch like Steve did. Well he died on his couch not yours but you get the idea.

So unless you're reading this on your couch with a huge cut in your ass you should really take a deep breath and appreciate the fact that your ass is fine and life could be worse. Have a great day!

Schrödinger's script

In 1935 Erwin Schrödinger came up with a thought experiment in which a cat is stuck in a sealed box with a glass vial of poison that will be shattered at a random time. Until you open the box the cat has to be considered both alive and dead due to the fact that you cannot know if the poison has been released. Most people are familiar with this paradox but what most of them don't know is that it was actually a critique of the Copenhagen interpretation, not an explanation. He believed that by showing the counterintuitiveness of quantum mechanics he could throw an unfavorable light on the math needed to describe quantum states.

In 2010, a writer named Phil Catani started to write a screenplay called *Schrödinger's Cat*. He has spent the last 2 years shopping it to agents and filmmakers alike. It has been pitched as an action adventure where the misunderstood hero has only a few hours to save the beautiful scientist trapped in a sealed container with a vial of poison. It has been pitched as an intense drama centering on the life of a bright up-and-coming mathematician and his struggles against both the evil teachers union at his place of employment and his own crippling insecurities. It has been pitched as an interracial buddy flick called *Schrödinger & the Cat*. It has been pitched as a sci-fi epic that has a regular ending and a special Director's cut alternate ending. It has been pitched as a comedy where the beleaguered main character gets trapped in a sealed container with a cat.

There has been interest from a few influential individuals but to date no offers have come. Phil has gone through periods of sincere optimism and deep self doubt. With so many relational observers in Hollywood it is fair to say there is equal evidence to support both interpretations of his prospects. The system in place to determine which screenwriters are successful and which will labor in obscurity is so flawed that Phil seems unable to observe whether or not progress is being made. At times, he wonders if there really is a difference between a shaky or out-of-focus photograph and a snapshot of

clouds and fog banks.

He is deeply in debt and yet he knows that if he can sell one script he can achieve financial independence. He can't get a date but he knows if he can sell one script he can sleep with models. Nobody wants to talk to him but if he can sell a script suddenly his opinion on almost any topic will be in great demand.

He knows that in 10 years he will know how it all turned out.

But right now, *Schrödinger's Cat* tucked under his arm and on his way to another pitch meeting, he is both a success and a failure.

the myth of female orgasm

It's quite simple. Nature does not allow things that serve no purpose. Every claw, every tooth and every ejaculation has some bigger role in the survival of a species. It's with this firmly in mind that I offer the following: the female orgasm doesn't exist. It's a myth propagated by women to exert control over men. Let me explain.

Let's take a trip out to the ol' African Serengeti and take a quick poke around, shall we? Lots of game animals. Lots of game animals having sex. You can sit in Tanzania and watch wildebeest for as long as you wish and you will never once see a male wildebeest start flipping a female wildebeest every which way as he plants his seed, spending 20 minutes getting her ready then plowing her from every angle to make sure she has a mind-blowing experience. Hell no. If you're a wildebeest and you want to avoid being lion food you dump and run, right? Same with me! Does that make me a bad guy?

Let's look at it from another angle. The male orgasm is what releases our sperm into the female (or onto, or all over, depending upon which porn you prefer). There is a *point* behind it. The so-called female orgasm doesn't release an egg or even help the mating ritual along. It's superfluous to the act of intercourse, window dressing. Evolution wouldn't allow it. So why would females pretend to achieve this 'state?' Now *that's* the right question. It's all about power over males. So many girlie-men these days are concerned about their partners 'satisfaction.' The women put on these elaborate shows to either reward or punish their man. They can cruelly build up to an 'orgasm' only to make the man feel at the last possible moment that they somehow blew it for the woman, or they can yelp and holler like the man is packing an electric salami if, for example, the man has just given her a new necklace.

A study done was done in 1977 by the Reproductive Biology Research Foundation at the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Washington University in St. Louis. They recorded some of the first laboratory data on the anatomy and physiology of human sexual response based on direct observation of 382 women. Their findings on the nature of female sexual arousal and orgasm would have dispelled many long standing misconceptions had not the National Organization of Women (NOW) stepped in and made sure that everyone at the RBRF clammed up (any non-linear free association you make between clam and vagina is entirely *your* own doing). Somewhere tucked safely in a vault in Missouri is proof that females can't have orgasms.

It's more diabolical than it might seem on the surface. It's not just pure "if they have one I want one jealousy" stuff. Ever wonder why Nancy Pelosi remains so influential despite

the fact that she is obviously a sea-hag escaped from hell? Whenever there is an important issue in front of her and she needs the support of women everywhere, she will make a veiled threat about spilling the beans about the whole female orgasm thing if females don't start playing ball (again with the double entendres). This is a big issue and yet men are just too preoccupied to see the conspiracy going on right beneath their noses (ok, that one I meant).

So my message is clear. Women, enough with the theatrics ok? I'm not handing out any Emmys. Just lay there and take it like a wildebeest, will you? And guys, don't let your girl play with your head. Do like I do. Just get in, get out and plant the seeds of the next generation ... hopefully one that doesn't have to live under the dark tyranny of the female 'orgasm.'

Favorite Facebook Status updates:

Why do some people worry about "all hell breaking loose"? Sounds pretty fun to me.
Definitely would break up the day.

I don't think I got the same 'the birds and the bees' talk most people did. I won't spoil the ending but it went a long way in explaining hummingbirds.

I like the idea of fancy hotels having doormen outside dressed up and waiting to hold the door open for me. I just think I'd rather see them dressed up as a hot dog. If we're going to make it clear to everyone that their job is to open doors for other people then there is no reason we can't go the extra mile and humiliate them as well.

Because my ass is my best feature I always get to meetings early so I can be at the window looking casually outward before other people come in. When they do I turn my head, flash a winning smile and give a little clench. Wa-pow! Manion for the win!

I think Stephen Hawking is famous enough to warrant an action figure. Think of all the cool accessories for the wheelchair. G.I. Joe having trouble with COBRA? Send in Stephen with the jet pack.

something's fishy

"I shall commit my thoughts to paper, it is true; but that is a poor medium for the communication of feeling."

Did you ever play that game where you were blindfolded and asked to stick your hand in a paper bag filled with wet noodles and asked to guess what it was then just as you started to touch it you were told it was Frankenstein's brain?

"I feel exquisite pleasure in dwelling on the recollections of childhood, before misfortune had tainted my mind and changed its bright visions of extensive usefulness into gloomy and narrow reflections upon self."

That's what it was like for most guys the first time they got to third base. There were a lot of details left out in health class.

"The world was to me a secret which I desired to divine. Curiosity, earnest research to learn the hidden laws of nature, gladness akin to rapture, as they were unfolded to me,

are among the earliest sensations I can remember."

For one, there was no guidance given on the female sex organ whatsoever. They might have told us the names of the various tubing and it amazes me to this day that at least one teacher didn't give us young men the heads-up about the fact that when we get to third base we shouldn't approach it like a plumber trying to unclog a toilet. Far worse than that, it's criminal that the instructors didn't warn us that when we remove our 'plungers' there might be some odor attached to the endeavor.

"When I reflected on his crimes and malice, my hatred and revenge burst all bounds of moderation."

I swear I distinctly remember wondering if I needed to take the girl to the hospital. I almost passed out from the fumes. Later on I learned this was normal but at the time I didn't know whether to just wash the finger or cut it off before whatever substance was on it began to eat away at my wrist. We all might look back on this kind of thing and laugh but at the time it's traumatizing stuff. It is against this backdrop that boys and girls are asked to explore their own sexuality, not knowing what other fun little secrets await them on their journey to manhood or womanhood. We round third and head for home asking ourselves "what else haven't they told me?"

"I cannot describe to you my sensations on the near prospect of my undertaking. It is impossible to communicate to you a conception of the trembling sensation, half pleasurable and half fearful, with which I am preparing to depart."

This doesn't explain why it is we have both romantic comedies, which spend the entire time documenting the attempts of a man to get a girl into the bedroom, and porn, where we see what actually takes place there. Why is that? Why do we need two movies for one transaction? For any young viewer that has sat through an hour and a half of Sandra Bullock being wined and dined only to have the credits start to roll just as she is led through the bedroom door, it must send an odd message. For an audience member who has been to third base but hasn't rounded home it could actually be terrifying.

We simply don't know how to talk about, let alone teach about, sex in health class. Having never taught it I can't say for sure, but I'd have to guess all the nervous giggling in the classroom every day must be creepy as hell.

"The innocent and helpless creature bestowed on them by heaven, whom to bring up to good, and whose future lot it was in their hands to direct to happiness or misery, according as they fulfilled their duties towards me."

In the end though, perhaps thinking for a few seconds that you are touching Frankenstein's brain is actually pretty cool.

3 hours, 5 thoughts

Sometimes it gets me down a bit. All the ugliness in the world. I'm not talking about poverty, disease, hunger or hatred. I'm talking about physical appearance.

Ugly people.

People walking around with their big ugly faces and flawed bodies. Just walking around

inflicting themselves on everybody. They know they're ugly and yet they still crawl from their homes each days and interact with the population at large.

I'm just sick to death of it.

I know, I know ... what can you do? You can point it out to them all day long and yet they still want to hang around everybody else. The worst part is that they want to find a way to procreate and pass on their hideous genes to another generation of ugly people. You need a license to drive a car, right? Isn't there a way that we can pass a law that requires people to have some sort of committee give them a quick looking over before letting them run off and create more of the same?

I'm just sick of some people's unrelenting ugliness. Day in and day out with the same repulsive mug. How hard is it to buy a cloth sack and throw it over their unsightly head?

Suddenly, I'm the one that has to sit there all day looking at this fucking ugly person and I have to keep my mouth shut while it's perfectly ok for them to crash around inflicting their face on me? Even cracking what passes for a smile and making the bile in my stomach lurch up into my esophagus.

What the fuck?! Has the world gone mad?

Put your fucking head in a wood chipper you ugly fucking person. Either go join a freak show or tie rocks to your feet and go drown yourself! That's what I want to scream every time I have the misfortune of stumbling into one of these abominations with their moles or too-thick eyebrows or non-apple-bottoms or chipped teeth or too-long noses or too-long toes or stubby noses or non-flat stomachs.

You can't teach a robot to cry. That's what I always hear when people talk about artificial intelligence, that we'll never be able to teach robots emotions.

So?

Don't. Just teach them when they're supposed to act a certain way. Look down at a dead body and cry. It's what you're supposed to do. Have the ducts in their eyes release a few drops of water and they are everything that we think we are. Everything we're told we are. Everything we are supposed to be even though sometimes we're not.

Teach them to lie to themselves. Instruct them how to pretend and they'll figure out the rest. Just sit over the box containing a body and release the tears and hold everything else in. Teach them to fear what they feel or don't feel. Even better, give them the serenity of knowing they don't feel anything but it's ok. Be themselves ... which is nothing but a ghost walking through a finite period of time.

Until it's their time to be in the box. Not seeing the parade of people walk by, some of the crying and some of them not and some of them wishing they could and others wishing when they cried they meant it.

Meant anything.

Maybe robots are too honest to cry.

I think it's important to every now and then treat myself to a little subtle upgrade. While I am not typically a fan of cosmetic surgery, having seen too many vain women end up

looking like some sort of melting creature from space, I don't think a little work here and there is a bad thing, as long as it makes you feel better about yourself. That's why I marched right into my doctor's office and got my anus bleached yesterday.

I'm telling you, I feel like a million bucks!

Once reserved for porn actors, anal lightening (sounds like a gay baseball team) is now all the rage. It's no different than getting your teeth whitened these days. They hand you a little color card displaying all the shades of the post-procedure bung, from cheery salmon to ghoulish white. You can, for a little extra, do what I did and get a little anal fade going. Now instead of being worried about what people will think about my dark ring I simply can't wait for the first person to drink in the sight of my new hole.

It's as easy as bending over, spreading your cheeks and having a cream applied to your asshole. Then all you have to do is sit there holding your butt wide open for 45 minutes while the cream burns your anus. Once you're done you get a 5 minute break and then you repeat that step two more times. Literally you only have to be in anal agony for a little more than two hours and you get to stagger out with a whole new balloon-knot.

One you can be proud of.

What is it about the nipple anyway?

If you're a guy, it's all about the nipple. You haven't truly seen the breast until you've seen the nipple. A girl can have a swimsuit on that exposes 98% of the jug but without that last fleshy little ring you can't consider yourself as having seen the tit. It's the difference between the pull-out Sears bra advertisement in the local paper and porn.

Same girl. Same pose. Just the nipple-factor.

They come in all sizes, shapes and shades and once a man has seen a nipple it forever changes the way he sees that girl. Legs and butts and stomachs are all well and good but once a guy has laid eyes on a nipple the relationship has gone to the next level. He is a member of the nipple club.

Now the problem with girls today is that they are not as worried about whom they allow into their nipple club. With picture phones and webcams they are inviting in members at a dizzying rate! I don't think they fully appreciate how sacred the nipple is. In fact, they risk making it just another body part.

I know what you're thinking.

What about the vagina?

That's a whole other issue. That's a reproductive organ and thus lacks the naïve charm of a nipple. Seen at the wrong angle the vagina is downright terrifying.

Not the nipple. It can say hello from under a t-shirt or lay there quietly lurking under a sweater like an alligator waiting for a gazelle to stray too close to the water's edge. It's the great wildcard when it comes to arousal. Men will paw at them clumsily not knowing whether the slightest breeze against one will have the girl's toes curling in ecstasy or if he might as well be pulling on a nearby doorstep.

Why do you think Hollywood is so obsessed with the 'nipple slip'? If you're a female

celebrity and you think you have cute nipples, it's only a matter of time until you "accidentally" let one pop out on the red carpet. If you have ugly nipples then you have to be a 'serious' actress.

For heaven's sake, men have them!

But somehow on a girl, it's a whole different animal.

So, anyway. If you're a girl ...take care of your nipples and try to avoid showing them to just anyone. I know that when you see them every day they become very boring but to the men of the world they are still something special.

I have been fortunate in my life in the respect of having been party to more than one last hurrah. Some final event that brings to a close a particular chapter of your life or becomes some sort of turning point in the lives around you. The question becomes whether or not it's important, that if at the time you were aware of it being a last hurrah, or if it was only in retrospect that you knew it was, in fact, a last hurrah. Can you have a next-to-last hurrah or even just a plain old hurrah? What if you have a reunion of a last hurrah 20 years later ... does that invalidate it?

On August 5, 1945, there were a lot of people in Hiroshima having a last hurrah without even knowing it.

domestic spelunking

Guilt is an odd animal. It doesn't come at you like most other opponents. Lust will charge through the door and make itself known, but can be easily vanquished by quickly rubbing one out. Envy can be talked down off the ledge by simply taking a good look around and turning off the TV for a few days. Greed ain't nuttin but a thang. Nothing uses the shadows quite like guilt.

So I'm having this dream last night, I'm at a wake and although I don't recognize any of the faces, I'm still standing there all morose and such and wondering who's in the box. That's the thing about dreams, sometimes you're just thrown in balls-deep with no explanation. It's been awhile since anyone I know has died and I'm pretty sure most people I know are healthy and not on death's doorstep. So why a funeral?

I try to turn the corner of the room I'm in and look into the bigger, adjacent room that is holding the guest of honor but it's crowded and I can't seem to get by anyone.

Next I'm on a train. I sort of get that one, pushing through a crowd made my brain 'jump the tracks' appropriately enough, and think of the pushing and shoving that takes place on a commuter train. The thing is, I'm still trying to make my way through the crowd to see who is in the box. I seem to think that he or she is interred in the next car. I'm keeping my eyes down so as not to make eye contact with anyone, the last thing I need in an already confusing dream is to add some conversation. The train is barreling along, in and out of dark places and light and it's creating sort of a strobe effect.

Just like the party I'm at. I lift my eyes and I'm surrounded by old friends. Except they are still young and I'm still young and the music is thumping and the lights are flashing and it is clearly *on*. Someone passes me a beer and we're all shouting above the loud music and having a great time. Everything I say is funny and everything they say is funny and we're

loud and obnoxious and suddenly I'm back at the funeral home. My friends are gone but I'm still holding a beer and shouting and acting the fool. Everyone is looking at me in horror and suddenly I just know that this is a child's wake because everyone is particularly heartbroken and I just yelled something humorous and inappropriate.

And I wake up.

Sitting here now I can totally rationalize how the subconscious is complicated and you can't take things either too literally or too seriously but I'm telling you when I woke up my cup runnethed over with guilt. Try as I might I couldn't get back to sleep, all I wanted to do was somehow make it back to the funeral home and apologize to everyone. A funeral home that didn't exist filled with people I've never met before and I laid there in bed feeling like the worst guy in the world.

A wake. A train. A party. What the fuck did it mean?

Now I wonder why I chose to say guilt was an animal instead of an emotion. Does it stalk you? Does it pick up your scent and trail you and chase you through sleep and wakes and trains and parties and then suddenly decide the time is right to jump out and inflict itself on you?

Can it really feel triumphant if it makes you feel horrible but you're not sure why? Seems like a bit of a hollow victory if I need to spend time trying to figure out what I have to feel guilty for.

Or maybe that's the big win, making you sort through all the possible transgressions you have to feel accountable for. Maybe this guilt stuff is a little smarter than I give it credit for but maybe it underestimated me as well.

Fuck it.

Tonight I'm going back to that wake and I'm going to tear that shit up.

battle dressed for bed

You have to admire the logic of children. It's usually a lot more reasonable than most of us give them credit for. Let's look at monsters for example.

When I was a kid I knew for certain that monsters didn't exist from sunrise until about 10 or 11 pm. I knew it for certain and nobody could convince me otherwise. On the other hand, if my parents asked me to run down into the basement and grab something for them after the normal television viewing hours had concluded I looked at it as nothing short of a death sentence if I walked down there unarmed.

Here is where the interesting logical part of being a child came into play. Monsters didn't exist, but if they *did* then others things that didn't must also exist. Or at least be different than they appear during normal daylight hours.

For instance, my Nerf gun. If monsters did indeed exist than my Nerf gun must be a Smith & Wesson Deathmaster 450X, spitting out a combination of hot lead and anti-matter.

Following me so far?

I would walk down the stairs knowing monsters didn't exist and feeling complete terror, but also confident that the Nerf gun in my hand shot only little Nerf bullets unless monsters did exist, at which time I was positive that it would blast out a hail of scorching lasers and send whatever was lurking in the closet straight back to hell.

To walk in both worlds simultaneously is something that only a child can do.

Obviously my parents must have thought it cute that I would hesitate when the request was made and then nonchalantly grab my weapon before starting the trek downstairs. They existed in only one place, the world where monsters don't exist and they enjoyed sending their offspring on silly errands for the simple joy of seeing them face their own inner demons.

As soon as my little hand touched the doorknob two distinct realities popped into existence. My one-piece Scooby Doo pajamas with the feet on them in one, black boots, camo pants and torn white muscle shirt in the other. The distant sound of the evening news coming on in one and the buzzing of helicopters over a soundtrack of *All Along the Watchtower* by Jimi Hendricks in the other.

Two kids making their way down the same stairs; the helpful son grabbing a screwdriver for his Dad and earth's last hope for survival.

The parents listening heard only one of them slowly making his way down, the opening of the tool chest situated at the other end of the basement and then, finally, the sound of little feet tearing ass up the stairs in a way that made them sure that he would be unable to slow down in time and keep running straight through the opposite wall and into the garage.

Except for that one time. The time that the sound of the tool chest was instead followed by the almost-imperceptible noise of a light switch at the top of the stairs being turned off by a father who thought it would be funny to see how his son reacted.

"They're coming straight for you!" screamed my headset as my fingers fumbled to release the safety of my Deathmaster 450X. I laid down suppression fire best as I could as I tried to make it behind the couch before the real shit started. The closet door swung open violently and in the darkness I could see the glowing red eyes, smell the foul stench of their breath and hear their cloven hooves as they launched themselves at me. The grenade launcher attachment sent off a few of the concussion variety and soon the carpeting was littered with teeth and scales. I felt them circling behind me so, with a burst of profanity, I rolled forward and made a break for it. Suddenly I saw a shaft of light and realized that one of my parents had opened the door at the top of stairs. They had no idea what awaited them only a few yards away so I ran. I ran until my lungs were about to burst and I covered those 12 feet in record time.

That's when I saw it. Lurching up the stairs towards the outline of my Dad. All horns and bad intentions. I couldn't risk using my flamethrower, but a miss from my 450X could be a one-way ticket to oblivion for my old man. I had to risk it. My finger squeezed the trigger at the same instant my Dad must have flipped the light switch back on.

Monster brains suddenly erupted and covered his horrified face as the twitching and trembling beast collapsed at his feet. He looked down and saw me kneeling with my still-smoking weapon clutched in my blood-soaked hands and for a moment his eyes met mine

and then his finger twitched involuntarily and plunged the stairway back into darkness. Almost as quickly it flicked again, I'll never be sure how voluntarily, and once again the light popped on and I sat there in my Scooby Doo pajamas with the feet in the them and he stood there with a face completely devoid of monster brains. He never thanked me for what could have never actually happened.

Yep, kids certainly have a different way of seeing the world. Or worlds. The logical and the illogical, the real and the unreal, and the place where both exist simultaneously. My dad and I never spoke of that night but he never asked me to go into the basement or the closet or the woods or attic or the garage after dark again.

It's almost a shame actually, such a waste of firepower.

roommate trouble

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I've said it before and I'll type it again, your embarrassing moments are really the only things that are truly yours. It's hard to picture any success I've had without thinking of the people or circumstance behind it. Not so with those times where you are completely mortified. While I won't go as far as to say they define a person, they certainly throw a spotlight into the nether regions of who you truly are. Now obviously you're sitting back slightly in your chair eager to hear about one of mine. I mean, I've set the stage, now all I have to do is start in and tell you about that one time at the bachelor party ...

Not going to happen.

I am rarely ashamed about anything I've done but the bachelor party incident is not something I will willingly share unless a certain amount of water boarding is involved. Probably a great deal of it. Now, before you go rushing off to read another blog about cooking or Jesus, I will throw you a bone and tell you another story that is almost equally as humiliating. That seems very fair to me.

It was my first day of college. I had just been dropped off by the parents and was fresh off meeting my new roommate for the year. A large, thick young man who didn't seem particularly bright and mumbled his words a bit much for my liking but on the other hand it could have been worse. At least that's what I was thinking to myself after our initial interaction. I was stacking towels in my closet when he walked by and casually mentioned that the showers were co-ed. He then departed the room and left me frozen in place.

Literally, my arm was holding a towel half way on route to its destination and there it remained as I processed what I had just heard.

Co-ed showers?

It was quite obvious he was too much of a dullard to be kidding; he must have thought it just neighborly to mention it as he saw me putting away my towels.

Right?

Co-ed showers?!

My legs almost gave out before I made it to the edge of my bed where I promptly gave up

any pretense of standing and let gravity do its thing.

The battle inside my head began in earnest. My eyes were thrilled with this news because it meant seeing boobs flopping around whenever I chose. The rest of my body was panicked, knowing I was physically a complete disaster. Any girl who caught sight of me naked would soon spread the word that the Lance Manion show was something to be missed at all costs.

Except ... for my penis.

I'm going to come right out and say it. I am packing.

But let me back up a bit and explain something about the young Lance Manion that sat trembling on the edge of his bed. He differs greatly from the Lance Manion of today who is so comfortable speaking about himself in the third person. Back then I was a bit naive. Not only had I not been around the block much, but I wasn't even sure where this block was. Events had conspired to keep me a bit behind the times if you will. I was entered into school a year earlier than most kids and I hit puberty much later than other males. Those two factors worked together to make sure I didn't get my bait and tackle until well into my junior year of high school.

That's right. Junior year. Is it any wonder I'm fucked up?

While all the other boys, even most of the freshmen, were walking around fully loaded I still had the starter kit. I remember distinctly an inebriated girl approaching me at a party sophomore year and attempting to thrust her hand down the front of my pants as she said, "Let's see what you got down there." I reacted as if the invitation had come from my wrestling coach. The look of confusion on her face was profound. Any other boy would have loved to have been in that spot, but any other boy would have had a functioning dong for her to grab. I had the junk of a 6 year old so I had to backpedal and make excuses and flee the party before word of my sexual transgression reached the ears of my friends.

I guess while I'm dishing here I might as well tell you another regrettable result of my late blooming. I had ZERO idea what was going on between the legs of females. There was something I couldn't understand and didn't have the nerve to ask during health class. Even now I'm having trouble typing it so you can appreciate just how stupid I was when it came to the physiology of the fairer sex.

Ok. Here it is.

I didn't understand how girls could swim or take a bath.

I know, you're no closer to understanding what I mean having read that sentence. Why on earth couldn't a girl go swimming or take a bath?

Because I thought their uteri (plural of uterus) would fill with water.

There I said it. I didn't understand why water wouldn't just go rushing up their tubing and make them sink. I had seen plenty of pictures of the female genitalia and it certainly didn't look to me like the vagina shared any of the water-tight properties of the anus. I literally imagined a girl climbing out of the bath and having to stand there as her vagina drained like a punctured hot water bottle. I would stand poised and ready at the edge of

the pool as girls hurled themselves into the deep end, seemingly oblivious to the peril their large-capacity uteri put them in, waiting for the frenzied request to dive in and start hauling them out before they drowned. A call that never came.

That was the Lance Manion that sat on the edge of the bed absorbing the news that I would now be showering right next to these confusing creatures. My next thought was whether or not they made shower chaps. If I could get my hands on a pair of those bad boys I was convinced I would be ok. They would hide my skinny legs and bony ass but prominently feature my giant penis. I was just about to head down to the school store to see if these ego-saving items existed in plastic or if I was going to be forced to spend a year showering in leather when my roommate returned and saw me sitting on my bed white as a ghost.

"You know I was kidding right?" he asked.

The Lance Manion who is currently occupying this chair, and who has little trouble talking about himself in the third person, as I've mentioned previously, would have casually laughed and played the whole thing off but I swear the Lance Manion on the edge of the bed simply pitched forward unconscious.

I passed right the fuck out. I guess I hadn't taken a breath since he left the room. I remember him asking me if I knew he was kidding as the room got dark and then nothing else. A few hours later I came down with strep throat and spent the next two days in bed feeling like I was about to die. Alone and unloved at some god-forsaken college in the middle of a cornfield and to this very day I'm convinced my immune system shut down temporarily because of the shock of picturing myself walking around in front of naked girls wearing nothing but leather chaps and a large boner.

That's about as close as any event could ever sum me up.

the anniversary present

This will show you exactly how messed up their marriage was. Neither of them could remember

who originally came up with the idea of how to celebrate their 30th anniversary. Maybe it was

just a natural progression, as long as you are comfortable using the term natural to describe

something so messed up.

The writing was on the wall for everyone to see. Well, the cake anyway. Every year they put a

number of candles on it equal to their years of marriage plus one for luck. This year there were

thirty candles. There was no candle for luck. Did they each feel somehow that a candle for luck

would be unlucky?

It wouldn't even be fair to say they hated each other. I mean, it would be accurate to say they completely loathed the very sight of each other, but not fair. Fair seems to indicate blame and the terrible truth is that each one of them individually would have made someone else a good spouse.

Not a great spouse but not a bad one either. Not as bad a spouse as they made the other anyway. I guess it's judgmental to say a truth can be terrible in the first place. The truth is just the truth.

And the truth was that they had kids so divorce was never an option. They were stuck together and they both knew it. Each heard the gavel come down and the sentence handed out in their own way. A sentence that always seemed to stretch out just a little further. At first there seemed to be a light at the end of the high school tunnel. Get the kids off to college and then they could go their separate ways and enjoy what dwindling years lay before them. Then came the realization that they would need to stay together until each child started a family of their own.

Then came the realization that having the grandkids splitting time with each of them on holidays just wouldn't do.

Then came the final realization that they were truly fucked. Realization... resignation. Whatever.

Perhaps it was when their family and friends asked them what they really wanted for their 30th anniversary that the idea came to them. Each had been thinking it since their 5th anniversary.

Maybe it was as late as their 7th but it had been there lurking in both of them for a long time.

So after the last of the well-wishers had departed they sat at their kitchen table. He placed the gun on the table.

You would think that at a moment like that there would be more drama but there wasn't. It was almost without any animosity at all. He put in a single bullet and spun the chamber.

Neither of them really cared how it turned out, just as long as it was finally over. That might be

the hardest part to believe but it was true.

They each produced their notes and placed them on the table in front of themselves.

Written on

the paper was a well thought out explanation of what drove them to suicide. There were little

hints about the sad state of their relationship but what was the point of dragging old demons into

the light at this point? Instead, they described a general malaise mixed with a fear of aging. It

would make perfect sense to both loved ones and the authorities.

Did I mention that neither of them really cared how it turned out just as long as one of them was

dead?

You might think that his gesture of asking if she would like to go first might suddenly ignite

some small spark of sympathy or even allow them to rediscover some small bond between them

but clearly you haven't spent thirty years wishing nothing more than to hear the tragic news of your

partner's sudden and unexpected demise, only to see their stupid face still breathing in bed next to

you night after night.

She deferred. He took the gun, placed it to his head and squeezed the trigger.

Click.

He did so without any hesitation and was almost sorry to hear the firing pin hit an empty chamber.

He handed the gun over. An act completely devoid of malice. Robotic.

She looked at him and for a moment it appeared that she would speak but then thought better of

it and simply placed the gun against her forehead, closed her eyes and pulled the trigger.

Trigger is a funny word. It means to cause or generate or elicit. What it meant for the bullet is

different than what it meant for the man. For the bullet it meant beginning a short journey through her cranium. For the man it meant putting away his letter, dialing the police in

mock

horror and starting his life again.

She was smiling.

He smiled.

pick a nose, any nose

So I was thinking about being a motivational speaker or something. I can talk pretty good and I don't mind getting up in front of crowds. I was in a band when I was younger. Well, marching band. Same thing, sort of; you have to get up in front of people and perform ... just without the gay spandex. Well, the uniform was pretty gay with the hat and all so I guess it's a wash.

Maybe motivational speaker isn't what I meant. The kind of speaker that gets up in front of a bunch of people looking for advice on how to live their life based on a simple metaphor, or needing inspiration to overcome their shitty life or something, is more of what I was thinking.

Here's why. I came up with a great one the other day. A metaphor. Most people would think that people who pick their nose and eat it would need a two step program to stop. Just makes sense. You'd need to stop the urge to pick your nose and you'd definitely need to stop wanting to eat it right?

Wrong!

You only need to figure out how to stop picking your nose. You can still want to eat boogers but if they are still inside your nose you can't get at them. You see what I'm getting at?

You don't need a two step program at all. You just need the one step: stop picking your nose. Picking is the only way to get at the snot inside it so if you can stop picking you've got it licked.

Can't you almost see a guy in a nice suit walking back and forth on a small stage at some Holiday Inn meeting room laying this information on you for only \$15? That guy could be me. There's got to be a dozen things that you could compare that strategy to.

I've done my homework. I've sat and thought about all the other possible ways to get snot out of your nose and picking is the only way I could come up with. Using a pencil or tweezers still counts as picking, picking is a verb, not a noun like finger. Unless you say something like "pickings are slim" where I think that makes it a noun but that wouldn't be applicable (a great word for a guy to say in a suit and holding a microphone), because if you stopped picking your nose the pickings would be bountiful (another 5 star word) in an unpicked nose.

The best part is that I don't need to go into a great deal of detail on how to stop picking your nose. I could just find someone in the audience to admit that they pick their nose and then yell at them to stop until they cry or fall to their knees and promise not to do it again. The 'why' they stopped isn't as important as the message of now they don't need to stop wanting to eat their boogers.

