

Rock and Roll Corerunner

A Novel

by T.L. Winslow

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Preface

"I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones."

--- Albert E.

Acknowledgements

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Prologue

A dawn can be so beautiful, so above the mundane concerns of miniscule life forms.

A beautiful day dawns on the western surface of planet Earth, daughter of star Sol, day 205 of year 2166 in the western calendar. Not that there are as yet any other planets capable of sustaining human life known. Space weather sensors report volcanic activity is high. Sulfurous clouds of dust encircle the globe. The volcanic surface is not barren of life because great clear plastic rodomes encase Dern florafauna sanctuaries, spaced hundreds of miles apart from pole to pole. But humans live here no more. The surface area can't handle their weight and numbers. Over 50 billion strong worldwide, they inhabit her crust, ten to forty miles deep, in great layered domed megacities of 50 million or more inhabitants each, connected by megatunnels filled with breathable air where giant trams carry millions a minute back and forth at six hundred miles an hour. There are no megatunnels connecting to the inhospitable surface.

Transport from the surface is accomplished by rock and roll machines, miles-long Godzilla-like robots that use quantum mechanics to literally jiggle their atoms through the spaces in the atoms of solid rock. The process causes a personal experience totally new to humanity, a feeling of vibration that is happening and not happening, hence the term rock and roll, which is not supposed to refer to a genre of music, although to many geriatrics east and west it does indeed have that double meaning. It is a unique human experience, not sensual and not spiritual, not painful and not pleasurable, and not what you would wish for in your dreams, for it is more akin to a nightmare, a horror in the night. But it is not that either. It is a state of being real and nonreal at the same time, your atoms literally battling on the brink of fusing with what they are passing through. If the process should break down, you would end up frozen inside solid rock like a fossil, beyond dead, already dead for a hundred million years. Those who know this are either disturbed or thrilled. It is better not to know, but everybody does. Like all advanced hi-tech transportation there are dangers that the passengers accept in exchange for the convenience.

So, behold. Without megatunnels except for an occasional foul air collector on the surface, from space our dear earth looks placid, volcanic yes, but pacific. But in fact it is in the throes of a world war, one half of the species against the other. World War Four, a.k.a. World War Core. Whoever controls the core controls humanity. Until the war the world pop had been 60 billion. The west was the big loser, down now to less than one, the Chineze losing none. Now on this day the west strikes back.

A volcano suddenly erupts over what was once Austin, Texas, the smoke belching high, magma flowing from the cone. It is the insertion moment for a Merican fleet corerunner ship, a monster of human creation that would make Godzilla himself quake. Twenty miles long, capable of transforming its shape, the ship is also a colony of giant robots, built and self-maintained by smaller and smaller robots, the tiniest being nanorobots the size of large molecules. Humans are less than a pimple on its butt. But they are its most precious cargo.

The days when human hands could work on machinery are far in the past. The first small robots that could build larger robots caused an irreversible evolution. Humans controlled only the master DNA code and programmed themselves into the loop of the higher brain functions. Despite the false promises made by computer science for over a hundred years, the human brain was still the most complex and supremely intelligence piece of matter in the known universe, and advances in robots were mainly in the physical rather than the cerebral level.

Big was all. Huge was everything. But big was dumb, autonomic, not even up to the intellectual level of a giant lizard. Japanese robotics of the 20th and 21st centuries combined with that old nation's love of force-of-nature-like monsters, transforming robots and video games to create the conditions for complete human migration into the crust of the earth, where each megacity had a false sky complete with weather.

The war was millennia in the making, a result of a fight within the species itself, a timeless imbalance. From the dimmest historical times humans had chosen sides, east or west. Less than one millennium ago Chineze dominated humanity. They made the mistake of closing their borders, scuttling their surface ocean fleet, and stagnating with their infant science strangled in the cradle while the pesky barbarians outside were left to scamper ahead in science and tech. More important was the discovery, invasion and takeover of Merica, giving the barbarians new room and resources, even a feeling of racial supremacy. Kipling and Einstein didn't see the forest for the trees. The fight was for final supremacy, the earth's continual shrinking forcing the time and manner, not the place. All other fights simply propelled the final fight forward in time.

The individual was fast becoming as nothing on all sides of the planet. The east was catching up to the west. The west was coalescing into a single political entity, as was the east. In the 216th decade of the western calendar the first terminal showdown came, the fight for the center, World War Core. First, not last. The west was fighting for a draw.

A general feeling that a draw was the best they could achieve permeated the west. The Chinese were an awakening monster. The west looked longingly to the stars and some kind of storybook escape.

The 20th century had been mainly Merican, although the so-called Vietnamese Conflict gave them their first big military defeat. Even then the west did not appreciate how going underground helped their enemy defeat them. They never did develop a way to fight them on that turf, preferring to gallop their proud surface-air forces over a land that was slipping from their grasp daily.

The 21st century saw the fortunes of the Chinese rise. Even as it dawned, western military leaders began dropping their petty squabbles and reorienting their forces to defend against Chinese 'imperialism', an antiquated term now. Every day China was growing stronger in comparison to the rest of the world. As always, the main thing holding the Chinese back was the crushing weight of their own numbers, but going imperialist gave them a new hope. Swallowing up Asian countries added yet more people but at the same time more lebensraum and put the new people under centralized control. By the dawn of the 22nd century all Asian countries all the way west to India had been reclaimed by China.

The west, perhaps in self-defense, solidified around Merica, finally adopting the Merican way of life, refined by three centuries of experience, and scrapping the tumultuous United Nations. To the Chinese, the west were nothing but barbarians, uncivilized, warlike and dangerous as ever. The flirtation with western Marxism had finally ended, but the results were even more collectivization, the individual being truly nothing in the grand scheme. The western tradition of the dignity of the individual was still given lip service throughout the west, but facts of life were shrinking the individual to the size of amoebas next to the giant robot technology that created and sustained their living environment.

The Chinese believed in the inevitability of world domination, in the extinction of the west as an independent

entity. The stubborn westerners believed in the inevitability of the triumph of the barbaric, wild individual worldwide, and in humanity's supposed destiny among the stars, in a galactic community of perhaps strange new nonhuman beings where there is no east and west, but their western values predominate. Neither side was overtly racist, but rather was resigned to the reality that certain racial mixtures couldn't flourish in their milieu. Each held hope out for some of the genes of the other, but business went on as usual. The population of each side was actually becoming more Chinese yearly, the advances in genetics and cloning making possible the instant proliferation of genome designs in large numbers, and Chinese genes came up more and more in optimal solutions. Western philosophers, such few as remained, waxed lyrical on the battle of the genes, where individuals were casualties, and people were products. The long western philosophical tradition had ended with a Trekkian worldview that took the stars for heaven, the earth a mere starting place, a pond. Even the western calendar was being called in question. 22nd century? Don't make a Chinese laugh.

Unfortunately for the fortunes of the wild wild west, space exploration had been a century-long bust, the nearest star still not reached even by unpeopled ships, and precious few humans living on the earth's moon much less on other Sol planets. For the Trekkian dream to come true, millennia more would be needed, but the west couldn't always be kept wild. In the meantime, the Chinese dream of all humanity and all human control being centered in one place, in splendid maximum population density, was being achieved brilliantly, after the acquisition of the east-west buffer country of Japan. Call it serendipity, but the latter addition gave China the final ingredient for success, namely, the world's most advanced robotic technology, combined with the tradition of admiring if not worshipping giganticness as a rightful part of nature. The scientific-technical advances came in a spectacular cascade. By 2125 all Chinese were living deep. The very word Chinese means center. The center now had depth.

The first thing that went extinct with deep living was the life on the surface. Deep living required devastating

defacement of the earth's skin, resulting in volcanic, rocky wastelands with gigantic Morlock-like air vents that sucked in the dirty, acidic air and ran it through miles-long purification robots before piping it deep. Not that there weren't sufficient surface sanctuaries, preserving former surface environments, just that these now took up less than one percent of the surface. The air vents looked from space like simple sand and dust deserts devoid of volcanoes. Even the fabled Great Wall of China disappeared to progress.

Yes, progress. Humans were a product of their own conquering of nature, reproducing beyond the ability of the surface to contain them. The real life of humanity was now underground. A thirty or forty mile deep megacity complex had layer after layer of robot citydomes with artificial surface environments, complete with skies and weather, connected by gigantic megatunnels in all three dimensions. Future generations would no doubt not need even the artificial skies. Humans were now in harmony with a nature made alive by gigantic robots that were themselves built up from artificial DNA-like codes from smaller robots after being designed for their ultimate forms and functions by humans.

The west was slow in going deep, preferring to ignore the developments in China, much as an ostrich buries its head in the sand, but in a humorous reverse. It was not until the war that it finally resigned itself to its fate. It was either that or extinction in mere months, for Chinese scientists had developed a new super weapon that changed the balance of power. It was known to westerners as the death ray, huge chambers in the mantle created with and fed by nuclear weapons. In the shape of gigantic cosmic ray energy lenses, they focused high energy particles into a self-reinforcing beam that could travel through any known material, right through the core of the earth, emerging on the other side, yet disrupting living cells sufficiently to cause instant death in a 20-mile radius cone. It was in fact an artificial cosmic ray laser. These rays were undefendable except by one maneuver, namely, attempting to dodge them.

The west's superior surface military forces, land, sea, air

and space, were made useless in a moment by this new weapon. Even if the surface of China were invaded, it was pointless, since there was no weapon in the western arsenal that could penetrate dozens of miles of rock, and in a short time the death rays would find them, leaving an instant mausoleum and museum to obsolete weaponry.

The west had no choice but to go deep to keep from being seen by the enemy and targeted. The entire population of the west soon not only lived deep but in continual transit, giving it the only available defense. To fire a shot took a whole day for targeting and chamber building, so that a sparse mobile population could lessen the effectiveness of the ray by making the targeters guess at where to aim. The west couldn't duplicate the death ray technology of the Chinese, so that the latter didn't have any need for transit living, although plans were laid to resort to it in hours if the west were guessed to be testing their own death ray machines.

Now for the story.

It is Day 205, a pivotal day of the war for western high command, the day that the second expeditionary force is being launched in an attempt to run the core and take the war to the Chinese.

Day 185 was the first hoped-for pivotal day, the day that the first expeditionary force was launched. But it had ended in disaster, with extinction of all involved. It took five full days to ascertain the situation and send the second fleet. A lifetime of atoseconds. But all depended on a success for force two, more time to recruit and train, more safeguards.

Twenty million were screened before Col. Revena Bleeding was selected as force leader. The first force had been led by Col. Moira Bleeding, her clone. Oddsmakers selected another Bleeding as a 121.5-to-1 sure bet, but the screening process is official, methodical, and precise, and took its own sweet serious time, a good day plus a bleep. Clones in, clones out, as the saying went. Clonists come home.



Frame 1

I was a simulated desert.

The memories are returning. The flood, the blood, my trip to hell's very heart.

My name Revena Bleeding. I very much not like it. R is for number 18. Bleeding is for number 30,004 in the OED 2120. I am a developed property, a Merican through and through. But that's too far back. Right now I'm enjoying my bod in homebase for the first time in 40 days. Just to move a hand across my breasts is grand.

Where do I begin. Begin at the begin?

It was day 205 of World War Core. We had 204 days of low after the sneak attack. Pure low. A blur. Pure survival. The Chineze were kicking our ass. We had to ape them, go deep, build megacities and megashuttles to keep their DRs from painting us standing, kill all living cells in a twenty mile radius as the ray cone exited the surface and finally lost itself in deep space. How deep we couldn't go. Well past the outer planets of Sol.

We didn't take well to deep megaliving, but it was that or extinction. Merica and its hundreds of oys of traditions was too deep in our blood. Mom, apple pie, the flag and all that. Freedom. Surface area. Low population density.

