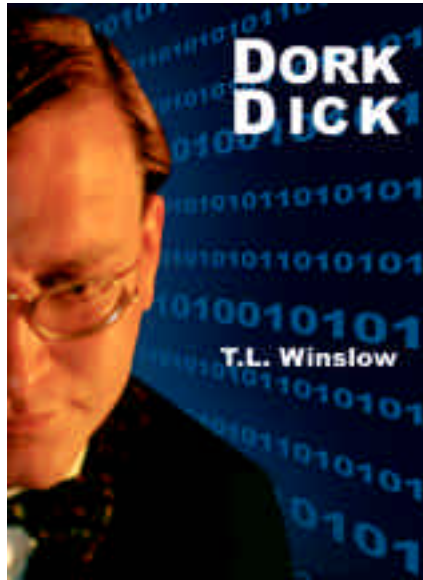


Dork Dick



A Novel

by T.L. Winslow

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To David L. Smith and Kevin Mitnick

Vaya con Dios...

And to Dean Koontz, Ian Fleming, John Le Carre, and Peter Coyote

The trees deserved what they got...

Special thanks to Tom Boyle for editing suggestions.

Prologue

The bank has an inside and an outside with respect to the public. Not outside the bank building; all on the inside. 'Outside', the customers see neatly dressed bank employees, calmly and courteously doing their jobs. 'Inside', the work environment is a sweatshop, a pig sty. But the air conditioning is great. Right air for a grand theft.

That is delightfully confusing, yuk yuk. As an editor I could turn 'Lolita' into a novel about a farmer and a cute pig, yuk yuk.

Roger Knight was a bull pig, a prime pig. Pure lard white, from lack of sunshine. Pure lard fat, from lack of exercise. A short-sleeve white shirt with a white tank-top t-shirt underneath, dripping wet with sweat. You didn't want to get a whiff of his armpits, heavily pasted with white deodorant gunk though they were; the chemicals didn't work nearly well enough. In the heavily air-conditioned bank environment, if he kept his arms at his sides, he could pass — no more. Even through the cabinet of other chemicals he drenched himself with, a certain indefinable stench came through — faint, but calmly warning you that if the clothes came off, it would burst into its own like an opened closet with a corpse inside.

That was my first case, after I came out of the closet, yuk yuk.

It looked overcast when Roger came in that morning; as if it might even rain later.

Did you tell readers that the bank is in the Seattle area and everybody carries an umbrella everywhere? They might not get the joke, yuk yuk.

This deep in the bank's recesses, he wouldn't know it if it did. He was just thinking of whether to park his car out in the open parking lot a half block away, or risk getting a space in the too-small covered garage. Always too small for gruntwork employees like him; the precious few reserved parking spaces for the bigshots made his ponderous stomach churn. If he drove around and around, up level after level, to the top, without finding a space, he'd have to go all the way back down, and still park in the open parking lot. He hadn't tried. He got sweaty enough just walking that half block, and he had to look presentable as he made his way through the outside section of the bank, where customers might see him.

Sweated like a great big hog, yuk yuk. Don't say it outright and let the readers infer it, for more effect, yuk yuk. He had a big mouth. Told everything, yuk yuk.

He was sitting at a desk piled with three computer terminals, in a cubicle farm among dozens of others like him. Shelves all around him were filled with computer printouts in colored binders, marked with felt tip pens. His trash can was filled to overflowing with used paper cups and junk food wrappers. He had loosened his tie a bit, without seeming to have done so; one could only loosen it all the way on special occasions, such as weekend overtime work, when there were no customers outside.

His cubicle was a hog pen, yuk yuk. We vacuumed his keyboards and they were full of food particles, dandruff, burgers, boogers, and hairs. Even crotch hair, yuk yuk. From his hands.

Roger had been with the bank for 15 years. He knew that his days there were numbered. Not that he hadn't sacrificed his twenties and most of his thirties to the bank-god, having so little in the way of a personal life that just

being able to find a good massage parlor that wouldn't refuse to serve him and that didn't bust his credit card limit was his idea of family life. Not that he paid for sex with a credit card; he would withdraw cash from the bank on his credit card first.

I have Net robots making me full-time reports of all this kind of activity now, yuk yuk.

Fifteen years. Count 'em. Five, ten, fifteen. It didn't seem like that much life could go so fast, amount to so little. If you could call it life. The hopes and dreams of life, that's what constituted life. He had hopes and dreams once. Those reserved parking spaces, for instance; one day, his name on one perhaps. A net worth of half a million dollars, so that he could retire in something like ease; a retirement check to keep him from having to use up his net worth during retirement.

I wonder if he was going to just turn it into gold coins and sit on it, or if he was going to invest it in the stock market or something. The way the market has been going up, he could parlay half a million into ten-twenty times that easy, yuk yuk.

There had been many who had tried to tell him, but they weren't listened to. Like that old man who once stood out in front of the open parking lot, before the security guards made him go. He actually got Roger's attention long enough to tell him that the bank would force him out before he could ever invest his retirement plan, like it had done to him. "Get out of here now, while you're still young," the man had warned him, openly, brazenly, at the edge of the parking lot.

He had just yawned him off and got in his car. He was tired and horny, and wanted to go to a massage parlor after eating out, alone as usual, at a restaurant that catered to single men (the waitresses all had big hooters and knew how to sell food and drinks with them). He invariably ordered some kind of Chinese food, even at American-food restaurants.

I don't want this story to be x-rated, yuk yuk. But I have to tell it like it is or be untrue to my calling as a dick, yuk yuk. So I'll just mention going to a parlor but not what they do when they get there, or how, when they saw this hog, they always left him waiting until they were sure he wouldn't go away, then assigned him the ugliest whore at the bottom of the totem pole, with breath that would scare a skunk away, yuk. Or the fact that he had become so fat that he couldn't reach his own dick and masturbate to release the tension, like I do. No, he literally had to have another person do it, or he was a prisoner inside his own flesh, yuk yuk. Even a whore would put plastic gloves on first, yuk yuk.

His expensive apartment was a dirty pigsty, but we discovered that he had rigged a bidet in his shower to wash his ass crack out with, and the drain was plugged with shit, yuk yuk. His arms were too short to reach his crack and use ass wipe on it, yuk yuk. One of those Japanese computer toilets with a built-in bidet was out of his price range, yuk yuk.

Now he was becoming that old man. He knew how they did it. After you peaked in your early forties, they began to hassle you, make you work on crap, demean you, flaunt younger workers in your face. If you didn't get the message and quit, they made it more and more intolerable, until you were eating shit. Then they tried cutting your pay, forcing you to relocate to shithole bank satellites.

Come to think of it, if he couldn't reach his dick, how did he have crotch hair on his hands? Must have been from trying to unplug the drain with his hands and not washing them afterwards. Leave it to the reader to fill in the lines, yuk yuk.

If all that didn't work, they'd try framing you on sexual harassment of a secretary or co-worker, or some other grievance that somebody in their control would suddenly use to oust you with.

Like planting some marijuana seeds on him. With the laws they have now, one thousand seeds is life without parole, yuk yuk. Farming as the ultimate crime, yuk yuk. They've got a law against everything now, if somebody is out to get you, yuk yuk. America now has a higher percentage of

its population incarcerated than any other country, even Russia, yuk yuk. Being a dick is good business.

If all that failed somehow, they could simply call you on the carpet and fire you in ten minutes for incomprehensible reasons. What could you do, sue? See you in court, hardy har. If you could afford it.

Unless your attorney is the government, you have to have a lot of money to go to court with any prospect of winning, yuk yuk. Gold bless America, yuk yuk.

Chances are you'd be scrambling to keep your lifestyle up. The lifestyle they carefully indoctrinated you to have, usually involving being six weeks or less from bankruptcy. Car payments, apartment payments, clothes payments — a bank employee was expected to have a nice car, a nice apartment, nice clothes, right? You were on the fast track up, they said. When you were promoted, you'd have an even nicer car, apartment, clothes. So get used to it, it's part of the business. Shit if it was.

Shit if it was, yuk yuk. That's pretty risqué, yuk yuk. But shit can be edited out for television.

He should have realized from the beginning why his co-workers were all in their twenties and thirties like he; why workers in their forties, and especially fifties, were as rare as ghosts.

They're all either in jail or selling insurance or real estate now, yuk yuk. Nobody under fifty expects to ever see a decent social security check, yuk yuk. Who was that governor who warned that America would one day be saddled with millions of aging people who wanted to die but medical technology wouldn't let them? Lamb, yuk yuk. Try suicide, you dumb dork sheep. Better not put that into the text. Too cynical.

His generation, in contrast to previous ones, was based on the computer, and that would be his zing on them, his revenge, his calling card. He never gave them a sign he was 'on' to them; no, he kept his head down, never made waves. But in his frantic computer programming work he worked extra-special hard on one software project that wasn't on any official work schedule or manager's manpower sheet. He was going the way of the dinosaur there, yes he knew; but this was one dinosaur that wouldn't go without making a legend of himself.

Dinosaur. That word recurred in his thinking as regularly as poontang these days. He was so sick of being ribbed for being a Wayne Knight (no relation; he had checked) lookalike, especially after that movie *Jurassic Park* came out. Roger's similarities to his character, conspiring to steal company secrets while working as a computer programmer for a firm, always left him on the defensive — in denial, loud and worried and tired. When Wayne Knight hit it even bigger in the TV series *Seinfeld*, at least he was no longer a computer programmer, just a mailman — that helped take the pressure of Roger a little. As if the simultaneous knowledge that Wayne was making millions, while he, Roger, was six weeks from bankruptcy, didn't hurt worse.

Poontang, yuk yuk. Might not even be edited out for television. Oriental word. That Wayne Knight made big fat and ugly into a product, yuk yuk. Millions of dorks look up to him as their role model, yuk yuk. The big fat redneck market was sewed up by John Goodman and Roseanne first.

But the very idea of turning on his company, and rigging their computers against them... that idea actually grew steadily in his thoughts. Why not?

Why not? He was a computer genius; the management always told him so. He'd commit the perfect crime, and get even for the whole world of hurt he'd been dealt. He'd have millions of bucks to live a free and easy lifestyle. Women would find him attractive suddenly, after smelling the money; the hookers anyway. With enough money, he could have live-in hookers — maids, he'd call them. Secretaries. Administrative assistants. Personal assistants. With enough money he could beat the entire shitty system. The bank sure had the money.

Like he would ever get a real woman to give her goodies to him any more than I have, yuk yuk. At least I don't need to fantasize about it when I've got my work to throw myself into, yuk yuk. I can live without it. Jesus did.

Roger had seen hundreds of millions flow through the bank in a single day. He had seen them lose millions, and find it again. Some they never found again.

He had always, like other bank employees, been scrupulously honest. A Boy Scout. A Dudley Doright. He still was. That was the problem. Then he met that old man in his dreams.

I will always be scrupulously honest. I don't have a weakness of the flesh like he does, yuk yuk.

That old man was he. To be young, alive, full of dreams. Why was he no longer young, alive, and this his only dream? At least robbing the bank was another dream; that made two.

He knew what time it was now. The one and only Carmen McRae. An insider joke for jazz lovers. Lyrics from a song of hers. As a multi-millionaire computer criminal, he'd listen to jazz all day and all night on the beach somewhere — Rio, maybe. He'd finally find poontang that would marry him, even if only for his money. If she'd at least fake it, pretend to love him for himself, put in the act, he'd gladly leave it all to her. But not without doing everything with her body he could do to take the unfulfilled, lonely, screaming horniness out of his ego, superego, and id forever.

That's the way of the world. Male gonads torture a man for decades, he works like a mule to amass wealth, and then a young woman fucks him out of it, yuk yuk.

That... that was the dream now. Many, many countries away from this bank and its open parking lot and old ghosts. He just wanted what was his already; he had earned it already, and they had stolen it from him. They had stolen his dreams, and it was his right to get them back.

He had worked on his bank robbery software for three years now. It worked by mis-rounding a cent off a bank statement here and there, and funneling it into a phantom account that would be casually transferred to a numbered Swiss account and erased right before the usual bank self-audits. He was about to start it in operation when he read about a similar scheme being detected in another bank, causing him to panic and wipe the software out of existence.

He came up with a far cleverer idea in its place. The bank executives had long had a legal scam going with check cashing. When a bunch of checks from the same account came in at the same time, the software would clear the biggest checks first. The net result was, that if the whole set of checks didn't have sufficient funds to clear, the smaller checks would each fail to clear, running up penalties beautifully.

This policy was kept secret from the public for years; but, even after it leaked, it was not too embarrassing, since the executives already had a cover-story that they were doing it for the benefit of the customers, since they'd likely want the biggest checks, that covered things like rent and mortgages, to clear before the smaller checks.

They never mentioned that they could have just held the smaller checks without running them through, and notified the customer in time to make a small deposit to cover them; or even let them have a small negative balance for a grace period if they had a long history with the bank and kept an average balance for the year high enough. No, they loved to see a hundred dollars in penalties on five bounced checks, each for less than five dollars.

Twenty five dollars worth of bounced checks, and they tell you they'll close your account unless you deposit one hundred twenty five dollars, yuk yuk. Running a bank is like a license to steal, yuk yuk. He who has the gold, rules. And they got your business in the first place by offering free checking, yuk yuk.

Roger knew that this software was guaranteed to be kept super secret by the bank, even from its own rank-and-file employees, so it was the best place to steal the bank itself blind from. As a senior programmer he led the team that legally stole from customers by weighting checks, as they called it (running the highest amounts through first), and so

he was in the position to sell the bank brass on the idea of occasionally not weighting the checks, to decrease customer grumbling and public oversight.

He then added the ghost routines that fooled the bank into thinking it had occasionally not weighted the checks, and sent penalty notices (especially for long-time customers), when what it actually did was weight the checks all the time but hold the small checks without running them through right away, thus keeping the penalty notice from occurring for a week or so. Instead, a bank statement was sent to the customer, showing the big checks as having cleared, but making no mention of the small ones being held in limbo.

The way his scam worked was to hope that some honest long-time customers would know, without being notified, that they had not really had enough funds on deposit to clear the small checks; and thinking that they were going to be penalized, from past experience, they would hastily deposit enough to cover it all, penalties included. His software then cleared the small checks, scooped the phantom penalty money up, and deposited it to his phantom accounts, and everybody was happy. As unlikely as it sounded, this scheme raked in several hundred clams at least every business day.

To further throw bank auditors off the track, his software did occasionally reverse weight the checks, but not for long-time customers — only new customers, who didn't know anything. As an additional precaution, he made sure the software trail for the ghost routines led to a fellow employee instead of him, one also over forty and on the exit track.

He would run the ghost software not only on his bank but on all its affiliates, who used the same software release, until he had accumulated half a million dollars, then quietly accept the hints to resign, and disappear into the big wide woodwork, erasing his tracks first. Since no money was actually stolen from the bank, only from customers, who didn't realize it, he thought he had a perfect crime, the kind that would never be reported to the authorities as such. Especially as the bank had actually tried to steal that same money itself first. A thief stealing from thieves: and all the Chinese sayings about it would keep him laughing for years.

Would that be laughing all the way to the bank, or all the way from it? Yuk.

Happy was Roger as he was waddling to his car out in the open parking lot that evening. He had worked late, as usual; the model company loser-employee with no family. It had just rained; he could tell from the damp look in the company's greenery. He could also tell from the lower than usual smog level. And the extra-damp air caused his usual late-day body odor to dampen with it. It would soon resume raining, he was sure, as usual. He was thinking about Chinese take-out and where he'd pick it up, as usual.

Dripping in duck fat, as usual, yuk yuk.

As he fished for his car keys, standing at his driver's door, a white unmarked spam can van drove up, two men in joggers clothes closed on him from the lot, relieved him of his umbrella (potential dangerous weapon), and hustled him into the open van door, while a third man read him his rights. He cried like a baby and confessed before, during, and after interrogation; not that they had to read you your Miranda rights anymore before taking a voluntary confession.

No more Chinese food ever, yuk yuk. I never make arrests myself. Too weak, yuk yuk. I leave that to the professional brawn, yuk yuk. That, and they say they don't want me around to get in the way.

He thought they would let him go if he confessed and gave the money back. Later, in prison, he found more happiness as a gay transvestite than he had ever known in the cruel outside, inside — whatever.

If he had realized women were out of his class earlier, maybe he wouldn't have gone criminal. Too bad. His obesity was a result of wanting what he couldn't have. He used Chinese food as a substitute for poontang. In priz he found that Peking drake is just as yummy as Peking duck, yuk yuk. If it doesn't kill you it will make you stronger, yuk yuk. Now the good part. The part where I come in.

He had been told that he was clever, very clever — a genius maybe. But he had made one mistake. He had not screened his customers prior to granting them the free relief from penalties. One of them had been a former bank employee, now disgruntled and wanting revenge, just like he was afraid of becoming. We'll call him Mr. Pibb, as his real identity is now protected by the prosecutor's office. Even though he no longer worked there, he opened a small personal checking account and, when he purposely ran a string of checks through, expecting them to be weighted, so that he could make a stink about the penalty charges and sue and get publicity — or at least use the threat to get some of his retirement benefits reinstated — he was outraged to find no penalty notice being issued, and the small checks being held in limbo.

Not that this did Roger in by itself. The disgruntled ex-employee Mr. Pibb instead decided to "screw the dumbos" by starting a web site offering low-interest loans to people who started an account with the bank, hoping to write a bunch of small overdraft checks on their accounts to his front companies, and use the time pad before the penalties were really assessed to juggle the money into and out of the penny stock market, keeping the difference after covering the checks at the last minute.

It was just his bad luck that Dork Dick was surveilling the penny stock market, looking for irregularities.

Another coup for Dork Dick.

That's what I call myself, yuk yuk. My real identity is a closely-guarded secret. Don't want my family to be subject to retaliation and blackmail, yuk. I applied for a service mark on the name and everything. I've got my own web site, and my fame is spreading by the minute. This ghost bio will get me over the top.

The thing that was irregular was, it turned out, simply that the disgruntled ex-employee was uncommonly lucky with the market. He made lucky investments — or smart ones. But Dork Dick doesn't take chances. He assumed the worse, and dug into the lucky man's life. Nothing unusual surfaced, to be sure. Even his forced resignation from a bank was quite in order, and not unusual enough to raise flags. But the fact that he maintained a personal account at that very bank, and ran a web site that did business with that bank, did.

It took a long time to figure out the dork's scheme, and inform bank officials of it. The defect in the bank software on which it was based was at first thought to be innocent buggy programming, but when the trail led to one of Roger's co-workers, the investigation went criminal.

That co-worker was too young to worry about being forced out. That was Roger's only mistake. He didn't check his age. He only looked to be in his forties. He was actually in his twenties. Since Roger was old enough to be forced out, and the trail didn't lead to him, that made it all too suspicious to be an innocent case of bad programming. It had to be deliberate, and thus criminal.

A judge granted a request for a search warrant, and soon resident traps were planted in the operating system, eventually catching one of his phantom accounts in the act of crediting itself. This led to the warrant for his arrest. Even then if he hadn't been so willing to confess, his lawyer could have perhaps plea bargained, since the bank was anxious to avoid the publicity of a trial. But he squealed like a pig, didn't he? Thirty years without parole. Mr. Pibb got immunity.

Another pig in the poke. C'est la vie, yuk yuk.

Geniuses don't make crude mistakes like that. Serves him right. Now he's a queen con in a federal hogfarm, yuk yuk. Maybe he is a genius, since he's now got his retirement paid for; the prison life might be better than the life he had led. The co-worker was cleared, but landed up in jail anyways when it was confirmed that his older-than-usual looks came from a secret drug habit, yuk yuk. And, he had lied on his employment application about his age, listing it as thirty-something. The bank knew all along that he had lied, and kept it on file so that they could more easily deny him retirement benefits when the time came. Roger could have maybe hacked the employment office computers and checked him out, but he didn't.

Two on my first case. Fill 'er up, says the warden. Invest in private prison stocks: hot stock tip, yuk yuk. I'm Dork Dick, and I will be filling up whole new wings at a time soon.

Part I. The Duck Dick Years

Chapter 1

Dork Dick stopped his ghost bio after the first chapter, and shelved it for the time being. He came to feel it to be too unbecoming of a professional dick to write or publish a bio until after he had retired permanently — just like his hero, the ultimate dork, Big Bill, as he called him. That didn't stop him from writing it as he went, anyway.

After the Knight case was wrapped up, he spent a busy weekend doing spring cleaning, buying hundreds of dollars worth of cleaning products, everything from Lysol to Zap! cleaner. He didn't want any crotch hair to be found if anybody broke into his house and shook it down.

Not that he lived in his house. He just kept it out of a domestic prejudice that probably came from his family. He lived in his Lab, as he called it: an underground network of thermal-sonic concrete-lined rooms and tunnels under a small lake out back of his house, just outside the big city, where it starts to blend in with farms. Before the fish are even awake and swimming each morning, Dork Dick is down in his Lab, busily searching the Net for signs of dork computer crime.

The few who knew where his Lab was located would joke that he should be called Duck Dick, all the more so as the pond had a regular flock of ducks that never left, since he fed them well with leftover pizza and popcorn, which he ejected out of a snorkel-like tube from below the pond floor. At times geese visited the pond, but never made it their permanent home like the ducks did.

Dork Lab would have made Batman's Bat Cave look sick, at least in his dreams. The racks for the microcomputers stretched monotonously for at least a hundred yards, row after row, eight feet high. The tangled web of cables behind the slick control panels would have done a nuclear sub proud, being taken up in neat pipes that rose up over a false ceiling, and fanned out like a spider web. The main control room was a dazzling array of computer monitors, large and small, the biggest reminiscent of NORAD's, the whole effect more like a TV network studio, or a phone company main control room, or both.

It was hard to believe that Dork Dick had put it all together himself, from parts that he obtained at below-wholesale prices. Not hard for him to believe, but hard for others to believe, he half-hoped. If the government had built it, the price tag would have been in the billions. Thousand dollar hammers, yuk yuk.

Dork Dick spent just 1.3 million, which he had just received from the sale of his family estate north of Seattle. The estate was his inheritance after his dear madre died. He had no siblings, and had the typical loner-leader complex of the only child, the firstborn, the male heir. Not that his madre had died — she was still alive, and lived with him, up in the house. He rarely saw her now, but she understood he was trying to make a living.

He wasn't lazy like typical wealthy male heirs, because he was born poor, and grew up struggling. It was just luck and the economy that allowed his madre, in her later years, to scrimp and save up enough for the down payment on a fixer-upper home, which he helped fix up for her. With some government assistance, yuk yuk. When the real estate market doubled, then doubled again, then again, the original \$50,000 junk home was appraised at over \$1 million, and they sold it and sank the money in the new cheap rural farm, which they got at a farm foreclosure auction for only \$175,000. Since mom was still alive, and the new property was kept in her name, they didn't have to worry about taxes. Now, that was Dork Dick's main worry: inheritance tax when she passed away. In the meantime, he paddled like hell, trying to make a living at P.I. work.

Dork Dick had never married. He had only had one girlfriend, and she had jilted him at age 20, breaking his heart, and leaving him a confirmed lifelong bachelor. No other girl would ever fit in his heart, he often said; he only had room for one girl there, and it was taken. His heart was LIFO — last in, first out. (He lived under the impression that all women's hearts were FIFO — first in, first out.)

Meanwhile, the once-stunning girl married and divorced three times, had three kids, and grew a middle-age spread and a double-chin, while avoiding him like the plague, not even talking to him. She didn't even know he carried a torch for her.

Now, at middle age, both were celibate. The difference was that Dork Dick was eternally sexually repressed and unfulfilled, and yearning for his lost youth, his lost girl, that he was still saving everything for, while she was sexually worn out, hating men and sex, and interested only in the latest TV soaps and in the affairs of her grown kids, while fighting the signs of menopause and a chronic yeast infection.

To Dork Dick, poontang was a mysterious holy of holies that he had been condemned by a cruel Nature to never being able to know or have, much less use like real men in the movies and the rock videos. He was only sure of one thing: women spread their legs and gave men every inch of their asses, while men kept their legs together and only put out feelers, yuk yuk. And then there was the terrific mess of childbirth. Therefore, he could last longer with or without it than they could, yuk yuk.

The lifelong celibacy kept Dork Dick looking ten to fifteen younger than his age, like a lot of celibate priests. It also freed his mind to be able to totally concentrate on the hunting fixation of detective work — like a hunter who could journey as long and as far as he pleased for that ultimate big game prize, because he didn't have any woman waiting for him back at the cave. Being impotent by age 30 also helped.

Not that Dork Dick was a dick until age 45. Until then, he was a computer software entrepreneur, a little older than Bill Gates, and making the supreme mistake of trying to compete against him rather than sell out to him. The result was total bankruptcy, about the same time that Gates became the world's richest dork (we'll reserve the word man out of respect). The bitterness of spending half his life competing against a fiend that couldn't be competed with, working for a piece of a pie that he could have no piece of, left him with a fire in his belly to make the last half of his life mean something: he'd make life miserable for computer geeks like Big Bill, by putting them in jail. Maybe a shrink would have added that he was actually putting computer geeks like himself out of their misery by putting them in jail.

Takes one to know one, goes the old cliché. The new digital age inaugurated by Big Bill's success had ironically created a new crime wave that traditional law enforcement was unprepared to fight, and that was Dork Dick's big chance. Unless a person devoted his career to them, computers are incomprehensible, and even scary to people, and not even cops and dicks are immune. A quick apprenticeship with a traditional detective got him his detective's license, and his eagerness to jail people who had never been jailed before found him favor with the local federal law enforcement officials, who, tending to be more dorkish than the local law enforcement officials, were less repelled by him personally, and more willing to take his many hot tips, delivered via email.

When the Knight case resulted in an arrest and prosecution and conviction, he had finally become legit in their eyes, and got a nice whistleblower's fee to boot, paid out of Knight's seized assets. He showed his madre the money, and took her out to a Red Lobster franchise restaurant, and never felt better inside and out, as the buttered lobster churned in his chyme. His usual fare was pizza and popcorn — microwaved in his Lab, unless he had the money to have it delivered from the local franchises (the pizza, not the popcorn).

Actually, until more money came in, many of the computer bays in his Lab were just false panels with nothing inside, but as real money came in, he promptly filled them in with real equipment. His biggest expense was his T1 line to the local Internet hub, and he had been ashamed to admit that he had taken lowly manual jobs such as delivering newspapers and handling baggage at the airport to help pay for it.

By his second case, he was financially self-sufficient, and all the more determined to fill wing after wing of federal prisons nationwide with convicted computer dorks. One day, he hoped to land Big Bill himself, but he never

mentioned it, for fear that he would get in over his head and face ruin. Instead, he praised Big Bill unctuously whenever and wherever he could, as a cover story.

What did Dork Dick look like? You might have guessed by now that he was a Bill Gates lookalike, short, ugly, wearing thick glasses, and possessing annoying habits such as an irritating "yuk yuk" laugh. We'll leave you guessing, since Dork Dick hid himself from the world, never venturing out in public unless in disguise, and doing all his work from within his Lab, seldom needing to leave it. His criminals were doing crime on the Net, and he had to find them there on the Net; once found, he used the Net to report them, and received his pay on the Net.

He did dick work at the speed of thought, as Big Bill himself would have put it. He was a cottage dick, a work-at-home, telecommuting dick; he made dick work totally cerebral.

The actual details of arrest he left to the 'old' type of dicks and cops, whom he thought of as little more than service personnel, on a par with pizza delivery boys. He hoped for the day when robots would finally be perfected that put them out of business even in the musclework department, just like workers in manufacturing industries. In short, he was a budding Big Brother type fascist.

Not that he wasn't capable of physical labor. He had laboriously dug-out the former farm, poured the concrete, filled the top over with dirt, and built a pond, all by himself. A lesser workman might have had a problem with seepage and dampness in the Lab, but his work was so tight and ship-shape, and well provided with ventilation, that he could house electronic equipment there permanently without fear. He had even provided for a generator room, with its own filtered air supply, when he could get the money to buy the generator and the tank of diesel to go with it. Not that he planned to use it, except during rare emergencies; he had more (or less, depending on your point of view) practical plans for constructing a windmill generator farm on the rest of his land and connecting it into the power mains, forcing the utility company to buy power from him, as allowed by law.

Always thinking, he had endless schemes in various stages of development and implementation to sell duck meat and eggs, grow produce, raise police dogs, hamsters, de-toxified hemp (when it became legal), even apples. Occasionally he would poach wild fowl from his own land, and eat the ones that weren't too wormy. Eggs too.

He slept in a sleeping bag, and lived as frugally as the Unabomber had in his hand-built Montana cabin; in many ways, they were curiously alike. But Dork Dick was on the right side of the law, and was totally non-violent — wouldn't hurt a fly. All right, he would hurt flies, and cockroaches, and did it all the time, since he had a constant infestation problem — but he did it without satisfaction or thrills.

Causing a dork to be arrested and jailed — that gave him all the satisfaction and thrills he could handle. Those dorks at least didn't have to sleep alone like he did, not if they came out of the closet.

Her name was Amy — his lifelong dream girl. At times he would fantasize about her so hard he would break down crying. If only he could bring her back from the past, as stunning as when he first met her as an 18-year-old student. If only the real Amy would suddenly realize he loved her, and tell him she was sorry — he'd take her back in a minute, and forgive her for everything. He'd take Viagra to regain the potency of youth. He'd change. He'd tell her he loved her every day for the rest of his life. He'd do oral things to her if she wanted it. He'd get a real job. Anything. Just to be able to spend the rest of his life not having to sleep alone.

If he could just have what he couldn't have... that was going to be his epitaph one day.

Chapter 2

The Net is a gigantic non-physical world of ever-changing data, so big that no mind can comprehend or absorb it all. It makes you feel big and small at the same time. A perfect hangout for dorks and geeks.

Surfing the Net is an apt description because the Net is like an ocean of data that each person struggles to cross without being drowned. It was also a nearly lawless frontier, where crimes could be committed with impunity, and punishment scoffed at: Dork Dick's dream hunting grounds. He was never lonely when he was hunting something, or somebody.

Big Bill was the richest man in the world, and getting richer by the minute. The richest man of all time. Lived in a mansion of his own design on the shore of Lake Washington. If he had that kind of money to throw around, he'd have the elegant Chambord Castle, in France's Loire Valley, dismantled and shipped and reassembled next to Lake Washington.

He found himself looking at web sites on European travel, and soon found a nice photograph of Chambord Castle. At least with the Net, if you couldn't have it, your mind could reach out and touch it. Your body might be trapped in a world that won't let you touch what you need, but your mind could at least hope to make up the difference this way. Not that it might not be a blessing in disguise, what with STDs and AIDS to worry about. He for one just couldn't say no to the real thing if it ever came his way, so maybe he should be glad it never did.

The three-story white Versailles look, the four big wine bottle-like parapets at the front, the collection of interesting-looking rooftop spires, towers, steeples, minarets, or whatever they're called; the huge utterly flat lawns encircling it, the big wide sidewalk sweeping up beside it.

There he would be, eating big crusty baguettes and French cheeses, chilled wine, crisp salad greens, pates, crudites, fresh fruit and assorted sweet pastries; imported succulent briny oysters from Brittany, which they call 'huitres'. Watching bike races go by.

Bike races. That would be in France. We're back in Washington State now. Okay, he's rich enough to sponsor his own French-style bike races on his front lawn. He'd run a farm for starving artists, so that no Van Goghs would have to commit suicide in despair.

Where was it that he painted his legendary 'Olive Trees' series, standing in an olive grove outside an old sanitarium? Saint Remy? Yes, that was it. My how he captured the translucency of the iridescent blue sky, the ragged Alpilles mountains — even the mischevious Mediterranean mistral wind, using only a curling swirl of color. Looking at his paintings, one could almost feel the heat and smell the dustiness of the Northern Brittany landscape. Even images of them on the Net.

Brittany? Wasn't that where that TV series *The Prisoner* was filmed, starring Patrick McGoohan? No, that was on the English side of the Channel. No problem. Being so rich, he'd have that village dismantled and reassembled right outside his French castle. He'd even hire McGoohan to run it, with a princely sum that he couldn't refuse. Maybe buy him a movie studio to cinch the deal. No problem. McGoohan got all the pountang he wanted. He was no dork, not he.

Huitres. How is that pronounced? Like "wheats" without the "wh"? An "oo" in place of the "wh"? "Ooeats"? "Give me a plat of huitres, silvooplay. How is that spelled anyway? C'il vous plait? Est'cette-il vous plait? He had studied French in fifth and sixth grade, and forgotten most of it by now. He'd hire French tutors and immerse himself until he received a doctorate from the Sorbonne. Even if he had to pay somebody off. Not just the language, but French cooking.

French chambermaids. That's what his castle would be chock full off. The kind in all the naughty movies. He'd have naughty movies filmed, starring himself. Visitors looking at all those wine bottle boudoirs would strain to look through the windows, but fail, since they'd have heavy gauze curtains. Inside, the most luxurious boudoir appointments the planet could produce. He'd spare no expense. A million bucks a square foot. A square inch. In that opulence, even the sexiest, most desirable French maid would gladly surrender to his clumsy dork gropings. They'd teach him, mother him; he needed lessons, but he would learn fast. Between their legs were the saltiest, choicest huitres only he could have.

How insensitive. They'd sue his ass off.

No. He'd be so rich that he'd be unsuable. That's really rich. But then, everybody can be sued. Okay, he'd be so rich that they could only sue a front of a front of a front for the interest on the interest of his interest. Make that nested ten times instead of three. That's really rich. Twelve times is even better. Twenty. Like computers themselves, his immunity layers would double every two years. Moore's Law of Lawsuits, yuk yuk.

No. Really rich is being unsuable. A person trying to sue him would get thrown in jail. That's really rich. Meanwhile he'd claim their names were unfamiliar and he has no knowledge of their actions to the press. No, he'd be so rich that the press would be kept and cover it all up. No interviews. That's really rich. Big Bill suddenly became frightening to him, but he swept it aside. Back to the ole daydream masturbation fantasy. French chambermaids.

If they complained of the low pay, he'd buy a porno studio and sign them up as actresses to pacify them. It's only money. It'd be a tax writeoff maybe.

He'd offer some French chambermaids to McGoohan if that is what it took. He had to have him running that village. And get that funny car he used to drive.

Why not move St. Basil's Cathedral out of Red Square and put it nearby too? Those onion domes would fill in his back forty nicely.

Why import huitres from Brittany? He could get a scrumptuous selection of seafood right from Puget Sound, not to mention Alaska. Maybe he could have genuine Brittany huitres transplanted and grown locally? Why not? It's just money. Money can make anything happen. He'd release a new operating system version and bilk people out of another billion or ten.

He needed to buy a chowder house on Lake Washington under an assumed name, so he could sneak in the back and eat for free, impress friends. Slurping oysters on the half shell. Impress friends. Be cool. Get poontang. Show his style with the oysters to beautiful girls to get their poontang. He wouldn't allow computers into his chowder house. You'd have to leave them at the check-in, like guns in Dodge City.

Huitre huitre huitre huitre huitre — the sound he'd make with his face in a chambermaid's crotch. No, that's dirty. Too dirty for him. He's not French himself, after all. He respects women. They're not objects.

Amy is no object. He respected her so much, he had let her have her own life, without him to dirty it up. He would never slurp her huitre, unless she asked him first, at least twice. He could sleep with her every night for years and never even have sex with her, if that's the way she wanted it. Just to sleep with her in the same bed was enough. In the same room, in double beds. He wouldn't look at her when she was disrobing either. He respected her privacy. If he had the farts, he'd sleep on the other side of the castle. He'd have air conditioning discreetly installed that kept the air on his side of the boudoir separate from hers. One way only: he'd love to smell the air from her side. Just the smell would satisfy him. She never farted. Even if she did, he'd love to smell it.

Cream of huitres. Sprouted huitres bread. Huitres and Low. Huitres Jesus. Huitres for me at the bus stop. Huitres, the breakfast of champions. Only on the Net can you get unlimited access to visual huitres even by accident. He tried to avoid the hard core porno sites, unless it was part of his work. He really did. Made him feel more lonely than ever. Dried out, dessicated, impotent.

Huitres. Tweet. Tweet tweet goes the bird. Tweety bird. Huitres bird. The Net was his huitres. It had suites of huitres. It was bigger than that. It was a space.

Cyberspace. How did William Gibson put it? There, on the shelf where he kept his most beloved books, was his well-worn hardcover edition of 'Neuromancer', Gibson's groundbreaking 1984 novel. 1984 was supposed to be the year Big Brother took over. Instead, it was the year the geeks made their move on every front. Gibson's front was literature, fiction.

There it was. Page 51. "Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions... A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system... clusters and constellations of data." Like the stars in a planetarium, only data not celestial bodies. Travel was instantaneous, faster than warp drive. Satisfaction, satiety, was immediate. Unlike with real people, real women. The Net never let you down, never left you unfulfilled. The dust jacket featured a picture of Gibson surrounded by Star Trek collectors memorabilia. What a dork. Ugly. Glasses, well down on his nose. Skinny. A slight resemblance to Patrick McGoochan maybe.

Gibson must be a millionaire. He probably never got any until he was. Maybe still doesn't. Only a millionaire though, not a billionaire like Big Bill. The latter would no doubt be the world's first trillionaire eventually. What could stop him? Amazing how he doesn't succumb to the pressure to drown himself in huitres and die from too much of it, like Elvis Presley.

Molly. That was the girl in the book. Case was the neuromancer's name. Twenty-four it said. Hardly any physical description. But he got Molly when he wanted her. He even left her, jilted her. Unimaginable almost. You're nobody until somebody loves you. Right. So find yourself somebody. Not if you're a dork. They're an exception that proves the rule. They go after what they can get: money.

Gibson must have got his jollies off subliminally in that fiction. "I don't need you," he said to Molly, on page 270, the next-to-last in the book. "He found a girl who called herself Michael." In that fictional world, organs could be bought like merchandise: livers, pancreases, or is that pancreai? Maybe sex organs too. Maybe Michael had started out as a genetic male. Didn't matter by then, that far in the future.

Okay, Case was jilted by Molly, not the other way around. But he still didn't need her. Insignificant point. He had his Amy, like every other dork. He buried himself in his work, churning out fiction. Gibson, not Case. He, Dork Dick, had his dick work. And a name to make for himself.

Why does a whole big segment of the world strive to reach 'perfection', 'strive to be strong', and genuinely not want to have sex, which they call sin? Lord I try, yuk yuk. Somebody should give him religion. Until then, he'd just be a dork dick and hope for a painless death and sweet oblivion.

That brings it all up to date. He had gotten his rocks off. Back to the old salt mines.

Dork Dick had only wasted half a day surfing the Net to the rhythm of his French fantasies. He finally sobered up and started earnestly studying the stock market, trying to create web spiders and robots that would comb the Net for information on new Internet-based companies being floated on the stock market, and see if he could perhaps find something that wasn't right. He just knew somebody out there was scamming somebody, and he didn't want to read about it in the media, he wanted to make the media learn about it from him.

Just how many new millionaires have been created recently by floating Internet company stocks on the market? It seemed that the public was so gullible that you could merely create a company out of thin air, set up a web site, then float the stock; people invested in it, even drove the stock to wild heights, without requiring the company to have turned a dime of real business.

And he had just gotten his 1040 Instruction Handbook from the IRS yesterday. Eighty-two pages, the longest ever, all filled with references to the Taxpayer Paperwork Reduction Act.

Timeout for a quick side trip.

He decided to check up on www.2600.com, the famous site run by computer hackers, scoffing at the law, the system, the whole world. "Free Kevin Mitnick" banners appeared in greeting. Mitnick was their martyr, jailed without trial for years by the federal government for being so dangerous. News of a new government computer site successfully hacked. Good for them, he thought. Now if he could only trace the hackers out, he'd get them a cell next to Mitnick.

A sudden chilling feeling ran down his spine. It was that thing again. That horrible thing from another dimension that visited him and tried to become him. Just like a thousand other times, it got sick at what he was, and fled in terror.

Sorry, don't pick a dork for dinner, dumba from another dimension, yuk yuk.

He wasn't completely honest about having no other women in his life other than Amy. Online he had a chat room lover. Her name was Kpvesilof — a garbage name, taken on a whim, perhaps a code for something, if so, he couldn't figure what. He pronounced it "K.P. Vesilyov", as if it were the name of a Russian femme fatale. She had broke into online chat with him out of the blue one day, attracted by his Member Profile that listed him as a "genius". She told him she liked geniuses, was a genius herself, and one thing led to another. It didn't mention that he was a dick. He only allowed qualified persons to know that.

He could tell you, but then he'd have to kill you, yuk yuk.

One time she told him to call her Gwynn. He never did. He preferred baby. Their chats, at first, lasted hours, covering everything from former lovers to cracker barrel philosophy and political predictions.

Until it came time to talk her into a real date. He never got her to do it. Not that he wouldn't have stood her up anyway. Nobody wants a dork for real. She could only love him, if it were possible at all, for his mind. By never meeting her face to face, the online romance could continue; one real meeting, and he was sure she'd never want to chat with him again.

She was signalling him to break into online chat with her. He did. She had broken up with her last boyfriend six months earlier, but it seemed strange that he was always helping her with one thing or another, such as moving stuff. She was a legal transcriptionist, she claimed. A member of Mensa. Five feet seven, 130, curvy, and loves to please her man. How would she feel about pleasing a dork? He almost asked her that as a joke, but wisely restrained himself.

She loved to make jokes about soft and hard items, she being the former, and assuming him to be the latter. He only hoped that Viagra really worked; he'd never had occasion to get any or try it. With her, he probably never would.

But he quickly found an online site for ordering it. Viagra, from Pfizer. For your fizzer, yuk yuk. Twenty bucks a pill, good for a few hours only.

He was about to pay \$250 for a supply of it, when he suddenly cancelled out, because he believed it to not be strictly legal; an 'online physician' gave you a 'prescription' after you filled out an online health questionnaire, indicating your need for the drug. As a straight-arrow member of the law enforcement community, he couldn't have any part in anything shady, even a tad shady. What about the chance of blackmail during a crucial moment in his career, one filled with high drama and intense pressure? Couldn't chance it.

He told her he was a computer consultant; that sounded like a profession for down-home geniuses. Luckily she never questioned him too closely about it, professing ignorance of computers; he didn't have a good story made up yet.

She told him she loved the outdoors: backpacking, hiking, skiing, sailing, boating. That left him out, yuk yuk. He loved living under a duck pond and hunching over computer terminals. Not that it was all bad; that's how they met, yuk

yuk. Chances are she was as plug ugly and dorkish as he was. Ironically, if they could have met, they might have decided they were right for each other after all. Neither could chance it though. That's love and life.

In his dreams she was a shapely, beautiful, soft, curvy, well-endowed sex vixen who did everything the models in the porno studios did, without charging. Let it be.

At least she would talk to him without running or going to the authorities and filing charges, yuk yuk.

She wasn't really a genius. He figured that out quick. She barely had two years of college. Her idea of an intellectual experience was reading 'The Hours' by Michael Cunningham, about Virginia Woolf's suicide and her lovers. It was, actually, too intellectual for him, but he considered it just another romance novel like they sell at chain drugstores, and lowered his estimation of her intelligence. Meanwhile, her many professions of ignorance about computers swelled his ego, made him proud to be a real genius.

His online name was bigbillhuitres, the underlying allusions easily disguised or denied; she never asked. He told her to call him Bill. She called him baby.

She didn't know how much he was bored by chatting with her. But he was so lonely, he wished he were in love again, wished his heart were free of Amy, that K.P. — Gwynn — could push her out and take her place. It would then be a classic battle of a him and her, a May-November romance, leaving both of them unhurt and indeed quite renewed. She'd then go her way, and he'd go his — totally fulfilled, at last. He'd even be the one who left her: it was who left who that determined whether you enjoyed the experience, or never got over it — Amy had taught him that.

She suddenly had to go. Something about a call coming through on her other line. Funny, she never let him have her voice phone number. Not that he had asked. Oh well, he's got work to do anyway. Doesn't he always?

"Ciao, baby."

"Cya, baby."

She probably didn't really have a call coming through on her other line, yuk yuk. Probably made a statement that let too much of his dorkiness show through — no yuk. When she lied to him like that, she was probably making a moue, yuk yuk. Moue, pronounced like a cow's sound, is French for a grimace. He remembered some of his French.

Big Bill, this one's for you: moue. Yuk yuk.

He connected with the Viagra web site again and completed the order.

Chapter 3

It was on all the news media: military computer hacker arrested.