Like I said, there has got to be a dozen things you can use an example of this plan in action. Take for example the guy who drinks and drives. That's a popular disease these days and chances are there will be a few of those folks in any audience. All I have to do is show them that it's ok to drive as long as they stop drinking beforehand.

POW! Point made.

It's not the driving that's bad, just like it's not the wanting to eat your boogers that's bad. It's the act of eating them that is bad, just like it's the drunk part of driving. Just typing this has me all excited about having an assistant changing the slides as I make each point. You know, one of those kick-ass PowerPoints where I can show a diagram of the nasal cavity and then a car all smashed and twisted around a tree. Making lots of eye contact and peppering the speech with dramatic pauses. I can stand in front of them and pretend to be going through some huge internal debate, raising and lowering my finger to my nose as they all gasp and wonder which direction I'm going to go.

I'm telling you, this idea is gold. You can still *want* to do drugs, just don't buy them and you can't do them! You can still *want* to go out and have sex with strangers but if you lock yourself in a trunk you can't leave the house. You can *want* to surf just don't learn to swim. Keep that finger out of that nose and you're fine. Shit, there's the book title right there!

Maybe get an actor to pretend they are a psychologist in a TV commercial saying what a breakthrough idea this is and how everyone should hustle down to the Holiday Inn this Wednesday at 8 so they can get their shit straight by listening to me. Of course, I'll run a disclaimer at the bottom of the screen admitting that the psychologist isn't a psychiatrist and instead is an actor but I'll make it so small that an eagle with its beak pressed right up against the screen couldn't read it.

You see, I can still *want* to help people as long as they are willing to pay for it.

There's a perfect way to end this, but I just can't seem to put my finger in it.

VH

It suddenly occurred to me the other day ... there must be dozens, if not hundreds, of women that walk around with the knowledge that they slept with Michael Anthony from Van Halen. I can't envision the horror.

Imagine finding out that your wife slept with Michael Anthony! How could you ever forgive the dirty slut?! Now if it were David Lee Roth I don't think there is a red-blooded man in America that would begrudge his wife that one. Assuming, of course, that it was before his 2nd solo album. After that he drops down a few notches. If I had a wife who had been nailed by DLR in, say, 1989 I think I would tell everyone I know. It would also go a long way in explaining the burning sensation I have whenever I pee.

But Michael Anthony?!

Unforgivable.

I try to picture the scene backstage ... the chaos, the excitement when the band finally enters the room after the show. There he is ... the magnificent David Lee Roth. Only the

best of the best whores dare approach him. His leotard glistening, he sorts through the various prospects and finally departs with the lucky lady. Obviously, there is still plenty of estrogen in the air as Eddie makes his way around to console the runner-up. I can almost feel the tension as he finally makes his choice and leads the spandex-clad woman off to some nearby back room or closet.

All eyes then make their way to Alex Van Halen. The bronze penis is about to be awarded and I'm sure there is a little desperation among the females as they jockey for his attention. You know there is one who is clutching a thrown drumstick to her breast like some sweaty bouquet as if to say he was the one she wanted all along.

Amongst the road crew there is also growing anticipation. They know as soon as Alex makes his selection that it is open season on the rest of the herd. All of them, from the manager to the sound guy to the light technician, eyeball the remaining talent and await the moment that they will descend upon them like so many hyenas on a pack of gazelles. Snorting and grunting and making sure their backstage pass and over-blown sense of importance to the show are on full display.

And then there is Michael Anthony.

King of the Hyenas.

The 4th hottest girl in the room thinking "I shaved my privates for this?" as she weighs her options amongst the rock and roll rabble. Her friends giggle and encourage her ... a sure sense that it is a tragic mistake waiting to happen.

Twenty minutes later she is pulling down her miniskirt and desperately looking for an exit so she can run to a pharmacy and buy a gallon of Lysol to soak her vagina in overnight. A long black night of ignoring the ringing phone and doorbell, lost in the din of her own self-loathing.

"Michael Anthony? Did I really let the Van Halen bass player do me?"

A scene that will replay itself every night for at least a month and then sporadically for the rest of her natural life.

Twenty years later, slumped over a dimly lit counter at a local bar, slurring out "Michael Anthony? Did I really let the Van Halen bass player do me?". The memory of his thick sausage bass-playing fingers probing her. His big damp belly. That beard.

That terrible-smelling beard.

His nubby little bass player penis.

And to think, there are so many women walking around who have had this experience. Living with the secret terror that it will one day come to light and they will be driven from polite society. Forced to take refuge among the other victims of bad decision-making.

Like girls that slept with *any* of the *Poison* band members.

Except C.C. ... I assume those girls killed themselves a long time ago.

the premise is not the story

It's not so much that I find life particularly dull, it's just that I don't like the fact that we live out our days in a dull order. One after another, we're born, we age and then we die. Day after day. Boring!

I'd much prefer to live out my life in a random way, where every morning I wake up a random age on a random day in my life. I'm not asking for *more* days, if I live a particular day then I can't live it again, I would just like to mix them up so all the shitty ones aren't waiting for me at the end.

Call it a fear of aging or, more accurately, a pretty good idea of what lies ahead.

Wouldn't it be much cooler to go to sleep not knowing what the next day will hold; physically, mentally and socially? All the great triumphs and disappointments waiting to be lived, each equally as likely on any given morning. Call it a reorganization of consciousness.

Now the big issue is how it would work. When your eyes pop open how would you know what day it is? Are you in school, are you at work, is this the day you lose your virginity or is this the day you have that double root canal?

That's the most interesting thing about the whole concept. Just before you wake up you'd have to go into a small briefing room and get your daily update. I imagine it like a police holding cell, a single chair on the other side from a table where two people wait with manila folders to give you the pertinent details. It definitely wouldn't be like some corporate meeting room, I can't picture that in any of the various scenarios in my head. Nope, this is a small drab room painted in the colors of a government cinder-block building, perhaps gray or vomit-green. The table is rickety and the chair is one of those numbers that has a gray metal back and a seat that is covered with a green vinyl that is torn and peeling. Heavy and uncomfortable. The light would flicker occasionally as if the universe wanted you to know what a hassle your existence is. Your two handlers wouldn't be so much ill-tempered as disinterested. It's clear every morning that they have something better they could be doing than bringing you up to speed with your age and background for the day.

I imagine myself somewhat surly, perhaps even putting my feet up on the table despite its poor condition. I'm sure I'd be excited by the prospects of what lays ahead for me but I surely wouldn't want *them* to know it. My face would be a mask of indifference.

But inside ... how cool would it be if you were just as likely to live out some great day of your youthful prime as a depressing day stuck in a nursing home or mindlessly crawling around as a baby? Every morning, trying to nonchalantly sit down and wait for that folder to be opened and the particulars of your daily reality to be revealed. I can imagine my fingers nervously picking at the vinyl between my legs, trying my best not to make the hole any bigger, but unable to contain my enthusiasm.

I don't have the time or energy to run through how all the choices you make impact days you've previously lived out. I guess the whole thing presupposes that you've already lived your whole life out and now you're just going through the motions. Whatever. Those motions can be pretty fun and at least you wouldn't have to deal with the fact that every day you get another day older.

Can you picture the two people sitting across from you giving you the specifics before

they see you off each morning? I've got one man and one woman. The man drinks bad coffee out of a Styrofoam cup and wears white socks with black dress shoes. I don't think he realizes that you can see his socks when he's sitting. The woman is middle-aged and although not unattractive I find her unappealing physically, but her advice on certain topics is sometimes valuable. I like to think when the man tells me "Don't do anything stupid" each day seconds before I am launched into my life he says it with some affection.

If you stop and think about it, I guess you still have to deal with the fact that every day you have one less day ahead of you. In fact, after awhile you can probably figure out that you've never lived a day past a certain age so that must be when you die. You could probably do the math in your head and figure out how many days you have left. Not sure that's a big selling feature of my little plan but I think it still beats slowly aging and losing virility and mental faculties.

Maybe there will come a morning meeting when your two handlers will point out that this day is your last, and they will stand and shake your hand and tell you it's been a pleasure working with you. Wouldn't it be great on some level? Going into your last day feeling great. Perhaps you're 16 and it's summer vacation and you can go climb a hill on a cloudless day and stare up at the blue sky.

I can hear the squeaking noise the chair makes as I pull it out from under the table and briefly cross the tile floor so I can sit down. I'm not sure whether each morning the guy pulled out my folder from a well-worn briefcase he has sitting next to him, or if the folder is always sitting there on the table as I walk in. Either way, was that a quick flicker of remorse in the female's eye as the folder is flipped open for the final time?

I guess there is still the chance that I will spend my last day alone, incoherent and sitting in a puddle of my own urine, even in this version of living out my life, but I certainly like my odds.

Will I be 16 and strong of body and stupid between the ears in all the great ways you can only be when you're young? Can I lie back on the grass and fold my arms behind my head and watch the sun set and the stars start to twinkle above me until I drift off to sleep?

Favorite Tweets:

The na at the end of banana annoys me as much as it would you if it were bananana.

People who are scared of things becoming unraveled are overestimating raveled.

When a man spends time in prison it changes him. Especially his asshole.

eel

It's rare that I go out to eat. I'm a bit of a homebody but last night I decided to treat myself to some Chinese food. I'm a big fan of sesame shrimp so I was pretty pumped up about things when I entered the restaurant. As I'm waiting to be served I see this big tank along the wall. Curious I walk over and what do I see but this big eel sitting there with his big eel face looking at me. About 3 feet long, the thickness of a Coke can and the color of

something that you spit out after a long hacking cough. Turns out that this ugly guy is on the menu! He's waiting there for someone to order him. Wow.

So I sit there for awhile looking at this fucked up looking fish-thing when it occurs to me that I should eat him.

How primal is *that*?!

I suddenly got this huge rush of power. It was up to me if he lived or died. I whispered to him, "Do you want me to eat you? I could you know," but he just stared vacantly back at me. It hit me that this is how a lion feels crouched in the grass as he sneaks up on a wildebeest ... sizing up his next meal. I actually jumped when the hostess touched my shoulder and told me my table was ready.

I took the menu and gave it an obligatory look up and down but every few seconds I would gaze past the plastic placard and stare at the eel in the tank. Sitting there, completely unaware that I held his life in my hands.

At least a half dozen times I peered around my menu and whispered, "I'm thinking of eating you" and "I'm going to put you in my mouth, chew you, swallow you, and digest you" in his direction.

When the waitress finally came to my table I asked a favor. I told her I'd like to order by the tank. I walked over with every nerve-ending tingling. I locked eyes with my slippery friend one last time. "I'll be having the eel". Moments later he was unceremoniously hauled out of his tank and brought back to the kitchen. Was that a pang of guilt I felt?

I'm not sure what I expected but I was a little disappointed when she didn't return 10 minutes later with a 3 foot long fried entrée. Instead I got a plate with hunks of the slimy former-tank-inhabitant mixed in with peas and noodles.

I was even more disappointed to find out that he really did taste like chicken.

Still ... what a rush. If you've never eaten something that you spoke with just moments before I highly recommend it. In fact, I might not ever again eat anything but things I buy out of a tank or cage.

I even heard about this place that cooks a catfish while it's still alive and, through the wonder of a hideously primitive nervous system, you get to eat it while its mouth is still making breathing motions and its eyes are looking up at you with the mother of all 'WTF' expressions.

I guess that would be the pinnacle of dining coolness ... unless you happen to be one of those lucky bastards who crash lands on a desolate mountain top or something and is forced to eat his/her fellow passengers.

Of course, how disappointing would it be to find out that the hot chick in seat 14C tastes like chicken?

cheerasourus non-erectus

What the fuck has happened to cheerleaders? Back when I went to high school, as deplorable as they were at being decent human beings, the 7 or 8 hottest girls were always the cheerleaders. They dressed up in those slutty little outfits and only slept with

football players and that was the way things were. Everyone understood the rules and nobody questioned them. At the games they stood in front of everyone and shrieked and kicked and occasionally formed a pyramid or something but that was the extent of their acrobatics.

What happened?!

I went to a high school football game a few weeks back and couldn't believe my eyes. There were like 30 girls lined up and they were a collection of the ugliest and fattest girls to ever squish into tank tops. Holy shit! I had heard rumors that ever since cheerleading became an actual sport in and of itself, some schools had added a few 'thicker' girls to hoist the other girls up into the air and catch them as they fell, and drag a cement mixer up a steep hill by their teeth, but this was ridiculous. It seems overnight the unattractive girls of the world staged a coup and took over cheerleading squads. Of the 30 there were like maybe 5 I would have done in high school and I was a complete loser who would have done almost anyone. Some of them even wore knee braces and wrist-supports and shit like that ... I wanted to explain to them that they are supposed to be eye-candy, not sweaty muffin-topped gym rats.

Doing a little research I found out that this takeover actually happened at the Mom-level some years back. Because they never got to be cheerleaders when they were in high school, all the fat and ugly Moms took over the pee-wee/midget cheerleading associations and started to tell the heinous lie that all girls can cheerlead. Especially their fat and/or ugly daughters! The hot girls eventually moved on to other things because we all know they aren't going to any spend time with unattractive girls in grade school. It's social death. So now you have this whole huge flood of fat and/or ugly girls pouring into high schools completely unaware that fat and/or ugly girls have no place in cheerleading outfits. Like a plague of fat and/or ugly locust they swarmed into tryouts driving out the hot girls. To make matters worse, this new era of cheerleading doesn't allow cuts so anyone who wants to can squeeze themselves into the outfits and call themselves a cheerleader!

Outrageous.

As you may imagine I'm a bit conflicted on the topic. As I mentioned, I was a total dork in high school so on some level I should be happy that the beautiful people have lost something that at one time was just handed to them. Perhaps it's human nature to be somehow attracted to the very things we abhor. Take for instance, whenever I'm walking down the aisle at Home Depot I'm usually sporting a full erection despite the fact that I can't build squat and don't even know what most of the equipment is used for. In high school I was forced to take one shop class and while the rest of the males were putting the finishing touches on their assorted gun racks and entertainment centers, I was still struggling to complete the cutting board that my mother would later be so proud of. I believe I received an F+ for the class and visited the nurse with injuries requiring bandages and applied pressure at least a half dozen times. The point being that I should revel in this new cheerleading reality, shouldn't I? The problem is that even as a dork I looked forward to seeing the flash of panty when the cheerleaders would kick. Just the slightest peek would start my blood racing ... especially south of the border. Sometimes you see some teen movie where the cheerleader forgets to put on her underwear and

flashes the crowd and I have to be honest with myself and admit that if I would have seen actual cheerleader vagina for even a fraction of a second I would have probably suffered an aneurism and died on the spot. For however horrible they were as people, the cheerleader was iconic. A symbol to all post-adolescent teens. And by symbol I mean someone to jerk off to three or four times a day.

Powerful stuff.

Or it was anyway. Now that's all gone apparently, as the word powerfully now means possessing enormous power in chunky legs and bulging biceps. And the faces! What I wouldn't have given for one apple-pie smile as I looked down from the stands. Instead I saw busted face after busted face, shrilly carrying out gymnastic moves previously only seen in Romania, by crowds accustomed to squat calloused females covered in chalk and tape, hurling themselves around in the hopes of getting an additional tenth of a point on their score. Nobody in Romania is trying to catch a glimpse of the mess that is no doubt lurking under those short skirts. Believe that.

You have to wonder if cheerleaders still have attitudes. How can they possibly be snotty if everyone can make the team? Could it be that hot girls actually look down on cheerleaders now? As implausible as that might have seemed only a few years ago it might actually be the case. Like when the mammals took over the Earth from the dinosaurs.

Only this time in reverse.

backfired

For the United States, 2016 started with a bang. A very big bang. A bang that reverberated around the world.

A bang that was triggered by years of turning a blind eye to Iran building centrifuges and decades of ignoring the issue of illegal immigration. These two problems, along with thousands of other festering concerns not worthy of actually addressing, joined forces to allow the inauguration of the nation's 46th President to be interrupted by the detonation of a small nuclear fission bomb. The aforementioned big bang.

The shock wave started by gelignite dissolved in nitroglycerine quickly passed through the explosive lenses and then balls-deep into the Uranium235 and, thus, began a chain reaction that achieved the terrorists' goal of killing every politician, lobbyist and influential lawyer residing in the country they hated the most, in one terrible flash.

What is it they say about goals? They are made to be broken? No wait. That doesn't sound right. I think its dreams that are made to be broken. Hmm ... nope. Is it eggs or omelets perhaps?

Whatever is made to be broken then that's what I'm going for.

Best laid plans maybe?

No.

Anyway, after years of careful plan-laying and under the very noses of a government more focused on getting the current representatives elected to another term than actually

accomplishing anything on behalf of the people they represent, extremists realized their dream of wiping Washington, DC off the map.

The first domino fell in dramatic fashion. But the thing about dominos is that they tend to run in packs and after one falls then another gets it into its head to fall and so on and so forth until you have something very similar to fission taking place. Or you can liken it to social evolution and the sudden extinction of a failed bloated political system. Meteors and bombs and such. Whichever analogy makes you feel smarter.

The terrorists fucked up.

America got a do-over. You see, what passed for government in 2016 wasn't what the Founding Fathers had intended and everyone knew it. They were just paralyzed, unable to do anything to change it, because the only people with the power to change anything were the people benefiting from the very corruption of the original ideal. The politicians. The lobbyists. The lawyers. Suddenly the United States had the chance to rectify a very big mistake and they leapt at it.

You see, political service was originally supposed to be akin to jury duty. It was something that citizens were supposed to do for a few years and then return to their normal lives. It was never intended to be the immoral cesspool of greed that existed in 2016. It became worse than even the most cynical patriot in 1776 could have ever imagined.

Now the terrorists who had wanted the destruction of democracy and capitalism had, in fact, resurrected it. It was allowed to be reborn, a indivisible phoenix rising from the tainted ashes. Obviously, the remains of the depraved system didn't go without a fight but the people rose up as one and threw out anyone with the label of Republican or Democrat and instead filled the newly rebuilt halls of Congress with businessmen and teachers and farmers and accountants and plumbers and even the odd poet. The first law they passed dealt with strict term limits and the second was election reform that made sure for the foreseeable future that only the interests of the people were served. The debt was acknowledged and dealt with. The terrorists and the countries that harbored them were acknowledged and dealt with. The abominations of the free market called corporations were acknowledged and dealt with.

And the best part?

Other countries followed suit. "Off with their heads" became a rallying cry until every last head that wanted to stay attached fell in line.

And still I dreamed on, further into the future than I had ever dreamed before. And this was cloudier cause it was years, years away. But I saw an old couple being visited by their children, and all their grandchildren too. The old couple weren't screwed up. And neither were their kids or their grandkids. And I don't know. You tell me. This whole dream, was it wishful thinking? Was I just fleeing reality like I know I'm liable to do? But me and Ed, we can be good too. And it seemed real. It seemed like us and it seemed like, well, our home. If not Arizona, then a land not too far away. Where all parents are strong and wise and capable and all children are happy and beloved. I don't know. Maybe it was Utah.

precious gifts

Recently it occurred to me that sometimes it's easy to forget about all the wonderful things we take for granted. The little things that make existence easier for us even when it might seem that life is difficult or we have the problems of the whole world stacked up and resting upon our shoulders. I found myself particularly guilty of this so I thought it was time for me to do a little exercise to remind myself how many gifts I have and don't appreciate.

I think I got the idea from a movie or maybe it was a homework assignment from a hippie grade school teacher I had, but I thought I was overdue for a little reality check.

Day 1 - The night before I put on a blindfold and I kept it on for 24 hours to mimic the effects of being blind. I went blindfold despite my earlier claims that if I were blind I would instead wear two eye patches so I'd look like the most bad-ass pirate ever. I figured if the object was to appreciate my eyesight it wouldn't help if I spent the day walking around looking all bad-ass. Not that I did a lot of walking. Blindness definitely sucks, especially when I'm watching TV and the other people in the room refuse to describe what's going on because they think the idea of wearing a blindfold all day is stupid and also I had spilled a large amount of soda and snacks during the course of the day ... again because they refused to help me out. Being blind is certainly an eye-opener when it comes to who your friends really are.

Day 2 - I stuffed my ears full of cotton and then duct taped a pair of headphones over my ears the night before, which wasn't easy due to the fact that I was still wearing the blindfold, with the goal of waking up deaf. Mission accomplished! Let me tell you something, you ever want to get a good night's sleep give being deaf a whirl. You want to talk peaceful! Especially when you don't wake up until 10 because you can't hear the alarm. Now, obviously, I didn't have time to learn sign language so I pretty much kept to myself all day as people didn't seem to appreciate my attempts to communicate the way I've heard deaf people talk. I thought my impersonations were spot on but I guess some people have thin skin, still hard to believe someone would take the time to write "you sound like a bull seal in heat" on a napkin and hand it to me. Bottom line though, being deaf is very relaxing.

Day 3 - Starting to run out of handicaps. After the nightmare of trying to take off the duct tape and subsequently losing at least 20% of the hair on my head I settled upon removing my sense of smell for the following day. Let me tell you something, when you stick cotton up your nose everyone else in the house will wish they were deaf because you snore like crazy. I'm sure the rest of the animal kingdom would really get their panties in a twist if they lost their sense of smell but let me tell you, we human really don't need it anymore. The only drawback was that my nose wouldn't stop running and I kept having to remove the nasal plug and give it a good blow. Other than that I couldn't tell you one time I missed the smell of anything. In fact, if anything it was a pleasant change from the usual odors that assail me every time I walk into my bathroom. At about Noon I decided that not having a sense of smell really isn't a handicap at all and decided to switch to having a stutter. Obviously the first thing to do was make a mix CD to get me in the mood so I quickly downloaded and burned "You Ain't Seen N-n-nothing Yet", "M-m-my Sharona", "My G-g-generation", "Ch-ch-changes", "F-f-foolin" and "B-b-bad to the

Bone" to get me in the mood. A little-known scientific fact to pass along, and if it's not it should be, if you listen to all those songs in a row you end up singing "*B-b-b-bad to the B-b-b-b-b-bone*" whether you want to or not and completely embarrassing yourself. Stuttering is as annoying as the loss of smell isn't.

Day 4 - I couldn't really take away my senses of taste or touch so I decided to be retarded for the day. Not a little retarded either, I went full-on retarded and let me tell you one thing, one horribly politically incorrect thing, it is fun as hell being retarded. Granted, if you're actually retarded then you probably don't enjoy it as much because you're too retarded to enjoy it. Ironically, that sentence came off a bit retarded. But anyway, this whole trying to appreciate the gifts I've been given in life thing is starting to head south. With the exception of my eyes, which I have to give a big shout out to, I can't really say that the other disabilities were that bad. If I could have gotten another friend to act retarded with me I'm seriously thinking it might have been the greatest day of my life.

Day 5 - Woke up paralyzed from the waist down. Not really, but anyone seeing me make my way downstairs to start my day would have been completely fooled. Unfortunately for me my friends were getting a bit tired of my tomfoolery so they refused to be tomfooled or even play along. Apparently there is a scene in *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* wherein Steve Martin's character is attempting something very similar and Michael Caine's character comes upon him with a switch in hand and begins to test the boundaries of his lack of feeling below the waist and my so-called friends took it upon themselves to reenact this scene repeatedly until such a time as I had to abandon the whole thing and seek ice. Let me tell you, both medical personnel and faith healers should further explore this cure as it certainly got me out of my chair and walking again, pronto.

Day 6 - Although I don't personally think of it as a handicap I think some in our society would consider homosexuality a drawback at the very least, so I settled on that for my next challenge to live through. Much like I did with being retarded I opted for full-on gay, the kind you see at the gay pride parades that make normal gay people wince. You know the type, the wearing leather chaps and squealing and glistening and being in much better shape than I am type. Even my gay friend told me once that he thought that these parades do more harm than good to the gay community. Actually that's not entirely correct as I don't have a gay friend. If I did though, I imagine that he'd feel that way. It's not that I don't have gay friends, I'm sure that I do, it's just that most of my male friends are married and wouldn't want their wife and kids to find out. I just don't have any gay friends I know about. Anyway, I went about the entire day acting really gay and it's nowhere near as fun as being retarded. Had I another day I would have tried being a retarded homosexual, but as I wanted to wrap this up in a neat tidy week I only had 1 more day. And that day was spoken for.

Day 7 - And on the seventh day he believed that the Earth was only 6,000 years old! I woke up with the knowledge that I was created by a loving God and all was going to be well as long as I followed a few simple ground rules so I was off and believing. Now obviously not being able to actually use science or critical-thinking skills all day was going to be a hassle, but any negatives I ran into could easily be offset with the awesome hats I was going to get to wear. I'd envied them from afar for years so this was my big day. I ran right to the nearest place of worship and inquired what I needed to do to get the big pointy variety. Turns out it's not as easy as you'd think, you can't just buy them and

throw them on and go parading around showing off your enormous new lid and, strongly implied, your closeness to the big man upstairs. It's this big complicated thing where you have to join certain groups and move up the ranks and get picked for certain jobs and then appointed to other positions until finally you have to move closer to God and overseas to get a crack at the *really* big hats. You can imagine my disappointment. What's the point of abandoning common sense if I can't wear a gigantic hat?

As you might imagine my week of trying to appreciate what I had, turned out to be a real mixed bag. I ended up appreciating the fact that I can see a bit more, I learned that if you stutter enough you develop a stutter and I had the chance to wonder whether my gay friends, if I have any, would they find me attractive, so the week wasn't a total loss. Of course, nobody I know is talking to me anymore, apparently this little experiment came off as slightly insensitive to some folks, but I'm sure they'll start to miss my company and come crawling back any day now.

Self improvement is never easy.

blindsided

I saw this movie where Sandra Bullock's character goes out and abducts this enormous black kid and teaches him to play football and ends up shipping him off to her alma mater and scoring awesome seats at all the games and such, and I immediately thought to myself "Where do I sign up?!" The problem is that the movie is totally misleading when it comes to how easy it is to find an enormous black kid just walking around.

First of all it's a long drive for me just to get to the black kids and I swear every kid I saw was either too old, too young or scrawny as hell. Nobody was going to be ponying up 50 yard line seats for any of these kids, let me tell you. No wonder their parents let them roam around at all hours. Finally after a week of canvassing local schools and parks I came upon a good candidate. I forgot how Sandra went about introducing herself to the kid in the first place, so I had to improvise. Luckily for me I had a bottle of chlorophyll and some heavy-duty netting, so instead of trying to talk him into the van like some weirdo, I simply snuck up behind him and held a cloth soaked in chlorophyll against his face. Problem was that chlorophyll doesn't make people go unconscious, I was thinking about *chloroform*. Looking back, why did I even have a bottle of chlorophyll to begin with? It was an expensive lesson in terms of getting repeatedly punched and kicked, but the next day I was back at it, visions of 50 yard line seats dancing in my bruised and swollen head.

Long story short, I eventually found another giant black kid that looked of high school age and 'acquired' him without too much fuss. Funny thing though, the kid that Sandra grabbed was passive and had a heart of gold while the youth that was slowly coming to in the seat next to me did not seem to share those characteristics. At all. I think it would be fair to say he was almost exactly the opposite. As much as I tried to explain the situation to him he simply refused to listen and as his strength slowly returned I could see I was going to have my hands full.

The first few days were just heartbreaking. Every time I tried to make a kind gesture, I just seemed to make things worse ... and I was running out of chloroform. Turns out he did have a bed at home, he had a good relationship with his father and did fine in school.

He even knew how to play football already. I couldn't catch a break!

You know the expression "No good deed goes unpunished?" Well now I understand where that phrase comes from. No sooner had I completed the paperwork enrolling my new charge in the nearby high school, but I see his face splashed all over the TV and newspapers! The local authorities had jumped to the completely wrong conclusion about the whole thing and now they were making me out as some sort of bad guy. I swear, you try to help people and this is what you get.

Long story short, I ended up having to let the unappreciative kid go. He was simply too large, too strong, and as much as I hate to make the accusation, I felt he was a bit racist for my liking. Truth is though, it was mostly the large and strong parts. I could have won him over eventually if he hadn't almost ripped down the bars keeping him in my basement before the tranq darts took effect.

I guess the worst part was listening to him describe his 'ordeal' to the press when I returned him to his neighborhood. It was very hurtful. He just didn't get it. Some kids just look a gift horse right in the mouth.

Oh well. Everything is a learning experience right?

After fixing up the basement, and by fixing up I mean reinforcing the steel bars, I lowered my sights a bit and decided to try to get in good with the folks that run the Scripps National Spelling Bee. I'll be headed over to the Indian neighborhood in just a bit.

unbridled

I am literally oozing with unbridled joy. Usually I am bridled, but right now I am oozing in a way that even paper towels could not handle.

Why you ask?

Because someone told me a little tip for starting a fire and it actually worked. Now obviously, I would be relatively pleased if I had something to help me get my fire going when I want one but this in itself could not flip the bridled to unbridled switch. What I'm so damn happy about is that something actually did what it said it was going to do.

The world seems to work overtime in keeping people's joy safely bridled and nothing does this more effectively than advertising. Commercials are full of shit. It's gotten so that when I watch TV I just assume everything that I see in an ad is a lie. Except of course the pharmaceutical ads where they are forced to tell the truth about side effects and list them in such a graphic and comprehensive fashion that I dare not take even an aspirin for a week after seeing one for fear my dick will come off in my hands and I will bleed uncontrollably from my rectum (if I'm lucky).

So when someone tells me something that works I'm almost dizzy with joy.

I remember a few years ago someone bought me a book filled with tips about how household products could be used for a variety of other helpful uses. Stuff like how to use deodorant to treat mosquito bites and hemorrhoid cream for cold sores and that type of stupid shit. I literally sat in front of a mirror for an hour wondering what it was about me

that could possibly lead someone to the conclusion that I would want a book like that for a present and how I could prevent myself from ever sending out that vibe again.

The point being that none of it worked. I tried like a dozen of the stupid things with toothpaste and Coca Cola and Cheerios and corn oil and vinegar and every time I sat there wondering what it was about me that could possibly lead someone to the conclusion that I would want a book like that for a present.

Bottom line is none of it actually did what it said it would. Then out of the blue someone mentions that if you take the lint that you would otherwise throw away when you clean the dryer trap and put it in a used up toilet roll it would make a great little fire starter.

Now if you're anything like me, and who isn't, you get frustrated when you plop down good money for a fire starter and then you have to spend 10 minutes trying to get it lit so you can put it in with the wood to get the fire lit. The only job it has in the world is to start a fire! It was created specifically for the task and smells like a combination of gasoline and sawdust, but there you sit huddled in front of the fire trying to get the fire starter started. So to say I went into this enterprise already motivated to embrace this lint-in-toilet-paper-roll endeavor is an understatement but at the same time I was cynical, having endured putting peanut butter in my hair to try to remove the gum that was already there only to have a giant wad of peanut butter-scented gum remaining in my hair at the end of the operation.

My cynicism couldn't have been more misplaced. The lint-in-toilet-paper-roll fire starter is brilliant! It bursts into flames at the slightest provocation and seems intent on setting everything within its reach alight as well. I literally cannot contain myself. I have already made a dozen of them and although the temperature outside is well above freezing, actually well above 50F if you want to know the truth, I insist on having a roaring fire going just to unbridledly enjoy the starting of it.