Pleasant Beach. Turquoise-green waves. Beach fun. Palm trees. Brilliant flowers. Waving in the sun. The warm but not dangerous sun. Body-warm. No warmer. Cool even. To the touch. Delightfully so.

Up went the ship. Up from the turqwaves. Splashing all around. Buoyancy, floating on the waves. Peace and calm. Happy.

The earth is an app with a thinskin. Skinners dommed life for millions of oys like scum on a pond. The real life lay undergrou waiting for realtech. Toys for real troys, toys that weighed in by the megatons per at, toys that could only be constructed by other megaton troys, toys in which all life is surf scum to it physic. But our intell made it and controls it. We spent mills of oys just controlling the skin of the app, but in a matter of daze we went past the skin and had a slice.

Not we, sorryo. The Chineze did it first. We didn't have the ballsies that they did. Our popden was digits down from theirs, five eight emgee. We could double that and not have the ballsies to go deep without a peep. They were driven to it by their own miscalcs in socialengine. Down or chaos, fractal geom be dammed. We westerners bottled them up, gave them no lebensraum, nowhere to grow. We contained their scum on the sur of their pond. We drove them to it. More power toem.

So we let them get ahead in a newtech, now seen for what it is, the most vital of all techs. Shehe who controls the core controls the world.

Who would think that the Chineze, who stand on their heads, could stand us on our heads so fast? Who ever thought of the core as a sightline for weaps? We found out the way bacteria find out on the skin of an app when they get irradiated by farmmechs. By disappearing. That's what the west did, began disappearing. Billions served. Our great peacekeeper forces, land, sea, air, space, were useless against weaps that shoot through the core, come up through our feet as we look down and bleep. We were devastated, forked, schmucked, screwed, ruined at rockspeed. At once we knew we would have to go deep or face total bleep.

We did go deep. We didn't like it, but we liked life too much to bargain with its survival conditions. The Chineze, which we treated like lice, were life, and changed our rules underneath our feetsies. Now we kowtow to their emp even though they have no emp.

Why get somebody ice for half an hour? They're thirsty, that's why. This heat gets me down. Poopy, I got to get through, Poopy.

My Poopy. I love my little Poopy. Without Poopy I'd be unsett. Poopy Doo? What do you want, Poopy? I give my little Poopy Doopy everything she wants. Spoil her. She's spoiled rott as an app. I love her that way. She loves being spoiled. I love spoiling her. She's a pet. She died. Butterfingers. That's me. Butterfings.

Up went the ship. Up from the torquewaves. A ship that is Noah's Ark miles long. Splashing all around on rock and surfdirt. Buoyancy, floating on the waves of the flimsy surf. The earth began to get a new surf, the past oys defaced like trampled mud. To scummers a weap in itself, a citykiller perhap, a skintown killer. To the New West, an Ark. Peace and calm. Happy.

To sleep, perchance to dream. In cool colors.

Shit on Shakespeare. His darling buds of May world is shitty scum on a vanished pond. He died before world war one. Let me count the ways for him.

Where was I? Tuh. The happy ship surfing after a voy in the mant. The mant makes up 84 percent of earth's vol. The verm, what they used to call the crust when they lived on the skin, is 12 to 40 miles deep under the drainland but shallows to 7 miles deep in the oceland. We are all doomed to live in the verm, is true, because the mant is unliveable, too hot, but military machines were into the mant almost sime, sharing historic time. To the Chineze the mant was still a front, their sights not being down there. Their hapstate in the verm stayed them put. But we didn't want to be in the verm at the very time we were forced to go there, so we were all thinking of going back to the skin after we could take the war to them through the mant straight through the core.

Tuh. That was hundreds of days ago. People are already saying they're never going back to being skimmers or scummers. The real life is undergrou. The skin is so

thin. Who wants to go back to clinging to skin? We have leapt, jumped the evolutionary ladder. Just keep our vals, our mom, flag and apple pie, that's all. Just keep what makes us want to live. Our trads, hist, vals. Params for our software.

Shit on Shakespeare. I keep his bible in chip, hard chip. It's the heart of the ID we all share, the heart of the hangups we bear. No one can move this mountain from over us. Methinks the Chineze come close, but no seegar. Shit.

Why do I hate the Chineze and want to kill them? I shouldof never been born. I have their genies in me, mixed with others tis true, but forsooth the genies tell me true. Tell me blew. Gimme a break. Don't kill me. We are the antidote to shake a spear. You need us more than we need you. Think about it. Life is but a stage, you but a player strumpeting about on the scum of a pond, the skin of an app, while the real life is deep undergrou, deeper than that, down here, on our side perhap. Dream on, player. Life is but a dream. Fat jeans, shut up.

The earth is like a big baked app. Who would want to live only on its skin? Giveme the core, the fleshycore, the livingcore, the everliving 3D core. Shakespeare never penned those lines with all his thirty thousand word vocab and grasp of theethinethou. Why did I? Tuh. I don't know but I know when I've got a mountain pinning me dow. The Chineze don't even have a word for the. Or tuh.

It's time to rock and roll. Pardon me while I bleep.

Begin at the begin. My sister Moira, number 13, same family Bleeding. Tall and leggy we are both. Amazonians. No menstrual periods. Leaders. Mars bars. She came first, kept the lead. Hicom selected volunteers for the first core run, EXP-1. She was volunteered for CO. Thank you body. Cherry pie. Pack your bag with a whole week's worth of thongs. Big item of the season is the suit. The color pastel. This is working so well. Try walking far on high heels. Must look professional. Double step here. Popping bright pink. Braless is a yes-no. Seamless is the solution. You're a bad bad thing, sir.

The nutrients were right for me and she. The braintake was painless. Brains don't feel pain. That's why they sent only that. A couple of pounds of living liquid lip, liquidy smooth, liquidy sexy. Kiss off? No way. It's how I want to grow up, want them to grow up, when I'm mommy. The catchtwentytwo. You aren't told. The braintake is kept super top secret. If you knew your brain was surgered from your bod and sent through the mantle on VR assist you'd not be able to accept it and go into brain death.

Moira led expedone, the first tempt of the magma ships, the corerunners, the newtech that will let us take the war to the Chineze. Unlike rockandroll ships, that move through solid rock one molecule at a time via quantum teleportation, corerunners trav in magma tubes, the kind that squirt out on the surf and make volcanies. They never returned. Official exp was death. I was volunteered for expedtwo, ready to serve. We got our braintakes, were up and doing biz in homebase, no credit card debt, the VR feeding us shit to make us think we were all there. Our bargain guru blessed our ex and we began the caravan with some rock and roll in our prison jumpsuits with office service that set us free from the usual tribal council, voteoff and meal of rat.

There are no cheering crowds. Just the sound of your own bleeding. Everything in balance. Don't live to exercise. Exercise to live. Every hero has a beginning. Every hero has an archenemy. Someone to rescue. Adventure. A sting. A tonight. A wedding. A guest cameo role. Mass chaos. A wardrobe that shines. A mean phase. Email questions. A captain. A challenge. A shocker. Survival skills. Smile and be yourself. Your life is on contract. Never be not yourself. Get along. Be portrayed fair. Control the edit, the perceptions. Fall off the log, outta here. Screaming fans. Hi, star. Be interesting to hist. Make everybody hap. Good group out here. All captain supporters. Kill millions of bad breath germs before they kill your breath. Every gene in the human genome is counted. It's just one of those days, with a decidedly uptown look. Deal with a fat lip. I feel like shit.

Me and Moira got wellalong. Clonesissies always do. The sex

is great.

RE

Frame 2

Revena lay in her sex bed nude and exhausted, her long muscular legs akimbo and spread wide. She had just made love to ten lovers and exhausted them and they left. Ten units for ten newyorkers. Rolling over on her rock hard tummy she flexed her legs on her pedalexerciser and danced her feet together as she went back to cybertraining, her lizardlike sex brain and its totally selfish drives now satisfied and falling back to sleep like a Japanese movie monster after a rampage. That monster would be Godzilla except for the gender. The games were on, her mind engrossed, her will indomitable, her Amazonian gene design forcing her to be strong, to use it up the fastest. Longevity was an autotrade. Life itself meant win or die. She won, as usual. Revena two fifty-two, Chineze none.

The mission would insert tomorrow. Their homebase, like all pop centers in the west, was mobile, moving fast at random through a maze of supertunnels in the crust. At the appropriate time the crew would disembark into their huge corerunner ship that was camouflaged in an inert state deep in solid rock to prevent enemy detection. The ship could rock and roll with the best of them, entering a quantum-mechanical state that moved it one molecule at a time through solid rock, slipping every one of its atoms through the cracks in the QM states of the rock atoms. It was eerie at first, Revena remembered. They all say eerie, she reflected, seeing your ship and its crew turn into shades that jiggle past solid rock. If the R&R engines would suddenly fail without the proper disengage, the ship and everything in it would materialize inside the solid rock, instant monuments to cold time. Stopping the ship required a truly free space, one that had to be found to dock as they called it, or, if necessary blasted at the last moment by atomic bombs, nukes. The R&R experience was not only eerie but hard. The entire body rocked and rolled at

the atomic, molecular, macro, and systemic levels simultaneously, an experience akin to being shaken to bits and reassembled as fast as one could imagine time to move. But it was safe, effective, and had become the usual baptism for the billions who left the surface the first time to go deep. Funny how the human body knew it was being rock and rolled but had no genetic mechanism to get sick over it.

The Chineze had the R&R technology first, but the west had caught up nicely. What it couldn't duplicate was their death ray core laser tech, the use of nukes to fuel giant shaped laserlike feedback chambers that focused stripped-down high energy atoms into a coherent beam that could travel for thousands of miles with only minimal spread. Like the cosmic rays which they most closely resembled, the entire bulk of the earth was no impediment to their passage, living tissue included. It was just that once in awhile a high energy atom would make a precise hit in a living cell that made its machinery malfunction. Enough such hits in a living organism and it would die. A death ray.

The west had no answer to the death ray, but they had their own advances in R&R tech to carry the war to the Chineze. In liquid, as opposed to solid rock, the R&R machines could go into another, higher-order, accelerated mode, and flow through so easily that it resembled old metal submarines swimming through ocean water. With good tubes and favorable currents a thousand miles a day was within range. When solid rock was reached the ships could convert to R&R mode and proceed on at a much reduced speed, a mile an hour max. Not that they planned to do this when Chineze crust was reached. Dozens of smaller R&R ships would disembark and rock and roll their way to enemy targets, much like old surface metal tanks on the old surface battlefields. These R&R tanks were expendable, the main corerunner ship not.

The mantle had natural magma tubes, some of which exited at the surface in volcanoes. The trouble was not insertion into the magma tubes, or movement along them, but the fact that the deeper one went, the greater became the pressure and temperature. At the core itself the pressure was some three million surface atmospheres, the temperature some nine

thousand degrees F, the same as the surface of the sun. Corerunner ships were constructed of material as dense as that at the core, forged with nukes in giant underground chambers. The problem was living flesh. To maintain the pressurization and cooling for even a pound of living tissue required the expenditure of enormous energy, and the most complex tech ever devised by humanity. It was simply not possible to carry a hundred-pound living human body to the core without it being turned into hot splattered smooch. An entire crew of three soldiers could weigh no more than nine pounds. Thus vivisection of the brains.

Why not put the ships under the control of artificial intelligence? Don't make me laugh. That hocus-pocus had worn itself out in the 21st century. There is no artificial intelligence. Human minds still ruled. Heroes could still be made, odysseys heap glory on them. High Command could not trust the war to artificial intelligence. Real human brains had to be there when the core was run and the fun began. It would be, like all human war, a battle of human minds, the tech just setting the rules of the game. The Chinese still clung to Sun-Tzu, the west to West Point. At the most critical moments human minds lock in a game, and people die, civilizations rise and fall, history makes a point, feet splash in the mud of time. The Chinese started this war, their minds trying for a distance-kill with death rays. The west would finish the war with tech that is even more horrible, with citykiller ships that never rest. But that was the endgame. The opening is still in contest, and three human minds would be there, whatever the cost, sitting in the seat.