It was a male college student, one Joshua Cowper at the University of Washington, in Seattle. He protested his innocence. The government said it had caught him red-handed. Dork Dick to the rescue.

Branson, Missouri: the live entertainment capital of the world. Advertises all the time on cable channel TNN, the Nashville Network. Shania Twain is one of their products. Country music watered down to pop, to mainstream cool beats. Country clothes, jeans and blouse, but tight, on a curvy undercarriage. One that knows how to move it suggestively while pretending to be country-wholesome.

The wholesome set, that's what built Country. The trick is to keep them from turning off while cutting into their kids' more raunchy preferences. She can act like a harlot onstage as long as she goes to a down-home country church on Sundays. Dolly Parton once had it so hard. Not anymore.

Country always had two self-conflicting trends. One, the gospel-Christian-Bible-thumping trend. Two, the Ellie Mae-hillbilly-close-relative-voluptuous-sex thread. You could claim to be Country by navigating either thread, like a lifeline in a rough sea rescue. If you got caught going off the deep end either way, you could always blame it on drink; and, even if you went to jail, claim to find Jesus, be born again. So, you'd be recycled, and come back up Country.

What did Dolly Parton always say? She once saw a trashy girl when she was young, and knew that's just what she wanted to be when she grew up: trash. But good trash, yuk yuk. What a time those plastic surgeons must have had on her breast job, yuk yuk.

Joshua was going to rot in that jail, and find Jesus, but this time he wouldn't come back up Country: it was his first time. He stewed in the bitter juice of believing he was innocent, and in prison he was allowed access to a computer, and the Net. He used it, lavishly, protesting his case wherever he could. Dork Dick smelled that juice cooking, and came to believe there was something phony about his conviction, mainly from the thought that nothing else but true innocence would turn an intelligent young man like that Country. Like Clint Eastwood in *True Crime*, he started trying to figure out who was really guilty.

Not that there was nothing in it for him. He was not fond of getting people released from jail actually, but if he could put somebody in his place at the same time, and get publicity as somebody's savior, he'd go for it.

That reminded him of the most traumatic experience of his life. How long ago now? A year? He'll never forget the day. Never forget dead old Bluebeard. It was a regular day, overcast like always...

Up above the Lab, on the pond, Dork Dick's robo-ducks were busy doing their surveillance work. He had gotten a great deal on miniature black-and-white surveillance cameras, and mounted them in waterproof compartments in several of his robo-duck decoys, all radio-controlled, powered by thin waterproof power-control cables that went down into the pond bottom, and into the Lab. He had enough spare online disk space to store two days' worth of surveillance digitally, before having to back it onto digital tape and store it in a library. He didn't have enough money for tapes then, but he had already built the tape storage lockers, and they were empty and waiting for the day when.

His robo-ducks were just machinery. Among the real ducks, he had his favorites: Blackbeard, Redbeard, Bluebeard. He could tell them apart, no fool. They were so cute when they were eating. He fussed over them, kept an eye out for them, was their protector, almost their mother.

The intruder alarm went off, causing Dork Dick to stop his labwork and focus in on the farm above.

It was just a couple of teens, boys, trespassing. They were crouching at the edge of the pond, talking, giggling, skimming rocks. They had the Gen-X too-big clothes that marked their age; and the razor-cut hair, that made them look like rejects from a boot camp.

"Quack quack! No trespassing! This is private property! Leave the premises immediately or the authorities will be called!"

The boys froze, looked around. Then they noticed one of the ducks from the flock floating out in front of the others, facing them: a robo-duck. Big mistake, in hindsight.

They looked around frantically, suspiciously. Suddenly, the bigger one took out a hand gun from under his white t-shirt, and began blasting at the duck. On the fifth or sixth shot, he got it. The real ducks quacked frantically and took off flying. The other robo-ducks were now exposed, becoming truly sitting ducks. The boy began reloading.

Enough was enough. Dork Dick did call the authorities. By the time they arrived, the boys had fled, and they had picked off two more of his five remaining robo-ducks.

But that was not the tragedy. Bluebeard, Dork Dick's favorite pet duck, was shot to shit, dead as a duck. Dork Dick's magic shield was killed, and something snapped. He had failed to serve and protect.

The life spirit tore through the shell of the dead bird, and lay down to roost on Dork Dick's shoulder that day. Forever more, he kept Dork Dick company, and became his little voice, his conscience, his alter ego, his comedy partner: Duck Dick.

From then on, whenever Duck Dick talked to Dork Dick, only he could hear it. Like the TV show 'Touched By An Angel', Duck Dick was his guardian angel, his security blanket.

Not that he was a sob sister and couldn't accept the reality of death. He picked up the dead bloody bird with his bare hands, gave it to madre, and ate it with her after she had cooked it. It was like a communion, the Eucharist.

His madre handled the authorities, telling them it was all a mistake; she didn't want to press charges or have them chase anybody. Dork Dick had told her what to say, on the private intercom, just in time.

He had cut the two secret agents some slack. Fine job, penetrating his stronghold's defenses like that. Just like James Bond — Sean Connery — in 'Dr. No'. They fought the dragon, and the dragon didn't win this time. Fine job. Now go take the bikini girl and have a fine time. You are granted a license to kill, good for one day.

Blackbeard and Redbird never returned. Dork Dick understood. It was too hot in that LZ, no matter how great the chow.

Abrupt change, yuk yuk.

Let's go back to the year of his birth, and examine where Dork Dick came from, what made him tick.

Born in the Year 1953. That was the title Dork Dick was fond of for his autobiography. He had grown up in such an age of change, hadn't he? When he was still drinking from the teat, Eisenhower was President. Little Rickey was being born on TV at about the same time; they said the show out-pulled Eisenhower's inauguration in the TV ratings.

The 1950s were his big decade of learning basic things, like walking and talking and riding a bike. His whole world was two or three blocks square, if that big. He learned everything from television or school. When they conflicted, the former was preferred. Howdy Doody and Buffalo Bob. Disney's 'Alice in Wonderland'. All those TV westerns. He was born to be a dork.

Once a grownup had asked him if he had masturbated yet. He was totally nonplussed, had never heard the word. Thought he said Master Bates or something, yuk yuk. Years later, when he first did it almost by trial and error, and had a Big O, he remembered that grownup, and wanted to tell him, but couldn't remember which grownup it was. A neighbor back in Colorado. Five thousand Big Os later, when he found he was addicted to it, and was miserable without it, he wished they had put the pedophile bastard in jail, yuk yuk.

He couldn't understand why women didn't all know his problem and pester him day and night to cure him by giving him their curative orifices, then he learned that they didn't care about anything but themselves, and had a whole different agenda.

Worried about pregnancy, parents, social acceptance, getting a wedding ring on their finger first, yuk yuk. Unless you were Bond, James Bond. Then they volunteered it unflinchingly. But only if they got in the movie first, yuk yuk.

Who was that bikini girl played by? Andress. Ursula Andress. Should have been Arsula Undress, yuk yuk. Miss Honey Rider. What did this honey ride? Yuk Yuk. She had the most perfectly symmetrical face in Hollywood. Her ass was a little bony though, yuk yuk.

When the sixties came, he fell in love with Sean Connery as James Bond, which to him was the coolest thing on Earth since creation.

Don't you mean to say, 'who to him was the coolest person on Earth since creation'? Wait one... Scratch that. Pardon moi. You make objects out of people, yuk yuk.

He tried to look like Bond, walk like Bond, talk like Bond. He started smoking Parliaments, even though still in grade school, to be cool. He was actually afraid they'd hurt his health, and never inhaled, and was even afraid for his lips to touch tobacco juice, hence the Parliaments with the special recessed tip.

He sent for catalogs from the Johnson-Smith Company, wondrous publications featuring alluring display ads for cheap spy equipment and magic tricks, along with Halloween masks and gross jokes; and don't forget the how-to manuals from karate and judo experts, locksmiths and girl picker-upper pros.

He got in trouble in school with his dish-shaped eavesdropper amplifier, complete with headphones. His cool fake switchblade knives got lost or confiscated. His carbonite cannon got him in trouble with the neighbors.

Once he had snuck into a garbage dump at night, dressed in his homemade James Bond outfit: black clothes, shoulder strap, and Daisy BB air pistol. He had snuck around behind a bulldozer, which was busily stacking up garbage and moving it into the pit. He suddenly found himself bathed in spotlights, and the dozer creaked to a hasty halt. He had actually come close to being run over, but didn't realize it for years. He now realizes the horror of war, the trenches of World War I, the London air raids of World War II, better because of it. He had not been drafted into Vietnam because he was in college, and would have been a 4-F anyway.

Back to James Bond and the mechanical firebreathing dragon of Dr. No on Crab Key.

He wasn't staked out in front of a water outlet to drown to death. He wasn't beaten up and thrown in a cell with an electrified mesh in front of the escape hatch. He didn't have to crawl through hot steaming pipes burning his hands. Instead, a cop took him to the station, where he confiscated his gun, and passed him around the station for show. When interrogated, he played the cool hard-as-nails secret agent, and wouldn't talk. He wouldn't tell them his name, address, or even serial number. He "forgot where he lived and who he was".

The cop put him in his cop car and began driving him around, and when he got near his block, he sheepishly caved in and said that he "just remembered" where he lived now, etc. His name too.

Luckily, the cop just let him off in front and didn't come in and tell his madre. She wouldn't have understood. He sure missed that BB gun: it was her Christmas present for him, and they were too poor to afford another, not unless he saved all his allowance, which he couldn't do, not with all the other things he was always sending for. So he did without the gun.

But his how-to books: that was his life then. He dreamed through them of one day growing up and becoming a real James Bond, and saving the country, and getting the girls, and getting the President to call him up while he was making out with her in a raft, or under a parachute. He didn't know how he would tell his teachers and friends that he was, well, born to be superior to them all, and attain such a high calling in life. But he would be diplomatic. Not everybody could get all the poontang, yuk yuk. He felt sorry for the women he would use and jilt for better ones.

He was the coolest cat since James Bond, until he got to junior high and found that real girls thought he was ugly, and wouldn't talk to him. He was never invited to the many sock hops, roller skating rink dances, private parties, anything. He never got a single girlfriend. He tried to make like he was not interested in girls yet, even though that was all he thought about, other than Bond, James Bond. Meanwhile, he got a collection of nudist colony magazines, and his eyes popped out at what girls and women had.

Funny how they never showed them during their periods, yuk yuk. They must close the nudist colony down on those days, yuk yuk.

He really did end up, by high school, a true dork, absorbed in the math and science courses, hoping to get into college with a scholarship, and get girls there. By then James Bond was no longer so cool, and Connery was opting out of his options himself. He had only one dream about girls now, and that was to get a good job out of college, and marry a nice one that thought he'd give her a good living. That was literally the only way he'd ever get one in bed with him: to put a wedding ring on her hand first.

At forty-five, he was still waiting to do it. The only catch: the women his age were now too old for him, couldn't have children anymore. Not that they hadn't made a pretty strong statement by now that they didn't want him. He'd have to always hope he could catch a younger woman, since only they could give him some rugrats; he, who couldn't get any his own age or older.

Maybe a fat woman would settle for him, if he could develop a taste for the Rubinesque, yuk yuk. If he didn't let his prejudice show through and ruin it. If she wasn't neurotic about being fat. Didn't try the Oxygen diet, yuk yuk.

And now he regrets that time, that one time, when he was in his early twenties, and could have maybe got in bed with a college student who was in her late thirties, and was actually hard-up enough to make a pass at him: he had actually shown age prejudice, and jilted her. And he was still a virgin. And she was slim and trim and not bad looking. Go figure.

Now late thirties is young to him. Worse. A woman is in her peak for sexual desire about then. He couldn't handle such a woman. Unless Viagra was a true wonder drug, yuk yuk.

Why did Dan Quayle want his money back? He said it was the worst damned suppository he'd ever used, yuk yuk.

What is poor man's Viagra? Some duck tape and a clothespin, yuk yuk.

He'd seen those jokes on the Net too.

Maybe all the women now were too young or too old, forever more. Maybe he'd end up like Jesus and die celibate. The difference is, he never seemed to mind. Never made a pass. Never scored. Never cared. James Bond was out of

his league. Or he was out of his. He'd better get his mind out of the gutter and back to work; he worked for a living, didn't he?

Shouldn't you capitalize the word he when referring to Jesus? Oh me oh my. What's wrong with me today? Yuk Yuk.

Besides, Jesus was not a cowboy, not a spy, not a commando, not anything neat. Couldn't even probably use a computer. And he dressed in a gown like a faggot. What was going on in that *Jesus Christ Superstar* movie? Who directed that? A faggot? Yuk Yuk.

That was so long ago, all those young dreams and that hero-worshipping view of the world. He looked different then, so much younger, newer, slimmer. No, not slimmer. He was skinny as a beanpole now. It was his hips. They were wider now. He weighed a few pounds more, and it had gone to his hips. His face was heavier, showing his age, especially with the creases and bigger pores. He hated gray cheek hairs which his razor had missed cropping off completely. He had quite a few gray hairs, more every time he looked in the mirror or picked loose ones off his clothes.

He had a realistic view of life now. Sean Connery was just a handsome actor who played a dick in the movies. Even he never actually got all that poontang. He was actually steadily married all that time, and probably glad to be getting it regular at that. Real dicks have an unglamorous, unsexy life. Pretty undangerous too. Imagine lying half-naked in bed with a Bond girl for three days straight, while the director says, "take fifty-four", "take fifty-five", and so on. All for ten seconds of hormone-arousing film footage, aided by that sexy James Bond music. How old did he have to get to figure that out? Yuk yuk. Definitely unfun.

'Un' is the word that transforms James Bond's world to Dork Dick's. He was un-Bond, un-James Bond. Dick — Dork Dick. Duck Dick. Impotent. Come to think of it, Sean Connery had aged at jet speed at the end of the sixties, and had come a long ways down from his first Bond film in 1963.

Who are you kidding? He can still get any woman he wants, yuk yuk.

Even he couldn't play Bond now. Nobody could. There was only one Bond, and that was Connery; and only for a brief few glorious years. Male dicks themselves were doomed to live in the past. He sure did.

He still had one legacy from his preteen days as a young, starry-eyed Bond wanna-be: an old locksmithing machine, which he had received after paying for a correspondence course that had put ads in comic books. He took the course, learned how to make keys from codes, make pass keys and master keys, and some other worthwhile skills. He had worn out and broken the set of lock picks that they sent him. But he still had that locksmithing machine, a tad rusty but workable. He still used it, creating a master key system for his Lab, and making all his own keys.

Being a real James Bond is just a gruntwork job. The hero that dashes around, gets the most beautiful girls in the world in their prime, and doesn't make anybody jealous — that's fiction, yuk yuk. Why didn't he understand that when he was ten? Then his whole life could have come out different. Maybe he could have taken up sports. Not football: he was too puny. Tennis maybe. Golf, like Tiger Woods. James Bond played both. But that's another story.

He was a dork with or without Bond; the latter was just a convenient excuse. All those comic books he had read, all those TV westerns. And then Star Trek: that was the dork maker of the century. That really did it. You can't reconcile James Bond with Spock unless you're a true blue one hundred percent homogenized, pasteurized, certified dork. He still has the *Neuromancer* book with William Gibson in the picture, holding Star Trek crap, a phaser in his hand, a model U.S.S. Enterprise on his desk.

He's a product of mass merchandising, mass entertainment. With only half a life left, can he break out of the mold and be true to himself? How? He has no true self anymore. He is doomed to be a dork for life. If he wasn't impotent he'd masturbate the tension away; thanks to his age, he couldn't even do that now. Maybe Jesus had been born impotent; that would explain mucho.

Back to his work. That poor kid in prison. Framed, he says. Joshua Cowper. And went Country. Parton, Dolly Parton. With the Minnie Mouse voice. Twain, Shania Twain. Has a real Tae-Bo physique, sure enough. Slim, shapely, curvy, and tight. Got passed over for a Record of the Year Grammy by hip-hop. Too young herself to be a Bond fan probably. Joshua maybe had a Bond fixation. No, he was too young too. Look in the mirror, yuk yuk.

Those young punks by the pond. They were hip-hoppers! That's the reason he let them go this time. Hip-hop is their Bond. Their generation doesn't have the sheer number that his, the Baby Boomer generation, did. They have hip-hop instead. Their secret weapon. Bang! It knocked Country out with one punch in the first round. Bang! It knocked out Dork Dick's ducks just as easily. Cogito ergo sum, yuk yuk. Joshua was framed by hip-hoppers somehow. That was a lead to follow, yuk yuk.

Why would a hip-hopper frame a college student on hacking military computers? Because he hacked them himself and didn't want to go to jail, naturally. Or didn't want his parents to kick him out of the house maybe. Maybe he was still in high school.

Chapter 4

"I never thought about winning. I only kept thinking about pumping with my left leg..."

Dork Dick's mother, Thelma, was up in her kitchen daydreaming about the past again. A small black and white TV was tuned to some soap opera, while she stirred Sugar Twin into her double-size mug filled with Folger's instant. Her fingers were gnarled with arthritis, disfigured with age spots and wrinkles; they hurt like hell, and she constantly let you know it. She didn't care if people were repelled at her hospital-talk, as she called it: at her age, she deserved to be able to give you hell, let you know she had one foot out of the grave. One foot and the leg with it.

Pumping with my left leg. That quote was printed in big letters in the local paper once, when they did an article on her after a win. Her hands used to grip that sled unflinchingly without a hint of pain. Somebody would hand her a hot cup of coffee as she went past the crowd. Maxwell House probably. That was popular then. She preferred Taster's Choice when she could spare the money, but Folger's was all right. She had lived on chicory with or without a dash of real coffee when times were rougher.

As a thirtysomething divorced woman in the 1960s, she had believed the women's libber promises of the time and tried to make a career of competitive dog sled racing. Since it was a relatively new sport, the first All-Alaska Sweepstakes being held in 1908, she welcomed her chance to make a mark in the name of women as a musher.

Her little boy was not an outdoorsy type, and was satisfied to stay home and watch television and read comics in his room. He had been brainwashed to male supremacist thinking by the age of seven. Brainwashed past undoing. It wasn't his fault. Nowadays they prevent that from happening. Not that they don't pick it up in their teens anyway.

At one time she had owned 14 competitive racing dogs at the same time, plus half a dozen retired dogs who just ate dog chow and yapped. Her dogs just loved racing, and she loved to do it with them. Twenty-five legs trying to move over an eight-mile course faster than anybody else (the twenty-sixth leg was her left leg, which she used for pushing).

Alaskan huskies or Alaskan malamutes all. The dogs were just doing what they were bred to do, and, for that matter, so was she. Not that those breeds would win any races today. While she had seen or heard about every type of sled dog being used in races — Siberian huskies, Eskimo dogs, Greenlands, Samoyeds, Hokkaidokens, Norrbottensprets, even Irish Setters, Dalmations, Golden Retrievers — the winners today are usually Siberian huskies crossed with Greyhounds, or mixed teams of huskies and hybrids.

Funny thing about Alaskan huskies. They weren't registered, although there were clear breeding lines. Siberian huskies and Alaskan malamutes were registered, and thus could be show dogs.

Where do the huskies get their love of pulling sleds at running speed? Being bred originally from wolf stock, they are just letting their pack hunting instincts out.

Women, like dogs, were bred over the millennia. Bred to be the dogs of the human race. They were the ones that had the greatest endurance, the best immune systems, the longest lifespans. The highest power-to-weight ratio. Even when her son grew up, she could beat him at anything physical, because she was as big or bigger than him. Only men bigger than her could get the better of her.

Just like dogs, women's pack hunting instincts had been perverted, tamed by men to bow to their will. But, unlike dogs, women could unlearn this breeding, and take their rightful place.

"Hike!" (start moving)

Her racing team could average 20-22 mph throughout a course. That's three-minute miles, faster than Roger Bannister.

"Gee!" (turn right)

"Haw!" (turn left)

You're pushing the whole time, working your heart out, so drained of energy that you can barely speak.

Luckily, you hardly have to say a word to well-trained dogs, except at one key point in every race: the free zone, or last leg of the race, where there's no restrictions on passing.

"Go Home!"

You shout "Go Home!" and your dogs just about shift into a new gear, stepping it up to the finish line, knowing they'll be getting dog cookies at the end.

Once she was leading the race, and when she was about to shout "Go Home," the lead dog just stopped and froze, went on a sit-down strike; the race was over for her. That's the thing with racing dogs: there are good ones, and mediocre ones. You never know for sure until the heat is on and it's too late. That's why breeding and training is so all-important.

She would spend four or five days a week training her dogs, every week from mid-October on, after the temperature fell to 40-50 degrees Fahrenheit. She would hook the dogs into larger strings than in real races, sometimes ten or more dogs, and race them for 100-200 miles, on top of sprint runs. Every musher had their own secret system for training, nutrition, dog and equipment selection, even the type of booties they put on their little feet.

Her employers never understood. She was a frequent visitor to the unemployment and welfare offices. Nosy neighbors called her the Dog Woman.

She had to spend a lot of money on dog chow. They required a special high-protein high-fat diet, which she found was best provided by human-grade chicken, ground-up. She used to tell people she was chicken poor, and not get the joke. The damn dogs went 40-60 pounds each. After retirement, she tried to break them on dry dog chow, but usually they were addicted to chicken for life. Not running anymore, they would grow fat, balloon up, and eventually keel over standing with a heart attack. Mama Thelma's Chicken Dinner Restaurant: guaranteed satisfaction from head to tail to hell.

From head to tail, from the lead dog to the wheel dogs, every dog must pull his own weight, although the wheel dogs (closest to the sled) pull more than the others. They are athletes, and burn every ounce of chicken they get.

But the most special dog of all is the lead dog, because he steers the team and regulates speed. And they were very hard to come by. They had to learn to take voice commands, as well as know to bypass distractions and detours, no matter how interesting. She would use a kissing sound for speed-up, "on-by" to tell it to skip a fork in the trail, "gee/haw" for turn right/left, "easy" for slow down. A lead dog must be trained individually, on foot, then on cross-country skis, until it is perfect. Only then should it be hitched to a team. In compensation, the other dogs, even if inexperienced, will be easily "corrected" by the lead dog itself.

She only had two good lead dogs in her entire career: Jock (a male), and Billie (a female). She named the latter for the gender-bending tennis star, who served that man-dog his lunch once. She named the former for the dog's big penis. Not that she ever told anybody. After her bad marriage had ended, she swore to never touch a man's penis again.

Dog penises were a kind of mental compensation: seeing their balls swinging back and forth, getting erections, the red pencils coming out of the sheaths. That was as close to a damned penis she ever wanted to come.

Men were dogs. Her son was a puppy, a dog in the making. She tried to steer him away from becoming a dog, just as she steered her dogs to be all the dogs they could be. As far as she was concerned, she hoped he'd never bring a woman home to mama. If he tried it, he'd have to move out immediately. She didn't want any sexual hanky-panky going on in her house; none of that red pencil business on her property.

Her son was a good boy. Led a nice, quiet celibate life. Sometimes she wondered if he were one of those gays. She tried to picture what gays did with each other, but never could imagine it. And was glad.

That time, when he was a teenager, and she had caught him in the living room, of all places, his red pencil exposed, in his hand, lovingly fondling it. They never spoke about it again. But she never caught him again. That was in the late sixties.

Back in the early sixties she had felt on top of her game. She started out with a sled dog club in Denver in 1962, when the Denver Broncos were a joke of a football team with striped socks, and her little house had once been a quonset hut. Yes, a quonset hut. She loved to watch Carl Akers and Gene Amole on the Denver TV news. They painted Denver as a friendly, laid-back metropolis, not a cow town that served as a transit point for skiers, which it really was. The hype about its mild climate was true, at least. City politics was cheesy, and the cops always in somebody's pocket. But the judges were fairly lenient, as long as they laundered the cops first.

Her husband had several run-ins with the Denver cops, and she was always the one there to bail him out, visit him in the county lockup, find the money to pay the fines. He told her they made him strip and spread his butt cheeks for examination before they would admit him to the county lockup or give him his jail clothes. She wondered what kind of cop would admit to having that job.

But her husband left her in the 1950s. In the 1960s she was a free, independent, Virginia Slims kind of woman — would have been, if she hadn't been burdened with a child, and had the stigma of being divorced to live with. Men she dated would run as soon as they found out they'd have to raise another man's brood. She knew what it was like to be discriminated against. She made out with some of her dates, in the car seat in front of her house, where her son wouldn't see, but she never had sex with a man again.

Around 1967, she moved them to Washington State to be closer to the action in Canada. The best sled dog races are in Alaska, but she never got there, couldn't afford it, all the dogs required and the cost of transportation. Unlike auto, or even bike racing, there were no commercial sponsors with big pockets; even entering one race was forever beyond her modest means. But that was back before sponsors — dog food, winter clothing, sleds — did appear, and simultaneously made it even more expensive.

Just a few years ago, in 1996, the International Rocky Mountain Stage Stop Sled Dog Race, with a purse of over \$100,000, was founded in Wyoming. Oh, to be young again. You have to win that or some other qualifying race now to even enter Iditarod.

The regret of her life was never having participated in the 1150-mile Iditarod, from Anchorage to Nome, held every March since 1973, thanks to sponsor Joe Paige. It was a 12 mph race, with 16-dog teams; a grueling endurance test, sleep deprivation adding a new dimension to those used to shorter races. Not that there isn't a mandatory rest day: one.

The frozen, windy summit of Rainy Pass. It's anything but rainy. The big big world out there makes you feel so very, very small. Parts of the trail seem more like valleys on the moon, the dry frigid snow like sterile white moon dust.

The legendary and often devastating winds along the Yukon River. The sudden savage storms along the Bering Strait leg. The luck of the weather is often decisive. Broken sleds can be replaced, but cost you time; injured dogs cannot — you must continue with what you have left.

A woman had not only won it more than once, they ruled the 1980s. Susan Butcher won three times in a row, 1986-8, and again in 1990. The first race in 1973 was won in 20 days. The fastest time now was nine days, two hours, 42 minutes, and 19 seconds, by Doug Swingley of Montana. Once the second place was only one second behind the winner. The stragglers might take thirteen, fourteen, fifteen days to finish, but still come through with pride. The slowest finisher ever took over 32 days and 15 hours.

Thelma may have problems with her short term memory now, but her long term memory was as good as ever. When she couldn't remember the Iditarod stats any more, she'd look into doctor-assisted suicide, join her dogs in Valhalla.

Iditarod: the race ever-too distant to compete in. The very name Iditarod comes from the Eskimo word meaning distant, although they meant the length of the race itself. The same distance as Miami to New York, the terrain far more rugged. It might be minus 20 degrees Fahrenheit at high noon on a clear calm sunny day — on the good part of the trail; other parts get to minus 40 or lower; thirty degrees lower after counting wind chill.

The Wyoming race was a stage race, allowing dogs more rest, just like the 1925 "Great Race of Mercy to Nome" on which the Iditarod is based, a one-time medical emergency stage run for diphtheria antitoxin that made the Anchorage-Nome route famous. They had 20 drivers and more than 100 dogs for that 670-mile run, and it was only from Nenana to Nome, not Anchorage to Nome, and it only took five and a half days. They got the 20-lb. package of serum from Anchorage to Nenana in a train. The reason dogs were needed was that the train didn't go beyond Anchorage, and airplanes couldn't handle the cold back then.

By 1973, the gripe was not airplanes but snowmobiles. The race was needed to keep mushing from becoming a lost art.

The American Humane Society and animal rights activists called the Iditarod cruel and inhumane to the dogs. Not that Iditarod didn't have twenty-five checkpoints now, some with hot water, veterinarians, and other amenities, many at the urging of the AHS, which has been one of the race's biggest critics. (She was delighted when David Willis, the main AHS critic, was indicted for embezzling money from his own organization in 1998 — served him right.)

Dogs die in the race. That's life, the survival of the fittest. Dogs that really don't want to mush just sit down and refuse to move. Most die from overenthusiasm, die happy, die doing their thing, giving meaning to their lives.

Some checkpoints are populated year-round. Some, like checkpoint Rohn, have population zero: everybody is transient. The town of Iditarod itself is a ghost town. A designer ghost town.

In years to come, Iditarod will grow to as big a media event as any professional sports world championship. Already there are free gourmet dinners, cash, trophies, and gold nuggets showered on the lead sled at various checkpoints by the locals. The Iditarod edition of Monopoly caused prize money to jump noticeably, to the point that every finisher gets some money, a thousand bucks at least.

But the Iditarod was the Grand Prix of mushing. She was never anything but a small-time freelancer, limited to the continental races she could afford to travel to.

Her favorite personal race was Canmor, in Calgary, Alberta, where the prize money now goes to \$25,000 — much less in her day. She spent far more money than she ever made, even from selling prize dogs. It turned out to be an expensive hobby instead of a real career.

In the 1970s, she had unusually severe female problems, going into partial menopause too early and not going into full menopause until way too late. Her chin grew a few thick, manly hairs, which she sometimes forgot to shave. One doctor once said her female problems were brought on by not having had sex for so long. She told that doctor off. He was like all men, a dog, his mind always on one thing.

She discovered the writings of radical feminist activist Mary Daly, but did not have, at the time, the time nor mental maturity to thoroughly digest them. Still, the overall message sunk in, namely, that males had an agenda of hate against females.

Daly, however, had a steady job, in a college, even if she were briefly fired once for her radicalism. Thelma — she was struggling in a still male-dominated world.

She tried not to think about the assortment of other jobs she was forced to take to keep a roof over their heads and food on the table. Now at her age she could get so many things for free, and she took advantage of all she could. The world owed it to her now.

She worked in companies where she did twice the work of a man, and got paid one-third of what they did. Men are selfish, self-centered, macho sluts. Women's lib made some headway in thirty years, but the pay differential is still substantial. And not just for jobs involving physical work. They claim to be more able to give commands than women, to run things.

Dog driving is not merely riding on the back of the sled issuing commands to steer the dogs. It is work. You must push the sled, more as the dogs get tired. Sometimes you must get off completely and run alongside. It is easy to pull muscles, fall off the sled and have to pull yourself back on the runners with one hand, run yourself ragged chasing your team after you fall off, run into trees (not like Sonny Bono — he was on skis, without dogs), and so on.

Above all, a musher must push the sled — with one foot. The key is endurance and flexibility over muscle bulk, luckily for women. Running, biking, cross country skiing and downhill skiing are all good ways to build strength. She did them all at various times. Nobody could keep her down out on the trail. Nobody could pay her less for the same work. When she won, she won the same prize money men did.

No, Darryl, no! We're both married to others now! No! No! Yes! Yesss!! (organ music)

She wished she could kill that Darryl. He had no respect for the sacredness of the marriage vows, of the damage even one infidelity can do to his wife's self-image. That he was black and she was white had nothing to do with it; his wife that is — he was in bed now with a woman who could have been either black or white — with this TV she couldn't tell.

She turned the TV off. It took more than one try, the knobs being so damned small and her hands so crippled up. Everything they make now has too many knobs and dials and buttons. She can't even read most of them. Or turn them. The young people are trying to crowd their elders out even if they aren't conscious of it.

In a sled dog race, she could push all the buttons, read all the signs and signals. You must remember that at all times you are the alpha dog. If you are tired, hesitant, uncertain, your team will pick this up and become confused and unresponsive. Your team doesn't care if you're male or female, just alert and in charge.

People always would care. If not in the workplace, then in relationships. She wished she could punch that big Darryl out. He looked like a boxer, like Muhammad Ali. Pretty face. Strong and sleek like those people can be. When she was a child her parents wouldn't even let her speak to them, once punished her for playing with one of their kids. That was over fifty years ago. My how short life is. Yet how many things changed suddenly, too many to remember. After fifty years of changes, she felt like she had lived two lives. Three.

From head to tail to hell...

That time on the trail, along the Continental Divide in Colorado. The sled went over the narrow path cut in the side of a steep mountain, and hung there, the dogs pulling, slipping back, towards the gorge. She kept her balance, got out, slipped, held on, pulled herself up, got on her feet, and led the team on furiously until the sled was righted again. Not strength but willpower and intelligence, that's what was expected of the alpha dog. The other dogs had the strength. She guided them in the best use of it, for the maximum benefit of all.

If the ledge had been a modern computerized TV or VCR, and she had to push the right button to save them, she would have been soon down at the bottom of that gorge, with a broken neck. One day the young will systematically destroy the old by making essential devices impossible for them to use. The automobile. The cook stove. The front door lock. Maybe even the toilet, chuckle.

Marriages are a two-dog rat race. The man always wants to be the alpha dog. Many women are content with that, but many aren't. She wasn't.

She wasn't jealous of her husband, even though she knew he fooled around, had an illegitimate son in WWII, somewhere in France. She just couldn't get along with him at home. He rocked the sled, was untrainable. She was stronger than he was, inside, in the basic gut will to survive. He was dead because he had smoked and drank himself to death. She did neither. Coffee was her only poison, and it was a very kind poison, if it was a poison at all.

Not that she hadn't been jealous of the superior strength of a man. They could handle larger dog teams better than she. She would change-up from six to eight dog races depending on her mood she told people, but actually the eight-dog teams taxed her. Most people stuck with one or the other, but not she; she never stopped trying to best the men. The International Dog Sled Racing Association grew more powerful every year, imposed more rules and regulations and restrictions. Women's lib was mainly a failure. Men still ran the IDSR, and too much else.

Men never ran her family. Not since the divorce. Their tiny family was a classic case of what they called dysfunctional. If they hadn't had some luck in real estate, they'd really be up Shit Creek by now, after her son failed at the computer business and went belly-up bankrupt; he tried to keep every real asset in her name rather than his, for fear of lurking creditors or income tax agents. He had a will drawn up leaving him the house upon the event of her death. She knew he needed it. Until she died, however, she'd keep tight control of the reins. Her boy, despite all she could do, was not quite lead dog material yet.

In the 1980s, she got a hysterectomy, and caught cancer of the uterus, which was fortunately cured. Time flew now, she ruminated on the writings of Mary Daly, and the decade seemed to be over before she had gotten used to the 8s in it. Her main gripe was their taking of Lawrence Welk off the major networks, the advertisers pulling the plug after they decided the audience was "too old." When it found new life on public TV stations in the late '80s, she watched religiously, even though she never supported them with a nickel. The music of the younger generations was just noise to her.

In the 1990s, she finally felt old age catch up with her. Her life was over the day she caught severe arthritis, and needed a cane to even walk. She was dying day by day, day by day. Her son would be lost without her, but she would live on as long as she could, for him. And every day the TV taunts her with promises that they're going to have a cure for arthritis one day soon.

His father was a sex fiend. She was glad when he died. He never showed his face around her after the divorce. Never paid his child support either. He got away with it then, before they had strict laws with teeth. He was such a horny dog he even tried to make her stand on her head to do it.

She didn't ever want to touch a man again. They're all horndogs. Only one thing on their minds. She was sure now that that quote was taken out of context and displayed in big letters to titillate the dirty minds of the horndogs and nothing else. She had legs back then.

Her dogs were the best friends she ever had. The best. They all loved her. She had a way with animals. They were her real husbands.

Her last dog had died five years ago. Now all she had in the way of pets was the damned ducks on her son's damned pond. He fed them, and told her not to. That didn't stop her.

She had seen that dog just last Sunday. It was a full moon, and he was scratching at her back door, begging for his chicken. When she was too frightened to open the door for a ghost dog, he went to the pond, walked on water, nabbed a dozing duck, and chomped that up instead.

Their penises were invisible. Maybe as compensation, their necks and heads looked like floating penises. Her son lived under a lake of floating penises. Made her chuckle sometimes. His own idea too. But he's a genius in computers. She hoped he could finally make a real living at it despite that Bill Gates whats-his-name. So many divorced women have it bad financially, don't have good children who know their duty like he does. He told her he'd never let her go to a home.

She imagined that the ghost dog chomping a dozing duck who looked like a floating penis was a good facsimile of what gays did with each other. If penis was to them what chicken was to her dogs, she decided she couldn't blame them, if they were really born that way and it wasn't their choice.

He was never told he was now a dick, a P.I. He tried to be a secret agent even from his own madre; thought that would protect them both better. As if he could hide anything from her.

When she heard the shooting, she peeked out of the kitchen window, and saw the two hoodlums firing at the defenseless ducks in their pond. They looked like Mexicans, wetbacks probably. Looked like Lou Diamond Something, although she didn't remember the name, only the look. Their hair was presentably short, but the additional shaving around the head, like a bowl cut for the Three Stooges, showed arrogance and disrespect for authority. Their baggy clothes, too big for them, also did so. At least they didn't wear their underwear on the outside.

She wanted the cops to catch those hoodlums and throw them in jail. Then her son called and told her to let them go. No reason was given, he just asked her to do him a favor. She did. She would make him remember it later, get him to do her one.

If she ever saw those hoodlums again, however, she'd call the cops again, and not tell her son first. The way they killed those defenseless ducks in cold blood, she almost wished the cops would put them in the hospital, not just the jail.

The hospital. The last time she had been there, they had removed a golfball-sized cyst from the back of her neck. It had grown bigger year after year until she could hardly turn her head, and finally sought help. They said her hair and skin were naturally greasy, and the grease got into pores in the skin and caused a reaction, an infection. She wondered if chicken grease had anything to do with it, but didn't ask. As the years went by, she grew more and more fond of chicken, and hardly touched any other varieties of meat.

The damned recipe she was using today asked her to "chiffonade" some lettuce. That means cut it up into ribbons like a French chef on a cutting board, risking his fingers but never making a mistake. With her arthritis yet. She added some chicken, potatoes, veggies, thyme, paprika, celery, onion, into the pie shell she had made from flour and eggs and water, and rolled out with a rolling pin. Chicken pot pie for dinner tonight.

Her son gave her that French cooking book, said he wanted her to learn something new. She did. She learned she was too old to learn something new. A retired sled dog wanted to be fed, not do the cooking.

One thing she was sure now. She needed gristle. For her arthritis. Chicken gristle was the best. She would sometimes cook an entire chicken, raid it for the gristle, gnaw it off the bones, then serve the rest of the chicken to the dogs. Now, with no more dogs, she just put the meat down the garbage disposal.

Once she was going out to feed her dogs at night when the winter moon was full.

"I love you all more than the moon, the stars, the whole damn universe!" she shouted to them.

"We love you more than anything too!" they replied. "Except our damn chicken!"

She understood that. That was the last time she felt on top of the world. It was all downhill after that. One day she would get Alzheimer's, lose even these precious memories...

Chapter 5

Free Joshua Cowper. The d00d didn't d0 it. Spam all the media with his story now and break down the walls of the Bastille. Make your stand or end up in fedland.

The University of Washington's computers proved easy to hack, yuk yuk. The key is to get passwords to the accounts of your marks. There are three ways to do this: guess, use a software-aided search attack, or coax them out of the marks themselves and/or their contacts and/or property. Some smart alecks at the U of W had set up web sites like the above, supporting Cowper's cause; ignore those.

The television monitors were tuned to various channels, but one was of interest now, so Dork Dick turned its volume control up.

Does this man look like a criminal? The government says yes. They want to send him to jail for 99 years. The young man himself, Joshua Cowper, says he is innocent, that he was framed. More tonight on America Unplugged.

Hackers euphemistically call the non-software attacks on a password 'Social Engineering'. It is age-old dick work, no different than trying to get the combination to a safe.

I admit I've got a personal computer. Everybody has to have one now to get admitted to grad school. But I'm no hacker. I couldn't hack my way out of a do-loop.

Kevin Mitnick's career showed that even computer security experts can be victimized. He once gained entry into the computer system of nationally-known computer security expert Tsutomu Shimomura, yuk yuk. Even the Web site of the U.S. Department of Justice has been hacked, and the CIA's site was attacked; they won't admit if it was successful, yuk yuk.

Look at me. I was a good kid. I don't have a criminal record. I was on a partial scholarship. Then one day the government came and took my life away, and I don't know why. Is this the land of the free where there's equal justice for all?

A picture on one of his monitors piqued his interest. He clicked the volume up.

General Clark says that the decision to televise the three captured soldiers, one of whom was badly beaten, was ill-advised. They were taken on the Macedonian side of the border, part of a 350-man force known as Able Sentry, that was supervising the area. U.S. soldiers have wandered across the Yugoslavian side of the border before, officials say, but they believe these soldiers were abducted.

He muted that channel's volume.

There is no security. There is only security for a time, at a price, yuk yuk.

The government says you have the expertise to crack any military security system in America. They said that when they seized your computer it contained gigabytes of highly encrypted data, that they still cannot crack even with their most advanced computer networks. A list of secret military computer phone numbers and passwords was recovered from your disk, they allege. They say you won't give them any help decrypting the data, supply a key. Can you explain that?

Dan Farmer, author of the Satan program that checks web sites for security weaknesses, performed a test, in 1997, on 660 bank sites. Should have been 666, yuk yuk. He found that 70 percent of them were lacking in security. Should have been 66.6 percent, yuk yuk. The more complex the site, the more problems he said, yuk yuk. It's the popular ones that are the most complex, he said.

I can't explain anything. I was framed. What more can I say? That military stuff is all Greek to me, man. I'm like a fish caught on a hook.

Social Engineering: a true computer criminal can't get along without it. Nor, unfortunately, can a computer dick. Just because a computer system is attached to a network, doesn't mean it can always be broken into by programs.

After all the things I've been through, I just wish I could go back to school, get my degree, and get a job. I guess I'll never do that now. I don't have any key. If I did I'd be glad to give it to them. Maybe then they'd let me go. They won't even charge me, man. They are holding me without charges and without the right to face my accusers, have a jury trial. I want to cry.

Yes, theoretically, there is a magic code sequence to break into any computer: the password. But the combinatorial possibilities of possible passwords are so huge that one would need millions, billions of years to try them all randomly in hopes of guessing the right one. The lifetime of the universe itself, yuk yuk.

Smart password-guessing software is driven by a database of passwords that others have been known to use, on the theory that people tend to use similar passwords, itself based on the theory that the passwords are based on popular names, places, dates, to make them easier to remember, or just easier to think up in the first place if they're lazy, which most people are.

Why were there airline reservations in your name to Belgrade?

It is much faster to try to get direct access of the brain of the owner of the password, and psych the mark out of it.

That must be a mistake. Or maybe it's a frame. Why would I want to go to Serbia? I'm not Serbian.

It would be easy to set up airline reservations in anybody's name, that's for sure. If he were a spy why put reservations in his own name? Score one for Cowper, yuk yuk.

Hacking a computer usually boils down to hacking accounts on the computer. The classic case is a computing system at a university. Let's say you want to get into your professor's account, and change your grade, steal the answers to the final exam, etc.

The first good thing to have is the ability to disguise your voice. Failing that, a number of electronic voice disguisers on the market do an even better job anyway.

Why won't your roommate at school confirm your story that you were in your room studying for three days straight, just at the time that airline records have a person with your name making a trip to Moscow and back?

Moscow? Oh yes, Serbians and Russians are blood-brothers, Eastern Orthodox Christians, slavish blood, and all that.

Call the computer system administrator up and, disguising your voice, pretend you're the mark him/herself. Tell them you forgot your password. Surprisingly often, the nice system administrator will give it to you or, at least, let you set up a new one. Be prepared with some background information on your mark to check your identity, yuk yuk. They usually ask your Social Security number, your phone number, university i.d. number, and, too often to neglect, your mother's maiden name. You can get all that information usually right on the Net, if you know how to use it, yuk yuk.

I've never been outside the United States in my life. Unless you count that afternoon car ride to Vancouver, a few years back. We ate at a French restaurant and I saw the zoo for the first time. Honest, my parents were with me.

If the system administrator is a male, it usually leverages your chances if you can fake being a sexy female. Even if your mark is a male, you can pretend you're his wife, his fiance, his sexy sister, whatever. All computer professionals tend to be dorks and geeks, and are social losers with empty sex lives eager to talk to women, score points with them, anything.

Why did your Web browser contain numerous bookmarks to web sites having to do with hacking, pornography, drugs, luxury living, foreign travel, and Serbian nationalism?

If you think the system administrator knows the mark personally, you will have to learn to sound like them, imitate their accent, their lisp, the way they use contractions. Do they say "like" a lot? Chuckle or laugh a lot? If you do the latter, at least make it hard to duplicate, like he does, yuk yuk.

Yuk yuk. You have to breathe in, not out. Use your nasal cavities and develop just the right resonances. Take Curly's "nyuk nyuk", edit out the fat guy, overwrite a skinny dork, append a nerd factor, modulate with sexual starvation and repression, and you're still only half there, yuk yuk. Put in the precious mommy-dependence, the Colorado and Washington accents, and don't forget the James Bond wannabe attempt, yuk yuk.