So here I sit in my shorts and tank top, sweating profusely, as my joy crashes around unbridled wondering what it is about me that could possibly lead someone to the conclusion that I would want a book about creative ways to use household products for a present.

chatroom lament

*"Ships that pass in the night, and speak each other in passing,
Only a signal shown and a distant voice in the darkness;
So on the ocean of life we pass and speak one another,
Only a look and a voice, then darkness again and a silence."*

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

The sea is rich in potential metaphors ... and if you know one thing about me you know I love a good metaphor. In this case I will pass up the obvious salty sexual metaphors for fear of being perceived as tedious. Who can't see a quick Bermuda Triangle comment begging to be made?

Instead, I can't help but think that the sea can provide me with far more thought provoking fare on this rainy morning. I realize that I wouldn't be honest if I didn't feel the need to start muddying the waters by suggesting intent and outcome are never clear on

the sea or on the internet. Some days we are nothing short of Master and Commander of the HMS Audacious plowing resolutely through the world wide web and other days we sit in front of our screens like the Skipper trying to control the Minnow as our "tiny ship gets tossed." Most days we experience the duality of having successfully delivered the bomb to Tinian only to be sunk later and at the mercy of the sharks.

So this technology allows us to say hello to new people and goodbye to new people at a quicker and quicker pace and we try to feel that these fleeting connections add to us rather than erode. It's not that I have an issue with saying goodbye ... it's just that sometimes I liked to watch the other ship sail away. I like to feel that sense of melancholy that somehow validates the effort I have invested. Now people just melt instantly into the teeming digital seas without a glance back. Lost in the crowd or the translation ... you never really know the difference.

poisoned

Most days being a writer is nice. You sit down and squeeze out a few words and then go on with your day but some days there is real work to do. The kind of work where one must roll up the ol' sleeves and get to it with a set jaw and steely will.

This is one of those times because a thought came into my head and, before I could dismiss it or squish it and move on to a less volatile subject matter, it seemed to take root. Then all these other ideas started to swarm around it like vultures. Before long I had no control over the initial idea and wasn't even sure of my opinion on all the subsequent thoughts that seemed to piggyback unwanted on the original.

Here was what I wondered to myself: "What if semen was toxic?" i.e. when you were climaxing into a female you were actually going to kill her.

Lot of mixed feelings to sort through. Never mind the effect it would eventually have on humans as a species, the very first reaction I had was "Awesome!"

I know, wrong on SO many levels but there it is. Now as writer I have to take the time and sort through this shit because obviously I can't run around feeling like killing women with my dick is acceptable. Although you could make the case that nobody would ever know, I think that this type of outlook would somehow make it right onto my face and everyone I knew would suddenly draw in their breath sharply upon seeing me and know that something was amiss behind my otherwise cool gaze.

I think the best thing to do here is not recoil in horror but bravely explore the initial response in order to understand it better.

Why would I want to kill the woman underneath me? Why would I want to kill a woman nice enough to let me stick my penis in her vagina? Why, why, a thousand times why?

Here is where being a writer is difficult. If I lacked the type of gritty integrity possessed by the writing type I would immediately jump on the anti-Manion bandwagon and be awash in the gratitude of every reader unfortunate enough to have read my original few paragraphs. I would once again hoist the trembling fist in my own direction and drench myself in derision. But no! Not the writing type. We must forge ahead into unpopular waters even when the word "forge" doesn't exactly work when I use unpopular waters

instead of unpopular territory. I think “sail” would have worked better, but either way there is some forging to be done so here goes.

The dick is nothing but a snake (ask Adam and Eve) and snakes are venomous so how cool would it be not only to have the orgasm, signifying your own triumph as far as passing on DNA goes (in addition to the individual conquest of whatever female is on the receiving end of this act), but actually know what it feels like when a snake strikes and injects its poison into some hapless furry animal?

POW! My dick just killed you! Behold, my mighty instrument!

Awesome!

Shit, I said it again. It's going to take some mighty good writing to get out of this one.

The concept only works if (a) the poison is fast-acting, and (b) the female doesn't know you're packing a poison pill. It also helps to imagine a world where you can just get up and leave the corpse there and you are not charged with the disposal of said female. I think that would take a little of the luster off the entire venture. Snakes have the luxury of just swallowing their victims and moving on.

So we can all agree that this type of thing would be bad and entirely unacceptable. Besides removing any hope of a subsequent generation of people due to the untimely death of every willing female participant, it would also be a great loss because women are not always entirely unpleasant to be around in non-coital situations. Clearly, there are many of them that men would like to have repeat sex with as well. The one-and-done plan as outlined by the poison-penis fantasy clearly wouldn't be good for anyone in the long run.

Hmmm. I'm re-reading that last bit and I'm just not convinced. Maybe if instead of deadly splodge I ejaculated an enormous spike that shot through the back of her skull? Less cruel but a lot more mess to clean up.

Honestly I don't see the big deal, there are numerous examples in the animal kingdom where the female kills and/or eats the male after copulation. Suddenly, I'm a bad guy for having a tiny little daydream about the goose giving the high hard one to the gander?

I'm not even a good enough writer to talk myself into the position I wanted you to take after all the writing was said and done. So perhaps not passing on these genes is best for everyone after all.

Except, of course, for the poor girl who I just killed with my meatstick.

accidentents will happen

I came up with a new word. Accidentent. It means a mishap or detrimental event caused by a miscommunication resulting from one of the people in a conversation having a thick accent (also add accidentally).

I guess I'm just sick of foreigners. I know ... that makes me a bad guy but I am. Sick of trying to understand foreign tongues, sick of being embarrassed because I don't know the difference between a Japanese guy and a Chinese guy by looking at them. Don't even get me started on trying to tell the difference between someone from the Middle East and a

Pakistani. I always feel like I'm one wrong word away from getting beheaded at the mall.

Foreigners are for when I am visiting another country! I like foreigners when I am walking around with a camera, my wallet full of their silly looking currency and snapping pictures of their ruins and barefoot children. Talk whatever way you want as you ask me for change or if I want my hair braided ... that's why I came. Just not in my country. Call it foreigner fatigue. How can I enjoy other cultures and other languages if I never get a break from them? I don't want foreign things in my back yard!

I want to be surrounded by people who look like me, who talk like me and who act like me.

There. I said it. Is that so wrong??

I feel like I'm trapped at the It's A Small World exhibit at Disney!

I'm sick of Mexican comedians yelling and gloating about how they are taking over the country. Congratulations ... in 20 years the U.S. will be just as big a shithole as Mexico. Yippee. Nice work, Señor.

I'm sick of 'Native' Americans still being here. I know they were here first but when we arrived all friendly they tried to scalp us and tie us down to anthills with honey on our eyelids so we had to defend ourselves and kick their ass. Then they didn't even have the good taste to vacant the continent like the loser of a war should. Common decency says the losers slink off into oblivion. Nope. Instead they sit around being alcoholics, running casinos and crying about how we throw our trash on the side of the road.

I guess I really should learn to tell the difference between a Japanese man and a Chinese man after all. One is polite and allows us to film a nice movie like *Lost in Translation* in their country and the other ships over an inflatable pool 10' x 5' without a warning on the box that it does not include a pump and the purchaser of said pool will be required to spend their entire Memorial Day blowing up the fucking thing. It's just a matter of time until we're at war with one of these guys (and here's a hint ... it's not the one with the annoying game shows).

And is it too much to ask to buy a damn Slurpee and a muffin without getting a forced lesson in Arabic? Honestly. I'm not a mean person but I just want to stop in a grab a snack! I remember a time when I could do that. Figure out how to use the fucking register before I get there ok? And why the fuck do the people who want to buy lottery tickets come before those trying to pay for their items?!

I can't even remember a time where I ordered food through a drive-through speaker and the voice on the other end didn't sound like someone from the bar scene in Star Wars.

How many more accidentidents will it take for everyone to decide to go back to wherever it is they came from and learn to be happy there? Look at the French. If they can stand to live surrounded by other Frenchmen then anybody can make a go of it in their own country!

Really. If you do, I promise to visit ...barring an accident at the airport.

the greatest story ever told. not.

As nice as it is to be able to go online and buy books with a few clicks of a mouse nothing beats spending time at a book store. Just the smell of the place. Walking up and down the aisles, stumbling upon a tome you are unfamiliar with and whisking it up to the counter for purchase. Exhilarating! If you're anything like me though there is one section you want to stay out of. A section that will ruin your night. A section that have you balling your fists and shaking them towards heaven as you cry out "Why? Why? Why?!"

The autobiographies.

I doubt there is anywhere on the planet that can have you loathing your fellow man faster than this black hole of literature. Even if you're able to ignore the opportunist books, Obama's aunt who feels the need to tell us about life in Kenya ("Busy day today. Sat in mud hut. Ate grub") or Emilio Estevez believing for a few moments that because his brother is interesting that somehow that makes him interesting, there is a fresh new hell on every shelf. The balls on some of these people to think that their life story is more interesting than anyone else you might find walking down the street. Is it arrogance or just self-delusion?

Isn't it funny how you end up fixating on something and it ends up representing everything you hate about a much broader subject? As my eyes travelled up and down the shelves, drinking in the litany of morons who felt the need to burden the poor consumer with the trials and tribulations of their vapid existence, they finally came to rest on perhaps the greatest waste of paper ever to thrust itself unwanted into my consciousness.

The Guttenberg Bible.

Not *The Gutenberg Bible*. *The Guttenberg Bible*.

The autobiography of Steve Guttenberg.

I will give you a moment to figure out who the hell Steve Guttenberg is. It should be in there somewhere, mixed in with all the other 80s and 90s actors that you've long ago forgotten about. I'll give you a hint. *Police Academy*. No?

What about *Police Academy 2: Their First Assignment*? Nothing?

Police Academy 3: Back in Training?

Surely *Police Academy 4: Citizens on Patrol* will jog your memory.

The lovable Carey Mahoney, the troublemaking scalawag with a heart of gold?

Police Academy 5: Assignment Miami Beach?

Police Academy 6: City Under Siege??

Come on. Think! Steve Guttenberg ... *Police Academy 7: Mission to Moscow*?

Ok, clearly those films aren't helping. What about *Three Men and a Baby* with hunky co-stars Tom Selleck and Ted Danson? Getting warmer?

What about *Three Men and a Baby 2: Their First Assignment*? Nothing?

Three Men and a Baby 3: Back in Training?

Surely *Three Men and a Baby 4: Citizens on Patrol* will jog your memory.

The lovable Michael Kellam, the troublemaking scalawag with a heart of gold?

Three Men and a Baby 5: Assignment Miami Beach?

Three Men and a Baby 6: City Under Siege??

Come on now. Think! Steve Guttenberg ... *Three Men and a Baby 7: Mission to Moscow?*

I think I've made my point. For anyone unclear as to what that might be, it is this: who the fuck is Steve Guttenberg to write an autobiography?! The dust jacket quotes weren't even from book critics, they were from his Hollywood pals. Who gives a crap about this guy's life? You could tell the same ten books had been there since they arrived in 2010, waiting on the shelf until their inevitable journey over to the discount table and then, finally, to the dumpster. The book is an outrage! A blight on the literary landscape.

Pretty good title though.

pon farr for the course

I'm not exactly sure what got me thinking about the Amish and their coming-of-age ritual called *rumspringa*, but once it started rattling around inside my head I couldn't think of much else. Well, until I started to think about the Vulcan psychological condition *pon farr*. For those of you who are unfamiliar with one or both of these, I will elaborate ... although if you don't know who Spock from *Star Trek* is I'm not sure I can help you. I'm not saying that you need to be a fan of the show but if you're unfamiliar with Spock you're probably not from around here or, even worse, Amish.

Anyway.

Rumspringa refers to the window of opportunity for an adolescent to break the rules a bit to see if he or she is really cut out for the Amish way of life. It is not uncommon to see such crazy behavior as driving automobiles, using telephones, wearing brightly colored clothes and doing drugs with an underage black prostitute before engaging in oral and anal sex. After a certain period of time they then decide whether to go back into the community and accept baptism within the Amish church or head for the fucking hills.

Pon farr on the other hand occurs every seven years and causes Vulcans, both male and female, to go into a fit of uncontrollable rage until such a time as they can procreate. They are prone to violence and will actually die unless they can get some.

We all know *that* feeling, am I right?

I guess we know now why there aren't any Amish Vulcans. You get a rumspringa running smack dab into a pon farr and it is *on*. Everyone on board the starship will be sprinting away from the ruddy-cheeked bearded guy with pointy ears and suspenders!

I guess I can't imagine any space-going vessel having use for a crewmember who can't use a computer, won't fight a Klingon (ghuy' lo'laHbe'ghach amish jaghla'), and absolutely refuses to beam anyone up in the first place.

If you're thinking that I'm just going to spend the rest of this story making fun of the Amish, then your instincts are dead on mister. The question is where to begin. What can you say about a culture that refuses to educate itself past the 8th grade level? Keep 'em

dumb and they'll stay on the farm, is that the idea?

Perhaps a more interesting way to pass the time (instead of just making fun of those barn-raising simpletons), would be to note that Gene Roddenberry, creator of the *Star Trek* series, was a highly educated man who completely embraced technology and envisioned a future where scientific advances lifted humanity up and improved the quality of life for everyone. On the other hand Jakob Ammann, the Swiss Mennonite leader who led his followers away from traditional Anabaptist teachings (which he felt weren't heavy enough on the church discipline and shunning aspects of faith) and out into the Pennsylvanian countryside, was as dumb as a brick and taught that technology was something to be shunned. See? Right away he got some shunning in. He wasn't out in the fresh air more than five minutes before he was off and shunning.

The question that first springs to mind is this: which one of them would win in a fight?

Wait. Not where I was going with this *at all*. Ok, maybe it's the second question that springs to mind. I think you might need to lay off the UFC and martial arts movies a bit. Really? Your first question would be who would win in a fight? And then you wonder why I don't try harder writing these stories.

Anyway, *a* question that immediately springs to mind is this: is there a connection between the Amish and Vulcans? Both reject pride, both place a high value on calmness and placidity and both are reluctant to bring attention to themselves. They both prize order above all else.

Let's face it, Spock is one beard short of being a buggy-driving, hat-wearing Amish guy. Was this intentional on the part of Roddenberry? While it is widely known in nerd circles that the character of Spock was based on former Los Angeles police Chief William H. Parker and his calm demeanor (Roddenberry was a LA cop for awhile and worked under Parker), there might also be something else to this Vulcan-Amish thing. Although Parker did in fact desegregate the LAPD during the civil rights movement he was also blamed by many for the Watts Riots because of the department's alleged brutality towards the black community.

Here's the weird thing. The Amish from way back have had quote, "Little time for either Negroes, lawyers or rum." I realize typing the word quote followed by the apostrophes is redundant but I wanted to make it perfectly clear that those were *their* words not mine in case my alcoholic black attorney ever reads this.

Do you see what I'm trying to get at? Me neither. Am I trying to say that Spock secretly hated Lt. Uhura? Most people agree that she disliked him in the original series. Racial tension perhaps? Didn't he picture her briefly in a bonnet and apron in one episode during his pon farr?

Whoooooah. This has really gotten away from me.

I hope they answer some of these (cross?) burning issues in the next Star Trek movie.

a porcelain puzzler

Sometimes you just have to sit down and think things through. You can't just take the easy way out and settle for your first assumption. Take, for example, the issue of

overflowing toilets at parties. Most people just aren't willing to put in a little extra work to figure out why there are a disproportional amount of toilets that get backed up at parties relative to typical day-to-day use.

So I sat down on my thinking chair, ironically enough made of porcelain, and got to thinking.

Some people just jump to the conclusion that someone does it on purpose. Someone clogs the toilet and then leaves.

Nope. That can't be it. That is far too risky behavior. If you were ever caught you'd be forever known as a 'clogger' and your social life would dry up fast. Therefore we can eliminate that as a possible cause.

The next answer that jumps out is pure math. The toilet is flushed more so there would be a higher percentage chance of a clog occurring. Even assuming that a clog "just happens" and is not a result of a particular flusher's behavior, which is a faulty assumption as any plumber would testify, it comes down to crunching numbers and the numbers tell us that we should not see anywhere near the number of overflow incidents that we do. Not even close. So that eliminates another suspect.

Now we're getting down to it.

This next one has real possibility. I call it the 'sparkling anus syndrome.' SAS says that people at a party, particularly single, sexually-active people, are very conscious of their bodies and if they are forced to take a dump at a party they will over-clean that area to compensate. If they could, they would jump in the shower and hose down the offending area just in case they get lucky at the party. Nobody wants to head into a sexual encounter knowing they have swamp ass. I would suspect that the better looking the crowd the more incidences of SAS would occur. Same with the male/female split, the closer it is to 50/50 the more SAS will come into play. If it's a sausagefest what guy would bother?

Here is where many people will make a fatal mistake. That scenario sounds good so they will leave it at that and simply blame SAS.

They are forgetting something, though. The same people who would be so conscious of their ass smell would also be very uncomfortable running the risk of being a 'clogger'. There must be other forces at work here ... so the thinking continues.

This is where the porcelain thinking chairs pays off. It puts me in the zone. I'm in the head of the buzzed partygoer with swamp ass and it occurs to me the missing piece of the SAS puzzle.

It comes down to their home plumbing. If your home commode has poor pull then you are going to be very conscious of an unknown toilet and its flushing capacity. If, on the other hand, you have one of these bad-ass toilets that has suction usually only seen on the Space Station and could pull a live squirrel into the sewer without breaking a sweat then you are not as sensitive to the fact that some toilets might not be able to handle a SAS load of paper.

Brilliant!

Show me a good looking person with an awesome home crapper and I'll show you the

'clogger' at any party. I bet the soles of their shoes would still be damp when I busted them.

I'm telling you, a porcelain thinking chair is worth every cent.

getting rattled

Some rattlesnakes don't have rattles.

I know right. Crazy.

I probably should have made sure you were sitting down before sprung that on you.

Here's the thing. It's true that all rattlesnakes are born with rattles. I hope you're either sitting down now or never bothered to get back up from the shock of the first sentence because there is a kind of rattlesnake where the rattle actually falls off because they don't want it anymore.

I swear.

The reason? Because the damn rattlesnake hunts in the trees instead of on the ground and the rattle accidentally rattles all the time and scares off the prey. I know what you're thinking. Snakes that hunt in the trees are bright green, the length and thickness of a jump rope and have an evil demented smile on their face all the time. They eat frogs and such and every frog dies with the same last thought going through their amphibious head, "A snake up here? Really?!" Rattlesnakes on the other hand are short and thick and sit camouflaged under a rock or sitting in leaves until a mouse or rabbit walks by and they spring into action with a quick bite. They are not built for life in the canopy.

These rattle-less snakes beg to differ. Maybe there was a shortage of mice and rabbits or perhaps they got bored with the ease at which meals were acquired, but whatever the reason they looked up at a tree and said to themselves, "that's the life for me."

You can be sure that nature did nothing to encourage them. All the other rattlesnakes probably scoffed and all the green tree snakes resented the intrusion, but at some point in time the first slow, fat, clumsy rattlesnake stopped fighting their arboreal tendencies and up they went. Not only that, but after enough times of having their rattle go off at the wrong moment they decided enough was enough and cut it loose.

The rattle falls off because unlike other rattlesnakes who have the first segment of their rattle attached to the end of their tail, this particular rattlesnake has a degenerative first button that falls off with each shed. I think it goes without saying that the other rattlesnakes consider more than the tail of this rattlelesssnake 'degenerative.'

Now the obvious question is whether to admire this behavior or root for their inevitable extinction. The easy choice is to enjoy their eventual evolutionary failure, but I think most people see too much of themselves in these sans-rattle rattlesnakes to take any pleasure in the fact that half of these dumb reptiles probably fall to their death in the first couple years of life off the terra firma.

Of course there are some of you that probably think the coolest part of being a rattlesnake is the rattle and the idea that a snake would abandon this birthright to chase some crazy tree-dwelling dream is offensive. I can understand this group of folks fully getting on the

"get your pudgy ass back on the ground" bandwagon.

I guess here is where I typically leap to the defense of the snake that aspires to live a different life than that expected of him and to rage against the 'snakes' that want to hold him down. I'll be honest though, in this particular case I sit with both an angel and a devil on one shoulder and Andy Kaufman perched on the other. Do I really want a tree full of rattleless snakes stalking birds and falling on innocent passer-bys? Truly, the Tony Clifton of snakes.

I can feel the cool hand of reason slipping up my skirt on this issue and no amount of purposely using three S's in rattle-less snake makes me feel anything less than a fraud.

If I truly aspire to be a degenerate, why can't I lose this rattled feeling?

icing from my cake

Sometimes we are a victim of circumstance and sometimes it's our own damn fault. Sometimes it's both and that's when you know you're really in for it. With a less embarrassing story I guess I could build it up with all sorts of references to unseen forces moving in the background, fate pulling strings behind some cosmic curtain or my own self-destructive tendencies manifesting themselves at a particularly inappropriate time, but in this case I think it's best to plow along and try to tell this story with as little embellishment as possible.

I write a lot, so it follows that I spend a disproportionate amount of time in front of my computer. It also follows that I consume a disproportionate amount of porn. Most of the time it is sprung upon me as I try to Google something completely unrelated and I find myself defenseless to its many charms. That being said I use a disproportionate amount of tissue paper at my computer. In my defense, sometimes I find the act of masturbation completely abhorrent and engage in it quickly and with the same enthusiasm I have for folding my clothes when they come out of the dryer. It is simply something I have to do so I can get back to work. Perhaps it is because of this compulsory and loveless relationship I have with the act itself that I am so callous about the need to dispose of the evidence of these transgressions. Sometimes my waste basket is overflowing with these little formerly-smoking guns.

Today I found myself at exactly that crossroads. I went to throw out a fax I had received when I realized there was no more room at the inn. Or in the inn. Whatever. Usually I would just jam my hand in and push everything down but given the contents I was not inclined to follow this course of action lest my hand return to me sticky and in need of immediate decontamination. Looking out the front window I saw that although my garbage can was at the curb I was in luck and the garbage men had not yet arrived for pick-up. The use of the word luck in that last sentence will later be up for further discussion. Perhaps it was because I thoughtlessly referred to them as garbage men as opposed to sanitation engineers that I brought this upon myself. Whatever the case, the story moves pretty quickly from here.

I run outside with my trash can tucked under my arm and realize that although it is a bit breezy out the temperature is unseasonably warm and the neighborhood is choked with small children laughing and frolicking. I think to myself, I really do need to get out more

and enjoy the nice weather and I am truly feeling that all is right with the world when I open the lid of my garbage and deposit my trash into it.

Almost on cue I hear the rumbling of the garbage truck making its rounds. I slowly backpedal up my driveway but I make sure to give a nice wave to the garbage engineers so they know that I in no way consider myself superior to them. I stand and watch fascinated as the truck stops and then a giant metal arm reaches out and grabs my garbage can like some sort of fetid Transformer. It hoists it quickly skyward, flips it over and deposits it directly over the top of the truck so the refuse can topple out.

Here's the problem. As you might have guessed from my earlier remarks, I tend to be the type of person who, instead of taking out the trash when he should or the garbage can down to the curb on schedule, will step on it and push it down...whenever said garbage isn't soaked my own DNA samples of course. My garbage can was indeed upside down but I noted that all of the garbage did not come hurtling quickly down into the garbage truck. Apparently I had packed it a little tight and it was taking awhile for the forces of gravity to work their magic. Instead only my recent contributions were coming out and given the stiff winds these contributions were not in fact headed so much north-south as east-west. To help you further picture what met my eyes I will just come out and say it ... all my soiled tissues were blowing all over the street. They looked like a swarm of white butterflies taking flight from the top of the garbage truck.

Enter the helpful children.

It took me a full 3 or 4 second before what I was witnessing translated into action but once I understood the implications of a dozen neighborhood children scrambling to help me retrieve my 'butterflies' and put them back into the garbage can I became a whirling dervish of activity. "Nooooooooo!!!" I yelled as I charged out into the street to start to recover my cum-soaked tissues. "No need to pick them up, I got them!" I bellowed as the streets seem to teem with impressionable children eager to help. "No Sally, that's not frosting! Just put it down!" Standing in the eye of the semen snowstorm it occurred to me that I really need to cut down on the porn. Good lord.

Typically I handle these tissues with the same care that a guy in a hazmat suit handles radioactive waste but instead I was grabbing them with the fervor that kids grab candy falling from a compromised piñata. Unfortunately, so were the kids.

I had to stand there as they each approached me and handed over what they had collected. I reminded each of them the value of washing their hands. In my head I could already hear the wailing sirens of the police that would no doubt be coming to collect me. Even if they don't show up, every boy out there will remember what happened and I'll need to move at least three states away before they hit puberty and put the pieces together.

May god have mercy on my soul ... Sally said it was the worst frosting she ever tasted.

Favorite Facebook Status updates:

If I ever came into a large sum of money the only extravagant thing I would do is build a huge bathroom with a dozen toilets scattered around it. Whenever my dog goes outside to take a dump I always watch in envy as he slowly walks around and eventually finds the perfect spot to go.

Hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia is the fear of long words. What sick bastard came up with that? Imagine having to give that patient their diagnosis. "You'd better sit down for this."

It's not unusual for our planet to hit a low temperature of 0 or a high of 120 degrees Fahrenheit but when my house goes below 68 my heater turns on and if it gets above 72 the air conditioning leaps into action. I have a comfort zone of 4 degrees. 4. Obviously this skin thing isn't working out at all.

Whenever you see an old movie that has a young girl in it that later grew up to be a hottie, there is always a little confusion going on in your pants.

If I were a movie star I'm pretty sure I'd watch my own movies over and over. That's an embarrassing thing to know about yourself.

10-4 social proof

It started on June 6th when Billy "Rubber Duck" Bartucz met "Big" Ben Sullivan at the Flag Town Campgrounds in Upstate New York. As fate would have it they both planned to hitchhike across the country and after they started talking about it in more detail they agreed to meet the next night at another campsite a few hours' drive (or ride, to be precise) down the road. Assuming they would both make it.

They did and after spending another enjoyable evening in each other's company they decided to meet up again the following evening in Ohio. It was there that they ran into Pete McCall, another hitchhiker, and asked him to join their group. He not only liked the idea, but invited a pair of hitchhikers a few tents over. Jimmy Davis and his girlfriend, CW, an overweight but amiable gal, were only too happy to sign on so that morning five hitchhikers thrust out their thumbs with the intention of hooking up at another predetermined spot later that day.

By the time they got to Tulsa there were 85 of them. With cell phones and laptops, the word had been spread and soon they had to fan out so as not to overload the roads with hitchhikers. Every morning they would leave their encampment like bees swarming out trying to get the next ride.

Of course hitchhiking is illegal in most states so eventually the group started to come under some scrutiny but they moved through road blocks like water through a sieve. Armored cars and jeeps could do nothing to stop them. Campground were another thing though and soon the number of free-ride-solicitors was too great and they were turned away from every place they tried, so it was decided that they would meet up in large fields and make do where they could.

Somewhere in New Mexico, it was agreed that everyone who insisted on playing acoustic guitars and harmonicas at the campfires late into the evening every night would be given the wrong location to meet at the following day. The following evening things were significantly quieter and people were in a noticeably better mood.

No law enforcement agencies would dare move against such a large group but instead they waited on the outskirts and picked off the stragglers. Even so they could do nothing to slow down the movement across the Rockies, their numbers growing with every

passing day.

As they approached California there were over a thousand of them. A sea of thumbs and cardboard signs, choking every highway, freeway, expressway, parkway, throughway and interstate. A herd unlike anything seen in nature, a sea of humanity flowing over peaks and down through valleys, completely dependent on the kindness of strangers to move them along. With numbers this great, every possible story that could be told was played out. Terrible acts of cruelty and inspiring acts of altruism. The very best of mankind and the absolute worse. It was all there.

On the afternoon of June 21st they arrived in Pismo Beach, California just as the sun was setting. Rubber Duck and Big Ben looked out at the throngs and gave them all a smile and a friendly wave. "Gas, grass or ass ... nobody rides for free!" Rubber Duck exalted and the crowd roared its approval. The two road-weary friends then turned and walked to the edge of the cliff that sat perched high above the calm blue ocean. With a final glance back at the crowd and a reassuring nod to each other, they jumped. For a moment there was silence as the gathering drank in the scene but then as one they ran to the edge and launched themselves off.

It was spectacular.

Of course with that many bodies hurling themselves into the water there were a few bumps and bruises but the water was cool and refreshing and most of these hitchhikers badly needed a bath so it was all good.

What? You didn't think lemmings could swim?

Everyone swam and laughed and each thanked the thousands of drivers who had made the moment possible in their own way and while not many of the swimmers lived happily ever most of them had wonderful night.

the orange glass cup

With the advent of eBooks it is estimated that by 2015 over 70% of all adults over the age of 18 will be published authors. Now some of you would leap to the conclusion that a self-published writer like myself would be against this proliferation of literature but you couldn't be more wrong. I would much rather see 1,000 authors sell 1,000 books each than see 1 sell 1,000,000. Selling a million of anything tends to create the print equivalent of a phenomena like Justin Bieber.

It is in this spirit that I offer the following advice to the millions of you who haven't published a book yet but are thinking about it: Sometimes an orange cup is just an orange cup.

i.e. don't overwrite.

I know that when we come upon this cup in your story that it could well be made of plastic or ceramic or paper or any number of metals but the point is, it's a cup. Of course, technically it could also be made of glass but then wouldn't you have called it a glass? I don't want to discourage you, but if you called a cup made of glass a cup then perhaps you should think about joining the 30% of people *not* writing a book. I am also aware as I read your story that the cup might be large or small and it might even have writing on it

but the important thing is to keep things moving along and I really don't need a thirty word description of the cup.

Unless of course one of the main characters has said something along the lines of "If we can just find that orange cup we'll know who killed the Professor." In this case I think it would be perfectly understandable to give us a quick rundown of the aforementioned vessel in the unlikely chance that later in the story that same character happens to stumble into a room filled with a wide variety of orange cups.

Now I realize that some of you are reading this and no doubt asking yourself why anyone would be dispensing advice about keeping things short and then go on to beat the living shit out of the topic of an orange cup. It's just that kind of attitude that is going to get you nowhere faster Mister (or Missus). There is a point behind everything I write and I would like nothing better than to give you that point but for the time being I forget what it was. It will come back to me soon I assure you, so in the meantime I'll just keep writing.

I am a professional writer, mind you. I have sold literally dozens of book, albeit mostly to family and friends (and by *sold*, I mean gave away), so you'd do well to take everything I say and tuck it away in the 'good advice' portion of your brain.

Don't overwrite.

Especially about orange cups.

The thing about orange cups is that they are just the kind of thing a reader likes to come to their own conclusions about. It's about trusting your audience. If a reader isn't allowed to picture an orange cup in their head without you spending two paragraphs telling them every detail then they will reach the conclusion that you think they are unimaginative. Can you blame them? Do you really believe that your orange cup is so superior to the lame orange cup that they will be imagining that you can't throw them a bone? If I'm a reader, for example, and the murder-mystery is barreling along and suddenly the detective in question crashes into a solemn room where cigarette smoke hangs in the air and a turntable is softly playing some big band favorite from yesteryear, and he sees the suspect holding an orange cup and wearing a tight cloth cap do I really want to feel as if the author has such a low opinion of me that he will think to himself he'd better give me the details of the cup lest I am imagining it as some fruit-clad chalice adorned with pink umbrellas, rhinestone handles and a large Plexiglass bottom with a live goldfish swimming around it? Unless the book I'm reading is called *The Amazing Orange Cup* you'd be right in assuming no. I mean to say, half the fun of that scene is letting the reader fill in how lazy the smoke is, moving through the room, what old song is playing and what color the tight cloth cap is. As a writer you'll never be able to create the mood better than the person holding the book/reader in their hands. So unless the orange cup has a secret button that launches poison darts out of the side of it, then it's just a fucking orange cup!