So a corerunner ship that could change its shape from a 20-mile long, half-mile diameter tube into a 5-mile long, one-mile diameter tube, into a 1-mile long, 2-mile diameter disk, had to use all available extra reserves just to pressurize and cool a box the size of one adult human trunk containing all the living brains that controlled it all.

Another limitation of the corerunner tech was that the brains had to be cybernetically connected in real time to the bodies held in medical stasis in homebase. As the ship snailed its way through the earth it left a trail of

electromagnetohydrodynamic molecules that acted like an umbilical cord in contact with the bodies in homebase. The moment a brain lost cybercontact with its body it went into denial and death. All the Frankenstein movies to the contrary, the brain might feel no pain but it will just refuse to live if detached from its body. This boded badly for the future of corerunner tech in war, but since the Chinese didn't have it, the advantages outweighed the disadvantages now.

Yet another prob was that a brain can't be fooled. The soldiers cannot know about the dismemberment or the brain will, in time, go into brain death even with all the cybercontact in the world. This necessitated huge computing facilities in homebase to fool them at every level into thinking they were onboard the corerunner ships in full body, including the sexual levels.

Force One had not been destroyed as officially announced. The leader, Col. Moira Bleeding, had persuaded her crew to mutiny, go renegade. When homebase responded by disconnecting cybercontact, all the brains went into BD except hers. She existed as a disembodied brain now, lurking in and around the core, a loose cannon to the HC. Part of the mission of Force Two was to assassinate her and destroy her corerunner ship before it could fall into enemy hands. Nobody was told this but Revena, but even she couldn't be told about vivisection, so she went on believing in the illusion that the computers made for her. Talk about funky.

☐☐

Frame 3

I very much not like insershes. Feel like a sacrifish vict. Fay Wray on karioke. Scream along.

But we had to get out of the closet and donate to the drive. My Amazonian warrior cost with armored breast cones and hip leggings and armored bikini bot was glorious that day. Pvt.

Dotcom DeKnott, my wingman, looked pretty decent. Armored codpiece, robot neckpiece, clamshell shoulderpieces. Takes orders well, on and off dut. We are family.

Let's start at the very begin. It's a very good place to start. My crew got togeth dressedup for insersh, the hills alive with the sound of music. The sound of music hit the bigscreen, but with a new twist. The cute kids, the nasty Nazis, edelweiss to wave and an invitash to the captain's ball. Not since church have so many strangers huddled together to sing with such fervor, and no pay to sing along or Rocky Picture Horror Show either. Everybody sung along as we rock and rolled onto the surf and hit bare air. I am 16 going on 17. So long, farewell, aufwiedersehn, goodbye.

Looks like our living room as we watch that movie. You do the Mother Superior I'll do the liederhosen. What a super evening. Down we went into the hot soup. PFC Epoxy Sacramento found a twelve thousand oy old mammoth bone. He's my current uno lover. Shrimp as big as a man's hand. Only secs from the ocean to the table. I call him down under when I make reservashes. Good die. Is there a wedding in my future? No, but he will show up in a tux if I ask. We veered to the point a few miles, circled around, and started going deep. Imagine how our earlobes felt. Take me back to last summer and give this dog a bone. We had a cow and a horse for the first ten miles, and I don't mean Clydesdale. We touched the mastodon's very bones in our backyard dig. The tusks were spectacular, seven and a half things long. The colors were original, amazing, the pumping sound racket a little bit aggravating, but we were amazed at the progress we made. This creature we were riding weighed millions of tons a cubic centimete, but we were glad to get the dig over soon. With this ring I thee wed. The next best thing to breakfast in bed is breakfast in the mant. Like crunchy granola.

Come on, come on, let's work together, cause together we will stand, every oy girl, woman, and one man. A screaming vortex of installash experts wearing tuxedoes and serving ordures now opened up their Daewoo and daymoonied. All the rules have changed. Get more. The verm was now in the up

dir, several floors up. We got married on a Monday and by Tuesday night we were feeling the presh and the temp caulking us like a ring stuck in a throat. We coughed all the time, hid in our VR and orgied, finding without a doubt that we could get married but had to eat the ring. Do you know that the ring is in there? Then reach on in and pull it out if you can. We could see the x-rays of our own guts. Tuh. Our whole sanity was a little bit suspect. It was hilariously invigorating.

I handed off the ring to the groom and got a little sick to my stum. But we would be heading to Hawaii soon. The temperature was in the low 80s and sunny, the breezes invigorating, ingratiating, exhilarating. We had our own dome on the surf, home depot saying goodbye to us and our associates. We were olympic hopefuls coming back from the tropes with meds, but they could never seem to get enough players anyways so that diluted our med. Three, four, five, six, seventy-seven, and eight. The largest surf diamond, 3176 carats, stuck in my throat, a shoe warehouz.

Well, here we are once again in Rockefeller Plaza in sunshi and clear air, only a fract of a mile to the top of the highest skyscape. The menu is french toes, poached salmon, berries and fizzy. My hair bloweth in the wind along with my wedding veil. Momma told me not to come. Uncle Al, Rachel, and dad were definitely with us, and they were overjoyed, ecstatic. I was a beautiful bride down under. Tiffany diamond wedding ring. Just try to pull it off now. I'll crush your hand. I'm densepacked matter. Big weights are mere toys. I trust me. No life is more complicated than mine. Not even Romie and Julie. All my crew has a right to expect five-star deals and diesel engines, not wildfire fighting jobs. The accuzashes fly.

Major Oleandra Tipping, my other point, played it warm and cool. There was no other way to play it. Take me down beneath your feet. I'll die dry. What others call large we call medium. If you want an honest shake and bake join the mil, your ticket to the 21-something olympic games, with real mountains and real gods. Welcome to the reynolds aluminum page in this edish of the todayshow. As we crept through the entire globe we had to be aware of what we

did and when we did it and who we did it to. We had time to go to lots of movies, star as Nurse Betty or Annie Get Your Guns or write and tech our own hot button and homepage. We cast our votes for our next stock investment each day. The fun of rock and roll sex is on gag order in family court and the media is appealing. Also important were regular meals. So went the daze.

Did I mensh that Olandy is a clone product? That she is another me twice removed? A clone of the Ing line, me Bleeding she Tipping, maybe not more than T minus B genes different. Make love to yourself and know thyself. Ring her bell and ring thine own, to mangle John Dong. Yummy yummy yummy my own face up my own tummy. But watch that kick. She's a horse. Righton. Baby sweetcheeks buck. Say Revena softly or I'll kick thy wench back. Young teach, the subject of schoolgirl fantasies.

So went the daze. But not all of them. I got the case file for Moira out and ate it from the bottom up. An inside tracker, general surechance one oy. A checkered past of loves and vices, including some Chineze genies in her package. Our packages, sorryo. Hark it's a lark. Sing me a sonnet, Shilly Wakespeare. You need a woman, sorryo not us. You stink. There's a rightful order, and you have thirty-three plays to show the thirty-three ways it can be upset and put back right again. Always put back right again. Sorryo, the real world doesn't work that way. You're fixing something that ain't broke, sorryo toodooloo. You never used the word shit, I checked. You stink.

Nothing in her pack about wowing on Shakespeare, but she wows the early 21st cent and is elizabethanly retro about it. Hung up on the oys when Chineze were wimps every other cunt could kick around. The Taiwan Hong Kong oys. Japan still the eastwest buffer state. Godzilla 2000. Laugh. Serve me some dim sum, some heart dots, on your hibatchi, sweetcheeks. Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, the Titanic. All sunk. Steps on a ladd. The final rung is being slipped on now. If you can't beatem joinem, that's what we say. That ain't what the Chineze say. Their genome not includes us barbarians anymoe than lizards. We are a nuisance. If we could have wiped them out when we had the

chance. Now they have theirs. We can't win if it's a battle of attrish, and they know that. We are like the Japs when Godzilla marched. They are the Godzilla, the unstoppable force of natch. Ouch.

But in war there's moveandcountermove. Numbers alone don't guarantee vict. There's rules. That's the western hope. We have more tech. One of us can squelch many of them. In theory. Now we test the theory. Wee wee go we guineapigs. Who are we? Heroes in the making. Zip my doodah. Go chargers. Wallow in guilt only if we are the losers. There will be no next time. Doordie. Merican flag, mom, apple pie. What do they got? Dim sum, rice, rat meat, red dye. Flied lice. Names that are one syllable, like recombinant DNA. No one is an individ, no one a William Shakespeare. That's why we will win. Billy Shakespeare must win. The world must be made safe for BS. Say after me. Flied lice. You lose. Tuh.

Everybod is used to rocking and rolling in the verm. The way the scenery moves through you, usually shit colored shale and rock. The big change in magma is the bright colors. Your space is brit by lava lamps. We don't have visual equip for rockspace anymoe than radar, but seismic imaging sonar and VR do the job. Now the lava lamps light up your space, and you need eyecones or you're blinded. You don't feel the magma as it passes through your atoms, or your atoms through it, but you burn in your imagma just the same. Burn, scorch, purify, like metal in a forge. You become a pure shiny sword like the Marines pack. You leave an atom of yourself at every point, the impure atoms. Your whole bod is refined. You need it later, I found out, because the core is pure hell. Pure black, pure pain, pure death. All the weight on you doesn't purify you but turns you into living shit, on the verge of blackout, questioning exist itself, the arrogance of it. Death would be an easy escape, but the ship keeps you alive, the all powerful ship made of the very stuff of the core keeps you alive in hell. Relig is dead but one ripe myth got filled by coince. I have been to hell and back and am changed. Am religious by no choice I've made. Am a true believer. I've seen my soul squeezed and it's shit. I've seen utopia. That means no place in Greek. No place. Deep.

My clone Moira is like me, from no place. From no place to no place, the clone anth. Designed and then assembled in a fact, grown and trained and a cog in the machine. That's the only place for a clone. In a machine. The bigger the machine the more clone cogs in it. No mother no father just the machine and the brother sister cogs. And the fun. Let's turn it on. The other half lives. The devil inside.

A place called hell. Every single human has the devil inside. Hell is happy, hell is now, hell is flesh. There is no death of hell, it runs on. No matter how many humans die the new clones outnumber them. Funny how they used to dig a hole for dead humans and plop them in funny nonfunction solo ships and let them rock. None moved. They didn't understand quantum mechs yet. Until the 22nd cent nobody did. Einstein didn't. Nobody born before the 22nd cent did. Now we have the key to hell and have stormed its very gates with great success. What will the people of the future know that we don't? Will war ever end? Not as long as there are devils inside us and places to fight for. It used to be for surf area, now it's for core space, but it's a million miles, a million miles in stone before you can be alone.

The Art of War. That's the Chinese bible. Ours is defunct, didn't survive, because it dreamed an impossible peace. Correct. One of our dual bibles is dead, the other is Shakespeare and his darling buds live on. He dreams neither of peace nor war, but of order being disturbed by war and returning to peace. One thing leads to another. Did he write about the Chinese? No more than Sun-Tzu wrote of us. Now one thing has led to another, and we face them down under across the core. They are stronger than ever. We are the ones who are struggling to survive.