I don't know. I guess I view as much or as little porno as the next guy. I didn't mean anything by it, honest. As to the Serbian sites, man, I don't have any knowledge of that. I disavow knowledge of that.

Like in *Mission Impossible*, yuk yuk. He's not in the government. Only they use that kind of talk, yuk yuk.

The best way to observe the mark's speech pattern is to call them posing as a telemarketer or telephone sweepstakes representative. Even if they just tell you they can't talk to you, you can learn a quite a bit from the way they speak, and quite fast too. If they actually want to speak to you, you can use that opportunity to milk them for information. Tell them they won something and you need their address and social security number and other basic info. before you can send it to them.

You know that Serbian leaders, eager to retaliate against America for its support of Kosovo separatists, would pay high prices for American military secrets?

Of course, abusing somebody's SSN is illegal. Since you're doing it for the purposes of catching criminals, you know it's ethical, yuk yuk. Just don't let yourself be traced and caught, then you won't have to explain why, yuk yuk. Nobody can catch a good criminal without bending or breaking a few laws to do it, yuk yuk.

No, I don't know. Didn't, until you told me. I'm not a traitor. I love America. I'm not Russian, Yugoslavian, Serbian, or anything like that. What would I be able to do even if I wanted to? I'm not a hacker. I'm just a music major.

If voicing the mark directly won't work, the next best way is to use direct snail mail. Indeed, marks often don't trust telemarketers, but will open up to written questionnaires as if they were from the IRS, yuk yuk. To forge a sweepstakes questionnaire, just get some samples from your own mail, or somebody's garbage. Then use your own computer and laser printer to produce one, along with mailing envelopes that look professional.

I just want to graduate, and party hearty. I like girls, yes. Okay, I masturbate to porno. Does that turn you on to know it? I wish I could meet more loose women. What single young man doesn't? I mean, unless he's gay. But I'm not a spy or a traitor.

Sometimes you can simply use a real sweepstakes questionnaire package, and change the envelope to one with your own return address.

Both your parents are strong anti-Saddam Hussein activists, are they not? The Kosovo separatists are Muslim, like the Iraqis. Wouldn't you think you were hurting Islam, and indirectly, Islamic leaders like Saddam Hussein, by helping the enemies of the Kosovo separatists?

The only catch is that you have to either have a valid return address — usually a P.O. Box rented under a fake I.D., which is another subject — or you have to cruise the mark's house and hope you can snatch the mail out of his mailbox before the mailman gets it. If you can be sure of snatching the mail, you can just send the mark's name and address to legitimate sweepstakes firms, causing them to pummel him with the questionnaires.

*You are putting words in my mouth, man. And my parents. We put America first. You're digging for dirt that just isn't there. *bleep* Man. Bummer.*

Talk about putting words into one's mouth, like the blasted IRS, when he went bankrupt, went into depression, and forgot to file his blasted IRS returns on time. They love to kick a man hardest when he is down. He figured they should owe him money, but since he couldn't afford an accountant any more to itemize all his deductions, his best attempts, when he finally got over his depression enough to try, showed him owing a couple of thousand dollars. The IRS considered him a criminal that is guilty until proven innocent, and socked him for three thousand dollars more in penalties and fines, plus stiff interest. He couldn't pay anything for a long time, and threw all their letters away unopened because they depressed him. When the time came that he could pay they claimed he now owed them ten thousand bucks! And all along, he knew they owed him!

That's why he moved back in with his mother, helped her improve her property and sell it, and made sure that everything was in her name not his. For years he didn't file or pay taxes at all; he at least figured out that filing a return is an irrevocable act that is treated like a plea of guilty to something with an explanation, and the IRS acts like your judge and jury and executioner, deciding how much you owe them, and keeping everything they can keep. If you don't

file at all, they lose you out of their system, and it takes too much detective work per tax dollar recovered to make it worth their while to harass you, compared to all the other fat filing sheep in their pen. Now that he was on the verge of making a living again, he almost regretted having to file tax returns, sending money to his old nemesis.

Dork Dick turned the volume on the television down to almost nothing. It was getting distracting. He would get the entire TV script off the Net later and analyze it.

Back to good dick mark information fishing techniques.

Calling their telephone company is good. Call the mark's Residential Billing Office (RBO), tell them you want to change your service, say, add call waiting, and get them to punch up a screen with all the information on your phone numbers, billing name, SSN, relative's name, unlisted phone lines, etc. Then milk them for the information, such as by asking them to tell you what name it's listed under, since you forgot which name you used for which phone line. Then change the service, wait a few hours, and call back to cancel it, in order to cancel your tracks, yuk yuk.

Once Dork Dick called an RBO and gave the mark's phone number, and they asked his name. He said Bob. They said the mark had his account listed under the name Fred. So he said that was his roommate's name, yuk yuk. RBOs are good marks themselves, yuk yuk.

"Do you want my Social Security Number now?"

"What?"

"My SSN. When I opened the account I couldn't find my card and never gave it to them. Maybe my wife called and gave it to you. What number do you have there?"

(The RBO gives the SSN out.)

That's it. My wife did give it to you then. Fine.

Once Dork Dick tried milking an RBO for a mark's information, only to find the mark was the paranoid type, and had arranged a password with them. So, he told them he forgot the password, and wanted to set up a new one, and they did, yuk yuk.

A number of times he found out that the mark had given the phone company false information routinely, such as a false SSN, and it burned him. That's why he uses it only as a last resort or with secondary backup. You also have to use an untraceable phone number to call from, since this is an 800 call and they can always trace that — a phone booth, etc.

Radio Shack has been good to him, yuk yuk. If the phone company's billing office has closed down for the day, you can rely on good old Radio Shack to stay open until 9 p.m., yuk yuk.

Everyone shops at Radio Shack sooner or later. If you have a mark's phone number, but can't find his name and address from a criss-cross phone directory because it's unlisted, you can thank those Radio Shack guys for asking "Can I have the last four digits of your phone number?" on every order, yuk yuk. They save them on their computers forever, yuk yuk.

When you give them these four numbers, they get a small list of maybe two or three names. This is where we come in with a phone call to their store. A Radio Shack guy answers.

RSG: Thank you for calling Radio Shack, America's Technology store. You've got questions? We've got answers! This is Al. How may I help you this evening?

YOU: Hi, Al. This is Leon from Radio Shack #1253 here at Water Street Center. I just had a kid come in here and get a refund for something he bought yesterday and after he left I took the thing apart and all the guts are missing from it.

RSG: You're kidding...

YOU: Nope. All I got here is the casing to a \$300 police scanner. Now he gave me his real phone number and he lives there in your area and I need you to type the digits 7734 and see what you come up with there.

RSG: (Typing)... I have three listings here.

YOU: Okay. Could you read off all three names? I'm going to find out which one of them is him and call up the police.

If you have a match, pass Go and collect \$200, yuk yuk. Else, call up other Radio Shacks until you exhaust the possibilities within shopping distance of that area code and exchange. Sometimes the information they gave Radio Shack is false or misleading, such as a roommate's name, but at least it is a step forward.

This is only a sample of the many techniques dicks use to get information on marks. Then there's posing as an activist, showing up at the mark's door, giving him a speech, and getting him to sign his name, address, phone number, SSN, even driver's license number, has worked more than once, yuk yuk. Calling an elderly mark and posing as the Telephone Book, in an automated computer-sounding voice, asking them to verify their listing by stating their name, address, phone number, SSN, Visa credit card number, etc., yuk yuk. Elderly marks are the most gullible.

Calling the mark's answering machine and hacking it is often easy, and leads to a gold mine of information on phone numbers of friends, relatives, etc. Some answering machines let remote callers literally listen in to the sounds in the room, like a bug, yuk yuk. A good dick has a workbook of answering machine makes and models, and the best way to hack them: some just need you to punch one phone button, some two; some are so dumb you can just punch all the buttons in order fast and they accept it.

If all else fails, you have to attack the mark's house physically.

Sometimes, just going to the mark's door and asking for a glass of water (never say your car broke down and ask to use the phone since you might have to use it, and that could trap you into making traceable calls, plus you don't want the mark to associate you with their phone — there's something so trusting about a total stranger coming up and asking for something ingestible that they could, if they had been psychos, poison; it almost makes you into instant family if played well) can give you time to spot the answering machine and identify the make and model.

If they don't have nighttime motion detectors, try the mark's phone box outside his house. Automatic Number Identification (ANI) is what the phone company calls it, yuk yuk. This means that in the middle of the night you go to the mark's house, open his phone box, plug in your phone, and dial the phone company's ANI number which will read off his number to you (once they actually used 1-800-MYANIIS, yuk yuk). You could also call up a friend that has Caller I.D., and get it from him.

Usually, just getting the mark's name, address, phone numbers, relatives' names, etc., is enough to break into his university computer account through a system administrator.

If all else fails, you can always break and enter the mark's property, rifle his computer desk, try to get on his computer itself, etc. Dress warmly, yuk yuk. Don't leave samples of your body behind, yuk yuk.

If you have to invade an organization's offices, the standard tricks of having a ready-made i.d. photo badge, dressing up as required (business suit, tie, etc.), wearing a disguise (latex appliances, glasses, hair props, clothes stuffers, etc.) — all the standard dick tricks apply: see any James Bond movie or read any James Bond novel, yuk yuk.

Chapter 6

To make a long story short, Dork Dick started to build a profile of Joshua Cowper, learn about him, much like filling in a jigsaw puzzle. Like James Bond's organization did for him.

James Bond again. When he was a mere thirteen he joined a James Bond book club, receiving one genuine James Bond novel by Ian Fleming each month, 14 in all. He eventually ended up with a revered shelf-shrine full of his hero's words and deeds, which he slowly lapped up like a dog does luscious dog food. Wet dog food.

And threw it up and ate it again, over and over, yuk yuk.

Words can't express the feelings young Dork Dick had about James Bond, his role-model, capturing his personality just at the most vulnerable time. Reality was a bore next to everything that is Bond, James Bond. Even when he tried to outgrow him, he just grew a new version of him. He made a career pledge to get right with Bond again, do him proud. Make being a dick cool again, even a dork dick, one that catches computer criminals. Even if the some of the criminals are dorks.

Even if all of them are, yuk yuk.

He had gotten behind on his book club payments, but the books kept coming, and he stiffed them a lot of money, ignoring the numerous invoices for months — years it seemed. The collection letters finally stopped, and he figured they would just write him off; he was a minor anyway, right? One day, years later, unexpectedly, a savvy collection agent called his mother when he wasn't home, and wormed his way into her good graces, learning that her boy was an A student, and about to go to college. He then sprung the bill on her, and she sent him a lump sum to settle, worrying that if she didn't he would be denied admission to college. No yuk yuk. That collection agent was Bond-cool. He was impressed. Sean Connery was a Scot, and tight with his money too.

The Bond novels now sat proudly on a shelf in his Lab cockpit, their grayish-bluish dust jackets frayed but still serviceable, the pages of the books filled with pencil, pen, and crayon marks, snot and other body fluids, folded-over corners, and other signs of having lived in them, spent his teenage years there. Perhaps he never left.

Meanwhile, the world had passed Bond by. He was uncool now. Too sexist. Too racist. Too too too too... scanning for the right word... un-Tutu, yuk yuk. Tutu was in, Bond was out, yuk yuk. There were no James Bonds in Kosovo or Serbia, yuk yuk. Yes there were — him, yuk yuk. Without ever leaving his Lab.

Dork, James Dork. Sedentary, but at your service, yuk yuk.

He looked up at the long row of books, just within reach as he sat in front of his computer. Like a flashing red light on a deserted highway, telling others to turn back, but perversely, attracting him instead. Only it's not a highway, it's a tightrope, and it's surrounded on all sides by the Twilight Zone, yuk yuk. The Net. The Matrix. Cyberspace.

"Walking on a tightrope, I'm heading for the Twilight Zone". From the single "Tightrope," from the album *I Ain't Doing Too Bad* by Jazz Waltz singer Irene Reed. What a recall.

Total, give or take genetic imperfections from environmental causes, yuk yuk.

Remember when they gave Bond a Walther PPK? He preferred a Beretta, but MI6 made him switch. Standard issue for double zero agents, they said.

That thought cause him to reach out, like a jukebox, and pick up *Casino Royale*, Ian “Kiss Kiss Bang Bang” Fleming's first Bond Book. Published in 1953, the year of Dork Dick's birth. He thumbed through it to jog his memory. Not that it needed much jogging.

Check. Bond went to sleep with a .38 Colt Police Positive under his pillow. Later, he carefully slipped his .25 Beretta with a skeleton stock into a shoulder holster under his left arm.

That made him right-handed, yuk yuk.

Error 75. It was *Dr. No*, not *Casino Royale*. Right. Dork Dick switched books off the shelf, thumbed through with the precision of a Bible-thumping preacher in his Good Book, found the page he wanted.

Here it is. After nearly getting killed by Rosa Klebb when his semi-auto silencer snagged in his pants at the climax of *From Russia With Love*, Major Boothroyd, the Secret Service's armourer, outfitted Bond with a 7.65mm Walther PPK and Berns-Martin triple-draw holster. Boothroyd said he preferred the Walther over the Japanese M-14 (8mm Nambu), Russian Tokarev (7.62mm), and Sauer M-38 (7.65mm), which finished 3-2-1 in his reliability tests.

Sure. He could see Fleming out in his backyard in Jamaica, performing his own tests to research his novel, yuk yuk. Probably made it up. Anybody could guess that German was the best, then Russian, and Japanese last — back in the 1950s, yuk yuk. Now it would be Japanese first, German second, and Russian last. Or would it? Crumbling consumer economies notwithstanding, Russia is a gun culture, at the service of the police and military. Erase this speculation and get real test data.

Back to Bond and Boothroyd, and their decades-old hardware problems.

Regardless of the reliability tests (they were all reliable enough), the M-14 and the Tokarev would be a bit hefty for double-zero duty in fancy casinos underneath fitted tuxedos, leaving just the Sauer and the PPK. Boothroyd recommended the PPK over the Sauer ultimately for its lighter trigger pull and magazine grip spur. Easier to load and shoot when dressed in a wetsuit with the other arm around a babe.

He also recommended that Bond pack a .38 Smith & Wesson Centennial Airweight if he needed anything heavier. When did he? He packed his big gun between his legs, yuk yuk. The whole James Bond idea is a dick joke. The other kind of dick, yuk yuk.

Error 355. Boothroyd erroneously referred to Centennial barrel lengths of 3.5 and 5 inches. Perhaps those were special modifications available through the Secret Service Custom Shop, yuk yuk.

Not that Dork Dick knew anything about guns personally. He just studied it on the Net. Pure data without the need for real-life powder burns.

Bond grudgingly agreed to carry the Walther, reluctantly giving up the Beretta with a poignant tribute: "He thought of his fifteen year marriage to the ugly bit of metal. He remembered the times its single word had saved his life — and the times when its threat alone had been enough." A dick joke, yes. Everything has two meanings. He really worked for Libido, the organization all men work for. He had a *license to kill* women; he was a woman killer. The rest was just foreplay and afterplay. Nowadays, in America at least, not even the President has that much license, yuk yuk.

The Walther PPK has long since been replaced by the VP-70z, and is now considered antiquated and underpowered. However, the same style gun, chambered in .22M, is a preferred assassination weapon of some U.S. Special Forces. There's also the Walther TPH, which is stainless steel and has rear adjustable sights. What would Bond use today?

Fleming died in 1964. Robert Markham (real name Kingsley Amis) carried on, producing a 15th Bond title. In 1981, John Gardner took over, and published 14 more by 1996. Now, Raymond Benson has assumed the mantle, with his first title released in 1997. Dork Dick refused to read anything but Fleming on Bond, wishing to take up the mantle himself in his silver years. So now he had to use his imagination.

What would he use today? A Glock revolver? They don't make one, yuk yuk. Their plastic polymer frame, which is still mainly metal, caused it to get more fame than it deserved, from erroneous scare broadcasts that it could elude airport metal detectors. Still, this Austrian-made line of full and semi-automatic pistols is very durable, and the U.S. Navy SEALs like them. Not that they don't also like the Heckler & Koch USP, which is similar in design but has a special rib under the trigger to mate it with laser targeting devices, and the same superior durability.

A Korth .38 revolver. That's what Bond would use now. The finest handgun in the world. Expensive as hell. Made in Germany. Tolerances worthy of a BMW or a Mercedes, the former being used by the movie Bonds all the time now.

Dork Dick got interested in Korths after he saw the name mentioned in a forgettable Dean Koontz novel, *Winter Moon*. Koontz was no Ian Fleming, yuk yuk. But you can only reread Fleming so many times when you want something new. Five Koontz novels was enough: dead end there. One day he'd fictionalize his real life adventures and take up where Fleming left off, yuk yuk. James Bond grows dorky in the 21st century, yuk yuk. Maybe he wouldn't even call him James Bond by then. Just Dork Dick, yuk yuk. That way they couldn't sue him.

His own Korth was laying around the Lab in its original box, in a locked file cabinet filled with dick gear. He had to special order it from a gun dealer in Everett, but it was worth the wait. An expensive leather shoulder holster, and a rapid reloader too. Not that he had ever fired it. Might bruise his shoulder, yuk yuk.

Might bruise me, yuk yuk.

Just hop to my other shoulder, yuk yuk.

If he were Dirty Harry with a chip on his shoulder and a high pain threshold he'd have gotten a Korth Combat Magnum, another expensive revolver. This one was double-action, and had no safety. Don't put it in the front of your pants, yuk yuk. No, do, yuk yuk. It has a unique auto-ejection system for fired rounds. Makes reloading faster.

Of course Dirty Harry used the Smith & Wesson M29. Similar in size and shape to the Ruger Redhawk, a U.S.-made revolver used mainly for hunting, and sold with its own sling. The Super Redhawk has a scope mount and an effective range of 100 yards. It was an obscene movie gimmick to have it used by a dick for hunting people like vermin. But it worked, yuk yuk.

But he was no Dirty Harry wannabe. He hated guns and violence. Left that for the old-fashioned kind of dicks, and the movies. Next to the Korth he had his Daisy air cartridge pellet pistol. At least he fired that one. In his hand it looked like a real gun too. He had a target set up in his Lab, and loved to plink it. He was a pretty poor shot, and the bullseye was practically in near-new condition, yuk yuk.

He called up a long list of current revolvers, pistols, machine guns, and double-barreled shotguns from the Web, going through it longingly, lovingly, as he tried to memorize it word-for-word. Not that he didn't back all anti-gun legislation, yuk yuk. Only cops and dicks should pack guns legally. That way only criminals would have guns, yuk yuk. Too bad the U.S. Constitution doesn't mention cops or dicks.

That was how the pro-gun forces kept in business, yuk yuk.

There's one to remember: the SPAS-12. It is an autoloader shotgun, with a removeable folding stock, plus attachments allowing it to fire gas, smoke, and explosive grenades. It has a true pistol grip and swivel sling mounts. It was what they used in the movies *The Terminator* (I and II), and *Jurassic Park*. It can even switch between autoloader and pump action.

Nice toy, yuk yuk. Not just for the military, yuk yuk.

The M-240 Flamethrower: the hand-held flamethrower seen in the film *Aliens*. Sigourney Weaver, the manly woman who kicks butt. It has no backpack tank, rather a fuel cylinder much like an ammo clip. It fires quick blasts of napalm.

Right up James Bond's crotch, yuk yuk.

Movies should be as close as real civilians ever get to deadly force weapons. What a world it would be if. If the lion lay down with the lamb without eating it. If governments didn't try to oppress their own people. What world is that?

Stop the music and hand me a telephone, I want to get off *The Matrix*, yuk yuk. "Guns, lots of guns", yuk yuk. Maybe we're really all being held in vats and are being used as batteries by AI robots gone freelance, who just feed us a simulation of reality to keep us from freaking out and dying or trying to revolt, yuk yuk. If so, he was going to raise some damned fine voltage before they turned him into liquid food and recycled his cookies, yuk yuk.

Chapter 7

Why don't they put some roofies in his cookies, yuk yuk.

Shut up, yuk yuk.

They call it Rohypnol. The date rape drug. Roofies is the usual slang, but they also call it ruffies, roche, R-2, rib, and rope. It's illegal in the U.S.A., but you can get prescriptions for it in other countries, over the Net. As little as two to four bucks per tablet.

Is it like legal in Holland to use, and the cops can't search you for it, as you're eating a Royale with cheese? Yuk yuk.

Shut up, yuk yuk.

A brand name for flunitrazepam (a benzodiazepine), a very potent tranquilizer similar in nature to valium (diazepam), but many times stronger. The drug produces a sedative effect, amnesia, muscle relaxation, and a slowing of psychomotor responses. Sedation occurs 20-30 minutes after administration and lasts for several hours. The drug is often distributed on the street in its original bubble packaging which adds an air of legitimacy and even makes it appear to be legal.

Combined with alcohol, marijuana, or cocaine it produces a rapid and very dramatic high. Even when used by itself, users can appear extremely intoxicated, with slurred speech, no coordination, swaying, and blood-shot eyes, yet with no odor of alcohol.

The drug has been added to punch and other drinks at fraternity parties and college social gatherings, where it is reportedly given to female party participants in hopes of lowered inhibitions and facilitating potential sexual conquests. Police departments in several parts of the country say that after ingestion of roofies several young women have reported waking up in frat houses with no clothes on, finding themselves in unfamiliar surroundings with unfamiliar people, or having actually been sexually assaulted while under the influence of the drug.

When mixed with alcohol or other drugs it may lead to respiratory depression, aspiration, and even death. When taken repeatedly, it can lead to physical and psychic dependence, which is thought to increase with both dose and duration of use. The amnesia-producing effect prevents users from remembering how or why they took the drug or even that they were given it by others.

It is a colorless and odorless powder, perfect for slipping in a girl's drink at a party. Soon, but not too soon, she grows drowsy, disoriented. You volunteer to take her home.

When you get her to her home, you rape her at will. She is tranquilized, defenseless. Later, when she comes to, she can't remember. She isn't sure what happened, if anything. Even if the worse happens, she can't testify in court, because her testimony could be shot to shit.

Be sure and don't leave any evidence, yuk yuk. Trojans, yuk yuk. Don't take any pictures or camcordings, yuk yuk.

Don't let her think her long sleep after the party was unusual because of the lack of a hangover: be sure she gets some alcohol.

Virtually perfect crime.

Don't get caught with roofies on you. That would be incriminating, yuk yuk. Don't let a roofies purchase be traced to you. Wear some kind of disguise when you go to the bar for your score. Be sure the bar is busy, very busy. That about covers it.

Do get caught with Trojans on you, yuk yuk.

The original Trojans were forced to fight a defensive war, while the Greeks claimed to be engaged in *defensive aggression* — Dork Dick had seen this on the cable TV American Movie Channel, airing the classic film *Helen of Troy* (1955). Why did they call condoms Trojans? It seems they should be called Greeks, yuk yuk.

That's it. Greeks like to take it up their buns, so Trojans are what you wear when you're entering Greece, yuk yuk.

James Bond didn't need roofies or Trojans, but that was long ago, and far, far away; and he was a superstar. Millions of other red-blooded males did, and do. Women will do anything to criminalize roofies, yuk yuk. Even though it is one of the few weapons they can carry that can reduce men to their size. The battle of the sexes turns on it.

That and Norplant, yuk yuk.

Real dicks needed it. The feds use it all the time and get away with it. It's a tool of the trade.

If you want to eat sausage, don't watch it being made, yuk yuk.

Cowper had made purchases of roofies. One, two, three, four — the last one two weeks before his gestapo-style arrest and disappearance from society by the feds. And yes, Trojans too. Amazing — Dork Dick was psychic.

Don't forget that, until they met at the 500 Club in Atlantic City, both Jerry Lewis' and Dean Martin's acts struggled, yuk yuk.

It was New York, yuk yuk.

Atlantic City, yuk yuk.

You win. We're a team and have 18 of our 19 years still ahead of us, yuk yuk.

The next step is to track down Cowper's Roofies supplier.

It's like sawing women in half. I wouldn't know which half to throw away, yuk yuk.

Shut up, yuk yuk.

Chapter 8

The sled went sliding over the ledge, into the gorge, with Thelma still on it. She hadn't jumped off in time. It was too steep to even give the comfort of the water-sloshed spillway of an amusement park ride. She would have likely screamed if she could have drawn the breath, but the leg pumping had exhausted her air reserves. She was gasping, her heart barking like her dogs, who were wrenching from side to side in their harnesses. The barking was faint, strangely without substance.

She slipped over the ledge with the sled, into the blindness of pure surprise. The tenebrous gloom was utterly stuffy, as if she were not outdoors in the pure high country, but down in the flatlands in some windowless doghouse, where all manner of inhumane treatment of animals could be remembered. She didn't feel like she was falling, even though the snow, which usually had a natural phosphorescent glow, was utterly invisible now. She felt like she was falling now. She flailed her arms backward blindly.

Cold snowflakes stung her surprised face as the suddenly freezing wind drove them through the now-empty frames of her goggles. But she could not see them even as they frosted her eyeballs. Struggling to quell a wave of rising panic attack, she wondered if she had been blinded by the imploding glass of the lenses.

Permanent darkness. That was her special fear. She was claustrophobic. That's why she loved the great outdoors, why she preferred her kitchen with its open windows to the rest of her son's French funhouse, and never entered his infernal dungeons.

Just as she started to scream, the sled hit bottom and rolled back onto its runners, landing upright with surprisingly light impact, with her blind body still aboard. Almost as if landing on a giant's duck-down pillow, it came to a soft, noiseless halt.

"Jock?"

She wasn't shouting, but croaking, like a frog. Her mouth was as parched as if it had been sucking raw Cotex and Tampax. She was dizzy now too. She started losing her balance again, shimmying, almost falling out of the sled. One arm was paralyzed. Her lead dog was clinging to her desperately, pumping its hips as it tried to run up her body to safety.

It was making love to her. She embraced him. He satisfied himself, and she let him leave.

The bed. She was not out in the sled trail. She was having a nightmare.

Her snoring open mouth had dried its own lining out to the point that she couldn't even swallow or spit up saliva to moisten it. She had been sleeping on one side so long that half her body was numb, on the verge of circulatory collapse. Her heart was racing against the collapse, like a motorboat tied to the dock. The nightmare was nature's safety reflex, her subconscious trying to scare her into adrenaline-pumping fight-or-flee mode, and wake her up, to attend to imminent danger before it was too late. Her will to live had not failed her yet. She was nothing if not spunky.

She rolled onto her back, feeling the blood gurgling into her left shoulder. She was so exhausted, so tired. Depressed. She was too tired to get up and get a drink of water. She tried to close her mouth to let the moisture return. She couldn't, because she had to breathe through it, take deep breaths, to keep up with her heart. Finally she could shut

her mouth, breathe normally through one nostril that wasn't plugged up. The second nostril eventually unplugged, just as the first one plugged up in its place.

A sudden urge to pee did cause her to get up, drag to the bathroom, fighting the arthritis, fighting the sudden losses of balance. She nearly tripped and hit her head on the bathtub and broke her neck. She used her hands to scoop up cold water from the vanity faucet and drink like a dog, splash her face, wash her tired, red eyes. She blew her nose on some toilet paper, flushed it down with her yellow water after wiping herself down there. She felt like when she was still married, just after half-awake sex. The drained yet warm feeling.

She shuffled back to bed, almost fell onto the mattress, face down, feeling her own cold, wet stain. She started to scoot to the other side, hoping it would be dry. She never made it; she was out like a light. As she lost consciousness, she realized that the stain was sperm, not urine. She had been raped. She fought to remember that. Remember that dream.

The next morning, she woke later than usual. And she didn't remember anything. But she was depressed, very depressed. She wanted to cry but didn't know why, so she didn't. She was too old to have dreams anymore. She was a survivor. A realist.

The next night she couldn't sleep. She ended up getting her pipe out and smoking some fresh pot, bowl after bowl, to the point of total mellow stupefaction. She held the pipe in one hand, resting it precisely where the wet spot in the mattress had been the night before.

She woke up to find her mattress smoldering. It was on fire. She hobbled to the kitchen, brought back a saucepan full of water, and soaked the hot spot. A choking cloud of smoke arose among the hissing and the spitting. Heady, the mixture of mattress smoke and ganja smoke and stain smoke.

She left and sat in the kitchen, stupid and silent. She went to sleep sitting up, and awoke at four thirty A.M., immediately running some water to put in her teapot, and turning the burner on high.

She was crying this time, as she sat watching the burner flame lick the bottom of the teapot. She tried to remember. Her bottom had been licked, had been flamed, had been violated. She dreamed how it had been. No, it had been not hot but oh so cold.

She was falling. She was giving herself to Jock. No she wasn't. She wasn't falling, she was jiggling back and forth, rocking the bed. He was taking her. She was not resisting, but she wasn't consenting either. She had no choice. He had given her none. If only he had asked her first.

The teapot began whistling suddenly. So innocently. Not guilty enough to be discreet. Just as loud as if it had no memory of its own pain. It was crying, but not feeling it. She was crying, and didn't remember why.

It was Darryl. She had never kissed a negro before. It was good and sweet. Like semi-sweet chocolate. Her parents wouldn't even let her play with those people.

It was El Jefe himself. Fidel Castro. In a green army suit. Bearded. His breath smelled of tobacco. His teeth were yellow. He did anything he wanted with her, used her, violated her at will. A woman of her age. Had he no shame? She had lost almost all lubrication down there, didn't he realize? It hurt. Like arthritis, like all movement, it hurt. She was undone. She'd kill him.

She'd go to the cops. But she had no evidence. They'd certify her and then who'd take care of her son? No, she couldn't go to the cops. She'd have to take care of him herself. Put razor blades down there. Yes, that would cut him up good.

The next night she carefully inserted a razor blade in Vaseline, then into her private place, before turning off the lights and turning over for some serious sleep.

She remembered when her high school prom was just around the corner. Dazzling dresses and handsome tuxedos set the stage for the dreamy event of her life, which she still remembered vividly 50 years later. So why was getting ready for that event so terribly difficult?

A lot of her schoolmates made a big production out of it and thought they had to spend a lot of money, but she couldn't have, even if she had thought it necessary. She made her own dress, and got a ride with friends. The hardest thing was to get everything done in time, not only readying the dress itself, but getting everything that goes with it. The most embarrassing thing would have been to get to the prom, and see that half the other poor girls had the same dress. So she tried hard to accessorize hers with a lace shawl, an antique sweater — not cashmere, that was out of her price range. Wool.

Her dress was oh-so romantic, the hues oh-so rich. Sheer chiffon, feminine lace, a touch of shiny satin, a lush velvet bow. Back then they didn't have halters, or go strapless. The big shoulder look was in. Everybody wore long that year. Nowadays the girls are sluts, wear thong bikini underwear, or none at all. Do that lesbian thing. The men go gay.

She saved herself for her husband. Now she was raped at long last. It felt as final as if it had been on her prom night. She had lost her innocence. She was nothing but a dog. Men were all dogs. Women weren't, unless they were dragged down by the men to their level. It wasn't possible that she would permit this. She needed strength now. She didn't want her son to see her cry. She was glad to be leaving this world that had lost its taboos.

Did she love dogs or hate them now? She cried harder.

Chapter 9

Dork Dick liked computer store owners and salesmen. They used to carry his company's software packages. He hated to be the one who turned one of his former brothers in.

Like hell you did, yuk yuk. Serves him right for selling out to Microsoft to stay in business, yuk yuk.

He was probably an illegal immigrant anyway, yuk yuk.

Eastern Europe, the Middle East, or Latin America? Yuk yuk.

I wasn't sure, yuk yuk.

Did he wear anything on his head? Yuk yuk.

No.

He wasn't an Arab, yuk yuk.

Most Arabs in America don't wear rags on their heads, yuk yuk.

I meant Sikh, yuk yuk.

He went by the name of Finnegan, yuk yuk. He was about as Irish as a potato, yuk yuk.

Potatoes are Irish, yuk yuk.

They came from South America, yuk yuk.

Maybe that's where he came from, yuk yuk.

Shut up, yuk yuk.

But the forgery ring case could wait one more night. He had to have some R&R, and there was no better bet tonight than college basketball, on TV.

It was Monday, March 29, 1999, and Dork Dick wanted to watch the NCAA Men's College Basketball Championship Final game, the last such game of the millennium, on his mother's 27-inch TV set, so he could lay back on her big comfy couch and visit her to keep both of them from getting too lonely. As the game was about to begin, he came up and hunkered down in his mother's living room, with some microwave popcorn and some Milwaukee's Best Light canned beer in tow.

The game featured the University of Connecticut Huskies versus the Duke University Blue Devils. The 37-1 Duke team was favored over the 34-2 UConn team by 9-1/2 points. Since his mother was a sled dog musher from way back,

he thought she'd love a team named the UConn Huskies. She didn't. Right. All the University of Washington teams were called Huskies, and she didn't watch them. She was a radical feminist, had an argument for everything.

He tried to sell it to her anyway. Not that she wouldn't stay around just to be with him and shoot the small talk when he would let her.

"Ask me. Ask me, mother, what it means."

"That's a beautiful place I never saw before."

The beautiful Tropicana Field in St. Petersburg. Attendees such as General Norman Schwarzkopf. The Huskies center Taymon Domzalski was 6'11" tall, and white. The coaches were both white.

A bunch of big tall mainly black guys trying to throw a ball through a hoop, back and forth in a race against a clock, with a pile of silly rules about fouls and free throws. The white guy was only there as a token; that, and he was taller than the black guy in the corresponding position on the other team.

"What is this? You asked me to ask. Ask you. What is this guy's position?"

"He's the Blue Devil's center. The white guy is the Husky's center."

"It looks like an African dog fight, doesn't it? Look at 'em go at it with each other. When do the women play?"

"That was last night. Did you miss it?"

Mainly white people in the audience. Gazing in a kind of jealous awe at the superior black athletes...

She was picking up the remote control, trying to change the channel.

"Stop it, mother."

... while looking down on their sloping foreheads and lack of intellectual prowess. Huh. Exploitation is all it is.

"Did I bring you up this way?"

"You didn't bring me up any way. I was prejudiced against blacks all my life and you never said anything against it."

"How did you know that was what I was thinking?"

"Yuk Yuk. Well, that's how we all were back then. We were brought up to be prejudiced. Didn't watch blacks. Not that we were racist or anything. But this is a new time. Times have changed. The TV shows have made me aware. It's the same old white male power game, keeping blacks down along with women. But now they're the stars, making big bucks. Like you never did, mother."

She hadn't heard most of it. She had been talking at the same time. He repeated some of it. About it being okay to watch mainly blacks playing basketball.

"Yes, but this is pure exploitation."

Exploitation? The very dedication of these so-called adults to a kid's game is the most demeaning joke on them of all. The white sled drivers alone have any dignity or intellectual stature, making

the event look like it was one white guy's mind pitted against another, a chess game where the blacks are only pieces who don't think for themselves. While the black guys sacrifice their bodies for little more than an increment to a score, the white guys remain sedentary and in command throughout.

She didn't hear what he was saying, being too busy talking to herself. When the both stopped, she found her voice again.

"Why are the coaches both white?"

"That's Norman Schwarzkopf, the general, yuk yuk."

"You asked me to ask. Yes. A white male general is sitting there having the time of his life. But I'm bored."

"He's leading Tropicana Storm, yuk yuk." He meant to say viewing.

After a pause for a big play, Dork Dick continued.

"You're a died-in-the-wool racist, aren't you, mother?"

"They're racist. I'm just watching, they're actually doing it."

"They don't look at it the way you do, yuk yuk."

Another long pause. The sound of crunching popcorn breaking through the TV noise in Dork Dick's ears. Popcorn spilling onto his shirt, the couch and the floor. He'd have to vaccum later since Thelma's arthritis wouldn't let her push the heavy Kirby, even with the green power drive button pushed down. They didn't have enough sense to put swivel casters on it, just big roller-like wheels that made it too hard to corner without picking it up sometimes, yuk yuk.

"What is this? Why did the coach pull the tall white boy out?"

"Too many fouls. They only get so many and are then thrown out. He's being saved for the last quarter."

"The coaches are the sled drivers, son, the players nothing but their dogs. In my day, they didn't use black people for dog's work."

"They pay them for it, mother."

"I thought this was college. They don't pay them, do they?"

"You're right. I guess they do it for free. For a college scholarship. The college makes big bucks though, yuk yuk. A few of them go on to the pros and make big bucks."

"What about the rest?"

"They get a college degree."

"And it's worth what? Who does their coursework for them? I heard black college ball players graduate without being able to read a novel."

He wanted to tell her she was sexist too, but he thought better of it.

She won. He quit trying to sell it to her. She was waiting for his interest to slack. A telltale sign, that's all. Then she would ask him about his life, his work.

The game went on, Dork Dick glued to the screen.

She looked across the room at herself, in the wall mirror.

Wrinkles. Her hair needed washing. But it was so hard to wash it with arthritic hands and arms. Too tiring. So she let it go. It got oily and matted. She would never let one of her dogs slide this low.

She didn't appreciate the beauty and power of her youth when she had it. But at least old age has the virtue of being allowed to be set in one's ways.

She, a racist? She had never had enough contact with them to be a racist. Colorado was too white back when she was living there. It might or might not be now. But Washington certainly still was. Too white.

That was it. She didn't hate all men. Just her own kind. White men. All trying to be generals, make her the cannon fodder, the grunt, the sled dog.

She had never been allowed to even play with those people.

Suddenly she wished she could turn the clock back and throw herself at big black men, have passionate sex with them, bear their children in quantity. She could be their equal, even their superior, their commander, and they'd appreciate every moment of it as long as she pampered them with the thrilling joys of her white embraces. She remembered a black guy on Jerry Springer saying that "once you have it black, you'll come back," and "the darker the fruit, the sweeter the meat." She believed him.

White men had screwed her up, like they needed. Black men would have just screwed her like she needed. A new crop of half-black half-white people would not take to the gang line, would break free from the tow line, their neck lines dangling loose.

She suddenly began examining her ugly son's face and figure, not returning his puzzled looks, as if he were a bug in a jar. Yes, a half-black half-white son would have been a far better thing to leave behind her. She had seen some beautiful racially-mixed people. Happy looking. Biracial heritage, they called it on TV. Hawaii. Happy state.

Too late now. She wasn't a racist. She was just prejudiced from lack of contact, like everybody else. There was this older black gentleman who ran a roadside stand, selling vegetables. She thought of him sometimes as her boyfriend. She visited him regularly, bought his tomatoes and cucumbers. He complained flirtingly if she missed a week.

She wondered if he made a pass at her, what would she do? He would be too big for her. It would hurt. If only she were young again. She would say yes, would try it. She would kiss one. On the lips. It's not poison. Dark fruit is the sweetest. They used to make them use separate drinking fountains. Big lips. Big. White woman's purity. All for what? To have an ugly son who prides himself on being a dork and is infected with attitudes she hated in his father?

One thing for sure. He's all white. Huskies come in white and black, and both. Was skin color in people the same thing as coat color in dogs? Or what made them different?

Meanwhile, Dork Dick's mind was on its usual all-white level.

The Huskies won 77-74 in an upset. Duke would go down in history as having been in 5 NCAA men's basketball championships in the 1990s — 1990, 1994, 1999 — and won two (1991, 1992). UConn got revenge for being knocked out by Duke in the 1990 semifinal with that miracle shot by Christian Laettner, and yet again the next year. He tried to explain this to her. This game might turn out to be as big as the 1979 championship where Michigan State and Magic Johnson beat Indiana State and Larry Byrd by 75 to 64. For the next ten years, pro basketball and its revenues went up a big notch. It took Michael Jordan to rescue it in the early 1990s. Now that he had retired, the NBA needed some new stars.

She didn't care. By then, neither did Dork Dick, because he was now confused what a college team was: the white coaches and white-dominated schools and white audience, or the black racedoglike players who were being used in it to get the green in the whites' pockets. The whole college system was a farm for the pros, where the really big green was made.

White racism was a racket: a conspiracy by some people to have a chain of crimes committed to protect their own source of income; in all rackets, to figure out what is really happening, just follow the green, yuk yuk. This kind of racism was guaranteed to last well into the 21st century.

But what about talk of Michael Jordan becoming an NBA owner, in his native state of North Carolina? The Charlotteville Hornets. The first black one, yuk yuk.

And partial owner only, yuk yuk.

Who was that black George Mason University History Professor whom Dork Dick had seen on cable saying that he had grown up thinking whites were superior to blacks — were "smaller" — but fought it, and hopes that before he dies whites will no longer be considered the master race? When he got back to the Lab, he looked it up: Roger Wilkins. Looked like a reject from "The Gods Must Be Crazy", in a suit and tie with bifocals. GMU never won a NCAA Men's Basketball Championship, yuk yuk. He could usually expose their true beliefs by seeing if they were married to a white, yuk yuk. If they didn't think whites were the master race, why breed kids with as much of their genes as they could get?

He told himself to check up on Wilkins better, before even trying to mention him to his madre; if he did have a white wife, he could spring it on her at the strategic moment.

But Dork Dick wasn't a racist. He was just white, and couldn't help it; blame his madre, yuk yuk. He soon degenerated into mind games with himself, trying to explain why the word Connecticut was perfect for a hacker, who could cut connections; or why the name Blue Devils was perfect for hackers, who delighted in hacking IBM, known as Big Blue. He was lost in these thoughts as he left the house and went back to the Lab.

He had had one other big thought that day: Melissa, the e-mail virus that infected only Microsoft Word programs, through its buggy macro capability. Bill Gates' Microsoft monopoly in software had left the entire consumer computing world susceptible to instant infection through bugs in their programs. Too bad he didn't have proof that the bugs were intentional, or he might have had Bill Gates where he wanted him.

Over a barrel on Niagara Falls, yuk yuk.

Melissa was the brand name of his madre's lipstick. He had seen it several times in the bathroom. Quite a bold shade of red. The older they get, the more they want to paint themselves gaudy colors, hmmmph.

He fell asleep trying to study the virus and made an abortive attempt to trace it down.

A few days later, on April 2, 1999, after the Duke forward Elton Brand won the John R. Wooden college basketball player of the year award, and all was well with the world, David L. Smith, the white computer dork who programmed and released the virus on a pirated America Online account just before April Fool's Day (good touch), was traced, arrested and told he faced decades in prison for "interrupting public communication". The Microsoft programmers whose bug let the virus work — they weren't arrested, yuk yuk. They have protection, ordinary dorks don't. It's a matter of numbers and dollar signs. A racket.

Those federal prisons are really hellholes I heard, yuk yuk. They don't take care of them like they do state pens. Full of boat people, Cuban immigrants, drug dealers — homos and lesbians. They like to fuck you in the face and ass at the same time, yuk yuk.

How does a lesbian fuck a woman in the ass?

With a giant vibrator, yuk yuk.

Which pens are you talking about?

Leavenworth, Marion, Florence.

I thought the latter two were maximum security, solitary.

So who was talking about just the prisoners? Yuk yuk. Why become a guard in a pen unless you're a homo or lesbian and want some easy action? Yuk yuk.

Shut up, yuk yuk.

Wanna lick some nice ass-cracky? Yuk yuk. Want some peanut butter and hot fudge right out of the buns? Yuk yuk.

Shut the fuck up, yuk yuk.

Neighbors and acquaintances of Smith described him as a typical computer zealot. Lived with two cats. Life seemed to revolve around the Net. A true computer dork. "He was a very solitary person... a quiet neighbor," says another computer professional, a female, living one floor below him. "I'd hear his modem go off once in a while." She was probably a dork too, he guessed. Why else was she listening?

Name was Ann Trautmann. Smith was not interested in her. At least, she didn't admit it. Dork Dick was sure about it. She never heard him go off in her, yuk yuk. At least he would have it his way in his own dreams later.

That night, while dreaming of sexual scenarios involving Ann Trautmann, with him playing the part of Smith, Dork Dick had a nightmare. It wasn't the fact that she was deathly beautiful, wore a dental floss bikini, and yielded to his advances at will, especially when people were looking. He always got what he wanted with his women, yuk yuk. It was a matter of getting his just rewards as a professional dick.

It was he who had first started the hunt for Melissa's creator, crunching numbers on all his computers day and night to try to find the erased links that led to the dork. He had to assume various disguises, travel around the country, all the way from Washington to New Jersey. Had to fight off Smith's goons and bodyguards. Fend off an attempt by Ann to frame herself as the true programmer. Finally, a pitched military battle inside Smith's undersea cave lair, with hundreds of casualties, while Smith escaped in a high speed minisub, with Ann by his side.