Still with me o' potential book writer?

Good. We professional authors need to stick together...just don't think of offering me any advice. I'd probably tell you to go throw yourself down a mineshaft.

The mineshaft you just imagined in great detail...

shocking homeless information

If there is one time that is particularly hard on the homeless, it's when it rains. Not so much getting wet, although the threat of flu and pneumonia is definitely there, but just the idea that they don't have a place to go when it rains.

One of the simple joys of life is having a 'roof over your head' when it rains. To hear it pouring outside while you are safe and snug inside your home is something the homeless are denied. Even if they find a place to stand under, it's not the same.

And then there's the lightning.

Most people live their whole lives blissfully unaware that the government controls the lightning.

You didn't know that? Come on, time to grow up.

Lighting has been quietly killing the homeless since the government developed the technology in the late 80s. It's such an absurd thought that nobody has put the pieces together. If you look at the data it's quite obvious.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) have compiled lists of lighting fatalities since 1959. From that time until the late 80s, the US averaged 90 deaths by lightning a year. The digital *Storm Data* listing of the locations of these victims is not very precise. Of the known designations, recreation was the largest category in every region and in the US. The next largest group involved people located under trees, and the next was related to proximity to bodies of water. The remaining categories involving small numbers of people were golfers, people involved in agricultural activities, telephones users, and people in proximity to radios and antennas.

Sounds reasonable enough, am I right? For those with a burning passion for all things meteorological, you'll also be interested to note that July is the worst month for getting hit by lightning and the most likely time to be struck is between noon and 6:00 pm.

Casualties are highest on Sundays, followed closely by Saturdays.

Makes that roof over your head seem even better about now, doesn't it?

Once we look at the *Storm Data* as we creep into the 90s though, things change.

Suddenly the average number of deaths per year jumps to 300. Strange that this has never been reported. What's also strange is that the make-up of the victims also changes. Now in addition to the usual suspects listed above is a new category: individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime place of abode. How did the press miss this one? Another interesting shift in data concerns the time of these strikes. The majority now occur between midnight at 6:00 am. When the homeless are asleep!

Downright sinister.

Sinister enough that it got me digging a little deeper ... and I was shocked and appalled by what I found.

You know what else changed in the early 90s? The FBI added another category to their crime index. That's right, 300 isn't even the tip of the iceberg.

And then you wonder why the homeless started the whole baggy pants fad. Would you go

to sleep wearing a belt with a metal buckle?!

Seemingly out of nowhere the FBI added "high voltage" to their list of crimes. High voltage, you ask? Exactly!

Since 1993 there have been over 6,315 instances of death by "high voltage." How many of these crimes have been solved? Zero.

That's right.

Zero.

If you dig a little deeper you find many different causes of death but they all sound damn familiar; people burned internally inside their brain where motor functions were severed and the body couldn't control motor and life support functions such as respiration, victims who had their heart and aorta burned to a crisp (where the major blood flow takes place) and then bled to death internally, and some who were stunned by an electrical charge and their heart stopped beating.

Ready to be chilled to your very core?

How many of these individuals were homeless men and women?

6,315.

On a related note, somehow I think this bit of information was given to the 'Occupy Wall Street' crowd because you suddenly saw them start to pull up their tents pretty quickly. At some point even a liberal government is going to get tired of their stupidity and I guarantee I know what the weather forecast will be *that* night. Regular or extra crispy!

Let's be honest. Nobody like the homeless. They are a depressing reminder of the frailty of the human condition ... and they usually smell like shit. But how can we turn a blind eye when our government is systematically barbecuing them?

Anyway, my point is that every time there is a big storm at night and I'm lying with my head on my pillow listening to the thunder it's really nice to know I have an address associated with my name in the big ol' government computer.

Not being homeless kicks ass.

not another fucking spider blog

I guess it's because I've been watching a lot of YouTube videos of spiders, eating things you wouldn't even think possible, that the thought even occurred to me. There is just something about watching an insect eating a mammal or reptile that fascinates me. It just seems wrong somehow. You would think that if in the unlikely event a snake fell into a web that it would just wriggle its way right out.

Nope.

It hangs there confused for awhile and then only tries to make an escape after the proud owner of the web comes to see what all the ruckus is about and proceeds to start biting. This pisses off the snake to no small degree but the web ends up being a lot stronger than you'd think and before long the snake is all wrapped up and this tiny little spider is enjoying a quick *Opheodrys vernalis* snack.

On the other hand some spiders are just so damn big that they just grab shit and sink in the ol' fangs. Mice are one thing but some of these monstrosities actually attack full-sized birds and bats. Bats!

I sit transfixed in my chair unable to look away.

So it was that earlier today I was mowing my lawn and decided to get underneath the big holly tree out front. I speak as if you know which house is mine and by saying "The big holly tree" you'll immediately say to yourself, "Oh yes, the one by the garage". It is just this type of implied intimacy that explains your love of all things Manion.

So I'm really getting under the tree with the mower, knowing that typically I just get close enough to avoid being scratched by the unnecessarily-pointy leaves of the holly tree (the one by the garage) and the grass directly underneath sometimes gets a bit shaggy, and doing my best to avoid getting mauled by the unnecessarily-green leaves when I feel it: the unmistakable feeling of having walked into a spider web.

The mother of all spider webs.

It was huge and stretched from the shaggy grass at the base of the holly tree, that I might have mentioned before sits in close proximity to the garage, all the way to the gutter that hangs directly above the oft-mentioned garage. We've all been there, that gross feeling and the inevitability of looking like a complete moron to any onlookers as you try and wipe away the webbing that is invisible to everyone but you. You call out to everyone "Spider web!" but to them you just look like you're having a small seizure.

I was just about to start the 'webbing retard dance' when I remembered all the YouTube videos. So I froze and waited to see what would happen. Sure enough less than a minute later I saw the spider.

It was lurking behind an unnecessarily-pointy-and-green leaf and came out to see what all the hubbub was all about. It took in the scene. It absorbed the situation. At least that's what I assumed it was doing as it just sat there looking at me stuck in its web.

I have failed to this point to mention that it was a delightful day outside. Upper 70's, light breeze. The perfect day to stand, unmoving in a large web, watching a spider take in and absorb things.

Then it started to move slowly towards me.

No way. The spider wasn't as big as the tip of my dick and here it was wrestling with the thought that maybe, just maybe it could eat me.

The worst part? I got nervous. Just for an instant I swear. I just had this "What if he can actually eat me?" moment. Feeling embarrassed I decided to see this through. As it made its way closer I even wriggled a fingertip as if I was hopelessly ensnared and ready to be digested at the spider's leisure.

He bought it. Before long he was only an inch away from my face and starting to spin extra silk out of his ass to fortify his hold on me as if he feared I would suddenly realize my peril and make a break for it. I had to admire his pluck. I guess he thought that if he could actually land me that he'd have enough food for pretty much his entire lifespan and then some. Perhaps he was even thinking about the possibility of sharing me and thus

becoming the coolest spider in the whole holly tree by my garage and even, perhaps, other nearby trees ... be they holly or otherwise.

As dumb as I might have looked to a passerby, had I freaked out when I first walked into the web and been flailing around in my attempt to remove all the web, it didn't hold a candle to how dumb I looked now pretending to be caught in the web for the benefit of the spider. It was only after the fact that this reality occurred to me of course.

But back to the action.

The spider was now only about half an inch from my face. He moved closer and I got a good look. Remember when Arnold was able to pry off the faceplate of the alien in *Predator*? Oh how I wish I had the intestinal fortitude of Arnold. The spider obviously had Arnold-type-fortitude in spades because he was about to bite me.

AA!!!!!!
!!!!

It didn't matter that I was huge and he was tiny, I broke and ran. His venom would have caused a momentary irritation at best and at no time was I in any peril whatsoever but I ran. So help me I ran.

Screaming.

And flailing.

And the worst part? When I ran the web came undone and the spider landed on my face and then another layer of web made sure he wasn't going anywhere soon.

So the two of us left the cozy confines of the holly tree near the garage and began a less-than-leisurely jaunt to parts unknown. Namely the street at the exact moment a neighbor was driving past.

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!

That was the spider. Having realized that he was perhaps a bit too optimistic as far as meals go I think he was now just hoping to survive his encounter with whatever it was that mowed the lawn.

After the car had come to a screeching halt. After the explanation. And the humiliation. I returned the spider to his tree and finished the lawn.

Looking back on it I wouldn't trade the experience for the world and I like to think the spider felt the same.

Little Gorge

There is a small town in West Virginia where time runs a little differently than it does around most places. The town is situated in the Appalachian Mountains and because I'm from the north you'll assume that I am in some way making fun of the residents of that town by saying what I did about time running a bit differently. But rifling through your head to come up with hillbilly clichés isn't going to help you as much as trying to remember what you were taught in science about how gravity can actually bend the time-space continuum. Even that won't help as much as I'd like, suffice it to say that when I

say Little Gorge, West Virginia is set deep in the Appalachians, I do mean deep.

There are no hotels in Little Gorge, the last thing the town wants is to encourage outsiders and there are no travel agencies in Little Gorge because the last thing the town wants is to encourage their own residents. The particular thing about the town is that anyone who was not born within the city limits can never fall asleep there. So you see why a hotel would be a cruel trick to play on visitors. In the event of a medical emergency involving someone from the outside, they are hustled into an ambulance and taken to the nearest hospital outside the county because no amount of anesthesia will put them under. To date nobody has ever had to have an operation while they are awake but the possibility of such an event remains.

Funny thing about when the people from Little Gorge venture outside of town...if they fall asleep, they wake up two weeks later. Leave it to mountain folk to mess up a perfectly good Brigadoon storyline. There are no such things as vacations for the townspeople of Little Gorge. They trade fourteen days of their life for every day spent somewhere else. Occasionally one of the young ones will want to bolt and make for a nearby big city but after the realities of the town's situation have been explained to them they let common sense guide their decision. Stories of outside life do tend to make their way in, however, and tend to plant the seeds for the next generation of impetuous youth so that temptation will always be there.

So to the outside world, the residents of Little Gorge seem downright rude. They seemingly have no desire to interact with the rest of humanity. The truth is that they have a secret to keep, because the last thing they want is a team of government scientists descending on their quiet town and turning them all into lab rats.

Obviously you'd think that this set-up must create a plethora of interesting stories, fascinating examples of the human spirit in action and folktales galore, but nothing is farther from the truth. This extraordinary circumstance just gives the citizens of Little Gorge an excuse to do what most of the people who live in small mountain towns do. Nothing much.

Ok, I will admit there is one thing that is interesting about the place. You see all of the inhabitants of Little Gorge have a secret but only a few of them have another one on top of that.

Their secret is that the first secret isn't true.

you know the drill

Morale was low inside the firehouse that sat just inside the city limits on the west end of Chiayi. There had been an increase in the number of fires inside the city recently and the poor training that the firemen had received was starting to show. Like all firehouses in The People's Republic of China they were given an inadequate amount of equipment, they were understaffed and all of the firemen felt underpaid and underappreciated.

That wasn't what was eating Dazhu Xing at the moment though. It was the training. More specifically it was the fact that this training hadn't been reviewed and updated in decades. It wasn't adapting to a new set of realities. Although technology had advanced and the city had grown, they were given strict instructions and protocols on how to deal with

every scenario that could possibly arise from a counsel far removed from Chiayi and unqualified to make such judgments.

He had visited other countries and seen new techniques being employed that not only saved collateral but also saved lives. Why was his country so backward in its thinking? Did communism by definition have to turn a blind eye to the rest of the world and stick with its own traditions even if it meant doing so was detrimental to the very people it claimed to serve and protect? It seemed more about keqi than doing what was right.

Take for instance the regulations about getting to the fire itself. Once an alarm has been sounded the response time for his crew to arrive is more than double what it should be due to the government policy of having to stop at every light, wait for it to turn red, have all the firemen jump out, run around the fire engine and then get back into the vehicle in a different spot. A few years back when Dazhu went to the board that oversees such things to complain they agreed completely and invested in a device that when installed made sure the lights turn red as they approached to save them from having to wait for a green. Dazhu was unable to make it clear to them that this was not the answer he was looking for.

The board also suggested that his crew spend more time practicing jumping out at each light to improve their time, and called for the removal of one of the hoses, so it would be easier for the firefighters to get in and out.

Now I could go on and provide even more details about this completely fictitious person and the fictitious fire department he works for and perhaps even pretend that this blog is a scalding commentary about the inefficiencies that are allowed to go unchecked in a communist society but the point is this ... is the image of a fire department racing to a fire but having to stop at every red light and perform a Chinese fire drill the funniest damn thing you've ever imaged?

No?

I truly don't believe you are thinking about it hard enough. Try again. Flashing lights, blaring sirens, the yellow fire-resistant suits and big rubber boots. Chinese guys scrambling to get in and out of the fire engine as a building somewhere down the street is burning down.

Nothing?

Wow.

You not even trying a riddle.

distance

I should never have jogged to someone else's Ipod. The songs didn't take my mind off my sore knees or the years sneaking by. To make matters worse today was the day that I had planned on altering my route to include a new hill. Being out of shape I tend to stick to the kind of flat where you can see an anthill coming 20 yards away.

I like the word distance when I hear people talk about distance runners. Great way of describing it. Distance. That's why I need to run to the songs I like because it helps me

create distance. Not in miles but between myself and the pain in my knees and lungs and head. Throw on the wrong soundtrack and it affects your distance.

I'm on the way down from the top of this hill when I first see him. Of course, I call it a hill but if you live in Colorado or Wyoming you'd probably snort a contemptuous snort and call it a tiny bump on an otherwise smooth road, but I'm telling the story so just be grateful that I didn't describe a jagged peak that disappears into the clouds.

Anyway, I'm headed down when I see this optical illusion created by the great distance between myself, what I couldn't possibly be seeing and my borderline dehydration (having gone at least 10 minutes without a long gulp of Gatorade). There's a guy at the bottom of the hill and the way he's standing it makes it appear as if his body is normal but instead of a head he has a stop sign. I drop my head, laugh a little to myself and continue jogging, certain that he is standing behind a stop sign and this is just one of those funny things you see that can never be recreated however hard you try. The smile fades a bit when I think I remember not seeing a stop sign there on the jog past that spot 5 minutes ago.

I look again. Still a stop sign for a head.

Little laugh, drop head. Funny the information your eyes can present to your brain with a straight face.

Another shitty song on the Ipod.

I look again and now there is no getting around it. It's a guy with a stop sign for a head. Not in some metaphorical sense but an actual red octagon with the word STOP written on it where typically you see a person's head.

Now of all the questions you'd think would be racing through my head at that moment you might be surprised a little to learn what the only one really was. As I approach this guy, do I have to stop? What you also might be surprised to learn is that I didn't think that because his head was a stop sign and I was under any illusions that I was legally required to stop, but just that someone who has a stop sign for a head might not feel comfortable in public and stopping and saying hi to put him at ease might be the nice thing to do.

I swear.

I could sit here all day and speculate what questions might have popped into your head but instead I'll just carry on and tell you that as I got closer the physiology of this guy truly was a normal-looking person with a regulation stop sign where his head was... except for one detail. He had a big mustache sitting under the T. No eyes, no mouth, just this thick stash.

As you might expect I lost my nerve and just jogged right by him with a little nod of recognition. I can't beat myself up too much for not being more neighborly, the stash really threw me.

Yet another shitty song on the Ipod. Damn, you'd think that just the law of probability would dictate that at least one non-shitty song would come on but this playlist was shit from bow to stern.

I admit that for a little while after this encounter I did wonder to myself which sign I

would be if I had to choose one, I'm certain it would only have 4 sides as opposed to 8, but for the rest of my unpleasant run I mainly was thinking about Arthur Schopenhauer and his quote about truth .

"All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident."

I thought about the distance between each of those stages, not in the way we process information and reach conclusions but in actual feet and yards. About the man with a stop sign for a head and how proud I was that I was able to close those distances before I actually reached him.

Although in retrospect, I really should have stopped.

the King and the 3 crowns

Every 3 or 4 years, whether I need it or not, I go to get my teeth cleaned. I'm good like that. Like clockwork. I don't mention this lightly, I hate getting my teeth cleaned so the fact that I step up to the plate with such regularity is something I'm pretty proud of. Sort of gives me that *adult* shine.

My dental hygienist takes her job seriously so when I sit down I know I'm on for the long haul. I'm never sure if she loves or job or hates it, but once that chair gets tilted all the way back, my feet are high and my head is low, she is all business. I always think it's strange how much I want her approval. When she tells me to open a bit wider you'd think I was a snake unhinging its jaws. She tells me to move a little to the left and I practically break my own neck as I hurl my head leftward. I swear, if she brought a donkey over and had it place its balls in my mouth I doubt I'd utter a peep in protest. I guess when someone is wielding a sharp object in your mouth, you aim to please.

So she starts in cleaning, adorned with her bib and safety glasses. Apparently, she's not very good with blood because about two minutes in I feel her forehead hit mine. Rather hard actually. Obviously I've had my eyes closed as she's been working, otherwise I'd be staring right into her face for the entire appointment and that would be creepy so that explains why I wasn't ready for her head smashing into mine. Her nose ends up in my mouth and I guess the wetness of said mouth brought her suddenly to because her head pops back up and she acts like nothing happened. Clearly it did, because it's either that or her red nose indicates she's gone and joined the circus since she started my cleaning. But I let it slide. Again, she's the one with the sharp metal thing in my mouth.

Unfortunately this little scene continues to replay itself every few minutes. After every tooth she asks me to rinse and every 3 or 4 teeth she excuses herself and walks outside for some air. I can watch her right out the window and I see her bending over and taking a knee and swinging her arms around like she's either building enough nerve to return to her post or about to pinch hit in the bottom of the 6th. I rarely use baseball terminology as I find the sport crushingly dull, so make sure to enjoy that little nugget as you won't be seeing another for quite awhile.

Finally she's back, wrist-deep in my orifice and with all the scraping and chiseling I expect two Venus de Milo's where my front teeth use to be, but a quick once-over with the tongue confirms that they are still intact.

I should point out at this time that during the entire appointment she's had the radio on and it's been tuned to Radio Margaritaville. I wasn't aware that Jimmy Buffet had a radio station that plays only his songs or songs that he feels inspired him. This radio station answers the age-old question, "What are they listening to in hell?". Finally after hearing him cover Jimi Hendrix's *The Wind Cries Mary*, I spluttered and gurgled out that she needed to either change the station, turn it off or take the radio and club me over the head with it until I'm unconscious.

The whole 'clean a tooth, pass out and recover' routine had my appointment pushing two hours and I wasn't even half done. My jaw ached and I was sick of making that little gagging sound every time I tried to swallow with my mouth wide open which apparently is impossible, but you have to try otherwise you feel you're going to drown in your own spit. My mouth was so wide open that one time she dropped the little metal thing and then there was a pause and then you heard this little splash like when you throw a coin in a fountain. Lightheaded from the significant blood loss I was experiencing at the hands of Madam Scraper, I was overjoyed to see her eventually reach for the little floor buffer thing and start to apply the finishing touches.

Finally the sun was low on the horizon and my day at the dentist was almost over. Now that his opening act was finished, the dentist strolled in like the dental rock star he is in his white jumpsuit, announced my x-rays look fine, threw his sweat-soaked scarf on top of me and told me that I only need 3 crowns.

Thank you. Thank you very much.

the comedy lesson

So you want to make people laugh do you? Well before you go galloping off trying, I'd like to review a few things, otherwise you might hurt yourself or someone close to you. You're not trying to kill someone are you? Are you?

I didn't think so.

First of all let's discuss profanity. You see more and more of it these days and the conventional wisdom seems to be that it is ok as long as there is a point to it and it isn't gratuitous.

Wrong.

Conventional wisdom forgot why people curse in the first place. And another thing, when is the last time you laughed at conventional wisdom? Not including the conventional wisdom that profanity should never be used gratuitously, of course.

I think it would be easier to demonstrate my point with a joke:

Knock knock.

Who's there?

Go fuck yourself.

Go fuck yourself who?

Open the fucking door already.

As you can clearly see that is funny. It makes no sense but you can't deny it's funny.

Well, I guess you could deny it, but you'd be wrong. What makes it funny? The gratuitous use of the word "fuck." So the takeaway from this is that profanity is funny.

Let's view this from another angle. There is an old joke that goes as follows:

What's the difference between Cirque du Soleil and the Rockettes?

One is a bunch of cunning stunts.

No questioning that's funny. It lets the listener of the joke figure out the punch line themselves. There is inference of profanity but none is actually uttered. If funny isn't good enough for you, though, I'd suggest it be told this way:

What's the difference between Cirque du Soleil and the Rockettes?

One is a bunch of stunning cunts.

Now that's hilarious. I suggest you try it both ways to see for yourself. I doubt many of your listeners will even bother to work out the word play and just roar that you said cunts out loud.

You see where I'm going with this?

Worried that somebody might be offended? Don't be. People need to be offended every now and then. It's healthy. If they don't vent a little self-righteous indignation from time to time they end up bottling it up and either sitting in a bell tower with a high-powered rifle or, far worse, starting a Bible/Torah/Koran study group.

Ok, one last example and then I send you off to be funny on your own. This is a bit cerebral so try and stay with me:

The other day I opened my front door and screamed "Hey you kids! Get the fuck off my lawn!"

Two things you should know. One, I live in a townhouse so it's really not my lawn. And two, there were no kids outside at the time.

Now some of you are wondering why this is funny.

Exactly.

In and of itself it's not. It might be interesting and make the listener think you're smarter than you really are but any actual guffaws would have to be created inside their own head. Except for the fact you said "Get the fuck off my lawn!" If you say that loud enough and wildly swing your arms about people will laugh. Even though what follows isn't exactly funny. I bet if you pretend to be really old the laugh will be bigger.

So there you have it. Humor and profanity are like peanut butter and jelly.

Now go write a blockbuster comedy.

Oh yeah, and if you're ever at the University of South Carolina ask everyone you meet on campus if their women's sports teams are called the Gamecunts. Would love to see *that* mascot.

Mr. Kaycee plays ball

It was just a crazy turn of events that put me on to my son's ability otherwise I'm sure I

would have bunged him off to the shrink in two shakes of a lamb's tail. I just so happened to not only sit listening to him talk in his sleep one night, smiling and thinking it was about the cutest and creepiest thing I'd ever heard, but then also happened to be at the right spot at the right time to hear my neighbor repeat word for word the exact conversation the next day.

I'll slow down and let that sink in. Believe me, take your time. It took me quite awhile to figure out what was going on myself. Let me throw in some details.

I was only up because my dog is old and craps in the house. To get my attention she walks around on the tile at the front of the house and if I don't hurl myself down the stairs like an Olympic hurler she will take that as a sign that it is all clear to commence walking about the living room crapping. I literally sleep with one eye open these days. So I was plodding back up the stairs after standing at the back door for the better part of the evening awaiting my dog's triumphant return from the back yard when I heard my son talking.

At first I thought he was calling out to me but his voice seemed to be too flat to be in any distress so I casually made my way down the hall trying to make out what he was saying. He was going into great detail about how the back deck needs replacing and it was about god damned time he got serious and marched his ass down to the hardware store and bought the necessary lumber.

Not the usual stuff that comes out of his mouth. I was expecting snack foods or monsters to be honest. Those seem to be his two main preoccupations at present but what I got instead was a long dissertation on the difficulties of replacing rotting wood. It went on for quite a time and slowly my smile faded and was replaced by a mix of concern, bemusement and sleepy acceptance that the mind is an odd beast and one can never tell, can one?

I'll skip ahead to the following day around dinnertime. I was heating the grill for the burgers when I heard my neighbor open his back door and come out on his deck. My wife had left me years before due to my "selfish outlook" as she called it, so it was only my son and I for dinner pretty much every night. I had become quite the little cook and I was able to throw together hamburgers without much thought. In fact my mind was wandering back to the previous evening and my son's strange ramblings, my well-trained hands mechanically squeezing the meat into patties and mindlessly tossing them on the grill, when I heard the identical strange ramblings from next door. For a few moments I thought my head had an echo because the words going through them were being repeated word for word.

There. You're all caught up. And probably not believing a word for word I'm saying. I don't blame you. Not at all. I didn't believe what I was hearing. How could it be? My son walked out to inquire how things were going in the dinner department and to tell me the corn was almost ready to go and I just stared at him like a mental patient. In this case, I must have looked like I was a mental patient to him and I was wondering which of us was the mental patient on my side of the equation. Clearly one of us was a few cards short of a deck.

Or perhaps my son had a few extra cards hidden up his sleeve.

Like any parent my first thought was "How can I get rich off this?" If I had a little 'Rain Man' or something was there a way to make a lot of cash from it? We ate our meal in silence as I stared at my son with a proud yet freaked out look. Was this a onetime thing? Would the talk shows be interested? Does he have a tumor of some sort? I remember seeing John Travolta in a movie where he got smart all of a sudden after a tumor started growing in his head. He never went on any talk shows as I recall and that seemed a wasted opportunity to me.

I did dishes and casually ask my son if he remembered the dream he had but, as I expected, he had no idea what I was talking about and I didn't want to push the topic any further. Better he didn't know what I suspected and just continued on oblivious to his new-found earning potential.

But how to get rich from this peculiar ability. Even calling it an ability seemed rash at the time but how else to describe it?

Then it dawned on me. The neighbor on the other side of my house announced the games for the major league baseball team in our area. If my son was able to anticipate what he was going to say then all I needed to do was point him in the direction of this broadcaster, have him pick up the play-by-play, enough to see who won the game, and then lay down a bet based on this insider knowledge. Child's play. Well, sleeping-child's play anyway.

After I looked up the next home game for the team I went to the bank and took out two mortgages and suddenly found myself quite liquid as they say in financial circles. The night before the game, I flipped my son's bed to face the other way, threw on a pot of coffee and waited for the pertinent details of tomorrow's game to begin pouring out.

I wasn't disappointed. Somewhere near 2:00 a.m. he began giving me the ol' balls and strikes and I realized quickly we were already in the 4th inning. I sat transfixed as he described every pitch and hit and even talked through the commercial breaks about how much he'd like to ball the new blonde ball girl. With the home team winning 6-2 in the 8th he suddenly rolled over and went silent.

Now at this point you must be thinking how disappointed I was or how I was already thinking about how I can make sure I got the whole game next time but such was my enthusiasm for cashing in on my son's gift that I figured a 6-2 lead with only one more time at bat for the visitors was about as sound an investment as there is. Later that same day the necessary funds were placed with a reputable gambling establishment and I clutched my betting slips and watched the opposing team score five runs in the top of the 9th as I screamed and lept around in front of the TV. My son fled the room, scared off by my sudden interest in baseball. After the lead-off batter for the home club walked the next batter struck out and then the next hit into a double play to end the contest.

My son did indeed end up having a tumor but after losing the house I couldn't afford the treatment necessary to give him the best chance at beating it.

It was the bottom of the 9th and his old man had struck out.

tuna helper

If there is one resource on the planet that we are not utilizing to the fullest extent is has to

be dolphins. While not completely untapped you certainly can't argue with the stark reality that they are completely undertapped. Mostly because of the fact that you are reading this and can't argue anything. (One of the downsides to being on the receiving end of a story.) There are so many things we could be doing with them (dolphins), in addition to the obvious ones of looking for sunken treasure and herding tuna. I read somewhere that we are close to figuring out their clicking language, so if we can do that we can ask them to teach us all the other fish languages. Take for instance the manta ray. If it can sense fish under the sand using electric signals and such, there is no reason we couldn't ask it to look for oil instead.

I'm just spitballing here. The point is that the ocean probably has a lot to teach us. Now for you Nervous Nellies (This is a perfect example of how difficult is to write. Most people assume that you just sit down and start writing away but the truth is that you never get more than a few sentences in before you run into a Nervous Nellie. And here is an example, do you capitalize Nervous Nellie? I'm pretty sure about the Nellie but isn't nervous an adjective or adverb? I'll be frank, I have no idea. If my name *was* Frank then I'd go ahead and capitalize it in that last sentence, even though I know it's an adjective or adverb or something involving action or description or something but I'd assume you, the reader, would catch on to my funny use of the capitol F. The capitol N isn't as funny because nobody could be sure I meant it as ironic or I just don't know any better. See how hard it is to write?) out there ...

I'm going to go ahead and start that paragraph over, that little digression went on way too long. Ok, I was talking about dolphins and wanted to make sure the 'timid or worrisome' readers out there didn't get their panties in a twist over the idea that by partnering so closely with dolphins that they would learn all our secrets and somehow become a threat. Before you imagine a sky dark with dolphin bombers, remember that back in the day when all us mammals were sitting together in the sea it was only humans that crawled up on land and started getting army and handy and fingery. (If you'll allow me another detour from the main topic I'd like to point out that in the last sentence my automatic spell check only flagged the word fingery. It was perfectly fine with army and handy despite the fact that I was using them in a completely incorrect manner. Now do you see the stress involved in writing? How am I ever going to be able to relax and trust my spell check when it is so obviously ill-equipped to deal with my use of the language? But soldier on I must despite the fact that I only used the word soldier because the word army was still in my head so now I'm certain this story is headed nowhere coherent.)

Simply put it would take the dolphin a few hundred thousand years to evolve hands and I'm sure we'd start to suspect something in all that time. You can't exactly spring hands onto humanity without us noticing you were up to some evolutionary shenanigans and until that day comes dolphins aren't going to be able to build any weapons or cool aquatic re-breathers that allow them to move around on land with those dumb little nubby fins they've got now. So really they have no choice but to play ball with us. (Was I the only one who suddenly had the quick image of a dolphin hitting a volleyball back to a trainer at Sea World?)

I started off saying that the dolphin has been badly undertapped but I think it's fair to say that I have done a poor job of giving you examples to support that contention. (Despite the difficulties in writing, I still pride myself on holding my own feet to the fire when it

comes to being accountable for a good finished product. If I were a dolphin, I'm sure I would hold my fluke to the fire, or the ocean equivalent [a hot thermal vent], if I were dictating this to a human with a typewriter.) The point being I owe you, good reader, a few examples of why we are not making the most of our dolphin friends but for the life of me I can't remember any of the dozens that had initially sprung to mind when I started this story due to the fact that with all the Nervous Nellies, handys and wonderings if a thermal vent is really the ocean equivalent of fire I've completely lost my train of thought.

Let me try one last time. I do hope that if you take anything from this it's that writing is hard and you should really think twice before deciding to do it yourself. Much easier being a reader. Unless you want to argue something.

Dolphins. Right.

Fuck. (One of the small joys of writing is profanity. Whenever you need a small break in the action throw in a fuck. You might want to write that down.)

Did I mention tuna herding?

I know the army use to strap things to their head and have them retrieve items in the water like lost torpedoes. (I would be remiss in not mentioning the scene in the 1966 version of Batman where a brave dolphin throws himself in the path of a torpedo fired by the Joker and intended for Batman and Robin who at the time are helplessly tied to a floating buoy. Next thing you know they are safely roaring away from the dust-up in their Batboat so we are left to assume that other dolphins must have arrived on the scene and overcome their considerable lack of useful appendages and somehow untied them. If you ever want to teach the dolphins how fucked up our culture has become in the last 50 years, just show them our portrayal of the Joker in 1966, the one as played by Jack Nicholson in 1989 and then the Heath Ledger one in 2008. Our evolving view of 'villains' will make them glad they stayed in the drink.)

So we have tuna herding and strapping things to their head so they can find our lost torpedoes. And the talking to other fish thing. That's a pretty convincing argument, you have to admit. I introduced the topic, supported my initial proposition and now I'm barreling towards a conclusion. All in all, I'd say that was five minutes well spent.