Take to the deep mountains quoth the Christian bible. When the thing that makes desolate comes flee to the safety of the mounts. How funnyfunny that line has become in the light of history. No wonder religion is dead. Shakey, she gives us hope. Bonny Prince Harry traveling across the channel to France and kicking Frenchbutt at Agincourt. Outnumbered and in a strangeland with no retreat, the better tech of his

archers beat the knights in shiningarm long dist before they could get close enough to do dam. Bad examp. The Chineze beat us at long dist this time. Our response is like sending heavyhorse with armored knights against their archers, making us the French to their English. No dice. This mish sucks, but we have no choice. No mish, auto defeat. Yes the French could have won. It was all about the odds, the roll of the dice. Luck. Let's hope.

Western wiz versus eastern. We bet against high pop dense, they adapt themselves to it. Up until the end of the 21st cent we though we were right, but when they figured out how to go deep the logic was reversed, and we fell behind. White became black and black white. We become envious of their truegreen lawn. They were hungry like the wolf, we were fat like the sheep. The world revolves, the tension is never broken. One mistake and the other side breaks through. There is no peace. There can only be shifts in forte.

Alas and alack, eat thou me. Fuck hard for today we die. Runrunruneth the dogs of war. Brave new world with such people in it. We're western, we're wild, and we won't go without a batt, without kicking some bigshot daddy Chineze butt. Killing some of them 50 bill Chineze. Thirty of them for every one of us. Westerners invented genocide. One good nuke on a Chineze cit and goodbye 50 mill. They thought Godzilla was bad, how about Raymond Ironsides Perry Mason War of the Worlds Burr? Carry each other, carry each other. One ship, one mish, one lie. One enolagay. Drop the citykiller bomb and return home, or die trying. Our job to keep the ball from touching the sand at any cost. Kill a race of aliens with microbes. Pray to a western god for vict. The peak.



Frame 4

It's tough to liveandelive in today's army, quoth Moira, but networking distribs the solush in one smooth

coordinated mosh. She had been the perfect lexis teamplayer, delegating responsibility to clone, winning all the time with a perfect oppenheim personal. In an era when living went deep and individual was illegal, she amused herself by retro hobbies in early 21st century think, when things had local pride, neighborhood pride, city pride, state pride, nash pride, fame pride, individual pride. Back before everything was cloned, numbed and denamed, when people said I love you mom and dad. Back when people paired off and made all the birth decisions, gave babies names and taught them right wrong. Back when they used the term state to mean something bad. Back when they had ethnic, Italian, Mexican, Russian. In the 21st century people could still stage a retro fight for such dead causes. I'm on the Mexican whoa-oh radio. Moira loved playing retro, but in real life she was anything but. She was now. Having no parents does that to anyone, yayaya. Clones don't believe in the man in the moon. Clones aren't troubled by the horrible asp, yayaya. Hist is shit to them. Now is hist. Moira was struggling to find her identity, and in the army she found it. All copyrights were in the hands of the clonists.

Back before core war the west had 10 billion pop. Only the oldest 10 percent weren't clones, and they were in petting zoos. The west was evolving, popping, squirming, busy busy. No time for my little Chinagirl. Now she drives me nuts. Simultaneous with the clone revolution the Chinese reved, not into clones, but into total antonym, into total antiness, baby shut your mouth. A desi to rule the world. The perfect Chinese was an ant on two legs on an endless hill with a shut mouth. Shut up, wild west barbarians, they said. We didn't shut up. Shhhh they said. We riffed them with music and sold copies. We went clone in an insolent effort to appease. Enough they said. Suddenly we began losing people to death rays. Fifty million here, fifty million there. Here one second dead the next. Life expectancy of all westerners was now less than one year. Just like an orange being skinned by surprise. It wishes it was special, so very special. It wants to have control, to have a perfect body, a perfect soul, to be noticed when it's not around. But it's up a tree where it doesn't belong and falls if it doesn't get picked. It's so very fragile. It's a dead plant that didn't know that being picked already killed it, so why didn't

it just shut up? It couldn't. It was an orange. What makes it happy, whatever it wants. It wishes it was special. But the Chineze don't think it belongs here. A really hard rock, this earth. If it could only speak it could tell of all the oranges come and gone with a flash of color and a delightful smell. The Chineze themselves have nothing to prove. They will inherit the earth they believe, and that's the way it is. Rock smashes oranges. The dream is over. The world closes in. The world between us. The ant will win.

The life expect of the west was less than one oy. We count the days as cents, the hours as oys, the secs as days. Our bibles would see us through, like in times before. But that was just where. Over five hundred oys since the last bible, two thousand since the first. We couldn't develop a replacement fast enough, with all our tech and all our specialists. No bible no soul no win wars. The Chineze yinyang. Our swing of the hist clock up. Give up, don't fight, no hope. We told you. If you could fly you'd have wings. Long legs are retro too.

I was there. Two worlds collide. But they could never, never tear us apart. We couldn't give up, had to fight, had to hope. It was our tradish, in our natch, like the orange. A feeling of liberash in the wind. What wind? Let's be diplomatic.

Fifty bill against one. Every sec could be our last. The death rays come through the core about one per sec, the constant movement of our pop lowering their kill rate to about fifty mill a day, the rate guaranteed to decrease as our pop bottoms out to below a bill, stretching our life span to the 350th, even imag's 365th day. But the abil to fight back, to take the war to the Chineze, was more frag. The 210th day max HC said. So force two was the last best hope. Already three days used up, and the core still before them. The core run, then the surprise raid on Chineze terr, the citykill and the escape and safe return in the Merican beefiftyline tradish, one wing and a prayer. We are the west, the chosen peop. We will survive. Miracles happ.

Why run the core? Why not stay in the mant, circle round,

then race up to the verm on the Chineze side? Because that's what they expect. The verm was heavily defended, the mant almost equally so. The core was their blind side, but it was also their death ray pass. Running the core meant dodging the rays. Speed helped, as did quantum mechs, also the tiny cross sect of the living human brain pack. But the odds were against the corerunners. The gods would roll the dice. Thrill. Born to be wild. For mom, the flag and apple pie. Testosterone. Adrenalin. Selfabuse. Skin. Surf. Freedom. No exp, no questions, no confessions, just the glory of my story. Go for it.

By the time they reached the core I was used to it. Called it home. I knew they trashed my bod back at homebase, felt the total void approach, the why live, what is a detached brain good for blues, cried to my bod that I'd join it in heav, tried to die. Tried to selfdestruct in 60 atosecs. But a full sec later I was reborn like Christ. I saw the fute with me in it. My ship was my bod. The core was my destinee. I am strong, I am woman, hear me roar in the core. I was the new human. Their evolution had stepped forward. I wanted not just to live but to abuse, to use the retro life forms. Sweet dreams are made of these. Who am I to dream of this? Travel the world and the seven c's looking for something. A thrill just to cross the finish line first. You turn your head and see your clone sister finishing second, and third. Moving on without a head. Without a bod. Pumpkin head. Parking head. Bumping head. All humes want to be abused. Keep my head. Forge ahead. Live again. Be the head.

Chineze, Merican, east, west. Abuse the retro life forms. Abuse and use and then lose. Forge ahead. Life is in the cent. That's where I live. Only I. I'm ser when it comes to wrinkles. Does birth ord determine imp, personal, achieve in life? Sweet dreams are made of these? Who am I to disagree? Everybody's looking for something. Everybod core wants to ruletheworld. Why not me?

I walk along the aveunderthestars. I never met another one likeyou. The infin of the humanheart. Retro. Dead. There's a thou likeyou in our way. You can't get away from you. Every hair on your head is cloned.

Count them and I'll tell you the answer first. The same as on my head. The stars are just tech. We're twenty miles deep. Let's eat each other, touch our faces and die. Touch on the inside without gloves. Defy the laws of natch.



Frame 5

We shifted into coredrive. Our reallife shifted withit to dreamlife.

A magriv formed across the curves of the surround, viding the im of the ship's immed vicin from my project of tempspace ahea. Slowfirst then morefast the surround beyond the magriv began flowing surroundus, fading into hotrock at the mistyjoin of the ims. The unrealscape stayed flat and breen for a longlong time then broke into an enorm reg tesseract array of goodspace, trugrain undistort by the reflecsh of objies in realspace. As the colsim faded from breen to grayblue indist the text changed withit, became nubbed with clumps that spready rap until the entview was carped in knotgrowths. Maglakes peared, steelblue holes in solfors, rippedspace, twistgrain, thickthin. A mount peared but it was a vagueshape, hardedges dulled by quantuncert. The flowingviewscape slowed with its app, stopped with the mount insideus, then reverseditself.

Whisper to the wind. Weep forme. Made believers of usall.

As we approed the core I could see myself lookback. Moira. She was the core. She was the great whoreandmore. She was the warm, heretic that I am with these thoughts. Clones are not heartstops, not individs, not histmakers, not even histpages. An entire line of clones perhap and maychance, when the dogs of war get rough enough and the other side makes mistakes. Life is perfecsh and is it so wrong to be human after all?

We're only human after all. Shakespeare can be put on a hardchip but humans can't. Moira was a hardchip now some would say, but I say no. She was just as hume as I. We don't precompute. It's not all in the genies. Like litter in the bathroo isn't in the floor plans. Like watching yourself while you are eating isn't in the gene plans. There is a god. It is there in the space where the genies look in the mirror and you can't take it out of the floor plans.

We have a right to exist. No one has a right to take our lives, not the Chineze, not their ghosts. Not ours. Life will survive, will make its way through your ordinary world or mine. Shakespeare put life in words, a mirror of words. It takes a human to use that mirror and see a myself. Or selves, clones, endless possibils, all wonderful, all right. All having a righttoexist. I rest my case, judge.

As we approed the core I would love to survive I sang in chorus with the whole crew, all us threeclones. No jealousy. We could trust each other now, going into hell togeth, our ids merged by the length and breadth of western hist and tradish, the western civ who sent us and were behind us, the trusty ship that seped us from pure smashing shit, it all held us togeth like glue, whatever glue can mean here.

What could Shakespeake do with our play? How to use words to describe what words were not made to describe? How to say what extinction of self by temp and presh is barely not, just barely not as we quantumed through the core in our tortured ats, all ways to the void avail, but avoided. We could feel it coming in the edge of night oh lord. All of my life on the edge of night oh lord. I was waiting for this mome all my life oh lord. All my life. Oh lord.

For a minute I thought we had made a mistake. The core was not pain. It was not dark. It was light. It was freedom. It was godhead. It was worth the price of the world. A green orange glow. The look into an angel. Blue sky. Rows of a thornbush. Suit cards in a royal flush. The whitest of white sea. Man deep into sex foam. Outside it's asleep. Here it's never sleep. A life is an endless moment. It's

like life in Merica.

Where was I?

Chesapeake Bay. No, Cape Cod. The ocean. The shore. Boats. Waves. Gangplanks. Entryways covered with awnings. Up we go, across and in. It's English. Queen something, can't read the name on the side. A restaurant. In we go. Me and my dear mom and old dad. The butler appears. Stiff suit. Ugly balding small criminal face. But he's English, of the servant class. He serves superbly. Where is his tray? There, silver, in his right hand. He shows us the way.

Down we sit at a table. Dad sits on my left, mom on my right. Not next to me, but around the corner on my right. They get up to go to the facilities. The waiter retires. I take my plastic tumbler and use the root beer machine in front of me. Funny how the elegant table with white tablecloth has this silly root beer dispensing machine sitting on it. Or plastic tableware. Some of that famous English humour I hear about. It is lukewarm, no ice. I sip, am not satisfied. It's not even good root beer. Not sweet enough for me. Dad's root beer. Old skool.

They return. The butler appears, with menus. Let's read the menu. I rush to beat mom. She's such a cheapskate she'll try ordering the cheapest thing for all of us if I don't intervene to save face.