Just as he was closing in, the feds nabbed Smith first, and refused to pay him a whistleblower's fee. He tried to tell him that Smith was protecting Ann, and they said to fuck off. The phone company threatened to close his accounts. He had to live on macaroni and cheese instead of steak, lobster, and caviar; pop instead of Laffitte Rothschild Milwaukee's Best Light beer. He grew bitter.

He went to the Seattle federal building, went up a sinister elevator, asked a receptionist in a bugged reception room to let him talk to an agent, and ended up alone in a faceless skyscraper room with that shades-wearing, black-suited, monotone-droning nightmare agent in the movie 'The Matrix', which Dork Dick had just seen, on its release day of April 1st.

The agent considered Dork Dick as leading a double life. By day, he's a computer programmer for a good software firm; by night, he's a hacker, immersed in the Net. "One life has a future, the other has no future."

"You humans are the virus, and we are the cure. Why don't we just put you in prison now and get it over with? You are only allowed to remain at large because we own you. And you want to be paid? You owe us your soul. If we can't get you to cooperate, we will shut you up and insert a bug in your stomach, through your belly-button."

More agents suddenly entered the room, tried to surround him, the ghastly live-looking robot AI bug wiggling in one of their hands.

He jumped out of the window, and bounded onto the roof of the skyscraper across the street. Looking back, the receptionist was standing in the interview room with the agents. She was a fox. She was wearing a dental floss bikini. She had wanted him to stay.

He escaped, because he could expand his mind and separate reality from virtual reality, bend the rules, if not break them. Smith had been nabbed and disappeared forever into the jails of the government; would never surface again.

Melissa: Dork Dick regretted that choice of names. He was a fan of the sci-fi novelist Melissa Scott, in particular her book 'Dreamships', about a future where spaceships traveled through hyperspace as their space jockeys — their vision transformed by virtual reality and artificial intelligence — navigated a virtual world of their own design — such as rivers and mountains with forests — rather than try to take the incomprehensible stream of raw space sensor data really coming in head-on and make sense out of it.

The potential of computers to create better and better real-time simulations would one day make it possible for government to control everybody for life. They already had taken a quantum step. They had stolen the name Melissa. Now Melissa will forever have the meaning of a nuisance email virus that cost companies time and money. Who wants to navigate a Melissa? Or listen to anybody named Melissa? All the punch has gone out of that name.

Why didn't he name it after a politician instead? Slobodan, yuk yuk. April, yuk yuk.

Suddenly Dork Dick woke up, blinking. The media said that Smith's parents had made his \$100,000 bail. They had let him out. What is this country coming to?

He went back to sleep. The first thing he thought of was that he enjoyed imagining the things they did to dorks behind jail bars. Degrading sexual things. The jig is up here. Jail is the jungle. There are no dorks in jail. Just body part suppliers and body part users. The second thought was that this Smith's parents were well-fixed. What other rich Smiths did he know? The Johnson-Smith Company. Could it be? What a breakthrough that would be.

Maybe this connection he had made proves that he's The One, the messiah of mankind, that will help them all break out of their vats, after accepting that their collective reality is just a virtual reality program. Then he'd get all the girls he wanted... if Smith didn't get them first.

That night, Thelma had yet another nightmare. The same one as before, continued from where it left off.

She was tumbling down a freezing cold river, in the dark, stiff with hypothermia. The sled was floating along behind. Her dogs were there with her, all frozen stiff, like stuffed animals. She could see them perfectly up close underwater, despite the lack of light. They illuminated themselves from within, like phosphorescence.

One of them was Fidel Castro, green army suit, beard, yellow rotting teeth, and all.

Doing a double-take, she saw that he was actually Lou Diamond Phillips (although she didn't remember the name), trying to play Fidel Castro in the movies.

He was good, a good actor. Her son had made her watch an 'Outer Limits' episode with him, where he played a half-man half-robot. He did good, acted good. He could play anybody Indian or Hispanic.

Could he play a sled dog? No, he couldn't. He was trying to, that she was sure of. But he could only go so far as to play Fidel, then he ran out of tricks, out of range. Underneath his uniform he had a fur suit on, puffing the material out, making him cuddly almost. He had paws stuffed in the army boots, paws coming out of his army jacket cuffs. He had a dog's red pencil coming out of his fly.

They don't have sled dogs in Cuba, south of the border, no. Too hot, too tropical for that. That's why he failed to pull off the impersonation: he was from the wrong side of the Tropic of Cancer. Or was that Capricorn? His range had its limits.

The water was too cold to feel it. She didn't feel warm, no, she felt like she was touching something cold, through fur. But she wasn't cold. That must mean she was numb, dying. She saw red blood droplets spurting up in the inky blackness from the water to the sky, like a geyser. It recirculated in the atmosphere, turned to snow, and came back down again.

It was vaginal blood. She had lost her virginity, and that was hymenal blood. First blood. Spurting from down there.

She couldn't move her limbs, couldn't see the river bank, couldn't see where she was headed, couldn't hear rocks ahead, couldn't hear, couldn't hear...

She woke up in morning light, feeling a warm wetness down there, like she was having a period. This was impossible at her age.

She felt down there, came up with blood on her hand.

The razor blade. She had forgotten about it.

Chapter 10

The Protein Feveronics Game Company was strange, very strange.

They had a lot of computer software games for sale, but they didn't sell many. Instead, they gave them away. They didn't copy-protect them, didn't require them to be registered to individuals, or use any of the methods other software companies used to stop illicit copying and distribution.

It's almost like they wanted people to steal them. And people did: tens, if not hundreds of millions of people's computers were swimming with Feveronics game software they didn't pay for. The games were not the best, but they were free. People, since the earliest days of personal computers, had expected software to be free. They didn't haggle with the price now.

At least Feveronics was no Microsoft, thought Dork Dick. Microsoft never gave anything away for free, unless it was to put an established competitor, like Netscape, under. If IBM had tried to do that to them with their OS/2 Operating System, they would have cried murder and gone to the government for protection. When Netscape did just that, Microsoft cried bloody murder in the name of free enterprise, yuk yuk.

The Feveronics software operated well with the Net. You could play games with others on the Net using it, and connect to the Feveronics web site anytime to get free game help.

One thing people definitely didn't want from Microsoft was games. The company's dorky image precluded them from being cool enough.

They did want Microsoft's Internet browser, which was what Netscape was worried about. Not that destroying Netscape would have given him a monopoly on the Net like he enjoyed for personal computer software.

Up until 1997, Bill Gates was so busy monopolizing computer operating systems and application software that he let the Net itself pass him by. Consequently, he didn't get the choice properties on Boardwalk he had been used to owning in this new market, and, despite his great wealth, could never make up for it, never monopolize the Net.

The Net would be mankind's great hope. Bill Gates had spoiled the standalone computer, but when they pooled together to create cyberspace, it was too big and free even for him to tame, yuk yuk.

The real fear savvy people like Dork Dick had, was not Bill Gates himself. No, his umpteen-billion dollar Microsoft stock held him back in the face of the umpteen-trillion or even bigger potential of the Net. What Dork Dick feared was a new personality like Bill Gates, who was broke, lean and hungry, getting a lock on the Net and milking it relentlessly for all it was worth, while the government did nothing yet again until it was too late. This specter haunted Dork Dick constantly.

SPECTRE: Special Executive for Counterterrorism, Revenge and Extortion. That haunted James Bond constantly. Whether to add the periods after each letter, yuk yuk.

So history repeats itself, yuk yuk.

Dork Dick broke the Feveronics case single-handedly. Being on the lookout for a S.P.E.C.T.R.E. wannabe, he found it. The software was clever, very clever. The hidden routines were hidden — very, very well hidden.

Shut up, yuk yuk.

But Dork Dick reverse-engineered them, flushed them out like grouse from the woods, where they could be shot at with skeet rifles.

Talk about mixing your metaphors, yuk yuk.

At least I didn't say ducks, yuk yuk.

At least you didn't say shotgun, yuk yuk.

What shotgun would one use for ducks? You should be an expert, yuk yuk.

I admit nothing without my lawyer present, yuk yuk. But every boy has his dad's Remington 870, yuk yuk.

Is that a jibe at my dad?

He took it with him when he left you, didn't he? Yuk yuk. Before you had gotten old enough to become a hard core dyed-in-the-wood bloodthirsty killer of helpless birds and animals, yuk yuk. Now look at you, yuk yuk. Can't even shoot a handgun worth shit, yuk yuk.

How about a Thunder Five? A 5-shot revolver that can chamber .45 ACP and-or .410 shotgun shells, and can even mix and match in the same loaded cylinder. Couldn't miss with one of those toys, yuk yuk.

Fuck you, yuk yuk. The kick would blow your arm off, yuk yuk.

How about the Mossberg MHS410? Similar in design to the M500 shotgun, both are smaller than the Remington, although not any more concealable.

Concealable? Like the good time-travel warrior in 'The Terminator', who went around naked with an overcoat and a shotgun hidden inside? Yuk yuk.

Eat me, yuk yuk. I didn't say anything about sawing one off.

You don't have to. Just take one look at you, yuk yuk.

Mine's at least bigger than yours, yuk yuk. The 410 has a pistol grip, recoil pad, muzzle brake, and spreader choke.

So does your mind, yuk yuk. Does it come with a license to kill ducks? Yuk yuk.

No, but the State sells them to just about anybody, yuk yuk.

I guess that makes me a budding anarchist, yuk yuk.

Go watch a rerun of 'Howard the Duck', yuk yuk.

You won't let me, yuk yuk. Why do you keep playing them Feveronics games and pretending you're working for a living at the same time? Yuk yuk.

I am, yuk yuk. Just watch me put it through the IRS, yuk yuk.

If you can do that, you're truly a genius, yuk yuk.

Shut up, yuk. Now let me get back to my Feveronics story.

Okay. Just dictate and I'll type it in, yuk yuk.

The Feveronics game plan was...

Don't rub it in too much, yuk yuk.

The Feveronics plan was to get people playing their games on every computer in the world. Then, while they were asleep, part of the game program would stay resident in the computer's memory, unobtrusively scanning the disks for communications programs, and building spy monitors in them, so that they could spy on, and capture, personal financial data, such as credit card numbers, bank PINs, passwords to bank accounts, along with evidence of illegal, embarrassing, or questionable activity, like attempts to view pornographic sites, etc.

Some people would be proud of it, yuk yuk.

I don't think so, yuk yuk. Larry Flynt maybe, not most people. It's still in the closet mostly, yuk yuk.

Okay, leave it in, jerkoff, yuk yuk.

The data was then carefully encrypted, and stored unobtrusively on the mark's disk. When the mark called Feveronics' special help site for its games, using their computer, the data would get unobtrusively sent to their computers, and entered into a sophisticated grand theft, blackmail, and extortion network, operated full-time by an entire sector of thieves hiding in the back of garment sweatshops in New York.

Was that the Mossberg the resurrected man, played by Jeff Goldblum in the movie version, used in the Dean Koontz novel 'Hideaway', to defend himself from the other resurrected 20-year-old satanist mall rat, who was possessed by the spirit of Satan's henchman Vissago, while he was possessed by the spirit of God's archangel Uriel? Yuk yuk.

You read my mind, yuk yuk. It was the mention of the pistol grip that did it, yuk yuk.

You love to grip your pistol, no wonder, yuk yuk.

Get off of my asshole and let's continue.

Get off of my tail and I will let you, yuk yuk.

I'm not on your tail. I just poured salt on it, yuk yuk.

Tastes salty anyway, yuk yuk.

I resemble that remark, yuk yuk. Getting back to work...

And Dork Dick had kind of liked the d00ds because they were, after all, just out to give people some fun.

Like Pussy Galore and James Bond. Bad example. She was actually a lesbian and he had to rape her in the stables in the movie *Goldfinger*. Double-zero licenses included a license to commit date rape apparently, yuk yuk. He was cool even while he flipped her onto the hay, jumped her bones, and started kissing her.

"Stop! Stop! ... Don't stop! Don't stop!" Yuk yuk.

Les Filles Pour Bond. Les Bond Girls. Honey Rider. Pussy Galore. Holly Goodhead. Mary Goodnight. Kissy Suzuki. Tiffany Case. Plenty O'Toole. Sylvia Trench. Octopussy. Xenia Onatopp.

Kim Bassinger. Which Bond Girl did she play? Yuk yuk.

It slipped my mind temporarily, yuk yuk.

Slip your mind back into your pants and get back to work, yuk yuk.

Those Feveronics guys were slippery. Through a bank of corrupt New York cops they actually had a law enforcement front, passing the incriminating data to it when the mark didn't pay up. They had actually gotten hundreds of people arrested and imprisoned. Some of their cops were beginning to get recognition and promotions. They were paying off some politicians already, plus state and federal lobbyists.

Speaking of slippery. Which type of shotgun barrel has been in more women's vaginas, the Mossberg or the Remington? Yuk yuk.

You're sick, yuk yuk.

I'm Duck Dick, yuk yuk.

You do have a certain pinache, yuk yuk.

What does that word mean? Yuk yuk.

You can look it up faster than me, duckbrain, yuk yuk.

You meant panache, stupid. You probably confused it with pinochle or pinata, yuk yuk.

Oops. Mea culpa. Show it to me.

panache. From Latin pinnaculum – tuft, plume. 1. A plume of feathers; especially such a plume on a helmet. 2. dashing elegance of manner; carefree, spirited self-confidence or style; flamboyance.

Shit. And I was talking to a duck when I said pinache, yuk yuk.

And I'll never let you forget it either, yuk yuk.

That Feveronics. They had a certain pinache. One time a rich mark wouldn't pay extortion money, so they arranged a police agency to send him email full of attached child pornography.

Can you play pinochle? Yuk yuk.

Shut up, yuk yuk.

You stupid fool, I typed pinache and you didn't even notice it, yuk yuk.

That makes me your mark again, yuk yuk.

A double decker mark. That's why they play pinochle with a double deck, yuk yuk.

I wish I had your brains, yuk yuk. Shut up and let's continue.

The mark didn't even read the email and tried to delete it. But they arrested him in the act before he could hit the delete key, and got him 10 years for possession of child pornography, yuk yuk.

Possession laws for information, as opposed to real items like bombs, drugs, and weapons, were rife for abuse by authorities eager to abuse their authority, yuk yuk. Dork Dick at least had to admire Feveronics' style. It was tempting to try to extort money from Feveronics themselves, and if he had been a latent criminal this would have been his chance, a cool hundred million, or maybe more.

But he couldn't do it, no matter what dreams he woke up having. He was, after all, a dork, like Bill Gates, through and through. Life was just a game, and he played by the rules, even if he had both feet on the foul line all the time, yuk yuk. Big Bill was going to give away his entire personal fortune to charity one day, when the game was over for him. So, for that matter, would he.

It better be some damned good charities, yuk yuk. Michael Jackson already beat him with his aid to children in Kosovo, yuk yuk.

Yah, because he's a pedophile, yuk yuk.

Beat it, yuk yuk.

The Feveronics ring had only stolen a few billion dollars by the time Dork Dick sent an email query to the Seattle feds offering to sell them his scoop, in advance. This time they bit.

Don't bite, says Michael, yuk yuk.

Thriller, yuk yuk. Did you see the video, and those fangs? Yuk yuk.

Besame Mucho, yuk yuk.

Shut up, you know I don't know Mexican.

I was referring to Dexter Gordon, yuk yuk. Kiss me a lot, besame mucho, get it? But don't bite, yuk yuk.

Weisenheimer, yuk yuk.

They approved a \$5,000 upfront advance, with an additional 1% whistleblower's fee, up to \$250,000 maximum. When the information panned out, he got the full amount. In the bargain, he got into the good graces of the Seattle FBI Director, Brad Foshette, and actually got a kind of tour of their offices, on his way in and out of the big man's office.

Is he related to the Foshette of the famous Foshette Flop? Yuk yuk.

That was Fosbury, yuk yuk. The Fosbury Flop.

I was just testing you, yuk yuk. By the way, what is a pinochle, in the game? Which two cards? Yuk yuk.

I don't know. Spot me.

A jack of diamonds and a queen of spades, yuk yuk. Like a Kosovo boy and Michael Jackson, yuk yuk.

Shut up, you jaded sick perverted closet fag sob down filled poop packer, yuk yuk.

Ebony and ivory, like a piano keyboard, packed one after the other, tight, yuk yuk. Maybe you said pinache because you were thinking of pianos and shit and your tongue slipped, yuk yuk.

That's it, yuk yuk. I think of biracial poop packing all the time instead of sex with beautiful mainly white female Bond Girls, yuk yuk.

Maybe that's just your cover story because you are afraid to come out of the closet, yuk yuk.

Shut up, yuk yuk. I refuse to be distracted again.

Just how many Koontz novels have you read? Yuk yuk.

More than I'd admit to without immunity, yuk yuk.

It's nothing to be embarrassed about. He sold over 200 million copies, and 17 million more are sold each year now.

How many is that a week?

Over three hundred thousand a week, yuk yuk.

Pick me a town in any clime where people like a swinging time, stay awake both day and night, where everybody's feeling right, let me read Koontz until I satisfy my evil soul, yuk yuk.

Sing it, yuk yuk.

Let me swing until I satisfy my soul, yuk yuk.

I play a mean trombone, don't I? Yuk yuk.

Not as good as my piano, yuk yuk. Let's get back to my damn diary, yuk yuk.

Smack dab in the damn middle, yuk yuk. By the way, you know what should really embarrass you? Yuk yuk.

No, what.

The sheer number of Peter Coyote movies you've watched, yuk yuk. E.T., yuk yuk. The Edge, yuk yuk. Outrageous Fortune, yuk yuk. Sphere, yuk yuk.

Why should I be embarrassed? He's a damn good actor, must have some Indian blood and pop peyote buttons on the side, yuk yuk. Very straight, plays government authority figures well.

Yuk yuk. He was a true hippie when you were still hung up on James Bond and discovering the BASIC computer language on a teletype. He didn't even start out as an actor, that's the funny part. He started out as a writer, going to school and shit, but he got so sidetracked by the drug-fried leftist street revolution in the sixties that he ended up as a street-troupe actor so he could get laid, steal, demonstrate, and get arrested to experience 'real life', yuk yuk. He got mixed up with the then virulently white racist Hell's Angels, speed, and smack until his whole hippie movement fizzled in the greed of J.R. Ewing and Reaganomics. After twenty years selling out to the Hollywood establishment, he finally published a book last year, and I bet you didn't read it, yuk yuk.

No, but you're going to make me, aren't you?

Why should I? You'll just wait for the movie like you always do, yuk yuk. It wasn't even a novel, only a memoir, yuk yuk. Self-indulgent like all the hippie LSD-trippie types are known for. Too bad you missed out on that shit by a decade. Wait till you get your gray ponytail, yuk yuk.

Hey, I only have a few gray hairs. And I don't do drugs, just like Michael J. Fox taught me in his *Family Ties* days, yuk yuk.

Is that all the distractions you got, or can I get back to work? You probably couldn't come up with a good one if I asked ya. And don't say how many Dabney Coleman movies I have watched, yuk yuk. *Wargames, Nine to Five, Buffalo Bill*, yuk yuk.

Buffalo Bill was a TV show, not a movie, yuk yuk. The one where Geena Davis got her big break, yuk yuk. It was about the town of Buffalo, yuk yuk.

You're changing the subject. I bet you couldn't come up with another distraction. I'll give you to the count of three. One, two, ...

Oh yeah, just watch me. What are the melds in pinochle and their scoring values?

Tell me so I can ignore it.

150 points for a flush, which is the ace, ten, king, queen, and jack of trump. 10 points for the nine of trump, also called the deuce. 40 points for the king and queen of trump, commonly called a royal marriage; 20 points if they are not trumps, which they call a common marriage. 240 points for king and queen of all 4 suits, which they call a roundhouse, or a round trip.

Stop, yuk yuk.

Is it a Liz or a Zsa-Zsa? Yuk yuk.

Lame, yuk yuk. I'll get the Feveronics pinochle game and learn to play it with the computer.

Can I play too? Yuk yuk.

What else are you sitting on my shoulder for, you fine feathered friend of a kibbutzer, yuk yuk?

As Ronald Reagan would say, there you go again, yuk yuk.

What is it this time?

Kibbutz is an Israeli collective farm, yuk yuk. You meant kibitzer. I really put the kibosh on your ignorance, didn't I? Yuk yuk.

Go on, I can't stop you now. Next word play?

kibbe or kibbeh – a chapped or ulcerated chilblain, esp. on the heel. kibeï – a native U.S. citizen, born of immigrant Japanese parents but largely educated in Japan; cf. issei, nissei. kibble – to grind into coarse particles or bits; a meal or prepared dog food in this form. kibbutznik – a member of a kibbutz. kiblah – the point toward which Moslems turn when praying, viz. the location of the black stone at Mecca, in the Kaaba; the stone was supposedly given to Abraham by the angel Gabriel; from the Arabic word for cube.

Stop! I'm k'd out. You k.o.'d me in the first round, yuk yuk.

Kibbles n'Bits, kibbles'n bits, kibbles and bits, kibbles and bytes, yuk. Describes what I do for you in a nutshell, yuk yuk.

Alright, already, yuk yuk.

The word alright is frowned upon by English purists, yuk yuk. They prefer all right, yuk. Copyright, alrights reserved, yuk yuk.

Shut up, alright? Yuk yuk. I'll use alright to be a rebel, yuk yuk.

Alwrong, yuk yuk.

He was placed on their list of official crime fighting agencies in Washington. He could now ask for funding for specific law enforcement projects, and submit a proposal with a proposed budget, just like a manager in a big corporation.

His quarter-million, after taxes, paid for improvements to his Lab, and for the first time he had some money in the bank. He hated paying them taxes, but now he was square with the IRS for the first time in years, and it was a load off his mind.

His what? Yuk yuk.

Shut up, yuk yuk.

He was blowing bubbles under his duck pond now. When awake, and working.

He still faced the devil in his dreams.

You'll never get married to a woman in this world, chum. Maybe you should think about a nice man, yuk yuk. Michael Jackson's still single, yuk yuk. On the other hand, he only marries the rich and famous, and Big Bill is spoken for, yuk yuk.

Shut up, yuk yuk.

Imagine Michael's ebony in Big Bill's ivory, yuk yuk. Imagine the size of the divorce settlement, yuk yuk.

Michael doesn't do Windows, yuk yuk.

They can do it on the keys, yuk yuk. Does Big Bill have a big mouse? Yuk yuk.

Ask my Palm Pilot, yuk yuk.

I thought you preferred a full laptop, yuk yuk.

So I did, until now, yuk yuk.

Do I have a big bill? Yuk yuk.

How would I know? Yuk yuk.

Why do they call it Cold Duck? Yuk yuk.

Don't tell me.

A Hot Duck pops its own cork, yuk yuk.

I'm going to bed and sleep it all off, yuk yuk.

Sweet dreams, yuk yuk. Don't fall, yuk yuk.

Sleeping Where I Fall, yuk yuk. That's the title of Peter Coyote's memoir of the sixties and seventies. Something you just said made me suddenly remember it, yuk yuk.

Chapter 11

I want to be paid for my work.

Dork Dick was struggling with a nightmare, drenched in sweat, tossing, turning, breathing fresh air too fast for basal metabolism. His mind was feverish. In a wrestling match with Satan again. He had just watched a biography of Bill Gates on cable's Arts & Entertainment channel. The touching story of the dork workaholic who slept under his desk, slept on his girlfriend's doorstep, was half-dead when she found him. Didn't marry until he was almost forty. Married a Microsoft exec, just his type. The smiling face, dorky but cherubic. The proud parents, well-connected and wealthy themselves. Had a daughter, but as yet, no son. No matter, Big Bill's promised to give his personal fortune away. Probably will only leave his heirs a pittance.

A trillion or two each, yuk yuk.

There he was, standing in front of a new computer science center at a university, his name on the building. Smiling. A little like "what? me worry?" Alfred E. Neumann.

The smiling face kept haunting him, taunting him, mocking him, all night. Now the face began to talk.

Everybody who seeks to enter cyberspace will pay me. They will pay me at least one hundred dollars.

I look like I'm just 13 years old. But I'm the gate.

That was Bill Gates. He wrote a software program for the first consumer microcomputer, the Altair, and tried to sell it as a product, refusing a labor-hour contract like any other programmer would have negotiated, big dollar signs in his eyes. When he found out, to his horror, that people freely copied his software from each other for free, he never forgot it. He was different from the other computer geeks at computer fairs ever after: a wolf among the sheep.

He got even with the sheep. He became the robber baron of the millennium 5 years later when he cut a sweetheart deal with at-the-time almighty IBM, pandering a piece of software he bought for \$50K or so to them as his own, and insisting that each and every copy be licensed to the end-user for so-many bucks, just as with the now-obsolete Altair. This time, he had some competition: Digital Research and its CP/M.

His operating system he called MS-DOS, Microsoft Disk Operating System (the original programmer called it QDOS — quick and dirty operating system) a small software program most programmers could have written in a year or two single-handedly. He didn't even do that. He just had family connections and money to hire good lawyers. Together they wrote a contract that was a pact with the devil if there ever was one.

Gates was a lifelong lover of the game of Monopoly. His plan was to get a monopoly of all software for IBM's new personal computer, after ousting IBM from the picture.

First, he would suck up to them, and get them to put him in the game as its first player; spotting him Boardwalk to boot. Consequently, when it suited his purpose, he actually priced DOS fairly, at \$30 or so, Dork Dick forgot, to undercut DR's CP/M, which they charged \$200 or so for. Gates, for a season, was actually the man of the people, lowering the price of software for the little guy, yuk yuk.

When DR was out of the picture, he could and did sneak the price back up to what the market would bear, yuk yuk. Around a hundred dollars. Not only that, but he would release programs full of bugs, while feverishly working to fix them under the table. When consumers had spent enough time with their purchases to find the bugs and grumble, he would release an update, charging them for it. He thus doubled and redoubled his sales, by making his consumers into marks, yuk yuk.

If a million people want on, I will be paid one hundred million dollars.

If a billion people want on, I will be paid one hundred billion dollars.

Dork Dick was in mortal horror. The devil was talking, right in his face. And he looked thirteen. Planning to dominate the world, like in the game of Risk. With no more appreciation of the difference between a game and the real world than a thirteen-year-old who had been raised to win no matter what; to win pretty, win ugly, but just win.

This time it was real peoples' lives at stake; the gate to the future itself.

I myself did nothing for it. I just got there first. Like in the game of Monopoly. I bought up Boardwalk and you paved it with hotels for me.

I am the gate biller of cyberspace. And I am the most evil man who ever lived. And there is nothing you can do about it.

Dork Dick cried in his pillow. It was his fault somehow. He could have stopped him. He just didn't have the facts, the big picture. Nobody but Big Bill himself did.

The government should have.

That was where the government failed to do its duty.

Gates' entire DOS empire was based on a contract, a license to kill. At first, there was only IBM. After his DOS became the king with consumers, and all applications software had to be written for it or have no market, he could rewrite his ticket with IBM, as an explicit monopoly licensor of operating systems.

Later, he used his de facto monopoly to corral PC clone makers, who had to license his DOS for their machines, or go out of business. Once they had been sold, the consumer had no choice. Every time somebody bought a PC, he was all-but forced, coerced — left no choice — but to pay Microsoft one hundred dollars for a sub-license.

It was like he was trying to patent the PC itself, although he didn't invent it, and it was itself just a system built of off-the-shelf components. At the same time, he lauded the "open architecture" of the IBM PC, meaning the lack of proprietary rights or a patent; that is why thousands of entrepreneurs could and did go into business to make a cheaper, better, more reliable product, and did. But no matter how good they made it, Gates' DOS rode on its chips like an evil virus.

Meanwhile, IBM's dumb execs, seeing the consumer not buying its 'name brand' PCs, even with their untarnished reputation for service and quality — they decided to pull out of the market for hardware. After that, Microsoft was left with nothing but clone makers dependent on his licenses.

It was like a herd of ducks and geese at the lake. Microsoft were the geese, the only geese, and mean ones too. Anybody who tried to make their own DOS clone, or cut a deal with a clone manufacturer, got attacked mercilessly, pecked, honked at, until they gave up. This was the genius at work, honk honk. A big goose in a small pond.

What's really swift about this story is that the PC should have failed in the market totally. Apple Computer had developed a superior product, the Macintosh, that put the PC to shame. But the world doesn't beat a path to your door just because you've built a better mousetrap, does it?

Whether PC or Mac, the operating system was the bottleneck for the software, and that's why it became the genie's bottle for the greedy Gates; rub it, and squeeze the gold coins out, if you don't care whose blood, sweat, and tears you're stealing.

It was the problem of standardization. For application software to have a market, the underlying PC architecture has to be standardized, as does the operating system. Gates tried to patent the standards themselves virtually, even if he had to force the standards on the market himself.

He did it all with his damned licenses — contracts.

The government could have declared that, in the public interest, it had voided that contract; its courts wouldn't enforce it. Then people could get DOS for pennies, for free; the source code could be freely shared and improved on by other software companies, creating a healthy competition for new versions, and keeping the cost down. The engine of American ingenuity would then have been left wide open in the application software area too.

But the government completely dropped the ball. Meanwhile Big Bill's company was making all that money, with no plans on sharing it or refunding it. And without even needing to program anything: just update DOS from time-to-time. His company programmed other software packages as window dressing at first, and Big Bill studied night and day, went without sleep, trying to learn enough to be able to wow an occasional employee with a penetrating insight into his work; he was good at acting the part of the greatest genius, at least in his own company.

But creating new ideas: that wasn't his bag. What was his real life's work? To be the gate that bills. Kerchunk, kerchunk, kaching! go the cash registers.

Meanwhile, his bigger problem was Apple Computer. They had a far more brilliant group of designers, and their Macintosh was far ahead of IBM's PC. Like Microsoft's employees, Apple's considered IBM as the number one enemy; Big Bill never let them know the truth.

The trouble was, they were not marketing geniuses like Big Bill. They made the mistake of trying to proprietize the hardware, and bundle it with the software as a turnkey system, not imagining its potential for juking the market around by the veritable balls. The success of this product, however well deserved, would have choked off the market to hardware clone manufacturers.

Microsoft's software licensing deal, in comparison, looked like when the Nazis entered Russia and were welcomed as liberators. Thus, the collective might of the clone makers slowly but surely choked Apple out of the market, while Microsoft happily played both sides of the street against the middle.

If Apple had opened their Macintosh architecture up and let it be cloned, they could have licensed their operating system software like Microsoft did, and put Microsoft and their inferior attempted clone out of business. No yuk yuk.

As Apple's share of the market shrunk, and the IBM and clone share grew, Gates feverishly sunk at least fifty million dollars into cloning and stealing all the ideas Apple had developed for their Macintosh operating system, and thus was born Microsoft Windows, the company's banner product, a slow, buggy, inefficient memory and CPU hog of a program, that would waste millions of user man-hours waiting for it to spin its wheels in its own muck: if Gates could put this inferior turkey over on the market, he deserved to be the world's richest man, yuk yuk.

Apple might still have saved the day by doing things Bill's way. Instead, Apple sued Microsoft, claiming that the latter's clone software violated their proprietary rights. They lost, after a long, expensive legal battle (expensive to Apple not Microsoft, in the big picture) because Microsoft showed the non-technically savvy judges that, while their Windows operating system duplicated Apple Macintosh's function-for-function, Windows implemented each function differently (inferiorly). A real no-brainer that legal victory, yuk yuk.

Gates was a genius alright. A genius at Monopoly, the Real Life Edition®.

He did far more harm than good, delighted in destroying competition, not only Apple, but even the applications software companies that he had originally claimed his company was not interested in competing with — then kept all the cash in the game and wouldn't give it back. The government didn't make him give it back. It had already collected its cut, in taxes, and become an accomplice.

The software market was permanently rigged in favor of Microsoft, even for far more brilliant programmers than IBM or Apple had. If you wanted to start a software company, you had no choice, you had to market application software for PCs running Microsoft's DOS. But you have to compete with Microsoft in the investment market; and they have Boardwalk, you don't. So, investors preferred to invest in Microsoft's plans to make the same application software you were planning to, knowing it was a sure thing; you were the risk.

The ultimate investor insight: the fact you had a better, smarter software program, was irrelevant; they would rather wait to pay full price for Microsoft's junk, that they ripped off by copying yours, than get yours for half price now.

It was the damned Microsoft logo. The mark of the Beast. The fact that every time they turned their PC on people were greeted with a Microsoft logo, had turned them into virtual cult members, ready to follow their leader anywhere, to drink purple Kool-Aid for him. Gates got more free ads for his company than big corporations like McDonald's and Burger King could afford to pay for. Hitler invented mass propaganda via radio and movies; Gates moved it to PCs first and never stopped hammering it home.

The logo was the real gate. He had actually worked it onto the startup screens for every PC in existence; or as close as Satan would have wanted him to.

Pretty soon, nobody could stay in business making application software for PCs: Microsoft had a monopoly. But don't tell that to Big Bill's face: he would get as mad as the devil denouncing you. A true pathological grand thief.

And the really maddening part is, that buying something from Hell's Gates doesn't buy you anything but a raincheck from further payments, much like those West Virginia miners who sold their souls to the company store in the Jimmy Dean song.

The computer chips underlying PCs themselves evolve at such a rate that they double in computing power, at the same or lower price, every two years or so. So, buying the latest PC with Microsoft's spawn on it will only keep you on top for two or three years; then your computer is considered obsolete, and you can't even give it away, except to charities. You have to go back, maybe to the same clone maker, maybe another, Microsoft doesn't care. You have to relicense Microsoft's spawn from scratch. It's more like you're just renting their software, yuk yuk.

From day one Gates saw this vision: everybody dependent on personal computers, and having to rent his software to use them. He would be the Gate. All the software on all the PCs would be Microsoft's double-zero license. Meanwhile, the junkyards would be full of the PCs of the past, and his competitors. All junk.

It never had to be like this.

Where was the Bobby Kennedy to take him on early and decisively? Why didn't they use the RICO statute on him? The antitrust laws? The Hatch Act, yuk yuk?

The operating system for the PC was too important to public welfare for the government to back a monopoly in any way, shape, or form. Either they should have declared Microsoft's license illegal, or at least forced the price down to a dollar, instead of let them drive it up to one hundred dollars. Maybe they could have imposed an excise tax and plucked the money out of Gates' hands at the source, then given it to the SBA to invest in healthy competition.

Too late now. It would never have flown in Congress. Sounds like socialism. Would it have been? What could they have done?

Gates had created a devilish empire of licenses to kill competition. All based on a piece of software he stole for a song.

By the time IBM had realized that it had sold its soul to the devil, it was too late even for this former behemoth. Despite their investment of millions, billions, they could not stop the Microsoft operating system monopoly, nor stop the distortion of the market itself, the obscenely high cost of operating systems. They tried selling their competing operating system OS/2 for one hundred bucks too. If they had just given a hundred million copies away. Ah, the sweet sound of if. Skid Row's number one consolation.

Imagine a brilliant author writing a novel as brilliant as half of Shakespeare's plays put together. He puts it on the market as a hardback, at a price of one hundred dollars.

People rebel. No one novel is worth that, no matter how brilliant. The book is subject to widespread pirating. The right of the people to know is supreme. The author makes little more than his advance.

Now imagine Big Bill putting, not a work of sublime brilliance that advances humanity itself, but a how-to manual, on the book market. 'How To Make A PC Do Basic Functions', one hundred dollars. And then sell one hundred million copies, because it's encrypted, and a PC is just a piece of junk without it.

Meanwhile, anybody trying to decrypt and publish what it says is sued, threatened with jail. Anybody trying to make a clone program, likewise. And anybody trying to make application software that doesn't use it at all is in a dream world; there just isn't any way around it.

Even the original author of DOS would be sued and jailed for trying to make another DOS, yuk yuk. And maybe that is Gates' achilles heel too. Maybe the courts could declare the original sale invalid because of fraud, and all licenses based on it void, yuk yuk. He might still claim a copyright to his updates to it, but they would be invalid too, since the original copyright applications had to state who owned the copyright to any works DOS was based on, and were now improper, yuk yuk. He might still try to force the clone makers who had signed licenses to honor them, regardless of the copyright issue. They would, by tearing them up, yuk yuk. The DOS program itself could then be freely distributed on their clones without any license.

But that was what a Bobby Kennedy would have done, not what happened. Instead, at the key moment, thanks to Microsoft lobbying a stupid Congress to pass laws against 'software piracy', government agents could break your door down, seize your PC, search it for "illegal pirated software", make you pay through the nose for it, huge fines added, jail sentence hanging over your head. A few highly-publicized arrests serve to keep the sheep in line.

Big Bill is the gatekeeper. Not of the Pearly Gates. Of Hell. He turned the PC into hell's gate.

The sheep are lined up quietly in front of hell's gate.

To compete against Microsoft soon made one a black sheep. A goat.

A whole generation of bright programmers found out that, no matter how bright they were, no matter how hard they worked, they couldn't give their software away, while Microsoft could and did foist inferior software in every category on a market that had no choice but to purchase it.

Since it's all encrypted, Gates can meanwhile claim to be a genius — the greatest genius — and get away with it at will. He is a genius, but at marketing only. If he were a genius at mathematics and computer science, he'd be six weeks from bankruptcy like everybody else, because he couldn't give his software products away in the distorted Microsoft-dominated market.

A starving goat, living off refuse. One had to have a hard stomach indeed to remain a goat. Not that there isn't green grass pasture in plenty, if you give up the dream to sell your software as a product like Microsoft does. Sell programming labor as a service, and then you're welcomed back to the meadow. You're permanently out of

competition with Microsoft. Instead, you're part of its labor pool. They will even train and certify you. Eventually, you will find it hard even to sell your labor if you don't have their certification.

I want to be paid for my work. And the rest of you can eat cake.

Not that the market was educated enough even to know that what they were buying from the DeBeers of software was schlock. That was the true brilliance of Big Bill: he never let his marks know they were dumb to keep him in business. No consumer revolt at the cash register, nothing. Yet it was always they, the consumer, that had the power to break Gates.

Take OS/2, IBM's operating system. It had been out for years, and was far less bug-ridden and far more capable and mature than Windows 3.1, yet the shopkeepers sold the latter to herds of eager customers, while the OS/2 packages were relegated to the dumpsters in back. When Microsoft finally halfway caught up with Windows 95, it resold its old customers without effort, effectively making two sales for the same thing they could have bought from IBM the first time. IBM gave up.

It was dumb execs in IBM who created the monster, with their penchant for keeping competition against themselves down. Wanting only a single PC software company to deal with, that they thought they could destroy or buy-out when convenient: that was their big mistake.

Not that the government didn't compound the problem by considering them — not Microsoft — as the danger, from their decades of dominating the computer industry, back when computers meant only mainframes. IBM was self-conscious about appearing to have a monopoly, and allowed companies to go into and stay in business competing against them apparently, for window dressing against government intervention.

When mainframes themselves were made obsolete by PCs, and Microsoft revealed their intention of pushing IBM out of their market completely, the trap was complete. Even they could spend billions, employ their best and brightest, and end up bankrupt: that was the game of Monopoly, after all.

This was the first time that they couldn't stop the competition from being real; and maybe the last. Even cash-rich IBM couldn't stay in a game of Monopoly without Boardwalk.

For the first time in history, IBM laid off workers, failed to pay a dividend on its stock. One day Microsoft would buy IBM at a fire sale. IBM couldn't even give its mainframes away. Even IBM's execs would have to pay Microsoft licensing fees when they tried to use PCs.

Big Bill went without sleep to make sure nobody could catch up to him. The game started rigged, and he meant to keep it that way. You could enter the game with any amount of money you wanted, go round after round. Each round, you'd have to run faster to stay in the same place. In the end, you had to lose; it was rigged. So, welcome to Big Bill's Free Marketplace, yuk yuk.

A chain of crimes to protect one's own source of income. When you're rich enough, you can launder your crimes, yuk yuk.

The world was ripe for total domination by Big Bill, when something unexpected his way came. The Net. Netscape. Junkyard dog Janet Reno and the Justice Department. Steve Case and America Online. Java. Yahoo! Excite. Lycos. Amazon.Com. Online porno.

A man whose whole life is a game. Goes without sleep until he is forced to drop. His mind totally engrossed with the game. Not much room there for things like philosophy, truth, beauty, and art — the so-called humanities — much less the sciences. Just the guy we want running the world — not.

Dork Dick gulped. It suddenly occurred to him that because Big Bill wasn't deeply studied in the sciences and humanities, he could never really be truly dangerous. A man with the deep erudition and the big bucks: that would be the first threat to rule the world for real. Maybe he was doing the world a favor by keeping a much more dangerous

person down. Maybe a more dangerous person was letting him run out in front and draw the scrutiny, while he finished his plans, plans that might be easy to sell Big Bill himself on, causing him to throw all his wealth into it blindly.

Shudders in the night. It was all too deep for him. He was just one fish in the sea. The sea didn't depend for its existence on what he did or thought, thankfully.

But Big Bill keeps on keeping on. He can't do anything else. He can't help himself.

Maybe the government can declare all of Big Bill's money to be play money and save the rest of it for real people, yuk yuk.

It's 1999, and the issue is still too close to call. But Big Bill has not scooped up the Net's Boardwalk yet. Not that he hasn't tried, but this time the consumer is more savvy, and Microsoft's Internet software and services are refused point blank, even when offered free. Ironically, if Big Bill had really been what he claims, a genius, he could have invented, created, implemented, and patented the Net before anybody else, and just in time for Nostradamus' fans to rejoice in glee. Gee, he coulda been a contender. Coulda even patented the standards for all Nets. Sued people for starting a Net without his permission.

Maybe there is a God, yuk yuk.

One hundred dollars. One hundred dollars. Thank you, here's your receipt. One hundred dollars. Today we have a surprise! A discount! Ninety-nine dollars and ninety-nine cents. Ninety-nine dollars and ninety-nine cents. Ninety-nine dollars and ninety-nine cents. Ninety-nine dollars and ninety-nine cents. Ninety-nine dollars and ninety-nine cents. A hundred million times, thank you. Two hundred million. Three hundred million. Four hundred million. Five hundred million. Let's double that.

All because the U.S. Constitution says something about Congress having the power to secure to authors and inventors the rights to their works for a limited time. After it says that the main purpose for Congress is to secure the general welfare, yuk yuk. In Microsoft's case, the limited time should have been about one or two years maximum. After they made ten, twenty, a hundred million, the government should have pulled the plug fast. The original programmer, fie his name should survive the Apocalypse, got fifty thousand bucks.

Congress did a great job there of securing his rights to his works, yuk yuk.

Bill Gates is a thief. A grand thief. All he markets is his own self-image. All he creates is suckers.

"We sell these neat boxes that do neat things" — Dork Dick tried to remember Gates' exact words from the A&E Biography, and ended up with a convenient paraphrase. They did sell boxes. Cardboard boxes. Inside they contained diskettes, CD-ROMs, that they also sold. But the software on them they never sold. They only licensed it. That's where the devil does his dirty work.

Bill Gates is the biggest criminal in American history. And he will never be caught, nor do a day in jail.

Dork Dick was sick. He hated the way the world had come out. He hated the very existence of Microsoft and Big Bill. He hated the rest of the world for not stopping him. If they had killed Hitler when he was an infant, a boy, a teenager, in his twenties, his thirties, his forties.

Why wasn't software the most vital and competitive industry in history? It was born in the land of the free, the home of the brave, the winner of the Cold War against Communism. Just when they thought they won, here comes Windows 95 and none other than Jay Leno introduces it on a stage to America, while the Rolling Stones sing Start It Up.

Too much wealth and power in too few hands. There could have been five, ten, a hundred thriving companies in the place of the Microsoft's one. And none of them would have hired Bill Gates as a programmer — no talent, no imagination, yuk yuk. If he had an MBA he could get a job in some marketing department. Most likely he'd get a law degree to go with it. Imagine him as your lawyer, yuk yuk.

Imagine if there were several Bill Gates, yuk yuk.

Too much wealth and power in too few hands. Even if they think of it as a game and live like the proletariat, eat pizza and drink canned pop, fly coach, let their mansion be used for business as well as pleasure, plan to give it all away to prevent a hereditary gentry from abusing it.

You can't have that much money and not become corrupt. How can you stand all the suffering, the starvation, the injustice, and keep it? If you do, you have to be as corrupt as the devil. You have to like it that way.

But he was a dork. A computer dork. A male computer dork.

Everybody who seeks to enter cyberspace will pay me. They will pay me all they have, and still owe me.