Is it all *in* all or all *and* all? And why would I use the word dust-up in the one environment where there was literally no dust? I should have gone brouhaha or scrap.

No wonder dolphins don't write.

That Was Now, This Is Then

Watching him talk was almost mesmerizing, the way his words came in short high-pitched bursts while his hands slid along the top and back of the chair seemingly oblivious to the conversation. I say conversation in only the loosest sense of the word as he never lifted his eyes or acknowledged the person listening in any way. He simply spoke as if talking to himself while his little fingers explored every nook and cranny of the antique chair. These days instead of calling a kid "quirky" they seem to feel the need to label him as having Attention Deficit Disorder or mild autism or whatever the

diagnosis-of-the-month happened to be, but whenever you were alone with him you always somehow felt he was the brightest person in the room ... despite the fact that sometimes he would leave that room mid-sentence, completely oblivious to the fact that you were listening.

His mother was a piece of ass even though she was well into her thirties. She wasn't just cute, she was a piece of ass. Take that however you want but there was no denying it. She had that exotic look that only South American women can possess. Her husband, his father, had cut out before he was born and there was no lack of suitors to replace him but she felt it best if she just focused on her son. Behind her back many people whispered that it was the lack of a strong male role model that was to blame for his effeminate mannerisms and the way he walked on his toes all the time. She whispered back many times that a strong male was the one that abandoned them both, so the boy had all the modeling he needed and she would take it from there.

His mother is a pharmaceutical sales rep and that is how I got to know him. I had *known* him since he was born but I only got to *know* him the week I was asked to look after him at his house while his Mother went to a training seminar in Phoenix. When she left, he was surprisingly emotional about her departure but resumed work on his Lego castle moments later seemingly without a care in the world. He talked to himself nonstop even as I did my best to interact with him. Eventually, I gave up and just sat and watched him float from one activity to the next. Although he might have been the most uncoordinated and athletically-challenged kid on the planet I offered to take him on a hike and play catch and such anyway but he was far too busy drawing or building or reading books out loud to himself. Often times, when he didn't understand something he was reading, he would stop and explain it to himself.

His mother never warned me about his bedroom though; I had to muddle through that experience for myself. The door to his room had the number 571 written on it, when you walked in the air conditioner was blowing out arctic-cold air, and his bed consisted of nothing more than what appeared to be a few seat cushions pushed together. I tried to ask why he didn't have a normal bed but he just walked past me clutching his bedtime snack of beef jerky and flavorless ice pops he had made himself by putting Popsicle sticks in cups of water and then sticking them in the freezer. The room had none of the toys and games I'd expected to be piled up everywhere and was almost empty but for a few clothes scattered on the ground, a model plane hanging in the middle of the room and what I mistakenly called a football stuck in a corner. When I walked over to touch it the boy yelled for me to stop and that he hated rugby. I didn't bother to ask why he had the ball in the first place.

Struggling for a conversation re-starter I asked him if he had built the plane himself.

"That's a twin turboprop Fairchild FH-227D."

Although he technically didn't answer the question I felt real progress had been made.

"It crashed Friday the 13th."

Well so much for progress. Not wanting to let the opportunity for dialogue slip away I replied "Yeah, Friday the 13th is one unlucky day."

He seemed to nod his agreement as he arranged the cushions together underneath him and

then pulled a cover over himself.

For the next few days the only time I felt that he paid any attention to me was when I was putting him to bed. Even when I made him his meals and we sat at the same table he was miles away. It was only in the chill of his room each night that I was able to actually share a few moments with him, fleeting as they were.

"Did you build that model plane yourself?" I inquired, eager to see if he would take the bait.

"I died on that plane."

Suddenly, I missed the closeness we had shared at the dinner table.

"You died on that plane? How did you die on that plane?" but he was already under his cover and asleep.

The next night when we walked into the room he said "I died on that plane when it crashed" without provocation.

A whole day had passed between his two comments but I knew exactly what he was talking about. A whole day of listening to his lilting voice, giggle and stutter and argue with itself, while I kept myself amused with the TV and a good book. Having experienced his room on previous nights I knew to throw on my jacket before heading up the stairs to the cold that awaited me.

Suddenly we were picking up where we left off 24 hours ago and jacket or no jacket a chill ran down my spine just the same.

"How do you know you died? When was this?"

He started to arrange the cushions but I walked over and sat down on one to impede his progress. He seemed nonplussed and simply walked over to the other side of the room with his head down.

"After I died they ate me."

I got off the cushion.

The last night there was a part of me that didn't even want to go into the room to put him to bed. I honestly was waiting for him to look me in the eye and make some unnerving comment that would haunt me for the rest of my life. I wasn't sure if I was scared of him or simply felt bad for the kid, but I hesitated to go into the room. I hadn't felt that way all day in the comfort of being anywhere that wasn't his freezing cold bedroom with the little plane hanging in it but now I had one last task to perform and that was tucking him in.

"Well I hope you had fun this week. Your Mom will be back tomorrow."

He walked over and got the ball from the corner. He smiled and suddenly tossed it to me in an awkward heave that looked so unpracticed and girly it made me wonder how he was ever going to survive middle school let alone high school. I caught it on the bounce but by the time I went to throw it back he was already making his way to his makeshift bed.

"It's hard to be in 2 places at once."

I started to reply that staying with him at his house wasn't hard at all but then it dawned

on me that he wasn't talking about me. Or even to me.

I walked over and gently put my hands on each side of his face and tried to look directly into his eyes.

"Good night, little man."

His eyes met mine briefly and then moved off to every other point on the ceiling above us.

"Buenas noches," he replied.

I thought about asking his Mom about why he sleeps with his room so cold and why he sleeps on seat cushions instead of a bed or why with all the weird behaviors he exhibits the only medication he's on is one that treats altitude sickness, but in the end every answer would only lead to another dozen questions so when she arrived back home I kept them all to myself. She's no doubt a good Mom and he's a great kid so after only a week of interacting with him I should keep my opinions to myself.

Not every kid is in need of rescue.

Favorite Facebook Status updates:

There are times when I need to come up with the perfect sentence or phrase but the words behave like the Coyote chasing the Roadrunner.

A rodeo is really nothing more than a bunch of people watching other people in cowboy hats being cruel to horses and bulls. In a perfect world every rider would be thrown off and trampled to death.

You know that sound of a plate being dropped in a restaurant? The loud crash and everyone swiveling their head to see which waitress is going to be fired. It's such a distinctive noise. Wouldn't it be great if that was the sound girls made when they took a crap? No matter how loud the music is in the bathroom everyone in the house is going to hear it. Even when you're watching TV with the volume up. "Oh, Beth is taking a dump again."

A moment of clarity: Every time I start to get offended that nobody really cares what I have to say I remind myself that I really don't care about what anyone else has to say.

Have you ever stepped into the shower to find a mosquito trapped in there with you? You immediately get that "only one of us is coming out of here alive" feeling followed by a few minutes of splashing water at it until it finally falls and gets sucked down the drain. As it is falling, however briefly it may be, don't you hear that whining plummeting sound that fighter planes use to make in WW II when they got hit and crashed? I'm actually surprised when I don't see a little smoke and flames coming out of it just before it hits the ground.

Snowballed

(first appeared as a spoken word story on www.thetripodcat.com)

Did you know that if you throw a snowball against a wall it will leave a mark that looks identical to your hand? Obviously, the size of the splatter and subsequent handprint will

be relative to the distance that the snowball traveled before impact but it will always leave 4 identifiable fingers and a thumb with a few superfluous bits of icy wetness clinging nearby.

What's more, due to the fascinating nature of snow crystals and their hexagonal symmetry the snow clinging to the wall will actually contain your fingerprints. You would have to have a machine that could put the snowball back together perfectly before you could get the print but it's still an interesting fact and might cause you some concern if the snowball you threw didn't actually hit a wall but instead flew off course and hit a small child on a toboggan in the head and caused them to swerve into a cement mixer traveling at a high rate of speed on a nearby icy road. Stuck to the bloody mangled wooly cap would be all the evidence the authorities would need to put you away for a long time.

Not really. I just made all that stuff up.

The question is whether or not you believed me even for a moment. Doubtlessly you've thrown your share of snowballs and seen them explode into watery Rorschach smudges against countless walls and such, but I wonder if for a minute you thought about it and it actually kind of made sense why a snowball thrown by a hand would leave a hand-shaped spot on a wall. If you're smart enough to manipulate logic and math to the point where you can make obvious crap sound plausible then you have to reconsider your definition of smart, don't you?

As far as the science involved with water molecules, crystalline lattices and six-fold symmetry I'm sure you were just happy to plow right through any actual explanations and get any references to physics behind you. Had I started in about how snow crystals tend to form simpler shapes when the supersaturation (humidity) is low as opposed to more complex shapes at higher humidity (had I mentioned supersaturation again I fear you would have abandoned this story entirely) then I could have probably told you that the snowball not only carried your fingerprints but your phone number and credit score as well and you would have believed me just to get past it quickly.

Maybe science is throwing us a bone by making a snowball explode into a dripping ambiguous design as opposed to some cool quantum anomaly. What could be more fun than a smear that lets you see whatever you want in it? I will admit that the post-collision snowball lacks the bilateral symmetry of your standard Rorschach inkblot but you get the general idea.

Or do you? Perhaps the mere mention of the word symmetry in the last sentence tipped you off that we were once again going to plunge into the verbiage of academia and you're bracing yourself for the blizzard of big words sure to follow. Sort of a like a big freezing snowball right smack to the brain.

You would think that a guy who came up with a famous psychological test would be nerdy and unattractive but Hermann Rorschach was a dead ringer for Brad Pitt. How he had time to fiddle around with inkblots when he could have been out starring in movies and banging chicks, I have no idea. Perhaps his good looks were the reason his inkblot tests didn't catch on until he sold them to someone who was nerdy and unattractive like Hans Huber. For this reason, Huber is widely considered the Ray Kroc of psychology.

Not really. I mean he could be but I just made that up so it's probably not the case. I

wasn't lying about Hermann looking a lot like Brad though.

The word crock, as in "someone is feeding you a crock of shit", actually comes from the screw job given to the McDonald brothers by Ray Kroc.

No, not really. Crock means an earthenware vessel and its meaning predates Ray Kroc by thousands of years and before you get any bright ideas about the term "crock pot" it also came about before ol' Ray McFucked the burger brothers. Obviously, otherwise it would be a "Kroc pot" first of all and second of all, who cooks burgers in a crock pot?

I'm not sure why you need bilaterally symmetrical inkblots in the first place. A not-bilateral-at-all snowball thrown against a black wall would work just as well. Truth is if you want to learn about a subject's motivations, perceptions, cognitive operations and response tendencies, all you have to do is write a dumb short story and see what they read into it.

Well?

pets

I think having a pet is a great way for children to learn about responsibility and commitment. The first thing you can teach them is that if they buy a goldfish there is no point in giving it a name. None whatsoever, and if they do they are stupid. Make this point by yelling various names at the fish in the bowl and then pointing out the complete lack of attention the goldfish gives you. Sometimes your young son or daughter will point out that even though fish don't have ears, they feel sound waves as vibrations and that is why you should never tap on their tank. You'll want to nip this sort of insurrection right in bud. I would suggest tapping forcefully on the goldfish's bowl with a ball peen hammer until such a time as the child is required to get a large towel to soak up the water pouring out all over the floor and something to hold the fish that is now flopping around on the carpeting. You don't want to waste a valuable teaching moment, so make sure and reinforce the point that it's a fucking fish so it doesn't need a name.

You might try and do the same thing with the old people I see at the park sometimes. I approached one of these geezers who spent every afternoon feeding pigeons and was treated to the following information: "The big one over there is named *Grey Boy*." I rubbed my chin briefly with a quizzical look on my face and then offered "No he's not. He's a fucking pigeon." I thought for a moment he was pulling my leg, a man of his years giving a bird a name but it quickly became clear that he was dead serious. He looked all offended. Trying to explain myself a little further I said, "You might as well believe that he's named you *Sad Fuck* and every afternoon he leaves his winged buddies with a wave of his wing and tells them he's off to hang out with *Sad Fuck*." I also explained that sitting in a park talking to birds is exactly the kind of behavior that will get someone of his advancing years an opportunity to try to convince the guards that your pal *Grey Boy* was able to track you down at the local nursing home.

Do you see what I'm getting at? Dogs have names, cats have names (although I have my suspicions about cats) and maybe even monkeys have names. The point of a name is something that when spoken makes the object of said name recognize you're speaking to them and pay you some attention (which is why you can see I have my doubts about

cats). If you call a fish *Carl* he/she is not going to know his/her name is *Carl* which makes it a pointless exercise.

Now some of you may argue that we give deaf people names and they can't hear shit. OK, I agree that they can't hear it but other people can hear it and know who you're talking about. As in the sentence "Somebody get *Timmy* out of the fucking driveway before he gets run over, already!". If you're alone with *Timmy* and want to call him *Can't Hear Shit* (sounds like a good Indian name to me) then feel free. Just watch out in case ol' *Can't Hear Shit* can read lips. Some of them are sneaky like that.

Here's my point. You can't just go around giving animals names because next thing you know you're giving inanimate objects names and then we'll never know who the crazy people are so we can lock them away. A name is a big deal and the more you use it inappropriately the less value it has. Why do you think you're helpless against a demon unless you figure out his name? Once you know his name you have him by the metaphysical balls. I'm not even sure voodoo works unless you know the victim's name. I could be wrong about that, maybe you just need a lock of hair or a semen sample or something.

But I digress.

A name means something. In the old days you were named after a physical feature, a family tradition or what you did for a living. It was important stuff. Now you have kids naming their fish after their Grandfather Carl. Is that really what the kid thinks of his Grandfather? That he was a mindless, limbless, cold-blooded aquatic vertebrate? Now if he secretly hated the man then it might be ok to name the fish *Carl* under the one condition that he immediately goes out and buys a large piranha to consume *Carl* as he cheers it on. If he then names the piranha though, we're back to the ballpeen hammer solution. Just watch out the kid doesn't lose a finger putting the piranha in a cup.

The water gets a bit muddy when you start to give people nicknames they don't understand or give your own body parts names. In the case of the former I'm not going to allow it unless the person on the receiving end of the nickname clearly understands the reference and agrees to respond to it. In the latter case I will allow it as long as you use your real name first to identify it, i.e., Brian Catani's *Donkster*.

As you can see, I take names very seriously. That's the truth or my name isn't Lance Manion.

A Mining Life

If I'm remembering my family history correctly my great-great-great Grandfather was a prospector. For a while anyway. He went out to California back in 1851 to try his luck as a panhandler. Pan in hand he joined the ranks of the "forty-niners" and spent a whole year sifting through riverbeds for gold but it seems that he was a complete bust at it. This ended up being not such a bad thing because he then opened a brothel that ended up delivering more gold than he could have ever found panning in a stream. He died a wealthy man, but apparently the prospector bug ran in the family because his son took his fortune and sunk it all into a silver mine down the road a bit in Panamint in 1875. Apparently success in the precious metals industry was not in the cards for him either as

the following year the entire town was destroyed in a flash flood. Luckily he was out visiting relatives in Colorado at the time and was fully insured so the whole thing ended up being a push. Now *his* son, sick of California, pulled up roots and headed to Texas in 1909 to try his hand in the oil business. Speculators were pouring into the state to get in on the petroleum boom but after drilling half a dozen dry holes with no success he ended up giving up his dream of being an oil baron and opened a bar near Spindletop and did quite well for himself.

Here's an interesting fact completely unrelated to my family tree. The bulls that they use in bullfighting aren't just any run of the mill bulls but they are actually bred on special farms (*ganaderias*). I did not know that.

Anyway, my Grandfather couldn't wait to get out of Texas and so as soon as he was of legal age he struck out on his own and headed out to Tennessee to open a pearl farm. He picked what he thought would be a nice spot on the Tennessee River and rustled up as many Washboard mussels as he could afford. While other nearby farms prospered, his mussels were never up to the task and he was forced to sell the land a few years later. At a tremendous profit.

Apparently they select the bulls that they use for bullfighting based on their ferocity, fighting skills and intelligence. Young bulls are tested to see if they will provide 'sport' for the spectators. Only those that show the right stuff are used for the *corrida de toros*. Sort of like how we select Marines. Only the best and brightest.

My Dad, who hated the smell of mussels and mud, once again fell prey to the lure of mining and headed back west to Jeffrey City, Wyoming to search for uranium. His battles with the indigenous peoples who were always at odds with uranium mining got pretty heated but just as he was about to get permission to start mining operations the price of uranium tanked and in 1984 he was forced to abandon the idea and instead bought a winning lottery ticket. Even though I was still a kid at the time I can remember the sound he made upon reading the numbers in the newspaper.

It's funny, the bulls are competing to be selected to go into an arena and be slaughtered. After the 'fight' they are hauled out of the arena and sold by the pound in the *plaza de toros*.

While my ancestry isn't exactly a cautionary tale, you might suspect that I would avoid any type of speculation in my career path but what can I say... it's in the genes. So after graduating with a Bachelor of Engineering degree and a Masters in Mineral Exploration I sunk my inheritance into a dilapidated coal mine in West Virginia. My research had shown little in the way of evidence that I could return it to prosperity but my gut was telling me otherwise. And sure enough there was no coal there.

None whatsoever.

But what there was, was jerky and plenty of it. I had hit the biggest vein of jerky in United States history. Now it is a common misconception that jerky comes from meat but that couldn't be further from the truth. Jerky comes from deep underground, the product of the same forces that give us so many of our precious metals. "Jerkification," the combination of compaction, heat and time, transforms decaying plant parts and animal corpses into the delicious taste treat we consume today. Once word spread about my

'strike' the phones haven't stopped ringing. The boys from Slim Jim, Oberto and Jack Links all want a piece of me now.

Meanwhile back on the farm, the bulls that didn't show much promise spend their days grazing and breeding while the strongest head off to 'the show.' Obviously both groups are unaware of this irony but I'm sure it has crossed the mind of a few Marines as they hurl themselves into whatever fray their superiors have picked out for them. I know it has crossed mine a few times.

As I sit on the floor and read to my son I have to wonder if he'll end up taking any of the stories I am telling him about rocket ships and heroes and rare gems and bad guys and asteroid mining to heart.

welcome to Bolivia

Here is the danger of asking someone if they are ok. Sometimes they say no. Talk about a single word that brings everything to a screeching halt. Or it should anyway. Being a veteran of this answer I might screech a little but I know not to halt. Halting is a very bad idea. In fact, you might say that the utterance of that reply often brings me to a screeching gallop.

Can you blame me? Is there anything worse than having a quick superficial question answered in such a way that you're expected to clear your social calendar for the next hour and listen to the problems of some nut job as if you can actually do anything to help? "Sure Charlie, tell me all about your dead Aunt and I'm sure I'll have her up and walking about in no time!" you want to exclaim. No matter what you offer up they are going to immediately counter that they already thought of that and it is completely not going to help in any way at all.

Instead of scrambling to come up with another solution my brain usually immediately wants to pass along the following opinion; "well then you're fucked aren't you?" And the whole time you can feel the minutes and hours of your life draining away as they go on about whatever ill it is that has befallen them.

Here is the thing. If you ask anyone if they are ok, and they answer truthfully, they are going to say no. Nobody is ok. That's why we don't want to hear it! No matter what their circumstance, if we look closely enough into their eyes we can see a reflection of ourselves. Maybe that explains why I always messed up that quote "the eyes are the windows to the soul" in my head. I swear I thought it was "the eyes are the mirror to the soul". Reading that back I can't help but feel stupid; obviously, that makes no sense whatsoever. Well, no sense outside the point that I was originally trying to make. In that context it suddenly seems brilliant.

If we spend enough time with the hapless creature that was rude enough to answer our innocent question honestly then we realize that the only thing separating us from whatever malady that is inflicting this poor bastard is timing. Clint Eastwood has that great line in Unforgiven: "We all have it coming kid."

And we all know it.

So why not answer their reply with sympathy, you might ask. Now before I immediately

become guilty of the very same gainsay that I complained about at the end of the second paragraph let me look at it a bit from your angle. I'm assuming that you realize that sympathy won't actually help, but does that fact actually make the offering up of said sympathy that much more meaningful? Sort of like the emotional equivalent of Butch and Sundance running out to meet the Bolivian army.

Hmmmm. Interesting point. But what is the end result other than a few minutes of your life that you're not going to get back? In fact, wasted time is soon to become everybody's biggest reason to say they're not ok, so is it selfish to want a little bang for your buck? Bottom line is it didn't seem to work out so well for Butch and Sundance.

We all know the correct answer to the question of "are you ok?" is yes. It's part of the social contract we conscious entities have managed to hammer out amongst ourselves. So next time someone asks you and you want to fall to your knees with your hands outstretched and wail "No!" with all the angst you can muster take a minute and think it over.

Nothing they are going to say will help. Keep a tight grip on the wheel lest you remind them or yourself that we all have it coming.

OK?

Dead Economists Society

When I was first asked to be a substitute teacher at a prestigious boys' school in Massachusetts, Economics 101 was to be my subject matter. I guess I was expecting a more open-minded approach to learning than what was demonstrated during my brief tenure there. Here's what happened, I have left nothing out and I will let you be the judge.

Knowing I had only a week to improve the lives of my young charges, I knew I had not a moment to lose so the first thing I did was march them all out into a heavy rain and had them walk around in a circle until they began to learn a little something about the dangers of conformity - and the chill that can be provided by a cold March downpour in Boston. As I walked back in with my wet pupils some of the other instructors raised a few eyebrows in my direction but I pretended not to notice. After class, through chattering teeth, one of my students shared with me that he might be interested in pursuing a marketing degree as opposed to the economics degree that his father had planned out for him. I simply advised that he let his heart dictate such decisions and left it at that.

The following day I arranged for the class to spend the hour kicking soccer balls while quoting famous economists. You know the sort: "All the perplexities, confusion and distress in America arise not from defects in their Constitution or Confederation, nor from want of honor or virtue, so much as downright ignorance of the nature of coin, credit, and circulation." And then the kid would wallop the ball, the sense of wonder about economics filling his soul. "The trade of the petty usurer is hated with most reason: it makes a profit from currency itself, instead of making it from the process which currency was meant to serve. Their common characteristic is obviously their sordid avarice." With that the pupil lays into the ball and sprints toward the common goal in a very exuberant and poignant fashion. "Protectionism is a misnomer. The only people protected by tariffs, quotas and trade restrictions are those engaged in uneconomic and

wasteful activity. Free trade is the only philosophy compatible with international peace and prosperity." I think you get the drift by now ... if only the boys had. They seemed to progressively lose interest with every additional quotation. Whereas I'd imagined them leaping and bounding about as they filled the net with ball after ball and finally scooping me up in their enthusiasm and running along with me in their clutches until their legs gave out, I saw none of this anticipated behavior. Instead, after a final line from Bill Bonner I was forced to herd them back inside and call the whole thing a resounding failure.

Stronger measures were evidently in order.

The next day I chose the quietest boy in the classroom and asked, "Please turn to the introduction of your book Principles of Economics by Alfred Marshall, Ph.D." Dutifully he flipped open his book and began to read aloud.

"To fully understand economics, we must be fluent with the quantity of a good supplied and the quantity of a good demanded. If, using a standard graphical representation, we put price on the vertical axis and quantity on the horizontal axis it is relatively simple to chart the changes in the demand as the price" ... I stopped him there.

"Excrement. That's what I think of Mr. Alfred Marshall." The boys all looked up as one at me. I continued. "We're not laying pipe. We're talking about economics. Now, I want you to rip out that page. Go on," I encouraged "Rip out the entire page. You heard me. Rip it out!"

The sounds of the textbook being savaged by eager young hands had my blood coursing through my veins at a breakneck pace.

"Gentlemen, tell you what. Don't just tear out that page, tear out the entire introduction. I want it gone. History. Be gone, Alfred Marshall! Keep ripping, gentlemen!"

As the last few pages drifted slowly to the floor beneath each desk I gestured for the boys to get up and huddle around me.

"This is a battle. A war. And the casualties could be your hearts and souls. Armies of academics going forward, measuring consumption and production." I brought them closer, my face only inches away from theirs. "We don't study economics because we think it's cute, we study economics because we are members of a consumer culture. And the consumer culture is filled with acquisitiveness. To quote John Kenneth Galbraith 'Economics is extremely useful as a form of employment for economists.'" Only my future marketing major seemed to understand. After class he informed me that he approached his Dad about switching his focus to marketing and away from economics and was told in no uncertain terms that he'd be doing no such thing. He was very disheartened by this.

The following day I brought the boys out into the hall to look at some of the old pictures of former graduating classes. Most of the time was spent laughing at the bad sideburns and short gym shorts they chose to wear but as we were wrapping up our little tour I had them gaze upon the Class of 1978.

"They're not that different from you, are they? Invincible, just like you feel. The world is their oyster. They believe they're destined for great things, just like many of you. Their

eyes are full of hope, just like you. Did they wait until it was too late to make from their lives even one iota of what they were capable? Because, you see, gentlemen, those boys are now selling insurance, engaging in audits and designing new and more absorbent toilet tissues. But if you listen real close, you can hear them whisper their legacy to you. Go on, lean in. Listen. Do you hear it?"

They leaned in expectantly.

"*Caveat emptor.*" I whispered reverently.

At the start I told you I'd tell you everything and let you be the judge. Actually, jury would have been a better word. You see, upon hearing about the father that wasn't going to let his son pursue his dreams of leaving economics behind and plunging headlong into the marketing game I got so distraught that I figured I would do the only humane thing left to do so I broke into the student's house later that night and shot him. Sitting here in the quiet of my cell I can still hear the tortured cries of his Dad when he heard the shot and came and found him. Such a senseless tragedy.

Now I have supplied my story and society at large has demanded justice, I guess all there is left to do is for you to make up your mind about right and wrong and hand down your verdict. Before you reach any conclusions though, I ask you to spend some time standing on your desk or table or bed and looking at things from a different perspective. Then stand there awkwardly as the music plays and then the scene fades to black.

Thank you.

hippest blog ever!

Now someone reading a blog might find it odd that the author of that blog would mention the fact that his prostate is swollen to the size of an engorged, orange-flesh honeydew. The reader might find that this isn't 'hip' enough for them. To this end I feel I must offer two important points to counter this perception.

First, what is not widely known is that orange-flesh honeydews are also known as temptation melons. Is there anything more hip than temptation?

I didn't think so.

And, second, if you are going to write a blog you have to be able to write. Anyone can describe an enlarged prostate. Your novice blogger might compare it to a 'melon.' Strictly amateur hour. I went with orange-flesh honeydew and I stand behind that decision. What's more, to make it even more hip I added engorged. There's a word that screams party!

So what's not hip about an enlarged prostate?

I'll tell you.

But make sure you don't plan on eating for a while.

So you'd think, based on Bernoulli's Principle, that the more swollen my prostate got, the narrower my urethra would get and the faster my flow of urine would be. Assuming that I was standing and the viscosity of my urine remained a constant, that's what I thought as well.

Wrong.

Totally wrong. Month after month I've seen it start to slow down. I even ran the numbers, assuming that the length of my tubing ($h = 1\text{m}$) was about 3 feet (too much?) and my penis hole was about 1 cm (too much?)... ($A = \pi R^2 = \pi/4 \text{ cm}^2 = 7.8\text{E-}5 \text{ m}^2 = 0.000078 \text{ m}^2$.) $g = 9.8 \text{ m/s}^2$ so $v = \sqrt{2 \cdot 9.8 \text{ m/s}^2 \cdot 1\text{m}} = 4.43 \text{ m/s}$. Finally $Q = Av = 7.8\text{E-}5 \text{ m}^2 \cdot 4.43 \text{ m/s} = 3.45\text{E-}4 \text{ m}^3/\text{s} = 345 \text{ cm}^3/\text{s}$. You can see that this clearly supports my reasoning on the topic of peeing pressure! And yet my flow is all over the fucking place.

Not only does this mean that I am suddenly that guy in the Flomax commercials, getting up in the middle of night with that irritated look on my face, but there is an even darker side to it.

Something you don't see in the commercials.

Something you could never see in the commercials for it is that shocking.

It was only a fluke that I even saw it. I was starting my typical day in the bathroom, dealing with my weak stream and all when the light shone through the window at exactly the right angle to see the problem. After showering, I immediately ran to my chalkboard to see if I could figure out what I had just witnessed.

And there it was.

So clear a child prodigy could have seen it.

I wasn't taking into account the turbulence created by my internal swelling! Add the surface-tension of your standard depth toilet bowl and there it was explained without a shadow of a doubt.

Every time I was peeing I was creating an almost imperceptible cascade of urine particles splashing back up on my bare legs. Instead of a strong steady torrent of piss, which keeps the splatter effect to a minimum, I was dripping and dribbling my way to a post-peeing urine gloss on my leg hairs that rivaled the effect of a ride on Splash Mountain. If the sun hadn't struck the piss-mist in just the right way I would have never noticed it at all.

Now the unwanted leg luster is all I can notice.

But, rate of urine discharge aside, tell me that peeing on myself every day isn't fucking hip. I bet even Tucker Max doesn't piss on himself as much as I do.

The only solutions to my problem, short of actually taking Flomax and becoming one of them, is to increase the size of my pee hole. Math tells us that doubling the size of the hole will increase the flow rate by 16 times (assuming, of course, that we keep the depth of the toilet water constant)!

You're going to sit there and tell me that you've ever read a blog that is more hip than a writer explaining why he has to double the size of his pee hole?!

Ready for the big finish? The prostate gland stores and secretes a fluid that makes up part of the seminal fluid that constitutes semen. It also has some muscles in it that help to expel the fluid during ejaculation.

Very hip.

Favorite Tweets:

A ghost isn't as scary after you hear one fart. Sort of humanizes them.

When I'm done speaking you can be sure I've said a mouthload.

You hear this advice all the time; just be yourself. Easy for them to say. Have you seen myself?

If we're honest about it most of our headstones would read 'DIDN'T FUCK ENOUGH.'

Darryl the Duck

When little Frankie was given the assignment of taking home a duck egg and making sure it was kept warm and safe over a weekend he took it very seriously. Both his parents and his teacher were shocked at the attention he paid it and the great lengths he went to ensure that it was returned to school the following Monday not only in one piece but spotless. A mother tiger doesn't dote on her cubs as much as Frankie looked after his egg. Although unusual, for the policy is very clear on these matters, the school actually allowed Frankie to take home the duckling after it hatched due to the positive influence it seemed to have on him. It was Frankie's first pet and that first night he went to bed right next to the incubator just so his new friend wouldn't be lonely. The next day he named his pet duck Darryl and the two of them seemed inseparable.

If that isn't foreshadowing, I don't know what is. You're not sure which direction this story is headed but you're certain it's going to arrive there pretty quickly.

The next day Frankie was showing Darryl to his friends when one of them accidentally stepped on him. It was, of course, an accident born from the excitement of young boys crowding around a new pet and all parties felt terrible but as his friend's foot came down on Darryl's head there was a slight but definitely not inaudible crunching noise, despite the forgiving nature of the grass beneath him, that seemed to come from the neighborhood of Darryl's skull and would seem to play a noteworthy role in the future of said duck. Frankie scooped him up and at first all seemed to be well as Darryl seemed to shake it off like a trooper but Frankie was immediately convinced that the certain twinkle that had been in his pet's eye since he fought his way out of his eggshell was now extinguished. A theory given more credence when later that night Frankie left Darryl alone in the bathtub to have a little swim only to return a few minutes later to find him upside down in the water. Luckily a few pushes on the chest area had the duckling spewing forth a modest quantity of water and spluttering and other things ducks do when they have unexpectedly ventured back from the other side.