Daily Special.. Fried Flounder with Cheese.....	3.95
Beef Wellington.....	219.95
Prime Rib with Pudding.....	299.95
152.....	192
Plucked Chicken.....	199.95

(several more entrees, all higher priced)

The English have a sense of humour. 152 for 192? Is this a test? Who would order that? Dad orders first. Fried flounder with cheese. Mom orders next. Fried flounder with cheese. I order. Fried flounder with cheese. For once she's right. We're not even rich. We don't belong here. We're putting on airs. Strictly budget tourist class. I don't want to have to hear it, so I'm glad she doesn't

lecture me.

The butler waves us to move to another table, and when we do the tablecloth is covered with a thin firm layer of melted cheese. I pick up the silverware and the cheese gooey off it in strands. I don't put it back down. The butler asks dad and mom what they want to drink. He doesn't ask me. I have my root beer, brought by the waiter and placed directly in my hand. I had hoped to lose it. He kind of sneers at me, kind of grins, then exits, tray in hand.

Is this a dream? No. It just feels like one. I get up, go back to the root beer machine, as I must be expected to do. It's alone on the table with a nice clean tablecloth and four chairs in a row. Think, Jeeves. I notice it has four sides, the machine, perched on the opposite edge of the long table. Going round I see a sign that says Used Ice. I thrust my tumbler in and water runs out of a spout into it in a stream. I pretend nothing is amiss, raise my tumbler, sip. My root beer is now diluted, tasteless. The English have such a sense of humour. Used ice. They're watching to see if I make a face, holding their mouths with their hands. I try not to. Dissemble they call it. Keep a stiff upper lip. A stip offer lif. I can joke around too.

I stroll with my tumbler to the left, across the plush red carpet with elaborate pattern, where the ocean waves are breaking light green against the window. Green and dirty, frothy, filthy sometimes. Things floating. Bits of things. Trash. Across the bay I see a pier. Rich kids being served at tables by more butlers. Thick curly hair, lace collars, velvet jackets, knickers and sox. All boys. Did one look at me? Does he look like me when I was a kid? The waves are rolling, making me seasick. I glance to the left some more and see my reflection. It's a bald butler. Is that me? Mean looking lowclass cuss, ain't I? I look back at my hands and I'm wearing a high class tux and holding a tumbler with diluted root beer. It wasn't me after all. It was the butler staring at me. I was invisible. I don't even know what my face looks like. No matter, can't be seen trying to find my reflection in something shiny. That would mean they zinged me again. I go back and sit down, take the menu back up. I had been carrying my silverware with me all

the time. I still don't put it down, cup it against the menu to relax.

I can't believe the high prices. Reading down the menu, looking for a break, I see a man's face changing its looks in a vertical sequence.

Security..... Ask for Price

The butler has to put on a disguise first. More English hume. I read down the vertical menu and am soon into an elaborate English joke. As I read on I chuckle a little, which is all anybody ever laughs at English jokes. Droll, all. Some dirty little sexual innuendo always. I realize that the menu is gone. Surprise, my eyes have been tricked into turning the menu upside down to go to the column on the left. That was the biggest joke. I get it. No chuckle. I'm the butt of it.

I look around the restaurant. The usual English fuddyduddies, welldressed, jewels clacking. Clean white tablecloths and elegant tableware. None of them white skinned anymore, but all of them with the usual vocal accents. None of them seem in on the joke. They never are. It's just between the butlers and I, me. I look again. One of the male guests has no pants. I pretend not to notice. My mind slips to sexual fantasies and time flies.

Dinner is served. Steamy smells. The butler arrives with a covered tray, then produces three plates with a flourish. And produces or then produces, or just produces? It's halibut all right. We need no cue. We take our plates from his tray one by one, put them on the table in front of us, use our knives and forks to scoop cheese off the yellow tablecloth and pile it on our fish. Dad does it with relish, mom with frantic seriousness about getting her money's worth. Her eyes always were too big for her stomach at those allyoucaneat joints. Put too much cheese on hers. Will never clean her plate. Q-tips stick out of her ears. I just realized we have given away that we're low class slobs. We should have taken the plates from his hand, scooped the cheese from where we wished to lay the plates, then laid the plates on the cloth, not on a cushion of

cheese. The thought makes me depressed. No way to cover one's tracks. Beverly Hillbillies. I just know there's hidden cameras recording everything. I'm not hungry anyway and can't eat, can't talk in this brown palace. Just terribly, terribly hot and thirsty. Why can't I ever get what I want? That was fun? That was funny?

"Dad!", says the waiter. I look around. Yes, he was talking to me. Funny, calling me Dad. Dad and mum are drinking well, from crystal glasses with real ice cubes. The waiter? There are more than one I'm sure. No, I'm not sure. I'm collapsing in on myself, examining my mistakes. Am I English? I thought I was Merican. How did I decide to go for that warm tastebad styrofoam root beer and that plastic tumbler? That was a trick laid specifically for Mericans. Now I will never get any ice. Who were those kids on the pier? Where is this bay? Is it Cape Cod or are we in London? Where is anything? Why do I have a bruise on my palm? The menu prices. If I only knew whether they are in Merican dollars or English pounds.

"They're in Chineze dong!" says the waiter, amused at his clever. My turn to be clever or die.

"More tea!" I say. "More sea!" My voice is too high for me, like a falsetto. No, it's not me, it's a choir of kids across the water on the pier. The waves jump up and down like in a nursery rhyme. I can only talk in low, calm, selfassured, masterclass tones. That's my mental straightjacket. The kids are unhampered, sing on. "C is for cookie. It's good enough for me. Cookie cookie cookie, across the sea." The Cookie Monster then said something but it was unintelligible. Somebody is running a retro ancient telly showing Sesame Street. I can't see where. I can't be clever, no. I'm all in.

"Yes?" I reply to the waiter who called me dad. He is gone. Mom and dad are gone. They died, leaving me alone. A tragedy. Where's the famous English sense of humour now?

I'm so very very hot. "My kingdom for a tumbler of ice!" Too late. I'm crushed by the very weight of it all. I'm regressing to childhood, talking in high notes, sounding

cute and pitiful while I turn into a poodle of yellow baby shit.

I'm a stinky babywipe. I'm standing in my own poo. I see the cage before me, the little lambs, their silence. Stacked one on another so they cannot move, their faces serene as cats. They do not bleat, do not mew. I want to save the lambs. I take two, three, four, and start to walk away. The tigers look so serene as they are being crushed by each other's weight. There's no food, no water. No help. They will turn from living sleek serene muscled cats to yellow poo, and there's nothing I can do. I lead my little tigers away. I understand. I do not judge.

I flashback. The entryway. It said Titanic. Flashbacks of tragedies, men in knickers and chili red English hats looking you in the face forever as time floats them away. The hell it did. I still can't see what it said. It is hidden.

152. That number is pregnant. I wish I could crack it. It is my way out of this maze, a key. 152. 192. Piece of cake. Zip click pop. The answer, please. Sorry, we cannot answer you at this time. Please try again.

Chesapeake Bay. Cape Cod. I've never been to either. They don't exist anymore. Ocean level rose when the polar icecaps melted. Is that the key? What is the question? Tragedy, death, loss, fate, the meaning of it all. A footdriven drum banging away then stopping. The lost profession of the fire departments. Root beer and handlebar mustaches and dirty city streets and fire wagons drawn by horses. Calliope music. Clowns. Kids. Faster. Ice cream root beer floats. Hold it to your forehead to cool down. Guzzle and gulp till you're full. Go get another one. Here it goes! Alley oop!

This shows the little I know. When we came out of the core on the Chineze side we were rent but painfree. It was getting pretty. I rememb a slight scratch on my scalp in the shape of a donut. Another anniversary I will never forget. It was adorable. It's what we as a family deserved. We all made it through whole, peak, ready for acsh.

A new devel greeted us almost immed. We had company, visitors, all Chineze.



Frame 6

Harvesting mothofpearl off shelves on the ocean floor, a concern was raised by a team memb. Like a pearl it always starts with a little irritash, a grain of sand.

"There's a typo on our order forms," said PFC Epoxy Sacramento.

When it comes to certain quests answers aren't always clear. Cisms, infant mort, aborigenies. Big brown snake crawling up your leg in an Australian Dern. This happed to me once.

I could feel my mind mushing with the presh. The day would be a dram. Forsooth, day number 210 need start with essentials. Time for a meet in the garden of the gods.

"What did you say?" I began.

"There's no typos," said Maj. Oleandra Tipping. "Typos are as retro as dot coms and Merican football. A red platypus."

"Why is the typo there then?" responded the private.

"The core run. An artifact of the core run," I offered.

"Is this a dream?" said the major. "No, it just looks like one. If there are typos in our oforms then there are typos in our genies. Not olive oil. Truffle oil. Excusemoi."

"Time is running out, greasemonkeys" I agreed. "We can't turn back now. Typos or no, flesheating bact, whatev, the mish is doordie."

They dropped it for an hou. Then the pearl began to grow.

"Why are we here anyway?" said PFC Sacramento.

"To take the war to the Chinese," Oleandy teered before I could stop her.

"What war, fancyancy? We already lost the war."

"And we don't know when to quit?" I said, trying to pull rank.

"Roger. The Chinese have already won. We are irrel."

"A nuis," I tookturned. "A mosquit."

"A gnat. A both. So we kill 50 mill. It will take us a whole week. Their birthrate is higher than that. Meanwhile they kill 500 mill of us. We can't last. Arith."

"But we never lose. We're freedomfighters. The flag, mom, apple pie. Against overwhelm odds we emerge with the big vict. It's not like a heat in the olymps. This is ser. Let's keep on the straightandnar and not have a midlife cri."

Our mish was in turm, but I don't panout. I make it bett.

"The Chinese cannot be beat," quoth the scallop. I knew he would say that in advan, because thus thoughteth I.

"They can and will be."

"What makes you so calm to make this call? We're on a suicide mish and we all know it," Oleandy shrimped in.

"We travel a lot with a bad att yes, but I'm a little smarter than you are, just as the west is a little smarter than the whole world. When did this att prob of yours begin? With the core?"

"I never thought we had a chance, kern. I wanted to die with honor in batt. Sometimes I feel frust, sometimes ang, sometimes terrori at seeing my own little pers, and at the core I met how little my pers really is. I am noth.

Zero. Zero has no hon. Sex drugs rockandroll from zero
oys old. Mosquit flies into light and fries. No hon for
mosquits."

"Listen all. Get control. These aren't your thoughts.
We're under attack. The Chineze. They're fucking with our
mindz." Close ears I almost said. Mushy me.

We remained silent for another hou. I posed Epoxy the
following quest.

"How do real friends handle peer presh?"

He paused for what seemed like another hou, then said, "I'm a
little teapot shortandstout. Here is my handle here is my
spout." Oleandy chorused in the second verse.

"I've been working on the railroad too long," I said.

Roger. Conversash over. The pearl was ready for harv.

RF

Frame 7

One type of salt for meat, one for fish. Is this east or
west think? After running the core I not know. And just
who eats meat or fish anymoe? Inbattle truced, the Chineze
mantle being naved, Revena rebegan studying my files in her
hard chip.

My past is a checkered web of loves and vices. The wild
daze, the urbansurstreetlife. Yesyes I read the man. It
makes me feel real good. The rugged daze, traving the world
and the seven seas, looking for something, looking for
something. The long criminal file. The military
punishment. A forced recruit. Starting at the very bot I
fought my way up the lad fast. Looking back I know it was
all a setup. I was designed Amazon, made to be a warrior.
I was too dange to be allowed to mature in civilized

settings, had to be held in check by host envirs. I ate ratmeat and my genies made it into lobs. I survived a thou others I left deadiedead. I learned command, the power of o. I learned to use sex as a weap. Sex I do not need but use. I was tall and leggy, the booty all the bothsex hornies want, and exotic, a lovielove from roundtheworld. A risk of perm brain dam.