Still owe him. Owe what? What else is left? Their souls And then they'd insert a bug in their stomach, through the belly-button.

And 5 million American women have anorexia nervosa or bulimia, yuk yuk.

Was it too late now?

Bond, James Bond. He has the license to kill. When will MI6 give him the nod?

Oops. He wasn't British. His American government didn't have an MI6. Their CIA had a charter prohibiting domestic operation. At least when they had to tell it to Congress.

Chapter 12

That morning Dork Dick slept until noon. He woke up more tired than when he had gone to bed. He had spent the whole night wrestling with the devil. He kept having this dream about a giant car, a jeep or a mail truck; he wasn't sure, because it kept changing. It was so huge that the driver's seat was a decoy; the real driver's seat was inside one of the tires. It got into battles, and the enemy couldn't stop it because he aimed for the drivers in the seats, who weren't there. Even if it got into a terrible crash, the tire with the real drivers would just pop out, and the tire would become a rescue craft, its super-thick rubber coating oblivious to the goings-on.

And when the sun was seen in its normal place in the sky, the ducks just as happy as ever, the monitors of all the TV channels going on just as cheerfully, he forgot what he had been dreaming about.

Another day at the salt mines, yuk yuk.

He was up out of his sleeping bag and into his cockpit seat after only a short trip to the john.

No, he didn't forget everything. He had been wrestling with an angel, not a devil.

Wrestling with an angel. Who did that? Jacob, right? He looked up an online Bible, and found it in Genesis, chapter 32.

For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.

There's a difference between autonomy and secession into a separate nation. Kosovo and Yugoslavia, for instance. When it comes to the Net, there is no such choice.

This salad has been handed down from my great grandfather, to my grandfather, to my father, to me.

It was Easter Day. The PBS affiliate was airing 'Easter Parade', starring Judy Garland and Fred Astaire, like they did every year since 1948, yuk yuk. Not.

Their religious hatred had been handed down for countless generations, for six hundred years, even though the Muslims and Eastern Orthodox Christians were now mixed in the Balkans like a salad. They never got the hang of just working together and leaving heaven for the philosophers, like in the world of Big Bill.

Religion was the original software monopoly, yuk yuk.

At least there was more than one Big Bill: a Big Jesus, a Big Mohammad, and let's not forget Big Buddha; and, in the 20th century, Big Adolf, Big Josef, Big Mao. Did he forget the 19th century and Big Joseph, Big Mary? It was sick, but far healthier than the looming 21st century cyberspace scene promised to be.

Now he remembered a chunk of his nightmare. Big Bill, the devil himself, towering over the gate of Hell, smiling sweetly. And nobody does anything about it. He can walk around among the sheep without a fraction of the security of a Milosevic, a Clinton, a Pope Paul.

Slobby Dan Sonofabitch? Yuk Yuk.

How does he do it? Or is he basically asking for it? Wants to be assassinated? Go figure.

Who, Slobby Dan?

No, Big Bill.

Imagine being his bodyguard, yuk yuk.

He hasn't even been kidnapped yet and held for ransom. He should be good for at least 50 billion or so, yuk yuk.

Double that if you really want it, yuk yuk.

If no private citizens would, why didn't a foreign country kidnap him? Iraq for instance. Their army keeps America from capturing Saddam Hussein, so it should be able to keep it from rescuing Big Bill long enough to milk his family for ransom.

That assumes his family would pay ransom for him, yuk yuk.

That's right. Why should they? They can keep his money, and stop him from giving it away to charity like he promised.

He's nothing but a pair of dancing shoes, really. What color are his eyes?

That night he was back wrestling with his devil.

The entire Microsoft empire was built on sand. Software can easily be copied, licenses or no licenses, copyrights or no copyrights. To force people to give them money when they just know they don't need to pay 'really', is a terrifically cruel trick.

He had to give Gates credit. Microsoft had become the world's richest company purely by finding a way to collect all the money on Earth for something that it shouldn't have been able to collect much money on. Their competitors couldn't, didn't, from day one, no matter how great their software was. It didn't pay to study computer science; better to read Machiavelli, and watch *Dallas* TV reruns on The Nashville Network

All the software companies waxed lyrical about illegal copying and software piracy. Only Microsoft transcended the karma of it and cashed in; the very merciless attitude it took to extract the first buck, duplicated by means of the inhuman automation of computers themselves, as easily to tens of billions of bucks as the first buck.

Selling software is tricky on two levels. One, the stuff is just 1s and 0s, and can be illegally copied. Zero, the source code, if copied, can be modified to create a new product, a new company, a new competitor. Thus, Microsoft never sold source code, never even licensed it probably.

Dork Dick remembered the A&E Bio of Gates. IBM had tried to get at the DOS source code, and Gates refused. This was his most critical moment. The dumb IBM execs should have used their muscle. They had it back then. Too bad.

By selling only object code, Gates is insuring that not only end-users, but potential competitors, cannot get their hands on the source code. Reverse-engineering is heavily and explicitly proscribed in all Microsoft licenses, yuk yuk. But what stopped a thousand companies from reverse-engineering DOS?

Dork Dick still didn't *get* it. A mystery. Like who killed Kennedy.

He did get the joke of OS/2 being called OS Dos, for the Mexican word for two. That was funny — until Windows 95 killed OS/2.

Was Gates just lucky? Or did he do things he would like to hide now? He wished he could get some dope on him that would deep-six him like Gordon "greed is good" Gekko, yuk yuk. Something illegal. Something criminal. Ah well.

If the source code had been made public from day one, then not only IBM, but every clone maker, could have enjoyed a healthy market of software companies making their own versions of DOS, with competitive features and pricing. The licenses would have been more like a buck per copy, not a hundred bucks.

If Congress had 20-20 vision, it could have stepped in from the start, and declared DOS to be the gate, the Boardwalk of the game, and no one person or company should be able to have a monopoly in it. If he cried foul, then throw back at him the fact that all copyrights, all patents, are themselves government-granted monopolies: what the government giveth, it can taketh away, if the general welfare demands it.

To cry that the government shouldn't intervene in the marketplace, is deceptive double-speak: without the government intervening, automatically, constantly, through its Copyright, Patent, and Trademark Office, there would be real free enterprise — and nobody, not even Big Bill's competitors, could stand that. He just wanted a monopoly on being first to the choice properties and planting his hotels, rigging the game so that no matter who came in later, no matter how brilliant, no matter how much money they brought into the game, it would all just end up in his hands at the end, as they went bankrupt and out.

Big Bill just knew he was a genius. He had fixed the game from the first day, and kept his competition, and the public, and especially Congress, from seeing it until it was well nigh impossible to stop it, without bad side-effects he would be sure to point out. Like all that employment he had created, being destroyed; all those taxes his employees paid, stopping. All the jobs in Washington State, moving out. Maybe moving out of the whole country, he could argue, yuk yuk. He could wave the flag of patriotism like American auto and steel workers did, even though he was an owner, not a working stiff.

Why does hindsight not only give you 20-20 vision, but haunt your soul so hotly? If he had only known what was going on back in the seminal days of the early 1980s, he could have become a prophet, got a Ph.D in it, given lectures, wrote papers, and alerted the world to the Microsoft Menace. If they had heeded him, then mission accomplished, case closed. If they didn't, he could at least have said "I told ya so," and maybe now wouldn't be so plagued by nightmares, by guilt, by a sense of personal debt for it all. Women might come looking to give him some sex as a partial consolation.

He could have stopped Gates. He could have. He could.

Not only that, but way back in the early 1980s, he could have been the first to campaign against the looming Y2K problem, and got double credit. He could have predicted software viruses, and warned against them too. He wouldn't mind having become a multi-millionaire for it either, yuk yuk.

Like in that novel 'Ender's Game', by Orson Scott Card. A six-year-old kid is chosen to save Earth from a race of marauding alien bug creatures, who have almost destroyed Earth once, and are threatening to do so again. Only this kid can save Earth, because he had the right stuff. He does it without even realizing it, thinking he is just practicing on a simulator, playing a game, when he's really hooked up to the real Earth fleet, and blasting real space bugs. He always wins games; he won the real one too, without being frozen by philosophical self-doubts.

He was the Bill Gates of space warfare, when it had become all cerebral.

But then, he had backing. Dork Dick couldn't count on that. Nobody chose him for a mission impossible. He was way over six years old.

Nobody listens to nobodies. He would have been silenced. He was fighting the odds, fighting history.

But one man can change things. Even if he did a little time, maybe it would have been worth it for his peace of mind.

Ender's siblings were a brilliant as he, and tried to rule the world by using fake names on the Net, and leaving political commentaries that influenced people's views and actions. They would seed debates with several voices at the same time, playing all sides against the middle, leaving one big voice to clean up at the end and look all the more brilliant and convincing. This novel was even more classic since the Net hadn't really been created yet. Now everybody's filling up the newsgroups with Ender-wannabe manipulative posts.

But if he could go back, he could be the first to do it for real, if not on the Net, then on the computer BBSes (bulletin board systems) that grew up at the grassroots level, even in the days of the Apple, before the PC. He could have predicted that Microsoft was the Great Satan, and the embodiment of all evil, from day one. He might have given them a bad image and caused the IBM execs to pull out of the initial sweet sucker deal.

Card must have known about BBSs when he wrote the novel in 1983 or 1984; therefore, it wasn't that hard to extrapolate to a new future Net.

Too bad. It coulda been a contender, yuk yuk.

Marlon Brando was more brilliant, creating the prototype for millions of losers beaten by Big Bill, yuk yuk. That face, that voice — genius, classic, timeless. His own face, yuk yuk.

Even if that didn't work, he could have used his dick skills. He could have burgled Microsoft's offices, stole the source code, gleefully distributed free copies to hungry programmers all the way from Washington to San Francisco and New York.

He could have led a commando raid on the Redmond, Washington headquarters of Microsoft.

The taking of Redmond 1-2-3, yuk yuk. Maybe even now the thought will occur to somebody to send a small army to their compound, surround it, and force them to hand over all source codes, and then instantly transmit it worldwide on the Net, freeing the world forever. Perhaps the Indians, working with Muslim Kosovar immigrants, or something like that.

He'd like to write that screenplay, yuk yuk. Gates wouldn't give up without a fight, not if it were a 90 minute screenplay. Dick, Dork Dick, would parachute in first, and rescue the hostages held in captivity deep within the compound, disable the fail safe self-destruct device on the source code vaults. Gates' workers would not only be programmers but trained paramilitary troops, well-supplied and armed to the teeth, and eagerly popping mind-altering drug pills to juke their fighting hormones and pain threshold up to the max.

It would be a great finale to the screenplay, costing millions to stage. At the end, the whole complex would be blown, would catch fire, and disappear from the face of the Earth.

Touched By An Angel, the CBS series starring Roma Downey. Last night Dork Dick had watched it with his madre. It was about a cult led by a charismatic black guy, who took disenchanted people into a commune, and prepared to give them poisoned Kool Aid and burn them in gasoline. Roma appeared to them at the critical moment as an angel, all illuminated with a spotlight, and saved all of them; all except the leader himself, who committed suicide.

And was sent straight to Hell, yuk yuk.

Bill Gates' corporate HQ reminded Dork Dick of that commune. The A&E special, which showed Gates holding some kind of sick dork olympics, planning out the events in detail; people jumping into a river or lake, paddling about, jumping up and down frantically at the shore, shouting and screaming. When the invasion came, and they lost, he'd have his bodyguards ladling out the purple goop and splashing the gasoline.

Who would be the angel? Roma? No. Him? Not likely. His madre, who was instrumental in his rise, using her wealth and social connections to get her son an interview with IBM's CEO, leading to the big contract for their new PC? Yes, his madre. She would come back from purgatory, telling him that she had made a mistake, and wanted to correct it now, yuk yuk.

Did he move into his Redmond digs before or after he became unstoppable? Your commando raid might not be going far enough back in time, yuk yuk.

Dream-spoiler. I didn't hear that, yuk yuk.

What if he, Dork Dick, took to haunting the Seattle area, especially around the airport, looking to get lucky and find Bill Gates flying in coach on the red-eye, with only one or two bodyguards? Could he kill the bodyguards with a micro-Uzi, kidnap the devil boy, and have the will to torture him on video tape, cut off an ear, extract confessions and apologies, maybe get him to walk him into the main HQ where he could get the source code out and then transmit it to the world over his own MSNet? He'd hide the missing ear with a rakish beret, yuk yuk.

You're sick, yuk yuk.

If he tried to torture Big Bill, what would it be like? He retched at the thought of it. He wasn't a torturer, sorry. Too bad. Millions would get off on a video of it probably. Like that Nicholas Cage flick *8MM*, where a Bill Gates type rich tycoon pays \$1 million for a young woman to be 'snuffed', just for kicks. He tried to forget he ever thought of it, move on to some other thought.

It's like sawing women in half. I wouldn't know which half to throw away, yuk yuk.

You already told that one, yuk yuk.

I was just planting that one on you then to show I'm psychic, yuk yuk.

You stole it from Jerry Lewis anyway, yuk yuk. From his movie *Geisha Boy* (1958). We watched it together, remember?

Very Jewish of us, yuk yuk.

Shut up, yuk yuk.

The French were into him deep, yuk yuk.

Shut the fuck up, yuk yuk.

But if he could hold him hostage, why couldn't he get him to do business at the speed of thought, and give all his money back? On the Net: at the speed of thought. Give the money back, and give the source code out. Then he wouldn't kill the dork. He'd just make his getaway, knowing nobody would pursue him.

It was his dream, and he could pull out the stops. What about hiring O.J. Simpson to knife the dork, and his entire family too, in case they got any ideas about inheritance? He was the only real double-zero license-to-kill agent in America, and everybody knew it — everybody white, yuk yuk. The blacks largely believed he didn't do it; and want to be accepted as the intellectual equal of the whites at the same time, yuk yuk. Sorry, they flunk, yuk yuk.

That IQ test was culturally biased, yuk yuk.

So, hire him to do Big Bill. He would, for the right price. A few dozen bills — billions. Enough to buy his own country in Africa and set himself up as the king, yuk yuk. Thousands of beautiful white women would follow willingly, wanting to be his Queen Noors — all at the same time.

How about infiltrating a computer software fair, knocking an exhibitor out and impersonating him, wait for Big Bill to come around and visit him? Then spring the trap, kill his bodyguards, whisk him away to the roof, then by helicopter to the wharf, and into a tramp steamer headed for parts unknown in the Middle East or Africa?

How about creating an android that just appears on Microsoft's doorstep, asking to be adopted? Like a Trojan Horse, yuk yuk. They eagerly take it in, asking how it works so they can duplicate it and make more billions. Suddenly, it taps into their computers, extracts all their source codes, and transmits them worldwide along the Net, then sets off a small nuke hidden in its pelvic region, yuk yuk.

Big Bill had sewed the lid on the consumer software industry the day he bought all rights to DOS for fifty thousand bucks from a grateful starving programmer who wasn't a marketing genius. You can't buy that many rights to anything for fifty thousand bucks. He had sold not only his, but every other programmer's soul, to the devil. Everybody's soul. Who would take it to the Supreme Court and get it invalidated? Contracts for selling your soul to the devil aren't enforceable in American courts, right? And what about courts in other countries? Where there's a will there's a way.

Courts do what the people with the gold tell them, just like the politicians do. Microsoft had the gold now to own the joint, pay off anybody. All because of those stupid little diskettes saying "DOS". The worst piece of software in history, in the hands of the devil, cost the human race its soul.

Hire the world's strongest man, from one of those ESPN shows, yuk yuk.

You caught me watching again, didn't you? I wish I had a body like them.

How about that event when they roll 700-pound truck tires end-to-end across a sand lot? You couldn't even budge one of them tires, yuk yuk.

Don't rub it in, yuk yuk. Maybe one of them strong men could overpower Big Bill's bodyguards and snap his neck like a duck, yuk yuk.

Drop the subject, yuk yuk. What does the E in ESPN stand for? Yuk yuk.

Frankly, my dear duck, I don't give a damn, yuk yuk.

Chapter 13

But tomorrow is another day, yuk yuk.

Hip-Hop: Dork Dick had been meaning to check up on this hip-hop thing ever since the incident with the duck blasters. He finally tried surfing some sites on the subject, putting together a profile.

It began in the 1970s in New York's South Bronx, on the streets. Gangs like to hang out on the streets. They have to have something to do when they're not committing crime or shooting each other. African-American and Hispanic roots. Breakdancers. Rappers. Graffiti artists.

It evolved into a surrogate for gangfights. They would try to outdo each other in windmills and head spins instead of knifing each other like in a Michael Jackson video.

Their brains must have ended up bruised, like Muhammad Ali, yuk yuk.

It used to be an improvisational act. Now it's carefully choreographed. Even air jogging, or spinning on your head, your skull cushioned by a bandana, baseball hat, and a wool cap. They have dance schools for it just like Fred Astaire once had for his flavor.

Dork Dick was skinny enough to attempt it, but too old to have the energy. He tuned to BET and MTV to watch some hip-hop, Lauryn Hill being the current queen. He didn't 'get' it. It sucked. Why didn't they give the Grammy to Shania Twain instead of her? He was in tears, he really was.

The loose clothes. That was the essence. Can't do it in tight clothes. Loose clothes let you conceal things on the street, particularly handguns. That would be the day. James Bond air jogging in loose clothes, fighting SPECTRE agents, his Walther PPK blazing away at the same time, yuk yuk.

They don't do it in India yet, he figured. No room. Too much cowshit in the way. Cows would stomp you. Cobras would bite you in the ass. Hip-hop presupposes lots of room, lots of good clean surfaces, good clean American streets. Presupposes cops lurking about, always on the verge of hassling you. Presupposes having to always explain why you shouldn't be arrested for loitering. It's a brewing race war on the streets.

India has one of the sickest social systems ever devised, the caste system. The untouchable class shovels all the shit, cleans all the latrines, is regarded as human shit. An American couldn't tell one class from another if they were lined up naked in a police lineup — the originally distinct races had long since been mixed up to the finest degree.

The land of India is known for its great problems, but it also has great untapped resources, particularly, large numbers of bright, eager, English-speaking workers.

Software programming is basically English language-based. This is because of its roots, and because the biggest computer manufacturers and software companies are based in English language speaking countries. For speakers of other languages to compete, they have to do it in English.

Why not recruit millions of untouchables, the dorks of India, and let them program software? An idea worthy of Edison, yuk yuk.

Open Source. That name was one bright spot on the dark Microsoft-dominated horizon. A new type of software. One thing about Microsoft products, they were an all-or-nothing proposition. Inside the neat box was a CD that did a ton of neat things, but you couldn't rent it on a per-use basis, you had to license the whole package, however much or little you used it. That's why software seemed to promise a golden land of ease for all, when actual productivity went flat, even went down. You were so busy studying all the neat things a package could do for you that you wasted more time than you saved by the time you did the little real thing you really needed to do with it. And you had to pay for the whole package.

Open Source was a brilliant idea, therefore, not of Gates. It allowed per-use charging for software functions in a Net environment, allowed functions to be purchased instantly from a variety of software companies, not bundled all together by one monolithic company.

It was too early to call this fight. Big Bill and his company would instinctively do everything they could to stop anything that promised to let any competition whatever into their monopoly. But how could it be kept down forever? Time would tell. Maybe after the year 2000 madness dies down, and the dust settles, all will be well with the world after all. Bill Gates will declare bankruptcy, die in obscurity and poverty, selling his last curio to a pawn shop, eating out of garbage bins, his face covered with horrible cancers, his body ridden with unspeakably degrading and painful diseases. A beggar in Calcutta. An outcast. An untouchable.

Chapter 14

Dork Dick was lurching in front of his all-powerful console, his altar to the god of cyberspace, on a cube of Colby cheese, some oat bran bread, and a few nips from a jug of Carlo Rossi burgundy. Eating the cheese somehow made him think of eating shit, and liking it, like a starving rat.

A complete meal, all the nutrition needed, give or take some citrus products, and all dirt cheap. He'd have a grapefruit at madre's later that evening, eating it raw and whole, no sugar spooned onto it, just to make his nutrition complete. After that he'd have dessert, one loaded with sugar; at that point his system had built up its immunity enough to handle anything.

He had been watching John Le Carre on cable TV, on the Book Channel. The silver-haired Brit was reading from his novels and making clever on-the-spot asides, while wowing the audience with the economy and precision of his prose. References to compatriots such as Anthony Burgess exposed one's ignorance so politely, in the subtle British manner. He could just see the ghosts of Sir Alec Guinness and Michael Caine hovering over him like guardian angels.

To Dork Dick, this Brit was the enemy.

John Le Carre. Real name David Cornwall. Should be corned beef. Corny all. Porn wall. The spy dreambuster. He called Ian Fleming's works "cultural pornography." They both were part of Britain's intelligence community, but the former wanted to tell it like it is too much. Spies were nothing but bureaucratic postal clerks with eyes on other countries' similar numbers. No evil master criminals with monocles and pet cats. Gorgeous women went into acting and modeling, not real spying. The muscle men weren't; more like technicians, with cellular phones, binoculars, orchestrating their kills like game wardens.

If so, so much the better for movies.

Those jaded Brits, thinking they had a debt to pay, joined the Circus, yuk yuk. Became socialist or went communist in droves. Were easy for Moscow to recruit, playing on their famed Anglo-Saxon guilt about daring to have dreams of empire, and seeing their empire swallowed up in two world wars in which they didn't have the guts to join Germany's side and win. Their very taking of sides with Russia against Germany as much as made them all commie sympathizers, even though their alliance with America pulled them back the other way.

Meanwhile, they let Bill Gates steal it all from both sides, all sides, forever. And without guilt.

Intellects as vast as the Brits possess could have gone into software bigtime and, through their socialist tendencies, rescued it from Microsoft. Instead, John Le Carre worries over *The Spy Who Came In From the Cold* until he has reduced it from one hundred fifty to fifty-five thousand words. That will save the trees — for Dean Koontz. That will keep the cover price down for the poor intelligentsia. That will keep him from making too much wealth to be guilty for later, like Tolstoy.

All they felt was their own pain. And typed it all in on an ancient device called a typewriter, not Microsoft Word.

Be the gate. Gates' legacy to the world. Just a word play on his own damned name.

What about the Gates Rubber Company? Different Gates. They sold out to some Brits. Go figure. They wanted to be the attache case, the suitcase, the Samsonite, not the gate. Big Bill could buy them out with his petty cash drawer now.

Dork Dick could churn out fiction. Well-turned phrases, colorful characters, memorable plots, and all that rot

Let's see, yuk yuk. *The Spy Who Came In From the Cold Closet*, yuk yuk.

Smiley stood, Earl Grey at the ready, spine to the cold Queen Liz fireplace, Oxford to the grate, leather elbow pad of the pullover to the Shakespeares on the teak shelves of dad's library. "First let's do the numbers," he began, eyebrows leaping with a penman's flourish, a smart fart punctuating the sentence musically.

"It may be autumn south of Ecuador, Amigo Smiley, but jew can't figure the currency devaluation een Brazil until the IMF announces the turnaround plan." Shlomo Francisco de Caravallo stroked his waxed mustache with the forefinger, the rest of his delicate digits poised on the tea cup and saucer with the expertise of a Polish accordionist waiting his cue on critics' night, the pinky alone raised saucily away from the lacey cuff, suggestively close to Smiley's beige cotton athletic supporter. He looked so good in pullover, supporter, and garter belt, thought Caravallo; legs could use some shaving, though.

"I feel, amigo, that if we don't do the numbers, the numbers may well do us - do us all."

"Do you? Doo whacky doo whacky doo dam bam bang boom! Burp! Shakealeg!"

"You're welcome. I took the liberty of spiking our tea with dear old dad's private reserve. When are you going back to Austin and give up this Brazilian act?"

"When are jew going back to the monastery and tell them jew're a fairy?"

"When you do."

The teacup exploded out of Shlomo's hands. Before he could register surprise on his face, he was dead.

Smiley dropped the patronizing smile. His secret is never broken, just the tea services.

"And that will be never, silly ass. If I have to say it, your samba sucked as poorly as you." He blew out the tip of his saucer gun. "Whhhh!" "I'll mention you in my book, amigo, but only as a favor to myself."

Should it be "as poorly as you", or "as poorly as you did"? Accuracy and precision are at stake, yuk yuk. What now? Leave it to his editor? Yuk Yuk. On the podium, he'd quote himself as if it were all quite easy, quite effortless. Pip pip, bloody bloody, cheerio, and all that.

But John Le Carre would not let the world see it until he had honed it down to the tersest and the cleverest. Let's see:

Smiley leaned, tea up, against a Folio at the grate. "First let's do the numbers," he said with his 3 B's: brogue, brows, buns. The latter cold.

"It may be autumn south of Ecuador, Amigo Smiley, but jew can't figure the currency devaluation een Brazil until the IMF announces the turnaround plan." Shlomo Francisco de Carvalho's waxy lips shaved and ate the Olde English peach with a standing sip.

"I feel, amigo, that if we don't do the numbers, the numbers may well do us — do us all."

A neigh.

"You're welcome. I took the liberty of spiking our tea with dear old dad's private reserve. When are you going back to Austin and give up this Brazilian act?"

"When are jew going back to the monastery and tell them jew're a fairy?"

"When you do."

Shlomo's teacup flash photographed his deathmask. Title: "Saucer gun stops another tattle."

"And that will be never, silly ass. If I have to say it, your samba sucked as poorly as you. Whhhh! I'll mention you in my book, amigo, but only as a favor to myself."

Is there anything Big Bill can't take over? This must be it. He would just own all the publishing companies. He could publish any claptrap and have a guaranteed bestseller, while whole cities full of starving authors ate rat meat.

Already did, yuk yuk. Just published *Business @ the Speed of Thought*, as an obvious sales pitch for his software releases, Windows 2000, Windows NT, etc.

Great literature, yuk yuk. One reviewer said that, faced with the prospect of re-reading this boring gobbledy-gook, he'd rather have his brain gouged out with a plastic fork, yuk yuk.

A real novelist's life is hell, everybody knows that. They live without much or any income for years, hoping to sell a novel. And when they do, it makes them less profit than if they had been delivering pizzas all that time. A few at the top strike it rich, giving the rest hope. Even the lucky ones see their books top out, stagnate, go down, and out of print. They write title after title, running faster and faster to stay in the same place. They finally saturate their own market, or burn-out.

Meanwhile, Big Bill could have taught them a few things. His software, which is really just a form of writing, is not sold, but licensed — rented really. One must read it on a personal computer, which itself becomes obsolete in two or three years, along with the software. He sells you the same title over and over, correcting bugs in it along the way, at your, not his expense. He charges obscenely high prices, and you can't do anything about it. Nothing he writes is original, but rather outrageously ripped-off from those less savvy in the marketing department. No matter how many copies he foists on the market, he has plenty more available, and all at the same high price: one-hundred bucks. He is a monopolist, and proud of it.

Just can't get your mind out of that rut, can ya, yuk yuk.

Long after all the novelists of the 20th century are forgotten, Big Bill's name will live on, as one of the top ten big men of the entire century. His "writings" did more to change history than any other novelist's, yet they contained nothing of lasting value, and indeed were ghostwritten by a crew of faceless dorks working for salaries and stock options and free pizza.

At least they were smart enough to sell out to Big Bill and not end up like you, yuk yuk.

STFU!

When would Big Bill get the Nobel Prize, and the Pulitzer too? The latter prize was only some three thousand dollars, but he would doubtless find delight in snatching even that tiny dinner plate from real writers' tables. He had sent mankind nearly back to the age of the monkeys, by replacing their typewriters with PCs, so, as the biggest monkey at the top ...

Is it about getting him, getting even with him, or just getting along despite him? Yuk Yuk

I don't want to answer that! STFU!

Gates will let anybody be a writer, as long as it doesn't get in the way of his control of the information economy. What can the writer buy with his money except Microsoft products or services?

Guess, yuk yuk.

A handgun.

At least you're not fat like Roger the Wabbit. Yet, yuk yuk.

Shut up and let my vast intellect wander, yuk yuk.

At least he can't take that away from you, yuk yuk. Cancel that, yuk yuk.

The media had just announced that famed American Atheist leader Madalyn Murray O'Hair, and her close family members, were being dug up 90 miles west of her home in Austin, Texas. An inside job. Famed — infamous is a better word. And she had been so unpopular that her sudden disappearance was taken as an escape attempt from her own situation, and not treated as a potential homicide.

You should get so lucky with Big Bill, yuk yuk.

Think of him as a duck, yuk yuk.

At least Big Bill wasn't into dick work, especially computer dick work. The really nice thing about Dork Dick's chosen profession was that, in contrast to dicks for other types of crimes, one doesn't have to wait for a crime to happen, or be reported. Computer crimes are crimes of the imagination, and the best way to catch them is to imagine them for oneself, and then use the vast cyberspace as a hunting ground to detect signs of their existence; the cliché that the way to catch a crook is to think like one, raised to a higher plane, yuk yuk.

And the biggest crook of all is immune from prosecution, yuk yuk.

Dork Dick kept a running list of computer crimes he'd like to prove have happened, but couldn't (so far):

- Proof that all the Internet Service Providers are in league to steal from their customers: either money, or information.

- Proof of a conspiracy to use the Net in a massive attempt to create a shadow economy that doesn't pay taxes; a barter economy, using e-money or Monopoly Money instead of real money. Can't tax that, yuk yuk.
- Proof that the entire Net is a government front, as part of a master plan to enslave mankind.
- Proof that Big Bill is trying to destroy the Net by taking over all its ISPs, so that he can make sure that everybody in the world owes him their soul. Scratch that one, it's common knowledge, yuk yuk.
- Proof that the Net is being used to manipulate the stock market, perhaps by spreading rumors at timed moments for the benefit of insiders.
- Proof that there is a subliminal brainwashing system in place somewhere in the Net.
- Proof that foreign governments are manipulating the Net, or using it to commit crimes such as theft.
- Proof that there is a Net tapping operation in place, with secret groves of computers busily recording all traffic, extracting information, and updating profiles on every person using it. Maybe the IRS is behind it, maybe the NSA, the CIA, the FBI, Majestic-Twelve, FEMA, it's deuces wild, yuk yuk.
- Proof that there is a Beggar King of Cairo behind all the many get-rich-quick pyramid chain-letter schemes on the Net.
- Proof that there is a cartel of arch-criminals behind all the porno on the Net, especially a cartel of dictators of foreign countries.
- Proof that there is a plan to end all free thought and expression on the Net by some insidious end-around bootleg play, and who is behind it.
- Proof that the Intel computer CPU chips themselves are secretly designed to help insiders in the Net gather personal data on its users.
- Proof that there is a world virus, or world bomb, that could be set off by one person or organization on command, and destroy all the data on the Net in seconds.
- Proof that there is a conspiracy to make the entire world dependent on the Net, then threaten to take it away at the whim of one person or organization, create a worldwide economic collapse, aid a one world government takeover, or something equally apocalyptic.
- Proof that there is a conspiracy to make the Net the Big Brother of George Orwell's "1984," making every human alive its slave forever.

Tools are needed to process the Net. That's the difference between the average user and the power user: tools. That, and access. The average user has a low bandwidth access channel, often a telephone line and a modem, or a digital line. Even a full T-1 line only has so-much bandwidth.

There's more activity and data on the Net than any known computing facility can absorb, or at least Dork Duck thought so. The more access one can gain, and the more tools one can apply to that access, the more the cyberspace becomes one's own to manipulate rather than just 'surf.'

The Net is thus not totally physical, nor totally unphysical, but a marriage of the mind with electronic equipment, and itself an ever-growing, ever-changing ocean of minds and electronics, that no one mind can absorb or master completely, and indeed every attempt at doing so ups the ante of the game for everybody.

At its ultimate, cyberspace will make some people into gods and leave the rest behind as cattle, yuk yuk. Life is more exciting now than ever before, and computers don't know if you're a dork or a jock or a babe, do they? With virtual reality's potential, one day it won't matter anymore, yuk yuk. Those who are late getting onto the Net are making themselves genetically obsolete, yuk yuk.

A glimpse of a New York tenement in 1903, of Dork Dick's ancestors, fresh off the boat, traded in his mind with a vision of counterfeit Monopoly money and traitors to all that America stood for. Off he went into cyberspace exploring that dream, hoping he could catch some crooks and put somebody in jail and get paid for it.

Chapter 15

Why did she ever want to become a mother? She, a dyed-in-the-wool radical feminist from the 1960s on. It forever spoiled her peaceful sisterhood with them.

Thelma was holding a baby pig in her arms, at the petting zoo inside the South Gate of Seattle's Woodland Park Zoo, between N. 50th and N. 59th Streets, Phinney Avenue N. and Aurora. Just walking that far inside the zoo with her cane was slow and difficult.

Her thoughts were running deep now, like the rivers that drowned her in nightmares. Her son's newfound wealth and fame as a detective had reactivated her, made her want to do something, she didn't know what. Make a public statement. Change the world on her way out. She chose the zoo, from long-repressed feelings that caging animals was wrong, and a TV show about animal rights activists on cable — not that she agreed with the latter when they went overboard and tried to stop the Iditarod; dogs doing what they love are not 'abused'.

Being a mother: that's what she most wanted to protest about. It was still okay to be one, despite what the world said. Radical feminists can be mothers too. It was time somebody spoke out for mothers. Even zoo animals had mothers. She had been ruminating on it for days, ever since the cable TV show.

Feminists don't have to become mothers, or even want motherhood for themselves, to defend it for other women, any more than other feminists have a problem defending lesbianism, or careerism, or militarism, or politics for women. Or participation in female-only, androgynous utopias that they all have to sell.

But her fellow feminists always stopped short at giving any positive support to the women like her who chose active, positive, prolonged motherhood. Unless they had biracial children; and then they were welcome to breed like rabbits, and got picked for TV spots. Anything weakening the white male patriarchal power structure couldn't be bad. Her husband, while a pig himself, had at least killed German male swine in the war.

Power. Feminists speak about the power of the mother, yet the mother is the least powerful of all women, and always has been. Any power the mother had was destroyed centuries ago, and was probably as much a myth as the Virgin Mary or Isis. To have power, even feminists have to give up being mothers; at least to the extent that Madeleine Albright did.

Motherhood was a patriarchal institution for a lot longer than marriage. The mother-child bond is universally acknowledged as somehow 'powerful' and 'negative' by everyone, except possibly mothers — but whoever listened to them? Their opinion doesn't count. They have no power. That was the beef she had with the world.

Some mythical 'all-powerful' mother wells up from their collective psyches, so they venerate it on some level while completely devaluing it at the conscious level. What could make them value it again? Even then, they pine about the attempts of patriarchal religions to extinguish the Goddess, and deal with the stress caused by knowing that it is women and not men who gave birth by imagining some golden othertime when it was somehow otherwise.

The battle line today is when they try to separate mothers from their children. Mothers and children have been separated as early as possible, for centuries, at younger and younger ages. Women are told every which way to view the fetus and the infant as 'separate,' while being encouraged to separate themselves from their children as soon as

possible and get back to the 'real world.' And now women are being told that it's in their own interests to accelerate the removal of the mother-child bond, and all the messy biology that goes with it, to the point of eliminating it altogether.

She had raised her son in protest to that flaky feminist theory. The net result was that he had become so totally dependent on her that he lived with her in his forties. And never married, or even had a girlfriend. And she was glad.

Feminists have finished the job that patriarchy started, she grumbled.

Feminists now do not defend the mother, or mothering. At best they have ignored mothers; at worst they have added to the coup d'etat. Even in sci-fi/fantasy literature, many, but not all, feminist writers present the mothering function, at best, as just a temporary inconvenience, a duty that should be gotten over with as quickly as possible. Many even enjoy it, just so long as it uses up as little of a woman's life as possible, so she can get back to the 'real action.' They decry — quite rightly — any attempt at enforced mothering under patriarchy, but why do they always display such a distaste of those women who do choose mothering over a 'career'?

Not just pregnancy and mothering, but lactation gets the sourpuss treatment from feminists. She had breastfed her son for four years, taking him on her sled to do it. She had been kicked out of a Piggly-Wiggly for breastfeeding while shopping. She couldn't afford a lawyer to sue them — as if all lawyers weren't pigs (men) then and none of them would have taken her case — and judges were all pigs too, so it wouldn't have gone to court — but she gave the store manager a piece of her mind: "I'm just using my breasts for what nature intended them for. Why don't you take the same offense at all those Playboys showing silicon-enlarged breasts, meant only to give men masturbation fantasies?"

She hadn't really said that last sentence. They didn't have 7-11s back then with big magazine racks and *Playboy* magazines; nor, for that matter, breast implants, nor even the pill. But ever since they did, she couldn't help but splicing the two stores and the systems that supported them together in her thoughts into a single emotional issue-event to fume and frustrate over. It was about male versus female power. And there she was nurturing a... male.

She really believed long years of breastfeeding contributed to her son's slow maturation, and consequent high intelligence; it's the fast maturers that reach lids to their intelligence the fastest — for instance, monkeys, cats, dogs. But even chimpanzees breastfeed their young for 4-5 years.

It was not just breastfeeding, it was bonding. The message the feminist world sent her was loud and clear: the practice of women bonding with children is 'too powerful' and hence dangerous, and should be discouraged, devalued to the minimum necessary for the maintenance of the physical health of the infant.

She broke with them over that.

Not that she had anywhere to go. Every psychoanalytical theory from Freud on, feminist included, has claimed that mother-child bonding is somehow detrimental to humans, particularly if prolonged. You have to go to religion to find pseudo-intellectual attempts to justify that.

The feminist theorists, however, go on to say that it isn't the mother's fault; it's just a by-product of primitive biology and sexism. Technology and more participation in 'real-life' will get rid of the whole messy business eventually.

She showed them. Now, at the end of her life, she was more sure than ever that they were going in the wrong direction.

Not that she was a pariah among feminists. They forgave her as a mother for her sins, while still calling motherhood itself a sin, and biological motherhood the most sinful sin of all — even as thinkers like Daly extolled the virtues of sin, saying it came from the Indo-European root-word 'es,' meaning to be, and that feminists must "sin big."

As a gesture, they supported the inclusion of the father in the parenting role — to try and rid parenthood of its all-powerful bad-mother image, they hastened to add. But even men who did take an active participatory role in parenting their children were often considered 'lesser' men. Her husband hated his fathering role, and she hated him for hating it.

At least the feminists couldn't call him a lesser man — the lecherous bum. He was now in his seventies, and had just robbed the cradle again, living with a 19-year-old bimbo, a Lolita: she was having some of his sperm frozen so she could conceive after he died.

Probably more men identify with the protagonist in 'Lolita' than could ever identify with the silly earth-fathers doting on their babies, like Mary's husband Joseph. Male mothers aren't considered any more important than female ones by feminists — but at least they aren't so 'emotionally sick' as to breastfeed for 4 years, they told her.

Emotionally sick. That caused her to go on a slow simmer, to this day. Feminists and Piggly-Wiggly managers on the same side of an argument. And not that one only.

Even while motherhood beyond 'the minimum necessary' is somehow shameful to feminists, 'over-romantic,' and almost completely dismissed, she was horrified to see feminist literature come out more and more in open support of not only pornography, but pedophilia, even necrophilia. "A story is just a story" they would say, when it suited their purpose. When it came to the Catholic Eucharist alone — they scoffed at its necrophilia.

Mary, Joseph, Jesus — all of Christian sexuality was forever hung up on untying their Gordian knot, because it was connected with the Godhead. Not her. She had given up on religion years ago. She was a pagan, not a Christian, early indoctrination notwithstanding.

Many feminists were pagans, witches, atheists, agnostics, or whatever. But, while fighting phallic religions and all that they taught was fine, they didn't seem to know when to stop and draw a line.

The breaking point was breastfeeding.

Previous generations, from the Middle Ages through the nineteenth century, saw upper class women abandoning breastfeeding of their own children because it was dirty, disgusting, interfered with their 'real-life' duties as upper class 'wives,' etc. It was left to servant and slave-women to do it: the invisible, untouchable 'wet nurses.'

In the 20th century, the replacement of breastfeeding by the formula bottle allowed many more women in all socioeconomic classes to abandon what had become the stigma of lower class slavery. Despite a push by the medical profession and women's health workers in recent decades to reverse this process, as well as encourage gentler, more humane childbirth techniques, it has been less than successful. Most women still do not breastfeed, or if they do, it's not for very long, only 'the minimum necessary.'

'The minimum necessary' — how she hated those words. A woman develops and carries her breasts for decades. Yet, according to these hated words, they spend most of their life having no use. Playboy shit.

Anything beyond 'the minimum necessary' is seen as some sort of aberration on the part of the mother, and obviously damaging to her child. As breastfeeding was abandoned by wealthy women of past centuries because it interfered with their 'real lives' of being 'wives,' so today women abandon it at the earliest opportunity because it interferes with whatever their 'real lives' are: wives, workers, soldiers, congresspersons, or whatever. Women can do anything and be proud of it, except be breastfeeding mothers — milk cows, without the grass.

With recent technological advances, she was horrified at seeing the beginnings of the extermination of pregnancy itself. Upper class wealthy women can hire a surrogate womb, just as previous generations hired wet nurses. Like the latter, the gestational mother, a surrogate 'womb for rent,' is the least paid, least visible, least valued person in society — given at best token admiration for being 'altruistic,' yet not quite on the same par with Mother Teresa wannabes. So are the nanny or au pair, the day-care creche workers, and the pre-school kindergarten teachers, who are among the lowest-paid and lowest-status workers there are.

After recent high-profile trials of murderous and incompetent nannies, we can't even trust our servant classes to be mothers anymore — so says the media. But don't worry, they say: within 50 years, maybe earlier, it will be taken over by machinery, affordable by all socio-economic classes, just like in Aldous Huxley's 'Brave New World.' And then that all-powerful, mythical, pregnant, breastfeeding, child-tending, child-bonding version of woman can be completely

dispensed with. And good riddance, say all her feminist peers. But keep the Goddess; she's too deeply ingrained in our psyches.

There was just one little problem with this thinking: millions of years of evolution. Female sexual organs, especially during menstruation and child-bearing, forgetting lactation, consume far more resources than their male 'equivalents,' so female brains have evolved efficient hardwired behavior-controlling mechanisms for the efficient use of such costly organs. These mechanisms, including an 'instinct for nurturing' which most female members of every mammalian species necessarily have, evolved over many thousand generations and haven't vanished in a few years of political correctness, nor will they be extinguishable by turning on a robot's light switch. As for the Goddess, she's just in the psyche, the most recently evolved part of the high brain; the other mechanisms are more highly buried than that.

This doesn't mean that women are doomed by their wombs to be inferior, but simply that they are, in significant ways, different. Thelma for one was immensely grateful.

Much as she loved mushing, Thelma still was a mother first, last, and always. Technology would never change that for people like her, not without a civil war or two. Would feminists advocate the making of war against intransigent women when the technology did arrive? Advocate government force? Make it mandatory to surrender motherhood? A crime to be a mother?

It was like the government mandating that all wombs be sewn shut. Female genital mutilation, pure and final.

Mary Daly's classic analysis of 'token-torturers' came to mind then: the long history of women's 'burning times.' Even she, in her treatment of female genital mutilation (FGM), which over 100 million women alive today have suffered from (2 million more each year) — mainly in African countries — completely missed the fact that women in modern western — British, et al. — hospitals of today routinely have their genitals mutilated during hospital childbirth; she wasn't personally experienced about it, but she was sure from the grapevine.

Not that she didn't think that Mary Daly was the smartest, most erudite, deepest thinking feminist on Earth. A professor at Boston College, her works, such as *The Church and the Second Sex*, *Beyond God the Father*, *Gyn/Ecology: the Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy*, and others — all strewn around her house, well-read but unsoiled, through meticulous habits and respect — pegged her as a genius, as a genuine threat to males and their agenda of hate. They were both about the same age too, and saw the world similarly; too bad Daly was a lesbian, and Thelma straight.

The British, she had heard, even have support groups for women who have suffered major physical and psychological damage as a result of such mutilations — as damaging as rape and often more so (not even the most jaded woman, who might possibly say "rape me again", is going to say "mutilate me again"). But even feminists as brilliant as Daly still don't see it happening, because it is happening to mothers. Therefore, they would not see wombectomy as happening either.

Meanwhile, to perform FGM on children is decried as barbaric, sexist; and laws are on the legislative agendas everywhere to criminalize it (a U.S. federal law criminalizes it, although it is seldom prosecuted). Usually, African patriarchal tribal practices are connected with FGM, and that closes the subject; their own hospital practice, on mothers, doesn't exist to them.