Darryl had had quite the day.

After the chaos of resuscitation settled down, Darryl seemed to have no interest in his food. The only thing that Frankie could get him to eat was bread crumbs from the chicken tenders he had offered up in desperation. Then Darryl fell asleep. On his back. Frankie looked it up online and found that ducks don't sleep on their back but there his duckling was reclined and out like a light.

The next day Frankie thought fresh air should be at the top of the menu and would do

them both some good. Out they ventured to a nearby field, bat and glove in hand, to enjoy some sunshine and baseball. Frankie took great pains to position Darryl far away from the action but as fate would have it the same boy that had stepped on his head a day earlier hit a crazy foul ball that hurtled with no delay straight at our unfortunate water fowl. Where moments before stood a noble, albeit small, yellow duck there was nothing but a few tiny feathers floating gracefully to earth. To find the final resting place of the duck in question, your eyes would have to follow the path of the baseball. Having done that you would find a small pale lump about halfway between the descending down and the baseball which had come to rest about 30 or so feet away. If you were to have said that the ball had gotten all of Darryl you wouldn't be overstating it.

Frankie was aghast and the boy who had twice in two days damaged the hero of our tale was inconsolable. As one the boys sprinted to what they assumed would be the corpse of a small duck, but instead found Darryl struggling to his feet. A great cry arose and Darryl was hoisted up amongst loud cheers and passed around and twice dropped as the boys eagerly praised his resilience.

Day 3.

The neighbor's cat got a hold of Darryl. Frankie was looking high and low for his friend in his living room when he happened to look outside and see him in the mouth of Peaches, the Russian Blue who lived next door. I don't have to tell you his reaction.

Well I guess technically speaking I do. I should have said that you can probably guess his reaction, which would have been much less confusing. Anyway, Frankie streaked outside and chased Peaches up the largest tree in his front yard. High up into the tree. Like tippy-top high. Standing at the right angle and craning his neck in just the right way he thought he could make out the outline of the cat amongst the assorted leaves and limbs. Quickly doing what any boy would do in that situation, he started to hurl rocks in the general direction of the furry ducknapper until he saw one rock find its way to the target whereupon Peaches let go of his prize with a screech and Frankie watched Darryl tumble down the tree, careful to hit and ricochet off of every large branch in his path, and then in a dazzling display of hand-to-eye coordination the panicked boy was almost able to catch him before he hit the ground.

This time there were at least three distinct crunching noises. One of which could be written off as the sound a duck makes when it lands half on an acorn but the other two were definitely causes for concern. Frankie scooped up his pet and gazed lovingly into his eyes. Darryl on the other hand would have given him a "Are you fucking kidding me? Is every day going to be like this?" look if he had been conscious.

Frankie was now the proud owner of a duck that sunk. He found this out as he washed him off and his pet once again joined him in the territory of the awake and aware. Darryl looked around, shook his little wings and then walked off his owner's hand and promptly sunk to the bottom of the tub.

Here's the thing, at this point in the story I am really torn about whether to end it with Darryl having a riding mower pass over him only to waddle away unscathed and triumphant or having him, through some hilarious happenstance, ride a skateboard into a sewer grate and drop down to a certain fate of being eaten by either a rat or a snake.

Indecision is always a red flag for us professional writers and I now recognize a fatal flaw in the storytelling, which is why I am not sure how to wrap it up.

The perspective was all wrong. As cute as this saga might be, exactly how cute depending (as is usually the case with these things) on your imagination, it absolutely should have been written from the duck's point of view. A third person account was both predictable and beneath a professional writer such as myself. Now I realize that this revelation means having to start it all over again and rewrite it and that's just not going to happen so it's now up to you to decide whether or not to put in the necessary time and energy to restart it from the beginning but from a duck-centric viewpoint and fill in the necessary gaps or just curse me loudly for wasting your time and move on.

I can't really complain if you abandon it but I would be interested to know which ending you chose left to your own devices.

Try it, you'll probably be sorry.

true courage

It wasn't until I was watching *Old School* for the 100th time that it hit me what true courage was. There was a scene where Frank The Tank, masterfully portrayed by Will Ferrell, walks out onto his porch holding a blow-up doll and asks his friends which outfit he should adorn her with; nurse or cheerleader. There was no shame, there was no embarrassment ... just a man asking advice on his sex toy. That's when it really sank in.

I've never had sex with a doll. I've never even considered it. Why? Because I could never buy one. I remember in high school nearly passing out on my way to the counter with condoms. Those 30 feet seemed like a mile. A mile of passing by everybody I knew and anyone who had ever met my parents. I'm not sure why there wasn't any pride involved, surely by buying condoms I was telling the world that I was getting some, right? But, no. Because it involved sex it was one of the most difficult purchases I would ever have to make. I can't imagine walking into an adult bookstore, looking through their selection of products, and then tucking an inflatable doll under my arms and striding towards the counter. It is so far beyond my comprehension it's like imaging landing a jetliner, doing open-heart surgery or enjoying a Paris Hilton interview. My few trips into adult bookstores were spent watching the other people in the adult bookstore and avoiding them watching me in the adult bookstore. The last thing I was going to do is look at any of the magazines and risk getting an erection in public.

Apparently, I'm a prude. Perhaps sex with an inflatable doll is awesome and I've been missing out on a whole dimension of satisfaction. It's time to do some homework. Now keep in mind that because I Googled 'sex toys' I'm going to have to destroy my computer hard drive and switch internet service providers to cover my tracks when I'm done here. Anyone who thinks that the government isn't tracking every perv that visits these websites is fooling themselves! If I had time I would have driven down to the library to do this but I'm afraid little 9 year old Sally would walk up behind me as I was scrolling through and I'd end up having to explain myself to the police ... again.

OK, so far so good. I've pulled the blinds, unplugged the phone and locked all the doors. Hmmm ... a vibrating anus. You don't say. Rotating mouth action. Apparently there have

been some major breakthroughs in the material they use as well. "Senso" ... soft AND stretchy! Here's one that has blonde horse hair, and I was worried about them not being realistic! Wait just a sec, they have some with painted fingernails. Real girls have painted fingernails! I'm almost sold. Now here is one with an air pump, it doesn't really go into why, but I'm intrigued. For those with a mechanical fetish there's one that comes with its own repair kit. That will save an embarrassing trip to hardware store! Hold on, hold everything ... now I'm seeing something about a breakthrough called "cyber-skin" that feels even more like the real thing.

Then I found her. The Fatty Patty Doll. Large and in charge. Three colossal love holes. 4 feet 9 inches tall. 55 inch chest and a whopping 39 inch waist. Connected pouch-type vagina. Self esteem sold separately, just like college. The best part? They will mail her right to me. There's no need to make the 'walk of shame' into the adult bookstore!

I hate to admit it, especially after you've been so patient reading all this, but I don't think even if I had it with me right now I could bring myself to use it. Really. Maybe I AM a prude but I'm not sure I could bring myself to have sex with a doll. Even if I was alone I think I'd be too self-conscious. It might feel great and I may even be able to close my eyes and pretend to some degree, but I think that if I did achieve 'lift off' with my rubber partner that I would then have to blow my own head off as opposed to live the rest of my life knowing I mounted something that required batteries (and then had to clean it off/up/out). Is that wrong? What happens in the near future when there are sexy robots that appear completely realistic? Will I miss out on the fun because of some strange psychological hang-up? Probably, but am I the only one that sees the potential problems that come with 'rotating mouth action'? Somehow that screams embarrassing trip the emergency room or at least the risk of severe abrasions where I'd least like to receive severe abrasions.

All I know is that soon Virtual Slut 2050 is around the corner and when that day comes Frank The Tank will be the first in line at Radio Shack to buy one. THAT, my friends, is true courage.

Weighing in at 2 and a half ounces!

Gary would be the first to admit that he was a little bit too competitive for his own good. Given the fact that he was a former professional wrestler you would, of course, jump to the conclusion that this story will involve wrestling. It does not. But just to clarify, he had earned money while wrestling but had never made it to the big time. He spent years wrestling on the underground circuit; small auditoriums, gyms and bars mostly. Despite all the stitches and concussions he was never asked to wrestle at the next level. He finally retired from the 'sport' to focus on his 'career' at the recycling plant. If he should ever read this he will be undecided about what set of apostrophes pisses him off more.

But as I said, this story does not involve wrestling.

But it does involve the same competitive nature that he showed in the ring.

He was slouched across his 3-piece sectional at home with his enormous body that clearly could have used a 4-piece, watching TV. Flipping through the channels he found a nature program and settled in for a bit of wholesome and enlightening programming. He had a

snack and a drink and all was well with the world.

Until the narrator just couldn't stop going on and on about the Star-Nosed Mole. At first Gary watched fascinated as the program showed the ugly little guy burrowing away with his face that looked like his ass. Details about his digging prowess were shared and time and again the 22 pink appendages that make up his nose were mentioned and praised. The finger-like tentacles at the end of the snout are covered with approximately 25,000 tiny touch receptors known as Eimer's organs, which are used to identify food. The mole can touch 13 separate areas of the ground every second with these bad boys and locate and consume 8 separate prey items in under 2 seconds.

"You're still a revolting rodent," Gary said between handfuls of Ritz Bits Peanut Butter crackers.

It showed the mole walking around looking for worms. All of a sudden his nose would sniff one out and then he'd grab the hapless worm who thought he was safely hidden in the soil and start chowing down.

Maybe it was because his own box of crackers was getting low and he didn't want to get up and get another or maybe it was because the narrator had pointed out that the 'fingers' of the Star-Nose were 6 times as sensitive as a the human hand, but whatever it was Gary had had enough.

He closed his eyes and started to feel through what was left of the crackers at the bottom of the box to find the ones that still had 2 crackers with peanut butter between them. He hated to eat just a single plain cracker and if he had a single that was covered in peanut butter the whole cracker-to-peanut-butter ration was thrown off. His fingers, thick as they were, danced through the assorted crackers and every few seconds identified an intact cracker and brought it quickly to his mouth.

For some reason this filled him with a great amount of pride.

The narrator was explaining all about Theodor Eimer, the German zoologist who first described these incredible tentacles in 1871. Just as Gary was about to relax he heard the voice on TV veer away suddenly from Teddy and return to the business of extolling the virtues of the Star-Nose's nose. Apparently researchers have found that after touching a small piece of food it takes them only 230 milliseconds to identify it as edible and eat it.

Gary knew that the box at his side contained no more whole cracker sandwiches. What was left was only the single crackers, some with peanut butter and some without. He wondered why, if the mole was so wonderful, nobody knew about them and the mole was relegated to some lame nature program on a channel nobody watches.

He closed his eyes and plunged his hand back into the box, trying to feel each cracker to identify if it held peanut butter on one side or was simply sitting in the box peanut butter-less. Carefully he found one of each and made his own peanut butter sandwich. Nothing else existed except his fingers and the crackers and this task. He was blind and hungry and soon it came easier for him. Eventually the box was completely empty with not a single cracker left unaccounted for.

"I could have been a mole," he said with some satisfaction.

Dennis

Because I know the ending of this story, I can tell you now it's not going to be as funny as I thought it might be as I was living it out. At the beginning I was carried away with the possibilities as they unfolded because at the beginning I was an idiot. Oblivious to the existential ramifications of a seemingly holistic and innocent act of high spirits and a can-do attitude.

I'll try to start at the top but you'll forgive me if I jump around a bit. Honestly, I'm not even sure how I'm going to make it to the end because in my head this is one of those stories that is far too true to end. I really do try to be honest when I'm writing and sometimes it ends up funny and other times it sucks and I can't help but feel if I stay within the stifling confines of honesty that this one might suck a lot.

I'll skip the back-story about how I ended up at a storage auction because otherwise this short story will end up a novel. Actually, if I were ever to have the urge to sit and bang out a 400 page book I think this would be as good a story as I'm going to get, but I can't be bothered so I'll just skip ahead to the good parts.

I was at a storage auction. For those that don't know, these are held when someone stops paying for their rental space/locker so the storage facility puts out a public notice and a bunch of vultures who own secondhand shops and thrift stores swarm in and bid on the contents. There are a bunch of reality shows out now that romanticize the proceedings but without the editing and dramatic music it's really quite a depressing collection of people blindly bidding on stacks of dusty boxes in the hope that buried somewhere within them is something worth selling. Of course, my friend didn't pitch the idea of attending in quite this way so I agreed to go and check it out.

I bought a locker.

The last one of the day. I was the last bidder and then silence. I don't know why but I just shot my hand up and won the damn thing. At the time it seemed hysterical. We both had driven there in minivans so we were actually able to load all of the boxes into them and head back to my place for the big reveal. I have to admit I was a bit giddy at what might lurk within the various boxes and unusually large number of duffel bags. Who owns 10 large duffel bags?

As I write this you can probably tell my tone has improved and you're waiting for some funny stuff to unfold as a result of the purchase of said contents of the storage locker. I feel it as well because I'm forgetting for a moment how this ends and remembering how I got all caught up in the excitement of it.

When I got home my friend and I unloaded all of the boxes and bags onto the front lawn and decided to go through everything thoroughly just like they do on the TV shows. We joked about the possibility of the bags containing severed heads or cocaine and we circled them for a few minutes, almost hesitant about beginning.

Over the next 5 hours we found out that these were the belongings of a guy named Dennis. He had died 4 months beforehand and that explained why the storage locker had been up for auction in the first place. We found out he died from Google, after we learned every damn thing about him which obviously included his name and where he was from. Here is where funny and sucks parted ways. He had been 57 when he passed away, he

was somewhat mentally handicapped and spent years working at a grocery store. We knew this because he had kept his time cards and the hat he had worn to work. He had been married for awhile but his wife had left him. We found this out reading the painful letters and cards he had kept. He had spent the last years of his life in a group home.

He was so fucking human it was beautiful, there were multiple boxes filled with a mix of bibles and various religious material sitting right on top of a breathtaking collection of hardcore porn. For awhile when we were separating things into what we were going to throw out and what we were going to keep we actually put them in different bags but then agreed that it was much more appropriate to throw them out together. They had been partners for years so it seemed cruel to make them split up at the very end.

It was a heartbreaking five hours. Going through all that was left of somebody on this earth was brutal. Dennis even provided us with a moment right out of the movie *Se7en* when we found notebook after notepad filled with lists of everything that had appeared on QVC for weeks at a time. Every item and every price. His handwriting was neat and deliberate and to think of him sitting in front of a TV writing down this stuff for what must have been months was so creepy that there was absolutely nothing funny about it.

I'm not sure how the people in the TV shows do it. For the record, Dennis had an amazing collection of old records and Elvis memorabilia that when we sell it will make us literally thousands of dollars. As I only paid \$200 for the locker you'd think this would fill me with an unquenchable enthusiasm for going and buying another locker, but I swear if I could do it all again I would have kept my hand down and just walked away empty-handed. Throwing out the clothes and toiletries and bank statements and framed pictures and unbelievably large number of calculators and wallets (apparently it must have been hard to find that special gift for Dennis) belonging to somebody you never met and you know you'll never meet is hard. Looking out at the end of your driveway and seeing it all waiting to be picked up by the garbage men the next morning is brutal.

Hooking up the old VCR wasn't too difficult. Deciding to watch a video we found of his 40th birthday party seemed only natural, a nice way to pay our respects. Watching the video of his 40th birthday party was surreal and despite the nervous laughter as the characters that made up his life were introduced one by one we both felt the knot in our stomachs forming. We watched every minute, a whole fucking hour of it because to turn it off somehow seemed unconscionable.

We booed and hissed when his fat whore of a wife appeared with him, we knew how it would turn out, although at the time Dennis himself was blissfully unaware, but we also choked up when they kissed as Barry Manilow sang *Mandy* in the background.

This isn't the first time I've found it difficult to capture something with words but in this case you should be glad. I almost want this story to be as awkward and clumsy as possible to spare you from actually feeling some of the shit that we felt. Better to think I suck as a writer than view yourself, however briefly, as nothing more than a bunch of boxes and bad videotapes waiting to be tossed after being picked through by either loved ones or strangers or people that might be both. I mean, how many people knew Dennis kept his porn with his bible study stuff?

At the end of the video Dennis was presented with a birthday cake that was in the shape

of a girl wearing a bikini. The candles on her breasts served as flaming nipples and were the kind that after you blew them out they lit up again so as his family pressed around him he hammed it up for the camera trying unsuccessfully to extinguish them. He then cut the first piece of cake and chose to take the slice from out between the cake's wide open legs which left a giant inappropriate gash oozing some sort of red filling that the children took no notice of but had us smiling despite ourselves. That was so Dennis.

I now know 100% that there are no such things as ghosts. I always believed it, but I now have proof because if such things existed there would be no way in this world or the next that I wouldn't have been awoken in the depths of night by a confused or even angry apparition wondering why I was throwing all of his stuff away. No visitation. Except for the rumbling of the garbage truck outside hauling away all that remains of Dennis to the dump.

cracked

Whenever I'm in an old building or one that has fallen into premature disrepair my eyes always seem to linger on the cracked paint on the ceiling. That's like the clincher, the one thing that defines whether or not the room has been taken care of or not. A simple stain on the carpet can be explained away easy enough but when you glance up and see peeling paint it's a dead giveaway. Cracking paint is the 'giant cobwebs on the staircase of the haunted mansion' of ordinary buildings.

I saw the first crack in the paint of my bedroom ceiling today. It was quite traumatic actually. Not only did it mean I had to buy a new can of paint and a roller but it signaled something else.

My ceiling had quit trying.

They say a chain is only as strong as its weakest link and now I knew where my ceiling's weakest link was. I like to imagine that all of the paint was doing its best to stay connected, like some titanium dioxide hands-across-America thing, when suddenly two little pair of hands came apart. And all the other hands gasped and tried to internalize the implications of this letting-go-of-hands. Did they suddenly envision the inevitable flaking to come or did they redouble their efforts not to let go of the hands on either side of them?

Guess that depends on the brand of paint I used to begin with.

Was that little patch of paint disgruntled or was there some good reason that it could no longer dutifully cling to the ceiling? I started to blame myself. Did I miss a small bubble when I first applied the paint? Could it be that this whole time that little spot of paint was heroically holding on, desperately fighting gravity and perhaps a tiny bit of dirt or a human eyelash that somehow got slapped up there with the rest of the paint? Or did I just get a hold of a can of paint that had a little quit in it?

If you look at the dimensions of a can of paint and then figure out how large an area you can paint with it you realize that paint is a damn flexible substance. It may look all square in the can but in the end it is the Mister Fantastic of home improvement materials. The fact that most of you didn't understand that I was referencing a character from the *Fantastic Four* goes a long way in explaining why there are no comic books at Home

Depot. That's a shame, those hard working men in the tool belts deserve a little whimsy now and then.

I know what you're saying, you're saying "perhaps that little spot of paint was trying to give the ceiling that 'crackle' look that's all the rage these days."

I'm surprised at you. I've never known you to be soft.

If that little spot of paint had wanted to achieve that he would have surely discussed it with all the other paint on the ceiling before taking it upon itself to start cracking. That's just common sense.

What's that? You want me to believe that in the case of ceiling paint conforming isn't as easy as it seems?

Listen, I realize that it must be harder to cling to a ceiling upside down and all than it is to sit on a wall but that's the job and that little spot of paint knew what it was getting itself into when it signed up. Obviously you just want to make excuses. If this was your ceiling that was cracking, I'm sure you'd be singing a different tune.

I have better things to do than sit here and type good reasons why my ceiling paint is starting to peel. Fixing the problem, unfortunately for the small spot of paint, isn't one of them.

Niger please!

You would think in the increasingly politically correct world we live in someone over at the United Nations could saunter over to Niger's representative, Boubacar Boureima, and ask what the fuck is up with his country's name.

Tradition is all well and good but does he know how many white geography teachers he's freaking out in the United States? I don't even think my teacher in high school *mentioned* Africa at all for fear he'd have to pronounce the name. Does anybody else remember when the US suggested that Iraq tried to buy uranium from a West African country? It was Niger but do you think even pretty boy Brian Williams wanted to tackle that one? The *slightest* hesitation on that name and the next paying gig he's getting is speaking in Alabama to the local Rotary Club at a Ramada Inn.

Now you might also ask ol' Mr. Boureima why there are also 40,000 people still thought to be held as slaves in his country. Niger, please! I realize that they criminalized slavery in 2003 (yes, you read that correctly. 2003. Not 1803 or 1903. 2003) but now they just deny it exists. You could also then ask Boubacar if he knows what irony is.

So maybe its best that our uneasy teachers steer clear of the current history of Niger, given that it has the world's highest fertility rate, suffers from endless droughts, is one of the poorest countries on earth, has 3.3 million citizens with HIV, and most of the government is under investigation for allegedly embezzling funds from the education ministry. Is it any wonder they are a former French colony and that French is still their official language? I bet somehow the French are responsible for the name.

I was going to Google some more information but I'm afraid to have the word Niger in my Google history in case one of my black friends happens to see it. Yes, you read that

correctly. Black. Not *African-American*. That has to be the dumbest way to categorize someone I've ever heard and if I need to explain why then you're probably not going to agree with me anyway and in that case I wish only horrible things for you and your family going forward. I'm white. They're black. Who gives a crap where we come from? I've literally been in a situation where I'm talking to someone and they'll want to point out the black kid surrounded by four white kids for some reason and they will say "the kid in the red shirt" and I'll say "there are three kids in red shirts" and they'll say "the one in the lighter red shirt with no collar" and I'll be "you mean the *black* kid?!" and they will almost hyperventilate. I can't imagine black guys having the same problem pointing out "the white kid over there" but as I'm white I guess I can't be sure.

So here's the point. If we're going to keep asking South Carolina to change their flag I think it's totally acceptable to ask Niger to come up with a new name. One that doesn't make white people so nervous. Is that too much to ask? I don't even know how to pronounce it because I've never actually heard anyone say it out loud. If folks from Nigeria have locked up Nigerian status what do you call people from Niger?

I bet even black readers had at least one funny answer spring to mind there. Does that make them racist or realists? Has there ever been much of a difference? If it were a *Family Feud* question I bet the #1 answer would be "Fucked."

blank

Well *this* is uncomfortable. Your eyes barreling along, expecting word after word, while my writer stands absently downstairs waiting for the ding from the microwave that will signal that his tea is ready. If this were a cartoon, oh how I wish it were for your sake, the page would remain blank as a pen leaned against the blankness signaling to you that there was nothing to see, but as you seem intent on having your eyes continue their journey from side to side and down the page you draw this out and force me to explain myself. Without the clacking of fingers on a keyboard I have nothing to show you, showing you is held in much higher esteem by my writer than telling. Obviously, there is no scene to speak of where you might glean a hint of the upcoming action nor can I offer an accent or telltale physical characteristic. I cannot even turn inward at the moment because my inwards remain empty. That much I can both show and tell. Given my empty state, the difference between show and tell seems as transparent as the similarities between truth and dare.

If you can be patient I have no doubt my writer will return, tea in hand, to the task at hand and no doubt entertain you with some triumph or tragedy thrust upon me. At this moment I can't say I have a preference or even an understanding of the difference between them. I'm led to believe from the writer that without you identifying with some aspect of me that you won't have much of an interest either.

Might I suggest, with no insult intended, that perhaps you're still reading this for that very reason? Might my writer sit down to find you've already identified with the complete lack of me and he can continue with a captive audience?

a detective story

Mike had been a detective for over 20 years. He had started young and idealistic but ended up looking a lot like most of the others he worked with; hard, weathered, and unhappy. The fact that he was unhappy was beside the point but, also quite possibly, the entire point.

He had distinguished himself from his colleagues because he was able to put little things together to make something larger. Every crime was a puzzle and he was never satisfied until he had every piece. He was never happy until the borders were unbroken and the picture complete. That never happened so, therefore, he was never happy.

His problem this morning was, that after 20 years, a lot of the unfinished puzzles were starting to come together in a completely unexpected way. Something that it would have taken over 20 years to see and only if you were looking. It had started innocently enough, an ironic term given the subject was crime, the prior evening with a party game called "Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon." He had been encouraged to participate at a gathering he had no interest in being at and after the rules had been fully explained to him he quickly put his glass of scotch down and left without another word to anyone.

The game was loosely based on a concept put forth by a Hungarian playwright named Frigyes Karinthy that everyone is, on average, approximately six steps away from any other person on Earth. Well before social networks were popular and network theory was in its infancy, Karinthy believed that the modern world was 'shrinking' due to ever-increasing connectedness of human beings.

Hundreds of incomplete puzzles brought together with one final piece. It had been a very long night.

Regardless of how crazy and paranoid it felt, he hurriedly sat down into his chair and booted up his computer. After a few moments he typed 'collective consciousness' and hit the search button. It brought up another few terms and he spent the next 30 minutes trying to figure out exactly what it was he was trying to put his finger on.

"I think you might also try 'hive mind,' Mike."

Mike jumped, he had not heard his Captain come into his office. Next to Cpt. Nigel Snigget stood his partner of the past four years, Ed Breezly. Smiling broadly, Ed walked into his office and sat down in the chair opposite Mike.

"I think he might also have some luck with 'eusociality,' Nige."

Behind Nigel, he could see others lining up to peer inside at him.

The Captain slowly closed the door behind him and walked slowly to Mike's desk. "I guess congratulations are in order then" he said with no trace of good will in his voice. "You broke the case."

Mike faltered a second, overwhelmed with what this meant. He felt for his side arm and realized it sat on the filing cabinet across the room where he had slung it, his jacket, and his keys in his haste to get to work in front of the computer.

"So I was ... I am ... right?" The words tumbled out of his mouth. His tongue felt thick and his head dull.

"I'm afraid so Mike." The corners of his partner's mouth gave up their attempts at holding

a smile.

Mike sagged back into his chair, trying to come to grips with what it all meant. He started small, like a baby letting go of a piece of furniture and hesitantly putting one foot out in front of the other.

"All the crimes. All of them are connected. Every one."

His Captain decided to push the baby over. "Mike. It's all connected. The crimes, music, wars, sports, hunger, the fucking *Price is Right*."

Ed chimed in to try and help him; "It's just a game Mike, ol' buddy. Do you see that now?"

He couldn't see. He couldn't think straight. Only one word kept coming drumming against the back of his eyeballs and finally it leaked out as more of a whimper than a question.

"Why?"

"Because we don't know how many of you there are."

"Come on Nige, throw him a bone. Can't you see he's struggling a bit?" Ed's smile returned but now it had a menacing luster to it.

"Ok, it's like this." Nigel straightened his shirt with a quick downward tug. "While our best and brightest are tucked away ensuring the survival and advancement of the wheat, the rest of us are entertaining the chaff."

"You're the chaff, Mike." Ed piped up.

The recent recipient of the chaff moniker could only look on confused as Cpt. Nigel Snigget drew his service revolver and calmly put one between his eyes.

Favorite Facebook Status updates:

Every time I watch golf and hear about the incredible pressure that golfers have to deal with I think about antlions. Antlions are the larvae of a insect that ends up looking like a dragonfly, but when they are young they excavate conical pits in the sand by crawling backwards in circles, at the same time flipping out sand grains with their long jaws. The slope of the funnel is adjusted to the critical angle of repose for sand, so that the sides readily give way under the feet of a would-be escapee. The antlion waits quietly at the bottom of the pit, with its body off to one side and concealed by the steep wall.

When crawling insects inadvertently fall into the pit it is virtually impossible for them to climb the loose sand on the steep walls. The struggling victim is then cruelly pulled beneath the sand as its body fluids are gradually siphoned out.

I think it would be great if there were giant, genetically engineered antlions the size of ponies and they were released into the sand traps at golf tournaments. THAT would be pressure.

Do you ever wonder if the tropical fish born in captivity sense there is something not quite right about the plastic coral reef they swim around?

What better way to express the fact that you are oblivious to being part of a larger society

than hanging a pair of metals balls on the back of your pick-up. Have you seen these? Large metallic testicles for young kids and old ladies and everyone else to admire. Funny in concept but to actually inflict them on the rest of us is the worst kind of inbred hillbilly fucktardedness.

How did I know that somewhere my otolaryngologists was discussing my Auricular paresthesia with someone?

My ears were burning.

A recent study showed that 57% of Americans wish that dinosaurs from the cretaceous period still existed. I'm not sure those people have thought it through but I admit it would be cool to open the newspaper each day to see who's been eaten.

validated

It seemed like a pretty harmless transaction. I had always parked in the lot across the street from the hospital when calling on one of my clients, but then a friend of mine told me that he always parks in the hospital lot and then just goes across the sky bridge and gets his ticket validated even though he wasn't actually visiting any of the patients there. Saves him \$15.50 every visit downtown.

Seemed simple enough except when I started to walk down the hallway towards the ticket stamper, I saw it was sitting on a desk occupied by a security guard. Now immediately I'm sure you've leapt to the conclusion that this security guard was a man in a bad blue security shirt with a bad emblem on the sleeve that vaguely resembled a badge of some sort and black pants that were two sizes too small and seemed to be made of rayon or nylon or some other material that ended with -on but you are wrong. It was a woman.

Anyway, I panicked and walked right past her and into the bowels of the hospital. After I walked around for a little bit I started to weigh my options. If I was unable to extricate myself from this tricky predicament my vehicle might be forever trapped on the blue level of St. Whatever's Hospital parking garage.

Obviously the easiest thing to do would be to steal a white jacket and pretend to be a doctor. After being unable to acquire the necessary garb I was forced to settle with some surgical scrubs I found in a linen closet. I threw them over my street clothes and started for the desk, ticket in hand and seemingly eager to be slid through the machine.

But what is she wasn't buying the surgeon routine? Could I be arrested for impersonating a doctor? As I got closer I could feel the sweat building on my brow and before I was within 10 feet of the desk I pivoted on my back foot and hightailed it back down the hall. She'd never buy that I was a doctor.

The next obvious solution was to borrow a gown and try to pretend I was a patient leaving the hospital. Although I found it a bit breezy in back the transformation was easy enough and in no time I was shuffling down the hallway holding the plastic bag containing my clothes and only moments from freeing my car from its unwanted detention. This time I was literally two feet from the punching contraption when it occurred to me that usually guards won't allow a patient to leave and drive themselves home. Quickly I wondered if I could invent some bleeding-heart story that could explain

my departure but was too worried that the guard would try to escort me back to my room only to find I didn't have one, so with a quick spin that sent a burst of cold air up my not-adequately-covered backside I once again headed back the way I had come.

Pretty much oblivious to the suffering all around me.

Who did I need to be to get out of this mess? I couldn't be myself, could I? Not to this security professional. She could be a highly trained woman with a military background and a short fuse who could sniff out the type of person who would try to cheat the system and attempt to park at the hospital when in fact their business had not been in the hospital at all. The kind of woman who waits all day for the opportunity to wrestle such a person to the ground in a very public and humiliating manner and put her knee on the back of their head until the proper authorities are summoned.

I spent close to an hour trying to find a security uniform or at least a walkie talkie so I could 'relieve' her and then make my escape. No dice.

I studied her in greater detail. Usually I see faces in clouds but this was the first time I ever actually saw clouds in a face.

Should I try honesty and throw myself on her mercy or perhaps pull a fire alarm and in the ensuing confusion stamp my ticket and bolt out of there? Was I agile enough to complete the transaction without her even knowing as I wandered by or would it be easier to sneak up behind her and render her unconscious when nobody else was looking?

The idea of being myself became more difficult as I realized I wasn't sure who I was any more.