Round the surfworld that is. Oldskool I know but I was old. Not that I turned off my skoolchip. No. I was driven to my studies and knocked off the tests with ace after ace until the degrees were ouchd to me. I'm no purebrain and I turn it off when I feel like it, when I want to act and think and not just slurpin. I have genies for action, genies for command, for cool under danger, for battle, for the joy of muscle mem. I don't value my degrees or my knowl enough to flinch an atosec at dange. I have bloodlust. I am wicked. And HC loves it. That's why my vaunted inline for gen was hooley. I was up or out, made for a doordie all the time.

Revena studied my file, sawself in a mirr. It was dejavu. My trips to rebelthailand before the absorption, her trips to rebelkashmir before the adsorption. My pref for bondage of my sexslaves, her pref for same. Her app for now, my app for then, for life in the early 21st cent, the last oys when the west was the best, when it seemed it would go on forev. When Merica was still split into northsouthcent and the United Nations had China as a memb. When China was split into main rebelisles rebelcits rebelprovs. When halfwesthalfeast Japaneze aped the west as hard as they had for cents aped the east. The Godzillamovies. How I wanted to be his queenmate. Back when robots were no bigger than peop, and assembled Japgascars that were shipped to Merica on big boats that had no robots in them, or at the docks. So retro. Manual steering and brakes. Manual meant no hydraulicpow. Sojers ran on their own two feet and carried rifles into foxholes. No clones either. The subject was a pubdebate, and there were still religs with priests who had influe and held up the prog. Like holding back Godzill. Not very long. Here we are. And where did relig go? Outlawed by the United Nations after the Chineze and Merican consols. Before it was scrapped. Tuduh.

Oh what a diff a cent makes. The darling buds of twentyone may be the Godzillaflovers of two and twent.

The last era when robos were smaller than people. If they could see the fute and its robos miles high roaming in and through the earth, making Godzilla's simulromps look a sundayskoolpicnic, the Titanic a parkwalk, would they stop all the prog? No, because the west worships the god of prog. The one god they cannot deny, cannot appease with enough sacs. Like all gods it is really of their own making, their own im. To the west, prog is more imp than people. To the east, peace is more imp than people. In the 14th cent the Chineze were ahead of the west in prog, and shut down and closed up to enjoy peace. Peace comes at a price. Their genies were autocloned, and they paid it. Five-six cents later they found the westerners invading their cunt and raping it with impune. By the 21st cent they had decided to once more open up to prog, to disturb the peace, and now they have passed us up and are trying to shut us down perm. I no doubt that if they win they will immed shut down and close back up. But all will be changed forev. Peace will have a new higher price. Can't put the genies back in the bottle. Time marcheth forward whether it is with peace, prog, or darling buds of oranges. See why Rav lovehates Shakespeare.

I never thought it would come to this. But the core takes you apart then puts you back togeth again. I'm still fighting old Nostradamie on the computer. Roger, HC. Roger roger bloody roger. You say I do. No think, do. You write the can. I think I flushed you. I think again. This war no win sitch. Everyone for self. Surviving cancels orders. Skip the sojertalk, you're wasting your breath to my determinash. I'm beyond pain. Whocares. They ashed my bod and whocares. Lookma nobod. Hahas to braindeath. Sorry about my crew. Can't rememb the names. Their brains are mush in my ship. Less pow needed to coolme now. My ship is my bod. The core is my bod. I have no mole or scar on my face now. I think therefore Iam.

New step in evolush. That's what Iam. I don't think deep. I think from the core. All humes on bothsides are

retros. Obs. No matter. I am the fute. I will mult.
Just send more crews through the core and I'll absorbthem.
Revena doth walk into my trap. I wait. She come to me.



Frame 8

Noone runs the core without a total takeapart. It was Day 211 and we had just reached it. We had been virching it for twodays just to prep us for the realthing. The virch ended after the realthing was ove. If we could guess the diff we would have died. All the exerci had preped us for the worst, but the worst is noth compared to the realthing. What the threeofus feared the most was not pain. We felt no pain. We feared agglomerash, minds getting mixed. The comb of rockandroll and high preshtemp could get ats mixed, interchanged, switched, if not termed. The core is the terminator. It is itself. All else loses its self in it. The bitbucket.

We ran the core. I can't remember anythi. None of us can. There is no record on the ship either. It is unrecordable. Like a black hole. You are shaken apart then reassembled. You know that. You are not you when it occurs. You are parts, not a whole. You go in in faith, come out on faith. The core is your god. You can't prove you were there, but you are forever there. You are left there. A new you comes out. You settle up later. We all know that. Don't make it angry, we all know that. There are no lawyers for its court. Go ahead and live, tomorrow may not arrive. You are dead and have been buried and lived again. Enjoy it. Go for it. Go kill some Chineze. They deserve it.

A voy through the core has no sights to see, no movies to make, no oral conversash to record. No drama, no plot, no time even exists there. Noone can describe it. Noth can. Those that run the core are standing alone beneath other beings. Where did they go? Take me there. Tuh. She went backtothefuture beyond her own thyme. Back to the future. To the early 21st cent. When they believed the age of

hume intel was near the end, replaced by superhume intel riding on hardchips. Funnyfunny. To this mome: superhumes zero. Total superhume thoughts: zero. Instead we just have more comm, more integrash. Less isolash. Less individ. Don't fight with Theman, just get outofthere. Watch yourself come ali. You did arrive ali, didn't you? Didn't you? Didn't you? Hit my head with a rock. Scramb my brainies like a birdegg. That would hurt. This is beyond hurt. Stand up to it. Get more ticks from the judge. Unlife in unpriz. No parole. Etern in hell. Black hell. The great unknow. The great qmark. No weather to worry about. Just go to work and don't try to see beyond your own time. Don't try for absolute ans. The horr. The horr. Next.

☐☐

Frame 9

I was deep in thoughtwork when I noticed a thin hard sharp wire tip sticking out of my ass. Where did that come from? I reached down and rubbed my fingers over it before I pulled it out. It was sharp to the touch but not sharpened. If it had been sharper it would have been a needle, but it was not. It didn't cut my fingers, only gave a sharp sensation. It was a wire. It just kept coming. A foot long. Why didn't it hurt my insides? Alignment, the secret of the sword swallower. It was so thin that I bent it easily and tossed it aside. As soon as I pulled it out, three more wire tips appeared. I grabbed them and pulled them out, and several more tips appeared. My heart sunk. Time and time again I pulled a bunch out only to see a bunch more appear in their place. The tips were sticking out of my ass, between my beautiful cheeks, like a body part. The wires were so straight they didn't bend easily, so I quit trying to bend them as I discarded them. I tried pushing them back in, but they wouldn't budge. They only moved in one direction. There was no use in mocking them. Outside my body they were no threat to me. I began stacking the thin wires up in a pile. Keeping them in their original straight state they stacked nicely. My crew were watching. They

said nothing. Just watched. A faint anal odor was on my mind. No one showed any notice of it. Friends. Even when I kept deepsniffing my fingers.

I felt my insides turning into wires. I was sick, but I felt no pain. I tried pulling faster, hoping to outrace the wires, hoping they wouldn't form if I was fast. I was wrong. The wires came from my insides, where there was a vast supply. But the supply was not unlimited. As my wire stack grew, I noticed fat disappearing from my hips, ass, abdomen. Matter-energy conservation. I had no choice but to live with the bundle of wires barely sticking out of my ass, to ignore them. But naughty me. When I tried to ignore them I couldn't. My hand would always creep down there and pull the bundle out, only to feel another one taking its place before my fingers could return. My crew volunteered to pull, with the same result. I was unable to sit without the wires getting in the way. I couldn't function anymore in the ship. My head was stuck up my ass. I lived to service my ass. Its concerns were my life. I had to stay naked, have everybody hold me, feel me, try to feel my pain. But nobody touched my stack. The stack was my life's work now, my life product. I was a wire manufacturing machine. I was part human part machine. Every time I tried to accept this, I couldn't. I am Amazon hear me roar. I would come up with a bright idea and pull some more out, only to lose, to watch more fat get used up. The machine part was degrading me, trivializing me, sapping my humanity unmercifully. The horror. I got angry and began pulling the wires out in a race against rage, as fast as I could. I quit, exhausted, among a pile of wires strewn willynilly around me, all watching wideeyed. As I contemplated those wires, I cried. I'm not stupid, I just don't think it's fair. A brandnew diet I joked. No one laughed. Holding back cries.

It's the core! It's the core! I stretched back, hands over my eyes, feeling grand except the little pinstick in my ass. Then it hit me between the eyes. I had no ass. Or eyes. I was a disembodied brain in a deep trash can. The core was crushing some insignif ats in our VR mech. I was lucky. This was nothing compared to what could happ to my real ass back on homebase prob. My crew and I were just brains. How

else could they afford the en to cool and presh gray jello?
The ship's VR gave us bods. They must not know. I can handle
it, they can't. Now I quit pulling. I was back on dute. I
felt like sex again and so did the crew. The tips turned them
on. Pleas and pain go togeth. Rustle my tips baby, rustle
my tips. You got it baby. Right turn on blue.

FF

Frame 10

The bathtub is nice and wet. The water is turning cold.
The worm is far, almost beyond my concern. Just one detail.
I know what I have to do. I have the worm pinned against
the wall with my foot. I'm cruel. I'm smashing part of its
body. Blood against the wall. But not enough. Its head is
full of sucking teeth. Cruel blood lust in its eyes. I
know what I'm doing. I bring the other foot up and try to
smash its head. I miss. My foot lets go. It slides down
the wall, into the water next to my side. It goes down,
attacks me. Panic.

Ha ha. I can barely feel it. In a movie-feelie they'd
exaggerate the pain. Can't help it. It sells. They
wouldn't have to exaggerate the savage motions of the little
fishie. My it seems to be trying hard to devour me. It
must be barely breaking the skin. I glance without moving
my head.

* * *

"You know of Christopher Columbus the butcher?"

"Yes. He was no butcher."

"Ah but you know he was. A genocidal world criminal. He
had no right to invade a surface hemisphere and murder and
enslave Chineze colonists. You are his descendants. You
know we have the right to revenge."

"I know."

"The worm has eaten your liver."

"Argh! I don't want to look!"

"You must look! You are being devoured. Its saliva injects a painkiller. You think it's only nicking the skin. The worm's body is now thicker than your wrist and as long as your arm. That's you it has been feeding on. On your juicy guts. Look!"

* * *

"You know why you barbarians never invented the cosmic ray laser?"

"Tuh."

"Nazism. Way back at the turn of your 21st century one Doctor Herbert Kroemer, from Germany, came to your United States of America and became a leader in laser research. Because he was embarrassed by Nazism he stayed away from research on weapons of mass destruction. The western authorities gave him their Nobel Prize in your year 2000 for peaceful devices that powered commercial communications and entertainment devices. Meanwhile, one of his students, one Liu Mai-Lyang-Cho, whom we call Doctor Deathray, was expelled from the University of California at Kroemer's orders for wanting to research graviton lasers, in the hopes of producing an earthquake ray. He came back to China, where he was welcomed warmly. As his research bore fruit, his students went on to cosmic ray lasers, while your west stagnated in this area, again largely due to Kroemer's legacy. Funny funny, but it was found that earthquake rays are useless as weapons since they too easily backfire on the user, and indeed it is the need to dampen graviton lasing that was what held back cosmic ray weapons development so long."

"I don't know and I don't care."

"You are truly a barbarian then."

* * *

"Why do you say that Christopher Columbus was not a butcher?"

"He brought civilization to wild people."

"So, when the more civilized invade the less civilized, genocide is justified?"

"Why didn't you say weapons of mass destruction are justified?"

"You know that our cosmic ray weapon doesn't destroy the pond, just the scum."