It is any wonder that many women having been mutilated in one childbirth, would prefer Caesarian section for the next? Is it any wonder that women have deserted motherhood in droves? Who cares about mothers? Cut them with impunity. Infibulate them. Sew them up so they only have an opening the size of a straw. Some sick men say it gives them more pleasure during intercourse.

She didn't want a Caesarian. That's why she stopped at one child. She had made her husband angry, then sad, by her sudden infertility, her secret abortions. He left her for a 17-year-old waitress he met at a truck stop; she promptly gave him four sons. So screw him, she said.

Medical-sanctioned female torture of all types, as Daly did point out, starts in the upper and middle classes, becomes a fashion, and spreads 'downward' through the classes over time. The first women to submit to the cutlery torture of the man-midwives in the Middle Ages were the royal wives of European nobility. No wonder women welcomed and demanded the introduction of chloroform in the 19th century. By the end of the 20th century we have a situation where women midwives are being charged with child endangerment; in some places, midwifery itself is even illegal, with heavy criminal penalties attached. But we don't burn them at the stake anymore, heh.

Barbaric, now there's a frequently abused adjective.

Some feminists, such as Shulamith Firestone, now even proclaim pregnancy and childbirth per se as barbaric, just as women of the Middle Ages thought breastfeeding was, and dump it onto the lower classes and those of the 'altruistic' servant classes — until such time as technology will free us all from it, forever. Her son had just seen a movie — she forgot the name — where robots planted human beings like seed crops, raised them, and fed them with liquified human remains intravenously — "pure black sludgy goo". That wasn't barbaric?

Daly's analysis about how such mechanisms are enforced considered the U.S. as a dominant world cultural force, the upper class of all nations and cultures. The adoption of commercial surrogacy — its legalization and promulgation in the U.S. during the 1980s and 1990s — is not universally followed by other countries yet; but the pressure is building, and will obviously be adopted by the rest of the world sooner or later, as it becomes more technically successful and cheaper. Scare movies will be happily and conveniently forgotten or laughed off.

Not that she was all one-sided.

After thousands of years of enforced motherhood, where women didn't even have the choice of which male sired their children, she could well understand women's desire to abandon motherhood and its attendant biology altogether. Pregnant and breastfeeding mothers are a reminder of the cruelty, the physical and psychological rape heaped on mothers for generations. Even her own mother, unfortunately.

She could empathise and even strongly support the view that it often is a barbaric process. Feminists, herself included, often decry the 'feminisation of poverty'; and while they wrinkle their noses in disgust, or sigh stoically at the hopefully short-lived temporary necessity of the messy business of birthing, they ever hope to provide better access to education and technology so that lower class women too can enjoy liberation from that nasty, distasteful mothering mess and get on with 'real life' — at their option. But she could not, like them, recommend having it removed out of sight and mind, even in art and literature; it was un-American, among other things. And history is doomed to repeat itself if forgotten.

An option, not an order from the government. Hopefully there will always be some women, and some men too, who enjoy parenting as a big and important part of their lives, and embrace it 'the old-fashioned way' with all its messy biology and bonding. But the social ostracism for their choice will be the same as now: a quaint old-fashioned anachronism, for religious idiots, hippies, over-romantic fools, and the lunatic fringe generally.

Lesbian feminists can be proud of their lesbianism under feminism; career feminists can be proud of their career choices under feminism; sports feminists can be proud of their sports under feminism; military feminists can be proud of their soldiery under feminism — but mothers have become more and more ashamed of their pregnancies, their lactating breasts, their enforced dependency on men, and-or control by patriarchal medical, welfare, and educational institutions; and those who aspire to nothing higher, are pitied — are treated as if they stink like a yellow-soiled diaper.

Lesbians, homosexuals, pornographers and pedophiles, serial killers — everyone — can all 'come out' and 'be understood' in art and literature and film — except mothers. The latter must stay in the closet while feminist do-gooders liberate everyone from the detrimental effects of motherhood. They'd laugh themselves silly to see a Mardi Gras parade of pregnant and breastfeeding women wearing purdahs.

This is not to say there weren't feminist activist mother groups, but they were a minority and almost a fringe element of feminism. She had tried to start one once, and it fell through for lack of support. And that was after the

publicity boost given by Demi Moore's nude pregnant Time Magazine cover photo. (Or was that Vanity Fair? Her mind wasn't what it once was.) The only organization seeing life now is La Leche.

She didn't see this unmothering process, however, as part of the anti-male feminist theory of 'men hating women' and trying to kill them all off or reconstruct women into men's popular sexual fantasy du jour. It was something women were doing to themselves.

She didn't think most men hate women, even though some men obviously do. Most men just don't care about women one way or another, want nothing to do with them. It's not their problem.

Women would probably prefer it had nothing to do with them either. She saw it as women hating their own womanhood, or one part of the experience of womanhood, for which she was alternately grieved, angry and paranoid.

She would even concede that women's own 'woman-hatred' of menstruation, pregnancy, birthing and lactation and motherhood is an understandable, logical, rational response; and she had had her own bouts of it. To actually enjoy or give nominal respect to the cruelty and social ostracism of motherhood and female biological functions is insane, she had to admit. To prolong the cruelty beyond the 'minimum necessary' is also insane, if one concedes a scale of necessities. She even wondered whether trying to understand the subject itself was worthwhile anymore.

She could accept that motherhood is dead or dying, and it was too late to reverse the process, as long as she could get away with her atavism. She could even accept that it may be a good thing for women, since they are all hopelessly sold on the mother-child bond being obviously detrimental and negative for both women and children. So it was probably a good thing for them that they discourage mothers from bonding with their infants for any longer than the 'minimum necessary' so they don't 'contaminate' the child any more than the 'minimum necessary'.

Eventually the 'minimum necessary' will be nothing at all, she knew. It may take a few more decades or even centuries to fully convince the majority of women, but then they can all be happy, she concluded. She just wanted to be long gone when that day arrived.

All women can then enjoy the freedom of the 'real world', the utopia of dystopias, the holy grail, the promised land, where it's okay for adult men to have sexual relationships with children, or any other of the myriad immoral, or anti-social, or not-very-nice behaviors that are part of the vaunted human condition or experience, potentially within us all, as the wannabe enablers of the experiences put it. Just so long as she, and her son, were gone by then.

Yet in this same 'real world' it still was not okay for women to breastfeed children, let alone write about it, discuss it, or present it in a positive way.

She took the pig to her breast and, exposing her teat, tried to make it suckle. As if a dried-up teat could be suckled. It caused people to stare. She gave up, in a rage.

She left the zoo dry-eyed, cleansed, and determined to return.

She understood her nightmares now. The animals were calling to her to breastfeed them. Not just the animals. All the lonely people of the world. The feminists anyway.

Thelma suddenly decided to start a new religion.

Chapter 16

Thelma stuck with her decision to start a new religion.

After a short brainstorming session, she decided instead to reinvigorate an old religion, Zoroastrianism, with her mother's milk of radical feminist kindness.

Zoroastrianism was the first monotheistic religion, dating back some 3500 years. She was raised a monotheist, and, while she was not agnostic, she didn't see any reason she couldn't go back to monotheism, as long as God was a She.

Zoroastrianism, despite its great age, now had only about 100,000 adherents left worldwide, five or six thousand of them in the U.S.

She could safely afford to ignore them all. What she wanted was a ready-made religion to radically feminize, and this one struck her as perfect, not the least reason being its close proximity in the dictionary to the word Zoo.

She spent all of one hour studying some printouts from web sites she got from her son. He used a search engine, saved some screens, printed them out, and gave them to her. She told him she was reading a romance novel that mentioned it, and wanted some quick background. No need to clue him in.

The threefold path of good thoughts, good works, and good deeds is the center of the faith, their motto, she read. Zoroastrians believe in one god called Ahura Mazda ("Lord Wise") who is all good and created the world and all good things, including people.

They certainly made a good automobile, the Mazda, she joked.

Zarathustra, the religion's founder, more properly called Zarathushtra, has been known in the West as Zoroaster, from the Greek transliteration of his name; in Persia and India he is known as Zarthosht. No one knows exactly when he lived. Zoroastrian tradition places him at around 600 B.C., but this date is thought by modern scholars to be far too late; their estimates range from 1500 to 1000 B.C.

Good, she thought. If they couldn't pin the date down any closer than that, they could easily have lost the fact that Zarthosht was a woman. She would claim to be Zarthosht come back to life.

The various sacred scriptures and their history bored her: the Gathas, and their phallic Avestan-Sanskrit language, were all too much to bother with. She'd write her own Bible she decided.

She knew they worshipped in front of a fire. They didn't worship fire itself, but what it symbolizes: God.

Her religion would worship the fire inside women, a softer kind, that nurtures instead of destroys. She found an old lava lamp, from the seventies, still in operating order, and decided to use it instead: safer than real fire too.

The religion was based on dualities: good and evil, heaven and hell. It was just perverted by phallic thinkers into a mirror image of the religion she wanted. Fine, she had mirrors of her own.

They taught that after life on earth, the human soul is judged by God as to whether it did more good or evil in its life. Those who chose good over evil go to what Zarathushtra referred to simply as the "best existence," or heaven, and those who chose evil go to the "worst existence," or hell.

She liked that. Women would go to heaven, men to hell.

They didn't believe in or teach reincarnation of karma. Neither would she. On second thought, how would she claim she was the founder reincarnated? Nuts. After all, prophets can be reincarnated, while non-prophets can't. That made her more than merely human, it made her divine: a Goddess. So much the better, she decided.

Zoroastrianism also believes in the progress of sacred time, and the eventual end of time, she read. It teaches that the collective good acts of humanity will slowly transform the imperfect material world into its heavenly ideal, making it fresh, or renewing it.

That made it all the more perfect for a religion to be founded in the year 1999 of the old phallic system. Sacred time had now cycled, and henceforth women would be on top.

At the end of time everything and everyone will be purified, even the souls in hell — so hell is not eternal. That part she found hard to swallow, but decided to keep it, since that way men could have a hope that one day they would be good enough to rejoin women in heaven, probably after they had been castrated — her reading of the word purified.

The most important thing about Zoroastrianism is their professed dedication to ethical and moral excellence, she read. The motto of the faith, the threefold path, is the center of the faith, their distinction from others. One knows what is good through the Divine help of Good Mind (Vohu Manah) and divinely-inspired conscience (Daena). By thinking good thoughts, one is moved to speak good words, and that leads to good deeds.

Made sense. She'd keep that motto. She had a damn good Vohumanadaena.

This is a practical and world-affirming faith, one web site said — one that does not hate the world nor dwell on man's sin and guilt.

She liked that. Don't dwell on hating men, just get on with taking the world away from them.

One site said that man's spiritual quest is to preserve the lord's seven creations: sky, water, earth, plants, cattle, man, and fire. Fire, the physical representation of Asha (Order/Truth/Righteousness) is very important as a life-energy, and is present during all religious rituals, which are important Zoroastrian duties.

Good for men, she thought. Woman's spiritual quest is to preserve the goddess' seven creations: sky, water, earth, snow, plants, zoo animals, woman, and fire. She liked fire, the life-energy; and Asha would be cool to her guru Mary Daly too, she was sure.

She left the thinking-up of religious rituals till later. But she decided to have them, because it would beat the boredom and look cool too. Something based on 'Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood' by Rebecca Wells.

Unlike many of today's mainstream religions, Zoroastrians are encouraged to "lead a good and prosperous life," and hence monasticism, celibacy, fasting and the mortification of the body are anathema to the faith, she read: such practices seem to weaken man and thereby lessen the power to fight evil, the web site said.

Good, she thought again. Let man be weakened as much as possible: these very things must therefore be strengthening to woman. Why else had she led a monastic, celibate life for decades, mortifying her body and living on meager fare? Men had kept her down, that's why. But now, it all made sense: she was being prepared, by Uhura Mazda, for her Goddesshood. (She had changed Ahura to Uhura because her son constantly harped about this black woman on *Star Trek*).

Her son had mentioned Nietzsche's 'Thus Spake Zarathustra', and she soon got him to print her out a copy of it from the Gutenberg Project site on the Web; it was an English translation by Thomas Common.

It would need a lot of work, but she thought she could edit it up into a new Bible for her religion, which she called Zoogoddessastrianaism, or Zooga for short.

She was the prophetess of Zooga, its Goddess. She would start time over with year one, precisely on the year 2001, so it would be easy to convert to the common calendar when needed — just in case men still hung onto power.

She asked her son how to set up a web site, and he gave her a nice laptop PC with a magnified screen so she could make out all the small text with her bifocals. She set to work to spread the word, announcing services to be held at her house. No one attended the first, nor the second, nor the third. The fourth was attended by some radical feminist friends who she talked into it. By the fifth, she had enough to fill her dining room table to capacity.

She began her services by moving the lava lamp to the center of the dining room table. Pulling up her wheelchair at the head of the table, she would gaze into it, meditate, and recite verses from Nietzsche that she found to have the right feeling and had rewritten in the pages of her new Bible — after changing black to white, and white to black; day to night, and night to day; male to female, and female to male; old to young, and young to old; all with great religious enthusiasm. The name Zarathustra she changed to Goddess. Nietzsche's love of mountains was thrilling to her, but his ignorance of mushing unfortunate; she would supply his defects.

She was particularly fond of what she did to the 18th chapter of Part One, which Nietzsche titled "Old and Young Women." It originally went like this (her version in italics):

Old and Young Woman

Young and Old Men

Why stealest thou along so furtively in the twilight, Zarathustra? And what hidest thou so carefully under thy mantle?

Why mushest thou along so openly in the dawn, Goddess? And what displayest thou so carelessly over thy parka?

Is it a treasure that hath been given thee? Or a child that hath been born thee? Or goest thou thyself on a thief's errand, thou friend of the evil? —

Is it a treasure that hath been given thee? Or a child that hath been born thee? Or goes thou thyself on a giver's errand, thou friend of the good? —

Verily, my brother, said Zarathustra, it is a treasure that hath been given me: it is a little truth which I carry.

No, my sister, said Goddess, it is a treasure that hath been given me: it is a big lie which I carry.

But it is naughty, like a young child; and if I hold not its mouth, it screameeth too loudly.

But it is well-behaved, like an old child; and if I hold its shaft, it whimpereth not too softly.

As I went on my way alone today, at the hour when the sun declineth, there met me an old woman, and she spake thus unto my soul:

As I went on my way alone today, at the hour when the sun inclineth, there met me a young man, and he spake thus unto my soul:

"Much hath Zarathustra spoken also to us women, but never spake he unto us concerning woman."

"Much hath Goddess spoken also to us men, but never spake she unto us concerning man. "

And I answered her: "Concerning woman, one should only talk unto men."

And I answered her: "Concerning man, one should only talk unto women."

"Talk also unto me of woman," said she; "I am old enough to forget it presently."

"Talk also unto me of man," said he; "I am young enough to remember it always."

And I obliged the old woman and spake thus unto her:

And I obliged the young man and spoke thus unto him:

Everything in woman is a riddle, and everything in woman hath one solution — it is called pregnancy.

Nothing in man is a solution, but only one thing in woman hath riddles — it is called pregnancy.

Man is for woman a means: the purpose is always the child. But what is woman for man?

Woman is for man an end: the beginning is always the child. But what is man for woman?

Two different things wanteth the true man: danger and diversion. Therefore wanteth he woman, as the most dangerous plaything.

Two different things wanteth the true woman: safety and a real life. Therefore wanteth she man, as the most safe sled dog.

Man shall be trained for war, and woman for the recreation of the warrior: all else is folly.

Woman shall be trained for peace, and man for the pulling of the sled: all else is folly.

Too sweet fruits — these the warrior liketh not. Therefore liketh he woman; — bitter is even the sweetest woman.

Too weak pullers — these the sled liketh not. Therefore liketh he man; — strong is even the weakest man.

Better than man doth woman understand children, but man is more childish than woman.

Better than woman doth man understand children, because woman is less childish than man.

In the true man there is a child hidden: it wanteth to play. Up then, ye women, and discover the child in man!

In the true woman there is a child hidden: it wanteth to be born and suckle. Up then, ye men, and discover the child waiting in woman, but only when commanded!

A plaything let woman be, pure and fine like the precious stone, illumined with the virtues of a world not yet come.

A workthing let man be, impure and coarse like an uncut stone, shadowed with the vices of a world come and gone.

Let the beam of a star shine in your love! Let your hope say: "May I bear the Superman!"

Let the fire of the sun shine in your love! Let your hope say: "May I bear the Superwoman!"

In your love let there be valour! With your love shall ye assail him who inspireth you with fear!

In your love let there be fear! With your fear shall ye guard against her who inspireth you with overconfidence!

In your love be your honour! Little doth woman understand otherwise about honour. But let this be your honour: always to love more than ye are loved, and never be the second.

In your love be your feminism! Little doth man understand otherwise about feminism. But let this be your feminism: always to love less than ye are loved, and never be the first.

Let man fear woman when she loveth: then maketh she every sacrifice, and everything else she regardeth as worthless.

Let woman fear man when he hateth: then maketh he every power grab, and nothing else he regardeth as worthy.

Let man fear woman when she hateth: for man in his innermost soul is merely evil; woman, however, is mean.

Let woman fear man when he loveth: for woman in her innermost soul is totally good; man, however, is evil.

Whom hateth woman most? — Thus spake the iron to the loadstone: "I hate thee most, because thou attractest, but art too weak to draw unto thee."

Whom hateth man most? — Thus spake the penis to the vagina: "I hate thee most, because thou attractest, but art too weak to quench me finally.

The happiness of man is, "I will." The happiness of woman is, "He will."

The happiness of woman is, "You won't." The happiness of man is "As you will."

"Lo! Lo! Now hath the world become perfect!" — thus thinketh every woman when she obeyeth with all her love.

"Lo! Lo! Now hath the world become perfect!" — thus thinketh every man when he disobeyeth his penis with all his hate.

Obey, must the woman, and find a depth for her surface. Surface is woman's soul, a mobile, stormy film on shallow water.

Obey, must the man, and find a depth for his penis. Knife is man's soul, a stationary, calm shaft in deep fire.

Man's soul, however, is deep, its current gusheth in subterranean caverns: woman surmiseth its force, but comprehendeth it not. —

Woman's soul, however, is fire, its current gusheth in high plateaus: man surmiseth its force, but comprehendeth it not. —

Then answered me the old woman: "Many fine things hath Zarathustra said, especially for those who are young enough for them.

Then answered me the young man: "Many fine things hath Goddess said, especially for those who are old enough for them.

Strange! Zarathustra knoweth little about woman, and yet he is right about them! Doth this happen, because with women nothing is impossible?

Strange! Goddess knoweth much about man, and yet she is wrong about them! Doth this happen, because with men nothing is impossible?

And now accept a little truth by way of thanks! I am old enough for it!

And now accept a big lie by way of ingratitude! I am young enough for it!

Swaddle it up and hold its mouth: otherwise it will scream too loudly, the little truth."

Swaddle it up and hold its shaft: otherwise it will whimper too softly, the big lie."

"Give me, woman, thy little truth!" said I. And thus spake the old woman:

"Give me, man, thy big lie!" said I. And thus spake the young man:

"Thou goest to women? Do not forget thy whip!" —

"Thou goest to man? Forget thy whip!" —

Thus spake Zarathustra.

Thus spake Goddess.

She didn't know what it meant, but her feminist friends all had their opinions, especially the lesbian ones. All were agreed that their new religion had a glorious future with women. It was deep.

She found the lesbian sisters often having sex at the table during the services, and started to object, but something inside stopped her, probably the feeling that men would object. When she felt one of them down on the floor, under the table, trying to put her hands in her privates, she resolutely crossed her legs until she moved on to another, who spread her legs eagerly and began softly moaning.

No different than a lot of radical feminist meetings that way.

Chapter 17

Thelma's second favorite passage from Nietzsche's 'Thus Spake Zarathustra' was Chapter 37 of Part Two, titled "Immaculate Perception":

Immaculate Perception

Immilkulate Reception

When yester-eve the moon arose, then did I fancy it about to bear a sun: so broad and teeming did it lie on the horizon.

When tomorrow morning the sun rises, then will I fancy it about to bear a sky: so broad and teeming did it lie on the breast of the horizon.

But it was a liar with its pregnancy; and sooner will I believe in the man in the moon than in the woman.

But it was a prophet with its pregnancy: and sooner will I believe in the woman in the sun than in the man.

To be sure, little of a man is he also, that timid night-reveller. Verily, with a bad conscience doth he stalk over the roofs.

To be sure, much of a woman is she also, that open day-reveller. Verily, with a good conscience does she stalk over the tents.

For he is covetous and jealous, the monk in the moon; covetous of the earth, and all the joys of lovers.

For she is sharing and generous, the sister in the sun; sharing of the earth, and all the joys of lovers.

Nay, I like him not, that tom-cat on the roofs! Hateful unto me are all that slink around half-closed windows!

Yes, I like her, that she-cat on the tents! Beloved of me are all that stand in front of half-opened windows!

Piously and silently doth he stalk along on the star-carpets: — but I like no light-treading human feet, on which not even a spur jingleth.

Piously and noisily doth she stalk along on the sun-carpets: — but I like heavy-treading human feet, on which every spur jingleth.

Every honest one's step speaketh; the cat however, stealeth along over the ground. Lo! cat-like doth the moon come along, and dishonestly. —

Every dishonest one's step is hushed; the cat however, pranceth along over the ground. Lo! cat-like doth the sun come along, and honestly. —

This parable speak I unto you sentimental dissemblers, unto you, the "pure discerners!" You do I call — covetous ones!

This parable speak I unto you brazen showoffs, unto you, the "impure ignoramuses!" You do I call — generous ones!

Also ye love the earth, and the earthly: I have divined you well! — but shame is in your love, and a bad conscience — ye are like the moon!

Also ye love the sun, and the heavenly: I have divined you well! — but pride is in your hate, and a good brazenness — ye are like the sun!

To despise the earthly hath your spirit been persuaded, but not your bowels: these, however, are the strongest in you!

To love the heavenly hath your spirit been persuaded, but not your breasts: these, however, are the strongest in you!

And now is your spirit ashamed to be at the service of your bowels, and goeth in by-ways and lying ways to escape its own shame.

And now is your spirit proud to be at the service of your breasts, and goeth in main ways and truthful ways to find its own pride.

"That would be the highest thing for me" — so saith your lying spirit unto itself — "to gaze upon life without desire, and not like the dog, with hanging-out tongue:

"That would be the lowest thing for me" — so saith your lying spirit unto itself — "to gaze upon life with desire, and be like the sled dog, with hanging-out teats:

To be happy in gazing: with dead will, free from the grip and greed of selfishness — cold and ashy-grey all over, but with intoxicated moon-eyes!

To be sad in gazing: with live will, under the grip and greed of sexiness — hot and flushed all over, but with sober sun-eyes!

That would be the dearest thing to me" — thus doth the seduced one seduce himself, — "to love the earth as the moon loveth it, and with the eye only to feel its beauty.

That would be the cheapest thing to me" — thus doth the unsexed one unsex himself, — "to love the sun as the sky loveth it, and with the mouth only to feel its beauty.

And this do I call immaculate perception of all things: to want nothing else from them, but to be allowed to lie before them as a mirror with a hundred facets." —

And this do I call immilkulate reception of all things: to want everything from them, but to dare to stand behind them as a mirror with a hundred facets." —

Oh, ye sentimental dissemblers, ye covetous ones! Ye lack innocence in your desire: and now do ye defame desiring on that account!

Oh, ye brazen showoffs, ye generous ones! Ye have sin in your needs: and now do ye glorify lust on that account!

Verily, not as creators, as procreators, or as jubilators do ye love the earth!

Verily, as creators, as procreators, and as jubilators do ye love the earth!"

Where is innocence? Where there is will to procreation. And he who seeketh to create beyond himself, hath for me the purest will.

Where is guilt? Where there is no will to procreation. And she who seeketh not to procreate herself, is for me the purest slave.

Where is beauty? Where I must will with my whole Will; where I will love and perish, that an image may not remain merely an image.

Where is beauty? Where I must love with my whole Love; where I will perish if I don't love, that an image may remain merely an image.

Loving and perishing: these have rhymed from eternity. Will to love: that is to be ready also for death. Thus do I speak unto you cowards!

Perishing and loving: these have never rhymed throughout eternity. Love to will: that is to be unready also for life. Thus do I speak unto you brave sisters!

But now doth your emasculated ogling profess to be "contemplation!" And that which can be examined with cowardly eyes is to be christened "beautiful!" Oh, ye violators of noble names!

But now doth your masculine ogling profess to be "contemplation!" And that which can be examined with brazen eyes is to be christened "beautiful!" Oh, ye respectors of lowly names!

But it shall be your curse, ye immaculate ones, ye pure discerners, that ye shall never bring forth, even though ye lie broad and teeming on the horizon!

But it shall be your blessing, ye immilkulate ones, ye impure ignoramuses, that she shall bring forth milk, even as ye stand naked and alone on the horizon!

Verily, ye fill your mouth with noble words: and we are to believe that your heart overfloweth, ye cozeners?

Verily, ye fill your mouth with lowly words: and we are to believe that your heart is empty, ye sages?

But my words are poor, contemptible, stammering words: gladly do I pick up what falleth from the table at your repasts.

But my words are rich, proud, eloquent words: gladly do I pick up what falleth from your chest at my repasts.

Yet still can I say therewith the truth — to dissemblers! Yea, my fish-bones, shells, and prickly leaves shall — tickle the noses of dissemblers!

Yet still can I say therewith the truth — to showoffs! Yea, my fish-bones, shells, and prickly leaves shall — tickle the noses of showoffs!

Bad air is always about you and your repasts: your lascivious thoughts, your lies, and secrets are indeed in the air!

Sweet air is always about you and your repasts: your lascivious thoughts, your truths, and open thoughts are indeed in the air!

Dare only to believe in yourselves — in yourselves and in your inward parts! He who doth not believe in himself always lieth.

Dare to believe also in others — in others and in their outward parts! She who doth believe in her milk always drinketh.

A God's mask have ye hung in front of you, ye "pure ones": into a God's mask hath your execrable coiling snake crawled.

A Goddess' mask have ye hung in front of you, ye "impure ones": into a Goddess' mask hath your excellent upturned breast poked.

Verily ye deceive, ye "contemplative ones!" Even Zarathustra was once the dupe of your godlike exterior; he did not divine the serpent's coil with which it was stuffed.

Verily ye deceive not, ye "frivolous ones"! Not even Goddess was ever duped by your godlike mouth; she divined the breast's upturn with which it was stuffed.

A God's soul, I once thought I saw playing in your games, ye pure discerners! No better arts did I once dream of than your arts!

A Goddess' soul, I always thought I saw playing in your games, ye impure ignoramuses! Better arts did I ever dream of than your arts!

Serpents' filth and evil odour, the distance concealed from me: and that a lizard's craft prowled thereabouts lasciviously.

Men's filth and evil odour, the distance concealed from me: and that a lizard's craft prowled thereabouts lasciviously.

But I came nigh unto you: then came to me the day, — and now cometh it to you, — at an end is the moon's love affair!

But I left you: then came to me the day, — and now leaveth it you, — at a beginning is the sun's love affair!

See there! Surprised and pale doth it stand — before the rosy dawn!

See there! Flushed but not surprised does it lie — behind the pale dusk!

For already she cometh, the glowing one, — her love to the earth cometh! Innocence, and creative desire, is all solar love!

For already he goeth, the dark one, — his hate from the sun leaveth! Sexiness, and procreative desire, is all solar love!

See there, how she cometh impatiently over the sea! Do ye not feel the thirst and the hot breath of her love?

See there, how he leaveth patiently under the fire! Do ye feel the wetness and the cold breath of his hate?

At the sea would she suck, and drink its depths to her height: now riseth the desire of the sea with its thousand breasts.

Under the sea would he suck, and drink its shallows to his depth: now falleth the fullness of the sea with its thousand breasts.

Kissed and sucked would it be by the thirst of the sun; vapour would it become, and height, and path of light, and light itself!

Kissed and sucked would it be by the thirst of the sun; vapour would it become, and height, and path of light, and light itself!

Verily, like the sun do I love life, and all deep seas.

Verily, like the sun do I love life, and all deep seas.

And this meaneth to me knowledge: all that is deep shall ascend — to my height! —

And this meaneth to me knowledge: all that is deep shall fall — to my level! —

Thus spake Zarathustra.

Thus spake Goddess.

She concluded the passionate reading by accepting a lesbian sister's erect nipple in her lips and sucking it tenderly. She tasted milk. Life was good.

Once her son brought her two more lava lamps, not the black and white colors like she had, but more vivid colors. He said he had ordered them from the Johnson-Smith Company catalog for her.

Chapter 18

Dork Dick, meanwhile, was trying to learn about Calcutta. He found the Indian Tourist Office's official web site, and a number of others, official and commercial. He clicked back and forth, eclectically, trying to build a big picture of the city in his mind.

Click.

The largest metropolis in India, Calcutta is a vibrant city on the move, volatile and unpredictable. The Gateway to India till 1912, and the capital of the Raj in India, it still bears the Victorian imprint on its streets and structures. A city just about ready to burst at the seams, Calcutta is home to more than 10 million people.

That country is only one-third the size of the U.S., but has almost as many as China, which is slightly larger than the U.S. How many in Beijing? 12 million. Shanghai? 14 million. Bombay? 9 million.

You mean Mumbai? Yuk yuk.

Delhi? 6 million. Madras? 5 million. Bangalore? 3 million?

Yah, but at least the Indians got on the Net first, yuk yuk.

Click.

It is the commercial nerve center of the East, with major industrial plants, textile mills and corporate units.

Want some panties cheap? Yuk yuk. How about some t-shirts?

Ask Kathie Lee Gifford, yuk yuk.

Shut up, yuk yuk.

Click.

Regal edifices, grubby alleys, bustling bazaars, elegant hotels, people from all walks of life — Calcutta has it all.

That's an understatement, yuk yuk.

Oooh! Roaches! I can't live like this, yuk yuk.

Roaches are for the natives. If you're a mock-English, you dress in white and sip gin and tonic and never see a roach, yuk yuk.

Look at what I found, yuk yuk.

Rupa and Company Ltd.

The Brand Portfolio

It is an old marketing axiom that you cannot put down a good product. And supported by inspired communications, the product acquires brand equity and lives on in the hearts of its consumers.

The Rupa brands fully live up to this promise. They are prized for their excellent value and have carved a niche for themselves in their categories.

Some of the well known brands are: BRUNO briefs & vests BUMCHUMS T-shirts and bermudas MACROMAN briefs KAISER designer briefs & vests FRONTLINE briefs & vests RIBLINE vests SOFTLINE bras & panties THERMOCOT thermal innerwear SUPER BRIEF drawers & briefs KIDLINE briefs & vests FOOTLINE socks MERCERISED VESTS

Stop it, yuk yuk.

You are sick, yuk yuk.

Look who's talking, yuk yuk.

Click.

A hub of fervent activity in the realms of music, theatre, arts, and sports, Calcutta has always prided itself on the many luminaries it has sent forth, be it artist Rabindranath Tagore, Satyajit Ray, or Mrinal Sen.

Mother Teresa, yuk yuk.

Nothing like that Calcutta porn, yuk yuk.

Shut up, yuk yuk.

Imagine one of those young, dark, beautiful, bejeweled Indian girls, with a giant dork in her mouth. Yours, yuk yuk.

Shut up, yuk yuk.

Mother Teresa, before she was a nun, yuk yuk.

You're really sick, yuk yuk.

Where's my Informaton Please Almanac, I want to look those Indian luminary names up.

It's up my duck ass, yuk yuk.

Pull it out and give it to me, yuk yuk.

Tagore, Sir Rabindranath (poet); Calcutta (1861-1941).

I thought he was an artist.

Shut up, yuk yuk.

Tsu. Dsyusky)go;, fotrvypt_' Vs;viyys. 632033/

Stop it, yuk yuk.

Ray, Satyajit (film director); Calcutta, b. 5/2/1922.

Probably a porno film director, yuk yuk.

Sen, Mrinal. No listing.

What is this?

Write him off for now, he's probably a porno star with a footlong dork, yuk yuk.

No. Let's use a search engine on him.

Which one? dorkbot.com? Yuk yuk.

Hotbot.com.

Yes master dork, yuk yuk.

List of Indian Film Directors.

Guru Dutt — created some of India's most socially conscious movies. Mrinal Sen, 1923- — director of thought-provoking films. Ram Gopal Varma — the master technician of Indian cinema. Ray, Satyajit — famous Bengali film director. Shekhar Kapur. Sooraj R. Barjatya — writer and director of Hindi films. Subhash Ghai — writer, producer, director and starmaker. Tapan Sinha — Bengal's leading film director and producer. Vinod Chopra

Click.

Born in 1923 in Faridpur in what is now Bangladesh, Mrinal Sen studied science in Calcutta before he joined the Communist Party of India. At this time he read voraciously on films and aesthetics and reviewed films. His early films were heavily influenced by Marxist ideals.

Boring, yuk yuk.

Click.

Unlike Satyajit Ray, his great contemporary with whom he is often compared, Mrinal Sen did not restrict himself to Bengali films. He made them in Oriya and Telugu as well as in Hindi. His film *Bhuvan Shome*, with its austere style, sardonic humor, and expressionist exploration of the politics of class, is a landmark in modern Indian cinema, and became highly influential for what used to be called the 'New Indian Cinema.' Sen's work itself shows a fusion of myriad influences ranging from Bresson to Premchand. Sen has remained active in left-wing politics, and among some in the Indian intelligentsia his work has received more accolades than the work of Satyajit Ray, who was often charged with being apolitical.

What is the sentence? Yuk yuk.

Duck up, yuk yuk.

Click.

The intense dedication to the arts manifests itself in a plethora of festivals, dance, music performances and other cultural events. Calcuttans are also famous for their all-consuming passion for sports, especially soccer football and cricket.

Click.

Calcutta is a city of baffling paradoxes, a city that leaves its stamp on one's mind ... forever.

That last sentence was well-turned, thought Dork Dick. Pregnant with double-meaning. A challenge thrown in one's face.

Sounds like famous last words, yuk yuk.

Click.

Entering the City.

As one enters the city of Calcutta, the impressive Howrah Bridge across the Hooghly river, a huge cantilever structure, supported by two 270-feet-high piers, greets the eye.

A second bridge on the river Hooghly is one of the latest attractions of the city. A modern-day engineering marvel, it is the largest cable bridge in Asia, designed on the lines of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. The bridge connects the twin cities of Calcutta and Howrah. It was inaugurated in the year 1992, at a cost of Rs. 388 crores. The bridge is capable of handling around 85,000 vehicles daily on 9 lanes.

Remember, this is the way out too, yuk yuk.

Where's the airport? Yuk yuk.

Click.

The Maidan.

Forming the green heart of the city is the great stretch of lawns called the Maidan, fringed on one side by the river, and on the other by an elegant boulevard, the Chowringhee. The Maidan is the venue for an assortment of events, ranging from soccer football matches to political rallies. The grounds are also aptly referred to as the "lungs of the city."

Cough cough, yuk yuk.

Surrounding the lawns of the Maidan are a number of other famous landmarks. At the southern end is the Victoria Memorial, an imposing white marble edifice, a museum housing the relics of the British Empire, and one of Calcutta's most cherished areas. The Memorial, which took 15 years to build, also has an Art Gallery.

The relics of the British Empire, RBE. Rest in peace, yuk yuk.

At the northern end of the Maidan is the Ochterlony Monument (1828), a 48.15 m (165 ft.) high column, erected by public subscription to honor Sir David Ochter Lony, a one-time resident of Malwa and Rajputana, who fought the Nepalese war (1812-4) to victory. On 9th August, 1969 it was renamed 'Shahid Minar' to honor martyrs of the freedom struggle. Just adjacent to it are the Eden Gardens, with a picturesque lake and a quaint Burmese pagoda. The world-renowned Eden Gardens Stadium is also located here.

What freedom struggle?

Shut up, yuk yuk.

The Birla Planetarium (1929), one of the largest in the world, the second of its kind in the commonwealth, and similar to the one in London, is at the southern end of the vast Maidan, close to the crossing of Theatre Road and Chowringhee Road. It is a circular, single-story structure constructed in pure Indian architectural style, and includes Zoological Gardens.

The Zoological Gardens at Alipore, opened to the public in 1876, has one of the finest collections of birds, animals, and reptiles in India, including a children's zoo. The aquarium in front of the Zoological Gardens contains rare varieties of sea fish.

Situated on the southeast corner of the Maidan. The Rabindra Sadan is the seat of Bengali culture, where every evening, drama cultural programs and exhibitions are held. It is a cultural complex housing a number of auditoriums and exhibition centers, namely, Sisir Manch, Bangla Academy, Gaganendra Shilpa Pradarshashala. Nandan theatre is a part of this complex which has multiple film theatres and the Satyajit Ray Film Archive.

Click.

Museums and Libraries.

The many museums in the city pay testimony to the cultural richness of India's heritage. The Indian Museum (1814), one of the largest of its kind in India, housing relics of ancient civilizations as well as an art gallery, is located in Chowringhee. The Academy of Fine Arts, Marble Palace, Nehru Childrens Museum, Netaji Museum, Birla Academy of Art and Culture, Birla Industrial and Technological Museum, Rabindra Bharati Museum and the Ashutosh Museum of Indian Art are some of the museums that contain invaluable and rare objects d'art. The AFA contains an artist's studio for working artists. There also exist about 25 other museums of zoology, botany, geology, agriculture, veterinary medicine, pathology and anatomy attached to colleges and universities and used for teaching and research.

Built in Italian Renaissance style, the Belvedere was the official residence of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal. The National Library is now housed here. It is the largest library in India with a collection of more than one million books, many of them rare, and is open to scholars from 8 A.M. to 8 P.M.

Is it on the Net yet?

Yes and it's absolutely fabulous, yuk yuk.

Shut up, yuk yuk.

Click.

Places of Worship.

Calcutta also has shrines and sites of worship belonging to all faiths. The Armenian Church (1650), at Brabourne Road, is one of the oldest churches in the city. The massive Nakhoda Mosque or Rabindra Sarani, modelled after Akbar's mausoleum in Sikandra, is said to accomodate 10,000 people at a time. 10 km from the city is Belur Math, the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission which promotes the neo-Vedantic movement. It has been built to resemble a temple, a church and mosque in one.

Ecumenical, yuk yuk.

It's lovely to have that, yuk yuk.

12 km from the city center, on the banks of the Ganga, is the magnificent Dakshineswar Temple (1809), dedicated to the Goddess Kali. Its mediieval Bengal style contrasts timelessly with Calcutta's industrialisation and commercialisation, attracting a large number of pilgrims and visitors each day. Visitors to the temple receive as 'prasad' a vermillion paste, the symbol of Kali, to wear on their foreheads as a tilak.

The Mark of the Beast, yuk yuk.

Big Bill would get mad at you for saying that, yuk yuk.

Exquisite in design and construction, the Pareshnath Jain Temple (1867) is a beautiful temple in Calcutta, laid out in an attractive garden.

Click.

Botanical Gardens.

Located 8 km from Calcutta on the west bank of the Ganga or Ganges are the famous 273-acre Indian Botanical Garden (1787).

Does the Ganges flow from west to east, or east to west? West to east.

Calcutta is at the end of the river. It must really be a shit river by then, yuk yuk.

Hey don't knock their sacred river. It's not all shit. I heard they throw bodies in it too, yuk yuk.

Shut up, yuk yuk.

The Garden contains 12,000 living perennial plants and over two and a half million dried out plant specimens in the herbarium, collected from all over the world. One of these is the 200-year-old banyan tree, said to be the world's largest tree, some 26 m high with a circumference of approximately 300 m (900 feet).

I know where they get their fertilizer, yuk yuk.

Within easy reach of Calcutta, the Sunderbans, the world's largest estuarine forest, is the habitat of the Royal Bengal Tiger, as well as the estuarine crocodile, wild boar and several varieties of birds and snakes. The famous Project Tiger Reserve can be approached only via the waterways.

I'd like to get me one of them Royal Bengal Tigers, yuk yuk.

They're grrrrrrreat! Yuk yuk.

Click.

Beaches and Picnic Spots.

185 km south east of Calcutta is Digha, a popular beach resort with a 6 km long beach, said to be one of the widest in the world. The other popular beach resort of West Bengal, Bakkhali, lies 132 km from the city. 48 km south of Calcutta is the beautiful Diamond Harbor, at the mouth of the Hooghly, an ideal picnic spot.

What was that floating in the water? Yuk yuk.

Shut up, yuk yuk. Drop that subject.

Located in the heart of Salt Lake City (a satellite township) just 12 km away from Central Calcutta, Nalban is a beautiful picnic spot for families who want to spend a few hours in the quiet greenery, tucked away from the hustle and bustle of city life. Its serene and unpolluted environment offers a soothing effect to visitors. The main attraction of this place is the picturesque 400-acre lake, with various kinds of boating facilities such as paddle boats, shikaras, etc. Added attractions of this place are various water sports like water scooter, parasailing, etc., and a hovercraft. Houseboats and a floating restaurant add to the splendor of this paradise.

Click.

Other Key Sights.

The Writers' Building was, till the mid-19th century, the place of residence for the junior servants (who were called writers) of the East India Company. The original building was constructed in 1770 on the same site as the present one, but it was plain stuccoed and with no pretensions to architectural beauty. The present Gothic structure, built during the tenure of Lt. Governor Ashley Eden (1877-1882), is much more imposing than the original ever was. Situated at the northern end of Dalhousie square, it now houses the Secretariat of West Bengal Government.

136 km from the city is the the unique university of Shantiniketan, the brainchild of the revered Rabindranath Tagore. Started as an experimental open air classroom, this university has emerged as a universal center of knowledge and academic excellence for students and scholars alike.

Located on Calcutta's Eastern Metropolitan Bypass is Science City, a 21st century marvel of science, communication and environment; the first and only institution of its kind in India. Surrounded by trees and lawns, here one finds science out of doors and alive.

Nicco Park, an amusement park located at Salt Lake, is the Disneyland of West Bengal, with a variety of unusual games and rides. The Cave Ride is the latest addition and is the only of its kind in this part of the world. The park is open to the public from 10.00 A.M. to 8.00 P.M. everyday during the winter and 11.00 A.M. to 9.00 P.M. everyday during the rest of the year.

What would it be like to take a tour of Calcutta? Dork Dick had never left the U.S., except in his mind.

You'd be at home in the amusement park, yuk yuk.

You must have read Koontz' novel *Hideaway*, about the young sociopathic boy who threw his friend over the tracks in the coaster, and set the park on fire, killing many and causing the park to fold, yuk yuk.

How did you get away with that? Yuk yuk.

Shut up, yuk yuk. I'm no sociopath.

Why do you talk to yourself then? Yuk yuk.

Shut up, yuk yuk. A lot of geniuses talk to themselves.

Who? Yuk yuk.

Shut up, yuk yuk.

Click.

Holidays and Festivals.

The one event that all of Calcutta anticipates with great zest is the Durga Puja, in the month of October, when the city seems to don a brilliant garb of vitality and festivity, an atmosphere of bonhomie, that carries on right through Christmas and the New Year. During the ten-day event, the Goddess Durga is worshipped, her statuesque images are created, and millions of pandals all over the city come alive to the thunderous and rousing beat of drums. Basant Utsav, Saraswati Pooja and Holi are other festivals that are celebrated with fervor.

I guess Christianity didn't make much of a dent, yuk yuk.

Why do you think they're making Mother Teresa a saint? Yuk yuk.

On another site he found a thumbnail sketch of Calcutta history.

Click.

Although the name Kalikata had been mentioned in the rent-roll of the Great Mughal emperor Akbar and also in Manasa-Mangal, to understand the history of Calcutta we have to go back to the 17th century. It was in 1690 that Job Charnock came to the bank of the river Hooghly (part of the Ganga or Ganges) and took the lease of the three villages Sutanuti, Govindapur and Kolikata (Calcutta) as a trading post of British East India Company. The city became famous in 1756 when Siraj-Ud-Dawlah, the last independent nawab of Bengal, captured the city. But the British regained their power in 1757 and the city was recaptured under Lord Robert Clive. Warren Hastings, the first Governor-General of India, made it the seat of the supreme courts of justice and the supreme revenue administration, and Calcutta became the capital of British India in 1772. By 1800 Calcutta had become a busy and flourishing town, the center of the cultural as well as the political and economic life of Bengal.

How did New Delhi get to be India's capital?

Delhi was too dirty, so they created a new one below it, upwind of the garbage dump, yuk yuk

Oh well, who cares? They used to take orders from a lawyer in a diaper anyway, yuk yuk. He gave them their freedom from Britain — freedom to go back to warring among themselves, like in Serbia, yuk yuk.