This seems to happen every time I look to a stranger for validation.

tertium non datur

The only people who dislike Cheryl more than the anti-anarchist crowd are the anarchists themselves. You see Cheryl started an Anarchy Club at her school. She did not do so in an attempt to be ironic or as an act of social satire or civil disobedience. She believes in the principles of anarchy and hopes that with the proper organization the movement can take root at her school and flourish.

You can see why the anarchists hate her.

The question is whether or not she is a hero or villain. Of course, first you have to establish whether or not you believe anarchy is a heroic notion or inherently evil. Once you've established that you can then decide if it is the ultimate act of rebellion to go against the principles of anarchy itself and make it a club or if you have to simply let the definition of a political belief define it. Those two schisms create four different realities for someone to exist in at her school and those that agree on one point will almost certainly disagree on the other. That is if anyone much cared.

Nobody has joined her club to date but she dutifully starts each meeting with a loud "competition, diffidence and glory!" and then sets about finishing the ever-expanding by-laws.

You wonder, if she was more attractive, would the Anarchy Club be more popular. Or,

using that train of thought, if she was more popular would the Anarchy Club be more attractive. Two different questions but no schism. Cheryl is not unattractive, she is simply average. Should I point out the two non-schisms that would be created if she *was* unattractive?

Hard to tell if there are any true anarchists going to her school. There are the usual lawless students but it's difficult to say if that is a conscious choice on their part or if it's just the path of least resistance. Cheryl is certain that none of them are familiar with Thomas Rainsborough, the Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine, the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo or Immanuel Kant so they can talk all the revolution they want but they are no better than the stiffies in the Junior Achievement club.

Ever since she appeared on the local news, who decided to fill up a slow news day with a profile on the girl who started an anarchy club, she gets hate mail. Her parents have had to replace the mailbox twice, repaint the garage door after vandals spray painted a capitol A with a circle around it followed by the letters "s-s-h-o-l-e" on it and regularly have to wash eggs off the windows.

She seems to be unaware of the irony in acts of civil disobedience being carried out against her, someone with a completely clean rap sheet, because she supports the idea of a stateless society based on non-hierarchical voluntary associations.

The real problem for Cheryl has been the real anarchists pleading with her to stop. The hard-boiled crowd. Whether they are extreme individualists or complete collectivists, anarcho-communists or anarcho-syndicalists, libertarian anarchists or no-card-carrying-required anarcho-syndicalist labor union members, they all write impassioned letters imploring her to cease and desist with the club.

If the proverb "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" holds any truth then it makes you wonder how many friends Cheryl really has.

Her parents and her guidance counselor wonder the same thing.

But every Monday, the flyer announcing the next meeting is taped up to the school bulletin board and, every Tuesday at 3:30, she sits in the empty classroom and starts to jot down the minutes of the meeting. She will pause every now and then and look out the window. Right outside there is a large tree and often times the two squirrels that live there will be chasing each other around the branches and she will get a large smile on her face.

Then it's back to work.

skin deep

When my friends and I are sitting around having a few beers or camping deep in the woods, we'll often times start quizzing each other about what we find attractive in females and my list goes something like this.

Girls that dye their hair are nice. Long press-on nails, colored contacts and those giant fake eyelashes are cool, too.

I like fake breasts. Not only fake but obviously fake. They have to appear unnatural. If I

had to admit one secret fantasy it would be a tit-bag that pops in my hand as I'm squeezing it. Late night at night I can't help but admit that terms like necrosis, asymmetry and capsular contracture really get the motor running. If a girl already has large breasts then I like it when she's had reduction surgery. Not sure how they drain those puppies but I sure hope it leaves a mark.

I love giant lips. That "just punched in the mouth" look is what I go for. They can't be too big. Melanie Griffith had the right idea but didn't go far enough. When a girl tells me, through smackers the size of donuts, that she got her silicon on the black market I get lightheaded. What can I say? I also like to overinflate my tires a little and my car handles fine.

Also, nothing gets me going like tightly stretched skin around the eyes. Joan Rivers may be getting up there in age but her face simply radiates beauty. When I brush a girl's cheek gently, I want it to make the same sound as when I rub a balloon. For me, I like eyebrows to look frozen on the forehead like two comatose caterpillars. In a perfect world they react the same when the female is hearing that she won the lottery or someone close to her just got hit by a bus. They don't move.

Liposuction. Now we're talking. If me and the boys are gathered around a campfire throwing a few back and exchanging stories, this is where my eyes get that far-away look as I rattle off my list of favorite scars; easily #1 with a bullet are fibroblastic scars. The stuff of fantasy in my books. Next come the hypertrophic scars followed closely by atrophic scars. Last but not least are the hypopigmented scars. Whenever I can get a hold of a brochure outlining different procedures it reads like Penthouse Forum. Usually, I can't make it past the second use of the word 'invasive.'

One of the things that most women don't learn from their beauty magazines is that even if you have a nice healthy head of hair that is no reason not to throw in a few hair plugs. Most of them are shaving their undercarriage these days anyway, why let that hair go to waste? It's the little things that sometimes mean the most.

Like binding feet. It's not just for the Asians anymore. A girl hobbles into the bar with "lotus feet" and her dance card is filled for the rest of the night. If she could dance ... which of course she can't. But if she could, she would be no stranger to the dance floor, I'll tell you that much. Not if I'm in that bar.

People are so hung up on looks. The truth is I don't much care about how girl looks at the start, but how much effort she put into looking like she does now.

Don't like tattoos though. Butterflies and hearts just make it seem like she's trying too hard.

In the end, it's not what's on the outside that matters as much as what's on the inside. Hopefully, a stapled stomach.

we are what we dream

As had happened a hundred times before, the model walked in and got comfortable as he arranged his canvas and paints. Her robe came off and he went to work. After about 30 minutes her rough outline began to take shape before him and he began to get the same

creeping feeling he'd had a hundred times before.

Disappointment. With his subject. With his tools. With himself.

So he tried something that he'd never done before and said hello.

She unfroze momentarily and even allowed her eyes to move in his direction. There they stayed and watched him grab his canvas and hurl it across the studio only to come to rest noisily against the ancient plumbing that seemed to haphazardly poke out of every wall before disappearing back into the crumbling brick.

He smiled and apologized. She explained she was getting paid either way so it made no difference to her.

He laughed. She smiled. He asked her what her name was and where she lived and how old she was and where she was from and if she enjoyed being a model.

Katherine. East Side. 26. West Side. It was ok.

He asked her about her dreams. She laughed. He asked her about her last six dreams and then he got a new canvas.

She'd had a dream about travel and he painted her feet in their entirety. He thought about giving them little wings but in the end they were just implied.

She dreamt about building a house and he painted her hands.

She had an explicit dream where she was ravaged by a group of painters from the nearby college and he painted her hips and breasts. They simultaneously shimmered and simmered. He squirmed on his stool with a throbbing erection that threatened to knock over the canvas as she went into every delicious detail but he never stopped painting.

She watched his face carefully as that particular recollection drew to a close and he painted her eyes, and she listened to his nervous laughter and heavy sighs and he painted her ears.

She had a strange dream about how weird it felt to have something growing from her head. Almost anticipating each word, his brush swept and curled and her hair flowed down and around and over the various pieces of her that were already busy drying on the cloth.

She had a dream about connecting the dots and he busied himself with all the parts of her body between her feet and hands and swelling breasts. A tension was growing in the room and she felt something wonderful was going on just out of sight and she smiled.

And he sighed again and painted her lips and they flowed down and around and over the various parts of her that were still preoccupied with drying on the cloth.

Another dream and she started to have smudges, she was outside the lines but the painting remained perfect despite all the movement that couldn't help but insert itself into the portrait.

She dreamt that her mom died and she was forced to roll her up in a carpet and stack her with all the other mothers who had died. Thankfully he was done by then and only his signature reflected her mother's feet, still wearing the pink shoes she wore around the house, sticking out of the roll of carpet. Some people will mistake it for a happy face.

She told him what a nice time she had then got dressed and left.

He began to stack all of his other paintings for the short trip to the waiting dumpster outside. He felt like the eager dumpster had been waiting and rooting for him a long time. Too long.

Dr. Ganzfield's Baby and Child Care

First off, I can't really come out and call this some inquiry into the grey area between fate and morality because it could also be looked at as so many other things. Secondly, and most importantly, it's my actual life so the best you could call it is an interesting work in progress. Depending on your opinion of the topics discussed you might have some strong feelings about my circumstances but believe me ... no stronger than I have.

It's all a bit confusing at times.

My father was a well known psychic and my mother was an only slightly lesser renown fortune teller. That might sound odd but when you're a kid whatever you grow up around seems the norm. I remember playing poker with my mom with tarot cards and the only difference I could tell was that even if you won there was always a little good news/bad news to it. Other than that my childhood was pretty much identical to most of my other friends.

Well, there was this *one* thing.

Being psychic my dad would punish me for things I hadn't done yet. Things I was going to do. It was especially difficult leading up to events I was looking forward to because invariably I would be grounded at the last minute due to some upcoming transgression.

That wasn't even the hard part, although sitting home while I wanted to be somewhere else *was* difficult, I won't lie. But it wasn't the hardest part. The hardest part was then doing the thing that got me in trouble in the first place. Sometimes weeks later.

Sometimes things I didn't even want to do but I felt I had to. It wasn't that I believed if I didn't I would upset the time/space continuum, it was more like I didn't want to make my dad angry.

By not doing something bad.

That was pretty weird sometimes.

So you can see where the whole fate versus morality thing comes into play... but only if you believe in things like divination, clairvoyants and ESP. Otherwise you're likely to write my entire childhood off as either abusive or a cruel joke. I try not to leap to any conclusions myself. Too much skin in the game, if you know what I mean.

Take, for instance, when I was not allowed to go to prom because I stole a car two months later. It all seemed so unfair. I *had* a car, why would I steal one? For two months I was trying to figure out not only why I was going to steal one but how to steal a car. I had no idea. In movies they pry off something on the steering wheel and thrust two wires at one another until the car roars to life, but I didn't have the faintest clue how to approach it. Or where to approach it. My dad was always very vague on the details and when I pressed him for additional information he usually got quite testy. He would say

that there were enough skeptics in the world without him having to come home and find one living comfortably under his own roof. Invariably my mother's attempts at providing further clarity using her crystal ball came up empty.

When I was younger and I would be sent to my room without dessert because I was going to sneak some cookies the next day, at least I had the cookies to look forward to. I never really felt bad when I took them because I'd already done my time. It was like a pre-paid sin. I know how it sounds, now but you have to remember I was a kid. I would gauge the boundaries of my upcoming transgression on the severity of the punishment I received. For instance, if I knew it was the day I was rude to my teacher I had to figure out in my head just how rude I could be.

But the car thing was really out there. On the day I was supposed to commit the crime I remember trying to injure myself to get out of it. I jumped out of a tree and broke my ankle. My neighbor saw what went on and called an ambulance, so in a moment of complete clarity I ended up jumping off the stretcher and stealing the ambulance and driving myself to the hospital. Two birds, one stone. My parents told me they were proud of my composure, but were still glad I missed prom so I would learn something from the experience. I guess in retrospect that without discipline you'd never learn anything. Even if it ends up being what you *don't* learn ... which in this case was how to steal a car.

bye bye Native American pie

Although Hollywood would have you believe that the "pie in the face" gag began in the 1909 film *Mr. Flip* and from there escalated into the enormous pie fights witnessed in such gems as the 1927 Laurel and Hardy film *The Battle of the Century* (which used 3,000 pies) and the 1965 comedy *The Great Race* (4,000 pies thrown) the truth is much stranger.

Turns out that pieing dates back to the Plains Indians of North America. There was a tribe of Sioux that shunned edged weapons and turned instead to pie throwing. Early settlers reported that a Sioux pie thrower could unseat a rider from 20 feet away. Not exactly with 'deadly' accuracy, but definitely uncanny. Despite the fact that even their greatest hunters found it impossible to kill a bison with pies, they tried none the less and the other tribes respected and feared them for their tenacity. Whenever another tribe would complain about the sticky filling and crumbs ruining the pelt of a bison the Sioux women would stay up many nights in a row baking, the scent of meringue would waft over the plains and then the retribution would come fast and gooey. The other tribes learned the hard way to keep their comments to themselves, lest they be on the receiving end of a Sioux pieing.

The plains pie throwers initially had no quarrel with the white men who arrived and in fact were grateful for the wonderful new custard recipes they were given but eventually, like all of the indigenous people of North America, conflict and death awaited them. As more and more settlers made their way west the U.S. military was given orders to squeeze the Sioux out of their native lands, something that the Corporal in charge of the endeavor said would be "easy as pie."

Words that would come back to haunt him. Not because it was difficult to defeat the Indians mind you but because of his unfortunate use of the word pie. Perhaps he should

have gone with "piece of cake," instead.

The Sioux leader at the time, Chief Squirting Flower, was a brilliant tactician and led his band of piers to many moral victories before they were all shot dead with guns. His use of the newly acquired banana cream technology was particularly humiliating to the numerous soldiers that were on the receiving end. What started as small skirmishes to settle small disputes, ended in full blown pie fights that claimed hundreds of victims and dozens of casualties (all Sioux, of course) to say nothing of the countless stains that were very difficult to remove given the stain-removing products of the time. Eventually the pie throwers had to collect their pans and set up shop elsewhere. A decade later they disappeared into baking lore forever.

Truly, one of the more tragic and lesser known stories of the birth of this great nation.

Don't let Hollywood and their piespiracy fool you. It's no coincidence that what started as a bit by Ben Turpin has now turned into a political statement. The next time you see some influential figure receive a pie in the kisser, listen close and I bet you can hear the soft battle cry of a Sioux pier.

*Them good ole boys were drinking whiskey and Rye
Singin' this'll be the day that I die
This'll be the day that I die*

Maybe not.

asides, tangents, and afterthoughts

When you ask a layman why they feel that teleportation will never actually be a possibility a lot of times you'll hear that even if we are able to recreate a person on a subatomic level and get everything right that the person on the other end of the machine won't actually be the person that stepped into the starting spot. It sounds reasonable enough until that person hears some fact on the internet that every one of our atoms is actually replaced every few days/weeks/months and that consciousness is actually the interaction between chemicals and not the chemicals themselves. If this is true then what difference is there between a person reassembled after being teleported and a normal person who has had all of the atoms in their body switched out and yet maintains their sense of 'self'?

I'm careful to articulate that this is what a layman might say because I'm not smart enough to actually know what I'm talking (there is always a slim chance that someone reading this might be (although it's doubtful given how dumb these usually are) ... wait a second (case in point) ... I seem stuck in parentheses (is stuck the right way to explain it?) how do I get out of a parentheses (even looking up the definition ("to enclose words not directly relevant to the main topic of the sentence but too important to omit" doesn't seem to help) wait, there was one going the right way to get back to the main sentence (how many parentheses am I in right now anyway? Crap! Now I'm even deeper (I'm counting 8 ('s against only 3)'s (not counting those as they are only part of the sentence and not real parentheses ... shit! Now it's even worse ...) well that's better (still need 5... wait 6 counting that last one ... but I know that I have another) coming at the end of this though... wait for it ...) yep, there it is (still not sure how to end the thought that started

this mess))) hey! I got 3 closed parenthesis there) and another ... (don't even know how I did that ... worth another try though)) cool, 2 more down ((I really should know this stuff as an adult) whoa there, since when does a thought start with TWO parentheses and only give me one (at the end of it?) oh I see, it anticipated the additional thought it would take to explain the second ((doesn't that infer that my keyboard can read what I am going to write before I write it? (not really as if it could it would never allow me to waste such large amounts of time typing obvious crap))). Am I out of parenthesis now? How do you tell ...? What the hell was I talking about (I could always go back and reread the beginning I guess)?

Damn, what a shame. I had this nice little sentence about going to bed one night and waking up to find I'd changed mind without having changed my mind. Whatever.

So we're not the atoms and we're not the cells, so we can be teleported and step through on the other side complete with our identities and ready to roll. Grammar kills yet another heady scientific discussion.

future generations won't read blogs

Bored? Go out and buy a snake. Bring it home and let it bite you. Now you're not bored.

Let me be clear lest I open myself up to lawsuits. Make sure it is not poisonous. You might also want to avoid either extraordinarily large snakes or ones with particularly pointy teeth. Other than that any snake will do for the purpose of this undertaking.

I cavalierly say to let it bite you but I think you'll find it's much harder than it looks to let a snake make contact and that is the point of the whole snake-biting-you endeavor.

Let's say for instance you agreed to buy a snake but weren't really sold on the whole letting it bite you thing so you went out and got the smallest most inoffensive garter snake you could find. A tiny little fella who's mouth looks like the Bumble after Hermey pulled all of his teeth. You will still find it difficult if not impossible to hold still and let it bite you.

Why you may ask? That's the question that will let you slip from the tyrannical shackles of boredom. When it strikes you will suddenly feel the ghosts of generations of people who have been bitten by snakes telling your hand, without your prior approval, to move out of the way and it will. It will blatantly disregard your logical assurances that this snake poses no danger and go ahead and give your hand the green light to flee the scene. Now you know why you're not bored anymore, you're facing up to the fact that while your decisions might seem to originate from your brain and are, therefore, completely under your control 24/7 occasionally they are overruled by your DNA.

If you'd like to risk being bored again you can continue reading. If the subject matter gets a little dull feel free to pull out your snake again.

You see behavior and experience actually change the biochemistry surrounding the neurons in our brain. It actually encodes the results of these experiences and starts to create a library of instinctual reactions. The part that is really interesting is that all of these instincts are transmitted through our glands into our reproductive systems. A nice way of saying that our personal experiences are also passed on to future generations.

Obviously behaviors that are not duplicated from generation to generation and those that are trivial do not have staying power in the DNA but those that do are built right into the neurons of the happy union of Mr. Sperm and Mrs. Egg.

Makes fighting the urge to pull away from a snake bite rather interesting. You're actually feeling the tug of your ancestors. Perhaps thousands and thousands of dead people are saying "move your hand, dumbass."

Explaining how genetic memory works allows me the opportunity to explain a bit more about the DNA strand itself, a chance I rarely pass up. Dinner parties, weddings, funerals, you'll always find me going on at length about how DNA is a quad helix as opposed to the commonly held belief that it is a double. I have however learned not to go into too much detail about this during eulogies ... something I hope will be passed on to future generations to save them the uncomfortable silences that I have been forced to endure. The two strands of the double-helix, as everyone knows from way back, represent the spatial and physical information of how a body will be formed. The other two strands form a second double-helix containing the temporal and mental information, i.e., what experiences from the past will be hard-wired into the subconscious of the individual. Because this second helix is invisible and cannot be seen by a microscope, it's more of a mathematical representation of a process as opposed to a physical object, it doesn't get much love from the science textbooks and posters community.

The argument of instinct versus learned behavior will rage on well after all of those people currently engaged in it have died but there can be little disagreement that DNA has to be the vessel in which instinctual behavior is carried from one generation to the next. You can talk until you're blue in the face about cellular mechanisms, codons and nucleotide bases, but the fact is that even though you know the little snake you bought with his little toothless mouth has no way of actually harming you, you will pull away when he strikes. Even if it successfully bites you and you suffer no harm whatsoever you will still pull away if it strikes at you five minutes later.

For anyone who actually takes the time to get a snake and try this I think you'll be richly rewarded. You will literally be having a conversation of sorts with long-deceased relatives and, in an act of defiance that is worthy of the living, you will be ignoring their advice and letting the snake bite you. Or trying anyway.

It's harder than you think.

Cornspiracy

Although I'm not much of a college football historian I'm pretty sure that the University of Nebraska team has won more games than any other team on the planet. If memory serves, I think they won something like 30 national championships in a row. Why do I mention this? Because in the last few years they have barely played .500 ball. The once mighty Cornhuskers have become a shell of the program they once were. Why? Could it be that they are busy 'husking' something else?

I'm going to put it right out there on the table. There is a cornspiracy going on in this country the likes of which we haven't seen in a decade! Not since the cranberry, folks, have we seen such a power play on our grocery shelves. Except Big Corn learned a

lesson from all that, so you won't be seeing Corngerine-flavored juices. No, no. They're smarter than that. You'll buy a bottle of Tangerine juice blissfully unaware that the main ingredient has become corn. Corn!

Take a second and go to your own kitchen. Pull out anything in your fridge or on your shelf and I'll wager that the key ingredient is corn. It is now in *everything*. They are *cornering* the market. What's worse is that they would have you believe that this is all just cornstastic! (if you'd like to try to be as funny as I am, just add the letters c-o-r-n in place of the letters c-o-n in any word beginning with con and see how amusing it is. Cornfused? I bet you are ... but it gets easier. Cornstruction, cornsequences, etc. Once you have that down move on to replacing *any* letters that begin a word with c-o-r-n.)

Not content(cornitent) with just bottled and canned goods they have now taken over the beef industry. Although you won't see it on the label, the key ingredient in beef is now, you guessed it, corn. These days cattle are fed exclusively corn. No more hay or grass or the occasional apple from the hand of the farmer's sensitive daughter. Nope. Corn is what's on the menu every night if you're a head of steer.

And now they want corn in your gas tank. They call it ethanol to try to hide it but what they mean is cornoline. Even cranberries never had the balls to try *this* one.

And to think I gave so generously to Farm Aid when Willie Nelson had me convinced that the poor American farmer was hurting. Now I find out those over-all-clad bastards have been working overtime to make sure that in five years even my carrots will be made out of corn. I hope Willie likes it when he sits down to smoke a bowl of corn-weed!

It wouldn't be so bad except corn isn't very good for us. It's a starch and then some. In one serving of corn (100 grams) there is 365 calories, 74 grams of carbs and 5 grams of fat. One of those five being saturated, the most diabolical of the fats! Want to know why American asses are getting bigger? Let me introduce you to my friend Mr. Corn. My Native American pals called him Mr. Maize ... but they didn't put Mr. Maize into every fucking thing they ate or drank. Of course, if they had found a way to make Mr. Alcohol out of him, the first pilgrims might have steeped foot on a continent that was ears of corn from sea to shining sea.

Ironically our only hope is the cranberry. If anyone can stop Cornzilla, it's the cranberry guys. Come on Ocean Spray, step up and get back to work. Knock down this corny bitch and take your crown back.

another squirrel story

Nature is a lot more interesting than most people give it credit for. For example, about a hundred years ago naturalists in North America noticed a very interesting behavior in the grey squirrel. Called *scatter-hoarding* the squirrels would collect acorns from both the red and the white oaks which grew in the area and bury what they didn't need to eat later when food was scarcer. Unlike the red oak acorns which are dormant throughout the winter months, the acorns from the white oaks germinate immediately and send down a large taproot and that is a pain in the ass for the squirrels when they go to collect them. Here's the interesting part that the naturalists observed. To counteract this behavior on the part of the white oak acorns the squirrels learned to bite out the seed embryos which

prevented it from germinating.

Problem solved.

Or so they thought for a few generations.

In an interesting act of adaptation, the white oaks developed acorns which collected small amounts of potassium permanganate in one chamber and trace elements of ethylene glycol in the other. What happened next was intriguing. When the squirrels went to bite the acorn to kill it, instead it allowed the two chemicals to come into contact and the result was an explosion that not only blew off the head of the squirrel but left a small crater where the unfortunate woodland creature had been happily squatting only seconds before.

Squirrels, much to the amusement of the researchers who gathered to see this evolutionary back and forth, did not take this lying down. In only a few years they developed protruding beaver-like front teeth that made short work of the unexpectedly-volatile white oaks and soon the forest floor was covered in downed trees.

The white oaks would have none of it. Soon the slightest vibration would send a legion of explosive acorns cascading down onto the hapless creatures below the trees. Logging was quickly suspended and many an innocent picnicker was found torn to shreds by the nutty cluster bombs.

In an evolutionary "Oh yeah?!" not seen since the Tufted Puffin, commonly found in North Pacific waters learned karate, the squirrels grew to unprecedented size (some reaching 18 feet at the shoulders) and developed a thick armor plating.

"Is that all you got?" the white oaks seemed to ask as seemingly overnight their acorns skipped right past coconut-size and ended up resembling thorny brown melons. Each with the destructive force of 100 pounds of TNT.

Scientists were absolutely fascinated. Never before had they seen such a remarkable example of evolution in action. The forests were abuzz with activity as enormous squirrel-creatures lumbered around trying to uproot deadly oak trees before they could unleash their fiery payloads.

National Geographic couldn't get enough.

So there you have it. Nature is truly more wonderful and unpredictable than any of us could have ever imagined.

Oh shit. The trees can move. The trees can move!

Mommy, how do you spell sterilization?

So after what seemed like hours of sitting in a lawn chair staring into the void I finally figured out how to solve a problem that has been particularly irritating me lately.

I'm going to write a children's book. It seems the only way.

And what will this children's book be about and how will it help solve the problem that has been particularly irritating me lately? I'm glad you asked. Although you will soon see that you're part of the problem so you might regret asking in the first place.

The book will be about this magical world that is totally made up and in no way resembles the world we currently reside in. In this world, and here's the big difference, people come in all sorts of shapes and sizes and colors but none of them look the same as anyone else so there is no prejudice whatsoever. Because everyone in this magical world looks completely different, everybody is judged solely on their actions and the content of their character. No religions exist and no political parties are needed. No bias and no excuses.

I know ... magical indeed.

Let's call this world Utopia X. Not sure why I threw in the X but kids today seem to like anything with an X at the end of it, so there you go. Utopia X. The people who live there we'll call Utopians. No X. But this world has a problem that I'm going to ask the young readers to try and solve. You see at first there were only a few Utopians who were stupid, lazy and/or violent and the rest of the Utopians put up with them and went about making Utopia X a wonderful place to live. The problems began when someone noticed that while the responsible, hard-working Utopians were having one or two kids that they took great pains in raising properly each of the stupid, lazy and/or violent ones were having five, six or more kids that they took even greater pains to avoid taking care of. Even preadolescent readers who are bad at math will soon see the problem if the Utopians don't do something.

I would be interested in hearing the solutions that kids come up with. I guess I'm hoping that when they get older they will hear a story about how on this non-magical world we allow conjugal visits to convicted killers so that they can have yet another baby out of wedlock without the means to provide for it and be reminded of the solutions they came up with for Utopia X.

You see, the next generation is our only hope, because for the last few generations we have to be the biggest collection of gutless turds ever to exist in the cosmos. If someone in Utopia X wrote a book about Earth it would doubtlessly be thrown in the Fantasy section. What intelligent species could ever believe that an advanced civilization could face such a problem and just sit with their thumbs up their own collective asses and ignore it until the whole thing finally collapses?

What I'd really like is for our government to admit that they don't have the balls to actually deal with our decaying culture and agree to whatever fixes that the kids who read my book come up with. However silly or extreme they might be. The kids will read the book, they will be presented with the simple fact that on Utopia X the stupid, lazy and/or violent people were out-procreating the decent citizens by more than a 3 to 1 ratio, and then the last 10 pages will be blank. My book will include a pen and on the final page of the story, when I've explained that for the moment the ratio of good people to bad people on Utopia X is roughly 50/50, I'll ask them to finish the book and give it a happy ending. However they feel is the best way to deal with the situation, that's how our government would be forced to proceed.

I can almost feel your cheeks getting flush with indignation. You could never be allowed to read the book because after five pages your brain would go hurtling off into your own dark places and then you'd project all of that shit onto me, the author/messenger. Even now I can feel your brain scrambling to poke holes in the logic of this approach lest you

feel that I'm somehow insulting you.

I am.

And myself.

And the crappy unraveling world we're currently living in.

We really are just going to let it all burn because we don't have the nerve to speak up, so now I'm turning to the kids before they are poisoned by books written by this degenerate generation telling them that the biggest problem in Utopia X is that there aren't enough social programs for those stupid, lazy and/or violent Utopians.

Think of the little kids you know and then imagine what they would write. Our only hope may come from the pens of babes.

good hands

I guess you can measure a day by how many times circumstances provoke you into thinking something that you hadn't planned on thinking about. Like watching an insurance commercial that offers you the assurance that you're in 'good hands' promptly followed by someone in the next advertisement offering up an observation, just as earnestly mind you, about what the future holds.

My first thought is that if you're buying life insurance and you end up collecting on it the only thing those 'good hands' will be doing is lowering you into the ground or perhaps handing over some cash to your grieving loved one so they can grieve in warmer weather and sip alcoholic beverages with chunks of fruit clinging to the edge. It should go without saying that in the picture I am trying to paint they are surrounded by exotic flowering plants.

Even if the insurance you end up using is car or home you can't really expect the future to 'hold' anything for you. There's a ton of stuff floating out there but it will never be handed to you. Even if you have insurance, that just replaces the stuff that gets lost or stolen. The future may hold a lot of promises but no certainties. There are simply too many sayings that involve things slipping through your fingers for it to be a coincidence.

Throw in the metaphors about holding onto the past and those about the present barely holding our interest and it's hard to get a grip (thought I was going to say hold, didn't you?) on what's worth grabbing to begin with.

So the thought I hadn't planned on thinking clearly has little to do with buying insurance. The ironic part is that I don't really want to spend too much time trying to figure out what it is I'm trying to think about because I have this weird feeling it has to do with time. Doesn't it always seem that when you start talking about metaphors it's simply a matter of time before the first irony starts creeping in uninvited?

So I sit up on the couch and debate whether to follow this train of thought or whether to change directions completely and ask aloud why anyone who enjoys Cheez-Its would buy Cheez-It Party Mix which clearly contains less than 1/5th the amount of Cheez-Its. As an aside, the boxes are identical and when I'm shopping for snack foods I shouldn't be expected to pore over every inch of a box to make sure I'm getting the right product. I

feel it would only be fair if the Cheez-It Party Mix box had a huge red warning label plastered on it alerting people that anyone who purchases this product is going to be sorely lacking in the Cheez-It department.

Now you may think that the decision of choosing between these topics would be easy but I fear that you are siding too quickly with the weightier of the two. Sure I'd get to feel like quite the little philosopher if I chose to wrestle with the former seemingly poignant subject matter but in the end would I actually get anywhere with it? Probably not. On the other hand, I can quite easily make a good case against pretzels, rye chips and cheese balls. Given only a few minutes I could probably cast outrageous aspersions against anyone preferring this unholy mix over good old plain old American old (damn, one too many old) Cheez-Its and be done with it. Free to sink back into the couch and waste the rest of my evening watching TV and picking out pretzels, rye chips and cheese balls. Using my 'good hands' to know my immediate future holds only real cheese goodness.

There is no danger of getting tangled in irony when debating the virtues of snack crackers.

Favorite Tweets:

Do you ever catch yourself thinking what an outstanding crazy person you'd make?

There is no doubt about it; Shirley Temple was the creepiest child to ever exist. Her movies are simply terrifying.

As they like to say in a five dimensional world ... even a broken clock is right four times a day.

Bullied, Bully, Bull

The problem I have with most movies is the story involves too many coincidences to move the plot along. It's interesting and all, but it takes too many twists of fate to bring it all together in the end to be believable. You'll forgive me if this story does the same but as I've said so often before it really did happen.

Except this time I mean it.

I'm walking through this semi-crowded mall with a girl and we're discussing elements of manhood. You know, the hot-button issues surrounding what our culture defines and interprets as manly. I realize that by putting the words manhood and manly in back-to-back sentences I risk sounded a bit repetitive but I want to encapsulate our conversation and the word "man" took front and center. Eventually the traits that lead to female attraction poked their head up, as opposed to just the usual hunting and gathering parameters that are typically bandied about, and it was agreed that a woman wants a man who can protect her. There were many other points that we did not agree upon but she was willing to admit that every woman wants to feel safe when her man is around.