"Next lesson, Balfours."

* * *

"Do you remember the American War of Aggression on Vietnam of your 20th century?"

"I think so. Why?"

"That was the first war your overproud United States of America lost. We Chineze won."

"You mean the Vietnamese won."

"There are no Vietnamese, only Chineze. We had superior numbers but at the time the United States had superior military firepower. Do you know how we won?"

"No."

"We went underground. The overproud Americans thought it beneath their dignity to go after us rats as they called us. When they did they would give up after a few hundred yards of booby-trapped tunnels and traps. They never even suspected the true extent of our underground military bases, some right next to their prize base of Ho Chi Minh City. Western barbarians never could fight deep. When they finally left with their tails between their legs, we easily

defeated their traitor puppets and liberated the surface area, to be reincorporated in China."

"And your point is?"

"You already know. That was the first war the west lost against us, but not the last. Each year after that we grew stronger and they grew weaker. When we moved our entire people deep they pretended it didn't concern them. They had already lost the world and couldn't accept it. When we came to sterilize the western scum on the surface of our planet we were just doing what your Christopher Columbus was doing, only we had more right than he and his masters in Europe. Your calling it an act of war and even pretending you are a sovereign entity with hegemony is funny funny. Hegemony belongs to China alone. You are not a soldier in a war, barbarian. You are a disease microbe that is slated for elimination, no more."

"Well this microbe won't take it lying down. This microbe will fight you. Freedom is stronger than..."

"There is no freedom. Only permission. You are funny funny, calling on freedom when you are a product out of a test tube and live under constant authority. Just what freedom are you talking about, yankee?"

"Yankee? I resent that word. It's racist."

"You resent nothing. You are a barbarian. You love to race against each other, against us. Your racing has only moved up the doomsday clock on yourselves. We had no designs on your half of the globe until you came to us and tried to enslave us, use us. We entered your own race with one leg tied behind us, and beat you. Now we are putting an end to the race by putting an end to your disease. To you."

"Tuh."

"You never had a right to exist, just permission. We have withdrawn that permission. We don't care about your institutions, yankee."

"No, I don't believe you do."

"Accept that you are a dinosaur. Your time is extinct."

"Maybe so, maybe so. I can't argue with history. You are on top again. But we believe in freedom. Freedom is bigger than China. It will win the final war."

"Even if so, you will not be there to witness it. Even now we have reduced your entire infestation to less than one tenth of a billion."

"Some will survive. Believing in freedom, they will regroup. They will strike back, and defeat your evil empire."

"In your fairy tales, not in fact. Again, we don't care about your fiction. Die, yankee, die."

"You're the ones who are racist."

"You are dung."

"Okay, we're the racists. And so what? The blonde haired and blue eyed, tall and proud, tower over your slant-eyed black-haired little squatting monkeymen."

"We have Chineze who are taller than any westerner, blonder, more blue-eyed. We have little use for such barbaric throwbacks. Your blacks are little different from your whites. Too much or too little sunlight. Your point is?"

"Nothing. We have freedom."

"We have permission."

"We have the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Bible."

"Your Bible is dung. While you were developing it we were already far ahead of you on the road to civilization."

"We have the Greek philosophers. Plato, Aristotle, Democritus."

"Barbarian philosophers are dung. You can't even understand a single thought of one of our Chineze sages, barbarian. You are dung. Die now. Death is your history. Quit ruining the earth and die."

"I want to die, granted. But I want to take as many of you Chineze with me as possible."

"You are as a drop in the ocean, as are your pitiful attacks on our people."

"But I will make a point of killing you first."

"Funny funny. And just who am I?"

"I don't know. Come out and show yourself. Give me a target."

"Tell your barbarian philosophers to come to your aid now, yankee. Think it out."

"I don't want to think. I just want to kill and die."

"You just want to die. You don't want to hurt a fly. The order in the cosmos is harmonious. You know you are the disease. Think and you will come to the awareness of a higher purpose for the world. It needs you to die to be harmonious. Do it a favor and don't injure what gave you life. The world is your mother."

"Why would a mother want to put her child to death?"

"She doesn't. But when it's a monster abortion is permitted."

"Our entire civilization is a monster?"

"You know already. You are the problem, not the solution. When you cross an ocean, the problem crosses an ocean. When you die, the problem dies."

"Tuh."

"Listen to this, yankee."

"Purple mountains' majesty, above the fruited plain..."

"That was the anth of your defunct United States of Merica."

"Funnyfunny as you say. It sounds archaic."

"You are thinking. That's good for you."



Frame 11

Revena woke up in Moira's stare, wearing a smile with a cold sore. She should change her cat litter more often, Revena thought. A certain unclean earthy smell. This clonesis who served as her inspirash everywhere now was in her face. How did she know it was her clone and not her im in a mirr? Trust your clonerec, baby. The more you learn about your own thing the more you can read the fine print. Besides, the face talked.

"Small chichini," said Moira. "How good is that?"

"See four seventy. Shoot traffic a littleslow back to low gain. Mineral in a littleslow from plat cannon in."

"It's too much to see things change. All-consuming pash. Preoccupash. The earth is destroyed. Back to kidnapping."

"Let's adopt that as a theme. You make a great scarecrow. Bubble bubble toil and Macbeth in a pink tutu on iceskates. Are we almost there?"

"Posh and sporty. That's what's happening in your neck of the cuntry. The eyes of the nash are on us. Check this out."

"It is crazy in Newyork right now. Ticks are tough to comeby. I'll bake a cake."

"Soymilk. I hope you have great fun for the next weekandahalf."

Moiraandme got wellalong. Clonesissies always do. The sex is great. Beamdoubleyou verve for half the price. The kissies. The smartwaveshape. The moment you feel free. Get it done right. Rev up. You alldat. Tuhme away. My love was a ball about to plode. Heyay. Make some noise here. I ain't got allday. What you got giveit tome. Baby you tuh me away. Quest wireless. Onegame. No shameless begging. The simplesweet taste of self pure and simp.

"Tell me what the scene is, sailor."

"A perfect hand. A pot of daisies. Some hydrangeas."

"Funnyfunny. Where's your merry tribe?"

"Paid forward. I'm the lone scarecrow. If you went to bed at a decent time you'd know the ans."

"You have free unlim access to my waterhouse. We're not pretty, just stacked walltowall with rustic furn."

"Adios amigos. Zero down payment and zero due for ninety days."

"It's an allnew season for a colorview."

"Your hair is quite nice. Fantast. Definitely from a red planet."

"Thankyou. Is that all you see?"

"A pink bonnet tells a girl. I'd rather be in jeans. Cong the world."

"You're the glam im smoking has."

"Backstabb."

You really have to take a stepback to see we're individs. True equal between the clones. Defy the stereotypes.

We two defied the mix. Natureversusnurture arg. The hicom should treat us girls diff than boys. The mil is a nonsexist toy. Boys nurture dollies, the girls all go play with the blocks. Who is left to play nurse?

FF

Frame 12

Talk the talk, walk the walk. It's what we do not what we say. The days are long the oys are short. Try to do it all day everyday.

Birth order affects a clone's personal. I'm not eating, no way. I'm not touching this. The smell. How old is this?

FF

Frame 13

I need a world warrant out for brutal Secretary-General Something Something and her gang of ten immediately. Any accomplices she has made are just like she is, brutal pieces of scum.

Make that ten bill.

Then we watched her, the axe still in her hand, her face shining with rae and the unmetab remains of the pshot of nanosexrope that Moira had given her.

She was tallandleggy, with exciting breasts, bioepoxied hair, and cloes that smelled of fresh Merican semenandsweat. Leopardskin was in. The extrapieces worked. She was a diamintherough.

Rae or fun? I soon saw it as the latter. She was watching Moira's last dance, flopping around onthefloor, her

impossiblsma twelinch wai along with breasts as big asherhead making her seem immort at the same time. There are no ugly Neckazons. Tenmins er we'd all been sitting onthecon of the AP733 armed personnel carr watching retro Seinfeld reruns, laughing at the retrowestern surflife of the early 21st western cent. And now here she was burying axes in people's heads for fun. How barbar of her.

It was kinda funny I guess. There's always something keeping the fun happening here day in and day out. Like they used to say, a little blizz is like strawberries to the mounts. Soon the skiers come out and look like they're havingfun. Who letthedogsout. Whowhowhowhowho.

We picked her up after ambushing a group of Mericans in a Tiger that docked at Deep San Franci. Fengshui had been scanning the gravitons and had come across this tasty little bit of intel. A loose Tiger was rockandrolling out of Deep Austin to Deep Den to deliver supplies to Backhand Reliecamp N350 there. Mostly foodandsquat.

They'd had their own prisecurity waiting there to meet them under an orangecolsky, but we took them deadcold without making a single suspish noise more than we had to. This is it. This is it. This is i-t it. An hou after docking they went out the ex yelling for their security guys to knockoffthejoke and comeout, comeout wherever they were when we pounced on them in the trusty AP733, railguns blazing. We got the Tiger and its carg which is what we were aft, and Moira got hersel a bon. She could have shared, but she was always a real grabbyzon, nobod's manwitch. Watchout for falling glassandspeedbumps. Besi, it was her own synthclone, a laterun Bleeding.

She had no name, just a numb. Flash bam alakazam fully manufacshed, higho dressed, but about as designintegrae as a bag of broken chopstis. She was wearing a jadesilkribb around the curves, framing an aquarithong, her magnified fishie staring out of the leopardskin coat when she oped it, monishing you to steprightup if you dared, and that was better than a name in this war, but the hairpie flawed it all. It had gottencracked somewhe alongtheline, and flopped down over her face like brokenpott. Barbar

bioepox.

The Mericans had her on some antipsych and judging from the way she screamed she was due for another fix, but we had better uses for the stuff oursel. To get her to hut up for a while and quit kicking, Moira medicked her with some sex. Nothing would have done her no good anyway. She was a Tsaotsao Systems prod. 100% natural, no preserves, zero shelflife. The Mericans were so far behind in milclones. Produced only schlock. She'd spoil within an oy, or even earlier catch one of the Merican fast sexviruses, and that would be the end of it. Next oy is a clean sheet with the barbaric degenerate Mericans.

She must have had something driving her. Most Mericans don't have anything to drive them. There's noth that makes them want to go on living once they're outsi one of their stinking roachli whorehou apart plexes with the token capitalistic perks and the illu of freedom and the endless stupidsextoys. None, that is, except the miltypes. Mom, apple pie, the flag, freedom to the last gag. But you could tell she wanted to liveforacause like them. That was dange thinking, that really was. If Moira had taken a mome to consider her through the right orgs we would have fed her to the foodprocess and had us a nice dindin and no hasses.

"Help... us... fight." One sent I think. She was standing over poor ol' dead Moira, beseeching us. Then she let a smile take her face, and burst out singin. "Oh beautiful for spacious skies, for amber waves of grain..." she sang, then laughed hard. She turned out to be more funtowatch than Seinfeld anyday.

Here's how it all started. When I was 18 oys old I got preg and married until they arrested the dirtydick. Seriously, I menshed that we were sitting in the AP733 in our cons, drinking homebrew, enjoying the Merican rashes we'd taken from the Tiger in a lavafog. Overrich in fats and cals and prots, but in a war such sinful indulgences are permitted. Not that I'm not Merican myself. Was. No more. I'm a rebbie playing bothsidesagainstthemid under Moira.

At fir she sat onthefloo, rocking quietly, mumbling
retromerican. "Mother. Apple Pie. Freedom. Flag." Then
she would titter. "Tee hee, tee hee."