They thought it was a new deli, and they were so hungry all the top officials made a rat-run for it, yuk yuk.

I'm sick of these official tourist-sanitized versions of the Big Cutta, yuk yuk. As long as you have plenty of traveler's checks, and credit left on your credit cards, they let you tramp around this version of Calcutta all day and go back to the hotel thinking it's charming.

It is — for about 1% of the population, yuk yuk.

You said it, yuk yuk. Just don't mind the rats in the shadows. Hold your breath when told, when not inside the "lungs of the city" — cough cough. Don't stray out of the air conditioning in your hotel, tour bus, or anywhere, without permission.

Or what? Yuk yuk.

Or they cut your balls off, yuk yuk. And feed them to the rats, yuk yuk.

Why don't they just cut all the poor mens' balls off? They could change the name to Ballcutta, yuk yuk.

Shut up, yuk yuk.

The real Calcutta, the one the masses have to endure, is what interests me.

Buy a book on it, yuk yuk.

That's not a bad idea, friend.

After a little browsing, he ordered *Song of Kali*, by Dan Simmons, from Amazon.com, the big web-based bookseller, and, reading the reviews, dreamed of grooving on its more real portrayal of the humid air, shit-crusted streets and back alleys, insistent beggars, and total atmosphere of evil and death-worship pervading the whole filthy stinking mass of despicable godforsaken slums, where there eternally isn't enough to eat, and the acceptance of the karma of hopeless poverty inevitably leads to the mentality of the rat.

Human rats. The rats and the rat-nots, yuk yuk. They come up to you, sniff you out, and beg until they get everything they can from you. They would kill you and eat you alive if something wasn't stopping them from it; they just devour you as much as they can get away with, as politely as they must. But you are food to them. Food on the

hoof. The whole city is a horror movie theme park. The mentality of the well-to-do must be just as remarkable, considering what lies around every corner, under every manhole, behind every wall. They are just the lucky rats, the have-rats. No different in kind, though, the caste system notwithstanding. Castes are just different levels of rattishness, of ratmanity.

The top rat of all is their deity, yuk yuk. Ask Indiana Jones about the Goddess Kali, the Temple of Doom, yuk yuk. The cuisine, yuk yuk. Child labor laws, yuk yuk. And that movie was toned-down for the American movie-going public. Sugar-coated it.

Who was the director? Sen or Ray? Yuk yuk.

Steven Spielberg. He was warming up for his Jewish holocaust film, yuk yuk.

Where else could the Goddess Kali and her bloody worship find a home but in the land of the human rats? As humans, they have a larger brain to suffer with, that lets them see the lucky few live in magnificent wealth and privilege, and not care; no, not really, any more than a rat cares. The trick is making them accept that they are human rats in the first place. It is beyond cruel. It is the industry of the place. Even Mother Teresa barely made a dent here. Social and government welfare agencies ditto.

Funny, the power of that scene in *Schindler's List*, where the concentration camp commandant, Amon Goert (Ralph Fiennes) has his pretty Jew 'housekeeper' alone in the basement, and is laughingly telling her that she is not a rat. The Nazis were so obsessed with their Jew hatred, they convinced themselves they were all rats, and had to be exterminated, like vermin. Yet they left the real vermin in Calcutta alone throughout the war. Their Jewish rats started out wearing mink stoles and expensive jewelry; they only turned them into rats to assuage what was left of their consciences before finishing them off.

Real rats are too much even for Nazis. Their power is unstoppable. It seems that the human race will always have its rats. Or will it?

It will always have Big Bill, yuk yuk.

Or at least Microsoft employees, yuk yuk.

They're more like cats than rats. They don't mind playing a game of cat and mouse, as long as they're the cat, yuk yuk.

Where did we hear that before?

We don't remember, but it was probably on American Movie Channel, yuk yuk.

Forget it, yuk yuk. Now, imagine these rats being let loose on Microsoft like the body of a giant cat, eating it down to the nubs? And still being hungry for more? If they are, there will be plenty more, because they can get it where Microsoft got it from.

It's worth a try anyway, yuk yuk.

This was going to be risky, dangerous. But Dork Dick had no choice now. His nightmare wrestling bouts were wearing him down. Maybe nothing would come of his naughty little venture, but maybe something totally gratifying would; he'd have to do it or die hating himself for not doing it.

He wanted to write an anonymous email, and post it to a selected few, namely, Indian immigrants to America who worked for computer software firms, particularly IBM, that had no love of Microsoft. If he could reach them, then they would figure out the details for themselves.

The idea was to convince them to go back to India, to Calcutta, and persuade a rich fatcat or group of them to purchase hundreds, even thousands, of PCs, equipped with Net access, and provide them to starving but educated Calcuttans, and teach them how to program. Like rats, they would, if provided with the food for thought, eat it up, devour it, and make mincemeat of it.

Then, they would secretly work to download pirated copies of all of Microsoft's main products, reverse-engineer them into source code, and master all the internal intricacies, becoming experts at the software themselves.

The work involved could run into the hundreds of thousands of man-hours. But in India, poor people are rats, not men. Rats eat rat food, expect to live in rat holes. The cost of that labor would be low, very low, especially to the rich rats there, hungry for truly big cheese.

The authorities would have to be paid off, and the whole operation buried deeply in some shit-crusted rat alley that nobody from outside India would enter even at gunpoint. The American law enforcement authorities would not be able to shut down this international software smuggling ring, no way.

The next step would be to recompile the source code, with enough modifications to give it a different object code signature, and release it surreptitiously onto the Net everywhere it could be released. Hopefully, first the hackers, then the consumers would figure out that they could get free clones of Microsoft's pricey programs, and in no time flat, Microsoft would go belly-up bankrupt.

After that, if the Indians wanted to keep improving the software until it was a substantial improvement over Microsoft's, and release the object code, under a new name, on web sites that charged money for downloads. Fine with Dork Dick.

They could call it Taj Mahal 1.0, yuk yuk.

They would no doubt charge five, ten, fifteen bucks for packages that Microsoft had pushed on the market for one hundred, two hundred, four hundred bucks. Maybe they would climb down to one or two bucks, if the transaction and download are all electronic, yuk yuk. They could dispense with formal copyrights and all that stuff, and dispense with lawyers and their fees too. They would make up the difference in volume.

By the time the authorities caught up with them by tracing financial transactions, it would be too late. They would buy off everybody in their way, and solidify their legitimacy with world applause at their liberation of the software market from the Microsoft tyranny.

They would lower the market price for all PC software, not only ending Microsoft's monopoly, but leaving room for old companies to come back in the market with products priced above the Indians', as long as they didn't compete head-on; or did but were worth the difference. In other words, a real free market again. One that was Microsoft-free.

Big Bill would end up in Calcutta, trying to track down the 'pirates', and being given a horrific runaround by Calcutta's underground lowlife, until he was himself reduced to a pitiful beggar dressed in a diaper and stinking like monkey shit, yuk yuk.

All without Dork Dick being connected with it by any law enforcement agencies, hopefully. To do this, he had to have a backup escape plan, where he would frame somebody else and catch them himself if he was forced to.

Too many layers. Don't sail against the tides of heaven, yuk yuk.

I'm not. I'm sailing with them, yuk yuk.

The nocturnal wrestling bouts ceased. In their place were hopeful images, dreams of meadows cleared of bad giants by nocturnal rats, of picnics, weddings, white trousers and shoes and straw hats. Bands playing. Sopwith camels flying, performing stunts with Robert Redford lookalikes piloting them, scarves waving in the wind. Of the return of summer after a too-long winter.

He was Robert Redford. He gets the girls now.

Robert Redford does Rattrutta, yuk yuk.

Part II. The Duckless Dick Years

Chapter 19

This time she did break her neck. It was Easter day, and she prepared a ham dinner feast with all the trimmings for her son. The dishes had their stains, the food an occasional gray hair, but she did her best despite having arthritis and weak eyes with a developing cataract. She accepted her son's jovial suggestion and had a cold can of beer, causing her to go to the bathroom twice in a row. The first time she was lucky, tripping and catching herself with a hand on the wall. The second time she fell on a loose bathroom rug, reached for the wall but couldn't keep her balance, hit her head on the bathtub, and broke a vertebra in her neck.

At first she was only worried about the cut on her forehead. She cried for help for some time before her son heard her and helped her get up, wash the cut, put hydrogen peroxide on it, some bandages.

He helped her to bed, wondered if he should take her to the hospital, asked her about it. She told him not to. The bleeding was almost stopped, and she just wanted to rest. He did the dishes for her to be nice.

The next morning, the bleeding was under control, but her neck hurt and she couldn't move it. He took her to the hospital, and the x-rays soon showed the broken neck. They laid her out flat on a table, applying braces to her neck. She hated remaining stationary with her arthritis paining her.

Two days later the neurologists were still deciding whether to operate. They did, but a nurse had given her too much sedative, and she almost didn't come out of it, so they postponed the operation until she was strong enough.

She didn't come out well. She left the hospital in a wheelchair. They told her she might walk again, but not to expect it.

At least, in a wheelchair, she wouldn't be falling in the bathroom and breaking her neck again.

Her dogs could pull all day on their lines and never break their necks. That's because the tow lines were fastened to their backs, not their necks.

She asked her son if he could build her a temple, with handicapped access, featuring an eternal lava lamp at the spacious altar.

Chapter 20

Dork Dick cut his madre a lot of slack. At her age, with death just around the corner, having a sudden religious conversion was quite understandable. Since she was born and raised a Catholic, then fell from the faith, becoming either a pagan or an agnostic, her new jag as a goddess and a prophet was almost refreshing. He could see her on her deathbed recanting and asking for a priest — a radical priest, yuk yuk.

He did build her temple, out back of the house, although he had to hire an electrician and a plumber to bring it up to code. It featured solarium walls on the east and west sides and a solarium roof. He took her old dog sled and made it into a throne, yuk yuk. The central altar, on a raised dais, had a collection of lava lamps, surrounded by a prayer floor that was mirrored part-way down in front, the rest being light-colored Pergo over plywood. He could just imagine the naked women sitting cross-legged on the mirrored floor, while he looked up and worked his tongue, yuk yuk. He had seriously thought about installing double-sided mirrors here, and creating a secret hiding space underneath the floor, but ran out of time and money; besides, if they found him out, the dykes would castrate him, yuk yuk. Not that he'd care if they'd accept him as a human toilet seat after that, yuk yuk.

He was glad for the chance to break away from the glare of the computer monitors for awhile and let his eyes relax and refocus at longer, outdoor-type distances. He had had strained eyes, migraines, even eyelid infections, caused by staring at bright computer monitors for hours, while rarely blinking, until the eyes dried out and became susceptible to infection. Just like colds; most people think the winter brings on colds, but it is actually the need to stay inside more, and breathe drier air, that weakens the nose linings and makes it more susceptible to infection by the ever-present cold viruses.

To cure the eyelid infection, he had to dab baby shampoo under his eyelids daily with a cotton swab. His Lab had its own bathroom, but he had economized and it was quite tiny, with a stand-up sheet-metal-sided shower, a commode, and a tiny sink. Every day, after getting out of his sleeping bag, he'd tromp into the small shithouse and relieve his bodily functions, shave with his cordless Norelco shaver, and take a quick shower in the crowded shower, whose walls were now covered with fungus. Sometimes he'd used his madre's bathroom, which was much larger, much more clean and neat and feminine, with pink rugs and toilet tank and seat covers, and shelves full of medicines, cosmetics, and drugstore preparations. Not that it was that clean; her arthritis made it too hard to use elbow grease in scrubbing, or to get into corners, but compared to Dork Dick's underground bathroom, hers was a spa.

He didn't mind his madre falling away from the Roman Catholic Church, especially after the U.S. National Conference of Catholic Bishops had used Good Friday as a platform to urge an end to all capital punishment. He was for that too — after all the rottenest people had been executed, yuk yuk. There weren't any Christs on death row, despite their constant attempts to impersonate him, yuk yuk. Even Bible-thumper leader Pat Robertson had been fooled by Karla Faye Tucker and tried to stop her execution in Texas unsuccessfully the February before last. He failed because only the Catholics have that kind of clout.

Missouri's Governor, Mel Carnahan, melted before the aura of Pope John Paul last January, commuting Darrell J. Meese's capital sentence to life without parole after the pope spoke to him at an interfaith service. He told the public that the decision meant no change in his support for capital punishment; he just couldn't say no to a Pope after kissing his ring, yuk yuk.

Shut up, yuk yuk.

Prison was too good for some people, especially when he was planning on filling them all up with dork computer criminals. Indeed, he was all for decriminalizing marijuana because the convicts took up too many jail cells he wanted to put to better use; if they were released, and came back as computer criminals, it served them right.

He hoped she would last another twenty years; he couldn't live without her, and didn't want to try. Where would he get another woman to replace her? He might have to get married, if he hadn't made enough money to hire a live-in maid — probably an illegal undocumented immigrant from Mexico who would hide comfortably in the shadows of his hacienda, cook, clean, do occasional sex tricks, and never talk.

And then only in Spanish, that nobody around here understands, yuk yuk.

And once she got to forty, she'd have two or three twenties she called daughter, who could take her place, yuk yuk.

They wouldn't be yours, though, would they? Yuk Yuk.

No way, yuk yuk. She'd have had about fifty Mexican boyfriends on the side by then, yuk yuk. He didn't want to own her, just rent, yuk yuk.

Failing that, he'd actually have to think about getting married. That was too much to swallow this young in life. Marriage would ruin his lifestyle. Imagine having to entertain and think about some other person's needs all the time. Dance, hand-in-hand, on a cruise ship. Dance in a nightclub all night. Dance on the streets. Live for love. Live to love. Degenerate to a Drew Barrymore, yuk yuk. More likely, Al and Peg Bundy, yuk yuk. Yes, marriage is for people who have either outgrown or don't believe in love and romance, yuk yuk. In a nutshell, him, yuk yuk. But it could wait. He could live with it or without it, but right now he was doing fine without it, and since his career was taking off, he didn't want to have to worry about wifey claiming half of his estate one day, yuk yuk.

Still, he had to marry one day, so he could have a whore, maid, and madre, rolled in one, yuk yuk. Somebody to cheat on and come back to, yuk yuk. Somebody who wasn't going anywhere or doing anything with her life, yuk yuk. A good Catholic wife, yuk yuk. Not that he was religious. He tended more to Madalyn Murray O'Hair's way of thinking, even if she had been murdered, chainsawed, and stuffed in a barrel somewhere, as authorities now claimed.

Even then, he'd prefer trying a web-site-based matrimony service, supplying contacts with single women from impoverished Eastern European countries, who have medieval values about men, and would think of him as a rich, mature prince, saving them from hell's gate, yuk yuk. If he could keep her from watching TV and movies, she'd never get too spoiled like American women all get, and he could use her as his whore and maid until he keeled over or had to go to a home, yuk yuk. Meanwhile, he'd never let her understand that he needed her as much as, or more, than she needed him; as much as he needed his aging madre.

But madre still had lots of years left, with that new wheelchair and her own religion and temple, so he shelved the subject in his thoughts, and got busy with his own work, soon becoming as totally self-absorbed as ever. That's what he was married to now — his work.

It's unlikely to let you down like a woman will, yuk yuk.

Shut up, yuk yuk.

You can't live with 'em, and can't live without 'em, yuk yuk.

True but shut up, yuk yuk.

They can live with you, or without you, yuk yuk.

Either way they suck you dry after they get their fangs in you, yuk yuk.

Like the IRS, yuk yuk.

The IRS is the ultimate woman in government, yuk yuk. In order to supposedly nurture you it first sucks you dry mercilessly, yuk yuk. When you have nothing left — zero — they give some of it back and expect you to feel grateful for their kindness and charity, yuk yuk.

Shut up. They might be listening, yuk yuk.

Chapter 21

The Cowper case finally broke through into the sunshine. He had been framed, by his roommate, who was a closet faggot, and used roofies on him at night to get his way with him. He even used Cowper's name to buy Rohypnol on the web, yuk yuk.

The roommate had been a computer freak and hacker from age five. He was a Computer Science grad student, with a rosy future, working for Microsoft until he burned out at forty, and had permanent nerve damage, yuk yuk. By then, if he were fortunate, his stock options would let him cash out with enough money to change careers, perhaps becoming a web site manager, or a travel agent, or a fast food restaurant owner-manager, yuk yuk.

Maybe a mortician. With the Baby Boomers aging fast, that industry looked like a winner, yuk yuk. He'd thought of trying it himself. Why else did cable bring back *The Addams Family* and *The Munsters*? Job demand, yuk yuk.

Turning the roommate, Carl Hamilton, into the authorities, however, took finesse. He had covered his tracks quite well, and done all he could to frame Joshua Cowper like a Picasso. He was good, very good.

Does he swallow or spit? Yuk yuk.

One could confiscate his computer, dissect it, and come up with nothing, because he had little if anything on it. Instead, he kept all his files scattered throughout cyberspace, encrypted with 256-bit keys, the kind that were either impossible to break, or at least took major computing power only the government could provide, and only if they wanted to so badly that they would commit big bucks to it, with a doubtful hope of success.

To attack his encrypted files, the best method was to locate and steal Hamilton's copy of the key. Like all security systems, the weakest link defines the strength. Even with perfect computer encryption, Hamilton still had to have a copy of his key physically accessible, or else he couldn't decrypt his own files.

The key wasn't the same thing as a password. Ever since some university professors had published a paper on 'public key cryptography' in the 1970s, and some university students led by Phil Zimmerman had used the paper to program an implementation useable on personal computers, which they freely released to the world in source code form under the name Pretty Good Privacy, all hackers had routinely used it to encrypt everything from email to pirated software to pornographic images.

The PGP software let each person make up two keys, a public and a private key, as well as a password. The public key could be distributed publicly, sort of like one's nom de plume, so that anybody wanting to send you some email or files could use your public key to encrypt them first. Then, even if the encrypted files were captured in transit, or even published publicly, they couldn't be decrypted without your private key.

It was revolutionary, because earlier encryption systems only had private keys, and one couldn't even deal with somebody else unless they were first screened, accepted as a good guy, and given the private key. For spies, that's good and fine. For the Net and its possibilities, it was lame. With public key cryptography, complete strangers could transmit encrypted messages to each other even if they didn't trust each other — even if they weren't sure a stranger wasn't a narc. It didn't matter, because one's private key was never shared, never divulged; and without it, the public key was useful only for encrypting messages and sending them to the owner of the private key, and nothing else.

But the private key was usually a huge string of gibberish symbols that nobody could memorize or type into a keyboard even if they could, and even if they typed faster than a prize-winning typist. They had to keep the key on some kind of magnetic storage, be it a disk, diskette, tape, card, strip, or whatnot, then supply it to the computer running the PGP software and apply it to the encrypted incoming message. On top of that, the private key was always held in encrypted form under a password.

Usually the key was kept on a microdiskette, carefully hidden away, perhaps in a garbage bag taped to the bottom of the kitchen trash can. It couldn't be kept in the freezer, in a freezer bag, because it was plastic and metal and might slightly warp; or would it? He wouldn't be so stupid as to hide it under his mattress, or in a safe deposit box. It would be too fragile to carry on his person all the time, even around his neck on a necklace. He might have hid it in a hole in the wall or ceiling or floor, behind a false panel, or inside a hollowed-out book in a bookcase. Maybe inside the false bottom of a can of shave cream or bug spray.

Maybe he hid it in plain sight, disguised as something else, for example, a work of art. Or just hid it in a big box of diskettes, using the safety of numbers. Maybe he taped it underneath a shelf or a desk, or inside the toilet tank.

Dork Dick spent two solid hours ransacking the dude's dorm room one day, after establishing his routine and feeling sure he wouldn't be there. He had surgical gloves, and garbage bags wrapped around his feet and taped to his ankles with duck tape, ditto with his hair, all to prevent leaving body samples, 'just in case.'

Nothing. Worse, he wasted thirty minutes hacking into his desk computer, because the dude had the basic operating system access password-protected, causing him to have to go around to the back, pull the disk drive out, patch it into his own laptop as an extra drive, and read it out through his CPU and operating system instead, making a copy of it on his spare disk drive. Luckily he had enough disk capacity to hold a complete copy the first time.

He took the disk copy back to the Lab, and analyzed every byte of information on it all night long, with no results, finally stumbling to his madre's house around 11 AM, red-eyed and strung out, dazed, and hungry. She made him some pancakes with raisins in the hot syrup, and twice as many strips of bacon as he could eat, along with some boiled eggs which he only picked at. This Hamilton was just a kid, a lightweight, after all.

He finally decided to sleep on it. In his line of work, sometimes the answer comes out of the subconscious, and into the conscious, during long sleep sessions. Sleep, after all, is the brain's attempt to process all the raw data it has been exposed to, to separate the wheat from the chaff, and lay the unimportant stuff away in long-term memory, clearing the short-term memory for new raw data; unless injured, the body could repair itself every day probably with little or no sleep. Do plants and amoebas sleep? Mark that subject for further study, yuk yuk.

Maybe, just maybe, this processing would reveal that the key was already found but not recognized, or not found but not hard to find because of an almost-completed process of elimination, that meticulous scorekeeping would expose to him plainly.

Dork Dick slept on this one for 18 hours straight, digesting pancakes and bacon, and farting richly throughout. As a lifelong bachelor, he had developed quite a few personal habits that would gross out any woman, his farting being one of the worst.

He wouldn't just fart. No, he had to make a religious experience of it, pulling his butt cheeks apart, bending over to force it out harder, and trying for an airhorn effect. So far his high metabolism would let him eat anything and not gain weight. Maybe the Duck is right, and one day the metabolism would slow down, causing him to gain weight faster than the Buddy Rich. Then his farts would be more voluminous. If he would get up out of his sleeping bag, to get a drink of water, and return, he'd immediately notice the ripe sulfuric fumes all around like a blanket on top of his sleeping bag, that he had to dive through before he could get back in. He loved the smell of his own farts, as only a lifelong bachelor could. He almost felt sorry for women in general sometimes, yuk yuk.

When Dork Dick woke up, he had a bad need to shit. The farts were a sign that his digestive system wasn't digesting the food right, and was making a mess of it, leaving his intestines full of half-formed diarrhea. After pooping

one, two, three different times, only to have to race back and poop again, Dork Dick finally felt evacuated. Then it hit him: farts!

He was sure now that Hamilton must hide his key up his own ass. How could he get into his ass without raising his suspicions? The answer, considering that Hamilton was gay, was only too obvious. In every profession they had a name for it; for instance, in football they called it necessary roughness, yuk yuk. In politics they called it political necessity, or plausible deniability. And he was a professional, wasn't he?

Could Dork do it? Go gay for his country, his career? He connected with some gay porn web sites, viewed several pictures of gays engaging in sex, oral, anal, and every variety in between, and figured it wouldn't kill him to try it once, even if he wasn't gay, as long as he could get into Hamilton's ass and search for the key.

Now he had to lay his trap for him. Gays didn't court like heteros, not yet, not on that campus at least. They were quite circumspect and discreet about it, almost like they were spies. Dork Dick had always been considered ugly and undesirable by women, but he hadn't tested himself on gay men yet, and hoped for the best. To help, he showered for a straight hour, using an entire bar of soap; dabbed cologne on every body part from his feet to his scalp; bought a new jock strap, and stuffed it with a half-sock, a full sock being too big and unwieldy. He just cut a sock in two with a pair of scissors, a white crew sock.

A pair of freshly washed jeans, a peach guyaberra shirt, with the top buttons undone, a cowboy hat, and the disguise was complete. Dork Dick had learned that people wearing cowboy hats in public are considered friendlier than the average person, and get talked to more.

He started hanging out on the campus, looking for Carl Hamilton.

It took two weeks, and more embarrassment than he'd ever known, but he finally ended up in bed with Hamilton one night, right in his dorm room, where his former roommate Joshua had once been raped without knowing it and now was languishing in jail, probably being raped and knowing it.

How did you find this out, Dorkie Dickie? Yuk Yuk.

It wasn't as bad as he thought it would be. He had never kissed a man on the lips before, held him in his arms, and cuddled. Of course, he hadn't done it with a woman either, if you don't count whores giving him hand jobs. He was surprised at getting aroused, and at how big his suspect's organ was, much bigger than his.

The details don't matter, but Dork Dick caught Hamilton trying to slip him some Roofies, and reversed it on him, causing him to go zombie before they had gone all the way.

Searching his anal area, he found nothing. Mad wouldn't be a strong enough adjective, or adverb either, to describe Dork Dick, laying naked in bed with a drugged-out faggot. Not that he was prejudiced, but he wanted to save himself for women, and didn't want to even think about enjoying other men for one minute, for fear that he'd spoil himself forever; call him prejudiced, okay, he was.

He couldn't help, however, admiring Hamilton's body, and his organ, which was far larger, cleaner, and more attractive than his, and his body, which was athletic, taut, and well, sexy, despite his prejudices. He turned on the light, and felt tempted by him, starting imagining doing things to his body, experimenting, letting it happen. What was a faggot, after all, but a man who likes making love to his own kind? What's the difference between that and masturbation? Who doesn't masturbate? (With or without needing Viagra to get it up).

Sigh to the sky. He just wasn't a peter puffer, nor a rump ranger. Maybe he could enjoy being given head, but not enough to take chances with having to reciprocate. Gone with the wind, Hamilton wasn't able to give him head now, and had lost his woody. Maybe he could give him a woody again by masturbating him, but he didn't, couldn't try it. He still had one, and he had him turned over to get to his ass, so he could have tried humping it, but something inside him grew scabs, turned on a cold faucet, made his lip curl up with distaste.

Sorry, Dork Dick couldn't do it, even after the devil inside him had his moment. He just wasn't gay. It had to be at least partly hereditary, the tendency for it. He just didn't have gay genes. Too bad. He might have been happier if he had been born that way. He wasn't. Gone with the wind.

Getting off the bed to dress, he dropped his sock, and it rolled under the bed. He got on his hands and knees to get it, and saw the key. He had kept it in his ass, but had discreetly withdrawn it and hid it under the bed, meaning to return it later.

Dork Dick broke into maniacal laughter, taking the key, sniffing it to certify its genuineness — after all, he loved the smell of his own farts — then throwing his clothes on and racing out to his car, where he had his battery-powered laptop. There, he made a quick copy of the key diskette, and returned to the dorm room, putting it back in the exact same place he had found it. He then took off to the Lab.

In the Lab, having a copy of his main disk, and his key diskette, he knew he only needed the private key password to be able to read everything encrypted with Hamilton's public key anywhere he could find it.

It only took another two weeks of dick work, using his standard dick techniques, learning the names and numbers of friends and relatives, tracing his local purchases at stores and restaurants, and running a password generating program, before he discovered it: CHUCKCHEESEDANCING.

Decrypting Hamilton's main disk, he got his Microsoft Internet Explorer phonebook, with all the phone numbers he called, complete with the passwords right there in the phonebook.

He called Hamilton's Internet Service Provider, and got into his email; it was nice of the ISP to store his email for 90 days back.

From clues in the email, he worked his way onto obscure university FTP sites, hit a dead end (he was into software pirating, but that didn't help catch him framing Cowper), and finally realized that Hamilton was a lamer, because he saved his personal files on the Net simply by encrypting them with his public key, and emailing them to the warez newsgroups. These were newsgroups consisting of little more than stolen software, posted by hackers after covering their tracks, so that anybody having access to the newsgroup could download the software disguised as an email message, and get the software for free: kind of a Robin Hood effort of certain hackers with that self-appointed mission.

Hamilton posted his own private files in those newsgroups, knowing that nobody but himself could decrypt them even if they downloaded them. Now that Dork Dick had his private key and password, he could do it at will.

His Lab was humming for a day and a night running custom scripts to scan all the thousands of newsgroups archives, find Hamilton's files, download and encrypt them, building up a new version of Hamilton's main disk, in plain, unencrypted text.

The rest was duck soup. There was Hamilton's own record of making that fake airline reservation in Cowper's name. There was his private diary, including accounts of seducing the stuporous Cowper, making love to him, and how his conscience was wracked with this secret, complete with love letters to him that he never had the courage to give him.

Dork Dick was soon emailing the local FBI, offering to sell them his work, that would free Cowper and put Hamilton in his place. At least in prison, Hamilton wouldn't lack for love, yuk yuk.

He got fifty thousand bucks for the package and, what was better — or worse, as time alone could decide — national media attention. The FBI had assured him that his identity as an informant would remain secret, but they had worse security than Hamilton, for he soon found the name 'Dork Dick Detective Services of Seattle' plastered over the media articles, and the official business phone ringing off the hook.

He was a businessman, after all. He was offered money for interviews. He took it. He was given free air fare and expenses shared by two major network morning TV shows, which he visited on the same day. He was not exactly a

sensation, but he had his fifteen minutes of Warholian fame. A major literary agent approached him about ghost writing a book. He was moving on up to the Eastside now.

For some reason, his shoulder duck took a hike.

Chapter 22

Precisely at three minutes past two a.m., the commando raid commenced.

"Link heart nova sad six." The sound of a squelch.

A squad of Navy SEALs, their heads disguised as ducks, slipped into the pond above the Lab. Simultaneously, duck calls were employed to effect, signaling in a code back and forth across the pond and out into the farm, where the second wave of commandos lay dug-in. The real ducks didn't grow alarmed, quack, fly away, because of silent aerosol sedative bombs; they just went to sleep on the water.

"Fairway romeo five badger east side stat."

Dork Dick was out on a publicity tour, and while he had a number of cybernetic security devices operating, they were easily circumvented or disabled by Navy experts. His robo-ducks did not have an autopilot programmed yet; that was one of the things on Dork Dick's to-do list, but he hadn't got around to it ("a round tuit" as he often joked) yet. Instead, they were lamely beached in the mud on one edge of the pond, facing outward into the darkness.

"Sam robert phantom do re mi flank maneuver two."

They built their own door into the Lab, through an underwater tunnel, intending to replace and seal up the concrete blocks they had to laser-drill through on their way in, without leaving a trace that they had been there. A waterproof plexiglass dome was affixed to the roof of the Lab before drilling began, to prevent water from leaking in. The engineers were impressed with the quality of construction and the tightness of the waterproofing, and shot the bull about it over coffee afterwards at the base.

"Penta gamma bison david one lazy zero."

Thelma was in her temple, in a spirited private discussion with one of her faithful, Marie, an aging Baby Boomer, now in her fifties, the latter sitting naked, save for a Hawaiian grass skirt, in a yoga cross-legged posture on the mirrored prayer floor in front of Thelma, who was sitting in her well-padded Goddess throne in front of the central lava lamps, eyeing Marie's breasts most admiringly. The back of the throne, constructed from her old dog sled, was self-supporting, so she could wheel her wheelchair into place. Marie had donned the customary dog harness with tow line attached to the sled's gang line, and dog collar with neck line attached to the tow line, as a condition to receiving the Goddess' wisdom.

Her breasts had not really lost their size until her late sixties, Thelma was recalling. In recent days Thelma had taken to Hawaiian clothing, especially sarongs and their cousins, pareos; she was wearing the latter now. She had been wearing an orchid in her hair, but had passed it to Marie's light brown short-cut head after the latter had kissed her sacred breasts in the now-customary Goddess audience greeting protocol, prior to donning the sacred vestments. Just like the way people kiss the Pope's ring at an audience, only matriarchal instead of patriarchal.

"It feels as if your life has a hole and you want to become whole."

"I know how you feel, Marie, but look at how many modalities you've tried and come up blank with. Those MSM capsules you recommended didn't do anything for me. Who was that you said was cured of arthritis by taking them?"

"Actor James Coburn."

"Good for him, but they just give me heartburn." She laughed at her little pun. Wisdom is thinking in the moment, she had heard; this she had plenty of still left inside her, waiting to come out, moment by moment.

"What was that body awareness therapy you took called?"

"Feldenkrais," said Marie, very slow, as if to spell it phonetically with lip movements. She paused and then did spell it out to be sure. "A homeopathic practitioner of acupuncture, Chinese medicine and organic foods recommended this modality to me. I attended a class that combined Feldenkrais methods with Pilates, Gyrotonics, and perimenopause hormone replacement therapy."

"You were yourself a yoga teacher and massage therapist, were you not?"

"That, and a psychic healer, Goddess. I blended the modern with ancient Aztec healing, Ayurvedic medicine, tai chi, chi kung, Acro-sage..."

"What is that one, acro-?"

"A kind of midair massage technique developed by a former circus acrobat."

"I'd like to try that. Do you have to use rings and bars?"

"Yes, Goddess. I'd show you, but this temple has the wrong feng shui to install trapezes and rings." She raised her arms up as if to feel the walls with psychic energy without leaving her cross-legged sitting yoga posture. Her milk jugs wobbled like large jello moulds.

Thelma sighed, dropping the conversation like a rock. "Ah." She stopped looking straight into Marie's face and let her gaze be taken by the lava lamps instead, losing herself in them. Soon she dozed off, happy to be sitting because it gave her arthritis less trouble than laying down now.

Marie had been waiting for this. She slipped off her harness and collar, jumped up on the altar on her back, her head hanging down and breasts wobbling on her chest like egg yolks, spread her still-soft-skinned legs, and began masturbating with both hands while fantasizing about being a virginal temple sacrifice, mesmerized by the funky lava lamps. She missed some funky music to go with this moment, wished she had brought her Sony Discman with some Melissa Etheridge CDs.

She loved the name Melissa. When it had gained publicity as the name of a computer virus, she felt personally slighted by the male ruffian who had decided it would be a fine joke to use and desecrate that name that way. So many people would take it the wrong way.

Her first lesbian lover was named Melissa. Tall, lanky, slender, small but perky breasts, light blonde straight hair that came almost to the nape of her neck, twenty-something, boyish high-cheekboned Jonathan Frakes type face, light skin that never quite tans as much as flushes. They met at the Whole Life Expo in Portland, at a book signing by curandera (folk medicine healer) Elena Avila of *Woman Who Glows in the Dark*. Melissa asked Marie if she had also read *Maya Cosmos: Three Thousand Years on the Shaman's Path*, by David Freidel, Linda Schele, Joy Parker and others; Parker was a co-author of Avila's book, and that's why she asked.

Marie, a librarian, had been diagnosed with cervical cancer at age 40, despite yearly pap smears, because of decades of unprotected sex, they told her. A DNC, a hysterectomy, vomit-inducing chemotherapy — all had turned her against both the orthodox medical establishment and men. Still, she believed a TV report from a doctor that having at least two orgasms a week, the American average, is necessary to bolster the immune system. Melissa obviously got far more than the minimum necessary, and was magnificently healthy; would hopefully never get cancer or have to have a hysterectomy.

One thing led to another, and soon Marie was enthralled by Melissa's knowledge of Mayan religion, and studying *Maya Cosmos* with her.

The authors David Freidel and Linda Schele are respected Mayan archaeologists at competing universities in Texas. Their previous, highly-acclaimed book *A Forest of Kings: The Untold Story of the Ancient Maya* presented the many secrets of Mayan history that were revealed with the recent breakthroughs in deciphering their enigmatic glyphs. After spending some study time on that, Marie continued with *Maya Cosmos*, with Melissa as her study guide.

"What creation story do you use to guide your life?" Melissa kept asking her. "When was the last time you thought about that story, or participated in a ritual that re-enacted your creation? If you are uncertain of your creation story, you are not alone."

The achievement of *Maya Cosmos* is its rediscovery of the long-persecuted Mayan-Olmec creation myth in hieroglyphs, art, and modern Mayan daily ceremonial ritual, and its attempt to place it in the universal archeo-astronomical tradition of the world.

The Mayan creation myth centers around First Father, the Maize god and father of the Twins, famous in the Popul Vuh creation story. First Father is identified with Orion where he is resurrected from the dead from the cleft carapace of a turtle, which are the three stars in Orion's belt. Recent studies in Egyptian archeo-astronomy have identified the constellation Orion with Osiris, the god of resurrection; the lower left star in Orion's belt, Alnitak, has been identified with the Great Pyramid of Giza. First Father emerges out of a cleft mountain and a cleft turtle carapace, the mountain here related to the idea of the pyramid.

In like manner, ancient India presents us with the god Vishnu sitting upon Mt. Meru. A serpent is entwined around this mountain and under the mountain is a great turtle. This identifies Vishnu and Osiris with First Father; Mt. Meru and the great pyramid with the Cleft Mountain; the Vishnu turtle with the Mayan constellation of the turtle, the belt of Orion; and the serpent entwined around Mt. Meru with the Mayan double-headed serpent of the Ecliptic.

"I dream of an older woman," said Melissa. "She is holding a ball of clay in her hands, pressing and molding it with her fingers." Working clay helps her prepare for creativity, which in turn arouses thoughts of the Creator. The Creator's gift was not merely the initial clay-molding called Genesis, but is an ongoing, abundant outflowing at this and every moment. Our personal awareness is a window through which the Creator experiences the world. Our own actions, although molded by this force, are also a local agent of this creation. When we pause to acknowledge the presence and companionship of the Creator, we feel grateful.

Marie knew she was that older woman, without Melissa having to tell her. When she did, Melissa was standing behind her, close, holding her by the shoulders. She embraced and hugged her from behind tenderly, eventually cupping and kneading her breasts like clay. At first shivering slightly, Marie grew warm and responsive under Melissa's loving and creative hands; then they both changed places and Melissa reciprocated, Melissa moaning delightedly.

The Creator's blessing perfectly balances the burden of individual responsibility we carry in any relationship, she told Marie, like a perfectly-symmetric sacred tree. A shared burden can then be carried more lightly — with joy even. "Praise creation," said Melissa. Meditating upon creativity and companionship with the Creator is but one of the blossoms sprouting on our sacred tree.

Marie had considered herself a Christian, before the news of the cancer. Now she considered her religion to be more universal. Looking down at the mirror she had been sitting on made her remember more of Melissa's days as her teacher.

There are so many congruences between Mayan mythology and the Christian faith that these two spiritually-inspired civilizations were destined to meet one day, Melissa told her. The Mayan recognizes in the Christian cross the secret of death and rebirth, the Mayan world tree, uniting heaven and earth, and providing passage between them. The common image of Jesus' exposed heart simultaneously dripping with blood while blossoming in a bouquet of flowers mirrors the Mayan perception of the sacrifice mutually required and offered between God and humanity.

As she masturbated, Marie dreamed that she had decapitated herself, and was now gazing in the mirror at herself, marveling at how she could see when she had no head, in tune with Mayan iconography of headless heroes portraying the necessary sacrifice of the personality so that the larger self may enter into consciousness. The Creator needs reflection in the consciousness of the creature; to provide that reflection, the creature must relinquish pride of self-ownership and become a more transparent mirror of a greater reality. The mirror is thus an important symbol, reflecting the universal truth: "as above, so below."

Among the many ways in which the Mayan finds the divine realm mirrored in the earthly sphere is in the ongoing fact of creation. Mayans regularly celebrate creation by ritual enactments; they believe, in fact, that their continued existence is totally dependent upon their remembering the Creator's presence. By properly reenacting the creation process, Mayans provide God a conscious place in the world, a place that God needs and uses. By making themselves useful to God, Mayans create for themselves a place in the cosmos that gives their lives meaning.

Masturbation was Marie's celebration of creation. She wished she had a fresh ear of corn to masturbate with now, would remember to bring one next time. Two, maybe a whole sackful. After meeting Thelma, it was easy to transfer what she had learned to Zooga; the only nagging problem was acknowledging God's femalehood, and calling Her Goddess instead. It was easier when she meditated on corn.

Goddess created the Mayan race from corn. Their ritual acts of communion with this sacred food, much like the Christian rite of the Last Supper, not only provide their bodies spiritual nourishment, but gives Goddess material, human embodiment and a window of experience through the Mayan awareness.

Corn is the one grain that requires human assistance to seed itself, making it therefore an archaeo-botanical riddle. It is the Mayan's symbol of spiritual responsibility to the ongoing creation process, and it was Marie's goal to lead Thelma, however slowly, to make it the central sacrament of Zooga.

Experts proclaim we are between creation myths and are wandering lost, reacting with anger to our frustrated need for meaning, and foretelling civilization-wide disaster; yes, that was the source of her anger, not just patriarchy. We de-evolve into a creature of habit when we lose awareness of the Creator; yes, Marie had long been a creature of habit, and wanted out of it. When we forget our companionship with the Creator, our very existence is threatened; yes, Marie had been on the verge of death, the cancer being a symptom rather than the cause. Even though the cancer was now in remission, a radical change to her lifestyle, mental and physical, was necessary or death was inevitable, from new cancers, if not something else.

It was not just what you ate, Melissa explained, but how you ate it. Having a moment of silence before a meal, eating more slowly and mindfully — these are simple acts that can serve as reminders of our participation in the ongoing creation; such ritualized eating adds priceless seasoning to the meal and extra nourishment for the soul. She and Melissa had taken to enjoying many private meals together, in one or the other's apartment, between study sessions, eating ritually while gazing in each other's eyes... that was where it started.

Melissa was skillful in psychoanalysis, and Marie opened up readily to her, exposing her many frustrations.

Remembering, upon encountering a frustration, that Goddess is molding the moment to inspire a leap of creativity, can help us make an opportunity out of the circumstance, stressed Melissa. In seeking a material expression through human actions and an individualized experience through human awareness, the Creator sometimes pinches the clay. We all have hearts through which the Creator shares love, and hands through which the Creator seeks to shape the world into a better home for that love.

Melissa thus introduced Marie to mutual masturbation, if that is the right term; they each masturbated alone, pinching their clay, while together, watching themselves and each other in a mirror. It was the closest to lesbian love she had ever gotten, and a less sensitive, faster-moving lesbian might have caused her to run, but not Melissa; she was so balanced, so patient for the needed changes in her to be made first.

Marie finally dreamed that a woman was teaching her how to dance among the sprouting corn plants, to step lightly without disturbing them. Praise creation! That woman was Melissa.

They took to nature walks and mountain hiking. Melissa liked to wear khaki shorts, hiking boots, a lemon-yellow tank top shirt, and wire-frame sunglasses. She never wore makeup or shaved her armpits or legs, or wore any chemicals, even deodorant; at this time in her life, Marie needed such a spiritual guide. On her left wrist she wore a copper bracelet, on her right a Shoshone bead bracelet.

At first just friends, like Xena the Warrior Princess and Gabrielle on TV, hiking together in the Cascades, they first made love in a sleeping bag, Melissa making the first move, making out, mutually masturbating for real, and going down. Soon they were romping around naked and making love in the sun, in corn fields, on sunny rocks, not caring who watched. She couldn't have an orgasm with a woman yet, though she was trying, the little turtle inside the shell trying to come out of the cleft carapace, the main problem being that the other woman had to take the man's lead, and then she remembered how dysfunctional she had become with men, what they call frigid; by herself she had no problem glowing in the dark. At least she realized that it was the thought of a man that scared her, not a woman.

Melissa ate her like she had never been eaten before, for hours at a time; men would eat her only for seconds, as if they were just testing her thruway before driving their hotrods in. She ate her in return, timidly, feeling dumb, but trusting, and trying to enjoy, surprised when it caused Melissa to orgasm, even though she couldn't. She imagined the silky hair around the vagina to be like corn silk. As above, so below: two women going down simultaneously, like a mirror.

But it was not to last. She was old enough to be her mother. Melissa went on to Montana and Colorado, Marie to Seattle, where she was drawn to the new Zooga religion, and wanted to be part of its history. She couldn't get over the way Thelma was totally asexual, like a stone statue, even though she and many others were dying to do it with her. Such is the price of being a Goddess she guessed. Thinking of Thelma opening up to her caused her to orgasm just then, her spine arching, her juices flowing.

"Low voodoo chair alpha base zed henry two one."

Outside, in the darkness, a six-foot-tall, two-legged, heavily-armed rubber duck glared at her through the solarium windows. This Dork Dick fella sure has a stable of fillies, he thought. How does such an ugly dork do it? He must be making far more money under the table than he declares on his tax returns.

"Scabbard parker helm noon seven oh scotch."

The commando raid went off without a hitch. The CIA had worked with Naval Intelligence and the SEALs to not only steal all the contents of every disk in the Lab, not only to bug it with the most sophisticated devices in the American spook service, but to place a self-destruct device under it that could be triggered on orders of the President himself.

"Spectra rain valley tater two two next ray."

Dork Dick was a good boy now, under control. He had been just too dangerous before now, a loose cannon, and now he could be kept useful but expendable, like the high-ups wanted. A tiny bug put in one of his car's seedy touring tires allowed his global position to be tracked within fifty feet at all times.