That's when her ass was slapped. This is the part where my timing may get called into question but I assure you, the words of accord between the two of us had barely escaped our lips when a resounding whacking noise emanated from the area of her backside and her reaction left little doubt that a good smack on the tush lay behind the sound. Behind

the sound and behind my female friend and her aforementioned and obviously violated and probably throbbing tush lurked a hulking figure. Grinning and covered from bow to stern in tattoos he stood admiring his handiwork.

"Nice ass," he offered up.

My friend looked at me. I looked at her. I looked at him. I looked at her again. She looked at him and then back at me. I was more than willing to keep this up all day when he spoke again.

"This your gay friend?"

"Listen, dickhole, apologize to the lady or we're going to have a problem here."

The words came out before I could stop them, some primal regurgitation of every action movies I'd ever seen. My eyes got squinty and I slowly rolled my neck around to get it loose as I'd seen done so many fighters do before entering cage. I felt like a bird displaying my plumage for all the females to see.

You could hear a pin drop and suddenly all the color drained from his face. Even his skulls tattoos seemed to fade a bit. My hands began to clench and unclench.

"Look, I'm sorry man. I was just trying to have a little fun." He backpedaled slowly and then turned a corner and was gone.

When a writer tells you that words fail him, your first thought is naturally going to be that the writer is a pretty bad writer but I'm afraid that's where I sit. Cast aspersions if you must. The glorious cocktail of adrenaline and testosterone coursing through my veins had me dizzy. You would think that my first reaction would be to turn to my female friend and bask in her approval or gloat or even play it off as nothing but I was too occupied with not having my penis stepped on as it snaked its way through *Bed, Bath & Beyond* and into the food court.

"Sorry about that," I said as I eventually turned to her. Mock apologizing for such a display was exhilarating. She was flush and still gazing at my plumage. She said she had to pee so I told her I was going to finish gathering up my dick at the food court and get a Coke. Truth was I was a bit relieved to have a few moments alone to collect my thoughts and after we agreed to meet outside Little Caesars I let out a long breath and finally was able to wipe my brow.

The brow-wiping was short-lived. Any time you have 2 hyphenated words in such a short sentence you know things aren't going to go well and such was the case here. As soon as I had turned the corner who did I see but my uncouth antagonist munching on a pretzel. As we made eye contact he seemed completely nonplussed which after our confrontation made me a little plussed. Obviously, additional action was required.

I walked right up to him. "Listen pussy, why don't you get the fuck out of here?" I inquired, once again wearing the mask I had selected in our first encounter.

He slowly smiled and suggested that I'd had my win and I should just let it go.

"Maybe you didn't hear me, Sunshine, time for you to go."

I reached out to grab his collar and he yanked my arm towards him ever so slightly as his

front foot slipped behind mine and then in a quick twist he spun me around as I fell and I ended up on my knees in front of him with his other arm around my neck.

He continued to eat his pretzel with the arm that was currently choking me.

"Let it go," he suggested again.

I was in the mood to let it go just this once.

He spun me back up to my feet with the same ease that he had deposited me there in the first place. The look on my face must have been priceless because he couldn't help but laugh a little when he saw it.

"I ... don't understand" I was finally able to stammer out.

He explained that it's just something he likes to do. He drives to places nobody would ever recognize him and pretends to pick on guys so they can have the empowering feeling of sticking up for themselves. His large and fearsome appearance just adds to the show.

"What happens if they don't defend themselves?" I asked.

He explained that he just keep tormenting them until they finally find their backbone. Then he sheepishly backs off and lets them enjoy a moment of pure unfiltered masculinity.

This guy was a hero of sorts.

It was then that my female friend turned the corner and saw me engaged with her ass-accoster. Filled with a newfound sense of security she walked right up and slapped him. Hard.

He glowered ever so slightly.

She was going in for another when I grabbed her hand and told her that he'd had enough and I truly felt he'd learned an important lesson. Just to be sure I sent him on his way with short lecture about respect for women.

The funny thing is on the way back to her place we had almost the exact same conversation as we'd had before except we'd switched sides.

wars are hell

The War on the Impoverished: I see those big barriers that divide noisy highways from nice neighborhoods and I can't help but think to myself that we need to put those up between nice neighborhoods and decaying urban areas. I'm not talking about those hip little city blocks that have Starbucks on them and everyone sits out on their stoop and walks their dogs and picks up after them when they take a crap. I mean those areas where the residents don't know how to use a rake or a garbage can. I'm talking, of course, about poor people.

Since President Lyndon B. Johnson created the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program the US has spent nearly \$9 trillion on ending poverty. That's \$9,000,000,000,000. Do you have any idea how many barriers that could have bought us? Hell, we could have just shipped all the poor people to New York City and then made it

like *Escape From New York* where we have troops stationed all around it to make sure all the poor people stay inside. The roads could be mined so nobody could sneak over and apply for a job and the harbors could be patrolled from the air to prevent people from swimming across to our side to take night classes at some community college.

I don't want to seem cold-hearted but the poor are just so completely hopeless and most of them are unpleasant to look at. I resent them making me feel guilty every time I decide to drop a few bills on liposuction for my pet tiger. Whatever happened to Darwinism? Weren't poor people supposed to become extinct or something? If you look around in nature you don't see a lot of animals letting other animals freeloader off them or ruin their school's test scores or rob their liquor stores, do you?

I'm all for a war on poverty. I think we can take 'em.

The War on Drugs: The problem as I see it comes from the fact that people are always pointing to Amsterdam as an example of a country where drugs are legal and things are ok. They say that if drugs were legalized in the US that the same thing would happen here and I agree to a limited degree. That's what would happen in Idaho and Nebraska. On the other hand both coasts would immediately go on a three year bender. I have that image of the sailor kissing the girl in the famous Alfred Eisenstaedt picture taken on V-J Day in Times Square after the war with Japan came to an end ... except the guy is on a combination of meth and ecstasy and he doesn't stop at kissing and he's doing it to everyone. And 'that guy' is actually every guy in Times Square. And in New York. State.

Look at the mess we get ourselves in when we have to try and hide our various appetites. If you ask a shrink they will say that we all have repressed desires and we'd better try and keep it like that. If too many of us unrepressed at the same time there would be long lines around the adult book stores, the supermarket snack isles would be barren and you couldn't score a pair of tickets to see the Pink Floyd laser show at the planetarium at gunpoint.

I do agree that it sucks that we have to pay all those annoying Central American countries to grow and/or make our drugs for us, but if we take that away from them then there will be nothing stopping their populations from exploding. Right now I think drug lords kill about 30% of their own population every year, so in a way it all works out.

Although post-prohibition alcohol consumption argues against it, I do wonder if having any drug you want on hand at the 7-11 might take away just a little of the appeal of them. Of course the point would be moot because the 7-11 would be getting robbed 24-7.

The War on War: Whatever happened to war? You know, like we read about in the textbooks. A man's war where you declare it and then just unload on the opponent. When did the pussies take over? Now we can never unload on anyone and we're never at war with a country, we're just in a disagreement with their leader. In the good ol' days we hated the Japs or Wops or the Krouts. Hated them! Called them horrible names and before every movie at the local cinema there was a little clip showing their cities devastated and smoldering away with bodies strewn everywhere and everyone at the movies cheered.

Now, I can't even bring myself to think about it. What would our ancestors say? Now we bomb a town and before the smoke even clears we're back and rebuilding everything on

our dime while our leaders offer their deep sympathies to whomever will listen! We can never get a war boner anymore.

Doesn't it stand to reason that if a country is ruled by a leader then that leader is a reflection of the population? If that's not the case then it is the responsibility of that population to get their shit straight before that leader does something stupid like piss off the US. Am I wrong? I just want to root for us against *them*. Can you imagine a football game where after every touchdown the team that scores has to apologize to their opponent and give them 4 of the 7 points?

I guess you could make the case that we brought it on ourselves because before the US got involved in wars, both sides use to just get everyone to line up about ten feet from each other and fire away until one side ran out of soldiers. We had to go and pioneer the idea that maybe we'll be harder to hit if we fire from the trees. Next thing you know our enemies are firing from schools and hospitals and we're sitting there with both hands tied behind our backs.

I want to go to war with another big country and just have at it. Missiles and explosions and tanks and we know who the bad guys are and we celebrate when we bomb the living shit out of them. All of them. Just one more big throwdown in my lifetime.

"One of our stray missiles hit a school bus filled with disabled seniors? Hooray!"

a growing friendship

I was unaware of the similarities of synapses of the human brain and the root system of a plant. Obviously one is far more advanced than the other and their functions are only similar in the fact that they both move things from one end to the other. In the case of the brain its chemical signals while the roots perform the more perfunctory task of providing nutrients but on some level it's the same.

I should know.

I don't want to pretend to be an expert in either field but what I can tell you is that a few months back I got a raspberry seed stuck between my molars so I now know a little something about synapses and roots and whatnot. You see, I left the seed there too long and the next thing I knew it actually sprouted. And took root. In my mouth.

Creepy, right?

Not as creepy as the fact that after I felt this discomfort and saw what had happened I not only didn't pick it out of my teeth but I allowed it to stay there and grow.

Creepier, right?

Not as creepier as the fact I ate a few pinches of Miracle Gro plant food. Well, not so much ate as put a pinch in between my cheek and gums like a big-leaguer ball player. Tasted like ass but I got to spit and look cool for awhile.

Sleeping was a problem at first due to the fact that it is crazy painful to have a plant grow into your gums. I know you think you can imagine it, but you can't. Crazy painful and it never really gets better. Once it bore through my upper palette and made its way into my nasal cavity you'd think the worse would have been over but let me tell you something ...

nope. I will admit that once it was through the bone it did grow faster, though. It snaked its way up to behind my eyeballs in no time.

That's where the whole synapses/roots thing comes into play. I know it sounds farfetched but I swear we hooked up somehow. I actually saw or felt the tiny little ends of the raspberry bush roots touching some of my neuroreceptors. Tickled something awful at first.

Did I get superpowers? Not at all and believe you me I'm as disappointed as you are. I'm not sure what I was expecting, maybe super tree strength or something, but after weeks of excruciating pain the payoff was a little on the lame side.

So what did I get? First, I got the superpower that everything I eat tastes like crap. Or dirt to be more exact. I was thinking it would taste like raspberries but no such luck. I haven't been able to eat any raspberries yet as I feel that it would be somehow wrong. Not exactly cannibalism but close enough for my liking. I've yet to eat any berry to be honest.

So what else did I get? Well I couldn't exactly call it talking, but I was empathetic as hell to a hanging plant outside my front door. Suddenly I knew it knew how much it hurt me to hear my favorite song *Melt With You* used in a Burger King commercial. Even I was unaware of how much this nauseated me that the band would allow their song to be used to pitch burgers and french fries, it wasn't until I was standing there next to my hanging plant that this huge sense of remorse and angst swept over me and then I felt the plant quiver ever so slightly in sympathy. I sort of nodded at it and then asked it a question. Not so much asked as wondered it to myself and felt it answer me.

I'd always wondered why it never grew well. I watered it and took care of it but it was always on the verge of dying. It never got full and green and never flowered.

Turns out that it keeps looking over the edge of the pot and seeing the big drop to the ground and thinks to itself "this can't be right." I laughed and tried to explain that everything is ok but every time it sways in the wind it knows that it's not in the ground and that's unnatural so it can't quite work up to blooming. When I thought about it I couldn't find any fault in the logic so I forgave my hanging plant for being a tremendous underachiever.

And that's really the only power I got for allowing a raspberry bush to grow inside my head. It has the common decency not to sprout outside my head or try to grow leaves out my ears so I see no reason to evict it. It seems content to live raspberry-less inside my skull and share a higher consciousness with me so I guess we're stuck with each other.

A superpower would have been nice though.

he blew at blowing

He was just listening to the radio. Not thinking about anything in particular and humming along to the Blues Traveler song. Humming and listening and then hearing and then absorbing and then freezing in his tracks. Listening without a care in the world up until the part of the song where the harmonica starts to play.

The harmonica.

Harmmmmmmonica. The sound of it.

Sweet merciful heavens, he used to play the harmonica and then he's freezing. Frozen by douche chills head to foot. A douchsicle.

Where was this compassionate God when he used to play harmonica? He remembers despite not wanting to, flashbacks like little tremors in his head. His old friends, the guitar players, seeing him coming and rushing to stand and throw their guitars into their cases and flee before he could make his way over. Fumbling in his pocket to grab his harmonica before they could depart.

The horror.

Harmonica from the Greek *harm* (to ruin) and *onica* (people's enjoyment of music). He sees them now so clearly, the faces recoiling in disgust and annoyance. Why didn't he see them then? What twisted influence did the harmonica have over him that made him blind to the effects of his exhaling and sucking and twisting his tongue but mostly his sucking? Such was his level of sucking that he sucked the very irony out of sucking at sucking.

He remembers buying a large harmonica (as if the small ones didn't do enough damage) that was double sided. Different keys. One side he would play when he wanted to sound as if a elk was being violated in the rectum by a wire brush, the other for when he wanted to sound like the same elk having his testicles stepped upon by a steel-toed boot. Better know in the mouth harp community as the keys of c and d.

Of everyone who had the misfortune of being within earshot of his wind instrument it was the guitarists for whom he felt the most regret. His friends who had toiled for years to get to the place where they could squat under a tree or sit on some steps and pluck away at some folk song and have pretty girls gather like moths at the flame to bat their eyes and sigh long sighs and his friends would play and the sun would shine down and the birds would respectfully clam up and all was right in the universe.

And then he would come rattling forward with his pockets filled with harmonicas. By that time he had half a dozen of different makes and models as if someone would have a preferences what caliber bullet they wanted shot into their skull.

The Blues Traveler song went on and on and the memories tormented him like lapping waves, eager to thrust themselves upon him the moment the last flashback retreated.

His friends the guitarists, and they were his friends which made the memories that much more painful, would try and play songs where there was no hint of an opportunity for a harmonica part. They would hurry through bridges and skip entire sections or make up words or talk or stop playing all together until the danger of him starting in on a harp would pass. He would sit patiently like a musical sociopath suggesting Neil Young songs with harmonica parts and the assembled females would wrinkle their noses and make it known to everyone but him, only because of the mania that somehow took hold of him and made him oblivious to the obvious dislike of any noise even resembling a harmonica shown by others, that they disliked the harmonica and the terrible effects it had on any song that had the bad luck to be on the receiving end of such accompaniment. He heard them now, why didn't he at the time? In his head he heard it all as clear as a bell. They would wonder aloud if he knew that little spit bubbles were forming on the other side of his harmonica and if he didn't quit playing they were going to have to throw up behind a

nearby tree. He would smile after a particularly noxious harmonica solo, without realizing that he'd cut his lip somewhere in the middle of repeatedly slamming the little steel instrument against his mouth and his teeth would all be red and his lips swollen and chaffed, and then wonder why none of the girls would try to slide up close and ask him about his influences and how often he practiced to become as good as he was.

Finally John Popper finished up *Run Around* and he was able to break free from the terrible trance and exhale. He hadn't touched a harmonica in ten years but he felt a little tingle run up and down his spine at the thought of just how stupid he must have looked playing one. He saw it all so clear now. Only old black men look cool playing harmonicas.

That's when *Middle of the Road* by The Pretenders started. He wasn't getting off that easy this time.

masks

I'm not going to be around forever so I need to show you how to do this without me. It's really very simple; you just have to work at it a bit. I'd hate to think if for some reason I wasn't around anymore that you would stop having pointless thoughts.

Let me start by walking you through the process. First you have to start with a premise. Don't put much energy into this it really doesn't matter. In fact, the more random and irrelevant the idea the better. Let's say for instance you think that clowns should start a union.

Now start writing.

It's just that easy.

Once you start writing, whatever you do, don't stop. As this is your first time I guess some hand-holding is in order. The first step would be to examine why clowns would need unions. Remember that no reason is too stupid and it doesn't even have to make sense. It could be cruel treatment at a circus that you completely make up or it could be concern for old clowns who can no longer put in enough hours to make a decent living. It doesn't matter. And remember, just because you are writing in defense of clowns is no reason you can't make fun of them. Pointing out the dilemma of a group of picketing clowns as to whether or not to wear their whiteface provides you the opportunity to explore both how silly they would look holding angry signs while wearing bright painted-on smiles and how rough-looking the clown community is without make-up. A win-win for the reader. Remember, all you're doing is putting the basic image in the readers head; it is up to them to make themselves laugh. If they don't have the imagination to pick up that ball and run with it then it's on them.

You owe them nothing, always remember that. It takes the pressure off.

Another key element to writing a pointless story is to avoid feeling that you can't go for the cheap joke. Although all clowns are known to wear enormous shoes you should feel almost obligated to point out that the new leader of the clown union has big shoes to fill.

See what I did there?

And best of all if you are running a little light on word count you can revisit this joke any time you like. Just rifle through every stereotype you know about clowns and cram them into the story whether they fit or not. Like when thirty clowns come pouring out of one clown car except in reverse. Take something as ordinary as a clown throwing a pie into someone's face. You can transform it into high comedy by replacing typical union thuggery and making it a 'drive pie.'

Now you're getting the hang of it.

You can even invent different clown unions that cover hobos, children's clowns, character clowns and even rodeo clowns. Inventing friction between them is worth at least a paragraph.

Then, just when the reader is convinced that he or she knows where the story is headed you'll want to take a quick turn and change their expectations. Throwing in a quick quotation like "It seems plausible that folly and fools, like religion and magic, meet some deeply rooted needs in human society" will allow your reader to assume for a few seconds that you are referencing clowns but then realize that you could be making a profound criticism about unions. You use their intelligence against them! Of course this quote was about clowns but because your reader doesn't want to be caught napping they assume you are smarter than you are.

Didn't I say this was simple?

When you are finished you might feel the urge to go back and change things in order to improve the story. Don't. It never works. You see your subconscious likes to weave itself into even the most mundane writing and when you go back and change things you are letting your conscious mind make all the decisions. It might be a subtle change but believe me it will change something that you're probably not even aware of.

Trust me on that.

The ending? Take whatever you are discussing and try to make a point that the reader has both been expecting all along and yet does not see coming. You're a writer now, aren't you? All you have to do is define exactly what that is in as much detail as you can and then make the observation that you also just did a pretty good job of describing a clown.

- ABOUT THE AUTHOR -

Why would anyone care to know personal details of a man that does most of his best writing in his underwear? You of all people shouldn't give a shit.

If you made it this far then you're probably wonderfully fucked up and a lot more interesting than he is.

What else is there to say?

if you must know ...

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Lance-Manion/298156290246139?ref=hl>

Twitter: LanceManionBlog

2 stories from the Lance Manion book *Merciful Flush*

the amazing spider man

So earlier tonight I'm hurrying around doing all the things that need to get done before a big storm, the last of which is to run the recyclables out to the garbage can. It had to get done because dark clouds sat on the horizon like a fat girl coming out of a donut shop (what?) and all the local weather stations had pretty much put the chance of precipitation at 108%. As I hurled my empties into the can my eye couldn't help but be drawn to a spider. Not just any spider but a great whopping argiope aurantia, better known as the Golden Garden Spider and one of three local species of argiope orb weavers.

As I watched I realized he was just starting the tedious task of building his web for the night. The ol' spinneret was cranking out proteinaceous silk like nobody's business and those eight arms were feverishly at work putting up the insect-catching structure. Problem was, the spider was building the web in between two garbage cans out in the open and it was about to rain. The spider was not only wasting time and energy but possibly endangering itself in the process. I did what any normal person would do when faced with this situation. I drew my face in close to the busy little araneidae and screamed "it's gonna rain dumbshit!"

The little fucktard kept working. Now normally I am quick to anger at the smallest of nature's creatures but for some reason cooler heads prevailed and I began to try to reason with it.

"Listen, you may think you're the shit with your silk being stronger than steel of the same thickness and all, but you don't know dick about the weather."

The spider was immune to the effect of my logic. What was worse was that it had not started to rain yet so in some strange way I felt like the spider was winning the argument.

"We have technology spider! I *know* it's going to rain. Eight legs or not you're going down!"

I was forced to slump down and await the rains that would bring my inevitable victory. I started to get a little antsy. This spider was hauling ass and would soon be done. The seconds turned to minutes and then the minutes turned to tens of minutes and still no rain. If anything the winds that were making the web-building process so difficult for our spider were letting up.

"Fucking weathermen."

Apparently the flies and beetles in my local area had also missed the forecast for the evening because soon the air was buzzing with activity. No sooner was I waving my hands in front of my face to keep from inhaling one of the various flying pests then I glanced down to find my spider nemesis was sitting in the middle of his finished web. I looked down at my watch. Had I really been crouched down between my garbage cans for 45 minutes?! Suddenly I had the feeling I was being watched. Sure enough, after inspecting his cephalothorax, I found myself staring right into the eight cold eyes of my

yellow and black archenemy. "Why do you even *need* eight eyes? People have two and we're doing just fine don't you think?"

He continued to mock me. Sitting there in his web. "So this is what we're doing tonight is it, you and me?" I sat down and got comfortable. "You know this is only for the night, right? In the morning I'm spraying this whole fucking driveway with Raid. Every inch."

In slow motion I saw the moth fly by my face in a wild zig-zag and then head straight into the web. "Nooooooooo..."

"What the fuck kind of flying is that? Do you even know where you want to go or do you just fucking careen around aimlessly until you end up eaten?"

The moth fluttered briefly in the web but he was caught. The spider, seemingly without a care in the world, slowly made his way down the web to his captured prey.

"Not tonight Sunshine!" Quickly I reached into the web and plucked the moth out of it. "That's right Mr. Eight Eyed Weather Diviner, no dinner for you."

I tried to release it but the moth was stuck to my fingers. It still had webbing all over and try as I might I couldn't get the shit off of it. No use saving it only to leave it unable to fly and an easy snack for the ants. "Fuck!" Off came a wing in my hand. "Shit. This is no way to build an insect."

Again I felt the eight eyes upon me.

"You win, you win! Ok?" I tried to flick the formerly-saved but now not-so-successfully-rescued moth back into the web but I couldn't get his sticky ass off my finger. White powdery shit started to get all over my hands. Finally I was able to brush him off into the web. He didn't struggle. He just lay there suspended between the garbage cans. The spider didn't move. Is it possible to motionlessly express disdain?

"Go eat him bitch!"

But the spider contemptuously just sat there.

The white dot in the web twinkled like an out-of-place star against the black driveway. As it was the only one out, I almost made a wish on the squished lepidoptera but instead I turned and, after telling the spider that I hoped he was happy, I went to go back inside.

That's when the skies opened up.

uncontructionalism

I think you'd be hard pressed to find an industry with a worse reputation than the home improvement crowd. These independent contractors make used-car salesmen look reputable in comparison.

And who can blame them?

Is there anything funnier than the idea of working on someone's home and doing a poor job? If I could do anything in the world I think I'd be a bad handyman. I am a true follower, nay *devotee*, of unconstructionalism.

I'd definitely be a doors and windows guy.

There is just something so awesome about agreeing to repair someone's front door and then only completing half the work. Spend the morning taking down the door and then the frame, going off to the Home Depot to pick up the new door and then never returning. Just leaving the house with no door. A big hole in the front so the wind and small animals can just walk the fuck in. The homeowner assuming that I've gone for lunch and then sitting there all mad and impotent as the afternoon wears on and there is no sign of me. Nobody would think that I wasn't *coming back*. It would be beyond their ability to process, they would just pace back and forth and then as the sun sets they would be calling the porn line I gave them as my phone number. Trying desperately to explain how I removed their door and didn't return, while at the same time telling the girl who sounds like she just arrived in the country via a freight container from Eastern Europe that they are not interested in what she is wearing.

I would just go home and sit there doubling over in a fit of glee imagining this poor fuck trying to come up with some way to barricade the gaping opening in his once-secure home before a horde of mosquitoes and stinging insects starts to march in and have at his family.

The look on his face the next morning as he keeps looking out where his front door used to be waiting to see me pull up and apologize and put in a door. But I never show. Ever. It would be completely beyond him to think that I would take down his front door and *not* come back. He'd be frozen in disbelief. He might go six months before he finally accepts I'm not coming back and he's going to need to hire somebody to fix it. I would be like some ex-lover in his subconscious. I bet by the end he blamed himself for me not returning.

If I really worked hard I bet I could remove both the front door and the sliding glass doors in the back at the same time. Same disappearing act but now I could imagine the wind whistling through the house in addition to all the other unpleasantness I would be heaping on these stupid bastards.

I swear, if I left and an hour later a terrible storm came through, with driving rain and lashing winds, I think I might die of joy. Just imagining the family scampering around trying to block the doors and mop up the rain and wondering where people get all those sandbags when there are floods, it might just be too much for my weak heart!

If I somehow came into a boatload of money, I think I would hire a *team* of workers. That way I could find a nice elderly couple and stake them out. Waiting for the day before the first big snowstorm of the season. Then I could go in and remove all the doors *and* windows. Enjoying the tea and biscuits they would no doubt offer up, knowing that I was hours away from high-tailing it out of there with all their doors and windows in my possession. Back to my secret lair like some sort of hardware Grinch. Reading about them the next day. The two frozen corpses found sitting in their living room waist deep in a snow drift. Pictures of their grandchildren buried on the coffee table where only hours before I had enjoyed a few Gingersnaps and tales of their exploits in WW II.

That may be the funniest thing I can physically imagine. The police wondering who the fuck would steal an old couple's doors and windows. Old people are just gullible enough to let someone do that. Stupid stupid stupid old people. They almost deserve to freeze to death in their own living room.

I guess there is something so inherently vulnerable about doors and windows. The whole "house is his castle" thing. Take away the door and it's like his fly is down in public. Touch his windows and that simple act of fenestration undermines his mental substrate and threatens to make him lose his temper.

Anyway. I wonder how many people you need to do this to before you end up with your face all over the TV.

I think it's time I found out.

2 stories from the Lance Manion book *Results May Vary*

ugly at prom

This is not something I wanted to write. It's been more like a fart I've been trying to hold in while surrounded by decent company. I've been hoping the urge to share this would pass but instead it grew stronger until I sit down here and it starts to escape like some metaphorical gas about to pollute anyone dumb enough to be nearby.

The problem started, like it does every year around this time, when I see the local boys and girls getting all dressed up for prom. Why it always leaps into my head I'm not sure but it does, the powerful realization that it must really suck to be an ugly girl on prom night.

I'm not saying that life is a party for the other 364 days but prom must throw some existential spotlight on being unattractive.

Then I saw her. The High Priestess of Ugly. Poor fucking girl looked just like Tom Petty with a long blonde wig and two small titties. Not even the *Hard Promises* Tom Petty but the right this minute Tom Petty. It wasn't that I was trying not to stare at her, staring was assumed, I was trying not to have my jaw hang slack with drool pooling in the corners.

She was outside taking pictures with a group. That camera was in for a long evening. Then I did a quick headcount. Five girls. Four boys.

Oh shit.

She didn't have a date but was going anyway. I could have cried. I totally admired her pluck in not letting the fact that she was too ugly for words stop her from enjoying an important evening with her friends. That wasn't why the tears were gathering forces behind my seemingly-impassive eyes.

I was crying for the boys. They had, unknowingly and against their wills, entered into a game of cockblock roulette with each other. One of their dates was going to have to hang out with this ugly girl and keep her entertained. One of their dates was going to have to take this ugly girl home so while they all laughed and smiled for the camera they also were shooting each other looks to see which of these poor condom-in-the-wallet-hoping-to-be-used bastards it was going to be.

And all the while *she* was galloping around with her Tom Petty face ruining every fucking picture she was in. You could see the parents trying to invent reasons to separate the kids for photos so she didn't have to be in them. Each parents gripping their camera with a "Can I get ONE fucking picture without that Tom Petty bitch in it?" look on their face.

It sounds as though I'm mad at her when in fact I'm really not. My heart aches for her carrying around that face every day. The problem is I imagine that she's the kind of girl that likes her marshmallows at room temperature so when she is sitting around a campfire she won't even bother to stick it on a stick and pretend to roast it for even a second and

will just sit there eating them right out of the bag while everyone else is dutifully holding theirs over the flames until it inevitably catches fire or falls in.

See what ugly does? It makes you feel like a bad person because if the girl is ugly enough you *become* a bad person.

Especially at prom season.

She probably doesn't mind that TV and movies are fagging up vampires and werewolves.

See? There it is again.

I went to prom. Luckily the world doesn't mind ugly guys too much. I still remember the blue tux, blue ruffled shirt and one-size-too-large blue velvet bow tie. What a fuckin' mess I was ... but it was ok. There were ugly girls at my prom to take the heat off me.

But nobody in the league with the girl I was staring at the other day. I need some sort of mental mint to get her out of my head. Her face disproved a loving God right there and then. If someone accidentally shot her they'd walk back and shoot her in the head just to make sure she was dead.

And probably not do any jail time.

I'm really not as terrible a person as I am when I see an ugly girl at prom.

economic pep talk

I knew times were getting tight with the economy and all but I had no idea that things had become generic cereal bad. As soon as I swung open the back of the station wagon I saw it. Occupying the space that should have been taken by my *Lucky Charms* was a alien box. I couldn't quite make out what it was until I picked it up out of the bag that was partially concealing it.

Magic Stars?

What in the name of Christ is this? What the fuck is *Magic Stars*? I want something that is magically delicious and I get this? And what the fuck is that on the front of the box? An alligator floating in space with an astronaut helmet on?

My head was spinning.

I felt all the strength draining out of me at precisely the wrong moment. I'm not sure how many other guys do this but bringing in the groceries is my weekly manly litmus test. It's where I make sure that I am still a man. I will look at the back of the station wagon, see 17 bags of groceries and say "two trips."

I am the Magnus Ver Magnusson of bringing in groceries. For those that don't follow the World's Strongest Man competition, Magnus is an Iclander who won the competition four times. Neighbors have noted similarities in how we both move when carrying large weights ... him with 130kg anvils and me with meat, vegetables and soda. Shuffling up the driveway to the front door.

So now I sat with at least 15 bags of groceries before me and my arms hung weakly, dare I say limply, at my side. Not even Jon Pall Sigmarsson could handle that many bags knowing the next morning he would be sitting down at his training table to a bowl

brimming with *Magic Stars*.

I remember when I was a wee lad (the accent on account of my current fixation with *Lucky Charms*) times got tight and generic food started to creep into the pantry. Back then it at least had the integrity not to try and pass itself off as a 'real' product. When money was in short supply my Mom would march in with a box that said *Cereal* on it. That was it. Cereal. And a green and black stripe on the top. Everything generic had this green and black stripe. There wasn't a lame attempt to disguise it as something other than cereal and there certainly wasn't a space-going alligator trying to pass himself off as a real marketable character.

But now there is no shame. The artwork is horrible; it looks like the cover art was done by the winner of an elementary school contest. Even the expression of the alligator is baffled. Like he's wondering why he is floating in space, how he got the helmet on in the first place and who on the distant planet beneath him would buy a box of cereal emblazoned with his picture. The alligator doesn't even have a name.

Seven trips. It took me seven trips to get in all the groceries. I didn't even dare peek in to the other bags to see what horrors they contained. If the *Lucky Charms* weren't sacred I can't even imagine what else I was bringing into my home. When I see those old pictures of people from the Great Depression staring ahead with that sad glazed look I can start to understand what they were going through.

This is America! We're better than *Magic Stars*! We should be shipping that shit to Africa or something. How can I get my Mariusz Pudzianowski on fueled by the thought of some B-grade nameless-reptilian-pimped whole grain oats with marshmallows? I can't! Come on economy! We must rebound. We must recover and rebuild.

We must always be after our *Lucky Charms*.