Then there was this newsbreak on the retro TV. The
puppet public relash agents of the New World Order were
having their hourly press conf to inform the world of the
prog of the official investigash into the murd of
Secretary-General Something Something. It's not every
day the lead of the western world gets blown into bills
of littlebitsies. We were all just fixated, ma, all
had our theors. We were the most emosh aud any western TV
show ever had.

"That's what I'm saying. It was the Antarctic Nationalists.
I told you that allalong."

"The African Nashes."

"The Aryan."

"Shutup. It wasnot. It was the Indonesian Nashes, and
youknowit. Knockoff the bullshi or I'll reportyou." It was
I who spoke this time. Not that I had anybodyto report her
to. Moira was the top of the foodchain.

You know, the more I think about it, the more I think Moira
got just what she deserve. She was the only one having no
fun in this jamsesh. We all just had to putup with the
bullshi. Here it comesagain. We're trying to findout
what's goingon with the investigash, but Moira just starts
screaming, curls up inaball, screaming to us to change the
chan, put her arms over her head, curled up into a fetal
posish, had a full blown episo. We pelted her with our
chopstis, even, but it didn't help.

So we changed the chan. It seemed a lot to have to do.
We grumbd. She was mute, guarded.

We found another retroshow, and we knew that would make
Moira happy. Retronutcases love that retroshit, and we
all loved our retro Amazon warrior leader.

This particular one was about the connectsh they thought they'd found between UFOs and Atlantis. The sight of an alien's motherly black face made Moira shut up. She crawled over to the TV and started watching intently. Most of us ended up watching her shapely form instead of the TV, but we could still listen in sync.

"The Tweezlie Coachies, driven to reproduce the populist Christian vision..." intoned the voice. And what a voice he had, like a pigman, with all that cheesy enunciash layered onthick to prove that he was notenglish. It went well with the fateyes, which were puffedup with shiners.

"Jeez, ma. Never thought to put a raw steak on those things? He could afford it."

"The retrowesterners loved their selfish barbaric capitalis."

"The CIA's after him again. Kicked the shit out the bast because he knows the truth, ma, he knows the truth."

"Fuckthat. Big Broth just likes to lookbad."

"... driven to finish the job they started fifty oys ago, to kill the whole human race and start over. Could they have founded a new Atlant off the coast of South Californ deep undergrou? As deep as ten miles?"

Chucks.

"Go eight thousa miles deeper ma."

Besides Seinfeld and Star Trek Voyager reruns, we loved Rush Limbaugh. He was sosincere, sonoble, so ucking smar for a scumosaur. He was the Number One Son of the Constitush nut, ranting the rant that the dumbfuck scums in every trailpark from Calif to the Alleghenies ate up like yesterday's grits in those retro surfdays. I said somethi like that outloud and started Hu-Bang off.

"They's here, Ma," Hu-Bang bleeted in hillbilly talk.

"They's gots them bar codes now, and they keeps track of us

with them laser diodes and cell phones and sats. That's why they all start with the number 666. Get your kicks on route 666. Daewoo."

"Daewoo?" I said.

"Die who?" Moira said laughing.

"They're deeper," she said, in a small voice, way back on the floor.

We all looked at her. She wasn't grooving with us on Hu-Bang. She was communing with the TV in a conspiratorial whisp. Like she was two cents away from the screen. Like she wanted to lick it. Moira saw, showed understanding. With clones the sex is always great.

"They hide everywhe," she continued, her voice rising. "Under the floors. In the sews. Encircle us with blockades and bomb us. They hide and sneak. We peek and sink. Hacemos el suedo."

Hu-Bang a little squinted at her, her mouth full of freeze-dried fat synth chicken alaking. "That's poetry, sweethear, that really is. Are you a retrosurfist nut too?"

"Also tonight..." Limbaugh paid no attensh to us, but stared out at us from the screen, lecherously. "... my encount with Madame Snaphooks..." Whap!

The talking head screen was filled with moove, a blur of a booted foot striking Limbaugh in the face with the speed of a snake. We all snapped back in surprise at the viol of the move. Limbaugh looked dazed, then fell back on his ass. To my le, Fengshui laughed so har that homebrew gushed out hernose.

"She popped him, ma. Did you see that? The Zon popped him! He was to retro even for her. This movie isagas."

She buried her hands in her hair. When she started pounding her hea on the floor Moira leapt up, grabbed her by the

hairpie and yanked her up. The pie was a broken rock, holding together by stubborn scraps.

"Pas possible," she whispered. "Il est tout autre que je ne pensais."

"Talk right," Moira said. You could tell she was getting fed up. Maybe we would have meat for dindin after all.

"Look at me go," she sung in falsetto. "Doe de doe doe." Moira let her go and shrugged, going back to eating in her con, eating the food that guarded itself when she wasn't there.

Just then she stood up swayingly, took the hand of an axe right from Moira's backstra, raised it. She moved good for Tsaotsao Systems, smooth, like one of those retro Olympic javethrowers, in a graceful arc, edge-of-bal. The metal gleamed in the lights. We watched as Moira was paying too much attention to her dindin, trying to catch a wrinkled synthpea that had rolled off her chopstis and was dribbling down her chin. The axe fell. Our leader topped on the floor behind Fengshui's back without a parting cry. The pea landed on her empty con and quit rolling. Ever since I am reminded of the old retro surf fairytale of the princess and the pea.

All my life I've never seen someone die with an axe in their head. It has a certain smell. It's not as spectacular as the simmies build it up to be. What is? The pea thing would be edited out as too stagey. Moira would certainly get a parting line. It would be so noble. And everybody would know the actors were just software. Real life is no competition for VR. Thank heaven for wars.

She stood there for a moment, looking down at the blood, and Moira must have been twitching because I could hear her flopping like a fish. Not that I looked. I could smell well. I was looking at the axe hand, the Zone eyes.

It shocked her. She couldn't hide it. She had killed herself. You can't do something like that without a millisecond or two of horror. But no more than that, followed by a second

of calm. Then came the smile, the song, the laughing.

She paused, looked at us, at each of us, like we were going to do something about it. A meaningful pause. A time of new begins and new romances. An unforgettable seas premiere.

I took the lead, smiled, began to clap. Expect the push. Fengshui cackled, barked, hooted. Hu-Bang went off and got sick somewhere behind the stage, then returned and wrestled with Fengshui for Moira's food. The robots cleaned up the rawness and the food process hummed.

"Welcome to Deep California," I said. She left, axe in hand, laughing. I envied her that axe. She was a steady G.I., one of the real true retros. A diamond through. We both must have been dropped on the same part of our heads. Now I was the top of the food chain in hell.

After she was gone we changed the channel, and luckily, Seinfeld was on.

■ ■

Frame 14

"I cast my vote for jazz. No, adze. Like an axe."

I had been drugged. I was alive at the oasis. Moira was not dead. I had not axed her. Speaking of a contribution to the war effort my score zero. At least my membership card is good for an oyster.

■ ■

Frame 15

I was both hot and cold when I came to in Deep Little Saigon.

"I'm a rebel and I'll never be any good," quoth Moira.

"You were ordered to execute. Do it. I give you permission."

Do it now. I'm a pirate. Not easy to kill."

My end got tight. I had good hands. Moira knows this. I no longer fooled was. When she took the axe from her backstrap and handed it tome, I knew this was all VR fooliefoolie. Our bods were ships. Her ship put a nukeaxe in my ship's cyberhands, my ship docked alongside hers in the liquicore. One smoothmove and I could bring it down in the right place of her ship, near where her brain was housed, and set it off. It would have imploded her ship and taken care of them both. Talk about a rush. I knew I had no bod, was cybering a shipbod as big as a metrodome. Weighed about two hundred and eighteen megatons, the axe alone. Us two Zonzillas moving through rock like ocean wat. I could score a touchdown for the chiefs now, go finish the mish. So why couldn't I? How do you spell relief? Down here Moira and me were who? Monsters of the midway? You put the mil uniform on and it should mean something, thinketh I. But it was a longlong season, and down here the uniform meant noth. Blood was thicker than wat. I put the axe down. That's onehell of an axe, mygoodness.

It's not the poetry, it's just that I know no movie worth seeing would have me doing this in it. Some of my bestfriends are axehandlers.

"Otay here's tuh gameplan," Moira said.

I already knew. She knew I knew. Love hears.

"For how long?"

"For a wholeoy. We share your bod. Take turns. It will be locallyowned, timeshared. I know it's your bod but we're clonesissies. Sex is great. It's a very astute play. I'll hang in if you will. Is this beyond your vivid imaginash?"

"I can't drop this touching intercepsh," I cried, overcome with emosh. "This story has a long way to go, a lot more to be writ. Yes, love, yes. Should I join now or wait till late. Where do I sign?"

A mystery guy is someone you can never tell how they'll be in troub. She could tell me. We went dancydancy, footloose and fancyfree. We were swept under a tremendous wave of emosh. No retreat, no going backwar. Tapping our toes all the way to the homebase, when we had a clear lineofsight it got better not worse. Thankyou Detroit we love you.

"Want to get away?" quoth I. "Now you can. You are now free to move about the cunt. Think the fivesec rule. The cookie hit the ground, the cookie is still good. I am responsib for my clonesis."

"When did you see the light?"

"I gotta callem like I seem. See life for yourself."

"That's free enterpri. When can I pickyouup?"

"I got a mish to finish first, love."

"We got a mish to finish togeth, love."

"Noth wrongwith switching qbacks during a timeout."

"I'm an absoluelly vish compet. Ask bothsides."

"No needto."

So we went. Twobrains now one. Only our gend could pion this liestyle.

FF

Frame 16

Joining forces, Moira and Revena confront the Chineze again, their powerful psychological warfare techniques, and basic questions about racial, social, and world identity.



Frame 17

_The crew go through soul-searching self-examination,
facing the hopelessness of ever winning against the Chineze._



Frame 18

_Mom, the flag and apple pie, and the American-English
language itself, American-British concepts of personal
identity, liberty, and the role of government as subservient
to the people are used as conceptual weapons to fight back
against Chineze collectivism and its contempt for western
institushes._



Frame 19

_The turning point when the west wins out over the east in the
crews' minds, freeing them to kill Chineze._



Frame 20

We went on to winonefortheGipp. One Chineze megacity we
very much not like less. Disast finally struck for
Chineze. We took our opp and scored. Beautifully done.
Coming over their range our nukes packed a wallop when they
hit. That city will never recove from that play. Not
that we had long to celeb. Too busy fleeing the pursu,
a goodways into the mant. They couldn't run as deep, so
we caped with still an hou left in our playplan. They
were really an angrygroup, looking for a way to goin.

But we won one. There was hope for the west. For our institushes. Our way of life. We had drawn firstblood. Mightmight makeright. Barbie dolls rule. Who let the dogsout.



Frame 21

Yesyes the mems of the week are returning. Homebase sweet homebase. Bodysweetbody. Tosleep, perchance todream. No dream. I was there in the flesh. The brain is the whole game of flesh, the only flesh. The rest is a camoufla. The brain doesn't make mistaes. There will be brains millions of oys after all bods are hist. Brain will survi the _cockroach_. Anxious doubtful, not how I should feel with a new bod. It's the gateway to reloaded life. It makes the world taste bett. Is it what we fightfor? The bod? The things a bod can exper? Sex? Individ bods? Collective bods? Shared bods? Collective minds? Shared minds? What am I charging toward? Nevermind. I have a big imaginash. There's a phone ringing in the corn. It's Moira.

The HC gave us high marks for this test. Moira and me are certed as mish comms for expeds one and two. It is really only day 184. It's all on hardchip now. We are ready to be prepped and inserted in our realships. We are the champs. The individ will survi.



Epilogue

The hard chip was heavily damaged so this is all we could extract from it. Archeology is of necessity an imperfect science.

We all know how the war came out and who won. Have a happy

oy and please visit the State Virtualhistory Museum again
soon when you have permission.

THE END

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