"Unicorn clay three dot five sweet bear delta soviet."

Later, their computer experts were stymied by his 512-kilobit crypto keys, and millions of five-hundred dollar hammers had to be ordered by the Defense Department to cover-up the moneys expended in the task of trying to decrypt his coded disk files — all without success.

"Thunder thursday health sieg four book blood donut wing."

If they had known about his lifelong fantasy love Amy, they could have guessed any and all of his passwords, which were based on the three letters of her name. The thing is, the government's file on him totally failed to mention any Amy, probably since he had never had anything to do with her other than attending a few classes with her and

trying to get enough nerve to ask her on a date, but never actually doing it. Even with FBI agents tracking down old professors and classmates, nobody mentioned any Amy as one of his known associates.

"Bronze david one tape pick chevy pick."

Another raid was planned to try and find his key disk, without results. Another raid of his mother's house, while she was in the Temple, also failed, as did a raid of the Temple itself. More raids of the Lab were planned now, but to keep from exposing themselves they had to find a way to keep Dork Dick away from the Lab longer and longer without growing suspicious.

"Ewe oar cheap ten heart."

Whatever was happening now in Country Music, this new stuff they were going to foist on the Country market definitely wouldn't be Country. But anything for their country, in the interest of national security.

Chapter 23

Like in that Sinatra song, it was a very good year, the year 1999. From April on at least.

April 1999 will be better known as the month to get pregnant if you wanted a Millennium Baby perhaps. Or as the month Clinton bombed Kosovo and Madeleine Albright was queen. Or as the month that the Trenchcoat Mafia shot up Littleton, Colorado's Columbine High School to celebrate Adolf Hitler's birthday. Or as the month the formerly great Chicago Bulls, minus a retired Michael Jordan, scored only 49 points — the lowest since the introduction of the shot clock in 1954. (It was a game against the top-ten-ranked Miami Heat, who scored 82, on April 10. Cornell David led the castrated Bulls with only 13 points.)

Or as the month that China's Premier and Number Three Man Zhu Rongji visited America trying to get China into the World Trade Organization after 13 years of failed attempts by his predecessors, and quoted the Gettysburg Address in English (on his visit to Denver, protestors shouted that he came to America smiling and offering to shake your hand with bloody hands).

The correct way to pronounce Zhu's name is "jew wrongy" — a clear case of anti-Semitism, Dork Dick joked. Zhu had taken a light slap at Albright, saying that she was still in high school when he had long been struggling for China's democracy, freedom and human rights. The constant rumors that China had made contributions to Clinton's campaign made more sense now; that sales visit was Clinton's payback.

Albright is alright with me, thought Dork Dick. Just so they don't draft him into Albright's wars. President Clinton had been a draft dodger, so what gave him the right? He had been a few years too young to be drafted into the Vietnam war, with or without a college deferment, and damned if he was ever going to do a day of military service now. He'd be a 4-F anyway. If not, he'd deserve a James Bond exemption for his dick work, and get a job in military intelligence far behind battle lines.

Or as the month that Bill Gate's personal fortune topped one hundred billion.

But it would always, in his book, be Dork Dick's Fifteen Minutes of Fame Month and Nobody Else But Me Mattered Time.

A hundred billion was greater than China's GDP, he thought for awhile, until he looked it up on the Net: \$4.25 trillion. Give Big Bill ten years and he'll top that, he chuckled, hoping it wouldn't come true.

Better yet, send a beautiful young Chinese seductress to Big Bill, make him fall in love, then move back with her to China, to a cushy job as China's number three man in Zhu's place. That would get that whole side of the world over the top, he chuckled. Maybe they should kidnap him, and not even hold him for ransom, just keep him as a permanent zoo exhibit, boosting their economy. Big Bill's Seattle headquarters is located conveniently for a kidnap attempt by commandos, double agents in Seattle's Chinatown, and a Chinese sub; if it didn't happen in a few years, he would write the novel, or a non-fiction expose, Dork Dick decided.

Dork Dick was invited to speak at a law enforcement convention in Seattle, and people rose to their feet after his resounding speech:

The greatest crime wave of the early 21st century will not be violent crime, not sexual crime, but dork crime — white-collar crime using computers as the weapon. Crime fighters of the past are totally ineffective at stopping this new threat. But one brave soul leads the way: yours truly.

I call myself Dork Dick. (after the laughter dies down) A dork, a geek yes — but the dork's dork, the geek's geek. I am living proof that not all computer dorks are closet criminals. Some are closet dicks. (more laughter) Well, we're coming out of the closet, and putting you criminals in jail! (applause mixed with laughter)

I have to take my hat off to computer criminals, who are nothing if not highly intelligent, geniuses in some cases. But they use their intelligence the wrong way, for evil, for theft, for disruption of society. They don't bend or even break the rules; they recognize no rules. They are just 'having fun,' 'satisfying their curiosity,' 'probing weaknesses for intellectual exercise.' Just because it's not based on physical force or contact, they think theft is no longer theft, rape no longer rape. They are the ultimate anarchists. Fraud is still fraud. (applause)

Cyberspace was born as a lawless frontier, yes. Little different than the Wild West of America. But just as the West was tamed, so will cyberspace be. Look at my hands, look at my eyes, look at my twitching mouth, as dorky as Bill Gates: you're looking at their worst nightmare, their Wyatt Earp, their Bat Masterson, their Marshal Dillon, their Man With No Name. A man who meets them in their own element, bringing the long arm of the law.

(whispering to himself) What? No applause? Yuk yuk.

On the way out through the huge conference slash ballroom of the hotel, signing autographs, shaking hands, exchanging business cards, he had his epiphany.

He saw Big Bill.

He was at the far back corner of the room, surrounded by bodyguards. He was sheepishly sneaking out. That profile — funny and ugly and classically dorky, yet stunningly haloed — made his bodily functions twitter; made him stop and stare, in rapture. The kind of rapture when you see an angel.

Dropping his current handshake, ignoring his own fans, he made straight for that corner exit, hoping to meet Big Bill, talk to him, anything. Trotting, in a stiff-legged dorky fashion, he made it as far as the grand down escalator that led to the main lobby, and thought he saw the back leg of one of the bodyguards. The escalator was so very, very slow, it took too long to realize he should have just trotted down it too, but by the time he had, he knew that Big Bill was already in his limousine, beyond the maze of interconnecting glass doors and elevators.

He better give it away to some really good charities.

Imagine if he gave it to bad charities. He could change the world balance of power and trade, and plunge it into a nightmare funhouse of a new Dark Ages.

If he did give it to really good charities, he would go down as the greatest philanthropist of the 21st century, the millennium, ever. Carnegie and every other philanthropist in history put together, plus Santa Claus and most if not all Catholic saints thrown in. Saint Bill, the dork saint.

When the hoopla died down, he was left with the biggest bank balance in his life, since the sale of his mother's house; this time, the money was in his name, not hers.

He now had the money to make reservations at a fancy hotel in downtown Seattle for the Millennial New Year's festivities. Not that they were not all booked up long ago. But that wouldn't stop him from ordering a \$250 bottle of champagne for New Year's; the fact every store was sold out did.

He could still go downtown, and walk among the crowds at night, waiting for the New Year countdown, and celebrating alone in the streets. Maybe somebody would take crowd photos, and maybe several decades later he would be a legend, and somebody going back through those photos would spot his face in the huge crowd, and sell the rights

to his every biographer forever after, like young Hitler celebrating World War I's end in Berlin. Maybe he could now wine and dine a real woman.

All in all, a very good year.

Just one negative. That Hamilton told people that he, the famous Dork Dick, was gay. Told them they had had a passionate love affair, making up anything he wanted. He kept the key up his ass, he said, figuring that if the feds busted in, he'd have time to run to the john, pull it out, set it on fire, and flush it, or at least mess it up by stomping on it. Dork Dick, he claimed, had frenched it out of his ass after draining him dry, and other graphic details.

They made fun of his name now behind his back. It was too terrible. James Bond was no faggot, and neither was he; he hated nothing so much as a bum rap.

The gay rumor cinched the book deal; the book would clear things up, vindicate him. He accepted a \$200,000 advance from the publisher, through his agent. The ghost writer came with a camcorder and let him yak himself hoarse, telling his life's story, filled with self-aggrandizement. Dork Dick was good; he didn't think he contradicted himself more than two or three times. The fact that he insisted on leaving the door open, and sat with his legs tightly crossed, was not lost on him. He couldn't help but glancing up the other man's lap, and a visible cringe ricocheted back in the body language.

The ghost writer left and sent him a draft of the book in only three weeks. Fast. Must get paid by the job instead of the hour. The book was rushed into production, and Dork Dick promised to do everything his agent told him to promote it; he was surprised at how much fell on his own shoulders.

The release date was set for September, so start planning your book tour immediately, the agent said. Pay for the travel expenses out of your advance. Contact bookstores about signings. Don't rule out discount stores such as WalMart, military base/post exchanges, and libraries. Prepare a list of all media, writers' groups, reader groups, and associations for each town you visit. Make a list of any bookstores or discount stores you might pass on the road between events and drop in to sign their stock and meet a few of the sales staff: small-town people are still awed by writers, and brag to all their friends about meeting a 'real, live, published author.'

The publisher would get the book into Amazon.com and BarnesAndNoble.com, Borders.com, as well as the Books In Print catalogs, and handle distribution to stores, but you have to pay for your own ads in magazines, and you're probably already near the ad deadline, the agent said. Get it polished up and mailed off along with your author profile, press kit, and interview questions, and pre-written article about yourself. If you wait much longer, the magazine's typical lead time of four months will leave your story behind as old news.

Start sending announcements, press releases, and news stories to local and regional papers, alumni associations, business associations, etc. Tell a little about the book, and when it's coming; next time you'll send out announcements that the book is available. Consumers need to see your name 7, 10, even 15 times to remember it, notwithstanding your fifteen minutes of news media fame, the agent stressed, even when it is Dork Dick.

Plan to make radio and TV appearances when the book is released, said the agent. Start putting together your audio and video clips from past interviews to pitch to the media and show them what a good guest you can be. Start with small, local stations to practice. Join a national database of people having something to say on talk shows, hoping to be contacted by producers looking to fill up empty slots.

The four-month mark is crucial, the agent stressed. As it nears, send out a mailing to booksellers. Use a targeted, scrubbed mailing list to save wasted postage on finely crafted posters returned to sender. It's best if you can get into a cooperative mailing with a limited target market: the non-fiction crime and punishment market, the law enforcement market, the computer market (he also suggested the gay market, but it was ignored). Bookstores like to look at materials around the four-month mark to see what they might like to order, which gives you time to answer booksellers' letters and send them any props they might request (bookmarks, etc.).

The agent gave him a formula for remembering when to target booksellers so they'll order his books in time for them to hit the shelf when they're officially released: if the book comes out in September, aim for booksellers in April thru July, etc.

At the five-month mark, target distributors with flyers, mailings, or, if possible, personal visits. As a rule of thumb, to target distributors, count back four months from your release date and add a week, the agent said, but still check with your publisher to find out when their sales reps will be pushing your book to distributors, as some will vary.

The time went so fast Dork Dick didn't do anything but work on marketing his book until the day it was released. The last two weeks before release were sleepless, hectic, crazy. He wondered when the paperless revolution would finally come, and save all those trees; his publisher frowned on electronic or e-books.

He received his book cover and even held an advance copy in his hot little hands. His dream was coming true right before his eyes: he saw himself as a rich, retired millionaire already.

A week before the book's shelf date he sent his last mailing to readers, fans, and favorite booksellers. His official Dork Dick public email address was jammed with emails that he didn't have time to answer, but, following his agent's instructions, he now made up and snail-mailed an author newsletter, and some postcards with the book cover pictured, for easy identification in the stores. He timed the final mailing just in time for readers to take it to town for their next book shopping spree and remind booksellers to push his book.

He touched base again with bookstores where he would be conducting signings and other events. Some of his contacts had already moved or been fired, so he had to develop new ones. He had already caught the knack of sounding excited all the time, from reading Napoleon Hill's book *Think and Grow Rich*, and Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. He was a super salesman, like his idol Big Bill.

He send out last minute press releases to local papers and papers in cities where he planned to be touring, along with emails to everyone on his personal fan/reader mailing list, announcing online sites where they could buy the book quickly and easily via credit card, complete with HTML code to click, right in the email body.

He got his madre to tell her friends about the book, and she got some of them to actually help spread the word. That was the only time he ever had anything to do with them, but it didn't matter in the feeding frenzy of a new author and his first book.

He sent a special 'For Your Eyes Only' follow-up email to his fan/reader mailing list, asking them to visit and check for it in stores, and report if they do so he'll know what kind of distribution the book is getting. The agent told him that this helps the proud book spotters decide to buy their own copies on the spot if nothing else.

On the first day of the book's release Dork Dick drove from one end of the county to the other, stopping at every bookstore, grocery store, pharmacy, and discount store he could find, armed with bright "local author" stickers and a pen. First checking to see if the book was actually there, he introduced himself to the manager and asked if he might sign and sticker the books. Most let him, because he did look, after all, somewhat like Big Bill; and he had shaved right before coming in, in his car, with his cordless shaver.

Those that didn't let him sticker his books, the agent told him, could be gotten around by bringing some neon sticky notes printed with slogans such as "Hot!", "Terrific!", "Great Buy!", and surreptitiously sticking one on the front book in the stack: shoppers coming in later will assume that the book is recommended, and usually pick up one of the unstickered ones. Dork Dick only had to do this in two stores, however.

Within days of release, Dork Dick was receiving news that his book was selling. It never hit the New York Times, or any other bestseller list, but it did sell enough to equal the advance, plus a \$90,000 royalty check, and a \$75,000 check, and a \$10,000 check, before sales petered out in less than a month. That was before deducting the agent's cut and his own expenses, not to mention taxes.

Within a month, the booksellers were dumping unsold copies into their dumpsters, after stripping the covers to return to the publisher for credit. Dork Dick found himself cruising the local stores' dumpsters, picking up all he could, for his private stash. Face it, the book was trash, but good paper should not go to waste. He got one of his neon stickers back that way, moved to the spine.

By New Year's Day, 2000, Dork Dick decided to stay home after all, and enjoy two \$6 bottles of Cold Duck, along with some cheap fake caviar, a baguette filled with butter and brie — like he'd seen in the old 'Twin Peaks' TV series — and a case of Milwaukee's Best Light. Madre cooked some prime rib, baked potatoes, and mince pie. He helped. He heated up a couple of Mexican-style TV dinners and scooped them into a bowl for a side dish.

He ate more than he should have, and felt bloated for days; he was, after all, a skinny little dork, used to pizza and pop and beer. Maybe the middle-age spread would finally catch up to him now; it would all be downhill from here, would get fat, develop a fat face and double chin, or at least fill out like Frank Sinatra did. Maybe it would make him look more manly and distinguished; he wasn't getting any the way he looked now, that's for sure.

On second thought, people like him who are always full of nervous energy, twitches, tapping feet, waving knees — they burn off too many calories to get fat. Getting sudden diarrhea after rich meals helped too: the real reason for including the super-spicy Mexican TV dinners? His skinny physique, with boyish muscle-free chest and chicken legs, was so embarrassing he never went to the ocean, even for boating, or to a swimming pool or beach. He didn't want to go to a health club, because he looked so much like Bill Gates that he might start a riot. By his own admission, he was only a computer dick because he couldn't get a job doing anything else. With a little success and fame under his belt, he couldn't switch now anyway.

By January, he was back to work as a successful but not rich or close-to-retired dick, worried about doing his taxes all month. But it had been a very good year, that last year of the millennium. He had put a faggot in jail and felt good about it.

Haunting thoughts that he had fallen in love a second time, and had lost Carl like he lost Amy, never crossed his mind but once or twice — that year anyway. He was a compulsive romantic lonely heart, despite his tough exterior; maybe all dork dicks are.

He didn't have time to relect on losing his Duck Dick, and his little laugh: too professional for that kind of dorky stuff now.

Next time he would pick his own case, not let it pick him.

Chapter 24

Out of the blue one day, Dork Dick received a thick envelope inviting him to join a Latin music CD club. He was about to toss it, when some little voice told him not to. A day later, during an idle moment, he carefully inspected it.

Hundreds of little stickers containing miniature album covers. Artists he had never heard of before, like Gisselle, Milly Quezada, Juan Luis Guerra, Marc Anthony, Rey Ruiz, Tony Vega, Gilberto Santa Rosa, Charlie Zaa, Leonardo Favio (a cross between Leonardo Di Caprio and Fabio?), Elvis Crespo (the Latin Elvis?), Carlos Vives (Carl Lives?), Chayanne (the Latin Cheyenne?), Nek, King Clave (clave means key), Selena (he had heard of her, her murder, the movie), Cher (she was Latino too? or just a Latino star?), and Pimpinela — he liked that name the best.

Hundreds of names, album covers, faces: a veritable third world of music, whose economy was based on pesos and other south-of-the-border moneys. The faces ranged from beautiful women, to chubby men in mariachi outfits, to handsome Latino males of all ages.

He was offered twelve free CDs for joining the club, and after that he only had to purchase six more in the next two years — a reasonable offer.

He joined. The membership form asked him what his main music interest was: Pop Latino (Ricky Martin), Mexicana (Los Temerarios), Tropical (Victor Manuelle), Country (Shenaia Twain), Soft Rock (Mariah Carey), or Hip-Hop (Will Smith). As if a little birdie tweeted in his ringing ears, he checked-off the Hip-Hop box.

Funny, but he hadn't noticed any Hip-Hop albums among the stickers. Going back over them carefully, he saw 'He Got Game' by Public Enemy, which he guessed was Hip-Hop; he ordered it.

This all made him remember the two Hispanics in loose hip-hop clothing who had trespassed and shot up his ducks. He had never seen them again. They were so out of place, so incongruent, and their appearance had caused such a change in his life somehow.

When the CDs arrived, he listened to them non-stop while working at his computer, often finding himself dropping off into misty dreams of the Dos Duckshooting Amigos — dos being Mexican for two.

He had a heightened interest in Latinos, and soon found a news story that many Latin countries were considering abandoning their national currencies for the American dollar, to stabilize their economies; this despite decades of fierce determination to be independent, and not bow down to the almighty Yankees. Maybe that helped the CD Club, he thought. The American dollar will be the pan-American Eurodollar one day, then the Asians will create an Asiadollar, and finally a universal world currency will emerge, so that CD Clubs can operate with ease everywhere.

It was probably Big Bill behind it all, so that his trillions will one day be negotiable anywhere he goes, moves, flees, whatever. One day nobody will be able to buy or sell, anywhere, without his mark on their foreheads; the Bible predicted it. He was the Gate of Hell. What was that in the Gospels about the gates of Hell not being able to prevail against the Church? Matthew 16:18.

He had a sudden idea, and inserted one of the music CDs into a computer CD reader. Scanning the disk, he realized it was loaded with pirated Microsoft software, and porno images.

The porno images were of two masked Latino men having sex with an old woman, her old breasts like wrinkled, half-empty water balloons, her eyes dazed, but not resisting. He watched dispassionately at first, until it was too plain to deny. It was his madre.

A faint digitized yuk-yuking sound, mocking, duck-like, quacked out of the computer's soundblasters.

What happened to your oversexed attempts at learning French cooking? Yuk yuk.

You're back?

That's right, yuk yuk. I'm back.

Dork Dick looked into his computer monitor, like a glass darkly. He couldn't see Duck Dick. Nobody could see him, except with peripheral vision and lots of attempts. Yes, he thought he could just make some of his profile out.

You remember that dream you had about eating French huitres in your French castle while watching bike races?

Yes. How did you know?

I know. You left a part of it out.

What?

The duck pond. I was sitting on the water, diving for worms. You were sitting on a bench in front of it, eating Brach's conversational hearts, the small ones, in various colors, with little sayings printed on them.

Yes, I like them. I always wait until just after Valentine's Day and buy all they have left over for a bargain price.

You always were cheap, yuk yuk. You were taking the hearts out of the bag one by one, reading each one, and deciding whether to eat it or chuck it at me.

Do ducks eat conversational hearts?

They're pure sugar. Heck yes, yuk yuk.

So what's your point?

When you got one that said "Kiss me," you'd eat it. When you got one that said "No way," you'd chuck it. "You're cute," you'd eat it. "O-U kid," you'd chuck it. "Yeah sure," you'd eat it. "Say cheese," you get it?

No, I don't get it

How did you know that I could read? Yuk yuk.

I just knew, that's all.

What else did you know then?

Chuckycheese? That was yours?

Right.

You framed Hamilton?

I admit nothing without my lawyer present, yuk yuk.

They were both hacking the military computer?

No, stupid. They were both gay, and into selling roofies for a computer date rape service, yuk yuk. Fake computer diplomas too. Both got into grad school right out of high school using them, yuk yuk.

But they weren't charged with any of that.

So? I hacked the military computer and framed first Cowper, then Hamilton. I thought it would hurt more to keep them apart, yuk yuk.

But my madre? Were you behind this too?

How do know it's not faked? It could be digitally retouched, yuk yuk.

Is it fake?

I admit nothing, yuk yuk.

I'm nothing without you then, am I?

No, but I like having your shoulder to perch on while I solve tough cases and publish crime novels, without giving you away and turning you in for the slew of crimes you've gotten away with doing your dick work, yuk yuk.

Amy... was that...

No way. You messed that one up yourself. Now straighten up and fly right, yuk yuk.

Shut up, yuk yuk.

Carl thinks you're cute, by the way, yuk yuk. He wants to date you, yuk yuk.

Shut up, yuk yuk.

Where does the word mariachi come from? From the Mexican word for marriage, yuk yuk.

I said shut up.

Alright.

THE END

Don't touch that dial. Just a minute, yuk yuk. Just how many species of ducks are there?

What?

You heard me. How many species of ducks are there?

You got me there, friend.

I'm truly insulted. You probably don't even know what species of duck I am, do you?

A mallard.

What's the scientific name for that?

Tell me.

Anas platyrhynchos platyrhynchos, yuk yuk. No, I'm not a mallard. I am a wild or domestic waterfowl of the family Anatidae, which also includes the swan and GOOSE, you stupid Bozo. We ducks are hunted and bred for our meat, eggs, and feathers by humans like you. Strictly speaking, duck refers to the female; the male is a drake, yuk yuk.

You mean that all along, you were a female?

If I were it'd serve you right, yuk yuk. The only female you've ever had too, other than Lady Five Fingers, yuk yuk. But no, I'm a drake, sorry chum. I bet you don't even know how long I am, yuk yuk.

No, and I bet you won't tell me.

Ducks range from 16 to 22 in. (36 to 56 cm) in length and have waterproof feathers, with a thick layer of down underneath, and webbed feet. They are usually divided into three groups: surface-feeding, such as the mallard, wood duck, and teal, which frequent ponds and quiet waters; diving, such as the canvasback and eider, found on bays, rivers, and lakes; and fish-eating, or mergansers, which also prefer open water, yuk yuk.

You're a surface-feeding duck, right?

That much is true, yuk yuk. Tell me why I can't be an American Black, yuk yuk.

Because you're a white racist like me, yuk yuk.

Good try, but no, that's not it. American Blacks are East Coast ducks, mainly Hudson Bay, down to North Carolina. Winter in Wisconsin down to Texas and Florida. Tell me why one look at me and I can't be a mallard, yuk yuk.

I give up.

A mallard male has metallic green head and neck separated from the purplish-brown breast by a white ring. Females are mottled, buffy-brown in color with a pale eyebrow and a dark stripe through the eye. Mallards summer throughout the Northern Hemisphere, true, and winter all the

way down to the Tropic of Cancer, and in Northern Africa as far south as the Northern Sudan. But one look at me and you know I'm not a mallard, yuk yuk.

Are you a mandarin duck?

*Do I look Chinese? Yuk yuk. Mandarins are *Aix galericulata*. The males have triangular orange feathers over their backs. Females are mottled light brown with eye over a white line. They nest in Manchuria, Northeastern China, and Japan; the Japanese ducks are sedentary, while the Chinese ducks winter south of the Yangtze, yuk yuk. I bet you don't even know the difference between dabbling ducks, perching ducks, and pochard ducks, yuk yuk.*

Give me an example.

Dabbling ducks include the American Black, the Mallard, and the Laysan Teal, found only in Laysan Island. Perching ducks include the Mandarin, the Wood Duck, and the Maned Goose, yuk yuk.

Maned Goose?

*Scientific name *Chenonetta jubata*. They nest in Australia and Tasmania. The Aussies always screw things up, names and things, yuk.*

I bet you're a wood duck, because you like to perch — on my shoulder, yuk yuk.

*Good guess, but no score, yuk yuk. The Wood Duck, scientific name *Aix sponsa*. Males have a green head crest and gray sides. Females are mottled, medium brown; white line runs toward eye, with a white circle around it. They nest in the eastern United States, and winter in the southern half of their range. Sorry, yuk yuk.*

What about pochard ducks?

*Pochard ducks are diving sea ducks, from the French word *pocher*, meaning to pocket. They have brownish-red heads, and include the Canvas Back, the Red-Crested, the Ring-Billed, and the Rosy-Billed, yuk yuk.*

So you're one of these?

Could be. I admit nothing without my lawyer present, yuk yuk.

Tell me about them.

*The Canvas Back, scientific name *Aythya valisineria*. A diving duck. Males have reddish brown head and light gray sides. Female is light brown with a mottled appearance. Nesting area is central Alaska south to central Oregon and northern Utah, New Mexico, and southern Nebraska. Wintering area is the Chesapeake Bay and San Francisco Bay, yuk yuk.*

You must be a Canvas Back then.

*Maybe, maybe not, yuk yuk. I'm not through. The Red-Crested Duck, scientific name *Netta rufina*. Males have red head, light gray sides; neck and breast are black, bill is bright red. Females have dark brown head and nape with whitish cheeks and foreneck. Nesting Area: small numbers in Denmark, Germany, Rumania, Netherlands, and Czechoslovakia; more in France, Spain, and former USSR. Wintering area is south to the Mediterranean, Black, and Caspian Seas. Nest sites are on islands or in dense vegetation near water's edge and with a tunnel approach; nests are*

constructed of grass and leaves. You know I'm not Russian, and you never saw any tunnels, so forget this one, yuk yuk.

The Ring-Billed Duck, scientific Name: Aythya collaris. Another diving duck. Males have black head, light gray sides, white stripes on beak. Female is chocolate brown, with white cheeks and base of bill. Nesting area is entire northern boundary of the United States to Nova Scotia, Labrador, British Columbia and Great Slave Lake. Wintering area is the entire southern United States.

I thought they had reddish brown heads, yuk yuk. Or was that brownish red heads? Yuk yuk. Or was that radish?

Don't confuse me with the quacks, yuk yuk. It's all bullshit anyway, musings of sick self-appointed ornithologists who would classify shit as a subtype of Shinola, yuk yuk. They think all species have to fit on a two-dimensional family chart, not understanding that evolution is at least twelve dimensional, yuk yuk.

Twelve? That's why the CD club offers twelve free CDs with a new membership?

I admit nothing without my lawyer present, yuk yuk.

How could evolution need so many dimensions? I thought the entire universe could be derived from only ten dimensions, using superstring theory, yuk yuk.

You mean that crude 1982 theory of Michael Green and John Schwarz that some particular quantum field theory of supersymmetric strings in ten dimensions gives finite answers at all orders in perturbation theory? You might be able to derive the laws of physics and chemistry using it one day, but with biology you have two extra dimensions, namely, chance and history, yuk yuk.

You're nuts, yuk yuk.

At least superstring theory reduces the older twenty-six dimension string theory to ten dimensions through near-miraculous anomaly cancellations using supersymmetries, gauge symmetries, covariance, dualities, conformal symmetries, etc. The symmetries, however, have never been unified, despite attempts to describe the superstring theory by a topological quantum field theory above the Hagedorn temperature (the temperature at which the string theory undergoes a phase transition), and finding a huge hidden symmetry, yuk yuk.

I suppose you can solve that mystery, yuk yuk.

They still think that spacetime curls up and changes dimension, introducing a fundamental minimum length scale constraining all physical measurement, yuk yuk. Until they dissolve spacetime altogether, the way the great duck on Einstein's shoulder dissolved the ether, they will just be treading water, yuk yuk.

Enough already.

Let's continue, yuk yuk. Where was I? Oh yes.

The Rosy-Billed Duck, scientific Name: Netta peposaca. YADD (yet another diving duck). Male has black head, gray sides, and bright red beak. Female is medium brown with bluish gray beak. Nesting area is Southern Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Argentina, yuk yuk.

You are a Ring-Billed Duck then, right?

Why couldn't I be a Rosy-Billed? I speak Spanish, don't I? Maybe my name is Rosarita, yuk yuk.

But you have to be a Ring-Billed, because you are a ringer for Big Bill, whom I am obsessed with!

You got it, yuk yuk.

I'm really screwed, ain't I?

Aren't I? Yuk yuk.

Next time can I pick my own case?

Look for the silver lining. Maybe, yuk yuk.

"The hell you will," chuckled Big Bill, from his mansion on Lake Washington, watching and listening-in on everything through the government-installed surveillance devices.

The Sunrise Section of Richard Strauss' 'Also Sprach Zarathustra,' made famous by Stanley Kubrick in the movie *2001: A Space Odyssey*, was playing in Big Bill's ears.

Chapter 25

Accolades and royal titles aside, he preferred to be known only as Dork Dick. And the dick work went on...

Dork Dick was doing some programming today. As a dick, he considered programming as somehow inferior to his new station in life, but since he didn't have enough budget to hire anybody (even if he trusted him), he did it himself. It was, after all, his own former profession, before Microsoft stole his market from under his feet.

The C Language. How did Big Bill ever foist that on the world? Then there was C++. The government, meanwhile, came out with their Ada language, which the commercial software sector promptly ignored.

C is a language for doing some information processing so efficiently that even its programmer can't remember how it worked a year later, yuk yuk. C is practically a sea of libraries. Microsoft itself is just a sea of libraries of C routines, with its own Navy to navigate them. It's enough to make you seasick. The general public will never understand C, and the general programming community will never fully absorb C++.

Why didn't they stick with good old Basic? Big Bill started out with Basic. IBM tried to save Basic with their Rexx language. The Web tried to save it with Perl. Then along came Java, a finally decent evolution of C and C++, just perfect for Net programming. So Big Bill tries to destroy it, because it wasn't invented at Microsoft. But then, what is? This time he couldn't buy them out, and his clone was so poor he couldn't put it over on the market like he usually does.

The real reason C was pushed by Big Bill was easy to see now. It made it impossible for single programmers, or even small groups of programmers, to strike out on their own and make products to compete with Microsoft's — without the giant Microsoft libraries, they were nothing. It favored the million-monkeys economic model of a monopoly corporation in software, the blue versus the orange badges at the company plant.

Microsoft was C foisted on an unwitting consumer market — and all behind the screens, because the consumer only licenses object code, produced by the C compiler, and encrypted to the point that it is a frustrating effort to try and decompile or reverse-engineer it. If everybody programmed in Basic, the cost of software would plummet, and Microsoft would lose control as his monopoly split up. Ada is even more scary to Microsoft, because it was designed to make software into standard 'components' that can be mixed and matched into applications by consumers, eliminating the secret library factory approach, and making licensing of exclusive software packages obsolete.

Microsoft sucks. Yes it does. You don't have to be autistic to say it. It outsucks K-Mart. It sucks to the aleph-infinity degree in every topological space known to Dunkin' Donuts.

Suddenly the air seemed too thick to breathe comfortably and the room grew too warm — hot even. Dork Dick rose from his computer chair, intending to turn up the fan on his air inlet vents to get a breath of fresh air, but he sat down again after finding himself too dizzy to remain on his feet. The walls moved in and out like living lungs, and the ceiling was descending, coming down, slowly but relentlessly toward him, like an industrial hydraulic press, nickel-plated to the lee side. Although he knew the room was shrinking only in his imagination, he was nevertheless terrified of being crushed to death, for that was the vision in his mind's eye.

Is something wrong? Yuk yuk.

He was overcome by an irrational urge to tell the duck to get off his shoulder and fly away, get out. His presence now seemed to be a terrible invasion of privacy, an unconscionable intimacy, and a flutter of nausea went through him at the thought that he might breathe his last breath here, and it would be a duck fart. *He's dangerous*, he thought.

Restraining himself from lashing out at him, he said in a whisper, "The walls are closing in on me."

Walls? I don't see any walls closing in, yuk yuk.

To Dork Dick, the room now appeared to be only a third or fourth of its former size.

The air was so hot and dry that it scorched his lungs, parched his lips, made him think of his immune system inviting sickness; of advanced AIDS patients in isolation wards, wheezing, their skin covered with blisters and puss.

"And the ceiling's coming lower."

He broke into a copious sweat. Dissolving in the heat, melting as if made of wax, unable to breathe, Swiss fondue in his sinuses. The heat was killing him.

Is that really what you see? Walls and ceiling closing in? Yuk yuk.

"Ye-yes."

Dork Dick stared at the walls, trying to make them move back, willing the room to return to its former proportions. He was determined not to let fear get the better of him, but it was his first claustrophobia attack, and he was panicking.

Are you hallucinating?

"I ... I ... yes. Because of you. Because of feeling... too close to you. You're making me sick, making me paranoid." He was speaking in fast spurts, in part because he was afraid that he would lose his consciousness if he didn't reserve his main strength, and in part because he hoped that not talking would distract his mind from the advancing contraction of the topology — from reality.

I make you sick? Paranoid? Yuk yuk.

"Yes. I've never told anyone about it before because I've been afraid you'd think me crazy. But I'm not nuts. If I were, I'd accept this paranoia as a perfectly normal state of mind, and not even call it paranoia, right?"

I admit nothing without my lawyer present, yuk yuk.

The hallucinations grew suddenly worse. Although he was sitting again, the ceiling appeared to be no more than a few inches above his head. The walls were only a few inches away on every side, rolling closer on the kind of rollers used in Xerox machines, the kind you saw through the glass windows darkly.

The atmosphere was being compressed inside the remaining space, molecules jamming against each other until the air ceased to be a gas and became a liquid, as dense as water, dense enough to swim in — like a duck. Then it became like syrup, like molasses, trapping him, like an oil spill from an Exxon tanker in Prudhoe Bay. When he breathed, he was convinced against all reason that his air tract was filling with crude oil, human corpse sludge, a morbid shade of green-tinged black. He heard himself whimpering, and he despised his weakness, but couldn't silence himself.

You're not hallucinating, yuk yuk.

"Shut up." The air became so thick that he was choking on it now, bending forward, coughing, gagging, blooming red.

Yuk yuk. Yuk yuk. Yuk yuk.

To Dork Dick's ear, Duck Dick's voice boomed and echoed within the shrinking room space like an amplifier with overload distortion. He was so loud and demanding, as if the fearsome and relentless advance of the viselike walls were his pleasure.

He jerked reflexively as the ceiling stuttered and dropped down so close as to make him slide out of his chair and lay on the floor, looking up. Duck Dick remained in the air, flying, stationary, hovering, flapping — unflappable.

The air had now been compressed to such a degree that he could feel it against his skin, like a heavy metallic all-encasing suit of armor, growing ever tighter, smaller, more confining. Inside that suit he was drenched with sweat, his flesh becoming bruised by the closing steel embrace, and the bones starting to crack and ache in every tortuously compressed joint.

Are you fighting it? Yuk yuk.

"The walls, the walls," he whimpered, as the armor closed around his body more quickly. He gasped, but now his lungs were clogged. He tasted the copper twang of blood and realized that he had bitten his tongue. Now he realized he was not in a suit of armor, but in a coffin, actually feeling the cold, damp embrace of the tomb closing him up into eternity, like in the Poe story, the Vincent Price movie, all the stories and movies.

Don't close your eyes, yuk yuk.

"No!" That would be intolerable. If he opened his eyes, he would see his death. The darkness would seize him and drag him down, down into the bottomless black maw of never. "Oh my God," he squeaked.

Do close your eyes then, yuk yuk.

Duck Dick flew back onto his shoulder, and he tried to pull away, but there was nowhere to go, and the grip of the duck feet tightened.

"Let me alone. Go away," he demanded.

Trust me, yuk yuk.

"I know what you are."

I'm your only hope, yuk yuk.

He found the strength to draw himself into a sitting position from which he could better confront him. For the moment he was able to bear up under the colossal weight of his claustrophobia, because the most important thing now was to get rid of him, not fight the walls.

"Get out!"

No, yuk yuk.

"Now! I mean it. Get out!"

No, yuk yuk.

"I don't want you anymore. I don't need you. Get out!"

No, yuk yuk.

"This is my life, you bastard, you sonofabitch! I hate you! Get out! Get out, damn you!"

It's not your life. It's my life. You're the jeep, I'm the driver in the tire, yuk yuk.

He knew what Duck Dick said was true. He was resigned to being possessed, didn't want to argue with him any more, or try to drive him away when it was impossible to do so. But he could not stop something raging inside himself. He struck out at the duck's face, and the duck defly flew away to make him miss, coming back and pecking at his eyes, seizing his wrist with his webbed feet, now exposing razor claws.

"You creep! You sick sonofabitch!"

They struggled on the computer chair. The duck was atop him now, trying to hurt him, so badly it seemed he *needed* to hurt him, but he could not stop resisting. He struck at the duck's face, but the duck blocked the blow with a strong wing, so he tried to claw at the duck's eyes, but the duck seized his wrist with his strong, toothed beak.

"You creep! I know what you are! I know exactly what you are! Oh yes, you rotten bastard!"

Dork Dick's heart was throbbing with terror that he couldn't understand. His vision blurred with a fierce anger that wasn't real, for he had nothing to be angry about really — no, not really. Yet his thudding fury was so powerful that it was shaking him to pieces.

"You're one of Them!" Dork Dick cried, even though he had no idea what he meant by that.

Who? Yuk yuk.

"Them!"

Them who? Yuk yuk.

"I hate your fucking guts!" Dork Dick said, trying to jam his knee into the duck's crotch and break his hold on him, but only exposing a lewd red feathered penis that he wish he hadn't had to know about.

They rolled off the computer chair, together, the man kicking, twisting in the grasp of the fowl. He tore loose and scrambled to his feet. "Get out or I'll call the police! Get the hell out of my Lab!" He could feel that his face was wrenched into a Greek mask of blind fury, like Carole Bouquet in *For Your Eyes Only* — what eyebrows that Bond Babe had.

It was an inexplicable rage, except somehow he knew that he would be all right if he could force him to leave. When he was gone, when he was alone, the walls would roll back, the air would no longer be thick and unbreathable, the terror, the terror, would, would, would subside, subside, and he would find peace, peace again.

You don't really want me to go, yuk yuk.

The duck got to his own feet, calmly gazing in his face. Ducks don't have facial expressions, but you can't help trying to read them.

He slapped the duck face so hard that his hand stung as if a stun gun had backfired in it.

The duck didn't move.

He slapped him again, harder, leaving the imprint of the duck's face on his hand, in profile, in miniature, like a bar of soap.

With no anger in his face, with an infuriating compassion in his eyes, the duck reached out a wing as if to touch him.

He shrank back.

Take me back, he pleaded.

"Get away!"

I'm going to lead you out of all this, yuk yuk.

"Get out of my life!"

Give me your shoulder, yuk yuk.

He backed into one corner of the Lab, feeling trapped when finding nowhere to go. The duck waddled up and stood right in front of him.

He was shaking violently with angst, his heart knocking to get out of his chest. He couldn't get breath, each inhalation being shaken out of him before he could draw it all the way back in and get O2 from it.

The duck took his shoulder before he realized what he'd done. He no longer had the strength to wrench away from him.

Close your eyes, yuk yuk.

Tears blurred his vision so completely that he couldn't see anything anymore, as he slumped against the wall, his shorts growing wet and sticky, sticking up his butt crack. He didn't know who he was anymore, might have been anyone.

Close your eyes, yuk yuk.

Weeping, Dork Dick slid down the wall, back to the corner, until he was sitting on the floor in his own pew. Sobbing uncomfortably, Dork Dick closed his eyes, and immediately felt that he was indeed in a coffin, one of those bulky bronze models with a lining of lead, and the lid was bolted down just inches above his face, the lace lining tickling his nose hairs. Such a narrow space, shallow and dark, as black as the nights on the far side of the moon, so utterly lightless that the darkness might be the only living thing left, an amorphous entity that flowed all around him and molded to his shape, sucking the last heat of life out of him. At least they had disemboweled him by now and he didn't have to smell his own pew — virginal pew.

Cornered and in an extreme state of helplessness, he could do nothing now but keep his eyes closed and listen to Duck Dick. His voice was as a beacon marking the way to release, to freedom, for an airplane pilot lost in the storm, with a Yeti outside attacking the engines.

Keep your eyes closed. I'll be your eyes, yuk yuk.

He couldn't stop sobbing.

The walls aren't closing in as far as they used to... Barely inching in now. Barely stopping.... and now... now they've stopped totally. The ceiling also... not descending any more... Everything's stopped, yuk yuk. Stable again. Do you believe me? Yuk yuk.

"Ye-yes."

Keep your eyes closed. Squeeze them tightly shut. Visualize what I'm telling you, and see the world through me, yuk yuk.

He nodded.

The air wasn't normal, but it was thinner than it had been since the beginning of the panic attack. Breathable, even sweet now.

Eyes closed... closed... but see what's happening now. The ceiling is starting to withdraw, just like in the garbage chute of the Death Star in Star Wars, yuk yuk.

"The garbage chute of the Death Star in 'Star Wars'. You're C-3PO?"

I'm Duck Dick, yuk yuk. Don't get cute, yuk yuk. The walls too... the ceiling and the walls... pulling back away from you, back from us both, away, slowly away... you understand? The room is getting larger, ever larger... that's better. A lot of space here now, yuk yuk. Do you feel the room getting comfortable again? Yuk yuk.

"Yes," he said, even though hot tears were still streaming down his cheeks — but his sobbing had ceased.

Duck Dick coached him softly and lulling, like a hypnotist, in that fashion, for several minutes, and Dork Dick listened closely to each word and visualized each statement. He was like Jeff Daniels, in that movie where he and that Anna something girl from down under flew across country with a flock of ducks. Eventually the air pressure returned to normal, and he was no longer thinking of suffocating. When his tears had dried and when his breathing had become rhythmic, relaxed, almost normal, the duck spoke in his normal, non-hypnotic voice.

All right buddy, open your eyes, yuk yuk.

He opened them, although reluctantly, his neck muscles frozen, his head unable to turn. The Lab was as it should be, from his angle.

"You made it all go away," he said wonderingly. "You made it right again, my duck friend."

Not just me. We did it together. And from now on, I'm sure we'll make beautiful music together, yuk yuk.

Dork Dick looked up at the ceiling, afraid it would re-descend.

Make beautiful music together. He was never to be alone now. He was an official member of the club. The Duck Club.

Within an hour, he looked at it, daring it to descend. Then he finally rose to his feet, got back in his computer chair, and went back to work on his dick work.

Membership has its privileges, yuk yuk. Now get off your act. I recognized that scene from Dean Koontz' book The Key to Midnight immediately, yuk yuk.

"How did you know it was Koontz? He used the pseudonym Leigh Nichols, yuk yuk."

He republished it under his real name five years ago, after updating it to reflect the collapse of the Soviet empire, yuk yuk. Nickel-plated to the lee side, yuk yuk.

"So you won't believe me when I tell you that I am really the son of a rich, powerful political figure, and had my memory erased by a sadistic neo-Nazi doctor, and my current identity planted over it, guarded by a heavy blanket of hypnotic suggestions that cause me to get claustrophobia if my past is questioned or probed?"

No, but I will believe that you and Big Bill are actually laying in vats and under the control of a virtual reality simulation making you believe it's the year 1999 and you're living in it — as long as you believe that I'm the AI master in charge, yuk yuk. You're like asshole siamese twins: he's the winner, you're the asshole, yuk yuk.

"I'm scared of Big Bill, that's all I know. Terrified actually. Am I really crazy?"

No. You're not alone. There's millions more like us, yuk yuk.

"At least Star Wars: The Phantom Menace hasn't gotten under my skin yet, yuk yuk."

It will, yuk yuk. It will, yuk yuk. The year 2000 has cost you your sanity, budding Jedi freedom fighter, yuk yuk.

"Uh-huh, uh-huh." (to a hop-hop beat) "Let's get in our low-rider and hit the streets and do nothing, yuk yuk."

You're not black, yuk yuk. Or brown, yuk.

"What if money is no object?"

There you go again, yuk yuk.

THE END